

not detract from the book's value. While specialists might criticize Harari's loose treatment of evidence in their particular field of expertise, religious spokesmen might label Harari a heretic, and geneticists might bristle against Harari's call for limitations, *Sapiens* illustrates compelling and alarming reasons why humankind as a "Global Empire" should re-evaluate notions of "progress."

***Chen Cheng ji qi Xishi ji yanjiu* 陳誠及其西使記研究  
A Study of Chen Cheng and His Records of Embassy to the West]**

By WANG Jiguang (王繼光)

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Wang Jigong's meticulously researched study moves away from the conventional notion that Ming (1368-1644) China and Central Asia, known as the "Western Region" to the Chinese, were irreconcilably separate and hostile to each other. It offers a comprehensive examination of Chen Cheng (1365-1457), the most important Ming diplomat sent to Central Asia, and his travelogues - the *Xiyu xingcheng ji* (Record of a Journey to the Western Regions), a chronologically arranged diary that enumerates his trip, and the *Xiyu fanguo zhi* (Record of Foreign Countries in the Western Regions), a group of short essays that describes seventeen Central Asian towns he has visited. Containing a wealth of first-hand information on Central Asian natural environment, economic practices, as well as daily lives and religious customs,

the two travelogues were the most reliable source for Chinese knowledge of Central Asia in the following centuries.

The first chapter describes extant editions of Chen's two travelogues and then recounts the existing scholarship on them. Wang challenges the widely accepted Qing (1644-1911) scholars' comments on Chen's records in the *Siku quanshu zongmu* (Imperially Commissioned Catalogue of the Complete Collection of Four Treasuries) that many transliterations in Chen's works are wrong and most of his accounts are not trustworthy. This biased evaluation, as Wang argues, comes mainly from Siku scholars' general neglect of pre-Qing literature on borders and non-Han peoples and their careless analysis of different editions of Chen's works (pp. 11-12). Rather, Chen's travelogues stand as valuable historical records on fifteenth-century Central Asia and they offer insights into early Ming's foreign policies and its attitudes toward the outside world (pp. 28-29).

The following four chapters outline Chen's ancestry and examine his career prior to his embassies to the West. Several stations are important for his later life. First, after earning his *jinshi* degree in 1394, Chen was assigned the position of messenger (*xingren*) in the Bureau of Messengers (*xingren si*) in Nanjing, the agency that handled contact with foreign regions. This is where he would have gained his first diplomatic experience. Second, Chen was sent in early 1397 to China's southwestern borders in modern Guangxi to mediate a frontier dispute with the ruler of Annam. There, Chen's diplomatic talent and skills began to be recognized by the throne. Third, Chen's career was stalled in 1402 when the Jianwen Emperor (r. 1399-1402) was deposed by his uncle, the Yongle Emperor (r. 1403-1424), but only two years later he was summoned to return to the capital. This return was mainly due to his connections to his fellow provincials from Jiangxi, and it was these people who later played a deciding role in Yongle's decision-making to choose Chen to head the delegation to the far west.

Based on a comprehensive examination of Chen's own record *Liguan shiji* (Factual Records of Previous Offices) and other primary sources, Wang delineates in Chapter 6 Chen's five missions to the Western Region. The last two chapters are devoted

to Chen's two travelogues, *Xiyu xingcheng ji* and *Xiyu fanguo zhi*, respectively. The two works are not completely new to historians of Ming China, but some details about them have until now remained largely overlooked. The 1414 mission to Herat in fact divided after passing Turfan and since Chen joined the southern division, accounts in *Xiyu xingcheng ji* thus describe only what he saw or encountered on the southern route (p. 155). After comparing seven extant editions of *Xiyu fanguo zhi*, Wang concludes that the edition in *Zhushan wenji* (Collection of Essays by Chen Zhushan [Chen Cheng]) is "the most complete version" (p. 178) and therefore is "much better than all other editions" (p. 206). Appended to the study are Chen's *Liguan shiji* and his memorandum and poems submitted to the throne when he returned to Nanjing in 1415.

What emerges from Wang's extensive study of Chen Cheng and his two travel records is a vivid picture of the natural conditions and daily lives in fifteenth-century Central Asia, in particular in Herat. Much of his information seems to be quite accurate and, for most the part, his report is free of bias, as he makes an effort to be non-judgemental and only when his Confucian sense of morality is offended do his prejudices overtly reveal themselves. Wang's study thus invites us to question a few assumptions underlying the conventional view of Ming China's foreign relations. Although the Ming court reduced its foreign involvements and eventually terminated embassies to Central Asia after the death of Yongle in 1424, it appears that at least the early Ming rulers respected these specialists with an expertise in dealing with "barbarian affairs" and thus repeatedly sent them to their neighbors. Though they remained scornful of the "barbarians", they were surprisingly informed about, or at least interested in, foreign countries.

Overall, this is an impressive book. It enriches our knowledge about Ming China's foreign policies and relations by moving our focus from the sea to the continent. Zheng He's (1371-1433) voyages are certainly remarkable, but Chen Cheng's embassies are in many respects not less important. Firmly based on a prodigious body of primary sources, this book is a major contribution to the field and is likely to inspire future studies. I

sincerely hope that it will be translated into English so that a broader readership can also have access to such a meticulous and illuminating study.

***Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842-1943.***

By Emma Jinhua TENG

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Mixed racial heritage has often been obscured by legal and historical records, especially in the United States, where race was sometimes assumed to have been a definite and often biological category (e.g. p. 170). Emma Teng demonstrates that Chineseness was historically defined not only in terms of blood quantum and phenotype, but also in terms of community and kinship relations. She illustrates the choices that biracial couples and children made to choose particular identities within the legal, social, and cultural parameters of the U.S., China, and Hong Kong (e.g. p. 63, p. 197). Teng ends her book by concluding that racial mixing may help to ossify new categories rather than to blur old ones (p. 245). Nevertheless, by successfully demonstrating the latitude by which people could fashion their identities in history, given their particular situations (p. 215), Teng also opens up a greater degree of flexibility by which we may discuss race and multiculturalism today.

For the purposes of this book, Teng defines “Eurasian” in terms of Chinese and Caucasian (especially American and British) relationships. The book therefore does not include issues