

# Book reviews



**Sebastian Veg,**  
**Fictions du pouvoir chinois :**  
**Littérature, modernisme**  
**et démocratie au début du**  
**XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,** Paris, Éditions de l'École  
 des hautes études en sciences sociales,  
 2009, 384 pp.

## HAUN SAUSSY

The excellence of this book risks being unappreciated if it is taken as the usual sort of comparative literature study. Books in this field often treat their texts as offering varying perspectives on the same thing: the comparison pivots around what authors of different languages, nationalities, and periods do with a theme or genre taken as stable for the purposes of the investigation. It would be a mistake to read Sebastian Veg's book as reflecting "China," or the "image of China," in Victor Segalen, Franz Kafka, Lu Xun, Bertolt Brecht, and Lao She. Such a reading would be driven to hopeless superficiality, for Kafka's and Brecht's celestial empires seem to have little to do with the China experienced by Chinese people, and Segalen's, despite his travels, is always transforming into a figure of the "empire of the self"; none of these allegorised Chinas inhabits quite the same space as the China of Lu Xun and Lao She. On the other hand, writing a book about "China in the work of Lu Xun and Lao She" would run the risk of indiscriminate inclusiveness: what in their work is not about China? An ordinary mind, given these materials, would achieve little.

But Veg's real subject is a relation, different for each work, between the power of fiction and the power of political organisation, both of which instantiate imaginary worlds and command assent, though in different ways and with different results; still, despite these differences, the early twentieth century caused both fictional and political representation to quaver. The forms taken by this multiply instantiated uncertainty succeed, in the end, in overstriding the boundaries of language and nation: "Here it is democratic modernism that brings together European and Chinese works in a simultaneous questioning of both traditional authority and of the literary tradition. [...] Beyond the given socio-political context, the question arises of a more general link between fiction and democracy in the modern age, or more broadly of the political value of modernism" (pp. 295-96).

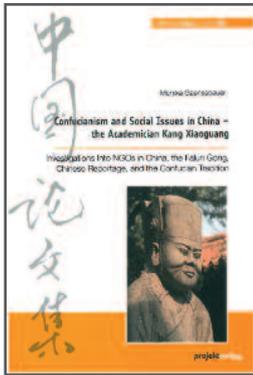
Veg is an unrepentant modernist. That is, he sees the abandonment of traditional modes of expression in literature and the rebellion against traditional authority in politics and ethics as preparing for democratic self-government by autonomous individuals. He also considers that the modernist writers were aware of the ambiguities of this liberation: that freedom can be ill-used, that autonomy can lead to anomie. Current scholarship

on modernism is much occupied with the question of "alternative" or "belated" modernities, a typology that grudgingly admits the existence of a standard or high modernity somewhere. Veg does not see modernism as divided into dominant and derivative streams. The faith in modern literature's power to transform society, so powerful among Chinese writers of the "May Fourth" generation, "interrogate in their turn the European modernists, in a reversal that does not consist of denouncing the intellectual colonisation of which the May Fourth Movement was supposedly one result, but which leads us to assess European modern texts on the scale of the liberatory confidence that Chinese writers placed in them" (p. 296). The worldwide current of modernism, for Veg, is not the flow of influences that were apparent to actors at the time, a flow going from West to East, but the "reversal" of that flow that occurs in the mind of the comparatist who comes to understand these various authors as all working on the same problems, more or less simultaneously, though in relative ignorance of one another.

The issues of fiction and democracy emerge differently from the contexts of each chapter. Veg draws them out of the works he studies; he imposes nothing. Indeed, asking the question of the relation of fiction and politics leads him to correct some long-standing perceptions. To those who charge Victor Segalen with a noxious nostalgia for the pageant of authority in imperial China, and a consequent contempt for the nascent Republic, Veg replies that the phantasm of a "radical political otherness" characterised by semiotic immediacy belongs to Segalen's narrator, not to the author, and that the dénouement of *René Leys* is indeed "the collapse of the orientalist aesthetic" (p. 54). Likewise, he finds in the seemingly timeless and schematic China of "The Great Wall" and other stories the core of Kafka's reflection on political modernisation, and in Lu Xun's "Ah Q" a dramatisation of the failure of normative reading. The apparent difference, in the minds of most readers, between Lu Xun's and Brecht's didacticism and Kafka's enigmas dissolves in the procedure, shared by all, of parodistic critique. "The self-referential mirroring of edifying literary genres gives Lu Xun, Brecht, and Kafka the chance to decry the instrumentalisation of fiction. [...] By means of these often complex patterns, these three writers give tangible shape to their refusal of a simple normativity that the fictional text would have the task of transmitting" (p. 183).

Refusing the opposite but analogous solutions of cultural studies and aestheticism, Veg takes fictional works to be neither representations nor autonomous constructions but performative instantiations. For him, fictions have a status and pragmatic force that makes them "symbolic objects in their own right." The task of the reader is to understand "how the act of writing and reading these fictions fits into their intellectual, social, and historical space" (p. 305). One can only hope that future studies of Chinese fiction – and of fictions of China – will take Sebastian Veg's well-argued discussions as a starting point.

■ Haun Saussy is professor at the University of Chicago.



**Monika Gaenssbauer,**  
**Confucianism and Social Issues**  
**in China—The Academician Kang**  
**Xiaoguang: Investigations Into**  
**NGOs in China, the Falun Gong,**  
**Chinese Reportage, and the**  
**Confucian Tradition,** Bochum/  
 Freiburg, Projekt verlag, 2011, 122 pp.

## DAVID OWNBY

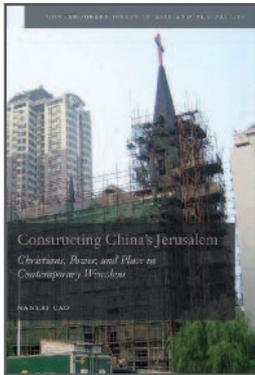
In this slender volume, Monika Gaenssbauer, Visiting Professor of Chinese Studies at the University of Erlangen, explores several facets of the publications and intellectual activism of the Chinese academic Kang Xiaoguang. Kang, Professor of Regional Economics and Politics at the School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development at Renmin University in Beijing, is a fascinating case, worthy of study both for the research he undertakes and the ideas he expounds, and as an example of the discursive and political possibilities open to public intellectuals in today's China. Kang is a prolific and wide-ranging author. Born in 1963, Kang graduated from the Dalian University of Technology in 1986 with a degree in applied mathematics. After teaching for some years, he returned to university studies in 1990 and earned a Master's degree from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Department of Ecology. His first position after graduation was as a scholar at the Institute of Policy and Management, and he subsequently served as a fellow at the Research Centre for Eco-Environmental Sciences before taking up his present post at Renmin University in 2005. Since 2007, he has also been Director of the Institute of Non-Profit Organisations, also at Renmin University. His main academic writings have focused on poverty relief and on "third sector" organisations, including non-governmental, non-profit, and other organisations attempting to function with some degree of independence from the Chinese government. At the same time, as an energetic public intellectual, Kang has frequently addressed topics outside of his academic purview, writing books on Falun Gong and on the need for a Confucian revival in China, for example. Some of Kang's most important works have been published in Hong Kong and Singapore. Although hardly a "dissident" as the term is generally used in the Chinese context (Kang is very critical of Western democracy), Kang is a patriotic maverick whose primary loyalty is to China's future rather than China's present leadership.

The four substantive chapters of Gaenssbauer's volume address Kang's writings on Falun Gong, on NGO activity in China, on the case of Li Siyi, a three-year old girl who starved to death in her apartment after the arrest of her mother, a drug addict, and the failure of Chinese authorities to respond to the mother's pleas to care for her daughter; and on Kang's proposal to establish a Confucian church. She sees this organisation as chronological – as established by the dates of publication of Kang's writings – and develops each chapter largely independently of the others, while making useful cross-references between them. To my mind it is misleading to begin with Kang's work on Falun Gong. Kang's research on poverty alleviation and his association with NGOs predated his work on Falun Gong by some years. Shocked by the events of June 1989, Kang sought to rebuild something like "civil society" in China through his work with NGOs throughout the 1990s,

and despite criticism of certain NGO practices, was generally pleased with the progress such groups had made. The Chinese state's over-reaction to the Falun Gong demonstration of April 1999 illustrated just how fragile this emerging "social contract" remained. Kang's work on Falun Gong thus grew organically out of his concern for NGOs and civil society; he broadened his focus to discuss religion and community, which had been at best secondary concerns up to this point. To my mind, Kang's book on the Li Siyi case was, similarly, a "side project" (as was his work on Falun Gong); Kang's energy and passion clearly allow him to pursue several endeavours at the same time. That said, the tragedies of the Falun Gong and Li Siyi cases obviously nourished Kang's growing enthusiasm for Confucianism and for the idea that the establishment of a Confucian church in China would provide a culturally valid means to reconnect state and society. Kang sees himself as completing the work Kang Youwei began in the early twentieth century to establish Confucianism as a state religion. Indeed, Kang is probably most interesting as an example of those Chinese who hope to locate and modernise elements of Chinese tradition in the hopes of crafting a uniquely Chinese modernity. Kang is by no means a hidebound conservative: he fiercely defends freedom of the press so as to keep China's political and economic elite minimally honest, but rejects democracy (which he witnessed firsthand as a visiting scholar in the United States in 1999) because of the corrupting influence of money on the political process. In any event, Kang is worthy of study for his wide-ranging interests, for the seriousness of his scholarship, for his polemical (yet highly readable) style, and for his intellectual independence. To date, he has been noticed in the West mainly for his writings on Confucianism, and Gaenssbauer helpfully introduces other aspects of his full range of interests and activities.

Gaenssbauer's treatment of Kang serves as an excellent introduction to this fascinating figure, although the chapters are perhaps a bit too summary to do him justice. Still, Gaenssbauer has read a good deal of Kang's protean output and makes it available to readers, together with the context necessary to understand Kang's intentions. Gaenssbauer also attempts to treat Kang not solely as an object of sinological study, but as a participant in a cross-cultural dialogue concerning issues of state and society in our globalised world. For example, she criticises Kang's proposal to establish a Confucian church in China under government control, quoting Habermas to the effect that "the executor of power in a modern constitutional state can never refer back to pre-constitutional conditions" (p. 92). Similarly, she gives her own views of the proper functioning of NGOs and comments on the implications of Kang's decision to publish some of his work outside of China (she is "irritated" by the ambiguity this creates). Although this approach is sometimes refreshing, it can be distracting as well, particularly in a broad study that attempts to cover a great deal of material at an introductory level.

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**Nanlai Cao,**  
**Constructing China's Jerusalem:**  
**Christians, Power and Place in**  
**the City of Wenzhou,**  
 Stanford, Stanford University Press,  
 2010, 232 pp.

## MARIE-EVE RENY

Based on 19 months of anthropological field research and 70 in-depth interviews in 2004-2006, *Constructing China's Jerusalem* presents a rich, detailed, and particularly nuanced ethnography of the daily practices of Christianity in the city of Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, where over ten percent of the population is Protestant. The question driving the analysis is how Christian identities, values, and symbols are constructed and consumed in a manner that reshapes local power structures. The author argues that Christianity in Wenzhou "is a historically complex regional construct framed by a moral discourse of modernity" (p. 12). Different actors inside the church take part in the constitution of Chinese Christianity. Cao brings particular attention to the active role of the local business community, which is composed of entrepreneurs who are Christian and active gospel preachers. Furthermore, the analysis explores Christian entrepreneurs' informal ties with key authorities in the locality, gender roles inside the church, and the dynamics underlying migrant Christian workers' interactions with local believers.

Cao's book is a significant contribution in three ways. First, it moves away from analyses that frame Christianity in China in a politicised manner and assume that church effervescence is part of a broader project of resistance towards the Party-state. Such understandings are subject to oversimplifications and misinterpretations insofar as church members and leaders have played the role of "partner[s] of the state in governing the local community" (p. 29). In Wenzhou, Christian entrepreneurs see themselves as serving God when working in the interest of the Party and the local government. The church leaders who play an influential role in local economic development have used their good business *guanxi* with officials "to obtain informal recognition from the authorities concerned" (p. 27). Rather than being politically motivated, Christian entrepreneurs and churchgoers view Christianity as a symbol of Western and cosmopolitan modernity, and migrant workers particularly associate church membership with access to urban citizenship.

Second, the book draws attention to the intimate relationship between the capitalist market economy and the practice of Christianity, which is particularly unique to Wenzhou. Cao draws upon numerous examples to illustrate it, including Christian entrepreneurs who work as house church leaders, enterprises owned by Christians named after places in the Bible, local chapels inside factories meant to attract and convert workers, and the role of Christian professionals' fellowships in "building attractive faith products" and "making Christianity a Wenzhou brand" (p. 39). For many Wenzhou entrepreneurs, the Bible is the road to material and economic success. Its principles are implemented in daily business management, and "good faith and high socioeconomic status [are seen as] go[ing] together" (p. 55).

Third, Cao provides a fascinating account of the gender- and class-based dynamics characterising everyday house church life, little of which has been touched upon in the literature on Christianity in China. The author observes that "female believers [...] outnumber their male counterparts" (p. 99), yet they are significantly underrepresented in the church leadership. Their roles inside the congregation revolve around daily household duties and involvement in artistic evangelising activities such as hymn singing. This division of labour is intertwined with "a widespread penchant to associate women with emotionality (*ganxing*) and men with rationality (*lixing*)" (p. 110).

Furthermore, Cao shows how the social discrimination that migrant workers face in an urban context is reproduced inside churches in Wenzhou. Although the latter offer the migrant population a sense of belonging to a social community of support and give it access to urban modernity, "conversion or baptism does not guarantee [it] full membership in the larger Christian community" (p. 155). Migrant workers are an easy target for proselitisation by Christian bosses, yet they remain second class citizens and urban aliens in the local religious community.

Despite its significant contributions, the book has three weaknesses. First, although the author is right to claim that "it would be [...] unsophisticated to interpret house churches as a form of resistance" (p. 7), one cannot entirely isolate their study from broader questions of state control and church defiance. Insofar as house churches operate as informal organisations in a political setting where independent civil society remains prohibited, the choice to run an unregistered church is potentially political, and church leaders are constrained to bargain with local authority to secure themselves some level of informal protection. That local authorities and Christian bosses share an interest in maintaining good *guanxi* does not suggest that there are no rules or red lines defining the boundaries of their interaction, or that the clergy do not occasionally seek to extend, renegotiate, or overlook them. In some circumstances, Christian bosses' very economic influence may facilitate their churches' ability to defy the state's formal and informal rules with respect to religious practice, whether they choose to do so or not.

The author's rejection of a domination-resistance framework may have been influenced by the focus on Wenzhou as a case study, namely a city where economics rule and where Beijing's concerns regarding the expansion of Christianity are of lesser relevance. Yet it may have also been symptomatic of Cao's predominant focus on church members (as opposed to the clergy) as a unit of analysis. While most churchgoers do not view religious practice as an act of resistance, they are also for the most part excluded from and unaware of the politics underlying house church-local government relations. Finally, the analysis' assumptions are not unrelated to the question driving Cao's research. While the author delves into some of the unregistered clergy's strategies of survival and expansion in Chapter 2, analysing the causes of church survival, some of which are inherently tied to the political context in which the clergy operates, transcends the scope of the study.

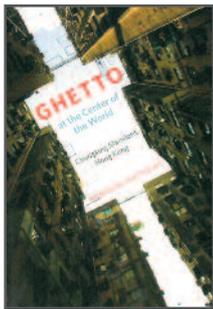
Second, the author rejects the domination-resistance approach, but it is unclear what the alternative theoretical framework of the book is besides Cao's claim to be adopting "a meaning-centered and historically grounded analysis of a Christian locality" (p. 8). Absent from the study is an inductively derived explanatory account grounded in theory that articulates the processes through which local believers experience Christianity. In accounting for how religion becomes a symbol of modernity, the author could have drawn inspiration from identity politics literature. What may make the building of an explanatory framework difficult, however, is the variety of topics

the book touches upon, which are not all easy to reconcile – from Christian bosses' relationships with the local state to gender roles inside the church. In this sense, the book lacks a theoretical core that unifies all chapters into a cohesive analytical discussion.

Third, the author could have dug further into some of the examples used to describe the construction and reproduction of gender hierarchies inside the church. Cao observes that "elite male believers [have promoted] textual Christianity through publishing" (p. 105). Yet it is unclear how the content of such publications validates gender differences. The mere fact that such texts were written by elite male preachers does not make them gender discriminatory. A discourse analysis of texts illustrating gendered narratives would have more effectively tied this discussion to the rest of the analysis. Furthermore, while the author describes superbly how gender roles in the church are perceived and cultivated, the identity construction processes originating in such views have yet to be accounted for. Finally, although men and women have played an active part in maintaining gender divisions, to what extent have some challenged them?

Nanlai Cao's book remains a significant contribution that speaks to studies of state-society relations, religion, and politics, as well as gender and class relations in contemporary China. As yet, it is the most comprehensive account of the complex dynamics characterising everyday life in Chinese Protestant house churches.

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**Gordon Mathews,  
Ghetto at the Center of the World:  
Chungking Mansions,**

Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press  
2011, 241 pp.

N. JAYARAM

After being posted as correspondent of an Indian news agency in Beijing in 1988, I made my first trip to Hong Kong in 1989 to buy some equipment and was told by the few Indians living in the Chinese capital then that Chungking Mansions was the place to go. I stayed in one of the so-called guesthouses there for a few days – and swore to myself never to set foot in the building ever again. It was not that the guesthouse was bad; on the contrary, it was kept reasonably clean by the Filipino partner of the Indian man who ran it. But it was the windowlessness of the place and the long wait for tiny lifts to upper floors that made it claustrophobic and unappealing. With obvious exaggeration I took to saying that nuclear fallout would have difficulty penetrating that maze of a building. And on my first foolish attempt at comparing prices of electrical and electronic goods in some ground floor shops then, a couple of strong words of abuse in Urdu/Punjabi were hurled at me – by a Chinese shop assistant.

Eventually, though, a year or two after moving to Hong Kong in 1995, I gravitated back to the building for occasional meals, which are somewhat

cheaper than in the so-called Indian restaurants elsewhere in Hong Kong. Some of the stores began stocking more food articles from the subcontinent. A few local products sold at ever increasing prices in Hong Kong's grocery chains are available at a slightly lower price in Chungking Mansions.

The building's proximity to the Cultural Centre, venue of music concerts and arts and film festivals, makes it a draw for the less squeamish members of the artsy set. I once heard snippets of a conversation at a table next to mine in a Chungking Mansions restaurant among some delegates to the annual Hong Kong International Film Festival, about the malevolent influence of Florida's Cuban Americans on Washington's policy towards Havana!

I was reminded of this while reading about a similar situation – not in terms of content of discussion but of language – in this book on Chungking Mansions by Gordon Mathews, professor of anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He says that once he, an American, ended up conversing with a Bangladeshi and a Cameroonian at a dinner table in the building, *in Japanese* (pp. 96-97).

Mathews describes Chungking Mansions as the centre of "low-end globalisation" featuring petty traders, asylum seekers, itinerant workers, small-time entrepreneurs, tourists, and the unavoidable gamut of sex workers and substance abusers. He defines "low-end globalisation" as "the transnational flow of goods involving relatively small amounts of capital and informal, sometimes semilegal or illegal, transactions commonly associated with 'the developing world'". This is the globalization of African traders returning to their homelands clutching a few hundred phones in their luggage, and of South Asian temporary workers bringing home to their families a few hundred dollars of needed money and extraordinary tales from a world their families can only imagine" (pp. 19-20).

If Hong Kong as a whole has long been an entrepot between China and the rest of the world, Chungking Mansions has functioned as a mini-entrepot, servicing – and being serviced by – the somewhat more indigent people of the world, those who are looking for cheap mobile phones and clothes from China.

The building is an informal United Nations of sorts. Mathews says he has counted 129 nationalities in its guesthouse logs and in his own meetings with people (p. 7). It might not be unrealistic to assume total all-time foot-falls from people of 150 countries or more. The people in the building are mostly tourists, businesspeople, migrant workers, local shoppers and diners (themselves representing many different nationalities and national origins), and asylum seekers. Mathews says even the last-named "are among the elite of their home societies" because they had "enough money to fly to Hong Kong, something that the vast majority of their compatriots cannot ever do" (p. 102).

Many readers might feel ill-at-ease with what seems to be the author's tacit defence of "neoliberalism" at work in Chungking Mansions. "Anthropological literature typically depicts neoliberalism as a profound evil, representing the forces of rampant global capitalism destroying all possibility of resistance," he notes. "From a macroscopic perspective it is no doubt true that neoliberalism adversely affects the world. But in the small world of Chungking Mansions, the effects of neoliberalism seem largely benign" (p. 213). Mathews cites numerous examples of underpaid and exploited workers in the building, whose desire is to one day become bosses themselves.

As Mathews is careful to note, however, the people in Chungking Mansions are there by their own volition. In that sense, it is a self-selecting sample that he has studied. These are not trade unionists or other kinds of activists, and even if they were politically active back home, once in Hong Kong and

in Chungking Mansions, they have to play by the narrow sets of rules – formal and informal – that govern life there. One is therefore left wondering why Mathews makes so much of the “neoliberal” aspect of the building’s functioning.

Another aspect that occasionally jars is his harping on national divisions among people in the building. A couple of sentences of his that have been picked up in numerous press reports about the book and his work on Chungking Mansions are quotes from a Pakistani about Indians, to the effect that he does not like them but cannot afford to fight (p. 101). But surely there would have been examples of abiding friendships and comradely exchanges as well, especially as they have shared languages and cultural and culinary tastes among other things. They are equally at the receiving end of discriminatory treatment from some Chinese people and Westerners in Hong Kong. Many Indians and Pakistanis tend to support each other’s cricket teams when they are playing a third country team, for instance.

That said, Mathews clearly has abiding sympathy for all the various types of people in the building. He is a committed intellectual and has held classes for asylum seekers, has intervened in disputes, and has even interceded with the police and other authorities in Hong Kong to help people in the building. He has spent many long days and nights studying all that goes on, and the people who live, work, and pass through there, together with a small battalion of his students. And he is concerned about the building’s future, given the pressure from rising land value and the increasing sinicisation of Hong Kong.

Periodically, some commentators writing in Hong Kong newspapers have called for the building to be torn down. In a way, this book by Gordon Mathews shows up the frivolity of their stand by highlighting the richness of life in and around Chungking Mansions. Incidentally, the building recently underwent another round of refurbishment – indicating, perhaps, that it is not ready to be condemned just yet – and copies of the book were distributed to mark the event.

Quite apart from being an important addition to anthropological literature – and the book is replete with fascinating accounts of how Mathews and his researchers went about interviewing people in the building and the difficulties they encountered – the book is certain to figure prominently among those that travellers to Hong Kong will be recommended to read if they want to get a real feel of the place. It is thus likely to appeal equally to academics and to lay readers.

**■ N. Jayaram is a journalist in Bangalore, India, and had previously worked in Hong Kong, Beijing, and New Delhi.**



**Sandrine Marchand,**  
**Sur le fil de la mémoire:**  
**littérature taiwanaise des**  
**années 1970-1990 (Down**  
**memory lane: Taiwanese**  
**literature, 1970-1990),**  
Lyon, Tigre de Papier, 2009, 390 pp.

## GWENNAËL GAFFRIC

As the title indicates, Sandrine Marchand’s book examines the fertile issue of memory in Taiwanese literature, focusing mainly on the period stretching from the early 1970s to the late 1990s. Exceptions are made, however, including discussion of some publications from the 1950s and 1960s (by Ch’en Ying-chen, Lin Hai-yin, and Chu Hsi-ning in particular), as well as a portion of Hou Hsiao-hsien’s filmography.

In her introduction, Marchand presents an interesting history of Taiwanese literature, stressing the relevance of a study built around a process of memorial writing. Marchand’s work is not confined to a unique conception of Memory but tries to demonstrate the intermeshing of several memorial modalities: memory and its relationship to a time (infancy, war, history), to other people (mothers, fathers, adults, American soldiers, the Japanese), to space (real or imagined native land, countryside, gardens), to sensations, to language... Moreover, she has chosen to organise into thematic chapters the presentation of different facets of writings on memory, and often of forgetting, by creating a dialogue between different authors around a common theme.

Two authors take pride of place: Wang Wen-hsing and Ch’en Ying-chen. Marchand relies heavily on readings from them and refers to them in all chapters. She succeeds in getting to grips with the two authors in all their ambiguity in their relationship with memory, history, identity, and literature: Wang’s ambiguity in his iconoclastic modernism, which clashes with his desire to act as inheritor of the ancient Chinese literary tradition, and that of Ch’en, stout champion of Chinese nationalism but at the same time deeply attached to Taiwan’s historical experiences. The book analyses many other authors as well (Hwang Ch’un-ming, Li Ang, Ch’i Teng-sheng, Ch’i Chun, Chu T’ien-hsin, Kuo Song-fen...).

Marchand’s aim is to present a range of forces, flows, and subjectivities that confront each other, raise questions, and reinvent themselves. She lays herself open to the charge of trying to be exhaustive. It should be stated at the outset that she has extensive knowledge of the rich trajectories of Taiwanese literature, and it would be unjust to accuse her of being unacquainted with major writers. Despite her clear choice of enlarging her field of investigation to a large number of writers, the process of selecting works inevitably raises the basic question of the literary canon, especially because of the great interest in the sensitive issue of memory. Which texts and authors are most worthy of discussion in order to best capture the process of “memorial reconstruction” in Taiwan’s formidable literary magma of the years 1970 to 1990? A single event can often spawn multiple readings and interpretations: textual treatment of 28 February 1947, for instance, reveals the memorial distortions at work in Taiwanese literature; and while Marc-

hand has discussed Kuo Song-fen, Hou Hsiao-hsien (cinema), and less directly Li Ang and Ch'en Ying-chen, she might have taken into consideration other writings on the event and different ideological positions such as those of Lin Shuang-pu, Lin Yao-de, Yeh Shih-tao, Cheng Ch'ing-wen, or Wu He, to mention but a few. Admittedly the book has not sought to be an encyclopaedic inventory of the memorial issue in Taiwan in the years 1970-1990, but it would have been useful to touch on the recrudescence, which was significant then, of "big river fiction" (*dahé xiaoshuo*): that of Tung Fang-pai, Chung Chao-cheng, and Li Ch'iao among others. These authors – often identifying with Taiwanese nationalism – tried to reinvent through their historical novels the links between national and family memory. Also unmentioned are the nascent attempts at an "aboriginal" literature in Chinese (authors such as Monaneng and Walis Nokan openly declare their writings to be part of an effort towards memorial exploration of "aboriginal" history). It is also regrettable that the author does not provide more detail on the extra-literary context of the period she studied: it would have been essential to explore other investment strategies in Taiwanese memory, especially historiography.

Marchand concludes by examining the complex issue of the language of expression chosen, but she does not consider all the literary production in "Taiwanese" language,<sup>(1)</sup> or in Hakka, which expanded greatly in the period reviewed, nor the writings of Wang Chen-ho, whose quest for a hybrid language (mixture of Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, and English) was perhaps the most ambitious then. Nevertheless, Marchand is well aware that "in Taiwan, language – languages, one should say – has a special value in relation to Taiwanese identity and memory" (p. 308). While presenting Taiwanese literature as "minor literature" (a view shared by other scholars such as Lee Yu-lin, Yang Kai-lin, and Carlos Rojas), in which "everything is political," she rightly points to the importance of the memorial issue for authors who are openly political, such as Ch'en Ying-chen, or resolutely apolitical, such as Chu T'ien-hsin.

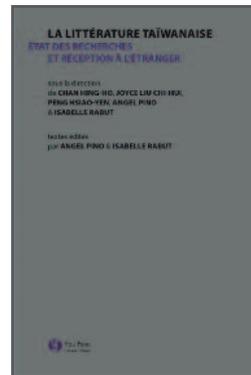
Marchand's discussion benefits richly from numerous extracts taken from the works considered, as well as their French translations. Moreover, the bibliography is abundant, with a good presence of academic texts in Chinese. Marchand stands out with her inventive, often lyrical, writing and the original perspective she brings to bear on the texts, with reflections on generally unknown or neglected authors by those working on Taiwanese literature, such as Ernest Renan, Augustin Berque, and Édouard Glissant. It is regrettable that the book contains numerous errors (typos, dates, names, and occasional discrepancies between original texts and French translations).

To sum up, while the difficulty is that dealing with the notoriously selective issue of memory cannot escape a "canonical" choice, Marchand appears nevertheless to be aware of this obstacle. Almost at the outset, she quotes Borges: "To think is to forget differences, to generalise, to abstract" (p. 19).

Thus the book is – despite or perhaps because of the questions it raises – an essential contribution to Taiwan studies in France, and will stimulate further investigations into Taiwan's rich literary legacy.

#### ■ Translated by N. Jayaram

1. What the author calls Taiwanese language is *Taiyu* (in Mandarin), or *Taiji* in Hoklo. It is related to *Minnan*, spoken in Fujian, and was the language of the majority in Taiwan until the KMT regime imposed Mandarin. It is estimated that 60 percent of the population still speaks the language.



**Chan Hing-ho, Joyce Liu Chi-hui, Peng Hsiao-yen, Angel Pino, and Isabelle Rabut (eds.), *La littérature taïwanaise. État des recherches et réception à l'étranger*,**

Paris, You Feng, 2011, 680 pp.

#### GWENNAËL GAFFRIC

This work brings together the quasi-totality of proceedings at a 2004 colloquium in Bordeaux. Contributions in English and Chinese were translated into French by Hervé Denès, Angel Pino, and Isabelle Rabut.

After an introduction by Pino and Rabut, the book contains three parts, the first two presenting original studies on Taiwanese literature and analyses of translations and their reception in Britain, Germany, the United States, and France, and the third being a vast bibliography of more than 300 pages shedding light on academic works and translations on Taiwanese literature in German, English, and French up to 2005.

Chapter 1, "The issue of modernism," deals with the reception and reinvention of Taiwan's literary modernism between the 1950s and 1990s. Contributions by Chen Fang-ming, Chiu Kuei-fen, and Zhang Yinde focus on the issue of readings of works and Western modernism theories in Taiwanese literary circles. They refute the idea of a simple "Taiwanese imitation" or one-sided Western imperialist influence, highlighting the ambiguity and creativity of the island's authors in their retranslations, appropriations, and inter-textual reconstructions.

In Chapter 2, "History of the literature," the contributions of Lin Juei-ming and Li Xiangping complement each other: they explore the ways in which the history of Taiwanese literature is written by presenting diametrically different viewpoints. While Lin Juei-ming seeks to retrace the contours of what he calls "Taiwaneseness" by stressing the particularities of the history of literary criticism in Taiwan, Li Xiangping offers a more sinocentric critique of what he deems nationalist romanticism of a certain literary historiography on the island. He emphasises the traumatism of the Japanese era (which as far as he's concerned function as common stigma in Taiwanese and Chinese histories). Sandwiched between these two contributions is that of Chen Wan-yi, who discusses the work of writer Yang Kui,<sup>(1)</sup> especially his early attempts at "literature in Taiwanese" at a time (in the island's literary circles in the 1930s) when the choice of language for writers was a major problematic.

In Chapter 3, "Literature and history," Peng Hsiao-yen shows the links between writing and memory among writers in garrison villages (*juancun*)<sup>(2)</sup> such as Zhu Tianxin and Zhang Dachun. Joyce Liu Chi-hui analyses the feeling of decadence among some Taiwanese poets of the Japanese era, especially Yang Shichang (which would have been rendered as Yang Chichang in *pinyin*). Mei Chia-ling offers a study on the representation of the body in Taiwanese fiction in the Japanese era.

1. Unlike in Sandrine Marchand's book, editors of this book chose to retranscribe authors' names in *pinyin*. The two books do contain parallel spellings in their index.

2. Villages where families of soldiers who followed Chiang Kai-shek were housed.

Chapter 4, "Some Taiwanese literary works," contains five contributions. Li Sher-shiueh compares *Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream* by Bai Xianyong with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Pei-yin Lin invites re-discovery of an "alternative canon" in *Wind and Moon*, a periodical from the "Japanese occupation" era. Esther Lin offers a tour d'horizon of new writing strategies among the generation of Taiwanese writers born after the 1960s. Sandrine Marchand deals with the issue of memory in Wang Wenxing's *Family Catastrophe*, and finally, Lin Ming-teh dissects the influence of *L'Affaire Crainquebille* by Anatole France on Lai He's famous novel *A 'Steel-yard'* (*chengzi* in pinyin, but it could also be rendered in Taiwanese as *chhin-á* in accordance with Lai He's original intentions).

In Part Two, the contributions of Pino, Rabut, Christina Neder, and Pei-yin Lin lay out in an interesting way the links between the strategies of translation and publication of Taiwanese literature and the island's visibility in the world.

From a simple point of view of organising the contributions, it might have been wiser to start with reflections on the way in which Taiwanese literature is written, instead of opening the collection with the issue of modernism. Similarly, arranging in chronological chapters would have avoided a situation in which studies on authors from the Japanese period (such as Lai He, Yang Kui, and Yang Chichang, or even the analyses of Pei-yin Lin and Mei Chia-ling) are far apart from each other. The editors could have also chosen to invite reflections on the analyses of Zhang Yinde and Li Sher-shiueh, as both of them offer a comparative study of the work of Bai Xianyong, and would thereby have avoided having the contribution of Esther Lin on the new generation of Taiwanese novelists sandwiched between a study of a periodical from the Japanese period and one of a novel (*Family Catastrophe*) from 1973.

Further, while it is important to accord the colossal bibliographical work of Pei-yin Lin (Britain), Christiane Hammer (Germany), and especially Pino (the United States and France) their due in Part Three of the book, it is regrettable that the list ends with 2005 in a 2011 publication: It is evident that, for instance, no fewer than 13 Taiwanese novels and anthologies of poems were translated and published in French in between, not to mention important recent academic contributions on the subject.<sup>(3)</sup> It might have been interesting to include an assessment of the reception of Taiwanese literature in Japan, a major centre of Taiwan studies and a country where a large number of Taiwanese literary works have been translated. Meanwhile, a consideration of "aboriginal" literature in Chinese is surprisingly absent from this collection.

The book regrettably is not without some misprints. Finally, apart from the useful inclusion of translators' notes, it would have been interesting – albeit at the risk of adding to their work – if some information had been added regarding the terms used in the original contributions. For instance, what does "Taiwanese spoken language" stand for in Chen Wan-yi's article – *Taiyu* or *Taiwan huawen*? Is the "Chinese region of Taiwan" in Li Xiangping's text a translation of *Taiwan qu* or *Taiwan sheng*?

Despite some of these editorial lapses, the book is a remarkable effort at presenting the different ways in which Taiwanese literature is viewed abroad, by giving voice to scholars from different climes and divergent ideological viewpoints, thus offering a rich insight into the history of Taiwanese literature in different periods. Similarly, the bibliographic work in the last part constitutes, despite being incomplete, an inestimable resource for anyone interested in Taiwanese literature.

In their introduction, Pino and Rabut raise the question whether Taiwanese literature is a "branch" of Chinese literature or is completely independent

(p. 15). The transtextual details examined in this book and that of Marchand suggest the possibility of an alternative interpretation: Taiwanese literature being neither exclusively "sino-referential" nor entirely "self-referential," would it not be possible to assert rather that it is Chinese literature that is a component of Taiwanese literature, in the same way as is Japanese literature or that of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Anatole France, or more recently Milan Kundera, Haruki Murakami, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez?

The two books considered above, the first works in French exclusively concerned with Taiwanese literature – but in a way that is not entirely exclusive – bring out the rich particularities of Taiwanese poetics and can be expected to nurture more Francophone studies on the island's literature.

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3. Two recent articles (in Chinese) could partly bridge this gap: Zhuo Li (Esther Lin-Rosoloto), "Taiwan wenxue zuopin fayi yu jieshou" (Translation and reception of Taiwanese literature in France), *Taiwan wenxue guan tongxun* (Bulletin of the National Museum of Taiwan Literature), no. 32, 09/2011, pp. 18-23; and Guan Shou-qi (Gwennaël Gaffric), "Taiwan wenxue zai faguoguo de xianzhuang" (Assessment of Taiwanese literature in France), *Wenshi Taiwan xuebao* (Academic journal on Taiwanese literature and history), no. 3, 12/2011, pp. 101-120.

## Books received

**Mireille Delmas-Marty and Pierre-Étienne Will (eds.), *China, Democracy and Law: A Historical and Contemporary Approach***, Translated by Naomi Norberg, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2012, 915 pp.

**Hélène Le Bail, *Migrants chinois hautement qualifiés au Japon***, Paris, Les indes savantes, 2012, 232 pp.

**Richard Beraha (ed.), *La Chine à Paris. Enquête au cœur d'un monde méconnu***, Paris, Robert Laffont, 308 pp.

**Claudia Astarita and Yves-Heng Lim (eds.), *China and India in Asia: Paving the Way for a New Balance of Power***, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 205 pp.

**Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (eds.), *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine***, Vancouver/Toronto, UBC Press, 321 pp.

**Véronique Michel, *La Chine branchée***, Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, éditions Sépia, 2012, 109 pp.

**Antoinette Maux-Robert, Henri Maux. *En mission dans le tumulte asiatique 1945-1950***, Cholet, éditions de l'Ouest, 2011, 620 pp.

**Antoinette Maux-Robert, *Le Dragon de l'Est. Henri Maux en mission dans la Chine en guerre 1937-1939***, Marly-le-Roi, éditions Champflour, 1999, 192 pp.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist, Ai Weiwei, *Une conversation***, traduit de l'anglais par Olivier Colette, Paris, Manuella éditions, 2012, 159 pp.