Traditional Chinese Political Culture

MA seminar # 46828, 2020/21 (Thursday, 8:30, room 2705)
Prof. Yuri Pines (yuri.pines@mail.huji.ac.il)
(Office 6145; office hours Monday 11:30-12:30, by pre-appointment)
This course is supported by Moodle2 https://moodle2.cs.huji.ac.il/nu18/

Chinese empire was an exceptionally durable political structure. How was this durability achieved? What were the advantages and disadvantages of traditional Chinese political system? The seminar analyzes the empire’s functioning modes, comparing them, when appropriate, to those of other major continental Eurasian empires. The course explores Chinese political culture, including ideals and values that shaped the behavior of major political actors, and the actualization of these ideals and values in everyday political life. The discussion is not confined to a single period and the student is expected to have a basic knowledge of Chinese history from the Shang to the end of the imperial period.

Students’ requirements: a) active participation in the classroom discussions (50% of the final grade); b) reading relevant materials before every class; c) oral presentation and a short book report from the list below (an alternative book is possible: please consult with me; 25%); d) a final book report or a short essay (25%). Students who submit a seminar paper must have the topic of the seminar paper approved no later than April 11, 2021.

The book that may help you to prepare for some of the discussions (and on which parts of this seminar are built) is: Yuri Pines, The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy (Princeton University Press, 2012) (e-resource in the library). Most reading materials (excluding those for the book reports) are scanned on the Moodle.

Students without background in Chinese history are requested to contact me in advance and consult about extra reading materials.

A. Introduction


B. Intellectual foundations of Chinese political culture


   Lunyu, tr. Dim-Cheuk Lau or Ted Slingerland, chapters 1, 4, 8, 12, 17-18
   Mencius, tr. D.C. Lau, chapters 1A, 3B, 4A
Xunzi, tr. Eric Hutton, chapters 8-9 [first part], pp. 52-77
* Note: multiple translations are available (the Hebrew translations are on the Moodle as well). You are most welcome to read the texts in the original.

3. **November 5**: Alternatives to morality in politics. Empowering the ruler and the state (“Legalism”) and questioning the guiding values (“Daoism”)

   * Laozi (trans. D.C. Lau or any good alternative)
   * Zhuangzi, chapters 2 (齊物論), 10 (胠篋), 17 (秋水) (trans. A.C. Graham or any good alternative)
   * Note: multiple translations are available (the Hebrew translations are on the Moodle as well). You are most welcome to read the texts in the original.

C. **Fundamental principles: Unity and Monarchism**

4. **November 12**: The “Great Unity” Principle

   Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire*, Chapter 1, “The Ideal of Great Unity,” pp 11-43 (of which pp. 32-37 to be discussed in the next class)

5. **November 19**: Limits of All-under-Heaven: Real and Imagined Unity


6. **November 26**: The Monarch is above all 王者至上: Ideology of Monarchism

   Sima Guang 司馬光, introductory comments in 資治通鑑 1.1 (draft translations into English and Hebrew are on the Moodle)
   Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance* (Yale, 1981), 1-41 and 95-103.

7. **December 3**: Sages and Mediocrities: The monarch’s qualifications

D. The Empire of the Bureaucrats?

8. December 10: “Yes, Your Majesty.” Ministers vs. the Ruler

Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance*, 49-79; 88-93

9. December 17: Loyalty to whom? The dilemmas of zhong 忠

Wang Cheng-main [Chengmian], *The Life and Career of Hung Ch'eng-ch'ou, 1593-1665: Public Service in a Time of Dynastic Change* (Ann Arbor, 1999), 1-10 and 241-252

*Book Report:*

10. December 24: Cliques and “Parties” 党: Officials’ Malady or Merit?


*Book Report (studies of Donglin 東林 movement):*

E. Far from the Emperor’s Eyes: The power of local elites

11. December 31: Local elites: The sources of their durability


*Book Report:*

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12. **January 6**: Kinship groups: the source of the elites’ societal power


**Book Report:**


13. **January 13**: “The father is the most respected” 父權至尊: family values and domestic tyranny

*A Dream of Read Mansions*, ch. 33.

Mark Elvin, “Female Virtue and State in China,” rpt. in idem, *Another History* (Sydney 1996), 302-351.


**Book Report:**


**Preliminary Summary: The Empire's Durability Revisited**

14. **January 20**: The orthodox values 三綱五常 and their price


**Book Report:**


**F. Meritocracy or Elite Reproduction: The Examination System**

15. **March 18**: How to become a junzi? Selection and Examinations

Sima Guang 司馬光 on junzi 君子 and xiaoren 小人 (臣光曰 in 資治通鑑 1.2)

Wu Ching-tzu (Wu Jingzi), *The Scholars*, ch. 3

16. April 8: The empire of the text: the examinations’ content as political weapon


**Book Report:**
Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, 2000)

G. “Good iron doesn't make nails”: China’s Military

17. April 22: China’s strategic quagmire and Chinese military thought

Li Hua 李華, “Ancient battlefield” 历古戰場 (Hebrew or English+Chinese on the Moodle)
Sunzi (Sawyer or other translation; Hebrew on the moodle), chapters 1-3, 11

**Book Report:**

18. April 29: Military personnel and their changing social status

Ban Gu, “The Biography of Li Guang,” in Burton Watson, tr., *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China* (NYC 1974), 12-33 and 45
Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance*, 156-188

H. “We and Them”: Myths and Reality of Pre-modern Chinese “Nationalism”

19. May 6: “Human face and beast’s heart”? Perceptions of the Other


**Book Report:**
20. May 13: Alien occupants, Chinese collaborators, and the question of “Sinification”


Book Report: (Debates about the Sinification of the Manchus)
Evelyn S. Rawski, “Presidential address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” Journal of Asian Studies, 55.4 (1996), 829-850
Pamela K. Crossley, A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology (Berkeley, 1999), pp. 1-52

I. Should the Monk bow to the Emperor? State and Religion in China


Book Report:
Valerie Hansen, Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276 (Princeton, 1990)

22. May 27: Organized Religion: Taming its Challenges

Timothy Brook, “At the Margin of Public Authority: The Ming State and Buddhism,” in idem, Chinese State in Ming Society (London and NY, 2006), 139-158.

Book Report:

J. Feeding the People: Economic Management

23. June 3: State and Economy: Macro questions
Peter C. Perdue, Exhausting the Earth: State and Peasant in Hunan, 1500-1850 (Harvard, 1987), 1-24; 234-252

**Book Report** (Two books compared)

Pierre-Etienne Will, Bureaucracy and Famine in Eighteenth-century China (Stanford, 1990)

Richard Von Glahn, Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000-1700 (Berkeley, 1996)

**24. June 10:** Reforms and their Opponents: The recurrent cycle?

*Salt and Iron Debates 發鐵論, chapters 1-2 (Gale's translation or Hebrew translation on the Moodle)*


**Book Report**


**K. Rebellion and its Cooptation: Taming 亂**

**25 June 17:** “The least revolutionary and the most rebellious of all nations”.

Dynamics of popular rebellions


**Book Report:**


**26 June 24:** “Revolutionary violence of the masses” in historical perspective


Howard S. Levy, trans., Biography of Huang Ch’ao (1955), 1-7; 26-45.

Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong [supposed authors], Outlaws of the Marsh (Shui hu zhuang 水滸傳), trans. by Sidney Shapiro (Bloomington, 1981), chps. 27-31
Summary: The Tyranny of History?

27. June 29 (Tuesday, taught as Thursday): China’s imperial longevity: image, reality, and historical verdict

Reading TBA