

readings and it is perhaps a work to return to rather than read at a sitting. *Changing Clothes in China* is about the discourse surrounding clothes rather than the clothes themselves. The author quite correctly dismisses the very many near-identical dragon robes, outnumbering other styles of Chinese dress in museum collections, as having misled us about the existence of fashion in China. Had she been able to engage more fully with the rather more diverse material evidence which does survive, it would have arguably given even more weight to this rigorously argued and impeccably resourced publication.

VERITY WILSON  
Co-Editor of 'Costume'

THE SUBTLE REVOLUTION: POETS OF THE "OLD SCHOOLS" DURING LATE QING AND EARLY REPUBLICAN CHINA. By JON EUGENE VON KOWALLIS. pp. viii, 299. Berkeley, University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 2006.

doi:10.1017/S1356186308009255

Since the mid-twentieth century, one of the most complex and hotly debated issues in the field of modern Chinese literature has been the collaborative and confrontational relationship between tradition and literary modernity, and between Chinese and 'western' traditions. Influenced by recent scholarship on the 'translated modernity' of modern Chinese culture, many scholars in the field, as Jon Kowallis rightly observes in *The Subtle Revolution*, believe that "only the infusion of new images from abroad [and] ideas of the West . . . served to propel Chinese poetry in the direction of the 'modern'" (p. vii). Interestingly, some Chinese poets themselves readily endorsed this view because their ideological opposition to traditional modes of expression. By emphasising this rupture they were able to lay claim to 'modern' features of new poetry (*xin shi*). Influential late-Qing literary figures such as Liang Qichao (1873–1929) spoke of a revolution in the world of poetics (*shi jie geming*); since 1897, Huang Zunxian (1848–1905) used new-style poems (*xin pai shi*) to describe his own works, a term with a unique fixation upon the newness of the vernacular movement (*baihua yundong*) and new poetry. These tendencies, on the parts of critics and poets, have created a number of blind spots that have led to a misunderstanding of the nature of classical and new forms of poetry. Kowallis challenges these deterministic views and argues, with refreshing perspectives on several poets of this transitional period, that "poetry in the classical language . . . did serve its writers and their intended readership as a vehicle to articulate a complex and sophisticated understanding of, as well as reaction to, the entry of modernity" (p. vii), in a "culturally authentic way in their own, not a translated, language" (p. 245).

Well known for his research on Lu Xun and modern Chinese literature, Kowallis has carved out in this heavily annotated book a new and exciting territory often ignored by students of modern China. The Introduction details the teleological view of previous scholarship (received image of late Qing China as "an effete, corrupt society"), disagrees gracefully, and uses the opportunity to make interesting points (pp. 8–9) rather than falling back into the remedial mode (filling in a gap). Poets such as Wang Kaiyun (1833–1916), Deng Fulun (1828–1893) (Chapter 1), Fan Zengxiang (1846–1931), Yi Shunding (1858–1920) (Chapter 2), Chen Sanli (1852–1937), Zheng Xiaoxu (1860–1938) (Chapter 3), and scholars such as Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909), Chen Yan (1856–1937), Jin Tianyu (1873–1947), Di Baoxian (1873–), Wang Yitang (1878–1946), and Qian Zhonglian (1908–2003) are selected for comparative analysis because, according to Kowallis, they were recognised by most non-partisan literary historians, critics, and commentators of their own day as the central literary figures but were mostly written out of the literary history for political reasons.

Chapter 1 examines Wang Kaiyun, Deng Fulun, and the "Neo-Ancient" school (*nigu pai*), offering a pleasant read that weaves a critical biography of Deng with a close reading of Deng's "Sitting in the

Listen-to-the-Rain Pavilion in Autumn” and Wang’s “Two Verses of Evening Sailing on the River Xiang” in relation to the historical events. Chapter 2 looks at Fan Zengxiang and Yi Shunding’s paradoxical uses of such “outdated” techniques as allusion and rhymes to explore contemporary issues (p. 71). It is not insignificant that Kowallis uses categories for these poets’ works (“allusionist”, “Tong-Guang style”, “neo-ancient” school) throughout his study that are different from the conventional ones that follow the poets’ ostensible connection to Tang or Song masters. As such, the book itself is designed to stir a “subtle revolution” and change our understanding of Chinese poetry in fundamental ways.

Chapter 3 thinks a crucial question through the works of Chen Sanli, Chen Yan, and Zheng Xiaoxu: should a ‘modern’ poet devote himself to social activism or be content in the role of an astute, objective observer of the historical events? Chen’s works are framed by allusions to historical events of his time, and he even openly comments on the Russo-Japanese War, endowing the subject of his “A Short Song Sent to Yang Shumei”, China, with a “pathetic, almost antiheroic quality” (p. 182). Likewise, Zheng’s poetry is filled with blatant political commentary. This chapter also engages productively with such new critics as F. R. Leavis, C. Day Lewis, C. B. Cox, and Arnold P. Hinchliffe, especially their discussion of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, modernists who, in Kowallis’ words, seem to be “playing a power game in terms of language with critics” (p. 203). The comparative analysis brings into perspective various ideas of literary modernism and maintains that Chinese poetic modernity is not a product of translation and mimicry of western models (p. 245).

*The Subtle Revolution* argues convincingly that the influence of classical poetry extended far into the twentieth century, even beyond the May Fourth generation (pp. 7–8). Above all, grasp of modern topics is not the only prerequisite to literary modernity. As the cases of Fan Zengxiang and Chen Sanli show, the modernity of these poems also lies in the ironic distance the poets are able to maintain with their contemporary history (pp. 238–240) which leads to the expression of a sense of personal alienation in a modernity “expressed in the classical forms” (pp. 168–231).

This is heady stuff, but the author has presented his meticulous research in accessible prose. Kowallis’ book is a refreshing and timely contribution to the study of Chinese poetry. It is a somber reminder of the abuse of such ideas as transnationality in the study of modern Chinese literature in our age of globalisation. Frequent and lengthy block quotes could seem off-putting to the uninitiated, but this is a small quibble. The book will prove an invaluable resource for students and scholars of modern and traditional Chinese literature, Qing studies, comparative literature, and Anglo-European poetic traditions interested in comparative study. The book may also find audience in a general readership, since it has an annotated bibliography, texts of all poems in Chinese, eight full page illustrations, and the author’s translation of Fan Zengxiang’s *Song of Rainbow Cloud* (*Caiyun qu*), the first complete translation into any foreign language (pp. 95–122).

ALEXANDER C. Y. HUANG  
*Pennsylvania State University*

FROM THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT TO COMMUNIST REVOLUTION: GUO MORUO AND THE CHINESE PATH TO COMMUNISM. By XIAOMING CHEN. pp. xi, 156. Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007.

doi:10.1017/S1356186308009267

In August 1924, the Chinese writer and poet Guo Moruo wrote to his friend Cheng Fangwu that “Marxism [was] the only truth of [their] times” (p. 38). In January 1923, Guo had written that he, and