

The Journal of Asian Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/JAS>

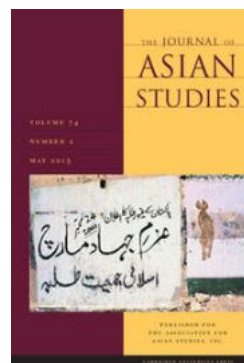
Additional services for *The Journal of Asian Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



***The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama.* Edited by C. T. Hsia, Wai-Yee Li, and George Kao. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. xiii, 409 pp. \ \$120.00 (cloth); \ \$40.00 (paper, ebook).**

Liana Chen

The Journal of Asian Studies / Volume 74 / Issue 02 / May 2015, pp 466 - 467

DOI: 10.1017/S0021911815000170, Published online: 27 May 2015

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0021911815000170

How to cite this article:

Liana Chen (2015). The Journal of Asian Studies, 74, pp 466-467 doi:10.1017/S0021911815000170

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

Despite these caveats, the author bases his argument on an extensive reading of secondary literature available in English, Chinese, and Japanese. The strongly discursive style could make the book a somewhat challenging read for undergraduates, but it still provides a valuable overview of the state of research and questions raised in the field. The author also offers a number of fresh interpretations that place China's monetary history firmly within a global context and create an impetus for further inquiry.

ELISABETH KASKE

Carnegie Mellon University
 ekaske@andrew.cmu.edu

The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama. Edited by C. T. HSIA, WAI-YEE LI, and GEORGE KAO. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. xiii, 409 pp. \$120.00 (cloth); \$40.00 (paper, ebook).
 doi:10.1017/S0021911815000170

Drama has long been marginalized by the Chinese literary elite or coopted (rather than appreciated in its own right) by historians into the generalized narratives about China's poetic *wen* literary tradition. In the English-speaking world, it has been a challenge to teach premodern Chinese drama in translation due to the lack of quality translations and accessible textbooks.

The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama is part of the most recent scholarly endeavors to advance the field and make translations of traditional Chinese dramas more readily available, especially translations of the earliest mature form of Chinese drama. A welcome addition to the classroom, this anthology introduces its readers to ten representative works of Yuan drama (also known as northern drama or *zaju*). The anthology is the culmination of the effort by two generations of sinologists, and has been long in the making. According to Jonathan Chaves, one of the translators, this project was initiated decades ago by C. T. Hsia and George Kao. Several of the graduate students in Hsia's seminar on Yuan drama at Columbia University participated in the project, and they have now become well-known scholars and translators. Wai-Yee Li oversaw the final editing and completion of the entire anthology.

The ten selected works are organized by the five most commonly found themes in early Chinese plays: history play (*The Zhao Orphan* and *Tricking Kuai Tong*), crime and punishment (*Selling Rice in Chenzhou* and *The Moheluo Doll*), folly and consequences (*The Eastern Hall Elder* and *The Tiger Head Plaque*), female agency (*Rescuing a Sister* and *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Wife*) and romantic love (*On Horseback* and *Over the Garden Wall* and *Scholar Zhang Boils the Sea*). The general introduction offers an eloquent and succinct account of the aesthetic and structural features of northern drama, its performance conventions, and the cultural and historical contexts in which northern dramas were produced and disseminated. The introductions to each individual work, on the other hand, provide explanations of each play's literary and historical sources, comparison with other Yuan plays that deal with similar stories or historical figures, and analysis of major themes and motifs.

Additionally, the anthology highlights the complexity of the editorial history of Yuan plays. The earliest extant northern dramas are a group of thirty Yuan plays collectively

referred to by modern scholars as “thirty *zaju* published during the Yuan dynasty” (*Yuankan zaju sanshi zhong*). While the significance of these Yuan editions has long been acknowledged, they present a major challenge to readers because they lack stage prompts or full dialogues that facilitate the advancement of the plot. Later editions by scholars of the seventeenth century may have brought to us more readable plays with standardized narrative structures and full-fledged characters, but they also bear a strong imprint of the moral values and ideologies representative of the Ming-dynasty elite culture. One has to ask to what extent can later redactions approximate the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Yuan textual traditions. As Wai-Yee Li argues in the introduction, “It is probably more useful to think of [a Ming edition] as a composite Yuan-Ming creation that contains both Yuan elements and Ming editorial changes” (p. 1).

This principle is reflected in the anthology’s treatment of textual variations, as it seeks to balance between restoring “authentic” Yuan texts and respecting the aesthetic value of Ming editors’ versions. In contrast to Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West’s recently published *The Orphan of Zhao and Other Yuan Plays: The Earliest Known Versions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), which is based on the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Yuan scripts, *The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama*’s choice of adopting scholar-turned-entrepreneur Zang Maoxun’s (1550–1620) seventeenth-century *Selection of Yuan Plays* (*Yuanqu xuan*) is backed by a different set of considerations. Zang’s edition not only is more influential throughout history, but also presents more coherent and readable texts, with plots trimmed and narrative sharpened. Readers would surely appreciate the meticulous annotations to each play, where textual variations are identified and explained.

To illustrate the structural and ideological differences between the Yuan edition and the canonized version by Zang Maoxun, the anthology also features two translations of the frequently taught and widely adapted play, *The Zhao Orphan*. The juxtaposition demonstrates how the Yuan play was Confucianized and transformed by the Ming literati.

The translations of the plays are a joy to read—they are lucid and accurate, with rhyming schemes that approximate the Chinese original. In contrast to currently available translations, the anthology features a wider variety of plays that would work well in world literature classes. For those who are interested in comparing different editions, this anthology serves as a decent complement to West and Idema’s *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010) and their most recent *The Orphan of Zhao and Other Yuan Plays: The Earliest Known Versions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

LIANA CHEN

George Washington University
liachen@gwu.edu

The Compelling Ideal: Thought Reform and the Prison in China, 1901-1956. By JAN KIELY. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014. ix, 403 pp. \$65.00 (cloth).

doi:10.1017/S0021911815000182

The Compelling Ideal is a thoughtful, rigorously researched, and meticulously detailed investigation into early twentieth-century Chinese penal reform, from the last decade of the Qing dynasty to the formative years of the People’s Republic of China