Cycles of Cathay:¹
Sinology, Philology, and Histories of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in the United States

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Abstract: This article offers a critical assessment of the field of Song history in the United States as it has developed since World War II. By placing the development of Song studies in the United States within the wider context of the philological tradition of European sinology, the development of academic discourse in Republican China and Meiji Japan, and the social-scientific methods preferred of postwar area studies, this essay recovers narrative strands that have been commonly omitted from accounts of the historiography of China in the United States. By their partial resumption of the philological methods of sinology, cultural historians of imperial China have created a filiation that is distinct from the new medievalism in the historiography of Europe and that complicates recent discussions of the methods and politics of social history and cultural history.

So the complete identity of the medieval Persian list of “Catayan” words of Nasir-al-Din and Ulugh Beg, published by Graevius, with the Chinese cycles and chronological series, was established for the first time by Golius and with it, the identity of China and Catay. . . . Incidentally it had led [in 1655] to the first printing (from wood) of Chinese characters in Holland, which were really the first properly printed characters in Europe.²

¹ The name “Cathay” derives from “Khitay” (Khitan, Qidan), the pastoral people who founded the Liao dynasty (907–1125) in what is now the Northeast of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Mongolia. During the Mongol era, “Cathay” became the common European name for the land north of the Huai River. See Karl A. Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, History of Chinese Society: Liao, 907–1125 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949), 1–2. A “cycle of Cathay” is a period of sixty years, the approximate age of Song studies in the United States.

To accommodate the general reader, I have used the common pinyin transcription for Chinese words and names throughout the article, including in quotes from postwar authors who use a different system of transcription in the original text.

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During the 1980s and the 1990s, the related tendencies of post-structuralism, post-modernity, and the age of the screen led scholars of medieval Europe to re-examine the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages, and to reassess the legacy of nineteenth-century philology: “new medievalism tries to contextualize the concept of modernity as a process of cultural change, and thus to profit from the decline of modernism’s hegemony both as the dominant period and the arbiter of methodological orthodoxy.” In their reflexive inquiries, these scholars rediscovered at the same time the essential mutability of the medieval manuscript and the positivist assumptions about language, text, and nation that had caused the philologists of the nineteenth century to condemn this unfixity as a form of childishness that their critical editions should improve. The return to philology was thus at the same time a critique of philology. The living variance of the texte mobile made visible the historical particularity of nineteenth-century notions of authorship and the authoritative text, as well as the nationalist rivalries and personal feuds of German and French philologists.

Cultural historians of China have similarly re-engaged a nineteenth-century philological tradition in a reflexive critique of received notions of text and writing. Different from the new medievalists, however, cultural historians of the Chinese imperial past have resumed philological methods of the sinological tradition to critique, not only the legacy of colonialism and orientalism, but also the privileged position of the quantitative social sciences in the area studies of the Cold War. The new medievalists have argued that nineteenth-century philologists misinterpreted the alterity of the Middle Ages, which they subsequently obscured by imposing modern ideas of text and authorship on its mutable texts—“science moderne du texte moderne, appliquée à des objets anciens.” But in China (as in India), European scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries encountered an educated class of literati whose philological methods connected them to a continuous, if changing, tradition of canonical study and classical composition. As they studied with literati of the Qing Empire (1636–1912), sinologists were less apt perhaps to mistake the foreignness


of ancient and medieval texts than to assimilate the belief in an essential continuity in the written tradition, from the Qing dynasty to the Song dynasty (960–1279), and from the Song to the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) and Zhou (ca. 1100–256 BCE) dynasties. The founders of area studies in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s broke with the sinological tradition and instead applied to the texts of the imperial past the quantitative methods and analytical terms of the social sciences. This new approach to the imperial past did not mark a departure from scholarship in China, however, as many of the founders of area studies acquired their initial training at the new universities in the Republic of China, where a generation of young historians wrote histories of the new nation-state by means of modern methods and scientific vocabularies which they, in turn, had acquired during their academic training in Japan, Europe, and the United States.

Because most historiographical treatises on Chinese studies in the United States begin their narratives with the establishment of area studies after World War II, they have tended to neglect the crucial departure of area studies from European sinology, as well as the divergent origins that affiliate sinology with Qing literati, and area studies with Republican academics. The recovery of these different filiations, however, is crucial to a proper understanding of cultural history and the cultural turn in the study of the Chinese imperial past, for it explains how cultural historians of the imperial past use new philological methods to critique both the sinological tradition and the more recent methods of social history. Recognizing the particularities of textual production in imperial China, cultural historians have newly acknowledged the value of the works of colonial sinologists, who possessed a living familiarity with literati culture, and have drawn on these works in their postcolonial critique of Cold War social science. At the same time, cultural historians have used critical philological methods to disarticulate long-standing assumptions about a unified and continuous “Chinese” tradition that sinologists and Republican nationalists had inherited from Qing literati. The consideration of this longer trajectory of the study of imperial China in Europe and the United States, in other words, allows the recovery of neglected connections and divergences between sinology and area studies, and of the distinct origins of Chinese and European medievalisms.

The shifting histories of the Song dynasty in the United States illustrate the gradual abandonment of universalizing categories from the social sciences in favor of a new philology that accommodates the discursive particularities of the sources. The first generation of Song historians—

notably E. A. Kracke, Jr., James T. C. Liu, and Robert M. Hartwell—began a reassessment of the political, intellectual, and economic achievements of the period, based largely on the analysis and tabulation of standard sources that were centered on the capital and the imperial court. Their students shared their disposition toward the quantitative social sciences, but they transferred their attention to local sources in order to evaluate whether these would confirm the trends in social mobility, intellectual debate, and economic development discerned by their teachers. As their approach became anthropological rather than sociological, they found that the allusive texts of Song literati would not yield the density of data required by sociological computation, and that the sources would not allow conventional distinctions between social history and intellectual history, or between economic history and political history. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, art historians and intellectual historians determined that only an integrated study of literati culture—with its poetry and prefaces, inscriptions and examination essays, memorials and colophons, paintings and calligraphy—would do full justice to their subjects. Relying in part on the philological methods of prewar sinologists, cultural historians used epistemological categories of Song literati to critique the universalizing claims of social science, and thereby restored the unfamiliar discourses and unexpected narratives of the past, and “the buried potentialities of the present.”


In Colonial Circles

The academic study of China in Europe began in the early nineteenth century, in the context of the colonial enterprise. On December 11, 1814, the Collège de France appointed Abel Rémuasat (1788–1832) as the first incumbent of its “Chaire de langues et littératures chinoises et tartares-manchoues,” the first such Chair in Europe. University College, London, elected the Reverend Samuel Kidd (1799–1843) the first Professor
of Chinese in Britain in 1837. Additional Chairs were established at King’s College in 1843, at Oxford in 1876, and at Cambridge in 1888. The substantial library of Chinese books and the varied collections of Chinese objects accumulated in St. Petersburg by Russian embassies and caravans during the eighteenth century, were augmented in 1855 by the appointment of V. P. Vasil’ev (1818–1900) to a new Chair of Chinese Language and Literature at St. Petersburg University. In 1876, a Chair of Chinese Language and Literature was created also at Leiden University to train specialized officials for the enhanced colonial administration of the Netherlands East Indies. The Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin established a “Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen” in 1887 at the urging of Bismarck, to assist the expanding commercial interests of the young German state. The first German Chair in Sinology was created in 1909, at the Kolonialinstitut der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg. As the academic institutions of even these colonial and commercial powers lacked comprehensive libraries and basic reference works, it need not surprise that governments without pressing interests did not invest their resources in the study of that remote country and its arcane language.

From these gradual, scattered beginnings emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a generation of erudite, cosmopolitan sinologists. Some of the early academic appointments had been held by men who were self-taught in the Chinese language, and by returned missionaries. The new, urbane generation of sinologists set out as diplomats, legation interpreters, and colonial administrators, and traveled widely through the Qing Empire and the Republic of China before returning to Europe, where they engaged in studies of Chinese antiquity that were informed by the work of Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy and the Foundation of Chinese Studies in Post-Revolutionary France,” Variétés sinologiques, new series, 78 (1995): 175.


9. See Barrett, Singular Listlessness, 75–79; Twitchett, Land Tenure, 8.


by a thorough knowledge of living languages and a vivid sense of the past. When Jan Jakob Maria de Groot (1854–1921) was sent to Amoy in 1877 to learn Fujianese, in preparation for service as an interpreter in the Netherlands East Indies, he made detailed observations of the cycle of annual religious celebrations, which he published in Dutch in 1881–1883 and in French in 1886. By the time he was appointed Professor of Ethnology at Leiden University in 1891, he had undertaken another four years of ethnological research (1886–1890) and acquired a detailed understanding of the continuities between the religious practices of commoners, officials, and the imperial court. Otto Franke (1863–1946), who in 1909 became the first professor of Sinology in Germany, had in 1888 abandoned his studies of Sanskrit to become an interpreter at the German legation in Beijing. Henri Maspero (1883–1945) spent most of the period 1908–1920 at the École Française d’Extrême-Orient in Hanoi, investigating the historical geography of Vietnam, studying Thai languages, and observing the religious practices of the peoples in the Sino-Vietnamese borderland. His extensive researches in living languages and cultures, and his dedicated study of historical artifacts, in later years assisted him in developing new approaches to the transmitted texts and archaeological remains of Chinese antiquity. In 1910–1912, Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978), who had published an article on Jönköping dialects at the age of 15 and obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Slavic languages at 19, conducted research on nineteen varieties of Mandarin Chinese in Henan, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Nanjing. This research became the basis for his dissertation, completed at Uppsala University in 1915, as well as for his Études sur la phonologie chinoise (1915–1926), and for his later reconstructions of Middle and Ancient Chinese.

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The particular value of the scholarship of this generation, besides its general erudition, resides in its critical but immediate engagement with the traditions of the imperial period. When Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918) climbed Mount Tai in 1891 and in 1907, it still occupied a prominent place in the sacred geography of a living polity.19 J. J. M. de Groot could still write, in 1911, “Up to the present time Heaven always has had a saint in Peking, seated on the throne, to convert the Tao of Heaven into a Tao of Man by means of a government supremely learned and sage, and by means of his private conduct and example, and continual promulgation of his will.”20 Marcel Granet (1884–1940) developed his Durkheimian interpretation of the ancient canon while studying its texts in 1911–1913 with literati who had yet memorized them for the imperial examinations.21 And even after the imperial altars were abandoned and examination halls were converted into modern schools, a common sympathy bound the scholar-officials of the fallen dynasty to the learned diplomats of Europe. J. J. L. Duyvendak (1889–1954), who served as an interpreter at the Dutch legation in Beijing from 1912 to 1918, preserved the following charming vignette from that period:

Even recently, one barely realized that the Westerners practiced philosophy and art. Technicians they were, who manufactured cannon and telegraph cables and cars. But in matters of the mind, the only thing a Chinese literatus respects, they were raw barbarians. The natural wildness of their customs, still expressed daily in their impetuous ballgames, was tempered somewhat by the injunctions of the Christian religion, which to that extent was deserving of praise. But otherwise . . . ah, how well I remember the infinite amazement of my old friend—I mention him here with grateful affection—, my Chinese teacher, a venerable literatus of the old stamp, when on a certain day I led him past my bookcase and confessed that of cannon, railroads, and telegraphs I understood as little as he, and that my treasure of books was comprised almost exclusively of works of a historical, literary, linguistic, and philosophical nature! How his amazement yet increased when I translated for him a few verses by [P. C.] Boutens and he recognized in them a tone that he knew from his own poets!22

The destructive force of World War II and its violent aftermath did not end this sinological tradition, but it diminished its resources and separated scholars from the land and the people they studied. The war killed several prominent scholars: Marcel Granet died from anger at the German invasion of France, Henri Maspero succumbed to illness and exhaustion at Buchenwald. Many of the most promising German sinologists left their country between 1933 and 1945, and very few of them returned in later years. One of the finest Chinese libraries of Europe, at Göttingen, was evacuated and eventually destroyed. As the devastated countries of Europe rebuilt their cities and their factories after the war, they allotted few resources to the study of China, a country whose relevance was lessened by the effective closure of the People’s Republic of China and by the widespread decolonization in Asia. The Dutch government no longer required Chinese-speaking officials for its colonial administration. The École Française d’Extrême-Orient closed its office in Hanoi in 1954. Étienne Balazs (born Balázs István, 1905–1963), though later called “the father of modern studies of China in Europe,” spent several decades on the shifting periphery of this unstable academic world. After defending a profoundly original dissertation on the economic history of the Tang dynasty (618–907) in Berlin in 1932, he fled in 1935 to France where his Hungarian origin, his German degree, and his lacking experience of contemporary East Asia excluded him from the regular positions in his field. In 1940, as the German armies invaded France, he fled into the countryside where he lived in poverty until 1948. When Fernand Braudel (1902–1985) eventually recruited Balazs in 1954 to set up the study of China at the Sixth Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, he submitted Balazs’s proposal for a Manuel de l’histoire des Song to the Rockefeller Foundation, preliminary to more ambitious proposals for the...

funding of the social sciences and *aires culturelles* at the Sixth Section. The Rockefeller Foundation in due course acknowledged the value of Braudel’s *aires culturelles*, but it rejected Balazs’s series of reference works on the Song dynasty as it deemed them to be focused on too distant a period of Chinese history, and to perpetuate a nineteenth-century tradition of history and philology.\(^\text{27}\)

**Circulating Sciences**

Although emigrated European scholars contributed to the strength of the postwar area studies programs established at universities in the United States, the founders of these programs belonged to a separate academic tradition.\(^\text{28}\) The young American scholars who arrived in Beijing during the 1930s found only the faded, overgrown ruins of the former empire, and they did not seek the company of its retired officials. When George N. Kates in 1933 abandoned his dual career in American film and British academia to cultivate the tastes of a scholar-aesthete in Beijing, his interest in “the traditional way of life” immediately distinguished him “from the other Americans who were studying Chinese there.”\(^\text{29}\) As John King Fairbank (1907–1991), who was one of those “other Americans,” confesses in his 1967 foreword to a reprint of Kates’s memoir:

> The young Americans in Peking in the 1930’s did not see themselves as “old China hands” and were fascinated by the China around them, whenever they could spare the time, but they were intent on becoming sinologists—and sinologists tend to be purposeful creatures, determined to master a language and

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professional technique that they hope will unlock the secret of a civilization, so
determined, in fact, that they sometimes disregard the civilization immediately
available to them.30

The American students instead sought the guidance of a young genera-
tion of Chinese academics who had obtained undergraduate and graduate
degrees in Japan, Europe, and the United States, and who comprised the
faculty of the new colleges and universities of the Republic of China.31
Fairbank, for example, studied Qing dynasty documents with T. F. Chiang
(Jiang Tingfu, 1895–1965; B.A., Oberlin, 1918; Ph.D., Columbia, 1923), the
head of the History Department at Qinghua University. Edward A. Kracke,
Jr. (1908–1976) received training in Song dynasty history from William
Hung (Hong Ye, 1893–1980; B.A., Ohio Wesleyan, 1917; M.A., Columbia,
1919) at Yenching University.32 The structure of the new colleges and uni-
versities was explicitly modeled on European and American institutions
of higher learning, as the Republican government withheld recognition
from universities that were not divided into proper faculties and depart-
ments.33 Although some departments continued the philological traditions
(and even the scholarly lineages) of imperial literati, most scholars were
eager to apply to Chinese history the sociological categories and disciplin-
ary methodologies they had acquired during their studies abroad—just
as an earlier generation of Japanese historians had rewritten the Chinese
past according to the methods, concepts, and narratives of Henry Thomas
Buckle (1821–1862), François Guizot (1787–1874), and Leopold von Ranke
(1795–1886).34 The American and Chinese scholars who after World War
II built the area studies programs in the United States referred, therefore, not to the European sinological tradition and its philological, interpretative approach to imperial culture, but to the work of Chinese historians who had achieved a mastery of social-scientific methodologies abroad (often by writing dissertations about the history of Europe or the United States) and applied these to the Chinese past upon their appointment at the Republican universities. The line that divides American area studies from European sinology, in other words, is continuous with the line that divides the Republic of China from the Qing Empire, modern schools from the imperial examinations, and Meiji Japan (1868–1912) from the Tokugawa shogunate (1600–1868), running backward from 1946 to 1912 to 1905 to 1868.


for war”), the pursuit of “total world knowledge” in the American area studies programs created a place for the new social-science disciplines which the traditional, conservative faculties of European and American academia were otherwise slow to accommodate. European sinologists had made important contributions to the development of the social sciences: Marcel Granet, for example, had worked closely with Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), and had inspired Marc Bloch (1886–1944) to write Les rois thaumaturges. Étienne Balazs had engaged the comparative sociology of Max Weber and Karl Marx, and was assisting Fernand Braudel in his reform of the Sixth Section. But these sinologists had remained faithful also to the nineteenth-century philological tradition, using sociological theory in the main to develop new interpretations of ancient texts.

Balazs’s studies of the economic and legal institutions of medieval China, after all, took the form of annotated translations of treatises from the seventh-century History of the Sui (Suishu), whose discursive particularities he wished to maintain as part of his institutional history. The social sciences favored in American area studies, in contrast, were modeled more closely on the natural sciences, in hopes of diminishing the differences between “the social and the natural and humanistic disciplines” and of establishing thereby “a truly solid base upon which universal social science laws and probabilities may be built.”

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of European sinology during the 1950s and 1960s—sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Defense Education Act—were replete with maps, graphs, and tables that laid out trends and patterns suggested by sociologists and political scientists. The universalizing categories of these early studies revealed social configurations and trajectories of political development that Chinese literati and European sinologists had not detected. They also canceled, however, the generic conventions and historical discourses that scholars such as Balazs had attempted to preserve in their monographs.

A Grand Cycle, Recycled

The first generation of Song historians in the United States asserted the academic and political relevance of their period by reference to the work of the Japanese historian and publicist Naitô Konan (Naitô Torajirô, 1866–1934). In the work of several decades, Naitô had identified the Song dynasty as the beginning of the “modern period” (kinsei), the first modern period in world history. Joshua Fogel has called Naitô’s On China (Shinaron, 1914), in which Naitô first published his ideas about the periodization of the Chinese past, “probably the most influential work on Chinese history and culture of the twentieth century.” As Naitô continued to revise his ideas through the end of his life, however, a final summary of the characteristics of this modern period appeared only after his death, formulated by his son Naitô Kenkichi. The latter discerned in the posthumous papers of his father the following eight defining elements: the disappearance of the aristocracy of the Tang dynasty; the autocratic power of the emperor, enabled by the absence of an aristocracy; the absolute power of the emperor, formalized in law and political institutions; a greater freedom and mobility of the common people; the replacement of aristocratic privilege by a system of examinations open to commoners; the inauguration of substantive policy debates, under the pressure of a


44. Fogel, Politics and Sinology, 165.
new political consciousness among commoners; the monetization of the economy; and the rise of a popular culture of novels, songs, and theater.\footnote{See Miyakawa, “An Outline,” 538–39. Cf. Fogel, Politics and Sinology, 165–210; Twitchett, Land Tenure, 16.}

The profound political, economic, social, and cultural changes created by the violent transition from the Tang dynasty to the Song afforded this period an obvious historical importance. The establishment of an enduring autocratic government and the development of an indigenous, proto-capitalist commerce and industry, moreover, gave the period political relevance. As American historians pondered the reasons for the “loss of China” to Communism, the Song seemed to offer repressed traditions of bourgeois liberalism and political resistance that might redeem this loss.\footnote{See, e.g., Wm. Theodore de Bary, “A Reappraisal of Neo-Confucianism,” in Studies in Chinese Thought, ed. Arthur F. Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 81–111.}

In the charged political context of Cold War area studies (which were concerned also with the prevention of a Japanese return to fascism), the imperialist origins of Naitô’s ideas were largely overlooked. Although Arthur F. Wright (1913–1976) recognized, in an essay published in 1960, that Naitô and his contemporaries had devised their periodizations of the East Asian past to justify the Japanese invasion of the continent (where the impetuous youth of Japan might protect the fragile subtlety of Chinese culture against the alien violence of Western imperialism), most of Wright’s peers disregarded the particular origins of Naitô’s hypothesis in the political debates of the Taishô era (1912–1926).\footnote{See Wright, “The Study of Chinese Civilization,” 249. Cf. Fogel, Politics and Sinology, 165–68, 182–95, 268–72; Tanaka, Japan’s Orient, 158–59, 205–09; Von Glahn, “Imagining Pre-Modern China,” 38–39. Hisayuki Miyakawa studiously avoided all mention of political context in his “Outline of the Naitô Hypothesis.”}

The positivist premises of social-science historians during the 1950s and 1960s, moreover, matched those of the Japanese historians during the 1920s and 1930s (and, indeed, those of the Chinese historians who devised a suitable Marxist periodization for the People’s Republic of China during this time), and thereby elided the peculiar origins of the Naitô hypothesis.\footnote{Cf. Tanaka, Japan’s Orient, 275–76, 282–83.}

Perhaps the recognition of familiar nineteenth-century narratives—translated into Japanese during the Meiji period, applied to the East Asian past in Taishô Japan and Republican China, and re-imported in this guise to the United States—contributed to the truth effect.

In a well-known 1955 essay, E. A. Kracke, the founder of “the field of Song studies in America,” described the “almost revolutionary” change in Song society in a manner that showed his familiarity with Japanese scholarship: the migration of the Song population to the fertile South,
the production of a surplus of grain in this fertile region with its favorable climate, the proliferation of trade and specialization encouraged by the agricultural surplus, the creation of an infrastructure of roads and canals to facilitate interregional and maritime commerce, the proceeding monetization of the economy (including the introduction of the first true paper currency in the world), and the development of a flourishing, sophisticated urban culture. During the ensuing decades, American historians of the Song dynasty would reiterate this narrative, in substantially the same form, in the opening pages of their monographs.

Kracke’s most influential publication has proved to be a short article entitled “Family vs. Merit in Chinese Civil Service Examinations under the Empire,” which appeared in the Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies in 1947. In this article he contrived to show, by a statistical analysis of two Song dynasty lists of graduates, that the imperial examinations allowed for significant social mobility. The lists contain the names of the 330 examination graduates of the year 1148 and of the 601 graduates of the year 1256, along with the names and highest office of their father, paternal grandfather, and paternal great-grandfather. Assuming that the record of office-holding among linear male ancestors was representative of each graduate’s social background, Kracke calculated that about 56 percent of the class of 1148 and about 58 percent of the class of 1256 had “no apparent official family tradition whatever” and that, by consequence, “a very large share of the higher governmental positions [which were reserved for graduates of the examinations] would be in the hands of the novi homines.” 50 Although Kracke himself soon refuted these extreme formulations, his 1947 essay became the point of reference for a substantial literature on social mobility and the imperial examinations, and it is still cited occasionally by historians unfamiliar with more recent scholarship. 51

James Tzu-chien Liu (1919–1993) began his academic career as a student of political science, first at Qinghua University and then at Yenching University, where (like Kracke) he worked with William Hung. He completed a dissertation on Sino-Japanese relations at the University of Pittsburgh in 1950, but the recurrent memory of his imprisonment and torture by Japanese police officers in Beijing pressed him to abandon this earlier research, and he focused his attention instead upon the history


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of the Song dynasty. In this new field of endeavor, his prior training in political science remained apparent. In a 1957 essay about the early Song reformer Fan Zhongyan (989–1052), for example, Liu took up the implications of Kracke’s work on the examinations and asked whether “these scholar-officials of non-bureaucratic extraction develop[ed] a political idealism which reflected their social origin and also added new significance to the Confucian tradition that they revived.” He found a dichotomy between career bureaucrats, “who looked mainly for promotion,” and Confucian idealists, who felt bound to render “good service to the empire and its people.” In his 1959 monograph on the New Policies of Wang Anshi (1021–1086), he continued this sociological approach to early Song politics. Following Chinese and Japanese scholars, he proposed that the factional conflict that beset Wang Anshi’s radical reforms might be explained in part by the discrepant social and economic backgrounds of the opponents, as “[t]he reformers represented principally the newly risen medium-sized landowners” of the South, while “the conservatives . . . represented essentially the interests of the hereditary large landowners in the North.” In his 1967 biography of Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) (first published in Chinese in 1963), Liu argued that the “neo-traditionalism” of Song Confucian thought, although vigorous and innovative at first, soon became “a state-sponsored system of thought that stifled questioning and criticism”—a notion that he later elaborated in China Turning Inward.

To the institutional history of the Northern Song begun by E. A. Kracke and the inquiries into Northern Song political thought by James T. C. Liu, the young Robert M. Hartwell (1932–1996) added a rigorous, quantitative assessment of the Northern Song economy. In “A Revolution in the Chinese Iron and Coal Industries During the Northern Sung, 960–1126 A.D.,” Hartwell estimated, based on a combination of qualitative evidence and fragmentary statistics, that iron production by 1078 amounted to 75,000 to 150,000 metric tons per year, numbers comparable to those of early industrial England and, indeed, not reached again in the Chinese past itself.


53. Cf. Liu, Reform, ix, and inside cover.


55. Liu, “An Early Sung Reformer,” 120.


until the nineteenth century. In the same article, he hypothesized that coal came into widespread use during this period, not only to heat urban dwellings and to bake bricks, but to smelt iron and to manufacture steel. Although Donald Wagner has recently shown the inadequacy of Hartwell’s statistical analysis (which was based on the assumption that the Northern Song administration of iron production was regular and uniform, whereas it was in fact irregular and various), his qualitative evidence remains convincing. This small article, a mere ten pages in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, offered concrete examples of the technological innovations of the early Song, with startling numbers that immediately drew the attention of historians of Europe. In addition, the article complicated the shape of the Chinese past, not just by insisting that the industrial developments of the eleventh century amounted to a “revolution,” but also by arguing that these developments did not follow a linear trajectory, and that in fact they were undone after the loss of the northern iron and coal mines to the Jurchen conquest in 1126. During the following ten years, Hartwell examined the possible reasons for the failure of this precocious industrial revolution in a series of articles about the specific historical conditions of the Northern Song and about Song economic thought.

The first generation of Song historians in the United States thus established their period of inquiry as a legitimate field within area studies. The work of Naitô Konan gave the Song dynasty a prominent place within Chinese history, in a Hegelian scheme of cultural maturation that Western historians recognized as authoritative. The application of methodologies from the quantitative social sciences, evident in the analytical categories and numerical tables of their publications, contributed to the area studies objective of making “the great civilizations . . . more truly comparable with one another.” The specific topics of their research, moreover, possessed immediate relevance for the global politics of the Cold War: the sponsorship system of the Northern Song bureaucracy suggested “a spirit akin to that in parliamentary democracy”; the reforms of Wang Anshi possessed renewed interest “[t]oday, when the Chinese tradition

of statecraft is being reappraised in the light of current developments”;65 Song neo-traditionalism created a “state-sponsored system of thought that stifled questioning and criticism,” but it also contained enduring principles of political resistance;66 just as the economic enterprise of Song merchants and officials indicated a proto-capitalist disposition that might one day be reactivated. Most importantly, however, the scholars of this first generation summarized the work of leading Chinese and Japanese historians, and published original articles and lucid books that introduced American audiences for the first time to the accomplishments of this important period in world history.

A Proliferation of Cycles

In 1982, Robert Hartwell published a long article in the Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies that summarized his detailed demographic and prosopographic studies of the past decade and that offered a set of new, compelling hypotheses about the shape of the imperial past.67 In his “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750–1550,” Hartwell confirmed the southward shift of the population, the social transformation of the ruling elite, the economic revolution, and the cultural achievements identified in earlier scholarship, but he insisted that these changes, rather than linear and uniform, were “cyclical as well as linear, took place at different rates, and sometimes moved in opposite directions in the various regions of the empire.”68 He proposed, therefore, that “an understanding of the historical process requires a systematic analysis of the internal dynamics of ecologically diverse physiocratic regions which were at different stages of development and a careful inquiry into the cumulative impact of the interrelationships between these major areas on the nature of Chinese society at various points in time.”69 Hartwell accordingly defined seven macroregions (adapted from the work of G. William Skinner) and illustrated the uniform but asynchronous, cyclical pattern of their settlement, demographic growth, economic development, administrative organization, and cultural attainments. The most influential hypothesis formulated in the article, however, concerned a linear development: based on his prosopographic research Hartwell argued that the most profound social transformation of the ruling elite occurred, not from the Tang to the Northern Song (when the founding elite and a stable professional

65. Liu, Reform, inside cover.
68. Ibid., 367.
69. Ibid.
elite “preserved the political dominance of the North for several generations after the economic and demographic transition of the South had been accomplished”), but from the Northern Song to the Southern Song, as “a semi-hereditary professional bureaucratic elite” was replaced by “a multitude of local elite gentry families.”

For all its original achievement, Hartwell’s 1982 article was not so much a pioneering essay as a signal publication that introduced a new generation of social historians and that established the authority of a new approach to Song history, based on the methods of the Annales school. Several years before the appearance of Hartwell’s article, David Johnson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey had published important studies about the decline of the great aristocratic families of the Tang dynasty. And as many as twenty years before Johnson and Ebrey published their monographs, Denis Twitchett had identified himself as a “social historian writing on China,” in an article that urged the creation of “a dynamic picture of the developments in clan organization over the past two millennia,” including “the multiplication of regional forms of organization.” The new generation of social historians heeded Twitchett’s injunction, producing between the late 1970s and early 1990s a critical mass of dissertations, articles, books, and conference volumes that tested the hypotheses of their teachers by examining the social strategies of local elites as well as regional economic development and the spread of regional religious cults. They were assisted in their endeavors by current scholarship in Japan, where many pursued their dissertation research under the guidance of historians such as Ihara Hiroshi and Chikusa Masaaki while the People’s Republic of China remained closed to American students. Although their methodology retained an important quantitative element, these social historians borrowed concepts and analytical approaches from structural anthropology rather than from political science and sociology. Instead of the standard histories and other documents produced in the imperial capital, they preferred county and prefectural gazetteers, genealogies, funerary inscriptions, temple steles, letters, and other local sources.

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73. It is a peculiarity of Chinese historiography that no archives survive from the period between the wooden slips of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and the seventeenth-century fragments of the imperial archives of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).
The most influential among the studies of local elites by the new generation of social historians was *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-chou, Chiang-hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung*, by Robert P. Hymes. Rejecting Kracke’s narrow definition of the Song elite, Hymes argued that elite status should not be restricted to imperial officials and holders of the highest examination degree (*jinshi*, “presented scholar”), but that the Song elite should be defined instead, like the elites of other societies, by a broad access to the scarce resources of “wealth, power, and prestige.” Such a broader, more local definition retained officeholders and presented scholars in the ranks of the elite, but admitted in addition graduates of the qualifying prefectural examinations, donors to temples and schools, leaders of local defense activities, and other men of local prominence and wealth, along with their agnatic and affinal kin. With the aid of this new, local definition of the Song elite, Hymes proceeded to dismantle Kracke’s case for substantial social mobility, by a two-part argument. First, he argued that Kracke’s equation of the offices of three lineal ancestors with the entirety of an examination candidate’s “official background” was invalid, and that “Kracke’s percentages are perfectly consistent with even the total absence of mobility in his sense” if one included into his figures the probability that candidates had brothers, uncles, and affinal kinsmen who held official appointments. Second, in his own research on the elite of Fuzhou, Jiangxi province, Hymes found that “no direct evidence shows any significant access to degrees in Fuzhou by men from families without wealth or influence, without previous success in the exams, and without social connections to already influential families or to officialdom.” In the latter chapters of his book Hymes laid out the strategies by which the elite families of Fuzhou maintained, with enduring success, their access to wealth, power, and prestige, and showed the consistent confinement to the county, during the Southern Song, of strategies that during the Northern Song had encompassed the whole of the empire or the entirety of the prefecture. Whereas the elite families of the Northern Song had married their sons and daughters to prominent families of distant regions and had maintained residences in different counties, the same families during the Southern Song intermarried with families of their own county, maintained residences in one county only, built local shrines and temples, preoccupied themselves with local defense, dispensed local charity, and advocated local causes as county magistrates became a more remote presence.

75. Ibid., 36.
76. Ibid., 46, emphasis in original.
In 1990, Valerie Hansen (like Hymes a student of Robert Hartwell) published *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127–1276*, a highly original study in which she proposed to examine “the common people’s understanding of the many changes taking place around them” by showing that their gods gradually acquired economic expertise and that the cult of the most efficacious of these gods spread along commercial routes and acquired a regional following.77 Although David Johnson had demonstrated, five years earlier, a similar spread of religious practices along commercial waterways, his “City-God Cults of T’ang and Sung China” concerned the travel of the notion of a city god rather than the propagation of one particular deity, as “most cities did not share their chenghuang shen [city god] with anyone else.”78 And although Stephen Teiser had described in *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* the changing conceptions of ancestral sacrifice during the ninth and tenth centuries, he did not yet there associate the changing imagination of the underworld with notions of debt and credit in the world of the living, as he would in later work.79 Hansen translated and cited numerous accounts of miracles, recorded in anomaly tales and in temple inscriptions, to establish that divine efficacy was the common coin of Song vernacular religion. Deities who answered prayers received lavish temples, lifelike statues, and imperial titles, but impotent deities saw their statues rot and their temples deserted. To ensure the continuity of their cult, therefore, “the gods acquired the financial expertise necessary to manipulate the increasingly complex Song economy,” and “as their followers were drawn into increasingly large market systems, they brought their gods in with them.”80 In her second book, *Negotiating Daily Life in Traditional China*, Hansen again examined “the medieval transformation” through the convergence of secular and religious economies, this time by a combined history of the contracts of the living and the contracts of the dead.81

The proliferation of scholarly publications on Song history since the 1970s makes it cumbersome to do more than to indicate the areas of the most concentrated activity. First, Hymes’s critical examination of Kracke’s hypotheses about social mobility belonged among a substantive group

of monographs, articles, and conference volumes dedicated to the study of local elites, the imperial examinations, and strategies of social reproduction. Hymes’s own hypotheses were challenged in turn by Beverly Bossler, who argued for the continued existence of a “national elite” during the Southern Song (even if, unlike the “professional elite” of the Northern Song, this later national elite supported itself by a local basis), and by Hugh R. Clark, who found that marriages in the Mulan River Valley in Southern Fujian during the Northern Song already followed the local patterns that Hymes deemed characteristic of the Southern Song.

Second, the general interest in family organization and marriage networks during the late 1970s and early 1980s made Song historians immediately receptive to the importance of women’s history and gender history. Based on a series of preparatory articles, Patricia Ebrey wrote The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period, a “broad survey of the ways marriage shaped women’s lives,” including “sexuality, jealousy, and gender symbolism.” In addition, Bettine Birge published an important article about women’s education and examined in detail the increasing restrictions on women’s property rights during the Song and Yuan (1272–1368) dynasties. Beverly Bossler took up a sequence of topics in gender history (women’s literacy, a daughter’s relations with her natal family after marriage, courtesans, concubines), in a series of articles that dedicated close attention to the limits that Song dynasty generic conven-


83. See Beverly J. Bossler, Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, and the State in Sung China (960–1279) (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1998); Hugh R. Clark, Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structure of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley (Fujian), from the Late Tang through the Song (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007).


tions impose on historical knowledge. Third, during the 1990s religion replaced local elites as the favored topic of inquiry among Song historians. Articles, monographs, and conference volumes appeared about the spread of regional cults, competing configurations of the pantheon, pilgrimages, and changing notions of the underworld, as well as the religious aspects of Confucianism and imperial government, and the more technical aspects of Buddhism and Daoism. Fourth, research on the drastic economic developments of the Song dynasty yielded studies of the commercial activism of the Northern Song government, of urbanization, of port cities and the florescence of maritime trade, and of commerce and industry.


Besides the sheer number and scope of their publications, the second generation of American historians of the Song dynasty contributed a set of convincing patterns of local development, and they integrated topics of inquiry previously separated by disciplinary conventions. The new social historians set out to try the hypotheses put forth by their teachers, using a comparable assemblage of analytical categories and quantitative methods, but applying them to local sources rather than to documents produced by the central government. Their work was most persuasive when it generated from miscellaneous sources coherent patterns of development that could not be explained as a coincidence or as a deliberate design and that likely exceeded the awareness of the authors of the sources: the shifting marriage patterns discovered by Robert Hartwell and Robert Hymes, the spread of religious cults mapped by David Johnson and Valérie Hansen, the economic development of peripheral regions reconstructed by Hugh Clark and Richard von Glahn, and the supersession in government office of presented scholars by beneficiaries of facilitated degrees and hereditary appointments, as calculated by John Chaffee. The study of local society at the same time revealed the inadequacy of conventional distinctions between social history and intellectual history, and between political history and economic history. As social status was determined by imperial examinations that required literary and exegetical learning, and as economic debates were founded upon moral and historical reasoning, habituated categories of European historiography distorted the coherence of Song dynasty sources. The effective study of social mobility required an understanding both of the examination curriculum and of marriage patterns. A proper treatment of economic development demanded the

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consideration of commercial practices as well as government institutions and classical learning. Valerie Hansen’s explication of local religion cited hagiographic traditions, administrative procedures for granting divine titles, and a new commercial imaginary. By their local perspective and their integrative methodology, this second generation of Song historians approached the “history of Chinese society” that Denis Twitchett had proposed in 1959.\footnote{90. Twitchett, “The Fan Clan’s Charitable Estate,” 97.}

\textbf{A Belated Turn, a Return, and a Reversal}


For this purpose Song historians, like cultural historians of other parts of the world, turned away from the quantitative social sciences, toward literary theory and post-structuralist anthropology. Art historians led the way through the cultural turn. Students of Song art had long been dissatisfied with the inapt categories of European art history, which would not accommodate continuities between painting, poetry, and calligraphy, and did not recognize men who were at once painters, poets, calligraphers, and statesmen. Cultural history, by contrast, offered a conceptual space within which literati culture could be reconstituted in all its subtlety and complexity. Into this accommodating field, art historians of the Song issued studies of the mutual borrowing between painting and poetry, the interested strategies of disinterested artists, the interpenetration of poems and gardens, the political import of calligraphic styles, and painted allusions to poems that indicted imperial judgment.\footnote{92. See, e.g., Maggie Bickford, \textit{Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar-Painting Genre} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Robert E. Harrist, Jr., \textit{Painting and Private Life in Eleventh-Century China: Mountain Villa by Li Gonglin} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); Amy McNair, \textit{The Upright Brush: Yan Zhengqing’s Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics} (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998); Alfreda Murck, \textit{Poetry and Painting in Early Modern China} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).}

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ademic disciplines. Ronald Egan, for example, wrote essays about the art criticism and art collections of famous poet-statesmen, and Joseph Lam explained the use of music in the establishment of imperial legitimacy.93 Among historians, the most explicit cultural critique was developed in the new field of frontier studies, but intellectual historians, too, took up the discursive categories of their sources to expose the inadequacies of conventional distinctions in their field. The reintegration of the many aspects of literati culture across disciplinary boundaries stirred an interest in the work of prewar European sinologists, who had possessed an intimate knowledge of that culture, and some of the common subjects of sinology returned to favor, such as historiography, epigraphy, the religious practices of literati, and the cosmological aspects of imperial government. As among historians of other parts of the world, however, the cultural turn did not elicit universal enthusiasm, nor was its dismissal confined to an older generation.94 During this same period, for example, a substantial group of Song historians developed a keen interest in traditional varieties of political, military, and diplomatic history.95 The new cultural historians and the new political historians are gathered uneasily between the covers of the conference volume Emperor Huizong and the Late Northern Song, in which one half of the essays portray Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1125) as a willful monarch at the center of political intrigue while the other half interpret Emperor Huizong as a convergence of signs and the product of political manufacture.

Although intellectual historians have, by the nature of their subject, always given close attention to precise terms and to categories of understanding, American studies of Song thought during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s often described their subject in borrowed terms of Western

philosophy ("metaphysics," "humanism," "rationalism"), restricted the range of topics and texts considered philosophical, and accepted sectarian narratives as accurate historical descriptions. In "This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China, Peter K. Bol by contrast allowed his subject matter, his categories, and his texts to be determined by the internal dynamics of an enduring debate about the relationship between shi ("literati") and wen ("culture," "cultural forms," "literature," "overarching models for a unified polity patterned on the natural order," and so forth), concepts whose very meaning and associations changed in the course of the period treated in his book. This required, for example, that he include literary texts into his consideration, for "literary composition was the most common way of connecting learning, values, and social practice, and changing the way men wrote was the common way of influencing intellectual values." By the close analysis of a massive number of sources, Bol compiled a detailed, subtle history of "a period of extraordinary intellectual diversity" between 600 and 1200 CE. In the course of these centuries, a trust in the cumulative cultural tradition was gradually replaced by a faith in "the mind’s ability to arrive at true ideas about moral qualities inherent in the self and things." In his subsequent work, Bol analyzed debates about wen and the culture of the shi from the Northern Song forward, whether in the context of the imperial examinations, the conduct of government, or the creation of local intellectual identity.

Just as Peter Bol cited the shifting definitions of Song intellectual debates to abolish teleological, reifying narratives of philosophical development, so Naomi Standen used the uncertain shape of the tenth century and the changing boundaries of the northern borderland to critique

98. Ibid., 27.
99. Ibid., 3.
anachronistic, nationalist accounts of Chinese history.\textsuperscript{101} By rejecting the common assumption of an enduring territorial and ethnic “China,” Standen recovered in her \textit{Unbounded Loyalty} a history “of some of the ways in which borders and boundaries functioned before the invention of the nation-state and the development of the narrative of nationalism.”\textsuperscript{102} Conceiving the tenth-century northern borderland in positive rather than in negative terms, Standen retrieved a history of shifting pragmatic allegiances defined by administrative centers—a history previously overwritten by anachronistic condemnations of moral laxity and ethnic betrayal. The same borderland received critical attention from art historians Irene S. Leung and Hsingyuan Tsao, who analyzed the ambiguous use of ethnographic detail in Song paintings of the northern steppes and the cultural continuities in tombs built in this frontier.\textsuperscript{103} In his \textit{Rebel Den of Nùng Trí Cao: Loyalty and Identity Along the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier}, James Anderson made the borderland between the Song Empire and Southeast Asian kingdoms visible in new ways, although he did so more by means of an informed anthropological vocabulary than by a cultural critique of texts and indigenous categories.\textsuperscript{104}

Other scholars have put the critical hermeneutics of cultural history to use in the study of topics previously preferred of European sinologists, such as the religious beliefs of literati, the ritual practices of Confucianism, epigraphy, and the conventions of traditional historiography. Mark Halperin and Anne Gerritsen each published a monograph about temple steles, attempting to reconstitute the religious landscape—both physical and spiritual—in which such inscriptions were originally erected. By accepting the textual geographies of Song literati, both authors contrived to create a continuum between the inscribed surfaces of the past and their

\begin{itemize}
\item[101.] See Naomi Standen, \textit{Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossing in Liao China} (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007). Although Naomi Standen obtained her doctorate degree at the University of Durham and teaches at the University of Newcastle, I include her \textit{Unbounded Loyalty} in this survey of American scholarship because she helped shape the field of frontier studies in the United States when she taught for several years at the University of Wisconsin at Superior.
\item[102.] Ibid., 1.
\item[104.] See James Anderson, \textit{The Rebel Den of Nùng Trí Cao: Loyalty and Identity along the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).
\end{itemize}
own pages of print.\textsuperscript{105} My own book, \emph{The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China}, "examines the intersections between the practice of writing and the practice of weddings during the Middle Period, and in the process reassesses the relationship between the Middle-Period text and the practice of the historian."\textsuperscript{106} The chapters of this book took their shape, not from the positivist cycles of physiocratic regions, but from the contours of discursive formations and the changing tastes of literary fashion. In the conclusion, I demonstrated that the incompatible, segregated discourses laid out in the chapters converged in the polysemous materiality of tombs in which deceased spouses were buried together. Stephen H. West has been the most versatile and the most theoretically rigorous among cultural historians of the Song dynasty. In his articles about urban space and literary form, about food and artifice, about imperial power and conspicuous consumption, about gardens and subjectivity, West combined playful erudition with theoretical sophistication to recover lost cultural connections and forgotten ways of reading and seeing.\textsuperscript{107} In his contribution to the conference volume \emph{Emperor Huizong and the Late Northern Song}, for example, he argued that the fictional account of the monarch’s gruesome demise in \emph{A Personal Account of Southern Leftovers} (\emph{Nanjin jiwen}) represents "as real a version of Huizong’s death as do more standard sources," as these latter are as much "a form of tautology bounded by homological rules of genre, informed by preexisting conclusions, as are genres of historical fiction."\textsuperscript{108} In the same volume, Charles Hartman displayed the textual striations of the biography of Huizong’s minister Cai Jing (1047–1126) in the fourteenth-century \emph{History of the Song} (\emph{Songshi})—the traces of successive political convulsions that reconfigured a positive assessment into an incriminating account. By this manner of detailed scholarship, Hartman established not only the intricate procedures of Song official historiogra-

\textsuperscript{105} See Anne Gerritsen, \emph{Ji’an Literati and the Local in Song-Yuan-Ming China} (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Mark Halperin, \emph{Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China}, 960–1279 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

\textsuperscript{106} Christian de Pee, \emph{The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China: Text and Ritual Practice in the Eighth through Fourteenth Centuries} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), xii.


phy, but also the origins of enduring historical prejudices that less critical historians have replicated across the generations.109

Conclusion

The origins of European sinology lay in the colonial enterprise and the new Orientalism of the nineteenth century. The early sinologists, like their contemporaries at Fort William College in Calcutta and like the first generation of philologists in Germany and France, sought the common origins of the world’s languages, including hieroglyphics, Sanskrit, and Chinese.110 The first Chair of Chinese Language in Europe was created, along with a Chair of Indology, at the proposal of Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838), who had himself been Professor of Arabic and Professor of Persian, and who had also studied Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Ethiopian, and Turkish.111 Stanislas Julien (1797–1873), the second incumbent of the Chair at the Collège de France, had received an education in Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Sanskrit before learning Chinese and Manchu.112 Sinologists of later generations carried this tradition forward. Otto Franke was by training a Sanskritist, Henri Maspero an Egyptologist. Édouard Chavannes and Marcel Granet were both accomplished classicists. Paul Demiéville taught Sanskrit and philosophy at Amoy University in 1924–1926, before becoming editor-in-chief of the Buddhist dictionary Hôbôgirin in Tokyo.113 Robert H. van Gulik (1910–1967) as an undergraduate studied Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Russian, and completed at the age of 24 a dissertation about the Tibetan origins of the horse cult in China and Japan.114 It is not surprising that these sinologists developed an affection for the literati of the Qing Empire, whose classical learning much resembled

their own, just as the new Orientalists in Calcutta found much in common with the pandits who taught them.\textsuperscript{115}

In the United States, the study of Chinese history was founded, not upon philology, but upon the quantitative social sciences. Although some of the Chinese academics who taught the first generation of American China scholars, such as William Hung, had received a traditional education during their youth, they were committed to writing the Chinese past in the scientific terms and authoritative narratives they had learnt during their studies in Japan, Europe, and the United States. The founders of area studies took the outlines of this history home with them when they returned from China and Japan in the 1930s and 1940s, convinced of the superiority of social-scientific methods to traditional philology. Historiographical treatises about American studies of China have emphasized the importance of the differences between the first and second generations in this new field. Such essays juxtapose the institutional history of the first generation to the social history of the second generation, and set the Cold War politics of the teachers against the Vietnam-era politics of their students. These distinctions are apparent also in historical studies of the Song dynasty, even if that period did not possess the acute political relevance that sharpened debates about modernization and imperialism among historians of the Qing and Republican eras. Considered within the longer history of the study of China, however, the differences between these various applications of social-scientific methodology seem of less consequence than their similarities.\textsuperscript{116}

The rehabilitation by cultural historians of a philological approach, with a precise attention to textual traditions and discursive differences, has marked a methodological and theoretical departure of greater moment. The texts that survive from the Song period were composed, in their overwhelming majority, by highly educated literati, in the sophisticated circles of examination candidates and imperial officials. They were written, moreover, in a classical language removed from the vernacular, and in accordance with the discursive conventions of strictly defined genres. The prominence of generic conventions in the extant corpus of Song texts may be due in part to the circumstance that almost all surviving texts were printed, and that private manuscripts and archives have perished almost


\textsuperscript{116.} Certainly it is an exaggeration to speak of three distinct “paradigms,” separated by “paradigm shifts,” within the space of these two generations, as do Paul Cohen in \textit{Discovering History} and Philip Huang in “The Paradigmatic Crisis.”
entirely.¹¹⁷ The positivist categories of the social sciences do not suit these texts, in which the manner of representation often dominates the matter. Even in the best examples of social history, the positivist approach and the structuralist analysis of the social sciences limit the choice and the interpretation of texts. Robert Hymes’s explicit departure from the language of his sources places his sociological definition of the “elite” in danger of being no less circular than the narrower definition by E. A. Kracke that he rejects. Without an exact cultural and ideological analysis of Song notions of “prestige” it remains uncertain under which conditions, and by which criteria, the holder of a prefectural degree from a landowning family would accept a merchant sponsor of a local temple as his peer.¹¹⁸ Valerie Hansen, similarly, uses the notion of divine efficacy to imply a shared, objective reality and thereby elides the ideological distinctions between the commemorative texts composed by local literati and the beliefs of illiterate practitioners.¹¹⁹ The acceptance of the cultural particularity of the extant corpus of Song texts—its abstruse intertextuality, its stylized discourses, its exclusion of the voices of commoners—paradoxically opens up a vast range of sources and interpretations. Whereas Patricia Ebrey writes that “[a]ll scholars who do research on the late Northern Song have been frustrated at times by the textual sources available to them,” Stephen West, by his freer stance toward the “boundaries between empirical and representational truth,” finds that “[t]he total number of records for this period is truly staggering.”¹²⁰ Like the new philologists of the new medievalism, cultural historians of the Song dynasty have recovered the historical particularities of their sources and have thereby been able to discern the inapposite modernist assumptions about texts, history, and society that inhere in social-scientific categories. Some critics, of course, have in turn dismissed the post-structuralist approaches of cultural history as vacuous and as inapplicable to the sources, but more often than not these critics have confused post-structuralism with post-modernism and deconstructionism, have misunderstood the premises of cultural history, and have misidentified its representative works.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ See Hymes, Statesmen, 7–9.
¹²¹ Pamela Crossley, for example, names Jonathan Spence as “exemplary” of “the post-structuralist view,” and Philip Huang criticizes post-structuralist theory by condemning “the conclusion that facts are no more than representations” and that “factual evidence comes to be no different from fabricated evidence.” See Crossley, “The Historiography,” 650; Philip C.
ology has re-established a connection between academic scholarship and the literary traditions of the imperial past. This approximation between sources and method has resulted in a greater hermeneutical acuity that has enabled the exposure of fundamental shortcomings in the positivist methods and structuralist theories of social history. This does not mean that social history has become obsolete. Although the social history of the Song dynasty, by the nature of its sources, has never possessed the materialist basis or the political engagement that Geoff Eley and William Sewell identify as the particular strength of the social-historical method, the conciliation of social history and cultural history that they propose remains relevant. The measurement of economic development and migration, the calculation of percentages of imperial appointments by hereditary privilege, and the detection of other patterns of which historical actors themselves may have been unaware, will ever retain their value and will ever remain the province of social history. The critical textual awareness of cultural history can assist in such research by ensuring that the sources are compatible with the social-historical method, and that the research maps a material phenomenon rather than the outlines of a literary convention. Eley warns that there is “absolutely no reason why the ‘cultural turn’ should be the end of the story,” and that the prediction of future developments is all the more difficult because during past decades “history’s renovative energy—its new influences, new approaches, and most inspiring works—always came from the outside.” The cycles of Cathay will continue to spiral, as they have since the first publication of Chinese characters in Europe in 1655, since the Song, since the beginning of time. But the critical hermeneutics and the dialectical reflexivity of cultural historians, who have rejoined sinologists of prior generations in their dialogic studies of literati culture, are apt to check at least the revolution of tautological definitions and circular arguments, by admitting the historical resistance of the text.


122. Cf. Chartier, *On the Edge*, 2–7; Eley, *A Crooked Line*, 126, 155–60; Farquhar and Hevia, “Culture,” 509–11; Hunt, “Introduction”; LaCapra, *History and Reading*, 21–24. Empirical critiques of the Naitô hypothesis, for example, have omitted to consider whether the centrality Naitô accorded to imperial autocracy may not have been a function of Taishô-era debates about the legacy of the Meiji Restoration (notably what became known during the 1930s as “the emperor system,” *tennōsei*) rather than a disinterested result of his research on the Northern Song, or whether the Tang aristocracy may have fallen victim to his Taishô populism rather than to the wars of the Five Dynasties. Cf. Tanaka, *Japan’s Orient*.
