

*Hu Feng: A Marxist Intellectual in a Communist State, 1930–1955.* By Ruth Y. Y. Hung. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2020. Pp. viii + 275. \$95.00 hardcover, \$32.95 paperback.

Hu Feng 胡風, the pen-name of Zhang Guangren 張光人, has always seemed something of an enigma: committed to left-wing politics from an early age, he spent much of his career in disputes with Communist Party cultural authorities, in 1955 eventually coming under the direct censure of Mao Zedong 毛澤東 and becoming the target of a national campaign of denunciation. Born in rural Hubei in 1902 to a modest household, he was able to enter high schools in Wuchang and Nanjing in the early 1920s, then went on to the preparatory school of Peking University, and finally to the English Department at Tsinghua. In 1929 he went to Tokyo, where he enrolled in the English Department of Keio University. He was active in politics while in Japan, even joining the Japanese Communist Party before being deported back to China in 1933 because of his radical activities. Once back in Shanghai, partly based on the reputation as an activist he had secured while in Japan, he was given important positions in the League of Left-wing Writers, even though he was prevented from joining the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) owing to the sort of factional dispute that would dog him for decades thereafter. While working for the League, he became close to Lu Xun 魯迅 in the older man's final years, managing much of the material and posthumous events that contributed to the famous writer's legacy. He spent more than twenty years in detention after his 1955 purge, being released only in 1979. Over the course of the 1980s, the Party reviewed his case a number of times, finally granted him full rehabilitation only in 1988, some three years after his death. His is a remarkable story, and particularly relevant to the degree that it was an especially dramatic example of the relationship between the CCP and Chinese intellectuals in general in the years after 1930.

Aside from an early work by Yang I-fan published soon after the 1955 purge,<sup>1</sup> this new and erudite book by Ruth Y. Y. Hung, although marked by serious flaws, is the first monograph in English to deal with Hu's life, literary thought, and political vicissitudes. As the first prominent cultural figure to be brought down by official action after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, Hu's story has been the subject of any number of articles in both English and Chinese, but it is Hung's signal service to have gathered a substantial amount of the information about Hu in one place. That being said, the general understanding of Hu and his case has become very well known among scholars of the intellectual and political history of

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<sup>1</sup> Yang I-fan, *The Case of Hu Feng* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1956).

modern China and this book does not challenge the conventional wisdom regarding his fall and the reasons for it. Hung's approach, however, does attempt to broaden the scope of that wisdom: as she affirms at the beginning of the work: "I am less interested in asking whether Hu had been treated fairly by Mao and in the political movements that persecuted him than in exploring how Hu's literary criticism exemplified a case of modern literary criticism and its contribution to international revolutionary politics" (pp. 2–3). This is quite a claim, and, as I shall try to show below, the book too often stumbles over itself in trying to live up to it, mostly because the question of the relationship between modern literary criticism and international revolutionary politics, once stated, never receives any serious analysis.

For all that the book fails to follow up on what it seems to promise to be its main focus, it does devote most of its attention to the political and ideological facets of Hu's career, even as it stands at some distance from delving into his personal life and relationships. This distance lends an abstract quality to the book as a whole, perhaps typified by statements like: "It would be hard to assess the 'success' of the Yan'an Forum and 'Talks' today without wondering what possessed the intellectuals there to dish out such political enthusiasm and support as they listened to Mao" (p. 82). One can only suggest that it is the author's job to get close enough to these intellectuals to be able to determine just what the factors were that "possessed" them, and to attempt to do so in a manner that would offer approaches to the problem other than that said intellectuals were simple victims of mindless delusion. It must be added that the general rhetorical tone of the book rarely departs from imparting the notion that the author does indeed regard Hu as having been treated unfairly, although this is something so widely accepted both in China and abroad that it would be hard to imagine anyone arguing against it. Hu's eventual exoneration even tacitly put the Party's imprimatur on this version of his career. While the book adheres to the established notion of the damage the CCP has inflicted on Chinese intellectual life, ironically, on many of the key issues that faced Hu in his various struggles, the author seems to accept the Party's version of those events and their background, backhanded testimony perhaps to the CCP's ultimate success in its ongoing efforts to control the narrative of modern Chinese history.

One of the most convincing features of the book is that Hung does not try to let Hu off the hook in regard to his implication in the circumstances that led to his own downfall. As she says, ". . . Hu, having sealed his political fate with the CCP's road to statism, found himself spiraling down into a set of conditions that he helped forge, through which a revolutionary movement gained ground even after it became a significant force against human freedom" (p. 4). She goes on to add a more general point: "Studies on intellectuals and Marxism in modern China should . . . recognize that Hu and his generation of left-wing writers and critics

were not merely prisoners of political power but modes of being in the same power structure” (pp. 8–9), and then to explain her particular focus: “. . . the portrayal of Hu as merely oppressed does not represent him adequately but rather eclipses his struggle to be at once within and without political and institutional power” (p. 10). These are all important and valid points that few others have stated so clearly and unequivocally. If nothing else, Hu’s profound imbrication within the ideological structure managed by the CCP offers perhaps the only logical explanation of how Hu, for all his seemingly endless conflicts with Party authority throughout most of the two decades following his return from Japan, was able to maintain position and some power within Party-authorized cultural structures right up until the time of his purge, ironically, something the author barely notes outside of the very valuable “Chronology of Hu Feng’s Life” appended at the work’s end. This and other key points in Hu’s career being placed either only in the notes or in the Chronology is a serious shortcoming of this work, as it poses a hindrance to the reader gaining a clear sense of the overall narrative.

The book is divided into seven chapters and an epilogue, which chronologically chart Hu’s life and career. Another of the book’s problems is that much of the time its account of Hu’s early and middle days is seen from the perspective of a rigid teleology, that of an inevitability to his downfall in the mid-1950s, which makes it difficult to appraise how much latitude Hu actually enjoyed in the 1930s and 1940s, or how much influence his advocacy may have had on the development of left-wing cultural policy in general. At certain junctures, the author seems to allow for some flexibility in Party cultural discourse, as when she points out that:

. . . the CCP’s ideological control [in the mid-30s] was not as complete as it would be after 1949. . . . Whether one was a Party representative of the Left-league or a sympathizer of the Communist cause, one enjoyed much freedom in the manner and degree of political positioning. The absence of pressure from one ruling ideology enabled Hu to continue working in the revolutionary camp despite internal conflicts and tensions. (p. 40)

This assertion of openness is qualified, however, by the the author’s description of the realities on the ground at the time: “In effect, the CCP could not provide the Shanghai municipal committee of the Communist Party its overarching support, either financially or institutionally” (p. 40). The potential for ideological agency and the lack of logistical control are conflated here, which begs the question of whether or not there actually was “one ruling ideology” at the time, or merely that it could not be enforced. Orthodox Party history would favour the interpretation that there always a definitive ideology, if only one of obedience to the correct line, which is also the general tenor of the book as a whole.

While the general sense of the book is that the ideological control of the Party was constant through time, the author cannot quite seem to make up her own mind on the specifics of this point, offering numerous contradictory statements on it. For instance, we are told on p. 148 that “The CCP’s assumption of state power in 1949 did more than upset the still reasonably balanced relationship between ideological power and intellectual power in the early 1940s,” indicating she believes that there was considerable openness prior to 1949. On the other hand, earlier on, on p. 99, we have been told that “If criticism of Hu in the wake of the ‘Talks’ [i.e., in the early 1940s] failed to persuade him to face the rise of the CCP squarely as a totalitarian state apparatus, the general expectations of the founding of the People’s Republic did the task,” suggesting that Yan’an was the real watershed in closing down alternative opinion, even if Hu himself was not aware of it. These two assertions pretty much contradict one another, and such contradictions are present throughout the book; they are part of the general shortcoming that there is no real attempts to gauge what changes there might have been to Party orientation over time or the factors behind such changes.

The temporal slippage implicit in these accounts of Party ideology is a problem throughout the work. For instance, in describing Hu’s early years, the author claims that “by the time Hu came of age and set off for such cities as Wuchang in 1921, and then Shanghai in 1923 to partake in Western learning, he was in pursuit of Marxist criticism, at that time the prime requisite of New Literature and characteristically the locus of modern Chinese intellectual radicalism.” This is plainly an overstatement of Marxism’s influence in these early years, perhaps an unfortunate consequence of the author unconsciously accepting as fact the Party’s determination to claim intellectual leadership in Chinese cultural circles from its very inception. Indeed, the support offered for this contention, a quote from Bonnie McDougall reads: “by 1934 or 1935, it was considered eccentric in literary circles not to be . . . left-wing, and between 1935 and 1939, the Communist Party had an almost irresistible fascination for any writer under forty” (p. 22). There is a gap of at least a decade here between the author’s assertion of Hu’s gravitation to Marxism and the evidence offered in support, the sort of misstep that is unfortunately all too common throughout the book. The claim is also at odds with a statement on the very next page: “This allegiance to radical social causes prepared [Hu] for the adoption of Marxism as his literary framework” (p. 23), undermining the earlier assertion that Hu marched off the big cities in search of it. Another example of flawed chronology takes place on p. 99, where the author claims that: “Even though it was Hu’s critics who initially adopted the term *subjective combative spirit* in the 1950s, Hu did not object to his association with the term.” This is belied by an instance from p. 103, where Hu uses the term in a

1948 letter, not to mention the fact that the author has been using the formulation throughout the book, and the footnote attached in support again does not address the issue at hand. These flawed chronologies are actually part of a larger problem with the book: that the author seems to view Party policy as a fixed entity from the get-go, and rarely goes into the ways in which the policy evolved over time and in response to particular events.

This difficulty with adequate historical reckoning extends beyond the book's chronology of Chinese Marxism: there is a hollowness to the sense of historical specificity throughout the work. For instance, in chapter two we are told that: "In retrospect, it is clear that the generation of radical intellectuals to which Hu belonged compromised the historical role of the individual writer-critic—his independence of mind, his critical consciousness, and his literary subjectivism" (p. 21). The clear problem here is the reification of the notion of "historical role": does it refer to some ideal role of the writer-critic of the early May Fourth period, of the embattled 1930s, of the late Qing, of the long period when Confucianism dominated Chinese thought, or to some paradigmatic Western notion of the role of the critical intellectual, all of them demonstrably quite different from one another? The failure to unpack the notion of historical role is serious here; the jamming together of different possible histories perhaps stems from the author's attempt to tap into a notion of an overarching "international revolutionary politics," but this manner of presentation in which historical specificity is not taken into account ironically only serves to undermine the notion that some "international" historical role actually exists, if only because of the lack of a precise demarcation of what it might comprise. The sense that all history is frozen into a single mode runs throughout the book and must be accounted another of its failings.

In line with this, one of the major issues in evaluating Hu and his career is the question of whether Chinese Marxism—or Marxist governments in general—was always already destined to be the authoritarian apparatus it eventually became once the CCP achieved state power. And a vital point within this question is determining the extent to which Hu believed that he and his ideas could actually have legitimate agency in shaping literary and cultural policy. Was there, in other words, space for genuine individual initiative within Chinese Marxism as it developed through the years? The debates within leftist circles in 1930s Shanghai should offer important clues as to Hu's thinking on this point, and unfortunately the author provides few quotes from Hu's own work in this liminal period, preferring instead to make affirmations in her own voice. For instance, on p. 45 we are told: ". . . against Hu's hope that political consciousness and ideological achievement would appear gradually with the learning of new ideas, actuality, political slogans, and declarations dominated the direction and habit of popular

thinking to a degree beyond his revolutionary experience.” On its face this seems plausible, but it would be considerably more convincing had the author chosen to share some of Hu’s own words on the subject, especially if it could be shown he was aware of this trend toward the dominance of slogans. Not to mention that the phrase “popular thinking” seems to exist in a vacuum, lacking any attempt to establish a plausible predicate for it. In fact, the section “Intellectuals in Power” (pp. 83–87) is the only place in the whole account of Hu’s career that the author employs Hu’s own voice to any extent in order to characterize his polemics, and welcome as that interlude is, direct quotations from him should have been much more widely employed.

Similarly, the statement: “Although Marxist aesthetics had taught the ‘cultural workers’ how writing could also be a form of ‘fighting,’ they lacked Marxist praxis, allowing indoctrination to become not only the touchstone of political consciousness but also a new trend of intellectual servitude” (p. 45), damning as it is, is simply too vague and disconnected from historical context to be of any analytical use, and the references to Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger offered in support only heighten the abstract and disembodied quality of the affirmation. In addition, in chapter four there is a long description of Hu’s “subjective fighting spirit,” probably the mentality for which Hu is best known, capped by the statement that he “believed that ideological devotion must be traversed by a respect for and belief in what Heidegger calls *Dasein*” (p. 72). Even should we accept this as being true, the whole discussion is rendered moot by the author’s failure to include a single utterance of Hu’s own in describing this crucial attribute of his, not to mention the author’s lack of any attempt to inform the reader of what this notoriously difficult notion of Heidegger’s might actually mean in this context.

Such frequent appeal to Western critical authority as exemplified by the mention of Arendt and Heidegger above more often than not is misleading rather than being a source of clarification. For instance, on p. 47, we are told that “According to [Raymond] Williams, the formation of modern Chinese consciousness and humanism began the moment that Lu Xun abandoned medical studies for literature,” which strongly suggests that Williams is discussing Lu Xun in the cited section of *Marxism and Literature*. It should come as no surprise, however, that this is not the case and that the pages referred to in Williams’ chapter entitled “Structures of Feeling” seem to have very little to do with Lu Xun’s crucial vocational transition. Similarly, the extended quotations from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *What Is Literature?* on p. 42 may or may not be relevant to Hu Feng’s case, but the discussion of Hu’s situation that follows the Sartre quotations is too brief and non-specific to allow any useful conclusion either way. Such references to Western critical authority, sprinkled freely throughout the book as they are,

leave the unfortunate impression that they add up to little more than academic name-checking.

In respect of Hu's political convictions, it is surmised on p. 56 that ". . . starting in the mid-1940s, Hu became increasingly resistant to the 'orthodox' Marxism that originated in Mao's Yan'an caves." This is no doubt the case and is part of the conventional wisdom concerning Hu, but it also implies that prior to Mao's laying down the law at Yan'an there was a perception on the part of Hu (and perhaps on the part of Lu Xun as well) that the Party ideology was at least potentially open to shaping through their efforts. The rejection of the "Soviet formalism" of Wang Ming 王明 by Mao in the 1940s must also have seemed to leave space open to alternative and indigenous possibilities for Party policy in the future, as perhaps did the critical consciousness manifested in the writings of Ding Ling 丁玲 and Wang Shiwei 王實味 at Yan'an, for all that that consciousness was eventually suppressed by Mao (a possibility lent substance by the author's careful account of events at Yan'an in 1942 on pp. 78–82). We learn that as late as "November 1954, under the self-delusion that the CCP Central Committee had favorably received his '300,000-Character Report' . . ." (p. 224, n. 37), Hu still held out the hope of his ideas being able to carry the day. At this point in Hu's career, "delusion" is probably the appropriate word to characterize his belief, but the book never really entertains the possibility that he might plausibly have not been operating in this same key of delusion earlier on.

Furthermore, Hu seemed to have always been convinced that resistance to his ideas was personal and not part of some ineluctable ideology, a belief lent credence by his failure to be admitted to the Party upon his return from Japan. The author astutely points out: "he attributed the problems in the cultural arena to the sectarianism of a few Party representatives and blamed Zhou [Yang] for them." "*Their way of doing things does not represent the Party*" (p. 61, emphasis in original). On the next page, however, the author seems to close off the avenue that her evidence had just tentatively opened: "it [i.e., Hu's 'method of divide and rule'] constituted an essential origin of his tragedy, for it averted Hu's eyes from the fact that the Party members *were* the embodiment and the manifestation of the (state-) ideology" (p. 62, emphasis in original). It must be interjected here that the period under discussion is prior to the time when the CCP held state power, so the issue of "(state-) ideology" vs. "pre-state" ideology demands more treatment if the argument is to have any weight. But perhaps the final word on this issue was best phrased by Feng Xuefeng 馮雪峰, when he recalled that: "One could say that the Party, in general, led Lu Xun; but it is not true to say that the Party Committee of the Left-league led Lu Xun" (p. 205, n. 19). In other words, the "Party" here takes on an almost metaphysical nature, Feng's statement suggesting that any particular

concatenation of human agents cannot be infallible, but that the Party itself exists on a higher plane, theoretically subject to a variety of potential shapings. Hu and other voluntarists may have been naïve about the Party's ultimate thrall to the high-handedness enabled by Mao's personal grasp of power, but it seems a bit unfair to characterize this as mere "self-delusion" throughout the long series of disputations in which he engaged. It should also be noted, once again, how problematic it is that quotes as important to the narrative of Hu's career as the two cited above are relegated to the notes and not incorporated into and analysed in the body of the text.

The author goes into the issue of ideological authority in chapter five, beginning with the fundamental issue: "The crucial question is, who owned Chinese Marxism or who had the authority to interpret it?" This is followed by the assertion that "What was particularly dangerous to the vanguard Party members, as Kirk Denton pointed out, was not Hu's intellectualism qua intellectualism but that 'his ideas were framed in a Marxist theoretical discourse that threatened to co-opt their own appropriation and reconstruction of that discourse'" (p. 98). The words "appropriation" and "reconstruction" here are highly suggestive: they essentially open the door to the idea that the ideology of the CCP through its years of development was open to interpretation and adjustment, belying the notion that the ideology was predetermined to be the monolith it eventually became. The author herself offers testimony to the potential openness of Party policy when she affirms late in the book that:

. . . in actual history [the CCP] had never arrived at a consistently practiced ideological principle that could serve, independent of human will, as a standard of judgment. On the contrary, as shown by the Hu Incident and throughout the history of socialist China, the CCP's practice of cultural policy was characteristically inconsistent. (p. 134)

This seems completely correct, if at odds with the rhetoric of the book as a whole, but raises two questions: given this fluidity, can Hu's determination to advance his own ideas really be thought of as "self-delusion"? And, perhaps more fundamental (and even disturbing) is the question of whether Hu's determination to advance his ideas might not also be seen merely as that of one of a number of "human wills" struggling for power? If the latter is the case, the Party's wish to silence him would be alarmingly consistent with Hu's own practice. And it is hard to imagine Hu's motivation in composing his over-the-top paean to Mao in a poem dedicated to the Chairman (quoted on pp. 113–17) as anything other than a tacit recognition of the dominance of personal power in determining "the course of history."

The matter of Hu's relationship with Lu Xun is of great importance to his intellectual trajectory, something of which the author is well aware, but her

evaluations of it are often problematic. For instance, we are told early on that “Hu’s relationship with Lu Xun as a close associate and protégé became one of the earliest reasons for the CCP’s persecution of Hu, despite Mao’s call for ‘learning from the Lu Xun spirit’” (p. 44). Again, while this assertion seems quite plausible, the footnote in support only cites Mao’s “spirit” remarks, and not the substance of the assertion, yet another example of where support for a key authorial claim is not provided by the text cited in evidence for it, or, in fact, by anything at all, either here or later on in her book. Since we seem to be dealing in hypothesis here, might not the opposite be equally plausible? In other words, is it not possible that Hu’s high-profile survival into the mid-1950s can be at least partially accounted for by the exalted position of Hu’s patron in the Communist cultural canon? It seems at the very least an interesting issue, and one that cries out for further discussion.

At other points, the analysis of Lu Xun simply does not scan. For instance, we are told that:

Lu Xun from the beginning had a marked partiality for a situation in which artists and writers accepted party politics and partisan work as a part of their duties. It was, in a sense, this partiality that led to his reservation in giving the Left-league his entire consent. It was the same partiality that stopped him from being as enthusiastically [*sic*] as the Marxist writers of his rank were . . . in embracing institutions. (p. 53)

If “partiality” here means what the dictionary defines it as (“a special fondness, preference, or liking”), then this utterance is plainly contradictory. It does not follow logically that one can at the same time be partial to accepting party politics and partisan work as part of writerly duty and have fundamental reservations about giving consent to the institutions embodying that work. At the very least, this apparent paradox demands explanation. Finally, there is an assertion about Lu Xun that raises more problems than it solves: In summing up Hu’s attitude toward literature of social criticism, the author states that “it was part and parcel of the severe criticism by Lu Xun and the May Fourth Movement he led” (p. 154). In the cavalcade of influential activists taking leading roles in that pivotal movement, such as Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, Hu Shi 胡適, and the younger radicals at Peking University, Lu Xun, with his multiple hesitations, bent for self-questioning, and persistent unwillingness to put himself forward as a leader, surely must be assigned a subsidiary rather than a dominant role in the movement, at least in its early years. Again, perhaps, the author has been unduly influenced by the orthodox narrative of modern Chinese history sponsored by Party authority.

The question of Hu’s personal disposition toward what eventually befell him is of great interest in trying to piece together his early attitudes to the ways in which

the Party functioned. The author, unfortunately, does not probe very deeply into the complications of this. Nevertheless, we are given tantalizing glimpses of Hu's own attitudes: He is quoted, for instance, as saying in 1965—presumably when he was in captivity—that “My state of mind is as it has been for the last decade or so, I confide unshakably in Chairman Mao and the Party Central Committee's leadership” (p. 6). This alarmingly Orwellian statement from a prisoner of the state is evidently taken at face value by the author, as there is no attempt to determine whether or not coercion had anything to do it, and what that “anything” might have been. Similarly, in response to an analogous self-criticism in 1955, at the very beginning of Hu's travails, the author can only comment that “what little of Hu's true feelings that permeated through his experiences, criticism, private correspondences, and biographies presented a full picture of the psychology of a Marxist intellectual whose commitment was not in any way compromised” (pp. 19–20). This bland accounting of Hu's psychology hardly does justice to the enormity of the tribulations he experienced, begging the key question of just what Hu's “commitment” was, with the phrases “what little of Hu's true feelings” and “presented a full picture” standing in direct contradiction to one another. In her stand-offishness toward making personal assessments of Hu, the author makes no attempt to differentiate what might be Hu's actual beliefs from what is being forced upon him, however subtle the coercion might have been. It is possible Hu is being quite sincere here, but a more rigorous hermeneutics would be required to sift through the matter; at the very least, there should have been some recognition of the multiple questions such a document poses.

The attitudes toward literature by Hu Feng and his associates are surely of great importance in evaluating the critic's role. This is perhaps evinced most powerfully in a statement he made in 1967, arguably the time of greatest carceral pressure on intellectuals in PRC history: “Theories of art and literature are a grave issue. They should be under scrutiny through a free discussion and [are] irresolvable by mass repudiation” (p. 90; brackets in original). This utterance would thus seem to present itself as Hu's bottom line about literature all along, whatever views he had about its function in society, and more should have been made of it in the book. Instead we get the contradictory formulations of p. 137: “First . . . the CCP's attempt to establish, control,” produced in writers “an apprehension that called into question literature's use value in the processes of Chinese modernization and nation-building. Second, the constitution of this group of committed writers and intellectuals marked the beginning of a long-standing, interdependent tie between literature and politics.” To begin with, there is an implicit contradiction between points one and two: the commitment of writers to literature's social function makes apprehension about that function unlikely. The actual issue

concerned the type of literature the committed author was meant to produce, with the denial of function centred on “bourgeois” writers and their characteristic subject matter (i.e., people like themselves). The real complication arose from the fact that virtually all writers in the pre-1949 period were by definition “bourgeois,” and squaring the circle of generating “revolutionary” and mass-oriented literature from such a source was the crux of the matter.

For all their importance to Hu, the author can be extremely murky when discussing literary matters, as when she says:

These poems [published in the Hu-edited journal *July*] demonstrated that Chinese socialist realism added to ‘Western’ modernism as much as it remade the genre, overcoming or liberating the ‘limits of realism’ that Marston Anderson identified in Chinese revolutionary and postrevolutionary literature. (p. 130)

There are so many imponderable assumptions here that it is difficult to know where to begin assessing the statement. First, it is generally acknowledged that, whatever it may have been, “modernism” was the antithesis of socialist realism rather than being any possible supplement to it. If the author believes otherwise, she should have tried to make the case rather than just announcing it as the flat affirmation that the two combined “remade the genre” (for that matter, it is not clear which genre it was that was remade). And how this strange amalgam overcame or liberated the “limits of realism” is left to the imagination, especially since those limits are never described. Instead of a close reading of the poems then, which would have been the only way to convince us of the validity of her conclusions, the author characteristically engages in more ungrounded abstraction.

Finally, a technical point: The author has clearly carefully read and/or consulted much, if not all, of the voluminous writings Hu Feng produced over the years. The book’s bibliography, however, careful as it is in the citation of the work of other writers, does not itemize Hu Feng’s own writings, making it difficult to ascertain their precise dates. Given that Hu was engaged in numerous polemics keyed to specific periods and events, this presents a real source of uncertainty as to how Hu’s ideas may have changed over time or in response to specific incidents or the arguments of others. Listing each of Hu’s writings individually would doubtless have added pages and pages to the book, but careful scholarship really demands that it should have been done.

Overall, then, for all the important insights contained in the book, it must in the end be judged an inadequate account of the life and work of this pivotal figure. This is perhaps inevitable, as Hu Feng presents such a vast array of ideas and actions as to defy any single attempt to capture his various manifestations, but

this particular attempt of Ruth Hung is marred by too many errors of judgement and omission to get as close to that elusive goal as it might have done.

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***Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism.*** By April D. Hughes. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 181. \$68.00.

*Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* offers a tightly focused and concise study of how two Chinese emperors, Sui Emperor Wendi 隋文帝 (r. 581–604) and the female ruler, Wu Zhao 武曩 (r. 690–705), made deliberate use of some strands of Buddhist apocalyptic, messianic, and millenarian thought in legitimating their regimes. Although it has long been known that these two figures, perhaps the shrewdest operators in the world of medieval religion and politics, benefited by aligning themselves with some of these popular religious currents, the genealogy of these religio-political ideas has not been fully traced. We have seen the story only piecemeal. In her book, April Hughes carefully lays out the extant sources and the research on them to date. For the first time in the scholarship, *Worldly Saviors and Imperial Authority in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* presents a coherent chronological sequence of the key sources, symbols, and ideas. Hughes has given us an invaluable overview of the influence of Buddhist apocalyptic thought not only on the founders of dynasties, but also on popular uprisings in the medieval period (mostly focusing on the sixth to eighth centuries). Those in search of a clear, no-frill narrative of this significant trend in medieval Chinese statecraft will appreciate this book.

This study makes an original contribution to our understanding of how two founders of medieval Chinese dynasties were able to channel effectively the millenarian hopes and dreams of some of their subjects in uniquely challenging circumstances. Sui Wendi strove to unite a large and fractious empire that had been divided for hundreds of years prior to his rule. Wu Zhao needed legitimation for her Zhou dynasty and her unprecedented position as a female emperor. As they sought ideological justification for their worldly ambitions, some of their people were seeking to make real the utopias depicted in Chinese Buddhist texts. The