Review Article

MAN, WOMAN, AND BODY IN EARLY AND IMPERIAL CHINA: RECENT GERMAN SCHOLARSHIP

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It is a perennial problem in scholarship that some of the most intriguing works on a specific subject are written in languages we do not read. This is all the more true in a field such as sinology where the acquisition of the primary language itself already takes up so much time that little seems to be left for learning yet more than perhaps the essential Japanese. This situation leads to the fact that, from time to time, the wheel is invented independently in two different places, with great expense of energy, while the result could have been much more efficiently achieved if two scholars had known of each other and had shared their knowledge and wisdom in a synergetic manner.

It is a pity that of the useful and interesting scholarship produced at German-language universities by German-speaking sinologists on subjects related to gender and body, very little receives an international echo precisely because it is written and published in German. Indeed, it is rare that any of the authors mentioned in this essay appear in the bibliographies of even the most carefully researched English-language scholarship. Yet many of the issues addressed here are of crucial importance to the arguments put forth in such studies. This review article hopes to offer a few pointers to some of the illuminating discussions in recent German-language gender-related scholarship.

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Both books under review here offer fresh insights and new views on issues that may appear trite at first sight: Why another study on the *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn annals) and the *Zuozhuan* (Zuo’s tradition) and related texts, one might ask at first, considering the volume edited by Dennis Schilling und Jianfei Kralle? And why another study on China’s correlational (anthropo)philosophical thought, as Gudula Linck’s study on the understanding of self in China proposes to be? There are good reasons for both. Not all that is being said in these two studies is necessarily better than what has been said before. Each of these books, however, in its own particular manner, continues a revisionist tradition in German-language studies on gender-related topics in which an important part was played by, to name just two outstanding examples, works such as Ute Fricker’s *Schein und Wirklichkeit. Zur alchinesischen Frauenideologie aus männlicher und weiblicher Sicht im geschichtlichen Wandel* (Appearance and reality: On ancient Chinese female ideology from the point of view of men and women through history) (Hamburg: Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens Bd. 112, 1988) and Stephan van Minden’s *Die merkwürdige Geschichte der Sai Jinhua. Historisch-philologische Untersuchung zur Entstehung und Verbreitung einer Legende aus der Zeit des Boxeraufstands* (The strange story of Sai Jinhua: A historico-philological study on the origins and the spread of a legend from the time of the Boxer rebellion) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag [Münchner Ostasiatische Studien, 70], 1994). Fricker radically reconfigures our understanding of well-known texts ranging from the earliest *Lienü zhuan* (Biographies of exemplary women) and Ban Zhao’s *Nüjie* (Precepts for women) to the women’s biographies in the *Gujin tushu jicheng* (Imperially approved syntheses of books and illustrations past and present), while van Minden successfully argues that even less than we thought we knew about “that woman, Sai Jinhua” can be uncovered as factual. Other such publications have appeared in the series of *Berliner China-Studien* (Mechthild Leutner, ed.), the *Schriften der Universitätsbibliothek Marburg* (Monika Übelhör, ed.), and the Bochum *Chinathemen* (once edited by the late Helmut Martin). Such monographs and series typically comprise German-language studies on gender, body, and, in particular, Chinese women, their historical experiences and their writings throughout the ages (from Lü Zhi to Song Qingling, from Qin Liangyu to Qiu Jin, and from Li Qingzhao to Tie Ning), in historical as well as literary depictions (with primary sources ranging from dynastic histories to newspapers and magazines, from court cases