narrative of ritual evolution (i.e., from political and religious practices of the early Zhou, to the creation of classics such as the *Odes*, and then to Warring States philosophies of self-cultivation), one can nonetheless learn much from the knowledge and expertise conveyed in every page.

Four Seasons: A Ming Emperor and His Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth-Century China. By John Dardess. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. 287 pp. $38.00 (paperback).

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doi:10.1017/jch.2018.29

It takes an exceptionally skillful historian to present the most prominent political issues and figures of the long Ming Jiajing reign (1521–1567) without reducing human emotions and relations to stereotypes and moral judgments. In *Four Seasons*, John Dardess not only accomplishes this but also seamlessly weaves historiographical questions into captivating storytelling.

Four Seasons is organized around the various stages of the Jiajing rule and the tenures of four officials who rose to the position of chief grand secretary. From "spring" to "winter," each chapter delineates the personality and career of one of these men and, by detailing his collaboration with the emperor, explores a cluster of issues that challenged the Ming empire in the sixteenth century. These issues, which include the Great Rites controversy and the demise of the notorious Yan Song, have been the subjects of many monographs. In a refreshing way, Dardess's biographical approach compels the reader to explore the nitty-gritty aspects of policy and political questions by looking at how they were shaped by these powerful individuals' personal style, preference, and habit.

Chapter 1 introduces the thirteen-year-old prince, Zhu Houcong, who was selected by a group of officials led by the chief grand secretary Yang Tinghe to succeed to the throne after the Zhengde emperor died without an heir. Appropriately titled "A Young Emperor Shows His Teeth," this chapter shows Zhu Houcong to have been an intelligent teenager with exceptional stamina. He persisted and prevailed with astonishing political success in demanding a series of changes to the imperial rituals regarding ancestor worship and filial expression. "Young as he was, he instinctively understood power: how to use his personal resources to get his way over men (and women) much older and vastly more experienced than he" (11). Dardess describes the so-call Great Rites debates, a series of negotiations over imperial rituals, from the perspective of a young ruler whose strong filial feelings towards his parents found support in his classical studies and among a few sympathetic—and perhaps opportunist—officials. Ritual norms had always been subject to negotiation; Ming history had witnessed many instances in which political and intellectual power enabled meaningful reinterpretation of Confucian rituals. Yang Tinghe's weakness as a bureaucratic leader lay not so much in the technical ritual

https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2018.29 Published online by Cambridge University Press

details as in his disregard of the young ruler's filial feelings and his followers' suppression of the emperor's supporters as pure career opportunists. Dardess challenges the conventional image of Yang as a Confucian hero. I would point out further that the negotiations between Jiajing and Yang actually demonstrate the complexity of the meaning of the "good Confucian man." As Confucianism was a complex system subject to interpretation and change, so was the meaning of the Confucian hero.

In Chapter 2, "Spring: Grand Secretary Zhang Fujing," Dardess further emphasizes the importance of ritual for the Jiajing emperor and the Ming empire, reminding the reader that ritual disputes were not trivial matters appropriated by politicians; ritual reforms were at the heart of the empire-wide engagement with the "heritage of civil religion" of the Ming (36) and of Jiajing's intellectual, emotive, and ruling interests. Zhang Fujing's career reveals the centrality of ritual matters in Ming politics and government. Through a plethora of public and private exchanges between Zhang Fujing and the emperor, Dardess introduces the reader to examples of the significance of ritual and ceremony: not only filial rituals, but also the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and non-Confucian traditions. The correspondence between the two reveals the emperor's knowledge on this topic as well as the ways in which everyday life—for example, procreation and his mother's Buddhist piety—informed his thinking.

His many taxing responsibilities meant that the emperor's reliance on Zhang crossed from the public sphere into his private affairs. Dardess pores over the massive private correspondence between the emperor and Zhang to shed light on the multiple roles played by the grand secretary: Zhang was to "serve not just as a policy advisor, but also as Jiajing's writing instructor, life coach, and even his doctor and psychotherapist" (50). I am reminded of Ray Huang's *1587: A Year of No Significance*, and of his close reading and translation of the communication between the Wanli emperor and his top officials. Students are always fascinated by the surprisingly human nature of such accounts and sources, which help them develop a more sophisticated understanding of premodern politics. They will no doubt be intrigued by the many excerpts translated by Dardess.

Chapter 3, "Summer: Grand Secretary Xia Yan," presents a different type of top aide, a "technocrat," along with a different set of policy and political issues. While Dardess lets Zhang Fujing's confidential communication with the emperor reveal Zhang's deep understanding of the ruler and the entanglement of power and ideology, in this chapter he resorts to fewer direct quotations, instead recounting Xia Yan's rise as a talented and competent minister of rites in order to illuminate the multiple challenges faced by the Ming empire: international relations (in particular the tribute system, pressures on the northern borders from the Mongols, and maritime trade and defense in the southeast), rebellions, famine, military decline and corruption, debates about education and bureaucratic recruitment, and political factionalism. Xia's substantial and successful contributions to Ming governance exemplify the relatively stable and reliable quality of the bureaucratic machine that kept the Ming empire functional. Dardess depicts a stark contrast after Xia had taken up the role of grand secretary. Xia was unsuccessful in this decade, frequently disappointing and even angering the emperor, and increasingly looking like a negative foil to the more agreeable Yan Song. Eventually, Xia lost imperial favor in the midst of the court struggle over the Mongol policy, and he was executed partly due to Yan's maneuvering. Dardess rightly points out that the Grand Secretariat "was not a good place for a pure technocrat-manager" like Xia, who "lacked the

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psychological awareness and the social skills that would have allowed him to thrive as a politician" (137).

Yan Song, the focus of Chapter 4 ("Autumn: Grand Secretary Yan Song"), is depicted as the opposite of Xia Yan. The reader catches a glimpse of Yan's managing ability in his responsibilities during the emperor's two-month trip to visit his deceased father's tomb. (Dardess notes that the logistics rivaled those "required for a major military expedition" (155).) Yan's performance as Xia's successor to lead the Ministry of Rites seemed reasonably conservative, showing his ability to protect himself and gain imperial favor in complicated political negotiations intertwined with policy-making. Again, Dardess integrates important contemporary issues in his biographical account, including Sino-Japan relations, the Mongol and Annam problems, and new trends in Neo-Confucian scholarship. It seems that, as in the case of Xia, Yan's weaknesses became amplified once he became the chief grand secretary. He proved to be ineffective and unimaginative as a top aide to the emperor, especially in the crisis of 1550, when the capital was seriously threatened by the Mongols. In the meantime, however, Yan enjoyed the Jiajing emperor's favor by offering service to the latter's intensifying Daoist pursuits and providing "opinions" that pleased the emperor's ears.

Dardess treats Yan Song, a stereotypical villain in Confucian historiography, with a historian's critical craftsmanship. He accomplishes this in several ways. First, by injecting the historian's analytical voice in his presentation of well-known material and stories, he makes the reader pause and think. Second, instead of recounting the familiar, Dardess finds new ways to make the story of Yan's demise engaging. For instance, by describing the many instances of impeachment of Yan during his tenure in the Grand Secretariat, he offers the reader an opportunity to read closely the back-and-forth between rival officials and between officials and the emperor. Also, Yan's notorious corruption is presented to the reader with a long inventory of his assets (215–19). Lastly, unlike conventional historiography, Dardess considers human reality in his assessment of Yan's performance as a chief grand secretary. The reader is reminded that when the Jiajing emperor appointed Yan to the highest bureaucratic position, Yan's style might have been compatible with that of the emperor who, after "twenty intense and demanding years of ruling," was "coming close to mental exhaustion and physical collapse" (181). Yan himself was aging too; he experienced increasing difficulty with reading the ruler's mind and saying the right things.

Arriving at the last chapter, "Winter: Grand Secretary Xu Jie," it is helpful to reflect on where the Jiajing emperor was in his life in 1562–67. Now in his fifties, he had ruled for approximately forty years. The Ming empire, troubled as it had been in many aspects, had just entered an exciting era (the "late Ming") in its economic and cultural experiments. It is difficult to say whether the new era made Xu Jie possible or vice versa. Nonetheless, the Ming system experienced "rejuvenation" (227) with a different type of chief grand secretary—"unlike Zhang, a hard-edged ideological warrior; or Xia, a brilliant technocrat; or Yan Song, a corruption-based machine politician" (229). His responsibilities and accomplishments prior to his term in the Grand Secretariat were "varied and rich" (259), demonstrating solid understanding of and ability to deal with policy issues, relatively consistent adherence to moral principles, and political talent. Xu was willing to secure favor by writing Daoist prayers for the emperor, as Yan Song had done, and by avoiding direct confrontations, he was devoted to good governance as an official. After the demise of Yan, the bureaucratic following Xu had nurtured over the years

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through official and non-official channels proved very effective in rejuvenating the empire with intellectual vigor and political determination.

The intellectual, cultural, and political struggles around the Yangming school of Neo-Confucianism in the Ming were extremely complex and consequential. Dardess calls the Yangming school "a new form of the standard Neo-Confucianism" (228), which he distinguishes from "the standard Neo-Confucianism of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi" (22), and from the "dissenting form of Neo-Confucianism" pioneered by Chen Xianzhang (172). Dardess's biographical account of Xu Jie shows Xu's intellectual-philosophical affinity to the Yangming school and his somewhat tactful but non-politicized sponsorship of the intellectual activities made popular by it. I understand Dardess's reluctance to overburden or even intimidate the reader with Neo-Confucian metaphysics. But the seeming discrepancy demonstrated in many officials' (and Xu's) stance against ritual reforms and their interest in the Yangming school could have been discussed more carefully and consistently throughout the chapters to demonstrate the complexity of Confucianism and its history. This is a challenge that China historians need to embrace in our collective scholarly and pedagogical effort.

Four Seasons, like Dardess's other books on Ming government and politics, makes complicated historical and historiographical information accessible by organizing it into biographical accounts of prominent historical figures. In addition to *Ming shi*, *Shilu* of the Jiajing reign, and *Ming tongjian*, he draws on a large number of personal writings to help reconstruct the complex human relations on emotional and political levels. In many places, Dardess explains why the particular nature of a source—for example, the private and secret messages between the emperor and an official—allows us to understand a situation more deeply or differently. He is able to bring in rich details that make the book such a pleasure to read.

Borrowed Place: Mission Stations and Local Adaptation in Early Twentieth-Century China. By Riika-Leena Juntunen. Leiden: Brill, 2015. 369 pp. $188/€143 (cloth).

The Catholic Invasion of China: Remaking Chinese Christianity. By David E. Mungello. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. 194 pp. $79/£52.95 (cloth).

Christian Monks on Chinese Soil: A History of Monastic Missions to China. By Matteo Nicolini-Zani. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016. 408 pp. $39.95 (paper).

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doi:10.1017/jch.2018.25

Virtually all historians of Asia are familiar with the protracted history of Jesuit exchange with China during the Ming and Qing eras; it is still common that graduate students are required to read Jacques Gernet's *Chine et Christianisme, Action et Reaction*. Scholars of recent decades have challenged Gernet's oversimplified narrative of Sino-Missionary conflict, however, and now offer better informed and more nuanced interpretations of

https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2018.29 Published online by Cambridge University Press