Urban Life and Intellectual Crisis in Middle-Period China, 800–1110

By Christian de Pee. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022. 290 pp. 129 € (cloth); open access e-book. ISBN 978 94 6372 166 0.

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doi:10.1017/jch.2023.32

In this new book, Christian de Pee has taken the urban world as the anchor for a wide-ranging and provocative discussion of literary and cultural history across the Tang–Song Transition. Following an initial discussion of the late Tang, the bulk of his text focuses on the Northern Song. De Pee explains that the book is based on reading the 155 "collected works" (*wenji* 文集) that survive from the ninth through the eleventh centuries. Through page after page, many chock-full of eloquent translations of the range of materials preserved in these collections, including poetry and essays, de Pee lays out an argument that reframes our understanding of late Tang and Northern Song approaches to the urban world. More importantly, however, he presents a new approach to the long-standing paradigm identified with Ihara Hiroshi, Robert Hartwell, and Robert Hymes, one that posits a turn away from the imperial center to regional and local issues following the loss of the Yellow River basin to the invading Jurchen early in the twelfth century.

De Pee begins with some broad reflections on recent scholarly approaches to middle period cities, in the course of which he acknowledges the holes in his source base. Picking up on the recent work of Charles Hartman, among others, he reflects on the "selective transmission" of texts that has always colored middle-period historiography: "The collected works of the late Tang and the early Song do not offer a representative record of the period, let alone a comprehensive one. They transmit a selection—sometimes a very incomplete selection—of writings by men of exceptional talent and unconventional views" (20). Equally insightfully, and in an essential recognition of the difference between manuscript and print transmission, he adds that we cannot know "[h]ow the extant works from the ninth century compare to their manuscript originals" (20). In a further echo of Hartman, de Pee acknowledges that what survives for us today has been filtered through the prism of the Neo-Confucian reformation. Despite these reservations about the reliability of his sources, however, de Pee presents a new perspective on the Tang–Song Transition and a highly plausible argument for his new interpretation of the localist paradigm.

De Pee distinguishes his approach from the "materialist" analysis he feels has characterized most prior studies of middle period cities (including, I must note, my own). Using the frameworks defined by the modern social sciences, he asserts, these studies "have collected locations of buildings and details of urban practice from a wide range of sources … in order to reconstruct the physical layout and social structure of Middle-Period cities" (23). What these studies have lacked, and therefore what he argues de Pee is exploring, is the connections "between the text and city" that reveal the "historical perceptions of urban life" (23).

De Pee then moves to his analysis of the approach to the urban world in his ninth-century texts. Building upon the work of Nicholas Tackett that has demonstrated the concentration of the cultural and political elites in Chang'an and Luoyang, de Pee argues that Tang authors placed these two cities "at the center of literary production" (35). In both poetry and prose the two cities "occupied the center of time and space" (39). Tang authors, however, did not engage either city as physical space: "The streets and avenues of the capital they hid in dust and behind a blur of traffic; the shops and markets they did not mention at all" (39). Rather, de Pee argues, these cities lay "at the center of the cosmic order" (46), Tang literati, he argues, "cherish their memories of Chang'an … because it possessed to a superior degree and in a superior combination the things that could be found elsewhere in the realm, and that one day the transformative virtue of the ruling house [which ideally defined the culture of the capital] might spread to the furthest reaches of the world" (47–48, with addition).

After further reflections on texts addressing the Tang capitals that emphasize the political and cultural centrality of the capitals to the world view of the Tang literati, de Pee then turns to the heart of the book. In a chapter he titles "Finding Oneself in the City," he addresses the first century of Song rule. In the aftermath of the dynastic transition and the decades of interregnum division, de Pee finds a very different approach to the urban world. The court was no longer based in a city imbued with the aura of a *jing* 京 but rather in a city with little history of dynastic centrality. This represented a new kind of imperial center with new values. Although some "insisted that Chang'an retained its cosmological force," for most Song literati "[t]he center of cosmic power now lay at Kaifeng" (78–79). In contrast to Chang'an and Luoyang, "the capital had become 'a field of commodities and wealth,' where virtue was subject to fortune" (81). Unlike the ancient capitals, Kaifeng presented a world noted for the dust and chaos of its vibrant markets, a world in which merchants held unprecedented cultural authority. This in turn diminished the capital's distinctive role "[a]s literati learnt to judge the worth of cities by the relative standards of luxury and fashion, rather than by a fixed hierarchy of power and rank" (82). If the literati of the late Tang were obsessed by the dual capitals, those of the early Song found value across the empire's urban world.

Engaging with this new approach to the urban world,

> the literati of the eleventh century reoriented their literary genres … They composed rhapsodies about canals and odes to locks. They wrote commemorations for bridges and pavilions … Whereas the poets of the ninth century had looked away from busy avenues and crowded alleys … poets of the eleventh century took notice of markets and wine houses, merchant and acrobats, the poor and the dead (83).

The new capital, he finds, "did not lay hold of the official's ambition or the poet's imagination to the same extent as Chang'an and Luoyang had done during the Tang" (95). As provincial cities, including Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Hangzhou, Chengdu, and others, grew as centers of cultural and political authority, they "diminished the singularity of Kaifeng" (97).

Ultimately what strikes de Pee is the engagement with the urban world that he finds in the eleventh-century literature: "[T]he literati of the eleventh century deemed the activity of the streets worthy of representation" (113). But, he argues, "The purpose of writing the city, however, was less aesthetic than ideological … literati of the eleventh century could show themselves to advantage within it" (119). Literati, he asserts, risked losing their distinctiveness in the city. Thus, even as they acknowledged the life of the urban world, they sought to set themselves apart from the common crowd through their "learning, wit, and erudition" (119), values they alone had perfected and which the common folk, consumed as they were by the hubbub and competition of the markets, could neither master nor appreciate. They further distinguished themselves by the "things" they could acquire: "literati endeavored to set themselves apart … by asserting superior taste and discernment" (133), a distinction, however, that de Pee argues emphasized base materiality over cultural refinement.

Through the early decades of the Song, de Pee finds, literati believed they could master the chaos of the urban world and find within it the principles of the ancients. When that mastery proved difficult, however, they gradually grew disillusioned. They "withdrew from the streets and markets in order to find absolute truth and values within themselves" (150). A growing number found the less threatening, less chaotic world of provincial cities preferable to the "inherently corrupt and corrupting" influence of the capital (152). This perspective was only enhanced by the New Laws sponsored by Wang Anshi, which engendered so much resistance. De Pee concludes in one of the central passages of the book, that a "withdrawal of literati to the towns and landed estates of their home regions … began during the intellectual crisis occasioned by the New Laws, rather than with the loss of the northern half of the empire in 1127" (159).

With this striking challenge to the timeline of the paradigm, de Pee then moves to that literati withdrawal. Central to his framing is a perceived loss of an intellectual confidence: "The moral learning of [the eleventh-century literati] had revealed to them the unity and coherence of all things, and had therefore taught them to detect deviations from the pattern and to restore all affairs to the true" (166). Because the literati officials lived in the cities, they presumed they could directly perceive the "accomplishments and the failures of governance" (166). This confidence, he argues, was behind the reform initiatives of Fan Zhongyan and Wang Anshi. The failure of the reform movements, and most especially the failure of the latter, led to what de Pee calls irresolvable tensions that in turn undermined the confidence that had permeated literati culture at the founding of the dynasty. In response, decades before the current paradigm suggests, the literati physically "withdrew from officialdom" and found refuge in the provinces.

Placing the reform movements "within the intellectual history of the city," he writes, "restores the coherence" of intellectual, political, and economic history as well as the history of science, fields that have "generally been treated in separation" (170). De Pee supports this claim with an extensive discussion, supported by translations, of the practical accomplishments and philological orientation of literati administrators, including discussions of infrastructure, water ways and land management, monetary policy, and their embrace of "ancient prose" (*guwen*). He further makes his case through an extensive discussion of the two eleventh-century reform movements, both of which "are intelligible only by the intellectual confidence of the period" (220). The reaction for and against the initiatives generated "a profound intellectual crisis" in large part because both sides shared the "fundamental assumptions" yet reached such incompatible perspectives (226). Where they most profoundly disagreed was whether Wang's reforms were in "accord with the intent of the ancient kings" (226), the confident pursuit of which had driven the intellectual and administrative goals of the preceding century. To his critics, Wang "had thwarted the moral order established by the founding emperors [of the Song]" (229). Thus, he concludes, "was the intellectual confidence of the early eleventh century defeated" (231). And thus, he continues, did "literati during the latter decades of the eleventh century and early decades of the twelfth century resolve to improve their community instead of serving in the government" (234).

This a bold book, one that deserves notice if for no other reason than for the depth of de Pee's masterful engagement with the literature of the period he addresses, a commendable accomplishment by itself. As he promises in his introduction, de Pee has drawn on a vast array of primary sources, as is immediately apparent from his extensive citations and impressive bibliography. Despite having acknowledged its flaws in his introduction, he makes persuasive use of that literature to illustrate his argument and provides extensive citation to further texts that he does not include among his myriad translations.

More important than the philological accomplishment, the book is especially notable for the reconsideration of the localist paradigm that has governed scholarship on the Song for the past half century. Any paradigm invites further examination, and the localist paradigm has been no exception. De Pee not only argues for an earlier onset of the return to locality, but he provides a new reason for it. No doubt this will engender further study, perhaps the most significant accomplishment a monograph can attain.

As is likely for any such bold initiative, however, *Urban Life and Intellectual Crisis* invites some push back. One might wonder, for example, whether de Pee's near absolute reliance on text at the expense of other resources, especially painting or material evidence, might have driven his own intellectual confidence that he has unearthed a neglected truth. Might that confidence have been tempered had he considered visual sources such as the *Qingming shanghe tu*, so famous for its detailed depiction of the urban world that is his focus yet composed half a century after the events he claims led to the literati withdrawal from that world? How might he integrate into his timeline the impulses behind the antiquarian collectors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? One might further wonder if de Pee's reconceptualization of the paradigm has any bearing on issues others have sought to address. For example, how do we balance the evidence he has mustered to show literati withdrawal in the later eleventh century against the equally strong evidence that literati participation in the imperial examinations not only continued through the later decades of the Northern Song but even expanded deep into the Southern Song? How do we further balance the active engagement with government that is manifest in the intense factional debates that consumed the last decades of the Northern Song? Does the initiative of the Emperor Huizong in the last decades of the Song to bring the myriad local and regional cults under a single administrative office in anyway address his thesis? And is de Pee's approach so dramatically at odds with the "materialist" approach to the urban world of the Song as he maintains? Might the textual and "materialist" approaches come together in a way that enlightens both?

Finally, how does his argument address the Tang–Song Transition, to which so much attention has been devoted recently and across which de Pee defines his thesis? The elite focus on the capitals through the Tang that lies at the heart of his discussion of Tang literati has been shown by others: Patricia Ebrey, Nicholas Tackett, and a host of Chinese and Japanese scholars. De Pee's approach is new and insightful, but the underlying argument regarding the approach of Tang literati to the capitals has had parallels. What makes his analysis distinctive, and a notable addition to the Transition discussions, is the evolution he draws in literati orientation as Tang morphed into Song. As literati emerged out of the fractured realm of the early tenth-century Interregnum into an integrated dynasty, they brought with them the perspective of a century of division when regional courts had been their political pivot. This led, in turn, to a decentered embrace of the urban world among the literati. Kaifeng was the political and cultural pivot for eleventh-century literati, but even before their withdrawal from the urban world in the last decades of the Northern Song the literati were embracing the vitality, the food, the environment of the South. It is this embrace of diversity in the urban world beyond Kaifeng, de Pee argues, that provided the escape for the literati as their confidence in an ultimate, unitary truth was undermined after Wang Anshi's reforms collapsed in acrimony.

These, of course, are the very kinds of issues that potentially become the avenues of further study. That they arise, however, in no way minimizes the importance of de Pee's work. Rather, if they are engaged by others going forward, such work will affirm the book's importance. This is a challenging and significant book that should have a lasting impact on middle period scholarship.

Structures of Governance in Song Dynasty China, 960–1279 CE

By Charles Hartman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Xiv + 452 pp. $150.00 (cloth)

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(Received 16 January 2024; accepted 17 January 2024)

doi:10.1017/jch.2024.5

Charles Hartman has produced a broad and deeply researched study of Song court politics and procedures, unequaled in any Western language. In contrast to the chapters on imperial reigns in the *Cambridge History of China*, which attend to both personnel and policy, Hartman's goal is to show how the tensions between two modalities, Confucian institutionalism and technocratic governance, evolved and were managed during the Song period, in order to arrive at a correct judgment of the Song's place in China's history. His research yields many more valuable findings than this review will enumerate. Instead, I will consider the categories—the two modalities—that undergird Hartman's analysis, an analysis which too easily becomes procrustean, and which is foreshortened by a principled disregard of the society that his state sought to govern, the changing connectedness of one modal group to that society, and the real differences within that group over policy and values.

Hartman builds on his preceding book on Song historiography. There he argued that the Southern Song historians created a "grand allegory" that posited that the true nature of dynastic government was based on benevolence, which flowed from the character of the founding emperor and his successors but was thwarted by nefarious ministers. This metanarrative served the interests of Confucian institutionalists—literati who identified with the Qingli-period (1041–1044) minor reforms led by Fan Zhongyan and Ouyang