

Festivals, Feasts, and Gender Relations in Ancient China and Greece

Ancient China and Greece are two classical civilizations that have exerted far-reaching influence in numerous areas of human experience and are often invoked as the paradigms in East–West comparison. This book examines gender relations in the two ancient societies as reflected in convivial contexts such as family banquets, public festivals, and religious feasts. Two distinct patterns of interpersonal affinity and conflict emerge from the Chinese and Greek sources that show men and women organizing themselves and interacting with each other in social occasions intended for the collective pursuit of pleasure. Through an analysis of these patterns, Yiqun Zhou illuminates the different sociopolitical mechanisms, value systems, and fabrics of human bonds in the two classical traditions. Her book will be an important resource for readers who are interested in the comparative study of societies, gender studies, women’s history, and the legacy of civilizations.

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Preface

This book is a study of interpersonal relationships and structures of sentiment, with a special focus on their reflection in various sociable contexts and on the gender dimension, in ancient China and Greece (ca. 10th–4th centuries BCE). By examining a wide range of sources (mainly literary and historical) that show men and women engaging in the collective pursuit of pleasure on such occasions as family banquets, public festivals, and religious feasts, the study aims to illuminate the different sociopolitical mechanisms, value systems, and human bonds in the two classical civilizations that have exerted far-reaching influences in numerous areas of human experience.

My inquiry steps outside the predominant subjects of study in the fast-growing field of China–Greece comparative research, namely, science, medicine, philosophy, and historiography.¹ By focusing on human

¹ Examples of the articles and book chapters in the existing literature: Keightley (1993), G. Lloyd (1990, ch. 4), Nylan (2000), Schaberg (1999), Turner (1990), Vernant and Gernet (1980), and Wooyeal and Bell (2004). Journals such as the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Philosophy East and West*, *Dao*, and *Asian Philosophy* from time to time publish comparative studies on Chinese and Greek philosophy. Most recently, a special issue of the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (2002, vol. 29, issue 3) was devoted to comparing Chinese and Greek ethics. Monographs: Beecroft (2010), Chen Fang (2001), Jullien ([1995] 2000), Kim (2009), Kuriyama (1999), Li Zhiqiang (2008), Liu Chenglin (2001), G. Lloyd (1996, 2002, 2004, 2005), Lloyd and Sivin (2002), X. Lu (1998), Raphals (1992), Reding (1985, 2004), Shankman and Durrant (2000, 2002), Wang Daqing (2006), and J. Yu (2007). The preceding list includes only publications that focus on comparing China and Greece, and leaves out such works as David A. Hall and Roger T. Ames's voluminous studies (1987, 1998, 1999) on Chinese and Western philosophies, in which the Greeks play an important role. Shankman and Durrant (2000: 4–8; 2002: 3–5) offer useful reviews of the literature that to various degrees draws inspiration from a juxtaposition of ancient China and Greece.

Only two essays to date focus on gender issues in ancient China and Greece. Nylan (2000) compares images of elite women in the Akhaimenid (559–331 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–220 CE) empires as they are portrayed in contemporary Greek and Chinese

interaction in convivial settings, I seek to create a portrayal of the two ancient civilizations that has both structure and texture and that is both more dynamic and more concrete than earlier studies.

My study explores important topics in gender studies and family and women's history, including the relationship between the public and domestic domains, the dynamics of sexual rivalry and cooperation, the implications that homosocial bonding and gender relations have for each other, the role of religion and ritual in women's lives, and the relationship between female subjectivity and male imagination. As gender relations and the relationship between the family and the larger sociopolitical order continue to emerge as among the most protean and intensely contested aspects of human experience across cultures, my study will help provide a comparative understanding of some of the major historical paradigms in human organization whose legacies are still influential today.

Finally, I hope my inquiry will add to those studies that take sociable activities as their entry point for understanding social organization, value systems, and human relationships. This approach has already enriched our understanding of ancient Greek society, as exemplified in works by scholars such as Oswyn Murray and Pauline Schmitt-Pantel.² The awareness of the need to enlarge the scope of inquiry to gain both more valid generalizations and deeper understandings of individual cases has already led classicists to study convivial practices in the neighboring cultures of Egypt and the Middle East.³ Findings from China, another major ancient civilization, will not only contribute an important case study but also enhance the theoretical interest of sociability studies.⁴

Texts, Translations, Citations, and Reading Approach

All the Chinese and Greek primary texts, major commentaries, and translations consulted for this study are listed at the beginning of the bibliography. Unless otherwise indicated, all Greek texts and translations are from the Loeb Classical Library (with occasional modifications).

historical works, and Raphals (2002b) compares Chinese and Greek notions of gender and virtue through a discussion of Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, and several early Chinese historical and didactic texts.

² See these two scholars' works in the bibliography.

³ Dentzer (1982), Murray ed. (1990), and W. J. Slater ed. (1991).

⁴ Murray (2000) calls for including China among the "ancient societies" in future studies of sociability.

Chinese texts come from various editions. For the *Book of Odes*, the most important Chinese text for my study, I use Arthur Waley's translation and make modifications when necessary. The pinyin system is used for the romanization of Chinese throughout the book. For the transcription of Greek names and epithets, I have generally adopted the Greek form (e.g., Alkaios instead of Alcaeus, Ktesios instead of Ctesius) but in some cases have used the familiar Latinized form (e.g., Socrates instead of Sokrates, Achilles instead of Akhilleus).

Though literary texts form the mainstay of the primary materials in this study, I have analyzed them primarily for the insights that they offer into the ideas and practices in social relations in ancient China and Greece. Thus readers sensitive to the fine points in the aesthetic and rhetorical aspects of literary texts may find much wanting in the following pages. I believe, however, that the richness and intensity of the sentiments expressed in the literary texts will still assert themselves and that the texts provide an indispensable source for an investigation of ancient convivial life.

The staggering amount of scholarship behind almost any aspect of the issues touched on in this study makes it impossible to be exhaustive in my references to the secondary literature. I hope, however, that I have managed to cite those works that are most relevant to the topics under discussion, that represent influential positions on the issues, and that contain the most up-to-date research and can guide the reader to earlier studies.

Acknowledgments

This book is based on my 2004 dissertation at the University of Chicago. My committee members, Anthony Yu, Michael Murrin, W. R. Johnson, and David Roy, guided me through the various stages of the project. Anthony Yu, in particular, displayed boundless faith in me as a scholar-in-the-making throughout the long years that I spent in Hyde Park. Without the benefit of his vision and constant reassurances, I could not have brought a wide-ranging and risky project such as this to fruition. Outside of Chicago, Wai-ye Li and Lisa Raphals generously read the dissertation and provided me with much-needed encouragement. I am especially grateful to Wai-ye for suggesting that I incorporate the bronze inscriptions among my Chinese primary sources.

I have come a long way since the summer of 2006, when I picked up my dissertation again and began to revise it. In the revision process, I

have benefited from the magnanimity of many colleagues and friends who took the time to read my work and discuss it with me. I thank Jim Reichert for helping me clarify some important concepts in the prospectus that I eventually submitted to Cambridge University Press. Richard P. Martin provided an informative conversation on Greek women's poetry. Andrew Abbott, Roger Ames, Miranda Brown, Martin Kern, Feng Li, Li Meng, Edward Shaughnessy, Ban Wang, and Anthony Yu read portions of various drafts and supplied stimulating comments. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Geoffrey Lloyd, Michael Nylan, and Peter White, who plowed through a later draft and sent back detailed comments. Near the final stage in the preparation of the manuscript, Mark Lewis read the entire draft and provided comments that enabled me to refine some of my arguments. My deep appreciation also goes to the two Cambridge reviewers, whose incisive and constructive comments played a crucial role in strengthening the study in almost every aspect.

I am profoundly indebted to all the colleagues and friends I have mentioned for generously sharing their knowledge and insights with me. I found it challenging but extremely rewarding to try to absorb their criticisms and suggestions during the revision process. I claim sole responsibility for whatever errors or infelicities my personal biases and limitations prevented me from correcting.

Some of the contents of this work were presented at the following venues during 2005–2006: Valparaiso University (Christ College), Harvard University (Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies), and Stanford University (Center for East Asian Studies). I thank the participants on those occasions for their valuable input. Here I also acknowledge the support from the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, which provided a fellowship that helped me make a critical transition in the writing of the dissertation. In addition, my sincere appreciation is extended to Beatrice Rehl, of Cambridge University Press, my acquisitions editor, for her enthusiastic support for this book project from the beginning, and to Susan Greenberg, my copy editor, for her careful review of the manuscript.

Finally, a big thank you to Dingxin Zhao, who has tirelessly attempted to persuade me, the pessimist, that scholarship would probably give me the best chance to find meaning for a fundamentally insignificant human life. He has watched the continuous metamorphosis of this study with assured sympathy, and he has been my most inspiring critic. To him and the other pillars of my life, my parents, brother, sister, and Wu Xuezhao, a loving mentor and loyal friend for twenty years, I dedicate this book.