

argues that the center of the Chinese Muslim educational network moved from the Shaanxi area to the east. But, as Gao Zhanfu has pointed out, Shaanxi maintained its status as the center of Muslim education (*jingtang jiaoyu*) until the middle of the nineteenth century and it was only after this time that it relinquished its status to Huzhou.<sup>1</sup> Gao's contention is corroborated by documents concerning Chinese Muslim communities between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> The author also mentions Yunnan and Canton were cut off from the Chinese Muslim educational network. Nevertheless, an examination of inscriptions from the same period indicates that the author has not fully taken into account the distinctive character of the *Genealogy* as historical material. As Tatsuya Nakanishi has pointed out, the *Genealogy* was written, and supported by, certain scholar groups such as the one established by Chang Zhimei 常志美 in Shangdong (The school of Zhao and his teacher She Qiling 舍起靈 belonged to, or at least stemmed from, this group) and has the characteristic of illuminating the conduct of renowned scholars (*mingshi* 名師) within the groups.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there is no guarantee that the *Genealogy* has covered Chinese Muslim scholars in detail and there is every likelihood that opposing groups could have been excluded. Moreover, the scholars listed in the *Genealogy* are limited to those whose whereabouts were all well known to She or Zhao, so it is not surprising that many entries concern scholars in the Eastern Chinese coastal area where they were active.<sup>4</sup>

It is also a matter of regret that the author has overlooked the fact that within the areas where the Muslim education network had spread, the writing and publishing of *Han Kitab* was an extremely distinctive phenomenon limited to the urban cultural environment of the Eastern Chinese coastal area. In Shaanxi and Gansu, other areas where the educational network also flourished, Muslim intellectuals tended to avoid learning classical Chinese and since they did not actively write *Han Kitab*, the specific notation of *xiao-er-jing* 小兒錦 or *xiao-jing* 小經 began to form. An approach that attempts to understand the inner psychological world of Chinese Muslims by examining the *Han Kitabs* on Islamic thought and philosophy can further develop the author's analysis. I look forward to his next work.

*Understanding Canton. Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period.*

By Virgil Ho. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. 528 pages, 16 pp. halftone plates. ISBN-10 0-19-928271-4; ISBN-13 978-0-19-928271-5.

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Cantonese social history during the Republican period has until recently clearly been a field overshadowed by studies devoted to politics (such as those by Chan Ming Kou and Michael Tsin). Yet Canton was not only the “cradle of Revolution” but also, as Virgil Ho points out at the beginning of

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- 1 Gao Zhanfu. “Yisilan Jingtangjiaoyu yu huizuishhui de Guanxi” (The Relationship between Islamic Mosque Education and Hui Society). Xian Islamic Culture Studies Society, ed., *Islamic Culture Studies*. Ningxia, 1998, p. 105.
  - 2 Takashi, Kuroiwa. “Gaku to kyō: kaimin hōki ni miru Shindar musurimu shakai to chiikisō” (Xue and Jiao: The Diversity of Chinese Muslim Societies Observed in the Muslim Rebellion 1862–1878). *Tōyō gaku* 86:4 (2004), pp. 105–08.
  - 3 Nakanishi, Tatsuya. (The Discourse on the Shaykh in Chinese Islamic Literature and its Background). *Tōyōshi kenkyū: the Journal of Oriental Researches* 61:3 (2002), pp. 8–18.
  - 4 Nakanishi, Tatsuya. “Shohyō: Zvi Ben-Dor Benite cho The Daot Muhammad” *Chūgoku isuramu shisō kenkyō* 2 (2006): 21–22.

the book under review, “the largest city solely administered by the Chinese”. As a consequence, it provides a crucial viewpoint regarding the far-reaching social changes that took place in China during the Republican era. For this reason, among others, *Understanding Canton* is a very important work.

One of the main difficulties with many of the issues Virgil Ho has chosen to deal with is that the sources are by nature rather limited. Nevertheless, Ho has done remarkably well, and with imaginative effort, to gather all the available materials together. The result is that the present book has simply no equivalent in existing Cantonese social history either in terms of scope or range of materials used, in either Chinese, English, or – to a much lesser extent – Japanese. In many cases Ho is, to my knowledge, the first scholar to make use of the sources.

The book, originating in Ho’s doctoral dissertation (Oxford University, 1995), is divided into six chapters, which are almost completely independent one from the other. The first two deal with matters of perception: in the first chapter, Ho describes the growth of a feeling of pride (and a concomitant disdain for countryside “bumpkins”) among the Cantonese that took place mainly as a result of the rapid modernization of the city during the Republican period. Chapter 2 convincingly explores the highly ambiguous way the West and Westerners were seen in the eyes of Canton commoners, with special reference to the craving to imitate the fashionable lifestyle of the great western cities.

Chapters 3–5 deal with the so-called “problems” of, respectively, opium, gambling and prostitution. Ho attempts here to question the usual cliché that describes them as “plaguing” Republican Canton. According to him, the allegedly devastating impact of these practices has been exaggerated, and he refutes the myth of a worsening of the situation during the Republican period, providing, for example, many clues that actually suggest a decrease in the number of brothels and prostitutes during the period under focus (pp. 227–32). He also suggests that the popular perception of these practices was far more favourable than might be expected. The emphasis the population put on moderation and self-restraint to define an appropriate way to deal with the use of opium, gambling and the patronizing of prostitutes is especially remarkable. These activities were considered legitimate as long as one enjoyed the pleasure of them without falling into the trap of addiction. Obviously, the authorities did not succeed in imposing their vision that the only acceptable attitude towards opium, gambling and prostitution was total abstinence. In this regard, it would have been of great interest if the author had discussed the origins of this remarkably widespread conception of self-restraint.

Of these three chapters, I found Chapter 4, concerning gambling, especially worthy of attention, since it is largely an unexplored issue. In particular, Ho is very convincing when dismissing two conventional assertions. First, he shows that cases of pathological gambling that could lead to dramatic consequences like suicide or the selling of one’s children remained very marginal. Second, based on many examples, he demonstrates that it is wrong to assume (as most Chinese historians continue to do today) that gamblers were invariably cheated by the numerous tricks unscrupulous bookmakers played upon them.

The final chapter concerns Cantonese opera seen from the perspective of the profound changes that took place during the 1920s and 1930s, especially in terms of its evolution into a mass-oriented entertainment. Cantonese opera, more generally, also provides a fascinating mirror for the evolution of Cantonese society, especially with regard to the position of women. The conclusion, finally, convincingly links the outcomes of the study with the contemporary situation in the city of Canton. Ho underlines, in particular, how popular conceptions of gambling and prostitution remain ambiguous (to say the least) in spite of intensive official propaganda against these re-emerging phenomena.

The great strength of this extremely rich book is that it painstakingly explores the complexity of the changes that took place in Cantonese society without falling back on general concepts like “westernization” and “modernization”. The defining feature of Ho’s approach is probably his dismissal of every sort of overgeneralization and his attention, on the contrary, to the contrasts and ambiguities of Cantonese society.

The book is not however without its problems. First, Ho should seriously consider adopting the now universally accepted *pinyin* as his transcription system. Further, too many terms are missing in

the glossary. I also noticed some repetitions in the text: as an example, we are told almost the same thing about the advantages of public lotteries on page 204 and page 214. Small errors, surprising when we consider Ho's obvious familiarity with the field, are scattered through the book. For example, the first bridge over the Pearl River was completed in 1933, not 1929 (p. 181), and the resort of Lizhiwan is located in the western suburbs of Canton (not the eastern, as mentioned p. 209). Also, the warlord-type regime of Chen Jitang ended in July 1936 (not 1935, see p. 287).

In some instances (especially when dealing with politically-related issues), *Understanding Canton* perhaps could be criticized for remaining too superficial. But that would be quite unfair: it is necessary to keep in mind that Ho is the first person to study questions like gambling or prostitution in Canton in truly scholarly terms, and so consequently lacks previous academic work to base his study upon.

The most serious problem, in my opinion, is actually a loophole: Ho pays no attention to the spatial dimension of the social phenomena under his focus. It is both surprising and rather telling not to find even a single map in the book (which has nevertheless many good illustrations). This lack, he explained rather uncomfortably in the introduction, was due to lack of space. The absence of maps is not the only problem though. Prostitution, opium and gambling are described without an analysis of the location of brothels, opium dens and gambling houses throughout the city (even if some sketchy data are given especially in the case of gambling houses). Since he pays a great deal of attention to the perception of these phenomena, he should have, at least, pointed out the fact that the suburb of Henan (Honam) located on the southern side of the Pearl river had a very specific significance for Cantonese inhabitants of the 1920–1930s, being commonly labelled as the place *par excellence* for gambling and opium.

Nevertheless, the above criticism must be considered no more than minor quibbles for, as a whole, *Understanding Canton* is a pioneering work which makes a great contribution to our understanding of Cantonese society during the Republican period. It will clearly be the basis of any further serious research dealing with Republican Cantonese social history.

*Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan.*

By Nancy Guy. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005. Pp.ix-230. ISBN: 0-252-02973-9.

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The first book-length study in English of the history of Peking Opera in Taiwan is basically a coroner's report – a detailed, step-by-step description of the slow strangulation of a once-popular art form. Guy is primarily concerned with the relationship between art and the state, and the lasting effects of Cold War politics on the aesthetics and lives of individual artists. She carefully outlines a number of factors leading to Peking Opera's stagnation and loss of audience in Taiwan, but the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) is clearly Guy's number one suspect.

The first recorded Peking Opera performance in Taiwan was only a few years before the island came under Japanese rule. During the colonial period (1895–1945), the genre grew in popularity. According to Guy, there were a number of factors responsible for this: economic growth and the building of theaters and railways. But primarily, Guy argues that Peking Opera owed its popularity to the very fact of colonialism. The genre offered a link to China and Chinese identity in opposition to Japan. Thus, even when the Japanese banned all Chinese performance genres after 1937, people kept performing Peking Opera secretly.