

Patrons and Patriarchs: Regional Rulers and Chan Monks During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. By BENJAMIN BROSE. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, Kuroda Institute Studies of East Asian Buddhism #25, 2015. xiv + 5 maps + 242 pp., including appendices. \$55.00 (hardcover).

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As Benjamin Brose states at the opening of his wonderful book, “This is a study of elite Chan monks in southeastern China during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms” (1). It is indeed that, but it is also much more. The author, who has been working since his 2009 doctoral dissertation on issues connected to the doctrinal and political role of Chan through the century of the Tang-Song Interregnum, has made an important contribution to the reassessment of that transitional century that has been underway in western scholarship at least for the past decade.

As Brose explains, since Ouyang Xiu’s dismissal of the era and especially of the rulers and courtiers of the so-called Ten Kingdoms as “bandits... with tattooed faces and shaved heads,”¹ the Interregnum has been treated as the death throes of the illustrious Tang, and the southern kingdoms have been “typically cast as illegitimate, rogue regimes” (4). As has become increasingly apparent through a range of recent studies, however, far from being a chaotic and desperate conclusion to a Golden Age, the Interregnum, especially in the southern kingdoms, marks the beginning of the trends that reached their fruition in the glories that were Song. Where others have focused on political consolidation,² social organization,³ even trade and economics,⁴ Brose focuses on religious networks formed by Chan monks and their relationship to the new state structures in the South. As he puts it, “this book argues that many of the literary traditions, monastic institutions, and political privileges commonly associated with Song-dynasty Chan were already in place in southeast China during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms” (7).

Brose defines his approach as “prosopographical,” an historiographical approach that was popular several decades ago but had gone out of favor until recently—one might think of Nicholas Tackett’s magisterial study of Tang elites, to which Brose refers often, as a model of renewed interest in the approach.⁵ Basing his analysis on three

¹Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Wudai shi*, from Richard Davis, *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 467, with adaptation.

²See, for example, Johannes Kurz, *China’s Southern Tang Dynasty, 937–976* (London: Routledge, 2011), and Hongjie Wang, *Power and Politics in Tenth-Century China: The Former Shu Regime* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011). See also the essays in *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms*, edited by Peter Lorge (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011).

³See my own *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River valley (Fujian) from the Late Tang through the Song* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007).

⁴I treat both in “The Southern Kingdoms between the Tang and the Sung,” *Cambridge History of China*, vol 5, “Part One: The Sung Dynasty and Its Predecessors, 907–1279,” edited by Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially 171–188.

⁵*The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014). Beverly Bossler’s *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, and the State in Sung China (960–1279)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1998) is an earlier example.

compilations of “monastic biographies” compiled in the tenth and eleventh centuries—*Zu tang ji* 祖堂集, *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄, *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳—Brose illustrates the dense network of master-disciple relationships among the monks who rose to prominence across the southeast through the Interregnum.

After two initial chapters devoted to the last years of the Tang, in which he argues there was continuity across the Emperor Wuzong’s persecutions of Buddhism in the 840s and so rejects the long-received opinion that institutional Buddhism had been seriously disrupted,⁶ Brose gets to the meat of his argument: Whereas in the Tang Chan had been a marginal factor in Buddhism, largely restricted to “the hinterlands of southeastern China” (41), as a new political order consolidated across the south in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, the newly-empowered political class appointed regional Chan masters to powerful abbacies in their capitals in exchange for “their sanction and service” (47). These masters, in turn, perpetuated their authority, both religious and political, through their disciples and the monastic “lineages” that ensued.

Although altogether there were nine kingdoms in the south through the Interregnum century, Brose is focused on only three: Min (Fujian), Southern Tang (Jiangnan), and WuYue (Zhejiang). Across three successive chapters he traces the development of Chan lineages that began in Min, spread to Southern Tang, and finally flourished in WuYue. Min was by far the least stable of the three, a point that is central to Brose’s thesis. It was in the instability of Min that two patriarchs, Xuefeng Yicun 雪峰義存 and Xuansha Shibeī 玄沙師備, established their lineages. Brose argues that as instability overwhelmed each kingdom in turn—Min succumbing to internal fratricide; Southern Tang to the invasion of first the Latter Zhou and then of the Song; and WuYue not really succumbing but surrendering to the inevitability of the Song—the heirs to these two—their “lineages”—dispersed throughout the kingdoms of the southeast.

Brose, however, is interested in more than just the dispersal of Chan lineages throughout the southeast. In each kingdom, he demonstrates, leading Chan clerics, almost all of whom were heirs to lines of masters that lead back eventually to either Yicun or Shibeī of Min, worked in close conjunction with the political elite: “Leading Chan clerics in Min established strong institutional bases and were fully integrated into the kingdom’s political power structures” (69); “In Southern Tang... [the clerical network of Fayuan Wenyi 法眼文益, heir to Shibeī] was able to encompass and incorporate the prevailing Buddhist cultures of the region while maintaining, through the exclusivity of their lineage, their privileged position as the court’s favored clerics” (86); “by the reign of WuYue’s last king, Qian Chu 錢俶, the royal family appears to have channeled its support almost exclusively to the lineage of Xuansha Shibeī” (90). In the process, and especially as it evolved in WuYue, Brose is interested in the definition—or, one might say, the lack of definition—of Chan orthodoxy, arguing that “Chan” came much more to mean clerical association than to mean any kind of ritual or doctrinal unity.

Finally Brose turns to the reunified empire of the Song and the emerging dominance of the Linji 臨濟 lineage, a line of Chan orthodoxy that had survived the turmoil of the North

⁶Brose realizes this is not a path-breaking assertion. Here and elsewhere in his text he relies heavily on the work of Suzuki Tetsuo, Albert Welter, and Yanagida Seizan, among others, all of whom have contributed to a reassessment of post-persecution Buddhism, and does an excellent job locating his work in relationship to theirs.

through the Interregnum and displaced the southeastern lineages in the affections of the secular political elite. While not refuting the reality of Linji dominance, however, he challenges the standard interpretation. Arguing that “scholars have usually attributed the demise of [the southeastern lineages] to the conservatism of [their] teachings” (115), he argues instead that the Song court promoted Linji for political reasons: The southeastern monks were too closely tied to their respective court patrons, while the Linji clerics owed their emergent power in the religious hierarchy to the Song. Critical to this argument, moreover, is his assertion that the relationship between Linji and the Song secular political elite replicated the relationship between courts and clerics in the recently independent South: “Rather than link themselves directly with the standard-bearers of southeastern Buddhist culture, Song courtiers instead constructed new networks of affiliation and obligation, allying themselves with monastic communities that had an established presence in northern China and had demonstrated their loyalty to the Song court” (131).

This is a very closely argued book, brimming with dense information. Perhaps one could nitpick about the myriad of clerics who populate its pages. Keeping track can be a challenge, but that myriad is the very essence of Brose’s argument: By no means were all monks in the southern kingdoms members heirs to Yicun or Shibe, but it was the relationship between those heirs and the courts that patronized them that mattered. Brose does admit, however, to an historiographical shortcoming: Referencing the three texts on which so much of his analysis rests, he admits that what we can learn has “largely been framed and filtered through the editorial choices and ideological agendas of these texts’ editors” (8). Two of the three compendia, *Zutang ji* and *Jingde chuandeng lu*, were compiled within the framework of the southeastern court-cleric alliance, while the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, although a product of the early Song, was compiled by a native of WuYue. They thus perpetuate an image of exclusive power at the expense of other possible coexistent networks that did not receive court patronage. It is perhaps for this reason that he admits, in conclusion, that his conclusions are “provisional” (140).

Such provisionality, however, should not detract from the importance of Brose’s book. As another nail in the coffin of Ouyang Xiu’s 歐陽脩 dismissive approach to the southern kingdoms of the Interregnum, as another support in the growing structure of studies that recognize the importance of those kingdoms to the definition of Song culture and so late imperial Chinese culture, this is an important study.

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If there’s one uncontested fact about the Chinese intellectual, it is the sense of being a part of a culture with a long history. Hence, to understand Chinese intellectuals, we need to understand the main themes of Chinese history that serve as reference points for Chinese intellectuals today. Ideally, the scholar of Chinese intellectual history would start in the Spring and