

Swarthmore College

Works

History Faculty Works

History

8-1-1993

Review Of "Rents, Taxes, And Peasant Resistance: The Lower Yangzi Region, 1840-1950" By K. Bernhardt

Lillian M. Li

Swarthmore College, lli1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Let us know how access to these works benefits you

Recommended Citation

Lillian M. Li. (1993). "Review Of "Rents, Taxes, And Peasant Resistance: The Lower Yangzi Region, 1840-1950" By K. Bernhardt". *Journal Of Asian Studies*. Volume 52, Issue 3. 705-707. DOI: 10.2307/2058874

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history/290>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

phonetic realism and appears to regard his Old Chinese reconstruction as a more or less abstract phonological system that accounts for his various kinds of primary evidence in the most natural and internally consistent way. The result of his approach is undoubtedly the most detailed, well reasoned, and typologically natural reconstruction of Old Chinese up to the present.

Following a number of other recent linguists, Baxter considers Old Chinese an atonal language. Following an idea first put forth by the French scholar Andre Haudricourt, and subsequently further developed by Edwin Pulleyblank and Mei Tsu-lin, Baxter derives the Middle Chinese *qu* tone from an Old Chinese final *s*, and the Middle Chinese *shang* tone from a final glottal stop. Since the *ru* tone already has a distinctive set of final stop consonants, this analysis in effect leaves Old Chinese without any tonal distinctions at all. This theory of tonogenesis has generally become the standard view in the past twenty or so years, at least in the West.

Initial consonants are the thorniest problem in Old Chinese phonology. The only substantial evidence for their reconstruction is the category of Chinese characters composed of both a semantic and phonetic component (*xieshengzi*). Unfortunately, this body of evidence is in many cases ambiguous and it is difficult to demonstrate that these characters reflect Old Chinese consonantism in a completely systematic way. The problem becomes acute in reconstructing initial consonant clusters. Almost everyone in the field accepts that consonant clusters existed in Old Chinese, but the graphic evidence on which particular reconstructions rest in many cases allows for very different interpretations. Baxter's reconstruction of initials is well argued and contains numerous new features, but his treatment of consonant clusters, while fascinating in many ways, is in the end unable to overcome completely the problems inherent in the evidence itself. It may be that we will always have to remain content with a certain degree of ambiguity with regard to Old Chinese consonantism, especially on the question of initial clusters.

Baxter's analysis of Old Chinese vocalism is unquestionably the strongest part of his reconstruction. Using statistical methods, he shows that the traditional rhyme groups of Chinese *guyinxue* must be revised in a number of ways. The traditional *yuan* group, for example, is shown to contain three different main vowels rather than a single one as proposed by most earlier linguists. The arguments given in favor of his six-vowel system are based on rhyming patterns in the *Shijing* and on typological naturalness. Baxter's approach to vocalism is on the whole quite convincing and is certain to be influential in future work on this subject.

Baxter's *Handbook* is a well thought-out and judicious compendium of what can be said about Old Chinese phonology at the present time. He knows his material well and the rigor of his methodology is unprecedented. A reader of Baxter's book is left with the impression that he has pushed the traditional approach to its limits and that any further progress in the field will have to be based on a quite different methodological approach.

JERRY NORMAN
University of Washington

Rents, Taxes, and Peasant Resistance: The Lower Yangzi Region, 1840–1950. By KATHRYN BERNHARDT. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. xiii, 326 pp. \$37.50.

In tracing the history of land taxes and rents in the Jiangnan region from the mid-Qing period until the consolidation of the Communist Party's power in the

mid-twentieth century, this book takes a fresh look at the complicated and changing relationship between the state, the landlord, and the tenant. Although the author is careful always to show how the Jiangnan region differed from other regions, even those adjacent to it, the overall direction of the book points toward a reinterpretation of class struggle and the social origins of the Communist revolution.

Although it is the reinterpretation that will receive the most attention, it is important to note the achievement of the author in painstakingly constructing an understanding of the complicated web of statutory quotas, surcharges, remissions, silver- and rice-copper conversion rates, customary fees, proxy remittances, and other variables that constituted what is known as the land tax, on the one hand, and the numerous variables that affected the rental relationship between landlord and tenant, on the other. Limitations of space do not permit me to do justice to the wealth of detail and the clarity of explanation that characterize Bernhardt's work. Even without the social analysis that derives from it, the institutional history alone would commend this book as an invaluable reference.

Bernhardt sees the 1840s and 1850s as a critical turning point in the history of land taxes and rents in Jiangnan. A combination of silver inflation, lower agricultural prices, higher taxes, and decline in the value of land led to an increase in rents, which in turn led to a wave of social unrest. The state remained outside of the rent relations between landlords and tenants. With the Taiping occupation of Jiangnan came important shifts in the alignment of power. Although Bernhardt is careful to note that the evidence is sometimes ambiguous, she finds that, on the whole, the Taipings acted in a way not "congenial" to landlords, and they were "guided more by expediency than ideology" (p. 109). Not only were landlords subject to tax burdens greater than before, but the rural officials employed by the Taipings were nonelites who competed for authority. In this, Bernhardt differs both with the view that the Taiping legacy left the old gentry more entrenched than ever (a view she repeatedly associates with the work of Philip Kuhn and Frederic Wakeman), and with the more general view that Taiping control of the countryside was rather superficial.

In the post-Taiping period, the state became involved with landlords in stabilizing rent collection. The greater use of bursaries and rent-dunning bureaus further distanced the landlord from the tenant in a personal sense. These measures should have lightened the burden of the landlord, but toward the end of the dynasty, tax protests, as well as rent resistance, proliferated as a combination of factors increased the actual burden of the landowners.

In the Republican period, the Guomindang, contrary to general impression, intervened more frequently in rent reduction than its predecessors. Real rates were lower than ever, but collective action increased nevertheless for political rather than economic reasons. Although Bernhardt initially states that the local officials became the target of tenant grievances (p. 10), she later takes exception with Lucien Bianco's view that the state rather than landlords became the object of peasant opposition (pp. 207–8), pointing out that the state sometimes protected tenant interests. Although she appears reluctant to abandon the notion of class consciousness entirely (pp. 228–29), Bernhardt views the Jiangnan landlord sympathetically, lamenting his "economic plight" (p. 220). "In the end," she concludes, "what destroyed landlordism in the lower Yangzi region was the interrelated processes of state-strengthening and growing tenant political power. When the People's Liberation Army conquered Jiangnan in 1949, rent relations were already on the verge of collapse. Land reform just dealt the final blow" (p. 232).

This is a rich, multidimensional work that has implications for numerous topics. It makes taxes and rents as comprehensible as they will ever be. It demystifies class struggle. It provides a new look at the economic and social impact of the Taiping occupation of Jiangnan. It offers a clear challenge to conventional views of both the Guomindang and, by implication, the Chinese Communist Party in this key region of China. Like most important books, it also invites new research and reevaluation in all these subjects, for which it will serve as the focal point for a long time to come.

LILLIAN M. LI
Swarthmore College

The Discourse of Race in Modern China. By FRANK DIKÖTTER. Originating publisher: London: C. Hurst and Co. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. xii, 251 pp. \$32.00.

Myths do exist in Western understanding of China. One such myth is that China is the only civilization that has no mythology. Another pertains to Chinese culturalism, that her traditional sense of superiority was moral rather than racial. Dikötter's work questions this myth, and wonders if the culture/race dichotomy is largely Western. The Central Realm's all-encompassing civilizing power did not prevent it from regarding barbarians at the four peripheries as beasts with a different physical constitution from the human. Dikötter argues that racism became ascendant when China was threatened by external forces: nomads, Buddhism, Manchus, or Westerners. It was the "defensive" side of her otherwise confident ecumenical culturalism.

African slaves were imported as early as the Tang dynasty; therefore, the equation of "black" and "slave" occurred earlier in China than in northern Europe. Alongside the African "black coal," Europeans were similarly defective—their "ash-white" complexion signified their demonic spirit. Whereas Chinese disdain for the blacks remained consistent throughout, their perceptions of the whites changed with the rising fortunes of the white race. From the 1890s, Western discourse of race was grafted onto homespun racism. Reformists like Tang Caichang and Yi Nai contemplated interracial marriage with the white race as a means of strengthening China. Pan-Babylonianism became popular, even with an advocate of "national essence" such as Zhang Binglin. For Kang Youwei, the extinction of the blacks was a step toward his utopian Global Community, when the yellow race would also turn white.

Thus Confucian ecumenicism (*datong*, the "Great Sameness") was reinstated with a vengeance. Dikötter's treatment of the Chinese transition from racial (*zhongzu*) consciousness to national (*minzu*) consciousness is less satisfactory. The *zhongzu* consciousness of the 1890s was still "ecumenical." Chinese intellectuals sojourned at the halfway house of "supernationalism," i.e., pan-Asianism, before they arrived at the nationalism of the 1900s. Nation, unlike race, is not purely biological, and therefore cannot be treated as a mere extension of racial discourse. An issue of relevance is the "national psychology" discourse popular among both reformists and revolutionaries.

Dikötter's treatment of the racial discourse in the Republican period is uneven. Although his section on Chinese eugenics is the most comprehensive treatment of the subject so far, his sections on Republican racial perceptions are episodic and inconclusive. The Chinese were not original in emphasizing hair instead of color