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## Book Review: *Developmental Fairy Tales*

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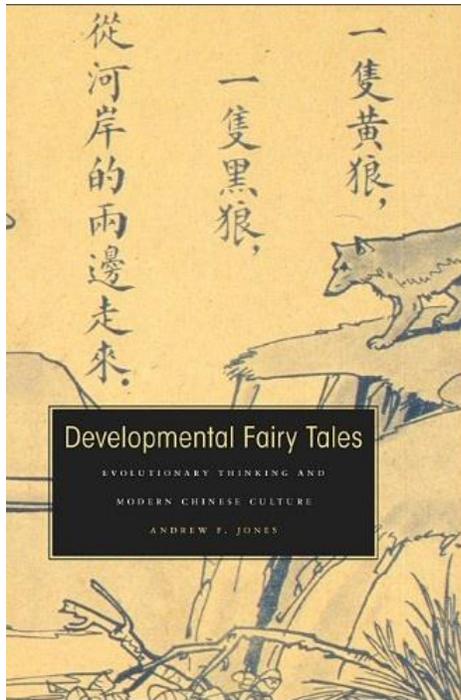
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Jones, Andrews F. [Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture](#). Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011. 259 pp. \$49.95 (cloth).

By Nicole Kwoh

At the 1996 APEC Economic Leaders Meeting, Jiang Zemin concluded his speech on economic development with a quote from Lu Xun: “For actually the earth had no road to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made” (1921). This quote highlights the important role played by the first generation of modern Chinese literature in shaping the current rhetoric of building a road to progress. In *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture*, Andrew F. Jones explains the construction of this ubiquitous concept of cultural and historical progress. With a focus on Lu Xun (1881-1936), Jones broadens the influence of evolutionary theory beyond short stories and essays to include narratives of “everyday discourse” (p. 8), and skillfully pieces together widely circulated academic journals, film, print advertisements, and children’s literature of the Republican Era. Jones’s fresh interdisciplinary approach sheds light on the extent to which artistic and political reverberations of developmental social theory shaped modern Chinese culture, with the crucial help of the contemporary growth of print culture, Western science, and commercial media. The five chapters of the book are organized to show the broadening of developmental theory’s impact on literature, politics, and economy.

Jones links vernacular developmental narrative forms with Late Victorian “science fiction” (p. 48), in particular that of Edward Bellamy and Jules Verne. Their works, Jones explains, explore

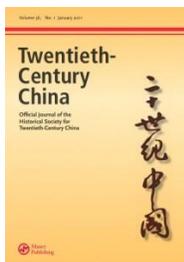
evolutionary social theory by questioning the relationship between a “backward” reality and a utopian destination, a narrative that came to be appropriated by Lu Xun and fellow participants in experimental fiction such as Wu Jianren, author of *The New Story of the Stone* (1908). Jones shows that this narrative structure often also worked as a framing device in which plots and characters come full circle, inevitably ending where they had started despite their efforts. In their journey, the final part of a chain of events is presented both as an avoidable crisis and an inevitable natural process. The opening line from Lu Xun’s “The Misanthrope” (1925) illustrates this circularity in its stark declaration: “My acquaintance with Wei Lianshu began with a funeral, and ended with a funeral.”

Jones keenly argues that the politicization of these developmental narratives was grounded in the tenet that literary creation has the ability to influence the historical path of the nation. Chinese nationalist intellectuals perceived a decline in China’s sovereignty in the face of increasing reliance on goods and technology imported from the West, foreign political control, and a fractured central government. China’s powerlessness in attaining modern nation-state status in the imperialist world order came to be viewed by Lu Xun and his contemporaries as a consequence of an inherited cultural tradition that appeared inexorable, but from which a rupture was needed if ever China was to overcome a stalled modernity. Jones subscribes to the prevailing view that developmental theories informed nationalist intellectuals, who believed it was their responsibility to take the lead in awakening the nation to action (or, at least, to its predetermined condition) and, consequently, turned to vernacular fiction as an instrument of social change. Significantly, Jones comes to the provocative conclusion that this developmental narrative was understood not merely as a parable to convey tensions emerging from a desire for agency against Western imperialism and from a need to confront an inevitable modernization. It also, in itself, served as an “act” that re-captured historical agency from the steady pace of the evolutionary view of human history.

The author’s insightful examination of literature, film, and artwork reveals that these narrative acts converged on the recurrent use of the image of a captive animal or child receiving education in his or her formative years, a scene in which the shape of the child’s future is reliant on adult intervention. Indeed, posits Jones, the child or beast, as determiner of the nation’s future and embodiment of the consequences of both “nature and nurture,” becomes the “primary object of literary representation” (p. 10). This is especially convincing in a detailed analysis of Lu Xun’s essay “How to Train Wild Animals” (1933) inspired by “A Narrow Cage” (1921) by Vasilii Eroshenko (1890-1952), an advocate of developmental theory with whom Lu Xun forged a close friendship. Looking at the expanding commercial publishing industry, Jones points to the launch of children’s magazines in 1921 by publishing giants Commercial Press and Chunghwa Books as further evidence that the image of the child became central to the discourse on development in popular culture and mass media. Jones expands the scope of analysis of these magazines beyond their article content to analyze advertisements, cover illustrations, and photomontages. By examining this intersection of child education, national development, and print capitalism, Jones reveals a fascinating Republican Era discourse on child development. It is in children’s literature itself that we detect a form of “the vernacularization of evolutionary narrative” (p. 82). Jones goes one step further to argue that this expanding market for products aimed at educating children catalyzed the rise of the entire print industry.

In one of the most intriguing sections of the book, Jones provides a comprehensive and reliable study on the rise of Western taxonomy and natural science as institutional disciplines in China, highlighting the role of Lu Xun's younger brother Zhou Jianren (1888-1898), a zoologist and advocate for the importance of external conditions to child development. Western scientific texts, especially those pertaining to biology or zoology, were translated and disseminated in China, primarily through the efforts of a network of New Culture writers. According to Jones, this enabled the indigenization of foreign texts, which took on meanings specific to the Chinese condition.

This provocative study pushes open the boundaries of developmental theory in the formation of modern Chinese literature and media culture. It is a valuable resource for scholars interested in twentieth-century China's comparative literary history, intellectual history, children's literature, translation, and cultural studies.



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