

*Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*. Edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006. Pp. xx + 625. \$59.95/£38.95.

The stereotype is utterly entrenched: Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1125) devoted himself to painting birds and flowers and to producing calligraphy in his distinctive calligraphic style in the years that the Jurchen peoples pressed down on China's northern border. Neglecting his duties, he abdicated just in time to see north China fall to the Jurchen armies.

Almost every point, this pathbreaking volume contends, is wrong. Huizong was completely committed to governing his empire. Yes, his concept of governance differed from modern understandings; ritual and music occupied a central place, but he tried to implement real-world reforms. Huizong's ministers extended the New Policies of the Wang Anshi era (1069–1085) to a greater extent than historians have realized. Moreover, the emperor could not have devoted himself to the arts because he did not actually paint the paintings, do the calligraphy, or write the poems attributed to him (his assistants did and then stamped their work with the imperial seal).

Scholars need a book like this especially because *The Cambridge History of China* volumes devoted to the Song dynasty (960–1279) have been mired in publication delays for years. In the meantime, readers seeking a publication with the same high standards as the *Cambridge History* should read this book. The contributors include the most established senior scholars in the field (Peter K. Bol, John Chaffee, Joseph S. C. Lam, Paul Jakov Smith, Tsuyoshi Kojima, Stephen K. West), as well as more junior scholars who have recently completed dissertations that inform their essays here (Ari Daniel Levine on factionalism; Shin-yi Chao on Daoism; and Asaf Goldschmidt on medicine and public health). Every assertion rests on a solid foundation of evidence. Unfortunately the book includes no bibliography, but the book is extensively footnoted and includes long passages in the original Chinese as well as English translation. Books like *The Cambridge History of China* play an important role as authoritative references that all—whether colleagues in other fields or students writing term papers—can consult. This volume exceeds that standard.

John Chaffee's essay makes the important case that Emperor Huizong and his Grand Councilor Cai Jing consciously sought to extend the reforms that Wang Anshi (1021–1086) initiated under the Emperor Shenzong (r. 1067–1085). As Chaffee explains, historians have been so quick to see Huizong as a bad, last emperor that they have neglected the detailed sources about the measures, particularly the empire-wide school system, that he tried to implement. He argues that Huizong himself supported the reforms, and that their failure (as evidenced by the fall of the north) served as a profoundly negative example that dissuaded subsequent emperors from ever launching similarly ambitious programs. His essay rests on a large body of evidence, carefully explicated and persuasively analyzed.

Chaffee's path-breaking essay suggests the importance of considering surviving sources carefully, a long-term project that Charles Hartman has been pursuing in recent years. His contribution to this volume beautifully illustrates his entirely new approach to Song-dynasty sources, one he calls "archaeology" because comparison of textual passages

(often in different sections of the dynastic history) allows him to excavate different layers of text and identify their authors. Many historians of China have a rough sense of how the dynastic histories were written: first, a team recorded the emperor's daily movements; then another team compiled a draft history of the dynasty; then someone drew up the veritable records (*shilu* 實錄); and finally, after the dynasty ended, historians employed by the new dynasty wrote the dynastic history that we read today. Hartman shows that nothing of the sort happened in the Southern Song. Different emperors commissioned chunks of the dynasty history from outside scholars like Hong Mai, who complained bitterly of having inadequate sources, with the result that they hurriedly threw their texts together on the basis of existing compilations. Hartman's work is extremely significant because the controversies about history writing shed new light on the intellectual divisions of the time.

The most provocative essays in this volume concern authorship. Maggie Bickford extends her findings first published as "Emperor Huizong and the Aesthetic of Agency" (*Archives of Asian Art* 53 [2002–2003], pp. 71–104) to show that Emperor Huizong did not paint all the paintings signed with the seal "yuzhi 御製" (imperial composed) and "yubi 御筆" (imperial brushed). Only the term "qinbi 親筆" (personally brushed) indicated genuine imperial authorship. Bickford offers a close analysis of nine different paintings (beautifully reproduced in colour) to show the differences among the "imperial brushed" paintings. Her use of textual evidence from as early as the Song showing that contemporary observers understood the differences in meaning among these different seals makes her case even stronger. Art historians have long seen Huizong's calligraphy and bird-and-flower paintings as distinctive, but Bickford makes the stimulating argument that these styles facilitated copying by court artists in the imperial academy.

Ronald Egan's essay on Huizong's palace poems extends Bickford's point to the literary realm: a stable of court poets produced poems in Huizong's individual style that were not actually written by Huizong. Egan makes the case, though, that the surviving poems are important because they shed light on Huizong's view that artistic excellence demonstrated his sagely rule. His and Bickford's essays force us to realize the modern notions of authorship and originality may not apply to a premodern context, and they suggest how we should revise these ideas so that we can appreciate the paintings, works of calligraphy, and poems as the work of Huizong, even if he did individually not produce them.

In sum, this conference volume amply demonstrates how a group of scholars can collectively and creatively overturn received wisdom at the same time that they produce authoritative work.

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