

BOOK REVIEWS

The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China.

By Dieter Kuhn. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. Pp. 356.

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Reviewed by Patricia Ebrey, University of Washington

E-mail ebrey@u.washington.edu

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Harvard University Press recently initiated a series of six books on the History of Imperial China, under the general editorship of Timothy Brook. The volumes, each covering a dynasty or period of comparable length, are broad in coverage and aimed at non-experts. Working within these constraints, Dieter Kuhn has written a portrait of Song China that students, the general public, and even historians of China will find full of skillful syntheses, intriguing observations, and provocative arguments.

It takes courage to undertake a volume of this sort. To appeal to the general reader the book has to be written with conviction, without the ordinary qualifications. That is, phrases such as “scholars infer”, “evidence suggests”, or “according to one author” have to be used sparingly. Not many scholars have the daring to state as fact so much of what they think deep down, and not just on subjects they have researched themselves, but also subjects for which they have to draw from other scholars’ research.

Dieter Kuhn rises to this challenge very successfully. Drawing on his many years of teaching and research on Song and Liao society and culture, he has something to say on nearly everything – from emperors to wars, funerals to taxes, science to poetry, health care to migration, painting to clocks. Keeping in mind the needs of the student or general reader, he translates most Chinese terms and limits the number of people mentioned by name to a hundred or so. Still he is able to ground most discussions with particular cases, precise numbers, or short quotations, thus assuring that novices grasp the point he is making.

The book begins rather conventionally with political history. I did not detect much effort to be revisionist in the political narrative. The most famous of the many stories about emperors, chief councilors, and other political actors were generously included, probably to give the book a lively narrative line.

As Kuhn ventures into intellectual, institutional, economic, and social history, he draws on recent scholarship in both Western languages and Chinese to offer succinct overviews. Although citations of sources are brief and many points are not credited, the notes to these chapters nevertheless offer useful guidance to anyone who wishes to probe more deeply into a subject. Dozens of Song scholars will be pleased to see that their work is cited. When compared to earlier books aimed at a general audience, such as Jacques Gernet’s *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion* and Mark Elvin’s *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, this book offers a much fuller bibliography and many more citations to primary and secondary literature. Moreover, it incorporates newer material on many subjects, such as climate change, inflation, printing, architecture, and schools, to name only a few. Kuhn is particularly good on topics that deal with material culture broadly conceived – water mills, transport canals, mines, currency, clothing, sedan chairs, cosmetics, and the like.

One of the many strengths of this book is the integration of discussion of Liao, Xia, and Jin throughout the work. On the issue of the treaties Song signed with these three neighbors, Kuhn sides with those Song officials who pragmatically opted for indemnified peace, willing to tolerate *de facto* coexistence. He argues that the payments the Song made to its northern neighbors helped stabilize their finances and enabled them to survive for more than a century but proved of little consequence to the Song economy

or government finance. He draws attention to the huge peace dividend that Song received, crediting Song's prosperity in part to the long peace. Kuhn treats the fall of the Liao in much the same terms he does the fall of the Northern Song, and later treats the Mongol conquest of Jin and Southern Song in similar detail. Discussions of Buddhism in Liao and Jin follow the discussion of it in Song; similarly burial customs of the Khitan and Jurchen follow discussion of them among the Han Chinese.

I am not quite sure why the term "Confucian" is in the title of the book. In the chapter on "Model Rulers", we are told that because the first three rulers were lovers of learning "Song China came closer to the ideal of Confucian ruler than any other dynasty in Chinese history" (p. 29) and Confucianism is given pride of place in the chapter on "Three Doctrines". However, this is not a book that sees ideas as the primary motor of historical change. Several pages are devoted to explaining the ideas of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi, but they are not treated as more important to understanding the Song period and its place in Chinese history than a host of other factors. Song's international situation, the economic expansion, the technology of printing, the growth of cities, the persistence of family practices all seem just as implicated in what was happening in this period. Kuhn's understanding of historical change is clearly not monocausal.

Song specialists will undoubtedly find cases where they think a statement is in error or a discussion too simple. But brevity is a small price to pay for a book that attempts to provide the big picture.

Those who teach Chinese history will find this book of great use in updating their lectures. They also could assign parts of it to their students – for instance, these three chapters, "Transforming the Capitals", "A Changing World of Production", and "Money and Taxes", would work well together to give an updated picture of the transformation of the economy from Tang to Song. They would not be as lively as the comparable chapters in Mark Elvin's *Pattern of the Chinese Past*, but they would be more up-to-date and more useful as an entry into the scholarly literature. The publication of this book should also encourage some historians to offer an entire course on the Song period, perhaps devoting the first couple of weeks to this book, then turning to more specialized readings.

More than twenty well-chosen illustrations enhance the book and help the reader understand the material. By contrast, the maps are less satisfactory. Although ten maps are included, they are not tied closely to the text. For instance, on page 59 in a discussion of the war with Xia in 1081–1082, we are told that Shenzong realized he could not win the war and "abandoned his hopes for reconquering northwest China, and only Lanzhou remained under Song control (Map 4)." But Map 4 on the next page just shows the provinces of the Northern Song and does not indicate where the war with Xia took place, or locate Lanzhou. Similarly, I do not think it helps the general reader to be told (p. 63) that "Aguda's forces attacked the trading station in Nangjiang prefecture" unless the place is shown on a map.

In summary, *The Age of Confucian Rule* is a book that everyone who teaches Chinese history should have on his or her shelf and consult frequently. Dieter Kuhn presents his material intelligently and covers an extraordinary range of subjects. The attention he gives material culture is refreshing and helps him to make his case for the importance of China in Song times.

Community Matters in Xinjiang, 1880–1949: Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur.

By Ildikó Bellér-Hann. Leiden: Brill, 2008. Pp. xvi + 480.

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Reviewed by Jun Sugawara, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

E-mail sugawara@uighur.jp

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Ildikó Bellér-Hann's *Community Matters in Xinjiang 1880–1949: Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur* discusses the condition of Uyghur society in Xinjiang from the late nineteenth century to