議題（包括上海會計師行業與國家的關係），有興趣的讀者可以參考拙著《民國時期的國家與社會：自由職業團體在上海的興起，1912–1937》。[4]

上述意見見仁見智，但無礙筆者對全書之欣賞和推薦——本書無疑應當列為學習上海史的必讀書。我們可以期待，對上海近現代歷史的重新認識和理解將不斷深化。葉文心的這本著作對上海和中國近現代史的進一步研究，特別是對歷史上經濟、社會和文化的交合點的研究，提供了又一個新的啓發和幫助開拓了一個新的領域。

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Pattern and Person: Ornament, Society, and Self in Classical China. By Martin J. Powers. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006. Pp. xvi + 374. $49.95/£32.95.

When I was asked to review Professor Powers's book, I was a little concerned because of my fairly weak understanding of the questions related to "Classical China." Someone who specializes in the Ming-Qing period is often ill-equipped to understand the very different set of issues concerning that remote period of the history of China. My worries were however put to rest very quickly as I started reading the book: Martin Powers makes sure at every step that the unfamiliar readers are given more than enough information to understand and make their way through the concepts explored by this enlightening book. My near-ignorance of the subject and the period, and the brilliance of the book, pushed me to write as detailed as possible an account of its content, as a result this book review might seem longer than usual for that sort of exercise. Similarly, not wanting to miss any of the ideas developped by the author, I took the most straightforward approach and simply reviewed each chapter in turn.

In this book, Professor Powers tackled an extremely ambitious project, namely "to write an extended meditation on the cognitive dimension of art: how artefacts encode basic propositions about what it means to be a person" (p. i). Rather than embarking on

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4 北京：新星出版社，2007 年。也可參考其英文版前身，*Chinese Professionals and the Republican State: The Rise of Professional Associations in Shanghai, 1912–1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)，但英文版不包括關於會計師的那一章。

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《中國文化研究所學報》 Journal of Chinese Studies No. 49 - 2009

generalizations, he used the art and the political writings of Classical China, the subject he is most familiar with, to explore this topic. The idea that objects, and the patterns on these objects, are a substrate for the abstract thinking of a certain period seems obvious enough (although few have managed to show it as well as Martin Powers), but the notion that the thinking associated with these objects continue to exercise their influence after their disappearance is something he had already explored earlier in an article on painting theory. In "When Is a Landscape Like a Body?"[1] he observed that the preponderance of landscape painting at the beginning of the Song dynasty was accompanied by a decline of the practice of portrait and figure painting, two genres which were in favour particularly during the Tang dynasty. Before the establishment of the Song dynasty, there had been drastic changes in the system of civil service examination which created a new kind of élite, élite that was to replace the old hereditary aristocracy in all their social, political and economical functions. Landscape painting was therefore turned into the ideal medium of these new élite which saw themselves as worthy of their position because of their intellectual merits. Because of the rising influence of those new élite, portrait and figure painting, a favourite of the old aristocracy, was therefore given a lower status. Interestingly, the theoretical discourse which accompanied this shift still relied on a notion of élite that was not so different from an aristocratic discourse. The literati were thus claiming that they had the right to explore and paint nature because their education made them members of a sort a "natural aristocracy" which was not hereditary and thereby accessible to anyone deserving enough to become a member. In this context, it is landscape painting, a genre that emerged before the advent of literati culture in painting, which became the "object"—not disappearing this time but changing profoundly in its form—of a changing way of thinking.

In "Introduction: Graphic Patterns and Social Order," the first character to appear is the craftsman, who is in any culture following some kind of patterns in his work for persons who are usually their social better. Their activity is therefore necessarily situated within social relationships that are grounded on a specific notion of worth: "Graphic patterns, in other words, can serve as paradigms of social order" (p. 2). In "Question of Historical Method," the author continues with a description of the book"s methodology and a clarification of his position *vis-à-vis* some of the most enduring clichés attached to political thinking in China, clichés that were born in Euro-America but somehow found their way back to China. We will see in the last section of this review how important it is for the author to show that there is no benefit in presenting China, its history and its episteme, as the "other of the West." The next section, "Art and Personality," allows

1 Martin J. Powers, "When Is a Landscape Like a Body?" in *Landscape, Culture, and Power in Chinese Society,* ed. Wen-hsin Yeh (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1998), pp. 1–22.

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the author to warn art historians, but also art sociologists and anthropologists, against falling into the usual trap of intuitive analogies between form and ideological content. Personal, emotional, readings of patterns and designs—which also tend to rely on cultural stereotypes—should be avoided in order to understand their advent and significance in a given society.

In "Visual Perception and Social Order," the author defines clearly the topic of this book, namely to understand how "personal identity and prerogative [can] be negotiated in visual terms in early society" (p. 13), the society in question being China in the period between the fifth and the second century B.C. Martin Powers also adds that this question is transhistorical and must be studied with an "awareness of the present" (p. 13). Adding that it is difficult to find words for "personality" in the literature of the Spring and Autumn period, he describes how "status" was the operative concept in defining one's function in a society where public and private affairs were often the same. He very importantly specifies that this was not specific to China, such a situation having been described in Tudor England for instance. But this conception of "person" was also a changing situation as the political thinking of the Warring States period started to include other concepts like that of "people" (*min* 民). Never a static concept, the "person" was as likely to change in the thinking of ancient China as in the rest of the world. In the last section of this introduction, "Ornament and Order," Professor Powers uses the patterns on a late Spring and Autumn period ritual vessel to illustrate how its different registers as well as its various designs can be read as revealing a certain type of social order. Whereas this vessel indicates a clearly stratified society, the very fluid and dynamic patterns on a later vessel of the early Han dynasty, this time present on objects that were not used for rituals, were indicative of a much more dynamic society, ruled by an adaptable bureaucracy that was, for the first time in the history of China, capable of providing positions to man according to their talent. Clouds and dragons, because of their flexible nature, became therefore an essential pattern in this fluid society.

In the first chapter (Style), a wealth of examples of how the making of ritual objects was revealing of an entire culture and its social organization is provided with an important number of translations. These texts (given with the original Chinese) illuminate both the stylistical analysis of the objects and their social context to give a portrait of the changing cultural conditions of that remote period. Paramount in these texts is the changing status of concepts like "state," nobility and "people" and Martin Powers manages to show in the ornament of these objects how these transformations were visually translated. In order to do so, in sections titled "Social Content in Classical Ornament" and "Procedural Rules," he does not limit his analysis at a visual description of the vessels, but also describes the way they were made by the craftsmen of the past so as to emphasize how certain kinds of standardization in their making reveal different social structures (he also reminds us by the same token that it was in China that a kind of mass production line was first to appear). The compartmentalisation of the ritual vessels, for instance, the fact that the knowledge of how to make them was not necessarily shared by their makers indicates a

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strict social division. As markers of social structure, all the objects of a period have to be taken into account, which poses the complicated problem of "Style," the white whale of art history which is indispensable but can create sometimes insurmountable problems. This is where the notions of "macro style" and "micro style" (p. 42) come in handy and allow the author to recognize how variations in style can still provide an understanding of the methods and social implications of the use of certain patterns. In the last section, "Style and Order," he shows how craft could both reveal and support the episteme of a time and place by reminding the reader that the notion of "paradigm" in Plato's work derived from the activity of craftsmen. In a similar reading of objects, Martin Powers show how China during the Spring and Autumn period could use its own artefacts to manifest its own social structure. In the words of the author: "By late Warring States times, certain features of artefact could serve, not simply as metaphors, but as models for complex theories" (p. 46).

In the second chapter (Terms of Craft), Professor Powers confronts the objects and their ornaments with the texts of the period (providing us with a word of caution on the problems of dating such texts). After selecting the most revealing kinds of texts, the author goes through a long list of words and analyse their meaning in the section titled "Production and Style," making sure the traditional English translation of these words is understood within its proper context. By doing so, he manages in "Material and Social Measurement" to reveal in an extremely precise fashion the implications of ritual objects, but also simply luxurious items, in the social definition of roles and prerogatives. The reader is thus made aware that, during the Spring and Autumn period, the meaning of such terms as *shi* 式 (style), *du* 度 (degree) or even *fa* 法 cannot be understood outside of their proper context and that they can reveal very specific epistemological conditions. In "Compartmental Logic and Ceremony," it is eventually the notion of "degree"—in the sense of social position—that seems to take on a new importance. The additive nature of this concept is transposed in the additive quality of the patterns on ritual vessels, a quality that presupposes a "modular system in which social degrees could be visibly expressed as levels of density, number, size, or motif" (p. 57). Social position is however not the only thing revealed in the patterns and the rituals, they also reveal how they are related to the larger realm and how nature itself becomes compartmentalized. In "Compartment Logic and Nature," the author shows how this understanding of nature also relies on craft terms. The structure of ornamental patterns in the ritual objects, the social structure and the forms of nature conceived within this epistemological context therefore echoed one another to reveal the functions and strategies operating during that period.

In chapter 3 (Abstraction), it is shown that *shi* (style) can also reveal that the degree of density of ornament and its level of abstraction are "a *sign* for a *proportionate* degree of authority" (p. 66). From a more antique form of commercial exchange relying on agricultural products to the more sophisticated exchange of ritual objects of the Spring and Autumn period, it is the relationship between nobility and the rest of society that reveals the degree of ritual abstraction evident in style. In "Style and Abstraction," we are shown that the stylisation of ritual is always visible in the patterns of the ritual object and

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in "Possession and Identity" that ornament in general marked early societies presence in an environment not yet overly marked by human intervention. Martin Powers advances then the daring theory that ornament plays, in early societies, the role of abstracted social value, a role that would be played for stored labour value by capital in industrial societies. But the similar role shared by ornament and capital cannot be the whole story and it is precisely the "abstracting power of style" (p. 71) that allowed ornament to play this part and become a sign in its possession by the nobility. Ornament therefore functions like ideas, but in "Figurative Ornament and Representation," the author adds that, in addition to abstraction, figures also plays a similar part. But the figures in question are not what is meant by representation in a mimetic, Euro-American sense, and Martin Powers then embarks on an analysis of the sense of *xiang* 象 in the literature of the time. These figures are therefore more evocative than directly figurative; they can therefore just as well take the shape of a kind a figurative abstraction, what Martin Powers call "allusive design" (p. 79) and also transfer the quality of the designed to its owner. In "Summary: Style and Status," the author recapitulates the process that made possible the transfer of authority from one person to another thanks to the production of object and their abstract designs, designs and status that are then derived into words like *shi, du* and *fa*.

Chapter 4 (Craft) is dedicated to the status and bargaining powers obtained by the craftsmen themselves. Some of them occupied a fairly high rank in the hierarchy and their position provided them with some measure of power over the nobility. In "Crafting Order," the author uses ancient texts to show that *fa* means "craft" and can be applied to both great thinkers and craftsmen. In "The Craftsman in Early Social Discourses," other texts are used to try to establish what was the relationship between the "makers of honor" and the "possessors of honor" (p. 89). What was felt as an impossible contradiction in Europe where most craftsmen came from the lower classes of society, was resolved by attributing to them the status of "sage," an effort made possible by the idea of *fa*. Things were not so simple at the times of the Warring States though and different texts will tackle this issue differently, some attributing to the nobles the creation of artefacts (the fact that they were commissioned to craftsmen made no difference) and others, like the *Zhuangzi,* attributing to craftsmen themselves the talent and high moral standard required to create these objects. But in "Craft Officers and Government," we are reminded that these craftsmen were generally the designers of the ritual objects and not their direct makers. There was therefore less social obstacles for them to become major actors, closely related to the ruling class.

In the fifth chapter (Government), the author takes us into a fairly different world in which the different schools of thoughts typical of the Warring States period, which made a discussion on the changing social status of classes like the craftsmen possible, subsided during the Eastern Zhou. Authors of that period were inclined to discuss the proper use of ornament precisely because the social order was far more stable in their view. The theory of the "Mandate of Heaven" (*tianming* 天命) made sure that most rulers would listen to popular discontent, a new attitude which allowed craftsmen to show their disagreement on

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issues of decorum and "degree" (*du*) of social status. When criticism was addressed to the ruler, the critics were using a rhetoric that was based on the vocabulary derived from craft, the vocabulary of the designs and ornaments or ritual objects. In "Ornament and Property," Martin Powers situates this use of vocabulary in the new context of land ownership of the late Eastern Zhou and early Warring States period, during which ownership of the land shifted from the gentry to landowners, which also meant that taxation became more widespread while wealth and station were more commonly inherited. This led the necessity of strict observance to rules of decorum particularly important, but also respect for the people on behalf of the gentry and the necessity not to overburden them with unnecessarily lavish ritual objects. The author shows us here how very open discussions on politics and status were during that period, making the old clichés of the eternally autocratic China suddenly absurd. The questioning of the aristocracy's use of resource for creating expensive ritual objects led to the notion that virtue was no longer commensurate with wealth: by the Warring States period, ornament was in danger of being simply a display of wealth.

Chapter 6 (Labor, Invention and "Taste") elaborates on the changes in the use of modular patterns from the Spring and Autumn to the Warring States period, a change Martin Powers calls "Synthetic Macro Style" during the latter period. This change also manifests the fact that, whereas the previous patterns could be done incrementally and therefore be left to assistants, the new style could only be made by craftsmen deciding how the patterns would grow, a method therefore necessitating more brainpower. There was a clear separation between design and execution. In "Decor and Secular Culture," Martin Powers attempts to answer the question of why such a radical change could occur. Previous historians had already explained this change in social terms, the new desire for display accompanying a change from a ritual respect for nature to a more secular attitude toward government and the world. The separation between nature and ceremony during the Warring States period made these more complex designs possible. In addition, the fact that knowledge was more readily accessible also robbed nature of a large part of its mysteries, social order being not any longer seen as dependant on the mysterious forces of nature. In that context, "ornament . . . had lost its old ideological function, creating a need for new ways to justify the transfer of resources from producers to rulers" (p. 122). That "rift between society and nature" (p. 121) was also visible in the literature of the time. In this period of "discovery of subjectivity" (p. 122, citing A. C. Graham[2]), the bureaucracy arose from the weakening of the familial system and a need for the redefinition of man's place in the universe was made central. In "Ceremony Versus Ingenuity," other literary sources are provided to support the idea that more intellectual labour was then required to

[2] A. C. Graham, "Chuang-tzu's Essay on Seeing Things as Equal," *History of Religions* 9, no. 2–3 (1969–1970), pp. 142–43.

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create patterns that reflected this change in attitude and social standards. These changes were accompanied by, apparently for the first time in China, the idea of "taste" (*guan* 觀) as a way for the "people" (*min*) to appreciate the luxury displayed by the ruling élites, an "acquired capacity" (p. 129).

The author continues his exploration of the changes in social structure during the Warring States period and their subsequent modifications of patterns and craft ideas in the political texts of the periods in chapter 7 (Craft and Political Theory), in which he explores in details such period terms as *fa* and *du,* and all the politically and socially related vocabulary derived from craft, by replacing their changing meanings in the context of the texts and comparing them with similar notions in Europe, giving us in the process examples of a meritocratic discourse in early China that might fly in the face of many unfortunately well established clichés: by then, the ruler's authority was no longer intrinsic in the man but merely a function of political circumstances. Recapitulating these notions in "Style and Status," Martin Powers concludes that the fourth century B.C. was a time during which it was possible for the wealthy to imitate courtly taste precisely because ornament was no longer seen as intrinsically related to power and virtue.

Chapter 8 (Ornament and Identity) is dedicated to the study of new changes appearing in the motives around the third century B.C., with a growing number of designs that cannot be described as patterns any longer because of their more obvious resemblance with animals. These figures are, however, still so much part of the ground, that Professor Powers calls this style "metamorphic" (p. 164), a style fundamentally different from what came before. This kind of style being impossible to make by simple repetitive patterns, they required "the social activity of segregating roles" (p. 165). Socially constructed positions can therefore be shown by objects made by craftsmen who could rise from the ranks thanks to their own personal skills. The "Hidden Dragons" studied in the objects of the period are no longer signs of ranks but proof of "taste." In addition, the shape-shifting quality of the dragon can be compared to the adaptability of the great man: the undulating dragon in these motives is comparable to the undulating path of the ambitious man. In "Form and Knowledge," he then embarks on a comparison between the relativist view of the *Zhuangzi* and the God-based fixed structure of the Greeks to analyse how social relativism came about in Warring States period China. He concludes this section by showing that the openness of the *Zhuangzi*'s view of the world and society still allowed for a number of points on which to base a functioning social structure. "Natural Order" (*ziran* 自然, which means "self-generated," i.e. non artificial or "self-made" in the social sense) becomes, thanks to its own flexibility, the most reliable point upon which to base a social order, and obviously the designs of the objects of that period. In "The Generic Condition," Martin Powers roots the ambiguity between figure and ground in the motives of bronze objects in the relativism of the period: whereas the certainty that there is a clear ontological lines between objects lead to perfectly defined demarcation lines between objects in representations, periods when this certainty is replaced by a more relativist attitude *vis-à-vis* nature and social constructs allow for a less clearly defined relationship between figure

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and ground. In that context, the dragons look like clouds, they do not separate clearly from the background, but they still look like dragons.

In chapter 9 (Bureaucracy and Agency), the author goes on to explain that the new logic of spatial relationship was figuring the new relationship of the individual to the state and that these new ideas were shaped in the court-sponsored academies of the Warring States period. In "Academies and Cosmopolitics," he adds that the relationship between these academies and the court was not straightforward and that a great deal of what we would call today "academic freedom" was possible because they were not as dependent on ceremonies and ritual as previous court-sponsored institutions. It was in these academies that, according to the texts, "bureaucratic theory and the theory of nature developed hand-in-hand . . . during this period" (p. 190). A very normal occurrence: it is when the foundations of powers seem less solid, more fluid, that a desire to redefine these foundations becomes paramount. It is in this context that the thinkers of bureaucratic theory came up with the idea of an order that would run itself, what Martin Powers call "the Dialectics of Agency," i.e. the concept of *wuwei* 無為. It is again the absolute flexibility of the dragon design that is evoked to represent the bureaucrat who could be entirely adaptable and always capable of recognizing the needed talent for a certain task in others and in themselves. The "shapelessness" (*wuxing* 無形) of the bureaucrat or the ruler was translated in similar "shapelessness" in the designs of bronze and lacquer vessels of the same period. By replacing it in its original political and bureaucratic context Martin Powers also manages to debunk the Euro-american idea that the notion of *wuwei* was somehow mystical. Agency therefore is no longer in the monarch but in the individuals who have to adapt to their position of their own accord: "the burden of identity falls back upon the responding individual (p. 202)." In "Bureaucratic Practice," Martin Powers then shows us through ancient documents that all these new ideas were put into practice at the administrative level, and again, the vocabulary used to define these notions came from the realm of craft. The original meaning of *wuwei* (usually translated as "non action") is a bureaucracy that functions like a machine in an entirely rational way (the fact that the bureaucrats were starting to be paid on fixed terms was part of the idea of the state as a well-oiled machine, where agency and function would not rely on personal whims). The notion of self derived from this new discourse relied clearly on a "fluid concept of identity" (p. 209).

Chapter 10 (The Politics of Personhood) starts with the affirmation that the traditional view of Asian personhood as "interdependent" does not match the historical data (a binary view, opposed of course to the "independent" Western person, that is very surprising to see survive after the research made in the domain of postcolonial studies). When historical data is given proper place, one has to realize that merit-based appointment arrived in China much earlier than in Europe, in spite of the desire to establish such a system expressed by many thinkers. In "Figure/Ground Dialectics," Martin Powers relates the figure/ground visual relationship in design to the problem of certifying social identity and analyses in "Comparative Perspectives," the many ways figure and ground related to one

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another in different cultures and at different times. In these third century motives, if the figure appears to be so closely related to the ground that it almost disappears in it, it is because the self was seen as belonging to a group but was at the same time capable of wilful action and therefore to acquire talent and recognition from the rest of the social structure. If figures seem to be independent from the ground, during the Renaissance for instance, it is because of its entire dependence on a higher agency, namely God, the necessary condition of its "independence." It is however at this moment that more realistic images appear in the motives of vessels and Martin Powers sees in these images, this time clearly differentiated from their ground, the manifestation of a new type of political "ground" upon which to build the ideas supporting a centralised state with a salaried administration.

In chapter 11 (Patterns, Pictures, and Fractals), the author wants to show that the reading of cloud designs as ascending was also a Chinese characteristic and was associated with the idea of social climbing through one's own capacities, an idea also present in the description of clouds in the literature of the period. In "The Generic Condition of Cloud Designs," he explained that the association of clouds with thunder made them fulfil a metaphorical role similar to that of the dragon. They were, just as much as the dragon, a representation of the ruler's power at first, but later, during the late Warring States period, they became "quite distinct from the ceremonial order" (p. 230). By that time, the clouds and thunder were also understood as purely natural phenomenon and therefore an outcome of the *wuwei* and *ziran* (natural Order). In "Cloud Designs at Mawangdui," Martin Powers recognizes the presence, on the famous casket of Lady Dai, of more natural looking clouds, less stylized, as a way to associate the authority of nature with the authority of the bearer of these designs. In their making, the clouds of the casket also required procedures that could not simply be repeated as in the more ancient geometrical designs on bronze vessels. In "Thoughts in the Clouds," Martin Powers emphasizes the fact that the figures and animals in the clouds of the Mawangdui casket are adapting to the flow; showing how their positions are dependent on changing conditions, they are inscribed into a world "without fixed hierarchy" (p. 244).

In "The Water Cycle," the author returns to the texts of the period to show that both the scientific texts about water and the bureaucratic theory of that period were still relying on craft metaphors. The most often used metaphor being that of the "pattern of fluid circulation referred to as *dao* [道]" (p. 245). Comparing once again these ideas with the ones in Europe, and making sure the reader will not mistake the kind of freedom thought of in Christian Europe with the one expressed by these Chinese texts, Martin Powers shows that, although the assimilation of natural law with social laws was also common in Europe, it still relied on the presence of a personal god: if the individual was free in Euro-America, it was only free to follow God's will in a hierarchical and unidirectional system (and, one would be tempted to say, suffer the consequences if he chose to do otherwise) whereas the late Warring States individual was, like the characters of the Mawangdui casket, floating in a fluid universe whose laws could not be bent, but that could offer multidirectional and non-hierarchical choices.

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In chapter 12 (The Laws of Nature), the questions related to this fluidity of nature are studied again in a series of textual analysis about the notion of *dao,* a notion which is notoriously difficult to define. The author, of his own admission, believed he can only offer one more interpretation (this reader being inclined to believe that Powers's approach is the most convincing): an interpretation based on the assumption that the attributes of *dao* are "derived from close observations of the physical behavior of water" (p. 254). He supports that definition through close reading of many texts of the period in "Water Flow." In "Art and Thought," he emphasizes the notion that *dao* is not a "supernatural standard" but a "pattern of global circulation" (p. 265) ever present in the here and now (the idea that Chinese philosophy at its most indigenous is a materialist one is also shared by the comparatist philosopher François Jullien who prefers to focus on a much later period with the works of Wang Fuzhi 王夫之[3]). The concept of "indeterminacy" (*wuxing*) and "turning back" (*fan* 反), always associated with *dao* and the circulation of *qi* 氣 in texts like the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, are also clearly visible in the designs of objects from the late Warring States period. Rejecting the all too easy explanation of a *Zeitgeist,* Martin Powers goes back to the explanation that informed this entire book: the bureaucratic theory, and the philosophy of the period relied on craft terms that were themselves shaped by the new designs which were representing the self-generatedness of nature. This nature always in flux and without hierarchy was also a reflection of the flexible social structure of the time.

In chapter 13 (Nature and Society), Martin Powers moves on to the early Han dynasty to recognize the coming of age of both the designs already encountered and a new social structure. In "Politics and the People," he describes the disappearance of the feudal (*fengjian* 封建) system as the replacement of the old nobility by a system of civil servants, a situation that entailed a new political role for the people (*min*). It is this change in the relation of the people to the ruler that the author wants to emphasize as it shows how much the idea of traditional sinology that there was not much of a sense of self in ancient China was mislead and was ignoring both the historical facts and the texts of the period. In "Justice and the People 民," he also reminds us that the idea of justice, in a world where the people were given as much importance as the rulers or the civil servants (albeit not in a sense of "equality"), was certainly far more developed than previously believed and dependant on the notion that the fluidity of *dao* in nature and society would give everyone a function dependant on circumstances. In texts like the *Mengzi* 孟子, the people was given a position that very nearly equalled that of the heavens, and it was in their unarticulated will that the sovereign had to find its legitimacy (and I am here reminded of the important—and already ancient as it was published in 1977—work of

[3] François Jullien, *Procès ou création: une introduction à la pensée des lettrés chinois: essai de problématique interculturelle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, *c.* 1989).

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Léon Vandermeersch on the notion of "Mandate of Heaven" [*tianming*], where the French specialist came up with similar conclusions[4]).

In "A Fluid System Model of Social Dynamics," he regales us again with a close reading of the literature of the time and its use of specific contexts used to describe this social fluidity and its desire for balance, structure, and justice. These desires were rooted in an absolute respect for the rule of law, an idea Martin Powers explains in "*Dao* and Public Policy." It is thanks to this foundation that the people got access to their own voice and the texts of this period also reveal how much the *min* became politicized and was capable of demanding more social justice without ever violating their position in the fluid social structure of the time. What was true of the early Han dynasty was however fairly short lived and by the end of the second century B.C., it was "replaced by a hierarchical paradigm much closer, in certain respects, to some European models" (p. 296). In spite of this, "impartiality in law and government, the stress on merit instead of birth, and the distinction between public and private, state and court, civil and military" (p. 296) became a stable characteristic of Chinese political discourse throughout the later dynasties.

In chapter 14 (Identity and Possession), Martin Powers emphasizes the fact that this independence of the people also allowed for the institution of private property, a notion so deeply ingrained that, by the late the Han dynasty, an attempt by the court to take possession of land that belonged to private individuals created a quick response from the civil servants as well as popular unrest. In the texts of the period, "Independent Possession 獨有" became in fact part of this fluid social structure, its validity depending on circumstances: whoever was best fitted to own property was therefore necessarily the rightful owner. In this context, the sovereign became a "chief executive of the state" (p. 301), and not its owner, just as anyone could become involved in the running of government.

In "Epilogue: Sources of Self," the author recapitulates many of the notions explained in the above chapters and especially the connection between visual representations and conceptions of self in any culture, a connection that relies on very material links and not the vague and arbitrary concept of *Zeitgeist* which was still so important to early twentieth century comparative literature for instance. He also reminds us of how stereotypes on Chinese culture and civilizations are still hindering many interpretations of the objects and even the texts of China, whether ancient, modern or contemporary. This book, and any conversation with Martin Powers, will show clearly to the reader/interlocutor that toppling the usual clichés about China being a sort of antithesis of the "West" is one of his major preoccupations (one would be tempted to say one of his missions in life). In this debate, which is still raging on and far beyond the fairly narrow sphere of "sinology," he is also

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4 Léon Vandermeersch, *Wangdao: ou, La voie royale: recherches sur l'esprit des institutions de la Chine archaïque* (Paris : École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1977–1980).

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taking side and substantiating his position at every step with his profound knowledge of historical and political texts from China, Europe and America. I might be particularly sensitive to his position because of my nationality.

There is in France an intense debate about the differences and similarities existing between the Euro-American and Chinese realms in the domain of thought. The very popular philosopher François Jullien is defending the position that China is the "other" of the "West", the thinking created within literati culture being portrayed as a kind of opposite to the thinking shaped by Platonist and Christian philosophy (this Western thinking being dualistic whereas literati thinking would be monistic). On the other side, several professional sinologists like Anne Cheng and Jean-François Billeter are defending the opposite position, a position shared by Martin Powers that there have been periods of great similarities in different domains (the one I am more familiar with being of course the eighteenth century, period during which it has been possible for Christian European and Chinese painters to exchange ideas and cross-fertilize each other's creations, although one has to understand that it has been possible mostly because it took place outside the realm of literati art). With his decision to offer some contemporary perspectives with a comparative approach, he is also proving beyond the usual doubt often prevalent in Euro-America that there is no political fatalism in China, that the Chinese are not condemned by their modes of though to an eternal life of political servitude and that most of what has led to the democratic choice in "Western" countries has also been present, in one form or another, within the Chinese episteme. Instead of the worn-out stereotype of a China coiled around an age-old autocratic system, Martin Powers has amply demonstrated that political thinking in China has as much variety as in Europe, North America or anywhere else in the world, that it has changed many times and that it is bound to change again. Through the most revealing of signs, although certainly not the most obvious to decipher, i.e. the patterns created in a very different world from today's China, Professor Powers has explored the relationship between acts—in this case, artistic acts—and thinking and how they not only reveal an entire world, a world that has vanished long ago, but also how these signs and ideas have continued to grow and change. Martin Powers will guide you not only through the stunningly beautiful art of Ancient China but also through the sophisticated political thinking of a world that has not completely vanished and can be discovered again by sinologists and non sinologists alike.

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