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A NEW DISCOURSE ON *FENGJIAN*: THE REDEFINITION OF FENGJIAN AND THE DEMONIZATION OF FEDERALISM

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*This article examines the evolution of the vocabulary "feudal (*fengjian*)" in early twentieth-century China. Despite having served as a symbol of local autonomy and countervailing against imperial authority as emphasized in the Confucian tradition, the term had descended into an object of scorn, oppression, and retrogression in the latter half of the twentieth century until today. An alternative interpretation toward the modern misuse of* fengjian *may be found by focusing and comparing the two seemingly unrelated and radically different portrayals of* fengjian *by: political thinker Zhang Taiyan's federalist ideology; and Marxist historian Guo Moruo's manipulation of Chinese classics. Under the historical context surrounding the turmoil of 1920s China, this article argues that much more than a mistranslation, the redefinition of* fengjian *was an intentional slander to, through the ambiguity surrounding its definition, destroy the Chinese tradition of liberty and local autonomy, further justifying a unified, highly centralized Chinese nation-state.*

KEYWORDS: *Fengjian, Chinese federalism, Zhang Taiyan, Guo Moruo, Chinese Marxist historiography, Shijing, confucian political thought, political decentralization*

INTRODUCTION

> At Heaven's bidding they looked down;
> The peoples below were awed,
> There were no disorders, no excesses;
> They dared not be idle or pause.
> Heaven's charge was upon the lands below (命於下國*ming yu xiaguo*),
> Firmly were their blessings planted and established (封建厥福*fengjian juefu*).[1]

Such was the earliest description of *fengjian*, as it would have been sung in the *Classic of Poetry* (詩經 *Shijing*): an image of prosperity, peace, and order. As the mandate of heaven was established upon the lower states, the lands were blessed

[1] Joseph R. Allen (ed.), *The Book of Songs*, trans. Arthur Waley and Joseph R. Allen, (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 323. For clarity, all Chinese texts which use the characters "*fengjian*" will be retained as "*fengjian*", regardless of whether it refers to "feudal" or "enfeoffment and establishment".

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with harmony and order through the political structure *fengjian*. Later Confucians, especially of the Song and Ming dynasties, often utilized *fengjian* as a means to countervail and criticize centralized imperial authority.[2] The vocabulary, under the influence of propaganda, currently experiences a completely different fate in today's China: a symbol of retrogression, the outdated, the anti-revolutionary, and oppression from the bourgeoisie. In textbook material and the official historiography of the People's Republic of China (PRC), *fengjian* had not stayed true to its original meaning of enfeoffment (*feng*) of land and the establishment (*jian*) of new states, creating the various princes (諸侯*zhuhou*). Before the 1940s, it was widely accepted that the Qin Empire (221-206 BCE) had established the *junxian* (郡縣) system, causing *fengjian* China to come to an end. Under the Communist regime, however, *fengjian* was equated with "feudalism" of the Marxist understanding and referred not to the "classical *fengjian*" political structure of Chinese antiquity.[3] Yet what caused such a change in the attitude toward and even definition of *fengjian*? What explains the insistence and emphasis that China's official historiography puts on the redefinition of *fengjian*?

Dissimilar to regular linguistical evolutions, the change of attitudes toward "*fengjian*" was pushed by intellectuals and propaganda. Despite so, scholars such as Lin Zhishun and Hou Jianxin, fail to point out the highly political nature surrounding the term's usage, but only address its misuse without investigating the reasons to why such complications persist in the first place.[4] Arif Dirlik, tracing the term's usage alongside the development of Marxist historiography in China since the early 20th century, concludes that the misconception is largely formed under the Chinese Marxists' attempt to receive Chinese history into Marx's framework of historical materialism, and in doing so twisted its definition.[5] John E. Schrecker, who categorizes Chinese history into a series of

[2] Confucian scholars often utilised the *fengjian* system as a means to criticise the imperial *junxian* system since the Qin Dynasty. Major *fengjian* supporters of the Song-Ming period include: Bi Zhongyou (畢仲游) (1047-21), Hu Anguo (胡安國) (1074-1138), Hu Yin (胡寅) (1098-1156), Hu Hong (胡宏) (1105-61), Zhang Zai (張載) (1020-77), Zhu Xi (朱熹) (1130-1200), and Chen Chun (陳淳) (1159-1223) of the Song; and Huang Shengzeng (黃省曾) (1496-1546), Huang Zongxi (黃宗羲) (1610-1695), Gu Yanwu (顧炎武) (1613-1682), and Wang Fuzhi (王夫之) (1619-1692) of the Ming.

[3] Confusingly, the Chinese Marxist historiographical tradition often interchanges the two definitions of *fengjian*. Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元) (773-819), for example, was a Tang Dynasty scholar who argued in his famous essay "*Fengjian Lun* (A Discourse on Fengjian)" that *fengjian* was not the true intention of the Confucian sages, rather a force of circumstance. Liu's work was often praised by Mao Zedong, who encouraged the nationwide reading of the essay during the "Criticise Lin Criticise Confucius Campaign" of 1974. Marxist historians therefore often emphasise the "progressive", "materialistic", and "anti-feudal" nature of Liu's essay. Ironically, certain Confucian scholars who praised the merits of the *fengjian* system are praised also as "anti-imperial, anti-feudal" thinkers. These include Gu Yanwu, Huang Zongxi, and Wang Fuzhi.

[4] See, for example, Ri Zhi, "'Fengjian Zhuyi' Wenti (Lun Feudalism Bainian lai de Wuyi) [The problem of "*fengjian* ideology" (A Discussion of the century-old mistranslation)]." *Shijie Lishi* 6 (1991): 30–41, 125–124; Jianxin Hou, "A discussion of the concept of 'feudal'." *Frontiers of History in China* 2, no. 1 (2007): 1–24; Tianyu Feng. "Society of Imperial Power: Reinterpreting China's 'Feudal Society'." *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2014): 25–50.

[5] Arif Dirlik, "Social Formations in Representations of the Past: The Case of 'Feudalism' in Twentieth-Century Chinese Historiography." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 19, no. 3, (1996): 227–267.

struggles between the *fengjian* and *junxian* systems, considers the communist distortion of *fengjian* a form of "theoretical nihilism" and "rhetorical device" in hopes of distancing Chins from the past and eliminating traditions potentially in opposition with the party's causes.[6] Viren Murthy who focuses on the late-Qing reformers' usage of *fengjian* in promoting local autonomy attributes the term's distortion to the communists' effort to invalidate the past and portray the linearity of Chinese history, all while further glorifying the party's efforts in bringing China beyond *fengjian*.[7] Prasenjit Duara provides a detailed genealogy toward the evolution of "*fengjian*." While *fengjian* had still been used as a beacon of local autonomy and self-governance in the early republican era, it had been quickly defeated by the then growing tide of nationalism, partly contributed to the state's conversion to Marxism, which quickly led to *fengjian* being rendered as a useless, obsolete political thought symbolizing disorder and disunity.[8] Gao Gengsong focuses on Yan Fu (嚴復) (1854–1921), a late Qing translator who first committed the mistranslation of *fengjian* and feudalism, and finds its widespread misconception and popularization to result of the mistranslation's providing a platform of discussion for early 20th century Marxists in criticizing what they found to be outlived.[9]

Scholars of this area generally succeed in identifying the key problems of generalizing and misusing the idea of *fengjian*. It is also widely accepted as a fact that the growing popularity of nationalism and centralist ideology is an indirect cause toward change in attitudes toward *fengjian*. Most historians simply identify nationalism as an aiding factor to how the Marxist definition of *fengjian* overwhelmed its classical meaning. None, however, have explicitly connected the classical and contemporary roles of *fengjian* and their respective portrayals, in investigating why the misconception persists and the deeper implications of rebranding the ancient political system in the context of modern Chinese political history. Through comparing two portrayals of *fengjian* during the political turmoil of 1920s China: Zhang Taiyan's *fengjian*-inspired federalism; and Guo Moruo's introduction of "*fengjian* society," this article argues that the redefinition of fengjian was a deliberate attempt by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in eradicating political ideologies which challenged the legitimacy of the Northern Expedition.[10]

[6] John E. Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 184–85, 195.

[7] Viren Murthy, "The politics of fengjian in late-Qing and Republican China" in *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity*, eds. Kai-wing Chow, et al., (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008), 175–76.

[8] Duara Prasenjit, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 147–75, esp. 170–5.

[9] Gengsong Gao, "Yan Fu's (Mis)translation of 'Feudal/Feudalism'." *Intertexts* 19, no. 1 (2015): 23–38.

[10] Steven Philips notes that one of the aftermaths of the Northern Expedition was the "demonization of federalism", which saw *fengjian* be "translated as 'feudal', and came to mean less an alternative administrative system than a set of pre-modern values", but has not expanded on it. See Steven Philips, "The Demonization of Federalism in Republican China" in *Defunct Federalisms*, eds. Emilian Kavalski and Magdalena Zolkos, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 89.

"*Fengjian*" in Zhang Taiyan's Early Thought

While over-generalized, Schrecker's categorization of the entirety of Chinese history as a series of struggles between the *fengjian* and *junxian* systems, a categorization according to him even applicable toward European history, is not far from reality.[11] Often after an event of significant impact toward the empire's survivability, such as the Jingkang Incident after the Song; or the Ming-Qing transition, scholars either blamed the *fengjian* system for leading to the weakness of the empire; or praised the system as an alternative means of governance. In many ways, the federalist movement of 1920s China was a continuation of the *fengjian-junxian* struggles throughout Chinese imperial history. Seeing little progress toward a peaceful and democratic political framework under the republican government, "*fengjian*" thinkers believed that through federalism, provincial authorities would focus on developing local institutions and autonomy; whereas "*junxian*" thinkers, often backed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), found that only a unified, centralized Chinese nation state through the impending Northern Expedition of 1926 may rid China of disorder.

Chinese federalism is inseparable from *fengjian*. In fact, the Chinese embodiment of federalism, which was coined as "united provinces in self-governance (聯省自治 *liansheng zizhi*)" by Zhang Taiyan (章太炎) in 1920, was directly influenced by the Ming Confucians Gu Yanwu and Wang Fuzhi's respective advocations for *fengjian*.[12] Most intellectual historians of China focus on Zhang Taiyan as a nationalist and anti-Manchu revolutionary, his career as a federalist is often neglected, seen "commonly even in today's scholarship … as a stain on his reputation."[13] These historians, however, simply fail to see that Zhang's earlier nationalism was indeed

[11] Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective*, 72–80.

[12] Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936), original name Binglin, changed his name after Huang Zongxi's courtesy name Taichung (Tai); and Gu Yanwu (Yan). Much of Zhang's decentralist federalist ideology took inspiration from the Confucian tradition of *fengjian*. Zhang was a fierce critique of the nationalists' vision of unifying China through military action and denounced the nationalist government's legitimacy after the Northern Expedition. Zhang proclaimed himself "loyalist of the Republic of China" and insisted on using the "five-coloured flag" of the republic to be draped over his coffin. See Ta-chia Li, *Minguo Chunian de Liansheng Zizhi Yundong* (The Federalist Movement of the Early Republican Era), (Taipei: Hongwenguan Chubanshe, 1986); Zhijun Tang, *Zhang Taiyan Zhuan* (Biography of Zhang Taiyan), (Taipei: Commercial Press Taiwan, 1996); Viren Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan : The Resistance of Consciousness*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Zhijun Tang, *Zhang Taiyan Nianpu Changpian* (Extended Chronicles of Zhang Taiyan), (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2013); Nianchi Zhang, *Zhang Taiyan Shengping yu Xueshu* (Zhang Taiyan's Life and Academics), (Shanghai, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2016); Fanshen Wang, *Zhang Taiyan de Sixiang: Jian lun qi dui Ruxue Chuantong de Chongji* (Zhang Taiyan's Thought and its Impact towards Confucian Thought), (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2018).

[13] Hokyin Chan and Tze-ki Hon, "'Fenli' yu 'Tongyi' de Duoyuan Bianzheng: Zhang Taiyan Liansheng Zizhi Sixiang de Tezhi (Dialectics Between Autonomy and Unification: Zhang Taiyan's Thought on Provincial Self-Rule)" *Zhongguo Wenhua Yanjiusuo Xuebao* 67, (2018): 223. Taiwanese historian Li Ta-chia, for example, claims to fail to grasp the "true political motivations" of Zhang Taiyan's federalism; Tang Zhijun claims that Zhang was "manipulated by warlord powers" which led to his "pedantic" federalist thought. This, of course, reflects the sensitivity of decentralist ideology in the study of Chinese intellectual history. See Li, *Minguo Chunian de Liansheng Zizhi Yundong*, 126; Tang, *Zhang Taiyan Zhuan*, 332–33; Zehou Li, "Zhang Taiyan as a Revolutionary and a Thinker" *Chinese Studies in History*, 15, no. 3–4, (1982): 90–108.

compatible with federalism. As early as 1907, when Zhang worked as an essayist for the *Tongmenghui* (同盟會) owned publication *Min Bao* (民報), Zhang stated three principles of the nation state:

> First, that the nation is imaginary, and does not truly exist; second, the functions of the nation are founded by force of circumstance, not by means of reason; third, the business of the nation is most despicable, not the most holy.[14]

Distancing himself from Sun's slogan of "expel the Tartar barbarians, revive China (驅除韃虜 恢復中華)," Zhang expresses that "to expel the Manchus is to expel autocracy; to expel the Qing is to expel monarchism."[15] Zhang's "nationalism" was clearly poles apart from the "conventional nationalist" which dominated early twentieth-century China. Rather than justifying national self-determination through Han ethno-centrism, Zhang adhered to democratic and federalist means. Mencius believes that all-under-Heaven may "be settled through unity (定于一 *dingyu yi*)," but too teaches that: "Tang did it with only seventy *li*, and King Wen did it with a hundred."[16] Zhang's federalism was similar: a shared nationality, culture and language does not justify a unified and centralized state. Unification never brings unity and unity does not require unification.

As early as 1899, Zhang had in several essays complimented the *fengjian* system for its referential value to the weakening Qing Empire. Much of Zhang's rhetoric reflects the Song-Ming discourses on *fengjian*, clearly taking inspiration from their arguments. Written in 1899, Zhang's "Discourse on Vassals (藩鎮論*Fanzhen Lun*)" writes:

> Since the *fengjian* system was left unusable, legislators and politicians have feared for the domineeringness of the *fanzhen*. Such words, however, would only be uttered by successors to the isolated Qin and shallow Song (孤秦陋宋 *Gu Qin Lou Song*).[17]

Zhang however acknowledges the limitations of circumstances and suggests against directly copying the ancient *fengjian* system unto the Qing, only preserving *fengjian*'s implications of preserving local autonomy in defending against foreign threats. According to Zhang:

> When affairs are few, the most minute of details may be arbitrarily indulged upon, keeping all movements within all-under-Heaven subject to one. But when approached by foreign threat, the state prays for Heaven's decree for its long-lasting attatchment. In hopes of preserving the state's borders, the

[14] Taiyan Zhang, Zhang Taiyan Zhenglun Xuanji (Collected Political Essays of Zhang Taiyan), (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1977), 359.

[15] Chan and Hon, "'Fenli' yu 'Tongyi' de Duoyuan Bianzheng", 208.

[16] Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. Philip J. Ivanhoe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 6, 33.

[17] Taiyan Zhang, *Zhang Taiyan Zhenglun Xuanji*, p. 99. '*Gu Qin Lou Song*' is taken from Wang Fuzhi.

> state relies on its laws, *fujie* (the power to delegate authority), and *zhangfu* (ranking system).[18] When one abides by these, the *fanzhen*'s affairs become complicated and may not conveniently maneuver around foreign threat. If only the laws, *fujie*, and *zhangfu* may lead people into taking up arms and defend against foreign invasion, as if marionettes dancing on their own, how would one need to agonize over the state becoming defenseless? I only pity the fact that in ceding land, preparation of war is determined by the regional government; the defense of the regional government is determined by the might of its troops; and the might of its troops is determined by the individual who commands them. This is not something that may be engaged in through relying on Heaven's favored decree.[19]

At this stage, the idea of ceding central authority to regional government remains largely as a means to defend the state against foreign invasion. Zhang directly criticizes the Qing government's desire to centralize authority, and diminish local military authority, considering their actions that were led by the "ignorance towards the great causes of preserving the race."[20] "Formerly, the strongest of the *fanzhen* of China was none other than Zeng (Guofan 曾國藩) and Zuo (Zongtang 左宗棠). Zeng defeated the Taiping Rebels, and they failed to legitimize their rule in Jinling." According to Zhang, however, the Qing court's distrust and ignorance of centralization cost China all hopes of modernization. Had Zeng's authority been preserved, "the talented scholars of the lands of Wu (Jiangsu) and Chu (Hubei and Hunan) would swiftly gather under his leadership, within thirty years, the Self-Strengthening Movement would have been completed, how would we be left inferior even to Siam?"[21] Despite so, "the white man only dares to covet, they collect themselves and dare not act out their impudence."[22] With the Qing's ever growing desire in suppressing local autonomy, however, Li Hongzhang (李鴻章), sponsor and commander of the Beiyang Fleet may only "stare in silence and despair, and dare not unveil the slightest trace of ferociousness" in sight of "the government's acquisition of the navy's funds in constructing palaces"; Zuo Zongtang, who reconquered Xinjiang, "despite preserving his loyalty to the utmost extent," was "in sloppy fashion and awkward rhetoric, denounced by arrogant men as if some brusque robber."[23]

Zhang thus put forth his suggestion toward the achievement of regional autonomy, a proposal inspired by Confucian tradition and the success of Japan's Meiji Constitution, that: "to weaken the *fanzhen* for the sake of establishing a constitution, is public-mindedness at its utmost; to weaken the *fanzhen* for the sake of satisfying the debauchery of one or two, is selfishness at its utmost."[24] Zhang found *fengjian*'s encouragement of local autonomy to be compatible with

[18] *Fujie*: tally signifying imperial authorisation of military leadership; *zhangfu*: uniforms of Chinese officials, of which ornaments (*zhang*) signify rank.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 101.
[21] Ibid., 101–102.
[22] Ibid., 102.
[23] Ibid., 100, 102.
[24] Ibid., 102.

constitutionalism and further believes through establishing a constitution, local governments would return their authority at times of peace:

> If imperial virtue clarifies affairs and returns to the correct path of its duties, magnanimously revives the systems of old, presents to the people laws modelled after the cardinal directions of Heaven and earth, and through such means enlighten and educate all-under-Heaven, incorporating all under one constitution, the *fanzhen* are surely to immediately obey commands, just as the *Satsuma* and *Nagasu Han* (Domain/*Fan*) of Japan. They started their domains through their glorious deeds and ended them by returning their lands. How would their domineeringness be worth any worry?[25]

Zhang Taiyan's "Discourse on Enfeoffment (分鎮論 *Fenzhen Lun*)" written in the same year further elaborates on how he imagines lands shall be ceded in protecting the Qing Empire's integrity, suggesting an even more decentralized framework:

> The times are hopeless, and it is too late for any reformation of the bureaucratic system. Perhaps it would be best to combine the *fengjian* and *fanzhen* systems as one. Declare the lands of *Yan* (Hebei), *Qi* (Shandong), *Jin* (Shanxi), *Bian* (Henan), and the *Dongsansheng* (Manchuria) as the royal domain, and the affairs within shall be left unchanged. The remaining lands shall be enfeoffed into five *Dao* … Each *Dao* governed by its governors and talented men … Administration and bureaucratic set-up shall be dictated by the domain alone. Ten thousand shall be paid yearly to the *quanfu* as tribute yearly, any non-performance will not be tolerated.[26] Regarding the support and loss of land, the governor alone shall be held accountable. Once the noble title is received, unless in case of the loss of land, or the lack of funds, the position must not be transferred within the holder's lifetime. In case of death, he shall be succeeded by his subordinate, who shall be recommended by his former superior beforehand, receiving imperial appointment. They shall announce to their neighboring nations: "This is my enfeoffed (*fengjian*) state. Any diplomatic relation, meeting, treaties, and contracts shall be decided bilaterally, free from the imperial court's intervention."[27]

Not only does Zhang wish for local autonomy in hopes of protecting the empire from foreign invasion as seen in the "*Fanzhen Lun*." The "*Fenzhen Lun*" further imagines governance and jurisdiction beyond imperial control. Zhang's imagination of *fenzhen*, with each state's emphasized diplomatic independence, would create a political system rather different from western federal states such as America. Along with the advocation of constitutionalism, and soon democracy, this sowed the seeds of Zhang's later, more matured conceptualization of a federalist China. Despite gaining popularity through the early 1920s, Zhang's federalism

[25] Ibid.

[26] *Quanfu*: official responsible for the collection of tribute and taxes as recorded in the *Zhouli* (*Rites of Zhou*).

[27] Ibid., 105–106.

was often later denounced as a plot in an attempt to fragment China; ridiculed for its apparent inability to defend against foreign impact and was truly a political thought unfortunately overwhelmed by nationalist ideology.

The Demonization of Decentralization

Since the 1910s, Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀) and Li Dazhao (李大釗), founders of the CCP started to attribute all things outdated as "*fengjian*." As Gao argues, Yan Fu's mistranslation provided early Chinese Marxists with a platform for discussion. From their perspective, *fengjian* was nothing more than an empty word to attract a following, a vague concept of an imagined enemy that their revolutionary efforts sought to defeat. Most of these early twentieth-century intellectuals, however, were aware of the term's homonymous usage and had made an attempt to avoid the term's misuse. In the early writings of Chen and Li, *fengjian* almost always referred to its sociological definition (in other words, "feudal"), which primarily identified unfree labor. In a rare instance where Chen referenced the classical *fengjian* system in 1915, Chen specified that: "the outdated morals, laws, scholarship, and customs are not products of the modern age. None of those are the legacy of the '*fengjian* system (封建制度 *fengjian zhidu*).'"[28] It was not until 1922, 1923, and 1924 respectively that Chen, Mao Zedong (毛澤東), and Zhou Enlai (周恩來), started to frequently use the historical definition of *fengjian* in criticizing regional strongmen, referring them as "*fengjian*-esque warlords (封建式軍閥 *fengjianshi junfa*)," in fear that the banner of the *fengjian* system justified federalism, or what they saw as a mere excuse for "warlordism."[29]

This critique of decentralization was not unique to China. Max Weber, in his 1920 *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, identified Confucianism, especially its enablement of the gentry's self-governance and local autonomy, as "irrational" and "charismatic" rule.[30] While the Confucians under the *junxian* system had for millennia, through *fengjian*, criticized the centralization of imperial authority and fought to preserve local autonomy, Weber deemed the faults of Chinese governance and the origin of Chinese "backwardness" to be that its degree of centralization was not made extensive enough, even under the *junxian* system:

> Beyond the city walls the effectiveness of administrative authority became narrowly circumscribed. For in addition to the power of sibs, great in

[28] Duxiu Chen, *Chen Duxiu Wenji* (Collected Essays of Chen Duxiu), *4 vols.*, (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2011), vol. 1, 92.

[29] Ibid., vol. 2, 266–77, esp. 270–277. See also Arthur Waldron, "Warlordism versus Federalism: The Revival of a Debate?" *The China Quarterly*, no. 121 (1990): 122; Feng, *Fengjian Kaolun*, 266. The problematic naming of politicians and intellectuals who opposed the unification cause as "warlords" is explored by Vivienne Xiangwei Guo, who provides a detailed study on the role of warlords as agents of enlightenment, challenging the traditional portrayal of "warlords". See Vivienne Xiangwei Guo, *Negotiating A Chinese Federation: The Exchange of Ideas and Political Collaborations between China's Men of Guns and Men of Letters, 1919–1923*, (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

[30] Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, trans. Hans H. Gerth, (New York: Free Press, 1951), 31–32.

> itself, the administration also confronted the organized self-government of the village. There were also numerous peasants living in the cities, and, since the latter were merely urban settlements of farmers, there remained only a technical administrative difference between city and village. A "city" was the seat of a mandarin and was not self-governing; a "village" was a self-governing settlement without a mandarin![31]

"Below the *hsien* (*xian*) district … " Weber continues,

> there were only those governing agents who were, officially, honorific office holders and, actually, often *kulaki*. But very frequently committees functioned alongside the official administration of the districts right up to the level of the province. Officially the committees were appointed or "delegated" authority … Actually, they held their positions through recognized or usurped charisma and they 'gave advice' to the officials.[32]

This implied that self-governance equated to disunity which led to Chinese weakness as compared with the imperial powers of the west, and thus China's so-called "Century of Humiliation" and frequent defeats in warfare was a direct result of disunity caused by lack of centralized authority. The idea that local autonomy, especially in rural areas, leads to "irrational" governance due to the lack of intervention from the central government persists to this day. The late Feng Tianyu, in suggesting potential methods to clear up misconceptions around *fengjian* in scholarship, too had not forgotten to emphasize that the highly centralized imperial authority of the Qin to Qing dynasties enabled "cultural unification" and "ensured wide-spread pragmatic rationalism," thus China was "able to avoid the religious fanaticism and theological dogmatism in medieval Europe."[33]

Decentralization, therefore, was portrayed as a source of disorder, disunity, and counterintuitively, despotism; whereas unification, the only means of defeating such "feudal remnants." This logic resonated with both the CCP and KMT, whose alliance soon formed the First United Front in 1923 in hopes of through the impending Northern Expedition, achieving the unification of China. Defeating federalist ideology, therefore, was a common objective shared by the Nationalists and Communists. As noted by Robert A. Bedeski, "the distance between Sun (Yatsen 孫逸仙) and Mao was not great: both were nationalists who felt that only a strong Chinese nation-state could survive and modernize."[34] With Sun's death in 1925 and Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣介石) subsequent rise to authority, the difference between the two parties only narrowed, as the two dictators' only consistent ideology was neither nationalism nor communism, but opportunism in attaining political agency. It was under this political and ideological context that the *fengjian* which represented local autonomy was confused with the *fengjian* which represented reactionism; and that a centralized, unified China was propagated as an

[31] Ibid., 91.
[32] Ibid., 94–95.
[33] Feng, "Society of Imperial Power", 48–49.
[34] Robert E. Bedeski, "The Concept of the State: Sun Yat-Sen and Mao Tse-Tung." *The China Quarterly*, no. 70 (1977): 354.

undoubted principle of good governance. The true meaning behind criticizing *fengjian* was in fact criticizing "reactionary" political ideologies that affected the Northern Expedition's political legitimacy and objectives of unifying China.

Despite being twenty years after the "*Fanzhen Lun*" and "*Fenzhen Lun*," Zhang's political philosophy had remained relatively consistent, unlike most intellectuals of the era who accepted ethno-centric nationalism as their core value and were led to believe that only an authoritarian state and centralized authority may bring order and ensure territorial integrity. We see still traces of *fengjian* in Zhang's 1920 advocacy for federalism:

> Hereon, the people of all provinces, ought to draft their unique constitutions. Officials civil and martial, and the military, ought to be served by those of the province. From the magistrate of the *xian*, to the governor of the province, shall all be directly elected by the people … Position the provincial governor within the capital; and position military commanders within strongholds. Separate them in different positions, such that the affairs of the civil and the martial would not be affected by one another. Anyone who oversteps their positions, claim to inspect civil affairs, or enthrone themselves as "supreme commander of allied armies," identify them as schismatic forces and eliminate them.[35]

By such means, Zhang imagines that those who "in the name of constitutional protection, scheme in schismatizing" may have been identified and stopped before they create disorder.[36] Yet this proposal alone simply identifies usurpers and fails to solve what was in Zhang's eyes the more fundamental problem of excessive centralization. Zhang would later refer to this fundamental problem as the "Three Vermin (三蠹 *San Du*)": "The constitution favoring centralization; the National Assembly pursuing authority; and the president being of no difference from an emperor."[37] Similar to Wang Fuzhi who criticizes the Son of Heaven for extending his authority beyond his duties, rendering the empire in "isolation" and "shallowness," Zhang condemns the Three Vermin for its desire to manipulate details within local governments overwhelming its overall efficiency in defending the nation. Zhang argues that centralization, rather than decentralization, encouraged the warlords' subversion. In hopes of avoiding internal disorder and distrusting subordinates when under foreign threat, the government favors centralization, leading to the situation where "the positions of president and premier are preyed upon by those avaricious for power," encouraging the emergence of the so-called warlords.[38] This, in turn, forces the central government to "bargain for loans through betraying the nation … and barely survive by means of oppressing the people."[39] Zhang thus further proposes a "nominal government" in hopes of defending Chinese sovereignty and ensuring a democratic system:

> Beyond the issuing of medals and the authorization of military power, all other matters may not be decided without further agreement. Military authority

[35] Zhang, *Zhang Taiyan Zhenglun Xuanji*., 752.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 756.
[38] Ibid., 752.
[39] Ibid., 755.

> shall be ceded to military governors of the respective provinces, and the central government shall be forbidden from possessing a single troop or cavalry. All diplomatic treaties shall be approved by the military and provincial governors … Though the central government exists, it is as if a piece of barren wasteland, subversion and usurpation would naturally come to an end. Each province shall send their respective representatives in supervising the affairs of the central government, without need of any form of legislature … This federalist system is first of its kind, yet there is no better solution towards the circumstances of China. Even for the federalisms of Germany and America, their central governments retain great power. To implement such systems in China, turmoil and disorder will know no end.[40]

Since the fall of the Qing, a unified Chinese nation-state had never been a definite principle of good governance. The failure of the new republican government to instate a democratic political structure led to widespread disappointment and the rise of federalist ideology as an alternative political framework. The popularity of federalism caused it to be endorsed by many other intellectuals such as Hu Shih (胡適), and continuously pushed by provincial strongmen. The young Mao Zedong, a Hunanese located at the base of the federalist movement in 1920, too wrote an article justifying the federalist movement. Written on the tenth of October, the national day of the republic, Mao expressed his dissatisfaction toward the Chinese national identity and called for the rise of provincial patriotism. Mao further proposed the division of China into twenty-seven nations in the form of republics, with each adopting a "provincial Monroe Doctrine (省門羅主義)," and "the refusal to speak of centralization for twenty years."[41]

With the Northern Expedition, however, both the KMT and CCP were eager to finally defeat federalist ideology not only on the physical battlefield but also on the intellectual battlefield, by portraying it as a mere excuse for provincial authorities to justify their personal power. Statesmen who advocated federalism, especially the Cantonese Chen Jiongming (陳炯明), who forced out Sun Yat-sen from Guangdong in 1922 were condemned as "warlords" and "traitors." Zhang's federalist thought faced a similar fate and was widely condemned, even by his student, the popular nationalist essayist Lu Xun (魯迅), as a sign of retrogression, counterrevolution, and collusion with warlords, betraying the well-respected revolutionary that Zhang was twenty years ago.[42] The fate of *fengjian*, whereas, was soon to be sealed by historians of the CCP.

Give Fengjian a Bad Name and Hang It: Guo Moruo's Redefinition of *Fengjian*

It was therefore no coincidence that Guo Moruo (郭沫若) started to write *A Study on Ancient Chinese Society* (中國古代社會研究 *Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Yanjiu*;

[40] Ibid., 753.

[41] Zedong Mao, *Mao Zedong Zaonian Wengao* (Early Writings of Mao Zedong) (Changsha: Hunan People's Publishing House, 2008), 476.

[42] Chan and Hon, "'Fenli' yu 'Tongyi' de Duoyuan Bianzheng", 223.

hereafter *ZGSY*) shortly after joining the Communist Party in 1927, during the Northern Expedition.[43] It was in this work that any historian had first used the term "*fengjian*" in referring to the Qin to Qing dynasties and in labelling the Zhou Dynasty as "slave society." While Guo's narration continues to dominate modern Chinese official historiography, rather than a mere succession of the "linguistic equivalence between *fengjian* and feudalism" which had been "established by Yan Fu's translation," an examination of Guo's work would lead us to conclude that this misconception indeed developed as an instance of history in service of politics.[44] It was by such means of historical justification that the CCP rewrote history by demonizing any form of separation of authority.

Dirlik had pointed out several major errors in the *ZGSY*: (1), Guo was unaware that Marx had specified historical materialism as an explicitly European historical model. (2), Guo failed to realize that the defining characteristic of Marx and Engel's "Asiatic mode of production" is despotic rulership, causing his logically invalid periodization of pre-Western Zhou society as "'Asiatic' primitive communist society." (3), Guo had not provided a defining criterion to what constitutes as "slave society," causing the work to be presented with a lack of foundation. Based on these characteristics, Dirlik concludes that the generalization of *fengjian* came to be popularized with Guo's (and the CCP's) "crude and mechanical" attempt to universalize Marxist history.[45] On Guo's choice and analysis of classical Chinese texts, Dirlik commends him for having "left a striking impression of communion between author and subject across the centuries"; on his usage of newly uncovered archaeological discoveries, Dirlik finds it "innovative."[46] Had Dirlik been able to decipher Guo's analysis and choice of evidence, however, he may not have come to such a conclusion.

In "evidencing" that the western Zhou under the *fengjian* system was indeed a slave society, Guo quotes extensively from inscriptions on ancient Chinese cauldrons (*ding*) and Confucian classics. Guo's assessment, however, contained largely examples of ignorance toward (that is, if not deliberate distortions of) ancient texts. In Guo's version of the Western Zhou Dynasty, humans had been stripped of their sense of individuality, and people relied on "the spiritual to command all within the universe, and rulers to command all within

[43] Guo Moruo (1892–1978) was a Marxist historian, archaeologist, poet, and politician. Due to his contributions towards the development of Marxist historiography in China, Guo is highly acclaimed in Chinese literature. In western literature, however, the highly controversial nature of Guo is a popular topic of discussion, especially regarding his undertakings in history and archaeology. See David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: The Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Xiaoming Chen, *From The May Fourth Movement to Communist Revolution: Guo Moruo and the Chinese Path to Communism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007); Shiyi Chen, *Guo Moruo Kaogu Lun* (A Study on Guo Moruo's Archaeological Works) (Chengdu: Bashu Publishing House, 2009); Xiaoqian Li and Fu Ren, "Guo Moruo" in *Jindai Zhongguo Shijia Xueji* (Eminent Historians of Modern China) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2018), 241-59; Lucien Bianco, *Lishi de Fuche: Zhonge Geming zhi Bijiao* (Stalin and Mao: A Comparison of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions), trans. Peiran Xia, (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2020).

[44] Gao, "Yan Fu's (Mis)translation of 'Feudal/Feudalism'." 35.

[45] Dirlik, *Revolution and History*, 140.

[46] Ibid., 139-40.

society."[47] Guo uses the *Shijing* in evidencing that "all humans were sons to the ruler, the sons of the Son of Heaven. Thus, humans were entirely instruments; entirely articles":[48]

> So he caused the Duke of Lu; To be lord of the east.
> Gave him the hills and streams, Lands, fields, dependencies (土田附庸 *tutian fuyong*). (魯頌: 閟宮 *The Hymns of Lu: The Closed Temple*) …
>
> The king charged the Lord of Shen: "Go to this southern country,
> Approach these people of Xie (因是謝人 *yinshi Xieren*), Make there your appanage (以作爾庸 *yizuo eryong*)."
> The king charged the Lord of Shao: "Tithe the Lord of Shen's lands and fields."
> The king charged his stewards: "Shift his lordship's own men (遷其私人 *qianqi siren*)." (大雅: 崧高 *The Major Odes: Mightiest of All Heights*) …
>
> The people have farm and field, but these you seize without warning.
> The people have working folk (人有民人 *renyou minren*). But these you commandeer. (大雅: 瞻卬 *The Major Odes: High Regard*)[49]

From these passages, Guo concludes that "*fuyong*" in fact meant "farmers bound to the land"; "*siren*" was the equivalent to "*yong*" in "*yizuo eryong*," also meaning laborers; "*minren*" whereas, was seen by Guo as equivalents to "farm and field," both being properties of the ruling class.[50] As Joseph R. Allen translates, "*fuyong*" meant "dependency," in other words, a vassal state. Yet Guo reinterprets the stanza not to mean lands, fields; and dependencies as separate entities, rather labor (*yong*) who are bound (*fu*) to farmland (*tutian*). The term "*fuyong*" in referring to vassal states may be found in the *Book of Rites* (禮記 *Liji*), which writes: "Those who hold less than 50 *li* of farmland, and are incompatible with the Son of Heaven, depend (*fu*) on the *zhuhou*, they are called *fuyong*."[51] It would therefore be a serious form of stigmatization to argue "*fuyong*" meant forced labor.

The second passage which Guo quotes is trickier as various interpretations may be deduced depending on the character *yin* and the context of the poem. Despite so,

[47] Moruo Guo, "Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Yanjiu (A Study on Ancient Chinese Society)" in *Guo Moruo Chuanji: Lishipian* (Complete Works of Guo Moruo: History), *8 vols.*, (Beijing: People's Press, 1982), vol. 1, 150.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Guo only quotes the original texts of the classics and cauldron scripts without providing his own translations. Available English translations are thus cited, without imposing Guo's interpretation upon the quoted texts. Ibid.; Allen, *The Book of Songs*, 273, 283, 314.

[50] Guo, "ZGSY", 150.

[51] Tianyu Yang, (ed.), *Liji Yizhu* (Translation and Annotation of the *Book of Rites*) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2004), p. 193; "incompatible": that is, they may not be directly commanded by, nor pay tribute to, the Son of Heaven; The modern character of "*yong*" in *fuyong* would consist of the radical "*tu* (earth)", which means city wall, and further signifies the state. "*Fuyong*" would thus mean "a depending state". See Xu Shen, Yucai Duan, Hao Xu, (ed.), "Shuowen Jiezi Zhujian di Shisan Xia (Commentary on the Annotation of the *Shuowen Jiezi* Volume Thirteen Part II]" in *Xuxiu Siku Quanshu* (Supplement to the Complete Library in Four Sections), *1800 vols.*, (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2002), vol. 227, 21.

neither Allen nor James Legge translate *yong* as labor. Whereas Guo's narration that "*yong*" and "*siren*" referred to "the Lord of Shen's new and old slaves respectively" would be most outrageous.[52] Allen's "make there your appanage" would assume *yong* to be identical to *fuyong*, with "there" being the state of Xie. Legge translates the verse into: "And by means of those people of Sëay (Xie), Proceed to display your merit."[53] In this translation, Legge assumes *yin* to mean "comply with," thus the Lord of Shen would make the people of Xie submit in a display of his *yong* ("merit").[54] The closest popular interpretation that implies "labor" would be Mao Heng's (毛亨), but not refer to laborers who would toil in the fields, rather, "*yong*" means "city wall."[55] The verse would thus translate as: "To rely on (*yin*) the people of Xie, and construct (*zuo*) your city walls (*yong*)." Under this interpretation, the people of Xie would certainly be laborers in building the city walls for the Lord of Shen. Forced labor or slavery, however, would be out of the question. After all, why "rely on (*yin*)" the people of Xie when one may simply "command" them? Guo's interpretation faces the same challenge. Even if "*yizuo eryong*" truly means to have the people of Xie toil in the fields, the "*yin*" in "*yinshi Xieren*" simply overthrows the possibility of forced labor.

Other than "*minren*," Guo further lists twelve verses from epigraphs inscribed upon Zhou Dynasty bronze vessels in evidencing that terms traditionally interpreted as "peoples" in fact referred to slaves. Few of these inscriptions narrate or imply any trace of slavery but were rather descriptions of how the Zhou Dynasty *fengjian* system operated. Several examples provide contextualization:

> Bestowed on you shall be officials of the realm (邦司 *bangsi*) amounting to four elders (伯 *bo*); peoples, including carriage drivers and commoners (庶人 *shuren*), altogether 659 men. Bestowed on you shall be thirteen foreign officials (夷司 *yisi*); peoples altogether 1050 men. (大盂鼎 *Da Yu Ding*) …
>
> Bestowed on you shall be minor ministers (小臣 *xiaochen*), flutes, drums, and bells. Bestowed on you shall be townsfolk who shall be assigned to the fields. (大克鼎 *Da Ke Ding*) …
>
> The King said: "Command your men to run! Whoever reaches the goal first, I shall bestow on him ten houses of slaves (臣 *chen*). (令鼎 *Ling Ding*)"[56]

Apparently, according to Guo Moruo, this was evidence that "the so called '*shuren*' and '*minren*' were completely identical to slaves, servants, and objects. '*Shuren*'

[52] Guo, "ZGSY", 150.

[53] James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: The She King, or The Book of Poetry* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 1960), 537.

[54] This use of *yong* may be seen in *Mencius*: "If he kills them, they do not resent it; if he benefits them, they do not assign the credit to him (*lizhi er buyong*)." See, Mencius, *Mencius*, 146.

[55] Heng Mao, *Maoshi Zhushu* (Annotation and Commentary of Mao's Commentary), (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2013), 1424. Zhu Xi also adopts this interpretation. See Jingde Li, (ed.), *Zhuzi Yulei* (Collected Conversations of Master Zhu), (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986), 2136.

[56] Guo, "ZGSY", 252.

were precisely slaves."[57] Yet only the *Ling Ding* among these passages indicates such a despisal toward human beings, or compares humans to objects, indicating their status as slaves. The *Da Yu Ding* (Great Yu Cauldron), for example, is a cauldron of great significance toward the study of *fengjian* in Western Zhou. Inscribed on the cauldron were the resources which the King Kang of Zhou presents to Yu. As the text indicates, not only human resources of drivers and "*shuren*" were presented, but ministers holding the rank of *Bo*. If the carriage drivers and *shuren*'s statuses as slaves are evidenced merely because they were "bestowed," why could the same logic not be applied to ministers? Regarding Guo's understanding of the word *shu*, *The Commentary of Zuo* (左傳 *Zuo Zhuan*) narrates that: "He killed the legitimate heir and established the 'son of a secondary consort' (*shu*) in his place"; and that "the clans of the Three Dynasties have become commoners (*shu*)."[58] A passage from the same chapter Guo later quotes also writes: "He who rules over the people (君民者 *junmin zhe*), how can he use his position to lord it over the people (豈以陵民 *qiyi lingmin*)?"[59] It would be unlikely that a slave was placed as heir, or that the descendants of King Shun, of the royals of the Xia and Shang dynasties have all become slaves under the Zhou. It would be especially erroneous to believe that a ruler may not 'lord upon' slaves, mere pieces of property. "*Shuren*" and "*minren*" had undoubtedly referred to "commoners" by the Zhou Dynasty. It is indeed curious that Guo suppresses these passages, but later cherry-picks certain sections of the *Commentary* in evidencing that slaves may have been rewarded in the Zhou Dynasty:

> Earlier, Fei Bao had been a slave (*li* 隸), his crime recorded in a red writ. Luan Ying had a strong retainer named Du Rong, whom the inhabitants of the capital feared. Fei Bao said to Fan Gaia, "If you will just burn the red writ, I will kill Du Rong." … (襄公二十三年 *Twenty-third Year of Xiang Gong*)[60]

Even more fallaciously, Guo returns to the *Shijing* which reads:

> And what is this inheritance? Heaven will cover you with rewards.
> My lord shall live long. Have long life, and a gift as well (景命有僕 *jingming youpu*).
> And what is this gift (*qipu weihe* 其僕維何)? He gives to you a girl (釐爾女士 *lier nüshi*).
> He gives you a girl. That you may in due time have grandsons and sons.[61]

Immediately following this verse, Guo writes that: "from this we realize the word '*pu*' is the original form of 'slave', there is no need for the analysis done by experts on the classics."[62] It is unknown how Guo's vivid imagination had caused him to comprehend and interpret "*pu*" to refer to a slave in the context of this poem, nor had he made any attempt to evidence it. As seen in Allen's translation, *pu* translates as a gift, in other words, an attachment. In this sense, "*jingming youpu*" would

[57] Ibid., 253.
[58] Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan: Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals."* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 1387, 1725.
[59] Ibid., 1141.
[60] Guo, "ZGSY", p. 254; Durrant, *Zuo Tradition*, 1109.
[61] Allen, *The Book of Songs*, 249.
[62] Guo, "ZGSY", 253.

translate as "Heavenly favor shall be attached upon you"; whereas "*qipu weihe*" would translate as "how will this attachment be presented." What makes Guo's interpretation of *pu* as a slave most erroneous is the status of the "girl" who was gifted. "*Nüshi*," composed of the characters "girl" and "scholar," referred to learn women with a scholarly character, a quality which a mere slave would not be logically capable of achieving, nor would ever be permitted to achieve. The latter line which reads: "that you may in due time have grandsons and sons" too suggests Guo's error. It would not have been appropriate for the nobleman to rely on his lineage upon a lowly slave. Along with his sloppy analysis of Zhou Dynasty cauldron inscriptions, rather than a scientific analysis, Guo was imposing his (mis)understanding of terms such as "*shuren*" and "*minren*" upon such inscriptions and classics. The following section where Guo "evidences" that the Western Zhou was "slave society" falls into the same fallacy:

> Earlier, Fei Bao … I will kill Du Rong
> You are appointed as an official of Cheng Zhou. Stock twenty houses worth of grain (颂鼎 *Song Ding*)
>
> To purchase these five men, would cost 100 *lüe* … [Hu] accepted the five men, called Pei, Heng, Ou, *, and Sheng (曶鼎 *Hu Ding*)[63]

While certain texts are valid indicators that slaves had existed under the Zhou Dynasty, some passages were taken out of context and see no sign of slavery at all, whereas none indicate that slaves were the fundamental source and means of production. Despite so, Guo asserts that these sources show that "slaves in the Zhou Dynasty, were precisely a principal form of property."[64] Without any evidence, Guo even makes the unfounded claim that: "The fact that slaves may be slain, is unrecorded in the epigraphs, which is a shame. The reason is that the murder of slaves was a common occurrence, and unworthy of inscription upon luxurious vessels."[65]

While it would be absurd to suggest a single "correct" interpretation of the classics, it is entirely possible to eliminate obviously fallacious interpretations. Guo Moruo's misinterpretations of the classics were therefore no mere misunderstandings. Various misinterpretations, especially those of the *Shijing*, may be pointed out by any amateur reader of the Confucian classics, and certainly not "mistakes" that someone of Guo Moruo's caliber would commit. It was a series of deliberate redefinitions, taking advantage of those unlearnt in the classics, in an attempt to slander Chinese antiquity, and of course, *fengjian*. It is therefore not hard to conceive that the redefinition of *fengjian* occurred during the Northern Expedition, as a part of the wider agenda of demonizing federalism. Consequently, tyrants such as Qin Shihuang (秦始皇) were rebranded as "the founding father who established the *fengjian* system in Chinese social history."[66] Statements that defend the tyrant's "innocence" soon appeared among the Chinese left. An essay authored in

[63] Untranslatable character. Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 255.
[65] Ibid., 255n.
[66] Ibid., 28.

1933 by Lu Xun and *de facto* CCP leader Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白) writes that: "Qin Shihuang was wrongly accused. The shortness of his dynasty which fell in the hands of his son has led him to suffer, and the petty literary hacks went on to flatter their new masters in defaming him."[67] The two furthermore found that the tyrant's burning of Confucian classics and premature burial of Confucian scholars were justified as it had helped achieve the "great causes" of "unification of systems and scripts."[68] Only through the unified, centralized, and authoritarian rule of Qin Shihuang would the rational rule be achieved, and push China beyond slave society; only through the unified, centralized, single-party, Chinese nation state would the rational rule be achieved, and push China beyond the status of being "semi-*fengjian*, semi-colonial." Guo Moruo's near-pseudohistorical account of slavery in the Western Zhou, whereas, was the first step toward the slandering of the *fengjian* system, and indeed, any system that proposed the separation of authority.

There was simply no reason for Guo to name this imported conception of a historical stage into "*fengjian*," when a valid, popular understanding of "*fengjian*" had preexisted. While Yan Fu mistranslated "feudal" into "*fengjian*" considering the sake of convenience and readability, he provided an alternative translation "*fute* (拂特)" in his early writings.[69] Guo's situation was rather different. As a professional historian, it was his responsibility to navigate around potential confusion and avoid reusing "*fengjian*" which had been for 3000 years only known to have denoted enfeoffment and establishment. It would not have been in Guo's best interests as a historian to adopt "*fengjian*" in narrating feudal society, with little attempt to clarify between *fengjian*'s original historical definition and its newly imported sociological definition. It would be easy for Guo to simply adopt Yan Fu's translation of "*fute*," or better yet: to coin a new term and be widely credited for it. That is, however, only if his best interests were that of a historian, rather than that of a politician or propagandist. Therefore, not only did Guo attempt to introduce "*fengjian*" as "feudal society," but to entirely replace and erase the *fengjian* of the Western Zhou. Guo thus speaks of the *fengjian* system as if the naming of the Three Dynasties as *fengjian* was a deliberate manipulation in aiding obscurantism:

> In the past, it was claimed that the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties were of the *fengjian* system, different from the *junxian* system which was in use since the Qin. This was seen as a principle bound by Heaven and Earth. No one dared to challenge this definition, nor was one ever permitted to question it. But now *fengjian* has been given a new meaning, and so the theory that the Three Dynasties used the *fengjian* system has been shaken.[70]

Guo's definition of *fengjian* society itself largely lacked foundation, even by the standards of his time. Comparing Guo's work with contemporary Marxist historians, Guo's work uniquely stands out for failing to grasp Marxist theory.[71] Nor

[67] Shuren Zhou and Qiubai Qu, "Huade Hunshu Yitong Lun (Comparing the Burning of Books in China and Germany)", *Shen Bao: Ziyou Tan*, July 11, 1933.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Gao, "Yan Fu's (Mis)translation of 'Feudal/Feudalism'." 34.
[70] Moruo Guo, "Shi Pipan Shu (Ten Critiques)" in *Guo Moruo Chuanji*, vol. 2, 13.
[71] See, Feng, *Fengjian Kaolun*, 238–51.

has he succeeded in respecting and preserving the linguistic properties of the characters "*feng*" and "*jian*." Yet it was precisely this ambiguity of what "*fengjian*" truly meant that aided the term's depravation. Understanding the importance of the discourse on *fengjian* in medieval China, and its connections with federalism which dominated early 1920s Chinese political thought, Guo's manipulation of *fengjian* is contextualized. Guo's standard toward what constitutes as *fengjian* was ironically the collapse of the *fengjian* system and the unification of China. Qin Shihuang, who ought to have abolished the *fengjian* system in favor of *junxian* became the "founder" of *fengjian*. With the redefinition of *fengjian*, not only is the future legitimacy of the CCP justified through the universalization of Marxist historiography. Perhaps more importantly, the status of *fengjian* as the Confucian liberal tradition of local autonomy was completely removed, and the historical justification toward a federalist China was destroyed. With Guo's definition of *fengjian* adopted by Mao in a speech in 1940, soon to be ingrained in textbooks, Guo's manipulation of *fengjian* was undoubtedly the instigator toward the widespread misuse and derogation of the term. The CCP's adoption of Guo's manipulation, whereas, has always served the purpose of demonizing decentralization.

Guo would continue his career largely as a propagandist, rather than a proper historian, widely earning his reputation as "a skillful opportunist."[72] Or as Luciem Bianco writes, what is

> most impressive [about Guo] is his ability of flattery. Being called to Nanjing by Chiang in 1937, Guo immediately wrote "Meeting Generalissimo Chiang (蔣委員長會見記 *Jiang Weiyuanzhang Huijianji*)" claiming that the supreme leader's "eyes possessed exceptional spirit" and "expressed determination in resistance."[73]

In 1959, Guo wrote "Overturning Cao Cao's Verdict" after a conversation with Mao in November of 1957, who expressed that the traditional "villain" in Chinese opera and fiction was a "force of righteousness" and "an impressive man unfortunately wronged."[74] After 10 years of flattering Mao's wife, Jiang Qing (江青), comparing her with China's only female emperor Wu Zetian (武則天), along with the "overturning" of Wu Zetian's verdict as a cruel dictator; Guo immediately denounces her as the skeletal demoness *Baigujing* (白骨精) from the classic novel *Journey to the West* after the fall of the Gang of Four following Mao's death.[75] Guo's manipulation of *fengjian* was of a similar nature: by removing *fengjian*'s character and true purpose in Chinese history while preserving its name; invent and insert an unrelated, conflicting definition toward its now empty shell, *fengjian*

[72] Hsüan Mo, "The Chinese Communists' Evaluation of Confucius and the Political Aims of Their All-Out Campaign to 'Criticize Confucius' (II)" *Chinese Studies in Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (1975): 4.

[73] Lucien Bianco, *Lishi de Fuche: Zhonge Geming zhi Bijiao*, 196.

[74] Guo, "Ti Cao Cao Fanan (Overturning Cao Cao's Verdict)" in *Guo Moruo Chuanji,* vol. 3, 457–76.

[75] Guo, "Guanyu Wu Zetian de Liangge Wenti (Several Inquiries Regarding Wu Zetian)," in *Guo Moruo Chuanji*, vol. 3, 510–17; Bianco, *Lishi de Fuche*, 196.

was successfully defamed, causing few now to even recognize *fengjian* as China's millennia-long tradition of liberty.

Conclusion

The transformation of *fengjian* from a Confucian tradition of liberalism and local autonomy, to what we see now: a landfill for all things retrogressive and pedantic, is not a transformation solely led by the mere evolution of words. *Fengjian* had for long served as a banner of the Confucian ideal of promoting local autonomy and limiting imperial authority. *Fengjian* also had an inseparable linkage to the federalist movement which dominated 1920s China, in particular, Zhang Taiyan's vision of a federalist China took direct influence from Confucian tradition. Undeniably, Yan Fu's mistranslation of *fengjian* as feudal was the origin of the generalization of *fengjian*, whereas the generalization of *fengjian* had been committed by the early Marxists of China, at least a decade before Guo Moruo had even started to write *ZGSY*. Had it not been Guo Moruo's work, however, the modern misuse of *fengjian* would not have been cemented into Chinese textbooks in the 1940s, and infiltrate into academia, which to this day, dominates Chinese historiography. With the historical context of the Northern Expedition which occurred throughout Guo's writing of *ZGSY*, and the irrationality in Guo's interpretation of Confucian classics, we see Guo's motivation for demonizing *fengjian*, serve the greater agenda of demonizing federalism. By removing the original meaning of *fengjian*, China's own long domestic root and tradition of local autonomy, decentralization, and all forms of separation of authority was portrayed as retrogressive and pedantic in nature.

While James L. Hevia showed optimism toward the future of "*fengjian*," claiming that "we should probably not be too surprised if *fengjian* were to undergo yet another transformation," this is unfortunately highly unlikely.[76] Being in direct opposition with the Marxist interpretation of history, rehabilitating the concept of *fengjian* continues to be an inherently sensitive task. In justifying the CCP's rulership, modern China faces the same task of universalizing Marxist historiography. Furthermore, as we have observed, the controversy of *fengjian* reaches far beyond the legitimacy of authority, but also an intentional misuse that attempts to demonize and erase ideologies of local autonomy. Today, the Chinese official interpretation of history often views the unification of China as an untouchable principle and attempts to create the illusion of a primordialist, hyper-united Chinese nation state that has existed since antiquity. By removing *fengjian*'s original meaning, this illusion is further enforced, eliminating any trace of a regionalist tradition in China, and preventing individuals from taking inspiration from *fengjian*. Precisely due to the topic's sensitivity, merely a handful of Chinese academics dare to speak of the controversy surrounding *fengjian* in the historical context, let alone attempt to associate *fengjian* with alternative forms of governance in the modern political context. This creates the illusion that only the madman Liu Zhongjing (劉仲敬), rather than the proper academic, would ever consider the *fengjian*

[76] James L. Hevia, review of *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, by Prasenjit Duara, *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 4 (1997): 604.

system valuable. This article, being named "A New Discourse on *Fengjian*," therefore not only attempts to propose a new perspective toward how the modern misuse of *fengjian* came to be. This article further attempts to through the uniqueness and significance behind the evolution of *fengjian*, encourage its well-deserved awareness and rehabilitation, in other words, "a new discourse." Perhaps by such means, *fengjian* as a Chinese tradition of liberty and local autonomy may be revived and rediscovered.

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