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A Discussion of Several Issues Concerning the “Tang-Song Transition”

Mou Fasong 牟發松

Professor of Department of History, East China Normal University,
Shanghai, China

moufasong1954@aliyun.com

Abstract

Naitō Konan's hypothesis on the “Tang-Song transition” was first expressed in lecture notes from his 1909 class on modern Chinese history at Kyoto University and, then, expounded in subsequent works such as “A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties” and “Modern Chinese History.” The theory systematically outlines that an evolutionary medieval to modern transition occurred in Chinese society during the period between the Tang and the Song dynasties, focusing in particular on the areas of politics/government, the economy, and culture. Political change is regarded as the core metric, demonstrated in concentrated form by the government's transformation from an aristocratic to a monarchical autocratic system alongside a rise in the status and position of the common people. The “Tang-Song transition theory,” underpinned theoretically by a cultural-historical perspective, advocates for a periodization of Chinese history based on the stages and characteristics of China's cultural development, which is also attributed to cultural shifts, downward to the commoner class from a culture monopolized by the aristocracy during the period between the Tang and Song, with concomitant changes in society. For over a century since it was first proposed, the “Tang-Song transition theory” has had far-reaching influence in Chinese, Japanese, and Western academic circles, continuing to be lively and vigorous even now. We might be able to find the cause in its originality and liberality, which leave significant room for later thinkers' continued adherence and development or criticism and falsification and continue to inspire new questions. Naitō's proposal was also intimately connected to his observations of China's circumstances in the late Qing dynasty and early Republican period, which also provided a “sample of the era” regarding realistic approaches to historical studies.

Keywords

Naitō Konan – Tang-Song transition theory – Naitō hypothesis – periodization – cultural history

1 When Was the Tang-Song Transition Theory First Proposed?

The “Tang-Song transition theory” (often referred to in European and American studies as the “Naitō hypothesis”) in Naitō Konan’s 内藤湖南 [Naitō Torajirō, 1866-1934] system of periodization, which features the concept of a “Song modernity,” so familiar to historians of Chinese history today, might be considered the most original, or perhaps the hallmark, of the noted Japanese scholar’s historiography. “A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties,” first published by Naitō in 1922, is commonly regarded as the first place that the theory was put forward.¹ In fact, many sections of the text were taken from lecture notes from the class Modern Chinese History [*Zhina jindaishi* 支那近代史] presented by Naitō at Kyoto University on successive occasions. These materials were published by the Tokyo publisher Koubundou in 1947 under the title *Modern Chinese History* [*Zhongguo jinshishi* 中國近世史], compiled based on notes taken by Naojirō Sugimoto 杉本直治郎 [1890-1973] in 1920 and Shigeki Kaizuka 貝塚茂樹 [1904-1987] in 1925 who attend Naitō’s lectures. Based on Naitō’s handwritten notes, we can see that the teaching materials for these two years were composed from earlier materials in 1918 and 1919, to which only minor revisions were made. According to Naitō’s son, Naitō Kenkichi 内藤乾吉 [1899-1978], the “most outstanding” first chapter of Koubundou’s edition of *Modern Chinese History*, “The Significance of Modern History,” was published earlier in 1922 as an article titled “A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties.” The two are substantially similar in content, construction, and sequence, as the course materials of 1918 and 1919 served as blueprints for both.

In fact, Naitō’s promulgation of a “Tang-Song transition” can be traced even further back. Naitō became a lecturer in history at Kyoto Imperial University

1 Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, “Gaikatsuteki Tō Sō jidai kan 概括の唐宋時代觀 [A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties],” *Rekishi to chiri* 歴史と地理 9, no. 5 (1922). For the Chinese translation, see Liu Junwen 劉俊文, ed., and Huang Yuese 黃約瑟, trans., *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi* 日本學者研究中國史論著選譯 [*Translations of Selected Works by Japanese Scholars on Chinese History*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1.10-18.

in 1907, the year that he gave a class on Ancient Chinese History [*Zhina gudai-shi* 支那古代史]. Naitō gave his class on Modern Chinese History in 1909, and we can still observe a page of Naitō's handwriting from the preface [*xuyan* 緒言] to the preparatory course notes composed by Naitō for this class, photocopied onto this section's title page and presented to us in its original form by Naitō Kenkichi from the postscript to Volume 10 of the *Complete Works of Naitō Konan*. As stated at the beginning of the preface as recorded in the postscript: "In what era should we properly ascribe modern history as having begun? We should consider it to follow the Song. There are various signs to indicate this."² Based on this, the work then expanded on five aspects of the Tang-Song transition. Naitō first discusses the most central contention of the Tang-Song transition theory—that is, the establishment and characteristics of a monarchical autocratic government in the Song dynasty [960-1279]. Second, he regards "relations with neighboring countries," referring to the Song dynasty's consideration of itself as "one country" confronting, equal to, or even weaker than the barbarian kingdoms of the Liao [907-1125], Jin [1115-1234], Yuan [1206-1368], and so on—no longer the "one China under heaven" of old, but with a more advanced sense of self. Third, he proposes a "contest of political power via peaceful methods" in which the contests between different political factions of the Song dynasty were based more on differing political views versus the factional battles of the Tang dynasty [618-907], dominated by the pursuit of power and ruthless methods. Fourth, he refers to "relations between the state and society" as the Tang Dynasty's goal of transforming society to suit the state's purposes in contradistinction to the Song dynasty's need for state power and systems to be adapted to social change. Fifth, "new trends in scholarly thinking," includes, in classical studies, for example, a shift from household codes and the passing down of tradition to a focus on more independent thought to satisfy the classical "interests and charms of the tastes of antiquity," or changes in the literary sphere such as in the revival of classical texts and arts (e.g., calligraphy and painting). The final conclusion is that all these changes "have a modern connotation," indicating that we can "characterize the era following the Northern Song as being part of early modern history."³

The content related to the Tang-Song transition mentioned above in the preface to *Modern History of China*, reflects basically the same overall perspective as "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties" and *Modern Chinese History*, published later albeit slightly simplified, in which sections 1, 3, and

2 Naitō Kenkichi 内藤乾吉, postscript to *Naitō Konan zenshū* 内藤湖南全集 [*Complete Works of Naitō Konan*] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969), 10.527.

3 Naitō Kenkichi, postscript to *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 10.527-29.

5 on politics and culture are almost identical. The preface lacks only a section on “economic changes,” though the economy is not the focus of Naitō’s Tang-Song transition theory. As stated by Naitō Kenkichi: “We can know that the ‘Song modernity hypothesis’ today regarded as one of the historiographical hallmarks of the author had already been formulated by this time (1909).”⁴ That is, the earliest time that Naitō Konan first put forward the “Tang-Song transition theory” was, in fact, 1909.

2 The Tang-Song Transition: Content and Center

The main content of the “Tang-Song transition” has been systematically rendered in “A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties” and *Modern Chinese History · The Significance of Modern History*. Both texts directly state that “the Song dynasty is the beginning of the modern period” and that the “end of the Tang and Five dynasties [907-960]” era was a “transition period” from the medieval to the modern period, before listing various changes involved in this transition. The former is the more concise, with a Chinese translation of only around 5,400 characters.⁵ The latter, the curriculum material, is a much more detailed dissertation and has received a Chinese translation of over 7,600 characters, in which the content is grouped separately under eight subheadings.⁶ In this paper, we sort the subheadings in their original sequence (the numbering in this list of subheadings has been added by the author) and summarize their main content, as follows.

1. The decline of aristocratic government and rise of a monarchical autocratic government, the Six Dynasties [220-589] to the mid-Tang period, the heyday of aristocratic government. The government of the aristocracy experienced a decline during a transitional period from the end of the Tang to the Five Dynasties, making way for the rise of an autocratic monarchical government. The power of the state’s ministers became concentrated in the person of the ruler and, indeed, this autocratic form of government was perfected in the Ming [1368-1644] and Qing [1616-1911] eras.

2. “A change in the position of the monarch” during the “heyday” of aristocratic government. The government was held exclusively in the hands of the

4 Naitō Kenkichi, postscript to *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 10.530.

5 Naitō Konan 內藤湖南, “Gaikuo de Tang-Song shidai guan 概括的唐宋時代觀 [A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties],” in *Riben xuezhè yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.10-18.

6 Naitō Konan 內藤湖南, “Zhongguo jinshishi 中國近世史 [Modern Chinese History],” in *Zhongguo shi tonglun 中國史通論 [A General Theory of Chinese History], Part 1*, trans. Xia Yingyuan 夏應元 et al. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 323-34.

aristocracy as a whole, in which the ruler in a sense belonged jointly to the aristocratic class, and the aristocracy could, if supposing the ruler unsuitable, then take steps to depose him. In the modern era, the ruler became that which was held in common by all officials and people of the state and an entity with absolute power, whose position was, relative to the aristocratic era, significantly more secure and stable.

3. The “establishment of monarchical power.” The government in the aristocratic era became an agreement between the Son of Heaven and the nobility, the promotion of whose government rested on the presupposed acknowledgment of the particular prerogatives of the aristocracy, in which the aristocracy was not absolutely required to observe the Son of Heaven’s every command. The emergence of the modern era was accompanied by a gradual decline in the prerogative of refusal [*feng bo quan* 封駁權] by the Chancellery [*men xia sheng* 門下省], representing the views of the aristocracy, which had completely disappeared by the time of the Ming and Qing; the power of the monarch grew without limit and the early-modern chancellor [*zaixiang* 宰相] took on an essentially secretarial function or was even done away with in the Ming and Qing.

4. “A change in the status of the people.” The people on the whole were considered akin to “slaves” by the aristocratic community during the era of aristocratic government. From the Sui [581-618] to the early Tang, peasants were bound to the land as tenant-farmers of the state [*guojia dianhu* 國家佃戶] under the tripartite tax [*zu yong diao* 租庸調] system. Although directly under the state, they were, in reality, tenant-farmers of the entire aristocratic community. The tripartite tax system of the mid-Tang collapsed and was reformed into a double-taxation system [*liang shui fa* 兩稅法], liberating the people from the prior system, which had bound them to the land. In the “modern” era, the people had the freedom to dispose of land and the harvest, and private property rights were acknowledged to some degree. The disappearance of the aristocratic classes allowed the monarch and people to face each other directly.

5. “Change in the appointment of officials.” The selection of officials had occurred entirely at the behest of the aristocratic powers under the nine-rank [*jiupin zhongzheng* 九品中正] system of the Six Dynasties. The imperial examination system in the Tang dynasty continued to be of particular benefit to the aristocracy. The modern reformation of the examination system, with content that tended toward the practical and incorporated a significant increase in the number of both participants and successful candidates, also gave the common people much greater opportunity to ascend the ranks of officialdom on a much more equal basis.

6. “A change in the nature of factions.” During the Tang, factions revolved around the aristocracy and were preoccupied with power struggles. During the Song, on the other hand, factions involved more of a battle of differing political viewpoints.

7. “Economic change.” During the Tang dynasty, the quantity of money in circulation was not large. Currency began to circulate during the Song dynasty in significantly greater amounts, and the “currency economy” flourished.

8. “A change in the nature of culture.” Classical studies of the Early Tang generally pursued the same scholarly styles as the Wei [220-265], and Six Dynasties eras, focusing in particular on household codes and passing down tradition. Doubt crept in concerning the commentaries and annotations of antiquity beginning in the mid-Tang, leading to new ideas about the interpretation of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Chunqiu* 春秋]. The questioning attitudes toward classical texts reached their apex during the Song dynasty, with reinterpretation of them becoming a prevalent trend. In literary studies, the popularity of the four—six parallel style of prose [*si-liu pianwen* 四六駢文], in vogue from the Six Dynasties period to the early Tang, transitioned by the mid-Tang into an emphasis on classical prose. In poetry, there was a change in a focus from form to free expression; *ci* 詞 poetry, which emerged in the late Tang, and *qu* 曲 poetry, which developed in the Song and Yuan periods, broke new ground in rhythm and gave vent to freer forms of expression, enabling literature, which had once been the purview of the aristocracy, to become an object of interest for the common people. In art, color murals had been popular during the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods, but this fascination gradually shifted during the Five Dynasties and two Songs to folding-screen paintings [*pingfeng hua* 屏風畫]; the gold-blue-green landscape [*jin bi shan shui* 金碧山水] diminished as plain line drawing with water and ink [*baimiao shuimo* 白描水墨] came into vogue; paintings that had served as magnificent architectural decorations or aristocratic items became scrolls that were easily carried and exhibited by commoners who had ascended to the ranks of officialdom while in foreign lands. Similar changes took place in the fields of music and dancing, with a transformation from meeting or serving the requirements of the aristocratic lifestyle to catering to the common people’s tastes.

These eight areas of Tang-Song transition can be grouped into three broad areas: politics/government (1-6), the economy (7), and culture (8), but if we look in particular at the decline of aristocratic governance from the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang onward and the emergence and replacement of them by the autocratic monarchical rule of the Song dynasty, then the rise and fall of these two political systems also presents a concentrated demonstration of

a “rise in the status and position of the common people.” A rise in the power wielded by the common folk is an important indicator in Naitō’s hypothesis on Song dynasty modernity. As Naitō points out in his seminal *Study on the Onin War* on Japanese history: “The broad swathe of history is, from a certain perspective, always a record of the gradual ascendance of the lower classes upwards. Most of Japanese history is also such a record of those at the lower end society gradually progressing upwards.”⁷ Naitō expressed similar opinions on numerous occasions in discussing Chinese and Japanese history, for instance, when listing the two major “contents” of Chinese cultural life in *The Cultural Life of Modern China*, one of which was an “era of advancement of the common people.” Naitō again listed five “elements” of culture and lifestyle later, one of which remained: “The occurrence of a ‘common era’ with new ways of living.”⁸ The fourth of the eight areas of the Tang-Song transition outlined above is the ascendancy of the “common people’s status and position,” in which Naitō points out that “Although China gave absolutely no recognition to the right of the common people’s hand in government,” the ending of the aristocracy not only expanded the reach and scope of the monarch’s power but also “liberated” the common people from the dominion of a status system and “from the hands of the aristocracy.... The period saw a change from a complete lack of recognition toward the people’s freedoms or personal rights toward a time in which personal rights attained gradual recognition.”⁹ Thus the era of monarchical autocratic government was also one in which the common folk enjoyed a rise in their power and experienced a more direct relationship with political and governing systems, including the opening of “equal opportunities to ascend to the ranks of officialdom” for the common folk under the imperial examination system and a focus by near-modern political factions founded on differing political views on social issues and the public interest. Furthermore, there was also mass production of luxury products and handicrafts targeted for public consumption under the context of a true monetary economy, which flowed into the homes of ordinary people, representing the addition of a new “element” to lifestyles in a “common era.”¹⁰ Without exception, literature and

7 Naitō Konan, “Ounin no lan nitsuite 應仁の亂に就て [A Study on the Onin War],” in *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 9.130.

8 Naitō Konan, “Kindai Shina teki bunka seikastu 近代支那的文化生活 [The Cultural Life of Modern China],” in *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 8.122, 131.

9 Naitō Konan, “Zhongguo jinshishi,” 328; idem, “Shina ron 支那論 [A Treatise on China],” in *Naitō Konan zenshū* 内藤, 5.327.

10 Naitō Konan, “Kindai Shina teki bunka seikastu,” 8.122-34; idem, “Zhongguo jinshishi,” 329-31.

art also showed a characteristic tendency toward mass popularization, greater accessibility, and a cultural “shift downward.”

3 The Theoretical Basis of the Tang-Song Transition Theory: A Cultural-Historical Perspective

Culture is of particular significance in Naitō Konan’s Tang-Song transition theory. “A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties” by Naitō states at the beginning that, “in an examination from a historical, particularly cultural-historical, perspective,” the general term “Tang and Song” is meaningless “because there is a clear distinction in the respective cultural characteristics of the Tang and Song.” The question is raised again later: “Fundamentally, what is the difference between the cultural states of the medieval and the modern?” Naitō then provided an answer across the eight areas, including in politics/government, the economy, scholarly literature, and the arts. He concludes: “As outlined above, both the Tang and Song Dynasties experienced cultural and lifestyle changes in every area.”¹¹ As shown by these extracts, the basis of the “Tang-Song transition theory” is a “cultural historical perspective”; the “Tang-Song transition” was a transition of “cultural characteristics”; a demonstration of this can be found in the differences in “cultural states” and “cultural life”; both of these references to “culture” are broadly defined, encompassing government, the economy, scholarly literature, the arts, and so forth. We note that these broadly defined references to “culture”—for example, the “cultural historical perspective,” “cultural characteristics,” “cultural states,” “cultural life,” and so on in “A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties”—appear nowhere in “The Significance of Modern History,” in *The Modern History of China*, which covers similar content in greater detail and is also based on the course materials in 1918 and 1919. We can ascertain from its eighth subheading “Changes in cultural characteristics” as well as from the ending to the paper—“As outlined above, changes occurred between the Tang and Song across e.g. government, economic, and cultural domains”¹²—that the term “culture” in “The Significance of Modern History” is employed narrowly. The term “culture” appears only once in the preface to Naitō’s 1909 *Modern History of China* course notes, that is: “These were changes with modern significance in politics and culture,”¹³ which we also observe is used in a narrow sense. We can deduce

11 Naitō Hunan, “Gaikuo de Tang-Song shidai guan,” 10-18.

12 Naitō Konan, “Zhongguo jinshishi,” 332-34.

13 Naitō Kenkichi, postscript to *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 10.529.

from the foregoing that Naitō's cultural historical perspective had already been formed by the time of the publication of "A General View of the Tang and Song Dynasties" at the latest.

A cultural-historical perspective theoretically underpins the entirety of Naitō's historiography, including the Tang-Song transition theory.¹⁴ Naitō states at the beginning of the preface to *Chinese Ancient History*: "as for the rest of so-called East Asian history, it is the history of China's cultural development."¹⁵ Naitō determined the stages of China's historical development and their characteristics based on the stages and characteristics of China's cultural development, that is, by carrying out a "periodization" of the history. Naitō attributed China's cultural development to cultural shifts. This movement is constituted by, first, an expansive wave outward and a feedback wave inward of regional culture, which he tentatively called a "natural spatial shift" in culture (the natural space here often corresponds to the distribution and living space of different ethnic groups, and thus such a natural spatial shift is also often demonstrated by a cultural shift between different ethnic groups, reflecting interactive relationships between the political power of China's interior and the surrounding ethnic groups); second, by a cultural shift across different classes and strata, which Naitō tentatively termed the "societal spatial shift" (often exhibited in a downward cultural shift). These two types of cultural shift became major metrics in Naitō's subdivision of Chinese history into different historical periods. We see that the "outward expansive wave" in Chinese culture paused from the latter half of the late Han [25-220] to the Western Jin [265-317] in terms of its "natural spatial shift," delineated as the first transition period, that is, the period between the ancient and medieval and transitioning from the former to the latter. Then, because of the "awakening" of the external ethnic groups, an "inward feedback wave" in Chinese culture into China's interior took place in the period from the Five Barbarians and Sixteen States [304-439] to the mid-Tang, delineated as the medieval era. Finally, the "inward feedback wave" in culture reached its apex in the period covering the end of the Tang and Five Dynasties, delineated as the second transition period, that is, between the medieval and modern and transitioning from the former to the latter.

14 Mou Fasong 牟發松, "Neiteng Hunan he Chen Yinke de 'Liuchao Suitang lun' shixi 內藤湖南和陳寅恪的 '六朝隋唐論' 試析 [The Analysis on Naitō Konan and Chen Yinke's 'On Six Dynasties and Tang Dynasties']," *Shixue lilun yanjiu* 史學理論研究, no. 3 (2002): 65-66, 69-70.

15 Naitō Konan, "Zhongguo jinshishi," 3.

If the delineation between the ancient, the first transition period, and the medieval in Naitō's periodization system of Chinese history is based primarily on a “natural spatial shift” in culture, then the delineation of China's near-modern period would be based primarily on a societal spatial shift in culture—that is, as outlined above, a cultural shift from a medieval period monopolized by aristocracy downward to non-aristocratic commoner classes and demonstrated by an increasing vulgarization, popularization, and popular accessibility of culture and a concomitant increase in the status and position of the common people. From Naitō's perspective, this societal spatial shift in culture endowed with near-modern characteristics, over time, signifies that the common people will eventually become the “mainstays” of cultural life and the “standard bearers” of the arts and popular taste.¹⁶

4 Followers and Challengers of the Tang-Song Transition Theory

Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory has met with forceful challenges, as has his entire system of periodizing Chinese history. One challenge after the end of World War II, a little over a decade years after his death, came from the Historical Science Society of Japan [*Li yan pai* 歷研派] school guided by a Marxist historical materialist perspective. This school of thought, preoccupied with the global postwar trend toward socialism, was full of hopeful expectations, particularly with regard to the establishment and development of the new China. The Historical Science Society school was an enthusiastic participant in discussions around the periods and their social characteristics in Chinese history so as to incorporate Chinese history into a universal law on the development of world history, befitting a materialist historical perspective. Their doubts surrounding Naitō's near-modern theory of the Song dynasty was given pioneering expression in *The End of the Ancient Period in East Asia*, published by Maeda Naonori 前田直典 [1915-1949] in 1948. From the perspective of East Asian or even world history, Maeda envisaged a shared range of parallel and connected characteristics in the historical development of East Asian countries. If China's medieval period were supposed to begin in the third century (as Naitō theorized), then a thousand-year gap would appear, with the beginning of Japan's medieval period in the twelfth or thirteenth century, and yet China's and Japan's entrance into the modern stage occurred “in a nearly

16 Naitō Konan, “Shin Shina ron 新支那論 [A New Treatise on China],” in *Naitō Konan zenshū*, 5.537-42.

parallel position.”¹⁷ In accordance with the empirical findings on China’s economic history of his teacher, Katō Shigeshi 加藤繁 [1880-1946], Maeda asserted that the end of the Tang dynasty was the end of the ancient period, rather than the beginning of the new modern period. Ishimoda Shō 石母田正 [1912-1986] soon thereafter established his hypothesis on the Song dynasty’s entrance into the medieval period, based on Katō Shigeshi and Yoshiyuki Sudō’s 周藤吉之 [1907-1990] findings on the large land-ownership system [*da tudi suoyou zhi* 大土地所有制] and tenant-farmer system [*dian hu zhi* 佃戶制], within which his “medieval” period became equivalent to feudal society in the “universal law” on world history. Niida Noboru 仁井田陞 [1904-1966] again provided supporting arguments in support of for Maeda’s thesis from various perspectives, including legal history, legal sociology, and community theory, giving further weight to his hypothesis on medieval-feudal society in the Song dynasty.

Representative figures among adherents of Naitō’s theory on Chinese history, that is, among the “Kyoto school,” include Naitō’s disciples Okazaki Fumio 岡崎文夫 [1888-1950], Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定 [1901-1995], Utsunomiya Kiyoyoshi 宇都宮清吉 [b. 1905], Miyakawa Hisayuki 宮川尚志 [b. 1913], and their “disciples” Yoshio Kawakatsu 川勝義雄 [1922-1984], Michio Tanigawa 谷川道雄 [1925-2013], and so on, among which Miyazaki could perhaps be described as a “star pupil” of Naitō’s historiography. It was on the economic front that Naitō’s evidence for the Tang-Song transition theory appeared the weakest. Miyazaki provided much more evidence in his *East Asia’s Early Modern Age*, published in 1950, on the economic front in favor of Naitō’s hypothesis, particularly the economic characteristics of China’s Song-era modern society, such as large-scale cities, developed transportation systems (revolving around canals), a flourishing economy of exchange, the establishment of contractual landlord-tenant relationships, as well as modern characteristics in political and military affairs, such as a centralized bureaucracy, a civil service under the imperial examination system, a huge volunteer-based central army, and so on. Whereas Naitō had once compared the Song dynasty to the cultural Renaissance in the West, Ichisada furnished a comprehensive systematic argument that the “cultural renaissance of the East (of the Song dynasty) predated that of the West by three centuries” and that the former might even have “inspired and influenced” the latter.¹⁸ Ichisada could be described not only as a follower

17 Maeda Naonori 前田直典, “Gudai dongya de zhongjie 古代東亞的終結 [The End of the Ancient Period in East],” in *Riben xuezheng yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.136-37, 150-51.

18 Ichisada Miyazaki 宮崎市定, “Dongyang de jinshi 東洋の近世 [East Asia’s Early Modern Age],” in *Riben xuezheng yanjiu Zhongguo shi lunzhu xuanyi*, 1.168-201, 235-37.

of Naitō’s Tang-Song transition theory but also as its developer and defender, whose response to the challenge of the Historical Science Society school was a powerful one. His contributions to the defense and further explication of his teacher’s theories are comprehensively recognized across the field, including by detractors, to the point that, at times, Naitō’s Tang-Song transition theory is described in Western academia as the Naitō/Miyazaki hypothesis.

Notwithstanding its opposition to the near-modern hypothesis, the Historical Science Society school nevertheless still acknowledged that a major epoch-defining transition had occurred in Chinese history between the Tang and the Song—albeit from the ancient to the medieval, in their delineation of this transition. In other words, both the Kyoto school and Historical Science Society school reached a consensus that the Tang-Song transition was a major transition of a substantive and structural nature, and in this sense the Historical Science Society school, which challenges the Naitō hypothesis, is also its follower. However, Ichisada, a steadfast devotee of the Naitō hypothesis, has even been regarded as having “departed from Naitō’s original intentions”¹⁹ because of his structural “supplementation and refinement” of the social and economic-historical aspects of the Naitō hypothesis. In this sense, Ichisada, as a follower of the Naitō hypothesis, is also a critic of his teacher or, to put it another way, a critical follower.

The postwar trend in Japanese historical scholarship, which elevated theoretical thinking in particular, shifted significantly beginning in the 1980s, and the fires of debate about the different periods of ancient Chinese history, including arguments between the society and the Kyoto schools about the Tang-Song transition theory, soon died down. Nevertheless, the Tang-Song transition theory continued to have direct and indirect effects, and various new theories and hypotheses continuously generated about Chinese history were still required to present a direct or indirect response to its arguments.

In the past, European and American scholars of premodern Chinese history had largely “generally accepted” Naitō’s Tang-Song transition hypothesis. The publication of Robert M. Hartwell’s 赫若貝 [1932-1996] *Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550* in 1982 may have heralded a shift in this regard, the first direct response to the Naitō hypothesis from Western

19 Michio Tanigawa 谷川道雄, “Naitō Konan no rekishi houhou: ‘Bunka no youshiki’ to ‘minzoku no jikaku’ 内藤湖南の歴史方法——「文化の様式」と「民族的自覚」 [Naitō Konan’s Historical Method: ‘Cultural Style’ and ‘National Consciousness’]” in *Kenkyū ronshū: Naitō Konan kenkyū: Gakumon, Shisō, Jinsei* 研究論集: 内藤湖南研究——學問・思想・人生 [Research Essays: Special Feature: Naitō Konan: Knowledge, Thought, Life], ed. Kawai bunka kyōikū Kenkyūjo 河合文化教育研究所 (Nagoya: Kawai bunka kyōikū kenkyūjo, 2008), 5.9.

academia on Song dynasty history. The questions of note for Hartwell centered on the conspicuous progress experienced in population and agriculture in the first five hundred years of the period from 750 to 1550, which has been described as an “economic revolution.” That being the case, for what reason did the pace of material progress slow down so remarkably in the following seven-hundred-year period, and why did this period have fewer other achievements than its antecedents? Hartwell argued that changes in the relative advantages of regions and overall increase in wealth and population resulted not only in a change in the developmental process in regions but also had a comprehensive impact on political-social structures nationwide. The spread of people from areas in the empire with high population density created difficulty in administration, leading to the devolution of centralized power and strengthened local independence, freezing further bureaucratization of the central government in its tracks.²⁰ This analysis contradicts the Naitō hypothesis, which favors a continual strengthening of the monarch’s autocratic powers during the Song dynasty. Hartwell also investigated a shift in the primary ruling classes, from the hereditary elites of the Tang dynasty to the professional elite class of the Northern Song [960-1127] and then to the local elites of the Southern Song [1127-1279], as well as to differences in orientation between the elites of the two Songs in serving the imperial court or putting down local roots. This revises the Naitō hypothesis concerning the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of the common people. If the object of the Naitō hypothesis could be described as an investigation of the entire Chinese empire, then Hartwell’s focus was the different economic, social, and cultural developmental cycles in each of its many regions. His “regionally differentiated” perspective, particularly its characteristic focus on the social changes experienced by elites, illuminates the transformation in the two Songs and thus challenges and updates Naitō’s Tang-Song transition theory and marks a change in the type of research conducted in the United States on Song dynasty history. Following in the footsteps of Hartwell’s key problematic focuses, Robert Hymes 韓明士 investigated the issue of abrupt breaks in historical development between the two Songs through an empirical investigation of specific areas.²¹ His view was that, from the perspective of the elites in Fuzhou, a group that was continuous over the two Song dynasties, the degree of rupture between the two Songs would have constituted a far more visible transition than that between the

20 Robert M. Hartwell, “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 2 (1982).

21 Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chow, Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1-6, 200-218.

Tang and the Song. Chinese society and its elites from the time of the Southern Song were oriented more to the pursuit of “local” strategies. The title *China Turning Inward: Intellectual-Political Changes in the Early Twelfth Century*, by James T. C. Liu 劉子健 [1919-1993], an eminent scholar and a founder of US studies on Song dynasty history, discloses some of its author’s critical attitude concerning the “greater emphasis on a huge divide between the Tang and the Song.” Liu emphasized the major historical transformation experienced between the two Songs.²² The Chinese translation of Peter K. Bol’s 包弼德 *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Sung China*, published by China Scholarship in 2000, offers a comprehensive and pertinent review of views in US scholarship on Tang and Song history over the past ten years. Bol holds that a new generation of US-based historians has been affected by the postmodernist trend, “overturning some of the most important components of the Naitō hypothesis by gradually painting a new picture of the Tang-Song transformation.”²³ He sees the crux of the Tang-Song transition theory as a great rise in the power of common people, but in actuality this was nothing more than a “redefinition” of the political and cultural elites “as well as a process by which they gradually became ‘local elites,’” rather than the picture of society that Naitō had painted of a great rise in the power of the common folk. Nevertheless, Bol “still acknowledges [Naitō’s] theory of historical periodization,”²⁴ but vigorously rejects the comparisons of modernity in the Naitō hypothesis between the Song dynasty and the West, and historical teleology tending toward European and American-style modernity.

5 The Influence and Significance of the Tang-Song Transition Theory

As stated by Zhang Guangda 張廣達, Naitō’s Tang-Song transition theory, “as the earliest hypothesis proposed in modern historical discourse on China, is still called into service and referenced frequently after nearly a century,” and

22 James T. C. Liu 劉子健, *Zhongguo zhuanxiang neizai: Liang Song zhiji de wenhua zhuanxiang* 中國轉向內在：兩宋之際的文化轉向 [*China Turning Inward: The Cultural Turn between the Two Songs*], trans. Zhao Dongmei 趙冬梅 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2002), 5.

23 Peter K. Bol 包弼德, “Tang-Song zhuanxing de fansi: Yi sixiang de bianhua wei zhu 唐宋轉型的反思——以思想的變化為主 [This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Sung China],” trans. Liu Ning 劉寧, *Zhongguo xueshu* 中國學術, no. 3 (2000): 67.

24 Bol, “Tang-Song zhuanxing de fansi,” 72, 86.

“to this day continues to be a driver of academic research.”²⁵ Then to what secrets precisely does the proposition owe its continued liveliness and vigor? Put simply, “its originality and liberality.” Its originality lies in the fact that, at its heart, Naitō’s concept of a “Song modernity” encompasses both the inherent characteristics of Chinese history and cultural development while also permitting a degree of encounter or connection with “modernity” in the West, thus becoming “another near-modern” richly endowed with uniquely Chinese characteristics, and a concept of an era that is more inclusive or perhaps more universal than “modernity” in the West. “The liberality of the theory is in the contradiction and tension between its originality and universality and leaves for space for the continued promulgation and development or falsification and innovation of this academic proposition,” which continually inspires new topics.²⁶

Naitō clearly calls the end of the Tang and Five Dynasties era a “transition period” from the medieval to the new modern, yet not all eight areas named in the Tang-Song transition argument demonstrate this, and, indeed, the majority should not be seen as having been completed during the transition period. Some of the changes in these areas began during the mid-Tang while others followed the establishment of the Song, neither occurring exactly at the same time or completed in unison. The speed of the transition was also uneven. This could well provoke researchers into delineating different “transition periods” on the basis of different focuses in these areas. For instance, Naitō’s disciple Naba Toshisada 那波利貞 [1890-1970] believed that the most fundamental and major transformation from the medieval to the modern occurred abruptly during a six- or seven-year period in the Kaiyuan 開元 [713-741]—Tianbao 天寶 [742-756] era, a brief transition (which Toshisada refers to as a “transformation period”) after which China shifted to a new modern era,²⁷ notwithstanding the continued flourishing of such changes during the mid- to late Tang and Five Dynasties era. However, if the Tang-Song transition as understood by Hartwell and Hymes were deconstructed into two stages—from the mid-Tang to the Northern Song and then from the Northern Song to the Southern Song—then

25 Zhang Guangda 張廣達, “Neiteng Hunan de Tang-Song biange shuo ji qi yingxiang 內藤湖南的唐宋變革說及其影響 [Naitō Konan’s Tang-Song Transformation Theory and Its Influence],” *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 11 (2005): 5.

26 Mou Fasong 牟發松, “Tang-Song biange shuo’ santi: Zhi cishuo chuangli yibai zhounian er zuo 唐宋變革說三題——值此說創立一百周年而作 [Three Questions about ‘The Tang-Song Transition’: An Essay on the Occasion of Its Centennial Anniversary],” *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao* 華東師範大學學報, no. 1 (2010): 10.

27 Naba Toshisada 那波利貞, *Tōdai shakai bunkashi kenkyū* 唐代社會文化史研究 [Studies in Tang Dynasty Social and Cultural History] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1974), 1-10.

the transition spanned a few centuries. The focus of the transition would also differ from that of Naitō. Moreover, Hartwell and Hymes, as well as Liu, emphasize the degree of transformation between the Songs as exceeding that which occurred between the Tang and the Song dynasties. If Naba's perspective, held as well by scholars who believed in a “mid-Tang transition” (e.g., Chen Yinque 陳寅恪 and Zhang Zexian 張澤咸), could be seen as compatible with Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory, then the views of Hartwell, Hymes, and Liu represent a dismantling of the framework of Naitō's hypothesis. These different views on the Tang-Song transition period touch on questions around rupture and continuity in the development of Tang-Song history and the developmental stages in China's premodern history, and the investigations and empirical findings of scholars on such questions both inside and outside China have had an enormous impact on promoting greater depth in Chinese historical studies. In fact, the issues of concern and the discussion platforms on them were initially all provided by Naitō's Tang-Song transition theory.

The scholars and gentlemen of the Song dynasty also possessed a high degree of self-awareness with regard to the fast-moving changes in thinking and culture that had occurred between the Tang and the Song. These scholars made an effort to distinguish their current era from those of the Han and the Tang and claimed a connection with the “three ideal dynasties” [*lixiang zhong de sandai* 理想中的三代] of Chinese antiquity. Their self-awareness of their own era was not entirely dissimilar to those of people during the Renaissance, and Ichisada called the changes and developments within a narrowly defined cultural field during the Song dynasty an “Oriental Renaissance.” Yet through the reinterpretation or perhaps transformative acceptance of Tang dynasty—era cultural phenomena among people in the Song dynasty-era, we can observe that, “relative to the markings of Western modernity, and Western Renaissance holding up the banner of freedom, equality, and human liberation,” the neo-Confucianism system, which “occupied an important position in the Song dynasty's version of a Renaissance” and ultimately became its mainstream ideology of modernity, seems to indicate, with respect of the liberation of human beings and freedom of ideas, “the opposite direction from that of the cultural renaissance in the West.”²⁸ Our examination of Naitō's ideas on “near-modern culture” can inspire renewed reflection on our part regarding the nature and characteristics of Song dynasty culture.

Naitō believed that the establishment of a monarchical system of autocracy corresponded with a rise in the status and position of the people and strengthening of their power, as such an establishment followed the elimination of

28 Mou Fasong, “Tang-Song biange shuo' santi,” 10.

the aristocratic classes that considered “common folk” slaves. Hence, it was a system in which the monarch and the people could be direct counterparts. Moreover, it developed through a long period of complex transformations of power and systems, and increasing responsibilities and awareness, by which the common people could finally become the gravediggers of the monarchical autocratic system and driving impetus behind a republic. We cannot confirm Naitō’s expanding “rise of the common people” and “individual rights” from the perspective of empirical history in the “near-modern” societies from the Song to the Qing, let alone connect these “people” or “common people” with the main direct producers of the era—the tenant-farmer and small-scale farmer classes, who had a high degree of personal dependence and were subject to super-economic exploitation. However, when we consider the equality of status and position between people under an autocratic monarchical system—that is, the fact that everyone is equal before the emperor—is that not comparable to the idea in the religious reformation in Europe that “all are equal before God,” as its feudal class perspective came under attack and was repudiated? If we had removed the emperor, then could we not transform the idea that “all are equal before God,” as in the European Enlightenment, to one in which “all are equal before the law”? The Naitō hypothesis can at least inspire us to pose new questions in terms of transforming and using traditional conceptual resources.

Naitō formed the Tang-Song transition theory around the time of the Xinhai Revolution [1911-1912], and his proposal of such a hypothesis was also intimately connected to his observations of China’s situation in the late Qing and early Republican [1912-1949] periods. A deep awareness of history informed Naitō that the Xinhai Revolution was in some respects a continuation of the process of “near-modern” history that could be traced back to the Tang-Song transition period and had existed for millennia. The mechanisms needed to maintain the current social order and trend toward political upheaval were a major topic of discussion in Japan in 1912 amid the fall of the Qing and early years of the Republic, during which Naitō began to contribute his ideas with the publication of *A Treatise on China*, two years later. Naitō had previously advanced his Song modernity hypothesis during his Kyoto University lectures, which is why the work begins by calling the Song dynasty the emergence of Chinese modernity and the genes of modernity: populism, the enormous spontaneous power of the people, and the traditions of local autonomy. These undercurrents driving the development of Chinese history since the Song dynasty were still coursing at that moment, and thus Naitō could confidently answer the questions raised in the first section of this book, titled “Monarchy? Or Republic?” This also meant that Naitō’s judgment that a republican government would

follow the Xinhai Revolution should be regarded as a millennia-long “inevitability of a broader trend, and product of natural forces,” rather than the product of his personal “sympathy or approval.”²⁹ Naitō had discussed a flourishing trend favoring commoners in local administration during the Song dynasty as well as a spirit of grassroots “township-level self-governance organizations” [*xiangtuan zizhi* 鄉團自治] since the Yuan dynasty, as well as concepts of autonomy and egalitarianism embodied in Huang Zongxi’s 黃宗羲 [1610-1695] critique of monarchy and Gu Yanwu’s 顧炎武 [1613-1682] discourse on feudalism, Zeng Guofan’s 曾國藩 [1811-1872] Xiang 湘 army established with the backdrop of local autonomy, and so forth. Naitō ranked such local traditions of autonomy very highly and, indeed, hopefully and believed that a republican system of governance would be based on elements of local self-governance that had existed since the Song. Regardless of whether a relationship necessarily existed between historical local traditions of autonomy and populism and the Republic that grew out of the Xinhai Revolution, by what means have the modern values within such traditions been excavated and inherited? To put it another way, how can we unearth forceful ideas in opposition to tradition from within tradition? We must still await a more solid empirical investigation. However, the value of the Naitō hypothesis is that, in order to attain mastery of current Chinese characteristics and put our “finger on the pulse of a new era,” we must begin our search with the Chinese historical characteristics. If we read the more than twenty compositions by Mao Zedong 毛澤東 [1893-1976] in connection with his promotion of the “Hunan autonomy movement” in 1919-1920 as recorded in the *Early Manuscripts of Mao Zedong*³⁰ and then reflect on the spontaneous strength and local autonomous traditions of the Chinese people throughout history as outlined by Naitō, we might find [that movement] particularly noteworthy. Mao was a passionate advocate of autonomy in Hunan and staunchly promoted the province’s autonomy movement, writing about it as follows:

We are advocating for complete autonomy of the village, complete autonomy of the county, and complete autonomy of the province. Popular elections for village chief, popular elections for county chief, and

29 Naitō Konan, “Shina ron,” 5:305-7, 45.

30 Mao Zedong 毛澤東, *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao 1912.6-1920.11* 毛澤東早期文稿 1912.6-1920.11 [*Early Manuscripts of Mao Zedong 1912.6-1920.11*], ed. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi 中共中央文獻研究室 and Zhonggong Hunan shengwei bianji zu 中共湖南省委編輯組 (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1990). These texts were written at the same time as Naitō was composing *A Treatise on China* and *A New Treatise on China*.

popular elections for provincial chief ... are what is called the “autonomy of the Hunan people.”³¹

He saw Hunan autonomy as “a matter of life and death, honor and shame for the Hunan people, ... I urge the people of Hunan ... even if your parents die, wait to bury them” so that you may “first build up this embankment of autonomy.”³² Mao’s fervent ideals of populism and local autonomy, first, would naturally have been influenced by Western democratic politics but, as the same time, were unlikely to be entirely disconnected from ideas about the will of the people and self-governing traditions in Chinese history.

Naitō was born to a well-established Confucian family and had deep knowledge of Chinese studies, cultivation in the Confucian classics and a love of Chinese culture, which accounts for his continual distance from the prevailing trends of his day that elevated Europe at Asia’s expense. Yet Naitō was by no means a scholarly recluse, and his career in the news industry adjacent to or relating to the political realm before teaching at Kyoto University spanned more than two decades. Although he professed that his *Treatise on China* was entirely written “with thoughts on China on behalf of the Chinese people,”³³ his “other” positions remain conspicuous. Japan’s fate and interests were fundamentally his greatest concern. As widely and generally known, some of his perspectives on historiography were pressed into the service of Japanese militarism to [justify] its invasion of China, a fact related to Naitō’s identity, positions, and characteristic “overinvolvement in politics” as well as to his followers’ understanding or use of Naitō’s historiography.³⁴ A distinction should be drawn between the two. Nonetheless, the reality that the promulgation and focus on certain issues concerning the Tang-Song transition theory were a vivid sign of the times and their practical concerns is self-evident. In the same way, the Historical Science Society’s critical questioning of Naitō’s Tang-Song transition theory during the postwar period and the establishment of the new China and the new hypothesis on a Song medieval era are also

31 Mao Zedong, “Xiangren zhi xiang’ yu ‘Xiangren zizhi’ ‘湘人治湘’與‘湘人自治’ [‘Hunanese governing Hunan’ and ‘Hunanese Autonomy’],” in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao*, 524.

32 Mao Zedong, “Wei Hunan zizhi jinggao Changsha sanshiwan shimin 為湖南自治敬告長沙三十萬市民 [A Respectful Warning to the 300,000 Residents of Changsha on Hunan Autonomy],” in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao*, 528.

33 Naitō Konan, “Shina ron,” 5, 294.

34 Miyazaki Ichisada, “Naitō Konan to Shina gaku 内藤湖南とシナ學 [Naitō Konan and Sinology],” in *Miyazaki Ichisada zenshū* 宮崎市定全集 [The Complete Works of Miyazaki Ichisada] (Kyoto: Iwanami shoten, 1994), 24, 248.

connected to the deeply felt impact of the materialist historical perspective on the Society and deeply held sympathy toward and expectations about the Chinese revolution and the building of the new China. Was the social formation established during the Tang-Song transition period as envisaged by the Society—a landlord-based medieval feudal society—anything other than the target of China’s 1911 revolution? Since the 1980s, Chinese society and China’s relationship with Asia and the rest of the world have experienced what could be called a tremendous shift without parallel for millennia, alongside the ending of the Cultural Revolution and the promotion of a market economy-led policy to achieve reform and liberalization. The Tang-Song era “cries out” for a history with empirically based descriptions and explanations of relationships showing continuity or rupture between the past and the present to enable us to better grasp the present and achieve a more reasoned perspective about the future. Regrettably, it appears no such investigations have been conducted to date, so we have stumbled into a new millennium without an adequate sense of our history. It is hoped that the review presented in this article on the Tang-Song transition theory will help to expedite such an investigation.

Translated by William Green

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