returned in the form of material benefits (including matchmaking services!), symbolic activities, more humanistic supervision, reduced status hierarchies, and an increased role for the women’s association, the union, the youth league, and, to oversee all this, the Communist Party. The result was a definite softening of labor-management tension alongside continued economic growth and technical upgrading.

For political scientists, one of the book’s most surprising findings is the return of the party and the relations between the owners and managers on the one side and government officials on the other. The cadres did not force themselves on the company, threats blazing and palms out. Au contraire—factory leaders invited the party back in to help stabilize industrial relations. Moreover, ownership and management dominated the relationship. Pace Andrew Walder’s clientelist analysis (see Communist Neo-Traditionalism [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986]), “the party has become the enterprise’s client” (p. 149).

In the end, Chen finds an unexpected combination of old and new. The reintegrative strategy bears uncanny resemblance to the values and practices of unit (danwei) socialism of Maoist days. Yet the relationship between the party/state and the firm has come to rest in a new place that is both more symbiotic than in previous analyses and also much more balanced toward the firms. Some Assembly Required shows us industrialization that did not simply give in to the supposedly all-powerful rationalizing, modernizing dictates of the market, but that, through the agency of its leadership, achieved new yet still distinctively “Chinese characteristics.”

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Thinking with Cases: Specialist Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History.
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For much of its history, Western Sinology has followed the biases of the Chinese literati in focusing on the canonical tradition when trying to understand the intellectual world of the elite. The traditional Chinese view of practitioners of law, medicine, and religion was frequently dismissive: Magistrates hired secretaries who took care of the day-to-day business of law and statecraft, and doctors and monks were frequently the butt of jokes in the popular imagination. But similar to the way art historians are disassembling the cherished divide separating “amateur” literati artists from professional painters, scholars in other fields are paying more attention to the actual practices of fields of knowledge. As demonstrated very clearly in the eight essays in Thinking with Cases: Specialist Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History, case studies are invaluable in the China field as diachronic records of how individuals negotiated the tensions
between classical canons (be they Confucian, Buddhist, legal, or medical) and their applications. Cases confound the canonical tradition because they are, by nature, contingent and frequently foreground the exceptional and the individual.

From early imperial times, an 案 were associated with state administration, especially legal case records. An literally means “table” or “tray” and metonymically came to refer to the documents placed on them. The high cultural status of the idealized magistrate no doubt explains the motivation for Song monks to begin labeling records of Buddhist philosophical debates as “public cases.” As Robert Sharf’s essay “How to Think with Ch’an Gong’an” makes beautifully clear, Chan gong’an were important documents for the professionalization of the Chan elite in training them in the dialectical method developed by the great masters. Although legal cases began to be compiled during the Tang, the collection and publication of legal and medical cases took off during the Ming under the influence of the rapid growth of publishing. Collections of case records helped professionalize both fields, disseminating new knowledge and ways of analysis, as well as establishing the reputations of individual practitioners and schools of practice. The essays in this volume make clear that the increased interest in cases as a genre during the Ming had as much to do with the growth of commercial publishing as the new intellectual respectability of the relative, the individual, and the concrete.

In addition to raising important insights about how generic conventions should inform the way in which we understand specific texts, the individual essays in Thinking with Cases will be essential reading for scholars who are trying to learn how to make sense of the forms and conventions of cases in the fields of law, medicine, and religion and in Confucian philosophy. New insights about the generic features of an inspired Hung-lam Chu’s argument that Huang Zongyi’s (1610–95) Cases of Learning of Ming Confucians (Mingru xue’an) should not be classified, as it has been, as either biography or history, but as a new and intentional genre of Confucian “case learning” designed to let students judge the records of Ming figures to help them find their own path to self-cultivation. Judith Zeitlin’s essay on the medical case records published by Sun Yikui (ca. 1522–1619) points out the potential entertainment and literary value of cases as a genre. Fiction had long borrowed from legal and medical cases; it should not surprise us that publications aimed at specialized audiences would borrow back the narrative techniques of fiction.

The three essays on legal practices include discussions of the processes by which magistrates negotiated the seemingly inflexible statutes in the legal code in order to come up with fair judgments that reflected moral sentiment (Jiang Yonglin and Wu Yanhong); the development of forensic knowledge as a professional field during the Qing (Pierre-Étienne Will); and the production of case records from oral testimony (Yasuhiko Karasawa). This last essay explains the puzzling consistency among all the depositions in legal case records; the formal records do not reflect what the plaintiffs or defendants actually said—they reflect the editorial intervention of the magistrate in order to create a reliable and consistent version of the events for the official record. Medical cases are also well represented: Charlotte Furth draws on her extensive research
to map out the development of medical cases as a genre; Ping-chen Hsiung looks specifically at the development of pediatric cases from the Song through the early Qing; and Judith Zeitlin analyzes case records for their literary qualities. Robert Sharf’s essay on Chan gong’an deserves special mention for its close reading of Zhaozhou Congshen’s (778–897) famous comment that dogs do not have a Buddha nature in order to tease out the hermeneutics of Chan paradoxes. As he shows, the often illogical gong’an texts did teach Chan monks how to think and, equally important, how to perform Chan. By considering the Confucian xue’an that began to be published during the sixteenth century as a new genre, Hung-lam Chu suggests an important new reading of the Mingru xue’an as a philosophical study guide to self-cultivation.

The quality of the research and the insights in each of the essays is very high. Though most readers will probably limit themselves to the essays in their specialized area of research, it is well worth sampling the collection more broadly. Similar to the cases they discuss, these essays contain a lot of surprising gems. My only quibble with Thinking with Cases is that the collection is too invested in responding to questions about the place and value of case-based knowledge and reasoning within Western scientific structures of knowledge. Because no such epistemological battle exists in the China field, it is unnecessary to frame the collection in terms of the Western value-laden debate about forms of reasoning. Thinking with Cases makes an important contribution to the China field by showing the value in considering an as a genre and the role of cases in producing and training professionals who could translate fixed canonical knowledge into practical and contingent action.

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With the postsocialist social and economic change, a new form of economic and cultural inequality, Amy Hanser tells us, is on the rise in urban China. This new inequality is characterized by “a new structure of entitlement” that Hanser defines as “often unconscious cultural and social sensibilities that make certain groups of people feel entitled to greater social goods” (p. 3). To illustrate her argument, Hanser employs ethnographic research to delineate the different “distinction work” (p. 186) among three service work sites in the city of Harbin. She explores the ways in which these three sites—a high-end private department store, an aging state-owned department store, and a crowded, low-end clothing bazaar—produce and enact social distinctions along the lines of class, gender, and generation. By mapping how these social differences and divisions are