

**Ian JOHNSON**, *Wild Grass: Three Stories of Change in Modern China*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004. ISBN: 0-375-42186-6 (hc). Price: US\$24.00.

Ian Johnson first gained renown in 2001 for a series of *Wall Street Journal* articles describing the Chinese government crackdown on the Falun Gong religious sect. Having won a Pulitzer Prize for his efforts, Johnson expands further into China in *Wild Grass*. This attractive, accessible, and well-written text revolves around the small lawsuits of intrepid citizens, who, by pursuing simple justice, are challenging and eroding Chinese communist power. These small acts of resistance, in Johnson's view, portend the eruption of "subterranean tensions" that will ultimately result in the demise of the communist regime (p. 8).

*Wild Grass* follows three individuals—a tax rebel in Shaanxi, an architecture student in Beijing, and a Shandong daughter caught up in the Falun Gong crackdown—each of whose story adds weight to the book's main theme of lawful resistance to opaque and arbitrary laws. In search of the imprisoned Ma Wenlin, the author ventures into rural Shaanxi, where he witnesses a peasantry overburdened and angered by taxes illegally levied. Noting Shaanxi's sharp contrast to China's wealthy coastal cities (and unconsciously echoing Edgar Snow), Johnson alerts foreign observers to the importance of the countryside. "This region's backwardness had made it a precursor of change," he argues of Shaanxi (p. 15).

Johnson subsequently explores the intimate world of the Beijing *hutongs*, neighborhoods threatened by a ravenous combination of government corruption and unscrupulous real estate developers. This is the underside of Beijing's real estate bubble, depicted by Johnson in detail that, like Beijing itself, mingles Ming dynasty with Kentucky Fried Chicken. Featuring a Tsinghua University graduate student, the tale is rich in history and humor, but fails as an indicating argument for the collapse of the government in Beijing. Johnson's anecdotes of old Beijing are nonetheless delightful, and serve as a good-natured interlude before he plunges into the polarizing debate over Falun Gong.

Johnson's investigation of the Falun Gong phenomenon takes him to Weifang, Shangdong Province, where he joins forces with Zhang Xueling, a woman "of few allies and little sophistication" (p. 256). Eluding the police and bonding with Falun Gong practitioners, Johnson enters a rarely seen salient of the underground movement. In an unusual perspective, Johnson reveals ties between the Chinese Communist Party and sympathetic anticult

movements in the United States. Given the awful polarization of the discourse on Falun Gong and the massive propaganda campaign undertaken by both sides, Johnson does admirable work in elucidating the issue without sliding into pedantry or resorting to the sledgehammer of didacticism.

*Wild Grass* provides stimulating reading for sinologists and grist for a general audience. Johnson aptly places himself near the center of the narrative, and only when he strays from his own experience does the prose drift slightly from its cogent moorings. The author manages to convey the romance of foreign reportage in the PRC, and the details of his journalist's craft would surely enliven discussion among college students or aspiring foreign correspondents.

Striking and pithy though it may be, Johnson's text is hardly comprehensive. If we want a fuller sense of the internal pressures facing the rulers in Zhongnanhai, authors must continue to probe at the degradation of the environment, the urban influx of migrant labor, the eruption of anti-Japanese nationalism among China's youth, and the smashing of the "iron rice bowl" for industrial workers in such crumbling and restive northeastern cities as Liaoyang and Daqing. Nevertheless, in his compact and readable *Wild Grass*, Ian Johnson performs a great service to anyone seeking to understand the mass of contradictions that is the People's Republic of China.

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**Antoine KERNEN**, *La Chine vers l'économie de marché: Les privatisations à Shenyang* (China toward a market economy: privatization in Shenyang). Paris: Editions Karthala, 2004. 271 pp., with maps, plates, tables. ISBN: 2-84586-519-8 (pbk). Price: €24.00.

The prime characteristic of the Chinese reforms during the post-Mao era is that they have carefully built their momentum around the systemic core of the planned economy and its bureaucratic, social, and ideological outgrowths located in the cities. Such circumvention allowed the new China of the reforms to "grow out" of the Maoist system. Earlier studies have documented the growth of the nonstate urban sector as well as the market conversion of local bureaucratic networks. Others have analyzed the link between prereform structures and behaviors within and around the institutional layout in the so-called parallel or informal economy. From the commodification of socialism to the corporate and/or the entrepreneurial evolution of the state, these paradigms have emphasized the overall, systemic