

Traditions of Political Dissent in Tang China

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Introduction

There is a paradox in the scholarly literature about the Tang dynasty.¹ Recently-renewed emphasis on the traditional image of the Tang as a high point in China's long history is one element in this paradox. There has even been a recent government-initiated scholarly enquiry as to how the Tang managed to attain its level of sophistication and effectiveness, at a time when Europe at least was in turmoil. In this connection, the words "open" or "vigorous" have often been applied to Tang society. The Tang was xenophile; its social climate was less restrictive than those of later periods. The position of women was freer than it was later to become. There was remarkable diversity in the religious landscape. The Tang was also a time of great administrative achievements, when the core structure of a governmental system that was to last for the rest of the imperial era was laid down.

Yet, and this is the second element in the paradox, the Tang dynasty has generally not been noted for its political philosophy. Denis Twitchett has reminded us that Xiao Gongquan's 蕭公權 *History of Chinese Political Thought* (*Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiang shi* 中國政治思想史) moves straight from the pre-Tang teacher Wang Tong 王通 (584–618) to the generation of Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), from the eve of the foundation of the dynasty to the early ninth century, nearly two centuries later.² Thus by implication the great period in Tang history, the early and mid-eighth century,

¹ The text that follows is an adapted version of a lecture jointly organized by the Institute of Chinese Studies and the Department of History given at the Institute of Chinese Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong on 19 March, 2004. I wish to thank especially Professor Billy So, Chairman of the History Department, not only for arranging this occasion but also for his comments on the lecture. I have hardly been able to do them justice in the text that follows.

² Denis Twitchett, "The *Ch'en Kuei* and Other Works Attributed to Empress Wu Tse-t'ien," *Asia Major*, Third Series, forthcoming; see also Xiao Gongquan, *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiang shi* (Taipei: Zhonghua Wenhua chubanshiye weiyuanhui, 1954), pp. 404–22. Xiao reserves a brief discussion in the following section, pp. 423–26, to the Daoist-coloured essays of Yuan Jie 元結 (719–772); see below at note 184.

resulted in no innovation in political thought of any interest. Similarly, historians or political scientists, focusing on late dynastic China and reviewing imperial government up to that time, have not located any notably important developments in political ideology in the Tang period.

If this was so, then what were well educated men involved in government, the “guardians and critics” that Frederick Wakeman characterized,³ or the “moral-intellectual virtuosi” of a recent lecture by Thomas Metzger,⁴ thinking in this remarkable period of success? What accounts for this apparent silence? Was the Tang political as well as social climate tolerant of dissent in a way comparable to Tang social attitudes generally? Or did the more powerful emperors of the period repress dissent as did those of some later regimes, such as the early Ming? If their political power was inhibited, to what extent and how? Are some political scientists and historians justified in implying that the Tang dynasty was uncreative in an overall characterization of political ideology in dynastic China? Is the remark of a well respected historian of the Song dynasty (960–1279) that implicitly justifies comparing remonstrators to “the functioning of a loyal opposition” acceptable with reference to the Tang?⁵ Was political activity so well established in the Kaiyuan 開元 (713–742) and Tianbao 天寶 (742–756) periods that the system did indeed, as another highly respected scholar characterized it, function “with resemblances to the situation in a parliamentary system?”⁶ This essay will attempt to characterize the Tang tradition of political dissent, its institutional basis, its themes and degree of openness. It will make a broad distinction between remonstrance, criticism of discrete issues made without general threat to preservation of the status quo, and more radical protest, in which criticism is more comprehensive and if followed up would involve extensive revision of the status quo.

Any attempt undertake this task clearly will be grounded only partly in formal political-philosophical writings of the kind that furnished Xiao Gongquan’s outline of Tang political thought. A proposition of this essay is that to give a rounded account of the Tang tradition of political dissent, to tell the story as it was, it is necessary to go beyond such formal discourse and examine the working political system. The “tutelary narration” of official accounts of the political system has to be deconstructed. Distinctions that would not have been meaningful to Tang scholar-officials have to be set aside. Prescriptive political writings, such as the hand-books on emperorship produced early in the dynasty, the official

³ Frederick Wakeman, Jr., “The Price of Autonomy: Intellectuals in Ming and Ch’ing Politics,” *Daedalus* 101, no. 2 (Spring 1972), pp. 35–70.

⁴ Thomas Metzger, “The Western Concept of the Civil Society in the Context of Chinese History,” in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 212.

⁵ James T. C. Liu, ed., *Political Institutions in Traditional China: Major Issues* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), p. 114. But cf. the remarks of Ch’ien Mu, *Traditional Government in Imperial China: A Critical Analysis*, trans. Chun-tu Hsueh and George O. Totten (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1982), p. 75.

⁶ Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The Background to the Rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 49.

institutional compendia and codes, the historical narrative and the many individual writings preserved by officials keen to record their own participation in the political process have to be drawn on. Above all, account must be taken of memorials of remonstrance, which so often refer to political ideals, and of the tradition that lies behind them.

Approaching this wide range of documentation, it would be wrong to have unrealistic expectations, for all the vaunted achievements of the Tang. The basic character of Tang government suggests that any dramatic extension of political discourse in practice would be unlikely. The Tang dynasty governed on a truly enormous scale. The population of the Tang empire has been estimated at between fifty and seventy million, and it was overwhelmingly engaged in agriculture, in a near subsistence level struggle to live.⁷ The distances involved and the diversity of terrains and of peoples are again amazing. But this great empire was governed by a surprisingly small élite. The corps of civil officials has been estimated at 19,000, of whom perhaps two thousand served in capital posts, the clerical staff working under them at about 50,000. Administration was largely run through paper records. But any attempt to estimate the extent of literacy in society beyond this élite is fraught with difficulty. Though literacy itself increased over the three centuries of Tang rule, the percentage of those who had effective access to the political process by virtue not just of literacy but of the right kind of education remained tiny. To take part effectively in the political process a member of the élite needed command of the five classics and of historical precedent, of a well defined “memorization corpus”⁸ or access to the “community of memory.”⁹ The politically active community therefore remained very small. For most of the three centuries of Tang rule, it was centred mainly on the capital.

A broad brush comparison with the Qing (1644–1911) may be instructive: for then “a governmental complex made up of some 3–4 million persons ranging from officials to clerks, soldiers and licensed monopoly merchants was trying to deal with a population of 3–400 million.”¹⁰ There is a quantum difference also in the amount of source material: for the Qing, the number of writers with extant collections has been estimated at 1,700;¹¹ for the Tang, the number listed in the survey of Tang prose sources by Hiraoka Takeo 平岡武夫 in *Tōdai no sambun sakuhin* 唐代散文作品 is 83, with most of these small and reconstituted from general anthologies.¹² A more recent listing, including both prose and verse, has 108.¹³ Under the Tang, moreover, the Song and post-Song tendency to concentrate intellectual, educational and other organizational energies on local communities had not

⁷ The poverty of the great mass of the population was characterized at the time; see e.g. Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956, hereafter *ZZTJ*), 207, p. 6571, memorial by Li Jiao 李嶠, dated 704.

⁸ Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 236–40.

⁹ Metzger, “Civil Society,” p. 207, quoting Robert N. Bellah.

¹⁰ Metzger, “Civil Society,” pp. 217–18.

¹¹ Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual*, rev. and enl. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), p. 951.

¹² Hiraoka Takeo, ed., *Tōdai no sambun sakuhin* (Kyōto: Jimbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo, 1960), pp. 4–9.

¹³ Wan Man 萬曼, *Tang ji xu lu* 唐集敘錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980).

gained momentum. The intellectual community, resident at the capital, was focused on the emperor and on the apex of the hierarchy over which he presided.

Especially in the second half of the Tang dynasty, a political community evolved in which opinions on the origin, purpose and performance of government were rehearsed. The assessments of this community were referred to very often in political debate, by terms such as *gong yi* 公議, *gong lun* 公論, *shi yi* 時議, *wu lun* 物論, or *gong wang* 公望. But this community seems to have been, in so far as it is possible to tell, virtually coextensive with the community of officials, or as another political scientist referring to both traditional and modern China has suggested, “coterminous with government”¹⁴ and it also had as much a “top-down vision of politics and agency”¹⁵ as those who delivered opinions *ex officio*. Certainly no less than in other periods of Chinese history, there was “basically no form of social coalescence outside of the imperial chain of command that was both legally and politically articulate.”¹⁶ There was no larger social or intellectual hinterland where alternative ideologies might have begun to take root, next to “no influence by citizens or nongovernmental élites.”¹⁷

The people, *a priori* a likely source for dissenting views, were prominent as a topic in political discussions from the start of the dynasty until its close. Personal experience of popular conditions was extolled as an advantage, in the two emperors whom the “tutelary narration” most clearly identified with open government and political success, Taizong,¹⁸ and Xuanzong.¹⁹ Popular disaffection, not in the abstract but as the result of specific government demands, was frequently represented as a crucial issue in the dynastic narrative. It might be attributed to excessive labour requirements, the failure of military campaigns to yield anticipated rewards, or extortionate and irregular taxation. The desirability of gaining

¹⁴ Lucian W. Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), p. 14.

¹⁵ Metzger, “Civil Society,” p. 211.

¹⁶ Metzger, “Civil Society,” p. 215.

¹⁷ Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*, p. 13.

¹⁸ *Tang hui yao* 唐會要 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955, hereafter *THY*), 52, p. 911, memorial of Cui Zhi 崔植, dated 821: “Rulers who in early ages established dynasties mostly rose from the common people, and they knew the sufferings of the people. When first they inherited the great enterprise [of dynastic rule], they were all able to be energetic and attentive to detail. Taizong in addition was endowed with the resources of the early sages. . . .” For Taizong’s own concern for the common people, see e.g. *ZZTJ*, 194, p. 6104, “When I was eighteen years of age, I was still among the people. There was nothing of the people’s sufferings and the truth or falsehood of them that I did not know. When I came to take my place on the great throne, and settle in detail the concerns of the world, I still made errors. How much more will this be true of the crown prince, born and growing up deep in the palace. The hardships of the common people are not what his ears and eyes have encountered. Can he be without arrogance or indolence?”

¹⁹ *THY*, 52, p. 911, memorial by Cui Qun 崔群, dated 819: “Xuanzong was born and grew up among the people and in person braved hardships. Hence early on his accession he knew the sufferings of the people and personally showed compassion over the many administrative tasks.” For Xuanzong’s own concern for the common people, see *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 3, pp. 27, 38–39.

popular support, or the achievement of having done so, by more positive means, such as for example a moderate penal code, was also recognized. But the view was again essentially “top-down” or paternalistic, the common people were seen in moral terms, either as a source of occasional moral insight about government that they could not themselves represent to high authority or else as a morally unsatisfactory body awaiting “transformation.” In both cases they were components of rather than participants in the polity. Any organization that made claims on or rivalled the government, as did the Buddhist church in economic terms, was likely to be restricted or suppressed.

In another strand in Tang political ideology, the world away from the capital, especially that of “mountains and forests” was considered morally purer than the capital or than prefectural seats of government. The critical opinions of members of the élite “drawn from the hills and forests” was sometimes greatly respected. Recluses were summoned from the mountains and directly appointed to posts, sometimes to those which carried the duty of remonstrance. Here they became, usually only briefly, high profile examples among the “moral virtuosi” at the capital. Zhang Hao 張鎬 in the reign of Xuanzong (r. 712–756), promoted from commoner status on the recommendation of an omissioner to be himself an omissioner, and later a chief minister, is one example;²⁰ Yuan Jie was summoned to court, first by Xuanzong in 758, when the summons did not reach him, and then by Suzong (r. 756–762) in 759. His review of the military and political situation led the emperor to state, “You have broken my depression.”²¹ Another, who became a cause celebre in 795, in the claustrophobic climate of Dezong’s (r. 779–805) later years, was Yang Cheng 陽城 (d. 805).²² Li Bo 李渤 (773–831) under Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 805–820), a prolific critic of policy who submitted over 45 memorials despite holding office only in the duplicate administration at Luoyang, was another summoned from seclusion.²³ Li Bo was an acquaintance of Han Yu, as was Lu Tong 盧仝 (d. 835), who “was twice summoned to be a monitory official but did not stir.”²⁴

The small size of this governing élite, and the fact that in turn an even smaller number were effective participators in the political process, was an important factor relating to the tradition of dissent. It had the effect of producing an ongoing information crisis. It forced the apex of the state to concern itself with sources of information outside the regular chain of command, simply because that chain of command was too thin to be effective in monitoring the real state of both the administration and the people. The fact that the emperor needed to

²⁰ *Taiping yu lan* 太平御覽 (reprint of Song dynasty facsimile ed., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, hereafter *TPYL*), 223, p. 8b; cf. *JTS*, 111, p. 3326, biography of Zhang Hao.

²¹ *Yuan Cishan ji* 元次山集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), Appendix 2, grave stele text composed by Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿; Sun Wang 孫望, *Yuan Cishan nianpu* 元次山年譜 (Shanghai: Gudian Wenxue chubanshe, 1957), pp. 34–35, 38–39.

²² *JTS*, 192, pp. 5132–34, and note 177 below.

²³ *JTS*, 171, p. 4437, biography of Li Bo.

²⁴ *Han Changli shi xi nian jishi* 韓昌黎詩繫年集釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1984), 7, p. 782; see also Hartman, *Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity*, pp. 72–73.

mediate between competing interests in order to maintain his position made it especially important that he should listen to the individual remonstrator. As Taizong remarked, "I wish only that the true man should correct and remonstrate, wishing to have it that my ears and eyes connect with the outside, so that below there are no grievances or blockages."²⁵ A century and a half later, Dezong stated when acknowledging a work of remonstrator, "One mind cannot alone survey; a single eye cannot look all round."²⁶ Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), arguing that all the provisions that the Tang had set up for representing critical opinion to the emperor should be respected, and in the context of a plea that all sectors of society, including craftsmen and merchants, scholars and commoners, should be listened to, put it as follows:

If the son of heaven listens only with his own two ears, looks with only his own two eyes and ponders with his own mind alone, then he will be unable to hear beyond ten paces, or to see beyond a hundred paces, and beyond his palaces he will have no knowledge. How much more is this so, given the great extent of all within the four seas and the complexity of the ten thousand operations?²⁷

Even more than the Qing, therefore, the Tang, by virtue of its small size and limited administrative reach, was an "inhibited political centre."²⁸ By the mid-eighth century times, moreover, the dynasty had lost the control that it had inherited from the northern dynasties, through census and registration provisions, over its population. At the same time, the political centre was the locus for the highest ideals, and administration was seen overwhelmingly as a moral rather than technical operation. The emperor was represented in hyperbolic terms as discharging a beneficent cosmic role. But the educated élite had a strong interest in indicating that he was not in fact perfect or omniscient, that he could not govern on his own. Since the state had not attained utopia and since it was "corrigible," it needed systems for representing critical opinion from those qualified to give it. Thus, like the emperor himself, middle and lower rank officials were also in favour of access to the throne. The élite's role as the conscience of the polity was therefore indeed that of both guardian and critic, and it subsumed a number of elements: knowledge of canonical authority and of historical precedent, of the "memorization corpus;" control of moral rhetoric; a sense of what the community at the capital believed; and knowledge of and paternalistic sympathy for popular conditions beyond the capital.

The accepted perspective on Tang political thought, to resume, sees the period of the dynasty's greatest success as one in which the governing élite did not formulate new political ideas. The Tang, in this view, was not exceptional in the longer perspective and may safely be included in generalizations about the political culture of dynastic China. Behind this too lies the fact that the Tang were not heirs to the enormous diversity that, for example, the

²⁵ Wu Jing 吳兢, comp., *Zhenguan zheng yao* 貞觀政要 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1978), 2, p. 52.

²⁶ *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, hereafter *JTS*), 144, p. 3922.

²⁷ *Bai Juyi ji* 白居易集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 65, p. 1371, "Celin 策林" 70; see also the review of the Tang history of remonstrator Bai gave in 64, p. 1334, "Celin" 36.

²⁸ Metzger, "Civil Society," pp. 217–18.

European renaissance inherited from the classical Greek world, and that they inherited a tradition in which there was only one governmental system, that of the imperial dynastic state. Ideological variation within this model was relatively slight. Three poles were characterized: between Confucian ideals, with their stress on moral absolutes, and Legalism with its inbuilt amorality; between Daoist non-interventionist and Confucian interventionist attitudes to administration; and between conservative reflexes and a willingness to recognize and adapt to change. The great universal Indian religion of Buddhism, all pervasive in the China of the Tang dynasty, affected both views of history and governmental ideals; but the wealth and power of the Buddhist church led it to be as much a source of tension with as of influence on state administration. Finally there is the fact, highly relevant to the first, formative decades of the dynasty, that the Tang house and with it much of the north-western élite were partly of Turkish origin, that they had fought their way to the control of the north China plain and had spent much of their lives committed to soldiering. The success of the early Tang, with its semi-military origins, in establishing the ideal of open and responsive administration was greatly to influence the ideology of the remaining periods of the dynasty.

Traditions of Dissent

It is the argument of this essay that the Tang gave their own, distinctive shape and emphasis to the ideology of government that they inherited. The main emphasis, very frequently repeated by Tang commentators themselves, was towards the recognition of the process of historical change and the need to adapt to it. This recasting of inherited ideology is documented not primarily by formal intellectual discourse, but by the working political system itself and the documentation that it produced. Tang scholar-officials, moreover, would have considered any distinction between the content of memorials and edicts and that of essays and prefaces artificial.

This recast ideology involved the Tang political élite in taking stock of the tradition of dissent. Since the preceding Sui dynasty (581–618) was identified as having lost popular support partly through its intolerance of dissent, the early Tang rulers were particularly sensitive on this score. The concept of dissent, however, is a wide one. Remonstrance, institutionally internalized dissent, was produced from within the community of serving officials. More radical concepts of dissent, or protest, were produced unofficially, and in some cases from the margins of the administrative hierarchy. The distinction between these two is all important in what follows.

The former category involved criticism from within the political structure. It involved questioning not the system, still less the mandated dynasty, but attempting to realize traditional ideals from within the functioning system. Its proponents depended entirely on the administrative system for their identity. There were a number of posts in the capital bureaucracy reserved for such critics, and holders of these posts had a specific duty to offer criticism. They were mediators not originators of ideas. But, as “guardians and critics,” they claimed a continuous right of independent judgment; they identified a higher good for the state. This category, of institutionalized dissent through remonstrance, may be termed structural, in that it was a provision that the Tang inherited and endorsed. It was distinct from the “surveillance” arm of government, the censorate (*yu shi tai* 御史臺), although censors

might well also be involved in remonstrations.²⁹ It has been understood to belong more to the history of political institutions and practice, and that is where, in his studies of administrative practice, *Traditional Government in Imperial China*, the great Chinese University scholar Ch'ien Mu surveyed it.³⁰

The second tradition of criticism came from outside the functioning administrative structure. It amounted to open protest or the request for change, and it is distinguished by a longer perspective on the problems that it analyzes and an outlook that is more detached from any immediate administrative context. In the Tang, this more detached and radical protest was a characteristic of the intellectual climate at the start of the ninth century. It was typically expressed in writing for private circulation rather than submissions to high authority. It is best represented in the thought of Liu Zongyuan. In Liu Zongyuan's thought, it involved giving express form to recognition that dynasties were not permanent, and that "regime change" was a historical phenomenon. Liu also suggested that the cosmological sanction for the role of the emperor and the state was open to question; that man was the prime agent in historical events and that institutions had developed in the face of less than ideal conditions. Perhaps most strikingly, running through Liu's analysis of certain issues, was the idea that the "general good" was an over-riding value for the polity, by which even the emperor should be judged.

If Liu's opinions seem remarkable, it must be remembered that he has been the most extolled political thinker of the second half of the first millennium, and that Xiao Gongquan himself gave him prominence. But it is argued here that these opinions should not be isolated from their political context. Rather, they may be understood as arising as much from the tradition of remonstrations that preceded the early ninth century as from other the kinds of discourse, editorial insertions in compendia and free-standing essays from which they derive. For almost all the themes that mark the political philosophy of Liu Zongyuan were anticipated in the memorials of protest that the dynasty's working political system produced up to the early ninth century, and indeed the system identified some historically interesting problems that Liu Zongyuan did not analyze.

The High Status of Remonstrations in Tang Historiography

The Tang state thus encouraged institutional or structural dissent. The mechanisms for remonstrations were instantly familiar to all serving officials. Similarly, there were broad features of the tradition, including the classic acts of remonstrations from antiquity, that were universally known and respected.

The Tang, however, promoted the principle more than earlier states had done. For the scholarly community of the eighth and ninth centuries, the principle had explanatory value in analyzing the historical narrative; it played a major part in historical causation. In later periods of the dynasty commentators identified the principle of open remonstrations with

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See below, at note 148, the case of Xu Yougong 徐有功.

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Ch'ien Mu, *Traditional Government in Imperial China*, pp. 72-75.

periods of notable political success. Similarly, Tang commentators attributed some of the dynastic reversals of the period, notably the ascent to power of the Empress Wu and the rebellion of An Lushan, to the break-down in the remonstrating mechanism. It will also be suggested that the prominence given to dissenting views and to protection for their advocates represents a partial recognition on the part of the Tang state that disagreement was healthy and that a measure of political activity was inevitable.

From early in the period of its consolidation, the principle of remonstrance was immensely important to the Tang political world. The dynasty, of course, spans a long period in human history, all but three centuries, during which the terms on which political life was conducted changed drastically. Many generalizations therefore do not hold for the whole period. Yet acts of remonstrance with the emperor, of submitting critical memorials, recur through the period. It is easy, therefore, to locate statements emphasizing the importance of remonstrance in any of the three centuries of the Tang. What is much more difficult is to deconstruct the “tutelary narration,” the accounts of Tang history that we now have, and to assess the relative importance at the time of the numerous and varied acts of remonstrance that punctuate the narrative.

For the extant official historical accounts, the documentation of the Tang, were assembled to illustrate what were considered permanent moral truths. The scholars who controlled the documentation believed remonstrance was a major moral principle. They reserved it as a heading in biographical collections, in institutional compendia,³¹ in a handbook for literary composition,³² and anecdotal collections.³³ Memorials of remonstrance were collected and formed into anthologies or formed themes of collections.³⁴ Editors used remonstrance as a term of commendation for individual compositions in prefaces to collected works.³⁵ Remonstrance was divided into various kinds: the *Liu dian* 六典 of 738 or 739 lists five, citing in its commentary the Han dynasty *Bai hu tong* 白虎通 to suggest

³¹ *THY*, 52, pp. 904–12, “Zhong jian 忠諫.”

³² Xu Jian 徐堅, comp., *Chu xue ji* 初學記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 18, pp. 437–39, “Fengjian 諷諫.” The earlier *Yiwen lei ju* 藝文類聚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 24, pp. 426–41, reserves a substantial space for remonstrance. *Yiwen lei ju* lists, p. 8, the *Sanqi chang shi* 散騎常侍, one of the monitory posts as does, pp. 285–87, the *Chu xue ji*, which also enters the *Jianyi dafu* 諫議大夫, pp. 287–88.

³³ Liu Su 劉肅, comp., *Da Tang xin yu* 大唐新語 (Taipei: Xinyu chubanshe, 1985), 1, pp. 12–17, “Gui jian 規諫,” 2, pp. 18–28, “Zhong jian 忠諫.”

³⁴ *JTS*, 144, pp. 3921–23, biography of Du Xiquan 杜希全. The anthology was called *Ti yao ba zhang* 體要八章. Dezhong responded with a high flown composition praising remonstrance.

³⁵ *Wen yuan ying hua* 文苑英華 (reduced size facsimile of Song and Ming eds., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966, hereafter *WYYH*), 702, p. 4a, Dugu Ji 獨孤及; 703, p. 3a, Liang Su 梁肅; The phrase here used, “*zhu wen er jue jian* 主文而譏諫” was drawn from the Great Preface to the *Mao shi* 毛詩 and refers mainly to indirect admonition given through belles lettres compositions; see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. IV, Part I. *The First Part of the She-King* (London: Oxford University Press, 1871), vol. I, p. 35.

that these corresponded with the five constant elements of man's nature.³⁶ Remonstrance represented the responsibility of the "moral virtuosi" to the "corrigible centre." There was a deeply held conviction, indicated by the many statements supporting the principle, that willingness to brave what was called the thunderstorm of the moment (*yi shi zhi leidian* 一時之雷電)³⁷ was essential to the moral health of the polity. The selective prominence accorded it also had the aim of reinforcing for scholar officials their own role as "guardians and critics" of the polity.

The remonstrance that they so valorized was a peculiarly circumscribed activity. The word remonstrance (*jian* 諫) meant to submit critical advice to a superior. It was not specific to the function of advising the sovereign. As Confucius had stated, a son had the duty to remonstrate with his parents "in the gentlest way (*ji jian* 幾諫)."³⁸ A wife could remonstrate with her husband,³⁹ a junior official with a senior one;⁴⁰ a Chinese with a foreign state, a foreigner with a foreigner.⁴¹ The criteria for certain canonization titles included the ability to "accept remonstrance" or to "give remonstrance without tiring."⁴² The very fact that Congjian 從諫 was a given name suggests the pervasiveness of the ideal.⁴³ None the less, overwhelmingly in the extant record, members of the bureaucracy saw remonstrance as the submission of critical advice by an official to the emperor.

Remonstrance in the official, institutional context involved criticism of specific acts or policies by those within the political hierarchy, or exceptionally by members invited in from beyond it. It was typically represented in the narrative record as voluntarily initiated, the result of independent moral insight, rather than generated by the normal political process. It involved a challenge to the "corrigible centre" and might be misunderstood, ignored or punished, just as it might be appreciated and rewarded. In the longer term, it was not normally considered a politically deviant or disruptive act. By mid-Tang times it had become institutionalized not only through posts that the dynasty inherited, but also through those that it additionally established. The state also paid homage to the principle by running a decree

³⁶ Zhang Yue 張說, Xiao Song 蕭嵩 et al., comp., *Da Tang liu dian* 大唐六典 (ed. of 1724; Tokyo: Hiroike Gakuen Jigyōbu, 1973), 8, pp. 19b–21a. The *Liu dian* lists all the monitory posts, including the *Zuo* 左 and *You buque* 右補闕 and *Zuo* 左 and *You shiyi* 右拾遺, the posts that the empress Wu established in the Chuigong 垂拱 period; see 8, pp. 21a–23a, for the left posts, attached to the chancellery; and 9, pp. 18b–19a, for the right posts, attached to the central secretariat. Their duties were the same. There were other classifications of remonstrance; see *Kongzi jia yu* 孔子家語 (*Si bu cong kan* ed.), 3, pp. 18a–19b.

³⁷ *JTS*, 168, p. 4378, biography of Wei Wen 韋溫.

³⁸ *THY*, 79, p. 1458, definition for canonization title "Xiao 孝," quoting *Analects*, IV, 18.

³⁹ *ZZTJ*, 196, p. 6180, dated 642; 206, p. 6520, dated 697.

⁴⁰ *ZZTJ*, 204, p. 6463, dated 690.

⁴¹ *ZZTJ*, 213, p. 67743, dated 726; 226, p. 7282, dated 780.

⁴² *THY*, 79, p. 1461, definition of canonization title "Hui 惠," p. 1468, definition for canonization title "Xi 僖;" cf. the requirement for acceptance of remonstrance for the title "De 德," quoted in connection with Dezong's name from the *Shufa* 諡法 in *ZZTJ*, 226, p. 7274.

⁴³ *JTS*, 161, pp. 4231–33, biography of Liu Congjian 劉從諫.

examination (*zhi ke* 制科) called the “*Xianliang fangzheng zhiyan jijian ke* 賢良方正直言極諫科.”⁴⁴

The prominence given in Tang documentation to acts of remonstrance by individuals had specific political and ideological implications. The historiographical ideal was that the emperor and the official hierarchy should manage the “ten thousand operations,” responding to the cosmic process as an internally harmonious structure. The dynasty should ideally conduct administration but have no politics. Ideally even the voice of the individual remonstrator would be silent.⁴⁵ In valorizing the memorial of protest from the individual, rather than from a group, Tang political ideology minimized the element of criticism that remonstrance involved. If there was political activity in the sense of factional struggle, then this had to be condemned in moral terms as a breach in harmony. The narratives therefore tend to portray factional struggles in relentlessly moral terms, as encounters between good men as individuals and “small men (*xiao ren* 小人)” in factions, or if such straightforward depiction in black and white was not possible, in terms of a deteriorated moral climate. Good men were more effectively represented as acting singly or independently of one another because the single voice itself suggested a higher level of moral composure. It was the malign and the weak who needed the support of their fellows.

Tang political tradition, moreover, promoted this obligation of remonstrance to a general moral charge on all qualified individuals, and did not restrict it to the range of monitory posts mentioned above. All members of the official hierarchy, and even those beyond it, had a responsibility to represent important opinions to the throne. Even out of office, a prospective official could not altogether escape from imposing this obligation on himself. As a mid-eighth century scholar-official, Yuan Jie, himself summoned from the countryside to remonstrate, put it:

How did the good and successful men of ancient time
Differ from the men of the present day?
If they could not rescue their age from its disasters,
They offered persuasion in order to keep their purposes whole.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ R. des Rotours, *Le traité des examens* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1932), p. 207, citing a first occurrence of the term *Zhi yan ji jian* in a decree examination title in 760, from *Ce fu yuan gui* 冊府元龜 (reduced size facsimile repr. of Ming ed., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, hereafter *CFYG*), 645, p. 16b; see also Xu Song 徐松, comp., *Deng ke ji kao* 登科紀考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 10, pp. 346–47.

⁴⁵ See below at note 164; also *Han Changli shi xi nian jishi*, 5, p. 563, poem in which Han Yu, perhaps because in 806 a new emperor was on the throne, suggests that, “The times were pure and memorials of remonstrance should particularly be few.” The commentary, however, sees irony in this and in a similar line by Cen Shen 岑參 (715–769) in a poem to Du Fu; see Chen Tiemin 陳鐵民 and Hou Zhongyi 侯忠義, eds., *Cen Shen ji jiao zhu* 岑參集校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1981), 3, pp. 199–200.

⁴⁶ *Yuan Cishan ji*, 2, p. 30. The term “offer persuasion (*feng yu* 諷諭)” is used of critical advice not directly presented to the throne in memorial form.

There were also instances of commoners (*bu yi* 布衣) doing the same.⁴⁷ Yuan Jie himself portrayed the fruitless attempts at petitioning a local administration of an old peasant woman and the beseeching of the emperor by a farmer.⁴⁸ Such figures had no legal protection and their best entitlement was to sympathy and possibly redress from an impartial and morally righteous authority. It is clear that the dice were usually heavily loaded against them; but driven perhaps by a sense of grievance, or by personal ambition or at least in some cases a free and well-provisioned ride to the capital on the state postal system,⁴⁹ they came forward none the less. Exceptionally, too, a woman submitted a memorial.⁵⁰

Remonstrance by single officials, however, because it proved moral seriousness in the individual and required courage, carried particular prestige. If a remonstrating official pleased rather than irritated an emperor, a material reward might follow immediately. But the converse was also true. An ability to remonstrate was a signal mark of distinction in a biography, whether in the official history or in accounts of conduct, tomb texts or laudatory tributes. It was celebrated in verse. It was a mark of an élite within an élite, and it was referred to in highly literary terms. In addition, there was a tradition of “moral super-virtuosi” of a succession of individuals, very few, who managed to stand for a while behind the throne, to sustain their contact with emperors and build up a body of monitory advice. The main figures in the records are Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643),⁵¹ and Lu Zhi 陸贄 (754–805).⁵² Without exception they promoted the ideal of remonstrance.

Yet in Tang times, this tendency to valorize the individual remonstrator is likely to mask a more diverse, and indeed more natural, reality. Dissenting memorials were by no means always submitted by one person alone. From early in the dynasty, mention is made of “the many officials” submitting memorials of remonstrance.⁵³ Officials in monitory posts might send in joint memorials.⁵⁴ When the narrative records that “the officials (*qun chen* 群臣)”

⁴⁷ *JTS*, 25, pp. 952–53, memorial by Sun Pingzi 孫平子 who may also have been a commoner; *JTS*, 190B, pp. 5041–42, memorial pleading for Li Yong by Kong Zhang 孔璋.

⁴⁸ *Yuan Cishan ji*, 2, pp. 20–21.

⁴⁹ *ZZTJ*, 203, p. 6438, commentary, gives the Tang regulations for allowances made to informers using the postal service to go to the capital.

⁵⁰ *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, hereafter *XTS*), 202, p. 5756, memorial submitted on behalf of Li Yong by his wife, nee Wen 溫.

⁵¹ Biography in *JTS*, 71, pp. 2545–63.

⁵² Biography in *JTS*, 139, pp. 3791–3819; see also Denis Twitchett, “Lu Chih (754–805): Imperial Adviser and Court Official,” in *Confucian Personalities*, ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (Stanford: Stanford University press, 1962), pp. 97–98; and Josephine Chiu-Duke, *To Rebuild the Empire: Lu Chih's Confucian Pragmatist Approach to the mid-T'ang Predicament* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000).

⁵³ E.g., *ZZTJ*, 192, p. 6022, dated 622, when the many officials remonstrated against Gaozu's training of guards in archery within the palace precincts; *ZZTJ*, 191, p. 6002, dated 626, when Gaozu had the officials discuss the anti-Buddhist memorial of Fu Yi 傅奕; *ZZTJ*, 210, p. 6667, dated 711, when many officials are represented as memorializing against the construction of Daoist monasteries.

⁵⁴ *CFYG*, 546, p. 4b, dated 728; *Yuan Zhen ji*, 34, pp. 398–99, memorial of remonstrance, mentioning that in 820 thirty-eight official in attendance from the two ministries were involved. Cf. *JTS*, 16, p. 483.

memorialized or remonstrated, it is likely to have been the case that numbers of officials were involved. It also becomes clear, especially from the mid-eighth century, that very often a single remonstrator represented group interests from within the community at the capital. The existence of group interests was again acknowledged, but represented in moral terms: a group of “petty men (*xiao ren* 小人)” formed a “faction (*peng dang* 朋黨),” while group of *junzi* 君子 did not. As a chief minister expressed it in 818, “The *junzi* and the petty man will always have adherents. It is just that when the *junzi* has adherents then they share their minds and share their virtue. When the petty man had adherents, then this is a faction. These phenomena are externally very similar; but inwardly and in fact very different. It is for the emperor to observe what they actually do, in order to tell the difference between them.”⁵⁵ Not only the content of remonstrations was often likely to be the expression of group interests, but also the question of who was suitable for appointment to remonstrating posts was itself represented as a matter of general concern, and therefore of group interests.⁵⁶

Moreover Tang emperors were by no means so nervous of assembling officials for debate that they prevented the practice. Successive Tang emperors assembled large numbers of officials to discuss specific problems. Among the issues were: corruption by a senior provincial official;⁵⁷ or the guilt or otherwise of a senior official.⁵⁸ Questions of ritual management were often discussed in this way: for example, the issue of which ancestors in the imperial line should receive offerings in the imperial ancestral cult,⁵⁹ or the vessels used in sacrifices in the imperial ancestral temple in 734;⁶⁰ The crucial issue of how fully the principle of devolved government through the enfeoffment of imperial relatives and high officials should be implemented was, according to one account, discussed in Taizong’s court in 628.⁶¹ Sometimes issues that modern analysis might identify as crucial to the stability of the state were brought forward in this way, the taxation and registration policies of Yuwen Rong 宇文融 (d. ca. 730) in 724 being a prime example.⁶² It was also permissible for numbers of officials, often those holding remonstrating office, to ask to see the emperor.⁶³

Events that seemed inexplicable or uncanny were also referred to open discussion. A particularly well-known case was the burning down of the empress Wu’s Mingtang 明堂 in 695. This event was reported to the imperial ancestral temple and an edict was sent out “seeking frank statements.”⁶⁴ Another was the sudden flooding of the Luo river in the

⁵⁵ *THY*, 52, p. 910, response of Pei Du 裴度 to question of Xianzong, dated 818.

⁵⁶ *THY*, 56, p. 972. In 806, two monitory officials expressed opposition to the appointment of Du Congyu 杜從郁, a son of the chief minister Du You 杜佑 to be a remembrancer. “When a father is a chief minister and the son is to be a monitory official, if there are successes and failures [to be followed up] in the administration, one cannot have the son discussing the father.”

⁵⁷ *JTS*, 85, p. 2812, biography of Tang Lin 唐臨, in 651.

⁵⁸ *ZZTJ*, 244, p. 7876, Song Shenxi 宋申錫 in 831, under Wenzong 文宗 (r. 827–840).

⁵⁹ *JTS*, 25, p. 968.

⁶⁰ *JTS*, 25, p. 969.

⁶¹ *JTS*, 72, p. 2572, biography of Li Baiyao 李百藥; cf. *Zhenguan zheng yao*, 3, p. 100.

⁶² *ZZTJ*, 212, p. 6761, dated 724.

⁶³ *ZZTJ*, 244, p. 7876, dated 831.

⁶⁴ *ZZTJ*, 205, p. 6500, dated 695.

seventh month of 705 under Zhongzong, drowning "several hundred people." In the eighth month, all ninth grade officials and above, civil and military, were ordered to submit "frank statements and extreme admonition."⁶⁵ The proposal to modify the empress Wu's rebuilt Mingtang was put out for detailed discussion by the officials in 717.⁶⁶

The prestige of remonstrance was such that historians had an interest in recording the tradition at its margins. Thus a remonstrator who came from outside the central and senior offices at the capital from which by far the majority of submissions originated might be honourably mentioned. Or an official who was impelled to break the normal access procedure by forging his credentials, might also be documented.⁶⁷ Or a commoner whose reasonable opinion was rejected. Many remonstrations were prepared and never submitted, through last minute failures, of courage perhaps or of logistics. As a chief minister at the start of the ninth century put it:

Whether an official lives or dies depends on the anger or pleasure of his sovereign. So how many will dare to open their mouths and offer remonstrance? Should there be remonstrators, then they take stock by day and ponder by night; they edit out in the morning and cut down in the evening. If they get to reach on high, it is only two or three out of ten of them. Thus the sovereign should carefully seek for remonstrance, ever fearful that it will not come. Still less should he hold the remonstrators guilty. For this is to block up the mouth of the world, not for the good of the dynastic altars.⁶⁸

The very nature of the system, particularly the unpredictable factors it necessarily involved, the temper of the emperor and the courage of the submitting figures, made for a tradition that was diverse and rich in anecdote. Thus the fraught might be alongside the trivial; the very dangerous with the safely conventional. Remonstrations that were intended to modify the conduct of the emperor were different from those that adduced information from outside the court or the administrative city. For a monitory official as a participant in a drunken poetry competition led by the emperor to criticize the tone of the proceedings might require as much moral courage as remonstrating against excessive spending on a religious building programme. But the process was at its most dangerous when remonstrance involved attempting to intervene in court conflicts that had already declared themselves violent. Influencing administration by representing intelligence from beyond the court was generally safer.

Recurrent Themes in Remonstrance

Remonstrance, then, was a structural component in the medieval Chinese state. It had been present since early times, and was part of the political tradition inherited by the Tang.

⁶⁵ *JTS*, 7, p. 140; *ZZTJ*, 208, p. 6594, dated 705.

⁶⁶ *JTS*, 22, p. 875.

⁶⁷ *ZZTJ*, 192, p. 6622, dated 626, the governor of Hanzhou 韓州, Feng Tongren 封同人.

⁶⁸ *ZZTJ*, 237, p. 7646, dated 807, Li Jiang 李絳.

But the dynasty elevated it to much more than one of many principles of political conduct.

If the character of individual sovereigns and the changing political conditions at court meant that there was significant variety in the way remonstrations operated, none the less there were recognizable continuities and recurrent themes, and these in turn were an important aspect of Tang political life. Remonstrations had tended to identify certain topics, which in turn became routinized. The more firmly established the theme, the more political and institutional tradition functioned to shield the remonstrator from any frustration from the emperor. Doubtless the provision of these routinized topics served to establish the political climate, the responsiveness, for example, of a new emperor to remonstrations. In turn they became part of the political theatre of the state, in the sense that they were repeatedly staged and that the outcome in real political terms was presumed in advance. So too was the response of the emperor, whether in the form of gifts to the remonstrator or a variant of the traditional remark, "This is a true act of remonstrations."⁶⁹

It is useful, before considering how strikingly individual sovereigns might differ in the extent to which they encouraged or permitted their officials to remonstrate, to characterize some of the recurrent themes in the political tradition. For variations between emperors and even within reigns took place against a continuous tradition of policy submissions, even at times when emperors seemed to discourage this.

For example, the dangers of excessive interest in hunting or horsemanship, on the grounds that it disrupted agriculture and the people's livelihood, was so well-established and so often repeated a theme that it is hard to believe that it involved risk. It was, with lavish palace building, expensive clothing and jewellery and provision of erotic entertainments for the court, a thoroughly traditional concern. It had after all its classic formulation in famous rhapsodies by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 180–117 B.C.) and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.–A.D. 18) of the Han, compositions to which numbers of Tang verse writers referred. Warnings to the emperor or the crown prince against excessive hunting, sometimes on the ground of the damage it did to popular agriculture, were submitted in 627,⁷⁰ 631,⁷¹ 639,⁷² 650,⁷³ and 682.⁷⁴ Under Xuanzong, there are examples from 712,⁷⁵ 719⁷⁶ and in the run up to the climactic sacrifice on mount Tai of 725.⁷⁷ Li Jin 李璡, the prince of Ruyang 汝陽, whom Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) greatly admired may have remonstrated with Xuanzong on this topic.⁷⁸

⁶⁹ ZZTJ, 199, p. 6275, dated 651; ZZTJ, 209, p. 6633, dated 703; cf. CFYG, 533, p. 1b, where this remark is put into the mouth of Xiao Zhizhong 蕭至忠, a high official, in place of Zhongzong, who was annoyed by the remonstrations involved.

⁷⁰ ZZTJ, 192, pp. 6042–43, dated 627.

⁷¹ ZZTJ, 193, pp. 6088–89, dated 631.

⁷² ZZTJ, 195, p. 6150, dated 639.

⁷³ ZZTJ, 199, p. 6272, dated 650.

⁷⁴ ZZTJ, 203, p. 6411, dated 682.

⁷⁵ CFYG, 549, p. 13a, dated 712.

⁷⁶ CFYG, 546, pp. 3b–4a.

⁷⁷ CFYG, 546, pp. 4a–b.

⁷⁸ *Jiu jia ji zhu Du shi* 九家集注杜詩 (Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series ed.), 14, p. 204a. For references by Tang *fu* writers to Sima Xiangru and Yang Xiong, see R. J. Neather,

(Continued on next page)

Some of the recurrent topics in the tradition of remonstrance, however, involved contested ground, or potentially contested ground, those parts of the political structure where the emperor and the civil bureaucracy were in competition for control or at least influence. One of these was the education of the crown prince, the future sovereign. Taizong himself sanctioned remonstrance on this, in 633, by inviting admonition on this subject.⁷⁹ There followed a succession of remonstrating memorials, for example in 639,⁸⁰ 640,⁸¹ 643, 672,⁸² 680⁸³ and 682.⁸⁴ Much later, Yuan Zhen as a remonstrator identified this as the first issue for the dynasty.⁸⁵

Another was the use of the state's wealth, for temple building, for the honouring of sacred Buddhist relics, for provision of large Buddhist feasts, or for the construction of palaces and gardens for the emperor or members of the imperial family. There were, for example, memorials in 631,⁸⁶ 667 (two),⁸⁷ 700, 704,⁸⁸ 707–709⁸⁹ and 710,⁹⁰ 711⁹¹ and 713.⁹² And again in 757, in 764,⁹³ and, from a *jinshi* candidate, two in 767. There were other well-established themes relating to the value of restraint or austerity: remonstrance against lavish burial or the lavish upkeep of imperial mausolea; remonstrance against military adventurism.

A succession of memorials urged the emperor to conform to the criminal code in punishing those who had angered him, rather than go to excess or to disregard procedures. There are examples from 618,⁹⁴ 626, 627,⁹⁵ 631, 650, 651,⁹⁶ 676,⁹⁷ 679.⁹⁸ These were not, of course, attempts to make the emperor himself subject to the law. Rather they were intended

(Note 78 — Continued)

- "Sima Xiangru and Yang Xiong in the Tang *Fu* Tradition: Evidence from the Tang Hunt *Fu*," paper presented at the International Symposium on "History, Poetry and the Classical Tradition," New Haven, CT: Yale University, 23–25 April 2004.
- ⁷⁹ ZZTJ, 194, p. 6104, dated 633.
- ⁸⁰ ZZTJ, 195, p. 6150, dated 639.
- ⁸¹ ZZTJ, 195, p. 6150, dated 640.
- ⁸² ZZTJ, 202, p. 6370, dated 672.
- ⁸³ ZZTJ, 202, p. 6396, dated 680.
- ⁸⁴ ZZTJ, 203, p. 6411, dated 682.
- ⁸⁵ Yuan Zhen *ji*, 32, p. 373.
- ⁸⁶ ZZTJ, 193, p. 6088, dated 631.
- ⁸⁷ ZZTJ, 192, pp. 6031–32; p. 6044, dated 627.
- ⁸⁸ CFYG, 532, pp. 10b–11a, dated 704.
- ⁸⁹ CYYG, 532, pp. 19b–20a, dated in Jinglong 景龍 period (707–709).
- ⁹⁰ ZZTJ, 210, p. 6659, dates 710.
- ⁹¹ ZZTJ, 210, p. 6665, dated 711.
- ⁹² ZZTJ, 210, p. 6679–80, dated 713.
- ⁹³ CFYG, 546, pp. 6a–8b, dated 764.
- ⁹⁴ ZZTJ, 186, p. 5834, dated 618.
- ⁹⁵ ZZTJ, 192, pp. 6031, 6044, dated 627.
- ⁹⁶ JTS, 85, pp. 2812–13, biography of Tang Lin.
- ⁹⁷ ZZTJ, 202, p. 6380, dated 676.
- ⁹⁸ ZZTJ, 202 p. 6390, dated 679, *Kao yi* 考異 quoting *Yu shi tai ji* 御史臺記.

to persuade him to abandon arbitrary or impulsive decisions and follow the letter of the penal code in punishing others. The arguments were sometimes made in terms of protecting the emperor's reputation; he should not be seen as arbitrarily vindictive or cruel and unusual. But an issue of control may also have been in play.

Thus in 651, Xiao Jun 蕭鈞 memorialized remonstrating against Gaozong's 高宗 (r. 649–683) sentence of death on a man who had stolen property from a treasury, stating that "what he had done wrong truly was hard to allow. Yet according to the permanent law, his crime did not extend to the death [penalty]. If the extreme punishment is now brought to bear, I fear that when the world hears of it they will certainly consider that your majesty underrates the penal law."⁹⁹ In 654, when Gaozong ordered the execution of a minor musician official who had leaked intelligence from palace women, requiring that his case be "appended to the penal code." Xiao Jun requested that proper procedure be followed. The remonstrance was accepted, and he was "banished to a distant place."¹⁰⁰

Similar, though less explicit, admonitions followed, for example in 717,¹⁰¹ 719¹⁰² and 737. The same issue was rehearsed in 722, when Xuanzong was persuaded to reduce a public beheading he had imposed on a magistrate from a family of eminent dynastic servants first to death by flogging and then to a hundred strokes of the heavy cane, followed by banishment to "an evil place in Lingnan 嶺南."¹⁰³ The specific role of the emperor in relation to the penal code was not an issue in the review of the polity given by Du You and Liu Zongyuan in the early ninth century. But Du You and other scholars of this period were implicitly concerned with this demand when they advocated a moderate penal code.

Credulousness towards the supernatural in emperors incited a tradition of remonstrance. In 668, Hao Chujun 郝處俊 memorialized against the emperor ingesting a longevity potion.¹⁰⁴ Under the empress Wu, Wang Qiuli 王求禮 remonstrated against officials who sycophantically represented unseasonal snow in the third month as an auspicious sign.¹⁰⁵ Li Yong in 705 warned against appointing a charlatan claiming supernatural powers as director of the imperial library.¹⁰⁶ In 719, a partially preserved memorial suggested the correct response to an eclipse lay in better conduct rather than a proliferation of measures aimed at redressing the balance between *yin* and *yang*.¹⁰⁷ Su Yuanming 蘇源明, Du Fu's friend and the patron of both Du Fu and Yuan Jie, warned against another charlatan, Wang Yu 王璵.¹⁰⁸ Zhang Hao warned that feeding a large number of Buddhist monks would not increase the chances of securing peace.¹⁰⁹ The open calls for

⁹⁹ ZZTJ, 199, p. 6275, dated 651.

¹⁰⁰ THY, 55, p. 950, dated 654.

¹⁰¹ ZZTJ, 211, p. 6726 dated 717.

¹⁰² ZZTJ, 212, p. 6737, dated 719.

¹⁰³ ZZTJ, p. 6750; cf. p. 6754, dated 722.

¹⁰⁴ ZZTJ, 201, p. 6356, dated 668.

¹⁰⁵ JTS, 187A, p. 4884.

¹⁰⁶ CFYG, 544, pp. 16b–17a, dated 705; ZZTJ, 208, p. 6589.

¹⁰⁷ ZZTJ, 212, p. 6736, dated 719.

¹⁰⁸ CFYG, 552, p. 4a; XTS, 202, pp. 5772–73.

¹⁰⁹ ZZTJ, 219, p. 7024, dated 757.

criticism that the dynasty issued at times of dramatic catastrophe, such as floods,¹¹⁰ or the loss through fire of sacred precincts, resulted in a spectrum of opinions. A conventional position attributed disasters to a combination of agencies, “ghosts and spirits” and five phase theory. These in turn were caused by imperial dereliction, in providing proper ritual at the correct time. But a skeptical position might attribute the collapse of the ancestral temple simply to the use of ancient timbers, as did Yao Chong 姚崇 (651–721) in the case of the temple collapse of 717. The more conventional position was that the emperor should respond by “being attentive to the reprimands of heaven, accepting loyal remonstrations and keeping sycophants at a distance.”¹¹¹ Yao Chong was also noted for his pragmatic intervention in the case of a locust plague in Shandong, when he argued against the idea that the plague was sent from Heaven and devised practical means of burning the locusts by night.¹¹² Again, the idea that man rather than “heaven” was to be the agent for historical change was prominent in the thought of early ninth century intellectuals.

More risky were remonstrations against the personal religious initiatives of the sovereign. They were dangerous precisely because they might challenge imperial beliefs held in the face of the disapproval of scholar-officials. Anti-Buddhist memorials ran this risk. There was a succession, ending in perhaps the most famous of all Tang remonstrations, Han Yu’s “Memorial discussing the bone of the Buddha” of 819.¹¹³ This was in many respects a classic act of remonstrance, and it deserves its heroic reputation. Han Yu apparently acted alone; he attacked a well established custom; the relic had been paraded to the capital at least five times before under Tang rule, about once every thirty years.¹¹⁴ Moreover, he was addressing an emperor whose temper was made volatile by ingesting toxic longevity compounds. He rescued from death only by the intercession of friends.

If established themes in remonstrance like these recur throughout the Tang record, the impression should not be given that the mechanism worked smoothly and steadily throughout the dynasty. Individual sovereigns varied in their performances and they responded differently to the tradition of remonstrance. Some were responsible for the significant expansion of the provision that is the Tang achievement. Others virtually closed the system down.

The Ideal Defined: The Reign of Taizong

At the start of the dynasty, then, the principle of remonstrance was given very great emphasis. Precisely because they were nearer in time to a successful episode of “regime change,” the early Tang court formulated ideas on dynastic stability with a radicalism lent

¹¹⁰ *CFYG*, 544, pp. 17a–23a, dated 705; *ZZTJ*, 208, p. 6594.

¹¹¹ *ZZTJ*, 211, pp. 6725–26, dated 717.

¹¹² *JTS*, 96, pp. 3024–25; cf. *CFYG*, 546, pp. 1a–2a.

¹¹³ For a discussion of some of the anti-Buddhist memorials of the second half of the eighth century, see David L. McMullen, “Li Chou, a Forgotten Agnostic of the Late-Eighth Century,” *Asia Major*, Third Series, VIII, Part 2 (1995), esp. pp. 86–90.

¹¹⁴ Yin Xiaqing 尹夏清, *Sui Tang diguo xin zhixu* 隋唐帝國新秩序 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2001), p. 113.

edge by their own experience. Gaozu endorsed the principle of remonstrance.¹¹⁵ But was the great figure of Taizong who dominated the reformulation of the ideal of remonstrance. Despite, or perhaps because of his towering martial achievements and intimidating presence, this was an image that Taizong went to great lengths to promote. He is portrayed as a figure who welcomed open debate at court, from middle ranking as well as senior officials.¹¹⁶ He spoke of the risks that remonstrators had faced, and praised those who had braved the “backward facing scales (*ni lin* 逆鱗)” under the throat of the imperial dragon.¹¹⁷ Wei Zheng adapted the *Analects* of Confucius to speak of the need for the remonstrator to have his ruler’s trust: “If remonstrance is offered and is not believed, the ruler will consider himself slandered. If the remonstrator is believed and does not offer remonstrance, then he may be termed a derelict in office.”¹¹⁸

Under Taizong, the official community at the capital, the *jing guan* 京官 or *chao guan* 朝官 was relatively small and cohesive, a fact that later commentators in the dynasty recognized with envy.¹¹⁹ The sources for this early period, too, are dominated by accounts of what happened at the political centre. From the start of the Tang, its governmental processes involved more discussion than other dynasties. There were several, at some points more than ten, chief ministers, who met in committee with the emperor to discuss decisions. Ch’ien Mu himself noted that they were able to sit down in a relaxed way in his presence.¹²⁰ The process of initiating administrative business is said to have started not from the emperor, as was formally speaking the case in the Song and later, but from the secretariat (*zhong shu sheng* 中書省).

In this atmosphere, contrasting sharply and self-consciously with that of the Sui, the ideal of an open remonstrance provision was read back into high antiquity, and the Tang world believed that it had been institutionalized from an early date. The emperor Taizong himself mentioned the petitioner’s drum held to have existed in the Zhou. The need to represent the voices of “grass cutters and firewood gatherers” was stressed, not only by Taizong but also by his advisers.¹²¹ But the empress and the crown prince were also recorded as having remonstrated and being praised for doing so.¹²² Taizong was praised for

¹¹⁵ *ZZTJ*, 187, p. 5843, dated 619.

¹¹⁶ *Zhenguan zheng yao*, 4, pp. 46-54, “Qiu jian 求諫;” pp. 54-64, “Na jian 納諫;” pp. 64-76, “Zhi jian 極諫.”

¹¹⁷ *Zhenguan zheng yao*, 2, pp. 50, 52.

¹¹⁸ *Zhenguan zheng yao*, 2, p. 52, adapting *Analects*, XIX, 10; cf. D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 154.

¹¹⁹ *THY*, 52, p. 912, memorial of Cao Que 曹確, dated 867: “Your servant has read the precedents from the Zhenguan period. Early under Taizong, the statute setting up grades for officials had civil and military officials in total 643. . . .”

¹²⁰ Ch’ien Mu, p. 69; see also pp. 39-42, for characterization of the meetings in the Zhengshi tang 政事堂.

¹²¹ Citing *Mao shi*, Legge, vol. II, p. 501. *Zhenguan zheng yao*, 2, p. 47, memorial by Wang Gui 王珪; *CFYG*, 531, p. 16b, memorial of Yu Shinan 虞世南. This rhetorical trope lasted through the dynasty: in 813, Xianzong was enjoined that, “If you do not dispense with the words of grass cutters, then upright scholars and worthy subjects will certainly exert themselves [for you];” see *THY*, 52, p. 909.

¹²² *Zhenguan zheng yao*, 2, pp. 58, 63.

“following remonstrance like a current flowing (*cong jian ru liu* 從諫如流),” a compliment that was sometimes inappropriately applied to emperors who followed.¹²³ Two anthologies on remonstrance were compiled. Wei Zheng was the single most extolled remonstrator in Tang history. Later Tang commentators frequently referred to him. But he, like a handful of other close ministers who sustained similarly close relations with an emperor over the dynasty, had in a sense a privileged position. Such relationships, given great prominence in Sima Guang’s account, the *Zizhi tong jian*, are not a good indication of the state of the system as a whole. Others, in less close relationships to the emperor or even unknown to him, were allowed to submit critical memorials and were commended. Sun Fuqie 孫伏伽, a member of the staff of Wannian 萬年 county was an example.¹²⁴ Others whose memorials were recorded in the centrally-compiled sources were from the senior posts in the six boards; the secretary of the chancellery (*ji shi zhong* 給事中), the head of the imperial library; grand secretary; the censorate; a prefectural governor who bluffed his way into the palace; more than one military official. Even women are recorded as having submitted statements that were accepted. Taizong’s empress did so shortly before her death.¹²⁵ Another highly articulate critic of imperial policy was the consort Xu Hui 徐惠, who rebuked Taizong for extravagant building.¹²⁶

Emphasis on the value of remonstrance was emphasized in handbooks on emperorship written early in the dynasty by the emperor. Xiao Gongquan sees these as lacking philosophical interest. Indeed, in some ways they come close to what we would nowadays call “self-assessments.” But Denis Twitchett’s recent exploration of the content of the *Di fan* 帝範, the *Jin jing* 金鏡 by Taizong and the *Chen gui* 臣規 by the empress Wu have suggested that they express subtle and significant changes in the concept of emperorship.¹²⁷ Both the *Di fan* and the *Chen gui* emphasize remonstrance. The tradition of remonstrance, they indicated, cut both ways: it was the duty of officials acting individually to warn the emperor of his mistakes and excesses; it was also the duty of the emperor to take serious heed of those warnings and to respect those who delivered them. A duty that was thought of as complementary was to identify sycophants or flatterers. If the emperor failed to do so, Taizong himself warned, he risked being cut off from reliable intelligence about the outside world.

From Taizong’s reign, remonstrating officials were ordered to be in attendance on the emperor with the specific duty of criticizing errors.¹²⁸ These comprised the monitory officials (*jianyi dafu* 諫議大夫); and grand counselors (*sanqi changshi* 散騎常侍). Other

¹²³ *ZZTJ*, 218, p. 6998, of Suzong, dated 756; in *WYYH*, 451, p. 2b, Lu Zhi in an imperial rescript of appointment makes Dezong use it of an imperial prince. Han Yu in his essay “Zheng chen lun 爭臣論” attributes this quality, in a hypothetical situation, to Dezong, in an effort to incite Yang Cheng to remonstrate. See also *ZZTJ*, 235, p. 7566, dated 795.

¹²⁴ *JTS*, 75, pp. 2634–38, biography.

¹²⁵ *ZZTJ*, 194, p. 6121 dated 636; cf. also 200, p. 6324, dated 661.

¹²⁶ *ZZTJ*, 198, p. 6254, dated 648.

¹²⁷ Denis Twitchett, “How to Be an Emperor: T’ang T’ai-tsung’s Vision of His Role,” *Asia Major*, Third Series, IX, Part I, pp. 1–102; and “The *Ch’en Kuei* and Other Works Attributed to Empress Wu Tse-t’ien.”

¹²⁸ *ZZTJ*, 192, p. 6031, dated 627.

officials whose rank was low also had the duty of attendance on the emperor and the obligation to criticize when they identified mistakes. The crown prince's staff also included officials whose duty was to provide admonition.¹²⁹ There are also references to the two symbolic places where the common people might voice their protests, the Lung-stone (*Fei shi* 肺石) and the Drum for Appeal (*Dengwen gu* 登聞鼓). These were to the east and west of the Chengtian 承天 Gate in Chang'an and, after in 663 the Daming Gong 大明宮 became the site of government, in front of the Hanyuan dian 含元殿.¹³⁰ At Luoyang, the second capital, they were outside the Yingtian 應天 Gate.¹³¹

Despite the fact that its institutional provision was on a smaller scale than later, the reign of Taizong provided a standard for later advocates of remonstrance. There were thus many references to it: from the relatively obscure, like the junior officer of Jinyang 晉陽, a county in Changzhou 常州, who in 712 extolled the openness of the Zhenguan court and the emperor's willingness to accept remonstrance,¹³² to Song Jing 宋景 (663–737) and Su Ting 蘇頌 (670–727), exemplary ministers at Xuanzong's court; from the major official historian Liu Fang 柳芳¹³³ to the paragon official Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–784); from Li Sheng 李晟 (727–793) to Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen,¹³⁴ to the emperors Dezong,¹³⁵ Xianzong¹³⁶ and Wenzong 文宗 (r. 827–840).¹³⁷ It should be emphasized that praise for the early Tang performance in administration is selective, not, as some scholars of the later dynastic period imply, a matter of mandatory piety. It can clearly be demonstrated that for example Bai Juyi considered that the special quality of government in the Zhenguan and Kaiyuan periods derived from its freedom of access. The health of the whole administrative system, this assessment implies, depended on the situation prevailing at court. After Taizong's death, moreover, the court was, moreover, to prove inherently unstable and liable to violent upheavals. Only late in the reign was Taizong's enthusiasm for listening to remonstrance said to have waned;¹³⁸ but even here he is recorded as having accepted the charge, from Wei Zheng, with good humour.¹³⁹

¹²⁹ *Da Tang liu dian*, 26, pp. 21a–22a.

¹³⁰ The Lung-stone had been used in the Liang dynasty; see *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 2, p. 37, dated 502. Shen Gua 沈括 (1029–1093), *Meng qi bi tan* 夢溪筆談, “Qi yong 器用,” states that the Tang Lung-stone was still there in his day, “shaped like hanging lungs.” See Hu Daojing 胡道靜, ed., *Xin jiaozheng “Meng qi bi tan”* 新校正夢溪筆談 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), p. 193.

¹³¹ *Tang liang jing chengfang kao* 唐兩京城坊考 (repr. in *Tōdai no shiori* ed.), 1, pp. 1b, 15a; *TPYL*, 184, p. 8a, quoting *Xi jing ji* 西京記; There are references to the Drum of Appeal, in e.g. Li Hua 李華, “Hanyuan dian fu 含元殿賦,” *WYYH*, 48, p. 4a; *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 12, p. 295; *Yuan Zhen ji* 元稹集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 32, p. 372.

¹³² *CFYG*, 533, pp. 3a–4b, memorial of Yang Xiangru 楊相如.

¹³³ *ZZTJ*, 199, p. 6261, quoted editorial insertion by Liu Fang.

¹³⁴ *Yuan Zhen ji*, 32, pp. 370–73; 33, pp. 377–79.

¹³⁵ *JTS*, 144, p. 3922, biography of Du Xiquan.

¹³⁶ I am grateful to Professor Denis Twitchett for pointing this out in a private communication.

¹³⁷ *JTS*, 176, p. 4568, biography of Wei Mu 魏謩.

¹³⁸ *ZZTJ*, 199, p. 6260, dated 648.

¹³⁹ *THY*, 52, p. 905.

Remonstrance in Later Reigns

The emperors who followed Taizong varied greatly in the extent that they were able to dominate the court and the degree to which they encouraged remonstrance. As the open atmosphere of Taizong's court was lost, so the customary provision whereby the holders of posts with special responsibility to remonstrate accompanied the chief ministers into court discussions was not sustained after Taizong's reign. The political court under Gaozong is represented as a very different place from that of his father's early years. The officials personally charged by Taizong with maintaining his style of government, Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 (d. 659), Han Yuan 韓瑗 and Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658), are represented as remonstrating with Gaozong against his wish to establish Wu Zhao 武曌 as his empress, and as losing at the cost of their lives.¹⁴⁰ Following their deaths, the atmosphere became altogether more restrictive. When in 664 the emperor Gaozong asked the general Li Ji 李勣, represented in the narrative as a sycophant, why no one was remonstrating, he was told that "everything you do is perfect; the officials cannot get to remonstrate."¹⁴¹ When in 682 an official dared to criticize the emperor's initiative to celebrate the Feng 封 and Shan 禪 rites on Mount Song 嵩, his memorial was welcomed as the first act of remonstrance for nearly twenty years.¹⁴² Later commentators identified the emperor's failure to maintain the system as one of the causes of the dynastic instability that was to dominate the record for the next half century.

The "tutelary narration" viewed the reign of the empress Wu with great hostility. The period of her domination of dynastic politics is thus represented as one of chronic instability and irregularity. But the empress is none the less recorded as having acknowledged the value of direct remonstrance,¹⁴³ and it is doubtful whether she could have maintained her position without an ability to identify and draw on new political opinions to play off against those interests that might threaten to control her. To her, at least belongs the significant credit in the Chuigong 垂拱 period (685–689) for a bold and lasting expansion of the institutional provision for remonstrance, for founding the offices of two omissioners (*shi yi* 拾遺) and two remembrancers (*pu que* 補闕), one of each assigned to the chancellery and one to the secretariat.¹⁴⁴ These offices remained as a part of the "constitution" until the end of the dynasty. When Bai Juyi accepted the post of omissioner of the left, he quoted the *Liu dian* and described the statutory functions of the office. "This is the basic intention of the dynasty in establishing the post of omissioner."¹⁴⁵

The empress also encouraged the submission of proposals and other information by all-comers, setting up four "suggestions boxes" for the purpose, each coloured according to its

¹⁴⁰ This episode is excerpted and included in *THY* under the heading "Zhong jian 忠諫;" see *THY*, 52, pp. 905–7.

¹⁴¹ *ZZTJ*, 201, p. 6343, dated 665; cf. 201, p. 6352, admonition in 667 on building palaces.

¹⁴² *ZZTJ*, 203, pp. 6410–11.

¹⁴³ *ZZTJ*, 206, pp. 6546–47, response to memorial of remonstrance by Zhu Jingze in 700, "But for your frank statement, I would not have known this."

¹⁴⁴ *THY*, 56, p. 965–66; *TT*, 21, pp. 556–57.

¹⁴⁵ *Bai Juyi ji*, 58, pp. 1228–29.

direction. The remonstrating officials (*jianyi diafu* 諫議大夫, renamed *zhengjian* 正諫) and the newly established omissioners and remembrancers were to be in charge of them.¹⁴⁶ The official historians judged, surely correctly, that concealed purpose of these devices was to encourage reports of subversion. But it may be better to interpret the empress's policies as interweaving, in a combination that increased the coercive, the remunerative, coercive and normative sanctions for maintaining imperial control. Thus it was a remembrancer, Zhu Jingze 朱敬則, who persuaded her to relent on the terror that she had instigated.¹⁴⁷ There were officials involved in the legal institutions who used the process of remonstrating to protest against irregularities. One, the remarkable Xu Yougong 徐有功, protested against the misuse of the "suggestions boxes." "In successive appointments as a penal official, because he memorialized remonstrating against wrongful death [sentences], he was three times under sentence of death. Yet he outwardly maintained his purpose and the sadistic officials somewhat lost out."¹⁴⁸ Moreover an official told the empress that towards the end of her reign she had become less receptive to remonstrating, just as Wei Zheng had told Taizong.¹⁴⁹ It seems certain, therefore, that her contribution to the Tang system of access to the throne of those with dissenting opinions was considerable. The "suggestions boxes" were referred to through the eighth century,¹⁵⁰ were entered in the *Liu dian*¹⁵¹ and were still operative in the ninth century.¹⁵²

The tendency for violent court intrigues to involve the remonstrating offices is particularly well demonstrated in the reign that followed. Most officials may be assumed to have kept silent in the blood letting at court of the first decade of the eighth century. One or two, despite fearless remonstrating, survived and built reputations. One such was Li Yong 李邕 (678–747), whom in his later years Du Fu admired.¹⁵³ But the poet Gao Shi 高適 (ca. 700–765), who like his friend Du Fu greatly admired Li Yong, described this as a time when "no remonstrating officer dare to have discussions."¹⁵⁴ The period saw three officials murdered for remonstrating. Wei Yuejiang 韋月將 who submitted a memorial warning against an imminent palace plot was saved from Zhongzong's 中宗 (r. 684, 705–710) anger

¹⁴⁶ *Feng shi wenjian ji* 封氏聞見記 (Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series ed.), 4, pp. 20a–23a; *ZZTJ*, 203, pp. 6437–38. The account concludes, "They first charged confidential officials (*shi guan* 識官) and then let memorials be thrown into them."

¹⁴⁷ *ZZTJ*, 205, pp. 6485–86, memorial dated 692; *JTS*, 90, pp. 2913–14.

¹⁴⁸ *JTS*, 85, pp. 2819–20, biography of Xu Yougong.

¹⁴⁹ *ZZTJ*, 203, p. 6565, dated 703.

¹⁵⁰ *Yuan Cishan ji*, 1, p. 5; *Bai Juyi ji*, 64, p. 1334, "Celin 36;" *Yuan Zhen ji*, 32, p. 371.

¹⁵¹ *Da Tang liu dian*, 9, pp. 30a–31a.

¹⁵² *JTS*, 154, p. 4097, biography of Kong Kui 孔戣; *Han Changli shi xi nian jishi*, 6, p. 680; *Bai Juyi ji*, 64, p. 1334, "Celin 36."

¹⁵³ *JTS*, 190B, pp. 5039–40, biography of Li Yong describes how Li Yong was recommended by Li Jiao and Zhang Tinggui 張廷珪 as "lofty in his words and upright in his conduct, suitable to be a remonstrating official." He submitted two memorials relating to palace politics. For Du Fu's commendation of Li Yong's memorial of remonstrating against the Zhang 張 brothers, see *Jiu jia ji zhu Du shi*, 14, p. 208b.

¹⁵⁴ *Gao Shi shi ji bian nian jian zhu* 高適詩集編年箋註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), pp. 163–64.

by the intercession of a number of officials. But it was only the prohibition against executing in the summer that delayed his death. He was executed by a zealous official in Lingnan at dawn on the first day of autumn.¹⁵⁵ Yan Qinrong 燕欽融 was murdered in open court by means of a forged order, again for denouncing an imminent plot.¹⁵⁶ A third, the commoner Lang Ji 郎岌 was similarly beaten to death.¹⁵⁷ These men were posthumously rehabilitated in the following reign and became bywords for courage and self-sacrifice.

A particular focus for remonstrance in the early years of the eighth century was the use of state resources for building monasteries, Daoist and Buddhist, for members of the imperial clan. "Recently men have offered direct statements and there have been frequent keen remonstrations. But loyal arguments have been heard in vain and they have never been implemented."¹⁵⁸ Remonstrance was both by submission of memorials and by the classical literary device of writing *fu* 賦. Thus in 705, Xu Jingxian 許景先 submitted a *fu* to the emperor protesting against the construction of the Shengshan si 聖善寺 and the Baoci ge 報慈閣 at Luoyang, and was promoted to be an omissions officer of the left.¹⁵⁹ Xin Tipi 辛替否 pleaded with Ruizong (r. 684–990, 710–712) to reverse the lax policies of his older brother Zhongzong, flattering the emperor for rehabilitating victims of the previous reign and for "realizing that scholars who speak frankly are of benefit to the state."¹⁶⁰

The long reign of Xuanzong opened with further attempts at renewal. The emperor was said to have "known the sufferings of the people," and to have "extended relief to administrative operations." The year 717 saw an attempt to restore the open atmosphere of Taizong's court.¹⁶¹ But if this was unsuccessful, there were certain chief ministers, numbering about nine or so, who kept channels open. If the emperor was irritated by one or two of them, he praised others.¹⁶² He was recorded as stating, in the case of one of them, Han Xiu 韓休 (673–739), that "I may be thin to look at; but the world is fat. . . . Han Xiu always remonstrated forcefully; but when he withdrew, I slept more soundly."¹⁶³ There was a general trend to idealize the first part of Xuanzong's reign. In court verse composed in the imperial presence, this was portrayed as a time when the drum of remonstrance was available, for the grass cutter, but it remained hung up, because there were no faults in administration.¹⁶⁴

Like Taizong and the empress Wu, however, Xuanzong in his later years permitted less remonstrance, in effect passing government to two chief ministers who blocked access.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁵ *JTS*, 100, p. 3110.

¹⁵⁶ *JTS*, 187A, p. 4884.

¹⁵⁷ *JTS*, 187A, pp. 4884–85.

¹⁵⁸ *CFYG*, 533, p. 7b, memorial of 712 or 713, by Yang Xiangru 楊相如.

¹⁵⁹ *JTS*, 190B, p. 5031, biography of Xu Jingxian.

¹⁶⁰ *CFYG*, 545, pp. 7b–11a; *JTS*, 101, pp. 3158–61.

¹⁶¹ *ZZTJ*, 211, pp. 6728–29, dated 717.

¹⁶² *ZZTJ*, 217, p. 6724, dated 716, praise for Song Jing's remonstrations.

¹⁶³ *ZZTJ*, 213, p. 6801, dated 733.

¹⁶⁴ *QTS*, 88, p. 967, Zhang Yue 張說 (667–730).

¹⁶⁵ *ZZTJ*, 214, pp. 6825–26, dated 736.

In 737, Pei Zhen 裴稹 a court diarist managed to rouse the emperor on an issue of punishing miscreant princes. Xuanzong wanted to promote him irregularly to the high post of secretary of the secretariat (*ji shi zhong*). He replied, "It has been certainly many days since your majesty has cut off the road of inviting remonstrance. If I your servant today were to accept this exceptional favour, then people will wish to speak in crowds, and how could you reward them?"¹⁶⁶ In 748, Yuan Jie attended a feast given by a remonstrator who claimed that his post had become a sinecure (*san rong* 散冗). Yuan told him of a slave who, despite continued beatings, sleep-talked the truth to her lord. Yuan suggested sarcastically that the remonstrator secure a similar person to remonstrate with the sovereign.¹⁶⁷ Again, later tradition identified the closing off of access and therefore of freedom to remonstrate as one of the causes of the great calamity of the An Lushan rebellion in 755.¹⁶⁸

In the crisis conditions that followed the outbreak of the rebellion, there were periodic attempts to make the system more effective. In 756, the monitory officers were told that they did not have to inform the chief ministers of their discussions.¹⁶⁹ In 758, the monitory officers were ordered to submit sealed reports every ten days.¹⁷⁰ There were those who were prepared to write seriously and idealistically about their role in these offices. Du Fu, who was an omissioner of the left for a brief period from 757 until 758, was one. It is much to be regretted that we have no very clear picture of how this immensely articulate man performed as a remonstrator. Some scholars have assumed that he wrote prolifically admonishing the emperor Suzong during his brief tenure of court office. But there are grounds for doubt. He surely admired those who had succeeded in remonstrating, just as he sympathized with one official who had many drafts that he had never managed to submit.¹⁷¹

In 765, Dugu Ji 獨孤及 (725–777) as omissioner told Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779) that he had ceased to listen to remonstrations.¹⁷² One year later, in 766, Yan Zhenqing, confronted by a chief minister who blocked access to the emperor by insisting that all representations should be made first to him, reviewed the implementation of the principle from the start of the dynasty. Taizong had promulgated a regulation:

¹⁶⁶ *ZZTJ*, 214, pp. 6828–29, *kao yi*, quoting Dugu Ji's *xing zhuang* 行狀 for Pei Zhen. Sima Guang, however, rejects this account as false praise by Dugu Ji.

¹⁶⁷ *Yuan Cishan ji*, 4, p. 53.

¹⁶⁸ See note 173 below. Liu Su, the compiler of *Da Tang xinyu*, implicitly attributed the An Lushan rebellion to the breakdown of the function of remonstrance, by including his comments on the rebellion at the close of his account of Wei Jiansu's 韋見素 failed attempt at remonstrance; see 2, p. 28, "Ji jian 極諫."

¹⁶⁹ *THY*, 55, p. 948; *ZZTJ*, 219, p. 7001, dated 756.

¹⁷⁰ *THY*, 55, p. 948.

¹⁷¹ See D. L. McMullen, "Recollection without Tranquillity: Du Fu, the Imperial Gardens and the State," *Asia Major*, Third Series, XIV, Part 2, p. 197, note 37; also note 68 above. It is possible that Du Fu sent in sealed memorials on trivial subjects, since according to the *Liu dian*, 8, p. 23a, quoted by Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi, monitory officials "discussed matters in court if they were important, and sent up sealed statements if they were trivial." See *Yuan Zhen ji*, 33, p. 378; *Bai Juyi ji*, 58, p. 1228.

¹⁷² *ZZTJ*, 223, pp. 7172–73, dated 765.

If there should be anyone without a gate pass who has an urgent memorial, in all cases the authorities supervising the gates are to bring him forward to memorialize. They are not allowed to shut him out.

It had been the disregard of this principle by two autocratic chief ministers Li Linfu 李林甫 (d. 752) and Yang Guozhong 楊國忠 (d. 756), so that “the emperor’s intention was not declared to those below and the feelings of those below were not transmitted to those above,” that had led to the catastrophe of the An Lushan rebellion. The principle of open access had again become itself a topic of remonstrance and seen as a factor disregarding which led to a major dynastic crisis.¹⁷³

Though his reign opened with declarations of political principle, and though he fulsomely endorsed the ideal of remonstrance on several occasions, Dezong proved to be one of the most restrictive of Tang emperors. For three years until 789, as an economy measure, appointments to omissions and remembrances were not renewed, so that only two remonstrators were in post.¹⁷⁴ The emperor tended to develop exclusive relations with a succession of chief ministers, who like some of their predecessors blocked access to the throne. It was perhaps an irony that his sustained contact with Lu Zhi resulted in some of the most eloquent formulations of the principle of remonstrance. As Lu put it to Dezong:

If remonstrators are numerous, that indicates that one is friendly; if they are forthright, it shows that one is tolerant; if impetuously accusatory, it demonstrates that one is forgiving; if indiscrete, it illustrates that one has been able to comply. Thus the relationship of the sovereign with the remonstrator is one of mutual benefit. The remonstrator has the gain of rank and reward; the ruler has the gain of stability and security. The remonstrator acquires the reputation of making submissions; the ruler also acquires the reputation of garnering and accepting remonstrations.¹⁷⁵

The restrictive political climate led to frustration among the scholar-official élite and to attempts to break through to the emperor. This was a time of heroic individual acts of remonstrance. We learn of Yang Cheng 陽城, Xiong Zhiyi 熊執易 and Gui Deng 歸登.¹⁷⁶ When Xiong Zhiyi showed Gui Deng a draft memorial, Gui Deng said, “I am willing to send in another name. How could I bear to let you stand alone beneath the thunder?”

The reign of Xianzong opened with the hope that earlier values could be recovered. The emperor was told that accepting remonstrance was the most urgent priority of the time.¹⁷⁷ Several officials remonstrated frequently in this period, among them Yuan Zhen, who was said to have “a nature as sharp as a spear-tip. When he witnessed something, his temper

¹⁷³ *ZZTJ*, 224, pp. 7189–90, dated 766.

¹⁷⁴ *JTS*, 130, p. 3622, biography of Li Mi 李泌.

¹⁷⁵ *ZZTJ*, 228, p. 7364; 229, pp. 7379–80, 7381–85; 230, p. 7423. For the background, see Twitchett, “Lu Chih: Imperial Adviser and Court Official,” pp. 97–98; and Chiu-Duke, *To Rebuild the Empire*, passim.

¹⁷⁶ *JTS*, 149, pp. 4019–20, biography of Gui Deng.

¹⁷⁷ *JTS*, 149, p. 4020, biography of Gui Deng.

would rise. Since he occupied the remonstrator's spot, he had no wish to toil away or restrict himself, he therefore held nothing back."¹⁷⁸ Yuan complained bitterly about the powerlessness of remonstrating officials when compared to the paragons of Taizong's reign.¹⁷⁹ At the same time, this is a period when the intellectual world commented most freely on the political system. The result is that the amount of comment on the ideal of remonstrations is copious.

Bai Juyi was also an omissioner, and, like Yuan Zhen, commented on the function and its offices.¹⁸⁰ Like Yuan Zhen, he cited the *Liu dian's* definition of the omissioner's role. He added that the reason that omissioners were low in rank was that this freed them from considerations of status that in higher-rank officials led to reluctance to speak openly. He pledged himself to discharge his duties:

Now your majesty is just established at the imperial zenith and has recently accepted the great name. Night and day you toil and labour to secure good order. Whenever you promulgate an administrative act or attend to an issue, all is consonant with the true way and suitable for the time. Thus the mind of the world is eagerly and by the day awaiting the great peace. But if from today on there should be by some chance something that is not suitable for the time, your majesty would surely wish to hear of it; if by some chance there was something not consonant with the true way, your majesty would surely wish to change it for the better. Should there be in your words or actions or in your decrees and orders, some slight omission or some slight adjustment to be made, then your servant will confidentially expound what he has seen and secretly present what he has heard, and it will simply be for your sagely mind to decide on it.¹⁸¹

To Bai Juyi also belongs the credit of reformulating the traditional idea that composing verse descriptive of popular injustice was a significant way of representing political and administrative wrongs. In office as an omissioner, he crossed the emperor in 809, when he took up a cause that had been the theme of 17 or 18 memorials from remonstrating officials, giving it a sharper edge than any of them. The issue was the appointment of a eunuch to senior military command.¹⁸² Bai also pleaded forcefully for Yuan Zhen, when Yuan was banished from the capital for a misdemeanour.¹⁸³ Bai's record in office like that of Yuan Zhen, suggests that the principles and practice of remonstrations were still vital in the Yuanhe period.

¹⁷⁸ *JTS*, 166, p. 4327.

¹⁷⁹ *Yuan Zhen ji*, 33, pp. 377–79. Yuan Zhen's description of the remonstrating officials as in sinecures (*rong yuan*) resembles that of Yuan Jie; see above at note 168.

¹⁸⁰ *JTS*, 166, pp. 4341–42.

¹⁸¹ *Bai Juyi ji*, 58, pp. 1228–29.

¹⁸² *JTS*, 166, p. 4244.

¹⁸³ *Bai Juyi ji*, 59, pp. 1248–49.

Protest versus Remonstrance

After this necessarily highly condensed account of the copiously documented tradition of remonstrating to the emperor, a conclusion should return to the concept of “protest.” In his *History of Chinese Political Philosophy*, Xiao Gongquan, having discussed the thought of Liu Zongyuan and Han Yu, makes a brief reference to the writing of Yuan Jie, a middle ranking official of the reigns of Suzong and Daizong. Yuan as a young man had written sweeping denunciations of the society of the late Tianbao period. These characterize an overwhelming and all-pervasive moral decadence in society, and plead for a restitution of the simple values of high antiquity. But Xiao is surely right to suggest that, unusually strongly worded though they are, “his statements profoundly convey regret over harshness against the people, but do not suggest doubt as to the basic form of government.”¹⁸⁴ Yuan’s outlook both as a young man and later as an administrator in the provinces may have been angry enough to be termed “protest;” but his comments do not amount to a critique of the political system.

It was not to be until some five decades later that the scholarly world entertained serious and broadly based critiques of the Tang administrative structure. The intellectual world of Liu Zongyuan and Han Yu was shaped by the recognition that the centre was no longer able to impose its political will on the provinces. The court had lost the highly centralized role and with it the enormous prestige that it had enjoyed at the start of the dynasty. The result profoundly affected the intellectual climate at the capital. Scholar-officials remained wholly committed to the ideology of dynastic rule; but they could only appeal rhetorically to the centralized authority of the seventh and early eighth centuries. Especially during the later years of the reign of Dezong, there is documented for the first time a climate of intellectual discussion that was not generated by specific political processes but was much more free ranging and, in one or two instances, more radical. Dissenting views were expressed and circulated unofficially. At the same time, however, those aspects of the traditional ideology that related to criticism of the “corrigible centre” and to the need to deliver information from the increasingly independent provinces to the centre became more rather than less important. The volume of direct criticism to the throne did not diminish; the heroic tradition of remonstrance continued.

It was the generation that lived through the restrictive political regime of Dezong’s last decade that formulated the clearest expression of this fundamental shift. A key transitional role may have been played by Du You 杜佑 (735–812). A provincial administrator for much of his career, he formulated his opinions as editorial insertions in his *Tong dian* 通典, a grand review of the state’s administrative structure. Du You’s compendium underlines how Tang scholar-officials made no distinction between memorials of remonstrance, essays, and editorial insertions. When he selected materials to demonstrate the correct policies for confronting the barbarians, he chose first a memorial of 697 from a remembrancer, Xue Qiang 薛謙光 then a passage from a lost work on military policies by the mid-eighth scholar Liu Kan 劉凱, before giving his own editorial judgement.¹⁸⁵ The same point could

¹⁸⁴ Xiao Gongquan, *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiang shi*, pp. 423–26.

¹⁸⁵ *Tong dian*, 200, pp. 5495–5503.

be made about another issue of key importance in Tang political philosophy, the *feng jian* 封建 issue. The principal Tang statements in the documentation for this issue that antedate Liu Zongyuan are first a particularly long memorial of remonstrance to Taizong and, secondly, an editorial insertion in the *Zheng dian* 政典, a lost compendium of Xuanzong's era by Liu Zhi 劉秩,¹⁸⁶ and thirdly Du You's own editorial insertions in the *Tong dian*.

Having been worsted politically in the early period of his career, Liu Zongyuan was an exile, a rejected official forced to serve in the far south. Much influenced by Du You through a mutual contact, Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), he expressed his political ideas in essays and letters not intended as acts of remonstrance but designed for a readership of fellow scholars like himself receptive to unofficial circulation.¹⁸⁷ His most forceful expressions of dissent are thus given in the tradition of political discourse that interested Xiao Gongquan.

Liu Zongyuan's writing¹⁸⁸ enables us to turn away from the tradition of remonstrance, of dissent expressed directly to the emperor from within the administrative framework, to a more radical form of dissent. Liu did not produce a systematic political philosophy. But certain general ideas recur in his comments on aspects of the political world of his day. It is one of the main arguments of this essay that these ideas may be related to the tradition of remonstrance that preceded them. Liu's ideas, in other words, took issues from the political agenda of the preceding decades and gave them more detached, rigorous and incisive expression. He was, like so many Tang scholar officials, a firm believer in evolutionary change, while endorsing as permanent certain underlying moral principles. One idea was his skepticism, his impatience with the idea that supernatural agency played a role in the fate of the dynasty. This was a theme that had informed more than one memorial of remonstrance to the emperor in the earlier years of the dynasty. His treatment of this theme was implicitly a criticism of the emperor, for many of the Tang emperors were considered credulous in this respect. Others had vested too much effort in the system of correlative cosmology.

Liu Zongyuan put forward another of his ideas in one of his most celebrated and eloquent essays. Developing the argument of Du You, he proposed that the system of government through prefectures and counties, the *junxian* 郡縣 system, was greatly superior to that of hereditary fiefs, the *feng jian* principle. Again, this had been a theme in remonstrance. What was remarkable in Liu Zongyuan's analysis was that he adopted a perspective that ran through the process of "regime change" and argued that when dynasties changed, the prefecture county system brought less disruption and less suffering to the polity as a whole.

A further idea, more directly related to the concept of political dissent, was Liu's promotion of the idea that the general good (*gong* 公 or *da gong* 大公) was the supreme value, by which even the emperor was to be judged. But again it can be shown that in giving

¹⁸⁶ *THY*, 46, p. 830.

¹⁸⁷ David McMullen, "Views of the State in Du You and Liu Zongyuan," in *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China*, ed. S. R. Schram (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), pp. 59–85.

¹⁸⁸ For a comprehensive account of Liu's intellectual position, see Jo-shui Chen, *Liu Tsung-yuan and Intellectual Change in T'ang China, 773–781* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

express form to this argument, Liu Zongyuan was picking up on the rhetoric of the public good that was much used, by emperors and officials in a wide range of contexts in political life.¹⁸⁹

Xiao Gongquan, in his review of Tang political thought, reserves a single comment only on the writing of Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi. He suggests that the *Celin* 策林 series of model examinations answers that Bai composed in 806 was coloured by the Daoism that the Tang dynastic house promoted.¹⁹⁰ The series is in effect a review of the Tang polity, addressed to the emperor, since the emperor was formally responsible for decree examinations. The mode of writing is therefore midway between the memorial of remonstrance to the emperor and the more detached and analytical discourse of Liu Zongyuan's essays. It suggests again that the ideas to which Liu Zongyuan gave analytical depth and a sharper edge were generally current in the intellectual and political world of the first decade of the ninth century. Bai Juyi represented moderate reforming opinion. He was also a convinced relativist, who believed in adapting institutions to historical change, while promoting permanent moral principles. He discussed many of the issues that Liu Zongyuan treated, the role of the supernatural in history, the *fengjian* issue and others such as the desirability of a moderate penal code. He specifically countered the idea that history represented a progressive decline from high antiquity, quoting a discussion between Taizong and Wei Zheng in 630 to make the point.¹⁹¹ But his use of Tang history is significantly selective. In his 75 essays, he adduced the early history of the Tang in two main contexts. The first is the primacy of the welfare of the common people, and here he quoted Taizong's own remark. The second was another point that found echoes in contemporary discussion, the relative lenience of the Tang criminal code, and again he was able to commend the Zhenguan period. But in another essay, he suggested that the Tang, though it inherited a deteriorated situation, had by creating new posts for remonstrance brought about good order. "These [posts]," he wrote, "were established by your illustrious ancestors, and honoured by successive emperors. Even the way of Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 has no means to surpass them. Thus the great harmony of the Zhenguan and the perfect order of the Kaiyuan were rapidly brought about through this."¹⁹²

At the same time as Liu Zongyuan was formulating his radical unofficial analyses and Bai Juyi drafted his model examination answers, other officials continued to deliver memorials of remonstrance. Since the emperor Xianzong was reasonably tolerant of criticism, the principle of remonstrance was eloquently reasserted and refined over this period. One official who remained largely silent through the middle and late Yuanhe period, despite deeply held opinions, especially on Buddhism, was Liu's friend and correspondent Han Yu who was also a friend in the early 820s of Bai Juyi. Then in 819, Han dramatically broke his silence, submitting his "Memorial discussing the bone of the Buddha," one of the most famous memorials of remonstrance in all Chinese history.

¹⁸⁹ David McMullen, "Concepts of Public and Private in Tang China," forthcoming.

¹⁹⁰ Xiao Gongquan, *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiang shi*, p. 423.

¹⁹¹ *Bai Juyi ji*, 62, p. 1295, "Celin" 8; *ZZTJ*, 193, p. 6084, dated 630.

¹⁹² *Bai Juyi ji*, 64, p. 1334, "Celin" 36.

The very different responses by Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan to the deterioration of Tang power and the fact that they remained correspondents and friends is to be explained by their shared rather than their divergent assumptions. Both, like Bai Juyi, were wholly committed to service under the Tang dynastic state and to the ideal of a harmonious administrative system. In turn, each of them took his commitment to an extreme in terms of the traditions available to them. Liu expressed in keener form the skeptical ideas that had been current in the political arena of the preceding century. He also reformulated the role of the emperor in relation to the good of the whole polity. Han exploited the tradition of remonstrance to submit a highly specific and risky proposal that the emperor change a course of action to which he was committed. Han Yu proved at the end of his life, long after he had ceased to be active in leading the anti-Buddhist campaign for which he is best known, that the remonstrance that he had eloquently promoted in connection with Yang Cheng more than two decades before, meant action and with it high risk.

Conclusion

To summarize: remonstrance and the principle of open access were ideologically very important to the political community in the Tang. They had deep historical and ideological roots and were an accepted part of the political structure that the Tang inherited. But the Tang expanded the provision for remonstrance. The system that they developed, despite appalling irregularities, fulfilled important political functions: it provided the political centre with sources of information that were necessary to maintain a political balance; it kept the “eyes and ears” of the emperor open. Sanctioned as it was by remote antiquity, it also conferred dignity and moral self respect on both sovereigns and officials and even on the few commoners who were able to use the provision. Like the ideology of open recruitment to official service, its regular implementation imparted long-term stability to the governmental structure. The system, with its prominently located physical symbols, came close to recognizing that dissent and political contention were inevitable and that they should be protected rather than penalized. The fact that it lasted through very different conditions suggests the stability of the administration below the emperor, in the structure of which it was embedded.

It was the strong emperor Taizong who formulated the principles most eloquently, while the empress Wu significantly expanded the system at the institutional level. Weaker emperors, or emperors who became tired as their reigns wore on, tended to rely on one or more chief ministers and effectively to block off access. The result was that the principle, the ideal of remonstrance and open access, were periodically and emphatically reasserted, though in contexts that differed greatly. The official community as a whole had in practice no means to promote these ideals except through the single initiative. Hence the problem that Yan Zhenqing described in 766 and the long succession of often eloquent comments endorsing the system that followed from the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

For the guardians of the “tutelary narration,” the record of remonstrance provided a varied and complex theme that perfectly illustrated their moralistic reading of history. Its proper operation came to have persuasive explanatory value, as a telling factor in historical causation. Thus the climactic events that threatened the survival of the Tang dynastic state,

the ascent to power of the empress Wu and the decision of An Lushan to use his military might against the dynasty, were attributed to the failure of the sovereign to keep open the channels of remonstrance.

A longer perspective on the system is more elusive. But the point made by Bai Juyi, selecting and commenting on the Tang dynasty's achievements, should be accepted; the Tang system truly surpassed anything that had preceded it. Moreover other evidence from the early eighth century suggests that the political community then came close to recognizing that politics, in the sense of competitive disagreement among able officials at the apex of the administrative hierarchy, should not necessarily be stigmatized, nor should political losers be unduly punished.¹⁹³ The more difficult question is to determine whether the Tang system was more open than those of later periods, and, if it was, whether this greater openness was historically significant or interesting. There is, after all, no analogue in Chinese history to the Whig interpretation of history, which saw British history as a progression towards reduction in the role of the sovereign, increasing recognition that the state served private interests and a long progress towards the ideological goal of universal suffrage. Nor is Chinese Marxist historiography, with its emphasis on the economic base or its highly moralistic reading of class conflict, of any help. For the remonstrance mechanism is essentially the conception of those already politically empowered or else invited into the political arena, and it is hard to read it as susceptible to a class-based analysis. A view that saw a progression in values in the Chinese governmental system is that first propounded in the west by Etienne Balazs. This relates as much to historiography as to developments on the ground. Balazs saw a trend to recording more technical bureaucratic and administrative information, to a secular spirit in documenting administration and a reduction of emphasis on the religious functions of the state. But this trend cannot be correlated with a trend towards greater tolerance of the dissenting voice at the apex of the administrative system.¹⁹⁴

There were, however, certainly periods following the Tang when the imperial dynastic system was far harsher, conditions at the apex of the administrative hierarchy much more dangerous, and the emperor far more despotic and less tolerant of dissent. The early Ming is a particularly well known example. The reign of Yongzheng has also been seen as a period when imperial control was exceptionally effective and when traditional means of articulating dissent were suppressed.¹⁹⁵ And it might also be argued that there were few periods when the rate of participation in dissent through remonstrance or participation in

¹⁹³ ZZTJ, 212, p. 6754, dated 722. Here, Zhang Yue argued against corporal punishment for high-ranking officials under sentence. His proposal was that, "Chief ministerships are taken up when the time comes. If the great ministers of state may all be humiliated by the cane, my great fear is that this will involve us. My statement is not made on behalf of Pei Zhouxian 裴胃先 (the official under discussion), but for the gentlemen scholars of the empire."

¹⁹⁴ See Etienne Balazs, "History as a Guide to Bureaucratic Practice," in *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*, ed. with an Introduction by Arthur F. Wright, trans. H. M. Wright (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 129–49.

¹⁹⁵ Pei Huang, *Autocracy at Work: A Study of the Yung-cheng Period* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), esp. pp. 3–23, "Introduction."



group discussion was as high in relation to the overall size of the official body at the capital as in the Tang.

To conclude with the paradox with which this essay opened: the high period of Tang success resulted in no innovatory writings on political philosophy that have survived. Yet in this period the medieval, as opposed to late dynastic, administrative system was at its most effective. The political process generated a great deal of documentation, only a tiny proportion of which is extant. It resulted in many statements of political principle, most of which were occasioned by identified irregularities. The political climate varied greatly from emperor to emperor. But notably at the beginning, it was relatively open and expressions of dissent were tolerated or even actively solicited. So effective was the precedent of the political order under Taizong that it replaced high antiquity as a standard to be invoked and recovered. Many acts of remonstrance were opportunistic and treated safe or recognized themes. That tradition of direct criticism from within the system continued through the dynasty. But after the An Lushan rebellion, later eighth century intellectuals wrote independently about the state. They promoted the ideal of the general good; they gave an emphasis on popular welfare that was stronger than anything that had preceded it. They suggested that the emperor himself was governed by the requirement to honour the general good.

There is, however, much common ground between the remonstrance tradition and the concerns of the late eighth century intellectuals who used the compilatory and discursive or essay traditions to comment incisively on the political system. The issues that the working political system had identified in the first two centuries were, by and large, the same issues that these scholars chose to treat. These scholars were influenced by and in turn promoted a traditional sense of vigilance and tirelessness that ensured the political vitality and, in some periods at least within the Tang, the relative openness of the medieval Chinese political system.



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唐代政治異議傳統

(中文摘要)

麥大維

本文試就唐代歷史上的一種矛盾現象進行分析。一方面，歷史學家強調唐代是一個繁榮而開放的時期；另一方面，他們指出在政治史上，特別是在鼎盛的八世紀，缺乏傑出的政治哲學家。正因如此，蕭公權的《中國政治思想史》除了對天寶時代元結的一段描寫外，從隋末的王通直接跨越到了九世紀初的韓愈和柳宗元。

本文認為，出現這種矛盾的主要原因跟唐代政治制度的特點有關。唐代政界一開始就反對隋代的暴政。唐太宗本人的理想是要培養一種開放的、直言不諱的政治氣氛。他不斷鼓勵人們諫諍，認為這不僅是諫官的職責，地方官員也負有同樣的責任。進諫當時是一個非常受人尊敬的舉動，類書、文集、傳記、實錄等對諫書均有編錄。正因為政治氣氛比較開明，所以參政者願意在諫表中或在參加朝廷討論時提及政治活動的基本原則和思想。本文也描述了唐代主要的皇帝和宰相對「納諫」的態度和他們與諫諍有關的事情，同時也描述了他們在鼓勵諫諍方面的差異。由於七世紀和八世紀初在朝廷參政比較開放，這對獨立政治哲學作品的產生反而起到了抑止作用。

在這樣的政治制度內用諫諍的方式來具體地評論政治可以稱為「異議」。本文認為，我們應該把通過諫諍所表達的異議與柳宗元和杜佑比較獨立和全面的看法和評論進行對比，他們兩人的觀點可以稱為「抗議」。

八世紀末到九世紀初的政治氣氛和思想界與唐初有很多不同之處。其中之一是當時的思想家如柳宗元等，其銳利的見解是為當時的思想界，包括他們的朋友和同事寫的，而不是為了進諫。不過，他們所注重的問題、關心的事情以及他們的思想與唐初和八世紀的政治討論及諫諍內容和主題有很多共同之處。

八世紀雖然沒有產生卓越的政治哲學家，但是當時的政治界所關心的問題與蕭公權所尊敬的那些九世紀思想家所關心的問題是相似的。