

procurements, and interface between inner and outer courts? Indeed, why even bother to change this institution of eunuchs; why not get rid of it altogether? As Kutcher puts it, “Was it possible that Chinese rulers, taught to use history as a guide to governance and carefully warned about the dangers of eunuchs, still managed to fall for the same old tricks, time and again?” (5).

The evidence presented by the books under review here lends itself to the following conclusion: the organizational inertia of the Chinese political system made the eunuch an unavoidable fact of imperial political institutions. Late Ming writers further confirm this position: despite all their complaints, denunciations, and warnings they could not conceive of a government without eunuchs. Tang Zhen (1630–1704) came closest when he mentioned that the only way to eliminate eunuchs was to do so at the start of a new dynasty, when the new emperor and imperial family could learn to survive without a fleet of domestic and political servants (Kutcher, 41). If any new dynasty was to succeed in this endeavor, it would have been the Manchus. Yet they did not. Each Qing emperor found an expedient use for eunuchs, who served his political and material needs, whether it be asserting authority and imperial legitimacy, managing palace affairs, or controlling his administrative officials. The fact of the position of the eunuch was too established to easily abolish altogether. The next best option for the ruler, it seems, was to shape the institution to their immediate political needs. The policies and their consequences have here been illuminated by these two fine histories.

Qing Travelers to the Far West: Diplomacy and the Information Order in Late Imperial China

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This exciting new monograph by Jenny Huangfu Day is a cultural history of the envoys, legations, and writings that characterized imperial diplomacy in the last half-century of the Qing dynasty. As the introduction explains, the book examines not what diplomats learned about the “West” in their travels, but rather how diplomats “created frameworks for understanding the ‘West’” (1). To this effect, Day painstakingly traces how envoys reconciled literary genres, drew comparisons between Chinese classics and modern conditions, and made use of the latest social scientific schema in their works. Each sought in some way to introduce a worldview that accommodated both China and the “West” as major powers of the past and future. Day convincingly demonstrates that these arguments had significant impact in late Qing China. Not only did diplomats serve as “distant information managers” for the Qing empire, they also paved the way for some of the most crucial political developments of the era.

Each of the six body chapters of the book profiles a participant in the diplomatic endeavor, the cultural concerns of his generation, and the shifting institutional contexts for diplomacy. They are Binchun (“The Traveler”), Zhigang (“The Envoy”), Zhang Deyi (“The Student”), Guo Songtao (“The Scholar”), Zeng Jize (“The Diplomat”), and Xue Fucheng (“The Strategist”). Their travels spanned about thirty years, from Binchun’s departure for a European tour in 1866 to the end of Xue Fucheng’s posting in 1894. These men were not a homogenous group. Whereas Binchun and Zhigang were Manchu “banner diplomats,” Zhang Deyi, a Han bannerman, trained in the Zongli yamen-run interpreters’ school, the Tongwenguan. Of the group, only Guo Songtao fit the scholar-official mold; Zeng Jize and Xue Fucheng both rose under the patronage of Zeng Guofan. These distinctions, and other nuances explored in the book, introduce a view of the late Qing that is strikingly less homogenous than standard presentations of entrenched rivalries between Confucian conservatives and self-strengtheners would suggest. Not only did these men arise from a diversity of origins, but they took in strikingly different insights during their Western travels. Although the book’s argument is more concerned with *how* the envoy saw versus *what* they saw, the well-crafted narrative is interspersed with intriguing and entertaining details from the travel records.

Day is attentive to the words and intentions of individual travelers, each of which completed some form of diary while abroad. At first, these journals were submitted for official review upon return to China, but at the same time (and more so in later periods) they found widespread audience through publication, sometimes in serialized form in the periodical press. As Day explains in the text, the envoy journal had precedents in imperial history, but the nineteenth-century travelers, from banner diplomat Binchun in the 1860s to sophisticated author Xue Fucheng in the 1890s, understood themselves to be remaking the genre, with varying success. Thus Binchun’s attempts to anticipate the desires of his official readership resulted in a vague and unsatisfactory representation of England, but all the same Zhang Deyi’s meticulous detailing of London social life was decried as trivial and pedestrian. The writers who elicited the most notice and praise from Chinese audiences were those, like Guo Songtao, Zeng Jize, and Xue Fucheng, who made sustained arguments about the future of China and the Qing empire through their work. In effect, the envoys did their most important work not in compiling observations of the West, but in using their overseas experience to reflect on a forward path for the empire and nation.

The book is elegant both in organization and prose, and the chapters can be read independently as cutting-edge treatments of their subjects, or in conjunction as an important project at the intersections of intellectual, cultural, and political history. Day has managed to find portraits of nearly every subject. A map denoting the paths of envoy travels and the locations of the various legations would have been a useful reference. For source material, the study takes advantage of a recent surge of interest in late Qing diplomats, resulting in many new editions of their writings. Day cites a number of very recent secondary works in Chinese and Japanese on her subjects, pointing to strong current interest in and solid empirical work on these figures and their writings in Asia. Yet it must be stated that *Qing Travelers* illustrates that standard archival publications like the *Chouban yiwu shimo* have not yet been fully mined for information on diplomacy and the workings of the Zongli yamen. In addition, Day references a wealth of recent secondary scholarship, as well as theoretical work, relating to the field of communications and cultural encounters. Citations to theoretical literature (such as the work of James Carey, Stuart Hall, and others) are used mainly to remind readers that

envoy writings, written using the particular idiom and following the anxieties of a particular historical moment, are extremely fraught when read out of context.

Indeed, some of the most intriguing points raised in this study revise longstanding assumptions about key events and personalities in the late nineteenth century. In a chapter on Guo Songtao, the author offers a sympathetic view not only of Guo's apparent cheerleading for the superiority of Western society, but also of the animosity of his critics. Guo was one of the first envoys to work in a permanent legation and at a remove from Beijing, and often found his work to be at odds with the desires of the Qing court establishment. A subsequent chapter on Zeng Jize offers a tantalizing revision of the standard view of the Sino-French War, a topic nearly untouched since Lloyd Eastman's *Throne and Mandarins* (1965). Day shows not only that telegraph information moved faster between diplomats than Eastman understood, but also that Zeng ably orchestrated a "media campaign" to support Qing agendas in Vietnam. Finally, in a final chapter on Xue Fucheng, as well as in comments in the Epilogue, Day raises important questions about the political orientations of Chinese intellectuals on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War. Was it really the war itself that polarized and activated nationalistic agendas, or had writers like Xue and his cohort already laid the groundwork? This question, and the diverse backgrounds of the envoys, also prompts us to wonder whether the individuals saw themselves as working on behalf of "China" or the "Qing." Day typically frames her subjects as representatives of the "Qing," but in cases like Xue Fucheng's plan to empower *Huaren* as powerholders in a prospective Chinese overseas empire, we cannot be so sure.

By using the lens of "information," the author in some ways undersells the contributions and intellectual projects of the profiled individuals. With their observations, the envoys and legations certainly facilitated the expansion of the Qing "information order" far beyond the borders of the empire (although this information order centered primarily on Europe and the Americas to the exclusion of other parts of the world). And, at least some of the diplomats earned the moniker of "information manager," particularly Zeng Jize who not only relayed negotiations between European powers and the Qing in the lead-up to the Sino-French War, but also organized the large-scale translation of newspaper articles, including an inventive mimeograph endeavor. However, the real message here seems to be less about how the Qing gathered and processed disparate information from different global destinations, than about how diplomats made meaning of a rapidly changing world order. Diplomats employed novel schemes to organize and present their observations, to be sure, but it seems more significant that each man profiled in *Qing Travelers* independently conceived himself as tasked with finding a method for understanding how China fit into a new world order. The book thus demonstrates that the diplomatic endeavors of the Zongli yamen prompted seismic shifts in thinking about places known and unknown.