

1: October | | Confinement

"The Great Wall of Confinement is an excellent book. It synthesizes an already significant corpus of writings on Chinese prisons and labor camps, marshals an array of literary sources as essential historical source materials, and compares the literature of Chinese incarceration with its Soviet and European counterparts.

The Great Wall of Confinement: University of California Press, In her case, there is a detailed account of the cruel treatment she suffered at the hands of guards, prison cadres and those higher up in the chain of command. Throughout her ordeal, she refused to confess to what she presumably did not think was a crime. She continued to speak her mind and fought her original sentence up to the national level, to no avail. Her refusal to show contrition landed her back in prison in She went on one of the longest known prison hunger strikes, even though these were known to elicit violent responses by the authorities. This book is many things in one. Second, Williams and Wu adopt a rewarding perspective by mining fiction and reportage for their portrayal of Chinese prison camps, complementing differently mediated research by scholars such as Harry Wu, and James Seymour and Richard Anderson, to name but three well-known authors publishing in English. Williams and Wu drive home the gravity of their subject matter in their first few pages, by validating the notion of concentration camps as applicable to prison camps in the PRC. This could mean either that its scope was now extended to animates, which makes sense in the light of a Maoist vision of human beings as malleable material; or, that inmates had the status of inanimatesâ€”if it helps us remember, the alphabetic coincidence is worth itâ€”and human beings were dehumanized; or, both. The clarity and cogency of the introduction are borne out in the chapters that follow. Also, ever since the Han dynasty, Chinese rulers have punished criminals by sending them into internal exile, and often limited their mobility to return long beyond the time of their sentence. This has happened to many ex-inmates of PRC prison camps since the s who were forced to accept job placement in the vicinity of the camp liuchang jiuye , although this particular component of the prison enterprise has been on the decrease in recent decades. Williams and Wu submit that even if subsequent, Republican-era Guomindang legal practice was seriously flawed, it helped lay the groundwork for the democratic system that would emerge in Taiwan in the s and s. Legal policies were adjusted to political needs, rather than the other way around. The combined ideological and pragmatic thrust of this strategy is reflected in what the authors identify as the dual mission of Communist prison camps. Once population growth is factored in, this would roughly mean proportionally four times fewer inmates than half a century earlier, and forty times fewer of them held for reasons to do with, say, sociopolitical ideology. Then again, something to the tune of two hundred thousand political prisoners is still a staggering figure. It is also in this part of the book that they start making frequent reference to a variety of prison writings to sustain the narrative. These texts range from more or less straightforward documentation and journalism to reportage and emphatically fictionalized accounts in novels and short stories. Thus starts a depressing journey through circumstances in the camps, which range from the callous and humiliating to the inhuman and downright unlivable. Williams and Wu dwell on detention centers, where people can be held for renewable terms of up to three years each, without any legal procedure or idea about the foreseen length of their imprisonment. Their situation can be so unbearable that detainees consciously break the rules or commit crimes, in order to expedite their definitive sentencing and transport to a regular labor camp. Detention centers are also the place where the pressure to confess is perhaps the greatest, including intense violence and threats of imminent execution. On the latter topic, Williams and Wu cite reports of camp cadres enlisting the aid of mosquitoes by stripping an inmate naked and leaving him tied to a tree in a marshy area, and intentionally exposing their victims to inmates who suffer from contagious diseases. This is how famous labor activist Han Dongfang contracted tuberculosis. It lists a series of horrors, some of which are relatively well known to general audiences outside China, through the work of international human rights organizations and activists. Two typical Williams and Wu subsections are those on the isolation cell and on prison argot. This is visible in the subtitle of their project: While the publication of prison writings is thus a fairly recent phenomenon, many are memoirs that go back to the early decades of the PRC.

2: Project MUSE - The Great Wall of Confinement

"The Great Wall of Confinement deals with issues ranging from the legal grounding or the lack of any of the Chinese concentration camp system, to its technical implementation, its discursive manifestation, and its physical as well as psychological impact. A book like this is long overdue.

Related Books About the Book China is the only major world power to have entered the twenty-first century with a thriving prison camp network—a frightening, mostly hidden realm known since as the laogai system. Focusing mainly on the second half of the twentieth century, Philip F. Williams and Yenna Wu. About the Author Philip F. Williams. His previous books include *Village Echoes: The Fiction of Wu Zuxiang* A Literary Theme, *Ameliorative Satire*, among other books. The final chapter examines fiction and nonfiction works by prisoners and civilians who condemn the system and its subculture. Recommended [for] all levels and libraries. The book is a compendium of information on virtually every aspect of the prison camp system as it has been and as it is today. It is likely to be taken as the authoritative work on the subject for a long time to come. The work will surely prove a fascinating read for anyone interested in contemporary Chinese political and social life. *The Great Wall of Confinement* is one of those books whose objectifying, academic approach never detracts from the certainty that they raise fundamental questions of morality. *The Great Wall of Confinement* is a vindication of the documentary value of literature, as one of the powers of writing. Wisely departing from studies that rely on interviews with camp survivors or official statistics, the authors succeed in giving a human dimension to the laogai by making critical use of a genre that has thrived since the death of Mao, namely prison literature. The value of this riveting book lies in the wealth of detail that casts light on a sinister reality that the regime and its sympathizers abroad are keen to ignore. How the prisoners have lived and died, adapted or failed to adapt, what they have eaten and how—as in the Soviet Gulag, food has been used as a weapon—how filthy they are, how bad their medical treatment, and how some prisoners exploit and persecute others, are all well shown here. *Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* "The Great Wall of Confinement deals with issues ranging from the legal grounding or the lack of any of the Chinese concentration camp system, to its technical implementation, its discursive manifestation, and its physical as well as psychological impact. A book like this is long overdue. With this work, Williams and Wu have made an important contribution to the fields of Chinese legal and literary studies. It synthesizes an already significant corpus of writings on Chinese prisons and labor camps, marshals an array of literary sources as essential historical source materials, and compares the literature of Chinese incarceration with its Soviet and European counterparts. The value of this important study stems equally from its tone—a rare combination of a level-headed quality with a very fine sensitivity to the human tragedy recounted in this literature. Where does China Go? The angle is new; the question is to find out how Chinese have written on this subject, whether in fiction or reportage, the way they went about telling their stories, how much they said, or withheld.

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The Great Wall of Confinement is a thoroughly researched, analytically forceful work of clear structure and style. It is suitable for an audience ranging from undergraduate students to senior researchers of various disciplinary orientations, in Chinese Studies and elsewhere (history, political science, sociology, literature).

5: The Great Wall of Confinement : Philip F. Williams :

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The Great Wall of Confinement Book Description: China is the only major world power to have entered the twenty-first century with a thriving prison camp network—a frightening, mostly hidden realm known since as the laogai system.

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