

represents one distinct interpretation of the original story (or what is taken to be the respective original). The vast amount of Monkey King adaptations rests on the multivalence of the original figure—and reinforces it in turn, as there is not just one Monkey King available to contemporary audiences, but multiple Monkey Kings. The figure is known to most Chinese, yet may signify something entirely different based on which adaptation, representation, or interpretation one grew up with. Second, adaptations rightly deserve to be regarded as creative works in their own right and some, like *A Chinese Odyssey*, have themselves become classics by now spurring fan cultures of their own.

Adaptations thus complicate concepts of authorship, with authorship becoming attributable to both the original author and the adaptor into the various genres and media. Sun demonstrates that “[i]n many of these cases, the image of Sun Wukong is used as self-representation, and accordingly the monkey’s story is revised and the image changed or even manipulated the political agenda of the adaptors” (p. 7). In his rewritings, Sun Wukong thus is turned from the clever trickster into a national hero, from a fighter into a lover, depending on the agenda of the respective adaptor. More than that, in the graphic novel *American Born Chinese*, he even appears as an alter ego of his author, who uses the multivalence inscribed into the original Monkey King to negotiate his own experiences as a Chinese in America. The author as a category in literary theory may be dead, yet in the literary practice of readers and authors, he continues to matter—particularly when he disguises himself as yet another incarnation of the powerful myth of Sun Wukong. Sun’s well-executed book therefore deserves the attention not only of the fans of the Monkey King, but also of those interested in the broad questions of the techniques, the status, and the implications of adaptation, rewriting, and representation more generally.

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*The Art of Being Governed: Everyday Politics in Late Imperial China.* By MICHAEL SZONYI. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017. xv, 303 pp. ISBN: 9780691174518 (cloth, also available as e-book). doi:10.1017/S0021911818002759

Given that, almost without exception, “every state must have an army” (p. 1), how did China under the rule of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) manage the daunting tasks of defending its extensive border and maintaining, within that, a semblance of order? The question is important not only for historians drawn to the traditional realm of military history but also for others interested in how the Chinese state actually functioned and how pre-twentieth-century China could be compared with other contemporaneous polities.

But central as this line of inquiries regarding state capacity and administrative efficacy may be, as Michael Szonyi argues in this pathbreaking and elegant book, there is another equally compelling story waiting to be told: how individual households in the Ming dynasty—households that had for various reasons come to be registered as “military”—managed their obligations to the state while pursuing as best as they could their own interests. So though this is certainly a book about the Ming military institution

commonly known as the *wei suo* (guards and battalions) system, it is a work of neither military nor institutional history, as such categories are usually understood; rather, it is at its core a work of social history, a study of how certain households from certain parts of Ming dynasty China (primarily the coastal area in the Fujian region in southeast China, where Szonyi has done extensive fieldwork) engaged in certain types of “everyday politics.” In approaching the subject in this fashion, Szonyi aims to shed light not only on the “art of being governed” (yes, one could find in the book a sustained engagement with James Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed*) but also on alternative avenues to compare “early modern” societies.<sup>1</sup>

A singular virtue of *The Art of Being Governed*, it should be said in the outset, is its analytical clarity. Much as Szonyi is tempted to use the example of the *wei suo* system to generate claims about Chinese and, more broadly, early modern societies, he is clear about the boundaries of his study. Since in this book he is primarily interested in “how military institutions shaped the lives of ordinary people” (p. 2), Szonyi has opted to focus on those dimensions for which there exist sufficient “first-hand” sources. Hence, he gives less attention to rebellions or desertion (or to the ad hoc tactics associated with everyday resistance) and centers his discussion instead on the variety of “everyday political strategies” military households chose to deploy—strategies that also have the benefit of having been “recorded in writing by the people who used them” (p. 10). And though Szonyi might seem at times to be overly enthused by the notions of “everyday politics” and “regulatory arbitrage” (that is, the taking advantage of “differences between one’s real situation and one’s regulatory position” [p. 59]), he is mindful that the historical actors he is studying were not “automatons driven by rational choice” but “purposive, thoughtful agents who made self-conscious efforts to pursue what they saw as their best interests” (p. 8). While I have my reservations about this latter blanket characterization, I am persuaded by the clarity and elegance of the book’s analytical framework.

To make his case, Szonyi focuses on the stories of some twenty military households from the greater Fujian region as they are recorded in their family genealogies. Such records are not without their problems, Szonyi reckons. But if they are read judiciously and, whenever possible, against other official accounts, he argues, family genealogies—even if they were compiled long after the Ming dynasty—could indeed allow the historian to gain access to the perspectives of ordinary military households. Thus the reader is introduced to families whose stories illustrate how individual households selected family members to fulfill their military obligations (chapter 1) as well as how such households maintained ties with relatives serving in the army to take advantage of the benefits linked to their military registration (chapter 2). The reader is presented also with stories that demonstrate how those who were stationed in military garrisons sometimes took advantage of their special status to engage in illicit activities (chapter 3) as well as how such military families otherwise sought to integrate themselves into the local societies through the institutions of marriage, worship, and education (chapter 4). And the reader is introduced to stories that illustrate how soldiers and their families in military colonies (which offered support to military garrisons) became “adept at turning the differences between their land and ordinary land to their own benefit” (chapter 5) as well as how they, too, sought to integrate themselves into their local communities (chapter 6).

For Szonyi, the stories he relates in his book are significant for a number of reasons. For a start, he would point out, some of the social consequences of the *wei suo* system

<sup>1</sup>James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

have in fact survived the Ming dynasty (chapter 7) and could be observed even to this day. Second, the variety of strategies deployed by the Ming military households not only challenges the conventional view of state-society relations as a zero-sum game but also testifies to the importance in the political realm in pre-twentieth-century China of “using informal institutions to mediate with the state and its agents” (p. 219). Third, the case of Ming dynasty China may not be an isolated one; “[d]id early modern governance mark the moment,” Szonyi ponders, “when getting closer to the state, being seen by the state, talking like a state, could be used to serve one’s interests, generating new patterns of everyday politics” (p. 233)? If the answer is affirmative, comparing and contrasting the art of being governed as it was practiced in different political or geographic contexts may well prove to be a promising avenue for comparative history.

The most fascinating—but also most vexing—aspect of *The Art of Being Governed* is its heavy reliance on family genealogies. While Szonyi, who has also written a book titled *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford University Press, 2002), is no doubt aware of the limitations and shortcomings associated with this genre, to this reviewer at least, there remains in his approach a degree of tension between rhetoric and reality. In particular, while much of Szonyi’s analysis is based on the assumption that the strategies described were actually carried out (military duties were delegated, goods were smuggled, marriages were arranged, temples were constructed, etc.), perhaps to lighten the burden of veracity placed on the family genealogies consulted, he would go so far as to argue that we should treat the accounts found in them as “fictions.” “Families made use of certain narratives to explain a situation,” Szonyi explains. “[A]t the core of this analysis is the question of why they chose these narratives rather than others” (p. 29). I appreciate the need to make this analytical intervention, but I am not entirely convinced that this is sufficient to absolve the problems associated with the heavy dependence of family genealogies as historical evidence.

Finally, on a technical note, I wholeheartedly applaud Szonyi’s decision to place many of the primary documents used in this study on an openly accessible website. As the scholarly community continues to explore the potential and the limitations of the digital world, figuring out how best to share one’s “raw materials”—and rendering one’s research more transparent—will be an increasingly essential task. It is my hope that the physical form of the scholarly monograph will remain, but I would certainly encourage all of us to leverage the ever-evolving state of technology to share our research.

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*Silk, Slaves, and Stupas: Material Culture of the Silk Road.* By SUSAN WHITFIELD. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. xi, 339 pp. ISBN: 9780520281783 (paper, also available in cloth and as e-book).  
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Susan Whitfield’s *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas* is not only about the history of the Silk Road; it is a dialogue that oscillates between the people and the objects that traveled along the Silk Road. It is a book on material culture, an approach historians have