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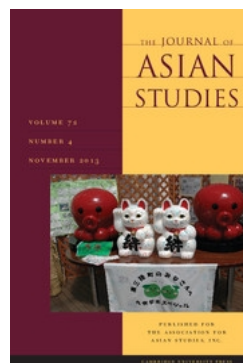
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**Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora.** By Jing Tsu.  
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. xii,  
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auxiliary cavalry at minimal cost (p. 257). When collaboration turned to conflict, it had less to do with cultural differences than with actuarial realities: since political ties were primarily based on personal bonds rather than alliances between groups, the death of an emperor, *qaghan*, or trusted frontier official could put everything up for grabs.

In an effort to transcend the court-centered Chinese literati perspective, Skaff draws on an impressive range of sources including archaeologically recovered documents from Turfan, funerary inscriptions, and Buddhist texts. Inevitably, he ends up citing standard sources, such as the Tang histories and the *Zizhi tongjian* (*Comprehensive mirror for aid in government*) more often than other materials, but he is fully aware of the biases of literati historiography and capable of putting the standard histories to vivid and effective use. One example of this is a falling out between the Tang frontier commander Fumeng Lingcha and his client Gao Xianzhi, recorded in the Tang histories. Fumeng excoriated the general, who was of Korean descent, as a “dog shit eating Koguryan slave”—from which Skaff sensibly concludes that ethnic difference was recognized in Tang times but did not bar the formation of patron-client ties (pp. 89–90).

The author locates the Eastern Eurasian practices shared by Turko-Mongols and Sui-Tang Chinese within a larger Eurasian interaction zone, and provides examples of commonalities in diplomacy and rulership from as far afield as Byzantium, Sasanid Persia, and early medieval Europe. These zones, however, are not very clearly demarcated, nor is there much consideration of how the similarities originated. Skaff refers to a long history of “entanglements” and politico-cultural one-upmanship, and he not unreasonably points out that the problem of origins is beyond the chronological scope of his book. Nevertheless, this remains the least satisfying aspect of his otherwise excellent study. Readers may be left wondering whether some of the practices he discusses, such as status-based seating arrangements at banquets, are indeed so chronologically and geographically widespread as to be a characteristic of *all* human societies that have moved beyond hunting and gathering. The author shows some awareness of this problem (p. 294), but never really addresses it.

Although this book does not exhaust all the issues it raises, it nevertheless offers a compelling reconceptualization of Sui-Tang China’s interaction with the steppe peoples. As such, it is the most important work on Tang foreign relations to appear in a very long time.

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*Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora.* By JING TSU. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. xii, 306 pp. \$45.00 (cloth).  
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The rapidly growing field of sinophone studies has gained prominence in recent years by challenging the standard historiography of what we call “modern Chinese literature.” At its heart lies a committed critique of mainland China and its hegemonic Mandarin culture, long held as the proper point of reference for measuring linguistic pedigree and literary artistry. But while this approach laudably foregrounds migration, colonial history, the diversity of topolects, and ethno-nationalist politics as forces with which we must reckon in order to probe the nature of Chinese literature, only a few scholars

have proposed specific methodologies to raise sinophone studies beyond the level of polemic. (See the recent works of Shu-mei Shih, David Der-wei Wang, and Tee Kim Tong, for example.) Jing Tsu's groundbreaking *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* exemplifies this urgently needed scholarship. Identifying the Chinese language "as the first problem to be dealt with" (p. 235), it sheds light on the empirical and theoretical underpinnings of the field in order to suggest new directions.

Tsu's overarching goal is to make explicit the fraught relationship among language, nation, literature, and those language workers whose trade is literary criticism. She strips this uneasy nexus down to its basic but frequently taken-for-granted core elements: the "sound" and "script" of the so-called Chinese language. The book's eight substantive chapters present a persuasive narrative of the ways in which writers, critics, readers, and language-policy makers from the nineteenth century to the present have tried to negotiate and manipulate the multiple sounds and orthographies extant in the sinophone world.

Chapter 1 presses readers to contemplate a global process of warlike gains and losses, which Tsu calls "literary governance" (p. 2), the central idea of the book. Going beyond the familiar politics of minority and postcolonial discourses, Tsu depicts a complex network oscillating between literary competition and accommodation, between linguistic loyalty and betrayal, between national strife and common interest, and between prestige and non-recognition in global literary markets. On the one hand, literary governance refers to the material conditions that govern one's access to language as a form of competitive cultural capital; on the other, it debunks the mythical promise of "linguistic nativity"—often embodied by the figure of the native speaker—as a guarantee of Chinese authenticity (pp. 2–8). The current enterprise of national languages and national literatures, Tsu argues, is born from these intertwined forces, frequently manifesting itself as a gatekeeping game that engenders frays and rivalries between members of the Chinese mainland and diaspora, between diasporic writers, and between different topolects and even languages.

The next seven chapters explore various facets of literary governance to give a captivating account of language as a battleground. Chapter 2 investigates the making of a Chinese national language in the late nineteenth century. Tracing this history through the debates surrounding script reforms—in particular, the phonetic writing systems proposed by Wang Zhao and others—Tsu demonstrates how "spoken sounds enter the arena of textual combat" (p. 21). Chapter 3 turns to the invention of the first Chinese-language typewriter by Chinese-English bilingual writer Lin Yutang, showing how mechanical and electronic technology made it possible not only to reconfigure the dynamics between ideograph and alphabet but also to reconceptualize Chinese as a global language on a par with English. Chapter 4 shifts to a different kind of translingual practice by comparing the bilingual writers Lin Yutang, Eileen Chang, and Ha Jin. Focusing on their controversial and even failed attempts of self-translation back and forth between the sinophone and anglophone markets, Tsu raises provocative questions about new forms of linguistic loyalty and accountability in response to the positivist trend in recent scholarly treatments of bilingualism and translation studies. Chapter 5 examines how Chen Jitong, China's first Chinese francophone bilingual writer, promoted the idea of a Chinese "world literature" in the late nineteenth century. Chen conceived of world literature as a supranational competition between the Chinese and the Western world, and his project exemplified the hierarchical social and linguistic conditions of what Pascale Casanova calls the "world republic of letters."<sup>4</sup> Chapter 6 returns to the question of writing

<sup>4</sup>Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

systems by examining how Taiwanese thinkers have constructed native modes of linguistic modernity. Through cases of Cai Peihuo's proposed romanization of the dominant Taiwanese topolect and Song Zelai's experiment with writing in this mother tongue of most of the local Han population, Tsu brings to light the polymorphous nature of Taiwan's languages, which include less established tongues like Hakka, and their legacy in linguistic indigenization.

The last two chapters focus on contemporary Malaysian Chinese literature, where literary governance takes the form of struggles for recognition and innovation. Chapter 7 analyzes Kim Chew Ng's allusions to May Fourth writer Yu Dafu to argue that diasporic writers like Ng may creatively reconfigure mainland Chinese literary hegemony—and the appeal of linguistic nativity often associated with it—to reshuffle their position of marginality “within an otherwise unrecognized and undifferentiated rank of minor literary productions” (p. 185). Chapter 8 examines Zhang Guixing's literary contemplation on the “mediality” of the quintessential sinoscript, raising questions of access to Chinese-language literacy that are deeply entrenched in the migratory and transcolonial topography of Southeast Asia.

Among the book's numerous accomplishments is Tsu's astute deconstruction of some of the most charged questions in sinophone studies. Eschewing the current intellectual fatigue with the idea of nationalism, her discussion of language reforms, for example, unravels nationalism's continuous dissolution and reconstitution. Even as sinocentrism is routinely accused of producing diaspora by relegating non-mainland and non-Han sinophone communities to the margins of Chinese literary history, Tsu urges us not to forget that diasporic writers also frequently disagree among themselves. Indeed, one of the urgent tasks for sinophone studies scholars may be to provide a better account of diaspora as an unfinished business and to vigilantly reengage China as a part, although not the center, of the polysystemic sinophone networks. Tsu's project is thus undergirded by the awareness that attention to heterogeneity alone cannot illuminate the dynamic formations of the “standard” itself, such as Mandarin, nor is it adequate to explain why the notion of native tongue continues to structure some of the fundamental terms of literary criticism. In her conclusion, she thus urges scholars to develop a set of analytic tools to sustain the momentum of sinophone studies. With its admirable erudition and scope, *Sound and Script* should be widely read by scholars and students interested in Chinese and comparative literature, cultural studies, linguistics, and translation studies.

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This lively conference volume is a useful update on recent scholarship concerning China's relations with the maritime world in the period leading up to the Opium Wars,