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Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall. *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014. 304 pp. $60.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-295-99450-5.

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In conjunction with the exhibition at the British Museum in 2014, the art historian Craig Clunas and Jessica Harrison-Hall, curator of Chinese ceramics at the museum, have co-edited this informative accompanying volume. The book features not only wonderful images of a wide variety of artifacts such as portraits, paintings, books, porcelain, furniture, clothing, and jewelry from fifteenth-century Ming China, but also a series of insightful essays. While many exhibits came from the British Museum collections, some items were loans from various museums in the United Kingdom, China, Korea, France, Germany, and the United States, symbolizing the global nature of the topic at hand. In this volume, Clunas and Harrison-Hall argue that the first half of the fifteenth century, in particular from 1403 to 1449, was a time that defined and changed China. These fifty years, during the reigns of the Yongle, Hongxi, Xuande, and Zhengtong emperors, were formative years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) politically, culturally, and diplomatically, bookended by the Yongle emperor's victory in the civil war and the Zhengtong emperor's defeat and capture by the Mongols at Tumu Fort.

Together, images of the artifacts and the essays provide a wonderful visual and analytical assessment of these fifty years of the Ming Dynasty, a time period that has not been of exceeding interest among scholars. Clunas and Harrison-Hall divide the book into six chapters, each focusing on a major theme that defined the Ming Dynasty. In his introductory chapter, Clunas argues that this fifty-year period became a "second founding" of the Ming Dynasty. What defined the Ming Dynasty—trade, the famous blue and white porcelain, the literati class, among others—had their formative years in the early fifteenth century. After Clunas's introduction in chapter 1, each of the remaining chapters focuses on a theme: court culture, military, culture, religions, and the wider world connection.

The main discussion on Ming military and warfare comes in the third chapter by David Robinson. This is part 1 of two chapters that focus

respectively on the arts of war (*wu*) and the arts of peace (*wen*), two pillars of the Ming Dynasty. In his chapter, Robinson examines the military campaigns of Ming China and its coercive force, like other early modern empires around the world. By examining the campaigns to the Mongolian steppes, the invasion and annexation of Đai Viêt (Vietnam), and naval expeditions to Southeast Asia, East Asia, and East Africa led by Admiral Zheng He, Robinson argues that these military efforts were more than the Yongle emperor's need to prove himself after he seized power in the civil war; they were part of the wider developments in Eurasia. Robinson traces the continuity from the previous Mongol Yuan Dynasty to the Ming. After overthrowing the Mongol empire that spanned much of Eurasia, the Ming court not only placed Mongols who surrendered to Ming in the upper echelons of its military, but was also keen on forging overland military alliances with selective Mongolian steppe powers in this "Mongolian-inflicted world" (p. 118). Ming's maritime expeditions also built on Mongolian trade networks. This continuity of the reach from Yuan to Ming to other parts of the world demonstrated a connection to the wider world.

The other side of the arts of war was the arts of peace. In the next chapter, Clunas analyzes the development of Ming culture, in particular the development of the written language, including calligraphy and printing. While this fifty-year period witnessed a flourishing of the courtly culture, there was also tight imperial control of the compilation and production of texts. Clunas examines important historical records such as ***Yongle da dian***, ***Great Canon of the Yongle Reign,*** but also argues that there were far fewer written sources during this time compared to later periods. This type of censorship was another way for the Ming court to gain and maintain control of its empire in a non-military context.

Timothy Brook concludes the book in chapter 6 with a further analysis of the Ming military and the wider world. He pushes back against the criticism that Ming closed its borders by the mid-fifteenth century by tracing how Ming China engaged with the wider world before its shift to border defense. Beyond Zheng He's famous maritime expeditions, Brook argues that the first half of the fifteenth century was a period in which Ming China embraced international influences. Not only did Ming emperors know about a vast world beyond China, but they also desired to project its power to the world. For instance, the Yongle emperor wanted to forge a pan-Asian network in the midst of concerns for instability on its northern borders. Tribute and trade during this time also brought about the movement of goods (such as porcelain out of China and cobalt from Persia) and people.

Other chapters show that this early Ming connection with the wider world manifested not only in overland campaigns and maritime expeditions, but also in non-military forms at home in the imperial court in Beijing and through religion. Harrison-Hall argues in chapter 2 that in the imperial court during the first half of the fifteenth century, the palace provided a "visual vocabulary" for the Ming culture, and imperial motifs were defined and standardized (p. 111). Underlying Harrison-Hall's analysis of the courtly culture is an interesting assertion of Ming's attitude to other cultures. For instance, not only was the Yongle emperor receptive to other cultures, but some palace women, eunuchs, and palace workers were from outside of China, and the cobalt for the famous Ming porcelain was from Persia.

In terms of religious beliefs and practices, Marsha Haufler argues in chapter 5 that religious beliefs were wide-ranging and fluid, as Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism (the Three Teachings), and other religions including Islam worked together. Political and religious motives also worked hand-in-hand, as demonstrated by court-sponsored religious spectacles, and personified by Zheng, a Muslim who embraced Buddhism.

This global perspective in its analysis on fifteenth-century Ming China is one of the greatest strengths of this volume. While many scholarly works have focused on Chinese encounters with Europeans in subsequent centuries, Chinese awareness of the wider world had been ongoing. According to Clunas, this exhibit at the British Museum was the first to examine this period in China and its connection with a wider Eurasian world. Rather than portraying "Chinese influence," however, it analyzes the "complex flows of people, goods and ideas that underlay its connectedness to its neighbours and beyond" (pp. 42-43). The authors in various chapters capably demonstrate that during the first half of the fifteenth century, China had a close connection to Eurasia. Ming's complex relationship with the Mongols, as manifested through warfare on the one hand and absorption of the military expertise and trade networks on the other, showed the entanglement of Ming's foundation in this more globalized context.

In addition to the stunning images, one of the pleasant surprises of the book comes from its discussion on Zheng He, the admiral who led the famous fleet on a series of large-scale maritime journeys from China to Southeast Asia and across the Indian Ocean to East Africa. Zheng's expeditions are well known, and many scholars have discussed Zheng and his improbable maritime journeys, especially in light of the six-hundredth anniversary of the feat. In addition to covering Zheng and his journeys in the essay on the military and in the concluding chapter on China's relations with the world, various authors in this volume discuss Zheng in different contexts in the volume, as a eunuch (chapter 1) and a practitioner of religions within the context of the tolerant religious environment in China (chapter 5). Although Zheng himself was Muslim, he embraced a mix of Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism. Not only did he sponsor the printing of Buddhist texts, he also helped restore certain Buddhist sites such as the Da Baoen Monastery in Nanjing.

While this volume is broad in scope, the editors could have considered several areas more fully. First is the geographical span of discussion within China. This book focuses on Beijing and northern China in general. With its extensive discussion on the courtly culture in Beijing, this is an understandable discussion, but the analysis on China is incomplete without a discussion on southern China. References to the south—of certain people and places—are scattered throughout the book, but there is no systematic discussion of the area. This might have to do with the artifacts on hand. Of the museums in China with which it partnered, they were all located in northern China. Second, the editorial focus on the court and the elites could be strengthened by a discussion on what the editors call the "ordinary people." The remarkable opening in the introduction about a boy saving his unnamed mother is a brilliant example of extracting and reconstructing the lives of these ordinary people in written texts. However, after that wonderful story, the book turns to emperors and elites. It is understandable that most objects on display at the exhibition belonged to the court and the educated elites. However, as Clunas maintains, stories of ordinary people were recorded and they would have been a much-welcomed addition to this volume. Finally, the absence of Chinese characters of names, places, and objects in the essays is unfortunate. Many images in this volume are captioned with the original Chinese titles, which provide wonderful references. The same could have been done for the essays as well.

Overall, this is a wonderful collection of both stunning images and thoughtful essays in a nicely printed volume that is large enough for the viewing of the images without the bulk. An important work in art history, it provides insight into the military in fifteenth-century China and adds to scholarly understanding of the otherwise understudied formative years of the Ming Dynasty that

set the foundation for what the empire was becoming.

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