



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China by Peter K. Bol
Word, Image, and Deed in The Life of Su Shi by Ronald C. Egan

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Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 55, No. 2. (Dec., 1995), pp. 519-535.

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REVIEWS

“This Culture of Ours”: Intellectual Transitions in T’ang and Sung China by Peter K. Bol. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. Pp. x + 519. \$49.50 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi by Ronald C. Egan. Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1994. Pp. xvix + 474. \$38.

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Peter Bol’s book covers half a millennium of medieval Chinese literati thought, recounting the transition from the northwestern (Ch’ang-an/Loyang), aristocratic literary culture of T’ang China (618–907) to the ethical-philosophical discourse of Northern Sung (960–1126) Confucian gentlemen who represented the “rise of the south” in imperial Kaifeng social and intellectual life. Ronald Egan’s new book, in contrast, meticulously documents the life of one man, Su Shih (Su Shi in pinyin), and draws on the eleventh-century cultural artifacts and literary texts that this giant of Confucian letters left to posterity upon his untimely death in 1101. Bol offers us a unique cultural perspective on the long-studied transition from a small group of leading T’ang aristocratic families to a broad-based Sung literati elite, which fleshes out for the first time how

momentous social change between 750 and 1100 correlated with epochal intellectual change. Egan immediately engages us with a compelling account of the “rise and fall” of a man so talented on all levels that his political enemies searched through every line of his essays and poetry to find proof of his political iconoclasm and *lèse majesté* toward the Sung throne. Bol concludes with the Southern Sung (1127–1279) rise of a new literati culture that centered on Ch’eng I’s Northern Sung *Tao-hsueh* (the learning of the *tao*) doctrines. These doctrines were the centerpiece for Chu Hsi’s twelfth-century synthesis now known inelegantly and anachronistically as “Neo-Confucianism.” Egan ends with a multi-dimensional view of a complex man, whose political frustrations drove him while in ignominious exile to rethink fundamentally the cultural life of the literatus. Bol tells us why, of the Northern Sung literati, Ch’eng I eventually won the Confucian battle of ideas; Egan shows us how in defeat Su Shih communicated through poetry, prose, and lyrics his cultural vision of the literatus. In sum, here are two different men, two different fates, and a well-documented mutual dislike for each other that Chu Hsi characteristically used to his advantage to drive Su Shih’s reputation further into the ground while at the same time raising Ch’eng I to sagely status.¹

Although different in tone and levels of generalization, the books by Bol and Egan, when read carefully, each enlarges our understanding of the cultural and intellectual complexities of Sung Confucian life. Though they frame their accounts differently, each deals with many of the same celebrated Northern Sung Confucians (Fan Chung-yen, Ou-yang Hsiu, Ssu-ma Kuang, Wang An-shih, Ch’eng I, etc.) in such a way that the men appear almost interchangeably and as consistently recognizable in each account. If at first sight Egan’s work lacks the “big picture” that Bol so readily presents, then Bol initially seems to lack Egan’s sensitivity to the political alienation suffered by Su Shih and others in the bitter, factionalized aftermath of the Wang An-shih reforms. We should recall that at the time of their deaths in 1101 and 1107, respectively, both Su Shih and Ch’eng I were proscribed Confucians for having op-

¹ See Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi’s Ascendancy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992).

posed those then in power. As much as they disliked each other, they were even more despised by others who correctly saw each as a threat to the legacy of Wang An-shih's reforms.

Bol's first chapter offers an interesting perspective, which he hopes will "avoid reductionist and determinist explanations of Chinese intellectual life" (p. 35), on the transformation of the T'ang-Sung socio-political order. Between the years 600 and 1200, the transformation of the *shih* from men of good birth to men of culture meant that significant changes had occurred in the categories that were important traditionally for defining literati life: culture, birth, and office holding. Changes in the conception of the primary elite, for example—its new character ideals—played a part in redirecting their efforts to maintain their status as *shih*, according to Bol, but he cautions against overemphasizing connections between social, political, and intellectual developments. These developments were not seamlessly interconnected; rather, intellectual concerns had a high degree of autonomy, Bol argues, and could impact the social and political order on their own terms. Bol demonstrates this in the seven subsequent chapters, which trace in detail the "intellectual transitions" from the late T'ang to the Northern Sung.

The demise of the aristocracy in the late T'ang was the social context for the transformation of the *shih* in the Sung, not its determinative cause, according to Bol. Once the "commodity" of good birth ceased to be sufficient to define *shih* status, examination status and its correlates of culture and education became the sine qua non for *shih* identity. The Sung court expanded the use of the *shih* in administrative positions because, Bol argues, the *shih* were loyal subordinates who lacked the independent power that the military men who had helped bring the Chao family to power still had. In the process, civilian governance by *shih* chosen through Sung examinations of unprecedented scope mitigated against the sort of military threat that had been so prevalent in the late T'ang and during the Five Dynasties (907–960). Because civil officials were drawn almost exclusively from the ranks of the *shih*, however, by 1100 the *shih* had accumulated enough independence and local power for their role as local elites to outshine their role as state bureaucrats.

Shih domination of local society, based on their educational and cultural qualifications, was one of the unforeseen outcomes of the

court's enfranchisement of the *shih* in the Sung political order. Large Sung bureaucratic families that were akin to the great clans of the T'ang slowly gave way to localized lineages and clans and a concurrent rise of the south in the competitive examinations. Unlike T'ang families, Sung families were unable to monopolize official positions and thereby perpetuate themselves in state offices. Even the hereditary *yin* privilege could not accomplish this. The high numbers of examination candidates (not equaled again until the late Ming dynasty) mitigated against any long-term monopoly of political status via examination success. Education geared toward passing examinations remained an important investment once the examinations also became one of the means to legitimate dominance in the local economy, institutions, and cultural activities.

The transformation of the *shih* from aristocrats to civil officials and then to local elites provides Bol with the long-term social and political context for mapping the diverse possibilities available in intellectual life between 600 and 1200. Beginning with a discussion of scholarship and literary composition in early T'ang court life, Bol explores how "writing as culture" took hold among the *shih* and how literary composition became the most popular field of learned life. *Wen* served as the literary core of a Confucian discourse that received the legacy of the sages and former kings and affirmed its relevance for the present. Cultural forms were models that replicated traditions from the past. Like Edwin G. Pulleyblank before him,² Bol sees a crisis of confidence in literati culture in the aftermath of the An Lu-shan Rebellion of 755. The very *shih* who sought to save Confucian culture (*si-wen*, "This Culture of Ours") suffered through a crisis of faith in the viability of culture to ameliorate contemporary problems.

T'ang literati from Ch'üan Te-yü (759-818) to Han Yü (768-824) unintentionally helped to destroy the underpinnings of the aristocratic culture of medieval China by introducing a "self-conscious inquiry and debate over ideas" (p. 110). The "new, creative, and variegated intellectual culture between 755 and 820,"

² Pulleyblank, "Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Legalism in T'ang Intellectual Life, 755-805," in Arthur Wright, ed., *The Confucian Persuasion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 77-114.

challenged the long-assumed unity between the *tao* of heaven and earth and the style and oeuvre of individual writers. This challenge resulted in reconfigurations of the relations between *wen* and *tao*. Bol believes Han Yü's ruminations on the decline and recovery of the *tao* of the sages to be the first comprehensive Confucian vision of a moral order, complete with explanations for its present decline and necessary conditions for its future revival.

The call to revive the past through ancient-style *ku-wen* prose served Han and others as the literary means to act in accord with ancient values by writing in the manner of the sages themselves, while conveniently excluding Buddhism. Investing styles of writing with moral significance, Han Yü sought to manifest morality through *wen*. However, the desire to find the grounds of moral certainty through literary devices was problematic. The *tao* now took precedence over *wen* in T'ang literati discourse, and, as Bol shows, "aristocratic medieval culture died" when the *shih* began to ponder what values they should seek rather than what literary styles they should employ. Early Sung intellectual culture continued these late-T'ang meditations on the role of *ku-wen* when Confucians such as Fan Chung-yen and Ou-yang Hsiu established "the role of the *ku-wen* writer as agitator for political and social transformation." A durable literary consensus did not emerge, however, and men such as Ch'eng I, who thought that *wen* was irrelevant to mastering the *tao* and its moral values, began the radical turn toward a solution that called itself appropriately "the learning of the *tao*."

Sung intellectual culture was initially dominated by the literary (*shih*, *fu*, *lun*) requirements for the civil service *chin-shih* degree. *Ku-wen* scholars such as Fan Chung-yen and Ou-yang Hsiu tried to redress this focus on literary refinement by calling for educational reforms and by requiring *ku-wen* on the examinations. As director of the 1057 examinations, for example, Ou-yang caused an uproar by passing only those candidates who had written essays in *ku-wen*. Despite the furor, *ku-wen* became increasingly influential as a movement, uniting in the 1050s even Ch'eng I (who stressed human nature as an innate endowment) and Su Shih (who emphasized realistic responses to immediate human feelings and needs). *Wen* remained at the center of *shih* life, but the center that Ou-yang Hsiu tried to maintain produced within itself a cauldron of diverse

positions that would eventually compete with each other for the mantle of state orthodoxy.

Wang An-shih and Ssu-ma Kuang represented the first opposing camps to emerge from the mid-eleventh-century *ku-wen* consensus. Both sought, in Bol's view, to address the proper relation between state and society. An activist, Wang found in antiquity his version of a universal political, social, economic, and cultural program that he promulgated as the "New Policies" in the early 1070s. More conservative, Ssu-ma Kuang attempted to install political reforms that would not require the reorganization of society. Except for a brief period between 1085 and 1093 when Ssu-ma Kuang and his followers were in charge, Wang An-shih's partisans dominated the Sung court until the fall of Kaifeng. The wealth and power of the state took priority over moral philosophy or literary talent, and Wang's opponents were ruthlessly expelled or exiled. Competing visions of the political order struggled with each other, all in the name of the *tao*. Wang sought to legitimate his agenda through a unified and orthodox codification of select Classics that he placed at the core of the civil examination curriculum. Ssu-ma appealed to historical precedents in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (which he emulated in his *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*) for understanding the political history of dynasties and the reasons for their rise and fall.

Though at odds over policy, Wang An-shih and Ssu-ma Kuang were agreed that political solutions were required to address the lack of unity in literati values and dislocations in the social order. When political reforms, whether activist or conservative, failed to fulfill their promise, Bol contends that those caught in the middle of the storm, such as Ch'eng I and Su Shih, were encouraged to search elsewhere for solutions to the problems of the age. Though at odds over the value of literary culture, Ch'eng and Su were agreed that politics was part of the problem besetting the Sung, not the solution. For Bol, Su Shih represents the last great spokesman for the centrality of *wen* in intellectual culture (p. 259). Su questioned the need for any orthodoxy to unify *shih* values. When Ch'eng I stressed moral self-cultivation for all *shih* and thus fundamentally challenged the value of *ku-wen* literary achievement and activist government service, he widened the path of inquiry into transcendental truths first trod upon by Han Yü and others in the T'ang. In the twelfth

century this inquiry would lead to a new orthodoxy based on *Tao-hsueh*.

Bol concludes that by disavowing *wen*, Ch'eng I's *Tao-hsueh* constituted "a radical break in *shih* thought" (p. 300). When Ch'eng I claimed messianic authority for himself and for his brother Ch'eng Hao to speak for the *tao* of the sages lost after Mencius, Ch'eng I simultaneously gainsaid the literary culture of the T'ang and Sung and the classical legacy of the Han. Ch'eng denied that text-based or exegetical learning was integral to moral learning. Through his teachings, he showed others how they could begin to search for the *tao* and true values through moral cultivation and faith in the cultural legacy bequeathed to Mencius but later lost during the Han and T'ang. In Ch'eng's eyes, literary production was frivolous and political activism fundamentally misguided if each were not centered on a fundamental moral understanding of the *tao*. Heavenly principles, not human artifice, were the way of heaven and earth. Moral principles that explained the *raison d'être* for human values and rituals became the guidelines for *shih* life.

The new culture of *Tao-hsueh*, profoundly conservative politically and socially, spoke to the beleaguered *shih* in philosophical and ethical terms. To know the *tao* through learning and cultivation required new character ideals and new models of enlightenment. Ch'eng I and his followers, particularly Chu Hsi, won the hearts of an influential minority of the *shih* in the twelfth century by convincing them to change the criteria of *shih* identity so that their new learning could help them better fulfill their local ethical, cultural, and political responsibilities. According to Bol, then, the old cultural-textual tradition of *shih* learning was replaced by an ethical-philosophical perspective that resacralized the Classics and invented the Four Books as the repository of the truths taught by Confucius, Mencius, and their immediate disciples. Ch'eng I, Chu Hsi, and by extension their own followers thus became the direct disciples of Confucius and Mencius, leaving Han and T'ang Confucians out of the genealogy. A counterculture at first, *Tao-hsueh* eventually created the social, political, and intellectual conditions for its own increasingly orthodox and independent standing in Southern Sung literati life.

Bol's historical perspective on the new culture of *Tao-hsueh* in the

Northern Sung is tightly argued, but, as he himself acknowledges, he leaves out issues that others would stress. Rather than presenting a typical intellectual history of Confucianism from 750 to 1100, Bol claims instead that his socially nuanced approach is in essence an account of “*shih* learning” in transition from cultural to moral discourse. Bol’s analysis of the eleventh century for the most part ignores many early *Tao-hsueh* moral philosophers (such as Chou Tun-i, Shao Yung, and Chang Tsai) that Chu Hsi and others later stressed in their famous orthodox genealogy known as the *tao-t’ung*. In this way Bol successfully avoids uncritically following the long-standing convention of using Southern Sung Neo-Confucian teleologies to elucidate Northern Sung Confucian thought. As Bol puts it succinctly (p. 370 n. 129): “How could there be a Neo-Confucian orthodoxy before Chu Hsi in the absence of a Neo-Confucianism to be orthodox about?”

Others will rightly contend that Bol’s work fails to deal seriously with Buddhism and its well-documented impact on T’ang and Sung Confucians (typically denied rhetorically by *Tao-hsueh* scholars and their subsequent followers in a straightforward form of negation). Bol’s response to such criticism is not entirely satisfactory, but he does contend that before we can grasp the extent of Buddhist doctrinal influence on Sung Confucian thought we first need to understand what changes in literati intellectual culture actually occurred. Unfortunately, this means that Bol leaves it for others to explore the role of Ch’an Buddhism in the rise of *Tao-hsueh*.³ Finally, Bol breaks with the philosophical biases that enveloped Confucian studies in the Southern Sung, and like Egan he emphasizes the central role of literature in Confucian discourse during the T’ang and Sung dynasties. Although Ch’eng I and Chu Hsi successfully convinced their followers that literature was an irrelevant ornament of culture, *wen*, as Bol shows, was a form of discourse that entertained substantive theoretical issues within the genres of poetry, rhyme-prose, and the lyric. Su Shih exemplifies for both Bol and Egan the literatus who chose literary forms to express Confucian values and cultural ideals.

³ On this, see the recent book by Robert Buswell, *The Formation of Ch’an Ideology in China and Korea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). See also Ding-hwa Evelyn Hsieh, “A Study of the Evolution of *K’an-hua* Ch’an in Sung China” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1993).

In his haste to map the complicated road leading to the triumph of *Tao-hsueh* in the Southern Sung, a triumph that may not have been as total as Bol and others usually assume, Bol perhaps overstates the demise of *wen* in post-Sung Confucian discourse. His major points would not suffer if he were willing to hold the more nuanced position that, while *Tao-hsueh* moral philosophy certainly became the centerpiece of Confucian discourse after the Sung dynasties, *wen* nevertheless remained an extremely important form of cultural expression. We know that the ability to compose *wen* remained a clear marker of elite social status during the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. One has only to think of the centrality in later years of the infamous "eight-legged essay" for which Ch'eng-Chu learning was the required content in a literary exercise testing stylistic form, to realize how incomplete the *Tao-hsueh* victory over T'ang-Sung cultural forms really was. Ming-Ch'ing civil examination essays were judged explicitly on their content (principles, i.e., *li*) and their form (style, i.e., *wen*). Bol's otherwise convincing account of the T'ang and Sung would be better served had he more carefully considered subsequent literary developments in the Yuan, Ming, and Ch'ing dynasties.

Through Su Shih, his career, and writings, Egan enables us to see in personal terms many of the intellectual events that Bol paints in broader strokes. It is in the intellectual details, some of which gently revise Bol's more global conclusions, that Egan excels. Egan's "life and times" of Su Shih is so methodologically straightforward in its approach that its success in capturing Su's literary significance will surprise many who think that only by couching Chinese literary history in the modish language of post-modernism can we make any significant contribution to contemporary Chinese studies. In *Word, Image, and Deed*, we first observe Su Shih in the 1060s as an examination prodigy and promising heir to Ou-yang Hsiu's *ku-wen* literary mantle, and then we perceive his initially discreet political opposition to Wang An-shih's reforms in the 1070s. Next we follow Su into political exile in 1080 to Huang-chou in the middle Yangtze, and then his return to political and court prominence in the 1080s and 1090s, when he criticized Ssu-ma Kuang for going too far in his rejection of all Wang An-shih's reforms. Finally, we travel with Su Shih to his ever more distant and trying exiles,

first in Hui-chou on the coast of Kuangtung (1094-97) and then to the disease-ridden island of Hainan (1097-1100). Allowed to return to the mainland in 1100, Su Shih, by then suffering from fever and intestinal disorders (most likely those associated with malaria), died in 1101 in the emerging Grand Canal entrepot of Ch'ang-chou, where he had planned to live out his retirement.

From a brash and overconfident writer of examination essays, Su Shih developed into a superb essayist, poet, and cultural theorist, a master of *wen* in Bol's terms, whose wide following among literati was both a tribute to his writing ability and a public threat to his political enemies. His initial opposition to the Wang An-shih reforms, which Su communicated in policy papers criticizing all the "New Policies," was followed by a period of service as either prefect or vice prefect in the eastern prefectures of the Sung empire. There, according to Egan's balanced account, he distinguished himself as an able and concerned local administrator.

By the late 1070s Su Shih had turned to poetry as a public forum in which to attack the reforms and satirize the reformers. The poems of this period led directly to his first arrest and trial in 1079 for allegedly having defamed the emperor and the court, a charge that he denied, although he later admitted he had criticized the reform leaders in his poetry. Ever since, Su Shih's poetry of political and personal attack has been hotly debated, and many have argued that he got what he deserved.⁴ Even his brother and friends would later appeal to him, unsuccessfully, to stop writing poetry because of the dangers his writing created for him and them. As a court official he was entitled to remonstrate when he disagreed with certain policies, but to write and circulate such caustic poetry while merely a local prefect was for his enemies sufficient cause to arrest and interrogate him. The emperor spared Su Shih's life but demoted him to Huang-chou, where Su held the title of assistant militia commandant. He was forbidden to speak out on state affairs, and those who had been the audience for his treasonous writings were all either demoted or fined. On the way to exile in Huang-chou, Su wrote a

⁴ Charles Hartman thinks the Sung state "acted remarkably well" on the charges leveled against Su. See his "The Inquisition Against Su Shih: His Sentence as an Example of Sung Legal Practice," *JAOS* 113.2 (1993): 228-43.

poem commenting on a painting, shown to him by a friend and former superior, of a rural marriage scene in nearby Chu-ch'en village. Egan translates it as follows (p. 53):

I myself am Chu-ch'en's former prefect;
 To encourage agriculture once I went to Apricot Blossom.
 But the scene there today, who could bear to paint it?
 County bailiffs demanding taxes bang on doors at midnight.

Su Shih still had not learned his lesson. Fortunately for us, if not for him, he never did.

Beginning with Chapter 3, Egan traces the "body of alternative thought" (p. 54) that Su Shih developed during the 1070s and 1090s. While Wang An-shih advocated a complete overhaul of the literary content of the civil examinations and recommended that candidates be required to write essays elucidating the classics, Su Shih rejected such efforts as "intellectual tyranny," according to Egan (p. 63). Su's own commentaries on the *Changes* and *Documents* articulated a vision of the Way and human nature that grounded the rites in the natural inclinations of human beings. Unhappy with Ch'eng I's program for moral self-cultivation, which he considered too fixed and abstract to be complete, Su Shih instead emphasized selfless public service and a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. Egan perceptively points to the influence both Ch'an doctrine and Pure Land Buddhism had on Su Shih's intellectual development, particularly on the centrality of compassion in Su's writings. Egan suggests that Buddhist compassion supplemented Confucian "humaneness" in Su Shih's public career as a local official. Su's insistence on a spontaneous and unpremeditated response to human events and Su's appeal to the doctrines of "no mind" and "non-attachment" all suggest to Egan the importance of Buddhism in Su Shih's life.

Su's split with Ssu-ma Kuang over the issue of Wang An-shih's Hired Service policy, which Su saw as more useful than Ssu-ma's proposal to replace hired labor with an outdated corvee system, left Su with only his family and most loyal admirers as his supporters. Unhappy with Wang An-shih's reformism, disenchanted with Ssu-ma Kuang's conservatism, and unable to endure Ch'eng I's moralism, Su Shih found he had alienated almost everyone in the capital.

In the question he drafted for the 1086 examination administered by the Bureau of Academicians, Su referred obliquely to the political failures of the previous two Sung reigns. His enemies immediately memorialized that Su had slandered two of the Sung emperors and should be punished as a disloyal official. Ludicrous charges were heaped upon plausible charges, and once again all of Su Shih's writings were subjected to careful political scrutiny. Wang An-shih's vengeful court followers launched a full-scale purge of their opponents in the summer of 1094, leading to Su's demotion, exile to Hui-chou in 1094, and to Hainan in 1097. His career in total eclipse, Su Shih saw his literary works and those of his father and brother proscribed by the court and all of his printing blocks ordered destroyed.

Despite the circumstances of his exile to the far southeast from 1094 to 1100, Su Shih continued to write poetry, compose lyrics, and present his unique views on painting and calligraphy. Egan calls the works from this period Su's "literature of exile" (p. 207). In contrast to Su's earlier poetry, his poetry in exile carried the added weight of frustration and alienation at being excluded from the political and cultural center in Kaifeng. Su found in poetry a way to deal with the reality of his total public disgrace. Freed from all bureaucratic responsibilities, Su Shih's productivity also multiplied. He commented on the classics and took an interest in medicine and alchemy as means to improve his health and prolong his life. But he never forgave those who perpetrated the injustice he believed he had suffered.

Seeking to reconcile himself to his circumstances, Su Shih, according to Egan, never completely put the circumstances of his exile behind him. Su saw himself as similar to the fourth-century poet T'ao Ch'ien, who also had labored in obscurity and become a gentleman farmer of renown. Su's brother saw through Su Shih's pose. Although Su claimed to have found contentment and joy in exile, below this surface appearance lay deep-seated anger. Transcendence through poetry was his goal, but the rancor Su felt often turned his writings into the "poetry of resentment and defiance" (p. 250). Resentment and contentment were both signs of his defiance of his fate.

Su Shih's self-expression was not limited to literature. He was

also the first Sung literatus to bring the arts of painting and calligraphy into the domain of the cultured life of a gentleman-scholar. Su and his followers formulated the principles that later became associated with amateur painting (*wen-jen hua*). Through calligraphy, Su expressed novelty and transformed earlier models of writing emulated since the T'ang dynasty. Absorption in one's art enabled the calligrapher or painter to transcend his ordinary concerns in a moment of pleasurable attainment of the Way. The act of painting or writing became a model of spontaneous accord with the world. Through painting the artist unconsciously recreated natural images from which the underlying pattern (*li*) of his subject emerged. Calligraphy and painting mediated the interaction of the mind and the world.

Although he tries not to overemphasize the claim, Egan suggests that the visual arts became important during Su's exile because of the political dangers Su Shih had faced when he expressed himself through literature. We might add that Su Shih's cultural activities in exile were by their very nature an unstated challenge to the cultural styles of the politicized and moralizing literati who had successfully removed him from office. His poetry, calligraphy, and painting represented his artistic challenge to them, a challenge that didn't have to be issued in the precincts of politics.

In this vein, Su Shih also turned to the lyric (*tz'u*) to produce a new kind of literary song. Egan deftly shows how Su Shih used the popular urban songs of his day to create a new literary form that could be appreciated by highbrow literati. Su inserted autobiographical references into the lyric and changed its scope to include more than just the usual stock love songs then current. Again, Egan suggests that Su Shih's interest in the lyric form during his first exile was a response to the political dangers he faced in writing conventional poetry and prose. In the highly personal voice of the lyric, Su Shih was able to communicate feelings that he did not dare express in his poetry. In the latter, Su stressed his contentment and transcendence. In the lyric song, Su Shih developed the full potential of the *man-tz'u* form to convey fleeting images from the past and their disjuncture with the present. The drama told in a *man-tz'u* suited Su Shih's stress on spontaneity, thoughtlessness, and the infinite adaptability that was his favorite

pose in exile. In one stanza Su wrote (p. 348):

They resemble a flower but do not,
 And no one regrets their falling.
 Abandoning home, they lie beside the road,
 Seeming, after all,
 To have memory though no feelings.
 A tender heart, twisted with longing,
 Pretty eyes, weary with wine,
 When almost open they close again.
 Dreaming a thousand miles on the wind,
 They pursue him as he leaves,
 Only to be awakened
 By the oriole's song.

Egan concludes his study with a brief review of later appraisals of Su Shih's life, the most interesting one being Chu Hsi's Southern Sung picture of Su as a self-indulgent and unrestrained man of poetry and letters. Yet Egan shows that Su Shih was himself ambivalent toward aesthetic pursuits and not a single-minded champion of an alternative literary lifestyle. The discrepancies between the different genres in which Su Shih excelled suggest to Egan that we would be ill-advised to try to see a single pervasive unity in all facets of Su's life. Instead, Egan, ever cautious, prefers a portrait of a complex man whose intellectual development changed and was redirected by his political experiences and years in exile.

Similarly, Egan keeps his distance from Bol's inclusive cultural definition of *wen* during the Northern Sung and favors instead a more nuanced understanding of the different meanings of *wen* as prose writing, public writing in general (*wen-tzu*), or private writing (*wen-chang*). Egan fears that an all-inclusive term like *wen* too easily leads to assuming a unity of intent and purpose in Su Shih's writings that is simply not there. Egan prefers to leave Su Shih a complicated and contradictory man who is best approached using a multidimensional set of lenses, each carefully modulated according to the historical setting and literary genre in which Su Shih wrote. What unifies Su Shih's life, one gathers from Egan's account, is his cultural accomplishment in the face of political failure. Each genre he chose presented Su with different challenges and new issues. As

an artist and writer he reacted to his frustrations and alienation in a variety of ways, and in each form he chose he managed to leave a record for posterity that challenged the monolithic Confucian orthodoxies that followed him. If Ch'eng-Chu moral philosophy was triumphant after the Sung dynasties, it is also clear that literary and artistic creation remained important thereafter for the cultured literatus (*wen-jen*).

Egan has done us a great service by reminding us that Su Shih was seminal in creating the ideal that emerged during the later Ming and Ch'ing dynasties of the Confucian artist and writer. Unless we can fully appreciate the Confucian ardor for *wen*, we will never really understand why literature has loomed so large in the two stages of the twentieth-century Chinese cultural revolution. Egan's present study of Su Shih and his earlier book on Ou-yang Hsiu⁵ reveal the expertise of a classicist simultaneously conversant with the literary and historical issues of the Northern Sung dynasty. While it has become increasingly popular for students of Chinese cultural history to turn to interpretive approaches to literary texts and cultural artifacts, Bol's and Egan's books show that there is still no substitute for linguistic competence and philological expertise in reading, translating, and analyzing difficult Chinese texts in classical Chinese.

Unlike Europe, where the vernacular triumphed over Latin several centuries ago, China preserved classical Chinese into the twentieth century as the lingua franca of elite culture. Although classical Chinese is difficult, Bol and Egan have thorough mastery of their T'ang-Sung texts. The close textual readings that Bol and Egan employ in their studies may be out of favor for the present. But with the almost complete and probably premature worldwide demise of Marxist-style socio-economic history in the late twentieth century, many social historians of late imperial China have rushed (perhaps too rapidly?) to the so-called "new cultural history." In order to be taken seriously, these scholars still have to reveal their "cultural literacy" in premodern sources by demonstrating their ability to use the linguistic tools that Bol and Egan have mastered so well.

⁵ Egan, *The Literary Works of Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-72)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Bol's and Egan's books are thus indispensable models for training graduate students who too often hastily fly over texts and read them using the most fashionable intellectual lenses—whether postmodern or subalternist—without first carefully walking through them.

Readers who are sympathetic to the idea that literature is a depository of intellectual and philosophical values (as we all should be) will especially appreciate Bol's and Egan's restoration of Su Shih to the forefront of Northern Sung intellectual history. Many contemporary Confucian specialists in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and now Singapore (and many of their Western counterparts, with some notable exceptions such as Charles Hartman) have underestimated the acute aesthetic sensibilities toward literature, art, and calligraphy that Confucian literati had before 1900. Instead, we have generally been presented with a series of ahistorical accounts of an idealized Ch'eng-Chu philosophy dominant in East Asia since the Sung dynasties. These accounts generally do not acknowledge how stale philosophically and tendentious morally Neo-Confucian philosophy became over the centuries, subject as it was to rote memorization in China, Korea, and Vietnam by countless millions of young male examination candidates since 1400. In Su Shih we find a Confucian voice whose poetry and prose communicated fundamental human emotions and artistic sentiments, which *Tao-hsueh* moralists such as Ch'eng I and Chu Hsi, eyes ever toward heaven and the *Tao*, sought to redirect toward transcendental reflection. The sagely *Tao-hsueh* literatus and the worldly poet and cultural critic thus represent two important poles in the Northern Sung intellectual landscape, a landscape in which the Wang An-shih political reformers occupied the political center, which guaranteed the latter political, economic, and cultural influence until 1126.

These intellectual and cultural realities had been lost in a post-World-War-II generation of Sung philosophical studies that uncritically accepted a dubious black box called "Sung Neo-Confucianism" to explain all aspects of Sung and Yuan-Ming-Ch'ing Confucian moral philosophy, literary production, philological study, and statecraft thought. By advancing Buddhist-inspired *Tao-hsueh* "studies of the mind-heart" (i.e., *hsin-hsueh*) as the highest cultural "truth" in Confucianism, many postwar scholars of China's "high culture" successfully shunted men like Wang

An-shih and Su Shih, in particular, to the historical sidelines. The flawed but still useful studies produced by these scholars of Neo-Confucianism, whose personal moral tastes invariably favored Ch'eng-Chu *li-hsueh* (studies of principle), are now being supplanted by historically nuanced and intellectually balanced, ateleological accounts of Northern and Southern Sung Confucian literati. Peter Bol's and Ronald Egan's books reviewed here exemplify that trend.⁶

Bol in particular reminds us that intellectually the Northern Sung was not merely a preliminary act to the Southern Sung virtuoso performance of Chu Hsi. Likewise, one of the great strengths of Egan's meticulous account of Su Shih's life is his recovery of the pre-Neo-Confucian face of Northern Sung Confucianism, a face whose features were wrought by the long-despised Wang An-shih and his champions. Wang An-shih's centrality to the last fifty years of the Northern Sung dynasty defined the life of Su Shih and other Wang An-shih opponents, such as Ch'eng I, who remained on the periphery except for brief moments of prominence in the Sung court.

From Bol's and Egan's well-crafted studies we learn that upon its inception the Northern Sung dynasty was a time of unprecedented wealth and stability, which initially permitted fundamental rethinking of Chinese social, political, economic, and cultural life. The diversity of ideas and programs in the eleventh century eventually gave way to a profound sense of institutional failure and personal betrayal. Picking up the dynastic pieces in imperial Hangchow after the tragic fall of Kaifeng to the Jurchen, the Southern Sung court and its competing literati groups produced for the first time a unified ethical-philosophical orthodoxy that transcended the dynasty's many failures and successfully countered Mongol efforts to promote Ch'eng-Chu *Tao-hsueh* orthodoxy in North China. From the slow but steady apotheosis of the Sung dynasties emerged the *raison d'être* for a late imperial *Tao-hsueh* movement among literati that successfully defended a Sung-inspired, transcendental Ch'eng-Chu moral orthodoxy under the Mongol Yuan, Chinese Ming, and Manchu Ch'ing dynasties.

⁶ See my review of *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy*, by Tillman in *HJAS* 54.2 (1994): 575-86. See also my review of *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary and John Chaffee, entitled "Education in Sung China," in *JAOSS* 111.1 (1991): 83-93.