

Traces of Grand Peace: Classics and State Activism in Imperial China. By Jaeyoon Song. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015. Pp. xiv + 434. \$59.95/£47.95.

Jaeyoon Song's recent book is an ambitious effort to illuminate the complex intellectual background to Wang Anshi's 王安石 New Policies (*xinfa* 新法) reforms and their aftermath in the Northern and Southern Song eras. The key argument is that Wang Anshi's efforts to expand the role of the Song government in society rested on a foundation of innovative exegetical work centred on the *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Rituals of Zhou*), in which he and others found what amounted, in Song's view, to a "constitutional document that authorized a set of full-scale state-activist reforms" (p. 341). In developing this argument, Song makes an important contribution to the field by reading sympathetically the way scholar-officials employed intellectual resources in what was perhaps the most charged political debate in China's middle period. Specifically, Song's work is one of the few attempts in English to take seriously the political role of classical scholarship. Too often, classical exegesis appears in accounts of Northern Song political struggles as an example of Wang Anshi's ambition (arrogance in the eyes of his detractors) or as the purview of those rejecting mainstream culture, such as the forerunners of *Daoxue* 道學. What Song has done, however, is craft an argument that presents Wang as wrestling through one specific classic to reinforce the political solutions that he had come to advocate during his service before being given the reins of state. That said, the volume's organization and stylistic unevenness, as I shall discuss below, do obscure that argument at times.

The *Zhouli* is certainly well chosen for a study of this sort. It was a natural source for statecraft thinking because it purported to describe the institutions of the Duke of Zhou's 周公 administration during the early Western Zhou era. At the same time, however, aspects of its description, such as its account of the relationship between the so-called royal domain and those of the feudal lords, presented a challenge for those advocating a more assertive role for the central government throughout the empire. Such tensions between the text and its political application provided ample ground for a confluence of exegesis and power politics.

Song's work aims at wide topical coverage in an attempt to analyse a very complex political and intellectual environment. He organizes his material in something of a hybrid, quadripartite structure. He essentially juxtaposes a chronological discussion of the *Zhouli*'s reception with a thematic analysis of the relationship between Wang's reforms and the text. Part I (Wealth, Power, and Legitimacy) introduces the *Zhouli* and moves from its interpretation before Wang Anshi to the role of the text in the New Policies. Li Gou's 李覲 interpretation of the text and its relationship to Fan Zhongyan's 范仲淹 initial reform effort in the 1040s receives

particular emphasis as preparation for understanding the enduring appeal of the *Zhouli* among institutional reformers. The final chapter in the part introduces Wang himself. Parts II (“Bureaucracy and State Management”) and III (“Economic Plans, Social Organization, and Moral Suasion”) then examine Wang’s application of the *Zhouli* to the various arenas of state operations by placing the New Policies reforms in the context of institutions described in the classic. Part II deals with some overarching topics such as Wang Anshi’s idiosyncratic use of etymology for interpreting the text, the role of the premier (or prime minister) in the state, and the function of the ruler in governing the empire, while Part III addresses specific state operations with chapters on fiscal operations, public education, and the moral edification of the population. Part IV, subtitled “Political Visions and Plans for Reform in the New Policies Period,” suggests a shift from theoretical reflections on the text to the actual implementation of reform. Two of the chapters in this section are devoted to the explication of one particular issue: the territorial organization of the empire as depicted in *Zhouli*. These are followed by a chapter devoted to “the Market, Social Organization, and the Military System.” The last chapter addresses efforts during the Southern Song by opponents of the New Policies regime to wrest control of the *Zhouli* from the reformers. The shifting between perspectives, chronological and thematic, that this approach embodies is perhaps overly ambitious as it does become disorienting.

One important idea that Song deploys in his analysis is that Wang and his antagonists were engaged in a “constitutional” debate. Echoing the work of David Schaberg, this approach helps readers transcend the moralism and partisanship with which the original sources are suffused (pp. 17ff.).¹ Moreover, the book demonstrates Song’s impressive command of both the primary sources and the relevant secondary literature. This solid scholarly base means that there is much substance that readers interested in the material can mine for further insight.

Nevertheless, the work’s ambition does seem to outstrip the execution. The most important problem with Song’s work is that it seems to be essentially two separate books, neither of which has been fully realized. The first is a book about the evolution of *Zhouli* exegesis through the Southern Song. There is ample discussion of the pre-Song standard commentaries of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 and Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 along with the ways that Song thinkers reacted to those interpretations. At the same time, there is a book here on Wang Anshi’s use of the text in his political struggles and his distinctive interpretive approach. The material related to this second theme contributes

¹ Schaberg’s employment of the concept of “constitution” in connection with the *Zhouli* appears in David Schaberg, “The *Zhouli* as Constitutional Text,” in Benjamin A. Elman and Martin Kern, eds., *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 33–63.

to a long running discussion of the intellectual foundation of Wang's politics.² Although *Zhouli* exegesis and Wang's use of the text are related topics, either one could serve as the topical centre of a book: one would take as its focus the intellectual history of the text itself; the other the ideological dimension of a specific political event. As it stands, however, they are not fully integrated, and the result is a text that veers back and forth between the two, making it difficult to follow the specifics of any one argument.

The clearest manifestation of the uncertain focus is the book's organizational inconsistency. The chapter titles of Part I suggest a broadly chronological approach to the material, beginning with chapter 1 devoted to "A Brief History of the *Zhouli*, 200 bc–ad 900" and concluding with chapter 4 "The Rise of the *Zhouli* during the New Policies Period." The last chapter (14) of Part IV returns to the chronological approach: "Taking Back the *Zhouli* in the Southern Song." Between chapters 4 and 14 are nine chapters that focus on thematic material related to Wang Anshi's interpretations. However, most of the discussion of pre-Song *Zhouli* exegesis actually appears in the thematic New Policies chapters, not in the chapter on the *Zhouli* before 900. Similarly, as he feels it necessary to explicate different aspects of Wang's interpretations, Song refers to late Northern Song or even Southern Song material in the thematic chapters. As a whole, then, the organization feels a bit haphazard, instead of like a unified logical structure.

The author has also not fully explained some of his decisions. For example, the attraction of devoting a chapter to Li Gou and the series of fifty interrelated essays on the *Zhouli* he wrote in the 1040s ("On the *Zhouli* as the Road to Grand Peace") is clear (p. 53). Li had a systematic take on the text and provided the author with the conceptual hook for his title. However, Li's marginal political position makes it imperative to explain his import to the larger arc of either *Zhouli* exegesis or eleventh-century politics. Song never quite manages this. He asserts that Li's "take on the *Zhouli* reassures us that this text did play an irreplaceable role among the Confucian Classics" (p. 76), but Wang Anshi is surely sufficient—and the more telling—evidence of the *Zhouli*'s centrality. Why there is the need to devote an entire chapter to Li Gou remains unclear, but perhaps this observation at the end of the chapter is revealing: "By referring to the text of the *Zhouli*, Li Gou could address the economic, social, political, bureaucratic, and moral/ethical dimensions of government in a systematic way. No other Confucian classics could replace the *Zhouli* in this regard" (p. 77). This statement illustrates the lack of a consistent focus in the book's

² Another recent contribution to this subject appears also in the Elman and Kern volume: Peter K. Bol, "Wang Anshi and the *Zhouli*," in Elman and Kern, eds., *Statecraft and Classical Learning*, pp. 229–51.

central argument. We move here from a single individual's specific interpretation of the *Zhouli* in the eleventh century to a transcendent assessment of the *Zhouli*'s place in the broader intellectual culture.

The discussion of several “generations” of commentators attempting to reclaim the *Zhouli* from its New Policies associations in the book's last chapter also seems incomplete. The chapter provides a fairly extensive list of individuals who wrote on the classic, but unlike earlier chapters that delved into the technical aspects of the interpretations of Zheng Xuan, Jia Gongyan, Li Gou, Wang Anshi, and Wang Zhaoyu 王昭禹, this chapter seems rushed and does not address what exactly was innovative in anti-reform Southern Song interpretations. The result is that closure remains elusive on one of the big arguments of the book—how classical exegesis was integral to political debate. Fortunately, the author has elsewhere published an essay that does more clearly describe the kind of Southern Song interpretive shifts hinted at in the book chapter.³

The discussion of the *fengjian* 封建 system also remains unresolved. Even those casually acquainted with the *Zhouli* are aware that it makes a clear distinction between the royal domain and the realms of the so-called feudal lords. Given that, it is odd that Wang would take up the text in service of a political agenda that expanded the scope of central authority and regulation. Song does effectively explain how Wang made specific interpretative moves that allowed him to conclude that the royal domain was both larger than had been granted by earlier commentators and determined policy for the entire empire. Song points out that Wang was aided in his effort by the fact that “Northern Song political culture was generally critical of the *fengjian* model” (p. 294) and that his critics interpreted the text “as the constitution of divided rule, regional autonomy, and the balance between the central, regional, and local governments” (p. 295). But Song does not clearly explain what that last assertion means. It certainly does not mean literally what the sentence says, that there was some structural limitation on the central government. It must mean that the critics were advocating imperial restraint of some kind, but there is no systematic explanation of how they anchored that in the *Zhouli*.

The book also wrestles with one last organizational problem. In developing Wang's interpretation of the *Zhouli*, Song must deal with two distinct challenges: (1) he needs to distinguish Wang's approach from that of the standard commentaries represented by Zheng Xuan and Jia Gongyan; and (2) he has to overcome the fact that Wang's *Zhouli* commentary, which formed one part of his *New Meanings of the*

³ Jaeyoon Song, “Tension and Balance: Changes of Constitutional Schemes in Southern Song Commentaries on the *Rituals of Zhou*,” in Elman and Kern, eds., *Statecraft and Classical Learning*, pp. 252–76.

Three Classics (Sanjing xinyi 三經新義), has not survived in its entirety. The second problem necessitates his drawing on the late Northern Song explication of it by Wang Zhaoyu. The combination of these twin necessities and the topical approach to the material in Parts II, III, and most of IV means that the chapters tend to jump back and forth between Zheng and Jia, demonstrably Wang Anshi material, and Wang Zhaoyu material. The result is that the reader can easily lose track of these four distinct perspectives during the course of the various chapters.

The organization and integration of the arguments are the substantive problem in the book. Although simple modifications to the text would not solve them, the writing occasionally exacerbates the lack of clarity that stems from those organizational issues. Judicious editing would certainly have helped bring points more clearly into focus and would have linked the essential threads of the various arguments. Many sections seem repetitive, and the same points appear multiple times across the chapters. The inclusion of long translations of excerpts from various primary sources also obscures some of the essential points. Although I recognize that the primary texts themselves represent the essential evidence in an intellectual history argument, excessively long translations that are not systematically explicated actually increase the risk of confusing the reader, who must do extra work to figure out which parts of the quotation are truly significant.

Another problem with the writing that affects its clarity concerns the selection of English translations for some of the technical terminology. A good example of this appears in the discussion of the *Zhouli*'s description of bureaucratic functions. Different categorizations of such functions are rendered using general English terms. We have therefore the "Ten Articles," the "Six Canons," the "Eight Statutes," and the "Eight Regulations" (pp. 121–38), but Song does not explain his reasons for these choices or how they relate to each other. Elsewhere, translations are inconsistent. For example, on pp. 223 and 240, the term *dang* 黨 (used as a territorial unit) is translated as "faction." Although that is the usual translation for the term when used to describe associations engaged in a political struggle, it is not a particularly helpful translation when describing administrative geography, especially given its negative connotations. But then in a translation on p. 242, Song renders it as "ward." I think the second option works better, but I would recommend consistency at the least.

Finally, I think Song's book would have benefited from a more aggressive level of copy-editing. Such editing could at least have caught some of the more obvious stylistic infelicities that occasionally obscure the points that Song wishes to make. A couple of examples will illustrate what I mean. A description of the expansion in the number of recognized Confucian classics reads: "Subsequently, the number of the state-sanctioned Classics grew over time, absorbing influential commentaries and new theories, from the initial five to nine to twelve to thirteen to even twenty-one" (p. 3). Clearly, the increase in the number of the Classics was not literally a function

of “absorbing” “new theories.” A more nuanced way of expressing what must surely have been Song’s point is something like, “In light of new theories, the number of texts considered Classics increased over time from the original five to ultimately thirteen or even twenty-one.” Elsewhere, reading Song’s intent is even more difficult. In chapter 8, we have the following: “More specifically, the pairs relate to local and regional leaders who ‘harmonize and converge’ (*xie’ou*) the ten thousand people in the regional states in order to ‘incorporate the populace’ (*demin*)” (p. 189). The choice of translations here is an issue, but even an editor who is not a specialist would recognize that in English “converge” is not a transitive verb, and neither “converge” nor “incorporate” takes people as objects. It is difficult to know what such phrases actually mean. As such examples multiply in the course of the book, the risk of confusing the reader increases.

My reservations above notwithstanding, I learned much from Song’s book. Although the organizational and stylistic issues impact its clarity, Song’s erudition is indisputable. And the value of his framing of Wang Anshi’s New Policies and their aftermath as a debate over constitutional arrangements that takes seriously the way that classical exegesis was intimately entwined with political debate comes through in the work.

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Daoism, Meditation, and the Wonders of Serenity: From the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220) to the Tang Dynasty (618–907). By Stephen Eskildsen. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015. Pp. viii + 387. \$85.00 hardcover, \$29.95 paperback.

In Chinese religious texts we can find descriptions of meditation practices that aim to actively manipulate the processes in the mind and body in the hope of obtaining insight, healing, longevity, immortality, or other results. These practices include visualization, respiratory exercises, dietary practices, and sexual techniques. The most well-known and primary example of such complex ideas and proactive practices are probably those of the Shangqing 上清 tradition, although many lesser known and less influential texts produced by other religious communities can likewise be found in the Daoist Canon. Some texts describe much simpler and more passive methods of meditation that aim at similar goals by simply making the mind as calm and clear as possible or by turning the attention inward and focusing it on a single location, often the lower elixir field in the abdomen. When such “serenity-based” meditation practices