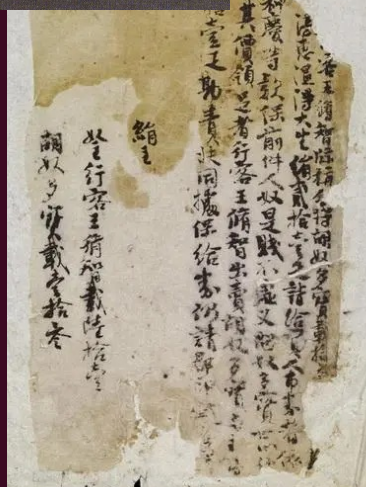
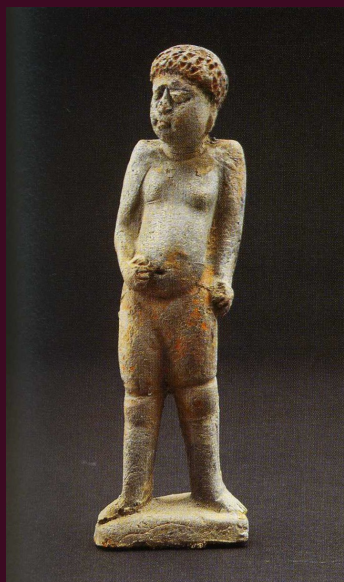


SLAVERY AND ITS MEDIEVAL ABOLITIONISMS: CHINA CONTRASTED TO EUROPE

A Lecture by Dr. Don J. Wyatt (Middlebury College)

Thursday, March 07, 2024, 04:30pm / Academic Building-West, Room 6051



During the age of their intersecting eras of medievalism, from approximately the years 500 to 1500 of the Common Era, both China and Europe, after having maintained entrenched systems of enslavement for centuries, witnessed incipencies presaging what we can think of as our modern conception of abolitionism. Moreover, in the Chinese case, surprising intimations along abolitionist lines are discernible even as early as the immediate centuries prior to what corresponds to Western late antiquity (CE 150-750). Oftentimes, whether in China or in Europe, what we find expressed in this vein in the records is less anti-slavery sentiment in the abstract than an objection to illegal enslavement—in other words, incredulous resentment that a free person has somehow incurred the fall into bondage. To be sure, such attitudes retarded the development of authentic abolitionist thinking, such that—at least as it arose in Europe as well as in the Americas—abolitionism, as a full-fledged movement opposed to ensconced conventions of slavery, was largely the product of only as recently as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Arguably, in China, it would be delayed even longer. Yet, this comparably shared deferment notwithstanding, abolitionism as a mindset in West and in China is perhaps always thought of as having stemmed from different impetuses. Upon analysis, we find that these contributing factors of difference in themselves elicit numerous consequential questions, with not the least of these being whether true abolitionism everywhere and always necessitates a moral imperative or, at the very least, an ethical component.

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