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# *Imperial Politics and Confucian Societies in Late Imperial China*

## **The Hanlin and Donglin Academies**

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### *SCHOLARS AND THE CIVIL SERVICE*

China began the transition from an aristocratic society to a bureaucratic one more than 600 years before Europe. From a society in which social position and political power were based largely on kinship credentials, China was transformed into a meritocracy in which social prestige and political appointment depended for the most part on written classical examinations to establish legitimate academic credentials. What took more than three centuries in Europe (1600 to 1900) was initiated in China between 750 and 1250, interrupted by the Mongol conquest of North and South China in the thirteenth century, and continued into late imperial China with the restoration of native Chinese rule in 1368. The formation of the Confucian gentry as a nonaristocratic elite class in China, with political status and social prerogatives corroborated through "trial by examination," produced social groups that endured until the twentieth century.

Although civil service examinations had been instituted in the sixth century, it was not until Empress Wu (r. 690-705) in the late seventh century that rulers in China discovered that officials selected by open examinations served as a useful countervailing force to the power of entrenched aristocrats in capital politics.

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Nevertheless, the great majority of Confucian officials during Tang times were not products of the examination system (Deng, 1967: 25-49, 77-134; Houn, 1956; des Rotours, 1932; Waley, 1949; Ichisada, 1981: 111-116; Wechsler, 1974: 57, 99; Chaffee, 1985: 14-15).

Fearing repetition of the centrifugal power of regional clans and military leaders after the reunification of China in 960, Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) emperors promulgated civil service examinations as the measurement of talent in the empire. They were faced with ruling an empire of extraordinary economic strength undergoing decisive demographic change. As part of the process of developing a broad range of new institutional mechanisms by which to govern more than 100 million subjects, Northern Song rulers chose civil service examinations to limit the development of alternative military and aristocratic power centers and to draw into their government the sons of elites from newly emerging regions in South China. Deftly appropriating the civilian values of Confucianism to legitimate the institution of fair and impartial bureaucratic channels to select officials, which were open theoretically to almost all Chinese regardless of social background, Song emperors put in place an examination system that would occupy a central institutional position in Chinese government and society until 1905, when the civil service examinations were abolished (Kracke, 1968: 1-27; Franke, 1960: 1-15; Lo, 1987: 4-15; Lee, 1985: 19-45; Chaffee, 1985: 182-188).

What was unique about this conscious effort by the state to develop new instruments for social control and political efficacy was its remarkable success in accomplishing the goals for which it was designed. Seen in terms of its own essential functions, the civil service recruitment process effectively restructured the complex relations between social status, political power, and cultural prestige throughout late imperial China. Because elite education became almost totally identified with its primary goal of selection, it misses the point to evaluate the examination system, as so many contemporaries have, solely according to its economic or scientific sterility.<sup>1</sup>

Although it has become common to dismiss the examination system as an institutional obstacle to modernization in China, a more comprehensive view would reveal that there are no a priori reasons that the gentry-official managerial elite reproduced by the system were by definition inefficient as “power managers” in a preindustrial society. In fact, a classical education based on “non-technical” Confucian moral and political theory may have been as suitable for selection of elites in China to serve the imperial state at its highest echelons of power as humanism and a classical education served elites in the nation-states of early modern Europe. If we evaluate Confucian education solely in light of modern goals of academic specialization and economic productivity, then the social and political dynamics of this cultural and institutional enterprise are misrepresented (see, for example, Liang Ch’i-ch’ao, 1959: 20; and Grafton and Jardine, 1986: 161-220).

Despite centuries of repeated criticism and constant efforts at reform, the “examination life,” like death and taxes, became one of the fixtures of elite society and popular culture. The examinations represented the focal point through which state interests, family strategies, and individual hopes and aspirations were directed. In the absence of alternative careers of comparable social status and political prestige, the goal of becoming an official took priority. Once set in place and granted full legitimacy, the civil service recruitment system achieved for education a degree of national standardization and local importance unprecedented in the premodern world.<sup>2</sup>

The civil service examinations in turn engendered a national school system down to the prefectural level during the Song, and even further to counties during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. These high-level public schools initially prepared candidates for the written tests devised by state-appointed examiners. Fully seven centuries before Europe, the imperial Chinese state committed itself financially to support an empire-wide school network.

For a brief period in the eleventh century, for example, the Shenzong Emperor’s (r. 1068-1086) chief minister Wang Anshi

(1021-1086) tried to replace examination success with graduation from state schools as the basis for selection of officials. Such reforms did not take hold, however, and examination success triumphed over formal training in imperial institutions of higher education. Despite their initial success, state schools eventually were absorbed into the examination system, and during the Ming and Qing dynasties, remained schools in name only. Little actual teaching took place in them, and state schools became simply waystations for students to prepare on their own for civil service examinations (Deng, 1967: 55-137; Lee, 1985: 55-137; Ichisada, 1981: 18-19, 116-117, 124).

Moreover, entry into state schools presupposed classical literacy. Because training in both vernacular and classical literacy was left to the private domain, state schools in China never entertained goals of mass education until the twentieth century. Designed to recruit talent into what Ping-ti Ho has aptly described as the "ladder of success" in imperial China, a classical education became the sine qua non for social and political prestige in national and local affairs. Confucianized themselves, imperial rulers recognized elite education based on the classics as an essential task of government, and Chinese gentry perceived a classical education as the correct measure of their moral and social worth. Both believed that ancient wisdom, properly generalized and inculcated, tempered men as leaders and prepared them for wielding political power in the central and provincial bureaucracies and in local yamens (Woodside, 1983; Ho, 1962: 255-266; Lund 1957: 12-17).

Education was premised on social distinctions among literati, peasants, artisans, and merchants in descending order of rank and prestige. Until the Ming, for instance, sons of merchants were not legally permitted to take the civil service examinations. Furthermore, occupational prohibitions, which extended from so-called mean peoples to all Daoists and Buddhists, kept many others out of the civil service competition. When this social vision became out of sync with reality, the state's vision of education changed only enough in the late fourteenth century to enfranchise sons of merchants in the examination competition.

More often than not, education in imperial China was simply recognized for what it was: one of several tools in the repertoire of the state to maintain public order and political efficacy. From the point of view of the state, reproduction of well-trained and loyal Confucian officials remained the prime concern. Imperial support of education and examinations was contingent on the success of the examination process in supplying talented and loyal men for the empire to employ. Because positions in the civil administration carried more prestige, power, and remuneration than corresponding positions in commerce or the army, entry into officialdom became the goal of all who could afford the educational time and expenses required to prepare for the state examinations. The “best and the brightest” set as their goal entry into the exclusive Hanlin Academy in the capital, the highest honor and appointment to which a civil service candidate could aspire (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 194-210; and Carnoy, 1982: 79-126).

### *THE HANLIN “CLUB”*

Because it represented the most prestigious academic institution in late imperial China, as well as a training ground for the highest echelon of officialdom, the Hanlin Academy enabled those who passed the civil service examinations with the highest honors to reach the forefront of the political world. Its origins as a society of scholar-officials can be traced back to the Tang dynasty, when medieval emperors granted their personal favorites an honored place as special advisors within the palace. Still not regarded as full members of the bureaucracy, Hanlin academicians initially served as personal advisors to Tang emperors, who chose them more for their moral reputations than for their academic or political qualifications.

In time, Hanlin scholars also became involved in drafting state documents for the emperor. As the latter’s private secretaries and consultants, Hanlin members, through their proximity to the

throne, successfully usurped a degree of political power from the bureaucracy. During the Song dynasty, the functions of Hanlin academicians increasingly shifted from political matters to cultural affairs, whereby Hanlin readers were assigned to take charge of the required classical and historical discussions with the emperor. This shift in emphasis marked the first extension of the Hanlin Academy's influence into literary and educational fields.

Although Hanlin academicians had diminished political influence under the Yuan dynasty, whose Mongol rulers generally favored military over bureaucratic forms of rule, Hanlin appointees were still assigned to deal with cultural matters, particularly the preparation of national histories. During subsequent restoration of Chinese rule during the Ming dynasty, the Hanlin Academy became a fully developed government institution. Its state functions increased and included supervision of the civil service examinations, publication of literary works, participation in classical and historical discussions with the emperor, and performance of temporary assignments as imperial envoys. The role of Hanlin academicians in policy making remained small when compared to their Tang and Song dynasty predecessors, but the academy soon became an important stepping stone to political influence in the imperial court and state bureaucracy (see Lui, 1981).

The views of Hanlin academicians consequently were not the idle thoughts of marginal Confucian scholars. They were the influential opinions of highly placed metropolitan examination graduates, who had the ear of the emperor and were destined to become national officials. An *optimus* or *secundus* on the palace examinations, for example, followed a career pattern typical of a Hanlin academician. This late imperial career pattern entailed close links between the Hanlin Academy, Ministry of Rites, and the Grand Secretariat. In effect, members of the Hanlin Academy became the emperor's private secretaries and consequently were in an ideal position for career advancement to the pinnacles of power in the bureaucracy and the inner court. A Hanlin career represented a late imperial model for advancement through these complementary and overlapping governmental bodies.

The functions and structure of the Ministry of Rites during the late empire remained similar to those of previous dynasties. Following the abolition of the executive secretariat and removal of its chief councilor in 1380, however, the emperor increasingly became the sole coordinator of government affairs. Although the name “Ministry of Rites” sounds peripheral to political power, in imperial China its ministers and functionaries were at center stage. The Bureau of Ceremonies, for example, was charged with all ceremonial affairs, but the latter included administration of the national university system, as well as supervision of the nationwide civil service examination system from the county, prefecture, and provincial levels to the national level in Beijing. In effect, the Ministry of Rites controlled the imperial education system. In part, it was a “Ministry of Education.”

In addition, the Bureau of Receptions had as its charge the management of foreign relations under the traditional tributary system in effect since the early empire. Consequently, the Ministry of Rites had in its portfolio two major functions of government: education and foreign affairs. Confucian classical training thus yielded a world view inculcated through the rigorous examination system and practiced in the arenas of education and foreign affairs.

By taking care of both imperial sacrifices and imperial family matters, the Ministry of Rites had the further distinction of being the only ministry that was a member of the inner court of the emperor and at the same time a full-fledged member of the outer court bureaucracy. It thus had access to the inner sanctum of imperial prerogative and could effect its policies through the education bureaucracy down to all county levels outside Beijing (Ho, 1980: 1-35, 60-75).

Most important members of the inner court during the Ming dynasty came from the Hanlin Academy, the Grand Secretariat, and the palace eunuchs. After 1380, when the power of the bureaucracy was reduced by removing all key posts of executive leadership at its top, personal secretaries to the emperor, known as “grand secretaries” increasingly took on the job of coordinating and supervising the six ministries. The Ministry of Rites, because



it straddled the middle ground between inner and outer echelons of power, also became more important.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Ming emperors increasingly delegated much of their authority to members of the inner court. As a result, the already close links between grand secretaries and the Ministry of Rites became more intimate and produced career patterns of major political and institutional consequences for the late imperial bureaucratic system.

Statistical study reveals that a majority of the grand secretaries during the Ming originated from the Ministry of Rites. Close links between the Ministry of Rites and Grand Secretariat had another distinctive feature. Most grand secretaries had also been members of the Hanlin Academy early in their official careers. During the Ming dynasty, for example, 75% of all grand secretaries had earlier been members of the Hanlin Academy (von der Sprenkel, 1952; Ho, 1980: 16; Ku, 1984: 45-66).

Moreover, 66% of all Ming grand secretaries had also served in the Ministry of Rites, and 56% of the latter went directly from the Ministry of Rites to the Grand Secretariat. In Ming political life, we see the Hanlin Academy, Ministry of Rites, and Grand Secretariat converging. In a typical bureaucratic career, then, a successful graduate (normally with high honors) in the metropolitan and palace examinations was first appointed to the Hanlin Academy where he served the court as a compiler, editor, or as personal secretary to the emperor. From there he went on to serve in a variety of possible positions but eventually became a fixture in the Ministry of Rites, often as a capital or provincial examination official supervising the examination system. The Ministry of Rites then served as a springboard for promotion to the Grand Secretariat, which until the eighteenth century remained the highest advisory body in the state apparatus (Ho, 1980: 16-19; Lui, 1981: 29-44).

### CONFUCIAN PRIVATE ACADEMIES

Since the Song dynasty, private academies had attracted talented young men who wanted more out of their Confucian educations than just the rote mental preparation provided in government schools for the civil service examinations. The Donglin Academy, for example, first emerged in the Yangzi delta in Changzhou prefecture, Wuxi county, as a local private academy during the last years of the Northern Song dynasty.<sup>3</sup>

Confucian literati at private academies such as Donglin had differing views of the kind of education best suited for the fulfillment of their social and political roles. They often appealed for the relative autonomy of education in private academies as an antidote to the warping of Confucian educational goals by the cutthroat examination process. From the Song on, a tension arose between private academies such as Donglin, devoted to Confucian moral and philosophic instruction, and officially sponsored academies and schools such as the Hanlin, oriented toward "official studies," that is, the mechanical training required to master the state orthodoxy. Private academies that flourished as Confucian centers of learning during the Song and Ming periods, with some exceptions, were chiefly concerned with helping students to become effective political and moral leaders in government and society. This goal presupposed, in the specific case of the Donglin Academy, an education that stressed moral cultivation and the study of the Four Books, Five Classics, and the Dynastic Histories (Hayashi, 1953, 1958).

By the late Ming, the growth of academies had been phenomenal. They became centers for Confucian discourse on one hand and political protest on the other. More than 30% of all Ming dynasty private academies were established during the Jiajing emperor's reign (1522-1566) alone. The rise of new Confucian attitudes in Ming private schools included unconventional political overtones that were associated with the increasingly popular teachings of the general turned moral philosopher, Wang Yangming (1472-1529). The latter's ideas touched off a period of remarkable intellectual ferment and political and social criticism (Meskill, 1966: 149-153).

Wang Yangming, for instance, used the occasion of the reopening of the Donglin Academy in 1513 to celebrate the revival of Confucian learning, which had been overshadowed by a conventional education oriented toward examination studies and the compositional principles required on the examinations for preparing eight-legged essays. With the increase of private academies during the sixteenth century, many officials feared that the independent scholarly positions of academies posed a threat to the established political order. Scholar-educators such as the Cantonese official Zhan Ruoshui (1466-1560) were accused of preaching perverse doctrines and thereby attracting rootless students to their private academies. Established near Guangzhou, the academies under Zhan Ruoshui's influence were ordered closed during the Jiajing emperor's initial prohibitions against private academies issued in 1537 and again in 1538 (Meskill, 1982: 73-74, 87-86; also see Wang Yangming, 1959: juan 23, 429-430; Meskill, 1966: 153-163; Ono, March 1962: 37-67, May 1962: 67-92)

Wang Yangming sponsored even more academies than did Zhan Ruoshui. Wang's educational efforts thus also provoked criticism because he saw private academies as the means to achieve what the government schools did not: Confucian activism. Private academies founded in Wang Yangming's name all over the empire (Wang was exiled to border regions for his outspoken views) became headquarters for associations or clubs, in addition to serving as centers of Confucian learning. Such activities prefigured the political controversies associated with the Donglin Academy.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, it was not unusual for several private academies in a particular region to form an organization holding regular meetings to discuss educational, cultural, and political issues. Such associations of academies included official patronage by local officials, as well as participation by literati from a relatively wide surrounding region. The halls of private academies organized into associations became stopping points and crossroads for Confucian scholars and officials traveling from one meeting or place to another.

The “Yangming schoolmen” thus had evolved in preliminary form organizational potential for unified local and private involvement in cultural and political affairs that surpassed anything before that time. The reappearance of the Donglin Academy at the apex of a loose association of groups, clubs, and parties during the seventeenth century brought out what had been brewing for more than half a century: political organizations based on the proliferation of private academies. These “cells of reform” to use John Meskill’s apt phrase, revealed the outlines of a broadly based social movement that eventually transmitted its local political interests to the highest levels of Ming government by “packing” the Hanlin Academy and thereby gaining pivotal positions for its partisans in the Ministry of Rites and Grand Secretariat (Meskill, 1982: 87-96).

During the late Ming, private academies such as the Donglin Academy in the Yangzi delta became centers for dissenting political views. Yet even these private challenges were institutionally channeled through examination success into the civil service and appointment as Hanlin academicians. In an era when Chinese emperors had abdicated their day-to-day involvement with affairs of state, the power vacuum created at the center was filled by contending eunuch and gentry-official forces, who each sought control of the inner court (Mizoguchi, 1978; Ono, 1980: 563-594, 1983: 307-315).

Had Confucian gentry been able to transmit their local influence to the provincial and national levels through legitimized factional organizations such as the Donglin Academy, it is interesting to speculate what sort of political forces would have been released into Confucian political culture. Some scholars have speculated that the late-Ming drive to reform the state “showed features strikingly similar to the trend against absolute monarchy and toward parliamentary rule in the West” (Struve, forthcoming).

The contentious debates between followers of the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy entrenched in Ming official rhetoric and followers of the populist teachings of Wang Yangming emerging among local gentry and literati thus were not idle philosophic exchanges or light repartee. A serious political debate over the

nature of Confucian political culture was emerging, a debate that would unsuccessfully shake the autocratic pillars of the imperial state.

*THE ILLEGITIMACY OF SOCIETIES OF SCHOLARS  
IN CONFUCIAN POLITICS*

As a local private academy and national political faction, groups such as the Donglin partisans had few respectable precedents by which to justify their actions within a Confucian cum Legalist state system. The "Great Plan" ("Hong-fan") chapter of the *Documents Classic*, for instance, specified that political unity required that there be no factions. Hence, the Donglin party was playing with political fire (Munro, 1980: 182-183).

According to Confucian political theory, persons of equal or near equal status who banded together into parties or factions were criticized as a group bound together for personal profit and influence. The classical ideal was one of impartiality, whereby government officials followed prescribed avenues of loyal behavior based on hierarchical ties between ruler and subject. Enemies of partisanship were thus able to stand on Confucian high moral ground when they accused partisans of being a party devoted solely to their own personal profit and influence.

Such literati associations had their own high moral ground, however. Since the Song dynasty, Confucians had distinguished between good and bad factions, arguing in the words of the statesman Fan Zhongyan (989-1052), "if through friendship men should work together for the good of the state, what is the harm?" Shortly thereafter, Ouyang Xiu (1007-1070) submitted a memorial to the emperor entitled "On Factions" in 1045, which continued Fan's strategy of reversing the charge of factionalism and using it as a symbol of moral prestige instead. In order to rally support for reforms that first Fan Zhongyan and then he had advocated, and to bring supporters of the proposed reforms into the government, Ouyang Xiu affirmed the loyalty and public-mindedness of legitimate factions:

Your servant is aware that from ancient times there have been discussions on the worth of parties. It is only to be hoped that a ruler will distinguish between those of gentlemen and those of inferior men. In general, gentlemen join with other gentlemen in parties because of common principles, while inferior men join with other inferior men for reason of common profit. This is quite natural [Ouyang Xiu, 1967: 3/22-23].<sup>4</sup>

Other Song Confucians were ambivalent about horizontal peer-group collaboration in the form of parties or factions. Sima Guang (1019-1086), for example, thought factions were tinged with private interests, but he blamed their appearance on the political climate produced by the ruler: "Therefore, if the imperial court has parties, then the ruler should blame himself and should not blame his groups of officials." Zhu Xi, the later voice of imperial orthodoxy, was less forgiving. In his view, parties and factions were in essence "selfish" political entities that betrayed the "public" Dao. On a priori theoretical grounds, horizontal peer group associations were rejected. Such groups, according to Zhu Xi, betrayed Confucian principles of government (see Sima Guang, 1980: 9/7899-7900; Zhu Xi, *Ca.* 1522-1566: 12/4b, 12/8b).

#### *IMPERIAL PROHIBITION OF PRIVATE ACADEMIES*

The political illegitimacy of private societies of scholars as forums for national politics empowered legitimate state action against them. Prohibitions against Zhan Ruoshui's private academies in as early as 1537-1538 had proved ineffective because they were not part of a sustained official policy. The grand secretaries who initiated the prohibitions had in actuality only registered their opposition to certain academies for their political connections. They apparently saw no overall threat emerging from private academies. Local and regional officials continued their patronage and encouragement of private schools, despite the prohibitions.

In 1579, however, a second round of prohibitions was promulgated during the tenure of Zhang Juzheng (1525-1582) as Grand

Secretary and chief counsel to the Wanli emperor (r. 1573-1615). Shi Guanmin (fl. ca. 1565), then prefect in Changzhou prefecture, was accused of wrongfully collecting private funds since 1572 to construct the Longcheng Academy in Wujin county. For his indiscretion, Shi was dismissed as prefect, but alarmingly, an accompanying edict was issued abolishing private academies throughout the empire, especially in the Yangzi delta where most such academies had been formed. Academy grounds were ordered returned to their local communities, and the buildings of the academies were to be turned into government offices. Gatherings for political discussion were forbidden, and regional censors were commanded to supervise local education more carefully.

Using the misappropriation of private funds for the Longcheng Academy as a pretext for action, Zhang Juzheng was able to force the conversion of 64 private academies in the Yangzi delta to state control. The 1579 prohibitions had more political clout than earlier policies because of the antiacademy sentiments of Zhang Juzheng, who effectively dominated imperial government in Beijing during the 1570s. Zhang's policies were more effective than earlier prohibitions because of his sustained efforts to carry out an antiacademy policy in general (Meskill, 1966: 160-163; on Zhang Juzheng as Grand Secretary, see Huang, 1981: 60-67, and Crawford, 1970: 367-404).

What turned Zhang against private academies was the uproar from their midst in 1577 over Zhang's failure to go into full mourning upon the death of his father that year. According to ritual precedent established since ancient times, all government officials were expected to resign their positions and spend three years (actually, 27 months) in mourning upon the death of a parent. Orthodox Confucians inside and outside the imperial court were outraged by Zhang's flouting of established ritual in order to remain in office. They demanded his impeachment on the grounds of improperly fulfilling the requirements for filial piety. Out of this ritual dispute emerged the Donglin and other diehard factions of the late Ming (Ming Shi, 1982: 8/5647-48, juan 213).

In an example of ritual debate carrying over into the political arena, Zhang got his revenge in 1579 by closing down the acade-

mies that had served as the organizational nexus for his vocal opponents. Connections with the Wang Yangming movement then prevailing in private academies were clearly anathema to Zhang because of the threat they posed to his position as chief minister (Meskill, 1966: 164-168; Atwell, 1975: 336-338).

Prohibitions promulgated and effected during Zhang Juzheng's antiacademy campaign, while effective temporarily, failed to stem the tide of private academies and associations. The climax of the collision course between private academies and central authority was not reached until the early seventeenth century, when the Donglin Academy in Wuxi joined with neighboring academies to organize as a diffuse but still powerful faction able to influence imperial policy in Beijing by becoming members of the Hanlin "club." In the process, the Donglin partisans brought down on themselves repressive state policies that exceeded in magnitude the prohibitions of 1537-1538 and 1579.

#### *THE RISE AND FALL OF DONGLIN ACTIVISM*

In 1603, Gu Xiancheng (1550-1612), whose family had resided in Wuxi county since the Song dynasty, decided at the suggestion of his friend and fellow townsman Gao Panlong (1562-1626) to rebuild the Donglin Academy and restore it to its earlier level of cultural prominence. Gu's prestige as an exemplary Confucian attracted large gatherings to the meetings at the Donglin Academy. Moreover, he did not hesitate to call upon sympathetic officials to join together in a common political cause. In his plans for the meetings held at Donglin, Gu envisioned a major meeting and eight minor meetings annually. The gentry-literati associated with the Donglin Academy in Wuxi county quickly became the leading intellectual voice for Confucian orthodoxy in seventeenth-century China (Gu Xiancheng, n.d.; also see Yixing xian zhi, 1869: 4/44a-45a, and Hucker, 1973: 147-150).

Besides the scholarly meetings organized by Gu Xiancheng and Gao Panlong which attracted hundreds of concerned Confucians to the Donglin Academy, political cum scholarly meetings



were also organized at the Jingzhengtang (Hall of Classical Orthodoxy), the chief lecture hall in the Longcheng Academy in Wujin county, which had provoked Zhang Juzheng's earlier prohibitions against private academies. Additional meetings were held in Yixing county at the Mingdao Academy and in other cities of nearby prefectures. Hence, the Donglin movement took place in the three major county seats of Changzhou, involving literati from all of the prefecture (Yang Qi, 1981; see also Wakeman, 1972: 41ff, and Chu Tan, 1945).

As we might expect, the Donglin partisans themselves affirmed Ouyang Xiu's view of factions in order to justify their own actions. Against the Confucian mainstream, which opposed factionalism on a priori moral grounds, the founders of the Donglin Academy implied that their position was based on a uniformity of moral views, and not on private interests. Gu Xiancheng, for instance, distinguished between "upright men" and those whose partisanship was based on selfish interests.

Reversing the usual definitions of public versus private in Confucian moral debate, Gu and his followers appealed to an ideal of a "public-spirited party" as the proper channel for literati involvement in national politics. Unlike the "privately-motivated parties" of the past, Gu and his associates sought an alternative that would allow men of honor to join together for the common good (Ono Kazuko, 1980: 589).

Representing a late Ming convergence between Confucian moral philosophy and political activism, the Donglin partisans at their apogee of national influence commanded the attention of Confucians all over the Ming empire by successfully placing their members via the civil service examinations into the Hanlin Academy. For a time from 1620 until 1623, members of the Donglin, after initial setbacks, were predominant in the imperial government in Beijing. With the Hanlin Academy serving as a convenient gateway to political power and influence within the inner court and outer bureaucracy, all key state posts were held by Donglin partisans by the beginning of 1624. Political intrigue and murky dynastic infighting in the end, however, led to disaster for the Donglin party. These partisans suffered a series of reverses

that coincided with the rise to prominence of the eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1568-1627), who became the young Tianqi emperor's (r. 1621-1628) most intimate advisor. Despite their high place in the imperial court, the Donglin representatives were gradually undermined by Wei's faction at court and eventually dismissed from office.

In the summer of 1625, the purge of Donglin partisans reached its climax. Arrests and deaths by torture of Donglin leaders were accompanied by imperial denunciations of private academies as politically subversive organizations. Private academies throughout the empire were ordered destroyed. The halls of the Donglin Academy, partially destroyed in 1625, were completely torn down by imperial order shortly after Gao Panlong committed suicide in 1626. A special order was sent out from Beijing to tear down all academies in Changzhou and Suzhou prefectures in particular, because most were assumed to be part of the Donglin organizational network. (For a contemporary list of Donglin martyrs and their sufferings, see Jin Risheng, 1633: ce 1, 1a-24a; also see Donglin biesheng, 1958.)

Although manipulated by crude politicians for their own purposes, the chief issue in 1625 was in essence a tug of war between imperial prerogative and the possibility of concerted and organized gentry involvement in politics. Crude uses of power by the eunuch Wei Zhongxian and his collaborators against their Donglin opponents mirrored a fear widely held among more cultivated Confucians, not just despised eunuchs, that within Confucian political culture it was wrong, on whatever grounds, to establish separate political organizations for advancing personal interests.

By implication, all factionalism was impugned in the destruction of the Donglin Academy. The limits of what was politically permissible in Ming political life had been reached. In a phrase from the *Analects*, Confucius had said, "I have heard that the gentleman does not show partiality." Siding with a faction went against the public interests represented ideally by the ruler. In the political arena at least, the late Ming redefinition of public inter-

ests to include private interests had failed (Lunyu yinde, 1966: 13/7/31; Lau, 1979: 90; also see Meskill, 1966: 173-174).

But Wei Zhongxian's use of terror proved ineffective in reining in the political forces that the Donglin partisans had unleashed. After Wei fell into disgrace in 1627 (he subsequently committed suicide), private academies and associations reemerged in full force. Factionalism likewise reared its divisive head in the political controversies that ripped apart the last reigns of the Ming dynasty. Among the most successful and best organized group of literati were those associated with the Fu She (Return [to Antiquity] Society), which centered on Suzhou the leading city in the Yangzi delta, in the 1620s and 1630s. A formidable organization dedicated to supporting its members in the factional struggles that dominated late Ming politics, the Fu She represented the largest and most sophisticated political interest group ever organized within the imperial bureaucratic structure.

With the fall of the Ming dynasty to Manchu conquerors, the Fu She ceased to function. Ming factionalism disappeared as well. Both the Donglin partisans and their Fu She successors had sought ways to deter the trend toward despotism in China and restore the literatus to a position of dignity and responsibility. In the end, however, their diffuse efforts had failed to stem the tide. The reasons for the fall of the Ming were attributed by literati of the time partly to imperial despotism and partly to the debilitating factionalism that had failed to achieve a viable consensus for literati involvement in national politics (Atwell, 1975: 333-367, especially p. 358).

#### *SOCIETIES AS FORUMS FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROTEST*

In social and political terms, the autocratic forces of the imperial state represented national interests. Linked to the elite nexus of scholar-officials associated with the clubs and associations centering first on the Donglin Academy and then later on the Fu She gentry forces represented local interests. If we evaluate the Donglin partisans in light of their social background and ties to

local society in the Yangzi delta, we find that the Donglin party in fact represented a broad range of reformist interests among gentry-literati in the region.<sup>5</sup>

In effect, the battle between the imperial state and local interests was fought not only in factional battles at court in Beijing but also in local areas in and around Changzhou. The city of Wuxi was located on the Grand Canal between the Changzhou prefectural capital in Wujin county to the northwest and Suzhou prefecture to the southeast. Renowned as a commercial center for textiles and other products since the Song dynasty, Wuxi during the late Ming became a cultural and intellectual center whose literati rivaled Suzhou and Yangzhou literati for eminence in the Yangzi delta (Wuxi jinkui xian zhi, 1814: 6/16b-21a; also see Chongxiu, 1820: 89/18b, 86/5a).

Although Wujin county was the seat of prefectural administration in Changzhou the prefecture comprised five counties, four of which were important cultural and economic centers in their own right. Unlike most other prefectures, which usually were oriented toward a single urbanized market and political center, Changzhou was uniquely polarized north and south at the level of higher-order market towns along the Grand Canal between Wujin and Wuxi cities.

Within the most commercialized macroregion in late imperial China, urbanized markets in Changzhou became a potent driving force to an emerging market economy in the Yangzi delta. Wujin cotton and flax, Wuxi porcelain, and Yixing tea and pottery became important products in China's interregional trade. Imperial orders, for example, stimulated the growth of the pottery industry in Yixing, which, along with the more famous pottery and porcelain kilns in Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province, became for all intents and purposes imperially sponsored kilns (Nishijima Sadao, 1984; Tanaka Masatoshi, 1984a; see also Dillon, 1978, and Yuan, 1978).

Although aborted in the 1620s, the Donglin agenda also reflected social and economic forces that had been brewing for more than a century. The hegemony of the state in local matters was challenged by reformist gentry who sought to curtail the absolute

power of the emperor in favor of local initiative at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels. Donglin followers called for a devolution of power from the imperial court that would enable both the imperial bureaucracy organized into six ministries and local officials to share in the decisions that would decide the fate of the empire. (On the political aspects of local Donglin activities, see Ono Kazuko, 1980, 1983; see also Dennerline, 1979: 124-125, and Yuan, 1979: 296.)

Donglin partisans did not exhibit a unified political stance on all issues, because their "party" was composed of people from every social group in late Ming society: gentry, merchants, artisans, soldiers, and even criminals. What united its disparate members, however, was their criticism of government policy. For example, gentry attacked the land and tax policies of the state; merchants and artisans disliked the antimercantile biases of the agrarian-based imperial political structure. Riots against the predatory actions of eunuch representatives of the state, who were sent out by the throne to fill the imperial coffers, were joined by artisans, merchants, and laborers. Frequently, they were led by disenchanting members of the local elite whose status placed them just above the non-elite but well below the more entrenched gentry (Tanaka Masatoshi, 1984b: 181-183).

Links between the Donglin partisans and urban commercial interests were particularly close. The call for relaxed government constraints, curbing of official exactions, and elimination of eunuchs as tax commissioners cut across longstanding social differences. Gentry families increasingly were turning to trade, while peasant households were supplementing their income through family-based cottage industries. These activities in turn added impetus to the evolution of textile, sericulture, and silk-weaving industries prominent in the Lower Yangzi region. Donglin members demonstrated their solidarity with merchants in their calls for relaxation on government restraints on industry, curbing of official exactions of local profits, and elimination of eunuchs as tax commissioners.

Urban riots and political protest, for the most part, were directed against the abuses of the system in place. Few could

envision or entertain a new political order, but those who participated in antigovernment protests did expect reforms that would temper the unified despotic role of the state in local affairs. The emperor-eunuch “party” in Beijing was thus perceived by the Donglin partisans as the cause for unwarranted interference in local matters. Anti-eunuch sentiment was shared by urban craftsmen and merchants who participated in the urban riots of the late Ming. (Hou Wailu, 1955: 26-35. For discussion, see Yuan, 1979: 280-320; Zurndorfer, 1981: 75-86; Peterson, 1979: 67-80.)

Perhaps what was new in this ongoing conflict was not the extremes to which the imperial state would go to defend itself (that was common enough in Chinese history), but rather the audacity of the literati assault. As a result of the wider dissemination of higher learning during the late Ming, schools and academies in the empire had opened the path to an enlarged educated class of people. Hence, the reformist agenda of the thousands of Ming Confucians affiliated with the Donglin Academy and the Fu She signified, in John Meskill’s words, “the growth of a civilization against the boundaries of the political order it had produced” (1982: 159).

Ming criticism of overbearing political authority carried over into the early decades of the Qing dynasty, even though the broader political consequences of Ming activism were successfully aborted. The startling perceptiveness of such celebrated Ming loyalists as Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) and Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) suggest they were thinking about the relation of imperial institutions to state-building. Both Huang Zongxi and Gu Yanwu were products of an unprecedented period of social, political, economic, and cultural ferment during the seventeenth century. Their critiques of imperial autocracy are better evaluated in light of the polemics of the late Ming and should not be reduced to pre-twentieth-century political anachronisms.<sup>6</sup>

The abuses of overcentralization were a prominent feature of Ming criticism of imperial power and represented gentry protest against authoritarian government. Both Huang and Gu were directly involved in the clubs, associations, and academies that emerged in late Ming cultural life, and both were directly or

indirectly associated with the political activities of the Fu She. Gu Yanwu barely escaped involvement in a case in which a fellow member of an early Qing poetry society was executed for compiling a banned work on the fallen Ming dynasty. Huang Zongxi's father, Huang Zunsu (1584-1626), for example, had been a Donglin activist, martyred in 1626.

Huang Zongxi's fascinating *Mingyi daifang lu* [Record of the wait for a call to official service written in a period of darkness] delineated the inadequacies of the autocratic monarchy at the heart of Confucian political culture:

Those who later [after the sage-kings of antiquity] became rulers were not like their predecessors. They believed that because they held the power over benefit and loss in the empire, there was nothing to keep them from taking for themselves all the benefits and leaving for others all the losses. Accordingly, no one dared to live for himself or seek to benefit himself. The ruler thereby made his own great selfishness the great commonality for all in the empire.

At first, the ruler felt some qualms about [this arrangement], but his conscience eased with time. He looked upon the world as an enormous estate to be handed down to his descendents for their perpetual pleasure and well-being [Huang Zongxi, 1969: 16].<sup>7</sup>

Huang Zongxi contended that in the final analysis the fundamental problem in Chinese political life lay within the very structure of the imperial state and was not the result of contending parties or cliques struggling for power. What was required, Huang thought, was a reformed system of decentralized government based on classical principles that would address the legitimate private interest of local society.

A close reading of Huang's audacious remarks reveals the full political implications of late Ming antiauthoritarianism:

The rationale for public officials lies in the fact that the empire is too big for one man to govern, and that it is necessary to share the work with others. Therefore, when I [as an official] come forth to serve, it is for the sake of the whole empire and not just for the ruler. It is for the sake of all the people and not just for one surname [that is, the imperial lineage] [Huang Zongxi, 1969: 2b].

Likewise, Gu Yanwu shared the late Ming reformist view of the Confucian state as overcentralized. He urged a return to classical forms of government in use before the rise of the autocratic state during the early empire. Both Huang and Gu saw in the ancient system of feudalism certain lessons of decentralization that could be adapted and applied to overcome the weaknesses in the imperial system of prefectures and counties directly under an emperor:

In later ages, there appeared inept rulers who gathered all authority into their own hands. But the countless exigencies of government are so broad that it is quite impossible for one man to handle them all, so that authority then shifted to laws. With this a great many laws were promulgated to prevent crimes and violations, so that even the greatest criminals could not get around them, nor the cleverest officials accomplish anything by evading them. People thereupon expended all their efforts in merely following the laws and trying to stay out of difficulty [Gu Yanwu, 1974: 270, juan 13].

Writing on the problems of local government, and in praise of the advantages that certain aspects of a decentralized feudal system might provide. Gu Yanwu added:

Sages in antiquity treated all the people in the realm with magnanimity. They bestowed land upon them and divided up states [for feudal lords to rule]. Rulers of today monopolize the world but are not [even] satiated by having [all] the the prefectures and counties [of the realm] as their personal [property]. They are suspicious of everyone and try to control everything. As a result, regulations and documents become more and more suffocating each day. . . . When will the [interests of the] people [be taken into account] so that they will not be impoverished? When will the [interests of the] country [be taken into consideration] so that it will not be weak? [Gu Tinglin, 1976: 12-17, especially p.12].

Such political statements were kept underground by their authors and by their followers for most of the Manchu Qing dynasty, only to burst into the public domain in the political debates of the late nineteenth century. Yet, the audacity of such views was not a premodern anachronism. These views represented the logical



outcome of political and social debates that filtered into the imperial arena beginning in the sixteenth century, although aborted in the seventeenth. Nevertheless, the staying power of such views into the early Qing period is impressive when we consider the powerful limits imposed on gentry-literati by a revived Confucian autocracy under Manchu rule (see also Wakeman, 1975: 68-73).

What exactly did the Donglin initiative represent in light of late imperial Chinese history? Did the Donglin style of activism fail because of the autocratic nature of the imperial state or because of the suicidal nature of the Confucian political style? Could a political niche ever have been successfully carved out for gentry organizations a la Donglin in the interstices of Confucian political culture? Would the legitimacy of Confucian parties have been vindicated if the Donglin partisans had triumphed?

#### *QING DYNASTY IMPERIAL ATTITUDES AND POLICIES*

Many early Qing Confucians felt that more than anything the political futility of the age had been revealed in the divisive factional disputes and school rivalries, which had compromised both Donglin partisans and members of the Fu She. A revulsion against politics was not unusual. This unease about cliques and factions had begun when political infighting precipitated the demise of the Donglin partisans. Many scholars subsequently refused to join any group or party after the Manchu conquest, believing that factional rivalry had contributed to the internal dissolution of Ming society and government.

Manchu policy toward private academies also contributed to the demise of Ming political activism. Existing academies were watched very carefully, and after 1652 no new private academies were allowed. This time, the strict supervision brought independent academies under the purview of government officials, who achieved what their Ming precursors could not: state control of academy education and activities. It was not until 1733, after a hiatus lasting approximately 90 years, that new academies were permitted.

These new schools, however, were never again "private." By tolerating only a combination of local support and official supervision, Manchu authorities successfully prevented the recurrence of activist private academies, which had plagued late Ming rulers. Provincial officials were held responsible for what went on in the areas where they served (Okada, 1965; deBary, 1973: 165-168).

The imperial government's large-scale intervention in academics after 1644 aimed to depoliticize Chinese literati and mobilize them in support of Manchu rule. This effort dovetailed nicely with the revulsion from political involvement that was a legacy of the Ming debacle. A life of scholarship by contrast appeared as a welcome alternative and avoided the risk of persecution. The Donglin Academy in Wuxi returned to favor as an officially monitored academy oriented now toward official studies. Still open until as late as 1676 or 1677, after reconstruction in the 1640s, the Donglin Academy benefited in 1685 from the Kangxi emperor's (r. 1662-1722) more lenient cultural policies. These included promotion of existing local academies. In the 1680s, Donglin thus became a state-supported institution.

Despite its improved financial condition under Qing rule, the Donglin Academy never again stood out as a center of political activism. What Ming autocracy had failed to destroy, Qing authoritarian policy and new literati fashions in scholarship successfully channeled into apolitical Confucian scholarly activity. In the early nineteenth century, however, the "ghost" of Donglin reappeared, and a second stage of gentry political activism ensued that would again penetrate the Hanlin Academy. (On Qing academies, see Liu Yizheng, 1931:61-63, and Wuxi jinkui xian zhi, 1814: 6/18a-18b.)

Increased political activism in the aftermath of the Chinese defeat in the Opium Wars (1839-1842) initiated a revival of interest in the most important precedent for literati solidarity to date: the political agenda of the Donglin partisans during the late Ming period. In many ways, the reemergence of protest in the nineteenth century reflected changing gentry perceptions of late-Ming initiatives to legitimate gentry politics in the imperial state. The image of the Donglin partisans moved from a "selfish"

political faction to a group of concerned literati whose aim was to ameliorate the public needs of the day. The "abortiveness" of late Ming politics was now replayed in the precincts of the late Qing state.

Reemergence of Ming-style literati activism in the political arena after the Opium Wars was preceded, however, by a chorus of voices in the late eighteenth century critical of the alleged political corruption of the last decades of the Qianlong emperor's (r. 1736-1795) reign. During the 1780s and 1790s, the Emperor had conferred on Heshen (1750-1799), a former Manchu imperial guard, great power and prestige. The atmosphere of corruption represented by Heshen and his cronies was in fact the tip of an administrative iceberg in which the Qing state tried to cope with its inner decay.

Internal rebellions such as the Jinchuan (1770-1776), Wang Lun (1774), White Lotus (1796-1805) and Eight Trigrams (1813) uprisings ended a long period of relative peace that had extended since the Kangxi emperor's reign. Dislocations in the grain tribute system along the Grand Canal, which provided the tax revenues of South China to the imperial government in Beijing, and corruption in the salt administration revealed how deep and pervasive were the problems facing the court and bureaucracy. Such decline, with the aid of hindsight, was blamed on the "Heshen era" by Confucian literati who found Heshen a convenient target of gentry dissatisfaction. Hence, literati opposition to Heshen represented their larger response to the institutional problems of the late Qing regime (for more detail, see Elman, forthcoming: ch. 9).

Heshen's status as the emperor's favorite permitted him to amass a personal fortune said to be second only to the imperial treasury. In the process, factional politics centering on Heshen's supporters and adversaries reappeared on the Confucian political stage. Such factions were predictable given the circumstances and tolerated as long as they remained out of the public arena. Eventually, with the permission of the succeeding Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796-1820) Heshen was allowed to commit suicide. The removal of Heshen from the fulcrum of imperial power symbolized the transition from the Qianlong to the Jiaqing reign. Unexpected-

edly, however, internal factional alignments within the inner and outer courts burst their political boundaries and entered the public arena.

The divisive politics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which pivoted around the questionable character and allegedly despotic machinations of Heshen, are instructive for evaluating literati political perceptions and intellectual change. Controversy over Heshen and his influence became the focus for covert literati alignments in the 1790s that emerged during the early years of the Jiaqing reign as self-righteous "voices of remonstrance." Accordingly, nineteenth-century revival of interest in the Donglin political legacy was in part the product of contemporary events that mirrored in the minds of reform-minded Confucian literati before the Western impact their beleaguered status vis-à-vis an imperial government dominated by another dangerous imperial favorite.

Donglin partisans had squared off against what they considered an "unconstitutional" eunuch, Wei Zhongxian, in control of the imperial bureaucracy. Late eighteenth-century Confucians faced a palace guard, Heshen, who had allegedly usurped imperial power for himself and his accomplices. Heshen was compared to Wei Zhongxian in their outraged and self-righteous rhetoric. High moral ground shifted to the "voices of remonstrance."

Political tactics and alliances were forged during the late eighteenth century within the legal limits permitted by the imperial state. Like their Ming forbears, Qing emperors viewed horizontally aligned groups of gentry-officials as factional threats to the sanctity of vertical loyalties that culminated in the person of the emperor himself. The ideological constraints within Confucian political culture against gentry factions were frequently voiced by Qing emperors. As in the seventeenth century, Manchu emperors affirmed that literati factions represented selfish and exclusive organizations that clashed with the public interests of the dynasty.

Both the Yongzheng (r. 1723-1735) and Qianlong emperors, for instance, repeatedly attacked literati factionalism based on their positions as public protectors of the state. In their view, selfish interests of individuals organized into factions had precip-

itated the fall of the preceding Ming dynasty and would do so again if they were allowed free reign to organize themselves (Da Qing Gaozong, n.d.: 192/10a-11a; Nivison, 1959: 223-224). Ironically, Manchu emperors could portray themselves as protectors of the Confucian imperial system from the excesses reached by a native Chinese dynasty (Da Qing Shizong, n.d.: 19/1b; Nivison, 1959: 224).

In an edict issued during the first year of the Yongzheng reign (May 22, 1723), the link between literati factionalism and the Ming debacle was made explicit: "Factionalism is an extremely bad pattern of behavior. At the end of the Ming, cliques were set up and plotted against each other, with the result that they all suffered injury together. This tendency has not yet been arrested."

In 1724, the Yongzheng emperor propagated a lengthy essay entitled "On Factions" in which he confronted Ouyang Xiu's famous essay of the same title and which had justified factions. Late Ming Donglin and Fu She partisans had drawn considerable moral support from Ouyang's essay. As we have seen, Ouyang Xiu's essay differentiated between self-interested and public-minded factional alignments. In the process, he defended public-minded factions as an appropriate form of literati association within the vertically directed power structure of the state.

One of the key elements in the abortiveness of Ming politics had been the failure of public-minded factions to gain legitimacy in the imperial structure. The Yongzheng emperor's open and well-publicized rejoinder made it clear, however, that the threat of covert factions had never been totally eliminated. Succeeding his father on the wings of a well-placed faction within the facade of imperial unanimity, the emperor in effect presented a position paper denying political groups even a semblance of legitimacy (Munro, 1980: 184-186).

Similarly, the Qianlong emperor shared earlier suspicions concerning factional groupings of officials and upheld the limits of literati presumptions in political life enunciated by his father. Wary of ritual debates that had compromised the moral legitimacy of Ming imperial policy, the Qianlong Emperor even refuted the opinion of Cheng Yi (1033-1107), one of the linchpins of the

Neo-Confucian orthodoxy supported by the Qing imperium. We find the emperor at odds with elements in the Neo-Confucian agenda who did not fit in with Manchu imperial prerogatives (Da Qing Gaozong, n.d.: 192/10a-11a).

Cheng Yi claimed that the best rulers had followed the advice of their chief advisors and that the best government had existed when regents such as the Duke of Zhou had assisted youthful rulers and educated them in virtue. Contending that the best rulers had honored virtuous ministers, Cheng Yi concluded that “the most important responsibilities in the empire are those of prime minister and imperial tutor in the Classics” (Er Cheng quanji, 1927-1935: ce 5, 2/2a-4a).

The Qianlong emperor thought Cheng Yi’s views—otherwise part of imperial ideology—tantamount to *lèse majesté*. “Who after all employs a prime minister if it is not the sovereign?” he asked. Qing emperors, like their Ming predecessors, endeavored to exalt the throne at the expense of the bureaucracy and their chief ministers. In the process, factions were self-righteously denounced. For both the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors, factionalism arose when scholars and officials chose to advance their selfish personal interests through “unconstitutional,” that is, horizontally defined, peer organizations (see the Qianlong Emperor’s “Shu Cheng Yi lun Jingting zhazu hou” [Afterword to On Cheng Yi’s discussion as imperial tutor in classical study], quoted in Qian Mu, 1972: zixu, 2; translated in Nivison, 1959: 231.)

Remarkably, all this rhetoric did not survive the transition from the Qianlong to Jiaqing era intact. The Heshen Affair became the cornerstone for reformulation of literati prerogatives vis-à-vis the state and its imperial institutions. Donglin-style activism, submerged for a century and a half, reappeared as a beacon of hope rather than as a sign of selfish factionalism.

Like its Ming eunuch precedents, the Heshen affair altered Confucian discourse concerning gentry-official responsibilities for the welfare of the dynasty, which was then in the midst of administrative calamities. Opposition to Heshen in the 1790s, like opposition to the eunuch Wei Zhongxian in the 1620’s, was

brought into focus from diffuse streams of literati and bureaucratic dissatisfaction into a polarized faction whose solidarity derived from its political antagonism with Heshen and his cronies. Covert power alignments had appeared, which would yield overt "voices of remonstrance."

In the eyes of many Chinese and Manchus, the threat Heshen posed to Confucian political life and official careers conveniently exceeded the dangers of organizing as an opposing faction to right the wrongs of their age. Fear of ideological constraints against factionalism lessened when compared to literati accounts of the subversion of the throne for personal profit and greed by the handsome and well-placed Heshen. High moral ground now stood under the Confucian opposition. Their "public-minded" duty as concerned Confucians clashed in their eyes with the selfish predators feeding on imperial intimacy. Terms of discourse on political factions were slowly reversed in the 1790s.

From the outside, little changed until the death of the retired Qianlong emperor in 1799. Important court officials could not speak out directly, but the Jiaqing emperor slowly effected Heshen's demise. Upon taking personal command of the government, he invited all qualified officials to memorialize the throne to offer advice on the problems facing the dynasty. This privilege of submitting opinions to the throne by officials not responsible for the matter under discussion signified an opening of the political process after decades when the throne had not welcomed unsolicited advice (see Hucker, 1959: 182-208).

For many, however, the emperor's moves to remove Heshen from power did not go far enough. Although he acknowledged that many of Heshen's followers must have shared in crimes attributed to Heshen, the emperor could not allow even implied criticism of his father, who had given Heshen the scope to maneuver in court. Moreover, the Jiaqing emperor wished to avoid a full-scale purge. Instead, the emperor chose to view Heshen as the man responsible for corrupting those below him. The enemy was not a faction but an evil individual. With Heshen gone, the loyalty of officials, he hoped, would return to where it belonged: the person of the emperor, not the machinations of a faction.

*THE REEMERGENCE OF HANLIN DISSENT*

In late September 1799, however, the Changzhou literatus Hong Liangji (1746-1809) dramatically spoke out in a letter to the court, in which he contended that the Heshen episode should be dealt with as a factional problem. Hong's implied criticism of the throne, presented to Prince Cheng (1752-1823) because Hong was not entitled to remonstrate with the emperor directly while serving as Hanlin academician, was unprecedented. Hong's colleagues, friends, and supporters held their breath, fearing that Hong's audacity would cost him his life. Hong's passionate remonstrance with the Jiaqing emperor represented the opening salvo in the revival of literati activism in nineteenth-century politics. Donglin-style political behavior had returned to the Hanlin Academy via a continuator of earlier Changzhou Donglin traditions. Its initial fate, however, hung in the balance, as the Emperor pondered his options in responding to Hong Liangji's challenge to his imperial prestige (Mann, 1975: 30-32).

A protege of one of the emperor's confidants, Hong Liangji also sent others a copy of his letter. Prince Cheng had delivered Hong's letter at once to the emperor. The latter, enraged by Hong's audacity, immediately removed Hong from his Hanlin post. Angered even more by Hong's distribution of the letter to others behind his back, the Jiaqing emperor degraded many of those who had received it. The Ministry of Punishments, after convening in an emergency session with the Grand Council, recommended that Hong be decapitated for the crime of *lèse majesté*. The emperor now had an opportunity, with the full ideological support of Confucian political theory behind him, to eradicate the polarized forces that had compromised his initial policy decisions.

As a member of an intimate coterie of scholars in Changzhou who had come to national prominence together in the 1780s Hong stood on high moral ground. From the hallowed precincts of the Hanlin Academy, he had openly reaffirmed the right of a concerned Confucian official to remonstrate the court. Hong Liangji's letter represented an eruption of long latent political concerns into the public arena. The Heshen era had incubated feelings of anger,



frustration, and helplessness as the alleged political corruption of Heshen's henchmen and military defeats in local rebellions ripped apart late imperial state and society (Li Huan, n.d.: 132/27a-27b).

Hong's letter represented the work of a man who lived to see the end of Heshen and the promise of reform under a new emperor who would heed the advice of his subjects and "throw the rascals out." When this expected chain of events failed to materialize, Hong felt compelled to break the chains of silence imposed on him:

Now I am merely a Hanlin [academician]. It is not part of my duty to remonstrate. But I can think of many times, in the few years since I became an official, that I have enjoyed unusual favor in serving my country. An official does not receive such favor without repaying it. Nor would a subject dare to seem as if he had feelings that he had not voiced completely [Beizhuan ji (Collection of Epitaph Biographies), compiled by Qian Yiji, 1893: 51/6b, translated in Mann, 1972: 161].

Hong's decision to protest as a concerned Hanlin academician may also be explained in light of contemporary efforts to reconsider the scholarly role of the Hanlin Academy, which had become devoid of political concerns. Yao Nai (1732-1815), a Confucian advocate distressed by the apolitical vocations accepted by most contemporary scholars, composed an essay entitled "On the Hanlin Academy" in which he complained of the superficial nature of the Academy's purely literary concerns and its failure to encourage a climate of frankness. Criticizing the fact that the Hanlin Academy had lost its remonstrance function, which it shared in earlier dynasties with imperial censors, Yao Nai, perhaps with Hong Liangji's earlier letter to Prince Cheng in mind, complained:

For this reason, the gentleman searches after the Way. Petty men seek after [literary] techniques. The [public] responsibility of the gentleman is expressed through the Way. The responsibility of the petty man is expressed through [literary] techniques. . . . Of course, the Way is contained within [literary] technique. Yet it would be better if expressed through loyal remonstrance and

public debate, which encompass the greatness of the Way. Simply to use phrases and graphs to occupy the time of a Hanlin academician only limits him to [literary] technique [Yao Nai, 1907: 1/4a-5a].

Yao Nai pointedly added that Ming Hanlin academicians — many of whom had been Donglin partisans — surpassed their Qing counterparts as voices of remonstrance. Hong Liangji's 1799 letter in many ways was a stalking horse for the political dissent that was a characteristic feature of nineteenth-century gentry political activity.

Unlike his Donglin predecessors, however, Hong Liangji appealed to the literatus as a concerned individual, not to a faction of concerned literati. By going it alone, Hong mitigated the full force of Confucian ideological strictures against literati cliques. This independent stance may in part account for the Jiaqing emperor's decision to exile Hong to Chinese Turkestan and not have him summarily executed in 1799. More importantly, the emperor's decision to spare Hong's life signaled that literati dissent would be tolerated, as long as it was voiced through appropriate channels of remonstrance (Nivison, 1959: 242).

A vital precedent, imperially authorized, had been handed down. In the process, Hong Liangji's letter became a celebrated case throughout the Qing empire. Hong was treated as a hero by the adoring crowds and admiring gentry he met on the way to exile in far-off Yili. The Jiaqing emperor, cognizant that the execution of Hong would send an unintended message of terror throughout the bureaucracy and prevent other officials from speaking freely and offering him needed advice, maintained that he had never considered killing Hong. In fact, the emperor claimed that he was keeping Hong's letter near his bedside as a constant reminder to himself of a ruler's obligations in affairs of state.

In fact, the emperor pardoned Hong Liangji in 1800 and allowed him to return after a prolonged drought in Beijing, which resulted in the ritual granting of amnesties to propitiate Heaven. In the official pardon, the emperor publicly blamed himself for punishing a remonstrating official. Rain immediately fell, according to the imperial account, and the emperor composed a poem to

commemorate the occasion, which was included in one of Hong Liangji's collected writings (*Da Qing Renzong*, 1964: 50/44a; *Da Qing huidian shili*, n.d.: vol. 22, p. 17091, edict dated fourth year of Jiaqing).

By 1800, the political climate in China had changed. What previous Ming and Qing emperors, particularly the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors, would have expressly forbidden, namely the unauthorized public censure of the throne, the Jiaqing Emperor had tolerated. Nevertheless, the Hong Liangji case did not legitimate factions. Consequently, the Jiaqing emperor's efforts to lessen the autocratic aura of the throne over his officials in the bureaucracy did not retract or even modify Confucian injunctions against collective political participation.

Although Donglin-style factionalism and literati group activism remained expressly forbidden, Hong's dramatic 1799 letter represented the reemergence of late-Ming gentry activism in the late Qing empire. With the imperial system increasingly caught between internal rebellion and external imperialism during the nineteenth century, however, China's lettered elite increasingly sought political legitimacy for their role in determining their fate. Echoing the concerns of Hong Liangji, "voices of remonstrance" came forth to redress literati grievances and ameliorate the dynasty's problems. Factions and parties took shape around contemporary political, social, and economic issues.

As the dynasty faltered, the influence of its scholar-officials increased. Seeking precedents to justify themselves, literati groups reevaluated their seventeenth-century predecessors in light of new political models for political mobilization that had been imported from Western nations. In particular, the Donglin legacy was reopened for study and possible emulation. Efforts by late Ming Donglin activists and early Qing statecraft scholars to create societies of scholars and through such societies redefine their role in the state bureaucracy were now reexamined. Such societies became heroic examples of literati resolve to provide answers for the problems of the late nineteenth century (Rankin, 1982).

## NOTES

1. In important ways, the late imperial Chinese “state” was separate (that is, semiautonomous) from the gentry officials who filled its bureaucratic precincts. The ruling house maintained its private pedigrees for a royal aristocracy whose interests were at times asymmetrical with the class-based interests of gentry elites. Especially during conquest dynasties (Yuan, 1280-1368, and Qing, 1644-1911), when first Mongols and then Manchus became the dynastic rulers, state interests serving the aristocratic elite did not always correlate exactly with the interests of bureaucratic or local elites.

2. The examination ethos carried over into the domains of medicine, law, fiscal policy, and military affairs. After the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), however, only military examinations still remained institutional fixtures parallel to the civil service in the recruitment of military officers. See Needham (1970: 379-395), Hartwell (1971: 281-314), McKnight (1989: 493-516), Miyazaki (1981: 102-106), and Nivison (1960: 177-201).

3. *Donglin shuyuan zhi* (Gazetteer of the Donglin Academy) (1733 edition: 15/6a-7b). See also *Wuxi Jinkui xian zhi* (1814: 6/16b-19a). The standard, although dated, Western secondary sources on the Donglin movement remain Hucker (1973) and Busch (1949-1955). Primary sources are conveniently included in *Donglin shi-mo* (Beginning and End of the Donglin Partisans; Shanghai Bookstore, 1982), and Huang Zongxi, *The Record of Ming Scholars*, Julia Ch'ing, ed. (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1987: 223-252). For discussion of the complexities of the Donglin school, see the useful summary by Lin (1983). Busch notes that the Donglin (Eastern Grove) area in Wuxi originally may have been the site of a Buddhist temple.

4. Ouyang Xiu (1967: 3/22-23), translated in de Bary et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960): 391-392. See also Liu (1967: 52-64), and Ono Kazuko (1983: 307-315).

5. Mizoguchi (1978: 111-341) has reevaluated the Donglin movement as an important factor in late Ming social history.

6. Unfortunately, the priority of the “Western impact” for evaluating late imperial political thought in China continues to highlight pre-Opium War political developments only to the degree that they cast light on nineteenth-century events.

7. Huang Zongxi, *Mingyi daifang lu*, p. 1b in Huang Zongxi (1969). See the translation in de Bary et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960): 532. On Huang Zongxi's portrayal of the Donglin partisans, see Gu Qingmei (1984: 47-50). On Gu Yanwu, see Goodrich (1935: 75-76).

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