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BOOK REVIEWS

Brindley, Erica Fox, *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-824-83386-2. xxx, 207 pages. $52 (hardcover).
DOI 10.3868/s020-002-013-0008-4

In this bold and thought-provoking book Erica Fox Brindley examines an issue long assumed to be a primary point of difference between European cultures and their descendants and the intellectual milieu of early China: the role of the individual. In the past, comparative studies of the individual in China have often assumed a basic distinction on this point, or have taken up one definition of the individual and argued that it did not exist in a particular Chinese context. Brindley eschews the ready comparison and instead looks to see whether concepts of the individual did exist in early China. She demonstrates there was in fact considerable discussion of the individual in pre-imperial intellectual history, and the bulk of her book is an examination of its forms.

Accepting the "'agent' as a subject that acts" (p. xxv), Brindley pays particular attention to the ways early writers addressed human agency. Her analysis encompasses the notion of the individual person both as agent and as "an instrument or medium of higher authority" (p. xxvi). Brindley astutely notes that even when arguing in favor of group identification and communitarian values, many philosophers still spoke of individuals in different ways.

Some of the best discussion in the book compares individualist thought ascribed to Zhuangzi and Yang Zhu with the ideas of well-known thinkers like Mencius. Brindley shows that inborn, individual human nature was central to all these philosophers' conceptions of the human being. Also very effective is Brindley's analysis of how the "innate agencies" (p. 77) of the person were at the center of intellectual debate in the time around the 3rd century BCE, when thinkers like Xunzi and Han Feizi argued that the potential of the individual was such that it had to be controlled. Brindley shows with numerous examples how thinkers viewed and portrayed the individual—as superior, as subordinate, as agent, as subject. She proves that assumptions of individual choice and agency underlay many philosophical arguments about the role of the person in society and the world.

Brindley's study brings together a variety of authors and thinkers and does not simplify or gloss over the differences between them. The resulting picture is complicated, and at times the connection of the various aspects of the argument becomes clear only in the summarizing conclusion that closes each chapter. It seems to me that more explicitly tying the various aspects of the discussion together over the course of the chapters might have enhanced the presentation by

keeping the links evident to the reader.

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Chan, Alan K. L., and Yuet-Keung Lo, eds., *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1-4384-3188-8. 381pp. $26.95 (paperback).
DOI 10.3868/s020-002-013-0009-1

The terms "philosophy" and "religion" sometimes arouse the suspicion of Orientalism. Fortunately, the editors and authors gathered here do not engage in controversies about whether China did or did not have religion and/or philosophy. Instead, they delve right into the thick of things. The volume comes neatly accompanied by a second one on Interpretation and Literature, which includes an article by Poo Mu-chou 蒲慕州, the title of which, "Justice, Morality, and Skepticism in Six Dynasties Ghost Stories," points to the great volatility of our concepts of literature, philosophy, and religion.

The first article is by the co-editor Alan Chan. It sets the tone for the succeeding three; and the four of them constitute the most coherent part of the book, since they all touch upon Wang Bi 王弼 (226–49) and his circle in one way or another. Chan focuses on He Yan's 何晏 (d. 249) discourses on Dao 道 and the nameless (*wuming* 無名). He takes issues with Tang Yongtong's 湯用彤 (1893–1964) assertion that *xuanxue* mainly was an ontological enterprise. Instead, he emphasizes its ethical implications. The main thrust of Chan's argument lies in the question of whether the sage experience emotions or not. According to He Yan, while he does not lack emotions (*wuqing* 無情), a perfect blending of *qi* prevents him from being swept away by them. But provided a sage is not burdened by emotions, why did Confucius display such overt grief after Yan Yuan's 顏淵 death? Obviously, there is a degree of tension between the sage's transcendence and his engagement in worldly human relationships.

The second article by Jude Soo-Meng Chua deals with Wang Bi's theory of "names" (*ming* 名), or, in Chua's coining, "correlative semiotics." Names arise from actualities (*shi* 實) or forms (*xing* 形), not vice versa. As most students of pre-modern China well know, *ming* and *shi* also refer to reputation and performance in office. Transferred to the political plane, reputation that arises from an office never automatically yield the moral character needed for its