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Astral Sciences in Early Imperial China

Challenging monolithic modern narratives about ‘Chinese science’, Daniel Patrick Morgan examines the astral sciences in China *c.*221 BCE–750 CE as a study in the disunities of scientific cultures and the narratives by which ancients and moderns alike have fought to instil them with a sense of unity. The book focuses on four unifying ‘legends’ recounted by contemporary subjects: the first two, redolent of antiquity, are the ‘observing of signs’ and ‘granting of seasons’ by ancient sage kings; and the other two, redolent of modernity, involve the pursuit of ‘accuracy’ and historical ‘accumulation’ to this end. Juxtaposing legend with the messy realities of practice, Morgan reveals how such narratives were told, imagined, and re-imagined in response to evolving tensions. He argues that, whether or not ‘empiricism’ and ‘progress’ are real, we must consider the real effects of such narratives as believed in and acted upon in the history of astronomy in China.

DANIEL PATRICK MORGAN graduated from the University of Chicago in 2013, and is a researcher at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Laboratoire SPHERE (Sciences, Philosophie, Histoire), Université Paris Diderot, where he spent 2013–16 as a member of the European Research Council project Mathematical Sciences in the Ancient World (SAW). Trained as a sinologist, and now working in an interdisciplinary team of historians of science, the author is dedicated to building bridges through the history of science, scholarship, religion, sport and manuscript studies to follow the ancient polymath as he collapses, compartmentalises and cross-pollinates the categories defining his world.

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To my father,
who taught me how to shoot

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*Daniel Patrick Morgan
Pierreclos, 25 February 2016*