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**The Political Economy or the Politics of the Void?:  
The Question of Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan via Giorgio Agamben**

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“The void is the sovereign figure of glory.” (Agamben  
2011: 245)

**I**

Agamben’s analysis of the concept of “void” in the governmental machine in the West, developed in his recent book *Kingdom and Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, triggered my interest and curiosity. Agamben traced the elaborations of the Trinitarian doctrine between the second and fifth centuries AD, and demonstrated how the empty space represented by *hetoimasia tou thronou*, the empty throne, was in fact the most significant symbol of power situated at the center of the governmental machine in the West. Even contemporary democratic regimes, according to Agamben, testified the integration of *oikonomia* and Glory at the center of the government by consent through the practice of the acclamative form of public opinion and consensus.

*The empty throne is not, therefore, a symbol of regality but of glory. Glory precedes the creation of the world and survives its end. The throne is empty not only because glory, though coinciding with the divine essence, is not identified with it, but also because it is in its innermost self-inoperativity and sabbatism. The void is the sovereign figure of glory. (245)*

In Agamben’s analysis, the majesty of the empty throne in fact linked the

contradiction between immanent trinity and economy trinity. The apparatus of the *oikonomia* therefore served as the articulation of the double structure between ceremonial regality and effective management, and captured within the governmental machine the “unthinkable inoperativity—making it its internal motor—that constitutes the ultimate mystery of divinity.” (*Kingdom* xxii-xxiii, 245)

What I find interesting in Agamben’s discussion of *hetoimasia tou thronou* is not the obvious theological rationale or rhetoric in Western political theories and governmental practices, but the link between the notion of economy and the void. Agamben’s study of the void and the empty space in the governmental machine in the West reminded me of the similar discursive trope of nothingness or emptiness (*wu* 無, *kung* 空) formulated by the Kyoto school. The concept of “nothingness” (*wu* 無) or “emptiness” (*kung* 空) elaborated by the Kyoto school, such as Nishida Kitaro’s logic of *basho* as absolute non-dualistic place or *topos* of nothingness, or Nishitani Keiji’s concept of *sunyata* (zero, emptiness or nothingness 空, 無) and his proposal of the “standpoint of emptiness” (空の立場), have been debated constantly.<sup>1</sup> The trajectory from Nishida’s comment on the contrast between the East and West, referring to the East as conceived with the ground of nothingness while the West with the ground of reality, to Miki Kiyoshi’s pro-war statements basing on the philosophy of nothingness in 1940, is a highly problematic and controversial philosophical issue. The figuration of *Tōyō* (とうよう 東洋 the Orient) as the *topos* of nothingness (東洋無) seemed to indicate the non-substantial and non-possessive quality of Japanese or the Oriental culture. But, in fact, this figure of nothingness functioned in the discourse of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere as a seductive and mystic center of the void that invited different parties of East Asian area to

1. The political orientation of the Kyoto school during the second world war continuously attracted debates whether the philosophers of nothingness served the political purpose of the empire or not. See for example, David Williams’s *Defending Japan’s Pacific War: The Kyoto School Philosophers and Post-White Power*, Christopher S. Goto-Jones’s *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School, and Co-Prosperity*, Curtis Rigsby’s “Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School.” John C. Maraldo’s “The War Over the Kyoto School,” John Namjun Kim’s “On the Brink of Universality: German Cosmopolitanism in Japanese Imperialism.”

identify with the immanent essence and form an integral whole. The discursive political economy of the void popular in the writings of the philosophers of the Tokyo school, as well as in the war-time *Kominka* propaganda in Taiwan to become the non-I subject in order to serve the nation (奉公無私), forced me to think the stake involved in the notion of “the place of emptiness” or “empty seat” with regards to the question of the governmentality of the subject in relation to the state.<sup>2</sup>

I do not intend to go into the debates of the complex issue related to the Kyoto school, but I do want to suggest that in the discourse of the fetishized void, either as the empty place or the *topos* of nothingness, the phrase “void” is treated as the token, like any shifters in linguistic apparatus, to be arranged and exchanged in the discursive economy, functions differently according to the contextual symbolic network and addresses to different subjective positions in response to particular object imbedded in the particular symbolic others. The phrase “void” then has to be read against its contextual and semiotic framework. By examining various discursive formulations of the void, or the political economy of the void in the discursive mode, we would be able to detect the loophole that might exist in different governmental machines of today.

I also want to bring in the discourse of *xin* through the trope of the void formulated by two Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing enlightenment movement, Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan, into our perspective. *Xin*, as a compound concept in Chinese, indicates the immanence of life, including the activities of the mind, the will, the affect and the spirit. Both Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan, in the wave of the enlightenment movement, appropriated the notion of the void in their discursive formation of the concept of *xin* and that of the nation. Putting Liang Qichao’s and Zhang Taiyan’s discourse of the void back to the context means to situate them in the historical moment of the Chinese

2. I have discussed elsewhere how the notion of the Non-I (*wuwo* 無我) and serving the public (*fenggong* 奉公) in the name of the Japanese spirit (*Yamato-gokoro*, *yamato tamashii*), though a popular slogan in the discourse of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere (大東亞共榮圈) promoted by the Japanese colonial government, turned out to be the mode of subjectivation for the Taiwanese “Imperial Subject” during the *Kominka* movement in 1930s and 1940s. See my article “Immanentism, Double-abjection and the Politics of Psyche in (Post) Colonial Taiwan,” *Positions: east asia cultures critique*. Volume 17 Issue 2 (2009 Fall): 261-288.

revolution at the birth of the new nation-state. By doing so, it would allow us to grasp a more accurate understanding of the discursive function of the “void” in Zhang Taiyan’s thoughts and the notion of the “inoperativeness” in his contemporary horizon.

The aim of this paper therefore is also to think the questions Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan raised at the turn of the twentieth century and the reasons why their questions are of relevance to what Agamben dealt with a century later. A series of related questions are: Why was the discourse of political economy the operative logic in Liang Qichao’s discursive formation of a new nation state and a new people at the end of the nineteenth century? Whether Zhang Taiyan’s proposal of the “place of emptiness” and “the empty seat” in his vision of the nation and the state echoed or differed from the logic of the *Hetoimasia tou thronou* as discussed by Agamben and the “absolute nothingness” or “Oriental Nothingness” advocated by the Kyoto school? To answer these questions, we first need to discuss Agamben concept of the relation between economy and glory in the western governmental machine, and in what ways does it operate as well in the paradigm of the governmental machine in East Asia, particularly in the context of modern China.

## II

Economy is the key concept in Agamben’s study of governmentality in *Kingdom and Glory*. Challenging Carl Schmitt’s thesis of political theology, Agamben’s basic argument is that Christian theology, from the very beginning, is “economic- managerial, and not politico-statal,” and that this theo-economic paradigm explained the history of the close link between the political and economic-governmental traditions in the West (*Kingdom* 66). Agamben stressed that economy involved not the epistemic or a system of rules, nor a science, but a whole set of practices and activities of the management, administration and arrangement [disposizione]. As a contrast to *polis* that concerns the affairs of the city-state, *Oikos* designates the affairs of the “household,” the smallest social unit, a complex organism composed of heterogeneous relations, including masters and slaves, parent and children, husband and wife. Derived from

the Latin word *oikonomia* and the Greek word *οικονόμος*, economy indicates the activities of partition, order, organization and execution of the cares and the needs of the household (*Kingdom* 17-21). Concerning the blurred demarcation between *oikos* and *polis*, Agamben wrote in *Homo Sacer*, “once it crosses over the walls of the *oikos* and penetrates more and more deeply into the city, the foundation of sovereignty—nonpolitical life—is immediately transformed into a line that must be constantly redrawn.” (*Homo Sacer* 131) Whether and how the line is redrawn in various historical and political contexts would be the question to be investigated.

Agamben’s analysis draws our attention to the ambiguous separation/link between *oikia* and *polis* at the core of the apparatus of governmentality. The “political economy” emerged since the 18<sup>th</sup> century already testified the fact that the study of the activities of economic and its production and exchange, in other words, the administration and management of the order of things, were defined within the domain of the *polis* for the interest of the State, no matter whether it is the neoliberal state, the national socialist state, the totalitarian state or the democratic state. The superimposition of the one over the other makes the logic of the city-state penetrate into the private domain; likewise, the logic of the private household management, with its master-slave hierarchical order and its self-serving rationalization, also easily supersedes the governing principle of the public domain as soon as one holds the power over the state. Agamben wrote, “the paradigm of government and of the state of exception coincide in the idea of an *oikonomia*, an administrative praxis that governs the course of things, adapting at each turn, in its salvific intent, to the nature of the concrete situation against which it has to measure itself.” (*Kingdom* 50) The sovereign act of the drawing, administration and rationalization of the line of separation/link between *oikia* and *polis*, from the ownership of property, taxation, civic and military service, education policy, the control of population, to the management of bare life, would then be the object of the governmental machine.

The close link between the domain of *oikia* and that of *polis* goes even deeper and much earlier. Agamben pointed out that it was first in a passage from *On Joseph* by Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE – 50 CE) in which the Aristotelian opposition between *oikos* and *polis* became

obscured: *oikia* was defined by Philo as “a *polis* on a small and contracted scale” and economy as “a contracted *politeia*,” while the *polis* presented as “a large house [*oikos megas*] and politics as “a common economy [*koine tis oikonomia*]” (*Kingdom* 24). Hippolytus (170-235) and Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225) further elaborated the technical notion of *oikonomia* basing on the Trinitarian articulation of divine life. The Pauline phrase “the economy of the mystery” was literally reversed in Tertullian as “the mystery of the economy.” Trinity was no longer the articulation of the divine being, but of its praxis. Thus, Agamben explained, through the nexus that links economy and monarchy, “the divine monarchy now constitutively entails an economy, a governmental apparatus, which articulates and, at the same time, reveals its mystery” (*Kingdom* 41-43).

The introduction of the concept of trinity into the practice of economy, with the anarchic foundation as its *arkhe*, requires our further attention. According to Agamben, the fundamental nexus that links the two poles between God and his government of the world is the *anarchos*. The fracture between being and action, ontology and praxis, essence and will, not only points to the secret dualism that the doctrine of the *oikonomia* introduced into Christianity, but also to the notion of the void. This notion of the void is a tricky question. Agamben suggested that God, as the immovable mover at the center, is the void, the unthinkable inoperativity, which governs the bipolar system of the Western governmental machine and culminates in the figure of the *hetoimasia tou thronou*, the symbol of Glory and the seat of rationality (*Kingdom* 53-65). This empty space then is the place that could be occupied by any abstract notions and ideational concepts on which hierarchical power and social relations are established. The transcendental norm of the kingdom here parallels the immanent order that governs the state.

In the case of economic trinity elaborated by Hippolytus and Tertullian, as Agamben demonstrated, the paradigm of the act of government was no longer the manifestation of God’s being, but the mysterious administration of the world, involving the calculation and partition of power and its exclusion. Derived from Agamben’s analysis and from what we have observed in the course of history, we could also say that the notion of the empty but prepared throne and its unquestionable glory reverberated not only in various forms of Western governmental

machine but also in Asian governmental regimes. The unquestionable logic at the center of the governmental machine then is the vanishing point that governs the regime of the visible and even the regime of the sensible, as what Foucault and Rancière respectively analyzed that operates as an autonomous apparatus and permeates in our consciousness in an unconscious process.

Alberto Toscano challenged severely the historical substantialism masked under Agamben's archaeology of theological economy in his *Kingdom and Glory*; he also critiqued the absence of the distinction between the two forms of economic, that is, trading by barter and chrematistic through the accumulation of money analyzed by Aristotle and discussed by Marx in the *Capital*. Toscano pointed out that by transgressing the natural order of needs and positing a limitless accumulation of wealth, chrematistics presaged the principle of capitalism and should be the real political question for the present. Neither capitalism nor Marx's theory, suggested Toscano, can be encompassed by the notion of *oikonomia* and its genealogies, and therefore we cannot rely on Agamben, Toscano insisted, for a truly radical and total critique of contemporary politics and economics (Toscano 130-132).

Toscano might be right with Agamben's lack of attention to the question of chrematistic, but he seemed to be intentionally ignoring Agamben's analysis on the apparatus of the abstraction of values established through language that was instituted by law [*nomos*], that is, the separation and management of life that constituted the domination over social relations that Marx was so concerned with in his study of the abstraction and the fetishism of value-form and the logic of capitalism. For Agamben, it is the regime of discursive cut and separation that is operative in the economy and management of things.

"The regime of cut" in the Lacanian-Badiouian sense, to me, explains the problem of metaphysics and the logic of separation and exception studied by Agamben. The law of separation and partition is inscribed in *logos*, and the economy and management of things is based on this law. Every separation contains or preserves within itself a sacred and unquestionable core and language is the mediation that exercises the operation of the separation. The concept of scission, either it is the *coupure de sujet* in Lacan, the *coupe d'essence* in Althusser, the regime of cut

and the *effet de cisaille* (shearing effect) in Badiou, the *écart* and the *part des sans-part* in Rancière, addresses the issue of ideational operation of separation activated through language.<sup>3</sup> The split and separation takes different forms in different socio-political contexts at different historical junctures. Agamben's inquiries into the logic of inclusion and exclusion, separation and exception, the gap between phones versus logos, the biopolitical fractures stipulated among people, all point to the economy and *dispositif* of the sacramentalized language and the legitimization of History that effaces all pre-histories. To disentangle the naturalized and justified bondage established by the law of language is to put the metaphysical and ideational cut and separation in question, and to think the possibility to dis-articulate the link constituted by the cut so that the future can come.

Referring to Agamben's recourse to Saussure, Kevin Attell suggested that the deepest paradox of language for Agamben resided in the bar itself, "this abyssal void or bar" at the center, the bar between "the presupposition of the fact of language and signification taking place" and "the possibility of the contrary" (Attell 835-6). The barrier executed as the act of separation at any historical moment was the moment on which the law was established and the line was drawn. Agamben's work of archaeology was exactly to study the modalities, circumstances and moments in which the split took place, and how it was constituted as the origin of the narrative of History (*Signature* 103).

To Agamben, the inoperativity at the center of the governmental machine in the West, with "the secret theological nexus that links it to government and providence," is the key to all questions (*Kingdom* 64-65). The problem is apparently not inoperativity as such, but its capture in the apparatus of glory while the empty throne is merely the mask of the void. The question then would be the discursive technique of the administration and the management of the void with which the governmental machine

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3. For Lacan's *coupure de sujet, la coupure du désir, la fonction de la coupure*, see his *Seminar XI*, pp. 29, 188, 215; for Althusser's *coupe d'essence*, see *Reading the Capital*, p. 98; for Badiou's regime of the cut, see Badiou's *Logics of the Worlds*, p. 480, for *effet de cisaille*, see *Logic* p. 479; for *horlieu* (outplace), see Badiou's *Theory of the Subject* 8-12, 32-36; for Rancière's *écart* and the *part des sans-part* in *La mésentente* 20-31, 71-72.



functions or malfunctions. The apparatus of governmentality imposed by law would even make the sovereign state of exception a space devoid of law, a juridical void or non-lieu, “a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations—and above all the very distinction between public and private—are deactivated.” (*State* 50) The chaotic and lawless conditions in the martial law period, the state of exception, of different historical moments presented us one extreme form among various forms of the governmental void at the center. An awareness of “the secret theological nexus that links it to government and providence,” Agamben suggested, would be the first step to think an “ungovernable,” beyond government and anarchy, beyond the economy and beyond glory, that is, something that could never assume the form of an *oikonomia*.

Agamben’s study of the genealogy of Western governmental paradigm, therefore, was to unravel how the mystery of the void at the center has assumed the mask of glory and even continued to appear as the contemporary government of consensus in the liberalist democratic system. However, life *per se* is what, as Agamben stated, “opens itself as a central inoperativity in every operation, like the live-ability of every life,” and “the life which contemplates its own power to act renders itself inoperative in all its operations, and lives only its livability.” (*Kingdom* 250-251) Agamben’s task in this sense is to propose to profane and challenge the law that separates life from itself and to restore the live-ability of every life in itself. In Agamben’s studies, therefore, the distribution and the management of power through language made the community a commensurate one, calculated and counted entirely, without residues. Religion exercised the first power of separation, and to profane means to challenge the line of separation and to restore life that is not separated from its form, a life in which “the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities of life, always and above all power.*” (*Profanations* 75; *Means without End* 3-4)

The operational apparatus of the management of things and all aspects of life, in the name of the unquestionable rational kernel and under the guise of the glory of the empty throne, is indeed the question we need to face in front of all various forms of contemporary governmental paradigm. Only when we became aware of the separation of life from its possibilities and potentials, the restriction of life by arbitrary and naturalized biological

concept of life, the heterogeneous pre-histories that had been suppressed by History, then could we begin to deactivate the apparatuses of power.

### III

Western governmental paradigms were introduced into modern China at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, along with a large corpus of the translations of Western knowledge that were published as enlightenment pamphlets, articles appeared in popular newspapers and magazines, and textbooks for different levels of school education. Missionaries from abroad as well as Chinese intellectuals who participated in the intellectual movement of enlightenment translated various branches of new knowledge, including physics, chemistry, mathematics, astrology, geography, as well as social sciences, such as sociology, economy, psychology, education and political science. Among these branches of new knowledge, the texts that dealt with the techniques of governmentality were most welcomed by Chinese intellectuals, for example, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*, Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, and so on. In the massive discourse of enlightenment, that is, the building a new nation and the molding a new people, we observed the emergence of a particular mode of political economy disguised with Confucian ethical phraseology. I call this production of knowledge a process of double-translation through intellectual syncretism: the writer translated and appropriated heterogeneous disciplinary concepts from another language to respond to the questions and demands of his time and his worldview. By using traditional Chinese phraseology or newly coined Chinese terms, adapting or altering the Japanese translated texts, these phrases were inscribed and overlaid with mixed references. Western semiotic networks and traditional Chinese semiotic networks were merged in one figure.

Chinese intellectuals of the enlightenment movement embraced certain highly invested terms such as nation, people, patriotism, democracy, constitution and government. But, the translation of these terms created complex questions. Nation, for example, was variously translated as

*guomin* (國民national people), *guojia* (國家state) or *minzu* (民族ethnic people), while patriotism was translated as *aiguoxin* (愛國心) or *baoguo* (報國), connoting the loving of the country with the Confucian sense of duty to repay the country.<sup>4</sup> These terms are like the “shifters,” analyzed by Jacques Lacan in his discussion of Émile Benvenist, that carried double meanings, both as statement that seemingly refers to the signified object, but in fact functions as an act of enunciation that refers back to the subject position (Lacan, *Seminar XI* 136-142). We need to conceive the complex processes of double translation and double appropriation as the operations of the shifters with different signifying structures and subjective positions, one epistemic system superimposing over the other. The process of double translation at the turn of the twentieth century in China indicated a time of drastic paradigm shift, the complex alteration of the epistemology behind the discursive formations related to the changing relational networks of social life as discussed by Agamben (*Signature* 9-11, 31-32).

Liang Qichao's essay “On the New People” (*xinminshuo* 新民說) (1902), as a symptomatic text, demonstrated perfectly the discursive bridge between utilitarian political economy with Confucian ethics and illustrated for us the discursive intellectual syncretism particular of his age. The rhetoric Liang employed was exactly the political economy of the concept of the void, but his argument was to move from the nothingness (無), the not-having or the lack, to the *there is* (有), that is, something to be. In Liang's discourse of the “new people” (新民), his definition of the “new” is not only to stimulate and renew something that already existed, but also to take and implement something that one originally did not have.<sup>5</sup> Since there were only common people of the local district, but “no national people” (無國民) in China, Liang proposed that the first urgent task (第一急務) for China today was to summon up the “new people” for the new

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4. In a recent conference on the modern Japanese political philosophy and the rise of nationalism in East Asian countries, the question of the translation of “nation” has been raised by scholars such as 渡邊浩 and 松田宏一郎. 渡邊浩 “Nation, Democracy, Freedom: the Case of Japan” 松田宏一郎 “Patriotism and Nationalism: the Design of 偏頗心”. International Conference on modern Japanese political philosophy and the rise of nationalism in East Asia.” Taipei. May 31, 2013.

5. 淬厲其所本有而新之，採補其所本無而新之。

nation.<sup>6</sup> In his argumentation and persuasion, nation was described as a corporation—*gongsi* (公司) and the imperial court as the administrative office—*shiwusuo* (事務所). Liang encouraged the new people to fight not only for their “self-interest” (*lijì* 利己) but also for the “real self-interest” (*zhenlijì* 真利己); so-called “real self-interest” was defined in terms of the “group” (*qun* 群), that is, in Liang’s framework, the nation-state (*guojia* 國家). Everyone was expected to serve the nation first so that he could secure his own interests in the long run. Liang delivered a strong argument that it was necessary to build up the nation-state in order to achieve the goal of civilization. Liang even analyzed the modes of production according to the interest of the nation-state and prescribed that, in order to produce and maintain the interests (生利) of the nation-state, it was essential to demand the force of production from the people. The force of production were respectively identified by Liang as physical force (*tìlì* 體力), intellectual force (*zhìlì* 智力) and moral force (*délì* 德力). Education and cultivation therefore were necessary techniques to enhance the productive force (殖產之術) for the nation so that the total capital and total labor (總資本總勞力) of the nation-state could be increased. To make sure that people take production as each individual’s responsibility, Liang even stressed that people should be educated so that they would feel “ashamed” for being the one who only consume but cannot produce (恥為分利者) (Liang, *On the New People*, 696-702).

In Liang’s formulation, all aspects of a person’s life, not only his physical capacity, but also his social morality (公德), such as perseverance (毅力), self-esteem (自尊), progressiveness (進取), duties for the group (合群), and martial spirit (尚武), are to be the objects of management and administration by the nation.<sup>7</sup> Liang Qichao’s essay on the “New People” symptomatically demonstrated exactly how the national subject

6. 吾中國有部民而無國民。新民為今日中國第一急務。

7. Liang Qichao’s debt to Japanese intellectuals, especially Tokutomi Soho (德富蘇峰), was obvious. Liang had translated and even copied Tokutomi’s essays in the news magazine, the *Kokumin no Tomo* (國民之友) and *Kokumin shimbun* (國民新聞) as his own essays published in the news magazine that he established during his stay in Japan after the Hundred Day Reform. See my discussion of this case in my paper “The count of psyche: The birth of biopolitics and ethico-economic in early modern China” and chapter two of my book *The Topology of Psyche: Post-1895 Reconstruction of Ethics*.

could be discursively constructed in the way that the *bio* (life) and the ethics of the individuals were formulated for the political economy, that is, the management of all things for the State. Here, the law of the state has superseded over all aspects of a person's life because life has become the target of political economy for the best interest of the state.

There are several clues for us to explain this obvious mode of political economy in Liang Qichao's essay "On the New People". For one thing, Liang and his contemporaries had been acquainted with an obscure writer John Hill Burton's *Chambers's Educational Course: Political Economy*, one of the textbooks for the Scottish enlightenment movement. John Fryer's (傅蘭雅) translated Burton's *Political Economy* into Chinese in 1886 as *Zuozhi Chuyan* (佐治芻言), literally meaning "some suggestions for the assistance of governing." Furthermore, Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉), the most famous Japanese enlightenment intellectual at the time, also translated John Burton's *Political Economy*. In his trip to London in early 1860s, Fukuzawa Yukichi made acquaintance with the Chambers brothers and was recommended to read Burton's book. After he returned to Japan, Fukuzawa Yukichi started to teach political economy during 1867-1870 and also translated Burton's book into Japanese as *Seiyo Jijo* (*Things Western* 西洋事情). The same logic of political economy was reverberated in Fukuzawa's even more famous and influential book *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (*Outline of a theory of civilization*, 文明論概略) (1875) that was widely read and studied by Chinese intellectuals.<sup>8</sup> These texts and several hundreds of books of enlightenment knowledge echoed similar formulations of the distinction between civilization and barbarianism (文野之別), the necessity for the wealth of nation (國富論), the civic service to the nation (群己權界論), the national subject's duty in

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8. John Hill Burton's *Chambers's Educational Course: Political Economy for Use in Schools, and for Private Instruction* is one of the educational textbook series published by the Edingburgh W. & R. Chambers. Apparently Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei had read John Fryer's translation of Burton's *Political Economy* before they fled to Japan. For the discussion of the circulation of John Hill Burton's text in East Asia, see *Western Economics in Japan: the Early Years* edited by Hiroshi Mizuta, Albert M. Craig's "John Hill Burton and Fukuzawa Yukichi", Paul B. Trescott's "Scottish political economy comes to the Far East: the Burton-Chambers Political Economy and the introduction of Western economic ideas into Japan and China."

the production line (生利), as well as labor division and cooperation for the optimal benefit. Liang Qichao and his contemporaries consequently became familiar with the argument that followed not only the Benthamian utilitarian rationale, but also the other resources taken as enlightenment knowledge, such as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and many other like-minded thinkers.

One aspect of the logic of governing suggested by the liberalists is to promote the concept of liberty and democracy, and to stress the principle of not forcing people to serve the state, but of inducing people. Just as what John Burton explicated in his book: “Political economy ... is not a system for controlling men’s actions, but for discovering how men are induced by their natural propensities to act.” (Burton, *Political Economy* 49) In order not to control, but to coerce and to ignite the inherent capacity and aspiration in each individual, be it intellectual or moral, the cultivation from the inside is of supreme importance, so that the individual would be willing to serve the country out of free will. Liang’s argumentations, though in the mode of reasoning following utilitarian political economy, effectively and persuasively resonated in the Chinese readers’ cultural memories because he appropriated a large amount of classical Confucian ethical teachings from various texts. The logic of governmentality hidden in the utilitarian political economy was then in tune with the call for a virtuous and ethical subject in the Confucian sense for the interest and the service of the nation.

Besides the liberalist mode of political economy and the techniques of governmentality advocated in John Burtun’s book, we also need to take note of the fact that Liang Qichao’s intimate intellectual affinity with Tokutomi Soho (德富蘇峰) indicated the particular nationalist political economy in the name of a greater Asia as a transnational empire.<sup>9</sup> Liang had translated and even copied Tokutomi’s essays in the news magazine, the *Kokumin no Tomo* (國民之友) and *Kokumin shimbun* (國民新聞), as his own writings and published them in the magazines that he established

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9. 已有多人指出梁啟超的文學革命以及散文風格直接受到德富蘇峰的影響，可見王汎森，《中國近代思想與學術的系譜》（台北：聯經出版社，2003），頁205；馮自由，《革命逸史》（臺北：商務書局，1978），頁 269-271；梅家玲，〈發現少年，想像中國：梁啟超〈少年中國說〉的現代性、啟蒙論述與國族想像〉，《漢學研究》2001年19卷 1 期，頁249-276。

during his stay in Japan. We have detected obvious close resemblance of Liang's *Shaonian Zhongguo Shuo* (〈少年中國說〉) with Tokutomi Soho's *Youth of New Japan* (新日本の青年), Liang's "guomin shida yuanqi lun" (國民十大元氣論) with Tokutomi Soho's discussion of the spirit of civilization, Liang's "wuming zhi yingxiong" (無名之英雄) with Tokutomi Soho's opinion on anonymous heroes, Liang's analysis of the competitiveness of modern nations (論近世國民競爭之大勢及中國前途) with Tokutomi Soho's analysis in his book *Japan in the Future* (將來的日本).<sup>10</sup> Liang even called himself "Chinese Tokutomi Soh" (*zhongguo de defusufeng* 中國的德富蘇峰) without being aware of the fact that Tokutomi Soho was the one who preached the importance and necessity of the expansion of greater Japan in Asia (大日本膨脹論), published in 1894, a precursor of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperous Sphere during the pacific war. *The Expansion of Greater Japan* written by Tokutomi Soho's and a similar book *How Japan Expanded in Asia* (日本膨脹論), published in 1916 by Tokutomi Soho's friend Goto Sinpei (後藤新平), the head of civilian affairs of Taiwan under Japanese colonial rule and the first director of the South Manchuria Railway, were all strategic elaborations of the nationalist political economy concerning how to include Taiwan, Manchuria and Korea in the domain of the greater Japan so that the resources produced there could serve the purpose of the use for Japan. Tokutomi Soh also lessoned on the importance of the spirit of empire that every Japanese citizen should acquire.

The physiological conception of the state, with biological-evolutionist implications, was a dominant discourse since the Meiji Restoration. One typical example that could illustrate such discursive outlook was the translation of Gustav Adolph Constantin Frantz's *Physiologie der Staaten* (physiology of the State 國家生理學) into Japan in 1884.<sup>11</sup> The Meiji

10. See my discussion of this case in my paper "The count of psyche: The birth of biopolitics and ethico-economic in early modern China" (Liu 2011a) and the second chapter of my book *The Topology of Psyche: Post-1895 Reconstruction of Ethics* (Liu 2011b).

11. *Physiologie der Staaten* was divided into two sections: the first part dealt with the sovereignty of the state; the second, the concept of the state. State sovereignty included the authority to govern, to legislate and operate courts, to control the military, to defend the country's borders; the concept of the state included territory, society, the people, sovereignty, the origin of the state, the relationship

Ministry of Education conducted the translation of this book, as in many other cases, and reflected the policies promoted by Ito Hirobumi (伊藤博文) and Mori Arinori (森有禮) for the modernization of Japanese education system. Frantz stated repeatedly in his book that the main concern of his writing was “political physiology” or “State physiology.” He treated the state as an organic body, similar to a plant or animal. If the circulation of the “fluids” within the body does not function smoothly, then the State would be weak. Furthermore, the internal organization of the State must be determined by the State’s purpose, just as the organic parts of an animal dominated by its head. The government is the principal organ charged with the task of achieving the goals of the State (Frantz, 179-180). Frantz’s notion of the physiology of the State was translated in the book as *Kokutai* (國體), literary national body, and worked well with the Japanese traditional notion of *Kokutai*. This biological and physiological conception of the state, and the relation of the individual to the state as cell in an organic body, imposed a certain law that binds the individual with the state. Fukuzawa Yukichi and Tokutomi Soh apparently shared such physiological conception of the state and the loyalty of the individual to the nation, as the bond between the cell and the body.

The same logic of political economy in the mode of physiological conception of the state explained Liang Qichao’s vision of the new people. Confucian ethics of *polis - oikos* and its familial hierarchical order thereby had superimposed over the discourse of the governmentality of the modern nation, infiltrated with the theological as well as physiological logic behind the governmental machine developed from the West. The individual’s moral attributes were to be measured, governed and managed for the benefit and the reason of the State. The ethical subject, just like the *homo oeconomicus* discussed by Marx as well as Foucault, was fundamentally maneuvered by the demand/want of the economic stage of the time and willingly transformed the demand/want into his or her own desires, duties and even meaning of life. The individual’s volunteering commitment, to exercise moral potential and to devote life to the service of the Nation

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between the state and popular customs, the basic nature and natural existence of the state, the purpose of the state. Gustav Adolph Constantin Frantz, “Die Naturlehre des Staates als Grundlage aller Staatswissenschaft” (Leipzig: Winter, 1870). This book developed out of „Physiologie der Staaten“ (1957).



State, with free will and autonomous consent, was made possible through Liang Qichao's rationalization and the formulation of the virtues of the new people, an ethico-politico-economic subject.

This rationale to obtain the maximum utility of people's productive force through their ethical subjectivation made them the most governable subject, just like the "eminently governable" liberalist economic subject discussed by Foucault in his study of *The Birth of Biopolitics*. The individual would pursue his own interest, but his interest has already been posited in the way that it would converge automatically with the interest of the state. In Foucault, *homo oeconomicus* is "someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment," and consequently "the correlate of a governmentality" (*Birth of Biopolitics* 270-271). Likewise, ethico-politico-economic new people in modern China are the adequately educated national subjects to the extent that they are in fact the most manageable and governable subjects, responsive to the governmental system that was in action. This ethico-politico-economic subject in its abstract, ideal and pure form is then the most governable subject, could be entirely counted, seized and defined by the rationality of the civic state, always in operation or ready to act, following the law propelled by the motor of the governmental machine. If the discursive modes of new ways of calculation and regulation have already infiltrated in the same texts that paved the way for the new space for civil society, and the individual in the society, a society in the making, a society that was invoked to rebel against the present government, was accounted for the rise of a new form of exclusive governmentality, how do we envision any form of resistance? In this mode of thinking, how can life maintain its living force or to resist the regime that regulates and constrains its path?

#### IV

To me, Zhang Taiyan's re-translation of Zhuangzi provided a rigorous ground for the critique of the constitution of the nation-state that was taking shape in China at the turn of the twentieth centuries. The process of double translation here is reversed as a double negative but creative

activity. Instead of the appropriation and discursive syncretism practiced by Liang Qichao, what Zhang Taiyan exercised here was his radical critique of the translatability of the nominal system while at the same time he put forth his singular interpretation of the state of affairs.

Zhang was one of the leading theorists among the revolutionary intellectuals that participated in the movement to overthrow the Qing Dynasty and to build up the Republic. Being a highly renowned and respected scholar who was erudite in classical Chinese thoughts and etymology, who even coined the term “zhong-hua-min-guo” (中華民國), the Republic of China, Zhang was often invited to serve in certain political positions, such as the chief editor for the activist newspaper *Min Bao* (民報) that strongly criticized the Qing Empire’s corruption, the chief-editor of the *Dagonghe Ribao* (大共和日報) associated with the Republic of China Alliance after Wuchang Uprising, Minister of the Guangzhou Generalissimo. But, because of his bold character as a critic, Zhang was also often in sharp disagreement and even open confrontation with contemporary intellectuals and political leaders, including Liang Qichao, Kang Youwei, Yan Fu, Yang Du, Sun Yat-sen, Yuan Shikai and Chiang Kai-shek. Qing government put him in jail from 1903 to 1906 because of his activities in the publication of the revolutionary newspaper *Su Bao* (蘇報). Yuan Shikai, the first official president (1913-1916) of the Republic of China during the warlord period, again put him under house arrest during 1913-1916 because of his open critique. He criticized Chiang Kai-shek several times, first against Chiang’s military act of northern expedition in 1926 in the name of unification, then against Chiang’s giving away the north-eastern provinces upon Japan’s invasion in 1931, and hence created tension between him and the Nanjing government.

Zhang Taiyan’s concept of *xinzhai* (心齋) as the nodal point of emptiness that awaits the arrival and departure of all beings as equal is crucial in his formulations of the notion of nation (國家). He presented the idea of nation with the figure of “place of emptiness” (*kunchu* 空處) and “empty seat” (*kungwei* 空位), again a sharp contrast to the concept of nation proposed and formulated by Liang Qichao and his contemporaries. Zhang Taiyan’s philosophical formulation of the void (*kung* 空) in association with the concept of “the place of emptiness” and “the empty seat” did not derive from mere ideational speculation, but was forged

as the stakes he engaged with in his debates with his contemporaries in different political stages.

The first essay in which Zhang developed his concept “the place of emptiness” was the essay on nation (*guojia lun* 國家論) published in 1907 on *Minbao* (People’s Newspaper 民報), a year after he was released from the imprisonment kept by the Qing government. Here, Zhang interpreted the nation as the “riverbed” (*hechuang* 河床), serving as “the place of emptiness” (*kongchu* 空處) that allowed the river to pass by daily, that is to say, the nation should be considered as an empty place that offered itself to be traversed by different people at different historical moments. The subjectum (主體) of the nation was merely a “void” (空虛) and “non-being” (非有).<sup>12</sup>

Zhang Taiyan’s formulation of the nation as the place of emptiness was intended as a debate with Liang Qichao and Yang Du (楊度), whom Zhang addressed as the nationalists (國家論者). In an article “*Jintiezhuyi Shuo*” (Essay on Gold and Metal 金鐵主義說) published on *Zhongguo Xinbao* (Chinese New Newspaper 中國新報) earlier in 1907, Yang Du promoted the importance to develop the wealth and military force of the nation so that the realm of China (*zhonghua*) can expand. Yang Du also stressed that *zhonghua* (中華) was a name not for an ethnic group but for all the people who have acquired the fine culture and could be addressed as a unified people with refined culture (華). The central argument in this article is then the concept of *wuzugonghe* (五族共和), meaning the harmonious assimilation and integration of five races, arguing that the non-Han ethnic groups were also Chinese under the name *zhonghua* as long as they acquired or were assimilated into Chinese culture so that the differences of ethnic cultures could be erased. Following Yang Du’s rationale of culture as a mode of spiritually commensurable immanentism, Chinese culture would serve as a seductive and mystic center, an expansive category that integrates all different ethnic groups as long as they adopted the refined Chinese culture.

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12. 「一線一縷，此是本真，經緯相交，此為組織。」「布帛雖依組織而有，然其組織時，惟有動態，初無實體。」國家如同河床，「以空虛為主體」，容受日日不同的水之「空處」；主體本身便是「空」，主體也是「非有」。章太炎：〈國家論〉，收於上海人民出版社編，《章太炎全集（四）》，頁463。

Zhang Taiyan disagreed with Yang Du's proposal of the total spiritual integration under the name *zhonghua*. He criticized Yang Du's ignorance of the historical processes and the differences of the cultures pertaining to these different ethnic groups. Zhang Binlin stressed that the term *zhonghua* was merely a "borrowed name as marker" (託名標識) to indicate the dynamic and altering compositions of the changing people in the course of history who cohabitated around the place in different temporal stages. He also explained that the nation was only a temporary dynamic composition, as the movement of the constitution of the textile woven by warp and woof (經緯相交，此為組織). In this sense, the composition of the nation was viewed as dynamic movement in constant re-composition. The nation has no substance of its own, but appears only as a mobile condition. (然其組織時，惟有動態，初無實體). Zhang further stressed that the love for the nation (愛國心) was not to love the fixated present state (所愛者亦非現在之正有), but to love the composition (組合) and the "not yet germinated" that is to come in the future (渴望其未萌芽者).<sup>13</sup>

Contrary to the contemporary discourse that demanded patriotism, Zhang Taiyan not only had deconstructed the notion of patriotism (愛國心), but also shattered the myth of a coherent and cultural concept of the integrative and expansive nation. In so doing, Zhang in fact stressed the importance to acknowledge the historical process of the dynamic and constantly altered composition, to challenge the fixated law stipulated by the past or by any subjective power, and to welcome the coming of new people and new composition of the nation.

The question then is how to conceive a nation or a government that can function so as to welcome the arrival of the "not-yet-germinated," including the co-existence of the uncounted member, regardless what races, languages, vocations or birthplaces they belong to. In "Questioning the Representative System" (代議然否論) published in 1908, Zhang Taiyan analyzed the representative system of the government and pointed out the drawbacks of this system that, to him, was in fact "an altered

13. 章太炎所說明的「愛國心」，並不是愛其實體，而是愛其「組合」。「人心本念念生滅，如長渠水，相續流注，能憶念其已謝滅，而渴望其未萌芽者。以心為量，令百事皆入矩矱之中，故所愛者亦非現在之正有，而在過去，未來之無有。夫愛國者之愛此歷史，亦猶是也。」章太炎：〈國家論〉，收於上海人民出版社編，《章太炎全集（四）》，頁463。

form of feudalism” (封建之變相). Zhang pointed out that the power of the representatives was seized by the rich and the upper class people and consequently continued the division between the aristocrats and the common.<sup>14</sup> In another article “Critique of Political Party” (誅政黨) published in 1911, Zhang pointed out that the constitution drafted by the government was often a self-serving practice that aimed to profit people in power through the expansion of its party by securing the official positions in the government.<sup>15</sup> These perceptive observations of the bureaucratic operation and the representative system presented Zhang’s sharp critiques against the expansion and consolidation of power of the party. Contrary to Sun Yat-sus’s wish, Zhang even suggested to dismiss the revolutionary party *tongmenghui* (同盟會) right after the success of the 1911 revolution (革命軍起，革命黨消) so that the government would not be formed and ruled by one single party.<sup>16</sup> Zhang’s suggestion of terminating the one big party right after the revolution was also due to the fact that he had observed the conflicts between the party troops of the Hunan Province and the Hubei Province caused by the growing ambition and the seizure of power manifested in the party members.<sup>17</sup>

14. 「豪右據其多數，眾寡不當則不勝。」〈代議然否論〉(1908)，收於上海人民出版社編，《章太炎全集(四)》，頁300-311。
15. 「政府立憲，意別有在，輒為露布天下，以為己功，乘此以結政黨，謂中國大權，在其黨徒，他日爵秩之尊卑，是今政進錢之多寡，貪饕罔利，如斯其極。」《誅政黨》連續刊登於檳榔嶼《光華日報》「論說」欄。章太炎文中批評當時政客，共分七類，第一類便是康有為、梁啟超等人，「掇拾島國賤儒緒說，自命知學，作報海外，騰肆奸言，為人所攻，則更名《國風》，頌天王而媚朝貴，文不足以自華，乃以帖括之聲音節湊，參合倭人文體，而以文界革命自豪。後生好之，競相模仿，致使中夏文學掃地輒，則夫己氏為之也。」見湯志鈞編，《章太炎年譜長編》，頁353-354。
16. 章太炎認為，「以一黨組織政府」，則會「人心解體」〈章炳麟之消弭黨見〉，天津《大公報》1911年12月12日，見湯志鈞編，《章太炎年譜長編》，頁366-367。
17. 當時，湖南與湖北的同盟會黨員之間已有間隙，黃興與孫武之間不和。黃興擬擴大同盟會，譚人鳳欲以一黨組織政府，都是章太炎所反對的。多年後，1933年10月10日，章太炎在「民國光復」的演講中也明白指出，當年革命初成，同盟會黨員已經逐漸暴露出「步調不齊、人格墮落」的問題，因此他當時會提出這些論點。見〈章炳麟之消弭黨見〉，天津《大公報》1911年12月12日，〈民國光復〉演講(1933年10月10日)，見湯志鈞編，《章太炎年譜長編》，頁364，366-367；另見，徐立亭，《晚清巨人傳：章太炎》，頁364-366。

After the Republic was formed, Zhang wrote a series of political analysis on the respective malfunctions of the governmental systems. The historical time Zhang Taiyan faced was the Warlord Government, so-called Beiyang Government, which was established in 1912 and lasted till 1928 upon Chiang Kai-shek's unification. In a speech he delivered in 1912, Zhang pointed out the drawbacks of French Republican and US system and suggested that the offices for administration, legislation and supervision should be independent from one another, and the power of the president should be limited and placed at a "vacuous and inoperative place" (*kunxu buyong zhidi* 空虛不用之地) to prevent him from developing into a dictatorship system. More importantly, the office for education and examination should be independent from the central government.<sup>18</sup> In 1916, after he was released from the house arrest enforced by Yuan Shikai, Zhang again addressed in a public lecture in front of parliament members of Zhejiang province that the problems of the government was its being easily controlled by the bureaucratic system as soon as the party was established. He criticized the electoral practice in the democratic system for being only the machine manipulated by the warlord government and the party policy.<sup>19</sup> Zhang and other intellectuals further proposed the concept of "the Government of United Provinces" in 1917, and subsequently the concept of federalism in 1920, because the central government at that time had expanded its power beyond control and their proposal to keep the central government in a vacuous position was to constrain its power, and that the government of each province could exert its local power in order to govern itself (聯省自治虛置政府議).<sup>20</sup>

18. 1912年1月3日，章太炎在中華民國聯合會第一次大會演說。湯志鈞編，《章太炎年譜長編》，頁375；〈復張季直先生書〉，刊於1912年1月6日《大共和日報》，轉錄自湯志鈞編，《章太炎年譜長編》，頁378。

19. 「黨會偶一發生，官僚即屬之而入。」「軍府指揮于上，政黨操縱于下，民間選人，不過為其機械已耳。」1916年7月3日，章氏在浙江國會議員歡迎會中演講。見湯志鈞編，《章太炎年譜長編》，頁533。

20. 章太炎與張溥泉延續了1917年〈對於西南之言論〉，提議「聯省自治」，以便脫離南北政府的牽制。在1920年11月9日《益世報》「聯省自治虛置政府議」中，章太炎提出：「從今以後，各省人民，宜自制省憲法，文武大吏，以及地方軍隊，並以本省人充之；自縣知事以至省長，悉由人民直選；督軍則有營長以上各級軍官會推。令省長處省域，而督軍居要塞，分地而處，則軍民兩政，自不相牽。」見湯志鈞編，《章太炎年譜長編》，頁

Looking back from hindsight, the purpose of Zhang Taiyan's formulations of these political visions of a "vacuous center" appeared not merely as a borrowing of Western governmental paradigms, but as his attempt to check the growing consolidation of the centralized power of the government, the parliament and the president so that these places would not be occupied by any single power structure and that the void at the center could keep the different departments of the government function independently from one another.

Zhang Taiyan's philosophy of the place of emptiness, to view the nation and the government as "the place of emptiness" and "empty seat", the composition of the nation as dynamic and transitory, and the government as the vacuous and inoperative central nodal point (環中), apparently is derived from both Buddhist thoughts and ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (莊子). His interpretation of the metaphor of *xinzhai* (心齋 the house of *xin*, the site of affect, mind, intellect, intuition, empathy, compassion, etc.) discussed by Zhuangzi in his chapter on "The World of Men" (*renjianshi* 人間世), as the vacuous and inoperative nodal point at the center, and the constant movement of this *topos* is the key to make room for the arrival of all others as equal beings.<sup>21</sup> Here, Zhang Taiyan offered a different vision of *xin*, not the one interpreted by Liang Qichao as utilizable and governable force of *xin*, but the site where *xinzhai* functions as a force of resistance against the economy of the consensual measurement under the apparatus of nominal/juridical system. Zhang Taiyan translated the *ālaya-vijñāna* (阿賴耶識), the eighth consciousness in the tradition of Yogacara school of Buddhism, and the Kantian concept of archetypes, in his interpretation of Zhuangzi's *xinzhai*. In so doing, he put forth his critical interpretation of the triad structure of power-norm-consensus behind any given conventional nominal system and the possibility of the force of thinking through critical translation.

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605-606。

21. 莊子提出「心齋」聽之以氣、虛而待物的概念，能夠知道「彼」與「此」並無定分，「如戶有樞，旋轉寰內，開闔進退，與時宜之，是非無窮，因應亦爾」，更能夠「以百姓心為心」，「野者自安其陋，都者得意於爛，兩不相傷，乃為平等。」莊子《齊物論》，頁64，77，120。

## V

Zhang Taiyan started to work on his reading of Zhuangzi's *Qiwulun* (齊物論 *Equality of All Things*) in 1910 as *Qiwulun Shi* (齊物論釋 *Reading Zhuangzi's Equality of All Things*). Five years later, when he was about 45 and was under house arrest by Yuan Shikai during 1913-1916, Zhang substantially revised his text. On first reading, Zhang Taiyan's *Qiwulun Shi* appears to be a scholarly study of Zhuangzi, drawing on different texts by Zhuangzi and various Buddhist texts from Yogacara practice (唯識學) and Huayan School (華嚴宗) as cross references. But, reading through the entire work, we came to realize that in this highly philosophical text, Zhang Taiyan wove together several threads with the metaphor of *xinzhai* which he used in other essays concerning his interpretation of the nation as the place of emptiness, the nation being constantly in the process of being composed and decomposed, the vacuous and inoperative place that allows the arrival and departure of different people through the historical process, and the empty seat where the president and the central government holds to make the local government and the different sections of the government function at equal terms. This *topos* of *xinzhai*, figured as void, I shall explain in the following, makes the notion of "the place of emptiness" a highly political concept that could resist any metaphysical separation through nominal partition.

First of all, we need to pay attention to how and why Zhang Taiyan made use of the concept of the *ālaya-vijñāna* (阿賴耶識), the eighth consciousness in the tradition of Yogacara school of Buddhism, in his interpretation of Zhuangzi's "*xinzhai*". According to conventional understanding, *ālaya-vijñāna* is the eightfold network of primary consciousness, containing the seeds for the seven consciousnesses, that is the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, mental consciousness, and the inferential but deluded consciousness. The eighth consciousness, as a storehouse and the all-encompassing foundational consciousness, is also understood as Tathata (thus-ness, such-ness 真如), *Sunyata* (emptiness 空性), or Dharmadhatu (realm of Truth 法界). Zhang Taiyan did not exactly



follow the Buddhist tenets, but employed the Kantian notion of archetype to explain the triad network of the fixation caused by the self (我執), the fixation caused by the law or the episteme behind the law (法執) and the “thus-ness” of life (真如), that is, the primary consciousness of temporality (世識), spatiality (處識), the forms of five senses (相識), the measurement of quantitative relation (數識), action (作用識) and cause-effect relation (因果識). By doing so, Zhang Taiyan had introduced Kantian critique of pure reason into his interpretation of the fixations caused by the imaginary function of the self and by the rational thinking implicated by the epistemic system. For Zhang Taiyan, all things were seeds and geneses for other things, while “*Xinzhai*” or the eighth consciousness as the nodal point was to be conceived as the pivotal seat where sensory, intuitive and affective perceptions, as well as cognitive, inferential, speculative and abstract notions were formed. Though this pivotal seat was described as a site of emptiness, it was not a pure vacuum, but was conceived as infiltrated in a dynamic movement interacting with all seeds of possibilities and potentials.

Secondly, following from the previous premise, Zhang Taiyan examined the role of the nodal point that transfers the subjective sensorial perception to inferential cognition, and then to the attachment of self-consciousness or the beguilement stipulated by the law. In this procedure, *xinzhai* functions as the passage of the translation from all consciousness to the formation of the mental processes. The formation of the subjective mental processes or objective judgments, Zhang Taiyan pointed out, was inevitably influenced and shaped by the conventional consensus and nominal system shared by local practice (舊章制度, 名教串習, 庸眾共循). People relied on what they were taught and reacted spontaneously, as if it was an arrow on the bow or an oath that one had to keep (發如機括, 留如詛盟). In order to make room for the arrival of new bodies and to allow all things to be perceived as equal, *xinzhai* had to remain as a place of emptiness, that is, to keep the continuous opening and closing of *xinzhai* so as to break the fixation of the illusory and deluded consciousness. What does it mean to maintain the movement of the opening and closing of *xinzhai*? In Zhuangzi, the rise and fall of ideas was described as the opening and closing of the door of *xinzhai* in a revolving movement so that new thoughts can come and go in an instant. That is to say, in order to

dis-entangle and dis-articulate the rigid concept derived from the nominal system, it is necessary to loosen up the law enforced either by conventional consensus or by the epistemic structure. Therefore, to keep *xinzhai* as a place of emptiness means to constantly unbind the deluded consciousness fixated by the habitual nominal system, to acknowledge the truth that each one has its own temporal moment and its singular essence, so that all things can be received as equal.

Thirdly, Zhang Taiyan developed his critique on conventional norms and nominal systems, and pointed out that everyone had his or her own “singular temporal moment” (各有時分) and should not be measured by the same norm. Contracts (*qiyue* 契約) or measurements (*zhunsheng* 準繩) seemed to be objective rules, but they were in fact stipulated by subjective positions or local conventional practices (強為契約，責其同然，竟無畢同之法). Furthermore, Zhang Taiyan insisted that there was no constant principle (*tao* 道 principle or path) because the principle varied according to the changes of time (道本無常，與世變異). Following the same reasoning, Zhang Taiyan also pointed out that there was no first cause or origin in history. Each moment was to be viewed as the co-existence of all aspects of the events and as the seeds and geneses of all things to come.<sup>22</sup> History then was to be regarded as the continuous appearing and disappearing of diverse temporal moments of actions and various forms of cause-effect relations, and all the happenings and the encounter of different bodies bred the seeds for the future.

Fourthly, basing on this radical delinking of the origin of history and the dis-articulation of the legitimacy of any nominal law, Zhang Taiyan stated explicitly that there was never fixed norm for different generations. (文之轉化，代無定型) All the classics, including the Book of Rites, Book of Documents, Spring and Autumn Annals, the Classics of Poetry, and even the Classic of Changes, were all records of various historical moments, presented merely the traces of the subjective judgments of one moment of time in the past, and not to be taken as unbreakable laws or canons. We should not model after any norms as if the ancient kings set it as norms of teachings.<sup>23</sup> The norms exercised in Han Dynasty are not

22. 萬物皆種也，以不同形相禪，始卒若環，莫得其倫，是謂天均

23. 「史書往事，昔人所印是非」；「文無定型，不過三代」，「不法先王」

to be taken in judging the time of the Yin Dynasty, nor does the standard of Tang Dynasty to be taken as the measurement for Qin Dynasty.<sup>24</sup> Zhang Taiyan also resorted to his etymological studies with abundant examples, and pointed out that, due to the turnover of the dynasties and the large migrations caused by wars or invasions from different parts of the continent, not only the norms varied, but also the phonetic systems and the scriptural patterns mutated through the passage of time. Names or markers were borrowed vehicle as substitute (以名為代), and could never recover the original event because they appeared merely as the traces of footprint (鳥跡) or the sound of birds (鷖音).

Zhang Taiyan's notion of *xinzhai*, the vacuous and inoperative "place of emptiness" and yet full of movement of life, or *qi* (氣), proposes a vision of the power of thought that is dynamic in the flow of opening and closing, continuously unbinding the fixations formed by pre-given nominal system so as to receive new bodies in an inoperative position (虛而待物). In this mode of thinking, one receives and listens to the other bodies not with his ear or his mind, but with his *qi*, that is, with his life (聽之以氣). The *qi* or life is not a conceptual attribute, but the liveliness of life itself, that which upholds and support life. To Zhang, the law of life manifests itself as singular and equal with one another (諸法平等), and his formulation of the "place of emptiness" therefore functions as a radical critique of any fixation enforced by the empirical and restricted law derived from the present given nominal system. In order to arrive at the perception of the equality of all beings, one has to constantly work on the unbinding of the fixated images and ideas bound by the nominal system (滌除名相). In this vacuous and inoperative position, one can then love the coming of the not-yet-germinated (愛其未萌芽者).

## VI

Agamben's discussion of the inoperativity of the empty space and the Trinitarian economy of *Hetoimasia tou thronou* pointed to the close connection between the divine Trinitarian economy and the Christian

24. 「然則史書往事，昔人所印是非，亦與今人殊致，而多辯論枉直，校計功罪，猶以漢律論殷民，唐格選秦吏，何其不知類哉。」同上註，頁75-76。

dualism, that is, the dichotomy between essence and form, spirit and body, being and act, will and praxis. This system of dichotomy addresses the heart of the metaphysical quest in the Western civilization. The trinity of the son–the father–the spirit finds its parallel in the tripartite of the material form/economic – the imaginary ideology/the state apparatus –the void / the real movement of the over-determined historical process. If the void is seized by the ideational separation conducted by the metaphysical system and made sacred by the logic of exception, masked by *Hetoimasia tou thronou*, the symbol of Glory, then the dialectic movement generated from the living matter would freeze.

For Agamben, to think an “Ungovernable” beyond economy and glory would mean to begin with the disarticulation of both *bios* and *Zoe*, to restore life as it is and to retrieve it from the metaphysical trap so that life would never assume the form of an *oikonomia* (*Kingdom* 259-260). It is the reason why Agamben proposed to profane the empty throne in order to make room for something he addressed with the name *zoë aionios*, “eternal life.” (*Kingdom* xiii) The not-yet and the to-come would be possible only when this regime of conceptual cut was inoperative, and the bondage set up by all forms of separation and partition governed by the logic of the fixated present can be dis-articulated. Agamben suggested, it requires thought to deliver one to his or her own power and possibility of life: “To think ... to be affected by one’s own receptiveness and experience in each and every thing that is thought a pure power of thinking.” (*Means without end* 8)

If the rhetorical move in Liang Qichao’s argument for the birth of the new people was to move from the not-having or the lack (無), to the *there is* and something to be (有), then Zhang Taiyan’s position was to affirm the dynamic re-composition of the void by negating the pre-given fixated state and law. For Zhang Taiyan, the topological space presented by the tripartite structure of “Self-fixation, Law-fixation, Thus-ness” could remain alive only if the void of *xinzhai* could exercise its constant movement of opening and closing and maintain as a *topos* of emptiness. In other words, the void is not the fixated or fetishized spiritual vacuum, but the dynamic movement of dis-articulating the nominal system and the reception of the not-yet-germinated. The possibility to break through the fixations caused by the self-imaginary (我執) and the law-epistemological break (法執)

was to allow the dynamic movement of the liveliness of life to constantly unbind the nominal bondage, so that thoughts appeared and disappeared in a instant and the place could make room to welcome the others. To Zhang Taiyan, therefore, the radical affirmation of the future to come was not presented through the projection of an ideal vision, but through the constant act of negativity so as to challenge and remove the fixated rules and habitual conventions. Following Zhuangzi and Buddhist thoughts, Zhang Taiyan elaborated his reasoning to restore life from the binding and separation exercised by empirical or symbolic laws, and to take life's "thus-ness" as it is, which is the law of life itself in the sense that all life and all law is equal (諸法平等).

The question Zhang Taiyan faced at the time was when the empty seat of power was seized again and again by diverse forces, the Qing government, the warlords, the self-inaugurated emperor, the over-powering big president, the nationalist one-party government, the concentrated power of the parliament, the greedy and invasive foreign military troops, and so on. His engagement in the re-reading of Zhuangzi's *On the Equality of All Thing* indicated a critical perspective against the seizure of power in all forms and over all aspects of life so that the power of thought could counteract the utilitarian and juridical vision of nation-state advocated by his contemporaries. Zhang Taiyan's painstaking engagement in his study of etymology, his problematization of the nominal system, and his severe critique of the bureaucratic systems of the newly formed Chinese nation-state in the beginning of the twentieth century, seemed to address the similar questions Foucault and Agamben have engaged with through their philosophical archaeology of the practice of bio-politics and the governmental machine in the West. Zhang Taiyan in witnessing the formation and the practice of governmentality, along the path of the building of the modern state of a new China, not only questioned the operational machine of his time, but also presented a radical and critical ontology of history that no single vantage point should seize the center. This center is the place of emptiness that all matters come to interact as seeds to activate one another. Through the dynamic movement of the *xinzhai*, any partition set up by the economic regime of perceptual-nominal system could be analyzed, contextualized, contested and dis-articulated. *Xinzhai* or the void then is the counter-movement of the fixation in all

forms and of any historical conjuncture. Different from the ideational formulation of the new people and the new nation, in terms of the governing of *xinli* in the mode of political economy elaborated by Liang Qichao and his contemporary, it is Zhang Taiyan's critical perspective on history and his politic of the *xinzhai*, or void, I think, that enables us to question the conditions of law in our present moment.

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