

Wixted, John Timothy, Review-article on James J.Y. Liu,
Chinese Theories of Literature (Chicago: University
of Chicago Press, 1975), in *Monumenta Serica* 33
(1977-78), pp. 466-471. [James J.Y. Liu = Liu Ruoyu
劉若愚]

James J. Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature*. Notes, bibliography, glossary-index. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975. x, 197 pp. \$15.00.

Chinese literary theory is a notoriously difficult field of study. In a book that is short, concise, and generally well written, Professor Liu has boldly addressed himself to many of its central problems.

Three purposes are stated by the author in writing the book. "The first and ultimate one is to contribute to an eventual universal theory of literature" by presenting theories of literature derived from the Chinese tradition. The "second and more immediate purpose is to elucidate Chinese theories of literature for students of Chinese literature and criticism." The "third purpose is to pave the way for a more adequate synthesis than yet exists of Chinese and Western critical views so as to provide a sound basis for the practical criticism of Chinese literature."

The author is most successful with his second and immediate goal. His pursuit of the first actually interferes with the successful carrying out of the second. And the third is largely undermined because the entire relationship between literary theory and criticism in China has been purposely left out of this study.

Liu has determined that he will treat only "theories of literature," which are defined as being those concerned with "the basic nature and functions of literature" at the ontological level, and not treat of "literary theories," which deal with "aspects of literature, such as form, genre, style, and technique" at the phenomenological or methodological level. As regards theories of literature, he delimits six classes which are said to have been discovered inductively from Chinese theoretical texts themselves: the metaphysical, deterministic, expressive, technical, aesthetic, and pragmatic.

It is here that the boldness of the author is in evidence. By treating Chinese literary theory topically rather than chronologically, he has aligned authors of different periods in a way that highlights certain class similarities. These he expounds, then compares and contrasts with relevant Western theories of literature. Naturally this is done at the cost of clear elucidation of the historical development of the critical tradition. But such studies have already been made by Chinese scholars. And the approach can certainly be justified by the many perceptive and lucid distinctions that the author is able to bring to bear.

The greatest drawback related to the method is that many critics must be treated under two, three, or more categories. Their work gets cut into segments that are distributed throughout the work, often, like Humpty Dumpty, never to be put back together again. Liu's treatment of the *Major Preface*, of Lu Chi, and of Liu Hsieh all suffer because of this. (Often the only unifying vehicle for the book is its meticulously compiled Glossary-Index.) I think this fragmentation is a fault of the author and the somewhat mechanical application of his six categories

rather than a fault of the approach. Liu seems to have difficulty conceptualizing, or at least communicating, the organic relationship that obtains between parts and wholes. One need only look at Donald Gibbs' thesis on the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* to see that an analytical approach to literary theory can avoid this pitfall. It is ironic that although Liu states that "one should not apply, wholesale, to Chinese literature critical standards derived solely from Western literature" (p. 5), he himself is curiously anachronistic in finding "inconsistencies" or "glaring *non sequiturs*" in critics whose theories prove recalcitrant to his six categories. Somewhat less refractory ones become "syncretic" or "eclectic."

In devising his six categories, Liu is consciously departing from the four-fold orientation (universe/mimetic, audience/pragmatic, artist/expressive, and work/objective) of H. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, while revising an earlier formulation of his own in *The Art of Chinese Poetry*. I am not sure the result is an improvement. Coupled with discussion of the categories, however, is Liu's reformulation of Abrams' four coordinates into a four-phase circle operating in two directions: Phase 1 deals with the relationship between universe and writer, Phase 2 the relation between writer and work, Phase 3 that between work and reader, and Phase 4 that between universe and reader. This is a brilliant stroke on the part of Professor Liu, one which helps greatly in conceptualizing the dynamics of the literary process. References to these four phases (which should have been clearly identified as such on the chart on p. 10) repeatedly clarify discussion in the book.

(I might elaborate that a horizontal line added to this diagram between writer and reader would mark the social axis of literature, while a vertical one between work and universe would mark the semantic axis. One might then assign "intention" to the writer, "reference" to the work, and "interpretation" to the reader. Interpretation occurs when the reader apprehends as "referring" a relation among these four elements; it is interpretation which confers reference and realizes intention.)

Professor Liu's central concern is with the "metaphysical" category, which is defined as encompassing theories based on the concept that literature is a manifestation of the underlying principle of the universe. Devoting 47 of his 140 pages of text to this section, the author here makes his most interesting comparisons and distinctions between and among Chinese and Western theories. Moreover, it is the only chapter that he develops fully. Comparisons with Western theory at the end of later chapters become increasingly skimpy, ultimately petering out with a single-sentence comparison at the end of the chapter on pragmatic theories.

The author's interests clearly lie with these broadly defined metaphysical theories, because it is from these that "distinctively Chinese contributions to an eventual universal theory of literature are most likely to be derived" (p. 16). In trying to satisfy the first, idealized goal of his book, the author gives disproportionate emphasis to these theories, which in turn distorts the contribution the work makes to his second, more practical aim of elucidating for students of literature the

Chinese critical tradition. For the latter purpose, it would have been proper to give greater stress to pragmatic theories. Certainly they should not have been left to the last of the book. As Liu himself notes, pragmatic theories "have been the most influential ones in traditional Chinese criticism" (p. 107); "from the time Confucianism was established as the orthodox ideology of China in the second century B.C. down to the early twelfth century, the pragmatic concept of literature remained practically sacrosanct" (p. 111).

There are problems with the assignment of critics to the metaphysical category itself. The argument that "writers of the T'ang and later periods continued to mention the analogy between the *wen* of Heaven and the *wen* of man, but they generally used it to provide a cosmological basis for their pragmatic doctrine [(and) not to justify the exaltation of literature, as did Liu Hsieh and the Hsiao brothers]" (p. 29) can in fact be used to say that Liu Hsieh himself used metaphysical concepts to provide a cosmological basis for his expressive, aesthetic, pragmatic, and technical views. Indeed, is that not precisely what he was doing? The author argues that this is what Po Chü-yi did for pragmatic ends (p. 29); and he makes adjustments concerning the metaphysical elements found in Yeh Hsieh's theories (p. 85), as well as for ones perceived in a passage by Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju (p. 101). One might ask, what of the metaphysical elements in Chung Hung's prefaces to the *Shih-p'in*; do they not help provide a justification for the much more mundane task of classifying poets?

Liu opens his book by finding it "generally agreed" that the study of literature may be divided into two branches; literary history and literary criticism. This dichotomy is distinguished from the three-part division of the field (into literary history, literary theory, and practical criticism) which "has not been universally adopted." (Since each set of distinctions has its adherents, it is debatable which is more generally agreed upon.) After dividing the study of literature into these two branches and discussing them briefly, Liu bafflingly proceeds to introduce an entirely new major category, "study of criticism," the latter being made coordinate with "study of literature." Absolutely nothing is said by way of explanation about this larger distinction he is making between study of literature and study of criticism (even though the former has already been made equivalent to a tripartite division of the entire field of literature). These two groupings are simply produced in the form of a chart (pp. 1-2). As Liu nowhere takes the trouble to define or explain most of the divisions and sub-divisions made under the two major categories in the table, they remain virtually meaningless. One can get an idea of how poorly conceived the scheme is by noting the distinction he makes between "theoretical criticism" and "theoretical criticism of criticism," each being made a sub-division under a different major category. Such a formulation is not acceptable, for surely the conception a critic has of the realities he is dealing with will affect the way he assesses theories and methods for dealing with those realities.

Weak as Liu's attempt is at outlining a theoretical framework for literary study, it does comparatively little damage to the body of the book, as it is mostly irrelevant to it. Where real harm is done is in his failure to discuss (even in passing)

the relationship between literary history, theory, and criticism. Instead, theories of literature are treated *in vacuo*. The chapter on "Technical Theories" suffers in particular as a result. Since theory is necessarily closely bound up with history and criticism in the important questions of literary "imitation" and "method," these perform end up being treated inadequately.

One positive feature of the book is that many difficult critical passages are translated into quite good English. Especially welcome are the excerpts from many texts made available in translation for the first time. Further, Liu corrects or revises many passages from among his own earlier published work (and has the courage to note openly that he is doing so). There are of course places where one might disagree with a translation or wish to modify the rendering of a specific term (like *tang-hang* in the Yen Yü passage on p. 38). A certain leeway in such cases, however, must be allowed, as much critical terminology is open to varying interpretation.

Yet one does wish that Liu had been more consistent in citing other available translations. In this respect he is sometimes helpful, but all too often he is not. This is symptomatic of his treatment of problems in the footnotes, some being accorded fuller scholarly reference, many getting more perfunctory treatment.

The author disclaims any desire that the bibliography be complete for the history of Chinese literary criticism: "to list everything that has been written on the subject, good, bad, or indifferent, would be both impractical and pointless" (p. 169). Nonetheless, it is upsetting to see important works and articles omitted.

Since this work will doubtless attract a readership largely unacquainted either with the Chinese language or with any knowledge of what bibliographical tools to use to pursue study in the field, most readers will have to rely solely on this work as their *vade mecum*. For this reason it is most disquieting that many outstanding articles in Western languages are not cited. James Hightower's lucid chapter, "Literary Criticism through the Six Dynasties" (in *Topics in Chinese Literature*, rev. ed. 1962), as well as his article, "The *Wen hsüan* and Genre Theory" (*HJAS* 20 [1957], 512-533; rpt. in J.L. Bishop, ed., *Studies in Chinese Literature*, 1965), are not mentioned. Ronald Miao's very useful "Literary Criticism at the End of the Eastern Han" (*Literature East & West* 16 [1972], 1013-1034) may have appeared somewhat late for inclusion; but there is no excuse for having omitted Burton Watson's excellent "Literary Theory in the Eastern Han," which appeared in the Yoshikawa Kōjirō *Festschrift* (*Studies in Chinese Literature*. Tokyo, 1968). Hellmut Wilhelm's article on Chung Hung's *Shih-p'in* (in *Wen-lin*, Chow Tse-tsung, ed., 1968) is cited; but E. Bruce Brooks' perceptive and provocative study of the work, which appears in the same volume, is not mentioned. Similarly, although Donald Holzman's study, "Confucius and Ancient Chinese Literary Criticism," is referred to, David Pollard's "*Ch'i* in Chinese Literary Theory" is nowhere mentioned (even though it would be potentially a more useful citation for most readers than the Hsü Fu-kuan work which properly is cited with frequency); both were papers from the same conference (recently published in *Chinese Approaches to*

Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, Adele Rickett, ed., 1978). Discussion of Yen Yü would have profited from reference to P. Demiéville's important review of G. Debon's translation of the *Ts'ang-lang shih-hua* (*T'oung Pao* 49 [1962], 463-471). The author is apparently unaware of the unsigned review by Achilles Fang of Vincent Shih's translation of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (*Times Literary Supplement*, Dec. 4, 1959); it offers perhaps the most cogent interpretation of the troublesome title to that work. Excellent studies by Donald Gibbs and Maureen Robertson, on the term *feng* in Chinese criticism and on Ssu-k'ung T'u's 24 modes, both published in the Hsiao Kung-ch'üan *Festschrift* (*Transition and Permanence*, D. Buxbaum and F. Mote, eds., Hong Kong, 1972), probably appeared too late for inclusion. Yet, while Liu cites unpublished doctoral theses in the field by Richard Lynn and Donald Gibbs, he is content to end one footnote by saying, "There are also several unpublished dissertations on Wang Kuo-wei" (p. 153). Why not provide fuller information for those who might be interested, especially in view of the monumental nature of Adele Rickett's complete, annotated translation of that author's *Jen-chien tz'u-hua* (Univ. of Penn. Ph.D. thesis, 1967; soon to be published)? Similarly, Huang Chieh's *Shih-hsüeh*, an excerpt of which Liu renders, has been translated in full by Elizabeth Huff (Radcliffe College Ph.D. thesis, 1947). There is the mine of material in Wong Siu-kit's study of the term *ch'ing* in Chinese literary criticism (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1969). Also, why is there no mention of Susan Bush's excellent study (*The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 1971), which includes discussion of the important critic Su Shih?

There are some surprising omissions among Liu's citations to studies written in Chinese on the field. It is amazing to find no reference either to Chu Tung-jun's outline history of Chinese literary criticism (Chungking, 1944) or to any of that scholar's numerous articles on a wide range of critical subjects. In fact, Liu makes the puzzling statement that "there exist (in Chinese and Japanese) a dozen or so general histories of Chinese literary criticism" (p. 4). I cannot come up with a dozen different volumes—to say nothing of separate histories—even by counting separately both the three different editions of Kuo Shao-yü's work and the three volumes in Lo Ken-tse's study, together with the histories Liu nowhere mentions and is apparently unaware of (the Chu Tung-jun work mentioned above; the survey history by Huang Hai-hsin [Kwangchow, 1962], and the pioneering work by Suzuki Torao [Tokyo, 1927; translated into Chinese by Sun Liang-kung, Shanghai, 1929]), as well as the two Aoki Masaru studies which are cited. To list relevant scholarly studies in Chinese that he might have noted in conjunction with many of his discussions would be tedious and somewhat unfair; for, notwithstanding what I have already said, the author's annotation of Chinese sources and scholarship is usually adequate and sometimes quite good.

As far as Japanese scholarship is concerned, however, the author follows his customary practice, ignoring it altogether (except for material available in Chinese or English translation: the Aoki histories and a Yoshikawa Kōjirō article on Chinese poetics). Needless to say, there are Japanese studies which might have been consulted with profit and indicated in the notes: for example, Funatsu [Funazu]

Tomihiko's study of the sources of the *Ts'ang-lang shih-hua* (*Tōyō bungaku kenkyū* 7 [1959], 34–51), as well as that scholar's study of Li Chih's literary criticism (*Ibid.* 19 [1971], 1–21). In discussing the famous *Analects* passage (translated on p. 109) which enumerates the reasons why one should study the *Book of Poetry*, Liu cites numerous Chinese commentaries and English translations in the notes; Yoshikawa Kōjirō's important study of that work (*Yoshikawa Kōjirō zenshū*, vol. 4, 564–567) might have also been consulted and noted. This is to say nothing of translations into Japanese of Chinese critical works (like Kōzen Hiroshi's of the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* [Tokyo 1968]), which implicitly form useful commentaries on these works. Further, even without consulting the studies themselves, the author might have used to advantage (and referred to the attention of the reader) English- and French-language abstracts of Japanese scholarly studies published in volumes of the *Revue bibliographique de sinologie* appearing by 1970: on the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* (I:331; II:456; IV:651; IV:652; VI:461), on the *Ts'ang-lang shih-hua* (V:611; VI:481), and on numerous other critical topics (II:457; II:477; II:478; IV:653; V:601; V:637; VIII:575; VIII:630).

In a word, one wishes that Professor Liu had shown greater care and thoroughness in researching his subject matter and in introducing it. It is presumably out of such solicitousness for the reader that the author is so punctilious in referring to potentially relevant passages in his own earlier writings.

One sees in *Chinese Theories of Literature* an acute and perceptive mind undertaking a pioneering work. Many comparisons and distinctions which the author makes are particularly apt and penetrating. One cannot but learn a great deal from reading this work. Yet many suggestive avenues are but sketchily treated or inadequately developed. In many respects, this remains a book two-thirds done.

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