

BOOK REVIEWS

MICHAEL HUNTER. *The Poetics of Early Chinese Thought: How the Shijing Shaped the Chinese Philosophical Tradition*. New York: Columbia UP, 2021. Pp. 240. US\$145.00 hardcover, US\$35.00 paperback, US\$34.99 ebook.

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At times, by a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances, one happens to chance upon a text and become utterly absorbed by it. This is what happened to me while reading Michael Hunter's volume *The Poetics of Early Chinese Thought: How the Shijing Shaped the Chinese Philosophical Tradition*. For someone like me, engaged in research on Modern and Contemporary Chinese poetry, the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry) represents "the" Chinese collection of poetry, the one from which Chinese poetry springs.

Western sinologists and scholars, such as James Legge in the nineteenth century, Marcel Granet, Arthur Waley, Bernard Karlgren, and Ezra Pound in the twentieth century, have long been publishing seminal works about Chinese classical poetry, delving into the complexity of the study of the *Shijing*. This substantial body of academic work conveys the impression that this collection of poems belongs to another 'level of knowledge,' one that stands out from the rest and appears somehow to be 'out of reach.' Composed between the eleventh and sixth centuries BC, the three hundred-plus poems collected in the *Shijing* are written in ancient Chinese, and modern readers may have difficulties interpreting the work today. Furthermore, having become a fundamental part of the training of imperial officials who had to learn the Five Classics (*Wu Jing* 五經)—including, as Hunter also mentions, the *Changes* (*Yi* 易), *Documents* (*Shu* 書), *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春 秋), and *Ritual* (*Li* 禮) classics (3)—the

Shijing plays a key role in the Chinese literary canon. Thanks to its prominent position in Chinese culture, it enjoys great cultural prestige.

On popular websites too, the *Shijing* (in English, the *Wikipedia* entry is *Classic of Poetry*) is included among the “Five Classics,” or is considered one of the “Six Classics” when *Music* (*Yue* 乐) is included, or again one of the “Five Classics” (on *Baidu* 百度, the Chinese website similar to *Wikipedia*, we find 成为《六经》及《五经》之一). By referring to them, *Wikipedia* and *Baidu* also indicate how the “Classics” were the basis for the knowledge of the learned and cultured elite. It is interesting, at this point, to notice that the *Shijing* is generally recognized as belonging to the Chinese literary canon. Thus, to engage with a critical volume discussing the *Shijing* means that the potential reader will also be approaching the volume with reverential respect. The very title of Michael Hunter’s volume triggers this same sentiment as we find in it two key elements that introduce the complexity of the work: “poetics” and “philosophical tradition.” Through his analysis, Hunter brings to light the intimate connection that exists between the first Chinese poetic productions, as they are represented in the *Shijing*, and the development of Chinese philosophical thought.

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The interdisciplinary approach that Hunter applies to his research enhances the way poetics and philosophy resonate with each other. Indeed, his point of view stems from the observation that the position of the *Shijing* is in some respects puzzling: even though so many elements from the *Shijing* can be detected in the works of poets and philosophers who have shaped Chinese civilization, it has become increasingly marginalized. Therefore, we must reread the canonical texts of Chinese philosophical thought in search of traces of the *Shijing* that can contribute to its contextualization from a more contemporary point of view.

The path Hunter follows is indicated by the titles of the five chapters that follow the introduction: “Reading the *Shi*,” “A Poetry of Return,” “*Shi* Poetics beyond the *Shi*,” “The *Shi* and the *Verses of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭),” and “The *Shi* versus the Masters.” Together, they describe the progressive shifting of the analysis from the poetic corpus of the *Shijing* and its characteristics to its reverberation on the cultural environment. Through this process, the reader is offered the means to follow the development of Hunter’s idea of classical Chinese philosophical thought that has been modelled on literary assumptions rooted in the world vision of ancient Chinese poetry.

In particular, in his introduction, Hunter refers to the *Shi* 詩 to indicate the set of compositions collected in the *Shijing* that constitute “the most foundational corpus of early Chinese thought” (1) and specifies that as “the most widely learned, memorized, and quoted canonical tradition, the *Shi* [...] was a sine qua non of elite education in the Warring States period (fifth century BCE–221 BCE), that so-called Golden Age of Chinese thought” (1). According to Hunter, pillars of Chinese philosophy such as the identification of virtue and power (48) or the concept self of *dao* 道 are all established in the *Shijing* (1), and without the *Shijing*, we would never have had Confucius or Laozi, or even the verses of Qu Yuan (1).

In order to prevent misleading statements, Hunter suggests that we avoid using

contemporary categories of thought that belong to the modern era to analyze processes from historical periods in which other categories were applied. This is why he is very attentive in defining the terms he uses also when it comes to words such as “thought,” “thinkers,” and “ideology” (2). His point is that “the foundations of one of the world’s great philosophical traditions are to be found in a work of literature” (2) and, therefore:

A better, less anachronistic description is that the *Shi*, by virtue of their cultural authority, established a common worldview and conceptual vocabulary that conditioned early thinkers’ sense-making efforts more than other extant ideologies and systems of thought. If we are to make sense of their efforts, then it behooves us to think about and through the *Shi* as much as they did. (2)

In which way, then, does Hunter reinterpret the *Shi* from this modern world’s viewpoint? First of all, he remains very close to the original texts to which he refers. This close reading takes into account the sounds of the Chinese language of its time, not only in order to follow the rhythm impressed by the poets, but also to discover possible associations of thought that the scarcity of written sources only allows us to guess at; the formal composition furthermore contributes to emphasize patterns of repetition. The themes preferred by the poets further reveal the focus of interest of the times.

Second, Hunter’s exploration is not based solely on a few examples, but includes a very large number of poems. To analyze the *Shijing*, he offers a very broad overview of how it is composed. The attention to detail, the abundance of examples, and the description of the characteristics of each section of the *Shijing* are further remarkable aspects of Hunter’s volume. Not even the word “poet” escapes Hunter’s critical analysis because, as he explains in the case of the *Shijing*, “A *Shi ren* 詩人 [...] isn’t a ‘poet’ but ‘the person or people of the *Shi*,’ that is, the people who first uttered them and whose thoughts are disclosed therein” (4). This aspect is relevant since Hunter considers the *Shi* not only in their composite nature of “multimedia performances” (4), inclusive as they were of music and dance, but also as texts that could undergo changes: “the tremendous variability of the *Shi* suggests that we might think of a single poem not as a stable, independently circulating work but as a localized instantiation of the repertoire” (4). Along this line of a poetic material with an unstable nature, through his very accurate close reading, Hunter begins an intellectual journey that takes him into the very heart of the poetic discourse of the *Shijing*.

Characterized by words, verbs, and expressions related to movement—rivers that flow, seasons that alternate, people who march—and through many other examples, the character of the *Shi* is discovered and revealed “as a profoundly kinetic poetry” (13). The “movement” underlined is not just “a” movement, but is one that always takes us back to the centre, a movement as expressed by the verb *gui* 歸, to return, which recurs in the *Shijing* almost as an “obsession” (13). Hunter explains how the movement of return can be back home, back to the beloved, back to the country of origin, or back to the emperor; he reaches the conclusion that, in whichever way it

happens, the return is always a return to society, to components of the society of which one is a part. From this point of view, the *Shijing* appears as a representation of the values cherished by society at that time. It follows, as Hunter demonstrates, that all subsequent references to the *Shijing* are either a validation of the concepts and principles expressed in it, as can be observed in the dialogues of Confucius with his disciples, for instance, or they indicate a departure from these concepts and principles, as can be detected in Laozi or in the *Verses of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭) by Qu Yuan. When, as in the latter, they depart from the existing principles, the following question arises: one can decide not to “return” and maybe experience a secluded life or a life at a distance, but then what? The shift Hunter underscores in the poetic production from the *Shijing*, and therefore from the Zhou dynasty, to the early imperial time through the Warring States, is one that indicates a change in the focus of poets, questioning categories that are progressively perceived as less certain or less definitive. Hunter illustrates this process by following the reappearance, or coming to the surface, of elements already detected in his analysis of the *Shijing* in the other texts: one word, one theme, one expression are each clues of a subtle dialogue that develops among the Chinese thinkers of the time; they themselves are representatives of the multiple ‘souls’ of Chinese philosophical thought, but who all, in a more or less direct way, engaged with the world vision in the *Shijing*. The care Hunter takes to help orient the reader in a subject of such vast dimensions is exerted step by step, patiently, from one observation to the next, from one text to another, and always at every step making the analysis as transparent as possible.

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It is necessary to highlight one more aspect that is specific to Hunter’s volume, in the concluding chapter “A Classic of N/Odes.” To conduct his analysis as a scholar of our times, Hunter adopts network theory:

Network theory emerged in the twentieth century [...] as a way of analyzing complex technological, biological, social, and semantic systems. A network model is a tool for parsing systemic complexity. By reducing a system to a bundle of connections or edges among discrete nodes or vertices, a network model filters out less essential information to reveal the underlying structure. Network theory then offers various tools for analyzing that structure and even predicting the behavior of a system [...] (189-90)

Network theory is, therefore, the means that allows Hunter to give the following explanation:

If the advantage of a network model is that it foregrounds the problem of connecting extant texts and thinkers, then the advantage of a *Shi*-centric network model is that it offers the greatest number of pathways for making those connections. Even if we can’t draw a direct line between, say, the *Analects* and the *Mozi*, we can still connect them via the *Shi*. Once those connections are mapped, we will be in a much better position to understand the debates, polemics, and competition that made the early Chinese intellectual scene so vibrant. (191)

In unfolding his methodology, Hunter uses a very modern scholarly conceptual apparatus. His methodology and language bring the reader from the Chinese era

into our modern era, one pervaded by science and the language of science. Finally, a special mention goes to the bibliography included in Hunter's volume with numerous primary sources in Chinese, in which the texts of the great scholars who have transmitted their knowledge of Chinese poetry accompany the most recent publications on the subject.

In light of a contemporary scientific approach, with his *The Poetics of Early Chinese Thought: How the Shijing Shaped the Chinese Philosophical Tradition*, Hunter not only helps the reader to follow the evolution of early Chinese philosophical thought starting from its roots in the earliest Chinese poetic texts, but also finds in the 'movement of return' one of the possible codes of interpretation of this evolution. Furthermore, he also lays bare his personal journey of poetic investigation to bring the antiquity of the *Shijing* to contemporary times, stimulating a more vivacious and fresher approach to studying the literary canon of China.

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FRANCES R. BOTKIN. *Thieving Three-Fingered Jack: Transatlantic Tales of a Jamaican Outlaw, 1780-2015*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2017. Pp. 240. US\$125.00 hardcover, US\$35.95 paperback, US\$31.95 ebook.

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Frances Botkin's *Thieving Three-Fingered Jack* is the first book to give sustained attention to one of the more important and enduring figures of resistance in eighteenth-century Jamaica. Three-Fingered Jack, also referred to as Jack Mansong, garnered fame as a black outlaw before his 1781 death at the hands of bounty hunters. His brief career was also associated indelibly with the Afro-Jamaican magico-religious practices of *obeah*, or "obi," as contemporary accounts often called it. This short but evocative study introduces readers to the intercultural Atlantic history of Three-Fingered Jack, following the famous outlaw's tracks from eighteenth-century Jamaica to Britain and the US. Grounded first in the historical evidence of Jack's life and death, Botkin's study then explores the later reinventions of Jack's story. Fictional and dramatic versions of Three-Fingered Jack have appeared repeatedly throughout two centuries of popular culture, drama, and fiction, allowing new generations of storytellers to claim and reclaim—or, as Botkin puts it, to "thief" Jack's tale for their own ends.

As we might expect, Jack appeared in multiple guises along the way. First mentioned in the official record as an ambiguous and threatening outlaw, he was then presented on stage as a chivalrous and doomed pantomime antihero. That stage figure took on a life of its own, and Jack eventually emerged as an eloquent and romanticized critic of slavery in abolitionist-minded melodramas. Jack's story, as Botkin shows, was claimed and reclaimed by competing interests. Nineteenth-century novels imagined

him in plantation narratives of sensational sex and violence, and twentieth-century versions used his story to comment on Jamaica's politics and popular culture.

This study offers a useful methodological model for scholarship in comparative popular cultures. There is no single authentic version of Jack's story, as Botkin is careful to point out, and no one rightly "owns" the story—*Thieving Three-Fingered Jack* never purports to offer a "true story" of Jack's life and death, instead aiming to show "what different permutations of this story tell us about storytelling in the Atlantic world" (21). Botkin draws out the rich and varied problematics of Jack's various stories, using archived history to understand later renderings of the outlaw and his struggles. The compelling opening chapter, for example, reads the official records of an eighteenth-century Caribbean police state against the living memory of contemporary Maroons, the modern-day descendants of escaped slaves with a complex history of colonial collaboration and resistance. In the official view, Jack's outlawry appears a chaotic crime spree, and the men who killed him willing collaborators with English policing authority. At the same time, as some of Botkin's Jamaican sources suggest, Jack's outlawry might also be deliberate opposition to the logic of colonialism; his killers, in that view, worked within a system that instigated black-on-black competition and violence to control unruly people living on the margins of plantation society. The ambivalence of Jack's character and his resistance to Jamaican colonialism is one of the more important insights in Botkin's study.

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Botkin's approach to her material and to her sources should also inspire important discussions about the practical ethics of scholarship on race, slavery, and colonialism. She herself notes her relatively privileged position as a white, non-Jamaican-born investigator of histories and issues that remain important to Jamaicans today. As she points out, researching Three-Fingered Jack often led directly to larger contemporary social and political questions. That had been the case from the beginning: Jack's 1800 appearance in Anglo-American pantomimes, for example, was arguably part of a broader response to the Haitian Revolution. In later centuries, Jack's story continued to speak to Jamaican political practices, ideologies of nationalism, and even styles of masculinity. Botkin's study, aware of the importance of such questions, treats these issues sensitively. Even if inevitable traces remain of our deep-rooted assumptions about race, power, and performance, Botkin works hard to center the voices and perspectives of her Jamaican informers, and this book as a consequence feels less academically abstracted and more concretely connected to its content.

The book's consistent attention to performance, in eighteenth-century Anglo pantomime, nineteenth-century melodrama, twentieth-century Afro-Jamaican pantomime, and even in the stylings of "blaxploitation" film, also helpfully reminds readers that Jack's story circulated in ways that official records and canonized literary cultures often fail to see. Jack's theatrical renderings—in the popular 1800 pantomime by John Fawcett as well as the melodrama that gave Jack a stage voice in the 1820s—were vigorously contested. In each case, Botkin shows, the figure of the black outlaw could be used to justify Anglo-Atlantic racial politics or, equally effectively,

to express Black Atlantic aspirations and critiques. In much later performances such as Ted Dwyer's *Mansong* (1980), for example, Jamaican theatre effectively used Jack's story to make arguments about violent resistance to exploitation and oppression in the twentieth century. As Botkin shows, Three-Fingered Jack featured in a wide variety of literary texts as well. Early novels such as William Earle's *Obi, or, The History of Three-Fingered Jack* (1800) focused on white readers' anti-slavery sympathies, while later texts reverted to a combination of plantation nostalgia and sensationalism to imagine Jack's misbehaviour and his relationship to the ever-present obeah practices. Botkin's discussions of lesser-known literary versions of Jack's story, particularly William Burdett's *Life and Exploits of Mansong* (1800), Thomas Frost's *Obi; or, Three-Fingered Jack* (1851), and H.G. de Lisser's *Morgan's Daughter* (1930), add welcome detail to the long and sometimes confusing trail of literary reinventions.

What these literary and dramatic renderings show is often grim. "Like Jack's three-fingered hand and decapitated body," Botkin writes, "the dis- and re-membered narratives tell a brutal history of violence, loss, and retribution" (8). At the same time, as the study shows, the life and death of Three-Fingered Jack could also point scholars toward the central questions of Caribbean and Atlantic cultural history. Jack's story centres on questions of collaboration and resistance, violence and rebellion, and shows us much of how different groups curate and pass on stories that define themselves and their communities. If the ethical questions of such work are never simple, Botkin's *Thieving Three-Fingered Jack* nevertheless aims to push the study of race and colonialism in commendable directions, honouring the lives and experiences that continue to shape and be shaped by Jack's story.

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SU YUN KIM. *Imperial Romance: Fictions of Colonial Intimacy in Korea, 1905-1945*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2020. Pp. 204. US\$49.95 hardcover, US\$32.99 ebook.

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Imperial Romance: Fictions of Colonial Intimacy in Korea, 1905-1945 by Su Yun Kim explores the contentious relationship between Korea and Japan during the colonial period through the lens of intercultural romance. The monograph is primarily a work of literary scholarship that surveys representations of heterosexual relationships between Japanese and Koreans. Readers of colonial fiction will be familiar with this trope, but no English-language studies have tackled the subject in comparable depth. The choice to frame the book around intercultural romance enables Kim to reconsider canonical texts by the likes of Yi In-jik, Yi Kwang-su, Yom Sang-söb, and Yi Hyo-sök from a fresh perspective, illuminating strands of desire and apprehension related to assimilation through marriage.

As one might imagine, the topic of romance between a Japanese and Korean couple in the early twentieth century is a minefield. The legacy of colonial Korean literature itself has been stained by the history of collaboration. In South Korea, literature that was written in service of the Japanese empire has been labelled *ch'inil*, a term that innocuously means “intimacy with Japan” but bears the stigma of national betrayal. Decolonization efforts after liberation in 1945 were cut short in the chaos that resulted in the establishment of two separate states on the peninsula. Collaborators were not punished by the new South Korean government, a state that initially relied on largely the same police apparatus that was previously employed by Japan to maintain order. Due to this fraught history, collaboration remains a sensitive subject more than 75 years later. Kim explains that depictions of relationships between Japanese and Koreans in colonial literature have been read schematically through a nationalist framework: “Narratives that end with a successful marriage are considered to be ‘pro-Japanese,’ while those that depict an unsuccessful marriage are deemed ‘resistant-nationalist’” (12).

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Imperial Romance will be of interest to readers who want to learn more about collaboration and assimilation in the context of colonial Korea and the Japanese empire. In this respect, the monograph serves a useful companion piece to earlier English-language studies such as *Intimate Empire* by Nayoung Aimee Kwon, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea* by Mark Caprio, *Primitive Selves* by E. Taylor Atkins, and *Romance, Family, and Nation in Japanese Colonial Literature* by Kimberly K. Kono, among others. Caprio and Atkins both explore the Japanese perspective, analyzing top-down policy in addition to cultural products. Kono’s study, like Kim’s book, analyzes fictional depictions of intercultural relationships, but her focus is on Japanese literature. Meanwhile, Kwon investigates collaboration in the context of Korean literature, arguing for a more nuanced approach to this sensitive issue that rejects the binary of collaboration versus resistance adopted by numerous earlier studies. She too mostly uses Japanese-language sources. In *Imperial Romance*, Kim combines readings of Korean fiction (and a handful of films) with historical research based on the analysis of periodicals and government-general documents. In comparison to previous studies, her monograph is tighter in focus, allowing for a more thorough investigation of a single issue throughout the colonial period.

Romance (*yŏnae*) is certainly a subject ripe for further discussion. In Korea, the term gained currency in the early 1920s as an import from abroad. As Kwon Bodurae has argued, the emergence of romance coincided with the transformation of gender relations in Korean society. The notion that an individual could choose their own partner signalled the dawn of a new era for women in particular. No longer restricted to the household, some women took on new roles in society: working in bars, studying at foreign universities, etc. The so-called “new women” (*sin yŏsŏng*) became a symbol of change for progressives, but were also stigmatized by others for their embrace of Western fashion and cultural norms. These women could also fall in love on their own accord, prioritizing their feelings in favour of the Neo-Confucian

dictate to be a loyal mother, wife, or daughter. Most scholars have discussed romance in this period in terms of heterosexual relationships between men and women. Kim mostly follows this trend.

One particularity of *Imperial Romance* is that Kim largely discusses romance in terms of marriage. This choice partly reflects a limitation in extant sources: census data, for example, were partially collected about official unions between Japanese and Korean individuals, but unofficial relationships were understandably not as well documented. Her discussion of fiction occasionally touches upon unmarried couples—both those who have no plans to tie the knot and those who fail to do so because of extenuating circumstances—but marriage (or the failure to marry) remains the focus for the majority of the book. It would have been interesting to see a more sustained discussion of intercultural desire, a subject that Kim broaches in her reading of Yi Kwang-su's early Japanese-language story "Maybe Love" (*Ai ka*, 1909). As Kim notes several times throughout the book, actual Japanese and Korean marriages were skewed in terms of gender: far more Korean men married Japanese women than vice versa. If Atkins has argued that Japanese engagement with Korean culture during the colonial period was driven by a hunger to acquaint themselves their primitive past, why did Korean men desire Japanese women? How can we understand this trend against the background of colonial structures of power? Ch'ae Man-sik's "My Innocent Uncle" (*Ch'isuk*, 1938), a story not discussed in the book, hints at the complexities of these questions. The narrative is told from the perspective of a young Korean man who has hopelessly bought into Japan's assimilationist propaganda and fantasizes about marrying a bride from the "home country" (*naeji*) because of the appearance, affability, and manners that he associates with Japanese women. Tellingly, he contrasts these traits with the ignorance of traditional Korean women and the arrogance of their new women counterparts.

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Kim is more interested in relationships (fictional and real) than the mechanics of desire. She reads Korean literary and film texts as evidence of their respective authors' sustained interest in the topic of intercultural romance throughout the colonial period. The nature of these stories, Kim explains, shifted over time: pre-1937 narratives centered the issue of marriage, whereas later wartime texts focused on either adoption into a Japanese family (through marriage) or romantic love outside the confines of matrimony. Although she initially describes these representations as fantasies of becoming equal to one's colonizer, Kim's actual readings are more nuanced, unearthing a range of responses to the possibility of intercultural romance that run the gamut from enthusiasm to deep-seated apprehension. She recounts, for example, how the government's generally endorsed idea of harmony between "Koreans and Japanese under the same roof" was "negotiated and rejected" by Korean writers in the 1920s (56). Throughout the colonial period, the male intellectuals who penned fiction used narrative as a device to think through the ramifications of mixed relationships on both a micro (a single domestic household) and macro (the future of Korean culture) scale. Class often played a role in fictional intercultural relationships:

Korean men generally hailed from an elite background, while Japanese women were commonly lower-class. The latter typically relocated to Korea for economic reasons despite the peninsula's subordinate status as a colony.

Less focus is given to how these stories may have functioned to normalize the notion of intercultural romance in popular culture. This angle is raised several times in the book, but mostly in the context of media and propaganda. The highly publicized marriage of Yi Ŭn and Nashimotonomiya Masako in 1920, for instance, was upheld as a model for the union of Japan and Korea, as were the handsome Japanese and Korean couples showcased in the magazine *Naisen ittai* (1940-44), despite moments of incongruity that Kim detects between the will of the editors and the reality of the subjects they interviewed. As integration became a more pressing issue for Japan after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the government-general pushed Japanese and Korean intermarriage (*naesŏn kyŏrhon*) as a realization of its “Korean and Japan as one body” (*naesŏn ilch'e*) policy. Kim does argue that early narratives by Yi Kwang-su and Yi In-jik served to introduce the idea of intercultural romance, but more focus on venue and readership could have sharpened this point.

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Overall, *Imperial Romance* is a welcome addition to Korean literary scholarship of this period. Concise and sharply written, the book furthers our understanding of colonial culture at the intersection of fiction and propaganda. In the epilogue, Kim summarizes a set of contemporary issues related to intercultural romance, some more tangential than others: post-liberation depictions of Japanese and Korean colonial romances, *yang gongju*, a term that literally means “Western princesses” but refers to women who have sexual relationships with American soldiers, as well as representations of “comfort women” in documentaries and fiction films. These sketches are useful as a reminder of how the dark history of the twentieth century continues to haunt everyday life in South Korea, but the main appeal of *Imperial Romance* is how Kim's vivid interpretations of colonial texts remind the reader of the overwhelming uncertainty of life under the Japanese occupation. As Janet Poole elegantly describes it, this was a time when Korean intellectuals struggled to come to terms with the prospect of an unending colonial present in which a future for Korea had disappeared. Romance, Kim suggests, provided a space for them to work through this anxiety in fiction as they reckoned with the lures and dangers of one day becoming Japanese.

WANG XIAOPING. *Chinese Literature and Culture in the Age of Global Capitalism: Renaissance or Rehabilitation?* Leiden and Boston: Brill. 2021. Pp. x+388. US\$167.00 hardcover, US\$167.00 ebook.

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Wang Xiaoping is a prolific scholar of modern and contemporary Chinese literature,

cinema, and culture and a keen observer and interpreter of contemporary academic debates in China. In English alone, Wang has published four books and numerous articles, and his output in Chinese far surpasses these numbers. In *Chinese Literature and Culture in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Wang embarks upon an ambitious endeavour: mapping the contours, the premises, and the impetus fueling Chinese literature, cinema, and cultural criticism from 1976 to the present. Wang reads poetry, films, short and long fiction, as well as a robust set of critical works in English and Chinese that all, in his thesis, engage an acute identity crisis China has been facing. Namely, Wang investigates literature, culture, and academic debates to search for an answer to the question: what constitutes Chineseness in the current era, in which China is both a Communist country and a major player in global capitalism?

The answer is given through an extensive discussion and close readings of Chinese new poetry, 1980s Avant Garde Fiction, 1990s Historical Fiction, Six Generation Cinema, and critical essays and books by thinkers associated with the Chinese New Left and Liberal camps. Wang argues that Chineseness today is refracted in cultural texts as a dialectic between a socialist consciousness that harks back to the Mao era *while* looking forward to envision new possibilities, and a liberal mentality that draws upon both the Chinese pre-modern, mostly Confucian ethos and Western liberalism to forge a future for the Chinese nation. In a dense analytical narrative, Wang moves chronologically from the late 1970s to contemporary times, and examines each cultural phenomenon by loosely employing Raymond Williams's concept of Three Cultures. Williams suggested, as early as the late 1950s, that the complex dynamic underscoring national cultures can be understood as a dynamic of triangulation between the dominant hegemonic culture, residual culture—a culture of a previous age that resides within the dominant national culture either as a fortification of or as a disruption to its values—and an emergent culture that generates new social structures and values and thus becomes a new force that challenges dominant culture. Wang adopts this framework for one main use: detecting residues of socialist culture in poetry, fiction, and cinema that had often been misread, in his view, as emblems of a new “free” expression that the end of the Mao era supposedly enabled. In the impressive array of texts examined, Wang identifies a slow “disappearance of idealism” (18) that nevertheless remains a *fait accompli*. Socialist themes, aesthetics, and value continually inform Chinese language literature and cinema even though they have diminished over the years. Juxtaposing, for example, in Chapters Six and Seven, the films *Dirt* (*Toufa luanle* 頭髮亂了, 1992) and *The Making of Steel* (*Zhangda chengren* 長大成人, 1997) with *Lust/ Caution* (*Se/Jie* 色戒, 2007) demonstrates how, in Wang's reading, even as thematic eulogizing of the revolutionary generation made way for more so-called universal engagement with espionage and sex, residues of the CCP/KMT conflict, with their radically different ideologies, still shaped the artistry and the reception of Ang Lee's 2007 work.

Indeed, as Wang states in the opening pages of the introduction, this academic study promotes a political agenda, which is calling for a “socialist re-orientation”

(313) that could carry forward, revitalized, the values of China's socialist revolution. One way to move in this direction, this book suggests, is by revisiting contemporary culture and reading it through a lens that is sensitive to socialist undercurrents:

While China's postsocialism is, to a certain extent, characterized by pragmatism—a political principle practiced by Chinese politicians in the post Mao period in general, as well as the living conditions and life philosophy followed by the Chinese populace in their daily activities in particular—we must still pay close attention to the inalienable imprint and strong residue of socialism. (7)

Chinese Literature and Culture in the Age of Global Capitalism thus emerges from an ideological standpoint that aspires and foresees a Chinese socialist renaissance as the answer to what Wang believes is a sense of apathy and ethical bankruptcy that engulfs contemporary China.

For those who are used to reading academic studies that strive to maintain critical distance from their topic, Wang's book may read as non-objective. At times he faults writers, such as the novelist Yu Hua, for what he sees as "a conservative and irrational mentality" (115); others, like the poet Fu Tianhong, he praises for their nostalgia to their once fully-socialist "beloved motherland." Yet, readers who choose to open themselves to this different and politically recruited type of scholarship will find much to gain from reading through the many rich chapters of *Chinese Literature and Culture in the Age of Global Capitalism*. This book introduces to English language readers, via detailed close readings, many works by less familiar yet important writers and filmmakers such as the Hong Kong-based poet Fanken Chen in Chapter One, Fu Tianhong in Chapter Two, Cheng Zhongshi in Chapter Four, and filmmakers Guan Hu and Lu Xuecheng in Chapter Five and Zhang Yu in Chapter Six.

Those who are curious about contemporary debates over what constitutes "a China path," understood as a call for "establishment of a Chinese cultural subjectivity and identity for a nation rising in the international arena" (287), would also find much interest in the last three chapters of the book, in which Wang meticulously details the stakes and the different camps animating the contemporary Chinese intellectual milieu. These chapters not only describe the New Left thinkers and the Liberal thinkers' discrepancies and disagreements, but do so via a careful consideration of published dialogs online and offline that are underscored by

three trends of intellectual complexity [...] the intricate interaction between, and the dialectic of, postmodern discourse and nationalistic sentiment; the 'conservative' inclination of statism and 'corporatism' and their implicit cooperation; and the conflicts between the pursuit of social democracy and dreams of neoliberal freedom. (258)

Unpacking the abovementioned keywords undergirding the Chinese academic world, Wang's narrative in these chapters spans more than central thinkers in the PRC such as Wang Hui and Gao Quanxi, but includes thinkers and writers working in North America and Europe who either actively participate in these debates, such as Zhang Xudong, or whose scholarship Wang deems relevant to these con-

versations, such as Jason McGrath, Andrew Jones, and others. While the past years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic have dramatically transformed China's participation in global economy as well as geopolitical positioning more broadly, the conversations surveyed in this book provide a useful and detailed introduction to the premises and stakes that structured contemporary and recent Chinese thinking about questions of national identity, culture, socialism, soft power, and capitalism on the eve of the 2008 Olympics, which is roughly the end period that this book covers. As such, many readers will find the book relevant today.

I conclude with two points that stand out, and not to the book's advantage: the glaring absence of female writers and filmmakers, and the translation of the book into English. It seems surprising that Wang includes no female auteurs in his otherwise long and robust list, from the contemporary fiction writer Can Xue to the poet Zhai Yongming to the film director Aubrey Lam, to state just a few examples. The decision to study only male artists and male thinkers, leaving out critical and internationally acclaimed thinkers such as Dai Jinhua, for example, in the book does not contribute to its cogency. Second, *Chinese Literature and Culture in the Age of Global Capitalism* is a translation, as stated on page xiv, of the Chinese manuscript 《走向文化復興：全球化時代的中國文學與文化》. Yet, I was not able to find any information about the translator. One may assume that it is the author in this case, but that needs to be clarified by the publisher. The translation itself is very heavy and at time seems a touch inaccurate or too literal. A more adept translator, who should always be credited and named, would have rendered Wang's prose more fluent in English and thus made the book more pleasurable to read.

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STEEN BILLE JØRGENSEN AND HANS-JÜRGEN LÜSEBRINK, EDs. *Cultural Transfer Reconsidered: Transnational Perspectives, Translation, Processes, Scandinavian and Postcolonial Challenges*. Brill, Rodopi, 2021. Pp. 267. US\$132.00 hardcover, US\$132.00 ebook.

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In this fascinating collection of essays, Steen Bille Jorgensen and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink propose a new paradigm in "(inter)cultural studies" pushing for the use of "cultural transfer" as a way of avoiding the inherent imprecision of older concepts such as "cultural relations," "cultural exchanges," "literary influences," and "cultural circulations." The aim is to connect the field to, and use advances from, linguistics, anthropology, literary theory, and translation studies (1). They follow the notion that "any cultural artifact transferred between different cultures [...] undergoes a process of transformation, of re-semanticization, re-interpretation and [...] re-reading" (2) and "the fundamental conviction that translation always means shift-

ing [...] between two cultures” (3). Theirs is a decidedly “agent-centered approach” (3), that conceptualizes cultural relations “as fundamentally dynamic and multilateral, as well as asymmetric and [...] reciprocal” (4). The more general conclusions and developments of concepts and methodologies stem from, among other things, a uniquely Scandinavian focus. The goal is not to substitute other existing and working theories but to “reconsider the complexity of relatively abstract research questions and paradigms seeking nonetheless to provide new insights through new framings and analyses” (12). This outline, or groundwork, is quite evident from the ten interconnected essays, split into three sections: “Transnational Processes of Cultural Mediation,” “Aspects of Textual Transfers,” and “Perspectives.” Though no review can do justice to such a rich repository of analyses and conclusions that have both general interdisciplinary value and specific field bound knowledge, I will briefly address each section.

572 Part I, “Transnational Processes of Cultural Mediation,” showcases three excellent analyses that largely seek to subvert the centre-periphery dichotomy, which is typical of, for instance, Pascale Casanova’s world literary paradigm, and successfully stress the role played by individual agents. A strong critique of the supremacy of the nation in grounding World Literature Studies is much appreciated. Magnus Qvistgaard’s notion that the transfer process is one of metamorphosis, which is made through the case of Ibsen, is a particularly useful and telling example. The critique of nations as “independent containers” (44) and of the “a priori definition of the writer” is effectively shown to be lacking nuance. There is a stress on the fact that “what is at stake is never merely the fate of the objects of transfer themselves but always the concepts used in framing them” (54). While I agree that “methodological nationalism” (61) poses a problem, I do find that the argument is somewhat susceptible to devil’s advocacy because the examples and the argument itself are conditioned on resisting, stretching, challenging, and manipulating national categories (61). This could be read as a confirmation of at least a softer version of the Pascalian notion of the *a priori* of the nation(alism). Michel Espagne’s chapter shows cultural transfer in which Scandinavia relates to well identified centres such as France and Germany. This is a rich and persuasive outline, which still makes me wonder if cultural transfer with another semi-European centre/periphery, in fact Turkey, has become too invisible or if it is simply not on a par with these other centres. Sweden in particular has a long history of cultural transfer with the Turks, from the Ottoman Empire on, involving some enormous leaps in several spheres of social life and governance. One wonders if that national centre has become obscured by other European centres in academic discourse only, or in reality. Espagne’s emphasis on the transformation of the receiving cultures has great resonances with Petra Brooman’s “cultural transmitters” in the second chapter. Likewise, Anne-Estelle Leguy’s analysis of the practice of Impressionist painting by Norwegian and Finnish women offers a particular possibility for dialogue with Espagne’s points about Scandinavian mirroring of French culture, especially since, as the editors put it, “processes of reception and resemanti-

cization should not be limited to a question of language” (13).

Part II, “Aspects of Textual Transfers,” is a tight cluster of essays that shows a more recent development of CTS connecting the notion of cultural transfer to the mobility of literary works. The three key topics—intertextuality, rewriting, and translocation—make up a dynamic conceptual trio that creates a great deal of resonance across the field. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink provides a solid critical opening in which Yambo Ouologuem’s work is used to simultaneously probe into some basic assumptions about both colonialism and decidedly continental notion of “intertextuality,” which is persuasively connected to (stylistic) violence. Miriam Lay Brander’s analysis of the effects of an appropriation of French aphorism in former colonies on the very dynamic between orality and writing is particularly inspiring. Her emphasis on the creative potential of this practice has much wider applications, especially in the field of creative writing (theoretical and practical) and the popular contemporary discourse on authenticity and appropriation. Steen Bille Jørgensen’s contribution to “existential and ethical implications of textual creativity and intertextuality” (16), which also deals with “creative appropriation” (141), is particularly strong. The emphasis on Gentzler’s notion of rewriting as a literary strategy of individuation of readers and writers (146) and the way our individual “sensibilities and intellectual capacities are [...] connected to different languages” (161) open up certain ossified ways of doing World Literary Studies. One is left with a certain curiosity about the way this connects to the subversion of centre/periphery and the transnational understanding of literary history that was discussed in the first section.

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Part III, appropriately titled “Perspectives,” does a solid job pulling out and considering distance and proximity, which one finds operative in many of the previous chapters. This section broadens and gives firmer ground to certain notions and types of analysis presented in the first two sections. The tension created between micro-analyses within national spaces in Walter Moser and the circulation between continents in Wiebke Röben de Alencar Xavier, if read together, throws the reader back to the stakes outlined in the volume’s first section. Moser’s case study not only provides a solid example of how agents and objects of cultural transfer operate, but the specificity of progressive integration/assimilation of the Baroque “in the process of decolonization and political independence” (195) is quite useful for World Literature Studies and a wider popular discourse on cultural appropriation I mentioned earlier.

As a point of mild critique, given that this well measured selection of excellent analyses creates strong resonances across the volume, pertaining to topics (and their topicality) and geographies (real and metaphorical), what I wish to have seen is a more general conclusion, or at least shorter conclusions to each section that develop dynamics created by different texts. While each individual essay makes its case quite convincingly, and read together in curated clusters they make up a vibrant field, the entire volume would benefit a great deal from the editorial understanding of the proverbial woods (that is, what all the individual pieces amount to). This type of

doubling of the introductory and concluding remarks is, no doubt, not a common practice; and, no doubt, the readers will benefit from each analysis and the general introductory notes, but it seems to me that the overall focus of the volume, or an attempt to give credit to individual agents, however successful, would have benefitted from zooming out and presenting a dialogue between the analyses.

LUIZA FRANCO MOREIRA. *Premises and Problems: Essays on World Literature and Cinema*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2021. Pp. 233. US\$105.00 hardcover, US\$32.95 paperback.

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- 574** Almost two centuries after Goethe's coinage, world literature [*Weltliteratur*] continues to be a category that abounds with debates as it invites multiple modes of analysis, reading, and categorization. The complexities and tensions inherent to world literature encourage interdisciplinary interventions ranging from history to geography, from political science to philosophy. *Premises and Problems: Essays on World Literature and Cinema* contributes to the ongoing debates around world literature by focusing on the various definitions of the categories of "world" and "literature" as well as the resulting violence of their respective boundaries. Edited by Luiza Franco Moreira, *Premises and Problems: Essays on World Literature and Cinema* is the result of a colloquium organized by the Fernand Braudel Center and Binghamton University's Department of Comparative Literature in April 2016. The volume appears as part of the series published by the Fernand Braudel Center Studies in Historical Social Science. In her introduction, Moreira states that both the volume and the colloquium express a "convergence of interests between the Center and the Department" (2), yet this convergence of interests does not necessarily result in an interdisciplinary methodology. Moreira draws attention to the distinction between social sciences and literature as she claims that despite sharing "an interest in world literature, their approaches do not necessarily coincide" (3). The firmness of disciplinary boundaries in a volume that questions such boundaries comes across as a missed opportunity.

The volume, by directing its focus to a methodological concern, aims to call into question the definition of world literature understood as a "systematic category" (1) in the United States. Claiming that such categorical definition prioritizes certain languages while disregarding the "literary languages that do not hold a sufficiently high level of prestige" (1), the volume aims to understand the "ways that hegemony is established and the costs of losing it" (2). While examining the causes and consequences of prevailing hegemonic structures, the volume focuses "on specific historical moments that afford dynamic and not quite central perspectives on hegemony and, more gen-

erally, into the conflicts between diverse literary and linguistic traditions” (2). The volume presents a wide range of linguistic diversity as well as distinct temporal and geographical contexts. Nonetheless, the connection between diversity and the intricate workings of hegemony remains rather disconcerting. While claiming to refrain from “reproducing the point of view of the current hegemonic literatures” (2), the volume remains silent on the hegemonic reach of the languages and literary traditions that are included in the chapters. Ranging from Arabic to Portuguese, from Turkish to Spanish, these languages do have histories of various degrees of hegemonic practices as well as their respective fields of subjugation. The volume’s specific argument would have been more compelling if the implications and complexities of hegemony were more openly addressed. A closer look into the content of each chapter makes it disconcertingly clear that most of the authors and filmmakers that the contributors discuss are names with international prominence, having already gained recognition via prestigious awards and translations. Coming across the names of Bolaño, Borges, Pamuk, and Ceylan in a volume claiming to problematize the hegemony of certain linguistic traditions is disheartening to say the least. Inclusion of works by authors, translators, and filmmakers who have not made it into the syllabi of world literature courses across North American institutions would certainly enhance the argument of this volume.

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The chapters, organized around thematic and geographical proximity, allow the reader to follow an organic unfolding of ideas. Chapter One, by Tarek Shamma, offers a study of the impact of the translation of Aristotle’s work into Arabic by Abu Bishr Matta bin Yunus. Shamma advocates for a new understanding of translation that “challenges the standards of comprehension and miscomprehension that are usually used in the assessment” (25). Arguing that the translations into Arabic allowed for a new conceptual paradigm to become possible, Shamma advocates for the exploration of “the complex and often interesting ways in which foreign texts speak to other cultures across the limitations of time, place, and literary tradition” (25). Chapter Two, by Benjamin Liu, explores translation and transliteration as tools to create fluid identities that mimic a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural movement. With Chapters Three and Four, the thematic focus shifts from translation to articles that address traditions in which the definition of literature shapes the boundaries of categories such as world literature. Hannan Hever analyzes the secular/holy tension within literature in Hebrew, and Karim Mattar questions the possibility of an Islamic republic of letters using Orhan Pamuk’s *The Black Book* as a case study. The following two chapters transport the reader from the Middle East to South America. In Chapter Five, Luiza Franco Moreira argues that the apparent lateral conversations of world literature do not reflect its complex and multilayered constitution. She discusses Elizabeth Bishop’s translations of the Brazilian modernist poet Drummond de Andrade to study how two distinct authors, cultural traditions, and languages constitute one another. In Chapter Six, Patrick Dove engages with the works of Bolaño and Borges to invoke these authors’ perpetual questioning of a firm and certain definition of meanings.

Dove proposes a “reopening and reorientation of the old Platonic suspicion about literature and its presumed lack of essence or being” (163). As highlighted in Moreira’s introduction, Richard Lee’s chapter stands by itself both methodologically and contextually, as Lee presents a theoretical exploration of the interdisciplinary nature of world literature. The concluding two chapters of the volume address world cinema: Jeroen Gerrits presents a comparative framework between the films of Lucrecia Martel and Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and Cecilia Mello focuses on the positioning of the Brazilian cinema in relation to the “world.” Gerrits discusses the role of cinematic skepticism by focusing on the cinematic technique and narration in Martel and Ceylan, while Mello calls into question the role of the periphery by studying how Brazilian Cinema is represented within world cinema.

Premises and Problems reads as a compilation of coherently flowing texts that allow the reader to delve deeper into specific genres, geographies, and approaches that are relevant for the discussion of world literature and cinema. The volume provides a timely intervention into how world literature defines itself and contributes to the creation of a more inclusive and critically alert field.