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Editor's Introduction: Limitations of the Tang-Song Transition Theory

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The Tang [618-907] and Song [960-1279] periods enjoy special historical status among the ancient Chinese dynasties. In the Ming Xiaoling 明孝陵 mausoleum of the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty [1368-1644] Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 [r. 1368-1398], this fact was highlighted in the inscription by the Qing dynasty's [1616-1911] Kangxi emperor 康熙 [r. 1661-1722]: "[the Great Ming was] governed to a level of prosperity even greater than that of the Tang and Song" [*zhilong Tang-Song* 治隆唐宋]. The Tang was considered a glorious cosmopolitan empire, while the Song was deemed the pinnacle of Chinese civilization. However, the transition between the two periods was anything but smooth, and scholars have long recognized fundamental differences between them. Among the many historical explanations, the Tang-Song transition theory proposed in the early twentieth century by Naitō Torajirō 內藤虎次郎 [1866-1934]—commonly known as Naitō Konan 內藤湖南—is the best known and the most influential.

The Tang-Song transition theory was widely influential in the study of Chinese history by Japanese scholars, particularly during debates over periodization that took place in the mid-twentieth century. After the 1970s, the theory became a source of debate in the Song history research community in the United States. Although it had long been known to Chinese scholars, the topic suddenly become the subject of fierce contention at the turn of the twenty-first century for many reasons, such as the massive translation of sinological works from outside China, the declining popularity of the Marxist historiographical paradigm, and the efforts of Chinese scholars to avoid the trend toward trivial topics. Over the past twenty years the Tang-Song transition theory has undoubtedly become one of the most familiar historical concepts to Chinese scholars. As a result, an increasing number of scholars have begun to examine the misuse of the concept and even question its explanatory validity.

Four articles in this issue of *JOCH* represent the recent reflections of Chinese scholars on this topic. The article "Dispelling the Myth of the 'Tang-Song Transition Theory,'" by Yang Jiping 楊際平, presents a critical analysis of the basic conclusions and main points of Naitō's hypothesis and argues that the grounds for his arguments are problematic, being "just an abstract set of principles for discussion that are based on Eurocentrism." In his article, "Time to Turn the Page in Tang and Song History Studies: Exploring the Tang-Song Transformation Theory from Multiple Perspectives," Li Huarui 李華瑞 presents a commentary on previous scholarship, in which he argues that the theory has become outdated and that it has done little to advance the study of Tang-Song history, concluding that it is now time to "turn the page on history written with an old paradigm and justified by old values." "A Historical Study of Political System Reform in the Tang and Song Dynasties," Wang Huayu's 王化雨 article, reflects on the many shortcomings of the Tang-Song transition theory through the lens of political history and proposes some directions for future research. Mou Fasong's 牟發松 article, "A Discussion of Several Issues Concerning the 'Tang-Song Transition,'" presents a concise review of Naitō's theory.

In sum, Chinese scholars have gradually come to a consensus that the Tang-Song transition theory should be reconsidered. As for how long it will take to build a consensus around a new paradigm, that remains to be seen.

Translated by Carl Gene Fordham

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Dispelling the Myth of the "Tang-Song Transition Theory"

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Abstract

Administrative statutes in the Tang clearly recognized that the fields of commoners could be held through private ownership. Field ownership structures in the recently restored *Tang Statutes*, while seeming to support ideas of land nationalization, did not actually change the private landowning practices that had been in place since the Qin and the Han dynasties. Numerous tenancy contracts unearthed in Dunhuang and Turfan dating back to the Tang and Five Dynasties show ample evidence that, prior to the establishment of the double-tax system in 780, a highly developed system of contract tenancy was already in place. Tenancy was clearly the leading form of agricultural production outside subsistence farming. This proves that the labor force during the Sui and Tang dynasties consisted not of "slaves and tenant farmers" or "agricultural dependents and serfs" but of commoners who were legally free. The Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties, as described by Japanese historian Naitō Konan, bear no resemblance to the historical reality of this period. In many instances, Naitō's arguments have distorted the history of these dynasties in an effort to make China's history fit neatly into the framework of medieval European history. Consequently, his premises, arguments, and his central conclusion are all wrong. It is crucial that we dispel the myth of Naitō's "Tang-Song transition theory" and return to historical reality.

Keywords

Distorting history – Eurocentrism – Naitō Konan – Tang-Song transition theory

In 1922, Naitō Konan 内藤湖南 [Naitō Torajirō, 1866-1934], a professor at Kyoto Imperial University, published an article titled "A Comprehensive Look at the Tang-Song Period," which claimed that "the Tang dynasty was the culmination of the medieval period, while the Song dynasty marks the start of the modern era."[1] Naitō had two bases for his argument. First, from a political perspective, this transformation could be seen in the decline of "[nobility-based] aristocratic government"[2] and the emergence of "monarchical autocracy." Second, this transition marked changes in the status of commoners, with the New Policies of Wang Anshi 王安石 [1021-1086] in the Song dynasty [960-1279] further validating the significance of land ownership by commoners.[3] After the publication of Naitō's article, his ideas and theories continued to be developed by his students, such as Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定 [1901-1995], who formed the Kyoto school of historical research. Although during his lifetime Naitō never referred to his own theory as the "Tang-Song transition," through recurring debates Naitō's students and scholars at the Tokyo School gradually came to refer to this imagined transition between the Tang [618-907] and Song dynasties as the "Tang-Song transition." After the end of World War II, some scholars—including Maeda Naonori 前田直典 [1915-1949]—began to

1 Originally published in Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, "Gaikatsuteki Tō Sō jidai kan 概括的唐宋時代觀 [A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties]," *Rekishi to chiri* 歷史と地理 9, no. 5 (1922). This section is based on a translation in Liu Junwen 劉俊文, ed., *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguoshi lunzhu xuanyi* 日本學者研究中國史論著選譯 [*Translation of Selected Works by Japanese Scholars on Chinese History*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1.10-18.

2 All direct quotations from Naitō's work in English have been taken from Joshua Fogel's translation of the original Japanese text. See Naitō Konan, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," trans. Joshua Fogel, *Chinese Studies in History* 17, no. 1 (1983). Transliteration of Chinese names and dynasties have been converted from Wade-Giles to pinyin for consistency. Here, "aristocratic government" is Fogel's translation of what Naitō termed *kizoku seiji* 貴族政治. As this article is referring to a Chinese translation of Natiō's work, the term used here should be understood as *guizu zhengzhi* 貴族政治, not as *kizoku seiji*. Given that it is argued later in this article that the term *guizu* 貴族 refers to the nobility, not to the aristocracy, of medieval China, and the term *guizu zhengzhi* refers to a system of government in the pre-Qin centered on the nobility, the words "nobility-based" are added to this translation in order to maintain Fogel's original translation and ensure consistency with other English-language scholarship, which almost invariably uses some form of "aristocratic'" in the translation of this term. In all other instances of the term "aristocracy" or "aristocratic" in a Naitō quotation translated by Fogel, the term has not been altered or added to because the term *kizoku* as used by Naitō (translated by Fogel as "aristocracy") and the term *shizu* 士族 used in the original Chinese article (translated here as "aristocracy") both refer to the same thing. —Trans.

3 Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, "Gaikuo de Tang-Song shidai guan 概括的唐宋時代觀 [A Comprehensive Look at the Tang-Song Period]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguoshi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.10, 13, 14.

subscribe to the term "Tang-Song transition."[4] However, for them, the Tang dynasty was still an ancient period centered on a slave society whereas the Song dynasty was a medieval era based on feudalism and serfdom. This school of thought came to be known as the Tokyo school.[5]

Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory has had a lasting influence on the study of Chinese history in Japan and internationally[6] and has also found many proponents within China. Although some have called the theory into question,[7] their reservations have not garnered significant attention.

I understand Naitō's theory to be based on two major arguments. The first concerns the organizational structure of government, whereas the second

4 One of the earlier articles to summarize the specific term "Tang-Song transition" was Ikeda Makoto 池田誠, "Tō Sō no henkaku ni tsuite no saikentō 唐宋の変革についての再検討 [A Reexamination of the Tang and Song Transition]," *Nihonshi kenkyū* 日本史研究 24 (1954).

5 For the Chinese translation of the article, see Maeda Naonori 前田直典, "Gudai dongya de zhongjie 古代東亞的終結 [The End of the Ancient Period in East Asia]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguoshi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.135-52.

6 Many Tang and Song scholars in the United States and England have accepted the validity of the Tang-Song transition theory. However, although some aspects of the original theory have been retained, others have been modified and revised. For example, Denis Twitchett argues that "Naitō's theory was stated in very general terms. He was not originally an academic historian … but the general outline which Naitō perceived—largely by intuitive understanding—has stood up remarkably well to the progress of modern research" (*The Cambridge History of China: Sui and T'ang, 589-906, Part 1*, ed. Denis Twitchett and John Fairbank [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 3.9-10). The American scholar Peter Bol has called Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory the "Naitō hypothesis" ("Tang Song zhuanxing de fansi: Yi sixiang de bianhua wei zhu 唐宋轉型的反思——以思想的變化為主 [Reflections on the Tang-Song Transition: With a Focus on Intellectual Change]," *Zhongguo xueshu* 中國學術, no. 3 [2000]). Robert M. Hartwell centered his research on constituent regions and local elites ("Demographic, Political, and Social Transformation of China, 750-1550," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 2 [1982], 404).

7 See Zhang Zexian 張澤咸, "'Tang-Song biange lun' ruogan wenti zhiyi '唐宋變革論'若干問題質疑 [Questions Regarding Key Problems with the 'Tang-Song Transition Theory'], " in *Zhongguo Tangshi xuehui lunwenji* 中國唐史學會論文集 [*Collection of Articles from the Tang Dynasty Institute of China*], ed. Zhongguo Tangshi xuehui 中國唐史學會 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 1989). See also Zhang Zexian 張澤咸, *Tangdai jieji jiegou yanjiu* 唐代階級結構研究 [*Research into Class Structure in the Tang Dynasty*] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1996), 504-13. Other works include Li Huarui 李華瑞, "'Tang-Song biange lun' de youlai yu fazhan '唐宋變革論'的由來與發展 [The Origin and Development of the 'Tang-Song Transition Theory']," *Hebei xuekan* 河北學刊, nos. 4-5 (2010); Diao Peijun 刁培俊, "'Tang-Song shehui biange' jiashuo de fansi yu quyu shiye xia de 'lishi Zhongguo' '唐宋社會變革'假說的反思與區域視野下的'歷史中國' [Reflections on the 'Tang-Song Social Transition' Hypothesis and Understanding 'Historical China' through Regional Perspectives]," *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊 45, no. 2 (2013); Zhang Guogang 張國剛, *Tangdai jiating yu shehui* 唐代家庭與社會 [*Family and Society in the Tang dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 350-58.

pertains to socioeconomic issues, and both have a decisive effect on changes in the nature or developmental stage of society. The fact that the Kyoto and Tokyo schools focused their discussions on questions concerning these two areas shows that they were able to grasp the essential issues at stake. It is somewhat of a pity, then, to find that the Sui [581-618], Tang, and Five Dynasties [907-960] as described by Naitō bear no resemblance to the historical reality of this period. In fact, Naitō's "A Comprehensive Look at the Tang-Song Period" is little more than an abstract framework developed according to a Eurocentric paradigm. In an effort to make China's history fit neatly into medieval European history, Naitō's arguments have altered the history of the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties in a way that seriously deviates from the historical reality of those periods. As for the changes in the organizational structure of government and socioeconomic structure that Naitō described as leading to this transition, these changes either did not take place during the period in which he describes them or were totally at odds with the historical reality of the time.

1 Propositions by Naitō and His Students Concerning the Organizational Structure of Government during Tang and Song Were Divorced from Historical Reality

1.1 *Naitō and His Students Defined the "Aristocracy" Inaccurately as "Nobility"*

When Naitō speaks of the nobility [*guizu* 貴族], he is actually referring to the aristocracy [*shizu* 士族]. By describing the "aristocracy" of the time as "nobility," Naitō defined nobility in a way that was inconsistent with both popular understanding of the term throughout history and the basic characteristics of the aristocracy.

The term *guizu* appears in written texts throughout Chinese history to refer to the relatives of the imperial family or leaders of ethnic minorities. This meaning is consistent with the understanding of the nobility in medieval Western Europe and the nobility as found in some countries today. Given that, from the past to the present, the term "nobility" has had its own specific meaning, Naitō's unique use of the term to define the "aristocracy" from the Wei [220-265], Jin [265-420], and Southern and Northern Dynasties [420-589] until the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties is certainly inaccurate.

Throughout history, the nobility—both inside and outside China—has held an entrenched legal status that was hereditary and could be passed on to successive generations. In contrast, what we understand as the aristocracy of the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern, Sui, and Tang dynasties was not a group with an entrenched legal status that could be inherited.

The legal status of people throughout Chinese history has been determined by the rules set out in administrative statutes and criminal codes as well as in records in household registers. However, whereas statutes and codes in the Wei, Jin, Sui, and Tang periods record distinctions between officials and citizens [*guanmin* 官民] and subordinated people [*liangjian* 良賤], they made no distinction between the "upper class" and the masses, thus no distinction between the "aristocracy" and "commoners." Household registers and other related documents, such as household declarations [*shoushi* 手實][8] and financial registers [*jizhang* 計賬],[9] also distinguish only between free and subordinated people and between officials and the masses, with no records indicating differences between commoners and the aristocratic elite. This evidence demonstrates the absence of a clearly defined legal concept of the aristocracy at the time.[10] Prior to the edict of Emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝 [r. 471-499] of the Northern Wei [386-534] in 495, which assigned certain lineages an "aristocratic" status based on their previous bureaucratic positions, the designation of individuals as either aristocratic elite or commoner was assigned through public opinion. This absence of an officially recognized classification scheme made it impossible to have a uniform standard that determined who made up the aristocracy, inevitably leading to difficult situations in which court officials, scholars, and genealogists had different theories about which families should be included.[11]

8 Household declarations were records of declarations made by civilian families to the village head recording information such as the age of the people in their household and the amount of land they had. These documents would form the basis of the Household Register.—Trans.

9 Financial registers were records of changes in the status or situation of residents of a particular area and were generally made by the village head.—Trans.

10 Conversely, there was a clearly defined legal concept for *shiren* 士人 [upper-gentry] and in some instances, *shiren* would even have specific *shi* registers. During the reign of Fu Jian 苻堅 [r. 357-385], a Di 氐 leader of the Former Qin [350-394], *shi* registers from the Wei and Jin dynasties were restored (exempting those registered from tax and corvée labor), and corvée labor practices were standardized. See Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jinshu* 晉書 [*History of the Jin Dynasty*] [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974], 113.2895.

11 An example can be found in the Zhang family in the court of the Tang emperor Xuanzong 唐玄宗 [r. 712-756]. Born as a commoner, Zhang Yue 張說 [667-730] served as the director of the Secretariat [*Zhongshuling* 中書令], as well as the assistant director for both the Left and Right of the Department of State Affairs [*Shangshu zuoyou puye* 尚書左右僕射]. Zhang's children also held high positions: his elder son Zhang Jun 張均 [fl. 750] was the minister of justice [*Xingbu shangshu* 刑部尚書], and his younger son, Zhang Ji 張垍 [fl. 730], earned the endearment of Emperor Xuanzong and married his daughter, Princess Ningqin 寧親 [fl. 785]. The Zhang family is described as "renowned par excellence" (see Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [*New History of the Tang Dynasty*] [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975], 125.4411). According to Tang dynasty precedents used in compiling the *Treatise of Lineage Names* [*Shizu zhi* 氏族誌] for Emperor Taizong 唐太宗 [r. 626-649] and the *Record of Family Names* [*Xingshi lu* 姓氏

Although the aristocracy existed as a social group over a long period, its membership was constantly changing. This was due, in part, to the fact that the bureaucratic positions of aristocratic officers were not hereditary. All these points demonstrate the marked differences between the aristocracy and the nobility.

Although some might argue that the Jin dynasty household levy [*hudiao* 戶調] system and landowning system [*zhantian ketian* 占田課田] provided the aristocracy with certain economic privileges, such as exemptions from taxes and corvée labor, this was not actually the case. As the treatise on financial administration in the *History of the Jin Dynasty* [*Jinshu shihuozhi* 晉書·食貨誌] clearly states, land held by ranked officials was exempt from tax and labor requirements whereas that held by aristocratic landlords was not.[12] It would be inaccurate to use the concept of the aristocracy as a substitute for ranked officials, as this would be applying to an entire social level what was true for only some.

Aristocratic landlords and commoner landlords made up two separate groups within the landlord class, with the two groups constituting the foundation of landlord political power. The Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties had no substantial difference in economic position between aristocratic landlords and commoner landlords, and it was customary for the two groups to work together with government officials in order to maintain feudal power. An example of this is the influential Sui ministers Gao Jiong 高熲 [541-607] and Su Wei 蘇威 [542-623]; Gao Jiong was originally from a commoner family, and Su Wei came from an eminent aristocratic family. The two ministers were on close terms with each other, and historical documents record that "during the time that Gao Jiong and Su Wei came together to assist each other, the administrative statutes and criminal codes, regardless of how important or otherwise, were all carefully planned out. Accordingly, it came to pass that, after several years, the fortune of the dynasty was recast and all under heaven was in put in order."[13] During the early years of the Tang dynasty, another such friendship formed between the humble born Wei Zheng 魏徵 [580-643] and

錄] for Emperor Gaozong 唐高宗 [r. 649-683], there is no doubt that the Zhang family would have ranked high in the aristocracy. However, Kong Zhi 孔至 [fl. 753] a genealogist whose aristocratic family was in decline, did not include Zhang Yue and the families of others who were considered "new families" in his genealogical work *On the Types and Classes of the Hundred Families* [*Baijia leili* 百家類例].

12 Fang Xuanling, *Jinshu*, 26.790.

13 Wei Zheng 魏征 et al., *Suishu* 隋書 [*History of the Sui Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 41.1186.

the upper-class aristocrat Wang Gui 王珪 [570-639], when they both served as ministers to the crown prince Li Jiancheng 李建成 [589-626].

Not only was Naitō misguided in his use of "aristocracy" and "nobility" but all his assertions regarding the state of the aristocracy at the time were also incorrect. For example, he notes that from the Six Dynasties until sometime before the mid-Tang, "government in this period was completely possessed by the overall aristocracy, and no one outside it could rise to a high official post."[14] On the contrary, many of the top-ranking officials during the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties came from humble beginnings. According to calculations by Wang Zhenglu 汪征魯 in *Research on the System of Official Selection during the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties*, during the Western Jin [265-317], ninety-one of the subjects of biographies in the *History of the Jin Dynasty* who served as officials came from upper-class aristocratic families, eighty-four came from common aristocratic families, and fifty-nine came from lower classes. This means that a total of 25.2 percent of officials originated in the common people. This group contained thirteen high-level officials at a rank of three or above, namely: Yue Guang 樂廣, Chu Tao 褚陶, Yan Ding 閻鼎, Tao Kan 陶侃, He Fan 何樊, Gou Xi 苟晞, Fan Gui 範晷, Xiong Yuan 熊遠, Wang Xun 王遜, Yu Yu 虞預, Gao Song 高崧, Wei Gai 魏該, and Li Ju 李矩.[15]

Naitō also noted that when the Tang emperor Taizong 唐太宗 [r. 626-649] ascended the throne, he gave instructions for an inquiry into aristocratic genealogies to be carried out and that "even imperial authority could not alter pedigree ranking."[16] Naitō is fundamentally wrong here. In fact, precisely the opposite is true, for it was none other than Emperor Taizong who used the power of his imperial authority to arbitrarily change the rankings of aristocratic families across the empire, raising his own family ranking to the first rank and demoting the eminent Cui 崔 family to the third rank.

Naitō further states that "in the Southern Dynasties as well, the Wang 王 and Xie 謝 families were far more important than the family pedigrees of the emperors."[17] In making this point, Naitō was probably drawing on the popular adage regarding the influence of the Wang family from Langya 琅琊 over the royal Sima 司馬 family during the Eastern Jin [317-420]: "the Wangs and the

14 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 89.

15 Wang Zhenglu 汪征魯, *Wei, Jin, Nanbeichao xuanguan tizhi yanjiu* 魏晉南北朝選官體制研究 [*Research on the System of Official Selection during the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties*] (Fujian: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1995), 461-70.

16 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 89.

17 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 89.

Simas rule the empire together."[18] However, because of his scant evidence and limited understanding of the history of the Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasties, Naitō once again got many of his facts wrong.

The reality is that this adage referred to a time before the founding of the Eastern Jin, more than a hundred years before the beginning of the Southern Dynasties. At the time, Sima Rui 司馬睿 [r. 317-323], a distant relative of the ruling Sima family, who would later go on to found the Eastern Jin, was garrisoned at Jiankang 建康 (modern-day Nanjing 南京) as merely a prince of the royal family. He was under the command of Sima Yue 司馬越 [d. 311], the prince of Donghai [*Donghai wang* 東海王]. As such, it was only natural that the two brothers from the eminent Wang family, Wang Dao 王導 [276-339] and Wang Dun 王敦 [266-324], enjoyed much greater prestige than Sima Rui at this time. When Naitō says that "in the Southern Dynasties as well, the Wang and Xie families were far more important than the family pedigrees of the emperors," he is wrong in terms of both the people involved and the time that it took place.

1.2 *China Was a Monarchical Autocracy from the Qin and Han Dynasties All the Way through the Ming and Qing*

It is widely known that the political history of ancient and imperial China clearly went through two distinct stages of nobility-based aristocratic government and monarchical autocracy. However, nobility-based aristocratic government did not hold sway during the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties only to give way to monarchical autocracy from the Song onward. On the contrary, nobility-based aristocratic government dominated the Spring and Autumn [770-476 BCE] and Warring States [475-221 BCE] periods, with monarchical autocracy commencing with the unification of China in 221 BCE by Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 [r. 246-210 BCE] and continuing right up to the Qing dynasty [1616-1911]. Upon the unification of China, his first act was to abolish the nobility systems that allowed ministerial and official positions to be passed down along hereditary lines.

From the moment that Qin Shihuang took the title of "emperor" [*huangdi* 皇帝], he held absolute paramount authority. As recorded in the *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji* 史記], "all the affairs of the empire, great and small, are decided by the emperor.... The chancellor and the other major officials are all handed decisions that have already been made, and they simply second the

18 Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nanshi* 南史 [*History of the Southern Dynasties*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 583.

emperor's opinion."[19] The emperor had the authority to establish or abolish any existing government institution and wielded power over the life and death of all his officials. Many of the things that Naitō determined as beginning in the Song dynasty were actually common occurrences beginning in the Qin [221-206 BCE] and Han [206 BCE–220] period all the way up to the time of the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties. These include things such as

> for entrance into high officialdom, the special powers attached to family pedigree disappeared and all posts were appointed through the power of the emperor.... The basis of all power in the state belonged to the one person of the emperor; none of the other high officials held full powers, while the monarch never entrusted to any officials' full powers for their tasks. Accordingly, officials did not bear full responsibility for their jobs, while the sovereign alone bore all responsibility.... Even a [grand chancellor] with considerable power could be abruptly dismissed, made a commoner, or sent to prison if he incurred the emperor's dislike.... No matter how highly ranked a local official was, his post could easily be changed with a mere imperial order.[20]

Although a host of historical evidence points to the contrary, Naitō willfully chose to ignore it, as it did not match the European model in which throughout medieval Europe monarchical power was declining.

Quite a few of the events and situations that Naitō considered as taking place in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties never even happened. They were simply a case of Naitō making up history out of thin air. For example, in the putative nobility-based aristocratic government from the Wei to the Five Dynasties, "the monarch was the common property of the aristocratic class; government was effected by recognizing the special powers of the aristocracy; and alone, he could not hold absolute power."[21] The situation that Naitō is describing here fits in well with that of medieval Europe. However, the reality is that from the Wei to the Tang and Five Dynasties, no individual enjoyed a higher standing than the emperor. Emperors simply did not need the approval of the aristocracy or nobility to govern their empire.

19 Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 58.

20 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 89-92.

21 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 90.

During the decline of monarchical power in medieval Europe, it was common practice for the nobility to openly unite and take a stand against the monarch. However, during the period of monarchical autocracy from the Wei to the Five Dynasties, aristocrats, commoners, and ministers alike did not dare to usurp the authority of the emperor unless they had sufficient power to do so.

Naitō noted that

> the important organs of state in the Tang were the Department of State Affairs, the Imperial Secretariat, and the Imperial Chancellery.... The Imperial Secretariat represented the emperor, while the Imperial Chancellery represented bureaucratic, namely aristocratic, public opinion, but of course all high officials in all three organs of state came from the aristocracy. Thus the aristocracy did not pay absolute obeisance to imperial orders. For that reason, the language used in imperial responses to memorials from officials was extremely friendly and never commanding in tone.... All the [grand chancellors] of the Tang came from the aristocratic class, and it was the custom that upon attaining this post not even the emperor could freely shake their power.[22]

Naitō's statements here are clearly at odds with the historical reality in the Sui and Tang dynasties. Many of the grand chancellors in the Sui and the Tang came from the common people. In the article "Observing the Convergence of Aristocratic Landlords with Commoner Landlords through Tang Dynasty Grand Chancellors, An Outline," Liu Xuepei 劉學沛 notes that "looking at both the New and Old Tang Histories as well as the *Essential Document and Regulations of the Tang* [*Tang huiyao* 唐會要], the Tang dynasty had a total of 376 grand chancellors. Not including the six who served Li Shimin 李世民 as the prince of Qin 秦, this leaves 370 official grand chancellors. Although we cannot confirm the background of four grand chancellors in this group because of a lack of complete historical records, the family background of the remaining grand chancellors shows that 217 were aristocratic landlords and 148 were commoner landlords.... over 31 percent of grand chancellors in the Tang came from the common people."[23]

22 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 91-92.

23 Liu Xuepei 劉學沛, "Cong Tangchao zaixiang kan shizu dizhu yu hanmen dizhu de heliu, lungang 從唐朝宰相看士族地主與寒門地主的合流（論綱）[Observing the Convergence of Aristocratic Landlords with Commoner Landlords through Tang Dynasty Grand Chancellors, An Outline]," in *Zhongguo Tangshi xuehui lunwenji* 中國唐史學會

Naitō's comment that "the Imperial Chancellery represented bureaucratic, namely aristocratic, public opinion" is simply a flight of fancy. If we look at the facts, all the authority of the three major state organs came directly from the emperor. These institutions were the tools through which the emperor governed his empire, and they existed to serve the emperor. They were absolutely under his command. The separation of responsibilities between the three organs was only a separation of the functions of the empire's governing apparatus. At no stage was there any question as to which organ represented the emperor and which represented government officials. Although the Imperial Chancellery had the authority to deliberate on and reject proposals put forward by the Imperial Secretariat, whether its opinions were followed was determined by the emperor. Not only could the emperor decide whether to listen to his ministers but he could also immediately remove any official who disagreed with him from his post or even have him executed. In short, regardless of their rank or position, every government official was nothing more than a subject of the emperor and, when all was said and done, had no choice but to unconditionally submit to his will.

As for comments such as "the language used in imperial responses to memorials from officials was extremely friendly and never commanding in tone," again this is Naitō imagining Tang China through the prism of declining monarchical authority in medieval Western Europe. There is no evidence of this in China whatsoever.

Naitō also notes that "it was the custom in the Tang that local officials often held the same powers in their localities that the sovereign held at the center."[24] Here, he is clearly conflating local officials in Tang China with the local magnates who lived during the period of declining monarchical authority in medieval Western Europe. Naitō does not seem to have understood that the medieval European context was fundamentally different from that of China beginning in the Qin and Han dynasty. From the time that Qin Shihuang unified the empire, China had a centralized government in which authority in key military, political and fiscal matters was all held by a centralized state. All appointments or dismissals of local officials (e.g., commandery governors, commandants, and prefects) were made by the central authorities, with the power of local officials heavily restricted. In an imperial China run by a centralized state, the crimes that local officials feared most were those concerning

論文集 [*Collection of Articles from the Tang Dynasty Institute of China*], ed. Zhongguo Tangshi xuehui 中國唐史學會 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 1989), 52.

24 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 92.

individual power grabs, the overstepping of one's authority and the formation of cliques colluding to usurp power.

2 The Assertions Made by Naitō and His Students Regarding the Socioeconomic Structure of the Tang and Song Dynasties Are Inconsistent with the Historical Reality at the Time

Naitō stressed that during "the era of aristocratic government … the people were looked upon as slaves of the body of aristocrats. In the Sui-Tang years, the people were released from the hands of the aristocracy and came under the direct control of the state."[25] Here, Naitō's emphasis on the people coming "under the direct control of the state" is informed by changes that took place in medieval Western Europe, where the practice of feudalism meant that although the monarch was the nominal overlord, in practice, they could only govern the subjects residing within their personal fiefdom. A popular saying at the time described this as "my vassal's vassal is not my vassal." It was not until the later stages of the Middle Ages, marked by the growing power of monarchs coupled with the declining power of the nobility, that monarchs began to wield personal power over the majority of households within their realm and commence compiling statewide household registries.

The situation in China was completely different. Even before Qin Shihuang unified China, Zhou [1046-256 BCE] vassal states had already established household registers that put the control of civilian households directly into their own hands.

The amount of material related to state control of households is too numerous to list in detail. An example of this evidence is household data recorded in the histories of the Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties, which confirms that civilian households were under the direct control of the state in each of these periods. Living at a time when he did not have access to as many pre-Tang household register documents as we do today, Naitō can perhaps be forgiven for making the wild claim that "in the Sui-Tang years, the people were released from the hands of the aristocracy and came under the direct control of the state." However, this just goes to show that many of Naitō's assertions regarding the socioeconomic structure of the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Tang, and Song periods do not stand up to historical scrutiny.

25 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 93.

Turning now to Naitō's comments regarding taxation reforms in the mid-Tang, we find Naitō stating that

> the Tang system of *zu-yong-diao* 租庸調 required that people pay a land rent, serve corvée labor, and contribute goods to the government. From the middle years of the Tang, this system gradually dissolved and was replaced by the double-tax system. This development enabled people to choose their residence freely. Since the land tax could be paid in money, the position of the people began to open up widely from their early slave-tenant farmer status in which they had been tied to the land.[26]

This statement is riddled with obvious errors. First, it should be pointed out that, under the double-taxation system in which land and household taxes were collected separately each year, the land tax was assessed in bushels of grain whereas the household tax was assessed in cash. In practice, however, a certain proportion of household taxes was often collected in cloth; furthermore, there is no evidence that cash was used instead of grain to pay the land tax. Naitō's statements regarding the double-taxation system mixed up which taxes could be paid in cash. Additionally, with regard to workers being tied to the land, as far as I can see, both tax systems were much the same. One of the principles in determining taxes under the double-taxation system was the elimination of the distinction between long-standing and newly settled households, with all households required to register in the location of current residence.[27] This did not make it easier for the common people to leave the land. On the contrary, it made it more difficult.

Moving now to the issue of the distribution of land in the Tang, we find Naitō saying that "the position of the people and their private power in wealth underwent a great change from the era of aristocratic government … the system of land distribution was closely related to this … in the Song dynasty, the sense of popular land ownership was gradually secured through the new laws of Wang Anshi."[28]

In fact, the private nature of land ownership by common people in the Tang dynasty was already clearly acknowledged in the administrative statutes and criminal codes at the time. Examples can be found in the household and marriage section of the *Tang Code* [*Tanglü* 唐律], which contains articles that refer

26 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 93.

27 See Liu Xu 劉昫 et al., *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [*Old History of the Tang*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 3421.

28 Naitō, "A Comprehensive Look at the T'ang-Sung Period," 93.

to "all cases of illegal cultivation of private and public land," "all cases of wrongfully laying claim to or illegally trading or selling public or private land," and "all cases of officials who encroach upon private land."[29] Here, the references to "public land" specifically referred to government-owned land, and instances of "private land" refer to land held by the common people. An article that refers to "all cases of public or private wasteland" in the section on land regulations in the recently restored *Tang Statutes* [*Tangling tianling* 唐令·田令][30] even goes so far as to clearly acknowledge private ownership of wasteland.

In a debate held in the fourteenth year of the Kaiyuan era 開元 [713-741] in which Tang chancellor Li Yuanhong 李元紘 [d. 733] opposed the establishment of agricultural colonies [*tuntian* 屯田] on land around the capital that had previously been used to provide officials with salaries but was now abandoned, Li Yuanhong explicitly stated that

> these fields which have been returned by officials are spread across various districts and cannot be grouped together. The common people have worked hard to cultivate their private land and this land cannot be taken from them. Should agricultural colonies be established, their establishment would require an exchange of private land for public land.[31]

Such a clear conception of land ownership rights coming from the highest echelons of state power was rare in imperial China. Li Yuanhong's views appear in stark contrast to the "public fields" [*gongtian* 公田] land nationalization policy of the Song grand chancellor Jia Sidao 賈似道 [1213-1275], which forced landowners to sell one-third of their holdings to the state, often for much less than the market value.

Whereas Naitō's key arguments revolved around an analysis of bureaucratic systems, he rarely touched on economics and left out any mention of issues regarding the tenancy system. They were later taken up by his student Miyazaki Ichisada, and two of his articles, "East Asia's Early Modern Age" and

29 Wallace Johnson, trans., *The T'ang Code, Volume II: Specific Articles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 139-42.

30 Tianyi ge bowuguan 天一閣博物館, Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo Tiansheng ling zhengli ketizu 中國社會科學院歷史研究所天聖令整理課題組, *Tianyi ge cang Ming chaoben Tiansheng ling jiaozheng, Fu Tangling fuyuan yanjiu* 天一閣藏明鈔本天聖令校證(附唐令復原研究) [*Collated Edition of the Ming Tianyi Ge Manuscript Copy of the Statutes of the Tiansheng Era, With Appended Research on the Restored Tang Statutes*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 258-59.

31 Liu Xu, *Jiu Tangshu*, 3074.

"From Agricultural Dependents to Tenant Farmers,"[32] focused on the issues of manorialism and tenancy.

Technically speaking, ever since Qin Shihuang abolished the patrimonial system of appointing subordinate rulers and created a unified state through centralized power, manorialism and its closely associated seigniorage ceased to exist in China. Written documents from the Qin, Han, Wei, and Southern and Northern Dynasties do not contain any mention of the term "manor" [*zhuangyuan* 莊園], and no record of the term has ever been found in any official administrative documents, such as household registers, household declarations, or tax registers in any dynasty. Although transmitted texts from the Tang dynasty and manuscripts unearthed at Dunhuang 敦煌 mention the term "manor," it is clear that, as used in the Tang dynasty, it was merely a synonym for "cultivated fields." Thus, we have a situation in which not only were owner farmers in the practice of calling a small section of their fields a "manor" but so were many of the landholding military officers and soldiers who lived throughout the large administrative circuits across the empire. Indeed, even the legendary Dong Yong 董永, the personification of filial piety who sold himself into slavery to pay for his father's funeral, was also in the habit of styling a portion of his fields as a "manor." Needless to say, the term did not hold any specific connotations. The "manors" in the Tang had little in common with manors in Europe or *shōens* in Japan, and even less with any associated systems of slavery, feudalism, and serfdom.[33]

Miyazaki's statement that, between the Tang and the Song, the primary labor force in agricultural production shifted from agricultural dependents [*buqu* 部曲] to tenant households [*dianhu* 佃戶] is seriously divorced from historical

32 Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定, "Dongyang de jinshi 東洋的近世 [East Asia's Early Modern Age]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguoshi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.153-242; Miyazaki Ichisada, "Cong buqu zouxiang dianhu 從部曲走向佃戶 [From Agricultural Dependents to Tenant Farmers]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguoshi lunzhu xuanyi* 日本學者研究中國史論著選譯 [*Translation of Selected Works by Japanese Scholars on Chinese History*], ed. Liu Junwen 劉俊文, trans. Suo Jieran 索介然 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 5.1-71.

33 For further details, see Yang Jiping 楊際平, "Tang Wudai wenxian suojian de 'zhuang' 'zhuangzhai' 'zhuangtian' 'zhuangyuan' 唐五代文獻所見的'莊' '莊宅' '莊田' '莊園' [The Terms 'Zhuang' 'Zhuangzhai' 'Zhuangtian' 'Zhuangyuan' as Found in Tang and Five Dynasties Documents]," in *Zhongguo jingji tongshi: Sui Tang Wudai jingjishi* 中國經濟通史: 隋唐五代經濟史 [*General History of Chinese Economy: Economic History of the Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties*], ed. Zhao Dexin 趙德馨 (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 2002); Liu Hongyun 劉紅運, "Dunhuang wenshu suojian de 'zhuang' 'tianzhuang' 'zhuangtian' 'zhuangyuan' fei fengjian zhuangyuan shuo 敦煌文書所見的'莊' '田莊' '莊田' '莊園'非封建莊園說 [The Terms 'Zhuang' 'Tianzhuang' 'Zhuangtian' and 'Zhuangyuan' as Found in Dunhuang Manuscripts Do Not Refer to the Feudal Manor]," *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊, no. 2 (2000).

reality. During the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties, a common saying in the north went, "for plowing consult a [male] field slave, for silk consult a [female] weaving slave" [*geng ze wen tiannu, juan ze wen zhibi* 耕則問田奴，絹則問織婢].[34] The south had a similar saying that "running a state is like running a household. For plowing consult a [male] slave, for weaving consult a [female] slave" [*zhiguo ru zhijia, geng dang wen nu, zhi dang wen bi* 治國如治家，耕當問奴，織當問婢].[35] These sayings reveal the important position that male and female slaves occupied in the terms of social production. From the Sui onward, what had once been a "common saying" regarding the consultation of slaves now became a historical aphorism: "*the ancients said*, for plowing consult a [male] slave, for weaving consult a [female] slave."[36] This transformation indicates that consulting slaves in matters of plowing and weaving had become a historical memory for those living in the Sui and the Tang, which in turn illustrates that the role of slaves and agricultural dependents in agricultural production at that time was no longer as great as it had previously been.

Miyazaki notes that,

> the manors of medieval aristocrats … were rented out on land contracts to the tenant who agreed to pay the highest rent. In this way, agricultural dependents in the middle ages were released and replaced by tenant households.… not long after the Song dynasty had been established, probably sometime around the reign of Emperor Zhenzong 宋真宗, the system set up around agricultural dependents completely dissolved.[37]

This assertion mixes up the timing of events and is another case of Miyazaki seriously departing from the historical reality at the time. At no stage did governments in the Sui and the Tang carry out measures to free large numbers of agricultural dependents. Whether private landlords allowed freed slaves to leave their households was a matter of personal choice, and there is no way that any unified measures could have been taken. The real reason for the decline of agricultural dependents was not their release but, rather, a range of measures in the Tang to limit slavery, which dried up the supply of both slaves and agricultural dependents. Furthermore, tenant households during the Tang

34 Wei Shou 魏收 et al., *Weishu* 魏書 [*History of the Wei*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 1445.

35 Mentioned by Shen Qing 沈慶 in "Daoyi Liu Yu zhuan 島夷劉裕傳 [Biography of the Island Barbarian Liu Yu]," in *Weishu*, 2140.

36 Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Beishi* 北史 [*History of the Northern Dynasties*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 2623.

37 Miyazaki, "East Asia's Early Modern Age," 173.

did not emerge from agricultural dependents. The bulk of tenant households were made up of owner farmers, part-owner farmers, and people who had been displaced, all of whom were legally free. With regard to the timing of events in Miyazaki's thesis, whereas the agricultural dependent system ended during the Tang, the system of tenancy had been in existence long beforehand. By no later than the early Tang, tenancy arrangements had become the most common farming practice outside subsistence farming.

To date, more than ten tenancy contracts have been unearthed in Dunhuang, all of which are from the late Tang and Five Dynasties, when the area was governed by the Returning to Righteousness Army [*Guiyi jun* 歸義軍]. In addition, over 120 tenancy contracts (including a few fragments) have been unearthed at Turfan, most of which date back to the era of the Gaochang 高昌 state [460-640] and the early Tang dynasty. Together, they total around 140 contracts (one of which records an instance of a tenant claiming ownership and subletting his field, leading to a situation in which one field had two owners),[38] which is more than three times the number of tenancy contracts from the Song, Liao [907-1125], Jin [1115-1234], Yuan [1206-1368], and Ming [1368-1644] currently known to exist.[39]

In general, these tenancy contracts had quite a short duration, and more than 85 percent of them for a period of one to two years. This indicates that the relationship between landlords and tenants at the time was temporary and that tenants were relatively free. Although some instances occurred in the Song in which landlords prevented tenants from leaving their land, no such examples of this practice have been found as yet in the Tang. Indeed, whereas Song regulations mandated that the relationship between landlords and tenants was that of master and servant, this was not the case in the Tang and Five Dynasties, and no special regulations existed in the criminal codes and administrative statutes of the time regarding tenants. As noted in the General Principles section of the *Tang Code*, for "all cases of crimes committed by official bondsmen, agricultural dependents, or government or private slaves, where the specific article has no formal text concerning these inferior classes, treat them as free

38 Yang Jiping, "Lun Tang, Wudai suojian de 'yi tian er zhu' yu yongdianquan 論唐、五代所見的'一田二主'與永佃權 [On Perpetual Tenancy and the 'One Field, Two Owners' Phenomenon Found in the Tang and Five Dynasties]," *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu* 中國經濟史研究, no. 3 (2018).

39 According to incomplete data, tenancy contracts dating from the Song, Yuan and early Ming (before the Hongzhi 弘治 period [1488-1505]) currently include no more than ten contacts written in Chinese characters, three tenancy contracts in Old Tibetan 吐蕃, ten tenancy contracts in Tangut 西夏, and around thirteen contracts in Old Uyghur 回鶻. This gives a total of a little over thirty contracts.

persons."[40] This indicates without a doubt that tenants enjoyed a legal status as free men and that no legal basis existed on which to distinguish between landlords and tenants in terms of higher and lower status or being master and servant.

Facts speak louder than words. Naitō and Miyazaki's theory about the Tang's being a medieval slave society and the Song's being a time when "the position of the people began to open up widely from their early slave-tenant farmer status" can no longer stand up to the scrutiny of new material evidence that has emerged in the past twenty to thirty years. The same is true of Maeda Naonori's theory developed with others at the Tokyo school, which regarded the Tang as an ancient slave society and the Song as a medieval and feudal serf society. Prior to the mid-Tang, except for owner farmers, tenancy systems were the dominant structure of agricultural production. This historical reality, confirmed by the tenancy contract system, means that no evidence remains to support the various assertions made by the Kyoto and Tokyo schools regarding whether the use of agricultural dependents in the Tang constituted a serf society or a slave society.

3 Dispelling the Myth of the "Tang-Song Transition Theory"

The fact that many major changes take place in each relatively long period of history is not surprising in the least. For example, if we examine the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, we naturally find that a whole host of changes took place. Politically, these changes included the decline in the power of the monarchy, coupled with the rise of vassal lords. This led to increasing power struggles between expanding states, which in turn laid the foundation for Qin Shihuang to unify China. Major cultural changes also took place during this period and are manifested in the decay of traditional Zhou state rites and music practices as well as debates between competing schools of thought. In science and technology, advances in smelting practices and improved iron tools led to substantial increases in social production.

In the Qin and Han periods, extensive changes took place in government organization and fiscal management. After China's unification, Qin Shihuang fundamentally changed the structure of state power by replacing the previous system of patrimonialism with one of bureaucratic centralism, allowing him to create a unified multiethnic state that was both autocratic and centralized. At the same time, major changes occurred in the makeup of the bureaucracy. In

40 Wallace Johnson, trans., *The T'ang Code, Volume I: General Principles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 249.

line with the movement toward state centralization, a system of three senior statesmen and nine ministers was established in the capital, whereas in local regions, commanderies and districts were set up and managed by governors and magistrates, respectively. In financial affairs and taxation, new measures for land taxes, poll taxes, and corvée labor were introduced.

After the upheaval created by the division of the empire and several partial reunifications that followed, a period of large-scale cultural and ethnic integration occurred in the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties. During this period, changes in bureaucratic systems shifted real power away from the three senior ministers to the Imperial Secretariat. Changes in the process of selecting officials included the introduction of a new system in which "Recommending Legates" [*zhongzheng* 中正] were used to promote and rank candidates for posts in the imperial bureaucracy based on nine official ranks [*jiupin* 九品]. This system and its subsequent ossification led to the gradual rise of an aristocracy that increasing held political power. In terms of financial and taxation measures, political disorder and the ensuing lack of detailed census data resulted in a shift from proportional taxation to a fixed quota based on land area whereas the poll tax was replaced by a household levy.

Reunification during the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties enabled the return of a unified multiethnic state that was both autocratic and centralized. Changes in the government structure facilitated the rise of the three departments and six ministries, and the nine-rank system was gradually replaced by a selection system centered on imperial examinations. With the implementation of new measures limiting the use of slaves, contract tenancy became the leading mode of production, other than subsistence farming. After fiscal changes and reforms in the taxation system in 780, the double-taxation system replaced the previous *zu-yong-diao* system, in which fixed taxes had been paid in grain, cloth, and labor by each registered taxpayer.

During the Song, partial reunification of the empire once again was followed by the reestablishment of the centralized state. Although socioeconomic advancements proceeded at an unprecedented rate, and cultural practices and academic scholarship flourished, the state was increasingly hampered by its weak fiscal conditions and the lack of military force.

All these changes are just as important as those that took place between the Tang and the Song, if not more so. Yet until now, scholars have rarely encompassed these changes in theories about a transition from one particular period to another, and even when they do, these theories never even get close to being considered as describing "settled historical fact" in the way that popular support has bestowed on the Tang-Song transition theory. No other "transition theory" can lay claim to a such a wide influence over historians and academics, to the point that it becomes the basis for future research.

Only Naitō and his students, who, in comprehensively describing their imagined "major transition" between the Tang and the Song across a variety of topics—politics, economics, culture, intellectual discourse—were able to come to the conclusion that the Tang was the culmination of the medieval period, whereas the Song marked the beginning of the modern era. Accompanying this feat was the packaging of their entire suite of arguments into a single "Tang-Song transition theory." Although this theory, as summarized by Naitō and his students, is seriously divorced from the historical reality of the Tang and Song periods, it nevertheless fit nicely with Naitō's original motives and worked well with the meaning of the term "transition" [*biange* 變革]. By referring to more than simply a gradual change, the term *bian'ge* denotes expelling the old and bringing in the new and describes a fundamental change in the intrinsic nature of that which is changing. The connotations of this fundamental change can be seen in Naitō and his student's description of the Tang as an aristocratic government in which the people were slaves and tenant farmers, in contrast to his description of the Song as a monarchical autocracy that further validated the significance of land ownership for commoners. It can also be seen in the contrast between the Tang as the culmination of the medieval period and the Song as the start of the modern era.

With regard to the major political and socioeconomic transitions imagined by Naitō and his students to have taken place during the transition between the Tang and Song, they either never actually took place or were already taking place in the early stages of the Tang long before the period of transition between the two dynasties. For example, as mentioned above, China did not wait until the Song to become a monarchical autocracy—it had been one from the moment that Qin Shihuang unified the empire and claimed the title of emperor. Similarly, changes in the nature of the aristocracy were not exclusive to the transitional years between the Tang and the Song. The decline of aristocratic families was already well underway by the beginning of the Sui with the abolition of the nine-rank system and the establishment of imperial exams. Nonetheless, traces of the aristocracy continued to exist throughout the Tang and Song and could even be found after the fall of the Song.[41] One could say that the dissolution of the aristocracy during the transition between

41 Both the Songshi 宋史 [*History of the Song*] and the Jinshi 金史 [*History of the Jin*] continued to make frequent reference to terms describiing the aristocracy, such as *shizu* 士族 [scholar bureaucrat families] and *shizu* 世族 [hereditary families]. See Toghtō 脫脫 et al., *Jinshi* 金史 [*History of the Jin*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), vols. 64, 105, 16, and 131. The upper levels of Song society held the aristocracy in great esteem when it came to marriage, but at the end of the Southern Song, the government once again "started to set up *shi* registers." See Toghtō 脫脫 et al., *Songshi* 宋史 [*History of the Song*]

these two dynasties was a fait accompli. Furthermore, records in the *Tang Code* and *Tang Statutes* show that the right of civilian households to own private land was clearly recognized in the law in the early stages of the Tang. There was no need to wait until after the mid-Tang for such recognition, let alone until the commencement of the Song. The same is also true of changes in agricultural production, with transmitted texts and unearthed manuscripts revealing that slaves and agricultural dependents were no longer the main force in production by the Sui and early Tang. These texts also show the high prevalence of tenancy and contract tenancy, with tenancy clearly being the leading form of agricultural production at the time, other than subsistence farming. These changes occurred before the mid-Tang and long before the transition period between the Tang and Song.

In conclusion, the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties as described by Naitō bear no resemblance to the historical reality at those times. Naitō's arguments, in many instances, distorted the history of these dynasties in an effort to make China's history fit neatly within the framework of medieval European history. Consequently, his central conclusion, main arguments, and so-called premises are all wrong. The approach taken by Naitō is not a scientific one in which he undertook research based on historical material; rather, he started with a predetermined conclusion and then selected and interpreted historical materials to support his argument. It is crucial for us to dispel the myth of the "Tang-Song transition theory" and return to historical reality.

The "Tang-Song transition theory" as set out by Naitō and his students is a myth. Another theory, highly regarded in some academic circles, that Zheng Qiao's 鄭樵 [1104-1162] statements regarding changes in official selection and marriage practices from the Tang to Song are evidence that he was the first proponent of the "Tang-Song transition theory" is also just a myth. It is crucial for us to shatter the myth of the "Tang-Song transition" as advanced by Naitō and his students and, in line with the tenets of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, make proper use of transmitted texts and unearthed manuscripts from the Tang and Song dynasties (especially unearthed manuscripts published over the past forty years). In this way, we can study the changes that occurred during the Tang and Song dynasties as well as during the intervening period and perform a practical assessment of the status of these changes within the context of Chinese history.

Translated by Michael Broughton

(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 46.908. These examples show that, as during the Tang, vestiges of the aristocracy could be found throughout the Song.

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Time to Turn the Page in Tang and Song History Studies: Exploring the Tang-Song Transformation Theory from Multiple Perspectives

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Abstract

In China, Naitō Konan's "theory on modernity since the Song" (Tang-Song transformation theory) did not elicit widespread academic interest until the twenty-first century. The following article provides a comprehensive analysis of the reception to Naitō's theory by Chinese historians and the implications for Chinese Song studies. The author discusses the Naitō hypothesis from six different perspectives: the theoretical basis and political background of Naitō's work, historical development patterns in China and the West, Chinese history as the history of a multiethnic country, international scholarship on the periodization of Chinese history, and the contributions by Chinese scholars. The author concludes that Chinese Tang and Song historians should turn the page and move on from Naitō Konan's modernity theory (transformation theory).

Keywords

China – gender – modernity – Renaissance – Song dynasty – Tang-Song transformation theory

The Japanese scholar Naitō Konan 內藤湖南 [1866-1934] put forward his "Modernity since the Song Dynasty Theory" [*Songdai jinshi shuo* 宋代近世說], subsequently referred to as "modernity theory," in the early twentieth century. Following World War II, Naitō's student Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定 [1901-1995] and others continued to develop his ideas into the more

commonly used "Tang-Song transformation theory," or "transformation theory."[1] Although both theories proved greatly influential with international historians of the Tang [618-907] and Song [960-1279] dynasties for a long time, they initially elicited little response in China. It was not until the early twenty-first century that Naitō's work began to capture the attention of Chinese scholars and became a focus of discussion. Today, as Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 referred, "it has become common for Chinese scholars to analyze the Song dynasty on the basis of the modernity or transformation theory."[2] Many Chinese researchers now consider the transformation theory to be self-evident and treat it as a convenient framework that can be applied to a variety of historical contexts. This approach has given rise to a whole series of new "transformation theories," such as the "mid-Tang transformation theory," the "Northern-Southern Song transformation theory," and the "Song-Yuan transformation theory." Over the past twenty years, Chinese scholars have tried to improve the standard of research on Tang and Song studies by breaking down the dynastic periodization between the two historical periods. If we examine the results of these efforts, however, it becomes clear that the effects of the transformation theory have been minimal, with the theory's shortcomings outweighing its benefits. The transformation theory has fulfilled its historic mission; it is time for Tang and Song historians to turn the page. The following article substantiates this proposition by discussing Naitō's modernity theory from six different perspectives.

1 The History of the Transformation Theory

To clarify the starting point of the academic discussion, we outline important aspects of the theoretical foundations of the Naitō hypothesis and the origins of its status as a paradigm in Song history.

1.1 *Evolution of the Concept of "Modernity"*

The first iteration of Naitō's views was the theory on modernity since the Song dynasty. The Chinese term for modernity, *jinshi* 近世, is found in records predating the Qin dynasty [221-206 BCE] but began to appear more frequently in

1 Professor Naitō is best known under his literary name Naitō Konan 内藤湖南 but is sometimes also referred to by his legal name, Naitō Torajiro 内藤虎次郎. In English-language literature, Naitō Konan's theory is often called the "Naitō hypothesis."

2 Zhejiang daxue Songxue yanjiu zhongxin 浙江大學宋學研究中心, ed., *Songxue yanjiu jikan* 宋學研究集刊 [*Edited Volume of Research in Song Studies*] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2008), 1.3.

records originating after the Qin and Han dynasties [206 BCE-220 CE]. As a temporal marker and a concept for periodization, *jinshi* always takes the "present" as its point of reference. Because the present is continuously displaced, the concept of *jinshi* also remains fluid, only vaguely pointing to an undefined period that is relatively close to the present.

After 1840, Western learning spread eastward, making it unavoidable that Western methods of historical periodization would also influence the interpretation of Chinese history. In 1917, Fu Sinian 傅斯年 [1896-1950] stated: "There is a consensus that there are three stages in Western history, namely, antiquity [*shangshi* 上世], the Middle Ages [*zhongshi* 中世], and modernity [*jinshi*]."[3] Chinese historians introduced the Western model of periodization to China during the late Qing dynasty [1616-1911] and the early Republican period [1912-1949], and Japanese scholars employed this model to divide Chinese history into different periods. However, they had not yet begun to analyze Chinese history from the perspective of the Western path of development. The first real attempt to identify major trends in China's historical development using the idea of "world history"—a model that revolves around our knowledge of the development of Western civilization—was the modernity theory by Naitō, who was the main representative of the Japanese Kyoto school of Chinese history. Between 1910 and 1920, Naitō developed the hypothesis that the Song dynasty marked the beginning of Chinese modernity. He published a series of works, including *A Treatise on China* [*Shina ron* 支那論], *Modern Chinese History* [*Shina kinseishi* 支那近世史], and "A General View of the Tang and the Song."[4] Naitō argued that the major transformation from Chinese antiquity to modernity occurred between the Tang and the Song dynasties.

1.2 *The Theoretical Basis of Naitō Konan's Modernity Theory*

Naitō Konan's modernity theory has two main threads. First, Naitō was clearly influenced by François Guizot's book *Histoire Générale de la Civilisation en Europe*, which presents Western feudalism as a form of aristocracy.[5] By substituting Western feudalism with China's aristocratic system, Naitō could draw parallels between China and the Western development pattern from feudal society to a monarchy as described by Guizot. In his book *Treatise on China*,

3 Fu Sinian 傅斯年, *Shixue fangfa daolun: Fu Sinian shixue wenji* 史學方法導論：傅斯年史學文輯 [*Introduction to Historical Methods: Collected Works on Historical Research by Fu Sinian*] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004), 52-53.

4 Naitō Konan 內藤湖南, "Gaikatsuteki Tō Sō jidai kan 概括的唐宋時代觀 [General View of the Tang and the Song]," *Rekishi to chiri* 歷史と地理 9, no. 5 (1922).

5 François Guizot, *Histoire Générale de la Civilisation en Europe depuis la Chute de L'Empire Romain jusqu'à La Révolution Française* (Brussels: N. J. Gregoir, V. Wouters et Cie, 1840).

published in 1914, Naitō described China's development from an aristocracy to a system of monarchical despotism and eventually to a republican system of government as part of a fundamental pattern in Chinese history. As in the views expressed by Guizot, Naitō believed that a monarchical system of government causes polarization between the state (the sovereign) and the common people and eventually leads to unrest and revolution. Naitō, Uchida Ginzō 内田銀藏 [1872-1919], and other cultural historians in the Kyoto school held viewpoints on history that were formed by Guizot's *Histoire* and Fukuzawa Yukichi's 福澤諭吉 [1835-1901] *Outline of Civilization Theory* and based on ideas about Western feudalism and absolute monarchy.[6]

Second, Naitō's theory was clearly influenced by the historical patterns and characteristics of the Renaissance in Europe. Naitō began to draw analogies between China's Song dynasty and the Western Renaissance—a proposition that was eventually developed more comprehensively by his student Miyazaki Ichisada. Miyazaki concluded that "the eastern renaissance (the Song dynasty) occurred three centuries prior to the Western Renaissance," with the Eastern renaissance "inspiring and influencing" developments in the West.[7] Using a linear concept of history and following the European pattern of renaissance, religious reform, and enlightenment, Miyazaki searched for a comparable timeline in Eastern history—an East Asian "modernity" that predated the European one. Naitō Konan and Miyazaki Ichisada's modernity theory (transformation theory) created a new narrative in East Asian history, attempting to surpass the European model of historical development. They believed that, after the commencement of the Song dynasty, China had successfully come through its middle ages (Han through Tang dynasties). During the Song period, they argued, China experienced a renaissance (with a flourishing culture), religious reform (with neo-Confucianism replacing Buddhism as the main belief system), and the rise of an urban population (due to a developed system of commerce) as well as the idea of the nation-state (because its aristocracy was in decline and it had an increasingly powerful sovereign). Over the past hundred years, the concept of renaissance has been widely researched and discussed in Japan as well as in China.

Naitō Konan not only relied on Western research methods and viewpoints for his modernity theory but also compared the historical conditions that gave

6 Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉, *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* 文明論之概略 [*Outline of Civilization Theory*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1931).

7 Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定, "Dongyang de jinshi 東洋的近世 [East Asia's Early Modern Age]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi* 日本學者研究中國史論著選譯 [*Translations of Selected Works by Japanese Scholars on Chinese History*], ed. Liu Junwen 劉俊文 and trans. Huang Yuese 黃約瑟 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1.236-37.

rise to the modern nation-states in Europe and in Meiji Japan—namely, sovereigns joining hands with the common people to bring down the power of the aristocracy, thereby creating a system of centralized power. It is important to note, however, that Naitō's ideas were not entirely identical to the transformation theory that his successors developed after World War II. To be precise, Naitō's own "modernity" was China's Qing dynasty. He believed that certain patterns in Qing society, politics, economics, and culture had already begun to take shape during the Song dynasty, especially the system of monarchical despotism. Naitō had deep knowledge of famous Chinese historians and thinkers since the seventeenth century, including Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 [1613-1682], Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 [1610-1695], Dai Zhen 戴震 [1724-1777], and Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 [1738-1801]. He was greatly influenced by Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi's critique of the system of monarchical despotism but frequently relied on their work in a way that was contrary to their original intentions.[8] Although Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi's critique of the monarchical despotism of the Song and Ming [1368-1644] dynasties was fueled by their desire to return to the feudal system of China's antiquity, Naitō, by contrast, studied the "progressive nature" of the rise of monarchical despotism through his analysis of the societal and cultural changes during the Song. Despite his reliance on Western research methods and viewpoints, Naitō Konan did not simply echo the West.

1.3 *Naitō Konan's Successors and the Transition from the Modernity Theory to the Transformation Theory*

Naitō Konan's hypothesis that the Song dynasty marked the beginning of Chinese modernity was based mostly on his observations about Chinese society and culture. Miyazaki Ichisada strengthened Naitō's position by contributing further research on China's economy and institutions, eventually turning the Naitō hypothesis into one of the major propositions of the Kyoto school. Whereas the arguments supporting Naitō's theories were based on his observations of China's historical development, Miyazaki Ichisada instead chose to approach the question from the perspective of world history. He argued that China's new Song culture was not only a Chinese but also an "East Asia's Early Modern Age" [*dongyang de jinshi* 東洋的近世].[9]

8 Joshua Fogel 傅佛果, *Neiteng Hunan: Zhengzhi yu hanxue (1866-1934)* 內藤湖南：政治與漢學 (1866-1934)[*Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naitō Konan (1866-1934)*], trans. Tao Demin 陶德民 and He Yingying 何英鶯 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2016), 203, 194.

9 Ren Seikichi 連清吉, "Neiteng Hunan yu Gongqi Shiding: Riben Jingdu Zhongguo xuezhe de shiguan 內藤湖南與宮崎市定——日本京都中國學者的史觀 [Naitō Konan and Miyazaki Ichisada: The Historical Viewpoint of the Sinologists of Japan's Tokyo School]," in *Chang Bide jiaoshou bazhi jinwu shouqing lunwenji* 昌彼得教授八秩晉五壽慶論文集

In his explanation of the societal differences between the Tang and Song dynasties, Naitō did not rely on direct analogies between China's middle ages and modernity and the Western transformation from feudalism to modern capitalism. Miyazaki Ichisada, however, made use of such analogies, for instance, in suggesting the concept of a "nationalism of East Asian modernity" [*dongyang jinshi de guomin zhuyi* 東洋近世的國民主義]. Miyazaki believed that, from the perspective of world history, the East and the West shared certain structural patterns and followed similar trajectories in their historical development. He rejected the idea of a Western-centric approach to history, paving the way for future research on regions on the periphery. Miyazaki attached great importance to the intrinsic development of modern East Asian societies, seeing them as a major cause for Japanese modernization. The importance of Chinese cultural resources, especially during the period of Tang-Song transformation, became a central topic in scholarship on East Asian history.[10] As a consequence, the focus of the modernity theory shifted from the origins of Qing political culture to the historical "progress" that resulted from societal transformations during the Tang and Song. This is how the "modernity theory" developed into the "transformation theory."

The transformation theory has several theoretical weaknesses and does not entirely conform to China's historical circumstances. The historical institute at the University of Wuhan has aptly summarized these concerns as follows. First, the transformation theory is not appropriate for China's national conditions and has already been negated by the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal political struggle in modern China. Second, the concepts of an "era of aristocracy" and "monarchical despotism" are exceedingly vague. Third, the theory lacks an objective and clear definition of what constitutes modernity. Fourth, the transformation theory only describes a historical phenomenon, without providing any explanation of the driving forces behind these developments. Fifth, transformation theory takes the whole of China as its object of study without giving credit to the complexity and regional nature of Chinese history. Sixth, a theoretical analysis of the pre-Qin and pre-Han periods, including the Xia [c. 2070-1600 BCE], Shang [1600-1046 BCE], and Zhou [1046-256 BCE]

[*Festschrift for Professor Chang Bide's Eigthy-Fifth Birthday*], ed., Tamkang daxue zhongwenxi 淡江大學中文系 and Yu xian suo 語獻所 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 2005), 325-44.

10 Xiong Wei 熊偉, "Tang-Song biange lun tixi de yanhua 唐宋變革論體系的演化 [The Evolution of the System of the Tang-Song Transformation Theory]," *Dianzi keji daxue xuebao* 電子科技大學學報 [*Journal of the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China*], no. 5 (2008).

dynasties, is lacking. The basis for the transformation theory is rather weak for these six reasons.

2 The Transformation Theory from a Political Perspective

Naitō's theory not only was the result of his academic concern about the historical periodization of Chinese history but also was influenced by his interest in China's political developments, as well as Japan's China policy throughout his lifetime. After World War II, modernity theory—developed and enriched by Naitō's students and the Kyoto school—was concerned primarily with questions regarding the periodization of Chinese history and the nature of Chinese society. However, irrefutable evidence indicates that modernity theory as originally proposed by Naitō Konan was deeply intertwined with Japanese militarism. Joshua Fogel's book *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naitō Konan (1866-1934)* makes four points that are especially noteworthy with regard to this question.

First, Naitō Konan was a supporter of Japan's militarist policy of aggression against China. In the months after the outbreak of the First Sino-Japanese War [1894-1895], Naitō wrote four articles praising the victorious Japanese military. In these articles, he made the following argument: "While it is indisputable that Japan has a mission in China, this mission must ultimately be based on China's long-term historical and cultural developments."[11]

Second, Naitō Konan was a political commentator first and a sinologist with a focus on Chinese history second. His academic scholarship clearly served his political opinions. In his studies on Chinese culture, Naitō was deeply influenced by scholars such as Gu Yanwu, Huang Zongxi, Qian Daxi 錢大昕 [1728-1804], Dai Zhen, and Zhang Xuecheng, and he internalized their spirit of combining theoretical studies with the practical application of knowledge.

> Naitō firmly believed that solving real world problems ought to be an important goal of academic research. He was therefore opposed to the idea of leaving career politicians and militarists to determine Japan's Asia policy. Based on his unique and traditional understanding of Chinese culture and history, Naitō continued to comment on contemporary political questions such as China's reform and modernization as well as Japan's role in these developments.[12]

11 Fogel, *Neiteng Hunan*, 82-83.

12 Fogel, *Neiteng Hunan,* 11.

Naitō's *Treatise on China* was not written as a comprehensive discussion of Chinese history but, rather, was meant to address the practical question of how to respond to China's state of chaos following the Xinhai Revolution [1911-1912].[13]

Third, Naitō Konan was known as an outstanding China scholar who showed both respect and appreciation for Chinese culture. But his cultural appreciation always remained secondary to his overall goal of benefitting the Japanese nation. Naitō's research on Chinese history and culture was based on his desire to "understand the origins of Japanese culture" and shed light on its future fate.[14] During the First Sino-Japanese War, Naitō published three editorials in which he used a cultural approach to explain his theory of a Japanese "mission" in China [*tianzhi lun* 天職論]. Fogel pointed out that Naitō's theory of a Japanese mission was based on the following understanding:

> In the China-centric East Asian cultural sphere of influence, China and Japan shared a common sinological tradition. Based on this understanding of China, Naitō ceased, to a certain extent, to understand China as a nation-state, instead seeing it merely as the origin of Chinese "culture" and "civilization." Naitō therefore concluded that in order to protect Chinese "culture" and "civilization," Japan had to protect and even dominate China.[15]

Fourth, Naitō developed a theory to explain the phenomenon of shifting cultural centers. Naitō believed that, after the Meiji Restoration [1868], Japan had come to represent the culture of the East and gained sufficient strength to contend with Western culture. He was convinced that Japan would replace China as the cultural center of the East. Chinese culture would eventually be melted away by Japan's unique cultural characteristics to form the "new height" of Eastern civilization. This, Naitō argued, was Japan's cultural "mission" for the future.[16] The reason for Naitō's misconception about Chinese culture was his modernity theory. Naitō was persuaded that China had entered modernity with the Song dynasty, roughly eight hundred to a thousand years before his time. With this development, China had preceded the world's progress toward modernity by four to five centuries. It was precisely this premature development, Naitō

13 Fogel, *Neiteng Hunan,* 194.

14 Qian Wanyue 錢婉約, *Neiteng Hunan yanjiu* 內藤湖南研究 [*Research on Naitō Konan*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 135.

15 Fogel, *Neiteng Hunan*, 86.

16 Yang Yongliang 楊永亮, "Neiteng Hunan 'Songdai jinshi shuo' wenhua tanze 內藤湖南'宋代近世說'文化探賾 [Exploring the Cultural Subtleties of Naitō Konan's 'Modernity Theory']" (PhD diss., Northeast Normal University, 2015), 1.

argued, that eventually led to China's difficulties in administration and governance during the Qing dynasty. The modern system of monarchical despotism had alienated royal officials from government affairs and eventually curbed China's progress toward a civilized society. Naitō believed that an external "stimulus" could have remedied this situation, an idea similar to the "impact and response model" used to analyze modern Chinese history.[17] Despite his respect for Chinese culture, Naitō approached his research from the perspective of safeguarding Japanese national interests. We therefore cannot ignore the fact that his modernity theory provided theoretical support for Japan's "compassionate" invasion of China.

3 The Transformation Theory from the Perspective of Gender

Naitō Konan's hypothesis on the Song dynasty as the beginning of Chinese modernity and Miyazaki Ichisada's transformation theory—the attempt to explain Naitō's hypothesis by drawing on the European path to modernity—have one important point in common: they fail to touch upon questions concerning women. The reason is presumably that all the historians concerned were themselves male. Naitō and Miyazaki drew analogies between Song culture and the European Renaissance, declaring culture the most obvious marker of a society's entrance into modernity. They saw the Renaissance "as an age of reflection on the history of mankind" and a period that was "self-conscious about the Middle Ages, rediscovering antiquity, and at the same time creating modernity."[18] Our understanding of the question of whether the Song dynasty was indeed the beginning of Chinese modernity would benefit by our use of a gender perspective to analyze the changing status of Chinese women between the Song dynasty and the early twentieth century and compare it to the status of women in Western societies from the time of the Renaissance until the twentieth century.

Research over the past twenty to thirty years has shown that the ordinary living conditions of women during the Renaissance were complicated and multifaceted. Women were still subject to suppression and restrictions by the patriarchal system and far from "enjoying equal status to men."[19] But many women dared to challenge the status quo, a phenomenon that has been called

17 Yang Yongliang, "Neiteng Hunan," 1.

18 Miyazaki Ichisada, "Dongyang de jinshi," 236.

19 Liu Yaochun 劉耀春, "Wenyi fuxing shiqi funü shi yanjiu 文藝復興時期婦女史研究 [Research on the History of Women during the Renaissance]," *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 4 (2005): 182.

"Renaissance feminism."[20] In fact, the position of women in society began to improve gradually beginning in the Renaissance. In the fifteenth century, women in Europe not only participated broadly in the economy but also began to extensively engage in politics. Although women in sixteenth-century England did not have direct voting rights, they were able to express their political will by choosing deputies to take part in elections on their behalf.

Women in high society had already begun to wield political power, with some rights being legally inherited and others "seized" intentionally. Throughout European history, whether in ancient Greece or ancient Rome or during the Middle Ages, the assumption of the role of an emperor, a king, or a similar position of power had always been the exclusive privilege of men. Beginning in the fourteenth century, however, a series of female monarchs appeared, with their number eventually exceeding thirty. Sharon Janson, an expert on women's history, stresses the factor of gender in her research and analyzes the political history of early modern Europe from the perspective of female rulers.[21]

Even though European women only gained the right to vote after World War I, they were able to continuously improve their position in society from the Renaissance onward through their struggle with the patriarchal system. Eventually, the rulers in these patriarchal systems reduced their prejudice toward and control over women. Throughout this struggle, the position of women in society gradually improved in keeping with the ongoing progress of modern societies. The status of Chinese women, in comparison, followed a vastly different trajectory after the Song dynasty.

Our knowledge about the conditions for women during the Song dynasty has developed in stages. After the 1990s, some scholars asserted categorically that the status of women had slightly improved during the Song, providing them with a freer social environment than either before or after the Song dynasty. Most objective research, however, still concludes that the position of women actually worsened during the Song compared to the Tang dynasty. In this regard, the following three points should be noted.

First, at the end of the Tang dynasty and during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period [907-979], Chinese society was in disarray, with the traditional clan system disintegrating. In the wake of the movement to revitalize Confucianism [*ruxue fuxing yundong* 儒學復興運動], a discussion surrounding

20 Liu Yaochun, "Wenyi fuxing shiqi," 184.

21 See Hou Jianxin 侯建新, "Xifang funü shi yanjiu shuping 西方婦女史研究述評 [Review of Western Research in Women's History]," *Tianjin shifan daxue xuebao* 天津師範大學學報, no. 5 (1991); Liu Yaochun, "Wenyi fuxing shiqi funü shi yanjiu"; Wang Suping 王素平, "Xifang xuejie guanyu jindai zaoqi Yingguo funü shi de yanjiu 西方學界關於近代早期英國婦女史的研究 [Western Academic Research on the Early Modern History of British Women]," *Jingji shehui shi pinglun* 經濟社會史評論, no. 3 (2010).

the proper status of women in society strengthened the Confucian yin-yang theory [*yin-yang xueshuo* 陰陽學說] from the beginning of the Song until the reign of the Song emperor Renzong 仁宗 [r. 1022-1063]. At the same time, the resurgence of ancestor veneration caused a revival of the Chinese kinship system [*zongfa zhi* 宗法制], which had been all but destroyed. The reconstruction and development of the patriarchal clan system [*jiazu zhidu* 家族制度] directly affected the position of women, and Confucian ethics were increasingly integrated into family and clan regulations. This shows that the Song dynasty placed great emphasis on preventing illegitimate relations between the sexes and on segregation between men and women in society. More vigilance against women gaining political influence occurred during the Song dynasty than any other period.

Second, although China's imperial examination system [*keju zhidu* 科舉制度] originated during the Sui [581-618] and Tang dynasties, only during the Song dynasty did the system become accessible to the common Chinese people. Anyone had the right to take part in the examinations, whether government officials or the common people. It was also during the Song period that the selection process for candidates changed from a system of recommendations to a system based on personal talent and ability. If we examine the civil service examination system from the perspective of gender, it becomes obvious that women, who comprised around half the population, were entirely excluded. Women were denied the right to take part in the examinations and become public officials as well as the right to education and personal development more generally. In essence, the civil service examination system embodied the gender hierarchy of the Song dynasty and exacerbated discrimination against women during this period.

Third, the transition from the Tang to the Song dynasty was an age of major societal changes in China after the Spring and Autumn [770-476 BCE] and the Warring States [475-221 BCE] periods. The hierarchies and structures of these societies, built around the distinction between public officials and ordinary men, strictly excluded women. Under the premise of differential treatment and given sufficient personal talent and opportunity, almost all men—with the exception of members of the lowest social strata or members of a number of base professions—had the chance to improve their social status and rank in society. Women, by contrast, had no opportunity to improve their social rank independently. Because of their subordinate status, women could change their rank in society only in connection with the rank of a man.[22]

22 See Yang Guo 楊果, "Xingbie shijiao xia de Songdai lishi 性別視角下的宋代歷史 [Song History from the Perspective of Gender]," *Huaxia wenhua luntan* 華夏文化論壇, no. 2 (2015).

In addition, the phenomenon of foot-binding, which first appeared in the Southern Tang [937-975] during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, now plays an important role in research on women's history in China. The number of women with bound feet was already comparatively large during the late Northern Song [960-1127] and the early Southern Song [1127-1279] periods. By the mid-Southern Song, at the latest during the reign of emperor Ning Zong 寧宗 [r. 1194-1224], the practice of foot-binding had turned from a fashion phenomenon into a local custom. During the final years of the Yuan dynasty [1206-1368], the practice began to develop into a general custom, a process that was completed only in the Ming period. After the establishment of the Yuan dynasty, the important Cheng-Zhu school of neo-Confucianism [*Cheng-Zhu lixue* 程朱理學] continued to inform public ideology. Ideals of female chastity grew more influential, and the desire to use foot-binding as a way to gain control over women became more pronounced. During the Ming dynasty, foot-binding was more widespread than it had been during the Song and further reduced opportunities for interaction between men and women. Whereas the original custom of foot-binding was driven mostly by aesthetics, it gradually developed into a general custom designed to prevent illicit relations between the sexes. Eventually, bound feet became a comically distorted female characteristic, before women were eventually reduced to objects enslaved by men.

The fate of women and their declining social status after the Song dynasty show that Chinese history was not on the same trajectory as history in the West, where the Renaissance was followed by the industrial revolution and modernity.

4 Transformation Theory from the Perspective of a Multiethnic Country

China has been multiethnic since antiquity. If we examine the modernity theory from this perspective, it becomes clear that Naitō Konan's idea of "China" was limited to areas under political control by the Han Chinese, the "natives of China." Naitō viewed the Jin [1115-1234], Yuan, and Qing dynasties as political rule as a result of alien conquest. After World War II, Miyazaki Ichisada, Saeki Tomi 佐伯富 [1910-2006], and others made substantial additions to our understanding of the characteristics of China's societal and economic developments during the Song. Even though Miyazaki and Naitō's methods of argumentation were not the same, they eventually arrived at similar conclusions. Both agreed that China's social development stagnated for more than a thousand years between the Song and the late Qing dynasty. As a result, European and North

American scholars generally understood modernity theory as the proposition that China had failed to develop a modern society after the Song. Under the influence of the Naitō hypothesis, most scholars believed that China's society had stagnated after a period of rapid development during the Song and that this state of affairs resulted because China was "increasingly isolating itself from the outside world and restricting external trade under Yuan and especially under Ming rule."[23]

Japanese historians also began to pay attention to these questions. Based on the theory of a Tang-Song transformation, the successors to Naitō Konan's modernity theory naturally explored the question of continuity between the Song and Yuan dynasties. Especially important in this regard was the question of how modernity theory was related to the idea of a Ming-Qing transition period, an additional Japanese theory on the periodization of Chinese history. Edited by Japanese scholars and published in 1996, the book *Basic Questions of Historical Studies on the Song and Yuan Dynasties* represented the views of Japanese historians on modernity theory between the 1970s and the 1990s.[24]

If we understand the Tang-Song transformation as an isolated event, accept that China's development into a modern society was interrupted after the Northern Song, and agree that Chinese society once again experienced massive changes during the mid-Ming, how do we then explain the period of stagnation between the Yuan and the mid-Ming dynasty? How can we understand the transition and the connection between the Tang-Song transformation and the transformation that occurred during the second half of the Ming dynasty? All these became important questions for European, North American, and Japanese scholars working on Chinese history from the Southern Song onward. In 1997, an international conference in California called "The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition: A Turning Point in Chinese History?" focused on the long-term societal changes since the late Tang. Discussions ranged from the historical importance of the "Song-Yuan-Ming transition" to the relationship between state and society during this period.

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23 Paul Smith 史樂民, "Song-Yuan-Ming de guodu wenti 宋、元、明的過渡問題 [The Question of the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition]," in *Dangdai xifang hanxue yanjiu jicui: Zhonggushi juan* 當代西方漢學研究集萃——中古史卷 [*Selection of Research by Contemporary Western Sinologists: Ancient Chinese History*], ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey et al. and trans. Zhang Yi 張禕 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 251.

24 Sugiyama Masaaki 杉山正明, "Menggu shidai shi yanjiu de xianzhuang ji keti 蒙古時代史研究的現狀及課題 [Current State and Questions in Historical Research on the Mongol Period]," *Song-Yuan shixue de jiben wenti* 宋元史學的基本問題 [*Basic Questions of Song and Yuan History Studies*], ed. Kondo Kazunari 近藤一成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010).

Paul Smith has summarized the research on this topic as follows: "The establishment of the Song dynasty is the beginning of the Song-Yuan-Ming transition." He wrote:

> If we view the Song-Yuan-Ming transition from a regional perspective, Jiangnan stands out as the sole region of China spared from war and destruction of the time. This makes it useful to think of the Song-Yuan-Ming transition as the localization to Jiangnan of the most important social, economic, and cultural trends of the Tang-Song transformation. Jiangnan's unique status in the transitional era can be seen in the two areas most susceptible to the destruction caused by wars: population trends and cycles of regional development.[25]

In "Current State and Questions in Historical Research on the Mongol Period," the Japanese scholar Sugiyama Masaaki 杉山正明 argued that:

> In order to fully understand China's Ming period, we need to actively engage in research on the Jiangnan region during the Southern Song and the Yuan dynasty. From a Eurasian perspective, the Mongol empire absorbed the heritage of the Southern Song, turning Jiangnan into the world's first wealthy "society of production" (after thorough comparison with other regions at the time) that was open to the world both by land and by sea. If we compare the Mongol period to similar time periods in Eurasia and Africa, the superiority of the Jiangnan society becomes obvious.[26]

Although Japanese scholars seem to hold viewpoints that are largely similar to those of their European and North American colleagues, it is important

25 Paul Smith 史樂民, "Song-Yuan-Ming de guodu wenti 宋、元、明的過渡問題 [The Question of the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition]," in Dangdai xifang hanxue yanjiu jicui: Zhonggushi juan 當代西方漢學研究集萃——中古史卷 [Selection of Research by Contemporary Western Sinologists: Ancient Chinese History], ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey et al. and trans. Zhang Yi 張禕 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 252, 254. Jiangnan 江南 refers to regions south of the lower Yangtze River and around its delta.

26 Sugiyama Masaaki 杉山正明, "Menggu shidai shi yanjiu de xianzhuang ji keti 蒙古時代史研究的現狀及課題 [Current State and Questions in Historical Research on the Mongol Period]," in *Song-Yuan shixue de jiben wenti*, 287-88.

to point out that fundamental differences continue to exist. The idea of a Song-Yuan-Ming transition, for instance, does not support the extension of the modernity theory to later time periods. This type of research reduces China's pluralistic historical development to the Jiangnan region—a typical example of researchers imposing their subjective viewpoints onto China's rich and varied history.

5 Transformation Theory from the Perspective of International Song Studies

Naitō Konan's modernity theory had an enormous effect on the work of international sinologists in the twentieth century. But during the second half of the twentieth century and especially after Western-centric approaches to history were critiqued and eventually revised, most international sinologists have essentially renounced Naitō's European-style modernity theory.

5.1 *The Development of the Transformation Theory in Japanese Scholarship*

Evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of Western methods of periodization in the late 1970s, Japanese scholars began to see the idea of "modernity"—as used by Western historians and social scientists—as a construct based on the development of European societies. The Western systems of slavery and feudalism in particular proved difficult to apply to China. Research on China's premodern "sprouts of capitalism" was equally insufficient for showing that China would have developed into a capitalist society on its own.

Kishimoto Mio 岸本美緒, a well-known historian of the Ming and Qing dynasties, realized that, beginning in the late nineteenth century, China and Japan began to use the two terms for modernity *jindai* 近代 (*kindai* in Japanese) and *jinshi* (*kinsei* in Japanese) differently. Kishimoto argued that, unlike *jinshi*, *jindai* carried a connotation of Western influence. Eventually, *jindai* replaced *jinshi* in China. Beginning in the 1930s, the idea of the Opium Wars [1840-1842] as the beginning of Chinese modernity [*jindai*] began to gain in popularity. For Chinese scholars, the invasion by foreign imperialists and the destabilization of traditional Chinese systems of governance were the real symbols of modernity. The controversy in the 1950s and 1960s about Chinese modernity [*jinshi*]

between two schools of Japanese historians—the Rekiken school[27] and the Kyoto school—was mostly a conflict about these two terms for modernity.[28]

Japanese scholars eventually worked out a new explanation for the nature of modernity [*jinshi*] in Chinese and East Asian history, suggesting that the formation of "traditional society" [*chuantong shehui* 傳統社會] was equivalent to the process of "modernization" [*jinshihua* 近世化]. This interpretation of modernity was part of the knowledge system that was representative of Japanese scholarship beginning in the mid-1990s. The Tang-Song transformation was considered a major change in the theory on the starting point of China's creation of a "traditional society."[29] The concept of "traditional society" used here is obviously not identical to Miyazaki's idea of a European-style "modern society." This shows that European modernity theory has been called into question and reinterpreted from various angles.

5.2 *The Development of the Transformation Theory in Europe and North America*

The effect of Naitō Konan and Miyazaki Ichisada's theories on European and North American scholarship was somewhat complicated. Western academics approved of Naitō's viewpoint that the political, economic, cultural, and military characteristics of the Qing had originated in the Song dynasty, especially Naitō's idea of the Tang-Song transition as an important point in the periodization of Chinese history. At the same time, many acknowledged Miyazaki Ichisada's great achievements in Song social economics and culture.

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27 Rekiken 歷研 is the abbreviation for a Japanese group of historians called Rekishigaku kenkyukai 歷史學研究會 [Historical Science Society of Japan] founded in Tokyo in the 1930s. The group was left leaning and pursued historical studies based on a Marxist understanding of historical development. In the Chinese-language version of this article, the author refers to this group of historians as *liyan pai* 歷研派 [Historical Research School].— Trans.

28 Kishimoto Mio 岸本美緒, "Congxin sikao Zhongguo 'jinshi' shi 從新思考中國'近世'史 [Rethinking 'Modernity' in Chinese History]," in *Lishi fenluntan lunwen huo zhaiyao ji* 歷史分論壇論文或摘要集 [*Collection of Conference Papers and Abstracts of the Forum on History*], from the Beijing Luntan (2005) Wenming de hexie yu gongtong fanrong 北京論壇 （2005） 文明的和諧與共同繁榮 [Beijing Forum 2005: The Harmony of Civilizations and Prosperity for All] (Beijing: Beijing luntan zuzhi weiyuanhui, 2005), 2.323.

29 Itoh Masahiko 伊藤正彥, "'Chuantong shehui' xingcheng lun = 'jinshi hua' lun yu 'Tang-Song biange' '傳統社會'形成論 = '近世化' 論與 '唐宋變革' [The Theory of the Formation of 'Traditional Society' = the Theory of 'Modernization' and 'Tang-Song Transformation']," in *Songshi yanjiu luncong* 宋史研究論叢 [*Series on Research in Song History*], ed. Jiang Xidong 姜錫東 (Baoding: Hebei daxue chubanshe, 2013), 224-25.

Most scholars, however, did not support Miyazaki's theory of the Song dynasty as the beginning of a European-style modernity in China.

In his book *Le monde chinois*, the well-known French sinologist Jacques Gernet called the Song dynasty the Chinese renaissance.[30] The modernity that Gernet was talking about, however, was not the Song dynasty but the period between 1644 and 1900. For him, the Song dynasty was a pre-1644 bureaucratic dynasty.

In the United States, Song historians tended to see the transition from the Tang to the Song dynasty as the time when China moved from antiquity to modernity. By the 1970s, however, American historians of the Song basically negated the Japanese idea of a Tang-Song transformation. More recently, Western scholars have, instead, developed the paradigm of an "early modernity" [*zaoqi jindai* 早期近代]. This type of research suggests that China's early modernity occurred simultaneously with the gradual commercialization of the late Ming dynasty, with commercialization considered a distinguishing characteristic of early modernity.[31] Supporters of the early modernity paradigm were influenced by a Chinese theory developed in the 1940s, according to which China's sprouts of capitalism first appeared during the Ming dynasty.

5.3 *The Transformation Theory and Its Influence on Chinese Scholarship in the Twentieth Century*

Miyazaki Ichisada and others continued to develop Naitō Konan's work, and, by the end of World War II, Naitō's modernity theory had had long-lasting and wide-reaching influence on international Tang and Song studies. In China, by contrast, Naitō's hypothesis received little attention before the period of reform and opening up [1978]. This lack of academic interest prevented the modernity theory from having much influence on Tang and Song research in China. After the period of reform and opening up, the transformation theory eventually began to attract the attention of many Chinese historians. The effect on Chinese scholarship, however, remained limited throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The book *Tang Studies in the Twentieth Century,* published in 2002, for instance, has a comprehensive introduction to the Japanese discussion on the Tang-Song transformation as well as economic conditions during the Tang

30 Jacques Gernet 謝和耐, *Zhongguo shehui shi* 中國社會史 [*History of Chinese Society*], trans. Geng Sheng 耿昇 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1995). The original French title of Gernet's book is *Le Monde Chinois*. Cambridge University Press then published an English-language edition under the title *A History of Chinese Civilization*.—Trans.

31 Endymion Wilkinson 魏根深, *Zhongguo lishi yanjiu shouce* 中國歷史研究手冊 [*Chinese History: A Manual*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2016), 1.2.

dynasty.[32] But it does not contain any references to mainland Chinese research on the transformation theory. The *Catalogue of Writings on Song History in the Twentieth Century,* published in 2006, equally lacks any entries for Chinese publications on the Tang-Song transformation.[33]

We conclude that the transformation theory represents only one of many Japanese schools of thought on Chinese historical periodization and on Tang and Song studies more generally. The theory neither represents a mainstream view in Japanese academia nor is widely accepted by international Song historians. In other words, only the Kyoto school has continuously propagated the modernity theory since the 1970s. International academic circles, including the Tokyo school, the Marxist school of historical materialism, and many in the new generation of scholars, have either abandoned or disproved the modernity theory.

6 Transformation Theory from a Critical Perspective

A search on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure [CNKI][34] yields nearly a thousand publications on Tang and Song history in the twenty-first century. More than two hundred results are returned from a search on keywords such as "transformation theory," "Naitō Konan," and "Miyazaki Ichisada," including master's theses and doctoral dissertations.[35] Based on their general tenor, these publications can be divided into the following five groups.

The first group of publications is mainly introductory in nature, with representative works by Zhang Qifan 張其凡, Li Huarui 李華瑞, Zhang Guangda 張廣達, Liu Liyan 柳立言, Li Qing 李慶, Xiong Wei 熊偉, and others.[36] Through

32 Hu Ji 胡戟, Zhang Gong 張弓, Ge Chengyong 葛承雍 and Li Bincheng 李斌城 eds., *Ershi shiji Tang yanjiu* 二十世紀唐研究 [*Tang Studies in the Twentieth Century*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2002).

33 Fang Jianxin 方建新, *Ershi shiji Songshi yanjiu lunzhu mulu* 二十世紀宋史研究論著目錄 [*Catalogue of Writings on Song History in the Twentieth Century*] (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2006).

34 The China National Knowledge Infrastructure [CNKI], or Zhongguo zhiwang 中國知網, is the most commonly used online site for Chinese academic content, including journals, conference proceedings, and dissertations; https://www.cnki.net (institutional access only).

35 Wang Qin 王秦, "Shinian lai 'Tang-Song biange' yanjiu shuping 十年來'唐宋變革'研究述評 [Review of Research on the 'Tang-Song Transformation' over the Last Ten Years]," *Changjiang shifan xueyuan xuebao* 長江師範學院學報, no. 4 (2010).

36 Zhang Qifan 張其凡, "Guanyu 'Tang-Song biange qi' xueshuo de jieshao yu sikao 關於 '唐宋變革期'學說的介紹與思考 [Introduction and Thoughts on the Theory of a

the continuous efforts of many, the majority of Chinese scholars researching the Tang and Song dynasties are now familiar with the basic paradigm and characteristics of the transformation theory. The level of familiarity and awareness of the theory's implications for China's historical periodization, however, vary among scholars.

The second group of publications is research focused and includes Qian Wanyue's 錢婉約 influential book *Research on Naitō Konan* [*Neiteng Hunan yanjiu* 內藤湖南研究] as well as a recent translation of Joshua Fogel's *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naitō Konan* (*1866-1934*), which was first published more than thirty years ago. In addition to publications that provide a thorough analysis of the close connection between Naitō's political views and his academic work, there is also research that strongly approves of his modernity theory. Mou Fasong 牟發松 , for instance, argues in his article "Three Questions about the Transformation Theory" that:

> Naitō Konan not only had a comprehensive and systematic understanding of ancient Chinese culture, but visited China repeatedly for his research during the late Qing and early Republican period. Naitō believed that "the new Chinese culture that took shape during the Song dynasty has continued to exist until our modern age." This shows that Naitō's ideas were based on his profound understanding of both Chinese history as well as contemporary China, which had in turn a significant influence on him and the modernity theory.[37]

'Tang-Song Transformation Period']," *Ji'nan xuebao* (*zhexue shehui kexue ban*) 暨南學報(哲學社會科學版), no. 1 (2001); Li Huarui 李華瑞, "20 shiji Zhong-Ri Tang-Song biange guan bijiao 20 世紀中日唐宋變革觀比較 [A Comparison of Chinese and Japanese Twentieth-Century Views on the Tang-Song Transformation]," *Shixue lilun yanjiu* 史學理論研究, no. 4 (2003); Zhang Guangda 張廣達, "Neiteng Hunan de Tang-Song biange shuo ji qi yingxiang 內藤湖南的唐宋變革說及其影響 [Naitō Konan's Tang-Song Transformation Theory and Its Influence]," *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 11 (2005); Liu Liyan 柳立言, "He wei Tang-Song biange? 何謂唐宋變革? [What Is the Tang-Song Transformation?]," *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢, no. 1 (2006); Li Qing 李慶, "Guanyu Neiteng Hunan de Tang-Song biange lun 關於內藤湖南的唐宋變革論 [Naitō Konan's Tang-Song Transformation Theory]," *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊, no. 10 (2006); Xiong Wei, "Tang-Song biange lun tixi de yanhua."

37 Mou Fasong 牟發松, "'Tang-Song biange shuo' santi: Zhi cishuo chuangli yibai zhounian er zuo '唐宋變革說'三題——值此說創立一百周年而作 [Three Questions about 'The Tang-Song Transition': An Essay on the Occasion of Its Centennial Anniversary]," *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao* 華東師範大學學報, no. 1 (2010): 7; a more recent article is Mou Fasong 牟發松, "Wenhua jieshou shiye zhong de Tang-Song biange shulun 文化接受視野中的唐宋變革述論 [The Transformation Theory from the Perspective of Cultural Acceptance]," *Lishi jiaoxue wenti* 歷史教學問題, no. 4 (2014): 66.

The third group of publications analyzes the transition period between the Tang and the Song dynasty based on the transformation theory. The number of publications in this category, however, is relatively low. Of special interest is a series of articles on Song literature, intellectual history, and art history that support the use of the transformation theory as a guide for research in literature, intellectual history, and art history during the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Some of the more representative pieces in this group include Wang Shuizhao's 王水照 "Re-Evaluating the 'Naitō Proposition,'" in which he argues:

> The re-evaluation of the "Naitō proposition" that we propose not only attempts to determine whether the "modernity theory" as such is correct or whether specific conclusions are in fact tenable, but seeks to further the academic development in our fields in general. A mature academic discipline not only relies on detailed descriptions and case-by-case analysis, but also requires a number of complete macro-narratives. This includes the need for a combined theoretical framework and the search for common regularities.[38]

Based on the idea of breaking down barriers between Tang and Song studies, the fourth group of publications discusses historical developments and changes in geography, transportation, culture, economy, and law under the framework of the transformation theory. In 2006, the *Jianghan Tribune* [*Jianghan luntan* 江漢論壇] published five articles under the common theme of Tang-Song transformation, with authors offering their views on the transformation period from the perspective of culture, military affairs, social hierarchy, and so on.[39] Although the titles of many articles contain the term "Tang-Song

38 Wang Shuizhao 王水照, "Chongti 'Neiteng mingti' 重提'内藤命題' [Re-Evaluating the 'Naitō Proposition']," *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產, no. 2 (2006): 10-11.

39 Zhang Guogang 張國剛, "Lun Tang-Song biange de shidai tezheng 論唐宋變革的時代特徵 [Discussing the Characteristics of the Tang-Song Transformation Era]," *Jianghan luntan* 江漢論壇, no. 3 (2006); Sun Jimin 孫繼民, "Tang-Song bingzhi bianhua yu Tang-Song shehui bianhua 唐宋兵制變化與唐宋社會變化 [Tang-Song Transformation in the Military System and in Society]," *Jianghan luntan*, no. 3 (2006); Li Tianshi 李天石, "Zhonggu menfa zhidu de shuailuo yu Liangjian tixi de wajie 中古門閥制度的衰落與良賤體系的瓦解 [The Decline of the Medieval System of Powerful Families and the Disintegration of the Liang-Jian System]," *Jianghan luntan*, no. 3 (2006); Du Wenyu 杜文玉, "Tang-Song shiqi shehui jieceng neibu jiegou de bianhua 唐宋時期社會階層内部結構的變化 [The Changes of the Internal Structure of the Strata in Society during the Tang through Song Period]," *Jianghan luntan*, no. 3 (2006); Yan Yaozhong 嚴耀中, "Tang-Song biange zhong de daode zhishang qingxiang 唐宋變革中的道德至上傾向 [The Trend of Moralism in the Tang-Song Transition]," *Jianghan luntan*, no. 3 (2006).

transformation," the articles mostly discuss the two dynasties individually or the period of transition between them. But they do not analyze the Tang-Song transformation as a Japanese theory of historical periodization.

The fifth group of publications treats the transformation theory as self-evident and speaks of a "societal transformation" whenever discussing questions concerning the Tang or Song dynasties. The meaning of the concept of societal transformation, however, remains broad and vague.[40] This type of publications often do not directly concern the Tang-Song transformation as such. Instead, to support their own research conclusions, the authors often include the argument that the Tang and Song societies developed from an aristocracy into a society of common people and new elites.

A simple analysis of these five groups of publications demonstrates the following points. First, a continuing stream of introductory publications indicates sustained interest and enthusiasm for the transformation theory in the twenty-first century. Second, the sustained interest in the transformation theory has caused Chinese scholars, especially in Song literature, intellectual history, and art history, to place great importance on the enormous societal changes in the transition period between the two dynasties. They continuously analyze these changes in search of direction and a possible trajectory for the development of culture and thought after the Song. Third, scholars of Song literature, intellectual history, and art history support the use of the transformation theory as a guide in their fields. A closer analysis of their interpretation

40 See Gao Debu 高德步, "Tang-Song biange: Qimin dizhu jingji yu Qimin shehui de xingqi 唐宋變革：齊民地主經濟與齊民社會的興起 [The Rise of the Landlord Economy and Society of the People of Qi]," *Xueshu yanjiu* 學術研究, no. 7 (2015); Li Jian 李健, "Tang-Song shiqi keji fazhan yu Tang-Song biange 唐宋時期科技發展與唐宋變革 [The Technological Advances in the Tang and Song Dynasties and the Connection with the Tang-Song Transformation]," *Zhongzhou xuekan* 中州學刊, no. 6 (2010); Tai Pengfei 邰鵬飛, "Tang-Song biange shiye xia de Tang Xizhou Shazhou de xiangcun zhidu yanbian 唐宋變革視野下的唐西州沙州的鄉村制度演變 [The Evolution of the Village System in Xizhou and Shazhou in the Tang Dynasty from the Perspective of the Tang-Song Transformation]," *Xuchang xueyuan xuebao* 許昌學院學報, no. 1 (2010); Sun Xiaodi 孫小迪, "Jiyu Tang-Song biange lun de yinyue sixiang shi yanjiu fansi 基於唐宋變革論的音樂思想史研究反思 [Reflections on the Research on the History of Musical Thought in View of the Tang-Song Transformation]," *Dangdai yinyue* 當代音樂, no. 24 (2016); Bi Weiming 畢巍明, "'Tang-Song biange lun' ji qi dui falü shi yanjiu de yiyi '唐宋變革論' 及其對法律史研究的意義 ['The Tang-Song Transformation' and Its Meaning for the Research on Legal History]," *Shanghai zhengfa xueyuan xuebao* (*fazhi luncong*) 上海政法學院學報（法治論叢）, no. 4 (2011); Zhang Kaixiang 張楷祥, "Tang-Song biange shijiao xia huihua yishu de shanbian 唐宋變革視角下繪畫藝術的嬗變 [The Evolution of the Art of Painting from the Perspective of the Tang-Song Transformation]," *Meishu jiaoyu yanjiu* 美術教育研究, no. 1 (2016).

of the transformation theory shows that these theories are still highly regarded and widely propagated in their areas of research. At times, they tend to accept the theories uncritically. The use of the modernity theory, however, has shown few positive effects on research in intellectual history, Song literature, and art history because thse scholars mostly use the new theoretical framework to explain existing insights. Fourth, the fourth and fifth groups of publications show that the transformation theory has mostly served as a label in Tang and Song scholarship without really advancing or benefitting the field.

Transformation theory became a focus of academic discussion at the turn of the century for two reasons. The first reason is the ongoing process of reorientation in Song history. The second reason is that Chinese scholarship on the Song was based on theoretical paradigms from the 1950s and 1960s that had not undergone any significant development since then. The upheavals in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in particular led to the marginalization of the Chinese historical periodization system based on ideas about historical materialism and the five social formations. This historical background enabled the transformation theory to become a focus of academic discussion at the turn of the twenty-first century.

If we look at the transformation theory from a critical perspective, few areas for further research remain. The Kyoto school has already fully developed the theoretical framework. All important questions have been discussed and proven in sufficient detail, leaving little room for further development. The main focus of the transformation theory has therefore shifted from the Song-Yuan transition period to the Ming-Qing transformation. This is why most Chinese scholars now focus on the final conclusions and not the reasoning behind the transformation theory.

In the twenty-first century, the transformation theory has had limited effects on Chinese Song studies. Since 2000, the Chinese community of Song historians has held a biannual competition for awards named after Deng Guangming 鄧廣銘 [1907-1998], with thirty-four winning publications (not including theses) to date. These publications are largely representative of the trends and standards in Song scholarship among established as well as upcoming Chinese scholars in the twenty-first century. However, none of the prize-winning publications were influenced by the transformation theory. Even publications that respond to the transformation theory do not rely on the theory in its discussion of historical changes during the Tang and Song dynasties. Rather, the authors find a way to distance themselves from this theoretical approach. The academic discourse in China's major journals and the topics at academic conferences in the field are formally still connected to the transformation theory. But almost all research presented under these themes actually analyzes

major questions in Tang and Song history based on the assumption of continuity between the two dynasties. This type of research has little direct bearing on the transformation theory. Therefore, we can conclude that China's mainstream research on the Tang and Song dynasties has not been influenced by the transformation theory.

Over the past hundred years, the most influential theories and methods in Chinese and Japanese scholarship on Song history have been Western research methods in the social sciences and history. With regard to historical periodization, no consensus has been reached between the modernity theory and the theory of the decline of feudalist societies. To put it simply, the use of Western methods and theories leads to a different understanding of the nature of Song society. Apart from this difference, the areas of discussion and research are basically the same.[41]

By analyzing the modernity theory from six different perspectives, we demonstrate that scholars in Tang and Song studies should turn the page and leave the modernity theory (transformation theory) behind.

Translated by Anja Bihler

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A Historical Study of Political System Reform in the Tang and Song Dynasties

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Abstract

The theory of Tang and Song reform proposed by Naitō Torajirō, commonly known as Naitō Konan at the beginning of the twentieth century, not only is a perspective on the differences between the Tang and Song institutions but, to a large extent, also formed the research model on the history of the Song-dynasty system in Japanese research on the history of political institutions. Since the 1990s, the topic of Tang and Song reform was introduced to China, but it did not bring any new ideas to the study of Chinese history, nor did it promote reflection on previous research ideas or methods. The historical transformation in the Tang and Song dynasties is, indeed, worthy of attention from historians, but it needs to be done by combining the discussion of Tang and Song reform with the study of political institutional history, avoiding the various existing paradigms in theories on Tang and Song reforms. We must expand the research horizon, placing importance on the restoration of historical reality and referring to the perspectives of "change" and "continuity" rationally, thus allowing for a true breakthrough in Tang and Song historical studies.

Keywords

Naitō Konan – political history – system reform – Tang and Song reform – Tang and Song reform theory

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Japanese scholar Naitō Konan 內藤湖南 [Naitō Torajirō, 1866-1934] began a discussion about social transformation in Tang [618-907] and Song [960-1279] dynasties, after which research on

Chinese history in Japan was mostly influenced by this discourse, most prominently the historical study of political institutions. Since the 1990s, researchers on the history of Chinese institutions have increasingly joined the discussion on the transformation in the Tang and Song dynasties. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect carefully on the relationship between the academic discourse on the changes in Tang and Song dynasties and the history of political institutions and explore how to combine the two better to promote progress in research.

1

Naitō Konan's exposition on the transformation in the political institutions of the Tang and Song dynasties propounds his theory on Tang and Song reforms. He viewed the Tang dynasty as the end of an aristocratic political system and the Song dynasty as the beginning of a monarchical dictatorship. Before and during the Tang dynasty, the emperor shared political power only with those aristocratic families, and the aristocratic families could even dismiss the emperor. In the Song dynasty, the aristocratic families declined, and political power was held entirely by the emperor. The emperor's position was thus consolidated, and he could control officials at will. The political system with the emperor holding full power began to develop in the Song dynasty and was completed in the Ming [1368-1644] and Qing [1616-1911] dynasties.[1]

Naitō Konan was not the first scholar to discuss the differences between the Tang and Song polities. His substantial contribution is in sorting out some of the most critical phenomena from various changes, taking a holistic look at Chinese politics and even overall development of Chinese society. Moreover, his comparison of Tang and Song politics provided later scholars with a framework for understanding Song-dynasty politics. His discussion on the differences between Tang and Song dynasties in their political institutions, and dictatorship by the emperor in the Song dynasty, set the direction of research by later researchers. His method of summarizing the essential characteristics of the two dynasties by comparing Tang and Song polities was mostly inherited by his fellow researchers. The topic of Tang and Song reform has become the basis for discussion and exchange among scholars. Naitō Konan's analysis of

1 Naitō Konan 內藤湖南, "Gaikatsuteki Tō Sō jidai kan 概括的唐宋時代觀 [A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties]," *Rekishi to chiri* 歷史と地理 9, no. 5 (1922). A Chinese version is included in Liu Junwen 劉俊文, ed., and Huang Yuese 黃約瑟, trans., *Riben xuezhe yanjiu zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi* 日本學者研究中國史論著選譯 [*Translations of Selected Works by Japanese Scholars on Chinese History*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1.10-18.

the transformation in the Tang and Song dynasties, to a large extent, is said to have created the basic model for the study of political history of the Song dynasty in Japan.

Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定 [1901-1995] not only inherited Naitō Konan's theory but also made it more detailed and in-depth. He pointed out that the Song emperor was able to exercise dictatorship not through his personal ability but also because of the political system. The key point is that changes in the government structure in the Tang and Song dynasties placed various government agencies under the direct command of the emperor. The emperor contacted bureaucrats directly through memorials to understand the political situation and to issue instructions, thus he held power in his own hands.[2] These expositions further clarified the connotation of "monarchical dictatorship" and opened up many new discussions in academic circles.

Under the influence of Miyazaki Ichisada, Japan made great progress in the study of the Song political system. Historians such as Tomi Saeki 佐伯富 [1910-2006], Kaoru Umehara 梅原郁 [1934-2020], and Toshikazu Araki 荒木敏一[1911-1996] conducted many detailed empirical studies individually, on issues directly related to "monarchical dictatorship" through the emperor's eyes and ears, the bureaucratic system, and the imperial examination system. On this basis, the political transformation of Tang and Song dynasties was further discussed.[3] These groundbreaking analyses not only enriched and perfected the existing theory on Tang and Song reform but also advanced understanding of the Song-dynasty political system in academic circles.

The academic achievements of researchers in this period not only benefited directly from Naitō Konan's theory on Tang and Song reform but, at the same time, were also constrained by it. Their selection of topics tended to focus on those that were considered to be clearly related to this reform, which framed the directions of their research. When analyzing the specific system changes,

2 Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定, "Dongyang de jinshi 東洋的近世 [East Asia's Early Modern Age]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi* , 1.153-241; idem, "Songdai guanzhi xushuo: Songshi zhiguanzhi de dufa 宋代官制序說：宋史職官志的讀法 [The Preface to the Official Institutions of the Song Dynasty: How to Read the Official Chronicles of Song History]," trans. Yu Zhijia 於志嘉, *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌 78, nos. 1-2 (1989).

3 Tomi Saeki 佐伯富, "Lun songdai de huangchengsi 論宋代的皇城司 [On the Imperial City Department of Song Dynasty]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu zhongguoshi lunzhu xuanyi* 日本學者研究中國史論著選譯 [*Selected Translations of Japanese Scholars' Research on Chinese History*], ed. Liu Junwen 劉俊文, trans. Suo Jieran 索介然 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 5.337-69; Kaoru Umehara 梅原郁, *Sodai kanryo seido kenkyu* 宋代官僚制度研究 [*Research on the Bureaucratic System in Song Dynasty*] (Kyoto: Dohosha, 1985); Toshikazu Araki 荒木敏一, *Sodai kakyo seido kenkyu* 宋代科舉制度研究 [*Research on the Imperial Examination System in Song Dynasty*] (Kyoto: Dohosha, 1969).

they often overemphasized the systemic transformation between the Tang and Song dynasties but insufficiently revealed systemic continuity between the dynasties. When making overall comparisons, they paid more attention to factors such as regulatory systems and institutional mechanisms that directly highlighted differences, while paying little attention to complicated and subtle conditions, such as the actual operation of the system. When interpreting the background of systemic transformation, they inevitably stuck to a transition from "aristocratic politics" to "monarchical dictatorship," which sometimes made the interpretations look formal and empty. These shortcomings, to a certain extent, contributed to the emergence of later research ideas that broke through the theory on Tang and Song reform.

In the 1980s and 1990s, two generations of Japanese political history researchers, represented by Teraji Jun 寺地遵 and Hirata Shigeki 平田茂樹, began to seriously reflect on the political history of the Song dynasty under the influence of the theory on Tang and Song reform. They pointed out that, in previous studies, scholars had used too many research approaches that relied on theoretical types to highlight the political differences between the Tang and Song dynasties, paying too much attention to static analysis and the description of government agencies and legal institutions but seldom discussing state consciousness and the process of policy formation. To rectify this shortcoming, they successively proposed new ideas, such as "political process" and "political space." They believed that the process of forming Song-dynasty national policy should be analyzed from a dynamic perspective, the actual roles that various political figures played in this process, and the relational network among them—in particular, the "fields" of various government affairs in the Song dynasty should be studied in depth.[4]

Teraji Jun and Hirata Shigeki therefore captured the shortcomings of the theory of Tang and Song reform, which pays too much attention to formal comparisons and simplifies historical complexity and offers academics a new perspective from which to observe the Song political system. They urged scholars to pay more attention to the actual operation of political power carried out within the framework of Song system, which was restricted by a variety of complex factors. At the same time, their thinking also opened up new topics

4 Teraji Jun 寺地遵, *Nansong chuqi zhengzhishi yanjiu* 南宋初期政治史研究 [*A Study of Political History in the Early Southern Song Dynasty*], trans. Liu Jingzhen 劉靜貞 and Li Jinyun 李今芸 (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1995); Hirata Shigeki 平田茂樹, "Riben songdai zhengzhishi yanjiu shuping 日本宋代政治史研究述評 [A Review of the Research on the Political History of the Song Dynasty in Japan]," in *Songdai zhidushi yanjiu bainian* 宋代制度史研究百年 [*A Hundred Years of Research on System History of Song Dynasty*], ed. Bao Weimin 包偉民 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2004).

for academic study, such as decision-making activities, administration of documents, and systemic space. Thereafter, Japanese scholarship on Song history produced a series of works with topics and methods that are consistent with these lines of thinking, which have greatly enriched people's understanding of Song politics.

It should also be noted that the research by Teraji Jun, Hirata Shigeki, and others have not completely escaped the influence of the theory on Tang and Song reform: the theory of "political process" originated directly in Miyazaki Ichisada's argument about the direct contact between the Song-dynasty monarch and his officials; the core elements in Naitō Konan's theory, such as "monarchical dictatorship," were also inherited by them. In addition, in his research, Hirata Shigeki noted that the system operations should be observed from a micro and dynamic perspective, but to some extent he still followed Naitō Konan, Miyazaki Ichisada, and others, who used a comparative method to summarize the essential characteristics of the political system over a certain period, so Hirata Shigeki's thesis still has the weakness of emerging from a generalization more than a detailed analysis. To some extent, a new tendency toward theoretical types appeared.

In summary, what Naitō Konan's theory on Tang and Song reform gave the Japanese political history not only is a perspective on the differences between the Tang and Song institutions but also considerably shaped the research model of Song-dynasty history. Even scholars who wanted to go beyond the theory on Tang and Song reform did not completely escape the influence of this framework. When reviewing the theory on Tang and Song reform, Chinese researchers developed deeper reflections on the positive and negative impacts of the theory as a model.

2

Since the mid-twentieth century, some Chinese scholars—such as Qian Mu 錢穆 [1895-1990], Sun Guodong 孫國棟 [1922-2013], Zhu Ruixi 朱瑞熙, Zhang Bangwei 張邦煒, Qiu Tiansheng 邱添生, Liu Jingzhen 劉靜貞, and Zhao Yule 趙雨樂—have discussed the reforms in the political system in the Tang and Song dynasties. Some of their views, such as their understanding of the monarchy in the Song dynasty, are consistent with those of the Japanese scholars. Although most Chinese scholars have pointed out the differences between the Tang and Song political institutions, unlike the Japanese scholars, they regarded them mostly as changes in degree, rather than as essential transformations.

In the selection of topics and research methods, these Chinese scholars also often had their own approaches. For example, Zhang Bangwei's exposition on the characteristics of the Song dynasty's having "no inner court" and "no internal strife," and Liu Jingzhen's analysis of the influence of the emperors' character on the formation of "monarchical dictatorship" in the early Song dynasty revealed history that had not been paid enough attention in the past. These perspectives were very fresh.

However, because of the influence of various factors, in general, before the 1990s academic discussions about the social transformation in the Tang and Song dynasties focused on socioeconomic and cultural aspects. After the 1990s, many treatises on the transformation of the Tang and Song institutions emerged.[5] This situation is related, on the one hand, to the systematic translation of overseas treatises on the theory on Tang and Song reform since the 1980s and, on the other hand, to increasing academic exchanges on the Tang and Song dynasties. In addition, the concern about the reform of the Tang and Song dynasties also reflects that, after the 1990s, political historians wanted to go beyond the previous limitations from paying too much attention to specific issues and established a wider perspective, thereby enhancing the academic value of political history.

Chinese scholars' discussions on the transformation in the Tang and Song institutions have revealed many differences between the two regimes and have helped us develop a better understanding of their characteristics. At the same time, and to a large extent, we have a more comprehensive understanding of the overall development of a system to avoid some misunderstanding caused by arguing about one particular dynastic system alone. In addition, we can also offer a clearer picture of a certain dynasty if we look at the transformation of the entire system.

More importantly, through the research on the Tang and Song dynasties, some scholars unearthed the "intangible" factors hidden under the "tangible" regulatory system, which had an important impact on the transformation of the political system. For example, Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, Liu Houbin

5 Liu Houbin 劉後濱, *Tangdai zhongshu menxia tizhi yanjiu* 唐代中書門下體制研究 [*A Study on the System of Zhongshu Menxia in Tang Dynasty*] (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2004), can be regarded as the most in-depth study of the Tang and Song system reforms in the field of Chinese system history. Wu Zongguo 吳宗國, ed., *Shengtang zhengzhi zhidu yanjiu* 盛唐政治制度研究 [*A Study on the Political System of the Prosperous Tang Dynasty*] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2003), also has high reference value. Huang Zhengjian 黃正建, ed., *Zhongwantang shehui yu zhengzhi yanjiu* 中晚唐社會與政治研究 [*Social and Political Studies of the Middle and Late Tang Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), has likewise published many related articles in the collection.

劉後濱, Li Jinxiu 李錦繡, and others wrote individual in-depth discussions on the development trends and context of the system of selecting civil officials, the central administrative body, and government operations during the Tang and Song dynasties.[6] These "trends" and "contexts," the more specific systemic changes, can help us understand the transformative trajectory of the Tang and Song dynasties at a deeper level.

However, it should also be noted that the current discussions on Tang and Song reform in Chinese political history still have vast limitations, first, in the selection of topics. Many researchers have just traced a certain system they have studied in the past, either from the Tang dynasty to the Song dynasty, or from the Song dynasty to the Tang dynasty. Inspiring new points of discussions have yet to be raised.

Second, how precisely should we understand the Tang and Song institutional transformation? Researchers have often listed the differences and changes in the Tang and Song institutions, especially the system innovations in the Song dynasty. However, among the various differences and changes, which are substantial, and which are stylistic? And what are the differences in their importance in political transformation? The writings of the researchers are often vague. In addition, some institutional changes pointed out by the researchers, such as the shift in the main supervisory system of the Tang and Song dynasties from the emperors to prime ministers and officials, did not receive sufficient empirical evidence to support the claims. They seem to be "custom-made" for an existing historical view—for example, the strengthening of Song-dynasty imperial power. This situation makes it difficult for us to form a truly clear understanding of the systemic transformation.

Third, how should the relationship between systemic reform and other factors be analyzed? Some works have detailed explanations about the transformation of a certain type of system in the Tang and Song dynasties, but there is often a lack of discussion about its relationship with other political and social changes. For example, the essays that analyze the changes in supervisory organs in the Tang and Song dynasties often do not involve changes in the administrative system at the time, making it difficult for us to see the actual significance of the changes in supervisory organs for government operations

6 Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, *Songdai wenguan xuanren zhidu zhucengmian* 宋代文官選任制度諸層面 [*Various Levels of the Selection System of Civil Officials in Song Dynasty*] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993); Liu Houbin, *Tangdai zhongshu menxia tizhi yanjiu*; Li Jinxiu 李錦繡, "Tang houqi de guanzhi: Xingzheng moshi he xingzheng shouduan de biange 唐後期的官制：行政模式和行政手段的變革 [The Official System in the Late Tang Dynasty: The Reform of Administrative Model and Means]," in *Zhongwantang shehui yu* zhengzhi *yanjiu*.

and the specific factors that affect those changes, and they only summarized it using a general argument, such as "the strengthening of autocratic imperial power."

Some researchers have realized that systemic changes are related to other political and social transformations, but few practical discussions have occurred on where exactly the connection is and how it formed. In particular, when scholars try to analyze the macro reforms at the political and social levels from some micro system changes, their analysis is often not convincing. For example, when analyzing the Tang and Song administrative system of local officials, researchers first assumed that a major shift had occurred from "aristocratic politics" to "bureaucratic politics" during the Tang and Song dynasties. Then they pointed out that the status and treatment of the local officials in the Tang and Song dynasties had significantly declined, which proved that the aristocratic air of Tang and Song officials weakened. These limitations make it difficult for us to investigate deeper social changes through systemic changes.

These deficiencies are largely due to certain inherent deficits in previous studies on political history—for example, lacking awareness of the problem; paying more attention to diachronic system causes, but ignoring the various synchronic factors that have a direct impact on the system in a specific period; and researchers often have preconceptions due to their habitual ignorance.[7] These situations reveal that most researchers on the Chinese political history have not reflected on previous research ideas and methods after being introduced to the topic of the Tang and Song reform. It can be said that the discussion of Tang and Song Reform has not actually brought many new ideas to the field of Chinese Tang and Song system history. Most researchers just "embed" their previous research into a more influential academic framework, thereby adding "theoretical atmosphere" to their research, trying to give their work more academic significance.[8] In the current study of the system history

7 Bao Weimin 包偉民, "Zouxiang zijue: Guanyu shenru tuozhan zhongguo gudai zhidushi yanjiu de jige wenti 走向自覺：關於深入拓展中國古代制度史研究的幾個問題 [Toward Consciousness: Several Questions about Deepening the Research on the History of Ancient Chinese Systems]"; Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南, "Zouxiang 'huo' de zhidushi: Yi songdai guanliao zhidushi weili de diandi sikao 走向'活'的制度史——以宋代官僚制度史為例的點滴思考 [Toward a 'Living' System History: A Little Thought about the Bureaucratic System History of Song Dynasty as an Example]"; Li Li 李立, "Songdai zhengzhi zhidushi yanjiu fangfalun pipan 宋代政治制度史研究方法論批判 [Criticism on the Research Methodology of the History of Political System in Song Dynasty]"—all in Bao Weimin, *Songdai zhidushi yanjiu bainian*.

8 Zhang Guogang 張國剛, "Gaige kaifang yilai tangshi yanjiu ruogan redian wenti shuping 改革開放以來唐史研究若干熱點問題述評 [A Review of Several Hot Issues in Tang History Research since Reform and Opening Up]," *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊, no. 1 (2009).

of Tang and Song dynasties, some scholars have paid attention to this issue, and have begun to consciously update their research questions and methodologies, reflect on the perspectives and approaches of existing research, and learn from and draw on the research results and experiences of other fields.[9] These "reflections," "consciousness," and "learning," if they can be accumulated continuously, should enable real breakthroughs in research.

3

Finally, the author would like to put forward some preliminary ideas on how to better combine the discussion of Tang and Song Reform with the study of political system history.

First, the research horizon should be expanded. When discussing Tang and Song Reform, one should not only examine the various changes that occurred in different phases of Tang and Song dynasties, but also analyze the significance of these changes in the development of the entire society. It is necessary to put various changes in the context of social transformation and analyze the actual connections among these factors. As far as the system history is concerned, there should be sufficient consideration for the multiple motivations that promote the system change, as well as a more detailed analysis of the complexity of system transformation consequences. The system transformation can be regarded as a dynamic process composed of multiple links. On this basis, combining with the social background of each link, one can actually analyze the political, economic, cultural, and other factors, to see at what level and to what extent they have affected the system transformation. In addition, it should also be combined with other political and social reforms, and gradually analyze how the system reform has produced different effects with the contribution of various factors. As such, it is expected to break through the previous limitations of "debating about the system alone."

It should also be noted that when discussing Tang and Song Reform, one should use it as an entry point to consider the transformative stages of the entire ancient Chinese history. For the selection of topics, researchers should consciously expand the time period and not limit to "Tang and Song," or "during Tang and Song." Some system transformations within Song dynasty, such

9 Deng Xiaonan, "Zouxiang 'huo' de zhidushi"; Liu Houbin, *Tangdai zhongshu menxia tizhi yanjiu*. These works reflect the in-depth thinking of system history researchers in their research perspectives and methods.

as the restructuring of Yuanfeng 元豐 [1078-1085], can be further discussed in the context of a longer period of time. And, for example, did the system structure and power operation mode created by Tang and Song Reform continue in Ming and Qing dynasties? Did Ming and Qing dynasties inherit the system legacy created by Tang and Song Reform, or the system factors left over by Jin [1115-1234] and Yuan [1206-1368] dynasties? Such questions should receive attention so as to clarify Tang and Song system reform position in the entire Chinese history.

Second, it should be noted that "Tang and Song reform theory" is not the same as Tang and Song Reform. The latter is historical facts, whereas the former is the predecessors' views on historical facts, which may not always coincide with the historical facts. Holding the predecessors' opinions is bound to be difficult for us to form a deep understanding of the true history. Therefore, while drawing lessons from the existing "Tang and Song Reform Theory," one should also "defamiliarize" it. To prevent preconceptions while conducting a comparative study of Tang and Song institutions, one should not accept the general conclusions of the predecessors before their own analysis of empirical evidences. For predecessors' presuppositions and logical starting points, such as political power has a strong traction for social transformation, and so on, these should be differentiated and analyzed based on historical facts to discover the blind spots in their discourses and to break through the established theories. We can use the research approaches pioneered by predecessors as a reference, but it is inappropriate to imitate them without thinking. For example, the view of "monarchical dictatorship" reminds us that we can analyze the transformation of Tang and Song political institutions from the way the monarch exercised power. However, in terms of specific research objects, one should combine the political facts at the time to develop new discussion points, such as daily administrative operations, government documents operation mode, and so on. For the use of the terms such as "monarchical dictatorship," it is also necessary to reflect on this kind of "archeological knowledge." In short, "Tang and Song Reform Theory" can be used for reference indeed, but we must not treat it as a self-evident prerequisite, nor confuse it with the transformation of Tang and Song history itself.

Third, when we have much knowledge about the results of Tang and Song system reform, it is necessary to strengthen the reform process analysis, and avoid the "film-rewinding" approach that reverses the process based on the results. In the system reform, there are bound to be some links or transformed branches that seem to have little relationship with the final result. These elements often reflect changes in the political society and we should not ignore

them. Meanwhile, it is inappropriate to assume the mentality and motivation of politicians at the time based on today's understanding of the results of the reform. Instead, one should combine with the specific situation and earnestly consider why people made specific adjustments to the system at the time.

Finally, "reform" should not be considered as the only perspective to observe Tang and Song institutions. It should be noted that there is not only reform but also continuation between the two dynasties. Before careful analysis, one should not form a too strong "direction" so as to exaggerate or even "create" some differences that may not exist between Tang and Song. It should also be noted that whether various specific system changes reflect "break" or "continuity" sometimes depends on the questions we raise and the angle of observing the questions. Most system phenomenon considered to reflect "reform" when viewed from a different angle might reflect some kind of "continuity." In addition, when Tang and Song institutions have undergone major changes, what kind of political mentality and historical concept of the later generations are reflected in the theory of "Song inherited Tang system" [*Song cheng Tangzhi* 宋承唐制]? All these questions are worth pondering.

In summary, the historical transformation in Tang and Song dynasties are indeed worthy of attention by system history researchers, but one should not be limited to the various existing "Tang and Song Reform Theories." Instead, we should expand our thinking and open new paths before achieving something.

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A Discussion of Several Issues Concerning the "Tang-Song Transition"

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Abstract

Naitō Konan's hypothesis on the "Tang-Song transition" was first expressed in lecture notes from his 1909 class on modern Chinese history at Kyoto University and, then, expounded in subsequent works such as "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties" and "Modern Chinese History." The theory systematically outlines that an evolutionary medieval to modern transition occurred in Chinese society during the period between the Tang and the Song dynasties, focusing in particular on the areas of politics/government, the economy, and culture. Political change is regarded as the core metric, demonstrated in concentrated form by the government's transformation from an aristocratic to a monarchical autocratic system alongside a rise in the status and position of the common people. The "Tang-Song transition theory," underpinned theoretically by a cultural-historical perspective, advocates for a periodization of Chinese history based on the stages and characteristics of China's cultural development, which is also attributed to cultural shifts, downward to the commoner class from a culture monopolized by the aristocracy during the period between the Tang and Song, with concomitant changes in society. For over a century since it was first proposed, the "Tang-Song transition theory" has had far-reaching influence in Chinese, Japanese, and Western academic circles, continuing to be lively and vigorous even now. We might be able to find the cause in its originality and liberality, which leave significant room for later thinkers' continued adherence and development or criticism and falsification and continue to inspire new questions. Naitō's proposal was also intimately connected to his observations of China's circumstances in the late Qing dynasty and early Republican period, which also provided a "sample of the era" regarding realistic approaches to historical studies.

Keywords

Naitō Konan – Tang-Song transition theory – Naitō hypothesis – periodization – cultural history

1 When Was the Tang-Song Transition Theory First Proposed?

The "Tang-Song transition theory" (often referred to in European and American studies as the "Naitō hypothesis") in Naitō Konan's 内藤湖南 [Naitō Torajirō, 1866-1934] system of periodization, which features the concept of a "Song modernity," so familiar to historians of Chinese history today, might be considered the most original, or perhaps the hallmark, of the noted Japanese scholar's historiography. "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties," first published by Naitō in 1922, is commonly regarded as the first place that the theory was put forward.[1] In fact, many sections of the text were taken from lecture notes from the class Modern Chinese History [*Zhina jindaishi* 支那近代史] presented by Naitō at Kyoto University on successive occasions. These materials were published by the Tokyo publisher Koubundou in 1947 under the title *Modern Chinese History* [*Zhongguo jinshishi* 中國近世史], compiled based on notes taken by Naojirō Sugimoto 杉本直治郎 [1890-1973] in 1920 and Shigeki Kaizuka 貝塚茂樹 [1904-1987] in 1925 who attend Naitō's lectures. Based on Naitō's handwritten notes, we can see that the teaching materials for these two years were composed from earlier materials in 1918 and 1919, to which only minor revisions were made. According to Naitō's son, Naitō Kenkichi 内藤乾吉 [1899-1978], the "most outstanding" first chapter of Koubundou's edition of *Modern Chinese History*, "The Significance of Modern History," was published earlier in 1922 as an article titled "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties." The two are substantially similar in content, construction, and sequence, as the course materials of 1918 and 1919 served as blueprints for both.

In fact, Naitō's promulgation of a "Tang-Song transition" can be traced even further back. Naitō became a lecturer in history at Kyoto Imperial University

1 Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, "Gaikatsuteki Tō Sō jidai kan 概括的唐宋時代觀 [A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties]," *Rekishi to chiri* 歷史と地理 9, no. 5 (1922). For the Chinese translation, see Liu Junwen 劉俊文, ed., and Huang Yuese 黃約瑟, trans., *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi* 日本學者研究中國史論著選譯 [*Translations of Selected Works by Japanese Scholars on Chinese History*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1.10-18.

in 1907, the year that he gave a class on Ancient Chinese History [*Zhina gudaishi* 支那古代史]. Naitō gave his class on Modern Chinese History in 1909, and we can still observe a page of Naitō's handwriting from the preface [*xuyan* 緒言] to the preparatory course notes composed by Naitō for this class, photocopied onto this section's title page and presented to us in its original form by Naitō Kenkichi from the postscript to Volume 10 of the *Complete Works of Naitō Konan*. As stated at the beginning of the preface as recorded in the postscript: "In what era should we properly ascribe modern history as having begun? We should consider it to follow the Song. There are various signs to indicate this."[2] Based on this, the work then expanded on five aspects of the Tang-Song transition. Naitō first discusses the most central contention of the Tang-Song transition theory—that is, the establishment and characteristics of a monarchical autocratic government in the Song dynasty [960-1279]. Second, he regards "relations with neighboring countries," referring to the Song dynasty's consideration of itself as "one country" confronting, equal to, or even weaker than the barbarian kingdoms of the Liao [907-1125], Jin [1115-1234], Yuan [1206-1368], and so on—no longer the "one China under heaven" of old, but with a more advanced sense of self. Third, he proposes a "contest of political power via peaceful methods" in which the contests between different political factions of the Song dynasty were based more on differing political views versus the factional battles of the Tang dynasty [618-907], dominated by the pursuit of power and ruthless methods. Fourth, he refers to "relations between the state and society" as the Tang Dynasty's goal of transforming society to suit the state's purposes in contradistinction to the Song dynasty's need for state power and systems to be adapted to social change. Fifth, "new trends in scholarly thinking," includes, in classical studies, for example, a shift from household codes and the passing down of tradition to a focus on more independent thought to satisfy the classical "interests and charms of the tastes of antiquity," or changes in the literary sphere such as in the revival of classical texts and arts (e.g., calligraphy and painting). The final conclusion is that all these changes "have a modern connotation," indicating that we can "characterize the era following the Northern Song as being part of early modern history."[3]

The content related to the Tang-Song transition mentioned above in the preface to *Modern History of China*, reflects basically the same overall perspective as "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties" and *Modern Chinese History,* published later albeit slightly simplified, in which sections 1, 3, and

2 Naitō Kenkichi 内藤乾吉, postscript to *Naitō Konan zenshū* 内藤湖南全集 [*Complete Works of Naitō Konan*] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969), 10.527.

3 Naitō Kenkichi, postscript to *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 10.527-29.

5 on politics and culture are almost identical. The preface lacks only a section on "economic changes," though the economy is not the focus of Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory. As stated by Naitō Kenkichi: "We can know that the 'Song modernity hypothesis' today regarded as one of the historiographical hallmarks of the author had already been formulated by this time (1909)."[4] That is, the earliest time that Naitō Konan first put forward the "Tang-Song transition theory" was, in fact, 1909.

2 The Tang-Song Transition: Content and Center

The main content of the "Tang-Song transition" has been systematically rendered in "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties" and *Modern Chinese History · The Significance of Modern History*. Both texts directly state that "the Song dynasty is the beginning of the modern period" and that the "end of the Tang and Five dynasties [907-960]" era was a "transition period" from the medieval to the modern period, before listing various changes involved in this transition. The former is the more concise, with a Chinese translation of only around 5,400 characters.[5] The latter, the curriculum material, is a much more detailed dissertation and has received a Chinese translation of over 7,600 characters, in which the content is grouped separately under eight subheadings.[6] In this paper, we sort the subheadings in their original sequence (the numbering in this list of subheadings has been added by the author) and summarize their main content, as follows.

1. The decline of aristocratic government and rise of a monarchical autocratic government, the Six Dynasties [220-589] to the mid-Tang period, the heyday of aristocratic government. The government of the aristocracy experienced a decline during a transitional period from the end of the Tang to the Five Dynasties, making way for the rise of an autocratic monarchical government. The power of the state's ministers became concentrated in the person of the ruler and, indeed, this autocratic form of government was perfected in the Ming [1368-1644] and Qing [1616-1911] eras.

2. "A change in the position of the monarch" during the "heyday" of aristocratic government. The government was held exclusively in the hands of the

4 Naitō Kenkichi, postscript to *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 10.530.

5 Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, "Gaikuo de Tang-Song shidai guan 概括的唐宋時代觀 [A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.10-18.

6 Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, "Zhongguo jinshishi 中國近世史 [Modern Chinese History]," in *Zhongguo shi tonglun* 中國史通論 [*A General Theory of Chinese History*], *Part 1*, trans. Xia Yingyuan 夏應元 et al. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 323-34.

aristocracy as a whole, in which the ruler in a sense belonged jointly to the aristocratic class, and the aristocracy could, if supposing the ruler unsuitable, then take steps to depose him. In the modern era, the ruler became that which was held in common by all officials and people of the state and an entity with absolute power, whose position was, relative to the aristocratic era, significantly more secure and stable.

3. The "establishment of monarchical power." The government in the aristocratic era became an agreement between the Son of Heaven and the nobility, the promotion of whose government rested on the presupposed acknowledgment of the particular prerogatives of the aristocracy, in which the aristocracy was not absolutely required to observe the Son of Heaven's every command. The emergence of the modern era was accompanied by a gradual decline in the prerogative of refusal [*feng bo quan* 封駁權] by the Chancellery [*men xia sheng* 門下省], representing the views of the aristocracy, which had completely disappeared by the time of the Ming and Qing; the power of the monarch grew without limit and the early-modern chancellor [*zaixiang* 宰相] took on an essentially secretarial function or was even done away with in the Ming and Qing.

4. "A change in the status of the people." The people on the whole were considered akin to "slaves" by the aristocratic community during the era of aristocratic government. From the Sui [581-618] to the early Tang, peasants were bound to the land as tenant-farmers of the state [*guojia dianhu* 國家佃戶] under the tripartite tax [*zu yong diao* 租庸調] system. Although directly under the state, they were, in reality, tenant-farmers of the entire aristocratic community. The tripartite tax system of the mid-Tang collapsed and was reformed into a double-taxation system [*liang shui fa* 兩稅法], liberating the people from the prior system, which had bound them to the land. In the "modern" era, the people had the freedom to dispose of land and the harvest, and private property rights were acknowledged to some degree. The disappearance of the aristocratic classes allowed the monarch and people to face each other directly.

5. "Change in the appointment of officials." The selection of officials had occurred entirely at the behest of the aristocratic powers under the nine-rank [*jiupin zhongzheng* 九品中正] system of the Six Dynasties. The imperial examination system in the Tang dynasty continued to be of particular benefit to the aristocracy. The modern reformation of the examination system, with content that tended toward the practical and incorporated a significant increase in the number of both participants and successful candidates, also gave the common people much greater opportunity to ascend the ranks of officialdom on a much more equal basis.

6. "A change in the nature of factions." During the Tang, factions revolved around the aristocracy and were preoccupied with power struggles. During the Song, on the other hand, factions involved more of a battle of differing political viewpoints.

7. "Economic change." During the Tang dynasty, the quantity of money in circulation was not large. Currency began to circulate during the Song dynasty in significantly greater amounts, and the "currency economy" flourished.

8. "A change in the nature of culture." Classical studies of the Early Tang generally pursued the same scholarly styles as the Wei [220-265], and Six Dynasties eras, focusing in particular on household codes and passing down tradition. Doubt crept in concerning the commentaries and annotations of antiquity beginning in the mid-Tang, leading to new ideas about the interpretation of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Chunqiu* 春秋]. The questioning attitudes toward classical texts reached their apex during the Song dynasty, with reinterpretation of them becoming a prevalent trend. In literary studies, the popularity of the four—six parallel style of prose [*si-liu pianwen* 四六駢文], in vogue from the Six Dynasties period to the early Tang, transitioned by the mid-Tang into an emphasis on classical prose. In poetry, there was a change in a focus from form to free expression; *ci* 詞 poetry, which emerged in the late Tang, and *qu* 曲 poetry, which developed in the Song and Yuan periods, broke new ground in rhythm and gave vent to freer forms of expression, enabling literature, which had once been the purview of the aristocracy, to become an object of interest for the common people. In art, color murals had been popular during the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods, but this fascination gradually shifted during the Five Dynasties and two Songs to folding-screen paintings [*pingfeng hua* 屏風畫]; the gold-blue-green landscape [*jin bi shan shui* 金碧山水] diminished as plain line drawing with water and ink [*baimiao shuimo* 白描水墨] came into vogue; paintings that had served as magnificent architectural decorations or aristocratic items became scrolls that were easily carried and exhibited by commoners who had ascended to the ranks of officialdom while in foreign lands. Similar changes took place in the fields of music and dancing, with a transformation from meeting or serving the requirements of the aristocratic lifestyle to catering to the common people's tastes.

These eight areas of Tang-Song transition can be grouped into three broad areas: politics/government (1-6), the economy (7), and culture (8), but if we look in particular at the decline of aristocratic governance from the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang onward and the emergence and replacement of them by the autocratic monarchical rule of the Song dynasty, then the rise and fall of these two political systems also presents a concentrated demonstration of

a "rise in the status and position of the common people." A rise in the power wielded by the common folk is an important indicator in Naitō's hypothesis on Song dynasty modernity. As Naitō points out in his seminal *Study on the Onin War* on Japanese history: "The broad swathe of history is, from a certain perspective, always a record of the gradual ascendance of the lower classes upwards. Most of Japanese history is also such a record of those at the lower end society gradually progressing upwards."[7] Naitō expressed similar opinions on numerous occasions in discussing Chinese and Japanese history, for instance, when listing the two major "contents" of Chinese cultural life in *The Cultural Life of Modern China*, one of which was an "era of advancement of the common people." Naitō again listed five "elements" of culture and lifestyle later, one of which remained: "The occurrence of a 'common era' with new ways of living."[8] The fourth of the eight areas of the Tang-Song transition outlined above is the ascendancy of the "common people's status and position," in which Naitō points out that "Although China gave absolutely no recognition to the right of the common people's hand in government," the ending of the aristocracy not only expanded the reach and scope of the monarch's power but also "liberated" the common people from the dominion of a status system and "from the hands of the aristocracy.... The period saw a change from a complete lack of recognition toward the people's freedoms or personal rights toward a time in which personal rights attained gradual recognition."[9] Thus the era of monarchical autocratic government was also one in which the common folk enjoyed a rise in their power and experienced a more direct relationship with political and governing systems, including the opening of "equal opportunities to ascend to the ranks of officialdom" for the common folk under the imperial examination system and a focus by near-modern political factions founded on differing political views on social issues and the public interest. Furthermore, there was also mass production of luxury products and handicrafts targeted for public consumption under the context of a true monetary economy, which flowed into the homes of ordinary people, representing the addition of a new "element" to lifestyles in a "common era."[10] Without exception, literature and

7 Naitō Konan, "Ounin no lan nitsuite 應仁の亂に就て [A Study on the Onin War]," in *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 9.130.

8 Naitō Konan, "Kindai Shina teki bunka seikastu 近代支那的文化生活 [The Cultural Life of Modern China]," in *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 8.122, 131.

9 Naitō Konan, "Zhongguo jinshishi," 328; idem, "Shina ron 支那論 [A Treatise on China]," in *Naitō Konan zenshū* 內藤, 5.327.

10 Naitō Konan, "Kindai Shina teki bunka seikastu," 8.122-34; idem, "Zhongguo jinshishi," 329-31.

art also showed a characteristic tendency toward mass popularization, greater accessibility, and a cultural "shift downward."

3 The Theoretical Basis of the Tang-Song Transition Theory: A Cultural-Historical Perspective

Culture is of particular significance win Naitō Konan's Tang-Song transition theory. "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties" by Naitō states at the beginning that, "in an examination from a historical, particularly cultural-historical, perspective," the general term "Tang and Song" is meaningless "because there is a clear distinction in the respective cultural characteristics of the Tang and Song." The question is raised again later: "Fundamentally, what is the difference between the cultural states of the medieval and the modern?" Naitō then provided an answer across the eight areas, including in politics/government, the economy, scholarly literature, and the arts. He concludes: "As outlined above, both the Tang and Song Dynasties experienced cultural and lifestyle changes in every area."[11] As shown by these extracts, the basis of the "Tang-Song transition theory" is a "cultural historical perspective"; the "Tang-Song transition" was a transition of "cultural characteristics"; a demonstration of this can be found in the differences in "cultural states" and "cultural life"; both of these references to "culture" are broadly defined, encompassing government, the economy, scholarly literature, the arts, and so forth. We note that these broadly defined references to "culture"—for example, the "cultural historical perspective," "cultural characteristics," "cultural states," "cultural life," and so on in "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties"—appear nowhere in "The Significance of Modern History," in *The Modern History of China*, which covers similar content in greater detail and is also based on the course materials in 1918 and 1919. We can ascertain from its eighth subheading "Changes in cultural characteristics" as well as from the ending to the paper—"As outlined above, changes occurred between the Tang and Song across e.g. government, economic, and cultural domains"[12]—that the term "culture" in "The Significance of Modern History" is employed narrowly. The term "culture" appears only once in the preface to Naitō's 1909 *Modern History of China* course notes, that is: "These were changes with modern significance in politics and culture,"[13] which we also observe is used in a narrow sense. We can deduce

11 Naitō Hunan, "Gaikuo de Tang-Song shidai guan," 10-18.

12 Naitō Konan, "Zhongguo jinshishi," 332-34.

13 Naitō Kenkichi, postscript to *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 10.529.

from the foregoing that Naitō's cultural historical perspective had already been formed by the time of the publication of "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties" at the latest.

A cultural-historical perspective theoretically underpins the entirety of Naitō's historiography, including the Tang-Song transition theory.[14] Naitō states at the beginning of the preface to *Chinese Ancient History*: "as for the rest of so-called East Asian history, it is the history of China's cultural development."[15] Naitō determined the stages of China's historical development and their characteristics based on the stages and characteristics of China's cultural development, that is, by carrying out a "periodization" of the history. Naitō attributed China's cultural development to cultural shifts. This movement is constituted by, first, an expansive wave outward and a feedback wave inward of regional culture, which he tentatively called a "natural spatial shift" in culture (the natural space here often corresponds to the distribution and living space of different ethnic groups, and thus such a natural spatial shift is also often demonstrated by a cultural shift between different ethnic groups, reflecting interactive relationships between the political power of China's interior and the surrounding ethnic groups); second, by a cultural shift across different classes and strata, which Naitō tentatively termed the "societal spatial shift" (often exhibited in a downward cultural shift). These two types of cultural shift became major metrics in Naitō's subdivision of Chinese history into different historical periods. We see that the "outward expansive wave" in Chinese culture paused from the latter half of the late Han [25-220] to the Western Jin [265-317] in terms of its "natural spatial shift," delineated as the first transition period, that is, the period between the ancient and medieval and transitioning from the former to the latter. Then, because of the "awakening" of the external ethnic groups, an "inward feedback wave" in Chinese culture into China's interior took place in the period from the Five Barbarians and Sixteen States [304-439] to the mid-Tang, delineated as the medieval era. Finally, the "inward feedback wave" in culture reached its apex in the period covering the end of the Tang and Five Dynasties, delineated as the second transition period, that is, between the medieval and modern and transitioning from the former to the latter.

14 Mou Fasong 牟發松, "Neiteng Hunan he Chen Yinke de 'Liuchao Suitang lun' shixi 内藤湖南和陳寅恪的'六朝隋唐論'試析 [The Analysis on Naitō Konan and Chen Yinke's 'On Six Dynasties and Tang Dynasties']," *Shixue lilun yanjiu* 史學理論研究, no. 3 (2002): 65-66, 69-70.

15 Naitō Konan, "Zhongguo jinshishi," 3.

If the delineation between the ancient, the first transition period, and the medieval in Naitō's periodization system of Chinese history is based primarily on a "natural spatial shift" in culture, then the delineation of China's near-modern period would be based primarily on a societal spatial shift in culture—that is, as outlined above, a cultural shift from a medieval period monopolized by aristocracy downward to non-aristocratic commoner classes and demonstrated by an increasing vulgarization, popularization, and popular accessibility of culture and a concomitant increase in the status and position of the common people. From Naitō's perspective, this societal spatial shift in culture endowed with near-modern characteristics, over time, signifies that the common people will eventually become the "mainstays" of cultural life and the "standard bearers" of the arts and popular taste.[16]

4 Followers and Challengers of the Tang-Song Transition Theory

Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory has met with forceful challenges, as has his entire system of periodizing Chinese history. One challenge after the end of World War II, a little over a decade years after his death, came from the Historical Science Society of Japan [*Li yan pai* 歷研派] school guided by a Marxist historical materialist perspective. This school of thought, preoccupied with the global postwar trend toward socialism, was full of hopeful expectations, particularly with regard to the establishment and development of the new China. The Historical Science Society school was an enthusiastic participant in discussions around the periods and their social characteristics in Chinese history so as to incorporate Chinese history into a universal law on the development of world history, befitting a materialist historical perspective. Their doubts surrounding Naitō's near-modern theory of the Song dynasty was given pioneering expression in *The End of the Ancient Period in East Asia,* published by Maeda Naonori 前田直典 [1915-1949] in 1948. From the perspective of East Asian or even world history, Maeda envisaged a shared range of parallel and connected characteristics in the historical development of East Asian countries. If China's medieval period were supposed to begin in the third century (as Naitō theorized), then a thousand-year gap would appear, with the beginning of Japan's medieval period in the twelfth or thirteenth century, and yet China's and Japan's entrance into the modern stage occurred "in a nearly

16 Naitō Konan, "Shin Shina ron 新支那論 [A New Treatise on China]," in *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 5.537-42.

parallel position."[17] In accordance with the empirical findings on China's economic history of his teacher, Katō Shigeshi 加藤繁 [1880-1946], Maeda asserted that the end of the Tang dynasty was the end of the ancient period, rather than the beginning of the new modern period. Ishimoda Shō 石母田正 [1912-1986] soon thereafter established his hypothesis on the Song dynasty's entrance into the medieval period, based on Katō Shigeshi and Yoshiyuki Sudō's 周藤吉之 [1907-1990] findings on the large land-ownership system [*da tudi suoyou zhi* 大土地所有制] and tenant-farmer system [*dian hu zhi* 佃戶制], within which his "medieval" period became equivalent to feudal society in the "universal law" on world history. Niida Noboru 仁井田陞 [1904-1966] again provided supporting arguments in support of for Maeda's thesis from various perspectives, including legal history, legal sociology, and community theory, giving further weight to his hypothesis on medieval-feudal society in the Song dynasty.

Representative figures among adherents of Naitō's theory on Chinese history, that is, among the "Kyoto school," include Naitō's disciples Okazaki Fumio 岡崎文夫 [1888-1950], Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定 [1901-1995], Utsunomiya Kiyoyoshi 宇都宮清吉 [b. 1905], Miyakawa Hisayuki 宮川尚志 [b. 1913], and their "disciples" Yoshio Kawakatsu 川勝義雄 [1922-1984], Michio Tanigawa 谷川道雄 [1925-2013], and so on, among which Miyazaki could perhaps be described as a "star pupil" of Naitō's historiography. It was on the economic front that Naitō's evidence for the Tang-Song transition theory appeared the weakest. Miyazaki provided much more evidence in his *East Asia's Early Modern Age*, published in 1950, on the economic front in favor of Naitō's hypothesis, particularly the economic characteristics of China's Song-era modern society, such as large-scale cities, developed transportation systems (revolving around canals), a flourishing economy of exchange, the establishment of contractual landlord-tenant relationships, as well as modern characteristics in political and military affairs, such as a centralized bureaucracy, a civil service under the imperial examination system, a huge volunteer-based central army, and so on. Whereas Naitō had once compared the Song dynasty to the cultural Renaissance in the West, Ichisada furnished a comprehensive systematic argument that the "cultural renaissance of the East (of the Song dynasty) predated that of the West by three centuries" and that the former might even have "inspired and influenced" the latter.[18] Ichisada could be described not only as a follower

17 Maeda Naonori 前田直典, "Gudai dongya de zhongjie 古代東亞的終結 [The End of the Ancient Period in East]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.136-37, 150-51.

18 Ichisada Miyazaki 宮崎市定, "Dongyang de jinshi 東洋的近世 [East Asia's Early Modern Age]," in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.168-201, 235-37.

of Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory but also as its developer and defender, whose response to the challenge of the Historical Science Society school was a powerful one. His contributions to the defense and further explication of his teacher's theories are comprehensively recognized across the field, including by detractors, to the point that, at times, Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory is described in Western academia as the Naitō/Miyazaki hypothesis.

Notwithstanding its opposition to the near-modern hypothesis, the Historical Science Society school nevertheless still acknowledged that a major epoch-defining transition had occurred in Chinese history between the Tang and the Song—albeit from the ancient to the medieval, in their delineation of this transition. In other words, both the Kyoto school and Historical Science Society school reached a consensus that the Tang-Song transition was a major transition of a substantive and structural nature, and in this sense the Historical Science Society school, which challenges the Naitō hypothesis, is also its follower. However, Ichisada, a steadfast devotee of the Naitō hypothesis, has even been regarded as having "departed from Naitō's original intentions"[19] because of his structural "supplementation and refinement" of the social and economic-historical aspects of the Naitō hypothesis. In this sense, Ichisada, as a follower of the Naitō hypothesis, is also a critic of his teacher or, to put it another way, a critical follower.

The postwar trend in Japanese historical scholarship, which elevated theoretical thinking in particular, shifted significantly beginning in the 1980s, and the fires of debate about the different periods of ancient Chinese history, including arguments between the society and the Kyoto schools about the Tang-Song transition theory, soon died down. Nevertheless, the Tang-Song transition theory continued to have direct and indirect effects, and various new theories and hypotheses continuously generated about Chinese history were still required to present a direct or indirect response to its arguments.

In the past, European and American scholars of premodern Chinese history had largely "generally accepted" Naitō's Tang-Song transition hypothesis. The publication of Robert M. Hartwell's 赫若貝 [1932-1996] *Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550* in 1982 may have heralded a shift in this regard, the first direct response to the Naitō hypothesis from Western

19 Michio Tanigawa 谷川道雄, "Naitō Konan no rekishi houhou : 'Bunka no youshiki' to 'minzoku no jikaku' 内藤湖南の歴史方法——「文化の様式」と「民族的自覺」[Naitō Konan's Historical Method: 'Cultural Style' and 'National Consciousness']," in *Kenkyū ronshū: Naitō Konan kenkyū: Gakumon, Shisō, Jinsei* 研究論集：内藤湖南研究——學問・思想・人生 [*Research Essays: Special Feature: Naitō Konan: Knowledge, Thought, Life*], ed. Kawai bunka kyōikū Kenkyujo 河合文化教育研究所 (Nagoya: Kawai bunka kyōikū kenkyujo, 2008), 5.9.

academia on Song dynasty history. The questions of note for Hartwell centered on the conspicuous progress experienced in population and agriculture in the first five hundred years of the period from 750 to 1550, which has been described as an "economic revolution." That being the case, for what reason did the pace of material progress slow down so remarkably in the following seven-hundred-year period, and why did this period have fewer other achievements than its antecedents? Hartwell argued that changes in the relative advantages of regions and overall increase in wealth and population resulted not only in a change in the developmental process in regions but also had a comprehensive impact on political-social structures nationwide. The spread of people from areas in the empire with high population density created difficulty in administration, leading to the devolution of centralized power and strengthened local independence, freezing further bureaucratization of the central government in its tracks.[20] This analysis contradicts the Naitō hypothesis, which favors a continual strengthening of the monarch's autocratic powers during the Song dynasty. Hartwell also investigated a shift in the primary ruling classes, from the hereditary elites of the Tang dynasty to the professional elite class of the Northern Song [960-1127] and then to the local elites of the Southern Song [1127-1279], as well as to differences in orientation between the elites of the two Songs in serving the imperial court or putting down local roots. This revises the Naitō hypothesis concerning the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of the common people. If the object of the Naitō hypothesis could be described as an investigation of the entire Chinese empire, then Hartwell's focus was the different economic, social, and cultural developmental cycles in each of its many regions. His "regionally differentiated" perspective, particularly its characteristic focus on the social changes experienced by elites, illuminates the transformation in the two Songs and thus challenges and updates Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory and marks a change in the type of research conducted in the United States on Song dynasty history. Following in the footsteps of Hartwell's key problematic focuses, Robert Hymes 韓明士 investigated the issue of abrupt breaks in historical development between the two Songs through an empirical investigation of specific areas.[21] His view was that, from the perspective of the elites in Fuzhou, a group that was continuous over the two Song dynasties, the degree of rupture between the two Songs would have constituted a far more visible transition than that between the

20 Robert M. Hartwell, "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 2 (1982).

21 Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chou, Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1-6, 200-218.

Tang and the Song. Chinese society and its elites from the time of the Southern Song were oriented more to the pursuit of "local" strategies. The title *China Turning Inward: Intellectual-Political Changes in the Early Twelfth Century*, by James T. C. Liu 劉子健 [1919-1993], an eminent scholar and a founder of US studies on Song dynasty history, discloses some of its author's critical attitude concerning the "greater emphasis on a huge divide between the Tang and the Song." Liu emphasized the major historical transformation experienced between the two Songs.[22] The Chinese translation of Peter K. Bol's 包弼德 *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China*, published by China Scholarship in 2000, offers a comprehensive and pertinent review of views in US scholarship on Tang and Song history over the past ten years. Bol holds that a new generation of US-based historians has been affected by the postmodernist trend, "overturning some of the most important components of the Naitō hypothesis by gradually painting a new picture of the Tang-Song transformation."[23] He sees the crux of the Tang-Song transition theory as a great rise in the power of common people, but in actuality this was nothing more than a "redefinition" of the political and cultural elites "as well as a process by which they gradually became 'local elites,'" rather than the picture of society that Naitō had painted of a great rise in the power of the common folk. Nevertheless, Bol "still acknowledges [Naitō's] theory of historical periodization,"[24] but vigorously rejects the comparisons of modernity in the Naitō hypothesis between the Song dynasty and the West, and historical teleology tending toward European and American-style modernity.

5 The Influence and Significance of the Tang-Song Transition Theory

As stated by Zhang Guangda 張廣達, Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory, "as the earliest hypothesis proposed in modern historical discourse on China, is still called into service and referenced frequently after nearly a century," and

22 James T. C. Liu 劉子健, *Zhongguo zhuanxiang neizai: Liang Song zhiji de wenhua zhuanxiang* 中國轉向內在：兩宋之際的文化轉向 [*China Turning Inward: The Cultural Turn between the Two Songs*], trans. Zhao Dongmei 趙冬梅 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2002), 5.

23 Peter K. Bol 包弼德, "Tang-Song zhuanxing de fansi: Yi sixiang de bianhua wei zhu 唐宋轉型的反思——以思想的變化為主 [This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China]," trans. Liu Ning 劉寧, *Zhongguo xueshu* 中國學術, no. 3 (2000): 67.

24 Bol, "Tang-Song zhuanxing de fansi," 72, 86.

"to this day continues to be a driver of academic research."[25] Then to what secrets precisely does the proposition owe its continued liveliness and vigor? Put simply, "its originality and liberality." Its originality lies in the fact that, at its heart, Naitō's concept of a "Song modernity" encompasses both the inherent characteristics of Chinese history and cultural development while also permitting a degree of encounter or connection with "modernity" in the West, thus becoming "another near-modern" richly endowed with uniquely Chinese characteristics, and a concept of an era that is more inclusive or perhaps more universal than "modernity" in the West. "The liberality of the theory is in the contradiction and tension between its originality and universality and leaves for space for the continued promulgation and development or falsification and innovation of this academic proposition," which continually inspires new topics.[26]

Naitō clearly calls the end of the Tang and Five Dynasties era a "transition period" from the medieval to the new modern, yet not all eight areas named in the Tang-Song transition argument demonstrate this, and, indeed, the majority should not be seen as having been completed during the transition period. Some of the changes in these areas began during the mid-Tang while others followed the establishment of the Song, neither occurring exactly at the same time or completed in unison. The speed of the transition was also uneven. This could well provoke researchers into delineating different "transition periods" on the basis of different focuses in these areas. For instance, Naitō's disciple Naba Toshisada 那波利貞 [1890-1970] believed that the most fundamental and major transformation from the medieval to the modern occurred abruptly during a six- or seven-year period in the Kaiyuan 開元 [713-741]—Tianbao 天寶 [742-756] era, a brief transition (which Toshisada refers to as a "transformation period") after which China shifted to a new modern era,[27] notwithstanding the continued flourishing of such changes during the mid- to late Tang and Five Dynasties era. However, if the Tang-Song transition as understood by Hartwell and Hymes were deconstructed into two stages—from the mid-Tang to the Northern Song and then from the Northern Song to the Southern Song—then

25 Zhang Guangda 張廣達, "Neiteng Hunan de Tang-Song biange shuo ji qi yingxiang 內藤湖南的唐宋變革說及其影響 [Naitō Konan's Tang-Song Transformation Theory and Its Influence]," *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 11 (2005): 5.

26 Mou Fasong 牟發松, "'Tang-Song biange shuo' santi: Zhi cishuo chuangli yibai zhounian er zuo '唐宋變革說'三題——值此說創立一百周年而作 [Three Questions about 'The Tang-Song Transition': An Essay on the Occasion of Its Centennial Anniversary]," *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao* 華東師範大學學報, no. 1 (2010): 10.

27 Naba Toshisada 那波利貞, *Tōdai shakai bunkashi kenkyū* 唐代社會文化史研究 [*Studies in Tang Dynasty Social and Cultural History*] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1974), 1-10.

the transition spanned a few centuries. The focus of the transition would also differ from that of Naitō. Moreover, Hartwell and Hymes, as well as Liu, emphasize the degree of transformation between the Songs as exceeding that which occurred between the Tang and the Song dynasties. If Naba's perspective, held as well by scholars who believed in a "mid-Tang transition" (e.g., Chen Yinque 陳寅恪 and Zhang Zexian 張澤咸), could be seen as compatible with Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory, then the views of Hartwell, Hymes, and Liu represent a dismantling of the framework of Naitō's hypothesis. These different views on the Tang-Song transition period touch on questions around rupture and continuity in the development of Tang-Song history and the developmental stages in China's premodern history, and the investigations and empirical findings of scholars on such questions both inside and outside China have had an enormous impact on promoting greater depth in Chinese historical studies. In fact, the issues of concern and the discussion platforms on them were initially all provided by Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory.

The scholars and gentlemen of the Song dynasty also possessed a high degree of self-awareness with regard to the fast-moving changes in thinking and culture that had occurred between the Tang and the Song. These scholars made an effort to distinguish their current era from those of the Han and the Tang and claimed a connection with the "three ideal dynasties" [*lixiang zhong de sandai* 理想中的三代] of Chinese antiquity. Their self-awareness of their own era was not entirely dissimilar to those of people during the Renaissance, and Ichisada called the changes and developments within a narrowly defined cultural field during the Song dynasty an "Oriental Renaissance." Yet through the reinterpretation or perhaps transformative acceptance of Tang dynasty—era cultural phenomena among people in the Song dynasty-era, we can observe that, "relative to the markings of Western modernity, and Western Renaissance holding up the banner of freedom, equality, and human liberation," the neo-Confucianism system, which "occupied an important position in the Song dynasty's version of a Renaissance" and ultimately became its mainstream ideology of modernity, seems to indicate, with respect of the liberation of human beings and freedom of ideas, "the opposite direction from that of the cultural renaissance in the West."[28] Our examination of Naitō's ideas on "near-modern culture" can inspire renewed reflection on our part regarding the nature and characteristics of Song dynasty culture.

Naitō believed that the establishment of a monarchical system of autocracy corresponded with a rise in the status and position of the people and strengthening of their power, as such an establishment followed the elimination of

28 Mou Fasong, "'Tang-Song biange shuo' santi," 10.

the aristocratic classes that considered "common folk" slaves. Hence, it was a system in which the monarch and the people could be direct counterparts. Moreover, it developed through a long period of complex transformations of power and systems, and increasing responsibilities and awareness, by which the common people could finally become the gravediggers of the monarchical autocratic system and driving impetus behind a republic. We cannot confirm Naitō's expanding "rise of the common people" and "individual rights" from the perspective of empirical history in the "near-modern" societies from the Song to the Qing, let alone connect these "people" or "common people" with the main direct producers of the era—the tenant-farmer and small-scale farmer classes, who had a high degree of personal dependence and were subject to super-economic exploitation. However, when we consider the equality of status and position between people under an autocratic monarchical system—that is, the fact that everyone is equal before the emperor—is that not comparable to the idea in the religious reformation in Europe that "all are equal before God," as its feudal class perspective came under attack and was repudiated? If we had removed the emperor, then could we not transform the idea that "all are equal before God," as in the European Enlightenment, to one in which "all are equal before the law"? The Naitō hypothesis can at least inspire us to pose new questions in terms of transforming and using traditional conceptual resources.

Naitō formed the Tang-Song transition theory around the time of the Xinhai Revolution [1911-1912], and his proposal of such a hypothesis was also intimately connected to his observations of China's situation in the late Qing and early Republican [1912-1949] periods. A deep awareness of history informed Naitō that the Xinhai Revolution was in some respects a continuation of the process of "near-modern" history that could be traced back to the Tang-Song transition period and had existed for millennia. The mechanisms needed to maintain the current social order and trend toward political upheaval were a major topic of discussion in Japan in 1912 amid the fall of the Qing and early years of the Republic, during which Naitō began to contribute his ideas with the publication of *A Treatise on China*, two years later. Naitō had previously advanced his Song modernity hypothesis during his Kyoto University lectures, which is why the work begins by calling the Song dynasty the emergence of Chinese modernity and the genes of modernity: populism, the enormous spontaneous power of the people, and the traditions of local autonomy. These undercurrents driving the development of Chinese history since the Song dynasty were still coursing at that moment, and thus Naitō could confidently answer the questions raised in the first section of this book, titled "Monarchy? Or Republic?" This also meant that Naitō's judgment that a republican government would

follow the Xinhai Revolution should be regarded as a millennia-long "inevitability of a broader trend, and product of natural forces," rather than the product of his personal "sympathy or approval."[29] Naitō had discussed a flourishing trend favoring commoners in local administration during the Song dynasty as well as a spirit of grassroots "township-level self-governance organizations" [*xiangtuan zizhi* 鄉團自治] since the Yuan dynasty, as well as concepts of autonomy and egalitarianism embodied in Huang Zongxi's 黃宗羲 [1610-1695] critique of monarchy and Gu Yanwu's 顧炎武 [1613-1682] discourse on feudalism, Zeng Guofan's 曾國藩 [1811-1872] Xiang 湘 army established with the backdrop of local autonomy, and so forth. Naitō ranked such local traditions of autonomy very highly and, indeed, hopefully and believed that a republican system of governance would be based on elements of local self-governance that had existed since the Song. Regardless of whether a relationship necessarily existed between historical local traditions of autonomy and populism and the Republic that grew out of the Xinhai Revolution, by what means have the modern values within such traditions been excavated and inherited? To put it another way, how can we unearth forceful ideas in opposition to tradition from within tradition? We must still await a more solid empirical investigation. However, the value of the Naitō hypothesis is that, in order to attain mastery of current Chinese characteristics and put our "finger on the pulse of a new era," we must begin our search with the Chinese historical characteristics. If we read the more than twenty compositions by Mao Zedong 毛澤東 [1893-1976] in connection with his promotion of the "Hunan autonomy movement" in 1919-1920 as recorded in the *Early Manuscripts of Mao Zedong*[30] and then reflect on the spontaneous strength and local autonomous traditions of the Chinese people throughout history as outlined by Naitō, we might find [that movement] particularly noteworthy. Mao was a passionate advocate of autonomy in Hunan and staunchly promoted the province's autonomy movement, writing about it as follows:

> We are advocating for complete autonomy of the village, complete autonomy of the county, and complete autonomy of the province. Popular elections for village chief, popular elections for county chief, and

29 Naitō Konan, "Shina ron," 5.305-7, 45.

30 Mao Zedong 毛澤東, *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao 1912.6-1920.11* 毛澤東早期文稿 1912.6-1920.11 [*Early Manuscripts of Mao Zedong 1912.6-1920.11*], ed. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi 中共中央文獻研究室 and Zhonggong Hunan shengwei bianji zu 中共湖南省委編輯組 (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1990). These texts were written at the same time as Naitō was composing *A Treatise on China* and *A New Treatise on China*.

> popular elections for provincial chief … are what is called the "autonomy of the Hunan people."[31]

He saw Hunan autonomy as "a matter of life and death, honor and shame for the Hunan people, … I urge the people of Hunan … even if your parents die, wait to bury them" so that you may "first build up this embankment of autonomy."[32] Mao's fervent ideals of populism and local autonomy, first, would naturally have been influenced by Western democratic politics but, as the same time, were unlikely to be entirely disconnected from ideas about the will of the people and self-governing traditions in Chinese history.

Naitō was born to a well-established Confucian family and had deep knowledge of Chinese studies, cultivation in the Confucian classics and a love of Chinese culture, which accounts for his continual distance from the prevailing trends of his day that elevated Europe at Asia's expense. Yet Naitō was by no means a scholarly recluse, and his career in the news industry adjacent to or relating to the political realm before teaching at Kyoto University spanned more than two decades. Although he professed that his *Treatise on China* was entirely written "with thoughts on China on behalf of the Chinese people,"[33] his "other" positions remain conspicuous. Japan's fate and interests were fundamentally his greatest concern. As widely and generally known, some of his perspectives on historiography were pressed into the service of Japanese militarism to [justify] its invasion of China, a fact related to Naitō's identity, positions, and characteristic "overinvolvement in politics" as well as to his followers' understanding or use of Naitō's historiography.[34] A distinction should be drawn between the two. Nonetheless, the reality that the promulgation and focus on certain issues concerning the Tang-Song transition theory were a vivid sign of the times and their practical concerns is self-evident. In the same way, the Historical Science Society's critical questioning of Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory during the postwar period and the establishment of the new China and the new hypothesis on a Song medieval era are also

31 Mao Zedong, "'Xiangren zhi xiang' yu 'Xiangren zizhi' '湘人治湘'與'湘人自治' ['Hunanese governing Hunan' and 'Hunanese Autonomy']," in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao*, 524.

32 Mao Zedong, "Wei Hunan zizhi jinggao Changsha sanshiwan shimin 為湖南自治敬告長沙三十萬市民 [A Respectful Warning to the 300,000 Residents of Changsha on Hunan Autonomy]," in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao*, 528.

33 Naitō Konan, "Shina ron," 5.294.

34 Miyazaki Ichisada, "Naitō Konan to Shina gaku 内藤湖南とシナ學 [Naitō Konan and Sinology]," in *Miyazaki Ichisada zenshū* 宮崎市定全集 [*The Complete Works of Miyazaki Ichisada*] (Kyoto: Iwanami shoten, 1994), 24.248.

connected to the deeply felt impact of the materialist historical perspective on the Society and deeply held sympathy toward and expectations about the Chinese revolution and the building of the new China. Was the social formation established during the Tang-Song transition period as envisaged by the Society—a landlord-based medieval feudal society—anything other than the target of China's 1911 revolution? Since the 1980s, Chinese society and China's relationship with Asia and the rest of the world have experienced what could be called a tremendous shift without parallel for millennia, alongside the ending of the Cultural Revolution and the promotion of a market economy-led policy to achieve reform and liberalization. The Tang-Song era "cries out" for a history with empirically based descriptions and explanations of relationships showing continuity or rupture between the past and the present to enable us to better grasp the present and achieve a more reasoned perspective about the future. Regrettably, it appears no such investigations have been conducted to date, so we have stumbled into a new millennium without an adequate sense of our history. It is hoped that the review presented in this article on the Tang-Song transition theory will help to expedite such an investigation.

Translated by William Green

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Confucianism and Democracy: Four Models of Compatibility

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Abstract

In recent years, Philosophy Departments at universities in China and worldwide have experienced a renaissance in discussion on Confucian thought. As the country draws from indigenous traditions, rather than leaning completely on the importation of Western liberalism and Marxism, Confucianism has critical implications for politics, ethics, and law in modern China. At the same time, democracy never left the conversation. Democratic concepts cannot be ignored and must be disposed of, acknowledged, or incorporated. The relationship between Confucianism and democracy has been described by various authors as one of conflict, critique, compatibility, and hybridity. In this article, we examine a compatibility model, in which compatibility between Confucianism and democracy can be divided into four types: soft, hard, coexistence, and integration. We examine compatibility by examining "what is compatible" and "how compatibility can be achieved" so as to design speculative models for what a contemporary Confucian government would look like. Our focus is mainly political philosophy in order to explain the effect of cross-pollination of Confucian and democratic thought on political society.

Keywords

Confucianism – comparative philosophy – compatibility models – democracy – political

1 Introduction

A wide range of contemporary thinkers have sought an alternative approach to socialism and Western-style liberalism, drawing from China's indigenous resources to address current social, legal, political, and moral controversies. One attempt is the tradition dubbed the New Confucianism [*xin rujia* 新儒家], a label that includes philosophers such as Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 [1909-1995], Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 [1903-1982], and Tang Junyi 唐君毅 [1909-1978] and cannot be boiled down to any one set of philosophical precepts.[1] Many contemporary scholars in China and abroad have also re-examined Confucianism, ranging from the rather conventional thought of Xia Yong 夏勇, which can be described as Confucian-inflected liberalism, to the audacious thought of Jiang Qing 蔣慶, which seeks to reintroduce Confucian values at the foundation of Chinese society.[2]

Scholars such as Bai Tongdong 白彤東, Daniel Bell, He Baogang 何包鋼, Huang Yong 黃勇, Jiang Qing, and Xia Yong have proved to be influential in Philosophy Departments in China and worldwide.[3] Nevertheless, the influence of Western concepts such as democracy and the rule of law cannot be ignored: once the bell is rung, it cannot be unrung. Thus, even the unconventional Jiang Qing imagines a Chinese legislature with three chambers, one elected by the people, one filled by the cultural elite, and one selected and consisting of Confucian scholars.[4] For all its unconventionality, the model still reflects a tricameral legislature, each possessing the ability to present checks and balances over the other two. Western legal and political concepts cannot be ignored and must be disposed of, accommodated, or incorporated.

Confucianism has gained an influential following among contemporary Chinese philosophers, yet the democratic tradition remains an inextricable

1 John Makeham, ed., *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 1-2; Teemu Ruskola, *Legal Orientalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 227.

2 Ruskola, *Legal Orientalism,* 227.

3 Bai Tongdong, *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Daniel Bell, *China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Liberal Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); He Baogang, "Four Models of the Relationship between Confucianism and Democracy," in *Contemporary Chinese Political Thought,* ed. Fred Dallmayr and Tingyang Zhao (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012); Huang Yong, *Contemporary Virtue Ethics: Contributions from Ancient Confucianism* (Shanghai: Oriental Publishing Center, 2019); Jiang Qing, *A Confucian Constitutional Order: How China's Ancient Past Can Shape Its Political Future*, ed. Daniel Bell and Fan Ruiping (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Xia Yong, *The Philosophy of Civil Rights in the Context of China* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2011).

4 Jiang, *A Confucian Constitutional Order*.

part of the conversation. The emergent work on these two subjects has naturally led to an examination of their compatibility. He Baogang, for example, describes the relationship between Confucianism and democracy in terms of four models: the first in which they are in conflict, the second in which they are compatible, the third involving a hybrid, and the fourth critical.[5] This essay is concerned with compatibility. However, the proposition that Confucianism and democracy are compatible is a broad claim, and the goal of this article is to clarify it.

Confucianism is inherently difficult to define. Confucius never wrote a systematic treatise, nor did he employ a systematic methodology or define the central concepts that he used.[6] It is an expansive philosophy that covers a wide range of philosophical themes and has meant different things at different times over China's long history. For our purposes, we refer to political interpretations gleaned from pre-Qin [before 221 BCE] Confucianism, such as the *Analects* [*Lunyu* 論語], *Mencius* [*Mengzi* 孟子], and *Xunzi* 荀子. This definition is challenging as Confucius was primarily concerned with the morality of people in constructing a political system. Nevertheless, we create a working conception of political Confucianism designed to achieve the moral goals of Confucian philosophy.

We begin by identifying four models that describe the compatibility of Confucianism and democracy: soft compatibility, hard compatibility, compatibility based on coexistence, and compatibility based on integration. We then discuss the distinctions between these models by asking: "*What* is compatible?" and "*How* can compatibility be achieved?"

2 Four Models of Relationships between Confucianism and Democracy

In his article, "Four Models of the Relationship between Confucianism and Democracy," He Baogang describes the relationship between Confucianism and democracy in terms of four models: a model of conflict, a model of critique, a model of compatibility, and a hybrid model. The model of conflict addresses the problems between Confucianism and democracy, arguing that they have different origins: the first has agricultural origins whereas the second grew out of industrial society. This model is represented by Samuel Huntington

5 He, "Four Models."

6 Steven Greer and Tiong Piow Lim, "Confucianism: Natural Law Chinese Style?" *Ratio Juris* 11, no. 1 (1998): 80.

[1927-2008], who claimed that whereas democracy in a Confucian society is not necessarily impossible, Confucian democracy might be "a contradiction in terms."[7] The model of conflict usually favors democracy over Confucianism, placing heavy emphasis on the negative aspects of Confucianism in contradistinction to democracy. Similarly, the model of critique also finds democracy is inconsistent with Confucianism. Instead of judging Confucianism from a democratic perspective, this model emphasizes the difficulties in democratic societies and attempts to address them by appealing to classical Confucian tradition. These two models can be seen as having a presumption of incompatibility.

However, the model based on compatibility suggests that elements of Confucianism and democracy might be compatible, whereas the hybrid model holds that the elements from both traditions can be combined to create a hybrid political system.[8] These two models can be seen as having a presumption of compatibility.

This article is primarily concerned with the compatibility model. To provide a deeper analysis of how Confucianism and democracy might be compatible, we design four models that describe the compatibility of Confucianism and democracy: soft compatibility, hard compatibility, compatibility based on coexistence, and compatibility based on integration. The first two models distinguish *what* is compatible between Confucianism and democracy and therefore are concerned with which elements, aspects, or institutions of the two traditions are compared. The second two models distinguish *how* Confucianism and democracy can be compatible and therefore are concerned with what a system of government that combines the elements and aspects of the two systems would look like and how these different elements could work together.

We look first at the *what* question to examine soft and hard compatibility and then the *how* question to examine compatibility based on coexistence and compatibility based on integration.

3 The *What* Question: What Is Compatible?

Whether two or more things are "compatible" assumes a comparison of them and whether they can coexist. But *what* are those "things"? What do we

7 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 310.

8 He, "Four Models."

compare when we examine the compatibility of Confucianism and democracy? This is the *what* question.

We designed two models related to the what questions: soft and hard compatibility. Hard compatibility primarily examines institutions while soft compatibility compares the similarities in the abstract ideas between the two traditions.[9] Further, since the formation of an institution is usually grounded in or embodies certain abstract ideas or values, the following discussion is primarily focused on soft compatibility.

As He expresses it, soft compatibility is like "color matching," meaning that it compares elements on one side to counterparts on the other side.[10] This section focus on two elements of democracy that are arguably found in Confucianism: the legitimacy of political power and political equality.

3.1 *The Legitimacy of Political Power*

Minben 民本 can be translated as "people are the foundation (or root) of the nation." This classical Confucian concept is sometimes cited to show similarities between Confucianism and democracy.[11] A passage in the *Mencius*, for example, implies a similar idea: "The people are the most important element of the nation; the spirits of the land and grain are next; the sovereign is the lightest."[12] This quotation shows that Mencius [372-289 BCE] considers people as having the highest importance in society while placing the ruler as having the lowest. Another passage seems to be even more relevant to the legitimacy of political power: "Heaven sees according as my people see; Heaven hears according as my people hear."[13] When discussing the conditions for the transfer of political power, Mencius suggests that new rulers ultimately need to be accepted by the people. As Xu Keqian 徐克謙 argues, these passages imply that the preference for people justifies the legitimacy of political power, and this is consistent with how democracy views the origins of political power.[14]

However, David Elstein challenges this by claiming that when this form of Confucian thought is described as "democratic," it sets too low a bar to be

9 He, "Four Models," 23. While he does not describe it as "hard," He Baogang's "institutional structural approach" is comparable with "hard compatibility."

10 He, "Four Models," 138.

11 Viren Murthy, "The Democratic Potential of Confucian Minben Thought," *Asian Philosophy* 10 (2000).

12 James Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), retrieved August 21, 2020, from Sturgeon, http://ctext.org/mengzi/jin-xin-ii.

13 Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius*, https://ctext.org/mengzi/wan-zhang-i.

14 Xu Keqian, "Early Confucian Principles: The Potential Theoretic Foundation of Democracy in Modern China," *Asian Philosophy* 16 (2006): 137-40.

called "democracy."[15] For Mencius, whether the people accept a ruler is based on the their satisfaction with the ruler's handling of government affairs after ascension to a position of power.[16] This test is too passive for Elstein. Although he recognizes it as necessary for democracy, it cannot be sufficient because of the absence of the essential feature of democracy: popular sovereignty, a concept based on social contract theory and generally understood as viewing "the people as the rulers" of the country and that political power essentially originates with the people.[17]

A response to Elstein must distinguish between two separate but interconnected concepts: moral rights and legal rights. In general, legal rights are rights that are protected in legal statutes and codes whereas moral rights are sometimes understood as "moral claims," which are not necessarily supported in the law.[18] Critics claim that Confucianism does not respect moral rights because Confucian societies do not legally protect those rights. One such critic, John C. H. Wu 吳經熊 [1899-1986], states that Confucianism's focus on moral character lacks the concrete protections provided by legal systems.[19] Many of the moral rights valued by democracies are protected by certain institutions, such as suffrage, the rule of law, and party systems, institutions that Confucian systems lack.[20] This line of reasoning assumes that if a moral right is not protected as a legal right, then it is not valued by a society. It does not necessarily follow, however, that Confucianism does not value moral rights simply because it has not enshrined such rights as in the law.

This is because Confucianism places less emphasis on the creation of legal institutions to protect moral rights, emphasizing instead the moral cultivation of individuals and preparing them to exercise these rights. One such right is political participation. Confucianism encourages political participation, however, it limits participation to the *junzi* 君子, Confucius's vision of the ideal man, often translated into English as an "exemplary person."[21] Political participation by *junzi* is encouraged, as their role as advisers would be helpful

15 David Elstein, "Why Early Confucianism Cannot Generate Democracy," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 9 (2010): 426, 435.

16 Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius*, https://ctext.org/mengzi/wan-zhang-i.

17 Elstein, "Why Early Confucianism Cannot," 435.

18 Andrew Fagan, "Human Rights," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://www.iep.utm.edu/hum-rts/#SH3a/.

19 John C. H. Wu, "The Struggle between Government of Laws and Government of Men in the History of China," *China Law Review* 5 (1932): 68.

20 He, "Four Models," 183.

21 Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., trans., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

to political leaders.[22] It should be noted that a *junzi* is not born but, rather, is made, cultivated through moral education. The Confucian vision seeks to spread moral education to individuals, regardless of social class, though it is unlikely that this goal was achieved in Confucius's time.[23] It is difficult to imagine what a modern conception of *junzi* would look like. Some argue that it would be more expansive, including individuals of different social classes as well as women, though this is still a controversial interpretation among New Confucianists.[24]

Thus, it is possible that Confucianism also acknowledges the moral rights that democracy advocates, but because of the historical limitations of legal and political development, these rights are not legally protected. Confucianism values the ability of *anyone* to become a *junzi* and, therefore, participate politically, rather than sharing democracy's emphasis on universal political participation. Confucianism has not failed to recognize the right to political participation, which it values as a moral right, though it does not seek to enshrine it as a legal right. There is an observable overlap between Confucianism and democracy over this moral right.

The second challenge posited by Elstein is that the Confucian and democratic systems appeal to very different, and in his view irreconcilable, assumptions about the degree of public trust in rulers as well as the differing systemic views of majority rule. Elstein argues that Confucianism expects the ruler to be capable and virtuous. In comparison, democracy places much less confidence in the ruler, appealing to popular sovereignty to avoid the abuse of political power.[25] Elstein acknowledges Mencius's emphasis that the opinions of high ministers alone are not enough. As the *Mencius* states: "When all the people say, 'This is a man of talents and virtue,' examine the case, and when you find that the man is such, employ him."[26] Some scholars argue that this passage contains some democratic elements, but Elstein comes to the opposite conclusion. He emphasizes that because rulers need to investigate cases and

22 Karyn Lai, *Learning from Chinese Philosophies: Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualised Self* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2013). Lai refers to *Analects* 19:10 to illustrate this point.

23 Soor-hoon Tan, "A Confucian Response to Rorty's Postmodern Bourgeois Liberal Idea of Community," in *Rorty, Pragmatism, and Confucianism*, ed. Yong Huang (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 171.

24 Derek Hird, "In League with Gentlemen: Junzi Masculinity and the Chinese Nation in Cultural Nationalist Discourses," *Asia Pacific Perspectives* 15 (2017): 16.

25 Elstein, "Why Early Confucianism Cannot," 435, 441.

26 Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius,* https://ctext.org/mengzi/liang-hui-wang-ii.

evaluate the candidates themselves, even after approval by all the people, it is the ruler's judgment, not the people's judgment, that is decisive.[27]

Another passage, from the *Analects*, seems to take an even more negative view of majority rule. In this passage, Confucius tells his student Zilu 子路 [542-480 BCE] that an observer cannot conclude that a person is good even if he is praised by everyone in his community and, similarly, cannot conclude that he is bad even if he is hated by everyone in that community.[28] However, while the passage implies distrust of the majority's opinions, it is not necessarily inconsistent with democracy. Rather, it suggests that, from the Confucian perspective, democracy is justified by its intrinsic values. If democracy is justified only by the intrinsic values embodied in it, it does not need to assume that the majority always makes the best choice. Observers should never conflate democracy with simple majoritarianism. Most democratic countries seek to enforce systems to curb the total power of the majority from the danger of mob rule. Still others seek the development of a system of "deliberative democracy," which seeks to foster public contribution to the government without simple reliance on majority rule.[29] Thus, democracy does not suppose that the majority will always make the best decision. Instead, democrats may find common ground with Confucius in concluding that further investigation is needed to evaluate and judge a person even after he has gained approval from the community. Therefore, the passage above is not necessarily incompatible with democracy.

This discussion shows an underlying presumption that Confucians would see democracy as giving too much power to the majority. By contrast, democrats see Confucian systems as giving too much power to elites. Democrats also describe modern democracies as having introduced republican systems of government designed to curb the tyranny of the majority. The intent of this section is to simply point out that both Confucianism and democracy respect the will of the public, both the majority and the minority, to some extent in making decisions.

It is important to reiterate that this section focuses on whether abstract concepts in Confucianism and democracy can fit into a soft compatibility model. Our scope would be exceeded by posing the *what* questions on how a Confucian *junzi* could coexist with the ideas of universal suffrage and majority

27 Elstein, "Why Early Confucianism Cannot," 437.

28 Legge, trans., *Analects*, *The Chinese Classics: Vol. 1* (1861), retrieved August 21, 2020, from Sturgeon, http://ctext.org/analects/zi-lu/.

29 Thomas Christiano, "Argument for Democratic Equality," in *Philosophy and Democracy: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Christiano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

rule or whether a model could incorporate both systems. Many contemporary Confucian scholars have attempted to harmonize these traditions in thought experiments, conceptualizing a multichamber legislature, with one chamber based on universal suffrage and the other(s) based on meritocratic elitism.[30] Examples of speculative models that adopt elements from both traditions are given in our discussion of the *how* question. Our purpose in this section is specifically to acknowledge the shared moral rights in Confucianism and democracy, specifically the moral right to political participation. The question of *who* gets to participate politically is a larger topic that draws on differing views on political equality. This distinction is further clarified below.

3.2 *Political Equality*

Another element of democracy that is thought to contradict Confucianism is the concept of political equality. Xu Keqian claims that the passage that "all men may be Yaos and Shuns,"[31] referring to two legendary rulers, implies that Confucianism has a sense of an equal right to political participation similar to that of democracy.[32]

However, Elstein challenges this interpretation, noting Mencius' division of labor.[33] Mencius distinguishes between "great men" [*da ren* 大人] and "small men" [*xiao ren* 小人], referring to the rulers and the ruled, respectively. As Mencius states:

> Some labor with their minds, and some labor with their strength. Those who labor with their minds govern others; those who labor with their strength are governed by others. Those who are governed by others support them; those who govern others are supported by them. This is a principle universally recognized.[34]

Bai Tongdong discusses two reasons for the distinction between "great" and "small" men. First, people are not equally capable of realizing their potential for being wise and virtuous. Mencius believes that this is unavoidable. Second, this distinction is practically important because the division of labor is

30 Bai Tongdong, "A Confucian Version of Hybrid Regime," *Prajñā Vihāra* 13 (2012); Jiang, *Confucian Constitutional Order*.

31 Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius*, https://ctext.org/mengzi/gaozi-ii/.

32 Xu, "Early Confucian Principles," 148.

33 Elstein, "Why Early Confucianism Cannot,"437.

34 Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius*, https://ctext.org/mengzi/teng-wen-gong-i/.

necessary for society to function.[35] Elstein argues that although Confucianism acknowledges that people have equal potential at the beginning to become Yaos or Shuns, equal potential does not translate into equal political participation. Rather, the degree of realization of this potential determines the degree of political participation.[36] Thus, the difference between "equal potential" and "equal political rights" presents a conflict between Confucianism and democracy.

But the question of *who* gets to participate politically is also a debatable concept in systems that apply universal suffrage. Suffrage, or the vote, is the most common form of political participation. The extent of suffrage, however, has historically been limited and extended through political and legal change. In the United States, for example, suffrage was initially limited to landowning men. Later, states abolished the landowner requirement.[37] The Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution expanded suffrage to men regardless of race. The Nineteenth Amendment expanded suffrage to women. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment lowered the voting age to eighteen. Whereas the narrative of suffrage is one of expanding the right to vote to more people over time, the right to political participation is still, essentially, exclusionary.

Today, many restrictions remain concerning who can vote and run for office, but most of them are viewed by most people as reasonable or even taken for granted. For example, in the United States, only an adult may vote, specifying that individuals must be over the age of eighteen. Second, only a citizen may vote, which necessarily excludes noncitizens, barring them from participating politically in the country where they live. Third, democratic countries, particularly federal republics such as the United States, place residency requirements on people who seek to vote or run for office and age requirements for certain political offices. Some states even suspend the voting rights of citizens who are felons and some extend that suspension to include the period after they have completed their sentence.[38] Thus, the right to participate politically is not bestowed at birth—it must be acquired, by turning a certain age, being naturalized as a citizen, residing in a place for a certain amount of time, and, in the case of eligibility for a very few offices (e.g., president), being born in the country, rather than naturalized.

35 Bai Tongdong, *China: The Political Philosophy of the Middle Kingdom* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 67-70.

36 Elstein, "Why Early Confucianism Cannot," 438.

37 Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, "The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World," *Journal of Economic History* 65 (2005).

38 Nora Demleitner, "Felon Disenfranchisement," *University of Memphis Law Review* 49 (2019).

Both systems set a bar for individual political participation. In a Confucian system, political participation would require an individual to receive moral education in virtue, whereas, in a democratic system, it requires an individual who is a citizen to attain the age of eighteen. Although both Confucianism and democracy encourage political participation, neither allows universal participation. The difference between the systems, then, consists of who can participate and whether the restrictions on individual participation in each system are justified. Those living in democracies might argue that Confucianism is designed simply to exclude most people from political participation in the name of good governance. Confucians might respond that moral education and development are necessary for political participation and that accusations that Confucian systems are designed to exclude political enemies are too cynical. Rather, Confucianism encourages all people to participate politically by giving them the opportunity to cultivate their potential for virtue.

To fill the gap, compatibility must, therefore, address the problem of what to do with people who cannot or do not develop their ethical potential. Should such people still have the right to participate politically? Confucians would argue "no," saying that, for the purposes of good governance, only those who have realized their potential for virtue should be able to participate in something as important as state affairs. Despite everyone's equal potential for virtue, only those who have cultivated it should participate politically.

A similar challenge can be raised with respect to democracy. Most democratic systems operate under the assumption of political equality, but what does the phrase "all men (and women) are created equal" mean? Certainly, it implies generally equal human rights, such as the prohibition of slavery. However, whether it is sufficient as a basis of political equality in a democracy is another question.[39]

The response to this question depends on the theory chosen to substantiate that "all men (and women) are created equal," as there are also pervasive disagreements on the interpretation of "equality" in the Western tradition.[40] For example, let us suppose that all people are created with equal rationality. This proposition immediately raises many questions as to the content and criteria of such rationality and whether this type of rationality is cultivated through nurture or comes from nature. If rationality is cultivated through nurture, then one must ask: "at what point are people's rationality cultivated to

39 Bruce A. Hunt, Jr., "Locke on Equality," *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (2016): 547.

40 Louis Henkin discusses the different conceptions of equality in the American tradition with the broader view inherent in international human rights ("Rights: American and Human," *Columbia Law Review* 79 [1979]).

the point that they are ready for political participation?" In this case, democratic equality would require rational cultivation for political participation. If this were limited to an individual's potential for rationality, then why exclude children, felons, and noncitizens with legal residency from participation? It could also be argued that rationality is acquired naturally, but this is essentially a dignity argument. An assumption that political equality refers to equal dignity acknowledges that respect for people's equal dignity requires that they are permitted political participation. Again, why in that case do we exclude children, felons, and noncitizens with legal residency? This is because even if all people are bestowed with equal dignity, there is still a need for cultivation or development. Those in democracies acknowledge that children lack the knowledge and experience for political participation. Felons are excluded from participating either as punishment or because of the need for remedial development before the person can participate politically, though this is controversial. Noncitizens with legal residency are excluded because they are not considered to have sufficient "skin in the game" in matters of state and need to go through the naturalization process, which often requires civic education. Thus, development and cultivation are necessary before a person can participate politically.

In this section, we pose the *what* question, meaning what is being compared between Confucianism and democracy. We discussed the abstract concepts of political participation and political equality. Confucians and democrats agree that individuals should be encouraged to participate politically. This abstract concept is shared, though the traditions differ on who should be allowed to participate politically. At first glance, this leads to the assumption that the two systems have differing views of political equality, as a Confucian system would limit who can participate whereas democracy takes a more expansive view.

However, this assumption does not give the full picture. We argued that Confucianism and democracy both acknowledge a type of equality among all people. Confucianism argues that people have equal potential for moral education, whose realization entitles them to participate politically. The view in democracy is that people have political equality, but education and development are necessary for a person to participate politically. The bar for Confucianism is high, requiring moral development, and low for democracy, requiring civic education, yet both systems acknowledge the need for some limitations on political participation. Although the matter of degree differs, we see that Confucianism and democracy both acknowledge a realizable potential equality among people. Therefore, we can say that the two traditions have some soft compatibility.

4 The *How* Question: "How" Can Compatibility Be Achieved?

In the previous section, we discussed the *what* question, which asked "what" was being compared between Confucianism and democracy, focusing on the soft compatibility model, which seeks to find common ground in some abstract concepts held by both the Confucian and democratic traditions. That section did not go into much detail about the institution-centric hard compatibility model. This is because institutions are country specific, influenced by historical traditions and contemporary societal needs which are often rationalized post-hoc to fit within their overarching philosophical tradition. Hard compatibility further seeks to find compatibility not only between Confucian and democratic institutions but also between abstract ideas from one tradition and the institutions in the other. This distinction is important in this section because we examine speculative models of contemporary Confucian philosophers that combine Confucian and democratic elements, not only by comparing abstract ideas in the two systems but also by introducing Confucian concepts into democratic institutions.

This section addresses the *how* question, which asks "how" Confucianism and democracy can be compatible. Compatibilists often take two approaches in reconciling Confucian and democratic elements into a single political system. One model is compatibility based on coexistence. This model includes elements from Confucianism and democracy coexisting in one society or one political system. The other model is one of integration, which not only has Confucian and democratic elements coexisting but also interprets them as influencing each other and becoming integrated to form a new political system.

We examine the speculative models of other contemporary Confucian thinkers who have suggested new political models for China. We argue that these models are either coexistence models, which allow China to claim both indigenous and imported political concepts, or integration models, which propose an entirely new political system.

4.1 *Compatibility Based on Coexistence*

In this section, we examine two interpretations of coexistence compatibility between Confucianism and democracy, one example of which is the "hybrid" vision proposed by Daniel Bell and Bai Tongdong. For example, Bell proposed that one solution for avoiding problems generated from a merely democratic or meritocratic political system is a compromise: a bicameral legislature composed of a lower house and an upper house. The lower house would be democratically elected, whereas the members of the upper house, which he

calls the Sage's Academy [*Xianshi yuan* 賢士院], would be selected through competitive exams to test knowledge on a broad variety of topics, including politics, economics, literature, and philosophy.[41]

Bai Tongdong proposed a similar hybrid model, which he calls Confu-China. Bai incorporates Bell's two chambers, which he calls the house of the people and the house of the experienced, however, in his vision, individual voters are more involved in local communities, mainly with popular elections to local governments.[42]

Bell and Bai both envision combinations with the Confucian elements and the democratic elements coexisting in a single political system. However, it would be unfair to regard the hybrid proposal as a perfect example of the coexistence model as only part of it embodies this notion. For instance, Bai's Confu-China acknowledges the importance of the rule of law and argues that it should be based on morality.[43]

Another interpretation of the coexistence model splits democracy and Confucianism into two separate spheres: the public sphere and the private sphere. For instance, in the public sphere, citizens would be equals and share equal rights to political participation. However, private decision making should be guided by the hierarchical Confucian tradition. This model is familiar in Western democratic countries today, as it is similar to nonjudicial religious arbitration. One example is when a couple decides to have their marriage solemnized by religious law. A court enforces private decisions, typically in marriage and family law, made by private arbitration organizations, many of which apply halacha (Jewish law), sharia (Islamic law), and canon law (Christian law).[44]

Of course, whether we should draw a distinct line and whether it is possible to draw such a line to separate the public and private spheres are separate questions. For example, Bai claims that Confucianism emphasizes interactions between private and public spheres, as many private moral virtues may also be properly applied to the public sphere and virtues needed in the public sphere

41 Daniel Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 165-67.

42 Bai Tongdong, "A Confucian Version of Hybrid Regime: How Does It Work, and Why Is It Superior?" in *The East Asian Challenge for Democracy: Political Meritocracy in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Daniel Bell and Chenyang Li (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Bai, *Against Political Equality*, 123-33.

43 Bai Tongdong, "The Analects and Forms of Governance," in *Dao Companion to the Analects*, ed. Amy Olberding (Heidelberg: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 300-305.

44 Michael J. Broyde, *Sharia Tribunals, Rabbinical Courts, and Christian Panels: Religious Arbitration in America and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

must be cultivated in private life.[45] However, other scholars argue that the distinction between the two spheres must be maintained. Robert Calhoun, for example, claims that an explicit and effective distinction between the state and the community is needed.[46] John Locke acknowledges the public and private spheres in his work when he argues that, even though some of our rights are relinquished to establish a government, the rights we retain are not relinquished and should not be hindered by the government.[47]

The coexistence model is a form of compatibility that essentially maintains a form of government that incorporates some elements of Confucianism. Bell's and Bai's models maintain the republican form of government, including a bicameral legislature. The crux of the argument, therefore, is the creation of one house based on democratic principles and another on Confucian principles. Nevertheless, the guiding superstructure is a Western-influenced republican model. Thus, the coexistence model represents a form of "hard compatibility," to introduce Confucian ideas into democratic institutions in the hope of bolstering democracy through checks and balances of the democratic elements with meritocratic, Confucian elements. Indeed, the "sphere sovereignty" model reflects this conception even more, by maintaining a totally democratic position and carving out a place for Confucianism in private dispute resolution, in much the same way as modern countries have attempted to carve a place for religious decision making within a secular, democratic system. This includes procedures such as religious arbitration in alternative dispute resolution. However, its application remains controversial.[48]

4.2 *Compatibility Based on Integration*

Some scholars who have explored the compatibility of Confucianism and democracy have sought to ground some typical elements of democracy in Confucianism, claiming that it can offer an alternate explanation for democratic institutions or even be used to infuse democracy with more meaning.[49]

Xu Keqian, for example, presents two approaches for reconciling Confucianism with individual freedom. Xu, influenced by Mencius, argues

45 Bai, "The Analects and Forms of Governance," 307.

46 Robert L. Calhoun, "Democracy and Natural Law," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 5 (1960).

47 Patrick J. Connolly, "John Locke," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://www.iep.utm.edu/locke/#SH4a/.

48 For further examination of the challenges of legal pluralism, see Joshua T. Carback, "On Sharia in American Family Law: Confronting the Dangers of Legal Pluralism," *International Journal of the Jurisprudence of the Family* 7 (2016): 165.

49 Xu, "Early Confucian Principles," 137.

that the Confucian theory that "human nature is good" endorses the notion that "every person has equal potential for good," which can be used as a reason for a form of democracy. A view of equal human goodness can serve as a rationale for majority rule, as it would be unreasonable to exclude anyone from political participation. Thus, all people by nature are entitled to freedom of speech and the freedom to choose their way of life because of their "good native endowment and good original heart."[50] Xu's argument in favor of Confucian freedom implies a teleological sense of freedom. In Xu's interpretation of Mencius, people have a right to freedom because of their good nature or natural tendency to make good decisions. Xu's claim, however, may be too strong. While Mencius did recognize people's inherently good nature, he also noted the importance of satisfying material needs and good moral education in influencing people's informed decisions.[51] Here, "making a good or right decision," either private or public, seems to be the final goal, with freedom being merely a tool justified by the good tendency to finally achieve this goal. In other words, if a good tendency gets distorted from the goal and people's free choices do not lean to the "good decision," then, in Xu's view, the people should no longer have freedom. Xu's view is limited by his conception of equal human goodness deriving from the Confucian theory developed by Mencius. Other Confucians would criticize this way of thinking as a "Confucian theory," as many other Confucian thinkers, such as Xunzi [313-238 BCE], disagree with Mencius's claim that human nature is good, arguing, instead, that human nature is evil. Nevertheless, Xu presents a theory that reconciles Confucianism and individual freedom within a general Confucian tradition.

Li Chenyang 李晨陽 argues that Confucianism is compatible with a form of civil liberties through the concept of "choosing," a view of freedom implied from the discussion of choosing in the pre-Qin Confucian classics.[52]

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50 Xu, "Early Confucian Principles," 141.

51 Mencius notes the necessity of the satisfaction of physical needs for the moral development of common people: "If they have a certain livelihood, they will have a fixed heart; if they have not a certain livelihood, they have not a fixed heart. If they have not a fixed heart, there is nothing which they will not do in the way of self-abandonment, of moral deflection, of depravity, and of wild license" (Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius*, https://ctext.org/mengzi/teng-wen-gong-i/).

Mencius also notes that moral education is important for individuals to be able to make informed decisions: "But men possess a moral nature; and if they are well fed, warmly clad, and comfortably lodged, without being taught at the same time, they become almost like the beasts" (Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius*, https://ctext.org/mengzi/teng-wen-gong-i/).

52 Li Chenyang, "The Confucian Conception of Freedom," *Philosophy East & West* 54, no. 4 (2014).

Li describes two different kinds of freedom, which he calls the "thin notion" and the "thick notion." The thin notion refers to the potentiality of choice or a choice among available options, such as choosing where one lives and how one acts. A thick notion, by contrast, focuses on the realization of that potentiality, that is, making an actual choice.[53] As Li states, realized freedom is manifested when a person chooses the good,[54] as is said in the *Doctrine of the Mean* [*Zhongyong* 中庸]: "the authentic person chooses the good and holds firmly onto it."[55] According to Li:

> From the Confucian perspective, choosing the good is liberating and fulfilling. It enables and empowers the individual who so chooses. It is freer than abstract freedom, the potential of which has to be realized with competence, knowledge, and adequate conditions. Choosing the good is fundamental to the good life. Only in choosing the good can one build a good, coherent life. Choosing the good, however, is not detached from personal daily activities. When done appropriately, good choices in everyday life, such as choosing a good health insurance plan, contribute to the overall goal of the good life.[56]

Li concludes that if the main goal of Confucianism is "to achieve human freedom as choosing the good," then a Confucian political system should develop social institutions in which people can make such a choice and achieve the goal of making good choices.[57] Li writes that the "Confucian ideal of freedom has to be achieved in the context of human society."[58] Li's view thus provides another way in which Confucianism gives democratic concepts meaning while also acknowledging the instrumental need for civil liberties, in order for people to meaningfully achieve the aspirational moral goals of Confucianism.

Additionally, Xu believes that the Confucian ideal of the *junzi* embraces the sense of individual freedom. This is because a *junzi* is expected to have an independent personality, to act according to the Confucian moral concepts of *ren* 仁, which is often translated as "benevolence," and *yi* 義, which is often translated as "rightness," and to be responsible for his behavior. This requires him to

53 Li, "The Confucian Conception of Freedom," 908-9.
54 Li, "The Confucian Conception of Freedom," 909.
55 Chinese Text Project, https://ctext.org/liji/zhong-yong/zhs?searchu=%E4%B8%AD%E5%BA%B8&searchmode=showall#result. The translation of this text is by Li ("The Confucian Conception of Freedom," 909).
56 Li, "Confucian Conception of Freedom," 909.
57 Li, "Confucian Conception of Freedom," 912.
58 Li, "Confucian Conception of Freedom," 912.

exercise free will unaffected by external forces, such as financial difficulties and threatening forces. The emphasis on "independence" here seems to echo the spirit of "individual freedom" in the Western tradition.[59] Confucian freedom seems to have an existing moral standard, such as *ren* and *yi*, for considering a decision or action free. Thus, a person who advocates moral skepticism or hedonism is considered unfree. According to the Confucian standard, even if this person makes a decision after considering it seriously, rationally, and independently, that person fails to be free. Conversely, in the Western understanding of individual freedom, such a person would be seen as making a free choice by exercising his or her right to liberty.

Some scholars argue that human rights, in general, can also be justified within the Confucian tradition. For example, Daniel Bell distinguishes two kinds of human rights: core human rights and the "gray area" of human rights. Core human rights are universally acknowledged and include rights such as prohibitions against slavery, murder, and torture. The gray area of human rights, however, comprises social and economic rights related to family and criminal law.[60] Bell argues that societies other than those in the democratic West value these rights but they value them differently. Bell notes that the United States, for instance, might rank civil and political rights more highly than economic and social rights, whereas other countries might sacrifice the former in order to ensure the latter in the event of a conflict.[61] Moreover, Bell argues that liberalism does not have to be the only moral foundation for justifying human rights. Instead of relying on abstract universalism regarding rights, justifications should, instead, "be made from the inside, from specific examples and argumentative strategies that East Asians themselves use in everyday moral and political debate."[62]

Compatibility between Confucianism and democracy faces a challenge when determining the ways in which the two traditions can be compatible. The coexistence model often tries to find a place for Confucianism within a democratic system, carving out space in the private sphere where Confucianism can be a basis for decision making, similar to the way in which Western legal

59 Xu, "Early Confucian Principles," 141.

60 Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy*, 79.

61 Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy*, 61-62.

62 Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy*, 61; Daniel Bell, "Communitarianism," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2016). Https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/communitarianism/

systems carve out a place for religious arbitration.[63] Coexistence models thus distinguish between democratic and Confucian spheres. The integration model, by contrast, seeks to empower democratic concepts by infusing them with Confucian meaning.

5 Conclusion

We identified four models of compatibility between Confucianism and democracy, which we believe will add clarity to the current conversation. Further, the purpose of this discussion was to examine the different ways in which Confucianism could be compatible with democracy, depending on *what* is being compared and *how* the abstract concepts and institutions in one tradition can be reconciled with those of the other. The final determination, however, is still up for discussion, so we refrain from making the bald assertion that Confucian and democracy are absolutely (or absolutely not) compatible. However, we conclude that Confucianism is not simply an abandoned artifact on the sliding scale of modernity, that compatibility is possible, and that a Confucian system can provide China with an alternative to Marxist or secular democratic models, based on indigenous resources with unique meaning.

Confucianism touches the "soul" of the legal and political subjects and is not simply an alternative to democratic forms of government; rather, it may be compatible with creating an original Chinese democratic theory. Confucianism is not just a relic, and, at the same time, democracy cannot be written off as an inappropriate Western import. The concepts and institutions of democracy remain important and inextricable from the conversation. Just as Confucianism is beginning to be taken seriously again, democratic forms of government remain influential.

The question of whether Confucianism and democracy are compatible is not easy to answer, but it is one that is not infrequently posed. Many communities have accepted certain abstract concepts in the democratic perspective yet still find secular democracy incomplete. This is not limited to Confucian societies but is also found in Muslim and even nominally Christian societies that seek to reconcile democratic ideals with their traditional values.[64] This con-

63 G. Marcus Cole, "Law and Order without Coercion," *Journal of Private Enterprise* 22 (2007): 50; John Witte, Jr., "The Study of Law and Religion in the United States: An Interim Report," *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 14 (2012): 327-354.

64 See, e.g., Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Faisal Devji, *Islam after Liberalism* (London: Hurst, 2017).

versation is therefore not limited by the argument of incompatibility due to cultural differences between the East and the West. Indeed, the conversation in the West today presents with what could be described as "West-West" cultural differences in considering the compatibility of other systems of thought, religious or otherwise, with current conceptions of secular liberal democracy. Examination of that issue exceeds the scope of the paper, but it is well worth further investigation.

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Tao Yuanming's Perspectives on Life as Reflected in His Poems on History

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Abstract

Studies on Tao Yuanming have often focused on his personality, reclusive life, and pastoral poetry. However, Tao's extant *oeuvre* includes a large number of poems on history. This article aims to complement current scholarship by exploring his viewpoints on life through a close reading of his poems on history. His poems on history are a key to Tao's perspectives with regard to the factors that decide a successful political career, the best way to cope with difficulties and frustrations, and the situations in which literati should withdraw from public life. Examining his positions reveals the connections between these different aspects. These poems express Tao's perspectives on life, as informed by his historical predecessors and philosophical beliefs, and as developed through his own life experience and efforts at poetic composition.

Keywords

Tao Yuanming – poems on history – perspectives on life

Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 [ca. 365–427], a native of Xunyang 潯陽 (contemporary Jiujiang 九江, Jiangxi), is one of the best-known and most-studied Chinese poets from before the Tang [618–907]. His extant corpus, comprising 125 poems and 12 prose works, is one of the few complete collections to survive from early medieval China, largely thanks to Xiao Tong 蕭統 [501–531], a prince of the Liang dynasty [502–557], who collected Tao's works, wrote a preface, and

composed one of his extant biographies.[1] Over the years, Tao's pastoral poetry, his biography, and his reclusive lifestyle have received much attention from scholars using both traditional text-centered approaches and new approaches informed by manuscript culture, reception studies, and research into reading practices.[2] Scholars have examined the factors which impacted Tao's personality, lifestyle, and stylistic choices, focusing on the influence of "dark learning" or Neo-Daoism [*xuanxue* 玄學] on Tao's perspective on life [*rensheng guan* 人生觀] and his writing.[3] This article complements the current research direction and investigates Tao's *rensheng guan* as reflected and established in his poems on history [*yongshi shi* 詠史詩]. These poems constitute roughly one fourth of Tao's extant oeuvre, to the point that more of Tao's *yongshi shi* survive than those of any other early medieval Chinese poet.[4]

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1 Before the Tang dynasty, four biographies were compiled and written on Tao's life, including Xiao Tong's *The Collection of Tao Yuanming's Writings* [*Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集], and three standard histories: *The History of the Song Dynasty* [*Songshu* 宋書], *The History of Jin Dynasty* [*Jinshu* 晉書], and *The History of the Southern Dynasties* [*Nanshi* 南史].

2 For the discussion and review of the recent English scholarship on Tao Yuanming studies, see Zhang Yue 張月, "Ou Mei jinqi Tao Yuanming yanjiu zongshu fenxi yu zhanwang 歐美近期陶淵明研究綜述、分析與展望," *Gudian wenxian yanjiu* 古典文獻研究 20.2 (2017): 289–304. For the recent Chinese books on Tao Yuanming, see Yue Zhang, "A Selective Bibliography of Mainland Chinese Books (2010–2019) on Early Medieval Chinese Literature," *Early Medieval China* 26 (2020): 99–100 and Yue Zhang, "A Selective Bibliography of Mainland Chinese Books (2002–2010) on Early Medieval Chinese Literature (220–589)," *Early Medieval China* 18 (2012): 77–78.

3 For the recent studies on *Xuanxue*, see David Chai, ed., *Dao Companion to Xuanxue* 玄學 (*Neo-Daoism*) (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020). For the relationship between *Xuanxue* and Tao Yuanming's perspective on life, see Luo Zongqiang 羅宗強, *Xuanxue yu Wei Jin shiren xintai* 玄學與魏晉士人心態 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1991), 342–358; Tao Xinmin 陶新民, "Tao Yuanming: Xuanxue rensheng guan de zhongjie yu xuanyan shi de chaoyue 陶淵明：玄學人生觀的終結與玄言詩的超越," *Anhui daxue xuebao* 安徽大學學報, 24.1 (2000): 40–46; Li Yaonan 李耀南, "Xuanxue shiye zhong de Tao Yuanming rensheng guan he shenmei rensheng jingjie 玄學視野中的陶淵明人生觀和審美人生境界," *Huazhong keji daxue xuebao* 華中科技大學學報, no. 6 (2002): 23–28.

4 Wei Chunxi 韋春喜 lists 25 *yongshi shi* attributed to Tao. See, Wei Chunxi 韋春喜, *Song qian yongshi shi shi* 宋前詠史詩史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2010), 94.

Through writing *yongshi shi*, Tao synthesized relevant historical materials with his own perception of various aspects of life, including but not limited to his views of political careers, poetry composition, the experience of reclusion, and family life. Tao developed his *rensheng guan* by discussing three main issues in his *yongshi shi*: the desire for the proper appreciation of scholars, the problem of following the Dao in poverty, and the idea of withdrawing from politics after achieving results. Tao's views on these issues hinge on his understanding of "timeliness" [*shi* 時]. Although Tao was not the first writer to discuss these problems, his innovation was to connect these different issues and to internalize and individualize principles drawn from the lives of the ancients, which he applied not only to his poetry but also to his life. This innovation of practicing the values that he discussed in his *yongshi shi* in turn heightened the significance of these ancient figures.

Tao Yuanming read widely in history, so he could interpret ancient figures from a variety of perspectives. Scholars have widely acknowledged that Tao was exceptionally well read in history. Qi Yishou 齊益壽 believes that Tao Yuanming's erudition likely stems from the influence and environment of his family, which possessed large private collections of books. Tao Yuanming was described by Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 [384–456] as someone "fond of rare books" [*xinhao yishu* 心好異書]. According to Qi Yishou's analysis of the ancient books cited in Tao's *yongshi shi*, he had read *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji* 史記], *The History of the Han Dynasty* [*Hanshu* 漢書], *Continuation of the History of the Han Dynasty* [*Xu Hanshu* 續漢書], *Records of the Later Han Dynasty* [*Hou Hanji* 後漢記], *Records of the Jin Dynasty* [*Jin ji* 晉紀], *Records of the State of Wu* [*Wu lu* 吳錄], *The Definite Record of the Three Adjuncts* [*Sanfu juelu* 三輔決錄], and *Biographies of the Former Worthies of Runan* [*Runan xianxian zhuan* 汝南先賢傳].[5] Zhong Shulin 鍾書林 believes that Tao's mastery of history [*shicai* 史才] accounts for his appointment as the editorial director of the Palace Library [*Zhuzuo lang* 著作郎], though Tao refused to accept the nomination.[6] Tao's works demonstrate a consistent respect for the craft of history. In the *History of Northern Dynasties* [*Beishi* 北史], Shen Yue 沈約 [441–513] states that Tao's contemporaries regarded "The Biography of Mr. Five Willows" [*Wuliu* xiansheng *zhuan* 五柳先生傳] as an "authentic record" [*shilu* 實錄].[7] Tao's "Biography of the Former Chief of Staff to the Jin Generalissimo

5 Qi Yishou 齊益壽, *Huangju dongli yao gujin: Tao Yuanming qiren qishi sanlun* 黃菊東籬耀古今：陶淵明其人其詩散論 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chubanshe, 2016), 7.

6 Zhong Shulin 鍾書林, *Yinshi de shendu* 隱士的深度 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015), 337–339.

7 Shen Yue 沈約, *Songshu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 93.2287.

for Subduing the West His Excellency Meng" [*Jin gu Zhengxi dajiangjun Zhangshi Meng fujun zhuan* 晉故征西大將軍長史孟府君傳] was added to the official biography of Meng Jia 孟嘉 [ca. mid-fourth century].[8] Moreover, Tao's other works, such as "Nine Poems after Reading the *Shiji*" [*Du Shi shu jiuzhang* 讀史述九章] and "In Praise of the Paintings on a Fan" [*Shanshang huazan* 扇上畫贊], demonstrate his historical acumen. For example, although the concluding remarks sometimes differ from those in the standard histories in terms of their perspective and content, *Du Shi shu jiuzhang* continues the historiographical tradition of the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* by commenting on historical figures at the end of each biography. Later compilers of official histories considered Tao's writings of high historical value. As part of his engagement with history, Tao wrote many *yongshi shi*.

Most of the historical figures about whom Tao wrote were talented scholars who suffered political setbacks and were therefore unable to realize their ideals in the societies in which they lived. As for the difficulties they faced in accomplishing their political goals, Tao argues that, given the fickleness of public opinion, timeliness plays a key role in determining one's success.[9] For Tao, timeliness refers to both conditions that one can control – speaking or writing the right message with the right delivery at the right moment – and conditions beyond one's control, such as whether one was born in a harmonious society and has the opportunity to serve a virtuous ruler. In the following poem on Qu Yuan 屈原 [ca. 340–278 BCE] and Jia Yi 賈誼 [200–168 BCE], Tao emphasizes the role of timeliness in the careers of the two scholars:

屈賈	Qu Yuan and Jia Yi[10]
進德修業，	By advancing virtues and refining achievements,
將以及時。	One will act in a timely manner.[11]

8 I adopt the English translation of the title from A. R. Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming (AD 365–427): His Works and Their Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1: xii.

9 Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 陶淵明集箋注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 432.

10 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 520. Qu Yuan was a legendary scholar-official in the state of Chu during the Warring States period [475–221 BCE]. He was slandered and exiled to the south, where he eventually committed suicide by drowning in the Miluo River 汨羅江. Jia Yi was a scholar official in the Western Han dynasty [202 BCE–25 CE]. He sought to institute reforms and reduce the power of local lords, but he was slandered by officials opposed to him and died young at the age of 33.

11 The first couplet also appears in the biography that Tao wrote for Meng Jia, Tao's maternal grandfather.

如彼稷契， Such was the case with Ji and Xie,[12]
孰不願之？ Who would not wish to be like them?
嗟乎二賢， Alas! The two virtuous scholars,[13]
逢世多疑。 They encountered a distrustful world.
候詹寫志， Visiting Zhanyin, Qu wrote down his intentions,[14]
感鵩獻辭。 Shaken by the arrival of the owl, Jia Yi presented his rhetoric.[15]

The four-character lines of this short poem resemble the commentary historians traditionally placed at the end of biographies in standard histories. Tao's preface to this series of poems states, "I was moved by reading the *Shiji* and wrote poems to express my feelings." [16] Qu Yuan and Jia Yi were discussed together in one biography in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 [145–90 BCE] *Shiji*, which likely influenced Tao's choice to pair them together in this poem.

At the beginning of this poem, Tao seems to espouse a conventional Confucian teaching: that timeliness is essential to cultivating one's moral values and advancing one's career. He cites Ji 稷 and Xie 契 as examples of men who encountered a time when their abilities were appreciated by virtuous rulers and put in a good use. By way of contrast, Qu Yuan and Jia Yi were virtuous and willing to serve, but they had the misfortune of not being born at the right time and not encountering worthy rulers. Despite having abilities comparable to the exemplary officials Ji and Xie, Qu and Jia were doubted, slandered, and forced into exile. Consequently, their potential was never fully realized, and they were instead forced to use literature to articulate their thoughts and vent their frustrations with respect to society and politics. Tao wrote this poem after reading the *Shiji*, which suggests that Tao's understanding of the function of literature commenting on social reality is inspired by Sima Qian's theory of "venting frustrations" [*fafen* 發憤] from "The Letter to

12 Ji and Xie were virtuous and capable officials during the reign of the mythical emperor Shun 舜. See, *Sima Qian* 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), 1.38.

13 "The two virtuous scholars" refers to Qu Yuan and Jia Yi.

14 This line refers to an episode where Qu Yuan asked Zheng Zhanyin 鄭詹尹 [ca. 4th–3rd century BCE] to perform a divination to resolve his questions and doubts. The poem "Divination on Dwelling" [*Buju* 卜居], traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan, expresses his ambitions.

15 This line refers to an incident in which Jia Yi saw an owl entering his house, an omen of a shortened life span. In lamentation, he composed "Rhapsody on an Owl" [*Funiao fu* 鵩鳥賦].

16 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 512. In a series of thirteen poems on "Reading *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*" [*Du Shanhai jing* 讀山海經], Tao is also very explicit about his reading practices.

Ren'an" [*Bao Ren'an shu* 報任安書].[17] In that letter, Sima proposes that masterpieces are produced through this impulse of *fafen*, and he tapped into that impulse to compose the *Shiji*. In expressing sentiments similar to Sima's, Tao may have been signaling his desire to use his writings to transmit his reputation to future readers and compensate for his political frustrations. This poem shows that Tao believed that opportune timing was essential for cultivating moral values and advancing one's career; otherwise, the difficulties and frustrations would be insurmountable. In this difficult situation, what is Tao's perspective on scholars' choice and development? Should they continue expending effort to become politically successful? In a poem on Han Fei 韓非 [280–233 BCE], provided below, Tao insists that no matter how ingenious and assiduous a scholar is, if the time is not right, they will fail in their endeavors, or even undermine their goals:

韓非	Han Fei[18]
豐狐隱穴，	The sleek-furred fox conceals himself in a den,
以文自殘。	because of his patterning, he brings calamity on himself.[19]
君子失時，	If a gentleman loses his moment,
白首抱關。	he will still be a gatekeeper even when his hair is white.
巧行居災，	Clever actions harbor disaster;
忮辯召患。	Shrewd arguments invite worry.
哀矣韓生，	How sorrowful Master Han was!
竟死說難。	Unexpectedly, he died from "The Difficulties of Persuasion."[20]

17 Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 62.2423.

18 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 523.

19 This couplet alludes to a passage in the *Zhuangzi*: "The sleek-furred fox and the elegantly spotted leopard dwell in the mountain forest and crouch in the cliffside caves – such is their quietude. They go abroad by night but lurk at home by day – such is their caution. Though hunger, thirst, and hardship press them, they steal forth only one by one to seek food by the rivers and lakes – such is their forethought. And yet they can't seem to escape the disaster of nets and traps. Where is the blame? Their fur is their undoing." The English translation follows the one provided by Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 157. The original Chinese is from Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 20.168. My translation of Tao's couplet borrows from Burton's translation of the *Zhuangzi* passage.

20 For a detailed discussion of Han's "Shuinan," see Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 63.2147–2148, and Michael Hunter, "The Difficulty with 'The Difficulties of Persuasion' ('Shuinan' 說難)," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. P. R. Goldin (New York: Springer, 2013), 169–195. For the English translation of Han Fei's works, see Burton Watson, trans., *Han Fei Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964).

The paradox at the heart of this poem demonstrates that the pursuit of political success, social status, and even a fulfilling life can lead to ruin in the end. In Han Fei's case, his cleverness and eloquence led directly to a tragic fate. Han Fei was a statesman during the Warring States period [475–221 BCE], who moved to the state of Qin [770–207 BCE] when the King of Han [403–230 BCE] did not adopt his recommendations. Han was initially favored by the Qin king, but when he opposed Li Si's 李斯 [ca. 284–208 BCE] plan to annex the other six states, Li slandered Han in front of the king, which led to Han Fei's imprisonment and poisoning.[21] In the end, Han's talent led to his own demise. In his work "Shuinan" 說難, Han discussed methods for persuading rulers, but failed to persuade the ruler of Qin of his own worth, and was persecuted for irritating a major official. Tao therefore uses Han's life experience to express his perspective on losing one's moment. If someone misses their moment, regardless of their effort and dedication, they cannot achieve anything, and in fact, ironically, the more effort they put in, the quicker and more dramatic their failure will be. Yet at the same time that Tao believes that timeliness is indispensable, he also believes that compromising one's principles, whatever the circumstances might be, is never acceptable. This principle is made clear in Tao's poem on the two recluses of Lu, a reworking of a story from the *Shiji*:

魯二儒	The Two Confucian Scholars from the State of Lu[22]
易代隨時，	"The change of dynasties follows the passage of time,[23]
迷變則愚。	If puzzled by changes, one is truly confounded."
介介若人，	Upright gentlemen the two Confucian scholars were,
特為貞夫。	They were especially lofty and resolute.
德不百年，	"When virtue has not been present for a hundred years,
汙我詩書。	It taints our documents."
逝然不顧，	They resolutely ignored [Shusun's invitation],
被褐幽居。	Wearing coarse clothes, they lived in reclusion.

The first couplet initially seems to be Tao's own commentary but is actually a subtle citation of an observation by Shusun Tong 叔孫通 [d. ca. 188 BCE] in the biographies of the Western Han [206 BCE–25] officials Liu Jing 劉敬 [fl. 200 BCE] and Shusun Tong in the *Shiji*. The couplet quotes Shusun's opinion

21 For Han Fei's story, see Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 63.2146–2148.

22 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 525.

23 There is a variant version of this line, where 代 is replaced by 大. If we choose the variant, the line reads "changes largely follow the times." This variant reading shows even clearer evidence of the importance of historical moment to Tao. See Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 525.

that two Confucian scholars who refused to participate in the reformation of rites and procedures for the new Han dynasty held antiquated beliefs.[24] However, the second couplet shows that Tao does not consider these scholars to be backward; instead, Tao praises the two scholars for their integrity, overlooking their seemingly eccentric behavior, because the two Confucian scholars spurned Shusun, stating, "He served almost ten rulers, and he obtained each one's favor through obsequiousness."[25] With respect to Shusun Tong, Tao's opinion diverges from that of Sima Qian, who praised Shusun: "Shusun Tong observed the world and adjusted his approach to affairs, establishing and adapting rituals in accordance with the changing times. Eventually, he became the Confucian elder master of the Han dynastic house."[26] Tao, however, advocates holding steadfast to one's principles, regardless of the changing times. He emphasizes the virtuous words and deeds of the two scholars. For instance, the third couplet changes to the first person, mimicking the two scholars' tone as they refused to help reform ritual and music for the new dynasty, since they believed that such a reformation should only be conducted after a long period of ascending virtue. Tao revered the way in which the two scholars from Lu maintained their integrity. In other poems dealing with personal choice in a fast-changing transitional environment, Tao advocated for withdrawing from public life and "delighting in the Dao in poverty" [*anpin ledao* 安貧樂道] instead of changing with the times.

As discussed above, timeliness is a key prerequisite for the exercise of virtue. If the moment is right, a virtuous scholar should serve the state, but if the moment is not right, those who do not want to sacrifice principles should, according to Tao, *anpin ledao*. Tao not only advocated this principle in his writing, but also tried to practice this ideal in his own life, despite knowing the difficulty and drudgery that this lifestyle would entail. As he wrote in his "Stirred by Unappreciated Scholars" [*Gan shi buyu fu* 感士不遇賦], "I would rather suffer poverty to achieve my intentions, /neither compromising nor burdening myself."[27] Tao motivated himself to delight in poverty and enjoy a life suited to his nature by reflecting on figures from history who followed a similar path. In a poem composed in 403, Tao praises the concept of *anpin ledao* and demonstrates how he applied it to his own life.

24 Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 99.2722–2723.
25 Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 99.2722.
26 Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 99.2726.
27 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 433.

癸卯歲始春懷古田舍 其二	Meditating on the Past in a Farmhouse at the Beginning of Spring in the Guimao Year II[28]
先師有遺訓，	The Old Teacher left us the lesson,
憂道不憂貧。	"Worry about the Dao, not about poverty."[29]
瞻望邈難逮，	I see this lesson from afar, too distant to grasp.
轉欲志長勤。	I make my desire and aim to be upright and diligent.
秉耒歡時務，	Grasping a plow, I take joy in seasonal farm work.
解顏勸農人。	Letting out a smile, I encourage the farmers.
平疇交遠風，	The level farmland meets distant winds,
良苗亦懷新。	Good sprouts embrace new things.

The "Old Teacher" Tao refers to is Confucius, a substantial influence on Tao's writings and thought, whose injunction from the *Analects* he quotes: "Worry about the Dao, not about poverty!" Given a hypothetical extreme situation, Confucius advocates that a gentleman should seek and follow the Dao no matter what poverty or misfortune he encounters:

> The Master said, "The gentleman devotes his mind to attaining the Dao and not to securing food. Go and till the land and you will end up by being hungry, as a matter of course; study, and you will end up with the salary of an official, as a matter of course. The gentleman worries about the Dao, not about poverty."[30]

Here Confucius emphasizes the importance of the Dao, which is achieved through cultivating virtues and moral values, over material needs like food. Discussing Tao's allusion to the *Analects*, James Hightower suggests that Tao understood Confucius as believing that study was a reliable key to the Dao. Because his impoverishment was an obstacle to study, Tao farmed for a

28 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 867. This poem was written in the second year of the Yuanxing 元興 reign [402–404] when Tao was 52 years old.

29 This line is a direct quote from the *Analects*.

30 D.C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (New York: The Penguin Group, 1979), 136. I have substituted "Dao" for "Way."

living, providing a physical and financial foundation for studying the classics. Eventually, Tao's personal way of dealing with difficult situations shaped his perspective on ancient figures, which in return contributed to his decision to live a reclusive life and his firm belief in *anpin ledao*. Alan Berkowitz has noted that "recluses" in early medieval China were actually highly sociable and "reclusion" often served as a short-cut for seeking remunerative official positions.[31] By way of contrast, Tao advocated for a sincere reclusion aimed at adhering to the Dao. His position was expressed through a series of seven poems on ancient scholars who were materially poor but spiritually rich.[32] In each of these poems, he starts with the theme of the brutality of the natural world – a severe winter or gloomy weather – then discusses the effects of the poverty that the scholars suffered, such as a lack of proper food and clothes, before finally posing a rhetorical question to show that despite this unfavorable situation, these poor scholars cited ancient figures as role models, and ultimately found contentment by delighting in the Dao. Three poems from Tao's series of "Poems on Impoverished Scholars" [*Yong pinshi* 詠貧士] explore Tao's belief of *anpin ledao*. In the second poem of this series, we get a glimpse of Tao's life:

其二	II[33]
凄厲歲雲暮，	Fiercely cold, nearing the end of the year,
擁褐曝前軒。	Wearing coarse clothes, I was sunbathing at my front window.
南圃無遺秀，	The southern field bore no grain.
枯條盈北園。	Withered twigs filled the northern garden.
傾壺絕餘瀝，	Pouring out the jug, not one drop was left.
闚竈不見煙。	Glancing at the stove, I saw no smoke.[34]
詩書塞座外，	Ancient writings were crammed around my seat.[35]
日昃不遑研。	At sunset, there is not enough time to study.

31 Alan Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 64.

32 Most modern scholars have dated this series of poems to Tao's later life, between 420 and 421, but Davis believes that this poem could have been written earlier, between 402 and 405. See Davis, *T'ao Yüan-ming*, 1.136.

33 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 366.

34 Tao described other difficulties he encountered in other poems. For example, his house was destroyed by a fire [*Suffering a Fire in the Sixth Month of the Year Wuwu* 戊午歲六月中遇火] and he occasionally begged for food during famines [*Begging for Food* 乞食]. The English translation of these titles follows Davis's English translation.

35 I follow Yuan Xingpei's interpretation of 詩書 as meaning ancient writings in general. See Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 368.

閑居非陳厄， Loafing at home is not encountering hardship in Chen,[36]
竊有慍見言。 In private, I can still hear resentful words.
何以慰吾懷？ How can I console my emotions?
賴古多此賢。 I depend on the many virtuous men from the past.

Tao seems to live in constant want of clothes, food, and wine. He dealt with these quotidian worries by reading books, including such Confucian classics as the *Book of Songs* [*Shijing* 詩經] and the *Documents* [*Shangshu* 尚書]. Reading books, enjoying music (in particular, playing the zither and singing), and engaging in conversation created cultural capital which compensated for the material deprivation of the lifestyle of the recluse. However, the extreme poverty Tao suffered made it difficult to engage in even these activities. As Robert Ashmore discusses, the central irony of the poem is "a tension between an ideal and a person who confronts that ideal and questions whether it is adequate to his experience or his experience adequate to it."[37] Tao is surrounded by books and yet is unable to engage in the study that is indispensable to his literati identity and ideals of moral cultivation. The continuous use of strong negative words, such as "has/have no" [*wu* 無], "absolute/absolutely" [*jue* 絕], "no/not" [*bu* 不], and "no/not" [*fei* 非], reveals Tao's helplessness and embarrassment, and engenders compassion within the reader. Tao's embarrassment is also revealed through self-effacing comic detail: "sunbathing" because he lacks clothes in winter, pouring out an empty jar. To mitigate the tension between ideal and reality and console himself, Tao looks to figures from history. Tao adopts the character *ci* 此 in the last line to refer to the virtuous men of antiquity. This is not the only occasion that Tao weathered dire poverty by focusing on the example of ancient virtuous figures and their works. In the poem "Presented to My Cousin Jingyuan in the Twelfth Month of the Guimao Year" [*Guimao sui shier yue zhong zuo yu congdi Jingyuan* 癸卯歲十二月中作與從弟敬遠], Tao describes a period spent in his poor and empty house surveying ancient books. Although the sages were gone, the writings that recorded their words and deeds remained. The books were Tao's companions as he actively sought to follow in the footsteps of the sages.

Tao's aim in following the example of the sages was to adhere to the Dao, even in a moment of great difficulty. The Dao in Tao's mind was not abstract,

36 A reference to an episode in the life of Confucius in which he and his disciples were imperiled in the state of Chen.

37 Robert Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), 220.

but was instead realized by the virtuous lives his predecessors had led. He depended for spiritual support on the deeds and ideals of ancient worthies, who, although they encountered enormous constraints and difficulties, appeared calm, detached, and still focused on their ideals. A poem on Rong Qiqi 榮啓期 [571–474 BCE] and Yuan Xian 原憲 [b. 515 BCE] illustrates Tao's psychological dependence on models of *anpin ledao*:

其三	III[38]
榮叟老帶索，	Old Mr. Rong often wore rope as a belt,
欣然方彈琴。	[But] he delighted in playing the zither.
原生納決屨，	Scholar Yuan wore broken sandals,
清歌暢商音。	[But] he sang "The Hymns of Shang" clearly.[39]
重華去我久，	Chonghua left us long ago.[40]
貧士世相尋。	Impoverished scholars have searched for each other for generations.
弊襟不掩肘，	His tattered garment could not cover his elbow.
藜羹常乏斟。	His goosefoot soup often lacked rice.
豈忘襲輕裘？	How could he forget wearing soft fur?
苟得非所欽。	Obtaining it improperly is not something to be admired.
賜也徒能辯，	Ci was only good at sophistry.[41]
乃不見吾心。	Therefore, he could not understand my heart.

In the first couplet, Tao praises Rong Qiqi, a character in the *Liezi* 列子 whose life and personality Confucius apparently admired. Although Rong lived in poverty, he was nevertheless happy. As Rong explains to Confucius:

> My joys are very many. Heaven gives birth to the Ten Thousand Things, but man alone is noble. I had the luck to become a man; this is my first joy. In the distinction of male and female, the male is noble and the female

38 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 368.

39 The meaning of "Shang" here is somewhat unclear. It could mean the second note of the scale, which is often associated with melancholy and depression. Davis argues, "Since T'ao appears to follow written sources so closely here, it seems best to understand it as 'The Hymns of Shang' (from the *Book of Songs*), which Yuan Xian is described as singing." See Davis, *T'ao Yüan – ming*, 1.137.

40 Chonghua refers to the mythical emperor Shun.

41 Ci refers to Duanmu Ci 端木賜 [ca. 520–446 BCE], a disciple of Confucius known for his eloquence. He had a successful career as an official, which was rare among Confucius's disciples.

> base, therefore to be a male is considered honorable. Since I had the luck to become a male, this is my second joy. Among those who were born are some who do not see a day or a month or do not live beyond babyhood. Since I have lived for ninety years, this is my third joy.[42]

Rong was optimistic, and found value in such ordinary activities as playing musical instruments and singing. The *Liezi*'s Confucius approved of his outlook on life. Tao then provides another example of an honorable poor scholar, Yuan Xian who was a disciple of Confucius and suffered from poverty but was unwilling to compromise his principles to acquire wealth. Through his austerity, Yuan adhered to Confucius' position on the relationship between poverty, wealth, and the Dao, articulated in the following passage from the *Analects*:

> The Master said, "Wealth and high station are what men desire but unless I got them in the right way I would not remain in them. Poverty and low station are what men dislike, but even if I did not get them in the right way I would not try to escape from them."[43]

Confucius acknowledges the commonsense position that wealth and social status are desirable, but insists that obeying the Dao, the guiding principle in life, must come first. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the proper way to confront and even overcome poverty is through benevolence and virtues. Tao alludes not only to Yuan's commitment to this principle, but also to Yuan's conversation with Zigong, another of Confucius's disciples, regarding the difference between poverty [*pin* 貧] and distress [*bing* 病]. In that conversation, Yuan disputes Zigong's assessment of Yuan as "distressed," arguing:

> I, Xian, have heard that if one lacks wealth, it is called poverty. If one studies the Dao yet is not able to put it into practice, it is called distress. As for me, Xian, I am impoverished but I am not distressed.[44]

42 Davis, *T'ao Yüan – ming*, 2.90.

43 Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (New York: The Penguin Group, 1979), 72.

44 The translation is based on that of Alan Berkowitz, "Biographies of Recluses: Huangfu Mi's Accounts of High-Minded Men," in *Early Medieval China: A Sourcebook*, ed. Wendy Swartz et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 342.

In these allusions, Tao references two scholars whose physical poverty did not prevent them from enjoying meaningful and virtuous lives. Tao alludes to these figures not only to praise their values, but also to actively associate himself with them. For similar reasons, Tao dedicated a poem to Zhang Zhongwei 張仲蔚 of the Eastern Han [25–220]. The poem directly expresses Tao's deep appreciation of Zhang's personality and moral worth. Zhang's way of life was an example of the Dao in which Tao delighted:

其六	VI[45]
仲蔚愛窮居，	Zhongwei liked living a poor life.
遶宅生蒿蓬。	All around his residence grew wild grasses.
翳然絕交游，	Concealing himself, he broke away from social circuits.
賦詩頗能工。	He was quite skilled at composing poetry.
舉世無知者，	In all the world, there was no one who knew him,
止有一劉龔。	There was only Liu Gong.
此士胡獨然？	Why was this scholar so lonely?
寔由罕所同。	Indeed, because he could seldom find others like himself.
介然安其業，	He was steadfast and content with his deeds.[46]
所樂非窮通。	What he enjoyed was neither failure or success.
人事固以拙，	Certainly, I am clumsy in dealing with the affairs of men.
聊得長相從。	I just want to follow him for a long time.

Few historical records documenting Zhang Zhongwei survive, and his presence in Tao's *yongshi shi* is another element which distinguishes Tao's work from other poets in the genre, who focused on better-known figures. In his "Yong pinshi," Tao Yuanming often combines together references to several scholars, but this poem exclusively praises Zhang Zhongwei, demonstrating his profound admiration of Zhang. One of the few accounts of Zhang's life can be found in The *Biographies of Lofty Figures* [*Gaoshi zhuan* 高士傳]:

45 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 375.

46 Xiaofei Tian points out that the alternate version of this line reads "Forsaking the roots, he pursued the branches" [*Qi ben an qi mo* 棄本案其末], and argues that this variant shows that Tao was posing an ironic challenge to the traditional understanding of moral improvement and political success. See Xiaofei Tian, *Tao Yuanming & Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 193–194.

> Zhang Zhongwei was a native of Pingling (northwest of modern Xianyang, Shaanxi). Together with Wei Jingqing of the same commandery, he cultivated the Dao and moral virtue. He lived as a recluse and did not hold an official position. He understood astronomy and natural science; he was skilled in prose composition and delighted in *shi* and *fu* poems. He lived simply and in constant poverty; where he lived wild grasses were overwhelming. He shut his gate and nourished his nature; he did not seek glory or fame. None of the men of his time recognized him; only Liu Gong knew him.[47]

Tao believed that because Zhang Zhongwei's happiness did not rely on conventional definitions of success and failure, a person like Zhang was close to the Dao. Zhang also offered a model for achieving one's goals even in an environment of scarcity. Zhang's example shows the influence on Tao of Confucian values – namely, the idea that righteousness, not worldly success or failure, is the path to spiritual affluence and satisfaction. If one does not follow this righteous path and instead pursues wealth and status for its own sake, it stains the conscience. In the *Analects*, Confucius compares these ill-gotten gains to a transitory cloud:

> The Master said, "In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds."[48]

As Confucius sees it, material possessions and status are transient, but the virtues of the Dao are permanent. Zhang Zhongwei's adherence to this model epitomizes Tao's belief of *anpin ledao*, to the point where Tao dedicates the entirety of a poem to him. Zhang's dedication to principle was not common among his contemporaries, so he had few friends or acquaintances [*zhiyin* 知音], but literature helped him to cope with poverty.[49] Tao identified with Zhang Zhongwei so strongly that he chose to distance himself from his contemporaries and "communicate" with Zhang instead. Tao clearly demonstrates

47 The translation is based on Davis, *T'ao Yüan – ming*, 1.139.

48 Lau, *Confucius: The Analects*, 88.

49 Tao Yuanming believed that music could help people realize *anpin ledao*. For a discussion of Tao's understanding of the educational function of music, see Fan Ziye 范子燁, *Youran wang Nanshan:Wenhua shiyu zhong de Tao Yuanming* 悠然望南山—文化視域中的陶淵明 (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2010), 40–45.

this desire in the final couplet. James Hightower points out the function of the word *zhuo* 拙 in the penultimate line: "[Tao] is not pleading ineptitude as an excuse for staying out of worldly affairs, he is also claiming the kind of natural simplicity he spoke of in the first of the 'Back to the Farm' poems, 'Simplicity intact, I have come back to the field.'"[50] For Tao, Zhang's reclusion and focus on self-cultivation represented an ideal model of simple virtue, and he paid particular attention to Zhang's close relationship with his few friends. Even more isolated than Zhang, Tao could only seek consolation and spiritual support in virtuous figures from antiquity.

Given that *anpin ledao* was neither a comfortable nor easy lifestyle to adopt, why was Tao drawn to it? Tao's embrace of the ideal is likely related to the fate of his own political pursuits in a complicated and tumultuous political environment.[51] Tao had entered the service of Huan Xuan 桓玄 [369–404] in the second year of the Long'an 隆安 reign [397–401], when the latter was appointed as governor of Jiangzhou [*Jiangzhou Cishi* 江州刺史]. Tao served him for two years until his mother's death in the fourth year of the Long'an reign. In the spring of the third year of the Yuanxing 元興 reign [402-404], Tao returned to politics, serving Liu Yu 劉裕 [363–422], the future emperor of the Liu Song dynasty [420–479], as adjutant to the General in Command of Defense [*Zhenjun canjun* 鎮軍參軍]. In the third month of the first year of the Yixi 義熙 reign [405], Tao assumed the position of adjutant [*Canjun* 參軍] in Liu Jingxuan's 劉敬宣 [371–415] camp. In the eighth month of the same year, Tao became magistrate of Pengze County [*Pengze ling* 彭澤令], abandoning the position abruptly three months later, possibly due to his sister's death in Wuchang. The fast-changing and ruthless political environment Tao experienced over the course of his career likely influenced his decision to permanently become a recluse. Tao, who had worked with Liu Yu before Liu rebelled, may have sensed his ambition. Tao also witnessed the rise and fall of Huan Xuan, one of Liu's major competitors, whom Tao regarded highly. After experiencing so many disappointments, Tao's dream of achieving his ideals through politics began to fade. Reflecting on his life in his later years, Tao was keenly aware that he had not fulfilled the political aspirations expressed in the poetry he composed as a young man, and instead consoled himself by pointing

50 James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 213.

51 For a detailed analysis of the four major biographies of Tao Yuanming from the Six Dynasties, see Tian, *Tao Yuanming & Manuscript Culture*, 67–94 and Wendy Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception (427–1900)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 27–47.

to his steadfast principles. As Wendy Swartz notes, the elegy of Tao written by Yan Yanzhi emphasized this moral quality: "All the descriptions of his life and character in the elegy point to the same pair of ideas: contentment in poverty and steadfastness in reclusion."[52] Tao's sentiments were vindicated by later critics, most notably the influential late imperial literati Gui Youguang 歸有光 [1506–1571] and Wen Runeng 温汝能 [1748–1811], who praised his embrace of *anpin ledao*.[53] Through his espousal of this ideal, Tao successfully secured his place in Chinese literary and cultural history.

Yet Tao's *yongshi shi* do not always focus on unsuccessful scholars. Tao also examines several historical figures who were able to achieve their goals. Tao advocates for those successful in achieving their goals to "withdraw after making contributions" [*gongcheng shentui* 功成身退]. The concept is to achieve something [*gongcheng* 功成], and then, as the wheel of fortune is always turning, especially in a chaotic era, to avoid potential disasters by withdrawing from politics [*shentui* 身退]. *Gongcheng shentui* comes from chapter two of the *Dao de jing* 道德經, which challenges the conventional wisdom around duality and contrasts, and explains the attitude a sage should hold toward achievements:

是以聖人處無為之事，	Therefore the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action
行不言之教。	and practices the teaching that uses no words.
萬物作焉而不辭（司）；	The myriad creatures rise from it yet it claims no authority;
生而不有；	It gives them life yet claims no possession;
為而不恃；	It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;
功成而弗居。	It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit.
夫唯弗居，	It is because it lays claim to no merit
是以不去。	That its merit never deserts it.[54]

The sage follows nature and allows everything to proceed according to the Dao. The sage does not interfere with this process, nor claim ownership over it, but instead seeks to be remembered for his wise restraint in allowing the Dao to realize itself. By not deliberately seeking fame, the ethical person avoids

52 Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 140.
53 Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming*, 128.
54 D.C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1989), 2.4–5.

acting too intentionally and going against the Dao, and passes down their deeds and virtues. Chapter nine of the *Dao de jing* uses metaphors of water and a blade for the problems of wealth and fame, highlighting the importance of *gongcheng shentui* – knowing satisfaction and avoiding excesses which will keep one's achievement.[55] In Tao's time, this idea provided a way to maintain one's principles, engage in public life, and yet still avoid the perils of political treachery and instability. Tao's poem on the two Shus explicitly delineates Tao's understanding of this idea:

詠二疏	Poem on the Two Shus[56]
大象轉四時，	The Great Image turns the four seasons,
功成者自去。	Those who make contributions quietly take their leave.
借問衰周來，	May I ask, since the decline of the Zhou,
幾人得其趣？	How many people have followed this principle?
游目漢廷中，	Roaming around the Han court,
二疏復此舉。	The two Shus revived this action.
高嘯返舊居，	With a high whistle, they returned to their former residence.
長揖儲君傅。	They paid their respect to the position of the Crown Prince's
……	Tutor, bowing deeply….
誰云其人亡，	Who would say the two Shus passed away?
久而道彌著！	The more time passes, the more prominent their Dao becomes.

This poem is very similar, in both structure and content, to Zhang Xie's 張協 [d. ca. 307] poem on the topic of the Two Shus.[57] Tao may have read both Zhang's poem and historical accounts and been moved by their adherence to *gongcheng shentui*. Indeed, Tao's second line is practically a restatement of this idea. Z*iqu* 自去 in that line refer to foregoing status and surrendering

55 Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 12–13.

56 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 379–380. The two Shus refer to Shu Guang 疏廣 [d. 45 BCE] and Shu Shou 疏受 [d. 48 BCE], tutors of Emperor Xuan of Han 漢宣帝 [r. 74–48 BCE]. Their biography appears in *Hanshu*, 71.3040.

57 Zhang Xie's "Yongshi" can be found in Xiao Tong 蕭統 ed., Li Shan 李善, Lü Yanji 呂延濟, Liu Liang 劉良, Zhang Xi 張銑, Lü Xiang 呂向 and Li Zhouhan 李周翰, annot., *Liuchen zhu Wen xuan* 六臣注文選 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 390. For a discussion of Zhang's "Yongshi" and other *yongshi shi* in the *Wen xuan*, see Yue Zhang, "Approaches to Lore in 'Poems on History' from the *Selections of Refined Literature*," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 49.2 (2017): 83–112.

influence – once political results are achieved, one should discard fame and reputation and withdraw from public life.

To explain *gongcheng shentui*, Tao raises the issue of dynastic transitions and then focuses on the two Shus, whom he considered to be the best representatives of how to approach that problem. Most of the poem celebrates the actions that result from their Daoist-influenced worldview: their abdication of official duties, and their indifference to fame and to leaving a material legacy for their descendants. Tao praises the two Shus for understanding the idea of *gongcheng shentui* and the true meaning of the Dao. After contributing to the state by tutoring the crown prince, they withdrew from politics and enjoyed a quiet life in their home village. They understood that trying to achieve more would have defied the will of nature and only undermined their aims. Their lack of interest in fame and material possessions made them influential models for generations of scholars and officials. The last couplet places the two Shus' deeds in a longer historical context, asserting that the Dao the two Shus adhered to will last forever. Where Tao's poem on the two Shus demonstrates the advantages of *gongcheng shentui*, his poem on the Three Good Men [*Sanliang* 三良] reveals what happens when historical figures exert and invest enormous effort in their political pursuits:

詠三良	Poems on the Three Good Men
彈冠乘通津，	"Dusting off our caps, we boarded the ferry, heading in all directions.[58]
但懼時我遺。	We only feared that we missed our moment.
服勤盡歲月，	Working hard all year long,
常恐功愈微。	We often worried that our achievements were shrinking by the day."
……	…
一朝長逝後，	Once [their lord] passed away,
願言同此歸。	They were willing to go with him.
厚恩固難忘，	Great kindness was indeed difficult to forget.
君命安可違?[59]	How could they defy their lord's command?

The story of the Three Good Men can be found in many literary and historical accounts. Two representative historical accounts appear in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and the *Shiji*. The *Zuozhuan* is the earliest extant account:

58 The "ferry to all directions" [*tongjin* 通津] is a conventional trope for embarking on an official career.

59 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 383.

> Renhao, the Duke of Qin died. With him were buried alive the three sons of the Ziju clan: Yanxi, Zonghang, and Qianhu. All three were among the finest men of the Qin. People of the state lamented over their fate and composed the poem "Yellow Bird."[60]

The account in the *Shiji* is similar:

> In the thirty-ninth year [of his reign], Duke Mu died. He was interred at Yong. Those who followed him into death numbered one hundred seventy-seven. Among them were three members of the Ziyu family of good subjects, who were named Yanxi, Zhonghang, and Qianhu. The people of Qin mourned them and made and sang for them the poem "Huang niao."[61]

Both the *Zuo zhuan* and *Shiji* accounts record that after Lord Mu of Qin died, the Three Good Men were buried alive with him. The people of Qin lamented their fate and composed the poem "Yellow Birds" to commemorate them. Tao's poem demonstrates that the Three Good Men were eager to serve their country and diligently worked for their ruler. During their moment, they were highly favored, treated with dignity, and achieved great political success. However, their success was tightly bound to Lord Mu, and they were therefore unable to withdraw from the political world before they met a grim fate. *Gongcheng shentui* requires the courage and willingness to abandon one's immediate interests, and the wisdom to leave the service of a ruler safely and smoothly. Practically speaking, such a withdrawal is often hard to achieve because a ruler is loath to relinquish a loyal and effective official. G*ongcheng shentui* profoundly influenced the course of Tao's life. It appears not only in his *yongshi shi*, but also in his poems addressed to family members. In his poem "Command to My Son" [*Mingzi* 命子],[62] Tao offers his forebears, and particularly his great-grandfather Tao Kan 陶侃 [259–334], to his son as models, depicting them as calm, resourceful, virtuous, and aloof from worldly fame:

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60 The English translation is adopted, with some modification, from Ming Dong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing: A Route to Hermeneutics and Open Poetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 168.

61 Robert Joe Cutter, "On Reading Cao Zhi's 'Three Good Men': *Yong shi shi* or *Deng lin shi*?" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 11 (1989): 1.

62 This poem was written for his eldest son, Tao Yan 陶儼, during the fourteenth year of the Taiyuan 太元 reign [376–396], when Tao Yan was three years old. See Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 44. Between 386 and 397, Tao Yuanming resided at home, and several of his sons were born during this period: his second son Si 俟 was born in 388, his third son Fen 份 and fourth son Yi 佚 were born in 389, and his youngest child Tong 佟 was born in 394. See Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 845–867.

桓桓長沙，　How mighty and powerful Changsha was,
伊勳伊德。[63]　His great deeds and his virtues!
天子疇我，　The emperor rewarded him with farmland.
專征南國。　He commanded a punitive expedition against the south.
功遂辭歸，　After his accomplishments, he withdrew from politics and returned home.
臨寵不忒。　Receiving favor, he did not stray.
孰謂斯心，　Who would say that this spirit
而近可得。[64]　Can be found in recent times?

Tao's great-grandfather Tao Kan helped found the Eastern Jin dynasty [317–420] and held such high-ranking positions as grand marshal [*da sima* 大司馬]. But after reaching this level of success, he retreated from political life, refusing even the important positions bestowed upon him personally by the emperor. Tao Yuanming therefore saw *gongcheng shentui* as part of his family legacy, a legacy he wanted his sons to continue.

This article investigates Tao's perspective on life as expressed in his *yongshi shi*. Tao was well-read, and his rich understanding of Chinese culture is deeply rooted in that reading, but his perspective on life is also a product of his own life experience. The historical figures that Tao commented on are distributed across many centuries, from Ji and Xie in the mythical reigns of Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 to several figures from the Eastern Han. For the most part, the subjects of these poems were not majestic rulers nor major officials, but virtuous and upright scholars whom Tao saw as men worthy of emulation. By analyzing Tao's interpretation of the legacies of these scholars, we can better understand his perspective on life and his personality, which in turn augments our ability to interpret his other writings.

Tao's *yongshi shi* emphasize a series of key values and concepts he felt were key to leading a successful, ethical life. Tao believed that timeliness was essential to the political success of the scholar. Ji and Xie became virtuous models of great officials because they arrived at the right historical moment, whereas the equally virtuous Qu Yuan and Jia Yi were suspected and slandered because they arrived on the political stage at the wrong time. Tao felt that without timeliness, regardless of one's efforts and dedication, it would be nearly impossible to achieve lasting political accomplishments, and he therefore encouraged literati not to try to manufacture opportunities through clever schemes and artful

63 Tao Kan's posthumous title was Huan 桓, which when reduplicated means "mighty and powerful." He was granted the title Commandery Duke of Changsha [*Changsha jungong* 长沙郡公] in recognition of his military merits.

64 Yuan, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, 41.

rhetoric. Such tactics would be not only unseemly but ultimately counterproductive, as was tragically the case for Han Fei. Tao sometimes contradicted the verdicts of the historical accounts he alluded to and re-evaluated these figures according to his own ideals, as in the case of the two Confucian scholars and Shusun Tong described in the *Shiji*. Tao sought to use literature to circulate accounts of "unappreciated scholars" and in doing so, make a space for them in literary history. Writing *yongshi shi* was a way to achieve many aspirations: expressing emotions, making up for political failure, transmitting one's ideas and intentions to later readers, and achieving literary immortality.

Along with advocating for the achievement of one's goals by means of literature, Tao was committed to the ideal of *anpin ledao*. Adhering to the Dao was not an abstract concept in Tao's poems, but was rather made concrete through the example of praiseworthy ancient figures, and lived cultural practices such as reading, writing, and making and appreciating music. Living in poverty was difficult, but the historical figures that Tao praised overcame these difficulties and were able to uphold the principles of the Dao. Like Tao, most of these historical figures lived through transitional and chaotic periods and consequently withdrew from politics, abandoned efforts to pursue fame and reputation, and focused instead on cultivating their moral values. Tao projected himself onto these historical figures, and his vivid depictions of professed moral values in turn influenced later readers understanding of Tao's personality and output.

Although some of Tao's *yongshi shi* discuss life on the farm, for Tao, farming was a channel for putting his ideals into practice, and his focus remained on cultivating virtue. By commemorating historical figures in poems, Tao kept these figures alive in the spiritual world and the imaginary of scholars long after they would have otherwise been forgotten. Tao's *yongshi shi* have served as a medium for passing down the deeds and virtues of historical figures to future generations. Tao connected ancient figures with a future audience and in doing so, he placed himself in this lineage.[65] In writing *yongshi shi*, Tao expressed his profound understanding of the past. He not only presented examples of literati dealing with unfavorable political situations, cherishing the Dao in adversity, and withdrawing from office after achievements were made, but also incorporated his own experience of internalizing these principles, making them more concrete and personal.

65 Tao's self-idealization through linking himself with virtuous historical figures is similar to that of Zuo Si 左思 [ca. 250–ca. 305], a major poet known for writing *yongshi shi*. For recent studies on Zuo and his *yongshi shi*, see Yue Zhang, "Self-Canonization in Zuo Si's Poems on History," *Journal of Chinese Humanities*, 5 (2020): 215–244, and Yue Zhang, "The Reception of Zuo Si's 'Poems on History' in Early Medieval China," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, 14.1 (2020): 48–75.

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Review Essays

Buddhism and Modern Chinese Society

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Hou Kunhong 侯坤宏, *Taixu shidai: Duowei shijiao xia de Minguo Fojiao* 太虛時代: 多維視角下的民國佛教 [*The Times of Taixu: A Multidimensional Perspective of Buddhism in Republican China*]. Taipei: Chengchi University Press, 2018. 548 pages, ISBN: 978-9869630429.

Though I do not have an especially close personal relationship with Mr. Hou Kunhong 侯坤宏, author of *The Times of Taixu: A Multidimensional Perspective of Buddhism in Republican China* (hereafter referred to as *The Times of Taixu*), I have read his books and I admire his body of works and academic achievements within the field of contemporary Buddhist Studies. As colleagues in the Buddhist Studies field, we have naturally met on several occasions at various Buddhist Studies conferences and have spoken briefly. The most recent occasion was on June 2, 2019 in Shanghai at the "Seventh Academic Symposium on the Theory and Practice of Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism" [*Diqijie Xingyun dashi renjian fojiao lilun shijian xueshu yantaohui* 第七屆星雲大師人間佛教理論實踐學術研討會]. At this symposium, Mr. Hou presented his thesis paper titled "From Taiwanese Buddhism to Hong Kong Buddhism: Fo Guang Shan Buddhism as Model" [*Cong Taiwan Fojiao dao Xianggang Fojiao: Yi Foguang shan weili* 從台灣佛教到香港佛教—以佛光山為例]. This paper investigates the close exchanges between Hong Kong Buddhism and Taiwanese Buddhism which have occurred since the end of WWII, expounding upon the various efforts towards promoting the development of Humanistic Buddhism

in Hong Kong by monks of the Taiwanese Fo Guang Shan 佛光山 Buddhist movement. Originally, what is now referred to as "Humanistic Buddhism" was a form of Buddhism (as opposed to a Buddhist sect, per se) first advanced by Master Taixu 太虛 [1890–1947]. This form of Buddhism was intended to transform traditional Chinese Buddhism from a religion which sought to "transcend the world" into a modern religion which would "participate in the world" by encouraging followers of Buddhism to actively engage with current issues and serve contemporary society instead of merely "reading Buddhist scriptures under an oil lamp while sitting and discussing the afterlife." Originally, Master Taixu referred to his teachings as "Buddhism for Human Life," while only occasionally employing the term "Humanistic Buddhism." However, because of Taixu's disciple Master Yin Shun's 印順 [1906–2005] successful shift in terminology, we now generally say "Humanistic Buddhism". Regardless of how it is said, the initiator of Humanistic Buddhism was indeed Master Taixu. From Master Taixu's pronouncement until the present, Humanistic Buddhism has become the standard of development for contemporary Chinese Buddhism by serving as a framework for the transformation of Chinese Buddhism from a heavily traditional religion into a completely modernized form. Humanistic Buddhism also provides a critical background necessary to our understanding of this book, *The Times of Taixu.*

The Times of Taixu explores Chinese Buddhism during the Republican era from 1912 to 1949. As an editor for the National History Institute, the author utilizes his position to expose readers to a wealth of material regarding Chinese Buddhism during the Republican era by investigating its multifaceted relationship with society. This book can be seen as a kaleidoscope of Republican-era Buddhism (although it is by no means an exhaustive text on Republican-era Buddhism). Looking through this kaleidoscope, we can clearly distinguish the choices made and changes which occurred during Chinese Buddhism's transformative process from ancient times to the present. In this sense, despite the theory and practice of Master Taixu and Humanistic Buddhism being heavily mentioned through the work, we cannot truly regard *The Times of Taixu* simply as a monograph exclusively focusing on Master Taixu. Ultimately, Master Taixu is just one of many cases of Republican-era Buddhists discussed in this work.

Why, then, does the author use Master Taixu to name this book which explores Republican-era Buddhism on a much wider scale? The author explains this choice in the preface and conclusion. In the preface he writes:

> The main reason is that Master Taixu was Republican-era Buddhism's boldest reformer while at the same time its most keen observer and thinker. Additionally, his career work on Buddhist cultural matters

> exhibited the greatest influence during his time. Even more importantly, his collection of innovations and cultural philosophy in the field of Buddhism still hold immense significance and impact for us in the twenty-first century world. (p. 1)

In the conclusion, the author continues:

> Why choose Master Taixu instead of Master Yinguang 印光, who illuminated "Pure Land Thought"? Or Master Hongyi 弘一, who expounded on "Nanshan Law," for example? What about Master Xuyun 虛雲, who stressed the importance of Chan Thought, or Master Yuanying 圓瑛, who specialized in the Shurangama Mantra, or Master Dixian 諦閑, who promoted Tiantai Buddhist Thought? From the perspective of the author, although the Masters Yinguang, Hongyi, Yuanying, Dixian and other religious leaders expended tremendous energies developing particular schools of Chinese Buddhism, their work was limited to their respective branches. Master Taixu's work, by contrast, addressed Buddhist doctrine as a whole (including the three schools of "Chan Buddhism," "Southern Buddhism," and "Tibetan Buddhism"). Master Taixu's engagement with traditional Chinese Buddhism was not limited to a single branch but rather attached importance to each school equally by developing reforms (such as "Humanistic Buddhism" and "Buddhism for Human Life") to alleviate the historical ailments which plagued Chinese Buddhism as a whole and provide Buddhism with a path towards the future. The major time period when Master Taixu was promulgating his Buddhist doctrines almost perfectly aligns Chinese Republican era from 1912–1949, and in this way we may aptly use "Master Taixu as a representative figure for the history of Republican-era Buddhism." (pp. 488–489)

In its survey of Republican-era Buddhism, or rather modern Chinese Buddhism, this work employs two main themes which work together to "inherit the past while ushering in the future." The first theme, "inheriting the past," is embodied by the "revival of the Buddhist sects," while the second, "ushering in the future," can be found in the exploration of modern day Humanistic Buddhism. Both of these two major ideas were actively preached and promoted by Master Taixu. The author, Mr. Hou Kunhong, devotes a great deal of attention towards the latter theme, Humanistic Buddhism. The first theme, the revival of the Buddhist sects, is left largely ignored, however. If *The Times of Taixu* is lacking in any area, this would be it. We all know that Chinese Buddhism through the Sui [581–618] and Tang [618–907] eras saw the emergence of the "Eight Major Sects": the

Sanlun 三論宗, Tiantai 天臺宗, Huayan 華嚴宗, Chan 禪宗, Pure Land [*Jingtu zong* 淨土宗], Consciousness Only [*Weishi zong* 唯識宗], Ryuzong [*Lüzong* 律宗], and the Tantric [*Mizong* 密宗] schools of Buddhism.[1] Across the long durée of the history of Chinese Buddhism and up through the Ming [1368–1644] and Qing [1616–1911] dynasties, these "Eight Major Sects" became largely obscured and deserted while losing their original forms and styles. However, to a large degree in reaction to the flood of Western culture, especially Christianity, entering the country, forward-thinking figures from the Buddhist world raised the alarm and once again picked up the instructional tools of "Buddhist sectarian life." Following this re-awakening, the new spirit of teaching through action was dedicated to the revival of the glory embodied within the fundamental spirit of Chinese Buddhism's "Eight Major Sects." The influence of this spirit of "teaching through action" can be seen in Master Yinguang's [1861–1940] revival of Pure Land Buddhism, Master Hongyi's [1880–1942] revival of dharmic law, Master Xuyun's [1840–1959] revival of Chan Buddhism, Master Dixian's [1858–1932] revival of Tiantai, and Master Yuexia's 月霞 [1858–1917] revival of Huayan. The author of *The Times of Taixu* does occasionally mention these figures (they are the big shots of Republican-era Chinese Buddhism, after all, and would be normal to mention). Yet, when they are mentioned in the book, it is not in relation to "the revival of the Buddhist sects" but for other reasons entirely. For example, the book brings up Master Dixian's quote: "Be good at teaching Dharma, so that more people will come to learn." (p. 381). As opposed to dealing with larger matters of spirituality and revival, this saying simply addresses the material concerns in temple management. Yet, although the author does not speak about the contributions of Master Dixian and the other masters regarding the revival of the Buddhist sects and focuses almost exclusively on research related to Master Taixu's Humanistic Buddhism, this is still a work which far surpasses its predecessors. Most crucially, one of the author's major contributions is to reveal the critical relationship between Humanistic Buddhism and Master Taixu's own beliefs regarding Maitreyan Buddhism.

In previous scholarly explorations of Humanistic Buddhism, a common view holds that Master Taixu's actions were simply in response to the government between the end of the Qing and the beginning of the Republican Era, which had just launched the "Temple Property School Establishment

1 Also known as the "Ten Major Sects" if one is to count the establishment of the Kusha-shu 俱舍宗and Satyasiddhi 成實宗 schools which emerged during the Northern and Southern dynasties [420–589] period. However, because these two schools belong to Theravada Buddhism, in the Mahayana-dominated history of Chinese Buddhism, these two schools exhibited little practical influence. Additionally, many of their ideas were absorbed by the Mahayana "Eight Major Sects" so they are not frequently mentioned.

Campaign" [*Miaochan xingxue yundong* 廟產興學運動] due to its rapidly waning political power and near-empty treasury. This "Temple Property School Establishment" campaign was a policy which sought to have temples and their property confiscated by the government in order to establish secular schools and fund other social undertakings. From Master Taixu's perspective, instead of passively watching as Buddhist property was confiscated by the secular government for these social purposes, would it not be preferable for Buddhists themselves to seize the initiative by entering the world and serving society? Against this backdrop, Humanistic Buddhism was born with the aim of actively serving the secular world. Of course, there is no doubt that Master Taixu's Humanistic Buddhist and the "Temple Property School Establishment" had a direct cause and effect relationship. Master Taixu himself said as much, and the author of *The Times of Taixu* also mentions this fact within the book. However, while Humanistic Buddhism was a type of Buddhist movement, it was not exclusively a reaction to stimuli from the secular world. Most importantly, it also possessed its own intrinsic motivation and logic. This intrinsic motivation, from Mr. Hou Kunhong's point of view, was Master Taixu's own Maitreyan Buddhist beliefs. From the many analyses of Master Taixu's Humanistic Buddhism, we can see that Humanistic Buddhism is still often classified as belonging to Mahayana Buddhism's "Life of the Bodhisattva Movement," embodying Chan Buddhism's "No one left in the world" philosophy, falling into Tiantai "Three Truths" philosophy (the ultimate truth, the secular truth, and the middle way to reconcile them), or simply a form of Confucianized Buddhism, etc. These analyses, largely distorted by hindsight, all make claims about Humanistic Buddhism from either a Buddhist rationalistic basis or legalistic basis while failing to address Master Taixu's original inspiration for advancing Humanistic Buddhism—his own deep personal belief in Maitreyan Buddhism.

Maitreyan Buddhism itself belongs to the "Pure Land" branch of Buddhism. In the long history of Chinese Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism can be seen in the forms of Amitabha Buddhism as well as Maitreyan Buddhism. The concept of Pure Land specific to Amitabha Buddhism is the "Western Paradise," a Pure Land which only exists beyond the human realm and not in this world. By contrast, the concept of Pure Land in Maitreyan Buddhism includes the actual physical world in which you and I live, as well as everything in between. Before the Middle Tang period, Chinese Buddhism's Pure Land movement was mainly found in Maitreyan Buddhism as embodied by figures such as Master Zhiyi 智顗 [538–597] who founded Tiantai, and the celebrated Master Xuanzang 玄奘 [602–664]. Both of these masters were faithful disciples of Matreyan Buddhism. From the Middle Tang period until today, however, Maitreyan

Buddhism has been largely supplanted by Amitabha Buddhism which has become rampantly popular in its stead. A few people, such as Master Taixu, however, maintained belief in Maitreyan Buddhism, and it was exactly this devotion to the Maitreyan vision of Pure Land which inspired Humanistic Buddhism as a religious moment. To illustrate this point, the author employs the thinking of Master Taixu's disciple Master Yinshun to elaborate, who states,

> When the Maitreya is born into the world, the Maitreya will manifest the Pure Land in the human realm, and this is therefore the hope and pursuit of all Buddhists. Generally, followers of Buddhism tend to believe that the Maitreya Bodhisattva dwells in Heaven and in the Pure Land there, but they do not realize that this Pure Land of the Maitreya is actually in the human world. Maitreya, before becoming a Buddha, lived in the inner court of Heaven and was the purifier of the Heavenly Kingdom. We wish to be born into the Pure Land and become close to the Maitreya so that in the future we may join the Maitreya in purifying the human world and thereby attain the roots or capacities of kindness. From the perspective of Maitreyan Pure Land philosophy, it is the Pure Land within our actual human world which must be emphasized instead of the pursuit of Heaven. But for now, however, the rebirth of the Maitreya Bodhisattva is still quite far off. In this vast time beforehand, some preparations must be made for the Maitreya's rebirth. What must be prepared, then? Namely, the implementation of the ideas of Humanistic Buddhism. (p. 93)

This idea of Pure Land is a pragmatic embodiment of the relationship between Buddhism and secular society, specifically Republican-era Chinese society. Of all the themes mentioned in *The Times of Taixu*, the most crucial is the intimate relationship between Buddhism and politics. The exploration of this theme within the book includes the personal relationship between Master Taixu and Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石 [1887–1975] as well as Master Taixu's relationship with the Republic of China government at large.

Whatever relationship exists between religion and politics is not worth making too much of a fuss over. From ancient times to the present, in China and abroad, it is not at all unusual for some countries to have religiously-oriented political parties while in many instances religion and the state are entirely one and the same. However, upon hearing the word "Buddhism," we Chinese people tend to think that politics and Buddhism are entirely insulated from one another, and that disciples of Buddhism should not take an active role in politics. Why is this? Actually, this has much to do with the reality of how Buddhism has developed in Chinese history. In *A Brief Introduction to Buddhist*

Studies, the well-known Buddhist scholar Mr. Lü Cheng 呂澂 [1896–1989] discusses how Buddhism spread in the early Wei [220–265] and Jin [265–420] periods: "At that time, Buddhism and politics were intimately intertwined and many monks become highly active in political affairs. However, this led to many problems with corruption, leading to discontent among the people which in turn resulted in a widespread assault on Buddhism."[2] This left a stain upon Buddhism's reputation as an active player in the state's political affairs. Additionally, especially since the development of Chan Buddhism during the Tang dynasty, Buddhism became rusticated which further solidified the isolation of Chinese Buddhism and esoteric Buddhism from the rest of society. This isolation gradually reached such an extent that people began to label those monks who advocated active participation in secular affairs and often met with political figures as "political monks." Notably, in response to people who called him a political monk, Taiwan's Master Hsing Yun 星雲 has replied:

> You cannot say that a follower of Buddhism cannot participate in politics. Political participation is the personal right of all, unless one has committed a crime, has broken the law, or is being penalized by the legal system in such a way that one's right to participate in public life is taken away and this person no longer has the right to vote. It is no crime to be a Buddhist or to be a monk or a nun. Simply by showing concern society, does that make one a "political monk"? In fact, the meaning of Master Taixu's teaching "inquire about politics but don't handle affairs" is that monks and nuns can indeed show concern for society, the nation, and the well-being of the people. However, they simply should not become officials, county magistrates, or mayors.[3]

Here, Master Hsing Yun discusses the teachings of Master Taixu, who himself was labeled a political monk. This teaching, "inquire about politics but don't handle affairs," simply stated as "inquire about politics but do not become an official," expresses the hope that the relationship with the government will be one "kept at arm's length, neither near nor far, for everyone's benefit." In Part 3 Chapter 8 of *The Times of Taixu*, titled "Master Taixu and Jiang Jieshi: Buddhism and Politics in the 1930s" [*Shi Taixu he Jiang Jieshi: 1930 niandai de Fojiao yu zhengzhi* 釋太虛和蔣介石：1930 年代的佛教與政治], Mr. Hou

2 Lü Cheng 吕澂, *Zhongguo Foxue yuanliu lüe jiang* 中國佛學源流略講 [*A Brief Introduction to Buddhist Studies*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2017), 71.

3 "Shuo wo shi 'zhengzhi heshang' shi kandeqi wo 說我是'政治和尚'是看得起我 [To Call Me a 'Political Monk' is a Compliment]," last modified November 10, 2015, http://www.fjnet.com/rw/nr/201511/t20151110_236715.htm.

Kunhong provides a detailed account of Master Taixu's exchanges with Jiang Jieshi and explores how Master Taixu navigated the relationship between government and religion. Mr. Hou Kunhong writes, "Master Taixu expressed, 'stay at an arm's length, neither near nor far, for everyone's benefit' as a principle of the relationship between government and religion. This principle is still worth considering today" (p. 268). In Mr. Hou Kunhong's rich exploration of the relationship between politics and religion, an aspect of extended consideration is the relationship between Buddhism and military affairs. Following the Xinhai Revolution [1911–1912], we all know that China descended into the chaos of the Warlord era which was then followed by the Anti-Japanese War and the civil war between the Nationalists and Communists. In short, warfare was a frequent occurrence at this time. However, just as the flames of war and the burning of temple offerings may complement one other, warfare and Buddhism can be mutually well-suited. During this period, Buddhism, soldiers, and warfare forged an intimate relationship with one each other. Naturally, this crucial point did not escape Mr. Hou Kunhong's attention. Some people may understandably think that Buddhism seeks to avoid killing while war naturally involves killing people. How, then, can these two concepts possibly be rectified with one another? Is this not a case of trying to "match the horse's jaw with the cow's head"? However, this confluence is indeed a true manifestation of Chinese Buddhism. By reading *The Times of Taixu*, one may come to completely understand this apparent paradox. Here, I might as well provide the reader with two notable examples from the book. One deals with Hunanese Warlord Tang Shengzhi 唐生智 [1890–1970]. Because he advocated "using Buddhist teachings in leading the armed forces," he became known as the "Buddhist general." In the military, he once promulgated twelve orders which all battalions were to follow in "(Buddhist) Regulations for Obtaining Certificates" [(*Fojiao*) *De jie zheng zhang tiaoli* (佛教) 得戒證章條例]. The first order stipulated: "In order to promote Buddhism and carry out the mission of promulgating Buddhism in the military ranks, this army shall issue special badges to encourage firm belief and to aid in the advancement of faith" (p. 168). He also formulated the "Hunanese Declaration of the Buddhist People's Association" [*Hunan minzhong fohua xiehui xuanyan* 湖南民眾佛化協會宣言] to promote a "Buddhist Transformation Campaign" [*Fohua yundong* 佛化運動] among the population. In this declaration, he wrote, "Invoking the ways of Confucius and the Revered One of the World [*Shakyamuni* 釋迦牟尼] along with the President's Three Principles of the People, 'the goals of the revolution are all revealed through Buddhism.' Buddhism is a 'true friend of the revolution' and an 'aid to the Three Principles of the People.' Therefore, the Buddhist Transformation Campaign is extremely timely and appropriate" (p. 170). In this way, Buddhism and "The Three Principles of the People" became welded

together. This is not at all dissimilar to today's discussion on how Buddhism may be adapted to modern socialist society.

In *The Times of Taixu,* many instances of the "Buddhism-military relationship" mentioned by Mr. Hou Kunhong are of monks fighting in the Anti-Japanese War. These instances greatly exemplify the spirit of "people's total warfare." Just imagine, if all of these "otherworldly" monks and nuns were to join the ranks of the resistance, how could others possibly remain apathetic on the sidelines? In short, all the *sangha* among the Chinese people, including Master Taixu, could not help but be drawn into the torrent of resistance against Japan. In confronting this foreign invasion, many people put the interests of the country and the people first, took up the patriotic cause, raised funds, performed logistics and ambulance work, held emergency meetings, or even directly took up arms and served on the front lines. In doing so, many viewed their service in the Anti-Japanese War as acts of Buddhist self-cultivation. In considering the killing of the enemy as an act of demon slaying, "they [Chinese Buddhists] hoped to transform themselves into patriotic citizens of China instead of simply being mere followers of Buddhism." For example, Master Leguan 樂觀 [1902–1987] was a monk who actively served in the Anti-Japanese War. In his office, Master Leguan hung portraits of Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 [1866–1925], Lin Sen 林森 [1868–1943], and Jiang Jieshi yet not one image of the Shakyamuni Buddha. Hanging alongside the portraits were the brightly colored national and party flags in addition to practical information and guidelines for the ambulance teams. It was readily apparent that Master Leguan held the people of the nation in a much higher position in his heart than his beliefs in Buddhism" (p. 343). In the spring of 1939, Comrade Zhou Enlai 周恩來 [1898–1976] wrote a message to the Hunan Nanyue Anti-Japanese Company of Fighting Monks led by Master Juzan 巨贊 [1908–1984]. Zhou wrote, "On the horse, kill bandits. Off the horse, study Buddhism." To explain his message, he elaborated:

> The first Chinese interpretation of *arhat* 阿羅漢 was a killer of bandits. If he had not killed those troublesome bandits, he would not have been able to become an *arhat*. What I wrote before said to kill bandits and not to kill people. This 'bandit' is what Buddhism refers to as a wicked evildoer who absolutely cannot be tolerated. Currently, these Japanese bandits are slaughtering our fellow countrymen. If we do not kill these murderous bandits, how then are we to deliver beings from their suffering?[4]

4 "Zhou Zongli miaojie 'shangma shazei, xiama xue Fo' 周總理妙解'上馬殺賊，下馬學佛' [Premier Zhou Enlai Explains 'On the Horse, Kill Bandits, Off the Horse, Study Buddhism']," last modified August 31, 2018, http://www.sohu.com/a/251204724_161249.

Upon receiving Zhou Enlai's encouragement, it was not long before Master Juzan articulated his own sentiments about actively resisting the Japanese, stating: "As a Buddhist, one should not seek to cause trouble in the realm of humanity. Yet, at present, our nation is facing a tremendous calamity. Now is the time to show one's true colors as patriotic children of the Yellow Emperor." In referring to these "true colors," Master Juzan means that our moral courage as Chinese people must never falter in the face of foreign aggression. Unfortunately, not all people are made of the same moral fiber. At that same time, some members of the *sangha* saw their "true colors" fade away as they lost their sense of moral integrity and became traitors to the nation, just like Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 [1883–1944]. For example, in Changchun 長春 under the puppet state of Manchukuo, "Master Shanguo 善果 [d. 1951] actively promoted a campaign to sponsor the purchase of a so-called 'Buddhist fighter plane.' Due to his solicitation efforts, the Buddhists of Changchun raised a huge sum of money which enabled the Japanese military to purchase a new plane. Even as the war was drawing to a close, Master Shanguo organized the Buddhist nuns of Changchun in serving the Japanese troops. Once the war was over, due to this type of 'traitorous' collaboration with the Japanese, Master Shanguo was prosecuted under the Nationalist government but somehow escaped any punishment. However, he was unable to evade justice under the People's Republic of China. In 1951, the PRC government sentenced him to death" (p. 347). Although his name was "Shanguo," meaning "good result," he ultimately did not meet with a "good end." This naturally had to do with his own political inclinations and had nothing whatsoever to do with Buddhism.

Besides discussing Buddhism's relationship with politics, military affairs, and other major societal issues, Mr. Hou Kunhong's *The Times of Taixu* also provides readers with a rich and diverse exploration of Buddhist life at level of society. It highlights the spiritual comfort Buddhist can provide when dealing with the problems of sickness, old age, death, and other issues. For example, in his old age, Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 [1865–1936] "moved to the British concession and rose every morning to recite the 'Diamond Sutra' 金剛經 for half an hour. For his three meals, he ate porridge and steamed buns served with vegetables. He laid off most of the servants he had kept previously. In his old age, Duan Qirui lived an austere life and enthusiastically gave alms. His donations helped to fund the construction of the Qingdao Zhanshan Temple" (p. 315). While people such as Li Dazhao 李大釗 [1889–1927] and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 [1873–1929] strongly denied that they were Buddhists, following their deaths people erected memorials to them in the temples so that they could pay homage (pp. 372–373). In short, Republican-era China "confronted 'a catastrophe not seen for three thousand years.' At that time, the sacred land of China

was just as the writer Liu E 劉鶚 had described in his 1903 *The Travels of Lao Can* [*Laocan youji* 老殘遊記]: the nation is a sinking ship sailing the Pacific. Onboard the ship are countless refugees, a muddle-headed captain, and a crew of panicking sailors. There are those who take advantage of the situation to loot, while some escape by diving into the ocean, and even some who instigate mutinies."[5] These historical figures mentioned above all formed a connection with Buddhism which in turn demonstrates the profound and widespread influence Buddhism has had upon Chinese society and the Chinese people. Unlike other research papers on Republican China which possess a tendency to emphasize Western culture and thought, Mr. Hou Kunhong's work helps us to understand how Chinese people during that time looked to the ancient Buddhism of the East to define their values and establish a spiritual roadmap. This book is extremely worth the read.

Translated by Jon Formella

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Can Confucianism Save Liberalism? Should It?

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Chinese Confucianism is as diverse as a millennium-old intellectual tradition can be. However, the common ground for various Confucian positions stems from the shared corpus of texts and the questions that follow from it. One of these questions concerns *continuity*, which—especially in the case of political philosophy—resonates with the image of China as a state-based civilization rooted deeply in its history.

Bai Tongdong's latest book, *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case,* is an original voice in the ongoing debate on the contemporary application of Confucianism. Its point of departure is philosophical continuity, taken not as an assumption but, rather, as a question (how should early Confucian texts be read philosophically?). Bai has been engaged in this debate for over a decade now, starting with his work on the political stakes that shaped the historical reality of the early Chinese state.[1]

The originality of the argument presented in *Against Political Equality* follows from Bai's claim that classical Chinese philosophy was developed amid a historical shift to a society that, in many respects, resembled that of early modern Europe. This view was presented in his 2012 book *China: The Political Philosophy of the Middle Kingdom,*[2] and it sets the groundwork for the main argument in his latest book, as it offers an effective methodological vehicle for developing a comparative perspective. It also allows the author to voice

1 Bai Tongdong 白彤東, *Jiubang xinming: Gujin zhongxi canzhao xia de gudian Rujia zhengzhi zhexue* 舊邦新命——古今中西參照下的古典儒家政治哲學 [*A New Mission of an Old State: the Comparative and Contemporary Relevance of Classical Confucian Political Philosophy*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009).

2 Bai Tongdong, *China: The Political Philosophy of the Middle Kingdom* (London: *Zed Books,* 2012).

a critique of liberal democracy as well as to distance himself from a broader current of New Confucianism, revived recently by scholars such as Jiang Qing 蔣慶[3] as well as Daniel A. Bell and Wang Pei 汪沛.[4]

Against Political Equality has nine chapters that guide readers through the three main steps in Bai's argument. The first step sets the comparative framework by claiming that Confucianism in the Spring and Autumn [770-476 BCE] and Warring States [475-221 BCE] periods should be seen as a response to a shift from feudalism to modernity. This shift was marked by dissolution of the clan-based political authority and intensification of social mobility, creating new political solutions and new ways to think about the sociopolitical body as a whole. According to Bai, Confucian thinkers in the pre-imperial period found themselves in conditions that structurally resembled the rise of the modern state system in Europe, and thus their answers can be justifiably compared to those given by Western thinkers in the post feudal period. The second step follows from the argument that although liberal democracy remains a globally hegemonic political model, it is far from the last stage of historical development. Bai points out some problems in the Western political model, ranging from questions of legitimacy and political agency to education and citizens' ability to participate in decision making. The third step applies the Confucian responses to the challenges of modernity in order to reform the institutional and ideological frameworks of liberal democracy. The resulting "Confucian hybrid regime," when applied to Western democracy, would strengthen the liberal side but undermine the democratic side, offering a more community-oriented and meritocratic approach.

Chapter 1, "Why Confucianism? Which Confucianism?" reveals the foundation of Bai's philosophical project at the methodological level. The reader will find here some revealing explanations of how Bai reconstructs the *textual tradition* of Confucianism—a step often missing from the comparative approaches that tend to take the Confucian corpus for granted. Bai attempts to read the Confucian canonical works philosophically. This means that he approaches them as texts that engage reflexively in discussing "philosophical problems" (i.e., genuinely unsolvable challenges to human existence that transcend particular moments in time and space; p. 10). As such, these texts are taken as a whole and read systematically, even though this kind of a holistic approach has been challenged (p. 14). However, it is a pity that the book does

3 Jiang Qing, *A Confucian Constitutional Order: How China's Ancient Past Can Shape Its Political Future*, ed. Daniel Bell and Fan Ruiping (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

4 Daniel Bell and Wang Pei, *Just Hierarchy: Why Social Hierarchies Matter in China and the Rest of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

not provide a similar explanation of the liberal tradition, which is far from a closed system of ideas. Bai has a certain textual tradition in mind in referring to John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and John Rawls, yet interweaves them into the narrative without enough methodological caution. Thus, whereas "can early liberal texts be read philosophically?" is a provocative question, the answer to it might turn out to be even more interesting than the answer to the question concerning a philosophical reading of Confucian texts.

Chapter 2, "Confucianism on Political Legitimacy: For the People, of the People, But Not by the People," explores the early Confucian response to Chinese modernity in the pre-imperial period. Here, Bai stresses an important point made by other proponents of Confucianism, such as Jiang Qing—namely, that the core question of early Confucian political discourse is not sovereignty but, rather, legitimacy (p. 34). This has important consequences, particularly with respect to the alleged democratic tendencies found in Mencius as well as in how Confucian moral and political precepts should be interpreted. Bai takes a very open approach to an aspect of Confucianism that is sometimes neglected, namely, that it was developed as a discourse addressed to the ruling classes (p. 45). He sees this not as a limitation but as an advantage. It is interesting to follow his consistent defense of political meritocratic elitism and critique of the "one person, one vote" system on this ground. Nevertheless, the binary setting of the entire book becomes a burden here. As a confrontation between liberal and Confucian traditions, it excludes other perspectives—not only radical democratic antiliberal movements in Europe that had a tremendous influence on the development of the liberal tradition but also Daoist critiques of the Confucian political model that might put the question of authority and political legitimacy into a broader perspective.

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the Confucian "hybrid regime," which is Bai's response to the limitations of liberalism and Western democracy. In Chapter 3, "A Confucian Hybrid Regime as an Answer to Democratic Problems," the blending of democracy and meritocracy is defended as a proper response that allows a more stable political model in which social mobility and political participation are reframed along the lines of education and the development of moral cultivation. The argument in favor of a hybrid regime is based on a political reading of Mencius. Nevertheless, Bai's point is that a political perspective blending together democratic and authoritarian elements is universally applicable. Chapter 4, "The Superiority of the Confucian Hybrid Regime Defended," addresses some of the possible critiques of the Confucian corrections of the liberal democratic model—in particular, the accusation that it undermines equality, which is supposed to be one of the foundations of liberal democracy (pp. 98-102). In the conclusion to this chapter, Bai offers a good summary of

his argument so far: in general, Confucian political theory provides not only a model for more balanced political institutions but also a regulative horizon that is more realistic than the one offered by liberal democrats.

Chapter 5, "Compassion as the New Social Glue in the Society of Strangers," contains a philosophically intriguing defense of the Confucian version of the idea of universal care and humanness, seen as a response to the dissolution of social relations during Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. A deeper metaphysical structure of the Confucian project is at work here, and Bai skillfully shifts between early Confucian and neo-Confucian authors, showing how the universalist claims, concerning the care for others, remain hierarchical despite their inclusive features. The strength of this chapter follows in part from the fact that Bai develops his interpretation of compassion, care, and humanness from the Confucian tradition, without an attempt to fit it into the liberal philosophical discourse (pp. 125-28). This is the heart of the book. It offers insight into the Confucian understanding of social relations and offers a convincing political reformulation of the moral philosophy found in Confucian texts.

This discussion continues in Chapter 6, "Conflict in the Expansion of Care: The Private versus the Public." Here, Bai employs the philosophical apparatus that he constructed in earlier chapters. He argues that the division of society into two spheres (public and private) can be positively transformed by a more hierarchical order involving a gradual stratification of society. Individuals and groups that comprise such a society would be linked together by an affective network of relations inspired by the concept of universal compassion (p. 139).

Chapter 7, "Tian Xia: A Confucian Model of National Identity and International Relations," takes this argument even further, showing how it can be applied to international relations by exploring the implications of Confucian moral teachings on the idea of "All under Heaven" (pp. 184-87)—one of the most important terms in Chinese political thought. The Confucian model of international relations is presented as an alternative to various modern political theories of nation-state interests. In this context, Bai also argues that embracing the Confucian hybrid regime would allow the Chinese government to relax its dependence on nationalist ideology, which remains one of the biggest obstacles to its peaceful rise in the global arena (p. 213).

The last two chapters conclude the argument by pointing to the possibility of a Confucian concept of rights, based in particular on the Mencian approach to justice. In Chapter 8, "Humane Responsibility Overrides Sovereignty: A Confucian Theory of Just War," Bai reconstructs Mencius' views on justified war, showing that, despite many differences, the Confucian concept of justice can be elaborated as a social discourse with some merit in the context of modern

social and political conflicts (pp. 226-29). In this way, he lays the ground for the argument developed in Chapter 9, "A Confucian Theory of Rights." It is somewhat surprising that, in this chapter, Bai seems to return to a "compatibility claim" renounced in the introduction (p. xi).

Throughout the book, Bai consistently avoids argumentation focused on showing how Confucianism can be integrated into the liberal political discourse, offering, instead, various Confucian alternatives to the challenges faced by liberalism. The last two chapters seem to be written in a more conciliatory manner. However, the argument that Confucians can develop a concept of rights that is not in direct conflict with its liberal-democratic counterpart seems to be a strategic statement. It allows Bai to make the argument that, by applying the Confucian approach to the concept of rights, one can offer the meritocratic corrections of the liberal discourse.

Finally, in the "Postscript," Bai makes some general remarks concerning the applicability of the Confucian perspective to issues that pose moral and existential threats to humanity, such as climate change and unbalanced technological development. The book closes with a brief consideration of the very possibility of challenging the liberal-democratic model of political institutions under the current sociohistorical conditions.

A couple of points need to be mentioned concerning the way in which Bai constructs his understanding of liberalism and Confucianism. Both notions should be seen as philosophical-political projects, rather than as realized policies. Bai rarely confronts the fact that both liberal democratic and Confucian political institutions are already complex "hybrid regimes" that incorporate a variety of traditions. However, one might argue that, just as some of the early Confucian ideas concerning universal compassion can be seen as responses to Mohist critiques of Confucian elitism, many of the modern democratic institutions developed along social struggles and pressures that originated outside the liberal tradition. The fact that *Against Political Equality* uses certain "ideal types" of political discourses is something that might be easily missed by readers who trust frequent references to historical realities and actual political solutions. Bai swiftly shifts from philosophical arguments found, for example, in John Rawls's work to the realities of US policies or from actual social processes that shaped the Confucian discourse to philosophical arguments found in the Mencius. This should not be seen as a disadvantage—the argument concerning the shift from feudalism to early modernity at the dusk of the Zhou dynasty [1046-256 BCE] is a great piece of a comparative study of historical processes that influence philosophical discourse. Frequent references to political realities in the United States and Europe are also important elements of

the rhetorical layer of the book, as they prevent it from becoming a dry philosophical lecture.

Nevertheless, one cannot but wonder at how precisely crafted the illustrations of Bai's philosophical argument are. He criticizes liberal elements of modern representative democracy in a way that is inherent to the liberal discourse itself, while refraining from challenging it as a political doctrine. For example, he questions the "one person, one vote" principle not as politically invalid but, rather, as an idea that does not address some systemic inequality carved into the very edifice of a democratic political system (pp. 54-56). A similar mode of argumentation can be found in his discussion concerning individual as well as the private and public sphere (pp. 138-40). In these contexts, Confucian notions such as meritocracy and universal care appear to be augmentations, solving issues that liberalism is supposedly incapable of addressing. This is the idea behind one of the central political concepts presented in the book, namely, the abovementioned "Confucian hybrid regime."

I believe there are two reasons for Bai's method of confronting the liberal tradition. In Chapter 1, Bai points out that the ideological hegemony of liberal democracy is becoming less obvious (p. 1). Nevertheless, he frames his argument in the context of the optimism that followed Francis Fukuyama's claim concerning the end of history and the rise of the perpetual age of liberal democracy (p. 28). At the structural level, this allows Bai to develop a grand narrative in which Confucianism and liberalism are introduced as two great traditions of long standing that can engage in dialogue. But in his final remarks, he mentions yet another reason for the reservation in his critique of liberalism: "[S]ince liberal democratic models have been given an almost sacred status, any perceived challenge to them often results in complete neglect and even hostile reactions" (p. 289).

However, this argument seems misdirected because of the existence of a rich tradition of critical approaches that point out the discrepancies between liberal discourse and the actual atrocities that made it possible and are made possible by it. One great study of "blindness" to colonial violence among Western thinkers from Locke to Hegel is Susan Buck-Morss's book *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History.*[5] Buck-Morss shows that philosophical discourse on modernity is ill-suited to address political events that challenge the power structure supporting its universalist claims (e.g., the Haitian revolution). Modern liberal claims to legitimacy as a normative horizon of the globalized world are also discussed in Ariella Azoulay's recent book *Potential History:*

5 Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

Unlearning Imperialism.[6] Bai chose a much more cautious strategy of debating the limitations of liberalism, aimed at convincing liberals to adopt certain Confucian solutions, rather than disarming them through a profound critique of the very premises of the liberal narrative. To be sure, he often gives voice to Western thinkers who challenged liberal tradition, such as Nietzsche (e.g., pp. 115-19, 177) and even shows that liberal authors have acknowledged the limitation of their ideas (in particular, Rawls, pp. 61 and 268).

It would be still possible to provide a much more nuanced image of the limits of liberal discourse even by means of far less confrontational approaches than those offered by Azoulay or Buck-Morss—with respect to a theory of rights,[7] political participation and recognition,[8] or even concepts of just war.[9] What these books have in common with Bai's project is that they take seriously the claims of liberal thinkers and argue that the democratic institutions in their current form do not satisfy them. At the same time, their authors are much more skeptical about the idea of saving liberalism from itself than Bai seems to be. *Against Political Equality* would benefit greatly from an additional chapter discussing such challenges to liberalism—embedding the Confucian case much more in an ongoing debate concerning the alternatives and transformations in Western political discourse over the three decades after Fukuyama's claim.

The fact that Bai does not include this synoptic analysis, which would situate Confucian arguments in a broader current of debates, does not make his argument any less engaging. His Confucian answer might seem surprising in the sense that it offers a perspective in which the internal conflicts in liberalism are acknowledged and turned into cornerstones of a renewed political edifice. Thus, the argument that liberal democracy is still prone to issues concerning equality is reshaped into a question of how inequality can be institutionalized in a way that it contributes to society. The problematic status of political elites is rearticulated as a question of how elites can be better integrated into society as a whole. One might argue that this Confucian amendment allows liberalism to confront its own structural presuppositions in a more honest way by acknowledging its own propositional-performative contradictions. Such a reading underscores the characteristic feature of Bai's philosophical project, namely, the fact that *Against Political Equality* is not a Confucian defense of hierarchies and meritocracy but, rather, the application of Confucian frugality as a philosophical method. The author gives liberals a helping hand by

6 Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (New York: Verso Books, 2019).

7 Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

8 Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Verso Books, 2003).

9 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso Books, 2009).

pointing the way for virtue to be reintroduced into the fabric of political practice. Taken as such, Bai's book is an example of comparative scholarship that consistently follows the "single thread binding it all together" (*Analects* 4:15), weaving another chapter in the Confucian tapestry.

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Book Reviews

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Bai Tongdong, *Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. 344 pages, ISBN: 978-0691195995.

Debates over the compatibility of Confucianism with liberal democracy have raged for decades. Bai Tongdong identifies four camps in these debates: (1) prodemocracy incompatibility; (2) prodemocracy compatibility; (3) pro-Confucianism incompatibility; and (4) revisionists who might be prodemocratic or pro-Confucian (pp. 241–43). Bai's proposal of a hybrid regime, with democracy at the local level and a mixture of democracy and Confucian meritocracy at higher levels of government, is revisionist and pro-Confucian. It argues that Confucianism could improve liberal democracy, even though it accommodates some aspects of liberal democracy by "updating, revising, or even abandoning" (p. 243) some Confucian ideas. Bai's revisionism takes the form of a coherent system of political thought based on a holistic reading of the *Analects* [*Lunyu* 論語] and the *Mencius* [*Mengzi* 孟子], supplemented by materials from two other texts in the *Four Books* [*Sishu* 四書]: the *Doctrine of the Mean* [*Zhongyong* 中庸] and the *Great Learning* [*Daxue* 大學]. He also claims to adopt a revised Rawlsian approach to various issues in his proposal, which he believes John Rawls [1921–2002] would endorse.

Bai reiterates his controversial thesis that the transition between the Zhou dynasty [1046–256 BCE] and the Qin dynasty [221–206 BCE] in ancient China was a kind of modernization, as the feudal structures of the former collapsed, to be replaced by a centralized state and bureaucracy governing a "large, well-connected, plebianized, and mobile society of strangers" (p. 27). Bai's philosophical construction of the *Analects* and the *Mencius* answers three key questions in politics, which demanded new answers during this transition: (1) What is the bond, banner, or identity that gives unity to the political entity? (2) Who should be in charge of maintaining political order? (3) What mechanism facilitates relations among different political entities? The book is

structured around these three questions, beginning with the second and then proceeding to the first and third questions.

Few would disagree that the Confucian concept of political legitimacy is based on government for the people, and it is clear that government by the people was not an option that was even considered in the early texts. For revisionists, the issue is whether a Confucian government for the people today is best achieved through democratic or nondemocratic political systems. Bai considers that a democracy identified with popular sovereignty is incompatible with Confucianism because,

> in spite of all these governmental efforts [to educate the population and provide conducive environments for an ethically as well as materially satisfactory life] that are demanded by them, and in spite of their beliefs that human beings are all potentially equal (Mencius and Xunzi) or close to being equal (Confucius), early Confucians also took it as a fact of life that the majority of the people cannot actually obtain the capacity necessary to make sound political decisions and participate fully in politics. (p. 50)

However, the textual evidence does not completely close off the possibility that the Confucian belief in everyone's capacity for self-cultivation and learning, combined with modern educational and communication capacities, leave room for a more optimistic assessment of the *demos*'s as-yet-unrealized capacity for government.

The cause of incompatibility between Confucianism and democracy coincides with a "fact" of modern democracy that, together with the self-interested tendencies of human beings and political apathy, makes liberal and deliberative democracy impossible: "modern democratic states are in general so large that it makes it impossible for the majority of the citizenry to be adequately informed about state affairs, however hard both the government and the individuals try" (p. 67). What appears to be a "democratic deficit" in the eyes of others turns out to be a strength of Confucianism that could help to save Rawlsian liberal democracy by combining a revised Rawlsian political liberalism with the Confucian answer on who should be in charge of maintaining political order. Although Bai's Confucian revisionism is a strong rival to many similar attempts in the current debates in Confucian political philosophy, his Rawlsian revisionism is more contentious and less likely to be accepted as an interpretation or application of Rawls.

For example, Bai defends political inequality in his hybrid regime with "the rationale of Rawls's difference principle in *A Theory of Justice*," to justify a "political difference principle": "political or electoral inequality can be accepted if

the least advantaged (from a material point of view) are benefitted" (p. 102). In Rawls's theory, the right to vote is a basic liberty that belongs to a different part of the social structure governed by the first principle of justice, that "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others" (p. 60), while the difference principle applies to only socioeconomic inequality. It is of fundamental importance to Rawls that the first difference principle has priority over the second. "This ordering means that a departure from the institutions of liberty required by the first principle cannot be justified by, or compensated for, by greater social or economic advantages."[1] What Bai overlooks is the relationship between equality and liberty in contemporary liberal political philosophy. Liberals defend liberal democracy not because it is the best system for good governance in terms of achieving material prosperity or moral advancement of the population but because liberal democracy is government by consent, which ensures that all citizens have as much of a say in who governs them and in issues that affect them as is realistically possible. Individual liberty is protected by equal civil and political rights that constrain governments as well as citizens.

Despite his pessimism about people's capacity for making political decisions, Bai's hybrid regime leaves room for popular participation to the extent that democratic elections and other forms of popular participation have a place in government. Bai's hybrid regime also incorporates the rule of law and some human rights. These revisions are intended to check the authoritarian tendencies of the Mencian ideal. Limited popular participation is justified because "Confucians seem to assume that the masses are competent enough to know whether they are satisfied with the regime and its policies or not, but they are not competent enough to make political decisions that will maintain or lead to a satisfying political environment" (p. 89). However, for those who consider democracy synonymous with political equality, this hybrid regime's selective adoption of the election mechanism fails to give the people sufficient decision-making powers. Although the lower democratic houses of government represent the people's will, this amounts to no more than a feedback channel to be taken into consideration (or not) by the meritocrats who decide issues on which the people are incapable of making good decisions. Bai believes that "by the checks and balances between the lower and upper houses, hopefully political decisions would better represent the general will of the people" (p. 79), specifically invoking Jean-Jacques Rousseau's distinction between the popular will (actually expressed by the people through voting) and the "general will," which Bai explains as "the 'true' will of the people, the will the people

1 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 60–61.

should have" (p. 79). This is problematic not only because Rousseau's concept of "general will" precludes representation in Rousseau's political ideal but also because its well-known tendency to pervert democracy into its opposite risks undermining the intention to check the authoritarian tendencies of unlimited meritocracy.

Bai rejects the central position given to popular election by the dominant understanding of liberal democracy and emphasizes, instead, the rule of law and the protection of liberty and rights, which he associates with liberalism in his proposed reconciliation of Confucian meritocracy with liberal democracy (p. 245). In driving a wedge between the two strands of liberal democracy, he falls back on no less an authority than John Stuart Mill [1806–1873], who advocates plural voting, in which some are given greater voice than others through more votes or weighted voting, to prevent democracy from becoming a tyranny of the uninformed majority. However, he parts company from Mill in his attacks on individualism, which Bai associates not with liberalism but with democracy and is the cause of three of the four problems plaguing modern democracies: "suspicion of and even hostility towards the elite, neglect of interests of non-voters, and neglect of the interests of minority and powerless voters" (p. 58).

In addition to addressing the problem of irrational and sometimes apathetic voters with insufficient knowledge by putting a ruling elite of Confucian meritocrats in charge of maintaining the political order, Bai believes that his hybrid regime can avoid having the ruling elite captured by special interests through moral education and, more important, with institutional safeguards of the rule of law and the democratic (lower) house as a check, and ensuring that the upper house has a sufficiently large number of members to prevent them from forming a unified interest group (pp. 89–90). Those familiar with studies of elitism – starting with the works of Vilfredo Pareto [1848–1923], Gaetano Mosca [1858–1941], and C. Wright Mills [1916–1962], to more recent works on the United States – would be more skeptical that Bai's proposed institutional safeguards could prevent elites from serving their own interests, rather than those of the average citizen, let alone the weak and marginalized. Other Confucians would place more weight on moral education: if elites are inevitable, Confucian elites would be more likely to serve the people than elites in societies that emphasize self-interest.

Turning to the other two questions that early Confucians addressed during the Zhou – Qin transition, Bai suggests that what holds a society of strangers together is compassion, which can be cultivated to extend one's care for family and kin to strangers in and outside the political entity to which one

belongs. Instead of the cosmopolitan assumption of equal humanity, universal care in Bai's Mencian ideal is hierarchical – one cares more for those who are more closely related to oneself. Bai discusses how the *Analects* and the *Mencius* handle conflicts between love for family members and responsibilities in the public sphere and compares the Confucian model with the treatment of public vs. private in Plato's [427–347 BCE] *Republic*. In the Confucian model, the private and the public form a continuum – the family is "public" vis-à-vis the individual but private vis-à-vis society or the political entity – and the focus is on achieving harmony between the private and the public; in the *Republic*'s model, they are discrete and in conflict. For Confucians, a person learns to go beyond the narrow interests of the individual self to care for others in the family, and insofar as the family is considered private vis-à-vis political relations as public, this constructive aspect of the private could help to resolve conflicts between the private and the public and bring them into harmony.

Bai applies the Confucian continuum model of private – public to the issue of gender equality by, first, rejecting Plato's proposal in *The Republic* that the guardians include women as a "hidden and seemingly fatal challenge" to gender equality, because it implies that "unless traditional families are abolished, or at least the state takes over the child-rearing when it is the most burdensome, gender equality cannot really be achieved" (p. 172). Bai argues that women's having to leave office to raise children for a few years "doesn't necessarily make them less experienced in public affairs" (p. 172) and compares this with the three-year mourning period that takes a person out of office during that time. He concedes that his Confucian continuum model does not help to make the case for gender equality in situations such as hiring decisions that involve a choice between male and female candidates, in which women, by taking a few years off to raise a child, are at a disadvantage compared to male candidates with similar talent and drive. Nevertheless, he believes that he has shown that Confucians have the resources to support gender equality in the case of public service by women. Although it is laudable that Bai wants his theory to support gender equality, the cursory treatment leaves those with any grasp of the complex difficulties of gender equality frustrated while lulling others into complacency.

Bai uses his model of universal hierarchical care to interpret the concept of "all under heaven" [*tianxia* 天下] as a Confucian model of national identity and international relations, which accepts the existence of individual nation-states as realistic and justifiable but makes no assumption about equality among states. Bai criticizes nationalism and advocates a conditional patriotism that does not pursue national interests at all costs, and even sovereignty

is limited by compassion and humaneness, without making national identity so thin that it could not hold a people together and completely dissolve nation-states. Bai also develops a Confucian theory of just war on the basis of his new *tianxia* model, challenging liberal and cosmopolitan theories of humanitarian intervention, in which "human rights override sovereignty" (p. 230), with a Confucian principle in which "humane responsibility overrides sovereignty" (pp. 227–29), which bears some resemblance to the "responsibility to protect" doctrine adopted by the 2005 World Summit.

Consistent with Confucian meritocracy within each political entity, the relations between political entities are also hierarchical. The ideal world order is one presided over by a union of "civilized" states, which can interfere with "barbaric states" when the latter's population suffers from inhumane rule and welcomes interference, with the endorsement of the international community. Bai tries to avoid ethnocentrism, allowing that the "repertoire of civilized people" should include classics of various "traditions that meet the criteria of civilizedness" (p. 184), and citing Plato's *Republic* as an example of what should be included. What is certain and clear is that "being civilized" must include Confucian values: "the legitimacy of the state lies in service to the people, humane governance is the ideal of the government, and Confucian compassion is a key virtue" (pp. 184–85).

In general, Bai's philosophical reconstruction of Confucianism and his theory of a hybrid regime as a superior alternative to liberal democracy are supported by persuasive textual evidence from the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. Though not comprehensive, his engagement with alternative interpretations is broad enough to be persuasive.

Throughout the book, he also compares Confucianists and thinkers in other schools of thought, from the ancient Greeks, especially Plato, but also Aristotle [384–322 BCE], Rousseau [1712–1778], Friedrich Nietzsche [1844–1900], to John Rawls. Although most of them are interesting and serve his theoretical objectives, in a few unfortunate instances, the comparisons confuse and mislead, rather than illuminate, particularly in the chapter on compassion as the new social glue. In *Mencius* 2A6, "compassion" is the translation of *ceyin zhi xin* 惻隱之心 (also translated as "the feeling of alarm and distress"), which is the "seed of a virtue," humaneness. Compassion is a feeling or a moral sentiment, while humaneness is the virtue; the seed should not be confused with the whole plant; otherwise, personal cultivation would be unnecessary. However, as the chapter progresses, compassion becomes a virtue, as Bai compares "Mencius's elevation of compassion as a virtue" (p. 119) with Nietzsche's discussion of "the elevation of pity as a virtue" (p. 118). Although this is not a problem

that fundamentally undermines his theory, more careful and concise use of the concepts, respecting important conceptual distinctions between compassion and humaneness, and explaining/justifying any modification in their use, would certainly have improved the book.

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Xu Xu, *Bird Talk and Other Stories by Xu Xu: Modern Tales of a Chinese Romantic.* Translated with a commentary by Frederik H. Green. Berkeley: Stonebridge Press, 2020. 223 pages, ISBN: 978-1611720556.

From his first literary hit in the late 1930s until today, Xu Xu 徐訏 [1908–1980] has been charming the Chinese reading public with his literate and well-crafted stories. The publication of *Bird Talk and Other Stories by Xu Xu* is sure to bring new admirers into the fold.

To create his pen name, Xu Xu took the first and last characters of his full given name. He was born Xu Boyu (徐伯訏, the final character can be pronounced either Yu or Xu) in the coastal city of Cixi 慈溪, Zhejiang province. The city is 73 miles (118 km) south of Shanghai and 40 miles (60km) north of the city of Ningbo. Although Xu Xu studied in Beijing from 1927 to 1931 and graduated from Peking University, he was temperamentally drawn to the lush and humid climate of his hometown along the coast of south China. The climate was different in the south where the weather brought swirling clouds, rains and mists. He began his literary career in Shanghai in 1933 under the guidance and encouragement of Lin Yutang 林語堂 [1895–1976] whose interpretive writings in English explaining Chinese traditional values and perspectives have made him well-known to English-speaking audiences. Xu Xu spent most of his literary life in Shanghai and Hong Kong where the frigid winds and prolonged dryness of north China was far away.

Xu Xu's stories often appear autobiographical because the persona of the narrators he depicts in his tales appears to reflect the author himself. In many of the stories he is a young to early middle-aged Chinese man, of an even temper, well-educated, and always thoughtful. He observes the lives around him from a somewhat removed perspective, not much given to extreme swings of emotions and reacting only mildly to the vicissitudes of what life brings to him. He tends to behave like a gentleman acting responsibly in an adult manner, still a member of the gentry family into which the author Xu Xu was born.

In many of the stories published in this book, what pulled the narrator into daily life and provided the plots for his stories was his attraction to some young woman. The women were always younger than he was. In the case of this collection's title story "Bird Talk" [*Niaoyu* 鳥語] he is drawn to a girl who is seventeen while the narrator is already the editor of a literary magazine with a wife in Shanghai. The girl is called a "dimwit" by the people of the village where the narrator is taking a rest away from his busy life in Shanghai. The girl likes to communicate with the birds that fly among the bushes and trees in the garden of the house where he is staying. She makes chirping sounds to them, and they respond by sometimes staying nearby and not being startled by her sounds.

As the narrator gets to know the girl, he finds that she is awkward and ill at ease among the normal people of the village and appears removed from the daily activities around her. He notices her "naked white shins … stuck in a pair of black cotton shoes that were damp from the dew on the grass." As he gradually gets to know her and they hold short conversations, he finds she is especially sensitive to the way the birds go about their routines, near to and yet removed from the mundane lives of the humans in the village. He also finds that she is drawn to the poetry and Buddhist scriptures that he introduces into their talks. She does not seem a dimwit, but rather deeply in touch with a more humane and lyrical aspect of living things.

The two grow emotionally close and he asks to have the girl move with him back to Shanghai to live with his family and his other relatives there. Once back in the cosmopolitan city, the narrator falls again into his demanding work with the literary journal where he is editor, with its constant meetings and rounds of evening meals and drinking to entertain writers, intellectuals, and other professionals. The girl's quiet and introspective demeanor begins to stand in sharp contrast to the distracting bustle and worldly social pursuits that take away his time and energy. His family and relatives grow to disdain the girl, who quietly withdraws into her own mental and emotional world.

The narrator realizes he feels overwhelming love for the girl, and she says she has the same feelings for him. He decides they should both withdraw from the atmosphere of Shanghai, so they travel to Hangzhou where the narrator can find a new job and they can live a more sedate life. He arranges a temporary place for them to stay at a Buddhist nunnery. The quiet days of meditation, chanting the sutras, and helping the poor suddenly reveal to the girl an environment where she feels completely comfortable and accepted. Her new sense of comfort also sharpens her differences with the narrator who, though sensitive and thoughtful, has learned to thrive in the defiled world of material gain.

Xu Xu's story "Ghost Love" [*Guilian* 鬼戀], also in this collection, was published in 1937 and became the piece that brought him celebrity in China. It was first serialized in the popular literary and current affairs journal *Celestial Winds* [*Yuzhou feng* 宇宙風]. He revised it and published it as a book that by 1949 had gone through nineteen print runs. In 1995 filmmaker Chen Yifei 陳逸飛 [1946–2005] produced a remake of the book and titled it *Evening Liaison* [*Renyue huanghun* 人約黃昏] 。

China has a long history of tales involving ghosts. Often the ghostly apparitions transformed themselves into alluring young women who were able to bewitch and seduce men. The women were captivating and so "real" in the eyes of the men who were young students preparing to be scholars, that at first there was no way to imagine anything ghostly about the seduction taking

place. This made the eventual denouement all the more unexpected and unbelievable in retrospect. When this story was published, Xu Xu was about to turn thirty, himself a recent university graduate and deeply active in the literary world of magazines and young intellectuals.

The opening scene is set on Nanjing Road, then and now a major commercial street and shopping area in urban Shanghai. On a wintry evening about midnight, he sees a woman dressed all in black standing by a tobacco shop who asks him directions to a street that runs father to the south of the area. He smells the smoke from her cigarette and recognizes it as from a British brand that was then very popular. He says she is as attractive as a goddess, but she replies, "I am not a goddess. I am a ghost." He chuckles and thinks to himself "So one can see ghosts on Nanjing Road now."

The worldly sarcasm and clear statement of the woman might serve to throw out of focus the beginning of a ghost story, but from the opening lines the story deepens into the differences between ghosts and humans. He finds out where she lives, staying in a room in a Western style house on the southern edge of the city. He visits her in the evenings and becomes more enamored of her style and aura of mystery. She keeps telling him he ought to keep his distance because they have no hope of real consummation or of a life together. Once when visiting the well-known Longhua Buddhist Temple [*Longhua si* 龍華寺] in the city with friends, he thinks he sees her dressed in the grey robes of a Buddhist nun, and his recognition apparently gives her pause as she quickly moves away.

The sighting only emboldens the narrator, who decides he wants to see her in the light of day and not only in the gloom of darkness. He determines to find the house he has been visiting at night, but the people living there tell him the upstairs room was not being rented out but has been empty for a long time. The more the reality of the daytime dislodges the mists of the evenings, the more the narrator struggles to comprehend the situation he is in. He faces an emotional attraction very real and strong within himself, but a reality composed of unreal forces.

In the two stories introduced above, Xu Xu communicates his longing for a more stable and orderly past. He felt comfortable in the setting of "traditional" Chinese values and structures. His China of the 1920s and 1930s was changing, but the prevailing attitudes of the time were in harmony with the preceding Qing dynasty [1616–1911]. Attitudes were still set in the past where the vast countryside held somewhat isolated farming villages and where the male-dominated system of regulated family life held virtually total acceptance. Xu Xu's world view holding to this attitude is behind every story in the collection.

However, both "Bird Talk" published in 1950 and "Ghost Love" in 1937 are set in a transforming social and cultural milieu that was already being upended by the time the stories came out. In the late 1930s Japanese troops were taking over China's cities all along the east coast. In 1950 the end of a civil war in China marked the emergence of the new People's Republic. The instability of life in China during those decades could not fail to impact Xu Xu as an active intellectual and writer who reacted publicly through his writing and speaking to the storms roiling over his world. He began his literary career in Shanghai but left the city in 1937 because of the Japanese threat and headed inland to where the Chinese government was relocating. In 1950 he once again felt it wise to leave post-war Shanghai because he had been criticized by left-wing writers who said his philosophy was escapist and passive, unlike the clearly defined, activist messages of the Chinese communists who had come to power.

So Xu Xu moved to Hong Kong, an enclave then under British control. There he continued to publish large amounts of fiction, both short stories and novellas. His writings regularly appeared in the literary supplements of the *Sing Tao Evening Post* [*Xingdao wanbao* 星島晚報]. He also wrote a great amount of literary criticism, edited several literary journals, taught Chinese literature, and was Chair of the Chinese Department of Hong Kong Baptist University. When his collected writings [*Xu Xu wenji* 徐訏文集] were published in Shanghai in 2008, the set consisted of sixteen volumes.

"When Ah Heung Came to Gousing Road" [*Lai Gaosheng lu de yige nüren* 來高升路的一個女人], another story in this collection, was published in 1965 while Xu Xu was living in Hong Kong. The Chinese language used in this story has been transliterated into Cantonese, widely spoken in that area of southeast China. In this story Xu Xu is no longer the first-person narrator but instead tells the story as a third person observer.

Hong Kong island then was filled with economic migrants, people who had filtered into the relatively stable colonial bastion while the communist government on the mainland was undertaking land reform and moving toward a socialist society. Three men found themselves each setting up a small stall by the side of Gousing Road where the economically secure lived, in high rises lining the road, and interacted daily with the penniless street sellers who were able to survive, but only just. One of the younger men specialized in cutting keys, since the well-to-do in the apartments always had gates and doors to be locked. Another of the younger men sold potted plants and miniature trees, though his dream was to open a small shop to sell light bulbs and repair electrical appliances since he had worked in such a shop back in Canton. The third man was older and always cheerful as he cut leather and made shoes to sell.

They commented on the people who passed by while subsisting in their simple world of daily work.

As is true of the other stories in this volume, a young woman enters the picture and becomes the focus of the narration. Gradually she interacts with the three men and tells them she is poor like they are. She works for a rich lady in one of the high-rise apartments were her mistress lives a life of luxury. The two younger men began to fantasize about their new friend who is so kind and caring and cheerful. Their attempts to court her end when she makes it clear that she has no intention to enter into a marriage that will keep her poor and working hard for the rest of her life.

The story plays out in a fast-paced and light-hearted way and has a happy ending that cheered the readers in Hong Kong. But in this story, as in the others in this collection, Xu Xu gives us the opportunity to pause for thought. Through the plot of the story, he asks readers to consider the ways in which this young lady, in fact all of the women in his stories, have confronted the realities of their lives but with determination pursued their own goals. Xu Xu was an intellectual who gave several layers of meaning to all of his stories.

Readers of this collection will be rewarded both by the five stories presented, as well as by the excellent Introduction and Afterward provided by Frederik H. Green, translator of the stories and a scholar on the life and works of Xu Xu. Green's explanations set the life of Xu Xu in the context of the currents of modern Chinese literature during his lifetime. Xu Xu came to feel that during the twentieth century literature lost its confidence in mankind, as if it were wrestled to the ground by writers with other agendas. He wrote that the literature of the twentieth century was a literature of "doubt" [*huaiyi* 懷疑]. Green compares the literary trends of modern European writers of the twentieth century along with some of those from China's Republican period, displaying for us a picture of the literary atmosphere in which Xu Xu created his works. Green's contributions to this collection give us a primer of Xu Xu, his life and times, and examples of several of his popular stories. This well-conceived volume tells us much about Xu Xu, the times in which he lived, and it is a delight to read.

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Daniel Bell and Wang Pei, *Just Hierarchy: Why Social Hierarchies Matter in China and the Rest of the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. 288 pages, ISBN: 978-0691200897.

The core message of Daniel Bell and Wang Pei's 汪沛 new book, *Just Hierarchy: Why Social Hierarchies Matter in China and the Rest of the World* is clear, even elegantly so. They state: "Whatever the drawbacks of traditional forms of hierarchy, the effort to combat all forms of hierarchy is neither possible nor desirable" (p. 13). Furthermore, "...(t)he claim that morally justifiable social hierarchies should structure our social lives on an everyday basis, including our relations with loved ones. That's the claim we'd like to defend in this book" (p. 14). And defend they do, or at least attempt to. The result is, unfortunately, not as convincing as one might hope, particularly given that the conversation itself, in effect a softly spoken interrogation into the nature of human social interaction, is very relevant to the current moment in time, a moment when the power dynamics on a global stage are, indeed, shifting, and China's rise to prominence if not supremacy within the coming decades either forces us or provides an opportunity for us—depending on one's view—to imagine a different approach to social and political structure writ large. Adding to this now is the upheaval of COVID-19, coming itself amid a longer-term shift from global to local, internationalist to nationalist or even nativist politics, and we are faced as never before with the basic question of how to best interact with others, near and far. Bell and Wang's work responds directly to this question and at least furthers the conversation in some productive ways.

The problem is, in some respects, one of tone. On page 30, for instance, amid a discussion of hierarchies as they are manifested in relationships between lovers, the authors make the following point: "We oppose any relationship that involves involuntary physical violence toward another person, no matter how loved the recipient" (p. 30)—similarly, in a discussion of parent-child relations and in mere parenthetical terms "including physical punishment, which we do not endorse" (p. 53). Gratifying as it might be to learn that the authors do not encourage domestic violence, the notion that a work as expansive as this—particularly given that the expansiveness is covered in the relatively condensed space of only 206 pages—would also be a sort of "how to" for the modern world in terms of organizing human relationships—whether in the form of romantic partnerships, family, small social groups, larger organizations, governments, or national and global entities, in short, everyone everywhere—is a bit hard to accept. The first question that might come to mind is: Who are the authors to endorse (or not) anything in terms of social relationships? The answer is simply that the two are professors working in China (Bell at Shandong University and

Tsinghua, Wang at Fudan University in Shanghai). Bell has published articles on related topics in the past, if by "related" we mean advocacy for a reappraisal or even critique of what has for decades passed as virtually universally accepted truth: that human relationships based on individual rights and extended to a larger system of liberal democracy fueled by capitalism is the path forward for all of humanity. Exposing that and related assumptions to careful scrutiny is certainly long overdue, and Bell has contributed significantly to this endeavor. In previous works, such as *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society*, though, Bell's territory was narrower, and more explicitly China focused, even if the implications of his work have always been a critique of Western-centric political thinking.[1] This book, as the subtitle makes clear, is a full-on effort to include "the rest of the world," and therein lies the challenge that the work does not quite meet. The authors tackle their subjects bravely, even fearlessly, and their tone is authoritative ("we do not endorse") throughout. Their authority, however, is not entirely defensible given the highly disparate nature of the "fields" into which they almost meander. Bell and Wang are principally scholars of political philosophy, and it is in that area that their contribution is most notable. Put another way, it is one thing to opine on how hierarchies can, should, and should not work in parent-child relationships, and the implications of such relationships for larger political structures, essentially, Confucian social programming. To move into dynamics of human sexual experience (hierarchically speaking, "dominant" and "passive") seems to require some other mode of inquiry, not to mention academic literature review, and again the same as the topic shifts abruptly into regional and global politics, human-animal relations, artificial intelligence, and more. The scope of the discussion, in other words, is vast, and boldly so. It is undercut, though, by a sort of breezy style that suggests the relatively non-academic nature of the writing—the target audience is certainly general interest—and at the same time a questionable attempt to cover "everything" hierarchical, as though such an enterprise would be possible. Nonetheless, the authors proceed as though their pronouncements on this vast collection of topics is somehow warranted and worthy of consideration.

It is also important to note that Bell and Wang's work does not come from a vacuum, by any means. Principally, this discussion draws on contemporary philosopher Zhao Tingyang's 趙汀陽 promulgation of a revised Confucian "all under heaven" [*tianxia* 天下] in the contemporary world, one that extends far beyond its original Chinese origins, to be located in some super-governmental

1 Daniel Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

entity with dominion over the entire world. The problem with Zhao's view, Bell and Wang observe, is that it equalizes all forms of mutual care across a geographic territory that is untenable and, in any event, not aligned with actual Confucian teaching. The authors go on (pp. 132-135) to amend Zhao's theory according to a Confucian approach predicated on "graded love," meaning a degree of commitment to those around us based on concentrically graduated circles extending from intimate, in which reciprocal action is most intense, to remote, where although responsibility remains to both the human and animal realms broadly speaking, it is undertaken with much less engagement and commitment. In this sense, Bell and Wang's book is a welcome step toward the practical application of the ideas of just hierarchical interactions, schematized, for instance, in terms of "strong" and "weak" reciprocity. This is arguably the core contribution of their work. They begin with the observation that technically, in terms of global political discourse, not to mention law (at least since the Peace of Westphalia of 1648), each state is an equal among others. This equality belies the essential fact, though, that some states are clearly stronger and more significant than others and, accordingly, have different responsibilities to the global order. The relationships, in short, are always hierarchical to some degree and should be recognized as such. The distinction in terms of reciprocity is as follows: essentially, in "weak" relationships, reciprocity exists, but it is fragile and narrowly understood, with each party to the relationship focused solely on what it can gain, meaning that after a shift in benefit, the relationship ceases to be desirable, thus even minor fluctuation can mean the demise of the relationship itself. "Strong" reciprocity, meanwhile, is more durable, defined as a relationship in which each side is aware of and attentive to the other's benefit, even when its own is occasionally minimized or entirely nonexistent. The idea is that a strong reciprocal relationship exists with a full view of a longer-term relationship, elastic enough in its connection to weather, so to speak, the vicissitudes of material and even psychological change over time. As the authors describe:

> what counts as the interest of each state itself comes to be influenced, at least partly, by the interests (and culture and history) of the other state: There is mutual earning that affects how people think of their own interests and conceptions of the good life. (p. 107)

This is actually quite profound, as it pushes immediately beyond the narrow consideration of material gain (along the lines of the traditional tributary system) and goes on to mutual cultural appreciation and learning. The authors are not at pains to discuss what this learning might look like or how the "good

life" from one state's point of view becomes revised on the basis of interaction with the other state, obviously in the direction of weak to strong being the more striking example.

And this is a major point. Apart from an authoritative tone that is perhaps not very warranted, the book's many topics—hierarchies between intimates, citizens, states, humans and animals, humans and machines—each truly demands a book of its own, and each contribution could be very powerful. The strongest section, meaning it is well researched and documented and clearly explained, is undoubtedly the comparison of political power and its furtherance through meritocratic versus democratic systems, a subject that the authors tackle with substance and subtlety but that certainly could be expanded to include more examples and suggested applications. Similarly, the discussion of ritual in Chapter 3, "Hierarchy between States," comes something closer to envisioning how to implement the ideal of a just hierarchy in the global-political context. The key philosopher in this part of their discussion is Xunzi 荀子 [313-238 BCE], one of the three major Confucian thinkers, specifically his ideas about the function of ritual among contending states. Ritual [*li* 禮] is arguably the key concept in the Confucian understanding of how humans should interact generally, the social practice that allows us to rise above base self-interest and realize the benefits of mutual understanding and reliance most substantially. Xunzi's writings have notable implications for hierarchical relationships, in which rulers of stronger states, who could, of course, dispense with all pleasantries and simply plunder and subjugate the populace to achieve their aims, instead, take a different approach based on ritual. When viewed specifically in terms of strong reciprocal connections,

> Rituals such as common birth, marriage, and burial practices also have the effect of including the poor and marginalized as part of the society's culture and common understandings. (p. 121)

Common or shared understanding is of major importance and, in practice, would lead to what Xunzi calls "humane authority" [*wang* 王], a condition in which strong states renounce strong-arm tactics [*ba* 霸] for winning the hearts of people near and far with the proper use of rituals. Again, this falls into the *tianxia* discussion mentioned above, which is why Bell and Wang advocate a revision to Zhao Tingyang's approach, such that the geographical parameters set by this "all under heaven" is now "all under heaven" only in East Asia, where one could imagine that rituals could be instated and ideally strong but even in some cases necessarily weak reciprocities establish a solid, stable approach to interstate dynamics. There are two problems with this picture: Bell and Wang

address the first—the fact that US interests, in particular the US military presence, makes such a realignment unlikely in the short term—and the second (which they do not) is that this new East Asian *tianxia* bears unfortunate similarity to the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere [*dai toya kyoeiken* 大東亞共榮圈] envisioned by Japan during World War II, a period when a strong-weak relationship was expressed in the form of brutality, mass killings, and systematic rape. Although Bell and Wang allow that other East Asian states are likely to be suspicious of China's intentions in this regard, I think that is, at best, an understatement.

But again, these are rapidly changing times, and the US vested interests in the region in particular may be shifting, which is to say in essence that the "strong-weak" dichotomy positioning the United States at the top might itself be undergoing basic inversion. The trade war, which Bell and Wang do not discuss, or the antics of President Donald Trump, which they mention six separate times, are already essential cases in point. That is even before COVID-19 emerged, perhaps the most spectacular example of what happens when non-hierarchical systems, just or unjust, attempt to meet challenges to which they have no meaningful response. In other words, now is the time to be seriously considering the perspectives offered by Bell and Wang offer in this book, and, if for no other reason, it is important to read it.

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