

The latter, covering Chiang's life from 1927 to 1949, consist of diary entries, excerpts from speeches and articles, letters, telegrams and official documents that, like the *Veritable Records* of dynastic days, were meant to form the basis of a later official biography of Chiang. By using these materials and by elucidating Chiang from within a Chinese cultural frame, Huang makes a genuine contribution to studies of Chiang Kai-shek available in English, surpassing both Jay Taylor's biography, which is overly defensive, and that of Jonathan Fenby, which puts the boot in once more.

Huang writes as a political scientist interested in political leadership rather than the history of China. A fascinating chapter in the book compares Chiang Kai-shek with Gandhi in India. This is not an obvious thing to do, given that Gandhi stood for non-violence while the battlefield was judge and jury for Chiang. Gandhi embraced weakness; Chiang abhorred it. Huang is careful to note the differences of the situations in which these two men found themselves. Chiang was in office and carried myriad burdens. Gandhi was a free agent. She argues that both were able, through the narratives of humiliation and suffering which they embodied by their actions, their speeches and their self-presentations, to move their societies to overcome far stronger enemies.

In making the case for Chiang, I believe that Huang overstates her case. It may well be true that without Chiang, who was nothing if not stubborn and did not shy away from compelling his country to absorb enormous sacrifices, China would have given up the fight against Japan. However, in the same way that it was more the Soviet Union and the United States than the UK that defeated the Germans, it was the United States rather than China that defeated Japan. Both Churchill and Chiang refused to give in. The UK was protected by the North Sea and the Channel, and it had a strong navy. Chiang did not have that nor a strong army, but he could retreat ever further west. The real weapon of the weak was the ability to refuse to come to the negotiation table and sign a document of surrender.

Huang's study of Chiang nonetheless is informative and thought-provoking. It decisively moves away from the question of whether Chiang failed to stand up to Japan or in fact saved China – the question that has dominated studies of Chiang for nearly eight decades now. She is no doubt right that Chiang sustained and amplified a narrative of humiliation that faded under Mao but which Beijing once again finds useful to promote its agenda. Let us hope that many will follow Huang in the new paths she has opened up.

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The Future History of Contemporary Chinese Art

PEGGY WANG

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During the last quarter of a century, numerous scholarly “histories” of contemporary Chinese art have been published in Chinese and other languages. Most, including blockbuster texts by Wu Hung and Lü Peng, accord closely with the established conventions of art history writing by presenting comprehensive linear narratives of their

subject's development. Peggy Wang's *The Future History of Contemporary Chinese Art* positions itself as a critical foil to that existing body of literature. As the book's "time out of joint" titling suggests, it does not give us yet another sequential history. Presented instead is a portmanteau of chapters on the work of five prominent Chinese artists – Zhang Xiaogang, Wang Guangyi, Sui Jianguo, Zhang Peili and Li Tianmiao – framed by opening and concluding meditations on issues and problems of historical interpretation posed by contemporary Chinese art.

The book's back-cover promotional blurb describes it as a "corrective" which goes beyond simplistic "Western interpretations" of artworks "as social and political critiques" in favour of an attention to "fundamental questions about the forms, meanings and possibilities of art." Inside, Wang acknowledges an attention in the existing literature on contemporary Chinese art to long-standing philosophical and practical exchanges between the artworlds of China and elsewhere, while adding a further emphasis on the importance of not restricting contemporary Chinese art "to a story of domestic development" (p. 17). Wang also describes her book as seeking to elucidate "unquestioned assumptions about interpretation and dominance of geospatial paradigms" (p. 20) – in other words, regarding Western/ized post-Enlightenment academic/artworld discourses. Detailed understanding of Wang's polemic requires a significant prior engagement with contemporary Chinese art studies. Readers unfamiliar with the field may sometimes find her book opaque in this respect. General readers and students looking to gain greater insights into contemporary Chinese art and its varied significances will nevertheless find much that is readily illuminating.

Wang's intentions are admirable. Many accounts of contemporary Chinese art have tended to focus myopically on its relationships to localized political circumstances in revolutionary and post-revolutionary China. An attention to those relationships is not without value. Art in China remains closely enmeshed with power and governance along discursive lines that diverge from Euro-American post-Enlightenment ideas of artistic autonomy. It is nevertheless important, as Wang argues, to situate Chinese art in relation to its wider, regional and global, sociocultural and political contexts. Chinese art has, despite shifts within China between openness and isolationism over many centuries, remained in complex interactive relationships with the art of other cultures, East and West. A combination of those narrow and widened perspectives illumines the fuller, more varied significances of Chinese art. Although Wang does not hammer the point home, hers is effectively a de-colonizing intervention which disrupts the culturally hegemonic metastasizing of Western/ized ideas of modernity and an accompanying segregation of the world into arbitrarily defining and controllable regions/nation-states.

The strengths of Wang's book lie principally in the chapters on individual artists. The chapter on Zhang Peili, for example, provides a suitably nuanced, factually grounded account of the uncertain significances of the artist's work. Zhang has consistently rejected the idea of settled linguistic signification. That rejection informs critical interventions by the artist with authority in and outside China as well as the deniability of those interventions – a useful "non-positioning" in relation to a still authoritarian post-revolutionary China as well as an often liberally absolutist international artworld. European and American commentators have tended to describe Zhang's work as "deconstructivist" in accordance with post-Duchampian readings of modernist/postmodernist art. Such a reading overlooks the effects of trans-cultural parallax which open-up differently framed interpretations beyond the ambit of Euro-American cultural theory, among them readings related to the extended legacy of classical non-rationalizing Chinese aesthetics.

Wang's methodological approach is by no means entirely ground-breaking. Other scholars in the field of contemporary Chinese art studies have developed similarly

focused micro-histories. Moreover, her foregrounding of supposedly “fundamental” questions related to artistic production and reception at times tacks uncomfortably close to the shores of Greenbergian formalism. As such, Wang’s position can be seen to perpetuate traces of an unduly stark separation of art from the socio-political long-since suspended by critically informed writing outside the field of art history. One might add that existing accounts of contemporary Chinese art attentive to its political contexts do not, as Wang suggests, always overlook the significances of artistic form and intentionality. The interpretation of contemporary Chinese art, like that of art more generally, is not a zero-sum game. It cuts across categorical differences between localism and internationalism as well the cultural and the socio-political. Wang’s identification of a “Western” hermeneutics in need of correction is therefore to some extent a straw figure. Wang’s book is no less effective for all that in driving home its important critical points regarding the limitations of mainstream art history writing and in pointing the way toward more granular, culturally and discursively diversified readings of contemporary art.

Several writers in addition to Wang have signalled the interpretative problems posed by contemporary Chinese art as a local, regional and globalized subject. There is and can be no single authoritative perspective on those problems. Wang’s book indicates possible advances in terms of a closer attention to the means and intentions of artistic production across sociocultural boundaries. It does not, though, build an entirely convincing intellectual case. A major shortcoming of Wang’s book is the absence of any rigorous engagement with critical/cultural theory and its elucidation of artistic thinking, techniques and choices of materials, not only regarding art in Euro-American and related Western/ized contexts but also in Chinese and relevant non-Western cultural settings. An attention to intersections between the political economies of differing cultural milieus is crucial to a critical understanding of Chinese contemporary art and its bringing together of Eastern and Western artworld paradigms. The work required to shed a searching light on those intersections will certainly require the efforts of more than one research community. Wang’s contribution is, despite its partial shortcomings, undeniably productive in reminding us of the arbitrariness of singular interpretative limits.

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Circuit Listening: Chinese Popular Music in the Global 1960s

ANDREW F. JONES

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This slim but exceptionally rich volume brings new perspectives to the history of Chinese popular music, and – somewhat rarely in the English-language literature – brings the study of popular music in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan into direct conversation. Chronologically Jones’s new book bridges the gap between his earlier *Yellow Music* (2001) which covers Shanghai’s jazz age, and his first book *Like a Knife* (1992) on 1980s Beijing rock. This new volume is more ambitious in scope, using a series of case studies to illuminate particular flows of music and circuits of