

are really worthy of merit. Yip also modifies Wade-Giles at points, and then for the novice it can become almost impossible to know how to pronounce words unless one sees the characters. I suggest using pinyin for all terminology and for cultural personages whose body of work is primarily in Chinese and not English. The sole exception to this usage would be Hou Hsiao-hsien himself. I would prefer Hou Xiaoxian, so that those who know pinyin at least would know how to pronounce his name, but with his production company HHI and near legendary status now at international film festivals, that's one genie that is not going back in the bottle.

Finally, revision of a dissertation into a book must be carried out carefully and must be overseen by a competent editor. This book clearly reflects work that was not done in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It was done in the early-mid 1990s. All of the various insights reflecting this fact are too subtle and ubiquitous to point out now, but I have implied some of them above. Here, let me add only one set of concrete examples: the use of the term "recently" to refer to scholarship and cultural events. Yip refers to the publication of Rey Chow's book *Primitive Passions* as a "recent" publication (170), even though it was published in 1995, twelve years ago. She refers to Hou's "more recent *Goodbye South, Goodbye*" (227) even though it was released more than a decade ago. She even states that "analysis of the [February 28th] uprising has recently been published in English" (286), a reference to Lai, Myers and Wei's 1991 book on the subject. There are other such references in the book as well. One such instance would be a slip of the pen. A whole slew of them are a clear indication of "the tip of the iceberg": this book was in dire need of updating, and revision and editing, prior to publication. Had this been done, it could have been much better than it is.

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The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the "Old Schools" during Late Qing and Early Republican China, by Jon Eugene von Kowallis. Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 2006. China Research Monographs no. 60. viii, 299 pp. \$19.95 (paperback).

One of the most fascinating issues in the study of modern Chinese poetry is the question of the relationship between ancient and modern poetry, Chinese tradition and foreign literature. And one of the problematics that best crystallizes these aspects is the question of what should be understood by the term literary "modernity," when and under what circumstances it appears, and whether it has to be seen as "native," "imported," "transformed" or "translated." It was once common to see modernity in non-Western cultures as a reaction to, or as a more or less "nationalized" assimilation of Western presence or discourses, be they imposed or voluntarily assumed. Such was the case in Chinese literary studies, and particularly in research on China's *xin shi* or New Poetry (that is, from 1917 onwards): "modernity" in modern Chinese poetry was attributed to translations and "imitations" of Western modernist poetry. And for Chinese writers and poets, it was even more important for the ideological claim of a "modern" identity to insist on a claim of radical newness (even if the conscious relationship to traditional poetry of some renowned modern poets was acknowledged from the beginning). There has been a general shift, however, in the way we consider "modernity" in non-Western worlds: thus scholars of Chinese fiction, for example, have proposed the notion of alternative "modernities" in Qing novels, dating from prior to the literature of the May Fourth era.

Professor Kowallis' book, *The Subtle Revolution*, falls within this critical framework. It provides the reader with a challenging view on Chinese poetry written in the classical language at the turning point between the late Qing (i.e., the second half of the 19th century) and Republican eras (1911-1949), and thus re-examines the usual discourse on Chinese poetic modernity, bringing it out of politically-based delimitations (all poetry before 1917 being deemed not "modern"). The book is structured around the presentation of the representative figures of the "Old Schools" of late Qing poetry – such as Wang Kaiyun (1833-1916), Fan Zengxiang (1846-1931) and Chen Sanli (1852-1937) – labeled by the author as representative of the "Neo-Ancient," "Late-Qing Allusionist" and "Tong-Guang" styles. In fact, some of these designations are slightly different from traditional ones, which tended to delineate too exclusively the different poetical trends of the Late Qing according to the "specialized" inspirations from Wei, Jin, Tang or Song masters. As the author shows, these strict limitations do not accord with the actual practice of late Qing poets, literary influences at the time being more widespread than what the traditional categories would imply. The book is a rich introduction to late Qing classical poetry, thanks to the author's clear-headed and solid erudition, providing the reader not only with a critical presentation of previous studies on the subject and factual knowledge concerning individual poets and the contemporaneous literary history, but also with annotated translations and perceptive readings to accompany them. With respect to its scholarly contribution to the study of Qing poetry, *The Subtle Revolution* could already claim to be an important work that fills a gap in Western sinology.

But the book also builds bridges between periods which have long been considered discrete, and as such, the question of "modernity" it addresses is crucial: Professor Kowallis demonstrates that Chinese "old-style" poets were able, before the introduction of Western modernist poetry, to find within their own classical tradition resources to express, think and imagine the modern situation of crisis they were facing – what is meant by the term "subtle revolution" (p. 7). This book is thus not only the occasion to illustrate the different "schools" of late Qing poetry: through his close textual readings, the author gives the reader convincing examples of literary "modernity" in late Qing traditional poetry. Let us notice, for example, the following aspects emphasized by the author and which may define a certain "modernity": the sense of anguish and expression of existential crisis that accompanies the breakdown of the traditional order (pp. 40, 88, 228); a sense of "ironic distance" (pp. 125, 240); a new way of dealing with traditional imagery; the predominance of "feelings" over "plot" (pp. 26, 199); a shift in reflections on the role of literature (p. 143); an imagery for the state of the country which seems to foreshadow recurrent themes in later literature (such as the boat or the "ghostly" images, pp. 69, 151, 208, 229-30); the problematic of the role of the intellectual in China (p. 182); change in gender representations (p. 123); and the romantic persona some of these poets would assume (p. 144), which prefigures what would later become fashionable in the May Fourth era. Thus, all the "modern" aspects we so far have assumed were to be found only in the "modern" literature following the "Literary Revolution" (that is, the literature written in the so-called vernacular Chinese after the end of the Empire), may be found in late Qing classical poetry, revealing far greater similarities between these two literary periods than had heretofore been imagined. And this is precisely what the author suggests in places including, for example, his comparisons between certain Qing poets and modern writers such as Lu Xun (pp. 67, 143). He even proposes quite provocatively to see a higher degree of "modernity" in some of these late Qing poems than in a number of those that followed (p. 152).

As long as we understood Chinese poetical modernity as being initiated only in the Republican era, we were accustomed to reading it primarily from the perspective of Western

modernist poetry: instead, Kowallis radically modifies this standard vision, by suggesting similarities between late Qing modernity and Western modernist poets (such as Eliot and Pound), whose works could not have been known to the late Qing writers (pp. 199, 201-2). This is a strong argument for definitively assimilating into our approach to both Chinese and Western literatures the "interliterary" viewpoint which Professor Kowallis speaks about at the end of his book (p. 245), that is, to abandon a unilateral and Western-oriented perspective. This rereading of modernity would also call for a further examination of the concrete relationship between late Qing modernity in particular and that of the New Poetry – that is, more generally the question of the role and influence of traditional poetry on the "modern" literature (after all, as the author tells us, some "old-style" poets were still being read during the Republican era). But, of course, it would probably be impossible and indeed meaningless to search for one unique and clearly definable fount of modernity, which by the 20th century could no longer be said to be either purely traditional or 100% Western.

Another important aspect the author identifies is the more general question of what might be called the "plasticity" of classical Chinese. He invites us to see poetic expression in classical Chinese, even in contemporary China, as a spontaneous and significant means of expression toward which the Chinese still naturally turn, particularly in times of intense emotion produced by situations of collective crisis (pp. 230-1): he would thus suggest that classical poetry continues to be an artistic medium which holds the capacity to change and to remain "modern."

And last but not least, the book, written in a concise and plain style that avoids the kind of obscurities that a subject concerning issues of "modernity" might induce, also provides the reader with a helpful critical bibliography on late Qing poetry, a copious index, as well as original Chinese texts for all the translated poems.

Obviously the mature fruit of a long interrogation, Professor Kowallis' book is destined to represent a landmark that will open up new perspectives in the study of modern poetry, and will certainly become required reading for the comprehension of Chinese poetry as a whole, that is, both traditional *and* modern.

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The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the "Old Schools" during Late Qing and Early Republican China by Jon Kowallis. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2006. Pp.vii and 299.

Jon Kowallis's new book, *The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the "Old Schools" during Late Qing and Early Republican China*, is a significant contribution to the ongoing dialogue and critical analyses on the complex relationship between literary tradition and modernity. In modern China, literary criticism has consistently reinforced the predominance of the vernacular and its significance as a paradigm. With few exceptions, such as Qian Jibo's 錢基博 *Modern Chinese Literary History* (*Xiandai Zhongguo wenxue shi* 現代中國文學史, Shijie Shuju, 1933), post-1920 scholarship has sidelined or omitted from discussion in literary history all writers of genres associated with the so-called "old" literature or simply included them as antithetical models or reactionary influences that serve to accentuate the supremacy of the New Literature and its

ultimate triumph. The multifarious and contending forces active in shaping the discourse on modern literature during the late Qing and early Republican eras were repressively denied or underrepresented by literary historians and the state-censored educational materials of the latter half of the twentieth century. In recent years, some scholars of literature and intellectual history, in both the Chinese- and English-speaking worlds, have started to question the ideologically charged grand narratives of the May Fourth discourse and made serious efforts to fill in these critical blind spots. The enthusiasm for late Qing fiction has led to the publication of substantial critical works, which have significantly enriched our understanding of the narrative form of this period and its relationship to the development of modern literature. However, the question remains: What happened to poetry, the time-honored, prestigious native genre?

Focusing on the classical-style poetry of the era, Jon Kowallis tackles a similar set of critical issues and, in doing so, traverses new terrain in the field of modern literature. The introductory chapter situates his discussion in direct contestation with the May Fourth view of the moribund and inevitable decline of classical poetry in the late Qing era. The body of the book is divided into three chapters, each of which deals with a prominent school of poetry and its representative exponents. These are Wang Kaiyun, Deng Fulan, and the "Neo-Ancient" School; Fan Zengxiang, Yi Shunding, and the Late Qing Allusionists; and Chen Yan, Chen Sanli, Zheng Xiaoxu, and the "Tong-Guang Style." Most of these poets are being introduced to or substantially discussed in the English-speaking world for the first time. Although critical attention on these poets has been growing in recent years, even in China, barring brief mention in the history of classical literature (*gudian wenxue*), they are known only to specialists whose scholarship and research focus on this particular era. Kowallis's book depicts the world of poetry as a complex tapestry and persuasively demonstrates that the old poetic form continued to thrive and hold some sway in the modern world. He points out how mainstream or established these poets were during the late Qing and the early Republican eras, and further shows that these poets did not experience any sense of decline in contemporary poetic practice. They enjoyed popularity in their own time, but have been largely neglected or forgotten in current literary historiography. This of course is not to suggest that every poet popular in his own time will necessarily find a place in literary history, or in the ongoing process of canon formation. But the marginalization of these poets definitely raises questions about paradigms and criteria of evaluation in contemporary literary criticism. Were these poets too optimistic or too blind to perceive how antithetical their art form was to modern culture? Or does our understanding of the literary writings of the era demand substantial revision? Engaging the issue with rich evidence and substantial materials, *The Subtle Revolution* solidly refutes the May Fourth "deterministic" view of the death of classical language, which "brought about the 'inevitable' rejection of classical (read "native") forms and languages and its substitution with 'modern' texts based on the Western models and written in vernacular or spoken language" (p. 1), thus urging us to drastically rethink this paradigm in modern literature.

In contemporary discussion of Chinese literary modernity, major attention has been paid to the translated, vernacular narrative forms, which have been considered crucial and privileged over poetry. Current theoretical discussions of the issues of modernity and postmodernity in the literary field in the West have also tended to give poetry a rather subordinate role. Lyric poetry, presumably a timeless, pure, condensed form, offers a greater challenge than do works in the vernacular to any historical analysis or discussion of modernity. Kowallis's effort is admirable: he not only fills the gap created by the neglect of the study of classical-style poetry and its creators, all well-known, popular poets in their own time—thus helping us gain a more comprehensive picture of the literary writing of the era—but also, more importantly, locates the

missing link between the indigenous poetic form and Chinese literary modernities. The fact that traditional forms were valid, and even thriving in the modern context, poses intriguing questions about the so-called "translated modernity" that valorized westernized, vernacular prose forms.

Kowallis's general approach combines a discussion of the historical context with biographical accounts of the poets' lives, details of their interpersonal alliances (the master and disciple relationship in particular), and their aesthetic and stylistic relationship with the poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties, along with careful, insightful explanations of the individual poems. One of the main strengths of the book lies in the author's reading of the individual poems. The recurring issue concerning late classical poetry is whether it is truly *better* than the canonical poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties. The assumption is that it suffers in comparison to its predecessors, which justifies the further assumption that it does not merit a place in literary history. Questions arise about who makes the judgment call or whether universal criteria exist to evaluate poetry across different historical times. One reading strategy that Kowallis adopts is, rather than directly confront the issue of the formalistic or aesthetic changes (or status quo) in the poems themselves, he situates his reading in the "different historical circumstances" (p. 88) in which the poems were created and argues for the validity of the form from the reader's perspective. He posits that, given the familiarity of the poems' allusions, metaphors, and diction to their intended audience, the poems would have resonated well among their contemporaries. Late Qing poetry is characterized by allusiveness, drawing as it does upon the vast resources of literary tradition, which in Hu Shi's view showed merely obeisance to the ancient. Kowallis, however, argues that "the question with the late Qing poets is not how much or how little they borrowed from the past, rather it is how effectively they spoke, both emotionally and artistically, to their intended readership about the present" (p. 36; see also p. 30 and p. 138). For instance, in his analysis of Fan Zengxiang's popular song "Caiyun qu" (The Song of Rainbow Cloud), which is loosely based on the story of Sai Jinhua (1864-1936, the well-known courtesan who allegedly used her sexuality to save the nation in 1900), Kowallis suggests that Fan effectively drew from the poem's generic predecessor, Wu Weiye's (1609-1672) "Song of Yuanyuan" which describes the love story of the courtesan Yuanyuan during the Ming-Qing transition, but simultaneously infused some original irony into the song. Because of the layered intertextual relationships among poems by Fan and his predecessors, Kowallis suggests that "the remarkable way in which this functioned with its intended readership in China at the turn of the century was to bring about a constant and at times ironic interplay between the nation's past and present" (p. 125). In other words, the later texts are not always overshadowed by their canonical forerunners; rather, they might possibly have turned the "anxiety of influence" (to borrow Harold Bloom's term) into a creative force. Kowallis further demonstrates his insight by pointing out the "articulation of shock" (p. 202) and the sense of alienation (p. 240) in Chen Sanli's poetry, and "a profound sense of loss" (p. 151) in Yi Shunding's poems, understanding them as a new expression of modernity or "subtle revolution," in his words. His readings show that these poets, like Chen Sanli, continued to explore the potential of classical language while altering its affective range, thus generating new energy and import from it. Through contextualized, historically informed readings of these representative poets and their works, Kowallis demonstrates the erstwhile poetic form "as a vehicle to articulate a complex and sophisticated understanding of, as well as reaction to, the entry of modernity" (vii).

Kowallis's achievement in producing this study can hardly be overstated. The task required him to read and master many poetry collections, which mostly lack annotations in

Chinese. He has overcome such handicaps to conduct a study that does full justice to this highly specialized area of scholarship. Given the complexity and the allusive nature of the poetry of the era, the author's excellence in translating their linguistic and thematic intricacies into fine English is truly admirable. This is clearly a product of years of dedicated work. The book is also exemplary in that it makes good use of Chinese and Japanese scholarship on late Qing poetry, thus bringing to critical attention the important Chinese and Japanese poetry scholars, most of whom remain little known in the English-speaking world. This list includes Qian Jibo, Qian Zhonglian, Kurata Sadayoshi, Yoshikawa Kōjirō and others. At the close of the book, the author also provides an annotated bibliography, which may serve as a useful guide to further reading and research.

The book covers a time period spanning the 1850s, when Wang Kaiyun, along with Deng Fulun, formed the Orchid Grove Poetry Society, to the 1930s, which prominently featured Chen Sanli and Zheng Xiaoxu. I couldn't but appreciate the scope of this ambitious work, Kowallis's argument for this poetry's "entry to modernity" around the mid-nineteenth century, and thus his efforts to push the timeline for literary modernity to well before the Poetic Revolution of the 1890s. However, this effort seems motivated by the author's anxiety to find an appropriate place for Chinese poetry on the map of world literature and his reliance upon the implied critical paradigm, that is, the universal path of literary development leading toward modernity. Kowallis could have further explored how the experience of the indigenous genres enriches or contradicts our current understanding of literary modernity. Greater specificity about historical contingencies would have clarified how the individual poets' writing styles, poetic theories, and the poetry schools themselves changed during the last several decades of the Qing dynasty. Many issues came into play throughout this tumultuous historical period. Even for a work as well researched and thoughtfully put together as this one, it is difficult to entirely do justice to specific historical moments in relation to political and cultural changes and their impact on literary trends. For instance, locating poetic modernity of Wang Kaiyun's work in the middle of the nineteenth century involves exploring different sets of issues about the continued practice of classical-style lyricism in the Republican era, when the apparent "health" of the genre was in evident contradiction to the May Fourth contention that it was a doomed art form. In this sense, this ambitious study may have stretched its historical period of focus a bit too long to allow full analysis of all the temporal problems with which it attempts to engage.

However, to invoke a Chinese idiom, minor flaws cannot obscure the splendor of the jade stone. This remarkable book is certain to remind contemporary scholars that Chinese classical-style poetry did not end with the May Fourth era, and to promote recognition of this poetic form's relationship to the theories of modernity and the process of modernization.

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The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-sex Desire in Modern China, by Tze-lan Sang. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 380. 11 Illustrations. \$17.00 (paper).

The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China is the first book-length study on female homoeroticism from late imperial China to the present day. Not only does the book provide insights into the discursive theorization of homosexuality in the May Fourth era and

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