

turned out that the claimed uniqueness of the Đạo Mẫu religion's transnational character seems to limit this very character. Certainly, exchanges of many kinds take place freely between the people in Vietnam and those in the Silicon Valley or in other countries. As much as Đạo Mẫu religion is part of these exchanges it can be considered to be transnational. Yet it is also striking to note that, with the possible exception of a few examples of non-Vietnamese persons showing interest in the religion, the Mother Goddess religion thrives mainly among Vietnamese, at home as well as abroad. For these believers Vietnam commands a special place of honor in their religion "because it is the birthplace of the religion" (143). As a parallel example the authors refer in this context to the significance of Rome for Catholics. Although this is an interesting comparison, it will be noticed that Rome is the center of a religion but not at all for a particular ethnic group, while in the case of the Mother Goddess religion "Vietnam" seems to function for its followers as the center of attention either as a political body (the state of Vietnam) or as an ethnic entity (the Vietnamese, at home or abroad). As a result, it may be better to say that the religion of the Mother Goddess is transposable and transportable to any place where Vietnamese live and that in this (avowedly rather restricted) sense it exhibits also transnational characteristics.

The authors' longstanding fieldwork experience and their empathetic collaboration with their Vietnamese partners, mediums as well as believers, and with one another have given us a fascinating book. Its fascination lies in the fact that the reader is given the feeling of participating in the events described. The book is like the Mother Goddess religion it introduces, it is "a deeply personal experience."

Peter Knecht

**Fong, Vanessa:** *Paradise Redefined. Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. 267 pp. ISBN 978-0-8047-7267-9. Price: \$ 21.95.

In "Paradise Redefined," Vanessa Fong follows the lives of young Chinese from the town of Dalian in northeast China as they venture abroad in their quest to become "citizens of the developed world." Utilizing Benedict Anderson's notion of the "imagined community," and Aihwa Ong's extension of the concept from the national to the global level, Fong posits that the condition of "developed" is not delineated by national borders, but rather is an imagined community of individuals with access to certain social, cultural, and legal resources in whichever country they may happen to reside. That is, individuals can live underdeveloped lifestyles in developed countries, and concomitantly, individuals may enjoy highly developed lifestyles in what are characterized as underdeveloped countries. Fong argues that due to the "increasingly globalized nature of the media, language, and educational pilgrimages available" to them, young Chinese citizens in cities like Dalian "aspire to belong" to this "imagined developed world community composed of mobile, wealthy, well-educated, and well-connected people

worldwide" (6). Her book portrays the experiences of the young Chinese citizens she studies as they seek to gain membership to this imagined community of the developed world. To do so, she follows a cohort of 2,273 Chinese citizens born under China's one-child policy she first surveyed in 1997, when she taught in Dalian, until 2010, tracking the trajectories of their education, careers, childbearing, and childrearing, regardless of where they ended up living. Despite the obvious methodological challenges, which she describes in her "Introduction," Fong followed students to the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Singapore, among others. The result is a rich and enjoyable book which leaves the reader feeling that he/she has genuinely achieved a deeper understanding of the people behind the much debated topic of China's role in the world.

There are at least two key bodies of literature that Fong's work addresses and enriches. Within existing literature on large-scale migration trends, there are assumptions that people make their migration choices on the basis of rational, predictable reasons that are discernible through quantitative analysis. However, Fong argues that analyses of human migration based on quantitative data cannot help but tend to oversimplify motivations and goals. She notes that even with the depth and breadth that a global-scale ethnography across multiple field sites provides to the study of global processes and transnational people, the full reality of a group of people making choices in a global context still cannot be adequately represented (33). However, a methodology involving qualitative analysis at the very least reveals complexities and nuances often overlooked in the conclusions reached through quantitative approaches. For example, as Fong notes, while a quantitative analysis of her data would suggest that it is children of professionals, managers, and large business owners who are most likely to study abroad, the qualitative approach to analyzing the ethnographic data that Fong has utilized suggests that this was in fact not the most important reason for individual migration decisions (94).

A second field of literature for which Fong's study has resonance is that around China's growing global role. While much has been written in the last few years about this topic, much of the literature lacks historical and social context. Individuals, and their ideas and perspectives, are rarely treated as subjects worthy of analysis to better understand China's potential international impact. As a result, the conventional discourse around China's international behavior, focusing on the state as an autonomous and cognizant central actor, tends to characterize China as a unitary, monolithic actor acting on fixed geopolitical objectives to increase its share of international power. In recent years there have been calls for increased efforts by analysts to acknowledge the critical importance of Chinese perspectives when discussing China's role in the world and Fong's work fits into a small but growing trend of exceptions to the oversimplifications prevalent in the dominant discourse. Rather than perpetuating the fictionalized monolithic view of "China" constructed from an overreliance on non-Chinese sources, research such

as Fong's takes a nuanced view of the various actors and their perspectives. For both bodies of literature, Fong's discussions of issues as diverse as filial nationalism; social relationships as the foundation of identity; and patriotic sex and romance provide fascinating insights into Chinese young people's identity and their conceptions of social roles and connections, and sheds light on how (this particular group of) Chinese people see the world, and their relationships with others within it.

While Fong's research is undoubtedly a welcome addition to existing literature, the book could have benefited from a stronger sense of purpose and a more cohesive analytical framework. As such, the ethnographic material Fong employs often hints at interesting larger issues but does not go on to explore them. The book's structure is such that the majority of the theory Fong refers to is set out in the introduction, and is rarely mentioned again through the main body. Without contextualizing the material within a broader explanatory framework, it is difficult to reconcile the interesting but often contradictory vignettes and anecdotes Fong describes. For example, Fong discusses how some students became more defensive abroad than they had been at home of China's policies around political and religious freedoms, whereas others became more critical (160). However, she does not explore where or how these views might have originated, why they were stronger in some than in others, what larger trends this phenomenon might imply, nor does she situate the observations in relation to findings from other literature and research on these questions. Structurally, a final chapter that weaves together the theoretical points made in the introduction with the observations throughout the main body of the text would provide a satisfying conclusion to the book. As it stands, while Fong's ethnographically rich descriptions certainly reflect the nuance and complexity of the students' experiences, without being woven into an analytical framework, they leave the reader somewhat at a loss as to what the larger implications are.

Merriden Varrall

**Ghodsee, Kristen:** *Lost in Transition. Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 206 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-5102-3. Price: £ 14.95

This book is a collection of stories, each of which focuses on a particular theme relating to individuals' experiences of postsocialism. The stories are short, written in a simple style, that is accessible and easy – as well as a pleasure – to read. Each story makes a pertinent point relating to the post 1989 changes through the perspective of personal experiences (primarily but not only in Bulgaria). The author clearly states that the aim of the work is not intended for scholarly peers, but for students and nonspecialists (xii). If this is the intention, then Ghodsee has successfully achieved her goal and in the process made a number of other important contributions (discussed below).

It is in the "Preface" and the "Afterword" that the author draws the ideas together from the collected essays,

identifying the main focus of concern: to explain the nostalgia that populations across Eastern Europe express for their former lives under state socialism – an issue, Ghodsee says, which seems "incredulous" to us in "the West" who understood the system to be both "oppressive and unsustainable" (xiv). In the "Afterword" Ghodsee returns to this issue and offers some reasons for both the nostalgic views towards socialism and the cynicism towards postsocialist (neoliberal) reforms (179).

The 16 short stories that make up the main body of the book provide a set of fascinating personal experiences of postsocialism – covering a wide range of themes. Although all the stories have considerable value, I will only briefly mention three here. Chap. 1 titled "Contraband," tells the story of travelling in the carriage of a train where fellow travellers are trying to smuggle goods across the border. The tension between Ghodsee and the other young men in the carriage builds until she eventually learns, after a tense encounter with the officials at the border, that the goods being smuggled are Heinz tomato sauce! Chap. 4 titled "Hair" made a particular impression: the story of a young Bulgarian Muslim called Yordanka, who leaves her small native town in south Bulgaria in order to find employment in Sofia (to earn money her family desperately needed to cover the costs of her father's medications). In Sofia she is exploited by the owner of a shoe shop who does not pay the full promised salary every month. Eventually Yordanka returns home, worse off than when she had left, despondent and forced into selling her long hair to make ends meet for that month. Then there is a story titled: "New Carpets for Old Kilims" (chap. 6), which tells of how villagers trade their valuable old antique kilims for cheap synthetic carpets to Sofia traders who sell the antiques in the West for excellent profits. The story provides an interesting commentary on issues relating to markets: the exploitation of individuals with limited information concerning how the market functions, immoral entrepreneurs who take advantage of such distorted information flows and the possible role of the state in regulating such arguably corrupt and exploitative activities. These stories underline aspects of postsocialism that are all too familiar to ethnographers working in the region – themes relating to poverty and survival, migration, market exploitation, and cross border trading. In the process the author reveals some of the reasons why native East Europeans might be nostalgic about socialism; highlighting some of the many everyday problems that individuals face in the new capitalist "free" market economy in contrast to the security socialism offered in terms of employment, health, education, and a stable future.

It is in the introductory chapter that Ghodsee provides a personal documentation of how her knowledge and interest in socialist states developed over a lifetime and how she managed in the process to overcome stereotypes. Although not a stated intention of the work, the chapter also provides a documentation of one US citizen's struggle and commitment to counter a lifetime of Cold War propaganda and stereotypes of the socialist Other. In many ways I found this discussion as important and relevant as the stated theme of the work. It is hard to appreciate, for