

Real Life in China at the Height of the Empire: Revealed by the Ghosts of Ji Xiaolan. Translated by DAVID E. POLLARD. Hong Kong: CHINESE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014. Pp. xl + 334. \$45 (cloth).

For general readers and specialists alike, David Pollard's partial translation of Ji Xiaolan's anecdotal collection is a decidedly enthralling read. An eminent scholar-official active during the height of late imperial China, Ji Xiaolan—alternatively known as Ji Yun—is mostly remembered as editor-in-chief of the encyclopedic *Compendium of the Four Types of Books* (Siku quanshu), which preserved over three thousand literary works. Besides being an administrator and editor, he was an avid collector of art and antiquities. He also loved a good yarn. Over the course of his lifetime, Ji heard numerous stories and items of gossip told by friends, family members, servants, and colleagues. Around 1,200 of these he compiled into five volumes, collectively known as the *Yuewei caotang biji*. Given that *yuewei* signifies the perception of small matters pointing to great truths, Pollard refers to the collection as *Perceptions*. Ji's *Perceptions* are important for several reasons. They afford a fascinating window on everyday life during eighteenth-century China. The insights they offer into Ji Xiaolan's thought along with that of his social milieu help us to understand intellectual trends of the period. Furthermore, numerous ghost stories paint a rich canvas of religious ideas and practices while demonstrating the sophistication that China's millennia-old tradition of supernatural literature (*zhiguai*) attained.

It is to this vast corpus of supernatural literature that Pollard's title alludes: *Real Life in China at the Height of the Empire Revealed by the Ghosts of Ji Xiaolan*. As Pollard observes, Ji and the vast majority of his contemporaries were deeply religious, believed in ghosts, and worshipped a vast pantheon of Buddhist, Daoist, and popular deities. For much of the imperial period, the popular Buddhist and Daoist spirit-worlds were conceived as a hierarchy modelled on that of temporal society and its bureaucracy. Accordingly, otherworldly law courts apprehended miscreants and punished sins committed in life, human merit and demerit were meticulously recorded, while especially authorized deities arbitrated over human fortune. Ghosts were integral to this system. Didactic narratives in which ghosts exacted justice when temporal authorities failed both encouraged good deeds and warned against immoral acts. Ghosts frequently acted as witnesses in otherworldly trials. Ghost stories used to illustrate philosophical points reveal the thought of those who swapped them. Hence, as Pollard notes, the interaction between ghosts, gods, paranormal beings, and the living as recorded in Ji's anecdotes uncovers as much about eighteenth-century Chinese society as it does about the supernatural per se.

In copious commentaries, Ji Xiaolan often applied the logic of eighteenth-century Chinese evidential studies to explain, comprehend, and evaluate the working of the spirit-world, almost always drawing a conclusion. When logic occasionally failed him, Ji simply acknowledged his inability to understand. He frequently cited the opinions of friends or colleagues, sometimes concurring with them while at other times positing an alternate explanation. At times ghosts appear morally superior when contrasted with corrupt and venal members of society. Hence while a pinch of satire along with a hefty dose of didacticism may be discerned in many stories, Ji's tendency to read them literally is significant and helps distinguish his collection from Pu Songling's more famous *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (Liaozhai zhiyi) since the latter often specifically invites an allegorical reading. Indeed, the earnestness of Ji's commentaries renders his collection, and Pollard's translation, all the more valuable in regard to eighteenth-century thought. Modern readers may be forgiven for considering some of the stories allegorical, yet according to traditional Chinese literary ideas, unlike those of Europe, allegory and historical veracity were not mutually exclusive; they could co-exist in the same literary text given the tendency of traditional Chinese readers to seek higher truth from history.

Not all of Pollard's selections include supernatural elements, though. Many are firmly focused on the human realm and include topics such as mercantile culture, marriage, widow chastity, Jesuit missionaries, the bureaucracy, fraud, friendship, homosexuality, and the like. Such an assortment will, no doubt, be of interest to many readers. Among these stories are ones humorous enough to make the reader laugh, such as the proud servant whose expensive leather boots turned to paper when caught in a sudden rainstorm; evidently China's post-Socialist phenomenon of fake and poor-quality goods boasts a long pedigree. What unifies this miscellaneous collection of anecdotes is that they all relate unusual and news-worthy events from which admonitory lessons may be drawn.

No matter whether the stories pertain to ghosts or not, all items have been masterfully translated. Were it not for transliterated Chinese names, the reader would be unaware of reading a translated text. With a judicious turn-of-phrase, Pollard enlivens what is already absorbing content. His tone readily captures that of an erudite, eighteenth-century scholar-official while rendering his ideas into easily digestible prose. Readers may well feel as though they are sitting in Ji Xiaolan's living room being regaled with tantalizing tidbits from an old friend. Given the literary flavor of the translation, explanatory notes appear only rarely. Abstruse quotations that would be unfamiliar to the general reader are, therefore, occasionally paraphrased. For example, instead of translating a reference to the Tang dynasty historian Liu Zhiji's (661–721) suggestion that the deposed emperor Li of the Former Qin (r. 355–357) was maligned by official historians which appears alongside a similarly obscure reference, Pollard glosses both as, "He responded by citing past examples of distortion of true personalities in literature" (p. 208).

Throughout his translation, Pollard has selected *Perception's* longer items of socio-historical interest in addition to those that illustrate their author's thought and opinions. These he has topically arranged under four major sections that are further subdivided. Concepts and social practices possibly unfamiliar to the general reader are explained at the outset of each subsection. In order to further contextualize the stories and contribute additional information, Pollard has translated entire letters written by Ji Xiaolan that pertain to the story in question, presenting them at its conclusion. Such a meticulous synthesis will be of great value to specialist readers. The book is prefaced with an authoritative introduction that includes a concise biography of Ji Xiaolan, his socio-political background, his attitude to ghosts along with that of his contemporaries, the writing and arrangement of *Perceptions* as well as its place in the Chinese literary tradition. The book is beautifully illustrated with photos by Eva Hung in addition to surprisingly high-quality color reproductions of eighteenth-century paintings and calligraphy. The cover's intriguing design is based on a late eighteenth-century handscroll featuring cavorting ghosts and underworld denizens. As is usual with translated volumes, the book has not been indexed. This is a pity. Such is the scholarly importance of Ji Xiaolan's vignettes of life, specialists may have benefitted from an index. Nevertheless, this book is a significant landmark in the translation of China's late imperial anecdotal literature and such a joy to read that one is loath to put it down.

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An Early Chinese Commentary on the Ekottarika-āgama: The Fenbie gongde lun 分別功德論 and the History of the Translation of the Zengyi ahan jing 增一阿含經. By ANTONELLO PALUMBO. Taipei: DHARMA DRUM PUBLISHING CORP., 2013. Pp. xiv + 424. NT\$460.

Among the four Āgamas translated into Chinese in the fourth and fifth centuries, the translation of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, or the *Zengyi ahan jing*, is arguably the most mysterious and controversial. Antonello Palumbo's book is a groundbreaking piece of research, which wades through the jungle of problems, offering valuable clues and solutions to the mysteries concerning this collection.

This volume consists of two parts. The first part provides insight into the history of the translation of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, including the stories of how monks and scholars from India and Central Asia arrived in Chang'an in the fourth century to form translation teams led by Dao'an, an eminent scholar monk. The second part is a textual-historical inquiry into the *Fenbie gongde lun*, an incomplete commentary on the *Zengyi ahan jing*. The inquiry serves as a viable means of exploring the translation of the *Ekottarika-āgama* from new perspectives.

This book attests to the author's comprehensive grasp of the Buddhist sources in classical Chinese and Indic languages. Antonello Palumbo is also able to read scholarly works in several modern languages, including Chinese, Japanese, French, German, and Italian, and thus can utilize a large amount of relevant information to enrich his understanding of the issues. He delves into an extraordinarily