

Throughout the volume, the contributors were upfront but respectful about their disagreements with each other, particularly about the extent to which they regarded the Qin period in terms of continuity as opposed to change. All this bodes for the future—perhaps a more irenic and tolerant field? Finally, this reviewer appreciates the editors' willingness to include a contribution from a non-China specialist. Such a move reveals a praiseworthy willingness to engage voices and perspectives from outside of the China field, and a commitment to moving the study of early China out of the margins into the mainstream of academic discourse.

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Emperor Huizong. By Patricia Buckley Ebrey. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2014. Pp. xxix + 661. \$45.00/£30.00.

Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1082–1135, r. 1100–1126) has long held an anomalous position in Chinese historical memory. On the one hand he is acknowledged as a great artist and calligrapher, whose lavish patronage of the arts had a significant impact on art and culture. On the other, he has been condemned on a number of grounds: for his use of Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126; later classified as a “nefarious minister”) and together with Cai enacting extreme purges of political opponents; for profligate spending, in part on reform policies deemed not to have been effective but even more on his “Flower and Rock Network” that collected and then transported huge rocks for his Royal Marchmount park (Genyue 艮岳); for his quixotic patronage of Daoism and persecution of Buddhism; and most of all for his disastrous war against the Jurchen which ended with the fall of Kaifeng 開封 and his captivity under the Jurchen. Since this marked the end of the Northern Song—though not of the Song dynasty—he has also been cast as the bad last emperor of a dynasty commonly judged to be the weakest of major Chinese dynasties.

In recent years Huizong and his reign have attracted the attention of a number of Western—primarily American—historians and their views have departed significantly from the judgements described above.¹ Patricia Buckley Ebrey's role in this development has been central. 2006 witnessed the publication of *Emperor Huizong and*

¹ In addition to the works cited in the text, mention should be made of Ari Daniel Levine, “The Reigns of Hui-tsung (1100–1126) and Ch'in-tsung (1126–1127) and the Fall of the Northern Sung,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Volume 5 Part One: *The Sung Dynasty and Its* (Continued on next page)

Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics, which she co-edited with Maggie Bickford. It is a wide-ranging collection of thirteen essays that both highlighted the cultural accomplishments of Huizong and complicated understandings of the politics of the period.² Two years later Ebrey came out with a comprehensive and lavishly illustrated monograph of Huizong the collector, not simply of art and calligraphy, but also of books and antiquities.³ The appearance of *Emperor Huizong* coming on top of these other works is therefore all the more remarkable, since this massive biography clearly represents years of painstaking research.

Ebrey divides the seventeen chapters of her book into four sections, the first and last consisting of four chapters each dealing, respectively, with Huizong's childhood through the early years of his reign, and with the end of his reign through to his death in captivity in the north. The nine chapters in between are organized into two overlapping chronological groups (1102–1112 and 1107–1120), with each chapter being devoted to an aspect of Huizong's life and/or rule. This last is an understandable if unusual arrangement. It gives Ebrey the means to provide focused treatments of many noteworthy but diverse topics. The cost, however, is a somewhat static quality to the middle sections of the book.

The early chapters are brilliantly done. Ebrey nicely sets the stage with her descriptions of late eleventh-century Kaifeng with its imperial palace complexes and mines the limited sources to paint a picture of the young prince (Zhao Ji 趙佶) growing up in the cultured but insular milieu of the court but having almost no expectation of succeeding to the throne. She then gives a compelling account of the elevation of Ji following his brother Zhezong's 哲宗 untimely death in 1100 and

(Note 1—Continued)

Precursors, 907–1279, ed. Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 556–643; idem, *Divided by a Common Language: Factional Conflict in Late Northern Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Hu Yongguang, "Cultivating Merit: The Three Hall System in Late Northern Song China" (Ph.D. diss., Binghamton University, 2011); and Paul Jakov Smith, "Shuihu zhuan and the Military Subculture of the Northern Song, 960–1127," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66, no. 2 (December 2006), pp. 363–422.

² Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford, eds., *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 266 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006). On Huizong the artist, see also Maggie Bickford, "Emperor Huizong and the Aesthetic of Agency," *Archives of Asian Art* 53 (2002/2003), pp. 71–104; and Peter C. Sturman, "Cranes above Kaifeng: The Auspicious Image at the Court of Huizong," *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990), pp. 33–68.

³ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

of the early years of his reign, when he faced a steep learning curve. The politics of those years were unusually complex, given the major role initially played by the Dowager Empress Xiang 向太后 and the constant jockeying for power by reformers and conservatives (as Ebrey calls them). She provides a persuasive account of Huizong's move from an attempt to balance the groups—in the Council of State—to his decisive decision to govern through Cai Jing and the reformers, and goes on to treat the critical early years of Cai's reforms, especially those concerning welfare institutions and education. Her treatment of the infamous blacklisting of the political opponents of the reformers from 1102 to 1104 is especially interesting. She acknowledges their unprecedented character and notes that, from the perspective of those blacklisted, Huizong's actions went "beyond the bounds of accepted practice" (p. 127). But she also argues that the blacklisting was less severe than often claimed, involving only 226 living officials (out of 20,000 civil officials), and in any case was rescinded by 1106. Here I found her argument less than fully persuasive, for as Ari Levine has pointed out, the increasing severity of the blacklists (involving by 1104 not simply conservatives associated with the Yuanyou 元祐 partisans but also reformers who had become opposed to Cai Jing) had long-term consequences, since the rescinding of the blacklists did not result in the reinstatement of most of those who had been blacklisted.⁴

As mentioned earlier, the middle chapters of this book cover a very wide range of topics. In the book's second part, "Striving for Magnificence," we see an energetic emperor with a strong interest in Daoism (Chapter 5), who nevertheless aspires to revive early rituals and ritual instruments (Chapter 6), is welcoming and deferential to experts (Chapter 7), and above all steps himself in art and artistic undertakings (Chapter 8). It is worth noting that only in the last chapter and perhaps in Chapter 10 on court and palace life does one find much overlap with Ebrey's earlier *Accumulating Culture*, and even then her attention here is much more focused on understanding Huizong the individual. In other words, there is little retreading of earlier material.

In the second of the middle sections, "Anticipating Great Things," Ebrey focuses on a turn in Huizong's character and in his reign that in a Western figure could be called messianic. This is most evident in Chapter 10, which describes how his earlier attachment to Daoism reached new heights when Lin Lingsu 林靈素, his Daoist advisor, convinced him that he was the son of a high god whose heavenly place was in the Divine Empyrean, the highest of nine celestial regions. A delighted Huizong showered money and honours not only on Lin, but also on Daoists across the empire, while at the same time he mandated that Buddhist monks transform themselves into

⁴ Ari Daniel Levine, "Terms of Estrangement: Factional Discourse in the Early Huizong Era, 1100–1104," in Ebrey and Bickford, eds., *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China*, pp. 149–65.

Daoist priests. However, this theme of grandeur is also developed in Chapter 9, which recounts Huizong's decision to publish a new ritual code and his monumental—and monumentally costly—projects: a huge Bright Hall (Mingtang 明堂) rising some 294 *chi* 尺 in height, which was completed in 1117, and his fabulous park, the Northeast Marchmount, which was supplied with its exotic southern rocks by the “Flower and Rock Network” mentioned above (Chapter 9). Ebrey also includes in this section Huizong's fateful decision, in 1119, to pursue an alliance with the Jurchen Jin, a relatively unknown people who were growing in strength on the far side of the Liao.

Chapter 10, which treats the Song-Jin alliance, provides a segue into the final section of the book, appropriately titled “Confronting Failure.” With this transition the book also switches gears, turning into a narrative history of the last years of both Huizong and the Northern Song, highlighted by the (theoretically) joint Song-Jin war against the Liao, the subsequent Jin invasion of the northern circuits, Huizong's abdication in favour of Qinzong 欽宗 (r. 1125–1127), the fall of Kaifeng, and the final years for both emperors in northern captivity. Ebrey describes the Jin alliance as “the worst decision” that Huizong ever made (p. 372), but in her account of the war against the Liao (1121–1125) there is no sense that the alliance automatically doomed the Song or that it was a result of earlier aspects of his rule, such as his rock collecting. Rather she points to the Zhejiang rebellion of Fang La 方臘 in 1120–1122, put down by Song armies but at the cost of draining needed resources from the fighting in the north, as a major factor in putting the Song forces in a disadvantageous position at a critical point in the war with the Liao, as well as terrible generalship on the part of Tong Guan 童貫 and his fellow Song commanders.

Emperor Huizong is a remarkable accomplishment. Dealing with a period known for its notoriously poor sources,⁵ Ebrey has nevertheless been able to accumulate a wealth of sources by combing through many genres of literature: biographical, ritual, artistic, as well as the range of historical treatments. She does not use them indiscriminately; witness her appendix describing a number of popular accounts of Huizong and his court that she rejects as unreliable. The result is what promises to be the definitive biography of Huizong for many years to come, and beyond that the most detailed and comprehensive biography that we have for any Chinese emperor.

That said, there are certain things that I found lacking. Although in her afterward, Ebrey addresses the early historical judgements against Huizong and his reign as well as what she describes as a traditional reticence about writing biographies of emperors,

⁵ Charles Hartman has argued that a systematic culling of historical records by historians in the early Southern Song critical of Huizong and particularly Cai Jing were largely responsible for the large gaps in the historical record for that period. See his “A Textual History of Cai Jing's Biography in the *Songshi*,” in Ebrey and Bickford, eds., *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China*, pp. 517–64.

she does not address the modern historiography of this period. That is a legitimate authorial choice which does not in any way diminish her accomplishments. But I would point out that many Chinese scholars have quite different takes on the emperor and his reign. These are described by Bao Weimin 包偉民 in his review of *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China*, and a number of his comments about that volume concerning the interpretive frameworks used by historians are germane to this volume.⁶ Ebrey's response to them would have been helpful in situating her work.

I would also point to the reforms of Cai Jing and Huizong and their outcomes are another topic which gets only passing attention. These are hardly ignored, but at the same time they are not dealt with in depth. Ebrey introduces the reforms in her fourth chapter, "Choosing the Reformers," and then returns to them in Chapter 11, "Working with Councilors." There her concern is for Huizong's role in policy-making for and monitoring of reforms. It is potentially a huge topic, so she takes the issue of currency reform as a test case, finding that Huizong, while not demonstrating expertise on the subject, was actively engaged in decisions relating to it. For Ebrey's purpose—an understanding of Huizong the legislator and executor—this is a reasonable approach. However, it points to the need for a comprehensive analysis of the reforms, something that this book does not attempt to do.

Finally there is the question that one must ask of all biographies: how well does it present the character of the subject? In dealing with an emperor as Ebrey does, the obstacles are almost insurmountable on this score, since virtually every document relating to Huizong was subject to discursive and often ritual conventions reflecting the enormous gulf between emperor and subject. Ebrey works very hard to surmount this, with close readings of edicts, accounts of conversations, and Huizong's own writing, particularly his poetry. I found the most persuasive attempts in this regard in Chapter 10 on court and palace life and Chapter 17 on his time in captivity. There remained, for me, a perhaps unavoidable flatness to his character. That said, what comes through is a portrait of an extraordinary monarch who was enormously energetic, providing a personal imprint on a wide range of activities even while fathering sixty-five children. Far from being an ogre who "fiddled while Rome burned," Ebrey gives us an emperor who was talented, conscientious, and ambitious. That some of those ambitions got out of hand and, in the area of foreign affairs, proved disastrous, qualifies but does not essentially change the portrayal.

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⁶ Bao Weimin, review of *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford, *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 38 (2008), pp. 259–67.