



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Coal Mining in China's Economy and Society, 1895-1937. by Tim Wright
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The point is that throughout the first half of the T'ang there were grave doubts and endless arguments about the proper rituals and ceremonies. The question that needs to be asked is what was the consequence of this ritual uncertainty on legitimation. When the emperor found in favor of the Cheng school over the Wang school or when he chose one proposed format of the *feng* and *shan* over another, did his legitimacy suffer among the losers? Yen Shih-ku seems to have been wrong in suggesting that ritual details did not make a difference. In fact, they made a great deal of difference. If the situation were otherwise, how do we explain the repetitious wrangling over proper form? To put the question directly, just how important was ritual in legitimating the T'ang house or individual rulers?

As the subtitle of the volume indicates, legitimation is a major theme in this work. Wechsler's methodology is to introduce a considerable amount of theoretical literature throughout the volume. Literature on pilgrimages, for example, is brought up (without much effectiveness) in the discussion of the imperial tours of inspection, and Eliade's often brilliant insights appear frequently. Much of the introduction and chapter 1 are devoted to theoretical considerations, particularly those concerned with legitimation. T'ang T'ai-tsung presents a case of a ruler desperately in need of legitimation: he was able to ascend the throne only because he killed his older brother (the heir apparent) and, the historical records suggest, because he was able to force his father to abdicate to him. Just how important were ritual and symbol in his legitimation? The symbols are found in the decrees by which his father surrendered the throne to him: omens, lucky signs, and popular ballads—standard fare, and probably written by T'ai-tsung's men. One would be hard pressed, however, to show that ritual was a significant factor in T'ai-tsung's legitimacy. He did not make the grand imperial tours of inspection; to the contrary, his "travels outside of the capital region were modest in number and limited in reach" (p. 169). He did not build a Ming-t'ang, although he ordered a discussion of it (pp. 206–7). He rarely personally offered the suburban sacrifices (p. 113). Worst of all, he twice scheduled and then canceled the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, once because of the inauspicious appearance of a comet (pp. 181–82). If these rituals actually conferred or augmented legitimacy, then failure to perform them or to be compelled by cosmic forces to cancel them must surely have adversely affected legitimacy. Questions of this kind, like the question of how an uncertain or unknown ritual format can confer legitimacy, have not been raised in this volume.

Wechsler must be faulted for not pushing his data far enough and for not seeing that ritual and symbol by themselves cannot answer some of the legitimation questions he raises. He must also be commended, however, for delving into this kind of topic and taking it beyond the realm of mere description. There is much here, methodologically and substantively, that deserves the attention of those in the field of early Chinese history.

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Coal Mining in China's Economy and Society, 1895–1937. By TIM WRIGHT.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. x, 249 pp. Map, Tables,
Notes, Bibliography, Index. \$59.50.

Tim Wright has written the best single volume in any language on the modern history of China's coal industry. This ambitious work touches all bases, and it provides

a solid analysis of the economics, technology, politics, and sociology of the industry from the beginnings of its modernization in 1895 to the onset of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. The book also contributes to the ongoing debate on the nature of China's prewar economic performance.

The first half of the volume focuses on the economic determinants of the growth of modern coal mining in China, with further attention to the noneconomic factors that affected geographical and temporal patterns of growth. Wright demonstrates that in the supply of coal resources, labor, and capital (Chinese and foreign) there were no serious factor constraints to growth. He shows how revolutions in mining and transportation technology allowed the domestic and coal industry gradually to displace imported coal in the Chinese coastal market, play an increasing role in East Asian markets, and grow to a size comparable to that of the Japanese or French coal industries. He examines the ways in which the economics of transportation combined with political factors to determine China's curious geographical pattern of coal production. Thus Manchuria—with less than 2 percent of China's coal reserves and 7 percent of its population, but with an expanding industry and favorable railway freight costs—produced, under Japanese auspices, over 40 percent of China's output by the 1930s; on the other hand, the large-mine output of Shanxi, which had over 50 percent of China's known reserves but was beset by high transport costs as well as political and military disturbances, contributed only 4 percent of national output. Political factors also strongly affected the temporal pattern of growth, as the civil wars of the 1920s interrupted, albeit in a geographically uneven fashion, the generally smooth development of the industry to that time. By the 1930s, however, demand was the main constraint on the rate of growth of an industry whose major markets—shipping, railroads, light industries, utilities, and urban households, in certain cities—were of limited size. The industry had shown a 10.9 percent growth rate over the period 1895–1936 (5.2 percent over the period 1914–1936), and its overall success supports the conclusion of John K. Chang and others that substantial industrial growth took place in prewar China. But future rapid growth, Wright argues, would depend on either a drastic increase in the size of the modern sector of the economy (which contributed only 7.4 percent to GDP in 1933) or significantly increased coal consumption in the nonmodernized sector. Wright concludes that the limited contribution of the agrarian sector to investment in the modern sector was a “background constraint” (p. 195) on the development of the industry in prerevolutionary China.

The second half of the volume places the coal industry more directly in the context of modern Chinese political and social history, with topical chapters on the nature of foreign investment, Chinese entrepreneurship, mining conditions, and labor organizations. Wright's careful analysis of the powerful, but limited, foreign role in the coal industry places the debate over the impact of foreign investment on the Chinese economy on a new level of sophistication. His discussion of relationships between Chinese entrepreneurs and Chinese governments stresses the role of state power in all periods. Particularly during the period of greatest political disunity, linkage with bureaucrats and militarists was imperative for the survival and success of North Chinese coal-mining enterprises. (Wright shows [p. 146] that 75 percent of identifiable shareholders, directors, and chief managers of Chinese coal mines between 1912 and 1927 came from civilian and military bureaucracies. A more complicated picture of official, quasi-official and private entrepreneurship marked the Nanking period [pp. 149–52].) The final two chapters describe the gradual growth of a permanent community of miners; the organization of work through the contract system of labor; the appalling safety, working, and living conditions endured by

Chinese miners; and the very limited success of the labor movement during the warlord and Nationalist periods. "The working class was numerically small and socially weak," Wright concludes (p. 193), and the role of state power again was crucial. With few exceptions, mostly during the early years of the Nationalist government, authorities intervened in labor disputes on the side of management.

Wright has read extensively in the relevant Chinese, Japanese, and Western language sources. His work is well organized, clearly written, and well indexed. The volume is rich in its coverage, and frighteningly expensive. It is nonetheless recommended to all serious researchers in the modern China field.

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JAPAN

The Riverside Counselor's Stories: Vernacular Fiction of Late Heian Japan.

Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by ROBERT L. BACKUS. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985. xxxiv, 234 pp. Introduction, Notes, Bibliography. \$35.

The stories of the *Tsutsumi chūnagon monogatari*, newly translated by Robert Backus, constitute the only surviving examples of a substantial group of short narrative prose fiction mostly composed in the waning years of the Heian period (794–1185). Although these fascinating literary nuggets display familiar Heian conventions of plot and rhetoric, they are distinguished by a peculiar humor and gentle bite, infusing the brooding introspection and brilliant urbanity of earlier prose with a spirit of cynicism and detachment. Here, a shining paragon of masculine nobility carefully plans a romantic escapade to abduct a young lady, only to find that he has made off with her aged grandmother; a diffident courtier wins the admiration of all but his beloved, who has wearied of his affections and, it seems, his affectations; and affairs of the heart are pursued with more success and savored with more relish by servants than their masters. For years this collection has languished in literal, bare-bones English translation in a scholarly volume unknown to the general reader (Edwin O. Reischauer and Joseph K. Yamagiwa, *Translations from Early Japanese Literature* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951]). *The Riverside Counselor's Stories* offers a more graceful literary translation and will undoubtedly please a wider audience than its predecessor. Of more questionable value, however, and more problematic to the specialist, are the translator's introduction and commentary.

The somewhat vague and digressive introduction presents the history of what Backus terms vernacular fiction (narrative prose, more commonly called *monogatari*) and a description of the narrow but intensely cultivated world of its practitioners. The discussion moves back and forth between two unquestioned and mutually implicating assumptions: (1) that because the stories display certain features common to classical vernacular literature, they necessarily belong wholly to that genre and (2) that because the genre was developed by women, all but two stories should be ascribed to women. A comparison between the contemporaneous male-dominated *setsuwa* (short, often didactic anecdotal tales) and female-dominated vernacular fiction is used to illustrate and support these assumptions. But Japanese literature, particularly the zation. Although the information is accurate enough, the discussion is confused by