

Communications to the Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

Since the reply of Anita Andrew and John Rapp to my letter (*JAS*, August 1995) still insists that they stand by their misleading review (*JAS*, November 1994) of my book *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) and makes additional distortions, I have to further clarify the issues.

One of the basic issues underlined in the book, that traditional China had been autocratic during the imperial period and that the PRC has been autocratic since 1949, is a matter of fact which the reviewers still tried to circumvent but failed to deny. Yet, nowhere have I argued a “case for an unchanging autocracy.” The reviewers twice used part of a passage for such misrepresentation. The book states: “Under the emperor the imperial state bureaucracy was functionally divided into three interlocking but independent parts: the civil administration, the military, and the censorate. These were hierarchically divided into different gradations from the central to various local levels. From 221 B.C. to A.D. 1912, this basic structure of the Chinese imperial central administration remained essentially unchanged except for minor modifications and adaptations” (p. 71). Such continuity of the basic structure of imperial bureaucracy (in terms of tri-partition and hierarchy) is a matter of fact. Was the imperial state bureaucracy ever divided into four or more parts and not hierarchically graded?

The book traced both the continuities and changes of imperial autocracy, including changes in: ideological restructuring, the office of chancellorship, government ministries, civil service examination, grassroots organization, the dynastic patterns; the emergence of Chinese civil society, the breakup of the imperial system, etc. The reviewers had to admit that I “recognize that there were indeed significant ways in which the central administrative structure changed, especially during the Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties” (November 1994). How can the book be logically labeled as “unchanging autocracy”?

First the reviewers accused me of ignoring “evidence that would show the state’s limited success in achieving total autonomy from its subjects” but in a later reply (May 1995) they admit that the imperial bureaucracy was able in “maintaining the state’s autonomy as a whole.” This is just another case of self-contradiction. It is hard to argue with people whose “refinement” consists not only in making willful distortions but also asserting that propositions A and non-A are both true.

Andrew and Rapp contend that “Zhu and Mao were great exceptions in Chinese history, and that the bureaucracy often was able to constrain emperors’ action.” Yet, there were not only too many other great exceptions (such as the emperors Qin Shihuang, Han Gaozu, Han Gaohou, Han Wudi, Han Guangwu, Jin Yuangdi, Liang Wudi, Sui Wendi, Sui Yangdi, Tang Taizu, Tang Taizong, Wu Zetian, Song Taizu, Song Yingzong, Yuan Taizu, Yuan Taizong, Ming Taizong, Shunzhi, Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong, etc., etc.) but only rarely was the bureaucracy ever able to constrain the emperors’ action in exceptional cases.

The Confucian themes of humaneness, decorum, moral education, rule by virtue, and the Daoist themes of mysticism, nonaction, *laissez faire* governance, and

otherworldliness are all spelled out in chapter 3. Yet, the reviewers insist I treat “virtually all Daoist and Confucian thought as proto-Legalism” (November 1994) and of “ignoring the Utopian Confucian tradition based on Mencius” (May 1995). This is another blatant distortion. Here are some passages about Mencius in chapter 3: “Mencius expanded the idea of humane rule and set up a program that he tried to persuade the rulers of various states to adopt. This government program was quite specific: to impose less taxation, to employ the peasants in a timely manner, to use more moral persuasion, to provide more care for the old and young, to set up public schools, to encourage tree planting, to promote fishery and forestry, and to distribute farmland equitably. Mencius was the first Chinese philosopher to advocate the principle that the people have the moral right to execute a tyrannical ruler. He also gave the most eloquent defense for the dignity of the independent scholar.” And “Mencius is known for his statement on the inherent goodness of human nature. He believed all humans are instinctively endowed with the sense of sympathy, shame, modesty, and right and wrong; these in turn give rise to humaneness, righteousness, decorum, and wisdom,” etc. Only in the “refined” understanding of the reviewers can these be identified as proto-Legalism.

As proof of “unchanging autocracy,” they even criticized me for stating: “although this [Daoist] school of pre-Qin philosophy is often identified as naturalist and even anarchist, it had a close affinity with the totalitarian Legalists.” According to their “refined” understanding such affinity must be nonexistent. The close relationship between the Daoists and the Legalists is regarded as mere common sense by almost all scholars of pre-Qin philosophy. For example, in H. G. Creel’s *Chinese Thought* (Chicago University Press), after noting the close relationship between Confucianism and Legalism, Creel observed: “It is with Taoism [Daoism], however, that the affinities of Legalism are clearest” (p. 117). In K. Hsiao’s *A History of Chinese Political Thought* (Princeton University Press), their affinities are further elaborated. These authors are acknowledged authorities and not self proclaimed sinologists who specialize in Chinese philosophy but cannot read classical text in the original.

The reviewers criticized me of treating Confucianism mainly “as a support for traditional imperial autocracy.” I have intentionally distinguished “classical Confucianism” and other versions from the “official orthodox Confucianism” which was actually an amalgam of Legalism and Confucianism. It was indeed this version of Confucianism that had been consistently used to consolidate the autocratic rule of the emperor and the state’s domination over the people from its establishment as official orthodoxy under Emperor Han Wudi, who was a Legalist, in second century B.C. to A.D. 1911. The use of Confucian rhetoric to serve as facade for Legalist practice and as indoctrination tool had been a major feature of Chinese traditional autocracy. This is not only recognized by most Chinese scholars but even admitted by eminent Confucians and emperors. This is amply documented in the book. Do Andrew and Rapp really believe that all the despotic emperors promoted Confucianism out of altruistic compassion and not for serving their own political interests?

The book consistently uses political culture and the state as two major independent variables in explaining changes and continuities of Chinese autocracy, including the change of totalitarianism after the death of Mao. Contrary to the misrepresentation of the reviewers, this book recounts the changes in political culture and the actions of the state during the post-Mao era which led to socioeconomic and political changes resulting in the transition from totalitarianism to authoritarianism.

The real reason for Andrew and Rapp to label my book as “unchanging autocracy” is because it uses the term “totalitarianism” which is taboo in their lexicon of political

correctness. The “unchanging totalitarianism model” is a bogey paper tiger used by ideologues to scare anyone who dare to apply the term “totalitarianism” to their favorite regimes.

The real shame is that in the 1990s when people know more about the realities of totalitarianism, some Western scholars still deny its existence by resorting to distortion, scare tactics, illogical argument and denial. However, the totalitarian realities of Hitler’s Nazi Germany, Stalin’s Soviet Union and Mao’s PRC are objective historical facts documented by the blood of hundreds of millions of victims. No amount of ideological whitewashing can banish the term “totalitarianism” with its associated realities from the memory of humankind.

ZHENGYUAN FU
Chapman University

TO THE EDITOR:

In yet another reply to our August 1995 review of his book, Professor Fu Zhengyuan continues to take his own work and the words of other scholars, including ourselves, out of context in order to make his own book seem a less unbalanced and distorted account of Chinese history, philosophy and politics than it is.

We regret that Professor Fu evidently feels justified in launching personal attacks on the academic credentials of his reviewers simply because they disagree with him or are not willing to give him an uncritical review. In any case, his assumptions about us are inaccurate. Given the tone of his replies, we no longer wish to participate in this discussion. We stand by our review and our original rejoinder.

JOHN A. RAPP
Beloit College

ANITA M. ANDREW
Northern Illinois University