

Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey. By CHUNMEI DU.
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.
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\$32.95 (paper); \$32.95 (E-book).

Gu Hongming (1857–1929), the author of *The Spirit of Chinese People* (1915) was a cultural icon in early twentieth century Western imagination of the East. With his anachronistic pro-Manchu queue, his iterative denunciation of western civilization, and his advocacy of Confucianism, he appeared as a crazy or pathetic figure to some and as a “spokesman of the East” to others. “I am the last representative of the old China,” he once boasted. But was he really? Exploring his eccentric odyssey offers a much more complex picture. Born in Penang (today Malaysia) in a family of Chinese ancestry, he was educated in humanities at Edinburgh University. Then, tired of being “the imitation of a Western man,” and incapable of finding either satisfying position or reconnaissance in the British colonial order, he tried his best to “become a Chinaman.” In 1885, he started to work as a secretary under the Viceroy Zhang Zhidong. After the collapse of the Chinese Empire, he was hired as Professor at Beijing University. He would end his life touring in Japan claiming that the Empire of the rising sun was the true depository of Chinese culture. This brief biography already underlines that Gu was a hybrid and global figure worth inquiring into.

Du Chunmei’s monograph is articulated around themes-based chapters: a specific event or text of Gu always serves as a departure point to delve into a larger issue. The first part of the book focuses more on his writings, while the second explores his psychology, behavior, and social performance. As such, *Gu Hongming's Eccentric Chinese Odyssey* is no biography. The chronology is not respected—which impels unfortunately a few repetitions—but the analysis often goes far beyond Gu. I would even dare to say that many passages concerned with how non-Chinese intellectuals, novelists, missionaries, and political men mobilized his discourse or his figure in their own productions are much more interesting and original than the exegesis of Gu’s ideas. The book provides in fact two important outputs: first, it localizes Gu’s works in various transnational networks of peoples and intellectual circulation; second, it minutely investigates into the role played by psychological projection and symbolic exchange among translational cultural elites of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gu Hongming and his sulfurous personality are here entry doors to explore the co-construction of the West and Orient metacategories.

Regarding the man at the core of this monograph, Du Chunmei has tried to understand Gu with the notion of “trickster.” This approach is illuminating: it underscores that Gu, in both his textual productions and daily practices, was “a performer of his self-directed show” (p. 152). By dwelling into his inner complexion, she also successfully touches sore spots and displays how constructing one’s identity of a “Chinaman” entailed navigating within conflicting transnational and sociopolitical narratives as well as throughout traumatic personal ordeals. Her remarks on the intertwined relationship between the issues of body representation, sexuality, gender, racism, and colonialism are remarkable for they shed new light on Gu’s intellectual trajectory, while expanding our understanding of Orientalism and self-exoticism. However, I regret that her notion of “cultural amphibian” deserves the points she wants to make. It appears to me methodologically precarious for it implies that cultures are antecedent to individuals, who are but circulating from one to the other. In this regard, the author should have paid more attention to the theoretical debates in transcultural studies. Her conclusion that presents Gu as someone who elaborated his identity on a cultural Möbius strip is a better suited metaphor. Nonetheless, I am far from certain that Du Chunmei has completely succeeded in turning her back to ontological orientalism.

Thanks to her detective work that led to the discovery of unknown documents, Du accomplishes a real tour de force and provides a new pathway throughout the tangled debates and preposterous tales regarding Gu’s life and ideas. The book presents, indeed, numerous qualities. However, I would like to point at one important issue unfortunately poorly addressed: the absence of serious inquiry into the production and circulation of meaning within polyglot context. To write scholarship in intellectual world history should entail questioning how the peoples under study thought and expressed their mind through translanguing practices. Gu claimed to be competent in almost a dozen idioms, and there are attested materials by his hand in Chinese, English, German, French, and Latin (even it is only a few sentences). How Gu mobilized these different languages and how they participated in the construction of his discourse should have been explored in detail. This could, for instance, have been done by considering his translation more seriously, or his key concepts. Concerning the former, there is much to be gained in conducting a philological analysis of Gu’s interpretation of the Confucian canon. A rapid glimpse at his *Analects* shows already that he did not respect any orthodox commentaries. Confucius’s words were read through an imaginary Goethe speaking in Carlyle’s English. On the matter of concepts, his translanguing uses of

li 禮, rendered as *Sichtlichkeit* in German and *Art* in English raises not only theoretical problems in translation but also regarding the circulation and transvaluation of meaning. Yet, it seems that Du's analysis has remained mired in a linguistic transparency premise. Except for a few remarks here and there, everything is said as if the significance of the words Gu deployed was self-evident to us and to Gu himself.

In spite of these criticisms, I would like to conclude by stating that Du Chunmei has succeeded in providing an important piece of scholarship in world history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She has shown that intellectual history is not doomed to be the poor relation in this field.

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Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and Transpacific Exchange Shaped American Reform. By MARILYN LAKE. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019. v + 307 pp. ISBN 978-0-674-97595-8. \$35.00 (hardcover).

Progressivism in the United States was empowered as much by middle-class citizen-elites devoted to expanding responsible democracy as by the logics of nineteenth century settler colonialism. Nowhere served as a better model to progressives in California, New York, Boston, and Chicago than the so-called working man's paradise—the Australian colonies and, after 1901, the federated Commonwealth of Australia. Through a growing transpacific exchange of legal and social thought, people and publications brought Australian ideas into contact with American reformers. American reform in the early twentieth century thus had distinctly Australian features—the Australian ballot, the household living wage, women's suffrage, and the centrality of white citizenship. These are the central claims of Marilyn Lake's *Progressive New World*, her latest work exploring the many and substantial connections between the United States and Australia.

Lake's volume joins other recent works about the entanglements between the imperialism of the United States and "Greater American" political culture in the early twentieth century: A. G. Hopkins' *American Empire: A Global History* (2018) and Daniel Immerwahr's *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (2019).