



Project
MUSE[®]
Scholarly journals online

Carpenter's *America's Coming War with China: A Collision Course over Taiwan* (2006) or this reviewer's *Playing with Fire: The Looming War with China over Taiwan* (2006). These books treat the conflict as a diplomatic challenge (Clough), focus on the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1996 (Zhao), or look at the "Taiwan issue" as a serious problem for the United States and a possible cause of war (Carpenter and Copper).

If China Attacks Taiwan examines mainly the capabilities of the players, especially China, and draws scenarios. It is more narrowly focused on the military aspects of the Taiwan-China relationship. It suffers to some degree, as nearly all edited books do, from the fact the contributors take different approaches and sometimes arrive at different, even conflicting, conclusions. This is not, however, too serious, and, on the other hand, the reader has the advantage of more than one point of view. The editor is to be commended for good organization and the contributors for good scholarship, providing sources, and good writing. This book is recommended to China/Taiwan scholars and others who want to assess in depth the heart of what makes the Taiwan Strait the number-one flashpoint in the world.

John F. Copper

John F. Copper is the Stanley J. Buckman Professor of International Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. He is the author of more than twenty books on China and Taiwan. His latest book is Playing with Fire: The Looming War with China over Taiwan (Praeger, 2006).



Jing Tsu. *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895–1937*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005. xii, 329 pp. Hardcover \$55.00, ISBN 0–8047–5176–5.

To claim that modern Chinese identity is built on failure is provocative; to further claim that failure is the primary propelling energy that has brought modernity to China is even more so. But this is exactly what Jing Tsu argues in her book, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895–1937*. With this stimulating claim, the author turns around the established understanding of the late Qing and the early Republican era from a period of aspiring for advancement to a time that relishes and even thrives on a collective sense of failure. The author argues that the sense of humiliation and defeat, summed up in the concept of failure, can generate harsh self-criticism and insatiable desire for improvement in the individual as well as the entire society and nation. The feeling

of failure thus becomes a productive kind of energy that pushes for endless betterment. This presumably negative emotional state that permeated the late Qing and early Republican era also dominated the intellectual and literary thrust of the time.

The period from 1895, the year China was defeated in the first Sino-Japanese War and also lost control over Manchuria, to 1937, when the full-scale war of resistance against Japan began, is also a period of China's intense nation building. Framed within this critical period in modern Chinese history, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature* examines the psychological roots of Chinese nationalism and argues that it was born of two seemingly conflicting but actually indistinguishable conditions (p. 2). Jing Tsu challenges the ways in which sociologists and historians have traditionally investigated the workings of nationalism and proposes to situate such inquiries in specific cultural contexts "layered with historical memories and antagonisms that fuel the emotional resolve of the 'nation'" (p. 3). Instead of supporting that nationalism is a state-propagated ideology, Tsu argues that it in fact is more likely to be generated from collective experiences of national injury—case in point: early modern China. Chinese nationalism is built precisely upon the people's collective feeling of inferiority and self-doubt about its race and its civilization as a whole. Over the period from the late Qing to the early Republican years, Chinese people witnessed the steady decline of this once mighty civilization by invading foreign powers. Fighting for national survival has thus become the basis for modern China's national, racial, and cultural identity. The passionate call for and enthusiastic envisioning of a strong China and, simultaneously, the agonizing self-loathing of and torment over one's own weak and backward nation can be found in both serious and popular literature during this period. Such a phenomenon, according to Jing Tsu, is not surprising at all since these positions reflect the two sides of the same (psychological) coin.

With this promising premise, Tsu examines in the following chapters issues such as (the yellow) race, eugenics and the conception of a new nation, the "New Woman" as an eugenic project, the masochistic impulse inherent in nation building, and *kumeng*—translated as "suffering," "agony," "mental anguish," or "depression" (p. 196)—as an emotional and cultural manifestation of the deep-seated sense of failure. Tsu discusses several lesser-known intellectual and literary texts that bear significant evidence of how thinkers and writers at that time worked hard to rationalize the unbearable reality of China's diminishing position in the face of colonial powers. Many such intellectual manipulations were achieved by an inward turn to examining Chinese racial characteristics and cultural essence. Jing Tsu argues that the reason such a self-reflective approach works is that, once these intellectuals succeeded in establishing China's weakness as having resulted not from foreign invasions but from internal racial and cultural degeneration, cures were therefore possible. The logical recourse, from this point on, would be to reinvent Chinese

culture and to rejuvenate the Chinese race by instigating reforms ranging from as grand as building a new nation-society to as minute as personal hygiene.

The less familiar texts Jing Tsu discusses include late Qing reformer Tang Caichang's *Geguo zhonglei kao* (An investigation into the races of various nations); Liang Qichao's "On China's Imminent Rise" (*Lun Zhonggu zhi jiang qiang*); Lin Shu's translation of *Ethnology* (*Minzhong*); China's first eugenicist Pan Guangdan's various works such as "Eugenics in China: A Preliminary Survey of the Background," "The Racial Significance of the War of Resistance," and *National Characteristics and Racial Hygiene*; and sexologist Zhang Jingsheng's *Sexual Histories*. All of these materials are fascinating, and, by bringing our attention to them, the author certainly opens up new cultural and intellectual dimensions to our understanding of this unique period in modern Chinese history. The racial theories proposed by these Chinese scholars reflect most of all their anxiety in seeing their civilization in serious crisis. It is ingenious that these intellectuals could circumvent the gravity of the situation and find possibilities for redemption by manipulating Western racial theories (such as Darwinism) to explain China's weakness as a matter of a millennia-old race, but at the same time this very factor also proves the inherent superiority of the yellow race—precisely because it could survive such a long time, it will continue to survive. Once this assertion is established, proposals of renewal and change ensue. Jing Tsu's analyses here are certainly poignant and inspiring. With her findings, Tsu has established *how* failure was the dominant mindset of many intellectuals and writers, but she still does not quite answer the question of *why* the "failure" mentality was so pervasive—did it just "happen" that way? Is it culturally specific (hence a "Chinese" condition) or a universal psychological reaction to humiliation and defeat?

Other better-known materials included in Tsu's studies are works by Ding Ling, Yu Dafu, and Xiao Hong, among others. Coming from her unique perspective of the "failure" concept, Tsu provides fresh reading to some of the most-analyzed May Fourth fictional works such as "Miss Sophie's Diary" and Yu Dafu's "Sinking" and two others of closely related themes, "Endless Night" and "The Past." An important concept that Tsu applies to her readings of these literary texts is the interplay between two repulsions: sadism and masochism. Ding Ling's self-tormenting Sophie and Yu Dafu's sexually perverted male protagonists are examples of how uncertainty, frustration, and ultimately a sense of failure eventually come to help define both the female and the male individual's sense of injured/fractured self-identity. This kind of self-identity built on failure thus is able to find its broadened version in their suffering nation. Tsu's analysis of Xiao Hong's semi-autobiographical sketches of her life with Xiao Jun in Harbin, *Market Street* (*Shanshi jie*), also yields new insights to this well-studied woman writer and her feminist vein. Tsu argues that female suffering, a pervasive theme in many of Xiao Hong's works, is the way in which the woman sustains her self-awareness.

Without pain, there is no sense of the self. It is in this way that Xiao Hong succeeds in establishing a kind of female identity that does not follow the guidelines under the “New Woman” project. While it is easy to understand the connection between masculinity and masochism, as in Yu Dafu’s case, the relationship between femininity and sadism remains unclear to this reader, as in Ding Ling’s and Xiao Hong’s cases. Tsu seems convinced that the female struggle in both Ding Ling’s and Xiao Hong’s stories is self-perpetuated and is largely against the female self. But what can Tsu say about male suppression—the most usual suspect in any women’s fight for identity? There seems to be an obvious link missing in the author’s otherwise brilliant analysis.

Failure, Nationalism, and Literature provides plentiful inspirational materials and arguments to a much-studied historical period. The failure mentality Jing Tsu illustrates in her book is a very fascinating psychology indeed, especially when we see how it can be used to push an entire society to accomplish lofty goals at any cost; the example that comes to mind is Mao’s Great Leap Forward. The sense of failure continues to be quite alive today in the collective Chinese mentality, manifestations of which can be found in the Nobel Prize complex, a subject that has been widely discussed since Gao Xingjian won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000, and the 2008 Beijing Olympics, an occasion through which the Chinese government is determined to show the world that China is strong *again*. Jing Tsu’s book certainly gives us much to ponder.

Lingchei Letty Chen

Lingchei Letty Chen is an associate professor of modern Chinese literature at Washington University in St. Louis specializing in cultural identity politics and cross-cultural studies.