

that, in exchange for a modicum of food relief, however paltry in quantity and quality, Beijing residents acquiesced to becoming more legible—and thus more manageable—to the authorities. In that sense, opportunities to “deflect, subvert, and ‘escape without leaving,’” diminished as war eventually gave way to a new political and social order with its own opportunities to deviate.

The points raised above are minor quibbles. Zhao Ma is to be commended for showing us how resourceful and resilient lower-class women managed to live through—and survive—years of war and occupation with an impressive array of survival tactics. This work definitely “surprises and engenders thought,” and ought to stimulate others to explore an understudied segment of society in other parts of China during the war years.

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Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700.
By Joseph R. Dennis. Harvard East Asian Monographs 379. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015. Pp. xv + 390. \$49.95/£36.95.

This book is a study of the Chinese genre called *difangzhi* 地方志 (local gazetteers) defined by Dennis as cumulative records of a territorial unit published in book format, “generally by a local government, and arranged by topics such as topography, institutions, population, taxes, biographies, and literature” (p. 1). While their prefaces often claim that the genre originated back in the Zhou dynasty, gazetteers became a distinct genre only by the Song and Yuan periods, becoming especially popular by the Ming. From each of the first two periods c. 30 gazetteers are extant, while more than 1,000 exist for the Ming, with a further 7,000 available from the end of the Ming until 1949. Dennis proposes to be our guide in understanding the historical changes in the significance, format, and underlying agendas of gazetteers, and indeed, he provides us in this welcome work with a very useful critical overall picture of the genre.

This is the more important, since many historians of China use gazetteers regularly for local information (such as stone inscriptions, unpublished local writings, and genealogies), without asking how such information was produced. Dennis shows this is dangerous: gazetteers were sites where the “central state” interacted with local élites, and, hence, they were fields for battles over social status and property interests, forums to shape public opinion and advocate policy, and much more (p. 3; by “centre”

Dennis means both those officials sent by the centre to govern in the provinces, and those remaining in the capital). They are not simple compilations of unproblematic facts. The emergence of the gazetteer can be linked with the Song localist turn, with its efforts to demonstrate a locality's place in the larger civilized world: both in the traditional cultural centres of that world, and in remote border areas where only a minority of the inhabitants strove to accept Chinese culture.

In addition to the socio-political background, Dennis also studies the gazetteers from the point of view of the history of the book, as one possible example of non-commercial publishing: thus, he investigates the impact of the gazetteers on society and vice versa, also including the economics of their publication. For this research, he pays close attention to their important paratextual elements, such as prefaces, postfaces, administrative petitions and orders related to their compilation, lists of financial contributors to their production and editing, and compilers' notes (p. 6), concentrating mostly on those gazetteers published between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In the West, Balázs brought attention to history and the gazetteer as “bureaucratic guides”¹ for officialdom, and gazetteers have been studied to some extent ever since, but Dennis is the first to address much more broadly the social contexts of their production, circulation and reading, and in doing so changes greatly that traditional perception.

These general conclusions put forward by Dennis are important, and persuasively argued. But the book shines most fully in its details, and I would therefore like to give first a detailed overview of its various chapters, before I continue to mention some questions which in my view the book raises.

Chapter 1 examines some governmental background, on why different levels of governments compiled gazetteers. Nation-wide imperial gazetteer projects are said to have been critical to their spread in Yuan and Ming times, although such projects were not always successful despite repeated edicts: many were started, but the reluctance of officials to give a final word on important, empire-related subjects such as (in the Ming) the Nanjing court, palaces, or ancestral temples, combined with the short average terms of appointment, may account for the surprisingly frequent attempts to restart such imperial projects previously left unfinished. Local gazetteers too could be linked with national politics: with the compilation of a local gazetteer for Chengtian 承天, birthplace for the natural rather than ritual father of the Jiajing 嘉靖 emperor, we are right in the middle of national politics (and Dennis gives more examples of highly contested imperial material in gazetteers.)

¹ Etienne Balazs, “History as a Guide to Bureaucratic Practice,” in Etienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme*, ed. Arthur F. Wright, and trans. H. M. Wright (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 129–49.

Continuing this introduction, Dennis shows how by the 1200s the genre of gazetteers slowly differentiated itself as increasingly historical accounts from earlier, more geographical *tujing* 圖經, *tuji* 圖記, or *tuzhi* 圖志 (map guides). By then expectations that every locality should have its own gazetteer were widely expressed, even if not yet really reflecting actual availability. Such gazetteers, as local history, were meant to leave information on local facts (schools, examinations, local figures, events, landscapes) for the future as much as they were meant to assist with current governance: as much historical guides for local literati and documenting their participation in local society as they were Balázs's "bureaucratic guides" for officials. Thus, Dennis shows that biographical and literary writings became increasingly important, although there could be significant differences between gazetteers in subjects covered (e.g. religion): some stressed history, others geography, while a third distinctly less prominent approach was more functional, gazetteers as a mirror for governance and cultural transformation (and then possibly arranged into the six ministerial categories.) And there are aspects which always received short shrift: business, industry, entertainment.

The Ming made efforts to compile national gazetteers in 1370, 1376, and frequently thereafter (1412, 1418, 1454, 1524). Some of these projects were accompanied by clear editorial principles (*fanli* 凡例) and Dennis usefully discusses and translates those of 1412 and 1418. The initiative to compile gazetteers could come from any of the administrative levels however. Superior levels ordered lower levels to forward material (either finished local county gazetteers, existing or newly compiled, or just their content) for the compilation of prefectural gazetteers. But most frequent was local initiative independent of higher level officials, because of a variety of reasons, not least of which was self-promotion. As one particular salient example, Dennis discusses compilation in non-Chinese border counties, where Chinese magistrates were sent to replace native rulers. In such areas often the gazetteer was the first written literary (Chinese) work produced, and it usually left out local oral history by the "barbarians," since their purpose was to assist assimilation. In one interesting case investigated by Dennis (Mahu 馬湖 in Sichuan, an Yi 彝 area), the native rulers, the An 安, by playing to the Chinese norms, sought to enhance their status with those Chinese who would read the gazetteer, but their success came to an end later when new efforts to oust their influence resulted in a new Chinese yamen, an imposing Chinese wall, and a new, anti-An, gazetteer.

Chapter 2 provides a case study of the politics behind the 1477 and 1579 editions of the *Xinchang xian zhi* 新昌縣志. Read in conjunction with many genealogies, Dennis shows the kinship ties uniting the various (lineages of) compilers, and surmises their main object to have been to document and praise their leadership in local society. (Dennis uses, confusingly and inappropriately, the word "extended-family" for this level of interlocked, intermarried group of lineages between village lineages and

county government.) Such possible locally biased goals of gazetteers are important for incidental users of gazetteers to realize, since e.g. those biographies of virtuous women included in a gazetteer might only be those of the relatives of the compilers. Thus, gazetteer sections often cannot be properly understood apart from their whole (p. 64). Gazetteers may have particular agendas: the creation of a public genealogy, the scholarly promotion of its locale, the presentation of models of behaviour, or of a particular view of culture and government, or the enhancement of the general reputation of a locale. Their compilers may try to consolidate gains won through the prestige of past official careers. (In an aside, Dennis points out that current gazetteers often can be equally biased.)

Most useful is the detailed investigation by Dennis of the actual compilation process of these gazetteers, with most often the magistrate as the initiator, assisted by school instructors and student researchers, and an editorial committee. During the actual compilation, magistrates had to deal with the expected local efforts to exert influence, the pressure to insert exaggerated praise, and, on the part of some, inevitable efforts to involve higher officials to interfere. (Of course, gazetteers regularly claim that such efforts were resisted—but we are not in a position to know whether the gazetteers we have are more impartial than the ones originally written.) It turns out that in the case of Xinchang there existed intricate and close links between the lineages of the compilers of the gazetteers, the social ranking of lineages reflected in those gazetteers, and the surnames mentioned in the list of contributors. The compilers had closer social and marital relationships to each other than, perhaps, more distant relatives of their own lineages.

In this not wholly convincing set of arguments (about which later), it does seem from the prefaces adduced that indeed, there was an effort to exclude, or minimize the praise of, families “claiming to be old who completely lack verifiable traces” of Confucian morality. Most convincing is Dennis’s demonstration that the 1579 gazetteer was biased favouring the four major compilers’ families, when he shows that in the section on “auspicious portents” all seven occasions involved those families of the central compilers. Another revealing episode is the evidence presented that one underrepresented family strongly objected to the gazetteer’s version of the reconstruction of the local Confucian school, complaints which Dennis brilliantly located in that other family’s genealogy. Thus, only by going outside the local gazetteers we can see that the gazetteer gives a one-sided politically influenced story of a seemingly mundane event. Significantly, members of that family did not contribute money or material to the gazetteer, even while Dennis can show they were a dominant family after all.

Many gazetteers in principle excluded imperial edicts addressed to individuals or even grave epitaphs, in order to forestall improper local influence; but luckily

for us, many other gazetteers did include them. The argument not to include them was usually that such documents belonged to another genre, genealogies, not that they were private; and Dennis shows that compilers often wrestled with the tensions between gazetteers and genealogies, and the question what content was appropriate for which genre.

There are conflicting estimates of the numbers of gazetteers written; Liu Weiyi 劉緯毅² argued for some 1,000 during the Song, while others double that figure, and yet others come only to some 200, or 350. For the Ming, there exist equally divergent numbers. In Chapter 3 Dennis argues that much of the differences between those numbers has to do with the fundamental question: what counts as a separate gazetteer? There exist many marginal texts, revisions, unpublished manuscript versions, etc. (and including these, the Ming count in Dennis's view far, far exceeds even the highest numbers given by Ba Zhaoxiang 巴兆祥³ 3,000–3,500). Gazetteers were living documents, constantly revised and updated, added to with sequels or fully rewritten, by hand or using additional woodblocks. Thus, the word “edition” can be very complicated to use, even if in individual cases one may find general agreement on what were distinct works and what were not. Dennis gives revealing examples of many in-between cases: thus one magistrate had a block recut in order to include his own appointment, resulting in an awkward renumbering of pages.

Dennis divides gazetteers into private and official ones (his terms, and he warns us not to confuse his term “official” with the usual Chinese concept of “official publisher” in contrast with commercial presses and household publishing. Dennis uses the term “official gazetteer” if a residential administrator initiated and approved the project).

In any case, there certainly exist gazetteers compiled or initiated locally outside the government and without official permission. Blurring the boundaries, such private gazetteers could be co-opted later by the government; and local individuals could be put in charge of official ones. Often the “private” gazetteers were the foundations of the “official” ones, by bringing in semi-officials (the place of Confucian school instructors, serving outside their native places, and local students is conspicuous). And still further blurring occurred when those local, private compilers were current, retired or aspiring officials. Indeed, creating an impression of cooperation was crucial for an official gazetteer to be able to project for itself an authoritative status. Dennis gives many varied details of possible situations, one even more interesting than the other.

² Liu Weiyi, “Songdai fangzhi shu lüe” 宋代方志述略, *Wenxian* 文獻, 1986, no. 4, pp. 129–39.

³ Ba Zhaoxiang, “Lun Mingdai fangzhi de shuliang yu xiuzhi zhidu” 論明代方志的數量與修志制度, *Zhongguo difangzhi* 中國地方誌, 2004, no. 4, pp. 45–51, and later updates.

In one case, one official on sick leave at home began a gazetteer, stayed on to finish beyond his allotted leave, and was impeached (unsuccessfully) for doing so, triggering a widespread investigation of sick leave abuse. But there are also cases where superior officials kept lower ones in office until they had finished their gazetteer. The general short terms of office necessitated a wider local involvement and separate editors. In yet another case, one local yamen clerk who was assigned to research local temples, was transferred after finishing only one temple, and that was therefore the only temple included in the final gazetteer, no replacement having been assigned to take over his work.

Gazetteers relied upon a mixture of paid and volunteer labour. Those working for schools or yamen in all likelihood worked for free. But many compilers, researchers, or proofreaders, and especially those famous literati invited to write prefaces were paid, including when such local authors were retired magistrates. There were even literati who almost specialized in writing gazetteers (and hence, came from outside the locality where they were hired).

The offices where gazetteers' work was done often were located in the local yamen or school, but these offices could be elsewhere: in a compiler's home, on religious sites; even occasionally outside the locality. Some source material naturally came from the yamen archives, but typically requests for sources were solicited from many kinds of people, and proclamations requesting them were posted. Most of the necessary material was obtained for free (prestige and desire to be included were helpful factors; as was, one imagines, social pressure), but not always: items were purchased, including rather peculiarly, sometimes previous gazetteers, or such items were copied by hand. Collecting did not always go smoothly: there are complaints that "selfish" people did not contribute needed material. The collected materials could be arranged in a variety of ways (Dennis usefully discusses seven such ways of arrangement, translating Huang Wei 黃葦,⁴ pp. 152–53), based upon the compilers' view of gazetteers. Censorship did not play any role; but permission from higher levels, usually with an eye out for possible financing, was asked beforehand. But of course, compilers were careful, and gazetteers did not challenge core governmental policies.

In Chapter 4, Dennis uses local gazetteers as a useful corrective to previous investigations of the geography of printing, which tend to highly favour Nanjing because of biased sources. This is possible, since bureaucratic involvement in gazetteers has luckily resulted in a paper trail rarely available for other kinds of printing. He shows then that printing technology and labour was widely dispersed, and that Beijing was as much a centre as Nanjing. Moreover, addressing other recent studies which have tended to stress the continuing importance of manuscripts even after

⁴ Huang Wei, *Fangzhi xue* 方志學 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1993).

the advent of print, he shows that at least since the Southern Song printing was the norm, even if during the compilation process several intermediary manuscript stages were produced, and even if printing did not always follow, or even if there are printed works which survive only in later hand-copied form.

To reach these conclusions, Dennis uses much paratextual material, but notices that unlike purely literary prefaces, such information was not necessarily carried over in further versions, thus one has to use all versions of a gazetteer for such investigations, not just the later ones.

After the first printing, gazetteers were likely to be printed upon demand only, since there was no incentive to invest in many paper copies in view of the short terms of office. Sometimes they were cut and printed by local craftsmen attached to the yamen; others were cut and/or printed by itinerant craftsmen, with payment often coming from local donations, including often partly by the magistrate. Occasionally the work was sent out to printing centres to be done elsewhere. Only very rarely local commercial print shops printed a work; and while commercial publishers might reprint older, classic gazetteers (most notably, the *Da Ming yitongzhi* 大明一統志), commercial involvement was otherwise rare.

Dennis spends some considerable ingenuity in establishing “business zones,” the geographic area from which a block cutter received manuscripts, or travelled to. In aggregate, his data show that even isolated county towns had no difficulty in hiring block cutters and printers, and that print craftsmen could be highly mobile, functioning on a regional and national level (p. 191). Thus, Dennis shows that some block cutters worked in business areas of some hundreds of square kilometres, and that many publications originated from outside Jiangnan and Fujian, sometimes seen as the most prominent publishing regions.

Were books in general affordable (as Chow, McDermott, and Brokaw have argued), or rather restricted to a rich élite (Shen Jin and Idema)? In Chapter 5 Dennis investigates the economics of compiling and printing gazetteers, fully realizing that gazetteers have characteristics not necessarily shared with other kinds of publishing. Such investigation is not always relevant to solve financial issues of book publishing; gazetteers were not meant to be profit making, and their publication could often rely upon the free labour of more or less willing or reluctant donors, volunteers, and clerks. Still, prices for hired craftsmen, cutting blocks, or salaries for certain editorial personnel are useful, and again, Dennis squeezes out as much information from his material as possible.

Surprisingly even those gazetteers compiled on order from above were rarely funded by those higher governmental levels; financing almost always relied upon local donations, including some out of the local official’s private funds, or upon the diversion of local fines, litigation fees or confiscated monies (for which higher-level permission was necessary). In addition to the official involved and the gazetteer’s

actual compilers, also school instructors and other serving officials frequently participated. Not all officials did contribute money, however; and the total money needed (from 10–90 to even over 300 tael) could easily exceed an official's salary (approx. 60 tael). An official's contribution therefore was often only the start of a contribution campaign, by other officials or other members of the local élite, including commoners. Higher levels could request donations of lower levels, but surprisingly (and quite against the view of gazetteers being a quintessential central bureaucratic practice), there is no evidence that superior units ever paid for gazetteers of subordinate gazetteers.

Dennis goes on to investigate in detail the financial aspects of 11 gazetteers. In this, he is often quite convincing in how to interpret the data, which seldom detail everything. One of his conclusions is that generally paper was not a large factor of the costs (less than 2%), the cost of paper being able to be recovered later when printing on demand would take place; a very different case, therefore, from other non-commercial printing such as the later bibles, for which free distribution was paramount. And although Dennis lists many other figures (average per page costs ranging from 0.091 to 0.437 tael; a possible distribution of the costs of the 1552 *Xingning xian zhi* 興寧縣志 into 60% board for craftsmen, 30% wages, 6% blocks, 4% paper), he also shows that there were large actual price differences between e.g. Xingning and Beijing, thus concluding that much research remains to be done.

One important finding presented by Dennis is that his figures for the Song and Yuan suggest that also then prices and expenses were not that much higher than during the Ming, and hence he cautions us against concluding too quickly that there was a great drop in printing expenses in the latter half of the Ming, as several authors have postulated on fewer data. His final qualitative conclusion is that for the whole period from Song to Ming, “although officials did not consider printing a gazetteer to be overly expensive, one does get the impression that it was not something done with petty change” (p. 246). And while not many commoner farming families might have been able to afford a gazetteer, people on the next, still modest economic rung of the ladder probably could.

And indeed, evidence presented in Chapter 6 on readership shows that while officials and literati were the main readers of gazetteers, there are references to people of many different backgrounds as readers, supporting the thesis of an expanded reading public by late Ming. One interesting way in which Dennis goes beyond, possibly wishful, statements about intended readership in prefaces is by investigating where compilers got previous versions of the gazetteer: farmers and artisans figure there. Gazetteers were not distributed through commercial bookstores, but rather through the local offices and other individuals involved in their compilation, and Dennis spends some time showing the (rather unsurprising) places where gazetteers

might end up. There is also evidence for the existence of a market for second-hand (Dennis calls them “used”) gazetteers.

In the final Chapter 7 Dennis then proposes to investigate reading practices and use, but one has to admit that he does this rather in a perfunctory way, before presenting the admittedly much more exciting details of how gazetteers could function in lawsuits.

For some previous authors (Bol,⁵ not Balázs), officials did not show much interest in gazetteers; Dennis rectifies that blanket denial somewhat by showing that many officials tried to get hold of copies before or immediately after their arrival. Because of this interest, the local élite had a certain stake in what was presented in gazetteers, and how.

Within this overall somewhat unsatisfying chapter, the subsection “Reading Gazetteers for Evidence in Lawsuits” is much more compelling. To make his interesting story short, Dennis investigates here in detail a case about battles over water rights in Shangyu 上虞, the possible falsification about them in the gazetteer by one stakeholder, and how this all was or was not reflected in the Shaoxing 紹興 prefectoral gazetteer (to which Shangyu resorts), and the various versions (1606, 1671) of the Shangyu local county gazetteer. Another case presented, involving the same county, involved disputes with its neighbouring county, Yuyao 餘姚, again over water rights (and related to earlier border adjustments, always a source of disputes during the Ming).

The book ends with the examination of the catalogues of some major collections of gazetteers, in particular Qi Chengye’s 祁承爌 Danshengtang 澄生堂 library, and with some remarks on how gazetteers functioned as sources for the compilation of other biographical and genealogical works. His final conclusion is that gazetteers should not be seen as dry compendia of statistics or “akin to encyclopedias” (p. 339—a surprising statement to me, as if encyclopaedias cannot be partial in the same way as gazetteers are!).

From this synopsis, I think it is rather clear that I think that this is an important book, and that those historians who use gazetteers for their own research (that is, almost all historians) should do well to read and digest it closely. Not all of Dennis’s conclusions may come as a surprise to readers, but the many different ways gazetteers were compiled, circulated, and functioned have never before been documented in this amazing detail. And for me, those details constitute the greatest attraction of this book: they are not only helpful hints on how we as historians should approach gazetteers, they show the writing of local history as local history itself.

⁵ Peter K. Bol, “The Rise of Local History: History, Geography, and Culture in Southern Song and Yuan Wuzhou,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61, no. 1 (June 2001), pp. 37–76.

That said, I do have some comments; some more directly on arguments presented by Dennis, and some on issues not addressed in this book, but which I would love to see treated in forthcoming articles.

As for the former, I must confess that while his general conclusion, that local influences of lineages might compromise the content of a gazetteer is plausible (and not surprising), the too many details in Chapter 2 about who from lineage A married whom from lineage B in my view were not completely sufficient to establish his more precise point, that there existed a closely-knit group of four lineages in Xinchang. Lacking for me was any general context: what was the percentage of those listed marriages compared with the total number of marriages? How many large lineages did exist, were there major ones left out, did those have their own networks? It would not be very surprising if we see only the activities of the élite, but it would be more problematic if we see only half of that élite. In the case of Xinchang, Dennis tries to make a more historical point by attributing the increased cooperation between the influential lineages, thus increased exclusivity, to an increasing need for security in the mid-sixteenth century. I could imagine that the opposite, increased mobilization and incorporation of smaller lineages, thus increased inclusivity, would have been a possible outcome as well; thus I find this argument rather incomplete. Another more detailed problem I encountered was with the maps showing geographical business zones in Chapter 4; it may have been just me, but I could not figure out, despite reading the text closely again and again, whether the different kinds of lines (solid or broken, with single or double arrows) had consistent meanings.

Dennis starts his book with the national gazetteers, and very occasionally gives some details on prefectural ones (the 1537 *Hengzhou fu zhi* 衡州府志); but he rightly concentrates on county-level gazetteers, most important for historians. However, he never really discusses how his details and conclusions, whether about financing, the process of compilation, or content, might have varied by level. Many of the circumstances of financing, e.g., can only have applied to county-level gazetteers, and simply cannot have functioned in the same way for prefectural ones. One could also very well imagine that bureaucratic aspects would be more prominent for higher-level gazetteers. Moreover, the compilation of prefectural (and provincial) gazetteers must have had its own difficulties. An historian often has to face the question: to what extent are the differences observed in such gazetteers between counties real and instructive, and to what extent are they only a reflection of the differences in reliability or detail of the constituent county-level gazetteers available to the prefecture: can one really conclude county A had more Buddhist temples than county B? How were such questions problematized by compilers on those levels? Are there ways for us to gauge whether intra-prefectural or intra-provincial comparisons are valid?

Another way gazetteers of different administrative levels may have differed is in their approach to publishing: the publication of a county-level gazetteer seems

often to have been a one-of-its-kind deal, more akin to what book historians know as “private” or “family” publications. When, as we occasionally encounter, already-present yamen clerks are responsible for the cutting and printing, is that because they publish other works too? Would prefectural yamens more frequently be like regular publishers? Or are such differences due to other factors than administrative level?

Questions such as these are even more important to be asked when confronting national-level gazetteers. At one point, Dennis seems to imply fear of accusations of partiality might have delayed compilation of national gazetteers, because of issues dealing with the imperial family. Could that be generalized more; might higher-level gazetteers generally be compiled later or less frequently, the issues at stake being larger? I am inclined to think that Dennis might be in the position to best speculate on these issues. And indeed, to throw out even more requests for speculation: how is it that occasionally (or even, quite often), so many gazetteers have disappeared (especially in the face of Dennis’s overall contentions, that they were important, and increasingly available also outside the local environment)? On a county level, some indications are given here and there, although they are not very developed; but how can it be that we only have 35 of the original 1,000 *juan* of the first empire-wide gazetteer, the *Huang Yuan da yitongzhi* 皇元大一統志? Or that the 1370 *Da Ming zhi shu* 大明志書 is not extant, and that of all the Ming compilations only the *Da Ming yitongzhi* still exists? In some sense, the remainder of the book actually makes the complaint with which it starts, by the Zhengde 正德 emperor in 1519 that he does not have access to a gazetteer for Yingtian 應天 (Nanjing), even more, rather than less, puzzling. Clearly, not all magistrates thought gazetteers important, but, naturally, Dennis largely treats only those who did. (There are even some indications, that e.g. an assigned compiler had difficulty getting access to some yamen, and had to have his woodblocks cut in his home, but Dennis does not dwell upon those remarks.)

As for possible reasons that some magistrates did value gazetteers, Dennis shows that they might not teach how to govern, but that they might give some indications on how to get thing done in a certain locality: who were the local dominant families, what were the important temples, how was water management organized; unlike tax or population records, some of that information might not be available in the local yamen files. Yet, Dennis’s suggestion that gazetteers might have been a way in which a departing magistrate might communicate with an incoming one about policy ideas is less convincing to me: were there no better ways such communication might be accomplished?

On a final note related to bureaucracy: the compilation of many local gazetteers started, Dennis shows, by asking for permission to do so from the superior level. Dennis never treats clearly why. We are told at one place that higher levels never contributed funding, and at other places that they might give permission to use some local monies not otherwise earmarked; but I would have wished for a more detailed

treatment of why the request for permission seems to have been a necessary step. Just a formality? Self-promotion? Veiled or not-so-veiled demand for possible government funds? Permission to use offices, material, time, even if not involving money *per se*?

As I mentioned in my summary above, Dennis contrasts “private” with “official” gazetteers. I wonder very much whether the word “official” as used by Dennis is appropriate or even useful: I would reserve the word “official” to those (rare) cases when the local governmental offices *paid* for their compilation and/or production, or when the gazetteer was produced in response to a higher-level order (and costs were presumably allowed to be deducted from the local budget—although Dennis never explicitly says that those two latter aspects necessarily go together.) However, since we are clearly shown that in most cases, even if initiated by a local official, funding was provided from people from that locality or (partly) that official’s own private funds, I would think that the use of the term “official” in these cases is misleading. Of course, historians often have difficulty to accurately describe (semi-)private initiatives by officials: words such as “official” (and the Chinese term *guan* 官) can mean “government-related,” and they can refer to distinctly private affairs from officials.

Above I called the last two chapters on readership and reading, “somewhat perfunctory.” One of my reasons for doing so is that Dennis does not really address the differences between *reading* a gazetteer, and only *consulting* it for a particular fact; that is, he does not address what “reading” is—although he does mention that certain chapters were printed more frequently on demand, and thus, had more worn-out blocks, suggesting more consultation than full reading. Thus, he does not really place the gazetteer within the overall category it belongs to, the *leishu* 類書 (reference works), which he does not mention until much later, and only in passing, when gazetteers are mined for their content to make yet other *leishu*. A gazetteer usually is not like a novel to be read from cover to cover; it is used in other ways, but those are not differentiated by Dennis. And while he refers to paratextual material in order to get at some aspects of “reading,” he does not use such elements as often is done in order to investigate the visual organization of the texts, its signposts, its markings, its layout, and how these are meant to guide a reader to approach the text in a certain way (and help consultation). And gazetteers often have such elements.

Thus, there is some more work to be done on gazetteers. But all historians of whatever subject or nature, all those who use gazetteers, had better read this book before quickly “simply using” another gazetteer. Now that traditional gazetteers increasingly become available in full-text database format (*not* the source for this laborious study), it is even the more necessary to realize first what the characteristics of the genre as a whole are, and Dennis’s book is a wonderful and necessary introduction for answering that question.

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