

Material Culture, Power, and Identity in Ancient China. By WU XIAOLONG. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xvi, 244 pp. ISBN: 9781107134027 (cloth, also available as e-book).
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Archaeological discoveries of recent decades have revolutionized our understanding of early Chinese history. By bringing to light a wealth of material and paleographic sources, they allow us to dramatically expand or radically revise our knowledge of the past. Among these fabulous discoveries, those in Pingshan County (Hebei) take a pride of place. There, starting in the 1970s, archaeologists excavated the capital and elite tombs of the Zhongshan kingdom. This nearly forgotten polity from the Warring States period (453–221 BCE) can now be brought to life, as is demonstrated in Wu Xiaolong's outstanding study, *Material Culture, Power, and Identity in Ancient China*.

The state of Zhongshan, reportedly founded by a branch of the Di 狄 ethnic group in the late sixth century BCE, was occupied by the state of Wei 魏 circa 407 BCE, but regained independence circa 381 BCE. It was extinguished by the state of Zhao in 296 BCE and perished from historical records. It did not merit a separate “Hereditary House” chapter in Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian* (ca. 145–90 BCE), and aside from a few dozen anecdotes, which are mostly concerned with its foes, did not attract the attention of the Warring States period authors. It is on this backdrop that we can fully appreciate the revolutionary impact of the discoveries from the 1970s and later excavations. These yielded not only extremely rich material data, but also several extraordinarily long inscriptions on bronze vessels. Taken together, these material, paleographic, and textual sources allow us to rechart Zhongshan's political and cultural history. Wu masterfully accomplishes this task.

Wu provides a systematic reconstruction of Zhongshan's history; its material culture; its place within the broader cultural context of continental East Asia; and the exceptional position of King Cuo (d. ca. 313 BCE), whose tomb yielded the most artistically impressive artifacts and most informative bronze inscriptions. Wu shows that, far from being a marginal and culturally backward polity, Zhongshan was an active and creative participant in the economic, military, and cultural life of the Warring States world. The archaeologists discovered there “the most advanced” pottery-making kiln of that age (p. 37), “the largest iron cauldron and brazier of the Warring States period ever discovered” (p. 37), and amazingly beautiful bronze vessels that demonstrate “the technological and artistic achievements of Zhongshan artisans” (p. 97). Maybe the most surprising of these findings was a well-developed industry of counterfeit coins in Zhongshan: its workshops specialized in producing faked coins of the neighboring states of Yan and Zhao (pp. 38–39). Overall, these gorgeous discoveries (most of which are nowadays on display in Hebei Provincial Museum, Shijiazhuang) suffice to locate Zhongshan among the most vibrant centers of industrial, commercial, and cultural life of the Warring States period.

Ever since the publication of the Zhongshan discoveries in the late 1970s, it was habitual to discuss this state as an instance of alien tribesmen's acculturation into the Huaxia (“Chinese”) cultural sphere. Wu demonstrates the inadequacy of this paradigm and its methodological weakness. His systematic and methodologically transparent analysis of Zhongshan burial customs and of artifacts used in royal and elite tombs shows the complexity of the state's cultural trajectory. As he states, “[E]ven if the majority of the Zhongshan population was Di, the ruling lineage could very well be derived from the Huaxia, and vice versa. Lineage can often be manipulated or fabricated, as is ethnicity” (p. 76). Instead of flattening the data to fit the yardsticks of “acculturation”

or “nativism,” Wu focuses on “political, subjective, and contingent aspects of mortuary practice and visual presentation” (p. 24). In particular, King Cuo seems to have been able to easily move between different cultural identities. Thus, his ritual paraphernalia “affirm a Zhou cultural identity through affiliation with the Zhou ceremonial tradition,” whereas the objects interred for his personal use “showcase more mixed cultural heritages that include non-Huaxia artistic motifs” (p. 107). The kings and elite of Zhongshan creatively selected elements from the Huaxia and non-Huaxia cultures to fashion a hybrid culture that was flexible enough to mobilize legitimacy and support among different ethnic and cultural groups domestically and abroad.

Wu’s discussion excels at presenting material data and analyzing the artifacts from the point of view of art history. His analysis of historical and paleographic evidence is solid but is not free of certain debatable points. Putting aside minor inaccuracies, two points related to Zhongshan inscriptions may require reconsideration. One is Wu’s assertion that King Cuo’s inscriptions, placed uncharacteristically on the exterior rather than interior of his bronze vessels, were supposed to be read by participants in Cuo’s funerary ceremonies (pp. 169–70). I doubt very much that anybody would turn the sacrificial bronze vessels around to read the inscription that covers the surface of the vessel in its entirety. Nor do I agree with Wu’s interpretation of inscriptions as a king’s attempt to rein in his excessively powerful chief minister, Zhou 鬲 (chapter 5). In my eyes, the inscriptions, with their effusive panegyrics for Zhou, were probably manufactured by Zhou himself. Their avowed indignation against ministerial usurpation may be Zhou’s attempt to soothe the fears of his royal master.

Needless to say, my conjectures—just like Wu’s—are open to further discussion. Yet the very possibility to engage in this much-needed discussion of Zhongshan bronze inscriptions and other aspects of Zhongshan history is due to Wu’s excellent study. He should be congratulated on his major achievement that will become an important contribution to studies of early China in general.

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Luxurious Networks: Salt Merchants, Status, and Statecraft in Eighteenth-Century China. By YULIAN WU. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. 320 pp. ISBN: 9780804798112 (cloth, also available as e-book).
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Scholars of Ming-Qing history and literature have paid increasing attention to material culture in relation to persons as both individuals and members of communities—literary, cultural, and ethnic. Addressing material culture, book culture, and writing practices, Yulian Wu’s *Luxurious Networks* explores the role of a cluster of things—jade, stone, seals, and books—in the life of salt merchants in eighteenth-century China, and in turn the role of those merchants in High Qing society. The book touches on a series of important issues in the studies of Qing history, for example, the ethnic nature of Manchu rule, consumer culture, lineage, and female chastity. Using salt merchants as an entry point, Wu aims to reveal a new network between Manchu court and Han Chinese, to analyze the merchants’ role in High Qing consumer society,