

REVIEW ARTICLE

After Long Years: Reading *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*

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The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature. 2 volumes. Edited by Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen. *Volume 1: To 1375* (ed. Owen); *Volume 2: From 1375* (ed. Chang). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xxxii + 711; xxxi + 793. £236.00/\$335.00.

One of the titles in my personal library that I have reached for over the years with more than usual pleasure is the *Cambridge History of English Literature* in fourteen volumes, originally published from 1907 to 1916 (a fifteenth volume, being the “General Index,” appeared in 1927). The scope of these volumes, the assuredness of the various authors’ accounts of their respective periods or topics, and the gracefulness of their prose make for satisfying reading even today, despite the dated quality of some of the views expressed in them. These books were recognized early on as a landmark of literary history, characteristic of the urbanely amateur style so fashionable in Edwardian and Georgian times.¹ The one-volume abridgement and revision of them done by George Sampson in 1941 as *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (itself revised and expanded since then by other hands) was an achievement of discriminating elegance and was as broadly lauded as, and came to be even more widely read than, the original set of fourteen volumes. Together these books established for speakers of English a particular model of literary scholarship.

¹ A style traceable in certain respects to the writings of George Saintsbury, especially his Victorian-era *Short History of French Literature*, published in 1882 at Oxford, with a much revised fifth edition in 1897, a book that was very popular and greatly admired at the time.

It is instructive to read what the editors, A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, wrote in 1907 in their preface (p. iii) to the first volume of the history, stating there the “aims and objects” of the enterprise as these had been communicated to its invited authors:

- (a) A connected account was to be given of the successive movements of English literature, both main and subsidiary; and this was intended to imply an adequate treatment of secondary writers, instead of their being overshadowed by a few great names.
- (b) Note was to be taken of the influence of foreign literatures upon English and (though in a less degree) of that of English upon foreign literatures.
- (c) Each chapter of the work was to be furnished with a sufficient bibliography.

Appropriately adapted, these were likewise the goals of the original *History*'s successors, which have become legion. In the past fifty years Cambridge University Press has published focused *Histories* of smaller segments of English literature—e.g., medieval, early medieval, Romantic, Victorian, Early Modern, Twentieth Century. It has also extended the idea of literary histories far beyond England. There are now in print *Cambridge Histories* of French, German, Italian, Spanish, Irish, Canadian, Australian, American, Russian, Arabic, African and Caribbean, South African, Classical, Postcolonial, Early Christian, and Latin American literature. To supplement these, there are dozens of *Cambridge Companions* and *Cambridge Introductions* to a host of specific periods, individual authors, and ever more carefully delimited literary topics.

One would think therefore that it is high time, indeed long past due time, for a *Cambridge History* of the longest, continuous tradition of literature known to the world, namely the Chinese. We can now be thankful that attention has finally been paid, even though at two volumes and 1504 pages Cambridge's history of Chinese literature is only marginally larger in size than those of Irish literature (2 volumes, 1286 pages) or South African (2/1258) and of significantly lesser scope than those of, for instance, Latin American (3/2213) or Arabic (6/3334) literature. Neither the material nor the scholars are lacking to have compiled a history that would provide a deservedly fuller treatment of China's nearly 3000-year literary tradition. What we now have is far more than anything we had before, and it is also very well done. However, one cannot help but cringe at the \$335 price of the two-volume set (Cambridge is not selling the volumes separately). This will put it beyond the affordability of almost all individual scholars and, in these days of shrinking acquisitions budgets, even of some libraries. We will need to consider later who is the intended audience of these volumes and also, in light of the steep price and other factors, who their actual audience is likely to be.

More than thirty years ago Stephen Owen and David R. Knechtges gave notice of a plan to edit an eleven-volume history of Chinese literature, to be published by Yale University Press.² This plan did not bear fruit as hoped, but the idea was not abandoned.

² Knechtges and Owen, “General Principles for a History of Chinese Literature,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 1, no. 1 (January 1979), pp. 49–53.

During the intervening decades, while these two scholars became the recognized leaders in the study of Han through Tang literature, the concept continued to be discussed at various times by various people. Meanwhile, Knechtges was writing his own draft history of Chinese literature, for use in one of his regularly offered courses at the University of Washington. Different parts and different iterations of his meticulously prepared material, which includes translations of numerous important works and copious bibliographies, have now found their way into many hands, owing either to the author's generosity or to unsanctioned photocopying. Some portions of it have been used in a different form in Knechtges's and Taiping Chang's recently published *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide, Part One*.³ Owen likewise kept the flame alive, offering a similar course at Harvard, and eventually succeeded in gaining the sponsorship of Cambridge University Press (Yale having long ago forfeited its interest) for a two-volume production that he would co-edit with Kang-i Sun Chang. This is the work we now have before us, the first volume of which has been edited by Owen, the second volume by Chang. The principles followed are not always those contemplated and stated thirty years ago, but this is not surprising, for the field has progressed considerably since then.

The team of scholars the two editors have assembled includes the leading lights in the periods and subjects to which they have been assigned. The contributors and their chapters are as follows: in volume one, Martin Kern, "Early Chinese literature, beginnings through Western Han" (pp. 1–115); David R. Knechtges, "From the Eastern Han through the Western Jin, AD 25–317" (pp. 116–98); Xiaofei Tian, "From the Eastern Jin through the early Tang, 317–649" (pp. 199–285); Stephen Owen, "The cultural Tang, 650–1020" (pp. 286–380), including a section by Wilt L. Idema; Ronald Egan, "The Northern Song, 1020–1126" (pp. 381–464); Michael A. Fuller and Shuen-fu Lin, each writing separate sections regarding "North and south: the twelfth and thirteenth centuries" (pp. 465–556), and Stephen H. West, "Literature from the late Jin to the early Ming: ca 1230–ca 1375" (pp. 557–650); in volume two, Kang-i Sun Chang, "Literature from the early Ming to mid-Ming, 1375–1572" (pp. 1–62); Tina Lu, "The literary culture of the late Ming, 1573–1644" (pp. 63–151); Wai-yee Li, "Early Qing to 1723" (pp. 152–244); Shang Wei, "The literati era and its demise, 1723–1840" (pp. 245–342); Wilt L. Idema, "Prosimetric and verse narrative" (pp. 343–412); David Der-wei Wang, "Chinese literature from 1841 to 1937" (pp. 413–564), including sections by Jing Tsu and by Michel Hockx; Michelle Yeh, "Chinese literature from 1937 to the present" (pp. 565–705), including a section by Michel Hockx; and Jing Tsu, "Epilogue: Sinophone writings and the Chinese diaspora" (pp. 706–14).

As is evident, the second volume's 600-plus years of Chinese literature are together given more attention than the 2300 years concentrated in the first volume. Also, as the defined periods become chronologically more recent and more brief, the relative amount of space allotted to each of them increases. One understands the reasons usually given for this in historical surveys of Chinese topics—the increasing amount of extant material as we get closer to our own times, the correspondingly greater degree of specificity and

³ Leiden: Brill, 2010. Part Two is scheduled to appear next year.

verifiability that is possible, the typically more engaged interest we have in matters that can most readily pertain to modern life, not to mention the fact that in the field of Chinese studies generally there are more scholars focusing on later rather than earlier eras. Nevertheless, this kind of imbalance is neither pre-ordained nor inescapable. The very different distribution of pages *vis-à-vis* periods in the fourteen original volumes of the *Cambridge History of English Literature* is testimony that such skewing toward the modern can be resisted and that the results of doing so may even prove edifying. The six volumes of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* are a more recent example of avoiding the pull toward the contemporary, with only the sixth volume being devoted to literature from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day—and there has been no dearth of Arabic literature in the past century and a half. Surely it would be possible to do something similar when writing a history of Chinese literature, considering the acknowledged importance and span of the premodern millennia—and if we were of a mind to do so. It is interesting also to note that in Knechtges's and Owen's 1979 plans for an eleven-volume history, the 700 years covering the Yuan through modern times were to occupy the last four volumes only.

The two Cambridge volumes place their major historical division at *circa* 1375, shortly after the founding of the Ming dynasty. That this division is not the chance result of trying to ensure two volumes of roughly equal length but is a consciously arrived at decision is attested by the editors in their "Preface" as follows: "We have carefully considered the structure and goals of each individual chapter, as well as the best point to break the history into two volumes so as to add to, rather than detract from, the understanding of the reader" (1: xvi). The chief reasons given for the division at this point are (1) that the Ming, Qing, and modern periods are not as amenable as earlier eras in advancing "a more integrated historical approach, creating a cultural history or a history of literary culture" and (2) that "maintaining a coherent narrative becomes more difficult in the Ming, Qing, and modern periods, as literature becomes more diverse and the options for its dissemination increase" (1: xvii). There is a certain logic to this. But an equally convincing, I think more convincing, argument on the same grounds can be made for fixing the dividing line two and a half centuries earlier, around the end of the Northern Song. For it was at this time that the centre of gravity of the Chinese economy and culture definitively moved south, when new social structures and practices took hold that would afterward become conventional, when a truly urban culture had begun to flourish, with a growing number of popular literary works appearing in vernacular language, as well as an upsurge in printing establishments and consequent wider circulation of texts. Reasonable people may disagree about these issues. But in the end there is little to gain in disputing such decisions. We can only take the books as they are, realizing that any history is just one of many possible histories.

It is the stated purpose of the editors "to provide a coherent narrative that can be read from cover to cover" (1: xvi), and Chang in the "Introduction" to her volume refers often to what she sees as the book's distinctiveness in forgoing a firm division into dynasties and instead pursuing a "unique historical approach" which fosters an emphasis "not so much on individual writers, but rather on the forms and styles of writing" (2: xxiv). Yet, with the exception of Owen's chapter, which extends a century beyond the end of the

Tang dynasty, the chapters of volume one fall more or less into recognized dynastic or period groupings. And since volume two covers, in much greater detail, only two dynasties—Ming and Qing—and the modern period, it does not seem out of the ordinary for these three eras to be broken into smaller segments. The wish that the book may be read from cover to cover will probably not be fulfilled by anyone, except a reviewer. I have read every page of volume one, owing to particular interest in early and medieval literature, but admit sometimes to reading more selectively in volume two.

As implied above, this history is for our field an achievement of major importance. The only previous book to come close to it is *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, edited by Victor H. Mair.⁴ But the chapters devoted to various periods in that book generally run to less than half the length of those in the Cambridge volumes, although it includes instead numerous chapters devoted to specific genres and types of literature, with the result that, as a whole, it may not seem as tightly organized.

There are some features of the present book that appear to have been suggested to the contributors as general guidelines. One is the understanding that since this is meant to be a narrative history and not a literary anthology, translated extracts from the texts should be kept to a necessary minimum. This makes good sense in a project of this kind. A few authors, however, marble their chapters with abundant and lengthy translations. Another broadly shared aim, again more apparent in some chapters than others, seems to be that of nesting literary history in larger patterns of culture, rather than treating it as a self-contained object of study. There also seems to be an attempt in most cases to move away from the customary chronological focus on individual authors and their biographies. An unfortunate decision, presumably imposed by the publisher, is not to include Chinese characters in the body of the book but instead to consign them to a “Glossary” at the back of each volume, consisting of an alphabetized list of names, titles, and terms. The glossary occupies thirty-one double-column pages in the first volume and twenty-nine in the second, with each containing over three thousand items. This is simply unacceptable in these days, when Chinese fonts are available for all kinds of electronic formatting and can easily be incorporated into the running text. If the justification is to spare non-specialist readers the occasional discomfort of seeing symbols they do not understand, one has to wonder where the publisher’s priorities are; this is an instance of *in vitium ducit culpae fuga*.

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It is of course to the individual chapters that we must turn, in order that this history’s merits may be rightly judged. Here, in the interests of full disclosure, I must say that almost all of the contributors to these two volumes are well known to me personally. More than that, among those whose chapters appear in the first volume are some of my closest and most longstanding friends. I trust this will not keep me from giving praise where it is due, nor from raising questions where necessary.

⁴ New York: Columbia University Press, 2001; 1342 pp.

The first chapter of the book covers the largest period, approximately a thousand years, or nearly twice as long as that covered in all of volume two. In his 115 pages Martin Kern has produced a compendium of learning and good sense that sweeps away many of the old platitudes regarding the role of writing and the manifestations of literature in early China. Starting with sections on the language and writing system and then on oracle-bone and bronze inscriptions, he emphasizes that we must not project back to the early days of Chinese writing the later understanding of the concept of *wen* 文 as developed in the first century B.C. and continued afterward. As Kern has shown elsewhere, a major shift in the place of writing in Chinese culture occurred in the late Western Han dynasty; only after this did written texts decisively replace oral transmission as the chief vehicle of tradition. During the past dozen or so years, the work of Kern and other scholars, many of them initially trained as he was in Germany, has been redefining our understanding of pre-Han “literature.” To a great extent this phenomenon is the result of research on the newly excavated manuscripts issuing in such great numbers from archaeological sites. These texts present a different picture than the one we previously had of early writings, demanding acknowledgement of a culture in which orality, recitation, and memory were foremost. This is borne out, for example, by the enormous number of homophonic variants in manuscripts that quote from the *Odes* (the *Shi* 詩; not yet a *jing* 經 or “classic”), this being a pervasiveness that “would have made private reading impossible, [for] to identify and understand the text, one would have had to already know it” (1: 28). Kern’s section on the *Odes* and especially the subsequent section on the “Guofeng” 國風 songs in the context of the early hermeneutic tradition are among the highlights of this chapter.

The recognition that texts in early China displayed a large degree of graphic instability and freely borrowed discrete passages or blocks of text from each other or from a common repertoire of oral learning leads to the realization that texts were a promiscuous medium, in which any idea of an author as sole creator had not yet emerged. It will not do to impose on this material a desired level of certainty that it does not have. In all of the fourteen sections into which Kern’s chapter is divided, he keeps before us the practical and often performative features of the texts as well as their inherently fluid nature. One of the most illuminating instances of this is his brief account (he has published a more detailed study elsewhere) of the differences between the received text of the “Black Robes” (Ziyi 緇衣) chapter of the *Liji* 禮記 and the versions of this text in the Guodian 郭店 and Shanghai Museum manuscripts, revealing that the well-ordered structure of the manuscript versions, focusing on a sequence of quotations from the *Odes* and the *Documents* (*Shu* 書), is so loosened in *Liji* and the same quotations are there so scattered that “the loss of the [manuscripts’] political argument shows a deterioration in meaning” at the same time that “the loss of the earlier version’s tight textual organization points to the erosion of mnemonic structure” (1: 62). This situation goes along with the fact that “collections like the *Records of Ritual* were compiled as ‘books’ with ‘chapters’ only in early imperial times. What was eventually to become a ‘book chapter’ was earlier an individual treatise in its own right, which circulated independently from the other ‘chapters’ with which it finally came to be grouped” (1: 64).

There is much to savour in this opening chapter of the history. Kern's comments on Warring States narrative literature and rhetoric, on philosophical and political discourse, on literacy, and on the retrospective construction of scholarly lineages bring a fresh eye to material that is usually presented with tedious scholasticism. We are also treated here to judicious examinations of the *Chu ci* 楚辭 and to Western Han poetry, including the early development of the *fu* 賦, to say nothing of historical and anecdotal narratives, and the Han establishment of the "classics" (*jing*). In short, Kern not only begins our 1400-page journey in exemplary fashion; this chapter should now be the first reference suggested to anyone wishing to secure a well-grounded introduction to the culture of writing and the most important individual works of early Chinese literature.

With David R. Knechtges's contribution, which takes us from the beginning of the Eastern Han through the fall of the Western Jin in the early fourth century, there is certainly no lessening of erudition and authority. Knechtges is unsurpassed in his knowledge of Han and early medieval (i.e., late Han through Nanbeichao) literature, and his chapter here shows it on every page. When we reach the Eastern Han, which occupies the first fifty of this chapter's ninety-three pages, most literary works are attached to named authors. Despite the editors' preference for a different approach, Knechtges organizes his chapter primarily around individual writers. I cannot complain about this. I have always thought that the most important questions to be answered in a history of literature—whether in print or in a classroom—are "Who wrote what, and when?" I do not mean by this a bare chronological catalogue, but the essential information must be supplied somewhere. Whatever more there is to say, so much the better.

The increasing use of paper during the Eastern Han led to a wider distribution of writings, though the imperial court remained the centre of literary production as it had been in the Western Han. Still, as Knechtges notes, there were now more works being written outside the court, especially most of our extant poetry, including *fu*, the latter a genre that had earlier been mainly court-centred. A good example of this broader scope for composition is provided by the various works of members of the Ban 班 family. Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54) and his famous offspring, Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) and Ban Zhao 班昭 (c. 49–c. 120), are the focus of a detailed subsection of this chapter, which not only discusses their works but also throws light on the possibilities for literature during the first century A.D. as a whole. This picture is given colour with attention to the works of Fu Yi 傅毅 (c. 47–92), Cui Yin 崔駟 (30?–92), Du Du 杜篤 (c. 20–78), and Feng Yan 馮衍 (c. 20 B.C.–c. A.D. 60), all interesting poets who are rarely if ever mentioned in surveys of Han literature, as well as the prose works of the better-known Huan Tan 桓譚 (23 B.C.–A.D. 56) and Wang Chong 王充 (27–100+). One among many valuable observations made here is that Wang Chong's deliberately clear and simple style "perhaps even shows evidence of being a more faithful representation of the spoken language of his time than that of any other Han writer" (1: 137). It is of course impossible and indeed unnecessary to note all the works and writers discussed in this, or in any other, chapter of the book. Regarding this chapter's section on the Eastern Han, I shall simply point further to the excellence of Knechtges's comparatively extensive presentations on Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139) and Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192), two writers of manifold talents for whom the author seems to have

a special affinity, and to his important remarks on the emergence of the inscription (*ming* 銘) and the admonition (*zhen* 箴) as developed genres during this period.

The remainder of this chapter consists of three sections centring on the Jian'an 建安 era (196–220), the Zhengshi 正始 period (240–248), and the fifty years of the Western Jin (265–317). Each of these is approximately ten pages and is a model of how the literary history of a generation can be written deftly in small compass. The major names come in for focused study as does the development of particular genres, such as *yuefu* 樂府 poetry and literary criticism. One of the admirable features of this whole chapter is the unapologetic and proper attention paid to the *fu* as a poetic form of equal stature as the *shi* 詩. Although most literary histories tend to slight the *fu* after the third century, a failing that is not completely avoided in this book, it remained an important and widely practiced form down through the Tang dynasty. Also to be applauded is the recognition that the tetrasyllabic line was still the favoured meter for *shi*-poetry throughout the era covered here (1: 185)—as it would be even into the first generation of the Eastern Jin. Too often the post-Han achievements in this form are ignored by scholars who locate the maturation of pentasyllabic verse in the Jian'an era and then turn a blind eye to what they regard as an obsolete form. Knechtges knows the period too well to accept conventional bromides.

Besides works in verse and prose that we readily place in the category of literature as *belles lettres*, this chapter also brings into the discussion works of scholarship, such as Du You's 杜佑 (222–284) commentary to the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, Guo Pu's 郭璞 (276–324) commentaries to the *Erya* 爾雅, *Fangyan* 方言, and other works, and the Western Jin invention of the general anthology. Knechtges controls all of this material so well that he very rarely halts his narrative to quote from the texts (despite his acknowledged eminence as a translator). In this, as in his author-centred approach, he, more than any of the book's other authors, resembles the contributors to the original *Cambridge History of English Literature*. Over the years Knechtges has perfected a remarkably limpid style whose purity allows for the transferral of vast amounts of information as well as for measured strokes of wit, a style that seems ideal for the writing of literary history. His chapter is one of the high points of this book.

The next two chapters, by Xiaofei Tian covering the Eastern Jin through the early Tang, and Stephen Owen from the mid-seventh century to the early eleventh, span seven hundred years. Consonant narrative voices and conformable interpretive viewpoints are maintained by these two authors, and their chapters mesh well together. They take us from the second half of the early medieval era through the end of late medieval times. These chapters have a different inflection than that of Knechtges, but they are no less enjoyable to read. In them we see the fulfilled goal of the approach to literary history advocated by the editors in their preface. To put it differently, these chapters often read like a type of cultural history, centred on a literary hub whose spokes radiate outward.

Xiaofei Tian's chapter of ninety-six pages is divided into four major sections, on fourth-century literature, fifth-century literature in the south, sixth-century literature in the south, and northern literature from the fifth through early seventh centuries. These four sections comprise a total of twenty-seven subsections, each of which offers a brief but absorbing view of a particular, well-defined topic. Tian, like Knechtges, quotes from her texts sparingly. Her great accomplishment is to weave a complex and fascinating tapestry

of literature seen as an essential component of cultural life. There is no way for me adequately to suggest the wealth of anecdote and information presented here, much of which opens fresh perspectives on known topics—but not, as one finds, known as well as one had supposed. Tian excels at capturing the connections among events, individuals, and the real life of an age. An example of this is her account of a large group of northern court musicians rounded up by the Eastern Jin general, Liu Yu 劉裕, during his temporary occupation of Chang'an 長安 in 417 and his transporting of them south to Jiankang 建康. They were familiar with a repertoire of *yuefu* lyrics and tunes previously unknown in the south and their presence likely had a significant influence on the interest in “old poems” thereafter shown by southerners as well as on new directions taken in court music (1: 228–29). This incident is itself just one of many interesting connections Tian makes that lead her to characterize the fifth century as a time of retrospection in literature, which includes a notable vogue of verse written “in imitation of” (*ni* 擬) earlier titles and poets.

Tian is more openly aware than any other contributor to the effects of religion on literature. She is especially attentive to the role played by Buddhism in her period, from its incorporation into *xuanxue* 玄學 discourse in the mid-fourth century to its dominant position at the Liang court in the first half of the sixth century. It is important to see how these two subjects of study that we usually keep far apart (even in the construction of academic departments) were at this time, and through the Tang also, often intertwined. Tian does a fine job of bringing in the Buddhist elements wherever relevant throughout her chapter. Scant notice is paid to Shangqing 上清 and Lingbao 靈寶 Daoism which were in some periods of this era and among some groups of literati of equal consequence as Buddhism. But it would be ungrateful to fault the author for this oversight, considering how inclusive she is in all other issues.

Another specific merit of Tian's account is how keenly she is attuned to the implications and pragmatics of manuscript culture, a concern shared by Owen in the ensuing chapter. They succeed thereby in delivering a remarkably rounded portrayal of literature's place in the larger life of the day. There are dozens of useful comments made by Tian regarding the circulation and fate of individual texts (see, for example, the heavy losses of northern literary works [1: 274–75], or the anecdote from 540 involving Yang Junzhi 陽俊之 and a bookseller [1: 280]), serving to keep before us the fact that this was a very different world from ours or even from the China of the twelfth century and later. This fundamental but easily overlooked fact of medieval culture has an effect not only on what was preserved and for how long, but, following directly from that, how certain works were and have been evaluated. I should mention also the careful notice that Tian gives to anthologies and encyclopaedic compilations, the numbers of which increased dramatically during these centuries. Although no particular writer is allotted too much separate attention in this chapter, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) understandably receives more than most, and in various contexts. One can always quibble over emphasis: I would, for instance, like to have seen some mention of Jiang Yan's 江淹 (444–505) many other *fu* besides just the famous pair of “Bie fu” 別賦 and “Hen fu” 恨賦, or a fuller appraisal of Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384–456) who is handled somewhat curtly. This kind of haggling is endemic to our profession, but in truth Tian does not leave many openings for it.

Before moving on, let me just note two more topics treated here with uncommon discernment. The first is the troublesome question of Liang “palace-style” (*gongti* 宮體) poetry, which Tian has studied elsewhere in detail and here defines neatly. This kind of verse is in origin and practice quite distinct from the poetry of euphonic niceties associated with the Yongming 永明 (483–493) poets of the Qi dynasty, even though later writers regularly folded them together as the decadent, overdone, effeminate “Qi-Liang style” which was devoutly to be spurned. Upon reading subsequent critical manifestos and prefaces to literary collections, it is amusing to realize that every generation from the late sixth century down to the mid-eighth is assailing the Qi-Liang poets as *bêtes noires* and averring that only in *our* time has poetry at last freed itself from that malign influence. Tian displays similar acuity in the concluding section of the chapter, on northern court literature starting from the Tuoba Wei dynasty. The literature of the north is largely ignored in most histories, except perhaps for quick reference to its “folk songs,” cursory mention of three prose works (*Qimin yaoshu* 齊民要術, *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記, and *Shuijing zhu* 水經注), and a condescending assessment of its scholarly standards as compared with the more refined south. Tian, however, generously gives the north its due and thereby begins to correct a longstanding bias in the literary record.

The transition from Tian’s chapter to Stephen Owen’s, occurring at the accession of Tang Gaozong 唐高宗 in the mid-seventh century, is virtually seamless. Eschewing dynastic boundaries more boldly than any other chapter in the book, here we start one generation into the Tang and finish two generations into the Northern Song, more than a century after the Tang’s demise. Owen refers to this 370-year span as “the cultural Tang,” beginning it with the rise to power of Empress Wu 武則天 in the 650s and terminating only at the time of the first significant literary figures of the Northern Song around 1020. The nine sections (with no subsections) into which this ninety-five-page chapter is divided are in all but two cases marked as chronological periods, varying from thirty-five to sixty years.

Owen constructs here a rather free-flowing account that follows its own, at times unexpected, course. This is a high-risk venture and only someone who is as deeply versed in the material as he is could make good at it. This approach is peculiarly suited to the style of writing that Owen has developed during his career, which blends a tone of seeming casualness with one of supreme confidence. Many younger scholars try to imitate his style, but none of the imitators has the grounding—or, to use the old nautical metaphor, “bottom”—to do so successfully. Owen is an original, and this chapter represents him at his best. At one point or another here we encounter nearly every important writer, and some who are lesser known, as well as most of the key compositions of the age, whether in verse or prose, and also most of the noteworthy compilations of criticism or scholarship.

In the shifting currents of Owen’s fluid narrative, writers bob up momentarily, then disappear, perhaps to resurface again pages later, sometimes several times in different contexts—for instance, in discussions of court banquets, or poetry anthologies, or the civil-service examinations, or the tradition of romantic tales, or military expeditions, or networks of friendship, or the great rebellion of 755 to 763, or imaginary paradises, or attempted revivals of classical standards, or changes in prosody, or pseudo-historical

accounts of finer days. In other words, we are made witness to a panorama of late medieval literary life in its full variety. A potential drawback of this approach is its unpredictability: occasionally a writer or work is disposed of in a single sentence and you hope in vain for further details, as the narrative takes a different turn. But this is also one of the charms of the journey.

Owen is especially good at placing writers geographically, thus giving a sense of the spatial expanse of literary culture, that is, a horizontal view of the time. This is fairly unusual in Chinese literary histories. By this means he is often able to suggest the real complexity of a contemporary situation or development, something that could not as effectively be done if his organizing principle were based on a set chronological sequence of authors. One of many examples is the description of the community of scholars that evolved from candidates who sat for the *jinshi* 進士 and other capital exams from 792 to 800, an exceptional group that included Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), Li Guan 李觀 (766–794), Ouyang Zhan 歐陽詹 (c. 758–c. 801), Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751–814), Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846), Zhang Ji 張籍 (768–830), Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831), Li Ao 李翱 (774–836), Lü Wen 呂溫 (772–811), Wang Qi 王起 (760–847), Zhang Zhongsu 張仲素 (769?–819), and Wang Jian 王建 (b. 766?). One can hardly avoid thinking of present-day academic networks upon reading of how their “letters and poems of recommendation and mutual praise built reputations” (1: 333). The pages devoted to the relations among and productions of this extraordinary collection of writers are some of the most engrossing in this chapter. With these writers and their successors in the mid-ninth century Owen seems most completely at home.

Throughout this chapter Owen’s eye is most determinedly on poetry, and it is to the diverse kinds, creators, and attractions of verse that he most consistently returns our attention. The warmth of his attachment to poetry is evident everywhere; it is the tonic note of the chapter. His remarks on poetry are the centre around which all else revolves, and in this area few can match him. His always cogent appreciation of verse might be seen to best effect in the pages in which he discusses the new ninth-century conception of the poet as a specialist craftsman and the corresponding “cachet of passionate commitment to writing” (1: 349). Such terms may equally be applied to the author of this chapter.

There are of course some matters of interpretation and substance on which my views differ from Owen’s. To adduce two instances only, I do not see the chief aim of Liu Zhiji’s 劉知幾 (661–721) monumental *Shitong* 史通 as resting in a Confucian desire to reveal how “truth appears through the historical unfolding of the moral order” (1: 304), but find instead the greater emphasis of the work in Liu’s comprehensive analysis of the historian’s literary craft, similar to what Liu Xie 劉勰 (c. 465–522) sought to do for all refined writing in his *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍; and I think it an exaggeration to say that “the age of grand excursions and poetry parties was abruptly over” with the death of Emperor Zhongzong 中宗 in 710, for such gatherings still occurred well into the Kaiyuan 開元 (713–742) era of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗. But these may be quibbles.

The brief concluding section of this chapter, written by Wilt L. Idema on narrative texts recovered from the Dunhuang cache in the far northwest adds an important element to the story of Tang literature. Owen has already touched on the poetry manuscripts from this distant edge of the empire. Idema’s survey introduces the best-known of the narrative

works, some entirely in verse, some primarily in prose, some a mixture of both, with special attention to those of Buddhist provenance and usually meant to be read aloud. This also lays the groundwork for Idema's chapter in volume two on later narrative works. Worthy of special note is Idema's caveat that rather than being representative of what we might find elsewhere in China at this period, "the number and the contents of these texts would appear to be representative of a quite atypical local Han Chinese culture, in which Buddhism played a far greater role than in China proper" (1: 379).

The concept of the "cultural Tang," which allows Owen to carry his chapter into the early eleventh century will meet with doubts in some quarters. It is true that the tenth century is always something of a problem in literary history. A parlous time socially and politically, boasting no major writers, it seems in some ways more a parenthesis than an assertion. One needs at least to take account of two poetry anthologies—*Caidiao ji* 才調集 and *Huajian ji* 花間集—from the first half of the century, three large court-sponsored compilations—*Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, and *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記—from the latter half, several collections of anecdotal history relating to the Tang, and a growing corpus of *ci* 詞 poetry. Except perhaps for the anecdotal collections, these works, in my opinion, do not seem of a piece with the late Tang and align more comfortably with the eleventh than with the ninth century. However, this might be a matter of taste. The tenth century is an awkward fit, no matter how one sorts it.

Whatever we decide about the tenth century, there is no question that when we reach the eleventh century we are in a vastly changed world from the Tang. Here the responsibility for guiding us is taken up by Ronald Egan. We could not be in better hands. Citing the "relatively underdeveloped condition of Song literary history," he states that especially compared with the Tang, "[it] is not well mapped or thoroughly understood. The most salient reason for this is the sheer abundance of Song literary work that survives" (1: 384). Candour of this kind is as welcome as it is unusual and is emblematic of this author's unfeigning tone as he proceeds to his task. Egan's approach to his chapter is different than that of any of the scholars whose contributions to the book precede his. In eighty-four beautifully written pages, comprising nine sections (the last two of which contain several subsections), he organizes his chapter by tracing the development of several writing styles through particular focus on the works of the five most significant Song literary figures: Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002–1060), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105). There is no neglect of secondary figures who are discussed where relevant, but the varied writings and careers of these five eminences provide the infrastructure for the chapter, as they each appear in several different sections.

Song literature has always seemed somehow forbidding to me, but Egan, a master of this period, succeeds in making the Northern Song both approachable and fascinating. He concentrates first on new directions taken in *shi*-poetry, especially the vauntedly discursive quality of much Northern Song poetry, which he finds present as early as the first generation of eleventh-century poets. "Whatever the subject, there is a tendency to treat it in a distinctly thoughtful way, reflecting in the course of the poem on its meaning and implications, whether these be social, historical, political, or aesthetic" (1: 389). Egan seems to

have a special feeling for Ouyang Xiu, and his remarks on him throughout the chapter are penetrating, perhaps nowhere more so than in a section centring on Ouyang Xiu and literary prose. Wang Anshi, known to historians for his central role in Northern Song political controversies, is rehabilitated by Egan as an important figure in Northern Song *shi*-poetry. The self-reflective nature of much of Su Shi's poetry is highlighted, along with his "exuberance of metaphor and figurative language" (1: 417). And Huang Tingjian's famous, later denigrated, critical attention to the workmanship of poetry composition is explained here with great clarity. Near the middle of the chapter Egan presents separate sections on the relation of Buddhism and poetry as well as poems on paintings. The application of Chan Buddhist terminology to matters of poetics became widespread in the Northern Song. Its implications extended also to other arts, especially painting in which "it was the artist's handling of compositional elements in accordance with universal aesthetic principles that was the key, not the compositional elements themselves and their relation to the real world" (1: 433), a turn that owes something to Buddhism's emphasis on the illusory nature of all appearances.

I could speak of this whole chapter in superlatives, but the most outstanding part of it is surely the twenty pages devoted to the rise and development of *ci*-poetry. Here we have the epitome of what literary history should be, as Egan takes us through the first hundred years of the *ci*'s career, along the way discussing its form, its emotional and aesthetic valences, and its "gradual elevation in stature and expansion in scope" (1: 439) as seen in the works of some of its leading practitioners. These include our by now old friends Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi but also, in particular, Zhang Xian 張先 (990–1078), Yan Shu 晏殊 (991–1055), Liu Yong 柳永 (*js* 1034), and Zhou Bangyan 周邦彥 (1056–1121). Nor is the beginning of critical writing on the *ci* overlooked. Egan is clear-sighted and forthright enough to caution that the routine identification of the *ci* as the Song's primary form of poetry, paralleling the *shi* in the Tang, is an exaggeration; the *ci* gradually became for some of the literate élite an attractive alternative to the *shi* for certain types of lyric expression, but it never held the field. There is so much in this section that is as sound in fact as it is smart in the telling. Egan's account of the maturation and the measured acceptance of the *ci* in the Northern Song is the fullest, clearest, and most engaging history of this topic in any Western language. It should now be the first required item on any reading list for this subject.

It might seem that the first five chapters of this book, each different but excellent in its own way, must illustrate the full range of feasible approaches to literary history. But with the chapter following Egan's, on the Southern Song and the Jurchen Jin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we come upon something else again. This chapter of ninety-three pages is a tag-team effort, equally divided in terms of page count between two scholars, Michael A. Fuller and Shuen-fu Lin. After an introductory section by Lin, this plays out as two solo performances rather than a *pas de deux*: there are three sections written by Fuller, followed by three from Lin.

I have already mentioned my preference and general reasons for breaking the book's two volumes at what would be this point in history, after the Northern Song, instead of two and a half centuries later at the beginning of the Ming. It is also the case that the

narrative tenor and presentational manner of the book's chapters from this point on changes noticeably. Henceforth there is a busier, more crowded quality to the chapters, no doubt owing at least partly to the ever increasing amount of textual material available for comment with each advance toward the present. There are other differences, too. Greater attention from here on is given to connections between literature and politics and to sociological factors as well, these factors becoming steadily more complicated and demanding. More focus is placed on self-conscious statements and manifestos about what literature ideally ought to be, especially as derived by post-Tang writers from contemporary theories of philosophical morality or state-led melioration. An incidental result of this enlargement of interest is that few of the book's subsequent chapters seem as neatly ordered or as pleasingly written as its first five: there is perhaps too much to say, and less of it is about the texts themselves. In inverse proportion to the accumulating density of chapters, my own remarks will hereafter be more abbreviated than they have been heretofore.

In Michael Fuller's half of chapter six he first examines the interaction between literature and *daoxue* 道學 (what is often called "Neo-Confucianism," a term wisely avoided here) in the Southern Song, as framed in three periods into which he fits important early poets such as Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127–1206) and Lu You 陸游 (1125–1197) and later poets such as Bao Hui 包恢 (1182–1268), Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1127–1269), and Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283), along with *daoxue*'s most influential spokesman Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). Fuller here quotes many extracts from both prose and verse, as he does in the following two sections. Those sections focus first on the social function of literary groups and the impact of printing and then on the literature of the Jin dynasty which had displaced the Song in the north. In the latter section Wang Ruoxu 王若虛 (1174–1243) and Zhao Bingwen 趙秉文 (1159–1232) come in for special notice. The great strength of Fuller's pages is that they take us more closely into the social and intellectual areas of poetry than we have seen previously. But in various places, I think I sense Fuller curbing himself, lest he venture onto ground reserved for Shuen-fu Lin.

Oddly, much of what Lin says in his first section on Southern Song poetry and prose covers ground that Fuller has already gone over in convincing fashion. Sometimes we come upon conflicting opinions, as when Lin treats the "Four Lings of Yongjia" 永嘉四靈 and the "Rivers and Lakes" 江湖 poets as unified in their views (1: 522), whereas Fuller had earlier suggested the need for a more nuanced appraisal (1: 504–5). Lin also retells in his discussion of Southern Song *ci* some of what Egan had already said about the Northern Song, here contradicting at one point (1: 528) Egan's more extended and complex treatment of Zhou Bangyan (1: 450–52). But it is the discussion of Southern Song *ci* that is the highlight of Lin's pages. Here his partiality for Jiang Kui 姜夔 (1155–1221) as a composer of *ci* is very much to the fore: Jiang is allotted four consecutive pages, including a page-long analysis of one of his poems, this being a level of detail for a single poem not seen in the book's previous five-hundred-plus pages. Throughout his comments on poetry in all three of his sections (the other two are on urban culture and on the fall of the Southern Song) Lin refers often to the "aesthetics of spatial form," a concept he has proposed elsewhere. Like Fuller, he offers more extracts from his writers than we have yet been used to seeing. This dual-authored chapter does not, however, come

off as well as it might have. Its two distinct groups of sections at times seem wanting in integration, and the picture we are left with of the Southern Song is unfortunately somewhat fragmented.

The roughly century and a half from the late Jin to the early Ming, centring on the Yuan dynasty, is handled by Stephen H. West. Over the years West has made the Yuan his own garden. In this chapter he considers a broad range of material, from poetry in the classical language to performance entertainments in the language of the day, from non-Chinese writers to the birth of a new poetic form known as the *sanqu* 散曲 or colloquial song. He is also one of the few authors writing on the later periods to pay attention to the *fu*. It is of particular interest that early Yuan writers largely returned to the “ancient-style *fu*” (*guti fu* 古體賦) in contrast to the “regulated *fu*” (*lü fu* 律賦) that had arisen in the mid-Tang partly as a favoured form for a section of the *jinshi* examination. The Mongol rulers of the Yuan had abolished the exam system at the beginning of the dynasty, but West points out that when the exams were reinstated in 1314 it was the *guti fu* that was made one of the major requirements of the *jinshi*.

Even though the song-drama (*zaju* 雜劇) is the literary genre most characteristically identified with the Yuan, it is both instructive and proper that West devotes considerable space to literature in the classical language, which, to be sure, had not lost its prestige for men of letters. But it is the section on “colloquial literature” where West’s talents are best displayed. He has a deep appreciation of the *zaju* and a profound understanding of its direct, sometimes witty, often earthy language, and this shows in all his remarks about it. The new verse genre of the *sanqu*, also composed in colloquial language, derived from dramatic songs. West is equally at home with it, and the account he provides here of its development in the north and eventual spread southward is the clearest and most informative to date. A very evident feature of this chapter is the abundance, even superabundance, of translated extracts: by my count, translations take up a total of thirty-one pages, or a third of its total ninety-four pages. Enjoyable as they are, I fear the translations sometimes impede by their length and frequency the narrative flow and almost lend this chapter the air of a mini-anthology, in contrast to the book’s other chapters.

In the first chapter of volume two, Kang-i Sun Chang, the editor of this volume, surveys the first two hundred years of Ming literature. The other chapters in this volume and the last two of volume one all treat shorter periods but take many more pages to do so. Chang displays great modesty and restraint by limiting herself to only sixty-two pages. But she still manages to present a very full picture of this era which, as she says, has not attracted as much attention as the dynasty’s final two generations. There is no obvious reason for this. Early and mid-Ming literature has much to recommend it, in a variety of genres and contexts. Of the many topics that Chang expertly discusses in this chapter, let me mention only a few that especially caught my interest and which I think she writes about with unusual verve. These include Qu You’s 瞿佑 (1347–1433) collection of classical-language tales, *Jiandeng xinhua* 剪燈新話, and a sequel *Jiandeng yuhua* 剪燈餘話, which revived the style of the Tang *chuanqi* 傳奇 and enjoyed great popularity not only in China but also abroad in Korean, Japan, and Vietnam. Chang’s remarks on the imperial sponsorship of dramatic and popular song culture take us into a new area of

literary patronage. Her comments on the changes undergone by the *fu* in mid-Ming times and on Ming critical evaluations of Tang *shi*-poetry are important supplements to topics treated in the book's earlier chapters. But it is Chang's examination of women's writing that is of most moment. During this period, for the first time in Chinese history, women writers appear in numbers instead of as isolated and unusual figures. Not only do their own works call for notice, they also took the lead in rediscovering and reinterpreting the works of earlier women, such as Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084–c. 1155).

With the subsequent chapters of volume two the pace of history slows considerably, though the diversity and extent of literary activities increases. The late Ming, from around 1573 to 1644, is here entrusted to Tina Lu. This period includes the first great wave of the vernacular short story; the appearance of four vernacular novels that would ever after have great influence and popularity, along with the practice of writing commentaries for them that were often made part of the texts themselves; the birth of the southern song-drama; and the further growth of elite literary societies that had likewise been a feature of the early and mid-Ming. However, the most significant development in the late Ming literary world was the vast proliferation of texts throughout the bustling merchant-centred cities of the realm, thanks to an unprecedented expansion of private publishing. As Lu notes, "only in the beginning of the sixteenth century did printing become the primary mode of textual circulation, so we might even date the beginning of print culture's dominance over manuscripts to this moment" (2: 63). The late Ming witnessed the results of this in the creation of a widespread urban reading public and concurrent commodification of literature. This transformation as well as other related changes in social life were most observable in the burgeoning cities of the Jiangnan region. This area had already taken on new importance during the reduced empire of the Southern Song, but now it became the unquestioned axis of Chinese literary activity. In her chapter Lu lays out in detail the vibrant range of writers and their readers in this era.

Wai-ye Li's ninety-three-page chapter focusing on the first two reigns of the Qing dynasty is symmetrically divided into four sections with three subsections each. The first two sections contain some of the most absorbing writing in this entire history. She tells us, "the Ming-Qing conflict, protracted and tortuous, has almost always been described in apocalyptic terms of unspeakable violence, rupture, and devastation" (2: 153). Li starts by giving an overview of the political and social changes that came in the wake of the Qing conquest. She states that "the literary culture of the early Qing cannot be considered separately from its late Ming counterpart, nor from the history, memory, and representations of the Ming-Qing transition" (2: 156), for the chief question that confronted those who had lived through these wrenching events, as also for the first generation of Qing writers, was to come to grips with the fall of the brilliant Ming and consequent Chinese subjugation to their new, Manchu rulers. Of course parts of China had fallen under "barbarian" rule several times before, including the loss of the whole country to the Mongol Yuan dynasty; but the scale, the shock, and severity of the Manchu triumph was of a different order in the psychic mortification it inflicted.

The thirty-three page section on "History and memory in early Qing literature" makes for compulsive reading. Here Li adroitly introduces some of the main responses in

poetry to the dynastic cataclysm by individuals and literary associations, from loyalist resistance to inevitable accommodation. When she turns to discussing the “literature of remembrance,” by both men and women, the focus is more on prose writings, especially memoirs. In these works of nostalgia and pain, which seek to address “the anguish of forgetting and erasure” (2: 185), we face a commingling of the rawest and tenderest of human sentiments. So involving are Li’s narrative and her summaries of selected texts that it is almost as if she herself is writing from inside the literature.

The remaining sections of this chapter describe the new beginnings and exploration of altered possibilities that early Qing writers attempted. These include notable developments in vernacular fiction of various lengths and complexity. Here several of Li Yu’s 李漁 (1611–1680) works are considered closely. The fascination with composing commentaries and sequels to the great Ming novels *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義, *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳, *Xiyou ji* 西遊記, and *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 are seen as a way of appropriating and even correcting works that willy-nilly played a role in the Ming decline. New realms of experience were investigated in, for instance, Pu Songling’s 蒲松齡 (1640–1715) stories of the strange and fantastic. And finally we look in some detail at the long-form dramas *Changsheng dian* 長生殿 by Hong Sheng 洪昇 (1645–1704) and *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 by Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648–1718), which each in its own way problematizes the Ming collapse and also succeeds in creating scenes of great pathos that have since become part of Chinese popular memory. It should be evident that Li’s contribution is one of this book’s finest achievements.

The middle Qing period, up to the start of the First Opium War, is handled by Shang Wei. He presents the mid-Qing as “the final phase of traditional literary culture,” during which literati “came to examine the negative implications of their cherished values and ideals, as well as the limitations of the sources that sustained their own writing and moral imagination” (2: 246). But before the decline was a last flowering. Of course when one thinks of the mid-Qing, one thinks first of the imperially sponsored compilation of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, which directly or indirectly touched almost every scholar in the country, in some instances with mortal consequences. There was no shortage of other compilation projects, of official or private provenance. And the rise of so-called “evidential learning” (*kaozhengxue* 考證學) was the most important development in scholarship since the Northern Song. These matters are more or less assumed by Shang, as he proceeds to give a very full picture of mid-Qing literature in its numerous spheres and aspects.

The coverage is thorough in every regard. Here I will only pause over a few items treated by Shang. In the field of poetry, the individuals he especially singles out are Huang Jingren 黃景仁 (1749–1783) and Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798), representing different sorts of unconventionality. Yuan Mei’s writings in other genres and his influence on certain groups are also discussed. Theatre still meant song-drama, now particularly *kunqu* 崑曲 opera which had originated in the late Ming; the plots of several plays are related. Vernacular novels claim the most pages in this chapter, primarily—but not only—the two great literati novels, *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 and *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢. Shang notes these two works must be at the centre of any literary history of the mid-Qing, although they were then not as well-known as they became in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These

novels are here the subject of careful analyses including extensive plot summaries, nine pages for *Rulin waishi* and ten for *Honglou meng*. One may wonder if that level of detail is advisable in a book like this; the plot summaries of these and other novels and also of the plays seem unwarranted. In an unintended way, this actually reflects one of Shang's main points about the waning of literati culture in this period: it can tend toward an over-elaboration that sometimes seems exhausting.

The next chapter, by Wilt L. Idema on prosimetric and verse narratives, marks a break in the time-line. It focuses on a certain type of writing, discussing its manifestations throughout a thousand years, from the late Tang to almost the present day. It thus acts as the deferred continuation of the brief section he contributed on Dunhuang narratives in the Tang chapter of volume one. This unusual arrangement is justified because the works Idema treats here cannot be precisely dated and most of them do not have a named author. He goes to some pains at the beginning of the chapter to define them and explain why it is not helpful to call this material either "folk literature" or "oral literature." With some uneasiness he settles on the term "popular literature."

In a relatively succinct seventy pages Idema surveys a considerable assortment of popular narratives recorded in verse or in prosimetric form. These include *bianwen* 變文 texts from Dunhuang, *zhugongdiao* 諸宮調 from the Song, *baojuan* 寶卷 and *cihua* 詞話 from the Ming and later, *tanci* 彈詞 from the Jiangnan region in the Ming, *liqu* 里曲, *guzici* 鼓子詞, *zidishu* 子弟書, *dagu* 大鼓, *kuaihu* 快書, *paiziqu* 牌子曲, and *muyuge* 木魚歌, all from the Qing. We are also introduced to the *zhuban ge* 竹板歌 of Hakka speakers, to Minnanese ballads, and to south Hunanese *nishu* 女書. Besides tracing what he can of the history of these forms and describing examples of each, Idema adds discerning comments about the relationship between performance and text and types of entertainers, including professional storytellers. Along the way he provides plot summaries of many of these narratives in different forms. At the end of the chapter he expatiates on four of the most famous legends associated with chantefable literature, remarking also on the changes they undergo when told in various styles and venues. Idema's command of these generally understudied materials is unmatched. This chapter fills a gap in the history of Chinese literature that would otherwise be missing and perhaps even unnoticed.

We have now reached the mid-nineteenth century. But we are still far from the end of this book. The two chapters remaining are by a good measure the longest of all: 153 and 150 pages, respectively. The first of these is mainly by David Der-wei Wang and covers the roughly hundred years from the first Opium War to the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937. This was of course a hugely tumultuous and consequential time in China. And literature became more involved with the great political questions of the day than it ever had been before. I say this chapter is "mainly" by David Wang, because he is responsible only for its first 117 pages. There is then a thirteen-page section by Jing Tsu and a twenty-three-page section by Michel Hockx.

At this point my reviewer's stamina almost fails me. The quantity and complexity of material in this chapter is daunting. I cannot begin to summarize it. Only a scholar of Wang's calibre could keep it from breaking into a hundred separate shards. The framing question that Wang seeks to explore is: in what lies China's unique construction of literary

“modernity”? As this suggests, Wang’s chapter is less for those who are primarily interested in the informational content of literary history than for those who prefer literary history delivered in a wrapping of theory. Thus, we read: “one can describe China’s literary initiation into the modern as a process of inscribing, and being inscribed by, developments such as the call for constitutional democracy, the discovery of psychologized and gendered subjectivity, the industrialization of military, economic, and cultural production, the rise of an urban landscape, and, above all, the valorization of time as evolutionary sequence” (2: 414). Although this style of writing is now *de rigueur* in studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, it is sometimes hard going for those not conversant with it.

But while Wang can rise up on clouds of theory, he also spends time on the ground of reliable historical fact. In this chapter he presents a remarkably comprehensive account of Chinese literature’s struggles with Western incitements and with the weight of its own traditions. The range of writings that Wang engages at one time or another is astounding, from chivalric and court-case romances to political polemics, from classical poetry to picaresque fiction, from language reform to journalism abroad, from traditional Peking opera to the new spoken drama, from realist experiments to lyrical reminiscences. The social and political circumstances that furnished the topical fuel for writers is never far from Wang’s view, and he delights on probing into the deeper implications of such matters. Occasionally Wang’s approach may set up perhaps unintended challenges to what we have read earlier in this volume, as when he translates Zhang Xuecheng’s 章學誠 (1738–1801) famous remark “*liujing jie shi*” 六經皆史 in somewhat lapidary fashion as “the Six Classics are nothing but indices to history” (2: 417), seeing it as a contribution to “historiographical discourse,” whereas Shang Wei had rendered the phrase more plainly as “the Six Classics are all histories” (2: 253) and stressed its implications for undermining the sanctity of the Confucian classics; these are not completely contrary views, but the emphases are quite different as revealed in the translations.

The extra section added to Wang’s essay by Jing Tsu concentrates on the translation of Western literature into Chinese and its cultural consequences. Michel Hockx’s somewhat longer supplement takes a closer look at print culture and literary societies. Interesting as these additions are in themselves, they do not seem to me essential. Wang touched on these matters already, and not everything needs presentation in detail. More can always be added on a subject, but principles of selectivity and right proportion may also be exercised. I am not criticizing in any way the scholarship of Tsu and Hockx when I say that the editorial decision expanding this chapter to a length more than fifty per cent in excess of the average of all previous chapters seems to me ill-considered.

The book’s final chapter, mainly by Michelle Yeh, with a nine-page addition by Hockx, is almost exactly as long as the preceding chapter, though covering fewer years. The focus here is on literature of the past two generations, from 1937 to the present. To discuss the writers who published important work during “the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and its aftermath,” this being the title of the chapter’s first section, is certainly feasible. Nearly all of these writers are now gone, and we can begin to see them and their work in clearer perspective. Yeh is at her best here. I would simply suggest

that the murder in July 1946 of Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (b. 1899) by Guomindang agents is perhaps the most appropriate closing date for this period.⁵ Something greater than one person fell that day, and a new age was ushered in.

Yeh's task becomes unenviable and probably unviable when she comes to the writers of the past fifty or sixty years, that is, writers most of whom are still active and works that have been published in our lifetime. The problem is that this is not yet history. Think of writing a history of American literature since 1950. How could its diverse and teeming currents of writings in all forms be adequately accommodated? And how can critical judgment of contemporaries ever become more than advocacy of individual likes and dislikes? The scope of the problem is schematically evident in this chapter's organization. Yeh's first section (1937–1949) contains eight subsections averaging a bit more than four pages each, the second section (1949–1977) contains fifteen subsections averaging three pages each, the third section (1977–present) contains twenty-five subsections averaging a page and a half each. (The listing of all these in the volume's table of contents occupies one and a half pages itself.) The increasing fragmentation and dispersal of focus is striking. But we should not expect otherwise. The nearer we get to today, the more we are dealing in journalism. Hence, scores of writers are mentioned in this chapter, but most are afforded only a glance, with many, particularly as the time-line approaches the present, being allotted only a sentence or two. Although a massive number of authors as well as titles of books or stories (most of the latter unfortunately missing from the volume's Chinese glossary) are named here, I wonder how useful this can be for someone who is not already in the know.

None of this is Michelle Yeh's fault. She is an uncommonly informed reader, and she performs admirably in what may be an impossible role and hopeless conditions. However, a history of contemporary literature can only have the provisional nature of a report from the front lines, and interpretations will change with each person's vantage point. I am no specialist in this field and am largely content to rely on Yeh's guidance, especially when it coincides with my limited knowledge, as, for instance, when she gives more space than normal to Yang Mu 楊牧, a poet I enjoy (and, when writing under his birth-name, Wang Jingxian 王靖獻 [C. H. Wang], a scholar I respect). Yet even here I can grumble: why no mention of his acclaimed translations into Chinese of Yeats and Shakespeare, or the recently published (2007) volume of his translations from all periods of English poetry, *Ying shi Han yi ji* 英詩漢譯集? Likewise, I am disappointed to see Zhang Xiguo 張系國 (Hsi-kuo Chang) noted only for the novel *Zuori zhi nu* 昨日之怒, with no mention made of his very popular science fiction writings, such as the collection of stories called *Xingyun zuqu* 星雲組曲 and novels such as the *Cheng* 城 trilogy. These are the types of unavoidable wrangles one can expect to arise when speaking of contemporaries.

⁵ It is little known, and not mentioned here, that shortly before his murder Wen Yiduo had been offered by Peter Boodberg a professorship in Berkeley's Department of Oriental Languages, an invitation that, had he accepted, would have prolonged his life and also changed to some degree American Sinology; but he declined.

There are two remaining sections of the book. One is Michel Hockx's supplement to the final chapter. It is on print culture, like his contribution to the preceding chapter, and also discusses new media such as the Web. This seems more in the nature of a news report than a necessary part of this book. And finally there is a nine-page "Coda" by Jing Tsu on overseas Chinese literature. Curiously, some of this speaks again of writers whom Michelle Yeh has already discussed in her chapter, such as Zhang Ailing 張愛玲 (Eileen Chang). Here, as at the end of the preceding chapter, the brief contributions by Tsu and Hockx seem rather tacked on as afterthoughts. I am sure these sketches do not display their talents fully.

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As back-matter, both volumes contain their own "Select Bibliography" and index, in addition to an enormous glossary of Chinese characters as noted earlier. Inclusion of a concise list of suggested references for each chapter carries on a tradition that, we have seen, was established as one of the "aims and objects" of the original *Cambridge History of English Literature*. The intention of course is not to be comprehensive but compendious. The chapter bibliographies of the first volume here do not exceed thirty-five items and some have fewer than twenty, whereas those for the second volume typically number around eighty entries and some over a hundred. This is not because there is a shortage of studies on earlier Chinese literature. Here, as in other features, volume two is looser and less controlled than volume one.

Indices are imperative for a book like this. These two are generally adequate. But in both there are more than a few errors of commission and omission: instances of page numbers given on which mention of the writer or work indexed is not in fact found and other instances where no reference is found in the index for items mentioned in the text. Especially frustrating with regard to omissions in the second volume is the near-total absence of entries for the scores of book, story, and play titles mentioned in the lengthy, later chapters. However, even when such entries are included—and now I refer to both volumes—such titles are given only in English translations. This is the height of folly. For, unless you can successfully guess how a particular author is translating the title you are seeking, you will find it only by chance. Who, for instance, is likely to guess correctly that the seventh-century encyclopaedia *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 is indexed under "C" for "*Classified Extracts of Literature*"? Or that the Buddhist biographical collection *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄, usually translated as *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, is here known as *Records of Passing on the Flame*? If you were trying to find works about the Three Kingdoms, would you ever think of checking under "N," where only you would find the "*Newly Printed, Fully Illustrated in the Zhiyuan Era: The Plainly Told Tale of the Three Kingdoms*"? Were you to look under "W" in the index to volume one for references to the *Wen xuan*, you would find none; they are instead under "S," for "*Selections of Refined Literature*." And, really, should *Quan Ming shi* 全明詩 and *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 be indexed in volume two under "C" for "*Complete Ming [or Tang] Poems*" instead of under "M" or "T" or "Q"? Examples are endless. But there is a much larger question this raises, which now needs to be addressed.

I noted earlier that the only conceivable reason for including back-of-the-book glossaries of Chinese characters numbering in the thousands of entries, instead of just printing Chinese characters where called for in the text, must be a desire to make the book reader-friendly to non-specialists. This must also be the reason for referring to texts throughout both volumes by a translation of their titles, instead of by transliterated titles as is normally done in specialist publications. To do so is a quisling approach. The practice of always referring to books by their Anglicized titles often makes for awkward phrasing and at times is almost comical. What if we were compelled always to say *The Wretched Ones* (if that were the approved rendering) instead of *Les Misérables*? But this also perpetuates a certain element of the old stereotype that China is inscrutably exotic and requires naturalizing to conform with Western conventions. Consider for a moment what the practical consequences are for our imaginary general reader who has learned the title of a work in the specific translation favoured in this book—for example, the puzzling and rather painful-sounding title given here as *Song Lyrics of Gargling Jades*. Good luck to the non-specialist who tries to discover more information anywhere else, armed with just this English reference.

So we may ask again: who is this book's intended audience? Decisions (presumably handed down by the publisher) of the sort we are considering seem clearly aimed at a non-specialist readership. But is that the audience that is supposed to benefit from chapter bibliographies of eighty items, including numerous articles in specialist journals? Obviously not. I hate to say it, but that interested general readership is as much a fantasy as the editors' hope that these volumes might be read from cover to cover. Except for the rare outlier, this book's readers will be persons with professional and specialist interests in China, like the readers of this journal. They will dip into one or the other volume sporadically for information about a particular period or writer. It is too bad that the publisher does not show more awareness of or concern for this more dependable audience. But the shameless price of the book puts ownership of it beyond the reach of virtually all individuals, regardless of background. Almost all copies of it will reside on library shelves, and even there, alas, they will be infrequently consulted owing to the increasing disinclination of students, and even some scholars, to have physical contact with a book. Thus, the functional audience of the book, beyond the contributors themselves and a circle of their immediate friends, is in the end likely to be only graduate students in Chinese literature at major universities. All of this is lamentable. But it is more and more becoming the way of our world. While one knows it is futile to complain, the need to voice one's disapproval remains.

That said, and because it is said, it is even more important to underline in conclusion my great appreciation of the work here placed before us. The fact that this book, so long contemplated, is now a reality is in itself cause for celebration. I trust it is apparent from my comments that there is much to be learned and relished in every chapter. The contributors to these volumes may each be justly proud. The two editors, separately and together, ceded much toil and time, braved storms and lulls, to bring this ship to harbour. They deserve the praise and gratitude of all scholars involved in reading, studying, and enjoying any part of the long, long history of Chinese literature.