

REVIEW

**Peter K. Bol: *Localizing Learning: The Literati Enterprise in Wuzhou, 1100–1600***

**(Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series.) xiv, 393 pp.  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2022. £58.95.  
ISBN 978 0 67426793 0.**

Chu Ming-kin

The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong  
Email: [mk2chu@hku.hk](mailto:mk2chu@hku.hk)

Peter Bol's *Localizing Learning* examines the development and localization of learning in Wuzhou (modern Zhejiang) from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. It argues that Wuzhou literati created a local tradition of diversified learning. That in turn helped to shape their common identity and to establish their claims to moral, political, and cultural leadership. Bol's work traces the processes through which Wuzhou's local tradition of learning formed.

In chapter 1, Bol introduces the various roles played in Wuzhou by the local scholar, teacher, and biographer Lü Zuqian (1137–81). He emphasizes Lü's promotion of learning and the creation of a literati community that shared his vision. Apart from educating literati in how to cultivate ethical conduct, Lü also focused on examination success, with the ultimate goal of enabling Wuzhou literati to apply knowledge in governance. Examination education required Classical, historical, and literary knowledge, and Wuzhou's publishing houses supported the ready acquisition of such knowledge. Bol traces how they did this in chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 4, Bol turns to the leading Daoxue, or Neo-Confucian, thinker Zhu Xi (1130–1200). Unlike Lü Zuqian, Zhu emphasized moral cultivation over examination learning. Bol traces Zhu's intellectual legacy in Wuzhou from the late Southern Song to the Yuan. The examination system was suspended after the Mongol conquest of the Song in the 1270s. This weakened the status of the literati as a cultural and political elite. In chapter 5, Bol discusses the challenges to regaining influence and authority that Wuzhou literati faced under Mongol rule. In chapter 6, he shows how they successfully met those challenges by stressing their political, moral, and cultural accomplishments, by creating local marriage networks, and by maintaining written genealogies. As a result, they created a distinctive Wuzhou identity at the levels of both region and state. In chapters 7 and 8, Bol traces intellectual developments in Wuzhou – it was renamed Jinhua prefecture in 1360 – during the Ming. In these chapters, he focuses on the leading scholars Zhang Mao (1436–1521) and Hu Yinglin (1551–1602) respectively. The former urged Jinhua literati to emulate the achievements of their local predecessors in Daoxue, literature and government service. The latter reinterpreted Wuzhou tradition to move away from an exclusive focus on combining Daoxue cultivation and literary achievement. For Bol, Hu Yinglin's rejection of the traditional mission of learning signalled the end of an era and so Hu concludes the book.

Other reviewers of *Localizing Learning* have already evaluated such aspects as its use of digital tools to analyse Wuzhou's marriage networks and its discussion of how Wuzhou literati compiled genealogies and built lineages. I will therefore limit myself to a discussion of the book's insights into Song intellectual history. In particular, Bol masterfully shows how book and printing culture shed light on Wuzhou's intellectual landscape. Based on books published by Wuzhou scholars in the Southern Song (Appendix 2.2), he demonstrates their diverse interests. One example will make the point. In chapter 3, Bol analyses three encyclopaedic compilations, or "category books", produced in the early thirteenth century by Pan Zimu, Wang Xiangzhi, and Zhang Ruyu. He sheds light on these scholars' interests in language, ideas, culture, geography, history and statecraft. Bol's emphasis on the social and intellectual connections of the three compilers reveals how Lü Zuqian's erudition and promotion of intellectual plurality led to the compilation of these category books. Yet, for Bol, the publication of the category books marked both the beginning and the end of broad learning in Wuzhou: after the mid-thirteenth century, no scholar in Wuzhou compiled a work of such erudite learning.

This raises a question: why did Wuzhou scholars in the late Southern Song show an increasing preference for Daoxue over broad learning? I would argue that we might find an answer not only in the personal networks discussed by Bol, but also in the political and institutional contexts in which these category books were compiled and circulated. The three compilers that Bol studies all attained the advanced scholar degree in 1196, when Daoxue had been banned by the Song court. Although this proscription was lifted in the early thirteenth century, Daoxue still faced competition from other schools of learning in the examination field. As a result, the compilers of the three category books might have incorporated elements other than Daoxue thought because they sought not only to further their own intellectual agendas, but also to attract as many student readers as possible.

Among these three compilers, the works of Pan Zimu and Zhang Ruyu were apparently deemed more useful for examination preparation and their reach extended beyond Wuzhou. As Bol shows, publishers in Jianyang (modern Fujian) printed both the first edition of Pan's work and a revised edition of Zhang's compilation. By contrast, Wang Xiangzhi's work of historical geography seems to have circulated less widely, which may explain why no Song imprint exists today. Although the three category books did not inspire Wuzhou scholars to continue the erudite tradition of local learning, they did influence polymaths elsewhere to compile similar works in the late thirteenth century. For example, in Mingzhou, Wang Yinglin (1223–96) compiled *Yuhai*; in Raozhou, Ma Duanlin (1254–1323) compiled *Wenxian tongkao*; and in Jianzhou, Zhu Mu (1190–1256) compiled *Shiwen leiju*. I would argue that the printing and circulation of these category books were closely related to the examination system, an aspect that Bol does not discuss in detail. This connection is underlined by the fact that *Shiwen leiju* (1326), *Wenxian tongkao* (1324) and *Yuhai* (1351), as well as *Qunshu kaosuo* (1320), were all printed or reprinted soon after the Yuan court restored the civil service examinations in 1314.

These are minor additions to an important book, which showcases an impressive amount of research and knowledge. It includes accurate translations of significant texts written by influential scholars from Wuzhou, and provides extensive footnotes for further reading. These are particularly valuable contributions to the field of Chinese intellectual history.