

RICHARD TERRILL

ON CONTEMPORARY CHINESE POETRY

The Red Azalea: Chinese Poetry since the Cultural Revolution.

Edited by Edward Morin, translated by Fang Dai, Dennis Ding, and Edward Morin. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990. Pp 256. \$35.00 (hb); \$14.95 (pb).

A Splintered Mirror: Chinese Poetry from the Democracy

Movement. Translated by Donald Finkel, additional translations by Carolyn Kizer. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1991. Pp 128. \$25.00 (hb); \$10.95 (pb).

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China in the 1960s and 70s was remarkably successful. While it scored only a mixed and temporary success in changing Chinese social institutions and beliefs, it was more thorough in eradicating Chinese “culture” in the other sense of the word, the outward manifestations of traditional art, literature, architecture, and so on.

Even before the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the production of post-liberation Chinese writers and artists was uneven. In the second of his popular volumes of translation of traditional Chinese poetry, released in 1970, Kenneth Rexroth left out “Communist Chinese literature,” calling it “a different subject again” from even earlier twentieth-century Chinese literature. “Translations into English now being issued in Peking are uniformly extremely poor. The communist government should hire a new editor for their English language publications.”¹ While it could be true that official Chinese translators lacked skill, it seems more likely that the problems foreign readers encountered with post-1949 poetry were due to the material with which those translators had to work. Poets produced mostly “long lives” and social real-