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Project Title: Before Zhu Xi: Geopolitical Crisis and the Unfolding of Daoxue Neo-Confucianism in Song China, 1107-1163

Abstract:

a) Academic Significance/ Novelty of Research

This is a historical study of the formative stage of Daoxue after the Five Masters of the Northern Song (960-1127) and before Zhu Xi (1130-1200). Because the three generations of Daoxue scholars between the Five Masters and Zhu Xi are overshadowed by the great achievements of both, their contributions are one of the least researched areas in the study of Daoxue. Given the state of the field, an objective of this project is to fill a gap in the study of Daoxue, but it is not to provide a linear overview. Rather, I hope to engage with two paramount historiographical issues: the "twelfth-century" question and the vision and maintenance of polity amidst geopolitical competition and crises.

b) Hypothesis/ Research Questions to be Addressed

There are three different views concerning the Northern-Southern Song transition in the twelfth century. The first suggests that the political culture remained constant despite the traumatic event of 1127 when the Song lost its northern territories to the Jurchens. The second argues that the ascendancy of Zhu Xi signifies that China had "turned inwards" following the devastating tragedy of 1127 when Southern Song elites abandoned the expansionist approach that characterized the eleventh century. In its place was an inward-looking collective mindset, on which Zhu Xi built his introspective mode of moral philosophy. The third argues that Southern elites differed from their Northern Song counterparts in that their attentions to affairs shifted from the national to the local level. It is also argued that after losing the north, the Song court became less ambitious in governing the remaining realms. The retreat of the state created space at the local level for the elites to exert their influences. This changed the ways the elites understood their relationship with the state and resulted in changes in their cultural and intellectual endeavours. The rise of Daoxue and its emphasis of elite voluntarism was triggered by this transition.

These three views collectively bring to the forefront the "twelfth century question". Yet most inquiries tend to focus on the late twelfth century and after, that is, during and after Zhu Xi's rise. The immediate generations who personally experienced the 1127 transition received far less attention. As such, we are left to wonder about the impacts of such a large-scale geopolitical crisis on the lives and visions of the elites during the transitory moments.

Without restricting my investigation to the three positions outlined above, I ask how the 1127 crisis shaped the intellectual and socio-political orientations of the Daoxue thinkers who lived through the crisis. A central question that I will be asking is how these thinkers reconciled Daoxue's ethical principles of universalism with the realities of co-existing polities divided along ethnic and cultural lines coming into conflicts.

To address the issue of change and continuity, we will also need to ask were there notably differences before and after 1127 in terms of how these thinkers apprehended the polity that they called "our I dynasty" and their places in it. This would bring us to the second historiographical issue: the vision and maintenance of polity amidst geopolitical competition and crisis.

Was the Song an empire? Some historians of China argue that as compared to the Roman empire, Song China did not adopt the "rule different people differently" mode of government. By and large

Song 1 elites still held on to the idea that their dynasty should be an overarching polity that rules "all under heaven". On the other hand, some point to a form of pre-modern nationalism and argue that the Song state and the world order within which it was situated was conceptually a viable alternative to the modern system of nation-states.

While notions such as "empire" and "nation-state" were foreign to them, the Song elites did have to ponder and conceptualize the polity that they called "our dynasty". Is "this dynasty of ours" a Han-Tang style polity that defines its relationship with its neighbours as a tributary one? Or is it just a sovereign state among equals? Moreover, did the 1127 crisis change the way the elites assessed the geopolitical realities that they faced and the nature and place of their dynasty within the new order?

Daoxue advocates had one of the most sophisticated conceptions of the Song dynasty as a political entity within the geopolitical framework of their times, and their responses to the 1127 crisis were an integral component of their overall visions of cosmology, ethics, epistemology, culture, politics and history. Yet scholars who are interested in the Song dynasty as a polity rarely look to Daoxue's philosophy for answers, and those who see Daoxue as a system of moral philosophy have overlooked the important role geopolitical factors played in shaping Daoxue's worldview.

This project thus represents the first attempt to study the political views of these early twelfth century Daoxue thinkers with the assumption that the geopolitical realities that they faced had profound influences on their philosophy, and their views on cosmology, epistemology and ethics in turn shaped their understanding of the Song as a polity.

c) Methodology/ Approach and Feasibility of study

This is a project of intellectual history. My study of the Daoxue thinkers who were instrumental in advancing Daoxue beyond the Five Masters will connect their life events with their ideas. The first step would be to unearth their biographical data and map out the networks that they were involved in using digital tools such as CBDB and CHGIS to visualize the networks across time and space in a way not possible before.

To construct a reliable database, disparities in historical records need to be checked. I intend to visit the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., the Harvard Yenping Library of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, the Oriental Library in Tokyo and the National Library and Fu Ssunien Library at Academia Sinica, both in Taipei. These libraries boast huge collections of Song dynasty sources and have the most efficient cataloguing systems.

Expected deliverables include a book and a journal article revised from a conference paper.