

The Metamorphosis of Tianxian pei: Local Opera Under the Revolution (1949-1956)

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tells us how Jesuit missionaries, especially Schall and Verbiest, succeeded in demonstrating the superiority of Western astronomy based on spherical trigonometry, so much so that from Kangxi's time until the 1840s, the top position at the Astro-calendrical Bureau (*Qiantian Jian*) would be shared by a Jesuit and a Manchu. Chapter 3, "Searching for Truth in the Origins of Civilizations," features Mei Wending's mathematical genius and his response to Bouvet's cosmological claims about the origins of civilizations. Chapter 4, "How to Build a Coalition around Science," tells us that there was a "science faction" among the scholar-officials in court, devoted to continuing and transmitting Jesuit mathematical astronomy to elite society, so that it would become a part of classical knowledge. It is only in chapter 5, "An Outsider Enters the Mainstream," that Dai takes center stage, where Hu details the ways in which Dai developed his intellectual goals and agenda, which were to reconstruct the real and perfect classical world with his technical methods that were an integral part of classical learning. Chapter 6, "How to Dethrone Jesuit Science," reveals how Dai and others employed mathematical astronomy to explicate and understand rites and rituals in the classics, thus using Jesuit science to affirm the centrality of the Chinese classical order. Chapter 7, "Bringing It Home to the Palace of Light," highlights Dai's and others' endeavors to reconstruct the *mingtang*, understood by him to be a cosmological hall, an ancestral temple, and a policy chamber. Chapter 8, "Legibility of Visionary Scholars," shows how Dai and his cohort supplied classical and technical knowledge, especially in the domains of mathematical cosmology, historical geography, and social order (as reflected in the proper garb of the *shenyi*, "the long garment") that would legitimize the Qing imperial state.

Hu's revisionist study sheds new light on the innovativeness of Dai Zhen's learning and thinking, enriching our understanding of the scientific and technical dimensions of *kaozheng* scholarship. Yet, Hu's prospective view that such innovativeness adumbrates China's transition to modernity may be a stretch. Hu seems to have taken entrenched historiographic views, especially those of Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, Liang Qichao, Yasuda Jiro, and Mizoguchi Yūzō—which make Dai into a revolutionary spokesperson for early modern Chinese scientism, humanism, and individualism—as historical reality. While Dai's reimagining of the Confucian cosmopolis with his classical and technical knowledge was undeniably remarkable or even original, we may legitimately ask whether his thought represents fundamental questioning of the ultimate ground of moral values, the traditional mode of knowledge, and the old sense of the past. I do not believe Hu has scrutinized Dai's ideas in such a way that their "modernity" can be ascertained.

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Tianxian pei (Married to a heaven immortal) is a Chinese *Huangmeixi* (Huangmei opera) play from Anhui Province that became a national sensation in the 1950s thanks to a film adaptation based on a stage revision of pre-1949 versions. The old performance

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