

## Structures of Governance in Song Dynasty China, 960–1279 CE

Charles Hartman presents an ambitious analysis of the workings of governance in Imperial China centered on the Song Dynasty (960–1279). Here he develops a new model for thinking about the deeper structures of governance in Song and pre-imperial China – the “technocratic–Confucian continuum” – which challenges the prevailing perception of Confucian political dominance and offers a vehicle for expanding the definition and scope of Song political culture to embrace all its actors. Building on his acclaimed work *The Making of Song Dynasty History: Sources and Narratives, 960–1279 CE* (2021), this richly detailed exploration of the Song court is of significance beyond the immediate period of study both in rethinking the nature of monarchy in China and in examining the constructive possibility of political dissent.

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## Preface

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This book and its predecessor, *The Making of Song Dynasty History: Sources and Narratives, 960–1279 CE* (Cambridge, 2021), comprise two parts of a single project to examine the prevailing contention among modern historians that an elite class of Confucian scholars-officials dominated political life in Song. *The Making of Song Dynasty History* demonstrated that the surviving textual basis for this contention descends from the same discourse that this same Confucian class devised to rhetorically marginalize their political adversaries and to assert their own superiority over them. My first volume thus deconstructed Song historical sources to reveal the origins of this historical narrative of Confucian dominance in the rhetoric of contemporaneous Song political discourse. *Structures of Governance* revisits that same discourse – now, one hopes, shorn of its rhetorical camouflage – to construct a new, more inclusive vision of Song political culture. This model grants equal footing to both Confucian officials and their political adversaries. This second volume thus presents in detail a model of a more expansive political culture and in turn enables a more nuanced assessment of the Song Confucian achievement and its place in larger Chinese history.

I caution at the onset and will remind readers throughout this volume: this model of an expanded political culture does not objectively describe any historical reality that the surviving corpus of Song political discourse has transmitted to us. Rather, the inelegantly but carefully named “technocratic–Confucian continuum” functions as a heuristic device to organize historical events that do occur in that corpus. Clearly, terms like technocracy, institutionalism, or even Confucian governance have no equivalents in Song discourse. I have devised these theoretical abstractions as a way to group together and analyze disparate historical phenomena. They are a model for the thing; not the thing itself. For example, ideas that occur in the textual corpus of Ouyang Xiu or Sima Guang may be used to construct a heuristic model of “Confucian governance,” but that model can never fully describe the actual politics, either as theory or in practice, of the men themselves.

I have labored throughout this book to keep this distinction between theoretical model and historical reality clear. Yet the difficulty of this labor increases

as one moves downward from grand theory into the lower orders of historical analysis. Writing in English about events that happened a thousand years ago in China presents both challenges and opportunities. All theoretical abstractions (at least in this book) derive ultimately from textual sources. But the pathways traveled are different, and each case involves some degree of metaphorical transfer. For example, the meanings in Chinese and in English of a Song term like *guoti* 國體 and its blunt translation as “the essential body of the state” are close enough to span the temporal chasm between then and now and the cultural chasm between China and the United States. However, *jigang* 紀綱, a basic term in Song political discourse, if translated naïvely as “threads and cables,” travels much less well. My chosen equivalent here – “the system” – is itself a mini analytical construct: a newer English metaphor translates an old Chinese metaphor for an interlocking network of established institutions and regulations that Song politicians believed would promote effective governance. A modern scholar of Song writing in Chinese might use this Song vocabulary without comment, assuming (perhaps incorrectly) that modern Chinese readers will understand the Song meaning. But the scholar writing in English has no choice except to attempt some degree of “translation.”

A process similar to the metaphorical transfer from *jigang* to “the system” comes also into play at intermediate levels of historical analysis that lie somewhere between grand theory making and “translation.” Some English concepts that occur throughout this book – for example documentary control, ad hoc agencies, balanced governance – do not directly translate Song terms. They are short, convenient labels to circumscribe a defined range of Song phenomena for analysis. I feel confident, however, that both contemporaneous Song politicians and contemporary historians of Song would recognize in these phenomena fundamental aspects of a wider construction of Song political culture. That said, both the label and the scope of the historical phenomena thus circumscribed are mine. I have been careful to define both label and scope, and I have constructed the index to guide readers to these definitions.

Finally, although this book treats of Song governance, its final pages suggest how its conclusions may be relevant for other periods of imperial Chinese history, and perhaps even for the post-1911 period as well. I am not a scholar of modern China. Yet I have always felt that students both of the 1911 revolution and of the 1949 revolution, by too readily accepting the intensity of the revolutionaries’ own anti-Confucian rhetoric, yield thereby too much weight to the actual political dominance of Confucianism in pre-revolutionary times. Likewise, too readily accepted is the degree to which the twentieth century changed the deeper structures of Chinese political life examined in this book. We find in Song a robust discourse on such fundamental political questions as the ultimate purpose of government, the origins of political authority, the delegation of that authority, the formulation and implementation of policy,

and the nature of political loyalty. And on all these questions, we find the Confucian position always contested and its advocates often on the losing side of unremitting political struggle with their adversaries. As a voice from the midst of these struggles, Zhu Xi's memorials to Emperor Xiaozong speak to authority with a precision and passion seldom encountered in China before or after. But, despite the moral superiority that intellectual history has accorded him, his was hardly the dominant political voice of his day.

Since my two volumes on Song history were researched and written together, my debts for this volume are identical to those listed in the preface to *The Making of Song Dynasty History*, and I will not repeat them here. Special thanks, however, are due to four scholars and friends who have made additional contributions to this volume. As before, Paul Smith and Ari Levine have proven ever thoughtful and attentive readers, and their suggestions have improved every page of this book. Without the expert help of Xiong Huei-Lan I could never have completed the network analysis and Gephi visualization in Figure 9.1. Likewise, the Venn diagrams in Figures 11.2 and 11.3 were developed in coordination with Chang Wei-ling, whose knowledge of Song political history has been an invaluable resource during the writing of both volumes. I am grateful to Liu Ning, Director of the Liaoning Provincial Museum for permission to reproduce on the cover the magnificent graph *chi* 敕 “imperial command” from a surviving Huizong-era document in the museum's collection. A publication subsidy grant from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation subvented the color illustrations and printing. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Lucy Rhymer, the senior commissioning editor at Cambridge University Press, for her consistent support both for *The Making of Song Dynasty History* and for this volume. Lastly, as always, I am grateful for the love and support of my wife, Li-yun, and daughter, Katy, during the research and writing of this book.

## Notes on the Cover and on the Text

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### A Note on the Cover

The cover reproduces the Chinese graph *chi* 敕 (imperial command) from the order, about 1120, appointing Cai Xing as Director of the Department of Palace Services (see *infra*, p. 214). For the entire document see *Liaoning sheng bowuguan cang shuhua zhulu. Shufa juan* 遼寧省博物館藏書畫著錄. 書法卷 (Shenyang: Liaoning meishu chubanshe, 1998), 91–96.

A female secretary or palace eunuch, imitating the calligraphic style of Emperor Huizong, wrote the order on this elegant paper impressed with an ink-resistant, golden decorative pattern that remains occasionally visible beneath the ink. The graph's combination of artistic refinement and imperial authority well reflects the distinctive character of late Northern Song technocratic governance.

### A Note on the Text

Chinese characters are given for proper names, places, book titles, and technical terms upon their first mention in the text. Dates for persons follow Chang Bide 昌彼得, Wang Deyi 王德毅, et al., *Songren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 宋人傳記資料索引 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1976) and Li Yumin 李裕民, *Songren shengcu xingnian kao* 宋人生卒行年考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010). Dates follow the traditional Chinese lunar calendar converted into Western notation. Thus, for example, 1144/3/18 corresponds to the eighteenth day of the third month of the fourteenth year of the Shaoxing 紹興 reign period. Equivalencies between Chinese and Western years follow P. Hoang, *Concordance des chronologies néoméniques chinoise et européenne* (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1910). The beginning of the bibliography contains a list of abbreviations for primary sources that are cited frequently in the notes.