

# ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES 2018-2019 CHINESE LECTURE SERIES

## On Swindlers and How to Foil Them: Cautionary Tales from (and for) China

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Why do tales about swindlers flourish at certain times and places? In China, the swindle story has experienced bursts of popularity during the late Ming, the early Republican era, the early Mao era, and during the last twenty years. And comparable works exist around the world. What, for example, do Zhang Yingyu's *Book of Swindles* (Ming China, 1617), Richard King's *The New Cheats of London Exposed* (Georgian England, 1792), and P.T. Barnum's *The Humbugs of the World* (Reconstruction-era United States, 1867) have in common—and how do they differ? Swindle stories, clearly, serve a double purpose: they teach techniques for navigating perilous social environments, and they entertain. But their authors tend to frame these narratives within a questionable claim: that *ours* is an age of unprecedented peril. Focusing on the example of China, this talk will highlight one thread running through literary history: connoisseurship of the swindler's ingenuity.

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4:30-6:00 PM

Rutgers University  
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