

Although the communists did not criminalize poverty, per se, like previous regimes they stressed productivity and tried to limit urban residents' mobility. Chen concludes that the complex problem of identifying and addressing the needs of the urban poor remained unresolved throughout the period under study and that, because of political and economic chaos, institutions intended to address poverty frequently "degenerated into prisons of disease and starvation" (p. 229).

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DAVID B. LURIE. *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing*. (East Asian Monographs, number 335.) Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 2011. Pp. xxiii, 497. \$59.95.

David B. Lurie's innovative and deeply learned study will appeal to all interested in the topic of writing, as well as students and scholars of Japan and East Asia. Lurie questions shibboleths about writing such as the notion that phonetic alphabets are somehow superior or more "efficient" and sheds light on the remarkable process through which writing through glosses, or *kundoku*, which combined phonographic and logographic approaches, allowed for texts written in Chinese to be read as Japanese.

Lurie initially explores the early existence of multiple literacies in part one, "Language and Power." In his first chapter, "Shards of Writing?" Lurie emphasizes "alegibility" or the ability for writing to possess meaning independent of systematic linguistic associations. This power to appropriate—"ignoring, denying, or creating one's own reading" (p. 66)—proved crucially important in earliest times. Lurie provides a comprehensive overview and translations of the earliest surviving writings in his second chapter, "Kings Who Did Not Read." Lurie argues that writing served to mediate political relationships, and that the "alegible impact of writing was more important to its meaning and function than its capacity to transmit or preserve information" (p. 102). Chapter three, "A World Dense with Writing," explores how the seventh century witnessed the swift and dramatic expansion of different modes of writing practice (p. 166). Lurie emphasizes the importance of the physicality of texts, which contributed to their variety of uses, most memorably when a wooden document (*mokkan*) was later reused as a primitive type of toilet paper.

Part two, "Writing and Language," constitutes the core of this book. Chapter four advances the notion of *kundoku*, or reading by gloss, to reveal how texts that on the surface would appear to have been written exclusively in "classical Chinese" were in fact read in Japanese. Lurie explains how logographs of Chinese origin were transposed in Japanese order, with grammatical elements called *yomisoe* added to make sense of the passage. *Kundoku* glosses allowed for awareness of texts to exist independently of an understanding of any

one language. The same string of characters could be read completely differently by denizens of Asuka, in Japan, or on the plains of northern China. In spite of real differences among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean spoken languages, *kundoku* allowed for a variety of readings and helps to explain the rapid expansion of "literacies" and the production of an enormous amount of writing.

Lurie's fifth chapter, "Governing in Prose," explores two parallel eighth-century histories, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. Lurie overturns common assumptions, showing that these works overlap in *kundoku* techniques. The *Kojiki* employed a systematic approach, whereby *kundoku* techniques were used to engineer a new prose style, which has been misunderstood by nearly all who comment on ancient Japanese history. The *Nihon shoki* also relied upon *kundoku*, and thus neither text can simplistically be characterized as being written in "Chinese" or "Japanese." Chapter six, "The Poetry of Writing," then reveals the potential of *kundoku* in poetic writing in the *Man'yōshū* by explaining how the wonderful complexity of a mixed phonographic and logographic writing underpinned Japanese poetry, and indeed all writing in Japan. Poems were not merely written, but vocalized, and that the ambiguity and multiplicity inherent in this process proved to be a key means of literary expansion. Chapter seven, "Japan and the History of Writing," represents a tour de force overview of writing from the ninth century to modern times. Lurie explains the rise of distinct phonographs and also argues that *kundoku* glosses mean that Chinese-style works should not be conceived as "foreign" texts in Japan.

Lurie's *kundoku* analysis should transform understandings of writing in Japan and the world. His focus on alegibility is also important, but the concept is fraught, as one cannot know that a miscast phrase on a mirror meant that its content mattered or not. That some early mirrors were corrected suggests awareness of the content of these early inscriptions. It is telling that Lurie's examples of alegibility come from the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss and John Maxwell Coetzee. Writing became important as a means of disseminating information so early in Japan that it remains very difficult to ascertain the alegible significance of early writing.

The book is well produced and edited, with many line drawings. The combination of footnotes and endnotes proves awkward, as some of the endnote content belongs in the text, while other passages could be omitted altogether. But this aside, Lurie has crafted an impeccably researched, and deeply informative book that should spur future studies of literacy and writing. It deserves to be read widely. I recommend it highly.

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THOMAS DONALD CONLAN. *From Sovereign to Symbol: An Age of Ritual Determinism in Fourteenth-Century Japan*.