Public Memory in Early China. By K.E. Brashier. Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014. viii + 511 pp. $69.95, £51.95, €63 (cloth).

Reviewed by Liang Cai, University of Notre Dame (Liang.Cai.11@nd.edu)
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Public Memory in Early China is a nuanced and sophisticated reading of how the dead were memorialized in early Imperial China. Focusing on names, age, and kinship, topics students of Chinese history often encounter, Braisher offers a systematic analysis of their underlying philosophical and social meanings with comparative insights.

The introduction, entitled "Han Memorial Culture," synthesizes the tension and complementary roles of manuscript culture and oral performance culture in early imperial China. Classical learning passed on through repetitive mimicry: "The classicist imitated the sage by reciting their words and wearing their clothes" (16). Education started with chanting classics and ended with listening to sages' message through the ears. The author explains that "a mastered text first derived from a manuscript medium, after which it entered into the oral performance medium" (26). This observation echoes modern scholarship's findings that "the skill of lengthy verbatim recall only develops after writing is firmly anchored in a culture" (49). Reciting a text is a performance of transforming oneself and a way of seeking employment.

The main parts of the book investigate names, age, and kinship, which the author calls three parameters of the Han dynasty's memorial culture. Part I examines the different names the Chinese had throughout their lives. A personal name (*ming* 名) was given when a baby could interact with others, indicating that naming is a process of incorporating the newborn into existing social relationships. "The taboo of the personal name at death mapped out the scope of the bearer's relationship net" (91). But I also wonder if this taboo practice of personal names assumed some religious meaning or if magic powers were attributed to personal names.

A courtesy name (*zi* 字) was given to a child when he or she reached puberty, often showing that an individual had acquired a certain position in his or her lineage. Who used the courtesy name and when it was used reflected the dynamic interactions between men/women within a hierarchy of relationships. For example, using courtesy names to address colleagues was entirely inappropriate before the emperor (79), while ritual anthologies stipulated that a ruler should address his highest ministers by their courtesy names (80). Posthumous names (*shi* 謚) mapped one's position in history, providing a stereotyped image of how the dead should be remembered. The posthumous name muted the unique characteristics of an individual and reduced him or her to a simplified public identity.

Surnames (*xing* 姓) might have derived from official titles, ranks, or courtesy names, but their most common origin was geographical, either where a particular ancestor had been enfeoffed or where he had resided (105). The popular surnames shared by people could serve as a reference grid, often helping one connect his/her lineage with historical figures and construct a seamless line of ancestors. Surnames were also associated with the five phases (*wuxing* 五行) and thereby could locate the individual on the cosmological map.

Part II compares the Chinese understanding of age with other cultures'. A person's life was envisioned in different stages according to his or her age. While the medieval west depicted the 40s and 50s as the peak of life and considered old age a decline to a devalued state, the Chinese advocated the ideal of age veneration. Childhood was understood as a gradual process of becoming human (158). The older one became, the higher social status one obtained. Brashier uses legal regulations, the twenty grades of the *jue* 爵 system in particular, to illustrate that the hierarchical structure that organized Han society was based on age. In comparison with nomadic people's treatment of their aged members, Han Chinese treated their aged persons in a favorable way, as Brashier documents.

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In the west, death is the end of a person's aging, but in early China, death was treated as another chapter and the afterlife was regarded as the continuation of life. Brashier analyzes the practices of "expelling" the corpse, the burial delay, and the three-year mourning period. He argues that the tombs, sacrifices, stelae, and the three-year mourning service were public displays of filial piety and served as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Filial piety, which was supposed to secure the ancestors' blessings, publicly established one's pedigree for social and career advancement. In the afterlife, deceased ancestors became increasingly distant from the living, losing their individual identity, but ascended in the underworld hierarchy, gaining increased filial reverence.

Part III discusses how kinship inserted people into the Han's memorial culture. The Greeks viewed competition among peers as a step toward becoming fully human. By contrast, the Chinese regarded individuality "not so much [as] being separate and discrete from others, [but as] the capacity of fully expressing one's intrinsic role *within* a network" (212). Various sources —from ritual anthologies to court rhetoric, from shrines to primers—show that individuals' personal agency, from their voices, to their feelings, to their physical bodies, was diminished in a ritualized way. For example, the physical body is not one's personal possession and in court rhetoric ancestor shrines are more important than the ruler (219). While a living person was defined by his roles in a social network, the dead needed descendants to offer regular sacrifices in order to have a place and lineage to return to and rely on (*yi gui* 依歸). "The spatial self" presented in the network of kinship "diffuses into surrounding selves and vice versa." (262)

Part IV analyzes the material tools—calling cards upon which names were inscribed, ancestor shrines, the cemetery, and the commemorative portraits—that the surviving community used to remember the dead. Again, these souvenirs were not intended to preserve the memory of individuals, but rather to position the dead into a community of remembered heroes and worthy people. Part V examines the intangible tools of positioning the self into the public memory. The dead were treated in a ritualized way that reduced the dead to stereotyped objects. At the same time, the dead were often compared with historical figures and their accomplishments with historical events preserved in the classics, thereby being converted into classical heroes and past exemplars. Finally, the dead were classified, evaluated, and ranked by the living.

Brashier provides a thick description of some common and important topics in early imperial China. The interesting interpretation, detailed analysis, and rich materials make the book a much needed reading for students of Chinese history. For a big book like this, I found only a few places that need to be further reconsidered. First, the manuscripts purchased by Zhejiang University have been questioned as forgeries, and scholars should be cautious about citing them as evidence. Additionally, Brashier indicates that a picture cited on page 8 shows "students bearing books," while the editors of the original anthology read it as "*shangji tuxiang*" 上計圖像. Placing the scene into its original pictorial context and comparing it with later reliefs, this scene more likely depicts clerk-officials offering local annual reports to their superior (*shangji*) than a teaching scene.

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Reviewed by Hilde De Weerdt, University of Leiden (h.g.d.g.de.weerdt@hum.leidenuniv.nl)
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Ever since the first volume in the series was published in 1979, *The Cambridge History of China* has become a standard reference in the field of Chinese history. Chapters from the volumes

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