

**Veronica S. W. Mak, *Milk Craze: Body, Science, and Hope in China***

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The recent blossoming of China food studies has brought fresh attention to the topic of how China produces and consumes dairy. Much of the scholarly interest in this topic has revolved around two points: the historical emergence of China's milk industry, including the circumstances that gave rise to melamine poisoning in 2008, and the cultural transformation behind the adoption of dairy into the Chinese diet. Grounded firmly in the literature of food anthropology, *Milk Craze: Body, Science, and Hope in China* successfully integrates both of these perspectives into a unique multi-site ethnography.

*Milk Craze* focuses its attention on two sites in the Southeast: Hong Kong and the nearby culinary center of Shunde, each presenting distinct opportunities and perspectives. In Hong Kong, Mak uses cafe menus, product advertisements, and internet chat rooms to show the evolution of milk in culinary imaginaries in an international city with distinct dietary traditions. In Shunde, she starts with the city's two claims to culinary fame: handmade cheese and the steamed dessert known as "double-skin milk," both made with the milk of water buffaloes. Herself a new mother at the time of her fieldwork, Mak explored with young families in both locations the ways that milk reflects concerns about food safety, child health, cost of living, and the precarity of labor.

Following a detailed introduction, the book's content breaks down into four chapters. The first chapter focuses on Hong Kong, showing the stratification of meaning socially ascribed to dairy, divided by place and method of consumption. The early scarcity of cow dairy that once marked liquid milk and sweetened milk tea as habits of the British elite gave way to new products with new meanings, such as the Vitasoy brand of soy milk that was marketed as the "soft drink" of the 1970s middle class, and the intensely flavored "silk stocking" milk tea that for some has come to embody the classless virtues of Hong Kong itself. The second chapter shifts focus to Shunde's buffalo cheesemakers, following experienced craftswomen back to their workshops to watch the milk being boiled, coagulated, and pressed by hand into its characteristic coin shape, and back in time to learn how rural collectivization and the neglect of agriculture eroded traditional practices of buffalo rearing. Mak traces the decline of Shunde's buffalo milk to the rise of the national cow dairy industry, an unstoppable "state-corporate alliance" built on preferential policies, global capital, and marketing that ties milk to health and patriotism.

The third chapter examines the social messaging of infant formula. Beginning her story with the run on foreign-made formula after 2008, Mak asks why formula would become so attractive to a culture that would otherwise prefer breastfeeding. The answer shows the value of her dual fieldwork sites. In Hong Kong, formula feeding is shown to help women facing pressures to return to the workplace quickly and fully slimmed down but also playing on fears of mothers' inability to produce sufficient milk. In Shunde, migrant parents take pride in returning home with foreign-made formula, materially substituting for lost maternal care and tangibly demonstrating earning prowess. In both, the switch to formula feeding is promoted by industry-sponsored research that exploits the personal anxieties of parents who wish above all to ensure that their children can "win at the starting line," growing up with all possible advantages.

The final content chapter traces the "medicalization of childhood" through the pathologization of "picky eating." The combination of industry-sponsored research, dietary recommendations, and product advertising transforms children's dislike of certain foods into a medical condition, one with a handy solution in the form of nutrient-laden milk formula. Constantly asking chronically worried parents "Are you sure?," the anxiety-driven market for formula as a nutritional supplement creates a race with no finish line.

Mak's engaging study adds to the growing field of research on China's dairy as a government project, site of status and desire, and overlooked culinary heritage. I felt that the book was at its best when exploring the interaction of these expressions, such as the diverse forces behind the decline of Shunde buffalo farming, the impact of celebrity motherhood on childrearing norms, or the marketing that made Vitasoy a household name. *Milk Craze* is theoretically ambitious, occasionally to excess, as the introductory chapter raises so many issues that the reader is left wondering what the book actually wants to do. The heavy reliance on secondary literature, often without specific reference to the author's own fieldwork, occasionally left me doubting its conclusions. For example, the claim that buffalo milk is unable to compete with the savvy health promises of the modern dairy industry could be interpreted differently, since traditional products are much better placed to play off the anxiety about the anonymized chains that produced the 2008 melamine poisoning. Indeed, large milk producers have diversified into buffalo, yak, and camel dairy for this very reason (DuBois 2020). Similarly, Mak's claims about the novelty of bottle feeding ignore a much older moral panic about women who "have

breasts but do not feed” (*youru buwei*) (Luo 2018, 208). Finally, I felt that the author’s unique emphasis on Shunde and Hong Kong was a missed opportunity to speak to the preponderance of research on the history of dairy consumption in other parts of China, notably Shanghai (Zhang 2020).

This book will not be the last on China’s great dietary transformation, but by presenting dairy in the distinct forms of buffalo cheese, mass-produced liquid milk, and scientized infant formula, *Milk Craze* persuasively shows how a single food can embody both the erosion and reinvention of tradition, as well as the hopes and anxieties of consumers across the social spectrum.

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