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REVIEWS

DON J. WYATT, *The Blacks of Premodern China*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. 208 pp., 7 illus. $65·00 (cloth). ISBN 9780812241938

The history of encounters between China and Africa — or, more precisely, between people of China and people they perceived as black — is intriguing for obvious reasons: it appeals to our sensibility that the "human web" was even more extensive and intricate than we might have assumed, it alerts us to parallels and connections (such as the practice of enslavement) that we might not have otherwise paid attention to, and it informs our understanding, albeit in a limited way, of the increasingly complex ties between the People's Republic and the African continent.

That Don Wyatt, a historian of mid-imperial China, has taken on the task to trace the early episodes of this history is indeed welcome. The book, not long, follows roughly a chronological order. It begins by documenting the earliest conceptions of blackness in Chinese sources and explains how the terms *hei ren* 黑人 (found, perhaps not surprisingly, in the texts *Mozi* 墨子 and *Shan hai jing* 山海經 [Guideways to mountains and seas]) and *kunlun* 崑崙 (which first appears in *Mu Tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳 [Biography of Mu the son of heaven], albeit primarily as a geographic reference) have been deployed over time. The book then focuses on certain intriguing accounts found in *Pingzhou ke tan* 萍州可談 (Pingzhou chats on things worthwhile), an early twelfth-century notebook (*bi ji*), and seeks to make sense of the references therein regarding the presence of "demon slaves" (*gui nu* 鬼奴) in the southern city of Guangzhou 廣州 in no later than the Song period. The third (and final) chapter of the book then offers a close reading of parts of *Xing cha sheng lan* 星槎勝覽 (Arresting views from a raft guided by stars), which was left behind by Fei Xin 費信, who went on four of the seven voyages associated with Zheng He 鄭和, as well as the late sixteenth-century fiction *Sanbao tai jian xi yang ji tong su yan yi* 三寶太監西洋記通俗演義 (Popular romance of the record of the three-jeweled eunuch in the western sea); the argument is that, in part as a result of the fateful landing by the crew of Zheng He on the east coast of Africa, "Chinese at the close of the Ming era had become irrevocably robbed of their former comfort zone of ignorance" and that, "from their times forward, no mention of the *kunlun* or their domain could occur without simultaneously and conterminously referencing those newly discovered territories and their truly black inhabitants that lay at the end of the Western Sea" (p. 126).

Wyatt's book could, of course, be read in a somewhat different way. It is a story about imaginations and perceptions (ch. 1), about actual encounters and enslavement

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of people perceived as blacks on Chinese land (ch. 2), and about the journeys the Chinese undertook as Africa the land finally came into their view (ch. 3).

Wyatt is not the first to write on the subject of Afro-Asian connections. Nor is he the first to pay special attention to Zhu Yu's 朱彧 *Pingzhou ke tan* or Fei Xin's *Xing cha sheng lan*. Wyatt's main contribution, as he would acknowledge, is his ability to weave together a wide range of materials to tell a story that clearly centers on the early encounters between China and Africa. Hence, the reader is exposed to traditional Chinese sources ranging from *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Zuo commentary) from the first millennium before the common era to Wang Qi's 王圻 *San cai tu hui* 三才圖會 (Collected illustrations of heaven, earth, and people) dated to the early seventeenth century, and the reader is introduced to a feast of modern research ranging from those by earlier giants such as Feng Chengjun 馮承鈞, J. J. L. Duyvendak, Paul Pelliott, Edward Schafer, and Zhang Xinglang 張星烺 to those by scholars of more recent vintage (such as Derek Heng and Julie Wilensky). Along the way, the reader is also treated to discussion on a variety of stimulating topics, including the importance of skin color as a marker in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, the significance of food and cooking in the Chinese discourses on distinctions, the question of personhood of slaves, as well as the use of hair or hairstyle as a signifier for differences.

Perhaps by design, Wyatt's book really tells us as much what we do not know as what we do know (sorry for the Rumsfeldian construction). I understand "we can never expect to determine precisely when the term *kunlun* first entered into Chinese parlance" (p. 18) and, with regard to the first wave of *kunlun* who could be documented in Chinese sources, that "we are compelled to regard as intractably difficult to resolve these questions of *whom* the Chinese were referring to when they wrote of these specific *kunlun* and *what* the realities of their bondage were" (p. 21). I am in sympathy as well that, with regard to *Pingzhou ke tan*, the description therein "raises perhaps more questions than it answers" (p. 45) and that Fei Xin's ethnographic description, in the case of Mogadishu, "fully illustrates the difficulty of attempting to reconstitute any truly crystalline image of the peoples upon whom Fei Xin gazed based purely on his words alone" (p. 107). But while I appreciate that, as historians, we need to be transparent about our knowledge, if what we do not know becomes too much of the story, then at least this reviewer would find the exercise less than satisfactory.

One final point: in the course of writing this review, I did come across a few late-Ming or early-Qing writings concerning *hei gui* 黑鬼, *gui nu*, *kunlun*, or *hei ren* (see, for example, Qu Dajun 屈大均 [1630–96], *Guangdong xin yu* [New things heard or seen from Guangdong; Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1985], 7·233–35). Although more work would need to be carried out, based on what I have read, I am not convinced that seventeenth-century Chinese writers, when writing about people they perceived as black, were necessarily informed, whether directly or indirectly, by Fei Xin's accounts of his African encounters in particular or the voyages of Zheng He in general.

Wyatt's book should of course be on the reading list of students who are interested in the subject. But, as the author himself puts it, what is between the covers is really an essay — "a written 'attempt,' an expository effort designed to

offer something new but by no means one in which I [i.e. the author] presume to present anything that is categorically so" (p. 196).

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JIANG YONGLIN, *The Mandate of Heaven and "The Great Ming Code"*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011. 256 pp. $70·00 (hardcover). ISBN 9780295990651. $30·00 (paperback). ISBN 9780295993430

The *Great Ming Code* (*Da Ming lü* 大明律) was first compiled in 1367, before the Ming dynasty was formally inaugurated, and finalized in 1397 after several revisions. Even before this compilation process was complete, it became one of the foundational texts upon which the new Ming order was built. In *The Mandate of Heaven and "The Great Ming Code"*, Jiang Yonglin, a leading scholar of Chinese legal history, argues that the *Code* was a lot more than a legal work in any narrow sense. It was both a political document that helped to order the realm and a moral textbook designed to educate and transform society. It also promoted the rituals and values of the official cult headed by the Son of Heaven while controlling or quelling adherents of heterodox religions. Indeed, the cosmological principles upheld by the early Ming elites were thoroughly interwoven into the *Great Ming Code*; the text embodied the very worldview of the Ming ruling class. Developing these themes, Jiang presents a close reading of the *Great Ming Code* — his translation of which has already become a standard reference work for many scholars[1] — and extends his interpretation from the text itself to the world it was designed to shape.

In addition to the *Great Ming Code*, the primary sources of Jiang's study include two types of legal commentaries: exegetical works explaining the meaning of the *Code* as well as its historical and intellectual context; and the many "model verdicts" (*panyu* 判語) and "model notices" (*gaoshi* 告示) that were frequently attached to commentaries on the *Code*. Jiang also makes extensive use of the standard political and historical sources such as the *Ming History* (*Ming shi* 明史), the *Veritable Records* (*shilu* 實錄) and various promulgations of the Hongwu reign (1368–98).

The book is divided into six chapters. The first two chapters provide the background and context of the study, and also explain the relationship between religion and Chinese — especially early Ming — legal cosmology. Then follow three core chapters, each of which elaborates on one of the realms that Jiang identifies as the main concerns of the *Great Ming Code*: the world of spirits, the human realm, and officialdom. A conclusion makes up the sixth chapter.

In the introductory chapter, Jiang addresses some of the intellectual and historiographical questions with which the book engages, in particular the relationships between religion, law, and cosmology. For Jiang it is fundamental to understand that the *Great Ming Code* was full of religious meaning. At the heart of this view is the ancient notion that the emperor as Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) was responsible for maintaining a cosmic harmony between the world of men and the superhuman world of Heaven and its spirits. Established on heavenly principles, the *Code* was a crucial instrument for maintaining this harmony. In