
Research on inter-related musical traditions has always been an important focus for Hungarian ethnomusicologists. Béla Bartók’s field work in the Carpathian Basin, and Zoltán Kodály’s investigations into folk music of distant people linguistically related to Hungarians, as well as research carried out in the last 50 years, have sought to throw light on wide-ranging influences or borrowings, whether direct or indirect.

Now, János Sipos, who is proficient in several Turkic languages, is on a similar quest. He has been steadily carrying out historical research that reaches through to more distant and less known areas, despite many difficulties and obstacles out in the field. His vigorous efforts have uncovered new and better results.

His publications are evidence of the indispensable qualities required for research based on sound fieldwork, faithful transcription and informed analysis of the collected material. The recorded melodies and texts are also judiciously presented for publication. At a time when research seems to be veering towards more and more specialisation, it is a rare kind of personality who takes on the whole process, from beginning to end.

In his newest book, János Sipos compares the characteristics of the folk music of two Kazakh communities living thousands of miles from each other. He seeks to determine what contemporary people have been able to preserve of their ancient traditions; whether their melody styles are as similar as their languages, or whether their music evolved in completely different ways under the influence of neighbouring Mongolian and Arab culture.

Sipos knows that personal research work is essential, and is aware of the pitfalls in using transcriptions and publications at hand. Only in a very few cases is such a practice valid for a scientific purpose. All too often, other collections are aimed at a popular audience and disregard the scientific point of view. As for a professional transcription, it must distinguish between the important and less important elements of melodies and rhythms, and transcribes only the former. Finally the order in which the melodies are presented must serve as the most important tool to help the reader make sense of the material.

There are three major Hungarian researchers to have conducted important fieldwork among Turkic-speaking peoples until now: (1) In 1936 Béla Bartók recorded some 100 melodies in the vicinity of Adana (Turkey). (2) Between 1958 and 1979 László Vikár collected 3700 Turkic and Finno-Ugric melodies from Chuvash, Mari, Tatar, Mordvine, Votyak and Bashkir peoples living in the former Soviet Union. (3) Between 1987 and 1993 János Sipos
recorded and studied some 1400 data in 85 villages in Turkey. His latest collections add to this material.

Sipos has summarised the main conclusions of his research in his earlier books. He has shown that the Anatolian lament types are very similar to certain Hungarian laments. Clearly, one has to study not only the possible Ob-Ugrian or West-European connections of Hungarian laments but also the connections pointing to several Turkic peoples who have lived much nearer to us and had a tremendous effect on Hungarians in several ways.

There are lots of common features in the children’s songs of certain Turkic peoples and the Hungarians. And both laments and children’s songs usually represent the archaic layers of folk music.

The lower quintile shift, regular in Hungarian folk music, is unknown in Turkey. Latest fieldwork, however, has proved that it is common among the Tatars, especially in an indirect formal context.

The relations of the so-called ‘quintile shift’ structure (where the second half of the melody is five sounds deeper than the first part) may be found in the land of the northern Chuvash and the Mongols. It has become clear from recent field research that it is wiser to study essential musical similarities instead of direct melody identities as, for example, in the case of Tatar folk music.

The main questions remain: is there any real connection between the folk music of Turkic people and that of the Hungarians? Are the existing connections incidental, or only hypothetical, or are they general musical phenomena which can be found in the folk music of other people? Can the case for musical consanguinity really be proved without any shadow of doubt?

The growing amount of research outside the Carpathian Basin shows more and more that the Hungarian ethnomusicological studies must expend much more care on the folk music of Turkic people, at least as much attention as on the folk music of the linguistically related Finno-Ugric people, if not more. Both the pentatonic scales and the descending melodic lines direct our attention to this. And we have to remember that the Turkic elements are determinant in the music of other Finno-Ugric people as well, for example, for the Cheremiss and Votyak. At the same time we hardly have any examples of influences working in the opposite direction.

All this provides good reasons why Sipos turned towards the different traditions of Turkic people. However, we cannot hope for quick and surprising results. As he himself writes: “All this tends to prove the assumption that the time has not yet come to draw general conclusions about the music of Turkic peoples.” Let us add that the main reason for this is that, considering the history of Turkic people, their number and the huge territory they live on, we have only sporadic information about Turkic folk music.

In the first 70 pages of the book one can find the description of the collecting trips. This is followed by a comparative study of the folk music, with ample musical transcriptions and photos. Some parts of the study tend to be too detailed to be easy to follow. In the second part of the book we find 137 well transcribed melodies, followed by the Kazakh text of the melodies and their English translation. The various Indexes are also first-rate. The enclosed CD supplement heightens the trustworthiness of the book and affords great listening pleasure.

László Vikár


This book offers the reader fourteen papers on oral epic poetry – the proceedings of an international conference held at the University of Bonn, 7–10 September 1997. The sweep of the papers is wide both in space and time and concerns almost the whole world: Ancient Greece, South Slavs and Albanians from the Balkans, Türkmens and Karakalpaks from Asia, Aşık

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poets of Anatolia, singers from West Mongolia, the Philippines, and singers from Mali (Africa) and also from Scandinavia.

K. Reichl calls our attention to the fact that as soon as spoken folk-literature is “elevated” into music it results in a fusion of singer and listener as in the case of the Karakalpak Zhyrau’s performance (pp. 129–150).

E. Gürsoy-Naskali’s paper provides us with an insight into a very special form of epic poetry tradition surviving in Anatolia. Dudak değişmez ‘lips do not touch’ is a form of poetry which must not contain bilabial (b, p, m) or labiodental (f, v) sounds.

Even though folklore is – according to definition – literature, the author of which is unknown, aşık poetry can be considered as a kind of folklore. The aşıkş are Turkish folk poets who accompany their extemporaneous verse on a stringed instrument called saz ‘musical instrument’, especially those played by plucking. Aşık poets are ordinary people endowed with the ability of verse-making. In addition they play their instrument with a certain mastery. They assemble regularly on festivals where they compete with each other. The words of aşık poetry are expected to have deep meaning and ample poetic value in expressing the hard burden of both worldly and mystic love.

H. I. Sakata convinces the reader that music is a structural marker in epic performance. She describes the Yugoslavian horsehead fiddle called guštar that traditionally used to accompany epic performances. This recalled my personal observation from the outermost part of the steppe region. At the congress “Inner Asian Epos” held in 1997 in Ulán Bator the participants accompanied themselves on the two-stringed horsehead fiddle called morin khuur. It is supposed that the musical performances in each epic tradition help the singer to remember all the details of the events they sing about.

Thanks to this representative survey we gained a comparative material of the surviving tradition of oral epic.

Éva Csáki


Nam-mkai rgya-mcho, the Oirat Zaya Pandita (1599–1662) was the greatest literary and religious person of the Western Mongols. He introduced the so-called “clear script” (todo ւsîq) to clear away the ambiguities of the Uighur Mongol script.

Zaya Pandita became a monk in 1616, went to Köke Nur and in 1617 he arrived in Tibet. He spent twenty-two years there studying the Buddhist teaching with the leadership of the Panchen Lama. From 1638 to 1662 there are 176 works listed in his biography, among them the Altan Gerel, the Vajracchedikâ, the Thar-pa դհen-po, the Mjang-blun, etc.

He witnessed important political events; it was during his lifetime that the Khosut ruler, Gushi Khan occupied a part of Tibet and became the supporter of the Yellow Sect and the Dalai Lama. In 1640 there was also an outstanding action: the western and eastern Mongol tribes adopted a legal code to establish a sort of unity. Zaya Pandita was an active participant of all the actions of his age, a man of religious zeal, a person who embraced religious, political and cultural activity.

We are lucky to have several biographies of this important literary figure, among them perhaps the most important was written by Ratna-bhadra, his closest student. The work prepared at the end of the 17th century is not only the life story of Zaya Pandita, but gives an outline of the life of the Dzungar Khanate.

The publication of this biography of Zaya Pandita puts an important source at the disposal of researchers. The book contains the facsimile of the work (pp. 131–175), the transcription (pp. 13–50), the translation (pp. 51–180) and commentary (pp. 110–116). A detailed preface

The series “Pamjatniki Kul’tury Vostoka” started in 1993 by the ‘Centr Petersburgskoe Vostokovedenie’ (Petersburg Oriental Research Centre) intends to put valuable monuments of Oriental literature preserved at the treasure-house of their library at the disposal of scholars for further study. The latest issue offers the Oirat version of Molon toyn’s journey to hell. The present publication – as the previous ones – gives the facsimile of the text with a transliteration, translation and commentaries. A thorough study is given in the introduction comparing the Chinese, the Tibetan and all the Mongolian versions of the story.

Molon toyn was a well known figure in Oriental literature from very early times. The story of his visit to hell originates in India; however, the Sanskrit rendering has not been preserved, only the Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolian translations are available. The motive of rescuing his mother from the sufferings of the underworld was added to the story in China as early as the 2nd century as it well fitted into the Confucian idea of filial piety. From this time on up to the end of the T’ang period (907) more than two dozen versions were written. During the following Sung age a dozen more versions were prepared. A 7th–8th-century manuscript found in the Tun-huang caves relates the story as well. In China the story of Molon was put even on the stage of puppet shows and it has formed the final part of funeral rites. Actors presented it during day and night performances. During the Ch’ing dynasty (1644–1911) it was presented on market places by masked actors and it has become the subject of picture shows. The story is well known in modern Taiwan as well where a film was made of it, and here it preserved its role in burial rituals. The story has got as far as Korea and Japan, as well.1

The first known Mongolian translation was made from the Tibetan in the beginning of the 17th century by the highly reputed literary figure of the time, Siregetü güüsi. However, the archaic linguistic features of the text allow the supposition that an earlier version existed. Siregetü güüsi’s translation in a somewhat up-dated form has been cut into wooden plates in the 47th year of K’ang-his in Peking. A manuscript version of the same book is preserved in St. Petersburg and in Budapest. They were translated, or better to say, rewritten by Altangerel ubasi, who was a contemporary of the Tüshetu Khan, Gombodorji.

During the following 200 years several shorter, so-called folk-versions of the Molon toyn legend were prepared. The text in these versions is shorter and pictures take a more and more important role.

This is the first time that the Oirat version is presented in full. It is preserved in the library of the St. Peterburg collection of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The book has been mentioned earlier by scholars, but it is the first time that a thorough analysis of the text is given. The book has a colophon and mentions the translator (Culumjame – In other sources: Cülkrim rgyamzo, Culumgjamco, Cülkritzmame or Tshul-khrims rgya-misho), the copier (Masi qurduin) and the donator (Sayiyan çu qans).

Jahontova proves that the translator was Cul-
temjam and the text has not come from the pen of Zaya Pandita as supposed by some re-
searchers earlier.

The author gives a detailed comparison of the Chinese, the Tibetan, the Mongolian, the South Mongolian and Oirat versions taking as a basis the versions of Siregetü giüsü, of Altan Gerel, the two Tibetan ones preserved at St. Peter-
burg, the Inner Mongolian versions analysed by Heissig and the Ordos one given by Mos-
taert, a Chinese version from Tun-huang pub-
lished by Waley, and the present Oirat version. She points out that the Chinese version is the closest to the Oirat one preserving even literary coincidences. Though, over a long period of years the Oirat text incorporated some episodes from other, parallel texts, too, e.g. the story of the sinful lama who took pleasure in killing animals, or that of the woman longing for a beautiful man. The parallels with the Tun-
huang fragments prove that the Oirat version goes back to a very archaic version.

The publication of this important source is highly welcome, it is an important contribution to the research of the Maudgalyāyana literature that is still not satisfactorily clarified.

Alice Sárközi

LEE-KALISCH, JEONGHEE: Das Licht der Edlen (jiunzi zhi guang). Der Mond in der chinesi-
schen Landschaftsmalerei. Nettetal, Steyler Ver-
lag. 2001. 171 Seiten + 90 Abbildungen (Mo-
umenta Serica Monograph Series 48)
ISBN 3-8050-0457-5

In Sinological art history one can often encoun-
ter books written on specific artists or specific epochs; however, rarely can one read a vol-
ume wholly dedicated to one particular motif. Strangely enough, moon, one of the most wide-
spread motifs of Chinese painting, has not been investigated in depth yet. In the West this is the first book that attempts to analyse the various iconographic patterns and the different layers of meanings of the moon as it appears in Chi-
nese art of more than a thousand years.

The book is divided into three basic parts, and many more within them. The first part (pp. 13–62) is introduced by a short essay on the (mostly) poetical descriptions of the moon. It is followed by a long and detailed study of the moon as a motif in landscape-painting, and fi-
nally, as a tiny appendix to the first part, the usage of the word ‘moon’ in the artists’ names is discussed. Thus, the really relevant section of the first part is the middle one which is further subdivided into three main sections. In the first the author expounds the relationship between the autumn moon and the “jiunzi” from various perspectives (e.g. watching the autumn full moon, the reflection of the moon, or Li Bai and the moon, etc.). The next section lists the gen-
eral activities (e.g. playing zither, angling, walk-
ing, etc.) associated with the moon in Chinese painting. The last section analyses the relation-
ship between landscape and moonlight.

In comparison with the general exposition of the first part, the following two parts are more technical. In the second part of the book (pp. 63–90), the author explores the moon as a compositional element in Chinese landscape-
painting. Two major types are discussed: pic-
tures without human figures and, more thor-
oughly, the compositional patterns used in pic-
tures with them.

The third part (pp. 91–156), which investi-
gates various aspects of the representations of the moon, is the most technical one. It dis-
cusses various styles of representing the moon itself. Subsequently, she analyses the tech-
niques used in painting space and objects when exposed to moonlight. Finally, the techniques used when painting reflects moonlight are in-
vestigated. At the end of this part a general summary is given on the variegated features of moon-landscapes. The book ends with a short summary, a bibliography, and 90 plates of pic-
tures. No index is attached.

The basic aim of the book is, as evident from the title as well, to explore the icono-
graphic characteristics of “the moon and the
scholar” (gaoshi, wenshi, xueshi, or simply shi) motif; thus, it does not entail, for example, the recurring motif of a woman and the moon. Both the more general first part, and the more technical second as well as third parts are full of stimulating insights, and ingenious analyses. Lee-Kalisch suggests for example that these kinds of representations are highly formalised and ritualised. The ritual character of the moon-watching can be also supported by the fact that it can take place only in certain, non-ordinary surroundings (towers, terrace, wutong-trees); furthermore, it is often associated with Buddhist concepts or even meditation.

The author is evidently an expert on the history of Chinese painting; no allusions, however, are made to any general works on art history which would clarify her intellectual background. Naturally, this seeming lack of a manifest general orientation can also be an advantage, as no outside authorities are invited to explain inherent Chinese notions and techniques. However, such a stance might also hinder the possibility for an art historian of another field to firmly grasp the topic. Though in most of the cases the Chinese original comes next to the (German or English) translation, curiously, it is not added to some excerpts (e.g. p. 6, p. 29). A more serious problem arises when one scrutinises the logical structure of the first part. The author, who apparently paid much attention to the structural transparency of the book, seems to have forgotten it in the first chapter. The three basic units within the first part, though not really well proportioned (A: 7 pp., B: 39 pp., C: 3 pp.), still reflect a logical division. Even the three subchapters of part B can be regarded as based on some rationale. Within the first unit of part B (B.1.), however, one encounters several phenomena that are hard to explain if compared to other parts of the consciously careful order. Instead of subordinating it to the first subdivision, she juxtaposes the evidently hierarchically related parts (e.g. The ’autumn moon, watermelon and mooncake’ part should be evidently within the first ’autumn moon’ unit; the same is true for the g–h pair). I cite these illogical structural divisions only because in other parts of the book the structured units make the difficult and complex topic extremely clear. Apart from these minor faults, the book is highly interesting and stimulating.

Gábor Kösa


This volume is dedicated to K. Schipper, known best by his contributions to various aspects of Taoist studies and popular religions. K. Schipper, who was a student of M. Kaltenmark and R. Stein, had several unique features in his career. To cite just two of them he was among the few in the 1960s who carried out extensive fieldwork in Taiwan (1964–1970). Moreover, he was the first Westerner who was ordained as a Taoist master. As the volume especially celebrates the years Schipper spent at Leiden University (1993–1999), many of the articles are contributions by Leiden scholars. The articles follow the chronological order of the subjects discussed, thus the integrating element of the volume, like in works of this kind, is the authors’ esteem for and friendship with K. Schipper. I will proceed by briefly summarising the contents of the essays.

The first essay by B. J. Mansvelt-Beck sets the tone of the whole book, even if it also differs from the majority of the writings. This very lively, witty and stylistically free essay gives a good example of an attitude which concentrates on some seemingly basic, linguistic usages which are often neglected in favour of more serious, general studies. Such questions like what is the exact difference between two words, usually introduced in the third lesson of any Classical Chinese textbook, which are most often equally translated as ‘cry’ or ‘weep’ (qi and ku, Chr. Harbsmeier’s problem); or, in this case, who the simple first personal pronoun (wu, wo)

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Giovanni Vitellos studies *Longyang yishi* (“The Forgotten Story of Longyang”), a late Ming collection of homoerotic tales which contrasts the mercantile nature of homoerotic relations of the Ming with the attitude of antiquity, symbolised by the Lord of Longyang, which stressed honouring feelings (*qing*), moral values and romantic devotion.

The relationship between Taoism and medicine has been investigated by many eminent scholars, and the emphasis was usually put on the origins of medicine. In his writing Peter Engelbert discusses the basically Neo-Confucian character of Ming medicine. Although Neo-Confucianism has incorporated various Taoist and Buddhist elements in this respect as well, in this period medicine ceases to be linked in any way to Taoism. The process of despecialisation, the disappearance of other types of healers and healing techniques (e.g. acupuncture) all attest to the strengthening position of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy in the field of medicine as well.

The scarcity of information on organised Christian charity in Ming China, practiced by lay associations, is expanded by one more analysis by E. Zürcher. He investigates and translates “Statutes of the Humanitarian Society” (*Renhuilue*), composed by Wang Zheng (1541–1644) in 1634. The next essay in the volume by Nicolas Standeart analyses the difference between Chinese and Jesuit classificatory systems of sciences in Late Ming period. The analysis of the comparison shows that “Chinese authors seldom employed the Western style of analytic philosophical discourse” (p. 314). The collaboration between Chinese Christians (Yang Tingyun, Li Zhizao) and Jesuits (e.g. F. Furtado) resulted in their respective re-evaluation of the classificatory system of sciences, but had only minor impact on contemporary Chinese thinking.

The financial background of Qing imperial banqueting is analysed by Ellen Utizinger, who concludes that it was in fact the guest princes enjoying their meal in the Taizhedian who supported their own banquet. In the last writing of the volume Robin Ruizendaal explores the marionette theatre tradition of the Quanzhou region of Fujian and its legacy in Tainan-Gaoxing region of Taiwan. Ruizendaal describes the structure and the texts of the ritual prelude, the exorcistic dance by the patron saint, the invocation of the deities, and the presentation of the Memorial. The author also analyses the impact of changes in the entertainment market, and the surviving relevance of the religious meaning in contemporary society.

In sum, this volume, dedicated to K. Schipper, contains numerous essays of various different fields of Sinology, so that everyone can find something for his/her taste or discover new research fields for him/herself. Or one can simply enjoy the intellectual sparkle of these interesting essays.

Gábor Kósa


From at least the *Yigupai* movement at the beginning of the 20th century, every Sinologist is aware of the fact that Chinese tradition most often attributes a longer past to each element of Chinese culture than the scientific approach of Sinology could prove. Though there were several skeptics in Chinese history earlier who expressed their disbelief about the authenticity of certain scriptures or rites, systematic philological analysis in fact began only in the 20th century. During this period several methods were applied to demonstrate that many scriptures that Chinese tradition considered to be ancient ones written by ancient sages were in fact compiled and edited by Han or post-Han scholars. Though the tendency to invalidate traditional opinions on the long past of some scriptures remains one of the foci of Sinology, the contents of these scriptures have not been entirely researched from this perspective. During the Han period there were several attempts to find a continuity between the pre-Qin (i.e. Zhou)
and the post-Qin (i.e. Han) periods, and thus to complement the emperor’s claim to a universal view of the cosmos, the country and the people. In addition to the formation of a set of sacred scriptures, Han scholars aimed at inventing (according to their point of view, reinventing) a ritual orthodoxy. In addition to the loss of books during the Qin period, Han Confucian scholars also had to face the problem of a growing set of local religious practices which were assimilated to the religious universe of the unified empire. The representatives of these local traditions (fangshi, wu, etc.) were quite influential during the first century of the Han. Thus, Confucian scholars were forced to create (recreate) a central orthodox tradition in order to substitute for the substantial loss during the Qin and to compete with the influence of diverse local religious specialists.

Marianne Bujard’s new book is a fine example of the serious analysis of this process. Exploring the origins of one specific sacrifice, Bujard demonstrates that the general tendency described above can be supported by the thorough investigation of concrete examples. Bujard convincingly proves that the supposedly ancient imperial rite of jiao (performed every year by the Emperor to Heaven in the suburbs) was, in its form practiced from the 1st up to the 20th century, in fact introduced during the Han by Dong Zhongshu. In his Chunqiu fanlu, Dong argued that the jiao sacrifice was the only way of communication between the emperor and his father, Heaven. Though Dong Zhongshu did everything to convince Emperor Wudi to reject Qin and local methods of ceremonies, it was only later (in 31 BC) that Emperor Cheng abolished all heterodox religious practices, and established a long tradition when performing a sacrifice in the southern suburb of Chang’an. Confucian scholars, in order to suppress alternative religious influences, attempted to control the imperial rites by promoting an imperial ceremony which was to some extent artificially established.

Bujard’s book, prefaced by K. Schipper, is divided into three basic parts. In the first part (pp. 27–75; ch. 1–IV), after discussing Dong Zhongshu’s biography and the authenticity of Chunqiu fanlu, Bujard translates the relevant part (XIV, 65) of this work into French. Furthermore, this excerpt is analysed in the subsequent chapter. At the end of this first part she summarizes the definition of the jiao sacrifice as Dong Zhongshu saw it.

In order to gain legitimacy for his proposal, Dong Zhongshu searched through the classics and selected references and, what is perhaps more important, certain interpretations of these passages to establish the jiao rite. In the second part of the book (pp. 77–123; ch. V–VII) the author reproduces the relevant excerpts of the classics (Shijing, Chunqiu, Zouzhuang, Gongyangzhuang, Guilangzhuang, Shangshu, Zouli) and their interpretations to clarify this process. Bujard concludes that none of the sources Dong Zhongshu referred to contains a detailed description of the rite. What is more, there are several passages in the classics which clearly contradict Dong Zhongshu’s interpretation.

The third part (pp. 125–217; ch. VIII–IX) describes the relevance and the perspective of the Shiji and the Hanshu in legitimising the imperial jiao rite. Bujard discusses the role played by Gaozu, Wendi, and Wudi in introducing it. Moreover, the importance of the sacrifices performed to Taiyi and Houtu, especially as compared with that offered to Heaven, is investigated. In the subsequent chapter Bujard translates the second part of the Jiaosi zhi (‘On jiao and si sacrifices’) chapter of the Hanshu with abundant annotations. Both this and the previous translations are excellent. The book ends with a conclusion, a bibliography, some maps, an index and a brief English abstract.

Marianne Bujard conscientiously collected and explored all relevant material to support her opinion that the jiao sacrifice of the Zhou, mentioned in many classics, are far from being identical with that proposed by Dong Zhongshu. The passages of the classics all attest to the fact that the jiao sacrifice was not performed by the emperor alone to Heaven in the suburbs, preceding all other sacrifices, as with some further characteristics it was proposed by Dong Zhongshu. Thus, the analysis of the jiao rite

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again supports the general view that Han scholars endeavoured to create new ceremonies in order to legitimise their position as direct inheritors of Zhou legacy.

Gábor Kósa


There is every chance for a new Sinological field of study to be born. During the history of Sinology there were several instances when the need for a new field of knowledge became manifest. When the Shang oracle bones were found in 1898, specialised experts were needed to decipher them. Similarly, the growing amount of newly excavated texts, and archaeological finds from the ancient Chu sites all appear to necessitate the appearance of some “Chuologist” experts. If such a specific field is acknowledged in the future, they will certainly refer to the present work as a milestone in “Chuology”.

As is well known, prior to the Qin–Han unification China was not homogeneous. Although our knowledge stems from a certain line of transmission of written materials (Shang–Zhou–Han), it is evident from the archaeological finds that present-day China was dominated by various specific cultures from the Neolithic period on. These cultures shared many features, but, at the same time, possessed some distinctive characteristics on their own. The state of Chu was not simply one of them, but stands out in several respects. It was the greatest state when it collapsed under the Qin attack in 223 BC; however, there is some evidence to suggest that its cultural legacy survived in the subsequent centuries. Since then in the Chinese mind it was often associated with a distinct flavour and world-view. The scholars of this volume decided to reassess this traditional Chinese stance to define a more objective role of Chu in Chinese culture and history. One of the purposes of the authors is to re-evaluate the distinctiveness of Chu culture and its slightly distorted image preserved in the transmitted texts. A new assessment of this kind is made possible only because in recent decades we have had to face a growing set of new archaeological finds: Mawangdui, Guodian, Baoshan, Jiudian, Leigudun, to cite just the most famous ones. All of them provided unprecedented evidence on ancient Chinese culture and all of them come from sites of the (in some cases former) Chu state.

The structure of the book is clear and the content is well-balanced. The complex issue of Chu is approached from nearly all possible aspects, and thus the volume provides a general, but detailed view of this ancient state. The three parts of the book offer excellent essays written by the best specialists of the respective fields. After a preface and an introduction, the first part contains three essays. B. B. Blakeley has two contributions: one in this section summarises the debate on the location of the two capitals of Chu (Danyang and Ying). Despite the relative abundance of information on other aspects of Chu culture, there is no scholarly agreement on the precise location of the capitals. Blakeley succinctly gives the possible alternatives and a history of research on the issue. The major part of Blakeley’s essay is dedicated to the detailed description of the expansions and contractions of Chu territory from 700 to 223 BC. In the next essay Xu Shaohua surveys the archaeological finds and the material culture of Chu. He stresses that – in addition to the question of distinctiveness compared to the Central Plains – one also has to explore the issue of local, cultural diversity within the Chu political realm. Xu Shao lists all important Chu archaeological sites and discusses their regional characteristics. J. F. So, in the last study of the first part, gives a fine example of the dual nature of Chu culture. On the one hand, many artistic changes and innovations are paralleled by developments in other contemporary regions of China; on the other hand, however, Chu art appears to be a major source of radical innovations during the Qin and Han dynasty (incense burners, lacquer, silk, realistic and three-dimensional representations, calligraphy, etc.).

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The second section of “Defining Chu” is dedicated to the social dimensions of Chu. B. B. Blakeley examines the structure of Chu state and society, concluding that the majority of its characteristics derived from the north and were rather similar to the practices in the contemporary states. However, it sharply differs from them in its unique degree of centralisation that seems to have been inherited by the Qin and the Han. C. A. Cook, through examining bronze inscriptions, follows the process during which Chu became independent of the Zhou court. With the decline of Zhou ritual power Chu could develop new, independent forms of sacrificial objects and ritual rhetoric. S. Weld explores the legal documents from Baoshan. Through these documents one can gain a glimpse into the everyday life of Chu towns, the complex stratification of the society, the various methods of social control, the role of the king, the pre-Qin practice of registration, and (last but not least) the religious beliefs underlying legal procedures. In the last study of the second part H. Peters stresses the importance of Chu as a geographic, economical and political mediator between the north and the south. Chu played a crucial role in moving a specific set of goods (pearls, ivory, gold, etc.) from the south to the north or vice versa. This contact with various local traditions could influence the unique combination of features Chu culture displayed, and its preservation of individual traits (e.g. structure of towns and buildings).

The last section of the volume is dedicated to the “spirit” of Chu. J. S. Major – who was (as far as I know) the first westerner to write on the distinctive religious traits and their possible roots in Chu culture in 1978 – summarises his present view on the religious features of late Chu culture. He furnishes detailed evidence and provides various examples for all features he considers to be distinctive (e.g. belief in monstrous gods of direction and months, a consistent set of animal images, apotropic figures with protruding tongues, bulging eyes and antlers, importance of hunting as a ritual behaviour, shamanism, mediumism, and ecstatic flights). J. S. Major – although also mentioning the possible links of Chu to the state of Qi and the Shang – puts the emphasis on the emergence of a specific culture during the late Warring States, in the eastern and southern regions of Chu. As G. Sukhu demonstrates in the last study of the book, it was this “exotic” image of Chu that survived and was kept alive during the subsequent Han dynasty. Sukhu contrasts the underlying shamanic culture of the Chu ci and its Confucian interpretation. There is much evidence to suggest that Confucians attacked shamanic practices of “the south” in order to define and legitimise their own positions. As the shamanic Chu ci was one of the most popular literary works at the Han court, Confucian scholars did their best to interpret it within their own intellectual framework. Their triumph at the court is well illustrated by the fact that the Confucian Wang Yi’s commentary became definitive for the subsequent centuries. The last essay is followed by J. S. Major’s concluding remarks, and an important appendix in which Li Ling and C. A. Cook translate the Chu Silk manuscript. At the end of the volume there are notes, an excellent bibliography and an index.

The only shortcoming of the book is perhaps that, aside from the items in the bibliography, Chinese characters are completely absent. In the next edition this minor fault can be probably corrected. Another remark might pertain to the maps of the volume. As one of the aims of the book is surely to serve as a scholarly introduction to Chu studies, it is also intended for scholars who are not Chu specialists. There are several excellent maps in the volume; however, I missed a series of maps that would show the changing extent of Chu territory within the Chinese world in a successive, chronological order. The textual counterpart of such a set of maps is presented by B. B. Blakeley in his “The Geography of Chu” (pp. 13–19).

The majority of the individual contributions – and thus the book as a whole – appears to suggest that the distinctiveness of Chu culture is a relatively late phenomenon, which is – to some extent at least – attributable to its willingness to acculturate the indigenous cultures it conquered during the centuries. Although this
idea is basically true, it is to be noted that the authors of this volume, obviously, try to counterbalance the generally accepted and widespread notion that emphasises the complete difference and distinctiveness of Chu culture with which most of the contributors, apparently, do not agree. Future studies may support or alter this idea and some other ideas in the volume, but the basic contents of this volume will surely not change for a long time. This book is a major contribution to and a mature summary of Chu studies; moreover, a must for anybody interested in ancient China.

Gábor Kósa