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David E. Pollard, editor and translator. *Real Life in China at the Height of Empire: Revealed by the Ghosts of Ji Xiaolan*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2014. xl, 334 pp. Hardcover $45.00, ISBN 978-962-996-601-0.

David E. Pollard's new translation of a selection of Ji Yun's *Jottings from the Thatch Hut of Subtle Views* (*Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記) should be first commended for its title. *Real Life in China* is a splendid name, aptly warning the reader that he is not to be merely taken into encounters with seducing fox spirits and exotic ghosts or other uncanny beings. Ghosts and vixens he will meet, of course, and there are superb pieces of Chinese literary storytelling in these pages. However, a lot of discussion will also be found in parts of the book that is by no means less entertaining and interesting.

The importance of the nonnarrative, somewhat didactic elements in the *Yuewei caotang biji* has been traditionally linked to the personality of its author. Ji Yun 紀昀 (Ji Xiaolan 紀曉嵐, 1724–1805), mainly remembered in the history of Chinese culture for having occupied the post of chief editor of the huge *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 compilation commissioned by Emperor Qianlong, also wrote, rather late in life, five collections of random notes, collected afterward under the studio title *Yuewei caotang biji*. If Ji Yun places himself in the continuity of the *zhiguai* 志怪 (strange writings) tradition, his collection offers many singularities when compared to other works of the kind. Among the most striking is Ji Yun's taste for discussing and trying to rationally explain the strange—and not so strange—phenomena met along the course of his long career as an official, including his exile years in Urumqi. Ji engages in discussions with his informants, masters, fellow officers, and family members, and makes his whole cast of human and nonhuman characters extremely talkative and fond of arguing about the order of things. Those "talkative pieces" are by no means less entertaining or fascinating than the narratives. Ghosts, demons, and transformed animals mingle and speak freely with less supernatural citizens of the Qing Empire, about life, death, honesty, cheating, corruption, illness, and many other rather this-worldly topics. Listen to a lecture in eighteenth-century obstetrics given by a female fox spirit ("Fox Fairy as Tutor," pp. 61–63). Reflect on the case of an ordinary woman used by Yama, the king of the netherworld, to be his envoy precisely because, as a living being, she will be able to approach high-ranking officials protected against ghosts by powerful guardian gods ("The Grim Reaper," pp. 8–9). Hear Ji Yun's pondering about the psychological side of planchette spirit writing ("Planchette I," pp. 73–74). Witness the pitiful fate of a whole clan of Xinjiang's ferocious bandits and see how Ji Yun comments about it ("Bandits Destroy Bandits," pp. 315–319). One could quote dozens more instructive or touching samples from Pollard's choices in the collection, but this reviewer won't spoil any further the prospective reader's pleasure.

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Ji Yun's stories and reflections cannot be said to have attracted as many translators as Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異, but there have been quite a few translations of it since the beginning of the twentieth century. In contrast to *Liaozhai,* however, no exhaustive translation of the *biji* 筆記 exists; it should be noted that it has nearly twice as many entries as Pu's book, with 1196; as they are generally shorter, Ji Yun's book is not longer. One of the earliest selections to have been published in Western languages seems to be *Le Lama rouge et autre contes,* which appeared in Paris as early as the 1920s. It had the peculiarity to have been translated by Chen Lu 陳籙 (then transliterated as Tcheng-Loh; 1877–1939), the Chinese ambassador to France beginning in September 1920, who was working with Lucie Paul-Marguerite (1866–1955), the daughter of then-famous novelist Paul Marguerite and a novelist herself, whose fondness for Chinese culture inspired many of her works. This "Red lama" was a rather free adaptation of sixty tales from the *biji*. But one had to wait until the last decades of the twentieth century to see larger selections of the *biji* more rigorously translated: in 1983, Konrad Hermann chose around three hundred pieces from all five books of the collection and published them under the title *Pinselnotizen aus des Strohhütte des Grossen im Kleinen* in what was then East Germany (Leipzig, Weimar: Kiepenheur verlag). Most of the later translations came out in the 1990s: *Notte scritte nello studio Yuewei,* Edi Bozza, with forty-six tales (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1992); *Notes de la chaumière des observations subtiles,* Jacques Pimpaneau, with 125 tales (Paris: Kwok-on, 1995); *Passe-temps d'un été à Luanyang,* Jacques Dars, with 297 tales (Paris: Gallimard, 1998); *Fantastic Tales by Ji Xiaolan,* Sun Hai-Ch'en, with 140 tales (Beijing: New World Press, 1998); and eventually *Shadows in a Chinese Landscape: The Notes of a Confucian Scholar,* David L. Keenan, with 112 tales (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999). Among these early translators, only Pimpaneau did what one may call a *biji*-like translation of a *biji,* not explaining his choices, not giving titles to the pieces, and not giving their references in the collection; Jacques Dars alone refrained from subjective choice by deciding to translate the entirety of the first book of the collection, the *Luanyang xiaoxia lu* 灤陽消夏錄, respecting in another way the random-jottings style of the original.

How should we situate Pollard's book in regard to its predecessors? With 162 tales translated, his work, though not the largest selection, is one of the most consistent, offering a rather wide sampling of Ji Yun's prose pieces. Pollard, like all previous translators except Pimpaneau, adds his own titles to each piece, generally rather witty ones, supplying under every title a very useful abbreviation of the exact place of the piece in the whole collection, which will make it very handy to use in a Chinese literature classroom. Like David Keenan alone, he organizes his sampling of the tales in thematic sections, but where Keenan did stick to five general classes, organizing around five concentric circles of Ji Yun's relationship's network, Pollard makes up a broader, quasi-encyclopedic organization, sometimes reminiscent of the narrative "encyclopedias" (*leishu* 類書) of imperial China:

he ends his selection, as did the compilers of the Northern Song *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, by allowing himself to talk about the barbarians, here impersonated by the court Jesuits of Qing times, only after closing the stories about all Chinese humans, ghosts, and objects.

By beginning with "the supernatural and the curious," Pollard in a way tricks his reader into believing that he will be dealing with an anthology of strange tales and marvels. But the following sections, after taking the reader closer to Ji Yun's life ("Official Milieus," "Family and Friends"), will encounter various strata of Chinese society, from women to merchants, robbers to actors. In doing so, Pollard takes his reader gradually out of the "pure" supernatural in order to listen to Ji's considerations about the many sides of eighteenth-century Chinese life. This is one of the strongest points of the book. Some of the shorter sections (for example, "Legal Dilemmas and Disputes," pp. 135–151), showing the humor and skepticism of Ji Yun at his best while taking us into the heart of the daily choices a Chinese magistrate had to make, are really brilliant (I leave to the reader the pleasure of discovering the "blood test" story in this section). One other very good point about Pollard's work is the way he shows Ji Yun reemploying a tale in another setting: at several points, the translation of family letters allows us to witness Ji using one of the stories he remembered in different contexts and for different purposes (for example, pp. 170–171, 193–194, 212–216, 315–319).

This reviewer has very few reservations about the highly enjoyable *Real Life in China*. Pollard intends his book for the general reader, and his short introductions to sections and subsections are devised to explain facts of eighteenth-century China to readers without any background in Chinese studies. So, if they are sometimes slightly oversimplifying or somewhat misleading (for example, I'm not totally convinced that "the dichotomy between the slighting of the actor's life as degraded and the enthusiasm for the theatrical production was unusually pronounced in traditional China" [p. 290], at least if we take Louis XIV's France as a point of comparison; elsewhere, should not the author recommend to his reader curious about late imperial Chinese religions a more recent book than C. K. Yang's 1967 *Religion in Chinese Society*?), they indeed have the virtue of being straightforward and in most of cases to the point.

Maybe the only judgment I'd like to question briefly here is the way Pollard (and to be just, several of his predecessors, such as Pimpaneau or, in a lesser way, Dars) seems oddly to be ill at ease with Ji Yun being called a Confucian. Sure enough, Ji sometimes explicitly attacks other literati (*ru* 儒), though generally adding a pejorative epithet (such as "pedant": *jiangxue jia* 講學家; or "well-read pedants": *dushu jiangxue zhi ru* 讀書講學之儒), or aiming specifically at adepts of the Song (*daoxue* 道學) or Ming (*xinxue* 心學) brands of Confucianism. But I wonder what the chief editor of the *Siku quanshu* collection, which was sometimes deemed the "Confucian Canon" (*Ru zang* 儒藏), would think of barbarian translators of his own work considering him opposed to Confucians, or, at least to

Neo-Confucianism. Wouldn't it be more just that a man like Ji, animated by a spirit of honesty, benevolence, and openness, gifted with a strong sense of humor and a sharp intelligence, be simply called a Confucian in the best meaning of the word? One should be wary of remaining under the spell of post–May Fourth oversimplifications equating Confucianism with bigotry and conservatism. But we should guard against new clichés as well, as Xi Jinping's China shows us the flag of "Confucianism" once again brandished as the symbol of conformism and blind obedience to the state. Reading a great deal of Ji Yun should prove an excellent medicine against those trends! Let's again thank David Pollard for presenting us with this high-quality selection and dream that we may in the future see a complete translation of Ji Yun's collection of eighteenth-century natural and supernatural realities.

Vincent Durand-Dastès

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Gilbert Rozman. *The Sino-Russian Challenge to the World Order: National Identities, Bilateral Relations, and East versus West in the 2010s*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press. x, 304 pp. Hardcover $50.00, ISBN 978-0-8047-9101-4.

Growing cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation in recent years has been closely followed by several media and academic communities around the world. In light of the difficulties in the South China Sea and southeastern Ukraine, both countries have more than once been labeled "revisionist states," and their increased cooperation has been viewed as a step toward a strategic and formal partnership, which could potentially endanger international stability. Yet, others argue that the Sino-Russian cooperation is purely for economic benefit, with Russia being overly dependent on China's financial superiority and leadership with little to offer in return. Beijing's efforts to boost ties with Moscow are, then, recognized as a sign of China's increasing hegemonic aspirations, both regionally and internationally. To support these claims, the history of their bilateral relationship (e.g., the Sino-Soviet split of the 1950s and 1960s) is set as a point of reference and example to prove that, whatever the form

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