

Against Agamben: Sovereignty and the Void in the Discourse of the Nation in Early Modern China

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Abstract

In *Kingdom and Glory*, Agamben analyzed the dual perspective of the void, through the metaphor of the empty throne, in the governmental machine in the West. I engage with the ambiguous question of the void with regard to the concept of sovereignty through my reading of two Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing period, Liang Qichao (1872–1929) and Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936). This paper therefore addresses the question of sovereignty and the void in the discourse of nation in early modern China, an issue that is related to the problem of the political economy or the politics of life. I argue that the rhetorical move in Liang Qichao's argument for the birth of a new nation and new people was to move from the not-having (無) to the *there is* (有) in support of the formation of a new nation-state and a restricted logic of sovereignty, while Zhan Taiyan's position was to affirm the dynamic re-composition of the void by constantly negating the given fixated state, and thus proposing a different and radical vision of nation and full sovereignty of the lives of each and every one of the people who are co-inhabiting in the *polis*.

Keywords

Agamben, bio-politics, Chinese enlightenment, cultural translation, governmentality, Liang Qichao, nation-state, political economy, sovereignty, the void, Zhang Taiyan

The void is the sovereign figure of glory. (Agamben, 2011: 245)

The Void: A Shifter in the Discourse of Governmentality

The aim of this paper is to address the question of the controversial concept of sovereignty and the void in political philosophy. In his recent book

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The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government, Giorgio Agamben foregrounded the dual perspective of the void in the governmental machine in the West through the metaphor of the empty throne, either as the economy and articulation of the infinity of the universe, or as the political economy of the governmental management itself. Agamben traced the elaborations of the Trinitarian doctrine between the second and fifth centuries AD, and demonstrated how the empty space represented by *hetoimasia tou thronou* was in fact at the center of the governmental machine in the West. Even contemporary democratic regimes, according to Agamben, testified to the integration of *oikonomia* and glory at the center of the government by consent through the practice of the acclamative form of public opinion and consensus. With the attempt to question nationalism, racism, essentialism, and the consolidation of concentrated power in all forms, recent studies of radical political philosophy have returned to the question of anarchism and the groundlessness of foundation.¹ However, Agamben points out, in western tradition, ontotheology always already thinks the divine praxis as lacking a foundation, and the divine *oikonomia* and management of the world is 'always already anarchic, without foundation' (Agamben, 2011: 65). Concerning the concept of the void, Agamben wrote:

The empty throne is not, therefore, a symbol of regality but of glory. Glory precedes the creation of the world and survives its end. The throne is empty not only because glory, though coinciding with the divine essence is not identified with it, but also because it is in its innermost self-inoperativity and sabbatism. The void is the sovereign figure of glory. (Agamben, 2011: 245; emphasis in original)

In Agamben's analysis, the majesty of the empty throne in fact linked the contradiction between immanent trinity and economy trinity. The apparatus of the *oikonomia* therefore served as the articulation of the double structure between ceremonial regality and effective management, and captured within the governmental machine the 'unthinkable inoperativity – making it its internal motor – that constitutes the ultimate mystery of divinity' (Agamben, 2011: xxii–xxiii).

What I find interesting in Agamben's discussion of *hetoimasia tou thronou* is not the obvious theological rationale or rhetoric in western political theories and governmental practices, but the link between the notion of economy and the void that resonates intimately with the Oriental notion of nothingness (*wu* 無) or emptiness (*kung* 空), such as the ones formulated by the Kyoto school. The concept of 'nothingness' or 'emptiness' elaborated by the Kyoto school, such as Nishida Kitaro's logic of *basho* (場所), as absolute non-dualistic place or *topos* of nothingness, or Nishitani Keiji's concept of *sunyata* (zero, emptiness or

nothingness (空・無) and his proposal of the ‘standpoint of emptiness’ (空の立場), have been debated constantly.² The trajectory from Nishida’s comment on the contrast between the East and West, referring to the East as conceived with the ground of nothingness and the West with the ground of reality, to Miki Kiyoshi’s pro-war statements based on the philosophy of nothingness in 1940, is a highly problematic and controversial philosophical issue. The figuration of *Tōyō* (とうよう 東洋 the Orient) as the *topos* of nothingness (東洋無) seemed to indicate the non-substantial and non-possessive quality of Japanese or the Oriental culture. But, in fact, this figure of nothingness functioned in the discourse of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere as a seductive and mystic center of the void that invited different parties of the East Asian area to identify with the immanent essence and form an integral whole. The discursive political economy of the void popular in the writings of the philosophers of the Tokyo school, as well as in the war-time *Kominka* (皇民化) propaganda in Taiwan to become the non-I subject in order to serve the nation (奉公無私), forced me to consider the stake involved in the notion of ‘the place of emptiness’ or ‘empty seat’ with regards to the question of the governmentality of the subject in relation to the state.³

I do not intend to go into the debates of the complex issue related to the Kyoto school, but I do want to suggest that in the discourse of the void, either as the empty and vacant place, vacuous space, being without, the act of nullification or voiding, containing nothing, or as Lacan put it, a Democritean void of ‘not nothing’, the void already indicates differently in the West, with its religious or philosophical connotations. We need to take the ‘void’ as a shifter in linguistic apparatus, to be arranged and exchanged in the discursive economy, meaning differently and functioning variously according to the contextual symbolic order, demonstrating different subjective positions in response to particular objective realities. Likewise, the phrases in Chinese containing the meanings of ‘void’ such as ‘*wu*’ and ‘*kung*’, are also shifters and signify differently according to different contexts. ‘*Kung*’ (空) suggests vacuum and emptiness, while ‘*Wu*’ (無) refers not only to ‘not having’ as opposed to ‘there is’ (有), but also refers to the act of nullification or voiding. ‘Void’, ‘*wu*’ or ‘*kung*’ in Chinese, either as nothingness, emptiness or the dialectic act of voiding, has to be read against its contextual and semiotic framework. If we fail to do so, the discussion of the ‘void’ would then be a superficial parallel study, arbitrarily juxtaposing and transposing concepts from western philosophy into Chinese thought and vice versa. But if we do not attempt this trans-cultural philosophical engagement, we would never be able to think the similar or same processes that take place in larger and global contexts. By examining various discursive formulations of the void or ‘*kung/wu*’, particularly in the discourse of the political economy or the politics in relation to governmentality, we would be able to detect the loophole that might exist in different governmental machines of today.

I shall approach the ambivalent question of the void through my reading of two Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing enlightenment movement, Liang Qichao (1872–1929) and Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936). In the contrasting modes of discourse related to the concept of the void, either through ‘*wu*’ or ‘*kung*’, developed by Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan, I suggest, we can observe the divergent routes refracted in Agamben’s analysis of the empty place and his concept of the void. Furthermore, as opposed to Liang Qichao’s formulation of the polity which helped shape the mainstream discourse of the new nation-state of modern China, I want to argue that Zhang Taiyan’s proposal of the ‘empty seat’ at the center of the government apparatus, affirming the dynamic re-composition of the void by constantly negating the fixated state and thus proposing a different vision of the nation, appears to be an alternative path that has been suppressed and deserves our attention.⁴

I particularly want to bring the discourse of *xin* (心) through the trope of the void, either as *kung* or *wu*, formulated by Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan, into our perspective. *Xin*, as a complex concept in Chinese, indicates the immanent activities of life, including the heart, the mind, feeling, will, affect, spirit and so on. Both Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan, in the wave of the enlightenment movement and the birth of the nation in early modern China, appropriated the notion of the void in their discursive formation of the concept of *xin* and that of the nation, linking the individual to the state. Putting Liang Qichao’s and Zhang Taiyan’s discourse of the void back in their contexts means to situate them in the historical moment of the Chinese revolution at the birth of the new nation-state. By doing so, it would allow us to grasp a more accurate understanding of the discursive function of the ‘void’ in their thoughts and in their contemporary horizon.

To pursue our discussion, we first need to examine Agamben’s concept of the relation between economy and glory in the western governmental machine, and in what ways it highlights the political economy of the void in the paradigm of the governmental machine in East Asia, particularly in the context of modern China.

Agamben and the Political Economy of the Empty Throne

Economy is the key concept in Agamben’s study of governmentality in *Kingdom and Glory*. Challenging Carl Schmitt’s thesis of political theology, Agamben’s basic argument is that Christian theology, from the very beginning, is ‘economic-managerial, and not politico-statal’ and that this theo-economic paradigm explained the history of the close link between the political and economic-governmental traditions in the West (Agamben, 2011: 66). Agamben stressed that economy involved not the epistemic or a system of rules, nor a science, but a whole set of practices and activities of the management, administration and

arrangement [*disposizione*]. As a contrast to *polis* that concerns the affairs of the city-state, *Oikos* designates the affairs of the 'household'. Derived from the Latin word *oikonomia* and the Greek word *οικονόμος*, economy indicates the management and administration of the household, the smallest social unit, a complex organism composed of heterogeneous relations, including masters and slaves, parents and children, husband and wife. Economy therefore involves the activities of partition, order, organization and execution of the cares and the needs of the household (Agamben, 2011: 17–21). Political economy, on the other hand, indicates the blurred demarcation between *oikos* and *polis*, and the fact that the management and organization of one's own space and affairs have been regulated in the sphere of the polis. As Agamben wrote in *Homo Sacer*, 'once it crosses over the walls of the *oikos* and penetrates more and more deeply into the city, the foundation of sovereignty – nonpolitical life – is immediately transformed into a line that must be constantly redrawn' (Agamben, 1998: 131). Whether and how the line is redrawn in various historical and political contexts would be the question to be investigated.

Agamben's analysis draws our attention to the ambiguous separation/link between *oikia* and *polis* at the core of the apparatus of governmentality. The 'political economy' that has emerged since the 18th century already testified to the fact that the study of the activities of economy and its production and exchange, that is, the administration and management of the order of things, was defined within the domain of the *polis* for the interest of the state, no matter whether it is the totalitarian state, the national socialist state, the democratic state or the neoliberal state. The superimposition of the one over the other makes the logic of the city-state penetrate into the private domain; likewise, the logic of the private household management, with its master-slave hierarchical order and its self-serving rationalization, also easily supersedes the governing principle of the public domain as soon as one holds the power over the state. Agamben wrote:

the paradigm of government and of the state of exception coincide in the idea of an *oikonomia*, an administrative praxis that governs the course of things, adapting at each turn, in its salvific intent, to the nature of the concrete situation against which it has to measure itself. (Agamben, 2011: 50)

The sovereign act of the drawing, administration and rationalization of the line of separation/link between *oikia* and *polis*, from the ownership of property, taxation, civic and military service, education policy, the

control of population, to the management of bare life, would then be the object of the governmental machine.

The close link between the domain of *oikia* and that of *polis* goes even deeper and begins much earlier. Agamben pointed out that it was first in a passage from *On Joseph* by Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE–50 CE) in which the Aristotelian opposition between *oikos* and *polis* became obscured: *oikia* was defined by Philo as ‘a *polis* on a small and contracted scale’ and economy as ‘a contracted *politeia*’, while the *polis* presented as ‘a large house [*oikos megas*]’ and politics as ‘a common economy [*koine tis oikonomia*]’ (Agamben, 2011: 24). Hippolytus (170–235) and Tertullian (c.160–c.225) further elaborated the technical notion of *oikonomia* based on the Trinitarian articulation of divine life. The Pauline phrase ‘the economy of the mystery’ was literally reversed in Tertullian as ‘the mystery of the economy’. Trinity was no longer the articulation of the divine being but of its praxis. Thus, Agamben explained, through the nexus that links economy and monarchy, ‘the divine monarchy now constitutively entails an economy, a governmental apparatus, which articulates and, at the same time, reveals its mystery’ (Agamben, 2011: 41).

The introduction of the concept of trinity into the practice of economy, with the anarchic foundation as its *arkhe*, requires our further attention. According to Agamben, the fundamental nexus that links the two poles between God and his government of the world is the *anarchos*. The fracture between being and action, ontology and praxis, essence and will, not only points to the secret dualism that the doctrine of the *oikonomia* introduced into Christianity, but also to the notion of the void. This notion of the void is a tricky question. Agamben suggested that God, as the immovable mover at the center, is the void, the unthinkable inoperativity, which governs the bipolar system of the western governmental machine and culminates in the figure of the *hetoimasia tou thronou*, the symbol of glory and the seat of rationality (Agamben, 2011: 53–65). This empty space then is the place that could be occupied by any rational and abstract concepts on which hierarchical power and social relations are established. The transcendental norm of the kingdom here parallels the immanent order that governs the state.

In the case of economic trinity elaborated by Hippolytus and Tertullian, as Agamben demonstrated, the paradigm of the act of government was no longer the manifestation of God’s being but the mysterious administration of the world, involving the calculation and partition of power and its exclusion. Derived from Agamben’s analysis and from what we have observed in the course of history, we could also say that the notion of the empty but prepared throne and its unquestionable glory reverberated not only in various forms of the western governmental machine but also in Asian governmental regimes. The unquestionable logic at the center of the governmental machine is the vanishing point that governs the regime of the visible and even the regime

of the sensible, as what Foucault and Rancière respectively analyzed, which operates as an autonomous apparatus and permeates our consciousness in an unconscious process.

Alberto Toscano challenged severely the historical substantialism masked under Agamben's archaeology of theological economy in his *Kingdom and Glory*; he also critiqued the absence of the distinction between the two forms of economic, that is, trading by barter and chrematistic through the accumulation of money, analyzed by Aristotle and discussed by Marx in *Capital*. Toscano pointed out that by transgressing the natural order of needs and positing a limitless accumulation of wealth, chrematistics presaged the principle of capitalism and should be the real political question for the present. Neither capitalism nor Marx's theory, suggested Toscano, can be encompassed by the notion of *oikonomia* and its genealogies, and therefore we cannot rely on Agamben, Toscano insisted, for a truly radical and total critique of contemporary politics and economics (Toscano, 2011: 130–32).

Toscano might be right with regard to Agamben's lack of attention to the question of the chrematistic, but he seemed to be intentionally ignoring Agamben's analysis on the apparatus of the abstraction of values established through language and instituted by law [*nomos*], that is, the separation and management of life that constituted the domination over social relations that Marx was so concerned with in his critique of political economy. For Agamben, it is the regime of discursive cut and separation that is operative in the economy and management of things and, in Marx's terms, the abstraction and the fetishism of value-form and the logic of capitalism.

'The regime of cut', in the Lacanian-Badiouian sense, to me explains the problem of metaphysics and the logic of separation and exception studied by Agamben. The law of separation and partition is inscribed in *logos*, and the economy and management of things is based on this law. Every separation contains or preserves within itself a sacred and unquestionable core, and language is the mediation that exercises the operation of the separation. The concept of scission, be it the *coupure de sujet* in Lacan, the *coupe d'essence* in Althusser, the regime of cut and the *effet de cisaille* (shearing effect) in Badiou, or the *écart* and the *part des sans-part* in Rancière, addresses the issue of ideational operation of separation activated through language.⁵ The split and separation takes different forms in different socio-political contexts at different historical junctures. Agamben's inquiries into the logic of inclusion and exclusion, separation and exception, the gap between *phōnes* versus *logos*, the bio-political fractures stipulated among people, all point to the economy and *dispositif* of the sacramentalized language and the legitimization of a canonized version of History that effaces all pre-histories. To disentangle the naturalized and justified bondage established by the law of language is to put the metaphysical and ideational cut and separation in question,

to challenge and profane the sacred veil of the void, and to think the possibility to dis-articulate the link constituted by the cut so that the future can come.

Referring to Agamben's recourse to Saussure, Kevin Attell suggested that the deepest paradox of language for Agamben resided in the bar itself, 'this abyssal void or bar' at the center, the bar between 'the presupposition of the fact of language and signification taking place' and 'the possibility of the contrary' (Attell, 2009: 835–6). The barrier executed as the act of separation at any historical moment was the moment in which the law was established and the line was drawn. Agamben's work of archaeology was exactly to study the modalities, circumstances and social conditions in which the split took place, and how it was constituted as the origin of the narrative of History (Agamben, 2009: 103).

To Agamben, the inoperativity at the center of the governmental machine in the West, with 'the secret theological nexus that links it to government and providence', is the key to all questions (Agamben, 2011: 64–5). The problem is apparently not inoperativity as such, but its capture in the apparatus of glory, while the empty throne is merely the veil and the mask of the void. The question then would be the discursive technique of the administration and the management of the void with which the governmental machine functions or malfunctions. The apparatus of governmentality imposed by law would even make the sovereign state of exception a space devoid of law, a juridical void or non-lieu, 'a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations – and above all the very distinction between public and private – are deactivated' (Agamben, 2005: 50). The chaotic and lawless conditions in the martial law period, the state of exception, of different historical moments presented us with one extreme form among various forms of the governmental void at the center. An awareness of 'the secret theological nexus that links it to government and providence', Agamben suggested, would be the first step to think an 'ungovernable', beyond government and anarchy, beyond the economy and beyond glory, that is, something that could never assume the form of an *oikonomia*.

Agamben's study of the genealogy of the western governmental paradigm, therefore, was to unravel how the mystery of the void at the center has assumed the mask of glory and even continued to appear as the contemporary government of consensus in the liberalist democratic system. Agamben's task in this sense is also to propose to profane and challenge the law that separates life from itself and to restore the livability of every life in itself. Religion exercised the first power of separation, and to profane means to challenge the line of separation and to restore life that is not separated from its form, a life in which 'the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power' (Agamben,

2007: 75; emphasis in original; 2000: 3–4). Life per se is what, as Agamben stated, ‘opens itself as a central inoperativity in every operation, like the live-ability of every life’, and ‘the life which contemplates its own power to act renders itself inoperative in all its operations, and lives only its livability’ (Agamben, 2011: 250–51).

The operational apparatus of the management of things and all aspects of life, in the name of the unquestionable rational kernel and under the guise of the glory of the empty throne, is indeed the question we need to face in front of various forms of contemporary governmental paradigm. Only when we became aware of the separation of life from its possibilities and potentials, the restriction of life by an arbitrary and naturalized biological concept of life, the heterogeneous pre-histories that had been suppressed by History, then could we begin to deactivate the apparatuses of power.

Liang Qichao’s Political Economy of the Void and the Birth of Ethico-Biopolitics in Modern China

Western governmental paradigms were introduced into modern China at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, along with a large corpus of the translations of western knowledge that were published as enlightenment pamphlets and articles appearing in popular newspapers, magazines, and textbooks for different levels of school education. In the massive discourse of enlightenment, that is, the building of a new nation and the molding of a new people, we observed the emergence of a particular mode of political economy disguised with Confucian ethical phraseology. I call this production of knowledge a process of double-translation through intellectual syncretism: the writer translated and appropriated heterogeneous disciplinary concepts from another language to respond to the questions and demands of his time and his worldview. By using traditional Chinese Confucian phraseology or newly coined Chinese terms, and adapting or altering the Japanese translated texts, these phrases were inscribed and overlaid with mixed references. Western semiotic networks and traditional Chinese semiotic networks were merged in one figure.

Certain concepts such as nation, people, patriotism, democracy, constitution and government were highly employed and invested by Chinese intellectuals of the enlightenment movement. But, the translation of these terms created complex questions. Nation, for example, was variously translated as *guomin* (國民 national people), *guojia* (國家 state) or *minizu* (民族 ethnic people), while patriotism was translated as *aiguoxin* (愛國心) or *baoguo* (報國), connoting loving of the country with the Confucian sense of duty to repay the country. These terms are like the ‘shifters’, analyzed by Jacques Lacan in his discussion of Émile Benvenist, that carried double meanings, as a statement that seemingly

refers to the signified object but in fact functions as an act of enunciation that refers back to the subject position (Lacan, 1973: 136–42). We need to conceive the complex processes of double translation and double appropriation as the operations of the shifters with different signifying structures and subjective positions, one epistemic system superimposing over the other. The process of double translation at the turn of the 20th century in China indicated a time of drastic paradigm shift, the complex alteration of the epistemology behind the discursive formations related to the changing relational networks of social life as discussed by Agamben (2009: 9–11, 31–2).

Liang Qichao's essay 'On the New People' (*xinminshuo* 新民說) (1902), as a symptomatic text, demonstrated perfectly the discursive bridge between utilitarian political economy with Confucian ethics and illustrated for us the discursive intellectual syncretism particular to his age. I have discussed elsewhere how and why Liang Qichao's writings demonstrated the discursive mode of political economy and indicated the birth of ethico-biopolitics in the Chinese context.⁶ Due to the limited space of this paper, I'm not going to repeat the details. But I need to point out that one of the major sources for Qiang Qichao's knowledge of political economy is a text translated by John Fryer (傅蘭雅), that is, John Hill Burton's *Chambers' Educational Course: Political Economy for Use in Schools, and for Private Instruction* (abbreviated as *Political Economy*), one of the educational textbook series published by William and Robert Chambers of Edinburgh. In 1886 John Fryer translated this book into Chinese as *Zuozhi Chuyan* (佐治芻言), literally meaning 'some humble opinions for the assistance of governance'. Liang Qichao studied this text with his teacher Kang Youwei, along with other enlightenment knowledge translated from the West. The same text by Burton was also translated by the famous Japanese enlightenment intellectual Fukusawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉) as *Seiyō Jijō* (*Things Western*, 西洋事情) during 1867–70, and reverberated in his influential book *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (*Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, 文明論概略) (1875). By the time Liang Qichao was exiled to Japan, Fukusawa Yukichi's *Outline of a Theory of Civilization* was being read by almost every intellectual in Japan, of course including Tokutomi Soho (德富蘇峰), whom Liang Qichao was deeply indebted to. Liang had translated Tokutomi's essays in the news magazine the *Kokumin no Tomo* (國民之友) and *Kokumin shimbun* (國民新聞), and published as his own essays in the news magazine that he established during his exile in Japan after the failure of the Hundred Day Reform.

The rhetoric Liang employed was exactly the political economy of the concept of the void, but his argument was to move from the nothingness (無), the not-having or the lack, to the *there is* (有), that is, something to be. In Liang's discourse of the 'new people' (新民), his definition of the 'new' is not only to stimulate and renew something that already existed,

but also to take and implement something that one originally did not have (採補其所本無而新之). Since there were only common people of the local district, but ‘no national people’ (有部民而無國民) in China, Liang proposed that the first urgent task for China was to summon up the ‘new people’ for the new nation. In his argumentation and persuasion, nation was described as a corporation – *gongsi* (公司) – and the imperial court as the administrative office – *shiwusuo* (事務所). In order to fix the problem of the inoperativeness of the old dynasty and make the new nation operative, Liang encouraged the ‘new people’ to fight not only for their ‘self-interest’ (*liji* 利己) but also for the ‘real self-interest’ (*zhenliji* 真利己); so-called ‘real self-interest’ was defined in terms of the ‘group’ (*qun* 群), that is, in Liang’s framework, the nation-state (*guojia* 國家). Everyone was expected to serve the nation first so that he could secure his own interests in the long run.

Liang delivered a strong argument that it was necessary to build up the nation-state in order to achieve the goal of civilization. Liang even analyzed the modes of production according to the interests of the nation-state and prescribed that, in order to produce and maintain these interests (生利), it was essential to demand the forces of production from the people. The forces of production were respectively identified by Liang as physical force (*tili* 體力) and psyche force (*xinli* 心力), the latter designating both intellectual force (*zhili* 智力) and moral force (*deli* 德力). Education and cultivation therefore were necessary techniques to enhance the productive force (殖產之術) for the nation so that the total capital and total labor (總資本總勞力) of the nation-state could be increased. To make sure that people take production as each individual’s responsibility, Liang even stressed that people should be educated so that they would feel ‘ashamed’ for being the one who only consumes but cannot produce (恥為分利者) (Liang, 1999 [1902]: 696–702).

In Liang’s formulation, all aspects of a person’s life, not only his physical capacity but also his social morality (公德), such as perseverance (毅力), self-esteem (自尊), progressiveness (進取), duties for the group (合群), and martial spirit (尚武), are to be the objects of management and administration by the nation.⁷ In between the lines, Liang brings in various classical Chinese Confucian texts to reinforce the concepts of the virtues so that his Chinese readers can immediately appreciate his reasoning, and the texts he cites include not only the four classics – *Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean* – but also *Spring and Autumn Annals*, *Mozi*, *Xun Zi*, *Liezi*, and *Zhan Guo Ce* (strategies of the Warring States) (Liang, 1999 [1902]: 656, 657, 661, 691, 705, 712). There is an obvious move toward a positive, aggressive, warring and martial interpretation of Confucianism in Liang’s selection of these classical texts. Liang Qichao’s essay on the ‘New People’ symptomatically demonstrated exactly how the national subject could be discursively constructed in the way that the *bio* (life) and the ethics of the individual

were formulated for the political economy, that is, the management of all things for the state. Here, the law of the state has superseded all aspects of a person's life because life has become the target of political economy for the best interests of the state.

The logic of political economy in the mode of the physiological conception of the state influenced by Japanese enlightenment intellectuals explained Liang Qichao's vision of the new people. Confucian ethics of *polis-oikos* and its familial hierarchical order thereby had been superimposed over the discourse of the governmentality of the modern nation-state, infiltrated with the theological as well as physiological logic behind the governmental machine developed from the West. The individual's moral attributes were to be measured, governed and managed for the benefit and the reason of the state. The ethical subject, just like the *homo oeconomicus* discussed by Marx as well as Foucault, was fundamentally maneuvered by the demand/want of the economic stage of the time and willingly transformed the demand/want into his or her own desires, duties and even meaning of life. The individual's volunteering commitment, to exercise moral potential and to devote his life to the service of the nation-state, with free will and autonomous consent, was made possible through Liang Qichao's rationalization and the formulation of the virtues of the new people, an ethico-politico-economic subject. In other words, Liang's writings demonstrated the mode of intellectual discursive syncretism that appropriated the knowledge of political economy from the West, decorated through traditional Confucian phraseology, while at the same time instituted the normative law of power over life through the discursive political economy over the government of *xin* according to the interest of the state. Upon the administration and management of this vacuous site of *xin*, the 'psyche force' (*xinli* 心力) would then be administered and molded to forge the new people and new nation, a formation of the 'national people' from 'not having' (*wu* 無) to 'there is' (*you* 有) according to the restricted political economy and a restricted logic of the sovereignty defined by the state.

Zhang Taiyan's Concept of the Empty Seat (空位) and His Critique of the State

To me, Zhang Taiyan's re-reading of Zhuangzi (莊子) provided a rigorous ground for the critique of the constitution of the over-developed power structure of the nation-state that was taking shape in modern China at the turn of the 20th century. The process of double translation is reversed from that of *normative* intellectual syncretism to a *negative but critical activity*. Instead of the appropriation and discursive syncretism practiced by Liang Qichao, what Zhang Taiyan exercised was his radical critique of the translatability of the nominal system while at the same time he put forth his singular interpretation of the state of affairs.

Zhang was one of the leading theorists among the revolutionary intellectuals that participated in the movement to overthrow the Qing Dynasty and to build up the Republic. Being a highly renowned and respected scholar who was learned in classical Chinese thoughts and etymology, who even coined the term ‘zhong-hua-min-guo’ (中華民國), the Republic of China, Zhang was often invited to serve in certain political positions, such as the chief editor for the activist newspaper *Min Bao* (民報) that strongly criticized the Qing Empire’s corruption, the chief-editor of the *Dagonghe Ribao* (大共和日報) associated with the Republic of China Alliance after the Wuchang Uprising, and Minister of the Guangzhou Generalissimo. But, because of his bold character as a critic, Zhang was also often in sharp disagreement and even open confrontation with contemporary intellectuals and political leaders, including Liang Qichao, Kang Youwei, Yan Fu, Yang Du, Sun Yat-sen, Yuan Shikai and Chiang Kai-shek. The Qing government put him in jail from 1903 to 1906 because of his activities in the publication of the revolutionary newspaper *Su Bao* (蘇報). Yuan Shikai, the first official president (1913–16) of the Republic of China during the warlord period, also put him under house arrest during 1913–16 because of his open criticism. He criticized Chiang Kai-shek several times – first against Chiang’s northern expedition in 1926 in the name of unification, then against Chiang’s giving away of the north-eastern provinces upon Japan’s invasion in 1931 – and hence created tension between him and the Nanjing government.

Zhang Taiyan’s concept of *xinzhai* (心齋) as the nodal point of emptiness that awaits the arrival and departure of all beings as equal is crucial in his formulations of the notion of nation (國家). He presented the idea of nation with the figure of ‘place of emptiness’ (*kunchu* 空處) and ‘empty seat’ (*kungwei* 空位), again a sharp contrast to the concept of nation proposed and formulated by Liang Qichao and his contemporaries. Zhang Taiyan’s philosophical formulation of the void (*kung* 空) in association with the concept of ‘the place of emptiness’ and ‘the empty seat’ did not derive from mere ideational speculation, but was forged as the stakes he engaged with in his debates with his contemporaries in different political stages.

The first essay in which Zhang developed his concept of ‘the place of emptiness’ was the essay on nation (*guojia lun* 國家論) published in 1907 in *Minbao* (People’s Newspaper 民報), a year after he was released from his imprisonment under the Qing government. Here, Zhang interpreted the nation as the ‘riverbed’ (*hechuang* 河床), serving as ‘the place of emptiness’ (*kongchu* 空處) that allowed the river to pass by daily, that is to say, the nation should be considered as an empty place that offered itself to be traversed by different people at different historical moments. The subjectum of the nation was merely a ‘void’ (以空虛為主體) and ‘non-being’ (非有) (Zhang, 1985a: 463).

Zhang Taiyan's formulation of the nation as the place of emptiness was intended as a debate with Liang Qichao and Yang Du (楊度), whom Zhang addressed as the nationalists (國家論者). In the article '*Jintiezhuyi Shuo*' (Essay on Gold and Metal 金鐵主義說) published in *Zhongguo Xinbao* (Chinese New Newspaper 中國新報) earlier in 1907, Yang Du promoted the importance of developing the wealth and military force of the nation so that the realm of China (*zhonghua*) could expand. Yang Du also stressed that *zhonghua* (中華) was a name not for an ethnic group but for all people who have acquired refined culture and could be addressed as a unified people with refined culture (華). The central argument in this article is then the concept of *wuzugonghe* (五族共和), meaning the harmonious assimilation and integration of five races, arguing that the non-Han ethnic groups can also be counted as Chinese people under the name *zhonghua* as long as they acquired or were assimilated into Chinese culture so that the differences of ethnic cultures could be erased. Following Yang Du's rationale, Chinese culture would serve as a seductive and mystic void, an expansive category that integrates all different ethnic groups as long as they adopted the refined Chinese culture as their own immanent nature, and it is still the ethnic policy that has been practiced by the contemporary Chinese government.

Zhang Taiyan disagreed with Yang Du's proposal of the total spiritual integration under the name *zhonghua*. He criticized Yang Du's ignorance of the historical processes and the differences of the cultures pertaining to these different ethnic groups. Zhang Taiyan stressed that the term *zhonghua* was merely a 'borrowed name as marker' (託名標識) to indicate the dynamic and altering compositions of the changing people in the course of history who cohabitated around the place in different temporal stages. He also explained that the nation was only a temporary dynamic composition, as the movement of the constitution of the textile woven by warp and woof (經緯相交,此爲組織). In this sense, the composition of the nation was viewed as dynamic movement in constant re-composition. The nation has no substance of its own, but appears only as a mobile condition (然其組織時,惟有動態,初無實體). Zhang further stressed that the love for the nation (愛國心) was not to love the fixated present state (所愛者亦非現在之正有), but to love the composition (組合) and the 'not yet germinated' that is to come in the future (渴望其未萌芽者) (Zhang, 1985a: 463).

Contrary to the contemporary discourse that demanded patriotism, Zhang Taiyan not only had shattered the myth of a coherent and cultural concept of the integrative and expansive nation, but also deconstructed the notion of patriotism (愛國心). In so doing, Zhang in fact stressed the importance of acknowledging the historical process of the dynamic and constantly altered composition, to challenge the pre-given law stipulated by the past or by any subjective power, and to welcome the coming of new people and a new composition of the nation.

The question then is how to conceive a nation or a government that can function so as to welcome the arrival of the 'not-yet-germinated', including the co-existence of the uncounted members, regardless of what races, languages, vocations or birthplaces they belong to. In 'Questioning the Representative System' (代議然否論) published in 1908, Zhang Taiyan analyzed the representative system of the government and pointed out the drawbacks of this system that, to him, was in fact 'an altered form of feudalism' (封建之變相). Zhang pointed out that the power of the representatives was seized by the rich and the upper-class people and consequently continued the division between the aristocrats and the common people (Zhang, 1985b: 300–11). In another article, 'Critique of Political Party' (誅政黨), published in 1911, Zhang argued that the constitution drafted by the government was often a self-serving practice that aimed to profit people in power through the expansion of its party by securing the official positions in the government (Tang, 1979: 353–4). These perceptive observations of the bureaucratic operation and the representative system presented Zhang's sharp critiques against the expansion and consolidation of power of the party. Contrary to Sun Yat-sen's wish, Zhang even suggested dismissing the revolutionary party *tongmenghui* (同盟會) right after the success of the 1911 revolution (革命軍起, 革命黨消) so that the government would not be formed and ruled by one single party (Tang, 1979: 366–7). Zhang's suggestion of terminating the one big party right after the revolution was also due to the fact that he had observed the conflicts between the party troops of Hunan province and Hubei province caused by the growing ambition and the seizure of power by the party members (Tang, 1979: 364, 366–7; Xu, 1996: 364–6).

After the Republic was formed, Zhang wrote a series of political analyses on the respective malfunctions of the governmental systems. The historical time Zhang Taiyan faced was the Warlord Government, the so-called Beiyang Government, which was established in 1912 and lasted till 1928 upon Chiang Kai-shek's unification. In a speech he delivered in 1912, Zhang pointed out the drawbacks of the French Republican and the US system and suggested that the offices for administration, legislation and supervision should be independent from one another, and the power of the president should be limited and placed at a 'vacuous and inoperative place' (*kunxu buyong zhidi* 空虛不用之地) to prevent him from developing into a dictator. More importantly, the office for education and examination should be independent from the central government (Tang, 1979: 375). In 1916, after he was released from house arrest enforced by Yuan Shikai, Zhang again addressed in a public lecture in front of parliament members of Zhejiang province that the problem of the government was that it was easily controlled by the bureaucratic system as soon as the party was established. He criticized

the electoral practice in the democratic system for being only the machine manipulated by the warlord government and the party policy (Tang, 1979: 533). Zhang and other intellectuals further proposed the concept of 'the Government of United Provinces' in 1917, and subsequently the concept of federalism in 1920, because the central government at that time had expanded its power beyond control and their proposal to keep the central government in a vacuous position was to constrain its power, and that the government of each province could exert its local power in order to govern itself (聯省自治虛置政府議) (Tang, 1979: 605–6).

In hindsight, the purpose of Zhang Taiyan's formulations of these political visions of a 'vacuous center' appeared not merely as a borrowing of western governmental paradigms but as his attempt to check the growing consolidation of the centralized power of the government, the parliament and the president so that these places would not be occupied by any single power structure and that the void at the center could keep the different departments of the government functioning independently from one another.

Zhang Taiyan's philosophy of the place of emptiness, to view the nation and the government as 'the place of emptiness' and 'empty seat', the composition of the nation as dynamic and transitory, and the government as the vacuous and inoperative central nodal point (環中), apparently is derived from both Buddhist thought and the ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi. His interpretation of the metaphor of *xinzhai* (心齋 the house of *xin*, the site of affect, mind, intellect, intuition, empathy, compassion, etc.), discussed by Zhuangzi in his chapter on 'The World of Men' (*renjianshi* 人間世) as the vacuous and inoperative nodal point at the center, and the constant movement of this *topos* is the key to make room for the arrival of all others as equal beings (Zhuangzi, 1974: 64, 77, 120). Here, Zhang Taiyan offered a different vision of *xin*, not the one interpreted by Liang Qichao as the utilizable and governable force of *xin*, but the site where *xinzhai* functions as a force of resistance against the economy of the consensual measurement under the apparatus of a nominal/judicial system. Zhang Taiyan introduced the concept of 'wu' (無) as a move to void and nullify the fixated images, including that of the self (無我) and that of the nation (無國家) in several of his writings, such as 'wuwulun' (五無論 Five Nullification; Zhang, 1985c: 429–43). In his interpretation of Zhuangzi's *xinzhai*, Zhang Taiyan translated the *ālāya-vijñāna* (阿賴耶識), the eighth consciousness in the tradition of the Yogacara school of Buddhism, and the Kantian concept of archetypes. In so doing, he put forth his critical interpretation of the triad structure of power-norm-consensus behind any given conventional nominal system and the possibility of the force of thinking through the negative movement in a dialectic process.

Zhang Taiyan's Notion of Wu as Dialectic Negative Movement

We need to concentrate for a moment on Zhang Taiyan's *Qiwulun Shi* (齊物論釋 Commentary *Zhuangzi's On the Equality of All Things*) in order to discuss further his notion of *wu* as the negative movement in a dialectic process and the politics of the void employed by him.

Zhang Taiyan started to work on his reading of Zhuangzi's *Qiwulun* (齊物論 *On the Equality of All Things*) in 1910 as *Qiwulun Shi* (齊物論釋). Five years later, when he was about 45 and was under house arrest during 1913–16, Zhang substantially revised his text (Zhang, 1986). On first reading, Zhang Taiyan's *Qiwulun Shi* appears to be a scholarly study of Zhuangzi, drawing on different texts by Zhuangzi and various Buddhist texts from Yogacara practice (唯識學) and the Huayan school (華嚴宗) as cross references. But, reading through the entire work, we came to realize that in this highly philosophical text, Zhang Taiyan wove together several threads with the metaphor of *xinzhai*, which he used in other essays concerning his interpretation of the nation as the place of emptiness, the nation being constantly in the process of being composed and decomposed, the vacuous and inoperative place that allows the arrival and departure of different people through the historical process, and the empty seat that the president and the central government hold to make the local government and the different sections of the government function on equal terms. This *topos* of *xinzhai*, figured as void, I shall briefly explain in the following, makes the notion of 'the place of emptiness' a highly political concept, with its dialectic and anti-foundational power that could resist any metaphysical fixation through nominal partition.

First of all, Zhang Taiyan appropriated the concept of the *ālāya-vijñāna* (阿賴耶識), the eighth consciousness in the tradition of the Yogacara school of Buddhism, in his interpretation of *Zhuangzi's* '*xinzhai*'. The eighth consciousness, as a storehouse and the all-encompassing foundational consciousness, is also understood as Tathata (thusness, such-ness 真如), Sunyata (emptiness 空性), or Dharmadhatu (realm of Truth 法界). Zhang Taiyan did not exactly follow the Buddhist tenets, but employed the Kantian notion of archetype to explain the triad network of the fixation caused by the self (我執), the fixation caused by the law or the episteme behind the law (法執) and the 'thus-ness' of life (真如), that is, the primary consciousness of temporality (世識), spatiality (處識), the forms of five senses (相識), the measurement of quantitative relation (數識), action (作用識) and cause-effect relation (因果識). By doing so, Zhang Taiyan had introduced the Kantian critique of pure reason into his interpretation of the fixations caused by the imaginary function of the self and by the rational thinking implicated by the

reasoning affected by the epistemic system. For Zhang Taiyan, all things were seeds and geneses for other things, while ‘*Xinzhai*’, or the eighth consciousness as the nodal point, was to be conceived as the pivotal seat where sensory, intuitive and affective perceptions, as well as cognitive, inferential, speculative and abstract notions, were formed. Though this pivotal seat was described as a site of emptiness, it was not a pure vacuum but was conceived as a topological space, a no-place space, infiltrated in a dynamic movement interacting with all seeds of possibilities and potentials.

Secondly, following from the previous premise, Zhang Taiyan examined the role of the nodal point (環中) that transfers the subjective sensorial perception to inferential cognition, and then to the attachment of self-consciousness or the beguilement stipulated by the law. In this procedure, *xinzhai* functions as the passage of the translation from all consciousness to the formation of the mental processes. The formation of the subjective mental processes or objective judgments, Zhang Taiyan pointed out, was inevitably influenced and shaped by the conventional consensus and nominal system shared by local practice (舊章制度, 名教串習, 庸眾共循). People relied on what they were taught and reacted spontaneously, as if it was an arrow on the bow or an oath that one had to keep (發如機括, 留如誚盟). In order to make room for the arrival of new bodies and to allow all things to be perceived as equal, *xinzhai* had to remain as a place of emptiness, that is, to keep the continuous opening and closing of *xinzhai* so as to break the fixation of the illusory and deluded consciousness. What does it mean to maintain the movement of the opening and closing of *xinzhai*? In Zhuangzi, the rise and fall of ideas was described as the opening and closing of the door of *xinzhai* in a revolving movement so that new thoughts can come and go in an instant (如戶有樞, 旋轉寰內開闔進退, 與時宜之). That is to say, in order to disentangle and dis-articulate the rigid concept derived from the nominal system, it is necessary to loosen up the law enforced either by conventional consensus or by the epistemic structure. Therefore, to keep *xinzhai* as a place of emptiness means to constantly unbind the deluded consciousness fixated by the habitual nominal system, in a dialectically negative movement, to acknowledge the truth that each one has its own singular voice (吹萬不同, 使其自已) and that all things should be received differently and as equal (不齊之齊, 齊物之道) (Zhang, 1986: 273–4).

Thirdly, Zhang Taiyan developed his critique on conventional norms and nominal systems, and pointed out that everyone had his or her own ‘singular temporal moment’ (各有時分) and should not be measured by the same norm. Contracts (*qiyue* 契約) or measurements (*zhunsheng* 準繩) seemed to be objective rules, but they were in fact stipulated by subjective positions or local conventional practices (強為契約, 責其同然, 竟無畢同之法). Furthermore, Zhang Taiyan insisted that there was no constant principle (*tao* 道 principle or path) because the principle varied according

to the changes of time (道本無常,與世變異). Following the same reasoning, Zhang Taiyan also pointed out that there was no first cause or origin in history. Each moment was to be viewed as the co-existence of all aspects of the events and as the seeds and geneses of all things to come in different forms (萬物皆種也,以不同形相禪). History then was to be regarded as the continuous appearing and disappearing of diverse temporal moments of actions and various forms of cause-effect relations, and all the happenings and the encounter of different bodies bred the seeds for the future.

Fourthly, based on this radical delinking of the origin of history and the dis-articulation of the legitimacy of any nominal law, Zhang Taiyan stated explicitly, with his unique mode of critique, that there was no fixed norm for different generations (文之轉化,代無定型). No classical texts should be taken as unbreakable laws or canons because these texts were merely records of various historical moments, as the traces of the subjective judgments of one moment of time in the past (史書往事,昔人所印是非). We should not model ourselves after any norms, as the ancient kings set them simply as norms of teachings (不法先王). Zhang Taiyan also resorted to his etymological studies with abundant examples, and pointed out that, due to the turnover of the dynasties and the large migrations caused by wars or invasions from different parts of the continent, not only the norms varied but also the phonetic systems and the scriptural patterns mutated through the passage of time. Names or markers were borrowed vehicles as substitutes (以名爲代), and could never recover the original event because they appeared merely as the traces of a footprint (鳥跡) or the sound of birds (鷄音).

Zhang Taiyan's notion of *xinzhai*, the vacuous and inoperative 'place of emptiness' and yet full of movement of life or *qi* (氣), proposes a vision of the power of thought that is dynamic and dialectic in the flow of opening and closing, continuously unbinding the fixations formed by a pre-given nominal system so as not to be occupied by subjective judgment and to be able to receive new bodies in a vacuous and inoperative position (虛而待物). In this mode of thinking, one receives and listens to the other bodies not with his ear or his mind, but with his *qi*, that is, with his life (聽之以氣). The *qi* or life is not a conceptual attribute, but the liveliness of life itself, that which upholds and supports life. To Zhang, the law of life manifests itself as singular and equal with one another (諸法平等), and his formulation of the 'place of emptiness' therefore functions as a radical critique of any fixation enforced by the empirical and restricted law derived from the present given nominal system. In order to arrive at the perception of the equality of all beings, one has to constantly work on the unbinding of the fixated images and ideas bound by the nominal system (滌除名相). In this vacuous and inoperative position, one can then love the coming of the not-yet-germinated (愛其未萌芽者).

Conclusion: Re-thinking the Politics of the Void

Agamben's discussion of the inoperativity of the empty space and the Trinitarian economy of *Hetoimasia tou thronou* pointed to the close connection between the divine Trinitarian economy and the Christian dualism, that is, the dichotomy between essence and form, spirit and body, being and act, will and praxis. This system of dichotomy addresses the heart of the metaphysical quest in western civilization. The trinity of the son—the father—the spirit finds its parallel in the tripartite of the material form – the imaginary ideology – the real movement [the void] of the over-determined historical process. If the void is seized by the ideational separation conducted by the metaphysical system and made sacred by the logic of exception, masked by *Hetoimasia tou thronou*, the symbol of glory, then the dialectic movement generated from the living matter would freeze.

For Agamben, to think an 'ungovernable' beyond economy and glory would mean to begin with the disarticulation of both *bios* and *zoë*, to restore life as it is and to retrieve it from the metaphysical trap so that life would never assume the form of an *oikonomia* (2011: 259–60). It is the reason why Agamben proposed to profane the empty throne in order to make room for something he addressed with the name *zoë aionios*, 'eternal life' (2011: xiii). The not-yet and the to-come would be possible only when this regime of conceptual cut was inoperative, and the bondage set up by all forms of separation and partition governed by the logic of the fixated present can be dis-articulated. Agamben suggested that it requires thought to deliver one to his or her own power and possibility of life: 'To think... to be affected by one's own receptiveness and experience in each and every thing that is thought a pure power of thinking' (Agamben, 2000: 8).

If the rhetorical move in Liang Qichao's argument for the birth of the new nation and the new people was to move from the not-having or the lack (無) to the *there is* and something to be (有), in the mode of the political economy of the void in the service of the state, then Zhang Taiyan's position was to affirm the dynamic re-composition of the void by negating the pre-given fixated state and law. For Zhang Taiyan, the topological space presented by the tripartite structure of 'self-fixation, law-fixation, thus-ness' could remain alive only if the void of *xinzhai* could exercise its constant movement of opening and closing and maintain as a *topos* of dynamic emptiness. In other words, the void is not the fixated or fetishized spiritual vacuum, but the movement of dis-articulating the nominal system, in a mode of positive negativity, and the waiting for and reception of the not-yet-germinated. The possibility to break through the fixations caused by the self-imaginary and the epistemological blindness was to allow the dynamic movement of the liveliness of life to constantly unbind the nominal bondage, so that thoughts

appeared and disappeared in an instant and the place could make room to welcome the others.

To Zhang Taiyan, therefore, the radical affirmation of the future to come was not presented through the projection of an ideal vision but through the constant act of positive negativity of critique so as to challenge and loosen the given fixated rules and habitual conventions that no longer fit the contemporary conditions. Following Zhuangzi and Buddhist thoughts, Zhang Taiyan elaborated his reasoning to restore the full sovereignty of life from the binding and separation exercised by empirical or symbolic laws, and to take life's 'thus-ness' as it is, which is the law of life itself in the sense that all life and all law is equal (諸法平等).

The question Zhang Taiyan faced at the time was when the empty seat of power was seized again and again by diverse forces, the Qing government, the warlords, the self-inaugurated emperor, the over-powering big president, the nationalist one-party government, the concentrated power of the parliament, the greedy and invasive foreign military troops, and so on. His engagement in the re-reading of Zhuangzi's *On the Equality of All Things* indicated a critical perspective against the seizure of power in all forms and over all aspects of life so that the power of thought could counteract the utilitarian and juridical vision of the nation-state advocated by his contemporaries.

Zhang Taiyan's painstaking engagement in his study of etymology, his problematization of the nominal system, and his severe critique of the bureaucratic systems of the newly formed Chinese nation-state at the beginning of the 20th century seemed to address similar questions to those Foucault and Agamben have engaged with through their philosophical archaeology of the practice of bio-politics and the governmental machine in the West. Zhang Taiyan, in witnessing the formation and the practice of governmentality along the path of the building of the modern state of a new China, not only questioned the operational machine of his time, but also presented a radical and critical ontology of history that no single vantage point should seize the center. This center is the place of emptiness where all matters come to interact as seeds to activate one another. Through the dynamic movement of the *xinzhai*, any partition set up by the economic regime of a perceptual-nominal system could be analyzed, contextualized, contested and dis-articulated. *Xinzhai* or the void then is the counter-movement of the fixation in all forms and of any historical conjuncture. Different from the ideational formulation of the new people and the new nation, in terms of the governing of *xinli* in the mode of political economy elaborated by Liang Qichao and his contemporary, it is Zhang Taiyan's critical perspective on history and his politic of the *xinzhai*, or void, I think, that enables us to question the conditions of law in our present state and to think the full sovereignty of

lives of each and every one of the people that are co-inhabiting in the *polis*.

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Notes

1. For example, Todd May (1994), Saul Newman (2001, 2007) and Ray Brassier (2007), to name just a few.
2. The political orientation of the Kyoto school during the Second World War continuously attracted debates as to whether the philosophers of nothingness served the political purpose of the empire or not. See, for example, David Williams (2004), Christopher S. Goto-Jones (2005), Curtis Rigsby (2003), John C. Maraldo (2006) and John Namjun Kim (2009).
3. I have discussed elsewhere how the notion of the Non-I (wuwo 無我) and serving the public (fenggong 奉公) in the name of the Japanese spirit (Yamato-gokoro, yamato tamashii), though a popular slogan in the discourse of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere (大東亞共榮圈) promoted by the Japanese colonial government, turned out to be the mode of subjectivation for the Taiwanese 'Imperial Subject' during the Kominka movement in the 1930s and 1940s (Liu, 2009).
4. Liang Qichao's close link with the German political philosopher Johann Kaspar Bluntschli and his concept of the state, cultural nationalism (*Volksgeist*) and national consciousness have been extensively studied. See, for example, Pan (2006), Benesch (2011) and Sun (2012). I took my departure from the previous scholarship in the way that, besides the empirical analysis of the influence from the German or Japanese political thoughts, I want to point out that in Liang's discourse of the polity there's the emergence of ethico-biopolitics. See my discussion below.
5. For Lacan's *coupure de sujet*, *la coupure du désir*, *la fonction de la coupure*, see Lacan (1973: 29, 188, 215); for Althusser's *coupe d'essence*, see Althusser (2009: 98); for Badiou's regime of the cut, see Badiou (2009a: 480), for *effet de cisaille*, see Badiou (2009a: 479); for *horlieu* (outplace), see Badiou (2009b: 8–12, 32–6); for Rancière's *écart* and the *part des sans-part* see Rancière (1995: 20–31, 71–2).
6. I have extensively discussed this question in my paper 'The count of psyche: The birth of biopolitics and ethico-economic in early modern China' (2011a) and the second chapter of my book *The Topology of Psyche: Post-1895 Reconstruction of Ethics* (2011b).
7. Liang Qichao's debt to Japanese intellectuals, especially Tokutomi Soho (徳富蘇峰), was obvious. Liang had translated and even copied Tokutomi's essays in the *Kokumin no Tomo* (國民之友) and *Kokumin shimbun* (國民新聞) as his own essays published in the news magazine that he established during his stay in Japan after the Hundred Day Reform.

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