

In sum, Siufu Tang's *Self-Realization through Confucian Learning* is a notable contribution to Xunzi studies, but will not fundamentally reorient future research.

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***Li Mengyang, the North-South Divide, and Literati Learning in Ming China.*** By Chang Woei Ong. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016. Pp. xi + 354. \$49.95/£39.95.

Ong puts Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473–1529) at the forefront of the title he's chosen for his book, but a biography this is not. Perhaps best remembered for his controversial theory of how poetry should be written, Li becomes in the hands of the author a lens through which to clarify his real interest, which is the whole intellectual world of Ming China down to its collapse in the mid-seventeenth century. That's what Ong means by "literati learning." Li's effect upon that learning was on the whole negative.

The "north-south divide" noted in the title takes up the question why posterity refused to give what Ong rightly thinks is his due—why his ideas failed to gain traction in the south. The answer is complicated. Li was a northerner. In Ming times, north China was overborne by the larger population and greater wealth and sophistication of the south. North China's literati were fewer in number, and had a very difficult time achieving national acclaim and a national following. But how hard did they try?

It was not simply prejudice against or disdain for the north that disadvantaged intellectuals like Li. Northern society spawned a literati ethos that conferred supreme value on the emperor, on the central state and its bureaucracy, on state service as the only proper aim for its young men, and on an education tightly geared to the demands of the civil service examination system. The southern intelligentsia much preferred a more horizontal arrangement, de-emphasizing the top-down verticality the northerners championed, and favouring a sub-political focus on families, lineages, local academies, and informal literati networks, with the emperor and the state simply as benign protectors of all this. Li was definitely in the statist camp, and not in sympathy with the south's preferences.

The author offers a path-breaking study of what Li had to offer intellectually. He gives a good account of Li's interest in the metaphysics of nature—in *li* 理 and *qi* 氣, *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽. Li had a "theory of the cosmos." He understood the cosmos to be a source not of unity and regularity (as the dominant Cheng-Zhu 程朱 consensus

would have it), but of diversity and unpredictability. Li went so far as to endow the emperor with something of a cosmos-derived divine aura (p. 151). Southerners endowed the emperor with nothing of that sort, but rather charged him with a moral responsibility to manage the realm appropriately.

As to education, Li could scarcely countenance a system that the emperor and state didn't totally control. Ong alludes only briefly (pp. 169–70) to a horrific incident dating to 1404, when the Yongle 永樂 emperor, having massacred Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺 and his sympathizers two years earlier, disposed of a certain Zhu Jiyou 朱季友. Zhu, a native of the southern province of Jiangxi, came to the then capital, Nanjing, proudly bearing his magnum opus, a grand reconstruction of China's past based on his personal interpretations of the classical texts. Surely he expected praise, at the very least. Instead, Yongle flew into a rage. The work denigrated the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy! Zhu was escorted home under armed guard, and once there, subjected to public criticism. His house was ransacked, all his writings were destroyed, and he was forbidden ever to write or teach again. Until the repressions of 1402 and 1404, China's intelligentsia had been fairly free to come up with novel interpretations of history and overarching programmes for the country's future. Fang was the last to sketch out a new future, and Zhu the last to reinterpret that past. From that point, intellectual life in south China took a very different turn. That a century later Li should have "applauded" what the Yongle emperor had done may have had something to do with his failure to win southern hearts and minds.

Yet Li was no unthinking partisan of the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. Indeed he challenged it on several fronts, sidestepping its moralism in favour of poetry, history, ritual, and legalist-style administrative flexibility as disciplines better suited to sustain an autocratic system.

Li was also a theorist of writing. For him, prose was for recording facts and events, and philosophical ruminations, which should never be the subject of poetry, a medium he reserved exclusively for the expression of emotions and aesthetic reactions. Folk poetry was a channel through which the state could learn about the popular state of mind. Poetry that aimed to convey philosophy (as many southerners would have it do) was a poetry contaminated by a subject-matter that belonged to the realm of prose.

Ong's is a meticulous and comprehensive analysis of Li Mengyang's writings. He provides many long translations together with the original Chinese text, making this a good book to assign to students in graduate seminars. His book can rank alongside Khee Heong Koh's *A Northern Alternative: Xue Xuan (1389–1464) and the Hedong School*<sup>1</sup> as a thoughtful and well-researched study of a secondary figure in Ming China's literati world.

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge, MA and London, London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011.

Xue Xuan's 薛瑄 life was dull, but Li Mengyang's was not. Chaoying Fang's 房兆楹 entry on Li in the *Dictionary of Ming Biography* shows that he emerged from a social background of shiftlessness, irresponsibility, and poverty.<sup>2</sup> His official career was stormy. He spent a lot of time in prison for lodging political protests, including a protest against the court in 1505, and for championing a student strike in Jiangxi in 1511. In 1521, he was imprisoned again, and the next year he was reduced to commoner status. We now need a good biography of Li, dealing with his real-life personality and career and the connections these might have with his writings.

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***One Who Knows Me: Friendship and Literary Culture in Mid-Tang China.*** By Anna M. Shields. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015. Pp. ix + 363. \$49.95/£39.95.

*One Who Knows Me* is the first book-length exploration of friendship in Chinese tradition. Professor Anna M. Shields of Princeton University examines friendships among literati in medieval China, and their role in political advancement and literary creations. It is indispensable research for those interested in the perception and realization of friendship, as well as in the literary innovations and social values of writings about friendship in the mid-Tang. The book also sheds light on the reasons for the literati's experimentation with different literary topics, styles, and forms, and why they turned so often to writing about personal experience.

The contents are encompassing, informative, and scholarly, with ample citations and a comprehensive bibliography that covers research in different languages. At the beginning of each chapter is a relevant quotation from the literature. Within the chapter itself, quotations from texts are provided with the original Chinese. When a literary work is analysed, its full text or a major extract is often included. Although the author claims that the scope of the book is narrow, she has included a substantial number of literary works of different genres with a wealth of citations. This review will begin by discussing the nature of the book and its scope of study, before focusing on the content of each chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644*, ed. L. Carrington Goodrich (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 841–45.