

Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China. By Naomi Standen. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. Pp. xiii + 279. \$53.00.

The title may be deceptive, as *Unbounded Loyalty* is not at all about ardent patriotism, but rather the absence of a concept of country based on common ancestry and fixed borders and the search for alternative approaches to organizing polity. The author follows the movements of five educated émigrés from North China to the Liao kingdom during the tenth century: Li Huan, Han Yanhui, Zhang Li, Zhao Yanshou, and Wang Jizhong. These “frontier crossers” or “southerners,” as Standen prefers to call them, reveal the uniquely porous character of the borderlands, southerners changing countries then, much like Americans change states today, in search of opportunity. The concept of an impermeable border along the Great Wall, it is argued, emerged only after the Song and Liao dynasties sealed the Treaty of Shanyuan, in 1004–1005 (pp. 1–2, 25). The migration of Chinese to and from the Liao kingdom over generations reflects a general disregard for factors like race and region in choosing one’s political nest, but also the absence of social stigma to changing allegiances or serving non-Han rulers. Such indifference would draw severe censure a century later, as witnessed by the lambasting of Feng Dao for serving four dynasties that included two Shatuo regimes, plus a transient puppet of the Kitan.

Another objective of *Unbounded Loyalty* is to challenge a convention among Sinologists that places the Liao alongside the other so-called “conquest dynasties,” conflating its history with the Jin and Yuan solely because the Kitan ruling house originated in Inner Asia (pp. 6–9, 26–32). Yet unlike the Jurchen and the Mongols, the Kitan never ruled, nor aspired to rule the Chinese interior: its only holdings south of the Great Wall, the so-called “sixteen prefectures” centred on modern Beijing, had been voluntarily ceded by the Jin dynasty decades before the advent of Song sovereignty. Moreover, the political policies of the Liao are distinguished for their inclusion, rather than exclusion of fellow Inner Asian and Chinese subjects. The dynasty thrived by attracting outsiders at a time of tumult and uncertainty elsewhere, in the manner of the preceding Tang, its model for border management. The word “occupation” is thus historically inaccurate and intellectually dishonest as pertains to Liao rule.

Standen also tries to assess the meaning of “loyalty” (*zhong*) as the basis for political allegiances for people who lived in the tenth century, contrasting their values from the expectations of historians a century later, who in the main denigrated border crossers as either opportunists or traitors. She theorizes the existence of two strains of loyalty, “relational” loyalty to a particular ruler, which allows subjects to abandon undeserving sovereigns, and “idealistic” loyalty to a regime or an ethical abstraction irrespective of a ruler’s personal merit (p. 43). Relational loyalty was generally normative for the Five Dynasties and idealistic loyalty normative for the eleventh century (pp. 56–63). Standen bases her conclusions on a large corpus of primary sources, from the dynastic histories for the Tang and Five Dynasties to privately written works of high Song, the histories of Sima Guang and Ouyang Xiu. Some of Standen’s best analysis emerges in the treatment of historiographic issues related to sources. The theoretical work on loyalism is less persuasive. Did expectations of loyal duty genuinely change for a single century or did individuals simply feign indifference? A careful reading of Feng Dao’s autobiographical “Old Man of

Eternal Joy,” partly preserved in Ouyang Xiu’s *Historical Records*, seems downright defensive as it boasts his extraordinary record of public service. Later, in the worst tensions on record for his entire official career, Feng collides with Emperor Shizong of Zhou in ways that can only suggest a credibility deficit in his final years, his arrogant indifference to rulers finally taking its toll.¹

Overall, despite important breakthroughs, *Unbounded Loyalty* suffers from overreach and simplification. In attributing the emergence of ethnic consciousness to a single treaty, Standen seems overly simplistic. The fact that three of the five dynasties to govern the Central Plains in the tenth century were Inner Asian transplants was likely more critical to instilling a sense of separateness in the Chinese populace of Song times. The Shatuo, the dominant power in North China and the leading rival to the Kitan in the first half of the tenth century, are relegated to insignificance in *Unbounded Loyalty*. But the limited designs of the Liao on the Chinese heartland seems mostly due to a combination of preemption and containment by the Shatuo as early contemporaries. Another problem for Standen’s book, in the process of eschewing race as a factor in alignments and tensions for the period, she is guilty of the same sorts of overreach of scholars who formerly obsessed with race. For example, Ouyang Xiu’s *Historical Records*, which the author cites often, contains a well-known story where a Shatuo Emperor nearly killed a Chinese actor for employing a racial slur at court (*HR*, pp. 311–12). The story shows that northerners and southerners could collaborate politically, and at the same time, experience ongoing racial conflict. Without resorting to the traditional polarizing of polity along racial lines (Han versus Hu), and without taking recourse to meaningless terms like “cultural feeling” in place of “ethnic bias,” there should exist a middle ground where race is recognized as part of the multiracial world of the tenth century yet placed in proper perspective.

A complement is in order for the author’s generally intelligent and readable prose, save for an over-abundance of clichés and hyperbole that extends even to chapter titles, as in “Fed or Dead.” If authors do not have better judgement, editors should.

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Between Heaven and Modernity: Reconstructing Suzhou, 1895–1937. By Peter J. Carroll. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006. Pp. xvi + 325. \$60.00.

The transformation of urban morphology is one of the most striking features of early twentieth-century Chinese history. In his new book, Peter Carroll, an associate professor at Northwestern University in the United States, examines a range of urban development

¹ Ouyang Xiu, *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*, trans. Richard L. Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 442.