

Geo-Narratives of a Filial Son: The Paintings and Travel Diaries of Huang Xiangjian (1609–1773). By ELIZABETH KINDALL. Harvard University Asia Center, 2016. 504 pp. \$89.95, £71.95, €81.00 (cloth).

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doi:10.1017/jch.2017.18

In 1652, only eight years after the Manchu conquest of Beijing, when contests between Qing armies and Ming loyalists were still active, Huang Xiangjian 黃向堅, a native of Suzhou, set out on foot for remote Yunnan in search of his father, who had occupied a minor official post on the southwestern frontier. Huang had had no news of his father—or mother—for at least seven years. After an arduous and sometimes treacherous journey, Huang located his parents and against all odds managed to return safely with them to Suzhou almost two years and 2,800 miles later. *Geo-Narratives of a Filial Son: The Paintings and Travel Diaries of Huang Xiangjian (1609–1773)* is a beautifully and extensively illustrated exploration of the paintings and diaries that commemorate this journey. Setting Huang's work within the context of his times and the social and scholarly milieu of Suzhou, Elizabeth Kindall explores Huang's *oeuvre* both as part of a bid for imperial recognition of Huang Xiangjian as a Filial Son, and as the embodiment of a genre she identifies as “geo-narrative.”

Kindall brings to her subject matter a keen understanding of the well-established Suzhou landscape painting tradition, a thorough knowledge of the travel literature on southwest China, and broad familiarity with the narratives of filiality into which Huang's quest for imperial recognition fit. Attentive also to the social, geographical, political, and spiritual context in which the paintings were made, Kindall reads them as “an intriguing case study of the social function of art as an agent of moral persuasion, class identification, and biographical commemoration” (2).

The first chapter explores the salient conventions of place painting in Huang's native Suzhou. In this tradition only the most famous sites, and most famous views within these sites, were reproduced. The goal was not to illustrate a new view or location, or a unique perspective on a particular venue, but rather to create anew a familiar scene thereby offering “inclusion within the ‘cultural memory’ of a site via the shared experience of a historically sanctioned view” (38). These paintings, and the experience of viewing them, thus created a kind of social community in which shared experience, and by extension shared values, could be invoked. This community was further knit together when famous calligraphers would contribute colophons to artwork strengthening social networks, or paintings were donated to raise funds for important projects such as the restoration of Buddhist temples.

Chapters Two and Three focus on *The Travel Records of Filial Son Huang*, the textual and pictorial account of his journey. Kindall argues that although the work depicts a region that unlike Suzhou is not well known in painting, Huang uses the conventions of Suzhou landscape painting, not just in a stylistic sense, but also in terms of tapping into and creating a sense of shared cultural values. By working within the trope of filiality and alluding to earlier travel writing from the area, Huang places himself within a known cultural context in which his devotion earns him social recognition and cultural capital. In her words, the goal was to “enhance the Huang family's moral and material eminence

amongst Suzhou elite circles by promoting the narrative of their odyssey” (148). Kindall further explores how the trope of filiality is closely associated in the late Ming mind with the loyalty of a minister to his emperor. Building on this association she argues that Huang, even while seeking recognition from the Qing imperial government as a filial son, simultaneously cultivates a social coterie bound together by its Ming loyalist sentiments.

Not all of Huang’s *oeuvre* relates directly to the journey that reunited Huang with his parents and allowed them to return safely home to Suzhou. Chapter Four explores a handscroll of Mount Jizu 雞足山, a sacred site in Yunnan, that Huang visited after his reunification with his parents, but before their return home. Although not directly part of the narrative of reunification, filiality is expressed in the scroll in other ways. Kindall’s main contribution here is to demonstrate how the scroll, which she describes as a geo-narrative, could be read on a variety of levels depending on the experience and sophistication of the viewer. At the most basic level, the painting can be understood as a representation of a journey through the terrain of a specified exotic region. A deeper level of meaning would have been available to those familiar already with the history of the region portrayed, and/or with the story of the painter’s journey through it. Finally, for a select few who were familiar both with the location and its history, and well versed in Buddhist and Confucian thought, Huang’s work opened up the possibility of a transcendent “grand view” (*da guan*) from the summit in which one could theoretically “travel from the linear to the limitless; the regional to the universal; and the temporal to the eternal” (203). Huang’s painting made it possible for his father to relive the experience of the “grand view” although he would never again be present physically on the mountaintop. The painting was thus deeply imbued with personal meaning and its execution an act of profound filiality.

Painted in 1658, the year of Huang’s father’s seventieth birthday, a work known as the *Diannan* 滇南 album is the focus of Chapters Five and Six. This untitled album, which Kindall describes as “Huang’s most technically innovative and compellingly beautiful work” also marked the end of Huang’s Xiangjian’s period of artistic productivity (257). Likely painted as a seventieth birthday gift for his father, the eight scenes it includes comprise a geo-narrative that, taken both individually and collectively, portray the life of Huang Kongzhao as a spiritual journey that can be read at several levels. The album depicts scenes from Huang senior’s physical journey, the cultural topography through which he travelled, and also what Kindall refers to as “*loci* of remembrance” (259). Choosing not to focus on only one aspect of his father’s life, Huang instead uses the image of the sometimes exhilarating, sometimes arduous, journey through the a previously unknown landscape as a means to explore the formation of a complete “self” (258).

Chapter Six explores the *Diannan* album as a specifically pictorial record of his father’s “quest toward sagehood.” The quest was not limited to the religious realm but encompassed various facets of his life including the development of his official, philosophical, and religious personas in the journey toward full self-realization (*chengren* 成人, literally “becoming a person,” 332). Kindall contextualizes her approach in philosophical and autobiographical writing of the time, essentially reading this series of landscape paintings as “spiritual autobiography” (335) in the way Wu Peiyi has read travel narratives.

From this description it is clear that the “geo-narrative” of which Kindall speaks is more than a rendering of the physical topography through which the painter has travelled. As geo-narrative, Huang’s work rather presents “a structured topographic experience for viewers through an identifiable landscape whose greater significance, ultimate meaning, and purpose are slowly revealed” (2). Yet, it should not be forgotten that the resulting landscapes very much “represent a seventeenth-century Suzhou citizen’s expectations and perceptions of the colonial southwest” (1). Meaning is derived from the experience entirely through the lens of Han culture and history, and notable indigenous monuments are not represented. Indigenous peoples appear in the narrative (fully translated in an appendix) only incidentally.

Steeped herself in the history and milieu of Huang’s artistic, literary, social, and cultural world, Kindall sets Huang’s geo-narratives within the context of the scholarly Suzhou milieu to which the Huang family belonged. Her own experience of traveling to these locations, of climbing the peaks, and taking in the views also gives her readings a richer layer than would otherwise have been possible, and helps to distinguish the various levels at which the diaries could be viewed and enjoyed. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the social and cultural world of late imperial China.

Li Mengyang, the North-South Divide, and Literati Learning in Ming China. By CHANG WOEI ONG. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016. 368 pp. \$49.95, £39.95, €45.00 (cloth).

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doi:10.1017/jch.2017.29

It is hard to imagine a more comprehensive intellectual history than Chang Woei Ong’s *Li Mengyang, the North-South Divide, and Literati Learning in Ming China*. The title almost undersells the book; only the phrase “literati learning” succeeds in capturing its vast scope. Ong’s achievement is to provide a world of context to Li’s career, and he does such a thorough job that Li’s career becomes rather a vehicle for exploring its context.

Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473–1530) was a native of Qingyang 慶陽 county in Shaanxi province (although it is now in Gansu). He passed the provincial civil service exam in 1492 and the metropolitan exam the following year. Although he earned a posting to the Ministry of Revenue in the capital, he soon clashed with powerful people, including the court eunuch Liu Jin 劉瑾 (d. 1510), whom he believed to be abetting bureaucratic indiscipline. By 1522, Li had lost his official status and retired to Kaifeng.

Ong supplements his narration of Li Mengyang’s rise with ample insight on China’s north-south divide, especially with respect to civil service recruitment quotas; and then, with Li’s official career terminated on page 51, Ong devotes the rest of his study to examining Li’s thought, providing background that stretches back to the Song dynasty. Although Ong’s retreatment of well-studied Song themes may seem a bit digressive, it does serve to highlight Li’s uniqueness. At no time attempting altogether to refute the Song orthodoxy personified by the Neo-Confucian (or *Daoxue* 道學) heavyweight