
Theodore Huters. *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005. 370p.

GÉRALDINE SCHNEIDER
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Bringing the World Home is a keen study of the many-splendored phenomenon that is *fin-de-siècle* Chinese literature. Indeed, Theodore Huters uncovers a new critical vision of a fascinating but indeterminate age, the late Qing and early Republican moment in China (ca. 1860-1919). Focusing particularly on the period of introspection and crisis that engulfed Chinese intellectuals after China's defeat by Japan in 1895 until the advent of the New Culture Movement in 1919, Huters engages essential questions of cross-cultural inquiry in order to examine literary texts that have never been secure in their relationship with the canon. His analysis allows the interested general reader and specialist alike to perceive the complex dynamics that informed the vast scope of cultural transformation during the *jindai* (early modern) period from a perspective that challenges and simultaneously expands previous scholarship in the field.

Huters' argument, which is also the overarching framework of his textual readings, has several layers of meaning. First, he is deeply concerned with critiquing the "relentless pull" of a Hegelian teleological vision of unilinear historical progression that has characterized many sinological studies regarding particularly the late Qing period, in both the Chinese as well as Western academies. Scholars have often posited the period as "merely transitional" or, indeed, as a "modernity manqué" (4) that was repressed until being rediscovered only recently. In contrast, Huters proposes to take a step back from placing the late Qing/early Republican era within the strict perspective of an ineluctably emerging and uniform modernity. He argues instead that it is essential to look at ideas that could *not* be implemented and at alternative literary imaginative possibilities that did not become part of the subsequent May 4th paradigm of new literature and culture. By tracing the complicated encounter between China's classical corpus of historical/literary writing and the deluge of modern Western texts and ideas that were being introduced to China during this period, Huters identifies a complex and contradictory process of rejecting the old and invoking the new that engendered the multitude of narrative experiments which emerged at this time.

Building upon previous studies in the late Qing field, which have tended to see late Qing and early Republican texts as presenting their own unique yet hitherto unrecognized form of modernity, Huters traces alternative and at least potentially

subversive discourses outside the dominant modernizing Enlightenment model. As he examines the evolution of new verbal registers within the co-existing dominant discourses of traditional China and the modern West, Hutters engages theoretical ideas of Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Homi Bhabha regarding the possibility of “subversive mimicry” amid the process of identity construction.

But in foregrounding the vibrant intensity of these alternatives, Hutters also detects the presence of a powerful simultaneous force that pushed these same alternative visions of modernity to the margins. In other words, in describing the collision between new and old in late 19th- and early 20th-century China, Hutters identifies both an incredible receptivity to variety and deep misgivings about the process of intellectual adaptation and accommodation. In one example he shows, for instance, that in Shanghai, already then the most cosmopolitan city in China, things Chinese and things Western interacted in a model of productive hybridity even while there was also intense agonism over the potential loss of indigenous Chinese culture. At the same time, he argues that the contingency of new fictional possibilities was often overpowered by the deep-seated desire to build a new literary discourse that would be able to modernize all aspects of the culture and lead China into the future. Hutters thus identifies a central paradox in the process of reform during this period which he terms the “semi-colonial paradox.” He writes: “Reform needed to present itself as an internally generated imperative even as it insisted upon rejecting the legitimacy of any possible content to anything marked with the stigma of the past” (10). What unifies the cultural artifacts that Hutters examines here is therefore the same pattern of anxiety that characterized late Qing writers’ problematic relationship with their own cultural and literary heritage. Hutters’ investigation allows us to appreciate the extraordinary dynamism of the period as well as many thinkers’ contradictory stance toward the diversity they had brought forth.

Hutters’ study focuses on some of these intellectual struggles amid a context of intellectual uncertainties, “hesitations, reconsiderations, disputes and plain contradictions” (11). He chooses literary texts as the primary locus of his analysis because intellectual moves are frequently explicitly or implicitly set forth in literature. It is by focusing particularly on narrative fiction that it is possible to understand both China’s crises of accommodation and many writers’ new visions of social possibilities. Since literature is also the force that enables a people to build and sustain a sense of national consciousness, Hutters shows us some of the most vital transformations that were taking place within the genre of the Chinese novel. At the same time, he emphasizes the fundamentally linguistic nature of the crisis of accommodation that was occurring in nearly all aspects of Chinese life and culture.

In terms of overall organization, the book is structured in such a way that the reader may gain an understanding of the historical reality and literary context that preceded, led up to, and informed the texts Hutters examines. Part I, "Late Qing Ideas," presents an overview of the *yangwu* movement post 1860 during which Chinese intellectuals, in order to encourage accommodation with non-Chinese thought, argued that all Western technology was rooted in ideas of Chinese origin. Hutters then moves on to subsequent encounters with and evolving strategies for coming to terms with the encroaching West. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4 he surveys newly emerging ways of writing as well as new theories of the novel, focusing on the complexities of the term *wenxue* (literature), the impact of Yan Fu's iconoclastic essays, and the nature of the new style of writing advocated by the theorist Liang Qichao. All of this serves as valuable background when we reach Part II, "Late Qing Novels," which features a contextual discussion of Wu Jianren's novel *Xin shitouji* (*New Story of the Stone*) as well as a close reading of Zeng Pu's text *Niehai hua* (*Flower in a Sea of Retribution*). Finally, we move on to Part III, "The New Republic," where Hutters critically examines the Shanghai writer Zhu Shouju's *Xiepu chao* (*The Shanghai Tide*) and several narratives in Lu Xun's collection of stories *Panghuang* (*Hesitation*). The notes provided at the conclusion of the book are very informative, and the glossary of Chinese and Japanese terms enables readers to deepen their knowledge of relevant critical terms.

This book opens up many avenues of much-needed future research into the precise nature of artistic experimentation in the realm of fiction and the complex processes of negotiation of Chinese literary and intellectual accommodation during this critical period in Chinese history. Indeed, there remains a shortage of detailed studies of the exact processes by which the thorny accommodation between Chinese civilization and the incoming rush of Western ideas and practices was actually effected. The thoughtful, well-articulated analyses in this book go a long way toward encouraging such further studies. *