

Introduction

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There has been a distinct resurgence of interest in modernism as a theme or aesthetic practice in recent years. With the single word “Modernism” as a main title, there were eight volumes published in English in the past decade alone.¹ We can see the full breadth of interest in the topic if we expand the title search only slightly, to notable examples such as Marjorie Perloff’s *Twenty-First-Century Modernism*, David Bradshaw and Kevin Dettmar’s *Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, Michael Levenson’s *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough’s *Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, and Mia Carter and Alan Friedman’s *Modernism and Literature*, not to mention the newly emergent journal *Modernism/Modernity* and its affiliated Modernist Studies Association.² Yet, apart from Christopher Bush’s *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media*, relatively little has appeared in English about Chinese modernism, and even less still about modernism in Chinese poetry.³ The only exceptions are Carolyn FitzGerald’s *Fragmenting Modernisms: Chinese Wartime Literature, Art, and Film, 1937–1949*, a work quite restricted in time span and focused largely on the historical dimensions of violent conflicts and their effect on artistic practice across generic forms, and Au Chung-to’s *Modernist Aesthetics in Taiwanese Poetry since the 1950s*, a work that takes Taiwan as a singular focus.⁴

1 Heesok Chang, *Modernism*; Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*; Robin Walz, *Modernism*; Christopher Butler, *Modernism: A Very Short Introduction*; Ahmet Ersoy et al., *Modernism: Representations of National*; Michael Levenson, *Modernism*; Peter Childs, *Modernism (The New Critical Idiom)*; Laura Winkiel, *Modernism: The Basics*.

2 See the following: Marjorie Perloff, *Twenty-First-Century Modernism: The “New” Poetics*; David Bradshaw and Kevin Dettmar, *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*; Michael Levenson, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*; Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough, *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*; Mia Carter and Alan Friedman, *Modernism and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*.

3 Bush’s work, excellent though it is, does not so much address writing in Chinese as it does the idea of the Chinese character as catalyst for the development of Euro-American modernism. As to work about modernism in Chinese poetry itself, there has yet to be a single volume in print. See Bush’s *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media*.

4 FitzGerald’s discussion of poetry is principally about Mu Dan’s, to which she devotes an entire chapter and a significant segment of the epilogue. Her discussion of Mu Dan, though acknowledging heterogeneous sources in Chinese and Western poetics, does not develop a modernist theme as it could, focusing more on the urban/rural divide and other thematic elements of Mu Dan’s work. Au’s study offers many detailed insights into a specific set of

Our book fills this gap; it is the first broad-based compilation of research on modernist Chinese poetry collected in a single volume in English. The goal of our research, moreover, is not simply to attempt to fix “modernism” within the cultural record, Chinese or other. We aim, rather, to narrow the aperture enough to enable in-depth discussion of one style and geographical and generic pairing, Chinese modernist poetry, while at the same time allowing for at least some of the intellectual anarchy Xudong Zhang describes in his 1997 discussion of Chinese modernism, a cultural phenomenon that is “never a neatly developed, fully secured, and glamorously ossified object awaiting gentlemanly scholarship; it is always in a moment of painful birth, and profound ambiguity, mired in its formal and political promises and fragility.”⁵ Part of the problem, as Zhang points out, is not only the question of origin, but also the attendant problem of scope.

Zhang is not the only scholar to address such questions where modernism is concerned, and we find related problems in traditions other than Chinese. Most recently, in a wide-ranging study, Susan Stanford Friedman enjoins “planetary modernism” as a challenge to the most basic assumptions about what we as scholars and literary historians gain by staking out such stylistic or temporal categories. Friedman’s highly ambitious work uses a “more expansive framework” to move back in time to before 1500, a traditional starting point for Western modernity, and then across the planet to various episodes of cultural upheaval and modern development. The real benefit of Friedman’s work in the context of our study of modernisms is its successful decentering or complete dismantling of a center (West)—periphery (Chinese) epistemology.⁶ Such a reorientation, necessary and vibrant though it may be to our current efforts to grapple with modernism worldwide, is still on a slightly different track from what we endeavor to accomplish in this work. While it seems clear that the West did not actually invent modernity, it is evident that the West successfully created the idea that the West created modernity. Further, many cultures, China among them, accepted that invention both because Chinese people were forced to by very real threat of significant military reprisals by Western powers in the mid to late nineteenth century and because an appeal to exoge-

modernist poets associated with Taiwan but does not situate them into the broader modern Chinese (language) literary tradition (for good or ill). Moreover, the characterization of them as “Taiwanese” is sure to raise eyebrows among scholars, as all the subjects of her work are *waishengren* 外省人, “mainlanders” who were born in mainland China and migrated to Taiwan after the Civil War. See Carolyn FitzGerald, *Fragmenting Modernisms*; Au Chung-to, *Modernist Aesthetics in Taiwanese Poetry since the 1950s*.

5 Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, 3.

6 Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*, esp. ix–xi and 311–313.