

and in turn, in this book, different or similar to reality? How do we theorize or make sense of the discrepancy between the representation of the private self and reality? Answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this book, which aims at offering a subjective interpretation of “the private self” in multimedia, rather than seeking empirical evidence to delve into real people’s lives and intentions.

This book is luxuriant in detail and expansive in scope. It makes a significant contribution to the study of modern China. This book should appeal to scholars and others who have an interest in cultural studies and contemporary China.

ZHENG TIAN TIAN

*A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*

HONG ZICHENG (translated by MICHAEL M. DAY)

Leiden: Brill, 2007

xx + 636 pp. € 99.00; \$ 148.00

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*A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature* is the English-language version of a popular 1999 publication by Beijing University professor Hong Zicheng. The book details literary developments over a 50-year period since the establishment of the PRC. In his foreword, Hong surveys the various categorizations devised by scholars and ideologues to define Chinese literature in the 20th century, and the diverse and occasionally incongruous connotations of temporal frameworks such as “modern,” “contemporary,” and “new” with regard to its periodization since the May Fourth era. On the one hand, Hong’s mammoth study reflects a widespread trend in recent Chinese intellectual discourse towards cultural reconsideration and historical rewriting – including the rewriting of literary history. On the other hand, Hong sticks to a definition of “contemporary Chinese literature” which closely echoes official classifications and sounds somewhat ideologically overdetermined, that is, literary phenomena which occurred since 1949 “in the specific historical discourse field of ‘socialism’ and therefore ‘limited in scope to Mainland China’” (pp. xvi–xvii).

The book is in two parts – “Literature of the 1950s–1970s” and “Literature since 1976” – each comprising general chapters dealing with overall developments in the field and more specific ones detailing key movements, genres and authors. Hong focuses on poetry, fiction, drama and prose, occasionally touching upon other types of writing. He also documents a range of factors concerning the sociology and phenomenology of literary production such as the principles governing the Chinese literary system in its different stages of development, modes of dissemination, organs of censorship, and readership issues. Literary theory and criticism are not among the primary objects of investigation, but are mentioned as well throughout the book. For each part Hong provides dedicated chapters which scrupulously detail the major occurrences in the four above-mentioned sub-fields. Regrettably, the post-1976 section – otherwise rich in insightful remarks on recent fiction, poetry and prose – lacks a separate chapter for drama. This is disappointing not merely because of this reviewer’s scholarly predilections or in view of this genre’s vigour in the period under consideration, but also with regard to the volume’s internal coherence and structural organicity.

Hong effectively integrates history and criticism, as he manages to contextualize contemporary literary production and situate it in a historical continuum while concurrently offering meticulous critiques of a variety of case studies – especially for the pre-1976 period. Unlike many commentators, Hong does not dismiss the

“seventeen years of literature” (1949–1966) and the “Cultural revolution literature” (1966–1976) as unworthy of scholarly attention; he rather attempts to “formulate new observations with regard to these phenomena” and recognize a number of previously neglected trends that despite “undeniable faults with regard to ‘aesthetic nature’” (p. xviii) are nonetheless significant in the overall mapping of China’s literary field.

Hong is not blind to the contradictions and paradoxes inherent to the Party-State’s capricious “official line(s)”, and acknowledges the difficulty – if not outright impossibility – for Chinese writers to disentangle literature from politics. To some extent, the writers’ dilemma also becomes their critic’s own predicament. For a book originally published by a mainland Chinese press and thus inevitably subjected to a degree of editorial control, *History* is refreshingly forthright. For the most part Hong manages to maintain a balance between political correctness and individual judgment and tackle sensitive topics with grace and a great deal of irony. His narrative is peppered with witty remarks and does not refrain from discussing non-mainstream trends (such as 1950s popular fiction), “heterodox” undercurrents (such as 1970s hand-copied fiction), and contentious events such as the campaigns of criticism of the 1950s–1960s, the Cultural Revolution, the controversies over modernism, humanism, and alienation of the 1980s, the mechanics of censorship and other such issues. At the same time there are also a few omissions – Gao Xingjian’s pre-exile work, for instance, is only fleetingly mentioned in a footnote – and the cultural aftermath of some recent historical watersheds such as the Tiananmen events of 1989 are skipped over. Thus the reader may occasionally long for more in-depth examination of certain phenomena.

The translator’s work is commendable, although a few discrepancies in the translation of titles of works between their customary English-language renditions and those provided in this book produce some ambiguity. This is nonetheless remedied by the appendage of an index and a list of Chinese titles. The volume’s other appendices – a chronology and a glossary of terms – and critical apparatus are also noteworthy. Hong’s uneven referencing practice is improved in this edition by the addition of a comprehensive bibliography compiled by the translator.

Scholars of Chinese literature and culture will surely benefit from this informed piece of writing, and gain further knowledge on a range of formerly overlooked authors and works. The book may as well suit teaching needs, although students at their first encounter with Chinese literature might find its dense prose and abundance of detail slightly daunting. There is no doubt that this volume, along with the *Humanities in China Library* series it inaugurates, should serve as a model for further translations of influential Chinese-language scholarship in years to come.

ROSSELLA FERRARI

*The Jin Yong Phenomenon: Chinese Martial Arts Fiction and Modern Chinese Literary History*

Edited by ANN HUSS and JIANMEI LIU

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A Taiwanese publishing house has claimed that “wherever there are Chinese, there will be people reading Jin Yong.” For readers, Jin Yong’s magical, mysterious world of river and lake (*jiang hu*) exerts a powerful pull, from its fantastic descriptions of