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# Chow, Kai-Wing: Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China

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was always threatened by relapse. Just so, the unified Chinese state was always vulnerable to fracture into constituent parts.

The levels of organization, what Lewis calls the categories of spatial analysis, are The Human Body, The Household, Cities and Capitals, Regions and Customs, World and Cosmos. Each of the categories is described in its relation to its neighboring levels above and below. For many readers perhaps, one of the most fruitful interfaces addressed by Lewis will be that between "life" and "death," my quotation marks meant to permit flexibility of imagination. See for example, the discussion of "liberation through the corpse," through which a person grows a new body in which to move to immortality, "leaving behind his fleshly body like the castoff skin of a snake." (p. 56)

In the family, Lewis calls attention to the tension between two centers of organization, the orthodox patriline defined in ancestral cult, and the countercenter occupied by the mother with her strong authority in the household. In the Imperial household the tension was melded with the peculiarly Chinese habit of secreting the sovereign, which Lewis contrasts with the experience of Rome, India and early modern Europe. The Chinese head of state was kept largely out of sight, abiding in the inner rooms of the palace, the domain of the women and their eunuch servants. Thus came a shift of power from the official bureaucracy to the inner court. As part of the shift, the power of women, though openly despised, was ever pervasive.

No doubt the most critical tension was that between the emergent, unifying state in its Capital City and the constituent Warring States, now degraded to mere regions. Lewis says that Chu in the Yangzi valley "was probably the first state to introduce the institution of directly administered districts (*xian*) in newly conquered areas, the earliest record of which appears in 690 B.C." (p. 141) The more famous systemic practice of central appointment of regional officials was of course under Qin and then Han. But "the attempt to impose unity through the suppression of regional variations was limited by the imperial state's dependence on locally powerful families to impose its will." (p. 243)

Thanks to the scholarship, astonishing industry, and thoughtful care of the author, this weighty volume will no doubt be found as well-worn reference on the shelf of any student who would continue to explore the longevity and vitality of the state structure developed in China over two thousand years ago.

Davis, California

Benjamin E. Wallacker

Chow, Kai-wing: *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), xvii + 397pp., \$49.50. ISBN 0-8047-3367-8.

This is a carefully researched and cogently argued study of the publishing industry in late Ming China. The first two chapters explain the Chinese preference for woodblock printing over movable type and demonstrate that the industry was flexible enough to accommodate both publishers with a low level of capitalization and consumers with a low level of income. As a result, it is argued, books were inexpensive and widely available; book ownership was "not a privilege reserved for the elite." (p. 55)

This segment of Chow's work is important enough; it should put to an end the debate about why the Chinese did not adopt moveable type. Even more important, especially in light of the attention that scholars in China and the West have recently paid to the study of imperial China's civil service system, is Chow's discussion the sociopolitical context within which publishing functioned. The three chapters of the book explore the impact that publishing had on the nexus between scholarship, wealth, and power, that characterized late imperial Chinese life.

There was, Chow shows, a boom in commercial publishing in the late 16th and early 17th centuries that led to the commoditization of literary production and the formation of a class of professional writers that absorbed large numbers of scholars who did not survive the increasingly intense competition for examination degrees. Many such individuals were able to use the world of commercial scholarship to generate scholarly reputations that could be converted into either economic or political success. As a class, they came quickly to achieve an autonomous position within the Ming body politic, and as their influence increased the authority of the state over literary matters faded. Contradicting Benjamin A. Elman's assertion that the examination system kept the grip of Neo-Confucian (Cheng-Zhu) orthodoxy over China's intellectual elite strong, Chow argues that the commercialization of publishing weakened that grip by expanding the opportunities for the literati to "negotiate, resist, and appropriate the imperial ideology." (p. 151) As publishing expanded it came to play an important role in shaping the way examinees and the community of scholars in general viewed their scholarship and the examinations. Publishers produced examination aids of many types including anthologies of examination essays and a wide range of paratexts – prefaces, reading guides, references, glossaries, and commentaries – that provided the members of the academic community opportunities for expressing their dissent from the official interpretation of the standard texts. By the late Wanli reign (1573–1619), mainstream scholarship had taken a direction that diverged from the Cheng-Zhu school of Confucian thought that had dominated examination life and had served to tie the state and the gentry elite together. Examination essays no longer tended more or less reflexively to mirror the state-sanctioned orthodoxy, and there was a growing sense that intellectual authority was no longer the monopoly of scholars who had been approved by the imperial government. Thus, the "symbolic capital" that scholar-businessmen with literary skill and business acumen [*shishang*] generated for themselves was used to alter the balance of power and interests that existed between the imperial state and China's intellectual community. The publishing industry had played an indirect role in undermining the state's power to control the academic life – and the career trajectory – of the state's most important constituency.

Chow may have overstated Elman's point a bit. Elman does stress the power that imperial examiners had to ensure conformity with the Cheng-Zhu School within the examination halls.<sup>1</sup> He also, however, recognizes that outside of those halls there was a substantial amount of room for the exploration of new literary styles and new interpretations of the canonical texts, and one can only conclude from his scholarship that even within the

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1 Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 422.

narrow confines of the literary and rhetorical forms the mastery of which was required for examination success there was room for considerable creativity.<sup>2</sup> The picture of late imperial Chinese intellectual life that Elman paints suggests that that life was anything but sterile. Nevertheless, Chow's insightful exploration of the intersection between printing, examination-based mobility, and political power demonstrates that the relationship between the political field and the field of cultural production was profoundly altered by the late-Ming commercial publishing boom. His book is a major contribution to the field of late-imperial Chinese studies.

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Thomas D. Curran

Standen, Naomi. *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), xiii + 279pp. \$53.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-8248-2983-4.

Scholars whose interest concerns the Song dynasty (960–1279) and the three non-Chinese “conquest regimes” often associated with that dynasty – the Liao (907–1125; also known as the Khitan or Qidan), Xixia (1038–1227; also known as the Tanguts), and Jin (1115–1234; also known as the Jurchen) – in their reading of primary sources must necessarily confront issues related to the *frontiers* and *borders* between the Song and its alien neighbors. An extremely important question, then, is this: how did the treaties, alliances, conflicts, and shifting allegiances among these various states affect the way they defined their frontiers and borders? A better word than “defined,” and one used by Naomi Standen, is “invented.”

One of the main premises of *Unbounded Loyalty* is that political borders in pre-modern China were not fixed geographically as they are in the modern world. Rather, ideas about borders resulted from, and were a function of, relationships between political and military leaders and their followers. The author's focus in this study is the people of the borderlands who shifted their allegiance from the various states in north China, which emerged after the collapse of the Tang dynasty (618–907), to the new Liao state. She argues convincingly that cultural identity played no role in this change of allegiance, and that the modern concept of ethnicity did not even exist at that time. The point here is that if we, as modern readers, are to have a better understanding about frontiers, boundaries, loyalty, and identity, especially during the Tang-Song transition period, we need to come up with new ways of thinking. Naomi Standen seeks to do just that in her book *Unbounded Loyalty*.

Standen divides her study into two parts, each comprising three chapters. The second of these two parts also includes a Conclusion titled “Locating Borders: Then, Now, and In Between” (pp. 172–185). Numerous useful maps, figures, and tables appear throughout the book. Also included is an Appendix that lists over two hundred cases of people (mainly, officials and soldiers) or “frontier crossers” who began their lives serving regimes in north China but (for various reasons) transferred their service and loyalty to the Liao. In the tenth century (specifically, after 960) these same people could have given their allegiance to the Song, but instead chose to move north.

2 Ibid., Chapter 7.