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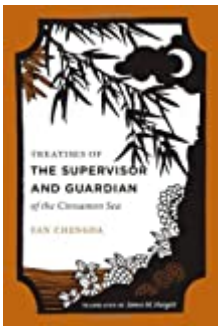

Fan Chengda. *Treatises of the Supervisor and Guardian of the Cinnamon Sea: The Natural World and Material Culture of Twelfth-Century China.* Translated by James M. Hargett. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010. lxvi + 349 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-99078-1; $40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-99079-8.

Reviewed by Sukhee Lee (Rutgers University)

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Commissioned by Sumit Guha (The University of Texas at Austin)

Material Culture of 10th Century South China

Writing a review of a work of translation is not an easy task, especially when the translation under review deals with lots of seemingly trivial information about insects, stones, and fruits. In this review, I will briefly introduce the bookâs contents and provide some suggestions about translation. *Treatises of the Supervisor and Guardian of the Cinnamon Sea* (hereafter *Treatises*) is an annotated, complete translation of Fan Chengdaâs (1126-93) *Guihai yuheng zhi*, a remarkable firsthand account of the environment and society of non-Chinese peoples in modern-day Guangxi Province during the twelfth century. As is well known among Song scholars, Fan was one of the most renowned poets during the Southern Song period (1127-1279). He was also an experienced traveler and avid record keeper of his travels. For a sociocultural historian like myself, however, he is chiefly remembered as a person who played a decisive role in disseminating the voluntary labor service (*yiyi*) across the empire and also as the author of the *Gazetteer of Suzhou Prefecture* (*Wu jun zhi*), one of the fine gazetteers from the Southern Song, which is credited with its extensive references and simple and pointed accounts.

Treatises is organized into thirteen categories: âPrecipice-grottoes,â âMetals and Stones,â âAromatics,â âWines,â âImplements,â âBirds,â âQuadrupeds,â âInsects and Fishes,â âFlowers; âFruits,â âHerbaceous Plants and Trees,â âMiscellaneous Items,â and âthe Man Peoples.â It provides a host of interesting, if not always important, information about the area. A reader will hear colorful stories about the finest wine called Auspicious Dew and various weapons used by local people. They will read about how they tamed elephants, caught Burmese pythons, executed decapitation using a bent bamboo pole to stretch the criminalâs head before actual beheading, and used chickens for divination. Probably most important for historians, they will learn about the history of the changing relationship between the Song government and non-Chinese peoples. Throughout the text, Fanâs meticulous attention and vivid accounts make these otherwise dry and tedious descriptions interesting and even enjoyable to read.

The original text is not voluminous at all and, as the translator, James M. Hargett, notes, is written in straightforward language. But it is to be stressed that it would be a tremendously daunting task to translate this work into a readable modern language not least because of the sheer nature of the topics it covers. As a scholar who has studied Fanâs literary works for a long time and has published a series of complete translations of them, the last of which is *Treatise on Mei-flowers* (*Meipu*) published recently in *Monumenta Serica*, Hargett is probably the best person in the English-speaking world to accomplish this feat.[1] Indeed, in providing standardized translations and extensive annotations for often highly technical and descriptive terms, Hargett does a truly admirable job. As many as 409 footnotes drawing on an impressive array of primary and secondary sources firmly buttress Hargettâs literal translation. Moreover, carefully chosen illustrations and photos help readers visualize what they read. In addition, the forty-eight-page introduction provides a comprehensive historical and textual background against which the translation is to be read.

Like any other works of translation, however, Hargettâs translation is not entirely free of mistakes. Most are minor, but some may distort the meaning of a given sentence. Below I list a few of them and try to suggest alternative readings. There are mistakes that could have been corrected by an institutional or social historian of the Song period.

First, âIn recent years, many settlement chieftains have transferred their [domicile] registration to internal [or Chinese controlled] areas. They receive corn [su] allowances and office appointments but only at the rank of senior and junior envoy [daxiao shichen]â (p. 163). This is the translation of âè¿æ²æ´é, å¤å¯ç±å§å°, ç´ç²è£æ, ç¡éå¤§å°ä½¿è£â (p. 254). The latter part is misleading. *Nasu bushou*, which is translated as âreceive corn allowances and office appointmentsâ means that they *donated* grain (*nasu*) to purchase official ranks (*bushou*) from the Song government. In addition, *daxiao shichen* are not âsenior and junior envoyâ but generic terms for the ten military ranks from 9b through 8a. Thus, what the sentence is saying is that recently many local chieftains purchased the government ranks from the Song and there are so many of them bearing a military rank ranging from 9b through 8a.

Second, âThe Noble and Aspiring [XionglÃ¼e] and the Brave and Agile [Yongjie] are also included among nine such military units, which are supplied with [military] commissioners like the wing regiments [xiangjun]â (p. 199). This is the translation of ârâæéç¥åæ · çä¹è», åçµ¦ä½¿, å¦å¢è»â (p. 260). *Geishi*, which is translated as âsupplied with [military] commissionerâ means âto provide labor power [for public service],â which was the main duty of *xiangjun*. Thus, the sentence actually describes that the nine additional military units, such as the Noble and Aspiring and the Brave and Agile, were assigned (*chong*) with the duty of âproviding labor power [for public service]â just like âwing regimentsâ (*xiangjun*).

Third, those who escort the horses designate them âcertified by the administrator of Wu County, order and rule commissioner, and chief of the Southwest Xie tribe [Xiânan Xiefan zhi Wuzhou jiedu shi duda zhaohui], which is written in the script of the state of Luodianâ (p. 188). The original text reads âæ¼é¦¬è, ç¨±è¥¿åè¬èç¥æ¦å · ç¯å°¦ä½¿é½å¤§ç§æç¾æ®¿åæåâ (p. 258). Apparently puzzled by the abrupt mention of the script of the state of Luodian, Hargett provides a speculative footnote on it (pp. 188-189n202). There are three things worth further consideration here. First, in the absence of other corroborating evidence, we simply do not know whether there ever existed the script of the Luodian kingdom. Second, the original text reads quite odd if we are to take âLuodianguo wenziâ to mean â*written in* the script of the state of Luodian.â Third, it would be worth noting that there are quite a few official titles during the Song that end with âwenzi,â such as Guanggou jinglÅ±esi wenzi ç®¡å¥ç¶ç¥åæå, Zhuanyuanshi guangou wenzi è½éä½¿ç®¡å¥æå, Xuanfushisi zhuguan jiyi wenzi å®£æ«ä½¿åä¾ç®¡æ©å®æå, and Shumiyuan jianxiang wenzi æ¨å¯é¢æªé¢è©³æå. Thus, I would suspect that âLoudianguo wenziâ here is simply a part of the official title that the people who escort the horses bear.

There are also a few other mistakes stemming probably from the authorâs oversight. For example, âAfter a short time, the snake loses consciousness [but still] turns and thrashes about. From the flank small wooden spears are all drawn [by the troops]. With great thrusts of force, the python is thereupon killedâ (pp. 83-84). The original text is âæé , èçè¦°, å¥®è¿é¨°æ², åå°æ¨ç¡æ, åç«ä¹æâ (p. 244). This passage describes how local people catch Burmese pythons. Here the subject of the entire sentence is the python whose head has been chopped off by people. *Xiaomu* literally means small woods or bushes, not âsmall wooden spears.â And *pang xiaomu jin ba* means that because of the snakeâs forceful tossing and turning (from pain) all the small woods (*xiaomu*) around it (*pang*) are uprooted. *Lijie nai bi* means that the snake dies because its strength becomes exhausted (after forceful tossing and

turning).

âNext I ordered that we have closer relations with the Yao. When I also saw that government subjects were united [in their support of me] and incapable of doing anything illegal, I then opened up their trade routesâ (p. 177). The original wording is âæ¬¡åè«è¿å, äº¦è¦çæ°çåçµ, æ¯å¾ç¯æ³, åéå¶åæä¹è ¯â (p. 257). *Jin* is not a verb here that means âhave closer relations.â It simply means âthe closer,â a fact that is borne out by the later appearance on the next page of âyuan Yao,â that is, âthe distant Yao.â âFan announced and explained [his policies] to *the closer Yao*, that is, the Yao people who live closer to the Chinese territory and also supervised [shi] that government subjects be organized [into militia units] so that they would be unable to commit crimes. Only then do I open up their trade routes (p. 178).â

Finally, âMerchants from Min place great value on geomancy [fengshui]. After losing all their goods, many go into Li territory to till the land, never to return homeâ (p. 219). Original text reads: âé©åå¤é¢¨æ°´, è©å»å¶è²², å¤å¥é»å°èç¨®ï¥§æâ (p. 264). Apparently, there is no connection between Fujian merchantâs obsession with geomancy and their ending up in Li territory. So, the author surmises that the original text may be corrupt. In this sentence, however, *fengshui* has nothing to do with âthe *fengshui*,â that is, geomancy. It should rather be read literally as âwindy water,â which means sea storm. This is clear because the first meaning of the verb *zhi* is âto encounter something.â Thus, the sentence means that Fujian (maritime) merchants (often) encounter sea storms. After losing their goods, they go into Li territory and become farmers never to return home. Zhao Rukuoâs text, which the author cites in the footnote, points exactly to this situation (p. 219n328).

As a reviewer, I feel compelled to make some suggestions about the translation. But I would like to stress that my minor corrections do not undermine the overall quality of Hargettâs translation and its significant contribution to the field. *Treatises of The Supervisor and Guardian of the Cinnamon Sea* is a fine and meticulous translation which represents the culmination of a labor of love that has lasted many years.

Note

[1]. James M. Hargett, âFan Chengdaâs (1126â1193) Meipu: A Twelfth Century Treatise on Mei-Flowers,â *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* 58 (2010): 109-152.

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