

Transgressive Typologies: Constructions of Gender and Power in Early Tang China. By REBECCA DORAN. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monographs 103. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017. 260 pp. \$39.95.

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Transgressive Typologies, a most welcome addition to the studies of gender, history, and literature of the Tang dynasty, sheds new light on pre-modern Chinese historiography and the concept of legitimacy in the context of gender politics. The volume also contains annotated translation of a large number of excerpts from official histories, collections of anecdotes, court poems, and other types of writings such as pornography. Some texts, for example the memorial tablet for Shangguan Wan'er 上官婉兒 (664–710) written by Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731) (227–28) and the story of Lady Yidu 宜都 by Li Shangyin 李商隱 (ca. 813–858) (145–46), had never been translated into English before. The volume is thus a valuable reference for scholars and students of the Tang dynasty. The general reader who is interested in historiography and the construction of historical figures might also find this book a pleasurable read.

In this volume, Rebecca Doran examines literary, historical, and anecdotal texts written or commissioned by female power-holders from the late seventh century to the early eighth, that is, Wu Zhao 武曌 (624–705) and the next generation of women in power, including such figures as Shangguan Wan'er, Princess Taiping 太平 (665?–713), and Princess Anle 安樂 (683?–710). Doran's critical reading of these texts has two foci: the images of the woman leaders in contemporary sociocultural contexts (chapter 2), and the development of the usually negative retrospective accounts about these women (chapters 3–5). When discussing the retrospective accounts, Doran highlights the gendered typologies and repeating narrative tropes that reflect the didactic purpose and assumptions of their authors, including historians and compilers of collections of anecdotes. Her aim is to deconstruct the images of woman leaders that are historically and culturally constructed in the retrospective accounts, most of which tried to delegitimize these women's rule through condemning their transgression of women's appropriate sociocultural roles. In the process of deconstruction, Doran brings the reader's attention to "history verses historiography" and to "the movement from event to typology" (64).

The five chapters in this volume are organized thematically, showing Doran's progressive exploration of the subject matter. The sources also follow a chronological order in general. Chapter 1 discusses the way female power from the Western Han to the Sui eras was constructed, both positively and negatively, in the Chinese tradition. The sources discussed are mainly official dynastic histories written before the mid-seventh century. Texts in chapter 2 are from the second half of the early Tang, mainly poetry written or commissioned by female leaders of the time about their rule, power, and images. Most accounts discussed in chapters 3 through 5 are written and circulated after the death of female power-holders of the early Tang, each chapter dealing with one particular theme such as legitimacy (ritual, omens, predictive songs), materiality (especially estates), and perceived gender anarchy. The unifying themes, revisited from time to time, are narrative typology, gender, and (de)legitimation.

In chapter 1, Doran navigates a matrix of historical records, generic conventions, and prescriptive models through which pre-Tang woman leaders are constructed and negotiated. In so doing, she delineates a number of typologies, narrative formulae, and rhetorical similarities in the biographies of these women that would inform the portrayal of powerful women of the early Tang. Whether a woman leader is considered by the literary-historical tradition a moral paragon or a transgressor depends, Doran argues, on her relationships within the patriarchal dynastic system, especially whether she fulfills her motherly role by furthering the imperial male line (32–33, 54). Unlike the depiction of male rulers, retrospective condemnation and de-legitimation of these women are often based on sex (55–63). In addition, as Doran notes, supporters of a female leader are often described in terms of sexual favorites, whose intrigues with the leader are believed to have brought about chaos or downfall of the dynasty. This last point is illustrated in detail in chapter 5.

Chapters 3 through 5 contain a number of case studies aiming at demonstrating how female power is reconstructed culturally and rhetorically. In each case study, especially in chapters 3 and 4, Doran compares and contrasts various versions of a particular story; and examines various accounts about a particular event (e.g. the auspicious snow, 120–22), a historical figure (e.g. Di Renjie 狄仁傑, 142–45), or a topic (e.g. royal weddings of two princesses, 175–82). By tracing the development of the narratives and the perspectives expressed therein, Doran demonstrates the construction, continuity, and transformation of particular typologies, historical figures, and events in historical and literary accounts.

Chapter 3 discusses the (re)interpretation of signs related to court rituals and celebrations, including omens, predictive songs, and dreams. As Doran points out, the interpretations were a way the woman leaders of the early Tang symbolically expressed their power. In later narratives about these women, however, the same events, signs, and songs are reinterpreted and reframed to show that the women in fact failed to understand the “real” meaning of the signs, revealing their immorality and illegitimacy and predicting their downfall. This is what Doran calls the “reverse treatments of the same motifs that underlie praise-filled accounts dating to the late seventh and early eighth centuries” (112). She pinpoints the circular reasoning in later condemnatory narratives (137) and notes that the argument used in condemnations of female-led government “can be, and are, applied to every woman in every historical period interpreted as dangerous and exerting too much public influence.” (119)

As Doran shows in chapter 4 with a focus on the image-making process, retrospective historical-literary accounts often use a similar rhetoric of condemnation, which is to associate the perceived immorality of early-Tang women leaders with their material life. According to this kind of rhetoric, those powerful women’s moral abnormality is manifested materially, just as their failure to correctly interpret the omens indicating their illegitimacy (175). The conspicuous consumption of female leaders and, in some cases, their male associates, was extolled in contemporary writings. In later accounts, however, private estates of the women leaders are not only perceived and described as embodiments of female and female-enabled excess, injustice, and transgression but also as locations where the women and their male supporters made political intrigues. These perceptions and descriptions became tropes attached to retrospective narratives about these women leaders (166). What is of particular interest is Doran’s discussion on the

moral-conceptual rubric of *fuyao* 服妖 (Ornamentation Anomaly, 174–78) in official histories, in which consumption behaviors of some powerful women of the early Tang are chosen as signs of disaster, disorder in gender and social hierarchy, and dynastic decline.

The discussion in chapter 4 of sexual insinuation in the rhetorical condemnation of powerful women is further developed in chapter 5. The chapter is devoted to the reversed gender roles of female power holders of the early Tang and their male associates, starting with the obfuscation of the boundary between lover and political ally (such as *chong* 寵, *qie* 竊, *si* 私, and *luan* 亂) in literary-historical accounts. By analyzing the historical reconstruction of a number of male associates, which shows “blanket sameness” (189), Doran identifies some other typologies that mark the narratives about powerful women of the early Tang, such as sycophants endorsing the sociopolitical and gender hierarchy and righteous officials (in fact the mouthpiece of the historian) rejecting it. Through analyzing why male partisans of female leaders are treated with uniformity and negativity in retrospective accounts, Doran explores how information is selected and erased in the process of gendered character-(re)construction of women leaders.

Chapter 2 is the only chapter that solely discusses texts written or commissioned by the powerful women of the early Tang during their lifetime. This chapter discusses a part of the concept of “inversion,”—the self-expression and the desired images of powerful women in literature of the early Tang. In addition, it introduces a “comparative thematic analysis of typological construction” (73) that will be used in chapters 3 through 5, focusing on the opposite treatments of the same themes in later accounts (e.g. the *baotu* 寶圖 incident and the estates that are discussed in chapters 3 and 4, respectively). However, many texts discussed in this chapter seem to be of generic nature and do not show or imply a female identity or image. For example, the court memorials and poems discussed on pages 79–82 are conventional praise to imperial power, which can be found during many other reign periods when the rulers were male. At times, for example in her discussion of the court poems on cut silk flowers (90–93), it seems that the author departs from her original argument of “contemporary construction of the images of powerful women” and concentrates instead on how “nature and power” are presented in the selected texts.

In fact, most of the texts in this chapter are discussed within a rather limited scope of imperial power, nature, and naturalness, preventing the author from further exploring the images of women in the texts and from asking and answering important questions pertaining to her main argument. One example is the twenty-five poems on visiting Princess Changning’s 長寧 (fl. 680s–730s) estate. If these poems, as Doran argues, indeed reworked the tropes already popular in literature at that time such as reclusion, what is the significance of a politically powerful woman self-fashioning as a recluse? Does Shangguan Wan’er write only about herself in these poems? What does it mean that she writes in a gender-neutral voice (97) and uses no female-related allusions (101) in these poems, and how does that fit into Shangguan’s self-expression or desired images? These are some intriguing questions that could have been asked and might lead to further exploration of the poems if one ventured beyond the scope of “naturalness and power.”

In addition, this chapter needs to include and critically analyze more sources and examples. The texts in their original length are rich sources of rhetorical devices and popular images about elite women of the early Tang, including the idealized feminine roles manifested in mythical women and parallel historical personages. Unfortunately,

chapter 2 only selects and briefly discusses short excerpts from the originals. For example, the four octaves by Zheng Yin 鄭愔 (d. 710) on Emperor Zhongzong's 中宗 (r. 684, 705–710) visit to Shangguan Wan'er's ward show how one of Shangguan's supporters perceive her and her relation with the emperor. The octaves could also be used to compare and contrast with some of the aforementioned twenty-five poems in which Shangguan perhaps writes about herself or her group of court elites. Yet only two couplets are briefly discussed (96). Another example is the seventeen octaves on Wu Zhao's visit to Shicong 石淙 in 700 (105–107), written respectively by Wu Zhao and the sixteen people who accompanied her, including her two sons, her courtiers, and her "male favorites." Wu Zhao was at the height of her power at that time, and these poems reveal how the sixteen people perceive her as well as her self-perception. However, only six couplets, written respectively by three people, are briefly analyzed, and the discussion again departs from the main focus on "female-related images" for which the author gives only one example (Queen Mother of the West).

Chapter 2 contains a few typos in Chinese characters. for example, *xiang* 響 (should be *xiang* 響, 75), *mi* 泌 (should be *qin* 沁, 86), *yang* 仰 (should be *ying* 迎, 92), *ye* 葉 (should be *xie* 叶, 94), *xiang* 相 (should be *xiang* 湘, 94, note 92), *lai* 萊 (should be *ying* 瀛, 101), and *di* 第 (should be *ce* 策, 104). There are also some minor issues of authorship and dating. It is highly likely that Shangguan Wan'er is not the author of all the twenty-five poems on visiting Princess Changning's estate.¹ In addition, there is no internal or external evidence that these twenty-five poems were written in the year 710 (97, 100).

Lastly, as Doran notes in the introduction, she did not "engage extensively with the rich corpus of Japanese sources pertaining to this period, a direction in research that awaits future work" (20). Sources and studies listed in the bibliography (239–49) are in English and Chinese languages. One looks forward to future studies that address the aforementioned issues in chapter 2 of this volume, include sources and scholarship in other languages in addition to English and Chinese, and continue the research that *Transgressive Typologies* has started.

Record of Daily Knowledge and Collected Poems and Essays: Selections. By GU YANWU.

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This book is a useful contribution in English to the better understanding and appreciation of Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–82), whom I have characterized as the most influential progenitor of mainstream Qing thinking.¹

¹On the issue of authorship of the twenty-five poems, see my discussion in Jie Wu, "Vitality and Cohesiveness in the Poetry of Shangguan Wan'er (664–710)," *Tang Studies* 34, no. 1 (2016): 48–49.

¹Willard J. Peterson, "Advancement of learning in early Ch'ing," p. 529, in Peterson, ed. *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 9 Part 2, edited by Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).