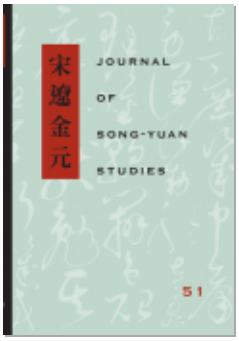
The Politics of Higher Education: The Imperial University in Northern Song China by Chu Ming-kin (review)



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comparison, but this is a point for future improvement. On the whole, the quantitative analysis offers important insight into the chronological foci of the extant Song political histories. The expectation of full or equal coverage may, however, be one that concerns the professional modern historian more than the Song scholar-official.

In sum, *The Making of Song Dynasty History* deserves a central place on any Song historian's physical or virtual shelves. It is a model of historical and literary source criticism. We need more of this kind of scholarship on Chinese historiography inspired by the great Hayden White. That to some extent such work also produces its own grand narrative is a risk worth taking and one that can be mitigated. Hartman admits that the "documentary" and "pedagogic" histories are to a large extent the work of Sichuanese and Fujianese historians; let's look into the metahistory of the Song Zhejiang institutional historians next.

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Chu Ming-kin. *The Politics of Higher Education: The Imperial University in Northern Song China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020. Pp. xv+264. $77.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-9888528196.

Scholars often consider the expansion of education a key characteristic of the Song state, yet the amount of scholarship on Song education in English in recent years is regrettably low. Chu Ming-kin's *The Politics of Higher Education* is an exciting work that brings attention to one of the most influential innovations in the Northern Song: the Imperial University (*Taixue* 太學). It traces the establishment and expansion of the university from the later decades of the tenth century to the fall of Kaifeng 開封 in 1127. By integrating sources from governmental records, official memorials, scholarly writings, local gazetteers, and informal anecdotes, Chu studies the policies, ideologies, and political impact of this educational institution and concludes that the development of government education in the late Northern Song marked an increasing tendency toward autocracy, which restricted the literati's freedom and eliminated the once intellectually diverse environment that scholars enjoyed in the early and mid-Northern Song.

Chu discusses the development of the Imperial University chronologically. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the early history of the Directorate School

(*Guozixue* 國子學), the only place to receive a government education in Kaifeng in the late tenth century. The newly established court adopted different measures to accommodate the increasing enrollment of commoners at this school and, at the same time, to encourage the participation of elite children. Although the school continued the functions of Tang central government schools, its size was still small by 975. Over the next several decades, the court changed its policies back and forth, sometimes allowing more commoners to study and sometimes tightening the numbers. Chu believes that this kind of policy instability reflected tension between commoners and the elite. The former wanted to, and always could, utilize loopholes to enjoy high examination passing rates through the Directorate School, and the latter rather hoped to reserve more space for their privileged children. Later on, the court established the School of the Four Gates in 1043 to provide more seats for commoners, and this school would become the famous Imperial University in later years. Chu also discusses the transition of the school curriculum. Some early pioneers such as Sun Shi 孫奭 (962–1033) and Shi Jie 石介 (1005–1045) rejected the parallel prose style that once dominated at the university. They promoted new understandings of the Classics and encouraged the ancient prose writing style in examinations.

Chapter 2 discusses the evolution of the Imperial University in the 1050s, a transitional period between the Qingli 慶曆 Reforms and Wang Anshi's 王安石 (1021–1086) New Policies. By focusing on three figures, Hu Yuan 胡瑗 (993–1059), Sun Fu 孫復 (992–1057), and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007–1072), Chu aims to reveal the relationship between the university and the civil service examinations and show a plausible intellectual environment that scholars created and enjoyed during Renzong's 仁宗 (r. 1022–1063) reign. Both Hu Yuan and Sun Fu were unsuccessful examination graduates, but their fame as prominent lecturers attracted many students at the university. Stressing the importance of current affairs and the Classics, Hu and Sun encouraged students to write essays in an original and meaningful way to replace the superficial flowery parallel style that had dominated examinations for centuries. Their students often excelled in examinations in the 1050s. As a supporter of Hu and Sun, Ouyang Xiu further used his position and influence to facilitate literary changes in education and in the examinations. Ouyang intentionally placed his allies in the university, and Chu argues that this action would become the beginning of the court's interference in education. Probably the most interesting part of this chapter is the discussion on a cyclical pattern

of enrollment. Apparently, students only had interests in school registration during the months between the directorate and department examinations.

The longest chapter in the book, Chapter 3 focuses on the background, implementation, and consequences of the New Policies in Shenzong's 神宗 (r. 1067–1085) reign. Even before Wang Anshi 王安石 promulgated his reforms on education and examinations, other scholars had already proposed an expansion of government education. Some of them envisioned a hierarchical school structure, in which students would be promoted from a lower level to an upper one if they performed well academically. Prominent scholar-officials such as Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), and Lü Gongzhu 呂公著 (1018–1089) also shared a belief with Wang Anshi that morality should be a key component in education. Hence, uniformity in morals increasingly became a consensus among officials, no matter what attitudes they would later take towards the New Policies. Chu then systematically introduces the content of Wang's educational reform, in which the Imperial University was greatly expanded in the capital. Financially supported by the court, university students were selected by a meritocratic measure named the Three Hall System (*sanshefa* 三舍法). Not only would promising students be moved from the Outer Hall to the Inner Hall and the Upper Hall, but successful graduates would also receive official titles without passing civil service examinations. The long-term goal of the reform was to use government schools to replace examinations in the recruitment process. To ensure a disciplined learning environment at the university, Wang Anshi removed more than half of the established faculty after some of them used essay questions to attack the New Policies. By staffing the campus with his own partisans and enforcing a standard Confucian curriculum based on his commentaries, Wang finally established an ideological order both in the capital and throughout the empire. Chu argues that such uniformity ended the open intellectual atmosphere of Renzong's reign and encouraged nepotism and fraud at the university. Shenzong was also alarmed by these behaviors and used the case of *Taixue*, in which a student named Yu Fan 虞蕃 (js. 1101) accused several lecturers and administrators of corruption as an excuse to punish officials at the school. Chu believes that this event marked the beginning of Shenzong's intervention in educational affairs and signified increasing autocracy after the New Policies.

The political and intellectual turmoil in Zhezong's 哲宗 (r. 1085–1100) reign is the main topic of Chapter 4. Unsatisfied with the practice of the Three Hall System and Wang's ideology, the Yuanyou 元祐 (1086–1094)

conservatives reversed the educational policies implemented over the previous decade. Chu believes that "the Yuanyou intellectual environment in general proved more liberal and pluralistic compared to the preceding Yuanfeng era" (137) because the Yuanyou elite struggled for "academic independence at the Imperial University and beyond" (152). Apparently, these elite were eager to embrace the myth of Emperor Renzong, in which the ruler was willing to share his power with scholar-officials, and used this myth to limit the imperial power of Zhezong when court affairs were determined by Empress Dowager Gao 高太后 (r. 1085–1093). But after Zhezong assumed personal rule in 1094, almost all of the Yuanyou policies were revoked. Conservatives were removed from the court, and reformers were welcomed back. Wang's commentaries and other writings became the standard references again. Hence Zhezong's rule brought the regime to another stage of autocracy.

Chapter 5 discusses the implementation of the empire-wide Three Hall System and argues that this reform was exploited by Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126) as a way to strengthen his political authority in Huizong's 徽宗 (r. 1100–1126) reign. Following the ideal of Wang Anshi, Cai Jing ordered the establishment of a national school system covering every county and prefecture in 1102. It was the first real attempt to make government education widely available in history. At every corner of the empire, the government spent resources on school construction and financial subsidies. Students were examined regularly, and those who performed well were promoted to higher halls at the same school or higher schools, including the university in Kaifeng. Cai Jing and other reformers planned to use this countrywide school system to replace the recruitment function of examinations. They argued that one's virtue and moral conduct could only be observed through extensive interactions between teachers and students in school. By examining official memorials in the 1110s, Chu rather finds that this promising learning environment failed to cultivate students' moral character and instead created more worrisome behavior among students and teachers, including cheating, nepotism, bribery, and poor grades. Chu further demonstrates how this school system helped wealthy elite strengthen their privileged positions rather than promote social mobility in the entire society. Alarmed by those signs, Huizong questioned Cai Jing's agenda and ambition, and he eventually abolished the national Three Hall System after Cai Jing retired in 1121.

The last chapter complicates the nature of the Imperial University in Huizong's reign. Chu demonstrates how Cai Jing used the Three Hall System

to persecute his opponents, control personnel affairs, and promote an official ideological orthodoxy in the government. Anyone who opposed the New Policies would be expelled from school and eventually from officialdom. Chu also discusses different student reactions towards Cai's controlling mechanism. Some of them pretended to embrace Wang Anshi's teachings, and others instead dared to criticize Cai Jing's administration. Contrary to Cai's plan, heterodox thought was still popular among students, teachers, and officials. The later part of this chapter introduces Chen Dong 陳東 (1086–1127), a patriotic university student often mentioned in modern Chinese literature, and the famous student demonstration he led on the eve of the Jurchen invasion in 1125. Unlike Chen Dong and his fellows, many other university students simply surrendered themselves to the Jin empire when Kaifeng fell in 1127.

The major contribution of this book is its incorporation of new approaches into the familiar narrative of Song educational history. Western literature on Song education often focuses on its social and intellectual impact, as seen in the work of John Chaffee, Peter Bol, and Hilde De Weerdt. On the other hand, contemporary Chinese and Japanese scholarship emphasizes the importance of institutions (*zhidu* 制度) in making this first government educational system in the world. Chu's book skillfully situates the institutional changes within a larger context, tracing lines of scholarly discourse to their intellectual agenda. Chu persuasively demonstrates how the university became a site of contention, in which each new faction in power would impose their policies and personnel decisions in order to strengthen their authority both politically and ideologically. This approach is influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's social theory and De Weerdt's study of the relationship between Southern Song examinations and the rise of the Learning of the Way. According to Chu, the diversity and openness of Renzong's reign were worth celebrating. But once Wang Anshi and other reformers took control of the government and promulgated the New Policies, both the university and examinations lost their independence and were subordinated to the requirements of intellectual uniformity. Over the last fifty years of the Northern Song, different factions and interest groups competed over authority in the university because all of them considered it a convenient site for controlling public opinion and taming the next generation of officials. By analyzing numerous memorials and incorporating a great deal of scholarship, Chu reveals the bitterness of education.

A systematic study of this institution of higher education, Chu's book provides precious details on many new topics. For instance, the discussion of

Sun Shi in Chapter 1 is the first in-depth English coverage of this key figure in the early Song. Chu also emphasizes students' agency when he presents vivid stories that convey their rationales, actions, and consequences. Once a new court revised the examination curriculum, students could quickly sense these changes and adjust their learning strategies in the school and their arguments in examination essays. In this way, they could always maximize their interests no matter who was in charge. Examples in the last chapter further indicate that even Cai Jing, the most notorious reformer of the Northern Song, could not create the intellectual uniformity that he envisioned. Passive resistance was pervasive both at the university and in local schools.

Some arguments of this book may arouse controversy. Chu Ming-kin situates his entire discussion in a dichotomic framework, in which the reformists such as Wang Anshi and Cai Jing always tried to silence the literati and enforce an order of their own, whereas conservatives would use various strategies to promote openness and diversity. This understanding could sound too moralistic and optimistic, as his thesis is based to a great extent on his acceptance of the validity of the sources written or compiled by later conservatives, including the *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 and *Song shi* 宋史. A critical reading of these sources could reveal biases embedded within them. Intentional selection, partisan discussions, and imbalanced coverage all contribute to a one-sided Neo-Confucian version of New Policies historiography over the last eight centuries. Unlike the writings of the conservatives, most writings of the reformists were lost either in the Jurchen invasion or due to later censorship. Even Wang Anshi's *Zi shuo* 字說, the signature linguistic reference taught in every school in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, is no longer extant. The existing materials are overwhelmingly guided by an anti-reformist ideology, and that anti-reformist bias repeats itself in Chu's thesis. Especially in Chapters 4 and 5, Chu's tone becomes harsh and critical when discussing reformist policies,[1] and then his words turn encouraging and slightly celebratory when introducing the opinions and the actions of the conservatives.

Published by Hong Kong University Press, the writing style of this book is not solely Western. For example, Chu tends to use long quotes, sometimes nearly a full page, to introduce scholar-officials' opinions. His conclusion also includes a discussion on the shortcomings of higher educational institutions

1. Chu repeatedly uses "cronies" to describe Wang's supporters (73, 89, 90, 92, 93, 105, 119, 213).

in today's China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan when it argues that these East Asian governments are eager to control the administration and ideologies in public universities. This kind of ahistorical comparison is rare in American scholarships but common in East Asia.

Overall, this book documents the evolving path of the Imperial University in the Northern Song and shows clearly competition and contention among different interest groups at a time when each attempted to ensure their authority in shaping the empire's ideology. It is a worthy contribution to Song political and educational history.

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Valerie Hansen. *The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World—and Globalization Began*. New York: Scribner, 2020. Pp. 320. $30 (hardcover); $19 (paper). ISBN 978-1501194108.

The global historian is above all a story teller,[1] and *The Year 1000: When Explorers Connected the World—and Globalization Began* is a compelling story. It is a pleasure to see two periods of this journal's specialization, the Liao and Song, feature in a far-reaching, loosely synchronic, and at times provocative global history, all told in the engaging and accessible way in which its author Valerie Hansen has proven form.[2] Granted, readers of this journal, especially those familiar with Hansen's previous contributions,[3] will not find new or revelatory detail in her treatment of the Liao and Song in this volume, nevertheless *The Year 1000* invites us to reimagine how we might generate and communicate our research on this period of history. For if Hansen's earlier textbook, *The Open Empire*,[4] frames the Song and the Liao in terms of Chinese history, albeit a Chinese history characterized by openness, *The Year 1000* goes further and provides an alternative, complementary account

1. Pamela Kyle Crossley, *What Is Global History?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2008), 103–6.

2. For example, Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

3. Chiefly, Hansen, "International Gifting and the Kitan World, 907–1125," *JSYS* 43 (2013): 273–302. And for summaries of the period, see "The Kitan-Liao and Jurchen-Jin," in *Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History*, ed. Victor Cunrui Xiong and Kenneth J. Hammond (New York: Routledge, 2019), 213–28; "The Kitan People, the Liao Dynasty (916–1125) and Their World," *Orientations* 42.1 (2011): 34–42.

4. Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 2015).