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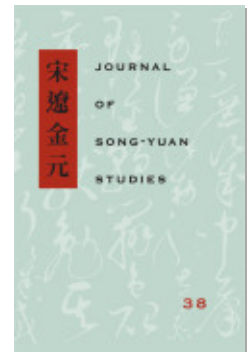
Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China (review)

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Naomi Standen. *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China*.

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. Pp. xiii + 279, 11 maps, 2 figs., 4 tables. \$53.00 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-0-8248-2983-4.

Standen divides the contents of her publication into an "Introduction" (pp. 1–12), and six chapters arranged in two parts. Part I bears the title "Borders, Boundaries, and Frontier Crossers: Concepts and Backgrounds" (pp. 13–104). It comprises three chapters about "Rethinking Categories," "Notions and Uses of Loyalty (*zhong*)," and "Crossing Boundaries and Shifting Borders: The First-generation Liao Southerners." Part II "Working for the Liao: Life Stories" (pp. 105–185) equally consists of three chapters (4 to 6): "Loyalties in the Borderlands: The Founder and the Confucian," "An Emerging Boundary: Two Approaches to Serving the Liao," and "Drawing the Line: Redefinitions of Loyalty." She includes in Part II the "Conclusion: Locating Borders: Then, Now, and In Between." By analogy to the "Introduction," the "Conclusion" should have separately concluded the text of the volume. The reader finds a helpful appendix on frontier crossings arranged chronologically from 902 to 1004 (pp. 186–210), providing names of individuals, places, sources, and other references of frontier crossings, along with notes to the chapters, a glossary, and bibliography. An investigation on borders and borderland should have maps giving degrees of latitude and longitude.

Her "Introduction" starts: "The reality of China as it exists today is impossible to ignore. But that should not lead us to imagine that China—or its borders—were a historical inevitability." As a consequence of adopting "terminology that carries the minimum of ethnic and cultural baggage," she defines the region under discussion as simply the "frontier." Moreover, "in order to avoid mentioning 'China' and so prejudging the issue," Standen simply refers "to the North and South within the frontier region" (p. 31). "Chinese" and "Kitan" are reserved for discussion of specific cultural, as opposed to political, matters (p. 32).

Standen's work "provides a case study of some of the ways in which borders and boundaries functioned before the invention of the nation-state and the development of the narrative of nationalism" (p.1). She outlines her approach to the tenth century and the problem of frontier crossers and what she calls "unbounded loyalty." The chief matter of Standen's book is "the varied relationship between people and frontiers, as seen in the choices people made regarding their allegiances" in the tenth century (p. 2). When applying moral

standards formulated by eleventh-century historians like Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang, the period under consideration is regarded as one of “renegades, turncoats, and even traitors” (p. 2). But, so Standen argues, such later standards assume that “political borderlines are clear-cut” and “correlate unproblematically with boundaries of identity and allegiance, and accordingly that frontier crossing is deviant. When these anachronistic criteria are thrust back on the past, the frontier crossers . . . must be either condemned or excused.” So she tries to make a case “for treating the choices and actions of frontier crossers as normal behavior, that may invite explanation but requires no justification” (p. 3).

In her opinion the role and the significance of the Liao in tenth-century history, in the wider context of the Tang-Song transition, has been neglected. She claims that “the greatest concern has been to explain how we get *to* the Song rather than how we get *from* the Tang. That is, scholars have chiefly sought the Tang (or earlier) origins of phenomena that characterize the Song, and have paid much less attention to considering what happened, under later regimes, to phenomena characteristic of the Tang.” Thus she concludes: “Hence the Liao have been considered as the enemy and equal of the Song in the later tenth century, but their political dominance during the century as a whole, and their concomitant role in shaping the post-Tang world, has been marginalized” (p. 3). For the post-Tang world the assertion should be qualified: the author is talking about political dominance north of the territory of the Five Dynasties and the Northern Han in Hedong province. The tenth-century Song emperors considered the Liao a political enemy, but certainly not the legitimate successor of the Tang or a dynasty equal in terms of culture to their own. Thus the search for Tang origins for the transformational processes taking place in the transitional period and later shaping and finally characterizing the Song rule and society may be regarded as an outcome when looking for continuity and rupture in a historical narrative. But if we look into the question of “how we get *from* the Tang” and “what happened to phenomena characteristic of the Tang” the author should base her judgement not only on political events and publications of historians. Standen concedes that “archaeological research enjoyed a huge burgeoning since the 1990s” but regards it as “another matter” (p. 216n27). Archaeological and architectural research of recent decades reveals that the Tang origins of Liao achievements have not been marginalized and really

provide a different and most impressive picture of the efforts undertaken by the alien regime to accept the Tang heritage and to follow in the Tang footsteps. In many ways—in particular as far as cultural and religious influences are concerned—the Liao dynasty was as much a product of the late Tang as the Five Dynasties (p. 8).

In “Rethinking Categories” Standen deals with borders, ethnicity, and loyalty. According to her interpretation, the tenth-century “emphasis was on bonds of allegiance and authority rather than territorial divisions” (p. 18). In her opinion “the concept of China or a Middle Kingdom was frequently no more than an ideal. Whether we regard imperial China as united or disunited during the confusing middle period from Tang to Yuan depends on whether we consider territory or authority” (p. 24). When comparing this period of Chinese history with pre-Tang history it is difficult to subscribe to this interpretation. The issue of ethnicity is important when Standen makes her case that cultural identity did not determine people’s action and ethnicity did not exist. She writes: “In its classic conception, cultural identity derives from factors many of which were first identified by nineteenth-century theorists of nationalism and subsequently adopted by twentieth-century ethnographers, including language, dress, foodways, beliefs and attitudes, customs, propensity for particular occupations, and so on” (p. 27). Is it really so? Here I may ask, what, for example, to make of Han Yu’s statement in the essay titled *Yuandao* 原道 from the early years of the ninth century: “When Confucius wrote the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he treated all feudal lords who observed barbarian customs as barbarians, and as “Chinese” those who had advanced in the ways of the ‘Central States’ (Zhongguo).”¹

Due to the fact that “ethnicity is not helpful as an organizing category,” Standen rather prefers to deploy a concept that did have meaning for tenth-century people, the idea of loyalty, or *zhong* (p. 32). “Loyalty,” in the opinion of Standen, “is a relative concept” which has to be separated “from both the concept of ethnicity and from associations with a particular territory” (p. 33). In chapter 2 titled “Fed or Dead,” which condenses the whole problem of tenth century loyalty in three words, Standen is telling her reader the story of notions and uses of loyalty from the first millennium B.C. to the eleventh century. I doubt that a reader interested to learn about frontier crossings in

1. Han Yu, “Yuandao,” in *Han Changli quanji* (Sibu beiyao ed.), 11: 4a.

the tenth century—a highly specialized subject—does need such a survey. The Tang and Wudai interpretations of *zhong* would have sufficed.

Standen's historical study—like many of her colleagues' publications on Chinese history published in the English-speaking world—presents theories and theoretical implants borrowed from political science, sociology, and other fields of social sciences before starting with the historic narrative. In my opinion, applying the methodology and tools of history in combination with Sinological competence suffices in many cases of research on Chinese history to compose a well-documented and convincing manuscript on a specific topic. Of course I'm well aware of the importance of concepts and theories of social sciences for the interpretation of historical problems. Nevertheless, let me ask the general question: Is it really a service to the reader and helpful for the understanding of Chinese history to load all sorts of social science theories in a book designed for historians and other specialists of Chinese history instead of limiting the social science input to the necessary, down-sized theoretical essentials in the relevant chapters only? Why is it nowadays taken for granted that social science methodology intrudes into almost all fields of history and thus in many cases takes the place of the historian's methodology and edges out historical philology? History should not become an auxiliary science of social science. Anyway, if historians investigate the source material well and present the narrative in a competent way, the social reality with all its implications for society will emerge. In that case the theoretical framework can easily be missed. This applies for Standen's book as well. In the chapters 3 to 6 Standen tells a good story of frontier crossings. She gives evidence of her knowledge and her methodological skill by choosing, investigating, and presenting the historical events and personalities of the frontier crossing officials against the background of changing concepts of loyalty. "Frontier crossing" means actions that involve moving from one side to the other of at least one border (but always within the frontier zone) [pp. 19–20]. It could mean the crossing of an individual or up to over a million households (p. 65). More than two hundred cases of crossing are recorded in the annalistic sources. She distinguishes various types of crossings: voluntary crossings, crossings under duress, and involuntary crossings. Furthermore she investigates "Han" and "non-Han" crossings between 900 and 1004. Crossings came to an end after the Song-Liao agreement of Shanyuan in 1005 (p. 104).

In her case study, she analyzes the biographies and motives of frontier crossings on the basis of five biographies of officials who switched sides: Han Yanhui (882–959) and Zhang Li (d. 947) of the earliest phase from ca. 900 to 936 (pp. 107–123), Zhao Yanshou (d. 948) the master of Zhang Li (pp. 124–148), Li Huan (d. 962), and Wang Jizhong (pp. 149–171). The five biographies set in the historical framework of the Five Dynasties, the Song and the Liao dynasties provide a good insight into a difficult century of Chinese history, when not only fragmentations of territory and major transformational processes in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms took place but also the dominant political and military power of the Qidan Liao dynasty ruled over north China. The Han-Chinese officials living in the borderland under most difficult circumstances had to accommodate themselves to this alien regime. She competently answers the questions on the basis of Chinese biographical and historical sources of how and why civil and military officials shifted their allegiance and loyalty from the rulers of the short-lived Five Dynasties to the Liao. What mattered to Han Yanhui was creating opportunities for himself and for those important to him. It may be of interest to note that Han Yi (936–995), a third generation descendant of Han Yanhui, and his wife, née Wang (d. 1011), still enjoyed imperial privileges half a century later.² The cases of Zhang Li and Zhao Yanshou are more complicated. Their changing sides were rooted in personal ambitions, and after 936 they both felt that they deserved greater recognition than they got. The extraordinarily designed and built multi-chambered tomb of Zhao Yanshou's step-father Zhao Dejun (d. 937) and his mother Mme Chong (d. 957) was excavated near Beijing in 1959.³ Wang Jizhong (d. 1022), originally a Song military official, was taken prisoner by the Liao in 1003 and would become famous as the Liao negotiator of the treaty of Shanyuan with the Song. Standen concludes "Wang Jizhong remained, in the end, a practitioner of hierarchical loyalty in a time of transition. . . . So whereas in 900 the changing of masters was regarded as unexceptionable and largely unproblematical, by 1005 the equivalent action had become a transgression of boundaries . . ." (p. 175). Practical allegiance had become a question of loyalty.

In her "Conclusion," Standen justifies once more her methodological

2. Dieter Kuhn, *Die Kunst des Grabbaus. Kuppelgräber der Liao-Zeit (907–1125)* (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 1997), 63–66, fig. 20: tomb of Han Yi and his wife, 1011, Beijing.

3. See Kuhn, *Die Kunst des Grabbaus*, 145–147.

approach and is confident that her choice of the concept *zhong* for her study leads “to a better understanding of a world long buried under the accretions of centuries of moralizing historiography” (p. 185). Her book is in the first place a valuable contribution to the tenth-century Qidan Liao history which contains most useful materials, indispensable for future research. It offers an insightful perspective on the Han-Chinese/alien regime border relations and borderland biographies of officials involved. Standen’s *Unbounded Loyalty* will certainly become a standard work on Chinese history of the tenth century.

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Mark Halperin. *Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China, 960–1279*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006. Pp. 364. \$49.95 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-0-674-02265-2.

Out of the Cloister offers an informative and insightful reading of carefully selected commemorative inscriptions (*chi* 記) on temple buildings from literary collections, gazetteers, and inscription collections. The author reads these documents as evidence of a new and distinctively Sung discourse on Buddhism. He discusses the inscriptions in terms of four central themes: the shared understanding of Buddhism and its place and history in China (Chapter 2 “Protecting the Dharma”), the relationship between Buddhism and the Sung state (Chapter 3 “Imperial Shrines”), contrasting attitudes toward temple restoration (Chapter 4 “Deplorable Displays and Edifying Examples”), and concern over familial ties and personal reminiscences (Chapter 5 “Personal Matters”). Each section begins with a learned and sensitive essay on the larger significance of its theme. Halperin carefully notes what is known about the life of the author of the inscription and the context of its composition. He brings to the analysis of the inscriptions a wealth of knowledge about the period, making each section a richly textured study of certain aspects of Sung Buddhism. To me it is these illuminating commentaries that make this book particularly important and of lasting value. It takes some effort to work through these subtle, and sometimes complex, commentaries, but those who take the time will be amply rewarded. A remarkably lively and sophisticated picture of Sung literati engagement with Buddhism emerges from this close reading of temple inscriptions. In what