

Island of Guanyin: Mount Putuo and Its Gazetteers. Marcus Bingenheimer. Oxford University Press, 2016. i-xii + 283 pp. Seventeen b/w illustrations. Hb., \$144. ISBN: 978-0-19-045619.

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Given their high degree of specificity and the rich nature of their varied contents, gazetteers are an invaluable resource for historians. They provide insights into a region or landmark by way of details concerning local worthies and social institutions, and the political, economic, and cultural dynamics that inform the locality. It is precisely because these primary sources are such a valuable research tool that Marcus Bingenheimer's book commends itself to the attention of historians and Buddhist scholars.

Despite its title, *Island of Guanyin* is not a book principally about the “bodhisattva of compassion,” nor does it provide insights into Buddhist doctrine or the place of Guanyin within the lives of devoted monastic and lay followers. Instead it remains almost entirely at a meta-level of analysis and discussion in order to survey and assess the nature of the gazetteer as an elite historical genre. Mount Putuo thus serves as an illustrative case-study (2), mined in order to substantiate some very fundamental and useful theoretical observations. First, the book provides a sustained, detailed, and compelling argument for considering gazetteers less as passive encyclopedic containers of local data in the forms of, for example, maps, poetry, and travelogues but rather as a kind of textual nexus generated from an intersection of a compiler's biases, motivations and constraints, and the political, social, and economic forces brought to bear on those personal factors. Gazetteers too represent a process of selection; compilers are responsive to earlier gazetteers and to the wider textual representations of a site. Second, striking a postmodern tone, gazetteers are described as part of a self-reflexive, mutually constitutive feedback loop of textualization (12–13) in which place is partly manufactured through the process of textualization, while that textually constituted “place” influences successive representations in future gazetteers and other texts that contribute to the *imaginaire* of, in this case, Mount Putuo. Third, a basic premise of the book is that “single events, objects, and persons afford insights by being both particular and typical at the same time” (190); there is no pretence at providing a broad historical narrative and caution is expressed concerning the possibility of extrapolating from the particular to wider conclusions (190).

Chapters are organized around the basic structure of gazetteers and are as follows: 1. “We Confucians” – Prefaces and Postscripts, 2. Landscape and Map, 3. Foundation Legends and Miracle Tales, 4. Elements of Landscape, 5. People, Biographies, 6. Inscriptions, 7. The Poetic Landscape of Mount Putuo, 8. Travelers and Pilgrims. Each of these is populated by a small group of illustrative “exhibits” according to the section within which it occurs. The various sets of exhibits provide a range of impressions drawn from nine core gazetteers spanning the Song Dynasty (960–1279), represented by the 1361 *Butuoluojia shan zhuan* 補陀洛迦山傳 of Sheng Ximing 盛熙明 (fl. 1361), to Wang Liansheng’s 王连胜 1999 *Putuoluojishan zhi* 普陀洛迦山誌. The organization of the book, parallel to that of temple gazetteers, serves well to highlight both the stability of structure and of genres constituting the sections while juxtaposing those continuities against considerable shifts in focus and modes of expression. Chapter 6 discusses inscriptions. Unlike the gazetteers that record their content, inscriptions are literally constituents of place as part of the topography. Despite their apparent stability of form and place they reflect changing contexts, not simply recording the flux of significant events, but also less obvious shifts in the register of these “documents;” to wit, for example, the decidedly devotional tone of Shi Hao 史浩 (1106–1194) recording his vision in 1148 of Guanyin (131–134) from the standpoint of a Song politician of high standing. This contrasted with Zhou Yingbin’s 周應賓 (d. 1626) inscription of c. 1607 (134–138) that takes a much more distant and even directly critical tone (138), associated with the constraints of a literati official of the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The book is replete with examples demonstrating the continually shifting discourse that is both beneath the “smooth surface” while yet influencing that surface and the place it informs.

Three minor suggestions: First, the quality of many illustrations is poor. Likely this stems from economic imperatives associated with the cost of publication and was beyond the control of the author. This type of illustration is notoriously difficult to reproduce but it would have been helpful to have included larger images as they are integral to the text and could add much to the discussion if their content was more readily discernible. Secondly, and once again this is likely to be associated with cost-constraints related to the number of pages, but Chinese text of translated materials would have been very helpful and could have been included as a brief appendix. Chinese text for the poetry-chapter was included and was very helpful. Finally, a strength of this work is its social and cultural focus; the author stands back to survey larger forces at work and adopts straightforward non-essentialising language. This approach sits uncomfortably

alongside the theology of the world as divided into separate domains of “sacred” and “secular” associated with Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). The book would not suffer were references to the superfluous “manifesting of the sacred” and “hierophanies” expunged from the work. The book can easily stand on its foundation of social and political history buttressed, as it is, by careful textual scholarship.

This rich and engrossing book is accessible to non-specialists but is assuredly a valuable resource for specialist researchers who seek a deeper appreciation of the complexities associated with temple gazetteers as products of the wider forces that informed them.