

Greene suggests that the texts could show “a strategy intended to safely reaffirm the value of meditation as a source of authority and legitimacy in a difficult political climate” (p. 92). Wofoyuan may thus be seen as part of a vitally transformative Sichuan-based discourse on the ways and means of meditation practice.

The last “Introduction” chapter is “The *Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents*” by Ryan Richard Overbey, who describes the third donor-dedicated carving in Cave 59, a short version of the *Bao fumu enzhong jing* 報父母恩重經 (Sutra on Repaying the Profound Kindness of Parents). Overbey notes that although always listed as spurious in official catalogues, it remained irrepressibly popular and was transmitted through local carvings and manuscripts. If the Cave 59 engraving can be aligned with the meditation texts dedicated in 735, it would be the earliest witness. Further, it was dedicated by a pious laywoman, giving voice to the sutra’s appeal for lay Buddhist mothers.

Space does not permit a detailed summation of this magnificent volume; suffice it to say that each feature shows the highest degree of attention to detail and quality scholarship. The case for the Wofoyuan precinct as a “mortuary shrine” is compellingly made, but the nature of the chosen engravings also shows that mortuary and meditation-practice orientations were closely related. This will be an enduring resource for scholars of medieval China, Buddhism, Chinese archaeology, and those attempting comparative studies.

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MÅRTEN SÖDERBLOM SAARELA:

*The Early Modern Travels of Manchu: A Script and Its Study in East Asia and Europe.*

(Encounters with Asia.) x, 301 pp. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. £58. ISBN 978 0 8122 5207 1.

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The study of Manchu has flourished over the past few decades, particularly in the United States and China. This has been in response to new trends in research on the Qing dynasty that have de-emphasized narratives of Sinicization in favour of recognizing the importance of Manchu identity to Qing rule and paying greater attention to the Inner Asian territories of the empire where Manchu was the principal language of governance. While researchers have made use of sources written in Manchu to produce important new scholarship on a range of topics in Qing history, work on the language itself has been restricted to a few themes. Aside from purely linguistic work taking advantage of Manchu’s status as the only Tungusic language with an extensive written record, most historians have focused either on Manchu’s role in Qing administration or on the role of the Manchu language in defining Manchu identity, as part of a “Manchu Way” promoted by the Qing court.

In this book, Mårten Söderblom Saarela makes an innovative and exciting advance in the study of the historical role of the Manchu language. Manchu, he tells us, did not just matter to Manchus and their close allies. Instead, he places the language, and, more particularly, its script, at the centre of a global (or, at least, trans-Eurasian) intellectual history of the early modern period. The status of

the Qing empire as one of the world's largest and wealthiest states meant that making sense of the writing of its rulers was a matter of great interest to scholars everywhere, from Paris and St Petersburg to Hansōng and Nagasaki.

Following an initial chapter that offers a thorough and compelling account of both the invention of the Manchu script and how its history was understood by early modern scholars who discussed it, *The Early Modern Travels of Manchu* takes up several aspects of the historical study of Manchu and its writing system, all of them with important comparative and transnational aspects. Perhaps the most important of these was work to decipher and analyse the Manchu script. The standard approach in the Qing itself, of treating the script as divided into syllable-based units classified as belonging to one of 12 categories, called "heads", on the basis of their ending sound, seems to have existed from very early in the script's history. But scholars in China, Japan, and Europe all worked to improve this system and how it was presented in pedagogical materials and other explanatory texts. Some of the earliest work done in this vein in China was the product not of Manchus or other bannermen but of late-seventeenth-century Han scholars like Shen Qiliang, Liu Dou, Liao Lunji, and Xiong Shibo, each of whom had first encountered Manchu through government service in Beijing, though important advances were also made by the Manchu bannerman Wu-ge. Some of these scholars, like Xiong, who was based in the southern province of Jiangxi, did much of their work with no access to actual speakers of the language. Yet between them, they came up with new methods of categorizing the syllables used to express sounds that were not native to Manchu, produced primers that paid greater attention to how the shapes of syllables changed when they were written together as part of larger words, and developed an analysis of syllables that divided them into two "half blocks" in recognition of the script's phonetic properties at the sub-syllabic level.

Similarly, in Japan, the leading Confucian philosopher of the Edo period, Ogyū Sorai, produced a tabular analysis of the Manchu script during the 1710s, following the model of the Japanese sound tables used to describe the *katakana* syllabary, work that he based on that of Liao Lunji and another Han scholar from south China, You Zhen. Not long after, a Prussian scholar based in St Petersburg, Gottlieb Bayer, developed a novel analysis of the Manchu script as an alphabet, an approach that became standard in Europe in part due to a 1780s initiative by the Frenchman Louis-Mathieu Langlès, based in Paris, to develop movable type for Manchu. Bayer's work relied on informants involved in Russian expansion into Siberia, including a Kalmyk scribe captured by Russia, while Langlès was in contact, though frequently from an oppositional stance, with the Beijing-based French Jesuit Joseph-Marie Amiot. Thus, as with Ogyū Sorai's work, European studies of Manchu script were developed in an environment of trans-imperial intellectual exchange.

Other themes taken up by the book include the use of the Manchu script to organize knowledge, both through the development of a kind of alphabetical order for Manchu and through projects, like that proposed by Gottfried Leibniz, to use Manchu as an intermediary to communicate Chinese learning to Europeans. Söderblom Saarela also demonstrates how Manchu was used by both Han and Korean scholars to reconceptualize Chinese phonology and make advances on prior systems, like *fanqie* spelling, for describing the pronunciation of Chinese characters.

In sum, this is a rich study that gives the Manchu script a clear place in both the intellectual history of China and of the world. The story of the Manchu language in the Qing can no longer be simply one of Sinicization and decline. Rather, the study of Manchu was intellectually productive, reshaping understandings of language in China, the rest of East Asia, and Europe. It is well worth the attention not just of experts in Qing history or Manchu, though they will find much that is exciting and new, but of anyone who works on the intellectual history of China or of the

early modern world. The publisher is also to be commended for what I believe to be a new development in the use of Manchu script in the digital era: the inclusion of a few bits of in-line Manchu text in a book otherwise in English.

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MORITZ HUBER:

*Lives of Sogdians in Medieval China.*

(Asiatische Forschungen 160.) xvi, 350 pp. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2020. €78. ISBN 978 3 447 11380 9.

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Despite growing awareness of the historic Sogdian people among contemporary audiences, the number of related scholarly monographs remains comparatively low. Moritz Huber has offered here a sizeable addition; moreover, this book, as a published PhD thesis, differs from some recent monographs in that it is not a collection of articles but instead purposed to be one cohesive work. The work critiques interpretations of Chinese sources (from the fourth to ninth centuries) that do “not accurately represent the situation of Sogdians in China” (p. 301). For Chinese scholarship, Huber specifically faults Marxist theory and reproduction of dynastic perspectives in interpreting the Sogdians as another ethnic minority (*shaoshuminzu* 少数民族) within China and for emphasizing descriptors such as “assimilated” (*ronghe* 融合) or “sinicized” (*hanhua* 漢化 or *huahua* 華化) within historical narratives. Instead, Huber suggests the Sogdians intentionally performed as both “outsider” and “insider” to protect the privileges they derived from being cultural brokers, and that the state-sponsored *Sabao* institution “may . . . have paradoxically reduced inclusion” (p. 304).

Regarding Japanese and Western scholarship, Huber critiques the use of categories derived from Western thought (i.e. politics, economics, society, religion, and arts) as being problematic, especially for the evaluation of mercantile activities and religious affiliation. In the case of religion, Huber believes that the Western concept, implicitly laden with monotheistic and exclusivist meanings, is not appropriate for an ancient Chinese context and instead suggests “a functionalistic study of rituals”. Despite these criticisms, the book continues to employ similar modern analytical concepts like “economic factors”.

To avoid anachronisms and achieve a clearer view of the Sogdians, the book champions psychiatrist Viktor Frankl’s (1905–97) Dimensional Ontology. I found the corresponding explanation insufficient to grasp satisfactorily the full implication of Frankl’s concept for the book. As regards possible pitfalls from using Frankl’s approach, the reader is simply told, without supporting evidence, “it is . . . entirely possible to search to know for the sources of error”. Chapter 1 exhaustively provides the extant Chinese sources on the Sogdian homeland. Huber has built his analysis on the recurrent categories found in these etic accounts which, he argues, are comparatively far less removed from the object of study.

Chapter 2 looks at accounts of Sogdians within China and provides the author’s most original contribution, an engaging narrative derived from the epigraphic evidence. The author’s enthusiasm for these sources is palpable; moreover, laudably, Huber has done his own transcriptions from the facsimiles, which has resulted in