

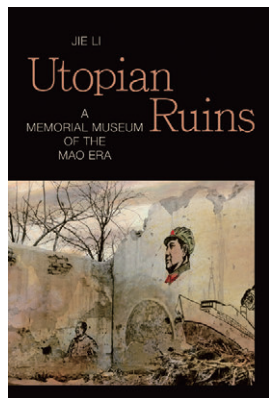
brief analysis of the amnesic nationalist imagination in science-fiction literature (p. 185-201) precedes a historical and philological development on the polysemy and the political uses of the concept of *tianxia* (天下), literally "under the sky" or "empire-world" in the politico-cultural imagination of the pre-modern period (p. 201-36). His ambition and the richness of his textual and theoretical references would seem to call for greater development to tackle in context such a complex concept in all its historical variations. It does, however, provide the author with the opportunity to apply his transcultural approach whilst taking care not to isolate the texts and to juxtapose their different interpretations of this polysemic idea.

The last chapter gives us a critique, sometimes stimulating but often rather confused, of what the author calls a "quadruple ideological projection" of China (developmental, liberal, pacifist, and ecological), its putative identity, its historical trajectory, and its future (p. 236-59).

The conclusion represents an attempt at a synthesis and formalisation of the author's methodological suggestions for cultural studies. In a language that is sometimes a little abstruse, he suggests that henceforth we think of the relationship between "European and Chinese worlds" in terms of circulation, hybridisation, and heterogeneity within these geocultural spaces. Despite the formal and structural weaknesses inherent in its constitution, this study, supported by an impressive quantity of secondary literature, would seem to be indispensable reading for researchers working with or on China, as well as those interested in intellectual history (Chinese, European, global) and in subjects relating to postcolonial criticism, transcultural studies, and comparative literature.

■ Translated by Elizabeth Guill.

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LI, Jie. 2020.
Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era.
Durham: Duke University Press.

SEBASTIAN VEG

Li Jie's new book is an intriguing study of a series of objects that can be understood as cultural texts in a broad sense, spanning literary writings, photographs, documentary films, and architectural

constructions. Produced during the Mao era, they have recently been "re-mediated," as Li writes, or reintroduced into China's media sphere, whether through journalism, independent film production, or museum-making. The study presents itself as a "memorial museum," a "curated collection" of exhibits assembled by the author around the theme of "utopian ruins." Rather than excavating new primary sources, "this imagined memorial-museum-in-book-form curates from existing textual, photographic, and cinematic records about the subaltern" (p. 6). The common theme of these texts is determined by the author's choice to include both utopia and ruins, the socialist ideals of Maoism as well as the violence and mass mortality it entailed.

The first two chapters deal with textual documents produced by two famous writers, Lin Zhao 林昭 and Nie Gannu 聶紺弩, who were persecuted and imprisoned during the Anti-rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution, respectively. Focusing on Lin Zhao's prison essays and notebooks, many of them written in blood, Li Jie argues that Lin drew on a tradition of premodern and revolutionary martyrology, in which blood stands for both the "promises and dangers of revolution" (p. 66). In the case of Nie Gannu, several of his poems found their way into his secret "dossier" (*dang'an* 檔案) together with "interpretations" penned by people reporting on him and, ironically, survived thanks to the dossier.

The second section of the book draws on photography and documentary films produced during the Mao era. Propaganda photography, theorised by the journal *Mass Photography* (1958-1960), is discussed as "eyewitness testimonies to revolutionary miracles that not only failed to witness and record but also contributed to man-made catastrophes" (p. 105). Nonetheless, photography deserves a place in the memorial museum: "Rather than dismissing propaganda photos or treating them as objective windows onto a historical past, we should recognize both the aspirations they express and their complicity in the catastrophe" (p. 147).

The moving images produced by Michelangelo Antonioni in his film *Chung Kuo: Cina* (1972) and Joris Ivens and Marceline Lorian in their epic *How Yukong Moved the Mountains* (1976) evince similar ambiguities. Li Jie argues that the directors "went to China in search of an authentic world where social relations were not mediated by mass-produced images, only to find another kind of 'society of spectacle' where the Maoist visual regime penetrated the most remote villages" (p. 167). Despite their shortcomings, the films stand as documents to the age, Li Jie argues, that were avidly discovered by nostalgic Chinese audiences in the early 2000s.

The final section of the book deals with architectural and monumental productions or legacies of the Mao era. Here the book covers some well-known ground, with the depiction of factories in three films: Wang Bing's *王兵 West of the Tracks* (*Tie xiqu* 鐵西區), Jia Zhangke's *賈樟柯 Twenty-four City* (*Ershisi cheng ji* 二十四城記), and Zhang Meng's *張猛 Piano in a Factory* (*Gang de qin* 鋼的琴). The factory serves as an ambiguous metaphor of the Mao era, which elicits both the nostalgia of some of the retired workers interviewed by Jia Zhangke, but also the enduring effects of industrial pollution and perennial disenfranchisement in Wang Bing's film.

The last chapter examines existing museums and memorials of the Mao era, beginning with a careful discussion of Ba Jin's 巴金 1986 essay calling for a museum of the Cultural Revolution, and surveying some of the sites that can make a claim to fulfilling such a mission. Ultimately, Jianchuan's Museum Cluster, with its cluttered, uncommented, yet immediately accessible and even tangible mass-produced content, may allow "more pluralistic interpretations of the past than any historical master narrative" (p. 247). By contrast, former "trauma sites" like the prison camp at Jiabiangou, a

refurbished May Seven cadre school in Hubei, or the Red Guard graveyard in Chongqing, and to a lesser degree the lone Cultural Revolution Museum in Shantou, remain largely inaccessible – on several levels – to the public.

Li Jie's study provides a rich and thought-provoking account of the cultural texts she has chosen to focus on and highlights the many-layered ambiguities inherent in today's remembrances of the Mao era. Some of these ambiguities perhaps deserve to be teased out more fully. This reviewer remains somewhat doubtful about both the object "utopian ruins" and the chosen form of a "curated exhibit." Certainly, Maoist ideology can be described as informed by certain utopian philosophies (although these might be spelled out more precisely). However, the systematic attempt to strike a balance between utopian idealism and violent or destructive outcomes often seems contrived. Do we really need to connect literary inquisitions with a "utopian quest to purify the ranks of 'the People'" (p. 69), or can we recognise that there are sincerely held but destructive and anti-humanistic views at the foundation of the Maoist project and socialism more generally? The word "dystopian," incidentally, only appears once or twice in the book, and always to characterise a "reality" that is contrasted with a "utopian vision" (p. 63). Portraying socialism as mainly a ruined ideal seems at best an oversimplification.

Similar questions are raised by the method of selective "curating." Although it is true that historical "objects" can be studied together with their "re-mediation" as memory in the present, the objects themselves are not quite the same in different parts of the book. The literary and visual texts produced during the Mao era and discussed in the first two parts are studied in their original contexts before they are "re-mediated"; by contrast, the factories and prison camps are studied only through their re-mediation and lack original context.

Finally, while the study mobilises an army of references from literary and cultural studies, cameo appearances by Agamben, Badiou, Barthes, Derrida, Žižek, and others add little substance, producing a scattered effect and deterring from the main argument rather than reinforcing it. By contrast, it is regrettable that the study does not engage more systematically with the renewed historical production on the Mao era that has appeared over the last decades, both in China and abroad. For example, Gao Hua's study *How the Red Sun Rose* (2019) is conspicuously absent from the discussion on ideology, and although Li's book aims to investigate "subaltern" memories, it is largely based on the productions of intellectuals or other elites, while studies of grassroots groups like Yang Kuisong's *Eight Outcasts: Social and Political Marginalization under Mao* (2019) or Guo Yuhua's 郭于華 *Shoukuren de jiangshu* (受苦人的講述, The Narrative of the Sufferers, 2013) are not mentioned. As a result, *Utopian Ruins* sometimes lacks historical depth. Without further discussion, the post-Mao era is termed "post-socialist" despite the ubiquity of references to socialism in today's media discourse. The larger arc of connections between the Republican, Mao, and post-Mao eras is also oversimplified when the book calls to reinvent the "public cultural practices" of the Mao era (p. 275), ignoring that these practices were themselves often violent and destructive deformations of civic practices that existed earlier in China's modern history. While curation and history remain legitimately distinct projects, more engagement with historians might bring additional clarity to the book's object and method.

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BRUCKERMANN, Charlotte. 2019. *Claiming Homes: Confronting Domicide in Rural China*. New York: Berghahn Books.

ANNE-CHRISTINE TRÉMON

Charlotte Bruckermann's book is set in Sweeping Cliff, a village that has been developed into a tourist site in the mountainous Shanxi countryside. As the village and its old courtyard houses are being economically revalued as a resource for development, the local population, although benefitting from increased income and employment opportunities, experiences dispossession and dislocation – and as such is threatened by "domicide," the destruction of home. Bruckermann builds on a wide-ranging literature, combining Marxist, feminist, and ritual studies, to interpret the ethnographic material she collected by living in Sweeping Cliff and sharing the villagers' daily activities for a year. She shows that most families manage to confront and thwart domicile. The home is simultaneously the house, the household, and the place where one lives, which is in all these dimensions constantly made by labour. She conceptualises the labour of homemaking as a relational mechanism for claims-making.

Part One, "History, Politics, Place," explores the villagers' claims to the home in the context of touristification and in an uneasy relationship with the past. Chapter One traces the architectural legacy of the village and Shanxi's merchant past and entrepreneurial tradition, currently being hailed by local governments and media in the context of a new capitalist accumulation. The village committee's leadership has surrendered to the tourism development company, which has taken over many former collective resources and buildings. Domestic dwellings started being targeted by the late 2000s, undermining villagers' claims for residence. Cautioning that the experiences