Book Reviews

Localizing Learning: The Literati Enterprise in Wuzhou, 1100–1600 by Peter K. Bol. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2022. Pp. xiv + 393. $70.00 hardcover.

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Localizing Learning is a study of literati culture in the five centuries that spanned the middle and late imperial periods of China. At the center of the inquiry is "learning" (*xue* 學), an enterprise that combined the literati's literary-philosophical endeavors and political achievements in their twofold role as scholar-officials. The study takes a distinctively local perspective, tracing the development of learning in the specific southern locality of Wuzhou 婺州 (modern-day Jinhua 金華). The book demonstrates that the Wuzhou literati devised different agendas of learning in accord with changing times and developed a cohesive identity based on their localized intellectual tradition. The Wuzhou literati identified their town with learning, and learning with their town, which opens a unique window onto the nationwide development of Neo-Confucianism from its heyday to its eclipse.

Localizing Learning features eight chapters, covering four major stages of historical development. The first three chapters address the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the literati were at the peak of their cultural and political influence. Chapter 1 features Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137–1181), the famous scholar who introduced Neo-Confucianism to Wuzhou students and established a local learning community. Chapter 2 presents the polemics and dynamics of Wuzhou intellectual life between the 1100s and 1200s, including phenomena such as contestations between different Neo-Confucian curricula after Lü Zuqian's passing, a flourishing printing industry, and the literati's use of argumentative writings as a means of learning. Chapter 3 focuses on three thirteenth-century "category books" (*leishu* 類書), which demonstrate a new cultural goal that combined wide and varied interests in

knowledge, or "comprehensiveness," with a commitment to organizational cohesion, or "coherence" (p. 87). The authors recorded various experiences in nature and culture not as random, scattered facts but as an organized demonstration of certain perspectives and arguments.

Chapter 4 moves to the transitional centuries between the 1200s and 1300s, when the so-called Four Jinhua Masters—the pivotal figures in the emerging Wuzhou tradition of learning—erupted into history. Bol introduces the four thinkers by delineating their stances on the central metaphysical issue in Neo-Confucianism, that the universe was structured by a grand unitary "coherence" (*li* 理; conventionally translated as "principle") and its various specific manifestations. This thesis designated two tasks of learning: extensive inquiries into the myriad manifestations of phenomena and a deep understanding of the ultimate coherence where all specifics unified. The Four Masters held different priorities between the two charges; some—for instance, He Ji 何基 (1188–1268)—emphasized the importance of piecemeal investigations, while others—such as Wang Bo 王柏 (1197–1274)—foregrounded the primacy of understanding unity.

Chapters 5 and 6 present learning during the Mongol Yuan rule, a time of existential crisis for the literati who lost access to ruling power. The literati switched their focus from moral philosophy to literary achievements, a transition Bol characterizes as an effort to "unite literati learning" (p. 180). Chapter 6 presents another key development in the Yuan, the emergence of two cohesive identities based on "self-conscious localization"—one based on the common legacy of Wuzhou learning and the other on membership in local lineages (p. 227). The articulation of these identities was how the literati responded to the political crises; after being deposed from ruling power, the erstwhile elites intended to "govern" in the arenas of communal learning and lineage.

Chapters 7 and 8 address the last historical stage (1400s–1600s), after the Ming dynasty replaced the Mongols and restored Han Chinese rule. Even though the literati had reinstated their status as a ruling elite nationwide, scholars in Jinhua experienced another century of doldrums due to the early Ming emperors' attempt to assert centralized authority over local power groups. Later, a revival of Wuzhou learning materialized with the rise of Zhang Mao 章懋 (1436–1521), who was committed to constructing the history of Wuzhou learning and resuscitating the legacy of the Four Masters. During the time of Zhang and

his successors, Wuzhou learning also witnessed an ideological change in step with the statewide development of Neo-Confucianism, as Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) orthodoxy met a major challenge from Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), who asserted that the central means of learning resided in one's innate moral capacity instead of external inquiries. The famous Zhu-Wang division galvanized debates between two increasingly polarized intellectual camps among Wuzhou literati.

Chapter 8 concludes the book by adding a new case, that of Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602), who began to turn away from Neo-Confucianism by glossing over the issue of self-cultivation and prioritizing verifiable empirical inquiries. Hu's scholarship seemed to fit the broad transition from Neo-Confucianism to "evidential learning" (*kaozheng xue* 考証學), the new mainstream in the last centuries of imperial China.

In addition to the main text, *Localizing Learning* provides six appendices with a wealth of valuable information. Five appendices present bibliographical information on writings by Wuzhou scholars as well as biographical and literary anthologies. Appendix 6.1 is a comprehensive introduction to the digital data used in this book, including an overview of the China Biographical Database (CBDB), the data for Wuzhou based on CBDB, and the details of the kinship and social network queries.

Localizing Learning will be a must-read for scholars of premodern China for multiple reasons. First, it is innovative intellectual history that adopts an illuminating local perspective and yet resists a sharp dualism between local and national histories. The book effectively presents a translocal narrative in which the vicissitudes embedded in Jinhua society and broader intellectual trends mutually inform each other. *Localizing Learning* is one of a kind in the current scholarship on Chinese thought and opens up new possibilities for a classic subject of study.

Second, *Localizing Learning* is a thoughtful response to and systematic integration of the recent structural developments in premodern China studies in the Anglophone world. It adroitly joins an intellectual-historical perspective with the interest in local society held by social historians, a key line of inquiry that has defined the landscape of Song, Yuan, and Ming studies in the past three decades. *Localizing Learning* is also a compelling demonstration of the efficacy of the digital tools China scholars have developed, particularly the CBDB project,

a potent generator of cutting-edge scholarship in China studies and the digital humanities at large. Bol's use of digital tools demonstrates how increasingly indispensable distant reading has become for empowering new analysis. For example, the most fundamental evidence for the rise of the local Wuzhou identity resides in the quantitative analyses of kinship connections and scholarly networks.

A seasoned scholar of Chinese thought, Bol has written this book with an awareness of the overarching narrative formed on the basis of his entire oeuvre. *Localizing Learning* should be read along with Bol's *"This Culture of Ours"* and *Neo-Confucianism in History* for a series of consistent themes that has structured his analysis of literati culture, such as the competition between the literary and the philosophical-moral in the changing curriculum, as well as the socio-intellectual credentials of a literatus.[1] Most commendably, Bol points out how his new findings in *Localizing Learning* would correct his previous work—namely, by showing that the maturity of Neo-Confucianism did not simply cancel out the social prestige associated with literary achievements or eliminate a sustained interest in broad empirical learning.

As Bol states, he remains committed to an intellectual-historical goal in the process of integrating practices and ideas, a vision that will continue to grow with further analytical refinement. An inspirational arrangement in this book is the deployment of "coherence," a major Neo-Confucian concept, as a framework for analyzing the literati's writing practice. Bol's treatment of "coherence," nevertheless, seems more naturalistic than what Neo-Confucian metaphysics permits. In the examples of "category books," what Bol identifies as "coherence" seems to be any discernable authorial intention—a relatively ordinary byproduct of thinking and writing, something more modest than what *li* should be with its commitments to strong metaphysical theses. The current argument rests on the assumption that many other similar texts would not feature any discernible analytical patterns except for some minimal ordering of things as stand-alone facts, which would be a tenuous case to make.

Another concept that will benefit from further refinement is *bo* 博, breadth of learning. While Bol frames "broad learning" as an

[1] Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992); *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008).

independent, marginal intellectual enterprise in the overall argument, in specific discussions across the book he also correctly notices that erudition was an aspect attached to mainstream learning agendas. Indeed, the multidimensional existence of *bo* deserves a pluralistic analysis. A simple way of differentiation is to see whether *bo* was the byproduct or main product of learning. For Zhu Xi and many of his Wuzhou followers, a broad understanding of the world was the byproduct of the exercise of Neo-Confucian cognitive-conative exercise, whereas for Hu Yinglin and scholars committed to evidence-oriented perception, it was the principal outcome, a crucial testimonial for the efficacy of their new methodology.

With its power to inspire and invigorate, *Localizing Learning* will be a field-shaping influence on the study of premodern Chinese thought and society in the decades to come. The book anticipates the future by amplifying the many exciting possibilities emerging from the present.

A Fictional Commons: Natsume Sōseki and the Properties of Modern Literature BY Michael K. Bourdaghs. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 228. $102.95 cloth, $26.95 paper, $26.95 e-book.

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In *A Fictional Commons*, Michael Bourdaghs writes in the lineage of moral criticism on Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石, which descends from Etō Jun 江藤淳. Underneath his elaborations of Sōseki's intellectual affiliations (William James, most prominently) and his informing intellectual and material contexts (changes in property relations, most prominently), *A Fictional Commons* is also fueled by Bourdaghs's affective encounter with a novelist and literary theorist he decidedly loves, and on whom he pins utopian hopes. The book is conceptually charged by the metaphor of economic exchange. As he writes,

> If my wager is successful, I will persuade you that with Sōseki, literature becomes a playful, noninstrumental site for imagining a different economy, a new commons, alternate modes of communal owning—which is to say, sharing. (p. 12)