

All in all, Max Oidtmann's *Forging the Golden Urn* is recommended for readers seeking a balanced and up-to-date understanding of Sino-Tibetan relations in the field of Qing studies. Well-researched and nicely argued, Max Oidtmann's eloquent work is a good example of why this kind of historical study is clearly still necessary and well worthy of continued ventures in the future.

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CHUNMEI DU:

*Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey.*

(Encounters with Asia.) 251 pp. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. £60. ISBN 978 0 81225120 3.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X20002268

The name of Gu Hongming (1857–1928) is scarcely a familiar one today outside China, even to specialists. Some may be aware of one of his more recent appearances in English-language scholarly literature, in Dorothy Ko's 2005 "revisionist history" of footbinding, *Cinderella's Sisters*, where he appears as its staunch defender. He also favoured polygamy, the wearing of the queue for men, the Qing monarchy (especially the Dowager Empress Cixi) and Confucianism as "what may be called a State religion". He would put in a good word for spitting in the street, and Chunmei Du wryly suggests it was a good thing for his reputation that he died before the establishment of Manchukuo, since this pro-Japanese contrarian might well have been one of its most trenchant apologists. Most of these deliberately provocative views were published in Gu's copious writings in English (he was little available in Chinese until the 1990s), his greatest success coming in 1915 with *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, translated in turn into several European languages. However his fame in the West, where he was "the most well-known exponent of Confucianism and Chinese tradition in the first two decades of the twentieth century", praised by no less a figure than Tolstoy, was paralleled by marginality in China, where he was a *bête noire* for cultural and political modernizers of the late Qing and early Republic, who felt for him only a disdain which he richly reciprocated, savaging in print the monarchist Kang Youwei ("snob-literati") and republican Sun Yat-sen ("mob-literati") equally. Denounced in *Xin qingnian* in 1918 by Chen Duxiu, and driven from his Peking University teaching post by student radicals, he was an enemy of almost everyone who mattered in the early Republican Chinese academic and intellectual worlds. This fine study of an angry and arguably peripheral figure is, however, far from peripheral itself, and is an incisive and well-researched account of someone who is nowadays "granted a prominent place on the altar of the masters of national tradition", yet who remains a problematic "trickster" and provocateur.

The account of a much-mythologized life with which the book opens shows us how Gu Hongming (Ku Hung-ming, Kaw Hong Beng), was not born "in the Qing", but rather as a colonial subject in Penang, speaking Malay and Minnan as his first languages and educated principally in English. Du Chunmei does an excellent job of demonstrating how racial identities, like linguistic ones, were fluid, suggesting at one point that his "Scottish" (also himself mixed-race) guardian may have been his biological father. It was certainly he who paid for Gu's education, which had

him memorizing Milton at an early age, before years of Greek and Latin, English literature, and Scottish Enlightenment philosophers in Edinburgh, where he graduated from the university in 1877. Further obscure years of study in Europe, giving him reportedly a command of several languages, prepared him for colonial service in Singapore and (for the first time) China. But in 1881 he “deserted” his interpreter’s post on the Canton-to-Burma expedition of the geographer Archibald Ross Colquhoun, possibly traumatized by a racist insult. He underwent a sort of conversion experience in which he became (in his own words) “a Chinaman again”. This led him in 1885 into the service of the renowned “self-strengthening” official Zhang Zhidong, and he maintained a vigorous practice as a polemicist and journalist alongside this post. From 1910 he held various teaching jobs, turning himself into one of the “sights” of Beijing for foreign and Chinese visitors alike, through his studied public performance of the role of arch-conservative defender of Qing legitimacy.

The book is a thematic study rather than a chronological biography, and deals very effectively with a range of topics: Gu’s anti-imperialist critique of Western civilization, which chimed so well with contemporary anxieties about materialism, met by a yearning for “Eastern” wisdom and spirituality; his (enthusiastic) reception outside China, in the German-speaking world particularly, where he was reviewed favourably by Hermann Hesse, compared to the prophet of Western decline Otto Spengler, and promoted by the philosopher Hermann Graf Keyserling’s School of Wisdom; his engagement with religion and his polemics with the missionary establishment; his performative Chineseness, and the psychological strains it involved; his encounters with figures like Edmund Backhouse and Somerset Maugham, who wrote Gu into a travelogue as “the Chinese philosopher”, and then recycled this account into a blatantly racist “evil Chinese” stereotype in his play *East of Suez*; the gendered aspects of his defence of the “mother of the nation” Cixi as well as of bound feet; and a final chapter expanding on the concept of Gu Hongming as the “trickster”, more English than the English, more Chinese than the Chinese. A wide array of theoretical literature is deftly and productively brought to bear on Gu’s career and writings, from Frantz Fanon on the “structural link between sexuality and colonialism”, through Judith Butler on performance, to Homi Bhabha and the concept of “colonial mimicry”. Always present as an undercurrent is Freud, since there is frequent recourse here to a sort of psychohistory, which stops just short of putting Gu “on the couch”; the author is indeed well aware of the perils of this methodology, particularly in an instance like this where a number of the basic facts about the subject and his career are in dispute, or are opaque.

Gu Hongming matters, as this engaging and sophisticated book shows, because in an age when he has been “revived as an icon of Chinese nationalism and cultural conservatism”, and when “clash of civilization” essentialisms are grasped at ever more fervently, there is great value in this sort of study of how East and West became “coconstructed concepts that are fundamentally interactive and mutually transformative”, how they are “imagined together”. Clearly Gu Hongming, this spokesman for “the East” who was created by “the West”, this “cultural amphibian”, paid a heavy price to become “a Chinaman”; indeed his plaintive anti-imperialist slogan of “Let the Chinaman alone” could at times almost be read as a very personal cry too.

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