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***The Poet Zheng Zhen (1806–1864) and the Rise of Chinese Modernity*, By J.D. SCHMIDT. Leiden: Brill, 2013. Pp. xxviii+720.**

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In this hefty tome J.D. Schmidt has given us yet another of his comprehensive studies of major Chinese poets. This time the subject is Zheng Zhen 鄭珍 (1806–1864), but previously Schmidt has dedicated monographs to Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126–1193), Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127–1206), Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) and Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905). As impressive as Schmidt's earlier studies were, this may be his most ambitious book yet, recasting a poet who has often been omitted entirely from literary histories as one of China's greatest writers. Schmidt presents Zheng Zhen's life and poetry with such authority and detail that anyone interested in Chinese literature must admit the weight of his evidence, in spite of a few quibbles.

For the publication of this book we owe our gratitude to Brill, which has done so much to sustain Western Sinology in recent years. In the preface (p. xviii), Schmidt alludes to some challenges he encountered in getting the work published. This kind of "life and times of a major Chinese poet," the genre employed with such success by Arthur Waley, seems to have difficulty attracting readers today. Yet Schmidt has almost single-handedly revived the form, bringing to life Zheng Zhen as a historical person while also devoting ample space to translation and interpretation of his poems. Though it is wonderful that Brill has been able to publish such a detailed study, one only regrets that the results of his labors are not also available in a more affordable edition. If only some publisher would recognize again the opportunity that Twayne took advantage of in the 1970s and early 80s, with its convenient series of Chinese "world authors."

The contents of *The Poet Zheng Zhen* are exceedingly rich, and this review will not attempt to cover them in detail. The organization of the book follows that of Schmidt's previous study of Huang Zunxian, a biographical study followed by a generous selection of the poetry itself, in smooth and readable English translations. Zheng Zhen was a native of Guizhou province who spent most of his life there, and Schmidt gives ample attention to his social environment, even providing clear maps and a number of paintings that help to provide a vivid sense of his local context. The book opens with two chapters presenting in remarkable detail Zheng's education and frustrating career. Here I would echo the blurb by Jonathan Chaves on the back cover of the book: "In fact, there is no more complete study of any Chinese poet from any period . . ." Using both Zheng's own writings and huge variety of contemporary sources, Schmidt is able to detail both the key events of Zheng's life and reconstruct his interior psychological states as well. Zheng's impressions and reactions throughout the Opium War and Taiping Rebellion are of particular historical interest.

The one area where Schmidt's treatment of Zheng Zhen lapses in scholarly rigor is when he attempts to paint Zheng Zhen as a representative of a larger cultural transformation, namely that of Chinese modernity. This is the burden of the third chapter, entitled "The Bright and Dark Sides of Zheng Zhen's Mind." Here Schmidt gives his most extended treatment of the unlikely proposition stated in the introduction and also indicated in the book's title, Zheng Zhen as an early exemplar of Chinese "modernity." Schmidt himself is too honest a scholar to conceal the counterevidence from the reader, and gives a balanced portrayal of Zheng's work that belies the claim of modernity. It is telling, for instance, that chapter three on Zheng Zhen's "positive and negative modernities" is followed by chapter four on "Zheng Zhen and the Song School's Theory of Literature," an informative and lucid survey of how Qing dynasty poets developed models from the Song. Over and over again Schmidt identifies some aspect of Zheng's work as modern, but then goes on in the next sentence to identify precedents in an earlier dynasty.

Schmidt makes much of the difficulty of defining "modernity," pointing out that different writers attribute it to entirely different areas. He specifically