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Emily Sun, *On the Horizon of World Literature: Forms of Modernity in Romantic England and Republican China*, New York: Fordham UP, 2021. 176 pp. $30.00. ISBN: 978-0-8232-9479-4.

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Towards the end of the Qing Dynasty, a series of reforms were sought to replace traditional, classical cultural values. The New Cultural Movement, launched and led by a group of intellectuals known as "new youths," promoted a new set of socio-cultural standards based on progressive, modern Western ideas such as science, democracy, individualism, liberation of women, and, perhaps most importantly, vernacular literature. Although this New Cultural Movement started out as an urgent need to respond to the socio-political crises following the decline and dissolution of the imperial power, the influence of this movement is extensive and far-reaching. Through translation, a wide variety of works—including science, engineering, social science, and literature—were made accessible to Chinese readers, and concepts and ideas were introduced. Like many other aspects at that time, literature, too, welcomed this new energy emerging from the encounter with the West. In a way, the arrival of these translated literary works almost paralleled the rise of vernacular literature and together they registered an innovative capacity that initiated comparative literature in China. And this, as Emily Sun makes clear in her new book *On the Horizon of World Literature*, not only laid the foundation for the movement to continue for many decades, but also built a solid framework for her asynchronous comparisons and contrasts between Romantic England and Republican China. Situating itself nicely in the Lit Z series of the Fordham University Press, Sun's monograph is clearly a nod to the significance of exploring "the creative potential of reading's untimeliness and history's enigmatic force," as the series editors Sarah Guyer and Brian McGarth proclaim.

There could be an inherent challenge to a project of comparing the two periods in question without first fully grasping the *Zeitgeist* of the time, as each period has its unique aesthetics and poetics inscribed and embedded in its own literary tradition. Granted, the socio-linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts

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of these two eras could not be more different from each other, but Sun's ambitious and insightful book neatly curates one set of English Romantic writers and one companion Chinese writer for each chapter, and she convincingly makes a case for why these writers can, correspondingly, shed a new light on the possibility of being read cross-culturally, with the Goethean optimism for "world literature." Sun argues that "the English and Chinese writers in question establish alike the newness (the modernity) of their own times in relation to earlier eras within different cultural configurations" (14). In the introduction, "Reading Literary Modernities on the Horizon of World Literature," Sun demonstrates how "literary modernity" is activated "in the movement of reading between languages that constitute the particular and actual mediums of literary modernities and inform the terms and conditions of lived and evolving histories and traditions" (9). Recognising the mutual influences, Sun explains further:

> The notion of world literature can thus be said to serve as the horizon for literary modernity in two senses and on two levels: on one level, as the framework for encounter and connection between national or regional literary histories and literary modernities, which define and redefine themselves dialectically in relation to one another; and, on another, as that which, in a more abstract sense, orients them, including orienting them mutually toward one another. (9)

The very idea of modernity can be of a global scale, but in Sun's view, through these encounters and exchanges, modernity also emerges as provincialized, with its own socio-cultural and literary genealogy. And through Sun's careful comparisons and contrasts with close textual analyses, these local, plural modernities will in turn unravel the significance of global modernity.

And the result is a successful one. Sun's monograph delves into the literary modernities in England and China by alternating between cross-cultural scopes of literary and aesthetic values in both contexts and in four different genres: poetic manifestos by Percy Shelley (1792-1822) and Lu Xun (魯迅，1881-1936), rewritings of Shakespearean tales by Mary Lamb (1764-1847) and Charles Lamb (1775-1834) and Lin Shu (林紓，1852-1924), familiar essays by Charles Lamb and Zhou Zuoren (周作人，1885-1967), and domestic

fictions by Jane Austen (1775-1817) and Eileen Chang (張愛玲，1920-95). Sun illustrates that although these four genres were transmitted from England to China, she does not intend to overstate the English influences on the Chinese texts; rather, she seeks the literary genealogy locally: Lu Xun's "On the Power of Mara Poetry" (摩羅詩力說) and "Toward a Refutation of Malevolent Voices" (破惡聲論) both derive from a long history of classical Chinese poetics and genres. Lin Shu draws inspiration from *chuanqi* (傳奇) in both the Tang Dynasty (as short story) and the Ming Dynasty (as theatrical works). Zhou Zuoren borrows from the Gongan School (公安派) and the Jingling School (竟陵派) of Ming Dynasty in his essay writings. The influences of both *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢) by Cao Shueqin (曹雪芹，1715-63) and *Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai* (海上花列傳) by Han Bangqing (韓邦慶，1856-94) are evident in the work of Eileen Chang. By detailing the genealogy of classical Chinese literature behind these literary works of modernity, Sun affirms how the literary modernities came into being both locally and globally, as well as ratifies the viability of "world literature."

As each chapter explores a specific genre and pairing, the discussion is intense. While Sun acknowledges these writings as objects or texts of modernity, she also addresses readers of these works as subjects of modernity; or, to be clearer, participants in modernity. This is done particularly well in Chapter 2, "Shakespearean Retellings and the Question of the Common Reader: Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* and Lin Shu's *Yinbian Yanyu*," as Sun turns her attention to Mary Lamb, the true heroine behind the undying success of the children's reader, *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). Sun brilliantly captures Mary Lamb's unique female sensibility and her emphasis on female characters in her rewriting of Shakespearean plays. *Tales*, commissioned by William Godwin as a children's reader, should be understood as a vehicle of education of compassion for commoners—or, in Lambs' own words in the preface, "to teach courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity" (*Tales* 2). Sun then pursues her discussion on how Lin Shu's translation, despite neglecting the Lambs' contribution in the retelling, manages to echo *chuanqi* in both Tang and Ming Dynasties. Lin's deliberate choice of *guwen* (古文) in the style of *chuanqi* in his translation, as Sun suggests, produces a text that "would appear oddly familiar and evocative to contemporary Chinese readers" (58). Sun then justifies Lin's achievement convincingly by contending that "[a]gainst contemporaries to approach the new as a rejection of the Chinese

past, Lin seems effectively to approach the new as a particular and selective renewal of elements of the Chinese past in correlation, if not direct conversation, with Western culture" (62). By thoughtfully going through both Lambs' and Lin's prefaces and the comparative analysis of their renditions of *The Tempest*, Sun's chapter manages to best exemplify the world literature she envisions.

Chapter 3, "Estrangements of the World in the Familiar Essay: Charles Lamb and Zhou Zuoren's Approaches to the Ordinary" is an interesting attempt as Sun selects "Old China" by Charles Lamb and "Wild Vegetables of My Hometown" (故鄉的野菜) by Zhou Zuoren for her comparative study. As in the previous chapters, Sun juxtaposes these familiar essays that deal with reminiscences of ordinary life and embrace an implicit social mobility. Sun opines that "[i]f ordinary life is traditionally regarded not as in itself a fully human life, modernity effects a definitive change in this hierarchy by displacing the locus of the good life from a range of higher activities to the domain of ordinary life itself" (78). Sun makes a compelling case by arguing that Charles Lamb should be considered as a "modern" familiar essayist because Lamb often attends to the familiar and the everyday in his writing. However, it is also noteworthy that in Lamb scholarship, Charles Lamb is often regarded as an "antique" writer—even Charles Lamb himself once claims, "Damn the age; I will write for Antiquity!" (*Letters* 797). How to position Charles Lamb both as an antique as well as modern writer is a paradox that is never properly resolved in Sun's chapter. The other important figure in this chapter is Zhou Zuoren who, along with Yu Dafu (郁達夫，1896-1945), served as editors of the earliest modern anthologies of *xiaopinwen* (小品文). In their respective prefaces to *The Collection of Chinese Vernacular Literature: Prose* (中國新文學大系・散文) Zhou and Yu each explicate a distinct standard of selection, which not only reflects the spirit of the age but also has powerful impacts on what defines prose writing in modern Chinese literature. Zhou's status as both an editor and a writer of *xiaopinwen* is far more complex than that of Lamb's. But in Sun's discussion, neither Lamb nor Zhou receives more comprehensive readings in their own cultural and historical genealogies, which limits the scope of this chapter's deliberation.

Chapter 4, "Between the Theater and the Novel: Woman, Modernity, and the Restaging of the Ordinary in *Mansfield Park* and *The Rouge of the North*," is the most substantial and the most ambitious chapter in the book. In this

chapter, Sun continues to investigate how women writers in both periods look at "world literature" by juxtaposing these domestic novels of Jane Austen and Eileen Chang. Through her intriguing analyses, Sun notes that both novels comfortably accommodate theatrical performances in order to highlight women's changing roles in their modern worlds. With the socio-economic transformations and local modernity taking place in the everyday, domestic households, these novels react to and interact with a broader, global modernity. Although the juxtaposition seems fitting, one might be perplexed about the choice of Eileen Chang as the counterpart to Jane Austen in Sun's comparison. In the previous chapters, it is evident that Lu Xun, Lin Shu and Zhou Zuoren all belong to the liminal era between the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republican China; Eileen Chang, who writes and publishes in a more chaotic time in modern Chinese history, seems to be out of line with the aforementioned writers. Albeit with success, this chapter reads as being somewhat incongruous with other chapters in the book.

The problem presented in Chapters 3 and 4 exposes one of the core issues in Sun's monograph: that is, Sun's careful curation of paired writers may, eventually, limit the applicability and the scalability of her research findings. Sun's ambition to build a model of world literature in the introduction chapter may be fully realised in the ensuing chapters, but can this model be applied to other works or other writers in the eras in question? Moreover, there is also an issue of the neglected writers in the proposed eras. In some way, the Chinese writers of Sun's selection resist fully embracing the idea that Western newness and progressive ideas are the only solution to the Chinese literary tradition; rather, these writers all adapt in their own way to the nuances brought by Western culture on their local literary modernity. But what about those who wholeheartedly advocated transplanting Western values onto Chinese soil to replace the traditional ones? Can one find the counterparts in both English and Chinese contexts that promoted revolutions at the dawn of modernity? The book leaves its reader desiring more comprehensive studies. Another problem is the overall structure of this book. There seems a disconnection from chapter to chapter, with Chapter 4 being the most ambitious and the most substantial but disproportionately long. Minor problems include the absence of bibliography, which is a rather unusual and peculiar decision. And there seems to be some inaccuracy (for example, on page 80, Zhou's essay was published

in 1924 instead of 1824) and inconsistency ("颶弓" is translated as "Storm Ruse" and "Storm Lure" on pages 66 and 68 respectively) in the book.

But nit-picking aside, *On the Horizon of World Literature* delivers what it promises to achieve. Sun sustains her eloquence in structuring the viability of meaningful comparisons in cross-cultural contexts with her scrupulous, almost intimate, readings. Sun's book suggests the possibilities of reading world literature very closely without hegemony; that is, without presuming Western influences on non-Western texts, or prioritising new influences over old ones. Sun invites her readers to navigate the question of modernity as a whole and the respective poetics and literary traditions of Romantic Britain and Republican China. This book broadens the horizon of world literature as well as understanding of the British Romantic era. Readers interested in English and Chinese modernities as well as the development of world literature will benefit greatly from Sun's proposed model of comparative readings.

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