

Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China. Edited by MICHAEL NYLAN and GRIET VANKEERBERGHEN. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014. 656 pp. \$70 (cloth).

REVIEWED BY CHARLES SANFT, University of Tennessee, Knoxville (charlessanft@gmail.com)
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It takes a potent editorial vision to create a volume of conference papers that makes a coherent statement, to say nothing of actual arguments. Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen have succeeded in doing these things with *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*. From a variety of standpoints, encompassing high level discussion and the finest detail, *Chang'an 26 BCE* demonstrates that the reign of Han Emperor Cheng (r. 33–7 BCE) was a time of great moment in political thought and activity, in religion, and in intellectual life. Emperor Cheng's reign is often treated in an off-hand manner, more or less as part of a supposed downward slide of the Western Han from the martial glory of Emperor Wu (141–87 BCE) to the usurpation of the Liu ruling house by Wang Mang (r. 9–23 CE) in 9 CE. Nylan and Vankeerberghen leave no doubt that this picture is flawed. The result is a volume that is simultaneously varied and cohesive.

There are nineteen papers in *Chang'an 26 BCE*, plus Nylan's introduction and postface. Together they present an incontrovertible argument for the importance of Emperor Cheng's reign, and the central position of the Western Han capital Chang'an both as setting and as record. A short review would be hard-pressed to treat so large a number of component sections effectively. For that reason, and because of the volume's cohesiveness, I will treat the book more or less as a single work and talk about what it says as a whole rather than examining each author's individual contributions as such.

The capital Chang'an was the physical location of the emperor's court and the center of much of the action in this book. *Chang'an 26 BCE* offers a wealth of detail on its namesake, its physical characteristics, its developments over time, the social interrelationship between its population and their living areas, and the monumental construction projects in and around it. Rome is of course the touchstone for a metropolis in European antiquity. A comparison between the Han capital and the Roman one is sometimes made in an offhand fashion through easy contrasts and shallow similarities. This volume offers a deeper consideration that suggests Chang'an and Rome possessed conceptual similarities, in that both contained constructions that were "expressions of political power in general and monarchic power in particular" (90). The comparative aspect has only a limited presence in the book and most chapters concentrate on Chang'an, treating it alone. The reader learns about how the city's foodstuffs arrived through a combination of water and land transport, the elaborate systems that brought water into the metropolis, and the organization of the city's sections.

The capital, as the largest and most important city of the realm, was inevitably a center for mortuary practice. Emperor Cheng had not just one but two planned tombs in the area, though only one saw completion. Other privileged if less exalted persons had large tombs in the region as well. Archaeologists found marvelous wall paintings in some of these, and the book's color plates show the reader the brilliance of the ancient pigments. Not only did Chang'an showcase the developments in funeral practices in its time; through the movements of officials and other members of the population, its usages spread to localities far from the capital.

The court during Emperor Cheng's reign was the site of contention, controversy, and change. The emperor himself was, as is well known, the subject of criticism. What is perhaps unexpected is the vitriol of that criticism, after death and already during his life: "Your Majesty has abandoned that most honorable way of life that befits a lord of all being, and you take pleasure in the degraded activities of commoners" (224). On the other hand, Emperor Cheng also drew praise: "He was dignified and grave when he attended court, inspiring awe like a god..." (222).

Much of what happened in the realm of politics resulted from the potent political forces at work in the capital beyond the emperor's control: the puissant individuals, such as Gu Yong, and the still stronger family lineages, which accrued power over the course of generations. The best example of the latter, of course, is the Wang clan, whose scion Wang Mang would eventually set himself up as emperor.

The reforms of 8 BCE, at the end of Emperor Cheng's reign, sought to restructure the upper echelons of the bureaucracy. The emperor sought thereby to improve government function and "assert his own status as the presiding executive at the apex of the entire bureaucratic structure" (240). The princedoms that had acted as mini-courts at the local levels similarly saw their powers drained away in the same round of changes, which for them "were the culmination of a long process in which administrative responsibility... was transferred... to the central court at Chang'an" (361). These changes were not the only ones in Emperor Cheng's reign; the time also saw shifts in imperial and other sacrificial practices.

Intellectual life is one respect in which Emperor Cheng's time has always been conspicuous. The father and son Liu Xiang 劉向 (c. 77–c. 6 BCE) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 CE) are famous for their bibliographic work, and yet *Chang'an 26 BCE* shows there is still more to say about how extensive their intellectual influence was. The notion of a distinct medical tradition, for instance, seems not to have existed before their work gathering and organizing the relevant texts. This was also a period of high literature, and this volume discusses a rhapsody by Liu Xin as well as other poetry. History and classical learning also saw significant developments around the same time.

This brief summary gives only an approximation of the range of topics and approaches that *Chang'an 26 BCE* covers. What it cannot convey is the depth of the sources that the component chapters gather, which include the full range of received texts, archaeological results, and much recent secondary scholarship in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages. The result is an evocative picture of a time, a place, and an emperor near the end of the Western Han period.

Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life. By ALEXANDER V. PANTSOV and STEVEN LEVINE New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 610 pages. \$34.95/£22.99 (cloth), \$23.99/£14.94 (ebook).

REVIEWED BY DAVID BACHMAN, University of Washington (dbachman@uw.edu)
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Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine have written what is likely to be the definitive biography of Deng Xiaoping until Chinese Communist Party [CCP] archives become available. Theirs is an attempt to create a balanced view of Deng, in some detail. Balanced is meant here in several senses, giving roughly equal weight to the entire course of Deng's life (the pre-1949 years, the Mao years, and Deng's post-Mao career) and evaluating Deng's attributes, achievements, failures, and abominations and crimes.

I will not extensively summarize Deng's life as told by Pantsov and Levine, but note some of the significant insights they provide about his career. Arguably, the most original contributions of this biography concern Deng's pre-1949 career. Pantsov, in particular, has culled Soviet-era archives and files concerning Deng and those with whom he interacted. Through these materials and other unearthed sources we learn a great deal about Deng's years in France and in the Soviet Union. Deng was at best a mediocre student of French, and lacking financial support, he often tried to work in French factories, where his proletarian (and alien) status was brought home viscerally to him—it was these experiences that converted him to communism. In the Soviet Union, Deng became an ardent student of Marxism-Leninism, and perhaps of the New Economic Policy, most