Historicizing Fear
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In 717 C.E., a bear was found entering the walled city of Guangzhou during the day, and the animal even entered the gate of the area commander. The soldiers chased it for ten li (5 kilometers) and then killed it. After more than a month, the area commander, Li Chujian, died. When the head commissioner, Zhu Sixian, was assigned to take Li Chujian’s place, he strongly opposed the assignment and delayed going for half a year. When he finally went to Guangzhou, he, too, died. Afterward, both the celebrated soldier Sima Song and the head commissioner, Dou Chongjia, went south to Guangzhou and died in succession.¹ This fictional story represents one way the elites of the Tang dynasty viewed the southern parts of their empire. The story is structured so that the death of the bear is the necessary and sufficient cause for the subsequent untimely deaths of officials sent to Guangzhou. These deaths have a supernatural cause in the story that cannot be avoided or counteracted—the mere act of going to the south caused the three officials to die. However, behind this proximate cause lies the historical reality of a subtropical Guangzhou rife with diseases to which northern officials had no immunity. This view exhibits the deep fears Tang elites had of their southern territories and evokes the strong sense that anything could happen in such a dangerous environment.

During the Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.), most of the territories that now comprise the People’s Republic of China were united in a strong and flourishing empire. Many of the institutions that are credited with encouraging centralized authority—such as the civil service examinations to enter government service—were adopted during
the Tang dynasty. However, the Tang elites, drawing on the experiences of previous generations, viewed the southern part of their empire as a wild and dangerous place, and they considered the indigenous peoples of that region to be almost subhuman worshippers of demonic forces. A long period of contact between Tang elites and the southern region, particularly in the city of Guangzhou, helped some Tang elites to move past the fears and *Othering* that were evident in earlier writings. The fears of the Tang elites reflected not just cross-cultural anxieties or simply the unease of a smaller conquering group ruling over a large subordinate population. Their views of a southern Other reveal a struggle over the definition of which groups could and could not be considered “Chinese.” Over the course of the Tang dynasty, elites gradually came to accept the south, reconciling their fears and moving southerners out of the category of Other and into the category of Chinese. This historical example from the Tang dynasty illustrates that East Asian and pre-modern societies grappled with fears of the Other; the example also illustrates the way one society moved past such fears of the Other.

**BACKGROUND**

Geographically, the West River (Xi Jiang) basin, which comprised the southernmost region of the Tang realm, was very different from the temperate zone Yellow River valley that was the center of the Tang dynasty's imperial culture. The climate and soils of the south were very well suited for agriculture, so much so that it was possible to harvest two rice crops per year and six or more vegetable crops.² This region is separated from the Yangzi River basin and the rest of China by the Nanling range, which has an average elevation of about 3,000 feet above sea level, with some peaks rising to 6,000 feet above sea level. The entire area south of the Nanling range has been referred to as *Lingnan*, meaning “south of the mountains,” since early imperial times.³ Lingnan encompasses most of the Pearl River basin and the modern-day units of Guangdong and Hainan Provinces, the Guangxi Zhuang Ethnicity Autonomous Region, and sometimes northern Vietnam.

Scholars have largely ignored Lingnan when studying the expansion of the Han Chinese cultural sphere, preferring instead to study regions where the distinction between Han Chinese and the “Other” clearly stands out in the historical documents. A large body of scholarship has focused on the relationship between Han Chinese and their nomadic neighbors to the north, for example, or on the era of imperial expansion in the early modern period.⁴ This body of research, while not directly related to the study of the southern frontiers of Han Chinese expansion, reveals that the relations between cultures in East Asia frequently used the same techniques found in European history of knowledge production and narrative
building to create unequal power relations between the “us” society and the “them” societies. In some cases, these narratives created connections across cultures while still maintaining the superiority of the “us” society. But in many other cases, the narratives served to objectify the “them” societies as different and inferior.

The southward movement of Han Chinese over the centuries of “China’s march to the tropics” has been characterized as involving two aspects: (1) Han technological and cultural superiority versus its southern neighbors and (2) the flight, assimilation, or extinction of the indigenous southern peoples. Early scholarship on this issue stated that because of the difference in environments, the move southward by the Han Chinese was limited more by disease than by the indigenous people. These people, despite their efforts of resistance, were eventually overwhelmed by the waves of immigrants from the north.5 The frontier thus created was that of an unequal clash between the civilized Han invaders/immigrants and the unsophisticated indigenous groups, with the struggle inevitably resulting in Han success and indigenous sinification.

This simple model of the frontier has been altered by Richard Von Glahn, who has divided the frontier process in Song dynasty Sichuan into three non-linear stages: borderlands, peripheries, and hinterlands. In this model, the borderland represents the period when extraction by the imperial metropole is hampered by a lack of manpower. The periphery indicates that while the majority of the population is still non-Han Chinese, the central government has enough operatives in place for large-scale exploitation of the locality. Being a hinterland signifies that the majority of the population, regardless of ethnicity, has accepted the cultural norms of Han Chinese culture, with correspondingly strong links between the region and the metropole further supporting the economic integration of the region into the empire.6 When this model is applied to an earlier period of Chinese history, then Lingnan (as constituted during the Tang dynasty) moves from a periphery to a hinterland. As a consequence, attitudes about the region shift from unfamiliarity and fear to acceptability and tolerance.

To combat the conquest/submission characterization of frontier zones, recent scholars have applied the concept of a “middle ground,” which was first used to examine borderlands in US history.7 Brett Walker applies this “middle ground” theory to East Asian history. The middle ground is “a place where the local context and historical moment shape cultural and political interaction among diverse groups of people.”8 The value of this approach is that it puts the focus on “how the middle ground arose from ethnic and cultural interaction between people and the natural world. In other words, with the focus now on place rather than exclusively on process, borderland history is no longer simply the tale of the conquerors.”9 Lingnan during the Tang dynasty fits the definition of a middle ground, a
place containing diverse groups of people interacting with each other and with the natural environment. As in other pre-modern settings, the employment of symbols, myths, and communication allows for the eventual incorporation of Lingnan into a Han Chinese identity.10

Scholarly themes that have been explored in other fields of history involving the conquest and assimilation of people have largely been missing from scholarly explorations of the southern expansion of the Chinese empire. In particular, the biased production of knowledge and the creation of an “Other,” as detailed by Edward Said, have rarely been mentioned in works researching the history of southern China.11 Said’s research actually focused on a much later period of history. But he made important observations about a culture’s production of knowledge regarding other societies. This knowledge can give that culture a certain power over those societies. Said’s theory of power from knowledge has strong parallels to the historical experiences found in the southward expansion of Chinese civilization. For example, fear has been theorized as working in two main ways in modern societies—as either a top-down projection from political leaders or as a consequence of the social, political, and economic divisions within a specific society. This model can work well for pre-modern societies as well.12 Although fear and the projections of that fear onto an “Other” can readily be found in pre-modern Chinese texts, these subjects have not yet been explored in detail, nor have they been compared to similar moments in world history.

PERCEPTIONS AND FEARS OF THE SOUTH
The incorporation of the Yangzi and Pearl River basins into the Chinese political and cultural spheres has had tremendous consequences for Chinese history. One of those consequences is that it took many centuries before the southern lands were viewed as anything other than a wild frontier area. This perception of the south existed long before the unification of China into a single empire in 221 BCE; as the borders of the empire moved farther south, the old perceptions spread to cover the newer territories, too.13 By the start of the Tang dynasty, the Yangzi River basin was no longer considered wild or a frontier; those qualities had been transferred to the Lingnan region. Building on the legacy of previous dynasties, the Tang dynasty elites looked on the Lingnan region and its capital, Guangzhou, as a dangerous frontier zone. Lingnan threatened the northerners both physically (with an unfamiliar environment full of hostile indigenous peoples) and spiritually (by offering the corrupting temptation of easy riches that only the most virtuous could resist). Many Tang writings continued to reflect such fears, with tales that painted the south as an area of physical and supernatural dangers. Other writings exist that demonstrate a way to move beyond those fears, however.
As the elites from the north moved into Lingnan to administer the region for the imperial center, the chief distinction they made between north and south was an ethnic one. The history of the Liu Song, which ruled the south during the fifth century C.E., states that “in all the mountains of Guangzhou there are the Li and the Liao, of many varieties; in all places, time and again, they engage in violent invasions, bringing bitter misfortune to the successive generations.” This source describes the indigenous peoples of Lingnan as an undifferentiated mass of violent and unreasonable savages, whose actions caused endless trouble for everyone. Although definitions for “non-Chinese” tribes change over time, Liao “referred to inhabitants of the southern mountains,” while Li stood for “non-Chinese peoples leading a settled existence in the lowlands.” Not only were these people “Others,” they were violent Others who destabilized Han Chinese society. As imperial elites had done with other ethnicities, the names they used for the southerners implied a subhuman nature. Man, a common name for southern ethnicities, indicated insect or reptilian qualities, whereas Liao indicated a close relationship to dogs or other beasts. This naming was a direct form of creating a subordinate Other; while the people may have looked human, in all written works the association of these groups with animals was preserved. These cultural attitudes survived into the Tang period, and the demonization worked to disadvantage southerners in many ways in Tang society. In a well-known story from the Platform Sutra, the Fifth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism asked his future successor, “You are a southerner, and an aborigine; how can you be a buddha?” Though the question—asked when the Sixth Patriarch of Zen was first seeking admittance as a Buddhist disciple—may have been apocryphal, the attitude behind it was not. Association with the Lingnan region in Tang times not only made a person different; it also made one inferior.

Another characteristic of the south that separated it from the civilized lands of the Yellow River basin was its vast wealth, which often led to corruption and decadence. Confucian ideals included a deep distrust of merchants and those people who sought wealth, who were seen as only interested in profits to the detriment of the overall society. A description from the third century C.E. states, “Guangzhou is surrounded by the mountains and sea; of the rare things that come out of there, one trunk’s worth of treasure is able to enrich many.” The Spring of Avarice at Stone Gate was a famous landmark just north of Guangzhou whose water—first recorded in a poem written by Wu Yin of the Western Jin dynasty—was supposed to be the cause of new administrators to Guangzhou turning into rapacious officials. This supernatural reason for corrupt officials—a reason that was reiterated and recorded by Tang elites as well—underlines the historical reality that despite their Confucian training, many elites who went south as administrators became prime examples of greedy and corrupt officials. Lingnan’s reputation for easy riches lasted through succeeding
dynasties. According to one text, “The lands of the south are truly fertile, the officials often rule in great wealth, so that people say: The magistrate of Guangzhou has only to pass through the city gates once, in order to earn 30,000,000 [cash].” In the sixth century CE, the Sui conquerors of the south noted that “from the beginning of the Liang dynasty, only the capital and the areas of San Wu, Jing, Ying, Jiang, Xiang, Liang, and Yi used coinage. The rest of the counties and prefectures used a combination of cowrie shells and silk. The cities of Jiao and Guang all used gold and silver for commodities.” In other words, most of the south still used a mixture of bartering, with silk, and shells for money. Certain prosperous regions of the Yangzi River basin used minted coins; however, Guangzhou and Jiaozhou, because of the volume of maritime trade, could use gold and silver as money. This wealth in the far south made the south categorically different from the agrarian and austere ideals of the orthodox Confucian areas of the Yellow River valley.

Merchants from beyond the empire, moving in and out of Guangzhou, further established Lingnan as a strange and alien place. A number of these merchants came to Guangzhou as part of an official tributary mission; twenty-three different states sent such missions to the Tang dynasty in their first 140 years of rule. This foreign community resorted to violence on occasions when confronted with what they considered to be unfair treatment, as seen by the assassination of the imperial governor in 684 CE and the sacking of Guangzhou by foreigners in 758 CE. Violence from foreigners, though, was less frequent than violence from the indigenous southerners.

**DANGERS OF THE SOUTH**

Tang elites feared the south and its peoples because many of the local non-Han people—elites as well as common folk—continued to actively resist imperial rule from the north during the almost 300-year period of the Tang dynasty. Although only one of these native insurrections may have threatened the city of Guangzhou, the hinterlands of the city were most definitely not filled with happy indigenous peasants laboring peacefully to support their Tang overlords. Forty-six separate rebellions led by the indigenous peoples of Lingnan are found in existing records. The areas most prone to rebellion were the prefectures located along the coast, west of Guangzhou and south of the West River (Xi Jiang) but northeast of Jiaozhou. Thus although the indigenous people of Lingnan may not have left many written records of their incorporation into the Chinese imperium, their actions stand as a strong record of resistance.

In fiction, southerners could express their resistance in other ways, employing supernatural forces to do so. In one story, the people of Zhenzhou worked to grow rich from maritime trade, but not in the usual ways. Zhenzhou, which corresponds
to the modern-day area around Sanya on Hainan Island, was along the coastal route
to Guangzhou; however, it was not a place where merchants normally stopped. So
the people of Zhenzhou used sorcery to bring the merchants close to shore and
strand them on the beach. As a result of these beachings, local leaders accumulated
several warehouses full of the riches of maritime trade—rhinoceros horn, ivory, and
tortoiseshell are specifically mentioned—and they used this wealth to try to bribe
their way out of imperial sanction but were ultimately unsuccessful. This story
confirms the elite’s fears about the dangerousness of southerners; the southerners’
greed and supernatural powers, it was feared, made them destabilizing forces within
the Tang empire. The inhabitants of Zhenzhou were seen as pirates with the terrifying
ability to control the weather. They were thought to evade punishment through
bribery, which reaffirmed their corrupt nature.

Guangzhou during the Tang dynasty could be a dangerous assignment for officials even without the threats of local insurrections, piracy, or foreign invasion. As
the bear story from the Taiping Guangji indicates, mortality rates of officials in the
city could be very high. Elites credited the environment with the ability to reverse
civilization, as seen in the recurring legend of the Spring of Avarice. But beyond
supernatural/miasmal afflictions, Lingnan had a more direct way to affect and eliminate northerners: gu poison.

Gu poison in Tang times came in many forms, according to written sources. But
Tang elites and the imperial government always interpreted the poison as sorcery
used to harm others. The indigenous peoples of Lingnan produced this poison
from venomous creatures through secret rituals. This poison not only produced
death but also caused those who were poisoned to want to poison others as well.
In some cases, the poison could be used as a love charm because it was associated
with extremely strong sexual desire. Gu poison also came from the environment.
The government listed gu poison as one of the Ten Abominations. Those who were
cought producing it were sentenced to death by strangulation. These fears of the
disruptive power of the south through sorcery served to regularize harsh treatment
against anything that could be considered to be gu poison. Because the only definitive thing about gu poison was its southern origin, the flexibility of its application
meant that many aspects of southern culture could be legally proscribed. In many
cases, the power to make the poison was associated with indigenous deities; the
Tang dynasty made several efforts to stamp out these “illicit cults.”

FEARS OF THE DEMONIC
Tang elites also feared the indigenous religions of the south, branding the majority
of them as “illicit cults,” and they did their best to repress these religions. Religion
in this period of imperial Chinese history represented more than just spirituality; religiously inspired uprisings had seriously weakened and even destroyed a number of previous dynasties. One of the most famous officials of the Tang dynasty was the upright and righteous official Di Renjie, popularly known in English as “Judge/Detective Dee.” While his work to ensure the continuation of the Tang dynasty during the reign of Wu Zetian has been considered his chief historical accomplishment, he also toured the southern territories of the empire to purge illicit cults and establish correct belief. In the official history of the Tang dynasty, Di Renjie was made a district magistrate in Ningzhou, which is in modern-day Gansu Province. There, he “supported harmony and lowered weapons, allowing them joyful hearts; so the people of the region put up a monument to praise him.” After paying his respects to the other officials of the area, he went on a tour of the Jiangnan Circuit, along the Yangzi River valley. At this time, “[The regions of] Wu and Chu commonly had many illicit temples. [Di] Renjie prohibited this practice, burning one thousand seven hundred buildings in all. He allowed four cults to continue: Xia Yu, Wu Taibai, Li Ji, and Wu Yuan.” Another official from later in the Tang, Li Deyu, would also work to eliminate illicit cults in the same area, which attests not only to the strong support such cults had among the local people but also to the strong desire of the government to control religious practices.

Di Renjie’s purge of religious cults is depicted in fictional stories of the time as well as in the historical records. In one story, a particular “southern barbarian god” was famous for killing all officials who entered his temple. Di Renjie was able to burn down the temple after recruiting local people who used his authority as a representative of the emperor to defeat the deity. After returning north, a fortune-teller told Di Renjie he had an angry southern spirit following him that was saying, “He burned my house, I want revenge.” However, this spirit and the more than twenty other evicted gods following Di Renjie could not act against him because of his official position, so they eventually all returned to the south. This story supports the established theme of the south being a supernaturally hostile region; however, it also points to the superior nature of imperial power to defeat these southern dangers. This confidence in the ability of the Tang imperium to successfully subdue the south moves beyond fears and Othering, which then allows for incorporating Lingnan and its peoples as proper Tang subjects.

BEYOND FEAR?

Economic integration and the increased interactions it required were other important factors in moving the Tang elites beyond their fears of the south. With regard to maritime commerce during the Tang period, the city of Guangzhou was the
major port of trade for most of the dynasty. This flow of revenue into the empire was not always the most important source of imperial revenue; but as the expansion of the early Tang period slowed (and then reversed), commercial revenues from maritime trade suddenly became an imperial priority. Following the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763 CE), the revenue from this maritime trade was vital for the survival of the dynasty. At this time, the overland trade routes were only tenuously open to the Tang empire; therefore, any threat to control of maritime routes had to be countered immediately. The importance of this source of revenue had been recognized even before the An Lushan Rebellion. Around 714 CE, the imperial court created the office of Superintendent of Trade, ostensibly to make sure commerce was carried out fairly in Guangzhou; however, this official’s main duty consisted of making sure the profits from international trade went directly into the imperial treasury. As a result of the establishment of this important official post, many prominent members of the Tang elite lived and worked in Guangzhou for parts of their careers, which served to increase the number of contacts between the imperial center and the Lingnan region. Increased contact pushed knowledge of the Lingnan region into the mainstream consciousness of imperial culture, as many elites either had been to the region themselves or knew many who had gone there. Lingnan became more than just a fearfully strange wild frontier; with so many elites having experienced the area, the region could instead be subsumed within regular Tang society.

The nature of Tang incorporation of the Lingnan region into mainstream imperial culture can be seen in the story of a man called Cui Wei who lived in Guangzhou during the Zhenyuan period (785–805 CE). He was the son of an official who was stationed in Guangzhou and was famous for his poetry. He was a smart person, but he was not interested in the family business. Instead, according to the text, he preferred stories of great heroes. Within a few years, he had spent all his money, and for a while he lived in a Buddhist establishment. On the day of the Zhongyuan Festival, which is the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the people of Guangzhou set up and displayed rare and strange things at the Buddhist temples, and they gathered for 100 plays at the Kaiyuan Monastery, according to the text of the story.

It is at this festival that Cui Wei started off on his real adventures. He helped a strange woman, who did not appear grateful at the time. But later she gave him a potent herb that can cure various illnesses. He used it to heal a man, who decided to sacrifice Cui to a household demon; luckily, Cui was saved by the man’s daughter, and he escaped into a forest. While fleeing, he fell into a pit, where he met a big white snake with a tumor on its lip. Cui healed the snake, who then took him to a fabulous underground palace. Inside the palace, he met several women. They treated him very well but spoke in cryptic messages. They gave him a great treasure,
the Solar Igniting Pearl. They told him he was being treated well because of the good
deeds of one of his ancestors, and they sent him back to Guangzhou on a white ram. On his return, Cui discovered that he had been gone for three years, which he confirmed by noting the change in prefects since he was last in Guangzhou.42

Thereupon, he arrived at the Persian market to secretly sell the pearl. At the market, there was an old foreign man. With one glance, the old man recognized the pearl as an item buried with an ancient king of the region, a man named Zhao Tuo. The pearl was used to cover Zhao Tuo when he was buried. Cui sold the pearl for 100,000 strings of cash and asked the foreigner how he recognized the treasure. The foreigner replied that the Solar Igniting Pearl was an ancient treasure from his homeland of Arabia; he later took a boat and returned to the Middle East. When visiting the City God temple on business, Cui recognized the statue within and saw that the words above the brush of the god were identical to those he had seen in the underground palace. He then realized that the “City of Rams” he had heard about in the underground palace was Guangzhou, and he saw five rams in the temple.43

This story contains several important themes that point to a less divisive understanding of the Lingnan region by the literate elites of the Tang. Even though the hero starts out by losing all his money in Guangzhou, by the end of the story he has once again become wealthy. Guangzhou is thus confirmed as a place to make money—but because of the hero’s travails, it is money made from his virtuous behavior and not from exploiting others. In this way, the wealth associated with Guangzhou can be transformed from a corrupting influence into a reward for virtue. The hero is the son of a northern immigrant, but along the way he meets some unsavory local people who consort with demons. This scene refers to the frontier nature of the city and to the strange local cults of the indigenous people. Human sacrifice was a mark of savagery, confirming that dangerous elements are still active in the south. The history of the region is fully exploited; although it is mysterious to the hero, this history would have been instantly recognizable to the readers of the story. Bringing the historical past into the story is important because it validates and normalizes the city, referencing an ancient and famous ruler known to the imperial elites of the Tang. This brings Guangzhou to a similar level of civilization as cities in the Yellow and Yangzi River basins of the north. Buddhist institutions exist in the city to take care of the indigent, as they did in all other important cities of the Tang, and Guangzhou is mentioned as having a City God temple, which is a feature of all good Tang cities at the time.44 In addition, the foreign settlement in Guangzhou plays a crucial role in the story, as that place is not only where the hero regains his wealth but is also where the hero learns where he has been and the significance of his supernatural encounters. The foreigner in this story is also assigned positive characteristics; he is knowledgeable, honest, and generous—as opposed to the
more “Confucian” characterization of merchants as greedy and exploitative or the characterization of foreigners as uncivilized and ignorant.

The story of Cui Wei represents a shift in Tang dynasty discourse about the southern territories or at least a shift in discourse about Guangzhou. Its main characteristics—wealth, dangerousness, and multi-ethnicity—had been transformed or supplanted so that these factors now supported imperial cultural values rather than challenged them. Wealth rewarded virtue rather than corrupted the virtuous. Even if the indigenous southerner wanted to sacrifice someone to a household demon (which officials feared illicit cults would encourage), someone else in the family would provide an escape route. Foreigners were wise and generous instead of threatening and greedy. The differences between Guangzhou and other parts of the empire remained, as the story points out in several distinct incidents customs or situations specific to the city. However, those differences did not separate Guangzhou into an “Other,” as many story elements, such as the shared historical background and the cult of City God, continued to connect the city with Tang elite expectations.

In another example of Tang accommodation and acculturation of southern culture, some local deities could receive the approval of government officials and become officially sanctioned gods. The clearest example of this is the God of the Southern Sea, a local deity from the city of Guangzhou. During the Kaiyuan period (713–741) of the Tang dynasty, this deity was honored with the title “King of Vast Benefit.” Imperial officials actively promoted the worship of this deity, associated as he was with the maritime trade that directly benefited the imperial throne. Near the end of the Early Tang period, Li Yong wrote an inscription at the temple of the God of the Southern Sea titled *Ce Ji Nanhai Shen Ji Bei*. He states in the inscription, “The god’s principle is bent on sacrificial offerings, weary for one hundred blessings and it will reach his ears; the emperor’s [the God of the Southern Sea’s] way answers promptly forever, he looks out at the nine oceans and all is regulated, of all the oceans, what does he not yet begin to have?” The official approval of this southern god occurred at the same time the imperial government found it necessary to create the office of Superintendent of Trade; southern gods who supported the imperial project were suitable allies and treated as such.

Worship of the sea god continued throughout the Tang dynasty. Han Yu, the famous writer and thinker of the Late Tang period, also wrote an inscription at the temple of the God of the Southern Sea titled *Nanhai Shen Guangli Wang Miao Bei*. In it he states that “because of this appointment respecting the Southern Sea God to be the King of Vast Benefit, pray and call upon him with sacrifices and reverence, and following it will be entirely peaceful.” The god also responded to his promotion with blessings for the city: “Therefore, this old temple, changed and its new, at
present Guangzhou controls its east and south, the sea direction is eighty \( li \) [40 km], its port is Fuxu, its bay is the Huangmu.”\(^48\) Describing another beneficiary of this god, Han Yu wrote “[Kong Kui] was fair and upright with a severe demeanor, in his heart he was happy and simple. He was respectful and careful regarding his duty; ruling the people he used understanding, concerning the god he used sincerity.”\(^49\) These inscriptions reinforce the connection of the god with bestowing favors and controlling the oceans. When approached correctly and with sincerity, the god was eager to show his benevolence, much like the idealized Confucian official. Since this temple was situated near the harbor, worshippers could stop and pray for safe passage before heading out to sea, as could merchants waiting for the safe arrival of their cargo.

However, Han Yu based his approval of the God of the Southern Sea on an assumed connection of this god to Yellow River cosmology and deities.\(^50\) According to Han Yu, the god was really the ancient god of fire Zhu Rong—because cosmologically, fire was the element of the south; therefore, a god of the south must be the god of fire. This method of re-branding local gods to fit the imperial pantheon would continue to be used in later dynasties as well.\(^51\) The fact that the local deity needed to be repackaged as an ancient Yellow River god points to the still tenuous nature of southern acceptability among imperial elites. While their gods or ways of life could be considered Chinese, they still needed to connect or conform to imperial standards.

**CONCLUSION**

Tang dynasty elites saw the Lingnan region and its inhabitants as a bizarre “Other” and feared them for many reasons. However, as time and increased cross-cultural contact brought these elites into the south, some qualities of the south were reconfigured to support or reinforce imperial notions of correct society and behavior. These qualities can be seen in some writings from the later Tang period. A new understanding of the south allowed later Tang writers to move past the fears and Othering that were manifest in earlier writings, which then influenced post-Tang Chinese intellectuals to consider Lingnan an integral part of the Chinese cultural landscape. These historical events demonstrate that fears of the Other are not particular to any one culture or group and also suggest ways those fears and biases can be overcome.

The acceptance of the south by the imperial center derived mostly from the shift in attitudes of the Tang elites themselves. The voices of the indigenous inhabitants of Lingnan had been effectively silenced by the conquering Han Chinese elites, and those aspects of southern culture that survived did so only under approved interpretations from Tang elites. Although southerners actively assisted in the
creation of these approved interpretations, this Tang dynasty example remains one of knowledge production about the conquered by the conquerors. Said’s model of knowledge production applies here, both before and during the Tang period. Regardless of whether Tang elites feared or accepted the southerners, only the elite opinions about the southerners had any importance, and the Tang elites and their successors continued to control the Lingnan region.

What changed within the Tang elite discourse, however, was the notion that the south was an “Other” to be feared. The fearfulness of the south was broken down by three main factors: (1) prolonged periods of contact between many Tang elites and southerners, (2) increased economic prosperity throughout the region, and (3) growing correlations between imperial cultural norms and southern cultural forms. Loss of fear did not mean a loss of difference; during the Tang and in later periods, the Lingnan region would continue to be described as having unique characteristics. However, Han Chinese society no longer saw these characteristics as threatening.

Pre-modern societies differ from modern societies, but those differences help clarify which aspects of human behavior are intrinsic to the species and which are contingent on surrounding circumstances. Information flows much faster in modern societies, but the smaller number of literate decision-makers in pre-modern times gives much greater importance to the elites who were engaged in knowledge production. The historical experiences of Tang elites and the Lingnan region point out that behaviors that may seem intrinsic to modern societies—fear of the “Other” most of all—have happened before, even though they sprang from different cultural expectations in a different historical environment. Those experiences also reveal how Tang elites moved past their fears of the “Other,” which may give confidence that modern societies can find their own ways to do so as well.

NOTES

4. For relations between settled and nomadic societies, see Barfield, The Perilous Frontier; Pan Yihong, Son of Heaven; Di Cosmo, Ancient China. For examples of early modern (1500–1800 CE) empire building and knowledge construction, see Crossley, A Translucent Mirror; Hostetler, Qing Colonial Enterprise; Elliott, The Manchu Way; Weinstein, Empire and Identity.
5. Wiens, Han Chinese Expansion, 130–145. This material was originally published in 1954 by the same press under the title China’s March toward the Tropics. See also Fitzgerald, The Southern Expansion, xxi.
7. See White, *The Middle Ground*.
18. See, for example, Lau, *Mencius*, 3.
41. *T’ai-ping Guang ji*, 34.10.43–1177. There is no Kaiyuan Monastery in Guangzhou in modern times; however, the names of monasteries frequently changed over time, and this is also a fictional story.
42. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird*, 97.
44. See Johnson, “The City-God Cults,” 453. This story is the only reference found to the existence of a City God temple in Guangzhou during the Tang.
46. Quoted in the *Yangcheng Fenghua Lu*, 16.
47. Quoted in the *Yangcheng Fenghua Lu*, 18.
48. Quoted in the *Yangcheng Fenghua Lu*, 18. The body of water next to this temple is currently known as the Huangpu.
49. Quoted in the *Yangcheng Fenghua Lu*, 18.
51. See Szonyi, “The Illusion of Standardizing the Gods.”

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