

Enlightenment thinker, usefully avoiding casting this in terms of a “radical” versus “moderate” Enlightenment. What emerges is a picture of Holberg as engaging critically with a broad range of European thinkers within a broadly Pufendorffian framework in the service of the Danish absolutist monarchy and supportive of the state church. But what this means for our understanding of a Danish or Nordic “Enlightenment” is left largely unspoken.

More so than the European, the Danish-Norwegian context in places remains somewhat underdeveloped, and some chapters could have benefited from fuller references to primary or secondary sources on this more local context. This occasional sketchiness may reflect the central place Holberg has long occupied in Danish and Norwegian Enlightenment studies to the detriment of studies of his contemporaries, and hopefully the studies presented here will serve as a spur to remedy this.

*Mads Langballe Jensen*

**Ori Sela**, *China’s Philological Turn: Scholars, Textualism, and the Dao in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. Pp. 328. US\$65.00.

In 1770, Chinese scholar Qian Daxin (1728–1804), then in his early forties, by his own account “began reading the *Shuowen*” (51). Qian—highest-level examination graduate and then examiner several times over, tutor to the emperor’s twelfth son, academy director, and the protagonist of Ori Sela’s new book—was not alone in turning his attention to this philosophically charged lexicographic work from the early second century CE. Up until this point, few studies had been written on the *Shuowen jiezi* (“Analysis of simple graphs as an explanation of complex characters,” in Sela’s translation) and even fewer published. After 1770, however, dozens of studies appeared, and they increasingly did so in print. From then on, scholars wrote hundreds of studies on, and paratexts to, the *Shuowen*. What social and intellectual factors precipitated this “philological turn” toward texts from the pre- and early imperial periods? Through nine wide-ranging chapters, Sela explores what he identifies as the turn and its origins. The three parts of Sela’s book focus, respectively, on biography and the historical context, history and philology, and the wider cosmos and humans’ place in it.

The three chapters that make up the first part of *China’s Philological Turn* treat Qian’s life. Born to a family of teachers in the lower Yangzi region (Jiangnan), Qian rose to key positions in the official and semi-official educational establishment in the imperial

capital, Beijing, and later in the South. Guided by his sources and research questions, Sela centers on the official side of Qian's life. It is a story of teachers, fellow students, examiners, government officials, and academic collaborators: all men. They have anxieties.

The Manchu Qing empire, into which these men were born, was one of the largest that East Asia had seen, and until 1760 it was still expanding. The Qianlong emperor, whose reign spanned much of Qian's life, headed a strong imperial government. The Qianlong court engaged in numerous scholarly projects. Southern Chinese intellectuals like Qian played an important part in the imperial system. However, caught up in a rat race of official literary examinations that demographic pressures made increasingly competitive and exposed to the information overload of an integrated society with an advanced print culture, they worried about their place in the world and their connection to tradition. Their position within the government and their social status depended on them being Ru, "Confucian" or "classicist" (Sela prefers to leave the term untranslated). Yet these were Ru in a world that looked nothing like that of antiquity, which had produced the Confucian classics. Qing China and its textual landscape were populated by Manchus (on the imperial throne!), Buddhists, Daoists, and Jesuit missionaries, who despite a weakened position both in China and abroad had left their mark on certain aspects on court culture and court-sponsored sciences.

In this context, scholars like Qian endeavored to establish themselves as good Ru through philological research. Sela argues that it all came together in the late eighteenth century, when the confluence of several factors—including, among other things, the growth of academies, improved postal networks, and official patronage—created the social infrastructure necessary for developments like the surge in *Shuowen* studies mentioned above (73–74).

The six chapters that make up the second and third parts of *China's Philological Turn* explore how Qian and his peers sought to maintain the Ru tradition while engaging with texts associated with other communities. The chapters of part 2 treat the aforementioned attention to the *Shuowen* and the associated philological exegesis of the classical Confucian texts, as well as Qian's research on the history on the Yuan empire, which, like Qian's native Qing, was ruled by an Inner Asian dynasty. Two chapters in part 3 describe Chinese engagement with Jesuit-mediated European astronomy and mathematics, while the last chapter treats ideas of fate and humans' place in the cosmic order.

Sela's book makes several interventions. Some, such as the reevaluation of the merits of terms like "Han" and "Song learning" (11), will be relevant to specialists only.

One of the larger issues that a reading of Sela's book raises is the relationship between scholarship and power. Sela's focus on the late eighteenth century allows him to separate Qian et al. from the scholars of the seventeenth century and from the Manchu

conquest. Sela is generally disinclined to invoke politics either at the court or lineage level. The consequences of Manchu censorship have been progressively downplayed in previous research, but the Manchu invasion has been seen as catalytic for the intellectual reorientation of the Qing period. In Sela's account, the non-Chinese rulers retreat yet further into the background. Sela rightly wants to preclude a Chinese nationalist and anti-Manchu reading of Qing intellectual history, but the reality of imperial power could indirectly affect scholarship in subtle ways (see Wang Fansen 王汎森, *Quanli de maoxiguan zuoyong: Qingdai de sixiang, xueshu yu xintai* 權力的毛細管作用：清代的思想、學術與心態 [The capillary effect of power: Thought, scholarship, and mentalities in the Qing period] [Taipei: Lianjing, 2013], chap. 8).

The main thrust of Sela's argument concerns the status of textual research. Indeed, if Manchu political power is here largely beneficial to Qian et al.'s scholarship, the Jesuits appear as a particularly annoying bee in Qian's bonnet. The Jesuits do not take the place of catalyst, absent the fall of the Ming as key event. The Jesuits are there to highlight the reach of the philological paradigm and the anxieties that Sela sees in its proponents. Sela dedicates two chapters to European astronomy in China, and the nineteenth-century reception of Qian as a mathematician lends coherence to the conclusion. I see the logic: subsuming mathematics and new foreign learning in a book on Chinese philology is an invitation to think of these things within the universe of the eighteenth-century Ru, and European learning evidently posed problems for Qian. Ultimately, however, Western learning looms so large for us today because of intellectual transformations that postdated the "philological turn."

The focus on the Jesuits means that other areas receive less attention. Qian's research on the Yuan would have benefited from a more detailed treatment. The four pages (122–25) dedicated to Qian's research into Yuan foreign names do not give Sela time to relate it to the official revisions of the transcriptions of such names undertaken at the Qianlong court. Similarly, the great surge in studies of ancient lexicography, partially relegated to a table in the appendixes, would have benefited from greater narrative exposition. Yet Sela's book is carefully researched and an important contribution to the ongoing debate on the character of Qing scholarship and its role in China's transformations.

*Mårten Söderblom Saarela*

---