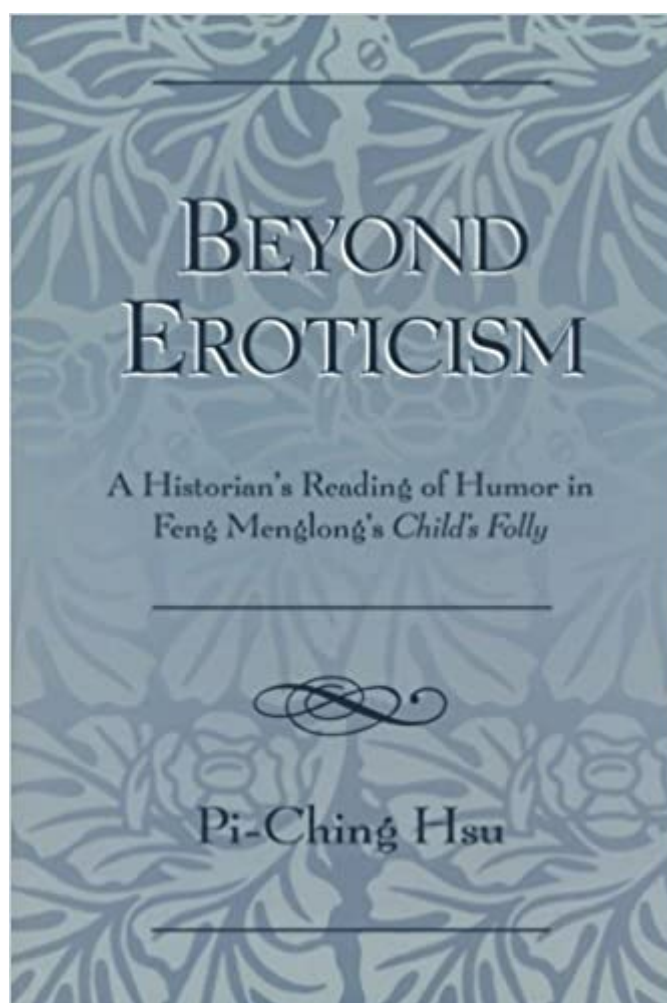


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Beyond Eroticism: A Historian's Reading Of Humor In Feng Menglong's Child's Folly



Synopsis

Beyond Eroticism translates and analyzes over forty songs and ninety jokes from Child's Folly, a trilogy of popular songs (Hanging Twigs), folksongs (Hill Songs), and jokes (Treasury of Laughs) compiled by Feng Menglong (1574-1646), a giant in late Ming (1368-1644) popular literature. Focusing on humor as the predominant characteristic of the "tactically forgotten" collections, the book offers a delightful study of the foibles, eccentricities, and anxieties of a broad cross section of late Ming society. The study also probes the inner world of the compiler as he reveals, unwittingly, the tensions in his own gender and class conceptions. Eroticism was Feng Menglong's trademark, but Hsu looks beyond that trademark, arguing that Feng used eroticism both to sell his books and to satirize the puritan state's orthodoxy and the "loose" love ethics of the masses. He did the former as a canny author of the commercial press, and the latter as a marginal member of the "gentry society"—a social elite who formed "public opinions" through employment of their cultural capital. An intellectual of high self-esteem, Feng Menglong took advantage of the transgressive nature of humor to project his social, cultural, and political criticism into his erotic, as well as non-erotic satire.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Pi-ching Hsu is Associate Professor in the Department of History at San Francisco State University. Professor Hsu has published several journal articles, written several book reviews, and served as a peer reviewer of article / book manuscripts. Professor Hsu received her Ph.D. in History from the University of Minnesota.

Lots of detail, extremely well documented, mostly easy to read; some parts drag down with the great amount of detail, and some conclusions are tenuous. Overall a great book on the literati of old China, and gives a sense of some parts of the society that aren't usually covered in history books.

Whenever a joke is analysed in an academic sense it risks becoming like the proverbial frog -- one can learn a lot by dissecting it but, in the end, it is still dead. A similar argument could easily be proposed for poetry. By the standards of academic texts this book is easily readable, informative, and manages to preserve the essence of the original intent. While the heavy (but necessary) analysis might make the appreciation of the jokes and poems somewhat less spontaneous, the writer still managed not make the text too tedious.

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