“garden”. But Bai Juyi’s Luoyang garden already not only included a pond but also an artificial mound, and the love of rocks too was well established by his lifetime. Bai Juyi went to great expense to transport his two favorite rocks from Hangzhou to Luoyang, and he also devoted a lengthy essay to the extensive collection of stones of Niu Sengru. So the connoisseurship of stones is not something that only really gets underway in the Song dynasty as seems to be suggested on p. 73. Our awareness of the fact that the modern “Chinese garden”, whether in contemporary Suzhou or in the West, to a large degree is a product of chinoiserie and orientalism and a post-1949 reification and invention of tradition in China itself, should certainly result in a greater awareness of the possibilities of closer correspondences in design, function and use between Chinese and European gardens in the corresponding periods (Prof. Clunas’ monograph is sprinkled with enlightening comparisons between his Suzhou gardens and Italian and English gardens of the Renaissance); but it should not blind us to the development of Chinese garden design as an artistic tradition with its own internal dynamics. Discourse is not only a function of local and historical socioeconomic developments, it also has a grammar of its own—words may change rather quickly, but grammatical structure tends to be very tenacious.

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Timothy Brook has written a splendid book which deals with two dimensions of Ming history that are still quite insufficiently studied in the West, namely, the social history of “Buddhism” in the late imperial period (specifically the late Ming), and the study of social elites (the gentry). He makes important contributions to both fields, showing the vitality of Buddhist monastic institutions and the appeal of Buddhist religious culture among the highest levels of the local elite. He argues that gentry families utilized the patronage of Buddhist monasteries to establish themselves as local leaders at a county or higher level. Buddhist monasteries were

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a forum where these families could manifest themselves as a public force, without becoming completely parochial (unlike the support of temple cults with their intimate ties to purely local communities) and whilst maintaining their independence from the state (as opposed to what would be the case in Confucian institutions). The focus of this book is on recognized monastic establishments (si or monasteries), rather than Buddhist ritual specialists (monks, nuns and various types of lay specialists) or small and unrecognized establishments (an or cloisters). The book presents a clearly structured argument, which is an enjoyment to read.

That the study of "Buddhism" after the Song is still a neglected topic is clear enough, but specific gentry/elite studies for the late Ming period are a surprisingly neglected topic as well. Admittedly, we know a lot on late Ming cultural (literature, art and elite culture) and intellectual history. Some work has been done on elite lineages from or until the late Ming period, and we now have the splendid recent dissertations by Martin Heijdra on the social-economic history of the Ming as a whole (both as a period and as a territorial unit), and Michael Szonyi on the use of ritual and festivals in constructing elite groups and local communities in northern Fujian from the Ming. Nonetheless, the social history of the Ming elite itself remains an understudied field, certainly in the West. Brook's study shows us some of the directions that future research could take and testifies to the richness of the available sources, which he has by no means exhausted.

A preliminary problem, of which I cannot at this point judge the precise relevance, is to what extent one can define gentry families as a distinct socio-cultural group or stratum. I always thought that elite families during the late imperial period might adopt different preservation strategies at once, to wit, the pursuit of an official career (preceded by time and money consuming studies for the examinations) for some, and commercial or managerial careers for others. Furthermore, a given family or lineage might have members functioning on different levels, both locally (where they would not classify as gentry for Brook) and regionally or even nationally, with distinct patronage patterns in all cases.