laid the groundwork for the emergence of the modern Chinese nation” (pp. 190–91).

The scope of the book is impressive, with chapters addressing a range of subjects, including Tang ethnic stereotyping, assimilation, the discursive construction of the “barbarian body,” the state’s treatment of ethnic difference, and the ways in which pro- and anti-Buddhist polemics dealt with the religion’s foreign origin. The contents are rich enough that any one of these chapters might be expanded into an entire book, and the author has drawn upon a tremendous variety of sources, ranging from material remains (such as tomb figurines) to Tang poetry, fiction, and essays, to the standard dynastic histories, Buddhist literature, and the inscriptions placed near the Orkhon River by Eastern Türk rulers in the early eighth century.

Yet the book also has its weaknesses. Although Abramson is well aware of the need to subject all of his evidence to close critical scrutiny, with particular attention to the distortions introduced by genre and the need to distinguish between Tang and Song voices in some of his sources, he does not always follow through in practice. Apparently unaware of the many doubts that have been raised about the Dialogues of Tang Taizong and Li, Duke of Wei (Tang Taizong Li Weigong wendui) since it first surfaced in the late eleventh century, he treats it as an authentic early Tang source rather than the Northern Song pastiche that it almost certainly is. Another slip is his reading (following James Legge) of Analects II.7 as “even dogs and horses have some ability to support their parents” (p. 32). Given that this passage is more often understood in a passive sense (dogs and horses are provided with food), Abramson ought to give some justification for his reading to dispel the impression that it was chosen simply because it happens to support a point he was trying to make.

Fortunately, such lapses are not frequent enough to vitiate the book’s major conclusions about ethnicity and identity. Abramson has not only made an important contribution to the scholarly literature on Tang China but also produced a work that will be of great value to anyone interested in the problem of ethnicity in Chinese history or the deep roots of Chinese nationalism.

DILEMNAS OF VICTORY: THE EARLY YEARS OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA.
doi:10.1017/S0021911809000163

It has too often been the case that the “New Democracy” period—the early years of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) referred to in the title of this book—has been overlooked in the historiography of twentieth-century China. The drama of the Communist victory in the civil war, culminating in Mao’s
proclamation of the establishment of the PRC on October 1, 1949, was almost matched by New China's entry into the Korean War. The latter was followed by a series of domestic campaigns designed to rid the new regime of threats and enemies, both real and perceived. The premise, and promise, of the New Democratic era soon faded with the announcement of the First Five-Year Plan in 1953 and the beginning of the transition to socialism. The story of those years has hitherto largely been ignored by researchers and educators. This fascinating collection of essays refocuses attention on this period, reminding readers of the uncertainty and hope, confusion and consolidation, that marked it. It is also of note for its chapter by the late Frederic Wakeman, Jr., which is fittingly the first of the essays in the volume.

As the editors write in the introductory essay, “The main aim of this volume is to depict the extraordinary diversity and complexity of how individuals, families, and social groups experienced the 1949–53 years” (p. 7), and the authors achieve this with an array of new insights in four main areas: The takeover of Shanghai by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is presented by Wakeman, Elizabeth Perry, and Nara Dillon; the Communist takeover of peripheral areas (Guizhou, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Soviet-occupied Dalian) is examined by Jeremy Brown, Chen Jian, Christian Hess, and James Z. Gao; how actors in the intellectual and cultural spheres adapted to accommodate the new system is covered by Perry Link, Sigrid Schmalzer, Paul Pickowicz, and Douglas Stiffler; and the volume ends, in a section entitled “Family Strategies,” with two case studies on the Ye and Liu families by Joseph Esherick and Sherman Cochrane, and a somewhat disparate essay by Gail Hershatter on the impact of the new regime on rural midwives in the early 1950s.

Despite the wide range of topics, the authors skillfully manage to weave threads of continuity among the ostensibly diverse chapters, with a number of reoccurring themes and personages, reminding the reader of the multilayered and simultaneous nature of the titular dilemmas. These dilemmas are shown to have existed for both the “liberators” and the “liberated” in New China, as each side sought accommodation and acceptance from the other. (The most notable exception is Brown’s fascinating essay on armed resistance to the new regime in Guizhou, which continued long after the Communist People’s Liberation Army had “won” the civil war.) What emerges most strongly from the book is not only the real sense of possibility shared by an unanticipated range of citizens of the new People’s Republic, from the Shanghai industrialist Liu Hongsheng to the xiangsheng performers introduced to us by Link, but also the complexities of the tentative and often ad hoc strategies embraced by the Communist authorities and those it was engaging with for the first time.

While this work admirably demonstrates the importance of examining these years from a non-party-centric perspective, its main weakness is highlighted by the slightly incongruous nature of Hershatter’s piece on how the CCP materially affected the lives of rural Chinese women through its promotion of “new” midwifery: There is an overwhelming urban bias in the collected stories of how Han China interacted with its new government. The other main weakness, however, is an inevitable consequence of its main strength (its micro-level focus). The reader
is left wondering what these experiences of, and strategies for, the New Democracy period meant for its future and how they influenced its fairly rapid demise.

*Dilemmas of Victory* is a welcome addition to the field, and it will be of interest to scholars working on a wide array of China-related disciplines: social, urban, diplomatic, and gender histories, to name but a few. It not only raises questions but also points to the possibility of a tantalizing wealth of further investigation into this newly “rediscovered” period in Chinese history, and it provides illuminating signposts as to where they may lie.

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**Beijing’s Games: What the Olympics Mean to China.** By **SUSAN BROWNELL**. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. xv, 213 pp. $72.00 (cloth); $24.95 (paper).  
doi:10.1017/S0021911809000175

In 1987, the Chinese periodical *Sports Vision* ran a story praising Susan Brownell as “the American girl who warmly loves Chinese sports” (p. 17). During the last two decades, Brownell has lived up to this characterization, becoming the most influential American scholar in the field of contemporary Chinese sport. I was pleased to learn that Brownell would be publishing a book during the run-up to this year’s Olympic Games in Beijing, expecting (as the volume’s high-profile back cover blurbers Jonathan Spence, Bob Costas, and Allen Guttmann agree) that this work would provide most Westerners with their best chance to learn more about the rich and complex field of Chinese sport and its relationship to the Olympic movement.

The work begins with a very personal chapter by Brownell on her relationship to Chinese sport as an athlete, scholar, and active participant in “China’s Olympic Dream,” and the author makes a convincing case (more than the actual Olympics ever have, at least) that a book about the Beijing Games could “reveal our common humanity” (pp. 13, 16).

Brownell is at her best when she is able to blend her athletic experience, scholarly insight, dogged researching and interviewing skills, and distinctly optimistic viewpoint to present unique and sympathetic perspectives on this Olympic dream. Refreshingly, Brownell asks us to discount notions of the Beijing Olympics as the “genocide games” or the endgame of some sinister eugenic plan. Instead, she presents the Games as a triumph of “freethinkers” in Beijing, such as artist-architect Ai Weiwei, director Zhang Yimou, and International Olympic Committee member He Zhenliang, all of whom played crucial roles in Olympic planning despite the official censure that they all experienced (pp. 2–4).

Brownell also excels in presenting sophisticated topics in clear ways, as in her discussion of the intersections between local culture, the 1980s drive to “seek roots,” the “subjective body,” and the official revival of martial arts in China