ANNE BIRRELL:
Shamanism in Early China.
(McGuinness China Monographs.) xv, 242 pp. Cambridge: McGuinness China Monographs, 2018. ISBN 978 0 9547559 4 2.
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A fascinating cultural product from the early Chinese southern kingdom of Chu, the Songs of the South (Ch'u Tz'u) is a collection of Classical Chinese poetry that reveals a tradition of Chinese shamanism with roots stretching back to archaic times. Scholars have been mixed in their manner of interpreting these poems: some read them as political allegory while others read them as reliable records of shamanism (for an insightful discussion of these two approaches to the Songs of the South, see Thomas Michael, "Shamanism, eroticism, and death: the ritual structures of the *Nine Songs* in comparative context", *Religions* 10/1, 2019, 1–26). Classic modern studies that apply a shamanic interpretation to the Songs of the South are Arthur Waley (1955, *The Nine Songs*, London: Allen and Unwin) and David Hawkes (1985, *The Songs of the South*, London: Penguin Books). In her new study of the Songs of the South, Anne Birrell offers another important contribution to the shamanic reading of this collection.

Birrell situates her monograph in the Eliadian tradition of comparative analysis of ancient shamanism as she analyses the shamanic elements of the early Chu ritual system in five poems collected in the Songs of the South: *The Sorrow of Parting*, *The Nine Songs*, *Questions of Heaven*, *Summons of the Soul*, and *The Great Summons*. Through an "archaeological dig" of these five pieces, Birrell focuses on numerous "shamanic indicators" that she lists as the polytheistic system, the shamanic costume, animal helpers, shamanic plants used in the ritual, clairvoyance, means of ascent, trance-inducing drugs, the rite of ascent, the shamanic number nine, the sexual contract between the ritual specialist and the spirit, howl incantations, shamanic performance, and the techniques of transgenderism. Based on her scrutiny of these ritual elements, Birrell argues that these poems represent nothing less than the Chu shaman's post-ascent record as a ritual handbook for candidates that judiciously includes the actual chants of the shaman performed in the shamanic ritual.

Birrell has produced a stimulating and innovative study replete with exciting findings which takes its place next to many other contributions to the shamanic reading of ancient Chinese materials. However, there are several weaknesses to her study that are difficult to overlook. From the outset, it too heavily relies on Eliade's outdated theory of the magico-religious data gathered together in his comparative interpretation, and Birrell's study entirely neglects the numerous criticisms of Eliade's conceptualization of the shaman or shamanism (see Feng Qu, "Anthropology and historiography: a deconstructive analysis of K.C. Chang's shamanic approach in Chinese archaeology", *Numen*, 2017, 64/5–6, 497–544). H. Sidkey ("Ethnographic perspectives on differentiating shamans from other ritual intercessors", *Asian Ethnology*, 69, 2010, p. 221), for example, points out that Eliade's sources are completely secondary and he did not "use any systematic evaluative criteria with which to access the accuracy and reliability of the source materials he used". Furthermore, Eliade has been criticized for his focus on the shaman's trance vision because this trend leads the study of shamanism into biological reductionism (Robert Wallis, "Exorcizing 'spirits'", in Graham Harvey (ed.), *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism,* Durham: Acumen, 2013, 307–24).

Birrell argues here that all of the shamanic indicators embodied in the Chu poetic texts coincide with the ecstatic feature proposed by Eliade. Following the Eliadian methodology that takes shamanism as a timeless and universal phenomenon, Birrell neglects to provide any contextual analysis of the Chu shamans and shows no awareness of the deep social discrepancies between the Siberian shamanism that Eliade took as the standard for all forms of shamanism and early Chinese Chu society. Other scholars such as Roberte Hamayon (1998, "Sens de l''alliance' religieuse", *Anthropologie et Société* 22, 25–48) and Michael (2018) have noted the different ritual logic between hunting shamanism and agricultural shamanism. Caroline Humphrey ("Shamanic practices and the state in northern Asia", in Thomas and Humphrey (eds), *Shamanism, History, and State*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, pp. 191–228) finds that tribal shamanism is distinct from state shamanism in Central Asia. Birrell, however, sees Siberian tribal shamanism and the Chu state ritual system based on shamanism as more or less identical and homogenous. Such an approach is highly problematic.

In addition to this, there is a long-lasting debate in the field of early China studies concerning the question whether the figure designated by the ancient Chinese term *wu* can be taken as a shaman. While Waley (1955), Hawkes (1985), K.C. Chang (*Art, Myth, and Ritual*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), and others equate the term *wu* in early Chinese texts with the word shaman in English literature, scholars such as Gilles Boileau ("*Wu* and shaman", *BSOAS* 65/2, 2002, 350–78) and Lothar von Falkenhausen ("Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums in Early China", *Early China* 20, 1995, 279–300) reject the translation of *wu* as shaman. Birrell deliberately ignores this debate and thereby misleads readers to the view that there is no issue whatsoever with directly identifying the early Chinese *wu* with the Siberian shaman. This approach to the subject of early Chinese shamanism is completely unacceptable.

There are even more problems in Birrell's comparative study with her identification of the archaic Shang Dynasty ritual specialists and ritual systems with those of the much later kingdom of Chu. Boileau (2002) has definitively demonstrated that the term *wu* in the Shang oracle texts has multiple meanings, including a spirit, a sacrifice, a divination, and a ritual specialist. The *wu* in the Chu texts usually refers to a living person, which is very different from the word's meaning in Shang inscriptions, but Birrell shows no interest in this semantic change. Furthermore, in her identification of 13 convergences between the Shang and Chu ritual systems, she confidently concludes that "Chu shamanism was largely constructed upon the model of Shang ritual" (p. 43). However, whether in historical or archaeological sources, there is simply no evidence to support her claim that there was "an easy transfer" from the Shang cultural system to that of Chu (p. 44), despite the fact that the similarities between the two systems simply reflect common ritual features found in many agricultural societies.

Very few modern Chinese scholars of ancient China support the simple identification of the Chinese *wu* with the Siberian shaman, and the great majority even reject the more general identification of the *wu* as a shaman. It is also not uncommon to find arguments claiming that the Chinese *wu* is a unique religious specialist in early China who is associated with rationalism, politics, and civilization. This feature certainly differs from Siberian shamanism. Yuedi Liu ("Wu de lixinghua, zhengzhihua he wenminghua", *Zhongyuan wenhua yanjiu* 2, 2018, 20–27), for example, holds that ancient Chinese *wu*ism is representative of a centralized civilization characterized by ceremonies, royal power, and historiography. As an important sinological project, in my opinion, Birrell's work should not ignore Chinese scholars' perspectives about early "Chinese shamanism".

Nevertheless, this is still an impressive and successful monograph in many ways. It is persuasive in its revealing of the ritual nature of the five poems from the *Songs of the South*. It also successfully argues against the scholarly opinion that reads these texts according to the traditional allegorical interpretation model. Last but not least, the book will certainly inspire readers to rethink the issues surrounding the question of shamanism in early Chinese history.

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XIAOFEI TIAN:
The Halberd at Red Cliff: Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms.
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The *Halberd at Red Cliff* tells the story of how the Jian'an (196–220) and the Three Kingdoms (220–265) periods became part of the Chinese cultural imaginary and how the memory of the era gradually evolved in changing cultural contexts over the centuries up until the cinematic representations of the twenty-first century. The book is divided into five chapters organized into three parts, each focussing on a particular aspect and group of texts of this cultural imagining. Chapter 1 traces the creation of the Jian'an era as a literary construction, while chapter 2 examines works by Wang Can (177–217) and the Three Caos (Cao Cao (155–220), Cao Pi (187–226), Cao Zhi (192–232)), exploring the themes of community building by means of food and feasting, letter writing, and gift exchange. Parts 2 (chapters 3–4) and 3 (chapter 5) focus on two physical and textual sites: Bronze Bird Terrace, a structure built in the Wei capital Ye on Cao Cao's orders, and Red Cliff, the site of the famous battle between Cao Cao and Zhou Yu (175–210) in 208 CE. Translating and analysing an impressive selection of poems and narrative texts, Tian identifies the textual milestones that continuously (re-)defined these two memory places and the people associated with them. The collection of a person's literary output can independently "signal the full *presence* of a person, no longer growing and changing, but arrested and wholly embodied in the writings he left behind" (p. 26, my emphasis).

I agree with Tian on the centrality of the literary tradition in the construction of memory of the Jian'an/Three Kingdoms period. Texts often provide the only remaining visible link to the past. However, it is worth noting that the textual material itself also points to additional and/or alternative ways and media of literati engagement with the past through objects, landscapes and famous historical sites: "traces" (ji 跡) of a past world long gone. A poem by Ai Xingfu (fl. late thirteenth–early fourteenth century), for example, captures the power of an inkstone supposedly made from remnants of Bronze Bird Terrace to conjure up the past and cast a spell over the present:

> From antiquity, in observing an object
> one must observe its owner;
> Yu's zither and Zhou's tripods