

Brenner's celebrated and criticized arguments about agrarian social relations and economic development in Europe. The problems of the original Brenner formulation, which anticipate close causal linkages between agrarian social relations and commercial practices, matter in this work as well. More analysis of firms and market structures would have possibly made the dynamics and limitations of commercial expansion a bit clearer. Chapter 7 turns to the world of new possibilities made possible by the Industrial Revolution, for sugar production as for many other commodities. In particular this chapter shows for sugar how the Japanese colonial government reorganized and expanded Taiwan sugar production, largely to meet expanding Japanese demand. In contrast, the Qing state did little. The author suggests that the Qing government lacked the "political cohesion" and "concentration of economic clout" (p. 386), but surely it also lacked the incentive to transform the sugar industry in a manner similar to Japan's needs. Chinese producers, increasingly in tandem with foreign imports, were meeting Chinese demand.

This engaging study of Chinese sugar offers a challenging interpretation of larger patterns of social and economic change in south China. Strong on presenting arguments that compare Chinese conditions with those found elsewhere and that cast the south China economic situation within its immediate maritime and a larger global setting, it makes less generous use of other recent scholarship on Ming-Qing Guangdong's social economy. In combination with other works on south China's economy and the larger maritime system of which its products were part, this book complicates as it illuminates our understanding of sugar in late imperial and modern Chinese history.

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*Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition.* Edited by SHERRY J. MOU. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. xxviii, 307 pp. \$59.95.

Recent years have witnessed an exhilarating transformation of Chinese studies by new scholarship on women and gender. The vast majority of this work has focused on late imperial times (Ming and Qing dynasties) and the twentieth century and has generated a wealth of archival research, critical studies, and literary translations. *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition*, a new volume of essays edited by Sherry Mou, pushes back the historical purview of gender studies even further by addressing the still relatively unexplored terrain of women's lives in the context of medieval China. In seeking to redress this gap in the scholarship, Mou states that the purpose of the collection is "not only to use 'woman' as a tool of formal analysis to unsettle the very male-centered notion of the 'literati tradition,' but also to unsettle historical and unnuanced theories of sex and gender" (p. xxi). The volume, based on papers presented at an international medieval studies conference and published as part of a multicultural series on medievalism, also signals the emerging dialogue gender and women's studies has sparked between China scholars and specialists from other fields.

Interdisciplinary in scope, the volume encompasses subjects as wide ranging as Taoist sainthood, border politics, courtesan culture, and elite male attitudes towards

concubinage, and reflects (more so than the editor perhaps implies) an eclectic array of methodologies and critical concerns. One basic objective that seems to tie the contributions together is to dispel the entrenched myths of “traditional” feminine silence and passivity. Such myths gained currency within the reformist discourse of the early 1900s that sought to identify and challenge women’s social and cultural subordination. In projecting a monolithic view of women’s pasts, however, such myths have hardly provided a productive paradigm for understanding the actual ideologies and practices that shaped female lives. Revealing moments in which female “presence” can be felt and heard, despite the various silencing mechanisms within traditional culture, promises to articulate complexity, change, and female agency to historical narrative(s) in Chinese antiquity.

One obvious constraint, of course, is the archive itself. Whereas scholars dealing with later dynastic history have derived some of their most valuable insights from records left by literate women themselves, those researching the pre-Song era have no choice but to rely primarily on male texts. Yet such sources, when scrutinized from a critical gendered perspective, can be highly illuminating, as several of the essays in this volume demonstrate. In her reexamination of Tang biographies of women, for instance, Mou exposes significant contradictions in the representation of female virtue that suggest a more complex picture of women’s moral choice and agency. Suzanne Cahill’s article analyzes transformation narratives compiled by the Tang Daoist master Du Guangting to assess medieval views of women, death, and sainthood. “Ji-Entertainers in Tang Chang’an,” Victor Xiong’s essay, reconstructs the lives of women working in the pleasure quarters from anecdotes recorded by the Tang connoisseur Sun Qi, noting both the intellectual content of their services and the physical abuse to which they were subjected by brothel madams and male clients. Rich in factual detail (Xiong even appends a map of ninth-century Chang’an), this essay unfortunately falls short in analyzing the sexual politics that produced this form of entertainment culture.

In other essays, the focus shifts from unearthing female experience to elucidating the gendered attitudes of male authors. Don J. Wyatt (the most self-conscious about the interpretative limitations of his sources) considers the implications of the unorthodox response of two prominent Song intellectuals, Wang Anshi and Sima Guang, to concubinage. He concludes that their reluctance to avail themselves of this system should not be taken as indicative of a protofeminist stance. In her article, “From Cross-Dressing Daughter to Lady Knight-Errant,” Sufen Sophia Lai also resists the temptation to attribute subversive intent to the authors who collectively fashioned fantasies of the women warrior. While neither her subject nor the conclusions she draws are particularly original (Louise Edwards has covered similar ground in her 1995 article on the topic), it is nonetheless an informative survey of the various permutations of this literary trope.

Other contributors approach “women’s presence” from yet a different critical angle, exploring how early ideologies of gender are inscribed in political, religious, and other social discourses. Jen-der Lee challenges views of traditional Chinese society as “monolithically Confucian” through an insightful analysis of legal documents concerning the death of an imperial princess, revealing that Confucian ideals of the patriarchal family were not firmly enough established during this period to dictate the verdict in the case. This is an important observation. It shows the uneven process by which Confucian ethics were legally codified, and how critical attention to women’s experience, here the marital problems and demise of a princess, can illuminate broader historical dynamics. In her second contribution to the volume, Lai traces the evolving

legend of Mulian to explore the gendered articulation of Buddhist notions of salvation and damnation. Such narratives, she argues, were used to reconcile Buddhist and Confucian values which, in turn, helped to “further institutionalize Chinese conceptions of the feminine” (p. 204) as embodying inferior *yin* qualities. Similarly, in her analysis of *heqin* intermarriage practices in medieval China’s frontier policy, Ning Chia shows how the establishment of family ties between imperial daughters and inner Asian rulers provided a rhetoric that helped naturalize (and hence secure) the hierarchical political relation between China and its rival states.

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*Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Sectarian Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.* By DANIEL L. OVERMYER. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, 49. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999. xi, 444 pp. \$55.00 (cloth).

C. K. Yang wrote in *Religion in Chinese Society* that, aside from Buddhism and Taoism, the third form of institutional religion in China “was that of the syncretic religious societies” (University of California Press, 1961, p. 301). Daniel Overmyer has studied some of these popular religious sects, which he calls “folk Buddhist religion,” and compared them to religious reform movements such as “the Pure Land Buddhist in thirteenth century Japan, the Lutheran in sixteenth century Europe, and *bhakti* sects in medieval Hinduism” (*Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976], p. 1). While they incorporated elements from Maitreyan, Pure Land, and Ch’an Buddhism, Inner Alchemy Taoism, and Confucian ethics, the religions should be regarded as new, for they possessed important characteristics that set them apart from traditional Chinese religions. These characteristics included the belief in a mother goddess who is the creator and savior of humankind, an eschatology marked by three stages, and universal salvation unmediated by religious professionals. Another striking characteristic is that they possessed their own scriptures known as *pao-chüan* (precious volumes). These texts, believed to have been divinely revealed to sect founders, are characterized by “simple classical language interspersed with vernacular constructions, the alternation of prose sections with seven- or ten-character lines of verse, usually in rhyme; and direct expositions of mythology, doctrinal teaching, and moral exhortation” (p. 3).

Overmyer is a pioneer in the Western study of precious volumes. He has now written a definitive work on this subject. He tells us that since 1976 he has “collected, photographed or read library copies of 131 *pao-chüan* of all types and periods” (p. ix). This book is based on 34 sectarian scripture texts dated to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although some studies of individual texts and bibliographical surveys of *pao-chüan* are available, this is indeed “the first book-length study in a Western language focused on the contents of these books as a genre developed over time” (p. x). According to Overmyer, sectarian precious volumes “represent a fifth type of scripture text in the history of Chinese religions, along with the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist classics and scriptures that preceded them and the popular spirit-writing books that have largely taken their place since the late nineteenth century” (p. 8). In claiming a place for them next to the canons of the Great Traditions, he “assumes that popular religious texts are just as deserving of such study as any other