

Communications to the Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

I write to protest the review of David Rolston's book by Sheldon H. Lu and published in *JAS* 57.3:836–38. Two very serious and potentially damaging points of criticism are levied against the author.

The first alleges that Rolston “refuses to enter into an honest dialogue with recent U.S.–based scholarship, but is fond of quoting and alluding to obscure, little known sources to support his generalizations” (p. 837). The meaning of this charge is, simply put, baffling to me. I don't understand, in the first place, why “U.S.–based scholarship,” whatever that is, must be privileged over any other scholarship based elsewhere. One would have thought that serious scholarly concerns for any of us working in the guild would require the transcendence of geographical boundaries. The matter of obscurity or familiarity of sources is wholly irrelevant, *as long as such sources are pertinent to the issue under consideration*. This last point seems not to have been entertained by the reviewer. Even, however, if the call for citation of “U.S.–based scholarship” is allowed here for the purpose of discussion, any reader who has examined the copious footnotes and “Western Works Cited” section of the bibliography will be inclined to dispute Professor Lu's generalization and his rather captious citation of two sentences from Rolston's “Preface” that patently are out of context.

The second point raised in the following paragraph on the same page of the review is even more severe, because in so many words, Lu is alleging plagiarism of his own writings. Apart from gross factual error, this is probably the worst sin, at least in the Western academy. If proven true, the misdeed also carries profound legal ramifications. To make a valid and printed accusation of this nature, it is absolutely imperative that specific documentation must accompany the charge and not a highly summarial but vague generalization: “these sections heavily build on my previous work and endlessly paraphrase my findings.” Whatever wounded feelings (justified or not) rather than dispassionate judgment that might have motivated the reviewer, a prestigious journal like the *JAS* that purports to serve the entire association of scholars in this vast field cannot afford to print such an irresponsible representation without demanding meticulous substantiation. The *Journal's* book reviewer editor who accepted the review, in my opinion, is guilty of serious negligence.

Professor David Rolston is an alumnus of The Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, The University of Chicago, and a past student. Lest my letter now appears to be a plaint of partisanship, I should make plain that only a few years ago, I wrote a similar letter to the editor of *JAS* protesting *Rolston's* review of a colleague's book. In that case as it is in this one, my only concern is with fairness of critique. Rolston, no more or less than any other colleague, deserves honest engagement and debate (including severe criticism), not savagery. I hope the *Journal* will allow me to air this complaint.

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EDITOR'S RESPONSE:

Mea culpa. I erred in allowing Professor Sheldon Lu's review of Professor David L. Rolston's book on *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary* to be published with the unsubstantiated charge that it made in the final paragraph on page 837 (*JAS*, 57, 3, August 1998). The offending paragraph closes with the sentence: "Knowingly appropriating recent U.S.-based scholarship on such a massive scale without a single word of acknowledgement is unconscionable and unprofessional." Although I had requested Professor Lu to rewrite an earlier version of the review—and he agreed to do so—I neglected to follow up on the above charge that remained in the revised version of the review. My apologies to Professor Rolston and all concerned parties. Professor Rolston has chosen not to respond to the Lu review.