

One may propose another premise to this asymmetry. Chosŏn literati were not at all unfamiliar with what was perceived as “vernacular” Chinese, since they had been reading *ōrok-ch’ē* (C. *yuluti*) or “conversational style” texts for a few centuries in the form of records of eminent Buddhist monks’ sayings and major Neo-Confucian texts such as the *Sayings of Zhu Xi* (Zhuzi yulei) and the *Reflections on Things at Hand* (Jinsi lu), which were written in so-called early *baihua* (vernacular Chinese). Although the linguistic details of early *baihua* were not the same as those of Ming-Qing Chinese vernacular fiction, not to mention that their comprehension of *ōrok-ch’ē* was not entirely well grounded in the first place, it never deterred Chosŏn literati from reading fiction imported from China. How well they understood the texts they were reading and how well they thought they understood them are different matters. Kornicki’s careful unravelling of the history of Sinitic and vernacular and their interactions in a variety of forms in East Asia enables us to see where these variations happened and how literacy reacted in different surroundings.

The sobering realization that most Sinitic texts did not get translated until the twentieth century makes us re-appreciate the “epistemological rupture” in modern East Asia, with which the author commenced the entire discussion (p. 26). The resounding effect of this rupture runs far and wide, from the formation of national languages, linguistic politics, colonialism, and the search for modern literary languages, to cultural negotiations and (re-)constructed traditions, translation and subscription to world literature, and so on. The break from Sinitic as “universal writing” that once had been accepted voluntarily in East Asian communities—sometimes at the expense of foreignizing their own languages—does not just mean switching over to vernacular scripts. Vernacularization is still in progress, and this book tells us why. The author’s clear and eloquent language lucidly leads the reader through the complexity of technical details and comparative data that he has carefully accumulated. Every node of comparison inspires new topics of discussion. This is a truly ground-breaking book.

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Problems of Han Administration: Ancestral Rites, Weights and Measures, and the Means of Protest. By MICHAEL LOEWE. Leiden: BRILL, 2016. Pp. xi + 326. €114, \$137.

No scholar has done more than Michael Loewe to shape the modern study of China’s early imperial history in the West. Any new publication from him is thus of immediate interest to students of the period, and *Problems of Han Administration* is no exception. It treats three separate topics: a religious ritual, measures and related matters, and the means by which officials and others in the Han period conveyed their disapproval of government policies and actions. While there is a brief preface to the whole book and a combined index, each of the three sections is independent, down to its list of works cited.

Every aspect of Loewe’s treatment is replete with detail. He draws frequently from the standard histories, and not by relying on the database searches and concordances that so many of us now depend on. He has obviously been collecting information by means of careful study of the texts in toto, which permits him to make deep connections, and reminds us of the value of extensive reading in primary sources, if any reminder is necessary. The result draws together relevant received texts of all sorts, which Loewe supplements with the judicious inclusion of archaeological and other information. Loewe specifically disclaims the presence of a unifying theme, but from the perspective of the reader, there does seem to be a connection between them.

The first section of the book concentrates on the religious/ritual observances called *zhaomu* 昭穆, which served to give order to the ruler’s sacrifices to his ancestors and to the material objects—tablets and shrines—around which their commemoration concentrated. In addition to *zhaomu*, Loewe treats other forms of imperial offerings to ancestors, the tombs of emperors, and the famous Mingtang 明堂 as they feature in this context.

The term *zhaomu* is well known and the general idea of using spatial relations to indicate ancestral relations is familiar. Yet only a real specialist in the practice would be able to read Loewe’s treatment

without learning a great deal. The bulk of the study is a detailed examination of records relating the shifting practices that bore the label *zhaomu* and the connotations of the term. The reasons for these developments are, as Loewe paints them, multiple. *Zhaomu* from the first seems to have encompassed practices that were described rather than prescribed and ideas that seem to have been mutable from the first. While a means by which a ruler could assert his legitimacy, divergence from ideals for various reasons seems to have troubled no one. Thus, beginning in the reign of Emperor Yuan 元 and throughout the Han, *zhaomu* denoted a variety of observances, which differed in large points and small, depending on the personalities involved and the exigencies of history. They were the subject of disagreement and admonition.

Those of us who are interested in the early imperial period have become accustomed to benefitting from Loewe's work. In this section Loewe turns his acute eye to later source materials and pursues *zhaomu* and related observances down to the very end of the imperial era. The variability that characterized these things in the early period persisted through the centuries, and the persistence of *zhaomu* reflects less any real consistency of practice than the durable potency of certain ideas.

The second part of *Problems of Han Administration* deals with weights and measures. Loewe places at the center of his discussion the "Jialiang hu" 嘉量壺, a bronze object comprising measuring containers and receptacles of various sizes and bearing inscriptions that label the various compartments and link the object to idealized notions about rulership. The lack of provenance information makes establishing a definitive period for this object impossible, although Loewe believes the "Jialiang hu" and its inscription were likely Xin-period creations.

Loewe creates around the "Jialiang hu" a wide-ranging discussion of weights and measures, and the inscriptions on related objects, in the early imperial period and after. This discussion weaves together received sources, example vessels and epigraphic materials that come to us through the hands of collectors, and the results of modern archaeology. The result is a perspective on the topic that is both broad and detailed.

Loewe gives much space to inscriptions on weights and measures, which he divides into several types, the most numerous of which are those that "conveyed information, either to instruct or to assist the owner or user of the vessel" (p. 177). He lists many specific examples and translates a number of them, which, along with the other details he gathers, will make this a vital reference for anyone interested in measures. In addition to Loewe's translations of specific inscriptions, he connects "Jialiang hu" to various specific records, both to analyze its significance and to argue for historical records concerning it, including those that he cites to argue for its legitimacy. The reader may or may not find convincing the argument for the object's link to the Xin period and even the specific author of its inscription, but Loewe's argumentation of the point is lucid and instructive.

Loewe repeatedly expresses particular skepticism about the inscribed vessels bearing inscriptions identifying them with the Qin standardization of weights and measures of 221 BCE. That caution is well deserved. The reader may wish to note two things. The first is that forthcoming work—obviously not available to Loewe when he was writing—by Li Kin Sum 李建深 in *Artibus Asiae* summarizes art historical and other analyses of Qin metal weights, which support dating them to the Qin period. That suggests but does not prove the authenticity of the inscription on the vessels. Archaeologists have, however, recovered many examples of the inscription on shards of broken clay measures from Qin sites across China. (See Wu Hung 巫鴻, "Qin quan yanjiu" 秦權研究, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 1979.4: 33–47.) Thus, while it is reasonable to question the reliability of *any* specific object lacking provenance information, the weight of evidence in the Qin case supports the authenticity of the inscription *text*, which we have many reliable examples of.

In the third, final, and shortest section of *Problems of Han Administration*, Loewe treats the various manners and means by which people, mainly officials, expressed discontent or unhappiness with government policy and practice over the four centuries of the Han dynasty. On a topic like this one Loewe's direct mastery of the sources really shines through, for he could not have collected the many examples he does without reading the entirety of the sources. There is no search that would find the various types of activities Loewe catalogs, which include comments on policy, proposals for government action, and even literary compositions. Loewe rightly includes one of the major Han records of discussions on the role and practice of government, the *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論, as part of his examination.

The picture that emerges is one of an evolving system that left space for active disagreement and criticism of authority, albeit in forms distinct from those familiar to some readers from the Western classical tradition. Anyone who has read much in the *Han shu* or *Hou Han shu* knows that officials argued with each other and, on occasion, with their monarch, in different contexts and to varying ends. Loewe's extensive treatment and analysis of methods shows the variety of forms the individual moments of criticism took and the greater historical context in which they existed. They are of intrinsic interest as examples, but Loewe's presentation shows the larger significance of them as a set. Some scholars tend to give much weight to the position of the emperor and its theoretically inviolate status. Loewe reminds us that in reality the position of emperor and the power of the man who held it were subject to criticism, with all that entailed.

I mentioned at the start of this review the theme that seems to me to bind the three sections of this book together, and perhaps it has already become clear: all of them deal with imperial power in various ways. The rituals of imperial ancestral offerings and the practices associated with them served as means to evince, to create, to claim, or to arrogate the authority connected with the imperial lineage. The control of weights and measures is another case in which the effective reach of government power becomes evident. The forms and topics that criticism took most evidently relate to the power of the imperial government. Loewe's three-part study informs us about three aspects of the forms and workings of power during the Han period, in the Xin interregnum, and beyond. Anyone with an interest in the time or in the specific topics Loewe treats will gain from reading this book.

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My Sapphire-hued Lord, My Beloved! Kulacēkara Ālvār's Perumāl Tirumōḷi. By SUGANYA ANANDAKICHENIN. Collection Indologie, vol. 136. NETamil Series, vol. 2. Pondichéry: ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE D'EXTRÊME-ORIENT, 2018. Pp. xi + 604.

The Divya Prabandham ("The Divine Collection," in Tamil the *Nālāyira Tivviya Pirapantam*) collects the nearly 4,000 verses of the canon of Vaiṣṇava sacred verses in Tamil, the works of the twelve ālvārs plus the one hundred verses of the *Rāmānujanuṣṭāntāti* in honor of Rāmānuja, the foremost ācārya of the tradition. This remarkable body of religious poetry is grounded in the old caṅkam poetry of Tamil Nadu, flourished in the seventh to the ninth centuries, and has gradually worked its way into the consciousness of modern scholars and a wider range of readers. Partial translations began appearing as in the early part of the twentieth century, while the last four decades have seen a flood of new work: A. K. Ramanujan's *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981); Norman Cutler's *Consider Our Vow: An English Translation of Tiruppāvai and Tiruvempāvai* (1979); John Carman and Vasudha Narayanan's *The Tamil Veda* (1989); Archana Venkatesan's *The Secret Garland: Āṅṅāl's Tiruppāvai and Nācciyār Tirumōḷi* (2010) and *A Hundred Measures of Time: Tiruviruttam* (2014). Friedhelm Hardy's encyclopedic *Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (1983) has proved invaluable context and a plausible story line for the roots of bhakti in the Tamil south, while this reviewer's theological explorations, *Seeing through Texts: Doing Theology among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas of South India* (1996) and *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: An Exercise in Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics* (2013), may be of interest as well. Still, Anandakichenin is right in insisting that the ālvārs need still more attention, given the beauty of the poetry, its rich cultural and religious meanings, and the impressive body of commentary and consequent literature arising from their songs. She aims to chart the forward path by this scholarly volume of context, text, and translation, fittingly included in the new NETamil Series as its second volume.

Kulacēkara Ālvār was a ninth-century Vaiṣṇava poet, one of the twelve ālvārs and, as tradition holds, a local king. Nonetheless, he is also a figure regarding whom details are hard to pin down. Anandakichenin does all she can to narrow down his identity. Though he is often reputed to be from Kerala,