

with an Asian component. Its path-breaking approach to connecting institutionalized Confucian practices as well as Confucian institutions to modern global values, practices, and institutions invite more studies in that direction not only in the area of Confucian traditions, but also other cultural traditions. This is an extremely important task from both an intellectual point of view and from the perspective of praxis: as a guide for action in dealing with not only the ills within modern Western societies but also the conflicts arising from the interactions between globalizing Western values and indigenous values/practices/institutions.

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Rong CAI, *The Subject in Crisis in Contemporary Chinese Literature*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. xii + 282 pp. ISBN: 0-8248-2846-1 (pbk). Price: US\$25.00.

Even if, as an early caveat, Rong Cai clarifies that this book “is not meant to be a comprehensive survey of post-Mao literature or an exhaustive study of the work of any single author” (p. x), it addresses issues and problems that—directly or indirectly—affect the dynamics of contemporary Chinese literature as a whole. The book examines the problems of the subject in Chinese literature within two recent periods that relate to China’s quest for modernity in a very different way: the discourse of enlightenment and cultural fever during the mid- and late 1980s, in which humanism was believed to be the key element for modernization, and the confusion and commercial fever in the 1990s, in which, after the Tiananmen events, the literary scene confronted a new paradigm set up by the market.

Rong Cai’s choice of the problematic subject as an angle of inquiry is certainly fertile. She understands the “subject” as a coin with two sides: representations in literary works (i.e. characters) and their creators themselves (i.e. writers and intellectuals). Considering that the power of the communist master narrative outlived Mao Zedong’s death and erased creative freedom, the book explores different ways in which the subject had “tremendous trouble rising above its debilitation” (p. 227). Unable to claim agency due to a new sociopolitical environment that kept them away from their traditional centrality, writers and intellectuals expressed their crisis through language, discourse, and—obviously—representation. Thus, a series of close readings of texts containing crippled, bizarre, and displaced characters reveal how this

problematic subject, “covered up by the post-Mao urge to surge ahead” (p. 12), was incarnated both on the textual and the social levels. By focusing on the dilemmas of the deformed characters the author is able to appropriately explore the literary and intellectual tensions pre- and post-Tiananmen.

Informed by historical contextualization and framed by plausible references to Western theorists, Rong Cai builds her readings within a balanced triangle formed by text, history, and theory. After an introduction in which the key concepts that articulate the book (subject, subjectivity, crisis) are justified, chapter two contextualizes the search for a new subject in contemporary literature by providing an intellectual mapping of post-Mao China. Chapter three deals with Han Shaogong’s *Ba ba ba* (Pa pa pa) and *Nǚ nǚ nǚ* (Woman woman woman), the action of which fluctuates around flawed characters. Chapter four focuses on Can Xue’s fiction and the antagonism of Self and Other in her stories as the manifestation of “the existential nightmare” of postrevolutionary China (p. 26). In chapter five, the author takes two stories by Yu Hua, *Shiba sui chumen yuanying* (On the road at eighteen) and *Xianxue meihua* (Blood and plum blossoms), and Zhaxi Dawa’s *Ji zai pishengkou shang de hun* (A soul in bondage) as representations of the traveler—literary, existential—in post-Mao society. Mo Yan’s *Fengru feitun* (Large breasts and full hips) is the center of chapter six, in which the author goes a step beyond and introduces the foreign Other (opposed to or integrated with the national self) as a new issue at stake in the previous discussions. Pertinently, chapter seven sees how literary representation and the intellectual self finally converge on the same plane within Jia Pingwa’s *Feidu* (The ruined capital), a novel in which “the author creates a new center to allow the marginalized intellectual to negotiate his anxiety in real history in the realm of literature” (p. 27).

Specific readings are extensive and occasionally unequal in length. Similarly, the equation between writers and intellectuals—traditionally valid and accepted throughout the history of Chinese literature—may also be unequal and not always applicable following the developments traced throughout the book (especially, given the stress on the market and commercialization underlying half of the main argument). This equation could have probably been problematized further. Finally, although most of the names that appear are not particularly obscure and may be familiar to specialists, the incorporation of a glossary with Chinese characters would have been appropriate.

This is a solid contribution to the examination of post-Mao literature. Taking advantage of the time perspective over more than a decade, Rong Cai is able to delineate, reassess, and calibrate chronological and literary divisions, such as the impact of the hiatus produced by the Tiananmen events over the literary scene, managing well the risk of oversimplification and addressing with strength the different interactions between literature and society over the historical continuum. This is an interesting work for scholars in modern Chinese literature looking for interpretative strategies around these authors, texts, and issues. For a less specialized readership it can provide a helpful and solid introduction to the social, intellectual, and literary context of the post-Mao period.

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Geoff CHILDS, *Tibetan Diary: From Birth to Death and Beyond in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. xi + 217 pp., with plates, maps. ISBN: 0-520-24133-9 (pbk). Price: US\$19.95.

Tashi Döndrup sits with a winsome look on his lined face, smoking tobacco from a pipe. Sporting a turquoise in his ear and hair tied up in the traditional halo, Tashi is the epitome of the supposedly “unchanging” change. However, to label traditional Tibetan societies as unchanging is to predetermine them as somehow standing still. The author Geoff Childs finds that Nubri valley ensconced in the highlands of Nepal is very dynamic. Places such as Nubri along the Himalayan belt in India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim are influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. This form of Buddhism comes from the Abhidharma teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha where the “Lama” is placed before all else as he is the living example of Buddha’s teachings. The energy for the transformation of the mind is much more powerful to communicate through the experience of a living person than through any other means. Therefore, Tibetan Buddhism encompasses the esoteric nature of life in its Dharma teachings of Mahayana, Mantrayana, and Vajrayana.

Childs does a significant job of portraying Nubri as vibrant and throbbing with people who, though not “blessed” with material culture, are significant in their role as preservers of a culture deeply imbued in spiritualism. Written in a simple yet remarkably engaging style, Childs chronicles his enriching experience among the people of Nubri valley. This first-hand account is “the inevitable and interminable progression of existence” (p. 4) of a people whose