

search engine within seconds. The conclusions of research results provided in a publication, or its contribution to a related academic discourse, can rarely be found.

One interesting aspect of the book is that it explicitly does not confine itself to academic literature in a classical sense, but also includes popular literature and web sources. Though these sections may be far less complete than the others, it surely adds value to the book and realistically accommodates demands established by the expansion of new media.

In conclusion, in spite of the shortcomings listed above, this is a very useful tool for anyone wishing to engage with the topic of Zheng He's voyages – no more and no less. Since Zhu Jianqiu's bibliography from 2005, the closest comparable work, is only available in Chinese, focuses principally on Chinese sources and as a matter of fact does not include works published in the past twelve years, in which the field was very active, it truly fills a gap in the literature.

Though with 200 pages the book is modest in size, the price of €98 falls within the normal range of academic publications. Nonetheless, one might surely wish that a reference work as fundamental and as widely useful as this could be afforded by a larger circle of students.

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MANLING LUO:

Literati Storytelling in Late Medieval China.

xvi, 242 pp. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2015.

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Literati Storytelling in Late Medieval China is about stories – prose tales, narrative poems, anecdotes and other prose accounts – authored or recorded by the educated men who made up the class of scholar-officials, the *literati*, during the period from the Tang dynasty (618–907) to the Song dynasty (960–1280). This Late Medieval period “witnessed the emergence of an unprecedentedly large number of recorded stories, both singly and in collections, creating a range of new thematic and narrative prototypes that would have enduring influences on later Chinese writers” (p. 4). Manling Luo's book offers a well-researched and thought-provoking exposition of the ideas and attitudes found in this corpus of texts. Many of the famous tales under study are available in English translation in anthologies such as Ma and Lau, *Traditional Chinese Stories. Themes and Variations* (Boston: Cheng and Tsui 2002 (original edition 1986)), and Minford and Lau, *An Anthology of Translations. Classical Chinese Literature, Vol. 1: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000). The chief concern of the author of the present study is the close reading of a large spectrum of stories from the Tang and its aftermath in search of “four dominant themes: sovereignty, literati sociality, sexuality, and cosmic mobility” (p. 13). The four main chapters of the book are devoted to these themes. The analyses of the philosophical, political, religious and sociological aspects of the stories are competent and well written. The book is the first major study to take up in earnest detail the plurality of “discourses” about life and death expressed in the narrative prose of that period. It definitely fills a gap in Western research on Chinese literature.

The word “storytelling” in the title deserves explanation and discussion. The cover illustration is taken from a painting showing a gathering of literati (no date) who listen to a female entertainer with a balloon guitar, *pipa*. No wonder, if the reader expects the book to be about oral *storytelling* and performed arts – but that is not the case.

The choice of the word *storytelling* seems as deliberate as it is problematic. In a Chinese context, this expression evokes primarily oral *storytelling* (*shuoshu*, *shuohua*), including a large number of professionally performed arts, historically linked from the present time back to the Song dynasty. Before that time, the storyteller’s profession (*shuoshude*, *shuohuade*) had little foundation in Chinese sources. Casual telling of stories (*jiang gushi*) – a universal human characteristic – has of course no limit in time or space. Manling Luo has chosen the word “storytelling” as an umbrella term to cover variegated story-materials preserved in different written genres. The word is by no means used in a casual manner and the persons behind the tales are systematically and insistently called “storytellers”.

While works of Chinese *storytelling* (*shuoshu*) are generally anonymous – the concept of authorship does not fit the traditional oral transmission of repertoires – the stories treated here as “literati *storytelling*” are prominently defined as authored works. Many individual pieces are apparently connected to a pool of circulating anecdotes that could hardly be attributed to any person in particular as original creator, but the circumstances of their written status implies authorship/editorship. The written language of these tales is the normative written style, *wenyan*, which was at the time the only written style available for prose. The stories occasionally contain framework comments about the “casual telling of stories”, referring to an oral setting for communicating the tales. Just as poems in China were often created and written in calligraphy during gatherings between friends, i.e. an oral setting, stories were told as informal entertainment – as in most other societies. Poems were declaimed, hummed or sung, and their oral form was identical to the written from the point of view of vocabulary and sentence structure. This was not and could not be the case with stories in prose. The daily spoken language of the time was characterized by dialectal and vernacular forms that only slowly and sporadically found their way into the written language, causing the later bifurcation into *wenyan* versus *baihua* (vernacular written style). Therefore, the narrative texts of this study reflect a number of *literary written* genres that were available for recording tales of many kinds.

Obviously, this book does not focus on features of orality and literacy in oral literature, performance-related literature or even oral “casual telling of stories”. It has a different aim. Already literati of the Song dynasty were aware of the splendid tales that their precursors had committed to paper: “We must study the Tang tales. Even small incidents are exquisitely moving, and often – without realizing it themselves – the authors are inspired. These stories and Tang poetry are the wonders of their age” (Hong Mai (1123–1202), *Notes from Tolerance Studio* [translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang]). Since Luo is mainly interested in the discourses on life problems reflected in the tales and anecdotes, she wants to break away from the view that the essential thing about these tales is their literary quality (p. 8). It is because of this purpose that she treats her corpus as “storytelling”, which she understands as a sociological phenomenon rather than a sphere of ingenious creation.

“What have yet to be examined closely, however, are the particular meanings of those stories by and for contemporary scholar-officials, or the crucial social function of literati *storytelling* for the elite community at large” (p. 6). In this respect, Luo offers a wealth of interesting observations and lucid analyses. One such example is her treatment of the “Story of Yingying” (pp. 125–34), the prototype of the evergreen love story that became a famous part of Chinese lore. Already in its first written form, this story manages, as Luo explains, not only to “highlight the threats of romance to patriarchy...”, but also to

“refuse to reconcile the two” and “calling attention to the potential hypocrisy of [the author’s] proclaimed didactic agenda” (p. 126 and p. 132). The Tang literati were already experimenting with complex and ambiguous narrative methods that would endow their tales with lasting interest. Thanks to Manling Luo’s painstaking and extensive study, the door is now wide open to understand better – through stories – the human condition and society of Late Medieval China.

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WILLIAM E. DEAL and BRIAN RUPPERT:

A Cultural History of Japanese Buddhism.

(Wiley Blackwell Guides to Buddhism.) x, 303 pp. Chichester and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015. £19.99. ISBN 978 1 4051 6701 7. doi:10.1017/S0041977X1500138X

The authors have set themselves a daunting task: to present 1,500 years of Japanese Buddhist history in one slim volume of 300 pages. And on the whole, they succeed admirably. In what is clearly intended to be a textbook, William E. Deal and Brian Ruppert introduce readers not only to the current state of the field but also to its academic history by presenting the most recent Western and Japanese scholarship in the context of critically evaluating standard narratives of the Buddhist tradition in Japan. This allows readers who have but a passing acquaintance with the field to appreciate the importance of the arguments discussed. The volume thus responds to the need for an accessible, integrated account of Japanese Buddhism.

Significantly, the authors extend their discussion to modern and contemporary Buddhism without shrinking from controversial issues such as Buddhist involvement in Japanese imperialism and wars. In this regard, I found it particularly heartening to see a consideration of Critical Buddhism. The Critical Buddhism movement has helped to train awareness on discriminatory and socially exclusive practices in Japanese Buddhism. Responding to this concern, the authors give considerable space to neglected voices such as those of “non-persons” (*hinin* 非人) and, in dedicated sections, female practitioners.

Another laudable aspect is the author’s adoption of a progressive chronology based on key developments within the Buddhist traditions rather than the political periodization of Japanese history. For example, the authors speak of “early” (950–1300 CE) and “late medieval Buddhism” (1300–1467) rather than “Heian”, “Kamakura” or “Muromachi-period Buddhism”. This reflects the fact that the roots of medieval Buddhism are actually to be found in the late Heian period, and that the so-called “new Kamakura Buddhism” did not flourish until after the Kamakura period. However, it is not always entirely clear on what criteria the authors base their periodization. For example, why choose 950 as the beginning of medieval Buddhism? The authors explain that “the ritual and political consolidation of the Heian royal court” occurred “around 950” (p. 87) but give no concrete example of what this implies. Furthermore, the authors themselves note that in the case of the Tendai tradition the rise in prominence of oral transmission lineages, often taken to be the beginning of “medieval Tendai” (*J. chūko tendai*), did not occur in the tenth century, as is traditionally claimed, but rather in the eleventh (pp. 91f.). Here a more nuanced discussion of exactly what developments mark the transition to medieval Buddhism might have been helpful.