

Asiatische Studien
Études Asiatiques
LXVI · 4 · 2012

Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft
Revue de la Société Suisse – Asie

Aspects of Emotion in Late Imperial China



Peter Lang
Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Oxford · Wien

ISSN 0004-4717

© Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, Bern 2012
Hochfeldstrasse 32, CH-3012 Bern
info@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com, www.peterlang.net

Alle Rechte vorbehalten.

Das Werk einschliesslich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt.
Jede Verwertung ausserhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes
ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Das gilt
insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und
die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

Printed in Hungary

INHALTSVERZEICHNIS – TABLE DES MATIÈRES CONTENTS

Nachruf – Nécrologie – Obituary

JORRIT BRITSCHGI.....	877
Helmut Brinker (1939–2012)	

Thematic Section: Aspects of Emotion in Late Imperial China

ANGELIKA C. MESSNER (ED.).....	893
Aspects of Emotion in Late Imperial China. Editor's introduction to the thematic section	

BARBARA BISETTO.....	915
The Composition of <i>Qing shi</i> (The History of Love) in Late Ming Book Culture	

ANGELIKA C. MESSNER.....	943
Towards a History of the Corporeal Dimensions of Emotions: The Case of Pain	

RUDOLF PFISTER.....	973
A Theoretical Vignette on the Postulated Effects of a Simple Drug by Chen Shiduo (1627–1707): Japanese Sweet Flag, the opening of the heart orifices, and forgetfulness	

Aufsätze – Articles – Articles

YI QU.....	1001
Konfuzianische <i>Convenevolezza</i> in chinesischen christlichen Illustrationen. Das <i>Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie</i> von 1637	

MELINE SIEBER.....	1031
Hier ist es anders. Der Shanghai-Kurtisanenroman <i>Haishang fanhua meng</i> (Träume von Shanghais Pracht und Blüte) und der heterotopische Raum Shanghai	
<i>Rezensionsaufsatz – Compte rendu – Review article</i>	
ISOMAE JUN'ICHI / JANG SUKMAN	1081
The Recent Tendency to “Internationalize” Shinto: Considering the Future of Shinto Studies	
<i>Rezensionen – Comptes rendus – Reviews</i>	
URS APP	1099
<i>The Cult of Emptiness. The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy.</i> (Jens Schlieter)	
JOERG HUBER / ZHAO CHUAN (EDS.).....	1105
<i>A New Thoughtfulness in Contemporary China. Critical Voices in Art and Aesthetics.</i> (Andrea Riemenschnitter)	
YURI PINES.....	1111
<i>The Everlasting Empire. The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy.</i> (Hans van Ess)	
ISABELLE RATIÉ.....	1115
<i>Le Soi et l'Autre – Identité, différence et altérité dans la philosophie de la Pratyabhijñā.</i> (Michel Hulin)	
GEORGE QINGZHI ZHAO	1120
<i>Marriage as Political Strategy and Cultural Expression. Mongolian Royal Marriages from World Empire to Yuan Dynasty.</i> (Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz)	
Autoren – Auteurs – Authors	1125

PINES, Yuri: *The Everlasting Empire. The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2012, 245 pages, ISBN: 978-0691134956.

A few months ago this reviewer received the *Geschichte Chinas*, that Kai Vogelsang at about the same time published with Reclam in Stuttgart when Yuri Pines latest book came out. Vogelsang's main concern is to show that there exists no unified narrative that can cover the last two thousand years of Chinese history. According to him, Chinas history is characterized by significant ruptures and new formations, not by unbroken lines. Yuri Pines tries to prove that the contrary is true, namely that a meaningful history of China can be written by establishing a handful of institutional constants that remained more or less stable throughout the ages. This is not Pines' first book on the "empire". Three years ago he published *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring State's Era* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), the three parts of which were entitled: 1) "The Ruler", 2) "Shi: The Intellectual", and 3) "The People". The chapter titles of *The Everlasting Empire* are as follows: "The Ideal of 'Great Unity'" (1), "The Monarch" (2), "The Literati" (3), "Local Elite" (4), "The People" (5), and "Imperial Political Culture in the Modern Age" (6). One might assume that there is considerable overlap between the two books, but Pines' new book in fact is more an attempt at a continuation of what he did before for the Warring State's era.

In the first part of several of his five chapters Pines briefly summarizes what he did in *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, namely a description and interpretation of the birth and development of important concepts and political entities in ancient China and the Warring States period. He then moves on to tell what happened to the relevant concepts during the long course of Imperial China's history. Pines has managed to write a vivid account that is a good introduction to some well-known stories from ancient China for the uninitiated reader and at the same time contains much information that is interesting and surprising for the specialist. There are not many Western sinologists who dispose of as broad a knowledge as Pines to make use of such an incredibly wide array of ancient Chinese sources.

While Pines thus is to be greatly lauded for his achievement of having written an important book that tries to essentialize what a Western reader should know in order to understand ancient and modern China, one, at the same time, also feels that Pines in his desire to show continuities sometimes neglects how much development there actually was in Chinese history. Nowhere does this

become more visible than in his third chapter that may be singled out here as an example. Just as in his earlier book Pines calls the “literati” who are dealt with in this chapter “intellectuals”. Some would argue that this is a blatant anachronism. The behaviour of these intellectuals is described as being influenced by time-honoured precedents. Pines suggests that there were standards for what it meant to be an intellectual that did not change over the centuries. However, in chapter 4 in which he partly recounts the results of David Johnson’s book on the medieval Chinese oligarchy and also the Naito hypothesis on the major break that took place during the Tang-Song transition, we learn that the “local elite” changed a great deal over time. Pines apparently does not think that this was all too important for the “intellectuals”, although it is clear that the literati came from the ranks of the local elite. But was the role of a Su Shi or a Sima Guang really so similar to the one of a Sima Qian or a Ban Gu? I wondered about this question when I read on p. 94 how Emperor Wu according to the *Zizhi tongjian* dismissed any criticism of his repeated executions of literati. The text that Pines quotes is not attested to in Han sources and it shows a distinctive Song flavour. In other words: What Emperor Wu says there he would most probably never have said in a Han text. It would be an interesting research topic for future generations of sinologists to look at the differences between the writing of history in Han and in Song times by comparing such texts as the *Shiji* or the *Hanshu* with the *Zizhi tongjian*. I am quite sure that by doing this we could arrive at a much better understanding of what it meant to be an “intellectual” in both periods than we have now. Also I wonder whether sentences such as “the deprecation of their status in the imperial court was extremely frustrating for the proud literati” (p. 94) do not miss the point. Pines here adopts the approach of Liu Zehua who goes as far as to diagnose that the “literati” suffered from a kind of “psychosis” stemming from their inability to maintain their double roles as moral guides of society and as the rulers slaves. I have the strong feeling that this description of Liu Zehua is trying to apply a discussion on the role of intellectuals in 20th century China to earlier periods. Yet, the “literati” under Emperor Wu, whose status was deprecated, were members of great families, and with the deprecation of their status these *families* lost influence. So I do not think that they had to be especially “proud” in order to feel what they lost. According to the older narrative of the Han texts – not the one of the *Zizhi tongjian* – the emperor tried to bypass the “old literati” by promoting lower class officials who *also* were literati: They were actually those whose rise marked the beginning of the promotion of the canonical scriptures to the status of examination texts. Thus, to say that Emperor Wu deprecated literati or intellectuals is a view that Sima Guang

may have tried to spread but it does not work very well if one reads the primary texts from Han times.

Another issue that I would like to raise is that one often finds sweeping generalizations in this book: “On average the Chinese empire was run by more professional and committed servants than was the case in most other premodern polities” (p. 101). Why so? The complaint of many Chinese texts of the past is that the bureaucrats were corrupt because they were underpaid, and historians of Late Imperial China would argue that corruption was rampant because there were actually not enough of them. Was China then really better off than, for example, a fragmented Europe where it was much easier to govern small statelets? “The First Emperor [...] inherited what may have been the single most effective and powerful bureaucratic mechanism in Chinese history prior to Mao Zedong’s era” (p. 107f). This comes from reading the *Shiji*. “The most sophisticated rebel in China’s history, Mao Zedong” (p. 154) or “[the cultural revolution was the] most devastating mass campaign in China, if not in human history” (p. 179) – this may be true, but was Mao Zedong really as important as Pines wants to make him? There can be no doubt that he was a central figure in the 20th century but would it not be wise to consider the possibility that in a hundred years later scholars who look at our century will have more moderate views about the importance of the changes that he introduced?

A third point I would like to make is that this book is sometimes quite sino-centric. When explaining the reforms that Wang Anshi introduced Pines says that they were a “curious blend of moral idealism and pragmatism, of the quest for social justice and an equally powerful desire to increase state revenues”, and “his ‘New Policies’ [...] became] the most audacious political experiment in imperial history” (p. 115). It is true that twentieth century scholarship has liked to describe Wang Anshi, who belongs to the group of people who were defamed by the Neo Confucian movement, as a good social reformer. This is a history *à rebours*, just as the one that in the seventies was written for Qin Shihuang. This vision of history, of course, was appealing to Marxists. But is it really probable? Pines thinks that Wang “wanted to deal with new demographic pressures and the impact of commercialization; and he hoped that the invigorated state apparatus would also promote social fairness”. Could it not be that the disastrous failures of the Song armies in their encounters with enemies in the North and the West were the real reason why Wang tried to get money from rich people and to strengthen the productivity of the peasants, and that the idea of social fairness that has interested the 20th century so much was not the real impetus? Also, on page 125, the Qianlong emperor under whose reign China’s armies marched to

Lhasa and annexed Xinjiang is described as “Yongzheng’s lenient son”, an epitheton that no doubt is given him in mainland Chinese historiography because after using up many resources for wars he was less harsh in the heartland. But should a historian really call him “lenient”? On p. 162, we learn that “the dynasties leaders [...] woefully underestimated the potential of Her majesty’s fleet”. That we all learnt in class. Especially, this is what is taught in China today where the Opium War marks the beginning of *Jindai shi* [modern history]. But does this really correspond to historical reality? “New Qing history” would probably give a negative answer to this question. The Manchu deliberately decided not to concentrate too much energy on fighting what was, after all, as far as the naked figures of soldiers and their potential impact were concerned, not a major threat. Instead, one decided to give foreigners some privileges in the South in order to be able to secure what was really important: The northern border where the Manchu homeland was. This may have been a wrong decision, but the soldiers onboard England’s ships were, in fact, no real danger for China in 1840 – it was rather the tide of change that they brought with them.

Having made these remarks, I would like to stress that this is a very original book with many strengths. The main thesis that overall the imperial model worked well and therefore remained without alternative cannot be challenged. Also, following the discussion in the field of political sciences for quite some time in the beginning of the 90s of the last century regarding a potential break-up of China, it is most refreshing to read a book that explains why unity has been a defining norm for so many centuries in Chinese history. Pines is to be applauded for pointing to the fact that, as he explains in chapter 5, there was the right to rebel, a right that in fact the Chinese people has made use of over and over again without that a revolution would have taken place. Pines’ theses are interesting and thought-provoking. Packed with substantial information *The Everlasting Empire* is a good read not only for those who work in the ancient China field but maybe even more so for those who are interested in contemporary China and its political future.

Hans van Ess