

Nevertheless, this is still an impressive and successful monograph in many ways. It is persuasive in its revealing of the ritual nature of the five poems from the *Songs of the South*. It also successfully argues against the scholarly opinion that reads these texts according to the traditional allegorical interpretation model. Last but not least, the book will certainly inspire readers to rethink the issues surrounding the question of shamanism in early Chinese history.

**Feng Qu**

Arctic Studies Center at Liaocheng University, China

XIAOFEI TIAN:

*The Halberd at Red Cliff: Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms.*

(Harvard-Yenching Monograph Series.) xiv, 454 pp. Cambridge, MA:

Harvard University Press, 2018. £35.95. ISBN 978 0 674 97703 7.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X20000324

*The Halberd at Red Cliff* tells the story of how the Jian'an (196–220) and the Three Kingdoms (220–265) periods became part of the Chinese cultural imaginary and how the memory of the era gradually evolved in changing cultural contexts over the centuries up until the cinematic representations of the twenty-first century. The book is divided into five chapters organized into three parts, each focussing on a particular aspect and group of texts of this cultural imagining. Chapter 1 traces the creation of the Jian'an era as a literary construction, while chapter 2 examines works by Wang Can (177–217) and the Three Caos (Cao Cao (155–220), Cao Pi (187–226), Cao Zhi (192–232)), exploring the themes of community building by means of food and feasting, letter writing, and gift exchange. Parts 2 (chapters 3–4) and 3 (chapter 5) focus on two physical and textual sites: Bronze Bird Terrace, a structure built in the Wei capital Ye on Cao Cao's orders, and Red Cliff, the site of the famous battle between Cao Cao and Zhou Yu (175–210) in 208 CE. Translating and analysing an impressive selection of poems and narrative texts, Tian identifies the textual milestones that continuously (re-)defined these two memory places and the people associated with them. The collection of a person's literary output can independently "signal the full *presence* of a person, no longer growing and changing, but arrested and wholly embodied in the writings he left behind" (p. 26, my emphasis).

I agree with Tian on the centrality of the literary tradition in the construction of memory of the Jian'an/Three Kingdoms period. Texts often provide the only remaining visible link to the past. However, it is worth noting that the textual material itself also points to additional and/or alternative ways and media of literati engagement with the past through objects, landscapes and famous historical sites: "traces" (ji 跡) of a past world long gone. A poem by Ai Xingfu (fl. late thirteenth–early fourteenth century), for example, captures the power of an inkstone supposedly made from remnants of Bronze Bird Terrace to conjure up the past and cast a spell over the present:

From antiquity, in observing an object  
 one must observe its owner;  
 Yu's zither and Zhou's tripods

are rare treasure of this world.  
 But this mere piece of pottery tile  
 came from Han's traitor,  
 How could one let it become intimate  
 with cultured men?  
 [...]
   
 Yet how can one bear having the prime  
 evildoer stain one's ink?  
 [...]
   
 I beg you, dear sir, to discard this thing  
 and never use it again:  
 If the Bronze Bird were still erect,  
 I would demolish it myself. (pp. 278–9)

This and other texts translated in this volume suggest a complex interrelationship between text, historical artefacts, landscapes and historical sites, all of which allow distinct experiences of the past. What are the epistemological understandings of the past that underlie its poetic representations? Some of the works translated by Tian display a strong ontological realism, an assumption that despite uncertainties in understanding and recounting past events, these are nevertheless ontologically certain, meaning they happened in a certain way at a certain time. By finding their “traces” (*ji*), these events or persons can be brought into and gain *presence* in the present. The fact that Tian presents her translations chronologically, revealing inter-textual links between individual (groups of) poems and their authors, reinforces the problematic impression that past and present are linked through a continuous thread of literary production and remembrance. This way of presentation favours historical continuity while downplaying interruptions in transmission, dead ends or the disappearance of memories for long periods or even for good.

The first chapter, entitled “Plague and poetry: rethinking Jian’an”, is particularly interesting in this context, for it suggests a different, less certain, relationship to the past. Tian invites us to see “Jian’an as always already an afterthought” (p. 12), an “era born in the awareness of its ending, in nostalgia and mourning” (p. 78). Literary Jian’an literally was a “Dead Poets Society”. The radical implications of this observation could have been stated more clearly. The retrospective discursive formation of the Jian’an era makes the link between past and present particularly tenuous, but even more importantly it renders the ontological foundation of the past uncertain. For it undermines the assumption that despite uncertainties in understanding past events these are nevertheless ontologically certain, meaning they happened in a certain way at a certain time. The compromised ontological status of the Jian’an era reveals itself in references to the era’s spectral or ghostlike character, both in the poems themselves as well as in Tian’s analysis (“I realized they were all in the register of ghosts”, Cao Pi in a letter to Wu Zhi, p. 25). The spectral nature of the era has the effect that it destabilizes conventional historical truth claims, making an uncomplicated telling of the past impossible. In turn, this impossibility opens up the new possibility for alternative, previously unimagined interpretations. Some sections of the book (Chapter 1, Epilogue “The return of the repressed”) contain subtle echoes of a deconstructive reading of the material – Derrida’s *Archive Fever* is referenced in the bibliography but not directly discussed – while in other chapters the author’s interpretation follows the positivist vision of history in her sources. However, the simultaneousness of these two conflicting positions leads to a number of fundamental questions: is there a stable foundation on which knowledge of the past and historical truth claims can be based? Do multiple retellings of a

historical event ultimately lead to an erosion of historical truth, memory and (personal or social) identity? In what ways does the past gain, or retain, *presence* in the present? And what is the role of poetry and literature in all this? The fact that *The Halberd at Red Cliff* stimulates such reflections beyond offering a wealth of new insights into a fascinating period of Chinese literary history is the reason why the book deserves a wide readership from across all humanities disciplines.

**Thomas Jansen**

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

LYNN A. STRUVE:

*The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World.*

x, 319 pp. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. ISBN 978 0 824 87525 1.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X20000336

This is a book that has been just asking to be written, and who better to write it than the pre-eminent living historian of the late Ming and the Ming–Qing transition, Lynn Struve? Struve emphasizes the importance of dreams to developing a history of consciousness, as well as to understanding the particular circumstances of the late Ming. She has benefitted from the work of contemporary scholars in China who, by writing on “Chinese dream culture”, have provided convenient compendia of dream records, but as one would expect she brings her own original analysis to bear on this material. Building on her earlier articles on dreams published between 2007 and 2013, she makes a strong case that during the late Ming and very early Qing (while the Ming *yimin* or “remnant subjects” were still alive), the elite engaged with the world of dreams as never before or since. A fascination with dreams is common to most, if not all, human cultures, but as those cultures become more sophisticated, belief in the supernatural aspect of dreams – their ability to foretell the future, for example – tends to be relegated to the less educated strata of society. Yet in what Struve calls the “dream arc” of the late Ming to early Qing, even the most highly educated members of the literati and scholar-official class recorded and discussed their dreams in unprecedented numbers.

Why was this? An obvious reason is the dangerous social and political instability of the period, leading people to search for insights into the meaning of events and their likely course, but Chinese society has been through many periods of instability without showing the same elite interest in dreams. Struve looks for answers first by outlining what we know today of the science of dreaming, and then by discussing Chinese attitudes towards dreams through the ages, so far as we can reconstruct them from textual evidence, with a particular emphasis on the late imperial era. Records of the interpretation of royal dreams in such early texts as the *Liji* show a belief in the significance of dreams at the highest levels of government; late-Ming writers on dreams often referred to these records as a precedent for their own interest.

Struve then discusses the “special dream salience” in the late Ming, focusing on the philosophical, religious, and literary discourses on dreaming, and linking this “dream salience” to the “moral-ethical subjectivity” which is a distinctive aspect