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through the First Millennium CE:
A New Perspective on Sinitic Colonialism

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Central Plain Policies toward the South
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A B S T R A C T

What is colonialism? To many it describes the policies of European empires in the latter half of the second millennium CE. The author of the present paper argues that, through the first millennium CE, the empires of the Sinitic world practiced a form of colonialism in the Yangtze River basin and the broader South. The paper begins with definitions of colonialism offered by several scholars of European colonial history. The author then explores the premise of Sinitic colonialism through three themes: administration, social construct, and economics. The author proposes that Sinitic policies that can be traced to the southern dynasties of the mid-first millennium CE reached their fulfillment under the Tang dynasty, and that they meet the definitions of colonialism offered in the opening paragraphs by European historians. The author argues in conclusion that these policies as practiced by the Sinitic dynasties of the first millennium set the stage for a new approach to the South under the Song dynasty when, for the first time, the empire became a southern empire.

Key words: colonialism, Sinitic, Southern Selection, settler colonialism, economics of trade

To many, colonialism was a feature of empires established by European powers in the latter half of the second millennium. Those with a more historical bent are commonly aware of much older colonial ventures among the early powers of the Mediterranean such as the Phoenicians and the Greeks. Indeed our modern related vocabulary derives from the Latin *colōnus*, a reflection of the Roman empire's reliance on colonies to spread Roman civilization as well as to defend the empire's frontiers. Continental ventures such as those of the Russian empire around the Black Sea and across much of Inner Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries perhaps come less readily to mind yet are equally illustrative of greater Europe's colonial history. A shared feature, be it of the Greeks in Sicily and the European Mediterranean coastline or the Phoenicians on the Italian peninsula and in North Africa, the Spanish in Central and South America, the British and the French in North America and later in South and Southeast Asia as well as Africa, or the Russians in places such as Georgia or Ossetia, is that all involved the transfer of population from a center to a remote location as exploiters, settlers, or civilizers—categories that are not mutually exclusive. This led either to the physical displacement of those who were there before, as happened in North and South America, South Africa, and Australia, where the genocidal policies of settlers toward the Indigenous inhabitants aimed to clear space for the new arrivals, or to the cultural and political displacement of Indigenous populations such as occurred in South Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, where the Indigenes were considered uncivilized and in need of guidance.¹

The question in the present paper is whether the policies of the Sinitic dynasties of the first millennium CE, some based on the Central (or North China) Plain and others in the Yangtze River basin, toward the lands of the South, which I will define as the Yangtze and Pearl River drainage basins and

¹ Like so many cultural terms in contemporary discourse, "indigenous" and its cognates have become controversial and potentially derogatory terms. For the purposes of the following discussion I will use the definition of "Indigenous peoples" adopted by the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues: "They are the descendants ... of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means."

See www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session (accessed March 5, 2023).

adjacent littoral lands, can be defined as colonialism, and if so why that would be important.² As a range of contemporary scholars in both China and the West have already demonstrated, imperial policy toward the grasslands to the north and the desert corridors to the west have long had a colonial dimension. As far back as the Han dynasty, the empire sought to control both the Tarim Basin to the west and the Korean peninsula to the north, efforts that were both repeated by the Sui and Tang dynasties. The modern Chinese state's occupation of the Moslem lands surrounding the Tarim Basin and of the Tibetan plateau derive from colonial policies inherited from the last imperial era, the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), which was led, ironically, by Manchus.³

The following discussion, however, poses a different question: Can the policies of the Sinitic

² I will use the term “Sinitic” throughout this paper in lieu of “Chinese” to identify the dynasties of the Central Plain. This is based on my concern that the latter term embraces a set of political and cultural assumptions that were not realized until late in the imperial era. On this, see Hugh R. Clark, “What’s the Matter with ‘China’? A Critique of Teleological History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 77:2 (2018), 295–314.

³ The Chinese empire's colonial policies toward the North and northwest in fact began many centuries ago. See, for example, Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turco-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections, 580–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and “Survival in the Frontier Zone: Comparative Perspectives on Identity and Political Allegiance in China's Inner Asian Borderlands during the Sui-Tang Dynastic Transition (617–630),” *Journal of World History* 15:2, 117–153, and Chang, Chun-shu, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire: Nation, State, and Imperialism in Early China, ca. 1600 B.C.–A.D. 8*, 2 volumes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007). Nicola Di Cosmo, “Qing Colonial Administration in the Inner Asian Dependencies,” *International History Review* 20:2 (1998), 287–309, Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), and Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), and “China and Other Colonial Empires,” *Journal of American-East Asia Relations* 16:1/2 (2009), 85–103, have all addressed Manchu colonial policies toward the northwest.

One exception to this focus on the north and northwest is Herold J. Wiens, *China's March into the Tropics: A Discussion of the Southward Penetration of China's Culture, Peoples, and Political Control in Relation to the Non-Han-Chinese Peoples of South China and in the Perspective of Historical and Cultural Geography* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Naval Research, 1952; republished by Shoe String Press [Hampden, CT: 1954]). Wiens explicitly used the word “colonization” to describe ancient imperial policy toward the South. Wiens' work merits recognition, but the study of China's history among western scholars was in its infancy, and Wiens was dependent on a range of scholars working in both western languages and Chinese whose work has long been superseded by more recent scholarship that benefits from far more extensive ethnographic and archaeological research.

dynasties toward the South, a vast region that for centuries has been considered an integral and thoroughly acculturated part of the Chinese empire, also be considered models of colonialism? I argue, in my conclusion, that Sinitic policies were consistent with contemporary definitions of colonialism. Ultimately, I shall argue, the Sinitic approach to managing the culturally and ethnically diverse and alien lands of the South, which I propose reached culmination under the Tang dynasty (618–907), is an essential component of the long-term evolution of Chinese culture.

SOME ESSENTIAL DEFINITIONS

It is important to state as a point of departure that the goal of the current discussion is not to assess the morality of colonialism, but rather to consider whether a set of policies pursued well over a millennium ago are sufficiently parallel to modern definitions and models of colonialism to qualify as colonial. But what exactly are those definitions, and how does colonialism differ from imperialism, with which it is often used interchangeably? They are, in fact, etymologically distinct, from which we know they have distinct meanings. "Colony" and its cognates, as noted, derive from *colōnus*, which in its Latin roots refers to peasants and their farmland and then evolved to refer to the land occupied by settlers, thus to the English word "colony." "Imperial," in contrast, and its cognates including "empire," derive from the Latin terms *imperiālis* and *imperium*, both of which relate to the actions and authority of a ruler, and thus to political power. This paper is concerned with the former.

Modern scholarship on colonization is dominated by discussion of European overseas empires in the seventeenth–twentieth centuries. Consequently, definitions of colonialism and its cognates are almost entirely framed in that construct.⁴ Because that pattern of colonization had such variation

⁴ As an illustration, one might look at the well-regarded survey edited by Lorenzo Veracini, *Colonialism: A Global History* (New York: Routledge, 2023). Among its nine chapters, one addresses the nineteenth–twentieth-century Japanese Empire, which was purposefully pursued in imitation of European empires: great powers have colonies, so to be a great power Japan needed colonies. The volume otherwise focuses entirely on European ventures.

One further term: "post-colonialism," has become a central, and contentious, theme of colonial studies. It is defined by J. Daniel Elam as "a body of thought primarily concerned with accounting for the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social impact of European colonial rule around the world in the 18th through the 20th century" (*Oxford Bibliographies* [up-dated January 15, 2019], accessed at [oxfordbibliographies.com](https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com)). Because it has been limited to and is so essentially defined by European colonialism in the late second millennium, it will not be central to the following discussion.

among empires and even within empires, there are different, sometimes contrasting, definitions. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind the admonition of Ronald J. Horvath, an admonition I shall repeat: “Definitions [of colonialism] ... must have sufficient flexibility to allow manipulation or articulation.”⁵ In other words, we must recognize that colonial ventures varied; no single definition is likely to cover all variations.⁶ As Horvath might note, Tang China was not nineteenth-century Britain, so we should not expect it to exactly replicate British policies. That need not mean, however, that Tang policies toward the South cannot be considered a model of colonialism.

For all its diversity, there are attempts to define colonialism, and I will use these to help frame my argument. Robert Young, for example, focused on settlement of alien territory by emigrants from a motherland as the central feature:

Colonization signified not the rule over Indigenous peoples, or the extraction of their wealth, but primarily the transfer of communities who sought to maintain their allegiance to their own original culture, while seeking a better life.... Colonization in

⁵ “A Definition of Colonialism,” *Current Anthropology* 13:1, 45–57 (1972), 46.

⁶ One might be reminded of debates over “feudalism.” Let us leave aside whether there ever was anything that fit the model of feudalism even in early second millennium Europe (see especially Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe,” *The American Historical Review* 79:4 (1974), 1063–1088. See also the extensive and complex discussion of this issue in the article “Feudalism Didn’t Exist: The Social & Political World of Medieval Europe,” at https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/2bsorc/ama_feudalism_didnt_exist_the_social_political/ (accessed January 16, 2023). Historians have long debated whether feudalism was a uniquely European construct or one that can be applied to other instances, such as Tokugawa Japan or Zhou dynasty China that adhere to the broad outlines of the model, even as they manifested distinct local circumstances. That is, was feudalism a model that can be applied to multiple scenarios or a single construct that is unique to late medieval Europe (and therefore of little analytical value)?

Because scholarship on colonialism has overwhelmingly focused on late second millennium European colonialism, the simplistic response, as it has been for many scholars of feudalism, is to say anything that deviates from that model is something else.

this sense comprised people whose primary aim was to settle elsewhere rather than to rule others.⁷

While defining colonialism as "a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another," Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy have also focused on an enduring tie between settlers and the metropole: "the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin."⁸

These definitions focus on the transfer of population from a motherland to new territory. They smooth out if not entirely neglect the attendant displacement if not eradication of the Indigenous population, as occurred in the Spanish colonies in South America or those of Britain in North America or Australia. Jürgen Osterhammel, in contrast, has focused on domination and exploitation, as is more appropriate to British and French policy in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia:

Colonialism is a relationship of domination between an Indigenous (or forcibly imported) population and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule.⁹

⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *Post-Colonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA, and Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 20. Among others who have focused on settlement, see Horvath, "Colonialism." Horvath's multi-cultural perspective stands in stark contrast to analyses that define colonialism strictly in terms of the European model of the eighteenth–twentieth centuries; see, for example, Rupert Emerson, "Colonialism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4:1, 3–16 (1969).

⁸ Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy, "Colonialism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/colonialism/> (accessed January 10, 2023).

⁹ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, tr. Shelley L. Frisch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 16–17, quoted in Peter C. Perdue, "China and Other Colonial Empires," *Journal of American-East Asia Relations* 16:1/2

One could go on. There have been numerous attempts beyond the several I have referenced to define colonialism; like those, they almost universally derive from the practices and policies of European empires. Yet colonialism has never been a uniquely European practice; arguably it is as old and as varied as human history. Every empire from the Assyrians and Babylonians to the Mughals and Inca have asserted in some form colonial rights over others. As we frame the following discussion, therefore, it is important that we keep this tension in mind, reminding us once again of Horvath's admonition: "Definitions [of colonialism] ... must have sufficient flexibility to allow manipulation or articulation." Sinitic policies may not perfectly replicate those of nineteenth-century Britain, France, or any of the myriad other models, but that need not mean they were not colonial.

In the essay that follows I am going to focus on three themes: culture and administration, economics, and social construct. Although additional themes could be considered, I will argue that taken together these will demonstrate that Sinitic policies toward the South can be defined as colonial. I will start with a broad overview of each theme. Then I will assess the parallels between Sinitic policy and the policies of European colonial powers.

THE CENTRAL PREMISE

Central to my argument is the distinction I will draw across a *longue durée* between North and South, defined essentially as the Yellow and Yangtze River basins respectively, although the extent of both is substantially larger than either basin. Although history has long presumed an inherent unity of North and South and regarded times of division as aberrations,¹⁰ North and South have differed from the beginning of time. The roots of the Chinese empire were in the North, on the Central Plain. Through much of the second millennium BCE, this was the realm of the Shang (or Yin) empire, within which the earliest sprouts of Chinese culture emerged. Through the following millennium Shang was replaced by Zhou. Once regarded as hopelessly barbarian, Zhou embraced the emerging values of the Shang elite

(2009), 91.

¹⁰ See, for example, Hugh R. Clark, "What's the Matter with 'China'? A Critique of Teleological History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 77:2 (2018), 295–314.

and extended the Shang cultural realm into the region that is defined by the tributaries feeding the Yellow River west of the Taihang range.

The ancient empire was hardly a unitary realm. The Shang and Zhou imperia were always limited, and there were great regional variations across the Plain, including diverse traditions, political structures, and languages, to name but a few. Following a challenge to the Zhou imperium in the eighth century BCE that forced the ruling elite to flee from the court's traditional homeland, this diversity gained further expression in a multitude of semi- and fully independent principalities. The Zhou court, though lacking much political authority, endured as the locus of essential rituals. Overriding this diversity, however, through the last millennium BCE a distinctive literate culture took shape that is lineally antecedent to the much later culture we call "Chinese," much as Classical Greek culture is distinct from but antecedent to later European civilization

At the same time, across the South an even more diverse panoply of cultures evolved. There was no overarching political or cultural structure across the South, as Shang and Zhou had provided to the Central Plain. Southern cultures were divided by two language families. Austro-Asiatic languages, which today are found among many of the upland cultures of southwest China and peninsular southeast Asia, dominated in the interior. Northern scholars, who monopolized the written tradition and so provide us the narrative of ancient times, commonly called the peoples of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic world *Man*. The coastal littoral regions were dominated by Austronesian languages, which today are found throughout insular southeast Asia, the wider Pacific, and even as far west as Madagascar. These peoples were most often called *Yue*, although in a reflection of the range of cultural and ethnic diversity embraced by both and of the imperfect knowledge of Northern scholars, *Man* and *Yue* were fungible and often used interchangeably.¹¹

Despite limited contact, North and South remained two entirely distinct realms, drawing on very different cultural premises, much as the Roman and Germanic worlds were distinct despite many years of contact. Northern scholars considered the diverse cultures of the South to be debased,

¹¹ The literature on the Austronesian and Austro-Asiatic language families is huge and contentious. There is a vast range of opinion on the origins and dispersal of both families. One might consult the *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* or the on-going Comparative Austronesian Series published by the Australia National University Press. My comments here are intentionally vague and consequently open to challenge.

uncivilized, perhaps even “barbarian,” to use a much-abused term.¹² One might note, for example, the disparaging comments in the *Huainan zi*, an eclectic work of the late second century BCE: “Yue [here a geopolitical rather than ethnic term, referring to the area surrounding Hangzhou Bay] is a land that lies outside [the Central Plain]. The people cut their hair and tattoo their bodies. They cannot become a kingdom of caps and gowns [i.e., civilized].”¹³ The reference to cutting the hair and tattooing the body became a disparaging trope; only the uncivilized, the barbarian who cannot “become a kingdom of caps and gowns,” would do such a debased thing! Although the empire of the Central Plain conquered much of the vast South late in the third century BCE, this cultural gulf remained profound at least into the middle centuries of the first millennium CE and a significant cultural and political factor at least until the early second millennium with undercurrents that survive even to the present.

SINITIC POLICIES TOWARD THE SOUTH: CULTURE AND ADMINISTRATION, ECONOMICS, AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

CULTURE AND ADMINISTRATION

When we think of the Sinitic world in comparison to the archetypal European colonial empires of the late second millennium, a major contrast jumps out: whether we think of the Spanish colonies in Latin America, British colonies “where the sun never sets,” French colonies in Africa and Southeast Asia, the Japanese in Korea and Taiwan, or Russian colonization of the Muslim khanates of Inner Asia, one thing that unites them all is that they are territories over which the colonizing empire had never previously had authority; only the Russian colonies were even contiguous to the metropole. In contrast, the Sinitic empires had claimed authority over the South since the late first millennium BCE. The claim, however, rests on a bit of historiographical legerdemain.

The Han dynasty had reigned over the Central Plain, from which political legitimacy derived,

¹² See the very thoughtful discussion in Shao-yun Yang, *The Way of the Barbarians: Redrawing Ethnic Boundaries in Tang and Song China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

¹³ Quoted in Xun Yue (148–209), *QianHan ji* (digital edition of the *Siku quanshu* [henceforth DSKQS]), 10:33a-b. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

since the late third century BCE. Han had inherited the empire from Qin, which had conquered the land as far south as the South Sea, establishing the first holistic empire. When the Han collapsed, early in the third century CE, however, the holistic empire was riven into two, three, and sometimes even more contesting empires. For the next three and a half centuries North and South were separate. For much of that time, in fact, the Central Plain was overrun by alien invaders. Meanwhile a succession of Sinitic dynasties, dynasties with a ruling elite that could trace itself through real or fictive kinship to the North, ruled the South from their courts in Jiankang (modern Nanjing) on the Yangtze River.

Loss of the Central Plain to alien conquerors, however, presented a conundrum to later historians. Going back to the founding of the Zhou dynasty over a millennium before, the empire's political theorists had defined imperial legitimacy through the Cosmic Mandate 天命, a metaphysical acknowledgment of imperial legitimacy granted by the power of the Cosmos. Control over the Central Plain had heretofore been essential to and synonymous with holding the Mandate; the Mandate had never rested in the South. But the Plain had fallen under alien control. The resulting question was: could aliens, "barbarians" who by definition lacked the essentials of civilization, possibly hold the Mandate, which itself defined civilization? Faced with this unprecedented conundrum, later historians resolved that the Mandate had moved to the South and rested with the Jiankang courts.¹⁴

North and South were reunited under a single imperial power when the Sui dynasty imposed its authority on the latter through a campaign of conquest late in the sixth century. Once again the empire laid claim to everything south of the northern grasslands as far as the South Sea. Equally importantly, the Mandate was restored to the Central Plain, and the South was relegated to a subordinate status. The presumed normative order was restored. For present purposes, however, the outstanding question is, how deep had the cultural authority of the southern courts been through the centuries of division? Were they colonizing islands of civilization in a sea of southern barbarism, or had they extended "true" civilization deep into their heterogenous empire?

This is a complex question subject to multiple answers, depending on what variables one might emphasize. Certainly by the time of the Sui conquests the lower Yangtze region centered on Jiankang,

¹⁴ Andrew Chittick has dubbed these courts the "Jiankang Empire"; see *The Jiankang Empire in Chinese and World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

and the successive southern courts had been influenced by the “orthodox,” or “Confucian,” values of civilization defined by the southern theoreticians much more deeply than had been true before.¹⁵ We would probably be correct, however, to assume the non-Sinitic Indigenous population remained numerically significant, certainly in many areas even dominant, and deeply attached to their “heterodox” traditions; the southern empire, after all, was their homeland. It is no doubt similarly correct that the cultural and familial ties that might once have bound the anonymous migrants, those who had found refuge and opportunity in the South in earlier times, to their place of origin in the North had withered, eroded by both space and time. We might well conclude, in fact, that even among those who accepted the premises of those orthodox values, a southern identity was strong. Most revealingly, patterns of resistance against their northern political and cultural hegemony in the name of southern identity persisted deep into the centuries of division.¹⁶

The centuries of division, however, had set the stage for a very different relationship between North and South. The anonymous immigrants who had filtered into the river basins benefited from centuries of work by the Indigenous cultures that had been there for time immemorial. Together the Indigenous and immigrant had built or enhanced cities, most notably Jiankang but also numerous regional cities and towns. They had cleared new lands for agriculture and developed flourishing commercial networks that tied together much of the Yangzi basin. They had embraced new religions, most notably including new schools of Buddhism and Daoism. The South of the late sixth century was prosperous, probably significantly more so than the North, that had weathered so much political and cultural disruption. The challenge to forming a reunified empire was to find a way to administer this culturally, economically, and politically distinct region.

As had all colonial empires, Britain faced a parallel challenge as the empire asserted control over its wide range of colonies. In North America, British authority had begun with a pattern of anonymous migration similar to that in the Yangtze basin. Later, when the empire asserted control over

¹⁵ Throughout the following discussion I will use “orthodox” to refer to the cultural values that had become normative in Northern, or Central Plain, culture—what is often defined as “Confucianism.” I will use “heterodox” to refer to value sets that differ from the “orthodox.” I do not use the terms to imply any value judgment but simply for heuristic distinction.

¹⁶ See the relevant discussion in Hugh R. Clark, *The Sinitic Encounter in Southeast China through the First Millennium CE* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).

South Asia and regions of Africa such as Nigeria and Kenya, migration was less important than exploitation. Regardless, the drive behind colonial consolidation was generally led by merchants, both in Britain and in the colonies. The Crown commonly delegated initial administrative authority to chartered merchant companies such as the Massachusetts Bay Company or the British East India Company; in all cases, however, the Crown eventually took direct control.

Throughout its colonial realm Britain granted a limited degree of local and regional authority to the local populations, although not always to the Indigenous people. The North American colonies each had some form of representative body composed of local elites of European, and generally British, heritage that was responsible for local administration; the Indigenous population was permitted no role in this. The African and South Asian colonies did not develop comparable assemblies, but the Indigenous elites were encouraged to learn British cultural traditions and were granted a limited degree of administrative and judicial authority over the native population. In all cases, however, all initiatives arising from the colonized elites, be they the legislative initiatives of the Virginia Assembly or the decisions of local courts rendered by Indigenous judges in South Asia, were subject to the oversight of a governor appointed by the Crown and ultimately of the British Parliament.

The Sinitic empires that governed the South from the fall of Han to the Sui reconsolidation of the holistic empire had gradually brought growing numbers of southerners into their administration. These were primarily men who claimed descent from earlier northern migrants; their recruitment was largely ad hoc and unsystematic. As a result, however, over decades and centuries the Jiankang courts had gradually become more fully embedded in the lands they ruled; they were increasingly southern.

Tang, on the other hand, was a northern dynasty. The administrative apparatus was initially dominated by a powerful network of families based in the northwest known as the Guanlong aristocracy. They had emerged during the centuries of division that followed the Han when Turkic ethnic and cultural influence was strong.¹⁷ These were the men who had supported Li Yuan, the

¹⁷ The ethnic and cultural roots of the Tang elite have been considered by many, notably in a series of essays by Chen Yinke collected in *Tangdai zhengshishi shulun gao* 唐代政治史述論稿 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1994 reprint of 1943 edition). More recently, see the relevant essays in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, "Sui and T'ang China, 589–906, Part 1," edited by Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), especially Denis Twitchett, "Introduction," and Howard J. Wechsler, "The Founding of the T'ang Dynasty: Kao-tsu (reign 618–26)." See in

founding Tang emperor, as he took power. This relationship in turn became the essential qualification for the powerful positions they assumed.

In time the northwestern aristocrats were challenged by new contestants for political authority, but the northern bias in the bureaucracy remained unabated. The imperial examinations sponsored by the emperor are illustrative. Although the exams were only one among an array of avenues to political power, and under Tang never the dominant one, through the course of the dynasty their role in qualifying men for bureaucratic office grew. They remained, however, overwhelmingly the preserve of men from the north, the old cultural heartland. Few were anxious to leave the familiarity of the North for the alien world of the South, where the customs were barbaric, foods were unpalatable, and health was endangered by the unfamiliar and dangerous diseases and animals that were rampant. The South was a dumping ground for men who had run afoul of court politics. Banishment to the South was regarded with good reason as a death sentence.

The despair of Liu Zongyuan (773–819), among the most prominent scholars of his era who nevertheless was exiled to the remote and alien western regions of the deepest South, is illustrative. Echoing many others who had suffered a similar fate, Liu expressed his loathing for the threatening world that surrounded him in a letter composed probably in 804:

addition the relevant discussions in Yang, *The Way of the Barbarians and Skaff, Sui-Tang China and Its Turco-Mongol Neighbors*. For an interesting, albeit narrow, perspective, see James T. C. Liu, "Polo and Cultural Change: From T'ang to Sung China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45:1 (1985), 483–505.

Though somewhat dated, the most thorough discussions of the aristocratic families of Tang and pre-Tang eras in English are David G. Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), and Patricia Buckley, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China: A Case Study of the Po-ling Ts'ui Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). There is an extensive literature in Chinese and Japanese, including the publications of the Chūkoku chūshi shi kenkyū kai 中國中世史研究會, especially the on-going series *Chūkoku chūshi shi kenkyū; zokuhen* 中國中世史研究:續篇.

When I am depressed, I go out and about. But as I do I find much to fear for through the wilds there are poisonous snakes and great wasps. Whether I look to the sky or regard the land, to walk but an inch is exhausting.¹⁸

As Edward Schafer wrote, Tang texts leave "the impression of a land overrun with anonymous lizards and their loathsome like." To add to Liu's despair, the Indigenes of such an untamed wilderness were not receptive to the virtues of his instruction: "They reject the transformation of civilization and abuse human empathy.... If you try to manage them with rites, they respond with stubbornness. If you restrain them with punishments, they run away."¹⁹

Many of those banished to the South, Liu among them, died before they could be restored to good standing in the North. Meanwhile, much like the native elites of South Asia and East Africa under the British or those of the Russian colonies in the heart of Asia, men from the South, who had limited access to the exams or any other route to power, were effectively blocked from access to positions with autonomous authority. Rather than seeking to recruit southern officials through standard procedures, the court created a special system known as "southern selection." Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) explained this in his *Revised Tang History*.

In 675 the Governors of the Five Commanderies of Lingnan [the deepest south, roughly modern Guangdong and Guangxi] and of Qianzhong [roughly modern Guizhou and western Hunan] sought to recruit local men as officials, but some lacked administrative talent. So [the court] dispatched Censorate officials as Selection Officials. This was called Southern Selection (*nanxuan* 南選). Thereafter whenever there was flood or

¹⁸ *Liu hedong ji* 柳河東集 (Shanghai, Renmin chubanshe, 1974 punctuated edition), 30:494–496, quoting from page 494.

¹⁹ *Liu hedong ji*, 28:465–466. Schafer, *The Vermillion Bird: Tang Images of the South* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), is the most magisterial English-language study of Tang attitudes toward the south; the quote is from page 207.

drought in Jiangnan, Huainan, or Fujian, Supplemental Selection Officials were dispatched to select individuals and to discard any ad hoc selection law.²⁰

An edict of the following year gave added detail:

The Governors of Guizhou, Guangzhou, Jiaozhou, Qianzhou, and elsewhere have heretofore assessed the suitability of local populations for appointment, but their selections have yet to have merit. Henceforth every fourth year an upright official of the fifth rank or higher is to be appointed, who together with an inspector is to be dispatched to conduct the assessment. The people call this Southern Selection.²¹

Two further passages help to flesh out the initiative. The *Tongdian* encyclopedia commented: “District and prefectural officials in Qianzhong, Lingnan and Fujian are not appointed by the Ministry of Rites [as standing officials were],” but rather are selected by Southern Selection.²² An edict issued in 701 further ordered that vacant offices across the South “in Guizhou, Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Jianzhou, Hezhou, Fuzhou, Shaozhou, and elsewhere,” were to be filled in this manner.²³ In summary, across the South a special system of recruitment to fill out regional and local administration had become regularized under the reign of the Tang emperor Gaozong (r. 674–684) and refined by his immediate successors. Rather than subject southerners to the standard vetting system under the control of the Ministry of Rites, which administered the imperial examinations but also vetted appointees rising

20 Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, ed., *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, henceforth XTS), 45: 1180. On “Southern Selection,” see Wang Chengwen 王承文, “Tangdai ‘nanxuan’ yu Lingnan Xidong haozu” 唐代“南选”与岭南溪洞豪族, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1 (1998).

21 Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1956; henceforth ZZTJ) 202: 6380. See also the parallel passages in Wang Pu 王溥, *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (DSKQS ed.) 75:21a-b.

22 *Tongdian* 通典, edited by Du You 杜佑 (<https://zh.m.wikisource.org/wiki/通典>, accessed January 21, 2023), j.15 (no pagination).

23 *Tang huiyao* 唐會要, compiled by Wang Bu 王簿 (DSKQS ed.), 75:21b.

through other avenues, officials of intermediate rank who had been so vetted were dispatched to oversee the selection of these officials.

Through two case studies we can explore how Southern Selection was implemented and what it meant at a local level. First is the case of the Zhang 張 family of Shaozhou 韶州.²⁴ Zhang family tradition, as traced by Ouyang Xiu in his genealogical tables of Tang officials in his revised history of the dynasty, claimed an unnamed ancestor of the Shaozhou kin group had fled the Central Plain in the early fourth century as part of the widespread flight of northern elites that accompanied the Jin court relocation to Jiankang. This claim is common in the records of southern families that later became prominent. It is hard to know how much faith to place in any such claim largely because links to the great families of the Central Plains were integral to the social strategies of ambitious families, but also because of the vague record that is common to many family traditions.²⁵ After an uncertain sequence of generations, the record tells us that Zhang Shouli 守禮, the first named member of the Shaozhou kin group, had served the Sui dynasty as assistant district magistrate (*cheng* 丞) in a district in Vietnam. Shouli's son Junzheng 君政 in turn was appointed assistant prefectural magistrate (*biejia* 別駕) in Shaozhou, a prefecture on the south slope of the Nanling Mountains that divide the deepest South from Hunan; thereafter the kin group was based in Shaozhou. Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (678–740), a third-generation descendent of Junzheng, brought unprecedented glory to his family when, having become the first of his kin to earn a *jinshi* degree in the examinations, he rose through the bureaucratic ranks until he served the Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685–762; r. 712–756) as grand counselor.

But Zhang Jiuling was the exception. His father was alone among four brothers, the grandsons of Junzheng, to hold office, having served as assistant district magistrate in a remote district in the mountains of eastern Guangnan. Scattered among his cousins are several who held assistant magistracies at the district or prefectural level, all in the deepest South. One additional member of the wider family, Jiuling's eldest first cousin, appears to have earned a *mingjing* degree; the records

24 Most of the following on Zhang Jiuling and his family is based on Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju punctuated ed., 1975), 78c:2681–2707. See also Clark, *Sinitic Encounter*, 55–57.

25 See, for example, the discussion of family origins in Hugh R. Clark, *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley (Fujian) from the Late Tang through the Song* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007), Chapter 2, "The Composition of Elite Kin Groups in the Mulan Valley."

are contradictory.²⁶ Of the 178 recorded descendants of Jiuling's father, the genealogy records that offices were held by eighty. Universally, these were the mid- and low-level local offices across Guangnan that were filled by Southern Selection. The Zhang of Shaozhou were exemplary of the local elite across the South who were recruited through the Southern Selection system.

Much the same can be said of the family of Ouyang Zhan (758–801), who was first among the small number from Fujian to earn a degree through the imperial examination. In a eulogy for Zhan, his examination colleague Han Yu commented: “The family of Ouyang Zhan had lived in Fujian for generations, and all before him had been officials, serving as assistant magistrates in the prefectures and districts.”²⁷ Subordinate local offices such as these were exactly the range of offices the court staffed through Southern Selection. Notably, there is no record that any of Ouyang Zhan's ancestors had earned degrees through the imperial system, nor that they had ever held positions with the autonomous authority held by the magistrates themselves; they were “assistants,” subordinate to the magistrate, almost surely a northerner who had been appointed through standard procedures. Ouyang Zhan's ancestors had held office through Southern Selection.

These family histories are illustrative but hardly unique. Like the local elites who sat in the colonial assemblies of North America or served in the administrative bureaucracy of South Asia, those recruited through Southern Selection were granted an illusion of authority, but real authority rested with those who oversaw their work. Echoing the common prejudice of the Englishmen who governed the colonies, the northerners who ran the Tang empire believed that southerners, even when granted an orthodox education, remained marginally civilized. Like children, they were not yet ready to fully assume the responsibilities of the scholar-official. Like children, as Liu Zongyuan had lamented, “They reject the transformation of civilization and abuse human empathy.... They respond with stubbornness... they run away.”

²⁶ See (*Qianlong*) *Guangdong tongzhi* (乾隆)廣東通志, edited by Hao Yulin 郝玉麟 et al. (DSKQS ed.), 44:40b-41a.

²⁷ Han Yu 韓愈, “Ouyang sheng'ai ci” 歐陽生哀辭, *Wubai jiazhu changtai wenji* 五百家注昌黎文集 (DSKQS ed.), 22: 2b-3a.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCT OF SETTLER COLONIALISM, PART ONE: SOCIAL COMPOSITION

Colonization has often had two vectors. On the one hand is the patronizing attitude of the elites in the metropole, as discussed in the preceding pages. A second vector, one that was not universal but certainly characteristic of British colonial ventures in North America, South and East Africa, and Australia, Russian ventures in the inner Asian heartland, or those of Japan in Korea and Manchuria, is "settler colonialism," referring to those settlers who occupied new lands in the name of a mother country and with the intent of displacing the indigenous population. This generally reflects Robert Young's definition of colonialism, quoted earlier, but the emphasis on "settler" as a form of displacement of an indigenous population runs more strongly.

John Locke provided a rationalization for settler colonialism in his "Second Treatise of Civil Government," composed in 1690:

[F]or I ask, whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniencies of life, as ten acres of equally fertile land do in Devonshire, where they are well cultivated?... There cannot be a clearer demonstration of any thing, than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land, and poor in all the comforts of life; whom nature having furnished as liberally as any other people, with the materials of plenty, i.e. a fruitful soil, apt to produce in abundance, what might serve for food, raiment, and delight; yet for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniencies we enjoy: and a king of a large and fruitful territory there, feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-labourer in England.²⁸

Following the premises, if not the guidance, of Locke, British settlers in North America, with the full backing of the court in London and intent on creating a more perfect reflection of a Christian

²⁸ Locke (1690), chapter 5, paragraphs 37 and 41.

community in the New World, usurped any right of the Indigenes to the land itself and the products thereof. In the Sinitic world, through the centuries of migration from north to south, the immigrants as well as acculturated Indigenes laid claim to the bottomlands that were best suited to their agricultural economy. Much as European immigrants to North America pushed the Native Americans off the good land, gradually the northern migrants pushed the culturally-resistant Indigenes who had utilized those lands for untold generations toward the less desirable, economically more marginal highlands.

Migration from north to south began long before the collapse of the Han dynasty early in the third century CE. Immigrant numbers, however, were very small. The pace of migration picked up substantially over the several centuries following the Han collapse, which added a new layer to an already complicated social construct across the South. Under this new order the southern population can be broken into five categories: the truly indigenous, known in sources as the “raw barbarians”; the acculturated indigenous, known as the “cooked barbarians”; the indigenized immigrant; the non-indigenized immigrant; and the immigrant elite.²⁹ No numbers count the balance among these groups, but logic would suggest the “raw barbarians,” the most direct heirs to the land, were the largest segment of the southern population. Beyond elite circles surrounding the southern courts that were composed primarily of the immigrant elite, throughout the South it is likely that very few adhered to orthodox, or “Confucian,” cultural standards. There had been some penetration of the orthodox culture, especially in the riverine corridors where the thin overlay of imperial administration was concentrated and along which northern migrants had moved. Elsewhere, as the distance from the nodes of acculturation grew, as one might move from the bottomlands into the hills and uplands, the legacy of indigenous cultures persisted with little change. As the new political order took shape, however, political and cultural power rested with those who could claim either descent from or association with the great families of the North. Xiaofei Tian, for example, notes that “in Shu and Wu connection with the prominent old families of the Han constituted considerable cultural capital.... Approval by members of those old families of

²⁹ See Charles Holcombe, “Re-Imagining China: The Chinese Identity Crisis at the Start of the Southern Dynasties Period,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115:1 (1995), 1–14, with relevant citations.

the North is often cited [in contemporary literature] as the demonstration of a man's cultural excellence and worth."³⁰

The bias towards men with links to Northern elites, be they real or presumed, only became more pronounced under the succession of dynasties that governed the South from the fourth to sixth centuries. The Jin court that had briefly restored the holistic empire in the latter half of the third century, faced with uncontrolled uprisings early in the fourth century, was forced to abandon Luoyang, its capital city on the western edge of the Central Plain.³¹ A collateral member of the imperial family then found refuge in Jiankang, where he established a new court that history knows as the Eastern Jin (ca.317–420). There he surrounded himself with fellow refugees, the immigrant elite that was composed of men with northern backgrounds who excluded southerners, both indigenous and immigrant, from access to power. As Jin was followed by a succession of southern courts, the barrier between the refugee northerners and men who were native to the south eased, but it never disappeared. Most notably, among the Indigenes, only men who had adapted to the orthodox culture of the court, the acculturated—or “cooked”—barbarians, had access. Indigenous men who maintained their distinct cultural values as well as indigenized immigrants remained outside the circles of court authority.

Beside the narrow circle of court elite, whose northern roots are generally well documented, was a second cohort that also claimed northern roots. Many of these claims, however, are suspect if not explicitly fictitious, and few in this cohort accessed the power of the court.³² These include both the non-indigenized immigrants as well as the “cooked barbarians” who commonly claimed to be the descendants of the anonymous migrants of earlier times. This cohort further breaks into two distinct sets. First are those who claimed to have been part of the fourth-century exodus that accompanied the refugee Jin court. This migration is known in the historical record as the “*Yongjia* migration” in reference to the last reign name of the Jin court before its flight to the South, during which so many had fled the

³⁰ Xiaofei Tian, “Remaking History: The Shu and Wu Perspectives in the Three Kingdoms Period,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136:4 (2016), 707. She adds that only four collected works by Shu authors survived in the Sui dynasty imperial library, and all four authors were native northerners who had relocated to Shu (709).

³¹ Although commonly referred to as invasions by bordering tribes, in fact these uprisings were led by “domesticated” non-Sinitic tribes that had lived for generations under dynastic protections and patronage inside the claimed dynastic territory.

³² See Clark, *Portrait of a Community*, Chapter 2, “The Composition of Elite Kin Groups.”

Central Plain. The second set are those who claimed to have migrated to the South before the *Yongjia* migration. The claims of either group, many of whom had been in the South for generations and had adapted to the cultural and seasonal rhythms of the South, are generally impossible to verify and difficult to tease apart.

As an example of the former, one can look to Fujian. In a tradition that is first recorded in the official history of the Chen dynasty (557–589), the last of the southern dynasties, the First Ancestor (*shizu* 始祖) of four of the most important lineages of Fujian had fled their natal homes in the north as part of the *Yongjia* migration, finding refuge not in the new urban centers of the Yangtze basin but along the Fujian coast.³³ When Fujian lineages began to compile genealogies, as early as the late ninth century, they routinely claimed the First Ancestor had arrived in the context of that migration. Although none of the lineages examined by Hugh Clark in his “portrait” of the central Fujian coast broke through into the ranks of orthodox elites before the eleventh century, these claims were integral to their strategies to position themselves as local or regional elites.³⁴ The claims, none of which can be traced to earlier than the second half of the eighth century, are impossible to refute, but also impossible to verify.

As an example of the second set, the long-standing southern families who claimed more distant northern roots, we can consider the case of the Tao family of Chaisang district 柴桑縣, located near the juncture of the Yangtze River and the Boyang Lake. The best known member of the family is Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427, also known as Tao Qian 陶潛). Famous as a poet, fabulist, and essayist, he is considered to be exemplary of orthodox southern Sinitic culture.³⁵ Yet the Tao family heritage is open to debate. Chaisang sat on the edge of the cultural world of the court, a gray area between the world of “orthodox” versus “heterodox” culture. Tao Yuanming’s great-great-grandfather Tao Dan 丹 had been a prominent general under the third-century Wu court. Much more is known about Dan’s son Tao Kan 侃 (259–334). He initially followed his father’s military career, serving the Jin dynasty even before the

33 *Chenshu* 陳書, compiled by Yao Silian 姚思廉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 35:486.

34 See the relevant discussion in Clark, *Portrait of a Community*.

35 In addition to his corpus of poems and essays, Tao Yuanming was the author of the famous fable of the Peach Blossom Spring. My discussion of the Tao family draws on two biographies: Fang Qiao (579–648), *Jin shu* (DSKQS ed.), 66:7a-23a, the official biography of Tao Kan, and Xiao Tong (501–531), and *Zhao Ming taizi ji* (DSKQS ed.), 4:7a-7b, the earliest surviving biography of Tao Yuanming.

court sought refuge in the South. At one point, as Kan sought promotion, he traveled to the Jin court in Luoyang, where he sought an audience with a prominent court aristocrat. The latter initially dismissed Kan as an uncivilized country bumpkin, calling him "a dog of *Xi* 洗狗," invoking one of the several generalized ethnonyms used by northerners to disparage men from the South. Kan was nevertheless able to prove he was well-versed in the orthodox tradition. Although he was thereby able to earn the aristocrat's imprimatur, Kan was then dispatched to a career overseeing *Man* barbarians. The aristocrat is said to have observed, "Henceforth he is our man for overseeing pacified peoples."

Were they Tao indigenous southerners who had acclimated to orthodox culture? Or were they indigenized northern migrants? None of the sources say. What is clear is that the family was facile in meeting the expectations of the orthodox elite. Although he spent his entire career "overseeing the pacified peoples," Tao Kan earned a reputation as a skilled civil administrator that enabled him to hold a succession of increasingly powerful positions both before and after the relocation of the Jin court. At the same time, neither he nor his descendants were ever fully a part of the orthodox elite. Notably, despite his position among the great poets and essayists of the South, Kan's great-grandson Yuanming was a resolute critic of that elite, perhaps most notably in his fable of the Peach Blossom Spring, which describes an arcadian utopia hidden from the world where the residents sheltered from the dross that lay outside it. He expressed his alienation in his autobiography, referring to himself in the story of "the Scholar has no idea where he is from."³⁶ As Xiaofei Tian has commented, "there is in fact nothing in Tao Yuanming's poetry or prose that suggests ... loyalist sentiment" favoring the Jiankang regimes.³⁷

Finally, across the South, beyond the influence of orthodox culture embraced by the court in Jiankang, the truly indigenous and culturally heterodox population remained. They were minimally integrated into the world of Sinitic culture, and little attention is paid to them in orthodox literature. When they do appear, it is generally to portray them as barbarian in the truest sense of the word. Recall Liu Zongyuan's lament quoted earlier: "They reject the transformation of civilization and abuse human

³⁶ Clark, *Sinitic Encounter*, 60–63. The quotation is from "Wuliu xiansheng zhuan," in *Tao Yuanming ji* (DSKQS ed.), 5:8b.

³⁷ Xiaofei Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 13.

empathy.... If you try to manage them with rites, they respond with stubbornness. If you restrain them with punishments, they run away.” Similarly, the *History of the Sui Dynasty* complains:

The character of the [southern] people varies between frivolous and ferocious, and they go back and forth between prosperity and rebellion.... Thus the myriad *Man* are brave and daring, and [each group] is distinct. They all value bribes and treat death lightly, and their only measure of greatness is wealth. They live in cliff-side nests and expend all their energy on agriculture. They cut wood to make tallies, and they do not break an oath even unto death. Fathers and sons follow different livelihoods. If a father is poor, he gives himself to his son. The myriad *Liao* [another ethnonym for native southerners] are all this way.³⁸

Echoes of this social hierarchy are common in cases of settler colonialism. By definition, an indigenous population has been pushed aside in favor of the new settlers. Turning again to the British colonies of North America—although one could find myriad similar patterns across the history of colonization—by the early eighteenth century the Indigenous peoples had been generally pushed out of the areas of British control much as the “raw barbarians” had been pushed out of the good bottom lands of the southern river basins. The story of North America is rife with men of European background who lived among the indigenous population, men regarded by those who stayed true to their British heritage as but a small step removed from native barbarism, as Tao Kan was dismissed with an ethnic insult. Most immigrants to North America, however, stayed close to their fellow immigrants and loyal to their cultural heritage. And finally an elite few—the southern planters and the New England and Mid-Atlantic merchants—formed an immigrant elite.³⁹

38 *Sui shu* 隋書, edited by Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 et al. (DSKQS ed.), 31:18b–19a. I have been guided in the following by Zeng Huaman (Tsang Wah-moon) 曾華滿, *Tangdai Lingnan fazhan de hexin xing* 唐代嶺南發展的核心性 (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press/Xianggang Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe, 1973), 1–14.

39 For a recent and very useful study of this, see David Hackett Fisher, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCT OF SETTLER COLONIALISM, PART TWO: INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE

Indigenous resistance to the northern immigrants is largely overlooked in orthodox sources of Sinitic history. Nevertheless there are numerous entries in the surviving record of rebellion against the emerging northern hegemony. As the Jin dynasty history says of the year 303, “At this time throughout the realm rebels arose in masses.”⁴⁰ Rebellion is, of course, the most explicit rejection of a ruling order, but by itself it need not be a rejection of orthodox discourse. It can, in fact, be motivated by the opposite belief, that the orthodox discourse had been hijacked or misinterpreted by the ruling clique. Though most rebellions are overlooked or minimized in the surviving record, some have had enough impact on that record to merit discussion.

I will focus on three case studies.

The rebellion led by the “sorcerer bandit” (*yaozei* 妖賊) Sun En 孫恩 (d. 402) against the Jin court across the turn of the fourth century represents one of the most serious indigenous challenges to the northern hegemony represented by the Jin court.⁴¹ We can view this rebellion as a break with the orthodox discourse that the court represented, but also, more threateningly, as an affirmation of cultural heterodoxy. Sun family problems actually began with En’s uncle Sun Tai 泰(?–398). Tai was a disciple of Du Zigong 杜子恭, a prominent mystic who propagated the esoteric teachings of the Way of Five-Pecks-of-Rice (*Wudou midao* 五斗密道), an esoteric faith-healing movement that had emerged among the indigenous people of the mountains of western Sichuan in the second century CE. Late in the third century CE the movement had migrated from the Sichuan mountains to the Han dynasty capital of Luoyang as the dynasty was collapsing, where it morphed into Celestial Masters Daoism (*Tianshi dao* 天師道). If its initial guise as the Five-Pecks-of-Rice faith healing movement had been an

⁴⁰ Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jinshu*, 13:11b.

⁴¹ The following derives principally from Sun’s biography in *Jinshu*, j. 100, and relevant passages in ZZTJ. I have also drawn on three secondary accounts: Tanigawa Michio 谷川道夫 and Mori Masao 森雅夫, *Chūgoku minshū hanran shi* 中國庶反亂史 vol. 1 (Tokyo: Tōyō bunko, 1978), 121–145; Matsu’ura Akira 松浦明, *Chūgoku no kaizoku* 中國の海賊 (Tokyo: Tōhō shoten, 1995); and Werner Eichhorn, “Description of the Rebellion of Sun En and Earlier Taoist Rebellions,” *Mitteilungen des Institute für Orientforschung* 2:2 (1954), 325–352. Sun is also called a *haizei* (海賊, literally “sea bandit”), a term commonly translated as “pirate.” Popular usage of the English term suggests someone who preys on shipping, which Sun is not generally accused of. Rather his infamy rests on his raids along the coast.

explicit rejection of Sinitic orthodoxy, its redefinition as the Celestial Masters movement under the protection of the reformulating order of the Central Plain represented a step toward accommodation.⁴²

Sun Tai's mentor Du Zigong, however, was a native of Hangzhou. Peter Nickerson has suggested that when the movement leadership left the Sichuan mountains for the protection of the northern court, a rump faction stayed behind; the dissidents, who stayed faithful to the mystical faith-healing identified with the movement's origins, in turn spread down the Yangtze River basin.⁴³ As plausible as this is to explain the presence of Du Zigong in Hangzhou, nothing survives of his background; we do not know who his teacher was or what connection he might have had, if any, with the Celestial Masters movement that had found a degree of accommodation with the imperial court. What we do know is that he became a teacher of the movement in the faith-healing tradition. He was known to have "penetrated the numinous and mastered the arts of the Dao. The scholars and great houses of the Eastern Jin [i.e., the relocated court] as well as the elites of the capital all followed him."⁴⁴ When Du Zigong died, Sun Tai assumed his position, including Du's deep reach into the elite circles surrounding the Jin court.⁴⁵ This in turn prompted suspicion among some who were close to the emperor, and Tai was banished to the deepest, and most culturally heterodox, South. Almost as soon as he was banished, however, Tai was recalled when others at court praised him to the emperor. Far from resolving the hostility of orthodox circles, his recall and enduring influence prompted his enemies at court to engineer his assassination.

The assassination of Sun Tai pushed his nephew and acolyte Sun En to flee to the islands that lie off the Hangzhou Bay and launch rebellion.⁴⁶ In a manifestation of southern alienation across the

⁴² There are many discussions of the movement in recent literature. Among English-language sources, for example, see Terry Kleeman, *Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese Millennial Kingdom* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), and Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, translated by Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), chapter 3, "Celestial Masters." See also Barbara Hendrichke, "Early Daoist Movements," Livia Kohn, "The Northern Celestial Masters," and Peter Nickerson, "The Southern Celestial Masters," in *Daoism Handbook*, vol. 1, edited by Livia Kohn (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 134–164, 283–308, and 256–282 respectively.

⁴³ Nickerson, "Southern Celestial Masters."

⁴⁴ Shen Yue 沈約, *Song shu* 宋書 (DSKQS ed.), 4a.

⁴⁵ Sima, *Zizhi tongjian*, 110:3485, and Shen, *Songshu*, 100:4a–b.

⁴⁶ The fate of Sun Tai is narrated in numerous sources. See for example Fang et al., *Jinshu*, 100:29b–30a, and Sima, *Zizhi*

cultural frontier, there was a mass surge of support: “Eight prefectures altogether followed Sun En in rebellion and slaughtered their magistrates. Within ten days several hundred thousand had rallied to him.”⁴⁷ The “ignorant masses” (*yu min* 愚民), as they are described in orthodox literature, believed that Sun Tai had “molted” like a cicada (*chantui* 蟬蛻) and been reborn as Sun En.⁴⁸ The belief that Sun En was his uncle reborn in a new skin like a cicada is explicitly heterodox. Most scholars agree today these “ignorant masses” were primarily descendants of the ancient, pre-Sinitic people of the coast.⁴⁹ That is, support for Sun En’s rebellion, the evidence argues, arose from indigenous traditions and beliefs.

Sun En was killed in 402, but his rebellion carried on. In the process, its roots in the indigenous world become even more apparent. Leadership of the revolt devolved upon his brother-in-law Lu Xun 廬循 (d.411). Leading “over one thousand ‘tower boats,’” manned it appears by those same non-Sinitic “ignorant masses” who had rallied to Sun En, Lu fled down the coast. Using these heterodox forces he seized Guangzhou 廣州, the cultural, political, and administrative center of the deep South. The Jin court, happy to have him so far away and out of its hair and content to leave him be, recognized him as “Commandant for Pacifying the Yue [Barbarians]” (*PingYue zhonglang jiang*), an echo of the marginalizing titles given to Tao Kan, who, it bears recalling, had been his court’s magistrate in Guangzhou.⁵⁰

Lu Xun managed to balance a relationship with the Jin court with his on-going role as inheritor of Sun En’s revolt for a decade, before he was trapped and committed suicide while aiding rebellious forces in the Guangnan–Vietnam border area. There is, however, one final record of his rebellion that underlines the reliance Sun En and he had had on indigenous support. This is in a telling passage in Yue Shi’s tenth-century gazetteer of the empire:

tongjian, 110:3485.

⁴⁷ Fang et al., *Jinshu*, 100:32a.

⁴⁸ Sima, *Zizhi tongjian*, 110:3485.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Tanigawa and Mori *Chūgoku minshū hanran shi*, 121–145; Matsu’ura, *Chūgoku no kaizoku*, 16–20, and Eichhorn, “Description of the Rebellion of Sun En.”

⁵⁰ Fang et al., *Jinshu*, 100:34b, and Sima, *Zizhi tongjian*, 112:3524.

The Quanlang 泉郎 are the barbarian households of [Quanzhou] prefecture.⁵¹ They are also known as the floating-boat people 游艇子. They are the remnants [of the forces] of Lu Xun.... [Following Lu's defeat] the survivors escaped and scattered across the mountains and seas. Some endure to this day.

In 625 the Tang commander Wang Yitong 王義童 sent an official offering them amnesty. Their leaders... accepted appointment as commandant (*duwei* 都尉) and ordered their adherents collectively to desist from banditry.... They commonly live aboard their vessels and move about with the seasons. They have no fixed abode.⁵²

Except where later texts quote Yue Shi, the “Quanlang” are otherwise unknown in the historical record. Exactly who they were is open to question. But several points are clear. Most notably, they were among the survivors of Lu Xun's disastrous campaign. Like others, they had found refuge “across the mountains and seas.” These were precisely the areas where, in the fifth century, Sinitic settlement was scant and indigenous culture survived. Those who became known as “Quanlang” had apparently worked their way up the coast until they found refuge along the coastline of what later became Quanzhou prefecture. We know very little about who the indigenous inhabitants may have been, but there is no reason to believe this stretch of coastline, much of which was ill-defined marshland that would not have appealed to Sinitic settlers, was heavily settled by anyone. In short, deep into the imperial era the indigenous world of the South, with its values that lay at odds with the standards of orthodox culture, endured.

Without determining Sun En's own ethnic identity it is impossible to determine if he should be considered an indigenized immigrant or an acculturated Indigene. What we do know is that Sun En sat on the cusp between orthodox society and the heterodox world of Indigenous culture. He was fully

⁵¹ The term *quanlang* occurs in no other context throughout the vast collection of the Siku quanshu, nor is it included in the authoritative *Hanyu da cidian*. However, citing a Japanese text, the *Dai kanwa jiten* defines “quanlang” as “a person who makes his living by taking products from the water” and as “fisherman,” but also as “men of the sea,” and most especially as “boat people” (*dan*); see 5:1040, character #17274:71.

⁵² Yue, *Taiping huanyu ji*, 102:2b.

conversant in the culture of the former, but he embedded himself in the world of the latter, which ultimately defined his identity.

The second case study is the rebellion of the Yiyang *Man* 義陽蠻 chieftain Zhang Chang 張昌 (d.304 CE). In contrast to the ambiguous identity of Sun En, Zhang Chang was definitively defined by the orthodox world as ethnically non-Sinitic; he was *Man*. Like Sun En, however, Zhang had managed to find a balance between his ethnic identity and the orthodox politics of the court. His biography in the *History of the Jin Dynasty* claims he served the dynasty as a minor district official, which at a minimum suggests he was conversant with court officials.⁵³

Early in the fourth century, before the Jin court lost control of the Central Plain and found refuge in Jiankang, Zhang Chang rebelled. His homeland on the Henan-Hubei border region had been granted as a fief by the imperial family to Sima Xin 司馬歆 (d.302), a collateral member of the reigning Sima family: "The rule of [Sima] Xin was oppressive and lost the hearts of the *Man* barbarians. Zhang Chang assembled several thousand followers intent on rebelling."⁵⁴ Faced with his growing strength, the court ordered a draft of young men from the region of the rebellion to put the uprising down; the draft was wildly unpopular and met with extensive resistance. "Vagrants and resisters" (*liuren ji beshuzhe* 流人及避戍役者), most likely a euphemism for those who evaded the draft, flocked to Zhang's cause. Eventually his followers swelled to over thirty thousand.

Echoing the ecstatic rites that northern texts commonly attribute to the southern "barbarians," Zhang Chang built on a rumor that circulated among the masses that an emperor would arise. He "divined" (*zao yaoyan* 造妖言) that a "sage," a *shengren* 聖人, would appear. To fulfill his prophecy, he then recruited a district functionary named Qiu Shen 丘沈. After changing the man's name to Liu Ni 劉尼, a combination of the surname of the Han dynasty royal family and the personal name of Confucius, he proclaimed this man to be a descendant of the Han dynasty royal family and to be the emperor who had been forecast. Thus even as he rebelled against the hegemonic rule of the northern dynasty, he adopted aspects of Sinitic culture to his cause.

⁵³ *Jinshu* 100:5a–6b.

⁵⁴ This and the following draw on ZZTJ 85: 2680–2684, and *Jinshu* 100:51–7b. Yiyang was located across the border of what were later the provinces of Henan and Hunan, thus Zhang Chang's rebellion began in lands north of the Yangtze River.

Zhang Chang's rebellion was put down after the rebels had thrown a fear into court circles. Zhang, who was so definitively non-Sinitic, represents a different profile than Sun En, whose ethnicity is less certain.⁵⁵ The social position of their followers, on the other hand, had much in common. To the scholars who wrote of their rebellions, they were uncivilized and a threat to true civilization. As such, and as rebels, they could not be absorbed; they had to be eradicated, as Zhang Chang's followers were, or physically removed, as Lu Xun had been.

The last of the three case studies of resistance lacks ambiguity. This rebellion unfolded along the Fujian–Guangdong border region late in the seventh century. Unlike the rebellions of Sun En or Zhang Chang, these events are entirely ignored in the mainstream historical literature, despite having caused considerable local dislocation and even the death of a prefectural magistrate. They are recounted only in local accounts, reflecting the tendency of mainstream records to ignore resistance to northern cultural hegemony that did not threaten the dynastic order.

Because this region, lying between modern Quanzhou in southern Fujian and Chaozhou in Guangdong, is isolated by mountains and lacks the riverine connections to the interior routes preferred by the migrants who commonly followed the river basins, settlement by colonizers was late in arriving. No record survives of the early stages of immigrant settlement that apparently began some time in the mid-centuries of the first millennium CE. Around the mid-seventh century, however, the settlers appealed to the Tang court for protection, presumably from raids by displaced Indigenes of the type that has been common to settler colonial ventures throughout history.⁵⁶ In 669, the emperor Gaozong (r.650–684) announced through an imperial edict that the *LiaoMan* 獠蠻, a generic term for “uncivilized” indigenous southerners, were causing disturbances in the border area between Quanzhou and Chaozhou. The court ordered Chen Zheng 陳政, a militia leader of indeterminant background, to occupy the region as an agricultural colony (*tuntian* 屯田), which he did with roughly fifty families.⁵⁷

55 Modern studies, such as Eichorn, “Description of the Rebellion of Sun En,” presume that Sun En was ethnically Sinitic, but there is little hard evidence. His family affiliation with the Way of the Five-Pecks-of-Rice and the ease with which he moved to the off-shore islands and recruited their residents to his cause at least should give some pause to that conclusion.

56 Luo Qingxiao 羅青霄, et al., (*Wanli*) *Zhangzhou fuzhi* (萬里)漳州府志 (1573 edition), 12:2a.

57 “Zhao Chen Zheng zhen gu Suian xian di” 詔陳政鎮故綏安縣地, preserved in Xue Ningdu 薛凝度, et al., (*Jiaqing*) *Yunxiao tongzhi* (嘉慶)雲霄廳志 (1816 ed.) 17:3a; see also at <http://pedia.sinica.edu.tw:8057>. The text is not included in

When Chen Zheng died in 677, apparently of natural causes, he was succeeded as leader of the outpost by Yuanguang 元光, his son. While we can imagine that tension with the Indigenous communities of the interior continued to plague the colony, nothing is mentioned in the surviving record until 686, when “the Guangdong bandit (*Guangkou* 廣寇) Chen Qian 陳謙 united with the *Man* barbarian chieftains Miao Zicheng 苗自成 and Lei Wanxing 雷萬興 and attacked Chaozhou 潮州 (Guangdong).”⁵⁸ None of the three have left any other record, so much of what transpired is unknown. The chieftains Miao and Lei are identified as ethnically *Man*; given their hostility to the loci of Sinitic settlement, we might guess they remained culturally “barbarian.” All we know of Chen Qian is that he was regarded as a “Guangzhou bandit.”

The outbreak focused on Chaozhou, where, “with light cavalry [Chen Yuanguang] attacked and suppressed them.”⁵⁹ He then petitioned the court to establish a new district between Quanzhou and Zhangzhou. According to prefectural gazetteers from late in the imperial era, as noted our only source for most of this narrative, this occasioned discussion at court:

Remote places [such as the area south of the Jiulong valley] are uncouth and yet to be civilized. We might dispatch a thousand and one officials, but if they do not know the local situation then the people will suffer. Now Yuanguang and his father have tended this land for several years. The barbarians hold them in awe, and the people revere their kindness. If we add “prefect” to his rank so that Yuanguang can run local affairs, then things will not be disordered and the people will not suffer.

Perhaps even more significant, the court luminaries are alleged to have gone on:

Song Minqiu 宋敏求, *Tang dazhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1968 ed.), the official compendium of major court edicts. He Qiaoyuan 何喬遠, *Minshu* 閩書 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1995 punctuated edition; henceforth MS) 41:1012 is the earliest source to refer to the dispatch of forces at the emperor’s command, but it does not cite an edict as such.

⁵⁸ A composite of Huang Zhongzhao 黃仲昭, *BaMin tongzhi* 八閩通志 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1991) 1:11–12 and MS 41:1012.

⁵⁹ MS 41:1012.

[The family of Chen Yuanguang] is to serve as prefect for succeeding generations (*rengshi shou cishi* 仍世守刺史).... Yuanguang is to recommend appointees for prefectural offices from his administrative assistant (*biejia* 別駕) on down and from country sheriff (*buwei* 簿尉) on up.⁶⁰

It is notable how similar to Southern Selection this was. What sets it apart is that Chen Yuanguang was granted complete discretion over the offices in his jurisdiction; no court officials were to be involved. Moreover, except for two brief periods, the Chen family in fact did monopolize authority in Zhangzhou from its establishment in 686 until the death of Yuanguang's great-grandson Chen Mo 謨 in 819. As a result, Yuanguang is immortalized in the local culture of Zhangzhou as “the King Who Settled Zhangzhou” (*Kai Zhang wang* 開漳王).⁶¹

A postscript: the establishment of Zhangzhou did not immediately lead to pacification of the local Indigenes. Yuanguang himself was a victim of the on-going unrest, dying in the course of a campaign in 711 said to have been against the sons of “the *Man* barbarian chieftains” Miao Zicheng and Lei Wanxing.⁶² The Zhangzhou–Chaozhou border area was to remain a center of non-Sinitic culture for many more years. If it took longer to civilize than areas that were more central to Fujian, however, ultimately Zhangzhou, like everywhere else, was brought fully into the sphere of Sinitic culture.

THE ECONOMICS OF SETTLER COLONIALISM

Beyond the subjugation and displacement of Indigenous people, settler colonialism was inescapably linked to economic exploitation. Already southern peasants had practiced sophisticated paddy agriculture for centuries if not millennia; the South was neither technologically backward nor impoverished. Indeed, perhaps the principle draw of the south to the conquering First Emperor and to

60 (*Wanli*) *Zhangzhou fuzhi* 4:2a & MS 41:1012. Like the imperial edict deploying Chen Zheng, there is no record of this debate in standard and more immediate sources such as Sima Guang's *Zizhi tongjian* or the Tang histories.

61 See Hugh R. Clark, “Quanzhou (Fujian) in the Tang-Song Interregnum, 879–978,” *T'oung-pao* LXVIII, 1–3 (1982): 132–149.

62 MS 41:1012.

the migrants who followed was the easy wealth the South was thought to offer, a striking echo to the presumptions of the Spanish in the New World or the British in North America and East Africa.

The growing influx of northern settlers and the step-by-step diminution of tension between them and the Indigenes contributed to an economic boom across the South. The northern economy, as Denis Twitchett wrote, was "limited by the generally low level of [agricultural] productivity." The northern peasants commonly produced one crop per year of dryland grains: wheat, sorghum, millet, gaoliang, that rarely provided little more than their essential needs. In contrast, double- and even triple-cropping that combined rice with other products was increasingly common across the South, leading to agricultural surpluses. Consequently, the northern cultural and political centers where elite wealth was concentrated grew increasingly dependent on grain shipments from beyond their immediate hinterlands, which through the Tang increasingly came from the Yangtze basin.⁶³

The extensive waterways and expanding road networks that facilitated transportation in turn led to new marketing opportunities as southern peasants sought to convert their surpluses into usable assets. In contrast to the highly-regulated traditional commercial systems of the North, under which markets were in theory subject to state oversight that necessarily imposed limits on their organic development as well as control over their operation, southern networks were developed as organic responses to marketing pressures, with little official oversight. In addition to being a reflection as well of the greater surpluses that were being generated, the growing integration of all sectors of the economy into a web of commercial links fostered greater economic and social complexity.⁶⁴

The Belitung shipwreck is an illustration of this commercial web. The wreck was found in 1998

63 Denis Twitchett, "Introduction," *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, "Sui and T'ang China, 589–906, Part 1," edited by Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 23–24.

64 See Denis Twitchett, "The T'ang Market System," *Asia Major* 12:2 (1966), 202–48, and "Merchants, Trade and Government in Late T'ang," *Asia Major* New Series 14:1 (1968), 63–95. Although the Twitchett essays remain essential, there is a wealth of more recent scholarship addressing this in both Chinese and Japanese. See, for example, Kawahara Masahiro, 河原正博, *Kan minzoku Kanan hattatsushi kenkyū* 漢民族華南發達史研究 (Tokyo: Kikawa hokuban, 1984), Fu Zongwen 傅宗文, *Songdai caoshi zhen yanjiu* 宋代草市鎮研究 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1988), Shiba Yoshinobu, 斯波義信, *Sōdai shōgyōshi kenkyū* 宋代商業史研究 (Tokyo: Toyo bunko, 1988), and Zheng Xuemeng 鄭學稼, *Zhongguo gudai jingji zhongxin nanyi he Tang Song Jiangnan jingji yanjiu* 中國古代經濟中心南移和唐宋江南經濟研究 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1996).

off Belitung Island in the Java Sea, south of Sumatra. The vessel's construction identifies it as having come from the western Indian Ocean. Its cargo included small quantities of high-quality ceramics, in addition to several pieces of very fine goldwork. The bulk of its cargo, however, consisted of close to sixty thousand ceramic bowls from the Tongguan kilns of Changsha prefecture on the middle stretch of the Yangtze River, many hundreds of miles from the coast in any direction. The bowls are all of a common size and shape so that they could be easily and efficiently stacked in the shipping barrels in which they were found on the ocean bottom. The decoration of the bowls emphasized west Asian design motifs, including imitations of Arabic script, a sure indication that their intended destination was somewhere far to the west of the Java Sea. One bowl is inscribed with the date 826, which it is generally agreed places the vessel's disaster no later than the second quarter of the ninth century.⁶⁵

A great deal of effort has been devoted to questions such as where the ship was headed, where it had taken on its cargo, and why it was in the waters near Belitung Island, which seems to be a digression from any route to west Asia.⁶⁶ For the present discussion, however, it is the sheer volume of the Tongguan ceramics that is relevant. Although it is possible they had been shipped up the internal river network and over the southern mountains to Guangzhou, the logistics of such an endeavor would have been far greater than simply to send the consignment down the Yangtze River to ports such as Yangzhou near the river's mouth. Presuming, therefore, the latter, we can envision a coordinated effort involving the responsible party/-ies of the vessel and a network of merchants based in the port city and in Changsha.⁶⁷ In turn, this speaks to the economic organization of ceramic production and to the economy of the greater Changsha region and of the wider Yangtze basin. That the kilns could meet such

65 Michael Flecker, "A 9th-century Arab or Indian shipwreck in Indonesian waters," *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 29:2 (2000), 199–217. Several collective volumes have been devoted to this wreck; see Regina Krahl, et al., editors, *Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds* (Washington, D.C: The Smithsonian Institution, 2010) and Alan Chong and Stephen A. Murphy, editors, *The Tang Shipwreck: Art and Exchange in the 9th Century* (Singapore: National Heritage Board, 2017).

66 See, for example, Alain George, "Direct Sea Trade between Early Islamic Iraq and Tang China: From the Exchange of Goods to the Transmission of Ideas," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25:4 (2015), 1–46.

67 Derek Heng, "The Tang Shipwreck and the Nature of China's Maritime Trade during the Late Tang Period," in Chong and Murphy, *The Tang Shipwreck*, 142–59.

an order clearly demonstrates that by the early ninth century a proto-industrial economy with a workforce devoted to ceramic production had taken shape in the heart of the empire.

This is all, in short, material testimony to the sophisticated level of economic organization that the Yangtze basin had attained by the first half of the ninth century. Indirectly it attests to the level of prosperity that organization fostered. Under the oversight of a bureaucracy that represented the imperial court and the North, the South was flourishing. Settler colonialism may link inextricably to economic exploitation, but it need not lead to economic immiseration. Under the oversight of a bureaucracy that represented the interests of the imperial court and the North and the wealthy elites who surrounded it, the South was flourishing. And just as the prosperity of the British colonies prompted an effort by the British crown to impose new taxes, so the prosperity of the South did not go unnoticed at the court in the North. Just as the emerging entrepreneurial class of Britain saw the colonies as a source of wealth, so too, to the Tang court and the grandees who surrounded it, the South was a source of both private and public wealth that could support the empire and themselves in ways the North alone could not. The limits of the subsistence economy of the Central Plain, the northern breadbasket, were exacerbated by a chronic pattern of disaster caused by unsustainable exploitation of fragile environmental regions.⁶⁸ Consequently, to sustain its lifestyle the court was forced to transfer surplus grain from the South. By the early eighth century, as much as four million cattles of tax grain, roughly equal to a quarter million tons, was annually shipped from the Huai and Yangtze River basins to the Central Plain and the capital.⁶⁹ In the years following the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), following which the politically powerful northeastern provinces withheld taxes from the imperial government, the dependence on the revenues from the South became even more pronounced. The relationship is a striking anticipation of that between the European colonial powers and the Americas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when, for example, the transfer of silver across the Atlantic made possible the Hapsburg Empire, and the resources of the North American colonies underwrote the

68 See Ruth Mostern, *The Yellow River: A Natural and Unnatural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), especially Chapter 3, "Loess is More: The Middle Period Tipping Point, 750–1350."

69 Denis Twitchett, *Financial Administration under the T'ang Dynasty*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 33.

construction of the British Navy and the imperial adventure it made possible. So too, by the later eighth century, the imperial structure of the Tang had come to depend on the transfer of wealth from South to North.

COLONIZATION?

What is striking in all three areas—administration, social construct, and economics—is how closely they parallel later European models of colonial empire:

- Just as in the European, in the Sinitic approach to governing the southern population granted a limited degree of administrative authority to the immigrant elite, always under the gaze of those appointed through regular recruitment channels administered by the Ministry of Rites, as the *Tongdian* encyclopedia commented on Tang recruitment, and always subject to the veto of those “orthodox” officials;
- Just as in those colonies toward which the European underclasses migrated—North America, Australia and New Zealand, Kenya, Zambia (or “Rhodesia”), and South Africa—the population of the South was divided between empowered settlers, disempowered settlers, and Indigenes.
- And just as the European colonies could prosper under colonial authority, as the British North American colonies did, the South was prosperous, but in both cases the metropole assumed the authority to extract wealth to suit its needs.

Of course, invoking Ronald J. Horvath’s critical admonition once again: “Definitions [of colonialism] ... must have sufficient flexibility to allow manipulation or articulation,” the parallels may not be exact. The Sinitic empires of the first millennium CE faced significantly different challenges than European empires of more recent times. In assessing whether Sinitic policy can be defined as colonial, we should be struck not by the differences, however, but by the striking parallels.

So, to return to my original question, with a tweak: Is Sinitic policy toward the South consistent with contemporary definitions of colonialism, almost all of which are based on the European models of later times? I will focus these comments on the Tang dynasty, which I find to be the fulfillment of the Sinitic colonial model in the South.

First, further contextualization is necessary. The dominant interpretation of imperial policy toward the South through the first millennium is colored by two central and intertwined propositions that have been at the core of historical discourse for centuries and remain so today. Implicit at least since the creation of the holistic empire by the self-anointed First Emperor late in the third century BCE, and explicit since the eleventh century when Song dynasty historians refined the definition of historical orthodoxy,⁷⁰ the default premise has been that the culture and authority of the empire had always been defined by its northern heritage, and only by that heritage. Control of the Central Plain bestowed political legitimacy because it was the source of the orthodox culture on which, this presumption asserted, civilization rests.

Second is the presumption that the holistic empire that stretches from the grasslands to the north and the deserts to the west to the Eastern and Southern Seas, the empire created by the First Emperor that had never existed before, is normative. Division such as had existed for millennia before the First Emperor, this perspective presumes, is the aberration.⁷¹ The narrative could not neglect the multiple centuries from the fall of the Han in the early third century to the rise of the Sui late in the sixth, centuries when the holistic empire was divided between rival northern and southern empires. Rather than perceiving that division as a return to an historical norm when North and South were separate realms, however, rather than seeing the years of imposed unity under the Qin and Han as an interruption to that norm, the orthodox narrative treated the centuries of renewed division as the aberration.

Because the civilization was defined by the culture of the Central Plain, and the empire it defined was innately universal, there was no framework through which to perceive of the South as territorially or culturally alien despite the inescapable diversity. If the First Emperor had forever reframed the extrinsic meaning of the Mandate when, late in the third century BCE, he forged unity

⁷⁰ Although concerned primarily with the ideological premises of Song historians, this theme emerges in Charles Hartman, *The Making of Song Dynasty History: Sources and Narrative, 960–1279 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁷¹ This point is argued more thoroughly in Clark, "What's the Matter with 'China'?" For a very recent perspective on this, see Chris Buckley, Vivian Wang, and Joy Dong, "One Nation Under Xi: How China's Leader Is Remaking Its Identity," *New York Times*, October 11, 2022, p. A10, a discussion of the cultural manipulations of the Sanxingdui excavations in the Tibetan regions of Sichuan Province.

among the competing courts of the Central Plain and then extended his realm all the way to the southern coastline, orthodox history argued, he only realized what had always been intrinsic. The Mandate was, by definition, universal. The constraints of secular reality were simply the failure to fulfill the promise of the Mandate. Just as John Locke never considered the occupation of the North American “wilderness” by English yeomen to be a usurpation of native rights, nor among northerners was there any reason to think of their authority over or settlement in the South as such. In fact, until the looming presence of European powers in the nineteenth century with their threat of invasion and colonization forced a reassessment of the natural order, there were no words in the political discourse of East Asia that were equivalent to the array of words in European languages that derive from *colōnus*.

It is due to these presumptions, I argue, that early imperial policy toward the South has not been assessed in terms of colonialism. However, if we again refer back to the definitions provided at the beginning of this essay, the consistency is striking. Recall the comments of Robert Young: “Colonization signified ... primarily the transfer of communities who sought to maintain their allegiance to their own original culture, while seeking a better life.... Colonization in this sense comprised people whose primary aim was to settle elsewhere rather than to rule others.” As descriptive as this is of the European emigrants who settled the Atlantic shores of North America that are Young’s focus, it also describes those who had left their ancient homes on the Central Plain or elsewhere in the North in search of a “better life” in the Yangtze basin or lands further south even as they “maintain[ed] allegiance to their own original culture.” This also echoes the framing of Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy quoted earlier: “the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers....”

There is little reason to believe that most of those who headed south did so with the intent to rule. Much like those British yeomen of later times, after all, they were overwhelmingly anonymous peasants in search of land and an improvement in their lives. Some Indigenous groups were content to work with the new settlers, but inevitably others, for whom these were their ancestral lands, resisted. Tension and sometimes conflict between settlers and immigrants is consistent with Young’s definition—as it also is with the settler-colonizer model—but it is only one way through which to understand north/south relations through the prism of colonialism.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of colonial subordination of the South to the North was in

administration. Just as Britain granted its colonies throughout its empire a veneer of self-administration without ever yielding ultimate authority, so the Tang, through the Southern Selection system, allowed southern scholars a degree of administrative authority. However, neither the South Asian civil servant nor the members of the colonial Virginia legislature were ever free of their mother country's oversight; much less could they extend their authority to the British homeland. Similarly, Southern Selection recruits were restricted to service in the very areas where their special examination was offered. Their authority, moreover, was always subject to the oversight of members of the standing imperial bureaucracy, the very institution to which southern scholars had such limited access. The barriers to southerners began to ease in the latter half of the Tang when the authority of the imperial court was under growing challenge. Even as the Tang imperium progressively weakened in the decades that followed the mid-eighth century An Lushan Rebellion, growing numbers of native southerners earned degrees through the regular examinations. Though the barriers were lowering, they were still there, and they were still high! Even the founding Song emperors who restored nearly the entire holistic empire after the Interregnum century between Tang and Song relied almost exclusively on the cohort of northern warriors who had backed their rise. Only as southerners began to crack the examination system under the third and fourth Song emperors did the relationship between North and South begin to change.⁷²

Equally instructive is the economic relationship between the North and South. This was an extractive relationship that had much in common with those explored in later times by Kenneth Pomeranz and Utsa Patnaik.⁷³ The South prospered even as it supported the elites who surrounded the

72 On this, see Hugh R. Clark, "Why Does the Tang-Song Interregnum Matter": Part Three: The Legacy of Division and the Holistic Empire, *Journal of Song Yuan Studies* 49 (2020), 1–24, republished with slight editing in *China during the Tang-Song Interregnum, 878–978* (London & New York: Routledge, 2022).

73 Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Utsa Patnaik, "New Estimates of Eighteenth Century British Trade and Their Relation to Transfer from Tropical Colonies," in *The Making of History*, edited by K. N. Panikkar, T. J. Byres and Utsa Patnaik (New Delhi: Anthem, 2002), 359–402, and "The Free Lunch: Transfers from the Tropical Colonies and Their Role in Capital Formation in Britain during the Industrial Revolution," in K. S. Jomo, ed., *Globalization under Hegemony: The Changing World Economy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 30–70.

court, much as Britain's North American colonies prospered while underwriting English merchant fortunes—neither colonial overlordship nor an extractive relationship need leave the subordinate region impoverished, although that was much more often the case as it was carried out in South Asia, Latin America, or sub-Saharan Africa. At the risk of oversimplification, the British colonies prospered because they were integrated into the empire's trade networks, the so-called triangular trade that linked Britain, West Africa, the Caribbean, and the colonies together. British merchants purchased colonial products—wood from the forests of New England, rum from the sugar plantations of the Caribbean, cotton from the plantations of the American south—thereby infusing wealth into the colonial economy. Similarly, throughout the Tang, southern products, notably the southern grain that was vital to the viability of the northern heartland, were a steady source of wealth transfer to the South. Beyond the grain that went north as tax revenue, large quantities of grain as well as luxury goods, both domestic and imported, went north through commercial avenues. The resulting flow of monetary resources from north to south in turn helped to build the southern economy. Colonial subordination, in other words, need not be unbeneficial, although in neither colonial North America nor the Sinitic South did these benefits extend to the culturally-resistant Indigenous populations.

A further illustration of this point is a passage from the mid-ninth century *Akḥbār al-s. ʿin wa'l-hind*, an Arabic text that describes trade in the port of Guangzhou, where merchant ships arriving from the South Seas were required by Tang law to stop. There port officials commandeered the goods:

When sailors arrive from the sea, the Chinese seize their merchandise, and store it in warehouses, safekeeping it for six months until the last sailor arrives. Then they take three out of ten and deliver the rest to the merchants.⁷⁴

The policy, however, affected only certain high value goods such as aromatics, of which the court took thirty percent for which merchants were compensated: “What the authorities (*al-sulṭān*) need, they

⁷⁴ See Alain George, “Direct Sea Trade between Early Islamic Iraq and Tang China: From the Exchange of Goods to the Transmission of Ideas,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25:4 (2015), 18, citing Jean Sauvaget, *Relation de la Chine et de l'Inde, rédigée en 851 (Akḥbār al-S. ʿin wa'l-Hind)* (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1948), paragraph 34.

take at the highest price, pay immediately and do not cause injustice." What remained could be sold by importers directly to private channels, as the Tang emperor Wenzong (809–840; r. 827–840) observed in 834:

In order to promote proper respect toward the imperial commissioners among the foreigners in Lingnan, Fujian, and Yangzhou, except for the collection of anchorage fees, court purchases, and tribute, we must allow them to come and go freely to trade, and we must not impose heavy taxes.⁷⁵

Whether through monopsony purchase or private channels, beyond the emerging consumer centers of the South the ultimate destination of the large percentage of these goods was the northern cities of the Yellow and Huai River basins where the administrative elite was concentrated. As with grain, the flow, whether in revenues collected in tariff or in trade, was from south to north. Yet the merchants of Guangzhou, to whom seventy percent of the high value goods were released after "the authorities" had extracted their thirty percent, could realize immense profits.

Finally, there is the complex, multi-layered social construct outlined above. John Locke had all but urged English yeomen to carve civilization out of the untamed wilderness of North America, and so they did. There is no John Locke in Sinitic history, no one who urged the anonymous peasants of the North to go bring civilization to the barbarians of the Yangtze basin, nor is it perhaps appropriate to suggest that was their goal. But as Robert Young said, while maintaining "their allegiance to their own original culture, they sought a better life." In so doing they added a new layer to southern society, the first of several that step by step reduced the status of the "raw" Indigenous as each successive layer of immigration enhanced the divide. Ultimately, just as the Indigenous populations of the myriad British colonies "where the sun never sets," of the French colonies in West Africa and Southeast Asia, of the Russian, Spanish, Belgian, and Japanese colonies across the world were all rendered politically and culturally subordinate, so the peoples of the South were subordinated to the authority of the North.

⁷⁵ *Tang dazhaoling ji*, edited by Song Minqiu, j. 10, #35, at ctext.org. (accessed August 2, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

For all these reasons I suggest that the relationship between the imperial authorities of the Central Plain and the vast reaches of the Yangtze River basin and embracing littoral fits the definitions of colonialism offered by Young, Kohn and Reddy, and Osterhammel. It is also consistent with the analysis of the relationship between Britain and its Atlantic colonies explored by Pomeranz. Of course there are differences, but once again we should keep in mind the Horvath admonition: “Definitions [of colonialism] ... must have sufficient flexibility to allow manipulation or articulation.”

But why is this important? By the Tang, the South for many centuries had been subordinated to the Central Plain, either by the assertion of imperial authority or the dissemination of orthodox culture. Yet until the Song dynasty (960–1279) the South was never a full partner. Historians have generally neglected to ask how the early empire, an empire that was dominated by the political, cultural, and economic power of the Central Plain, became the empire that embraced the cultural exuberance and economic power of the South? For all the outpouring of scholarship, both traditional and contemporary, the presumption of the underlying unity of all that the empire has ever embraced has pushed that question to the margins. The holistic empire is the presumptive norm, the inevitable resolution to the centuries of divided empire that followed the Han, the fulfillment of the Mandate.⁷⁶

Coming out of the decades of interregal division known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms that followed the collapse of the Tang early in the tenth century, the imperial court confronted a different world. To the early Tang rulers the South was an appendage, a breadbasket that served the needs of northern elites, a place to which officials who had fallen out of favor could be banished. It was a colony. By the tenth century, however, the South occupied a dramatically different position. In the aftermath of the mid-eighth century An Lushan Rebellion the South had outstripped the North as a source and locus of wealth. The decades of the Interregnum, during which the Central Plain and wider North had witnessed chronic instability and a rapid succession of dynasties had only served to exacerbate the contrast.

⁷⁶ A notable illustration is the title Wang Gungwu gave to the reissue of *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties*, his seminal study of northern politics under the Five Dynasties, now renamed *Divided China: Preparing for Reunification, 883–947* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2007).

Like the Tang, the Song dynasty in its founding was a northern empire. Like Li Yuan, the Tang founding emperor, the founding Song emperor Zhao Kuangyin (927–976, r. Taizu 960–976) relied overwhelmingly on the men who had worked with him to restore the holistic empire, men who were universally northerners. Initially this new elite did not appreciate how dependent the South had become—or how dependent the new order was going to be—on southern revenues. Unlike Li Yuan, however, once the South was subordinated, Zhao Kuangyin took a generally benevolent approach, even granting academic sinecures to prominent southern scholars and bureaucrats such as Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (917–992), a prominent scholar of the (Jiangnan) Tang court that controlled the Lower Yangtze River basin through the Interregnum century between Tang and Song, or the Chen family who had ruled the WuYue kingdom throughout the Interregnum.

Academic appointments such as that granted to Xu Xuan were one thing; access to power was another. Southerners remained at a disadvantage throughout the reign of Zhao Kuangyin and that of his brother and successor Zhao Kuangyi (930–997, r. Taizong 976–997). Both eras continued to be dominated by men of northern background. As Li Yuan had done in 618, Zhao Kuangyin had surrounded himself with the cast of northern warriors who aided his coup in 960. However, he reinstated the imperial examination system, an initiative that was pushed forward by his brother. By the time of the third Song emperor, Zhao Heng (968–1022, r. Zhenzong, 997–1022), the examination schedule had been regularized on the triennial schedule that remained the norm through much of the imperial era, and as the preferred route into the bureaucracy.

Initially the examinations had been dominated by northerners; for reasons that can be debated, men from the South were slow to take advantage of them. That changed during the reign of Zhao Heng, when southerners began to appear on the lists of successful examinees with regularity, and in growing numbers. By the reign of the fourth emperor, Zhao Zhen (1010–1063, r. Renzong 1022–1063), southerners had assumed an equal share of political and cultural authority. In the decades that followed, even before the dynasty lost the North early in the twelfth century, southern dominance in the bureaucracy and cultural life was apparent. No longer was the South just an economic appendage of the Central Plain. The empire was a southern empire.

This transformation rested on the centuries of southern subordination and northern colonialism. "Convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule," to recall

Osterhammel, the northern political elite had remained dismissive of what was developing in the South. Blinded, perhaps, by their presumptive superiority, they failed to perceive that across the South networks had developed that were fostering a different kind of social order. Through the Tang, social hierarchy in the North, which was dominated by old aristocratic orders such as the Guanlong aristocracy of the northwest and a similar and even more exclusive network based in the northeast, was stagnant. The rigid social order of the centuries of division had bent: there were pathways to bureaucratic power from outside the aristocratic factions. But bureaucratic power was not equivalent to social prestige; social movement in the North was negligible. In comparison, social structures in the South were open. Much as the North American colonies of Britain provided men of unremarkable social background the opportunity to reposition themselves in their social hierarchy, so the far more freewheeling social world of the South, where hierarchy was fluid, provided opportunity.⁷⁷

By the time the Tang collapsed in the last decades of the ninth century, across the South there were regional social networks. Families had taken advantage of the Southern Selection system to establish traditions of bureaucratic service. I have addressed the case of the family of Ouyang Zhan above, but also again and again one can read of families that drew on such traditions to serve the autonomous courts that governed the South through the century-long Interregnum. There was extensive economic integration based on far-reaching mercantile networks, networks that survived even as the overarching political unity imposed by the northern empire devolved into regional courts.⁷⁸ Southern ports including Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Fuzhou, and Mingzhou continued to attract commerce from the South Seas. Using links forged in the decades before the Tang collapse, the imported goods in turn were forwarded to consuming centers of the Yangtze basin but also to the Central Plain and even to Korea and Japan.

The British colonies of North America resolved the tension between themselves and the metropole through rebellion and independence. That was a possible course for the empire's South. Indeed it had been pursued in the centuries between Han and Sui when independent courts ruled the

⁷⁷ For this and the following, see the relevant discussions in Clark, *Portrait of a Community*.

⁷⁸ See Hugh R. Clark, "Why Does the Tang–Song Interregnum Matter?: A Focus on the Economies of the South," *Journal of Song Yuan Studies* 46 (2016), 1–28.

Yangtze basin, and it was revived by the autonomous courts of the Interregnum century. In the end, however, this was not the resolution. One might argue that North and South were bound too tightly together by their common embrace of an orthodox culture to allow for divergent paths, although a similar sharing of cultural premises did not prevent Britain's North American colonies from doing exactly that. Or one might note that unlike the South, which was contiguous to the North, the British colonies lay on the far side of an ocean at a time when the ability of the metropole to project its power was as yet limited. As had happened centuries before, when the last of the Jiankang courts was overwhelmed by the military power amassed by the Sui, so the autonomous southern courts that had ruled the South through the Interregnum century were unable to resist the power of the Song armies. In neither case did the South seek to reintegrate with the North on its own initiative.

Ultimately, however, it was access to power, a power that was never granted by the British to the colonial elites, that finally and fully folded the South into the empire. For centuries northern elites had limited the opportunities for southern elites to share in the imperial venture. The South was a source of wealth and exotica, but not of "men of caps and gowns." The South had attracted settlers, most of whom came not to rule but to find a better life. But out of the purview of the northern elite, the South had been transformed. What had once been a subordinate, colonized territory, a land of merchants but not of scholars, had by the Song reversed its role. As the examination patterns make clear, southerners had learned to play by northern rules. So rather than break with the empire, southern elites took it over.

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