

***Renewal: The Chinese State and the New Global History.*** By Wang Gungwu. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 159. \$30.00.

Uniquely trained and positioned, Professor Wang Gungwu has long established himself as a prominent historian of modern China of our times. His main contribution lies in that he, through his impressive *œuvre*, offers at once the insider's and the outsider's look into the vicissitudes of Chinese history. Based on the lectures he gave in Hong Kong, US, and Singapore over the past decade, this book shows Wang's most recent reflections on China's modern past. It consists of five chapters, in addition to a preface and an appendix. The focus of this book, as the author states in the preface, is on China's changing position in world history. More precisely, it is about the question how the modern Chinese wrestle with and challenge the "master narrative of world history that has placed China on its margins" (p. ix). His approach is to examine, "from the point of view of an ethnic Chinese who has looked at the subject largely from the outside" (p. x), the rise of a modern state in China and how this new phenomenon was (and still is) related to the country's imperial past and the various historical developments worldwide.

A key issue facing the Chinese, analysed in chapter one, is how to accommodate the modern world by the traditional concept of *tianxia* 天下 (all under Heaven). That is, like many other cultures around the world, the Chinese traditionally also had their own conception of the world. The *tianxia* concept, on the hand, prepared the Chinese to see the need to perceive and position their country in relation with others in the world, just as they did in the past when their land was overrun by non-Chinese peoples. On the other hand, however, the *tianxia* concept also made them reluctant to accept the international system established by Western powers. Of course, one seemingly easy solution is for the Chinese to construct anew their worldview. But this is, reckons Wang, less feasible; his main argument instead is that the status of modern China, while taking the form of a modern state on the Western model, has invariably registered many politico-cultural traits from the past. "No country," writes Wang, "can really begin only with the modern. China has its own heritage that serves as valuable social capital. . . . Each country's past experiences remain embedded in how its people think and act in the present" (p. 21).

Wang then gives a few examples in the following chapters to buttress his position. The first example is the construction of the Chinese nation. Again, proto-nationalist sentiment and feelings were not absent from China's cultural past. But the task for the Chinese to establish a modern nation-state remains challenging and difficult. In the end, after several failed attempts, needless to say, such state was founded. But it is, in Wang's words, "another kind of nation," because of the cultural residue of the imperial system. Indeed, he states, "For China today, it is the Ming-

Qing system that is most relevant to China's post-1911 entanglements both with Western powers and with progressive modern ideas" (p. 41). There are four reasons, which all, to a varying degree, point to the issue of how the Chinese perceive their relationship with their neighbours on the margins—the Southeast Asians in particular. Wang argues that since the imperial heritage was essentially land-based, the Chinese did not see enough importance of trade with others.

This land-based system also determines, he states, that for any government in China, the issue of legitimacy has been more important than that of sovereignty (p. 55ff). He supports this statement by saying that over many centuries, Chinese rulers (those of the conquest regimes included), tended to view China's relationship with others hierarchically, or in a way similar to the structure of a family according to the Confucian ideal. This tradition prevented Chinese rulers/leaders to fully position their country in the modernized, or Westernized, world. Of course, by stating this, Wang does not, by any means, endorse the Western system. He intends to provide readers with a better historical understanding of how and why the Chinese government on the mainland deals with Taiwan (as well as Japan I assume) in the way it is. Likewise, cultural ideals from the past also shaped, he believes, how the modern Chinese understood "revolution"—*geming* 革命 in Chinese which is a loaded phrase with complex meanings—and took part in it for changing their country. Even the recent development in the post-Mao era that seemingly abandoned the action of revolution remained gripped, he observes, by the *geming* ideal. His hope however is that having engaged with their neighbours, far and near, in making revolutions at home over the past century, the Chinese today can somewhat go beyond the past. In other words, they should, as they are doing now, transform the traditional idea of *geming* by delinking it from the idea of regime change, and let it include multifarious processes, or advances, in social and economic arenas. By doing so, Wang writes, "This can only make it easier for Chinese to define their place in world history" (p. 97).

All these discussions lead to the final chapter, which is entitled "Modernity, the State and Civilization." Wang's main observation is that over the past century, the Chinese have pursued their country's modernization, willy-nilly, with a dual task—to establish not only a modern nation-state but also the renewal of their time-honoured civilization. But these two purposes have not always been congruent. As such, the Chinese, as well as their political and intellectual leaders, have at times faced challenges. To a large degree, these challenges remain today, despite the notable progress in reconciling the two. Yet in the end, Wang is hopeful: "given the history of what the Chinese have done over the centuries to enhance their heritage time and again, one may hope that they will once again redefine their new civilization in ways that can respond creatively to the profound changes occurring around the world" (p. 124).

In sum, Wang Gungwu has written a thoughtful book; one that deserves to be read by anyone interested in the development of modern China. Wang argues powerfully and convincingly that in order to understand modern China, or China's modernization over the past century, it is imperative for readers to adopt a historical and cultural perspective. The issues discussed and dissected by him in the book are truly important and highly relevant to such understanding. As stated in the book's title and subtitle, the key message he intends to get across is as follows: Modern China has not been built from the thin air; instead, it has been a result of the relentless endeavour by the Chinese to make anew their past. As a new global historian—I am sure the author is certainly qualified to be one—the task is not to question why, after being exposed to outside influences for so long, China remains loyal (stuck?) to its past tradition; but rather to appreciate and even celebrate the country's attempt to bring to the world its own unique cultural traits and historical heritages.

Q. EDWARD WANG  
Rowan University

*Scribes of Gastronomy: Representations of Food and Drink in Imperial Chinese Literature.* Edited by Isaac Yue and Siufu Tang. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013. Pp. viii + 163. \$25.00.

Food determines culture, food reflects culture, food is culture . . . however one sees it, the relationship is close and significant. Of course it is—the culture which does not eat cannot survive—and the interconnection is not confined to Chinese culture, it is universal. Think of North American *potlatch* feasting where a lifetime's toil culminates in extravagant consumption; think of wedding banquets almost anywhere; think of nomadic arctic seal hunters, of Michelin stars, of killing fatted calves, of witchetty grubs, of endless television cookery programmes, of potato famines, of a land flowing with milk and honey, and of the precarious delights of tasting the *fugu* 河豚 fish.

There is an added dimension to food in Chinese culture, perhaps more a matter of degree than of major difference, a holistic concern with freshness, balance, texture, and appropriate flavourings which elevates the mundane necessity of sustaining life into an art form which can be created and appreciated anew at every meal. Much the same might be claimed *mutatis mutandis* for cuisines all over the world, and it would be rash to say of any culture that it lacked culinary skills, but the degree of difference,