

A New Literary History of Modern China. Edited by David Der-wei Wang. Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017. Pp. xxiv + 1001. \$45.00/£32.95.

Two surveys of modern Chinese literature have found a fond place in my memory. The first was put together in 1948 by the Roman Catholic priests at the Verbiest Academy, Peiping, with Joseph Schyns as chief editor. Its title was *1500 Modern Chinese Novels & Plays*, and according to the Foreword its main purpose was to “give the public at large a knowledge and an appreciation of modern Chinese literature. There can be no real understanding and recognizing of the true value of a people, without taking the trouble to study the works of their thinkers and the tastes of their reading public” (p. i). There are indeed 1,500 entries which evaluate individual novels and plays, with all titles and proper nouns given in both Romanization and characters. In addition there is a 55-page Introduction composed by the university academic Su Hsüeh-lin and a supplement of 116 pages giving “short biographies” of authors compiled by Chao Yen-sheng. Other background material includes details of foreign plays already translated into Chinese. The main body of the book deals with publications from the May Fourth period right up to 1947. The editors stress that the reviews “do not aim at literary criticism” (p. ii), but instead act as a guide to what might be read with profit and pleasure. Indeed, the bulk of the entries are contributed not by academics but by the catholic congregation at large, and have no pretensions to formal style and decorum, which in fact makes them very enjoyable to read. For instance,

p. 124: In the entry on Zhang Henshui’s novel named *As Flowing Water Returns Not*, the reviewer notes “[t]he author is to be congratulated that for once he has produced a proper and even a well written book.”

p. 313: We learn that “Yü Ta-fu is a sentimental, effeminate, morbid writer.”

p. 398: Hsiung Fuo-hsi’s play *Wang San*, we are told, consists of “[n]othing but misery, misery.”

Such comments achieve the acme of pithiness. Su Hsüeh-lin, for her part, also delivers herself of robust judgements, talks straight, which is very welcome. Overall, this Catholic endeavour was a noble one, and is still valuable in its recording of data not found elsewhere. Sadly, it would not be long before the voices of the contributors would cease to be heard.

The other survey, published four decades later, was conceived as a manifestation of European sinological maturity, and was facilitated financially by the European Science Foundation. Modestly entitled *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900–1949*,¹ the survey spread over four volumes, and drew upon the talents of “well over

¹ Directed by N.G.D. Malmqvist (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988–1990).

one hundred scholars,” the core being from European countries. Following conventional genre divisions, the fields covered were the novel, the short story, the poem, and the drama. Each volume had a lengthy introduction by a specialist in that field, and two to three pages were devoted to a description and discussion of each work considered, the selection generally following the critical consensus that had emerged by that date. Editorial scrutiny ensured a universally high standard of analysis, and readers knew what they were getting. In sum it was a job well done: Chinese characters were liberally provided, no corners cut. European sinology could be proud of itself.

Whatever satisfactions that surveys of these kinds afforded, it seems now that their day is over: a new generation of encyclopedic surveys that view things from other angles have changed the game. For instance, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*² signals in the plural “literatures” a broadening of perspective, and the division into three parts, namely Structure, Taxonomy, and Methodology, points to a shift in conceptualization. Boundaries have similarly been redrawn in the present volume. Notice of the change in perspective is given in “literary history” rather than “history of literature.” The one and only constant in the assortment of entries is the advancement of the timeline, which starts in 1635 when “Yang Tingyun defines *wenxue* as literature,” and ends in 2066 with “Chinese Science Fiction Presents the Posthuman Future.” Otherwise, apart from these chronological constraints, the contributors seem to have been given a free hand to deal with their assigned topic as they thought fit. In some cases the contributor is invisible, while in others the tone is very personal, the text occasionally having more to do with the appraiser than the appraised. Topics are scattered like stars in the firmament over the nineteenth and naturally much more thickly over the twentieth century, and a dozen carry over into the twenty-first. Luminaries like Chen Pingyuan, Qian Liqun, and Chen Sihe have their articles translated into English. Academic newspeak puts in an appearance, but does not get so much out of hand as to create a barrier.

Leafing through the book to get an idea of its contents, it immediately becomes clear that the meaning of “literary” has been greatly expanded: it now embraces various cultural landmarks and signposts, even matters it is hard to associate with writing, like “Recollections of Women Soldiers on the Long March” (pp. 388–94), which is based on interviews conducted in the 1980s by Helen Praeger Young. Gramophone recordings of Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong are the starting point of Chen Pingyuan’s wide-ranging consideration of the role of oratory in politics. Chen interestingly concludes that Mao’s “thick Hunanese accent” enhanced rather than detracted from his 1949 “The Chinese people have stood up” speech (p. 305). Linguistic

² Edited by Carlos Rojas and Andrea Bachner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

frontiers are not rigid, either: there is spillover into Tangusic and Tibetan. Comic strips feature in Lanjun Xu's essay on Zhang Leping's cartoon creation, the boy San Mao [Three Hairs]. He first appeared in 1935, was revived in 1946, and enjoyed a new series in the 1950s. Thus San Mao evolved from a street urchin in the 1940s to a happy child in communist China. In terms of the diaspora, Chinese Malaysian literature gets a good showing, and among the different media, the pop song is deservedly and indeed memorably represented by Teresa Teng in an essay by Andy Rodekohr. The cinema in turn is obliged to notice the phenomenal *gongfu* films of Bruce Lee, though equal space is given to Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness*, about the February 28 Incident in 1947, which won the Golden Lion award in 1989.

At this point in the review, I have to remark that in the 1001 pages of this tome there is not a single Chinese character for proper names, nor even any Romanization for titles of works, which are all given in English translation. I adopt the same practice, giving the readers of this review the same experience as readers of the book under review. They will find that a certain amount of guesswork is called for.

The items in this voluminous collection are rightfully called "essays." While many are quite sober summings-up of an author's work, in the style of *A Selective Guide*, others take flight and pilot their own course. For example, one would not have suspected from the title "The Politics of Translation and the Romanization of Chinese into a World Language" (p. 119) that the "essayist" would assume the identity of the prime mover: the first sentence declares "[t]he year is 1873 and I, Thomas F. Wade, British diplomat to China, was the initiator of this audience with the Chinese emperor." Uganda Sze Pui Kwan carries off the impersonation beautifully.

A similarly bold departure from convention is made by Ha Jin, evidently assigned to write on Lu Xun's epoch-making "A Madman's Diary." Instead of being treated as a venerable author, Lu Xun figures as a character in a short story written by a really groovy narrator. This story tells of Lu Xun's encounter with Qian Xuantong that forced Lu Xun to get the "madman" job done. In case the reader might think this too frivolous, if not lese-majesty indeed, the editor notes: "Ha Jin's essay is a fictional account based on extensive research on Lu Xun's experience as he wrote 'A Madman's Diary'" (p. 254). Just so: Ha Jin hits some surprisingly true notes, besides devising a hugely enjoyable tall story.

Lu Xun's stature being what it is, he merits more than one entry. "Lu Xun and Tombstones" by Wang Hui (pp. 306–11) turns out to be more about tombstones Wang Hui has known than about Lu Xun. Seeing Lu Xun whole has to wait until 1936, the year of his death, and with it a well-balanced essay by Eileen J. Cheng.

Another veteran writer, the anarchist Ba Jin, also clearly merited an appreciative all-round view, and thankfully gets it from Mingwei Song. No one among New Literature authors had more readers than Ba Jin. Gao Juehui, the star of his novel *Family*, was in Song's words "arguably more celebrated, adored, and idolized than

any other youth character in modern Chinese literature” (p. 335). In this essay Song locates the genesis of Ba Jin’s novels, conveys the broad tides of thought on which they rode, gives an adequate idea of their themes, and expresses himself well.

Popular as Ba Jin was, though, he would have had far fewer readers than the aforementioned Zhang Henshui. Zhang does get a slot in the present volume, the entry by Eileen Chow entitled “The Author as Celebrity” (pp. 354–59). During his peak years, we learn here, “Zhang would often have six or seven works in serialization simultaneously and would write around five thousand characters a day, keeping track of myriad characters and plots through a complex system of charts and outlines” (p. 355). On top of that he also became a prime target for counterfeiting, many novels being falsely published under his name. Other excursions into pulp literature and the demi-monde of mass entertainment can also be found in these pages. Neighbouring art forms are also embraced, those named in “Mei Lanfang, the Denishawn Dancers, and World Theater” (pp. 311–19) for instance, and also the songs of the rock star Cui Jian, especially “Nothing to My Name,” described as the song that rocked Tiananmen Square on 19 May 1989 (pp. 809–14).

Literary history in the conventional sense is brought up to date with the novels of Hao Ran and Mo Yan. Hao Ran illustrated the ups and downs of authorial careers post-Liberation. According to Richard King, he “adapted his political orientation on three occasions (in 1962, 1972, and 1978) to the changing priorities of the nation’s leadership” (p. 736) and so enjoyed “the longest literary career in the history of the People’s Republic to date” (p. 733). Several other essays feature writers and intellectuals who, to their cost, were not so adaptable.

Mo Yan, the most honoured among living novelists, in that he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, is also the most parsimonious among contributors to this volume, in that he only volunteers an excerpt from the postscript to one of his novels. This consists of his magisterial pronouncements on what makes a great novel. Most peculiar.

All the essays I have read are well written, sometimes to the point of offering positive enjoyment thereby. In this regard it would be ungenerous not to mention appreciation of John A. Crespi’s turn of phrase. True, he has more opportunity than most to indulge that talent, his topic being Ai Qing’s poetry, which itself tended to be emphatic. To give just one example, he says Ai Qing “knew how to unleash a torrent of apocalyptic verse” (p. 446). Yes indeed.

Enough has been said to indicate that readers or browsers or consulters of this history should be prepared for anything when they open a file, so to speak, such is the multivalence of that word “essay.” But essays in their recognizable generic form, like *xiaopinwen*, the familiar essay, are little mentioned, despite their popularity among writers and readers. Daily newspaper supplements and numerous dedicated magazines

provided ample space for essays to proliferate, including the polemical variety known as *zawen*. Essayists were household names. Perhaps the reason for their neglect in this handbook is the same as for *A Selective Guide*'s abandonment of a fifth volume on essays: having no recognizable agenda or shape, they are difficult to describe and their interest too amorphous to concisely convey. However, two veteran essayists do pop up here, though consideration of Zhou Zuoren is slanted toward the matter of his 1946 trial for collaboration with the Japanese puppet government, and Liang Shiqiu is cast only in the role of gourmet.

To sum up, anyone with the leisure, opportunity, and stamina to read through this tome from start to finish would certainly get an all-round education, thanks to its unrivalled range of subject matter and multiplicity of viewpoints. The more common selective use would probably be to seek fresh views on old subjects, and there benefits would also abound.

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Negotiating Socialism in Rural China: Mao, Peasants, and Local Cadres in Shanxi 1949–1953. By Xiaojia Hou. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2016. Pp. viii + 275. \$45.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Many scholars have written the history of China in the early 1950s from above, focusing on the actions and decisions of Mao Zedong and other party leaders. Others have written the history of the early PRC period from below, examining how political campaigns and official policies intersected with the dynamics of Chinese society at the “grassroots.” In the first English-language monograph on the origins of the agricultural producers’ cooperative movement of 1953, which organized China’s rural populace to pool their landholdings, farm together, and distribute harvests based on land and labour contributions, Xiaojia Hou writes from the mid-range perspective that the historian of Russia, Richard Stites, once called “history from the side.” She excels in explaining how negotiations among actors at different rungs on the PRC’s ladder of power, from central government leaders to village-level cadres, impelled China’s earliest steps down the path towards agricultural collectivization.

Paying attention to the role of cadres at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels, Hou’s account of the agricultural cooperativization movement makes it possible to, as she puts it, “observe the mechanism of Communist China from the