

magnified (<https://asiacenter.harvard.edu/publications>), it would be ideal to reprint the graphs in larger format. The appendix titled “Persons Appearing in the *Shishuo xinyu*” lists some one hundred persons and surely refers only to individuals who appear in the study. I also noticed the omission of Cai Mo from the index, and that a page number in the last footnote is a typographical error (p. 234, n. 38). Of course, these correctible problems do not detract from the quality of Chen’s study nor from the methodical presentation of his findings. Chen has introduced new ways of reading and understanding the *Shishuo xinyu*, an especially impressive achievement in light of all the scholarship that precedes him. There is much to relish in this learned yet highly readable book.

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Political Communication in Chinese and European History, 800–1600. Edited by Hilde De Weerd and Franz-Julius Morche. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. Pp. 633. €192.00.

“Political communication,” as used in the title of this stimulating volume, is a broad concept. Most obviously it covers the efforts of the states—and, in Europe, of two organized, hierarchical, churches claiming significant earthly powers (Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox)—to get their messages out to the public, and to receive certain messages from and about those over whom they claimed dominion. But it also covers a variety of public and private communications among the state’s subjects, and between them and local officials, that bore in one way or another on political projects: projects that ranged from personal office-seeking to promoting a particular interest or preferred policy to commemorating past events in ways that had implications for current policy. Many of these latter communications moved through networks that look more or less horizontal when compared to the steeply vertical channels of formal government; but they were never completely so, being permeated by numerous inequalities of status, wealth, and condition.

The book includes a mix of explicitly comparative essays, often jointly authored, with essays that focus on a European or Chinese topic but make brief reference to the other region. After a very thoughtful introduction, the remaining contributions

are organized into five loose categories. “Communication and the Formation of Politics” focuses primarily on documents and practices that were generated within bureaucracies, and at least originally for administrative purposes. “Letters and Political Languages” describes epistolary communications—both their contents and the networks through which they were exchanged—and how they served political purposes. “Communication and Political Authority” looks first at channels for the dissemination of public notices, primarily legal and administrative, but sometimes also ideological. It then considers what the choice of these channels can tell us about how authorities conceived their relationship to communities they ruled, and, to some degree, how parts of the public responded. This is followed by a case study (jointly authored by Chu Ming Kin and Franz-Julius Morche) of how such channels could escape state control, looking at two printers who, though they originally enjoyed ties to important officials, wound up running afoul of the authorities and having their publications censored. Part IV, “Memory and Political Imaginaries” looks more at the contents of texts and less at the networks by which they were distributed. It looks both at famous retrospective texts (accounts of the martyrdom of Yue Fei 岳飛 [1103–1142] and Thomas Beckett [1120–1170]) and relatively obscure ones (the valedictions composed by one local literatus for officials ending their terms in his home prefecture) and their capacity to shape politically potent memories. Part V is “Epilogues,” including one essay (by Wim Blockmans) that fits the conventional understanding of that term, looking forward to new developments in political communication near the end of this long period (particularly with the rise of printing in Europe), plus a more theoretical and methodological essay on the uses of historical comparison both within and beyond this volume.

As Robert Hymes notes in that methodological essay, the authors have generally shied away from making macro-level comparisons of “China” and “Europe” or of any Chinese state and any other European one (Byzantium, France, etc.); they instead focus on particular practices (e.g., the posting of official notices), individuals (e.g., the printers Chen Qi 陳起 [1186–1256] and Robert Estienne [1503–1559]), or ideas (e.g., the mix of martial [*wu* 武] and literary [*wen* 文] attainments in constructions of elite masculinity, discussed in the Beckett / Yue Fei essay by Bernard Gowers and Tsui Lik Hang), while sketching rather quickly a general background of the relevant macro-scale similarities or differences (e.g., political unity versus political fragmentation). This avoids various problems that would probably accompany any attempt to make macro-level comparisons at the present, very patchy, state of our knowledge about these issues in this time period. It also allows the authors to avoid engaging much with the internal diversity of either China or Europe, and still less with the representativeness of its examples.

This would be a tempting choice in any case, given that each author has only the word count of an essay, not a book, to work with, but it may well limit the volume's impact.¹

One refreshing feature of the book is that the authors have taken to heart the idea that the concepts used to make cross-cultural comparisons need not come from Europe. We get genuine efforts to see what might be gained by thinking of certain European elites as Chinese-style "literati," by using *wen* and *wu* to think about elite masculinities at both ends of Eurasia, and so on. Moreover, though the book as a whole spans the years 800–1600, the bulk of the essays focus on the period between 1000 and 1400 (or 1500 at the latest). Until near the end of that period, China had printing and Europe did not (though manuscript production was increasing rapidly in both places, and especially so in Europe). It was also an era in which European states were just beginning to develop their own institutions for raising a cadre of literate administrators and propagandists (having previously relied mostly on those educated by and for the Church), and one in which China—especially the south, where Song rule survived past 1127—was probably the more urbanized region. Consequently, those comparisons that lend themselves to assessments of relative "modernity" here often favour China. For the most part,

¹ A suggestive parallel here might be the volumes on East Asian and European historical demography, economy, and society published by the Eurasia Project, in which the scholars involved focused on specific communities for which unusually good data was available, allowing them to answer unusually detailed, event-centred questions: how much did birth and death rates change for males and females of particular age groups in the aftermath of a harvest failure of some particular magnitude? What was the chance that a family in which the household head died while there were multiple children under 10 would be impoverished a decade later? The result was a number of fascinating articles, but my sense from talking to colleagues is that these volumes remain relatively little known—in large part, I suspect, because of uncertainties about what findings about one village in Tuscany, Liaoning, or Sendai—which may have excellent records precisely because it was institutionally peculiar—tell us about the larger units that are the usual topics of our books and our courses. The volumes in question are Tommy Bengtsson, Cameron Campbell, and James Z. Lee, eds., *Life Under Pressure: Mortality and Living Standards in Europe and Asia, 1700–1900* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Robert C. Allen, Tommy Bengtsson, and Martin Dribe, eds., *Living Standards in the Past: New Perspectives on Well-Being in Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Noriko O. Tsuya et al., *Prudence and Pressure: Reproduction and Human Agency in Europe and Asia, 1700–1900* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), and Christer Lundh and Satomi Kurosu, eds., *Similarity in Difference: Marriage in Europe and Asia, 1700–1900* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

though, these essays avoid or minimize that kind of teleological comparison—which is also refreshing. Instead, they mostly use comparison to highlight the growing reach of the written word in both places—there is no discussion of political communication via visual images, ritual, architecture, or other non-verbal means—and/or as a way for specialists in both areas to see familiar phenomena from a new angle. (For instance, as we shall see shortly, the well-known turn towards “localism” over the course of the Song looks different when authors not only map the reach of many “local” elites’ networks of correspondents, but compare centre-local relationships in China to those in the far smaller polities of Europe.) Even differences that seem more or less categorical—for instance, between systems of pre-publication permission and censorship in Europe, which had relatively standardized legal procedures, and a harder-to-predict regime of post-publication punishment in China—are generally catalogued without treating them as either diagnostic of society-wide differences or as necessary triggers for later divergences.

The book’s first case study, by Christian Lamouroux, provides a remarkably lucid tour through the tangles of Song-dynasty public finance, showing how the centre eventually gained control of the knowledge it needed to re-centralize fiscal authority, which had largely devolved to regional military commands during the Tang. That this administrative success occurred during the dynasty’s ultimately unsuccessful wars with the Jin introduces some themes that resonate throughout the book: in particular, that short- and medium-term defeats for the centralizing state were often inseparable from longer-term victories, and that control over information often involved the elaboration of highly technical, standardized languages that belie the commonplace description of Chinese officials as (only) Confucian generalists. At the same time, because Lamouroux focuses almost entirely on intra-governmental communication, it stands somewhat apart from the bulk of the volume, which emphasizes communications that crossed the state/society divide, often making the analytical utility of those terms dubious. A bridge to these broader realms of political communication is provided by Filippo Ronconi’s interesting essay on how a new, more convenient, cursive script, originally used only in Byzantine record-keeping, spread beyond that context as the families who had trained their sons in it (and for administrative careers) rose in status. This cursive began to be used in the production of medical, philosophical, and other texts after about 800, helping to create “the first phase of Byzantine humanism” (p. 161). Both the parallels between this history and that of the rising power of families who trained men of letters in China, and the sharp differences between these cases—particularly in the relationships between such families, institutions that employed them, and the worlds of publishing and intellectual

trendsetting—pose stimulating questions regarding what was and was not unique about experiences at both ends of Eurasia, and why. However, both this essay and those that follow largely leave it to the reader to supply even tentative outlines of any such macro-level synthesis.

As many essays in the rest of the volume emphasize, the channels of communication between high officers of state and those beneath them ran in both directions, but with notable asymmetries. For the most part, states wanted to disseminate messages about how people should behave—legal codes, demands for taxes, military recruitment appeals—while sharing little information about the government’s own circumstances, resources, plans, or deliberations. The messages that they wanted to receive were largely the obverse of this: that is, central governments wanted to know what resources their subjects and low-level officials had, and sometimes what problems they faced, but they were generally uninterested in hearing what such people wanted their rulers to do. Overall, communication in both directions tended to expand across the long period considered here, both in China and Europe; indeed, the increasing reach of the top-down messaging of states (and Western church hierarchies as well) is the closest thing to a linear trend shared across the case studies considered here. But even that story becomes far more complicated when examined more closely.

As De Weerd and Watts point out in their jointly written essay, the early Song saw policymaking shift from the outer court to the emperor’s inner chambers (p. 51): a centralizing move that could easily have led to more secrecy. Indeed, both the Northern and Southern Song court repeatedly banned leaking to the public a wide variety of documents: court gazettes, memorials, examination essays, draft sections of the dynastic history, copies of the legal code, and so on (pp. 54, 62–63). Nonetheless, many such documents circulated widely, especially with the rapid expansion of printing after roughly 1100. This circulation often wound up being a boon to the state, expanding the reach of its messages.

Moreover, this increased publicity often engendered a feedback loop that resulted in still more publicity, and perhaps also more standardization. For instance, while the Yuan and Ming, unlike the Song, wanted from the very start of their dynasties for the contents of their legal codes to be widely known, they still hoped to monopolize the interpretation of that code. But maintaining that monopoly became much harder once the code itself was public. Being able to consult and quote the law facilitated the rise of private “litigation masters” (who were also often encouraged by government clerks who received commissions for referring promising clients). As these pettifoggers brought cases that (inevitably) were based on their own interpretations of statutes, magistrates who wished to retain control

of the legal process faced pressure to publicly articulate the reasoning behind their decisions—something they had not generally done before this period (pp. 53–55, 57, 59–60). The resulting documents, some of which were collected and printed, presumably shaped the strategies of future litigants, and certainly influenced the decisions of future magistrates. This made the implementation of the law at least somewhat more predictable across time and space, without limiting the court's power to promulgate new laws when it wished to.

More generally, several essays show that in retrospect, state-building projects also often benefitted from having more non-officials (and lower officials) able to express their political preferences. Sometimes non-officials made valuable suggestions, but what was even more important was that being able to knowledgeably discuss state projects became a mark of elite status and made elites more committed to those state projects. Perhaps the most consequential example is how increased public discussion of the Song dynasty's failure to hold North China—complete with increased circulation of maps showing the normative boundaries for a “Chinese” dynasty, along with essays on military strategy and on the differences between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” peoples—helped create a broadly shared, arguably proto-nationalist, commitment among elites to the political unity of the trans-dynastic entity now called “China” (pp. 86, 547). But those developments were not intended or foreseen, and thus anything but inevitable. This point is reinforced by a comparison in Ari Levine's essay, which compares Ye Mengde's 葉夢得 (1077–1148) recollection of the fall of Kaifeng 開封, to Niketas Choniates's memoir of the Byzantine loss of Constantinople in 1204. Both Ye and Choniates blamed these defeats on moral and political failures, particularly of their respective monarchs, and both expressed a firm belief that eventually “civilization” would revive and drive out “barbarian” invaders, but Byzantium experienced nothing like the surge of emotional irredentism that swept the Song elite (even among many people who favoured temporary acceptance of the loss of the north for pragmatic reasons); instead, Choniates's memoir highlights the scorn that refugees from the capital experienced when they arrived in the remaining Byzantine territories (pp. 535–36, 542, 547–48, 555–59, 563–64).

For Sinologists, one of the most interesting take-away lessons from this book is how it modifies our understanding of “the localist turn,” which has, for the last few decades been a central topic in the historiography on the Song in particular, and on middle and late imperial China more generally. The basic idea is that as the number of classically literate men outgrew the number of offices available for them—and as, in some periods, high stakes factional strife made too much reliance on court connections dangerous—socially ambitious families increasingly focused locally:

building up property and reputation in their native counties, marrying with families prominent in the same area rather than those with connections in the capital, taking over various aspects of local governance once handled by local officials and the sub-bureaucracy, and preparing to ride out multiple generations without having a lineage member in office when that fate, almost inevitably, became theirs.² That observation, backed by a considerable amount of social history, still stands. But while elite men married a few times at most, and in most cases held only a few or even no government offices during their lifetimes, they could exchange many, many letters, prefaces for the works of friends, and other texts, so that tracking those transactions provides a fuller picture of their connections. And what the essays by Beverly Bossler on Yao Mian's 姚勉 (1216–1262) letters and by Chen Song on Zhang than marriage and inheritance patterns can. Yu's 張俞 (1001–1064) messages to departing officials show, along with more general comments in Hilde de Weerdt and John Watt's "Towards a Comparative History of Political Communication" (and De Weerdt's 2015 book³), is that many of the men we might think of as "local" elites were in frequent touch with people at court, and in even more frequent touch with others like themselves in many places outside the capital—and that however local their property interests and patterns of physical movement might have been, they *wrote* frequently to these correspondents, often about empire-wide affairs. Indeed, discussing those topics was essential to anyone who wanted a reputation as a literatus even at the local level. This does not mean that there was no localist turn, of course, or that it was not an important and durable development in Chinese history. But it does mean that we should be careful not to assume that its political, economic, social, and intellectual dimensions moved in lockstep, nor think of growing local power as having necessarily diminished central power in a zero-sum way. (The same observation has sometimes been made about modern state-building, both in China and elsewhere.⁴)

² See, for instance, Robert M. Hartwell, "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750–1550," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.2 (Dec. 1982): 365–442; Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-chou, Chiang-hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For a recent review essay, see Chen Song, "Review Essay: The State, the Gentry, and Local Institutions: The Song Dynasty and Long-Term Trends from Tang to Qing," *Journal of Chinese History* 1 (2017): 141–82.

³ Hilde De Weerdt, *Information, Territory and Networks: The Crisis and Maintenance of Empire in Song China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), especially chapter 7.

⁴ For late Qing, Republican, and PRC examples, see respectively Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Power and Politics in Late Imperial China: Yuan Shih-kai in Beijing and Tianjin, 1901–1908*

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Better examples of literate people with truly local horizons—at least as far as we can tell—might be found among the clerks and other sub-officials employed in county governments. These men both transmitted the government's instructions to ordinary people and sometimes buffered the impact of government orders on behalf of local interests. However, the latter function was most often performed through indirection or quiet non-compliance, not by issuing any formal statements that claimed to represent those being shielded from state power (pp. 55–58). They were, therefore, in De Weerd and Watts's formulation, "mediators" between state and society, much more than they were political "communicators." Literati and higher-level officials were both (p. 83), but their often weak local roots and careers as a state-employed "service class" made them primarily state-oriented communicators, despite their broad networks (pp. 86–87). In a well-known essay, Peter Bol has distinguished between a kind of localism that particularly valorizes claims about how the locality in question is unique and not comparable to others, and another which instead emphasizes that the locality in question is an especially good exemplar of virtues that are prized across some larger oecumene.⁵ Not surprisingly, given the above characterization of China's literati, their expressions of local pride, as seen in this volume, tend to be of the latter variety. Zhang Yu's efforts—chronicled in Chen Song's essay—to assure the court of the loyalty of elites in his native Sichuan (and thus get the court to adopt less high-handed policies towards this region), to bring local shrines under the protection of officials who originally hailed from elsewhere, and to have Sichuan acknowledged as the birthplace of the ancient sage-king Yu serve as particularly clear examples (pp. 457–67).

Meanwhile, De Weerd and Watt suggest, European aristocrats and plutocrats were often powerful mediators, but were much less deeply invested in whatever literary attainments they might have (which were sometimes, by Chinese standards, shockingly limited). They were not, by and large, terribly important communicators, and remained socially distinct from the more humbly born but better educated

(Note 4—*Continued*)

(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 6–11, 219–24; R. Keith Schoppa, *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 5–8, 1867–187; Elizabeth J. Perry, "Collective Violence in China, 1880–1980," *Theory and Society* 13.3 (May 1984): 427–54, especially 449.

⁵ Peter K. Bol, "The 'Localist Turn' and 'Local Identity' in Later Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 24.2 (Dec. 2003): 1–50.

men who served both church and state in that capacity (p. 87). These are, of course, rough and ready distinctions, and numerous exceptions could be cited; they are, nonetheless, a useful way of thinking about centre and locality and state and society during the middle period of the Chinese empire, and a good example of how comparison can help specialists in both China and Europe specify what is and is not distinctive about the places they study. We are still a long way from being able to make confident generalizations about the issues covered in this book, but the essays here can help to chart various promising paths forward.

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A Library of Clouds: The Scripture of the Immaculate Numen and the Rewriting of Daoist Texts. By J. E. E. Pettit and Chao-jan Chang. New Daoist Studies Series. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2020. Pp. xx + 355. \$65.00.

This book, written collaboratively by two representatives of the younger generation of Daoist scholars (one a Chinese from Taiwan and the other an American) inaugurates a major renewal of the textual study and analysis of the canon of Daoist literature. The focus is on the Shangqing 上清 tradition, which originated in southern China in the mid-fourth century C.E., through the revelation of texts and instructions from the deities and immortalized humans of this tradition, and the continued transmission and reworking of this material, based on the ongoing communication between the divine and the human worlds—as well as on the creative input from the individuals through whose hands the texts were passed down. This process continued over the centuries until the beginning of the modern era, generally thought to be represented by a number of economic, social, and cultural shifts that took place during the Song dynasty (960–1278).

The book places itself in the context of Daoist studies, and it builds, of course, on the wide-ranging literature on the textual history of the Shangqing tradition produced within this field over the last five decades—in French, English, Japanese, and Chinese. The most important in Western languages is without question the work of Isabelle Robinet (1932–2000), the leading Western scholar on this tradition,