

analysis. The study prizes the carefully documented anecdote, but it is sometimes hard to see how each gem of scholarship adds up to a larger interpretation. Evidential research historically has tended to value textual sources above all other records. One wonders whether some of Ye's arguments about the centrality of drama to Qing court life and politics might have been sharpened by attention to visual and architectural sources at the palace: the great quantity of court painting albums of opera characters, for instance; or the many stages—some intimate, some multi-storeyed—scattered throughout the imperial residences. The point here is not that she should have tried to cover even more in this study, but rather that by embracing a fuller imagining of the archive she might have relinquished some topical breadth for greater analytical focus. Perhaps her work on court opera would have moved in this direction had she been given a longer lease on life.

In sum, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas* has done a great service by updating and synthesizing the vast Chinese-language literature on Qing court drama and bringing it into the English-language scholarly conversation. It will be up to the rest of us in the field to build upon the solid foundation that Ye Xiaoqing has bequeathed to us.

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Home and the World: Editing the “Glorious Ming” in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. By Yuming He. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 82. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013. Pp. xiv + 343. \$39.95/£29.95.

The great increase in late-Ming publishing may enchant the ever-widening circle of historians of Chinese publishing, but the Qing compilers of the various *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete library of the four treasures) catalogues were not very well disposed towards books published during the Ming period. They criticized these worthless books as *baifan* 稗販 (“hucksterish”), and deplored them for their sloppy editing and failure to properly cite resources, their “practice to plunder and steal, to delete and exaggerate at whim” (p. 2). To our benefit, Yuming He¹ in this insightful

¹ In this review I will often use Yuming He's full name, to avoid any misconstruction of her name as the pronoun “he.”

and wide-ranging monograph has decided to rescue these “worthless” books from the resulting neglect, not necessarily through re-establishing them as “worthy” after all, but through investigating them for what they can tell us about late-Ming readers and society. The books she investigates, joke books, drinking games compendia, drama miscellanies, popular encyclopaedias, and the like, advertised themselves as “*shishang* 時尚” or “*xinxing* 新興” in fashion, and therefore should be able to tell us something about those fashions, and the social groups in which they were fashionable. It may be that they constitute “‘pulp scholarship’ that is a protean hybrid of classical texts and traditional poetry, along with more popular lore” (p. 5), and exhibit a publication culture of “promiscuous reprinting, recompilation, and recycling” (p. 7), yet that does not mean that they are worthless for us, scholars who try to understand the period. Yuming He’s work is the more welcome since the attitudes of the Qing scholars have indeed resulted in the fact that many of these works with their modes of consumption have largely been forgotten.

In Chapter One Yuming He discusses the *Boxiao zhuji* 博笑珠璣 (Pearls to evoke laughter), a book portraying “low production quality, muddled pedigree, copious transcription errors, a general tone of commercial hyperbole, and insouciance about sourcing” (p. 17). Rather than dwelling on these negative points, Yuming He stresses instead the book’s positive qualities: the “playfulness and ephemerality” of the text, its “whimsical, hyperbolic, and intensely commercial world” (ibid.). The playfulness she shows by making visible the ways in which the work finds unsuspected connections among far-flung sources, often with an anti-erudition, or better perhaps, anti-pedantic attitude, using strategies of mixing different registers of language and types of genre, combining the erudite with the vulgar. The results are often hilarious. Any reader of Yuming He’s book will appreciate how she takes the reader by the hand in making sense of the drinking games and jokes in this book, and explains the broad cultural knowledge needed for full comprehension. (Such a reader will also appreciate that He’s publisher and editor have allowed many more Chinese quotations, with in-depth discussion, than usually is the case. And while certainly there are parts where a reader unfamiliar with Chinese will have difficulties following the nuanced discussion Yuming He provides, those who do know Chinese will be grateful to be shown on how to read such complicated texts.)

And Yuming He goes further—she also investigates which books provided the particular cultural knowledge required to engage in such games and jokes; and by doing so arrives at conclusions which certainly will also interest general social historians. Not only the Four Books, or more or less obvious primers such as the *Qian jia shi* 千家詩 (Poems by a thousand authors), but even the text of the *Da Ming lü* 大明律 (Great Ming code) was ground for the joker’s mill (and the use thereof indeed is very witty—read He’s book), and evidently widely known. Less surprising, but revealing nevertheless, is also the importance of dramatic works such

as the *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (Story of the Western Wing) or the *Pipa ji* 琵琶記 (Story of the Lute). And when investigating what lies behind the frequent, and on first sight unproblematic references to “old style poetry,” Yuming He shows that they actually all refer to the *Guwen zhenbao* 古文真寶 (True treasures of ancient-style writing), a late-Song, early-Yuan compilation which by the high Qing had fallen into neglect in China, although not in Korea or Japan. Further discussions of the games and jokes lead to a discussion of what exactly is meant by the term *suyu* 俗語 (common sayings) and the various linguistic registers required to participate successfully in the milieu in which such games were played. All these various registers were playfully interwoven, and include intentional “over-literal vernacular misreading [to reduce] authoritative texts to [humorous] absurdity” (p. 51), thus opening “spaces for the creation of alternative or subversive visions of cultural authority” (p. 55). Again, rather than merely theoretically stating such interpretations, Yuming He actually gives hilarious examples that make them come alive and convincing. She follows up the discussion of the game books by describing how such works fared when becoming mini-anthologies excerpted into one of the registers of the multi-register page layout in drama miscellanies or daily encyclopaedias. She ends this chapter with a discussion on how some regional in-jokes may be present.

The second chapter deals with reading practices of the *xiqu zashu* 戲曲雜書 (drama miscellanies), a genre whose greatest popularity lasted from the Wanli reign to the early Qing, and which are most recently investigated in English by Kathryn Lowry.² Yuming He explains the common layout in three registers of these works—the actual theatre plays in the top and bottom registers, while the newly fashionable narrow middle register was filled with songs, jokes, games, glossaries, etc., the kind of material discussed in the first chapter.

Yuming He shows us how these drama miscellanies foregrounded nonstandard modes of speech associated with an urban milieu of “alluringly dubious respectability” (p. 87), and illustrates their mock-serious mimicry of the canonical classics. Her discussion of the use of language in these drama miscellanies is followed by a welcome, if short, discussion of the better-known daily-use encyclopaedias, such as the various editions of the *Wanbao quanshu* 萬寶全書 (The complete book of myriad treasures), many of which were published in Jianyang 建陽 (here she builds on the recent work of Wu Huifang 吳蕙芳).³ She zooms in on the excerpts of geographical

² Kathryn A. Lowry, *The Tapestry of Popular Songs in 16th- and 17th-Century China: Reading, Imitation, and Desire* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

³ Wu Huifang, *Ming Qing yilai minjian shenghuo zhishi de jiangou yu chuandi* 明清以來民間生活知識的建構與傳遞 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 2007); idem, *Wanbao quanshu: Ming Qing shiqi de minjian shenghuo shilu* 萬寶全書：明清時期的民間生活實錄 (Taipei: Guoli Zhengzhi daxue lishi xuexi, 2001).

knowledge included in these encyclopaedias—and drama miscellanies (!), and compares them with their counterparts in more standard works such as the *Da Ming yitong zhi* 大明一統志 (The gazetteer of the unified imperium of the grand Ming—her translation). She does make some more or less convincing arguments on why the reader, or possessor of such works might think he has, with these excerpts, access to real, factual knowledge.

In this chapter also we are presented with some examples of Yuming He's readings of illustrations, here of those on cover pages, and again she mostly reads them intelligently, insightfully, and convincingly. The second chapter concludes with a discussion of the social space of private theatre, as the background against which to understand these books, or even, as the actual space in which these books functioned and were used. Yuming He describes this space as active, freed from traditional modes, full of shared playful activities. And of course she is right—yet, one occasionally feels she ignores the fact that some of these activities took place in rather elite society, which may not have completely overlapped with the readers of her books. After all, Wang Jide 王冀德, whom Yuming He quotes and translates effectively, actually objects marring dramatic sessions with vulgarities such as drinking games (pp. 136–37), when Yuming He had just argued, based upon these drama miscellanies, that they form one uncontested, integrated whole.

In the third chapter Yuming He promises to dig deeper in the relationships between texts and pictures on the one hand, and different versions of the same text (and the sometimes minimal and cosmetic changes between them) on the other. Different and newer pictures could give an older motive fresh novelty and interest even with minimal adaptation of earlier sets of blocks. She thus shows how the *Yuzhen jinsheng* 玉振金聲 (Chimes of jade and tones of bronze) transforms into the *Yugu xinhuang* 玉谷新簧 (A new reed from the jade valley). Other woodblock illustrations, such as one set on viewing lanterns, or another one of drinking scenes, she places in the context of representations in other media, in paintings, on stone carving, and the like. Yet other visual variations are shown to be present in the layout of similar texts, where for the same poetry excerpts different editions may opt for using spaces to indicate pauses, or punctuation, or nothing, and she ascribes that very variation to the lack of concern for orthographic standardization or editorial regularization. As Yuming He explains it, “to transcribe the same song with slight variations can, therefore, present and evoke the experience and memory of oral performance to its readers” (p. 169). The chapter culminates in a very insightful performance by Yuming He of her own, when she describes and compares several versions of the scene of “Zhang sheng tiao qiang 張生跳牆” (“Student Zhang Jumps over the Wall,” from the *Xixiang ji*), and ends with a short treatment of how charts or illustrations of court rituals could bring the far-away dealings of the emperor and the imperial palace within the ambit of common experience for the peruser of such popular books.

The fourth chapter deals with the *Luochong lu* 羸蟲錄 (Record of naked creatures; the term, referring to humans in general, and to non-Chinese in particular, is explained in detail), a book with short treatises and illustrations of over a hundred types of barbarians/foreigners. Now largely unknown, it was a very popular book during Ming times, and had ostensibly a very diverse readership. Likely because it is characterized by a less highbrow mode of representations, and by humour, informality and unabashed exoticism. It had an antecedent in the *Yiyu tuzhi* 異域圖志 (Illustrated record of foreign lands, possibly commissioned by the well-known prince Zhu Quan 朱權), which was rejected by the *Siku quanshu* editors for inclusion in their project as having false claims regarding its age, as being composed merely of snippets from both official and fabulous works, and as being factually unsound. In their turn, the many editions of the *Luochong lu* were excerpted in the many popular daily-use encyclopaedias already treated in He's previous chapters. Somewhat surprisingly, and rather ineffectively, Yuming He devotes separate sections on some possibly more "factual" parts of the work, on Korea, Japan, contrasting them with the more fabulous section on the "Xiongnu 匈奴." (The quotation marks are hers, since the passage deals with an amalgamation of people, beyond the historical Xiongnu.) By doing so, her surely correct characterization of the book as a whole as popular because of its cachet of rarity and novelty, is rather negated: exactly for Japan and Korea it should have been obvious for many readers that the excerpts were outdated, not current at all. The chapter on the "Xiongnu" therefore, as a more typical mixture of half-digested sources on a much less contemporary people, shows better what the book is about, and why it was popular. Thus, one aspect of the *Luochong lu* was that it confirmed conventional assumptions, and perpetuated and solidified prejudices against the Other.

In a separate conclusion, Yuming He gives a marvellous reading on how one can see, from an illustration portraying a couple of women buying fans from a peddler in the seclusion of their own home, the link of a late-Ming home with the wider world, hence the title of her book. It is a *tour de force*, as is much of her book—although unlike the major chapters of the book, where we are shown how a late-Ming reader might have perceived the books she discusses, this explanation underscores how we, as later historians, might perceive this world, something subtly different. Finally, there are two appendices: a list of other drama miscellanies, and an extended treatment of the *Piao jing* 嫖經 (The Classic of whoring) already pointed to in the main text, and once again showcasing how He's skills can help us make sense of a quite difficult text. Its foremost concern seems to be to avoid looking vulgar in front of others, a very late-Ming attitude.

It is clear from the above that Yuming He significantly enhances our knowledge of the late-Ming world of books and their readers, and that her book deserves to be read by all scholars interested in this period. And I have not even mentioned some other aspects of her book. I would like to mention how apt, intelligent, and well-

written He's characterizations of perceptions of contemporary readers are; in my summary above I had to forcefully restrain myself in constantly quoting her exact words. Also, every now and then a quoted passage leads her to discuss in fascinating detail some aspects of Chinese life in general, perhaps going beyond what could have been a contemporary reading, but enlightening us nevertheless (a tendency most visible when she discusses pictures rather than texts). Perhaps a few times she is not sufficiently conscious of the difference between a contemporary reading and ours; thus, when comparing variations of poetry layout, it should be pointed out that those variations are only visible to us, or at least someone having access to various editions, and not to a Ming reader who obviously often would have had access to only a single edition. Thus, the variations are probably better to explained as resulting from different demands by different readers, or different levels of competence of editors, rather than a general preference for "variety."

Yet, a good book also sets us thinking, and in the following I would like to briefly mention a few topics I think are worth discussing further.

First a minor point. She translates extremely well, of course, and often can make sense where many would be baffled (I only found one clear mistranslation: surely Japan was not "originally" [*ben* 本] among the Central States, but "based itself upon the Central States," p. 251). Therefore, I found her translations of the often long titles of Ming works puzzling: in an effort, I assume, to keep as close as possible to the Chinese word order, she is willing to violate Chinese grammar in translating them: a sequence AB becomes then sometimes in translation "A of B" instead of "B of A"; and more annoyingly, the title sequence *A: B*, which invariably in Western usage has to be interpreted as *Title: subtitle* (with the actual important title in the first part), in Yuming He's usage becomes *Subtitle: title* (with the important title at the end). This often becomes weird if not misleading for a Western reader, and I do not think her decision a happy one.

But that is a minor point. A conceptually more serious topic is the actual framework Yuming He places her whole book in. At many points, starting with the introduction, she links the works she treats as exemplifying the books the Qing *Siku quanshu* editors so derided, and, rhetorically at least, she derives from that fact part of the *raison d'être* of her book. This works well up to a certain extent in order to frame her book; however, one might question whether the popular books she discusses actually *were* targeted by these editors—and I do not think so. The kind of books Yuming He discusses about undoubtedly warrant the attention and close reading she gives them; but I think that they were actually beyond the pale of the books *Siku quanshu* editors thought warranted criticism: they were too popular, too non-scholarly. The books which in their view deserved their withering criticism were books which *did* lay claim to some pretention of real scholarship, but were found wanting—more serious kinds of history and literary compilations. Also here, as some recent authors

have shown (Nicolas Standaert),⁴ the Qing criticism has removed from general knowledge works which did not live up to their standards—but they are really another kind of works, still waiting to be thoroughly investigated. It is telling that the one book of those treated by Yuming He which indeed was directly criticized was the *Yiyu tuzhi*, an earlier edition of the *Luochong lu*—because indeed, unlike the other versions of the text she discusses so well, that was a princely edition, with much higher quality illustrations and scholarly pretensions; hence it was, barely one assumes, worth criticizing in the way the *Luochong lu* as such was not.

This leads me to a further comment. Just as with the *Yiyu tuzhi vis-à-vis* the *Luochong lu*, I think that there is a need to pay more close attention to the different levels in the material quality books could display. Not only between so-called popular versus erudite works, but also within the kinds of texts Yuming He deals with, there existed alongside sloppy popular products very elite luxurious products, with much better paper, textual reliability, a more luxurious whiter layout, more careful illustrations, and often a lack of the multi-register page, and with no claims to containing everything within one book. Indeed, Yuming He is aware of some of them, and does give some such illustrations of higher quality, but too quickly just treats them as “other editions,” rather than investigating their variety as reflecting different levels of readership. I already mentioned that she quotes at several spots the theatrical connoisseur Wang Jide as one person exemplifying the kind of reader of her kind of books, while she glosses over the fact that for this person the kind of drinking games which in “her” books are so intrinsically linked to theatre, are anathema. The failure to treat such variations in sufficient detail leads her, in my view, to the rare misstep of stating of one unappetizing dense cover page that “the effect of sumptuousness is enhanced by the overall density of inked-in space in the image” (p. 128), while I would still think that also for a late-Ming reader luxurious sumptuous books are indicated by opposite tendencies, a whiteness of the page. The books of Min Qiji 閔齊伋 or Wang Tingne 汪廷訥, which Yuming He mentions in passing, are in all their materiality and quality really meant for a different group of readers than the readers of the books she usually discusses; these groups should not be lumped together.

This issue, I think, is also related to Yuming He’s relative lack of attention to, or unsatisfactory treatment of, the actual *production* and *producers* of these books. While she stresses the mutual interdependence of texts, and refers often to the commercial nature of the books, one has the feeling that she has seriously underplayed the actual character of the commercial world. By concentrating on how the actual final books possibly may have been perceived, she gives the impression that the final product is the fully, consciously meant production of a publisher which wanted the public to

⁴ Nicolas Standaert, “Jesuit Accounts of Chinese History and Chronology and their Chinese Sources,” *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 35 (2012), pp. 11–87.

arrive at those interpretations. But many of these texts, I am afraid, are the way they are because of rampant plagiarism (a word hardly used by Yuming He, undoubtedly on purpose), and because of the ease with which texts could simply be copied just to flesh out a work, just to be able to say “it has everything, you do not need anything else.” For Yuming He, interested in the contemporary reader’s perspective, it may be defensible abstracting from questions of possible misattribution, plagiarism, and many other false commercial claims (of newness, fashion, up-to-dateness); but for a comprehensive view of the history of the book those latter questions also need to be asked. In similar vein, Yuming He bypasses discussing in detail the fact that there are many wrong characters within the texts, and that also otherwise her texts are full of sloppiness, although she herself needs to correct them, sometimes with difficulty, in her notes; this surely is a sign of producers for whom other factors than the needs of the reader were paramount. She concedes, for example, that often the tables of contents do not necessarily match actual contents, but she, surely too simply, takes this only as a sign of fashion, as a sign that these works do not operate within the world of classical erudition: as if a non-erudite (but fashionable) reader would not need a workable table of content. . . . Moreover, very often claims to freshness and novelty were just that—mere claims, despite all signs to the contrary, and undoubtedly late-Ming readers were aware of that; but Yuming He seems to take these claims rather too seriously. (Of course, the fact that these were claims which could and needed to be made does also tell us something.) Thus, in general I think Yuming He does not pay enough attention to the commercial imperative of *cheapness*; daily-use encyclopaedias abounded with pilfered material and outdated knowledge, as is clear with the passages on Japan and Korea taken from the *Luochong lu*.

Another questionable but prevalent claim of many compilation works was their claim to completeness. This claim becomes evident when we ask how encyclopaedias, and other multi-register works were meant to be *used*, rather than how they were *perceived*. Yuming He quite plausibly points to the desultory, segmented browsing the multi-register layout invites, rather than sustained reading (although personally I doubt that this always results in the unique individual, connoisseuristic reading she proclaims—not all books actually are of that level). But when, for example, discussing the inclusion of geography information in such works (and similar questions, *mutatis mutandis*, could be ask of other kinds of content), she does not really ask how such parts were to be used. In fact, such excerpts were not at all organized to be used as reference, unlike the way a dictionary part often is arranged in the same type of reference works. One couldn’t look up easily a place unless one already knew where it was located—and what is then such a list *for*? I believe that a possible answer lays in the fact that a publisher would want to include such parts, even in this unusable and readily outdated form, as a commercial claim to completeness, as “this is the only book you need.” This is one of the reasons I found the chapter on the *Luochong lu*

the least satisfactory of all the chapters. The book clearly is not the book to get up-to-date information on East Asia, while Yuming He seems to come close to thinking so, and she uses the information on Japan and Korea therein as reflecting late-Ming perception (she does not really discuss those late-Ming works which had better information, although in her conclusion she shows a much different role for these countries in late-Ming awareness). But of course, Japan and Korea could, for the sake of the claim to completeness not be left out of that work, which was really about other more fabulous and exotic peoples. Their claim to novelty was illusionary: sometimes such popular works were repositories where conventional and outdated wisdom came to die.

Finally, perhaps the largest topic undiscussed by Yuming He is: why are these books “typically” late Ming? What happened to these books, or at least their genres, afterwards, in the Qing? Indeed, she rarely addresses these questions: a few notes may mention that daily-use encyclopaedias remained popular, while on the other hand one brief sentence leads us to assume that the drama miscellanies did in fact die out, because of “changes in stage fashions” (p. 82). However, in general it is difficult to see that the public sustaining such works disappeared during the Qing, or the world of commercial publishing, or that poetry or theatre or drinking games did; and thus, neither may have these books. Part of the likely answer is again that these books were simply not “the” Ming books the Qing *Siku quanshu* editors talked about, as I argued above, and hence, that He’s implied opposition of “Ming” versus “Qing” books is irrelevant. (Of all the works discussed in her book, it is perhaps easiest to see why the *Luochong lu* disappeared, except as excerpts in encyclopaedias—it did not even fit the late-Ming, forget about the more global Qing.) And thus, the likeliest answer is that these genres did continue to flourish in some version or another during the Qing, perhaps under our radar (and outside the scope of genres even worth of dismissal by the high-brow *Siku quanshu* editors)—certainly Cynthia Brokaw’s research would let us believe so.⁵ However, since no genre of books can be supposed to continue without any change for hundreds of years, they undoubtedly did so with revealing changes—and I for one would love to see someone of Yuming He’s abilities to make sense of the vicissitudes of these books under the Qing as well.

These critical remarks, of course, only underscore that there are still many more neglected Ming and Qing books to study, and yet more ways of studying those so admirably treated in this book by Yuming He. Not only book historians, but anyone interested in late imperial social history should be eagerly following her subsequent scholarship.

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⁵ Cynthia J. Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).