

Translating twelfth century China

With James M. Hargett's lucid translation of the text and meticulous annotations of the *Treatises of the Supervisor and Guardian of the Cinnamon Sea* (*Guihai yuheng zhi*, hereafter *Treatises*) by Fan Chengda (1126–1193), a renowned official and scholar of the Song, this work has doubtlessly become more accessible to a much broader readership. Together with his translations of Fan's other three works, *Diary of Grasping the Carriage Reins* (*Lanpei lu*), *Diary of Mounting a Simurgh* (*Canluan lu*), and *Diary of a Boat Trip to Wu* (*Wuchuan lu*), Professor Hargett, a leading scholar in the fledgling field of Chinese travel literature, has accomplished his aim to provide English readers with translations of all four major prose works of Fan.

Hang Lin

Reviewed publication:

Fan Chengda (translated by James M. Hargett) 2010. *Treatises of the Supervisor and Guardian of the Cinnamon Sea: The Natural World and Material Culture of Twelfth-Century China*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, lxvi + 349 pp., ISBN: 9780295990798 (pb)

CONSISTING OF 13 SECTIONS, each devoted to a particular category of objects, the book offers a wealth of geographical, historical, cultural, and ethnographical data about southwestern China – mainly Guangxi – in the twelfth century, ranging from landscape, minerals, flora and fauna to the history of various non-Han peoples and their cultures. In this review, rather than

Below: Cormorant Fisherman on the Li River in Xingping Fishing Village, Guilin, Guangxi, China. Image reproduced under a Creative Commons license, courtesy of Vern Fong on Flickr.com.

recounting the content of individual sections, I would like to touch upon some issues that emerge from the work itself.

The original text by Fan, appended in full to the translation, is not voluminous at all. As a typical example of the *youji* (travel records) literature, the *Treatises* is written, as Hargett expounds, in a straightforward "reportorial-descriptive" language (p.xlvi). But a closer look at Fan's methodological approach and the work's content reveals that it is not a conventional *youji* but at once a gazetteer, an encyclopedia, and an ethnography. It comprises both passages outlining the landmarks, vegetation, and people of particular localities, and reportorial accounts on those areas' customs and products. For Hargett, the *Treatises* is not only "a personal memoir of

Fan's happy and restful days in Guilin [in Guangxi]", but also "a serious and detailed scholarly study" (p.xxxvi). Like many of his contemporaries, Fan was not only a curious traveller but also a keen observer. Containing large amount of personal observations and detailed information from informants, many of them "not generally found in local gazetteers" (p.4), the *Treatises* reflects Fan's strenuous effort to report information and to relate these facts to potential readers who probably knew little or nothing about these matters. In this sense, this work, like many other *youji*, is extremely valuable as a source work (p.xxxvi).

The particular value of Fan's accounts contained in the *Treatises* is enhanced by his relatively neutral attitude towards the area of Guangxi and the various non-Han peoples living there. For a long time in Chinese history, officials were sent to the remote and mountainous region of Guangxi for demotion or political exile. The reason why Fan headed for Guangxi

was of no exception. However, Fan did not harbor much fear or distress but was surprisingly enthusiastic about his assignment. Guilin was certainly far from the Song political center in Lin'an (today's Hangzhou), but when he arrived in Guilin in 1173 he "found peace of mind there" (p.3), and even after his tenure, he still "remain[ed] deeply attached to Guilin, so much that [he has] compiled and edited this [collection] of minutia and trivia" (p.4). Furthermore, Fan did not find himself in "a strange, alien land" (p.xxix) populated by non-Han "barbarians" who had not been assimilated into the orbit of Han-Chinese civilization, although Fan collectively termed them as *man* (literally: barbarians). In fact, he "refrained from 'looking down on the [local] people'", most of them probably non-Han, and "they in turn forgave my ignorance and trusted in my sincerity" (p.3). As the issue of political legitimacy became thorny again under the political and military pressure of the non-Han peoples from the north, in particular after the Jurchen seized the Song capital at Kaifeng and took over whole North China in 1127, there was a trend among Song literati to emphasize their cultural superiority over their non-Han neighbors to counteract their political and military inferiority and to strengthen legitimacy of their dynasty. Quite often too, those non-Han Chinese were described as "uncivilized barbarians". But in the *Treatises*, Fan has clearly presented another pattern.

In fact, Fan's observations and attitudes reflect how the Song endeavored to "maximize its control" in the southwestern border regions of the empire by "minimizing military conflict" with the large population of non-Han tribes-peoples residing there (p.xx). As the Song was already facing enormous pressure from the north, it endeavored to adopt a rather friendly diplomacy toward the tribesmen in the southwest. The Song followed the practice of "loose rein", also known as "bridle and halter" (*jimi*), to organize submissive tribal peoples (or peoples at least willing to submit themselves to the Chinese sovereign) into the Chinese administrative hierarchy. Although many of the non-Chinese people on the Song's southwestern borders were considered partially "sinicized", but more often than not local chieftains still had near-absolute control over land distribution and tax collection within their jurisdictions. But as long as this "loose rein" could bring peace for the Song, it was ready to accept the fact that the tribesmen's subordination existed only in name.

As is unavoidable in any translation of medieval Chinese text, some may have other suggestions for the translation or interpretation of individual words or sentences. For instance, on page 163, Fan's original sentence, which Hargett translates as "they receive corn allowances and office appointments but only at the rank of senior or junior envoy", would much better fit the context if it were translated as "many settlement chieftains [...] purchased official ranks [from the Song], but [they got] only military ranks ranging from 9b to 8a". Nonetheless, such minor quibbles should by no means diminish the remarkable achievement James M. Hargett has made in his conscientious translation and painstaking study of Fan Chengda's *Treatises of the Supervisor and Guardian of the Cinnamon Sea*. Containing rich data about the natural world, material culture, and ethnography in China's southwestern frontier in the twelfth century, this book is bound to attract both experts and students of Chinese history, culture, and ethnography.

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Reading the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Since its establishment in 2001, the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) remains a conundrum for many commentators. On the one hand, the organisation brings together a seemingly unlikely group of members – China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. On the other hand, the SCO attracts an equally disparate group of observer countries (Afghanistan, India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan), dialogue partners (Belarus, Sri Lanka, and Turkey), and guests (Turkmenistan, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations, and the Commonwealth of Independent States).

Emilian Kavalski

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THUS, WHAT CONFOUNDS MANY is that regardless of the dissimilarity between its participants, the SCO not only survives, but also has become the most prominent institutional framework in Eurasia – an area notorious for its aversion to any form of meaningful regional initiatives.

At the same time, what makes the SCO even more puzzling is that it is an international organization developed, promoted, and maintained by China. Beijing's rapid movement during the 1990s, from the difficult task of delineating and disarming its shared borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan, to promoting a multilateral organization and establishing growing economic and security ties with the Central Asian countries, attest to more than just conventional power politics. Instead, the creation of the 'Shanghai Five' – the precursor to the SCO – in the mid-1990s, promoted a climate that not only began to alleviate Central Asian (as well as Russian) suspicion about China's intentions, but also laid the groundwork for a regional political community. As the volume edited by Michael Fredholm indicates, China's engagement of Central Asian states in various collaborative initiatives during the 1990s, and the subsequent institutionalization of SCO, make conspicuous Beijing's socializing propensity. In this