

## **Non-Western Perspectives: The Chinese Dimension**

*A Commentary to Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe*

Christine Moll-Murata

With *Worthy Efforts*, Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly have presented a marvelous compendium of knowledge on work ethics and work valuations in Europe from Antiquity to the French Revolution. This is highly impressive both in presentation and analysis, since it commits itself to portray an important element of pre-industrial European history of mentalities. Social historians of China and sinologists are sure to appreciate the scope of this book and its broad perspective and long-term range similar in duration to that of the Chinese historical record. As comparative perspectives attain greater importance, books of this category, which are both at the cutting edge of scholarly research and elegantly formulated, are sorely needed by global historians in general and sinologists in particular.

*Worthy Efforts* not only develops great lines of thought, but also gives details and structures in a clear and thought provoking analysis. Its long-term view calls for the consideration of contemporary developments in regions and systems of thought that are not geographically connected. This review highlights points of convergence or marked differences between the European and the Chinese historical experience and valuation of work, in both secular and religious thought. A work of similar scope on Chinese work ethics and attitudes is lacking – both in Chinese and any European language. Therefore, this contribution tries to discern which points and authors could be taken up in a future Chinese counterpart to this work. Undeniably, minor contacts have existed for most of the time, but between the extreme ends of the Eurasian continent, social developments have been markedly different.

## Work in the Antiquities, East and West

In the first part of their book, Lis and Soly develop the perspective of the appreciation and non-appreciation of work in Greco-Roman Antiquity. The authors elucidate the long held conviction that work was despised in classical antiquity, and point to the famous passages in Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon that basically denounce productive activities apart from agriculture as effeminate, noxious to body and spirit. Most of all, wage labour (earning one's living by serving others) seemed unacceptable to the elites. As the authors state, with the rise of the status of artisans, the harshly disapproving voices became more pronounced but should not be taken as the general opinion. Glimpses of the self-appreciation of artisans can be gained by tomb inscriptions that show that individual craftspeople actually did value their own achievements and skills highly. The authors call for overcoming the dated modernist-primitivist divide, carefully arguing and qualifying points made by both schools of thought.

Neither in European nor in Chinese antiquity were there any discursive texts that addressed the idea of work as their main topic. Instead, work in all its facets is included in several discourses on larger social, economic and political issues. Some of these have become more dominant and long lasting in intellectual discussions that developed much later and pertain even to our days. In comparison to European antiquity, no distinctly depreciating terms for work are known from extant Chinese sources from the Warring States (403-221 BCE) and the early imperial period (221 BCE-220 AD). A future counterpart to Lis and Soly's work for China would outline the main approaches to work, as formulated by the Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist schools and in the work of Guanzi.

Division of labour between workers of the mind and physical work was taken as a matter of common sense fact in the Confucian school. This was most clearly expressed in the famous saying of the fourth-century BCE philosopher Mencius, the most important Confucian exegete, who formulates as a universally accepted rule, that those who perform mental labour rule over others, while those who exert themselves in physical labour should be governed by the mental workers and support them with the produce of their work.<sup>1</sup> This saying is embedded in a longer refutation of the argument brought forth by a competing school of thought, insisting that rulers should work in agriculture, prepare their own meals and still administrate their countries. Mencius elaborates how the mythological emperors of yore cleared the land for agriculture, canalized waterways and built dykes, and taught the people the proper hierarchical relationships

within their communities, all of which these sages could not have achieved without a division of labour that ensured their livelihood while they were performing their tasks for the common good.

The detailed description of a polity in which the rulers did their own farming and animal husbandry, and the refutation of that view, imply that at least during the fourth century BCE, different systems of thought existed that can be largely attributed to Daoism and Mohism. Notwithstanding this situation, the famous Daoist precept that advocates refraining from action (*Laozi* 2.2, rendered by Bernhard Karlgren as ‘the Sage remains in the acting of no action’),<sup>2</sup> also assumes a hierarchical order and is directed at those who govern others rather than at the population in general. In this context, ‘action’ is generally considered to refer to administrative activism.

The Legalist school of thought, the third ideology that became important in Imperial China, applied strong incentives and strict punishment in administrative theory and practice. In the 1970s an archaeological discovery brought to light a corpus of penal regulations at Yunmeng in Hubei Province which contained regulations on forced labour, including the organisation of the conscripted working teams (male and female). This text portrays work as a legal sanction that was used to ensure infrastructure and state expenditures, in addition to the general conscription, corvée, and taxation in kind.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the classification between workers of the mind and workers of the hand, the concept of the ‘four groups’ – the scholar-officials or military officers, farmers, artisans, and merchants – is a venerated notion dating from the period of the Warring States (fifth to third century BCE). Among these occupations, a division between the ‘basic’ and the ‘secondary’ branches pertained to the ‘fundamental’ scholars and farmers and the ‘derivative’ artisans and merchants. Especially in Confucian thought, the ‘basic’ groups were valued more highly, since agriculture and administration were thought of as being more essential for maintaining the state than the distribution of goods and specialized production of items often portrayed as mere luxuries.<sup>4</sup> This rings a similar tone to what Lis and Soly describe for Greek antiquity as the contempt for banausic, that is technical (artisan) trades.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Lis and Soly refer in great detail to the negative view on wage labour in the Roman tradition, as formulated especially by Cicero.<sup>6</sup>

In the Chinese tradition, by contrast, there is a distinct position that positively acknowledges any manner of making money. The famous Grand Historiographer Sima Qian, author of the first Chinese universal history, ‘Records of the Historian’ *Shiji* (c. 100 BCE) explains in the chapter on the ‘money-makers’ that basically, if market principles are allowed to take

their natural course, there is no need for dirigism.<sup>7</sup> Unlike activist and interventionist theorists of his times, Sima doubts the usefulness of government intervention in the economy. Human acquisitiveness will provide everything that is needed, and human acquisitiveness is omnipresent, from soldiers who are motivated to fight bravely in expectation of rich rewards; to highway robbers, courtesans, the nobility, and professions such as physicians, cooks, gamblers, hunters, and administrators.<sup>8</sup> The author deliberates over the financial profitability of particular trades, without reference to the Confucian tenets about decent and indecent ways of earning fame and making a fortune. Although he acknowledges that ‘the best kind of wealth comes from farming, the next best from trade and handicrafts, the worst from evil practices’, the author still states that ‘If a poor man wants to become rich, it is better to be an artisan than a farmer, better to be a merchant than an artisan, better to be a vender than work at embroidery. In other words, trade and handicrafts are the best way for a poor man to make money’.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Sima Qian gives examples, including immoral and illegal activities and occupations, such as gambling and even grave robbery, which all may lead to the desired goal of richness. Contempt for wage labour is clearly not discernible in Sima Qian’s opinions on making money. This contrasts with for instance Dio Chrysostom’s writings about socially unworthy occupations and the importance of gaining one’s wealth by respectable means.<sup>10</sup>

The school of Guanzi stands out among other influential, not distinctly Confucian voices. Guanzi (c. 720-645 BCE) was a historical personality and is said to have promoted the interests of one of the feudal states in the Zhou kingdom to great wealth and large territory by means of prudent political economy. The book *Guanzi* was probably written by a variety of scholars and combined at some point after the rise of the unified empire (221 BCE). The most concentrated statement of economic theory of the Chinese antiquity, it has a strongly *dirigiste* appeal, formulated as suggestions to a ruler on how to enrich his own state in competition with others. This had to be achieved inter alia by the tight control of the four occupational classes, which all had their particular duties and should not be allowed to live together, as each group should keep to itself.<sup>11</sup> Contempt for any type of work is out of the question in *Guanzi*. While some chapters urge farmers and their womenfolk not to give up agriculture and weaving, others stress the importance and complementarity of each of the occupational groups within the four classes. In a comparative approach, it would be valuable to explore whether the lines of argumentation and the valuation of the distinct occupations in Chinese and European antiquity differ or converge.



*Illustration 1 The Knick-Knack Peddler.*

Worthy Efforts masterfully discusses pictorial representations of work and workers. Yet it contains only one picture, set on the book cover, showing a seventeenth-century engraving of a farrier with his complete set of tools. The painting above by Li Song (fl. 1190-1264), an example of the popular Song dynasty genre of the street vender (huolang), can represent a collegial hail, across a distance of thousands of kilometres and hundreds of years, of another worker who carries all the paraphernalia of his trade with him.

Source: <http://images.zeno.org/Kunstwerke/1/big/1650021a.jpg>

## Religion and Work Valuations in the Middle Ages

Lis and Soly place emphasis on the relationship between the philosophy of the Stoa and early Christian thought on labour, thus stressing an important continuity between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The breakup of the extensive Roman Empire into a multitude of smaller polities, an ensuing

feudal socioeconomic system and the spread of a new religion can be seen as the most salient characteristics of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. Some of these features can also be found in China during the period after the collapse of the Han Empire in the early third century AD, as the country experienced a period of about four hundred years of North/South division, with short-lived, competing regimes and a great deal of religious fervour for Buddhism and Daoism. Thus some authors adopt the concept of the Middle Ages also with regard to China, referring to the period from the end of the Han (220 AD) until the next unification by the Sui (581 AD) or even until the foundation of the Song dynasty (960 AD). As can be expected, such large upheavals as the end of the unified Empire (however illusory this unity may have been in reality), also caused major changes in the prevalent system of work obligations and entitlement to service, hence to the development of reflection about the ideological legitimization of labour relations.

Lis and Soly devise a sequential model of Christian thought about work.<sup>12</sup> It starts with the Christian apostle Paul of Tarsus (d. c. AD 64), who allegedly advised the Thessalonian Christian community that a member of their brethren 'who does not want to work, should not eat',<sup>13</sup> having stated before that 'we never ate somebody's bread for nothing, but worked and exhausted ourselves day and night, in order not to be a burden to any of you'.<sup>14</sup> The authors continue with Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430), who in his treatise *De Opere Monachorum* ('On the Work of the Monks', c. AD 400) tried to mediate between those who held that Paul's statement referred to spiritual work (praying, singing hymns, reading, preaching), while subsisting upon alms, and those who supported themselves by manual labour.<sup>15</sup> Augustine decided that no opposition existed between praying and working, and that monks should be expected to perform manual labour as well.<sup>16</sup> The sequence ends with the clergy of the High Middle Ages in Western Europe, who had become wealthy and powerful, counting many feudal lords among their ranks, and attempted to maintain a kind of monopoly on the administration of the road to spiritual salvation. This clergy in the eleventh and twelfth century developed the tripartite estate system that held that those who prayed (*oratores*) stood at the topmost position, with the fighters (*bellatores*, i.e. the secular nobility) and the workers (*laboratores*) much below them. 'Spiritual labour became the main focus', as Lis and Soly point out.<sup>17</sup> Yet they also stress that over the centuries different schools of Christian thought and practice varied widely, and that the main questions as to whether physical labour was as worthy and sanctifying as contemplation, or whether prayer could be considered as labour and in consequence monks could be exempted from physical labour, has been answered in different ways.<sup>18</sup> Even

the rule 'ora et labora' given out by Benedict of Nursia around 540, implying that there were times for manual labour and times for contemplation, could be and was emphasized in different ways. More and more physical work for subsistence was entrusted to lay brethren or recent converts, a tendency only temporarily interrupted by reformatory efforts in Cluny as well as at Cîteaux Abbey and other Cistercian monasteries. The copying of the holy scriptures became the monks' principle task, a physically demanding occupation, yet one that seemed closer to contemplative work than ploughing and reaping. Interestingly, the less the monks executed hard physical labour, especially in agriculture, the more they described their own work with the metaphors of labour.<sup>19</sup>

When turning to China in the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) and the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, many parallels are apparent with regard to this process of estrangement of clerics from manual labour. The period saw the rise and establishment of a new, monastic religion where life in the monasteries was regulated by the rules of the religious order. The Buddhist institutions also had to find ways to come to terms with the secular rulers. Some of the emperors adopted the religion and gained eminent positions, to be venerated like Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. Most of the rulers and the nobility who embraced Buddhism were generous donors to the monasteries. In some of the dynastic courts, Daoism was preponderant. This religion had established clerical and monastic structures similar to those of the Buddhists, so that in fact, it is hard to distinguish between early monastic Daoism and Buddhism. In the cloisters, physical labour was also an issue, as in the Latin influenced parts of Western Europe. Yet one of the differences between the two civilisations was the rationale as to why Buddhist monks should not be obliged to engage in agricultural labour. The originally Indian precepts (*Vinaya*) for the monastic communities did not allow to harm sentient beings like plants, animals, and insects.<sup>20</sup> At first, the Indian monks were expected to sustain themselves by begging. However, both in India as in China, it was possible to receive a donation of property and of a labour force in the form of servile workers. Alternatively, the use of one's own labour was also possible.<sup>21</sup> Yet possession of such worldly goods was considered to be impure and had to be cleaned by employing intermediaries who administrated the property of the religious communities. Physical labour that harmed sentient beings, but was necessary for the upkeep of the monastic community, was executed by a group of people who could be novices, lay monks, people who had devoted their labour force to the monasteries in order to gain better

karma in the next existence, unfree labourers donated to the monasteries by pious owners, or hired labourers.<sup>22</sup>

Institutionalized Christianity in Europe under the influence of Christian rulers, with papal authority as a correlative to secular power, has remained influential up until our days. Quite differently, in China the re-unification of the empire in the seventh century led to the weakening of the clerical institutions and the rise of a Confucian bureaucratic elite that was strongly opposed to religious power. Eventually the Buddhist institutions were dealt a harsh blow in the proscription of 845. The number of the Buddhist clergy and their dependents had been at its highest during the North-South division, with 100,000 monks and nuns in the South, but as many as two to three million in the North,<sup>23</sup> out of a total population of about thirty million in the North and about 18-21 million in the South.<sup>24</sup> In the Tang Dynasty, in the year 830, it is estimated that there were 700,000 adherents of Buddhism.<sup>25</sup> Among them, according to one source, more than 300,000 people were laicized after 845 and placed under the control of the state for tax payment. The total number of monasteries before the proscription was reported at 4,600, and more than 40,000 smaller places of worship.<sup>26</sup> The exemption from taxes for monastery workers certainly was an important reason for them to offer their services to the Buddhist community. Yet incisive as the proscription was for the fate of Buddhism in China, which never again became an institution that could challenge state power, the proscription of 845 did not set an end to all landholding and labour obligations to the Buddhist institutions. In the subsequent Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1276-1368) dynasties, some monasteries again became large landowners, but the scope was more modest than in the period of North/South division and under the early and mid Tang.<sup>27</sup>

Reflecting on these figures, one wonders about the European case. It would be helpful to be able to assess the relative importance of the argumentation as to why monks were expected to work or not. Was there no secular thought about work and labour in the Middle Ages that could have challenged the influence of the Church? In comparison, in China the anti-clerical proponents of Confucianism, especially the statesman and scholar Han Yu (768-824), considered monks and nuns to be useless parasites.

It is interesting to note that the European rationalization for the serf-like unfree labour conditions of the lay population spread overseas. As has been shown by Tarcisio Botelho for Brazil, the idea of the Three Estates was adapted by Portuguese settlers to the realities of slavery in the overseas colony. The Portuguese masters of sugar mills in the seventeenth century had previously belonged to the Third Estate in their native country. They

redefined their own role as representatives of the nobility in Brazil.<sup>28</sup> Parallel to this, the early Christian conviction that legal slavery had no importance, because all people were equal in the eyes of god,<sup>29</sup> found its echo in sermons by Jesuit missionaries in Brazil, who told the African slaves that the hardship of their enslavement equalled Christ's passion on the cross, and that their patient endurance would eventually lead to the salvation of their souls.<sup>30</sup>

As in all writings on work ethics, written norms did not necessarily reflect actual practice. Lis and Soly are most careful in making this distinction wherever possible, and this is also the case for the Buddhist labour regimes. The documentary evidence of the Dunhuang monasteries shows that some monks actually worked in the fields.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, there is the famous saying that rings very much like the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians cited above: 'One day without work [means] one day without eating' (*yi ri bu zuo, yi ri bu chi*). It was formulated by one of the founders of Chinese Chan Buddhism, Baizhang Huaihai (720-814).<sup>32</sup> Yet this could also refer to any type of work in the sense of 'activity', not only to heavy labour in the fields. In its ambiguity, it is comparable to the saying attributed to Paul the Apostle.

### **Lis and Soly's categorization 'Peasantry, Commerce, Artisans, Wage-Labour'**

In the part on the Early Modern Period, the main chapters at first glance seem to resemble the fourfold classification of the Chinese tradition, since the first three are equivalent to the Confucian order: peasants, merchants, artisans. Yet whereas the Chinese classification starts with the elite among the ruler's subjects, Lis and Soly's book ends with the lowest category of workers: wage labourers. Wage labour as a labour relationship could be included in either of the preceding three divisions that are based on the extractive, distributive and productive economic sectors. As a consequence, some of the authors and works introduced in the first three categories occur again in the fourth. Since the book has a good index, they can be easily found, but still there are points where one wonders about the categorization in either of the four groups.

Concerning wage labour in the Early Modern Period, a similar question remains as for the Middle Ages. How important, in the overall picture, was wage labour in early modern West and Central Europe up to the Elbe River? In China, wage labour played a role since the first upsurge of a commercial economy in the Song dynasty, from c. 1000 AD onwards. Since then, it was prominently present in urban areas, which were relatively few in number,

but very extensive in territory in comparison to those in Europe. However, wage labour all but disappeared beyond the Chinese city walls. If the totality of all the small, medium, and large countries and polities in West and Central Europe is taken into account, were smallholding peasants or tenant farming households not also more numerous than wage labourers? *Worthy Efforts* culminates in the chapter on wage labour, perceiving the increase of wage dependency as ‘the most fundamental social change in late medieval and early modern Europe’, and stating that by 1800, most households in Western Europe derived at least part of their income from wage labour.<sup>33</sup> While this general tendency seems clear enough, still the order of magnitude, if entire Western Europe is taken into account, may require more quantitative exploration.

With regard to the classification of wage labourers, one may wish to argue about one of the first examples of this kind, the funerary stele of the reaper of Mactar in North Tunisia.<sup>34</sup> This text, dating from c. 260-270 AD, narrates a harvester’s career and life philosophy. It can indeed be read as a rags-to-riches account of a lowly agricultural worker (*rusticulus*) to a reputable official position as a magistrate. Yet the text does not say explicitly, as Lis and Soly claim, that he was a wage labourer. It has been interpreted that way by Mommsen,<sup>35</sup> but recent research, including Drexhage’s essay which the authors refer to, comes to the conclusion that wage labour alone could not have brought him to his later high position in life.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

Like all great outlines of history, this book cannot cover each and every perspective, yet the authors have given their subject as full a coverage as possible; at some points breathtakingly. *Worthy Efforts* presents a huge amount of voices and opinions in a manner so that the excerpts provided are short enough to maintain the overview, but long enough to give the reader the possibility to reflect on whether or not to agree with the authors’ interpretation of the evidence. The passages are impeccably referenced, so that sources and literature can be found with ease. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly stimulate discussion, and they invite comparative work to reflect on actual or seeming similarities worldwide and through the ages. This leads us closer to an Archimedean point from where the entire world of labour can be observed.

## Notes

1. *Mengzi* 3A4, translation James Legge, *Sacred Books of the East, Mencius (The Chinese Classics, Vol. 2, 1895)*, electronic version at Website *Sacred Texts of the East*, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/menc/mencio.htm>, Chapter 10, 6 [last accessed 10 September 2013].
2. Bernhard Karlgren, 'Notes on Lao-Tse', *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 47 (1975), 1-18 cited after website Thesaurus Linguae Sericae, <http://tls.uni-hd.de/procSearch/procSearchTxt.lasso>.
3. A.F.P. Hulswé, Remnants of Ch'in law. An Annotated Translation of the Ch'in Legal and Administrative Rules of the 3rd Century B.C., Discovered in Yün-meng Prefecture, Hu-pei Province, in 1975 (Leiden 1985). A more recent find at Zoumalou in Hunan Province included actual legal cases that show several shades of free, half-free, and unfree labour relations and, surprisingly, that people definitely not belonging to the learned elite went to court to sue for their property rights in the third century BC. See Ulrich Lau, 'Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte in Kriminalfällen der Qin-Dynastie' (Abstract of a presentation given at the 32rd Deutscher Orientalistentag, Münster, <http://www.dot2013.de/programm/abstracts/abstracts-sinologie/#Lau> [last accessed 7 October 2013].
4. Philipp A. Kuhn, 'Chinese Views of Social Classification', in James L. Watson (ed.), *Class and Social Stratification in Post-Revolutionary China* (Cambridge 1984), 16-28.
5. *Worthy Efforts*, 34-35.
6. *Worthy Efforts*, 86.
7. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, chapter 129, 'The Money-Makers', translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, *Selections from the Records of the Historian* (Peking 2001), 410-428, 411.
8. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 421.
9. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 423-424.
10. *Worthy Efforts*, 79, 95.
11. *Guanzi*, translated by Allyn Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China* (Princeton, 1985, 1998), vol. 1, 325 (VIII, 20 'Xiao Kuang').
12. *Worthy Efforts*, 121.
13. *New Testament*, Thessalonians 2, 3:10 (translation: King James Version) 'if any would not work, neither should he eat'.
14. *New Testament*, Thessalonians 2, 3:8 (translation: King James Version) 'Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you'.
15. *Worthy Efforts*, 110.
16. *Worthy Efforts*, 113.
17. *Worthy Efforts*, 121.
18. *Worthy Efforts*, 114-115.
19. *Worthy Efforts*, 118.
20. Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, Translated by Franciscus Verellen (New York 1995), 95.
21. Gernet, *Buddhism*, 77.
22. Huaiyu Chen, *The Revival of Buddhist Monasticism in Medieval China*, Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 2005, 188-191; installed at <http://de.scribd.com/doc/151851528/The-Revival-of-Buddhist-Monasticism-in-Medieval-China> [last accessed 15 September 2013]; Gernet, *Buddhism*, 95-96.
23. Gernet, *Buddhism*, 6.
24. These estimates were given in Ge Jianxiong, *Zhongguo renkou shi* (History of Chinese demography) (Shanghai 2002), 468. For the Northern Dynasties (in the sixth century), see

- p. 475. For the maximum figure in the South under the Liang before 548, Ge's estimate is based on growth rates computed from data for earlier periods.
25. Gernet, *Buddhism*, 6.
  26. Gernet, *Buddhism*, 139.
  27. Gernet, *Buddhism*, 139.
  28. Tarcisio Botelho, 'Labour ideologies and labour relations in colonial Portuguese America, 1500-1700', *International Review of Social History* 56 (2011), Special Issue *The Joy and Pain of Work*, 275-296, 281-283.
  29. *Worthy Efforts*, 132.
  30. Botelho, 'Labour ideologies', 293.
  31. Gernet, *Buddhism*, 96.
  32. Christine Moll-Murata, 'Work Ethics and Work Valuations in a Period of Commercialization: Ming China, 1500-1644', in: *The Joy and Pain of Work*, 165-195, 172.
  33. *Worthy Efforts*, 8.
  34. *Worthy Efforts*, 86-87.
  35. Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* (ed. in two vols, Darmstadt 2010), vol. 2, 369-370 ('Boden- und Geldwirtschaft der römischen Kaiserzeit'), 345 ('Die afrikanischen Provinzen').
  36. Jean-Marie Lassère and Michel Griffe, 'Le moissonneur de Mactar', *Vita Latina* 143 (1996), 2-10, 3, assume that while the reaper was not born in abject poverty, he did not own a house in town and servants. He may have owned his own land and earned additional money as a wage labourer. Hans-Joachim Drexhage, 'Zum Selbstverständnis arbeitender Menschen im Imperium Romanum', *Humanistische Bildung* 14 (1990), 7-40, 27 calculated that the reaper could not have risen to his high rank in the administration, for which a proof of income was necessary, by agricultural wage labour alone, but certainly had other means, which are not reported in the inscription.

## About the author

**Christine Moll-Murata** studied Sinology and Southeast Asian politics at the universities of Heidelberg and Bochum, and worked at the universities of Bochum, Tübingen, Utrecht and at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. She is currently senior lecturer at the department of Chinese history and philosophy at the university of Bochum, and has published on various aspects of Chinese and comparative history, including the valuation of work, apprenticeship, wages and living standards.

Christine.Moll-Murata@ruhr-uni-bochum.de