

Online Reviews

Bien, Gloria. *Baudelaire in China: A Study in Literary Reception*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013. Pp. 294. ISBN: 9781611493894

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As a scholar with first-hand access to archives in Chinese, Gloria Bien provides an invaluable resource on Chinese-language documents related to Charles Baudelaire's reception in China. To have synthesized this material in *Baudelaire in China: A Study in Literary Reception* is one of Bien's major contributions to Baudelairean studies, and complements more recent scholarship such as Jacob Edmond's *A Common Strangeness: Contemporary Poetry, Cross-Cultural Encounter, Comparative Literature* (2012).

Although Baudelaire never went to China, his poetry was known by Chinese intellectuals of different epochs, such as Xu Zhimo or Dai Wangshu. How an author is received in a culture different from his/her original one is a rather "slippery" issue. Bien's theoretical framework is based on Harold Bloom's concept of "anxiety of influence" and Hans Robert Jauss's "aesthetic of reception." The first recalls the anxiety provoked by the conscious or unconscious comparison with former "models"; the second links the fruition of poetry to the background of the reader and his/her expectations. Important references for Bien are also the "tetradic circle" by James J. Y. Liu, and Wolfgang Iser's "theory of reading."

The volume is composed of two parts: "The Critical Reception" and "The Creative Response." Bien offers insight into the historical situation of China starting from the end of the nineteenth century to the present, suggesting the new sensitivity produced, over time, by the complex developments of Chinese history. Baudelaire's peculiar way of depicting his times might have stimulated an interest from Chinese intellectuals. Bien also underlines the poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* which have been translated many times into Chinese, especially "Correspondances." This first part of the volume allows the general reader to become acquainted with a wealth of Chinese names and facts, and the scholar to obtain details and create links which can be considered very useful to further enquiries into the process of reciprocal literary influences between China and the West.

The second part of the volume includes five sub-divisions and offers a broad list of Chinese poets, starting from Lu Xun and Yu Dafu to Wen Yiduo and Ai Qing, who can be put in relation to Baudelaire either because they actually referred to his poetry, or because their poetry implicitly suggests that they were influenced by Baudelaire. It is, however, difficult to classify and to give things the right name; Chinese poets do not fit well in Western categories such as "Decadence" and "Symbolism." This second part is also a stimulating one because suggesting possible ways to interpret the extent of Baudelairean poetry's influence on Chinese poets offers the possibility of thinking about new paths of research in the field. In fact, by contextualizing each component of the very broad amount of information offered by Bien, it will become possible to draw a more precise picture of the process of interaction between the Chinese intellectuals who had access to Western poetry, and the Western intellectuals who were keen on Chinese, therefore exotic, poetry.

The three appendices usefully list the many ways in which, through the years, the name of Charles Baudelaire has been translated into Chinese; Chinese poems directly related in one way or the other to "Correspondances"; Chinese poems where the influence of Baudelaire's poetry can be

discerned. The openness fostered by contemporary times and technology increases awareness of the fact that a cooperative attitude towards scholarly research projects can be fruitful in producing new ways of interpreting the East-West interrelation. The long lasting poetic influence of Baudelaire on Chinese poetry and the different shapes it has taken among different poets and times shows a long tradition of reciprocal interest between China and the West. By opening up the field to new research on Baudelaire's literary reception in China, Gloria Bien shows that the topic of cultural interaction continues to be of great relevance today.

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