IN SEARCH OF THE ETHICAL EMPIRE:

MEDIEVAL CHINESE DEBATES ON FENGJIAN AND JUNXIAN

by

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ABSTRACT

What moral principles and organizational models were used to discuss imperial rule in China? What historical precedents were invoked to shape the institutions and practices of governance? In which ways, if any, was the administrative division of the realm conceived to be the foundation for promoting the well-being of the population and the stability of the ruling dynasty? In responding to these questions, political thinkers of the medieval period articulated their views around two models of virtuous rule; the decentralized system of investiture of hereditary lords (*fēngjiàn* 封建) often associated with the Zhōu 周 dynasty (1045–256 BCE), and the centralized administrative system (*jùnxiàn* 郡縣) first established by the Qín 秦 dynasty (221–209 BCE) and consolidated during the Hàn 漢 dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). In this dissertation, I explore the medieval Chinese debates between supporters of decentralized, yet cooperative, sovereignty along the lines of the *fēngjiàn* model, and those who advocated the *jùnxiàn* system's centralized administrative model.

INTRODUCTION

Most, if not all, politically engaged thinkers of the medieval period agreed that the realm should be under the rule of a single emperor, and that the ruling dynasty should guarantee the livelihood of the common people. They disagreed, however, on which system of governance would be better to achieve those objectives.

Those in favor of the system of investiture often stressed the fact that the institutions of *fēngjiàn* had played a fundamental role in securing the long-lasting rule of the Zhōu dynasty, whose political success and overall stability they attributed to the support and military aid offered by the territorial lords of hereditary fiefdoms (*zhūhóu* 諸侯).[1] These lords ruled over large portions of the territory and enjoyed great autonomy within their domains, they were entitled to collect taxes, manage the labor force for public works, and conscript men for their armies, among other prerogatives.[2] They were, however, subordinate to the Zhōu royal court, bound to it either by hierarchies of kinship or by oaths of service.

Advocates of centralization, for their part, contended that the system of rule established by the Qín helped prevent abuses from the hereditary lords and ensured that the commands of the central court were carried out throughout the realm. They assumed that with each generation, territorial lords would become more distant to the ruling emperor, and thus less prone to maintain

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[1] For a discussion of the political system of the Zhōu, see Li Feng, "'Feudalism' and Western Zhou China: A Criticism," *HJAS* 63.1 (2003), pp. 115–144. According to Li Feng, "the most important feature of the Zhou political system was its installation of numerous regional states," which formed "a "fence" or "screen" (*fānpíng* 蕃屏) to protect the royal capitals", p. 125.

[2] See Chang Yin-Lin, "Feudal Society of the Zhou dynasty," in E-tu Zen Sun and John de Francis (eds.), *Chinese Social History: Translations of Selected Studies* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), pp. 21–36.

their allegiance to the central court. This situation, they noted, was best illustrated by the long period of decline of central authority, when the subordinate states attacked each other and even challenged the royal court.

A caveat is in order here. Much like Weber's "ideal types," these two models functioned in Chinese political discourse as theoretical constructions, and most statecraft thinkers acknowledged that past dynasties combined institutions of both. As recent scholarship has shown, despite its efforts to tighten the central control of the realm, the founder of the Qín dynasty did not eliminate the practices of investiture.[3] This fact surely did not escape medieval Chinese thinkers, who nonetheless opted to highlight the polar opposition between the two models in their polemics.

It is also clear that many of them advocated for mixed institutions that would insure local interest without diminishing the authority of the imperial court, or as the Míng 明 dynasty (1368–1644) scholar Gù Yánwǔ 顧炎武 (1613–1682) aptly phrased it, a system that "infuses the intent of the system of investiture into the administration of commanderies and prefectures" [寓封建之意於郡縣之中].[4] Therefore, I focus on the polarity *fēngjiàn* / *jùnxiàn* only as it is presented in the argumentative strategies of the texts.

Extant medieval Chinese sources show that statecraft thinkers of the time supported one or the other system as part and parcel of a larger ideal of securing virtuous governance. When they examined the historical records in search of explanations of how institutions worked, and why they ceased to work, they evaluated the effect these instiutions had in the lives of the common people

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[3] See Yáng Kuān 楊寬. "Lùn Qín Hàn de fēnfēngzhì" 論秦漢的分封制, *Zhōnghuá wénshǐ lùncóng* 13.1 (1980), pp.23–38. Also, Griet Vankeerberghen, "Qin Attitudes towards Enfeoffment: Contextualizing the Abolition Passage in the "Basic Annals of the First Emperor of Qin" of Shi ji" [unpublished manuscript]. I am indebted to Professor Vankeerberghen for generously sharing her work with me.

[4] Gù Yánwǔ 顧炎武 (1613–1682), "Jùnxiàn lùn 郡縣論," in *Gù Tínglín shīwénjí* 顧亭林詩文集 (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1983), p. 12. See also, Miranda Brown. "Returning the Gaze An Experiment in Reviving Gu Yanwu (1613–1682)." In *Fragments* 1 (2011).

and the survival of the dynasty. Their views of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* are thus intrinsically connected to their views of antiquity, of historical transformation, and of the models of rule presented in the classics. Therefore, it is important that we give serious consideration to the rhetorical strategies, the moral principles, and the historical evidence used in the texts to support the authors' preference for either system. In other words, we need to ask, what historical experiences and underlying assumptions informed these writings and how are these historical experiences and characters deployed within the arguments in favor of each system of governance?

Overview of Arguments

This is a study of medieval Chinese discussions on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* as political discourse and political theory, with a longstanding presence in debates about proper governance in Chinese history. I will attempt to show that, in discussing historical events and proposing models for emulation, statecraft thinkers were not only hoping to convince the emperor to adopt specific policies, they were also presenting a sophisticated understanding of the workings of political institutions in history. Based on this reading, I argue the following:

First of all, medieval Chinese discussions on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* represent examples of political theory, understood as "the study of the concepts and principles used to describe, explain and evaluate political events and institutions."[5]

Second, none of the medieval references to the applications of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* in history aimed at reviving the past, but these two models were used to evaluate the shortcomings and possibilities of a more decentralized versus a more centralized approach to governance. In this

[5] I found this definition from Princeton University Department of Politics website to be most appropriate, since it is both inclusive and concise.

sense, the references to the distant or more recent past functioned as convenient means to summarize the effects of specific institutional arrangements in medieval theories of statecraft.

Third, the dual objectives of securing the stability of the dynasty and the well-being of the people formed the moral underpinnings of these debates. In this way, the debates on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* elaborated on principles of proper governance developed in pre-Qín political philosophy.

Fourth, the discourses and practices of *fēngjiàn* accompanied the development of the imperial state in China, not as an undesired remnant of a distant past but as constitutive of the political imaginary, that is, as one of the possible forms of securing virtuous rule. From this, I contend that for a significant number of political thinkers, *jùnxiàn* was neither a historical necessity, nor a more effective way to rule the realm.

Fifth, the calls to return to some form of *fēngjiàn* should in no way be interpreted as challenges to the central court's power. Nor should they be construed as veiled attacks on the imperial institution. They were understood as legitimate political alternatives by all members of the ruling class, including the emperors themselves.

Last, I will show that medieval Chinese debates on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* became a mandatory point of reference for debates on centralization or decentralization in later periods in imperial China, as well as in other East Asian polities.

Translating *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn*

In this dissertation, I use "system of investiture" as a close equivalent to the Chinese term *fēngjiàn*, a system of governance guaranteed the relative autonomy of hereditary territorial lords in their respective fiefs. I use "prefectural system" as an approximate translation for the term *jùnxiàn*, a system of rule in which the central court attempted to control the realm by directly

appointing administrators to govern the localities. Since both translations require some unpacking, I will begin by providing an overview of their definition in specialized dictionaries, as well as the evidence of their earliest uses in the transmitted texts, and from this move to discuss some problems with the adoption of these terms in the modern historiographies.

The term *fēng* appears prominently in Chinese textual records from the earliest dynasties. According to Féng Tiānyú, the earliest attested occurrence of the character *fēng* is in the oracle bones, where it is used as a verb to represent the act of planting a tree.[6] In his study of Western Zhōu government, Li Feng mentions that "the action of establishing an aristocratic polity such as *bang* [*bāng* 邦] in the Wei River valley is described as *feng* [*fēng*] 封, meaning planting trees to demarcate borders."[7] Qīng dynasty scholars Duàn Yùcái 段玉裁 (1735–1815) and Wáng Guówéi 王國維 (1877–1927) suggested that *bāng* and *fēng* could be used interchangeably in early texts to designate the act of granting territory to the regional lords.[8]

As a noun, *fēng* could be used to designate a mound, perhaps a boundary marker made up of trees, since it is semantically associated to "border", or "territorial limit." In addition, the term appears as part of an official's title in one passage in the *Analects*, where a border guard (*fēngrén* 封人) of the state of Yí 儀 asks to meet Kǒngzǐ.[9] It also appears in the term *fēngshàn* 封禪, alternatively *fēng* 封 and *shàn* 禪 sacrifices, a set of rituals seeking Heaven's approval of the ruling monarch. The opening commentary to the "Treatise on *fēngshàn*" in the *Records of the Historian* mentions that *fēng* referred to an altar made of rammed earth built at the summit of Mount Tài 泰

[6] Féng Tiānyú, "*Fēngjiàn" kǎolùn*, p. 9.
[7] Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, p. 48. Li Feng's study suggests that *fēng* 封 appears in inscriptions in bronzes dedicated to members of the aristocracy residing in the core area of the Zhōu realm. See his discussion of the etymology of *fēng* and his critique of H. G. Creel's interpretation in note 10 on p. 48.
[8] In Féng Tiānyú, "*Fēngjiàn" kǎolùn*, p. 11.
[9] *Lùnyǔ yìzhù* 論語譯注 [hereafter *Analects*], annotated by Yáng Bójùn 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 2009), p. 32–33.

upon which the sacrifices to Heaven were presented [此泰山上築土為壇以祭天，報天之功，故曰封].[10]

The earliest attested occurrence of term *jiàn* comes from the inscribed bronzes. According to the entry in the *Shuōwén Jiězì* 說文解字, as a verb it means to establish the regulations of the court [立朝律也].[11] As a compound, *fēngjiàn* appears in the *Book of Odes*, in the "Yīnwǔ 殷武" poem which praises the king of Shāng 商 for his military exploits and for pacifying the realm, thus securing his rule [命于下國、封建厥福].[12] Also, in the phrase "thus, he invested his kin with territory, [commanding them] to serve as a screen for the states of Zhōu …" [故封建親戚，以蕃屏周…] recorded in the *Zuǒzhuàn*.[13]

In contrast, *jùnxiàn* referred to forms of governance characterized by high degrees of centralization and little local autonomy, with territorial administrations headed by court-appointed governors and magistrates serving in rotation and barred from assuming positions in their local communities. Curiously, the *Shuōwén Jiězì* definition of *jùn* states that the term represents a Zhōu dynasty system of territorial governance, as a sub-unit of the *xiàn* [周制，天子地方千里，分爲百縣，縣有四郡].[14] *Xiàn*, in turn, is described as containing the element *xiàn* 県, which refers to an administrative unit. It is also related to the idea of "hanging down," or "attached," [此本是縣挂之縣，借爲州縣之縣][15] which has led some scholars to suggest that this was a way of differentiating the territories that were under direct control of the royal house.[16]

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[10] *SJ,* 28.1355.
[11] See Xǔ Shèn 許慎 et al., *Shuōwén Jiězì* 說文解字 [hereafter *SWJZ*], s.v. "建"
[12] *Odes*, "Yīnwǔ 殷武,"in *DSJ*, p. 88.
[13] See Féng Tiānyú, "*Fēngjiàn" kǎolùn*, p. 16.
[14] *SWJZ*, s.v. "郡"
[15] *SWJZ*, s.v. "縣"
[16] John E. Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), p. 260.

The creation of empire as a transformative event

In the early Western Zhōu (1045–771 BCE), as historian Li Feng notes, the state "bifurcated" into two separate areas of administration, a core area near the capital under the control of the royal house (*wángshì* 王室) and the more distant domains in the east, under the control of territorial lords.[17] Both textual records and recently excavated artifacts suggest that the Zhōu managed to rule over such a vast and diverse territory because the royal house could entrust its kin and close allies to govern territories in the kings' stead. This alliance between the central court and the territorial lords was maintained for several centuries through a hierarchy of sacrificial and kinship ties that bound the ruler with the invested territorial lords.

Although the lords were expected to support each other in times of need, they were neither independent, nor equivalent political units constituting a federation. According to the maxim stated in the poem "Běishān 北山" in the *Book of Odes*: "everywhere under Heaven is no land that is not the king's. Within the borders of the realm, there is no man who does not serve the king" [溥天之下, 莫非王土。率土之濱, 莫非王臣].[18] Active members of the ruling elite understood that the territorial lords' authority was ultimately derived from and dependent upon the king's will.[19] Thus, despite their high degree of autonomy, the territorial lords, at least ideally, all agreed with the notion that the territory and the people of the realm were ultimately under the command of the Zhōu sovereign.

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[17] Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 43–49.

[18] *Book of Odes* (*Shījīng* 詩經) [hereafter *Odes*], "Běishān 北山", in *Duànjù Shísānjīng jīngwén* 斷句十三經經文 (Taipei: Táiwān kāimíng, 1991) [hereafter *DSJ*], p. 56. Following Arthur Waley's translation, slightly amended. Waley has also suggested the possibility that this might be in fact a quotation from an ancient saying predating the Zhōu. See Arthur Waley (trans.) *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 189.

[19] The extant textual sources emphasize the top-down power relation between the ruler as a principal and the territorial lords as agents. See for example, the "Charge of Lord Wēi" (*Wēi zǐ zhī mìng* 微子之命) in the *Book of Zhōu*.

By the end of the Spring and Autumns period the power of the Zhōu royal house began to wane and the lords grew increasingly assertive of their own autonomy. By the mid-fifth century BCE the loyalty of the territorial lords to the ruling house had become little more than vacuous performance of ritual submission. Although the authority of the Zhōu central court was invoked to legitimize territorial expansion by warfare or diplomatic stratagems, most regional states had become practically independent. As the Hàn historian Sīmǎ Qiān 司馬遷 (145– *ca*. 85 BCE) states, "When the house of Zhōu weakened, the territorial lords vied for power and fought against each other" [周室微，諸侯力政，爭相併].[20]

The result was the long period of military and political confrontation known as the Warring States (475–221 BCE), during which a number of relatively independent states initiated administrative reforms to ensure the control the population and resources within their domains. These innovations later became the basis of the *jùnxiàn* system,[21] in a process has been described as one of "increased bureaucratization in the midst of political fragmentation."[22]

After centuries of interstate warfare, the kingdom of Qín achieved the unification of the realm and founded the first imperial dynasty in Chinese history. After conquering the last of the independent states, the First Emperor of Qín (Shǐ Huángdì 始皇帝, r. 221–210 BCE) consulted his ministers about the best way to rule the unified realm. The Chancellor (*chéngxiàng* 丞相) Wáng Wǎn 王綰 (fl. third century BCE) suggested that the conquered kingdoms be governed by male relatives of the founding emperor, so that the realm would be in peace for ages to come. The

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[20] Sīmǎ Qiān 司馬遷 (145– *ca*. 85 BCE) et al., *Records of the Historian* (*Shǐjì* 史記), annotated by Péi Yīn 裴駰, Zhāng Shǒujié 張守節, Sīmǎ Zhēn 司馬貞 (Taipei: Dǐngwén shūjú, 1981) [hereafter *SJ*], 5.202.

[21] Michael Nylan, "The Rhetoric of 'Empire' in the Classical Era in China." In Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag (eds.) *Conceiving the Empire. China and Rome Compared*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008), p. 42.

[22] Zhao Dingxin. "Spurious Causation in a Historical Process: War and Bureaucratization in Early China." *American Sociological Review* 69 (2004), pp. 603–607.

Minister of Justice (*tíngwèi* 廷尉) Lǐ Sī 李斯 (*ca*. 280–208 BCE) voiced his opposition to this plan. Lǐ Sī noted that the conflicts of the past centuries were the result of the early Zhōu practice of investing kin with territories; to revert to it now that the realm had been pacified, Lǐ Sī argued, would be only to invite disaster.

Instead, Lǐ Sī proposed to parcel the realm into prefectures and counties (*jùnxiàn*) administered by court-appointed officials with a limited tenure. The imperial kin and meritorious ministers, for their part, should be granted noble rank and a stipend derived from land, but should not have any political or military autonomy in their respective fiefs [諸子功臣以公賦稅重賞賜之].[23] The First Emperor agreed with Lǐ Sī's proposal, and "divided the realm into thirty-six prefectures" [分天下以為三十六郡].[24]

The establishment of a centralized administration to rule over the vast and diverse empire was arguably the most important legacy of the First Emperor. During his reign he managed not only to extend the territorial reach of the institutions of centralized governance, but he furthermore transformed the symbols and logics of rule. The administrative institutions of the imperial state represented an undeniable political breakthrough, and the ideologues of centralized rule presented them as the foundation for a new era of peace and prosperity that was to last for countless generations.[25] With the founding of the empire the role of the ruler acquired a new dimension. A new term, *dì* 帝, often translated as "emperor" or "thearch" was coined to convey the great achievements of the new sovereign.[26] In other words, a new model of rulership had been

[23] *SJ*, 6.246–247.
[24] *SJ*, 6.239.
[25] On imperial self-representation and the discourses of unity in early Qín see Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 2000).
[26] For a discussion of this term, see Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp.142–143.

established. In this sense, the Qín dynasty represented a clear example of what William Sewell, Jr. calls a historical event that transforms structures.[27]

Yet based on the extant sources one could also argue that the system of centralized administration represented both a continuation as well as a departure from previous political practice. It was a continuation because, as Yuri Pines has shown, the intellectual foundations that enabled the unification of the realm had been laboriously laid during the Warring States period. As he aptly puts it, "the idea that "All-under-Heaven" should be unified under the aegis of the single monarch predated the imperial unification and directly contributed to it."[28]

It was also a continuation of earlier political practice in the sense that a few kingdoms of the Warring States period had put the institutions of centralized administration to the test before the Qín unification. Among them, the states of Chŭ 楚, Wèi 魏 and Qín were the first to impose new ways of controlling social life by means of codified laws, tax collection, forced moves of the population, and to appropriate the work force of the populace for construction projects or military purposes.[29] These reforms were premised on the notion that the tighter the control of the central court over the territories and populations of the realm, the less likely the chance of sedition or armed conflict between local rulers, and hence, the greater the stability of the ruling house.

Against these expectations, however, the Qín dynasty came to an abrupt end soon after the death of the First Emperor. Standard histories have indicted the Qín rulers with ruthless application of the penal code, excessive use of corvée labor and extended military service, which alienated the rulers from nobles and commoners alike. The contrast between Zhōu and Qín approaches to

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[27] William Sewell Jr., *Logics of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[28] Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 11.
[29] On the early bureaucratization and centralization in the state of Chŭ, see Barry B. Blakeley, "Chu Society and State. Image versus Reality," in Constance A. Cook and John S. Major (eds.), *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp. 51–66.

governance became a mandatory reference for all debates on the best system of rule for the empire during the Hàn.

Taking his lessons from the fall of Qín, Liú Bāng 劉邦 (256–195 BCE), the founder of the Hàn dynasty, invested his kin and close associates with territories after conquering the realm. A decade later, however, he realized that the leaders of semi-independent kingdoms not only failed to offer military support when needed, but also were capable of jeopardizing his position as Son of Heaven. In response, he decided to eliminate all kings who were not of the same surname (*tóngxìng* 同姓) and to keep the imperial princes under the supervision of court-appointed officials.[30] In the course of its nearly four hundred-year rule, however, the Hàn would revert to investing non-kin with territories with varying results.

These events from the late third century BCE to the early third century CE mark the beginning of centralized bureaucratic governance in China and of the debates about the benefits and shortcomings of the two systems of rule, as part of a larger concern with proper governance. These debates included several administrative aspects of governance, such as the mechanisms of recruitment of officials and the assessment of merit, or the most adequate military organization to protect the borders of the empire, as well as moral principles of benevolent rule.

Disputers of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* in medieval China

In this dissertation, I focus on texts dating from the six centuries that separate the fall of the Hàn dynasty in the early third century and the mid-Táng. My sample includes memorials, treatises and essays by the Wèi 魏 dynasty (220–265) statesman Cáo Jiǒng 曹冏 (*fl*. third

[30] For a summary of the Western Hàn approach to investiture, see Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation,* pp. 150-176. Also Aihe Wang, “Creators of an Emperor: The Political Group behind the Founding of the Han Empire,” *Asia Major* (Third Series) 14.1 (2001), pp. 19-50.

century) and the Eastern Wú 東吳 scholar Lù Jī 陸機 (261–303); the Táng 唐 dynasty (618–907) emperor Tàizōng 太宗 (r. 626–649), and other Táng luminaries such as Lǐ Bǎiyào 李百藥 (565–648), Dù Yòu 杜佑 (735–812), Bái Jūyì 白居易 (772–846) and Liǔ Zōngyuán 柳宗元 (773–819), all of whom contemplated the following questions: Should the realm be governed as a centralized political entity, or would the population be better served by a system of decentralized, local rule? What institutions would maximize the interests of the local population without undermining political cohesiveness and unity? What is the most effective way to recruit men of talent and integrity into government service? What system better guarantees frontier defense and the suppression of local insurrections?

Considering that debates on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* had a long history by the start of the third century, why then focus on the medieval period? First of all, because unlike previous political thinkers, early medieval disputers of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* could reflect back upon the nearly four hundred years of Hàn dynasty rule to assess the workings of each system. Secondly, it was during this period that great clans were most visible in court politics. The discussions and memorials that inform the present study were for the most part composed by members of the medieval Chinese aristocracy, and give testimony of their close connection to the imperial center. Third, many later collections identify the early medieval period as the starting point of the debates on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn*.

Debates on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* in the medieval period were informed by the historical experiences of the Zhōu, Qín and Hàn dynasties. In classicist discourse, the Zhōu system of rule represented the high point of political and social harmony. Its founding monarchs were paragons of virtue, and their eight-hundred year rule surpassed all previous dynasties. The Qín, on the other

hand, disappeared after only two generations, a fact that no advocate of *fēngjiàn* could resist bringing to his audience's attention.

Proponents of *jùnxiàn* for their part, accepted the fact that the Qín had vanished all too soon, but argued that the dynasty's sudden demise also meant that the scale of conflict was smaller, and the common people were not involved. As a counterpoint, they highlighted the massive suffering caused by the disputes between rival lords during the three centuries of the Warring States period. In sum, according to their line of reasoning, a state governed by means of a large body of officials commissioned to oversee a limited jurisdiction for a specific period of time was superior not because it could better ensure the dynasty's long life, but because it was less disruptive for the common people when it collapsed.

Reviving the *fēngjiàn / jùnxiàn* debates

In modern times, scholars of China have been equally prone to celebrate as to condemn the institutional continuity of the Chinese empire. Among those who condemned it, we find towering figures such as Hegel and Karl Wittfogel who argued that the Chinese imperial institutions are to blame for what they perceived as centuries of political and economic stagnation, as well as despotic rule. Those who celebrated its continuity often did so on the grounds that the perennial institutions of the imperial state guaranteed a system of administration that could survive the cycles of dynastic change, accommodate contesting centers of power, and even assimilate invading groups, so that despite the convoluted periods of the regime change, the new rulers quickly resumed the proper governance of the realm.[31]

[31] Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire*, p. 4.

Scholars who view the establishment of the prefectural system as a positive development have emphasized that the first centralized system of the Qín and Hàn dynasties led to unity and peace after centuries of interstate conflict. Charles Hucker, for example, praises the first Qín emperor for achieving "what all Chinese considered a historical necessity, unification of the Chinese world."[32] More recently, sinologist Yuri Pines argued that "the first experience of the Chinese political system with powerful local elites ended therefore in disaster; and this legacy instigated lasting aversion to further devolution of state power to local potentates."[33] Here Pines is referring to the historical experience of the late Warring States, which served as a warning to later generations of political thinkers about the dangers of the system of investiture.

While Pines acknowledges the many challenges to centralized administration and concedes that the imperial dynasties often had to accommodate centrifugal tendencies in practice, he emphasizes that the enduring ideological underpinnings of the imperial administration presented the return to centralized rule as the more desirable form for the empire.

True, many political thinkers of the imperial era highlighted the problems brought about by the system of investiture. However, Pines' reading of the consequent "lasting aversion" to the institutions of decentralized administration seems unwarranted. Whereas the ideal of unity (*yītǒng* 一統) of "All under Heaven" remained largely uncontested, there is enough evidence to claim that several post-Qín thinkers rejected the institutions of centralized administration. In other words, if the foundation of the empire brought about a new awareness about the importance of territorial and administrative unity, how can we explain the fact that many Chinese thinkers of the medieval period strongly supported the system of investiture for the governance of the realm?

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[32] Charles O. Hucker, *China's Imperial Past: An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 43.
[33] Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire*, p. 106.

As this dissertation shows, the possibility of (re)establishing institutions that granted the local power-holders greater autonomy in the administration of the realm was never abandoned. Much to the contrary, it was given serious consideration, not only by thinkers whose personal interest might be furthered by a devolution of power to imperial kin, but also by emperors such as Táng Tàizōng 唐太宗 (r. 626–649), the very same figure who was supposed to benefit from a system of centralized administration.

Certainly, the pervasiveness of the discourse of unity and the evident continuity of many of the institutions of the imperial administration have led scholars to assume the Chinese predilection for the *jùnxiàn* system. Post-Qín sources almost always support the discourse of unity, but they are less univocal about the need to achieve unity through administrative centralization. Early Chinese political thinkers largely accepted the notion that a single ruler should govern the realm, summarized in the dictum: "there are no two suns in the sky, nor are there two sovereigns over the people" [天無二日，民無二王].[34] However, they contended that virtuous rule of the realm could be achieved by different administrative designs. Therefore, a necessary first step in my research is to undo the correspondence between "unity" as a political ideal and "bureaucratic centralization" as the administrative form of such unity.

It is important to distinguish between a political discourse that posits the figure of the ruler as the ultimate source of authority in the realm, on the one hand, and the alternative systems of administration that could be set in place to guarantee the proper management of everyday governance, on the other. To put it shortly, the recognition of the sovereign power of the emperor does not necessarily entail the preference for centralized systems of administration. How much autonomy the ruler should allow to local lords in the administration of their territories, and how

[34] See *Mèngzǐ*, "Wànzhāng 萬章", in *DSJ*, p. 29.

much of the administration should be directly under the control of the regular imperial bureaucracy was a matter of political and intellectual contention across the centuries.

Few studies have considered the relevance of these debates in Chinese political thought. Historian Min Tu-ki, for one, was one of the first modern scholars to highlight the enduring importance of the debate for Chinese statecraft thinkers of the imperial period in an article on the discourse of *fēngjiàn* in late imperial China. Min not only identified some of the most notable participants in these debates across the centuries, but also pointed to some of their common concerns. The first is the contrast between public interest (*gōng* 公) and personal/private interest (*sī* 私), the second is which system best guarantees the longevity of the dynasty, and the third is based on the opposition between those who sought to replicate the past (*fùgǔ* 復古) and those who affirmed the present (*shì jīn* 是今). From the Táng dynasty onwards, Min noted, scholars also began to discuss which system brings greater benefits to the people.[35]

More recently, Féng Tiānyú's 冯天瑜 book-length study *"Fēngjiàn" kǎo lùn* ("封建" 考论) offered a complex narrative of the importance of *fēngjiàn* discourses in Chinese society, from the Zhōu dynasty to the present, as well as a poignant criticism of the misuse of orthodox Marxist historical categories to describe the Chinese past.[36] In addition, in his study of the debates on *fēngjiàn* during the Northern Sòng 宋 dynasty (960–1126), Jaeyoon Song argues that references to the long tradition of debating the institutions of governance of the system of investiture allowed statecraft thinkers of the Sòng dynasty to contest centralizing policies of Wáng Ānshí 王安石

[35] Min Tu-ki, *National Polity and Local Power: The Transformation of Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 89–136.
[36] Féng Tiānyú 冯天瑜, "*Fēngjiàn" kǎolùn* "封建"考论 (Wǔchāng: Wǔhàn dàxué chūbǎnshè, 2006).

(1021–1086).[37] His study also shows the enduring importance and repeated references to the early imperial and medieval debates as the intellectual background to the Sòng policy discussions.

A revived interest in the dynamics and institutions of governance of early imperial China has moved scholars to reassess the importance of the practices of investiture during the Hàn dynasty. Recent work by historian Griet Vankeerberghen has demonstrated that discourses on the role of the territorial lords continued to inform imperial policies after the establishment of the Hàn dynasty.[38] Also, the emperor had to take into consideration family bonds not only when assigning territories, but also when meting out punishments.[39]

Despite the great interest in social and political developments in the medieval China, studies of the *fēngjiàn* / *jùnxiàn* debates are notably absent in the vast literature on the period. We find references scattered in many of these works, but only a handful of scholars have tackled the wider implications of these debates. Among them, David McMullen, one of the most remarkable historians of the Táng dynasty, has recently published a lengthy article on the system of investiture in the reign of emperor Xuánzōng 玄宗 (r. 712–756).[40] In this article, McMullen revisits several of the previous discussions on the system of investiture that informed Xuánzōng's decree.

Overview of chapters and Methodological approach

Each of the four chapters of this dissertation takes a specific text by a representative figure as the point of departure for its exploration of the different approaches to the *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn*

[37] Jaeyoon Song, "Shifting Paradigms in Theories of Government: Histories, Classics and Public Philosophy in 11th-14th Century China," PhD Dissertation, Harvard University (2007).
[38] Griet Vankeerberghen, "Rulership and Kinship: the Shangshu dazhuan's Discourse on Lords" *Oriens Extremus* 46 (2007), pp. 84–100.
[39] Griet Vankeerberghen. "Kinship and Kingship in Han China: The 120 CE Case against Liu Chang, King of Lecheng". In Garret P. S. Olberding (ed.) *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013) pp.203-236.
[40] David McMullen, "The Emperor, the Princes, and the Prefectures: A Political Analysis of the Pu'an Decree of 756 and the *Fengjian* Issue," *Tang Studies* 32 (2014), p. 85–86.

systems of rule. The definition of the corpus was not without its problems. First, the essays represent only a fraction of the many medieval writings on the topic. Other essays could have been selected, and would have arguably been equally fitting. Hence, I begin by discussing the representativeness of the texts, as well as the dynamics of their transmission. For this, I pay special attention to the criteria offered by the compilers, who often remark upon the extraordinary literary ability displayed in the discussion or the erudite knowledge of historical precedents. As each generation of editors must of necessity rely on previous collections and commentaries to decide what essays to include and how to categorize them, I have followed their tracks in justifying my selection. I have also attempted to incorporate as many contemporary voices as possible when discussing a text, with hopes of situating each of the discussions in their larger intellectual context.

The first chapter offers a close reading of Cáo Jiǒng's 曹冏 (fl. third century) "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" (*Liù dài lùn* 六代論), to argue that the ideals and institutions associated with the *fēngjiàn* system continued to exert a significant influence in the political imaginary after the fall of the Hàn dynasty. Cáo Jiǒng's essay is one of the earliest surviving documents that considers the events leading to the fall of the Hàn dynasty in his discussion. This shows that instead of expressing a strong desire to return to the *jùnxiàn* system, Cáo Jiǒng and others early medieval scholars argued in favor of the system of investiture following the Zhōu model.[41]

The second chapter focuses on Lù Jī's 陸機 (261–303) "Discussion of the Five Ranks" (*Wǔděng lùn* 五等論), one of the most elaborate treatises on the system of investiture of the early middle period. Lù Jī lived through the Western Jìn 晉 (265–317) conquest of his native state of Wú 吳 (222–280). Curiously, although Lù Jī was one of the towering literary figures of the early

[41] See Cáo Jiǒng's memorial in Chén Shòu 陳壽 (233–297), *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sānguó zhì* 三國志), annotated by Péi Sōngzhī 裴松之 (372–451) (Taipei: Dǐng wén shūjú, 1980) [hereafter *SGZ*], 20.591.

medieval period, his ideas on governance have not received much attention. I revisit his political writings in connection with the historical circumstances of his time.

The third chapter revisits the early Táng court debates about the potential benefits and dangers of granting fiefdoms to imperial kin. It centers on Lǐ Bǎiyào's 李百藥 (564–647) "Discussion of the System of Investiture" (*Fēngjiàn lùn* 封建論) as the point of departure for my analysis of discourses on administrative centralization during the early Táng. According to the records, in the early years of the Táng dynasty both the system of investiture and the centralized governance were considered valid alternatives for the administration of the realm. Emperor Tàizōng often considered investing meritorious ministers and members of the imperial clan with territory, hoping to emulate the virtuous rule of the Zhōu dynasty. Several of the most important figures in Tàizōng's court presented their views on the issue, in what was probably the most crucial moment in the development of the *fēngjiàn* / *jùnxiàn* debates.

In the fourth chapter, I concentrate on Liǔ Zōngyuán's 柳宗元 (773–819) "Discussion of the System of Investiture" (also: *Fēngjiàn lùn* 封建論), one of the most remarkable treatises on the development of centralized administration in China. Writing in a time of declining central authority, Liǔ Zōngyuán argued that any attempt to revive the institutions of decentralized governance would only invite disaster. His essay offers not only a historical narrative of the events that made centralized administration possible, but more importantly, a cogent theoretical model to analyze the development of human societies.

A caveat is necessary at this point. Although Cáo Jiǒng and Lù Jī stood in support of *fēngjiàn*, while Lǐ Bǎiyào and Liǔ Zōngyuán for their part advocated for greater centralization, this should not be taken as evidence of progressive evolution from a less complex to a superior form of government. As a matter of fact, discussions of which system better suits the needs of the

imperial court peaked during the early Táng and continued in subsequent dynasties. It is also not proof that scholar-officials writing under a strong dynasty were more willing to embrace the ideals of *jùnxiàn*. As this dissertation shows, the authors' position in the debate were the result of their own reading of institutional history, as well as their political interests.

In the conclusions, I offer a general overview of the arguments and an examination of the influence of these early thinkers on later debates on centralized versus decentralized administration. My purpose is to highlight the tensions between these two modes of virtuous rule in the political discourses of the first imperial dynasties, and to demonstrate that centralized administration was not an uncontested ideal in the development of the imperial state in China.

Throughout this dissertation, I study these instances of the *fēngjiàn* debates in three interconnected ways. First, as policy recommendations to condition executive decisions about the best way to govern the realm. Second, as works in social and institutional history, that is, as explanations of the social processes that shaped political institutions and the expected results of specific policies based on historical experience. Third, as works that can furnish theoretical insights to discuss the dynamics of imperial rule in historical contexts other than pre-modern China.

My focus, thus, is not on these documents as mere records of administrative practice or policy recommendations, but on how they are part and parcel of a larger discourse of virtuous rule. I approach these texts as representative of the conflicting views on proper governance that existed in China throughout the medieval period. Their authors, often ministers at the central court or engaged officials writing from outside the court circles, assessed the current state of affairs and suggested proper courses of action by drawing parallels from past events. They displayed both historical erudition and mastery of the textual tradition. In addition, they had extensive personal

experience with the dynamics of rule and the workings of the imperial bureaucracy. Their texts are testament to their enduring concern and active participation in the administration of the realm.

Finally, in analyzing these texts I attempt to overcome the epistemic imbalance inherent in applying categories of Western political thought to explain problems of governance in the non-Western, premodern world. In this sense, I contend that in view of the authors' erudite knowledge of the recorded histories and the sophistication of their analyses, we ought to treat these writings as theories of statecraft, or more simply, political theory, and not just data used to confirm or refute Western theories of governance. By approaching medieval Chinese thinkers' reflections on the administrative systems of empire I explore political concerns through the indigenous categories of discourse, and engage Chinese theorists of governance as living counterparts in our discussions about political thought and administrative practice.[42]

[42] This understanding has been suggested by Leigh Jenco and others during the Workshop on Chinese Thought as Global Social Theory, held at the National University of Singapore in December 2011.

CHAPTER 1

Family Matters: Cáo Jiǒng and the early medieval calls for reviving *fēngjiàn*

Cáo Jiǒng 曹冏[43] (*fl.* third century), courtesy name Yuánshǒu 元首, was a member of the imperial house of the Wèi 魏 dynasty (220–265). Little is known about his personal life. The scattered biographical information mentions that he was a descendant of Cáo Shūxīng 曹叔興, an older brother of the court eunuch Cáo Téng 曹騰 (d. 158).[44] It also notes that Cáo Jiǒng held the post of Governor (*tàishǒu* 太守) of Hóngnóng 弘農, probably during the reign of Cáo Ruì 曹叡 (204–239), emperor Míng 明 of Wèi (r. 226–239).

We also know that Cáo Jiǒng was the great-uncle of the young emperor Cáo Fāng 曹芳 (231–274), the third emperor of the Wèi dynasty.[45] Cáo Fāng was only 8 years-old when he ascended the throne.[46] Government affairs were for the most part in the hands of the two regents appointed by the young emperor's predecessor; Cáo Shuǎng 曹爽 (d. 249), an imperial kinsman,

[43] Also written 曹囧. Not to be confused with Cáo Jiǒng, the prince of Qīnghé 清河王 (d. 226), the first born son of Cáo Ruì, emperor Míng of Wèi.

[44] Cáo Téng was the adoptive grandfather of the late Hàn statesman Cáo Cāo 曹操 (155–220)

[45] Cáo Fāng nominally ruled from 240 to 253, and was forced to abdicate in 254. After his abdication, Cáo Fāng was allowed to retain his former title of Prince of Qí (齊王). After the Jìn conquest, he was awarded the title Duke Lì of Shàolíng (Shàolíng Lì Gōng 邵陵厲公). Because of his abdication, Cáo Fāng did not receive the respect owed to previous Wèi emperors, and his biography in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* appears in a section that deals collectively the lives of the last three nominal rulers of the Cáo family as "The Three Lesser Emperors" (*sān shǎo dì* 三少帝). See Chén Shòu 陳壽 (233–297), *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sānguó zhì* 三國志), annotated by Péi Sōngzhī 裴松之 (372–451) and edited by Yáng Jiāluò 楊家駱 (Taipei: Dǐngwén shūjú, 1980) [hereafter *SGZ*], 4.117–131.

[46] Since none of emperor Míng's male children survived childhood, he nominated Cáo Fāng as heir apparent. See *SGZ*, 4.117.

and Sīmǎ Yì 司馬懿 (179–251), a veteran statesman who had served under Cáo Cāo and had played a vital role in the accession of Cáo Pī 曹丕 (187–226) as the founding emperor Wén 文 of Wèi (r. 220–226).

The two regents, however, proved to be less willing to cooperate with each other than what Cáo Ruì had envisioned. Soon both regents were involved in court intrigues and factional struggles. Cáo Shuǎng managed to remove his rival from important court decisions by appointing him to positions with very little political relevance, but Sīmǎ Yì resigned his post feigning sickness, and started to plot the overthrow the Cáo Wèi dynasty. Thus, after only a few decades, the ruling family was facing the possibility of losing the mandate.

The evident conflict in the central court compelled Cáo Jiǒng take action. Thus, sometime in the fifth year of the "Correct Beginning" (*Zhèngshǐ* 正始) reign period (240–249), Cáo Jiǒng submitted his "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" (*Liùdài lùn* 六代論)[47] and the accompanying memorial to the young emperor and his regent Cáo Shuǎng. By revisiting the lessons of past dynasties, Cáo Jiǒng hoped to forewarn them of the underlying dangers of placing their trust on the wrong men and alienating themselves from family members.[48]

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[47] The "Six Ages" of the title of the essay refer to the three pre-imperial dynasties (Xià 夏, Shāng 商, and Zhōu 周) and the three "legitimate" dynasties that followed the administrative unification of the Qín (Qín, Hàn and Wèi). Note that Wáng Mǎng's short-lived Xīn 新 dynasty (9–23) is excluded here.

[48] The sources are not specific about the year when the memorial was submitted. The "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" explicitly states: "The Great Wèi dynasty arose twenty four years ago." [大魏之興于今二十有四年矣], so which would set the year of its composition in 244 or 245. *SGZ*, 20.591. The version in Mǎ Duānlín's, *Comprehensive Examination of Documents* reads: "In the *zhèngshǐ* era, Cáo Jiǒng, a member of the imperial clan submits the following memorial" [正始閒, 宗室曹冏上書曰]. *WXTK*, 270.2142-1. A post-script to the version in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* mentions that Cáo Jiǒng submitted his essay with the hope it would reach Cáo Shuǎng, because the emperor was still a young child, and adds that Cáo Shuǎng did not take it into consideration [是時天子幼稚，冏冀以此論感悟曹爽，爽不能納]. *SGZ*, 20.591. Considering that the *zhèngshǐ* era lasted from 240-249, and Cáo Shuǎng was executed in January 249, the year 248 would mark the *terminus ante quem* the memorial had to be submitted. Based on the use of the term "young child" (*yòuzhì* 幼稚) used to refer to the emperor I am inclined to believe the memorial and the essay were submitted to the thorne between 244 and 245, when the emperor was 8 to 13 years old.

In his memorial and discussions submitted to the court, Cáo Jiǒng strongly advocates a return to the *fēngjiàn* system, based on the idea that kin should take precedence over non-kin. He argues that in the past, the sage rulers were able to govern the realm by sharing the rule with their kin. In Cáo Jiǒng's view, the system of investiture of the Zhōu provided a more effective means of securing the dynasty's hold on power than relying on court appointed administrators.

Granted, there is little novelty in Cáo Jiǒng's discussion. For the most part he replicates the classical arguments in favor of *fēngjiàn* as the system of rule that allowed the Zhōu dynasty to rule for eight hundred years. However, unlike earlier proponents of *fēngjiàn*, Cáo Jiǒng was able to make use of the four hundred years of Hàn administrative experience to compare the possibilities and limitations of the two systems of rule. My interest lies in understanding how these historical precedents and theoretical perspectives were used in the text to discuss the need for a return to *fēngjiàn*.

In the present chapter I focus on Cáo Jiǒng's defense of the system of investiture as the point of departure of discussions of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* in medieval China. In the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties," Cáo Jiǒng comments on the historical experiences of the Zhōu, Qín and Hàn dynasties to support his claims in favor of the system of investiture. He also summarizes earlier debates on the issue. But his analysis goes beyond a simple overview of events that happened. Interestingly, Cáo Jiǒng introduces counterfactual possibilities as part of his analysis of the workings of the prefectural system. In several passages, he employs counterfactual questions as a rhetorical device. However, I would suggest that Cáo Jiǒng's thinking beyond historical occurrences and envision alternative outcomes to a series of events points to a sophisticated understanding of the unfolding of history. In sum, I propose that Cáo Jiǒng's call for intra-kin

solidarity should not be read as reiteration of past arguments, but a sophisticated explanation of the development of political institutions in time.

The textual transmission of the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties"

Given the fact that Cáo Jiǒng remains a marginal figure in studies of early medieval political thought, my choice of author deserves some explanation. There is little information about his life and only one extant treatise attributed to him. Perhaps this explains in part why Cáo Jiǒng's "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" has not been the subject of any major academic studies in the West.[49]

Despite this paucity of sources, there are various reasons to begin my study of medieval discussions of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* with a close reading of Cáo Jiǒng's work. First, I must note that whereas Cáo Jiǒng is not nearly as famous as other medieval Chinese political thinkers, his "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" has been regarded as one of the most representative pieces of the "discussions" (*lùn* 論) genre and as one of the most relevant discussions of the system of investiture by generations of Chinese literati. His "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" has been preserved in several collections dating from different periods of Chinese history. Its repetition speaks of the importance of the text for scholars engaged in very dissimilar textual projects.

The earliest extant version dates from the 5th century. It appears as a lengthy note in Chén Shòu's 陳壽 (233–297) *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sānguó zhì* 三國志). There, Cáo Jiǒng's

[49] I have found no reference of scholarly studies on the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" in Chinese or other languages in Knechtges and Chang's comprehensive reference guide to early and medieval Chinese literature. For a biographical sketch and a list of works attributed to Cáo Jiǒng, see David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang (eds.), *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*. *Part I* (Leiden, Brill, 2010), pp.74–75. To the best of my knowledge, the only rendering of Cáo Jiǒng's text into English is in Achilles Fang's translation of the "Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms", which —despite its usefulness as a primary source— does not offer much in terms of analysis of the text. See Achilles Fang (trans.) *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms (220-265) Chapters 69-78 from the Tzŭ Chih T'ung Chien* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 656–670.

treatise follows Chén Shòu's critique of the Wèi approach to the system of investiture, in a section on the titles granted to emperor Wén's children and a shorter note by the early middle period scholar Yuán Zhǔn 袁準 (ca. 237–316) on the same topic. The *Sānguó zhì* version of the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" was introduced by Péi Sōngzhī 裴松之 (372–451), the main commentator to the annotated edition. Péi Sōngzhī cites the *Annals of the House of Wèi* (*Wèi shì chūnqiū* 魏氏春秋) a historical work by the Eastern Jìn 晉 dynasty (317–420) scholar Sūn Shèng 孙盛 (*ca*. 302–373) as his source. The *Sānguó zhì* version also includes Cáo Jiǒng's memorial to the emperor and his regent as a preface to the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties."[50]

The core text also appears slightly abbreviated in the *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wénxuǎn* 文選) compiled by Xiāo Tǒng 蕭統 (501–531), as one of few examples of superb pieces in the *lùn* genre.[51] Overall, the *Wénxuǎn* is organized by literary categories—37 in total—including government documents such as patents of enfeoffment (*cè* 册), edicts (*zhào* 詔) and commands (*lìng* 令), although the largest part of the collection is devoted to works of poetry. Xiāo Tǒng and the other compilers of the *Wénxuǎn* were not aiming for comprehensiveness, that is, they were not hoping to transmit all existing texts but arrogating for themselves the right to decide which pieces were worth including in the anthology. In this way, the compilers of the *Wénxuǎn* were hoping to transmit to posterity the best samples for each category of existing literature, by "omitting the weeds and collecting only the purest blossoms" [略其蕪穢，集其清英].[52]

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[50] *SGZ*, 20.591.
[51] Xiāo Tǒng 蕭統 (501–531), *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wénxuǎn* 文選), annotated by Lǐ Shàn 李善 (d. 689) (Shanghai: Shànghǎi gǔjí chūbǎnshè, 1986) [hereafter *WX*], 52.2273-2281.
[52] See *WX*, p. 2. Also David R. Knechtges (trans.), *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature. Volume One: Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 89.

It is worth noting that in this selection Cáo Jiǒng's "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" is among the thirteen examples of the *lùn* genre dating from the early Hàn to the fifth century, together with works by earlier political thinkers such as Jiǎ Yì 賈誼 (200–168 BCE), Dōngfāng Shuò 東方朔 (160–93 BCE), and Bān Biāo 班彪 (3–54) and near contemporaries like Lù Jī 陸機 (261–303) and later scholars like Liú Jùn 劉峻 (462–521). The fact that Cáo Jiǒng's essay was included in this collection as one of few remarkable pieces of its genre in the *Wénxuǎn* suggests its importance for early middle period elite audiences. The memorial preceding the "Discussion of the Six Ages" however, was not included in this collection, nor is it present in the section dedicated to "Memorials" (*shū* 書) or any other section in the *Wénxuǎn*.

Cáo Jiǒng's essay is also partially transcribed in the Tang dynasty *Collection of Literature Arranged by Categories* (*Yìwén Lèijù* 藝文類聚) compiled by Ōuyáng Xún 歐陽詢 (557–641). An abridged version of the "Discussion of the Six Ages" appears in a section under the title "On emperors and kings" (*dì wáng bù* 帝王部).[53] This section contains short excerpts on the notion of sovereignty arranged chronologically, and it includes passages from the Classics, several Hàn dynasty works and a few longer quotations from later writings, such as Lù Jī's "Discussion of the Fall of the State."[54]

In addition, Cáo Jiǒng's essay was included in two massive Sòng dynasty collections; the *Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau* (*Cèfǔ Yuánguī* 冊府元龜), an encyclopedia compiled by Wáng Qīnruò 王欽若 (962–1025), and also in Sīmǎ Guāng's 司馬光 (1019–1086) magnum opus *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Zīzhì Tōngjiàn* 資治通鑑). The former offers a

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[53] Ōuyáng Xún 歐陽詢 (557–641), *Collection of Literature Arranged by Categories* (*Yìwén Lèijù* 藝文類聚) (Shanghai: Shànghǎi gǔjí chūbǎnshè, 1999) [hereafter *YWLJ*], 11.202-203.
[54] *YWLJ*, 11.198-206.

summarized version of the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" in the section on "Royal Clansmen" (*Zōngshì bù* 宗室部), in a sub-section on "Loyalty" (*zhōng* 忠), suggesting that this is an exemplary piece of loyal advice to the emperor from a kinsman.[55] A longer version can be found the "Wèi dynasty" section of Sīmǎ Guāng's *Comprehensive Mirror*.[56] Neither version includes the memorial that accompanied the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties."

The Yuán 元 dynasty (1271–1368) scholar Mǎ Duānlín 馬端臨 (1245–1322) also includes the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" in his *Comprehensive Examination of Documents* (*Wénxiàn Tōngkǎo* 文獻通考), in a section discussing the system and the practice of investiture throughout recorded history. For the Wèi dynasty, it has two sections, one on Wèi Tàizǔ 太祖 (i.e., Cáo Cāo) investing ranks, and one on Wéndì's (i.e., Cáo Pī) sons becoming the eight princes, the latter contains the full text of Cáo Jiǒng's discussion.[57]

The latest pre-modern occurrence of this essay is in the formidable collection by the Qīng 清 dynasty (1644–1911) scholar Yán Kějūn 嚴可均 (1762–1843), who includes it in the section "Complete Works of the Wèi dynasty". Yán Kějūn included the memorial and several notes to the original text.[58] Since this is the most inclusive extant version of the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties", I will base my translation and discussion of Cáo Jiǒng's text on Yán Kějūn's version, unless otherwise noted.

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[55] Wáng Qīnruò 王欽若 (962–1025), *Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau* (*Cèfǔ Yuánguī* 冊府元龜) (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1994) [hereafter *CFYG*], 285.3355-1/3355-2.
[56] Sīmǎ Guāng 司馬光 (1019–1086), *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Zīzhì Tōngjiàn* 資治通鑑), annotated by Hú Sānxǐng 胡三省 (1230–1302) (Běipíng [Beijing]: Gǔjí chūbǎnshè, 1956) [hereafter *ZZTJ*], 74.2355–2358.
[57] *WXTK*, 270.2142-1/2142-3.
[58] Yán Kějūn 嚴可均 (1762–1843), *Complete Works from the Ancient Past, the Three Dynasties, the Qín, Hàn, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties* (*Quán shànggǔ sāndài Qín Hàn Sānguó Liùcháo wén* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文) (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1989) [hereafter Yán Kějūn], 20.1160-2/1162-2. An annotated version of Cáo Jiǒng's "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" can be found in Gāo Bùyíng 高步瀛 (comp.) *Wèi Jìn wén jǔyào* 魏晉文舉要 (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1989), pp. 66-78.

Cáo Jiǒng's Memorial: On the need to elevate relatives

The opening statement of the memorial sets the stage for Cáo Jiǒng's discussion. "The rulers of the past," Cáo Jiǒng recounts, "invested their relatives of the same surname to demonstrate their affection for their kin, and they established those of different surname to demonstrate their honoring of the worthy" [古之王者，必建同姓以明親親，必樹異姓以明賢賢].[59] Here, the first distinction Cáo Jiǒng brings to the ruler's attention is that between kin (*qīn* 親) and virtuous non-kin (*xián* 賢); the former should be treated with affection, the latter with respect. Thus, both kin and non-kin are indispensable for governing the realm. "Without virtuous men," Cáo Jiǒng writes, "it would not be possible to achieve anything; without kin there would be nobody to assist in ruling the realm" [非賢無與興功, 非親無與輔治].[60]

Cáo Jiǒng quotes from the *Zuǒzhuàn* 左傳 and the *Book of Documents* to support his claims that kin and non-kin should participate in the administration of the realm. But it is a passage from the *Book of Odes* quoted at the end of the section gives the clearest indication of Cáo Jiǒng's preference. It reads; "embracing virtue he safeguarded peace, the royal clansmen protected him like fortified walls" [懷德維寧，宗子維城].[61] This brief reference would have been enough for his intended audience to grasp the message, but it is worth exploring in greater depth here. The lines are part of the "Bǎn 板" poem (Máo #254), which is mostly an admonitory poem for the ruler to be ever wary of Heaven's power. In the final stanzas, the poem stresses the need for the ruler and his kin to maintain their reciprocal obligations.

[59] Yán Kějūn, 20.1160-2.
[60] Yán Kějūn, 20.1160-2.
[61] *Odes*, Bǎn 板, in *DSJ,* p. 72.

The imagery used in this poem to talk about the relationship between the king and his kin will become standard reference in later discourses of *fēngjiàn*. Terms such as "hedge" (*fān* 藩), "screen" (*píng* 屏), and "wall" (*chéng* 城), all sharing the idea of protection and enclosure, would reappear in later discussions of the *fēngjiàn* system. They represented the ideal functioning of the system of investiture. In this sense, the shared vocabulary allowed to represent larger ideas about proper governance with great economy of words.

In his memorial, Cáo Jiǒng warns the ruler to avoid the excesses of favoritism for kin which results in weakness, and partiality toward non-kin, which results in plundering.[62] Ruler and ministers, whether or not of the same family, are to be bound by reciprocal obligations. If entrusted with territories, these obligations include military service to the dynasty, so that the ruler can rely on his kinsmen and loyal allies to protect the frontiers and support the central court whenever it faces a threat. Cáo Jiǒng concludes that since "the former sages understood [the proper way of governing] they sought [worthy men] broadly among kin and non-kin and employed them both, hence it was possible to preserve the Altars of the Soil and Grain [i.e., the State] for many years" [先聖知其然也，故博求親疏而並用之， 故能保其社稷，歷紀長久].[63]

In the next section of the memorial, Cáo Jiǒng presents his first complaint. He notes that while the Wèi dynasty had always been able to garner the services of worthy men, the present ruler has not given due consideration to his kinsmen [今魏尊尊之法雖明，親親之道未備].[64] Once more, Cáo Jiǒng borrows the authority of the *Book of Odes* to emphasize his point. He states:

[62] Yán Kějūn, 20.1160-2.
[63] Yán Kějūn, 20.1160-2.
[64] Yán Kějūn, 20.1160-2.

> Does not the *Book of Odes* say: "The wagtail is at level height, when brothers face difficulties..."[65] These words make it clear that brothers will come to each other's aid in times of turmoil and mourning, and will be of one heart in times of worries and misfortunes. Although there might be anger leading to family quarrels, they will not forget their duty to oppose humiliation [from without]. Why is this so? Because their worries and anxieties are the same.
> [詩不云乎:『鶺鴒在原, 兄弟急難』斯言之明兄弟相救于喪亂之際, 同心于憂禍之閒。雖有鬩牆之忿, 不忘禦侮之事。何則? 憂患同也][66]

Against this ideal of intra-kin solidarity, Cáo Jiǒng once again criticizes the current state of affairs as one in which "[members of the imperial clan] are appointed to an official post, yet their positions are not relevant, some are dismissed from office and not appointed (again)" [或任而不重, 或釋而不任].[67] Yet, for Cáo Jiǒng, the fact that imperial kinsmen were without administrative duties is not a troubling as the fact that they have been denied military power. With this concern in mind, he writes "sooner or later, the alarms will sound along the borders of the realm or there will be the need to repel bandits near the passes, and then the 'arms and legs' will not be able to provide support and the 'chest and heart' will have nothing to guard them" [一旦疆場稱警, 關門反拒; 股肱不扶, 胷心無衛].[68]

Considering his family ties with the young sovereign, one could dismiss Cáo Jiǒng's initial remarks as mere self-serving rhetoric. After all, as the emperor's grand-uncle, he could very well

[65] This is a reference to *Odes*, "Cháng dì 常棣" (Máo # 164), which praises the bond between brothers as the key to the well-being of the state and the basis of intra-family harmony. In *DSJ*, p. 41. Cáo Jiǒng not only refers to the poem in his citation, but also borrows largely from the language and imagery of the poem to elucidate his point. For example, in the sentence "although there might be anger leading to family quarrels, they will not forget their duty to oppose humiliation" [雖有鬩牆之忿, 不忘禦侮之事]. Cáo Jiǒng is paraphrasing the fourth stanza of the poem, which reads: "brothers may quarrel inside the walls, but they will oppose insult from without" [兄弟鬩于牆、外禦其務]
[66] Yán Kějūn, 20.1160-2.
[67] Yán Kějūn, 20.1160-2.
[68] Yán Kějūn, 20.1160-2.

be pleading for a larger fiefdom or greater leverage in court decisions, and merely coating his request under a more amenable discourse of impartiality. Yet, there are reasons to consider his memorial and discourse as evidence of a sincere wish to instruct the emperor. As a member of the imperial clan, Cáo Jiǒng was deeply invested in the fate of the Wèi dynasty. His arguments reflect a thorough examination of historical precedents, and his analysis of the political situation of his time is nothing short of premonitory.

The Wèi dynasty approach to the system of investiture

Due to its emphasis on restoring the mutual trust among members of the imperial clan, Cáo Jiǒng's memorial can be read as an appeal to reverse the early Wèi practice of granting territory to royal relatives while keeping them under close surveillance. According to the records, soon after he ascended the throne as emperor Wén of Wèi, Cáo Pī invested his kin with territories but he ordered that they should not be given administrative duties. Moreover, Cáo Pī forbade contact between his enfeoffed kin so as to prevent seditious alliances and commanded his officials to keep them under scrutiny to prevent military build-ups.

Perhaps this policy was guided by the need to secure his mandate, especially considering that Cáo Pī had outmaneuvered his brother Cáo Zhí 曹植 (192–232) in the contest for the throne. Furthermore, despite the latter's repeated pleas to be allowed to serve his ruler — in which he displayed very elaborate performances of humility to prove his allegiance to his brother — Cáo Pī was not convinced to modify this policy.[69]

[69] Two of Cáo Zhí's most telling memorials are the "Memorial Seeking to Prove Myself" (*Qiú zì shì biǎo* 求自試表) and the "Memorial Seeking to Convey Family Affection" (*Qiú tōng qīnqīn biǎo* 求通親親表). Both are preserved in *WX* 37.1675-1682 and *WX* 37.1685-1689. For an analysis of Cáo Zhí's communications, see Robert Joe Cutter "Personal Crisis and Communication in the Life of Cao Zhi," in David R. Knechtges and Eugene Vance (eds.). *Rhetoric and the Discourses of Power in Court Culture: China, Europe and Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp.149–168.

Cáo Pī's distrust for his family members was criticized by several later commentators. For example, in an annotation to the biography of Cáo Zhí in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, Sūn Shèng decries the lack of power of the enfeoffed lords with the following words: "How strange is the Wèi family application of the system of investiture! It does not model itself to the precedents of the former rulers, it does not seek to apply the method of the defensive barrier [or the hedges and screens], it goes against the customs of fostering harmony within the family, and turns its back on the duty of guarding the walled cities!" [異哉，魏氏之封建也！不度先王之典，不思藩屏之術，違敦睦之風，背維城之義].[70] Another commentator, Yuán Zhǔn 袁準 (*ca*. 237–316), criticized Cáo Pī's approach to investiture as one in which "the lords and princes are all dispatched to their fiefdoms, given empty names but no real power" [於是封建侯王，皆使寄地，空名而無其實。][71] In Yuán Zhǔn's opinion, Cáo Pī "transgressed the principles of using kin to protect the realm and damaged the kindness owed to relatives close as flesh and bone." [既違宗國藩屏之義，又虧親戚骨肉之恩].[72]

I would like to note that despite favoring administrative centralization, Cáo Pī did make a selective application of some of the principles associated with the system of investiture. For one, he was unwilling to apply a harsh punishment on his brother Cáo Zhí, when the latter was accused of drunkenness and irreverence (*zuìjiǔ bèimàn* 醉酒悖慢) by the Supervisor of Invested Territories (*jiānguó yèzhě* 監國謁者) Guàn Jūn 灌均 (fl. third century).[73] After receiving the report of such misconduct, Emperor Wén of Wèi decided to show leniency in dealing with a minor transgression

[70] *SGZ*, 19.576. This entry ends with a mention of Cáo Jiǒng's "Discussion of the Six Ages" as a detailed study of the rise and fall of previous dynasties [六代興亡， 曹冏論之詳矣].
[71] *SGZ*, 20.591.
[72] *SGZ*, 20.591.
[73] *SGZ*, 19.561.

by his brother and limited the punishment to reducing Cáo Zhí's territory and lowering his rank among the lords. His edict for that occasion reads: "Zhí is Our younger brother from the same mother. In the whole realm, there is nothing that We are not able to accommodate; what then about the present situation with Zhí? Those relatives who are as close as flesh and bone, even if they transgress, one must not sentence them to death, [the sentence] should be to change [i.e., reduce] Zhí's fief." [植，朕之同母弟。朕於天下無所不容，而況植乎？骨肉之親，舍而不誅，其改封植].[74]

Cáo Pī's decision on this case was by no means an innovation. As Griet Vankeerberghen has shown, at least since the Eastern Hàn cases of transgression by members of the imperial clan were expected to be judged directly by the emperor, and the emperor was expected to show leniency based on his bonds of kinship with the accused. The principle of showing kindness to those of the same "flesh and bone" (*gǔròu zhī ēn* 骨肉之恩) was invoked both to urge the sovereign to grant fiefs to its relatives as well as to ask for clemency in penal cases brought against imperial family members.[75]

Another way in which Cáo Pī implemented some of the principles associated with the system of investiture was when he used his power to grant territories to maintain the aura of legitimate transfer of the Mandate of Heaven after the abdication of Liú Xié's 劉協 (181–220), emperor Xiàn 獻 (r. 190–220), the last ruler of the Hàn dynasty. Following emperor Xiàn's abdication, Cáo Pī invested him with a fiefdom of ten thousand households. The former Hàn emperor was created Duke of Shānyáng 山陽 and was allowed to live his remaining years

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[74] *SGZ*, 19.561. Also in Yán Kějūn, 20.1078-2. The edict is transcribed slightly different in *WX*, it has [舛而不殊] instead of [舍而不誅]. See note in *WX*, 931.

[75] See Griet Vankeerberghen. "Kinship and Kingship in Han China: The 120 CE Case against Liu Chang, King of Lecheng." In Garret P. S. Olberding (ed.) *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), pp. 203–236.

peacefully. Despite the lower title, Liú Xié still ranked above the other lords, he was exempted from paying obeisance to the Wèi emperor, and he was allowed to continue the ritual sacrifices according to the Hàn protocols [奉帝為山陽公，邑一萬戶，位在諸侯王上， 奏事不稱臣，受詔不拜， 以天子車服郊祀天地， 宗廟、祖、臘皆如漢制].[76] Upon his death, he was buried with the ceremony corresponding to the Hàn Son of Heaven, and his title passed on to his descendants.[77]

Emperor Xiàn had ascended the throne when he was nine years old and spent most of his life under close surveillance in the imperial palace.[78] For more than two decades he was under the control of Cáo Cāo 曹操 (155–220), the cunning military leader and a skillful court politician who rose to power after the suppression of the Yellow Turbans rebellion and the elimination of the warlord Dǒng Zhuó 董卓 (d. 192). After Cáo Cāo consolidated his position, the young emperor was reduced to a mere figurehead, confined to the imperial palace and removed from all political decisions. However, it is worth noting that although Cáo Cāo controlled the larger part of the military establishment and of government administration for over twenty years, he did not attempt to overthrow the dynasty, nor to replace the feeble emperor.

Before ascending the throne, Cáo Pī was careful to maintain all the formal aspects of his submission to the Hàn dynasty. The extant correspondence with emperor Xiàn provides an excellent example of the textual 'performances of humility' that were expected in the communications between the imperial center and noble lords. On the surface, Cáo Pī’s textual self-deprecation and performances of submission give the appearance of an exchanges between the all-

[76] *HHS*, 9.390-391.
[77] *HHS*, 9.390-391.
[78] *HHS* 9.367

powerful emperor and his loyal servant. However, they contained slightly veiled allusions to the need for the emperor's abdication and the change of dynasty.[79]

As the previous discussion shows, although discourses and practices associated with *fēngjiàn* were present since the founding of the dynasty, government of the realm remained highly centralized. Cáo Pī's use of the *fēngjiàn* institutions was for the most part instrumental: imperial relatives were granted lands but prevented from acquiring real power. In view of this context, I propose to understand Cáo Jiǒng's essay as an informed and cogent critique of Cáo Pī's and subsequent Wèi rulers' approach to the system of investiture. In the following section, I focus on the historical events and rhetorical strategies that Cáo Jiǒng deploys to convince his readers.

The *fēngjiàn* ideal and the lessons of history

Cáo Jiǒng starts his discussion by establishing a direct relation between the system of rule and the longevity of a ruling house. In the opening sentence section, he reiterates the long held notion that the kings of the Three Dynasties were able to hand down power for many generations because they "shared the realm", while the Qín lasted only two generations because it attempted to rule the people alone, that is, it concentrated the governance in the figure of the emperor, therefore when it faced difficulties, no one came to its rescue. [三代之君與天下共其民， 故天下同其憂；秦王獨制其民，故傾危而莫救].[80]

Historian Charles Holcombe has read this passage as proof that in early medieval China *fēngjiàn* discourses were being employed to promote "public sharing of authority in contrast to its

[79] For an analysis of the textual performances that preceded the abdication of emperor Xiàn in favor of Cáo Pī, see David R. Knechtges, "The Rhetoric of Imperial Abdication and Accession in a Third-Century Chinese Court: The Case of Cao Pi's Accession as Emperor of the Wei Dynasty." In David R. Knechtges and Eugene Vance (eds.), *Rhetoric and the Discourses of Power in Court Culture*, pp. 3–35.

[80] *SGZ*, 20.591; *WX*, 52.2273; *ZZTJ*, 74.2356; Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-1.

private concentration in the hands of the ruler of a centralized empire" and that this was done mostly by the great families, since it "authorized a broad *shìdàfū* class to exercise power on the public behalf."[81] I contend that whereas Cáo Jiǒng certainly argues against a centralized administrative structure, there is little in his treatise suggesting that governance should be in the hands of the great families. Much to the contrary, his memorial seeks to elicit a response from the Cáo sovereign to prevent the undue influence of other great families, such as the Sīmǎ's, in court decisions.

True, Cáo Jiǒng advises the ruler to share the joys and worries with the people [與人共其樂者，人必憂其憂；與人同其安者，人必拯其危],[82] but he also stresses the importance of relying on the imperial family to confront the potential threats of non-kin elites. Despite his calls for securing the assistance of men of talent from a wide pool of potential candidates, Cáo Jiǒng's essay presents a clear case for privileging bonds of kinship over any larger, and still undefined, status-group consciousness.

Besides the concern for the administration of the realm, Cáo Jiǒng is making a strong case for allowing the imperial kinsmen to independently command military forces. Ideally, the decentralized military system of the Zhōu allowed the court to rely on powerful lords to secure the borders, but also to deal with less compliant lords. Cáo Jiǒng cites two examples of hegemons (*bà* 霸) of the Spring and Autumn period, Dukes Huán 桓 of Qí 齊 (d. 643 BCE) and Wén 文 of Jìn 晉 (697–628 BCE), to show that the ruling house could always trust its invested kin. Both acted on the king's behalf to punish the transgressions of other states. In this way, they brought the

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[81] Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasties* (Honlulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), p. 37.
[82] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-1.

recalcitrant lords back to submission and restored the respect due to the king [王綱弛而復張，諸侯傲而復肅].[83]

Cáo Jiǒng also recalls the famous incident when the king of Chǔ asks about the weight of the sacrificial cauldrons, and remarks that it was out of fear of the ruling house that he did not dare carry his plan:

> Although [the king of Chǔ] coveted the nine cauldrons, he still feared the Jī clan [the ruling house of the Zhōu dynasty], hence the treacherous thoughts in his mind were dispelled, and the unruly plot vanished as soon as it came out of his lips. Was it not because [the Zhōu] placed the utmost trust upon kin and appointed the talented and virtuous, so that when the branches and leaves are large and luxuriant the roots and trunk have something to rely on? [雖心希九鼎，而畏迫宗姬，姦情散於胸懷，逆謀消於脣吻，斯豈非信重親戚，任用賢能，枝葉碩茂，本根賴之與？][84]

From the previous account, it is clear that Cáo Jiǒng did not deny that oftentimes the Zhōu dynasty faced danger due to the ambitions of its subordinate kingdoms, yet even in such circumstances, it was the loyalty of the noble lords that ultimately prevented it from losing the realm. Naturally, the Qín experience presents the most suitable case in point for Cáo Jiǒng's argument. He claims that the main reason why the Qín dynasty lasted only two generations was because the First Emperor rejected the practices of investiture in very clear terms:

> The Qín observed the deficiencies of the Zhōu and considered what had made it so vulnerable to capture. Thereupon, it eliminated the nobles of the five ranks and set up magistrates in commanderies and counties instead. It abandoned the education through rites

[83] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-1.
[84] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-1.

> and music and established harsh government instead. Close relatives did not receive even a small fief, and virtuous ministers did not get even enough land to stick an awl. Inside [the court] he did not rely on his older son for support; outside, he did not make use of the lords to defend [the realm] against foreign [threats]. His kindness did not extend to his close relatives; his favor did not flow to the branches and leaves. This is just like cutting off legs and arms and rely solely on the chest and belly; or like throwing away the oars while on a shaky boat on the river or at sea.
> [秦觀周之弊，將以為以弱見奪，於是廢五等之爵，立郡縣之官，棄禮樂之教，任苛刻之政。子弟無尺寸之封，功臣無立錐之土，內無宗子以自毗輔，外無諸侯以為蕃衛。[85] 仁心不加於親戚，惠澤不流於枝葉，譬猶芟刈股 肱，獨任胸腹；浮舟江海，捐棄楫櫂][86]

Cáo Jiǒng's criticism of the *jùnxiàn* system is based on the notion that the ruler will necessarily have to share the administration and military protection of the realm. The problem with the *jùnxiàn* system is that since imperial family members are denied political or military decision-making power at court or territories to oversee outside the capital, there is no possibility of securing the position of the ruling house in times of crisis.

In the following section, Cáo Jiǒng revisits several iterations of the debates in the Qín and Hàn courts on centralized and decentralized administration, connects them with the specific historical contexts in which they were proposed as policy recommendations, and examines the ensuing court decisions and their consequences.

The first example that Cáo Jiǒng cites is that of Chúnyú Yuè 淳于越 (fl. third century BCE) [87], an advocate of the *fēngjiàn* system who was active in the court of the First Emperor of Qín.

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[85] A similar passage occurs in the *HS*, 14.393: [內亡骨肉本根之輔，外亡尺土 蕃翼之衛。]
[86] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-1.
[87] Also written 淳于越.

Chúnyú Yuè based his argument in favor of the system of investiture with reference to two well-known episodes of the Warring States period, the usurpation of the throne of Qí 齊 by Tián Cháng 田常 in 481 BCE; and the partition of the Warring State's kingdom of Jìn 晉 in 403 BCE. Chúnyú Yuè's discussion concludes with an appeal to the Qín ruler to adhere to the institutions of the past, that is, to make ample use of the system of investiture. "Not to follow the models of the past in the management of government affairs and still be able to endure for a long time, I have never heard of such a thing!" [事不師古而能長久者，非所聞也!].[88]

Chúnyú Yuè's recommendations were set against Lǐ Sī's proposals. Lǐ Sī suggested to parcel the realm into administrative divisions of prefectures and counties to be governed by court appointed officials with a limited tenure. The First Emperor followed Lǐ Sī's advice and established an empire-wide *jùnxiàn* system for the first time in history. Cáo Jiǒng argues that with this move, the First Emperor unknowingly undermined the foundations of his own dynasty so that when he passed away, the imperial family became estranged and weak and the court officials were able to usurp power with little difficulty. More specifically, Cáo Jiǒng revisits the episode in which Zhào Gāo 趙高 (d. 207 BCE) usurped power and was even able to put members of the imperial clan to death [至令趙高之徒，誅鋤宗室].[89]

In highlighting the mistakes of the first Qín ruler, who allowed ministers from outside the family circle to wield too much power at court and to control the imperial armies, Cáo Jiǒng is probably drawing an implicit parallel with the situation of the *zhèngshǐ* period, when the political ambitions of the Sīmǎ family had become evident.

[88] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-1. Chúnyú Yuè's position is recorded in the *SJ*, 6.254 and 87.2546. In this passage, Chúnyú Yuè paraphrases the *Book of Documents*: [事不師古，以克永世，匪說攸聞]
[89] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-1.

The second moment of Cáo Jiǒng's discussion involves the founding of the Hàn dynasty. He notes that even though Liú Bāng, taking his lesson from the fall of Qín, decided to invest his kinsmen with territories, he was too generous in granting territories, so that the invested kin became estranged from the ruling lineage and had amassed sufficient resources to challenge the central court. As an advocate of *fēngjiàn*, Cáo Jiǒng is quick to note that the problems with the system of investiture in the Western Hàn originated from the excess in its application. It was Liú Bāng's undue generosity that laid the foundations for the troubles that later emperors were to face.

During the reign of emperor Wén, Jiǎ Yì 賈誼 (*ca*. 200–168 BCE), the renowned scholar and minister of the Western Hàn, submitted a proposal recommending that all granted territories be divided among every descendant of each lord. Jiǎ Yì's plan was to reduce the effective power of the territorial lords without increasing the animosity between the ruling monarch and the enfeoffed members of the imperial clan. "If your Majesty desires to establish a peaceful rule over the realm," he wrote, "the best way is to increase the number of feudatories and decrease their power, then the power to govern the realm will be like the body commanding the arm, and the arm commanding the fingers." [夫欲天下之治安，莫若眾建諸侯 而少其力。令海內之勢，若身之使臂，臂之使指].[90] Furthermore, he argued that by ordering the division of the kingdoms among all descendants, the emperor was not only weakening potential threats, but also promoting impartiality and benevolence. Hence, it can be said that his memorial integrated principles of *realpolitik* coated with a layer of "Confucian" virtues.[91] Yet emperor Wén refused to follow Jiǎ Yì's advice and it was up to his successors to face the growing power of the territorial lords.

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[90] Yán Kějūn, 75.1161-2.

[91] See also Charles Sanft, "Six of One, Two Dozen of the Other: The Abatement of Mutilating Punishments under Han Emperor Wen." *Asia Major* (Third Series) 18.1 (2005), pp. 87-88.

Soon after his accession, Emperor Jǐng 景 (r. 156–141 BCE) was faced with the need to reassert central control over the quasi-autonomous kingdoms and their resources. In order to pursue this policy, he brought up a series of legal accusations against the local kings, all of whom were members of the imperial clan, and decreed that stripping them of land would be an appropriate penalty. But the local kings did not stand idly by waiting for their territories to be parceled and their income diminished; they formed an alliance and rallied their troops to fight the decision of the central court. The clash that ensued between central government troops and the armies of the Liú kings is known as the Rebellion of the Seven Kingdoms (154 BCE). The suppression of this rebellion took only a few months, and the result was favorable to the central government, which was able to regain control of large areas formerly under the aegis of the hereditary kings.

The need to further decrease the power of these kingdoms became more evident for emperor Wǔ 武 (r. 141–87 BCE), who decreed that all kingdoms be divided and overseen by centrally appointed officials. From then on imperial kinsmen were allowed to retain and pass on their titles and received sufficient stipends to maintain the luxurious lifestyle of the local courts, but they were barred from government duties. The policy of making imperial kin into a parasitic aristocracy with no real administrative or military duties was sharply criticized by Cáo Jiǒng. He notes: "the descendants [of the formerly powerful territorial lords of the Western Hàn] became too weak, their food and clothing coming from the tax revenues and had no participation in government affairs." [子孫微弱，衣食租稅，不豫政事].[92]

So far, we can see that Cáo Jiǒng is notably critical of these early Western Hàn application of the principles of *fēngjiàn*, the problem with the territorial lords stemmed from the initial excess

[92] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-2.

in the granting of territories, and the successive emperors' inability or unwillingness to remedy the situation. Either so powerful that they would threaten the throne, or so powerless that they could do little to assist the ruling lineage, the territorial lords of the Western Hàn were unable to fulfill their role. However, Cáo Jiǒng brings a third example to illustrate a more promising approach to decentralized governance. The next section of Cáo Jiǒng's treatise discusses Liú Xiàng's 劉向 (77–6 BCE) admonition to emperor Chéng 成. (r. 33–7 BCE) urging him to check the growing power of the consort clans.

> In the present, those of the same surname have become estranged, the maternal relatives have taken control of government, pushing aside those of the imperial family and weakening the lords of the imperial clan. This is certainly not the way to protect the altars of soil and grain and to secure the dynastic succession to the throne!
> [方今同姓疏遠， 母黨專政，排擯宗室，孤弱公族，非所以保守社稷，安固國嗣也。][93]

Since emperor Chéng had not fathered an heir to the throne, Liú Xiàng's main concerns were to secure the dynastic transition, restore the primacy of the imperial family, and prevent the usurpation of government positions by the Wáng and other powerful clans at court. The Wáng clan, for one had several of its members in top-government positions and had created an extensive power network in the imperial bureaucracy.[94] The Liú claim to the Mandate of Heaven was in serious jeopardy.

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[93] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-2.

[94] Luke Habberstad, "Recasting the Imperial Court in Late Western Han: Rank, Duty, and Alliances during Institutional Change," in Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen (eds.), *Chang' an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), pp.

It is not difficult to draw a few historical parallels between Liú Xiàng's memorial and the overall context of the "Discussion on the Six Dynasties." First of all, just like Liú Xiàng, Cáo Jiǒng was also a distant member of the imperial clan, one of "the same surname." Second, both memorials were purportedly written in times when court intrigues were evident and shortly before the respective emperors were toppled. Moreover, when this happened the lords were unable to lend support because their territorial bases had been weakened and they had been pushed aside from top government posts. Cáo Jiǒng complains that the imperial kinsmen had been demoted to the ranks of the common people and that non-kin have taken over the administration of the realm. Neglected or misused, they found no way of helping the dynasty.[95]

Counterfactual reasoning in the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties"

In this section, I would like to highlight the sophistication evidenced in the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties" by briefly discussing how Cáo Jiǒng introduces principles of counterfactual analysis to his study of the system of investiture. The usefulness of counterfactual reasoning in historical narrative has been a point of methodological contention in modern social history and historical sociology, especially during the 1980s. From my analysis of the argumentative strategies of the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties," I propose to read the use of counterfactuals in Cáo Jiǒng's text as something more than a rhetorical device.[96] I argue that counterfactual reasoning demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of causal sequences in historical explanation.

[95] Yán Kějūn, 20.1162-1

[96] The publication of Alfred H. Bloom's *The Linguistic Shaping of Thought: A Study in the Impact of Language on Thinking in China and the West* triggered a debate on the possibilities of counterfactual thought in modern Chinese. Bloom argued that the Chinese language did not enable its speakers to think in counterfactual terms. Cristoph Harbsmeier has cogently refuted Bloom's thesis. See Cristoph Harbsmeier contribution in Joseph Needham (ed.), *Science and Civilization in China*. Vol. 7, Part 1 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. 1998), especially pages 116-118.

As this is an unusual move, a few caveats are in order. First, I am aware that neither the purpose nor the language of the text are similar to those of modern Western social sciences. Therefore, it would be very difficult to find a theoretical position explicitly stated or discussed *in extenso*. Based on the premise that theory should be explicitly articulated to deserve such a name, there are those who claim that these texts possess no theoretical value and their relevance is limited to the context of their production, as policy recommendations or discussions of statecraft. However, as Leigh Jenco has suggested, the perceived absence of such a discussion does not invalidate our engagement with premodern Chinese political thought as a source of relevant theoretical insights.[97] Following Jenco's insightful approach, I contend that the theoretical concerns in Cāo Jiǒng's text are articulated with enough clarity and depth to be worth serious consideration.

Counterfactual thinking has been largely resisted by archival historians who stress the need to tell things as they happened, and not as they could have happened.[98] The value of counterfactual thinking for the social historian lies in that it creates an awareness to the fact that there are no predetermined or necessary series of outcomes resulting from a single event. However, as sociologist Larry Griffin has suggested, counterfactual possibilities are valid only if "the posited historical alternatives are "objective possibilities" in the particular historical context-the real past-housing the action or event subject to counterfactual interrogation."[99] Thus, the main value of counterfactual-reasoning for a social historian lies in its method to explore the possible alternative outcomes of a series of events in consideration of the existing structural conditions and historical contingencies.

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[97] Leigh K. Jenco. "On the Possibility of Chinese Thought as Global Theory". In *Chinese Thought as Global Theory: Diversifying Knowledge Production in the Social Sciences and Humanities.* [Albany: State University of New York Press, Forthcoming]

[98] On this point, see Martin Bunzl. "Counterfactual History: A User's Guide." In *The American Historical Review* 109.3 (2004), pp. 845-848.

[99] On counterfactual analysis in historical sociology see Larry Griffin. "Narrative, Event-Stucture Analysis and Causal Interpretation" in *American Journal of Sociology* 98.5 (1993): p.1099-1100.

There is yet another relevant methodological possibility opened by counterfactual thinking, one that emphasizes the agent's relative autonomy. Counterfactual analysis can make us aware that the decision-makers' effective response to a specific contingency is only one of the agent's gamut of possible options. That is, immersed within specific historical conditions, individuals or groups of individuals with the institutional capacities to decide political courses of action are expected to assess the cost and the benefit of each possible course of action and imagine each consequent alternative scenario. In the "Discussion of the Six Dynasties", we find several interesting examples of this mode of reasoning. Cáo Jiǒng argues for the superiority of the system of investiture claiming that if the First Emperor had followed the advice of Chúnyú Yuè instead of that of Lǐ Sī, the rebellions that followed upon his death would have not succeeded in uprooting the dynasty. He writes;

> Had the First Emperor accepted Chúnyú's advice and discarded Lǐ Sī's opinions, split up the territory and created imperial princes of his brothers and sons, conferred titles to the descendants of the Three Dynasties, and rewarded the meritorious ministers' hard work, each place would have had a permanent ruler and the people would have had a fixed lord; the branches and leaves would support each other, and the head and the tail would each fulfill its respective functions. Then, even though the descendants might lose the way and their contemporaries be no match for the virtue of [kings] Tāng [of Shāng] and Wǔ [of Zhōu], treason and scheming would not emerge, and the rebels would be annihilated. How could such insignificant men as Chén [Shèng] or Xiàng [Yǔ] be able to mobilize [the people]?
>
> [向使始皇納淳于之策，抑李斯之論，割裂州國，分王子弟，封三代之後，報功臣之勞，土有常君， 民有定主，枝葉相扶，首尾為用，雖

使子孫有失道之行，時人無湯武之賢，姦謀未發，而身已屠戮，何區區之陳項，而復得措其手足哉？][100]

In the second example, Cáo Jiǒng reverts the argument by stating that had the Hàn dynasts followed the Qín system, the Lǚ 呂 clan would have been able to usurp the throne. "The various members of the Lǚ clan usurped power, and plotted to harm the house of Liú" [及諸呂擅權, 圖危劉氏].[101] It was the cohesion of the invested kin that prevented this from happening,

> Since the lords [the enfeoffed scions of the house of Liú] were powerful, they were like sturdy boulders. This was because within the passes, Zhūxū of Dōngmóu preserved the Mandate, and beyond the passes, Qí, Dài, Wú and Chu served as defense [against external threats]. Had the [founding emperor] Gāozǔ followed the model of the vanquished Qín and disregarded the way of government of the ancient kings, they [his descendants] would have surely lost the realm and that would have been the end of the House of Liú.
> [徒以諸侯強大，盤石膠固，東牟朱虛授命於內，齊、代、吳、楚作衛於外故也。向使高祖踵亡秦之法，忽先王之制，則天下已傳，非劉氏有也][102]

In both cases, the counterfactual possibility is explicitly stated and follows from the premise that the alternative scenario is both historically plausible and would have been causally determined. Yet, Cáo Jiǒng reasoning is not without its pitfalls. As Bunzl notes, the conditional clause "if…then…", or in this case "had A not happened, then B would have happened"

[100] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-2.
[101] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-2.
[102] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-2.

presupposes the same unilinear historical development as evidence-based causal narrative.[103] In the case at hand, it is clear that Cáo Jiǒng assumes that had the Hàn not invested imperial kin with territories, the elimination ruling house would have been easily overthrown by the consort clan. Thus, he limits the unfulfilled potential outcomes of the situation to a single alternative scenario, namely, the substitution of the House of Liú by the Lǚs. Moreover, he suggests that had this situation developed, its consequences would have been irreversible [非劉氏有也].[104] This is all the more puzzling since Cáo Jiǒng was widely aware that such reversal could and did indeed occur, as was the case of the restitution of Liú dynasty after the Wáng Mǎng interregnum of the early first century CE.

From the previous discussion it can be seen that Cáo Jiǒng's "Discussion of the Six Dynasties", although presented as advice on the contingent political situation, and contained many detailed discussions of the lessons of the past, is not devoid of theoretical significance. Yet, I must acknowledge an implicit counterfactual derived from my own analysis. That is, if Cáo Jiǒng was on to something of theoretical importance, why did he not explicitly engage with the problems of counterfactual reasoning as a methodological principle? There are many plausible explanations for this. First of all, I must admit the possibility that Cáo Jiǒng was entirely unaware of the methodological implications of counterfactual assumptions. However, there is enough textual and linguistic evidence to refute the claim that the Classical Chinese language inhibited the possibility of considering counterfactual claims. In this sense, counterfactual argumentation would have deserved very little consideration for Cáo Jiǒng. Second, as mentioned earlier, the concern of this particular piece was primarily political; it was a plea to the regent Cáo Shuǎng to strengthen the position of the invested kin vis-à-vis the central court. Thus, it was hardly the place to expand on

[103] Martin Bunzl. "Counterfactual History," pp. 845-848.
[104] Yán Kějūn, 20.1161-2.

such concerns. More importantly, just because there is no explicit discussion of the theory or methodology of historical inquiry in premodern Chinese texts, it does not mean that these concerns are not present.

Concluding remarks

After considering the three examples of court debates and their consequences, it could be argued that Cáo Jiǒng presents a selective reading of the historical precedents to better suit his arguments. As a matter of fact, he downplays the troubles faced by the Zhōu rulers and focuses on the calamities of excessive centralization as experienced by the Qín. However, as the previous discussion shows, he is also willing to concede that decentralizing policies can be overdone. His criticism of Hàn Gāozǔ's serves as a case in point. Yet, despite acknowledging problems with the application of each systems, he presents a compelling case for the superiority of the system of investiture based on the close relationship between members of the same family. In the end, it was the treason of prominent members of the Sīmǎ family that would put an end to the Cáo dynasty, and just as Cáo Jiǒng had forewarned, the members of the ruling house were powerless to prevent or confront the usurpation.

A skeptical reader might also point to Cáo Jiǒng's status as a member of the imperial clan of Wèi and dismiss his discourse on virtuous governance as self-serving rhetoric. However, as the previous discussion shows, the texts offer informed policy recommendations and go beyond self-interest. As policy proposals, these texts were presented to the ruler as warnings of the dangers of centralized administration and with hopes of fostering a reform of the existing political system. Indeed, Cáo Jiǒng's "Discourse on the Six Dynasties" does so with remarkable foresight, and

although the ruling emperor, or his regent, paid no heed to his advice, the practice of investiture of the Jìn dynasty could be said to have followed his recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

No system is without flaws: Lù Jī's revision of the lessons of the past

Lù Jī 陸機 (261–303), courtesy name Shìhéng 士衡, was the scion of a powerful ministerial family of the state of Wú 吳 (222–280). He was the grandson of Lù Xùn 陸遜 (183–245), a former Chancellor (*chéngxiàng* 丞相) during the reign of Sūn Quán 孫權 (181–252), and the son of Lù Kàng 陸抗 (226–274), who served as Great Marshall (*dà sīmǎ* 大司馬) under emperor Yuánzōng 元宗 (r. 264–280), the last emperor of the Eastern Wú.[105]

According to his biography in the *Book of Jìn* (*Jìn shū* 晉書), Lù Jī stood out from an early age due to his extraordinary literary ability and proper deportment.[106] The *Book of Jìn* also records three instances of the high praise that Lù Jī enjoyed among his contemporaries. In the first episode, Zhāng Huá 張華 (232–300) an official in the Jìn court highlighted Lù Jī's literary abilities saying: "When people compose literary pieces, they are often anxious about [or lament] their talents falling short, you Sir, however, should be worried about their abundance." [人之為文，常恨才少，而子更患其多].[107] Another instance records his brother Lù Yún stating: "after reading my older brother's literary works, I feel like burning my own brush and ink stone." [君苗見兄文，輒欲燒

[105] Fáng Xuánlíng 房玄齡 (579–648), *Book of Jìn* (*Jìn shū* 晉書) (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1985) [hereafter *JS*], 54.1467–1473.
[106] *JS*, 54.1467
[107] *JS*, 54.1480.

其筆硯][108] Finally, the reclusive scholar Gě Hóng 葛洪 (283–343) offered the following compliment: "Lù Jī's writings are all as perfect as the jades of the Xuánpǔ, nothing can diminish their brilliance, like the [fabled] five [-colored] rivers, their source seems to be just one. Their many embellishments [actually] improve them, majestic, they float at ease, he was certainly without a match among the [writers] of his generation." [機文猶玄圃之積玉，無非夜光焉，五河之吐流，泉源如一焉。其弘麗妍贍，英銳漂逸，亦一代之絕乎！][109] Apparently, few of his contemporaries could match Lù Jī's exceptional pedigree and talent.

Thus, it is no surprise that Lù Jī is also one of the best-known medieval Chinese scholars. His life and work have been the focus of many scholarly articles in both Sinophone and Western studies of the period.[110] His most famous work is the "Rhapsody on Literature" (*Wénfù* 文賦), a prose-poem examining the patterns of proper writing. In addition, his poetry has been considered a model of the use of parallel couplet (*piánwén* 駢文) style in the early medieval period.[111]

Lù Jī is also the author of the "Discussion on the fall of the State" (*Biànwáng lùn* 辯亡論),[112] a parallel-prose poem written a few years after the Jìn conquest of Wú. In it, Lù Jī attempts to explain the historical events and principles of government that led to the defeat of his native state. The "Discussion on the fall of the State" consists of two-parts. The first part of the essay narrates the story of the founding of the state of Wú; it begins with a paean to Sūn Jiān's 孫堅 (*ca.*

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[108] *JS,* 54.1481.
[109] *JS*, 54.1480.
[110] For a comprehensive list of scholarly works on Lù Jī, see David Knechtges and Taiping Chang (eds.), *Early Medieval Chinese Literature. Part One*, pp. 616–628.
[111] *WX* 17.761–774. A full translation of the *Wénfù* is available in E.R. Hughes. *The Art of Letters. Lu Chi's "Wen Fu," 302 A.D*. (New York: Pantheon Books. 1951), pp. 94–108.
[112] The "Discourse on the fall of the State" has been translated in full into English and French. See Emile Gaspardone, "Le Discours de la perte du Wou par Lou Ki," in *Sinologica* vol.5 (1958), pp. 189-225. Also David R. Knechtges, "Han and Six Dynasties Parallel Prose" in *Renditions* n.33-34 (1990), pp. 78-94.

155–191) martial virtues followed by a commendation of Sūn Quán's role in consolidating the state.[113]

Based on Lù Jī's emphasis on the continued service of the Lù lineage to the state of Wú, the *Book of Jìn* suggests that Lù Jī's motivation for composing this essay was to transmit the accomplishments of his forebears to posterity.[114] Several events and numerous characters of the Three Kingdoms period are mentioned in the first part. It is very likely that Lù Jī was personally acquainted with a few of these personalities, some of whom were members of his own family who had occupied important positions at court.

After his description of rulers and heroes, Lù Jī ends the first part of the essay with a lapidary reflection on the ultimate causes for the fall of Wú. In his view, the main cause for the loss of the state was that its latter rulers were unable to employ men of talent.[115] This situation is contrasted in the first section of the second part of the essay, where Lù Jī points out that the earlier rulers were able to garner the support of worthy servitors. This was especially true for Sūn Quán who "lived in a modest palace and ate coarse food in order to make ample the rewards for meritorious ministers; and emptied his heart and became modest in order to receive the plans of counsellors." [卑宮菲食， 以豐功臣之賞； 披懷虛己， 以納謨士之筭。][116] In the conclusion of the essay, Lù Jī reiterates the lack of support for men of talent as the main cause of the fall of Wú, and goes a step further by noting that the lack of concord between the ruler and subjects that existed earlier in the dynasty had been lost.[117]

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113 For more on Sūn Jiān and the founding of Wú, see Rafe de Crespigny, *Generals of the South*, pp. 70–127.
114 *JS*, 54.1467.
115 *WX*, 53.2319.
116 *WX,* 53.2322. Also Knechtges, "Han and Six Dynasties Parallel Prose"
117 *WX* 53.2326-2327

In the “Discussion on the Five Ranks” (*Wǔděng lùn* 五等論), Lù Jī sought to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* systems in history.[118] The 'Five Ranks' in the title refers to the aristocratic titles of *gōng* 公, *hóu* 侯, *bó* 伯, *zǐ* 子, and *nán* 男, which were supposedly instituted by the sage kings of antiquity to invest their kin with territories or reward meritorious ministers and secure their help in governing the realm.[119]

Whereas the “Discussion on the fall of the State” probably has a cathartic effect on the author who laments the demise of Wú, the circumstances of the composition of the “Discussion on the Five Ranks” are much less clear. We do not know when it was written. One possibility is that it was composed during Lù Jī’s retreat in Huàtíng 華亭 (near present day Shanghai), and was intended as a reflection on the events of the recent past by historical parallel. Considering the fact that the discussion omits any reference to the Sīmǎ rulers or to the events that transpired after Lù Jī joined the Jìn court, it is very probable that it was composed before the year 290.

It is puzzling that despite the long list of studies devoted to Lù Jī’s literary production, few scholars have considered his political writings seriously. Still more intriguing is the fact that his “Discussion on the Five Ranks” has been largely neglected despite the fact that it is considered one of the most important essays on decentralized governance of the medieval period.[120] Since Lù Jī is not usually considered a political thinker in traditional scholarship, my choice of texts requires some further explanation.

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[118] These two essays are included in Xiāo Tǒng’s 蕭統 (501–531) *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wénxuǎn* 文選), 3.2310-2327. Also in *Lù Shìhéng wénjí jiàozhù* 陸士衡文集校注, annotated by Liú Yùnhǎo 劉運好, (Nanjing: Fenghuang, 2007) [hereafter *LSWJ*], pp. 978-1033 and pp. 1033-1037 respectively.
[119] An alternative title for this essay is “Discussion of the Five Ranks of Aristocratic Lords” (*Wǔděng zhūhóu lùn* 五等諸侯論).
[120] *LSHWJ*, p. 10–13.

Several commentators noted the similarities in the way that Cáo Jiǒng and Lù Jī presented their essays in support of the system of investiture. As a matter of fact, these two authors became a standard reference as the early medieval supporters of *fēngjiàn*. Bái Jūyì's 白居易 (772–846) "Considering the system of investiture and discussing the prefectural system" (*yì fēngjiàn lùn jùnxiàn* 議封建論郡縣), mentions Cáo Jiǒng and Lù Jī together as examples of scholars who considered that the fall of Qín was due to its removal of the territorial lords [秦皇廢列國棄子弟其弊也。萬人無定主,九族為匹夫。故魚爛土崩以至於覆亡也。而曹冏、士衡之論,繇是作焉].[121] The *Comprehensive Examination of Documents* (*Wénxiàn Tōngkǎo* 文獻通考) collected by the Yuán dynasty scholar Mǎ Duānlín 馬端臨 (1245–1322) also discusses their works together in a section examining the system of investiture in previous dynasties.[122] Finally, Wáng Wénjǐn 王文錦, one of the commentators to Dù Yòu' s 杜佑 (735–812) *Comprehensive Classic* (*Tōngdiǎn* 通典) succinctly mentions that discussions of the benefits of the *fēngjiàn* system are to be found in Cáo Jiǒng's and Lù Jī's essays [魏曹元首六代論、晉陸士衡五等論皆言封建之利].[123] This all goes to show that successive generations of Chinese scholars interested in the system of investiture took note of Lù Jī's "Discussion of the Five Ranks" and could refer to it to summarize the views of early medieval advocates of *fēngjiàn*.

The earliest extant version of the "Discussion on the Five Ranks" has been preserved in the "Discussions" section of the *Selections of Refined Literature*.[124] Xiāo Tǒng's admiration for Lù Jī is beyond doubt. Not only did Xiāo Tǒng include two of Lù Jī's "discussion" pieces as prime

[121] Lǐ Fǎng 李昉 (925-996) et al. (comp.), *Finest Blossoms in the Garden of Literature* (*Wényuàn yīnghuá* 文苑英華), annotated by Péng Shūxià (fl. late 12th-early 13th centuries) and Láo Gé 勞格 (1819–1864) (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1966) [hereafter *WYYH*], 495.2535-1.
[122] *WXTK* 265.2095-2 and 265.2181-2.
[123] *TD*, 31.848
[124] *WX*, 52.2273–2281.

examples of the genre, he also included several of Lù Jī's poems (*shī* 詩) and rhapsodies (*fù* 賦) in his collection, and was deeply influenced by the ideas about literature expressed in Lù Jī's "Rhapsody on Literature". As Wang Ping aptly notes, "taken together, works by Lù Jī occupy the top of Xiāo Tǒng's list of favorites."[125]

The "Discussion on the fall of the State" and the "Discussion on the Five Ranks" are both included in Fáng Xuánlíng's 房玄齡 (579–648) *Book of Jìn* in the biographies section. The *General Treatises* (*Tōngzhì* 通志) collected by the renowned Southern Sòng scholar Zhèng Qiáo 鄭樵 (1108-1166) contains one version of Lù Jī's "Discussion of the Five Ranks".[126] We find another essay by the same title in the Northern Sòng dynasty collection *Finest Blossoms in the Garden of Literature*. However, the "Discussion of the Five Ranks" included there is a different essay attributed to the Northern Qí 齊 (550–577) scholar Lǐ Gōngxù 李公緒 (*fl*. 6th century).[127]

Yán Kějūn transcribes several works by Lù Jī in his section "Complete Works of the Jìn dynasty", including the "Discussion on the Five Ranks".[128] This is one of the most complete versions of the text. More recently, a collection of Lù Jī's works annotated by Liú Yùnhǎo's 劉運好 was published in mainland China.[129] I have relied on both Yán Kějūn's and Liú Yùnhǎo's notes for my translation.

The system of investiture and the survival of the state

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[125] Wang Ping, *The Age of Courtly Writing: Wen Xuan Compiler Xiao Tong (501-531) And His Circle* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 76.
[126] *TZ* 124(a).37 (a).1921-3–1922-3.
[127] *WYYH*, 741.3867-1/38681. Lǐ Gōngxù's biography can be found in *TZ* 155.68.2509–3/2510-1
[128] Yán Kějūn, 99.22025-1–2026-1.
[129] Lù Jī 陸機 (261–303), *Lù Shìhéng wénjí jiàozhù* 陸士衡文集校注, commented by Liú Yùnhǎo 劉運好 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007) [herafter *LSHWJ*]

Shortly after his father's passing, Lù Jī and his brothers inherited the command over his armies.[130] Lù Jī received the title of General of the Banner Gate (*yámén jiāng* 牙門將) of a fraction of his late father's army when he was still a young man. It is difficult to assess how much military training and experience he accumulated during his youth, but it is very likely that by the time of the fall of Wú he was capable of coordinating defensive measures and of leading armies in battle.

According to the records, two of Lù Jī's older brothers, Lù Yàn 陸宴 (d.280) and Lù Jǐng 陸景 (249-280) were killed in battle during their defense against the incursions of the Jìn armies led by the veteran general Wáng Jùn 王濬 (206-286).[131] Lù Jī and his younger brother Lù Yún 陸雲 (262–303), on the other hand, were able to preserve their lives and their relative wealth during these turbulent times. They spent the next decade or so in the family estate in Huàtíng, where they devoted themselves to the composition of literary pieces. Whether the survival of these two Lù brothers was the result of a negotiated surrender with the invading Jìn army or because they were graciously spared in view of their literary talents is difficult to assess. What we do know is that despite after Lù Jī's long reclusion, he was finally convinced to abandon his estate and to serve the ruling family of the new dynasty.[132]

Domink Declercq noted that whether or not to serve Jìn implied the recognition of the dynasty's legitimacy, and thus presented medieval Chinese scholars with an ethical dilemma.[133] Lù Jī left his hometown and moved to Luòyáng 洛陽 to take posts as a servitor of the state of Jìn. Other prominent men of Wú were also summoned to serve the new imperial dynasty.

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[130] *SGZ*, 58.1360.

[131] Wáng Jùn was one of the main advocates of the invasion of Wú. See his "Memorial requesting the pacification of the Kingdom of Wú" in *JS*, 42.1208.

[132] *JS*, 54.1473. Lù Yún, for his part, might have entered the service of the new dynasty as early as 281 as a retainer to the Circuit Inspector Zhōu Jùn 周浚 (d. 289) as well as other posts in the capital. See Knechtges and Chang, p. 639.

[133] Dominik Declercq, *Writing Against the State: Political Rhetorics in Third and Fourth Century China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 125–127.

Serving in the northern capital was probably a very stressful situation for Lù Jī and other men of the Wú elite. Several of Lù Jī's extant poems express his nostalgia for the Southern lands and his anxieties about serving the Jìn, mixed with a sense of gratitude and duty to the new ruling house.[134] This also shows that while service to the state was an important aspect of elite life in middle period China, it was not necessarily accompanied by permanent allegiance to a state's ruling house.

Once at the capital, the Lù brothers were received with both praise and suspicion. Zhāng Huá, one of the most prominent Jìn statesmen at the time stated: "The benefit of attacking the state of Wú was that [we] obtained these two talents." [伐吳之役，利獲 二俊][135] On the other hand, the powerful minister Lú Zhì 盧志 (fl. fourth century CE) sought to provoke Lù Jī in the midst of a banquet by asking about his forebears in a markedly disrespectful tone. The insinuation was perhaps that they were without sufficient merit to be properly remembered. To this, Lù Jī retorted with an equally disrespectful question about Lú Zhì's own predecessors.[136]

In the next years, Lù Jī served the Sīmǎ rulers in different capacities, both in the central court in Luòyáng—including attendant to the heir designate Sīmǎ Yù 司馬遹 (d.300)— as well as in the local administration. Unfortunately, Lù Jī would also be implicated in some of the fiercest factional struggles at court. As an attendant to Sīmǎ Lún 司馬倫 (249–301), the Prince of Zhào 趙, Lù Jī was charged with forging the abdication edict that Sīmǎ Lún used to eliminate Empress Jiǎ 賈 (257–300) and depose emperor Huì 惠 (290–301). During the Rebellion of the Eight Princes (291–306), both Lù Jī and his brother Yún were called to serve under Sīmǎ Yǐng 司馬穎 (279–

[134] *WX* 26.1229–1232. For an analysis of Lù Jī's Luòyáng poetry, see Chiu-mi Lai. "River and ocean. The third century verse of Pan Yue and Lu Ji." (PhD diss. University of Washington. 1990), pp. 210–272.
[135] *JS*, 54.1472.
[136] *JS*, 54.1473.

306), the Prince of Chéngdū 成都. Both brothers received appointments as military commanders from their new patron.[137]

The Rebellion of the Eight Princes was seen as the result of the Sīmǎ founders' excessive reliance on kin, and hence became a standard reference to argue against the system of investiture in later medieval anti-*fēngjiàn* discourses. Lù Jī's "Discussion of the Five Ranks," however, contains no reference to this momentous decade, or to the events in which he was an active participant. I suspect this proves the earlier date of the composition of the text, rather than neglect or purposeful omission on the part of the author. In any case, a brief overview of the Sīmǎ approach to investiture would provide a better understanding of the issues at stake.

After removing the Cáo clan and securing the support of the court, one of Sīmǎ Yán's 司馬炎 (236–290) first measures as emperor Wǔ 武 (r. 266–290) of Jìn was to lavishly award territories to close relatives and allies. Convinced that his takeover of Wèi had been greatly facilitated by the fact that the Cáo rulers did not establish their family members as princes, the Jìn dynasty founder reinstituted the five ranks of nobility, and allowed the princes and lords to consolidate their power by recruiting their own armies and collecting taxes.[138]

The Jìn imperial princes became active participants in the succession struggles at the end of the third century, mobilizing their armies against the court and forming alliances to suppress other members of the Sīmǎ family. The result was a period of internecine warfare and factional conflict affecting both the central court and the peripheral princedoms. Some texts have remarked upon the parallels between the Rebellion of the Eight Princes during the early Jìn and the Rebellion

[137] The "Rebellion of the Eight Princes" or the "War of the Eight Princes" was a decade-long armed conflict between princes of the Sīmǎ clan and the central court. For more on the political and military events of this period, see David Graff. *Medieval Chinese Warfare 300-900* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 45–47.
[138] *JS*, 2.39. See also Dominik Declercq, *Writing Against the State*, pp. 125–127.

of the Seven States in the Western Hàn. Both were seen as the unintended result of allowing invested kin to concentrate enough power to challenge the central court.

It was during these turbulent times that Lù Jī was appointed to serve under Sīmǎ Yǐng. Probably sensing the impending danger, some of Lù Jī's friends urged him to excuse himself and return to his homeland of Wú, but he refused to abandon his post, arguing that it was his duty to make an effort to try to rectify the times.[139] Lù Jī served Sīmǎ Yǐng dutifully and proved his worth both as an administrator and as a military commander. Considering his role as a military aide to Sīmǎ Yǐng, it is almos a miracle that Lù Jī made it alive out of the succession of executions that followed the restoration of emperor Huì in 301. Many dear friends and allies, however, were executed in the ensuing purges.[140] Sadly, Lù Jī's death would come only a couple of years after joining Sīmǎ Yǐng's staff. Both Lù Jī and Lù Yún were executed in the year 303 as a result of slandering and treason.[141]

During the military campaign against Sīmǎ Yì 司馬乂 (277–304), Lù Jī was accused of disloyalty by the eunuch Mèng Jiǔ 孟玖 (third and fourth centuries), who was a close advisor to Sīmǎ Yǐng. Apparently, Mèng Jiǔ held a grudge against Lù Yún and was set on eliminating the Lù brothers. Moreover, Mèng Jiǔ's younger brother Mèng Chāo 孟超, who was under Lù Jī's command, had confronted him openly while on the encampment and refused to follow his orders. Mèng Jiǔ used the failure of Lù Jī's armies to accuse him of duplicity. Lù Jī was put to death together with his two sons. Mèng Jiǔ also accused Lù Yún of treason and managed to sentence him to death despite many voices pleading to spare his life. The execution of the Lù brothers is described as unjust in the *Book of Jìn*, which stresses the proper deportment of Lù Jī when facing

139 *JS*, 54.1473.
140 *JS*, 54.1473.
141 *JS*, 54.1480.

his slayer and the mourning rituals prepared for Lù Yún as evidence of their remarkable character.[142]

Lù Jī on the benefits and problems of investiture

The "Discussion on the Five Ranks" is divided into several parts, consisting of a short introduction, extensive expositions on the system of investiture followed by a discussion of its shortcomings, a brief description of the system instituted by the Qín and its modification in the Hàn, and a final conclusion. Traditionally, it has been assumed that Lù Jī is arguing in favor of the system of investiture. The *Book of Jìn* introduces this essay with the following remark: "[Lù] Jī also embraced [the idea that] "the Sage Kings divided the kingdoms, they considered appropriate to establish the system of investiture" thus in order to pass on a selection of their far-sighted ideals he composed the "Discussion on The Five Ranks" which reads [as follows]" [機又以 "聖王經國，義在封建" 因採其遠指，著五等論曰].[143]

Certainly, in the earlier part of the essay Lù Jī appears to have a strong inclination for the system of investiture.[144] After all, this was the system instituted by the sage kings of antiquity, and was the system that allegedly contributed to the long-lasting rule of the Zhōu. The opening sentence states, "In distributing the fiefdoms and managing the outlying areas, the former kings were always cautious; in instituting a system of rule and establishing its bases for posterity, they always thought of the benefits for future generations" [夫體國經野，先王所慎；創制垂基，

[142] In *JS*, 54.1480 and 54.1485 respectively.
[143] In *JS*, 54.1475.
[144] Charles Holcombe has understood Lù Jī's arguments in favor or the system of investiture as rooted in the notion of self-interest, "true feudal lords, like those of the ancient Zhōu dynasty, made better stewards of the land than bureaucratic imperial appointees, since they were stimulated to rule their lands with self-interest, while officials appointed by a central government were only concerned with pleasing their imperial masters and seeking bureaucratic advancement." Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han*, p. 53.

思隆後葉].[145] In this way, Lù Jī borrows from the *Rites of Zhōu* (*Zhōulǐ* 周禮) to kick-off his discussion of the system of investiture.[146]

In the next sentence, however, Lù Jī suggests that historical transformations bring about the need for different systems of rule.[147] His stated method is to examine the historical records in search for the causes for the rise and fall of dynasties [得失成敗，備在典謨，是以其詳，可得而言].[148] Lù Jī inserted several more comments on the need to understand that no system is without its flaws and that each period ought to be approached according to its own logics [固知百世非可懸御，善制不能無弊].[149] This indicates that his essay is not a one-sided defense of the system of the Zhōu.[150]

Another noteworthy aspect of the essay is that it proposes to leave aside the role of supernatural forces in its explanation of political processes. That is, Lù Jī is interested in finding discernible patterns that can explain the rise and fall of dynasties, but he notes that these ought to be found in the way human affairs are handled, and not in any transcendental plan [盛衰隆弊，理所固有；教之廢興，繫乎其人].[151]

The first and largest contrast is between the system of Five Ranks and the prefectural system. The former, Lù Jī claims, was instituted by the sage rulers of antiquity, the Yellow emperor and Táng [Yáo] 唐 [堯], the latter was established during the Qín and Hàn dynasties [五等之制，

[145] *LSHWJ*, p. 1034.
[146] The phrase [惟王建國, 辨方正位, 體國經野, 設官分職, 以為民極] appears before the description of each of the offices in the *Zhōulǐ*.
[147] *LSHWJ*, p. 1034.
[148] *LSHWJ*, p. 1034.
[149] *LSHWJ*, p. 1045.
[150] On this point, see Yè Jiànhuá 叶建华, "Lù Jī jíqí shǐxué 陆机及其史学," *Xuéshù yuèkān* (1989), pp. 49-50.
[151] *LSHWJ*, p. 1044.

始於黃唐；郡縣之治，創自秦漢].[152] The system of investiture presented the advantage of securing the help of kin and allies in the governance of the realm, especially for matters of defense. Since the territory was so vast, it was necessary to rely on both kin and allies to defend the borders and supervise the administration. “When they [the past rulers] established the lords, they charged them with the administration of the fiefs and the border regions, each lord was given the appropriate stipends whether kin or not. Thus, when the numerous states defended each other, their foundation became like sturdy boulders; although clansmen and non-kin were mixed together, they became like a protective wall to its achievements” [立其封疆之典，財其親疎之宜，使萬國相維，以成盤石之固，宗庶雜居，而定維城之業].[153]

As discussed in the previous chapter, the advocates of *fēngjiàn* often employed the imagery of solid lines of defense to highlight the military advantage of investing kin with territories. Also worth noting, Lù Jī assumes that each state would be ready to support each other and the royal house in times of need. More importantly, by sharing the governance of the realm with the hereditary lords, the ruler ensures not only their compliance, but their active participation in the affairs of the state. As Lù Jī succinctly puts it:

> Therefore, when the realm is divided [among the lords] this brings about deep joy, yet [in times of distress] the ruler will be able to share the same worries [as the people]; when the realm is properly ruled the benefits will be abundant, yet [in difficult times] the ruler will [also] share the misfortunes [of the people].[154] To make the benefits abundant, he spreads his kindness; to make sure the joys are far-reaching, he is concerned with the vast realm.

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[152] *LSHWJ*, p. 1034.

[153] *LSHWJ*, p. 1036–1037. This passage alludes to the poem Bǎn 板 in the *Book of Odes*. [宗子維城。無俾城壞、無獨斯畏].

[154] The language of this passage is reminiscent of that of Mèngzǐ’s audience with King Xuān 宣 of Qí: “The people will delight in the joy of him who delights in their joy, and will worry over the troubles of him who worries over their troubles.” D.C. Lau (trans.) *Mencius*. Book 1.b: p.63.

Thus, the feudal lords enjoy the stipends derived from their fief, and the countless princedoms receive the blessings for successive generations.
[是以分天下以厚樂，而己得與之同憂；饗天下以豐利，而我得與之共害。利博則恩篤，樂遠則憂深。故諸侯享食土之實，萬國受世及之祚矣][155]

Lù Jī's idea that the ruler shares his joys and worries with the hereditary lords resonates with those expressed by Cáo Jiǒng some decades earlier. However, unlike Cáo Jiǒng, Lù Jī did not seek to promote the primacy of the royal kin over other meritorious servants of the dynasty. It should also be noted that in the ideal functioning of the *fēngjiàn* system, both the sovereign and the territorial lords each tend to the governance of their respective territories, and the common people throughout the land are certain of who their lord is" [則南面之君各務其治；九服之民知有定主].[156]

In this model, sovereignty is not divided among the ruler and the lords, it belongs only to the king. Administration and defense responsibilities, however, are entrusted to the hereditary lords. There is no concern with usurpation or rebellion, the ruler and the lords become an artificial family, one in which "the ruler loves them as if they were his own children, those below trust him [the ruler] as the one to whom they are bound" [上之子愛於是乎生，下之體信於是乎結].[157] In this sense, it is also worth noting that the "ten thousand states" (*wànguó* 萬國) mentioned in the previous passages are not considered a sign of political fragmentation. Much to the contrary, they

[155] *LSHWJ*, p. 1037.
[156] *LSHWJ*, p. 1037.
[157] *LSHWJ*, p. 1037.

are the administrative units with which the ruler ensures benevolent governance even to the most distant corners of the realm.

Lù Jī then continues to describe the ideal working of the *fēngjiàn* system:

> The stability of the realm derives from the lords of the feudal states governing sharing the same ideas about government; the respect for the sovereign stems from the lords and ministers agreeing on their status. The many [lords] are like a net that spreads to the corners [of the realm], the Heavenly net [i.e., the royal family] brings them all together; when the four limbs [i.e., the feudal lords] decline or face difficulties, the heart and spine [i.e., the royal family] is capable of regulating [aiding] them.
> [然後國安由萬邦之思治，主尊賴群后之圖身。譬猶眾目營方，則天網自昶；四體辭難，而心膂獲乂][158]

The system of investiture is portrayed here as fostering greater military security and administrative efficiency, but it also suggested that it is a superior system in moral terms, since it allows for the moral transformation of the people "When the world is well-governed [alt. in peace], it is enough to practice honesty and to transform the customs; when the way [the power of the royal family] declines, it is enough that they protect [each other] against cruel adversaries [世治足以敦風，道衰足以御暴].[159]

Lù Jī seems to be most concerned with the continuity of the ruling lineage, regardless of whether it can effectively exercise power or not. In times of distress and weakening of the royal authority, he suggests, it is enough that the royal house is able to survive. For this, the support of the royal clan is essential. "When the ruler inherits a situation of decline," Lù Jī writes, "although

[158] *LSHWJ*, p. 1037.
[159] *LSHWJ*, p. 1037.

the royal kinsmen are demoted; yet they retain their nominal position and are able to pass it on to their offspring. Although, the imperial governance is less effective, it is not interrupted; the divine throne is debased but it is still preserved. How is this not a result of establishing [the territorial lords]? [及承微積弊，王室遂卑，猶保名位，祚垂後嗣，皇統幽而不輟，神器否而必存者，豈非置勢使之然歟?].[160]

Interestingly, after describing the main features of the *fēngjiàn* "ideal type," Lù Jī moves on to revise how the system had worked in practice and to analyze its historical drawbacks. Unlike Cāo Jiǒng, Lù Jī is interested in discussing the drawbacks of the system of investiture as well as its benefits. He writes:

> The problem with the system of inheritance lies in making [the territorial lords] too powerful to control; the drawback of the regulations ensuring generosity towards those below lies in making the branches too heavy for the trunk to support them. The transgressions of [the powerful lords] invading the weaker ones originated with the last rulers of the Three Dynasties.[161] The calamities [brought about by] the decay [of the system of investiture] culminated with the Seven Powers [of the Warring States].
> [世及之制弊於彊禦, 厚下之典漏於末折。侵弱之釁遘自三季, 陵夷之禍終于七雄][162]

From this passage we can see that Lù Jī is was certainly aware of the shortcomings of the system of investiture. The main problem he mentions is that it entails the possibility of allowing the lords to become too powerful for the court to control. This is a recurrent concern in the literature criticizing the *fēngjiàn* system, one based on the ever-present danger of secession or sedition, both

[160] *LSHWJ* p. 1045.
[161] Jié of Xià, Zhòu of Shāng, and Yōu of Zhōu
[162] *LSHWJ* p. 1044.

from kin and non-kin lords. Although Lù Jī explicitly mentions the distant past to illustrate his point, his views on the matter were probably also informed by the ongoing factional struggles between members of the Sīmǎ family. The tense climate in the capital and the experience of the "Rebellion of the Eight Princes" would have sufficed to warn an acute observer such as Lù Jī that granting territory to kin was not without its problems. Nonetheless, Lù Jī remained convinced that the system of investiture had guaranteed the long life of the earliest dynasties, and that is why the sagely figures of the past did not modify it.[163]

Also, Lù Jī is widely aware of arguments in favor of the prefectural system. One of the most common assumptions was that while the hereditary lords were relatively free of control, the officials' activities were closely scrutinized by the central court. Against this idea, Lù Jī contends that in the past there had been a mechanism to assess the performance of the territorial lords which kept them in check. This system was abandoned only when the central court had lost its power, or as Lù Jī narrates,

> With numinous virtue demotions and promotions were assessed daily, and the officials and lords both had the duty of coming to court to present their reports [every five years], therefore, even licentious and inadequate lords still were not able to transgress. How can anyone say that they were not under control? It was because the previous dynasties employed this system that they were able to rise! On the other hand, when the dynasty was in decline, the common people began to transgress the laws, the officials bought their government positions, using money as a substitute for talent. Thus, corrupt and violent people hoped to become lords. How can anyone say that this was not a chaotic situation? This is why later rulers eliminated it!

[163] *LSHWJ* p. 1045.

[夫德之休明，黜陟日用, 長率連屬，咸述其職，述其所職, 而淫昏之君無所容過，何則其不治哉! 故先代有以之興矣。苟或衰陵，百度自悖，鬻官之吏，以貨準才，則貪殘之萌皆如群后也, 安在其不亂哉! 故後王有以之廢矣][164]

Lù Jī's analyzes the experience of the Qín dynasty in order to discuss the dire consequences of denying relatives and close collaborators a territorial base. First, although he notes that the centralizing policies of the Qín were conceived to prevent the fragmentation of political power that characterized the Warring States period, he argues that the ruler's attempt to concentrate power was the main reason for the dynasty's demise.

> When ruling the state [the Qín dynasty] made the mistake of weakening those below.[165] The blessings [wealth] of the state were only to benefit the ruler. The sovereign's worries were not shared [by the feudal lords.] Although this was to bring forth its fall and to stir up the ensuing chaos [of the end of the dynasty], this was not the only reason; the struggles that brought about its downfall were in fact a result of [the ruler's] isolation.
> [制國昧於弱下，國慶獨饗其利，主憂莫與共害。雖速亡趨亂，不必一道，顛沛之釁，實由孤立][166]

From this passage, we can see that Lù Jī censures the system instituted by the Qín for fostering the selfish benefit of the ruler. Benefit and harm are contrasted here as two aspects of

[164] *LSHWJ* p.1067.
[165] This is possibly a reference to the Zuǒzhuàn, "Duke Wén. Seventh Year", "Duke Zhāo of Sòng wished to abolish the [fiefs] of the sons of former dukes, but Lè Yù 樂豫 said to him, "This cannot be done. The various clans of the Duke's house are its branches and leaves. If you remove them, the root and trunk will have no shelter or shade." [宋昭公將去群公子，樂豫曰：不可，公族，公室之枝葉也，若去之，則本根無所庇蔭矣。葛藟猶能庇其本根，故君子以為比，況國君乎？此所謂庇焉而縱尋斧也。] Following James Legge's translation in *The Chinese Classics*. Vol. V (Taipei: SMC Publishing. 1991), p. 248. See also the commentary in *WX*, 54.2335.
[166] *LSHWJ*, p. 1051.

governance that the ruler should share with those below. The Qín administrative system was designed to concentrate the authority in a single individual instead of sharing it with the hereditary lords.

By appointing magistrates loyal to the central court to administer the localities, Lù Jī notes, the *jùnxiàn* system allowed for greater direct control, as well as closer surveillance of the activities of the territorial lords. On the other hand, the excessive reliance on ministers and other officials, led to the weakening of the bonds between the members of the imperial clan, which in turn led to the isolation (*gūlì* 孤立) of the sovereign. Ultimately, it was the ruler's isolation that caused the sudden fall of the dynasty. Historical experiences indicate that emperors could be isolated, held hostage at the Imperial Palace under the custody of treacherous ministers, and cut off from trustworthy servitors and loyal kinsmen. Therefore, when rebellions arise or court intrigues take place, the ruler has no one to assist him. Isolation is the unintended result of the ruler's attempt to concentrate the administration of the vast realm.

Lù Jī's criticism of the Qín ruler's desire to accumulate power can be inscribed in the larger discourse of "sharing the realm" (*gòng Tiānxià* 共天下) as a way of promoting proper governance by fostering public spirit (*gōng* 公). However, whereas the selfishness of the ruler is considered detrimental to proper governance, the self-interest of the hereditary lords is what motivates them to act in the benefit of the people. In a passage, Lù Jī challenges the assumption that proper governance is based on fostering public-mindedness over selfish interest. In the words of Fù Xuán 傅玄 (217–278), an earlier contemporary of Lù Jī's, "Proper governance resides in doing away with selfish interests. […] Therefore, it is necessary to eliminate selfish interests in order to establish the way of public-mindedness. If there is public-mindedness the realm can be rectified."

[政在去私 […] 夫去私者所以立公道也, 唯公然後可正天下].[167] Against Fù Xuán's stance, Lù Jī argues that it was on account of their personal interest (*wèijǐ* 為己) that the territorial lords would be invested in the proper governance of the realm. Lù Jī contrasts the actions of the hereditary lords with those of the commissioned officials in the following terms:

> Stated briefly, the lords of the five ranks long for proper governance since its serves their own interests, the magistrates of the commanderies and counties seek their own profit from seizing possessions. How can I prove this? To gain admiration and get promoted, this is the constant aspiration of such officials; to cultivate themselves and to bring peace to the people, this what an accomplished person hopes for. This is so that they take interest in advancing their careers as a pressing matter, while the reputation of bringing peace to the people is put off for later. Therefore, those who plunder the goods of the common people in order to benefit themselves are in positions of power and have nothing to fear; those who are less concerned with true matters [i.e., self-cultivation and government] and focus on making a reputation are the magistrates who do this day and night.
> [且要而言之，五等之君為己思治；郡縣之長為利圖物。何以徵之？蓋企及進取，仕子之常志；修己安民，良士之所希。及夫進取之情銳，而安民之譽遲。是故侵百姓以利己者，在位所不憚；損實事以養名者，官長所夙夜也][168]

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[167] Yán Kějūn, 48.1735-1. See also Jordan Paper, *The Fu-tzu: a Post-Han Confucian Text*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987): 66. Paper translates *gōng* 公 as "justice", however, I believe "public-mindedness" works better in this context. First of all, Fù Xuán's discussion contrasts *gōng* 公 with *sī* 私, this latter having a negative connotation. *Gōng* 公 in this sense can be translated as something which is shared by many or by all, or can refer to something pertaining to the court or the State. See *HYDCD*, sv 公: 2) 公共; 共同。《礼记·礼运》："大道之行也，天下爲公。"{郑玄}注:"公，猶共也。"James Legge translates *gōng* 公 in this passage from the *Lǐjì* 禮記 as "public and common spirit". Also, *HYDCD*, sv 公: 3) 朝廷; 国家; 公家。《诗·召南·羔羊》："退食自公，委蛇委蛇。"{孔颖达}疏:"退朝而食，從公門入私門。"《论语·宪问》："{公叔文子}之臣{大夫僎}與{文子}同升諸公。"{杨伯峻}注:"公，指國家朝廷。" Kǒng Yǐngdá's 孔穎達 note also makes the distinction between public and private matters.

[168] *LSHWJ*, p. 1069-1070.

Here, Lù Jī asserts that a system of governance that binds the personal interest of the administrators to the well-being of the population is superior to one where there are no attachments between the administrator and the population under his jurisdiction because in the former, the administrator will share the bounties of proper governance over the long-term, while in the latter, the administrator will not be invested in the long-term prosperity and will only seek to establish a reputation that would help him achieve a quick promotion.[169]

As Lù Jī notes, one problem of the system of rotation of officials is that it encourages the resident administrator to secure praise from the local elites without allowing him enough time to make any contribution to the well-being of the people. Lù Jī's arguments resonate with those of the Eastern Hàn statecraft thinker Cuī Shí 崔寔 (110–173), who strongly criticized the mechanism of rotating officials.[170] They also constitute a basis for the views later articulated by Míng-Qīng political thinkers such as Huáng Zōngxī 黃宗羲 (1610–1695) and Gù Yánwǔ 顧炎武 (1613–1682), who would stress the benefits of having government administrators remain in one locality for an extended period of time (or even for several generations).[171]

According to Lù Jī, the first emperor of Qín had a limited understanding of the relationship between the imperial center and the territorial lords; in promoting centralized administration, he "took into consideration the minor faults of the [system of] five ranks but forgot about the great virtue of the numerous states [i.e., the system of investiture]; he understood the concern of the princedoms acquiring too much power, but he ignored the sufferings that caused the fall of the state" [思五等之小怨，忘萬國之大德，知陵夷之可患，闇土崩之為痛也].[172] Moreover, once

[169] See Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han*, p. 53.
[170] See Cuī Shí's 崔寔 "Discussion on Government" (*Zhènglùn* 政論) in Yán Kějūn, 46.725-1.
[171] For a discussion of Gù Yánwǔ's position, see Miranda Brown. "Returning the Gaze," pp. 50–51.
[172] *LSHWJ*, p. 1051.

the system of five ranks was eliminated, the Qín rulers had no way of countering the uprisings that brought about the end of its rule. "If the Qín had followed the system of the Zhōu dynasty," Lù Jī argues, "although it lacked *dào* [the Way/virtue], it would still have had [the support of the territorial lords] to share its burden" [借使秦人因循周制， 雖則無道，有與共弊].[173]

In the next section of his discussion, Lù Jī recounts the Hàn approaches to the system of investiture. Writing almost a century after the fall of the Hàn and almost half a millennium after its founding, Lù Jī could look into the Hàn experience for the various problems arising from the investiture of kin and allies. The specific episodes Lù Jī revisits must have been well-known to his intended audience, therefore, he does not offer more than passing references.

He begins by noting that in an attempt to correct the mistakes of the Qín, Hàn Gāozǔ was overly generous in distributing land and granting titles, a point already discussed in Cáo Jiǒng's "Discussion of the Six Dynasties."[174] For one, the Hàn founder had accepted the *de facto* autonomy of several of the kings that had aided him in gaining the realm. On the other hand, he also rewarded meritorious ministers with titles and territories, and established his offspring as princes. Less than a decade after the dynasty's establishment the conflict between the invested kings and the central court became evident. Therefore, Hàn Gāozǔ sought to replace the previously invested lords with his own kin, so that only imperial princes and other members of the Liú clan would be put in charge of the kingdoms (*guó* 國).

Like Cáo Jiǒng before him, Lù Jī revisits the recommendations of the Hàn ministers Jiǎ Yì and Cháo Cuò 晁錯 to limit the territories of the imperial princes and territorial lords. Several

[173] *LSHWJ*, p. 1051.
[174] Here Lù Jī is paraphrasing Bān Gù's discussion in the "Tables of Invested Lords" (*zhūhóuwáng biǎo* 諸侯王表) of the *Book of Hàn*, [而藩國大者夸州兼郡，連城數十，宮室百官同制京師，可謂撟枉過其正矣]. See *HS,* 14.349.

imperial princes, it bears mention, joined forces against the central court's policy to protect their autonomy and maintain their lands. Since, as Lù Jī aptly notes, "the hereditary lords derived their wealth from their fiefs and they drew their strength from the *shì* and commoners within [諸侯阻其國家之富，憑其士民之力],[175] they were able to gather their own troops to resist the imperial armies, but were ultimately defeated.

The centralization process of the Western Hàn was completed during the reign of emperor Wǔ, when the imperial princes were created nominal lords, but were not granted territories. That is, "they were lords in name but not in practice" [有名無實].[176] During the reign of emperor Chéng 成 (r. 33–7 BCE), the court invested several members of the Wáng Mǎng's clan with territories, and reduced the effective power of the Liú princes. Lù Jī argues that if the imperial princes had been allowed to retain military and administrative power, they would have forestalled the usurpation by Wáng Mǎng that interrupted Hàn rule.

After the restoration of the Liú house under emperor Guāngwǔ 光武 (r. 25–57 BC), the Hàn policy remained unchanged. In this way, although the imperial lineage was restored, the new regime "followed the tracks of the ruined cart" [遵覆車之遺轍].[177] Ultimately, without the support of the invested kin, the Hàn was unable to keep men like the Grand Marshall Liáng Jì 梁冀 (d. 159) or the warlord Dǒng Zhuó 董卓 (d. 192) in check, and the realm was once more in chaos.

In Lù Jī's analysis, the Western Hàn had replicated the same mistakes that had led to the downfall of Qín. Although Lù Jī admitted that imperial princes of the early Hàn had posed a threat to the court, he remained convinced that the system of investiture was not at the root of this

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[175] *LSHWJ*, p. 1055.
[176] *LSHWJ*, p. 1055.
[177] *LSHWJ*, p. 1055.

problem. “These were the disasters of going beyond what is proper, not the result of setting up territorial lords” [是蓋過正之災，而非建侯之累也], he argued.[178]

In his critique of the prefectural system, Lù Jī repeatedly expresses his concern for the welfare of the general population. For example, in analyzing the consequences of the fall of Qín, he introduces a larger ethical principle for administrative design. He writes: “when laying the groundwork [for the establishment of the state], they make sure that many receive their benefits; when considering its end, they make sure that few will suffer their misfortunes.” [經始權其多福，慮終取其少禍].[179]

In a later passage, he contrasts the situation during the succession conflicts of the Zhōu with those at the time of the usurpation by Wáng Mǎng and at the end of the Hàn. Lù Jī stresses the role of the system of investiture in limiting the scale of conflict and keeping the struggles focused on the central Zhōu court, without affecting the lives of the common people. The conflicts of the Hàn, on the other hand, “brought suffering to the masses, and sorrow to both the ignorant and the knowledgeable alike” [億兆悼心，愚智同痛].[180] The superiority of the system of investiture can be seen from the lower disruption in times of trouble.[181] Interestingly, the same principle will reappear in the writings of the mid-Táng dynasty thinkers Dù Yòu and Liǔ Zōngyuán, who would use it however to argue for the superiority of the prefectural system.[182]

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[178] *LSHWJ*, p. 1055.
[179] *LSHWJ*, p. 1045. There are several layers of textual references condensed in this passage. The earliest is the “Língtái 靈臺” poem 242, in the “Dàyǎ 大雅”section of the *Book of Odes*, which describes the pleasures enjoyed by King Wén after completing the Tower. This poem is used by Mencius to instruct King Huì of Liáng 梁惠王 (r. 370–319 BCE) about the need to follow the example of the ancient rulers who found their happiness in sharing their pleasures with the people. See *Mencius* 1.A2 [古之人與民偕樂，故能樂也]
[180] *LSHWJ*, p. 1063.
[181] *LSHWJ*, p. 1060.
[182] For more on DùYòu and Liǔ Zōngyuán’s view on this issue, see chapter 4.

Later critics, however, would attack Lù Jī for not realizing that it is the principle of investiture that brings forth those sufferings. One such critics was the late Táng scholar Lǐ Xī 李溪[183] (d. 895), the author of an essay by the title "Opposing the Discussion on the Five Ranks and the Discussion of the Six Ages" (*Fǎn wǔděng liùdài lùn* 反五等六代論), who refutes what both Cáo Jiǒng and Lù Jī considered the main advantage of the system of investiture, the clan solidarity in times of need. After comparing the two systems, Lǐ Xī concludes: "Thus, we can tell that those whom Cáo [Jiǒng] and Lù [Jī] call 'the defensive barrier' [of the realm] are in fact the sprout of sedition, those they call 'the ones who deliberate on government' are in fact the sprouts of disorder." [由是知曹、陸之論所謂藩衛者乃篡逆之萌也, 思治者乃禍亂之萌也].[184] Lǐ Xī rebuttal is founded on the historical evidence that the bonds of solidarity tend to wane with successive generations, the same idea expressed by Lǐ Sī at the founding of empire.

Concluding remarks

Perhaps due to his own experience, Lù Jī was willing to accept the change of dynasties as a common historical occurrence, yet he hoped that these dynastic changes do not disrupt the lives of the common people. Furthermore, he suggests that members of the ruling family of the vanished state should be allowed to keep a lower position and maintain the sacrifices to their ancestors, as had been the case with the last rulers of Hàn and Wèi.

From the previous discussion, it is clear that Lù Jī preference for the system of investiture was not without reservations. Based on the historical experiences of the previous dynasties, Lù Jī comments on the drawbacks of each system and considers which one would be better to foster

[183] Also written 李谿.
[184] *WYYH*, 741.3871-1.

proper governance in his own time. His position can be better summarized with the closing phrase of the opening passage, “the realm cannot be administered always in the same way, the successive generations will have different methods (of governance)” [經略不同，長世異術].[185] Thus, the ruler must be ready to adapt the institutions to the needs of the time.

On the other hand, certain principles of governance remain constant. For one, it is important to guarantee the well-being of the people in times of peace, and ensure that they suffer as little as possible in times of conflict. In addition, the “Discussion of the Five Ranks” he reiterates the long-held idea that the administration of the realm is largely dependent on securing the participation of men of talent.

[185] *LSHWJ* p.1034; *WX* 54.2331.

CHAPTER 3

Reclaiming the Center: Imperial Authority and Centralization in Lǐ Bǎiyào's Fēngjiàn lùn

Lǐ Bǎiyào 李百藥 (565–648), courtesy name Zhòngguī 重規, was a prominent court minister and a member of one of a few northern aristocratic families that dominated court politics during early Táng. He had an active official career during the Suí dynasty, working on the definitive ritual code and government regulations, and his talent was soon recognized by the new dynasty. As a survivor of the dynastic transition, Lǐ Bǎiyào had a long experience in court politics. Thus, in the first year of the Zhēnguān 貞觀 period (626), he was summoned to serve in Tàizōng's court as palace secretary (*zhōngshū shèrén* 中書舍人) and honoured with the title of Lord of Ānpíng commandery (安平縣男).[186] He was also a renowned scholar by the time he entered the Táng court.[187]

Since the early Táng consultation and decision-making processes were restricted almost exclusively to the apex of the court hierarchy it is no wonder that most of the surviving interventions on the *fēngjiàn* issue dating from Tàizōng's come to us in the form of treatises, memorials or commentaries composed by members of the emperor's inner circle. Men such as the aristocratic scholar Xiāo Yǔ 蕭瑀 (574–647), the exemplary minister Wèi Zhēng 魏徵 (581–643)

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[186] Liú Xù 劉昫 (887–946) et al., *Old Book of Táng* (*Jiù Tángshū* 舊唐書), edited by Yáng Jiāluò 楊家駱 (Taipei: Dǐngwén shūjú, 1981) [hereafter *JTS*], 72.2571–2577. Also David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China*, p. 121.

[187] See *JTS*, 72.2572.

and Zhǎngsūn Wújì 長孫無忌 (594–659), voiced their opinions regarding most matters and seem to have been involved in every aspect of the imperial governance.

Lǐ Bǎiyào was one important figure in this very exclusive group. As one of the most relevant statesmen of the early Táng establishment, he participated in most of the debates of the age. Thus, it is no surprise that, following emperor Tàizōng's request that court scholars contribute to the debate on whether the system of investiture should be reinstated, Lǐ Bǎiyào presented his views in an essay entitled "On the System of Investiture" (*Fēngjiàn lùn* 封建論),[188] one of the most articulate treatises in support of the system of centralized administration. Though less famous than the essay with the same title by Liǔ Zōngyuán, Lǐ Bǎiyào's work proved to be very influential, becoming a standard reference for latter advocates of centralized administration in imperial China.

Lǐ Bǎiyào's "On the System of Investiture" has been transmitted in several collections. The earliest version can be found under the heading "Discussing the System of Investiture" (*lùn fēngjiàn* 論封建) in Wú Jìng's 吳競 (670–749) compendium *Essentials of Government of the Zhēnguān Era* (*Zhēnguān zhèngyào* 貞觀政要), a collection of court discussions during the early Táng presented to emperor Xuánzōng 玄宗 (r. 712–756) in the year 729. This version of the essay is preceded by a brief account of the situation at court at the time the essay was presented to the throne, and is followed by a memorial by Mǎ Zhōu 馬周 (601–648), another opponent of the system of investiture.

The *Old Book of Táng*, the dynastic history compiled during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period (907–960), also contains the full extant version of the text plus a biography of its author.[189] A shorter version of the essay is contained in the *Institutional History of the Táng*

[188] ZGZY, pp. 175–179; *QTW*, 143.1444-1–1446-1; *JTS* 72.2572–2576.
[189] See *JTS*, 72.2572–2576.

dynasty (*Táng Huìyào* 唐會要) in a section under the title "Miscellanea on *fēngjiàn*" (*fēngjiàn zálù* 封建雜錄), which also includes summaries of other early Táng statesmen's —such as Xiāo Yǔ, Yán Shīgǔ 顏師古 (581–645), Wèi Zhēng and Mǎ Zhōu— views on the topic.[190]

The *Finest Blossoms in the Garden of Literature* (*Wényuàn yīnghuá* 文苑英華) has a section devoted to "Discussions" (*lùn* 論) which contains a variegated collection of essays, arranged by subject matter into twenty-two subsections.[191] Interestingly, the Táng discussions on *fēngjiàn* come right after two subsections on Heaven (*Tiān* 天) and the Way (*Dào* 道), and a second subsection on Yīn-Yáng 陰陽, perhaps marking the importance of the topic for the compilers of the *Wényuàn yīnghuá*.[192] Lǐ Bǎiyào's is the first of seven essays in this subsection.

The essay is also reproduced in the *Complete Works of the Táng dynasty* (*Quán Táng wén* 全唐文), which offers the longest extant collection of Lǐ Bǎiyào's textual production.[193] Finally, Mǎ Duānlín's basically transcribed the *Táng Huìyào* section into the "Táng zhū wáng" 唐諸王 section of his *Comprehensive Examination of Documents*.[194]

In the present chapter, I focus on the writings of Lǐ Bǎiyào as the point of departure for my examination of early Táng perspectives on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn*. I will highlight two particular

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[190] Wáng Pǔ 王溥 (922–982), *Institutional History of the Táng dynasty* (*Táng Huìyào* 唐會要) (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1990) [hereafter *THY*], 46.824–826. The section also contains the records of investiture of the sons and grandsons of the Táng sovereigns.

[191] Lǐ Fǎng 李昉 (925-996) et al. (comp.), *Finest Blossoms in the Garden of Literature* (*Wényuàn yīnghuá* 文苑英華) annotated by Péng Shūxià (fl. late 12th-13th centuries) and Láo Gé 勞格 (1819–1864) (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1966) [hereafter *WYYH*], 741.3865-1–3867-1.

[192] As David McMullen notes: "In Tang times, the schemes by which knowledge was classified were significant, for the order in which subjects were ranked provided an indication of their importance." See David McMullen, "Views of the State in Du You and Liu Zongyuan," in S.R. Schram (ed.), *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), p. 67.

[193] Dǒng Gào 董誥 (1740–1818) et al. (comp.), *Complete Works of the Táng dynasty* (*Quán Táng wén* 全唐文) (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1966) [hereafter *QTW*], 143.1444-1–1446-1.

[194] Mǎ Duānlín 馬端臨 (1245–1322), *Comprehensive Examination of Documents* (*Wénxiàn Tōngkǎo* 文獻通考) (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1987) [hereafter *WXTK*] 275.2181-1–2181-3.

aspects of his writing and historical contexts, namely, his stance against the reinstatement of the system of investiture and his emphasis on the public nature of the *jùnxiàn* system, and the interplay between the literary performances of the sovereign and the ministers, with special attention to the way that their identities are produced in the text. Considering the enduring importance of the topic and the resulting number of positions articulated on the issue in the early Táng, a word must be said about the representativeness of this author in the larger context of early Táng discussions of virtuous governance, and his relation to other important figures in the debate.

The Táng imperial family and the practices of *fēngjiàn*

The Táng dynastic founders, Lǐ Yuān 李淵 (566–635) and his son Lǐ Shìmín 李世民 (598–649), were members of one of the northern aristocratic families that had dominated politics during the Suí and previous regimes. The Táng rulers traced their ancestry to the founder of the Western Liang 西涼 (400–421), one of several short-lived states that occupied the north of China from the early fifth century. As the Lǐs initiated their path to become the sole rulers of the realm, other great families swiftly moved to secure positions in the new imperial regime.

In the year 617, Lǐ Shìmín decided to take up arms against the Suí emperor. Lǐ Shìmín crafted an elaborate plan to secure his father's compliance. With the assistance of Péi Jì 裴寂, one of Lǐ Yuān's closest advisers, they presented Lǐ Yuān with several women from emperor Yáng's 煬 harem. After disclosing the provenance of the women, Lǐ Yuān had no option but to join the rebellious plot.[195] After the success of the Tàiyuán 太原 uprising, which brought the downfall of the Suí, Lǐ Yuān ascended the throne as the first emperor of the Táng dynasty.

[195] Jack W. Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, p.18

Despite the swift success of the uprising, the new ruler's position was far from secure. The pacification of the realm took almost a decade, during which the Táng court was as preoccupied with internal power struggles as it was with external military threats. In order to complete the task of unification, it was necessary to eliminate or co-opt independent military forces in the periphery; in order to secure political stability, it was necessary to secure the support of potentially contentious clans; in order to guarantee the continuity of the ruling lineage, reliable succession procedures had to be established. In this context, it is likely that Lǐ Yuān's overly generous investiture of kin and close associates was motivated by the need to reward those who had joined him in overthrowing the Suí.

In total Lǐ Yuān reigned for less than a decade, from 618 to 626, when he yielded the throne to Lǐ Shìmín and assumed the role of retired emperor (*tàishànghuáng* 太上皇).[196] After his death in 637, he was honored with the title Gāozǔ 高祖. During this time, his sons were involved in an internal struggle to define who would succeed the reigning emperor. Ultimately, it was Lǐ Shìmín who, in the year 626, eliminated his two brothers in an ambush at Xuánwǔ 玄武 gate, inside the imperial capital, and used his position as Crown Prince to force his father's retirement. Two months later, Lǐ Shìmín became the second emperor of the Táng dynasty. He is better known by his posthumous title of Tàizōng (r. 626–649).

Despite the controversial events leading to his accession, Tàizōng would become a paragon ruler for later ages, capturing the attention of scholars across time. Much of this fascination has to do with the fact that he appears widely concerned with crafting his own persona in historical narrative as someone who exerts himself in emulation of the sage rulers of the past and, at the same

[196] For more on the institution of retired emperorship, see Andrew Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

time, hopes to become an exemplary ruler for future generations. In this sense, Tàizōng sought to embody the ideal sovereign as one that operates on three temporal registers (past, present and future) simultaneously.

Tàizōng's concern with history can also be discerned from the imperial sponsorship of several simultaneous projects to complete and revise the histories of the previous dynasties. In the third year of the Zhēnguān 貞觀 era (629), Tàizōng tasked some of the most renowned scholars of the age to undertake such massive projects, and assigned Wèi Zhēng and Fáng Xuánlíng 房玄齡 (579–648) with their overall supervision.[197]

In the first year of the Zhēnguān period, Tàizōng conferred land and titles to several high ministers, including Fáng Xuánlíng, Dù Rúhuì 杜如晦 (585–630), and Zhǎngsūn Wújì, Tàizōng's brother in-law. Lǐ Shéntōng 李神通 (fl. seventh century), a member of the imperial clan, addressed the throne to express his disagreement, expressing that these men did not deserve such honors, since they had not been part of the rebellion that established the dynasty, and they were without any martial merit. Tàizōng's reply is worth quoting in full, since it illustrates very clearly his perspective on the issue of investiture:

> The great affairs of the State rest in the [distribution of] rewards and punishments. The rewards should match the merit; those who lack any merit will of themselves retire [without expecting rewards.] The punishments should be in accordance with the crime; those who transgress should be made to fear. Thus, knowing how to distribute rewards and apply punishments cannot be taken lightly. In the present case, merit has been assessed before granting the rewards; Xuánlíng and the others' merit lies in their ability to devise the campaign strategies, it was their strategies that allowed us to consolidate our rule over the realm. Thus, when the Hàn dynasty obtained the services of Xiāo Hé 蕭何, even though he

[197] *JTS*, 73.2598. On the compilation of dynastic histories during the Zhēnguān era, see David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 165–170.

was without martial exploits he was able to indicate the tracks to follow and to command the chariots forward into battle; therefore his accomplishments reach those of the first rank. You, my uncle, are an imperial kinsman, and I am truly not miserly in granting rewards; however, I cannot bestow equal rewards upon those members of the imperial clan as I do upon ministers of meritorious service.

[國家大事，惟賞與罰。賞當其勞，無功者自退。罰當其罪，為惡者咸懼。則知賞罰不可輕行也。今計勛行賞，玄齡等有籌謀帷幄，畫定社稷之功，所以漢之蕭何，雖無汗馬，指蹤推轂，故得功居第一。叔父於國至親，誠無愛惜，但以不可緣私濫與勛臣同賞矣！][198]

Interestingly, in Tàizōng's recorded response there is a clear preference for those who render service to the dynasty over those related by blood. Moreover, Tàizōng downplays his uncle's martial exploits, and raises the stature of his ministers as those who, like Xiāo Hé, provided the strategies that allowed the consolidation of the dynasty. But perhaps the most salient aspect is the response this speech elicited amongst Tàizōng's ministers, who collectively approved the emperor's willingness to put family interests aside and do what is better for the state saying: "Our sovereign is most impartial, in granting rewards he does not benefit his kin; how can we voice any unreasonable complaints?" [陛下以至公，賞不私其親，吾屬何可妄訴?].[199]

Later in his reign, however, Tàizōng fostered a debate among court officials regarding the extent to which the sovereign should establish his kin as hereditary lords and rely on them to assist him in ruling the realm. According to the records, in the year 637, Tàizōng considered investing

[198] Wú Jìng 吳競 (670–749), *Zhēnguān zhèngyào jí jiào* 貞觀政要集校, annotated by Xiè Bǎochéng 謝保成 (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 2003) [hereafter *ZGZY*], pp. 174–175. I have also consulted the *Zhēnguān zhèngyào* 貞觀政要 (Taipei: Límíng wénhuà, 1990) available through Scripta Sinica online database.
[199] *ZGZY*, p. 173.

members of the imperial clan with hereditary territories.[200] This initiative can be interpreted in several different ways.

For one, it could be read as proof of Tàizōng's intention to follow the model of the virtuous rulers of the past. Since the beginning of his reign, he had made significant efforts to demonstrate that his policies were consistent with the precedents of the virtuous rulers of antiquity. According to the records, he even proposed that it was impossible to embody the ideal of the Duke of Zhōu without reinstating the duke's institutions, for example, the well-field system, the investiture of kinsmen, and mutilating punishments.[201] Soon after the retired emperor Gāozǔ's death, Tàizōng reversed the policy of denying territorial bases to members of the imperial family. In this way, Tàizōng's call would evidence desire to model his policies according to the Zhōu precedents of sagely rule.

It is also possible that Tàizōng wished simply to provide another chance to appear as willing to receive advice from his top ministers, that is, he brought up the issue as a cue to take the center of the stage and act out the part of the wise yet humble monarch. As mentioned earlier, Tàizōng has been described as keenly aware of his role in history, and many recorded instances portray him almost histrionically fulfilling the role of the virtuous emperor.[202] Therefore, consulting with his ministers whether the realm should be shared with kin can be read not as a step

[200] *ZGZY*, pp. 174–175.
[201] *QTW*, 161.1646b–47b, also cited in Jack Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, p. 60–61 (n. 33). It is interesting to note the irony that even as Tàizōng proposes the return to the models of rulership of the Zhōu, he uses, or is recorded as using, the imperial first-person pronoun *zhèn* 朕, as the exclusive marker of the imperial voice since the Qín dynasty, as recorded in *SJ*, 6.236.
[202] See Howard J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the court of T'ang T'ai-tsung* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 81–83. Dennis Twitchett, "How to Be an Emperor: T'ang T'ai-tsung's Vision of his Role," *Asia Major* (Third Series), Vol. 9, part 1–2 (1996), p. 4. Jack Chen aptly notes that "the constructed image was never as simple as a performed role or a donned mask, but something that could not be divorced from the very notions of selfhood and subjectivity." See Jack Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, p. 47.

in the top-tier decision-making process, but as a consciously displayed performance of virtue to enhance his own standing in the historical records.

Finally, raising the issue of investiture once more can be read as a political tactic to eliminate his agnates from positions in the central court in order to "ensure that the actions of the throne and the imperial succession would not be subject to agnatic interference," as Andrew Eisenberg cogently suggests.[203] Thus, following the advice of his ministers, Tàizōng could assign his agnates to remote areas, with little real military power or political clout, where they would be under strict surveillance from deputies of the central court, an administrative arrangement that bears a remarkable resemblance to that of the early Cáo Wèi state.[204]

Whatever the case, his proposal occasioned a vivid debate at court, where the most influential statesmen of the age weighed in.[205] Some ministers favoured a return to the decentralized system of governance associated with the Zhōu, often invoking the longevity of the dynasties that had adopted it or the well-being of the people in support of their arguments.[206] Among them, the Deputy Director of the Right of the Imperial Secretariat (*shàngshū yòu púyè* 尚書右僕射), Xiāo Yǔ 蕭瑀 (574–647), a descendant of the ruling house of the state of Western Liáng 梁 (555–587), voiced his support for the system of investiture in the following terms:

> Your subject has observed that with regards to the previous dynasties, for securing the blessings of the state and the longevity [of the ruling house] there is nothing like investing

[203] Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China*, p. 198.
[204] Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China*, p. 200.
[205] Tu-ki Min, *National Polity and Local Power*, eds. Philip Kuhn and Timothy Brook (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Yen-ching, 1989), 90–91. Also see David McMullen, "Traditions of Political Dissent in Táng China," *Journal of Chinese Studies* 44 (2004): 405–37.
[206] According to Howard J. Wechsler, only Xiāo Yǔ 蕭瑀 and Yán Shīgǔ 顏師古 (581–645) supported the idea of reverting to the practice of investiture, while most of the top ministers of the early Táng argued against it. See Howard J. Wechsler, "Factionalism in Early T'ang Government," in Arthur F. Wright and Dennis Twitchett (eds.), *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p.109.

hereditary lords with territories so that they become like a foundation of sturdy boulders [supporting the dynasty]. When the Qín dynasty unified the six kingdoms, it eliminated the lords and established officials instead, thus in only two generations it was destroyed. When the Hàn ruled All under Heaven, it established the lords so that they act as a defensive screen, thus it lasted over four hundred years. The Wèi and Jìn dynasties did away with it [the system of investiture], therefore they could not last long. The model of the system of investiture really is what we must follow.

[臣觀前代國祚所以長久者，莫不封建諸侯以為磐石之固。秦并六國，罷侯置守，二代而亡。漢有天下，參建藩屏，年踰四百。魏、晉廢之，不能永久。封建之法，實可遵行。][207]

Others argued, against Xiāo Yǔ's view, that investing kin with territories was inconvenient for very much the same reasons. Wèi Zhēng and Lǐ Bǎiyào both conceded that the system had worked for the Zhōu, but contended that reviving the system of investiture was not an adequate policy for their time. In his "Discussion against Imitating Antiquity" (*xiàng gǔ jiàn hóu wèi kě yì* 象古建侯未可議), Wèi Zhēng wrote; "when the sages take over matters, they emphasize importance of assessing their time, according to the times, some things are not permissible, the principles and substance constantly change [聖人舉事, 貴在相時, 時或未可, 理資通變].[208]

The debate over *fēngjiàn* would reoccur several times in the course of the dynasty, especially in times of political crisis. For example, in the late seventh century, a handful of the invested princes of the Lǐ family took up arms against the central court, dominated by empress Wǔ Zétiān 武則天 (624–705). The rebellion was swiftly crushed, and empress Wǔ felt confident enough to take the throne for herself in the year 690.

[207] *TD*, 31.867. *THY*, 46.824.
[208] *QTW*, 141.1429-2.

From this experience, Zhū Jìngzé 朱敬則 (635–709), one of her loyal servitors, crafted his arguments in opposition to the practice of investiture in his "Discussion of the Five Ranks" (*Wǔděng lùn* 五等論).[209] He noted that imperial princes had been able to rebel against the central court because they had been unchecked for too long. In his view, those who argued that the fall of Qín was due to its elimination of the five ranks of lords —such as the Hàn dynasty thinkers Cuī Shí, Zhòngcháng Tǒng 仲長統 (180– 220) and, Wáng Lǎng 王朗 (d. 228) — had failed to understand the dynamics of imperial institutions. Hence, he proposed to follow the lessons of the Qín and concentrate the administration of the realm under one ruler.[210]

Wǔ Zétiān ruled for fifteen years, and her government is often credited with allowing the entry of men without aristocratic background into the higher echelons of the bureaucracy.[211] On the other hand, she also invested men of the Wǔ family as princes and assigned them to territories in the provinces, thus sharing the governance of the realm with princes of the Lǐ family. It is clear that the practices of *fēngjiàn* were a significant part of empress Wǔ's strategy of survival.[212]

The Táng dynasty was restored immediately after the Wǔ interregnum, once Lǐ Xiǎn 李顯 (656–710), posthumously known as emperor Zhōngzōng 中宗 (r. 705–710), was reinstated as emperor. The dynasty, however, would face the threat of extinction twice more in the course of the next two centuries. In the mid-eight century, the rebellion of the frontier general (*jiédùshǐ* 節度使) Ān Lùshān 安禄山 (*ca*. 703–757) forced the imperial family out of the capitals and disrupted the normal functioning of government in most of the northern provinces.[213]

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[209] *QTW*, 171.1748-1/1749-1

[210] *QTW*, 171.1747-2/1749-1. See also David McMullen, "The Emperor, the Princes, and the Prefectures: A Political Analysis of the Pu'an Decree of 756 and the *Fengjian* Issue," *Tang Studies* 32 (2014), p. 85–86.

[211] David McMullen, "The Big Cats will Play," p. 317.

[212] On this point see David L. Mc Mullen, "The Emperor, the Princes, and the Prefectures," pp. 47–97.

[213] See Nicolas Tackett, "Great Clansmen," pp. 126–127

In the midst of the rebellion, the fleeing emperor Xuánzōng 玄宗 (r. 712–756) decided to invest four of his sons with territories and charged them with the defense of the realm.[214] This move may be seen as an alternative to the system of frontier militias (*fǔbīng* 府兵) that had been a cornerstone of Táng border security policy since the reign of Tàizōng.[215] The *fǔbīng* system had enabled the initial territorial expansion of the dynasty, but at the same time it had created the conditions for men like Ān Lùshān to gather large armies and concentrate massive resources.[216] Although the rebellion was ultimately crushed by the loyalist forces, it created the conditions for the *de facto* autonomy of many provincial governors, which were to subsist until the end of the dynasty.[217]

In the late ninth century, a second major rebellion shook the foundations of the Táng state, this time under the command of Huáng Cháo 黃巢 (d. 884), an obscure salt smuggler from Shāndōng. Once again, the ruling emperor and his court had to abandon the capitals and fled south, to present-day Chéngdū 成都, where they waited until the rebel forces were defeated. Despite its obvious decline in the final decades of the ninth century, the dynasty managed to endure, at least in name, until the year 907, when Zhū Wēn 朱溫 (852–912), one of the military officials in charge of suppressing the Huáng Cháo rebellion, overthrew the young puppet emperor Āi 哀 (r. 904–907) of Táng and founded the Later Liáng 後梁 dynasty (907-923).

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[214] David L. Mc Mullen, "The Emperor, the Princes, and the Prefectures", pp. 47–48.
[215] Charles Hartman, *Han Yu and the T'ang Search for Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 120. Hartman asserts that the increased importance of the examination system in the late seventh century marked the beginning of the decline of the militia system, as well as of the estrangement of a great part of the Táng elite from military activity, as well as a greater differentiation along ethnic lines between the civil and the military, pp. 121–124.
[216] See Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London: Oxford University Press. 1955)
[217] For a discussion of this issue, see Denis C. Twitchett, "Varied Patterns of Provincial Autonomy in the T'ang Dynasty," in John Curtis Perry and Bardwell L. Smith (eds.), *Essays on T'ang Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 98.

The Past should not burden the Present

Lǐ Bǎiyào noted that the Tàizōng's willingness to invest kin and meritorious ministers with territories stemmed from his desire to emulate the past. "Your Majesty's enlightened heart has always cherished the former worthies and the sages of the past," he wrote, "hence You wish to once again establish the five ranks of nobility and restore the old system, setting up the numerous princedoms and showing your kin-like affection to the hereditary lords." [獨照宸衷，永懷前古，將復五等而修舊制，建萬國以親諸侯].[218] Although the emperor's intentions were noble, Lǐ Bǎiyào noted that the time was not right for such a move, and proposed that the issue be left for the future, once more pressing matters had been solved.[219]

Like many political thinkers before him, Lǐ Bǎiyào stressed the gap between antiquity and the present to argue against reviving the system of the Zhōu. Those who insist upon the "eternal" or "constant" principles (*chángzhé* 常轍) underlying administration, he argued, have "overlooked the differences between antiquity and recent ages" [莫不情忘今古].[220] These differences render ancient institutions obsolete. "The reasons for historical instances of administrative success and failure," he writes, "all have particular causes" [然則得失成敗，各有由焉].[221] In other words, the institutions of high antiquity should not be reinstated because the social dynamics of his time require other political institutions.

In this respect, Lǐ Bǎiyào ideas resonate with those expressed in the *Hán Fēizǐ* 韓非子 (third century BCE), whose authors questioned calls to return to the ways of antiquity to achieve

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[218] *ZGZY*, p.177–178.
[219] *ZGZY*, p. 179. Wèi Zhēng also hoped to call Tàizōng's attention to the fact that the time was not propitious for re-establishing the system of investiture. For a summary of Wèi Zhēng's ideas on this issue, see Howard Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of* Heaven, p. 175–176.
[220] *ZGZY*, p.176.
[221] *ZGZY*, p. 176.

proper governance. One of the most telling passages appears in the "Five Vermin" (*wǔ dù* 五蠹) chapter: "The sage does not look to adhere to the ways of antiquity nor does he model himself after any eternal standards, he discusses the affairs of the age and makes the necessary preparations." [是以聖人不期脩古，不法常可，論世之事，因為之備]."[222] A similar idea was expressed in the *Book of Lord Shāng* (*Shāng jūn shū* 商君書), in a passage where the author argues against attempting to imitate antiquity by noting that the past offers more than one method, and that the same methods can have different results according to the circumstances [治世不一道，便國不必法古].[223] In other words, the differences in the conditions of the present and antiquity required dissimilar methods of governance.

Yet, although the notion of the gap between antiquity and the present was an old one, it bears mentioning that Lǐ Bǎiyào was hardly repeating conventional wisdom. He went beyond merely emphasizing the gap between past and present; crucially, he produced an account that explained the origins of the gap. He claimed that the system of investiture had worked in the distant past because of the vast differences in mentality that separated men of antiquity from the present. In high antiquity, men were impartial (*gōng zhī dào* 公之道), unlike men of the present, who were self-interested and would thus doom the system of investiture to failure.[224]

Public-mindedness came to the fore in the early Táng debates on *fēngjiàn* on more than one occasion, and it was often emperor Tàizōng himself who would voice the most articulate arguments in this regard. In the early years of his reign, he demoted several imperial relatives with the stated purpose of lightening the taxes and corvée labor of the common people.[225] In a similar

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[222] *Hán Fēizǐ* 韓非子, annotated by Chén Qíyóu 陳奇猷 (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1958 [1959]) [hereafter *HFZ*], 19.1040.
[223] See J.J.L. Duyvendak (trans.), *The Book of Lord Shang* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928)
[224] *ZGZY*, p. 178.
[225] *ZGZY*, p. 173.

vein, Fēng Déyí 封德彝 (568–627), a high official of the Imperial Secretariat, emphasized that imperial relatives without proven merit should not be granted territories, since that would lead to them treating the realm as a private possession, and to the way of impartiality being lost [一切封王，爵命既崇， 多給力役，蓋以天下為私，殊非至公馭物之道也].[226]

In his response to this proposal Tàizōng stressed that he was unwilling to increase the burden of the population to satisfy the whims of his kin [理天下本為百姓，非欲勞百姓以養己之親也].[227] It is important to note that Tàizōng uses this discourse of impartiality and care for the well-being of the populace to undermine the sense of entitlement of his close kin.

Interpreting Lǐ Bǎiyào's "*Fēngjiàn lùn*"

Lǐ Bǎiyào begins his discussion with the assertion that governing the realm and protecting the people are the sovereign's everlasting responsibility [經國庇民，王者之常制],[228] and that the problems of proper governance have been amply discussed in the historical records. The records, he notes, juxtapose the extended period of Zhōu rule with the meagre two generations of the Qín. From this Lǐ Bǎiyào concludes that "what determines whether [a state] exists or perishes lies in its prefectures and kingdoms" [存亡之理, 在於郡國].[229]

Interestingly, Lǐ Bǎiyào acknowledges the successes of Zhōu in ruling the realm for over thirty-generations, and suggests that their implementation of the system of investiture was a major factor in the dynasty's survival. In this regard, he notes:

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[226] *TD*, 31.867.
[227] *TD*, 31.867. See also Andrew Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China*, p. 190.
[228] *ZGZY*, p.175.
[229] *ZGZY*, p.175.

> The house of Zhōu drew its lessons from the longevity of the Xià and Shāng dynasties and so followed the policies of the rulers of high antiquity: "in linking their city walls to become as solid as stone boulders," their roots and base were deep and firm. So, even when the institutions of the king had declined, the branches and stems supported each other. For this reason, insurrections were forestalled and the ancestral sacrifices uninterrupted.
> [周氏以鑒夏、殷之長久，遵黃、唐之并建，維城磐石，深根固本，雖王綱弛廢，而枝干相持，故使逆節不生，宗祀不絕。][230]

The Zhōu ruling house lasted many generations because its rulers invested kin with hereditary territories. The Qín, on the other hand, eliminated the feudal lords and alienated itself from both imperial kin and commoners, so that in the end, a peasant rebellion was enough to bring the dynasty to an abrupt end.[231] Even though Lǐ Bǎiyào conceded that the Qín experience with centralized administration was a failure, he still objected to the proposal for reinstituting the system of hereditary territorial lords in the Táng. How can we explain this apparent discrepancy?

For one, Lǐ Bǎiyào assigns Heaven a role in determining the lifespan of a dynasty, yet he highlights the importance of proper governance in securing the state: "We know that whether the blessings last many generations or few is determined by Heaven's decree; whether the government prospers or declines results from how human affairs are managed" [是知祚之長短，必在于天時; 政或興衰，有關于人事].[232] For him it is a combination of both Heaven's approval and proper administration that decides the fate of a dynasty.

Furthermore, Lǐ Bǎiyào also comments on specific episodes in which the Zhōu rulers faced extreme difficulties, and points out that these situations were brought about by the system of

[230] *ZGZY*, p.175.
[231] *ZGZY*, p.175.
[232] *ZGZY*, p.175.

investiture.[233] In a direct critique of one of the most common tropes in *fēngjiàn* discourse, he notes that after a few generations, those who were supposed to serve as a "defensive barrier" (*fānpíng* 藩屏), that is, the territorial lords, turned into enemies. [且數世之後，王室浸微，始自藩屏，化為仇敵].[234] Not only was the royal house weakened, but the conflicts between the former subordinate lords became increasingly violent.[235]

At this point, Lǐ Bǎiyào introduces a direct critique of earlier participants in the debate, Lù Jī's and Cáo Jiǒng, and what he considered their misleading opinions on the *fēngjiàn* issue. In his "Discussion of the Five Ranks," Lù Jī had remarked that the conflictive episodes of the late Western and early Eastern Zhōu were solved by the timely and adequate intervention of the territorial lords, most of whom were royal clansmen.[236] Against this reading, Lǐ Bǎiyào argues that success is achieved by "clearly establishing the officials' duties, appointing virtuous and talented to positions in government administration, reviewing their achievements and sharing the governance of the realm with those who have proven merit" [設官分職，任賢使能，以循良之才，膺共治之寄][237]

In much the same way, Lǐ Bǎiyào attacks Cáo Jiǒng for suggesting that the ruler ought to share his joys and worries primarily with the invested lords, especially those of the same surname, and retorts that the ruler should be willing to share his joys and worries with his officials as well.[238] With the system of hereditary investiture, Lǐ Bǎiyào notes, the descendants of the founding lords lose the sense of obligation to the ruling lineage. Therefore, when Tàizōng expressed his wish to

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[233] *ZGZY*, p.176.
[234] *ZGZY*, p.176.
[235] *ZGZY*, p.176.
[236] In *ZGZY*, p.176. The original passage can be found in *LSWJ*, p. 1060.
[237] *ZGZY*, p.176.
[238] *ZGZY*, p.176.

implement the *fēngjiàn* system in order to emulate the sages of the past, Lǐ Bǎiyào staunchly opposed the plan. If a decentralized system of rule were reinstated, he reasoned, the realm would descend into chaos, and "each successive generation [of hereditary lords]," he warned, "will become increasingly cruel and licentious and more extravagant and overbearing than the preceding one" [封君列國，藉其門資，忘其先業之艱難，輕其自然之崇貴，莫不世增淫虐，代益驕侈].[239]

In addition, Lǐ Bǎiyào anticipated that the results for the people would be disastrous. Once the princes leave the capital and take over their fiefs, "some will punish the people and exhaust their strength, others will convene with other lords and together enjoy [the pleasures of their state]." [或刑人力而將盡，或召諸侯而共落].[240] Lǐ Bǎiyào might have had specific princes in mind, since at least a handful of early Táng princes had a reputation for depravity and violence.[241] Again, the question was how to ensure the moral quality of the imperial princes and ensure the proper governance of the realm?

Different positions were articulated in response to this question. Some sought to correct the faults of the system of investiture by designing mechanisms that would insure the quality of the hereditary lords or prevent the conflicts between them. For example, in the second year of the Zhēnguān reign (628), Yán Shīgǔ, one of the top ministers in Tàizōng's court, submitted a memorial to offer his views on the *fēngjiàn* issue.[242] His main concern was to prevent the conflict between princes, a conflict which had its roots in the unequal quality and size of the territories granted to them. Thus, Yán Shīgǔ argues that "the best policy for the times is to consider the distant

[239] *ZGZY*, p. 177.
[240] *ZGZY*, p. 177. This version has "落" instead of "樂" at the end of the sentence. See note 58 on p. 185.
[241] On this point, see David L. McMullen, "The Emperor, the Princes, and the Prefectures," p. 64.
[242] The date for the memorial is provided in *THY* 46.826.

and close, to parcel the realm and grant the imperial princes territories of similar size and population, so that the strong and the weak can aid each other, and to clearly draw their limits and establish the boundaries so that none become too large." [當今之要，莫如量其遠近，分置王國，均其戶邑，強弱相濟，畫野分疆，不得過大。][243] "By establishing such a system", he concludes, "[the dynasty] will endure for countless generations". [一定此制，萬世永久。][244]

Mǎ Zhōu, a Grand Secretary at Tàizōng's court, also raised his objections to the system of investiture. His criticism is directed towards the hereditary principle, as he assumes the possibility of worthy men fathering inadequate offspring. That is, once the emperor has decreed that certain fief is to be passed on by successive generations of a single lineage, it becomes difficult to remove a licentious lord, unless he commits a major offence. [貽厥子孫，嗣守其政，非有大故，無或黜免。][245] More importantly, if any of the lords is arrogant, then not only will the people suffer, but the dynasty will also be destabilized. [倘有孩童嗣職，萬一驕逸，則兆庶被其殃，而國家受其敗。][246] Mǎ Zhōu proposed to reward the meritorious ministers with the income from a territory, without giving them any administrative duties, unless they proved to be able administrators. [臣謂宜賦以茅土，疇其戶邑，必有才行，隨器方授。則雖其翰翮非強，亦可以獲免尤累。][247]

In 642, the Grand Master of Remonstrance (*jiànyì dàfū* 諫議大夫) Chǔ Suìliáng 褚遂良 (597–658), recommended that imperial princes be invested with kingdoms in the provinces. In support of the implementation of traditional *fēngjiàn* practices, he rhetorically asks emperor

[243] *QTW*, 147.1491–1.
[244] *QTW*, 147.1491–2.
[245] *ZGZY*, p. 179.
[246] *ZGZY*, p. 179.
[247] *ZGZY*, p. 179.

Tàizōng, "Why wouldn't Your Majesty employ those of the royal flesh and bone to garrison and defend the four quarters?" [陛下豈不以王之骨肉，鎮扞四方？].[248] Chǔ Suìliáng, however, sought to overcome the deficiencies of the system by assuring the quality of the incumbents, and proposed that the central court establish mechanisms to prevent the kind of abuses noted by Lǐ Bǎiyào and others. The future princes, he recommended, should remain in the capital at a young age to receive an education in the classics and court rituals. While underage, they would remain under the supervision of a prefectural governor (*cìshǐ* 刺史) who would be in charge of their instruction.[249]

In his comment to the *Book of the Later Zhōu* (*Zhōu shū* 周書) section on the imperial princes, the court historian Lìnghú Défēn 令狐德棻 (582–666), proposed a mixed system with both hereditary lords protecting the borders and worthy men selected to act as magistrates [且夫列封疆，建侯伯，擇賢能，置牧守，循名雖曰異軌，責實抑亦同歸].[250] This kind of system would ensure that no conflict arises. More significantly, such a system would guarantee the long life of the dynasty because of the mutual assistance of both the invested members of the imperial clan and the worthy men acting as imperial officials.[251]

According to Lǐ Bǎiyào, if the Táng emperor relied on the support of the various lords to govern the realm, his position would be unstable. In order to illustrate his point, Lǐ Bǎiyào provided an overview of historical events in which rulers found themselves in a vulnerable – or even perilous – position once confronted by powerful subjects.[252]

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[248] *QTW*, 149.1508–2.
[249] *ZGZY*, pp. 197–198.
[250] Lìnghú Défen 令狐德棻 (582–666), *Book of the Later Zhōu* (*Zhōu shū* 周書), edited by Yáng Jiāluò 楊家駱, (Taipei: Dǐngwén shūjú, 1980), 13.208.
[251] Lìnghú Défen, *Book of the Later Zhōu*, 13.210.
[252] *ZGZY*, p. 176.

He also argued strongly against the privilege of the hereditary lords, and against the idea that the sovereign should rely primarily on his kin. Noble rank should be granted on the basis of meritorious service. Or as he succinctly puts it, "if noble rank is not hereditary, the road to appointing virtuous men will be broadened; if the people are without a constant lord, their attachment to the government officials will not be fixed." [爵非世及，用賢之路斯廣；民無定主，附下之情不固].[253] Unlike the hereditary lords, Lǐ Bǎiyào notes, the metropolitan and provincial officials are selected by the central court from among the talented men of the realm, whether *shì* or commoner [內外群官，選自朝廷，擢士庶以任之].[254] Moreover, unlike the hereditary lords, officials' administrative performance could be systematically assessed, and promotions and demotions would be decided upon after consulting their records [澄水鏡以鑒之，年勞優其階品，考績明其黜陟].[255]

Lǐ Bǎiyào included a criticism of the financial hardships that some of the officials were made to endure. In a passage that is reminiscent of Cuī Shí's discussion on the need to raise the salaries of the imperial administrators, Lǐ Bǎiyào notes disparagingly that for some, their income "does not even cover the expenses of his own household" [俸祿不入私門], and that some are unable to bring their families with them to the locality of their official appointment, or even to feed or clothe themselves appropriately.[256]

In the last sections of the "Discussion of the System of Investiture", Lǐ Bǎiyào first offers a concise history of the dynasties that preceded the Táng, and then moves on to list the ways in which Tàizōng's had equalled or surpassed the sage rulers of antiquity. There is little in these

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[253] ZGZY, p. 177.
[254] ZGZY, p.
[255] *ZGZY*, p. 177.
[256] *ZGZY*, p. 177.

passages that relates to the issue of *fēngjiàn*, but the section is full of explicit references to those virtues that made Tàizōng a model emperor. I interpret these passages as an instance in which the minister attempts to perfect the sovereign by presenting the models of antiquity, and suggesting that Tàizōng has already become a greater ruler, and hence a model for future generations.

Lǐ Bǎiyào stresses Tàizōng's untiring devotion to matters of governance, his frugality, and his close relationship with his ministers. The brief survey of the previous dynasties contains a cautionary note for the emperor. Lǐ Bǎiyào suggests that although the Táng founder had established the dynasty, the realm had not been completely pacified. In such circumstances, it would be rash for Tàizōng to distribute lands among kin.

In the final passage, Lǐ Bǎiyào borrows the authority of the *Book of Changes* to highlight, once more, the central point of his essay, namely, that institutions of the past are not sure to work in the present: "In Heaven and Earth, all things wax and wane and are replaced by others, with time everything changes or ceases to be; how could this not apply to mankind?" [天地盈虛，與時消息，況於人乎？][257]

According to the final comment on the *Zhēnguān zhèngyào* version, Emperor Tàizōng decided to follow their advice, and refused to grant hereditary fiefs to kin and meritorious ministers.[258] An edict of the 11th year of the Zhēnguān period (637), however, states Tàizōng's intention to combine the virtues of both systems, by "establishing officials to rule [the land] within the seas and setting up [lords] as protective barriers to support the royal house", so that "nobody can fail to understand the decrees and regulations" [設官司以制海內, 建藩屏以輔王室, 莫不明

[257] *ZGZY*, p.179. Paraphrasing the "Fēng 豐" section of the *Book of Changes*, which reads: "天地盈虛, 與時消息而況於人乎?" See *Changes*, p. 18.
[258] *JTS*, 72.2576. Also *ZGZY*, 3.93.

其典章].[259] Also, the *Táng Huìyào* chapter on *fēngjiàn* notes that after considering different proposals, Tàizōng stated: "to parcel the realm to invest meritorious servants is the constant principle of the past and present" [割地以封功臣, 古今之通義也].[260]

Finally, *A Model for the Emperor* (*Dì Fàn* 帝範), a work composed to serve as a guide to future Táng rulers, an aged Tàizōng proposed to revive the *fēngjiàn* system but to keep the hereditary fiefdoms under check, so that they cannot pose a threat to the central court.[261] Jack Chen suggested that this chapter gives proof of Tàizōng's "undimmed confidence in the Zhou model of empire" and his lack of trust in his heirs' political abilities.[262]

The fluctuations of official policy on *fēngjiàn* during the two decades of Tàizōng's reign can be read in several ways. For one, it might reflect Tàizōng's own strategic ambiguity on the issue, that is, his cynical use of the system to foster his own personal interests. In this sense, granting territories to kin and eminent ministers could be used as a means of removing them from the court and the everyday decision-making processes. It is no surprise then that several of the invested ministers refused to go to their fiefdoms, and instead decided to remain in the capital, where they could continue to exert their influence in the administration of the realm.[263]

Another possibility is to assume that even though Tàizōng would have preferred to follow the precedents of old and devolve power to the imperial princes, the conditions of the time were not adequate for this.[264] The Southern Sòng scholar Táng Zhòngyǒu 唐仲友, an advocate of

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[259] *WXTK*, 2182–2
[260] *THY*, 46.829.
[261] See Táng Tàizōng 唐太宗 (599–649), *A Model for the Emperor* (*Dì Fàn* 帝範), Qīng Qiánlóng chì kè Wǔyīngdiàn jù zhēnběn 清乾隆敕刻武英殿聚珍本, especially the chapter on "Establishing One's Kin" (*Jiàn qīn* 建親), 1.3–2/8–2. For a full translation and commentaries see Dennis Twitchett, "How to Be an Emperor: T'an T'ai-tsung's Vision of his Role," in *Asia Major*. Third Series Vol. 9, Part 1 (1996), pp. 33–100.
[262] See Jack Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, p. 97.
[263] See Howard Wechsler, "The Confucian Impact on Early T'ang Decision-Making," p. 30.
[264] David McMullen, "The Big Cats will Play," p. 315.

fēngjiàn, argued that Tàizōng desired to carry on the model of the Three Dynasties, but the divisions among his ministers forced the emperor to shrink away from his original plan.[265] Finally, Tàizōng could have been taking a pragmatic approach, and used the investiture of kin with territories as a means to help him secure the services of agnates in the preservation of the realm, as Eisenberg has suggested.[266] Whatever the case, the several instances discussed above demonstrates that in the early Táng, the *fēngjiàn* debates were as much part of a tradition of political philosophy, as they were eloquent advice on political structures and administrative mechanisms of governance.

Concluding remarks

In an article published some decades ago, Howard Wechsler noted that the choice between the Zhōu and Qín models of rule constituted the most momentous issues in the early years of Tàizōng's reign.[267] This chapter shows, that whether the administration of the realm should be based on the *fēngjiàn* system or, on the contrary, based on the centralized system of the Qín, was also perhaps the most divisive issue for members of the ruling elite.

Many early Táng thinkers took the Hàn as a model of virtuous rule for the empire, since it was able to improve upon the institutional heritage of the Qín while at the same time avoiding the structural deficiencies of the Zhōu system of investiture. Hence, high points of Hàn rule were used to illustrate the benefits of a *jùnxiàn* system with a minor *fēngjiàn* component. It should also be noted that although the early Táng debates on *fēngjiàn* took place during the apex of the dynasty's

[265] See Wáng Huī 王褘 (1323–1374), *Dàshìjì xùbiān* 大事记续编, 51.6a. Cited in Jaeyoon Song. "Shifting Paradigms in Theories of Government: Histories, Classic and Public Philosophy in 11th to 14th Century China" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2007), pp. 222–223.
[266] Andrew Eisenberg, *Kingship in Early Medieval China*, p. 197.
[267] Howard Wechsler, "The Confucian Impact on Early T'ang Decision-Making," *T'oung Pao* (Second Series) 66.1/3 (1980), p. 29–31.

power, when Tàizōng's position was largely secured, this does not mean that these discussions were irrelevant for the administrative organization of the body politic.[268]

Lǐ Bǎiyào's essay and the other textual sources analyzed in this chapter provide sufficient evidence to support the thesis that during the early Táng period, the *fēngjiàn* system was discussed not only as administrative policy, but also as part and parcel of the discourses of proper governance. Writing nearly a thousand years after the foundation of the empire, Táng thinkers continued to base their discussions on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* with reference to longstanding models of virtuous rule and specific historical events and used these as evidence to point to the benefits and shortcomings of each system. The criteria by which they measured the performance of each system in history was nothing novel. Basically, they remained tied to fundamental notions of the well-being of the people, or at least the lesser disruption, and the effects of the system in securing the long life of the imperial dynasty.

Moreover, the historical precedents and intellectual reflections on the *fēngjiàn* issue during the reign of Tàizōng constituted an enduring legacy for later generations of statecraft thinkers, not only in China, but also in Korea and Japan. In addition, the *Zhēnguān zhèngyào* became a reference for Tangut, Mongol and Manchu rulers wishing to govern China.[269] Under Tàizōng's rule, the empire was unified, the sovereign's position was secured, and the borders had been pacified. Whether or not the historical narrative accurately describes Tàizōng's personality is not as

[268] Jack Chen states, "the proposal to share power among the members of the imperial house was chiefly ideological, and not born out of urgent political necessity." Jack Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, p. 60. David McMullen criticizes Chen's idea that *fēngjiàn* debates in the Táng dynasty were mostly ideological, and stresses its very concrete implications in politics. See David McMullen, "The Big Cats will Play: Tang Taizong and his Advisors," *Journal of Chinese Studies* No. 57 (2013), p. 318.

[269] For a list of translations of the *Zhēnguān zhèngyào* see Dennis Twitchett, "How to Be an Emperor," p. 6. Also, the *History of Tokugawa* mentions that Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, considered the *Zhēnguān zhèngyào* one of the most important texts to learn about the way of bringing peace to the realm. See Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Sources of East Asian Traditions. Volume 2: The Modern Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 125, 127.

important as the fact that he established his legacy in Chinese political thought and practice through a conscious embodiment of the virtuous sovereign ideal. Discussing with his ministers the viability of reinstituting the *fēngjiàn* system was one more aspect of his success in becoming a model for later generations.

CHAPTER 4

Adapting to the Circumstances: Liǔ Zōngyuán and the mid-Táng program for centralization

Liǔ Zōngyuán 柳宗元 (773–819), courtesy name Zǐhòu 子厚, is recognized as one of the most prominent literary figures of the mid-Táng period.[270] He was a member of one of the most prestigious clans of his time, the Liǔ family of Hédōng 河東柳. Despite the declining fortunes of his own family branch, Liǔ Zōngyuán could still enjoy the benefits of his illustrious pedigree.[271] During his own life, he managed to make a name for himself as a poet and a prose-writer, and he also occupied different posts in the imperial bureaucracy.[272] Liǔ Zōngyuán extant works include numerous rhyme-prose pieces, poems, memorials and a treatises discussing political and social issues of his time.[273]

Liǔ Zōngyuán is also one of the best known figures of the "Ancient Style Prose" (*gǔwén* 古文) intellectual group led by Hán Yù 韓愈 (768–824).[274] Like most figures in the *gǔwén* movement, Liǔ Zōngyuán was concerned not only with the practicalities of government control in a period when the empire was unified only in name, but also with the transformation of the role of the educated elite as a whole.

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[270] *JTS*, 160.4213–4214.
[271] Anthony DeBlasi, *Reform in the Balance*, p. 116, and note 6 in p.185.
[272] *JTS*, 160.4213. Also, Jo-shui Chen, *Liu Tsung-yüan and Intellectual Change in T'ang China, 773-819* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992), pp. 41–47.
[273] The *QTW* includes twenty-five sections of Liǔ Zōngyuán's works, arranged by genre. See *QTW*, 569.5753-2/593.6003-1. Liǔ Zōngyuán entrusted Liú Yǔxī 劉禹錫 (772–842), one of his lifelong friends, with his collected writings shortly before his death.
[274] Anthony DeBlasi, *Reform in the Balance*, pp. 1–7; 115–145.

In political terms, Liǔ Zōngyuán associated with the reformist group led by Wáng Shūwén 王叔文 (d. 806) during the brief reign of emperor Shùnzōng 順宗 (r. 805). During this time he was appointed Deputy Minister for the Board of Rites (*Shàngshū Lǐbù yuánwàiláng* 尚書禮部員外郎). Once opposing factions came to power early in the reign of emperor Xiànzōng 憲宗 (r. 805–820), Liǔ Zōngyuán suffered the subsequent political backlash. He was demoted and banished twice to remote locations to serve as a low level administrator.[275] Although displaced from the higher decision-making bodies in the central court, he remained informed and active in discussing political affairs.

Liǔ Zōngyuán's works in prose and poetry attest to his desire to improve the moral situation of his time, and his enduring appeal to the literati elite to be the agents of this revival.[276] It should also be noted that his "Discussion of the System of Investiture", written in the volatile political climate of the early ninth century and a product of a transformed intellectual milieu, was not intended primarily for the court, but rather for a private audience of like-minded readers.[277]

Considering the dislocation of administrative structures that followed Ān Lùshān's rebellion, Liǔ Zōngyuán argued strongly for the recovery of the system of centralized administration. His advocacy of the *jùnxiàn* model was rooted in a perspective shared by a significant part of the bureaucratic officials, one in which the interest of the imperial family need to be kept in check in order to secure the proper governance of the realm.[278] In his ideal political

[275] *JTS*, 160.4214. Jo-shui Chen, *Liu Tsung-yüan and Intellectual Change in T'ang China*, pp. 66–80.
[276] Liǔ Zōngyuán and his group were convinced that the times could be improved only with the efforts of cultivated *shì*. He contrasted the honest man of letters with the sycophantic men at court, who had secured their positions by flattery and deceit, and was convinced that the tables would turn and the righteous shì would be called back to serve at the central court. See Charles Hartman, "Alieniloquium: Liu Tsung-yüan's Other Voice," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles and Reviews* 4.1 (1982), pp. 23–73. Y. Edmund Lien, "The Moral High Ground: Two Admonitory *Fu* by Liu Zongyuan," *T'ang Studies* No. 23-24 (2005–06), pp.169–186.
[277] David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China*, p. 102, p. 197.
[278] David McMullen, "Views of the State in Du You and Liu Zongyuan," p. 77.

structure, the realm would be administered by officials appointed for their integrity and talent, who would ensure the well-being of the population. These high-minded bureaucratic officials would not only be in charge of the administration of the provinces, but would also serve to subject the imperial authority to bureaucratic control.[279]

In view of his literary achievements and political activism, it is no surprise that Liǔ Zōngyuán is one of the most renowned figures of the mid-Táng intellectual milieu, nor that this works received so much attention among scholars of the Táng dynasty.[280] An analysis of Liǔ Zōngyuán's numerous surviving works, however, exceeds by far the aims of the present chapter. Instead, I propose to examine his "Discussion of the System of Investiture" in connection to other perspectives on the issue of investiture and on proper governance articulated in the mid-Táng period.

Because of its author's reputation and the force of its arguments, Liǔ Zōngyuán's "Discussion of the System of Investiture" has been preserved in several collections. It was included in one section of the *Complete Works of the Táng Dynasty* that collects several of Liǔ Zōngyuán's discussions.[281] These include short treatises on topics such as the four social bonds (*sìwéi* 四維), on guarding the Way, and on the distinction between punitive expeditions and [illicit] invasions in the Spring and Autumn period.[282]

[279] David McMullen, "Views of the State in Du You and Liu Zongyuan," in S. R. Schram (ed.), *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), p. 62.
[280] Several of Liǔ Zōngyuán's works have been translated into English and other Western languages. John Minford and D.C. Lau include several of his poems and prose in, *Classical Chinese Literature*. *Volume I: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty* (New York and Hong Kong: Columbia University Press and Chinese University Press, 2000), pp. 864–867; 1009–1017; 1072–1076. Liǔ Zōngyuán's "Essay on Feudalism" is included in Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (comp.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition. Volume I: From Earliest Times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp.
[281] *QTW*, 582.5875-1/5877-1.
[282] *QTW*, 582.5874-2/5882-1

The *New Táng History* (*Xīn Táng shū* 新唐書) offers a condensed version of Liǔ Zōngyuán's arguments at the end of the section on the imperial family (*zōngshì* 宗室). There, it follows a summary of earlier iterations of the *fēngjiàn* debates.[283] In the final commentary, the compilers implicitly criticize Liǔ Zōngyuán and other disputers of centralization by noting that the Táng had been successful in establishing a mixed system that achieved balance between the interests of the ruling clan and those of the bureaucracy.[284]

Mǎ Duānlín's 馬端臨 *Comprehensive Examination of Documents* (*Wénxiàn Tōngkǎo* 文獻通考) offers a summary of Liǔ Zōngyuán's position in one of its many sections devoted to the historical practice and theoretical discussions of *fēngjiàn*, from the earliest recorded history to the late Táng.[285] Liǔ Zōngyuán's "Discussion of the System of Investiture" is also one of several essays on the topic included in the Míng dynasty scholar Táng Shùnzhī's 唐順之 (1507–1560) collection *Bài Biān* 稗編.[286]

In this chapter, I concentrate on Liǔ Zōngyuán's "Discussion of the System of Investiture" (*Fēngjiàn lùn* 封建論), which offers the strongest intellectual reaction to the mid-Táng administrative decentralization. Liǔ Zōngyuán has been regarded as the most articulate opponent of *fēngjiàn* by later generations of Chinese scholars. The famous Northern Sòng dynasty statesman-scholar Sū Shì 蘇軾 (1036–1101) declared that Liǔ Zōngyuán's treatise offered the final

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[283] Ōuyáng Xiū 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Sòng Qí 宋祁 (998–1061), *New Táng History* (*Xīn Táng shū* 新唐書), edited by Yáng Jiāluò 楊家駱 (Taipei: Dǐngwén shūjú, 1981) [hereafter *XTS*], 78.3537–3538.

[284] The comment reads: "Thus, to set up lords and to establish provincial administrators, is like combining the essential and the ornate, there is nothing better than this. With regards to assisting the country in times of trouble, nothing is as good as the hereditary lords; with regards to avoiding a situation where "the tail becomes too big," nothing is as good as setting up provincial administrators and ministers." [然建侯置守，如質文遞救，亦不可一概責也。救土崩之難，莫如建諸侯；削尾大之勢，莫如置守宰]. See *XTS*, 78.3538.

[285] Mǎ Duānlín 馬端臨 (1245–1322), *Comprehensive Examination of Documents* (*Wénxiàn Tōngkǎo* 文獻通考) (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1987) [hereafter *WXTK*], 260.2060-1.

[286] Táng Shùnzhī 唐順之 (1507–1560) (comp.), *Bài biān* 稗編 (Taipei: Xīnxīng shūjú, 1972), pp. 6266–6275.

word with regards to the system of investiture.[287] However, his views also made him the target of several attacks by influential supporters of *fēngjiàn* ideals, such as the Neo-Confucian scholars Hú Yín 胡寅 (1098–1156) and Zhū Xī 朱熹 (1130–1200). In view of its enduring importance for latter political thinkers debating the possibilities of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* I propose to highlight the centrality of Liǔ Zōngyuán's essay in mid-Táng discussions on proper governance.

Efforts at centralization in the mid-Táng

In the final years of emperor Xuánzōng's 玄宗 (r. 712–756) long and largely successful reign, the Ān Lùshān rebellion (755–763) altered the conditions and the possibilities of governance for the Táng central court. The military threat of the rebel armies forced the imperial court out of the capital. In the midst of the imperial family's retreat to the south, an elderly and weakened Xuánzōng was forced to abdicate in favour of one of his sons, who would rule as emperor Sùzōng 肅宗 (755–763). To make matters worse, much of the court's revenue was lost once the Northern provinces fell under the control of rebel forces. These conditions prompted several Táng statesmen and political thinkers of the second half of the eighth century to discuss the viability of reinstating the system of investiture with renewed vitality.

Liú Zhì 劉秩 (d. after 758) and Fáng Guǎn 房琯 (697–763), two of emperor Xuánzōng's closest advisors, recommended a return to the model of the Zhōu. Both men were involved in drafting the 756 edict investing the imperial princes with larger territories and assigning them greater responsibility in the defense of the realm.[288] Liú Zhì, for one, suggested that the princes be given greater administrative autonomy and even direct military command to supress the rebellion.

[287] See also Jaeyoon Song, "Redefining Good Government: Shifting Paradigms in Song Dynasty (960-1279) Discourse on '*Fengjian*'," *T'oung Pao* 97 (2011), pp. 301–343.
[288] David McMullen, "The Emperor, the Princes, and the Prefectures," p. 49.

In a passage that resonates with Cáo Jiǒng's and other early medieval arguments in favor of *fēngjiàn*, Liú Zhì wrote: "In the present, when imperial kinsmen are invested, they all have their corresponding titles yet they have no kingdoms [to administer]; they are in charge of appointing officials but are not allowed to handle affairs. Instead they remain in the capital and live off the state's taxes. Thus, the imperial treasury is never enough." [今封建子弟, 有其名號而無其國邑; 空樹官僚而無莅事, 聚居京輦, 食租衣稅, 國用所以不足也].[289]

Liú Zhì was, nonetheless, very aware of the difficulty of returning to the system of investiture as it had existed in the early Zhōu, since both the "public spirit" (*gōngxīn* 公心) as well as the "proper model" (*liáng fǎ* 良法) that had existed in the Three Dynasties had been lost.[290] Liú Zhì defines the first of these principles in terms of the actions of the sage rulers of the past who measured the virtue and achievements of their subjects to invest them with territories and did not take for granted that such territories should be conferred upon those of their own family as a private possession. [公心者何? 昔文、 武、 成、 康之衆建諸侯也, 有德有功者則畀之初未嘗専以私其宗親].[291] The "proper model" in turn, is defined as the ideal working of the system of investiture as established by the early rulers, where "above there are *fāngbó* and the *liánshuài*, below there are the *gōng*, *hóu*, *bó*, *zǐ* and *nán* [the five ranks of noble lords], the small and the great protect each other, and seniors and juniors each rules what corresponds to them [上有方伯連率, 下有公侯伯子男, 小大相維, 尊卑相制].[292]

Fáng Guǎn, for his part, was put in charge of the military counteroffensive to retake the capital. However, he suffered a devastating defeat at Chéntāo 陳濤 at the hands of the rebel troops.

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[289] *THY*, 47.830.
[290] *Bài biān,* p.6275-6278.
[291] *Bài biān,* p.6256.
[292] *Bài biān,* p.6257.

According to some accounts, this was because he attempted to use military tactics of the Spring and Autumn period to face a superior enemy. Based on this episode, Fáng Guǎn has been ridiculed in some accounts for his excessive attachment to the past. Edwin Pulleyblank, for one, noted that Xuánzōng's decision to invest imperial princes with territories and assign them greater military and administrative responsibilities, following Fáng Guǎn proposal, led to Lǐ Lín's 李璘 (d. 757) attempt to set up an independent state in the south.[293] Anthony DeBlasi, for his part, argues that Fáng Guǎn support of *fēngjiàn* practices is indicative of his "extreme antiquarianism."[294] In this view, the scant records on Fáng Guǎn's perspectives on political and military affairs are used as evidence of his "blind imitation of the way of the former kings."[295]

Critics, however, might have exaggerated his lack of understanding of the conditions of his time. David Graff cogently shows that his use of oxen-drawn carts to face the more mobile rebel cavalry was not the result of military ineptitude. Despite Fáng Guǎn's lack of field experience, the tactics employed were not necessarily anachronistic, nor were they employed in imitation of the models of the past.[296] In a similar vein, his advocacy of *fēngjiàn* was not necessarily out of touch with the realities of his time. The investiture of imperial princes with territories and the actual delegation of administrative and military responsibilities continued to show unpredictable results.

Despite the repeated military successes of Ān Lùshān's forces, their leaders were unable to translate their victories on the field into a strong administrative base. Without a solid political foundation, the rebellion was ultimately supressed by the Táng armies. However, after almost a

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[293] Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism in T'ang Intellectual Life, 755–805," in Arthur F. Wright (ed.), *The Confucian Persuasion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 99.

[294] Anthony DeBlasi, *Reform in the Balance: The Defense of Literary Culture in mid-Tang China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), p. 65.

[295] Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism in T'ang Intellectual Life," p. 99.

[296] Fáng Guǎn is said to have attempted to use Spring and Autumn military tactics to face the rebel armies, which caused his swift defeat. See David A. Graff, "Fang Guan's Chariots: Scholarship, War, and Character Assassination in the Middle Tang," *Asia Major* (Third Series) 12.1 (2009), pp. 105-130.

decade of fighting, the central government's authority was notably diminished. The realm was now constituted of an uneven patchwork of provinces under the rule of a handful of military governors, each with his particular interests and with different degrees of local autonomy. These semi-independent generals were able to challenge court authority, maintain control of their own armies, appoint regional officials, and even collect local taxes.[297] In response to this situation, a handful of ministers proposed that the semi-independent military governors of the provinces be created territorial lords with hereditary privileges, just like the imperial kin. In this way, some supporters of the system of investiture in the post Ān Lùshān period were motivated not so much by the putative desire to emulate the ancients, but by efforts to produce a rhetorical justification to the *status quo*.

The political conditions for the granting of fiefs in the second half of the eighth century differed greatly from those of the early Táng. As David McMullen aptly notes, “By the late eighth century, a generational change had taken place and few imperial clansmen serving in the political system might have seemed capable of fulfilling the classic ideals of *fengjian*.”[298] Moreover, the emperor’s authority had greatly eroded and several provinces were under direct control of their local governors. In view of this situation, defining what administrative system would better suit the needs of the empire seemed one of the most pressing concerns for mid-Táng political thinkers.

In the aftermath of the rebellion, a new generation of theorists of statecraft made their policy recommendations and articulated their perspectives on proper governance based on both recent and remote historical experiences. In their discourses, both *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* remained competing alternatives for government administration. Unlike the early-Táng discussions

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[297] According to Charles A. Peterson, this situation was only reversed during the reign of Táng Xianzong (r. 805-820). See "The Restoration Completed: Emperor Hsien-tsung and the Provinces," in *Perspectives on the T‘ang*, eds. Wright and Twitchett, 151–91.
[298] David L. McMullen, “The Emperor, the Princes, and the Prefectures,” p. 96.

examined in the previous chapter, however, those of the mid-Táng period were submitted by literati who did not enjoy the same proximity to the imperial figure. Therefore, their recommendations did not always reach the throne, and when they did, the authors ran a higher risk of being punished for offending the ruler. Although men like Hán Yù, the historian Dù Yòu 杜佑, or the celebrated official Bái Jūyì 白居易 (772–846) remained politically active throughout most of their lives, they oftentimes offered their criticism "from outside the functioning administrative structure," as David McMullen succinctly puts it.[299]

This, of course, does not mean that such men did not serve in government positions, nor that they were unable to climb the administrative ladder to the top. However, there is a clear distinction between those early Táng ministers whose destinies were intrinsically tied to those of the ruling house since the founding of the dynasty, on one side, and those mid-Táng literati who were involved with court politics after a life of study and administrative work. In addition, many mid-Táng literati assumed that moral self-cultivation was essential to restore the age, and although they understood that this transformation required a committed ruler, they assigned greater importance to the role of the educated elite than their early Táng counterparts.

Nonetheless, the debate about proper form of government remained an enduring concern for several mid-Táng scholar-officials. Bái Jūyì, for one, wrote a short discussion of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* in preparation for the imperial examinations, under the title "Considering the system of investiture and discussing the prefectural system" (*yì fēngjiàn lùn jùnxiàn* 議封建論郡縣) and made a case for the adequacy of both systems, depending on the times and provided that the sovereign abides by the constant principles of government. After briefly reviewing the traditional arguments in favour of each system, Bái Jūyì concludes that "if indeed the roots [of proper

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[299] David McMullen, "Traditions of Political Dissent in Tang China," *Journal of Chinese Studies* 44 (2004), p. 412.

governance] are established and their source is properly guided, prefectures and fiefdoms can both be used to administer [the realm] and bring about peace. If [on the contrary] restrictions are transgressed and the handle [of government] is lost, lords and magistrates can both bring about chaos and threaten [the court]" [苟固其本, 導其源, 雖郡與國俱可理而安矣; 苟踰其防, 失其柄, 雖侯與守俱能亂且危矣].[300]

Liǔ Zōngyuán and the foundation of social life

Liǔ Zōngyuán begins his discussion with a systematic explanation of the origins of the systems of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* as the result of historical contingencies. Against claims that *fēngjiàn* was first established by the sages, he stresses that it had nothing to do with their vision of an ideal political order, but that it was determined by the intrinsic dynamics of human interaction. "Even the sage rulers of antiquity Yáo, Shùn, Yǔ, Tāng, Wén and Wǔ," he writes, "were not able to discard it. This was not because they did not wish to do so, but rather because circumstances did not permit it." [彼封建者, 更古聖王堯、舜、禹、湯、文、武而莫能去之。蓋非不欲去之也, 勢不可也].[301] Hence, he concludes that the system of investiture should not be regarded as a timeless or eternally valid institution, or as he succinctly states, "the system of investiture did not reflect the intent of the sages" [封建非聖人意也].[302]

Liǔ Zōngyuán rejected the idea that any institution enshrined the sage's insight into transcendental patterns. Furthermore, he explains the disparities between the social dynamics of antiquity and the present in terms of the single theme; the interplay between competition (*zhēng*

[300] Bái Jūyì 白居易 (772–846), *Collected Works of Bái Jūyì* (*Bái Jūyì jí jiān jiào* 白居易集箋校), annotated by Zhū Jīnchéng 朱金城 (Shanghai: Shànghǎi gǔjí chūbǎnshè, 1988) [hereafter *BJYJJ*], pp. 3520.
[301] *QTW*, 582.5875-1.
[302] *QTW*, 582.5875-1, and reiterated in 582.5875-2.

爭), on the one hand, and contingent circumstances (*shì* 勢), on the other. The latter has been translated in various ways, for example as 'objective conditions' or 'conditions beyond one's control.' It can also refer to "expediency", that is, the willingness to abandon conventional standards or morality to achieve one's aims.[303]

This use of *shì* is clearest in the *Art of War* (*Sūnzǐ Bīngfǎ* 孫子兵法), where the authors urge readers to disregard established playbooks or values. "Avail yourself," the text reads, "of any helpful circumstances over and beyond the ordinary rules, and [be ready to] modify plans according to the favorability of circumstances" [計利以聽，乃為之勢，以佐其外；勢者，因利而制權也].[304] In practical terms, this meant that there were no hard and fast rules of war, no proven or timeless strategies for winning. Just as generals had to be prepared to modify their strategy according to ever-changing circumstances, in a world where the only constant was the existence of conflict, rulers too had to be willing to go over and beyond existing practices and precedents. In this way, the system of investiture reflected nothing more than expediency,[305] hence it was no different from the strategies employed by generals at war.

In the next paragraph, Liǔ Zōngyuán moves on to describe the initial circumstances that brought about the system of investiture. For this, he constructs a primeval moment in the formation of societies as the point of departure of his narrative, and argues that struggling for survival in a hostile environment, men created instruments for defense for the first time in history. As a background to his discussion, he sketched out a vision of the origins and evolution of human

303 For a discussion of the term *shi* see Roger T. Ames, trans., *Sun-Tzu: The Art of Warfare* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), p. 70.

304 *Sūnzǐ Bīngfǎ* 孫子兵法, annotated by Wèi Rǔlín 魏汝霖 (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1988) [hereafter *Sūnzǐ*], p. 64.

305 *QTW*, 582.5875-1-2. On Liǔ Zōngyuán and other Táng writers on the issue of intelligent design, see Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese 'Middle Ages': Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 34-54.

society, in which competition for resources (*zhēng*) ultimately reflected the need of primitive men to survive in the wild, where they had no natural advantage against beasts. Liǔ Zōngyuán's description largely follows that of the Warring States philosopher Xúnzǐ 荀子 (third century BCE). Xúnzǐ's account received much attention in later times as well. The celebrated Hàn dynasty historian Bān Gù 班固 (32–92), also espoused the idea that the earliest human societies were founded on the common need for protection against wild beasts.[306]

In Liǔ Zōngyuán's account, however, the focus swiftly moves from the conflict of man against nature to the enduring problem of man against man. The cultural innovation of artifacts constituted the first cause for contention between human beings [夫假物者必爭].[307] Nature no longer poses a significant threat. The struggle is no longer a matter of survival, but a matter of acquisition of resources. It is this new dynamic that generates the need for political authority to be established. Political authority stems from a common recognition of the individual qualities of the leader, a charismatic figure who attracts the masses with his wisdom, and keeps them in check by means of fear [其智而明者, 所伏必眾; 告之以直而不改, 必痛之而後畏].[308] Thus, the ruler is established to overcome the deleterious and potentially destructive effects of competition among men [由是君長刑政生焉].[309]

According to Liǔ Zōngyuán, however, this resulted in the divisions between groups (*qún* 群), which unleashed a series of unanticipated consequences:

> For this reason, those proximate to each other gathered together as a group, but because of the divisions between groups, the strife between them necessarily became greater. Once

[306] See David McMullen, "Views of the State in Du You and Liu Zongyuan," p. 63.
[307] *QTW*, 582.5875-1.
[308] *QTW*, 582.5875-1.
[309] *QTW*, 582.5875-1.

the strife increased, armies arose. Those among the leaders of the many groups with virtue and large armies were able to make the other leaders follow and take orders from them, thereby causing their followings to be pacified. From this arose the categories of the noble lords and the commanders-in-chief. Yet as a result, the level of strife became still greater. Those with virtue and large followers among the categories of feudal prince and commander-in-chief were able to get the others to follow and take orders from them, which resulted in the pacification of such persons. For this reason, all under Heaven afterwards came to be joined as one.

[故近者聚而為群，群之分，其争必大，大而後有兵。有德又有大者，眾羣之長又就而聽命焉，以安其屬。于是有諸侯之列，則其争又有大者焉。德又大者，諸侯之列又就而聽命焉，以安其封。于是有方伯、連帥之類，則其争又有大者焉。德又大者，方伯、連帥之類又就而聽命焉，以安其人，然後天下會于一][310]

Several points of this passage bear greater discussion. First, Liǔ Zōngyuán offers a model by which to study the development of human civilizations, based on an underlying pattern that allows societies to evolve "from chaos to unity."[311] He saw history as unfolding in response to the interplay of contingent circumstances (*shì*) and strife (*zhēng*), which in turn gave rise to the only two constant elements in human activity, that is, conflict and continuous efforts to resolve conflict.

Second, Liǔ Zōngyuán's intuitions about the "state of nature" in which men of ancient times found themselves also resonate with models found in the works of Western political philosophers, especially Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), who saw the creation of the state as a necessary stage to prevent the war of all men against each other. In both cases, he undisputed sovereignty of a single ruler above all lords and lower chieftains is thus the only partial guarantee

[310] *QTW*, 582.5875-1.
[311] William H. Nienhauser, Jr. et al., *Liu Tsung-yüan* (New York: Twayne, 1973), p. 55.

against the threat that cycles of increased physical violence will annihilate a large part of the population.

Finally, Liǔ Zōngyuán argues that the process of incorporation of groups culminated with the unification of the realm under the mythical rulers of antiquity. He offers a bottom-to-top narrative of the establishment of the sovereign. The point of departure of his socio-historical explanation is the constitution of "groups formed by those who are close" [近者聚而為群]. In this sense, his explanation reverses the top-down directionality presented in several Warring States texts. For example, in the "Shàng tóng 尚同" chapter of the *Mòzǐ* 墨子, Heaven establishes the ruler, the ruler invests the regional lords, and they in turn appoint the officials.[312] Dù Yòu, for his part, also considers the role of Heaven in both giving birth to the masses of people and establishing the ruler and his officials to rule over them [天生烝人，樹君司牧].[313]

Liǔ Zōngyuán's account, by contrast, veers away from the narratives of Heavenly origins of political institutions. In the *Fēngjiàn lùn*, it is human groups responding to contingent conditions that produce the larger political aggregate. Hence, the smaller political units not only predate the formation of the royal domain, but more importantly, they constitute the very foundation upon which the power of the sovereign rests. Since the realm was won with the support of the various territorial lords, it was a sound policy not to alienate those lords by denying them of their fiefdoms. It was for this very reason that neither the sages of antiquity nor the paragon rulers of the past could not dismantle the system of investiture. [蓋以諸侯歸殷者三千焉, 資以黜夏、湯不得而

[312] *Mòzǐ* 墨子 "Shàng tóng shàng 尚同上", edited by Sūn Yíràng 孫詒讓 (1848-1908) and annotated by Sūn Yǐkǎi 孫以楷 (Taipei: Huázhèng shūjú, 1987) [herafter *Mòzǐ*], 3.68.
[313] *TD*, 31.849.

廢; 歸周者八百焉, 資以勝殷, 武王不得而易].[314] Once the *fēngjiàn* system was set in place, those who benefitted from it secured their own interests by promoting the perpetuation of the system.

Liǔ Zōngyuán's description of the process by which the system of investiture came into being has also raised some interesting points of comparison with the stage theories of modern historiography. He understood that the solutions undertaken in response to structural conditions had the effect of transforming the scale of violence and dynamics of history, thereby rendering older institutions obsolete. As he saw it, the more effective a polity was at mediating the play of interest and neutralizing competition, the greater cycles of violence would subsequently be, at least until a ruler is established with the consent of all the parties involved.[315] Based on this perspective, his analysis has been appropriated by historians of China who sought to frame its society's development in terms of predetermined stages. Some historians have even argued that Liǔ Zōngyuán's narrative of the origins of political institutions can be read as an early form of the "social evolutionist" model.[316] However, unlike the teleological fallacies that underpin most modern evolutionist narratives, Liǔ Zōngyuán's essay argues that disparate institutions could arise from the same underlying tension. Moreover, in explaining how specific systems of rule came into being, his account takes into consideration the processes that determined their constitution while highlighting the tensions resulting from their historical application.

In this regard, Liǔ Zōngyuán acknowledged the early success of the Zhōu: "when the Western Zhōu ruled All under Heaven," he writes, "it divided the realm, establishing lords of the five ranks and granting them territories" [周有天下, 裂土田而瓜分之, 設五等, 邦群后].[317] These lords could be "summoned to court for audiences with the king and dispatched to their cities to

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[314] *QTW*, 582.5876-2.
[315] *QTW*, 582.5875-1.
[316] For example, Jo-shui Chen, *Liu Tsung-yüan and Intellectual Change in T'ang China,* p. 96.
[317] *QTW*, 582.5875-2.

protect the realm" [合為朝覲會同, 離為守臣扞城].[318] With time, the Zhōu rulers lost control of the lords, and the system fell into decline once the territorial lords began to challenge– and even, in some cases, usurp – the authority of the central court. Once the "tail became too large for the head," the realm descended into internecine warfare.[319]

The anxiety about the hereditary lords usurping the power of the sovereign has a long tradition in Chinese political thought. In the *Analects*, the Master is reported as saying "when the world is properly governed, then the rituals, the music, and the punitive expeditions are sent forth by the Son of Heaven; when it is not properly governed, then the rituals, the music, and the punitive expeditions proceed from the territorial lords" [天下有道，則禮樂征伐自天子出；天下無道，則禮樂征伐自諸侯出].[320] Liǔ Zōngyuán, for his part, argues for the superiority of the system of prefectures by pointing out that in times of crises, the officials remain loyal to the throne. This was the case during the uprisings that brought an end to the Qín, when "the common people rebelled but none of the officials did" [時則有叛人而無叛吏],[321] and once again during the Rebellion of the Seven Kingdoms in the early Western Hàn [時則有叛國而無叛郡].[322]

Liǔ Zōngyuán's concerns about the possibility of rebellion from the hereditary lords could also be a reflection on more recent history. Although he did not directly experience the trauma of Ān Lùshān's rebellion, the episode was still fresh in the collective memory of mid-Táng elites, and this might have influenced Liǔ Zōngyuán's views on the topic. He implicitly mentions the events that lead to Ān Lùshān's uprising in the following passage:

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318 *QTW*, 582.5875-2.
319 *QTW*, 582.5875-2.
320 *Analects*, 16.2.
321 *QTW*, 582.5875-2.
322 *QTW*, 582.5876-1.

When the Tang dynasty came to power, they set up prefectures and appointed officials in charge of them. This was what was appropriate for the realm. Although there still were some cruel and cunning men who from time to time would rise in revolt and bring harm to the area under their jurisdiction, the faults did not lie in the system of prefectures itself, but in the military governors. During that time, military governors rebelled, but the magistrates did not rebel. Once established, the system of prefectures and counties should not be modified.

[唐興, 制州邑, 立守宰, 此其所以為宜也。然猶桀猾時起, 虐害方域者, 失不在於州而在於兵, 時則有叛將而無叛州。州縣之設, 固不可革也][323]

Several other Táng thinkers writing in the aftermath of the Ān Lùshān rebellion reassessed the historical lessons offered by the centralized model associated with the Qín state. Hán Yù, for one, highlighted the contributions of figures such as Guǎn Zhòng 管仲 and Shāng Yāng 商鞅 who had benefitted their respective states.[324] For his part, Dù Yòu also praised Shāng Yāng's reforms for "enriching the state and strengthening the armies," which established the foundation for the first emperor of Qín to "pacify All under Heaven" [秦自孝公訥商鞅策，富國強兵為務，仕進之途唯闢田與勝敵而已。以至始皇，遂平天下].[325]

Dù Yòu provided his perspectives on historical events and political institutions in the Comprehensive Classic (*Tōngdiǎn* 通典), a monumental compilation that testifies to his knowledge of history and active engagement with governance. The compilation discloses Dù Yòu's personal position in contemporary policy debates. For example, when commenting on the system of investiture, Dù Yòu stated that "while setting up princedoms brings benefits to a single clan, establishing prefectures brings benefits to masses of the people" [建國利一宗，列郡利萬

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323 *QTW*, 582.5876-1.
324 See Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and The T'ang Search for Unity*, p.130.
325 TD, 13.310.

姓].[326] The reason for this is the larger scale and greater complexity of recent polities, which he argues, required adopting new methods of governance. Different methods, however, should follow the "principle of increase and decrease" [of population size] (*sǔnyì zhī lǐ* 損益之理).[327]

According to Dù Yòu, the rulers of earlier dynasties presided over smaller states, which paled in comparison to the scale and complexity of later polities. The Zhōu sovereigns, for example, were able to govern effectively because of the relatively small size of the population. However, Dù Yòu notes, the Zhōu arrangement was ill suited for a populous state like the Táng. Centralized dynasties that had been able to unify the realm counted with larger registered population [漢、隋、大唐，海內統一，人戶滋殖].[328] Thus although it suffered from some inherent flaws (particularly the tendency to produce short-lived regimes), the prefectural system in fact was better adapted for the administrative challenges of the Táng.

Dù Yòu is also critical of previous discussions of the issue of investiture. In noting the shortcomings of earlier participants in the debate, he writes:

> If we analyze the discussions by Cáo [Jiǒng] and Lù [Jī], indeed they can be said to express their writing is of the highest elegance and their reasoning is clear, [yet] they do not take as their root the notion that the ruler is established for the sake of the people, and they do not examine whether the population increases or decreases. If we observe the admonitions of Lǐ [Báiyào] and Mǎ [Zhōu], in fact they can be said to be based on notions of fate, [yet] they are not based on the gains and losses brought forth by the application of the laws nor do they concern themselves with the negative and positive principles of governance. Thus, the saying: "In the end they do not analyze in detail" can be applied to such works!

[326] *TD*, 31.849.
[327] *TD*, 31.849.
[328] *TD*, 31.849

[覽曹、陸著論，誠謂文高理明，不本為人樹君，不稽烝甿損益。觀李、馬陳諫，乃稱冥數素定，不在法度得失，不關政理否臧。故曰「終莫究詳」，斯之謂矣][329]

Moreover, Dù Yòu was convinced that the emperor should occupy the most revered position, while the ministers should aid him in government but always remain humble, just like the trunk, i.e., the emperor, should be strengthened and the branches, i.e., the lords, weakened, so that the people can prosper and the dynasty last for many years. [但立制可久，施教得宜，君尊臣卑，榦強枝弱，致人庶富，享代長遠]. “The way of proper governance,” Dù Yòu concludes, “resides in this!” [為理之道，其在茲乎].[330]

Like Dù Yòu and other supporters of centralized administration, Liǔ Zōngyuán assumed the system had clear advantages, but expressed his reservations when it came to assessing the Qín policies. He notes that despite the fact that the Qín ruler had managed to conquer all under Heaven, the collapsed within a couple of decades. In order to account for the dynasty’s short life, Liǔ Zōngyuán followed the conventional explanation first articulated by Jiǎ Yì in “The Faults of Qín”: this was because it had “conscripted thousands of men and imposed harsh punishments upon the population” [亟役萬人, 暴其威刑, 竭其貨賄],[331] which caused the people to rise against the dynasty.

Furthermore, he notes that the Qín implementation of the *jùnxiàn* system might have been somewhat extreme. In fact, the one of the reasons the system did not work properly was because

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[329] *TD*, 31.850.
[330] *TD*, 31.850.
[331] *QTW*, 582.5875-2.

the Qín central court did not allow enough leeway to its magistrates, so that the decisions that came formulated from the central court had to be applied regardless of local conditions, hence "local magistrates were unable to correct the faults of the system and the provincial governors were unable to manage their jurisdictions properly" [郡邑不得正其制, 守宰不得行其理].[332] It was precisely this lack of autonomy that contributed to the malfunctioning of the system as a whole.

However, as Liǔ Zōngyuán argues, neither the popular uprisings, nor the deficiencies in administration were faults inherent to the system of prefectures [咎在人怨, 非郡邑之制失也].[333] The Qín dynasty's sudden demise had nothing to do with its application of the *jùnxiàn* system, but was caused by alienating the people and restricting the magistrates' autonomy. Whereas the demise of the Zhōu can be explained by examining its system of rule [失在於制, 不在於政, 周事然也], that of the Qín was the result of poor policies [失在於政, 不在於制, 秦事然也].[334] In this regard, Liǔ Zōngyuán offers a clear historical distinction between the excesses in the application of specific policies and the institutional design with which those policies came to be associated.

Liǔ Zōngyuán uses the experience of the Hàn dynasty to further illustrate his point. Early in the dynasty, Hàn Gāozǔ had resorted to investing or merely recognizing the claim of several of his most important supporters as princes of their own states, while the area closest to the capital was made into prefectures and counties and remained under the direct administration of the central court. This dual system, Liǔ Zōngyuán argues, created the conditions for the *de facto* independence of most of the princes.

[332] *QTW*, 582.5876-1.
[333] *QTW*, 582.5875-2.
[334] *QTW*, 582.5876-1.

After the founding of the Han dynasty, the policies of the Son of Heaven were followed in the prefectures, but not in the fiefdoms; He had control over the appointed officials, but did not have control over the princes and territorial lords. Even if the domain of a prince or territorial lord was in utter chaos, He could not replace him; even if the people were suffering, He could not relieve their suffering. Only if the princes or lords were openly in rebellion could the central government dispatch troops to arrest them, and then replace them, or mobilize the army [for full scale war against the rebellious prince or lords] to completely destroy them. But as long as the crime of treason was not obvious, the princes and lords could continue to amass great wealth illegally, abusing their power, or severely harming the people, was there nothing that could be done about this?
[漢興, 天子之政行於郡, 不行於國, 制其守宰, 不制其侯王。侯王雖亂, 不可變也, 國人雖病, 不可除也。及夫大逆不道, 然後掩捕而遷之, 勒兵而夷之耳。大逆未彰, 姦利浚財, 怙勢作威, 大刻於民者, 無如之何?][335]

This paragraph illustrates the twin concerns of consolidating the authority of the emperor and guaranteeing the well-being of the population as the yardsticks with which to measure proper governance. With regards to the first concern, Liǔ Zōngyuán argues that the territorial lords of the Western Hàn did not feel compelled to follow the emperors' commands. In addition, one of the main drawbacks of the *fēngjiàn* system is that since the behavior of the imperial princes and territorial lords is difficult to monitor and assess, they can cause great damage to the people without the court learning about it. Furthermore, if the emperor found out about their transgressions, unless they were severe enough to deserve a severe punishment, all he could do is reprimand the princes in hopes that they would reform themselves. The imperial princes and territorial lords, for their part, could easily feign compliance and carry on as before [譴而導之, 拜受而退已違矣].[336]

[335] *QTW*, 582.5876-1.
[336] *QTW*, 582.5876-2.

However, when the imperial princes' territories were reduced, or they were prohibited from establishing direct contact to prevent collusion between them, then they rose in anger, forming alliances and challenging the imperial armies [下令而削之, 締交合從之謀周於同列, 則相顧裂眦, 勃然而起].[337]

During such times, Liǔ Zōngyuán notes, none of the imperial magistrates joined the rebellions.[338] Granted, in remaining, or at least appearing, loyal to the dynasty, the imperial officials could very well have been merely acting in their own interest. Unlike the territorial lords, the officials were regularly monitored by the central court and they could be promoted or dismissed with relative ease and without a significant cost. Or as Liǔ Zōngyuán succinctly puts it, "if someone is appointed in the morning but then proves to be unfit, he can be dismissed in the evening; if he is honored in the evening and then proves to be lacking, he can be dismissed the following morning" [朝拜而不道, 夕斥之矣; 夕受而 不法, 朝斥之矣].[339]

Liǔ Zōngyuán criticizes the partial implementation of the system of investiture in the early Hàn, and asks whether it would have been better not to invest imperial princes in the first place.[340] Curiously enough, he fails to mention the overall circumstances under which this decision was made. After a prolonged military conflict among the contenders to the throne, he Hàn founder made use of the *fēngjiàn* system to rule a significant part of the realm. The decision was largely determined by the relation of forces after the Hàn conquest. For someone who based his discussion of the development of political institutions in the interplay of *zhēng* and *shì*, to overlook the contingencies faced by Gāozǔ and his successors is quite unusual.

[337] *QTW*, 582.5876-1.
[338] *QTW*, 582.5876-1.
[339] *QTW*, 582.5876-2.
[340] *QTW*, 582.5876-2.

Liŭ Zōngyuán also followed Dù Yòu's idea that the system of investiture brings about larger periods of contestation of power in which the common people were made to suffer. Dù Yòu understood that centralized administration is preferable despite the shorter duration of the dynasties because it causes less disruption at the end.[341] From these experiences, Liŭ Zōngyuán concludes: "the merits of the Qín system can easily be discerned" [秦制之得, 亦以明矣].[342]

In addition, Liŭ Zōngyuán discussion focuses on how each of these two systems of rule can foster public-mindedness and restrain selfish interest. First, he refutes the idea that the invested lords' private interest fosters their responsibility towards the people in their fiefdoms. "Some might say that the invested lords take care of their land as their own possession, and look after the people in their kingdoms as their own children" [或者曰: 封建者, 必私其土, 子其人].[343]

More importantly, he notes that intention has little effect on actual political practice. That is, a system of rule needs to be judged by its effects, not by the stated intentions behind it. In one noteworthy passage, he examines how the system established by the Qín fostered the larger public mindedness, despite the fact that it was intended to serve the private interests of the ruling house.

> When the Qín dynasty abolished the system of investiture and established an impartial system instead, it was done out of selfish motivations: it was to strengthen the power of the emperor and to have everyone in the realm submit to his personal authority. However, the fact is that the realm became a public concern starting with the Qín.
> [秦之所以革之者, 其為制公之大者也; 其情私也, 私其一己之威也, 私其盡臣畜於我也。然而公天下之端自秦始。][344]

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[341] See David McMullen, "Han Yü: An Alternative Picture. Reviewed Work: Han Yü and The T'ang Search for Unity by Charles Hartman," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989), pp. 603–657.
[342] *QTW*, 582.5876-1.
[343] *QTW*, 582.5876-1.
[344] *QTW*, 582.5876-2/5877-1.

Although the concern with public spirit was hardly novel, Táng statecraft thinkers took the discussion to a whole new level. Some even suggested that the imperial treasure was not to be considered the private funds of the ruling family, while others stressed that matters of succession and appointment of the crown prince concerned the realm as a whole.[345]

Another commonly noted outcome of the system of prefectures is that it undermines the hereditary principle. In this respect, Liǔ Zōngyuán noted early in his essay that the reason why positions were made hereditary in the beginnings of the *fēngjiàn* system was because those who had established themselves as lords at various levels of the political hierarchy sought to perpetuate their privilege by bequeathing their position to their descendants [自天子至於里胥, 其德在人者, 死必求其嗣而奉之].[346] The right to hereditary succession can be treated as part of a socially accepted practice, one based in the accumulated merit of the founding figure as well as the popular expectation that the offspring would follow in their predecessors' footsteps. In a later passage, Liǔ Zōngyuán returns to the idea that it was the impulse to preserve the benefits of the state for themselves and their descendants that drove the rulers to implement the hereditary principle. [私其力於己也, 私其衛於子孫也].[347]

Liǔ Zōngyuán returns to the issue of aristocratic privilege in the final paragraph of the "Discussion of the System of Investiture."

> If men of virtue occupy the high positions, and the unworthy are placed below, then good governance and peace can be secured. With the system of investiture, successive generations of hereditary rulers take up the affairs of government. When someone inherits

345 David McMullen, "Views of the State in Du You and Liu Zongyuan," p. 76.
346 *QTW*, 582.5875-1.
347 *QTW*, 582.5875-2.

the administration of government, is it possible to ensure that men of virtue are appointed to high positions? Is it possible to keep unworthy men in lower positions? [使賢者居上, 不肖者居下, 而後可以理安。今夫封建者, 繼世而理。繼世而理者, 上果賢乎? 下果不肖乎?][348]

Again, the juxtaposition is clear, men of worth ought to be honoured and placed above, that is, in charge of governance, whereas the unworthy should be placed below. The twin risks of the system of hereditary rank is that it can maintain unfit men in charge of governance, while it can also prevent able and virtuous men from entering or moving forward in the administrative apparatus. A staunch supporter of the government by the worthy, meaning the application of somewhat impartial procedures to assess individual talent and incorporate capable men to the imperial bureaucracy, Liǔ Zōngyuán supports his arguments in favour of centralized administration with a reference to the recommendation system of the Hàn dynasty.[349]

Liǔ Zōngyuán's concern here resonates with that expressed in Mǎ Zhōu's memorial discussed in the previous chapter; heredity would only function if the quality of the offspring were guaranteed by birth. In the final remark, Liǔ Zōngyuán argues that the system of investiture's flaw of potentially blocking the access of talented men to the bureaucracy, is further proof that it was not the conscious design of the sages.

It should be borne in mind, however, that neither Liǔ Zōngyuán, nor Mǎ Zhōu before him, called into question the legitimacy of intra-family heredity in the imperial succession. Liǔ Zōngyuán himself only went as far to suggest that proper behavior should take precedence over birth rank when choosing the crown prince, but he did not dare oppose the practice of choosing

[348] *QTW*, 582.5877-1.
[349] *QTW*, 582.5876-1-5876-2.

from among the imperial offspring, as long as the emperor had fathered an heir. In this sense, as long as the ministers served the dynasty, it was their duty to assist the ruling family preserve "the altars of the soil and grains."

The Impact of Liǔ Zōngyuán's "Fēngjiàn lùn"

Latter advocates of the system of investiture took Liǔ Zōngyuán's essay as the target of their criticism of the *jùnxiàn* system. For example, In his "Discussing Master Liù's 'On the System of Investiture'" (*Biàn Liùzǐ Fēngjiàn lùn* 辨柳子封建論), the Northern Sòng scholar Hú Yín 胡寅 (1098–1156) notes that while Liǔ Zōngyuán's discussion of the system of investiture blames the hereditary lords for the weakening of the Zhōu, it omits the instances in which the royal house was assisted by the lords. Hú Yín sarcastically remarks that "to focus on these few episodes in order to argue against the system of investiture would be like wishing to eliminate all the shoes in the world after seeing a man who had his feet amputated [as punishment]" [摘取衰亂之一二欲舉封建而廢之是猶見刖者而欲廢天下之屨也][350]

Furthermore, Hú Yín challenges both Liǔ Zōngyuán's notion that the sages did not intend to set up a system of hereditary lords, as well as the assumption that the centrally appointed administrators of the system of prefectures, unlike the hereditary lords, are not prone to rebelling. Hú Yín concludes his critique of Liǔ Zōngyuán with what he considered irrefutable evidence of the superiority of the *fēngjiàn* system, that is, the longevity of the Three Dynasties and the brevity of the Qín and short-life, comparatively speaking, of all subsequent regimes, including the Hàn and Táng. In this regard, Hú Yín focuses on the last rulers of the Xià and Shāng dynasties to

[350] Hú Yín 胡寅 (1098–1156), "Biàn Liùzǐ Fēngjiàn lùn 辨柳子封建論," in Táng Shùnzhī 唐順之 (1507–1560) (comp.), *Bài biān* 稗編 (Taipei: Xīnxīng shūjú, 1972), p. 6276.

suggest that if it hadn't been for Jié and Zhòu, their dynasties would not have fallen. Hú Yín, however, fails to mention anything about the causes of the downfall of the Zhōu or the ensuing conflicts of the Warring States period.[351]

A latter critic of Liǔ Zōngyuán's attitude towards investiture was the famous scholar Wáng Fūzhī 王夫之 (1619–1692). In a commentary to the "Discussion on the System of Investiture" Wáng Fūzhī describes Liǔ Zōngyuán's advocacy of the prefectural system stems from a one-sided point of view. Wáng Fūzhī contends that the territorial lords had been an essential component in the governance of the realm since the earliest times, and that their significance is attested in numerous passages in the classics. More importantly, he claims that neither the territorial lords nor the court appointed magistrates are of much significance. All matters of governance, Wáng Fūzhī argues, stem from the emperor, without whose virtuous rule, neither territorial lords nor appointed magistrates would be able to perform their duties [有聖君有善治, 則諸侯得人, 守令亦得人; 非聖君無善治, 則諸侯不為用, 守令亦不為用].[352]

Concluding remarks

Liǔ Zōngyuán's criticisms of the system of investiture are inscribed into a larger trend amongst mid-Táng thinkers who sought to reassert the authority of the central court against the provincial military governors, on the one hand, and to restore the primacy of the bureaucracy over imperial kin and eunuchs, on the other. His policy recommendation is clear: the prefectural system must be kept in place, and the court should increase the efforts to control the military and improve

[351] *Bài biān,* p.6275-6278.
[352] Liǔ Zōngyuán jí 柳宗元集 (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1979), p. 75.

the mechanisms for the selection and appointment of officials [今國家盡制郡邑, 連置守宰, 其不可變也固矣。善制兵, 謹擇守, 則理平矣].[353]

Liǔ Zōngyuán uses history to discuss contemporary politics. At times it would appear that he misrepresents the evidence at hand to serve his larger argument. For example, in order to challenge the longstanding notion that that dynasties that relied on the investiture of kin were able to preserve their mandate for a longer period of time, he argues that both the Wèi and Jìn dynasties also used the system of investiture, yet did not last for very long [魏之承漢也, 封爵猶建。晉之承魏也, 因循不革。而二姓陵替, 不聞延祚].[354]

As discussed in the previous chapters, there were significant differences in the use of *fēngjiàn* in the early medieval dynasties. While the Wèi founders opted to keep its invested kin under close surveillance and deprive them of any significant administrative or military functions, the Jìn, in contrast, had placed great responsibility and granted enormous autonomy to the imperial kin. However, in Liǔ Zōngyuán defense, we should stress the fact that there was more than one reading of the events of the past among Táng dynasty political thinkers. For example, Xiāo Yǔ argued that the reason why the Wèi and Jìn dynasties collapsed after only a brief period in power was because they had discarded the system of investiture.[355] It is thus, very likely that Táng dynasty thinkers, much like present day historians, made use of the pasts, both remote as well as recent, not as a stable repository of events to be cited, but of narratives to be appropriated and contested.

Perhaps what is most remarkable about Liǔ Zōngyuán's presentation is that it offers a theory of the formation of human societies based on the dynamics of conflict and cooperation under contingent historical circumstances. His comparative analysis of the systems of governance,

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[353] *QTW*, 582.5876-2.
[354] *QTW*, 582.5876-2.
[355] *TD*, 31.867. *THY*, 46.824. Cited in the previous chapter.

although framed as institutional history, still leaves plenty of room for the intervention of specific personalities and the transformation of structures. In sum, Liǔ Zōngyuán's analysis of the system of investiture offers a multi-dimensional and open-ended reading of the development of political institutions.

CHAPTER 5

Epilogue and Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have engaged with medieval Chinese debates on *fēngjiàn and jùnxiàn* in order to show that the two models of territorial administration continued to exist as models of virtuous governance throughout much of the imperial period. Certainly, many thinkers assumed that the institutions of the centralized state would foster unity against the impending danger of secession posed by the territorial lords, but this was never a hegemonic view. Instead of attempting to find the establishment of a form of orthodoxy of the state formation or a shift in paradigm, I approached these debates as historically-informed polemics between politically engaged scholars. I focused on the rhetorical strategies, the use of historical figures and the underlying moral choices that medieval statecraft thinkers employed in their discussions of each system, to show that the polar model actually left enough room for disagreement.

This final chapter argues that that the positions articulated in medieval debates on *fēngjiàn and jùnxiàn* became almost mandatory reference for scholars discussing the proper administrative structure for the empire in later periods. For this, I will provide an overview of the continuity and importance of these earlier debates in later imperial discourses on proper governance.

Discussions of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* in later dynasties

According to Jaeyoon Song, several Northern Sòng "intellectual leaders," including Sū Shì, Sīmǎ Guāng, Fàn Zǔyǔ 範祖禹 (1041–1098) and Wáng Ānshí agreed with Liǔ Zōngyuán's idea

that the system of investiture was the result of historical contingency, and that the *jùnxiàn* system provided a much better model to rule the realm.[356] By contrast, scholars in the Southern Sòng produced extensive and elaborate refutations of Liǔ Zōngyuán's arguments. Zhū Xī, for one assumed that the ways of the ancient past were morally superior and could be revived to help bring order and transform the customs of his own time. Jaeyoon Song focuses on the contrast between these two moments to argue that it represents a "fundamental shift of paradigm in Southern Song political thinking."[357]

Jaeyoon Song brings sufficient evidence to support his claim that voices in support of the *fēngjiàn* system became all the more pervasive in the Southern Sòng, and his suggestion that this was related to larger intellectual changes in the elite.[358] Although I will not call into question the carefully researched argument, I would propose that the repeated arguments in favor of *fēngjiàn* in the Southern Sòng point to the continuity of the *jùnxiàn* principles in policy-making and political discourse. Among the Southern Sòng scholars, some continued to argue in favor of a mixed system that would allow for both central control and relative autonomy of the invested lords. Luó Bì 羅泌 (1131–1189), for example, argued for a system with more and smaller states, with each with a high degree of autonomy.[359]

This debate continued into the late imperial period, especially in the works of three of its most influential thinkers: Huáng Zōngxī 黄宗羲 (1610–1695), Wáng Fūzhī 王夫之 (1619–1692), and Gù Yánwǔ 顾炎武 (1613–1682), who often proposed a form of compromise between both

[356] Jaeyoon Song, "Shifting Paradigms in Theories of Government," p. 210.
[357] Jaeyoon Song, "Shifting Paradigms in Theories of Government," p. 337.
[358] "Unlike their Northern Song counterparts, Southern Song intellectuals unflinchingly talked of fengjian ideals." Jaeyoon Song, "Shifting Paradigms in Theories of Government," p. 312.
[359] See Lien-sheng Yang, "Ming Local Administration," in Charles O. Hucker (ed.), *Chinese Government in Ming Times: Seven Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 9.

models. Gù Yánwǔ, for one, argued that both the system of investiture and the imperial system presented significant problems, the former granting too much power to the lords and the latter concentrating all power in the emperor. Gù Yánwǔ particularly focused on the mecahnisms of surveillance and rotation of officials, which he saw as an unnecessary, even counterproductive, measure limiting the autonomy of the imperial magistrates.[360] For his part, Wáng Fūzhī, undermined Liǔ Zōngyuán's arguments in favor of the *jùnxiàn* system simply by stating that the only guarantee of good governance is a virtuous and vigilant emperor, and that the administrative system had little impact on the lives of the common people. Finally, Huáng Zōngxī argued for the combination of highly autonomous domains in the periphery and prefectures under centrally appointed, rotating officials in the areas closer to the court.[361]

Fēngjiàn and *jùnxiàn* in modern political discourse

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term *fēngjiàn* came to designate both a context-specific institution that existed since before the Zhōu dynasty until the early twentieth century, as well as a translation for the European term *feudalism* in Chinese historiography. In the former sense, it becomes a marker of institutional practices by which the sovereign granted territories to local lords for their administration; in the latter sense, it represented both the cluster of political institutions and relations of production in the European historical experience, as well as a preconceived stage of development in Marxist and other historiographies with pretensions of universal applicability.

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[360] See Miranda Brown. "Returning the Gaze," p. 64. Also John Delury," Gu Yanwu's Mixed Model and the Problem of Two Despotisms," *Late Imperial China* 34.1 (2013), pp. 1–27.

[361] See Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince. Huang Tsung-hsi's Ming-i Tai-fang lu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 51.

Japanese scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also grappled with the problem of *fēngjiàn* in Chinese history. For many of them, the question was both historiographical as well as political, since the thesis that China had remained stagnant for the past millennium would serve to legitimize Japan imperialism as the sole harbinger of modernity in Asia. The divisions among Japanese schools on this matter nurtured some of the most elaborate works in the study of Chinese elites of the medieval period.[362]

Beyond its contested meanings in academic circles, another significant shifts in the discourse of *fēngjiàn* in late imperial China was its use to represent forms of local autonomy associated with the provincial assemblies. Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century were able to articulate their demands for loosening the central control of the Manchu court by reference to the system of local lords of earlier times.

One of the most interesting interpretations was that provided by the famous Chinese reformist Kāng Yǒuwéi 康有為 (1858–1927), who asserted that *fēngjiàn* should be understood as a set of political institutions based on local autonomy that existed in China's earliest dynasties and that the officials were often responsive to local interests more than they were to directives from the central court.[363] For his part, Huáng Zūnxiàn 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), another important intellectual figure of the early twentieth century, advocated for a system of local self-governance that would foster public-mindedness from the village to the national levels.[364] Finally, Zhāng

[362] For a summary of these discussions, see Noriko Kamachi, "Feudalism or Absolute Monarchism? Japanese Discourse on the Nature of the State and Society in Late Imperial China," *Modern China* 16.3 (1990), pp.330–370. Also Féng Tiānyú, ""*Fēngjiàn" kǎolùn*," pp. 164–185.
[363] See Viren Murthy, "The Politics of Fengjian in Late-Qing and Early Republican China" in Kai-Wing Chow et al. (eds.), *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008), p.151–182.
[364] Murata Yūjirō, "Dynasty, State, and Society: the Case of Modern China", in Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow (eds.), *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890–1920* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p. 129.

Shìzhāo 章士釗 (1885–1973) offered a more sophisticated interpretation of the potentialities of local self-rule to discuss the need to found political participation in the actions of local talent during the early Republican period.[365] All of them made reference to China's long history of *fēngjiàn* as a historical experience that could be appropriated to push forward a decentralizing agenda of political reform.

Revolutionary intellectuals, for their part, presented *fēngjiàn* in a very different light. Chén Dúxiù 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), for example, attacked the *fēngjiàn* system as inimical to the interests of the majority of the population.[366] In the ensuing decades, Marxist historians in China were trying to fit the Chinese experiences of *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* into the universal five-stage scheme of societal development of orthodox Marxism. Once these scholars accepted the teleological framework of Marxist historiography, it became necessary to translate local concepts and experiences and find their place in this normative model. Many scholars were convinced that China had undergone a feudal stage, they disagreed, however, in the precise chronological markers of its transitions. In this context, delimiting the period when "feudalism" existed in China was of primary political importance, it required strenuous intellectual efforts and became the point of contention in many heated debates. In what would become the officially sanctioned view of China's development, historian Guō Mòruò 郭沫若 (1892–1978) was the first one to propose that China had gone from a slave society to a feudal organization in the Western Zhōu.[367] The fact that the early imperial Chinese rulers replaced a system based on hereditary privilege for one in which the

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[365] For a full discussion of Zhāng Shìzhāo's views on local governance, see Leigh K. Jenco, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.176–185.
[366] Viren Murthy, "The Politics of Fengjian in Late-Qing and Early Republican China," p.172.
[367] Arif Dirlik, "The Universalization of a concept: 'feudalism' to 'Feudalism' in Chinese Marxist Historiography", in T.J. Byres and Harbans Mukhia (eds.), *Feudalism and non-European Societies* (London: Frank Cass, 1985), p. 207.

realm was administered by court-appointed officials was seen by some as an early, albeit incomplete, superseding of the feudal stage of development.[368]

It is worth noting that stage theory is not a pitfall exclusive to Chinese Marxist historiography of the twentieth century. In a more recent years, historian John E. Schrecker has discussed *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* as subsequent eras in Chinese history. In his monograph, he presents a brief overview of the imperial period by describing the situation of the early Hàn as the result of an incomplete transition from *fēngjiàn* to *jùnxiàn*, one in which the resistance to the centralizing efforts of the Qín was made possible because "*fēngjiàn* values were still deeply held in society."[369] Besides several inconsistencies and historical inaccuracies in his analysis, the fundamental flaw of this work is the assumption that the two terms can be correlated with specific periods in Chinese history; namely, a "*fēngjiàn* era" dating from the Hàn to the Táng, and a "*jùnxiàn* era" from Sòng to Qīng. His description of the latter is worth quoting in full;

> Overall, in the junxian era, China had a centralized government with no competing political units. The elite was of wealth or talent and not of birth. Families moved up and down the social hierarchy, and class lines grew vague. Education and political sophistication spread, and the population at large played an important role in politics. The economy rested on private enterprise, and values were comparatively civilian and humanistic.[370]

Concluding remarks

In this dissertation, I have argued that *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* were not just systems of governance that existed in a specific periods of Chinese history, but integral aspect of discourses

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[368] For a summary of accounts on Qín centralization as a superior stage of historical development see Luó Xiānwén 罗先文 "近 20 年来秦汉分封制与郡县制讨论综述" in *Journal of Xiangtan Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, Vol. 24 No. 5 (2002).
[369] John E. Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), p. 33.
[370] John E. Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective*, p. 41.

of proper governance throughout the imperial period and beyond. The medieval discussions on these two systems were only the point of departure to a larger debate that incorporated ideas about the morality of government institutions and practices, about the social transformations and historical contingencies that conditioned the functioning of these systems, and of the more concrete aspects of rule, such as the administrative division of the territory or the mechanisms for the selection of officials. I have read these enduring debates not as signs as intellectual stagnation, but as a shared language used by political theorists of imperial China across the centuries. No doubt, much additional research is necessary to present a complete account of all the participants in the debate, and the many nuances that a wider corpus would surely bring to our attention. However, I stand confident that this exploration of medieval Chinese debates on *fēngjiàn* and *jùnxiàn* will serve to correct some of the unwarranted assumptions about the ideological hegemony of the centralized state in Chinese history.

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