

the colonial modernism and expansionism of Japan, and thus symbolized the dream of the “Great East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere of Rice.”

This is not just a story of the past; political and social imaginaries are still embedded in grains. For more case studies in current Asia and beyond, I would recommend special issues of *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society: an International Journal* (volume 5, issue 2 and issue 4).

The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts. By Matthias L. Richter. Studies in the History of Chinese Texts 3.

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The Embodied Text, while focusing on the *Min zhi fumu* 民之父母 within the Shangbo (Shanghai Museum) manuscript corpus, is in fact a wider inquiry into the methodology for interpreting excavated texts.

In most general terms, the work consists of three parts. In Part 1, ‘*Min zhi fumu*: Examining the Manuscript and Establishing the Text’, the author is particularly concerned with the history, variations, and reception of the *Min zhi fumu* itself. Part 2, ‘The Divergence of Manuscript Text and Transmitted Counterparts: A Review of Homogenizing Readings’, highlights problems one encounters with reading and interpreting excavated texts, and develops a methodology for coping with those problems, with caveats. Part 3, ‘Comparative Interpretation of *Min zhi fumu* and Its Transmitted Counterparts: Differences in the Nature of the Texts and Their Ideology’, building on the aforementioned methodology, uses *Min zhi fumu* as a showcase for illustrating characteristics of manuscripts as they can be found up to the foundation of the Imperial Qin Dynasty.

The Embodied Text is a prime example of scholarship basing its analysis of excavated texts on a close reading of the primary text, and is strongly invested in what could be called a ‘stoic’ hermeneutics. On the other hand, it is relatively poorly informed by a comparative perspective vis-à-vis the transmitted texts or even other excavated texts. The above assessment is not intended to imply that the author is negligent of the comparative perspective as the field’s most common methodology (and which the author himself also uses at times). Instead, the author is very critical of this methodology as the preferred way of approaching excavated texts.

Against the backdrop of these ideas, the author sets out to interpret the *Min zhi fumu*. He constructs a lineage which starts out from the *Min zhi fumu* and leads, over the *Ziyi* 緇衣 chapter of the *Liji* 禮記 (itself a transmitted text) to the *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子家語. At the level of the *Min zhi fumu*, it is impossible to speak of coherence or consistency among the aspects that, taken together, give the text its form. Playing devil’s advocate, one might say that, if one adopts the author’s methodology, and if one is dedicated to limiting the spurious or imaginative readings of certain Chinese characters when attempting to convey the text’s meaning, it becomes very easy to misread the text’s context. In a typical example: common opinion, when confronted with the phrase *huang yu tianxia* 皇于天下 (as it can be found in *Ziyi* chapter of the *Liji* or the *Kongzi jiyu*), has been inclined to read it as ‘to fill all under heaven’, in other words taking *huang* 皇 to stand for *heng* 橫. 6A2A. This reading makes it compatible with all occurrences of the phrase in the *Min zhi fumu*. Richter takes a different approach. He clings to the original phrase, thus translating it as ‘to attain supremacy over all under

heaven'. If one is consistent in this reading throughout the text, however, the coherence of the *Min zhi fumu* is, quite obviously, rapidly lost.

In this respect, Richter espouses the view that pre-Qin manuscripts ought to be considered as different from Qin and Han period materials, which share a relatively homogeneous set of meanings: the former draw on meanings that are to be conceived as adaptable to specific situations, or, in other words, as being 'indexed'. He calls the manuscripts from which meaningful coherence and consistency is absent the 'passive text'; the amalgam of text parts which, on the basis of context-specific rules, is used for practical purposes as teachings or predictions, is designated by him the 'active text'. These aspects, we are told, are the central characteristics of the pre-Qin manuscripts, for texts like the *Ziyi* chapter of the *Liji* and later ones are to be considered as 'composed' in that their elements form a coherent whole.

I largely agree with most of the elements of the methodology that is proposed in *The Embodied Text*. Giving preference to the meaning that can be deduced solely from the text itself, and trying to interpret the contents from inside the text, is the very fundament of the study of the history of ideas. At the same time, relying excessively on this method for texts on which outside information is scarce or non-existent, I believe, may lead into the trap of arbitrary interpretation. Richter is aware of this pitfall, and strongly warns against over-interpretation.

Min zhi Fumu is a short chapter composed of a mere fourteen bamboo strips, and passages that pose problems of translation are relatively rare. Perhaps the author's methodology is especially apt for this kind of material. Yet would it be equally successful for excavated manuscripts which contain many passages that are difficult to be understood at a basic level, i.e. in a tension between direct versus interpretative transcription, I wonder?

I am furthermore not very keen on adopting the aforementioned methodology (especially when contentious passages in *Min zhi fumu* produce difficulties for interpretation) if it means losing even trifling hints of coherence in terms of persuasive power.

On the other hand, I expect the author to publish further research results, so issues that are not quite solved in *The Embodied Text* will be hopefully addressed at a later time. On a last point, I would like to add that I was surprised to find *The Embodied Text* presents such thorough analysis: as an example of this even the strongly criticized research study of *Min zhi fumu* by Nishiyama Hisashi 西山尚志 (only published as part of the proceedings of a small conference) was thoughtfully included. Even until very recently, it was not uncommon to see the research findings of established Japanese scholars go completely unnoticed in Western scholarship. *The Embodied Text* is a notable exception to that tendency. In any case, one is to welcome the fact that this monograph is the work of a Western scholar, and that Western studies of Chinese manuscripts live up to a new and higher standard.

Law, Disorder and the Colonial State: Corruption in Burma c. 1900. By Jonathan Saha.

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Jonathan Saha's *Law, Disorder and the Colonial State*, part of Palgrave Macmillan's Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies series, is an important contribution to our understanding of the making