

BOOK REVIEWS

A Ming Confucian's World: Selections from Miscellaneous Records from the Bean Garden

By Lu Rong. Translated and Introduced by Mark Halperin. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022. 188 pp. \$99.00 (cloth) \$30.00 (paper).

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Mark Halperin's translation from Lu Rong's *Miscellaneous Records from the Bean Garden* is a treasure trove of both subjective and objective gems. It highlights the belief system of Lu Rong himself and provides invaluable information about the mid-Ming period.

In fact, Halperin asserts that Lu Rong's mid-Ming notebook should be accepted as representative of late imperial China as a whole. Acknowledging in his introduction the atmosphere of "heady transgression" that characterized the more attention-grabbing latter part of the Ming period, he nonetheless maintains that it was aberrational, posing only a temporary challenge to the "political and social structures, economic practices, and cultural attitudes that were present before the late Ming and persisted centuries later" (ix). Lu's (and Halperin's) book, therefore, "offers a remarkable panorama of late imperial Chinese society" (x).

Lu Rong (1436–1494) was a scholar-official of middling significance. His "representative yet distinctive Confucian view of the world" (x) is indeed well in evidence in his *Miscellaneous Records*. His belief in the transformative power of sagely culture is akin to a belief in magic, as in "Commoners who have been touched by classical teachings compete to do the right thing" (16); and he lauds one grand coordinator as being so lenient, fair, and unassuming that "rain and sunshine arrived in a timely fashion, and good annual harvests came repeatedly" (39). Unsurprisingly, Lu rails against ostentatious displays of wealth that confuse the social order, bemoaning how "Today, there are irresponsible young men from rich and noble households who use ramie, silk, damask, and satin for their pants. Such extravagance is most egregious" (1). His ideal is the simple society of the Three Dynasties, when "The men farmed, and the women worked with silk and hemp" (2). As for women, Lu wants them kept under wraps. One danger posed by the popularity of opera comes in the form of the male actor who plays female characters—a heady transgression in itself—because "the women forget themselves and chat and joke with them. There are cases where the women are secretly violated by them. For literati who wish to run a proper household, it is appropriate that they strictly

forbid this practice and completely cut it off" (15). Halperin occasionally supplies general or specific context by means of information blocks inserted throughout the text, and he notes here, in supplemental remarks on opera, that "Ming society was preoccupied with the clear boundaries and hierarchies between generations, genders, social strata, and ethnicities" (14). It is clear that Lu Rong is quite representative of this preoccupation.

Yet Lu's Confucian morality is by no means generic, and Halperin's labeling of it as "distinctive" is well-merited. Strikingly, Lu seems to elevate righteousness above other virtues. When a Muslim kills two Buddhist monks on suspicion of blasphemy, Lu comments that

His action drew from his sense of righteousness, and not even death could make him turn back. As for Chinese people, as soon as they encounter a difficult situation, there are those who will shove their way back into their own kind to save themselves. If we compare them with this man, moved by righteousness but blinded by ignorance, it is a lamentable situation! (9)

When a woman kills the two children she had by a second husband, upon discovering that he'd murdered her first husband, Lu notes how the Hongwu emperor (r. 1368–1398), founder of the Ming dynasty, "lauded her passion" (25). Similarly, when an adulterous woman is killed *by her paramour* for betraying her husband, the Hongwu emperor, on reviewing the case, declares, "To be able to kill the unrighteous—this is a righteous man," and then he pardons him (25). If Lu was endorsing Hongwu's remarks, after (qualifiedly) praising the Muslim's actions, then he was staking out a rather idiosyncratic moral position. On the subject of the Hongwu emperor, incidentally, Lu was unafraid to be at least indirectly critical of the dynastic founder, quoting a Hongwu-era memorialist named Zhou Jingxin who wrote that "His Majesty's virtue is slight, but his desire for slaughter is deep-seated." As Lu sums up, "How impressive! [Zhou] was one who had no office or charge to offer his opinions but still could speak in such a straightforward way!" (42–43). Plainly, Lu was a fan of the morally bold stroke.

Along with Lu's unique stress on righteousness, a defensive culturalism stands out as well. Of course, suspicion of divergent cultural norms is of ancient provenance in China (and elsewhere), but, perhaps with the Mongol experience still in recent memory, in Lu's case, its incidence is very noticeable. Dismissing disagreeable practices as un-Chinese, Lu refers to customs such as tattooing and wife-sharing between brothers as belonging to "island foreigners," even though they had been, or still were, followed by Chinese (16, 34). Dealing with the subject of the Mongol conquest, Lu states that "The model of *The Spring and Autumn Annals* is to honor China and expel the barbarian clans." That China failed to live up to this model Lu blamed on a simple lack of power and the fact that "Chinese people supported and assisted" the Mongols (57). Though these explanations border on the blithe, they are still ominous. In a separate section on foreign occupation, Lu quotes Chen Liang (1143–1194), who boasted, "Since ancient times, how could there be any foreigners who could completely swallow China!" Lu's grappling with the issue is quoted here in full:

Chen's discussion was about fixed principles. Who knew that a century later, the Yuan clan would enter and master China and unify the Chinese and foreigners? This had never happened before. Yet were not the Song Chinese and the

Mongols foreign? Did not Chen think that women could not be placed above men, just as foreigners cannot be placed above Chinese? Several centuries earlier, there already had been women who changed their surnames, altered their titles, and were lords ruling the world, like Wu Zhao [624–705]. Yet how do the Chinese and foreigners in later ages share the world but still have this definite unchanging principle? (60)

Lu's conflation of sexual and national hierarchy is noteworthy, but otherwise Lu's main point seems to be that Chen Liang was wrong and that Chinese culture is as vulnerable as Chinese sovereignty. Perhaps Lu does not hold out much hope for the Confucian civilizing mission, given the damage that can be done by a Wu Zhao or especially with the advent of a shared world. Writing elsewhere about the degraded state of civilization after the ancient Three Dynasties, Lu admits that "The mission of transformation through instruction was inadequate to deeply penetrate into people's minds. The people naturally then were not steadfast in their beliefs, and when they met others, they easily changed their views." (4) With all due allowances for post-Three Dynasties degeneracy, Lu's statement still seems rather devoid of cultural confidence.

Weighty issues aside, Lu Rong certainly counts as an "inquisitive Confucian" (xxvii), and the bulk of *Miscellaneous Records* lives up to its name in its resistance to easy summary. Its pages contain accounts of disappearing (or literally blown-away) brides (25–27), reports on erosion-inducing alligators (90), poems written in dreams (83–84), and recommendations in favor of the drinking of urine, which Lu calls "transmigration wine" (105–6). Lu also includes a couple of passages on bureaucratic inertia that may be laden with sour grapes: "Those with ambitions to accomplish things and make a name for themselves usually cannot avoid minor disputes" (59); and "Those who get a reputation in this world for keeping things tranquil mostly do their job and do not take matters in hand and change them" (84). Halperin has rendered about one-fourth of Lu's notebook into English.

Concerning the translation itself, although Halperin explains that he has rephrased and fleshed out the original text in order to maximize clarity (xxix), the result is still too sparse and inexplicit. The reader of his modern English text is forced to supply nearly as many missing grammatical and logical connections as would the reader of the classical Chinese original. For example, Halperin begins one section with the following two sentences: "When younger men have just passed the examinations and discuss political affairs, it is most appropriate that they be careful. In sum it is simply the common sense found in the classics." The antecedent of the "it" in the second sentence is unclear. Only at the end of the section does it emerge that Lu deems the mere common sense of the classics to be less useful to an adjudicating official than the "various books setting out this dynasty's legal system." (45–46) The reader's positive impression of "common sense," as well as his or her expectation that a Chinese writer would be reverencing the classics, may lead him or her off the thread of Lu's discourse, especially given the vagueness of the second sentence. The "simply" in the second sentence might not be the best word either. It might have been better to render the second sentence as "The problem is that the classics contain only common sense and lack specific legal application." Obviously, this is a subjective area, and Halperin cannot be blamed for preferring that Lu speak for himself; but the main text's 111 pages do not flow very quickly, given all the work left to the reader to fill in grammatical and logical blanks.

Otherwise, the very capaciousness of these *Miscellaneous Records* guarantees a broad appeal. Lay readers or perhaps college undergraduates will be intrigued by the glimpses

into late imperial Chinese culture that it affords, and they may be inspired to embark on further reading or study. Specialists will find in this book an invaluable research tool. It contains new perspectives and details on land surveys, book publishing, eunuchs, dream culture, and other subjects that are currently garnering research attention in the field. *A Ming Confucian's World* is a tremendous contribution. Essential.

China's European Headquarters: Switzerland and China during the Cold War

By Ariane Knüsel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xiv + 311 pp. £75.00 (cloth)

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Knüsel's book makes a welcome contribution to the study of Chinese–European relations during the Cold War. It is based on deep research into Swiss and Chinese archival sources and a solid grasp of the secondary literature on China's foreign relations and Cold War history. It is clearly written and well organized.

The Swiss role in China's policy toward Europe during the Cold War remains a little-studied subject. Knüsel's study of Chinese–Swiss encounters from the 1950s to the mid-1970s fills a gap in the Cold War historiography about the unique position Switzerland occupied in China's approach toward Europe. With fascinating details, Knüsel reveals that the People's Republic of China (PRC) strategically used Switzerland as a hub for its political, economic, cultural, and intelligence activities in Europe during the first two decades after its founding in 1949. In the wake of the improvement of China's ties with the United States and Western Europe in the early 1970s, however, Switzerland's function as Beijing's European headquarters diminished. By examining the nature and scope of Chinese political, economic, propaganda and intelligence operations in Switzerland, Knüsel enriches our knowledge about the making and implementation of Beijing's foreign policy, especially toward Western Europe.

In analyzing the cooperation and conflict between China and Switzerland, Knüsel usefully applies Federico Romero's decentralized and heterogeneous concept of the Cold War as “a complex fabric of disparate interactions (local, national, transnational and global) with multiple actors operating in many intersecting fields.” By highlighting the ideas, visions, initiatives, and agency of Beijing and Bern, Knüsel makes clear that post-1945 history was shaped both by the superpowers and by lesser players such as secondary and small countries, supranational groups, transnational movements, and international organizations. While China attempted to establish itself as a major actor in Asia and as a leader of the Communist camp in the 1960s and the Third World in the 1970s, Switzerland sought to assert itself as a key neutral mediator between the East and the West. Chinese and Swiss leaders were eager to fill the