

# **The King's Power Dominating Society—A Re-examination of Ancient Chinese Society**

*Liu Zehua*

**Abstract** In terms of social formation, the most important characteristic of traditional Chinese society was how the king's power dominated the society. Ever since the emergence of written records, we see that ancient China has had a most prominent interest group, that of the nobility and high officials, centered around the king (and later the emperor). Of all the kinds of power exerted on Chinese society, the king's was the ultimate power. In the formation process of kingly power, a corresponding social structure was also formed. Not only did this central group include the king or emperor, the nobles, and the bureaucratic landlords, but the “feudal landlord ecosystem” which was formed within that group also shaped the whole society in a fundamental way. As a special form of economic redistribution, corruption among officials provided the soil for the growth of bureaucratic landlords. At the foundation of this entire bureaucratic web was always the king and his authority. In short, ancient Chinese society is a power-dependent structure centered on the king's power. The major social conflict was therefore the conflict between the dictatorial king's power and the rest of society.

**Keywords** king's power; landlord; social classes; despotism; social form

## **Society of Imperial Power: Reinterpreting China's “Feudal Society”**

*Feng Tianyu*

**Abstract** To call the period from Qin Dynasty to Qing Dynasty a “feudal society” is a misrepresentation of China’s historical reality. The fengjian system only occupied a secondary position in Chinese society from the time of Qin. It was the system of prefectures and counties (junxianzhi) that served as the cornerstone of the centralized power structure. This system, together with the institution of selecting officials through the imperial examination, constituted the centralized bureaucracy that intentionally crippled the hereditary tradition and the localized aristocratic powers, and hence bolstered the unity of the empire. Feudalism in medieval Western Europe shares many similarities with that of China during the Shang and Zhou dynasties, but is quite different from the monarchical centralism since the time of Qin and Han. Categorizing the social form of the period from Qin to Qing as “feudal” makes the mistake of over-generalizing and distorting this concept. It runs counter to the original Chinese meaning of fengjian, and severely deviates from the western connotation of feudalism. Moreover, the decentralized feudalism in pre-Qin dynasties and the later centralized imperial system from Qin onwards influenced the generation and evolution of Chinese culture in vastly different ways.

**Keywords** feudal, fengjian, imperial system

## **New Thoughts on the Social Forms of Ancient China (from the Zhou to Qing Dynasties)**

*Zhang Jinguang*

**Abstract** The entire course of ancient Chinese history has centered on state power, which dominated and shaped the basic picture of social history. The key to

Chinese state power has been the state ownership of land, and based on this we can divide the social forms of ancient China into four successive periods: the period of yishe 邑社時代 or village societies (Western Zhou Dynasty and the Spring and Autumn Period); the period of official communal system 官社時代 (Warring States Period to Qin Dynasty to the early Han Dynasty); the period of half official communal system 半官社時代 (Han to Tang Dynasty); and the period of state vs. individual peasants 國家個體小農時代(Song to Qing Dynasty).

**Keywords** social formation, state power, land ownership, official communal system, individual peasant

## **The Era of Prefectures and Counties: An Inquiry into the Power Structure and State Governance in Ancient Chinese Society**

*Li Ruohui*

**Abstract** In spite of all the vicissitudes that Chinese society underwent from the Qin (221–206 BC) to the Qing (1644–1911AD) dynasties, the system of social government throughout this period as a whole was markedly different from that of Zhou. While the post-Qin dynasties adopted fa or laws to govern the nation, it was li or rituals that dominated in Zhou as a norm of social control. Hence the key to a fruitful inquiry into the administrative evolution of society from Zhou through Qing, a period spanning over two thousand years, lies in the investigation of the political shift from Zhou as a state to Qin as an empire. Since li is a system of ritual propriety representing a consensus of both the upper and lower social strata on the constitution of state power, it is fundamentally different from fa due to its lack of a binding or

coercive force. An artificial reorganization of society by a new form of social government called for a new political system known as junxianzhi(郡縣制), a bureaucratic system of centrally appointed local magistrates in “prefectures and counties”. The compulsory force of the law was guaranteed by the national army, and so a system of military officialdom ensured the command and monopoly over the army by the monarch. A fluid bureaucratic system, which enabled the ruling sovereign or monarch to delegate his authority to ministers and local officials, replaced the hereditary system of power by clan lineage. This paper begins with an analysis of the differences between the Confucians’ idea of rule by li and the Legalists’ idea of rule by law, and ends with a discussion on the birth and characteristics of the system of prefectures and counties.

**Keywords** prefectures and counties; codified law; political transformation, Zhou, Qin; shift from State to Empire

## **Northern and Southern Dynasties and the course of History since Middle Antiquity**

*Li Zhi'an*

**Abstract** Two periods in Chinese history can be characterized as constituting a North/South polarization: the period commonly known as the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420AD-589AD), and the Southern Song, Jin, and Yuan Dynasties (1115AD-1368AD). Both of these periods exhibited sharp contrasts between the North and South that can be seen in their respective political and economic

institutions. The North/South parity in both of these periods had a great impact on the course of Chinese history. Both before and after the much studied Tang-Song transformation, Chinese history evolved as a conjoining of previously separate North/South institutions. Once the country achieved unification under the Sui Dynasty and early part of the Tang, the trend was to carry on the Northern institutions in the form of political and economic administration. Later in the Tang Dynasty the Northern institutions and practices gave way to the increasing implementation of the Southern institutions across the country. During the Song Dynasty, the Song court initially inherited this “Southernization” trend while the minority kingdoms of Liao, Xia, Jin, and Yuan primarily inherited the Northern practices. After coexisting for a time, the Yuan Dynasty and early Ming saw the eventual dominance of the Southern institutions, while in middle to late Ming the Northern practices reasserted themselves and became the norm. An analysis of these two periods of North/South disparity will demonstrate how these differences came about and how this constant divergence-convergence influenced Chinese history.

**Keywords** Northern and Southern Dynasties, North South disparity, divergence and convergence of historical trends

**The Heavens are High and the Emperor is Near: An Imperial Power System that is Open to the People--**

**The Interaction and Representation of the Complicated Relationship between the emperors and the People in Qin and Han Dynasties**

*Lei Ge*

**Abstract** When we say that “the Emperor is near,” we are referring not to his nearness to the officials below him but rather to the people. It has always been an indispensable element of the emperor’s authority that he is able to establish a clear relationship with the populace and allow them to directly feel his presence in their everyday lives—both materially and morally—and even more importantly, feel the emperor’s concern for the people on a regular basis. Fostering the people’s sense of coexistence with the emperor is essential to solidifying the emperor’s position and maintaining the emperor’s almost holy image. The development of the imperial power structure through the Qin and Han Dynasties can thus be seen as the continuous development of the relationship between the emperor and his subjects. The main agents in the imperial society can be defined as the emperor, his officials, and the people; it can not be limited simply to the political dynamics between the emperor and the officials. Through his autocratic rule, the emperor has the ability to build a personal, transcendent connection with the people. Imperial rule is by definition autocratic, but the entire imperial power structure necessarily includes the people and his personal relationship with them. By citing multiple historical examples, we can begin to see how the emperors established such personal relationships with the people and why they were important to his rule.

**Keywords** Qin Dynasty, Han Dynasty, imperial power, autocracy, relationship between emperor and populace

## **Creativity in Song *Daoxue* 道學: Explication and Elaboration in Zhu Xi’s and Chen Chun’s Philosophy**

*John Berthrong*

**Abstract** This essay explores one hermeneutical method on the general features of the typology of Zhu Xi's and Chen Chun's axiological dao xue cosmology. While there are myriad ways to read Zhu's dao xue, one fruitful approach is to analyze dao xue cosmology in terms of four domains or fields of focus, namely (1) patterns and coherent principles [form]; (2) dynamic functions and processes [dynamics]; (3) harmonizing cultural outcomes [unification]; and (4) axiological values and virtues [outcomes]. The study then proceeds to sample how important dao xue concepts such as li 理 as patterns and coherent principles and qi 氣 as generative energy are mapped onto the fourfold typology.

**Keywords** axiological cosmology, hermeneutics, dao xue, form, dynamics, unification, outcomes, values and virtues, Zhu Xi, Chen Chun, li, qi

## **The Refracted Moment: Photographing Chinese History in the Making**

*Bruno Lessard*

**Abstract** This article examines the way in which both Western and Chinese photographers have documented Chinese history in the making by focusing on the photographic documentation of two key events in the formation of Chinese society: the 1911 Revolution that laid the foundation for the birth of the republic and the “energy revolution” that was the Three Gorges Dam project (1994-2012). The major difference between the two revolutions is that the latter was documented by the Chinese themselves. No longer relying upon images made by Westerners exclusively, as was the case in 1911, the Chinese appropriated this monumental event in their

history to archive it photographically. The article offers a conceptual framework for understanding revolutionary events in the context of historiography and photography history. The analysis of various photographs of the 1911 Revolution by Francis Stafford and of the Three Gorges Dam project and area by Edward Burtynsky, Bill Zorn, ZengNian, and Yan Changjiang shows that the event remains an evanescent and quasi-impossible entity to capture photographically, and that photographers can only archive its refracted presence in the faces, landscapes, and objects in front of the lens. What the pictures unveil is that the refracted moments of these two events are far more significant than the actual events themselves for the photographers under study.

**Keywords** 1911 Revolution, Three Gorges Dam, documentary photography, landscape photography, event

### **From *kang*(炕) to *kongtiao*(空调): China's Twentieth Century Cooling**

*Emily Williams*

**Abstract** This essay suggests an alternative strategy for thinking about changes in Chinese society in recent decades, using not economic data or theories of development, but the metaphor of temperature. It argues that the cultural imperative in China has, in recent decades, switched from that of keeping warm to that of keeping cool. This change is made tangible through two key objects: the kang (炕), the northern Chinese heated bed, and the kongtiao (空调), the air conditioner. The antiquity of the kang is explored as an object that is key to the development of Chinese civilization in the inhospitable northern climes. Moving between physical and metaphorical ideas of heat, the essay argues that throughout much of the twentieth-century, heating remained the main focus. Twentieth-century revolutions



and mass campaigns under Mao Zedong were undeniably ‘hot,’ aiming to stoke the fire of revolution and radical social change. Under the reforms following Mao’s death, however, politics ‘cooled off:’ the political system crystalized and the frenzy of mass campaigns cooled down. This was accompanied by social changes, including what can be called the rise of individual cool, defined by ironic detachment, hedonism and narcissism. The new cool society and cool persona find their architectural accompaniment in the kongtiao, the air conditioner, which has become a must for urban living, even in north China. The kongtiao is presented as an ultimately unsocial device, a machine with intensive energy requirements that dumps heat into communal spaces in the effort to preserve individual comfort.

**Keywords** kang, kongtiao, air conditioner, domestic architecture, Mao Zedong, modern China, political change, social change, climate, heating, cooling