

IDEAS BEHIND LITERATI ACTIVISM IN THE QIANLONG-JIAQING TRANSITION: ZHANG XUECHENG (1738–1801) AND THE STATIST RE-ORIENTATION OF CONFUCIAN SCHOLARSHIP

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Ideas entail actions. Historically, events prompted by individual or collective actions are more often than not predicated on prior evolutions of certain ideas. When the prosperous age of High Qing gradually gave way to the domestic crises of demographic pressure, ecological degradation, internal rebellions and bureaucratic breakdown at the turn of the nineteenth century, *literati's* re-emerging political activism generated a wave of new dynamics in imperial politics and saw a flourishing of statecraft reformism in the intellectual sphere.¹ This well-documented phenomenon during the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition is understood by some in modern scholarship as closely related to growing *literati* dissidence against the sagging bureaucracy resulting from the divisive court politics of the Heshen era, which translated into calls for institutional reform and greater autonomy against state incursion in early nineteenth century.² Therefore, studies on intellectual history of the period tend to focus on sociopolitical circumstances as the driving force for emerging trends in the world of thought. Elman's investigation of the rise of New Text classicism as an ideological cornerstone for statecraft reformism is a perfect example of how scholars conceptualize intellectual developments as predominantly shaped by grim political realities of the time.³

This sociological approach to intellectual history which stresses the formation of academic communities and individual scholar's personal experience

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¹ Jones and Kuhn 1978, pp. 107-162. For new political dynamics in terms of changing relations between the state and local elites, see Han 2016, pp. 606-648; For statecraft thinking in late imperial China, see The Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica ed., 1984. For a recent study of reformism in early nineteenth century, see Rowe, 2018, pp. 22-41.

² Nivison 1959, pp. 209-243; Polachek 1991, pp. 36-61.

³ Elman 1990, pp. 276-319.

as central to conceptual transformations merits further consideration. Firstly, the transmission of ideas may be far more widespread than personal or even institutional affiliations would suggest. Ge Zhaoguang has pointed out that scholarly exchanges in Evidential Scholarship (*kaozheng xue* 考證學) were not confined to the Jiangnan academic community which Elman pays special attention to. Neither was one's place of origin indicative of one's academic background as the mobility of scholars defies simplistic associations of their regional ties to their experience of scholarly training. The imperial examination system further served to forge networks between Jiangnan and the capital, transcending regional limitations and even creating nascent communities nationwide alongside scholars' bureaucratic careers.⁴ The exchange of ideas arising therein would thus be vibrant enough to generate impacts beyond the scholars' immediate circles. It is fairly possible that ideational communications and transformations prompting activist resurgence were not exclusive to a single locality or figure either. Secondly, treating a historical event as decisive in directing the trajectory of intellectual developments is reminiscent of R. G. Collingwood's distinction of an event as having an outside "in terms of bodies and their movements" and an inside that can only be perceived "in terms of thought." Collingwood goes on to identify the historian's main task to discern the thought of the agent behind every action in the event.⁵ Yet even if we grant the slight possibility for scholars to acquire the "right horizon of inquiry" in studying historical mind-sets,⁶ such an approach still risks reading posterior interpretations back into history which might be in stark contrast to what the agent had actually experienced.⁷ In this case, despite the unmistakable influence of changing situations in Qing politics and long-term social transformations on the world of thought, they constitute at best necessary factors in the formation of novel ideas. That is, without these factors the intellectual developments could have been entirely different, but their existence per se does not automatically initiate such dynamics. To sufficiently explain why certain ideas took shape in a historical period, we need to analyze how previous developments within the intellectual realm set the stage for these ideas to emerge in their concrete forms, without losing sight of crucial historical events that were appropriated by

⁴ Ge Zhaoguang 2012, pp. 15-18. Ori Sela also notes the consolidation of scholarly networks on philology was in fact centred around the capital and boosted by the examination system, see Sela 2018, pp. 40-54.

⁵ Collingwood 1994, pp. 213-217.

⁶ Gadamer 2004, pp. 301-302.

⁷ Tai Ching-hsien criticizes Elman's assertion that Zhuang Cunyu's 莊存與 (1719-1788) turn to the *Gongyang* school of New Text classicism was caused by Zhuang's power struggle with Heshen by claiming that Elman's reading of the crucial evidence supporting his own view is marred by his preconceptions. Instead, Tai states that in the evidence, which was an introduction to Zhuang's posthumous work composed by Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857), we can only learn Zhuang Cunyu lamented Heshen's abuse of power when reading the *Book of Poetry* and the *Book of Changes*. The *Gongyang* commentary to the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* is nowhere mentioned. See Tai Ching-hsien 2012, p. 312 (note 67).

scholars of the time for their own agendas. This inevitably involves an analysis of logical connections between preceding ideas and current intellectual trends to determine which “seeds”, if any, were planted in prior intellectual developments and waiting to sprout at the right time. The novel situations in the sociopolitical milieu can then be said to have created the momentum for these “seeds” to flourish, without which the emerging ideas could not have unfolded in the way they did.

In the following sections I shall trace the historical evolution of ideas leading to *literati* activism during the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition and offer a preliminary analysis of their connections to emerging trends in the intellectual world of that time. The peculiarities of political realities and social transformations under Qing rule, together with the advent of Evidential Scholarship, generated growing optimism among Confucian scholars that sagely rule had reappeared in their time, emboldening some of the finest minds to recover the meanings and principles (*yili* 義理) encoded in ancient classics and restore the Golden Age of antiquity in their age. Pivotal to such an agenda was the construction of institutionalized disciplines directing human nature toward moral perfection. The desirability of realizing past ideals in contemporary establishments eventually transcended classical studies and gave rise to a form of presentism – i.e. a strand of thought stressing the centrality for scholarly pursuits to address practical issues specific to their historical era instead of blindly following the dogmas of classical teachings – which crystallized in the historical studies of Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801).⁸ Appropriating previous scholars’ institutionalist concerns, this presentist agenda regarded the existing political framework – i.e. the Qing imperial state as indispensable to materialize the vision of re-enlivening antiquity’s glory. The underlying statism, that is a set of doctrines which upheld the state as embodying the cosmic authority of *dao* (道) and thus self-legitimizing, pushed the institutionalist agenda to its logical conclusion by subsuming scholarly endeavors completely under the might of political authority.⁹ It further became a convenient point of reference for subsequent statecraft reformism to resurge in the age of dynastic

⁸ The relevance of Zhang Xuecheng to Qing intellectual history is generally understood through his expertise as a historian, his historicist interpretation of Confucian classics and his ethical theory emphasizing the role of history in moral cultivation, see Nivison 1966; Qian Mu 1997, pp. 419-472; Yu Ying-shih 2000, pp. 35-90; Ivanhoe 2009, pp. 189-203. Yet Zhang’s historicist thinking is unmistakably tied to his statecraft orientation, see Chow and Liu 1984, pp. 117-156. Nevertheless, how the presentism of Zhang is connected to prior and subsequent intellectual developments remains understudied.

⁹ Peter Gue Zarrow observes the flourishing of statism in late Qing intellectuals’ reinvention of China in the wake of imperial disintegration. Though highlighting the gravity of the state in political discourse, Zarrow’s statism is entangled with the rhetoric of nationalism and sovereignty informed by Western political theories. Consequently, he sees the statist imagination of China as a rupture from imperial political culture. Here I will only point out that my usage of statism is closely linked to the internal discourse on political authority in Qing China before the popularization of Western learning. See Zarrow 2012, pp. 4, 276-298.

decline. Intertwined with shared cosmological assumptions among contemporary scholars, the presentist agenda served as a cornerstone for the statist re-orientation of Confucian scholarship. Presentism in this article thus stems from the inner logic of intellectual dynamics in Qing Confucianism, rather than from scholars' contempt of modernity's futurist agenda in the postmodern human condition.¹⁰ Even less is the term associated with the ideological reconstruction of history in twentieth century China for the gains of the communist regime.¹¹

1. Imperial Patronage and the Underlying Agenda of Qing Classical Studies

The beginning of the High Qing was marked by the imperial court's major shifts in cultural policies to accommodate Han *literati's* social status in the new regime upon its swift conquest of Ming China and subsequent dynastic consolidation. Under the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, the regionalist allegiance with Liaodong Chinese gradually moved toward a more inclusive stance for all under Qing rule to win over *literati* loyalty especially in the Lower Yangtze region (Jiangnan 江南). Seeking to assert political authority's cultural dominance, Kangxi also actively patronized scholarly enterprises by officially sponsoring Confucian learning through erecting the orthodoxy of Cheng-Zhu school Neo-Confucianism, directing massive projects like the compilation of Ming History and standardizing interpretations of classics. Consequently, the new dynasty gained recognition among Han Chinese as many offspring of Ming loyalists and leading Jiangnan scholars were eventually drawn to the court.¹²

Such a sociopolitical milieu turned out to be encouraging for scholars brought up in the new intellectual atmosphere following the Ming-Qing transition, which saw the decline of metaphysical speculation and growing emphasis on external disciplines as well as practical outputs of academic pursuits. Discrediting man's subjugation to the intangible heavenly principle (*li* 理), this new climate initiated an anti-metaphysical movement that upheld the concrete vital force (*qi* 氣) in the cosmic process of generation, which further debunked the duality of *li* and *qi* as cosmic reality. Consequently, the cosmological models buttressed by the moral metaphysics of *li* were increasingly reassessed on empirical grounds. Ritual practice as the objective, institutionalized mechanism for maintaining social order rather than moral self-cultivation also gained currency among a wider audience.¹³ With Kangxi's

¹⁰ Hartog 2015, pp. 193-204.

¹¹ Mitter 2017, pp. 263-274; Smith 2017, pp. 274-289.

¹² Spence 2002, pp. 147-150; Peterson 2016, pp. 571-605; Crossley 1999, pp. 108-128.

¹³ Wang 2014, pp. 1-40; Ge Jinrong 1994, pp. 78-155, 431-488; Yu Ying-shih 2016a. For new trends in cosmology of the period, see Henderson 1984, pp. 150-155, 175-195; Ge Zhaoguang

activist stance in ruling over the reunified realm, it is time to actualize the goals of the ascending practical learning (*shixue* 實學) now disciplined by imperial patronage. Hence, Li Guangdi 李光地 (1642-1718), a prominent official under Kangxi's patronage and leading scholar of the Cheng-Zhu school, acclaimed that the emperor's advocacy of sagely learning was comparable not to "that of post Han and Tang dynasties, but to that of the Three Dynasties of Yao and Shun." With the emperor meeting the expectations of sage-king, "Heaven would revive the destiny (*yun* 運) of Yao and Shun, unifying the traditions of *dao* and governance (*zhi* 治) once more."¹⁴ Serving initially as a mechanism for political critiques, the rhetoric of the tradition of *dao* empowered *literati* voices in imperial politics by granting a certain degree of intellectual autonomy to adherents of Confucian teachings as bearers of *dao*. But as Kangxi sought to patronize Confucian learning by presenting the state as the spearhead in propagating Confucianism, he ceaselessly proclaimed to have united the two traditions of *dao* and governance. The emperor would thus tirelessly study Neo-Confucianism and refashion himself as the sage-king monopolizing Heaven's mainstay (*qiangang* 乾綱).¹⁵ In this way, he became the only person connecting the realms of Heaven and man, which enabled him to announce the two inseparable traditions as having been endowed by Heaven's Mandate to Qing's dominion. Li's accolade thus reveals a good portion of political realities deftly anchored by Kangxi and the impact on *literati* mentality. He would therefore reformulate Zhu Xi's metaphysics to forward a meta-practical agenda of verifying metaphysical concepts in the actual accomplishments of statecraft, which provided an opportunity for ambitious *literati* to materialize their visions of transmitting *dao* through unreservedly serving the imperial state.¹⁶ Similarly, the representative of the Lu-Wang school "Learning of the heart-mind" (*xinxue* 心學) in early Qing, Li Fu 李紱 (1673-1750), saw Kangxi's reign as having united the long separated traditions of *dao* and governance since antiquity, making the ruler "the supreme authority both in the realm of politics and of culture."¹⁷ As a result, the intellectual autonomy promoted by previous scholars gradually succumbed to political authority and the critical strain in *literati* identity as bearers of *dao* independent of political establishments faded.¹⁸ Carefully charting the ground of *literati* autonomy increasingly regulated by the state, scholars like Li Guangdi and Li Fu came to regard the existing political framework as indispensable to actualize Confucian ideals.

2001, pp. 449-498. For the emergence of scholarly interest in Confucian ritual, see Chow 1996, pp. 15-70.

¹⁴ *Beizhuan ji*, 1: 334-335.

¹⁵ Ho Koon-piu 2002, pp. 277-291.

¹⁶ Ng 2001, pp. 69-129.

¹⁷ Huang 1995, p. 147.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-62, 148-168.

Such conceptual transformations were further complicated by unprecedented social change that characterized China's 'long eighteenth century.' Pressures on the political system resulting from population boom, imperial expansion, massive migration and growth of extra-bureaucratic organizations, aroused among solicitous *literati* an urge to accommodate these novel situations in preservation of Confucian cultural values.¹⁹ And in line with the convictions of Li Guangdi, this zeal for 'ordering the world' placed itself well under the aegis of state authority. Therefore, fervent official elites would repeatedly bring the 'state' into 'statecraft' by encouraging state activism in managing local affairs and propagating state ideology through education campaigns and orthodox ritual performance.²⁰ Confucian learning influenced by these sociopolitical factors also saw a revival of institutionalist interest in ritual studies aimed at recovering authentic Confucian rituals for present needs, which fueled the philological turn in Qing classical studies.²¹ The kingpin of Evidential Scholarship in the Qianlong era, Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777), when writing in commemoration of the senior philologist Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697-1758), would thus conceptualize classical studies as transcending mere philological concerns:

If (the study of) meanings and principles can be grounded in speculation instead of classics, then everyone would grasp them out of emptiness. What would be the use of classical studies? It is when through speculation one fails to comprehend the meanings and principles of worthies and sages that one turns to classics. And it is when the ancient classical texts create obstacles to understanding that one turns to philology. With the illumination of philology comes the illumination of classics, and with that comes the illumination of the meanings and principles of worthies and sages. Then what is also true in my mind will be illuminated. The meanings and principles of worthies and sages are preserved nowhere else than in the codes and institutions (*dianzhang zhidu* 典章制度).²²

Having met Hui briefly in 1757, Dai nevertheless ended up in irreconcilable divides with Hui over methodological issues on studying Zhou rituals. By regarding philology as the *sine qua non* to illuminate sagely teachings of antiquity, Dai here seemed to again insinuate a rebuttal of Hui's parochial focus on the technical aspects of ancient rituals and classics. For Dai, what is encoded in classics contains not only guidelines for ritual performance but the actual working of the cosmos. It is evidential scholars' unshirkable duty to recover true meanings of Confucian classics and ultimately the *dao* of antiquity through philological inquiry. This assertion not only accords with Dai's earlier convictions, but remains throughout his academic career until the very end.²³

¹⁹ Rowe 2002, pp. 473-562.

²⁰ I.e. the case of Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀 (1696-1771), see Rowe 2001, pp. 326-362, 406-345.

²¹ Chow 1996, pp. 155-186. For a recent critique, see Sela 2018, pp. 171-172.

²² *Dai Zhen quanshu*, 6: 497-498.

²³ *Dai Zhen quanshu*, 6: 368-370, 370-371, 478-479. See also Cheng Chung-yi 2009, pp. 227-233.

Small wonder that Dai would unhesitatingly strive to master evidential techniques, both Chinese and Western, and become a polymath of new knowledge, while still clinging to the classical vision of reviving past traditions in his day.²⁴

It then begs the question of how Dai understood the profound meanings and principles, which can be approached by first looking at his conception of the cosmic *dao*.

Dao is like the passage (of things in time and space). The transformation of *qi* (氣) spreads and generates without an end. This is called *dao* [...]. *Yin, yang* and the Five Elements are all *dao*'s substances; (man's) bodily vigor (*xueqi* 血氣) and intellect (*xinzhi* 心知) are the substances of (his) nature [...]. This is what people in antiquity called human nature and that originates from the *dao* of Heaven.²⁵

Following the anti-metaphysical line of argument in perceiving cosmic realities, Dai interpreted *dao* as merely the concrete manifestation of the *qi*'s movement. This empiricist understanding of cosmic forces inevitably led Dai to view the ideal way for society as manifested in everyday activities rather than metaphysical principles.

The *dao* of Heaven is expressed through transformations of Heaven and Earth; the *dao* of man is expressed through human relations and everyday utilities (*renlun riyong* 人倫日用). Thus, for Heaven and Earth, the transformation of *qi* spreads and generates without an end and this is called *dao*. For man and myriad beings, all things in their lives such as the day-to-day functioning of human relationships are also endlessly generating like the ceaseless transformation of *qi*. This is also called *dao*.²⁶

The immediate social implication of Dai's materialist cosmology lies in the necessity of the establishment and institutionalization of external disciplines to regulate human affairs, since the sheer movement of material forces is indeterminate and therefore requires objective means to domesticate their potential. But Dai's institutionalist concern was more than technical, as he based his vision of Confucian ideals on a peculiar conception of human nature.

Human nature originates from (the movements of) *yin, yang* and the Five Elements. All bodily desires which are fostered by bodily vigor move outward from the inside (of man). Human nature is the start and guides all the deeds of desires. Fate is the meanings and principles which are true for all minds (*renxin suo tongran* 人心所同然) and thus sanctions such desires. People in antiquity used the word fate more often and later generations used the word principle more often, but they are the same in essence [...]. Fate is nothing else but the

²⁴ Hu 2015, pp. 124-212. See also Sela 2018, pp. 93-132, 150-162.

²⁵ *Dai Zhen quanshu*, 6: 173.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6: 37-38.

observation of utmost intricacies of what human nature is of itself (*ziran* 自然) and the subjugation of nature to necessity (*biran* 必然) so as to act as a check. This is the ultimate rule for what human nature is of itself.²⁷

The heavenly principle enshrined in Neo-Confucianism is here brought into the realm of man's mental abilities to affirm socially acceptable norms by Dai Zhen. Such abilities also have a deterministic character to direct human nature against its unchecked status and toward a necessary end, which for Dai could in fact "contribute to nature's perfection" and serves as the goal for moral cultivation.²⁸ Since human nature is of itself insufficient to achieve its perfection, it necessitates the guidance of external authority to cultivate morality. Yet such guidance is not sheer coercion but instead must be based on true meanings and principles for all minds. Dai thus criticizes Xunzi for overlooking the fact that ritual propriety has its origin in human nature instead of being empty teachings, while Mencius correctly seeks to perfect human nature through sages' proper guidance.²⁹ It is also the ability to establish social norms capable of cultivating human nature without distorting it that distinguishes sages from others. Hence, Dai would assert that only sages can be true to their nature without faults since they regard being subjugated to necessity as what nature is of itself, and necessity is merely the unchanging rule (*buyi zhize* 不易之則) which is non-coercive in essence.³⁰ It logically follows that what is true for all minds remains unchanging as well due to its attribution to necessity. In fact, in his magnum opus on meanings and principles, Dai equated being unchangeable at all times for all under Heaven with being true for all minds, which can then be called principle. Dai utilized this conception to mount his attack on Neo-Confucianism, which for him had mistaken personal opinions of later scholars for principle itself. Song scholars' casual usage of the term to propagate their own agendas further perplexed real teachings of past sages.³¹ In order to shake off the devastating impact and rectify authentic Confucian teachings, scholars must return to the original *Six Classics* and recover their true meanings and principles using philological techniques.

It now becomes clear what Dai Zhen had in mind when we return to his commemorative remarks of Hui Dong. *Dao* being solely manifested in the material world requires people to construct establishments capable of embodying meanings and principles which can be affirmed by other minds, rather than forcing one's opinion buttressed by metaphysical principles upon society.³² Sages in antiquity understood this well and were thus able to establish proper codes and institutions conducive to creating the golden past. It is later scholars' distortion of true meanings and principles encoded in classics that caused *dao* to be lost in

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6: 102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6: 103-104.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6: 108.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6: 87, 99.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6: 151-153.

³² Cheng Chi-hsiung 2001, pp. 273-276; Cheng Chung-yi 2009, pp. 236-245.

society. Philological investigations in classical studies thus functions as the key to recover the *dao* of antiquity.³³ Success in the philological reconstruction of antiquity's truth would in turn profoundly influence contemporary establishments by directing what human nature is of itself toward necessity using the illuminated meanings and principles of sages. It is not surprising that despite Dai's criticisms of Xunzi, his ritualist conception of morality shares crucial assumptions with the Xunzian notion of ritual propriety which downplays the self-sufficiency of human nature in moral cultivation.³⁴ The mechanism for taming human nature undoubtedly lies in the guidance of true meanings and principles manifested in the codes and institutions, which for Dai would necessarily lead to man's perfection in a deterministic manner. The patronage and active intervention of Confucian learning by political authority in the High Qing therefore stimulated the emergence of an institutionalist agenda in classical studies aimed at recovering genuine Confucian teachings for contemporary needs of political establishments. Through Dai Zhen's reformulation, true meanings and principles of classics acquired by philological inquiry will authoritatively direct human nature and society toward a stage comparable to the Golden Age of antiquity. Viewed in this light, the flourishing of Evidential Scholarship in eighteenth century China was entangled with Confucian scholars' extra-academic concerns of their day instead of resulting from purely scholarly pursuits.³⁵ The conviction that *dao* is contained in the *Six Classics* and could be utilized for sagely rule arguably served as an undertone in intellectual developments of the age.

Dissatisfied by pedantic philologists' parochial focus on mere technical issues, Dai Zhen endeavored to illuminate true meanings and principles through classical studies, which were regarded as pivotal to realize *dao* in the contemporary scene. His optimism of *dao*'s return with the help of Evidential Scholarship was a general mentality shared among scholars of his day.³⁶ The desirability of such a scenario would spark even more radical ideas toward the end of the prosperous age.

2. Presentism and Statism in the Thought of Zhang Xuecheng

Dai Zhen's personal preference of recovering meanings and principles through evidential techniques might have caused him to suffer from attacks by both evidential scholars and advocates of Neo-Confucianism.³⁷ Yet his vision for scholarly endeavors spoke to a larger reality in the High Qing. Inheriting Kangxi's ideological grip on Confucian learning and radicalizing state activism in politics, Emperor Yongzheng relentlessly sought to discipline the entire

³³ *Dai Zhen quanshu*, 6: 368. See also Chang Li-chu 2010, pp. 165-171.

³⁴ Chow 1996, pp. 188-191. See also Wang Hui 2004, pp. 440-443.

³⁵ Cfr. Elman 2001, pp. 93-102. See also Sela 2018, pp. 179-180.

³⁶ Sela 2018, pp. 176-177.

³⁷ Yu Ying-shih 2000, pp. 103-143; Wang Hui 2004, pp. 453-458.

literati class by imposing state goals on the bureaucracy and public affairs.³⁸ Though Emperor Qianlong mitigated his father's uncompromising project, the successor merely transformed Yongzheng's coercive stance and adopted a more sophisticated approach. Like his grandfather, Qianlong vested the ambition for cultural dominance in patronizing large scholarly projects such as the compilation of the Four Treasuries Encyclopedia, which served to identify and eradicate heterodox writings despite eliciting mixed responses from scholar elites.³⁹ Keenly aware of new intellectual developments in Jiangnan, Qianlong also actively encouraged the thriving of Evidential Scholarship as representing Qing's cultural prosperity. Discrediting the ethnocentric discourse on orthodoxy, he further sought to ground state legitimacy in the rhetoric of unity (*yitong* 一統) manifested in the empire's spatial expansion and cultural diversity. Consequently, Han *literati*'s historical memory on alien conquest was reshaped by the emperor's monopolizing power for present needs.⁴⁰

Qianlong's culturalist claim to universal sovereignty not only ideologically relativized ethnic distinctions, but created a sociopolitical milieu conducive to *literati*'s imagination of re-enlivening the glory of antiquity in their own time. Dai Zhen's scholarly agenda was thus both reflective of the changing intellectual climate and echoed by equally enthusiastic minds to explicate the timely implications of academic pursuits. Particularly, it emboldened Zhang Xuecheng to develop his subversive ideas on classical studies after his short yet decisive communications with Dai. Recalling their first meeting decades later, Zhang acknowledged that he was deeply impressed by Dai's more-than-philological concerns while at the same time bothered by fellow scholars' ignorance of such pressing matters. Dai's insistence on realizing *dao* through illuminating meanings and principles motivated Zhang to search for alternative routes of acquiring *dao* in his age, which helped to crystalize his own conceptions of classical and historical studies.⁴¹ To demonstrate Zhang's approach, it is again helpful to first look at how Zhang understood *dao* vis-à-vis man.

[Dong Zhongshu said:] "The great source of *dao* came from Heaven." [One might ask, though] "Did Heaven actually ordain it explicitly and in detail?" My reply is that I am unable to know how things were before there was Heaven and earth; when, however, Heaven and earth produced man, *dao* existed but had not yet taken shape. As soon as there were three people living together in one house, *dao* took shape but was not yet plainly manifested. When there came to be groups of five and ten and these grew to hundreds and thousands, one house could not possibly accommodate them all, and so they split into groups and separated into classes, and *dao* became manifest. The concepts of benevolence and

³⁸ Zelin 2002, pp. 189-221.

³⁹ Wang 2016, pp. 615-637; Woodside 2002, pp. 282-293; Guy 1987.

⁴⁰ Yang Nianqun 2010, pp. 261-303, 349-397. For Qianlong's endorsement of Evidential Scholarship, see Chen Zuwu 2005, pp. 1-20.

⁴¹ *Wenshi tongyi*, p. 684. See also Yu Ying-shih 2016b, pp. 85-112; Yu Ying-shih 2000, pp. 7-17, 35-48.

righteousness, loyalty and filial piety, and the institutions of penal and administrative laws, ritual, and music were all things that could not but arise thereafter [...]. *Dao* is thus not something the wisdom of a sage can manufacture; it is in every particular instance gradually given shape and manifested and inevitably develops from the nature of the state of things. Therefore, it is said to be “of Heaven.”⁴²

Following Dai’s materialist cosmology, Zhang also conceptualized *dao* as inseparable from everyday activities in the human realm. But for Zhang, *dao* is representative of the natural order of things and thus devoid of attributes. Inevitably, human affairs are subject to how things develop according to their state “of Heaven.” Dai’s deterministic conception of human nature is taken to the next level by Zhang to further subjugate man to the external authority of *dao*. Hence, when sages strive to establish codes and institutions, they do so out of necessity to accord society with *dao*’s dictation.

Dao is what it is of itself (*ziran* 自然); sages do what they do of necessity (*bude buran* 不得不然). Are these the same? My reply is no. *Dao* does not act and is so of itself; sages see what they see and cannot but do as they do [...]. Commoners see nothing, and so do what they do without being aware of it. Which is closer to *dao*? My reply is that to do as one does without being aware of it is *dao* [...]. Doing as one does without being aware is the trace of the alternation of *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽). Worthies learn from sages; superior people learn from worthies, but sages learn from commoners. This does not mean that they study commoners themselves; rather, it means that *dao* must be sought in the traces of the alternation of *yin* and *yang*.⁴³

Even though commoners’ activities are inferred from *dao*, they are intermediate in nature despite being able to help sages transmit *dao* and order the world. The anti-metaphysical movement since the Ming-Qing transition here takes a fateful turn, as human society is now also regarded as essentially subordinate to cosmic forces manifested in everyday activities. Therefore, while the trans-mundane realm is inextricably linked with everyday occurrences in the experiential world, the mundane order also depends on the regulation of a higher authority, which is mediated through the codes and institutions established by extraordinary figures. When a temporal dimension is taken into account, past sages have created the Golden Age of antiquity precisely because they succeeded in observing *dao* and generating necessary establishments accordingly under their specific historical circumstances. If there were true sages in contemporary times, they should accomplish the same great enterprise by addressing urgent issues in the present, instead of dogmatically holding on to teachings from a different age.

⁴² *Wenshi tongyi*, p. 94. All translations of Zhang’s works are adapted from Zhang and Ivanhoe 2010.

⁴³ *Wenshi tongyi*, p. 95.

Zhang's conception of how *dao* unfolded in human society is closely connected to his views on *dao*'s relation to actual things and affairs (*qi* 器) in the experiential realm. For Zhang, though man cannot seek *dao* separately from "the alternation of *yin* and *yang*", *dao* nevertheless predates the existence of man. Hence, what man relies on to study *dao* is really "the detailed effects of *dao* but not *dao* itself. For *dao* is that by which all things and affairs are as they are (*suoyiran* 所以然); it is not how they should be (*dangran* 當然). However, all that human beings are able to see is how things and affairs should be."⁴⁴ In a still deterministic and somewhat agnostic tone, Zhang regarded actual things and affairs as the inevitable end of *dao*'s transformation. Yet they are not themselves *dao* and thus contingent in essence compared to *dao*'s constancy. By the same token, human establishments are also contingent creations out of necessary historical conditions, which are subject to inevitable changes due to *dao*'s movement.⁴⁵ Therefore, Zhang would deny the sacredness of the *Six Classics* simply due to their instrumental nature.

Dao can no more be abstracted from the material world than a shadow can be separated from the shape that casts it. Because those in later ages who accepted Confucius' teachings obtained them from the *Six Classics*, they came to regard the *Six Classics* as "books that embody *dao*." However, they failed to realize that the *Six Classics* all belong to the realm of actual things and affairs.⁴⁶

The symbiosis of *dao* with actual things and affairs functions as a two-way street: while empty speculations on *dao* detached from the experiential realm are ridiculed, any canonization of historical writings also distorts their nature of mere contingent products in certain historical periods. Zhang would thus belittle the attempt to illuminate *dao* from the venue of classical studies. Instead, the differentiation and classification of writings are themselves part of a specific historical process.

In the Three Dynasties and in earlier times, the *Book of Odes*, *Book of History*, and other classical disciplines were taught to everyone. It was not, as in later times, when we find the *Six Classics* placed on a pedestal, treated as the special subject matter of the Confucian school, and singled out as "books which embody *dao*." The reason, as I see it, was that students in ancient times studied only what was in the charge of state officials, the state's doctrines of government, and they simply applied this learning to the ordinary problems of everyday human obligations [...]. Confucius transmitted the *Six Classics* to instruct posterity, because he believed that the *dao* of the ancient sages and kings is something that cannot be seen, while the classics are the actual embodiment of the *dao*, which can be seen [...]. He did not write theories of his own, which would have been to talk about *dao* divorced from the real world [...]. We see clearly then that there is

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁵ See also Wang Hui 2004, pp. 470-477.

⁴⁶ *Wenshi tongyi*, pp. 100-101.

no *dao* set forth in the classics apart from the documents illustrating political doctrines and the day-to-day functioning of human relationships.⁴⁷

Zhang saw historicizing the formation of Confucian classics as a necessary but peculiar step for sages to transmit the invisible and autarkical *dao* under historical contingencies. Such an understanding immediately transcends epistemological concerns and points to a presentist endeavor of reshaping current establishments by observing the specific manifestations of *dao* in contemporary times, without recourse to dated classical teachings. Zhang therefore openly denounced classics as inefficacious for the practical purpose of transmitting *dao*.

Dao is perfectly preserved within the *Six Classics*. While its profound meaning is hidden in what has gone before (them), philology is able to make this clear. However, the changing course of things and affairs emerges in what comes after, and the *Six Classics* cannot speak of this. Therefore, one must extract the essential guiding principle of the *Six Classics* and at all times use writing as a way to thoroughly investigate the great *dao*.⁴⁸

Classics may have well served the purpose of illuminating *dao* in ancient times, but their very nature nullifies their validity to fulfill the same mission in the present. If true sages were able to create the right establishment comparable to that of the golden past, contemporary political institutions could potentially become the classic model for later generations as well.⁴⁹ Hence, Zhang's scholarly agenda entails an unmistakable presentist concern, despite his emphasis on historical investigations against essentializing Confucian canons.

A further question remains as how to "thoroughly investigate the great *dao*" for present needs without the guidance of classics. In Zhang's view, since *dao* is not the creation of sages' wisdom, the codes and institutions are also established out of necessity rather than of personal preferences. Such establishments must be carried out in a depersonalized fashion in deference to *dao* manifested in specific historical conditions, like that of the Three Dynasties. The reason *dao* was successfully grasped and embodied in human establishments back then was that scholars learned nothing more than "what was in the charge of state officials." These state documents "illustrating political doctrines" were sufficient enough to satisfy the needs of "the day-to-day functioning of human relationships." It is with the decline of the Three Dynasties and the canonization of such documents that *dao* was separated from the codes and institutions of later times.⁵⁰ If antiquity's glory were to be restored, the study of contemporary state documents to extrapolate *dao*'s manifestation in the present, instead of pedantic philology solely

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101. See also *Wenshi tongyi*, pp. 76-93.

⁴⁸ *Wenshi tongyi*, p. 104.

⁴⁹ Yu Ying-shih 2000, p. 60; Tai Ching-hsien 2012, pp. 11-14.

⁵⁰ *Wenshi tongyi*, pp. 101, 76-77.

focused on ancient texts, naturally becomes the *sine qua non*. Therefore, Zhang's search for *dao* might have been driven by a humanistic desire for "living an ordered, civilized life", but like Dai Zhen's conception of human nature, such a desire was not self-sufficient and had to be mediated by an external authority so as to act in accordance to *dao*.⁵¹ The authoritarian undertone, when combined with political realities of the High Qing, led Zhang to adopt a statist view on the functions of academic pursuits. He would thus see legitimate scholarly agenda as inextricably tied with the welfare of the state.

The *Book of Rites* says: "Ritual magnifies its time." It also says: "Writing must be standardized into the same script." What it means is to uphold the institutions of contemporary kings (*shiwang* 時王). When scholars merely recite words of past sages instead of getting a grip on the institutions of contemporary kings [...]. they are not thinking of practicality [...]. If noble men were to learn, they must study the contemporary codes to cater to the day-to-day functioning of human relationships. They must also study state documents to master the techniques of classical studies. In this way, learning can be for practical needs and literature will not be empty words.⁵²

Such statist concerns arguably played a crucial role in Zhang's formulation of what constitutes history. For Zhang, historical records are essentially records of state documents (*zhanggu* 掌故) preserved by official scribes, which serve to harbor the *dao* of ancient kings. These documents are thus indispensable accounts of state politics for officials and scholars alike to illuminate *dao* manifested in everyday activities.⁵³ Since state politics are subject to ineluctable changes under different circumstances, historical studies should accordingly address the practical needs of the state at different times to fulfil its inherent mission of statecraft.⁵⁴ Hence, Zhang's renowned claim that "all *Six Classics* are history" entails a strong statism in the sense that classics merely constitute a small portion of state documents in the time of ancient kings. It is through a comprehensive investigation of historical records (i.e. historical studies) that *dao* can be illuminated in the present for statecraft ideals.⁵⁵

Besides scholarly agenda, Zhang's statism led him to reconceptualize the *literati's* relation to political authority. As real *dao* must be sought in the codes and institutions of contemporary kings, scholars should in accordance base their endeavor to illuminate *dao* on studying the everyday practice of state officials, rather than locate learning outside the actual things and affairs and "distinguish it with the name 'learning of the Way'" (*daoxue* 道學).⁵⁶ Attacking the Neo-

⁵¹ Cfr. Nivison 1966, p. 141. See also his discussions on pp. 149-150, 181-183.

⁵² *Wenshi tongyi*, p. 271.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁵⁴ Cheng Chi-hsiung 1992, pp. 306-307.

⁵⁵ *Wenshi tongyi*, pp. 1-3. See also Qian Mu 1997, pp. 430-432.

⁵⁶ *Wenshi tongyi*, p. 710.

Confucian construction of a separate tradition of *dao* that divorces Confucianism from state patronage, Zhang reinterpreted the historical example of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius. For Zhang, the Duke of Zhou “happened to live at a time when the work of emperors and kings was complete” and could thus “form his own institutions and to ‘sum up’ in the *dao* of the Zhou dynasty the ‘orchestra’ of the ancient sages.” By contrast, Confucius “had virtue (*de* 德) but lacked position (*wei* 位). In other words, there was no one from whom he could acquire the power to create institutions.” Still, “this does not mean that Confucius’ quality as a sage was in any way inferior to that of the Duke of Zhou; it is simply that the time in which he lived caused things to be like this.”⁵⁷ Not audacious enough to completely dethrone Confucius, Zhang nevertheless undermined Confucius’ status in obtaining *dao* compared to those in power.⁵⁸ Since the case of Confucius is a peculiar historical precedent out of necessity, scholars should regard it as an exception rather than the exemplar.

The reason learning has not advanced since ancient times is that scholars of later ages mistakenly have modeled themselves on the *Six Classics* and taken Confucius as their teacher. Confucius was unable to obtain an official position, but he still put *dao* into practice. He edited and transmitted the *Six Classics* in order to hand down their teachings for a myriad of future generations, but this was something Confucius could not but do [...]. And so, those who study Confucius should study what it was that Confucius studied – not what Confucius could not but do.⁵⁹

Later generations no longer faced what troubled Confucius, that is “when the Zhou Dynasty was declining and there was nothing to be done about it.” Therefore, instead of showing hollow respect to what Confucius’ *dao* was, they must be clear about the history behind Confucius’ deeds. “Once one understands the unity of *dao* and actual things and affairs, one can go on to say that to study the logic behind the unity of *dao* and actual things and affairs one must explore the difference between Confucius and the Duke of Zhou.”⁶⁰ This “most essential principle of learning since antiquity” in turn led Zhang to criticize the flourishing fashion (*fengqi* 風氣) in current academia. Since the decline of the Three Dynasties, “the roles of official and teacher and the functions of governing and teaching could not be united and made whole.” Consequently, scholars driven by the desire for fame would only “follow whatever the age esteems” and thus “fail to discern the full scope and range of *dao*.” To restore the correct method of learning, one must “seek a beginning in *dao*”, which for Zhang unquestionably lies in studying present codes and institutions. Only then could learning and literature produced therefrom avoid being empty talks and

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁵⁸ Yang Nianqun 2010, pp. 331-314. Cfr. Chow and Liu 1984, pp. 125-126.

⁵⁹ *Wenshi tongyi*, pp. 718-719.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 719.

“advance toward *dao*.”⁶¹ Criticizing the trending Evidential Scholarship, which was thought to become increasingly irrelevant to tackling urgent issues of the day, Zhang saw true scholars reverent to *dao* as faithful students of political doctrines of the state through his statist reformulation of *literati*'s role in imperial politics. He would thus promote the notion of regarding state officials as teachers (*yili weishi* 以吏為師) since they are established *literati* in the political institution embodying *dao*. The compilation of local gazetteers, which became Zhang's lifetime devotion, also came to be seen as a statecraft endeavor for historical studies to document *dao*'s manifestation in everyday politics at the local level.⁶² The symbiosis of *literati* with the state, like that of *dao* with actual things and affairs, became Zhang's sincere conviction to re-enliven the glory of the Golden Age in his day.

3. High Qing Intellectual Transformation and Resurgency Statecraft Reformism

Although Zhang Xuecheng vested in the Qing imperial state the indispensable role of encompassing *dao* and guiding society toward prosperity, he was not blind to accumulating crises troubling the empire. Following Qianlong's death and subsequent downfall of Heshen, Zhang sent six letters consecutively to high officials in the new regime expounding on the necessity of imminent reform of the sagging bureaucracy.⁶³ But given his marginal status in both the officialdom and academia, it is unlikely his proposals generated any immediate impact. Nevertheless, Zhang's personal affiliation with esteemed patrons of scholarly projects enabled him to exchange and propagate his ideas with like-minded colleagues. In the late 1780s, when compiling an investigation of historical sources under the patronage of Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730-1797), then Governor-general (*xunfu* 巡撫) of Henan, Zhang worked closely with Hong Liangji 洪亮吉 (1746-1809), who would be later known by the dramatic act of submitting an accusatory letter targeting current affairs, and the master-to-be in ritual studies, Ling Tingkan 凌廷堪 (1757-1809).⁶⁴ Their academic exchanges being insufficiently documented, Ling's investigation of ritual as the foundation for codes and institutions nevertheless shares basic assumptions of Zhang in the sense that extra-academic disciplines manifested in political establishments are central to directing scholarly endeavors. Despite being a student of Dai Zhen, Ling saw the philological approach to recovering meanings and principles as the affirmation of individual paths to moral perfection without collective guidance, which for him was ultimately impossible. Instead, learning to illuminate one's

⁶¹ *Wenshi tongyi*, pp. 713-715.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 271. See also Yang Nianqun 2010, pp. 342-348.

⁶³ Cang and Ye 1996, pp. 118-124.

⁶⁴ *Wenshi tongyi*, p. 724. See also Cang and Ye 1996, pp. 59-67.

innate goodness must be grounded in ritual as the guiding principle, which in the glorious age of the Three Dynasties was “spread by the imperial court from above as (authentic) teachings and studied by the lowly as (genuine) learning.”⁶⁵ The implication of Ling’s understanding of ritual thus echoes with Zhang’s statist reconstruction of history, which necessitates the political patronage of academic pursuits and stresses the statecraft function of scholarly agendas. Ling would thus undermine metaphysical speculations upheld in Neo-Confucian ritual studies and focus on the practice of ritual under particular historical conditions. Not surprisingly, this approach eventually led to Ling’s presentist conception of how ritual functions as the institutionalization of ritual practice should reflect specific needs of the day.⁶⁶ Such an understanding also logically contains a reformist undertone, when the time calls for due change.

Similarly, the young Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775-1855) proposed in his early work *Shuochu* that official scribes be designated the title “*shi*” (史), following Zhang’s rationale that the compilation of historical records was an integral part of state functions in antiquity and should be used for the betterment of governance. Though it might be stretched to assume any direct influence of Zhang’s historical studies on Bao, there remains a possibility that Bao acquainted himself with Zhang’s ideas.⁶⁷ In 1797, one year after Zhang’s magnum opus *Wenshi tongyi* was first published as a draft, Bao worked briefly as an advisor of Zhu Gui 朱珪 (1731-1806), then Governor-general of Anhui and the brother of Zhu Yun 朱筠 (1729-1781). As Zhang’s mentor, Zhu Yun offered generous support for Zhang’s early career in the capital, helping the enthusiastic mind to navigate through the academia. Zhang’s close relationship with Zhu’s family is also evident in the fact that Zhang sent a copy of *Wenshi tongyi*’s draft to Zhu Yun’s son hoping that he could circulate the text to a wider audience.⁶⁸ The logical connections between Zhang’s and Bao’s ideas of history could thus be interpreted against a larger social background. Such logical connections are further manifested in the New Text master Gong Zizhen’s 龔自珍 (1792-1841) historical reconstruction of the formation of Confucian classics and “Master’s learning” (*zixue* 子學). Since late Qing, scholars have pointed out a number of commonalities between Gong’s understanding of classical texts’ history and that of Zhang. But Gong’s more nuanced approach is indicative of his own agenda at the time. Instead of treating the dissolution of the unity of scholars and state officials as a necessary evil in history, Gong saw it as immanent in the natural process of historical evolution, implicitly granting scholarly endeavors a degree of autonomy under overarching political

⁶⁵ *Jiaoli tang wenji*, 4: 28. See also Chow 1996, pp. 192-197.

⁶⁶ Zhang Shou-an 2005, pp. 113-129.

⁶⁷ Qian Mu 1997, pp. 432-433. For Bao’s political thought in *Shuochu*, see Rowe 2018, pp. 42-73.

⁶⁸ *Wenshi tongyi*, pp. 774-776. See also Cang and Ye 1996, pp. 41-46.

authority.⁶⁹ No doubt that Gong was equally disdained by contemporary scholar's parochial pursuits irrelevant to statecraft urgencies, which for him caused *literati* to "have their own abodes (other than official positions)" and thus "the kingly rule cannot reach down to the people and people's concerns cannot arise to the court." Nevertheless, he sought to secure a separate standing for the "Master's learning" apart from classical studies that emphasized scholars' duty to save the time, the political implication of which would promote greater *literati* activism in face of dynastic decline.⁷⁰ Applying the same logic of presentism to tackle issues specific to his day, Gong would reformulate *literati*'s role vis-à-vis the state while sharing the statist assumptions of Zhang that regard contributing to the welfare of the state as an unshirkable responsibility. Ideas underlying Gong's statecraft reformism can thus be seen as both a response to and an appropriation of previous intellectual developments during the High Qing. With the ending of the prosperous age, Zhang Xuecheng's insight began to be harnessed by a new generation of scholars who endeavored to seek ways of addressing contemporary issues troubling the dilapidating empire. Resurgent statecraft reformism during this period must therefore be viewed against the background of High Qing intellectual dynamics. Such connections would see further spread of Zhang's statist aspirations for Confucian scholarship among *literati* activists in early nineteenth century.

Conclusion

Elman has keenly noted that the discourse of statecraft in late imperial China entails both a reformist strain and an urge for "system maintenance" of the status quo.⁷¹ This analysis of intellectual developments during the High Qing also shows that the imperial patronage of Confucian learning and the ideological construction of universal sovereignty greatly encouraged Qing *literati* to actualize the ideal of sagely rule through transmitting *dao* under the authority of the current regime, which culminated in the thought of Zhang Xuecheng. Stressing the cosmological assumption of *dao*'s unity with actual things and affairs, Zhang denied the plausibility of consulting ancient classics to illuminate the present *dao* from a historical perspective. The historicist refutation of classical studies' approach to *dao* contains a strong presentist orientation which nevertheless shares with prominent evidential scholars like Dai Zhen the institutionalist interest of realizing *dao* in contemporary establishments.⁷² Zhang's particular understanding of history further generated his statist stance toward scholarly agenda and the role of *literati* in a regime harboring the cosmic

⁶⁹ Zhang Shou-an 2009, pp. 273-310.

⁷⁰ *Gong Zizhen quanji*, p. 7. See also Tai Ching-hsien 2012, pp. 257-260, 366-368.

⁷¹ Elman 1990, pp. 299-301. For a similar discussion, see Yang Nianqun 2010, pp. 304-308.

⁷² Cheng Chi-hsiung 2011, pp. 163-175.

authority of *dao*. Such a statism concluded the institutionalist search for sagely rule by upholding state authority buttressed by the cosmology of presentism, thus re-orienting Confucian scholarship toward wholeheartedly addressing the timely needs of the state. When dynastic decline posed growing threat to the Qing empire, Zhang Xuecheng's statist re-orientation of Confucian scholarship increasingly resonated with the scholarly agendas of statecraft reformers that legitimized emerging *literati* activism in imperial politics. High Qing intellectual transformation therefore left indelible marks on the subsequent development of political dynamics during the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition.

To be sure, Ling Tingkan, Bao Shichen and Gong Zizhen each developed their own systems of thought from an intellectual milieu of multifarious orientations. But the same goes for scholars like Li Guangdi, Dai Zhen and Zhang Xuecheng as well. The fact that shared assumptions of cosmic realities and political order can be detected among these scholars suggests a logical continuity of certain strands of thought evolving over the High Qing and into later times. The conviction of emerging sagely rule, the materialist understanding of the cosmos and the superiority of state authority in ordering the world are thus all "seeds" planted in the High Qing that would be exploited when new fashions shaped by novel sociopolitical circumstances began to flourish, without which the intellectual reaction to domestic crises at the turn of the nineteenth century could have been very different. Had there not been an intellectual transformation that upheld political authority in human affairs, solicitous *literati* might have striven to save the time by enlightening the people through extra-bureaucratic venues like their Ming predecessors.⁷³ Had there not been an intellectual transformation toward a more symbiotic state-scholar relationship and greater emphasis on statecraft functions of scholarship, the issue of whether broader political participation could enhance rather than limit state power would not have become one of the constitutional agendas of the modern Chinese state.⁷⁴ And had there not been an intellectual transformation that prompted a philological turn of classical studies and subsequent presentist conception of classics, the reemergence of statecraft reformism might not have been so dependent upon the flourishing of New Text learning to draw legitimacy of institutional reforms from Confucian canons.⁷⁵ By no means do I intend to exaggerate the role of ideas in directing the course of history, but an exploration of how evolving ideas in the High Qing informed intellectual developments during the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition will nevertheless deepen our understanding of this turning point in Qing history.

Several questions remain for further investigations. Firstly, what connections, if any, could presentism have had with the rise of New Text classicism? Was the New Text notion of historical epochs informed by the presentist understanding of history, since both emphasize the inevitability of change and therefore the

⁷³ Yu Ying-shih 2008, pp. 158-211.

⁷⁴ Kuhn 2002, pp. 46-53.

⁷⁵ For philology after the eighteenth century, see Sela 2018, pp. 179-193.

necessity of timely reform? One related question is, how might the *Gongyang* doctrine of “knowing how to weigh circumstances” (*zhiquan* 知權), which was appropriated by Qing New Text scholars for statecraft reformism, have been informed by the presentist concern of creating a political establishment that catered to the specific needs of the day?⁷⁶ Secondly, what strands of thought have possibly informed the ideas articulated by scholars like Dai Zhen and Zhang Xuecheng? To put it another way, what is the larger intellectual and sociopolitical background that gave rise to presentism and its statist undertone? Thirdly, how has the discourse on *dao* shaped intellectual transformations during and after the High Qing? Was *dao* merely a placeholder to be reinvented and even manipulated for particular ends, as is the case with Dai and Zhang but also and especially with Wei Yuan whose writings necessitated institutionalized control of human agency in the name of *dao*? Or did *dao* have a common connotation that dominated scholarly agendas in search for the good order?⁷⁷ Last but not least, what can presentism and statism tell us about the religiosity of Confucianism especially in relation to its political thought? Obviously, Zhang Xuecheng’s scholarly pursuit was predominantly guided by his ambition to illuminate *dao* in his age. For Nivison, Zhang’s *dao* “commands all the aspect of a religious whole.”⁷⁸ How could Zhang’s religious devotion to *dao* have influenced his thought? What would be the implications for the general intellectual transformations back then? Confucian religiosity has been studied by scholars mainly in terms of moral self-cultivation vis-à-vis its cosmological implications.⁷⁹ Yet the materialization of Confucian visions of self-cultivation through constructing an ordered human society inevitably channels such religiosity into the political realm, which remains understudied particularly for late imperial China. If future studies can address these questions and break new paths of interpreting the historical dynamics in this crucial period, my analysis here will certainly have served its preliminary role.

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⁷⁶ For *Gongyang* classicism, see Elman 1990, pp. 232-243, 271-275.

⁷⁷ *Wei Yuan quanji*, 2: 684-690. For evidential scholars’ pursuit of *dao*, see Sela 2018. See also Nivison 1966, p. 19.

⁷⁸ Nivison 1966, p. 141.

⁷⁹ Tucker 1998, pp. 5-45; Tu 1989, pp. 93-121.

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