

## Research on the Causes of Intellectual and Cultural Changes in the Process of the Tang-Song Social Transformation

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**Abstract:** The period between the Tang and Song dynasties (8th–13th centuries) marked a profound social transformation in Chinese history. Employing the "Tang-Song Transformation Theory" as a theoretical framework, this paper systematically examines the significant changes in economic, political, and social structures during this era, focusing on how these foundational transformations catalyzed profound innovations in intellectual and cultural spheres. It further explores the concrete manifestations of this cultural shift and its reciprocal impact on various aspects of society. Research indicates that changes in land institutions, exemplified by the widespread adoption of the tenant-farming system, and the flourishing commodity economy gradually dismantled the social foundation of aristocratic clans, propelling society toward a more popularized direction. Adjustments in the central power structure, such as the establishment of the Zhongshu-Menxia system, coupled with the continuous refinement of the imperial examination system, collectively reshaped the composition of political elites and facilitated the rise of scholar-official politics. The restructuring of social stratification—including the emergence of the wealthy class, the rise of urban citizens, and changes in the status of peasants—profoundly altered the relationship between the state and society. Against this backdrop, Confucianism underwent revival and modernizing transformation, particularly with the rise of Neo-Confucianism. Innovations in dissemination methods, aided by the advancement of printing technology and the development of academies, gradually constructed an ideological system adapted to the new social morphology-Neo-Confucianism. This system emphasized the exploration of moral principles and practical statecraft, exhibiting

distinct secular and popularized characteristics. Through institutionalized channels such as the imperial examinations and education, it, in turn, profoundly influenced economic development by standardizing commercial ethics; enhanced political governance by optimizing bureaucratic quality and maintaining order; and promoted social mobility and the shaping of social norms. The dialectical interaction between cultural innovation and social change, as manifested in the Tang-Song transformation, remains of significant relevance for fostering cultural confidence, advancing cultural innovation, improving social governance, and nurturing future generations in the new era.

**Keywords:** Tang-Song Social Transformation; Intellectual and Cultural Changes; Confucianism (Neo-Confucianism); Imperial Examination System; Commodity Economy; Popularization; Modern Implications

### 1. Introduction

In the early 20th century, the Japanese scholar Naitō Konan proposed the "Tang-Song Transformation Theory," positing that Chinese society underwent a fundamental shift from the medieval to the early modern period during the Tang and Song transition. Although later scholars have extensively supplemented and revised his views, particularly those influenced by Marxist historiography who have engaged in critical reflection on this theory, producing new understandings and evaluations suited to contemporary times, it is undeniable that this period indeed represents a watershed transformative stage in Chinese history. The Tang-Song transformation encompasses multiple dimensions, including economic structure, political system, social organization, and intellectual culture, with far-reaching influences that established the basic framework of early modern Chinese society thereafter.

Marx's historical materialism states that social existence determines social consciousness. The intense social changes of the Tang-Song period inevitably triggered profound transformations in the intellectual and cultural spheres. Simultaneously, the nascent intellectual and cultural system, with its own agency, reacted upon social reality, participating in the shaping of a new order. Guided by historical materialism and relying on detailed historical materials and existing research, this paper systematically outlines the core characteristics of the Tang-Song social transformation, focusing on analyzing the driving mechanisms by which economic, political, and social structural changes spurred intellectual and cultural innovation. It further explores how intellectual culture, through content reconstruction, dissemination innovations, and functional expansion, in turn influenced economic, political, and social development. This research aims to extract the dialectical logic of the interaction between culture and society from historical context, providing historical insights for fostering cultural confidence, advancing cultural innovation, and improving social governance in the new era.

## 2. Characteristics of the Tang-Song Social Transformation

The Tang-Song social transformation was not a linear progression in a single dimension but a profound, multidimensional change where economic base, political system, and social structure interwove and mutually propelled each other.

### 2.1 Economy

The core manifestation of the Tang-Song economic structural transformation was the shift from a natural economy to a commodity economy. From the mid-Tang period onward, with the collapse of the Equal-field System and the increasing liberalization of land trade, agricultural productivity significantly improved, evident in the widespread use of the curved-shaft plow, advances in rice cultivation technology such as the introduction of Champa rice, and the construction of water conservancy projects in Jiangnan [1]. This provided a solid foundation for the development of handicrafts like ceramics, silk weaving, mining, and metallurgy, as well as commerce. A national market network began to take shape,

long-distance trade flourished, and the monetary economy became unprecedentedly active, thoroughly altering the natural economic form dominated by a subsistence economy and labor-service rents since the Han and Tang dynasties [2].

The transformation of Tang-Song land systems and production relations manifested as the replacement of the Equal-field System by the tenant-farming system and the evolution from the manorial serfdom of the Tang to the contractual tenant farming of the Song. After the collapse of the Equal-field System, private land ownership was finally established, frequent land transactions led to "no established field system" and "no suppression of land annexation," and production relations changed dramatically. Contractual tenant relationships replaced state land grants under the Equal-field System and serfdom within Tang manors, becoming the mainstream. The Song system of Main Households (landowners) and Client Households (tenants) was the legal reflection of this change. Although Song tenants were still exploited, their legal status tended towards freedom; they were registered citizens of the state, and their personal dependency was significantly weaker than that of Tang manor serfs. Production relations showed marked characteristics of contractualization, monetization, and the popularization of hired labor [3].

A key feature of the Tang-Song fiscal system transformation was the shift from a in-kind and labor-service based fiscal system to a monetary one. Before the mid-Tang, poll taxes and corvée labor were the main fiscal foundations for the state apparatus. Thereafter, land taxes gradually replaced poll taxes, constituting the state's main revenue. By the early Qing's "merging of the ding tax into the land tax," the land tax became the sole form of agricultural tax (at least institutionally). The watershed was the Two Tax Law promulgated in the first year of the Jianzhong era (780) under Emperor Dezong of Tang. The Two Tax Law abandoned the traditional practice of determining taxes based on adult males, changing taxation from per capita to based on assets and wealth. This signaled the major trend in the structure of tax and labor exaction in ancient Chinese society moving from a dual-track system to a single-track system [4]. Measures like the Substitute Service Law and the Green Sprouts

Loan Law during Wang Anshi's reforms pushed fiscal monetization to its peak. This transformation profoundly influenced the mode of government operation and socio-economic linkages.

The shift in the Tang-Song economic pattern mainly included the southward movement of the economic center, the acceleration of urbanization, and the formation of open markets along the southeast coast. After the An Lushan Rebellion, the southward shift of the economic center of gravity was completed, and Jiangnan became the nation's economic lifeline. From the mid-Tang until the late Northern Song, the population in the Jiangnan region continued to grow, promoting the deep development of plain areas, with large amounts of uncultivated land being reclaimed into fertile fields. During the Northern Song, driven by both official and private efforts, water conservancy construction-particularly large-scale pond and canal systems-was significantly strengthened. Agricultural technology advanced accordingly, leading to substantial increases in both per-unit and total grain yields. By the mid-Northern Song, the southeast had already developed into a crucial pillar of state finance. The proverb "When Suzhou and Huzhou have a good harvest, the whole empire has enough to eat," traditionally thought to have originated in the Southern Song, was actually already common in the mid-Northern Song, reflecting the actual level of the region's agricultural economy. Research by Zhou Shengchun further indicates that the rapid population growth in the Taihu Basin during the Northern Song provided ample labor for land reclamation and intensive agriculture. By the late Northern Song, almost all reclaimable land had been opened up, and agricultural development reached its peak. After the mid-Northern Song, large-scale construction of polder fields (wei-tian) emerged in the Jiangnan region, centered on Su, Hu, and Xiu prefectures. Fan Zhongyan detailed their structure: "Each polder is dozens of li square, like a large city, with canals inside and sluice gates outside, closing them to block floodwaters," believing they were effective against both drought and flood. The Southern Song established its capital in Lin'an, further highlighting Jiangnan's political and economic status. The double-cropping and continuous cropping system, which sprouted in the mid-Tang and developed through the Five

Dynasties and Northern Song, matured in the economically most advanced Jiangnan region, further strengthening its status as an agricultural core area. During the Southern Song, the per capita cultivated land area in Jiangnan was still relatively ample, farming activities tended towards intensive cultivation, and whether landowners or tenants, most could rely on agriculture for their livelihood. The region not only achieved grain self-sufficiency but also supplied millions of dan of tribute grain annually and had surplus grain sold to areas like Eastern Zhejiang and North China, becoming an important source of cross-regional rice circulation. In essence, the overall development of agriculture in Song Dynasty Jiangnan reached an unprecedented height, marking a significant transformation in the spatial pattern of China's traditional agricultural economy [5].

The southward shift of China's ancient economic center began in the mid-8th century and was completed in the latter half of the 11th century, fundamentally altering the economic pattern centered on the Yellow River Basin since the Warring States, Qin, and Han periods. After the mid-Tang, the economic center moved southward, closer to the southeastern coastal areas, thereby providing a historical opportunity for the transition from a closed natural economy to an open commodity economy. The transformation from a landlocked country to a maritime country essentially meant a shift from a natural economy to a commodity economy, from custom-oriented to market-oriented, from a single-crop economy to diversified operations, from basic self-sufficiency to developed specialization and division of labor, from primarily producing use-value to producing exchange value, and from a closed economy to an open economy [6].

Accompanied by increased grain surplus rates, changes in the rural industrial structure, and agricultural development providing raw materials for urban handicrafts, farmers with surplus capacity began engaging in handicrafts and moving to cities. Song dynasty towns rose, and the urbanization process accelerated rapidly. Northern Song Dongjing (Bianliang) and Southern Song Lin'an both had populations exceeding one million, their prosperity vividly recorded in "Dongjing Meng Hua Lu" and "Meng Liang Lu". "Meng Liang Lu" Volume 13 states: "All things gather here, hundreds of trades and markets," and "From the main streets

to the various lanes, large and small shops are connected door to door, with no empty houses." "In the markets of Hangzhou's main streets, buying and selling never cease day or night. Around the third or fourth watch [11 pm-3 am], the crowd thins; when the fifth watch drum sounds [3-5 am], those selling the morning market open their shops again" [7]. Night markets lasted until the third or fourth watch, with morning markets immediately following, forming a 24-hour commercial cycle.

## 2.2 Politics

The hallmark of the Tang-Song central institutional transformation was the evolution from the Three Departments and Six Ministries system to the Zhongshu-Menxia system, and the shift from the Administrative Hall (Zhengshitang) to the Hanlin Academy and the Bureau of Military Affairs (Shumiyuan). The Tang's Three Departments and Six Ministries system (Zhongshu drafted policy, Menxia reviewed, Shangshu executed) gradually developed in a more centralized direction. In the early Tang, the central system followed the Sui's Three Departments and Six Ministries system, with the Administrative Hall as the central institution. As politics grew more complex, in the mid-to-late Tang, the power of the Hanlin Academy and the Shumiyuan rose, gradually becoming the true central institutions. As the power of the Hanlin Academy and Shumiyuan increased, the power of the Three Departments' chancellors declined. In the early Tang, state affairs were decided by the chancellor's office, the Administrative Hall or Zhongshu-Menxia; in the late Tang, the Hanlin Academy gradually grasped most of the draft edict power, the duties of the Office of Military Affairs under Zhongshu-Menxia were transferred to the Shumiyuan, and the remaining decision-making power of Zhongshu-Menxia became minimal. After Emperor Xianzong of Tang, major state decisions were drafted by the Hanlin Academy, announced by the Shumiyuan, and executed by Zhongshu-Menxia. The early Tang system of Zhongshu drafting, Menxia countersigning, and Shangshu executing gradually disintegrated. The reason for the evolution from the Administrative Hall to the Hanlin Academy and Shumiyuan was that Hanlin academicians and Shumiyuan commissioners were easier for the emperor to control, fitting the needs of autocratic monarchy; the Three Departments and Six Ministries

system could not adapt to the complex new circumstances following the development and changes in political, economic, and class relations in the late Tang. The Song formally established the "Zhongshu-Menxia" (Administrative Hall) system. The Chancellor (Tong Zhongshu Menxia Pingzhangshi) concentrated authority, with functional agencies like the Shumiyuan and the Three Departments (Sansi) established beneath him. The emperor achieved more direct rule by controlling the chancellor and the Censorate (Taijian), marking the strengthening of autocratic monarchy.

The evolution of the Tang-Song autocratic monarchy system profoundly influenced the relationship between imperial and ministerial power and that between central and local authorities. Song rulers, learning from the lessons of late Tang and Five Dynasties' military governor separatism, rigorously implemented a policy of "strengthening internal control while being externally weak." Through measures like "relieving generals of their command over a cup of wine," appointing civilian officials as prefects, the Tongpan (assessor) system, the Army Rotation Method, using Fiscal Commissioners (Zhuanyunshi) to control local finances, and reducing the Imperial Guard, they greatly weakened local power, diminished military authority, and strengthened centralization.

The shift in selection principles from emphasizing family background to solely valuing talent brought about the transition from an aristocratic society to a bureaucratic society around the Sui-Tang period [8]. Tang-Song bureaucratic politics underwent an important transformation from aristocratic politics to scholar-official politics. The influence of the powerful families (menfa shizu) since the Wei-Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties, though still present in the Tang, declined due to the impact of the imperial examinations and warfare. The Song reformed the imperial examination system, making it the primary path to office. The Song expanded the quota of presented scholars (jinshi) admitted and improved the treatment of successful candidates. To prevent examiner favoritism and candidate fraud, they implemented the lockdown system for examiners, the practice of sealing and recopying names on exams, and strictly prohibited cheating. From the sixth year of the Kaibao era (973), after the Ministry of Rites examination (provincial level), an

emperor-presided palace examination was added, formally establishing the three-tier examination system of prefectural, provincial, and palace exams. Success in the palace exam led directly to office. In the second year of the Yongxi era (985), the practice of publicly announcing names and granting degrees in the palace was created. During Wang Anshi's reforms, the various Classicist (mingjing) categories were abolished, selecting only through the jinshi exam; candidates were no longer tested on poetry, rote memorization of classics, but on the meaning of the classics and policy discussions. The stricter, more standardized Song examination reforms, coupled with the spread of printing, propelled Chinese society's transformation from a "powerful family society" to an "examination society." The Song selection system's emphasis on seniority and resume/experience valued the official's personal experience and ability to handle various practical problems. Most mid-to-high-level central officials and local governors in the Song had extensive local work experience. They advanced step-by-step from lower to higher ranks based on seniority. The experience they accumulated locally in elections, finance, rituals and sacrifices, military affairs and border defense, justice and prisons, engineering construction, etc., made them versatile talents capable of adapting to various tasks when promoted to higher positions. Most of them entered officialdom through the examinations, which ensured they had relatively complete cultural literacy and a high knowledge level. On this basis, the Song's composite-type bureaucratic group was formed, and the scholar-official politics of China's imperial era entered a new stage [8].

### 2.3 Culture

The transformation of Tang-Song intellectual concepts exhibited dual characteristics: a transition from aristocratic culture to popular culture, and from religious culture to secular culture.

Tang culture was carried mainly by powerful families. Literature and arts served courtly esthetics and religious ceremonies, such as court elegant music, parallel prose pianwen creation, and Buddhist cave art, all reflecting elite, closed traits. With the improvement of the examination system and the flourishing commodity economy in the Song, cultural power shifted downward:

on one hand, the rise of the urban citizen class gave rise to secular entertainment forms like variety entertainment venues (washe golang), script for storytelling (huaben), southern drama (nanxi). "Dongjing Meng Hua Lu" records in Bianjing "Within the variety entertainment venues, there are often medicine sellers, fortune tellers, old clothes hawkers, performers, food vendors, barbers, paper artists, singers, and the like" [10], making city life a literary theme. On the other hand, the spread of education promoted the descent of knowledge. Northern Song state and prefectural schools increased tenfold compared to the Tang. Academy lectures broke the monopoly of knowledge. Primers like Zhu Xi's "Tongmeng Xuzhi" instilled Confucian ethics into the populace. The essence of this transformation was the shift of the cultural subject from "aristocratic esthetics" to nationwide participation, constructing a popular culture centered on secular concerns.

Buddhism flourished in the Tang, with monastery economy occupying one-sixth of cultivated land. Dunhuang transformation texts (bianwen) and Longmen sculptures demonstrated religious domination of art. The rise of Neo-Confucianism (Lixue) in the Song reconstructed the value order: although Buddhism and Daoism continued, their social functions were rationally transformed-Chan Buddhism turned to "carrying water and chopping wood are nothing but the wondrous Dao," the Quanzhen Daoist school advocated "cultivating both nature and life," integrating religious practice into daily ethics. Meanwhile, Confucianism, by absorbing the speculative resources of Buddhism and Daoism, upgraded "theory of heaven's mandate" to "theory of heavenly principle" (tianli), liberating moral cultivation from religious frameworks into secular efforts of "investigating things to extend knowledge" and "making thoughts sincere and rectifying the mind." Cheng Yi's proposition "nature is principle" marked the unity of cosmic order and human ethics, deconstructing religious mysticism into verifiable rational practice.

The core of the Tang-Song academic intellectual transformation was a classical revolution from exegetical studies (zhangju xungu) to philosophical interpretation (yili chanfa), i.e., the shift from Han-Tang classical studies to Song learning (Songxue), and the differentiation within Song learning and the systematization of Neo-Confucianism.

Han-Tang classical studies were confined to explaining names and objects (mingwu xungu). The "Correct Meanings of the Five Classics" held "commentaries cannot contradict the annotations" as its standard, leading to rigid knowledge production. Song Confucianists launched a methodological revolution: Ouyang Xiu's "Questions from a Child about the Changes" questioned the authenticity of the "Appended Judgments," Wang Anshi promulgated the "New Meanings of the Three Classics" using "philosophical principles" instead of exegesis, Zhu Xi stated bluntly "scholars of old did not go beyond commentaries and sub-commentaries, people today do not read books." This transformation liberated classical studies from textual criticism, turning toward metaphysical contemplation of ethical order and political systems, forming a new canonical system centered on the "Four Books"-the Cheng brothers called the "Great Learning" the "gate to virtue," the "Doctrine of the Mean" the "mind-heart method of the Confucian school." The status of the Four Books surpassed that of the Five Classics, becoming an intellectual historical turning point.

Song learning was not a single trend of thought but contained multiple schools: Wang Anshi's New Learning (Xinxue), which emphasized institutional innovation and examination policy discussions; the Su family's Shu learning of Sichuan, which fused the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism; the Yongjia school of practical statecraft (shigong), etc. Neo-Confucianism, founded by Zhou Dunyi's "Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Polarity," developed by the Cheng brothers' "conceiving principle," and synthesized by Zhu Xi. His ontology established "principle" (li) as the origin of all things; in his theory of moral cultivation (gongfulun), he advocated "mastering reverence and nourishing one's nature" and "investigating things to exhaust principle" instead of religious practice; and through the "Family Rituals" (Jiali), he implanted the Three Guidelines and Five Constants into clan practice. Neo-Confucianism ultimately bridged the gap between universal law and concrete ethics through the theory of "principle is one, its manifestations are many" (li yi fen shu), becoming a new ideology with both philosophical depth and practical efficacy. A significant trend in Tang-Song literature and art was the popularization of creative themes,

individualization, and the widening scope and accelerating speed of cultural dissemination due to technological progress.

Tang poetry was vigorous and sublime, often chanting grand narratives like frontier forts and landscapes; Song poetry turned to trivial daily life. Yang Wanli's "Waking from nap feeling listless, idly watching children catch willow down" captures life's details; Huang Tingjian's "A cup of wine in the peach plum spring breeze" expresses personal friendship. The song lyric (ci poetry form) is particularly representative: Liu Yong's "Endure exchanging fleeting fame for low songs and slow wine" writes of urban love; Li Qingzhao's "Seeking, searching, lonely, lonely, bleak, bleak" reveals a female heart, both breaking through the "poetry expresses intent" tradition, highlighting individual value. In art, Song literati painting, represented by Su Shi's "Old Tree, Strange Rocks," expressed subjective feelings with "ink play," vastly different from the decorative gold-and-blue-green landscapes of the Tang.

The spread of woodblock printing sparked a knowledge revolution. The Northern Song Directorate of Education printed tens of thousands of blocks of the "Nine Classics." Bookshops in Jianyang, Fujian published storytelling scripts, medical books, and examination essays. Book prices fell to one-tenth of Tang levels. This produced three major impacts: knowledge descent, issue innovation, and cultural marketization. Zhu Xi's "Collected Commentaries on the Four Books" was widely circulated through merchant reprints. Primers like the "Three Character Classic" popularized ethical education. Commentarial literature rose relying on print media; vernacular fiction formed fixed genres through printed editions. In Bianjing's Xiangguo Temple, "behind the hall in front of the Zisheng Gate, there are all books, curios, and paintings" [Meng Liang Lu], art became commodities. The combination of technology, market, and literati creation thoroughly broke the aristocratic monopoly of cultural production, forming a dissemination network covering scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants.

## 2.4 Society

The main direction of Tang-Song social stratum restructuring was the transition from an aristocratic hierarchical system to a popularized society. Economic changes centered on free land

trade and the commodity economy, combined with political changes marked by the openness of the examinations, jointly broke the relatively solidified aristocratic hierarchical society since Han-Tang times. Social mobility increased significantly. Its core manifestations are as follows.

During the Tang-Song period, the status of peasants in rural areas changed from dependents to contractual tenants, leading to weakened personal dependency, contractualization of production relations, and the gradual popularization of hired labor. Thus, the relationship between landlord and tenant was as Zhu Xi said: "Among the rural commoners, many are families without land who must seek land from landowners to farm. At plowing, planting, and weeding times, they also borrow grain from the landowners. Only after the winter harvest do they repay it all. Tenants rely on landowners providing land and loans to support their families; landowners also rely on tenants farming and paying rent to sustain their households. The two depend on each other for survival. Now I urge households to warn each other: tenants must not encroach upon/infringe upon landowners, landowners must not oppress or mistreat tenants." [11]

The formation of the Tang-Song urban citizen class stemmed from urban commercialization and population mobility. Simultaneously, the gentry scholar class began to dominate local self-government, and the wealthy commoner class and citizen class also rose.

In terms of wealth, during the Tang-Song period, the development of the commodity economy relaxed social relations, made land transactions frequent, and increasingly connected all social strata to the market. This made it possible to purchase land and accumulate monetary wealth. The pursuit of wealth led to its gradual concentration in the hands of some. This created what contemporaries called "the rich get richer, the poor get poorer" [12]. Actually, this was not merely an increase in wealthy households, but the rise of a "wealthy commoner" stratum. Peter K. Bol, in his book *"This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China,"* analyzing the changes of Tang-Song social transformation, pointed out an important change was the emergence of a "local elite" stratum [13]. Actually, this "local elite" stratum was the "wealthy people" stratum in society at that time.

The disintegration of the old land system and production relations, accelerated population mobility, and the prosperity of industry and commerce gave birth to an unprecedented "citizen stratum". They included wealthy merchants and great traders, handicraft workshop owners, guild members, hired laborers, and all sorts of people dependent on the urban economy. Commercialized urban life and high population mobility nurtured new social relations and cultural demands.

In local society, after the disappearance of the old powerful families, the emerging "wealthy commoner" stratum, like small and medium landowners and wealthy merchants, rose economically. Through the examinations, bureaucrats, provincial graduates (juren), and government students (shengyuan) became key links connecting the state and grassroots society, dominating local education and self-government, such as community compacts, charitable estates, and academies, forming a "gentry society" [14]. Thus, the transformation of Tang-Song state-society relations manifested as the state shifting from direct control to indirect governance, and the Tang examination system dissolved the powerful aristocratic families, while the Song examination system made the gentry scholar stratum an important link between the state and grassroots society. Against the backdrop of population growth and economic complexity, the Han-Tang model of direct, strong state control over registered citizens became unsustainable. During the Tang-Song transformation, the state gradually turned to a more indirect mode of governance: relying on law, like the "Song Penal Code" and various compiled decrees; relying on the emerging gentry scholar stratum to play a role locally; and relying on ideological education, like the penetration of Neo-Confucianism into the grassroots, to maintain social order. Under these circumstances, the costs of management were relatively reduced, and the refinement of social governance improved [15].

### 3. Content and Characteristics of Intellectual and Cultural

Drastic changes in the economic base, political structure, and social relations injected powerful momentum for transformation into the realm of intellectual culture, catalyzing profound shifts in its content, dissemination, and functions. The overarching characteristic of Tang-Song

intellectual and cultural change was the popularization of thought and the formation of a new Confucian system. The Japanese scholar Naitō Konan once summarized the changes in scholarship, literature, and art during the Tang-Song transformation: Classical studies shifted from emphasizing master-disciple transmission and "commentaries not contradicting annotations" to questioning antiquity, with interpreting the classics according to one's own understanding becoming a fashionable practice; in literature, writing changed from prioritizing form to valuing free expression; in art, taking the Five Dynasties as a dividing line, murals before this period largely emphasized traditional styles, whereas ink wash painting afterwards adopted free methods expressing the artist's own will; in music, the Tang emphasized dance music, with musical theory focusing on form. After the Song, with the popularity of variety plays, popular art flourished comparatively, the taste for more ancient music declined, and it became more simply oriented towards the lower-level tastes of the common people [16]. Furthermore, the historian Qi Xia also pointed out: A major change in the intellectual and cultural sphere since the mid-Tang was the replacement of Han Learning's exegetical studies by Song Learning's study of principles and meanings, exhibiting characteristics of openness and practical application. Delving into the roots of these changes, many are related to the commodity economy. The openness and freedom in classical studies, literature, and art should be a reflection of the open nature of the commodity economy; the emphasis on practical application is undoubtedly related to the profit-seeking nature of the commodity economy. As for the flourishing of popular culture and urban marketplace culture, it is even more a direct result of the development of the commodity economy [17].

### 3.1 Content Transformation

The intellectual impetus for the revival and transformation of Confucianism during the Tang and Song dynasties stemmed from the promotion of the Ancient Prose Movement, the breakthrough of Song Learning against Han-Tang classical studies, and the trend towards the fusion of the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism). The Ancient Prose Movement, through reforms in

literary style and form, led to a liberation of discourse, which in turn propelled the liberation and development of Confucian thought, laying the groundwork for the rise of the trend to question the classics and doubt the commentaries. Beginning in the mid-Tang and reaching its peak in the Song Dynasty, this trend of questioning the classics and commentaries, through an open reconstruction of Confucianism's own system of classical interpretation, spurred the vigorous flourishing of Confucian thought and scholarship in the Song Dynasty. Under the impact of Buddhism and Daoism, Confucianism's critical spirit and rational spirit were more powerfully excavated and manifested. Particularly, the highly philosophical system of Principle Learning, which developed rapidly in the process of contending with Buddhism and Daoism, endowed Song Confucianism with powerful vitality [18].

Facing the challenges posed by Buddhist and Daoist thought and the crises of order and belief brought about by great social changes, the scholar-official class launched a massive Confucian revival movement. The "Ancient Prose Movement" advocated by Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan in the Tang Dynasty was a Confucian revival movement formed during an important period of transformation in ancient Chinese society, as well as a literary reform movement; the revival of Confucianism was the most fundamental aim of the Ancient Prose Movement.

Song Dynasty scholars launched fierce critiques against the exegetical commentary tradition of the Han and Tang periods, emphasizing the elaboration of the "principles and meanings" within the classics. By the mid-Tang period, in response to the conservative state of Confucian classical studies and the threat posed by the vigorous development of Buddhism and Daoism to the dominant position of Confucian thought, some scholar-officials began actively examining the internal state of Confucian classical studies and grew skeptical of traditional classical interpretations. A new trend of questioning the classics and commentaries emerged in academic and intellectual circles. By the Renzong era (1,022-1,063), the trend of various Confucians questioning the classics intensified; they not only dared to doubt the commentaries and annotations but also grew suspicious of the classics themselves.

Simultaneously, through prolonged interaction, the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism exhibited a trend of deep integration. Northern Song scholars were often consciously or unconsciously influenced by Buddhist, Daoist, and religious Daoist thought. The "Three Sus" (Su Xun, Su Shi, Su Zhe) are typical examples. The Three Sus associated closely with Buddhist monks and actively absorbed beneficial intellectual nutrients from Buddhism. The *Dongpo Commentary on the Changes* (*Dongpo Yizhuan*) was influenced by Buddhism, exhibiting characteristics of harmonizing Confucianism and Buddhism in its interpretation of the classics. When explaining the *Changes*, they often borrowed important concepts from Buddhism. For instance, when discussing "fate", the *Dongpo Commentary on the Changes* states: "There is no distinction between heaven and man in fate and nature; to the point of unity and the absence of self, it is called fate." [19] This means that regarding the relationship between the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man, excluding the factor of "no-self," the common destination pointed to is fate. Additionally, besides being influenced by Chan (Zen) Buddhist thought, the *Dongpo Commentary on the Changes* also incorporated Daoist ideas, giving it a characteristic blend of Confucianism and Daoism. Firstly, when expounding on the "Way of Heaven" and "Heavenly Virtue", the *Dongpo Commentary on the Changes* elucidates a Daoist or religious Daoist sense of "mysterious emptiness". Explaining the statement "Great is the Qian Origin, from which all things receive their beginning; it thereby commands Heaven" from the *Commentary on the Judgments* of the *Qianhexagram*, it says: "This discusses the Origin. The virtue of the Origin cannot be seen. What can be seen is merely that all things receive their beginning from it. The virtue of Heaven cannot be fully expressed in words. Only this [Origin] can command it; this is why it is called the Origin." [19] This mode of thinking primarily derives from Daoism. Secondly, The *Dongpo Commentary on the Changes* emphasizes the meaning of "tranquility", considering "tranquility" to be a natural peace of mind and stability of position; being tranquil in the natural Way is precisely the basic attitude toward life in Daoism. For example, when explaining the third line text of the *Qianhexagram*, "The nobleman is creatively

active throughout the day," Su Shi states: "This is the boundary between above and below, the intersection of fortune and misfortune, the decisive point of success and failure... The reason the first line can lie hidden, the second can appear, the fourth can leap up, and the fifth can fly all depend on this third line. How extremely difficult this third position is to reside in! If the third cannot reside here, then *Qian* loses that by which it is *Qian*." [19] Finally, Su Zhe and Su Shi, having experienced multiple demotions, had a profound understanding of "blame" and "praise". The text of the fourth line of the *Kunhexagram* aligns with the intent of Laozi's doctrine of non-action. *Laozi* Chapter 2 states: "The sage manages affairs without action, spreads doctrines without words. All things arise, and he does not turn away from them. He produces them but does not take possession of them. He acts but does not rely on his own ability. He accomplishes his task but does not claim credit for it. It is precisely because he does not claim credit that it never leaves him." Su Zhe's *Explanation of the Laozi* (*Laozi Jie*) states: "Engaging in affairs, yet having the mind of non-action; spreading teachings through speech, yet having the intention of no-words... The myriad things act for me, yet I do not refuse them; I give birth to them and act upon them, yet have never possessed them, never relied [on my ability], and upon success, have also never claimed credit for myself." [22][23]

The core manifestation of the Confucian transformation during the Tang and Song dynasties was the modernization of Confucianism, along with shifts towards individualization and secularization.

The emergence of various forms of Song Learning, such as the Cheng-Zhu School of Principle, the New Learning of Wang Anshi, and the School of Mind represented by Lu Jiuyuan, marked the rise of the study of principles and meanings, initiating the modernization of Confucianism. These Song Learning scholars abandoned the exegetical tradition of the Han and Tang, turning from "exegetical studies" to "the study of principles and meanings". Their research themes focused on exploring the substance of the universe, probing the nature of humanity, with discussions centered on "Heavenly Principle" , "original substance", "moral effort" , "mind" , and "nature". In terms of classical texts, the study of the Four Books rose to prominence, gradually

replacing the Five Classics as the core texts bearing the Confucian "transmission of the Way" and its principles. Their modes of expression and methods of cognition also became more speculative. Simultaneously, it standardized ethical morals, emphasized the order of Heavenly Principle, paid more attention to individual moral cultivation and perfection, and implemented Confucian ethics more deeply into all aspects of secular life. A highly philosophical new Confucian system was established. For example, Zhu Xi emphasized in *Family Rituals of Master Zhu (Zhuzi Jiali)*: "All ritual has a foundation and its cultural form. Guarding one's status and duties, and the substance of love and respect-this is its foundation. The ceremonial regulations and prescribed measures for capping, marriage, mourning, and sacrificial rites-this is its cultural form." [24] Furthermore, the modernization of Confucianism is also reflected in the emphasis on commerce and practical affairs by the Zhejiang Eastern School of Practical Statecraft, represented by Chen Liang and Ye Shi. During the Southern Song, the utilitarian school represented by Chen Liang and Ye Shi opposed the empty talk of nature and destiny by the Daoist scholars, advocating practical application. Ye Shi clearly stated, "If there is no utility and benefit, then morality and righteousness are merely useless empty words." [25] Zhu Xi criticized them for being "solely focused on utility and benefit," saying: "Nowadays, people from Zhezhong calculate gains and losses too excessively, creating mutual deception; its malpractice reaches the point where there is nothing they won't do to obtain profit." [27] The realm of literature and art during the Tang and Song dynasties similarly echoed the social transformation, exhibiting distinct characteristics of popularization, commoner-oriented nature, and individualization.

In artistic form, more popular literary genres appeared; in content and subject matter, literary content became more common-oriented; from the perspective of creators and audiences, Tang-Song literature further exhibited secular characteristics; in literary concepts, it further revealed the creators' rich and multifaceted three-dimensional personalities. The song lyrics were most directly influenced by vulgar characters, vulgar language, and vulgar styles, taking the lead in popularization. The ci became

the most representative literary genre of the Song Dynasty, more freely using vernacular language in expression, and its content often depicted urban life, romantic love between men and women, and personal melancholy. Song poetry placed greater emphasis on rational interest, argumentation, and themes from daily life. For example, Su Shi's "I cannot tell the true shape of Lushan, For I am in the very midst of it," or Huang Tingjian's "For you I recall the dream of Huangzhou, Alone sailing a small boat towards the Five Lakes." Literati painting, such as Su Shi's *Bamboo and Rock at Xiaoxiang*, Wen Tong's *Ink Bamboo*, and Mi Fu's *Spring Mountains and Misty Pines*, emphasized the expression of personal sentiment and the interest of brush and ink, differing markedly from the style of the imperial painting academy. Both the subjects and objects of artistic creation and appreciation greatly expanded and descended. Popular literary and artistic forms such as fiction, tales of the marvelous, and all-keys-and-modes also burst with vitality on the stage of urban life.

### 3.2 Transformation in Modes of Dissemination

The transformation of intellectual culture was not only reflected in its content; its modes of dissemination were also revolutionized by social changes, greatly promoting the popularization and downward diffusion of knowledge.

The popularization of printing technology greatly facilitated the widespread dissemination of Tang-Song intellectual culture. Although Bi Sheng's invention of movable type in the Northern Song had limited application with clay type, woodblock printing reached its zenith in the Song Dynasty. Song literary works, disseminated through printing, not only expanded their audience but also avoided errors from hand-copying, promoting the standardization and uniformity of literary styles. All genres of literature and various art forms in the Song Dynasty achieved comprehensive, unprecedented development. The continuous development and refinement of the civil examination system significantly broadened access to education and engagement in intellectual and cultural activities for all social strata. Adjustments to its assessment standards and content not only profoundly promoted the popularization and deepening of Confucian doctrine but also laid an important foundation for the rise of Neo-Confucianism.

The examination system, with its increasingly strict and fair procedures (such as name sealing and recopying), inspired a widespread and enduring social ethos of pursuing learning. Although the core of the examinations always revolved around Confucian classics, important reforms in the Song Dynasty, such as the abolition of poetry composition during Wang Anshi's reforms and the shift towards emphasizing the understanding of classical meaning and the ability to write policy discussions, institutionally strengthened the study and discussion of Confucian principles. This change objectively greatly propelled the dissemination, academic research, and eventual establishment of Neo-Confucian thought as the official ideology.

While one group hoped to spread Confucian culture through examination reform, another group of Confucian scholars emerged who hoped to disseminate Confucian culture to the whole society through schools. The rise of academies became important sites for the dissemination and innovation of Tang-Song intellectual culture. Academies began in the Tang and flourished in the Song. During the Southern Song, academies (such as White Deer Grotto, Yuelu, Xiangshan, and Lize) became the main strongholds for researching and disseminating Principle Learning. They were presided over by famous scholars, emphasized free discussion known as "joint lectures", focused on cultivating students' moral character, possessed independent financial sources like academy lands, and formed academic research and educational institutions independent of the official school system. This greatly promoted the flourishing of academic thought and the formation of regional schools [26].

### 3.3 Functional Expansion

Song Confucianism emphasized practical application, striving to apply Confucian thought to socio-political practice. Song scholars-officials generally held a strong sense of responsibility to "take the world as one's own duty". Neo-Confucianism, particularly Principle Learning, was not pure speculative philosophy; its fundamental purpose was "cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world", emphasizing the implementation of the moral ideal of "inner sageliness" into the socio-political practice of "outer kingliness". Fan Zhongyan's "being the

first to worry about the world's troubles and the last to enjoy its pleasures", Wang Anshi's reforms, and Zhu Xi's local governance practices all embody this spirit of "practical application."

Through means such as content transformation and innovations in dissemination methods, Tang-Song intellectual culture effectively realized its functions of social indoctrination and ideological governance. Through these channels of dissemination-books, examinations, education, community compacts, family rituals-the core ethical values of Neo-Confucianism-loyalty, filial piety, chastity, righteousness, the Three Guidelines and Five Constants-penetrated all social strata with unprecedented breadth and depth. They became an important ideological foundation for social integration and the maintenance of order, achieving a deeper level of ideological control [27].

### 3.4 Characteristics of the Transformation Process

The fundamental driving force behind the Tang-Song intellectual and cultural transformation was profound social change. The transformation of the economic structure provided the soil for the secularization and popularization of thought; the restructuring of the political system provided the political demand and the main agent for the Confucian revival and new thought; changes in social structure created new groups with cultural demands.

Once formed, the nascent intellectual and cultural system, in turn, became an important force shaping the new social order, exerting a significant reactive effect on social development.

### 4. Causes of Intellectual and Cultural Change

The new intellectual and cultural system formed during the Tang and Song periods, particularly the dominant Neo-Confucianism, did not passively reflect social existence. Instead, with its powerful agency, it profoundly reacted upon the economic, political, and social spheres, participating in and shaping the social order after the transformation. The social transformation of the Tang-Song period not only restructured the political and economic landscape but also deeply drove changes in intellectual culture. This process is reflected in the reshaping of the political superstructure by

changes in the economic base, the remodeling of social structure by political-economic interaction, and the comprehensive influence of multiple social forces on intellectual culture.

#### 4.1 The Effect of Social Transformation on Intellectual and Cultural Change

Changes in the Tang-Song economic base profoundly influenced the political superstructure, specifically manifested in land system reforms strengthening centralization, the commodity economy influencing political governance models, and the development of market networks prompting a shift in government functions.

The equal-field system and the zu-yong-diao tax system implemented in the early Tang, by allocating land and collecting taxes in kind, somewhat inhibited land annexation. However, with population growth and increased land sales, the equal-field system gradually disintegrated by the mid-Tang, replaced by the maturity of the private land market in the Song and the implementation of the Two Tax System. The Two Tax System, based on assets and land as taxation criteria, weakened the hereditary monopoly of the aristocracy over land, making state finances more dependent on a tax system directly controlled by the central government. This change strengthened centralization because the state no longer relied on the local tax support of powerful families but enhanced imperial control over the economy through direct management of land and finance.

The unprecedented prosperity of the commodity economy in the Song, such as the establishment of the Office of Maritime Affairs and the appearance of paper money, required the government to manage market and economic activities more precisely. The government gradually shifted from the Tang model of separated wards and markets to the open commercial city management model of the Song, for example, by canceling curfews, allowing night markets, and establishing well-developed municipal facilities like firefighting and granaries. These changes prompted an expansion of government functions from traditional military and agricultural management to commercial regulation, currency issuance, and market supervision, reflecting a shift in political governance models towards economic affairs.

The formation of a national commercial network,

such as the prosperity of the Maritime Silk Road, required government involvement in managing cross-regional trade, for instance, through the Office of Maritime Affairs to levy commercial taxes and manage foreign trade. This shifted government functions from the Tang's "emphasizing agriculture and suppressing commerce" to the Song's "simultaneously valuing agriculture and commerce", even supporting state finances through commercial taxes—the proportion of commercial taxes in the Song reached a historical peak. The strengthening of the government's economic role further promoted the specialization and division of labor within the bureaucratic system.

Tang-Song political changes and economic development acted together on social structure, specifically manifested in land-fiscal system reforms restructuring social strata, political demands and the commodity economy giving birth to new social structures, and fiscal monetization accelerating the contractualization of social labor relations.

After the collapse of the equal-field system, land privatization accelerated. The emerging landowner class, through land purchases and entering officialdom via the examinations, replaced the Tang's aristocratic families. The refinement of the Song examination system further promoted social mobility, allowing commoners to enter official careers through exams, forming a new elite class centered on scholar-officials.

Song Confucian scholar-officials returned to the cultural subjectivity consciousness of the pre-Qin scholars, highly promoting the political and cultural critical spirit of early Confucianism. They boldly questioned and criticized the Han-Tang Confucian classical studies characterized by exegesis and institutional studies, advocating the construction of a new form of classical studies and a new Confucianism-Song Learning—characterized by the elaboration of principles and meanings.

The Song's policy of "emphasizing the civil over the military" required a large number of civil officials. The examination system expanded the demand for education, promoting the flourishing of private schools and academies. Simultaneously, the development of the commodity economy promoted the rise of an urban citizen stratum, including merchants, artisans, and professional literati. They became new subjects of cultural consumption, driving

the prosperity of Song urban marketplace culture, with entertainment venues like washe and golang appearing.

The implementation of the Two Tax System in the Song and the popularization of monetary rent transformed the relationship between peasants and landowners from the Tang's dependent tenant system to a contractual rental relationship. Peasants enjoyed freedom of movement after fulfilling rental contracts, their personal dependency weakened, and labor relations became more market-oriented. This change promoted the contractual spirit in the social economy, laying the foundation for the legalization of the later commodity economy.

The combined political, economic, and social transformations of the Tang-Song period acted together on the intellectual and cultural sphere, specifically manifested in the economic base and political demands driving the Confucian revival, the commodity economy and social transformation influencing shifts in intellectual concepts, and the restructuring of social structure reshaping cultural discourse power.

While Buddhist and Daoist thought prevailed in the Tang, the centralized power of the Song required an ideological system that strengthened ethical order to maintain social stability. The imperial examinations, with Confucian classics at their core, compelled scholars to focus on Confucianism. Simultaneously, the social changes brought by commodity economy development, such as stratum mobility and the spirit of contract, demanded new ethical norms. Song Confucianism, by absorbing the speculative philosophy of Buddhism and Daoism, developed Principle Learning, providing a philosophical foundation for Confucian ethics and establishing a highly philosophical new Confucian system.

Urban commercial prosperity and the rise of the citizen class promoted the secularization and pragmatization of culture. For instance, Song literature shifted from the romantic poetry of the Tang to forms popular among commoners like song lyrics and script for storytelling, reflecting a concern for daily life and individual emotions. Concurrently, the examination system fostered an ethos that valued education and knowledge. The scholar-official stratum established its social status through cultural transmission, forming a cultural outlook centered on the value of the "Way".

In the Tang, cultural discourse power was

primarily held by the aristocracy; literature and art were dominated by court culture (e.g., parallel prose, regulated verse). Song scholars-officials became the dominant cultural force. Rising through the examinations, they emphasized "literature conveys the Way", promoted the Ancient Prose Movement, and made literature a tool for expressing political ideals and ethical values. Furthermore, the spread of printing facilitated the dissemination of knowledge and increased literacy rates (e.g., approximately 70% of urban males were literate in the Song). Cultural discourse power descended from the aristocracy to commoner elites, forming a cultural innovation group centered on scholars.

#### 4.2 The Reactive Effect of Intellectual and Cultural Change on Society

Tang-Song Neo-Confucian ethics exerted a reactive effect on the economic sphere, primarily manifested in promoting the standardization of the commodity economy, influencing commercial concepts, and fostering economic development.

Although Song Neo-Confucianism did not entirely encourage profit-seeking, the concepts it advocated, such as "integrity and trustworthiness", "distinguishing between righteousness and profit", and "frugality", profoundly influenced commercial activities. Philosophers like Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyang also participated in local governance, committed to maintaining market order and mediating commercial disputes. Family instruction texts like Yuan Cai's *Precepts for Social Life (Yuanshi Shifan)* extensively dealt with the principles of integrity and contract spirit that should be observed in commercial activities. These ideas subtly guided and regulated the increasingly developed commodity economy, providing certain support and constraints for market transactions [13].

The Zhejiang Eastern School of Statecraft, represented by Chen Liang and Ye Shi, explicitly proposed the views of "simultaneously exercising righteousness and profit" and "the four occupations [scholars, farmers, artisans, merchants] mutually contributing to each other's use", providing theoretical support for the legitimacy of industry and commerce. This somewhat challenged the traditional concept of "emphasizing agriculture and suppressing commerce", benefiting the further development

of the commodity economy. The ethos of diligence, frugality, and "accumulating righteousness to generate [vital force]" emphasized by Neo-Confucianism also shared certain similarities with what Max Weber discussed as the "Protestant ethic," and can be regarded as a cultural factor promoting economic development.

Tang-Song intellectual and cultural changes had a reactive effect on the political sphere, primarily manifested in promoting mobility and quality improvement within the bureaucratic corps, driving political system reform and innovation, and maintaining feudal ruling order and social stability.

The imperial examination system made Confucian classics, particularly those interpreted through Song Learning, the core assessment content for selecting talent. This provided the bureaucratic group with a unified cultural identity and basic moral norms. The scholar-official class cultivated under this system was generally deeply influenced by ideas such as "taking the world as one's own responsibility" and "assisting the emperor to become like Yao and Shun", demonstrating lofty political aspirations and a strong sense of responsibility. Specific embodiments of this spirit included Fan Zhongyan's "being the first to worry about the world's troubles and the last to enjoy its pleasures", Wang Anshi's "managing finances for the world, not for profiteering", and Sima Guang's emphasis on "benefiting the people and securing the state". Furthermore, the open nature of the examination system, to some extent, broke down the barriers of social stratification, allowing the ruling class to continuously absorb outstanding talent from among the people, thereby enhancing the vitality and representativeness of the bureaucratic system.

The political subjectivity of the scholar-official class awakened, and they actively participated in political innovation. Major reform movements like Fan Zhongyan's "Qingli Reforms" and Wang Anshi's "New Policies" were deeply influenced by the then-current Neo-Confucian thought, such as the teachings of Hu Yuan, Li Gou, and Wang Anshi's New Learning. These reforms embodied the efforts of scholar-officials to apply Confucian thought to solve practical political and economic problems[20,21].

The core conceptual system of Neo-Confucianism—the Three Guidelines (ruler

guides subject, father guides son, husband guides wife) and the Five Constants (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, fidelity)—was elevated to a highly systematic and sanctified status, regarded as the manifestation of "Heavenly Principle" in human society. This ideological system provided profound ideological support for centralized monarchical autocracy, a hierarchical social structure, and the traditional patriarchal clan system. The Neo-Confucian advocacy of "preserving Heavenly Principle and eliminating human desires" aimed to guide individuals to abide by established ethical norms, practice loyalty to the ruler and love for the country, and entrusted local gentry with the responsibility of moral indoctrination. This effectively ensured stability during the period of social transformation and the continuation of the feudal ruling order.

Tang-Song intellectual and cultural changes had a reactive effect on the social sphere, primarily manifested in promoting social stratum mobility and shaping new social mores.

The imperial examination system, as an institutionalized path for realizing Neo-Confucian values, provided a legitimate channel for upward mobility for all social strata, especially the children of commoners. "A farm boy in the morning, a minister in the emperor's court by evening" became a possibility. This relatively fair upward mechanism alleviated social contradictions to some extent, enhanced social vitality, and promoted the circulation of social strata [9].

Through various channels such as establishing government schools, academies, and elementary schools to develop education; family instructions and clan rules like *Family Instructions of the Yan Clan (Yanshi Jiaxun)* and *Yuansi Shifan*; community compacts like the Lü Family *Community Compact (Xiangyue)*; and popular literature like storytelling scripts and drama, Neo-Confucianism widely disseminated its core ethical and moral concepts to the common people. Concepts such as respecting teachers and valuing education, emphasizing the importance of studying, stressing filial piety, focusing on family harmony, and advocating neighborhood mutual assistance became increasingly ingrained, shaping the unique cultural atmosphere and ethical customs of Song society. The wealthy commoner and citizen strata, while pursuing wealth, often practiced Confucian ethics by

funding education, repairing bridges and roads, and establishing charitable estates, thereby enhancing their social status.

## 5. Historical Implications for the Modern Era

The grand panorama of the Tang-Song social transformation and its accompanying intellectual and cultural changes profoundly reveals the complex and dialectical interactive relationship between changes in the economic base, the restructuring of political systems, adjustments in social structure, and innovation in cultural development. This history holds valuable insights for contemporary China, which is at a critical period of the great rejuvenation, in multiple aspects:

### 5.1 Intellectual Guidance: Deepening the "Two Integrations" and Fortifying the Foundation of Cultural Confidence

The core historical lesson from the Tang-Song Confucian revival lies in its basing itself on the major issues of its time and innovatively developing tradition to respond to practical challenges and lead social change. The core experience of the Tang-Song Confucian revival and the construction of the Principle Learning system was: addressing major contemporary issues-countering Buddhist and Daoist challenges, rebuilding social order; maintaining cultural subjectivity-reviving the Confucian "transmission of the Way"; and courageously promoting theoretical innovation-breaking through Han-Tang classical studies, absorbing the essence of Buddhism and Daoism, and establishing the study of principles and meanings-thus successfully responding to the challenges of the era and guiding the direction of social change.

The historical implications of Tang-Song intellectual and cultural change applied to the modern context include adhering to the "Two Integrations," strengthening cultural confidence, and constructing a modern civilization for the Chinese.

Intellectual and cultural construction in the new era must profoundly practice "integrating the basic tenets of Marxism with China's specific realities and with its fine traditional culture." The successful "creative transformation" of Tang-Song Confucianism, such as its synthesis with Buddhism and Daoism, reminds us to deeply excavate the positive elements within China's excellent traditional culture, including

those from Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, such as the emphasis on morality, family-country sentiment, practical application, and the spirit of investigating things. These should be endowed with new contemporary connotations and modern forms of expression, enabling them to interconnect with the Marxist standpoint, viewpoint, and method, thereby providing intellectual nourishment for solving problems faced by contemporary China and the world.

The glorious and far-reaching achievements created through inclusive synthesis and innovative development are clear evidence of the Chinese cultural creativity and vitality. This requires us to deeply understand the continuity, innovativeness, unity, inclusiveness, and peaceful nature of Chinese civilization, resolutely reject historical nihilism and cultural inferiority complex, and inherit and promote China's excellent traditional culture with a high degree of confidence, while developing advanced socialist culture.

Following Thought on Culture as the fundamental guide, we must construct a modern civilization for the Chinese embodying the spirit of the era and leading national rejuvenation through the "Two Integrations." This civilization, like Tang-Song civilization, should be rooted in profound tradition yet full of innovative vitality, and capable of effectively responding to major issues in the modernization process, such as technological ethics, social governance, and the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

### 5.2 Cultural Development: Adhering to a People-Centered Approach and Stimulating the Innovative and Creative Vitality of the Entire Nation's Culture

The historical lesson from the transformation of Tang-Song intellectual culture and its modes of dissemination lies in its adaptation to the needs of emerging social strata and the effective unleashing of cultural creativity. The flourishing of Tang-Song intellectual culture, such as Song lyrics, storytelling scripts, and academy lectures, along with innovations in dissemination methods and the spread of printing, largely adapted to and satisfied the cultural needs of the emerging commoner landowner class, the wealthy commoners, and the urban citizen stratum. This released the cultural creative potential of all social strata, promoting the popularization and elevation of culture.

The application of the historical lessons from

Tang-Song intellectual and cultural change in modern cultural development includes serving the people's cultural needs, promoting cultural innovation, and facilitating mutual learning among civilizations.

Cultural development must adhere to the principle of the people as the main body. It is essential to accurately grasp the people's growing and increasingly diverse spiritual and cultural needs for high quality, personalization, and interactivity. A modern public cultural service system, including libraries, museums, cultural centers, and digital platforms, should be perfected, and high-quality cultural resources should be extended to the grassroots to safeguard the people's basic cultural rights and interests.

Cultural system reform must be deepened to break the institutional and mechanistic obstacles restricting cultural innovation. Content innovation and formal innovation based on inheriting excellent traditional culture should be encouraged, such as using new technologies like AI and VR, and industrial model innovation like the integration of culture and tourism, and the digital cultural industry. An atmosphere tolerant of failure and encouraging exploration should be fostered to stimulate the innovative and creative vitality of the entire nation's culture, forming a flourishing and vibrant pattern of cultural development.

The inclusiveness of Tang-Song culture was a key factor in its prosperity. The new era must uphold an open and inclusive mind, and more proactively carry out international cultural exchanges, such as the cultural exchanges along the "Belt and Road," learn from all outstanding achievements of human civilization, demonstrate the charm of Chinese culture in the dialog between Chinese and foreign civilizations, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

### **5.3 Social Governance: Drawing on Traditional Governance Wisdom to Improve the Modern Governance System**

The historical lesson from the ideological transformation of the Tang-Song period on social governance lies in its promotion of adjustments in the relationship between the state and society, and the advancement of governance models such as contractual relationships. During the Tang-Song transformation, ideological changes, such as the reinforcement of ethical

order by Principle Learning, promoted adjustments in the state-society relationship. The generalization of contractual relations provided new mechanisms for grassroots governance. Moral governance and education through community compacts, family rituals, and other means played an important role in maintaining social harmony and stability.

The application of Tang-Song governance wisdom in modern social governance includes giving play to the role of moral governance and education, improving the grassroots governance system, and building a society of integrity and contract.

While adhering to the basic strategy of governing the country according to law, great importance must be attached to the fundamental role of moral construction in social governance. The core socialist values, whose connotations draw upon the essence of excellent traditional culture, should be vigorously promoted. Social morality, professional ethics, family virtues, and personal moral integrity should be strengthened. Excellent family traditions and teachings, community conventions, and industry norms should be promoted. The exemplary role of advanced models should be utilized to create a social atmosphere that esteems morality and encourages kindness.

Learning from the wisdom of Tang-Song gentry who participated in local self-governance through education and public welfare, a grassroots governance system under the leadership of organizations that combines autonomy, rule of law, and moral governance should be perfected. The role of groups such as new local elites, outstanding traditional cultural backbones, and volunteers in mediating grassroots disputes, providing public services, and cultural transmission should be leveraged to enhance the effectiveness of grassroots governance.

The development of contractual relations during the Tang-Song period laid the foundation for the market economy and social trust. The modern market economy is essentially a credit economy. The spirit of contract must be vigorously promoted, the social credit system improved, and a credit investigation system covering the whole society perfected. Legal protection for trust-keeping behavior and punishment for breach-of-trust behavior should be strengthened to create a stable, fair, transparent, and predictable legalized business environment and

social interaction environment.

#### **5.4 Talent Cultivation and Value Guidance: Continuing the Cultural Lineage and Cultivating New Generations Capable of Shouldering the Task of National Rejuvenation**

The core historical lesson of the Tang-Song imperial examination system lies in its key role in promoting the popularization of education, facilitating social stratum mobility, and shaping shared social values. The maturation of the Tang-Song examination system acted as a core hub in promoting the popularization of education, facilitating social stratum mobility, and shaping social values such as "studying to become an official" and "valuing education and emphasizing learning," providing a large number of high-quality governance talents for the transforming society.

The application of Tang-Song talent cultivation experience in the modern context is to implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue and cultivating talents, and to perfect the modern talent training and selection mechanism to build a nation strong in talent.

Education is a major plan for the country. The effectiveness of fostering virtue and cultivating talents must be the fundamental standard for testing all work in schools. China's excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture should be deeply integrated into all stages and the entire process of national education, guiding students to establish a correct worldview, outlook on life, and values, and cultivating builders and successors who are capable of shouldering the task of national rejuvenation and are developed in an all-around way-morally, intellectually, physically, esthetically, and labor-wise.

Drawing on the rational core of the examination system's "selecting the worthy and employing the capable," evaluation reform in the new era should be deepened to break the stubborn malady of the "Five Onlys"-only grades, only advancement to higher schools, only diplomas, only papers, and only titles. An evaluation system for scientific and technological talent oriented towards innovative value, ability, and contribution should be established. Channels for the growth of all types of talent should be smoothed. The recruitment of civil servants and the personnel selection mechanisms of enterprises and public institutions should be

improved to ensure fairness and justice, forming a lively situation where everyone can do their best and all talents are put to good use, laying a solid foundation for building a nation strong in talent.

#### **6. Conclusion**

The social changes during the Tang-Song period, with their profound transformations in economic structure, political system, and social morphology, gave birth to systematic innovation in the intellectual and cultural sphere. Changes in land institutions and the development of the commodity economy, coupled with the continuous improvement of the imperial examination system and the increasing popularization of the social structure, gave rise to a new Confucian system with Principle Learning at its core. Through the deepening of the interpretation of principles and meanings, the spread of printing technology, and the development of academy education, this intellectual system constructed a value system combining philosophical speculation and practical character, profoundly shaping the economic ethics, political governance, and social integration models of the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties that followed. This historical process shows that the Tang-Song transformation was not only an adjustment of the political and economic structure but also a reconstruction of the cultural value system. In the process of responding to the issues of its time, Neo-Confucianism demonstrated powerful intellectual vitality. It was both a profound reflection of social reality and an important force shaping the new social order. Through institutionalized channels such as the examination system, education, family rituals, and community compacts, it infiltrated Confucian ethics into all levels of society, achieving the organic integration of cultural values and social governance.

The wisdom of history illuminates reality. The experience of the Tang-Song transformation tells us that true cultural vitality stems from a profound grasp of the issues of the era and the creative transformation of tradition. In advancing modernization today, China should fully draw on traditional wisdom, construct a new civilizational form that both continues the cultural lineage and faces the future through maintaining integrity and innovating, so that Chinese civilization forever maintains its vitality.

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