

Of Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax

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Shen Cailin 沈才林, Tennō to Chūgoku kōtei 天皇と中国 皇帝 [The Japanese and Chinese Emperors]. Volume 13 in Higashi Ajia no naka no Nihon rekishi 東アジアのなかの日本歴史 [The History of Japan in East Asia] (Tokyo: Rokkō shuppan, 1990).

Shen Cailin's ambitious book attempts to trace the histories of the Chinese and Japanese emperorships in tandem. They began in different ways in far different times. And today, the Chinese emperor, who once stood at the apex of "feudal despotism" combining supreme political and religious powers, is no more. The Japanese emperor, long reduced to ritual functions, remains a symbol of the unity of the Japanese people, but lacks political power.

Both because he is a historian of Japan and because only the Japanese emperor is still a force to be reckoned with, Shen focuses on the Japanese side.¹ He begins by finding so many points of difference between the Japanese and Chinese emperors, one wonders what can hold the book together. One could as well compare the Japanese emperor and the British monarch, or the Chinese emperor and the Russian Tsar. Shen points out that China and Japan both existed within the larger Chinese cultural sphere, that both were agrarian, community-based (kyōdōtai 共同体) civilizations. Still, even though part of the early institutionalization of the Japanese emperor was modeled on the Chinese despotic pattern, the Japanese emperor soon became subject to regents and the cloistered emperor system, and survived through the samurai era not as a symbol of power but of spiritual authority alone. Politically weak Chinese emperors were succeeded by strong ones, but ambitious Japanese emperors were trapped in their political weakness. The "unbroken line" of the Japanese emperor contrasts with China's dynastic changes; one inevitably speculates that spiritual authority is easier to maintain over centuries than is political, a topic Shen could have done more to clarify. If this is so, it may be because political power inevitably involves policy questions, which produce clear winners and losers,² while spiritual authority and ritual legitimacy are more all-encompassing. Given these differences, a more complete sense of kingship itself, however sketchy, would have put both the Chinese and Japanese systems in context and perhaps have shown them indeed to be related.

Shen traces some of the differences in the two early imperial systems to the thought behind them. Both treated the emperor as the Son of Heaven. In the case of China, however, Confucianism--at least from the Han--uneasily combined two notions: 1) that the Son of Heaven was such by receiving the Mandate of Heaven and had absolutely to be obeyed; and 2) that the Mandate was in effect conditional, that the moral nature of the emperor made him the Son of Heaven and his right to command was therefore not absolute. Ultimately, immoral emperors did not have to be obeyed (in early Confucian language, one might add, immoral emperors were not emperors). Shen implies that the tensions between these two views afforded some flexibility to the system and gave Chinese feudalism systemic stability. The Japanese notion of the Son of Heaven was largely different; Shen distinguishes between the Chinese emperor as link between people and Heaven and the Japanese emperor as link between People and gods (kami神). He implies that the Chinese concern with morality was necessary for giving the emperor a political role. The Japanese treatment of the emperor as something like divine, or anyway beyond morality, would thus give him only religious roles.

As well, the Japanese regarded their emperor as the sole source of legitimacy because, unlike the Chinese, he was descended from a "line unbroken," whether or not this line is traced back to the age of the gods. Divorced from political power, the monarchy survived a thousand years of political change essentially unscathed--unique in the world. Neither the origins of the monarchy in the transition from tribal to state society nor any possible genetic discontinuities in the imperial line alters the popular perception. Indeed, the continuity and therefore the legitimacy of the Japanese monarchy are unique. Furthermore, the Japanese monarchy soon became a supra-mundane institution, the emperor a symbol of religious charisma. To a greater extent than the Chinese emperor, the Japanese emperor partook of the divine and could not be replaced.

Indeed, Shen implies that the separation of charisma and legitimacy from power set the pattern for Japanese history since the eighth century. If this is so, then one would expect power-holders to claim the right to rule on other than the moralistic grounds of Chinese Confucianism. Shen explicitly argues that the legitimating function of the emperor could be used in a variety of contexts; lacking content, it could serve regents, shoguns, capitalists, and militarists alike. Even today, Shen points out, the emperor retains some of his religious charisma and the separation of political functions from the monarchy embodied in the postwar Constitution was ironically more a continuation of institutional arrangements than a reform.

The radically different social structures of the two countries

had much to do with the different emperorships as well, of course. The Chinese ruling class (shi 士) was educated, mobile, and loyal to the emperor: accepting subservience to the emperor as the price for protecting feudalism. The Japanese shi or bushi 武士 was a militarized and settled class which accepted dependency in lord-retainer relations and opposed imperial power. But this raises a second question. Even if one can usefully compare the Chinese and Japanese emperors without a more rigorous framework, Shen's use of "feudalism" (Ch. fengjian, J. hōken 封建) to lump China and Japan together obscures more than it exposes. He acknowledges forthrightly their remarkable differences--indeed, insists upon them--but he fails to make any attempt to relate these differences to any typology of feudalism. His use of "feudal despotism" (hōken sensei shugi 封建專制主義) seems a start at distinguishing the Chinese case, but it is analytically inadequate by itself. On the one hand, Shen refers to the early emperors as autocrats; on the other, he refers to the imperial era as feudalistic. It is true that the imperial system contained elements of centralization under a powerful emperor as well as elements of localism and hereditary claims to a share of power. However, Shen fails to define his "feudal imperial autocratic system of centralized powers," though he notes that the emperor functioned as both the highest political actor and the highest political representative of the landlord class (p. 30). Whether one takes centralization and feudalism as contradictory, the terms need to be better defined.

This view of the role of Chinese emperor as the focus of political and religious authority is, according to Shen, widely held (but will be discussed further below). Views of the Japanese emperorship, however, vary greatly according to which approach is taken, from focusing on his traditional position to putting him in a comparative framework, and which of his roles is emphasized. Briefly reviewing the literature (pp. 324-30), Shen finds that the Japanese emperor has been seen as a cultural force, unifying the people regardless of specific state forms; as a religious leader, the head priest; as a carrier of spiritual values, representing morality as well as mere ritual functions; as a symbol of political power, representing forces of exploitation which today oppose the development of democracy; and, finally, as a source of "nonpolitical political integration" whose promotion of unity and continuity is all the stronger for his lack of power--or responsibility.

Actually, this same multidimensional approach could well be applied to the Chinese emperor at various points in the long history of that institution. At the broadest level of generalization, the Chinese emperor did indeed embody both political power and religious

awe, but we still need to know if the one derived from the other, how the one legitimated the other, and how the emperorship was linked to broader cultural trends and to the nitty-gritty of political power. Shen's discussion of the relationship between the Chinese bureaucracy and the emperor is particularly disappointing, since in fact numerous emperors lamented publicly and privately their political disabilities in the face of determined if largely passive resistance. He is on firmer grounds in concluding that the Japanese political authorities treated the emperor as the source of legitimacy because he embodied the religious center of Japan. "The charisma of the emperor was the spiritual foundation which made mundane political power moral and legitimate" (p. 331). The question then becomes one of the mechanisms used to link political power to this source of legitimacy while keeping actual emperors politically quiescent.

The differences Shen cites between the Chinese and Japanese emperorships imply that for the modern period, at least, the crucial difference became the association of the Japanese emperor with the fate of the Japanese nation and its people while the Chinese emperor became associated with a moribund state and dysfunctional culture and dissociated from the Chinese people. How this happened is not immediately reducible to the political power which only the Chinese emperor held in traditional times, for both Chinese and Japanese emperors were religious figures from whom was derived political authority. If the derivations worked in different ways, nonetheless both were associated with specific forms of state. Indeed, one may argue that the later Qing emperors compromised their legitimacy by working with the foreign imperialists, that the battering suffered by China between 1840 and 1911 would have destroyed any system, while Japan on the other hand achieved notable successes in the same period. The Tokugawa was in large part overthrown because it cooperated with Western imperialists, but in fact Japan was not a primary target of imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century. Much of the anger focused against the Tokugawa stemmed from the Shogun's maladroit attempts to associate the emperor with its policies. That the Meiji emperor (r. 1868-1912) became a symbol of openness and "Westernization" did not, however, detract from the efforts to make him a symbol of the nation. He was not even tarnished by the incredible costs of industrialization. The different fates of the two monarchies were not wholly dependent on their political regimes.

The questions provoked by this overview fall into two categories: "are these generalizations adequate?" and "if so, what are the mechanisms which allowed the institution to work in this way?"

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Shen believes that ancient myths show that the Chinese--or the peoples who later became "Chinese"--linked leadership to clan totems, particularly the dragon. The legendary founders of the race were also teachers--of fishing, pastoralism, farming, irrigation--as well as anthropomorphisms of the forces of nature, heroes, and, I would add, gods. A problem with this approach, logical as it is, is that much of the textual evidence suggests these myths may not have in fact been very ancient. They could have been creations of the second millennium B.C. or even later. If so, they then form more valuable evidence of how the creators of the first Chinese states constructed their past than of the earliest state-making itself.³ In this reading, "Fu Xi" as the inventor of pastoralism may hint at the transition from a nomadic or slash-and-burn tribal society to a more settled, agrarian economy, but the particulars of his image probably reflect the late Shang or early Zhou more than anything else. Fu Xi and his brethren do not simply show something of the early struggles against nature, as Shen suggests, but also demonstrate the Shang-Zhou interpretation of their own origins as advanced states. The genealogical principle of rulership was established, however, probably based on the village clan structures out of which the original Chinese states emerged.

Although genealogical principles of the transmission of rulership were central, as Shen notes, legendary abdications pictured rulers as selecting the best man to succeed them over their own kin.⁴ Whatever these legends reflected about ancient ways of transmitting rulership, they contributed to the Warring States (453-221 B.C.) definition of "kings" (wang, 王) as possessing moral attributes. Rulers who were effective but without inner virtue were called ba 霸. Earlier, Shang kings (c. 16th-11th centuries B.C.) were ritually associated with the royal clan's ancestors, di 帝, and to the supreme ancestor or shang di 上帝, to whom the Shang kings turned for prognostications and aid.⁵ Whatever the exact origins of the Chinese word wang, it was associated with the sun and Heaven. Rulers of the Western Zhou (11th-8th centuries B.C.), which conquered the Shang, were also "kings" (wang), but they de-emphasized their royal ancestors. Zhou kings proclaimed that they ruled "all under Heaven" (tianxia, tenka 天下), and developed the new term "Son of Heaven" (tianzi, tenshi 天子). The notion of the Son of Heaven not only expressed the king's "ownership" of the world ("all lands are the king's lands"), but also his possession of the Mandate of Heaven (tianming, temmei 天命). By the same token, "Heaven" referred not just to a cosmological principle but to a kind of deity more powerful than the Shang or even the Zhou's ancestors.

Later Chinese emperors continued to be styled the Son of Heaven until the collapse of the dynastic system in 1911. It should also be pointed out that in time "king" became a philosophical concept and a formal title something like "prince". Although much of the metaphysical and ethical system that made the emperor a kind of pivot between Heaven (cosmic forces) and Earth (humanity) was not developed until later, the Zhou quite explicitly argued that the Mandate passed from the Shang to themselves because of the evil of the last Shang rulers. In other words, Heaven chose the Zhou. During the long centuries of Zhou decline, from the eighth century to the third century B.C., a de facto international system of feudal states emerged in the Chinese culture sphere. The Son of Heaven was thrust aside as of little importance as the states, usually headed by a family enfeoffed directly or indirectly by the Zhou house at some point, struggled for power. The system did not stabilize until China was unified by the Qin in 221 B.C., when the term for emperor (huangdi, kōtei 皇帝) was invented. It was based on the legendary rulers: the "three huang" and the "five di". As the "first huangdi," not only was China's unifier emphasizing his links to the meritorious rulers of the mythical past, as Shen correctly points out, but also the new term symbolized the new system of central control imposed on an unprecedentedly large scale. (It was also a way for the first Qin emperor to finesse the issue of whether to call himself "king" in the line of Zhou monarchs.) Huangdi had charismatic force, for in addition to mythical rulers, huang hinted at the numinous and di retained echoes of powerful ancestors. Ultimately, the content of rulership was formed in a concealed way: by combining wang and ba, "king" and "hegemon". But huangdi was the term by which, along with Son of Heaven, Chinese emperors were to be known for 2,200 years.

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For several centuries before the Qin, thinkers and political actors worried endlessly about the nature of just or legitimate rule and, perhaps above all, about how to make rule effective. Following Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Shen characterizes Western Zhou beliefs as: possessing a supreme god, called variously Heaven (tian) or ancestor on high (shangdi); he who received the Mandate of Heaven (tianming) and ruled and indeed possessed All Under Heaven (tianxia) was called the Son of Heaven. Heaven was treated with respect and the ways of the former kings were followed. At the same time, the Son of Heaven was expected to sustain the people and lacked any kind of irrevocable right to the Mandate. This reflects, according to Shen, how the more feudalistic Zhou was an advance over the slave society of the Shang.

As the Zhou declined into the Warring States period, however, great social ferment gave rise to a startling variety of theory-building. The Confucians and the Mohists especially focused on the role of the emperor. Confucianism eventually served as ideological support for Chinese feudalism. Its attitude toward the emperor consisted of two aspects: that since the emperor was a stand-in for Heaven, his Mandate was beyond question and he was owed absolute obedience; and that the nation should be unified and government centralized. The approach was hierarchical; there could only be one emperor, just as there could only be one sun in the sky or one paterfamilias in the family.

Shen observes that the small farmer economy of Warring States feudalism led to a superstitious desire to see an emperor emerge who would act as a savior. Shen does not explain why hopes should take this particular form or the mechanism by which popular feelings would be reflected at the top of society.⁶ That the emperor combined religious authority and secular power is true enough, though it is not clear that he did so to a greater extent than earlier Zhou and Warring States rulers. Ritual seems to have been intimately linked with Chinese rulership from the beginning. If the leaders of individual states of, say, the fifth century, lacked the cosmic centrality of the Zhou king or the later dynastic emperors, they nonetheless partook of the numinous through their worship of their ancestors, the spirits of earth and perhaps of Heaven, and their enfeoffment or descent from the Zhou house.

Mohism attacked the Confucian emphasis on "rites and music" but began with the same premise: the emperor represented Heaven in ruling the people. That the Mohist conception of Heaven was of a considerably more activist agent, ready to reward or punish the emperor directly, strikes me as of secondary importance, especially in light of Mencius. The Mencian emphasis on "benevolent government" (renzheng 仁政) increased the moral significance of the Heaven's Mandate. Heaven, according to Mencius, would only give its Mandate to a "sage" or saint (shengren 聖人). Furthermore, the Mandate and the will of the people were the same thing, and so if the emperor lost the trust and support of the people, he would also lose the Mandate. Finally, Mencius even justified regicide if the king in question was in fact a "tyrant" rather than a true king, possessing benevolence and the Mandate. Perhaps Shen overestimates Mencius's "democratic thought" (minpon shisō 民本思想) and the role which hierarchy and deference continued to play in it, but certainly Mencius would place limits on the behavior of anyone who wished to act as a "true" king.

Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 in the Han apparently reversed Mencius's emphasis. Once the emperor received the Mandate, his powers were

unlimited by secular forces: only Heaven itself could act to check the emperor. Nonetheless, Dong interpreted a variety of cosmological and climatic phenomena as Heaven's warnings to the emperor, marking his bad behavior. A plague of locusts, for example, was a call for the emperor to examine his conscience. Dong thus regularized the theory of the transfer of the Mandate: dynastic change, which as Shen points out, was later utilized in peasant uprisings. Later Confucians supported feudal despotism on the one hand, but with a belief in moral rule that precluded support for any theory of an unbroken imperial line.

Confucianism was officially recognized in the Han, thus becoming, in Shen's formulation, "the ideology of Chinese feudal society" and was a "major influence on the development and transition" of society (p. 94). He sees a clash between the notion that imperial power, being Heaven-derived, was unlimited, and the notion that rulership had to be moral. It seems to me that Confucians tried to reconcile these views by assuming that the Mandate reflected the "hearts" of the people, and that the loss of popular support and the loss of the Mandate were in a sense the same thing. But the result in any case was to bring human judgment on the quality of the emperor. Imperial charisma was thus never absolute. In Shen's view, the notion of unlimited power stabilized the feudal system while the reversibility of the Mandate modulated the contradictions and disturbances within the system. I find myself in vague agreement with this proposition. Heuristically, at least, it is useful to correlate the tensions between the gentry and the imperial institution, especially after the Song dynasty, with these two views of the emperorship. And the basic stability of the Chinese system was articulated in the Confucian capacity for adjustment. In practice, this fostered cultural continuity more than political stability (Shen's references to a feudal elite which lasted from the Zhou to modern times are misleading). But Shen is right to relate the Confucian idea of emperorship to the historical dynastic changes, which were promoted in the name of virtue and the Mandate. A third of Chinese emperors since the Qin committed suicide or were murdered or forced to leave the throne.

Still, I would emphasize that rebellion was never "justified" except on a post hoc basis. The seemingly logical step of moving from human judgment of an emperor's lack of virtue to finding the Mandate somewhere else could not be moral because of the value placed on loyalty. The duty of a Confucian was remonstrance; it is as if Chinese emperors were distinctly human and fallible on the one hand, but also in possession of a charisma which came from their status as the Son of Heaven. This latter concept seems to have developed in a

direction nearly opposite of its literal meaning of godly progeny and more toward the sense of the emperor as cosmic pivot or linchpin.

The Qin system had little to do with the idealistic speculations of the Confucian school and a great deal to do with Legalist theory, which was formed in counterpoint to the other schools of the day. Yet post-Qin emperors were of course increasingly shaped by later interpretations of Confucian sacred texts. At the very least, however devoted to Realpolitik later emperors were behind their masks, the rituals as well as the theories of Chinese rulership, taken seriously and directly tied to legitimacy, were rooted in the Confucianism--associated from the beginning with "ritual experts" (ru 儒)--of the Warring States era. These were finally given content after 221 B.C.; notions of rulership developed in the Qin and the Han proved central for two millennia. There is no direct road from the words of, say, Xunzi, to the institutions of the dynastic era. But the content of the emperorship was shaped by the debates and experience of the Warring States era, which led to the conclusion that central rule was necessary to provide order.

Be that as it may, Shen characterizes the post-unification imperial system as marked by taboos surrounding the emperor's person and name. The emperor's word was law. In addition, an imperial prince ensured continuation of the dynasty; inner palaces, where power sometimes gravitated, housed the emperor's wives and retainers; and "rites and music" delineated aristocratic standards of behavior. The Qin abolished fiefdoms, established a true national bureaucracy in their place, unified laws, writing, and measures, and thereby created an economically and culturally unified nation. Yet--in Shen's rather traditional reading--the Qin founder was a man of great faults as well as accomplishments. After unification, he neglected to plan for the nation and harmed the people. His building projects, from palaces and the imperial grave to the great wall, relied on cruel extraction of wealth and labor from the populace. His line could not long survive his crippling the empire--though the imperial system basically survived.

In Shen's terms, the Chinese emperor was the ultimate political figure: the peak of the feudal pyramid, the national symbol and representative of all administrative, legislative, judicial, military, and financial powers. Furthermore, in contrast to medieval Europe, the Chinese emperor was also the chief religious figure. Although China experienced several centuries of disunity and division, overall for more than 2000 years the social order was preserved in part because of the unifying influence of the emperorship. Yet when all was said and done, Shen points out that in real life imperial authority could be challenged from a number of vantages. Emperors were well

aware of the dangers that a powerful prime minister represented to their position. After the Han dynasty, at least, imperial powers were generally strengthened while prime ministers found themselves serving only at the emperor's pleasure. Indeed, the position was eventually abolished, though more than Shen I would emphasize that powerful ministers were necessary even to strong emperors and could enlarge their authority at the expense of weak emperors. The abolition of the prime ministership, along with other institutional adjustments as well as the principle of loyalty, tended to increase the emperor's direct authority, at least over the top elements of the central government, but such authority had still to be guarded vigilantly. And, of course, at least by the Song, actual implementation of the imperial will through a complex bureaucracy onto a sophisticated society and economy remained another problem. As well, the families of empresses and court eunuchs could attain great power through their proximity to the throne or their influence over child emperors.

I would put the issue more strongly than does Shen. A number of institutional weaknesses and contradictions in China inevitably stemmed from focusing so much power and prestige on one individual. In addition to powerful generals, aggrandizing ministers, and imperial relatives, one can also point to the bottlenecks and bureaucratic inertia, the factionalism of the formal and informal bureaucracies, the need to delegate power--but not too much--and the difficulty in getting reliable information that affected even the most capable emperors. Aside from remarkable men and women feeling great attraction to such a concentrated focus of power, the emperors needed capable supporters and consciously sought them out. No wonder emperors had to remain alert and diligent, even while the luxury of court life, itself an important component of imperial charisma, could enervate them. In the Chinese symbolic universe, the emperor indeed stood at the top of the earthly pyramid, though, aside from certain ritual occasions, he was regarded as neither omnipotent nor omniscient.

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The Chinese imperial system not only evolved in China, it influenced neighboring states. Early contacts between a still fairly primitive Japan and Han China were primarily in the hands of traders, but Japanese emissaries reached the court of the Eastern Han from time to time. Yet "Japan" (or Yamato 大和) remained divided among a number of warring village-based states, of which Yamato was the largest and most rapidly developing. The Yamato kings (and queens),

possibly with some advantage due to the prestige of receiving recognition from the Chinese and Koreans, were able to unify the Inland Sea area. In the process, they assumed more and more the autocratic stance of an emperor. As China entered its period of post-Han disunion, its northern courts were still able to keep loose track of developments in Japan. China's cultural dominance was little affected by its political divisions of the time, and the Chinese were struck that Japan had women kings, and also that their kings possessed magical and charismatic powers. Gifts were exchanged and at least some Japanese nobles gained a knowledge of the remarkably advanced civilization on the mainland. Shen leaves unexplored the nature of Korean influence.

The very term "king" (ō 王) was adapted from the Chinese wang, even when it referred more to the chief of a confederation of villages than a head of state. In the fifth century, Yamato kings accepted formal enfeoffment from Chinese courts, a useful weapon which cost them nothing in terms of local authority. They also began calling themselves "great kings" (dai'ō, ōkimi 大王) in contradistinction to lesser ones, although some scholars believe the term was simply a respectful way of referring to any king, not a specific high king. Shen himself believes various terms for the ruler were used interchangeably in the early Yamato, reflecting perhaps the political confusion in China itself. In any case, of more significance it seems to me was the adoption of "heavenly king" (tennō 天王), Son of Heaven (tenshi 天子), and finally "emperor" (tennō 天皇) by the seventh century. Shen suggests that this latter term, distinct from the Chinese huangdi 皇帝, stemmed from post-Han Daoist usages referring to the god who served as emperor of Heaven. In any case, the expression of some kind of connection to Heaven, central to the Chinese conception of the emperor, was adopted by the Japanese to form one element of their conception of their emperor. Indeed, Shen takes the Japanese term to have a stronger religious component.

As China was reunified in the Sui and Tang dynasties and contacts with Japan regularized again, the Japanese imperial institution was strengthened. Sui Yangdi 隋煬帝 was not amused by the Japanese appropriation of Chinese imperial titles. Yet not only were emissaries exchanged, Japan also sent men to China learn the arts of civilization. Upon their return, they were a powerful influence on the Taika reforms. Shen could have done more than mention the famous "Seventeen-Article Constitution" of Prince Shōtoku, for this document marked the organizing of a system of imperial and aristocratic rule. Its strong infusion of Buddhism also helped shape the imperial institution. But the emperor was at heart a nonsectarian symbol--and object--of religious awe.

The rise of the Tang dynasty in China in the seventh century, Shen believes, marked an appreciation for at least the power of the masses, and hence policies to prevent their excessive exploitation, rare for their day. Tang Taizong 唐太宗 (r. 627-49) in particular was open to criticism and advice, and his policies helped make China unprecedentedly rich. No wonder the Tang became a model for Japan and its influence seen in the Taika reforms. Shen credits men who had studied in China for up to 30 years and knew it well with prompting Japan's transition from a slave to a feudal society. In 645 the reformers won control of the court and, with the Tang as their model, began changing the politics, economy, military, and culture of Japan. This is also when the term Nihon or Nippon (日本) was adopted for "Japan". Harkening back to Prince Shōtoku (and ultimately classical Chinese thought), reformers insisted that there is "only one way (michi, 道) of the Emperor" on earth. Many specific regulations and institutions from the Tang were adopted in the effort to centralize authority under the emperor. In theory (cosmology) and in law, at least, the Japanese system strikingly resembled the Chinese.

Shen posits that in this way the Japanese emperor, like the Chinese, possessed supreme power. His word was law. But in fact, however, aristocratic, landowning magnate clans retained considerable independence in both countries, if at least in the long run much more so in Japan. Even for the Nara era, when imperial power reached its zenith, some of the attention Shen pays, for example, to the exact procedures for issuing imperial edicts, would have been better spent on trying to explore the degree to which edicts were actually implemented. The tendency to centralize and the imperial focus of that centralization were crucial, but the limits of this process have to be understood as well. The emperor was as much part of a social structure as a political one; if the early Yamato system of clan-states collapsed in the seventh century, an aristocracy emerged which acted rapidly to protect its interests against the imperial line. And if the emperor possessed more power than any other political actor, it was far from unlimited power. Why, in spite of trying, did the Japanese emperor fail to secure the political powers of his Chinese counterpart?

In Japan the fundamental dynamic of the emperorship rested on assumptions strikingly different from the Chinese Warring States problematic. Although much was adopted from Chinese theory (and terminology), this was combined with indigenous elements to make any comparisons tricky. Shen particularly points to Japan's self-image as the land of the gods (kamiguni 神国), which gave the emperor two faces. He (occasionally she) was the descendent of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and a kami himself. He was also a sage ruler in possession

of virtue and practicing benevolent government. The one face, in Shen's formulation, was "a human god" while the other was "a godlike human" (p. 102).

Japanese could more or less accept Chinese ideas of the Heavenly Mandate and bestowal of virtue as well as of benevolent government--but not the notion of dynastic revolution or of any break in the imperial line. Japanese thus could not believe that the imperial line could lose its virtue and the Mandate, much less that these matters were subject to human judgment. Both early citations of Mencius and more or less explicit acceptance of "dynastic revolution" can be found in Japanese texts, as Shen points out, but they are exceptions. For the most part, even if the Japanese elite accepted the presence of evil tyrants in Chinese history (though others refuted Mencius's hairsplitting differentiation between overthrowing a tyrant and assassinating a king), it took pride in the unique charisma of the Japanese imperial line. Descent from the Sun Goddess was linked to special Heavenly contacts and hence virtue and the Mandate. Even if this traditional view of the imperial charisma became--temporarily--somewhat attenuated with Confucian imports, it remained impossible to imagine, say, the Shogun replacing the emperor. Conversely, I cannot imagine the imperial line surviving unless political decision-making had been largely taken out of its hands by a variety of institutions.

Shen also shows how the Japanese conception of kingship influenced the fates of individual emperors. Many fewer Japanese emperors committed suicide or were forced out of office than in the case of China (and were in any case succeeded by imperial relatives). Fully fifty percent of Japanese emperors abdicated in Shen's count, opposed to less than seven percent of Chinese emperors. The Japanese were thus truer to the putative tradition of the ancient sacred kings Yao and Shun than were their Chinese heirs. Of course, Yao and Shun not only left their thrones but chose men other than their sons as successors, a notion which must have seemed bizarre to the Japanese. In my view, the remarkable abdication rate of Japanese emperors was an important part of the pre-Tokugawa imperial institution because, like the Shogunate, it relieved some of the tensions produced by such a strictly hereditary system. "Cloistered emperors" escaped the ritual burdens of office, and the more capable ones were able to assume political roles without dragging the emperorship itself into the political mud.

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In sum, Shen points out that the major differences between the

emperorships of China and Japan were based, first, on differing conceptions of Heaven--the Chinese Heaven referred to a kind of abstract, supreme deity whereas the Japanese referred specifically to Amaterasu, whose descendants were the emperors. The Japanese imperial line was thus truly sacred and the emperor possessed both human and godly aspects. The Chinese emperor ruled the people for Heaven and so unified Heaven and humanity, whereas the Japanese emperor descended to earth to rule, thereby unifying humanity and the gods. Second, the Chinese dynastic revolution, based on the notions of the Mandate and of virtuous rule, was almost totally lacking in Japan. The Mandate gave the ruler autocratic powers but the notion of virtue limited his ability rule arbitrarily. Benevolent rule was the core of the Confucian conception of the emperor. "Virtue" for the Japanese, however, indicated the sacred virtue of Amaterasu and the absolute nature of the charismatic emperorship. The Confucian check on the emperor was thus missing in Japan.

The Chinese emperor ruled while the Japanese emperor was essentially a religious leader. In his classic work on charisma, Max Weber found two main sources of the stuff of chieftains: one was the shaman, partaking of the numinous, and the other was the warrior, leading his tribe to victory. The Japanese emperor was associated primarily with the numinous from the beginning of the institution. His main responsibility was the rituals of the Amaterasu cult. The cult continued to be linked with actual, political rule. The emperorship with its religious charisma continued to provide a source of legitimacy to the central administration, though this did not necessitate the personal involvement of the emperor. Yet it still seems remarkable to me that the emperorship survived both the weakest and the strongest of central governments.

Ministers, regents, kampaku, and shoguns dominated Japanese emperors routinely. Indeed, imperial charisma became simply one arrow in the quiver of a capable strongman. Direct imperial power reached its height during the Nara and early Heian periods, emerging out of indigenous trends fostering centralization and using Tang China as a model. However, once power slipped into the hands of surrogates, even strong-minded men like Shirakawa 白河 (r. 1072-86) taking advantage of retirement, could not recover it. In any case, the system of "cloistered emperors" would not have restored power to the sitting emperor, and at that time Japan was undergoing political decentralization. Cloistered emperors indeed from one point of view further weakened the imperial institution, deriving legitimacy from the former possession of the emperorship rather than a formal delegation of political functions. In any case, feudalism turned the emperors into puppets of the ruling bakufu.

But there is another approach to the question how power slipped away from the emperors who began a unifying process which continued culturally even while political conflict led to feudalism. Part of the answer, in my view, is related to the limits of unification which can be seen in most pre-modern empires. The establishment of stable government after the first push of military actions establishing a central court seems to lead to vested interests which depend on yet want to limit imperial powers. The quality and extent of centralization differed in the cases of, say, the Chinese, Roman, and Aztec empires, but as in Japan the very process of institutionalizing central rule shifted powers to local authorities of one kind or another. Shen neglects this broad question to focus on the means by which the Fujiwara family, by providing imperial wives (and so emperors), took power in the Heian period. The Fujiwara established a kind of hereditary regency which itself became cumbersome and subject to clan infighting. But the basic institutional pattern separating ritual and power was fixed, though this separation never went so far that power could be imagined independent of its ritual source. The relationship of the Heian emperors to the Fujiwara regents was essentially continued in the later centuries of shogunal rule. Japanese rulers formally derived their powers from the emperor, down to 1945.

Perhaps the emperors served as a unifying symbol during the centuries of warrior rule that succeeded the Heian. And even when the emperors not only lost political power but were also reduced to poverty in the sixteenth century, they somehow retained the charisma to confer political legitimacy. As a Confucian or a political scientist would see it, at least, only an emperor could turn a mere militarist into the nation's rightful leader. Even the Tokugawa, whose military and administrative prowess led to an effectively centralized rule over an unprecedentedly large territory, recognized the necessity of establishing its government through formally delegated powers. But the emperors retained not a vestige of real power, and the separation of politics from ritual reached its zenith. As Shen points out, the leaders of the Meiji Restoration were thus able to use imperial prestige, demanding political reform in the name of an institution not responsible for the immediate political crisis, in a way that Chinese reformers, whose emperor combined religious and political responsibilities, could not.

In contrast to the Chinese ruling class, the Japanese samurai were neither scholars nor able to travel freely. And as a hereditary class without the same kind of loyalty to a political emperor, they stood in opposition to central authority. Shen believes that the stress placed on "loyalty" (chū 忠) in warrior culture referred to the duties owed the samurai by the lower classes, not loyalty to the

emperor (p. 180). Certainly, as Shen points out, the Nara-Heian Confucian notion of subjecting the emperor to human judgment had faded, leaving in the Tokugawa divine right notions of kingship and absolutely binding obligations of loyalty focused upward (p. 106). However, it seems to me that warrior culture, because of its very brutality, needed a focus of transcendental loyalty. That Europe's middle ages were a time of religious fervor which saw the cult of the virgin reach its height is not a coincidence. The purity so valued in the Japanese warrior culture was best expressed by the emperor, whose religious functions revolved around purification rituals, not by the Tokugawa house. This kind of "loyalty" was not of immediate practical import, but remained an undercurrent of Japanese thought as warriors were in fact civilized during the pax Tokugawa. It is incorrect to say that the emperor remained outside the sphere of samurai loyalty, though political responsibility stopped with the Shogun.

Overall, Shen's contribution to the study of premodern Chinese and Japanese history lies in his systematic and illuminating comparisons of the institution of the emperorship in its respective settings. In the case of China, the emperorship developed largely along lines determined by indigenous developments, of course. (Buddhism might seem to be the great exception here, but by the time Buddhist ideas exerted a clear force on the conception and self-conception of emperors, they were for all practical purposes completely "sinitized.") In the case of Japan, Shen carefully outlines the ways in which indigenous trends interacted with ideas imported from China. The force of Chinese ideas was limited to the appeals and the uses they offered to Japanese leaders and was thus in a sense rapidly made "indigenous". Nonetheless, it was Confucianism and the sheer awesomeness of the Sui and Tang emperorship as observed by Japanese explorers which, coming from outside of Japan like a giant electric shock, provoked an aristocratic state which had already absorbed most of its neighbors to take imperial forms.

Shen's discussion of the premodern period of the emperorship is marred by his excessive reliance on a traditional historiography which was largely written from the point of view of the center. He thus tends to conflate theory--important and interesting as it is in itself--with social reality, where the view of the emperor differed considerably depending on the position of the viewer. Shen's sources include the Chinese dynastic histories, the classics, the Shiji 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian] and the Zizhi tongjian 資治通鑑 [Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government], and for Japan the Nihon shoki 日本書記 [Chronicles of Japan]. These are all indispensable but need to be used more critically. Shen thus

conflates a Confucian (jugaku 儒学) theory of emperorship with a more general Chinese approach. I would grant that Confucian notions of emperorship can be traced from proto-Confucian forms in the early Zhou to an unfolding of philosophical approaches over the next three millennia. Nonetheless, numerous non-Confucian elements persisted in the emperorship, especially in the court's self-conception. Furthermore, Shen accepts the orthodox view of legitimacy, citing the existence of 219 emperors from the Qin (221 B.C.) to the Qing (A.D. 1911), slighting plenty of short-lived dynasties and emperors who were nonetheless real in their time and place. A more specific example of the influence of orthodoxy on Shen's judgments is his treatment of Cixi, empress dowager in the late Qing, as a paradigm of evil (pp. 129-33). With Marxist trappings, she becomes a female usurper in semi-colonialist clothes. For all of Shen's use of Marxist categories (the problem of "feudalism" was noted above), this is old-fashioned history, with both the strengths and weaknesses of a narrative approach closely following standard sources.

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In the modern period both the Japanese and the Chinese emperorships came under great strains. In the Japanese case, the new emperorship, grafted onto old rootstock, flourished for a time yet today seems curiously unsubstantial, a shade of its former self. Shen concludes that the emperor, already largely symbolic of nation and people, could continue that role, keeping alive "traditional spirit," even as the postwar Constitution stripped him of his very last political functions. Indeed, Hirohito was used to legitimate the post-1945 reforms. The Chinese emperor, on the other hand, was not able to make the transition away from a "feudal despotism" in which he combined ultimate political and religious authority. In the Chinese case, the emperorship fell with the dynasty in 1911 after a short struggle, which however, represented several decades of growing doubts about the usefulness and even legitimacy of dynastic institutions. It seems to me that Chinese were able to question the emperorship itself, precisely because they were long used to subjecting its behavior to universal ethical notions.

Shen emphasizes that the Qing made the crucial mistake of isolating the country just as concentration of landholding led to peasant uprisings and the dynasty entered decline. The repeated losses to foreign powers were perhaps less harmful to China in a direct way than damaging to the prestige of the Qing leadership (pp. 190-93). Western victories served to expose the government's corruption and decrepitude. Yet thoroughgoing reformism did not become any kind of

national movement until 1895, when, ironically enough, China's defeat by Japan provoked Kang Youwei 康有為 into taking the Meiji as a model. But since, in Shen's view, peaceful, top-down reforms could not work in China as they had in Japan, uprisings continued throughout the early 1900s, with a mixed ideology of anti-Manchuism, republicanism, and "equal land rights," until the dynasty collapsed. Shen's summary of events is all very well as far as it goes, but his lack of analysis is never more apparent than when he is gliding over a number of important issues in the last two decades of the imperial institution.

This was a crucial period not only for the imperial institution but for the future of China. Historiographical bias shared by Shen treats the 1911 Revolution as a progressive step, but the political failures of the early Republic suggest that China's internal problems lay at a deeper level. I by no means share revisionist views that Cixi in particular or the late Qing court in general were pushing for reforms that were in any way adequate to China's needs. Nonetheless, the impossibility of reformism is by no means clear to me, though the notion raises the useful question (not asked by Shen) of why the revolution failed as much as the Qing to institute reforms. Class analysis is suggestive here. Given China's domination by landowners, a more or less intrinsically conservative class, structural reforms promoting open trade, industrialization, infrastructure, and the like naturally faced much opposition. Shen traces the reform effort of 1898--surely the dynasty's last best chance for survival--to a "national bourgeois" social base. Although the distinction between national and comprador capitalism has been conclusively shown to be incoherent, the reforms would have aided the development of capitalism. And it is true that capitalist forces were quite weak. Cixi and the empress clique in the court simply did not have the imagination or the knowledge of the world to accept the necessity of reforms for several more years. Shen is right to trace the spread of a revolutionary movement to the failure of 1898.

Going beyond Shen's comments, we should note that China's socio-economic system was already approaching crisis when the arrival of the West put unbearable strains on the political leadership. Above all, national coordination of reform ideas was impossible; even if better ideas had been better managed, fiscal disarray alone might have doomed them to disaster. When the court finally turned to meaningful reform--though, importantly, still in a grudging and ambivalent fashion--after 1900, local and provincial-level leaders were highly skeptical about its capacities and suspicious of any attempts to centralize authority at their expense. The emperorship could not function as a symbol of national unity because Manchus had been de-

fined as outsiders. Even a "native" dynasty may well not have survived, however, for imperialist pressures led to a disastrous loss of prestige and maneuvering room. Finally, though self-styled revolutionaries were never in a commanding position, the appeal of republican ideology was strong. This was not airy idealism and altruism; rather, republicanism was part of a widespread discourse which included modernity and nationalism as well as virtue. As a modernizing nationalist, Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 would attempt to wear republican clothes at the expense of any institutionalized form of republicanism, until he tried to become emperor in 1915.

Shen links Yuan with landlords and the comprador bourgeoisie (he was himself a major landlord though his power had a lot more to do with the militarization of Chinese society than the support of any particular classes) and more plausibly with imperialist support. Nonetheless, it is not true to state (pp. 202-03) that the imperialist powers tempted Yuan into trying to become emperor himself. Japan gave some mixed signals, but the Western powers, including his traditionally key economic backer Britain, were unambiguously opposed. Yuan was probably acting out a desire to get a better grip on China's domestic politics. Yuan claimed that the Republic was a failure and that the people wanted an emperor. "Presidential decrees" attempted to show on the one hand that his merits and accomplishments in pacifying the land fitted Yuan for the emperorship while on the other hand continued trouble made it necessary that Yuan assume the post.⁷ But the significance of Yuan's brief emperorship ("the 83 days dream") lies in its rapid and thorough defeat. Never again would a serious contender for the throne arise, though restorationist movements continued through the 1920s and the Japanese put Pu Yi on the Manchukuo throne in the 1930s.

Opposition to Yuan, fearful he might try to found a new dynasty from the very beginning of the Republic, was coordinated by his former supporters Liang Qichao 梁啟超 and the militarist Cai E 蔡廷幹. Japan resolutely refused to support him, and Yuan's government faced money problems. His two most trusted and powerful generals refused to support him; Yuan's son, the putative crown prince, was widely held in contempt. The provinces of Yunnan (Cai's base) and Guizhou broke away from the "Chinese Empire" and Sichuan became a battle ground. While Yuan was trying to subdue the southwest, Guangdong, Guangxi, and eventually the lower Yangzi provinces were lost. Yuan died of illness aggravated by political frustration after abandoning the emperorship but still trying to hold onto power. A series of military dictators calling themselves presidents succeeded to power in Beijing while the nation as a whole fell under the control of provincial and local militarists: the warlord era began. Further

confirmation of the death of the emperorship occurred in 1917 when a Qing loyalist general, taking advantage of a temporary split between more powerful northern armies, restored Pu Yi to his throne in the Forbidden City. After 10 days, the northern generals had little trouble bringing the sorry incident to an end.

In 1911 and 1912, negotiations between revolutionaries, Yuan Shikai, and the Qing court brought about an essentially peaceful abdication in return for promises of "favorable treatment" of the former royal house, including a generous allowance (not always paid) and the right to continue court ceremonies in private in the Forbidden City for some time. Royalist sentiment at the time and especially in the north was probably strong enough to justify such generous terms, even though the royal family would play no constitutional role whatsoever. That a few years later the emperorship would be so thoroughly dead as to inspire no significant support, however, needs an explanation. It is not enough, as Shen does, to talk about the current of history and the popular will. Although very scattered evidence suggests that peasants expected there to be an emperor on the throne, the institution in Beijing was probably not as important in popular culture as its symbolic and substantive expression in the local rule of benevolent officials. In any case, the populace was not a significant political factor at this time. The more important educated classes, on the other hand, had become much less attached to an imperial ideology. Even conservatives had found in Confucianism and other indigenous philosophies glorifications of social order which could dispense with the emperor as the symbolic link between Heaven and earth. The educated classes, whether bourgeois, official, or intellectual, felt self-confident in their own virtue. Traditional Chinese thought always possessed some skepticism about the half-human, half-sage-emperor, prone to self-indulgence and mistakes. Combined with specific anti-autocratic thinking after the 1890s, powerful new symbols of national unity served to replace the emperorship in Chinese culture.

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In the case of modern Japan, Shen postulates that with the Meiji Restoration the "development of Japanese capitalism and the modern emperor-system had an important mutual relationship" (p. 6). The collapse of the Tokugawa political system allowed the emperor's charisma (tennō no ken'i 天皇の権威) to be used for political purposes in an atmosphere of crisis: Western imperialism, popular discontent, and samurai opposition (pp. 214-15). Both the Tokugawa and its opponents sought to use the court during the 1840s and 1850s to clothe

their actions in orthodoxy and legality. "Revere the emperor and expel the foreigners" (sonnō jōi 尊王攘夷) was a useful slogan, but the leaders of the Meiji Restoration were not themselves literal believers in imperial charisma. The emperor "returned to the political stage" (one is tempted to say, returned to his throne), according to Shen, in a storm of nationalist-democratic movements. I do not entirely understand Shen's reference to a democratic element in "minzoku minshu undō" 民族民主運動 for the popular movements of the day were millenarian and perhaps egalitarian, but not democratic in any modern sense of the term. Even the nationalism or anti-foreignism of the late Tokugawa was not a particularly popular phenomenon. One is tempted to look ahead and discuss the emperor's role in terms of symbolically representing the state and nationalism at the expense of labor justice, human rights, and democracy.

But what Shen correctly emphasizes is the Meiji state's modernization programs. Real power was in the hands of just a few leaders (the emperor was just a boy), but they made more frequent use than the Tokugawa of the emperor's name. Such major reforms as the abolition of the fiefs and the disestablishment of samurai privileges were accomplished in no small part by being so closely associated with imperial prestige. By the end of the 1870s the Meiji emperor was in fact playing a political role, not as an autocrat but through regular meetings with his cabinet. The Meiji system was essentially modern, but the existence of the emperor, in Shen's words, created a nation of subjects rather than citizens. As is well known, the Constitution of 1890, modeled on Prussia's, was promulgated by the emperor and emphasized his sovereignty. The very constitution claimed that the Japanese imperial line was unbroken from time immemorial while it located great authority in the executive.

The Meiji Constitution failed to settle a debate about whether the emperor, as a sacred and absolute figure, transcended the constitution, or whether he was essentially a constitutional monarch, with great but presumably limited powers. The exact terms of the debate, however, were probably less important than a generally authoritarian atmosphere, in which the emperor symbolized the pinnacle of the social and political hierarchy. Officials and soldiers pledged loyalty to the emperor, not the people or the nation, and they reported to the emperor. None of this prevented powerful democratic currents, from the People's Rights movement of the 1880s to the growing powers of the Diet in the 1910s, from powerfully influencing Japanese politics; nor did it prevent nouveau riche and ambitious youth from worshipping mammon at the expense of older and more orderly gods. But during a time of economic expansion and nearly unfettered capitalism, the emperor played a conservative role. It is

worth noting that the Meiji emperor became a landlord and investor in his own right.

Shen concludes that the Meiji government created a set of policies that favored landlords and capitalists, demanding complete loyalty from the people in the name of an emperor who still reigned more than he ruled. It is true that the government acted to suppress worker and peasant movements as well as anything with the slightest of radical tints, but it is not clear to me to what extent landlords and capitalists, with their divergent interests, were in fact able to make common cause. In any case, Shen finds a clear line of continuity from the late Meiji, marked by expansionism abroad and militarism at home, to the fascism and disaster of World War Two. The origins of Japanese ultra-nationalism and the evolution of the imperial institution from the Meiji to the 1930s have, of course, received enormous attention. A complete analysis would have to isolate a number of factors: the Army and the Navy, social classes, the civil bureaucracy, the political establishment, domestic and international economic configurations, and the like, to properly answer these questions.

A focus on the emperor may be misleading, and much current research emphasizes the discontinuous aspects of modern Japanese history, the originality of Japanese fascism, so to speak.⁸ Although many contemporary historians do not accept the notion that the seeds of Japanese fascism (if this is the appropriate label for the 1930s) were planted in the Meiji, the orthodox myth of the Japanese state was not particularly conducive to democracy. The emperor was deliberately associated with Japanese victories over China in 1895 and Russia in 1905. The former came as a surprise to most of the world, but the latter was not only a shock, as the first defeat of a Western power by a victim of unequal treaties, it also inspired nationalists across Asia.

Shen dismisses the kōza-ha 講座派 view of the emperor as an absolutist figure, coming into the Meiji era with feudal authority, on the grounds that it tends to ignore the class basis of Meiji rule. Instead, Shen agrees with the rōnō-ha 労農派 that the Meiji emperorship was a modern institution tied to the development of Japanese capitalism, though he finds that it retained feudal "tints" (pp. 231-32). Abroad, the Meiji emperor was seen as a great modernizer, something of a cross between England's Elizabeth and Russia's Peter the Great. Japan was released from the unequal treaties in 1911 and was essentially treated as one of the powers after World War One. In Shen's view, Japan's accomplishments have to be weighed against the morality of its foreign wars, and he points out that if the war responsibility of the Showa emperor is a matter of debate, so should be

that of the Meiji emperor.

During the 1930s, Japan became increasingly embroiled on the Asian mainland. Shen treats the Manchurian Incident (1931) as the real start of the Sino-Japanese War. The emperor was not pleased with the actions of his army, which had moved to occupy Fengtian without orders, but neither he nor his government moved to reverse the decision or reprimand the officers in charge. Shen condemns Hirohito for ignoring military regulations which demanded punishment of officers acting without imperial command. Indeed, by 1932 the emperor issued an edict recognizing the "unswerving loyalty" of the Guandong Army and treated the ongoing occupation of Manchuria as "bandit-suppression." Although the army had, at the very least, exposed the government to international condemnation, the imperial edict made public criticism of the army impossible and encouraged its aggressive tendencies. The creation of a Manchurian state shows again the failure of Chinese restorationism. In 1934 the Japanese army brought in Pu Yi, the last Qing emperor, to invest their colonial rule of Manchuria with legitimacy. Pu Yi was to provide his land with the "kingly way" (wangdao 王道), a phrase redolent of Confucian virtue. He was not to rule as a Manchu nationalist; rather, given the number of Han farmers who had moved to Manchuria in the last two centuries, his government was to provide "harmony among the five race." But neither was he to rule in the Chinese fashion, with the Mandate of Heaven, for his status was strictly subordinate to that of the Japanese emperor. In fact, Pu Yi and his government of a few Qing loyalists were not only puppets but virtually prisoners. The harshness of Japanese exploitation, though successful in building up Manchuria's infrastructure, acted to diminish the government's legitimacy.

After the war, Pu Yi was captured by the Russians and turned over to the Chinese. His new career as a war criminal lasted for fifteen years, after which he became an ordinary citizen--and a living symbol of successful communist re-education. His autobiography, though not completely reliable in its details and of unknowable sincerity, documents his early life in court, his days as a playboy in Tianjin and Shanghai, his cooperation with the Japanese, his reform-through-labor prison experiences, and the quiet joys of being an ordinary citizen under communism in China. The book had great international impact, as Shen notes, and became the basis of a grand, if rather overblown, Bertolucci film. Pu Yi presented himself as a figurehead of feudalism (allied with imperialism) and puppet of the Japanese; his psychological states are rather less explored, but psychology hardly ever mattered to the emperorship anyway. Pu Yi's end symbolizes not only the totality but some of the self-image of

revolution in China. Not cut down like the Russian Tsars but left to live out his days as a humble gardener (trotted out occasionally to meet foreign dignitaries), Pu Yi continued to be the perfect puppet. After 1911 when the imperial family was allowed to remain in the Forbidden City, Pu Yi represented the Qing throne to whomever would pay attention, after 1934 he represented Japanese rule in Manchuria, and after 1960 he represented the magnanimous and hopeful face of Chinese communism.

In Japan, the theoretical supremacy of the emperor was reasserted in 1935 with military-led attacks on the notion that the emperor was an organ of the constitution. The "organ theory" had long been associated with Minobe Tatsuji 美濃部達吉, a respected legal scholar and peer. Without precisely defining the limits of imperial action, it tended to treat the emperor as a constitutional monarch. Minobe's views became largely accepted in the 1920s, but his radical critics accused him of being a traitor in the 1930s, he resigned his peerage, and he was lucky to escape with his life. The Japanese right, desiring in Shen's view to operate a military dictatorship in the emperor's name, proclaimed that the emperor transcended the constitution and even in some sense the state. This, they argued, was the true national polity (kokutai 国体) of Japan.

And this was how Japan slipped into a full-scale war with China which brought it into World War Two and utter disaster. The emperor's role in the decisions which took Japan into war has been highly controversial and the availability of documents, much less their interpretation, has been distorted by political exigencies. However, Shen does a good job in steering between the absolutist views that either the emperor was the ultimate authority and so the buck stopped on his desk or that he was but the merest puppet with no power, no authority, and no responsibility. Shen perhaps leans a little more toward the former view than I consider warranted. He shows how the emperor participated willingly in major decisions, but it is difficult to find a single leader responsible for taking Japan into war comparable to a Hitler, and the whole process by which Japan found itself embroiled in total war illustrates the roles of institutional inertia, bureaucratic turf fighting, special interest groups, and the like as small decisions were made by people perhaps unable to see their overall impact until it was too late. This is not to deny the importance of moral judgments but to point out that Japan was suffering from a systemic failure that even today has not been adequately analyzed. The emperor's role as a symbol of the supremacy of the Japanese state was largely but not entirely out of his hands, and his role in the policy discussions of the 1930s and 1940s was limited but not negligible.

In any event, the Japanese Army's occupation of Manchuria and its interest in extending a zone of influence over north China inevitably came to blows with a surging Chinese nationalist movement, and by late 1937 against his better judgment Chiang Kai-shek was leading Chinese resistance to a Japanese invasion. The Japanese army promised quick victory in China; instead, it sunk into a quagmire of popular opposition and guerrilla resistance. But at the time, Hirohito's main concern seems to have been that Japanese interests not become vulnerable to a Bolshevik Russia at her rear. He was not sympathetic to the idea of alliance with German and Italy, for his tough approach to the Soviet Union did not extend to Great Britain or the United States. But when the Army and the Navy reached something of an agreement on the need to expand into Southeast Asia, the stage was set for conflict with Britain and the United States and for a peace agreement with the Soviet Union. Hirohito approved the Axis treaty in the fall of 1940, on the advice of Japan's military leaders and apparently against his own better judgment, as a gamble on a quick German victory. Meanwhile, Japanese politics had been transformed into an arena where the emperor's role was to unite his people; or to put it more precisely, the responsibility of the people was to be unified under their emperor.

At first the war seemed to be going well, though Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union was a surprise. The fateful decision to attack the United States was made in the fall and winter of 1941. The emperor gave his final approval after sitting through a number of military planning meetings. He was usually silent, but military records indicate that the imperial countenance registered happiness. Shen thus traces a transition from the late 1930s in Hirohito's attitude toward war with Western powers from opposition to skepticism to final approval. As to the invasion of China in 1937, Hirohito never challenged its morality or wisdom. The failure of the Japanese to impose an affordable system of rule on any part of China south of Manchuria in the following years, however, might have warned him as to the foresight of Japanese military leaders.

As is well known, the one clear-cut decision Hirohito definitely made came on August 9, 1945 when he broke the deadlock in his cabinet to accept the Potsdam Declaration. The Japanese stipulated that the emperor be maintained; the Allies' reply located supreme power in the Occupation but promised that the Japanese people would eventually determine Japanese political forms. Shen interprets this as an indirect recognition of the emperor (p. 262). In any case, after two atomic bombings, with most of the nation's infrastructure destroyed and mass starvation imminent, Hirohito was right: Japan had no choice but to surrender.

The complete story of Hirohito's rehabilitation has not been told, as Shen notes, and the records may never be made available. It seems clear that General Douglas MacArthur decided quickly to protect Hirohito as at least a potential asset to the Occupation. Many observers were surprised he was not put on trial with hundreds of others for war crimes. From legal, moral, and historical points of view, his absence distorted the whole proceedings; politically, however, MacArthur surely congratulated himself. The emperor legitimated the Occupation as emperors legitimated previous shoguns--and the Occupation returned the favor. (That Japan might have become a more open and democratic society had the imperial institution been simply abolished seems likely, but is another question.) As early as September 1945 Hirohito visited MacArthur to "accept responsibility" for the war if only because as the head of his officials he had failed to stop the war. Though it is still not known what exactly transpired, Hirohito apparently announced he was willing to stand trial and would accept death; in any case, he hoped to donate the privy purse for the Occupation to use for the Japanese people.

Shen points out that in 1975, however, the emperor denied he could have stopped the war, on the grounds that as a constitutional monarch he simply lacked that power. This nicely encapsulates the evolution of the postwar imperial institution, which seems less open to public criticism in Japan than ever. I would emphasize that Hirohito's visit to MacArthur was unprecedented (conservative Japanese were shocked and newspapers originally refused to carry the photograph of the formally dressed, diminutive Hirohito standing next to MacArthur, standing as tall and big and informally as he was dressed), but the visit was a natural evolution of the imperial institution. Hirohito had already (in his twenties), after all, been the first emperor to travel abroad, while emperors had played court to shoguns for centuries. What, then, was different? First, the institution of the emperorship, not just the fate of a given emperor, was being publicly debated, if only for a moment. Second, the institution was headed for precise constitutional definition. And third, the Occupation used imperial charisma not only for legitimacy but to support fundamental social and political reforms. Yet the postwar emperor symbolizes the nation--and the state--much as did his ancestors.

Shen reviews the literature on the emperor's responsibility for World War Two, citing four basic views: 1) that the emperor favored peace but functioned as a constitution monarch who had no choice but to approve decisions; 2) that he was a constitutional monarch but as commander-in-chief, and the government's leader had a veto right; 3) that he was in fact a leading warmonger, more plotter than puppet;

and 4) that he had no legal or political responsibilities, but his moral failure lay in his refusal to fight against the war and ultimately abdicate. Shen favors the second view: that is, that the historical record shows Hirohito neither backed particularly pro-war groups nor took advantage of his position to push for peace. The emperor's formal and informal roles in the Japanese political structure gave him a number of opportunities to veto or sharply criticize the war: the Army's illegal actions in the Manchurian Incident, the 1937 decision to invade China proper, various cabinet debates about the course of the war. And Shen cites two examples of the emperor expressing his decisive Will: to put down the February 1936 officers uprising, and to stop the Japanese army from pursuing Soviet troops during a July 1938 clash on the Manchurian border.

Thus although the emperor's role in the war was "not great," the war was "not against" his wishes. His responsibility lay in his position as the ultimate symbol of a system of capitalist modernization which took militarized forms. But Shen also sees Hirohito as an ultimately expendable tool of monopoly capitalists, which seems to deny his responsibility. Some of the problem here is the ambiguous nature of "responsibility"--a term which implies historical causality without spelling out all the factors behind complex historical events. A monograph on the imperial system will naturally concentrate on a question which has received such scholarly and popular attention as Hirohito's responsibility. But in general the question has received a disproportionate share of attention.⁹ The very debate, much less simply blaming the emperor, takes attention away from larger questions of Japanese social structure and culture. It also often strays into a kind of ahistoricism where Hirohito is held up to standards he could not possibly have appreciated.

The postwar Japanese emperorship inherited Hirohito's declaration of his humanity (or renunciation of sacredness) which so impressed MacArthur. Shinto was divorced from the government (for the most part). And the new constitution reduced the emperor to a symbol in so many words. All this was, as MacArthur saw, democratizing, but the emperor's main role, debates about war responsibility notwithstanding, had long been as a symbol-carrier. So the question becomes not one of his constitutional status, but the meaning others impute to him. In this light, the postwar emperor was not so much a democratizing influence as a symbol of national unity and continuity (p. 307). Some see it as a persisting manifesto of Japanese-ness in the face of continuing Westernization (and earlier Chinese influence). Shen points out that a whole range of imperial forms, including the era name with its vaguely cosmological connotations, persisted past 1945. Indeed, it is interesting that the Japanese emperor-

ship is one of the few imperial lines to survive thoroughgoing military defeat anywhere in the world since the nineteenth century. Yet the postwar emperor certainly did not and does not represent fascism. The institution has genuine popular support. It cannot be associated with any particular class or ideology, though various groups can try to use it. Efforts at constitutional revision, for example, may try to give the emperor a more prominent political role which would not be so important in itself but as a symbol of the revisionists' right-wing agenda. Meanwhile, the emperor stands more as a symbol of peace at the present time.

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The Chinese emperorship was a political creature which did not survive the political turmoil of the late nineteenth century. Particularly because the Qing emperors were defined as foreign in an increasingly nationalist age, they and then the institution became expendable. But the Japanese emperor remained associated with the fate of the Japanese nation and its people. Political turmoil in Japan in the nineteenth century ended the institution of the shogunate, restoring the emperorship to its culturally central role. Shen dismisses the Chinese emperor as a symbol of "feudal despotism" while pursuing more subtle explanations of the Japanese emperor. But in both cases he fails to explore the links between the imperial institution and the societies of which they stood at the head. He can hardly be faulted for not wanting to make an already large book unmanageable, but the problem is unavoidable. A Marxist historian might have been expected to link the evolution of the emperorship to social changes, but, following his largely traditional sources, Shen gives us a narrative largely from the capital's point of view.

At least when it comes to the modern monarchy, I would suggest that the immense changes in Chinese society set in motion in the eighteenth century led to secularization and a demand for political decentralization. That the court was increasingly moribund and unable to prevent itself from being seen as foreign was ultimately less important. (The impact of Western imperialism and its use of the court was also a contingent, if important factor.) Rather, the political-social system was unable to accommodate growing numbers of educated and capable men while the economic system was unable to grow fast enough to prevent at least a subjective sense of peasant emiseration. If a landlord-based society is inherently conservative, it nonetheless produced in China its own critics. The 1911 revolution was fueled if not created by a radical ideology of republicanism, human rights, feminism, and egalitarianism.

The Japanese monarchy by way of contrast stood at the head of a society capable of fundamental change through non-revolutionary means. The Meiji Restoration cleared the way for capable men to enter politics and business. It was fueled by an ideology of modernization with the emperor given the role of cultural preserver. Samurai, defined by their legal status rather than their economic position, were in a position to undertake thorough reforms without challenging every aspect of the existing system. As in China, contingent elements were important: the political purity of the court, in contrast to the shogunate, made it usable to the new Japanese elite. Chinese nationalism thus became tied to a variety of symbols: flag, Red Army, national anthems, and the like, while Chinese leaders were often invested with semi-mythical qualities. Japanese nationalism focused on the emperor; whereas Japanese political leaders were regarded more skeptically, they could still, at least until 1945, turn to imperial recognition for legitimacy.

Notes

1. The book formally gives about equal attention to China and Japan, being structured as follows: chapter one deals with the origins and early development of the Chinese emperor, chapter two with the Japanese (under Chinese influence), and chapter three compares them; chapter four discusses the real powers of the Chinese emperor, chapter five the Japanese; chapter six examines the destruction of the imperial institution in China and the creation of the modern "emperor system" in Japan, chapter seven the role of the Japanese emperor in World War Two; chapters eight and nine focus on the post-war emperor. On the one hand, an emphasis on the twentieth century inevitably leads to paying greater attention to the Japanese emperor; but on the other hand, a thorough consideration of the origins of the institution and of the influence of Chinese culture would have led to emphasizing the Chinese side in the first half of the book. In any case, Shen makes greater use of secondary sources and "received wisdom" when he deals with China.

2. Chinese emperors repeatedly condemned factions but inevitably found themselves dealing with them or acting as a de facto leader of one faction or another.

3. Shen also takes the Xia dynasty, putatively of the second millennium B.C., as historical fact although it is archeologically unproven.

4. The legends, in spite of a few hints about matrilinealism, reflect a thoroughly patriarchal view of society. China's great culture-heroes and rulers were all male.

5. The term for the Shang (商) dynasty was not related to the term "shang" meaning supreme; in any case, the terms were pronounced differently at the time.

6. Other scholars have speculated that a memory of primitive communism survived in Daoism and perhaps other schools which advocated a more egalitarian "natural order." In any case, it seems doubtful that most villagers had much political sense beyond their own lord and his tax collectors.

7. See the Zhengfu gongbao 政府公報 [Government Gazetteer] for December 1915 and January 1916 for examples.

8. Carol Gluck, Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), examining the vitality of non-center, non-orthodox views, shows that even if imperial ideology of the 1890s (the era of the Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education) contained the seeds of fascism, they fell on rather stony soil.

9. Like many scholarly debates, it will presumably never be finally settled. For more recent opinions, see Awaya Kentarō, "Emperor Shōwa's Accountability for War," Japan Quarterly 38.4 (October-December 1991), pp. 386-98; and especially Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, "Emperor Hirohito on Localized Aggression in China," Sino-Japanese Studies 4.1 (October 1991), pp. 4-27. Based on newly published diaries, these articles tend to place the emperor within a small elite (or ruling clique) that sometimes fitfully made the final decisions steering Japan into a disastrous series of wars. Wakabayashi also reviews the evidence suggesting Hirohito had knowledge of Japanese atrocities. The reasons for focusing on the emperor include the effects in the West of wartime propaganda and the psychological appeal of simple solutions, as well as legitimate scholarly curiosity.