

varieties of fox tale that emerged during the Ming and Qing periods. Illuminating analysis is another hallmark of Huntington's work: her close readings of fox narratives throw the contrasts between various genres, various texts, and various authors into clear relief; she has acute observations to make even about some quite well-known stories. *Alien Kind* is notable, too, for its sustained effort to delve beneath the surface of these tales to consider what human concerns and anxieties they express. Huntington argues plausibly that foxes provided an appealing means to think about women's roles, social mobility, and cultural adaptability. Her book is a welcome and important addition to the growing scholarship on Chinese literature of the strange.

ALLAN H. BARR
Pomona College

Wild Grass: Three Stories of Change in Modern China. By IAN JOHNSON. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004. ix, 324 pp. \$24.00 (cloth).

Ian Johnson has presented us with a fascinating account of the social tensions that underlie China's rapid economic development. He spins his story around the travails of three individuals who seek to gain justice, and in so doing he reveals the disjuncture between economic progress and the inadequate legal and political system. This has been a popular topic recently, but rarely has it been addressed so eloquently or in such human terms.

The book shows the progress in coverage of China since the early 1970s when it slowly became possible for foreign journalists to work in China. China journalists seem obliged to write their memoirs, and for many years these amounted to little more than a string of anecdotes that tried to introduce China as a more nuanced and complex place than many may realize. As civil society has deepened and freedoms have expanded, foreign reporting has progressed from covering the shenanigans of elite politics to a much deeper reporting of how changes are affecting Chinese society. Johnson's book is a fine example of this trend. However, like earlier works, Johnson's account concentrates on what has gone wrong under reform and the damage that the authoritarian system can wreak on individuals who stand up for their rights or simply get in the way of greedy local officials eager to make a quick yuan out of development.

Johnson's beautiful writing brings alive the contradictions and tensions of contemporary China, and some of it is deeply disturbing. All three stories share certain characteristics in addition to exploring the gap between economic growth and the lagging legal system. First, all the individuals are loyal citizens who are radicalized by their appalling treatment once they decide to stand up for their rights when confronted by local corruption and wrongdoing. None engage initially in acts that are illegal under Chinese law, and all are trying to get their just desserts. For their pains, they are abused, arrested, beaten, and even murdered. Second, these are stories of everyday abuse in the system. None of those featured are politically important figures but are ordinary citizens trying to go about their everyday business. Third, all hold the traditional belief that if higher-level authorities only knew of the injustices, they would correct them. However, it is clear that the higher-level authorities rarely care, or even if they do there is little that they can do to change the behavior of local officials. All of Johnson's people parade through a series of offices with the naïve belief that somewhere there must be a good official who will help them. None find such an official, and the only tangible result is to encourage even greater wrath of the local officials.

The first story covers the familiar terrain of farmers who are subjected to illegal fees and levies. The "hero" is Mr. Ma Wenlin, a self-trained legal expert who reluctantly seeks to help farmers from his old home to bring a collective lawsuit against the local government to return monies that it has taken illegally from the farmers. In this, he was merely doing something that had been successful in a neighboring county. Indeed, national media seem to have agreed with him. However, this view was not shared by local party officials who, after having had him beaten up when he visited the petitions office in Beijing, sentenced him to five years in a labor camp.

The second story does not entail such brutality but still reveals the disdain with which local officials treat their citizens, especially when there is money to be made from questionable land appropriation. Through the 1990s, countless numbers have lost their homes and have been cheated out of adequate compensation. Beijing and other major cities are home to daily demonstrations and disturbances that derive from this. Chinese officials like to stress the length and importance of China's history. Yet, this story reveals the utter contempt that many hold for their culture and history when money can be made by knocking down cultural heritage.

The third story concerns the travails of Ms. Chen Zixiu, a fifty-seven-year-old retiree who became a firm believer in Falun Gong. Like many others, she could not believe it when the central government declared the practice illegal and set about crushing it ruthlessly. Such was her concern that this apolitical, law-abiding citizen set off to Beijing not once but twice to protest. On the second occasion, she was arrested and beaten to death by the local Weifang authorities who felt that she had embarrassed them in the capital. Johnson draws out two broader issues: first, that the brutality at the local level was not an aberration but, rather, a conscious effort by higher-level authorities to "kill" the movement; second, the story reveals the spiritual vacuum that exists in contemporary China and how, absent relevant guidance from the government, people are attracted to a broad range of alternative belief systems.

While not all of China is as grim as the stories in this book would suggest, such events occur all too often and are not aberrations but, rather, products of an unreformed political system and an ineffective legal system. They make sober reading for those who claim that China does not need democracy at the present time or that democracy would only make life worse.

TONY SAICH
Harvard University

A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking. By FRANÇOIS JULLIEN. Translated by JANET LLOYD. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. x, 202 pp. \$22.00 (paper).

According to François Jullien, "we' within the European tradition who still perpetuate those early Greek categories [have] so thoroughly assimilated [the tradition] that we no longer see it—no longer see ourselves" (p. 1). Furthermore, he claims that "we" are in a "rut" (p. 15) due to our insistence on distinguishing between theory and practice in spite of the fact that "the gap between reality and its model cannot be plugged" (p. 14). Western readers need not despair, however. Jullien offers his analysis of early Chinese thought as "a way out of our rut" because "it never constructed a world of ideal forms, archetypes, or pure essences that are separate from reality but inform it" (p. 15).