

narratives, and seeking a balanced representation, across the five regimes, that did not concern Ouyang Xiu. Davis does not note the names of those whose biographies have been omitted. He has not translated at all the biographies in the “Consistent conduct” chapter, Ouyang’s two treatises (on astronomy and administrative geography), the timeline for the ruling houses of the Ten Kingdoms which mostly ruled south of the River Huai, or the Appendices on the Four Barbarians, which Davis feels “do not lend themselves to translation”. Specialists may particularly feel the absence of the first and last items on this list, which alters the overall balance of the text.

The elegant translation captures the flavour of the “ancient” style that helped to make this history distinctive in its own time. The judicious fifty-page introduction attends to Ouyang’s methods and motivation, surveys Five Dynasties history, locates the Five Dynasties in relation to their non-Chinese neighbours, and considers Ouyang’s Confucian moral stance.

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CHRISTIAN MEYER:

Ritendiskussionen am Hof der nördlichen Song-Dynastie (1034–1093): Zwischen Ritengelehrsamkeit, Machtkampf und intellektuellen Bewegungen.

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This is an impressive dissertation. Through an exhaustive presentation of major moments in eleventh-century debates about court-centred rituals, the author seeks to rethink current scholarship on Song literati identity, political culture, intellectual history and “Western” conceptualizations of “rites” (Riten).

After the obligatory detailed review of the state of the field, sources, and a broad historical sketch of the meaning of “li” (ritual, rites, propriety), the author sets out to reconstruct debates about sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, court music, the appropriate title for the natural father of an adopted emperor, and the mourning ritual for a Councillor. This reconstruction is attempted through long translations and paraphrases of relevant passages in the main chronological histories as well as select official documents. Given the breadth of the material and the difficult technical nature of these debates, the effort is admirable, even though the frequent lack of analysis and interpretation at this stage leaves open the question as to what audience this is intended for. Those unfamiliar with the technical subject matter of music pitches, court sacrifices, and the Bright Hall (mingtang) will most likely find more questions than answers in this part (pp. 103–297).

Patient readers will, however, be rewarded for their efforts to keep reading. Despite the awkward separation of the “reconstruction” (Part II) and the analysis (Parts III and IV) of the debates, in the second half of this hefty volume the author methodically teases out the broader implications of his chosen subject, not state or court ritual per se, but both the regularly recurring and the ad hoc discussions about ritual theory and practice. First, he reinforces the point, made earlier by Patricia Ebrey (*Family and Property in Sung China: Yuan Tsai’s Precepts for Social Life* (Princeton, 1984)), that the practice of rituals was a crucial element in the

self-definition of imperial Chinese literate elites. He further adds that participation in debates about rituals was a particularly significant and unifying element in the self-definition of Northern Song elites, and contrasts this with a more narrowly defined interest in local community and family rituals among Southern Song elites (p. 315).

Second, Meyer links the identity-shaping role of the articulation of ritual expertise to “the creation and reproduction of publicness” (Öffentlichkeit: also, public sphere) (p. 355). Here he returns to one of the major debates in the field of Chinese history in the early 1990s. Does (imperial) China have a public sphere? Through a rereading of Habermas’ *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*) Meyer arrives at a rather different conclusion from those who were pre-occupied with proving or disproving the formation of a Chinese public sphere in imperial and republican China.

He sidesteps the question of the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere outside of the early modern European context and instead argues for the application of a different type of publicness or public sphere in the Chinese context. On one hand, he argues for the applicability of “representative publicness” in the Chinese case, a notion used by Habermas to capture the essentially public nature of feudal rulership. On the other, he supplements the representative publicness of (and the corresponding lack of a private sphere in) dynastic rulership with “the reasoning or discursive public sphere” of the bureaucracy. This discursive public sphere is not only centred on the bureaucracy but also court-oriented.

Despite the centrality of the bureaucracy in the discursive public sphere, Meyer suggests that in Northern Song times it was not limited to officialdom but included scholars expert in ritual scholarship. Questions about rituals were not limited to particular offices or bureaus, but moved across court offices and regularly involved the establishment of ad hoc commissions and the recruitment of expert outsiders. Meyer therefore attributes particular significance to ritual expertise as a type of knowledge empowering scholars politically.

A broader and comparative perspective on political debates would have been useful: how did ritual debates compare to debates about military, financial or diplomatic questions in terms of participation and communication patterns? Was ritual expertise truly worth more than other types of expertise in building elite identity and political awareness? Critical readers will also wonder about Meyer’s definition of the expert outsider: can someone like Cheng Yi who accompanied and served his father during the latter’s assignments and who spent time in and out of office like most imperial bureaucrats count as a case study of the extra-bureaucratic expert? What are the different backgrounds of the outsider experts: retired officials, disciples of high officials, officials in exile?

The emphasis on the discursive public sphere is a useful addition to analyses of eleventh-century political culture which have tended to focus on factionalism as its defining characteristic. Meyer also addresses the question of the impact of factionalism on the articulation of positions in ritual debates. Based on a meticulous diagnosis of the interests of various participants in each of the debates, he concludes that debates about ritual questions were not simply technical questions; they reflected and shaped relationships of power. The comparison of different cases distributed over half a century suggests, however, that ritual debates were a relatively independent field in which factional relationships determined positions clearly in some cases (e.g. in the case of the title for the natural father of Yingzong and in the debate about the proper mourning procedures for Sima Guang) and appeared less relevant in other cases (e.g. in debates about court music). In this regard, Meyer’s discursive public

sphere might provide an explanation for the question as to why Southern Song elites saw the eleventh century not exclusively as a period of factionalism but also as a time when “the debates went on for days in a row, but no solution was found; several days went by, but there was no resentment” (Hilde De Weerd, *Competition over Content: Negotiating Standards for the Civil Service Examinations in Imperial China (1127–1279)* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 294). Meyer suggests that the discursive public sphere may have been more of a Song than a Ming and Qing phenomenon (pp. 556–7); the aftermath of the “more secure position” (p. 556) of the scholar-official during the remaining two centuries of Song history, however, remains to be addressed.

Ritual debates were in Meyer’s vision also the context within which the emergence of Neo-Confucian philosophy needs to be understood. A closer profile of three eminent participants in the debate on the title for Yingzong’s natural father, Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang, and Cheng Yi, serves as the basis for the argument that ritual expertise was fundamental to the careers and intellectual legacy of these men and that ritual debates provided a unique opportunity for Confucian scholars whose identity was anchored in ritual studies to showcase their arguments. Part IV offers a thoughtful study of the similarities and contrasts in these core intellectuals’ understanding of ritual. The conclusion that somehow Cheng Yi’s equation of ritual with the principle of coherence was inherently more persuasive than Sima Guang’s seemingly more pragmatic and statist position (p. 542) seems less persuasive as an explanation for the eventual adoption of a Chengist version of Neo-Confucianism as state orthodoxy.

By defining the object of his research as ritual discussions in which “self-definition, self-understanding, profiling and power interests, but also conviction and scholarship are tied into an indissoluble power game” (p. 566) Christian Meyer has made yet another important contribution to the debate as to why and how ritual has shaped imperial Chinese politics and society. Historians, anthropologists and scholars in religious studies who have contributed to this debate may have wished for a more extended engagement with the literature on this topic, but in the end they will find here a very compelling case of the literary discursive nature of court-oriented ritual in imperial China.

I suspect and regret that the traditional dissertation format of this work will limit its readership to dedicated reviewers and a small number of German historians of imperial China. A further indication of inadequate revision and editorial care are the recurrent absence and inconsistency of pinyin word segmentation (e.g., Taichangyingeli (p. 82) versus Taichang xinli (p. 81)); there is no index.

Hilde de Weerd

JAMES M. HARGETT:

Riding the River Home: A Complete and Annotated Translation of Fan Chengda’s (1126–1193) Diary of a Boat Trip to Wu (Wuchuan lu).

xi, 302 pp. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008. \$55.

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Our sense of China’s emergence in the Song dynasty (960–1279) from a medieval towards a modern world derives in part from the detail its writers provide in their miscellaneous jottings of the texture of their lives. Within this genre the travel