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# Vernacular Knowledge Transmission in Shi Chengjin's Guidebooks

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## Abstract

Shi Chengjin (*zi* Tianji, 1660-after 1739) was just a commoner-scholar without any relevant examination degree, but, throughout his long life, he nevertheless unfolded an untiring, prolific activity of writing in a broad variety of fields and genres (Altenburger 2009, 2015). While Shi's oeuvre also prominently included major collections of jokes and short stories that even gained him a certain degree of renown, the main body of his textual production might aptly be categorized as 'guidebooks' on numerous aspects of life, from education to the management of social relations, all the way to medicine, self-cultivation and the joys of life, informed by a syncretistic mindset. This author transmitted such vernacular knowledge to a 'middlebrow' audience who might have been able to comprehend his guidance also with a relatively modest background of education, for Shi was writing in a lowly style (*liyan*) that often approximated colloquial speech. Accordingly, he rarely refers to the Confucian classics or other cultural authorities, but often writes on the basis of his own life experience. The main concerns of his vernacular writings are the private and domestic world, focusing on ritual, the family, the body, and the self.

Shi Chengjin's varied oeuvre was initially privately published by his own sons, who produced editions of his collected works, by the telling title *Chuan jia bao* (Family Treasure). These eventually were being reprinted frequently and disseminated widely in commercial editions and have indeed remained in circulation up to our present time, which testifies to their striking impact history. While the fluctuating contents of the various *Chuan jia bao* editions still await a comprehensive bibliographical survey, they evidently include several major guidebooks and many dozens of minor pamphlets, some of which also may have been circulated independently. The present paper will lay a special focus on two of Shi's manuals dealing with issues of etiquette training and domestic ritual, entitled "Tongli zhiyao" (Essential knowledge of ritual behavior for children) and "Changli xuzhi" (Guide to everyday ritual), the latter of which includes actual performance scripts for typical social scenes.

By focusing on the field of vernacular everyday-life knowledge in the early 18th century, the popularization via guidebooks written in a simple language, and one early modern author's unique oeuvre of writings, the present paper addresses some of the core concerns of this workshop.

Roland Altenburger is Professor of East Asian Cultural History (Chinese Studies) at the Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg, Institute for East and South Asian Cultural Studies, since 2012. Prior to that he was an Assistant and Associate Professor in Chinese Studies at the University of Zürich. He received his doctoral degree in Sinology from the University of Zürich, in 1997, with a dissertation on terms of address in the novel *Rulin*

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waishi, and his habilitation (*venia legendi*) in Sinology at the University of Zürich, in 2001, with a study on swordswomen in Chinese fiction. He spent long research stays at Harvard University (1996-1998), at the National Central Library (Taipei, 1998), at Peking University (2010), and at Academia Sinica (Taipei, 2017). His main fields of research are the narrative literature of the late imperial period, representations of the local and landscape in literature (focusing on Yangzhou and Hangzhou), literary geography and cartography, and the cultural and social history of etiquette. His major publications include the monograph *The Sword or the Needle: The Female Knight-errant (xia) in Traditional Chinese Narrative* (Berne etc.: Peter Lang, 2009); the co-edited volume *Yangzhou, A Place in Literature: The Local in Chinese Cultural History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015); and the co-edited conference volume *Raum und Grenze in den Chinastudien (Space and Boundary in Chinese Studies, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016)*. Since 2017 he has served as the Dean of Studies of the Faculty of Arts (Philosophische Fakultät), at the University of Würzburg, and since 2019 as the President of the German Association of China Studies (Deutsche Vereinigung für Chinastudien, DVCS).