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Hu Mingyuan, Fou Lei: An Insistence on Truth. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2017. x, 251 pp. Illustrations, Bibliography, Index. US\$ 165 (HB). ISBN 978-90-04-34391-7

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work he had begun: One result was the Edict of Toleration of Christianity, issued by the Kangxi emperor in 1692.

Golvers provides a rich and useful academic edition with an abundant number of helpful annotations, all in all 2,537 notes, several indices of names and subjects, a Chinese–Latin glossary, and a selected bibliography.

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HU MINGYUAN, *Fou Lei: An Insistence on Truth*. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2017. x, 251 pp. Illustrations, Bibliography, Index. US\$ 165 (HB). ISBN 978-90-04-34391-7

Fou Lei 傅雷 (or Fu Lei in *pinyin*, 1908–1966) was an extraordinary cultural interlocutor: primarily known as a translator of French literature into Chinese, he was also an art and music critic, and a prolific writer on comparative cultural topics. Over fifty years since his passing, his translations of major works by Honoré de Balzac and Romain Rolland remain authoritative and inspiring. He was an early champion of the now widely appreciated painter Huang Binhong 黃賓虹. He also played a pivotal role in the artistic upbringing of his elder son, the eminent pianist Fou Ts'ong 傅聰. However, his career was somewhat elusive, partly because of its miscellaneous nature, and partly because it was split between Europe and China, and then tragically destroyed by political turmoil. Considerable efforts have been made in China to salvage his legacy, but comparable work on the European side has been wanting. Hu Mingyuan's intellectual biography of Fou Lei, covering both phases extensively, is therefore a welcoming contribution. It paints a vivid portrait of an idealist and a cosmopolitan whose spiritual journey coincided with, and served as a mirror for some of the most consequential events in the twentieth century, including the two World Wars, the Chinese Civil War, the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and especially the Cultural Revolution which led to Fou's suicide at the all too young age of fifty-eight.

Hu's book contains a substantial amount of previously unpublished archival materials (especially those related to the comparative literature scholar René Étiemble and the Jesuit theologian Jean Daniélou), painstakingly collected from multiple locations across Europe, and woven into a captivating narrative. The book also benefits from extensive field trips Hu undertook to trace Fou Lei's footsteps in Europe. She identifies a number of scenes either mentioned in Fou Lei's writings or depicted in paintings by his artist friends (see, for example, paintings and pictures of Saint-Gingolph matching each other, pp. 70–72), thus bringing Fou Lei's experiences right before our eyes. Based on these solid documentations and acute observations, her research clarifies a number of obscure aspects in Fou Lei's biography, including his early attitude towards Christianity, shown in letters to Daniélou, written in 1930 and 1931 respectively (pp. 32–33, 117). This is of crucial importance because it served as the basis for Fou Lei's own reflection on East–West cultural differences and affinities three decades later, in the context of a conversation with Fou Ts'ong about the contrasting religious temperaments of Johann Sebastian

Bach and Georg Friedrich Händel, two of the most iconic Baroque composers (see pp. 114–119). But here also lies the danger of cross-cultural comparison based on generalization: Fou Lei argues that “[t]he Chinese are largely moderate, peaceful, placid, simple and honest, more easily satisfied than the Westerners ... The Chinese ideal is to search for wisdom, not for faith ... they never took firmness of [faith] as the joy in life (which is precisely what happiness means to the Westerners)” (p. 118). Yet it was also the Chinese who, incited by blind faith, perpetrated the ugly political orgy called the Cultural Revolution. Some other twentieth-century Chinese thinkers such as Lin Yutang succumbed to the same allure of idealizing Confucian reasonableness and Daoist wit, only to be proven utterly mistaken.

Readers interested in the history of East–West cultural exchange would want to thank Hu Mingyuan for the preservation of the aforementioned firsthand sources, which would otherwise continue to languish in archives. Her work complements cross-cultural studies on a macro level by focusing on a unique but representative individual case, while not losing sight of broader theoretical concerns. It is fascinating to follow the spiritual growth of a modern Chinese scholar in such minute detail. Hu also deserves to be lauded for adopting an interdisciplinary approach to Fou Lei’s legacy, treating it as a significant episode in intellectual history rather than confining it to specialized fields such as translation studies which, as important as it is, would not fully capture his cultural vision in its richness and complexity.

On the other hand, I wish I could find the same kind of vivid narrative in Hu’s chronicle of the post-Europe phase of Fou Lei’s life. In contrast, the second half of the book is disproportionately filled with too many quotations (some of them rather lengthy) from Fou Lei and others, followed by the author’s own reflections. Although these quotations reveal a great deal about Fou Lei’s inner world, many significant “external” events are equally worthy of our attention. The balance between the two components in the term “intellectual biography” could have been better maintained.

But there is at least one advantage in this way of writing, especially in Fou Lei’s case. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, ideological debates loomed large in everyone’s life, regardless of whether he or she wanted them. Fou Lei’s attitude towards the new regime went through several stages: initially doubtful, resilient, and at best indifferent (being well aware of what was happening in the Soviet Union), he was soon convinced by its agenda, and wholeheartedly embraced it with childlike sincerity and selfless commitment, only to find himself being cheated and then ruthlessly persecuted by the regime. As a result, his family suffered terribly. When, at the onset of the Cultural Revolution, he and his wife Zhu Meifu 朱梅馥 decided to take their lives, he seemed to have entered a state of philosophical detachment. His life after 1949 can thus be narrated according to how he positioned himself amidst the political history of the People’s Republic, and comparisons with fellow intellectuals such as Ba Jin 巴金, Lao She 老舍, Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書, and Shen Congwen 沈從文 would be illuminating. This is one way to tell the story. And yet all too often it becomes *the* way to tell the story, to the extent that it is difficult to approach this period of Chinese cultural history without adopting a political framework. In this sense, I appreciate Hu’s decision to “navigate in what I perceive to be Fou Lei’s mental space ... I make my focus the internal life of an intellectual against external conditions” (p. 1). In other words, the backbone of the narrative remains Fou Lei’s own spiritual journey. From his point of view, the post-1949 political events were external incidents that distracted and interrupted

this journey. Indeed, we should not allow them to entirely structure and define Fou Lei's life. He deserved something better.

Fou Lei actually managed to make great achievements in the face of the dark, chaotic, and often meaningless situations: he pressed forward with his monumental translation projects, including Hippolyte Taine's *Philosophie de l'art* and numerous novels by Balzac, while suffering the humiliation of being labeled a "rightist" and many practical difficulties that came with it. As a stubbornly principled and intensely persistent person, he remained loyal to his own moral and intellectual standards, which he valued above his life. Despite the inhuman hardship, he could have endured the Cultural Revolution and survived, as some others did. But he chose the opposite, because for him life, truth, and moral principles were not separable. This seems to be how we should interpret the book's awkward title, "An Insistence on Truth." As a keyword, "truth" features at the very end of the chronicle in a remark made by Fou Lei's friend Étienne, who considered himself *un lettré* "in the Confucian sense," namely "someone who would give his life to tell the truth" (p. 221). Étienne seemed to be referring to a saying by Confucius: "If I should hear the Way in the morning, I would feel all right to die in the evening" (Annping Chin, trans., *The Analects*, New York 2014, p. 47). This powerful statement, linking the adherence to a moral-philosophical value directly to life itself, would be an apt summary of Fou Lei's death. But "truth" is not the same as "the Way" or "Dao." So what was the "truth" that he insisted upon at the expense of his life? And what happens when "the Way," or "Dao," is translated into "truth"?

The book provides no answer to these questions, but they reach directly to the heart of Fou Lei's lifelong effort to foster East–West dialogue. Does the Confucian "Way" amount to the same idea as the Western "truth"? With its strongly moral inflection – and Fou Lei likely would not object to adding an aesthetic dimension to it – is the Confucian "Way" perhaps not so compatible with "veritas"? Again, Fou Lei would probably consider them as representative of the difference between Chinese and Western cultures, but ultimately they might as well be more corroborative than anti-thetical, as he tried to demonstrate through his own actions. It might be true that "the question of the entwined identities of a Confucian literatus and a Foucauldian *lettré*" (p. 223), as Hu opines, is not the most pressing one. But it is an enduring one, if "the Way" and "truth" are what define the two identities respectively.

As with most cultural comparisons based on generalizations, Fou Lei's quest for East–West dialogue might not be a complete success, but his contribution is still formidable: he demonstrated both the unexpected affinity and the unresolvable contradiction between the two cultures. And he did so not only through his works: being a nationalist and a cosmopolitan at the same time, and being both an unyielding adherer to truth and a loyal guardian of moral principles, he was himself the embodiment of the affinity and the contradiction. Let me conclude by quoting a motto from a religion Fou Lei did not feel strongly attracted to. Instead of "truth," the following constellation seems to better represent Fou Lei's cultural vision, as shown by both his utterances and actions: "via, et veritas, et vita."

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