

late pre-imperial and early imperial tombs across the Chinese mainland share many archaeological finds and features. Nevertheless, contrary to the author's insistence, we can detect numerous qualitative differences in addition to quantitative ones. A fitting example would be the custom of putting lacquered boxes over the heads of the deceased in a number of late Western Han and early Eastern Han tombs around Yangzhou 揚州, Jiangsu province (see, for instance, Gao Wei 高偉 and Gao Haiyan 高海燕, "Han dai qi mianzhao tanyuan" 漢代漆面罩探源, *Dongnan wenhua* 東南文化 1997.4). Such are by no means insignificant observations as they were obviously linked to social and/or religious practices and specific to certain regions of the Chinese heartland. Not only do qualitative differences need to be acknowledged; they need to be explained. Furthermore, taking into account *Afterlife's* nonchalant understanding of the social categories "elite" and "commoner(s)" reveals that the social range of tombs reviewed in the monograph is inadequate to warrant sweeping generalizations. The introduction of the book declares that "the commoners' tombs at Shaogou in Luoyang City, Henan" (p. 17) are part of the study. In reality, the site appears only two more times throughout the subsequent pages (pp. 95, 210 n. 23). Besides, as highly complex vaulted brick chamber structures, these were anything but small-scale or simple tombs. The same is true for Shuihudi 睡虎地 Tomb No. 11 (dated 217 BCE) and similar discoveries. Although the author recognized that the man buried in Tomb No. 11 was a local official, he does not regard his modest tomb as an elite burial (p. 19). Yet, however low the occupant's rank may have been, he was still a member of the imperial administration. As one of roughly 130,000 highly trained officials that governed a population of perhaps fifty to sixty million people (Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed China* [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 70, 113), the deceased was certainly not a commoner. Rendering the distinction between elite and commoner(s) analytically meaningful would have called for a thorough discussion of both concepts on the one hand, and an analysis of a much bigger and socially wider set of mortuary data on the other. Except for the succinct statement that, during the Warring States period, "the higher and lower elites became more distinct, and the latter merged with the commoner class" (p. 19), the author failed to provide either.

Keeping its methodological limitations in mind, *Afterlife* makes for rewarding reading. It touches on a number of interesting finds and features that have not yet been examined in detail. The discussion of the relationship between so-called tomb guardian figurines (*zhenmushou* 鎮墓獸) and the depiction of the fecundity god is particularly intriguing (pp. 122–29). As far as general surveys of late pre-imperial and early imperial mortuary archaeology are concerned, this is the best monograph available at the moment.

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The Scholar and the State: Fiction as Political Discourse in Late Imperial China. By LIANGYAN GE.
Seattle: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS, 2015. Pp. xi + 279. \$50.

Liangyan Ge's new book deals with a topic of great significance and urgency. As the blurb announces, this is the first book-length study that seriously engages with the political dimension of traditional Chinese fiction by situating the novels under discussion in a "very specific political context" (as Margaret Wan remarked). Taking as its central concern what Ge calls the "rugged partnership" between the intellectual elite and the imperial power (the "scholar" *shi* 士 and the "state" *shi* 勢 of the title, respectively), the book revisits several landmark works of Ming and Qing vernacular fiction such as *Three Kingdoms*, *The Scholars*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as a few lesser-known erotic works.

The ambitious scope and overall narrative framework of the book are laid out in the introduction and the first chapter, where Ge paints in broad strokes the evolution of the scholar-state relationship and the emergence of vernacular fiction in the late imperial period. According to this largely familiar narrative, late imperial China witnessed a growing alienation between the literati class and state power, not

only due to the ever-rising surplus of scholars excluded from public service, but also because, in Ge's account, Ming and Qing rulers increasingly appropriated the *daotong*, or orthodox lineage of learning, that had hitherto been the prerogative of the literati class. In this respect, the examination system played a key role, by providing rulers with a powerful tool for manipulating and tampering with the Confucian canon. The increasingly disenfranchised and disgruntled literati class, then, found an alternative outlet in vernacular fiction, which emerged as a relentlessly destabilizing counter-discourse. While this narrative inevitably tends to flatten some of the complexities of both texts and context—one especially wishes that Ge had engaged with the recent scholarship on the examination system, essay writing, and state-elite relations by Hilde De Weerd and others, which have greatly complicated our understanding of these topics—it does offer the author a useful springboard for in-depth analyses of individual works in each of the subsequent chapters.

The first text to be scrutinized is *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in chapter 2. Ge convincingly argues that the earliest version of *Three Kingdoms* promotes a Mencian vision of “benevolent government” and valorizes a kind of ruler-minister relationship based on mutual recognition, devotion, and even friendship. By reading the Mencian view embodied in the novel against the historical background of the textual expurgation of the *Mencius* and the abolition of prime-ministership decreed by the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang, Ge productively anchors the novel to the specific political context of the early Ming autocracy. While some scholars may disagree with the author's assertions regarding authorship and textual filiations, the overall argument remains compelling. There is a brief hint at some discrepancies between the earliest extant edition of 1522 and the widely popular late seventeenth-century version edited by Mao Zonggang (p. 43), and a more systematic comparison would be worth pursuing. Is there a significant de-emphasis on the Mencian vision of political sovereignty in the Mao recension, and if so, what might this reveal about the political climate of the early Qing?

In chapter 3 Ge turns to the corpus of erotic literature and discusses several works mostly published during the early Qing. Among these are *An Examination for Women* (Nü kaikai zhuan), *Romance of the Embroidered Screen* (Xiu ping yuan), *Shadows of the Peach Blossoms* (Taohua ying), and several of Li Yu's short stories as well as his infamous novel *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (Rou putuan). Ge focuses on the central figure of the scholar-lover found across these texts and on what he calls the “examination metaphor,” whereby the selection of scholars to staff the official bureaucracy is seen as analogous to the selection of women for the imperial and private harem. Ge deftly notes how the examination metaphor turns out to be a surprisingly productive and ambivalent master trope, which both eroticizes and trivializes the institution of the examinations at the same time that it “academicizes” and elevates the erotic experience. Ge is clearly more interested in pursuing the former proposition and in uncovering its subversive significance. In this respect, it would have been interesting to map the use of the examination as a metaphor beyond the realm of erotic literature. Further, while Ge makes a compelling argument about the way in which the scholar-lover is turned from a passive and emasculated player in the examination arena into an active and virile player in the game of sex, one wishes that he had further investigated the significance of the reversal of roles in Li Yu's *Rou putuan*, where the priapic hero is himself subjected to a sexual evaluation by his prospective bedmate—hence once again reverting to the position of the examinee.

Chapter 4 turns to the novel that most explicitly addresses the fraught scholar-state relationship at the center of Ge's study. Drawing from the rich body of recent scholarship, the author situates *The Scholars* within the intellectual currents of the Yan Yuan-Li Gong school, Confucian ritualism, and the broader legacy of Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi on the one hand, and the specific socio-political context of the High Qing period on the other. Ge discusses the fascinating examples of Qian Mingshi and Zeng Jing to illustrate the power dynamic between literati and imperial authority. Ge argues that, beneath its episodic structure, *The Scholars* may be read as a narrative of the literati's struggle to break free from the textual capsule in which the state has entrapped them, and their reorientation from serving the ruler (*tianzi*) to serving society and civilization at large (*tianxia*). Examination essays and poetic writing, in this respect, do not represent antithetical genres, but rather are seen as “related components of a continuous textual culture, which the imperial state manipulates with the lure of fame and rank on one hand and the terror of literary inquisition on the other” (p. 99). Yet the relation between scholars,

state, and literary genres seems to be more complicated than that. Poetic composition is problematized in the novel not just because of the terror of literary inquisition, but also because it is often appropriated by charlatans and self-styled “famous scholars” (*mingshi*) for whom the author Wu Jingzi seems to reserve his sharpest barbs. And for all his foibles, the zealous anthologizer of examination essays, Ma Chunshang, is after all one of the very few morally unimpeachable characters we come across in the novel.

In the last chapter, Ge reads *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a dramatization of “all the emotions and commotions involved in the process of a young literatus’s repudiation of the examinations and officialdom” (p. 140). The commitment to government service is here symbolized via the trope of “mending heaven” (*bu tian*), an enterprise the novel’s protagonist Baoyu is famously unfit for. It would have been interesting to see the author discuss the reasons for the radically different value and function attributed to poetry in *Dream* vis-à-vis *The Scholars*, considering that the two works were virtually coeval.

On a general note, a more explicit explanation regarding the choice of primary texts would have been helpful in clarifying the scope of this study. With the exception of chapter 3, this study concentrates on the “usual suspects,” the great masterworks of Ming and Qing fiction. How about other works? The fiction on current events (*shishi xiaoshuo*) that flourished during the seventeenth century would seem to offer ideal material for this kind of analysis.

There are very few minor typos and oversights (*pinyin* misspellings and information duplicated in the text and the notes). In a few cases, I felt that a more literal translation would have done better service to the author’s arguments. For example, the quotation from *The Scholars* in which Wang Mian foresees that the civil service examination will prove detrimental to “genuine scholarship and correct behavior” (p. 106, translation slightly modified from Yang & Yang’s “real scholarship and correct behaviour”) could have been rendered more literally as “literary accomplishment, conduct, service, and withdrawal” (文行出處, a composite reference to *Yijing* and *Lunyu*) in order to reinforce Ge’s argument about the significance of Wang Mian’s voluntary withdrawal from active service as couched in Confucian, rather than Daoist, terms.

Quibbles and reservations aside, Ge’s study is an important new contribution to the field and a timely reminder of the challenges and rewards attending a rigorous historicization of traditional Chinese fiction. The book’s broad scope and remarkable clarity of style make its rich material particularly suitable for classroom use.

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Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700. By JOSEPH R. DENNIS. Harvard East Asian Monographs, vol. 379. Cambridge, Mass.: HARVARD UNIVERSITY ASIA CENTER, HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. Pp. xvi + 390. \$49.95.

Joseph Dennis’s book on Chinese gazetteers (*difangzhi* 地方志, local gazetteers or local histories) is the synthesis of many years of research on this subject. This research began with his doctoral studies, when he set out to fill the information gap in Western academic work about the production, circulation, and “use” of this category of historical literature. Dennis avoids using gazetteers as source material for research on specific topics, but rather uses them as objects of study in themselves to analyse certain key questions that he mentions in the introduction: the dissemination of knowledge in late Imperial China; the relationship between local societies and the central state or between the central state and peripheral regions; and the Chinese publishing industry (p. 3). Despite the title, Dennis essentially deals with gazetteers from the end of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) to the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and his presentation does not cover the entirety of the subject, but focuses on certain points. This is probably an unavoidable choice, considering the breadth of the subject and the characteristic contents of gazetteers, which, although they may at first sight seem similar and repetitive, often present specific elements