

The Temporality is a recurrent yet challenging issue in the study of local histories in particular when narratives of time are often fraught with imaginations. In the archaeological practices of Bronze-Age and Iron-Age cultures in the periphery, it is often difficult to establish a chronology that incorporates materiality, temporality and functionality of archaeological discoveries between centre and periphery. The reflection of time through material cultures is transgressive in nature.

Focusing on the temporality in the southwest frontier of ancient China, Alice Yao's new book, 'The Ancient Highlands of Southwest China: From the Bronze Age to the Han Empire', is a ground-breaking work in disentangling the complex history that is often clouded by a centre-dominated narrative. It is a crucial theoretic contribution to the field. Gu Jiegang and his 'Doubting Antiquity Movement' in early 20th century proposed that antiquity was a 'piling up of layered fabrications' (Li 2013). Whilst this was an important step toward the modernisation of historical research in China, the lack of constructive solutions hindered the moving forward of the subject for a long time. Historical texts were either treated as an unchallenged orthodoxy or being neglected/abandoned completely (cf. Falkenhausen 1993). One of Alice Yao's aims is to 'collapse the disciplinary boundaries between these (historical, anthropological, and archaeological) domains' (p. 17). Her innovative anthropological approach treats the 'historical awareness' of these peripheral societies as an 'ancillary to writing and historiography' (p.30), through which she finds funerary landscapes an medium to reconcile the lack of written documents in the periphery and to 'decentre' the 'periphery historicity'. This new view will contribute to revolutionize our understanding of transmitted texts (e.g., bronze inscriptions) as the study of them often is often constrained by the text and its immediate archaeological contexts. It will also be valuable in the research of Bronze-Age cultures and interactions in the central and marginal areas across China. Research on the regional interactions during the Erlitou and Shang periods has been a heated topic in the past decade. However, apart from finding evidence of long-distance trade and cultural transmission, how this process helped to shape local landscapes remains under investigated. For instance, it is a widely held view that the Panlongcheng site, situated right on the edge of the Yangtze River near nowadays Wuhan City, was an important military outpost established by the Shang from the north. This is attested by the discovery of very distinctive Shang style burials and bronzes as well as places and walls (Liu and Chen 2012). But how did the Shang people interact with local people and their environment? Yao's reconstruction of local funerary landscapes by detailed analyses of typical Bronze-Age and Iron-Age cemeteries situated in different environments in ancient Southwest China resonates with an important research direction at Panlongcheng, which is to examine how economic and cultural activities were influenced by the active alluvial processes at and around the site (Hai Zhang personal communication).

Yao's unpacking of funerary landscapes, consisting of 'body, cemetery, and landscape' (p. 48) benefits from her insightful reconstruction of the formation process of these cemeteries. By revisiting archaeological stratigraphies, which are often forgotten in this type of scholarly enquiries, and focusing on spatial relationships amongst archaeological features, not only is she able to disentangle rich information entailed in archaeological reports, assisted by the examination of artefacts, she also creates a channel to go 'beyond the temporality of sedimentation'. Whilst taphonomic research has become common in the archaeology of prehistoric settlements in China, its application in Bronze Age and Iron Age burials is still rare. Yet, Alice Yao has proved its unique position in understanding past societies and human behaviours. This detailed, innovative analysis of the cemeteries also provides a working framework for the reconstruction of burial rites and funerary landscapes. There is a consensus amongst scholars that funerals held for the deceased are also an important part of the living society. Drinking and associated activities are crucial for the living to gain prestige by engaging with the deceased (Falkenhausen 2006). But it is clear that such means to

communicate with the past vary greatly. I wondered whether 'ancestor' as a concept was universal to these societies in the margin and how the diversity of cultural exercises (e.g., local cuisines) and physical environments fit into this type of dynamics between the past and the present.

She uses drums and other types of material media to put her case studies into a broader regional context and delineates the history of the periphery and its interactions with the center. She notes that 'not only was space limited within the mounds, but membership was restricted and contingent on status' (p. 102). This perspective, again, is illustrative to the study of burial landscapes of ancient central China. For instance, the erection of those gigantic burial mounds for the Chinese emperors and empresses was also a crucial political movement, surrounding which power and social prestige were often re-created. There is thus no doubt that the methodologies and theories will be extremely influential to related fields. Beyond this, this book is also a great effort echoing James Scott's (2011) research on the peripheral societies and their significant role in the making of history.

Falkenhausen, von Lothar 1993 On the historiographical orientation of Chinese archaeology. *Antiquity* 67(257): 839-849.

Falkenhausen, von Lothar 2006 *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000-250 BC): The Archaeological Evidence*. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California.

Li, Feng 2013 *Early China: A Social and Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Liu, Li and Chen, Xingcan 2012 *The Archaeology of China: From the Late Paleolithic to the Early Bronze Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Scott, James 2011 *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Yao, Alice 2016 *The Ancient Highlands of Southwest China: From the Bronze Age to the Han Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press