

*The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture*. By Richard J. Smith. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. Pp. xii + 612. \$95.00 cloth, \$40.00 paper.

This book is a bigger, updated version of Smith's 1994 tome, *China's Cultural Heritage: The Qing Dynasty, 1644–1912*.<sup>1</sup> Now almost sixty percent greater in length, the textbook has been extensively revised to take account of the “explosion of Western-language scholarship on China” (p. ix) in the decades since its last publication. The main new theme in this volume concerns the ongoing debate on the “new Qing history”: its proponents argue that their northeast Asian origins were what allowed Qing rulers to successfully incorporate the Inner Asian periphery into the empire, while the traditionalists contend that, on the contrary, acculturation into Chinese culture (“sinicization”) was a prerequisite for successful conquest regimes. Smith takes the middle ground. The Qing dynasty was so successful because it combined its own military organization and cultural orientations with a selective adaptation/appropriation of Ming (i.e. Chinese) practices and institutions. Insights gleaned from a multicultural image of Qing society appear in Chapters 2 and 3, which narrate the Qing conquest and Qing political order.<sup>2</sup> Smith's primary aim continues to be “to identify and explain the basic features of Han culture in China Proper as it evolved during the Qing” (p. 12). While recognizing the potential for essentialization of the highly diverse spoken languages, customs, and life routines practised within the vast territorial expanse controlled by the Qing, Smith nonetheless perseveres in the belief that it is possible to describe something called “Chinese culture” or “traditional Chinese culture” (p. 7). This focus on culture and cultural practice makes *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* a textbook that has real strengths but also some weaknesses, a point to which I will return.

The updated work follows the thematic organization of its predecessors. An opening chapter outlines the political and institutional history of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and cites recent findings concerning the cultural and economic impact of sixteenth-century European traders and missionaries on Ming mathematics, science, literature, and commerce. Chapter 2, on the Qing conquest, devotes significant space to the Jurchen, a northeast Asian people living at the periphery of Ming and Chosŏn Korean rule, and their emergence as a regional power that challenged then subjugated

<sup>1</sup> Boulder, CO: Westview Press, first edition in 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Smith does not pick up on recent work reassessing the historical role that non-Han conquest dynasties played in Chinese history, more specifically re-evaluating the historical impact of the Mongol conquest. See Paul Jakov Smith, “Introduction: Problematizing the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition,” in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, ed. Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), pp. 1–34.

the Ming. The subsequent military campaigns that expanded the empire's territory and laid the foundations for the modern nation-state are squeezed into a chronological narrative of the Qing emperors, which touches on their multicultural policies and predilections (most notably during the Qianlong reign, 1736–1796). Treatment of the demographic and fiscal issues that signalled dynastic decline bypasses recent research that more positively appraises late Qing responses to European imperialism.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 3, “The Qing Political Order,” is slightly enlarged but remains unchanged in presenting the administrative structure as a system balancing various political tensions: “the emperor and the bureaucracy, civil and military rule, central control and local leeway, formal and informal authority, morality and law, idealism and realism, rigidity and flexibility, and personalism and impersonality” (p. 123). Chapter 4, “Social and Economic Institutions,” describes the organization of Qing society by political/ethnic origin, locality, kinship, occupation, and religion, then enunciates the principles (native-place, patron-client, teacher-disciple) that enabled individuals to network in pursuit of both legitimate and illegitimate political and economic goals. In addition to Confucianism and Daoism, Chapter 5, “Language and Symbolic Reference,” treats the nature of the Chinese writing system as displayed in classical texts and explains concepts such as the *yin-yang* principle that run through Chinese thought. Religion, treated in Chapter 7, introduces readers to Buddhism, religious Daoism, the eclectic popular religions, and state sacrifices. Chinese aesthetics, literati gardens, precious objects, art, and calligraphy are surveyed in Chapter 8, while Chapter 9 covers Qing literary trends and the great novels produced in this period. Smith inserts new scholarship on the status of women into Chapter 10, “Social Life,” which also describes Chinese child-rearing practices, the rituals and customs marking life from birth and marriage to death, and the amusements that enlivened life. A concluding chapter, “The Late Qing and Beyond, 1860–2014,” assesses the historical impact of the Qing legacy on contemporary China and brings the historical narrative to the present.

Smith has added five additional appendices to supplement those on Chinese names, weights and measures, and prices. Appendix C, “Regional Differences and Provincial Stereotypes,” reproduces important environmental contrasts between north and south China as well as popular notions held by many Chinese on the characteristics of people from various provinces. “Glossary of Some Philosophical Concepts” (Appendix D), provides the English equivalents for important Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist terms. Appendix E, “Tables of Contents for Selected Editions of the

<sup>3</sup> For example, Stephen R. Halsey, *Quest for Power: European Imperialism and the Making of Chinese Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

*Wanbao quanshu* [萬寶全書] (1612, 1636, 1758, and 1828),” provides the reader with a glimpse of the subjects that attracted ordinary Chinese to this popular encyclopedia of daily use which went through multiple editions in the early modern period. Appendix F, “Some English-Language Writings on *Honglou Meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber),” is a useful aid for instructors who are planning to use English-language translations of this novel for classroom instruction.<sup>4</sup> “The Three Character Classic (*Sanzi Jing*; 三字經),” Appendix G, presents the text of this important primer in its original Chinese and an English language translation, in a form that invites class discussion.

Another excellent feature of the book is the inclusion of an annotated bibliography, which is a printed version of the online bibliography on the Rowman & Littlefield website. Smith introduces readers to alternative online bibliographies of English-language publications but also the Chinese-language secondary literature. He provides lists of recent works on traditional Chinese culture, Manchu history and culture, and advises the reader on how to access published images of Chinese art, architecture, and cultural practices. The online bibliography in the book is impressive in its coverage and a testimonial to the care and dedication with which Smith has brought his textbook “up to date.”

*The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* achieves its author’s goal of presenting a survey of traditional Chinese culture during the Qing dynasty in a clear, smoothly flowing narrative that makes even arcane material accessible to a non-specialist. Smith incorporates new insights on gender, sexuality, science, technology, and law while preserving the details of case studies and local exceptionalism in ways that advance his stated desire to introduce readers to the vast diversity of Qing society and culture. There are deft references to contemporary political and academic concerns that help to provide a context for the interpretive stances taken in Chinese historical writing. The book is well-supplied with maps, photographs of personages and places, and illustrations from woodblock-printed texts that enhance the written word. Smith makes liberal use of translated passages from important philosophical and literary texts to give readers an idea of just how Chinese writers communicated their thoughts and sentiments. Chinese characters interspersed throughout the text remind readers that English translations can only approximate (and often distort) the meanings of the original.

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<sup>4</sup> The book, however, omits information concerning the banner origins of the Jia 賈 family, which is at the centre of the novel. See Evelyn S. Rawski, “The Banner *Story of the Stone*,” in *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone* (Dream of the Red Chamber), ed. Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2012), pp. 144–58.

Smith must be commended for having produced a textbook that will significantly contribute to pedagogy about China. It is perhaps unreasonable for a Qing specialist like me to express some disappointment over what is missing from its pages: a narrative that highlights the dynamic nature of Qing society, what made the Qing period distinctive and not just another phase in the dynastic cycle. Among the themes requiring more attention (and currently commanding attention in scholarly circles), are: administrative innovations stemming from Qing military expansion into Inner Asia;<sup>5</sup> the intensification of regional and global trade,<sup>6</sup> including among participants in the Chinese diaspora;<sup>7</sup> challenges to generalizations about foreign relations and the nineteenth-century response to Western imperialism.<sup>8</sup> *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* is primarily about traditional Chinese culture and not about the Qing. If used as a text in a course on Qing history, it should be supplemented by a book that focuses more directly on describing the rise and fall of Qing as a unique historical event, one that directly affected China's evolution in the twentieth century and up to the present.

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<sup>5</sup> Dai Yingcong, *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); and John D. Wong, *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century: The House of Houqua and the Canton System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Eric Tagliacozzo and Wen-chin Chang, eds., *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> In addition to Matthew W. Mosca's *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), see Kirk W. Larsen, *Tradition, Treaties, and Trade: Qing Imperialism and Chosŏn Korea, 1850–1910* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008); and Halsey, *Quest for Power*.