

evidence in support of the author's argument regarding the predominance of orality over the literate even in the cultic usage of written words.

Third, the topic of local identity derived from the scripts appears suggestive in light of the recent situation. While the social importance of local scripts has changed with relation to Burma or Siam, recently local scripts have been included in some public education in northern Thailand and academic researchers and NGOs are paying close attention to local scripts and manuscripts. This might be associated with government policy designed to encourage the regional tradition known as *phumphanya thai*. This recently occurring scenario of positive acceptance and interest in local scripts in Thailand would expand the discussion on oral/literate in northern Thailand.

As the author writes, "I view this book as comprising the first tentative steps into a new but important field that is fundamental to our understanding of the Buddhist world" (p. 204), this study contains the embryonic stages of the many and various problems regarding orality and textual transmission.

Community Schools and the State in Ming China.

By Sarah Schneewind. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006 ISBN 0-8047-5174-9. \$55.00.

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Although the title would seem to indicate that this book is merely about the relationship between the Ming state and public elementary schools known as "community schools" (*shexue* 社學), it contains much more. Not only does it convincingly show how central directives did not necessarily translate into local action, it also demonstrates that officials and people often commandeered the schools to fulfill their own interests. The author even indicates that activist officials frequently used the schools as ideological tools to promote Confucianism as a religion.

The author's goal is to use the community schools, the lowest centrally-mandated educational institutions, to look at the relationship between the Ming state and society. She chose this particular institution because the "community school was not an independent local institution, but neither was it merely an instrument of imperial control" (p. 2). Accordingly, it is a perfect place to catch sight of negotiations between the central government and local society. To show this, she endeavors to see who established the schools and for what purposes. Her main contention is that the community schools survived for so long because they were malleable – different governmental and non-governmental players could use them to fulfill their own interests.

Schneewind begins by examining the role the founding emperor played in establishing the schools in the early Ming (1368–1430). According to the conventional narrative, Zhu Yuanzhang was a forceful leader who not only profoundly shaped Ming government, but also Ming society. To make people into moral and law-abiding subjects, he ordered that community schools be set up in every village. Upon graduating, students would return to their father's occupation, rather than entering government schools. Showing considerable detective skills, Schneewind underlines how this narrative masks as much as it discloses. She points out that only five years after this edict's promulgation, the emperor rescinded it because local officials were abusing the schools. Zhu then ordered that commoners themselves should establish community schools in which attendance would be voluntary rather than mandatory. Based on a survey of 600 gazetteers, Schneewind looks at how many community schools were actually established in accordance with the initial decree. She discovered that only about one percent of county governments founded community schools while the initial decree was in effect. In other words, despite Zhu's alleged autocratic power, most local officials did not feel obligated to obey his decree. Although this point is well taken, I wonder if the

author is not too narrowly evaluating the evidence. She only counts those schools that were established during 1375–1380 as a response to the initial decree. But, was there a lag time between when a decree arrived and when it was carried out? Would the emperor's second decree rescinding the schools reach everywhere right away?

By closely scrutinizing memorials written by high officials and edicts that were issued in response, Chapter 3 looks at the mid-Ming (1430–1470). Here, efforts of high officials to foster the establishment of community schools come to the fore, but their reasons for doing so were different from those of Zhu Yuanzhang. They were using community schools as a new tool to assimilate minorities in troubled border regions. So many of these calls were made that, in 1439 and once again in 1504, the throne ordered that community schools should be established in each village. This time around, high officials with the title of “education intendants” (*tixue yushi* 提學御史) bureaucratized the schools by turning them into grooming salons for future bureaucrats. Contravening Zhu Yuanzhang's original vision, the community schools focused on developing literacy rather than morality and were envisioned as preparatory for higher education. Nevertheless, even here, by looking at the years in which they were built, Schneewind points out that community schools usually were not established in response to imperial decrees.

The author hits full stride in Chapter 4 where she looks at community schools founded by Neo-Confucian activists during the high Ming (1470–1530). Working with local gazetteers and commemorative community school records (*shexue ji* 社學記), which were often written by the school's founder, or at his connivance, Schneewind documents how the officials who initiated these schools shifted from education intendants to resident administrators. This wave of school building was not based on imperial wishes, but on what can only be described as religious zeal among local officials. Despite the dynasty's religiously tolerant policies, these resident administrators, inspired by Neo-Confucianism, frequently confiscated the temples of Buddhist, Taoist, and popular religious establishments and turned them into community schools. The community school, which included a shrine to Confucian worthies, would then be a place where Confucian rituals were taught to morally transform the locality's commoners. The author thereby presents us with a startling picture of religious strife. In the commemorative records, the school founders present themselves as Confucian heroes who are battling the corruption of the society around them by reviving institutions and values from antiquity. She is quick to point out, though, that these activists were a small minority of resident administrators, and the great majority of local officials showed little interest in community schools; instead, they were much more concerned with carrying out the essential duties of collecting taxes and administering justice.

In Chapter 5, the author examines the curriculum taught in the community schools. Although teaching literacy was important, the schools' major thrust was to spread Confucian morality and ritual. As a result, the most common textbooks were Zhu Xi 朱熹's *Elementary Learning* (*Xiaoxue* 小學), the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經), and the *Four Books* (*Sishu* 四書). Students did not need to completely understand these texts; instead, they were to be inspired by the examples within them. Ideally, the teachers selected for these schools would also impart Confucian morality to the whole community through public lectures and keeping records of the behavior of individuals.

Chapter 6 looks in detail at the actual functioning of the schools. Schneewind has discovered that most community schools were usually located in county or prefectural seats, which means they were too far away for most farm boys to attend them. She notes, though, that there was an incentive for commoners to enroll: one's son could gain upper-class deportment, which meant prestige, and possible entrance to government school. The latter would result in the student and two family members being exempt from forced labor requirements. Nevertheless, few community school graduates ever became noteworthy. Hence, although the schools enhanced literacy, they did not necessarily promote social mobility. One of the community schools' most acute problems was their lack of suitable teachers. The meagerness of both the salary and job's prestige resulted in the hiring

of desperate literati who abused their positions. Salaries were small because these schools were not funded through the official budget. Local administrators thereby had to finance them through their own salaries or money raised from the people, which is why confiscating local religious establishments was such a tempting alternative way of sponsoring the schools.

Based on local gazetteers that display significant local influence in their creation, in the last chapter, which covers the late Ming (1530–1644), Schneewind explores how local people reacted to the community schools. She indicates that, in many localities, after the community school founder was transferred, members of the community brought images out of hiding and reestablished the religious temples. In other places, local residents themselves founded community schools. In these instances, the schools frequently served as academies where elite men gathered to engage in literary pursuits. The weakness of this chapter is that it is based on a small number of records that come almost entirely from either Guangdong or Fujian province.

Overall, Schneewind's argument is convincing. Through the case study of the community schools, she has shown that Ming officials and subjects did not merely obediently follow imperial decrees. Throughout the dynasty, officials freely chose how and to what degree to implement those charges. Oftentimes, they reinterpreted the instructions in a manner that suited their private interests. One might wonder, though, whether this was merely the case with community schools because they were not at all important. Perhaps, if we looked at an educational institution that was more important to the emperor, we would see officials feeling more pressure to closely follow the imperial directives. Even so, the author's findings are instructive for anyone who is interested in the functioning of the pre-modern Chinese state at the local level.

Schneewind's book has made two other significant contributions. Her contention that community schools were not universal and usually short-lived is important because it casts doubt on the widely held belief that literacy was fairly widespread in late imperial China. Her portrait of Neo-Confucian religious zealots confiscating temples to establish schools to indoctrinate commoners with Confucian religion also shatters the rosy image of Ming society as one in which many people were trying to peacefully reconcile the Three Teachings (*sanjiao* 三教). In sum, Schneewind's finely crafted book will be of great interest to scholars of Chinese history, culture, education and religion.

A Social History of the Chinese Book: Books and Literati Culture in Late Imperial China.

By Joseph P. McDermott. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006. Pp. 294. ISBN -10: 9622097820.

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As Joseph McDermott argues in his "Introduction", the study of the history of the Chinese book is by no means a bookish topic. After all, book learning has played a crucial role in the political and cultural life of China for at least the last thousand years and was central to the identity of the country's elite. Even more broadly, transmission of all kinds of scholarly, technical, and popular information; religious ideas and practices; and entertainment in manuscript and printed forms meant that books found readers and lookers and listeners throughout all socioeconomic groups. But to address some of these issues more thoroughly than many earlier studies, McDermott limits the scope of his book to the official and literati elite in the lower Yangzi delta and concentrates on the Song (960–1279), Ming (1368–1644) and the earlier part of the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. There are good reasons for McDermott's choices – he examines a group that has left behind the most information on its own uses of books, in an area that has long been a heartland of Han Chinese high culture, and the tightened geographical focus allows for a more feasible analysis of economic