the combined value of these three particular gazetteers is greatly augmented by the fact that they collectively describe the same city at three different points in time, traversing a millennium and a half of history. This allows the three gazetteers the further weight of tracing historical developments in the city, and in its relationship to pan-imperial elite culture. This alleviates the primary weaknesses of using geographical texts as historical sources; geographies structure their accounts according to space, and in so doing compress time. But by juxtaposing three geographical texts from three distinct historical periods, one is able to analyze the interrelationships of time and space.

Milburn's translation and analysis is a valuable complement to Yinong Xu's *The Chinese City in Space and Time*, published in 2000 (Univ. of Hawai'i Press), which is also about the urban development of Suzhou. Xu's work is more analytical, presenting an intellectual framework for interpreting the historical developments of Suzhou, which he traces all the way to the twentieth century. Milburn's work, instead, focuses on the early and medieval developments of the city, and her analysis is more circumspect. In a few cases, she provides alternative interpretations of the evidence, such as when she argues that the early Suzhou's turtle-shell-like design should not be understood as a "forced extra-canonical" *fengshui* design as Xu argues, but as a residual layout from the original Gouwu "snail city" design, with its concentric rings defending the innermost area (p. 229). More generally, she merely tries to rein in Xu's conclusions about the early urban development of Suzhou that she argues go beyond the textual and archaeological evidence. But the two works have rather different goals; Milburn wants to make accessible English translations of the primary sources on which Xu's analysis of the early period relies.

There are a few comparatively minor weaknesses that detract somewhat from this otherwise excellent work of scholarship. One persistent problem is the author's lack of clarity about the relationship between the Wu region and the Central Plains. From her analysis of these three gazetteers she argues that the early urban planning of Suzhou did not align with "traditional Chinese city planning" (p. 209), but she is inconsistent about her use of "China" as either a cultural sphere (as in p. 209) or a political entity (as in p. 226). Within this ambiguity, she tends to overstate in her historical narratives the Chinese-ness of the Yangzi region. For example, she states that from the Qin unification onward "the lands of the ancient southern kingdom of Wu came to be regarded as part of the heartland of the empire" (p. 13), and describes the Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasties as "ethnically Chinese states" (p. 15), even though a few pages later in her narrative of social developments she emphasizes the multiethnic character of the city of Suzhou (and the rest of the Jiangnan region) (pp. 27–30). She notes the debate over the degree to which the Wu region was influenced by fourth-century immigrants from the Central Plains (pp. 31–32), but does not stake out a position herself, even though the gazetteers she is working with could potentially contribute greatly to this debate. Finally, University of Washington Press has published the book without any Chinese characters. For the most part, this was merely an annoyance, but there were a few times when it impeded understanding. For example, on page 229 the reader is told that the appendix to *Records of the Land of Wu* states that the city was "designed by Wu Zixu in the form of the character *ya*," but the reader is left assuming which *ya* character that is.

But these fairly minor shortcomings do not overturn the considerable contribution that this book makes to the field of early and medieval Chinese studies. Milburn's fine translations and circumspect analysis of these three gazetteers open the door for these otherwise neglected primary sources to be incorporated into broader historical analyses on urban development, architecture, Buddhist monasteries, and regionalism in early and medieval China.

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From Warhorses to Ploughshares: The Later Tang Reign of Emperor Mingzong. By Richard L. Davis. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014. Pp. xvi + 219. $60.

This book is Richard Davis's latest contribution to the study of China's Five Dynasties period (907–59). Its focus is the reign of one emperor during this period of political division. Specifically, Davis

has set out to produce an assessment of the career of Emperor Mingzong of the Later Tang dynasty (926–33). This is a most welcome effort. Although there has been a recent increase in the amount of scholarship on the Five Dynasties period (including publications by Hugh Clark, Glen Dudbridge, Peter Lorge, and Naomi Standen, to name just a few), the period still draws relatively little attention despite its chronologically central place in the Tang-Song transition. Davis, first with his translation of a significant portion of Ouyang Xiu's *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* and now two volumes on Later Tang imperial reigns (the current volume and a volume on the preceding emperor Zhuangzong published in Chinese), has emerged as a major contributor to the field.

In the current volume, Davis presents Mingzong's reign as a high point in Five Dynasties political history. His account emphasizes three dimensions of Mingzong's career. First, he argues that Mingzong's own aspirations, which were to craft a "regime of reasonable taxes, modest expenditures, minimal corruption, and vigilant oversight" (p. 1), led directly to his subsequent reputation for responsible government. Second, Davis interprets Mingzong's reign as "a microcosm of the trend toward civilian rule" (p. 3), laying the foundation for developments in the allocation of power between the late Tang and the subsequent Northern Song period. Finally, by integrating a discussion of the cultural background of the Later Tang emperors as members of the nomadic Shatuo ethnic group, he argues that Mingzong adjusted the practice of government by "weaving nomadic cultural and religious practices into the fabric of imperial life" (p. 3). Indeed, Davis sees this last dimension as an important responsibility given the subsequent disappearance of the Shatuo from history, describing it as a "sacred trust" (p. 2).

To support these propositions, the book is divided into six chapters with an epilogue added as a conclusion: (1) People and Places; (2) Royal Passage; (3) Political Events: The Tiancheng Reign, 926–30; (4) Political Events: The Changxing Reign, 930–33; (5) Institutions, Reforms, and Political Culture; and (6) Volatile Periphery. These chapters essentially constitute two large sections. After chapter one introduces the main *dramatis personae*, the next three chapters (two through four) provide a narrative of Mingzong's rise to power and his reign. The final two chapters analyze thematically the domestic political dynamics of the reign and its main security challenges. Mingzong is compared favorably to other rulers of both the Later Tang dynasty and its rival states and portrayed throughout as an able ruler who keeps the interests of the dynasty and the livelihoods of the common people ever in mind. Davis uses accessible language to present his evaluation, so the work will appeal to those in the growing field of global medieval history. Yet both these efforts—to evaluate a premodern emperor and to articulate the evaluation in non-specialist terminology—entail risks. It is to those risks that I would now turn.

Let me begin with the decision to use language and concepts that are not standard in Sinological circles. This has the potential to make the narrative both accessible to the general reader and available as a source for historians doing comparative work. The danger, however, is that the terminology distorts the phenomena described. In several cases, I think Davis's language may do this. The first examples involve language crafted to invoke analogies to modern American governmental practice. Perhaps the clearest case is the use of "administration" as a way of describing an imperial reign. Take, for example, the following passage: "Zhuangzong had launched the Tongguang reign of Later Tang with high expectations due to his winning record in war, but *his administration* took a negative turn early on due to the mediocrity of his circle of intimates, the insularity of his Inner Palace, and the haste with which he reached critical decisions" (p. 39, emphasis added). Such phrasing will be comfortable for non-specialist American readers accustomed to thinking about politics in terms of changes in "administrations." But the term brings with it other, inappropriate associations. In particular, it suggests predictable rhythms of political change as well as wholesale changes of personnel throughout the highest echelons of the executive organs of government. Moreover, governance organized by "administration" also potentially suggests that the imperial bureaucracy was divided into branches, such that one branch shifted with political transitions while others were insulated from them. None of this holds for imperial government prior to the twentieth century in China. Certainly, a new emperor might promote officials who he thought would enact his vision effectively, but much of the bureaucratic personnel was stable through imperial transitions. And if an emperor wanted to change any personnel in the imperial bureaucracy at any time, he was free to do so within the limits of his perception of his legitimate exercise of sovereignty.

The use of "administration" as a designation for a single reign by itself invites misinterpretation, but is compounded by other turns of phrase. For example, Mingzong is referred to as the "country's commander-in-chief" (p. 67). On the surface, there is nothing particularly wrong here. The emperor, as sovereign, certainly had ultimate authority over military force in the empire. Here again, however, the resonance with American usage may suggest a distinction to the unwary that is alien to the imperial tradition. In the modern American formulation, the assertion that the elected head of state is simultaneously the "commander-in-chief" is a constitutional statement about the supremacy of civilian leadership over the military establishment. There is no doubt that imperial tradition assigned ritual primacy to the ranks of the civil officials over military officials, but it is important not to obscure the idea that the emperor as *sui generis* transcended the distinction between civil and military authority. It was in this sense that he was understood to have responsibility to make use of civil (*wen*) measures and martial (*wu*) intervention as appropriate to the moment.

On the balance between these two groups, Davis does make an important argument about the ultimate interest of emperors in establishing firm control over the military and the role of the Five Dynasties period in laying the foundation for the stabilization of the civil bureaucracy and the centralization of military control, but the phrasing needs to be more precise. A reader familiar with Chinese political history will have no trouble understanding the issues, but the non-specialist may well misread a sentence like the following: "A pattern seems to have emerged early on that involved a broader franchise for civilians" (p. 65). The context makes clear that Davis is speaking specifically about the court roles of civil and military officials (that phrase appears earlier in the paragraph), but the unfortunate use of the more generic term "civilian" juxtaposed with the word "franchise" evokes an electoral system involving the general population.

These terminological choices have a cumulative impact on the general reader. Other linguistic decisions may affect those doing comparative analysis. Thus, various independent and semi-autonomous strongmen are described as "satraps" (e.g., pp. 34 and 157). This is a term that is not commonly seen in Sinological scholarship (although it does appear sporadically, as in Charles Hucker's *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, p. 144), but it has both precise scholarly and general analogical meanings. Using it in this context requires at least some explanation. Similarly, the introduction of the concept of "race" in discussing the distinctions between Han Chinese and those from nomadic groups (p. 138) calls for a careful justification of its applicability given the loaded senses in which that term is deployed in other cultural contexts.

I have so far focused on how the narrative of Later Tang history is articulated and the ways this might cause confusion. However, a second concern is Davis's assessment of Mingzong as a ruler. I do not object to the positive evaluation that Mingzong receives in the book. The issue is the criteria which bring Davis to that evaluation. The argument repeatedly seems to slip from analysis to moral judgment, a judgment that often seems to reproduce the perspective of his sources. Thus, the full comment surrounding the usage of "commander-in-chief" cited above reads as follows: "Confucian Society worked best when men of war knew something about the moral codes embodied in the rites ordering society. And the message promised to reach a broader audience, coming from the lips of the country's commander-in-chief" (p. 67). Even when Davis criticizes Mingzong, he does so on the grounds of traditional Chinese historiography: "Naming marginally literate warriors to civilian posts was commonplace in the Five Dynasties, but Mingzong had the opportunity to change this *unfortunate practice and failed*" (p. 68, emphasis added). Elsewhere he gravitates toward a moral assessment that seems modeled on the standards of the early sources. Thus, when discussing a release of deer from Mingzong's hunting preserve as a demonstration of imperial clemency, Davis observes: "Sources do not elaborate on the reasons for releasing only seven deer, as opposed to the entire population, but a token release is better than none at all" (p. 78). Davis seems to be suggesting here that Mingzong's actions were less than ideal since they represented merely a minimal conformity with traditional expectations for compassion. In this judgment, he continues the early historians' project through an even more rigorous application of their standards.

The blurring of moral standards is perhaps clearest in Davis's depiction of women. The moral assessment of women, especially imperial women, comes off as somewhat regressive. For example, the

presentation of the death of Emperor Zhuangzong, Mingzong's adopted father and imperial predecessor, emphasizes his moral failings in a telling manner: "Sometime before expiring, he [Zhuangzong] had been abandoned by his wife, Empress Liu, numerous consorts, and family members, who chose to scatter widely in search of sanctuary, rather than die with dignity at his side." While I would grant that this abandonment may speak to Zhuangzong's inability to inspire loyalty among his intimates, introducing the idea that the moral choices consisted of either abandonment or death "with dignity" at least rhetorically seems to suggest that proper female behavior is self-sacrifice for the husband, a curiously traditional Confucian perspective for a modern historian. Even if we grant that the purpose of the comment is to condemn Zhuangzong, we still have a vision in which women accepting death for their husbands or masters is the proper moral condition. The same perspective informs the book's final lines, an account of the overthrow of the last Later Tang emperor (Mingzong's adopted son). There we learn that, as the Later Tang was collapsing, Mingzong's widow, the Empress Cao, chose to commit suicide by self-immolation. The significance of this is described thus: "The story stands as testimonial to the moral backbone of the unusually demure Empress Cao, whose devotion to husband and country exceeded even her love of life." Davis again seems to have internalized the moral compass of official historiography. Why should we equate moral character with demureness? Is self-immolation evidence of a "moral backbone" or is it evidence of false consciousness? I would accept that she accorded with the expectations of the Confucian-inspired imperial historians. I am less certain that this tells us much about the state of the Later Tang at the moment of its demise.

My discussion of what I see as an excessively moralistic framework informing the book's interpretations of the period is not simply a disagreement about preferred ethical standards to be adopted by modern historians. Instead, the employment of this framework diverts Davis from a more analytical assessment of Later Tang in China's historical development during the Five Dynasties period. Davis does see the issues, but more than I would wish, he pulls back from a full assessment of those issues and returns to the narrative structure and moral framework for understanding Mingzong's actions. This has the advantage of bringing Mingzong to life, but the trade-off is the neglect of significant historical processes. Davis does, for example, allude to the changing social composition of the Later Tang bureaucracy (p. 124), the role of Mingzong and his court in pioneering new fiscal institutions (p. 148), and the implications of alterations to the so-called "protection privilege" by which the lineal descendants of high-ranking officials were guaranteed positions in the bureaucracy (p. 125). But in each case, he leaves the topic with a simple general statement about the development without engaging other scholarly discussions. Given his mastery of the primary sources, I had hoped that he would engage the emerging scholarship to paint a more concrete account of the various developments that must have been underway. Perhaps that will be forthcoming in his future work.

Finally, I would mention a couple of technical issues of a Sinological nature. Dating in the volume is a bit idiosyncratic and somewhat redundant. Throughout, dates appear in a hybrid form with the Julian year accompanied by the Chinese month and day. This is fine since it is necessary to render dates for English-language readers in the familiar Western chronology. It is also important to distinguish clearly the number of the Chinese month from the corresponding Western month (i.e., the Chinese fourth month does not correspond to April, but to a range of possible dates from mid-April to mid-June). The oddity is that Davis has chosen to render dates using two different formats without converting them to precise Western equivalents. Thus, throughout the text, we find locutions such as: "on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month (926.04.25)" (p. 60). It is not clear to me what the numerical rendering adds to the verbal version. Indeed, I think it is likely to lead those unfamiliar with Chinese dating conventions to think of April 25 instead of the actual date of June 8. My suggestion would be that if numerals are given, the conversions should be carried out, otherwise leave it in verbal form where there is less temptation to read the date unreflectively.

Another area that I think could use a little more Sinological precision is in the translation of bureaucratic titles. There are a number of offices that are referred to in ways that introduce ambiguity. For example, on page 41, reference is made to "*the* military commissioner" (emphasis added) Guo Chongtao. Since neither Chinese characters nor the Romanization for the title are given, it is not easy to figure out what this is. It seems that Guo held the post of *shumi shi* 樞密使, the head of the *shumi yuan* 樞

密院, the organ that controlled the central government's military forces. The problem is that there continued to be officials bearing the title *jiedu shi* 節度使 outside the capital, and these are generally referred to using the translation "military commissioners." Hucker, in his *Dictionary*, recognizes the potential for ambiguity and therefore distinguishes between the "military commissioners" (p. 144) in the regional commands and the "military affairs commissioner" (p. 436) in the capital. Given the role of the regional commanders in Five Dynasties history, it is imperative that the distinction be clear if the reader is to understand the narrative. I would suggest conforming to Hucker or devising some alternative terminology (with explanatory notes) to clarify such points for specialists.

My reservations above should not obscure the fact that Richard Davis has made an important contribution to our knowledge of Five Dynasties political history. By going beyond his translation of the *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* and producing an integrated narrative of the reign of a particularly important monarch during the period, he has opened a window into the concrete conditions faced by the succession of states which governed the various regions of the old Tang dynasty. I will happily have my students read the volume as an introduction to the historical actors of the period. Notwithstanding that important contribution, the primacy that Davis gives to the narrative and his willingness to incorporate elements of a moral evaluation do come at the expense of a more detached, analytical account of the Later Tang's place in the processes of the Tang-Song transition. It is my hope that we will see that in his future publications.

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