

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81248-1 - The Cambridge History of China, Volume 5 Part One: The Sung Dynasty and its Precursors, 907-1279

Edited by Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION: THE SUNG DYNASTY AND ITS PRECURSORS, 907–1279

Paul Jakov Smith

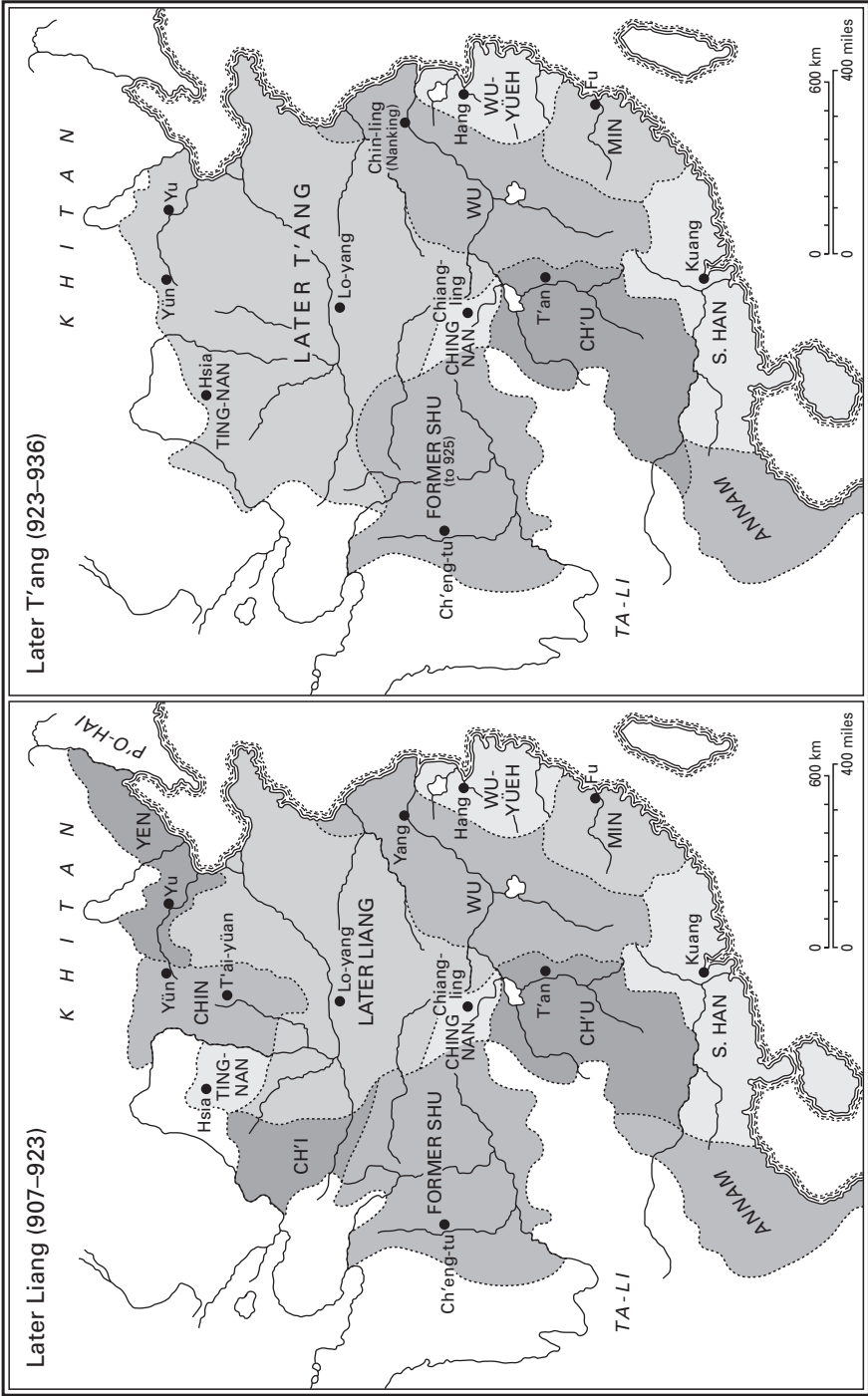
INTRODUCTION

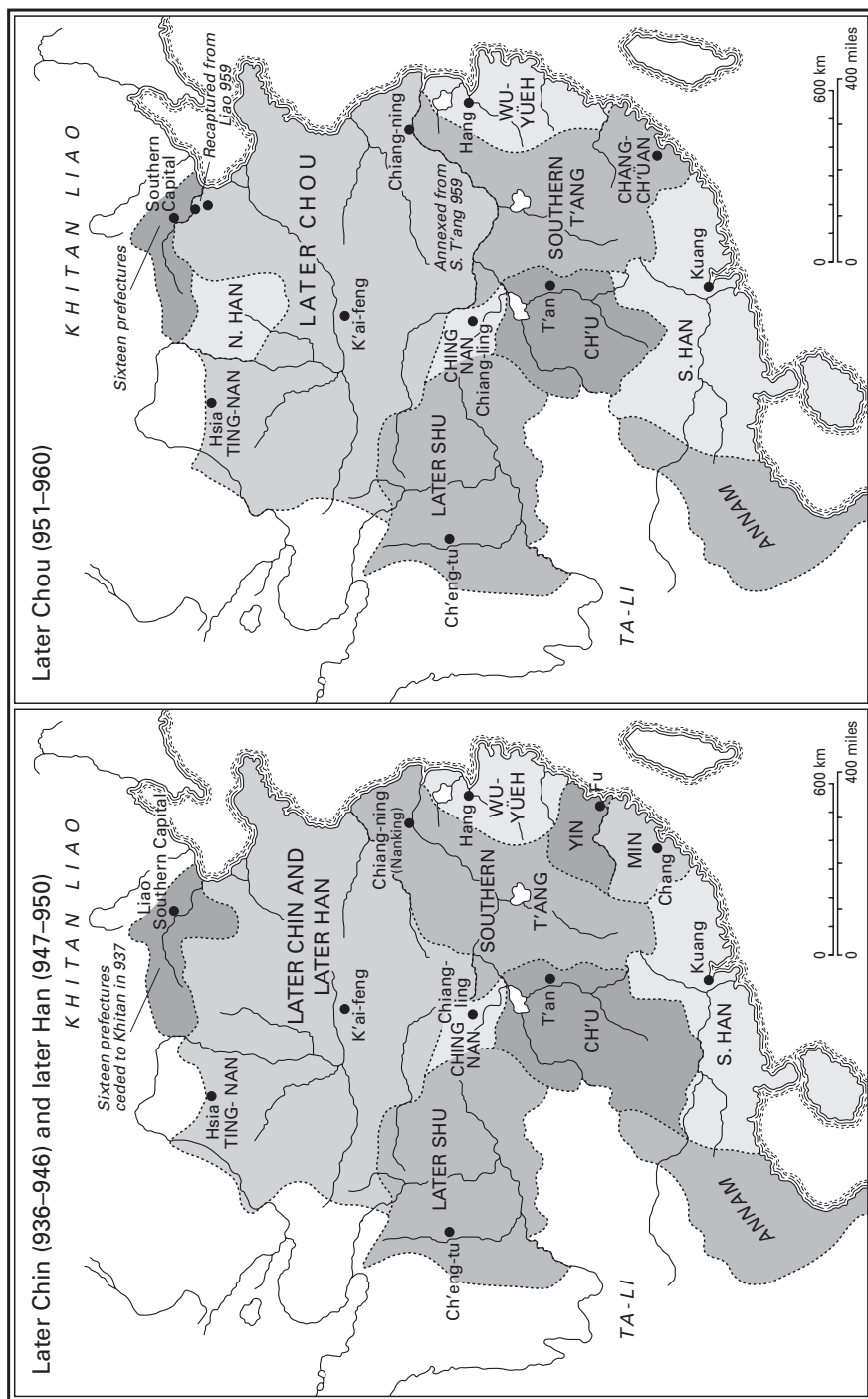
We present here the first of two volumes on the Sung dynasty (960–1279) and its Five Dynasties (907–60) and Ten Kingdoms (c. 907–79) predecessors. Whereas our companion volume (Volume 5, Part 2) takes a thematic approach to Sung institutional, social, economic, and cultural history, our task here is to present the political history of China from the fall of the T'ang dynasty in 907 to the Mongol conquest of the Southern Sung in 1279. Because our focus is on political events as seen from the perspective of the Sung court, we recommend that this volume be read in conjunction with *The Cambridge history of China*, volume 6: *Alien regimes and border states*, 907–1368, which covers the same period and many of the same events from the vantage point of the non-Chinese regimes and border states that had so momentous an impact on China in this multistate era of the tenth through the thirteenth centuries.¹ This overview will offer a brief introduction to the intersection of political trends and Sino-steppe encounters during the Five Dynasties and Northern and Southern Sung that are portrayed in the chapters to follow.

COMING OUT OF THE T'ANG: STATE BUILDING IN NORTH AND SOUTH

The collapse of T'ang power in the final decades of the ninth century unleashed massive forces of rebellion, warlordism, and territorial fragmentation, giving way to what traditional narratives depict as a half century of political division and social turmoil before the reestablishment of unity and order by Chao K'uang-yin and his new dynasty, the Sung (960–1279). The social turmoil was powerful enough to sweep away the underpinnings of the old T'ang aristocracy and usher in new social and political elites. But as the first two chapters of

¹ Herbert Franke and Denis C. Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge history of China*, volume 6: *Alien regimes and border states*, 907–1368 (New York, 1994).





Map 2. The Five Dynasties and the Ten Kingdoms, 907–960. After Albert Hermann, *An historical atlas of China* (1935; rev. ed., Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1966), p. 33.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81248-1 - The Cambridge History of China, Volume 5 Part One: The Sung Dynasty and its Precursors, 907-1279

Edited by Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith

Excerpt

[More information](#)

this volume demonstrate, the picture of chaos and political disorder that has long dominated our understanding of the transitional epoch separating T'ang and Sung must now yield to a view of the Five Dynasties in the north and nine kingdoms in the south as an era of robust state building that laid the foundation for unification under the Sung.

The political trajectory over time and across space during the first half of the tenth century is depicted in Table 3 and Map 2. In terms of territorial expansion, the successive regimes of north China consolidated their control along a north-south axis encompassing all of north China and the Central Plains from the Yellow River south to the Huai and Han rivers, and west along the corridor formed by the Wei River valley and the north face of the Ch'in-ling range. Sovereignty over north China was by no means complete during this period: the T'o-pa-ruled military governorship of Ting-nan, in the southern Ordos region of the future Hsi Hsia domain, remained beyond effective Five Dynasties' dominion; the Sha-t'o stronghold centered on T'ai-yüan (in Sung Ho-tung circuit, or modern Shansi) slipped the noose of central control in 951; and – most momentously for later events – the Sixteen Prefectures comprising the 300-mile barrier between the Central Plains and the steppe were ceded by the Sha-t'o state of Later Chin to the Khitan in 937. But the overall trend was toward the deepening of territorial control, culminating under the fifth, Later Chou, dynasty with the recapture of two of the Sixteen Prefectures (Mo-chou and Ying-chou) in the north and the annexation of the plains between the Huai and Yangtze rivers (the region known as Chiang-Huai) from the Southern T'ang.

The process of territorial consolidation in the north was propelled by the increasingly effective assertion of centralized political authority. Volume 3 of this series documents the devolution of T'ang political power to the military governors (*chieb-tu shih*) and increasingly autonomous generals (many of Sha-t'o descent) in north China.² It was these generals, military governors, and regional warlords (like Huang Ch'ao's lieutenant and Later Liang founder Chu Wen) who competed with one another for mastery over the north, and who sought to recreate their own image of the defunct T'ang order that they had helped to destroy. Thus the chief challenge facing the successive would-be dynasts was how to recentralize power from other members of their own kind – in particular, the military governors – while rebuilding the apparatus of the centralized, bureaucratic state.

² See especially Robert Somers, "The end of T'ang," in *The Cambridge history of China*, volume 3: *Sui and T'ang China*, 589–906, part 1, ed. Denis C. Twitchett (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 682–789. See also Herbert Franke and Denis C. Twitchett, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge history of China*, volume 6: *Alien regimes and border states*, 907–1368, ed. Herbert Franke and Denis C. Twitchett (New York, 1994), p. 10.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81248-1 - The Cambridge History of China, Volume 5 Part One: The Sung Dynasty and its Precursors, 907-1279

Edited by Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION: THE SUNG DYNASTY AND ITS PRECURSORS

5

The process of recentralization began with the very first Five Dynasties ruler, when the Liang founder Chu Wen began to systematically replace T'ang-era military governors with personally appointed prefects loyal to Chu alone. Although Chu Wen was never able to neutralize the animosity of the major military governors who were deeply opposed to his imperial aspirations and ruthless approach to governance, the four succeeding regimes (three Sha-t'o and one Han Chinese) were able to build on his momentum to impose ever-greater centralizing pressure on the military governors. By midcentury the Later Chou rulers Kuo Wei and his adopted son Ch'ai Jung had begun to win the war of attrition against the once-autonomous military governors. In this, they were assisted by the reemergence of civil officials operating through a regular bureaucracy. But they were also helped by Ch'ai Jung's recentralization of military authority through a series of reforms that transformed the two most potent armies – the Metropolitan and Palace Commands – from unpredictable power brokers to reliable agents of centralized imperial power, finally relieving the Later Chou rulers from dependence on the allegiance of the military governors.³ Naomi Standen shows that as a consequence of these long-term efforts to reestablish the authority of the state in north China “power had unequivocally moved to the center” by the time the head of the Palace Command, Chao K'uang-yin, deposed his Later Chou masters.

Meanwhile, throughout this half century of ostensible fragmentation a parallel process of state building was taking place in the south. Whereas northern state builders came out of the class of military governors with roots in the T'ang political order, southern rulers emerged out of outlaw elements unleashed by the massive social dislocation and demographic upheavals produced by the rebellions that helped topple the T'ang. In chapter 2, Hugh Clark describes how outlaw adventurers rose to the top of local military confederations and then flowed opportunistically with the shifting migrant tides to assume power in troubled regions far from their original homes, where through a balance of protective and predatory activities they created alliances with the resident elites. As T'ang political authority was seized by Chu Wen and his Later Liang regime in the north, the most powerful military entrepreneurs carved out independent states in the physiographic cores of south China: Wu-Yüeh in the Yangtze delta; Min in the river valleys of Fukien; Wu (followed by its successor state of Southern T'ang) in the elongated valley formed by the lower Yangtze River, P'o-yang Lake, and the Kan River; Southern Han, in the Pearl River lands of Kuang-nan East and Kuang-nan West (modern Kwangtung and Kwangsi), traditionally dubbed Ling-nan; Ch'u, encompassing the Hsiang and

³ The most important overview of this process is Edmund H. Worthy, Jr., “The founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative changes in military and political institutions” (diss., Princeton University, 1976).

Table 3. *Chronology of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms*

Regime	Dates	Founder and Origins	Capital and Core Domain
<i>Five Dynasties</i>			
Later Liang	907–923	Chu Wen (852?–912). One-time lieutenant in Huang Ch'ao's rebellion who amasses sufficient military might to capture the T'ang court in 903, murder the last adult T'ang emperor (Chao-tsung, r. 888–904) in 904, then depose Chao-tsung's son and proclaim his own dynasty in 907.	K'ai-feng. North and Central China (Hopei, Shantung, and Honan) south to the Huai and Yangtse rivers, but Shansi and the Peking region beyond Liang control.
Later T'ang	923–936	Li Ts'un-hsü (885–926). Son of Li K'e-yung (856–908), a Shatuo Turk named military governor (and in 895 Prince of Chin) by the T'ang court who, with Khitan help, resists Chu Wen's military advances. Ts'un-hsü carries on struggle against Later Liang, which he destroys in 923.	Loyang. From core region in Shansi, Later T'ang expands well beyond Later Liang borders to control most of intramural north China south to the Huai and Han rivers; neither it nor the succeeding regimes establish effective control over the Ting-nan military governorship centered on Hsia-chou, south of the Ordos.
Later Chin	936–946	Shih Ching-t'ang (892–942). Shatuo Turk and son-in-law of last Later T'ang ruler Li Ssu-yüan.	K'ai-feng. Controls all of Later T'ang territory except for the Sixteen Prefectures spanning Yu-chou (renamed Yen-ching by the Khitan, modern Peking) to Yün-chou (modern Ta-t'ung), which Shih cedes to the Khitan in 937. This strategic barrier protecting north China from the steppe, later termed "The Sixteen Prefectures of Yen-Yün," becomes the chief object of irredentist passions during the Northern Sung.
Later Han	947–950	Liu Chih-yüan (895–948). Shatuo Turk and military governor of the Shansi region centered on T'ai-yüan who takes advantage of the Liao emperor's death following a punitive invasion of Later Chin to establish his own reign.	K'ai-feng. Same as Later Chin.

Later Chou	951-960	Kuo Wei (904-954). Chinese, son of a local T'ang military leader, becomes high military official under Later Han, takes advantage of a military coup to proclaim himself emperor of the Chou. Succeeded by adopted son Kuo (originally Ch'ai) Jung (921-959), who governs effectively with the help of senior military commander Chao K'uang-yin, the Sung founder.	K'ai-feng. Kuo Jung initiates campaign of territorial expansion, culminating in 959 with the capture of two of the Sixteen Prefectures (Ying-chou and Mo-chou) from the Liao and annexation of the Chiang-Huai plains between the Yangtze and Huai rivers from the Southern T'ang. But the Kuo rulers unable to dislodge the Shansi state of Northern Han.
<i>Ten Kingdoms</i> Wu	902-937	Yang Hsing-mi (b. 851). Lu-chou (mod. Ho-fei, Anhwei) peasant turned bandit chieftain; named military governor by T'ang in 892, then Prince of Wu in 902. Wu rule usurped from within by Southern T'ang, 937.	Yang-chou, then Chin-ling (mod. Nanking). Controlled major portions of the lower Yangtze and Kan River valleys (Huai-nan East and West Chiang-nan East and West circuits during the Sung, modern Anhwei and Kiangsi provinces).
Former Shu	907-925	Wang Chien (c. 848-918). Butcher, salt smuggler, and outlaw leader in Hsü-chou-Ts'ai-chou region (Sung Ching-hsi North, modern Honan), joins T'ang forces against Huang Ch'ao, named military governor of Western Szechwan in 891, assumes title of emperor in 907. Region invaded by Later T'ang in 925.	Ch'eng-tu. Controlled all of the Szechwan basin, the upper Han River valley, and the corridors between Szechwan and northwest China (Sung Ch'in-feng Circuit, modern Shensi and Kansu).
Wu-Yüeh	907-978	Ch'ien Liu (d. 932). Emerges in late 870s as lieutenant to Eight Battalion militia leader Tung Ch'ang in the Yangtze delta region of Liang-che (modern Chekiang). Consolidates power in Hang-chou before turning on Tung Ch'ang in 996 in the name of the waning T'ang court, which names him Prince of Yüeh in 902, then Prince of Wu in 904.	Hang-chou. Controlled rich Yangtze delta and coastal regions of Liang-che circuit (modern Chekiang province).

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Regime	Dates	Founder and Origins	Capital and Core Domain
Min	909–945	Wang Shen-chih. One of three brothers in control of Fukien by 890s; outmaneuvers his elder brother to assume civil and military authority in the northern region centered on Fu-chou in 898, then title of Prince of Min in 909. Interfamily strife impedes political unification of the region, which is largely divided up by Southern T'ang and Wu-Yüeh by 945.	Fu-chou. Mirroring divisions in the Wang family, political control fractured along physiographic subregions of Fukien centered around Fu-chou in the north, the Chien-chou state of Yin (proclaimed in 943) in the northwest, and Ch'üan-chou and the coastal prefectures in the south. Chien-chou/Yin is taken by the Southern T'ang in 945 and Fu-chou/Min absorbed by Wu-Yüeh in 946, leaving only the Ch'üan-chou (or Ching-yüan) region – under control of the warlord Liu Ts'ung-hsiao – to maintain its independence until submitting to Sung rule in 978.
Southern Han	917–971	Liu Yin. In 894 inherits the positions of his father Liu Ch'ien, a hereditary tribal chieftain in the region west of Canton that allied itself with T'ang against Huang Ch'ao. In 902 is rewarded for service to the T'ang court with appointment as commandant of Canton, then named military governor of Canton in 905. In 917 succeeded by brother Liu Yen, who establishes the state as Great Yüeh in 917, then Southern Han in 919.	Kuang-chou (Canton). Controlled the region of modern Kuang-tung and Kuang-hsi (Sung Kuang-nan East and Kuang-nan West) traditionally designated as Ling-nan; asserted unenforceable claims to continue T'ang control over the Red River valley of Annam (modern Vietnam).
Ching-nan (or Nan-p'ing)	924–963	Kao Chi-ch'ang. Appointed regional military governor of Chiang-ling by Later Liang founder Chu Wen in 907, then assumes title of King of Nan-p'ing in 924, just after Later Liang's fall. Survives through diplomatic links to successive Five Dynasties.	Chiang-ling (Ching-chou, modern Sha-shih, Hupei). Controlled the three prefectures just within and east of the Yangzte River gorges, including sites of the two modern cities of I-ch'ang and Sha-shih, as well as the southern bank of the Han River around Ching-men-chün (modern Ching-men-shih).

Ch'ü	927-963	Ma Yin. Bandit chieftain and adventurer from the same area of Honan as Wang Chien, uses his military prowess to occupy a power vacuum in Hunan in 892, leading to control of all of Hunan by 899. Named Prince of Ch'ü 907; state of Ch'ü confirmed by Later T'ang in 927. Internal quarrels allow Southern T'ang to capture the ruling Ma family in 951, but Hunanese forces drive the occupiers out in 952 and restore order (under Chou Hsing-feng) in 956. The restored Hunanese state persists until it and Ching-nan are absorbed by the Sung in 963.	T'an-chou (Ch'ang-sha). Controlled the region of modern Hunan (Sung circuits of Ching-hu North and South), including the Hsiang and Yüan River valleys and Tung-t'ing Lake.
Later Shu (Former Shu successor state)	934-965	Meng Chih-hsiang (874-934). Commands Later T'ang invasion of Szechwan and remains as military governor until proclaiming his own state of Later Shu in 934. Succeeded the next year by his son Meng Ch'ang.	Ch'eng-tu. Same as Former Shu.
Southern T'ang (Wu successor state)	937-975	Li Pien (a.k.a. Hsü Chih-kao). Raised as stepson of Yang Hsing-mi, whose state of Wu he usurps in the name of a T'ang restoration in 937. Subordinated by Sung in 961, and fully annexed in 975.	Nanking. Under second ruler Li Ching (r. 943-961) Southern T'ang expands beyond Wu boundaries to absorb Fukiense state of Min c. 945 and Hunanese state of Ch'ü in 951, but loses Chiang-Huai region to Later Chou in 959.
Northern Han	951-979	Liu Min (a.k.a. Ch'ung). Brother of Liu Chih-yüan, founds Northern Han as a regional military regime in the wake of Later Han's collapse. Liao client state; resists Sung advances until 979.	T'ai-yüan. Built around the Liu family's military power base in Shansi. The only northern polity among the traditionally designated "Ten Kingdoms."

Note: Table 3 is based on F. W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), pp. 12-16, supplemented by chapters 1 and 2 in this volume.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-81248-1 - The Cambridge History of China, Volume 5 Part One: The Sung Dynasty and its Precursors, 907-1279

Edited by Denis Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Yüan river valleys and their Tung-t'ing Lake drainage basin; and the successor states of Former and Later Shu, occupying the Szechwan Basin and the mountain passes through the Ta-pa and Ch'in-ling mountains bisected by the upper reaches of the Han River valley. The sole exception to these region-sized states – the tiny kingdom of Ching-nan (or Nan-p'ing) – occupied a 170-mile stretch of the Yangtze River from the eastern portal of the Three Gorges (Kuei-chou, modern Hupei, Tzu-kuei county) downriver past Chiang-ling fu (modern Hupei, Sha-shih), which it held at the sufferance of its more powerful neighbors rather than through its own military might.

Despite their outcast origins, the rulers of south China underwent a process of political maturation that paralleled the evolution of their northern neighbors. Clark documents a shift from military prowess to political effectiveness as the chief measure of prestige and governance, as once-itinerant bandit chieftains formed stable demilitarized regimes based on political acumen, alliances with local elites, and the support of refugee literati in search of security and employment. In fact, state building in the regionalized south was even more robust than in the wartorn north. For (as both chapters 2 and 3 show) the greater stability of the south enabled the new regimes to initiate agrarian projects – especially water control – that enhanced agricultural productivity, and to sponsor internal, interregional, and international trade over land and by sea. Thus while the successive northern regimes had to focus on the crucial political problem of wresting power from other military governors, fending off each other, and developing workable approaches to the increasingly powerful Khitan, the southern kingdoms were free to develop sophisticated ways of taxing and even facilitating the growth of the increasingly buoyant commercial economy. And just like their northern counterparts, the rulers of the southern kingdoms reintroduced bureaucratic governance into their regions, deploying a mix of local and refugee literatus lineages as local circumstances allowed.

From a spatial perspective, natural physiographic barriers kept political boundaries in the south relatively stable. Only one of the southern kingdoms – the Fukienese state of Min – permanently disappeared during this era, as discord in the ruling Wang family opened the mountainous region around Chien-chou to annexation by Southern T'ang and the coastal plains centered on Fu-chou to absorption by Wu-Yüeh. Similarly, only one of the southern states – the Southern T'ang – harbored imperial aspirations, openly rejecting the legitimacy of the northern dynasties in order to promote its own ambitions to reunify the empire in the name of the T'ang. For a short time in 951 Southern T'ang claimed control (as Clark shows) of over thirty prefectures on a north-south axis from the Huai River to Ling-nan, and on an east-west axis from the Wu-i Mountains of Fukien to western Hunan. But soon after reaching this territorial peak its expansionist momentum was halted and then,