

Chen Hao

Ph. D Candidate, Department of History, Peking University

Address:

Department of History

Peking University

Beijing, 100871

Email: peterrc@163.com

Paper Title: Whispers of Stones: Writing the Deceased and Cultural Appropriations of Traumatic Memories under a Wave of Epidemics in a Medieval Chinese City (868-872 C. E.)¹

Recovering a Wave of Forgotten Epidemics from Stones

In 1983, two scholars found that a wave of epidemics and famines, which happened in Luoyang, was recorded in three tomb inscriptions, when they were documenting and making a bibliography of tomb inscriptions excavated in Luoyang. They turned to the official records of Chinese history, and they found records about epidemics and famines happened in other places in these years but no record on things happened in Luoyang². However, they may not realize that

¹ I would like to thank Prof. Arthur Kleinman, Prof. Rong Xinjiang and Prof. Tian Xiaofei for their helpful comments and suggestions which have been incorporated into the text.

² There are records about epidemics happened in Xuanzhou (宣州, a town located in today's Anhui province), Xizhou(歙州, a town also located in today's Anhui province)、Liangzhe (兩浙, which means Eastern Circuit and Western Circuit of Zhejiang, a official geographical term covers today's Zhejiang Province, southern part of Jiangsu Province and Shanghai) in the official historical records (*XTS* 36, p.957), the possible reason on why there

these tombs inscriptions would play an important role in the study of epidemics in medieval China, and only published a brief article to report their findings four years later (Li and Zhao 1987). Moreover, they used more than a half of the length of this article to discuss that one of these tomb inscriptions' owners might be the descendant of a famous scholar in Han dynasty, Jia Yi (賈誼). Moreover, they overlooked a fourth tomb inscription which recorded this wave of epidemics and famines as well. According to these tomb inscriptions, it was very possible that the wave of epidemics and famines started at 868, and they still spread until 872. It is worth mentioning that there were lots of other tomb inscriptions in the epidemical years excavated in Luoyang and had been published, but only these four inscriptions among the published inscriptions were there record the epidemics and famines happened in Luoyang³. Before discussing the importance of these records, we should survey the major models of understanding epidemics in ancient China.

Models of Understanding 'yi' in Ancient China

Epidemics are important part in the history of humans and recorded in historical writings from different areas. They are recorded as 'yi' in the official historical records of ancient China. However, these records used this word as a general catalogue and did not direct it at any specific disease⁴. Modern scholars try to solve the puzzle of this word and use it as the key to understand the interactions among medicine, society and culture of ancient China.

were no records about this wave of epidemics will be discussed in a latter part of this article.

³ A list of these published tomb inscription can be found in Kegasawa Yasunori's recent book (2009).

⁴ In another tomb inscription (*QWBY* 9, pp.419-421), a man lived in the area which is today's Hubei province got ill during a wave of epidemics in 870 and he thought that the epidemic which took him was Cold Damage Disorders (*shanghan*, 傷寒). However, there is no evidence show that the wave of epidemics in Luoyang was recognized as Cold Damage Disorders by physicians or patients in 9th century.

(1.) The model of historical etiology

Interests in the historical etiology of 'yi' go back to the research on 'the Orient origins' of Western epidemics (Ziegler 1969; McNeil 1976; Gottfried 1983). Denis Twitchett completes the most impressive research in this model by organizing limited records from Byzantine Empire, Persian Empire and China chronologically to show the great chain of pestilence spreading and trying to identify "yi" as pestilence (1979)⁵. Besides the pestilence, other potential candidates are raised by Chinese scholars, including typhoid fever, ship fever, flu, malaria, tetanoid fever and intestinal fever⁶. This model tries to identify and name 'yi' using modern etiological terminology and promises that historical questions will be better understood with modern medical knowledge of these diseases once we find out what they 'really' are. However, as noticed by Carol Benedict, the model transforms 'yi' into an entity unrecognizable in the eyes, minds, and experiences of those who suffered from it (1996).

(2.) The model of historical-geographical quantitative analysis

Scholars with geographical background bring their quantitative analysis model into the field of 'yi' in ancient China (Gong 2003; Sun 2004), and use the analytic result to build changing patterns of epidemical tempo-spatial distribution and connect the patterns with the grand trends of Chinese history, including population, environmental changes and the patterns of other natural disasters. This model tries to promote the heritage of 'historisch-geographischen Pathologie' from German medical history research tradition (Hirsche, 1859-1862) to the field of Chinese history. However, the data pool of most researches never goes beyond the official records of ancient China,

⁵ Cao Shuji and Li Yushang point out that the research of Twitchett lacks of evidence and uses too much historical imagination (2006).

⁶ Agela Leung provides a general survey and critical perspective on this research mode (1993).

and their model fail to provide any more narratives or details about geographical and historical, spatial and temporal axes of diseases transmission than those records. Fan Ka Wai's research makes an exception. By bringing in the interaction between the migration of population and the spread of "yi", he provides a much more detailed historical narrative about people and diseases in medieval China.

(3.) The model of social history

Social history of medicine becomes an emerging research area in China studies in recent twenty years. The study of epidemics first benefits from social history of religions, and Lin Fu-shih discusses the change of beliefs and expanded of organization of Taoism, Buddhism and popular religions under the waves of 'yi' in Han dynasty. Moreover, he provides a useful way to name or translate 'yi' by using the word 'epidemic' (1995)⁷. Influenced by his mentor Charles Rosenberg, Asaf Goldschmidt focuses on the revival of classical medicine and medical institutionalizing under a wave of epidemics in Northern Song dynasty (2009).

Both the model of historical etiology and the model of historical-geographical quantitative analysis overlook the individuals suffering in 'yi', and fail to provide us a history of those individuals who saw, experienced and suffered in the epidemics, because these models are too focusing on the big trends of history to hear the voices from individuals⁸. However, it may be unfair to critic the former scholarship on that because there were few records about experiences and feelings of individuals in the official records of epidemics in ancient China. In his inspiring

⁷ In this article, I will use Lin's terminology and translate 'yi' as epidemic.

⁸ The suffering and traumatic experiences of individuals are invisible in most classical historical studies of death and diseases, as Zygmunt Bauman points out when he critic on Phillipe Ariès's book *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1992).

speech given in Taiwan University in 2008, Lin Fu-shih uses literature as resources to explore the mental status of individuals suffering in waves of epidemics in Six Dynasties. However, the finding of tomb inscriptions brings us another new gold mine of historical resources should be looked into to find a new mode of understanding epidemics. However, we should generally survey the textuality of tomb inscriptions to find out how we will use them as resources to understand the sensibility and feelings of individuals in medieval China.

Ways to Read Tomb Inscriptions

Tomb inscription, a kind of memorial and mourning genre, is becoming more and more important for the study of medieval China for recent increasing archaeological findings. A tomb inscription was carved on a stone and accompanied the deceased into the tomb, and writing and burying of tomb inscriptions had been an important part of death ritual since 3rd century. In the inscription, there were records about the life, family and other aspects of the deceased (Zhao 2003). However, scholars have not reached the common ground on how to use this genre as historical resources. When Beverly J. Bossler and Chen Jo-shui try to connect the writing style with the intellectual condition and social values in this period (Bossler 1998; Chen Jo-shui 2008), Nakasuna Akinori and Liu Ching-cheng focus on the actual writing practices of tomb inscriptions and put these practices back to the social context (Nakasuna 1993; Liu 2004, 2008). Apparently, tomb inscription was a conventionalized writing, and fragments of people's lives were selected during the process of writing based on the social values as any kind of memorial literature. Since Tang dynasty, it was sometimes written by literati who were skilled in writing tomb inscription and there were basic guidelines of describing a person in the making. However, funerals was one

of the most important moments of a family, and the family members would pay so much attention on the writing of tomb inscriptions, and the memory of family and friends can not be overlooked even from the conventionalized terms. Moreover, between Tang and Song dynasty, a style of tomb inscriptions which reflected the author's own ideas and private experience developed (Neil Weinberg, 2002). The four tomb inscriptions, which will be discussed in this article, are just in the process of this development and there were more personal feelings and experiences in them than those inscriptions in early period of Tang. The fundamental premise on reading these four tomb inscriptions in this article is that genre reflects how the elites in medieval China, not just about the deceased but also but the family and friends of the deceased, represented themselves, including their ideas, personal experiences and expectations, when they met and negotiated with the contrast of social values in their lives. Moreover, comparing this literature and the official history will tell us the social relations between their family, community and the state, and even tell us the shifting status of their identities when negotiating with the mainstream cultural ideals. In ancient China, death in epidemics and famines were not seen as a decent way to die, so most tomb inscriptions avoided to mention them or try to use other words to cover it⁹.

The Stories

This chapter will represent the stories from the records of these four tomb inscriptions. A tomb inscription were generally composed by two parts, a narrative writing about the living experiences of the deceased and a metrical writing to honor him/her. The metaphors, allusions and writing style in them will cause reading and understanding difficulties for the readers who do not

⁹ Tu Chung-cheng publishes an article about the words and phrases choice about the death in the tomb inscription very recently (2009).

familiar with the medieval genres. So I choose not to translate these tomb inscriptions literally but re-narrate these stories in a more modern way.

(1.) Jia Tao (賈洮): The story of a local officer who seek safety in flight written by his younger brother (Li and Zhao 1987)

According to the tomb inscription written by his younger brother Jia She, Jia Tao was born in an honorable family, and there supposed to be the whole world and a promised official career before him. His grandfather was the director of the palace library (*mishu cheng* 秘書丞)¹⁰, and his father was a commander of Jinzhou (*Jinzhou sima* 金州司馬), a town located in today's Hubei Province, and his mother was a policy adviser's (*sanjichangshi* 散騎常侍) daughter. He was the oldest son of four children in his family and there must be much expectation on him from the whole family. He got into the national school when he was very young, and passed the national exam of three books of history (*sanshi ke* 三史科). Before he became a financial administrator (*hucuo canjun* 戶曹參軍) of Henan fu, a garrison located in today's Henan province and with Luoyang as its capital, he had been employed as a officer in charge of records in a town (*xian zhubu* 縣主簿), then he was promoted to a examiner of classics (*jingxue kaoguan* 經學考官) and a instructor of the palace literary institution (*guangwen zhujiao* 廣文助教), which was a institution in charge of the literatures and books in court. The highest position of his career was the erudite of the national school (*taixue boshi* 太學博士). The career transfer from an erudite to a financial administrator was actually a demotion, and Jia She did not mention the reason in this inscription.

When the famine appeared in Luoyang, he sought safety by coming back to the capital of the

¹⁰ My translation of the official titles in the tomb inscriptions follows Charles Hucker's work (1985).

empire, Chang'an, and died there the next year. It was ironic that Jia She tried to defend his brother's behavior and wrote that Jia Tao ran away because the local government can not pay the officers' salary and provide them with food when Jia Tao actually was supposed to in charge of the salary and food problem in the garrison¹¹.

(2.) Cui Shu (崔紆): The story of a local officer stuck to his duty written by his cousin (*QTWBY* 1, p.412)

Cui Shu was also from an honorable family. His great-grand father was the vice director of the secretariat and the jointly manager of affairs with the secretariat-chancellery (*zhongshu shilang tong pingzhangshi* 中書侍郎同平章事), which meant that he was one of the most important officers in the empire. His grandfather was an important local governor. However, Cui Shu lost parents when he was very young which made him face more difficulties than Jia Tao in his education and official career. In his whole official career, he was in a lower level of the empire bureaucratic system, and he spent most of his time working in the level of districts and moved from one place to another. He started his official career as a district defender (*xianwei* 縣尉), and promoted to a district secretary (*xiancheng* 縣丞). When the famine happened, he was a district magistrate (*xianling* 縣令) and he stuck to his duty and tried to keep the order in his district. He died in the period of epidemics, but his cousin did not declared that he was killed by the epidemics or famines in the inscription literally for the reason I mentioned earlier.

(3.) Zhang Liuke (張留客): The story of a woman who faced the epidemics with her Buddhist belief written by her husband (*QTWBY* 4, p.250)

¹¹ A comprehensive research on the duty of a financial administer in a garrison of Tang empire may be found in Yen 1967, pp. 164-168.

In the narrative of Zhang Liuke's husband, she was from the family of her husband's maternal uncle and she was mentioned as 'bieshi' (別室), which meant another room in the house literally. The phrase used a metaphor to express her status as a concubine not a lawful principal wife in her family¹². However, according to her husband's words, he was raised by his maternal uncle since very young, and it was possible that his own parents died early and his maternal uncle took care of him as a parent¹³. Moreover, a modern scholar Liu Yen-li thought that Zhang Liuke was the daughter of a domestic servant couple, and the master, the uncle of the husband, sent her to her husband as a concubine¹⁴. It was possible that they knew each other since very young. However, there seemed to be no lawful principal wife in the family and the way his husband expressed his love was far beyond the formal husband-wife relationship¹⁵.

Her husband was not very successful in his career, but Zhang Liuke never complained about that and tried to comfort her husband that wealth and rank did not bring happiness to the family and the union of family was better than other things. When the epidemics broke out, she was the only parent with their children because her husband was on duty in Chang'an. Her husband believed that her piety helped the whole family survive the epidemics. When her husband became

¹² Yao Ping misreads this phrase and misunderstands Zhang Liuke's identity, and Liu Yen-li points out this misreading. (Yao, 2004. Liu, 2007)

¹³ The most possible situation was that he lost his father when he was very young, and lost her mother later, so his maternal uncle adopted him, a further discussion of this phenomenon in Tang dynasty may be found in Li Runqiang 2004.

¹⁴ This kind of marriage was contrary to the wedding ritual in Tang dynasty, but there were lots of examples in the higher class according to Cen Jingwen's research (2006).

¹⁵ Yao Ping thinks that Zhang Liuke's husband married her as a concubine because he left his family and moved to another place to start his official career, and it was common that he married a local woman as his concubine to serve him. However, there is no evidence in this tomb inscription to support her deduction (Yao 2004, p.159).

the defender of Henan fu, she got sick. It was very possible that she was killed by the epidemic. However, her husband refused to mention this possibility and focused on that she donated all her dresses and jewelries to copy Buddhist sutras and make statues of Buddha before her death.

(4.) Shen Zirou (沈子柔): The story of a famous entertainer written by her 'lover' (*QTBWBY* 4, p.247)

Shen Zirou was a famous entertainer in Luoyang¹⁶, and the writer tried to create an image of her as an unsurpassed beauty and all celebrities of Luoyang adored her. Her mother's last name was Liu, and her childhood name was Xiaojiao. She was very good at playing zither and singing songs, and she even familiar with the rules and forms of poems when she sang them. She has a good moral character, and never lost her own insist for the money and showed filial obedience to her mother. When the epidemic broke out, Shen Zirou became very sensitive and worried she would die in this epidemic. She came to the diviners for help, and they taught her some religious ways to avoid the epidemic. However, this can not comfort her. Her foretell became the reality unfortunately, and she got sick in ten days and physicians were without abilities to save her back. Her death came so suddenly and she did not have the chance to see her lover for the last time.

Writer as Witness or Not

It is important to trace where the writers' narratives of epidemics and famines came from and whether they wrote about their own experiences or just heard the experiences of epidemics from the deceased or other people who actually suffered in that. Jia Tao came to Chang'an in the epidemics and died in Chang'an. It is very possible that he came to his brother for shelter. The

¹⁶ The identity of Shen Zirou is still an unsolved problem (Yao 2003), because in early period of Tang, an entertainer registered in a different household register system from common people, however this system was disorganizing during the period when Shen Zirou lived and made her identity problem much more complicated.

suggestion will put the writer, Jia She, in Chang'an when the epidemics broke out and he might not witness the epidemics and famines. His writing was representations of Jia Tao's narrative about his traumatic memories when he spent the last year of his life in Chang'an. Cui Shu died in 872 and buried in Luo Yang. His cousin wrote the tomb inscription for him in Luoyang when the epidemics might still be creeping, so it is very possible that he witness the epidemics. It is easy to find out whether Zhang Liuke's husband and Shen Zirou's lover witness the epidemics because they cleared it up in their narratives. When epidemic broke out, Zhang Liuke's husband was not in Luoyang. However, he came back to Luoyang before 872, so he witness the last years of epidemics. In Shen Zirou's tomb inscription, we can know her lover was in Luoyang during the epidemics. Actually, he wrote a phrase about the situation mentioned that there were no people or families can be sure that they would survive in the whole neighborhood or community. Three writers of four actually witnessed the epidemics. While writing about the deceased of their family members and lovers, they might still be suffering from the traumatic experiences or memories in the epidemics and famines¹⁷.

Males as State Agents

It is necessary to come back to the question raised in the beginning, but I will re-ask it in a different way. Instead of why other inscriptions did not mention the epidemics, famines and even the death, we should explore why these four inscriptions recorded that when other people avoided talking about that and rather kept silent even they suffered so much. In Jia Tiao and Cui Shu' tomb

¹⁷ Wulf Kansteiner's research shows that it is important to make a distinction between traumatic memory of actual victims and the collective memory of the public who may heritage this trauma from mass media or historical education (2004). This argument is crucial to this article because distinguish traumatic memory and the Cultural Appropriations of it in these writings.

inscriptions, bringing the epidemics into the narratives was for the interpretation of their official career which was seen as the most important part of a man's life in the social common norm and became the major part in tomb inscriptions for men. In Jia Tiao's case, it was an explanation for his dishonor way of losing the official title, when it was a praise song for Cui Shu who did not abandon the land and people entrusted by the emperor even in the extremely disastrous circumstance. In the beginning of this article, it mentioned that there was no official record of the epidemics. To find out why, we should look into the historical resources which the records depended on. Most records came from the edicts of the emperors to send the medical officers to the place where epidemics happened¹⁸. Maybe the report about this wave of epidemics never was sent to the emperor, because the local order had already been disrupted before that. The suffering experiences of these two local agents of the government showed the fragility of the local order based on a bureaucratic system.

When Zhang Liuke's husband came back to Luoyang as the defender of Henan Fu, it might imply that the government tried to rebuild the local order. However, the wave of epidemics was going to stop stalking at that time. He and his colleague not only faced a place with "disorder among agents of order" (Bourdieu et al. 1999), but also had to suffer from their family tragedies, like the death of his loving wife.

Buddhism and Survival ?

Buddhism was a major topic in Zhang Liuke's tomb inscription, and she might accept this belief from her mother. In the inscription, it mentioned her mother's name was Jingyi(淨意).

¹⁸ The archives of those records can be found in *CFYG* 147, and Denis Twitchett and Yue Chunzhi's researches show the general process on how the archives was used in the official historical writings (Twitchett 1992; Yue 2003).

Apparently this was her mother's Buddhist name. Buddhism was written as a virtue in female tomb inscriptions, but it was used in different contexts. Liao Yifang noticed that those narratives always put women's Buddhism belief after their loss of husbands and used as the evidence of remaining chaste and faithful to their husband as demanded by the Confucian moral code. The Buddhism belief got deeply involved in the emotional relationship between husbands and wives, as Chen Jo-shui points out that, some wives would use the Buddhism belief as their inner sustenance when their husband got concubines or addicted to the pleasure of entertainers. This belief apparently played an important role in supporting Zhang Liuke spiritually and emotionally when she met all difficulties in her life, including the unsuccessful career of her husband, epidemics and husband's absent during the time, but the question is how her husband interpreted her belief in his writing. In his writing did not show the fading away of their relationship and he showed his best respect to her belief. Obviously, it showed that writing about his wife's belief was not just a way to show his respect on her but also to express his deep love, combined with guilt, which was not supposed to be expressed directly and openly between them in medieval China. Moreover, Buddhism belief on the death bed was used to show women treat the coming death peacefully, which was seen as a decent way to die in medieval China. When Zhang Liuke was dying, the epidemic was still spread. It was very possible that she did not survive in the epidemics, but her husband use the image of her belief to replace the actual cause of her death and suffering to show a decent and peaceful journey to her end by sticking to the story that Zhang Liuke's Buddhism belief make the whole family survive in the epidemics including herself.

The Ways to Express Love

From the standpoint of Chinese emotional relationship study, marriage and prostitution

constituted irreconcilable opposites. Marriage depend on the absolute chastity of a secluded wife and they shared no passion or desire in the marriage but the obligation to have children for the whole family, while prostitution implied the untrammelled promiscuity of a public woman and male scholars shared their passional love to the entertainers¹⁹. Shen Zirou's tomb inscription got modern scholars' attention, because Yuan Kuangxiu expressed his feelings on Shen Zirou strongly: "Fire can burn my love but it would not melt, and knife can cut my passion but it would not stop." They use it as the evidence to confirm the stereotype that male scholars shared their passional love to the entertainers (Chen Shangjun, 2006).

However, if comparing this tomb inscription to other inscriptions of entertainers²⁰, we will find that the strong emotional expression was a exception even in tomb inscriptions of entertainers. Actually, its writing was closer to the fictions of romance than the tomb inscriptions about the 'real' scholar-entertainer relationship in Tang society. The romantic fiction of scholar-entertainer had two kinds of ends. One was separation, and the man had to abandon the entertainer to marriage a decent women for his official career and his family, like the end of Cui Yingying (崔莺莺). The other choice was that the man married with the entertainer as a concubine or took her as a family entertainer, similar to the end of Li Wa (李娃). However, both ends meant the ending of a romantic narrative and the start of social realities. Most romantic fictions worshiped the passion and tried to avoid the coming of the ending. In a tomb inscription of a family entertainer who became a concubine, she was written as an honorable woman who came from a 'decent' family. Her grandfather and father did not have official titles, not because they can't but because they

¹⁹ Matthew H. Sommer uses his research on the polyandry in Qing dynasty to critic the stereotype (2005).

²⁰ For example, two entertainers', Lady Zhang and Lady Li, tomb inscriptions both praise their beauty and virtue, but there were no actual personal emotion expression in them.

chose not to. And there were no more position for passional love expression in this tomb inscription (*QTW* 995). The narrative of this inscription was surprisingly similar to Li Wa's story but tell the story in a more sophisticated way. The epidemics provided Yuan a way to avoid the same end in the narrative of him and Shen Zirou's story. He used an erotic scene with Shen Zirou as the end of their story, and the sudden death of Shen Zirou made their erotic little world eternal and it could never be destroyed by the external compulsion²¹. He did not try to cover her death in the epidemics, or his desire to her and his fear in the epidemics, because this tomb inscription was not written for Shen's family, which was assumed as audience of tomb inscription. His intention was not 'making' Shen Zirou a decent person and honoring her under the direction of social rules but trapping her as a desirable object in his memory, even this desire would be tangled with fear.

Writing the Deceased as Cultural Appropriations and Personal Transcendences of Traumatic Memory²²

Tomb inscriptions were in an obscure place in the ritual of mourning in medieval China. It was not recorded in the foreground of ritual books, but it widely spread and accepted in the higher class. It became a popular way to express the mourning in a more personal way and create a decent image of death for the descendant and public in the later period of Tang.

When writing a tomb inscription of the deceased who might die in epidemics and famines, writers faced a more complicated situation. Writing was a way to transcend the trauma which had

²¹ Stephen Owen reads the romance of Tang as "an attempt to close off a more serious domain as private space, and in doing so, it comes into conflict with the vital interests of the social whole" (Owen 1996, p.131). The analysis here is deeply influenced by this statement.

²² I borrow the terminology "Cultural Appropriations" from the work of Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman (1996) and try to understand how individual's traumatic narrative emerge in his/her local world influenced by them.

been practiced for a long time in Chinese history²³. When writers tried to transcend traumatic memory of the family members and lovers of the deceased and made his/her life - specially the scenes on his/her deathbed - sound more decent and peaceful, they tried to follow the general writing guidelines to praise his/her virtue and do not mention the death cause and suffering they went through. However, these ‘considerate’ and ‘intentional’ writing practices make tomb inscription representation and embodiment of cultural appropriations of traumatic memory, which was constructed by the writing rules and forms and gives us a historical image on the socially silence about suffering in the epidemics and famines. These rules built up between the discursive regime and practical regime were not only linguistic games but also social origins of those ‘actual’ suffering and trauma in the epidemics. By analyzing the cultural repertoire and practices of these appropriations, we may find a way to read those records of silence and explore the multiple meanings from different individuals behind the social silence. Then, finding these four inscription will become just a start, and it will be even more important to re-read all the tomb inscriptions in these epidemics years and re-voice their traumatic memories from the obscure phrases in the inscription for both the deceased and the writers who witnessed the epidemics and famines.

List of Abbreviations

<i>CFYG</i>	<i>Ce fu yuan gui</i> 冊府元龜
<i>QTW</i>	<i>Quan Tang wen</i> 全唐文
<i>QTWBY</i>	<i>Quan Tang wen buyi</i> 全唐文補遺
<i>XTS</i>	<i>Xin Tang shu</i> 新唐書

²³ However, recent scholarship focuses too much on the political trauma (Idema and el., 2006.)

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