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Edited by John W. Chaffee And Denis Twitchett

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INTRODUCTION: REFLECTIONS ON THE SUNG

John W. Chaffee

This volume, together with its recently published companion volume (Volume 5, Part 1), presents fruits of a half-century of Western scholarship on the history of Sung China (960–1279). “Western” is of course a relative term, for the presence of Chinese and Japanese authors reflects the global character of the Sung history field. It is nevertheless appropriate as a descriptor of the scholarly activity focused on the Sung among European and Anglophonic scholars that has flourished since the 1950s. While drawing heavily on the pioneering work of Japanese scholars and enriched by the postwar flowering of Sung scholarship in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, the works in this volume emerged primarily out of Western discourses on the Sung.

Philosophical profundity; cultural brilliance as seen in unparalleled landscape art, calligraphy, and prose composition; and a sophisticated material culture, but also military and economic weakness, political humiliation, venal ministers and effeminate men: these are some of the characteristics that have traditionally been ascribed to the Sung by historians and the general public, and they help to explain why the Sung has long found little favor among many Chinese, especially when it is compared to the “glorious T’ang” (618–907) that preceded it. All modern scholarship on the Sung, Western and East Asian alike, has had to deal with this characterization of the dynasty that dominated traditional historiography and popular opinions about the period. But ever since the Japanese journalist-turned-scholar Naitō Torajirō (1866–1934) argued in 1914 that a massive economic, social and political transformation beginning in the late T’ang resulted in the beginning of China’s “modern age” (*kinsei*) in the Sung, alternatives to the traditional historiography have flourished, first among Japanese, then among Western and Chinese scholars.¹ From that scholarship has emerged a complex portrait of a dynasty which,

¹ For an excellent recent account of Naitō Torajirō, also known as Naitō Konan, and the impact of his work, see Richard von Glahn, “Imagining Pre-modern China,” in *The Sung–Yuan–Ming transition in Chinese history*, ed. Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 38–42.

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despite its military and geopolitical weakness, was nevertheless economically powerful, culturally brilliant, socially fluid, and the most populous of any empire in world history to that point. It was also a dynasty beset by problems and contradictions, belying simple generalizations.

The contributions to this volume bear witness to the richness and complexity of the Sung historical record and the fruits of recent scholarship. Covering a wide spectrum of topics – government, economy, society, religion, and thought, in roughly that order – they range widely, often well beyond the apparent confines of their topics, frequently intersecting with each other and not always agreeing, for the phenomena with which they are dealing often defy pigeonholing. The result is a rich mixture that offers the reader a portrait of this remarkable period that is detailed, complex, and essentially complementary. In introducing the volume, my goal is to underline that complementarity by identifying themes that cut across the chapters.

A WEAK DYNASTY?

We should begin by acknowledging that there are elements of truth to the traditional portrayal of the Sung. Even during the Northern Sung (960–1127), the dynasty's territorial reach was less than that of any of the other major dynasties, with borders in the northeast that did not include modern Peking, in the northwest that did not extend beyond the eastern end of the Kansu corridor, and in the far south that did not include Yunnan or especially Annam, which had been part of Chinese empires for a thousand years. The catastrophic loss of north China to the Jurchen which resulted in the severely shrunken borders of the Southern Sung (1127–1279), and the lengthy Mongol conquest of the Sung that finally extinguished the dynasty in 1279 provide clear evidence that the Sung could not handle their neighbors as well as the Han (206 BC–AD 220) or T'ang. Moreover, the terms by which the Sung secured peace with the Liao (907–1125), and later the Chin (1115–1234), were to Chinese sensibilities deeply humiliating, involving as they did tribute payments by the Sung and, in the case of the Chin, the Sung emperor addressing his Chin counterpart as "elder brother."

The blame for this unenviable record has generally fallen upon the Sung military and on treacherous political leadership, most notably in the latter case the recall and execution of the iconic Yüeh Fei (1103–42) by the chief counselor Ch'in Kuei (1090–1155) during the first war against the Jurchen. As we learn from Wang Tseng-yü's chapter (and from the entire volume 5, Part 1), the Sung engaged in a great many wars against their varied enemies, and most of them ended poorly. Wang details numerous instances of bad decisions made at the court, poor generalship, and corruption, in addition to badly prepared

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[More information](#)

REFLECTIONS ON THE SUNG

3

troops. But he also describes noteworthy successes in the dynasty's use of the military. Sung T'ai-tsung's (r. 976–97) unsuccessful campaign against the Liao notwithstanding, he and his brother T'ai-tsu (r. 960–76) before him managed to reunify the vast majority of agricultural China while at the same time successfully controlling the military, specifically military governors and the capital army, two challenges that had proved largely insurmountable during the preceding century. The Sung subsequently succeeded in maintaining a huge army – peaking at 1,259,000 troops during the 1040s – that was professional and supported by a well-developed logistical structure and by an armaments industry that excelled at technological military innovation, including the development of gunpowder technologies.² The military's strengths were primarily defensive, necessarily so because of the Sung lack of pastureland and therefore of good horses, but with some obvious exceptions it was a formidable defensive force.³

It is possible, indeed, to flip the common assertion about the weakness of the Sung military and argue instead that it was Sung military strength that preserved it in an age of exceptionally powerful states in Central and East Asia, states that combined the power of highly developed equestrian warfare with sophisticated state systems. In what was the most multipolar East Asian world in Chinese imperial history, the ability of the Sung not merely to survive but to thrive was remarkable, and it is to the economic sources of that thriving that we will now turn.

ECONOMIC DYNAMISM

In their chapter on Sung economic change, Joseph McDermott and Shiba Yoshinobu anchor their account firmly in the late T'ang, a period when the government was unable to maintain its direct controls over economic activity in the countryside (through the equitable-fields measure) and regulated markets in the cities. By allowing virtually unlimited private landownership rather than allotting land to peasants for a lifetime tenure, freeing markets from government regulation, and relying on both land and commercial taxes as well as government monopolies for their revenue, the authorities created the conditions for a fundamental economic transformation. Whether the ensuing change deserves the title of “economic revolution” – as Mark Elvin has claimed

² See Professor Wang's treatment of gunpowder weapons, and also Peter Allan Lorge, *The Asian military revolution: From gunpowder to the bomb* (Cambridge and New York, 2008), pp. 32–44.

³ Sung responses to their chronic lack of warhorses are well treated by Paul Jakob Smith in *Taxing heaven's storehouse: Horses, bureaucrats and the destruction of the Sichuan tea industry, 1074–1224* (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

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but McDermott and Shiba resist⁴ – is open to debate, but without question the economic growth in the early Sung was spectacular and unprecedented, and the wealth that it created was manifested in a population which by 1100 had exceeded 100 million for the first time in Chinese history, and in the emergence of a flourishing urban culture and a social elite that was far larger than the aristocratic elite of T'ang times had been.

This much is commonly acknowledged by most scholars. In their chapter, Professors McDermott and Shiba move well beyond these generalizations to present a detailed and complex portrait of the Sung economy. The spread of agricultural technologies and seed types (e.g. early-ripening Champa rice⁵) and increases in cultivated land are presented as factors helping to sustain the growth in population. But the authors also raise the question why the population did not grow yet more, and through their analysis of the individual macroregions within the Sung empire they describe in sobering detail the often devastating impact of famines and epidemics (especially in the north) as well as environmental degradation. Indeed, the environmental costs of both agricultural and industrial practices are a major theme of the chapter and an important part of their question why population growth was not even greater.

McDermott and Shiba also provide a useful tripartite periodization for the economic history of the Sung, namely (1) early Sung (960–1080), a period of expansion characterized by the spectacular rise of the south agriculturally and the industrial development of the capital region around K'ai-feng in the north; (2) middle Sung (1080–1162), a period of continuity up until the catastrophic loss of the north followed by turbulent recovery; and (3) late Sung (1162–1279), a period of frequent warfare and economic decline. While early Sung prosperity and late Sung decline are common themes in most accounts of Sung history, the choice of a middle period spanning rather than breaking at the Northern/Southern Sung divide is unusual. Since that period began with the New Policies of Wang An-shih (1021–86), which involved an unprecedented engagement by the government in agriculture and commerce, its continuation well into the Southern Sung suggests that the continuities over that tumultuous eighty-year period were more significant than either the cessation of the reform policies late in Hui-tsung's reign (c. 1120) or the war with the Chin and loss of the north.

⁴ For Elvin, see *The pattern of the Chinese past* (Stanford, 1973), Part 2.

⁵ Although McDermott and Shiba stress the role of Champa rice and document its use in various localities in southern China, it should be noted that this is a point of some disagreement among economic historians. For a more skeptical view of the role of Champa rice, see Li Po-chung, "Yu-wu 13, 14 shih-chi te chuan-che? Sung-mo tao Ming-chu Chiang-nan nung-yeh te pien-hua," in *Tuo shih-chiao k'an Chiang-nan ching-chi-shih* (Peking, 2003), pp. 21–96.

Commerce is another major theme in the McDermott–Shiba chapter, one that is central to any understanding of the Sung economy. Using the comprehensive list in the *Sung hui-yao chi-kao* (A draft compendium of Sung documents) of tax quotas c. 1077 for 2,600 tax stations, they are able to delineate the hierarchical marketing structure through which goods moved and document the ascendance of the south – especially the Lower and Middle Yangtze macro-regions – and the emergence of large and vibrant cities there. They also detail the roles played by developments in boat transport, the spreading use of paper money and instruments of commercial credit, and the creation of joint investment partnerships, all of which served to create a commercial order the likes of which had never before been seen. Indeed, such was the importance of commerce that it features prominently in three other chapters in this volume.

In her chapter on “China’s emergence as a maritime power,” Angela Schottenhammer addresses a topic that has aroused great interest among global historians, namely the central role played by China in a world trading order that spanned maritime Asia from the tenth through fourteenth centuries. In contrast to all other Chinese dynasties save the Mongol Yüan (1270–1368), the Sung not only permitted overseas trade, they also welcomed and facilitated it through the use of maritime trade offices or superintendencies, which taxed incoming goods but also supervised the trade and even aided foreign merchants when they were in need. This did not preclude corrupt practices, as Schottenhammer makes clear, but it created remarkably hospitable and stable conditions for a trade that involved a plethora of goods, most notably exports of ceramics (including porcelain, a new invention), metals, and silk, and, among imports, especially *hsiang-yao*, a term covering aromatics, perfumes, and drugs. For the first time, Chinese merchants in Chinese junks ventured across East and Southeast Asia, joining the ranks of Arab, Persian, Indian, Malay, and Korean traders who were engaged in the trade and who, in many cases, established trading communities in port cities, particularly Kuang-chou (Canton) and Ch’üan-chou. It should also be noted that the revenues from maritime commerce provided a significant if minor source of government revenue; averaging around a half-million strings of cash through much of the first century, these revenues increased to around 1 million strings in the late eleventh century and then 2 million in the early Southern Sung.

In his chapter on Sung government, Charles Hartman makes the striking observation not only that, compared to the Ming (1368–1644), Sung governmental revenues constituted a higher proportion of national revenue, but also that those from nonagricultural sources – commercial taxes and revenues from the government monopolies – were nine times as great. Commercial revenues are a central theme for Peter Golas in “The Sung fiscal administration.” Of course the chapter covers far more than commercial taxes. The

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Sung government's approach to fiscal matters was pragmatic and innovative. Thanks in particular to the enormous cost of maintaining a professional military (including a large navy, the great cost of which is documented by Schottenhammer), the dynasty's early fiscal health turned into chronic deficits by the mid-eleventh century. The land taxes, together with their accompanying labor service system, were of great importance but were increasingly unable to keep up with the government's ever-increasing financial needs, so that by the 1070s they accounted for only one-third of government revenues. One response was the development of a professional fiscal administration, whose cadre of career specialists established and implemented policies that met those needs with remarkable success; indeed, Golas credits the economic astuteness of Sung financial officials and their willingness to work with merchants for much of the dynasty's success in fiscal matters.⁶

More specifically, government monopolies (salt, wine, tea, alum, and mining), long a feature of imperial governance, were dealt with pragmatically; in some cases the government exerted maximal control in order to maximize revenues, while in others the same goal led to a loosening of controls in favor of private merchants. The money supply was expanded, in part through such practices as short strings of cash and iron coinage (in regions like Szechwan where copper coins were scarce) and increasingly through the use of paper money, and this served to expand commercial activities. But as Golas documents, it was the commercial taxes – primarily sales and transit taxes – that proved to be the primary underpinnings for the dynasty. Growing from just 4 million strings in the early years of the eleventh century to over 19 million in the 1040s, and reflecting not simply the expansion of trade but the growth of cities, the commercial taxes brought about a fiscal order unique in Chinese imperial history in its relative nondependence on land taxes and the rural economy. Liu Guanglin has gone so far as to argue that the Sung was a fiscal state (*ts'ai-cheng kuo-chia*), collecting revenues primarily through indirect taxes and using a professionalized fiscal administration, an arrangement driven in no small part by the need to support a large professional military.⁷ Whether or not one agrees with Liu's argument, the central role played by commercial and other indirect taxes in the empire's finances undeniably set the Sung apart from other dynasties.

Writing from an entirely different perspective, Robert Hymes in his chapter identifies money and commerce as a fundamental structural feature of

⁶ See Robert Hartwell's classic treatment of finance officials in the Sung bureaucracy: "Financial expertise, examinations, and the formation of economic policy in northern Sung China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 30 No. 2 (February 1971), pp. 281–314.

⁷ Liu Kuang-lin (Liu Guanglin), "Shih-ch'ang, chan-cheng ho ts'ai-cheng kuo-chia – tui Nan Sung fu-shui wen-t'i ti tsai ssu-k'ao," *T'ai-ta li-shih hsieh-pao* 42 (December 2008), pp. 221–85.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

REFLECTIONS ON THE SUNG

7

Sung society, especially elite society. This might strike some as a truism, since money – or at least wealth – is essential to all upper classes, and others as wrong in light of the popular image of the Sung as a period of artists and philosophers far removed from the crass concerns of lucre. Yet Hymes demonstrates how references to money and the marketplace are interwoven through poetry, music, and art, and he links the development and spread of porcelain to the declining use of bronze, silver, and gold for domestic objects because of the demand for these metals for currency. He further argues that Neo-Confucianism was driven, at least in part, by resistance to the market, in the articulation of nonmarket or antimarket strategies. Whether or not this was so, he and the other authors make a compelling case for the unprecedented importance of the commercial economy for society as a whole. And what was it that made this possible? I would suggest that a major reason lay in the stability that resulted from strong political institutions, not simply in the area of fiscal administration but across the range of governmental activities and groups.

ASSERTIONS OF AUTHORITY

When Chao K'uang-yin (Sung T'ai-tsu) seized the imperial throne through a military coup in early 960, there was little to indicate that his new Sung dynasty would be anything more than the sixth of the short-lived dynasties that had ruled north China for a half-century. Challenges abounded in the form of powerful neighboring states to the north and south, military leaders with a history of independence from the throne, and administrative institutions weakened by over a century of division and unrest. How he addressed these challenges and, together with his brother T'ai-tsung, reunified the empire is a story detailed in the companion Sung volume (5, Part 1). However, in Charles Hartman's account of Sung government and politics we get a sense of how the dynasty both surmounted its political challenges and managed to create structures and practices that largely defined imperial governance for the following millennium.

The process was not a matter of systematic planning in pursuit of ideal imperial structures. Brian McKnight, in his chapter on Sung law, describes a conservative approach to law in which T'ai-tsu, when issuing the *Sung penal conspectus* (*Sung hsing-t'ung*) in 963, essentially adopted the *Penal conspectus of the Great Chou* (*Ta Chou hsing-t'ung*) and its predecessor, the T'ang code (*T'ang-lü*), virtually without change. Yet he and his successors were quite willing "to adapt Sung practices to current situations," which resulted in their codifying a range of legal instruments even while maintaining the *Sung hsing-t'ung* unchanged, with the result that there were "rules having associated penalties

(*ch'ih*), administrative rules (*ling*), quantitative rules (*ko*), specifications (*shih*), and sometimes explanatory edicts (*shen-ming*)." The extensive development of policing, trial procedures, and penal systems – all of which contributed to Sung successes in effectively asserting local control – are further evidence of pragmatic systems building.

This reluctance to alter inherited structures was also evident in personnel organization. For over a century the Sung maintained the personal rank system of "stipendiary offices" (*chi-lu-kuan*), inherited from the Five Dynasties (907–60), which used administrative titles devoid of their apparent functional meanings to rank officials, employing instead a set of functional positions often assigned as special commissions. Although this was reformed in 1082, a time of true systems building, in general Sung institutional developments derived from pragmatic decisions taken in pursuit of concrete goals which, collectively, resulted in the creation of a distinctive Sung order.

Prominent among those goals was that of control over groups that had in the past threatened the imperium. Wang Tseng-yü describes how the Emperor T'ai-tsu at the start of his reign effectively clipped the wings of the palace army generals who had been the bane of the recent short-lived dynasties, and how the dynasty subsequently established procedures to control the military, even at the cost of military effectiveness. Similarly, Hartman describes how Sung emperors created bureaucratic structures and accompanying restrictions for eunuchs, palace women (and their families), and imperial kin – all groups from the inner palace that had dominated the court in times past – and in the process effectively tamed them. As Hartman explains at some length, one result of this was a monarchical institution that featured, with only a few exceptions, vigorous and effective emperors and a remarkably pacific court culture. The several contested imperial successions and the numerous regencies of dowager empresses all proceeded peacefully, unaccompanied by the massive purges and bloodletting that were common in the Han, T'ang, and Ming.

This curbing of the inner palace had an important corollary, namely an elevated role for civil ministers in imperial governance. Hartman has a section devoted to "The autocratic councilor", in which he describes the exceptional importance of Sung chief councilors, particularly during those periods of sole councilorship: 145 out of the 316 years of the dynasty. These periods include the tenures of Wang An-shih, Ts'ai Ching (1047–1126), and Ch'in Kuei, the latter two condemned by many later historians as evil ministers, but as Hartman notes in his historiographical discussion these judgments have been much colored by ideological biases in the primary sources themselves, thanks to selective editing by adherents of *Tao-hsüeh* (Learning of the Way) in

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[More information](#)

the Southern Sung and beyond.⁸ These historiographical insights have led to a rethinking of the historical record and, in recent years, revisionist studies of all three of these chief councilors, which have pointed to both accomplishments and complexities in their times in power.⁹ It is important to note, moreover, that the sole councilors always served at the behest of activist emperors, who frequently removed them from office when displeased with their actions or when determined to follow different policies. Thus we should be mindful of the limitations that existed for emperors and chief councilors, especially since both depended on the opinions and efforts of the Sung bureaucracy.

Even more than emperors and chief councilors, the officials – particularly scholar-officials (*shih-ta-fu*) – who staffed the Sung bureaucracy have long been viewed as one of the distinctive, and distinguished, features of the Sung. The primary reason for this was the unprecedented expansion of the civil service examinations and the accompanying spread of education in support of the examinations. Although the “protection privilege” (*yin*), which allowed those from high official families relatively easy access to office, was also important, examinations predominated, especially as a route to higher office. The development of the examination system, described by Hartman and especially Chaffee, provides yet another example of the pragmatic character of Sung institution building. Viewed synchronically, the Sung can be credited with creating a system that was to survive for almost a millennium, characterized by the primacy of the *chin-shih* (presented or advanced scholar) degree, a triennial examination schedule, multiple layers of examinations through which candidates progressed, a palace examination overseen personally by the emperor used primarily for final rankings of the *chin-shih*, anonymous testing procedures, and institutional ties between prefectural schools and the prefectural examinations. We should be mindful, however, that this system did not emerge fully formed. T'ai-tsung's decision in 977 to increase degree numbers dramatically, thereby fundamentally changing the role of examinations in the selection of the civil service, can be seen as the start of a century-long process in which the elements of the examinations described above were developed in response to a series of specific challenges.

⁸ See especially Hartman's “The making of a villain: Ch'in Kuei and Tao-hsüeh,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 58 No. 1 (June 1998), pp. 59–146.

⁹ This revisionism has been particularly marked with regard to Ts'ai Ching and his emperor, Hui-tsung (r. 1100–25). See the essays in Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford, eds., *Emperor Huizong and late Northern Song China: The politics of culture and the culture of politics* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Ari Levine's chapter on Hui-tsung in the companion Volume 5, Part 1; Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating culture: The collections of Emperor Huizong* (Seattle, 2008); and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Emperor Huizong* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

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Hartman describes two ways in which this classically trained group of select officials made an impact on Sung governance. The extraordinary proliferation of paper documents that is apparent in Sung sources points to the role of the written word, and this in turn allows Hartman to delineate the processes of government, the ways in which the flow of paper through memorials, impeachments, reports, and edicts shaped the political functions. Second is the emergence of literati-dominated government beginning in the early eleventh century. Here we must note a discrepancy between Hartman's use of "literati" in contrast to that of others in this volume, including Bol, Hymes, and Chaffee. Whereas the latter group use the term to refer broadly to classically educated scholars (*shih*) – Hymes's preferred term is "gentlemen" – Hartman draws on the Western notion of a *litteratus* and employs a more restrictive definition of "literati" as "civil officials who served in these upper ranks of Sung government." This allows him to focus upon a group of officials in the Northern Sung who not only participated in some of the most famous reform and antireform programs in Chinese history, but also produced a body of writing about government and statecraft that was to influence scholars and statesmen throughout the rest of the imperial period. Indeed, out of that same group emerged a wide-ranging discourse about history, culture, and philosophy, as well as government, that was to do much to shape China's intellectual landscape for the ensuing millennium.

SUNG CONFUCIANISM

The emergence and rise of Neo-Confucianism or *Tao-hsiieh* or Ch'eng-Chu learning (after Ch'eng I and Chu Hsi) is one of developments for which the Sung is justly famous, given their philosophical brilliance and especially the role played by Chu's thought as orthodox Confucian learning in subsequent dynasties. However, as the chapters by Peter Bol and Hoyt Tillman make clear, the intellectual landscape of Sung Confucianism – its *ju* learning – was complex and variegated, with a wide range of thinkers who often disagreed with each other over basic philosophical issues. Even the *Tao-hsiieh* movement of the Southern Sung – Tillman's focus – exhibited considerably more diversity than later triumphalist accounts suggested.

As the title of his chapter suggests, Bol's concern is to show how Sung Confucian thinkers "reconceptualized the order of things." This was to a large extent a Northern Sung phenomenon whose origins can be traced to the early decades of the dynasty, when a division can be observed between those who saw their task as the recovery of the cultural heritage of the past through the compilation of huge anthologies, and others who were inspired by the "Ancient Style" (*ku-wen*) of writing that had been championed by the