

REVIEW

G. E. R. Lloyd and Jingyi Jenny Zhao, eds., in collaboration with Qiaosheng Dong, *Ancient Greece and China Compared*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Reviewed by
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This collaborative volume derives from a conference celebrating G. E. R. Lloyd's eightieth birthday on January 25, 2013. Lloyd took a leading role in editing the book, which adds several papers (unspecified) that were not delivered at the original conference and omits some that were. As it would not be feasible to provide a full account of each chapter,¹ I shall aim here to convey the overall strengths and weaknesses of the collection.

Ancient Greece and China Compared contains several original and useful case studies preceded by many pages of general remarks that are less compelling.² An example of the latter is Walter Scheidel's chapter, "Comparing Comparisons" (40–58). Although his intentions are clearly laudable (he regards comparison as valuable, among other reasons, "as a way out of parochialism" [41], a phrase that he borrows from Lloyd and Nathan Sivin), he does not reflect on the reasons why scholars have been wary of comparative history. Much of the resistance, I suspect, stems from the perception that previous historians did it badly. I am referring not only to the growing dissatisfaction, in the Post-War years, with universalist narratives like those of Spengler or Toynbee,³ but also, in our

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1. The chapters not cited in this review are G. E. R. Lloyd, "Introduction: Methods, Problems and Prospects" (1–29); Nathan Sivin, "Why Some Comparisons Make More Sense than Others" (33–39); Jingyi Jenny Zhao, "Shame and Moral Education in Aristotle and Xunzi" (110–30); Jeremy Tanner, "Visual Art and Historical Representation in Ancient Greece and China" (189–233); Reviel Netz, "Divisions, Big and Small: Comparing Archimedes and Liu Hui" (259–89); Karine Chemla, "Abstraction as a Value in the Historiography of Mathematics in Ancient Greece and China: A Historical Approach to Comparative History of Mathematics" (290–325); and Michael Loewe, "Afterword" (410–19).

2. The worst of these is Robert Wardy, "On the Very Idea of (Philosophical?) Translation," in which the author repeatedly substitutes name-calling for *argumentum ad rem*: one passage by A. C. Graham is dismissed as "nonsense on stilts" (64), and another by Steven Pinker as "bullshit" (66). Such discourse is out of place in a volume that emphasizes taking other perspectives seriously.

3. Cf. William H. McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 286; also Geoffrey Barraclough, *Main Trends in History*, expanded and updated

field, to the severe distortions wrought by comparatists whose frame of reference was invariably European.⁴ This is not to say that comparative history must always be bad comparative history, but acknowledging everything that can go wrong (and has gone wrong) in comparative inquiry would win Scheidel a more sympathetic audience than simply berating skeptics for their “insularity” (46). Nor does he take note of a recent methodological proposal by Ralph Weber: comparing not two cultures, but at least three, in order to avoid tendentious polarity.⁵

One aspect of Scheidel’s chapter is well-taken, however: his recommendation of collaborative inquiry as the best solution to the problem that few human beings are competent to discuss more than one culture in depth (47). Just as collaboration has become practically unavoidable in science and medicine because of the complexity of the fields, it should, in the coming years, serve to transcend silos in the humanities as well.⁶ In this spirit, the very frontispiece of *Ancient Greece and China* advertises that “the book is set to provide a model for future collaborative and interdisciplinary work.”

Thus it is surprising that only two of the fourteen chapters are by more than one author:⁷ the book does not exemplify its own dictates.

by Michael Burns, as *Main Trends in the Social and Human Sciences* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1991), 171.

4. Cf. Russell Kirkland, “Hermeneutics and Pedagogy: Methodological Issues in Teaching the *Daode Jing*,” in *Teaching the Daode Jing*, ed. Gary D. DeAngelis and Warren G. Frisina, AAR Teaching Religious Studies Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150–51: “When Westerners encountered the religious and intellectual traditions of Asia, they went about making sense of those traditions by comparing and contrasting what they saw in them with what they ‘knew’ from their own tradition. . . . Chinese traditions, including the *Daode jing*, therefore came to be interpreted according to a variety of Western agendas, and any historical or textual facts that could not be made to fit into the interpreter’s agenda were simply ignored or explained away.”

5. “Comparative Philosophy and the *tertium*: Comparing What with What, and in What Respect?,” *Dao* 15.2 (2014), 151–71. Scheidel’s perfunctory review of recent work comparing Greco-Roman and Chinese sources ignores several authors, including Jean-Paul Reding, Alexander Beecroft, Samuel N. C. Lieu, and even Lisa Raphals, one of the contributors to this volume.

6. For but one sketch of the possibilities, see Daniel Buchman *et al.*, “Interdisciplinary Education and Knowledge Translation Programs in Neuroethics,” in *Creating Consilience: Integrating the Sciences and the Humanities*, ed. Edward Slingerland and Mark Collard, New Directions in Cognitive Science (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 334–48.

7. These are Xinyi Liu *et al.*, “From the Harvest to the Meal in Prehistoric China and Greece: A Comparative Approach to the Social Context” (355–72), and Vivienne Lo and Eleanor Re’em, “Recipes for Love in the Ancient World” (326–52). The latter finds that Greco-Roman aphrodisiacs had “overarching reproductive aims” (348), in contrast to those of ancient China, whose purposes included physical self-cultivation.

Nevertheless, once we get past the prolegomena and delve into concrete comparisons, the quality of the research is undeniable. Two contributors stand out as rare amphibians: R. A. H. King ("Freedom in Parts of the *Zhuangzi* and Epictetus," 83–109) and Lisa Raphals ("Human and Animal in Early China and Greece," 131–59) seem to be equally comfortable with Chinese and Greek sources (and thus I am incapable of judging them).⁸

Several other contributors, though more at home in one of the two cultures, have read extensively in the other field, and accordingly provide well-informed and insightful comparisons. Three examples are Michael Puett ("Genealogies of Gods, Ghosts and Humans: The Capriciousness of the Divine in Early Greece and Early China," 160–85), Yiqun Zhou ("Helen and Chinese Femmes Fatales," 234–55), and Michael Nylan ("On Libraries and Manuscript Culture in Western Han Chang'an and Alexandria," 373–409). Puett argues that the frequently observed lack of "personalities" in Chinese descriptions of gods, ghosts, and spirits (in contrast to singular Greek figures like Zeus or Prometheus) is a consequence of the systematic effort to eradicate their capriciousness. Zhou writes that Chinese *femmes fatales*, in contrast to Helen (or classical representations of historical women, such as Cleopatra, that were modeled on Helen), "do not have a single redeeming attribute, and never receive a chance to speak for themselves" (254). (Zhou might have remarked that this is not true of later *femmes fatales*, such as Empress Wu). And Nylan demonstrates parallels in the two cultures both in the role of empires in the redaction (and preservation) of texts and in evolving conceptions of authorship, which were radically different from our own.

These and other thoughtful studies await the reader. Readers interested in Greece, China, or simply how to think about disparate cultures of the past will find much fertile material in this book.

8. There is one influential article that King does not discuss: David B. Wong, "The Meaning of Detachment in Daoism, Buddhism, and Stoicism," *Dao* 5.2 (2006), 207–19.