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Book review: Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1990)

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nature of the struggles with ghost and demons during the nineteenth and twentieth century festivals and Mulian plays, compared with the Tang accounts used by Teiser.⁴ Is this the result of the distorted perspective of Teiser's sources, which are, after all, rather few in number (as well as limited in geographical and social scope), or are we indeed dealing with the increased fusion over time of the festival with shamanic exorcist traditions? How important were the mother-son and other familial relationships in the later festival? To answer these questions, we need to look more closely at the available material from the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties. Finally, it would be valuable to carry out a systematic comparative study of the Chinese and Japanese Ghost Festivals, which are documented in ample detail—both in terms of written sources and iconography. Because the two festivals share the same historical roots, an investigation of the similarities and differences between them would be extremely instructive on the way in which these two societies use religion.

B.J. TER HAAR

Arthur WALDRON, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990) (296 pages, with extensive bibliographies of primary and secondary sources, figures, maps, glossary of Chinese characters, index) (ISBN 0-521-36518 X)

Arthur Waldron's book demonstrates, with a wealth of detail from Chinese and Western sources, that the idea of one continuous Great Wall, starting with the wall built at the order of the First Emperor of the Qin, and continuing on the same site until the present-day walls were erected during the late Ming, is an historical myth. In fact, even the nature of the Qin walls themselves is extremely unclear, and of the subsequent dynasties few built any walls along the northern border at all (significant wall-building was undertaken by the Northern Qi [550–574], the Sui [589–617] and the Jin [1115–1234]; none were built by the Tang [618–907], the Song [960–1276] and the Yuan [1271–1368]). Furthermore, none of the later walls continued the Qin or Han walls, but they all ran their separate courses, dictated by the specific policy demands of their own times. They were built of stamped earth, which was a cheap building material, but which also decayed very rapidly. Most of the Ming walls were also built of this material and the massive,

⁴ This remark is inspired by David Johnson's fine contribution "Actions Speak Louder than Words: The Cultural Significance of Chinese Ritual Opera", in Johnson (1989) 1–32.

late Ming stone fortifications that are now open to tourism cannot be considered representative of the defense complex as a whole.

Because the notion of one continuous Great Wall since the Qin is an historical myth, the building projects which in fact did take place have to be viewed in an entirely different way. First of all, it means that during most dynasties there was no existing concept of a Great Wall or reality that could be kept in repair. Rather, the decision to build such border walls (or—much more frequently—not to do so) was taken on the basis of specific contemporary considerations, in which earlier walls could be quoted as good or bad precedents, but which had nothing to do with extending or restoring existing walls.

Waldron elaborates this point on the basis of a discussion of the Ming debates concerning the building of the Great Wall. During the early Ming, the dynasty possessed sufficient military strength to deal with the Mongol peoples effectively, so no walls were built. All this changed with the disastrous military defeat at Tumu in 1449, when the ruling emperor was temporarily captured by the Mongols. From now on two approaches competed for influence. The more pragmatic approach argued for a certain measure of military action, coupled with opening up the borders for trade and expanding diplomatic relations. However, this was a minority position for most of the time, and it was easily discredited as selling out to foreigners. It could only gain ascendancy at times when central control was so strong that culturalistic objections could be overridden. With the rising political importance of southern Chinese literati, the idealistic approach became increasingly dominant. According to this way of thought, China was primarily perceived as a cultural unit, and rigid moral standards were infused into each political conflict. There could be no place here for compromise with lowly nomadic peoples, with whom trade and diplomatic relations were also taboo. This lack of accommodation and compromise necessarily led to increased nomadic raids, much as in the case of the so-called "Japanese pirates (*wokou* 倭寇)" on the seacoast. Fierce and sometimes bloody factional struggles took place over the right course of action, but the moralistic approach usually triumphed. The outcome of all this was the gradual building of sections of a border defense complex, that eventually came to form the so-called Great Wall (a modern term: at the time the term *jiubian-zhen* 九邊鎮 or Nine Border Garrisons was used). Each time a section was built to block a certain attack route; as the Mongols moved their line of attack another section had to be built to block that route as well.

In the final chapter of his book, Waldron covers most of the same ground as he did in his "The Problem of the Great Wall of China" (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43:2 (1983) 643-663). The first version of the myth of the Great Wall originated in China itself, as part of the myths about the cruelty of the First Emperor of the Qin. It grew to its modern proportions only in the West and by the nineteenth century scepticism had become almost impossible to voice. In the course of the twentieth century, the myth in its modern and stronger form was incorporated in Chinese self-perceptions, as one of their great contributions to human history and as a source of nationalistic pride.

Waldron (p. 5) notes that actual fieldwork on the various wall-building projects is very scarce. As far as the Ming Great Wall is concerned, an interesting book has appeared that seems to fill at least part of this gap. In 1984, three young Chinese, Dong Yaohui 董耀會, Wu Deyu 吳德玉, and Zhang Yuanhua 張元華, with the collective and significant pen-name Hua Xiazi 華夏子 ("Sons of China"), carried out a long trek by foot along the remains of the Ming walls. In *Ming changcheng kaoshi* 明長城考實 (Dang'an chuban she 檔案出版社, Beijing, 1988) they report on their findings in some detail. A special feature of the book are the 68 pages with over 140 photographs (most of them in black and white) of extant Ming walls.

At about the same time as the book under review, two other books have come out that deal with the nomadic-Chinese relationship. Sechin Jagchid's and Van Jay Symons' *Peace, War, and Trade Along the Great Wall* (Indiana UP, Bloomington, 1989) is a summation of the important Chinese-language scholarship by Sechin Jagchid. Although the mythological image of the Great Wall as a separation between the nomadic and Chinese worlds is used, the real wall is only mentioned occasionally in the book, which is an able summary of the history of nomadic-Chinese relations from the Han until the Ming. For some mysterious reason, no reference is made to Waldron's 1983 article. The same applies to another summary of nomadic-Chinese relations covering the Han until the Manchus/Qing, by the anthropologist Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989), who also uses the mythological image of the Great Wall. Jagchid/Symons have used the original sources, while Barfield had to rely on translations, but he compensates for this with a different perspective and more factual detail. Whereas Waldron is primarily interested in the way Chinese domestic considerations influenced foreign politics, the works by Jagchid/

Symons and Barfield concentrate on the actual interaction itself.

Common to all three books is the awareness that nomadic raids on, and war with, China were not caused by an innate nomadic propensity to violence. Nomadic peoples needed certain products from settled societies, that they did not produce themselves, such as agricultural produce. As long as trade and diplomatic relationships were possible, these could be obtained through peaceful means. Whenever the Chinese blocked trade and diplomatic contact (whether called tribute by them or not), nomadic raids became unavoidable. Both Jagchid/Symons and Barfield provide much detailed information, nicely supplementing Waldron's book. However, they perpetuate the myth of the Great Wall, which could easily have been avoided had they referred to Waldron's earlier article.

Superficially, it may seem that the topics of nomadic-Chinese interaction and Chinese border life have been exhausted with the appearance of these studies. However, none of these three authors really successfully address either the question why the Mongols under Altan khan were prepared to conclude a treaty in 1571, or why they never again posed any threat to the Ming. Maybe this was the result, as Waldron argues (pp. 183-187), of strong leadership by Zhang Juzheng 張居正, who was capable of overriding idealistic resistance among the Chinese policy makers and carrying through the pragmatic approach. However, Carney T. Fisher, "Smallpox, Salesmen, and Sectarians, Ming-Mongol Relations in the Jiajing Reign (1522-1567)", *Ming Studies* 25 (1988) suggests two other reasons why the Mongols under Altan khan could have concluded the treaty, *viz.* the effects of smallpox epidemics on his population and their failure to incorporate the Chinese colonists (traditionally and incorrectly dubbed White Lotus sectarians). Although Zhang Juzheng's policy of accommodation broke down after his death in 1582, and the same uncompromising idealistic approach as had existed before caused increasing tensions with the Manchus (Waldron, pp. 188-189), there appears to have been no concomitant revival of Mongol raids. This question certainly needs further study.

Most probably, much more information can be brought to light about nomadic-Chinese interaction and Chinese border life in the sixteenth century. Up to now, Chinese, Japanese and Western studies of these questions have relied predominantly on the Ming Veritable Records (*Ming shilu* 明實錄) and the *Wanli wugonglu* 萬曆武功錄, sometimes used in conjunction with other annalistic histories of that time. This is also true for the work by

Noguchi Tetsurô 野口鐵郎, *Mindai byakurenkyôshi no kenkyû* 明代白蓮教史の研究 (Tôkyô, 1986), overlooked by Waldron. This book contains Noguchi's earlier articles on the so-called White Lotus Teachings, including an article on Altan khan and his Chinese colonists. We should bear in mind that both the Veritable Records and the *Wanli wugonglu* have been severely edited; certainly in my experience the Veritable Records and other edited versions of Ming documents are not the reliable sources which they are held to be. In the course of my own research on various aspects of North Chinese border history during the Ming, I have, for instance, used the collected memorials by Su You 蘇祐 (Wolfgang Franke, *An Introduction to the Sources of Ming History* [Kuala Lumpur, 1968] 5.5.26) and Yang Bo 楊博 (Franke, 5.6.26), as well as the collection of Jiaping and Longqing memorials *Jialong shuchao* 嘉隆疏鈔 by Zhang Lu 張鹵 (Franke, 5.2.2. no 1), all of which contain much information that is not given, or, if so, quite differently, in the Veritable Records. Since the last 150 years of the Ming were plagued by intense factional conflicts, it is only to be expected that later annalistic histories are biased and incomplete, and we should consult the best extant primary sources as much as possible.

The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth is a highly readable study of Chinese historical myths and the making of foreign policy. In my opinion, Waldron's most important contribution to the field is to open our eyes to the fact that Chinese foreign policy (or the lack thereof) was often the result of domestic political considerations. Whether the myth of the Great Wall itself, which he has so effectively demolished, will disappear from popular (or scholarly) perception is quite another matter. Chinese guides on the Great Wall itself, and popular historical works will undoubtedly help perpetuate the myth for some time to come. In fact, it will be an interesting research project in itself to see to what extent the myth will still be alive ten or twenty years from now.

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