

have even greater questions about the criteria through which Nguyen assembles his representations of medieval Buddhist monastic life, for the descriptive categories that he adopts—protector of the nation, thaumaturge, ascetic, literary specialist or exegete, etc.—are themselves suspiciously reminiscent of the taxonomies that appear in the classic Chinese compendia of “biographies of eminent monks.” There appear to be some methodological inconsistencies here—or, at least, perspectives in need of further clarification.

As a case in point we might consider the problematic of reconstructing a medieval “Vietnamese Buddhism” that is so elemental to Nguyen’s task. While the terms “Vietnamese” and “Buddhism” might, indeed, be applied with a certain neutrality, we still have to ask—stipulatively speaking—just whom and what we mean by these labels, especially in a period that was as complex, fractious, and transformative as that of the eleventh through fourteenth centuries. If “Vietnam” (or *Dai Viêt*) and its “national culture” were themselves normative constructs that were assembled and mobilized under the auspices of the Lý court—not unlike the *Thiền Uyển* itself—to what extent can we take categories such as “Vietnamese Buddhism” or even “Vietnamese Zen” as objectively descriptive of religion and society in medieval Vietnam? If the *Thiền Uyển* is as rhetorical as its author claims it to be—and if we are to be consistent with Nguyen’s critical and socially nuanced reading—shouldn’t we be asking whose story is being advanced here? Whose story is being suppressed? To whom? And to what ultimate affect?

One example will suffice to illustrate my point. Throughout the introductory chapters Nguyen assumes a kind of factual complicity between the Vietnamese state/rulers—who are, in turn, treated as homogeneous—and the Zen clerics who composed the *Thiền Uyển*. Thus the *Thiền Uyển* itself is understood by Nguyen to caste the Zen clergy and Zen ideology into a fully subservient—even apologetic—relationship to the “national” prerogatives of the Lý court by “legitimizing the Lý dynastic power with the populace . . . by providing mythical and religious justifications for the Lý cause” (P. 20).

I wonder if such representations do justice to the case. In point of fact, the legends of encounter between Zen patriarchs and Vietnamese rulers assembled in the *Thiền Uyển*—especially the numerous tales of prophesy and prognostication—are capable of supporting a rather different reading, one in which the Zen clergy or lineage, itself, supercedes the secular order in both historical constancy and authority. Emperors and dynasties come and go; but the Zen patriarchs, by their powers of prognostication and their enlightened insight into eternal cosmic verities, remain the constant—the final guarantors of imperial integrity. Despite its professed compliance with the aims of the Vietnamese “state” and its “people”—the state, here, being the Vietnamese sovereigns—one gets the sense that the mythology of the *Thiền Uyển* has an additional agenda of securing a special, even privileged, status for the Zen clergy of the Vô Ngôn Thông and Vinhāruci lines.

These are questions that might be explored more carefully. But rather than being construed as a criticism of Nguyen’s current study, they might be seen as points for future discussion that have been made possible by this altogether fine piece of scholarship.

Daniel B. STEVENSON
University of Kansas

Timothy BROOK, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998. 320 + xxv pp. 53 b/w illus. 4 maps. 1 table. £35.00/\$45.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-520-21091-3.

Zhang Tao, observes Timothy Brook, was not a happy man. Born in the last century of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Zhang lived in an age in which—at least in his view—the practice of accommodative politics was fast disappearing, the rigid but stable structure of

society was slowly but surely dismantling, and the moral fabric of local communities was rapidly unraveling. To Zhang Tao, a Huguang native and a one-time county magistrate in the prosperous lower Yangzi region, the root of all evils was commerce: "One man in a hundred is rich, while nine out of ten are impoverished. The poor cannot stand up to the rich who, though few in number, are able to control the majority. The lord of silver rules heaven and the god of copper cash reigns over the earth." To Zhang, the solution to Ming China's woes was obvious: the government should "establish policies to close the gates and prevent the merchants from traveling about" (p. 4).

Intrigued by Zhang Tao's complaints, Timothy Brook (who has also contributed a chapter on commerce and communication to the second Ming volume in the *Cambridge History of China* series) sets out in his latest book to examine the relationship between commerce and culture. The work, Brook explains, is "not an economic history of the Ming dynasty . . . but a cultural history of a place that commerce was remaking. It is about the role of commerce in Ming society—the pleasures its wealth brought and the confusions that it fueled . . ." (p. xvi). In revisiting the worlds Zhang Tao variously romanticized and condemned, Brook is able to take along his readers on a grand tour of the Ming economic, social, and cultural landscapes. Though the grounds he covers are not entirely new, like a seasoned tour-guide, Brook is at his best when he pauses to point out remarkable sights, offer refreshing interpretations, and raise stimulating questions.

The Confusions of Pleasure is composed of three major chapters, each of which covers about a hundred years—and each, in Brook's view, marks a stage of commercial expansion in Ming China. In "Winter: The First Century (1368-1450)," the reader is introduced to a variety of historical actors—some shadowy, some not—including Lu Li, a brick-maker who lived during the Hongwu reign (1368-98), and Madame Zhu, whose signature appears in a land contract dated 1400. Brook's argument here is clear and well-articulated: though Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor, had been relatively successful in limiting the physical and social mobility of the Ming population and in bringing a degree of order to local societies, by the mid-fifteenth century, such an artificially restrictive society was apparently no longer sustainable. This can be seen most clearly, Brook suggests, in the changing relationship between landlords and tenants. As commerce grew, "[t]enants were no longer willing to think of their relationship to their landlords as a personal bond . . . Now the relationship was simply contractual: an economic agreement that entailed no terms other than those specified in the rental contract" (p. 85).

In "Spring: The Middle Century (1450-1550)," Brook picks up on the themes of commercial expansion (he discusses, among other topics, the developments of the textile industries and maritime trade) and its role in the transformation of mid-Ming society. The reader is again introduced to a number of lesser-known historical actors, including Xu Jie, a local magistrate in the late-fifteenth century who found himself inextricably drawn to the commercial web that had spun around him, and Zhu Yong (fl. 1541), who, like Zhang Tao, was highly critical of the changes he saw around him. The transformation Brook observes in this period was subtle but significant: as the Ming state gradually lost its ability to assert moral control (especially after the Tumu debacle of 1449), the gentry found themselves having to step up in its place. What made this transformation "confusing" for some at the time, however, was that gentry membership had by the mid-Ming been significantly altered. Zhu Yong, for example, "might never have been able to break into the ranks of the gentry" had it not been for the very economic and social changes he would later complain about. Once they joined the rank, Brook argues, people such as Zhu Yong "had then to be concerned about justifying their position and preserving their status in the rough-and-tumble world . . ." (p. 151).

In "Summer: The Last Century (1550-1644)," Brook steps onto a relatively well-trodden ground. Among the topics he discusses are the development of publishing and book-collecting, the increased physical and social mobility of the population, the expansion and specialization of the textile industries, the role of foreign trade, and the transformation of values and

tastes of the gentry. Brook offers in this and in his short concluding chapter, “Fall: The Lord of Silver (1642-1644),” a dual argument. On the one hand, commercial expansion had indeed enlarged the membership of the gentry class and had, as a result, transformed Ming society as a whole. On the other hand, “the class system of overlordship and deference that held the Chinese world together at the beginning of the Ming was still there at the end. It had been much transformed by commerce, as merchants found their way into the elite and gentry turned to business to augment their income. But it had not been dismantled.” The crisis of 1644, Brook argues, did nothing to weaken this system. “In fact, it may have grown stronger.” (p. 260).

Although one wishes Brook had organized the subsections in the book in a more logical fashion and had developed some of the topics in greater detail, *The Confusions of Pleasure* is the most comprehensive study of the relationship between commerce and culture in Ming China to date. As cultural historians of the Ming dynasty expand their scope of inquiries to include not only major intellectual figures or communities of scholars but also the wider world of material and print cultures (I have in mind in particular the recent works by Craig Clunas: *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* [1991]; *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming China* [1996]; *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* [1997]), they have also shown increased interests in the economic contexts and implications of beliefs and practices. Timothy Brook’s study (and, to a lesser extent, Richard von Glahn’s *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000-1700* [1996]) should serve as a starting point for all students who want to take stock of our current understanding of the expansion of commerce in early modern China.

A book of this scope naturally raises more questions than it can answer. Here are two I believe warrant further reflections. If commerce, as Brook has demonstrated, shaped culture, what about the role of culture in the commercial expansion of Ming China? Would we find regional distinctions in commercial practices based on the differences of local cultures? To what extent would differences in commercial practices be manifested along gender and class lines? While Brook has discussed some of these issues in his book, given the interests in the role of “Asian values” in the recent economic development of a number of Asian countries, the role of culture in commerce deserves, I believe, a rigorous historical examination.

Another important but elusive area of inquiry has to do with class. Although Brook in his discussion has been conscious in shedding light on groups that are mostly silent in the records, the question of how commerce influenced the creation and dissemination of popular culture still awaits a more satisfactory analysis. While I accept that the distinction between elite and popular cultures, at least in the Chinese context, is often exaggerated, it is clear from Brook’s discussion that the development of certain tastes and fads in late-Ming China (such as courtesanship and the buying of sexual services of “singing boys”) could rarely be afforded by anyone outside of the gentry class. The question remains then is to what extent commerce in Ming China shaped the values and beliefs of those who, despite the increased opportunities, never quite made it to the ranks of the gentry.

Leo K. SHIN
Simon Fraser University

Luke S. ROBERTS. *Mercantilism in a Japanese Domain: The Merchant Origins of Economic Nationalism in 18th Century Tosa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. vii, 251 pp., bibliography, index, glossary. ISBN 0 521 62131 3.

Professor Roberts has written an incisive and insightful study of Tosa’s political economy from the establishment of the Yamauchi lordship in 1600 to the 1850s. The pattern of decline will be familiar: costly service obligations to Edo led to heavy borrowing in Osaka; servic-