

early Han literature is, in my eyes, essential for an adequate treatment of ritual debates and practices throughout the Han dynasty.

My last critical comment is directed not to the author but to the publisher. I cannot understand the decision to omit Chinese characters from the main text and relegate them to the glossary (which, alas, contains just a fraction of numerous *pinyin* transliterations scattered throughout the book). This might have made sense for a book targeted at a non-Sinological readership. Yet clearly the book, which jumps into the depths of Han political life with only minimal introduction of background information, is intended for specialists, for whom the absence of Chinese characters is a real minus, especially in view of the inexplicable exclusion of personal names from the glossary. Today, Chinese characters should be included in any study of Chinese history and culture as a matter of course.

My critical comments notwithstanding, Habberstad should be congratulated for his book. Scholars of early Han history will surely benefit from his manifold astute observations. I hope that the author will be encouraged to expand his treatment of the fascinating topic of the history and image of China's early imperial court.

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Women in Ancient China. By BRET HINSCH. Lanham, MD: ROWMAN AND LITTLEFIELD, 2018. Pp. xiv + 209. \$79.

Women in Early Medieval China. By BRET HINSCH. Lanham, MD: ROWMAN AND LITTLEFIELD, 2019. Pp. xx + 211. \$85.

In recent years, a number of scholars have produced significant studies of the role of women over the course of Chinese history. By far the most comprehensive in terms of coverage and scope is the ten-volume series *Zhongguo funü tongshi* 中國婦女通史 (History of Women in China; 2010), but there have also been important English-language monographs that attempt a *longue durée* analysis, such as Keith McMahon's study of empresses and palace women, *Women Shall Not Rule: Imperial Wives and Concubines from Han to Liao* (2013), as well as his *Celestial Women: Imperial Wives and Concubines from Song to Qing* (2016). With *Women in Ancient China*, a companion and prequel to his earlier study, *Women in Early Imperial China* (2002), Bret Hinsch undertakes the almost impossible task of summarizing for the general reader what is known about the condition of Chinese women from Neolithic times to the unification of China in 221 BCE.

Women in Ancient China opens with an account of the problems caused in Chinese academic circles by the state-supported doctrine that there was a "matriarchal" phase in the development of Chinese society, thus providing a useful introduction to the development of this theory and its ongoing influence. This is followed by four chapters describing the role of women in Neolithic societies, and in the Shang (ca. 1600–1046 BCE), the Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE), and the Eastern Zhou (771–221 BCE) dynasties. Covering such a vast period of time and such a huge geographical area in a couple of hundred pages poses exceptional challenges, some of which the author has explicitly recognized, and others that are not mentioned. One term, which it might be thought crucial to define, is "China." This volume deals with women in ancient China before China existed, and although the cultures in which they lived certainly existed geographically within the borders of what is now the People's Republic of China, that does not necessarily mean that they made any cultural contribution to later civilizations in the same region. This issue is raised by the author in one paragraph in the introduction, but that really does not go far enough. To take but one example, Liangzhu Culture (here dated to 3400–2500 BCE) represents a highly sophisticated civilization whose jade artworks have long been appreciated, but whose astonishing architectural achievements are only recently starting to be understood. The key sites associated with this culture, in and around Liangzhu in Zhejiang province, were eventually abandoned due to rising sea levels, which rendered the whole area uninhabit-

able until very recent times. Current research on the people of Liangzhu suggests that they migrated southward, eventually ending up in what is now Vietnam. Given the circumstances, the role played by Liangzhu people in constructing the gender norms governing the lives of Chinese women in later periods is likely to have been minimal to nonexistent; the presence of archaeological remains in a particular region should not be taken to imply cultural continuity. The chapter on the Neolithic period covers many thousands of years and sites scattered across China, which means that any conclusions can only be very tentative and sketchy.

Once the discussion moves toward epigraphical sources such as oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, the evidence of connections and continuity in the treatment of women—at least among the urban elite living in the Central States region—increases; nevertheless, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that women outside this very narrow social circle would not have recognized the strictures that governed the lives of those on the inside. However, any attempt to cover the status of women within the many ethnically diverse states of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, not to mention among the nomadic peoples of pre-imperial China, would have at least doubled the size of this book, and quite possibly defeated the object of the exercise—to provide a comprehensive overview, based on both transmitted texts and archaeological discoveries, of recent research on women's history aimed at students and general readers. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the evidence is not always as clear-cut as it sometimes appears, and that archaeologists and historians continue to bring their own views and prejudices to bear. Hence, tombs that are excavated with badly decayed remains may still be allocated as male or female based on the perception that accompanying grave goods are somehow masculine or feminine, with the concomitant impression being given that gender was significantly more strongly defined through material possessions in antiquity than was actually the case. In addition, this practice of ascribing gender to material objects is likely to be creating a serious underestimate of women's literacy and ownership of texts in the pre-imperial period. Many bamboo books have been discovered by tomb robbers rather than through controlled excavations, and even when there is compelling evidence that these texts were derived from a woman's grave, they are nevertheless standardly reattributed to male ownership.

The epilogue to *Women in Ancient China* features an interesting discussion of the development of the myth that evil women were always held responsible for the fall of Chinese dynasties. Bearing in mind how little political power women seem to have been accorded in Zhou dynasty society, even at the very highest levels of the ruling elite, it is astonishing that they were to be held accountable for the decline and fall of various regimes in a way that other factors, including government incompetence, corruption, and malpractice, foreign invasion, and natural disasters, were not. This short but incisive account provides a useful segue into the history of imperial China, in which the motif of the evil woman occurs again and again. In compressing so much detailed information into a manageable format, in covering so many different aspects of the lives of women in ancient China in an accessible way, *Women in Ancient China* represents a remarkable scholarly achievement.

In *Women in Early Medieval China*, Bret Hinsch provides an account of the key forces governing the lives of women after the breakup of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, and prior to the reunification of China under the Sui dynasty in 589 CE. This period in Chinese history saw enormous violence and social upheaval as the Han collapsed into the Three Kingdoms (220–280 CE), before seeing a short reunification under the Western Jin dynasty (266–316 CE), and then a more serious political fragmentation of the realm under the Sixteen Kingdoms (304–439 CE) and Northern and Southern dynasties (420–589 CE). The introduction to this volume explores the role of warfare in creating an atmosphere of considerable intellectual vitality as old certainties were called into question; this is then followed by eight chapters exploring different themes: family, mothers, politics, work, religion, learning, virtue, and ideals. The conclusion then discusses the ongoing tradition in China of viewing this period as highly positive for many women; as traditional gender norms were challenged, or simply ignored, women were able to develop a new subjectivity, a sense of themselves as individuals, which in turn allowed them to achieve success in areas that had previously been closed to them.

The women whose lives are described in this book are overwhelmingly derived from a Han Chinese ethnic background, and the only non-Han ethnic group given detailed consideration are the Xianbei.

This means that the southern aboriginal peoples of China, who were closely integrated into the Wu dynasty in the Three Kingdoms era and formed a disgruntled and discriminated-against group during the Southern Dynasties, get virtually no coverage at all. Likewise, during the Sixteen Kingdoms era, the impact of the cultural diversity found among the different states of Northern China, such as the Xiongnu (Former Zhao, Xia, and Northern Liang), the Jie (Later Zhao), and the Di (Former Qin), is not considered, nor is the later creolized Han-Xianbei elite that governed the Northern Qi dynasty. This gives a considerably flatter picture of the distinctions that undoubtedly existed, which would have had an important impact on the treatment of women. Even though Xianbei culture is treated in this volume in some detail, there are inaccuracies; for example, the author suggests that Northern Wei dynasty emperors had metal sculptures made representing women from the harem and then courtiers chose the one they liked best—thus, these monarchs “selected an empress in a deliberately frivolous manner to lower her standing in the eyes of the court” (p. 35). However, according to the *Weishu* 魏書 (History of the Wei dynasty), it seems that imperial wives had to make the metal sculptures themselves (what they represented, other than the human form, is not clear) and only a woman who succeeded could be honored as an empress, no matter how loved and favored she was by the emperor. Quite why skill in metalworking was so highly regarded at the Northern Wei dynasty court is not clear, nor is it known how it was determined that a sculpture was or was not successful, but it is highly unlikely that this was the humiliating proceeding suggested here.

The discussion of women’s work (specifically textile production) during this period also raises concerns, though these are far from unique to this book. Scholars often seem to underestimate the potential financial value of the textiles that women produced and overestimate the other tasks they could perform at the same time; there is also a distinct tendency to fail to grasp the amount of pleasure to be gained from skilled labor of this kind, perhaps because many academics no longer possess any kind of manual training. As early as the Han dynasty, skilled female textile workers paid the same basic rate of tax as landed men. This is a measure of the financial value accorded to the products of their labor and suggests that these women, as with textile workers in the late imperial era, were highly valued members of the community with the respect and social position that such status entailed. Furthermore, given that silk was frequently used as a form of currency in both early imperial and medieval China, the women who produced it were quite literally generating wealth. The texts that encouraged women to work hard at weaving were often explicitly wanting them to enrich themselves, their families, and by extension the entire realm. However, working at silk production would leave little time for other pursuits, and for weavers and embroiderers, hands damaged by rough work could not possibly produce delicate fabrics. It is for this reason that texts directing women to spend yet more hours at their looms have to be read with particular care—are they wanting women to acquire valuable skills and earn a good income, or do they valorize weaving coarse textiles like hemp, which would serve to keep the women that produced them in poverty and ruin their hands for more delicate and highly paid labor?

Women in Early Medieval China, like the other volumes in this series, provides a synthesis of a vast amount of disparate information, presented in an approachable and reader-friendly fashion for those wishing to gain an overview of the field and a grounding in the latest trends in research. It is perhaps inevitable that a synthesis of this kind will stress continuities and the way that ongoing traditions built upon earlier developments. The early medieval period was one that later generations would look back on in very different ways: conservatives would express horror at the assertive behavior of women and their “immorality,” while those who viewed the relaxation of traditional gender norms more positively would stress the comparative freedom women enjoyed at this time to express their opinions and personalities. In discussing the lives of early medieval women, a difficult juggling act is involved—the historian must at once consider the attitudes of the time toward women’s behavior (insofar as they can be comprehended), the interpretations of later generations of commentators and historians who form the prism through which much of our knowledge of this period is filtered, and contemporary Western expectations about women’s lives, which are different again. In this particular volume, given the quantities of material that survives from the period, it would have been possible to include the writings of women authors, to allow readers to hear their voices. All too often, histories of women report men writing as women, men writing about women, and men interpreting the lives of women according to

their own lights. Where women's own writings survive, it would seem incumbent upon us to take their words seriously, and allow them to speak for themselves.

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Spatial Imaginaries in Mid-Tang China: Geography, Cartography, and Literature. By AO WANG.
Amherst, NY: CAMBRIA PRESS, 2018. Pp. xii + 362. \$119.99.

In this book, Ao Wang expands and complicates our understanding of mid-Tang (roughly from the 790s to the 820s) literature by exploring the interplay between “geographical advancements” and “spatial imaginaries” (p. 1). This is an unexplored realm in the study of Tang literature. By “geographical advancements,” the author means “progressions in the geographical understanding of space,” a broad concept that includes “the accumulation of new geographical knowledge,” “a heightened geographical awareness,” “new spatial perspectives on the world,” and “new ways of thinking about human inhabitation” (p. 1); “spatial imaginaries” refers to “the conceptual counterpart of this phenomenon within literature” (p. 2). In this project, the author is not discussing the influence one had on the other, but how geography and literature developed hand in hand in the mid-Tang period.

Of course, there had already been interaction between geography and literature prior to the mid-Tang. The author shows that geographical works, including the “Tribute of Yu” (Yugong 禹貢) in the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), the *Classics of Mountains and Seas* (*Shanghai jing* 山海經), and the various “records of the earth” (*diji* 地記), are highly literary in nature; they in turn inspired the spatial imaginaries in contemporary and later literature. Nevertheless, Wang claims that the prominent status geography held in the mid-Tang was unprecedented, and he illustrates this in his first chapter, “Geographical Advancements in the Mid-Tang.” In the aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion, when the empire was struggling to restore imperial superiority and regain its control over local areas, “geography emerged as a field of knowledge that was of crucial importance to the empire” (p. 39). As a result, a group of multi-talented scholar-officials including Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831), and Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850)—many of whom held high positions at court—actively engaged in making and studying maps and geography. Among their achievements in geographical exploration, the grand *Map of Chinese and Foreign Lands within the Seas* (*Hainei huayi tu* 海內華夷圖) by Jia Dan 賈耽 (730–805), the *Maps and Treatises of the Provinces and Counties of the Yuanhe Reign* (*Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣圖志) by Li Jifu 李吉甫 (758–814), and the various map-guides (*tujing* 圖經) “provided inspirations for literary writers and led them in different directions” (p. 60).

Having set the context, in the following four chapters Wang discusses the interplay between geography and literature in the mid-Tang period from four aspects. The second chapter, “The Big Picture: Poetic Visions and the Cartographic Eye,” considers the conversations between a selection of mid-Tang literary texts and grand maps, in particular Jia Dan’s “Map of Chinese and Foreign Lands within the Seas.” The literati’s experience of reading grand maps together with their familiarity with cartographic knowledge and vision allowed them to create spectacular images of the world on paper, images whose representation of geographical features was then infused with a poetic and evocative appeal. Insightful as the author’s analyses of those literary texts often are, I do not always agree with him, especially when he claims that in Zhang Hu’s 張祜 (792–853) “Two Poems on Contemplating a Painting of Mountains and Seas” (“Guan shanghai tu ershou” 觀山海圖二首), “the imposition of a contemporary map view on an ancient painting creates the decisive tension that alienates the poet from the religious realm commonly associated with the painting” (p. 116). There is no compelling evidence suggesting that paintings of mountains and seas were often associated with the religious realm, and the lack of religious elements in Zhang Hu’s poems does not necessarily entail “a contemporary map view.”

The third chapter, “The Shifting Shape of the Local Sphere: Map-Guides and Literary Writings,” turns its eye to the central role map-guides played in mid-Tang literati’s writings in and about local