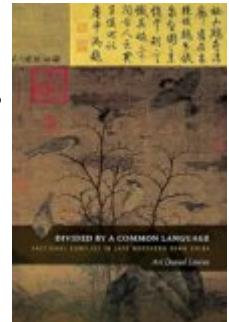


Ari Daniel Levine. *Divided by a Common Language: Factional Conflict in Late Northern Song China.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009. 273 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-3266-7.



Reviewed by Eva Goldschmidt

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Ari Daniel Levine analyzes the linguistic rules that were applied and had to be adhered to by faction theorists and factional rhetoricians in Song China. His analysis is based on a broad and deep reading of a wide array of edicts, memorials, and essays, and provides a very detailed insight into the ideological and institutional causes of factional conflict during the Late Northern Song period (1067-1104) in the context of the decay of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127). In addition, in the first six chapters of his book, Levine elucidates how these debates altered the political culture and climate at the imperial court in Kaifeng. In the last, the seventh chapter, he gives a cursory survey on how factionalists were regarded and treated by the following dynasties and in modern China.

In his introductory chapter, Levine introduces readers to the reign of Emperor Shenzong (r. 1067-85), during which court officials engaged in factional infighting to advance their preferred candidates for office and implement their polities. The emperor remained the ultimate arbiter be-

tween a still diverse spectrum of political ideas. With the onset of Shenzong's reign, Wang Anshi's chancellorship, and the dominance of leading politicians and intellectuals of the reforming party the situation changed dramatically. The emperor became a political ally or guardian of one loosely associated political group of ministers with executive powers.

In chapters 2 and 3, Levine explains the linguistic roots of the rhetoric of factionalism and how the specific vocabulary was applied to describe relationships between the ruler and his ministers. As in a classical poem, the terms "faction" and "factionalism" had to be defined in accordance with specific linguistically determined patterns. These patterns were sought and found in particular standard works of the Confucian tradition: *The Narratives of Zuo*, *The Book of Documents*, *The Analects*, and to a lesser extent the *Book of Changes*. All Late Northern Song political rhetoricians were well versed in the classical canon and very skilled at arbitrarily stitching together linguistic tropes to support their argument

that only vertical alliances between the ruler and a unified bloc of like-minded ministers could save the current ruling house. From Wang Anshi and Sima Guang to Su Shi and Qin Guan, all composed essays on factionalism and demanded that the ruler should again become an independent-minded and enlightened arbiter of men, capable of distinguishing between “petty men” and “superior men.”

A very meticulous examination of the rhetoric of the later antireform movement led by Sima Guang proves Levine’s hypothesis that both political blocs applied the same rhetoric. The many quotations from edicts and memorials submitted by the antireform group are hardly distinguishable from the ones of the rivaling bloc. Although the rhetoric remained at the same elevated level, the practical implementation of politics changed. Political adversaries were exiled into the malaria-infested South, and later they appeared on blacklists. The last chapter spans the historical arc from the onset of Southern Song dynasty’s usage of the term “faction” to the modern Anglo-Japanese translation of it.

The book is an almost clinical dissection of Late Northern Song political rhetoric and political factionalism. There are only a few references to the most aggravating external factors, i.e., the surplus of examination candidates, a fragile and costly peace at the northern borders, and a state budget chronically in deficit, which help to explain why the tone of the debates and the means of dealing with political adversaries became increasingly harsh. The closing chapter 7 is an interesting but hurried overview of subsequent historiography and is not of the quality of the previous six chapters.

Divided by a Common Language is one of a few very detailed and very carefully documented and researched studies that focus exclusively on political rhetoric. The book and its extensive literature list make a pleasurable read and will be an academic asset for postgraduate students and

scholars of political rhetoric in imperial China in general and the Song dynasty in particular.

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