From this description it is clear that the "geo-narrative" of which Kindall speaks is more than a rendering of the physical topography through which the painter has travelled. As geo-narrative, Huang's work rather presents "a structured topographic experience for viewers through an identifiable landscape whose greater significance, ultimate meaning, and purpose are slowly revealed" (2). Yet, it should not be forgotten that the resulting landscapes very much "represent a seventeenth-century Suzhou citizen's expectations and perceptions of the colonial southwest" (1). Meaning is derived from the experience entirely through the lens of Han culture and history, and notable indigenous monuments are not represented. Indigenous peoples appear in the narrative (fully translated in an appendix) only incidentally.

Steeped herself in the history and milieu of Huang's artistic, literary, social, and cultural world, Kindall sets Huang's geo-narratives within the context of the scholarly Suzhou milieu to which the Huang family belonged. Her own experience of traveling to these locations, of climbing the peaks, and taking in the views also gives her readings a richer layer than would otherwise have been possible, and helps to distinguish the various levels at which the diaries could be viewed and enjoyed. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the social and cultural world of late imperial China.

Li Mengyang, the North-South Divide, and Literati Learning in Ming China. By CHANG WOEI ONG. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016. 368 pp. $49.95, £39.95, €45.00 (cloth).

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It is hard to imagine a more comprehensive intellectual history than Chang Woei Ong's *Li Mengyang, the North-South Divide, and Literati Learning in Ming China*. The title almost undersells the book; only the phrase "literati learning" succeeds in capturing its vast scope. Ong's achievement is to provide a world of context to Li's career, and he does such a thorough job that Li's career becomes rather a vehicle for exploring its context.

Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473–1530) was a native of Qingyang 慶陽 county in Shaanxi province (although it is now in Gansu). He passed the provincial civil service exam in 1492 and the metropolitan exam the following year. Although he earned a posting to the Ministry of Revenue in the capital, he soon clashed with powerful people, including the court eunuch Liu Jin 劉瑾 (d. 1510), whom he believed to be abetting bureaucratic indiscipline. By 1522, Li had lost his official status and retired to Kaifeng.

Ong supplements his narration of Li Mengyang's rise with ample insight on China's north-south divide, especially with respect to civil service recruitment quotas; and then, with Li's official career terminated on page 51, Ong devotes the rest of his study to examining Li's thought, providing background that stretches back to the Song dynasty. Although Ong's retreatment of well-studied Song themes may seem a bit digressive, it does serve to highlight Li's uniqueness. At no time attempting altogether to refute the Song orthodoxy personified by the Neo-Confucian (or *Daoxue* 道學) heavyweight

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), Li nonetheless dissented in a few key areas. Most importantly, he doubted the existence of unifying principles in nature that, as Song thinkers had averred, could serve as patterns for human morality. In Li's opinion, the only ancient text that explained all the different principles in nature was the *Book of Changes*, but not even the *Changes* could be used to argue for a single "universal and overarching principle." As for the Confucian Four Books, they were even less comprehensive than the *Changes*, for they addressed only "a fixed set of issues." As Ong summarizes, "Li viewed the cosmos… as essentially diverse and sometimes unpredictable. As such, he did not grant that a cosmological theory claiming to be universal and capable of explaining every single phenomenon under Heaven could be correct" (125). The political corollary of Li's cosmology was that "Heaven's pattern and good government are not connected. It could even be said that Li saw good government as 'unnatural,' reversing the natural course of Heaven in the process of putting things right." In fact, it was only a Heaven-sent anomaly—a mandated monarch—that offered humankind any chance of preserving order on Earth. Li asserted that it was the function of the educated man to assist the Son of Heaven in this endeavor (139–40). In the process, he became an ultra-statist, assuming government primacy in education and in the inculcation of morality (ch. 5), and this attitude further alienated him from the Neo-Confucians, who saw themselves as the prime movers in such projects.

The second major component of Li's thought was his theory of literature. Again, he faulted his Song predecessors for confusing parts with totalities. As Ong explains, "The greatest mistake that Song scholars committed, according to Li, was to treat partial knowledge as a universal truth and demand that everyone conform to it…. [He] did not deny the discourse on principle a place within the broad array of literati learning, but he refused to grant it a superior position, much less to acknowledge that it was the only viable path to a universal truth toward which all intellectual endeavors ought to converge" (222–23). Ong devotes the next two chapters to an explication of Li's separate approaches to prose and poetry, which involved sweeping judgements of the various forms that were prominent at different times and which gave him the reputation of "archaist," because he tended to favor older forms. It is interesting that, although Li disparaged the notion of overarching patterns in nature, he nonetheless believed in the absolute suitability of certain poetic forms to convey feeling, a suitability rooted in nature. As Ong encapsulates Li's conviction, "What is 'correct' in poetics is what is 'natural'" (250, see also 320). For Li, the most natural expression of feeling was to be heard among commoners. In this respect, Li was probably not advocating any sort of populism but was more likely reducing commoners to an element of nature. "Although an [un]intelligent man on the street may be uncultivated," a colleague tells a receptive Li Mengyang in a dialogue recounted by Li, "his singing, drumming, laments, and chanting, and the way he sings while walking and sitting, the way he moans while eating and sleeping, and the way he sings and others follow, none of these is without [the principles] of comparison and stimulus, and all of these are outward expressions of his emotions. From this we could observe the meaning [of poetry]. This is what I meant by saying that poetry is the natural sound of Heaven and Earth" (256–59).

One wonders if Li opened the door to the study of folklore, subsequently to be developed by Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610); but the overall point about Li Mengyang is that he conceived of a world in which a field like folklore could exist, more or less independently, among the “broad array of literati learning.” In Ong’s appraisal, Li’s aggregate contribution is that he “challenged the unity of knowledge” espoused by past generations and “approached diversity seriously and positively. He saw the intellectual enterprises of politics and literature as independent disciplines, each with its own agenda, objectives, and internal divisions of knowledge, warranting customized theories and practices for learning” (113).

Li Mengyang certainly appears to have been an original thinker, but, perhaps unsurprisingly, his contribution to Ming discourse remained minor. In a concluding chapter, Ong deals with the issue of Li’s obscurity. He finds that, in the first place, Li was simply not a member of the dominant Neo-Confucian echelon (288–90), and, as a northerner, he operated outside of any master-disciple relationship more typical of the south, which might have secured for him more active promoters of his legacy (276–77). Secondly, his literary reputation was mostly negative, as he was perceived as a blind follower of forms who had forgotten the primacy of feeling (*qing* 情) in poetry—although in reality, his obsession with forms was part of a search for the best means to express feeling (316). All of which means that Li’s story must count as another case of undeveloped incipience in the late Ming. However, for highlighting diversity and providing counterexamples to predominating thought systems, Ong’s portrait of Li Mengyang is essential.

As for the style of Ong’s work, it tends toward the all-inclusive. Ong investigates every angle and spares no aspect of background. He incorporates long passages of primary material, appending the original Chinese, which sometimes run more than two pages in length. Readers may wish for more concision and compression—but they would be wrong to do so, for Ong is an excellent writer and translator. The embedded translations are especially exquisite and provide much reading pleasure as well as insight into the art of translation. To shorten or summarize them would be to diminish the quality of the book. Finally, Ong employs footnotes, rather than endnotes, and thus saves the reader from always flipping to the end of the book. Chang Woei Ong’s *Li Mengyang* is accessible, absorbing, and richly informative. It is a tremendous contribution to the field.

Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China. By Johanna S. Ransmeier. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017. 408 pp. $49.95 (cloth).

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We are accustomed, not unreasonably, to think of trafficking as an outcome of economic distress and/or natural disaster: an extraordinary environment that demands abandonment of fundamental human ties in order to ensure survival. Why else, we wonder, would families sell their wives or children? At the heart of *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China*, however, is one of those insights that makes the reader clap her forehead and wonder why no one has ever framed it this way before. Johanna Ransmeier states without fanfare, and then proceeds to illustrate in great detail, that families in late Qing and early Republican China were transactional, whether or not they found themselves in extreme circumstances. As she puts it on page 2, “With the exception of