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## Review: The Worlds I See: Curiosity, Exploration, and Discovery at the Dawn of AI

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**Review: *The Worlds I See: Curiosity, Exploration, and Discovery at the Dawn of AI*.** By Fei-Fei Li. (New York: Flatiron Books, 2023), 336 pp.

Dr. Fei-Fei Li is a Stanford University professor and founding director of the Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence. Her memoir, *The Worlds I See: Curiosity, Exploration and Discovery at the Dawn of AI*, follows Li's journey from intrepid student to AI pioneer. The title reflects the diverse worlds—geographic and personal, academic and professional—that have shaped Li's worldview and her approach to the field of artificial intelligence.

By humanizing the inherently robotic world of artificial intelligence, *The Worlds I See* offers a relatable perspective on a complex subject. It may not be an obvious choice for a reader of an archival journal. However, information professionals may gain meaningful insights from it. Any reader will likely be captivated by Li's multifaceted worldview. Her perspective is uniquely shaped by a blend of influences: a passion for classic Western literature, personal family challenges, and a strong foundation in multiple scientific disciplines including physics, neuroscience, psychology, engineering, and computer science. Others may appreciate the latter chapters' focus on ethics. Li acknowledges ethical frameworks in other industries such as healthcare are sorely needed in the field of AI. Although archivists and librarians already operate under ethical principles, the information profession is not immune to change. The rapid pace of technological advancement, including the revolution of AI, certainly requires reexamination to ensure they remain relevant.

Early chapters focus on Li's childhood in Chengdu, China. She highlights her early education and parental impact. She describes living in post-Cultural Revolution China as a "quiet upheaval," particularly for her parents whose unconventional values were often at odds with others. At age 15 Li comes to experience her own upheaval when her family emigrates to New Jersey. The family grapples with poverty and chronic health issues, but circumstances dramatically change when Li receives a full scholarship to Princeton University. Two contrasting worlds begin to emerge for Li, one of family hardship versus the liberating environment of Princeton. Throughout Li weaves in a broad history of physics and computational mathematics, providing the reader approachable context for her intellectual journey.

Chapters 6 through 8 shift to Li recounting her postgraduate studies at the California Institute of Technology (CalTech), now equipped with a clear research direction in computer vision—the field of recognizing and analyzing digital images. These chapters focus on important developments in her early career including the creation of *Caltech 101* and *Imagenet*, pioneering datasets in machine learning. The chapters are more technical, mirroring the complexity of Li's research—first as a doctoral student and later as faculty at Stanford. Readers without a background in computer science or engineering may find these sections particularly challenging. However, Li provides a welcome break from the density of her scientific explanations to share glimpses into her personal life.

By Chapter 9, Li has established herself as a leading researcher in the field of artificial intelligence. However, the expanding discourse and growth of AI research beyond academia prompts Li to consider AI's potential for both benefit and harm. A pivotal moment occurs when Li's mother asks, "What else can AI do to help people?" This question introduces Li to new challenges and the final chapters chart Li's career progression from one consumed by technical challenges to one grappling with ethics. Li ends her book by imploring her colleagues, and in fact, her readers to establish a human-centered framework for AI.

In addition to humanizing AI, Li's reflection on the rise of corporate AI research also makes for interesting, if not entirely unironic, discussion. Li herself transitioned to a corporate position with Google after nearly two decades in academia. As universities grapple with persistent budget constraints, well-funded companies increasingly influence research and innovation. This trend certainly has implications for the archival field, as the profession has similarly been shaped by academic practice.

Finally, digital archivists or those working closely with data might find *The Worlds I See* especially resonant. Much of Li's work in creating the *Imagenet* database and other efforts to refine visual recognition AI are described in painstaking detail. Those working with complex datasets might find themselves appreciating Li's especially candid discussion, in particular.

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