Fan Ruolan's book is based on her Ph.D. dissertation. Acclaimed as a ground-breaking work in the study of the history of Chinese women in Malaya, it was selected to be the second book published in China's overseas Chinese Historical Society Series (中国华侨历史学会文库). This book is comprised of a lengthy introduction, an abstract, six thematic chapters, an epilogue, and a postscript in addition to 30 tables and 19 photos. Except for the English abstract, the book is written entirely in Chinese.

The major contributions of this book to overseas Chinese studies are the new perspective it adopts and the new methodology it applies; a comprehensive and critical review on the scholarship on overseas Chinese women in Malaya; and the extensive materials it amasses in the process.

The 1930s was a pivotal period for the overseas Chinese population in Malaya due to two remarkable developments. The first was the Great Depression, which resulted in the modification of the immigration policy by the British colonial government that specifically restricted male, but not female, entrants until 1938. This policy dramatically altered the gender balance of the Chinese community. The second was the China National Salvation Movement that mobilized the entire overseas Chinese population. A considerable number of scholarly works have been devoted to the study of this period. Fan Ruolan's research also attends closely to these two important events but from a very different angle and with a very different approach. As a scholar committed to women studies, she has noticed that the existent scholarly works by and large ignore or overlook the important historical role played by Chinese women in Malaya's Chinese society. To support her point, she cites Xinhua lishi renwu liezhuan (Biographies of Chinese Historical Figures in Singapore) as an example, which lists only 15 women out of a total of 1,175 entries (p. 3). As a challenge to the alleged “androcentrism” in overseas Chinese studies, she proposes the adoption of a new approach that uses a woman's perspective to view the history of Chinese society in Malaya. She also suggests employing a new methodology of gender study to interpret the society's major social developments. Fan Ruolan's efforts have attained a certain success, particularly in her discussion of women's education in Chapter 2, women's economic role in Chapter 3, and women's political involvement in the China National Salvation Movement in Chapter 4.

As distinguished from some other researchers who do not separate girl schools from boy schools in their study of overseas Chinese education, Fan Ruolan has focused her attention on the former in Chapter 2. Owing to her meticulous compilation of extensive information and data from government statistics, consular reports, newspaper stories, journal articles, school magazines, social organization bulletins, yearbooks, commemorative publications, travel notes, and memoirs, she is able to weave a rather comprehensive story of overseas Chinese female education in Malaya during the 1930s. It includes the history of girl schools, the number of teachers and students, profiles of principals and staff, school curricula, school buildings, budgets, tuition figures, financial donors, relations with other Chinese establishments such as huiguan,
and literacy and illiteracy rates in the male and female sectors of the population. Meanwhile, from the comparisons between boy schools and girl schools, she argues that, though both men and women in Malaya's Chinese society supported female education, their motivations were different. While men pinned their hopes on female education to bring up “virtuous wives and qualified mothers,” many women looked upon education as a path to liberation and independence.

The author's depiction of Chinese women's economic role is equally impressive. In Chapter 3 she not only presents statistics and data analyses that illustrate women's job distributions, salaries and wages, career choices, opportunities for promotions, living conditions, and contributions to the society's economic development, but also includes a great number of personal narratives gleaned from journal reports, solicited articles from newspaper readers, interview transcripts, memoirs, and autobiographies. These vividly portrayed individual stories add zest to this chapter thereby enhancing its readability. As in Chapter 2, the author once again asserts that, though men and women both agreed that it was a good thing for women to go out to work, their motivations were not the same. Men welcomed this development because it would increase family incomes, while women hoped that the incomes from their jobs would enable them to attain economic equality with men.

Women's participation was an integral component of the China National Salvation Movement in Malaya. During this movement, the Chinese media widely reported women's political activities. The major newspapers including Sin Chew Jit Poh, Nan-yang Siang Pau, Kwong Wah Yit Poh, Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh, Penang Sin Pao, Tsunghui Hsinpao, and Sin Tsung Jit Poh all published women supplements. According to one survey, within a period of five years (1937-42), the women supplements of the seven newspapers mentioned above carried a total of over 900 articles related to women's involvement in the China National Salvation Movement (p. 311). These newspaper reports and articles are a gold mine for research on women political activism, and Fan Ruolan has successfully exploited these valuable resources in Chapter 4.

In addition to these three chapters, Fan has devoted Chapter 1 to female immigration, Chapter 5 to changing gender relationships in Chinese marriage and family, and Chapter 6 to the comparison of Chinese women in Malaya with their counterparts in Fujian and Guangdong.

The reader will be interested to note that Fan Ruolan has written a long introduction (61 pages) to her book which includes a critical review of existent scholarly works on Chinese women in Malaya, and a summary of the resources she used for her research. Her long review of scholarship covers masterpieces such as works by Song Ong Siang, Victor Purcell, Maurice Freedman, and Yen Ching-hwang; recent publications such as books by Kani Hiraki, James F. Warren, and Kenneth Gaw; and academic journal articles and baccalaureate theses. As her review is rather comprehensive, it can serve as a useful guide for future scholars in this field.

One of Fan Ruolan's major criticisms about the research done on overseas Chinese women history is that many scholars have heavily relied on British colonial government reports, censuses, and other official documents, which are all in English, while overlooking or entirely ignoring Chinese-language materials. In contrast, she has spent years scouring libraries in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xiamen, Hong Kong, and Singapore for relevant Chinese-language materials which include government docu-