commentary might mean beginners underestimate the complexity involved, and more experienced students would undoubtedly welcome Campany's insights. Determining when a tale betrays signs of Buddhist influence is sometimes difficult: is there a karmic element in the fate of the mollusc harvester, devoured one night by a mass of molluscs who "fed in a frenzy on her flesh" leaving only her skeleton behind, for example? (item 87). Does a mourning mother dog's collection and burial of the bones of her pup made into a medicinal soup (item 54) illustrate a wariness about harming animals for the benefit of humans stemming from an acceptance of animals as fellow sentient beings? That said, leaving these tales without commentary, only annotating when details might "otherwise mystify" (p. xix), eschewing the sinological habit of annotating to the "nth degree" (p. xiii), just pointing the reader to the relevant scholarship in brief footnotes, will enable undergraduates without the relevant language skills to engage in a very direct manner with the materials and use them to begin their investigations into a vast range of topics. Campany's introduction, the distillation of three decades of study of this genre, is a portal through which the reader can access his earlier works as well as other relevant scholarship and is more than adequate to point the inquiring student in the right direction. This fascinating volume will undoubtedly encourage independent thought and prove a useful pedagogical tool, and while initially sceptical of the publisher's book-jacket claim that this work "will likely find its way to bedside tables" (perhaps the modern equivalent of the Emperor Wu's personal book chest), this reviewer's copy will remain on hers for some time. However, these tales provide so much stimulating material (not to mention on occasion the frankly grotesque and alarming) that light sleepers should exercise caution if they are in need of a good night's rest.

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LUCA GABBIANI (ed.):
Urban Life in China, 15th–20th Centuries: Communities, Institutions, Representations.
(Études thématiques 27.) Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2016.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X17000696

Ever since the seminal publications by G. William Skinner (1925–2008) and Frederick W. Mote (1922–2005) in the 1970s, the urban history of late imperial China has been a thriving and productive field of research. While the pioneers in the field approached the Chinese city in history primarily in socio-economic terms, an established second line of cultural-historical inquiry focuses on cities as envisioned realms, as represented in literature, history and pictorial arts, and as places with a distinct urban culture of their own that set them off from the rural hinterland.

This volume, edited by Luca Gabbiani, includes both approaches, though the majority of the contributions emphasize cultural aspects, while the editor himself, in his introductory mapping of the field of Chinese urban history, clearly prioritizes economic, social and administrative issues. The volume's 12 contributions are arranged in pairs under six different subtopics: space, consumer culture, envisioning, religion, administration, and sociability, which convey of the broad thematic range covered by the contributors. The thoughtful arrangement facilitates dialogue among at least some of the contributions. Geographically there is a noted emphasis

on the northern capital, Beijing (five articles), which is counterbalanced by "southern" accents in two articles specifically referring to Yangzhou, and one each to Nanjing and Guangzhou. The volume compiles papers originally presented at a conference held in 2008. The rather long timespan for preparing the volume for publication led to a situation in which several contributors had published monographs that include more mature versions of their articles. An obvious example is the first contribution, by Siyen Fei, whose sophisticated analysis of a polemical conceptualization of urban neighbourhoods in late Ming Nanjing closely corresponds to a chapter in her monograph *Negotiating Urban Space* (2010).

The project of "Connecting Urban Histories East and West", as claimed by the editor's introduction, is pursued only rarely throughout the volume, most evidently and ambitiously in the article by Lillian M. Li, who compares the urban history of China not only to that of Europe but also to that of the Islamic world. She argues that, while in the West and the Middle East the competing big cities were being fundamentally re-conceptualized, this was not the case in China, with the singular exception of the new Ming-dynasty capital Beijing. Looking at pictorial visualizations of cities, she finds for China nothing comparable to European cities' self-celebrations. She concludes by reconfirming Mote's influential Weberian argument regarding the Chinese "urban-rural continuum" and the relative indistinctiveness of the premodern Chinese city. This, though, undercuts recent attempts at advancing to new definitions of Chinese urbanity, such as in Fei's aforementioned book.

Implicitly also contradicting Li's conclusion, Wu Jen-shu's article on forms and channels of advertisement for branded products argues that consumption was among the distinctive characteristics of Chinese urbanity. Peripherally concerned with urbanity, Joanna Waley-Cohen, in her eminently readable essay, focuses on luxury food consumption. She describes how the Qianlong emperor himself competed with the gastronomic connoisseurship of Jiangnan elites. Yangzhou, as a notorious place of conspicuous consumption and relentless pleasure seeking, comes into view here. Wai-yee Li, in an essay about representations of the Yangzhou massacre of 1645, interweaves personal memoir, novelistic re-imagination and literati poetry to a nuanced argument about remembrance and forgetting, and about gendered historical judgement that suggestively construed the city's ravage as the retribution for local women's allegedly loose morals. Lucie Olivová, in her article on *The Pleasure Boats of Yangzhou* (1795), likely the richest source on this city's cultural history, offers a spatial analysis of the book's organization along imaginary routes. She finds that only a small proportion of the itineraries related to the walled inner city, whereas the outskirts were profusely covered – from this she concludes that this book meant to capture Yangzhou's "cultural space", implying a distinct spatial conception of "city".

Lai Hui-Min's contribution offers a detailed study of temple fairs in three major Lama-Buddhist temples of Beijing, highlighting the Qing capital's strong Central Asiatic orientation. Ju Xi, in a richly documented article based on stele inscriptions, deals with religious associations in Beijing involved in the pork trade. It would seem somewhat surprising, though, that temples for major deities served as venues for guild gatherings of pork butchers, a ritually very "impure" (while definitely very important) profession. The association from pork butchering to public executions of criminals being somewhat undue, Jérôme Bourgon, in his meticulously documented article, approaches Beijing's topology from the point of view of penal history. He reconstructs the route on which convicts were taken to the execution site at Caishikou, also considering the rituals related to the performance, the executioners, and the crowd of urbanite spectators. He makes a case for the reintegration of these suppressed layers of memory into Chinese urban history.

Opium smoking and gambling, also often considered to be among the darker sides of early modern Chinese city life, are the subject of Xavier Paulès' article. Mindful to avoid any stereotypes, he takes a "revisionist" approach to these phenomena and regards the institutions dedicated to the pursuit of these activities, such as the halls specialized in the game of *fantan* in Guangzhou, first of all as "places of sociability". Luca Gabbiani, looking at the "municipal turn" in Beijing's administration during the Qing empire's final decade, finds both revolutionary change and continuity. Finally, Christian Lamouroux presents results from a field study on the commercial culture of one quarter of Beijing, from the 1920s to the 1950s, that he studies based on shop owners' professional licences preserved in the archives. Looking at just one street, he demonstrates how smoothly business interactions and social relations went hand-in-hand.

While this volume is carefully edited and thoughtfully arranged, its overall conceptual framework ultimately remains somewhat unconvincing. It is recommended primarily for the consistently high quality of its individual contributions, which, however, in several cases overlap with contributors' publications elsewhere.

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WILT L. IDEMA and STEPHEN H. WEST (eds):
Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language.
xxxii, 186 pp. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2016. £14.99.
ISBN 978 1 62466 523 3.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X17000775

Professors Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema have been collaborating on the translation of Yuan and early Ming literature since 1982. More recently, this prolific partnership has brought a series of mostly less well-known plays into English in the anthologies *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays* (2010); *Battles, Betrayals, and Brotherhood: Early Chinese Plays on the Three Kingdoms* (2012); *The Generals of the Yang Family: Four Early Plays* (2013), and *The Orphan of Zhao and Other Yuan Plays: The Earliest Known Versions* (2014). These works have dramatically transformed the depth and quality of early Chinese drama available in English.

Their latest translation, *Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language*, is something of a departure from their previous collaborations, in that the subject is not drama but a type of narrative written in a mixture of simple Classical language and vernacular known as a "plain tale" or *pinghua* 平話. The plain tale's normal theme is periods of dynastic change. The few surviving printings of the form date from the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries (the printing of *Records of the Three Kingdoms in Plain Language* dates from 1321–23), before it was eclipsed by the longer and more elaborate historical novel in the Ming. Scholars have traditionally linked the form with hypothetical scripts used for oral storytelling, but as outlined in their detailed introduction, West and Idema clarify that these carefully printed texts were more likely to have been produced as light reading material for figures ranging from literati to gentlemen farmers. Plain tales allowed such figures to read about epic periods of historical flux in a format that was cheaper and more engaging than official historiography. This is only the third English translation of a plain tale, after Liu Tsun-yan's 柳存仁 translation of *Wuwang fa Zhou pinghua* 武王伐紂平話 (King