

**Community Schools and the State in Ming China** by Sarah Schneewind. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 298. \$55.00.

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The institution of community schools in the Ming was never meant to be purely educational, with the innocent goals of improving the populace's literacy level or preparing young talented children for the civil examinations—such tasks were better assumed by clan schools or by private tutors employed by well-off families. The edict of the first Ming emperor on the nationwide creation of community schools clearly revealed his essentially political motive, namely to inculcate an ideology based on Neo-Confucianism that would facilitate central rule down to the grass-roots level. Practical aspects of the schools, such as the recruitment of pupils and teachers, or the arrangement of fees, teaching materials, and curricula, were therefore never quite the central concern of either the emperors, who were the formal initiators of the schools, or the bureaucrats or local notables, who implemented imperial policy. Consequently, the sort of information that might help to constitute an image of a typical Ming dynasty school (partly described in Chapter 6 of Schneewind's book) is rare even in their writings related to the schools. The lack of information makes it impossible to study community schools in the same manner as one might the *petites écoles* under the *ancien régime* in France. Thus, in this book, Sarah Schneewind wisely emphasizes the nature and historical significance of the sources (memorials, edicts, commemorative writings, letters, orders, and records in gazetteers) related to the community schools, and often concentrates on their authors, whose thoughts on the institution constitute a more analyzable corpus. Even though she claims to “look at text and phenomenon together” (p. 5), and her hard work in reconstructing the “phenomenon” of the community school is systematic and fruitful, it is in her deconstruction of the “text” that we find the most revealing discussion on the topic of Ming community schools.

Sarah Schneewind perfectly seizes the strengths and weaknesses of the sources she obtained for her study, and she defines the goal of the book as an analysis of “Ming governance as a relation between state and society through the particular window of the centrally-mandated local institution labeled ‘community schools’” (p. 3). Indeed, because the main concern manifested in such sources produced at various admin-

istrative levels was ideological or social control, which was sometimes cloaked as coaching methods, such sources are useful for analyzing the exertion of influence from the political center at the capital and from the broader cultural center. These texts occasionally provide useful but indirect information on local and social reaction to such attempts.

This does not mean that *Community Schools and State* is entirely about the discourse on community schools rather than on the schools themselves. Using a large quantity of local gazetteers from all parts of China, the author greatly enriches the picture of community schools, which was first provided by the Chinese scholar Wang Lanyin in the mid-1930s. Wang identified 7,335 schools, and Schneewind found 9,355. Moreover Schneewind has found supplementary information on pupils, teachers' salaries, school budgets, and property, including land and shops, and so on, all of which are described in Chapter 6 and presented in tables in the Appendixes. Together with Wang's long article, this book gives the most complete description of the content and management of community schools of the Ming, even though the information is still neither substantial nor systematic enough to permit any in-depth analysis of their actual evolution as a national or local institution.

As Schneewind's study shows, it is not such information, but the nature of the primary sources that tells us most about the evolution of the community schools in the Ming. Schneewind describes three periods in the development of attitudes toward the schools after a “shaky” beginning in the early Ming: a “liberal” approach of the organizers in the mid-Ming; attitudes of “hypercorrectness” in the high Ming; and local resistance in the late Ming. Even though she justifies this periodization with arguments based on substantial documents from various reigns of the dynasty, it is in fact the changing nature of the historical sources that seems to inspire her most. As she tells the reader: “We know about early Ming schools mainly from edicts, and about middle Ming schools from edicts, memorials, private letters and poems, prefaces and commemorative records. For the high Ming, the celebration of community school founders in commemorative records and gazetteers is supplemented by [local] orders” (pp. 108–9). Moreover, she bases her description of the late Ming mostly on gazetteers that she analyzes as a historical source at the beginning of Chapter 7, entitled “The Locality Fights Back.” Schneewind clearly shows that the researcher is at the

same time informed and limited by the kinds of sources available for studying the topic in the Ming. Her fine analysis of local gazetteers as a historical text (very useful for students beginning to study late imperial China) explains well the complex character of this rich and important source. It is in gazetteers that Schneewind discovers the “tenuous linkage” of imperial attention with large numbers of community schools in the sixteenth century (p. 53), showing a gap between imperial directive and local implementation. But the strength of local gazetteers as a historical source is revealed most clearly in the discussions of local resistance toward the destruction of improper shrines in the late Ming period.

The question of destruction of improper shrines and temples occupies a particularly important place in Schneewind’s book. These shrines and temples were supposed to be replaced by community schools, as part of the civilizing mission (*jiaohua*) of the latter. Schneewind rightly emphasizes that this practice has a long history that preceded the Ming and continued into the Qing. (Vincent Goossaert reminds us in a recent article that such a practice continued to occupy the Chinese state and elites in the twentieth century.)<sup>1</sup> Using mostly edicts, commemorative writings, orders, and other writings by officials, Schneewind describes mainly the “heroic” destruction of the shrines during the high Ming, providing some fine analysis on the complex motives of the activists but without much information on local reaction to such attempts at destruction of the shrines. It is in the last chapter on local resistance that she, drawing on gazetteers, gives the reader concrete examples of how local communities resisted the destruction of temples, and how local notables manipulated such official efforts for their own personal gains. The key difference in the ultimate fate of “improper temples” in the two succeeding periods seems to lie mostly in the sources the author uses. Materials used for the high Ming period tend to describe how things *should* be instead of what actually happened (this is also true of curricula prescribed by philosophers and officials such as Wang Yang-ming and Gui E of the same period), while some gazetteers provide information on local reactions and points of view. The reader may thus

<sup>1</sup> Gao Wansang 高萬桑 (Vincent Goossaert), “Jindai Zhongguo di guojia yu zongjiao: zongjiao zhengce yu xueshu dianfan” 近代中國的國家與宗教: 宗教政策與學術典範, *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica* (Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊) 54 (December 2006): 169–201.

ask whether local resistance was really limited to the late Ming period, and if other sources of the high Ming may reveal similar cases of local defiance or attempts at negotiation with the state at the local level. Historians of religion may have more to say on this point.

*Community Schools and the State* is most successful in analyzing the complex relations between the political center and local society. Schneewind repeatedly questions the effectiveness of central policy and finds uncertain answers. She judiciously concludes that often local magistrates made their own decisions according to their interpretation of the political winds of the time, taking into account local interests as well. Here she effectively demonstrates the limitations of the state/local dichotomy, showing that the two are interdependent and that one often reinforces the other in the complex process of state building.

Regarding the topic of state building, however, the reader may want to know more about regional differences. This book treats the Chinese empire as an entity, whereas local society was not everywhere the same. One may notice that the list of gazetteers consulted includes a greater number produced in southern China, consisting of the Jiangnan and southeastern regions. The attentive reader, moreover, would also realize that the chapter on local resistance is largely based on information in the local gazetteers of southern China, notably Guangdong. As a relative latecomer in the long civilizing process of Han culture, Guangdong had a complex relation with the late imperial political center, as has already been shown by works of scholars like David Faure and Helen Siu, much quoted by Schneewind in the last part of this book. The difficulty of studying northern China could be partly solved by looking at related institutions, such as the community pact (*xiangyue*), on which the same Wang Lanyin wrote another long article in 1935.<sup>2</sup> Chu Hung-lam’s study on this institution in Shanxi and Henan in the middle Ming sheds light on the variations of its local implementation in the north.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the “phenomenon” of the community schools is likely

<sup>2</sup> Wang Lanyin, 王蘭蔭 “Mingdai zhi xiangyue yu minzhong jiaoyu” 明代之鄉約與民眾教育, *Shida yuekan* 師大月刊 21 (1935): 103–22.

<sup>3</sup> Zhu Honglin (Chu Hung-lam) 朱鴻林, “Ming dai zhongqi difang shequ zhi’an chongjian lixiang zhi zhangxian—Shanxi Henan diqu suoxing xiangyue zhi li” 明代中期地方社區治安重建理想之展現——山西河南地區所行鄉約之例, *Zhongguo xuebao* 中國學報 (published in Korea), 32 (August 1992): 87–100.

to be more complex than the picture presented in this book, Sarah Schneewind must be thanked for producing a clearly argued, comprehensive, and up-to-date study on the subject. This book will be most useful for anyone interested in Ming political and social history. One simply regrets that the publisher does not allow the inclusion of more Chinese characters, especially for personal or other proper names. Whether inserted in the main text or presented in the form of a list, more characters would have greatly facilitated reading and prevented some of the ambiguities or errors in romanization.

**On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550–1900** by Benjamin A. Elman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. xxxviii + 567. \$55.00.

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A historian by training and an expert in late imperial China by inclination, Benjamin Elman has now directed his attention to a field of major importance: the history of science. His newly published book provides a synthesis of previous research on a much-discussed subject, the impact of Western science on China. The title of the book is also its thesis: that Chinese scholars dealt with the knowledge transmitted by Westerners, first by Jesuits (1550–1800) and then by Protestants (1840–1900), “on their own terms.” His historical survey makes clear that the impact of Western science in China can be understood only by fully accounting for the socio-cultural background of both parties in the initial encounters of what were two divergent approaches to classifying, systematizing, and authorizing knowledge. Elman’s book postulates the importance of culture in the making of science and science in the making of culture. It is breathtaking in scope and painstaking in detail.

Elman’s book joins an ongoing discourse in the history of science about the integrity of science, globally and locally, past and present. Chinese studies have contributed their mite to the discussion: What is science in non-European cultures and how should we address it? Granted, that if the term “science” is used in its widest and least anachronistic sense to designate any body of systematic knowledge