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Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong

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applications of Confucian thinking or the issues surrounding multicultural and global education programs. Additionally, in bringing attention to Tang Junyi's thought and influence, the book honors one of the twentieth century's greatest philosophers.

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Patricia Buckley Ebrey. *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong*. A China Program Book. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009. 576 pp. Hardcover \$65.00, ISBN 978-0-295-98778-1.

Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (ninth century), one of the earliest historians of Chinese art, opened his magnum opus *Lidai ming huaji* 歷代名畫記 (Celebrated painters of all the dynasties) with the pronouncement that, “As for painting, it perfects the civilizing teachings (of the Sages) and helps (to maintain) social relationships 夫畫者成教化。助人倫。”¹ In *Accumulating Culture*, Patricia Buckley Ebrey shows that Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100–1125) of the Northern Song (960–1126) dynasty, not only accepted such a claim, he went to astonishing lengths to recruit all cultural objects—books, bronzes, calligraphy, and antiquities, along with painting—in his enormous imperial collections to demonstrate the complete perfection of his reign. Ebrey argues that Huizong amassed his enormous collection of objects as a means to forge social relationships and to announce his cultural authority and political leadership.

The maintenance of social relationships seems like an unlikely catalyst for the large-scale collecting in which Huizong engaged, yet in the Northern Song, relationships between an emperor and his officials attained an unprecedented level of contention. During the reigns of Emperor Huizong's predecessors, the Northern Song dynasty had inducted into the bureaucracy, in significant numbers, a new type of official, the scholar-official. This bureaucrat obtained his prestigious position by demonstrating a mastery of the Chinese classics in the institutionalized civil service examination system. This new member of the bureaucracy often came into conflict with the established career official. The latter, like the Chinese emperor himself, had inherited his elevated rank through aristocratic lineage and

was generally seen as part of the imperium. The new scholar-official, while pledging loyalty to the emperor, also challenged him, and in so doing sought to reform government for the betterment of state and society. Often relations between emperors and scholar-officials were antagonistic, yet some emperors, such as Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), courted reform-minded scholar-officials, vigorously endorsing their policies in efforts to advance both society and imperial authority.

Ebrey has situated Emperor Huizong and his mega-collecting activities within this historical environment. *Accumulating Culture* demonstrates how Huizong used his collections to negotiate complex relationships with traditional aristocratic members at court while accommodating new constructions of culture. Contemporary scholarship argues that as the scholar-officials gained political power, they articulated their identity, not through wholesale replication of court culture, but through alternative artistic practices that were often defined against imperial production and were a means to challenge it. The artistic practices the scholar-official generated are now referred to in common academic parlance as “literati culture.”

While many traditional and modern historians of Chinese art have focused on the production of literati art, Ebrey’s groundbreaking book seeks to redress this imbalance and considers Emperor Huizong’s contribution to visual culture of the Northern Song dynasty and beyond. This is a magisterial undertaking. Ultimately Ebrey challenges long-cherished views about literati art, suggesting that it was not as *outside* as twentieth-century scholarship has argued. For Ebrey, Emperor Huizong was not merely a collector—he was the definition of culture, a political agent who, in addition to consuming art objects, also actively commissioned catalogues of his collections. These catalogues were not a mere inventory of positive data listing his possessions, but served to bring together traditional scholars, scholar-officials, and the emperor to discuss culture and inscribe it for perpetuity. Ebrey shows how in his partnership with the officials Huizong was making shrewd political calculations in his patronage of the arts. For example, members of opposing factions were brought together at cultural social events in the palace library, at private parties in his rarefied chambers, and at royal banquets, designed to replicate Zhou dynasty ceremonial dinners in his grand clarity edifice in order to view and discuss Huizong’s collection. Ebrey views these activities as less overtly political than debating policies. While Ebrey recognizes that at times relations were strained between Huizong and the scholar-officials, she argues that his catalogues and the cultural events testify that the emperor’s “goal was not to confirm the opinions of leading literati of his day but rather to persuade them of his vision” (p. 348). For Ebrey, the inclusion of literati culture into his collection was not an act of appropriation or evidence of cultural competition, but rather a fitting means for Huizong to demonstrate an expansive appreciation of culture in general.

This well-rounded and succinct volume effectively demonstrates the political nature of Huizong's collecting activities. One question it does leave unanswered is why Emperor Huizong completely omitted from his collection the works of two great literati scholar-officials, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105). This omission is one of the more controversial features of Huizong's collection. While Ebrey notes that Emperor Huizong's catalogues did not make room for each and every literati artist, but served to advance his own ideas of literati art, her explanation of Su Shi's and Huang Tingjian's exclusion from the catalogues seems a little abbreviated. In referring to their exclusion, she says, "Even though Su Shi and Huang Tingjian had been dead for more than a decade when the catalogues were compiled, Huizong did not want his catalogues to honor them in any way" (p. 348). The book does not go on to explain that Su Shi and Huang Tingjian were very prominent scholar-officials who were highly regarded as artistically talented individuals. Huizong's collection is all the more remarkable for their exclusion from it. It also does not provide the reader with enough detail on the long history of court cases and acrimony between Su Shi and imperial authority. The addition of these facts would have helped the reader to understand Huizong's motivations in harnessing literati culture or, as Ebrey puts it, "persuading" literati scholars to value his collection and catalogues.

Accumulating Culture is arguably the first book-length, single-author exploration of Song dynasty imperial collecting practices. Ebrey visited some of this terrain as coeditor of an earlier work, *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*, a compilation of scholarly essays about Emperor Huizong. In her new book, she focuses closely on Huizong as a collector and fleshes out the cultural dynamics of imperial patronage and art-historical scholarship during the Northern Song period. This is a much needed and timely work. Ebrey's painstaking research and erudition, along with her endless curiosity and true enthusiasm for her subject, establish *Accumulating Culture* as a major accomplishment in scholarship on the Northern Song dynasty. This volume will inspire further investigation just as it will enliven debate on one of the great cultural periods of Chinese history.

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NOTE

1. Zhang Yanyuan, as translated, with slight modifications, by William Reynolds Beal Acker, *Lidai Ming huaji* (the title of Zhang's book was translated by Acker as "A Record of the famous painters of all the dynasties"), *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), p. 61.