



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Die Agrarfrage in der Industriegesellschaft: Wissenskulturen, Machtverhältnisse und natürliche Ressourcen in der agrarisch-industriellen Wissensgesellschaft (1850-1950)* by Auderset and Moser

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used this publication to project an image of Japanese settler communities in Manchuria as a traditionalist right-wing utopia for Japanese and Western audiences. Kathryn Meyer focuses on a slum neighborhood named *Daikan'en* (the Garden of Grand Vision) in Harbin during the Manchukuo period. She shows how the reality of the urban slum in which all kinds of vice flourished, including illegal opium trafficking, belied the image of a harmonious society promoted by the Japanese Empire.

The third part tackles the post-World War II period, paying special attention to the experiences of the various settler groups in Manchuria. Ronald Suleski recounts the traumatic experience of a Japanese settler after the fall of the Manchukuo in 1945, including attacks by a Chinese mob, the death of the village leader, the settler's subsequent wandering, and his eventual return to his home village in Japan in 1948. Wang Ning offers a comparative examination of the life of political exiles sent to the Heilongjiang area during the Qing and PRC periods. Wang shows that exiles in the PRC period were subjected to intensive forced labor in numerous Communist Party labor camps and military farms in harsh environments, and to rigid thought-reform programs that aimed to transform them into "socialist new men" (240). Sun Xiaoping examines the PRC development of a large-scale military farm, called Beidahuang, in the Heilongjiang area. Mobilizing 140,000 discharged army veterans and female migrants from other parts of China from the 1950s to the 2000s, this agricultural development project was a huge success. However, the success came with dire environmental consequences, including loss of wetlands and black soil, and salinization of the soil.

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Die Agrarfrage in der Industriegesellschaft: Wissenskulturen, Machtverhältnisse und natuerliche Ressourcen in der agrarisch-industriellen Wissensgesellschaft (1850–1950). By Juri Auderset and Peter Moser. Vienna: Boehlau Verlag, 2018. 341 pp., hardback, €45.00, ISBN 978-3-412-51072-5.

Historical interest in "agricultural revolutions" is not new. Major work on Europe (and especially Britain) appeared between the 1960s and 1990s, and most of the substantial literature on the industrialization of US agriculture has emerged since the 1990s. But so far, surprisingly little comparative attention has been paid to developments from the latter nineteenth century versus those since the 1950s. The book under review, however, does just this, perhaps

reflecting a recent surge of interest among European rural historians in twentieth-century movements for the “modernization” of agriculture.

The book’s title translates roughly as “The agrarian question in industrial society: Knowledge-regimes, power relations and natural resources in the agrarian-industrial knowledge-society (1850–1950).” It is a study of the transformation in conceptions of the agricultural process over this period, drawing primarily upon Swiss sources but with reference to comparable developments elsewhere in Europe and North America. Unlike many studies of this period, Auderset and Moser’s is not an economic history of the transformation; its perspective is instead that of the “history of knowledge” as it is relevant to agriculture. Thus their central concept—“the agricultural-industrial knowledge-society”—denotes an ensemble of actors, institutions, discourses, and practices which emerged from the middle of the nineteenth century during attempts to integrate agriculture into industrial society. Accordingly, the book goes beyond the development of formalized expert knowledge to embrace the knowledge possessed by farmers and others involved in production. Indeed, the interaction between these two forms of knowledge played a large role in shaping agriculture’s transformation.

Four central chapters provide overviews of the development of key domains of knowledge since the mid-nineteenth century: farm management/economics, mechanization, plant-breeding, and animal-breeding. In the last chapter, more discussion of farming’s reliance and impact upon the environment would have been useful. Each chapter discusses how attempts to reconceptualize production according to the goals and models of industrial society ran up against the complexity of the beast. Relatively simple analytical schemes and practices had difficulty in accommodating farming’s temporal and spatial distinctiveness: horses differ from tractors, soils can vary across a single field, production and consumption in the farm family’s economy are difficult to separate, etc. In response, considerable effort was devoted to adjusting the discourse and practice of “scientific agriculture” to this complexity, with partial success.

The argument running through each of these chapters is that one can identify three distinct stages in this transformation. First, during the 1850s and 1860s an industrial perspective dominated discussion in agricultural circles. The successful use of fossil fuels to drive enormous increases in industrial production prompted some observers to remark on the “backwardness” of agriculture and to advocate an “industrial” approach to transforming agriculture. After the 1870s and 1880s, however, it was becoming clear to others

that agriculture did not fully lend itself to such an analytical straitjacket. As a result, the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s was characterized by ambivalence: a growing recognition of the similarities and differences between agricultural and industrial production but also the persistence of fundamentally conflicting conceptions of agriculture and how it could be modernized. Finally, the period since the 1950s marked a major turning point, throwing the existing knowledge-regime into crisis. Large increases in agricultural productivity, driven by heavy use of fossil fuels, led to the marginalization of previous conceptions of agriculture's distinctiveness, giving free rein to the industrial paradigm.

In a book of enormous scope but moderate length, it is inevitable that some issues could not be addressed in full. For instance, there is little discussion of the causes affecting the transformation across all four areas. From the 1950s, for example, the availability of fossil fuels is cited as the major factor in the shift toward the industrial model, and while this is obviously relevant to the growing use of agrochemicals and to mechanization, it is not clear how this factor would have had an impact upon other areas of discourse and practice such as plant- and animal-breeding or farm management. Furthermore, although the authors are fully aware of the political dimensions of the transformation, which undermined the role of farmers' knowledge/skill, increased their dependence upon the market, and in some cases led to protests by peasant organizations, they do not discuss the extent to which the transformation may have been shaped in part by the changing political influence of the peasantry over this period.

Reservations aside, this book is a remarkable work of synthesis which advances an important thesis and deserves a wide readership, not just among agricultural historians but also among those responsible for agricultural policy. One of the major implications of the authors' analysis (though it is not voiced) is that if the industrial paradigm still fits imperfectly with the distinctive nature of farming, as it has since the 1950s, then the long-term viability of our current model of agriculture must be in doubt.

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A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule. By Jonathan Schlesinger. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. 288 pp., \$65.00, hardback, ISBN 978-0-8047-9996-6.