There are several fairly clear conclusions to be drawn from the volume. One is the capacity that now exists for an exceptionally high degree of scholarship given the richness of sources that have been made available, particularly through archives and the publication of primary source material in the People's Republic of China itself, as well as the sophistication of the wider relevant literature. Odoric Wou's chapter in particular, on food shortages in Henan, is exemplary.

A second conclusion is that this volume clearly highlights the fragmentation of government in China during the war years; and a third is the extent and impact of the pressures the conduct of the war imposed on all the government agencies, Nationalist, Communist and Japanese. The fragmentation of governance has always been acknowledged to some extent. The Nationalist Party was based in Chongqing as the government retreated first south and, once the Japanese invaded, west. Japanese influence spread by linking cities along railway lines and through established lines of communication; the Chinese Communist Party operated behind Japanese lines. At the same time, the degree of fragmentation was even greater. The Communist Party's base areas and border regions were necessarily highly localized. A range of local armies and local warlords were often a more important focus than any notion of a wider political or administrative regime, this principle applied equally to nominal adherents to either Japan or the Nationalist regime.

Although the Japanese forces are often portrayed as invading colonizers who established a new and efficient regime as they went, in line with their "civilizing" mission (as described by Louise Young in *Japan's Total Empire* (1998)) it is also clear that Japanese efficiency was challenged by the China adventure. Too often assumptions were made about Chinese attitudes and reactions to Japanese policy that proved incorrect. Indeed in a number of places, as already noted, a fairly sympathetic local population became disaffected through the conduct of the war.

China at War provides fascinating and detailed studies of Japanese intervention in China during 1937 to 1945. In terms of the volume's stated goals of starting the process of reshaping the history of this period, it is much more than adequate. Necessarily the conceptual framework for much of the volume is concerned with national and nationalist concepts, and it talks about Japanese and Chinese actors quite freely. The use of these terms makes considerable sense for some parts of the population who were indeed conscious of their national identity and the possibility of invasion by a significant "other". At the same time, that kind of consciousness cannot be assumed to have been universal during 1937 to 1945. Peasants in North China during the war, for example, would by no means have been able to distinguish Japanese soldiers from Fujianese soldiers, who would have seemed equally as different and exotic. Most peasants would have held government of any kind in equal regard, no matter whether the government system in question was Japanese, Communist or Nationalist. Their requirement and their aspiration was that stability be maintained. It was precisely that absence of stability that undermined Japanese attempts at government in so many different ways and localities during the war, and paved the way for Japanese failure and withdrawal – and, subsequently, regime change.

Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossing in Liao China.
By Naomi Standen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. Pp. xiii + 279.
ISBN 10: 0824829832; 13: 9780824829834.
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An all too common failing, even among professional historians, is to look at the present as an inevitable, lineal outcome of the past. From this perspective, "China" seems to be eternal – a feature

of the geo-political map that always has been and always will be there. In *Unbounded Loyalty* Naomi Standen challenges that view, reminding us that history is the outcome of random chance, and that at any point along the historical narrative events could have gone differently and led to a different outcome.

Standen is the author of the Five Dynasties chapter to the *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, "Five Dynasties and Sung" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) and among the very few scholars to take as a central focus of her scholarship the tenth-century interregnum that separates the Tang and Song dynasties. In this volume she has given us a new approach to north China through that interregnum that forces us to recognize the possibilities that were inherent to an unstable era. Whereas past studies of the same era, such as Wang Gungwu's venerable study of military governors (*The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), adhered to China's traditional narrative that traces the lineage of the Mandate, of the "legitimate" dynastic transmission, through the historiographically-orthodox Five Dynasties themselves, Standen instead has placed the Liao dynasty at front and center. In so doing, she confronts the idea of China's historical inevitability: "[I]n fact, during those two hundred years following An Lushan's rebellion . . . nobody knew that a Chinese empire would ever again be the dominant power in East Asia. This book is an exploration of . . . a moment when 'China' as we know it was not inevitable, when East Asia might conceivably have remained, like Europe, a congeries of competing states" (p. 1).

To be blunt, Standen is turning History on its head. She demands that we see the Liao not as the orthodox narrative would have it, as a peripheral and barbarian empire arising from the steppe that was governed by the culturally and ethnically heterodox Kitan people. Rather, she sees it as a central player in the politics of north China at a time of flux and uncertainty. As she states at the very beginning, "This book is an attempt to portray a world made alien partly by distance, but mostly by history" (xi). History, the cumulative narrative by which the past is given form and pattern, traditionally has conferred upon the Liao a marginal status. But it is not the fault of the classical historiographical tradition alone: "The secondary literature's use of 'Kitan' for most of the tenth century positions them as a people rather than a political regime, implying that they are stateless and so denying them the position that they actually had" (p. 6).

Standen, in contrast, presents a world that was as short of such preconceptions as it was full of possibilities. In contrast to the "essentialized, national 'China'" that has had an eternal and normative unity interrupted by "deviation(s) from expectations" such as the three centuries of disunion that separated the Han and Sui dynasties (p. 16), Standen argues that during the decades following the final collapse of the Tang court in the late ninth-century rebellions, long-term multi-state division on the order of Europe was a real possibility. At least as importantly, through the late 940s the Liao court was an equal player in the multi-state, multi-centered politics of the north – not as a "conqueror", however, for that is a characterization that Standen explicitly rejects. In addition to the traditionally marginalized Liao, that system included the short-lived "Five Dynasties" courts of the Yellow River Basin, as well as players that the orthodox narrative treats even more marginally, such as the pre-dynastic Jin of the Hedong region. This is the same Jin whom the Liao later helped to overthrow the Later Tang to become the third of the Five Dynasties (936–947), but who previously had maintained for decades a delicately balanced de facto independence from both the Liao and the early Five Dynasties courts. What the system did *not* include, Standen argues, was any concept of ethnicity, which she links explicitly to the modern idea of nation-state. Through the decades of the interregnum north China was a pastiche of peoples: Han, Kitan, Shatuo, to name but a few, all of whom were participants in the multi-centered system she describes.

Standen approaches her analysis through the concept of loyalty (*zhong* 忠). When single dynasties ruled China, especially in the later imperial era, interpretations of loyalty took literally Confucius's injunction that "ministers should serve their prince loyally" (*Lunyu* 3:19). At times of dynastic

turnover ministers could resist, withdraw, or collaborate; the former were positives, for they sustained loyalty to a single prince, but to collaborate with the new order was betrayal. When unified rule was the exception rather than the norm, she argues, loyalty was a more nuanced argument. Standen cites as exemplary the "loyal and upright" (*zhongyi* 忠義) biographies of the *Jiu Tangshu*, compiled under the Later Jin, as a text that reflects interregnum values (pp. 54–58). Not one of the fourteen entries extolled resistance or withdrawal; rather they laud defense of the dynasty against rebels and bandits or courageous criticism of the reigning emperor. Loyalty, she maintains, was not the absolute quality it became in the later history, but a more malleable virtue that could be adapted to the time.

After establishing her analytical framework, Standen turns to case studies of five men who "crossed the frontier" between the courts of the Yellow River and the Liao: Han Yanhui, Zhang Li, Zhao Yanshou, Li Huan, and Wang Jizhong. Standen explores the meaning and possibilities of loyalty in a changing world, from Han and Zhang, who moved between the "southern" court and Liao with apparent ease early in the interregnum, to Wang, who found himself caught in the northern court and cut off from his home and family in the south as the fixed border he helped define early in the eleventh century rendered frontier crossing well-nigh impossible. Her argument is that only as the "southern" courts of the Yellow River basin began to re-conceive of themselves as heirs to the entire Tang empire – a change of strategy that really began with the Later Zhou (951–960) and came to fruition under the successor Song – did a more rigid standard of loyalty assert itself. But for nearly a century, following the collapse of Tang authority in the course of Huang Chao's rebellion (874–884), while the politics of the north were in flux and the most stable entity was in fact the Liao, crossing was not only possible, but morally acceptable.

There is a great deal to admire about Standen's work: she has excellent control over her limited source base and uses it wisely to make her points. She has brought a new perspective to the study of northern China through the tenth-century interregnum, a period that has been too often overlooked by most historians. She has redefined the players in the politics of the period, placing the previously neglected Liao in a new position vis-à-vis northern China through the tenth century that will allow it to be neglected no more. For these reasons and many others, Standen's is an important book, one that deserves praise, and that will have a lasting impact on the study of Chinese history.

There is, however, one point about which this reviewer is dissatisfied, and that is Standen's assertion that the interregnum represented "a moment when … East Asia might conceivably have remained, like Europe, a congeries of competing states." Although she leaves it aside after her initial exploration, it is a background theme to her entire analysis and central to the way she approaches her data. Thus its validity is important to her entire book.

I often have reflected on the historical quirk that the opposite ends of Eurasia evolved in such different ways, Europe as many but China as one. A "quirk", perhaps, but one that I think is central to their respective identities. The belief that China ought to be unitary is one of the oldest verities in Chinese culture: Confucius invoked Kings Wen and Wu for many reasons, but surely one was the memory, more imagined than real perhaps but influential nonetheless, that under them there had been unity, and the Zhou court endured for so many years as a powerless shell because it embodied that unity. The prolonged Period of Disunion that followed the Han may have been a real threat to the ideal, but the reunification under Sui and Tang marked, I believe, the end to any possibility of enduring disunity. When Zhu Wen finally deposed the Tang court in 906/07 it was an acknowledgement that Tang legitimacy had evaporated; if he and his northern successors for the next five decades lacked the power to reunify the empire, however, it wasn't for lack of vision or faith in the ideal. Even the rulers of the autonomous Ten Kingdoms courts of the farther south turned to the Zhu's Later Zhou court for an affirmation of their legitimacy as *wang*, an affirmation Zhu Wen and his successors were happy to provide.

Therefore, in presenting the period as one when reunification was iffy, I believe Standen may be misstating reality. In so doing, moreover, she also may minimize an important possibility for the Liao, for in participating in the politics of the northern plain the Liao court was potentially entering the contest for the Mandate, the right to be the solitary ruler of all China. Standen does not neglect this, but rather rejects it, arguing that the Liao made no effort to conquer beyond the Great Wall. She states her argument well, but for her, after all, this was the moment when disunity could have become long-term. It is a provocative argument, and one that is important to her approach. My concern does not deny the importance of her book. But I believe the argument has yet to be satisfactorily made.

Samarcande et Samarra: Élites d'Asie centrale dans l'Empire Abbasside.
By Étienne de la Vaissière. Leuven: Peeters Press, 2007 (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, Studia Iranica, Cahier 35). Pp. 310.
ISBN 10: 2910640213; 13: 978-2910640217.

Violent Order: Religious Warfare, Chivalry, and the `Ayyār *Phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic World.*
By D.G. Tor. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2007 (Istanbul: Orient-Institute, Istanbuler Texte und Studien, Band 11). Pp. 318.
ISBN 10: 3899135539; 13: 978-3899135534.
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The two books under review are read profitably together. Each deals with third (AH)/ninth (AD) century Islamic history, but located against a wider backdrop: de la Vaissière, the long history of Transoxanian elites to the close of that century; Tor, the emergence of paramilitary organization in the medieval Near East to the late fifth/eleventh century. Each of the books considers regions – Transoxania and eastern Iran – that often are given short shrift in the analysis of early Islamic history. The two books also advance our understanding of medieval Near Eastern military history. Of particular value is their way of relating military matters to society and politics. Finally, de la Vaissière and Tor are to be commended for taking on large-scale questions. Each does so by insisting on a serious rethinking of the question at hand.

De la Vaissière initially conceived his book as a *compte-rendu* (p. 9) of this reviewer's *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords* (Albany, 2001). The book is the more valuable for taking on a wider aim: an account of the integration of the Central Asian aristocracy into the third/ninth century Abbasid Empire and the subsequent introduction of the slave military system (the subject of my work). De la Vaissière writes in a deft, spare style and frames difficult arguments nicely. He relies on a range of written sources in Chinese, Sogdian, Persian and Arabic (but, here, mostly works in translation), alongside numismatic, epigraphical and archeological evidence.

His view of the formation of the third/ninth century Turkish regiments is sharply revisionist. These regiments, it is widely held, heralded the arrival of the slave military (*mamlūk*) institution to Near Eastern/Islamic society, a system of recruitment, training and activity that would reach its apogee with the Mamluks of late medieval Egypt. De la Vaissière challenges the argument, one associated with David Ayalon, Daniel Pipes and Patricia Crone, mainly on two grounds: that it fails to account for Central Asian influences upon the caliphate and that it gets wrong the dating and introduction of the *mamlūk* system. De la Vaissière is happy to recognize the formation of said system – the question lies in making sense of its initiation in the first Abbasid period.