

Additionally, more attention might be paid to questions of audience. Huang's work is quite sensitive to the class of readers, as in the triptich of works on the Sui and Tang, with their varying level of tolerance for Confucian niceties. But questions of readers' gender could also be brought in. Might the sudden burst of feminized male heroes of scholar-beauty fiction have anything to do with an increase in female readership during the seventeenth century? And how might we account for the fact that *Honglou meng* is the novel most favoured by female readers, as judged from their extant poems? Questions such as these do not come up in Huang's work but they could be used to amplify his ideas.

Finally, it might be hoped that the materials from China on both men and women could some day be matched against comparable materials from Western literatures. It is all very well to discuss the relativity of gender in China, but until detailed comparisons can be made with other literary traditions, the promise inherent in Huang's project seems somehow unfulfilled.

My list of amplifications is in no way meant to cast aspersions on Huang's endeavour. One can only take on so much in a single monograph, and this is an important step forward for gender studies of the Ming and Qing.

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China's American Daughter: Ida Pruitt (1888–1985). By Marjorie King. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006. Pp. xxxviii + 287. \$42.00 cloth, \$23.00 paper.

Anyone interested in China and encounters between Americans and Chinese over the years now has another volume to place on their bookshelves next to Peter Conn's biography of Pearl Buck, Steve and Janice MacKinnon's of Agnes Smedley, Helene Keyssar and Tracey Strong's biography of her mother, Anna Louise Strong, Tom Grunfeld's manuscript find of Millie Bennet's life story, and the memoirs and reflections of other Old China hands like Rewi Alley, Israel Epstein, and Sydney Rittenberg.¹ Like Sydney Shapiro and Maud Russell,

¹ Peter Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Janice R. MacKinnon and Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Tracy B. Strong and Helene Keyssar, *Right in Her Soul: The Life of Anna Louise Strong* (New York: Random House, 1983); Milly Bennett, *On Her Own: Journalistic Adventures from San Francisco to the Chinese Revolution, 1917–1927*, ed. A. Tom Grunfeld (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); Israel Epstein, *The Unfinished Revolution in China* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947); Rewi Alley, *Rewi Alley: An Autobiography* (Beijing: New World Press, 1987); Anne-Marie Brady, *Friend of China: The Myth of Rewi Alley* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); Sydney Rittenberg and Amanda Bennett, *The Man Who Stayed Behind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

many of these still await their biographers. In Marjorie King, however, Ida Pruitt found a committed and diligent teller of her story. King insists throughout her book, *China's American Daughter: Ida Pruitt (1888–1985)*, that Pruitt can only be understood in terms which have only recently become commonplace: as a truly “bicultural” figure (to which one today could add “transnational” and “hybrid”) whose fluid sense of identity King refers to as “constructed” rather than “evolved” (p. 219, n. 13). This helps explain Pruitt’s profound sense of dislocation in most places and periods of her life. Quoting the Harvard China experts John King Fairbank and his wife, Wilma, King argues that Ida Pruitt was “heart and soul with the Chinese common people” (p. xv).

If Ida Pruitt has been well served by her biographer, Marjorie King was also exceedingly lucky in her choice of subject. She became close to Ms Pruitt in Pruitt’s last decade and, through her friendship and interest, was granted extraordinary access to all of Pruitt’s records, diaries, letters, plus those of her parents and many friends—even her dream journals and FBI files were available to King for writing this comprehensive account of Pruitt’s ninety-seven year long life. In addition, King has scoured archives on two continents and interviewed anyone with even a passing acquaintance of the woman she describes as having had an extremely varied life trajectory. In fact, Pruitt had at least three distinctly different careers, from missionary daughter and teacher in rural China to founder of China’s social work profession, then to lobbyist both in China and the West for the dream of modernization via industrial cooperatives, ending her life as writer, teacher, and untiring publicist in the West for affairs Chinese. The book is thus a boon to the careful reader, with each statement of fact heavily documented in nice discursive footnotes. As any good biography should do, it thus opens wide a window on both a life and an era.

King proceeds chronologically through Pruitt’s life, setting out in an introduction her argument about Pruitt’s unsettled bicultural identity as the root of her strengths as intercultural mediator and, at the same time, of her profound unease outside of China. For King, it was also the source of her strong anti-imperialist inclinations which sprang from her sense of identification with the Chinese and her deep appreciation for China’s rich heritage. Further complicating Pruitt’s sense of herself in the world was her lack of success and ease in many kinds of personal relationships—which she later traced back to her relationship with her parents (helped by her immersion in orthodox psychoanalysis, exhaustively chronicled by King). In the prologue and two short chapters devoted to her childhood, King emphasizes Pruitt’s early years in the countryside among the Chinese people (“At Home in China” and “The Home with the Open Door”), so different from most of her Western colleagues and even from Pearl Buck—to whom Pruitt is often compared (p. 218, n. 3). King traces her family’s trajectory, from Ida’s mother Anna Seward Pruitt’s staunchly middle-class midwestern American upbringing and her father C.W. Pruitt’s poor southern roots to their independent decisions to go to China, their marriage there, and their assignment to the rural Chinese northeast, where they made their first home Chinese fashion among the people of Song Family Village in Huang county (Huangxian) in Shandong province.

C.W. reveled in his work, immersing himself in Chinese ways—wearing scholar’s gown and hat, for example—and was both beloved by and loyal to his Chinese acquaintances (maintaining ties with his Chinese teacher for fifty years). Like him, Ida felt most comfortable not only with people but also with things Chinese—with its art,

architecture, clothing, and especially food and smells (p. 8). Anna, on the other hand, disliked much of what she saw and experienced in China, which she saw as teeming with dangerous germs and immoral behaviour. She and Ida were at odds most of their lives. Ida blamed her mother's distant and judgmental character for both paralyzing her and preventing her from fully developing as a person. This led her to reject her mother and develop instead into what King rather unconvincingly labels a "male-identified female" (p. xvii), referring to the work of biographers like Lois Rudnick who have written about other strong, independent, often unhappy women. I find this unconvincing. Such an analysis ends up reducing all explanations to psychological ones. This was, however, a tendency, that Pruitt seemed inclined to endorse herself in later life.

Although Ida often heard her parents' heated arguments behind closed doors, they did work well together and Anna did her duty, like many other missionary wives of her generation, wearing herself out maintaining the semblance of an American home abroad (the images of a makeshift Thanksgiving dinner, for example, are particularly poignant and jarring), while at the same time serving as helpmate to her itinerating husband. She established and ran a medical clinic, and threw herself into both teaching and writing, which were clearly her first loves. As devout Presbyterian missionaries, her parents had little time—and her mother, little inclination—to focus on their children. Ida and her siblings had the run of the neighbourhood and made fast friends with the Chinese around them, aided by their beloved Chinese amah, Dada. If Ida learned anything from her parents (and it is clear throughout the book that their model and morality—along with their "can do" American style—influenced Ida's life immensely), it was to make your own life. Although she gradually rejected their religious calling (as many "mish kids" did), she felt compelled to dedicate her life to a greater mission. Her parents' mission was to mediate between God and their Chinese charges; Ida's was to translate and mediate between cultures, in her words, "as a thread weaving back and forth" (p. 45) stitching together different communities, urban and rural, east and west, traditional and modern.

The bulk of the book chronicles Ida Pruitt's life after leaving her parent's home and develops King's twin themes of her as both a secular missionary and an eternal pilgrim. Ida first experienced America during her parents' furlough in 1900 when she was twelve, travelling around the country with them on the grueling lecture circuit common to homebound missionaries, and it was during this first visit that she became aware of how little she actually knew of America and how uncomfortable she felt there, with her strange accent and Chinese ways. She had not been sent back to the U.S. for boarding school as a young child, as was the custom. In fact, she and her siblings had been home-schooled, due to her mother's fear of losing yet another child to Chinese disease. Yet, from 1906 until 1911 her parents insisted that she return to the U.S. for higher education, first at Cox College in Georgia, an unchallenging finishing school where she felt isolated and bored (but class president by her junior year and founder and editor of a literary magazine), followed by a year in New York at Columbia Teachers' College and School of Philanthropy (now School of Social Work). She then worked at an orphanage in Dobbs Ferry, New York, while devouring all that the city had to offer, but she continued to feel out of place. It was her closest brother's death, ironically not from disease in China but from typhoid in the United States, that compelled her to return to China to console and attempt some kind of

reconciliation with her bereaved parents. Given the detailed accounting and sourcing King does of earlier—and later—years, these rather crucial years of late adolescence are inexplicably described rather quickly and perfunctorily. One can only suppose that, for whatever reason, Pruitt left little record of this period for her biographer to draw on.

Pruitt spent six years teaching and administering in a nearby mission school (one founded by her mother), where she reveled in the company of her adoring students, rescued and adopted a young girl being brought up in a brothel, and joined a fashionable young expat crowd. This idyll ended abruptly with World War I and the death in the war of her “special friend” Jack, leaving Ida feeling like “an old maid at 29” (unfortunately, King does not make particular connections between these seemingly isolated events). Pruitt quit her job, made a formal break with Christianity, and returned to the U.S. for more training in social work and to replace her mother Anna in caring for her two younger brothers, one blind from an accident and in a special school in Virginia. It was from there that she was urged to apply to the Rockefeller-funded Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) as head of its new programme in social work, a task made more urgent by postwar demands in a China in turmoil. Her ease with the Chinese people and her clear competence in the personal side of social work were strongly in her favour, but her lack of administrative experience and fact that she was not, according to her Philadelphia charity supervisor, “instinctively a systematic person” (p. 49) dogged her throughout her tenure at PUMC from 1920 until 1939. When she was first hired, in 1920, her supervisor in her Boston Mass General medical social work training had alluded to Ida’s “lack of fundamental things” (p. 52). In King’s analysis, this was because Western professional women were not able to fully understand Ida. She was not a 1920s feminist “new woman” (nor even a May Fourth Chinese “new woman”), strong and efficient, with a “passion for professionalism.” Instead, Ida was competent but not aggressive, more of a “traditional Chinese grandmother,” according to King, who meddled, mediated, and sought to bring people together. The style of social work she developed took much from her gifted Boston mentors, Ida Cannon and Richard Cabot, who had founded the field of medical social work and stressed the importance of case work combined with indirect interviewing techniques. But, King argues, it owed even more to her Chinese amah, Dada, and the conciliatory style she had learned in her childhood to be a *shuohede*, or “one who talked into harmony” (p. 70). As was to be true throughout her life, it was her deep understanding of, comfort with, and identification with people, particularly Chinese people, that was her forte.

Intimate personal relationships, however, continued to confound her. To this reviewer, the only relatively uncomplicated ones she had were with her students and adopted daughters—who in fact she made into women like herself, always between two worlds. The deep entanglement she experienced at forty with Jack MacIntosh, a Canadian professor working in China, so unsettled her (he was as noncommittal as she was clinging), that after four years of his vacillating, she found herself leaving China, pursuing him to America, and waiting in New York for him to decide in Toronto about their relationship. As a result, deeply depressed, she turned in 1932 to the psychotherapy that her Boston mentor had suggested more than a decade before. Pruitt was so transformed by the insights from her traditional psychoanalysis (clearly by a very gifted analyst, although King has little to say about her) that she returned to China invigorated. She searched out and bought a traditional Chinese

courtyard house in a Beijing alleyway that was always open for her friends, her adopted orphan girls, and anyone passing through the city who was interested and who enjoyed the constant hubbub—plus Sunday waffles with Ida.

Pruitt later identified this period, from 1932 until 1938, as the happiest of her life. She had her work, her “family” of friends and daughters, all together in her big traditional Chinese house. King, rightly, makes much of houses and architecture in holding the secret to Pruitt’s innermost needs, formed in that traditional house in Song Village. It was in the Beijing house that she found her voice as a writer and chronicler of the stories of traditional Chinese people (just as she realized her own maternal grandmother had written about the lives of Midwestern pioneers), and it was in writing that she felt for the first time complete and not depressed.

It was in this house that she wrote what would become her major literary contributions for China scholars, the life stories of two very different women she had become close to: Ning Lao Tai-tai, a peasant woman whose biography I use nearly every year in my classes for its subtly complicated story of a woman who experiences great catastrophe and endures, and Old Madame Yin, an upper class woman whose life is changing fundamentally and who took to Ida as well. Although Pruitt was unable to convincingly tell her own story—no publisher would accept her *Chinese Childhood* manuscript—she was able to use her empathetic interviewing techniques honed by years of social work to brilliantly evoke these women’s lives and worldviews. Rather unconvincingly, King cites Bell Chevigny’s argument that a woman biographer’s relationship to her female subject is intertwined with her own mother/daughter relationship (p. 108). It was in this house as well that Pruitt honed her craft in explaining China and Chinese society and polity to the West in innumerable articles for Western magazines and journals that was to stand her in good stead in the next chapter of her life.

By 1939, with the Japanese occupation of the city and restrictions on everyday life, Ida’s work at PUMC neared its end. By then, criticisms of her administrative abilities and her brusque treatment of her staff, combined with growing Chinese nationalism, compelled the board of PUMC to ask her to step down in favour of a Chinese administrator (ironically, one of her own students). Some of this criticism seems justified; others, like the belief that she had not kept good records, King questions, given the cache of some 40,000 case files from Ida’s years at PUMC that King in 1993 found integrated into hospital records! (p. 229, n. 32) Unfortunately, these changes coincided with a New Zealand journalist, Jim Bertram—twenty years her junior who had lived on and off at her house and with whom she had a long affair—breaking off their liaison. The double losses of 1938 made her despondent, but not, as in her pre-analysis years, deeply depressed.

Although, unfortunately, King does not explore the timing here either, another project and another person miraculously appeared to fill the void in her life: the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives and Rewi Alley. Pruitt began to move leftward in politics, influenced by her new acquaintances, Edgar Snow and his wife Peg, plus Song Qingling, widow of Sun Yatsen, who told her about the Chinese Communists and their Eighth Route Army. From them she also learned about a new initiative to give meaningful work to refugees and war orphans. Employing people in small mobile factories and workshops throughout Free China, these cooperatives were supported by an uneasy alliance of what developed later into the

leftist Rewi-Ida-Song group and a group of conservative Nationalist supporters, like Mme Chiang and her banker/government relatives T.V. Song and H.H. Kong, who wanted to control the CIC and had different goals for it. Dedicating herself to spreading the word and raising funds for it, Pruitt travelled first to Hong Kong and then to the United States, where in a reversal of her previous pattern, she essentially spent the rest of her life.

Work for the CIC under the banner of its foreign foundation, Indusco, consumed her for fifteen years, first throughout the war years when she was unable to travel to China and its work was subsumed under an umbrella organization, United China Relief. Right after the war she returned for a year to travel and visit struggling sites throughout China, being particularly impressed by two in the far northwest. But, with civil war already underway and donations withheld by Nationalists from many sites in Communist strongholds, friends in China urged her to return to the West and continue funneling the funds she was so adept at raising to the cooperatives. Then, after Liberation in 1949 and particularly after the start of the Korean War in 1950, all hope she had of returning to live in China was dashed for twenty years, and the project itself was doomed. There was no doubt that it was a movement dear to her heart: she had always preached in her social work and in her writing that the key to an individual's integrity was meaningful work—ironically, not so different from her parent's Social Gospel message. She had always urged Westerners to accept that China and other Third World nations should be left to modernize in their own way. The Chinese cooperative movement—labelled “Gung Ho” during the war by an American supporter, Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson after its Chinese name, *Zhongguo gongye hezoushe* (p. 126), was distinctly Chinese—peasant and worker controlled, small scale, mostly rural, and local. Pruitt was determined to help it succeed, and she spent over ten years of her life firm in the belief that the movement had to tread a middle path, be non-partisan, and be acceptable to anyone populist and pro-union. In this way, she was distinctly different from other supporters of cooperatives and of China: from Pearl Buck who was anti-Communist, to those who were more openly supportive of Mao and the Chinese revolution: Maud Russell, Talitha Gerlach, Peg Snow, Agnes Smedley, and Anna Louise Strong. (King rightly notes, p. 255, n. 77, that no collective biography or study of this distinct group has yet been written—perhaps it should be her next project?)

In the summer of 1952, Indusco was disbanded, and its supporters and organization merged with other pro-Chinese groups like China Welfare Appeal of which Pruitt became the chair. But the combination of a reduced work load and intensive government surveillance (according to her FBI file, she was closely watched and regularly reported on from the late 1940s until 1970, clearly by someone very close to her!) did not fill her time sufficiently, and she yearned to return to China. In spite of the strict surveillance, she was able to secure two short trips back to China: one in 1959 and another in 1971–1972, but only through Song Qingling's intervention. About the ravages of the anti-Rightist campaigns and devastation of the Great Leap, Pruitt wrote nothing, although King is certain that she knew about them. Likewise, in the 1970s she spoke and wrote nothing about the destructive forces of the Cultural Revolution, focusing instead on the traditional Chinese values that the Cultural Revolution was bent on eradicating.

Pruitt had the luck—or was it the curse?—of living long, another twenty-five years. In 1961 she moved from New York and the apartment she had shared since 1946 with Maud

Russell to Philadelphia, near her adopted daughter Tania, who taught at Swarthmore, to Powelton Village, a community where her best friends, Adele and Allyn Rickett lived. It was here that Marjorie King met Ida Pruitt, became close, and started the project which turned into this generous biography. For twenty-five years Pruitt wrote constantly, producing novels, short stories, and promotional pieces for China. She even had affairs in her old age, but still, King reports, felt “poorly adjusted.” Her favourite metaphor was distinctly Chinese: there was an invisible red thread connecting her to China. At Pruitt’s memorial service in 1985, over and over the themes were sounded. In her writing, in her teaching, in her social work, her life and work had made an enormous impact. She had literally founded the field of social work in China. She had been a principal spokesperson for spreading ideas about worker controlled enterprises around the world. Students, diplomats, visiting Chinese delegations, anyone with an interest in or connection to China made the trek to her apartment in Philadelphia for an invigorating talk with Pruitt—and her Sunday waffles. Even her work in China continues today: in 1987 the Shandan Bailie School was established in her name in China’s northwest at the site of the cooperative she had visited forty years before, graduating 1,800 students by 2004. Her life and work live on.

We should all be so lucky to have as devoted biographer as Ida Pruitt has in Marjorie King. In her attempt to write about all of Pruitt’s long life, King has laboured long and hard. She has dug deeply, questioned closely, become familiar with all the players. But, in spite of her thoroughness, she has written too carefully in a number of areas for scholars interested in a full account of Ida Pruitt’s life. It would be important to know, for example, exactly what happened between Ida Pruitt and her parents in the years between her rift with them in the 1920s and her infrequent contacts with them from the 1930s until their deaths after the war. They figure strongly in the chapter on her childhood, but then disappear from the book. Other subjects are even touchier, and King may have been following Pruitt’s requests to tread lightly, but both her politics and her sexuality are treated gingerly. Being “a dear friend of Paul Robeson’s” and a lecturer to the American Labor Party suggest a closer relationship to the American Communist Party than King allows. Likewise, being a roommate for fourteen years of the openly lesbian Maud Russell plus counting the closeted Rewi Alley as perhaps her best friend for almost fifty years both suggest a more complicated sexuality than King admits. Perhaps someday another biographer will attempt the tougher biography of Ida Pruitt that Marjorie King was unwilling for whatever reason to write, and that the reader has the right to expect. Until then, this is a fine, comprehensive, and fair work, honestly earning its place on that shelf.

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