Resistance, Chaos and Control in China: Taiping Rebels, Taiwanese Ghosts and Tiananmen. By ROBERT P. WELLER. [Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994. viii + 255 pp. £47.50. ISBN 0-333-59381-2.]

When asked about the meaning of a certain ritual, Chinese informants often have little to say or, at best, refer the inquisitive anthropologist to a local specialist. Robert Weller argues persuasively that we should not dismiss or ignore this interpretive silence. The fact that the meaning of rituals, visions or texts often remains uninterpreted and thus multi-interpretable or "thick" is an important ethnographic fact. This "thickness" gives actors the power of "saturating" interpretation: sacrificial pig offerings on Taiwan, for instance, can be read as local Taiwanese resistance against the Nationalist state in one year, and as nationalist support for that same state in the next. What is essential is not the ritual, vision or text itself, but the social and political context of its interpretation. Weller rightly warns against the often-encountered fallacy of social scientists who interpret everything in a culture as either resistance or hegemony: "Rap music may at first appear to be cultural resistance, but it ends up as a McDonald's jingle" (p.13).

That we ought to focus on interpretive communities and processes and abandon the attempt to read a single meaning from a text is in itself not an entirely novel point. But Weller shows in his case studies exactly how this takes place, thereby making a powerful case for the use of seemingly abstract anthropological theory in order to generate important new insights into Chinese society and culture. In certain social and political contexts, such as in Beijing in spring 1989 or Guangxi in the late 1840s, meanings continue to be "thick." Differences of opinion over the meaning of, for instance, Godly visions during the early Taiping or of the notion of democracy during Tiananmen were both vehicles of intense power struggles and the reason for the broad appeal and phenomenal growth of both movements. Alternatively, powerful actors (such as the nascent Taiping state in 1850 or the CCP after 4 June) who manage to thin out "thick" events and impose their own orthodox reading (re)gain on political domination and organizational strength but lose on effervescence and mass appeal.

Many books and articles have been written on the Taiping rebellion, Taiwanese folk religion and the 1989 People's Movement. Yet this book's balanced combination of theory, ethnography and sinology, especially in the sections on Taiping and on Taiwanese ghosts, makes them all but redundant. Traditionally, general anthropology and China studies have not mixed well. Until recently, China anthropologists suffered from the suspicion of high-blown theorizing that characterizes traditional sinology and, to a lesser extent, modern China studies. This book is one example to show that there is a new generation of scholars who have joined China anthropology and, as Maurice Freedman wrote long ago, are "building a house of their own at the door of which the sinologues may soon be tapping."

Yet despite encouraging developments in the last decade or so, China

continues to be a peripheral geographical area to the main theoretical debates within anthropology. With very few exceptions, anthropologists of China find it hard enough to fit general theoretical ideas onto their China data; little time and energy are left to contribute to making China relevant to the further development of these ideas. Weller (and this reviewer!), too, has not yet taken this step, although his concepts of "thick" and "thin" meanings, and of "saturation" and "precipitation" of interpretation are useful additions to the anthropological vocabulary. To what extent, for instance, is Chinese religion's instrumental and syncretic nature unique and are the "thickness" of meaning and the "saturation" of interpretation therefore especially pronounced? Is Chinese culture thus ideally suited to develop hypotheses regarding the social organization of meaning that can be tested in other cultures? Questions such as these are the real challenge for future work by China anthropologists. To the vision of Freedman we may therefore add the hope that in the near future anthropologists of other cultural areas, too, will be well advised to knock at the door of China anthropology.

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The Making of a New Chinese Mind: Intellectuality and the Future of China. By HENRY K. H. WOO. [Hong Kong: China Foundation, 1993. 221 pp. $40.00. ISBN 962-7794-02-3.]

China has failed to make as great a contribution to world civilization as might be expected by the size of its population. This book not only answers the question of why this is so but also aims to help China overcome its deficiencies of intellectual tradition. The author digests, synthesizes and applies current Western theories of culture and modernization together with sinologist theories of Chinese science and economic development into his diagnosis of China's intellectual problems. His prescription is: "rejecting the May Fourth iconoclastic stance, substituting the old mode of methodological idealism by methodological realism, balancing the ideals of globalisation with the values of nationalism and to cope rationally with their respective merits and limitations, offset the effects of a crisis in modern education which manifests itself in its overly and artificially distancing itself from dialogue with the past" (p. 204).

The central theme of the book is the necessity of creating intellectuality or "reason" in China. It calls for an immediate renewal of intellectual investment. The author provides three main reasons why the task is urgent. First, intellect is needed to enhance China's overall competitive advantage in the world economy where knowledge, time and entrepreneurship are gaining importance. Secondly, China's failure to produce scientific and industrial revolutions demonstrate the limitations of the Chinese intellectual tradition. Thirdly, the intellectual mission triggered by China's meeting with the West 150 years ago remains far from being accomplished. These arguments are convincing. Nevertheless, the issue should be pursued further: what kind of "reason" does China need