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**Yingcong Dai.** *The White Lotus War: Rebellion and Suppression in Late Imperial China.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019. 664 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-295-74545-9.

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With *The White Lotus War: Rebellion and Suppression in Late Imperial China*, Yingcong Dai provides the definitive history of a key juncture in the trajectory of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Scholars have long identified the uprising of White Lotus sectarians and the prolonged campaign to squelch it as the pivot between eighteenth-century florescence and nineteenth-century declension. Before the rebellion, the Qing ranked along with the Habsburgs and the Ottomans as one of the early modern world's most capable empires. Under the energetic management of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–95), they vastly expanded the boundaries of the preceding Ming dynasty (1368–1644), incorporating broad swaths of Inner and Northeast Asia into a self-consciously multiethnic empire. After the rebellion—with a depleted treasury and Qianlong's son, the Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796–1820), chastened by the failure of his early reform efforts—the internal dislocations and foreigner-inflicted humiliations to come gradually shifted from inconceivable to inevitable.

Dai performs an autopsy of unprecedented precision, laying bare the exact combinations of personal interest and institutional vulnerabilities that catalyzed the rupture in the capacity of Qing rule. As is often the case with Qing history, a surfeit rather than deficit of sources has been the obstacle to past scholarly efforts. *The White Lotus War* does an immense service in combing through the vast material produced by the Qing state during the war and its contentious aftermath. It details with clarity the complicated interface of moving parts, from emperors and metropolitan officials to imperial kinsmen and Mongols in the banner armies, Green Standard Army fighters, and locally raised troops deployed outside their own region, down to the provincial and county officials charged with provisioning the soldiers.

Challenging conventional wisdom at every turn, Dai consistently highlights the import of her own findings while providing minute details of the campaign. Her most significant contribution is convincingly demonstrating that the greatest damage inflicted on the Qing imperial apparatus during the conflict came not from the sectarian partisans, but from the Qing's own generals in the field and officials in the impacted provinces. Wartime salary hikes and ample opportunities for embezzlement effectively disincentivized decisive victory for the generals and their civilian collaborators. Dai concludes counterintuitively that it was precisely the lack of military threat posed by the rebels that permitted Qing generals to focus on their own self-enrichment. Dai's other significant interventions in the existing scholarly literature include: an assertion of primacy of economic interest over devotional fervor as a motivating fac-

tor for sectarian organizers; explanation of how late-Qianlong-period efforts to formalize procedures for military spending prompted fiduciary workarounds that spiraled out of control in the White Lotus conflict; documentation of the prominent role of militias *qua* mercenaries paid by the state—rather than self-defense troupes mobilized by local elites—in conducting the campaigns and complicating the demobilizations; and demonstrating that construction of fortifications was *not* a decisive factor in resolving the conflict.

*The White Lotus War* consists of seven chapters bookended by an introduction and conclusion. The chapters effectively fall into two parts: a chronological narrative of the campaign (chapters 1–5) and diachronic analyses of military staffing (chapter 6) and a tally of the overall expenditures in the conflict (chapter 7). Fourteen maps provide welcome guidance in the geographical contours of the conflict, which centered in the topographically and administratively challenging mountainous regions of the shared border between Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Hubei.

The account of the campaign itself begins with the clandestine organization of multicentered uprisings, proceeding through the quasi-coordinated outbreak of the rebellion and its quick descent into quagmire. It continues with a discussion of the reform efforts Jiaqing implemented after his father's passing, including the removal of his father's notorious favorite, Hešen, and Jiaqing's own failed effort to create an analogous figure for himself in Nayancheng, whom he dispatched to the front to acquire military experience. Jiaqing's reforms soon failed; Dai attributes this to the power of vested interests and Jiaqing's own indecisiveness, which caused a rapid loss of credibility with those serving under him. The first part ends in tapering anticlimax, with Jiaqing declaring a definitive victory after years of blown deadlines and with pockets of rebels defiantly unpacified. Educators considering this book for classroom use should not be dissuaded by its length: these first five chapters can stand on their own and are within the upper limit of a week's assignment for an upper-division undergraduate course or graduate seminar.

Given the nature of the primary-source base, there is little in the way of impacted civilians speaking for themselves in *The White Lotus War*. Those arrested as sectarian partisans were often interpellated as the enemy the Qing state told itself it was fighting: the inappropriateness of the White Lotus moniker to the groups involved in conflict is ample testimony to the extent to which lay Buddhists were and remain defined by others. Dai does not convey a vivid sense of what it felt like to live in the tidal zone of conflict, a perspective that has become increasingly visible in recent works on the Taiping Civil War (1851–64), such as Stephen R. Platt's *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War* (2012), Tobie Meyer-Fong's *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China* (2013), and Xiaofei Tian's translation of Zhang Daye's *The World of a Tiny Insect: A Memoir of the Taiping Rebellion and Its Aftermath* (2013). Dai does convey the brutality suffered by the noncombatants caught between dueling forces prone to conscription/kidnapping and mass executions. Many battles were waged with cushions of civilians protecting sectarian and Qing forces; as Jiaqing was well aware, the dead then bolstered the Qing generals' headcounts of slain rebels. To the index entries "women, roles in sectarian movement" and "women, sale of," one could also add "women and children, violence against," as fleeing sectarian partisans often abandoned or slaughtered their own intimates, while sexual violence was also committed by Qing militias. In terms of human-scale perspectives on this conflict, Dai's remarks on injured and wounded soldiers raise the possibility that her sources could be used for a needed cultural and social history of disability in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century China.

*The White Lotus War* builds on Dai's previous monograph, *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibets: Im-*

*perial Strategy in the Early Qing* (2009), in enhancing the vitality of the field of Qing military history in a manner that will be of interest to anyone whose work deals with Qing studies, early modern empires, and military modernization.

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