

*One Quarter of Humanity*

Disclaimer: this book was read and responded to in a sleep deprived state (courtesy of 6.170)

I did not like the book *One Quarter of Humanity*; I found it dull and somewhat irrelevant. There were definitely some parts of the book that were interesting, but on the whole, the book was both a bit boring, to make matters worse, redundant, and as I said before, a bit irrelevant. Reading this book, on a number of occasions, I thought to myself “So what?” *One Quarter of Humanity* only resembles in parts what I would consider to be a history book. In fact, upon finishing the book, looking at the back cover, and seeing that it had won an award from the American Sociological Association I thought, “Wow, that makes a lot of sense.” The book, to me, was not a work of history but rather a work of sociology.

I know that as a historian, or at least a student of history, sociology should be important to me. I have no problem with history dealing with how people lived in the past, not just during major events, but when I read a history book, I want to walk away feeling that I know something about a specific time or place. I want to be able to have some sort of connection with that time and place based on my new knowledge. I did not receive that feeling from this book. When you get right down to it, I do not find sociology all that interesting. I’ll accept its importance to the field of history, but I’d rather not go into an extreme amount of depth in it, if at all possible.

Now, after all of that, I did take away a few things from the book. The book did change my perception of China a bit. I always heard people talk about the starving kids

in China (like “finish what you have on your plate, there are children starving in China”) but I never really understood it; when I was growing up, the news talked about countries in Africa having starving people in them, but never anything about China. Well, now I know that it was the writings of Malthus that inspired these ideas; however correct or incorrect they might be.

There were a number of things that bothered me about the book, as well. The concept that I had the most difficulty with was that of infanticide. It’s just the way that I think, but I find it all but impossible to accept that this practice not only occurred in large numbers, but also was not thought of as immoral in any way. Another thing about the way that the book was written bothered me. I felt that the book concentrated far more on making China look good and dispelling Malthus, than anything else. This bothered me quite a bit when discussing the farming production increases in China. I would have liked to see these numbers about China compared to those of the rest of the world; to see how much of these increases in grain production came from changes within China, and how much came from general improvement in farming technology.