

of lives included. These comprise empresses, consorts, good/bad female paradigms, but also military and religious leaders, rebels, scholars and nuns. Besides, a few legendary figures are mentioned: a choice that, as the editors rightly argue in the preface, is meant to highlight the symbolic significance of these “cultural icons” (p. ix). Indeed, this argument could be extended to almost all the biographies included, in the sense that the recorded lives of laudable or despicable women are especially useful to illustrate the cultural meanings of femininity (and masculinity). In this respect, the title of this work should perhaps have specified that the women in question are “renowned” or “notable”, thus rejecting the blanket category of “women” that does not do justice to the merit of the project – indeed, can one think of any “dictionary of Chinese men” *tout court*?

The dictionary is well arranged and is certainly a useful reference work, both for the information it provides and for its wide coverage. But it does have a few shortcomings. For instance, the division into three sections may be useful in practical terms, but one is not sure about what it clarifies about “the discrete periods in Chinese history and how these may have affected the lives of women” (preface, p. ix), given that very little explanation is provided on the varying backgrounds, and on sources used. While the finding list and glossary of Chinese names are functional, characters should also have been provided for the titles of works cited, and an index could perhaps have been included. Also, the choice to translate only some book titles into English, leaving others in Chinese, is not entirely consistent, especially when this happens within the same entry: for instance, on p. 229 (entry on Xu Shu) the titles *Suishu* and *Chuci* are translated, but *Yiwen leiju*, *Taiping yulan* and others are not. In terms of bibliography, a number of important secondary sources are not listed: for instance, one wonders why – given the strong reliance on the *Lienü zhuan* – no mention is made of Lisa Raphals’s work. Likewise, studies by Bret Hinsch and Li Chenyang could perhaps have been listed, as well as the recent article by Hans van Ess on Empress Lü, although the latter may have been published too late for addition. Finally, in section three, significant information about Buddhism is scattered throughout several biographies of nuns: inserting it all together in an introductory entry would perhaps have avoided unnecessary repetitions.

Overall, however, this reference book is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to scholarship, particularly for its potential to stimulate further research on gender norms and representations.

Valentina Boretti

FRANCES WOOD:

The First Emperor of China.

ix, 209 pp. London: Profile Books, 2007. £15.99. ISBN 978 1 84668 032 8.

As a much-publicized exhibition of the terracotta warriors opens at the British Museum, Frances Wood invites a general readership to journey into the world of the unifier of China. Readers are treated to numerous illustrations and eye-catching chapter headings such as “Elephants, steamed duck and Warring States”, or “Cowboys and indians or Confucianism and legalism”. Wood gives an accessible and balanced account of the First Emperor’s life and sets the

stage for his biography by outlining politico-philosophical debates among the various schools of thought and describing the authoritarian organization of Qin society prior to unification. In colourful detail she describes aspects of everyday life such as, for instance, culinary and sartorial habits or agricultural work. Her story does not end with the fall of the Qin and its immediate influences on the succeeding Han. She concludes with an account of the most recent, politically motivated (ab)uses of early imperial history in the heated atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution, scenes she witnessed first-hand on her travels through the People's Republic in the 1970s.

Wood's description of the Qin unification is based on translations of well-known transmitted sources, mainly the *Shiji* by Sima Qian, whose potential partiality she duly considers, and on scholarship in English. She takes account of the legal manuscripts excavated in Shuihudi in 1975, but overlooks a major study of epigraphic sources, Martin Kern's *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven, 2000), a work arguing forcefully for the cultural conservatism of the Qin and against their alleged "otherness". Ongoing debates on the cultural identity of the Qin, however, fall outside the scope of this book.

Of more importance is the question of what it achieves as a work for a general audience. Given that readability should be a prime concern, the book would have benefited from more thorough editorial revisions. The text is shot through with repetitions. The reader learns twice of Qin Shihuang's death and his chancellor's schemes to thwart his first son's ascent to the throne (pp. 34, 43). The circumstances of the Shuihudi find are recounted twice (pp. 35, 57), as is information on the alleged burning of the books (pp. 42, 79) and the nature of the *Shijing* and *Shangshu* (pp. 47, 83). Likewise, the First Emperor's quest for immortality which culminated in abortive expeditions to the Eastern Sea is related in two places (pp. 33–4, 116–7). The reader is also treated to two versions of the legend of general Meng Tian's widow who cried so desperately that the Great Wall crumbled (pp. 76, 155), and there are two introductions to the *Shiji* (pp. 21, 36).

Of course, these repetitions are more irritating than misleading. Possibly more confusing are certain contradictions in historical interpretation. For instance Wood provides conflicting readings of the chancellor's motives for fiddling with the succession. In one instance, she assumes that "the impracticality of summoning the heir from his distant exile" played a role, but shortly afterwards she points to the chancellor's fear of being forced into exile (pp. 43, 44).

The competing worldviews of the Warring States period are introduced rather late in the book. The entire fourth chapter is devoted to an extensive overview of Confucian, legalist and Daoist doctrine – a section mainly based on Nivison's contribution to the *Cambridge History of Ancient China* – but a novice in ancient Chinese thought might perhaps have been better served by a more succinct sketch in the introduction.

Some might also question the author's penchant for drawing parallels between early and late imperial history. Such comparisons should by all means be made when they are illuminating, but projecting the "[v]eneration for the written word" in the Ming back into the unification period risks imparting an image of an unchanging Chinese culture on the reader as well as giving a distorted characterization of early Chinese society and its values (p. 78). The same holds true for the extensive treatment of the Qianlong emperor's suppression of dissent adduced here to illustrate the ubiquity of censorship in

imperial history in order to put authoritarian Qin policies into perspective (pp. 86–8).

Finally, it might have been useful to include source information on the illustrations. These consist mainly of woodblock prints, and their comparatively late date might not be immediately obvious to the uninitiated who might end up with a rather anachronistic visual impression of early China.

In sum, Wood's book has to be welcomed as an attempt at popularizing the results of scholarly enquiry into ancient Chinese history, and hopefully more publications will see the light that foster interest in Chinese civilization among a wider audience. At the same time it is equally desirable that the fruits of sinological research be presented in a carefully structured manner. In this respect, the book under review falls short on several occasions, presumably because it had to be rushed through the press in order to make its publication coincide with the exhibition at the British Museum.

Oliver Weingarten

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.) xx, 625 pp. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University East Asia Center, 2006. £38.95. ISBN 978 0 674 02127 3.

Few reigns in dynastic Chinese history can match that of Song Huizong (r. 1101–25) for splendour and catastrophe. Despite that alluring combination, historians have rarely examined his rule. This fine collection of thirteen essays helps fill this gap and demonstrates how Huizong and his court stood apart from their counterparts among the house of Zhao. From the work's first few pages, as Ebrey describes how Jurchen troops held hostage the great capital Kaifeng for months on end, the reader knows that this period was no ordinary time.

Huizong inherited a political legacy of bitter factionalism and ambitious statecraft. Under his reign, this legacy underwent a transformation. First, as John Chaffee shows, Grand Councillor Cai Jing and his supporters silenced political debate for decades. Opposition disappeared, reviving only as the dynasty faced mortal peril in the mid-1120s. Second, unchecked by dissent, the court represented itself in terms of unprecedented majesty. As seen in articles by Patricia Ebrey on stone inscriptions, Peter Bol on civil service examination questions, Joseph Lam and Kojima Tsuyoshi on court music, Shin-yi Chao on Daoist temples, and Asaf Goldschmidt on public health, Huizong's rule meant nothing less than the return of sage-kings. His policies drew on eleventh-century precedents, but in its scale, multifariousness, and perhaps, above all, its utopian rhetoric, Huizong's governance aimed at an altogether different level of grandiosity. Ebrey's essay on the distribution of the emperor's calligraphy suggests an effort to disseminate imperial charisma on an almost industrial scale. In modern parlance, the court did not seek so much "reform" as "revolution from above".

Given the subtitle *The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*, one turns to the best-known cultural artifact of Huizong's rule, namely his painting