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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature* by Yingjin Zhang

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the inadequacy of Soviet aid to China, powerfully illustrating China's strong sense of entitlement to Soviet generosity. The most startling piece of information is a directive by Stalin demanding and getting extraterritoriality. (7) Constantine Pleshakov provides a clear description of Moscow's perspective on the demise of the alliance, stressing geopolitics and ideology. Whereas the Soviet "ideology of mature socialism" pursued detente with the West, China's "young" socialism was still bent on confrontation. (8) Chen Jian and Yang Kuisong provide the Chinese side, by focusing on domestic factors in China. The Chinese leaders' sense of moral superiority over the Soviets is striking, given that Khrushchev had stopped the extreme repression under Stalin whereas Mao was still engaging in such policies.

The seventeen translated documents provide another fascinating window onto Sino-Soviet relations. Three come from collections of materials by Mao Zedong published in the People's Republic of China. The remaining fourteen come from recently opened Russian archives. They include minutes of meetings between Russian and Chinese diplomats and leaders.

Themes which run through these essays and documents include Chinese feelings of resentment against perceived abuses both past and present and a consequent sense of entitlement to Soviet aid, Russian feelings of disbelief at perceived Chinese ingratitude for that aid, and great touchiness on both sides about perceived slights of any kind. The cumulative evidence makes clear that there were serious and enduring frictions from the start although the authors assign blame in a variety of directions. These frictions included Soviet aid to both the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party, competition between Nikita Khrushchev and Mao Zedong for the international limelight, the asymmetrical nature of the relationship, conflicting strategies for national security, divergent assessments concerning the risks of nuclear war, and domestic considerations affecting foreign policy. The picture that emerges is not of an alliance based on a community of bilateral interests, but rather a marriage of convenience that survived only as long as both parties agreed on their strategy for dealing with the United States. It would be interesting to probe American archives to see to what degree American policies facilitated the divorce.

I hope that this volume provides the inspiration for another conference and another volume to include Japanese and Korean scholars in order to add their perspectives. This book is first rate and an essential purchase for those interested in the development of the Cold War, Sino-Soviet relations, or modern Chinese or Russian history.

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*China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature.* Edited by YINGJIN ZHANG. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. xii, 307 pp. \$55.00 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

This collection of essays aspires to operate within "an open intellectual space" where "Chineseness" is conceived of as "a cultural rather than ethnic, national, or political reference point" (p. 5). Hence, the term "polycentric." However, if "polycentric" presages a shift away from traditional paradigms, then the book is only partially true to its mission; for while in some cases the essays are indeed theoretical

and attempt to enact such a shift, others are rather conventional, a fact that does not necessarily diminish their value.

The first section takes a metacritical stance. Zhang Longxi surveys recent attempts by the comparative literature field to come to grips with non-Western literature. Despite the rise in the popularity of literary theory and the progression of comparative literature into the “post-European” era, “there is very little mention of China or East Asia” (p. 22). Chinese studies has been equally dismissive of Chinese-Western comparative literature. Zhang advocates examining “literary relations within the East Asian context” (p. 30). David Palumbo-Liu explores the philological basis of “sinology,” which he holds responsible for the view that traditional Chinese literature is deemed “untheorizable” (p. 44); he also observes that Western theory “poses the threat of creating a hypothesis inadequately grounded in the reality of the Chinese text” (p. 38). Both camps are “u-topian” with each concealing its own ideological and institutional affiliations. He suggests we acknowledge our dispositions, thus “postponing” the utopian fantasy of ideologically free discourse and making way for hybrid literary explorations. Mark Francis begins with a comparison of the Chinese *jing* to the Biblical canon but turns to an inventory of major poetry anthologies in traditional China. Francis unquestioningly assumes that anthologies are the vehicle of canonicity. In Chinese poetry not only do poems become “canonized,” but the whole set of allusions and turns of phrase that the Shijing, Chuci, and Wenxuan enshrine become standards of poetic diction.

In the next section, although Ann Marie Hsiung’s effort to highlight the “pro-feminist” (p. 87) side of the depictions of Ci Mulan and Nü Zhuangyuan in Xu Wei’s plays is admirable, the plays are hardly “subversive” (p. 73). Examples of dominant females exist in *chuanqi* and *huaben* narratives, including ones where women assume the role of *wuxia*. That they “bend” their gender to fulfill Confucian virtue is ironic, and could have been probed further. With Xu Wei’s murder of his own wife, one is left wondering whether a misogynist can write a feminist play. Helen Chen’s article on Wang Anyi argues the reverse, that the obliteration of gender distinction sustains the exploitation of women. Chen describes how Wang appeals to a Lawrencian ideal of human sexuality, following one’s natural instincts as a way of counteracting the oppressive mixture of Maoism and Confucianism. She could expand her analysis to account for the fact that D. H. Lawrence has become a writer of questionable repute in feminist circles. Greta Niu examines Josie Packard from *Twin Peaks*, whose “fluidity” first enables her to move among identities and then causes her downfall as other characters attempt to “contain” her. However, *Twin Peaks* isn’t “set in a region not previously represented on national television” (p. 111). The series *Here Come the Brides* depicted the migration to the Pacific Northwest. Moreover, *Bonanza*’s inclusion of the Chinese cook Hop Sing also anticipates *Twin Peaks*. Significant female characters cannot exist in *Bonanza*, lest they upset the homosocial network of relations. Hop Sing resolves the problem of domestic space for the Cartwright family by bringing in not a woman but a “feminized” man, the Asian male whose own “fluidity” comes neatly, though problematically, without a history.

The final part includes chapters by John Yu Zou, Feng-ying Ming, Yingjin Zhang, Michelle Yeh, and Eugene Eoyang. An account of the reversal of the Orientalizing gaze, Zou’s chapter provides a more complete picture of the rise of modernity as a dominant ideology in China. Feng-ying Ming’s insightful exploration of late Qing science fiction reveals how this subgenre is a battle ground for the clash in East-West values. Yingjin Zhang views Shanghai as the “city as text” (p. 181), though his assertion that it has not received much attention overlooks the contribution

of Edward Gunn's scholarship, among others. His remark that "Chinese modernist writings . . . surfaced from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s and then vanished entirely from Chinese literary history until the 1980s" (p. 175) ignores the volumes of modernist Chinese literature published in Taiwan, calling into question the central thesis of the entire book. Michelle Yeh's exposé on the cult of poetry in mainland China, published mainly in "unofficial" journals, unearths an inaccessible and fascinating literary world. Eugene Eoyang's thought-provoking meditation on the epistemological displacements experienced in the study of a national culture not one's own, the "liminal space" that makes diaspora and exile "where the action is" (p. 219), concludes the volume.

A useful collection, this work could benefit from further editing. For example, Zhang Longxi includes a critique of Palumbo-Liu, but his reference to the original journal article indicates his unawareness of its inclusion here. What would these two scholars have come up with had each a copy of the other's work? Additionally, Yingjin Zhang's suggestion that Chinese literary studies is made comparative "by engaging . . . current Western theories and methodologies" (p. 8) is contradicted by Zhang Longxi's observation that problems with East/West models of critique will persist as long as comparative literature is viewed as a matter of "application" (p. 32).

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## INNER ASIA

*Tibet: Abode of the Gods, Pearl of the Motherland.* By BARBARA ERIKSON. San Francisco, Calif.: Pacific View Press, 1997. xxi, 302 pp. \$22.95 (paper).

This is a book that attempts to steer between the polemics of bipolar rhetoric on Tibet. Throughout the book, Erikson wants to avoid the idealization of pre-1949 Tibet and the hyperbolic damnation of Chinese oppression since that time. At the same time, she wishes to realistically evaluate how Tibetans feel about the continued Chinese dominance of their homeland. In accord with these objectives, the book is divided into two sections, one positive about China's influence and the other negative. The first section gives credit to the Chinese for the modern development of Tibet and the second recounts the less savory aspects of Chinese control of Tibet and the Tibetan response.

Chapter 1, "Abode of the Gods," sets the stage for China's modernization of Tibet by describing Tibet as backwards, while chapters 2 through 5 evaluate the state of Tibet's environment, lifestyle, health care, and education. In these opening chapters, Erikson tries to foreground China's efforts to improve Tibet's conditions because the negative effects of Chinese rule are consistently exaggerated in the literature dedicated to securing Tibetan independence. She personally witnesses little pollution of Tibet's environment and, on this basis, seems to accept that the Chinese have done little harm on this front (p. 34). In terms of lifestyle, she rates the development of infrastructure—roads (originally built for the Chinese army and still useful for this purpose), a Yak Frozen Semen Station, and the Holiday Inn—as significant benefits to Tibet. She