Buchbesprechung: Rezension = Book review = Compte rendu

Book Review

Riemenschnitter, Andrea, Jessica Imbach, and Justyna Jaguscik (eds.): *Sinophone Utopias. Exploring Futures Beyond the China Dream.* Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2023, 468 pp., ISBN 9781621966463.

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Exploring spaces, whether practical or conceptual, conductive to utopian thinking may appear untimely amidst the prevailing dystopian ambiance that permeates both the political and the cultural spheres. The failures of the 20th-century utopian modernist endeavors signal the depletion of the utopian thought legacy, a phenomenon not exempt in the Sinosphere. Xi Jinping's dream machinery, propelled by the grand narrative of the Chinese renaissance, has ushered in an era marked by authoritarianism, censorship, and stringent media control. Concurrently, issues such as environmental degradation and social inequality continue to escalate, compounding the challenges faced. Modern Chinese history is replete with utopian projects that have invariably culminated in dystopian consequences. The predominately dystopic and nostalgic cultural production of 20th-century fin-de-siècle Chinese and Sinophone literatures and arts seem but to confirm this. No future, no hope?

A solid collection of eighteen chapters under the title *Sinophone Utopias* strives to explore the complex and multifaceted landscapes of speculative futures beyond the confines of the Chinese Dream. Assuming that literatures and arts in the new millennium reflect a resurgence of interest in envisioning positive approaches to the future and cultivating utopian imagination, these articles demonstrate how contemporary cultural productions carry traces of earlier utopian visions, enabling new forms of utopian re-imaginations and reflections. Transforming from a passive poetic withdrawal to an active political reconstruction, the concept of an ideal society and the vision of a brighter future are ingrained in Chinese culture. As such, the rich tapestry of ancient Chinese culture serves as a repository for utopian imaginings, including works like the *Book of Poetry* 詩經, the *Book of Rites* 禮記, the Confucian *Great Unity* 大同, and notably, Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 (365–427) secluded, anarchistic, and poetic utopia *The Peach Blossom Spring* 桃花源.

Edited by Andrea Riemenschnitter, Jessica Imbach, and Justyna Jaguscik, *Sinophone Utopias* is a wide-ranging exploration of Chinese and Sinophone literature, culture, and society. The collection identifies sites of resistance within the cultural landscape, offering avenues for revitalizing hope and fostering agency toward more sustainable and inclusive futures. In response to the overarching ideological

reshaping under Xi Jinping, the volume skillfully navigates the discursive space within official utopian rhetoric, shedding light on unofficial dreams through grass-root utopianism as both "an attitude and a method" (p. 7).

The editors guide readers through four thematic sections, each unravelling distinct utopian aesthetic interventions and performative enactments. Part I, "Technology", initiates the exploration with a focus on science and technology, showcasing how technological innovations intersect with literary texts and works of art. **Wendy Larson's** notable analysis of Liu Cixin's 劉慈欣 novella *Poetry Cloud* 詩雲 (2003) raises thought-provoking questions about the utopian potential of literature and poetry, transcending the scientific paradigm. She delves into the tension between the technological capabilities of the Poetry Cloud and its limitations in appreciating the imaginative and emotional facets of poetry. By doing so, she challenges the notion that technological progress necessarily leads to utopian outcomes. Instead, Larson suggests that Liu Cixin prompts readers to reconsider the value of literature beyond its instrumental and utilitarian functions, emphasizing the importance of preserving the intellectual and emotional experiences that transcend scientific paradigms. **Johanna Krenz's** essay critically examines the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI), poetry, aesthetics, and politics in contemporary China. Focusing on three distinct AI poetry projects, Krenz navigates the complex landscape where technological innovation converges with cultural and political aspirations. The central question posed by Krenz revolves around the dual nature of Chinese AI poetry: whether it serves as a tool for the state to manipulate public sentiment or as a platform for avant-garde experimentation challenging dominant cultural discourse. **Shuang Xu's** study of matriarchal fiction in Chinese internet literature broadens this discussion, illustrating how the diverse utopian models emerging from technological advancements not only subvert gender stereotypes but also reformulate female versions of a better world while reflecting the generational one-child-policy mentality. **Kiu-wai Chu** completes the first section by turning to China's brave new world built on technologically advanced security and techno-culture via a closed-loop mass surveillance system and the critical responses from different generations of film-makers, including Jia Zhangke, Xu Bing and Lu Yang. Following Johanna Krenz' logic of argumentation, Chu contends that growing digital totalitarianism and surveillance capitalism produce feelings of loss of identity, subjectivity, and dystopian anxiety in the generation that spent their youth in China's reform era; however, new models of a playful hyper-subjectivity emerge in the works of the smartphone generation.

In Part II, "Values and Traditions", contributors delve into the relationship between utopian texts and China's literary legacy, socialist experiments, and ongoing political debates. **Nele Noesselt's** analysis of sci-fi writer Liu Cixin's *Wandering Earth project* 流浪地球 (2000) explores its filmic and graphic novel adaptions

revealing their adept maneuvering between adherence to and subversion of Chinese official politics. This strategic ambiguity allows China's one-party state to shape public opinion by ascribing its own meanings to the narrative rather than censoring it. The author aptly navigates the complicity between popular culture and PRC politics, reading Xi Jinping's slogans into and out of the sci-fi blockbuster. Starting from Huang Ziping's assumption that utopian hopes "as part of our reality" refer back to us, as they "do not come from nowhere" (p. 129), **Ralph Weber** explores the contested meanings of Confucianism in political culture fluctuating between utopianism and political realism. He examines three different key players in the field of utopian discourse in modern China – the CCP, political Confucians and Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波 – illustrating how they attract and repel each other like different poles of the same magnet. Weber concludes that Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo posed a clear threat to those in power due to his commitment to realizing utopian hopes while maintaining a realistic understanding of the prolonged timeline for such a change. Adopting the concept of "existential utopia" proposed by Michael Marder and Patricia Vieira, **Qian Cui** identifies diverse forms of utopia in Ge Fei's 格非 novel *Peach Blossom Paradise* 人民桃花 (2004). She distinguishes the "island world", emphasizing revolutionary transformation and collective societal changes, from the existential utopia of the "garden world", focusing on individual and interpersonal aspects. In her chapter "The Road to Revolutionary Utopia. Buddhist Rhetoric in the Red Narrative", **Yunxia Chu** examines literary works spanning from 1949 to 1976 in China. Focusing on the trope of "leaving home" and its evolving ascriptions in modern China together with the metonymic meaning of temple space she unveils how Buddhist and revolutionary rhetoric converge, revealing Buddhism's unexpected role as a rhetorical and ideological resource shaping Maoist utopianism. **Kun Zhao** opens her chapter by retracing the fate of the industrial workers from the northeastern province, who were the face of revolutionary utopia during the socialist period. However, in the 1980s, economic reforms let to their obscurity and they were dismissed as "masters of their own society" and reborn as "superfluous men". Reading Ban Yu's 班宇 stories as point of departure, the author follows these "orphans of modernization" as they grapple with the challenges of industrial transformation. Ban Yu's texts narrate how these workers disappeared into societal disqualification, mourning the fragments of their shattered dreams. The author identifies three factors responsible for the failure of these past heroes: the limitations of the working class, the irresponsibility of the intellectuals, and internal social stratification.

"Places and Stages", Part III, shifts its focus to performative practices and specific sites of utopian visions. **Carlos Roja's** analysis of the fictional village in Yan Lianke's 閻連科 novel *Lenin Kisses* 受活 (2004) and the real Bishan commune 碧山共同體 in Anhui province, founded by poet, filmmaker and activist Ou Ning 歐寧, provides a

nuanced understanding of dialectical utopianism. While the aesthetic design aims to push boundaries toward a future-oriented social imagination, Ou Ning's project, driven by social activism, seeks to transform utopian images into practical realities, facing suppression from authorities as a consequence. **Justyna Jaguscik's** exploration of workers' theatre underscores the critical and utopian potential of alternative narratives, challenging prevailing notions of labor and capital. Theatre serves as a space not only to intervene and pose challenging questions about "a labor regime that reduces workers to 'hands' on the production line" (p. 237) but also to cultivate a resilient sense of optimism, involve the community, and mobilize social activism. **Paola Iovene** broadens the discussion on theatre as a space that subverts the CCP's monopoly on representing the working class by staging utopias of unalienated labor. She points out that the working class not only is alienated from their labor but even more so from their self-image and self-representation, a concept she terms "Image alienation". The desire for unalienated living is the utopian trust motivating the contemporary play *We2. Labor Exchange Market* (2019). In his chapter "Cultivating Heterotopia. Ideology and Affect in Chinese Gardens", **William A. Callahan** completes the thematic section on "Places and Stages", turning to the under-researched field of Chinese gardens. Employing Foucault's concept of heterotopia, he examines gardens as living heterotopias, indicators of global politics and sites of social-ordering and world-ordering. Showcasing the controversial Yasukuni Shrine and the Nanjing Massacre Memorial as garden sites, institutions, enactments, and ideologies, they appear negotiating issues of war and peace, martiality and civility. Contrary to expectations, the author argues that the alleged peace/war gardens are not simply stable containers of ideology but engage in a playful non-binary civility/martiality dynamic.

Part IV, "Specters of the Past", highlights how contemporary cultural production that is still haunted by Maoist utopianism, navigates Xi's China Dream with its supra-nationalism and commercialization of culture production. The authors **Giorgio Strafella** and **Daria Berg** engage in ruin aesthetics in post-Mao art, delving into Cao Fei's 曹斐 14-minute-film *Rumba II: Nomad* and Ya Ming's 亞明 poem "Ruins" 廢墟 as examples of anti-utopian art. Giving an account of the poetics of ruin aesthetics and their significance in post socialist China, the selected artworks hardly illuminate the dreams of national renaissance but shine light on nightmares of civilizational crisis, pointing to a post-human and post-utopian world that no longer speaks to us and turns the homeland of humankind into debris. Stretching the narrative of man's fall from paradise over the biblical seven days, Yu Hua's 余華 novel *The Seventh Day* 第七天 (2013) serves as point of departure for **Jessica Imbach's** contribution. Imbach analyzes Yu Hua's text within the context of *diceng* literature 底層文學, elucidating how its thematic orientation and episodic structure indicate its engagement with the exploration and critique of the role of literature. The novel raises questions about

literature's function in representing socio-political and environmental justice, considering its potential complicity in the commercialized reproduction of social inequality and environmental destruction. **Helena Wu** in her chapter on Hong Kong directs her attention to the city's most-cited icon – the Lion Rock – as a focal point for reexamining Hong Kong's myth of economic success. The cultural connotations associated with this "symbol of Hong Kong localness" (p. 345) have taken on diverse meanings, ranging from indomitable spirit and economic prosperity to the pursuit of democracy, traversing between utopian and dystopian future projections. **Alvin K. Wong** meticulously analyses Chan Koonchung's 陳冠中 China Trilogy, dissecting how each of the dystopian novels decenters Chineseness and subverts the Chinese Dream: *The Fat Years* 盛世 (2009) by unmasking its mobilization of political violence, *Bare Life* 裸命, (2013) by thinking it through the erotics of internal colonialism, and *The Second Year of Jianfeng: An Alternative History of New China* 建豐二年以新中國烏有史, (2015) by playfully applying a "what if" historicism and re-temporalizing the conventional historiography of the two Chinas. **Andrea Riemenschnitter's** chapter on "Post-Utopian Returns" brings us full circle as she returns to the renditions of Tao Yuanming's *Peach Blossom Spring*. Riemenschnitter contends that this radical utopia is not bound by place or time, as it speaks back to official futurology on the one hand and addresses planetary challenges on the other, encouraging a global audience to contemplate local perspectives while simultaneously extending beyond humanity's territorial, political, and cultural confines. It comes as no surprise that contemporary reconfigurations of this idyllic life in a secluded mountain valley are utilized in eco-critical arts to safeguard natural landscapes against national, capitalist, and socialist appropriations.

In conclusion, *Sinophone Utopias* stands as a comprehensive and enriching volume that challenges officially prescribed notions of China's future. Its nuanced examination of utopian aspirations in the Sinophone world significantly contributes to ongoing discussions about globalization, the Anthropocene, and future potentialities. The editors have adeptly curated a collection that not only captures the diverse voices within the Sinophone world but also illuminates the variety and diversity of utopian aspirations permeating these literary and cultural expressions.

While some chapters remain in the analytical stage, a broader intellectual debate, fueled by ethical concerns and cultural criticism – such as those related to consumerism or the capitalization on digital mass identities in aesthetic creations – could have further sharpened the clear contours established in the excellent introduction. Such engagement would resonate with broader academic and societal concerns regarding the ethical dimensions of technological advancements or mass surveillance, and their impact on individual agency, cultural authenticity, and the overall trajectory of societies navigating the contours of utopian aspirations in the digital age.

Sinophone Utopias not only contributes to the study of Non-Western utopianism but also serves as a reminder that the flipside of globalizing China's futurology reveals a broad range of dystopian realities in present-day China. Scholarly-wise, the volume proves to be a valuable resource for academics, researchers, and students interested in Sinophone studies, speculative art, and utopian thinking. Whether these "newly circulating, rescaled utopian visions in aesthetic representations" (p. 1) are grounds for hope or merely aesthetic responses to official utopianism from the ivory tower is ultimately left to the reader.

Book Review

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The present book is an original, thought-provoking and beautifully written essay that reinterprets classical Indian literature according to a flexible, open-ended definition of the concept of *tragedy*. Given the broad scope of the author's approach to the psychology of tragedy, which includes ample references to premodern and modern English classics – the book begins with a fantastic paraphrase of Wilde's *De Profundis* – this essay is indispensable for anyone interested in comparative studies on Sanskrit *kāvya*. At the core of Sarkar's argument lies the proposition that classical Sanskrit dramas and epic *kāvya*s can be read as tragedies, contingent upon a critical redefinition of tragedy itself. She posits that tragedy should be recognised not by its denouement of sorrow but by the pervasive presence of pathos, which may climax at any juncture in the narrative arc, not exclusively at its conclusion.

The novel concept of the "tragic middle", central in Sarkar's argument, is defined and presented in Part I: "The tragic middle". Part II: "Doubt, obstacle, deliberation, death, disaster: The trial in Indian aesthetics", seeks to evidence the tragic middle in a number of case studies. The first one, with the suggestive title "Kālidāsa and the inheritance of grief", situates Kālidāsa as a paradigm of tragedy in Classical Sanskrit (or Indic) literature. This chapter contains comparative work on the theory of *sandhi*s (dramatic junctures), and comparison between dramatic theory in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* and Kālidāsa's oeuvre. Sarkar convincingly demonstrates that the latter was well aware of Bharata's theory.

The first part of the book includes references to Buddhist literary works with "tragic potential" (p. 64), that is those stories that could potentially be labelled "tragedies", for instance the giving away of children in *Vessantara/Viśvantara Jātaka* (we will come back to this problematic issue below). Here, the thrust of the argument rests on the assumptions that grief is itself a tragic element, and that grief constitutes an essential element in the *Vessantara Jataka*'s tragic middle.

The second case study, under the title "The map of melancholy: Lamentation and the philosophical pause", elaborates previously expounded ideas, this time focusing on Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*. Here Sarkar directs the spotlight to the narrative "obstacle" as an essential element that forces a "philosophical pause" that catalyses

profound psychological transformation within the protagonist. The third case study, "On losing and finding love: Conflict, obstacle and drama", explores the similar ideas in Kālidāsa's dramas *Śakuntalā* and *Vikramorvaśīya*; whereas the fourth case study, "The altered heart: Anguish, entreaty and lyric", examines Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* (*Cloud Messenger*). The monograph concludes with a succint three-page *Conclusion*.

Overall, the essay proposes a fresh theory of tragedy in Classical Sanskrit literature and applies it to Kālidāsa's oeuvre. It challenges the cliché inherited from 19th-century European philology, according to which the lack of tragedy in Indian literature constitutes a deficiency when compared with classical Greco-Roman literature. William Jones, for instance, stated that "The most outstanding feature in the [Sanskrit] dramatic literature is the entire absence of tragedy" (p. 2). Another example of this pervasive attitude is Warder's opinion of Śakuntalā (p. 55): "the play does not deal with human experience. It is a fairy story" (see also *Introduction*, p. 2). Indeed, the very definition "human experience" is problematic and Sarkar is on point when she retorts that this judgement "is based on the misunderstanding about fairy tales, which are far more emotionally complicated than either scholar [W. Jones and M. Coulson] chose to acknowledge" (p. 2, see also).

Two different responses seem to me legitimate in defence of Indian *kāvya* when faced with the above criticisms. The first one, which is Sarkar's angle, denies the main claim – namely, that there is no tragedy in India. Indeed, the notion that there is no tragedy in *kāvya* is reminiscent of the claim that there is no philosophy in India simply because it has no philosophy rooted in the Hellenic tradition. However, in order to put her argument forward, Sarkar is forced to redefine tragedy. This, in a way, becomes a liability when we apply the new definition more broadly. Indeed, even in Sanskrit drama we find examples of tragedy that are not in the middle, but in the end, as in the *Mudrarākṣasa* – a work that receives mention in Sarkar's book (p. 48) but that is not considered as a possible/serious exception to the theory she herself puts forward. I think Sarkar could have gone even further in her own argument by analysing, in her brilliant style, the uncanny finale of Viśakhadatta's drama. Similarly, the end of the *Meghadūta* is also tragic, if we choose to read it this way.

Another possible response to the aforementioned critical assessment of Indian literature is to accept its categorial validity, but to deny its implications. This is the view that most literati, in India and abroad, silently adopt. For the argument – namely, that Greek tragedy is the hallmark of literary excellence – can only work, circularly, in a tradition – the Greco-Roman tradition – that defines itself after a canon of ancient texts in which Greek tragedy occupies a central position. An example of the circularity, and in my opinion absurdity of this argument, can be found in Hegel's writings on Indian art, which seem to define his own thought better than they define Indian art. This is an issue that is still relevant in postcolonial studies

and revisionism of European philosophy on India (cf. Aakash Singh Rathore and Rimina Mohapatra, *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation, with Texts*, OUP, 2017).

Sarkar's book, therefore, injects some vitality into the field, because of its interdisciplinary approach and because of her potentially controversial claims. In the following lines I would like to discuss a few problematic points of the book.

One of the main problems in Sarkar's argument is the manner in which tragedy is redefined in order to make this category inclusive enough for Sanskrit *kāvya* to fit in. What I understand to be the main thesis is sustained on the basis of the principle of the tragic middle: "Indian aesthetics views narrative development to follow a line of progression, in which failure is embedded in the middle and plays a critical role in the subsequent unfolding of the story, regarded as the endeavour of a hero and a heroine toward a final goal." This definition is directly connected to the notion of "obstacle" or "rupture" in the middle of the plot, the concept of *vimarśa* or *avamarśa* used in Indian poetics (pp. 13–14). By stretching the definition of tragedy in this way, the category becomes broad enough to include Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā*, but it would also include comedies from all literary traditions. The concept of tragedy is dialectical, its opposite, or alternative, is comedy. Tragedy necessarily must be non-comedy (or non-tragicomedy). It is true that the concept of tragedy is problematic in Western literature. The fact that the tragic end or catharsis is the essence of tragedy seems to be undisputed, but one should keep in mind that this is simply Aristotle's assessment. Apart from the nobility of the characters, the catharsis is what would single out a tragedy from other types of dramatic works. This is regardless of the commonality of grief, pain and desperation of the characters. Comedy characters may suffer equally, or more, than tragic characters. One may recall here Woody Allen's film *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, where – in an openly comedic scene – a definition of Comedy is given: Tragedy + Time.

Even if one may broaden the definition of tragedy in order to include Indian dramas in it, that does not immediately make Greek tragedy and Kālidāsa's dramas commensurable. There are essential aspects of these two genres that make them different. Therefore, the question to me is: what do we gain in trying to say that they belong to a common category called tragedy? Sarkar has insightfully observed that there is one crucial difference between Greek and Sanskrit tragedy – namely, the location of the catharsis (end in Greek, middle in Sanskrit). So, it is not the proof that we should beware of putting these two types of drama in the same box? Is not the very position of the catharsis in the plot-line a significant genre-defining element?

Sarkar is on point when she highlights the lack of sensitivity in certain readings of *kāvya* that have failed to grasp the aesthetic power of Indian literary works due to the all-too-common practice to imposing a ready-made standard (pp. 2–3). But Sakar's attempt to show that, in reality, Western and Indian aesthetics are not as

different as some scholars have intended, is problematic. She invokes the idea of *pathos* as a nexus (p. 3):

> [I]f sorrow is thought to constitute the gravest, the most philosophical expression of art (as Wilde in the *De Profundis*), then would the (apparent) lack of it in *kāvya* mean that it is barren of matter truly essential for the understanding of the nature of existence?

But why should we take Wilde as a representative of the Western tradition, let alone a representative of the tragic? Wilde was certainly not a citizen of ancient Athens. In Classical scholarship one is reminded that *pathos* is not the hallmark of tragedy, for *pathos* is found in other genres as well, as stated above, for instance in lyric poetry or even in comedy.

Furthermore, what critics like Coulson or Warder state about *kāvya* is not that it has no grief. They simply state the obvious fact that there is no tragedy in India and that Indian drama "celebrates the ideal of union" instead of expressing "a fear of disintegration" (Gerow, p. 2). At times Sarkar validates the points of these critics, instead of refuting them. She broadens the definition of tragedy in such a way that it includes fear of disintegration at the mid-point of the plot. But this fear is crucially, necessarily removed at the end, with a celebration of universal harmony and success of the hero. In-depth essays on the nature of Indian drama and its relationship with religion, such as Bansat-Boudon's numerous essays on the topic, are not mentioned in the bibliography of Sarkar's book, and many readers may feel, with good reason, that her approach is conspicuously Anglo-centric. This is a point that needs to be addressed because, if my understanding is correct, the disputed question in the monograph is not whether Shakespearean tragedy exists in India, but tragedy in the Hellenic sense.

Let us also highlight the fact that the concept of tragedy is not defined in Sarkar's book. Perhaps we are taking the classical definition of tragedy as a point of departure. This includes the hero's flaw or moral pollution (*miasma*) and all the rest of the characteristics signaled by Aristotle. But the definition of what constitutes a tragedy and what constitutes a comedy were already vexed questions in ancient Athens. Aristotle represents a particular tradition in Greece, and his definition of tragedy does not necessarily exhaust what we see in the extant Greek tragedies. Sarkar could have looked into Greek tragedies in her attempt to revise the very definition of tragedy. The fact is that Aeschylus' plays were called tragedies even before Aristotle came up with a definition, and the category of tragedy necessarily requires other categories that are not tragedy in order to be meaningful. The performance of Greek tragedy can be situated in relation to religion, the god Dionysus, the *polis*, to the Olympic Games, family cults, and so on. Indian *kāvya* is not (always) commensurable with that, and this point needs to be addressed. As Pollock and other precursors of

Sarkar have shown profusely, *kāvya* is closely related to court culture. It would be interesting to see what Sarkar has to say about this, because the overall impression is that the social, religious and political context of Indian "tragedies" is overlooked.

Next, I would like to discuss the case of Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* because it is the work I am most familiar with, and because it is not a drama in the usual sense of the term, but rather a monologue. In assessing the poetic nature of the *Cloud Messenger*, Sarkar includes it in the category of tragedy because there is pathos in it: "I would like to see the *yakṣa*, as Vallabhadeva did, first and foremost as a tragic character" (p. 141). To my knowledge, Vallabhadeva, the earliest commentator on this work, does not considers the *yakṣa* a tragic character. In fact, one wonders how would an Indian scholiast phrase this is Sanskrit. A famous passage in Vallabhadeva's assessment of the genre of the *Meghadūta* points to the fact that the *Meghadūta*, in the eyes of Vallabhadeva, was not a tragedy, but a sort of romantic drama with a comedic tinge. Sarkar does not fail to mention Albrecht Wezler's "On Vallabhadeva's Characterization of the Meghadūta as a *kelikāvya*," in *Le parole e i marmi: studi in onore di Raniero Gnoli nel suo 70. compleanno*, ed. R. Torella, Roma, 2001. The word *keli* is related to "playing" and "games"; in this context, love games. There are also some other comedic aspects of the *Meghadūta* that critics with a romantically-skewed lens have overlooked, but translators such as Mallinson have spotted and translated as amusingly as possible in English. For example, the analogy of the cloud thundering and raining with a fat man farting when he releases his urine. (I develop this argument in "A New Reading of the Meghadūta," in *Puṣpikā. Tracing Ancient India Through Texts and Traditions. Contributions to Current Research in Indology. Volume III*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015, not cited in the book under review.) Sarkar rightly states that "The curse is an omnipresent theme in the determination of tragic events in Kālidāsa's work" (p. 81). But again, even if tragedy generally involves a divine or demonic curse, this does not imply that all curse is tragic. Whereas it is plausible to accept that dramas such as *Śakuntalā* involve a form of tragedy which includes a curse, this is not necessarily true in cases such as the *Meghadūta*.

The same goes for the Viśvāntara (Pali: Vessantara) narrative (p. 62), preserved in different versions, but generally depicting the virtue of perfect generosity of king Viśvāntara. Sarkar proposes to read this tale as a tragedy where the catharsis lies in the middle, the most critical moment in which the king-turned-ascetic gives away wife and children, knowing fully well that they will be brutally enslaved. But in my opinion the story of Viśvāntara is much closer to the story of Abraham and Isaac, it is the story of a trial with a happy end rewarding virtue. I would be ready to accept the inclusion of the tragic middle as a valid category, but not at the expense of ignoring the happy end. This, again, does not exclude a comparative reading of these stories. Indeed, Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* re-elaborates the story of Abraham and

Isaac with a rather tragic outlook. But as earlier critics of Indian literature have observed, a good ending does not make for a good tragedy.

Leaving these reservations aside, Sarkar's book is a fresh and beautifully written essay on Indian drama. Whether the theory works or not, that is something difficult to decide. What is certain is that such a bold and innovative approach to Sanskrit literature was a long felt need and Sarkar's work will no doubt help shaping the future of literary criticism. It is to be hoped that Sarkar's work will be read and discussed beyond the artificial academic limits of Indology.

Book Review

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Spring and Autumn Historiography is a useful book, even though it is also somewhat of a missed opportunity. It is useful because the author excels in deciphering the formulaic language of one of the most enigmatic early Chinese texts, making this text more accessible to students and scholars. It is disappointing, because the author could have advanced our understanding of this text much further, had she opted for a more nuanced historical approach and had she paid more attention to previous and current research.

The text under discussion is *Chunqiu* 春秋, which I prefer to translate as the *Springs-and-Autumns Annals*; Van Auken opts for a singular "Spring and Autumn" (to avoid confusion, I shall hereafter refer to the text as *Chunqiu*). As Van Auken acknowledges, the first time she looked at the text she "thought it was boring" (p. xiii), and this is the impression shared by the overwhelming majority of modern readers. The dry chronicle of major events in the life of the state of Lu 魯 and its neighbors and allies between 722 and 481 (or 479) BCE is surely not engaging reading. For two millennia, however, the text was a must for any educated man of letters, because it was widely believed that its formulaic language contains the "great meaning in subtle words" 微言大義 allegedly embedded there by Confucius 孔子 (551–479 BCE) himself. In the early twentieth century, however, as the traditional examination curriculum was abolished, while Confucius lost his position as China's "utmost sage" 至聖, the interest in *Chunqiu* receded dramatically.[1] An attempt to re-engage the text from a post-Confucian perspective is therefore highly welcome.

Van Auken's book is based on her PhD dissertation, "A Formal Analysis of the *Chuenchiou* (Spring and Autumn Classic)" completed back in 2006 (University of Washington, under the supervision of William G. Boltz). That seventeen years separate the dissertation and the current monograph may reflect the publishers'

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[1] Throughout the twentieth century, scholars who addressed *Chunqiu* did it primarily at sidelines of the studies of one of its commentaries, primarily *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Tradition*) and *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 (the third commentary, *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳, merited much less scholarly attention). In the twenty-first century, signs of renewed interest in *Chunqiu* abound, including a new journal, *Chunqiu studies* 春秋學研究, the inaugural issue of which was published by Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社 in May 2023.

reluctance to endorse this subject. Just as *Chunqiu* is not easy reading, so is any study that tries to "identify the regular patterns underlying the *Spring and Autumn* records and to decode (as much as possible) their significance, in order to throw light on the norms and priorities that they embody" (p. 3). Predictably, such a technical study with a relatively limited readership would frighten most publishers in the field. Here the support of Tang Center was probably crucial, and the Center deserves utmost respect for this.

The major advantage of Van Auken's book is its methodical nature (which is precisely why a book was required to cover the topic, rather than just a few articles). Whereas the *Chunqiu* formulae were studied intensively by traditional literati (whose efforts Van Auken largely overlooks; see below), none of them, to my best knowledge, produced anything comparable to Van Auken's tables and meticulous analyses of the text as unrelated to Confucius's designs.[2] The five core chapters deal with *Chunqiu*'s dating patterns (chapter 2), encoding individual rank (chapter 3), the interstate hierarchy (chapter 4), "registering judgments" (chapter 5), and the ways to convey the importance of the state of Lu (chapter 6). Among the most interesting observations of the book are the reasons for which certain events were *not* dated as precisely as they could have been (chapter 2) and the discovery of three "tiers" of states in the *Chunqiu*-promulgated interstate hierarchy (chapter 4). These insights demonstrate the advantages of Van Auken's approach and will be helpful to students and scholars engaged with *Chunqiu*, its commentaries, and even broader issues in the history of the Springs-and-Autumns (770–453 BCE) era.

Van Auken's achievements are marred, however, by several major weaknesses that cause me to view the book as a missed opportunity. The major problem is the awkward attempt to present a good technical study as something bigger than this, to wit, a pioneering analysis of *Chunqiu*-related historiography. Second, the author's insufficient attention to the historical context of *Chunqiu* results in a flattening of the text and glossing over of the tensions between its rigid formulaic design and the need to accommodate real historical events. Third, notwithstanding the monograph's title, the book does not engage (or does not engage with sufficient clarity) a variety of historiographic questions, such as who composed *Chunqiu*, for which audience, how the text was formed and circulated, or how it is related to other contemporaneous historical and quasi-historical texts. In what follows I shall

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2 The closest parallel to Van Auken's approach is the Russian-language article by Artemij M. Karapetiants, "Чуньцю и древнекитайский историографический ритуал" (*Chunqiu* and Ancient Chinese Historiographic Ritual), in *Этика и ритуал в традиционном Китае* (Ethics and Ritual in Traditional China, 1988). The latter study, however, remains widely ignored, not only because of the linguistic barrier (Van Auken, for instance, does not even mention it), but also because of the highly idiosyncratic nature of Karapetiants's tables, which make them barely legible even for native Russian speakers.

address each of these problems, in a hope to encourage the reader to utilize Van Auken's insights and go further to take a deeper look at *Chunqiu*, advancing the study of this unjustifiably neglected text.

1 Breaking through an Open Door: Van Auken's Alleged "Novelty"

Chapter 1, "Orientations: Approaches to *Spring and Autumn* Historiography" is by far the weakest. The author identifies "two conventional approaches" to *Chunqiu*. The first is "the orthodox reading laid out in most premodern commentaries," which focuses on the text as related to Confucius's "praise and blame" (*baobian* 褒貶). This approach is justifiably dismissed; but the dismissal comes at the price of ignoring the wealth and depth of traditional commentaries. Then comes an odd statement: the "second and equally problematic approach is to read the records as intended to be neutral, objective, and complete" (p. 8). This is a bizarre reading of *Chunqiu*: few scholars nowadays would claim that any historical text is "neutral and objective," and nobody would argue that any text can be "complete." The reader will wait till p. 21 and note 27 (p. 263) to learn that the "second approach" refers to a single and by now fairly forgotten article by George A. Kennedy (1901–1960) published back in 1942.[3] To my knowledge, no scholar in the field in recent decades has echoed (or merely referred to) Kennedy's views of *Chunqiu* records as "complete." Nonetheless, Van Auken polemicizes against Kennedy's claim repeatedly (pp. 8, 11, 21–22, 32, 37). Another object of polemics is James Legge (1815–1897), the only scholar who is accorded a lengthy citation (p. 14), and who is referred to throughout chapter 1 and beyond. By contrast, more recent studies of the *Chunqiu*, including some by the present reviewer, as well as the overwhelming majority of recent Chinese-language studies, are either misrepresented or ignored altogether. As I shall demonstrate below, Van Auken misses therewith a chance to engage the colleagues, myself included, in a meaningful debate.

This selective and biased treatment of secondary sources is not accidental. It aims to manifest the novelty of Van Auken's conclusions about the nature of *Chunqiu*. Hailing it as "a new approach" (p. 27), the author promises to demonstrate that "words produce hierarchy" (p. 29), and that the text's formalized and repetitive language is aimed to "convey an idealized and formulaic version of events and of the hierarchy of individuals that affirms and reinforces the authority of the Lu ruling

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3 Van Auken oddly identifies Kennedy as "another proponent of this view" (p. 263n27); actually, he is the *only* proponent of this view to my best knowledge.

house" (p. 29). The argument itself is surely correct in its first part (*Chunqiu* indeed deals primarily and overwhelmingly with hierarchy), but is anything but novel: Van Auken could scarcely find a single study that *does not* consider *Chunqiu* as reflective of idealized hierarchical patterns. It is overwhelmingly accepted that the text is predicated on projecting what Joachim Gentz aptly names "ritual reality."[4] Instead of acknowledging this, Van Auken opts to polemicize against Legge who criticized *Chunqiu* for "its lack of regard for the truth," presenting his views as having currency nowadays (pp. 21–23 and 29). This is employing the straw man strategy.

Speaking of Van Auken's second conclusion, namely that *Chunqiu* is preoccupied with buttressing the authority of the Lu ruling house, the claim is less accepted nowadays, but is not novel either. Early commentators had duly noted the exceptional position of Lu in the text, an understanding which eventually gave rise to the radical argument of the Han-dynasty *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 exegetes, according to which *Chunqiu* "treats Lu as the True Monarch" 王魯.[5] I think this is a questionable conclusion: rather, the elevation of Lu (the country in which *Chunqiu* was composed) may simply reflect the ritual elevation of the "host" over the "guests," as noted by Van Auken in chapter 6. The topic requires further discussion, however, and I shall leave it outside the current review.

Van Auken's habit of claiming novelty for rather conventional arguments recurs in the "Conclusions," where she demonstrates that regular patterns in *Chunqiu* "were not created by Confucius or any other later editor, but … were produced by Lu record-keepers" (p. 215). Here, the lengthy and, frankly, tedious discussion could have been saved by directing the reader to the shorter yet compelling treatment of this question by the foremost expert on *Chunqiu*, Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (1909–1992). Yang, whose annotated edition of *Chunqiu* with the *Zuo Tradition* (or Commentary, *Zuozhuan* 左傳) is among the finest examples of modern China's textual studies, analyzed *Chunqiu*'s relation with Confucius in his Introduction.[6] Just one point from his discussion suffices to demonstrate the impossibility that the records were produced (or even heavily edited) by Confucius. During the first century covered in the text, foreign nobles who headed their countries' delegations to interstate meetings or led the armies were referred in *Chunqiu* by a neutral *ren* 人 ("leader" or "man"). Starting in the late seventh century BCE, by contrast, the names of foreign ministers are habitually recorded. This is not a minor change: as Van Auken demonstrates correctly in chapter 3, naming patterns mattered a lot in determining

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4 Gentz 2005.

5 See, e.g., Yang Yunchou 楊運籌 (2019). Van Auken ignores this exegetical strand.

6 Yang Bojun, "Qian yan" 前言, in Yang (1990: 1–56); see especially pp. 5–16 for discussing the relations between Confucius and *Chunqiu*. Van Auken utilized Yang's edition, but never refers to either his introduction, or to his comments that discuss long-term changes in *Chunqiu* recording patterns.

one's rank. The change could not have been manufactured by Confucius, who would probably have opposed deviation from ritualized formulae if he had noted it in the first place. Rather, the recording change is likely to reflect a real rise in the political weight of ministerial lineages in the Springs-and-Autumns world, including, notably, in the state of Lu (see below). Van Auken buries this change in one of the appendixes (pp. 253–54). It would be much fairer to address its importance in the main text, and also acknowledge the primacy of Yang's study. Claiming originality by ignoring the predecessors' contributions is not a respectable approach.

2 *Chunqiu* in the Historical Context

One of the fascinating debates among the traditional *Chunqiu* exegetes focused on its relation to history. In particular, some of the promoters of *Gongyang zhuan* argued that *Chunqiu* is concerned with major political principles rather than with actual events in the lives of the Springs-and-Autumns-period states. In their eyes, the historical focus of *Zuozhuan* was its major malady. Thus, Liu Fenglu 劉逢祿 (1776–1829), one of the major critics of *Zuozhuan*, averred: "*Chunqiu* is not a historical text. Those who speak from the point of view of Mr. Zuo treat *Chunqiu* as a historical text, and, expectedly, lose its meaning" 《春秋》非史文，言《左氏》者以史文視 《春秋》，宜其失義也.[7] This sounds as an odd claim, but actually it is not entirely groundless. Insofar as formulaic records of *Chunqiu* are predicated on introducing "ritual reality," it makes sense to avoid a purely historical approach toward this text. Van Auken, whose very first sentence in the book is "This is not a book about the history of the Spring and Autumn period" (p. 1), and who focuses "on patterns that occur frequently enough to allow for significant conclusions" (p. 7) is justified in turning away from history as such. The problem is that she steps too far in the direction of a-historicity, which becomes detrimental to her analysis.

In reality, *Chunqiu*, however preoccupied with ritualized hierarchic order, cannot be dissociated from historical events, and even less so from long-term historical developments. A careful reader may easily discover tensions between the text's commitment to "ritual reality" and the need to reflect, however perfunctorily, real events on the ground. Take for instance, Yang Bojun's aforementioned observation about the increased visibility of high ministers in the latter half of the *Chunqiu* records. This is neither an accidental nor isolated phenomenon. Rather, the high ministers' (*qing* 卿) successful "upgrade" of their status in the strictly regularized *Chunqiu* records recalls a similar subtle but consequential upgrade of their sumptuary rights as observable in the changes in contemporaneous mortuary

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7 Liu Fenglu 1955: 599.

assemblages (dubbed by Lothar von Falkenhausen the Middle Springs and Autumns Ritual Restructuring).[8] Both upgrades suggest that despite their ostensible rigidity, the Zhou ritual norms were flexible enough to accommodate social changes. Conversely, *Chunqiu* demonstrates the ongoing rigidity of the Zhou system with regard to the exclusion of minor nobility, *shi* 士, from consideration as ritually meaningful actors. The fact that not a single *shi* is named in the 242 (or 244) years covered in the *Chunqiu* is not accidental. As such, the text associated with Confucius, the champion of the *shi*, is actually one of the singularly discriminative against Confucius's own stratum.[9] That these points were not noted by Van Auken, particularly in the context of her otherwise interesting discussion of *Chunqiu*'s ways to reflect individual rank (chapter 3), is regrettable.

Van Auken's focus on the norms of recording as rigid and unchangeable can be misleading. Take for instance chapter 4, "An Idealized Interstate Order." Van Auken argues that *Chunqiu* "depicts the interstate order as constant and unchanging" (p. 101). Table 4.1 summarizes this hierarchic order; the exceptions are recognized, but their importance is dismissed (p. 110). The problem is that alterations mattered and mattered a lot. I shall demonstrate this from a single example of *Chunqiu*'s treatment of the state of Chu 楚. In its first occurrences in *Chunqiu*, Chu appears under its alias, Jing 荊,[10] and is treated as a cultural outsider; hence the text omits any term for the agent of its military actions, similarly to its treatment of Rong 戎 and Di 狄 polities (p. 128; see Zhuang 10.5, 14.3, 16.3).[11] In 671 BCE, as Chu sends the first messenger to Lu, it is slightly elevated, as the text speaks of a "man" or "leader" of Jing 荊人 (Zhuang 23.5). From 659 BCE (Xi 1.6), Chu appears under its common name, and its military actions are invariably identified henceforth by an agent (a Chu leader/ man 楚人, as is common in treatment of most other states). Another twenty years pass, and the Chu leader merits a slight upgrade: *Chunqiu* (Xi 21.4) refers to him as "viscount" (*zi* 子), although it will never recognize his self-proclaimed title of "king"

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8 Falkenhausen 2006: 326–369.

9 See more on the rise of *shi*, its *Chunqiu* context, and Confucius's role, in Pines (2009a: 117–121). The only *shi* who merits a mention is Confucius himself, whose birth is reported in the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* versions of *Chunqiu*, whereas his death is the final entry in the *Zuozhuan* version.

10 Jing and Chu are synonyms (both refer to thorns). Chu's earliest appearances (in the Western Zhou oracle bone inscriptions) are under the name Chu; but the term Jing appears both in some *Shijing* 詩經 poems and in Western Zhou-era bronze inscriptions, which also often employ a double name Jing-Chu 荊楚 (see Yang Bojun's gloss in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 181). Jing was not necessarily considered a pejorative designation; thus it is used (along with Chu) as the country's alias in the Zeng Hou Yu-*bianzhong* 曾侯與編鐘 inscription, which unequivocally identifies Chu as the new bearer of Heaven's Mandate. See Luo Xinhui 羅新慧 and Yuri Pines (2023: 11–13).

11 All references to *Chunqiu* and *Zuozhuan* follow the years of the lord of Lu and the number of the item as adopted in Yang's *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* (1990) and in Durrant et al., trans. (2016).

(*wang* 王). This upgrade coincides, not surprisingly, with the first Chu-Lu alliance forged in the same year (639 BCE).

Van Auken pays no attention to these fluctuations. Yet these are very meaningful indications of the relation between *Chunqiu* as ritualized text and *Chunqiu* as a politically important record, the content of which was probably known to foreign leaders, which necessitated ritual upgrading of allied polities. The same pattern is observable later with regard to Chu's place in the sequence of the states that took part in interstate assemblies, multistate military campaigns, or covenants. In Van Auken's imagined interstate hierarchy, Chu should appear in the sixth place (below Qi 齊 and Song 宋), but whenever Chu's importance increases, this order is reversed. Thus, in 589 BCE, when Lu contemplated abandoning its alliance with Jin in favor of Chu, it made a covenant with leaders of no fewer than 13 states, and Chu topped the list, followed by another major power, Qin (which normally was placed much lower in Lu's hierarchy); by contrast, Song, and the recently defeated Qi were degraded (Cheng 2.10). Similarly, at the two "disarmament conferences" of 546 and 541 BCE, Chu was placed second to Jin 晉, reflecting its exceptional importance (Xiang 27.2 and Zhao 1.2). All these are meaningful deviations from what Van Auken identified as "consistent" pattern. They show the importance of contextual reading of *Chunqiu* and challenge the rationale behind Van Auken's table 4.1.

Yet another example of the tension between *Chunqiu* norms and historical expediency are records that depart from normative judgment of political personalities. For instance, assassinations of the rulers were supposed to be invariably condemned except in the case of Lu, where they were partly concealed following the norm of not reporting negative events from the home state (p. 166).[12] What Van Auken fails to note, however, is that at certain occasions the text conceals assassinations of foreign rulers, e.g., Lord Xi of Zheng 鄭僖公 in 566 BCE (Xiang 7.9), King Jia'ao of Chu 楚王郟敖 in 541 BCE (Zhao 1.10), and Lord Dao of Qi 齊悼公 in 485 BCE (Ai 10.3). These scandalous concealments, which caused headaches for commentators and exegetes, suggest that the *Chunqiu* norms were not inviolable.[13] The text could be modified to suit political expediency. That Van

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12 I speak of "partial" concealment because the absence of location in the records of the deaths of lords Yin 魯隱公 and Min 魯閔公 (Yin 11.4 and Min 2.3) clearly indicates a problem behind their "perishing." In the case of Lord Huan 魯桓公, assassinated abroad, the unusual location ("our lord perished in Qi" 公薨于齊, Huan 18.2) may also hint at the irregularity of his death. Van Auken does not discuss the importance of locations in *Chunqiu*.

13 For the implicit debate about one of these cases of concealment between the *Zuo* and *Gongyang* traditions, see Pines 2009b: 329–331.

Auken ignores these cases – despite the prominence they were given by such an outstanding scholar as Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721)[14] – is yet another example of her failure to provide a nuanced account of *Chunqiu*.

3 Historiographic Problems

Let us go back to historiographic questions. Some of these – related to the peculiarity of *Chunqiu* records – were duly dealt with by Van Auken. Many others were not even asked. Take for instance such a crucial issue as the addressees of *Chunqiu*. Who were the readers of these formulaic records that all too often conceal more than reveal? Karapetiants (note 2 above) opined that *Chunqiu* and similar annals of other states were circulating primarily among court scribes as a means of upholding cross-Zhou cultural unity. The present reviewer suggested that the initial addressees of the records were the ancestral spirits of the lords of Lu. Having ignored Karapetiants and dismissed my speculation, Van Auken does not offer any alternative.[15] If the text was really meant to elevate the state of Lu above others, then whom did it target? The rulers of the state of Lu? Broader Lu elites? Or was it intended to circulate beyond Lu's borders? We cannot expect definitive answers to these questions, but at least they should have been asked.

Chunqiu is full of enigmas. Many of these cannot be resolved, but they should be addressed. Take for instance the sixty-odd blank seasonal records, in which only the first month of the season is indicated without any further information (e.g., "Summer, the fourth month"; "Winter, the tenth month" and so forth). Who needed this kind of entirely redundant information? I have opined that these records

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14 Liu Zhiji, one of the most perceptive Chinese historians, dedicated a chapter of his *Penetrating history* (*Shitong* 史通) to "Doubting the [*Chunqiu*] Classics" 惑經 (*Shitong tongshi* 史通通釋, 14: 397–399). Note that Pu Qilong 浦起龍 (1679–1762), the author of the most authoritative commentary to *Shitong*, was appalled by the possibility that Liu Zhiji assaults the *Annals*' credibility and tried to offer an alternative interpretation to Liu's analysis. See Pu's notes in ibid., p. 397. Van Auken ignores Liu Zhiji altogether, as she does most of traditional scholars.

15 Van Auken actually misrepresents my research. She mentions my "most extravagant claim" that *Chunqiu* originated from the records placed in Lu's ancestral temple and then interprets this hypothesis as arguing that *Chunqiu* "was a record of 'ritual' performance" (p. 24), which allows her to dismiss my approach entirely. It does not make much effort to see that I never refer to performative aspects of ritual, surely not in the context of *Chunqiu*. Oddly, Van Auken has opted to polemicize with my earliest article on the topic, published back in 1997, and gloss over more mature studies, such as "Chinese History-Writing" (Pines 2009b: 318–323), and, most recently Pines, *Zhou History Unearthed: The Bamboo Manuscript* Xinian *and Early Chinese Historiography* (Pines 2020: 17–23). Nor did she refer to many other studies that interpret the *Chunqiu* in the context of ritual reports to the ancestors, e.g., Dong Fenfen 董芬芬 2016, or Guo Changbao 過常寶 2017. It is surely possible that my analysis is wrong, but I would expect at least a more accurate presentation of my views.

were part of communicating the ancestors, to wit, assuaging them that nothing bad happened throughout the season. An alternative interpretation was recently offered by Chen Minzhen, who related these blank records to the materiality of the *Chunqiu* manuscript text. Judging from a few recently discovered manuscripts, we may assume that the yearly account of *Chunqiu* was filled into a table, in which seasonal divisions were prearranged. If nothing noteworthy happened, the seasonal record remained untouched (or just the number of the first seasonal month was added). This understanding not only offers a plausible solution to the riddle of the blank records but also allows us to come to terms with *Chunqiu*'s notorious brevity: the table format would have precluded detailed discussions of the reported events.[16] For sure, it is possible that Chen is as wrong as I myself. But Van Auken does not try to offer a different explanation, she simply dismisses the oddity of blank records and treats them as entirely normal (p. 32).

Or take, for instance, the touchy question of later intervention into *Chunqiu* records. The first impression of most readers (including the current reviewer) is that the records were made as the events unfolded; otherwise it is difficult to believe that meticulous dating (often to the day) of such inconsequential events as rain-seeking ceremonies, solar eclipses, or funerals of Lu rulers and their primary wives would be preserved and reproduced long after the event occurred (for the dating patterns, see chapter 2, "Recording the Day"). But then we come to an anomalous record, such as "Ninth month, on *dingmao* day (24), the son Tong (or Zitong) was born" 九月丁卯，子同生 (Huan 6.5). Tong (or Zitong) was the future Lord Zhuang of Lu 魯莊公. As noted by Durrant, Li, and Schaberg in their translation (following Yang Bojun's observation), "of the twelve lords of Lu recorded in the *Annals*, only Lord Zhuang was the eldest son of the main wife. This is the one Lu heir apparent whose birth is recorded in the *Annals*, which suggests a post factum manipulation of this exceptional record, since no one at the time of his birth could have known that he would live to succeed."[17] This of course opens a plethora of questions: which other records were post-factum manipulated, by whom, and for what purposes? Again, the question cannot be definitively answered but it should have been asked.[18]

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16 Chen 2023.

17 Durrant et al. 2016: 94n47.

18 The most politically sensitive example of a possible post-factum manipulation of the *Chunqiu* record is that of the expulsion of Lord Xian of Wei 衛獻公 from his state in 544 BCE. If the *Zuozhuan* account is to be trusted, the original record "on the bamboo slips of the regional lords" 在諸侯之策 (referring to the *Chunqiu* and similar annals kept at other courts) should have contained the condemnation of the perpetrators, the Wei nobles Sun Linfu 孫林父 and Ning Zhi 甯殖. However, after Ning Zhi's son, Ning Xi 甯喜 assisted Lord Xian's return to his state, the record had been replaced with a neutral "The Marquis of Wei departed and fled to Qi" 衛侯出奔齊 (Xiang 14.4). See Durrant et al. 2016: 1006n365.

Yet another topic that should have been addressed is the process of *Chunqiu* composition. It is widely agreed that the text was prepared by the court scribes of Lu (just as court scribes elsewhere maintained their own parallel chronicles). But how did scribes decide which events merit inclusion in the chronicle and which do not? Here, I believe, *Zuozhuan* can offer a clue. Seven of the fourteen entries in the first year of *Zuozhuan* narrative narrate events (often quite minor) which were not recorded in *Chunqiu*; and for each event the explanation is provided as to why it was not recorded. Elsewhere, I suggested that this is "a sample of training materials for a Lu scribe. In all likelihood, the scribal office kept much more extensive records than those that appear in the *Springs-and-Autumns Annals*. The *Annals*' entries were selected from these original records, whereas other records were provided with an explanation of the reason for their eventual omission from the *Annals*. Without this information, a future scribe would not be able to decide which events should merit inclusion in the court chronicles, and which should not."[19] Most interestingly, a few entries in the final sections of the bamboo manuscript *Xinian* 繫年 from the Tsinghua University collection suggest that similar "draft chronicle" was maintained at the court of Chu as well.[20]

It may be unfair to reproach the author for the questions that she did not ask. However, given Van Auken's explicit promise to treat the text from a broader historiographic perspective, and given the rare opportunity she was given to dedicate a lengthy monograph to *Chunqiu* alone, the failure to address many of the above points is disappointing. As such, her book is somewhat of a missed opportunity. This said, it is immensely useful because it lays solid ground for further research of *Chunqiu*. The field should be grateful to Van Auken for her effort.

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19 Pines 2020: 29.
20 Pines 2020: 60–62.

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