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Thinking About “Non-Chinese” in Ming China

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At the start of his *Record of All Vassals* (*Xian bin lu*), a text completed no later than 1591, Luo Yuejiong, a scholar from Jiangxi (in southern China) whom we otherwise know little about, seeks to explain to his readers why his historical survey of “non-Chinese” peoples (*si yi*) deserves attention. In Luo’s telling, in his time, “scholars who are fond of antiquity” (*haogu zhi shi*) have generally taken to focus on texts composed before the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and ignore those from later periods. But while scholars who have developed a degree of familiarity with pre-Han sources might like to think of themselves as “broadly learned” (*bo-xue*), Luo observes, their intellectual horizon is, in fact, not unlike “the outlook of a frog at the bottom of a well.” By contrast, in composing his general study of those “non-Chinese” peoples who have, over time, interacted with China (*Zhongguo*; literally, “central dominion”), Luo Yuejiong points out, he has consciously consulted a wide range of sources, including in particular materials that are outside the scope of classical texts and standard histories.¹

Luo’s *Record* was of course only one of many texts composed in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) that were concerned with the *si yi*, a label that was used regularly in Chinese sources to refer to a wide range of “non-Chinese,” from people who lived in faraway countries to those who populated the border regions of the “central dominion.” As I have discussed elsewhere, for a variety of reasons—among them the persistent military threats (especially from across the northern border) faced by the Ming state, the increased opportunities for travel in Ming times, and

the expansion of commercial publishing in China since the sixteenth century—a growing number of Ming-dynasty scholars were becoming increasingly sensitive to human diversity as well as interested in identifying and demarcating the “non-Chinese” populations.² And though there appeared in the Ming period a great number of texts that were focused on the *si yi*, Luo’s *Record* does stand out for its apparent breadth of research: included in its bibliography (*yin yong zhu shu mulu*)—a referential device not commonly found in similar works—are a total of 345 items; while some of the texts cited, such as *The Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan*) and *Record of the Historian* (*Shiji*), both dated to the second half of the first millennium before the common era, might be considered canonical, the rest are distinctly an eclectic collection of post-Han compositions.³

What is noteworthy as well about the *Record of All Vassals* are some of its claims. According to Luo Yuejiong, though there were clear distinctions between the “Chinese” and “non-Chinese,” many of the *si yi* discussed in his text were in fact “descendants of the kings and nobles of the central dominion.” For example, the so-called Tatars (Dada)—among whom Luo included the Xiongnu of the Han period, the Turks (Tujue) of the Tang dynasty (618–907), and the Mongols who had been active in the northern region since the Song period (960–1276)—were, in his view, descendants of the last ruler of the Xia dynasty, who, upon the fall of his regime (in the early part of the second millennium before the common era), were said to have retreated with his followers to the steppe region. Likewise, according to Luo, many of the “non-Chinese” peoples who populated the southern border region were actually descendants of Emperor Ku (more popularly known as Gaoxin), one of the Five Emperors who had been identified in ancient sources as among the first sovereigns of the people of the “central dominion.” Luo Yuejiong was clearly sensitive to human diversity, but he was just as interested in making the case that, given their common origins, some of the “non-Chinese” could in time be transformed into “Chinese.”⁴

Luo’s *Record* is interesting to us not only because of its scope (in all more than a hundred foreign and borderland groups are discussed) or its claims (some of which are, admittedly, far from original) but also because it offers the historian an opportunity to reflect on how the increased awareness of human diversity on the part of some Ming-dynasty scholars had informed their understanding of—and approaches to—China’s antiquity. During the Ming, it should be noted, thinking or writing about “non-Chinese,” especially outside the context of policy debates, was by and large a marginal intellectual endeavor, and scholars who engaged in

it generally did not do so to challenge their own perceptions of antiquity. Nevertheless, by examining some of the more representative writings on “non-Chinese” during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—such as those by Qiu Jun (1421–95), Yang Shen (1488–1559), and Wang Shixing (1547–98)—one could better understand not only how Ming scholars differed in their perceptions of China’s antiquity but also, perhaps more importantly, how they differed in their approaches to ancient sources. My goal here is not to be explicitly comparative; what I seek to show is that, in making sense of the diversity of “non-Chinese” peoples both within and beyond the “central dominion,” scholars in Ming-dynasty China did find it necessary to reexamine and, in some cases, reevaluate the textual remains of times past.

Classical Texts as Sources of Authority

To place Luo Yuejiong’s general survey of the “non-Chinese” in the broader context of Ming intellectual and cultural history, the writings of the prominent fifteenth-century scholar-official Qiu Jun would be as useful a starting point as others. It is unclear whether Luo would count Qiu as among those “scholars who are fond of antiquity” he spoke disapprovingly of; what is evident is that, even though they were both interested in tracing the history of “non-Chinese” groups, their approaches, as well as their conclusions, were markedly different. Whereas Luo Yuejiong would emphasize the importance of taking into account information beyond those found in classical texts and standard histories, Qiu Jun would argue that the basic—unruly—nature of “non-Chinese” peoples had been amply documented in ancient sources. And whereas Luo would draw attention to what he perceived to be the common origins between the “Chinese” and “non-Chinese,” Qiu would insist on the basis of his own reading of early sources (many of which could be dated to the first millennium before the common era) that the two peoples were fundamentally distinct.

Qiu Jun’s interests in—and concerns about—the “non-Chinese” were no doubt shaped by his own background. A native son of Qionghshan (present-day Hainan Island) in China’s far south, Qiu was one of very few highly influential government officials of his time who had come from a region with a significant “non-Chinese” (in this case, the “Li”) population. A student in the imperial capital at the time of the Tumu debacle—in which the Ming emperor, during a misguided military expe-

dition, was taken hostage by the Mongols—Qiu Jun was evidently deeply influenced by his experience during the upheaval. But despite the ensuing political chaos (for some time, there was much concern about the immediate threats posed by the newly emboldened Mongols), Qiu's official career was by all accounts a successful one. Awarded the highest civil service examination degree in 1454, Qiu Jun was immediately assigned to the prestigious Hanlin Academy, where he served continuously for almost a quarter of a century. He took part in many editorial projects, including the compilation of the official records of two of the Ming emperors. Through these assignments, Qiu was able to not only access a vast quantity of government documents but also shape the official accounts according to his view of history. In addition to his memorials and official compilations, Qiu was the author or editor of a wide range of works, among which the most interesting to us are his *Correct Bonds in History* (*Shishi zhenggang*), a study he completed in 1481, and his *Supplement to the "Extended Meaning of the Great Learning"* (*Da xue yan yi bu*), a monumental encyclopedia of statecraft he finished in 1487.⁵

Not surprising, Qiu Jun's concerns about the Mongols in particular and other borderland "non-Chinese" groups in general are reflected in his conception of China's past. In his *Correct Bonds in History*, a survey of major developments in the "central dominion" from the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) to the beginning of the Ming period, Qiu clearly states that one of the main objectives of his study is to draw attention to the importance of "observing strict distinctions between Chinese and non-Chinese" (*yan hua yi zhi fen*). According to Qiu Jun, the need to defend the boundary between "Chinese" (*hua*) and "non-Chinese" (*yi*) is not unlike the imperative to maintain proper relationships between a ruler and his ministers (in the context of a country) or to uphold the bonds between a father and his sons (in the context of a family). In all three cases, Qiu argues, the "correct" (*zheng*) models of relations (or bonds) have been demonstrated time and again in the historical records. To Qiu Jun, then, a study of the past is, at its core, an examination of how earlier dynasties were or were not able to uphold such correct models of relations. Seen from this perspective, according to Qiu, whereas the dynasties of Han, Tang, and Song—under which China was ruled by the Chinese—were clearly part of what he would call the "orthodox tradition" (*zhengtong*), the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368)—under which the central dominion was ruled by the Mongols—was an example of historical aberration.⁶

Qiu Jun's desire to make use of the past to make sense of the present

is even more evident in his magnum opus, *Supplement to the “Extended Meaning of the Great Learning.”* Though it is billed as a “supplement” to a Song-dynasty work, Qiu’s compendium is in fact a study with a much different aim, focusing not on individual ethics but on government administration. Presented to the newly enthroned emperor in 1487, the *Supplement*, which runs to more than fifteen hundred pages in modern reduced-size reprints, is at once a masterly display of scholarship and a comprehensive blueprint for actions. Divided into 12 sections and 119 subsections, Qiu’s study is apparently intended to cover all important aspects of government, from the workings of the imperial court to policies concerning borderland “non-Chinese.” As part of the format of the work, each subsection would include a selection of quotations from both classical texts and standard histories, and each would feature Qiu Jun’s own commentaries as well as policy recommendations for the Ming ruler. Although Qiu’s ideas would at times prove controversial, that his study would be ordered to be reissued in the late Ming was a clear testimony to its continual political relevance and influence.⁷

To Qiu Jun, what is apparent from a systematic examination of the historical records is that it is natural (or, in his words, in accordance with “the pattern of all-under-heaven” [*tianxian zhi li*]) that there exists a boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese.” In the section of the *Supplement* devoted to “Subordinating non-Chinese” (*yu yi di*), Qiu can be found frequently quoting from both classical texts—the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*), the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu*), the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli*), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), among others—and standard histories (such as the *Record of the Historian* and *History of the Han* [*Hanshu*]) to make the case that, in order for the “central dominion” to enjoy peace, the boundary between *hua* and *yi* must be defended. The age of the sage-kings (that is, antiquity) was a time of tranquility, Qiu argues, because a clear distinction was made between the inner zones, on the one hand, and the outer zones, on the other. By contrast, the border troubles of later dynasties (such as the Han and the Tang) were results of the rulers’ “failure to defend attentively the boundary between inside and outside” and to prevent “the amalgamation of the customs of the *hua* and *yi*.” To strengthen border defense, in Qiu’s view, the Ming court should emulate the model of antiquity and limit interactions between the “Chinese” and “non-Chinese.” In the case of the northern border, where military threats are more imminent, this would mean that the Mongols should be kept strictly away from the “central dominion”; in the case of the southern border, where various “non-Chinese” peoples (among them the Ge, the

Ling, the Lao, the Yao, and the Zhuang—all descendants of the so-called Nanyue of ancient times, according to Qiu) have long intermingled with the “Chinese,” a key to success would be to restrict contacts between the local populations.⁸

To Qiu Jun, what seems obvious as well from his close reading of both classical texts and standard histories are the inherent differences between *hua* and *yi*. To him, that “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” are fundamentally distinct is evidenced by the presence of geographic boundaries (especially mountains and rivers) that have separated the two. It would be a mistake, according to Qiu, if the rulers of China were to try—whether through alliances or through force—to breach such natural barriers. In particular, in his comment on a passage from the *Rites of Zhou* (in which references are made to the presence in China’s peripheries of the peoples of Yi, Man, Min, Mo, Rong, and Di), Qiu Jun argues that whereas the Chinese have long dominated the center, the non-Chinese have occupied the margins; the *hua* have mixed with and assimilated to one another (*hun er tong*), while the *yi* have developed a wide range of temperaments and customs. And whereas the non-Chinese who settle near the Chinese have come to share some of the practices of the latter, those who live far away have remained unruly and rebellious. To maintain peace, Qiu observes, the earliest rulers of the central dominion were concerned less with transforming the customs of the non-Chinese than with confining them to their own space. This, to Qiu Jun, remains a sound policy.⁹

The claim that history offers important political and moral lessons was of course, by Ming times, hardly earth-shattering. Nevertheless, the writings by Qiu Jun are significant for at least two reasons. The first one has to do with the thoroughness with which Qiu employed both classical texts and standard histories to make sense of what he perceived as the essential tensions between the “Chinese” and “non-Chinese.” Qiu Jun certainly understood that the past was different from the present, but as a leading scholar-official of his time he was evidently much more impressed by historical analogies and the idea that the institutions and practices of ancient times should (and could) help guide contemporary policies. But the relationship between Qiu’s approach to the historical records and his sensitivity to human diversity was necessarily dialectical. Just as Qiu’s particular reading and understanding of ancient sources had informed how he made sense of the persistent threats posed by the Mongols and other borderland “non-Chinese,” his increased awareness of human diversity (and this is the second reason his writings deserve our

attention) had in turn reaffirmed his commitment to the classical texts as sources of authority.¹⁰

The Importance of Being “Broadly Learned”

The writings by Qiu Jun might continue to be influential, but as we could see from the case of Luo Yueji, Ming-dynasty scholars who were sensitive to the diversity of “non-Chinese” peoples were not uncritical of how China’s antiquity should be understood or how ancient sources should be approached. To be sure, the classical texts and standard histories Qiu often cited as sources of authority would continue to shape the collective imagination of the educated elite. Yet, by the sixteenth century, more and more scholars would argue that the hallmark of a true gentleman was not the individual’s mastery of the Confucian canon or his success in the civil service examinations; rather, according to this understanding, the defining characteristics of a “man of culture” (*wenren*) were his broad range of learning as well as his ability to adopt a critical approach toward scholarship. For individual scholars in Ming China, then, their growing awareness of human diversity not only offered them a chance to expand their scope of learning but also—more relevant to our discussion perhaps—provided them an opportunity to reevaluate a wide range of ancient sources.

Of those scholars whose interests in the “non-Chinese” populations appear to have intersected with their commitment to “broad learning,” the most well-known—and certainly the most prolific—was Yang Shen. Son of Yang Tinghe (1459–1529), a prominent minister at the Ming court, Yang Shen was by most accounts a brilliant student who, at the young age of twenty-three, was awarded first place in the civil service examinations. Appointed to the Hanlin Academy soon after his examination success, Yang would turn out to be just as outspoken as his father. In 1524, Yang Shen was one of 134 officials who were imprisoned by the emperor for their involvement in the so-called Great Ritual Controversy. As part of his punishment, Yang was sentenced to exile to the southwestern border province of Yunnan where he would, in effect, spend the rest of his life. Already famous for his literary talent and scholarship, Yang Shen, now free from political entanglements, was apparently able to devote even more time to reading and writing. In part because of Yang’s broad interests and in part because of his fame, by the turn of the seven-

teenth century, more than one hundred titles would be credited to him. Even if one disregards those items that were obviously falsely attributed, Yang's œuvre would include, in addition to his poems and other literary outputs, studies on poetry, epigraphy, phonology, philology, and history, as well as a significant body of writings on geography and borderland peoples.¹¹

Yang Shen's interests in China's border regions are clearly reflected in his writings on Yunnan. As Yang's adopted home for almost thirty-five years, Yunnan was, in Ming times, still widely perceived as a hostile region populated by a variety of "non-Chinese" (*yǐ*) peoples. Although it had long been in contact with the "central dominion," it was not until the Mongol Yuan dynasty that the region of Yunnan (approximately the size of present-day Germany) was officially incorporated into China. During his long years in exile, Yang Shen managed to travel widely within the province. Of the works on Yunnan Yang has left behind, at least three—*Journey to Yunnan* (*Dian cheng ji*), *Descriptions of the Mountains and Streams of Yunnan* (*Yunnan shanchuan zhi*), and *Climate of Yunnan* (*Dian hou ji*)—are specifically concerned with the geography of the southwestern borderland. Though Yang Shen was no doubt keen on contrasting what he believed to be the norms of the "central dominion" with what he observed in Yunnan, what is noteworthy about these studies is that, in general, Yang seems to be more interested in presenting firsthand knowledge than in imposing judgments. In this regard, as we will see, Yang Shen appears to have anticipated some of the scholar-travelers of late Ming China.¹²

Yang Shen's curiosity about Yunnan was not confined to geography. Since the border region had long lain outside the rule of the centralizing state, Yang was interested also in tracing the history of the native ruling clans. *Regional Rule in Yunnan* (*Dian zai ji*; completed in 1543) is not, as far as one can tell, an original work by Yang Shen. In a postscript to the text, Yang explains that while he has long searched for historical records for the kingdoms of Nanzhao and Dali (which, in succession, had ruled the region of Yunnan from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries), he had not had much success—that is, until he came upon two unusual texts written in the local Bo language. *Regional Rule in Yunnan*, thus edited and transcribed into Chinese by Yang Shen and his helpers, is essentially a record of legends and selected facts concerning the early rulers in Yunnan. For Yang, being able to trace the history of the rulers of Nanzhao and Dali was no doubt itself significant, but what seems to have given him even more pleasure was the broader context of his study. In making use

of as wide a range of sources as possible in reconstructing the past, Yang Shen saw himself as emulating not only Sima Qian (c. 145–c. 86 BCE) and Sima Guang (1019–86)—the two great historians from the Han and the Song, respectively—but also the very master, Confucius himself.¹³

Although much of Yang’s writings on the subjects did concern Yunnan, his interests in China’s border regions (and its borderland peoples) are reflected also in his “supplementary comments” to the *Guideways through Mountains and Seas* (*Shanhai jing*). Compiled over centuries beginning before the founding of the first empire in 221 BCE, the *Guideways* is now generally understood as a work of imaginary geography. Of particular note about the fantastic landscape found in the text is the presence, both within and beyond the so-called central lands, of a vast array of hybrid creatures. Although the *Guideways* had had a long history of transmission since the scholar Guo Pu (276–324) left behind his commentaries, it was not until the second half of the Ming dynasty that the text seems to have generated new interests. In addition to Yang Shen’s “supplementary comments” (*buzhu*) a collection of 107 short glosses of terms and names—at least one new set of commentaries, by Wang Chongqing (1484–1565), was also made widely available in the sixteenth century. In one such late Ming edition of the work, the *Guideways*, which had for centuries been transmitted without illustrations, is even accompanied by a set of images.¹⁴

For Yang Shen, what was noteworthy about the *Guideways of Mountains and Seas* was not whether hybrid creatures such as the Di (who possessed “the face of a human but the body of a fish”) or the Rong (who had “the head of a human with three horns attached”)—to name just two of the myriad beings mentioned in the text—actually lived. To him, what was important was to uphold the principle that true scholars must not limit their reading to the Classics alone. In a note that accompanies his *Supplementary Comments* (*Shanhai jing buzhu*), Yang in fact compares the Classics with the five grains one is expected to consume every day and texts such as the *Guideways* with special dishes that possess extraordinary flavors. The assumption is that the textual—and, by extension, cultural—tradition that is China is far richer than what has been defined by the civil service examination curriculum. To Yang Shen, what was important as well was to uphold the belief that, in order to make full sense of the cultural tradition, scholars must attend to rigorous textual studies. In part echoing the sentiment of Guo Pu, Yang argues in another note that accompanies the *Supplementary Comments* that even though scholars have long expressed doubts about the origins and contents of the *Guide-*

ways, many of the claims that have been made about the work can in fact be corroborated by other sources from antiquity. Rather than simply dismiss the text as “strange,” Yang Shen implies, it would be worthwhile for scholars to devote energy to reading the work more closely and critically.¹⁵

In part because of the range and quantity of his writings, Yang Shen, even to his contemporaries, has proved to be somewhat of an enigma. To his admirers, Yang’s literary and intellectual outputs were simply extraordinary. There might be occasional mistakes in his works, but such minor shortcomings should in no way diminish the accomplishments of one of history’s greatest minds. To his critics, however, the reputation of Yang Shen was ill-deserved. The size of Yang’s intellectual output might be vast, but the quality was at best uneven. To move beyond this narrow range of criticisms, recent scholars have drawn attention to Yang Shen’s contributions to the development of textual—and, more generally, “evidential”—learning in late imperial China. Although modern-day scholars might disagree on what Yang’s most important literary and intellectual legacies are, most would agree that his significance has at least in part to do with his iconoclasm: in his scholarship, not only is Yang Shen responding to the then-dominant, examination-centered school of learning, he is also reacting to the powerful (but, in his view, misguided) intellectual challenges posed by the teachings of Wang Yangming (1472–1529).¹⁶

The “broad learning” of Yang Shen, in the final analysis, does complicate efforts to put him in any intellectual straitjacket. But, as Adam Schorr has shown, it is perhaps more helpful to think of Yang not as a proponent of any one school of scholarship but as someone who was most concerned with upholding what he considered “refined” or “cultured” (*ya*) and exposing what he deemed “vulgar” (*su*). Cast in this light, Yang Shen’s efforts to trace the history of the native ruling clans in Yunnan as well as his readiness to draw attention to a work of imaginary geography do exhibit a degree of intellectual coherence: in both cases, Yang was demonstrating how scholars could extend their knowledge (and, by implication, the Way or *dao*) by reading closely and critically both ancient and not-so-ancient texts. To claim, as Schorr does, that Yang Shen placed aesthetics above truth is perhaps overstating the case. But in contrast to Qiu Jun, Yang was clearly less interested in developing overarching interpretations of—and drawing timeless historical lessons from—the Classics than in upholding the importance of textual (and evidential) learning. Yang Shen might or might not believe in the need

to defend the boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese.” What he seemed most convinced of was the need for scholars to treat the received texts from ancient times not automatically as sources of authority but as sources that required attentive studies.¹⁷

From Textual to Empirical Knowledge

While Ming-dynasty scholars who were sensitive to the presence and diversity of “non-Chinese” peoples would continue to emphasize the importance of classical (textual) learning, by the second half of the sixteenth century, many would also increasingly draw attention to the need for firsthand or empirical knowledge. Even though the precise origin of this development is difficult to pinpoint, it is possible to identify two contributing factors. The first one, not surprisingly, had to do with the increased popularity and ease of travel. By the sixteenth century, as more and more scholars took to the roads and roamed the breadth and depth of the country, many would decide that it would be useful to supplement what they had learned in local gazetteers and geographical guides with information gained from firsthand observations. The second contributing factor, by contrast, had to do with the growing exasperation felt by many a scholar in the late Ming. As a result of the absence of imperial leadership as well as a heightened level of bickering among the political elite, many frustrated scholars would choose to seek alternative forms of fulfillment. While some would opt for traveling and writing, others would engage in what historians would loosely refer to as “substantial learning.”¹⁸

One Ming-dynasty scholar whose interests in the “non-Chinese” clearly intersected with this growing emphasis on empirical learning was Wang Shixing. A native of Zhejiang province on China’s east coast, Wang might not be the most well-known scholar-traveler of the Ming period, but he was certainly one of the most enthusiastic and observant. Throughout his successful if uneventful official career, Wang Shixing would take advantage of almost every opportunity to see the country. His first assignment to southern Henan, a region well known for its place in China’s cultural history, was in many ways typical of his journeys. While there, not only did Wang manage to visit many of its historical sites, he also climbed Mount Song, one of China’s five major sacred mountains (*wu yue*). Wang Shixing’s subsequent official assignments would bring him to other parts of the country, allowing him eventually to accomplish

the rare feat of visiting all five of the sacred mountains. His travels, it should be noted, were not limited to areas with apparent historical or cultural significance; in time, he was also given opportunities to journey to the border provinces in the southwest. As it has been pointed out by one of his biographers, with the exception of the coastal province of Fujian, Wang Shixing seems to have managed to visit, at one point or another, every major region in the Ming territory. But Wang is not known to us simply as an avid traveler; his travel writings—*Notes on Travels to the Five Sacred Mountains* (*Wu yue you cao*; prefaced 1591), *Record of Extensive Travels* (*Guang you zhi*; prefaced 1593), and *Further Elucidations on My Extensive Record of Travels* (*Guang zhi yi*; prefaced 1597)—are impressive not only for their geographic coverage but also for their observations and periodic insights.¹⁹

For Wang Shixing, while travel was certainly a form of self-fulfillment, it was also an important means for scholars to supplement their textual knowledge with firsthand observations. This emphasis on empirical learning, while evident throughout his travel writings, is most explicitly set forth in Wang's preface to his *Further Elucidations on My Extensive Record of Travels*. There, he laments the practice by some fellow travelers to "substitute their ears for their mouths" (*ji er wei kou*) and to report what they did not personally experience. Unlike such travel writings, Wang assures his reader, his notes are "all based on what I have personally seen and heard; where this is not possible, I would rather leave out [the information]."²⁰

From the point of view of Wang Shixing, empirical learning was useful for understanding regional differences. In his *Record of Extensive Travels* as well as in his *Further Elucidations*, Wang appears particularly interested in explaining why certain provinces in the south (such as Guizhou and Guangxi) have lagged behind other regions in their developments. Wang's answers to his own question are still very much informed by a philosophy of geography that is based on his interpretation of certain classical concepts. In particular, as far as he is concerned, the three *long* ("dragons") of China—best understood in this context as systems of mountains and ridges that provide visual clues to the flow of *qi* (pneuma)—all have their own timing of manifestation. Whereas the *long* of central China and the *long* of the North were the first to manifest themselves, according to Wang, time has come for the *long* of the South (which runs from China's Southeast to the Southwest) to take its turn. But Wang's answers to his question are not based solely on the classi-

cal concepts of *long* and *qi*. For him, what distinguishes Guizhou and Guangxi from other regions is not their mountainous terrain but their river systems. Since the rivers in the two provinces neither lead directly to the ocean (as in the case of those in the lower Yangzi region) nor come together to form a basin (as in the case of the rivers in Sichuan), Wang argues, it has been much more difficult for the two southern provinces to develop major settlements and to become prosperous.²¹

For Wang Shixing, firsthand knowledge was important as well for making sense of the diversity of the borderland “non-Chinese.” In Guangxi, where he once served as an administrator, for example, Wang would identify at least seven categories of “non-Chinese,” including the Yao, the Zhuang, the Ling, the Dong, the Shui, the Yang, and the Lang. “Whereas the Ling and the Dong are similar,” Wang observes in his *Record of Extensive Travels*, “the Shui and the Yang are few in number.” And whereas the Zhuang are by nature “relatively submissive,” the customs of the Yao are “most repulsive.” Although in his depiction of the “non-Chinese” Wang still draws from a long-standing textual tradition that emphasizes the “impropriety” of the *man* and *yi*, he also offers firsthand observations. In his discussion of the so-called Yao people, for example, Wang does draw attention to their “repulsive” marriage practice (it was apparently customary for men to marry the daughters of their own sisters or the widows of their own brothers), but he also describes, in relatively neutral terms, the local customs for courtship (after their daily field work, single men would travel in groups to neighboring villages to sing to the young women there). Wang is interested in not only how Yao people dress—while women wear the so-called dog’s tail blouse, “as a gesture of not having forgotten their ancestry,” men wear short shirts and earrings—but also how they live, what they eat, how they entertain guests, and what they do when they are sick.²²

Wang Shixing was of course not alone in drawing attention to the importance of empirical learning. Xu Hongzu (Xu Xiake; 1587–1641), the most well-known scholar-traveler of the late Ming period, would spend most of his adult life traveling the far and wide of the country and almost made it his calling to correct the errors found in the *Union Gazetteer of the Great Ming* (*Da Ming yitong zhi*; 1461), the imperially sponsored geographical guide. In the world of arts, as historians have shown, a small but important group of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century painters (among them Zhang Hong [1577–after 1652]) would come to favor relatively realistic representations over idealized imageries. Even Yang

Shen, the textual scholar we encountered earlier, would in an essay on geography caution his reader not to depend solely on the descriptions found in textual records but to try to visit notable sites in person.²³

Nor was the “discovery” of the importance of empirical learning the prerogative of travelers. For example, in a preface to his monumental *Material Medica: A General Outline* (*Bencao gangmu*; 1593), Li Shizhen (1518–93) is noted to have said that he had spent thirty years compiling the text, that while doing so he had consulted more than eight hundred references, and that, in all, he had included in the work discussions of a total of 1,892 substances. What Li could have added too is that he had traveled widely to collect and examine specimens and that his compilation was by far the most comprehensive of all pharmacopoeias that had appeared. Likewise, in the preface to his *Exploitation of the Works of Nature* (*Tian gong kai wu*; 1637), a study of technology, Song Yingxing (b. 1587) would make the case that, given the benefits of the myriad things and phenomena in the realm of heaven-and-earth, a scholar who prefers to “discourse emptily on the ancient sacrificial vessels of Ju” but who does not even know “the measurements and care of cooking pots” is ultimately still “unworthy of emulation.” Although the advent of “evidential learning” has often been regarded as an eighteenth-century phenomenon, as Willard Peterson explains, “pursuing evidence as an endeavor in learning” was very much a part of the Ming intellectual landscape. To late Ming scholars, what constituted “evidence” was not limited to the contents of the Four Books and Five Classics; in their view, according to Peterson, “data drawn from one’s own perceptions of the myriad things in the realm of heaven-and-earth” as well as “from earlier, not necessarily ancient, texts” could both serve as the foundation of learning.²⁴

Antiquarian Learning in Context

Just as other contributors to this volume have placed the manifold manifestations of “antiquarian learning” in their particular contexts, I have laid out in this essay some of the ways Ming-dynasty scholars’ interpretation of—and approaches to—the ancient past intersected with their increased awareness of human diversity. By way of conclusion, let me again draw attention to two observations. First, as it should be evident, the particular relationship I have focused on in this essay was necessarily dialectical: just as their conceptions of antiquity and classical sources would shape how Ming scholars would perceive the “non-Chinese,” their

increased awareness of human diversity would also inform how the cultural elite of Ming times would interpret the ancient past and its textual remains. Second, among those Ming-dynasty scholars who made efforts to reexamine antiquity based in part on their perceptions of human diversity, there were clear differences: while some, such as Qiu Jun, would emphasize the “lesson” revealed time and again in ancient sources that the boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” must be vigilantly observed, others, such as Luo Yuejiong, would point to examples from the ancient past to show that there was in fact much in common between the people of the “central dominion” and those who surrounded them.

As illuminating as the debates concerning the relationships between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” might be, what is equally significant about the writings we have discussed are the different approaches Ming-dynasty scholars brought to their reading and uses of ancient sources. In the case of Qiu Jun, even though the Hainan native was no doubt sensitive to the diversity of borderland peoples, his political concerns, especially about the threats posed by the Mongols, had clearly informed not only how he would view the “non-Chinese” (as people who were “uncivilized” and who should not be allowed to mingle with the “Chinese”) but also how he would approach the Classics (as sources of political and moral authority). By contrast, in the case of Yang Shen, though he did spend half of his life in a southwestern border province, his interest in “non-Chinese” peoples was evidently inspired less by a desire to understand human diversity than by his commitment to critical textual studies. Finally, in the case of Wang Shixing, although he was by virtue of his success in the civil service examinations a man of (classical) learning, his interests in geography (“patterns of the earth”) would lead him to emphasize, in his travel writings as well as in his descriptions of borderland peoples, the importance of supplementing textual studies with firsthand observations.

For all their intellectual differences, it is worth noting that, despite (or because of) their increased awareness of human diversity, Ming-dynasty scholars remained, by and large, firmly committed to the idea of the superiority of their own culture (*si wen*). This self-assurance is obviously in display in Qiu Jun’s *Supplement* and Luo Yuejiong’s *Record of All Vassals*, but it could be readily detected also in the writings of Yang Shen and Wang Shixing (among others). This is not to say that Ming scholars were ignorant of the outside world. Even if one discounts the long-term impact of the far-reaching voyages of Zheng He (1371–1433) of the early fifteenth century, it is evident that, over the course of the Ming, the

steady stream of travelers to and from China had considerably enriched Chinese knowledge of polities and societies both near and far. Nor do I mean to claim that scholar-officials during the Ming lacked the ability to reflect critically on China's intellectual-cum-political order. One needs only to recall the intellectual upheavals associated with Wang Yangming as well as the political storms set off by members of the so-called Donglin faction, to mention just two well-known examples from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to appreciate the intellectual dynamism of Ming China. What I am suggesting, however, is that even those Ming scholars who had become more sensitive to human diversity did not, as a general rule, find it necessary to question the assumption of the superiority of the moral-political order as embodied in the institutions of China. To be sure, the arrival of the Jesuits in China in the second half of the sixteenth century did, in time, lead some of their more prominent followers—Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), Li Zhizao (1565–1630), and Yang Tingyun (1557–1627), among others—to openly reflect on the relationships between the teachings from the West and those found in China's classical tradition, but even then it is evident that such followers were more interested in establishing a common ground than in challenging China's cultural preeminence.²⁵

In calling attention to this Chinese sense of superiority, I am not suggesting that Renaissance humanists did not also hold the view that the civilization that was Christendom (or Europe, more specifically) was itself exceptional. As Anthony Pagden puts it, by the early modern period, there was a growing sense among the elites that whereas "Europe was the place of civility, of free men living in secure urban communities under the rule of law," the rest of the world "served out their day under tyrannies governed according to the caprice of individual rulers, or in nomadic or semi-nomadic groups never far from the primordial 'state of nature.'" But even though the assumption of European exceptionalism, according to Pagden, has persisted since at least the first century of the common era, both the reevaluation of the classical tradition by Renaissance humanists and the increased recognition of human diversity by colonial agents, merchants, missionaries, and other travelers did appear to have brought upon Europeans what Eugene Rice has referred to as "a new freedom from temporal provincialism . . . and a more self-conscious understanding of their own society." Renaissance humanists and travelers might not have given up their assumption of exceptionalism, but in their willingness to take seriously cultures across time and space, they did

contribute to the transformation of the political and intellectual life in western Eurasia.²⁶

As other essays in this volume have made clear, the cultural elite of Ming China did engage in the reevaluation of past scholarship, develop special interests in collecting and studying ancient artifacts, and, on the whole, broaden the range of approaches to the understanding of antiquity. While such activities are best made sense of in the specific contexts of political, intellectual, and socioeconomic changes in late imperial times, it would be useful, as Peter Miller and François Louis remind us in their introduction, to take this opportunity to reflect on the particularities of the Chinese (and, by extension, European) experience. In this spirit, let me offer two final observations. First, if “who the antiquaries were” is an integral part of our inquiry, it is worth noting that the Chinese scholars we have encountered in this volume were almost always officials of the imperial state. While I have shown that such scholar-officials were far from unanimous in their outlooks, it is worth considering (more carefully than I have done here) how their common background might have shaped the contours of their intellectual endeavors. Second, even though the Ming scholars we have discussed here—Luo Yuejiong, Qiu Jun, Yang Shen, and Wang Shixing—might in fact be interested in understanding “what the ancient world actually was,” at the core of their intellectual efforts was their desire to claim authority over knowledge. How the desire to claim authority, which was not simply about scholarship but was, in the case of China, about one’s moral standing, might have influenced how scholars approached the study of antiquity is, I think, a topic worthy of further reflection.

NOTES

1. Luo Yuejiong, *Xian bin lu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), *fan li* (notes on conventions), 13. For an introduction to the text, see Ping-kuen Yu, ed., *Chinese Collections in the Library of Congress: Excerpts from the Annual Report(s) of the Library of Congress, 1898–1971* (Washington, DC: Center for Chinese Research Materials, Association of Research Libraries, 1974), 2:652–54.
2. For a more extensive discussion of Ming scholars’ interests in the “non-Chinese,” see Leo K. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 158–70.
3. For a bibliography of Ming-dynasty works on the *si yi*, see Wolfgang Franke, *An Introduction to the Sources of Ming History* (Kuala Lumpur: University of

- Malaya Press, 1968), 201–32. For the list of works Luo consulted, see Luo Yuejiong, *Xian bin lu*, 234–37.
4. For his general claim on the common origins between the “Chinese” and “non-Chinese,” see Luo Yuejiong, *Xian bin lu, fan li*, 13–14. For the Tatars, see *Xian bin lu*, 1–21; for the “non-Chinese” in the south, see *Xian bin lu*, 211–27.
 5. On Qiu Jun (Ch’iu Chün), see L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 249–52; Li Zhuoran, *Qiu Jun pingzhuan* (Critical biography of Qiu Jun) (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2005). For a history of the “Li” in Hainan, see Anne Csete, “A Frontier Minority in the Chinese World: The Li People of Hainan Island from the Han through the High Qing” (PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1995).
 6. Qiu Jun, *Shishi zhenggang* (reprint, Taipei: Qiu Wenzhuang gong congshu jiyin weiyuanhui, 1972), esp. preface: 2b–3, 1:1a. On Qiu’s conception of China’s past, see On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 205–6; Li Zhuoran, *Qiu Jun pingzhuan*, chap. 8.
 7. Hung-lam Chu, “Ch’iu Chün (1421–1495) and the ‘Ta-Hsüeh Yen-I Pu’: Statecraft Thought in Fifteenth-Century China” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1983); Li Zhuoran, *Qiu Jun pingzhuan*, chap. 6.
 8. On the need to defend the boundary between *hua* and *yi*, see Qiu Jun, *Da xue yan yi bu* (reprint, Taipei: Qiu Wenzhuang gong congshu jiyin weiyuanhui, 1972), 143:1–6; for the quotations, see 143:5a, 6. On the northern border, see 144:16b–17. On the southern border, see 153:6–7a, 11b–13, 14b–17a. On Qiu’s ideas, see Li Zhuoran, *Qiu Jun pingzhuan*, chap. 7. On the importance of the so-called Five Classics in the imperial period, see Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
 9. On his perception of the inherent differences between *hua* and *yi*, see Qiu Jun, *Da xue yan yi bu*, 144:8b–9a, 153:1b–2a, 155:15b–16a. On the ancient conceptual division between an inner and an outer zone, see Michael Loewe, “The Heritage Left to the Empires,” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 995–97.
 10. For an overview of historical thinking and writing in China before the Ming, see Ng and Wang, *Mirroring the Past*, chaps. 1–5. On Chinese perceptions of antiquity, see Dieter Kuhn and Helga Stahl, eds., *Perceptions of Antiquity in Chinese Civilization* (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 2008).
 11. On Yang Shen, see Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1531–35; Feng Jiahua, *Yang Shen pingzhuan* (Critical biography of Yang Shen) (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1998). On his literary and scholarly outputs, see Wang Wencai, *Yang Shen xuepu* (The spectrum of scholarship of Yang Shen) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), esp. 140–84; Feng Jiahua, *Yang Shen pingzhuan*, 393–413.
 12. For the history of Yunnan, see C. Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China’s Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

- University Press, 2006); Bin Yang, *Between Winds and Clouds: The Making of Yunnan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). On Yang’s writings on Yunnan, see Feng Jiahua, *Yang Shen pingzhuan*, 294–304; Ihor Pidhainy, “Yang Shen and the Nature of Travel Writing” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2005). For his sensitivity to the differences between Yunnan and the “central plains” of China, see, for example, Yang Shen, “Dian hou ji xu” (preface to *Climate of Yunnan*), in *Sheng’an quanji*, juan 2, collected in *Yang Sheng’an congshu*, ed. Wang Wencai and Wan Guangzhi (Chengdu: Tian di chubanshe, 2002), 3:110.
13. For his postscript, see Yang Shen, *Dian zai ji*, in *Yang Sheng’an congshu*, 2:225–26; for discussions of the text, see Wang Wencai, *Yang Shen xuepu*, 245–48; Feng Jiahua, *Yang Shen pingzhuan*, 297–99. For a more general discussion of Yang’s interests in the “non-Chinese” peoples of Yunnan, see Mario Cigliano, “Yang Shen (1488–1559), un letterato in esilio e la rivalutazione delle culture minoritarie dello Yunnan,” in *Studi in onore di Lionello Lanciotti*, ed. S. M. Carletti, M. Sacchetti, and P. Santangelo (Napoli: Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, Istituto Universitario Orientale, and Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1996), 353–76; I would like to thank Maria Petrucci for her help with the translation of this article.
 14. For the origins and transmission of *Shanhai jing*, see Riccardo Fracasso, “Shan hai ching,” in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 357–67; Richard E. Strassberg, ed. and trans., *A Chinese Bestiary: Strange Creatures from the Guideways through Mountains and Seas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 1–79.
 15. My discussion of Yang’s reading of the *Guideways* is drawn heavily from Adam Schorr, “Connoisseurship and the Defense against Vulgarity: Yang Shen (1488–1559) and his Work,” *Monumenta Serica* 41 (1993): 89–128; Yang’s comments on the Classics are quoted on p. 112. For his comments on the “strangeness” of the *Guideways*, see Yang Shen, “Shanhaijing houxu,” in *Sheng’an quanji*, juan 2, collected in *Yang Sheng’an congshu*, 3:96. On Guo Pu, see Strassberg, *Chinese Bestiary*, 15–18.
 16. For Yang Shen’s contributions to the development of “evidential” learning, see, for example, Lin Qingzhang, *Mingdai kaojuxue yanjiu* (Evidential learning in Ming China) (rev. ed.; Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1986); Feng Jiahua, *Yang Shen pingzhuan*, chap. 9 (for a bibliography of Yang’s works, see 393–413); Willard J. Peterson, “Confucian Learning in Late Ming Thought,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8, *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644*, pt. 2, ed. Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 785–87. For a discussion of Yang Shen in a broader intellectual context, see Adam Schorr, “The Trap of Words: Political Power, Cultural Authority, and Language Debates in Ming Dynasty China” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1994).
 17. Schorr, “Connoisseurship,” esp. 91–92.
 18. For an overview of the intellectual developments in late Ming, see Peterson, “Confucian Learning.”

19. On Wang Shixing (Wang Shih-hsing) and his travels, see Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1405–6; Zhou Zhenhe, ed., *Wang Shixing dili shu san zhong* (Three treatises on geography by Wang Shixing) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 1–12.
20. Wang Shixing, *Guang zhi yi*, in *Wang Shixing dili shu san zhong*, 238; the translation is adapted from Julian Ward, *Xu Xiake (1587–1641): The Art of Travel Writing* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon, 2001), 17.
21. For the notions of *long* and *qi*, see Wang Shixing, *Guang you zhi*, in *Wang Shixing dili shu san zhong*, 210–12, 214; for more general discussions of the idea of “siting,” see Andrew L. March, “An Appreciation of Chinese Geomancy,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 27, no. 2 (1968): 253–67; Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 179–89. On the river systems of Guizhou and Guangxi, see Wang Shixing, *Guang you zhi*, 214.
22. For his depiction of the “Yao” and other “non-Chinese,” see Wang Shixing, *Guang you zhi*, 216–18.
23. For Xu Hongzu, see Ward, *Xu Xiake (1587–1641)*. For Zhang Hong, see James Cahill, “Huang Shan Paintings as Pilgrimage Pictures,” in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, ed. Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 253–58; idem, *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), chap. 1. For Yang Shen’s comment, see Lin Qingzhang, *Mingdai kaojuxue yanjiu*, 111.
24. For the preface to the *Material Medica*, see Li Shizhen (Li Shih-chen), *Bencao gangmu* (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1975), 1:17; on Li and his text, see Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 859–65; Joseph Needham, Gwei-Djen Lu, and Hsing-Tsung Huang, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 6, *Biology and Biological Technology*, pt. 1, *Botany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 308–21; Paul U. Unschuld, *Medicine in China: A History of Pharmaceuticals* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 145–63; Peterson, “Confucian Learning,” 782–84; Benjamin A. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550–1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 29–34; Carla Nappi, *The Monkey and The Inkpot: Natural History and its Transformations in Early Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). For the comment by Song Yingxing, see Sung Ying-hsing, *Chinese Technology in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. E-tu Zen Sun and Shiou-chuan Sun (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1966), xi; on Song and his text, see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period (1644–1912)* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 690–91; Pan Jixing, *Tian gong kai wu jiaozhu ji yanjiu (Exploitation of the works of nature, collated, annotated, and studied)* (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1989). On the development of “evidential learning” in Ming China, see Peterson, “Confucian Learning,” 772–88 (quotation is from p. 781).
25. For contacts between the Ming and the wider world, see the chapters by Morris Rossabi, Donald Clark, Wang Gungwu, and John Wills in Twitchett and Mote, *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8. For Zheng He, see Edward L.

- Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007). For the Donglin movement, see John W. Dardess, *Blood and History in China: The Donglin Faction and Its Repression, 1620–1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002). On the Jesuits and their followers, see Willard J. Peterson, “Learning from Heaven: The Introduction of Christianity and Other Western Ideas into Late Ming China,” in Twitchett and Mote, *Cambridge History of China*, 8:789–839; Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
26. Anthony Pagden, “Prologue: Europe and the World Around,” in *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History*, ed. Euan Cameron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12; Eugene F. Rice and Anthony Grafton, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, 1460–1559*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 86. See also Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

