

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Lee, Christina H. (ed.). Western Visions of the Far East in a Transpacific Age, 1522–1657

Richard Raiswell

Volume 36, numéro 3, été 2013

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091042ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i3.20560>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Raiswell, R. (2013). Compte rendu de [Lee, Christina H. (ed.). *Western Visions of the Far East in a Transpacific Age, 1522–1657*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 36(3), 177–180. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i3.20560>

Pour les auteurs de ce volume, il va de soi que plusieurs formes de rhétorique ou d'éloquence féminine existent tout au long de l'Ancien Régime. Remarquable dans sa portée chronologique ainsi que thématique, ce livre vaut aussi pour la richesse et la rigueur de ses contributions. Mais sa force est parfois sa faiblesse, puisque pour le lecteur la variété des sujets peut représenter un véritable défi. Néanmoins, s'il est vrai que la rhétorique féminine demeure relativement négligée dans les études francophones, surtout comparées à la prolifération d'études à ce sujet en langue anglaise, comme le constate Diane Desrosiers dans son état des lieux, ce livre consiste en une contribution notable à ce domaine.

ANNICK MACASKILL, *The University of Western Ontario*

Lee, Christina H. (ed.).

Western Visions of the Far East in a Transpacific Age, 1522–1657.

Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 227 + xiii + 17 ill. ISBN 978-1-4094-0850-5 (hardcover) \$104.95.

Western Visions of the Far East is Ashgate's latest offering in its relatively new "transculturisms" series. By concentrating on the period between 1400 and 1700—that is, before the full-scale apparatuses of colonialism and imperialism were properly in place—the series aims to plug an important gap in the historiography of cross-cultural interactions by examining terms of contact and economies of exchange. This current collection of ten essays brings together scholars from an array of complementary disciplines to examine what Europeans knew—and thought they knew—about China and Japan in the second half of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries. For Christina Lee, the volume's editor, what distinguishes European discourses about the Far East during this crucial period is that they are underpinned by a genuine curiosity about the people, culture, and resources of this vast and distant region. But while its intentions are laudable, this book falls quite short of the mark. There are several useful and intriguing studies, but more than a few are methodologically problematic and do not engage with the debates in

recent scholarship on travel and the attendant problems of observation and representation.

Two studies in this collection stand out as particularly useful. Lee's own contribution, "Imagining China in a Golden Age Spanish Epic," examines the construction of the Far East in Luis Barahona de Soto's 1586 poem, *Las lágrimas de Angélica*. Intended as a continuation of Ludovico Ariosto's hugely popular *Orlando Furioso*, Barahona focused his narrative on the struggles of Angélica, queen of the Chinese empire, in her attempts to rid the land of the Tartars. As Lee points out, in developing his image of China as the commercial and cultural centre of the Far East, Barahona drew on the writings of the Iberian missionaries that were becoming available. But in order to make his work accessible in the marketplace, the poet was also obliged to pander to his audience's expectations and to include allusions to the marvellous Orient with its strange peoples, so familiar to his putative readers through medieval texts. As a result, Barahona's winnowing of new geographical intelligence through old prejudices offers a unique window into popular perceptions of the region.

In a very different mode, Mayu Fujikawa's "The Borghese Papacy's Reception of a Samurai Delegation and Its Fresco-Image at the Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome" looks at Paul V's accommodation of a legation of Japanese Catholics in 1615. This delegation had no official status; rather, it was the creature of a particular northern Japanese lord. Accordingly, as Fujikawa argues, how the mission was received in Europe and the significance with which it was endowed were functions of local politics and pretensions. Thus, to the pope, receiving the delegation before a large public audience afforded him an opportunity to flaunt his apparent global influence. By contrast, when the mission moved north to Tuscany, the Florentines received it coolly; engagement with the Far East was not an element of Florence's self-fashioned identity. In this respect, as Fujikawa adeptly shows, the delegation's reception in Europe can be read as an index of European pretensions in Asia.

Unfortunately, the rest of the collection is less informative. Juan Gil's "Chinos in Sixteenth-Century Spain" endeavours to reconstruct the lives of three Asians resident in Spain—likely Chinese—from snippets gleaned from documents in the *Archivo General de Indias* in Seville. But beyond piecing together these sightings, the author offers no analysis. Several other papers are concerned with decidedly ahistorical questions. In sharp contrast to Fujikawa's approach to an analogous instance, Marco Musillo critiques the 1584 Tenshō

embassy to Italy through the lens of a static, essentialized definition of “embassy” derived from Torquato Tasso’s *Il Messaggiero* in order to determine if they were “real” ambassadors. For his part, Liam Matthew Brockey asks if the early seventeenth-century Portuguese missionary António de Gouvea might be considered one of the founders of modern sinology.

In many ways Brockey’s paper encapsulates one of the fundamental problems with this collection: its reluctance to engage with the *European* context in which many of the historical actors operated and situated their studies. For Brockey, what constitutes a modern sinologist is someone who links philology with the analysis of Chinese history and thought. But by this definition, it would be more historically appropriate to view Gouvea as a humanist—the heir of the European scholars of Hebrew in the sixteenth century, and of Latin and Greek in the fifteenth and fourteenth—rather than the prophet for a set of discursive structures hitherto unanticipated. This is a significant problem because it means that any assessment of Gouvea risks misconstruing the intellectual structures within which he thought he was operating and the rhetorical forms in which his observations were subsequently deployed.

More fundamentally, though, most of the papers in this collection treat the ontological status of “observation” and its relationship to “reportage” uncritically even though this was intensely contested territory in Europe at precisely this period. As many commentators at the end of the sixteenth century stressed—and as a growing number of modern studies in both the history of science and the history of travel have suggested—what is observed and the significance with which it is invested are a function not just of the assumptions and prejudices of the observer but of his or her place in the social geography of the day, and of the politics of knowledge production particular to the communities to which observers belong and to which they choose to communicate their findings. Enlightenment pretensions to objective, unbiased, and disinterested observation were ideals yet to be contemplated in the transpacific age. This seems a striking omission in a collection about western visions of the Far East.

Of the ten papers included here, seven deal with some aspect of the Iberian experience of the Far East. Two others deal with Italy, and one with an “Englished” redaction of Matteo Ricci. While this emphasis on Iberians is, as Lee points out, a useful corrective to trends in the existing literature, the lack of any engagement with the Dutch context in particular is unfortunate. Lee justifies this omission by stressing that “all knowledge of East Asia was almost

exclusively filtered through Portuguese and Spanish (and to a lesser extent, Italian missionaries)” (6) during this period. It is not clear, though, why the accounts of the voyages of the English and Dutch East India Companies that were published through the first half of the seventeenth century cannot be said to have had any impact on western visions of the Far East.

In the final analysis, this collection is marred by some methodological problems that stem from a reluctance to engage with the European context in which the figures under examination functioned. In order to be effective, trans-cultural analysis must engage with both observed and observer.

RICHARD RAISWELL, *University of Prince Edward Island*

Levack, Brian P.

The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. Pp. 346 + xii. ISBN 978-0-300-11472-0 (hardcover) \$35.

The last 30 years have seen the publication of a number of important studies examining the problem of demon possession in medieval and early modern Christianity. While these have added much to our understanding of the expression, diagnosis, and treatment of this phenomenon in particular social, historical, and geographical contexts, Brian Levack's *The Devil Within* is the first to offer a comprehensive treatment of the field as a whole. Spanning the period from the New Testament to the present, Levack examines a vast array of case studies taken from across the Christian west in an attempt to understand what was happening in the minds and bodies of the afflicted and those who encountered them. The result is a masterful work that will doubtless remain the standard introduction to the field for some time to come.

In accounting for possession behaviour, Levack explicitly eschews modern naturalistic explanatory paradigms: most putative demoniacs, he asserts, were not frauds; nor were they all suffering from some identifiable mental or physical illness. Certainly some of the symptoms manifested by demoniacs map closely onto various neurological or muscle-control disorders that are now well understood; for Levack, however, the process of retrospective diagnosis is