

Introduction

“During the Ming and Qing periods, Chinese travel literature moved from a historical phase of fluorescence to one of decline”

(明清時期游記文學由盛而衰的歷史階段.)

Zhu Yaoting and Gong Bin, eds. *Zhongguo gudai youji*, 220.

Some reviewers of my 2018 book *Jade Mountains & Cinnabar Pools: The History of Travel Literature in Imperial China* (hereafter cited as *JMCP*), which traces the development of travel literature, or *youji wenxue* 游記文學, in China from the Six Dynasties period (220-589) to the late Ming dynasty (roughly 1570-1644), expressed disappointment that my history of the genre ended with the early seventeenth century. As I explained in an addendum to the last chapter, space limitations and practical considerations necessitated that I conclude the book with a chapter on the late Ming, or “Golden Age” of Chinese travel writing. In that same addendum I also mentioned that my decision and use of the term “Golden Age” was not meant in any way to suggest that the development of Chinese travel writing somehow waned or declined in the period following the early seventeenth century, as claimed by the literary historians Zhu Yaoting and Gong Bin in the epigram that opens this Introduction. Many Western literary historians and critics apparently share Zhu and Gong’s negative assessment because little critical scholarship on Qing travel writing has been published in Western languages, with a few notable exceptions.¹ I

¹ The “exceptions” refer primarily to the scholarly publications of Marion Eggert, Renata Vinci, and Wu Jen-shu (Wu Renshu), listed in the Selected Bibliography. The two main anthologies published in English that provide translations of Qing prose travel writing are Richard E. Strassberg’s *Inscribed Landscapes* (1994) and Zhang Limei’s *Classic Travel Sketches of the*

would argue, however, that in quantity and quality, travel writing expanded on unprecedented levels during the Qing. Professors Zhu and Gong and other modern scholars have failed to realize that *youji* continued to thrive and develop in the Qing, but in ways never seen before in the genre's history. Rather than viewing this process as one of decline or deterioration, viewing it as one of *change* and *adaptation* yields greater knowledge and a multifaceted understanding of how *youji* developed into a new type of travel writing serving multiple contemporary purposes. This understanding forms the foundation of my approach to writing about the genre's development in the post-Ming period. With this approach in mind, the key questions to be probed and answered in the following chapters are: how did several foundational elements of earlier travel writing change during the Qing and why? And what were the results of these changes, especially as they relate to the overall development of *youji* during China's last imperial dynasty?

My selection of material to translate and discuss will be based on representative primary sources that provide answers to these questions. I must confess, however, that my expectations are modest. Given the bulk of available source material, space limitations will likely result only in a barebones outline concentrating on exemplar, representative works. But if that outline is fair, balanced, and illustrative and includes critical commentary that provides at least preliminary

Qing Dynasty (2015). These titles are also listed in the Selected Bibliography. In this context, perhaps it is worth noting that Stephen Owen's massive *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) does not include one prose work of any kind dating from the Qing dynasty.

answers to the above questions about the genre's development following the Ming dynasty, it might stimulate further interest in the topic and serve as a foundation for further study.

In my approach to studying the history of *youji* during the Qing, a distinction must be drawn between “travel writing” and “travel literature.” As for “travel writing,” this general term has many possible meanings and applications. Xiaofei Tian and others have rightly observed that it is “a category defined by content rather than by formal features.”² In this context, “content” refers to narration of a journey. Now, aside from accounts of factual trips to real destinations, which in the Chinese tradition are represented by a vast storehouse of extant textual material, for some literary historians, their definition of “travel writing” also includes imaginary or fanciful journeys to the heavenly realms of Daoist transcendents or voyages to illusory destinations bearing Buddhist religious associations (these types of writings are sometimes collectively called *shenyou* 神游, or “spirit travels,” or *mengyou* 夢游, or “dream travels”). Since “travel writing” lacks formal generic features, some scholars have even regarded written works as diverse in structure and content as poetry and prose as “travel writing.”³

My main concern in *JMCP* was literary history, specifically the development of Chinese travel writing as a *literary* genre. By “literary,” I refer to texts where the author engages with the

² Tian, “Chinese Travel Writing,” 175.

³ A recent iteration of this approach appears in Tian Xiaofei's book *Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China*, in which her analysis of China's engagement with the “foreign” during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (317-589) and the nineteenth century considers and compares “travel writings,” some real some imagined, written in both poetry and prose.

place he visits by employing a language register rich in lyrical content and personal association. My definition of *youji* focused on texts written in prose based on actual journeys to identifiable locations.⁴ Most of these locations were scenic environments such as famous mountains (*mingshan* 名山) or notable urban destinations such as West Lake (Xihu 西湖) in Hangzhou, which have attracted sightseers for countless generations. My main concern in *JMCP*, then, was “travel literature.”

However, unprecedented changes in the varieties and purposes of *youji* during the Qing have necessitated that I tweak my definition, understanding, and approach to studying the genre. To be sure, travel literature about scenic destinations, especially famous mountains, continued to be written, especially in the early and middle years of the Qing dynasty. The authors of these

⁴ While the study of travel poetry, real or imagined, is certainly a legitimate and worthwhile scholarly endeavor, my approach in *JMCP*, and the methodology I shall follow in this book, is to limit my study of Qing *youji* to prose works. I adopt this position because the lyrical-expressive modes common in Chinese poetry differ significantly from those in Chinese *youji* prose. Or, as Professor Tian herself noted: “we must not forget that a poem is an intricate verbal art form with a nature of its own.” *Visionary Journeys*, 281. Furthermore, Chinese poetry is governed by strict rules regarding grammatical structure, tone, and rhyme and embellished diction, while prose (*sanwen* 散文) is loose and irregular and thus, in my view, better suited to narration of travel and, in many instances, better suited for extended description of place. For these reasons, most Chinese literary critics and historians, both traditional and modern, associate *youji* with prose rather than poetry.

works mirrored and refined the styles from earlier periods. Some examples will appear in the chapters of Part I. However, much of Qing travel writing developed in entirely new directions. The general trajectory of the genre's development moved away from sightseeing-for-pleasure-based "travel literature" to "travel writing" that emphasized the author's *travel experience*, the purposes and goals of which were—in many, but not all cases—less about himself and more about social, political, and even political matters, often on the national level. In other words, a shift occurred from preoccupation with sites in the natural world to places and issues of importance in the human world. These goals led to the appearance and development of several entirely new forms or subgenres of what might broadly be called "travel writing." Just one example is the diplomatic or envoy diaries (*chushi riji* 出使日記) dating from after about 1850, the purpose of which is not the expression of belletristic skills or sentiments, but rather to report information to the Qing court on what its diplomats observed while abroad.

As for sources, a vast amount of *youji* produced during China's last dynasty survives and is preserved in several extensive and valuable collections dating from the late Qing, Minguo, and modern periods. Among these collections, *Collected Transcriptions on Lands and Places from the Little Square Pot Studio* (*Xiaofanghuzhai yudi congchao* 小方壺齋輿地叢鈔) is especially rich in content. The compiler, a late Qing scholar-official named Wang Xiqi 王錫祺 (1855-1913), began gathering texts for his anthology in 1877. The first section was published in Shanghai in 1891, which was then followed by a first supplement (*bubian* 補編) in 1896 and second supplement (*zai bubian* 再補編) in 1897.⁵ With over 1,400 selections by over 600

⁵ The first section includes more than 1,200 texts arranged in 12 volumes (*zhi* 帙). The first supplement contains 58 titles in 12 volumes. The second supplement, also in 12 volumes,

different authors, in size and content Wang Xiqi's anthology is unprecedented in the history of travel writing in China. What distinguishes the collection the most is the diversity of its contents, which includes geographical texts from China and monographs concerning world geography and individual foreign countries. These works were composed not only by Chinese writers, dating mainly from the Qing dynasty, but also by over forty foreign authors.⁶ Our primary interest in the *Square Pot Studio* collection is its 683 examples of Qing travel writing by Chinese authors, representing 48% of the entire collection.⁷

In addition to the *Little Square Pot* anthology, there are several other valuable collections of Qing travel writing, most notably *Travel Accounts about Famous Mountains throughout the Empire* (Tianxia mingshan youji 天下名山游記; 1936). Compiled by Wu Qiushi 吳秋士, the

anthologizes 180 titles. The main section and two supplements were published in Shanghai by the Zhuyitang 著易堂 in 1897. The complete collection was reprinted by the Guangwen shuju in Taipei in 1964, and in 1985 by the Guji shudian in Hangzhou. An online version is available here: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=6599922&remap=gb>

⁶ Most of the works in the collection concerning places outside of China are Chinese translations of geographical and travel accounts completed by the original (foreign) authors of those same texts. Just one example is a short history of the city of San Francisco (*Jiujinshan ji* 舊金山紀) written by William Alexander Parsons Martin (also known by his Chinese name Ding Weiliang 丁韞良; 1827-1916), a well-known Presbyterian missionary to China who translated several important Western works on religion, law, and science from English into Chinese.

⁷ The count “683” *youji* texts is based on the calculation of Jia Hongyan in his article “Zhongguo gudai youji zhengli yu chuban,” 95.

collection includes 219 selections organized geographically by province. Also useful are Zhong Shuhe's 鍾叔河 *Collectanea On Moving Into the Modern World* (Zou Xiang shijie congshu 走向世界叢書; 1981) in ten volumes, and *Compendium of Individual Poetry and Prose Collections from the Qing Era* (Qingdai shiwen ji huibian 清代詩文集匯編 (; 2011). The latter title includes numerous prose travel works. Other more recent collections, such as Chen Jiarong 陳佳榮 et al, comps., *Domestic and Foreign Travel Chronicles from the Successive Eras* (Lidai Zhongwai xingji 歷代中外行紀; 2008) provide numerous samples of travel writing from different dynastic periods, including the Qing. Of course, *youji* can be found in other works, especially individual author collections, or *bieji* 別集. In gathering primary source material, I shall mine these sources as well.⁸

Given the large amount of extant Qing travel writing, one could organize and discuss this material in several ways. For instance, I could redeploy the chronological approach to the genre's development I used in *JMCP*. In this volume, however, the nature of my sources and the history of the Qing dynasty, especially after about 1850 to its demise in 1911, required I adopt a different methodology, which I call a "geographical-topical approach." This approach organizes the contents of this book into three general parts: Part 1: Domestic Travel Writing, Part 2: Border or Frontier Travel Writing, and Part III: Foreign Travel Writing. As the name suggests, Part I will deal with travel destinations inside China, much of which date from the early and middle periods of the Qing dynasty. Part II will consider border or frontier areas of the Qing empire, such as Yunnan and Taiwan, where many Chinese literati, military men, and merchants traveled

⁸ Complete bibliographic information for all the titles mentioned here is available in the Selected Bibliography.

and wrote reports of their experiences, significantly enhancing our understanding of the Qing frontier experience and engagement with non-Chinese people living in border regions. Part III concerns travel accounts written about overseas travel experiences, mainly to Japan, Europe, and North America in the second half of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century. Faced with repeated humiliations and military defeats by the Western powers in the final decades of Qing rule, geographical knowledge was regarded as essential to successfully securing China's national interests through diplomacy. This is the reason Wang Xiqi organized his *Little Square Pot* anthology in such a way as to first draw readers' attention to world geography and the countries of foreign powers in the West. As we will see in Part Three, many of the late Qing travel writers who journeyed abroad sought solutions to China's problems regarding entry into the then-modern family of nations. Many of these accounts are anthologized in the *Little Square Pot Studio* collection, as well as the other sources mentioned earlier. Any appraisal of travel writing during the last century of Qing rule must seriously study this body of texts.