NOTICES OF BOOKS


reviewed by Herman Reichenbach

*Science and Civilisation in China* is, among its other merits, a fine preserve in which to poach ideas for dissertations. When the time came to offer my *Doktorvater* a topic, I recalled Needham’s reference to “one of the treasures of Chinese technological literature,” Li Chao-hsiang’s Lung Chiang Ch’uan Ch’ang Chih or Record of the Shipyards on the Dragon River. His tip that the Record “has not yet been properly studied” suggested to this maritime Hanseatic student the usefulness of a translation and Western edition of this Chinese shipbuilding classic.

Fortunately, before I had made any “investments”, an acquaintance who had also read his Needham confessed that after having put a year’s work into translating the Record he had learned that a Heidelberg Ph.D. candidate had been sitting on the same topic for something like a decade.

A proper study of the the Record has now been made, and the Heidelberg degree has been well earned. The *Drachenfluß-Werft von Nanking* has become an impressive dissertation—and a disappointing book.

The subject, the author’s scholarship and the illustrations would all have justified a handsome, well-printed volume. Instead Heidelberg University’s Oriental Faculty directed Lothar Scheuring’s manuscript to one of Germany’s countless dissertation publishers, who promptly turned the thesis into a paperback cheap in every way but the price. Most of the illustrations, including the photographs, have the quality of photocopies made from photocopies. What the Schriften des Deutschen Schiffahrtsmuseums or the Naval Institute Press might have done had they published this translation!

It may not be the author’s fault that his annotated translation of the Record was not issued as a decent book. That said, his scholarship is

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39 *Science and Civilisation in China* (SCC), IV.3, 482, 382, there romanized as *Lung Chiang Chhuan Chhang Chih.*
impeccable. The *Drachenfluß-Werft von Nanking* is a major addition to the small fleet of Western literature on traditional Chinese shipbuilding.

The Record is ostensibly a history of a Nanjing dockyard a century past its prime, written by the civil-service manager responsible for its brief revival. Issued in 1553, in eight chapters bound as three volumes, its main objective becomes obvious only in the final chapter, “one of the best collections,” to quote Needham again, “of literary and historical references to ships and shipping in all Chinese literature.”

Li Chao-hsiang couched his last chapter, a collection of earlier texts on shipbuilding, in Confucian phraseology to gentle the discrepancy between his pro-maritime message and the anti-maritime policies of the sixteenth-century government that he hoped to influence. Scheuring devotes almost half his dissertation to this chapter. The illustrations—poorly reproduced as they are—come from a variety of sources, not just from the Record. Scheuring translated only the sections of Chapter 8 that pertain to dynasties up to the sixth century; he promises the rest in a sequel.

Aside from Chapter 8, Scheuring translated large sections of Chapters 2 and 4. Chapter 2 describes the types of ships built by the Nanking yard; it is its “catalogue”, as Scheuring puts it.

Chapter 4 is a portrait of the dockyard. Scheuring contributes his own research in Nanjing on the precise locations of this and other local shipyards, a subject of controversy despite recent archeological finds. The other chapters of the Record are described, with some translation. Throughout, however, Scheuring has apparently spared no effort to translate all Chinese technical terminology into German; the index lets the book be used as a nautical dictionary.

A biography of Li Chao-hsiang, a textual history of the book, and a comprehensive but unannotated bibliography round out this first Western monograph on the Record.

The literary style of the *Drachenfluß-Werft* is clear and precise; I stumbled over no *Wissenschaftschinesisch*, as scientific mumbo-jumbo is called in German. The value of Scheuring’s book to maritime historians who read no German is difficult to judge. The English summary is written in good English, but it is only a summary. A German-English dictionary would obviously facilitate using the *Drachenfluß-Werft* at least as a Chinese-German-English nautical dictionary. Anyone writing on the maritime history of China who ignores Scheuring’s *Drachenfluß-Werft* will be letting an invaluable source slip by.

No maritime historian need consult Peter Wieg’s *Chinesische See-Dschunken*. The East German publishing house of Hinstorff, however, did prove that an “esoteric” topic like Chinese nautical technology can find a press willing to print a well-designed and nicely bound book even in Germany. Unfortunately, the manuscript provided by Wieg on

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“Chinese sea junk” does not warrant the attention denied Lothar Scheuring.

To be fair, Wieg—and his publishers—had a less scholarly readership in mind: ship-model builders. The author’s motivation to write a monograph was prompted by his restoration of a Chinese junk model for the Rostock Marinemuseum. Wieg, no sinologist, depends entirely on Western sources. He switches from one transliteration system to another, and lists in his bibliography only three dozen German, Dutch, English and French secondary sources. But for those who read only German (that should not include many subscribers to “Chinese Science”), Wieg’s modest book is the only alternative in print to Scheuring’s dissertation.

After a brief and superficial introduction to the maritime history of China and to the construction of junk in general, Wieg portrays seven types of traditional ships: Antung, Peichihli, Ningpo, Amoy, Hongkong, lorchah and Chekiang junks. It was a Chekiang junk model that Wieg restored in Rostock; he includes plans that the model-builder can use to construct one himself.

Although the other line drawings and plates are reproduced or copies from European secondary sources, the illustrations, collected as they are, are the redeeming quality of Chinesische See-Dschunken. An East-West joint venture to publish Scheuring’s Heidelberg dissertation at Rostock’s maritime press would have done more justice to both Scheuring and Hinstorff—and to their readers.