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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

**Non-Confucian Society in North China
during the Seventeenth Century**

By

Yifeng Zhao



**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

in

History

Department of History and Classics

Edmonton, Alberta

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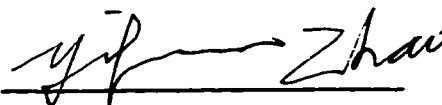
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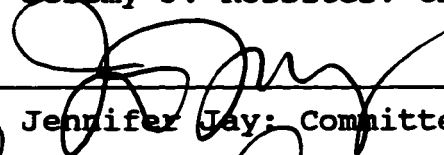
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To my parents

献给我的父亲和母亲

Abstract

This study examines the cultural characteristics of the rural commoners in northern China during the 17th century. It argues that the rural commoners formed a non-confucian society in which the state ideology, Confucianism, was not followed as a standard. The major religious character of such a non-Confucian society is pluralism, which was receptive to various religious influences. Confucianism family morality and institutions were largely ignored by the rural commoners, especially in the North. The Ming government actually applied a double standard in dealing with the family regulation of the gentry and the commoners. Without an ethical restriction from Confucianism, the rural commoners played a dynamic role in the commercialization of the late Ming and early Qing period. When Confucianism was in decline, there was an obvious departure of the scholar-commoners from Confucian values and lifestyle. As a part of the social changes since the mid-Ming, various marginal groups among the commoners became very active in society, including male and female religious clergy, women business people, and

rascals. This further deepened the crisis in the Confucian order of society. The rise of such a non-confucian society in late imperial China indicates a growth of the early Chinese civil society, which meant profound crisis of Confucian and gentry domination and a destructive ending of the imperial age of China. Methodologically, this study argues that Confucian-centered approach of Chinese study is not sound. Original sources, such as local gazetteers, private work collections, governmental documentation, as well as modern Chinese and English works in this issue are examined.

Preface and Acknowledgments

Approaching the completion of this thesis, I try to imagine myself a first time reader of these pages. What would I like to know about this study before I start reading? Obviously a brief explanation about why and how this subject was selected and came to this shape is necessary. Moreover, I feel obligated to acknowledge the contribution of the people who gave me training, influences, help, and love during the past years.

Growing up in a small city in the north part of China, I got to know the ordinary rural people in my youth. As a matter of fact, my father is the very first one in his family for several generations who moved to cities. From 1971 to 1973, I lived in a small village a hundred kilometers away from my hometown. During that time, I had to identify myself as a rural man. Although fifteen years later I found myself an associate professor in Changchun, a provincial capital inhabited by nearly two million people, I kept having a strong feeling about the rural commoners. They are simple, frank, forgiving, largely illiterate, extremely hard working, frugal, poor, sometimes tricky. They have the dynamic energy to act economically and even culturally. Nevertheless, they had been helplessly restricted from using their energy in private means by the government. Since 1980's, rural people have suddenly appeared everywhere, as store owners in cities, as *wanyuanhu* 万元户 (ten thousand yuan family) in the countryside, or, as independent trading entrepreneurs. How is it that the same people who could do little but manage to survive during the 1960's and

1970's, now apparently can do anything? Is this the magic of another great sage king such as Mao or Deng? Is this the achievement of university professors or governmental officials? I did not think so. The dynamism is in the common people themselves. They will likely play an even more important role in China in the coming future.

Recently, in Canada, as a visiting scholar and later a graduate student, I am impressed by two things. Firstly, Confucianism is very highly emphasized in the interpretation of Chinese civilization and history, which I think is a perspective of viewing the commoners as the dependents of the higher classes. Secondly, the recent studies of Chinese social history in the West demonstrate obviously constructive results, especially the concept of social diversity outlined in Susan Naquin and Evelyn S. Rawski's study of late imperial China. My personal strength in late imperial history is in economic and political history of the Ming. Nevertheless, I eventually decided to examine the social history of 17th-century China so that I can learn more from Western scholarship. In doing so, my primary concern remains a methodological one: how to understand late imperial Chinese history from the grassroots of Chinese society. I know it is too ambitious for an individual researcher to reach an overall conclusion, nevertheless, I am happy to have done some thing, this dissertation.

During the past years in Canada, my academic debt is first of all to Dr. Brian Evans. I have been lucky to work with him, the first year as a member in my supervisory committee and later as my supervisor. This dissertation, from the selection of topic, revision of

proposal, and all the steps of carrying it out to the present shape, has demanded countless hours of work by him. Training a Chinese student must be much more difficult than training a Western student. He not only read through all the four versions of this lengthy dissertation, discussed all the major points of this study with me, but also corrected my writing mistakes. He is critical in academic issues. Meanwhile, he is so patient that he explained every correction he has done on my work. He did not simply set up a standard to ask me to reach. Rather than that, he led me walk from a lower stage to a higher one. Beyond these, I am privileged to have him as a friend, a friend who would give me his hands whenever I need them.

Dr. Jennifer Jay conducted my supervision in my first year in this program and later worked as a member of my supervisory committee. She read most of my written work, provided very critical and important suggestions for the dissertation. I enjoyed the collaborative research and translations with her. Dr. Sinh Vinh provided me training of Japanese history. His quality as an extremely industrious and effective researcher always reminded me to work hard and well. When I was experiencing a personal difficulty in 1993, I was happy to work with Dr. Vinh as his research assistant and enjoyed his trust and kindness. Special thanks should be given to Dr. Timothy Brook. His comments on this study (given at the time of the thesis defense) not only improved the dissertation itself, but also broadened my view of late imperial China as a field of study. I also want to mention my appreciation to Dr. Richard Lynn. He

provided important suggestions when this study could only be presented on several pages as a proposal. Several years later, he read through this dissertation and gave me detailed suggestions to finalize it. Dr. Carl Kao encouraged me to work on literary sources for this study. Lydia Dugbah and Linda Bridges, who have been working in this department since I started this program, always do their best to smooth my path.

I am strongly obliged to Professor Li Xun 李洵, one of the most respected Ming specialist in contemporary China, who provided me with training in Ming history years ago. Without that training, I would have confronted much more difficulty in this study, especially in handling sources. When I was still an undergraduate student in Northeast Normal University, he selected me to join a small study group on Ming and Qing history. During 1982 to 1984, with his supervision, I accomplished my M.A program in history. It was soon broadly recognized as successful. A major instruction that he gave me and has been benefiting me ever since is: do not dig into an isolated topic of history relaying on the so called rare sources. He convinced me that the value of a source is not reduced simply because everybody has access to it. He spent decades of his life working on "Mingshi shihuo zhi 明史食货志 (treatise of economy in *Mingshi*).\" With his published *Mingshi shihuo zhi jiaozhu* 明史食货志校注 as a text, he showed me how every single word of this documentation contains rich historical information. More than once, he mentioned a traditional saying among Chinese scholars to me that studying history is sitting on a *leng bandeng* 冷板凳 (cold bench), that requires

lifetime dedication and pays you out only when you enjoy the work itself. In 1994, I visited Professor Li Xun in China after five years away from him. He advised me to go back as early as possible to carry on his research projects since he was already in his late 70s. My study process, however, has been longer than it was supposed to be. Last year, before I was ready to resume a commitment, Professor Li Xun died of cancer.

Many friends of mine encouraged me to finish this long expedition, academically or personally. They are Professor Zhao Yi, Yin Fengyou, Zhang Xiumei, Gao Eryin, Dr. Wang Xu, Dr. Liu Wenxi, Yu Shuo, Professor Ren Shuang, Dr. Leng Dong, Professor Chen Nan, Dr. Gui Xiang, Wang Dongfang, and Philip Manson.

During these years, the University of Alberta gave me teaching and research assistantship, temporary teaching position, and the J Gordon Kaplan Graduate Student Award. These not only supported me financially, but also rewarded me with valuable experiences. I would like to express my appreciation of *Past Imperfect* for publishing my first article in English, "Concubinage in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature: A Historical Study of *Xing-shi yin-yuan zhuan*." The libraries of University of Alberta, British Columbia University, Columbia University, Northeast Normal University, and Beijing Library allowed me to use their collections and facilities. Without that, the completion of this study would be simply impossible.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to Xu Shuping, my wife. When I started working on this project, she was left in China single handedly looking after my

daughter's life and education and struggling to reunite with me in Canada. After coming to Canada in the end of 1992, this former accountant has been working as a housekeeper and a presser at a dry cleaning shop to support the family and my financial needs. Sometimes, I am not sure whether I deserve her sacrifice like that. My happiness is also from Xueming, my daughter. She is an honor student in a junior high school, a scholarship winner, and a sweet child who always reminds me: life is joyful and rewarding.

In this study, pinyin system is used to spell Chinese characters, except that a few broadly accepted non-pinyin translations, such as Taoism and Yangtze, remain in their present ways. In the bibliography, modern collections of raw sources are considered original sources, rather than secondary sources. Among the original sources, some dates of publication are not available. It is mainly based on the date of the author, given in the text of this dissertation, that the time of publication is approximately located. Only main sources are listed in the bibliography. This study is based on broader examination of sources than that listed in the bibliography and footnotes.

I am solely responsible for any mistakes in this study.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
1. Conceptual explanation.....	1
2. Problems of Confucianism-centered approach in Chinese studies: A methodological concern.....	20
3. North China in the 17th century.....	29
4. Framework.....	38
5. Sources of this study.....	44
Chapter II: Pluralism: The Nature of Chinese Popular Religions.....	52
1. Diversified religious worship.....	55
2. Popular religions and the state.....	69
3. Controversial intellectual perspectives on Non-Confucian beliefs.....	84
Chapter III: Twisted Confucian Family Ethics of the Rural Commoners.....	100
1. Smaller families.....	104
2. The increase of single adults.....	116
3. Filial piety.....	119
4. Shrewish wives in literature and reality.....	126
5. Female chastity: A questioned Neo-Confucian restriction.....	146
6. Discussion	160
Chapter IV: The Commoners and Commercialization.....	165
1. Money-making activities of the commoners in the North.....	170
2. The mentality of the commoners in their money- making activities.....	177
3. Confucian attitudes toward commercial activities.....	189
4. A methodological rethinking	197
Chapter V: Scholar-Commoners: Departing from A Confucian Lifestyle.....	206
1. The turbulence caused by <i>shengyuan</i>	211
2. <i>Xibin</i> and their complaints.....	225
3. <i>Shanren</i> : The attempted departure from a Confucian lifestyle.....	236

Chapter VI: Marginal Groups in the Grass-Roots Level Society.....	246
1. <i>Sangu liupo</i> : The poisonous women in Confucian views.....	250
2. <i>Sheng</i> and <i>dao</i> : Buddhist monks and Taoist priests.....	265
3. <i>Wulai</i> : The rascals.....	274
4. The historical background and impact of the marginal groups.....	283
Chapter VII: Conclusion: Non-Confucian Society and Chinese History.....	292
Bibliography.....	315

List of Tables

1. Popular Worship Sites in Wendeng County.....	56
2. Official Worship Objects in Chiping County.....	58
3. Popular Worship Sites in Chiping County.....	61
4. Categories of Monasteries in Wanping County.....	65
5. Distribution of Monasteries in Wanping county.....	66
6. The Increase of Chinese Catholics during the 17th Century.....	98
7. Major Stages in Pu Songling's Lifetime Career as a <i>Shengyuan</i>	229

List of Maps

1. Northern China during the Late Ming.....	10
2. Bei Zhili in the Late Ming.....	11
3. Ming Henan.....	12
4. Ming Shangdong.....	13
5. Zhangqiu County of Shandong.....	131

List of Plates

1. Unicorn Culture.....	82
2. <i>Xuanji Tu</i>	83

Introduction

1, Conceptual explanation

In past recent decades, cultural identity, governmental institutions, and political events have been the major research issues in studies of late imperial China. Studies in the West and in China, recently, especially in social and economic areas, are increasingly paying more attention to regional diversity and versatility. Benefiting from this development, the present study is an attempt to analyze the social and cultural characteristics of commoners in the rural areas of north China during the 17th century. It will present and argue that the mentality, social conventions, and activities of Chinese commoners were very different from the standards set by state ideology--Confucianism--although the awareness of Confucianism among the commoners always existed. In comparison to the gentry, which is generally considered as a Confucian society, the commoners instituted a non-Confucian society at the bottom of the traditional Chinese world. It was such a non-Confucian society that played a dynamic role in the most significant changes during the 17th century, such as

commercialization, a decline in morals, and a rise of unorthodox common culture. These changes set the trend of Chinese social history in the following centuries. The mentality of the commoners is not contained in a written classic, such as the Christian Bible, or the Confucian *Analects*. Such a Pluralism was reflected in the commoners' beliefs, values, behavior, and customs. Because the commoners, the overwhelming majority of the population, were socially and culturally different from the elite Confucian society, a critical point of this study is, therefore, that a Confucianism centered perspective on Chinese social and cultural history has crucial limitations. From this point of view, the role of Confucian intellectuals in late imperial Chinese history has been over-stressed in modern studies of China due to the lack of attention paid to the commoners.

To develop the previous argument, some key concepts in this study should be explained first. In this study, "non-Confucian society" is used as a convenient term to indicate Chinese commoners who were not self consciously living according to Confucian values. In the original Chinese sources, commoners in late imperial China were termed as *min* 民, *shumin* 庶民, or *liangren*

良人, literally mean people, ordinary people, or fine people. These people, in comparison to the gentry, did not have privileges such as tax or corvée subsidies. On the other hand, unlike the discriminated classes, such as bondservants and prostitutes, the commoners were eligible to participate in the civil service examinations and to gain access to a higher status.¹

The societies that attended to the Confucian mentality were the upper classes. Although they are not the major subject of this study, a brief conceptual explanation about them is necessary. The Chinese upper classes in late imperial China have been called "gentry," or "elite," depending on the different research frameworks used by scholars. Generally, "gentry" has been a term emphasizing political status. For example, Chung-li Chang defined the gentry as

the holders of academic degrees obtained in the government examinations. The possession of these degrees set the gentry apart from the common people,

¹ In the Ming and Qing period, the official classification of people kept changing. For example, in the early Ming period, military families, artisans, and salt producers were under special restrictions. Those restrictions, however, were abolished by the late Ming period. For a brief description of this issue, see Xing Tie 邢铁, "Ming Chao de hudeng zhidu jiqi bianhua 明朝的户等制度及其变化 (The Ranks of Households and Its Changes during the Ming)," *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中国史研究 (Chinese Historical Studies), 1989:2, pp.89-99.

and gave them a privileged position in society and the right to serve as government officials.²

Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski, however, argued that the gentry defined in terms of political power (office holding) and cultural power (education) was merely a group among the Chinese elite. They asserted that

in the Qing period any concentration of education, political influence, social status, or wealth tended to be used to attain similar power in the other spheres.³

Accordingly, they prefer to use "elite," a broad concept referring to all the people who had comprehensive power in society, instead of "gentry" to indicate the broadly defined upper class in late imperial China.

The opposite term of "commoners" in this study is "gentry" instead of "elite." According to Naquin and Rawski's explanation, "elite" is too broad to distinguish the profound social differences among the people who had different kinds of powers. For example, a rich peasant without political privilege was much more vulnerable than

² See the introduction of Franz Michael to Chung-li Chang's *The Income of the Chinese Gentry*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962, p.xiii. Timothy Brook also reviewed at length the historiography of gentry studies since the early 1950s. See Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 1993, pp.5-15.

³ See Susan Naquin and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), p.115.

the gentry to downward social mobility. A merchant with so called "economic power," might and might not look for degrees. On the other hand, a degree holder who had so called political or educational powers might not necessarily be rich. At least, in the 17th century, it was not obvious that economic power had mobilized the Chinese merchants and ordinary rich peasants to emulate Confucian life style as it might have done in the 18th century. If we take whoever powerful as "elite," local tyrants and major bandits would be elite too and that may lead to unnecessary confusion. In this study, the distinction of Confucian society and non-Confucian society is mainly social-cultural, not economic. Gentry as a term referring to more institutionalized status is proper in such a framework.

Nevertheless, unlike that in Chung-li Chang's study, the term gentry in this study does not simply refer to the degree holders. It needs further explanation. In modern English, gentry is identified as "people of good family, esp. those next in rank to the nobility..."⁴ When it is

⁴ *New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language*, School, Home and Office Edition (New York: Lexicon Publication, Inc.)

used in this study, however, it is basically a translation from the Chinese word *jinshen* 缙绅, which meant people holding positions in the bureaucracy and people who had retired from such positions. The normal retirement of an official was called *zhishi* 致仕, which would formally allow him to keep a privileged status in society. The English implication of "good" in the term gentry is not applicable here because it sounds vague in the context of Chinese history. As a result, wealthy people without official positions, such as ordinary merchants or landlords, are not considered as a part of the gentry.

Gentry and scholar-official are overlapping concepts. The main difference between them is that the gentry include people who obtained their status by ways other than obtaining degrees in the civil service examinations, such as military contribution, donation, and even nepotism. These groups usually imitated the mainstream Confucian life style after they obtained upper class status. Because the qualifications of the gentry were largely based on official education and political status that strongly tied them to the state ideology and institutions, the gentry maintained a system of norms reflecting a strong Confucian mentality.

The percentage of gentry in Chinese population in late imperial China has been estimated as small as 5 percent.⁵ Certainly, we have to keep in mind that the size and components of the gentry population in Chinese society kept changing throughout the history of China.

Geographically, this study of the commoners is focused in the north. In Chinese, *Beifang* 北方 (the north) is a general term referring to the vast area in the north part of China, rather than to an officially fixed administrative region. In Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski's study of 18th century Chinese society, it refers to Shandong 山东, Henan 河南, and Bei Zhili 北直隶 (today's Hebei) provinces. They maintain that these three administrative areas also fell into a geographical area.

The North China macroregion was dominated by the plain that made up most of Zhili, Shandong, and Henan provinces and was ringed by mountains on three sides; swampy lands in the Southeast made a relatively permeable border with the Lower Yangtze. Situated on the border with Manchu and Mongol territories, North China was a gateway for trade with northern Asia; its strategic location combined with its role as the political center of the empire to ensure that it was heavily garrisoned. Its rivers being largely unavailable, the primary waterway in the region was the Grand Canal that connected Peking to the Lower Yangtze. Although the flat plain was subject to regular droughts and floods, the fertile soil produced

⁵ Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.115.

a surplus of wheat, millet, and sorghum that could be supplemented in times of dearth with imports brought in on the canal. Contrasting sharply with the more prosperous plains were regions on the fringes, flood-prone Huaibei to the south and the undeveloped mountains of Shandong, western Henan, and Shanxi.⁶

In William Skinner's river system based macroregions of agrarian China, on the other hand, North China covers a bigger area, including:

the lower basin of the Yellow river plus the drainage areas of the Huai, the Wei, and the host of smaller rivers that cross the North China Plain.⁷

In other words, it includes Bei Zhili, Shandong, most of Henan excluding its Southwestern part, east Shanxi 山西 (Shansi), the northern part of Anhui 安徽 (Anhwei), and the northern part of Jiangsu 江苏 (Kiangsu).⁸ The term "north" in this study roughly matches Skinner's concept. The main reason is that this study is from a socio-cultural perspective, not a political perspective. In the 17th century, social, economic, and cultural communication and mutual-influences among Shandong, Henan, and Hebei (Zhili) and surrounding areas obviously broke the

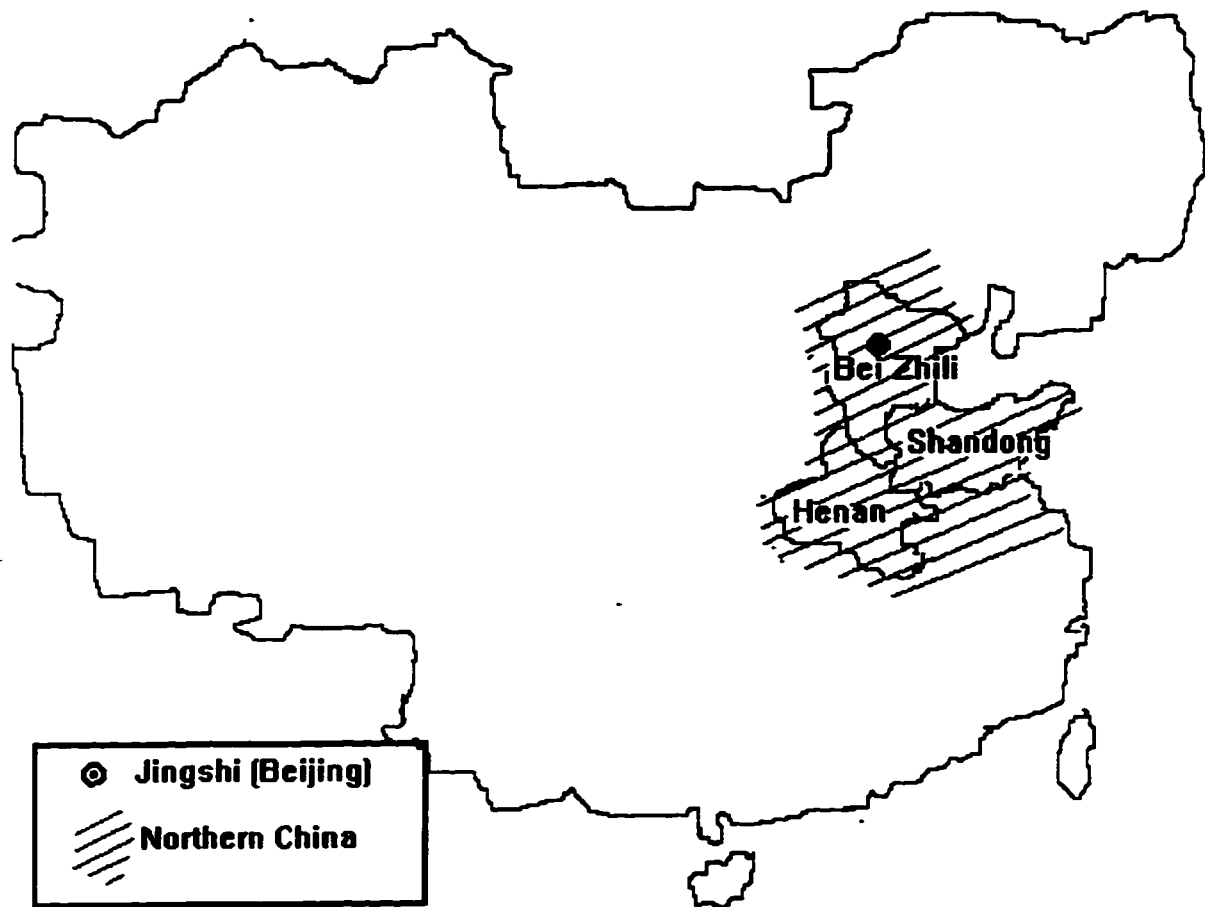
⁶ Ibid., p.140.

⁷ William Skinner "Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-century China," in William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), p.213.

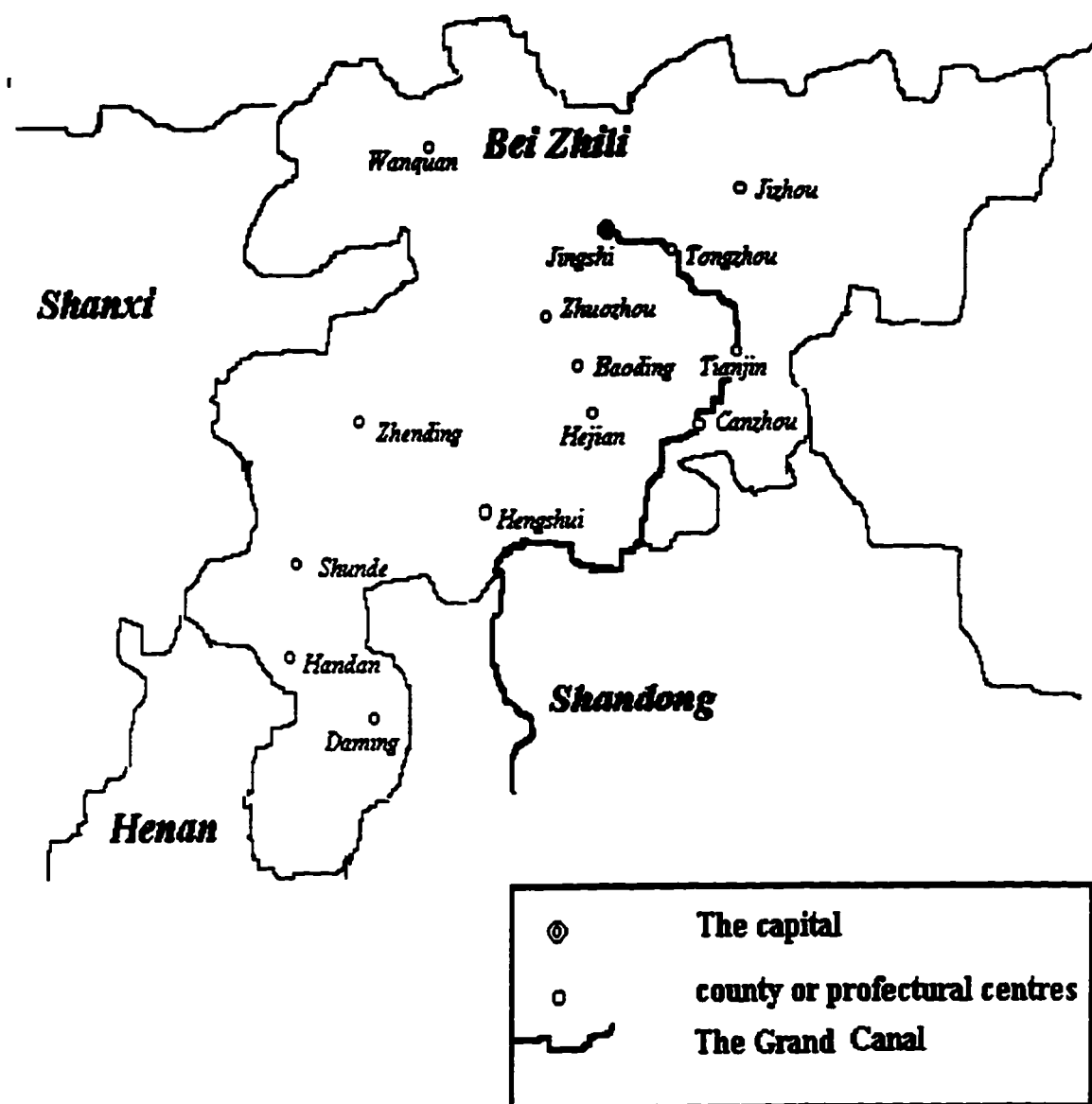
⁸ See Skinner's map 1 and 2, in *ibid.*, pp.214-5.

provincial borders. In the following maps, Map 1 shows the location of the North in China during the 17th century. Map 2, 3, and 4 provide general pictures of Shangdong, Henan, and Bei Zhili, the core areas of the North.

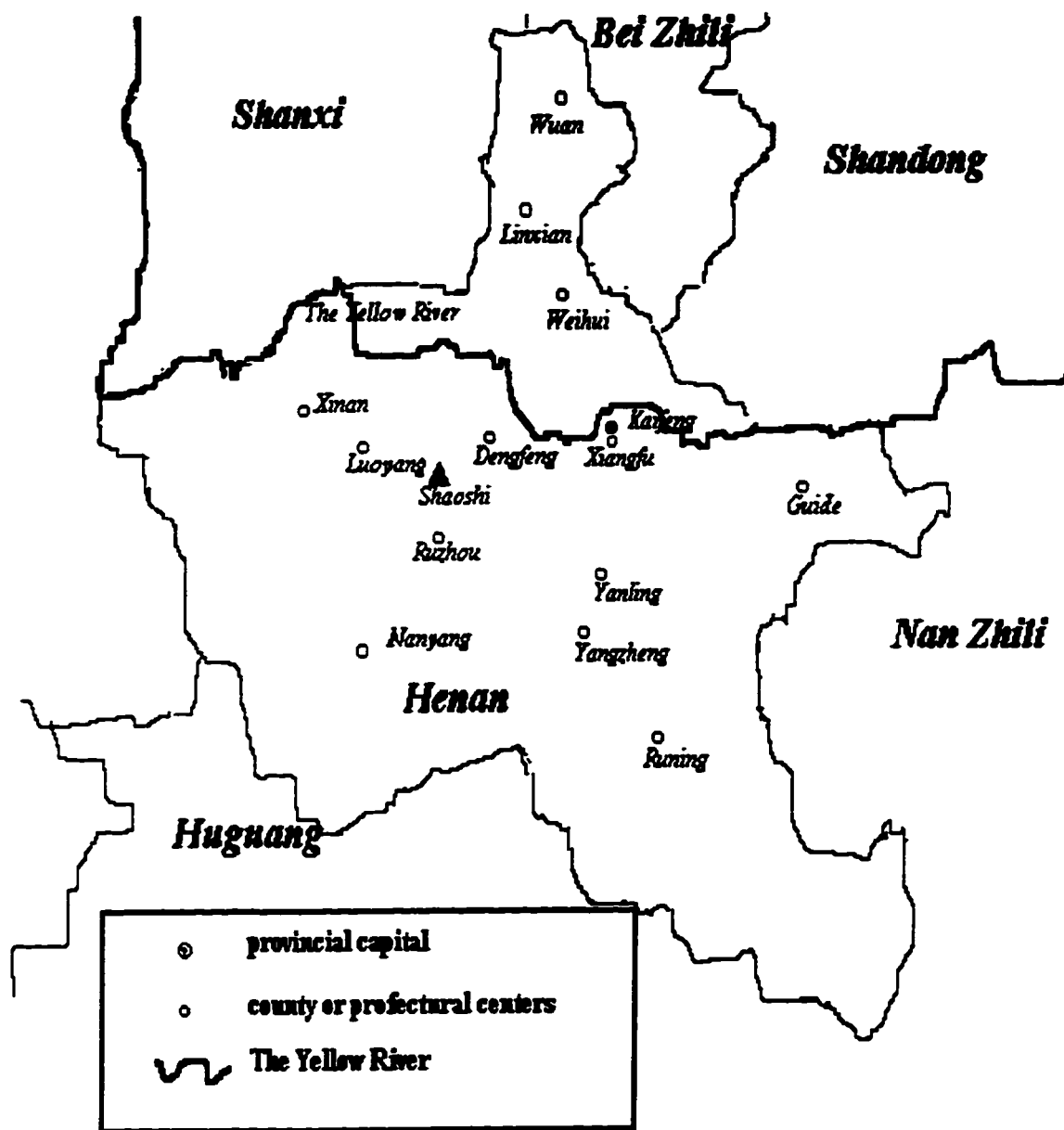
Map 1: Northern China during the Late Ming



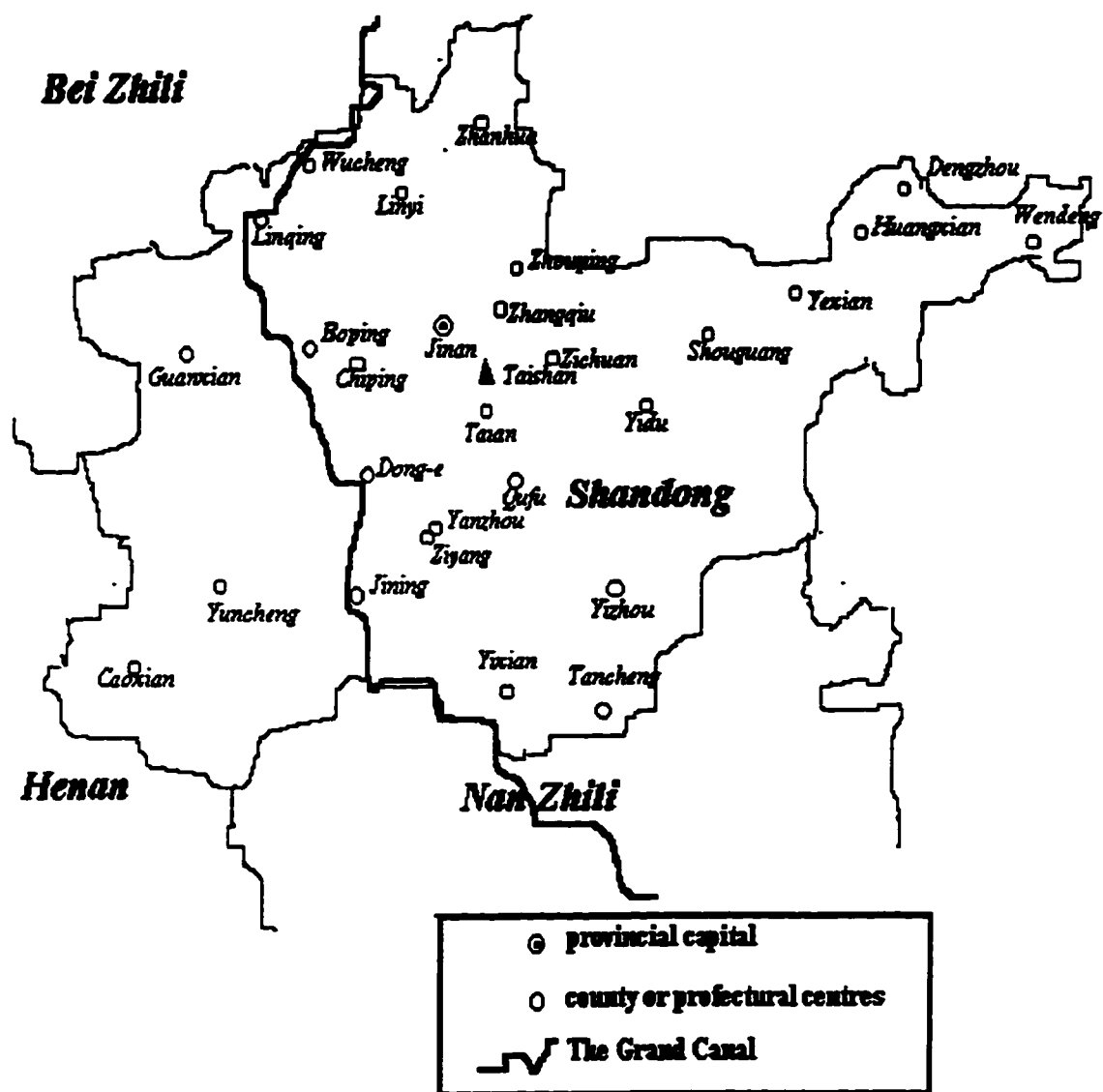
Map 2: Bei Zhili in the Late Ming



Map 3: Ming Henan



Map 4: Ming Shandon



North China was one of the most culturally and economically prosperous regions and was second only to its southern neighbor, the Lower Yangtze region (roughly southern Jiangsu 江苏, northern Zhejiang 浙江, and southern Anhui 安徽 area in Skinner's macroregional system), in that period. The Lower Yangtze area traditionally provided about 4,000,000 *shi* 石 top quality rice named *caoliang* 漕粮 to the North to feed a large percentage of the governmental personnel.⁹ The Grand Canal, consequently, not only facilitated the state transportation from the Lower Yangtze basin to the North, but also cultivated private commercial exchanges between these two regions. During the transitional period from the Ming to the Qing, some Lower Yangtze based people even came to the North to operate farms. Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613-1682), for example, owned a farm in Da Sangjia Zhuang 大桑家庄 in Zhangqiu 章邱 county of Shandong. He hired somebody to manage that farm.¹⁰ While the Ming set its main capital in Beijing (A.D. 1420), it kept the old one,

⁹ A standard *shi* equals to one hectoliter. From the 15th century, the *caoliang* contribution was made, time to time, in the form of silver instead of grains. See Zhang Tingyu, "Shihuo zhi 食货志 (Treatise of Economy), in *Mingshi* 明史 (The History of the Ming) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981).

¹⁰ Gu Yanwu had a huge farm in Zhangqiu county in Shandong. See Gu Yanwu, *Gu Tinglin Shiwenji* 顾亭林诗文集 (Collected Poetry and Prose of Gu Tinglin) (Hongkong: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), pp.188-9.

Nanjing, as the secondary capital. This dual capital system made communication between the north and the Lower Yangtze stronger than that between any other two regions.¹¹ In the 17th century, the Lower Yangtze region was the home of the famous anti-eunuch "Donglin Dang" 东林党 (Donglin Party).¹² The north, on the other hand, produced the most noteworthy literary works of that time, such as *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻缘传 (A Marriage Story to Awaken the World) and *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊斋志异 (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio). Shandong as the province containing Confucius' hometown, Qufu 曲阜, maintained a strong Confucian tradition and held an attraction for Chinese intellectuals from the Lower Yangtze as well as from other areas.

The Chinese of the North had long been viewed as bold and uninhibited in character. The Tang scholar official Han Yu 韩愈, for example, stated: *Yan Zhao duo kangkai beige zhishi* 燕赵多慷慨悲歌之士 (there are many heroic men in the Yan and Zhao areas)¹³. The Song poet Su Shi

¹¹ On the dual capital system of the Ming, see Edward Farmer, *Early Ming Government: The Evolution of Dual Capitals* (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1976).

¹² The name of this organization is Dongling Shuyuan 东林书院 (Donglin Academy). The more popularly accepted name Donglin Dang was given by its political enemies.

苏轼 said: You Bing zhidi zigu duo haojie 幽并之地自古多豪杰 (Since ancient times, You and Bing areas have produced many heroes).¹⁴ About Shandong, the Ming scholar Zhang Huang 章潢 (1527-1608) said:

Since ancient times, Shandong has produced many gallant men. However, sometimes there have also been active rebels. It was because people in Shandong are usually good at riding and skillful with bows and arrows, very much like people from Zhao 赵 Wei 魏 Yan 燕 Ji 蓟 (today's Henan and Hebei regions).¹⁵

The presence of these personalities is relevant to the frequent social violence and banditry activities of the North.

In this study, the diversity of social phenomena in 17th-century China will be generalized as "pluralism," a major characteristic of rural Chinese society. This pluralism was reflected in the different behavior of

¹³ See Chen Menglei 陈梦雷 (?-1741), *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今图书集成 (A Complete Collection of Books and Illustrations from Antiquity to the Present), hereafter as *GJTUJC* (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1985), vol. 8, p.200. Yan and Zhao were both states in the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.) that located in today's Hebei and Henan areas. Traditional Chinese intellectuals had a habit to use ancient terminology to name contemporary things, including geographical areas and titles, in their writing. The heroic men in Han Yu's saying included Jing Ke 荆柯, who got his heroic fame especially from his failed assassination attempt on the First Emperor.

¹⁴ Ibid. You and Bing were ancient prefectures mainly located in today's Hebei area.

¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 9, p.1745.

various social groups. Also, it was reflected in the phenomena of commoners' values that could be traced back to contradictory origins, especially in terms of religion. One individual might, in the same time, worship Buddha, Taoist gods, various gods of rivers, mountains, kitchens, and ancestors, as well as the Christian God when Christianity was introduced to North China after the 16th century. Pluralism was not historically in conflict with state totalitarianism. In traditional China, the totalitarian political power was on top of the powers of all superstitious or religious beings. When there was not a religious god who could unify the national spirit, many gods obtained equal possibility of existence, especially at the bottom of the social structure. In other words, secular state totalitarianism conditioned cultural pluralism in rural China.

John K. Fairbank viewed pluralism as a factor of modern society and noted the visibility of pluralism in the local areas. He asserted:

The over-arching imperial facade of unity in thought and action was hollow. Between it and the facts of daily life was a vacuum where there should have been arrangements for the pluralism of modern life. There being only one correct position in matters of thought denied the pluralism of alternative ideas that were actually thinkable and sometimes widespread. The unity

of policy asserted at the top denied the pluralism of policies visible in the local scene.¹⁶

At this point, we need to note that, state control was actually weak at the bottom level of society, especially in the 17th century.¹⁷ As a result, pluralism, as will be discussed later, was a significant characteristic of rural society. Pluralism can be a factor of modern society, as indicated by Fairbank. On the other hand, it also might exist in pre-modern society as an isolated factor. In the case of 17th-century China, pluralism was largely reflected in social phenomena not in harmony with the Confucian order. The term is not used in this study, however, as it relates to modernity.

In discussing the ethics of Chinese commoners, the term "popular asceticism" is used. This is not used in Max Weber's sense that the Protestant ethic generated

¹⁶ John K. Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), p.429.

¹⁷ Under the county (district) level, state control was mainly performed by semi-governmental institutions, such as *lijia* 里甲, which is called by Leif Littrup as "subbureaucratic system." This type of organizations performed some governmental function, such as collection of tax. However, they were insufficient to dealing with rural administrative affairs. There was a vacuum of power between the formal governmental organizations and the bottom of society. Moreover, *lijia* duty was by itself a part of corvée responsibility, other than governmental positions. Leif Littrup's examination of 16th century Shandong subbureaucratic system provides some detailed information in this regard. See Leif Littrup, *Subbureaucratic Government in China in Ming Times: A Study of Shandong Province in the Sixteenth Century* (Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1981).

social modernization in Western Europe. As will be pointed out in chapter IV, Weberian concepts are too idealistic to be the foundation of any solid historical perspective. The reason I refer to Weber's theory is mainly because under the impact of Weberian theory many Asian scholars have been trying to find out functional equivalents of this Protestant ethic in Eastern societies. In Japan, samurai ethics in the Tokugawa period are explained as contributing to Japan's modernization.¹⁸ For China, Professor Yu Ying-shih made great efforts to stress that there was a "this worldly asceticism" in Neo-Confucianism which was by itself compatible with modern capitalism. The problem with Professor Yu's approach is that within the same framework and methodology, we can see a more obvious spirit among commoners than among the Confucian intellectuals that is compatible with Weberian "asceticism," as a foundation of Capitalism. This study argues that among rural commoners, who did not consciously ascribe to Confucianism, "this worldly asceticism" was prevalent during the 17th century. Money making was practiced without any sense of guilt and rational

¹⁸Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: {PRIVATE } The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: The Free Press, 1985).

accounting in money-making activities can be found among rural commoners. Such a popular asceticism suggests that the value system of Chinese commoners in the 17th century was flexible, might be compatible with various social systems, including modern market economy. This part of this study is largely methodological, aiming at exposing the problems in Confucian centered Chinese studies.

2. Problems of Confucianism-centered approach in Chinese studies: A Methodological Concern

Giving non-Confucian society more attention may lead to a balanced perspective of the role of Confucianism in Chinese history. Modern thinking and scholarly research tend to exaggerate the importance of Confucianism. At the beginning of this century, the radical leaders of the May Fourth Movement used *dadao Kongjiadian* 打倒孔家店 (down with the peddlers of Confucianism) as their slogan. To many of the May Fourth thinkers, the bitter experiences of China with the West since the 1840s were due internally to the conservative nature of Confucianism.¹⁹ Another radical anti-Confucian campaign was organized in the 1970s, when

¹⁹ On modern anti-traditionalism, see Lin Yü-sheng 林毓生, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

political power struggles produced an anti-traditional movement. The nation-wide *pi Lin pi Kong* 批林批孔 (criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius) movement was the result. A less radical criticism of Confucianism was seen in the late 1980s when a group of reform-minded young Chinese intellectuals argued that what China should have done was to get rid of the *huangse wenming* 黄色文明 (The Yellow Civilization, meaning agricultural based continental civilization) of China and embrace the *lanse wenming* 蓝色文明 (The Blue Civilization, meaning commerce and industry based ocean civilization) of the West.²⁰ Confucianism, accordingly, became the major target of attack. None of the above-mentioned movements led to a constructive resolution of modern China's problems because the role of Confucianism in China was not as crucial as these romantic intellectuals thought.

Partly in reaction to radical anti-Confucianism, there has developed a school called modern Neo-Confucianism represented by Liang Suming 梁漱溟, Feng Youlan 冯友兰, Xiong Shili 熊十力, He Lin 贺麟, and Qian Mu 钱穆. These scholars, generally speaking, hold that

²⁰Su Xiaokang 苏晓康 and Wang Luxiang 王鲁湘, *Heshang* 河殇 (Beishi: Fengyun shidai, 1988 and 1991).

Neo-Confucianism should be kept as the essence of Chinese culture even in modern times. Liang even suggested that Confucianism should be introduced to Western culture to help it to resolve its modern resource and value crisis.²¹ Continuing the tradition of the Confucian intellectuals, these scholars keep the idea of shaping the national spirit structure in terms of an intellectual ideology.²² The Chinese intellectual faith that intellectuals represent the Chinese, however, is merely an illusion. The majority of the Chinese who did not embrace the doctrines of Confucianism and who did not know who Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) or Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472-1528) was, were not merely cultural dependents of the gentry. They had their own way of life and their own values. In over-

²¹Liang Suming 梁漱明, *Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue* 东西文化及其哲学 (Oriental and Western Cultures and Philosophies) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1923), xu 序. See Song Zhiming 宋志明, *Xiandai xin Ru jia yanjiu* 现代新儒家研究 (A Study of Modern Neo-Confucianism) (Beijing: Zhongguo Remin Daxue chubanshe, 1993), p.7.

²² Professor A. Wright's narration of the self-appreciation of traditional Confucian elite can also be viewed as an analysis of the modern Neo-Confucian thinkers. Wright wrote: "Either a man in the masses or an irresponsible elite might disrupt the balance of harmony, but only the learned and the wise could restore it. The wise and the learned were to be found among the Confucian elite, and the wisdom--the keys to harmony--they commanded was found in the Classics and, secondarily, in traditional mores and in the corpus of historical and other writings that contained the past experience of the Chinese." See Arthur F. Wright, "Values, Roles, and Personalities," in Wright, Arthur F., and Denis Twitchett, ed., *Confucian Personalities*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p.5.

stressing the importance and influence of Confucianism, modern Neo-Confucianism and anti-Confucianism are as one.

Some scholars in the West, mainly intellectual historians, who are apparently influenced by the modern Neo-Confucian scholars, have been using Western sociological theories to reinterpret Confucianism. Tu Weiming, for example, argues that the miraculous economic development in East Asia after 1970s is the result of applying Confucian values.²³ While Confucianism might be a relevant factor for East Asian modernization, the role of Confucianism in that development can hardly be clarified until the other major factors have been given sufficient attention. Tu Weiming ignores the commoners in his cultural analyses of Chinese tradition. Elite intellectuals dominated Chinese cultural and social unity in his theory, but this is not supported, in my opinion, by historical fact. Especially, when the recent economic boom in China is concerned, popular culture becomes even more relevant. The current Chinese economic development started from the so called *nongcun jingji gaige* 农村经济改革 (economic reform in the countryside). The

²³Tu Wei-ming, "Toward a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism: A background Understanding," in Irene Eber, ed., *Confucianism: The Dynamics of Tradition* (Macmillan Publishing company, 1986).

major element of that reform consisted of giving the rural Chinese more freedom to do what they wanted to do. The commoners, who had little to do with Confucianism and current intellectual thinking, quickly created a booming economic environment.

In the 1960s, scholars seemingly had noted the limitation of Confucianism-centered Chinese studies. For example, Professor Arthur F. Wright wrote:

For more than two millennia the Confucian tradition was an ever-present and pervasive influence. It moulded the lives and the thought of the men who created and perpetuated the civilization of China...²⁴

Yet two major classes go virtually unnoticed, who are

the peasant masses, who appear only as statistical anonymities in our sources, and the merchants, whose lives traditional historians generally disdained to notice.²⁵

Since the peasant masses and merchants constituted the overwhelming majority of Chinese population, how effectively Confucianism "moulded" the lives and thought of the Chinese becomes uncertain. However, little was changed in the Chinese studies of that time.

²⁴ Wright, ed., *Confucian Personalities*, p.3.

²⁵ Ibid., p.4.

It is interesting to note that the Confucianism-centered approach is mainly applied by intellectual historians. In intellectual history, researchers have been paying attention to the most significant and persistent spiritual factors of a people. Naturally, the written works of leading thinkers attract the attention of researchers. In social history, philosophers like Confucius do not have as big a voice as they do in intellectual history. Instead, the "statistical anonymities" come to the front. Researchers, therefore, have to look at such things as social activities, institutions, customs, economic structures, etc. When diversity is recognized, the presumption of Confucian domination in Chinese society is challenged. Through such types of studies, a social historian may see more diversity in a culture than an intellectual historian usually does. For a people like the Chinese who have been experiencing tremendous changes in modern times, diversity deserves more attention because it may lead to an understanding of the social and cultural potential and limitation of the Chinese in the changing world.

Unlike the Christian Bible after the Reformation, the classical Confucian doctrines and their later commentaries

were not written in vernacular for everybody in society, but for intellectuals and officials. Their contents require a high standard of literary proficiency to read them. Works, such as *Lunyu* 论语 (*The Analects*), *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (*The Heavy Dew in the Spring and Autumn*), and *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子语类 (*Classified Teaching of Master Zhu Xi*) were clearly not written for commoners, but for the educated and largely privileged elite engaged in statecraft. The values, beliefs, and activities of common people, who could not read the classical language in which Confucian teachings had been written, were therefore unlikely to be based on Confucian principles. Mostly illiterate, commoners did not usually show respect to Confucius. In classical written Chinese language, there are terms like *Ru sheng* 儒生 (Confucian scholar) and *Ru jiang* 儒将 (Confucian general), but there are no equivalent terms for Confucian peasant, Confucian peddler, or Confucian prostitute. In developing this teaching, Confucius and his followers were writing for and speaking to *junzi* 君子 (gentlemen or superior men), whom we have termed gentry. Even though the Former Han (206 BC.-24AD.) government adopted Confucianism as the state ideology, Confucianism was not continually advocated in Chinese

society until the Song dynasty (960-1279) when the civil service examination system and Neo-Confucianism largely promoted the influence of Confucianism in society. Even so, after the Song, there is still not sufficient evidence to conclude that Confucian doctrines had been well received by commoners.

Because of the gap between "high culture and popular culture," in the words of Professor Benjamin Schwartz, the difference between norms and behavior, and the tension between ideals and realities, the popular culture of China can not be generalized as Confucian culture.²⁶ This leads to the question: how did Confucianism connect to the popular culture?

Confucianism, as the officially recognized state ideology in imperial China, directly influenced governmental institutions, laws, policies, and social programs. In social practices related to those governmental regulations and activities, the common people were living in a Confucianism-influenced world. Confucianism therefore, indirectly, and in a less conscious way, played a role in the lower culture. The upper culture, although practiced by only a small part of

²⁶ Refer to note 36 in this chapter.

the populace in society, represented attractions to people in the lower classes. Higher culture, as such, consistently penetrated popular culture. The reverse was also true. When a social practice under influences of both upper culture and popular culture had been established as a convention, common people's conduct might meet Confucian standards. Moreover, upper culture and popular culture came from the same origin. In terms of ethics, Confucius and his followers did not create many new concepts. Instead, they mainly propagated, sometimes with reinterpretations, existing ethics and promoted their institutionalization. Filial piety, for example, existed before Confucius' time. When we recognize filial piety as a Confucian principle, we might forget that without Confucianism there would still have been filial piety in Chinese ethics. It is actually hard to say whether popular filial piety was from Confucian teaching or from the natural flow of traditional Chinese life. What Confucianism did was to formalize those concepts and to create radical standards such as *esi shixiao, shijie shida* 饿死事小, 失节事大 (starving to death matters little, loss of chastity matters greatly).²⁷

²⁷ This opinion was first made by Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033-1107) and strongly supported by Zhu Xi. See "Jiafan dian 家范典 (Records of

Since popular culture is different from high culture, it is not sound practice to analyze popular ethics by relying on the teachings of Confucian thinkers. The commoners were not, on the other hand, people without any ethical consciousness or values. They followed instead informal and diversified rules. Those rules can only be revealed by examining the activities of those people. This study will avoid interpreting social activities of the average Chinese based on Confucianism as a system of universal norms.

3. North China in the 17th Century

The 17th century was a period of significant changes and crises.²⁸ In the political sphere, it saw the dynastic transition from the Ming (1368-1644) to the Qing (1644-1911). This transaction was not really accomplished until the resistance of the Han elite, especially from the

Family Regulations)" in *GJTSJC*, p.850.

²⁸ The term "17th century" indicates the period approximately from 1600 to 1699. It would be too mechanistic to think that there was a radical gap between 1599 and 1600, or between 1699 and 1701. The 17th century in Chinese history largely continued a trend that had appeared in the 16th century and that reached a more significant level. On the other hand, the difference between the 17th and 18th centuries was likely more sizable. See Zhao Yifeng 赵轶峰, "Qing tongyi de juxian xing 清统一的局限性 (The Limitation of the Qing Unification)," *Shixue jikan* 史学集刊 (Collected Articles of Historical Studies), 1986:4, pp.9-14, 23.

South, Southeast, and the Lower Yangtze regions was suppressed half a century later.

As far as the commoners in north China are concerned, they did not make significant efforts to resist the Manchus at all but passively accepted the new dynasty. The North suffered much more serious chaos during the first half of this century because of peasant rebellions and frequent natural disasters. On the other hand, the North was able to avoid large scale warfare during the last half of the 17th century because of the earlier political consolidation in this area, although bandits and farmland redistribution still caused some problems.

Traditional Chinese historians attributed the collapse of the Ming to three major forces: factional struggles among the Ming bureaucracy, rebellions, and the invasion of the Manchus. Behind these obvious forces of change, however, modern researchers note that some factors functioned over a longer period. Chinese population, first of all, experienced a significant increase. Population under Ming registration at the juncture of the 16th to the 17th centuries was only about 60 million. Modern researchers, however, suggest that something more than 100 million people were then living in China, forming the

foundation of rapid population increase in the 18th century. Professor Ping-ti Ho, after extensive study of this issue, states:

In conclusion, it may be guessed that China's population, which was probably at least 65,000,000 around 1400, slightly more than doubled by 1600, when it was probably about 150,000,000. During the second quarter of the seventeenth century the nation suffered severe losses in population, the exact extent of which cannot be determined. It would appear that the second half of the seventeenth century was a period of slow recovery, although the tempo of population growth was increased between 1683 and 1700. The seventeenth century as a whole probably failed to register any net gain in population.²⁹

The introduction of corn and sweet potatoes from North America in the 16th century was a factor in the population explosion. The tremendous difference between the governmental registration and actual population indicates that a large percentage of population was out of Ming governmental control. A modern researcher has noted that the 17th century coincided with a peak of climatic disorders in Chinese history.³⁰ By destroying the basic requirements for people's livelihood, floods, droughts, and earthquakes sharpened social contradictions and

²⁹ See Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368-1953* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959). p.277.

³⁰ Deng Yunte 邓云特, *Zhongguo jiu Huang shi 中国救荒史* (A History of the Famine Reliefs in China) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1984), pp.1-61.

hastened political change. The financial crisis of the Ming government and the large scale rebellion in north China were both related to famines of the 17th century.³¹

By the 17th century, significant commercialization that began during the 15th and 16th centuries certainly continued. The dominant monetary system changed from paper currency and bronze coins to bulk silver, which largely liberated commercial exchanges and capital accumulation from governmental interference.³² Along with the loss of governmental control over population, occupational changes among peasantry, artisans, merchants, and others broke with the early Ming restrictions and became common in the late Ming period. Local periodic markets, inter-regional commercial activities, and the development of urbanization together formed a trend pulling society out from the traditional regional self-contained and self-sufficient agricultural based model. These changes were so obvious that it even encouraged the main-stream Marxist historians

³¹ About the late Ming financial crisis, see Zhao Yifeng 赵轶峰, "Shilun Ming mo caizheng weiji de lishi genyuan jiqi shidai tezheng 试论明末财政危机的历史根源及其时代特征 (An Attempted Study of the Origin and Characteristics of the Late Ming Financial Crisis)," *Zhongguo shi yanjiu*, 1986:4, pp.71-7.

³² See Zhao Yifeng, "Shilun Mingdai huobi zhidu de yanbian jiqi lishi yingxiang 试论明代货币制度的演变及其历史影响 (An Attempted Study of the Evolution of the Ming Monetary System and Its Historical Impact)," *Dongbei Shida xuebao* 东北师大学报 (The Journal of the Northeast Normal University), 1985:4, 41-6.

of China decades ago to declare that China was moving to a certain pattern of capitalism after the 16th century.³³

Viewing the Chinese social system as a whole, however, commercialization was not simply a positive element in the changing world of China. It was driven, in the view of conservative Confucian intellectuals, by the human desire for material possessions. A result of this was the shaking of traditional values, morality, and social stability. Intellectual trends reflecting social reality showed ambivalence, confusion, and contradiction.

Confucianism, after the formation of Neo-Confucianism in the Song dynasty, continued its influence among the Chinese populace. The 17th century, nevertheless, witnessed the decline of Confucianism. The main-stream Confucian school *Lixue* 理学 (School of Principles), established principally by Zhu Xi, was replaced by *Xinxue* 心学 (School of Mind), which was developed by Wang Yangming and his pupils. *Xinxue* was soon criticized by a younger generation of Confucian scholars who held that

³³ For a brief review, see Zhao Yi 赵毅, "Zhongguo ziben zhuyi mengya 中国资本主义萌芽 (The Germination of Capitalism in China), in Zhao Yifeng, et al., *Lishi lilun jiben wenti 历史理论基本问题* (Changchun: Northeast Normal University Press, 1994), pp.96-115.

Wang's radical liberal thinking was responsible for the ineffectiveness of the late Ming bureaucratic system and even for social corruption. The new replacement was later named *Shixue* 实学 (Practical Studies), which valued practical social and political strategies the most. Even the official restoration of *Lixue* in the 18th century did not really draw the scholarly thinking back to Zhu Xi. The most brilliant scholars of this time were departing from the track of Song and Ming scholarship and transferring to *Hanxue* 汉学 (The Han Learnings). The criticism of Neo-Confucianism in the 17th century was so overwhelming that a modern scholar Li Jixiang 李纪祥 viewed intellectuals in this period, including Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610-1659), Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613-1682), Chen Zilong 陈子龙 (1608-1647), and Xu Fuyuan 许孚远 (1535-1604), as *wenren* 文人 (literati) rather than *ru* 儒 (Confucian intellectuals).³⁴ The *ru* who suffered hostile criticism were essentially the intellectuals carrying on the tradition of the School of Principle and the School of Mind were ironically termed *shiru* 时儒 (popular Confucian intellectuals). In brief, after the popularity of Wang Yangming's School of Mind in

³⁴ Li Jixiang, *Ming mo Qing chu ruxue zhi fazhan* 明末清初儒学之发展 (The development of Late Ming Shanren Chen Meigong) (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1992), pp.82-91.

the previous century, the 17th century saw a radical decline of Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism. The greatest thinkers of the 17th century in China, all clearly different from those of the 16th century, were critical of the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming traditions. Confucianism, so troubled by internal contradictions, its influence on the gentry and commoners in rural areas grew weaker and less certain.

The 17th century has been viewed as a turning point in Chinese history also because this is the time when Western missionaries played an active role in China. The missionaries in China, however, did not have a strong enough impact to affect China's general social, political and cultural orientation. China's failure to westernize under this impact was not, however, simply because of a Chinese rejection of Western things. Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562-1633), the Ritual Minister and Grand Secretary who converted to Christianity without damaging his career as a leading Confucian scholar-official, was only one example among many that indicates the flexibility of Chinese values in the 17th century.

When Confucianism was struggling to revitalize itself, commoners were becoming more and more involved in

commercially related activities. Caring more about money than about Confucianism, the commoners were driven by something other than Confucian ethics in their social life. Decline in moral standards, in reality or just in the opinion of Confucian thinkers, was a by-product of social change.

The historical significance of the 17th century is fully noted by modern historians. For example, Professor Jonathan Spence takes 1600 to begin his narrative of a history of modern China because

we can get a full sense of how China's current problems have arisen, and of what resources--intellectual, economic, and emotional--the Chinese can call upon to solve them.³⁵

Professor Immanuel Hsü's survey of the modern history of China also starts from the 17th century.³⁶

In terms of polity, the 17th century witnessed Sinicized Manchus dominating the imperial court, bringing

³⁵ Spence, Jonathan D., *The Search for Modern China* (New York and London: W.W.Norton & Company, 1990), Preface XX.

³⁶A questionable generalization of Professor Immanuel Hsü about 17th-century China, nevertheless, should be mentioned here. He states: "During this period, China's political system, social structure, economic institutions, and intellectual atmosphere remained substantially what they had been during the previous 2,000 years..." This generalization neglects any fundamental changes during the most recent centuries. See Immanuel Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, the fourth edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.6.

the Chinese political system to a new stage of despotism, and challenging traditional political integrity. In terms of the economy, agriculture as the foundation of Chinese economy had been partly challenged by commercialization and urbanization. A national marketing system was forming, as a supplementary element to rural economic self-sufficiency and a factor changing the economic pattern. In society, while the traditional bureaucratic gentry continued its partial domination, the merchant class increased its power. When social mobility, which was due to commercialization and population growth, became significant, both state and the gentry domination of society became infirm. As far as Confucianism, which had been dominating upper culture or official ideology in the previous centuries, is concerned, it was experiencing an attempted regeneration demonstrated by the criticism of the Song and Ming schools. Furthermore, religious and ethnic diversity was remarkable in this period. Popular culture, in urban and rural areas, exhibited marked differences from upper culture. The cultural vitality of the commoners was manifest in various aspects of their social activities and indicated the existence of cultural secularization in 17th century China. Modern society is,

in a sense, a secular society, and not the product of a single authorized ideology. The 17th century provides a good opportunity to understand the basic spirit of Chinese culture, the structure of Chinese society, and the Chinese people.

4. Framework

A decade ago, when many leading historians of Chinese thought, such as W. T. de Bary and Qian Mu 钱穆, concentrated on the study of the importance of Confucianism for the spiritual integrity of Chinese culture as a whole, Professor Benjamin Schwartz pointed out the difference between the cultures of the Chinese commoners and the gentry. Schwartz saw two cultures in China:

As historians of China we also are very acutely aware not only of change over time but also of differences between high culture and popular culture. We have hardly begun to study the popular culture of China. We are also aware (as we are in our own history) of the enormous gap between the professed ideals and norms of the culture and the way things actually work—a gap that exists in all cultures... It is simply assumed that in every primitive society the norms of the society are unproblematically realized in the behavior of the society. In dealing with complex civilizations we discern change over time, conflicts and tensions

between high culture and popular culture, and the continuing tension between ideals and actualities.³⁷

That is, if the gap between the professed ideals and norms and the reality was "enormous" in late imperial China, our understanding of Chinese history mainly based on the studies of scholarly thinking and governmental regulations might be far removed from reality. Schwartz called for detailed studies of the social cultural context of commonlife with all its complexity and change, and a new perspective on the connection between upper and popular culture. Progress has been made in the past ten years.³⁸ In particular, articles collected in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* deal, in depth, with aspects such as the structure of communication and its impact on the value system, the connection of popular religion to the values of the commoners, and the beginning of "mass culture" in China. The methodology of these studies, as used by Evelyn

³⁷ Benjamin Schwartz, *China's Cultural Values* (Tempe: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1985). pp.2-3.

³⁸ See Patricia Buckley Ebrey and James L. Watson, ed., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China: 1000-1940* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1986); David Johnson Andrew et al., ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkely, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1985); Susan Naquin & Evelyn s. Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, among others.

S. Rawski, indicates a new stage in Chinese studies--an advance towards a systematic understanding of the verification of Chinese society and culture and an evaluation of the influence of the elite culture on commoners.³⁹ Nevertheless, the 17th century is still a less studied era compared to previous and later centuries. Northern China remains a less studied area. The cultural identity of the commoners as the overwhelming majority and their impact on the historical trends of late imperial China have not been fully examined. This thesis attempts to advance studies in these directions. It is divided into the following chapters:

I, the present chapter, deals with background and sources, conceptual explanations, and methodological concerns.

II investigates the popular religious activities of commoners in the North. Materials drawn from local gazetteers show a significant variety of popular religions. While Confucian statecraft made use of popular religions, popular religions in the north seriously damaged Confucian values and the Confucian world order.

³⁹ See Evelyn S. Rawski, "Problems and Prospects," in David Johnson Andrew et al., ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp.399-417.

The mainstream intellectuals of this time argued about the various non-Confucian beliefs. A major thrust of this chapter is that cultural pluralism was an inherent tendency of Chinese commoners in the north.

III argues that Confucian family institutions and ethics were not deeply inculcated among the commoners. Smaller families were more popular among commoners than among the gentry for economic reasons, as well as from ignorance of, or indifference to, Confucian family values. The population of single adults increased among commoners. Filial piety, as the key concept in Confucian family ethics, in particular, was not practiced seriously by commoners. The theme of fierce wives was a popular topic in literature, a reality in lower society, and a real challenge to male domination. Neo-Confucian restrictions on female rights, such as those on widow's remarrying and on participation in public activities were far from effective among the commoners. A significant change in this period, compared to previous centuries, was that even some well-known Confucian intellectuals had given up the goal of fully applying Neo-Confucian morality to popular culture and the common people.

IV shows that while adherents of Confucianism suffered psychological tension when participating in commercial activities, there was little of such ethical stress among the commoners. It was not Confucian asceticism that played a dynamic role in driving the economy toward commercialization but a kind of popular asceticism.

V examines the scholar-commoners, *shengyuan*, a group with a status between commoners and the scholar elite. The difficulties in their career development and everyday life in the 17th century caused a shift away from their positive roles in the Confucian social hierarchy to a turbulent one in the changing society. A departure from the Confucian scholar-official lifestyle can be seen among them. Their sense of their role in society became uncertain. While damaging the traditional moral and social order, this new role for *shengyuan* provided a new force for social mobility and for potential social transition.

VI examines several marginal groups, including clergy, independent female business persons, and local rascals. These groups were largely responsible for the popular undermining of Confucian morality. Meanwhile, they were

important indicators of the ongoing social mobility of 17th century China. Especially, the female business persons and their popularity among the commoners indicates a liberation of women from households. Rascals and the outright activities of other kinds of commoners, formed a force that led to disintegration of social culture, which in turn made all social reforms directed downward from upper society more difficult.

VII, the concluding chapter, is based on evidence given in previous chapters that support the central argument of this study: the social and cultural characteristics of Chinese commoners in the rural areas of North China during the 17th century were significantly non-Confucian and the non-Confucian commoner society played a dynamic role in the social and historical change of the 17th century. Culturally, commoners were not dependents of the gentry and they had their own characteristics that were sometimes in conflict with the state and elite culture. Furthermore, some extended interpretations about post-17th century Chinese social history are made based on the particular perspectives of this study. Finally, questions for further study are raised.

5. Sources of This Study

The original sources explored in this study fall into several categories. The advantages and limitations of these sources are noted below.

Local gazetteers are valuable sources because they provide detailed information about the customs, biographies, institutions, and historical events of a particular area, a *xian* 县 (county), a *zhou* 州 (subprefecture), a *fu* 府 (prefecture), or a province. One needs to note, however, that most of the gazetteers were edited under governmental supervision. Therefore, they largely reflect official opinion. Edited under different circumstances and by different people, the originality and reliability of local gazetteers vary. Generally, gazetteers edited during the early Qing period are considered more useful for the study of the 17th century. Some individual works, such as *Wanshu zaji* 宛署杂纪 (Miscellaneous Notes of the Magistrate of Wanping County), by a late Ming magistrate of Wanping 宛平 county, was based on direct observations by the author. Its value is roughly equivalent to that of well-edited local gazetteers. Many older gazetteers have not survived.

However, sections or information from them can be found in other works. The *Zhifang dian* 职方典 (Record of geography) in *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今图书集成 (A Complete Collection of Books and Illustrations from Antiquity to the Present), especially, contains invaluable sources of this kind. As Yang Jialuo 杨家骆, points out:

In terms of source exhaustiveness and editing quality, *Zhifang dian* is the best [section in *GJTSJC*]. Why should we say that its source is exhaustive? Because when *Zhifang dian* was edited, almost all the late Ming and early Qing provincial general gazetteers, prefectural and subprefectural gazetteers, and some county gazetteers were used. Now, more than half of those gazetteers no longer exist.⁴⁰

Governmental archives are valuable for their original and official nature. Because in the first decades of the Qing dynasty, Ming laws were still used by the newly established government, except for some special changes, *The Da Ming lu* 大明律 (The Law Code of the Great Ming) and *Da Ming Huidian* 大明会典 (The Official Regulations of the Great Ming) provide the major documentation for governmental regulations. One needs to be aware that the *Da Ming lu* was issued in the late 14th century. Some sections of it were not in force in practice by the 17th

⁴⁰ Yang Jialuo, "Zhifang dian jianmu shiyu" 职方典简目识语 (A Note to the Simplified Table of Content of *Zhifang dian*), in *GJTSJC*, vol. 8, after the title page.

century. The government of the Ming in its late period was reluctant to make changes to *zuzhi* 祖制 (rules designed by the ancestor). To compensate, the judgments of some model cases were followed as standards to handle increasingly complicated problems, so require careful examination of differences between written regulations and facts is necessary. The latest version of the *Da Ming huidian* was composed in the late 16th century. It was used for state administration, although exceptions always occurred. Some privately and officially edited works based on original governmental archives and some other sources, such as *Ming huiyao* 明会要 (The Major Regulations of the Ming) and *Xu wenxian tongkao* 续文献通考 (Continuation of the General History and Critical Examination of Documents and Studies). These sources contain some information missing from existing original governmental documents. *Qufu Kongfu dang'an shiliao xuanbian* 曲阜孔府档案史料选编 (Selected Historical Sources from the Archives of the Household of Confucius' Descendants in Qufu) provides original documents concerned with the relationship of the privileged descendants of Confucius with commoners living around them during the 17th century.

The official history of this period, *Mingshi* 明史 (The History of Ming) has been recognized to be the best edited work among all the twenty-five major official histories of traditional China because of its high quality of sources, source criticism, as well as its style. Although few details about rural commoners can be found in *The Mingshi*, it is particularly useful for the reconstruction of governmental institutions and for the comparison of social reality with norms. *Qingshi Gao* 清史稿 (Draft History of the Qing), which was completed in the early Republic era of China can not be used as an original source. The scholarly quality of this massive, yet rough, work has attracted much criticism. It is useful, nevertheless, to help clarify relevant early Qing governmental institutions and general social conditions.

The 17th century saw a great harvest of *sishi* 私史 (private histories). According to Xie Guozhen 谢国桢, there were no less than one thousand contemporary histories of the Ming and Qing transitional period completed by individual historians.⁴¹ Many of these works are still available. One of them, *Guoque* 国榷 (Judgment of

⁴¹ Xie Guozhen 谢国桢, *Zengding wang Ming shiji kao* 增订晚明史籍考 (Expanded Edition of An Investigation into the Historical Sources of the Late Ming) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981).

Ming History) for example, is among the best written chronicles in the whole history of traditional China. Although political events and institutions were usually the themes of these private histories, scattered clues about social development can be gleaned from them.

Wenji 文集 (individual literary collections) are a source of great importance to this study. Details about social activities can be found in letters collected in some *wenji*, and those letters dealing with current matters relevant to social activities are both original and tend to be reliable. *Tinglin Wenji* 亭林文集 (The Collected Works of Gu Yanwu) and *Shiyin Yuan canggao* 石隐园藏稿 (Manuscripts Preserved in the Shiyin Garden) by the senior late Ming senior official Bi Ziyang 毕自严 who was from Shandong, are two of them. *Pu Songling wenji* 蒲松龄文集 (The Collected Works of Pu Songling) is especially valuable because the author was a typical scholar-commoner of 17th century northern China.

Much material for this study has been found in *biji* 笔记 (miscellanies jottings). This kind of works usually contain short entries that deal with anything considered interesting by the authors. The historical reliability of these materials varies from work to work and from item to

item. *Zheyu Xinyu* 折狱新语 (A New Record of Court Judgment) is a collection of court judgments and sentencings made by Li Qing 李清, the author himself, when he was a local official. This work is as valuable and reliable as governmental document. Some other notebooks provide information on regional folk customs and the behavior of ordinary people. They provide interesting information pertaining to regional variety. Many notebooks contain anecdotes. Because anecdotes can reflect historical facts, they are occasionally referred to in this study. Considering the variety of *Biji*, in terms of content and reliability, one of the popular translations of it, namely "anecdote notes," is misleading.

Fiction, including novels, short stories and plays of the 17th century, is another important source. Chinese fiction of this time had a clear tendency to reflect the life stories of average people. The literary reflection of social life is full of details, which can be read for historical information. *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻缘传 (A Marriage Story to Awaken the World), for example, is a novel written by a Shandong native in the 17th century. This novel describes inner family relationships, rural neighborhood, regional religious customs, activities of

the marginal groups that matches other sources extremely well. Especially, the commentary of the author reflects the feeling and opinion of a 17th century writer, which is actually not fictional.⁴² Similar materials can be found in the recently published *Guben Xiaoshuo congkan* 古本小说丛刊 (Collectanea of Old Editions of Fiction). Many novels in this collection are just recently accessible.

Another category of original source is *leishu* 类书. This term has been translated as encyclopedias. While there are many similarities, there is an important difference between traditional Chinese *leishu* and modern encyclopedias. Entries of modern encyclopedias are modern studies on selected topics in the form of short theses, while entries in *leishu* are simply quotations from original books. For that reason, *leishu* can be treated as collections of original source materials. The section entitled "Zhifang dian" and "Jiafan dian" in *Gujin tushu jicheng* edited by Chen Menglei 陈梦雷 are the major sections of *leishu* used in this study.

Many original works of 17th century are available in book collections. Shen Yunlong 沈云龙 edited *Ming Qing*

⁴² About the usage of this fiction in historical studies, see Yifeng Zhao "Concubinage in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature: A Historical Study of *Xing-shi yin-yuan zhuan*," *Past Imperfect*, 1995:4, p.57-79.

Shiliao huibian 明清史料汇编 (Collection of Ming and Qing Historical Sources), *Congshu jicheng chubian* 丛书集成初编 (The First Edition of Collected Books), and *Mingji baishi chubian* 明季稗史初编 (The First Edition of Unofficial Histories of the Late Ming), are some of the many series used.

Some sources in the above categories are not directly quoted, especially governmental regulations. They provide a general understanding of 17th-century China and basic background knowledge necessary to evaluate other sources.

Chapter II

Pluralism: The Nature of Chinese Popular Religion

A religion reflects a people's ultimate spiritual concerns. The major characteristic of the religious belief of Chinese commoners is pluralism, which became especially significant in the North during the 17th century.

Chinese religions pre-dating the arrival of Buddhism, which began to spread in China in the first century AD, were mainly ancestor worship and deism.¹ Confucianism, which does not include personalized supernatural beings, was basically an atheistic system, which did not bring fundamental changes to popular religion. Confucianism took a pragmatic attitude toward all existing religious beliefs and viewed religious ritual practices as vehicles useful to maintain social integrity. Such an attitude is reflected in *The Analects*. According to this source, Confucius did not talk about *guai li luan shen* 怪力乱神 (prodigies, force, disorder and gods). However, to Confucius, worshipping gods was

¹ See Benjamin Schwartz, *China's Cultural Values* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1985) , pp.1-23.

necessary. He once instructed that one should *jishen ru shenzai* 祭神如神在 (sacrifice to the gods as if the gods were present).² Such a flexible approach to religious ideas was compatible with strong secular political powers in a diversified cultural and social setting. Once the state power was established in China, no professional religious positions were ranked above the highest political authority in China. All religions were subjected to the toleration and patronage of political authorities. The problem facing atheistic and politicalized Confucianism in relation to commoners was that it could not provide any ultimate hope or salvation to people experiencing fear of death, emptiness of life, and other feelings of bitterness and disappointment. There was, therefore, a vacuum that "pure" religions were to fill. Buddhism and Taoism were two of the successful ones, while other less successful religious beliefs and practices continued to exist. The regional geographical and economic differences in the vast territory of China and the rudimentary level of communication certainly enhanced religious diversity. By the 17th century, the

² Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. by D.C. Lau. (Hongkong: The Chinese University Press, 1983), pp.60, 22.

popularity of Buddhism and Taoism was so obvious that even Confucian intellectuals had to deal seriously with the issue of *sanjiao guiyi* 三教归一 (the unity of the three teachings), namely Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. In addition to these three major colors, the Chinese religious picture in the 17th century was full of many other hues, which were especially prominent in rural areas.

In this regard, the difference between upper and lower society is clear. The upper class generally kept Confucianism as the foundation for their maintenance of cultural-religious identity. Meanwhile, they looked to other religions for their spiritual needs, or used other religions as instruments for political and social purposes.³ The commoners, on the other hand, did not care about maintaining a national cultural-religious unity at all. The statecraft taught by Confucianism was not generally accessible to them because they were mostly illiterate. The ultimate satisfaction of the Confucian life, namely moral perfection, making great political

³ Professor Timothy Brook has exhaustively studied late-Ming monastic patronage and its connection to gentry society. See Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge and London: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University and the Havard-Yenching Institute, 1993).

contributions to the state, and achieving honorable status, required a lifetime study of Confucian teachings, endless meditation, or, political activity. The commoners were ignorant of this. Moreover, Confucianism failed to provide a personal god or gods for commoners who sought supernatural help in their everyday lives and an eventual salvation after their deaths. Most popular religions, by contrast, could at least make promises. To the commoners, the various gods and deities were closer to them than was Confucius. The religious attitudes and practices of the commoners were therefore different from those of the upper classes.

To examine this issue, this chapter will focus on the following aspects: 1. diversified religious worship among commoners in north China; 2. popular religions and the state; 3. controversial intellectual perspectives on non-Confucian beliefs.

1. Diversified Religious Worship

Confucius and his disciples were honored by the state in Guozhi Jian 国子监 (The National University) and the regional official schools in the administrative centers of prefectures and counties. At the local rural

level, however, regular Confucian rituals were no longer part of the picture. According to Yan Yuan 颜元 (1635-1704), who was a native of Hebei,

Today, yinci 淫祠 (various evil shrines) are in every village. I have never heard, however, that any village has a temple to worship Confucius. Only by the force of the law would every county establish one Wenmiao 文庙 (Confucian temple).⁴

This early Qing Confucian thinker suggested, in the foregoing sentences, that every village should establish a Confucian temple. This turned out to be a never realized dream.

Those receiving people's sacrifice were various other deities. For example, established popular worship sites in Wendeng 文登 county of Shandong were listed in the Gazetteer of the Wendeng County as the following.⁵

Table 1, Popular Worship Sites in Wendeng County

name of sites	to worship	time of establishment
Yuhuang Miao 玉皇庙	Sanguan Miao 三官庙	Yuhuang, Sanguan
		Ming
Bilu An 毗庐庵		Buddha
		Early Qing
Songshan Miao 松山庙		A.D. 1556
Hongjiao Si 洪教寺		Sanguan
		Buddha
		Jin A.D.1115-1234)
Jiashan Si 驾山寺,原名清凉寺		Buddha
		Unknown, rebuilt after the Yuan

⁴ Yan Yuan, *Yan Xizhai Xiansheng piyi lu* 颜习斋先生辟异录 (Master Yan Yuan's Criticism of Heretical Beliefs), (CSJCCB), p.1.

⁵ See Li Zunian 李祖年, *Wendeng Xianzhi* 文登县志 (Gazetteer of Wendeng County), 1897, chapter 4, in *Zhongguo Difangzhi Congshu* 中国地方志丛书 (Collected Local Gazetteers of China), hereafter ZGDFZCS, pp.287-320.

Taishan Dian 泰山殿	Bixia Yuanjun 碧霞元君	Kangxi period A.D.1662-1722
Changwan Si 长湾寺	Buddha	Unknown
Baiyi An 白衣庵	Guanyin 观音	Unknown
Taishan Ge 泰山阁	The God of Mountain Tai	A.D. 1630
Wenchang Ge 文昌阁	Wenchang 文昌	Unknown
Mituo An 弥陀庵	Buddha	The Yuan dynasty A.D.1271-1368
Songyou An 友松庵, 又名来鹤观 草场庵	Taoist Gods	Kangxi period
Liushan Si 六山寺, 原名弥陀院	Buddha	Unknown, rebuilt by peasants in 1644
Yuhuang Miao 玉皇庙	Yuhuang	Unknown, rebuilt in A.D.1781
Yuhuang Miao 玉皇庙	Yuhuang	Unknown, rebuilt in A.D.1701
Gaocun Ji Nanbei Er Miao 高村集南北二庙	?	Unknown
Jinling Si 金岭寺	Buddha	Unknown
Xiuzhen Guan 修真观	Taoist Gods	Unknown, rebuilt in the Yuan
Cuizhen An 萃真庵	?	Unknown, rebuilt in A.D.1825
Zoushan An 邹山庵	?	A.D. 1654
Cikou Guan 慈口观	Taoist Gods	A.D. 1665
Yuqing Gong 玉清宫	Taoist Gods	The Jin dynasty
Baifo Si 白佛寺	Buddha	Unknown, rebuilt in A.D.1703
Zheyang Si 柘阳寺	Buddha	The Song dynasty
Baoquan Si 宝泉寺	Buddha	Before A.D.1635
Tangcun Si 汤村寺	Buddha	Unknown
Huaniao Miao 花岛庙, 于家庵	?	Unknown
Baiyi Ge 白衣阁	Guanyin	A.D. 1634
Liangshui An 凉水庵	?	Unknown, rebuilt in A.D. 1791
Wangjiang Si 望浆寺	Buddha	The Song dynasty
Huanghua Miao 黄华庙	Huanghua Dawang 黄华大王 水神	The Yuan dynasty
Sanyuan Miao 三元庙	?	Before A.D. 1638
Huangshan Si 黄山寺	Buddha	Unknown, rebuilt in A.D.1760
Fengshan Si 峰山寺	Buddha	The Ming dynasty
Yanshou Gong 延寿宫	Sanqing, Zhenwu, Guanyu and Yaowang 三清, 真武 关羽 药王	Before the Yuan dynasty
Gouqi Guan 沟奇观	Taoist Gods	Unknown
Tiecha Shan Qingliang Ding 铁槎山清凉顶庙	Yuhuang	The Ming dyansty
Zhulin Si 竹林寺	Buddha	Unknown
Shenghuang Miao 圣皇庙	?	Before A.D. 1633
Piehui Shan Miao 撇慧山庙	?	Unknown
Yanshou An 延寿庵	Taoist Gods	Late Wanli period A.D.1573-1620

Longxian An 龙显庵 Wandong Si 湾东寺, prviously 湾头寺	Longwang 龙王 Buddha	A.D.1861 The Jin dyansty
Dasheng Si 大圣寺, also named as 院东寺	Buddha	Unknown, rebulit in the Song dynasty
Chanjiao Si 禅教寺 Bashan Si [上巴下山]山寺	Buddha Buddha	Unknown Unknown
Ganquan si 甘泉寺, previously 广润院	Buddha	Unknown, rebulit in the Song, Ming and the Qing
Kaizhen Guan 开真观, Donghua Gong 东华宫	Taoist Gods Taoist gods	The Yuan dynasty The Jin dynasty
Yuhuang Ge 玉皇阁	Yuhuang	The Yuan dynasty
Xinglong Si 兴隆寺	Buddha	The Yuan dynasty

A total of fifty-one sites for the worship of Buddhist, Taoist, and popular deities are listed here. Buddhism and Taoism as universal and better organized religions across China obviously formed a majority among these sites, while the others all had connections with local history or geographical settings.

In *Chiping Xianzhi* 茌平县志 (The Gazetteer of Chiping County), official worship and popular worship were clearly two separate matters. The Kangxi 康熙 era (1662-1722) edition of this gazetteer gives a list of those officially worshipped. They were:

Table 2: Official Worship Objects in Chiping County

name of sites	to worship
Dacheng Zhisheng Xianshi Dian Qisheng Ci 大成至圣先师殿启圣祠	the father of Confucius
Wenchang Ge 文昌阁	Wenchang

Minghuan Ci 名宦祠
Xiangxian Ci 乡贤祠
Sheji Tan 社稷坛
Feng Yun Lei Yu Shan Chuan Chenghuang
Tan 风云雷雨山川城隍坛

Yili Tan 邑厉坛

Bala Miao 八蜡庙
Guan Yu 关帝庙
Mashen Miao 马神庙
Lu Zhonglian Ci 鲁仲连祠

famous officials
local men of virtue
the god of earth and grains
wind, clouds, thunder,
mountains, rivers, and the
god of cities
wandering ghosts nobody else
would care about
various dieties and spirits
Guanyu 关羽
the god of horse
Lu Zhonglian, a righteous
person of Shandong in the
Waring States period

These deities can all be linked to Confucian ideas.
The preface to the religious section of this gazetteer
states the principle of selection:

Worship is an important issue in a country. Wherever
people live, worship should be performed. What should
be worshipped is first of all the great teacher of
rites, Confucius; secondly the major local gods;
thirdly people who contributed greatly to the nation
as scholars or officials.⁶

Thus, official worship was to enhance state
administration and was focused on politically related
deities.

Official worship changes in history. According to a
later version of the gazetteer of Chiping county, most of

⁶ Wang Shichen 王世臣, *Kangxi Chiping Xianzhi* 康熙荏平县志
(Gazetteer of Chiping County Edited in the Kangxi Period), in
ZGDFZCS, pp.153-4. The worshipped in Bala Miao were practiced at
the end of a yea. The worshipped included all kinds of spiritual
beings, such as river, mountain, tigers, cats, even insects. See
Shenyi dian 神异典 (records of deities and extraordinary beings),
p.371-5, in *GJTSJC*; anonymous "Bala Miao Ji 八蜡庙记 (On Bala
Temple)" in *GJTSJC*, vol. 8, p.1478, and vol. 9, p.1865.

the above-mentioned official worshipping sites had been abolished by the early 20th century, except for temples of Confucius and Guan Yu. Dead republican revolutionists, instead, replaced the other traditional officially worshipped subjects. The same source also gives us statistics of the popular worship sites in this county, including those already ruined by the time this gazetteer was written. According to the names of these sites, only three officially worshipped deities, namely Guan Yu, Houji 后稷, and Shennong 神农, were worshipped by commoners. There was one temple to worship Mencius together with a non-Confucian political figure, Mengchang Jun 孟尝君. The number of Buddhist monasteries recorded is twenty-six, plus Guanyin Tang 观音堂 (Avalokitesvara Hall), which is described as being "many, every big town and market center has it." Taoist temples number at least eight. Beyond official worship sites and Buddhist and Taoist monasteries, there were other popular worship sites:⁷

⁷ Niu Zhancheng 牛占城, et al., *Chiping Xianzhi* 茌平县志 (Gazetteer of Chiping County), 1935, in *ZGDFZCS*, pp.357-65. Some of these worship sites might under certain influence of Taoism or even Buddhism.

Table 3: Popular Worship Sites in Chiping County

name of temples	to worship	number of sites
Tianfei Gong 天妃宫	Tianhou 天后, a goddess of sea	1
Sanhuang Ge 三皇阁	Sanhuang 三皇	1
Tianqi Miao 天齐庙		1
Longmu Gong 龙母宫	Longmu 龙母, dragon Queen	2
Miluo Ge 弥罗阁		1
Yaowang Miao 药王庙	Yaowang 药王	3
Tudi Miao 土地庙	Tudi 土地, local gods of earth	in most villages
Luban ci 鲁班祠	Luban 鲁班, the god of carpenter and architecture	1
Bixia Gong 碧霞宫	Bixia Yuanjun	1
Cui Fujun Miao 崔府君庙		2
Ermeng Miao 二孟庙	Mencius and Mengchang Jun 孟尝君	1
Erlang Miao 二郎庙	Erlang Shen 二郎神	2
Sanxian Miao 三贤庙		2
Shennong Miao 神农庙	Shennong 神农, god of agriculture	1
Jiusheng Miao 九圣庙		12
Sanjiao Tang 三教堂		1
Sanyi Miao 三义庙		1
Taishan Xinggong 泰山行宫	The God of the Mountain Tai	1
Zhunti ge 准提阁		1
Maihuang Miao 麦皇庙		1
Shiwang Miao 十王庙		3
Sanguan Miao 三官庙	Sanguan	35
Ciji Yuan 慈济院		1
total		75 excluding Tudi Miao

The same source mentions that merchants worshipped the God of Money at home, which was actually Guan Yu in this county rather than Marshal Zhao 赵公元帅, who was worshipped as the god of money in many other areas. Every family worshipped the God of the Kitchen 灶王, who was believed to have Zhang as his family name. Wealthy

families would worship the Gods of the Gate, whose names were usually Qin Qiong 秦琼 and Yuchi Gong 尉迟恭.⁸

Not only is the large number of worship sites for a single county impressive, but the diversity of worshipped deities is equally significant. We can see that in Chiping, Buddhism and Taoism were popular. Nevertheless, they did not dominate popular worship. Other popularly worshipped deities existed in large numbers. Imagine that these worship sites were distributed in towns and villages, it would be difficult to see people in any two towns or villages with exactly the same subjects to worship. Only Guan Yu, Tudi, and Guanyin were common in most towns and villages.⁹

Another noteworthy phenomenon is the "joint worship," so called by Timothy Brook, of Confucius, Buddha, and Laozi. There was a temple named Sanjiao Tang 三教堂 (Three Teachings Hall) in Chiping. Sanjiao, three

⁸ Ibid., pp.188-9. By the 1930s, because of the revolutionary policies of the Republican government, many of the above-listed sites were used for school education or industry.

⁹ Guan Yu was a deity who was worshipped by both the governments and commoners. However official worship of Guan Yu was for his character of loyalty, while in the rural Shandong he was usually a God of Money. See Shan Man 山曼, et al., *Shandong Minsu* 山东民俗 (Folk Customs in Shandong) (Jinan: Shandong youyi chubanshe, 1988), p.355.

religions, in late imperial China referred to Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Commoners were practicing the three religions as a combined whole. When the three were combined in one concept, none of them could keep its pureness. This has been asserted by Brook clearly.

The ordinary men and women who supported the practice of joint worship were far more willing to accept diverse, even contradictory, elements from different religions into a single body of veneration, giving primacy to none. For them, the touchstone of belief was not true or false, Confucian or non-Confucian, but efficacious or inefficacious. Joint worship was a matter of improving efficacy, increasing human odds against the universe. It was a way of shaping given traditions to evolving devotional ends and transcending the compartments into which the elite theorized the Three Teachings, as well as transcending the political order which dictated the distinctions among them.¹⁰

Interestingly enough, it was in such a way that Confucianism was able to influence common people in rural areas. Similar temples existed in other counties as well. In the suburbs of Jinan, for instance, there was a Sanjiao Tang and three temples named Sanjiao Si

三教寺 (Temple of Three Teachings).¹¹ Another Sanjiao

¹⁰ See Timothy Brook, "Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and Their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 1993:21, 13-44.

¹¹ *GJTSJC*, vol., 9, p.1872-3. The Chinese word *tang* is translated as "hall," while *si* is translated as "temple." Originally, *si* referred to Buddhist sites and *tang* might be used more flexibly.

Si and a Sanjiao Tang existed in Zouping 邹平 county.¹² Similar statistics have also been provided by other local gazetteers of Shandong Province, such as Yexian Zhi 掖县志 and Zhanhua Xianzhi 沾化县志, as well as some lost gazetteers mentioned in *GJTSJC*.¹³

The case of Nanhe 南和 county in Hebei is noteworthy. There was a Sishou Tang 斯受堂 built up in 1661. The sponsor of this construction was a *shengyuan*. A local educational official contributed the introduction inscribed on a tablet. In this hall, Confucius, Buddha, and Laozi were together worshipped. In 1744, based on an order from the top to clean up *sanjiao zhiming* 三教之名

Here, however, these two words do not really have different meaning at all. Another Chinese word *miao* 庙 is also commonly translated as temple. It, however, may refer to Buddhist sites, or, sites of other popular religions. See note 15.

¹² Ibid., vol., 9, p.1874. Professor Judith A. Berling described the Three Teachings Religion of Lin Chao-en 林朝恩 (1517-1598) in southeast region, especially Fujian Province. See Judith A. Berling, "Religion and Popular Culture: The Management of Moral Capital in *The Romance of the Three Teachings*," in David Johnson, et al., ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, p.196. However, there is no clue available so far indicating whether or not the Three Teachings Halls in the North were connected to Lin Chao-en's doctrines. In other words, the appearance of Three Teaching Halls might also be encouraged by intellectuals, such as Wang Ji 王畿 (1497-1582), who approved the unity of the three teachings. Wang Ji visited such a hall and wrote a essay for it. see next section of this chapter.

¹³ See Zhang Simian 张思勉, *Yexian Zhi* 掖县志 (Gazetteer of Ye County), 1758; also see Zhang Huiyi 张会一, et ca., *Zhanhua Xianzhi* 沾化县志 (Gazetteer of Zhanhua County), 1931. Both of them are available in *ZGDFZCS*. Similar information of other counties is assessable by looking at *Zhifang dian* 职方典 (Record of Geography) of *GJTSJC*, which contains quotations or re-edited sections of some no longer existing local gazetteers..

(the name of so called three religions), the magistrate Zhou Zhanghuan 周章焕 removed the Buddha and Laozi to other places from this hall and changed Sishou Tang into a school.¹⁴ This suggests that in the 17th century, the mixture of Confucianism with other religions was common but this practice became restricted by the Qing government in the 18th century.

The situation in Wanping 宛平 county, close to central Beijing, described by Shen Bang 沈榜, the head of that county in the late Ming period, may lead to more insight in this regard. Beyond sites for official worship, Wanping had a total of 604 monasteries during the late Ming period.¹⁵ They were divided into seven types:

Table 4: Categories of Monasteries in Wanping County

type in name)	total number	in city	in rural areas
Si 寺 (temple)	211	72	139
An 庵 (chapel)	140	77	63
Tang 堂 (hall)	13	4	9
Gong 宫 (temple)	6	3	3
Guang 观 (Taoist temple)	21	7	14

¹⁴ Zhou Zhanghuan, et al., *Nanhe xian zhi* 南和县志 (Gazetteer of Nanhe County), 18th century, juan 3, 6a, in *ZGDFZCS*.

¹⁵ Shen Bang 沈榜 counted the number as 575 in a note. However the right number based on the detailed names list of those temples should be 604 in total. See Shen Bang, *Wanshu zaji* 宛署杂记 (Miscellaneous Notes of the Magistrate of Wanping County) (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1982), pp.223-35.

Miao 庙 (temple)	206	77	129
Ci 祠 (shrine)	7	2	5
	604	242	362

According to Shen Bang, the first three types were Buddhist monasteries. The fourth and fifth types were Taoist monasteries. The last two types were other popular religions. Thus, we have the following breakdown by religions.¹⁶

Table 5: Distribution of Monasteries in Wanping County

type	total	in city	in rural	city/% of total	rural/% of total
Buddhist	364	153	211	42.03	57.97
Taoist	27	10	17	37.04	62.96
others	213	79	134	37.09	62.91
	604	242	362	40.07	59.93

A comparison of the locations of the three categories of monasteries shows that Taoist and other monasteries were more likely to exist in the rural areas than were Buddhist ones. Shen Bang, the magistrate of Wanping, makes another comparison, stating that there were tens of

¹⁶ What Shen Bang said should be the situation of this county when he held office there. Exceptions existed in late imperial China. For example, *gong* could also refer to Buddhist monasteries, such as Yonghe Gong 雍和宫 in Beijing. *Miao* was also used to refer to Buddhist monasteries, such as Bada Miao 八大庙 (The eight great temples), which were the eight Lamaist monasteries in Chengde 承德 of Hebei.

thousands of people living in these monasteries while the students in official schools were numbered only several dozen.¹⁷

The huge number of monasteries and their variety shows only part of the religious picture of north China in the 17th century. Some beliefs, such as Shamanism, did not develop an organization but were practiced by individuals. According to records in *GJTSJC*, Shamanism was extremely popular among the commoners in north China. Wu 巫, shamans, were trusted to give protection from all suspicious phenomena, including diseases. The following are only some examples of the customs in Hebei and Shandong summarized from *GJTSJC*.

a. In Zhending 真定, worship was popular. People believed in ghosts and deities. For sickness, most people did not take medicine but call a Shaman to drive away the trouble makers.¹⁸

b. In Shunde 顺德, people believed in Shamans and respected ghosts. Weird religions were popular.¹⁹

c. In Guangping 广平, people believed in Shamans and respected ghosts. Various temples existed.²⁰

¹⁷ Shen Bang, *Wanshu zaji*, p.237.

¹⁸ *GJTSJC*, vol. 8, p.1004-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1130.

d. In Huaxian 滑县, the popularity of female Shamans was one of the major social problems of the county.²¹

e. In Ziyang 滋阳, Shamanism was popular. A kind of Shaman performance was called *duangong xi* 端工戏, where a man would make up his face and dress like a lady.²²

f. In Yizhou 沂州, When people were sick, instead of seeing a doctor, they would invite a Shaman to help them.²³

g. In Tancheng 郑城, more than half of the population respected ghosts and believed in Shamans. When people were sick, rather than taking medicine, they invited a Shaman to look after them. Female Shamans were called *guniang* 姑娘.²⁴

In the 1980s, some Chinese anthropologists concluded, after an extensive field investigation, that popular religions in Shandong are normally not regulated by orthodox religious sects. The concept that all creatures have souls is very popular. Most religious

²⁰ Ibid., p.1243.

²¹ Ibid., p.1344.

²² Ibid., vol. 9, p.2138.

²³ Ibid., p.2150.

²⁴ Ibid. *Guniang* in modern Chinese means "girls," especially those who are virgins. Here, however, its literary meaning is "aunt." Examples can be seen in *Xingshi*, pp.835,842. More discussion about female Shamans will be given in Chapter V.

beliefs clearly have the same nature as ancient religions. People choose what to do in their religious activities according to what they need.²⁵

The same anthropologists further assert:

Deities worshipped popularly are many, including the personal heaven, earth, and tens of thousands of other items, fictional gods from folk stories, and even real people who were believed to have become fairy gods. In popular society, people usually do not distinguish which particular religion those deities or gods belong to. Rather, according to their needs, people freely remake the existing deities and create new deities. The origins of many deities are difficult to tell. Their duties and responsibilities are also confusing, and there are no formal regulations of services to be practiced.²⁶

Beyond those established religions, other religious beliefs such as 风水 (geomancy) were also very popular in the North as in the Southeast.²⁷

2. Popular Religions and the State

Such a diversified religious reality challenged the cultural and spiritual unity of late imperial China, which might, in turn, lead to trouble for the state in its control of society. The state, accordingly, tried to make

²⁵ Shan Man, et al., *Shandong minsu*, p.345.

²⁶ Ibid., p.347.

²⁷ See Zhang Han 张翰, *Songchuang mengyu* 松窗梦语 (Dream Essays by the Pine Window) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p.92.

use of popular religions, including Buddhist and Taoist institutions. On the other hand, it kept close eye on non-Confucian religious organizations and took them under political control. The underlying tension between Confucian statecraft and various religious practices of the commoners was obvious in late imperial China.

Confucian religious activities focused on using religions to rule people instead of pleasing gods. This idea was reflected in the description by a Qing magistrate in the gazetteer of Dong'e 东阿 county in Shandong:

In ancient times, deities and people lived together. People were therefore confused. That was why the great sage kings benefited people first, then looked after deities. To respect deities was the way to respect people. Government made ritual regulations to conciliate the hundreds of deities, that were recorded in the Huidian 会典 (administrative laws) of the country and known by people. The most important worship is that for the great teacher Confucius, while heaven and earth are of secondary importance followed by deities that contributed to people or protected [people] from serious disasters. Respecting virtue and contributions [in worship] is the way to look after people...Taoist and Buddhist temples, even though not listed in formal official regulations, can improve the landscape of a county, provide viewpoints to visit, or pray for [people's] benefits. The ancient rite says: since it is there, do not abandon it...²⁸

²⁸ Wu Yi 吴怡, ed., Dong'e xiangzhi 东阿县志 (Gazetteer of Dong'e County), in ZGDFZCS, p.297.

The messages given by this magistrate are important. First of all, state worship of deities was eventually a way to deal with people; the worship of a deity did not necessarily mean that "the worshippers believed in the worshipped. Secondly, government is a higher authority than those deities. That was why various deities could be the objects of worship without the necessity of worrying about their competitors, and why the word conciliate 怀柔 was used. Deities were ranked according to their contributions, which was very much the same way to deal with officials. Finally, Buddhist and Taoist monasteries, were not considered orthodox and they were maintained mainly for their scenic value because people wanted them. This kind of worship showed respect for, rather than subjection to the worshipped. Based on these principles, the government regulated responsibilities for hereditary worship and rights in society. A statement written in the Ming says:

The emperors worship the god of the heaven, the god of the earth, and the gods of the great mountains and rivers in the country. Princes and prefecture and county heads worship local mountains, rivers, and gods. Ordinary people worship their ancestors and the rural earth and grain gods. The rites differ from the

top to the bottom. This is the way of dealing with gods.²⁹

Such a sense of hierarchy regarding responsibility for worship makes Chinese religions different from Christianity. There was no one "true and only" god to be worshipped by all members in society in China. There was, accordingly, a great deal of room for commoners to take any spiritual entity as their objects of worship. As far as Confucianism was concerned, the government told the commoners that it was not their business!

Shen Bang, the late Ming magistrate of Wanping, did not believe in Buddhism, Taoism, or other popular religious traditions. Nevertheless, he was glad to use these popular religions to help his administration. To Shen Bang, some ignorant men and women could not be educated by reason and could not be regulated by law. Those people, however, were easily kept under control with stories of retribution. It was just like, Shen continued, a surly child who is difficult to discipline through talk and physical punishment, but easily calmed with delicious food. This was where Buddhism and Taoism could help the state. In particular, Shen Bang noted that

²⁹Ibid., p.304. Early Qing Confucian thinker Yan Yuan also discuss this issue. See the following section of this chapter.

because of the limited number of official titles and stipends, few people could succeed through state service. There had to be other ways to satisfy the people. Buddhism and Taoism were open to everybody no matter what level of virtue and intelligence. According to Sheng Bang:

These two religions swallow dirt and garbage like this. How could we say that they are not able to make up the deficiency of our laws?³⁰

The role of non-Confucian religions, to this Confucian official, was very much like the role of the sewage system in a modern city.

The well-known late Ming scholar Chen Jiru

陈继儒 (1558-1639) viewed Buddhism as a large *yangji yuan* 养济院 (relief house) of the government. He argued:

Our Ming dynasty established relief houses to support those whom no one else would look after. However, a sub-prefecture or a county can maximally support only one or two hundred disabled people. Beyond those people, there are tens of thousands of young and strong people who cannot get enough food, cannot get warm clothes, and cannot get married. Thanks to Buddhism these people can be looked after. . . Is it possible to make every poor man marry? It is left to Buddhism to make them into monks, living peacefully. Is it possible to make everyone a business person? Buddhism sets up temples to collect the wandering people. Is it possible to provide everyone with splendid clothes and meat? Thanks to Buddhism, these people are begging everywhere for food and forgetting their desires. Is it possible to make everyone read?

³⁰ Shen Bang, *Wanshu zaji*, p.236.

It remains for Buddhism to teach scriptures and educate people. Is it possible to make everyone travel with sufficient expenses? It is left to Buddhism to accept people from all places. To prevent the gathered people from causing trouble, Buddhism builds up discipline to regulate people. To control hearts against crazy desires, asceticism is practiced. To avoid fighting among those young people, mercy and toleration are taught. To keep monks distinguishable from laymen, monks have shaved heads. [Buddhism] is not only supporting those poor men but also teaching them for the emperor. If there was not Buddhism to look after those people, there would have been many more beggars, bandits and thieves. The government would have to give a lot more relief and taken a lot more precautions. What Buddhism has done is to save the energy of the government... Before the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, there were many sages and not so many people. So, even the law of the kings was not necessary, not to mention the application of Buddhism. After the three dynasties, the well-field land system was abolished and people left their normal places easily. Kinship was abolished. Clans could not unify their members any more. The positions of Dangzheng 党正 (head of neighborhood) and Zushi 族师 (leader of clans) were abandoned, leading to the loosening of close neighborhood and close clan connections. When there was an emergency, people could get help from nowhere but went to Buddhism to survive. Therefore, believers in Buddhism have been getting more and more numerous. It is not simply that more people are going to Buddhism, the population itself has been getting larger. Because there are few sages and more people now, heaven and earth cannot look after everybody and every family. Therefore, Confucianism assumes the duty of looking after gentry and educated men. Buddhism looks after those without families. Taoism, with its theory of immortality, works in between to gather people left by Buddhism and many poor men survive relying on it. Buddhism shares the job of Confucianism. Taoism shares the work of Buddhism. The grace of heaven and earth and the sages' idea of making use of existing religions to educate people can not be greater.³¹

³¹ Chen Jiru 陈继儒, *Kuangfu zhiyan* 狂夫之言 (The words of A Crazy

In this view, Buddhism and Taoism were instrumental in enabling the Confucian rulers to rule the non-Confucian lower classes, to save expenses, to avoid rebellions, and to keep a popular morality. From the point of view of state control, the use of other popular religions was similar: non-Confucian religions, especially in rural China, were necessary to the government.

Although Buddhism and Taoism could serve as vehicles of Confucian statecraft, they were in many aspects contradictory to Confucian values and philosophy. The home of Confucius, Qufu 曲阜, was described as the only county where there were no Buddhist or Taoist monasteries. According to the "Fengsu kao"

风俗考 (references of customs) of Yanzhou Prefecture to which Qufu county belonged:

There are no *si* or *guan* in the territory of this county. People do not get monks to serve in funerals and memorial ceremonies. Buddhist monks and Taoist priests dare not come into this county because this is the hometown of Confucius.³²

In "Cimiao kao" 祠庙考 (references of shrines and temples) of Yanzhou prefecture, however, one Buddhist

Man), in CSJCCB , p.36-8.

³² GJTSJC, vol., 9, p.2138.

temple named Shimen Si 石门寺 (Stone Gate Temple) in Mt. Shimen fifty li away from Qufu city is listed under Qufu county. An appended comment by the editor of *GJTSJC* says:

Now, luxury temples are found everywhere in the world. Qufu is the only county without Buddhist and Taoist temples. Why? Maybe it is because the sage hated those heretical beliefs and does not allow them to get close to his place.³³

There is nothing to explain why people said that there were no Buddhist temples in Qufu while one is listed. When we consider, nevertheless, that in other counties in North China there were approximately 15 to 50, or even more, of that type of temples, Qufu was really a unique area in maintaining the domination of Confucianism.³⁴

Such a phenomenon clearly indicates that although Buddhism and Taoism could be used by Confucian politicians, orthodox Confucians were still not comfortable with the "heretical" nature of Buddhism and Taoism. In the gazetteer of Jizhou 冀州 (in Hebei), the editor mentions five evil things in this county, among them is *xiejiao* 邪教 (evil religions), which particularly refers to Buddhism in this context. The evils of Buddhism are mentioned as: gathering people together to read

³³ *GJTSJC*, vol., 9, p.2166.

³⁴ For the lists of temples in every counties or prefectures, see the "Zhifang dian", in *GJTUJC*.

scriptures, mixing men and women together, and confusing the illiterate.³⁵

Some popularized sects of Buddhism were considered especially harmful. For example, the editor of the gazetteer of Yanzhou 兗州 stated that people had been attracted by the White Lotus and Wuwei 无为 (actionless sect) which was a starting point of disorder.³⁶ In Guangping 广平 prefecture of Bei Zhili, Wenxiang 闻香 (Fragrance Smelling) and Wuwei sects were active. Nine out of ten families were involved in various "evil religions," that were viewed as potential for rebellions.³⁷

Organized folk religious sects were considered by the Ming and Qing to be harmful to the existing social order. Nevertheless, during the 17th century, north China saw a significant development of these type of sects.³⁸ Well-known sects active in the North include the following.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, vol., 8, p.1006.

³⁶ See *GJTSJC*, vol., 9, p.2137.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, p.1244.

³⁸ This development was not uniquely in the North. According to Daniel L. Overmyer, the last decades of the Ming dynasty, which is the early 17th century, sectarian religious activity reached its high point in China. See Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.ix.

Huangtian Jiao 黄天教 (The Yellow Heaven Teaching) was founded by Li Bin 李宾, who later obtained a Buddhist name Pu Ming 普明. Li was a native of Hebei, a peasant and later a soldier in the Ming army. After retiring from the army, he founded *Huangtian Jiao* in Wanquan Wei 万全卫 in 1553. Li Bin's teaching was a mixture of lay views of Taoism, Buddhism, and some concepts of Confucian ethics written in the form of *baojuan* 宝卷 (precious scrolls) in a simple language that was easy for the commoners to understand. A document of *Huangtian*, dated 1674-1683, indicates that by that time the leader of this sect had developed a political ambition to establish a Li dynasty. In the 18th century, the Qing government suppressed the *Huangtian* sect as part of the limiting of "evil religions."³⁹

³⁹ This paragraph was based on Ma Xisha 马西沙 "Huangtian Jiao yuanliu kaolue 黄天教源流考略 (The Origin and Development of the Yellow Heaven)," *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu*, 世界宗教研究, 1985:2, 1-18. Ma Xisha was different from Richard Hon-chu Shek by arguing that *Huangtian Jiao* was not a religious organization which did not have any rebellious idea. Also refer to Richard Shek, "Millenarianism without Rebellion: The *Huangtian Dao* in North China," *Modern China*, vol. 8, No. 3, July 1982. In that study, Shek emphasized several characteristics of the popular religious sectarianism of the 16th and 17th century which were in common with the intellectual spiritualization represented by Wang Yangming and his followers. Shek also provided more detailed description of *Luo Jiao* in the same study.

Luo Jiao 罗教, also called *Wuwei Jiao* 无为教, was founded in north China by a Shandong native, Luo Qing 罗青 (?-1527). Luo Jiao was closer to Buddhism although some elements of Taoism can be found in its doctrine.⁴⁰

Wenxiang Jiao, founded by Wang Seng 王森 in Luanxian 滦县 of Bei Zhili. According to Richard Hon-chun Shek, it was established on the base of occult magic and Buddhism.

Yuandun Jiao 圆顿教 (Round Enlightenment), founded by another native of Bei Zhili named Zhang 张 (Gong Chang 弓长) during the Wanli period (1573-1620) of the Ming, under influence of *Wenxiang Jiao* and *Huangtian Jiao*.

Bagua Jiao 八卦教 (The Eight Diagrams) was founded by a Henan native, Liu Zuochen 刘左臣, in Shandong during the early years of the Kangxi period (1662-1722). Also

⁴⁰ See Richard Hon-chun Shek, *Religion and Society in Late Ming: Sectarianism and Popular Thought in sixteenth-Seventeenth Century China*, pp.203-51. Also, see Daniel L. Overmyer, "Values in Ming and Ch'ing Pao-chuan," in David Johnson, et al., ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp.222-7. Overmyer examined the teaching of Lo and noted: "Whatever the role of Ch'an elements in Lo's teachings, the five scriptures he wrote are eclectic and based on a wide variety of sources, including not only Buddhist sūtras, but also vernacular catechisms, several earlier pao-chuan, miscellaneous Buddhist texts such as biographies, genealogies, and interpretations of texts, and Taoist and Confucian classics. As Sakai Writes, 'Lo was evidently a student of such books as these, which were very popular among the common people [in the Ming period]." See Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditoanl China*, p.115.

influenced by Huangtian Jiao, the sect worshipped the Sun.⁴¹

Bailian Jiao 白蓮教 (White Lotus), a traditional religious organization in late imperial China that played a crucial role in overthrowing the Yuan dynasty in the 14th century. Apparently quiet, but by no means non-existent during the early years of the Ming, it became active in the 17th century in north China. Led by Xu Hongru 徐鴻儒 in 1622, Bailian rebelled and soon overran the southwestern part of Shandong. It was soon suppressed, but the Ming suffered serious damage from it. According to Shek, over one hundred thousand people joined the rebels.⁴² The doctrine of Bailian was originally based on Buddhism and characterized by a belief in the Maitreya Buddha. Reflecting the religious pluralism of the commoners, the late Ming *Bailian* was influenced by *Luo Jiao* and worshipped Wusheng Laomu 无生老母 (Venerable Unborn Mother) as well. There were

⁴¹ See David Johnson, et al., ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp.222-7; Richard Hon-chun Shek, *Religion and Society in Late Ming: Sectarianism and Popular Thought in Sixteenth-Seventeenth Century China*, pp.353-5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.352.

close connections between Bailian and Huangtian Jiao and other sects.⁴³

There is something in common among these religious sects. They all had mixed religious concepts absorbed from several sources, especially Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and folk religions. This phenomenon shows that the commoners of China tended to be exposed to various religious ideals without differentiating them. Such a synthetic tradition of the Chinese commoners is a persistent core of Chinese popular culture. It is revived, if it was ever interrupted, in the last decade of the 20th century in the emergence of the so called *Qilin Wenhua* 麒麟文化 (unicorn culture) in China. *Qilin Wenhua* was the interpretative system founded in the early 1990s by Zhang Hongbao 张宏堡, a young fellow from northeast China, who claims to be the *zongshi* 宗师 (founder-master) of a huge organization that follows his doctrine. In the following illustration for this organization, the legendary animal *Qilin*, as the symbol

⁴³ About the role of Xu Hongru's sect in late Ming popular religious activities, see Richard Hon-chun Shek, *Religion and Society in late Ming*. For more detailed study about the White Lotus in late imperial China, see Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (Yale University Press, 1981).

of this semi-religious sect, that has "dragon's head, pig's nose, snake's shell, deer's body, tiger's back, bear's waist, ox' feet, and lion's tail" is portrayed. The way of meditation of this sect has been openly described as a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism, medical science, Confucianism, and marshal arts."

Plate 1: Unicorn Culture



" See Yang Shaoping 杨少平, ed., *Ziran de xiaosheng: Zhang Hongbao he tade Qilin Wenhua tixi* 自然的箫声:张宏堡和他的麒麟文化体系 (The Voice of Nature: Zhang Hongbao and His Unicorn Cultural System) (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1991), pp.28-9.

Plate 2 is the Xuanji Tu 玄极图 (ultimate mystery) in Zhang Hongbao's theory. Based on Taoist Taiji, this shows stronger force of absorption from outside, symbolizing the synthetic tradition of Chinese popular religions.

Plate 2: Xuanji Tu⁴⁵



简洁的旋极图，宗师赋予了它丰富的内涵和深刻的哲理。它不仅揭示了物种的起源，还道出了法子阴阳、阴阳互根、阴中有阳、阳中有阴、负阴抱阳、负阳抱阴、孤阴不生、独阳不长等基本规律，同时还指出了质量互变律、旋回律、阳极生阴、阴极生阳的相反律，指示了把握阴阳、保持阴阳平衡和实现阴阳转化的途径，揭示了万事万物运行轨迹都是螺旋式上升、蠕动式前进、循环往复、永不停止的规律，道出了做事要掌握以中为度的原则。旋极图还揭示了螺旋未必都是上升，任何事物必须依照开放、吸收、发展而不是封闭、排斥、保守，才能不断向前。深刻哲理，旋极图是麒麟文化对生命奥秘和宇宙规律认识上飞跃的重要标志。

⁴⁵ Ibid. Zhang Hongbao is by no means a thinker. What this so called Xuanji Tu demonstrates is the capability of the ordinary Chinese to make use of all existing thoughts. To see the similarity and difference between this Xuanji Tu and the Taiji Tu 太极图 of the Song Confucians, see also Feng Youlan 冯友兰, *Zhongguo zhhexueshi 中国哲学史* (A History of Chinese Philosophy) (Taipei: Shangwu, 1993), pp. 820-30.

Unlike Confucianism which was trying to take Buddhist and Taoist concepts to regenerate itself, the 17th century popular religions in north China were more thoroughly influenced by non-Confucian beliefs, although some aspects of Confucian ethics might be contained in their doctrines. Apparently popular among the commoners in the North, these sects encouraged women to participate in public religious gatherings and activities. This caused serious damage to the Confucian ethical code regarding females. Apart from officially patronized religions, these popular religious sects, in different degrees, had characteristics of secret societies. They were viewed as harmful to the existing social order, especially after the political consolidation of the early Qing period. For major sects to be involved in rebellious uprisings was not a rare thing. The White Lotus uprising in 1622 led by Xu Hongru in Shandong is merely one example.

3. Controversial Intellectual Perspectives on

Non-Confucian Beliefs

Seventeenth-century Chinese central and local government was utilitarian in dealing with popular

religions. Accordingly, whether or not the officials believed them to be true religions was of little importance. The key concept was whether those religions were useful or not for state administration. Intellectuals in general, by contrast, took this as a more serious matter. Some intellectuals of that time agreed with the unity of the three teachings, while others attacked this tendency as the destroyer of the whole Confucian tradition. Absorbing ideas from Buddhism and Taoism to reform Confucianism was nothing new since the establishment of Neo-Confucianism, neither was the criticism on this type of absorption. Learning from other religions was one thing, but unity with other religions was another. This was where the leading Song Confucians differed from many late Ming Confucians. The premier founder of Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi 朱熹, for example, studied Buddhism and Taoism and took quite a few ideas from these religions. Nevertheless, in terms of intellectual authority, he accepted only Confucianism. In other words, Neo-Confucians would take ideas from other religions but would not accept those religions as

their religions.⁴⁶ Wang Yangming's teaching draws heavily on the Buddhist concept of sudden enlightenment. The Taizhou 泰州 School of Wang Yangming's followers, especially Wang Ji 王畿, openly recognized that Buddhism and Taoism were not heretical beliefs and that Confucians needed to study those two religions.⁴⁷ Li Zhi 李贽, a radical thinker in Wang Yangming's School of Mind, even became a Buddhist monk.⁴⁸

Some Ming intellectuals went further and provoked debates. Yu Shenxing 于慎行 (1545-1608) viewed the three ways of thinking (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism) as equally important. He argued:

The teachings of the two religions [Buddhism and Taoism] are different from those of Confucianism. However, they are leading ultimately in the same direction. If scholars in this world can carefully study them without discrimination, they may find that those religions are useful for self-cultivation and even for politics. Are they really different from Confucianism?⁴⁹

⁴⁶ We can read from Zhu Xi criticism of Song Neo-Confucianism of Buddhism and Taoism. See Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁴⁷ Wang Ji "Sanjiao Tang ji 三教堂记 (On The Hall of Three Religions)," See Zhou Qingtang 周庆塘, *Jing-ping-mei beijing yanjiu 金瓶梅背景研究* (A Background Study of the The Golden Lotus), Master theses, Guoli Taiwan Daxue, 1983, p.126.

⁴⁸ See Li Zhi, *Chutan ji 初潭集* (Early Essays by the Longtan River) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 1974.

⁴⁹ Yu Shenxing 于慎行, *Gushan bichen 穀山笔尘* (Desultory Notes of Gushan) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), pp.200-1.

He Liangjun 何良俊, in his discussion of Buddhism and Taoism, quotes a saying of the Beiqi 北齐 period (550-577) when Confucianism was overshadowed by Buddhism, saying that Buddhism is the sun, Taoism is the moon, and Confucianism is the five stars.⁵⁰ Moreover, after introducing a Buddhist teaching about evil and good, He Liangjun comments:

How profound is this teaching! Were our teacher Confucius here, he would have shown his respect. How could people in the world discuss [Buddhism] carelessly?⁵¹

To this influential writer, Confucianism was not really superior to Buddhism.⁵²

Another perspective viewed Confucianism as the way to rule the world, while Taoism and Buddhism were the ways to cultivate oneself. In *Yueling Xianzhi* 乐陵县志, the author writes

Taoism and Buddhism were not mentioned by Confucians. Even so, they were enough to cultivate personal perfection although they were not enough to rule the world.⁵³

⁵⁰ He Liangjun 何良俊, *Siyoushai Congshuo* 四友斋丛说 (Compendium of Interpretation from the Four-Friend Studio) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), p.187.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.190-1.

⁵² Ibid., pp.187-8.

⁵³ Zhuang Zhaokui and Zheng Chengzhong 庄肇奎, 郑成中, *Yueling xianzhi* 乐陵县志 (Gazetteer of Yueling County), 1762, in *ZGDFZCS*, p.801.

Similar attitudes existed among Confucian intellectuals regarding other spiritual things. For example, the Confucian scholar Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 says:

Confucius said that there are no ghosts and gods. He said that to keep people away from flattering those beings is fine. Nevertheless, to say that there are no ghosts and gods is wrong...If there are no ghosts and gods, there are no ancestors. Confucianism does not abolish family worship. How can we say there are no ghosts and gods.⁵⁴

Accordingly, Zhou Lianggong believed in Karma and retribution. He even asserted that three generations of Luo Guanzhong 罗贯中's descendants had "husky voices" as a retribution for Luo's writing the novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (The Water Margin), a story of rebellion. He warned that those who wrote immoral books would receive more serious punishment.⁵⁵ Zhang Han, who was among the Buddhist and Taoist influenced Confucians, also accepted spiritual things.⁵⁶

The *Shandong Tongzhi* 山东通志 (Comprehensive Gazetteer of Shandong) edited in early Qing presented a similar perspective.

⁵⁴ Zhou Lianggong 周亮工, *Suying* 书影 (Reflection of Books), pp.214-5.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.15. Modern researchers are usually attributing *Shuihu zhuan* to another writer named Shi Naian 施耐庵.

⁵⁶ Zhang Han, *Songchuang mengyu*, p.117.

Confucians do not talk about the teachings of the two religions [Buddhism and Taoism]. However, hundreds of biographies have been written about them. Are people who write about that all stupid, saying crazy things?⁵⁷

The Qing government kept the traditional utilitarian attitude towards religions. Confucianism was adopted as a necessary condition to get the support of the Han gentry. Meanwhile, Shamanist ceremonies were carried on regularly among the Manchu royal family and the nobles as a traditional official activity. Buddhism, especially Tibetan Buddhism, obtained significant patronage from the government. It was the Qing government, however, that severely suppressed many religious sects that grew up during the 17th century when state political power was relatively weak.

Intellectual attacks on those who attempted to combine Confucianism with other religions were also serious. This type of criticism usually pointed to Wang Yangming and his followers. The biography of late Ming official Yang Shiqiao 杨时乔 says that Yang

does not like Wang Yangming's scholarship in particular. He hates, especially, Luo Rufang 罗汝芳 (a student of Wang Yangming). In his position of Tongzheng 通政 (in charge of the communication to and from the inner court), Yang submitted a memorial

⁵⁷ *Shandong tongzhi* 山东通志, in *SKQS*, pp.541-83.

to the emperor sayings: "The teaching of Buddhism was not mixed into Confucianism originally. It happened because of Luo Lufang who made use of the sage's teaching about mind and human nature to promote the Buddhist idea of sudden enlightenment. Luo says that our Confucianism is straightforward and not worth studying. He therefore views commentaries as piecemeal, classics as garbage, personal practice as foolish, and regulations and laws as fetters and handcuffs. How arrogant he is!"⁵⁸

A leading thinker in 17th-century China, Gu Yanwu, took a firm stand against the School of Mind. He criticized this school for "falling into Chan 禅 (Zen) without consciousness." What this school was teaching was "far away from the original idea of Yao, Shun, and Yu 尧, 舜, 禹 (all ancient sages in Confucianism) when they handed over their power of the world to others."⁵⁹ When talking about the suicide of Li Zhi, who was a radical member of the School of Mind, Gu Yanwu commented: "From ancient times until now, Li Zhi is the worst one among those small people who dared to oppose sages without fear."⁶⁰

Feng Qi 冯琦, a minister of rites in the late Ming period, suggested to the emperor that the intellectual

⁵⁸ Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), juan 224.

⁵⁹ See Huang Rucheng 黄汝成, *Rizhilu jishi* 日知录集释 (Complete Commentary to *Rizhilu*), Saoye shanfang edition, juan 18, 8b.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16b.

adaptation of Buddhism had been destructive to social morality and Confucianism. Therefore, severe restriction must be applied. He suggested that any stipended *shengyuan* who, in the civil service examinations, quoted one sentence from Buddhist scriptures, should be punished by one month deduction of stipend. A *shengyuan* who quoted more than three sentences from Buddhist scripture in his written work should be expelled. A *Juren* who quoted one sentences of Buddhism in his examination should be banned from participating in the examinations for three years, while any more of these kinds of quotations would cost an offender his degree. This suggestion attracted the attention of the Wanli Emperor (1573-1620), who immediately ruled that officials who leaned toward Taoism or Buddhism should resign from state service. For a more fundamental resolution, Emperor Wanli circulated further opinions from his senior officials.⁶¹ Gu Yanwu contributed a whole chapter, seventeen pages, discussing the possibility of abolishing Buddhism and Taoism. In his *Rizhilu* 日知录,⁶² however, Gu Yanwu knew that a complete abolition of Buddhism and Taoism was not practical

⁶¹ Ibid., 12a-13a.

⁶² Huang Rucheng, *Rizhilu jishi*, juan 3.

because they had been so profoundly accepted by the people. His resolution was, therefore, instead of eliminating those religions, to take them under control.⁶³

Gu Yanwu's close friend Fu Shan 傅山 (1607-1684) was disappointed with the general performance of Confucians in imperial China. He stated that after the Han and Tang dynasties, there had been many great people in Taoist and Buddhist religions. In contrast, "there has absolutely not been even one sage to appear among Confucians."⁶⁴ Certainly, to Fu Shan, all Neo-Confucian thinkers, including Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, were not very worthy.

The most significant criticism against non-Confucian beliefs in the 17th century was made by Yan Yuan, a native of Hebei. From the point of view of original or classical Confucianism, not the so called Neo-Confucianism of the Song and the Ming periods, Yan Yuan made a special effort to attack Buddhism, Taoism, folk religions, as well as the Neo-Confucians who had compromised with other religions. As a forerunner of the

⁶³ Ibid., 15a.

⁶⁴ See Hou Wenzheng 侯文正, et al., *Fu Shan shiwen xuanzhu* 傅山诗文选注 (Selected Poems and Proses of Fu Shan with commentaries) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1985), p.523.

early Qing *Shixue* 实学 (practical studies), Yan Yuan was realistic enough to divide his audiences into commoners, religious clergy, and scholars and to put his advice to them. He describes Fo 佛 (Sakyamuni) as a *si fangui* 死番鬼 (a dead foreign ghost) and a *qinshou* 禽兽 (animal) who completely betrayed his parents and country. To worship such a ghost was stupid, because being a monk meant escaping from the responsibilities of paying taxes, supporting parents, and continuing the family line. To become a monk was to be a traitor to the state and one's parents, which would bring shame to one's relatives and friends.⁶⁵ Taoist priests, Yan Yuan continues, were trying to achieve immortality through various weird practices, which was against nature. In doing so, the Taoist priests were acting like *shenshan zhong jingguai* 深山中精怪 (mountain demons), *liangjian yi du* 两间一蠹 (a vermin between the heaven and the Earth), and *renzhong yao* 人中妖 (goblin among people).⁶⁶ If Buddhism and Taoism were the major wrong roads, Yan Yuan says, the various sectarian religious activities were branch paths of them. He viewed all these types of activities as

⁶⁵ Yan Yuan, *Cun ren bian* 存人编, in CSJCCB, pp.1-3.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.5-6.

criminal because they ignored the authority of the state and Confucian principles. He pointed to the execution of Wusheng Laomu 无生老母 as a case to warn his commoner audiences.⁶⁷ In talking about the *Huangtian Dao* which was popular in the 17th century, Yan Yuan argues that commoners were not eligible to worship the Sun and the Moon, as folk religions usually did. Worshipping the Sun, the Moon and Heaven was the prerogative of the emperor. To worship deities that one was not supposed to worship results punishment. It was equivalent to a commoner visiting his magistrate everyday, which deserved punishment by the magistrate because such practice was unacceptable. The sacrifices that commoners made to deities were too shabby to serve to a magistrate, (Yan Yuan put in very plain language), "How dare you people invite deities with such humble things!"⁶⁸ The unity of the three teachings, to Yan Yuan, was, of course, heretical nonsense.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp.20-1. Also see Yan Yuan, *Yan Xizhai Xiansheng piyi lu* 颜习斋先生辟异录, in CSJCCB, p.9.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp.22-4.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp.25-6. Also see Yan Yuan, *Yan Xizhai Xiansheng piyi lu* , pp.6,11.

Many major Neo-Confucian thinkers and intellectual officials from the Song to the Ming were targets of Yan Yuan's criticism, including Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033-1107) and Cheng Hao 程颢 (1032-1085), Zhu Xi, Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101), and Wang Yangming. In Yan Yuan's words, after Xia 夏, Shang 商, and Zhou 周, the three ancient dynasties, which were viewed by Confucian thinkers as the ideal age,

Han Changli 韩昌黎 (768-824) of the Tang, Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi of the Song, and Wang Yangming of the Ming were all great gentlemen among our Confucians. Nevertheless, they all communicated with the thieves (refers to heterodoxy), were all cheated by the thieves, all made certain connections with the thieves, and all played around with the thieves.⁷⁰

The main problem of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi, from Yan Yuan's perspective, was that they put away Confucius' practical teaching and indulged in talking about *xing dao* 性道 (human nature and principles).⁷¹ These scholars could not understand the true meaning of Confucianism on human nature and the way of combining principles with practices. Because of these reasons, when they came across Buddhism, they falsely thought that Buddhism had better understanding about human mentality and nature. Bad scholars studied Confucian teaching only as a ladder

⁷⁰ Yan Yuan, *Cunren bian*, p.16.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.13.

to climb up for official positions. Without true knowledge of Confucianism, these people usually behaved improperly and had a sense of guilt. That was why they liked Buddhism which indicated possibility of avoiding punishment.⁷²

Yan Yuan, as a thinker at the end of the 17th century, was starting a new trend of restoring classical Confucianism and abandoning Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism. His thinking, however, did not change much the reality of the 17th century. The significant divergence among the Confucian intellectuals on religious issue itself was a major factor contributive to the general religious pluralism in Chinese society. Generally speaking, Confucian intellectuals in the 17th century accepted the existence of all kinds of religious beliefs, or, could not change the religious pluralism as an existing situation. A 17th-century novelist described himself as a layman talking about Buddhism, gods, ghosts, and all extraordinary things, without caring what people would say.⁷³ This religious diversity to Xue Yingqi

⁷² Ibid, p.18.

⁷³ Zhuoyuanting Zhuren 酌园亭主人, *Zhaoshi bei* 照世杯 (A Cup Mirroring the World) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), p.69.

薛应旗, a major scholar of the Donglin Academy, meant the decline of the ideal Confucian social condition.

The religious affairs in a well administered world are in the hands of the ruler. There is therefore only one unified virtue and the customs are unified. The religious affairs in a declining world are in the hands of people at the bottom of society. There are therefore various virtues and the customs are also diverse.⁷⁴

Accordingly, Confucianism in the 17th century formed no real restriction to other religious beliefs. The religious pluralism among commoners, who held only minimal Confucian values, was therefore a very natural phenomenon. To the grass-root level people, as well as to some Confucian intellectuals, there was no religion that was enough to satisfy their spiritual and/or practical needs. Variety was wanted. This religious diversity was also the foundation of the Chinese way to treat Western religions. The 17th century saw the fastest increase in number of Chinese Catholics in late imperial history. Based on the study of Ji Wende 计文德:⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Xue Yingqi 薛应旗, *Xue Fangshan jishu* 薛方山纪述 (Memorial of Xue Fangshan), in *CSJCCB*, p.7.

⁷⁵ Ji Wende, *Cong Siku quanshu tanjiu Ming Qing jian shuru zhi xixue* 从四库全书探究明清间输入之西学 (A Study of Western Studies in China Based upon Complete Books of the Four Treasuries) (Taipei, New York, and Los Angeles: Hanmei tushu youxian songsi), pp.55-6.

Table 6: The Increase of Chinese Catholics during the 17th Century

year	number of converts
1610	several thousands
1615	5,000
1617	13,000
1633	38,200
1650	150,000
1664	164,400
1667	256,880
1670	273,780
1701	300,000
1720	declined because of the "Ritual Controversy"

Christianity could not, however, have kept up such a pace for long. Besides the political differences between the Emperor and the Pope during the following century, more a more serious restriction on all religions in China was the fact that the Chinese wanted **religions**, not a **religion**. There must be more than one God. This picture can also help us to understand the non-Confucian activities conducted by rural commoners, which will be discussed in later chapters.

Another related issue here is the relation of popular religions to the state. It is indeed a rather complicated issue. Scholars have noted the compatibility of Chinese popular religions.⁷⁶ From the perspective of orthodox Confucians, nevertheless, all non-Confucian beliefs challenge the domination of Confucian values, beliefs, and even state administration and stability. The commoners, on the other hand, had to fill up their spiritual vacuum and find possible salvation in popular religions, rather than in Confucianism. The tension between popular religion and commoner's culture, on the one hand, and Confucianism and upper culture on the other, was of major significance in late imperial China.

⁷⁶ See Evelyn S. Rawski, "Problems and Prospects," in David Johnson et al., ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp.406-9.

Chapter III

Twisted Confucian Family Ethics of the Rural Commoners

When popular religions prevailed to the degree discussed in the previous chapter, the cultural unity, state control of society, and the values and institutions maintained by the gentry with Confucian beliefs were weakened. A similar phenomenon occurred in another sphere of social culture--family values. Commoners in north China neglected, or even challenged, Confucian family values during the 17th century.

The family was the basic social unit in traditional China. As Lloyd E. Eastman has pointed out:

So important was the institution of the family that the term "familism" has been coined to characterize Chinese social values and organization.¹

Although "familism" can be traced back to ancient times before Confucianism and had complex connections, to

¹ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Fields, and Ancestors: Constancy and Change in China's Social and Economic History, 1550-1949* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.15, cited from Daniel Harrison Kulp, *Country Life in South China: The Sociology of Familism* (New York: Columbia University Teachers College, 1925), and C. K. Yang, *The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Technology Press, 1959).

the ever-changing popular religions, Confucianism, especially Neo-Confucianism after the 12th century, clearly enhanced the institutionalization of it. In the Confucian family ethical code, the most important inner-family relationships were those between parents and children, among children, and between husbands and wives. With regard to the parent-child relationship, children were required to have the virtue of xiao 孝 (filial piety). Brothers were supposed to behave following the virtue of ti 悌 (brotherly submission). Husbands were in a position of dominance over their wives, and a wife was required to remain faithful to only one husband. The Ming scholar Zhang Huang, pointed out that relationships among parents and children, brothers, and husbands and wives were considered so important that three of the five Confucian fundamental ethical principles pertained to these relationships.²

² The other two were relationships between emperors and officials, and that between friends. See, Zhang Huang, "Zheng jia lun 正家论 (On Family Principles)," in *GJTSJC*, vol.321, p.15. We may notice that a commoner did not have to care much about his relationship with the emperor. Loyalty was a moral standard particularly for the privileged gentry class. A commoner was not supposed to feel guilty if he decided to serve a new political regime. A person in the gentry class was supposed to commit suicide for the collapse of the dynasty which granted him with privileges, or, at least reject public service under a new regime. For examples, see Zhao Yifeng 赵轶峰, "Mingmo Qingchu Zhongguo zhishi fenzi de daode chenglun gan

Enhancing Confucian family values was the goal of both the Ming and the Qing governments. For instance, in *Mingshi*, edited in early Qing, the editors commented, in a section entitled *Xiaoyi Zhuan* 孝义传 (Biographies of the Filial and Brotherly), that although the virtues of filial piety and brotherliness are based on human nature, they still need to be taught to people. The editors go on to say that ever since the ways of the ancient sages and men of virtue had been recognized as principles, "wise emperors all made great efforts to encourage people to follow ethical principles."³

Scholars now know well that during the late 19th and early 20th centuries the actual situation regarding family ethics in China was far from that proffered by the state and main-stream intellectuals.⁴ Some changes and variations in Chinese families in the 18th century have also been carefully examined.⁵ Nevertheless, Eastman states that:

明末清初中国知识分子的道德沉沦感 (The Sense of Demoralization of the Chinese Intellectuals during the transition from the Ming to the Qing Period), *Dongbei Shida xuebao*, 1987:4, pp.47-53.

³ Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, p.7575.

⁴ Eastman, *Family, Fields, and Ancestors*, p.39.

...we still lack a clear sense of the changes in family life, marriage, and the position of women that occurred between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries in China...⁶

remains true for the period before the 18th century. This chapter examines sources that reflect the commoners' neglect of, and challenge to, orthodox Confucian family ethics in north China during the 17th century. It will argue that: 1. smaller families were more popular among the commoners than among the gentry. 2. the population of single adults increased among the commoners. 3. filial piety was not practiced seriously by commoners. 4. fierce wives, a popular topic in literature, was a reality in lower society. 5. Neo-Confucian restrictions on females, in practice, were questioned. Together, these developments show that Confucian family ethics were

⁵ See Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski's *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987).

⁶ Eastman, *Family, Fields, and Ancestors*, p.39. There is a short section entitled "the battleground of the family" in Judith A. Berling's "religion and Popular Culture: The Management of Moral Capital in The Romance of the Three Teachings." See David Johnson et al., ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp.205-7. Based on a late Ming fiction, *Sanjiao guizhen kaimi yanyi* 三教开迷归真演义 (The Romance of The Three Teachings Clearing up The Deluded And Returning Them to The True Way), Berling noted the family crisis in late Ming. The identity of the author and the geographical region of that novel, however, could be further clarified. Apparently, it mainly reflects certain historical reality of the Lower Yangtze region.

seriously twisted in the social practices of commoners in 17th century China.

1. Smaller families

Social anthropologists customarily distinguish three forms of the Chinese family, namely, the small, nuclear, or conjugal family, large or joint family, and the stem family. The small family typically consisted of a father and mother and their unmarried children. The large, extended, family is of one or a pair of parents living together with two or more married children and their wives and children (if any), in one household.⁷ Eastman remarks that in the 19th to the early-20th centuries, approximately 60 percent of all Chinese families were small families and "Probably no more than about 6 to 7 percent of Chinese families" attained the ideal of large family with five generations under one roof.⁸ Naquin and

⁷ This paragraph is based on Eastman, *Family, Fields, and Ancestors*, p.16.

⁸ Ibid. Eastman did not clearly indicate for which century that this percentage was estimated. However, in the chapter regarding family, his sources were mainly modern studies about 19th and 20th century China, and he admitted, in the closing part of the same chapter, that we still lack knowledge about the Chinese families in the 16th to the 19th century. See *ibid.*, p.39.

Rawski note that, during the 18th century, the portion of large families was greater among the upper classes and small families were common among the poor.

The pooling of resources and energies into a corporate economy at the household level and the concerted effort to maintain the patriline were characteristic of families at every level of society in the Qing. For a significant portion of the population, however, merely sustaining the *jia* 家 (family) resources and the patriline from one generation to the next was a terrible struggle. Small fragmented families were especially common among the poor, where family cycles were short and relationships simple.⁹

The size and type of a person's family was largely limited by their financial capability, even though establishing a big family was a universal desire of the Chinese. As a fact, such a situation had been reality in 17th century China.

Because of the continuing warfare, political change, and famines, the 17th century was a tougher time than was the 18th century for commoners. In an 1679 edict, Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1662-1722) admitted:

People's livelihood is in extreme difficulty. Senior officials are becoming richer and richer....There are countless people who have had to sell their children

⁹ Susan Naquin & Evelyn Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.34.

to the capital (Beijing) at a very low price because of their lack of clothing and food.¹⁰

According to Xu Ke 徐珂 (1627-1700), in the Kangxi period, because of famine, a child would be sold for only several hundred copper cash.¹¹ In such conditions, raising a child was a hopeless struggle for poor commoners. When selling children off, a couple was reducing the size of the family and increasing the risk of discontinuing the family line.

Although the sale of humans existed throughout late imperial China, human purchase existed as a reality during the Ming dynasty, and was under certain restrictions by the law of the Ming.¹² In the early Qing period, however, a human market became an open trading place in the capital. This was largely because of the Manchu tradition

¹⁰ See Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Qingshi Yanjiusuo and Dangan Xi Zhongguo Zhengzhi Zhidushi Yanjiushi 中国人民大学清史研究所, 档案系中国政治制度史教研室, *Kang Yong Qian shiqi chengxiang renmin fankang douzheng ziliao* 康庸乾时期城乡人民反抗斗争资料 (Sources Regarding People's Anti-Governmental Uprisings in the Urban and Rural Areas during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong Periods) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), vol. 1, p.367.

¹¹ Xu Ke, "Yixia lei 义侠类 (The Category of righteous and chivalrous Men)," p.85, in *Qing bai leichao* 清稗类钞 (Classified Extracts from Non-official Histories of the Qing) (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983).

¹² See *Da Ming Lu*, pp.408,372; also see Han Dacheng 韩大成, *Mingdai shehui jingji chutan* 明代社会经济初探 (A Preliminary Study of the Ming Social Economy) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1986), pp.63-5.

of slavery and was related to the increased number of rootless people during the 17th century. From 1661 to 1678, the Qing court frequently discussed policies regarding obtaining registration, paying tax, and setting certain limitations on the traffic in humans.¹³ The historian Tan Qian 谈迁 (1594-1657) was surprised when he saw a human market beside the cattle market in Beijing during the transitional years from the Ming to Qing. He commented: "By this Heaven is treating humans like dogs!"¹⁴ Such an active human market largely increased the population of *nupu* 奴仆 or *nubi* 奴婢 (bondservants) in the early Qing period, which also meant an increasing number of broken families.¹⁵

The increased number of small families in the Ming period, mainly affecting commoners who were financially healthy, can be attributed to the taxation system. The

¹³ See *GJTSJC*, vol. 66, pp.186-9.

¹⁴ Tan Qian, *Beiyou lu* 北游录 (A Journal Written in A Travel to the North) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), p.386.

¹⁵ For original sources about the early Qing policies and social practices regarding to human purchase and slavery, see Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Qingshi Yanjiusuo and Dangan Xi Zhongguo Zhengzhi Zhidushi Yanjiushi, *Kang Yong Qian shiqi chengxiang renmin fankang douzheng ziliao*, pp.350-73. Also see Wei Qingyuan & Wu Qiyan 韦庆远, 吴奇衍, *Qingdai nubi zhidu* 清代奴婢制度 (The Bondservant System in Qing China) (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue chubanshe, 1982).

early Ming governmental corvée was based on a calculation of *ding* 丁 (male adults) and properties of individual households. This forced many existing big families to split into smaller families to avoid heavy tax burdens.¹⁶

The ethical crisis of the 17th century, which appeared profound to many Confucian intellectuals of the 17th century such as Tang Zhen 唐甄 (1630-1704), was that the virtue of Confucian brotherly submission was vanishing. Tang Zhen complained that nobody in the world practiced or even talked about it. "The virtue of brotherliness has vanished for a long time." To treat brothers, Tang argued, one should follow the model of Shun 舜, one of the sage kings of pre-Xia period. Shun's

¹⁶About the Ming corvée system, see Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, pp.1878-80, 1893, 1904; also see *GJTSJC*, vol. 66, p. 173. The early Ming government deliberately carried out a policy of constraining big powerful families. See *Mingshi*, p.1880. Modern study of the Ming corvée system, see Wei Qingquan, *Mingdai de Huangce zhidu* 明代的黄册制度 (The Yellow Registers of the Ming) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961). About the social impact of the governmental policy on family structure, see Zheng Zhenman 郑振满, "Ming Qing Fujian de jiating jiegou jiqi yanbian qushi 明清福建的家庭结构及其演变趋势 (The Family Structure and Its Changes in Fujian during the Ming and Qing Periods)," *Zhongguo Shehui Jingjishi Yanjiu* 中国社会经济史研究 (The Studies of Chinese Social Economic History), 1988:4, 67-74. Governmental enforcement of family division could be traced back to the Legalist practice of the State Qin in the third century B.C. In that time, two or more adult brothers live in one household would cause punishment. See Sima Qian 司马迁, *Shiji* 史记 (The Record of History) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), p.2230.

younger brother plotted to kill him, yet Shun made his brother a rich and noble man without one word of complaint. This standard was summarized as "without complaint even being killed by a brother", which was the ultimate point of Confucian brotherhood.¹⁷ Tang Zhen sounded naive. An ordinary man in the 17th century might not be comfortable with a brother who wanted to kill him. As a matter of fact, the governmental standard of brotherliness at that time was already at a much lower level. It was simply living together with one's brothers under the same roof. Men who were recognized by the government for the virtue of brotherliness were usually those who conducted an activity called, *tongju dunmu* 同居敦睦 (friendly living together).¹⁸

The early Ming government restricted the residential separation of brothers without the approval of the grandparents or parents who were still alive.¹⁹ Concerned Confucian scholar-officials in the late Ming period tried

¹⁷ Tang Zhen, *Qianshu* 潜书 (A Secret Book) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), pp.75-6.

¹⁸ Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, p.735.

¹⁹ See *GJTSJC*, vol. 66, p.173.

to apply governmental power to encourage brothers to get along. Zhang Han 张翰 (1512-1595), for example, recorded his experience of resolving a dispute between brothers in Daming 大名 Prefecture in Bei Zhili. In that case, two brothers charged each other over the division of family possessions. They revealed personal secrets about each other and fought endlessly. Zhang Han, as the official dealing with this case, judged: "How could you brothers not look after each other and fight like two dogs fighting over a bone?" Consequently, the two brothers were both caned and put into prison. This outcome made the two brothers regretful. Zhang Han then released them.²⁰ According to Liang Tingshi 梁廷[木式], a late Ming native of Yanling 鄱陵 in Henan, however, official efforts like those of Zhang Han were not effective. Liang noted that after the Tianqi 天启 period (1621-1627),

²⁰ Zhang Han, *Songchuang Mengyu*, P.12-3. The Song Neo-Confucian giant Zhu Xi personally dealt with a conflict regarding two brothers who divided family property when their mother was still alive. Zhu Xi's solution was to order the brothers to live together and posted an official regulation about that matter to stop that tendency. See Zhu Xi, "Xiaoyu xiongdi zhengcai shi 晓谕兄弟争财疏 (An Advice to Brothers Who Are Fighting for Possessions)," in *GJTSJC*, Vol. 326, p.16. The Biography of Filial and Brotherly Men in *Mingshi* recorded the story of Liu Min 刘闵, a Confucian hermit in the late 15th century. Liu was faced with his sister-in-law's request for family separation. He locked himself in a room and beat himself on the face. Seeing this, Liu Min's sister-in-law had to stop asking for

customs in the county changed dramatically....Family values were neglected. Phenomena such as driving out brother's orphans, grasping brother's shares of the late parents' possessions, suing brothers, and respecting concubines more than respecting wives, were all happening.²¹ Gu Yanwu also witnessed the popularity of family separation. He held that this practice should not be encouraged.²² Tang Zhen's more pessimistic estimate came decades later.

The father of the well-known novelist Pu Songling 蒲松龄 (1640-1715), an educated merchant of Zichuan 淄川 in Shandong in his declining years, had to divide his property among his four sons because the daughters-in-law never stopped clamoring against their mother-in-law.²³ Pu

division. The extended family continued.

²¹ Liang Tingshi, *Xiangao cunyi* 先稿存遗 (Preserved Previous Works), juan 3. See Wang Xingya 王兴亚, "Mingdai zhonghou qi Henan shehui fengshang de bianhua 明代中后期河南社会风尚的变化 (Changes in Social Customs in Henan during the Middle and Late Ming periods)," *Zhongzhou xuekan* 中州学刊 (The Journal of Henan), 1989:4, p.110.

²² Huang Rucheng, *Rizhilu jishi*, juan 13, p.21a-b.

²³ Pu Songling, "Shu Liu Shi Xingshi 述刘氏行实 (The Life Story of Woman Liu)," in *Pu Songling ji* 蒲松龄集 (Collected Work of Pu Songling) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1986), p.250. Jonathan Spence translated three paragraphs from that memorial article of Pu Songling in his *The Death of Woman Wang* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978, pp.77-8).

and his wife did not get their own fair share of the division because his wife was too nice to fight like the other women. Pu must have been harmed somehow by the event. Years later, writing to a friend, who was having a head-ache dividing family properties among brothers, he showed his reluctance to become involved in any of this type of family quarrel.²⁴

Logically, zu 族 (lineage) organizations should be a factor resisting the disintegrative tendencies in individual families. However, there were two points to be noted. First, lineage power was much weaker in the north than in the south.²⁵ Secondly, according to Gu Yanwu, lineage power was especially weak among the poor commoners.²⁶

²⁴ Pu Songling, "Yu Shen Defu 与沈德符 (A Letter to Shen Defu)," in *Pu Songling ji*, p.142.

²⁵ In his study of Shandong, Littrup asserted: "The sixteenth century is generally regarded as the time when 'élite' influence over local communities began to accelerate. This coincided with the growing tendency to establish institutionalized lineages which could perpetuate the power of certain families. The sources consulted for this study have not revealed much information on the creation of such lineages in Shandong and their possible influence. See Littrup, *Subbureaucratic Government in China in Ming Times: A Study of Shandong Province in the Sixteenth Century*, p.32. He views the educated 'élite' as 'gentry'. See *ibid*.

²⁶ Naquin and Rawski noted the similar phenomena in 18th century China. These phenomena, as a fact, existed in the north during the 17th century already. Refer to Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.36-7.

In today's North China, even the so called first class lineages do not have more than 1,000 men. The smallness of lineage population and the weakness of clanship in the North makes the North very different from Jiangnan 江南 (commonly described currently as the Lower Yangtze area). People who have succeed in civil service examinations immediately become the local leaders and their clansmen can be made to act as their servants.²⁷

Here, political status was absolutely more important than status in a clan. Wang Shixing 王士性 (1546-1598) saw the same phenomenon and explained why.

The Wan 宛, Luo 洛, Huai 淮, Ru 汝, Sui 睢, Chen 陈, Bian 汴, Wei 卫 areas (approximately today's Henan and surrounding areas) have been battlefields from ancient times. Since the Ming, many people were killed in the chaos from war. There is not a family that has lasted for more than 200 years in each county or prefecture. Except the gentry and the great families, the commoners do not build citang 祠堂 (lineage halls), do not compile zongpu 宗谱 (lineage genealogy) at all. When problems of inheritance happen, decisions are made based on the written names on the papers burned during the Buddhist funeral ceremony for the deceased. While they do adhere to the regulations for mourning garments, commoners do not make effort to get along each other. Only those who are liable for corvée service within the same household win the respect. Most people with the same family names do not mind marrying each other. A powerful man treats his clansmen as slaves. These practices were brought in by those people transferred by the government in the early Ming period from different areas to Henan, who had various local customs.²⁸

²⁷ Gu Yanwu, "Beifang menzu 北方门族 (Well-known Families in the North), in Huang Rucheng, *Rizhilu jishi*, juan 23, p.10b.

The late Ming rebellions that were especially disastrous in the north also threatened lineage organization. Some lineages that were used to living closely were fragmented and dispersed by the rebels.²⁹

In contrast, gentry families took clanship much more seriously. The Bi 毕 family in Zichuan county of Shandong was an example. The Bi family transferred from Yidu 益都 (also in Shandong) to Zichuan in the early Ming period. Later, to avoid heavy corvée burdens, the Bi family divided itself into three. As the preface to their genealogy mentions, "after the family was divided, members no longer cared about each other as before." By the 10th generation after its coming to Zichuan, someone in the Bi families began to hire teachers to prepare his children for civil service examinations. One of them became a *shengyuan* who drafted a genealogy for the lineage. The lineage was not well organized, however, until the *shengyuan's* two sons obtained *jinshi* degrees

²⁸ Wang Shixing, *Guangzhi yi* 广志绎 (Further Deliberations on My Record of Extensive Travels) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981), p.43. About the early Ming policy of transferring people, see Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, pp.1878-81.

²⁹ Examples are mentioned by Han Dacheng in his *Mingdai shehui jingji chutan*, p.122.

and became senior officials. Bi Ziyān 毕自严 (1569-1638), the first *jinshi* of the Bi families and who had served as the Financial Minister and a Governor in the late Ming government, prefaced the genealogy of the Bi:

The descendants of the same ancestor have become strangers. How could we be called as a family of rite, morality and knowledge? I, therefore, studied the maps and investigated among seniors of the clan and collected information about branches and their connections..."³⁰

In this case from Shandong, the commoners from one ancestor easily scattered into small families. As soon as a powerful gentry family has emerged, however, lineage organization was built up. The lineage organization based on such a political background of a major family was not likely able to last very long because the political status of a civil bureaucrat was not inheritable in 17th century China and his family would suffer downward mobility when the political power was gone.

Xiao Yishān 萧一山 examined the system of *yizhuang* 义庄 (clan villages), *yitian* 义田 (clan farm), and clan autonomy in the Qing and concluded that they were all not

³⁰ Bi Ziyān. "Zixi Bishi shipu xu 淄西毕氏世谱序 (Preface to The Genealogy of The Bi Family from The West of Zichuan County)," in *Shiyinyuan canggao*, juan 2, in *SKQS*, pp.1293-415 to 422.

significant in the North. One of the reasons for the regional difference is, Xiao asserts, that most traditional big gentry families had transferred to the South after the collapse of the Northern Song, which had had Kaifeng as its capital.³¹ The weakness of lineage organization and clanship was clearly a condition of the faster dividing of the ordinary families in the North and a part of the weakened familism in the North.

2. The increase of single adults

A problem with the so called Chinese familism can also be seen in the large number of single adults. The single adults were mainly in the following groups of people: religious priests, wandering people, part of the refugees and part of the marginal people, such as beggars, and prostitutes. Xie Zhaozhe 谢肇淅's estimate might be an exaggeration but it still brings to us some grains of truth:

In Yanyun 燕云 (centered in today's Hebei) area, there are four types of people in large number. There are more eunuchs than the gentry, more women than

³¹ Xiao Yishan, *Qingdai tongshi* 清代通史 (A General History of the Qing Dynasty) (Taipei: Shangwu, 1985), vol. 1, pp.611-28.

men, more prostitutes than fine ladies, and more beggars than merchants.³²

Xie did not explain why the number of women was greater than that of men. Since prostitutes were listed separately, it might be related to the large population of maids, bondservants, nuns, and actresses. Eunuchs, prostitutes, beggars, nuns, and actresses, usually did not have families. Maids and bondservants were dependents of other people's families.

Organized religious institutions were limited in number in the early years of the Ming. The government issued many orders to prohibit people, especially male adults, for joining religious establishments. The reason was that Buddhist and Taoist temples were not merely religious units, but also economic units. They were traditionally not responsible for corvée duties and might bear only limited land tax liabilities.³³ This type of restriction generally did not function after the 16th

³² Xie Zhaozhe, *Wu za zu 五杂俎* (Discussions on Five Issues), *juan 3*. See Bao Hongchang 暴鸿昌, "Lun wan Ming shehui de shemi zhifeng 论晚明社会的奢靡之风" (The Luxury Customs in Late Ming Society), *Mingshi yanjiu 明史研究* (The Studies of the History of the Ming), 1993:3, p.91.

³³ Refer to note 65 in chapter II, and see Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-century Ming China* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp.33,109.

century mainly because several emperors favored Buddhism and Taoism. Meanwhile, the tax and corvée burden and the increasing warfare and natural famines in the 17th century kept pushing people to look for shelter in temples.³⁴

Another related factor was that concubinage, as a social institution, was much more developed by the 17th century than in the previous centuries. The law of the Ming, which was published in the 14th century, allowed only nobles, gentry, and commoners, who were 40 or older and without a male child, to take concubines. Breaking this regulation was punished by caning. When this regulation gradually broke down, even a rich commoner could take dozens of concubines. To be a concubine of a financially wealthy man, therefore, became a choice to be considered for girls of poor families. Assuming that male and female populations were approximately even, one result of concubinage might be that poor men found it difficult to find brides.³⁵

³⁴ About the population of late Ming, refer to chapter IV.

³⁵ A study shows that the incidence of infanticide in China for the years 1850 to 1948 was at the rates of 5 percent of females births and about 2.5 percent of male births. See Eastman, p.21. If the

3. Filial Piety

In Confucian thinking, filial piety was a virtue pertaining to one's respect, obedience and life time obligation of support to one's parents.³⁶ This virtue was valued by the Confucian thinkers not only because it was considered "right," but also because filial piety was taken as a law of the universe. Li Yi 李翊 (1505-1593), a late Ming Confucian scholar, described filial piety as a universal rule that regulated all the relationships in the world. Everything in the universe was given birth by something else. Therefore, everything in the universe was indebted to and inferior to the existence which giving birth.³⁷ As a fundamental concept of such a view of the world, filial piety was an absolute principle to

gender rate was close to this figure in the 17th century, female population should be smaller than male in Chinese society.

³⁶ For the original meaning of the Chinese word xiao 孝, see Shen Shanrong 沈善洪 and Wang Fengxian 王凤贤, *Zhongguo lunli xueshuo shi* 中国伦理学说史 (A History of Chinese Ethics) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin chubanshe, 1985), vol. 1, pp.56-60.

³⁷ Li Yi, *Jiean Laoren manbi* 戒庵老人漫笔 (Essays of Older Man Jie-an) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982, vol. 8. Also refer to Zhao Yifeng, "Ming mo Qing chu Zhongguo zhishi fenzi de daode chenlun gan," *Dongbei Shida xuebao*, 1987:4, p.50. Benjamin Schwartz discussed the religious resonance of filial piety, emphasizing the factor of ancestor worship. See Schwartz, *China's Cultural Value* (Tempe: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1985), p.7.

Confucian scholars. As reflected in governmental regulations, the Ming government viewed the following as the admirable fulfillment of filial piety: treating parents obediently and respectfully, traveling a long distance to look for missing parents, living in a grass hut by a parent's tomb for three years to mourn the deceased parent, being heartbroken when one heard that one's parent had passed away, or, carrying the corpse of one's parents to their home town to bury them there, if parents died while traveling.³⁸

Had these standards been well fulfilled, Grand Secretary Feng Qi would not have bothered to report the crisis of morality to the throne. Breaking of these standards was observed from various aspects by people. In the later part of the 16th century, the scholar He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506-1573) lamented that people were not treating their parents as honorably as the people in ancient times had.

I see today's children treating their fathers and elder brothers like guests. They give a good banquet on the birthdays of their fathers and elder brothers and on festivals. This is merely the way to treat deities: when the sacrificial rite is finished, deities are forgotten like dogs. This is what was

³⁸ Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, p.734.

called "one moment of respect", which is used to treat one's county fellow, not one's father or elder brother. Ancient people did not do this. People in ancient times always treated their fathers and elder brothers with their hearts. When one found a good dish, even just some vegetable, he would take this dish to his father and elder brother. Because they always kept their parents in mind, no matter day or night, even one piece of food would remind them to think about their parents.³⁹

If what He Liangjun talked about was too subtle, a story told by Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634-1711) was much more explicit. In that story, a man from Henan, named Hou Er 侯二, beat his mother and drove her out of the house merely because she helped a beggar with some grain.⁴⁰ In 1636, the Bian 边 brothers, stonemasons of Zichuan, were killed by thunder. Superstitious people attributed this "to their ill treatment of their mother."⁴¹ The fact that these were not uncommon incidents is reflected in the words of Zhou Zhi 周智, a character in a late Ming novel: "As for today's parents, who has not been beaten up by their children, more or less?"⁴²

³⁹ He Liangjun, *Siyou Zhai congshuo*, P.311.

⁴⁰ Wang Shizhen, *Xiangzu biji* 香祖笔记 (A Notebook Composed by the Fragrant Ancestor) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1982), p.133.

⁴¹ *GJTSJC*, vol. 9, p.1949.

⁴² Fuci Jiaozhu 伏雌教主, *Cu Hulu* 醋葫芦 (The Vinegar Calabash), in *GBXSCK*, collection 8, p.701.

Inner family conflicts might be sharpened by extremely difficult situations. In 1670, Huang Liuhong 黄六鸿, a newly appointed county magistrate of Tancheng 郯城 in Shandong, where people were suffering the consequences of a serious earthquake, noted that in that county "a father and son in the same household could be transformed in a moment into violent antagonists..."⁴³ Jonathan Spence has noted that in Tancheng, "the whole cult of state Confucianism must have seemed remote to most of the people..."⁴⁴

Pu Songling wrote a letter to his fellow county man and friend Wang Luzhan 王鹿瞻 urging him to pick up his father's remains from another place. Wang Luzhan's father was driven out by Wang Luzhan's wife and died away from home. After hearing of the death of his father, Wang still failed to prepare a coffin and proceed to bring back his father's body.⁴⁵

⁴³ Huang Liuhong, *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全书 (A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence: A Manual for Local Magistrates in Seventeenth-Century China). The English translation of Djang Chu 章楚 was published by University of Arizona Press. This quotation was from Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), p.14.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*, p.16.

The decline of filial piety as an ethical principle was common in both the north and Lower Yangtze regions. Aina Jushi 艾纳居士 (pen name of a writer of this period) mentioned a special business run in a suburban district of Hangzhou 杭州 in the late Ming. This business was called *Xiaozi* 孝子 (sons of filial piety). These "professional" sons of filial piety were hired to perform the role for men who had funerals for their parents. Because the "professional" sons of filial piety always got drunk at the funeral banquet, while the real son was supposed to drink no alcohol at those ritual events, Aina Jushi composed a piece of ballad:

How strange it is that a filial son drank yellow
liquid (wine);
Like general Guan Yu 关羽, his face is red;
He would have falled on the street,
if there were not a funeral stick in his hand.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Pu Songling, "Yu Wang Luzhan 与王鹿瞻 (A Letter to Wang Luzhan)," in *Pu Songling ji*, p.132. The friendship of Pu and Wang started when they were both young. In 1659, when Pu was 20, he and Wang Luzhan, together with two other young county men of Zichuan, organized a poetry society named as Yingzhong Shishe 郢中诗社 (The Poem Society In Ying). In 1671, Pu Songling and Wang Luzhan were both working as *mubin* 幕宾 (personal assistant and consultant to an official). The same situation linked the two up more closely. Pu then sent a poem to Wang. See Lu Dahuang 路大荒, "Pu Liuquan Xianshen nianpu 蒲柳泉先生年谱 (Chronicle of Pu Songling)," in *Pu Songling ji*, pp.1763, 1770.

⁴⁶ Aina Jushi 艾纳居士, *Doupeng Xianhua* 豆棚闲话 (Talks under A Pulse Shed) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), p.111.

The appearance of professional sons of filial piety indicates the loss of people's sincerity about filial piety.

According to the laws of the Ming and Qing dynasties, ill treatment of one's parents would lead to serious punishment. Neither the declining Ming government nor the newly established Qing minority regime, however, could guarantee the efficiency of the law. Concerned Confucian writers, therefore, used superstitious threats to maintain filial piety. Hou Er, whose story was told by Wang Shizhen, was then said to have been punished to death by mystical power, not by any secular laws, and reincarnated as a pig with a human head.⁴⁷ Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612-1672), a well-known scholar, also recorded a story heard from his friend Xu Junyi 徐君义. It was said that in 1636, thunder struck the home of the Wang family and left a written warning on the steps: "Two sons in this house are not filial. They will face serious punishment later." These words were written with sand, but nobody could wipe them away until they disappeared themselves. Zhou Lianggong might not necessarily believe

⁴⁷ Wang Shizhen, *Xiangzu biji*, p.133.

this superstitious story himself. Nevertheless, he emphasized that ten thousand eyes witnessed this event. His purpose was, as he stated, "to warn those who are not of filial piety."⁴⁸

According to *The Analects*, "The topics the Master did not speak of were prodigies, force, disorder, and gods." Confucius had never talked about personal gods.⁴⁹ There was no room in the original Confucianism for any personal superstitious powers. Therefore, neither punishments from hell nor rewards from the heaven were the Confucian explanation for why people should fulfill filial piety. Confucius advised people to do so because, to him, those attitudes were by themselves good and human, not for getting benefit or for avoiding punishment. Filial piety, to Confucians, should be a basic, natural tendency from one's internal consciousness. Outside pressure, from any secular or superstitious power, would therefore devalue the meaning of filial piety. He Liangjun's criticism of people treating their parents as guests was a typical idea embraced by Confucian ideology.

⁴⁸ Zhou Lianggong, *Shuying*, p.145.

⁴⁹ Confucius, *The Analects*, p.61.

When threatening became necessary to maintain filial piety, this ethical standard could no longer be viewed as a pure Confucian concept. The Non-Confucian concept of reincarnation, which was mainly from Buddhism, penetrated and twisted the Confucian family ethic. This change suggests that "should" was not a strong enough reason for ordinary people to fulfill filial piety, then, "must" was introduced. In terms of morality, when one does something one feels one should do, doing that thing itself brings satisfaction and happiness. When a person does something because one has to, on the other hand, the maximum positive feeling that activity can bring to the actor is relief. The introduction of threats as a way to reinforce filial piety reflects the weakness of governmental control over popular ethics, as well as the departure of popular ethics from Confucian ideology.

4. "Shrewish Wives" in Literature and Reality

In dealing with husband-wife relationships, pre-Confucian Chinese classics provided norms that wives were supposed to be subjected to their husbands. Confucius, as a master of the classics and rites, was

clearly in favor of the idea of husband domination. It was recorded that there were three wives who were dispossessed by the family of Confucius for misconduct. This practice strongly indicates male domination in Confucius' own family. By the first century A.D., this practice widely influenced society. By then wives were supposed to be totally subordinate to their husbands. The so called *Sancong Side* 三从四德 required women to give up their social independence: as a maiden, a woman should follow the instruction of her father; as a wife, she should be subordinate to her husband; as a widow, she should depend on her son. Ban Zhao 班昭, the female writer of *Nujie* 女诫 (Advice to Women) explained husband domination through the theory that yin 阴 has to be subordinate to yang 阳. She wrote, "If husbands do not control wives, there would have been no authority. If wives do not serve their husbands, the ritual principle would be abolished."⁵⁰ The idea of husband domination here does not grant husbands the right to abuse their wives. Husbands have to behave themselves following yi 义

⁵⁰ Cao Dagu 曹大家 (Ban Zhao), *Nujie* 女诫 (Advice to Women), in *GJTSJC*, vol.327, p.58.

(righteousness), and *li* 礼 (rituals). Another female writer advised the following as the proper behavior for wives:

If your husband is angry, do not blame him, compromise and swallow the insult. Do not learn from fierce wives to fight with your husband.⁵¹

It is hard to estimate how those principles were followed by average people. Seemingly, during the period of the Three Kingdoms to the Sui (220-581 A.D.), political and social unrest and invasion by minorities did not allow for any consistent penetration of the public of those official principles. Substantial progress was made in the Song Dynasty, associated with the spread of Neo-Confucian thinking. By the Ming, husbands were legally of a higher level status, and husband domination was further institutionalized.⁵²

The problem is how far did average people follow those intellectual and official instructions? Earlier this century, Hu Shi 胡适 was attracted to a 17th-century

⁵¹ Woman Song 宋氏, "Shifu Zhang 事夫章 (An Essay on Serving Husbands)," in *Song Shi Nu Lunyu* 宋氏女论语 (Discussions of Woman Song), in *GJTSJC*, vol. 327, p.59.

⁵² See Shanxi Renmin Chubanshe 陕西人民出版社, ed., *Shoujie, zaijia, chanzu, ji qita* 守节再嫁缠足及其它 (Widowhood, Remarry, Foodbinding, and Others) (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1990).

Chinese novel entitled *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻缘传 (A Marriage Story to Awaken the World), which was said to have the theme of a wife humiliating her husband.⁵³ Xizhou Sheng 西周生, the author of this novel, described several women who totally dominated and even physically humiliated their husbands. Through the mouth of one character in this novel, the author estimated: "In this world, if only you are a man, you have to submit to your wife."⁵⁴ This saying is, of course, an exaggeration. Nevertheless, even exaggerated stories may embody reality. *Hanqi* 悍妻 (fierce wives, or shrewish wives) was a frequent subject in 17th-century literature. This literary trend itself was a social phenomena.

The lack of adequate information about Xizhou Sheng's background makes it difficult for modern researchers to judge to what degree his novel reflects social reality. Map 5, from *The Gazetteer of Zhangqiu*

⁵³ Hu Shi concluded that the real author of *Xingshi* was Pu Songling. About the controversy of *Xingshi*'s authorship, see Glen Dudbridge, "A Pilgrimage in 17th-Century Fiction: T'ai-shan and the *Hsing-shih Yin-yuan Chuan*," *T'oung Pao*, LXXVII, 1991, 4-5; Yenna Wu, "Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World: A Literary Study of *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*," Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1986.

⁵⁴ Xizhou Sheng 西周生, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), pp.1303-4.

County, shows the location of Mingshui Zhen 明水镇 (Mingshui Town), where the major part of *Xingshi* story was located, and other geographical sites that match the description in *Xingshi* precisely. In *Xingshi*, Zhangqiu is called as Xiujiang 绣江, which is the river passing right by the city of Zhangqiu. The names of mountains, such as Yuquan 玉泉, and lakes, such as Baiyun 白云, of Xiujiang in *Xingshi* are clearly marked on this map. Such a match at least helps us to sense the realistic attitude of Xizhou Sheng in writing *Xingshi*, and confirms that he was very familiar with this area.

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It could be merely a coincident that the home town of Pu Songling, whom was identified by Hu Shi as Xizhou Sheng himself, Zichuan, was only about 50 kilometers away from Zhangqiu.⁵⁵ Although Hu Shi's opinion of that Xizhou Sheng was a pen-name of Pu Songling has been rejected by most contemporary researchers, such as Lu Dahuang and Yanna Wu, there is no evidence solid enough to exclude Pu Songling from the possible author of *Xingshi* yet. They were at least contemporaries from the same region who wrote about the same theme with the opinions, if not identical. Thus, Pu Songling's works, especially his non-fiction works, may help us to sense the reality behind the fictional stories of Xizhou Sheng, as well as those of Pu Songling himself.

Pu Songling devoted several of his short stories to the theme of fierce wives including "Jiangcheng 江城," "Ma Jiefu 马介甫," "Sun Sheng 孙生," "Da-nan 大男 (Big Man)," "Lu Wubing 吕无病," "Shao Jiuniang 邵九娘 (The

⁵⁵ See Zhongguo Lishi Dituji Bianjizu 中国历史地图集编辑组, *Zhongguo lishi dituji 中国历史地图集* (Historical Atlas of China) (Shanghai: Zhonghua Ditu Xueshe, 1975), vol. 7, p.46-7. Although Hu Shi's opinion of that Xizhou Sheng was a pen-name of Pu Songling have been rejected by most contemporary researchers, such as Lu Dahuang and Yanna Wu, there is no evidence solid enough to exclude Pu Songling from the possible author of *Xingshi* yet.

Ninth Girl from the Shao Family)," and "Yecha Guo 夜叉国 (The Country of Yaksha)." ⁵⁶

Pu Songling's drama *Rangdu zhou* 攘妒咒 (A Spell to Stop Jealousy) and part of his *Fu gu qu* 妇姑曲 (Story of A Daughter-in-law and her Mother-in-law) are about the same subject.⁵⁷ Pu Songling's concern about this subject was certainly rooted in his own experience. In his article memorializing his wife Woman Liu, Pu told that his several sisters-in-law, especial the wife of his eldest brother, were rude to their mother-in-law. They fought all the time and finally broke the big Pu family into five. Pu Songling's financial difficulty started right from that moment because his wife could not match the ferociousness of the sisters-in-law in dividing family possessions. The husbands, the Pu brothers, did not play any important roles in such important family events.⁵⁸ Pu Songling also wrote two pieces of prose to

⁵⁶ Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊斋志异 (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio). Here, the titles that are not translated into English are names of Persons.

⁵⁷ Pu Songling, *Pu Songling ji*, pp.1145-275, 860-90.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.250-1.

express his anger about fierce wives. He wrote in one of them:

(wives) listening to husbands is an old-fashioned tradition and love between husbands and wives is stronger today than before. The trouble is that women have been increasing their power, which totally destroys the traditional authority of men ... it is love that made brave men bend to their wives. Seeing a yaksha (meaning a ferocious wife) sitting on the clay bed, a warrior attendant to Buddha (meaning a husband) has to show his obedience ... but if he once contradicts his wife's ideas, she will eat her husband's flesh and peel off his skin. Even distinguished man who might be angry under such circumstances would have to swallow his anger at home and he can only show his anger when he is out of home. Faced with light punishment (from wives), men would just take it. But faced with serious punishment, men would run away, which was the way to deal with parental punishment. Wives are disciplining their husbands in the way Mencius' mother taught her son...⁵⁹

In the second piece Pu wrote to urge people to donate money for the printing of a Buddhist sutra which was supposed to be able to bring back the traditional power balance between the two genders. Pu Songling states

⁵⁹ Pu Songling, "Miaoyin jing xuyan 妙音经续言 (A Comment on Miaoyin Sutra), in *Pu Songling ji*, p.309. Pay attention to the ironic tone in the last two sentences. Pu was saying that even punishments from one's parents, the person should accept only light ones to show obedience; while a punishment severe enough to cause injury, one should escape to avoid damage. However, husbands were accepting of all punishments by wives. By doing that, the husbands were respecting the wives more than respecting their parents. It was said that Mencius got serious discipline from his mother when he was little.

that the traditional Confucian education for women failed to stop women from being jealous and fierce: "morality is therefore declining and the sage's teaching is no longer effective." The only hope is the Buddhist sutras.⁶⁰

The letter Pu wrote to Wang Luzhan, mentioned earlier, may also help to understand why Pu was so concerned about "fierce wives." According to that letter, Pu's close friend Wang Luzhan could not do anything about his wife's driving out of his parents from his home, which made Wang lose contact with his parents and eventually led to their father's death while traveling. After learning this news, Wang failed to go immediately to pick up his father's remains, as he was supposed to do, which might also be related to the attitude of his wife.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Pu Songling, "Papo jing shu 怕婆经疏 (An Essay on The Sutra to Intimidate Wives), in *Pu Songling ji*, p.310-1. Another 17th century Chinese novel *Cu Hulu* mentioned the same, so called, sutra, namely, *Papo jing* 怕婆经. Because the text of this sutra is not available, we can hardly judge in what degree and nature did this document connect to Buddhism.

⁶¹ *Pu Songling ji*, p.132. Hu Shi, who viewed Pu Songling as the true author of *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, used this letter to interpret Pu Songling's emotion of writing the fierce wives in *Xingshi*. See Hu Shi, "Xingshi yinyuan zhuan kaozheng 醒世姻缘传考证 (A Study of Xingshi yinyuan zhuan)," in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*. pp.1482-4.

The existence of many fierce wives in the 17th century also was reflected in an article of Zou Yuanbiao 邹元标 (1551-1624), a major leader of the late Ming Donglin Academy, who was so sad about his beloved wife's death that he complained:

Many fierce and jealous wives had many children and grand-children and enjoyed long lives. Is that because heaven likes those women and is reluctant to look after my wife? There may not be an answer for this question. Every time I think about this, I feel so sad that I would rather die.⁶²

The male bias on the social roles of genders in many of 17th century works is obvious. The equally obvious information given by those works is that, nevertheless, fierce wives were not merely an issue of literary fantasy, but also a social reality. Such a reality certainly could not overthrow the general rule of men, yet it did indicate that, in terms of inner family ethics, husbands' domination over wives was no longer a rule in 17th century China.⁶³

⁶² Zhou Yuanbiao, "Chi zeng an ren xian qi jiang shi kuang ji 敕赠安人贤妻江氏圻记 (Commemorative Essay for My Emperor Honored Late Virtuous Wife Anren Jiang," in *GJTSJC*, vol. 328, p.5. "Anren" is a title granted to the wives of officials by the emperors based upon the husbands' levels and contributions.

⁶³ In this regard, the Lower Yangtze and North regions again shared the same picture. Feng Menglong 冯梦龙 (1574-1646), who was a native

Although husband domination of wives was supported by both the official ideology and governmental regulations, it was not easy for a husband to get rid of a fierce wife. According to the author of *Xingshi*, a man could do nothing about this destiny but tolerate it. He states:

All serious personal enemies in former existence will be made into husbands and wives...such a husband and his wife are malignancy on the neck of each other. The malignancy will cost your life if you cut it off, and you will suffer if you leave it untouched. There

of Jiangsu, and Li Yu 李漁 (1610-1680), whose home town was Zhejiang, were the two best-known literati in the lower Yangtze region in that time who contributed significantly to the same subject. Feng Menglong collected old stories about fierce wives and commented that most of the husbands were scared of their wives because they could not make firm and prompt decisions to resolve the problem family conflicts. See Feng Menglong, *Gujin Tangai 古今谈概* (Talks about the Ancient and Present Times) (Taipei: Xinxing Shuju, 1985), p.4575. Li Yu composed several dramas, such as "Wusheng Xi 无声戏 (A Quiet Play)," "Feng Qiu Huang 凤求凰 (Romance)," and "Naihe Tian 奈何天 (Helpless)" with fierce wives as the common theme. See Li Yu, *Li Yu Quanjì 李漁全集* (Collected Works of Li Yu) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1990), vol. 9, 8. In *Cu Hulu 醋葫芦*, a husband Chenggui 成圭, a Hangzhou merchant, is often beaten up by his wife Woman Du 都氏. The anonymous author of this novel explained that the Chinese pronunciation of the name of Woman Du means that "all women in the world are the same as Woman Du." See Fuci Jiaozhu, *Cu hulu*, in *GBXSCK*, collection 8. More literature works about "shrewish wives" of this period are mentioned by Yenna Wu. In her study on this subject, Yenna Wu explained that writing about "shrewish wives" as a literary phenomenon was mainly because shrewish wives provided an attractive subject for fiction. Beyond this, Yenna Wu agreed that this literary theme reveals a male fear of woman's competition for supremacy, anxiety that she may subvert the patriarchal order, and a certain amount of hostility toward her and the literary works on this theme could be a direct reflection of a new social reality, the increasing proportion of dominant wives, that Xie Zhaozhe asserted. See Yanna Wu, "The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1988:48 (2), pp.363-382.

is nowhere to escape in day time and the situation in the night will be even worse. Government can do nothing about this matter; parental authority does not work here; brothers can not help each other; neighbors can merely criticize in vain. Even when you are abused to death, nobody will come to resolve the problem. Even when you are beaten to death, nobody will come to give any advice. You want to be alive, your spouse will make you die. While you want to die, your spouse will keep you alive. The marriage is like a blunt knife, which had never been sharpened for generations, on your neck and sawing and sawing...so that your suffering will be gradual and endless.⁶⁴

This description reflects the helpless feeling of the 17th-century males who viewed husband domination as a rightful regulation. The real reasons for the helplessness of husbands could be various. First of all, when a wife came from a family of higher social status, politically or financially, than that of the husband, the wife might have a louder voice in family administration. Xue Sujie 薛素姐, a fierce wife in *Xingshi*, despised her husband because he got the *Shengyuan*--the first degree in civil service examination--with the help of her brothers.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi*, pp.5-6.

⁶⁵ Ming scholar Tang Shunzhi 唐顺之 (1507-1560) traced that wives' humiliation of husband based on the political power of the wives' maiden families back to the time of Liu-Song (420-479 A.D). At that time, princesses who married officials usually humiliated their husbands. One official who was selected to marry a princess wrote a

Secondly, in a society generally in favor of male domination, a husband was ashamed to tell people about marital conflict. Consequently, husbands usually would not seek a public solution to restore their domination of their wives. In Confucian philosophy, one who could not get his wife to follow the sage's instruction logically could not be a good officer in public service. Therefore, as recorded in *Xingli Huitong* 性理会通 (General Introduction to Human Nature and Principles), "Men today dare not to divorce because they view divorcing wives as a scandal."⁶⁶ So, many husbands had to swallow humiliation from their wives in order to save their public image. For the same reason, some scholars in the 17th century made great efforts to argue that there were no wives dispossessed by Confucius' family.⁶⁷

memorial to the throne to reject the marriage arrangement. According to this man's memorial, from Jin Dynasty (256-316) on, although men who married princesses were honored with high positions and fame, they had to be controlled by their wives. For instance, when their wives were present, Wang Dun 王敦 could not breathe normally, and Huan Wen 桓温 had to change his dignified manner. Somebody even hurt his feet on purpose to avoid marrying a princess... See Tang Shunzhi, *Baibian* 稗编 (Collection of Stories) (Taipei: Xinxing Shuju, 1972) vol. 92. What was happening in the 17th century, however, was more socially and common, rather than politically and rare.

⁶⁶ See *GJTSJC*, vol. 327, p.59, 46.

The third factor to be noted is that marriage was not only a personal relationship between the married. A marriage was usually a social relationship between the two families. As a result, marriage became stable among traditional Chinese families. In the story of *Xingshi*, the humiliated husband Di Xichen does not divorce his fierce wife Xue Sujie because his father cares about his friendship with Xue Sujie's parents.⁶⁸ This factor indicates that the so called Chinese familism contains contradictions within itself.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ See Zhou Lianggong, *Shu Ying*, P.132-133; Fang Duqin 方都秦, "Kongmen Chuqi Bian" 孔门出妻辩 (Defending Confucius' Family from the Saying that It Divorced Wives), in *GJTSJC*, vol. 328, p.5.

⁶⁸ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi*, pp.1046-7.

⁶⁹ For the gentry, "shrewish wives" might appear due to jealousy caused by the husband's affairs with other women or taking concubines. Concubines were, according to the law and in practice, more common among the gentry than among the commoners. Wives in the gentry class therefore more frequently fought with concubines. Wives considered concubines a threat to their own interest because concubines at least sexually shared the husband with wives, which might lead to sharing power in the household. Most concubines were selected for the husband's sexual fantasy, therefore concubines were usually much younger and sexually more attractive than their mistresses. Furthermore, children born by concubines would have equal rights like the children of legal wives. This would also be considered problematical by legal wives who already had their sons. This was why sometimes a "shrewish wife" was identified with a jealous wife. Jealous and "shrewish" wives caused serious concern not only because they threatened the male sexual privilege, but also because they threatened the continuity of the traditional paternal family line. According to Shen Defu, many rich and gentry men could not have offspring because of jealous wives. See Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642), *Wanli yehuo bian* 万历野获编 (Collected notes during the Wanli Period of the Ming) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), p.596.

To people who were financially limited, there was the fourth and also the most important factor. Marriage was financially demanding and divorce meant loss of money, property, a work hand, as well as a sound reputation.

A psychological explanation for wife dominance was related to the concept of female chastity. While husbands were privileged to have sex with women other than their wives, wives had to guard their chastity to their husbands. Women who followed this social norm might have a psychological tension. Under that norm, wives who sacrificed their sexual freedom for their husbands had no hope of equality. It was rare that a shrewish wife was at the same time a lascivious woman. In *Xingshi*, the "shrewish wives" all had a fearless spirit. Sujie's mother criticized Sujie's two brothers who felt ashamed of their sister's shrewish activities: "Did your sister sleep with another man?"⁷⁰ Being shrewish, therefore, could be a way to relieve their psychological tension. This suggests that sexual inequality did cause women to fight back in the 17th century.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi*, p.1045.

On a closer examination, we can find from the ancient classics and Confucian doctrines that there was more room for potential gender competition among commoners. The Chinese synonym for the English word wife is *qi* 妻. In *Liji* 礼记 (Records of the Rites), *qi* was a term particularly for the wives of ordinary men. The spouse of a king was named *hou* 后 or *fei* 妃, of a prince was named *furen* 夫人, of an official was called *ruren* 儒人, of a scholar was named *furen* 妇人. Only the wives of average men without any official title or privileged status were called *qi*.⁷² *Er Ya* 尔雅 explained the meaning of *qi*--wife: "Wives of ordinary scholars and commoners were called *Qi*. *Qi* means *qi* 齐 (equal). The status of those men was too low to be addressed in honorable ways. Therefore, husbands and wives were equally addressed."⁷³ This indicates that husband domination was particularly set up for higher classes, not for average couples. A wife of a commoner had to work like her husband to make a

⁷¹ See Zhao Yifeng 赵轶峰 and Zhao Yi 赵毅, "Shiqi shiji Zhongguo shehui zhong de hanqi 十七世纪中国社会中的悍妻 (Ferocious Wives in Seventeenth-Century China), *Mingshi yanjiu*, 1995:4.

⁷² See in *Liji* 礼记 (Record of the Rites), in *GJTSJC*, vol. 327, p.46.

⁷³ See *GJTSJC*, vol. 327, p.46.

living for the whole family. Therefore, wives made an equal contribution to family survival and they were equally important in the family, no matter what the Confucian giants had instructed. Even a wife of a poor *Shengyuan*, such as Pu Songling, had to work extremely hard all her life and share most of the responsibility of family support and administration.⁷⁴ In the lower Yangtze area, the situation in the lower classes was the same in this regard.⁷⁵ In a gentry family, however, a wife did not have to do any work outside of the household to meet the financial needs of her family. The privileged status and financial income came from the social effort of the husband. The duty, if any, for a gentry wife was to look

⁷⁴ See Pu Songling, "Shu Liushi xingshi," in *Pu Songling ji*, pp.250-1.

⁷⁵ The local gazetteer of Wu 吴 county states that husbands and wives in this county worked very hard shoulder to shoulder to cultivate crops, fish, and weave cotton cloth for survival. See *Qianlong Wuxian zhi* 乾隆吴县志 (Gazetteer of Wu County Edited in the Qianlong Period), *juan* 24, in Hong Huanchun 洪煊椿, ed., *Ming Qing Suzhou nongcun jingji ziliao* 明清苏州农村经济资料 (Sources of the Rural Economy of Suzhou in the Ming and Qing Period) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1988), p.625. In the countryside of Kunshan 昆山 County, the gazetteer records that the country women were the most industrious. Women participated in all physical work, such as weeding, harvesting, and irrigating, together with men. When the government assembled people, men hid away and old women showed up to answer. Men had gotten used to work such as spinning and weaving, while women were not as good as men in doing those. See *Jiajing Kunshan Xianzhi* 嘉靖昆山县志 (Gazetteer of Kunshan County Edited in the Jiajing Period), *juan* 1, in Hong Huanchun, *ibid.*, p.630.

after the household administration. Financially and socially, therefore, a gentry wife was more subordinate to her husband than was an average wife. When a gentry wife was not supposed to do any substantial work in the family, her definition of status was largely as sexual partner of the husband. A working wife, on the other hand, was not only the sexual partner of her husband, but also the working partner. There was a much stronger mutually-dependent relationship between the average husband and wife.

Popular religion from the mid-Ming period seemingly also was responsible for changing gender roles in the 17th century. According to a study of Yu Songqing 喻松青, Ming and Qing popular religions commonly contained positive attitudes toward the equality of the two genders and women were very active in popular religious activities. Moreover, female leaders of popular religious organizations were more common in the north than in other areas. Of ten female religious leaders (among them leading figures of rebellions) listed by Yu Songqing, nine were from the north, mainly Shandong.⁷⁶ This

indicates that the role of women in the commoner family and society in northern China during the Ming and Qing period was significant. The existence of fierce wives and the significant role women played in popular religious and rebellious activities were linking factors in the social history of 17th century northern China.

During the 17th century, when many radically conservative Confucian intellectuals were still trying to stop the decline in husband domination of wives, lower level intellectuals, who were more closely connected to the average people and social reality, started to compromise on the fact of wife domination, so long as the wives observed rules of chastity and respected their in-laws. The author of *Xingshi* even appreciated Woman Di, who totally controlled her husband in family affairs, as the representative of the "healthy atmosphere between the heaven and the earth."⁷⁷ There was an acceptance of the reality of wives in the 17th century. In addition to

⁷⁶ Names listed in Yu's study include Zhang Cuihua 张翠花, Mi Nainai 米奶奶, WeiWangshi 魏王氏, GaoZhangshi 高张氏, Jinshi 金氏, Liushi 刘氏, Zhaowangshi 赵王氏, ... See Yu Songqing, "Mingqing shiqi minjian zongjiao jiaopai zhong de nuxing 明清时期民间宗教教派中的女性 (Women in the Ming and Qing Popular Religious Sects)," *Nankai xuebao* 南开学报 (The Journal of Nankai University), 1982:5, pp.29-33.

⁷⁷ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, p.991.

Xizhou Sheng's viewing wives as destiny, Pu Songling once described how a shrewish wife changed her prodigal husband into a respectable person. Pu Songling wrote a poem to comment:

The reputation of fierce wife is not good, but it is sometimes needed to teach the husband. When a prodigal man is taught to change, he will say thanks to the mother of his children.⁷⁸

The relationship between husband and wife in the 17th century was quite different from the Confucian norms. Wives were challenging the husbands' traditional rights. The real relationships between husbands and wives were determined by various factors, such as community customs, social status, personal characteristics, foundation of particular marriage and many other concrete factors. This was not a change guided by intellectual thinking, but rather, a change that pulled intellectuals to follow.

5. Female Chastity: A Questioned Neo-Confucian Restriction

Although female chastity was valued in ancient and early imperial China by the noble and gentry classes, according to the study of Dong Jiazun 董家遵 on the

⁷⁸ Pu Songling, *Pu Songling Ji*, p.1109.
146

Chinese marriage, remarriage for women was common and even popular during the Han to the Song dynasties. Even to the Confucian giant Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (197-104 B.C.) a widow's remarriage was acceptable if it was allowed by her parents-in-law.⁷⁹ The Northern Song reformer Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹, whose mother married twice, even provided financial allowance for widows and personally arranged the marriage of his widowed daughter-in-law to one of his students.⁸⁰ In *Xin Tangshu* 新唐书 (The New History of the Tang Dynasty), there is mention of an official named Jia Zhiyan 贾直彦 who was banished to a remote place. Considering that his wife Woman Dong 董 was very young and that he might have to be away from her for a long time and might die during that period, Jia advised her to remarry after he was gone.⁸¹ These records show that although female chastity was valued in Confucian classics, it was not an arbitrary norm even in

⁷⁹ Dong Jiazun 董家遵, "Cong Han Dao Song Guafu Zaijia Xisu Kao 从汉到宋寡妇再嫁习俗考 (Widows' Remarriage from the Han to the Song Dynasties)," in Shanxi Renmin Chubanshe, *Shoujie zaijia chanzu ji qita*, p.129.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.149.

⁸¹ Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修 (1007-1072), *Xin Tangshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), p. 5826.

the upper classes by the Northern Song period. The Song Neo-Confucians made female chastity a compulsory norm. Cheng Yi once in answering a question regarding whether a man could marry a widow, stated:

The meaning of marriage is to match yourself. If you marry a woman who has lost chastity to match yourself, you lose your own chastity because of that."⁸²

Someone further asked if a poor and helpless widow could marry again. Cheng Yi answered:

It is because people in recent time are afraid of death from cold or starvation that such a question is raised. However, starving to death matters little and losing chastity matters greatly.⁸³

Female chastity then became an arbitrary standard of female morality. The governmental encouragement of female chastity, from then on, reached the highest level in Chinese history. According to a law dated 1497, if a wife ran away from her husband and married another man, she would face death by hanging.⁸⁴ The spread of Neo-Confucian ideology and state policies pushed widows to maintain their widowhood. However, there is one important

⁸² See *GJTSJC*, vol. 327, p.59.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Da Ming Lu*, p.289.

fact that needs to be noted. In terms of widows' remarriage, the Ming government adopted a double standard. Widows of officials ranked class five and higher were restricted from remarriage, while commoners' widowers were not supposed to follow this regulation. This double standard evidently shows that, even the governments of the late imperial China did not ask commoners to follow Cheng Yi's principles. In particular, Cheng Yi's instruction itself was questioned in the 17th century. Tang Zhen once argued:

Under the pressure of cold and hunger, one can not talk about ritual. Letting parents starve, one is not qualified to talk about filial piety... people have to survive..."⁸⁵

Obviously, starving to death was not merely a thing that "matters little" any more. Gu Yanwu also accepted widows' remarrying, with minor conditions though.

Diversity is the nature of things in the world. Even in the ages of the Three Great Kings, there were orphans, widows and remarried women...A young widow with a son of three or five years old should be looked after by the close relatives of the son. If the boy does not have close relatives and is not allowed to follow his mother to remarry into another family, he can only die. In such a case, if a man married this boy's mother and raised this boy like his own son, this boy has to accept this man as his adoptive father. When the adoptive father dies, the

⁸⁵ Tang Zhen, *Qianshu*, p.85.

boy should mourn him because the debt for being raised is second only to that for being given birth.⁸⁶

In the early 16th century, a man named Ao Ying 敖英 ran away from home to avoid a lawsuit. Years later, when his wife was about to marry another man, Ao Ying suddenly came back and the wedding was canceled. Considering that the family was too poor to allow him to marry another woman, Ao Ying continued to live with his wife and they had two sons. Later on, Ao Ying became an official in Nanjing. Instead of taking his wife with him, Ao Ying took two concubines. His hatred for his wife was so strong that he rejected providing a good education for her sons.⁸⁷ This story reflects that a wife could remarry due to her husband's long time absence, and a realistic poor man might tolerate it. However, it was unlikely to be tolerated in the gentry class. By the 17th century, widows who remarried were much more acceptable and viewed as normal. Intellectuals such as Zhou Lianggong once

⁸⁶ Huang Lucheng, *Ri-zhi-lu jishi*, chapter 5, p.16b-17a. The so called three kings are Yao 尧, Shun 舜 and Yu 禹, who were said to rule ancient China before the establishment of the Xia 夏 Dynasty in about the twenty first century B.C.

⁸⁷ Chu Renhuo 储人获, *Jianhu Ji 坚瓠集* (Hard Calabash Notes), in *BJXSDG*, vol. 15, p.23.

praised a Song official as a man with pure heart, for this man openly admitted that his wife used to be a widow.⁸⁸

The late Ming novelist Ling Mengchu 凌[彳蒙]初 (?-1654) did not want to support widow remarriage openly. Nevertheless, he noticed the unequal nature of traditional female chastity and commented that there is an unfair issue in the world. When a man has died and his wife marries again, people think that the woman has lost her chastity, damaged her reputation, and polluted her body. So women's remarrying is viewed as a taboo. When a man's wife is dead, on the other hand, he may marry again, take concubines, and totally forget his first wife. There would be no blame on him. In the same story, Ling Mengchu tells of a widow who arranged her second marriage with marriage brokers right in front of her former parents-in-law. No person had the legal right to stop this widow from marrying again.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Zhou Lianggong, *Shuying*, p.282.

⁸⁹ See Ling Mengchu, "Man Shaoqing jifu baoyang" 滿朝荐饥附飽揚 (Ungrateful Story of Man Chaojian), in *Erke Paian Jingqi* 二刻拍案惊奇 (The Second Edition of In surprising Stories) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), chapter 11.

Apparently, the freedom for widows to remarry developed during the 17th century. By the early Qing period, Qian Yong 钱咏 more openly criticized the Neo-Confucian standard. He pointed out that people before the Song dynasty did not consider women remarrying to be wrong. It was from the Song dynasty on that remarrying became shameful. This mistake was made by scholars who taught *Daoxue* 道学 (the Neo-Confucian doctrines represented by the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi). What is crucial in deciding whether or not to marry again was a woman's status, emotions, capability, and financial situation. There should not be a universal rule made for widows.⁹⁰ Another early Qing scholar Wang Yingkui 王应奎 (1684-?) also criticized the Neo-Confucian thinkers. He argued: Cheng Yi did insist that being starved to death matters little and losing chastity matters greatly. However, the classical rituals established by ancient kings include regulations on how a person should mourn step-father. That indicates that women's remarrying was

⁹⁰ See Qian Yong 钱咏 (1759-1844), *Lu Yuan Conghua* 履园丛话 (Talks in Footstep Garden) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), p.612; Feng Erkang and Chang Jianhua 冯尔康, 常建华, *Qing Ren Shehui Shenghuo* 清人社会生活 (Social Life in Qing China) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1990), pp.233-4.

not prohibited by the ancient kings...Now the gentry families view women's remarrying as a shameful activity and managed with great effort to keep widowhood, which often led to their committing adultery.⁹¹ According to Wang Yingkui, only the gentry felt ashamed of widows' remarriage, and such a compulsory requirement for gentry widows caused unexpected affairs among those women. Wang certainly did not expect the common women to follow this standard.⁹²

Widows remarrying was common in the 17th century as reflected in Chu Renhuo's words: "There are women who became widows the second time and married for the third time."⁹³ In the laws of the Ming and Qing, the only legal restriction on commoner widows remarrying was that a widow was not allowed to remarry until her former husband had been dead for 70 days. Otherwise, the husband's clan might bring the widow to the court.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Wang Yingkui, *Liunan xubi* 柳南续笔 (Continuation of the Liunan Notebook), in *CSJCCB*, p.165.

⁹² See Feng Erkang and Chang Jianhua, *Qingren shehui shenghuo*, pp.233-4. In the same section, Feng and Chang documented that from 1644 to 1861, eighty to ninety percent widows in Shanghai county married again due to their needs for survival.

⁹³ Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu ji*, p.32.

Pu Songling once wrote a statement for one of his countymen who was marrying his widowed niece. The statement openly mentioned the background of the woman and the statement was written in a cheerful tone.⁹⁵ In one of his dramas, Pu Songling indicated that men would not mind marrying a divorced woman.⁹⁶

Lloyd Eastman's description, likely based on more recent history, certainly fits the situation in 17th century China.

Prostitutes were not the only women who failed to conform to the Confucian ideal of female chastity. Widows who refused to remarry, for example, were often honored by the commemorative arches erected by the government, but such exemplars of chastity, like the joint family, were probably found more often in wealthy, elite families than among the poor.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.39.

⁹⁵ Pu Songling, "Siyue dairen qian zhinu zaiqiao qi 四月代人遣侄女再離 (A Statement Written for Somebody Who Is Marry His Widowed Niece off), in *Pu Songling ji*, p.217-8.

⁹⁶ See *Pu Songling ji*, p.878.

⁹⁷ Lloyd Eastman, *Family, fields, and Ancestors*, p.33. In the same study, however, Eastman provided a tentative generalization: that until the late 19th century, liberating tendencies of women were of limited effect and that the position of women during the early Qing period may well have fallen lower than at any other time in China's long history. See *ibid.*, p.20. This generalization is, however, doubtful. In addition to the social practices among the commoners which had seriously broken the Confucian concept of female humbleness, the governmental laws changed as well. For example, the daughters' rights of inheritance was improved by the early Qing. The early Ming government ranked daughters second to the clansmen of their fathers, as the last category in the ranking list, to success the property of the fathers. In this case, a daughter would not be eligible to success anything of her father if a clansman was

Ming law allowed divorce if a husband and wife could not get along with each other. In the early Qing period, cases can be found where a woman might divorce her husband because he was poor. There was a poor student named Sun Tianxian 孙天闲. After his several failures in the primary level civil service examination, his wife, who already had one son and one daughter by Sun, insisted upon a divorce. She soon remarried.⁹⁸ In the ideal Neo-Confucian ethic, a woman was to remain chaste from the time of her engagement. Official documents honored many widows who were engaged by arrangement but who never saw the men they had been engaged to. According to Niu Xiu, however, an engaged girl might break an engagement because the man she was engaged to was ill.⁹⁹

selected to continue her father's family line. See *GJTSJC*, vol. 66, p.173. After 300 hundred years of the founding of the Ming, in 1668, the newly established Qing government accepted that a daughter would be eligible to share one third of the legacy of her father when a nephew of her father was to continue her father's line. If a distant relative, rather than a nephew, was selected to do the same thing, the daughter would share two fifth of her father's inheritance. See *GJTSJC*, vol., 66, p.188.

⁹⁸ See Niu Xiu 钮[王秀](?-1704), *Hu Sheng 斛剩* (Collected Stories) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), P.2.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

The difficulty of maintaining female chastity according to Neo-Confucianism was obvious. As a result, a realistic policy was proposed by Lu Kun 吕坤 (1536-1618). Lu asserted that poor living conditions made it easy for men and women in poor families to meet together. They usually did not take reputation and chastity as serious matters. By contrast, the gentry families had the facility to separate women and men even within the household. Also, gentry families practiced ritual cultivated morality. Noting this difference, Lu Kun insisted that an official should not regulate the ignorant and poor commoners with the principles of the sages. When an official was dealing with affairs among commoners, he should not follow the written bylaws too strictly. Some flexibility beyond law and regulations was necessary.¹⁰⁰ This was a significant compromise made by Confucian officials. In brief, women from average families were virtually no longer supposed to keep chastity as strictly as the gentry women were.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ See Lu Kun, *Shi Zheng Lu* 实政录 (Record of Politics), chapter 6, p.19, in Yang Xuefeng 杨雪峰, *Mingdai de shenpan zhidu* 明代的审判制度 (Judicial System of the Ming) (Taipei: Liming, 1981), p.373.

Another notable phenomenon of 17th-century China was the unprecedented popularity of romantic stories, dramas, and especially novels. In literary history, this category of novels is called *Yanqing Xiaoshuo* 言情小说 (romance), or, when major characters were gifted students and beautiful girls, *Caizi jiaren Xiaoshuo* 才子佳人小说 (novels about the stories of gifted young men and beautiful girls). Literary giants, such as Feng Menglong, Ling Mengchu, Li Yu, Tang Xianzhu 汤显祖 (1550-1617), each composed some work in this category. Many lesser known authors contributed countless short stories and novels on this subject. A typical theme of these stories is that of a beautiful daughter of a rich and respectable family who encounters a handsome and gifted young man

¹⁰¹ During the 17th century, maintenance of widowhood was still encouraged by the government, which kept a strong impact on social practice. Apparently, however, the influence of this type of governmental policies were effective in limited range. In addition, to the commoner widows, keeping widowhood did not necessarily reflect their ethical choice but a decision about how to survive. For instance, according to the governmental order of the Ming, widows who did not have sons and wanted to keep widowhood for their late husbands were eligible to hire their husbands' property in the condition of adopting hires from the husbands' clans. Remarrying widows, on the other hand, had to leave behind not only their late husbands' property but also their own dowries to their husbands' clan. See *GJTSJC*, vol., 66, p.173. These types of policies forcefully increased the difficulties for widows to remarry. As a twisted reflection of such a tension, it was not rare that widows committed suicide. See T'ian Rukang, *Male Axaty and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times*.

from a lower class or poor family. The two fall in love, make a commitment to each other, and then are separated under the force of the girl's parents. After various difficulties, the girl's parents come to a compromise with the younger generation and finally accept the title of parents-in-law. While still containing some old Confucian sayings as decoration, these stories generally described love in a positive tone. The key concept in them is *qing* 情, meaning love, feeling, and passion, which would be put into the range of *yu* 欲, meaning desire in Zhu Xi's interpretation. Zhu Xi called for maintaining *tianli* 天理--principles of heaven reflected by Confucian norms and, the extinguishing of *renyu* 人欲--secular human desires including desires for sex, for money, for power, and for status. Traditional female chastity as a factor of *tianli* was shaken when girls were allowed to select husbands on their own for love.

Not only in fiction were women's activities in lower society effectively un-restricted by Confucian regulations in the 17th century. When Huang Liuhong came to Tancheng in 1670, he was concerned by what he saw there:

Married women and unmarried girls did not stay behind their doors as they should...but made themselves up and dressed in finery; they strolled by the rivers or rode in fancy carriages up into the hills, where they said they went to worship the gods or pay homage to Buddha; but while there crowds of young people of both sexes mingled together and sported in the monks' lodgings.¹⁰²

Recently, a Chinese scholar concluded that there was a woman's liberation movement in late Ming period.¹⁰³ In her study of literate gentrywomen in 17th century Jiangnan 江南 (the Lower Yangtze region), Dorothy Ko challenged "the victimized woman" image of late imperial China and viewed women as "architects of concrete gender relations, the building blocks from which the overarching gender system was constructed."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Huang Liuhong, *Fuhui quanshu*. This translated quotation is taken from Jonathan Spence's *The Death of Woman Wang*, p.19.

¹⁰³ See Chen Baoliang 陈宝良, *Qiao Qiao San Qu De Musha: Ming Dai Wenhua Licheng Xinshuo* 悄悄散去的幕沙: 明代文化历程新说 (The Vanishing Screen Covering: A New Perspective of the Cultural Changes during the Ming) (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1988), pp.71-80.

¹⁰⁴ See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p.8. It should be noted that Chen and Ko have different concepts about women in society during late imperial China. Chen views women as the victim of the existing social system in general, and terms women's freedom, somehow limited, as a "liberation." Ko's intention is that to find out how the Confucian gender system functioned and how the gentrywomen opened up arenas of freedom for themselves without directly challenging the ideal norms. In other words, Ko views the women that she examined as an active part of the operators of the existing gender system and social system. The key point of the present chapter is, however, that the so call Confucian gender system did not effectively function at the bottom of society.

6. Discussion

In the above examination, we find that the major aspects of Confucian family ethic were challenged by the social practice of the commoners in 17th-century China. The change in family ethics was determined by both historical changes and the cultural characteristics of traditional China. The so-called Confucian family ethic was by itself a changing concept in traditional China. In the original Confucian ideology, brotherliness, for instance, did not simply mean keeping married brothers in one household. Female chastity, in terms of forbidding widows re-marriage, did not become a compulsory ethical standard until the Neo-Confucians dominated the thinking of intellectuals by the Song period. Therefore, the twisting of the Confucian family ethic was largely a challenge to the Neo-Confucianism of late imperial China. The Neo-Confucian family ethic enjoyed an unquestioned domination of Chinese intellectuals and of political thinking from the 12th century to the 15th century. Then profound changes occurred. These changes might be related to Wang Yangming's Xinxue 心学 (the School of Mind). Wang

Yangming was certainly by himself a Neo-Confucian giant. However, by emphasizing the "original substance of the mind" and the "pure intelligence and clear consciousness of the mind," Wang Yangming stimulated individual spiritual freedom. The standard of intelligence and virtue, to intellectuals influenced by Wang, was largely subjective. This intellectual trend was responsible for the decline of late Ming social stability. The unprecedented cultural variety of 17th-century China was, therefore, partially stimulated by the mutation of Neo-Confucianism itself. In the words of Feng Qi, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the moral decline started from "the development of culture." In other words, society was too developed to keep the gentry away from looking for novelty. As a result, the intellectuals called on Buddhism and Taoism to help them to construct their theories. In the end, Confucianism became a shackle to them.

Because of the social and cultural differences between the gentry and the commoners, the changes in the family ethics of 17th-century China were not caused solely by intellectual thinking. Commoners had their own

culture and norms different from the state orthodoxy. Any outside injection of state ideology into the world of commoners had to go through a communication channel which largely relied on education. The overwhelming percentage of people were illiterate. This made it difficult for Confucianism to penetrate rural society. What strongly guided the social activities of the commoners were the current social custom and the needs of basic survival. Tian Yiheng 田艺衡 (1524-?), a late Ming writer, put this point clearly:

Cultivation is the duty of men. Today's peasants destroyed their hoes and plough shares to let their children steal. Weaving is the duty of women. Today's weavers destroyed their machines and let their daughters sell sex. Why? Cultivation and weaving in ancient times provided people with food and warmth. Cultivation and weaving today, however, make people hungry and cold. Therefore, cultivation and weaving are worse than stealing and selling sex.¹⁰⁵

When basic conditions of living were in crisis, average people would likely break existing norms if that could bring them a chance of survival. In this sense, commoners were more realistic than the intellectuals. When society is facing fundamental challenge, unlike Confucians who

¹⁰⁵ Tian Yiheng, *Chunyu Yixiang* 春雨异响 (Strange Sound of the Rain in the Spring), in CSJCCB, p.2.

would care very much about tradition and principles, the commoners would likely follow their common sense.

In the form of official ideology and norms, many aspects of the Confucian family ethic were against human nature, especially that of female chastity. When men's extramarital sexual activity was accepted and concubinage was functioning as an accepted practice, female chastity was a key symbol of gender inequality. Whenever the state and intellectual control of society was loose, the norms would naturally be inclined to be broken. Filial piety and brotherliness, in their Neo-Confucian form in 17th-century China, were not suitable social policies.

Seventeenth-century China saw tremendous political changes. The Ming regime was in overall crisis in its last fifty years. Corruption of the royal family, the bureaucratic system, and the factional struggle at the court destroyed the effectiveness of state control over the society. Serious famines in north China, peasant rebellions and wars against Japanese invasion of Korea and defense in northeast territory against Manchu invasion, preoccupied the Ming government finally leading to its collapse. The military operation of the Manchu

forces in south China brought serious social destruction along with human slaughter and intellectual disintegration. In such a time, it was hard to practice official ideology, ethical patterns, and regulations.

The Qing consolidation of Chinese society restored orthodox Neo-Confucianism. The political power of the new regime brought in relatively stable economic conditions and social life. Even so, Neo-Confucian family ethics were hardly well received among the commoners. The twisting of Confucian family ethics reflects the diversity of Chinese social culture and the flexibility of the traditional Chinese value system.

Chapter IV

The Commoners and Commercialization

Religious pluralism and the diversified ethical values of Chinese commoners show that they were not living under the strict regulation of any exclusive system of philosophical or religious doctrines. What was guiding their judgment was the common sense they had garnered from their experiences of life. This might mean that commoners lacked an integrated view in comparison to Confucian intellectuals, but it did not mean, however, that their activities lacked direction.

In exploring the dynamic sources of the recent East Asian economic development, researchers, like Professor Tu Weiming, for example, have stressed that Neo-Confucianism played a key role in that process.¹ In re-interpreting Neo-Confucianism, Professor Yu Yingshih has pointed out that Neo-Confucianism contributed to the

¹ See Tu Wei-ming, "Toward A Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism: A Background Understanding" in Irene Eber, ed., *Confucianism: The Dynamics of Tradition* (New York: Macmillan, 1986; also see Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," *Daedalus*, 120:2 (Spring 1991), 1-31. Other scholars' similar opinions are many. See Hwang, Kwang-kuo 黄光国, *Rujia sixiang yu dongya xiandai hua* 儒家思想与东亚现代化 (Confucianism and East Asian Modernization) (Taipei: Chu-Liu Book Co., 1988); G.L Hicks & Redding, "The Story of the East Asian 'Economic Miracle'," *Euro-Asia Business Review*, 2:.3, pp.24-32.

commercialization in China since the 16th century.² The insight that these scholars have provided is significant. Nevertheless, it can be misleading to address the positive role of Confucianism without careful consideration of the commoners, their commercial activities and mentality. Again, we can not simply presume that when we have achieved an understanding of the Confucian elite, we have also understood the Chinese commoners. It was the commoners, rather than the Confucian intellectuals or gentry, who played the most important and dynamic role in the commercialization that came after the 16th century. Rather than a triumph of Confucian mentality, the late Ming commercialization was a significant indication of the existence of the non-Confucian values in late imperial China. Such a phenomenon, on one hand, confirms the previous argument that the Chinese commoners had their own cultural identification in late imperial China, while on the other, it challenges the opinions that focus on Confucianism to interpret Chinese culture and history in general. This chapter examines the dynamism seen in the

² See Yu Yingshih, *Zhongguo jishi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen* 中国近世宗教伦理与商人精神 (Modern Chinese Religious Ethics and Merchant Spirits) (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 1987).

money-making activities of the commoners in the context of the commercialization around the 17th century.

In Chinese history, records of commercial activities, or private money accumulation through economic activities, can be traced back to the time before the birth of Confucianism. From then on, these activities never vanished, no matter what the official ideologies and major religions held. Overwhelmingly, these money-making activities, by means of economic force rather than by means of political power, were undertaken by non-privileged commoners. The traditional state policy of discrimination against and restriction of merchants, namely *yishang* 抑商 (restricting commercial activities), from the time of Confucius through the Tang dynasty was a reflection of the problem of Confucianism with commercialization. It was when the state restriction of urban commercial activities became less arbitrary, after the 10th century, that the economic prosperity of late imperial China became possible. The early Ming consolidation could be viewed as a setback for the commercial development of China. In 1386, an imperial edict, just one example of early Ming conservative policies, ordered all adult males to stay in their

original occupations. To insure the effectiveness of this policy, the same edict required that any man who wanted to leave his hometown must inform his neighbors in order to restrict commercial activities. This edict tightened up the eligibility of merchants: anybody who was doing commercial exchanges, including those who had already obtained official permission, must have a minimum of 100,000 wen 文 (cent) of copper coin or 10 guan 贯 of paper bills. Merchants with less than that amount of money would be arrested and exiled to uninhabited areas.³ The value of 100,000 wen or 10 guan, in the early Ming period, was as high as 10 taels of silver.⁴ Starting a small business was therefore next to impossible. Yet, profound changes occurred through the 16th to the 18th centuries. Rural commercial activities and the connections of rural commoners to local, regional and even national markets were much more developed after the 16th century in comparison to those in Song, Yuan and early Ming periods. These phenomena have been described

³ See *GJTSJC*, vol., 66, p.173.

⁴ The marketing value of the three types of currency all kept changing when they were in use. Approximately, with one tael of silver, which had relatively stable value, one could buy 250 kg. rice in the early Ming period. About the changes in Ming monetary system, see Zhao Yifeng, "Shilun Mingdai hubi zhidu de yanbian jiqi lishi yingxiang," *Dongbei Shida xuebao*, 1985:4, 41-6.

by Chinese historians since the 1950s with abundant sources and explanations.⁵ The major changes that enabled the late Ming commercialization, such as the abandonment of the household registration system, and the replacement of governmental issued paper bills by silver as the major currency, did not happen under any conscious supervision from the government, the gentry, or Confucian intellectuals. Rather, they appeared first as problems to the state and received pragmatic recognition by the government when all efforts to restore the older systems turned out to be useless. The commercialization itself, in the view of many Confucian writers, indicated the decline of Confucian values and social stability. Rather than Confucianism, the values, ethics, and beliefs of the commoners, are more relevant to the late Ming commercialization.

Merchant is an occupation that is as old as the history of Chinese civilization. The late Ming commercialization was, in large part, a popularization of

⁵ As noted by Professor Yu Yingshi and many others, Chinese historian in the 1950s fell in a dogmatic framework of looking for the Chinese capitalist spirit in pro-modern China to prove a universal law of human history. The theoretical problem of those studies, nevertheless, do not mean that all those discovered sources are meaningless. What we need is a new interpretations of these materials. See Yu Yingshih, *Zhongguo jishi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen*.

commercial activities among the commoners. It was accompanied by a remarkable transfer of population from other traditional occupations to various market-related occupations. It was a liberation from traditional restrictions on social status.

1. Money-making Activities of the Commoners in the North

Commercially, North China, in the 15th to 17th century was less active than the Lower Yangtze region, but it was more active than other regions. The reason for the differences among the regions was largely geographical.

In the gazetteer of Yuncheng 郛城 county of Shandong, edited in 1634, the editor writes that people "involved in commerce for profit are filling up streets and roads with various products coming from water and land."⁶ People in another county of Shandong, Boping 博平, after the Jiajing 嘉靖 period (1522-1566), were also described as "being popularly involved in

⁶ See *Yuncheng xianzhi* 郛城县志 (Gazetteer of Yuncheng County), in Fu Yiling, "Ming dai jingji shi shang de Shandong yu Hehan 明代经济史上的山东与河南 (The Role of Shandong and Henan in the Economic History of the Ming)," *Fu Yiling Zhi Shi Wushi Nian Wenji* 傅衣凌治史五十年文集 (Collected Articles in Honor of Fu Yiling's Fiftieth Anniversary in Historical Studies) (Xiamen: Xiamen Daxue chubanshe, 1989), p.183.

commerce."⁷ In the gazetteer of Linxian 林县 of Henan, mentioned by Professor Fu Yiling, peasants were producing pottery and digging minerals for the markets.⁸

The late Ming Scholar Zhang Han wrote several articles describing the commercial activities in his time. He noted that people were coming to the Beijing area from all across the country, especially from the Lower Yangtze area, to do business. It was, according to Zhang Han, because the late Ming artisans were no longer working directly for the government. They were able to develop their own businesses. These people, called *baigong zazuo* 百工杂作 (artisans in a hundred different specialties), were certainly commoners.⁹ In commenting on this sort of activity, Zhang Han was of the opinion that although these people made good money, they spent their money on expensive things and did not enjoy themselves. So, the businesses of these artisans indicated merely their subtle skills and weak

⁷ See *Boping xianzhi* 博平县志 (Gazetteer of Boping County), in Fu Yiling, *ibid.*, p.184.

⁸ Fu Yiling, *Ming Qing Shehui Jingji Shi Lunwen ji* 明清社会经济史论文集 (Collected Articles in Social Economic History of China during the Ming and Qing) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), p.200.

⁹ This picture is very much the same as what one can see on Beijing streets today.

abilities.¹⁰ Zhang Han shows little appreciation of these money-making activities of the commoners. To him, there must be some more valuable goals in life, such as becoming an official.¹¹

Shen Bang 沈榜, the county head of Wanping 宛平, close to Beijing, also observed that a majority of the peasants around the capital area were growing fruits and flowers and selling them in the market for much higher profit than they used to get from growing grains.¹² The local gazetteer of Shahe 沙河 county of Bei Zhili described people in this county as

by custom thrifty and simple. Scholars follow a Confucian gentleman's style. In the markets, there are many people involved in commercial activities.¹³

Market-oriented activities of the rural commoners in the north reached an unprecedented level during the 16th and 17th centuries. Comparison was made by the local

¹⁰ Zhang Han, *Songchuang mengyu*, pp.76-7.

¹¹ Ibid., p.85.

¹² Shen Bang, *Wan Shu Zaji*, chapter 1; see also Ke Jianzhong 柯建中, "Lue lun Ming Qing shiqi xiaonong ziran jingji xiang shangpin jingji de zhuanhua 略论明清时期小农自然经济向商品经济的转化 (A Brief Discussion of the Transition of the Independent Peasant Economy to Commercial Economy during the Ming and the Qing)," *Sichuan Daxue Xuebao* 四川大学学报 (The Journal of Sichuan University), 1983:4, p.70.

¹³ *GJTSJC.*, vol., 8, p.1130.

gazetteer of Taian 泰安 of Shandong. From that source, we learn that in the Yuan and early Ming periods, people in this county were simple, unadorned, liked to read classics, and stayed in *changye* 常业 (regular business), which meant agriculture. By 1602, however, according to the head of that subprefecture, Ren Honglie 仁弘烈, the traditional customs had been changed. People were competing in the markets. Ren viewed such a change as indicating a decline of the traditional values.¹⁴

Professor Fu Yiling notes that commercial activities were popular in Henan and Shandong:

According to the Ming local gazetteers, people in Shandong did not look down on merchants. In Yanzhou 兗州, among the four categories of people (namely scholars, peasants, artisans, and merchants) peasants occupied six to seven out of ten of the population while merchants occupied one to two. People in Huaixian 淮县 commonly worked as merchants. People in Linyi 临邑, where land productivity had reached a maximum, had gotten used to trading. In Anqiu 安邱, rich people were involved in commercial activities to make profits. Zhangqiu 章邱 was crowded by merchants ... Wuan 武安 of Henan 河南, especially, produced many merchants ...¹⁵

¹⁴ Ren Honglie, *Ming Ren Honglie Bianji Taian Zhouzhi* 明任弘烈编辑泰安州志 (Gazetteer of Tai-an Subprefecture Edited by Ren Honglie of the Ming), in *ZGDFZCS*, chapter 1, p.23.

¹⁵ Fu Yiling, "Ming dai jingji shi shang de Shandong yu Henan," in *Fu Yiling Zhi Shi Wushi Nian Wenji*, p.195.

A Qing gazetteer of Huangxian 黄县 of Shandong recorded that this county had thirty percent of its population in agriculture, while scholar-officials 士 and artisans together were twenty percent, and merchants occupied fifty percent of the population.¹⁶ The highest percentage of merchants in the population has been found in Shexian 歙县 of Anhui in the Lower Yangtze area. In the late Ming period, there only thirty percent of people remained in their hometown while seventy percent of them went out to do businesses.¹⁷ Like many figures in classical sources, these percentages were not based on accurate statistics but on estimates. Even so, the popularity of commercial activities among commoners was no doubt a fact.

¹⁶ *Tongzhi Huangxia zhi* 同治黄县志 (Gazetteer of Huang County Edited in Tongzhi Period), chapter 3; see Wu Liangkai 吴量恺, "Qing Chao Qianqi Guonei Shichang de Fazhan 清朝前期国内市场的发展 (The Development of the National Market in the Early Qing Period)," in *Shehui Kexue Jikan* 社会科学辑刊 (Collected Articles in Social Science), 1986:43(2), p.39. In the same article, Wu described the development of the early Qing inter-regional commercial exchanges.

¹⁷ Wang Shizhen 王世贞, "Zeng Cheng Jun wushi xu 赠程君五十序 (To Mr. Cheng for His Fiftieth Birthday)," in *Yanzhou Shanren Sibü Gao* 兖州山人四部稿 (Works of Yanzhou Shanren in Four Categories), chapter 61; see Bian Li 卞利, "明中叶以来徽州争讼和民俗健讼问题探论 (A Preliminary Examination of the Lawsuit Practice as A Customs in Huizhou Since the mid-Ming Period)," in *Ming shi yanjiu*, 1993(3), p.76.

The commercialization of agriculture that happened in Yanzhou 兗州 and Qingzhou 青州 prefectures during the early Qing period shows that there were little hesitation on the part of ordinary peasants when it came to involving themselves in commercial activities. In Ziyang 滋阳 county of Yanzhou, tobacco was cultivated since the early Shunzhi 顺治 period (1644-1661). By Yongzheng 雍正 period (1723-1735), tobacco was grown everywhere. Merchants came regularly from Beijing to buy it. Tobacco brokers therefore increased quickly.¹⁸ In Shouguang 寿光 county of Shandong,

tobacco cultivation was started in Kangxi period (1662-1722). Within several years, tobacco was grown in all the countryside. Dealers' traffic was as busy as shuttles in a loom. Then, tobacco production became the specialty of this county.¹⁹

Fang Xing 方行 mentions that the six largest tobacco planters in Jining 济宁 area were dealing with this business worth a total of two million taels of silver.²⁰

¹⁸ See "Zhifang dian," in *GJTSJC*, chapter 238.

¹⁹ *Jiaqing Shouguang xianzhi* 嘉庆寿光县志 (Gazette of Shouguang County Edited in Jiaqing Period), chapter 9; see Fang Xing, "Lun Qing Dai Qianqi Nongmin Shangpin Shengchan de Fazhan 论清代前期农民商品生产的发展 (On the Development of Peasant Commercial Productions in the Early Qing Period)," *Zhongguo Jingji Shi Yanjiu* 中国经济史研究 (Chinese Economic History Studies), 1986:1, p.62.

²⁰ Ibid.

According to 17th-century literature, doing business was a way for commoners, including *shengyuan*, to make a living. For example, in *Xingshi*, Di Xichen, who was humiliated by his wife, moved away from his hometown in Shandong and setup a pawnshop in Beijing.²¹ Another *shengyuan* in Linqing 临清 subprefecture of Shandong not only owned a hotel, but also ran it.²² Zhang Maoshi 张茂实, a son of a rich peasant in Shandong, became a merchant simply because he had seen one of his neighbors getting rich in business.²³

A clear overall impression given by these sources is that people of commoner origin were more active in economic activities than people who identify themselves as Confucians. More clearly, the majority of merchants and other business owners were commoners. In state Confucian ideology, ordinary people's money-making activities were much better justified than that of officials and intellectuals. This was explained by a Qing scholar Qian Yong 钱泳 (1759-1844):

Merchants should be rich, so that interest can be obtained easily. Buddhist monks and Taoist priests should be poor, so that corrupt desires would come to

²¹ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, p.1085. About Di Xichen, see Chapter III.

²² *Ibid.*, pp.262-3.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.900.

them rarely. Confucians should not be poor and should not be rich either. Not being rich would preserve their spiritual nature, while not being poor would allow them to concentrate on studies.²⁴

Based on such a classified picture of roles, the career of a Confucian elite was inimical to the career of a merchant. A merchant might conduct Confucian studies to expand his ventures or just as a hobby, which is put by modern historians as *gu er hao ru* 贾而好儒 (merchants who were fond of Confucianism). This sort of phenomenon would be considered acceptable by Confucians, but when a Confucian intellectual-official was making money in the market, certain psychological tension would usually occur. This issue will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

2. The Mentality of the Commoners in Their Money-making Activities

Although the late Ming commercialization appeared as a breakthrough in late imperial Chinese history, commercial activity itself was by no means new in China. Taking Yanzhou 兖州 of Shandong as an example, as already mentioned, Professor Fu Yiling found that people in that

²⁴ Qian Yong, *Luyuan conghua*, p.183.

prefecture did not look down on merchants. Such an attitude towards commercial activities can be traced back to the early history of this area. About people in Yanzhou, a record from the Former Han (206 B.C to 25 A.D) states:

Now it has been long after the age of the sages. The legacy of Zhou gong 周公 (Duke Zhou) is vanishing and the Confucian school system is damaged. Land is in short supply in relation to the size of the population. Profits on growing mulberry and hemp can be seen, while no benefit from forests and lakes can be made. People are by custom frugal and stingy, loving money, conducting merchant activities...²⁵

A simple conclusion here is that money-making is a built-in tendency of those commoners, that might have been there ever since money itself was created. The emotional willingness for people to participate in commercial activities was there long before commercialization became a reality and it was not necessarily related to Confucianism. The problems that prevented them from going further were the conditions they were facing, such as economic situations and state policies.

In terms of motivation, simply wanting to make money is not enough to make people successful in commercial activities. A general asceticism was necessary for

²⁵ *GJTSJC*, vol., 9, p.2136.

original capital accumulation. Furthermore, the asceticism needs to be "this world" oriented to encourage commercial activities. A Buddhist monk's asceticism for transcending his life in the human world would lead to the reverse.

Chinese culture in general emphasizes this world because it lacks a unified religion and a powerful concept of transcendental salvation. On this point, there was not a clear difference between Confucianism and popular culture. The ultimate goal of a Confucianism is to contribute to the moral perfection of the human world by achieving personal moral perfection and statesmanship. This world-orientation of popular culture, on the other hand, is reflected in the pluralism of the commoners' religious beliefs and values, which is ultimately pragmatic.

Buddhism and Taoism did attract people with the promise of more transcendent salvation. Nevertheless, the ultimate salvation of these two religions, *nirvana* and becoming immortal, were mainly possible for monks and priests who could conduct life-time and socially isolated religious meditation. Popular Buddhism and Taoism were all mixed with various factors. In the 17th century,

commoners who could only afford "faith" in Buddha or Taoist gods might only obtain reduced salvation. The most common form of this type of secularized religious beliefs in north China during the 17th century was the belief of *yinguo* 因果 (karma), *baoying* 报应 (retribution), and *lunhui* 轮回 (reincarnation). According to these beliefs, everybody would be rewarded or punished in one's later life, or in the next life, precisely according to one's activities and even morality. Although becoming a deity, fairy, or immortal was a part of this type of religious lore, the most popular dream was to be rich, honorable, and have successful descendants. In other words, the expectation of commoners in their religious life was mainly to obtain the patronage of spiritual powers. It was not a common goal of the Chinese to live permanently in a paradise filled with "the true God's love." The activities of Chinese commoners were overwhelmingly this world oriented. Achieving success in this world could bring the Chinese ultimate satisfaction. Commoners did not need any extra thing like a "calling" from a God to motivate themselves to money-making activities.

The story of Karma, retribution, and reincarnation provides an ideal for people to be honest and self-

disciplined in their activities, including commercial activities. The 17th century witnessed a general decline of morality in China, especially in the eyes of the conservative Confucian intellectuals.²⁶ Even so, a reasonable moral standard was the foundation of the developing commercialization of that time. A late Ming writer, who left only a pen name, provided such a standard:

A man seven *chi* 尺 tall in this world should cultivate his personality with principles, write articles from the heart, and make money by hard work. If one's personality is not based on principles, one is a mediocre person; if articles are not written from the heart, they are shallow; if money is not made by hard work, it is not real.²⁷

Money, therefore, should be made by honest hard work.

Another late Ming writer Gu Gongxie 顾公燮 believed that money made in immoral ways would be eventually lost and even cause retribution.

money and possessions are given according to fixed rules. Whoever has morality can pass his money and possessions to his descendants, while those who do not have this quality are unable to enjoy any part of them.²⁸

²⁶ Refer to chapter II, III, and IV.

²⁷ Zhuoyuanting Zuren, *Zhaoshi bei*, p.25. *Chi* is a unit of length. In modern standard, one *chi* equals to one third of meter. In imperial China, however, the length of this unit was shorter and kept changing. "Seven *chi* tall" was considered the normal size of a man.

To keep money, accordingly, requires both hard work and morality, which is judged by certain superior powers beyond humans.

Smart calculation, rational bookkeeping, and strategic planning were other necessary qualities for a successful business person. These can also be seen in the sources from the 17th century. For example, Gao Zhi 高智, a native of Zhangqiu county in Shandong, was a master of inter-personal relationships. He increased his money by lower interest rates. To deal with those customers hopelessly indebted to him, rather than sue them, Gao helped them to deal with stress and made use of them in his business. He had a plan to help his clan and other people to maintain a respectable reputation. Gao respected people who were working for him and other business people and never appeared to be superior to them.²⁹ The traditional Chinese value of inter-personal harmony was practiced consciously in Gao's business operation.³⁰

²⁸ See Gu Gongxie 顾公燮, *Dan Wu Bijì 丹午笔记* (The Notebook of Danwu) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1985), p.106.

²⁹ See, Fu Yiling, "Ming dai jingji shi shang de Shandong yu Henan," in *Fu Yiling Zhi Shi Wushi Nian Wenji*, p.198.

³⁰ What Gao Zhi did here is very much like what Professor Tu Weiming would likely put into Confucian ethics. Since Confucianism is only a

A Ming epitaph tells the experience of Zhang Ting'en 张廷恩 of Qixian 岐县 in Henan. He rented his farmland out at a rate twenty percent or more lower than that of other landlords'. In this way, Zhang kept all his lands rented out and eventually earned higher profits than the others. He had his book-keeping very well maintained. In his management system, deposits and withdrawals were looked after by different people so that no confusion of responsibility could happen.³¹ In Feng Menglong's short stories, the Xu 徐 family, a rural commoner family in Zhejiang that becomes rich by doing inter-regional trading, has a hundred people working for them.³² The management of those one hundred people certainly requires bookkeeping and regular calculation.

Asceticism is another quality needed to achieve money-making success, especially during the original capital accumulation phase. This is, however, an issue of

part of Chinese cultural heritage, I would rather not label anything related to clan or so as Confucian.

³¹ Li Mengyang 李梦阳, "Ming gu Li Shou Xuanwu Wei Zhihui Shi Zhang Gong Mubei 明故例授宣武卫指挥使张公墓碑 (The Epitaph of Mr. Zhang Who Obtained an honorable Title of Commander of Xuanwu Garrison of the Ming)," in *Kong tong ji* 空同集 (Collected Works Entitled Kongtong), chapter 42; See Fu Yiling, *Fu Yiling Zhi Shi Wushi Nian Wenji*, p.185.

³² Feng Menglong 冯梦龙, *Xingshi Hengyan* 醒世恒言 (Everlasting Words to Awaken the World) (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1956), p.754. This story's background is the late Ming.

greater complexity. As a traditional factor of Chinese culture, asceticism existed in China since the beginning of Chinese civilization. It was based on the poor living conditions of the Chinese, frequent famines and political instabilities. It was simply a fact of life needing no religious persuasion. An old saying describes the conditions of Chinese life as that *yifu chuo jia, jizhe biji* 一夫辍稼, 饥者必及 (one man's stopping cultivation on the land will lead to somebody's shortage of food).³³ As pointed out by Song scholar Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101), "In ancient times, people who worked on their land for three years must save up enough food for one other year."³⁴ Thus, commoners, therefore, had to be ascetic in order to survive, while it was not necessarily the case for the gentry. Qing scholar Qian Yong recalled an ancient saying: *richu er zuo, riru er xi* 日出而作, 日入而息 (start working when the sun rises; rest when the sun sets).³⁵ It was the daily schedule of Chinese peasants and other working people.

³³ See Yao Peng 姚鹏, et al., ed., *Zhongguo sixiang baoku* 中国思想宝库 (The Treasury of Chinese Thinking) (Beijing: Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Chubanshe, 1990), p.760.

³⁴ See Ibid., p.778.

³⁵ Qian Yong, *Luyuan cunghua*, p.185.

Used to limiting expenses and to hard work, commoners would not need any other moral or religious stimulation to make and save money once the general social economic situation allowed them to accumulate possessions,. When it was necessary, even collecting and selling human nightsoil could be a start of small business. Xizhou Sheng, the Shandong author who wrote *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, provided a picture of this business, including its advantages and disadvantages.³⁶ It seems that the business was common in both the northern and the southern provinces. Late Ming official Li Qing dealt with a case of a *Shengyuan* named Dong Yingmai 董应迈 who did that type of thing, apparently in the Lower Yangtze region.³⁷ The same business was mentioned by the early Qing scholar Niu Xiu 钮 [王秀]. A peasant, Huang Zhong 黄中, in Longxi 龙 [奚谷] county of Fujian led his three sons to purchase night soil from city suburbs.³⁸ The detailed operation of this type of business is described in a 17th century short story as follows.

³⁶ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, pp.479-80.

³⁷ See Li Qing, *Zheyu Xinyu*, pp.220-1.

³⁸ Niu Xiu 钮 [王秀], *Husheng xubian* 斛剩续编 (Continuation of *Husheng*), in *BJXSDG*, p.232-3.

In Yixiang 义乡 village of Wucheng county 乌程 in Huzhou 湖州, there is an old man named Mu 穆 ... Yixiang village is located in a valley. Peasants rely on human night soil to cultivate their lands. Because the village is far away from cities, and there is not water traffic to ship in night soil ... night soil is as expensive as gold there. Old Mu had an idea ... He got builders to construct three toilets with walls between them in his front rooms and had them freshly painted ... Peasants all came to Mu's house to buy night soil. Two baskets of night soil sold for a qian 钱 (one tenth of a tael) silver. Many others came to exchange with firewood, grains, or oil. After building up the toilets, Mu becomes rich. In addition, he saved every possible penny on food and expenses. Naturally, he became richer and richer.³⁹

In this way, Old Mu conducted a carefully planned money-making business and successfully carried it through, penny by penny. It was apparently not a problem to the Chinese commoners to lead an ascetic daily life for the purpose of developing their possessions.

A related question is the attitude of the gentry on this issue. Confucius encouraged people to tolerate plain or even bitter material living conditions to indicate and to cultivate one's superior morality. Confucius' favorite student Yan Yuan 颜渊 was such a person who was not bothered by his shabby residence and simple food and drink.⁴⁰ Confucian asceticism, however, was checked by

³⁹ Zhuoyuanting Zhuren, *Zhaoshi Bei*, pp.70-2.

⁴⁰ See Confucius, *The Analects*, trans., by D.C. Lau (Hongkong: The Chinese University Press, 1983), pp.48-9.

the Confucian value of rites. Once, Confucius was asked if the sacrificed sheep in a ceremony could be saved. He answered: "You are loath to part with the price of the sheep, but I am loath to see the disappearance of the rite."⁴¹ What was valued here was the great appearance of the government, status, hierarchy, and dedication to statesmanship. Such a asceticism did not limit the consumption of luxuries by the royal family, nobles, and officials. In late imperial China, luxury was virtually the accepted lifestyle of the gentry and contributed to corruption among the officials. On the other hand, Confucianism generally looked down on commercial activities and occupations. Although some Confucian intellectuals became involved in businesses, as pointed out by Professor Yu Yingshih in his celebrated study of the 16th century Chinese merchant ethics and Neo-Confucianism, there was not, however, one major Confucian thinker who argued that personal money-making was the goal of Confucian life.⁴²

Buddhism and Taoism might encourage asceticism for their transcendental nature. This type of asceticism was

⁴¹ Ibid., pp.23-5

⁴² Refer to Yu Yingshih, *Zhongguo jishi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen*.

practiced for an "other worldly" purpose. In Buddhism and Taoism, there was nothing like the Protestant "calling" of God to justify money-making activities in this world.

In general then, it was the asceticism among the commoners that was compatible to commercial development in late imperial China. A notable phenomenon among the Chinese entrepreneurs in late imperial period was that when they earned enough money they intended to enjoy sound material living. Luxurious consumption among the successful merchants emerged. Bao Hongchang 暴鸿昌 in a recent study attributes this to the corruption of the upper classes and points to this as a negative influence of the upper classes upon the popular customs.⁴³ In terms of religious beliefs, on the other hand, it could be because Chinese people were so firmly "this world" oriented that they did not care much about anything like transcendental callings. They made money for themselves, including their families. As far as social institutions are concerned, active consumption reflects the lack of a sound environment for reinvestment. Notably, private

⁴³ Bao Hongchang, "Lun wan Ming shehui de shemi zhi feng," *Ming Shi Yanjiu*, 1993(3), p.85-92. Also see Wang Xingya 王兴亚, "Ming Dai Zhong Hou Qi Henan Shehui Fengshang de Bianhua," *Zhongzhou Xuekan*, 1989:4, pp.107-10.

ownership in China had never been respected as a universal norm. Any political trouble might cause a thorough confiscation of one's possession. Individual entrepreneurs did not have any voice in making state taxation policy. This situation favored commercial expansion by encouraging spending. On the other hand, it limited the interest in capital accumulation. The restriction of Chinese commercial and industrial development was not in the ethics of the commoners, but rather, in state institutions, in governmental policies, in the mentality of the upper classes including Confucian ideology, and in some economic-ecological problems.⁴⁴

3. Confucian Attitudes toward Commercial Activities

Although sometimes Confucian ethics overlapped with popular ethics, The Confucian elite's attitude toward commercial activities in the Ming and Qing period clearly differed from that of the commoners.

Grand Secretary Shen Li 沈鯉 (1531-1615) once instructed his sons:

Everything at home should be kept plain. Do not make a rich appearance, which is not merely vulgar, but also not lasting. Generally, extreme prosperity will turn to decline. It is a law that a full moon is

⁴⁴ About related economic issues, see Philip Huang, *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), and *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

going to eclipse and the sun at noon is going to fall...Although I am now an official, I usually act carefully. I do not accumulate much money, farmland, and houses because those may lead to conflicts and give me a bad reputation when I die. You understand this idea of mine and know the philosophy of self protection. What I worry about is that you have been maintaining a large household with an exaggerated reputation of being rich, which will give trouble to your descendants. In such a situation, you should cut off some farmland, reduce your luxury items for personal enjoyment. Clothes should not be too beautiful and furniture should be rather sparse. Thus, we can save some good fortune for descendants. This is the ultimate reason.⁴⁵

Asceticism here was not a way to make money, but a way to avoid provoking jealousy of other people and a way to maintain family security. This kind of political asceticism was a product of the Chinese bureaucratic system and the life experiences of the scholar-officials. There is not a dynamic attitude toward commercial activities. Shen Li's instruction demonstrates Confucian approaches to life, and the value of fame. Also, it reflects Taoist philosophy about constant change.

Similar opinions was expressed by the Qing scholar Qian Yong:

Being rich and honorable is like blooming flowers, which will wither and fall within a day. Being poor and ordinary is like grass, which keeps green over years. However, when frost and snow come, both

⁴⁵ Shen Li, "Shen Wenduan Gong jiashu 沈文端公家书 (Shen Li's Letters to His Family)," in Wang Shizhen 王士禎, *Chibei outan 池北偶谈* (Causal Talks at the North of A Pond) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, U. of A collection), p.74.

flowers and grasses are withered. When the wind of Spring comes, flowers and grass all grow up. This is the universal law governing rich and honorable, poor and ordinary, birth and death, and rise and decline.⁴⁶

To Qian, being rich and honorable would hardly be maintained for more than thirty years. He asserted: "In this world, are there any flowers blooming forever, or any wealth and honor lasting forever?"⁴⁷ Since money does not guarantee lasting happiness, it is not worth painstaking effort. Qian then argued:

Money can not be too little nor can it be too plentiful. If it is too plentiful, it is difficult to handle; if it is too little, it is useless in one's development. To use money and to develop oneself both require thinking. People doing that have to work hard all their lives and can hardly be peaceful day and night. They are therefore getting tired. If one has money (not too much and not too little), with limited desire and careful management, one should be able to survive, possibly with some extras. I am sixty years old and have not a white hair yet. People are all jealous of me and think that I have secret ways of physical cultivation. One day, I talked with one rich man and a poor scholar, who were all younger than fifty and both had white hair and appeared exhausted. They asked me for ways of cultivation. I did not answer them and told some others later: "*Yinqian guaiwu, lingren fabai* 银钱怪物,令人发白 (Money is a monster making people's hair white)" What I meant is that one of those two men had too much, while the other one had too little.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Qian Yong, *Luyuan conghua*, p.178-9.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.183.

Because too much money would lead to unhappiness, Qian

Yong decided not to be a rich man:

Rich people are preoccupied by calculation and exhaust their bodies. They are rich but actually still poor. Honorable position holders beg in the nights [to more powerful people] like slaves and servants. They are honorable yet pathetic. I do not want to be rich or honorable like them.⁴⁹

Even Zhang Han, an intellectual official with a family background in fabric production in late Ming, kept alert about money's harm to people and expressed a psychological tension of this kind.

How important to people are wealth and profit! *It is common that people pursue profit but suffer by it, yet they still cannot forget seeking profit* 人情徇其利而蹈其害, 而犹不忘夫利也). They gallop in pursuit of wealth day and night, never satisfied with what they have, thought it wears down their spirits and exhausts them physically. Profit is what people covet. Since all covet it, they rush after it like torrents pouring into a valley; they come and go without end, never resting day or night. *How can this stop until it becomes completely uncontrollable like raging floods* (不至于横溢泛滥, 宁有止息)? Thus it is written: "The people come in droves, and it's all for profit that they come; the people go in droves, and it's all for profit that they go". They use up all their energy chasing after the most negligible profits, and become forgetful of their diurnal exhaustion. How is this any different from thinking the hair's tip big and the mountain small? It isn't that the hair's tip is in fact big and the mountain in fact small; rather, they see only the hair's tip, and do not see the mountain. It is as though they were being led on by the nose and pushed from behind. *Nevertheless, the members from merchant families*

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.178-9.

having delicious food and beautiful clothes, are harnessed, on their ornamented stallions, into teams, like bolts of cloth across the land or like ripples across a river; flying dust falls from the sky and mud-caked sweat pours like rain. Crafty, clever men latch on to their wealth and power, flattering them and scurrying about at their disposal. The young women of Yan (燕) and the girls of Zhao (赵) play on string and reed instruments, perform on zithers, dangle long sleeves and trip about in pointed slippers, vying for beauty and currying favour. Without knowing how petty their wisdom is, they boast that they are as smart and capable as to get them what they want, monopolizing the operations of change in the natural world, deal with all human and natural changes, shift with the times, control the prices, and would not let a hundredth part slip by when they tallying it all up. Doesn't the saying, "Great wisdom shows in leisure; small wisdom shows in business", describe this?⁵⁰

Here, commercially-related social activities clearly are not the proper things to do and merchants are doing business because they do not have great enough wisdom. To Zhang Han, the commercial related businesses, especially, are not suitable to people who were already dedicated intellectuals. For the intellectuals, the appreciable goals of life include three things: *taishang lide*, *qici ligong*, *qici liyan* 太上立德, 其次立功, 其次立言 (the greatest one is to establish morality, the second one is

⁵⁰ Zhang Han, *Songchuang mengyu*, p.80. This translation is partially a quotation from Timothy Brook's "The Merchant Network in 16th Century China" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. XXIV, Part II, pp.165-214. The parts in italic are re-translated by the author to catch the meaning of viewing commercial activities as less worthy thing to do.

to make contributions [to the state]; the third one is to publish one's scholarship). Anything beyond these three are no business of the intellectuals.⁵¹ Another late Ming scholar, He Liangjun, simply views property as harmful because children in rich families during the late Ming period were abandoning their studies for making money.⁵²

Feng Congwu 冯从吾 (1556-1627), an influential scholar in the School of Mind, wrote an article entitled "Qinjian shuo 勤俭说 (On Working Hard And Being Thrifty," which tells us how far the Confucian intellectuals could go in this regard. Feng makes his point by giving two contrasting examples. In Zhejiang, Feng tells, there were two families. One of them kept to scholarly teaching, while the other one did not study. Both of them kept asceticism as a principle of life. The difference was that the one who kept to scholarly studies made a lot of friends and maintained good relationships with their clan by helping them. The other one worked extremely hard in bookkeeping and management, but did not help relatives and clan. Eventually, the one studying became more and more rich and accomplished as a famous scholar. The one

⁵¹ Ibid, p.65.

⁵² He Liangjun, *Siyou Zhai congshuo*, p.313.

who did not study was betrayed by his community and was pulled into lawsuits. The conclusion of Feng is that based on scholarship, industriousness and asceticism are real and rewarding. Without scholarship, hardworking and asceticism are merely for profit and one becomes a miser whose wealth will eventually vanish.⁵³

In contrast, Feng Congwu does not have problems with personal wealth accumulation any more. The question is how to achieve it. This opinion represent the opinions of the radical wing of the School of Mind, which at least accepted intellectuals' money-making activity. Nevertheless, even such a radical opinion came with certain limitations. One is that it does not encourage broad range social commercialization because only intellectuals are able to be financially successful. To Feng, asceticism and careful bookkeeping, without doing scholarly teaching, were not only insufficient for accumulating possessions, but also harmful. This was certainly not a well-known fact in late imperial China. Moreover, Feng's ultimate goal of life was not to be a rich person but a *mingru* 名儒 (famous scholar). This

⁵³ Feng Congwu, *Shaoxu ji* 少墟集 (Collected Works of Feng Congwu), in *SKQS*, pp.1239-40.

orientation would restrict both intellectuals and commoners' commercial activity.

Some background may help us to understand Feng and his opinion. Feng was involved in the controversial Shoushan Shuyuan 首善书院 (Shoushan Academy) and received criticism for delivering speeches. He wanted to justify his academic activities by linking them to people's living.⁵⁴ A reality reflected in Feng's discussion is that one must maintain sound relationships with one's community and clan. Otherwise, there could be too many non-economic factors that might result in one's bankruptcy. For example, a small conflict might bring one into a lawsuit. Such a lawsuit might force one to face corrupt officials. Many of this kind of lawsuit would eventually cost one all his property. Feng failed to prove, however, why sound community relationships had to be maintained by scholarly activities.

In summary, during the 17th century, commoners demonstrated more dynamic spirit in joining money oriented economic activities than did the upper classes.

⁵⁴ About Feng Congwu and his connection to the Shoushan Academy, see Lü Jinglin 吕景琳, "Ming Dai Wangxue Zai Beifang de Chuangbo 明代王学在北方的传播 (The Dissemination of Wang Yangming's Teaching in North China during the Ming)," in *Mingshi Yanjiu*, 1993(3), pp.93-101.

Only some radical Confucian thinkers accepted money accumulation in the commercial world, while the mainstream Confucianism continued to look down on profit earning in commercial activities. Popular culture, therefore, was more compatible with the commercialized society, although it could not by itself produce such a society.

4. A Methodological Rethinking

The previous examination referred to some Weberian concepts, such as "inner-worldly asceticism." The studies of Professor Tu Weiming and Yu Yingshih also have connections with Weber's well-known theory on Protestant ethics and Chinese religions. A methodological explanation is needed to clarify the connection of this study to the others.

Max Weber contributed an influential theory, which revealed the ineffectiveness of the Marxist economic determinism pattern of history. He encouraged researchers to look at the religious value systems of a people to find out the driving agents of social transformation, instead of attributing all "historical progress" to economic factors. Nevertheless, Weber did not base his

research on sufficient historical sources. In discussing the Protestant ethic, he mainly quoted Protestant doctrine itself and failed to provide evidence that the majority of the European merchants consciously applied that doctrine in their commercial practices. In applying his theory to China, Weber did not pay enough attention to the different roles of Chinese religions in China and that of Christianity in the West. Taken together, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism could not make a Chinese counterpart of the Western Protestant ethic. Furthermore, as professor Yu Yingshih has asserted, Weber merely used some earlier doctrines of Chinese religions and ignored the emergence of the New Chan 禪 (Zen) sect of Buddhism, the New Taoism, and Neo-Confucianism, that existed since the Tang and Song periods. According to Professor Yu, it was these newly developed systems that were more compatible to commercialization than were the earlier classical religious doctrines.⁵⁵

In terms of ethics Max Weber takes a people's "inner-worldly asceticism" as a necessary element to mobilize their money-making behavior.⁵⁶ This quality was

⁵⁵ For Professor Yu's analysis of Weber's methodological approaches, see Yu Yingshih, *Zhongguo jishi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen*.

said by Weber to be unique to Protestant ethics. It was said that the willingness of Protestant Christians to please their God with achievements in money-making activities in this world made them extremely hardworking, ascetic, and honest. In criticising Weber's theory, Yu Yingshih, asserted that the main elements of the inner-worldly asceticism are also main elements of Neo-Confucian ethics and the difference between the Protestant "inner-worldly asceticism" and the Chinese ethics is only in degree.⁵⁷

From an historical point of view, one particular ethical element is definitely not sufficient to explain why a profound social change, such as the transition from pre-modern society to modern society, occurs. For this reason, Weber's Protestant ethics hypothesis is not historical, but rather theoretical. Meanwhile, Weber's

⁵⁶ For Max Weber's systematic opinions about Confucianism, see his *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. This is originally a volume of Weber's "The Social Psychology of the World Religions" published in 1920-1, just after Weber's death. Hans H. Gerth adopted the present tittle when he translated and edited this volume into a separated English issue. As a comparative study about Protestant ethic and traditional Chinese ethic, this book can be regarded as an extension of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Refer to Max Weber, "The Prefatory Note" in *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1951).

⁵⁷ See Yu Yingshih, *Zhongguo jishi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen*, pp.67-9, 74-84, 136-66.

argument on the characteristics of Confucian elite, as summarized and interpreted by C. K. Yang, remains sound.

They were distinct from the literati in other cultures by their vested interest in bureaucratic office, their high social prestige, their nonhereditary status, their system of qualification through literary classical education, their origin in secular feudal nobility but not in any priesthood.

Departing from Weber's original contents, we may interpret that these characteristics could lead the Chinese literati toward an intense interest in this-worldly orientation, in structure and maintenance of order, in orthodoxy and traditionalism, instead of renovation and change, in the literary and conservative contents of classical education, and their aversion to subject matters of economic production.⁵⁸

Professor Yu Yingshih, on the other hand, while making a sound argument to counter the uniqueness of the Protestant ethic, fell into the trap of a Confucianism-centred approach. He looked after the equivalent of the Protestant "inner-worldly asceticism" in philosopher's doctrines and among the gentry, which have yielded only very subtle evidence. In other words, the Neo-Confucian "inner-worldly asceticism" pointed out by Yu Yingshih was largely non-economic and vague. It was certainly not explicit, strong, and practical enough to motivate the late Ming nation-wide commercialisation. Such a conclusion, after painstaking research by Yu, confirms that it is the commoners and

⁵⁸ See C. K. Yang, "Introduction" in Max Weber, *The Religion of China* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p.xxviii.

their mentality that deserves more attention. If there was a factor in late imperial China equivalent to the Protestant "inner-wordy asceticism" in late imperial China, it was presented by the commoners and not by the Neo-Confucian intellectuals.

Some logical problem exists in Professor Yu's study as well. In his *Zhongguo Jinshi Zongjiao Lunli Yu Shangren Jingshen*, Professor Yu describes the goal of his study as to find out whether there is a connection between "this worldly orientation" of Chinese religions and the significant commercial development of China since the 16th century.⁵⁹ Since he has presumed that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism represent Chinese religious thinking, the question is actually whether Chinese religion connected to Chinese commercial development. The answer logically can only be a "yes" because all nations' religions would somehow have something to do with their economies. Even when the question is further specified as "whether or not the three religious ethics of China encouraged the Ming and Qing commercial development (中国儒, 释, 道三教的伦理

⁵⁹ Ibid., "Zixu 自序 (Preface by the Author)," p.64, "Xulun 序论 (Introduction)," p.10.

观念对明清的商业发展是否曾发生过推动的作用),”⁶⁰ the logical nature of the question remains the same. The social impact of all the major religious ethics was both positive and negative. Professor Yu was, therefore, answering an answered question.

Another problem with Professor Yu's thesis is that Wang Yangming and the School of Mind served as the major examples in his argument of the positive function of Neo-Confucianism. It is questionable to what degree the Wang Yangming school can represent the mainstream thinking of the Chinese in post 16th-century China. Wang Yangming received serious criticism from outside and inside Neo-Confucianism in the 16th and 17th centuries. Emperor Jiajing 嘉靖, for example, once issued an edict, based on some suggestions from the scholar-officials, saying Wang's thinking was harmful. A leading thinker of the 17th-century China, Gu Yanwu 顾炎武, was among those who seriously criticized Wang Yangming and his followers.⁶¹ It is misleading to presume that Wang Yangming school

⁶⁰ See "Zixu," p.55, in *ibid*.

⁶¹ See Huang Rucheng, *Rizhilu jishi*, juan 18, 8b-17a.

played a dominating role in late Ming and the Qing intellectual thinking.⁶² The connection of the New Buddhism and New Taoism with commercial activities was also indirect and vague in Professor Yu's analysis.

It was indeed a fact that many Confucian intellectuals, officials, and even royal family members were involved in commercial activities in the late imperial period. This fact, nevertheless, does not prove that those activities were driven by the Neo-Confucian ethics or the New Buddhist or Taoist ethics. It was more likely an indication of the impact of commoner's values on the gentry. Classical Confucianism was established in a time when artisans and merchants were under direct state control. It accepted the existence of merchant activities but certainly did not encourage them. *Li* 利 (benefit, interest, or profit) as a goal of life is the aim of the small and disrespected people according to classical Confucianism. According to Professor Yu, the situation changed when Neo-Confucianism was established. The problems is that so-called Neo-Confucianism (新儒学, in Chinese), as a term, never existed in Chinese language until modern scholars created it. It is the modern

⁶² Refer to Chapter I.

scholars who created a name for the actually diversified Confucian thinking that existed after the late Tang and the Song times. In other words, the difference between classical Confucianism and the so called Neo-Confucianism was hardly big enough to make them two different ideologies. In the so called Neo-Confucian age, some intellectuals adjusted their attitude toward individual money-making business, just like many of them held the traditional view of looking down on personal money accumulation. Those intellectuals, who supported money-making activities, mentioned by Professor Yu Yingshih were basically the radical minorities in Confucian schools, such as Wang Yangming's "left wing" followers or the lower class intellectuals who needed to make a living in ways other than serving the state. Wang Gen 王艮 (1483-1540) and Tang Zhen 唐甄 (1630-1704) are examples. Lower level Confucian intellectuals were much more accepting of commercialization because they were more closely connected to commoners' life and values.

Because the religious diversity of China existed not only in the variety of religions itself, but also in people's pluralist ways of religious practices, the Chinese were "always" under influences of different

ethical sources. Accordingly, the original Weberian question can not be answered with a Confucianism focused approach. Attention has to be paid to the popular ethics itself as an independent subject instead of merely as a reflection of the intellectuals' philosophy. It is strained logic to attribute the sophisticated commercial practices, institutions, and values in 17th-century China to the troublesome intellectual thinking of this time. Elitism is a common problem among scholars who applied Confucian-centered approaches.

Chapter V

Scholar-commoners:

Departing from a Confucian Lifestyle¹

The civil service examination system promoted upward mobility in late imperial China. In the Ming dynasty, all male commoners, except those who fell into specially restricted status, or criminals, were eligible to prepare and to take these examinations for official degrees.²

In this system, there were three major degrees for successful candidates, namely, *shengyuan*, *juren* 举人 (recommended scholars), and *jinshi* 进士 (advanced scholars). The *shengyuan*, as the preliminary degree, did not bring its holder enough financial benefit, nor enough political privileges, to change his life substantially.

¹ The major section of this chapter was presented, under the title of "Turbulence Caused by the Pupils of the Sages: A Study on *Shengyuan* in 17th-Century China," in the Fourth Annual Graduate Student Conference on East Asia at Columbia University in February 10-12, 1995.

² In addition to restricting several groups of people from participating the civil service examinations, the Ming government prohibited royal family members from taking these examinations to block their access to be officials, as a way to reduce power struggles. See Zhao Yi 赵毅, "Mingdai Zongshi Zhengce Chutan 明代宗室政策初探 (A Preliminary Examination of the Ming Policies to the Royal Clan)," *Dongbei Shida Xuebao*, 1988:1. All other restrictions put on people fell into *jian* 贱 (cheap) vs *liang* 良 (fine) categories of status, such as prostitute families and people in mourning for their parents. These restrictions had been lightly changed by the 17th century but they were not abolished. See Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, p.1694; Wang Dezhaoh 王德昭, *Qingdai keju zhidu yanjiu* 清代科举制度研究 (A Study of the Qing Civil Service Examination System) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984), p.127.

John Fairbank put *shengyuan* into the category of "scholar-commoners," which is vivid enough to indicate the social status of these people.³ This chapter deals with the educated people among the commoners and will illustrate the point that during the 17th century, the "scholar-commoners" were experiencing temptation to depart from traditional Confucian values and lifestyles.

Sheng, the first part of the two-character Chinese word *shengyuan*, means student. *Yuan*, the second part, means personnel, or, according to Gu Yanwu, "personnel in official quota."⁴ In the early Ming period, the official quota of the *shengyuan* for an average *xian* 县 (county) was twenty, thirty for a *zhou* 州 (subprefecture), and forty for a *fu* 府 (prefecture).⁵ By passing the county-

³ In dealing with late Qing *Shengyun*, Fairbank, called them "scholar-commoners" and described them as "a transitional group who had achieved exemption from labour service for example, but had not yet established themselves actually in the official class." See John King Fairbank, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol.10 (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.12.

⁴ Huang Rucheng, *Rizhilu jishi*, juan 17, p.1a. In oral language and literary works, the *shengyuan* was also called *xiucai* 秀才 (meaning talented students). Comments on the term *xiucai*, see Zhao Yi 赵翼 (1727-1814), *Gaiyu congkao* 陔余丛考 (Collected Examinations of Various Issues) (Shanghai: Shangwu chubanshe, 1957), p.579-80.

⁵ Huang Rucheng, *Rizhilu jishi*, juan 17, p.1a. See also Wu Zhihe 吴智和, *Ming dai de Ruxue jiaoguan* 明代的儒学教官 (The Official Confucian Teachers in Ming China) (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1991), pp.267-9.

level examinations, a male commoner could obtain the title *shengyuan* and then get access to the status of *jinshen* 缙绅 (gentry). All *shengyuan* had the potential to obtain higher degrees that would automatically lead to higher political and social status. When the number of the *shengyuan* was small, every *shengyuan* was granted an official stipend and a subsidy for two family members' corvée. Later, when civil-service examinations attracted more and more people, the number of the *shengyuan* increased quickly. As a result, the status of the *shengyuan* was diversified. The normally financed *shengyuan* were called *linshan shengyuan* 廩膳生员. A limited number of expanded *shengyuan* were called *zengguang shengyuan* 增广生员, and further *shengyuan*, granted outside the fixed quota and without stipend, were named *fuxue shengyuan* 附学生员. In 1432, there was a total of 30,000 *shengyuan* in the Ming empire.⁶ As estimated by Gu Yanwu, this number increased to a total of about 500,000 by the end of the Ming dynasty.⁷

⁶ Huang Rucheng, *Rizhilu jishi*, juan 17, p.1a.

⁷ Gu Yanwu, "Shengyuan lun shang 生员论上 (The First Part of The Article on *Shengyuan*)," in *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, p.22. In early Wanli 万历 period (1573-1620), Prime minister Zhang Juzheng 张居正

Unlike a *juren* or a *jinshi*, a *shengyuan* could not normally be appointed to an official position until he obtained a higher degree or undertook study at *Guozi Jian* under the title of *jiansheng* 监生.⁸ To be a *jiansheng*, a *shengyuan* needed to be recommended by his local educational officials. The annual average number of recommendees for a prefecture was two, for a county, one, and for a subprefecture, two every three years). Those *shengyuan* recommended to *Guozi Jian* were also called *gongsheng* 贡生. Having studied in *Guozi Jian*, the *gongsheng* could be granted positions in local governments or take the examination for the *jinshi* degree. In comparison to the *shengyuan*, therefore the *Jiansheng* were closer to the gentry class.⁹

The Ming government provided the *shengyuan* with significant privileges to encourage their further

restricted the number of *shengyuan* admitted annually. See Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, p.1687. This policy did not last long.

⁸ *Juren* were eligible to hold lower level posts in the government. A new *Jinshi* degree holder, on the other hand, would usually be appointed a class seven official position in the central or local governments, such as a county head, a senior clerk in the ministries, or a *Shuji Shi* 庶吉士 (provisional scholar) of *Hanlin Yuan* 翰林院 (the State Academy).

⁹ About Ming civil service examination system and its connection to school system, see Zhang Tingyu, "Xuanju zhi 选举志 (Record of Election)," in *Mingshi*.

studies, including corvée and a part of farmland tax subsidies, a stipend for each *linshan shengyuan*, and access for all *shengyuan* to local administrative officials. A commoner had to address the county head as *Laoye* 老爷, literally "grandpa" and can be translated as Sir or "your honor," indicating the ruled and ruler relationship between the commoners and the county heads. On the other hand, a *shengyuan* would address the county head as *zongshi* 宗师 (official teacher). This not only shows the closer status between them, but also describes the personal tie between a *shengyuan* and his county head. A *shengyuan* was eligible to wear blue robes, which a commoner was not allowed to wear. Less officially, yet commonly, the *shengyuan* were considered qualified to run private schools and to teach students. Local educational officials would examine the *shengyuan* annually to evaluate their studies and morality.

Such a status and the benefits it brought in, and its even more meaningful potential, attracted millions of students. In addition to those who climbed up to a higher degree and who eventually joined the intellectual official elite, many spent their life hanging around at

the bottom of the ladder. A considerable number of them became frustrated and retired from the venture. The *shengyuan* and the educated people who did not participate in civil service examinations for some reason, together formed the grass-root level intellectuals, in the words of Fairbank, the scholar-commoners. These people, linking the upper culture and commoners, represent the highest potential for commoners to be influenced by Confucianism. In examining the activities of these grass-root level intellectuals in the 17th century and to analyze Confucian influence on the lower culture, the *shengyuan*, the *xibin* 西宾 (private teachers), and the *shanren* 山人 (literary people without participating in public service) will be discussed.

1. The Turbulence Caused by the *Shengyuan*

The *shengyuan*, as an institution, was designed to enhance Confucian state administration. Despite such an expected function, the *shengyuan* in the middle of the 17th century played a different role. Gu Yanwu, the most respected Confucian scholar and thinker of that time, even called for a total abolition of the *shengyuan* status.

The purpose of the state in having the *shengyuan*, Gu argued in one of his three major essays dealing with *shengyuan*, was to select and educate talented young men throughout the country to serve the emperor as officials. The first problem of the *shengyuan* in the late Ming period, he pointed out, was that they merely learned how to compose articles for the examination itself. Only less than one percent of them could meet the literary standard for serving the state. The second problem of the *shengyuan*, continued Gu, was that about seventy percent of them did not dedicate themselves to serving the country. Rather, their goal was to protect themselves and their families with the title. Furthermore, Gu asserted, the *shengyuan* system had been corrupted. Seventy to eighty percent of the *shengyuan* obtained their status through personal connections to powerful people, or by bribery, instead of through studying.¹⁰

Many historians including Gu Yanwu noted that the low standard of learning in the *shengyuan* system was partially due to the rigid form of examinations, which were called *bagu* 八股 (eight-legged essays), so named

¹⁰ Gu Yanwu, *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, p.22-3.

because eight sections were required in the essay. The topics of examinations were mainly based on *Si shu* 四书 (four major Confucian classics). The candidates were required to discuss those topics based on the explanations of those classics made by Song Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi. The rigid range of topics and style of writing largely required memorization instead of free and creative thinking or expression. Thus, experienced teachers could prepare essays for their students to pass the examinations. Many students, on the other hand, would study nothing but model essays. Accordingly, model essays were edited and printed to meet the demand from the candidates.¹¹

In his second essay on the *shengyuan*, Gu described the *shengyuan* as evil creatures in the society. Gu concluded:

When the *shengyuan* system in the country is abolished, officials will be free from disturbance; when the *shengyuan* system is abolished, the difficulty of average people will be eased; when the *shengyuan* system is abolished, the abuse of

¹¹ See Lung-chang Young, "Ku Yen-wu's views on the Ming Examination System," *Ming Studies*, 1987(23), pp.48-63; Song Cai-fa 宋才发 and Xiong Xian-jun 熊显军, "Li dai ke-chang wu-bi de cheng-zhi yu fang-fan 历代科场舞弊的惩治与防范 (The Punishments and Precautions to Irregularities in Civil Service Examinations in Chinese History)," *Huazhong Shifan Daxue xuebao* 华中师范大学学报 (The Journal of The Central Normal University of China), 1986:1, pp.113-8.

factionalism will be cleaned up; when the *shengyuan* system is abolished, talented people will be able to come out to serve the world.¹²

Gu listed the following activities that the *shengyuan* frequently conducted, which were considered troublesome: 1. visiting governmental offices to interfere with official decisions; 2. taking advantage of their privileged status and behaving arbitrarily in rural communities; 3. associating with *yamen* runners, or even taking positions of *yamen* runners; 4. collectively withholding knowledge of mistakes of officials in order to make deals with them for their own interests.

Gu argued that the commoners had been burdened with extra tax and corvée services because of the subsidies for the *shengyuan*. Since tax and corvée were collected based upon the total amount of farmland and the male adult population in each region, the more the *shengyuan* in a region and the more those *shengyuan* had farmland, the heavier the tax and corvée duties would be on the commoners in that region. He noted that rich men would try to obtain the title of the *shengyuan* with

¹² Gu Yanwu, "Shengyuan lun zhong 生员论中 (The Second Part of the Article on Shengyuan)," in *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, pp.23-5.

money to avoid tax and corvée while poor people could not do the same thing. Gu concluded that the *shengyuan* gave their county people no benefit but brought a burden as heavy as a mountain on them.¹³ This problem became increasingly serious as the number of the *shengyuan* increased.

Gu was aware of the problem of the *shengyuan* developing a country-wide network for their own personal interests. The main official examiners were called *zuoshi* 座师 and the assistant official examiners were called *fangshi* 房师 by all the new *shengyuan* who obtained degrees in the examinations supervised by these officials. All new *shengyuan*, who obtained their degrees in the same year, would call one another *tongnian* 同年, which would further expand to relationships of a *shengyuan* to the sons and grandsons of *tongnian*, *zuoshi*, and *fangshi* under other names. Gu argued that when used, even in a modest degree, such

¹³ Ibid. In 1610, the Ming government set a standard of farmland tax subsidy for the *shengyuan* and other privileged social groups, which brought the tax share of rural commoner for the *shengyuan* to a limitation. Nevertheless, this policy certainly did not resolve the troublesome tax inequality. See Zhang Xianqing 张显清, "Ming dai jinshen dizhu qianlun 明代缙绅地主浅论 (A Preliminary Study of the Gentry Landlords in the Ming)," *Zhongguo shi yuanjiu*, 1984:2, pp.75-91.

networks among the *shengyuan* provided them with conditions to make personal requests of their related officials and therefore corrupt the normal functions of the government. When this developed further, Gu added, the *shengyuan* networks would become factions fighting against each other or even threatening the central authority of the emperor.¹⁴

Factional struggles among different groups of officials crippled the efficiency of late Ming government. Moreover, the corruption of the late Ming bureaucratic system was indeed partially caused by placing too strong a value on private connections, which challenged the value of law and established public regulations. Gu Yanwu, as a master of Confucian doctrines, was ultimately concerned with the welfare of *tianxia* 天下, the world or all people in the empire, which in Confucianism was valued as *gong* 公, public. The instruction of Confucius himself in this regard was *qun er bu dang* 群而不党, which means that a gentleman associates with people yet never participates in a faction.¹⁵ To a typical Confucian, therefore, personal

¹⁴ Gu Yanwu, *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, pp.23-5.

considerations should never be put ahead of public considerations. This was why Gu criticized the personal connections among the *shengyuan* and the officials. As a matter of fact, traditional Chinese intellectuals had a continuous problem balancing public and private values.

The late Ming *Shengyuan* system allowed students to be preoccupied with *shiwen* 时文, the model articles, while the Confucian classics, statecraft and current affairs were ignored. Reading and memorizing dozens of *shiwen* and imitating them in examinations was much easier than obtaining *shengyuan* degrees by studying them properly. Accordingly, there was a big market selling those articles. From 1592, or thereabouts, Suzhou 苏州 and Hangzhou 杭州 became the national production centers of *shiwen*. Merchants would distribute them to the North.¹⁶ One book produced for preparation for examinations was entitled *Jin-nang ji* 锦囊计 (Wise Counsel). It was said that if someone remembered seven articles from this book, he would be able to get a degree.¹⁷ Smart students who obtained

¹⁵ Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau, p.154-5.

¹⁶ Zhao Yi, *Gaiyu congkao*, p.696.

their degrees by easily memorizing some *shiwen* without real knowledge, Gu Yanwu argued, would hardly see how complex the affairs of the world were and what a successful life really meant. Diligent students, on the other hand, might spend their lifetime on study without success. In Gu's words, the people cultivated in such a system were not intellectuals, not officials, not soldiers, and not generals either.¹⁸ The early Qing government tried to restrict *shiwen*. For that, orders were issued by Emperor Shunzhi and Emperor Kangxi in 1660 and 1670. However, according to an edict from Emperor Qianlong in 1736, restrictions were removed by that time.¹⁹

Gu sounds too harsh here because the overwhelming majority of late imperial officials got their *shengyuan* degree first and then developed their career further. Certainly many of them, including Gu himself, were useful to the state. Even so, the problems pointed out by Gu were serious and existed throughout late imperial Chinese history, which made the designed goal of this

¹⁷ Tian Yiheng 田艺衡, *Liuqing richa zhaichao* 留青日札摘抄 (Extracts from Daily Jottings), in *CSJCCB*, pp.240-1.

¹⁸ Gu Yanwu, *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, p.23-5.

¹⁹ See Wang Dezhaoh, *Qingdai keju zhidu yanjiu*, pp.139-43.

examination system very suspect. Tian Yiheng, another scholar contemporary with Gu Yanwu, noted the serious problem from a similar perspective. According to Tian, seventy percent of degree holders did not deserve their degrees.²⁰

Because of these problems with the *shengyuan* system, Gu suggested limiting the number of the *shengyuan* to three for a small county and twenty for a big county. He also suggested a revival of "recommendation" as a means to solicit talented individuals to serve the country.²¹

Gu Yanwu's criticism of the *shengyuan* was largely from the perspective of re-evaluating the Ming institutions. To examine the same issue from another angle, we may look at the behavior, activities, and personalities of the *shengyuan* as recorded by other people in the 17th century.

²⁰ For Tian Yiheng's discussion about the Ming examination system, see *Liuqing rizha*, pp.236-251. For Gu's overall evaluation of the Ming examination system and the opinions from some of his contemporaries, refer to Lung-chang Young, "Ku Yen-wu's views on the Ming Examination System," *Ming Studies*, 1987(23).

²¹Gu Yanwu, "Shengyuan lun xia 生员论下 (The Last Part of the Article on the *shengyuan*)," in *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, pp.25-6.

In an edict to instruct the students, Emperor Kangxi (r.1662-1722) recognized that the troublesome activities of the *shengyuan* were far from being purged under the newly established Qing regime. He warned:

Recently, the activities of students are not proper and they have hardly any values of Confucianism. Although officials in the court and regions who did not carry out my instruction perfectly are responsible for this problem, it is mainly based on you *shengyuan*'s long existing habits which are hard to change quickly. Now, I am personally instructing and warning you. You *shengyuan* must listen respectfully.²²

Emperor Kangxi listed the activities of the *shengyuan* which they had to give up. These include: spreading rumors to threaten officials, cheating to avoid tax responsibilities, encouraging people to be involved in law-cases, interfering with official resolution of social affairs, instigating cunning people, bullying and humiliating orphans and weak people, organizing societies, and cheating in examinations.²³ Seemingly, the faults that Emperor Kangxi saw in the *shengyuan* were similar to those criticized by Gu Yanwu decades ago. To Emperor Kangxi, such activities of the *shengyuan* had to

²² Emperor Kangxi, "Xunchi shizi wen 训飭士子文 (Instruction to the Students)," in *Shandong tongzhi* 山东通志 (The General Gazetteer of Shandong), in *SKQS*, juan 1, section 2, pp.40-2.

²³Ibid.

be stopped to maintain the stability of society and the existing political order.

The turbulence caused by the *shengyuan* was nationwide. North China, as the capital area, the home area of Confucius, and one of the better developed economic regions, witnessed ample evidence in this regard.²⁴

Because of the higher status of the *shengyuan*, commoners were reluctant to be involved in any conflict

²⁴ Li Qing, in his career as a county head in the Lower Yangtze area in the last years of the Ming, came across many cases regarding the *shengyuan*'s unacceptable activities. In one of those cases, *Shengyuan* Wei 魏 lost several books in a room of a temple where he studied. Without any evidence, Wei impeached monk Huizhen 惠真 in this temple for stealing his books and some other things that he falsely added to his list of lost properties. On getting to know this story, another *shengyuan* named Shen 沈 claimed that another monk of that temple, the master of Huizhen, owed Shen's father-in-law one-hundred taels of silver with houses of that temple as pledge. The written evidence provided by *Shengyuan* Shen turned out to be forged. Li Qing then criticized these two *shengyuan* for defrauding property. The two were eventually let off because of their title of *shengyuan*. With more serious trouble, however, the *shengyuan* status might fail to protect its holder from a penalty. Li Qing ordered *Shengyuan* Wang Yixiang 王一相 to be caned for defrauding people of their land so that it might become his family's graveyard. In another case, Li Qing described *Shengyuan* Dai Zhenlin 戴振霖, who neglected his orphaned nephew, yet showed up to claim compensation when the nephew died, as "an ox with an animal's heart."²¹ The unexpected activities of Dai Zhenlin, Shen, and Wei might eventually cost them their degrees. In such a case, the former *shengyuan* might become a part of the local rascallions. Rong Xianjie 戎献桀 was such a disentitled *shengyuan*. He obtained five taels of silver from his nephew promising to help the nephew to obtain a degree. When the nephew failed to get the degree, Rong Xianjie, in order to keep the money, sued his nephew for raping his wife. Li Qing, who did not believe that a young man would rape his aunt in her fifties, had Rong Xianjie punished by caning. See Li Qing, *Zheyu xinyu* 折狱新语 (New Words of Judgment), annotated by Huadong Zhengfa Xueyuan Falu Guji Yanjiu Suo 华东政法学院法律古籍研究所 (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1987), pp.163-4, 187-8, 249, 293-4.

with them. The *shengyuan*, on the other hand, might be bold enough to challenge commoners. It was said that when several commoners were in conflict, one of them might threaten "I will hire a *xiuca* 秀才 (a popular way to call the *shengyuan*) to beat you."²⁵ In 1682, a man named Zheng Wei 郑伟 of Jining Zhou 济宁州 in Shandong pretended to be a *shengyuan* to apply to contract to collect leather tax for the government. Rejected by officials for some technical considerations, Zheng Wei over turned the desk of the official and put a curse on him. The investigation revealed Zheng Wei's real status. The official report said that Zheng, under the false title of the *shengyuan*, controlled the local leather merchants and people were as scared of him as if he were a tiger.²⁶ This case indicates that *shengyuan* as a status

²⁵Wu Yuancui 伍元萃, *Linju manlu* 林居漫录 (Random Records in the Forests), chapter 3; see Chen Baoliang 陈宝良, *Zhongguo liumang shi* 中国流氓史 (A History of Chinese Hooligans) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui xue chubanshe, 1993), p.226.

²⁶ "Jining Zhou guan wei lisheng Zhang Huaxian deng baozhan hangshui lingru zhiguan fanqing gechu yanjiu shi 济宁州关为礼生张华先等包占行税凌辱职官请烦革黜严究事 (A Complaint from Jining Subprefecture regarding to *Shengyuan* Zhang Hua and His Fellows' Control of Taxation and Insult on Officials)," in Qilu Shushe 齐鲁书社, *Qufu Kongfu dangan shiliao xuanbian* 曲阜孔府档案史料选编 (Selected Materials from the Kongfu Archives in Qufu County) (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1985), collection 3, vol. 18, p.50-1. In 1644, there was a urban citizen riot in Chengdu. The participants of that riot protested against *wudu* 五毒 (five categories of harmful persons), among them was so called *xuedu* 学毒 (harmful *shengyuan*). See Sun Qi

was used by some people to conduct offensive activities in society. In 1661, two true *shengyuan* of Shandong, both distantly related to Confucius, were put on a wanted list for behaving arbitrarily, hiding property of the Prince in Shandong, refusing to pay tax, among other officers.²⁷ In 1665, a blacksmith of Yixian 嶧县 in Shandong pretended to be a *shengyuan* and joined in a robbery. The same man refused to pay his tax and labor service to the government under his false title of *shengyuan*.²⁸

Several rascal-like *shengyuan* are described by Xizhou Sheng, a Shandong writer, in *Xingshi*. One of them, Ma Congwu 麻从吾, charges two Taoist priests with stealing his property. The county head discovers Ma's false charge because many of the lost items listed by Ma are Taoist tools for professional religious service.²⁹

孙骐, *Chengdu minbian* 成都民变 (The Riot of Chengdu), in Chen Dengyuan 陈登原, *Guoshi jiuwen* 国史旧闻 (Old Knowledge of National History) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), vol.3, p.138.

²⁷ "Pigei Qian Sheren wei jina Kong Zhenfu shi 批给钱舍人为缉拿孔贞复事 (Reply to Qian Sheren Regarding to Apprehending Kong Zhenfu)," in *ibid.*, p.92.

²⁸ "Niu Guandou cheng wei Wei Kong Kong Shangle deng maocheng shengyuan goudang taizha shang fu qi jushen dingzui shi 牛贯斗呈为伪孔孔尚乐等冒称生员勾党抬诈伤父乞拘审定罪事 (The Allegation from Niu Guandou Charging Kong Shangle and His Fellows for Pretending a *Shengyuan*, Ganging up Each Other to Swindle, and Injuring My Father)," in *ibid.*, p.104-5.

²⁹ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, pp.382-4.

Another *shengyuan* named Yan Liexing 严列星 constantly forced his neighbors to work on his farmland without paying them. This man also pretended to be his younger brother and seduced his sister-in-law on the day of her wedding.³⁰ Wang Weilu 汪为露, another *shengyuan* in *Xingshi* who had a habit of hiding under other people's windows to listen to their lovemaking, once lost a lawsuit with his neighbor. Wang Weilu lay naked in dirty mud in front of his neighbor's house and shouted swear words at him. As a result, the neighbor withdrew his charge against Wang.³¹ Similar stories can also be seen in *Cu hulu* 醋葫芦 (Vinegar Calabash), *Erke paian jingqi* 二刻拍案惊奇 (The Second Edition of Suppressing Stories) and many other works of that time. The ugly image of the *shengyuan* in 17th century Chinese literature reflects their reputation in society.

It was not surprising that late Ming Grand Secretary, Wu Sheng 吴[生生] reported to the Emperor that many *shengyuan* had become leaders of rebellions or had joined the Manchus against the dynasty.

³⁰ Ibid., pp.385, 405-7.

³¹ Ibid., pp.514-8.

The *shengyuan* in Sichuan accepted positions in the rebel government; the *shengyuan* in Shandong joined the White Lotus rebellion; the *shengyuan* in Liaozuo 辽左 (western part of Liaoning which was the frontier of the Ming defending against the Manchus) surrendered to the Manchus. The *shengyuan* are supposed to read and follow the teaching of Confucius, but they are acting like this. Why have the decline of our customs and the lack of loyalty become so extreme?³²

Wu Sheng blamed official corruption for these *shengyuan*'s activities, which were a reoccurring problem at the end of any dynasty.

2. Xibin 西宾 and Their Complaints

In the 17th century, obtaining a higher degree was very difficult for a poor *shengyuan* even though his scholarly standard was high. Before he could climb up the hierarchy, which might be an unattainable dream, he had to maintain the status of *shengyuan*. This would not be a problem for a financially healthy *shengyuan*, or to one gentry born. It was, however, stressful for a poor *shengyuan*. Although the corvée subsidy was a relief, the farmland tax subsidy would be of little help to a

³² Wu Sheng, "Xuezheng dangxiu gai fengxian shu 学政当修改风宪疏 (The Memorial to the Throne Regarding to Improving Educational Policies)," in *Chaian shuji 柴庵疏集* (Memorials to the Throne by Wu Sheng) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1989), pp.37-9.

shengyuan who did not have much land at all. In 1636, a report to the Emperor said that "Among the *shengyuan*, some are unable to plan out their days. All *juren*, however, are better off right after they get the degree."³³ Besides, in the late Ming period, the government was in serious financial crisis and the stipend for *shengyuan* could no longer be guaranteed.³⁴ The first decade of the Qing was a period preoccupied by political transition and social consolidation, while the civil service examination took a while to be put back in order. Xizhou Sheng wrote about *shengyuan*'s financial situation in detail. In his *Xingshi*, in a year of famine, 200 poor *shengyuan* in a Shandong county had to beg relief porridge every day from rich people.³⁵ This author comments that although the ancient sages, including Confucius himself, encouraged students and scholars to be content with poor living conditions, a realistic idea had to be in mind, which was called *xue bi xian yu zhi sheng*

³³ Lu Shiyi 陆世仪, *Fushe jilue* 复社纪略 (Brief Record about Fushe), in Cheng Dengyuan, *Guoshi jiuwen*, vol.3, p.138.

³⁴ About the financial crisis of late Ming government, see Zhao Yifeng, "Shilun Mingmo caizheng weiji de lishi genyuan jiqi shidai tezheng," *Zhongguoshi Yanjiu*, 1986:4, 55-68.

³⁵ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, p.456.

学必先于治生 (to study, one has first to survive). What could a poor *shengyuan* do to survive? After eliminating several possible considerations that might bring oneself financial difficulty, insult, or a sense of guilt, Xizhou Sheng concluded that there was only one way to go: to be a teacher.³⁶

Teaching in the agriculture-based rural society was described as *she geng hukou* 舌耕糊口 (ploughing with tongue to feed oneself).³⁷ There were two ways to be a teacher. One was to run a private school, where the other was to be hired by a family, or a multi-family group, and teach in the employer's house. Since running a private school required capital, which was not available, a poor *shengyuan* was most likely to be hired as a teacher in his employer's house. Teachers were addressed in written language as *Xibin* -- guests on the western side, probably, because in a banquet or reception, a teacher would sit on the western side facing the master who sat on the eastern side.³⁸

³⁶ Xizhou Sheng talked about this issue very emotionally, which suggests that he might have personally experienced the life of a teacher. See Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, pp.478-80.

³⁷ Ibid., p.2.

³⁸ *Xibin* had another meaning in late imperial China, which was

The life of a *Xibin* could be better than that of a poor peasant, but it was usually far from satisfactory to a *shengyuan*. It was merely a way of survival, while the true goal of a poor *shengyuan* was to become an official and to change his life completely. If a *shengyuan* had to remain as a teacher for a long time, the experience would become frustrating.

When finding work was very difficult, a *shengyuan* had to leave his family behind to find a teaching position in a distant place. This was especially hard for an aged *shengyuan* with a wife, parents and children at home. There is an unverified poem by Wen Zhengming 文徵明, a well-known late Ming calligrapher, painter, and scholar, describing the miserable life of a teacher. The poem says:

Year in and year out,
my hair has turned white without my achieving
anything;
half starved and half full,
I am a prisoner without shackles.
If I teach less,
the father and elder brother would blame me for
laziness;
If I teach more,

assistant to officials. Officials needed to employ some personal assistants to look after secretarial work and for consultation. The officials were supposed to treat their major assistants as guests and friends. Other synonyms of the *xibin* used in the sense of official assistants were *muliao* 幕僚 and *mubin* 幕賓.

the students would hate me as their enemy.
One day, when I realize my ambition,
I will say good-bye to my depression.³⁹

Pu Songling, a great writer of the 17th century, experienced all these frustrations. The following chart outlines the major stages of his life:

table 6: Major Stages in Pu Songling's Lifetime Career as A *Shengyuan*⁴⁰

year	age	events
1640		born in Pujia Zhuang 蒲家庄 (Pujia village) of Zichuan in Shandong
1658	19	ranked number one in county examination and became a <i>shengyuan</i> . Concentrated on studying until--
1670	31	too poor to survive and hired by the magistrate of Baoying County in Jiangsu as a <i>mubin</i> , yamen assistant until--
1672	33	becomes a private teacher in his home town
1679	40	started to write <i>Liaozhai zhiyi</i> 聊斋志异 (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio), which indicates his dedication to literature and tendency to withdraw from seeking higher degrees
1680	41	taught in a gentry Bi 毕's home, a position lasting for 30 years
1685	46	became a <i>linshan shengyuan</i> with official stipend
1687	48	took examination for a <i>juren</i> degree for the last time

³⁹ See, Kang Cheng 康成, "Gudai shushi de laosao shi 古代塾师的牢骚诗 (Private Teachers' Poems Complaining about their life in Traditional China)," *Zhi-shi chuang* 知识窗 (A Window of Knowledge), 1992:6, p.14. The authorship of this poem remains uncertain because it is not contained in *Wen Zhengming Ji* 文徵明集 (The Collected Work of Wen Zhengming).

⁴⁰ Based on Zhang Jingqiao 张景樵, *Qing Pu Songling Xiansheng Liuxian nianpu* 清蒲松龄先生留仙年谱 (The Chronicle of Pu Songling) (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1980).

1709 70 retired from teaching in Bi family
1715 76 died

Pu started to have a independent family in his early twenties when he and his wife got a piece of farmland and an old house in the division of the big Pu family holdings. From 1664 to 1679, Pu found a study place with board and lodging in the home of one of his friends who wanted a student companion.⁴¹ During that same time, Pu's wife had to take all responsibility for supporting the family. Their house was so bad that she was scared of the loud noise it made in the rain, wind, and the thunder. She was so afraid that she had to save some food from her dinner to attract a neighbor woman to stay with her during stormy nights.⁴² The Pu's had five children and Mrs. Pu raised them almost single-handedly.⁴³ Had Pu obtained a *juren* degree, all these difficulties would have become heroic sacrifice for achieving a family goal. Pu Songling, despite his extraordinary talent for

⁴¹ Ibid., p.22-3.

⁴² Pu Songling, *Pu Songling ji*, p.250-1.

⁴³ Ibid.

literature, did not achieve his dream and never got rid of his poverty and stress. Serving for 3 years as a yamen assistant was an opportunity because he was still relatively young and wanted to have the experience of public service. For an ambitious *shengyuan* like Pu, however, the reality of 38 years of teaching was miserable. Pu wrote a play to reflect the life of a teacher. The play was on the theme of *jiaoshu xiansheng bu zhiqian* 教书先生不值钱 (teachers are worthless). In the mouth of a teacher desperately looking for a teaching position, Pu wrote: "It was wrong to be a scholar. Being an artisan would be a better choice to earn food and dress."⁴⁴ In *Taoxue zhuan* 逃学传 (A Story of Running away from School), Pu described a student who rejected study saying: "*shishang wanban jie shangpin, weiyou dushu shi xialiu* 世上万般皆上品,惟有读书是下流 (all occupations in the world are excellent except being a student which is disgusting)."⁴⁵ In a vernacular verse, Pu Songling described the poor and embarrassing daily life of a teacher. It ends with:

⁴⁴ Pu Songling, "Naoguan 闹馆 (turbulence in School)," in *Pu Songling ji*, p.813-6.

Ink colored me black
wind yellowed my beard
if only I have one hint of life
I will never teach like a king of children⁴⁶

It was likely in his later years that Pu Songling wrote an elegiac address to drive the ever present poverty from his home. He began:

God of Poor, God of Poor, am I a relative of you? Why don't you move to those rich houses? Why stay in my home? Don't tell me that my home is your office where you are supposed to stay. Even if you have a hereditary position here, you should have gone away for a while for temporary duties somewhere else. Even if I am your bonded servant or a bodyguard, I still need a break. Why have you been following me step by step, all the time, and clung to me like a lover? God of Poor, since you came to my house, I have suffered countless embarrassments and all types of frustrations. Nothing of mine ended up with happiness. Friends stopped coming and nobody cares to look at me...⁴⁷

In the Pu family, three out of the four sons were *shengyuan*,⁴⁸ yet not one among them was able to provide help when their sister desperately needed support.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁵ Pu Songling, "Taoxue zhuan (A Story about Playing Truant)," in *ibid.*, p.1742-7.

⁴⁶ Pu Songling, "Xiujiu zichao 学究自嘲 (Self-Ridicule by a Scholar)," in *ibid.*, p.1748-52.

⁴⁷ Pu Songling, "Churi ji qiongshen wen 除日祭穷神文 (Sacrifice to the God of Poverty in New Year Eve)," in *ibid.*, p.1753.

⁴⁸ Zhang Jingqiao, *Pu Songling Xiansheng Liuxian nianpu*, p.14.

⁴⁹ Pu Songling wrote a poem entitled "Lian mei (Sorry for My Sister), in which he put: "xiongdi jie pinfa, huanji zhaogu nan 兄弟皆贫乏,

a year when Pu himself was in debt for the land tax, he had to write to the county head to fight for his stipend.⁵⁰

Pu Songling's tragedy, like many of his fellow *shengyuan-xibin*, was that he did not quit until it was too late. It was his wife who stopped him continuing to take examinations when he was over 50 years old.⁵¹ Pu Songling's father was a much smarter man. After several failures, he quit taking the civil service examinations and, in 20 years, became a successful merchant. There were few educated men, however, who could make such a determined decision in their early years. Among Pu's essays, there is one written for a fellow *shengyuan* to the county head. That *shengyuan* started studying when he was a child, but did not get his *shengyuan* degree until he was in his forties. Aged 64, without having made any further progress and in helpless poverty, what he wanted

缓急照顾难 (brothers are all poor and impossible to help her when she is in difficulty)... *xiongmei jie lunluo, xiangdui yi shanran* 兄妹皆沦落,相对一潸然 (brothers and sisters are all reduced to poverty and what we can do when we meet is weeping face to face).⁵² See *Pu Songling ji*, p.521-2.

⁵⁰ Pu Songling, "Wei pai xieyan cheng 为排邪言呈 (A Report to Reject Evil Sayings)," in *ibid.*, p.200-1.

⁵¹ Pu Songling, "Ji Liushi xingshi 记刘氏行实 (The Life Story of Woman Liu)," in *ibid.*, p.250-1.

for his lifetime of commitment was an officially awarded robe to wear.⁵² That was the destiny of many *shengyuan*.

Xizhou Sheng's reflections on the *xibin*, like Pu Songling's, has profound frustration as the theme. Woman Di 狄, a character in *Xingshi*, finds that her son is not learning much from his teacher. Without thinking about how difficult her son might be, the upset woman curses the teacher as "a thief and whore without morality and a son of a bitch who will never be reincarnated into a human."⁵³ The son of Woman Di, Di Xichen, is indeed an expert in embarrassing his teacher. He once, on purpose, occupied the only washroom until the teacher finally relieved himself in his own trousers. The embarrassed teacher then blamed himself, "teaching such a student is worse than being a cuckold." Even so, the teacher did not quit the job.⁵⁴

The frustrating situation of the teachers decreased their morale. Xizhou Sheng commented in *Xingshi* that

today's teachers have the same hearts as today's officials. The purpose of the officials in the past was to serve the emperor and benefit people, while

⁵² Pu Songling, "Dai tao yiding cheng 代讨衣顶呈 (A Report asking for Uniforms Written for Another Shengyuan)," in *ibid.*, p.204.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.274.

⁵⁴ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, pp.490-2.

the purpose of today's officials is merely to exploit people to benefit themselves... . The teachers in the past wanted to carry forward the [cultural] heritage and forge ahead into the future. Today's teachers merely want money to survive. Therefore, when the teaching salary is not paid in time, the teachers will hate [the students] just like the officials hate people who cannot afford the tax. When a student selects another teacher, the [former] teacher deals with the student just like a general deals with an escaped soldier. If teachers are doing a good job, they will still be tolerated. However, they are not doing a good job. It is not just one teacher, but every teacher is like this.⁵⁵

This Shandong writer might have over stressed the problems with his contemporary teachers. Nevertheless, his very negative evaluation of the teachers of his time indicates the general decreased morale among the teachers.

The demoralization of private teachers was apparently related to the corruption of officials. In the end of the 16th century, an official named Ye Chunji 叶春及 (1532-1595) wrote to the emperor to remind him that the morality and scholarly merits of the educational officials, who were considered as official teachers of the students in the country, were too low to win the respect of students. Because of that, many capable

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.510-1.

students were departing from the official educational system and hiding themselves in mountains and forests, or fled to Buddhist and Taoist monasteries.⁵⁶

3. The *Shanren*: The Attempted Departure from Confucian Lifestyle

The unsatisfactory situation of the *shengyuan*, the difficulty of achieving success in the civil service examination system, and the general political and social crisis of 17th-century China made many grass-root level intellectuals depart from the normal path designed by the official system. One method of departure was to become a *shanren*, literally meaning "people in the mountains." This term appeared in Chinese history no later than the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907) and became unprecedentedly popular in the 17th century.⁵⁷ Although in many aspects the *shanren* were similar to the *yinshi* 隐士 (hermits),

⁵⁶ Ye Chunji, "Zhong shi ru 重师儒 (Respect Teachers)," in Chen Zilong 陈子龙, et al., *Huang Ming jingshi wenbian* 皇明经世文编 (Collected Articles Regarding Practical Issues of the Great Ming) (Hongkong: Zhuji Shudian, 1964), p.3945.

⁵⁷ See Ou-yang Xiu 欧阳修 and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tang shu* 新唐书 (New History of the Tang) (Beijing: 1962), pp.4631-8; Chen Dengyuan, *Guoshi jiuwen*, vol.3, p.144-5; Qian Qianyi 钱谦益, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝诗集小传 (Brief Biographies of the Contributors of the Collected Poetry of Several Dynasties) (Shanghai, Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), pp.453-4.

the 17th-century *shanren* did not usually isolate themselves from society. Instead, they actively interacted with high level officials, as well as commoners, to find patrons who could financially support them. Late Ming scholar Shen Defu identified the *shanren* of his time as "wandering people without permanent residence who to visit powerful officials."⁵⁸ By contrast, a *yinshi* might not make an effort to get patronage from officials. For example, in Chongzhen period of the Ming (1628-44), Zhang Yuanming 张元明, a *shengyuan* of Zhangqiu county, was recommended by a senior official for a position in the government. He firmly rejected such opportunities and moved to the shores of Baiyun 白云 Lake in the countryside where he spent the rest of his life. His collected poetry was entitled *Ziyu cao* 自娱草 (self-entertaining draft). Zhang Yuanming was called a *yinshi* and he did not style himself *shanren*.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, p.585.

⁵⁹ Zhangqiu xianzhi 章邱县志 (Gazetteer of Zhangqiu County), in *ZGCFZCS*, juan 11, p.72. In a poem written by one of Zhang Yuanming's visitor, Zhang was called "Zhang Yinjun 张隐君 (Hermit Zhang)." See *ibid.*, juan 13, pp.113b-114a. To be a hermit might be a result of more profound frustration. He Liangjun was so concerned about the demoralization of society that he was happy he was older and dying. On his death bed he told his sons that the best thing to do was to become peasants. Studying and taking examinations was merely a last resort. To an intellectual, to choose to be a peasant and keep

Many *shanren* were former *shengyuan* who experienced frustrations in their careers or were disappointed with the general political situation in the late Ming. For example, the model *shanren*, Chen Jiru 陈继儒 (1558-1639) became a *shanren* right after his second failure at higher level examinations. Chen then destroyed his *shengyuan* robe and gave up the goal of being an official.⁶⁰ Zhang Shi 张诗, who named himself Kunlun Shanren 昆仑山人 (man from Mount Kunlun), was a poor *shengyuan* who could not afford a wife in his own home and had to marry himself into his bride's household. The father-in-law ill-treated him because Zhang Shi spent more of his time reading than supporting the family. Instead, the father-in-law and the wife had to make tofu to support the family. To avoid the bad treatment from his father-in-law, Zhang stopped his

reading books meant to become a hermit. He Liangjun expressed his desire to live in an isolated place like that. He worry that "the current situation of the country is so disastrous that I am afraid I can not eventually enjoy such a beautiful later years." See He Liangjun, *Siyou Zhai congshuo*, p.161. The social demoralization and decline of the nation that concerned He Liangjun would also affect other educated people in society. However, there were not many intellectuals who had the facility to isolate in a peasant-scholar life like He Liangju dreamed of. Most of them had to make a living by contacting people. There might be a kind of physiological tension of participation and withdrawal among those concerned intellectuals. This might help to interpret the contradictory characteristics of those *shanren* in the 17th century.

⁶⁰ See, Li Fengping 李凤萍, "Wan Ming shanren Chen Meigong yanjiu 晚明山人陈眉公研究 (A Study of Late Ming Shanren Chen Meigong)," Master theses, Dongwu Daxue, 1984, pp.10-1.

normal study and became a *shanren*. With this self proclaimed title, Zhang Shi became famous soon after.⁶¹ Gui Zhuang 归庄 (1613-1673), who became a *shengyuan* when he was only 14 years old, abandoned his public service goal and named himself *shanren* because of a family tragedy, and because of his resistance against the Qing.⁶²

When an educated person chose to identify himself as a *shanren*, he would direct his efforts to developing merit in literature, calligraphy, and poetry instead of the classics or those subjects in the curriculum of the civil service examinations. Some of them made their mark in late Ming literary writing with their unconstrained spirits. Gui Zhuang, for example, was viewed as *qi* 奇 (extraordinary, strange). As an intellectual trend, these

⁶¹ Niu Xiu, *Hu sheng*, pp.193-4; Also see Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, pp.335-6. Qian said that Zhang Shi quit taking civil service examination because once when he was attending an examination, the examiners asked examinee to bring their own desks and benches. There was another man who called himself Kunlun *shanren* in this period, whose name is Zhang Duqing 张笃庆, a friend of Pu Songling. See Lu Dahuang 路大荒, "Pu Liuquan Xiansheng nianpu 蒲柳泉先生年谱 (The Chronicle of Mr. Pu Songling)," in *Pu Songling ji*, p.1757.

⁶² See Gui Zhuang, *Gui Zhuang ji* 归庄集 (Collected Works of Gui Zhuang) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1962), pp.576-80. Born in Kunshan 昆山 of Jiangsu, Gui Zhuang was as famous as Gu Yanwu in the 17th century. His personality was described as "kuang 狂 (crazy), which was a positive evaluation among the intellectuals in that time, implying outstanding, extraordinary, and unconfinable.

shanren apparently represented an anti-traditional tendency.

Fan Lian 范廉 described the shanren as people who "were said to keep away from official titles but actually look for honor, wealth and fame all the time."⁶³ The activities of the shanren among high level officials must have been too notorious to tolerate such that Emperor Wanli (r. 1573-1620) once issued an edict to drive all the shanren out of Beijing, the capital. Confucian scholar Shen Defu called this decision "a great celebration of cleaning up from which the whole world will be benefited."⁶⁴

A common way for a shanren to make a living was *da qiufeng* 打秋风 (beat the Autumn wind), or *da choufeng* 打抽丰 (share profit from rich persons). To do this, a shanren needed to assume a polite and intellectual manner. *Xingshi* provides a vivid example of the shanren in rural Shandong province. Every time the shanren Tong Dingyu 童定宇 arrived in a new place, he would first

⁶³ Fan Lian 范廉, *Yunjian jumu chao* 云间据目抄 (Eye Witnessed Happenings of Yunjian), chapter 1; see Chen Dengyuan, *Guoshi jiuwen*, Vol. 3, p.145.

⁶⁴ Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, p.584.

collect information about the local rich people. Then, he would visit them with presents, such as a piece of calligraphy, paintings, some *chun yao* 春药 (aphrodisiacs), and flattering words which could make people feel truly content yet not embarrassed. The rich people would usually accept their presents and pay highly for those presents in the form of return gifts. People who were visited by the *shanren* had to be careful in dealing with them because they were able to damage anybody's reputation with their big mouths in their endless visits to other people.⁶⁵ Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), in one of his letters, described how *shanren* Huang 黄 moved among several officials and lied to them frequently, including Li Zhi himself, to obtain gift money.⁶⁶

Another way the *shanren* made money was recorded by Zhang Dai. This well-known 17th-century historian and writer saw *shanren* among those people who made their living by assisting in the selling of young girls as

⁶⁵ Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, pp.46-51.

⁶⁶ Li Zhi, *Fen Shu* 焚书 (A Book to Bourn) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), pp.48-50.

concubines. The particular role of the *shanren* in that business was to help manage those quick weddings.⁶⁷

Although several *shanren*, such as Chen Jiru, were broadly recognized as learned scholars and respectable individuals, the overall intellectual opinion on the *shanren* was negative. While Xie Zhaozhe and Shen Defu both described the *shanren* with ironic tones and viewed them as deceitful intellectuals, the unorthodox thinker Li Zhi commented on the *shanren* as troublesome people. Li Zhi described the *shanren* as people who had morality in their mouths but who actually aimed at stealing.⁶⁸ The modern historian Chen Dengyuan 陈登原 basically supports the traditional negative views on *shanren*.⁶⁹

It is true that during the late Ming period that some intellectuals styled themselves *shanren* mainly to identify their unbound personalities, other than their

⁶⁷ Zhang Dai 张岱, *Taoan meng yi* 陶庵梦忆 (Dreams Recollections of Taoan), in CSJCCB, p.45.

⁶⁸ Li Zhi, *Fen shu*, p.148-50.

⁶⁹ See Chen Dengyuan, *Guoshi jiuwen*, vol.3, p.145. Focusing on the case of Chen Jiru, however, Li Fengping emphasizes that *shanren* made important contributions to the prose and essay writing of 17th-century China. Li also appreciates *shanren*'s rejection of participation in the civil service examinations and of the corrupt state administration as honorable activities. See Li Fengping, "Wan Ming Shanren Chen Meigong yanjiu," pp.188-9.

occupations or status in society. Nevertheless, the significance of the *shanren* in the late Ming was represented by those who took the *shanren* as their lifetime career. It is noteworthy that although there were still educated people calling themselves *shanren* after the consolidation of the Qing regime in the early 18th century, the *shanren* were no longer a significant social group during the last 200 years of imperial China.⁷⁰

In summary, in the 17th century, the *shengyuan*, as the major source of official personnel, were still considered to be part of the foundation of the gentry-bureaucratic hierarchy. However, largely due to the political and social instability, as well as to the over supply of degree holders, the targeted goals of those scholar-commoners were no longer attainable by many

⁷⁰ The possible factors that might be responsible for the popularity of *shanren* in the late Ming period include: 1. the economic boom in the 16th century increased people's interest in literary and fine arts; 2. civil service examination became a hopeless way to be successful in life for the educated men; related to the influence of Wang Yangming's philosophy, which emphasized internal "mind," rather than the rather objective "Heavenly principles," educated people had an increasing tendency to express themselves as freely as possible; 3 state control of intellectuals was relatively loose in comparison to the Qing.

of them. In such circumstances, those minor degree-holders, unlike the traditional idealistic Confucian intellectuals who dedicated themselves to state service and universal responsibilities, shifted their central values to their personal material lives. With some privilege brought by their degree, the *shengyuan* commonly conducted troublesome activities, which, rather than enhancing the social norms and stability, caused complaints from local communities and serious criticism from traditional intellectuals. Both Ming and Qing governments had to make significant efforts to deal with these trouble makers. The radical suggestion of abolishing *shengyuan* as a social institution was also made. Poor degree holders, on the other hand, suffered financial difficulty and spiritual frustration. Since the minor degree holders were the major force to carry on youth education, the low morale of *shengyuan* further dismantled the effectiveness of social education. Intellectuals who were totally disappointed with the existing social system and political condition shifted to a non-Confucian dimension of life. They discarded the idea of making a living by mastering statecraft and serving the state. Represented by the *shanren*, these

lapsed intellectuals were unlikely to follow Confucian teaching and norms consciously. The troublesome *shengyuan* in the 17th century presented a possible directional change of the traditional Chinese intellectuals under social, political and financial stress.

Chapter VI.

Marginal Groups in The Grass-Roots Level Society

Another important part of the non-Confucian society of 17th-century China was the marginal groups. In classical Confucian categories, there were four kinds of people, namely *shi* 士 (scholars and officials), *nong* 农 (peasants), *gong* 工 (artisans), *shang* 商 (merchants), who were considered mainstream in traditional Chinese society. In the early imperial period of China, *shi* referred to scholars, officials, as well as individuals who had strong sense of morality. In late imperial China, however, it particularly referred to scholar-officials as a social class, equal to "gentry." The other three categories of people, on the other hand, were all commoners. It is obvious that people were classified in terms of occupation which was so institutionally stabilized that occupations meant social status and classes.

In terms of social status, the social structure of late imperial China was becoming complex. There were many categories of people, beyond the four major categories, who played active roles in society. In the Song period, a

writer named Wang Yucheng had already noted that beyond the traditional four categories of people, soldiers and Buddhist monks and nuns had become two new major occupations.¹ The social complexity developed even further during the Ming. Yao Lu 姚旅, a Ming scholar who studied Wang Yucheng's observation, says that on top of the six categories of people mentioned by Wang, there were eighteen other categories of people in Ming society. They were: Taoist priests, doctors, diviners, fortune-tellers, physiognomists, geomancers, chess players, brokers, ferry men, sedan carriers, hair stylists, porters, massagers, prostitutes, singers, actors and actresses, acrobats, and bandits. He comments:

People in these eighteen categories do not work on the land. Except for two or three trifling skills, they do not do anything. Other people treat them like fairies and ghosts and give everything to them with respect. Those [eighteen categories of] people have musical instruments at home and lead lives as luxurious as dukes and marquises. What these people are doing is

¹ Wang Yucheng's discussion is: "In ancient times, there were four categories of people. Now, there are six categories of people. In ancient times, peasants were also soldiers. Today's soldiers do not work in agriculture. Therefore, there is one more category of people added to the traditional four categories of people. Ever since Buddhism was introduced into China, [monks and nuns] have been releasing souls from purgatory and constructing temples. They do not cultivate the land, nor do they look after silk worms, yet they have clothes and food. Thus, another category is added to the five categories of people." See Wang Yucheng, *Fengchuang xiaodu* 枫窗小牍 (A Short Book Written by the Maple Window), in Xie Guozhen, *Ming dai shehui jingji shiliao xuanbian* 明代社会经济史料选编 (Selected Sources Regarding the Social and Economic History of the Ming) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1980), vol. xia 下, p.385.

more popular than [studying] poetry and classics. [Writing] *Ci* 词 (poetry with strict tonal patterns and rhyme schemes) and *fu* 赋 (descriptive prose interspersed with verse) are ranked behind what these people are doing as well.²

To Yao Lu, twenty-four categories of people made the society too complicated to match the social standard of ancient times. In fact, in the seventeenth century, beyond Yao Lu's twenty-four categories of people, there were many other people. In terms of occupation or activities, for example, there were beggars, midwives, and matchmakers. Certainly not all these occupations were new. Many of them, such as prostitutes, doctors, bandits, and Taoist priests had appeared in China long before the Song dynasty. Even so, it is no doubt that the society in the 17th century was facing profound changes and developed mobility, which caused serious concern among the elite.

Both Wang Yucheng and Yao Lu used irony to describe the people outside the traditional social classes. It seemed, to both, that occupations beyond the traditional four were parasitic and destructive to social stability. These people who were considered less constructive or

²Yao Lu 姚旅, *Lu Shu* 露书 (Dew Book), vol. 9; see, Xie Guozhen, *Mingdai shehui jingji shiliao xuanbian*, pp.385-6.

even destructive in comparison to the four mainstream categories are viewed as marginal groups in this study. Contemporary Confucian scholars of late imperial China might have pointed out the characters of some of these marginal groups. Nevertheless, their role in society and history cannot be simply judged, as did Yao Lu, from the perspective of state control or Confucianism. As a part of the non-Confucian society in late imperial China, marginal groups were a two-edged sword. One edge sharpened social conflicts and continually caused social instability. The other helped to shift China away from a gentry dominated society toward a commoners' society. If we accept that the Confucian world order was in decline in the 17th century, an emergence of new social elements was not simply a negative thing. It is impossible to study all these groups in detail. The goal of this chapter is to carry out a preliminary examination of the most active members of these groups and to present the most significant characteristics of them. Following tags given by 17th-century writers, the following groups of people are studied: 1. *sangu liupo* 三姑六婆 (three types of nuns and six categories of women); 2. *heshang* 和尚 or *seng* 僧 (Buddhist monks), and *daoshi* 道士 (Taoist priests); 3.

wulai 无赖 (rascals).³ Their activities in society indicate a profound decline of Confucian social order and a common neglect of Confucian morality.

I, *Sangu Liupo*: The "Poisonous" Women

Sangu liupo is a collective name referring to nine categories of women appeared during the Song, or even earlier. In Confucian morality, these people were generally considered destructive or poisonous, but they became very popular among the commoners in late imperial China. To understand this phenomenon, we need to examine what kinds of people made up *sangu* and *liupo*.

According to Tao Zongyi 陶宗仪, an early Ming scholar, the *sangu* were *nigu* 尼姑 (Buddhist nuns), *daogu* 道姑 or *nuguan* 女冠 (Taoist nuns), and *guagu* 卦姑 (women diviners). *Liupo* were *yapo* 牙婆 (woman brokers), *meipo* 媒婆 (woman marriage brokers), *shipo* 师婆 (female Shaman), *qianpo* 虔婆 (procuresses or female owners and managers of

³Although several kinds of religious people are included in this chapter, it is not the goal here to deal with religious doctrines or ideologies. The religious diversity of 17th-century China has been discussed in chapter II. This chapter will focus on the social status and activities of these groups and on their impact on society, particularly on Confucian norms. The factors relating to the increase of marginal groups in the context of late imperial Chinese political, social and cultural history will also be discussed.

brothels), *yaopo* 药婆 (woman doctors), *wenpo* 稳婆 (midwives). These women, according to Tao Zongyi, should not be allowed to enter one's house.⁴

Nigu, also called *nuseng* 女僧, or *niseng* 尼僧, were female Buddhist priests who provided general services of Buddhist worship and prayer, and practiced their own religious meditation and cultivation.⁵ The site of *nigu* was usually named an 庵 (chapel), while the site of *heshang* (the male Buddhist monks) were commonly called *si* 寺 (temple). As the Gazetteer of Chiping County says: "Approximately, a *si* is a Buddhist monastery. An *an* is a Buddhist monastery where *nigu* cultivate themselves."⁶ In the North, this was the major distinction between *si* and *an*. As an exception, *nigu* might occupy a *si*, such as Huanggu Si 皇姑寺 in Beijing.⁷ Nevertheless, it was very unusual to see an *an* which was occupied by *heshang* in the North. As Timothy Brook has pointed out, an *an* was usually

⁴Tao Zongyi 陶宗仪, *Chuogeng lu* 辍耕录 (A Notebook Written when I Stopped Working in Farmland), in CSJCCB, p.157; also see Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu ji*, in BJXSDG, vol. 15, P.205.

⁵ See Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, pp.681,685.

⁶ See Niu Zhancheng, et al., *Chiping Xianzhi*, p.857.

⁷ See Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, p.685.

smaller in size than a *si*.⁸ An *an* might provide a simple room for a woman who wanted to supervise the worship service arranged for her needs, or for a woman who wanted

⁸ See Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge and London: The Council on East Asian Studies of Harvard University and the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1993), p.4. Meanwhile, we may not exclude the possibility of a large *an* might be larger than a small *si*. For instance, in the Nanjing area, there were 3 very large *si*, 5 large *si*, 32 middle-sized *si*, 120 small *si*, and about 100 even smaller *si* which were too small to be mentioned in name in the local gazetteer. See Tang Gang 汤纲 and Nan Bingwen 南炳文, *Mingshi* 明史 (A History of the Ming) (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin, 1985), p.603. A short story of the Ming, on the other hand, describes how a young man sees a *da si yuan* 大寺院 (large Buddhist monastery) which turns out to be an *an*. See Feng Menglong, *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恒言 (Everlasting Wards to Awaken the World) (Beijing: Zuoja Chubanshe, 1956), p.279. There is another issue regarding the distinction of *an* and *si*. Based on Feng Menglong's description in *Shouning daizhi* 寿宁待志, Timothy Brook asserts: "...but the Ming ban on the private founding of new *si* meant that most Buddhist establishments founded during the Ming were known as *an* rather than *si*....the distinction had primarily bureaucratic significance: *si* were institutions that had received official authorization and on that basis had a right to expect the magistrate's protection, whereas *an* were privately founded and hence of dubious legality." See Brook, p.4 According to the wording of *Shouning daizhi* (rep. Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1983), what Feng Menglong described was likely the situation in the Fujian area. In terms of legitimacy, the general policy of the Ming toward *an* and *si* were likely the same. The early Ming government restricted the establishment of Buddhist and Taoist monasteries, which included both *si* and *an*, not just *si*. In the 7th month of 1392, an edict issued by Emperor Hongwu (r.1368-1398) says "All newly established *an*, *tang* 堂 (hall), *si*, and *guan* by Buddhist and Taoist clerks beyond official quota are to be destroyed." See Gu Yanwu, *Rizhilu zhiyu*, juan 3, pp.8b, 9a. In 1417, Emperor Yongle 永乐 (r. 1403-1424) banned the establishment of *an yuan* 庵院. See *ibid.*, p.10a. *An yuan* was another term referring to *an*, like *si yuan* 寺院 referring to *si*. This policy was a law in *Da Ming lu* 大明律 (The Law of the Great Ming), which also clearly lists that the same restrictions apply to both *an* and *si*. See *Da Ming lu*, p.44. When the early Ming quota was broken in the late Ming, *si* and *an* were all broadly founded nationwide, privately, semi-officially, or officially. Among them, the number of *si* was likely larger than *an*. See Tang Gang and Nan Bingwen, *Mingshi*, p.603.

to isolate herself from her secular life for a while, for whatever reasons. In some circumstances, an might provide protection for woman refugees who needed medicine, food, clothes, or advice.⁹

Generally, *nigu* were likely to be women who were frustrated in their secular lives. Some *nigu* were donated to an when they were little, because of certain health problems or family difficulty. Like all other religious clerks, *nigu* were not supposed to hold Confucian values, nor were they supposed to conduct themselves in the Confucian manner. Nevertheless, male superiority penetrated into Chinese Buddhist doctrine as well. There were 348 items of regulation to restrict nuns' activities, while monks had to follow only 250.¹⁰ Even though *nigu* were a tradition by the Ming dynasty, the Ming government was reluctant to accept their legitimacy. The first emperor of the Ming once completely prohibited women from becoming

⁹ In the *Bei Qi* 北齐 (A.D. 550-577) period, some gentry widows became *nigu* simply to maintain their widowhood. See Qu Xuanying 瞿宣颖, *Zhongguo shehui shiliao congchao* 中国社会史料丛抄 (Collected Materials of Chinese Social History) (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 1985), p.602. A similar case was given in the 1912 edition of *Wucheng Xianzhi* 武城县志 (gazetteer of Wucheng County), in *ZGDFZCS*, juan 15, pp.613-4.

¹⁰ See Wu Kang 吴康, ed., *Zhonghua Shenmi Wenhua Cidian* 中华神秘文化词典 (A Dictionary of Chinese Mystery Culture) (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 1993), pp.68-9.

nigu. Later, he made a limited compromise that women who were 40 years of age and older could convert to *nigu*.¹¹ Emperor Yongle 永乐 (r. 1403-1424) and Emperor Xuande 宣德 (r. 1426-1435) both prohibited women from becoming *nigu*.¹² Like many other early Ming policies, these orders were not carried out for long. By the time of Emperor Jiajing 嘉靖 (r.1522-1566), under the request of senior official Gu E 桂萼(?-1531), the Emperor again felt it was necessary to destroy an *yuan*.¹³ This persecution, however, was not effective. By early 17th century, according to Shen Defu, the number of *nigu* became larger than ever before.¹⁴

Daogu--Taoist nuns--were female priests providing Taoist worship and prayer service. The site for *daogu* was called *guan* 观 (Taoist temple), which was the same name as the site for *daoshi* 道士 (male Taoist priests). The regular job of a *daogu* was basically the same as that of *nigu*, except *daogu* followed Taoist doctrines and different ritual procedures. From the perspective of social history,

¹¹ Gu Yanwu, *Rizhilu zhiyu*, juan 3, p.8b.

¹² Ibid., p.13a.

¹³ Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, p.685.

¹⁴ Ibid.

a *daogu* was closer to an ordinary woman than was a *nigu*. Unlike Buddhism, which views human existence as worthless and unreal, Taoism created an ambition for its devotees to become fairy gods without giving up their physical shape. *Daogu* maintained their hair like ordinary women did, although they kept a unique type of loose hair style.

Guagu, women diviners, as an occupation, embodied diversity. There was not one particular religious doctrine, nor a particular organization that a *guagu* had to join. It was also rare that a *guagu* had a permanent location. Different from *nigu* and *daogu*, seemingly, *guagu* did not undertake any regular meditation for religious beliefs. They were business women making money by selling their predictions about people's future.¹⁵

Yapo, woman brokers, dealt with human sale and purchase. Zhang Dai 张岱 (1597-1679) described how active they were in this market:

In Yangzhou, there are about one hundred people making a living in the business of *shouma* 瘦马.¹⁶ People who want to get concubines can not let others know their idea. Otherwise, *yapo* will all assemble at the

¹⁵See Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu ji*, p.205.

¹⁶*Shouma* literally means "lean horses." It was a term for young girls to be sold as concubines in the 17th century.

residences of those people like flies on flesh and will not be easily dismissed.¹⁷

Zhang Dai then describes how *yapo* would present young girls to the concubine buyers for money. In other places, a *yapo* might deal in the trade of servants, servant girls and children.

The occupation of *meipo*--women matchmakers--was quite similar to that of *yapo*. Usually, a *meipo* was a woman who professionally arranged a marriage. In traditional Chinese culture, marriage could not be arranged by the marrying couple, not even just by the parents of a couple. Two basic conditions were the approval of the parents and the introduction by matchmakers. Although men could also arrange marriage, no professional male matchmakers were found in the sources used in this study. A *meipo* was necessary to a marriage as a ritual procedure, as well as for practical help. Since a wife or concubine could be purchased in a market, *meipo*, in certain circumstances, were identical to *yapo*. The difference was that *yapo* could act at the stage of selling and buying but would not interfere in the ritual procedure of normal weddings.

¹⁷Zhang Dai 张岱, *Taoan mengyi*, in *CSJCCB*, p.45.

Shipo--female Shaman--could also be called *wupo* 巫婆. Chu Renhuo said: "A *shipo*, which is today named *shiniang* 师娘, is a *wupo*."¹⁸ Especially in Zhending prefecture of Zhili (Hebei), *wupo* was called *shipo* 师婆.¹⁹ The typical job of a *shipo* was to enlist gods or fairies to resolve problems such as illness or disturbances caused by evil spirits.²⁰ Pu Songling, the great writer of Zichuan county of Shandong was so concerned about the problem of *wupo* that he wrote a letter to the officials asking them to forbid Shaman performances because those performances did harm to local security and productivity.²¹ In Yongping 永平 prefecture of Bei Zhili, female Shaman included various categories, such as *tiaozhaogu* 笤帚姑 (aunt broom), *jigu* 箕姑 (aunt winnowing basket), *zhengu* 针姑 (aunt needle), and *weigu* 苇姑 (aunt reed). They all claimed to provide the service of driving away supernatural beings in order to cure people's sickness.²² In Hebei's Daming prefecture,

¹⁸ Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu ji*, p.205.

¹⁹ See *GJTSJC*, vol. 8, p.1005.

²⁰ The popularity of Shamanism among the commoners in North China has been generally described in Chapter II.

²¹ Pu Songling, "Qing jin wufeng cheng 请禁巫风呈 (A Suggestion to the Officials regarding Restriction of Shamanism)," in *Pu Songling ji*, p.206.

where the local official Ximen Bao 西门豹 persecuted shamans in the Spring and Autumn period, female shamans were still active in society during the 17th century.²³ They were listed as one of the four major evil things of this prefecture in *GJTSJC*.²⁴

A *qianpo* was also called *baopo* 鸨婆. These were brothel operators, who usually had a background in prostitution. This occupation by itself tells why they were not welcomed by many families.

Yaopo, literally, medicine woman, had another title *yipo* 医婆, which can be translated as woman doctor. In 17th-century China, female doctors were already active in medical practice. Their practice was specially needed by female patients who were reluctant to see male doctors. Without solid professional training, many *yaopo* or *yipo* had only a limited range of medical knowledge. The basic jobs of *yaopo* included tending to carious teeth and selling medicine for protecting pregnancy or helping

²² See *GJTSJC*, vol. 8, p.592.

²³ Female shaman had appeared in state ceremony in the Zhou 周 dynasty (ca. B.C. 1100-256). See Huang Rucheng, *Rizhilu jishi*, juan 14, p.15b.

²⁴ The four evil things are: *changhui* 唱会 (singing party), *nuwu* 女巫 (female shaman), *yuesu wangzhuang* 越诉罔状 (breaking regulations to make lawsuit to higher level governments), and *yakuai* 牙儉 (business mid-men). See *GJTSJC*, vol.8, p.1344.

abortion.²⁵ In 1553, Woman Peng 彭 was called into the Forbidden City in Beijing and cured the eye problem of the empress dowager. The empress dowager liked Woman Peng so much that Peng was allowed to stay in the palace until she gave birth to a child there.²⁶ Traditionally, the average women could not enter the Forbidden City. Even the mothers of the formal concubines of the Emperor could not go in without an order from the throne. The only exception was the so called "three women" which were wet nurses, women doctors, and midwives. Among many women doctors, only those who were proficient in medication and selected by local governments and the eunuch officials could enter the palace when they were needed. Those selected would be granted a title *Daizhao* 待诏 (person waiting for the call of the throne), which was a great honor.²⁷

Wenpo, midwives, were an active group in 17th-century China. In Li Qing's judgment on a case, in which a *wenpo* was accused of breaking the umbilical cord of a baby, this late Ming official mentioned: "A woman cannot deliver a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, P.598.

²⁷ See Shen Bang, *Wan shu zaji*, p.83; Wang Kentang 王肯堂, *Yu Gang Bi Chen* 郁冈笔尘 (A Notebook of Yugang), vol. 4, in Xie Guozhen, *Mingdai shehui jingji shiliao xuanbian*, vol. xia, pp.382-3.

baby by herself and she must obtain the help of a *wenpo*."²⁸

In addition to assisting delivery, *wenpo* might play an important role in judicial practice. In *Xingshi*, a county head relied on a *wenpo* to confirm a lady's pregnancy. This inspection helped the county head to settle a case of property related conflict.²⁹ Several cases recorded by late Ming writers described that *wenpo* were employed to identify female virginity, which might be crucial to clarify a girl's reputation in that time.³⁰ According to late Ming scholar Wang Kentang's account, *wenpo* also could be called into the imperial palace. Their duty in the palace was not necessarily to help with child delivery. Another task for them could be, when the palace was selecting maids, inspecting those girl candidates to make sure that they were suitable for serving in the palace.³¹

All these occupations were legal in 17th-century China, but none was considered constructive according to

²⁸Li Qing, *Zheyu Xinyu*, p.299.

²⁹Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan*, p.302.

³⁰See Jiao Hong 焦立宏 (1541-1620), *Jiao Shi Bi Cheng* 焦氏笔乘 (A Notebook of Jiao Hong) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1986), p.86; Tian Yiheng, *Liuqing rizha*, p.99.

³¹See Wang Kentang, *Yu Gang bichen*, in Xie Guozhen, *Mingdai shehui jingji shiliao xuanbian*, vol. xia, pp.382-3.

Confucian social norms. It is important not to exaggerate the role of religious difference between *sangu liupo* and Confucian intellectuals, because this difference was not actually a main factor in Confucian criticism of these women. When the nine categories of women with different religious status were referred to under a collective name, *sangu liupo*, the common role of these women, in the mind of Confucian intellectuals, was as destroyers of Confucian female morality. This had little to do with Buddhism or Taoism. It was held that those women might go beyond their professional work and entice women into sexual scandals.

The early Qing scholar Chu Renhuo wrote down an unverified story about Lan Daopo 藍道婆.³² Lan Daopo, with bound feet and the appearance of a woman, was very good at tailoring and sewing. Many families invited her to teach clothes making. Lan Daopo then had sex with many of the women in the families that invited her. When Lan Daopo was finally sentenced to death, many women who had associated with her committed suicide because their reputations were

³²Unlike Taoist and Buddhist nuns, *daopo* (religious woman) were closer to layman in that they usually had families and did not belong to any institution. Their doctrines were commonly combinations of various religions, rather than holding one particular religion. About the identity and activities of *daopo* in Shandong, also see Glen Dudbridge, "A Pilgrimage in 17th-Century Fiction: T'ai-shan and The *Hsing-shih yin-yuan chuan*," *T'oung Pao*, vol. LXXVII, 4-5, 1991, pp.226-52.

totally destroyed. Chu Renhuo then comments: "This is why *sangu liupo* cannot be allowed to enter your house."³³ This author also described female Shaman in the Lower Yangtze area:

They dressed not like men and not like women, acted half in a dream and half awake, talked strangely. Their cunning and turbulent characteristics were rooted in their background of rural ignorant restless people. They confused ignorant people, scared and deceived women... It would be a festival if someone threw dozens of these women into deep water. How come men and women in the Wu area welcome these women so much?³⁴

The author of *Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan*, in an ironic tone, described the life of nuns, through the mouth of Haihui 海会, a maid who decided to convert to be a *daogu*. The greatest advantage of being a *daogu* was sexual freedom and making easy money. A *daogu* did not have family responsibility and other restrictions and she could visit

³³See Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu ji*, P.567. In Longqing 隆庆 (1567-1572) period of the Ming, a monk named Yuan Xiao 圓曉 pretended to be a witch and visited many women in the Yuhang 余杭 area. Similar consequences occurred when his true male status was discovered by local officials. See Tian Yiheng, *Liu Qing rizha*, P.141. Although this was not the conduct of *sangu liupo* but of a single monk, the lesson remained that *sangu liupo* were not people to be associated with. A story recounted in *Dupian Xinshu* describes how a *nigu* named Miaozen 妙真 assisted a sex hungry man Ning Chaoxian 宁朝贤 to entrap Woman Xiang 向, the wife of Baijian 白监. Woman Xiang thus lost her chastity, then started an affair with Ning. As a reward, Miaozen received money and sex from Ning. The author commented at the end of this story: "This is why people must not associate with *nigu*, *meipo* and the like."

³⁴Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu ji*, p.273.

people everywhere. In this novel, Haihui fell into company with a *nigu* named Guo 郭, probably a former prostitute. These two nuns are welcomed by many families in the name of religious practice, and influence many women to loosen their morality.³⁵

Meipo--marriage brokers--were described as money crazy. There is an "old saying" in a story edited by Feng Menglong 冯梦龙, a well-known novelist of the 17th century, which says: "*sangu liupo* always want more money." As a case in point, a *meipo* in this story deliberately makes a false match for money.³⁶

The reputation of *sangu liupo* was so bad among Confucian intellectuals that they named *sangu liupo* "*gui zhong zhi zei*" 闺中之贼 (evils in women's inner chambers).³⁷ Gu Yanwu proudly mentioned that his mother did not see a *daogu* even though that *daogu* followed strict

³⁵Xizhou Sheng, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, P.114-7.

³⁶Feng Menglong 冯梦龙, *Quan Xiang Gujin Xiaoshuo* 全像古今小说 (Ancient and Contemporary Stories with Illustrations) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1980), p.293. This story was likely composed in the Yuan or early Ming periods and was edited by Feng Menglong in the 17th century.

³⁷Xu Zhenji 徐贞吉, "lun zhi jia 论治家 (On Family Administration)," in *GJTSJC*, vol. 321, p.15a.

religious regulations.³⁸ Tian Yiheng warned of the social problems caused by *sangu liupo*:

People in ancient times called Buddhist nuns, Taoist nuns, and women diviners *sangu*, and called woman brokers, women matchmakers, female shaman, procuresses, women medication sellers, and midwives, *liupo*. People at that time did not allow those women to come into their yards in order to protect their families. They avoided those women just like snakes or scorpions, for they might cause serious damage. However, today, the damage caused by *sangu liupo* is everywhere.³⁹

While many descriptions about the destructive activities of *sangu* were found, criticisms of *liupo*, except *qianpo*--procuress, were relatively general and lacked evidence.⁴⁰ *Wenpo* and *yaopo*--midwives and women doctors particularly played positive and necessary roles in society and the only reason why they were viewed as harmful as procuresses was that they were individual women regularly acting outside their own households. This treatment was certainly based on the prejudice of male centered norms. Women, in Confucian norms, were supposed to restrict their activities to homelife as much as possible. Any social connection beyond their family circle

³⁸See Gu Yanwu, "Xian Bi Wang Shuoren Xingzhuan 先妣王碩人行狀 (My Late Mother Wang's Story)," in *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, p.171.

³⁹Tian Yiheng, *Liuqing rizha zhaichao*, in *CSJCCB*, pp.110-2.

⁴⁰About procuress, see discussion about prostitutes in this chapter.

would threaten their chastity, and further threaten those who associated with them. When those female workers were desperately needed in society, keeping them as far away as possible from gentry life was taken by Confucian intellectuals as a responsibility in the defense of Confucian norms.

II, *Seng* and *dao*--Buddhist Monks and Taoist Priests

The number of Buddhist and Taoist clerks increased significantly in the late Ming period. The founder of the Ming, Emperor Hongwu applied restrictive policies on Buddhism and Taoism. In 1373, an edict ordered that each prefecture, subprefecture, and county could have only one temple which would contain Buddhist and Taoist priests together.⁴¹ In 1391, another edict restricted the quota of Buddhist monks and Taoist priests to the following standard: forty for each prefecture, thirty for each subprefecture, and twenty for each county. They were required to register with the government every three years. Based on this quota, the total number of *seng* and

⁴¹ Long Wenbin 龙文彬, *Ming huiyao* 明会要 (Important Governmental Regulations and Policies of the Ming) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), p.694. About the Ming policies to Buddhism and Taoism, see also Gu Yanwu, *Rizhilu zhiyu*, Saoye Shanfang edition, juan 3.

dao should have been 37,090. The same edict also restricted the age of being a professional priest to forty years, or older, for men and fifty years, or older, for women.⁴² The number increased, however, because of the tax burden on the commoners and the patronage of the state during the post Hongwu period. In the turning years from the 15th to the 16th century, the total number of *seng* and *dao* was 500,000 and more.⁴³ After that, Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 1506-1521) took Buddhism under his wing. Emperor Shizong 世宗 (r. 1522-1566) was zealous in support of Taoism. Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1573-1620) and the Empress dowagers were all patrons of Buddhism. Emperor Shenzong even sent a surrogate to become a monk.⁴⁴ The policy changes following the 15th century encouraged the increase of *seng* and *dao*, who acted in society as a significant marginal group during the 17th century.

Buddhist monks and Taoist priests had their own hierarchy. Those active among rural commoners could hardly represent the true values of these two religions. It is evident that the rural Buddhist monks and Taoist priests

⁴² Long Wenbin, *Ming Huiyao*, p.695.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, p.679.

deliberately used their religious status in order to seek money and sex, and showed little sense of religious transcendence.

Generally, Buddhist monks and Taoist priests were supposed to sacrifice their secular lives for their greater happiness in other worlds. They were supposed to cultivate themselves by conducting endless meditation and to purify themselves for desire of money, sex, lying, taking life, alcohol and other things. Buddhist monks, particularly, were required to refrain from family life, sexual activity, alcohol, gambling, and killing.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, as Aina Jushi, a 17th-century writer, says: "There are three activities that are common among monks: gambling, drinking, and whoring."⁴⁶ This writer recounts a story about how a group of monks trapped passengers and

⁴⁵ In the early Ming period, there were Buddhist monks who had wives. The government, to distinguish them from common people, restricted this practice. Taoist priests were basically in two groups, namely Quanzhen 全真 and Tianshi 天师. Quanzhen as the main stream restricted family life, alcohol, and eating meats. Priests of Tianshi sect, however, commonly had families. Taoist priests who had families were called huojia daoshi 火居道士. Fu Qinqia 傅勤家, *Zhongguo daojiao shi* 中国道教史 (A History of Chinese Taoism), p.211. In Jiajing period (1522-1566), two daoshi who were in state service were revealed to have wives. They were both severely punished by the Emperor. This suggests that having a family for daoshi might be officially considered not acceptable. See Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, pp.697-8.

⁴⁶ Aina Jushi, *Doupeng xianhua*, p.110.

forced them to pretend to be well-cultivated monks and to die in order to attract donations from people.⁴⁷ Aina Jushi was not simply opposing Buddhism from a Confucian point of view. To this rural writer, Buddhism itself was acceptable except the retribution and incarnation stories which provided excuses for monks to deceive people. Many monks, Aina Jushi commented, were former criminals who escaped to religion. According to Wang Shixing, monks in Henan area were especially unpredictable.

Monks in Zhongzhou 中州 (Henan) never register with the government. Today they cut off their hair and become monks. Tomorrow they might keep their hair and become laymen. There was no restriction. That was why when the White Lotus rose up, tens of hundreds people became involved and the government could not investigate at all. Often, bandits cut their hair and become monks until their cases are over. Among one hundred regular monks and itinerant monks, there would not be even one person who does not drink alcohol and eat meat.⁴⁸

This phenomenon might relate to an unique convention of Shaolin Si 少林寺 (Shaolin Temple) in Henan, where most monks drank alcohol, ate meat, practiced martial arts, and

⁴⁷Ibid., pp.62-4.

⁴⁸Wang Shixing, *Guangzhi yi*, p.36-7. See also Chen Baoliang, "Mingdai de mimi shehui yu Tiandi Hui de yuanyuan 明代的秘密社会与天地会的渊源 (Secret Societies in the Ming and Their Connections with the Heaven and Earth Society), *Shixue Jikan* 史学集刊 (Collections of Historical Articles), 1994:1, p.9.

knew nothing about Buddhist enlightenment.⁴⁹ In early Kangxi period (1662-1722), Sun Sangsheng 孙商声, a very intelligent student of Zhang Xilu 张西庐, was invited by a monk to teach him poetry. Sun became so disappointed in the monk's drinking and fondness for prostitutes that Sun threw himself into a pond.⁵⁰ Another monk of the Shunzhi period (1644-1661) was described as fond of homosexuality.⁵¹

Some rascals also believed that becoming a monk was an easy way to make money. They used the habits of monks to obtain money by fraud.⁵² The destructive behavior of monks towards women's chastity especially concerned Huang Liuhong, the magistrate of Tancheng of Shandong in mid-17th century. He described those religious priests as "butterflies besotted by flowers."⁵³

Another similar case occurred in Henan. In the seventh month of 1682, Wang, a student traveler, drank a cup of

⁴⁹In Chinese, Wang Shixing's words are: "少林则方上游僧至者守此戒,是称禅林.本寺僧则啜酒啖肉,习武教艺,止识拳棍,不知棒喝。" See Wang Shixing, *Guangzhi yi*, p.41.

⁵⁰Niu Xiu, *Hu Sheng*, P.25.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p.79.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p.58-60.

⁵³See Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*, p.19.

tea from a monk of Xiangfu 祥符 county (close to today's Kaifeng of Henan). The student was poisoned. Monks came out, cut off all his hair, stripped him, and put hundreds of needles into his body. The monks then carried Wang to villages and towns. Chating Buddhist scripture, the monks would pull one needle out from Wang's body for each donation received from the crowd. When the monks finally reached Xiangfu city, they were captured by the people and turned over to the officials. The County Head Huang Guyun 黄[山古]云 sentenced the monks to punishment.⁵⁴

Documentation of such disgraceful acts by monks is particularly abundant in North China and the Lower Yangtze region.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Niu Xiu, *Hu Sheng*, P.94.

⁵⁵For instance, the late Ming official Li Qing personally dealt with a case of moral corruption of monks. There were two monks in Putuo 普陀 involved in fighting, followed by a lawsuit by the local official. Li Qing, recounts: these two monks fought each other for the position of *Duguan* 都管, which was the officially appointed head of a big Buddhist temple. This position caused competition because it could bring money from people who came to worship the Buddha in the temple. The fighting developed so seriously that one of the monks made up a story saying that the other monk was involved in a rebellion. Li Qing, in his final official judgment described these two monks as dogs fighting for a piece of bone and they would go to hell. One of the two monks was sentenced *tu 徒* (exile), while the other one received a beating and lost his position. See Li Qing, *Zheyu*, p.222. Even the reputation of the Emperors were used by monks to swindle. In 1574, a monk pretended to be the second son of Prince Leping 乐平 and traveled around with the picture of Emperor Taizu of Ming in his hand. In a temple near Xihu Lake in Hangzhou there was a tooth which was as big as a human fist. To attract people, monks in that temple declared that this tooth was a tooth of Buddha. According to Tian Yiheng, however, this tooth came from a kind of animal from inner Asia. In 1536 actually, several

In the Wanli period, an official named Li once met a monk. This monk submitted ten *liang* of silver and a letter which he declared that somebody had lost. Li, impressed by the honesty of this monk, appointed him to be the head of a temple. Moreover, Li donated one hundred *liang* of silver for the reconstruction of that temple. Junior officials under Li increased the donation to several thousand *liang*. One day, a man came to claim the ten *liang* silver. This man accurately remembered the contents of the letter handed in by the monk. This further convinced Li about the honesty of that monk. Right before the starting date for the construction, the monk disappeared along with all the donated money. The ten *liang* of lost silver, the letter, and the man coming to claim the lost things were all parts of a scam.⁵⁶

In *Dupian Xinshu*, written by a late Ming author, five categories of swindlers were said to be common among *seng* or *dao*. Among the examples described in this book, a monk,

hundreds of kilograms of similar Buddha teeth and Buddha bones were destroyed under the order of the Emperor. See Tian Yiheng, *Liuqing rizha zhaichao*, in *CSJCCB*, P.138-40. Monk Xingguo 行果, who was said to have come from the ocean, attended patients in Huangzhou. His popularity ended when an official died under Xingguo's instructions to practice *pigu* 辟谷 (avoidance of eating as a way of self-cultivation). See Tian Yiheng, *Liuqing rizha zhaichao*, pp.136-8.

⁵⁶Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu ji*, P.528.

knowing that a cow liked to lick salt, washed his body with salty water and came to a rich man's house. He claimed that a cow of that rich man was actually the reincarnation of his dead mother. The rich man was convinced of that story when he saw the cow lick the monk. The monk got the cow for free and promised the rich man that he would be rewarded by the Buddha for his philanthropic act. The cow was soon slaughtered by the monk for his food.⁵⁷ In another case, a monk advised Woman Dong 董 to serve the Buddha. Then the monk attempted to rape Woman Dong and finally killed her when she resisted.⁵⁸

The author comments:

It is common that evildoers hide in temples, and monks in temples are actually thieves. Many of those evil persons have been exposed. If some people have not witnessed such things, they should have heard about them. Why don't people learn this lesson? It is so stupid for women to visit temples and for men to convert to monks.⁵⁹

As for the *daoshi*, their best-known swindle was making silver from other cheaper metals. Some real silver was needed in addition to lead or mercury. When the "magic" procedure was close to completion, the *Daoshi* would run

⁵⁷Zhang Yingyu, *Dupian xinshu*, pp.1437-40.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p.1454-5.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p.1456.

away with the silver provided by his customers. This sort of swindle was famous in late Ming China. Three cases were described in *Dupian Xinshu*, and much more dramatic cases of this kind can be seen in fiction such as *Pai an jingqi*.⁶⁰

The unexpected activities of *seng* and *dao* usually led to rough treatment by local officials. In Li Qing's record, he sentenced a monk who was merely "suspected" of having sexual relations with a nun, to punishment by caning.⁶¹

Certainly Buddhist monks and Taoist priests were not the only one to practice these activities, and certainly not all monks or priests behaved like the above-mentioned people. The records made by 17th-century writers might be biased against Buddhism and Taoism. Nevertheless, it is clear that the *seng* and *dao* in the rural areas of the north were socially significant marginal groups that were acting contrary to Confucian beliefs.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp.1465-78; Ling Mengchu, *Pai an jingqi* 拍案惊奇 (Suppressing Stories) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), pp.741-84.

⁶¹Ibid., p.313.

III. *Wulai*--the Rascals

In recent years, along with the economic boom, Chinese society has diversified significantly. In these circumstances, some "unrespectable" people in traditional society have attracted the interest of historians, especially, Wang Chunyu 王春瑜 and Chen Baoliang 陈宝良.⁶² Their studies on *liumang* 流氓 are relevant to this study of *wulai*--rascals. *Liumang*, as a modern Chinese word, is commonly translated as hooligan. Wang and Chen treated rascals as a part of *liumang*. When we trace the original meaning of *liumang* and *wulai* in the 17th century, however, we can see a difference. *Liumang* were mainly unsettled people who conducted unpredictable activities over a vast and uncertain geographical area. Literally, the first part of the Chinese word *liumang*--*liu* means wandering, while the second part--*mang* means average people. *Wulai*, on the other hand, literally means people without stable occupation and morality, and were usually people with local roots. In most circumstances, *liumang* were illegal

⁶²About their studies, refer to Chen Baoliang, *Zhongguo liumang shi*.

inhabitants while *wulai* were usually registered local inhabitants.

In addition to *wulai*, in the historical sources of the 17th-century China, there were some other terms with similar meanings to the English word rascal such as *guanggun* 光棍 and *dipi* 地痞. These terms were originally descriptions of the activities conducted by these marginal unrespectable people. *Guanggun*, in Chinese, means clean stick, implying a single man. According to Chen Baoliang, *guanggun* also means "powerful penis," and therefore implies a strong individual, sexually and socially. The term *dipi* was formed by two Chinese characters, *di*--local, and *pi*--ruffian. *Wulai*, *guanggun* and *dipi* were basically identical in social origin. They were locally based individuals without stable occupations, who regularly and in many cases openly conducted "immoral" or even criminal activities. Rascals might conduct collective activities. The difference between a collection of rascals and secret societies is that the organization of rascals was temporary, loose, and without stable leadership or long term purposes. Rascals would develop into loosely and temporarily organized bandits. As a social phenomenon, rascals existed in different forms from ancient time

through to the present. In the 17th century, the rascals showed a increased variety. The early Qing official Zhu Zeyun 朱泽[云] estimated that six out of ten people were *xianren* 闲人, idlers.⁶³ Those idlers formed a strong base of recruitment for rascals in the society. Rascals reached large numbers and posed a major challenge to Confucian social norms and practices.

Rascals as a marginal group could be criminals. Aina Jushi described how commoners might change into rascals.

Those lazy people made money easily and spent money easily. They did not have grain for the next day and they did not have warm clothes to resist the cold weather. When there was nowhere to go, they would get some immoral ideas . . . This was because they did not follow the instruction of their parents and uncles, did not listen to the advice of their brothers and friends. They whored and gambled all the time, got used to good food, good clothes, a lot of money, and to treating people roughly. Then they came to a bad end.⁶⁴

Aina Jushi attributed the making of a rascal to an average person's laziness and prodigality. This explanation, although superficial, touched the general character of

⁶³ Zhu Zeyun "Yangmin 养民 (To Support People)," in He Changling 贺长龄, ed., *Huangchao jinshi wenbian* 皇朝经世文编 (Practical Articles of the Great Qing), juan 28. See Feng Erkang and Chang Jianhua 冯尔康, 常建华, *Qingren shehui shenghuo* 清人社会生活 (The Social Life of the Chinese during the Qing), (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1990), p.22.

⁶⁴Aina Jushi, *Doupeng xianhua*, pp.94-5.

rascals. A rascal usually did not have a sense of thrift. Their money came from the "wind", and they spent the money as if they were millionaires, on luxury entertainment and companionship. This was described by Aina as the following:

[They] come into a gambling house or a brothel, help others in whoring or in gambling, spend money carelessly as if a *guanggun*, make brother to every man and make sisters out of every prostitute they have met.⁶⁵

How did rascals make their money? Aina Jushi mentioned only parts of the businesses. In Lower Yangtze area, a major way for a rascal to make money was called *dahang* 打行 (group fighting). This activity started in the Wanli 万历 period (1573-1620) and reached its peak in the Chongzhen 崇禎 period (1628-1644). When some people were involved in fighting or legal cases and needed protection, they might come to see an organizer of this business. The organizer would assemble rascals to work for the customer and the customer would pay for such help. It was said that even some young men from the gentry or rich business families would become involved in such activities.⁶⁶ This

⁶⁵Ibid., p.96.

⁶⁶Chu Renhuo, *Jianhu ji*, p.288; also see Chen Baoliang, *Zhongguo liumang shi*, p.167-71.

was likely a kind of bodyguard business at that time. In the North, according to Chen Baoliang, organized rascals, who were called *lahu* 喇虎, were even more violent. They conducted collective robbery, rape, and bullying.⁶⁷

In Caozhou 曹州, of Shandong, some rascals made money by instigating lawsuits between people. The longer a lawsuit lasted, the more money these rascals made from the people who were pulled into trouble.⁶⁸ Gu Yanwu mentioned, in several of his letters, the *wulai* who tried to claim Gu's farmland in Shandong as theirs.⁶⁹

There were some powerful people behind the collective activities of rascals. In Daming 大名 prefecture and Zhending 真定 prefecture of Bei Zhili, there were some people who were called *jianhao* 奸豪 (evil bullies). They would organize parties in the name of weddings, funerals, school openings, and the like in order to collect presents from people. Those who failed to give presents to the bullies would likely receive trouble later. The themes of these types of parties might even have been completely

⁶⁷Chen Baoliang, *Zhongguo liumang shi*, p.156-60.

⁶⁸ *GJTSJC*, vol. 9, p.2145.

⁶⁹Gu Yanwu, *Gu Tinglin shiwen ji*, p.192; Zhangmu 张穆, *Gu Tinglin Xiansheng nianpu* 顾亭林先生年谱 (The Chronicle of Master Gu Tinglin), p.53.

fabricated. Such shameless activities were called *dagang* 打纲, extortion.⁷⁰

Even descendants of Confucius were involved in such activities. An official report of Pingyin 平阴 county dated the fourth month of 1681 states: a rascal named Kong Yinfang 孔印方 was supported by a member of Kongfu 孔府 (The household of the descendants of Confucius) and gathered hundreds of unidentified rootless people to loot newly opened farmland of other people. In doing so, they drove cattle through other people's farmlands and destroyed crops. Because it was related to Kongfu, the county magistrate had to complain to Kongfu asking for discipline of its members, instead of dealing with those rascals directly.⁷¹

In comparison to the above-mentioned cases, local rascals without powerful people's support usually bothered

⁷⁰ Ibid., vol. 8, pp.1006,1344.

⁷¹ "Yanzhou Fu Dongping Zhou Pingyin Xian zaowan nishen shuce 兖州府东平州平阴县造完拟申书册 (Prepared Report of Pingyin County in Dongping Subprefecture of Yanzhou Prefecture)," See Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo 中国社会科学院近代史研究所, et al., ed., *Kongfu dangan xuanbian* 孔府档案选编 (Selected Archives of Kongfu) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), vol. *shang* 上, p.105-6. In the Archive of Kongfu, there is a complaint about that some rascals from Shandong went to Peixian 沛县 in northern Jiangsu to occupy farmland in the name of Kongfu. Whether or not those rascals were supported by Kongfu remains uncertain. Nevertheless, sources like that reveal that rascals might connect to local powerful families, or use these families' name for their own purpose. See *ibid.*, pp.106-7.

people in somewhat tolerable ways. For instance, people in Wancheng of Hebei who believed in Buddhism and Shamanism usually donated rice to monks. Some rascals took advantage of this custom. They would hang portraits of deities on those believers' gates, beat drums, sing, and dance as if they were supernatural beings until people gave them money or rice. Then, they would move to other houses and repeat their actions.⁷²

A Qing writer identified *wulai* and *guanggun* with their activity of extortion.⁷³ One type of extortion was called *zha huodun* 扎火囤 (trapping). The typical method of *zha huodun* was to let a woman, wife or concubine of the rascal, or a hired prostitute, lure a rich man into an affair. The rascal would show up when or after the man slept with the woman and threaten to kill them both or take them to court. The entrapped man would then have to pay whatever price the rascal demanded. This trick was mentioned by many 17th-century writers, such as Zhang Kentang 张肯堂 and Ling Mengchu.⁷⁴

⁷² Shen Bang, *Wanshu zaji*, p.193.

⁷³ See Chen Baoliang, *Zhongguo liumang shi*, p.160.

⁷⁴ Ling Mengchu, *Paian jingqi*, juan 14; Chen Baoliang, *Zhongguo*, p.244-55.

In the fictional works of the late Ming writer Zhuoyuan Ting Zhuren, rascal personalities are vividly reflected. In his works, one rascal named Jin Youfang 金有方 is a *shengyuan*. All local weak men of money and pawnbrokers without connection with powerful people suffered trouble from Jin. Jin might drive people into situations involving murder or rebellion. Or, Jin might instigate cousins, uncles and nephews to fight each other for family property. Jin might help a former owner of sold items to ask for more money from the buyer. He also might encourage widows and orphans to sue someone for annexing land and houses. He would guarantee people the writing, submission, and acceptance of their complaint. Money made through conducting these swindles might be divided at a rate of two to eight, three to seven, or half and half between Jin and his partners.⁷⁵ In this case, the education and degree obtained by a rascal helped him to stir up conflicts and lawsuits among people and thereby gained profit. Another story told by the same author describes a rascal who benefited by relying on his physical strength:

The noise maker was a *wulai* of Yixiang 义乡 Village named Gu 谷 and nicknamed Shupi 树皮. Relying on his bull-like power, this cunning and fierce man swindled people. After he subdued several pushy young men in

⁷⁵Zhuo Yuan Ting Zhuren, *Zhaoshi bei*, p.76.

the village, Gu Shupi acted like a king. He asked people in the village to address him as "Gu Da Guanren" 谷大官人 (meaning Sir Gu). It was a pity that people in this distant village did not have to suffer any gentry or *shengyuan*, but had to suffer from such a shabby man. Without the hat of an official, Gu was more awful than those swindling gentry. Without dressing in a blue robe, Gu was worse than those cheating *shengyuan*. Even the senior Mu Taigong 穆太公 had to deal with Gu with 60 percent respect, 30 percent fear, and 10 percent flattery.⁷⁶

Rascals were more active in public affairs than the peasantry and other average people because of their bold personalities, spare time, and eagerness for power. The late Ming Grand Secretary Wu Sheng even said that all minor local public administrative officials were rascals.⁷⁷ There was a considerable number of rascals who joined the army and some of them became generals. Liu Zeqing 刘泽清, a late Ming general and warlord, was considered to be one of them. Because the late Ming government had to sell

⁷⁶Ibid., p.84.

⁷⁷Wu Sheng, "Yuhuan moru xiubei midao moru anmin shu 御恩莫如修备弭盗莫如安民疏 (A Memory to the Throne Suggesting That to Be Prepared Is the Best Way to Defense And to Settle Our People Well Is the Best Way to Eliminate Bandits)," in *Chaian shuji 柴庵疏集* (Memorials to the Throne by Wu Sheng) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1989), p.29. In Chongzhen period (1628-1644), Wu Sheng held positions in Henan, Shanxi, and Shanxi, as *xunan* 巡按 (commissioner) and *hunfu* 巡抚 (governor), as well as Grand Secretary in the central government. See Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, p.6521-4.

official titles and degrees to meet its financial needs, many people of rascal background rose to gentry class.⁷⁸

The early Qing government applied serious punishment to rascals. In 1666, Emperor Kangxi approved an order to inspect wanderers. Landlords were required to check origins of their tenants and the tenants had to obtain guarantees from other people in order to rent rooms. The so called e-gun 恶棍 (evil rascals) who did not work at their original business, but swindled instead, were supposed to be arrested and punished. Local officials who failed to carry out this order would be punished as well.⁷⁹

Connections to powerful people, education, lower level degree, strong physical strength, dauntlessness and shameless personality could all be conditions to make a rural commoner a rascal. In the 17th century, a considerable number of people lived off the activities of rascals. Being a rascal was becoming an occupation.

VI. The Historical Background and Impact of the Marginal Groups

All the above marginal groups had appeared before the

⁷⁸See Chen Baoliang, *Zhongguo liumang shi*, pp.224-7, 236-7.

⁷⁹ *GJTSJC*, vol. 66, p.187.

17th century, but no time other than the 17th century provides so many records of their social activities. Marginal groups made a much stronger impact on the traditional social structure, values, and thinking than ever before. This strong impact was largely caused by the magnitude of the increase in the number of these marginal people.

The serious exodus of mainstream people to marginal groups started in the middle of the 15th century. Zhou Chen 周忱 (1381-1453), a Governor of South Zhili, in a famous memorial to officials at the Ministry of Revenue, pointed out that peasants of this time were especially mobile. This was mainly caused by the heavy burden of tax.⁸⁰ Zhou Chen pointed out seven directions where the

⁸⁰ Based on Ray Huang's study, John K. Fairbank concluded that the tax rate of the Ming government was very low. See John K. Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), p.132, and refer to Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth Century Ming China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974). It is, however, only from the state administration point of view. To evaluate the tax burden of common people, we have to take the capability of people to pay the tax, the common level of productivity, the extra expenses charged on people during tax collection by the government and corrupt officials and yamen clerks, the social inequality of tax responsibility, and the impact of famines under consideration. Higher tax in a modern system might mean better social programs, which was not the same in traditional China. For example, the collection of *kuang shui* 矿税 (mining tax) in Wanli period was completely for the luxury expenses of the royal family. See Wang Chunyu 王春瑜 and Du Wanyan 杜婉言, ed., *Mingdai huanguan yu jingji shiliao* 明代宦官与经济史料 (Historical Sources of the Eunuchs and

independent peasants would go: to become dependents of a gentry family so that they did not have to look after taxation, to join artisan relatives in cities, to live on boats and do business in trading, to join county men in the army as family members and do business, to join relatives in garrison troops opening up wasteland, to move to neighboring prefectures, and to become Buddhist monks or Taoist priests.⁸¹ By the late 15th century, the number of peasants who left their home area increased to several million. In the middle Ming large scale movements of people were partially stopped by means of military suppression, taxation reform, and a new policy of resident registration. In one of Xiang Zhong 项忠 (1421-1502)'s memorials to the emperor, this general claimed that he had got more than 930,000 *liumin* 流民 (wandering people) returned to their original occupations and sent 500,000 hiding followers of rebels in the mountains to their home.⁸² Mobility from the four mainstream categories of

Economy During the Ming Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue, 1986), pp.80-133.

⁸¹Zhou Chen 周忱 "Yu Xingzai Hubu zhu gong shu 与行在户部诸公书 (A Letter to the Revenue Officials in Beijing)," in Chen Zilong 陈子龙, et al., ed., *Ming jingshi wenbian* 明经世文编 (Collected Articles Regarding Practical Issues of the Great Ming) (Hongkong: Zhuji shudian, 1964); also see Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, p.7446; Xie Guozhen, *Mingdai shehui jingji shiliao xuanbian*, p.398-9.

people to other social levels and mobility from area to area, however, by no means stopped in the late Ming period. The late Ming writer He Liangjun saw a picture similar to that which Zhou Chen had seen in the 15th century:

In the recent forty to fifty years, the tax has increased every day, and corvée has been becoming heavier. People can not tolerate this situation, so they moved away from the old occupations. In the past, gentry families did not have many servants. Now, the number of peasants who have converted to be servants in gentry families have increased ten fold. In the past, government did not have many employees. Now, the number of people who have left agriculture and make a living by working for the government is five times as large as before. In the past, there were few people in insignificant occupations. Now, the number of people who have left agriculture and joined artisans and merchants is three times as large as before. In the past, there was no person without something to do. Now, two to seven out of ten people who have left agriculture are idle. Approximately, six to seven out of ten people of the population are not commonly agriculture.⁸³

In 1567, an edict from Emperor Longqing (r. 1567-1572) ordered relief for the mobile people from Shandong and Henan, sparing them the farmland tax for five years. In 1599, Emperor Wanli (r. 1573-1620) issued an order to

⁸² See Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, p.4730. The "Shihuo zhi 食货志 (Treaties of Economy)" in *Mingshi*, recorded other governmental operations and their results regarding to the re-settling of the wandering people. See *Mingshi*, p.1879.

⁸³ He Liangjun, *Siyong Zhai congshuo*, chapter 13, in Xie Guozhen, *Mingdai shehui jingji shiliao xuanbian*, p.386.

relieve the mobile people who came to the capital. In 1612, Emperor Wanli approved the report of Beijing local government to distribute porridge for the hungry people who moved into Beijing.⁸⁴ These records indicate the existence of a huge mobile population in north China during the late Ming period. According to Xie Zhaozhe, beggars alone in Beijing city numbered more than 10,000 by the late Ming period. They were mainly former peasants.⁸⁵ In terms of activities, Xie says, these people were comparable to rascals:

basically gamblers do not have an occupation and do not participate in productivity. With even just one penny in hand, they would gamble. When their money is gone, they put their clothes on [to leave] and soon became naked [sold the clothes for food] crying on the streets.⁸⁶

From a cultural point of view, a consistent development of marginal population indicates the weakness of Confucian values at the bottom of society. When

⁸⁴ See Long Wenbin, *Ming huiyao*, p.964-5.

⁸⁵Xie Zhaozhe, *Wuza zu*, juan 5, see Chen Baoliang, "Mingdai de mimi shehui yu Tiandi Hui de yuanyuan," *Shixue Jikan*, 1994:1, p.6. Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski noted, in their study of the 18th century society, that "one would expect to find the largest concentrations of the poor in cities (to which they were attracted for employment but where mortality was high), overpopulated areas, and depressed regions." Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.127.

⁸⁶Xie Zhaozhe, *Wuza zu*, juan 5, see Chen Baoliang, "Mingdai de mimi shehui yu Tiandi Hui de yuanyuan," *Shixue jikan*, 1994:1, p.6.

Confucian values were weak and pluralism and pragmatism were popular among the commoners, the causal ties of the commoners to the core of the society--the gentry class and the state--became less.

The heavy burden of taxation forced a large number of peasants to survive in occupations other than agriculture. This, in turn, crippled the state control over people. In the late Ming period, the official registration system that aimed at fixing people in one particular geographical area and occupation was no longer functioning. Religious devotees and rascals especially were highly mobile. They were not listed in the so called *baojia* 保甲 registers, which was "used for mutual security and responsibility in cases of emergent local crimes."⁸⁷ When the dynastic control over society was in decline, the marginal people, because of their relatively unstable occupations, residences, and income, became a major resource of bandits and rebellions. The social disorder in the mid-17th century was partially prepared by the large late Ming marginal population. A related phenomenon was that Chinese secret societies developed quickly in the time around the 17th century. As Chen Baoliang pointed out:

⁸⁷ Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*, p.39.

Before the Qing dynasty, the activities of secret societies had developed to an unprecedented level. In other words, almost all the secret religious organizations and secret societies acting in the Qing period can be traced back to the Ming."⁸⁸

According to Chen, secret societies in the Ming were mainly organizations of rascals, salt smugglers, and fighters.⁸⁹

From a positive point of view, marginal groups played a role in commercialization and social reconstruction. Many of them, such as midwives, were by all means business persons. The popularity of *sangu liupo* among the commoners indicates a demand of various services and an acceptance of female business persons by the commoners. Meanwhile, the development of social commercial life provided various possibilities for people looking for quick money. All marginal people we have discussed made cash from other people, instead of from growing crops in a typical agricultural society. Unlike self-sufficient, or semi self-sufficient peasants, these marginal people would spend money in markets to obtain consumer items, which enlarged the market.

⁸⁸ Chen Baoliang, "Mingdai de mimi shehui yu Tiandi Hui de yuanyuan," *Shixue jikan*, 1994:1, p.1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.1-3.

The problem was, however, that the lack of an effective legal system, an overall weak condition of social security, corruption of the bureaucratic system, and a lack of a well institutionalized ethical code among the commoners all limited the potential of the positive aspects of the marginal groups to move to a more constructive part of a healthy society.

It is noteworthy that marginal populations in 17th-century China included a great variety of people. Their impact on society was different from group to group. Some, such as woman doctors, were constructive to a pre-modern society. Others, such as prostitutes have been viewed in most cultures as immoral. Besides, there were criminal or semi-criminal groups such as rascals. No matter what else these people did to the people around them, no matter how morally different they were as individuals, there was one thing in common among them: they were all people outside the mainstream occupations, and none was expected to have Confucian values. Moreover, those people were certainly influencing the mainstream commoners and even intellectuals in many ways. The fears expressed by many 17th-century writers about marginal people showed the seriousness of such an impact. There was

no possibility to eliminate the marginal groups from the society. The only choice left to 17th-century Confucians was to keep apart from those people. This difficult situation for Confucian thinkers indicates the limitation of Confucian doctrines in handling complicated social reality. In this sense, Confucianism was challenged by the changing condition of society, instead of by intellectuals, long before the coming of the West and its impact upon China. In examining the huge population of "non-respectable" occupations who demonstrated various values, one sees that Confucianism in lower level society of China during the 17th-century was not important.

Chapter VII

Conclusions: Non-Confucian Society and Chinese History

Commoners in north China during the 17th century lived in a world in which Confucianism was not the guiding principle as it was in gentry society. In terms of religion, pluralism was a major characteristic of the non-Confucian society. It was reflected not only in the variety of popular religions, but also in the synthetic approach of the commoners toward different religious concepts. Polytheism and pantheism were common among the commoners. Such pluralism makes Chinese culture different from cultures that have one highly integrated religion as the core of society. The concept of one "only true God," that exists in Christianity, could not be found in the non-Confucian society of North China during the 17th century.

Confucian family ethics, especially the family ethics of Neo-Confucianism after the Song dynasty, had only limited influence among the commoners. Clanship was weaker in the North in comparison to the South, Southeast, and the Lower Yangtze areas. Traditional Familism was challenged by people who acted as

individuals and disregarded Confucian family values. Women wanted to be more independent from men, participate in public activities, become private business persons, be leaders of popular religious organizations, and break the rule of female chastity. Such a tendency did not reverse the traditional gender roles in general, but it caused serious damage to Confucian social regulations.

The weakness of Confucian ethics among the commoners was a factor contributing to their active participation in money-making activities, which were essential to the late Ming commercialization. There is little evidence to indicate that the commercial activities of the commoners was inspired by Confucianism. Although we can find piecemeal cases of Confucian intellectual-officials being involved in commercial activities, the intellectual-officials suffered confusion in justifying these type of activities because of their Confucian mentality. Confucianism was not a dynamic force in the commercialization of late imperial China. Instead, the commoners played a dynamic role in this process. On the other hand, the weakness of Confucianism among the commoners was a factor leading to the destructive activities of the marginal groups, especially the rascals

and some rascal-like religious devotees, as well as some grass-root level intellectuals.

It is noteworthy that even the *shengyuan*, scholar-commoners, were forced to find their roles outside gentry society. Their frustration led to their demoralization and the departure of many among them from Confucian goals of life. This further crippled the influence of Confucianism at the bottom of society. Meanwhile, the change in the grass-root level intellectuals significantly contributed to the emergence of popular literature in late imperial China. After a long period of accumulation of changes, by the 17th century the cultural identity of the commoners became more obvious. The emergence of *baihua* 白话 (vernacular language) novels, precious scriptures, and drama in the late Ming period represented the formation of a huge world where a large group of writers was active. Intellectual activity now largely became work for the market. The buyers were mainly the commoners.

As a part of the general decline of Confucian influence in society, marginal groups were extremely active during the 17th century. The increase in marginal groups indicated large-scale social mobility. Such

mobility differs from the so called "up-ward" or "down-ward" mobility in terms of social hierarchy. It was the mobility of the commoners from traditionally classified occupations, especially peasantry, to market-related and less stable occupations. This can be called "horizontal mobility" and it was a stronger challenge to the traditional social landscape. The increase of marginal groups complicated the social structure, sharpened problems of state control, and put a heavy pressure on the maintenance of Confucian morality. The 17th century saw the significant growth of secret societies. These societies were more likely to be regular organizations of commoners, rather than organizations set up for gaining political power. In general, the significant diversity of the following century, as brilliantly described by Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski in their *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, was formed in the 17th century.

Social diversity developed during the 17th century and it stimulated various dynamic elements relating to economic and social changes. Certainly, it was not sufficient to generate an overall transaction towards a modern society in China. It was, however, sufficient to reject the view that the history of late imperial China

was stagnant without any significant development.¹ The existence of a strong commoner society and its impact, especially when it was not merely dependent on the gentry, but had developed its own economic, social, and cultural identity, indicates the growth of an early civil society. In such a society, non-political power and non-political-based status became more important than it was in previous times.

The connection of commoners to Confucianism was largely like the connection of the commoners to the state. In general, when state control was in decline, Confucianism was in decline, which was seen typically in the late Ming. Meanwhile, cultural and social changes might not merely follow political changes. In the early Qing period, state control was gradually enhanced in terms of governmental institutions and national unification. Nevertheless, the cultural and social diversity that developed in previous times could hardly be turned away. Accordingly, what we see in the early Qing period was a bigger gap between the "high culture"

¹ In general, the changes mentioned previously made Chinese society more compatible to the modern world that we are living in. Nevertheless, it is not the attempt of this study to indicate that the pattern represented by modern industrialization, commercialization, democracy, and individualism in the West, that has been the mainstream in modern history of the world, is the "normal" pattern of modern society.

and "lower culture." It was a picture of a highly autocratic government at the top and a highly diversified society at the bottom. Such a country would easily fall apart under a strong challenge from the outside.

Post-17th century China did not produce giants of Confucianism, even though Confucian scholars continued to be active in the intellectual world. It was mainly because Confucianism, as a system of elite mentality and institution, had increasingly become more incompatible with the growing needs, power, religious features, values and lifestyle of commoners. As a trend, Confucianism was becoming a vehicle for governmental use and a subject of scholarly research, or even of intellectual decoration, rather than the core value of people's consciousness. After the 17th century, with no new Confucian giants, China started a new age where Confucian moral perfection and principles were to be preserved in scholars' studios. The gentry was, accordingly, becoming a purer class of political power holders, not the representative of the universal value system. They had lost their status as cultural leaders. The Qing government institutionalized the sale of governmental offices and titles on a large scale, on top of the regular system. This was, in a

sense, a compromise by the state to the commoners. As a result, governmental corruption reached the highest level in Chinese history during the Qing period, a situation which further destroyed the possibility of restoring Confucian domination of the Chinese world.

Confucianism is an elite mentality. It recognizes educated and privileged people as the legitimate leading class of society and puts the nameless commoners in a position of dependents, listeners, and laborers whose values, activities, and roles are regulated from the top of the society. If the commoners needed to have a voice as a class, their only effective means was to grasp political power first. However, as soon as the political power transaction was made, a new group of political elites was produced. This was a repeatitive cycle in Chinese imperial history. The changes of the 17th century seemingly brought in another possibility for the commoners: changing their role in non-political ways. The most significant change in post-17th century China is not in the dramatic political transformation, but rather, in the growth of the commoners--their economic power, liberation, and depoliticized self-consciousness, which

significantly developed in the last two decades of the 20th century.

Non-Confucian society is important to an understanding of the historical trends, the social structure, and cultural characteristics of late imperial China. The development of a non-Confucian society in the North comes out of its history and geography. Shandong is the home area of Confucius. Throughout the imperial period of Chinese history, however, Shandong and the whole North were under the direct threat and influence of "barbarians." Two large scale transfers of the gentry class from the North to the South happened during the 4th and 12th centuries. The Qidan 契丹 (Khitans) took (present-day) Beijing and its surrounding areas under its wing from the 10th century to the early 12th century. When Neo-Confucianism was born in the 12th century, the North was conquered in turn by the Nuzhen 女真 (Jurchens), and the Monggu 蒙古 (Mongols). The Mongols ruled the whole China from 1271 to 1368 with the present day Beijing as its capital. Accordingly, the influence of Neo-Confucianism in the North had only the mid-Ming period (from A.D 1420, when Beijing was made the capital of the Ming, to the mid-16th century) to develop. Even

during the Ming, as the frontier facing the Manchus and Mongolians, the North suffered serious disturbances from the "barbarians," especially after 1449, when Emperor Yingzhong 英宗 (r. 1436-1449, 1457-1464) was captured by the Mongols.

Despite military and political conflicts, economic and cultural exchanges continued between the Northern Chinese, the Mongols and the Manchus. In the Ming administrative system, the territory of the Manchus, present-day Northeast China, was under the administration of Shandong Province. Although this was no longer in effect after the Manchus developed from a dependent tribe to a rival of the Ming in the 16th century, Manchuria actually served as a major colonial territory for the Chinese refugees from Hebei, Shandong and Henan areas. This brought the North strong "barbarian" influences and helped the North to be more accommodating to the Qing regime. A strong continuity of Confucian authority was difficult to establish in the North. During the Ming period, not one significant Confucian thinker was produced in the North, although many officials and fine Confucian scholars were produced in this area. In contrast, it was the North that produced the greatest

novelist, who focused on the life of his contemporary commoners and used vernacular language.

In late imperial China, the decline of Confucianism among the commoners in the North and in other areas was different in degree rather than in nature. Meanwhile, it is clear that in terms of family-clan ties and religious diversity, the North presented non-Confucian pluralism more significantly. Confucian mentality was, in general weaker, in the North than in the Lower Yangtze region.

In modern studies of Chinese intellectual history, post 12th century China has been called as "Neo-Confucian Stage."² Such a generalization does not work well in the study of Chinese social history. It is no doubt that Confucianism strongly influenced the governmental institutions and the gentry class during the imperial period of China. What is indeed questionable is how well Confucian and Neo-Confucian mentality could represent the cultural characteristics of the majority of the Chinese, among them the commoners in the rural areas. Zhu Xi, the leading founder of Neo-Confucianism, was not confident

² Wm. Theodore de Bary, "The Neo-Confucian Stage," in *East Asian Civilizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp.43-66.

about the overall performance of Confucianism in China.

In a letter to his friend, he wrote:

During the past 1500 years...although comparatively comfortable periods appeared several times, Yao 尧 (King Yao), Shun 舜 (King Shun), San Wang 三王 (the three greatest kings), Zhou Gong 周公 (Duke Zhou), and Confucius's teachings have never for one day been carried out in the world.³

According to Zhu Xi, Confucianism was not carried out in Chinese society at all. He blamed *renyu* 人欲 (human desire) for the incompatibility of Confucianism with society. He tried to maintain *tianli* 天理 (heavenly principles, which actually meant Confucian principles to him) as a standard of human life. The problem was that Confucian principles meant different things to the gentry and to the commoners. To be familiar with these principles and follow them somehow, would bring the intellectuals and politicians privileged status and a higher standard of living. To the commoners, especially the illiterates, to be familiar with Confucianism was difficult and to follow it would not make a significant difference in their life. In the other words, Confucianism did not appeal to the commoners because it

³ Zhu Xi, *Zhu Wenzhong Gong ji* 朱文忠公集 (The Collected Works of Zhu Xi), juan 36, in *SBCKCB*, p.579. Yao, Shun, Sanwang, and Zhou Gong were the major ancient sages in Confucian thinking.

did not directly provide much to them. Having a lower level of rights, the commoners took a lower level of responsibility for the state and its ideology. The priority to them was their own livelihood. Here we see a social division of the gentry and the commoners based on their positions in society.

There are three major problems of Confucianism with society, especially with the lower classes. The first is its elitism. It was a system of values, philosophy, and institutions, developed by some privileged intellectual politicians to maintain a highly stratified world order. From the classical Confucianism to Neo-Confucianism, commoners had never been given even a nearly equal position to that of the gentry in Confucian thinking and governmental system. Confucian ways to influence the commoners were largely relying on state efforts, such as governmental regulations, laws, and the civil service examination system. This made Confucianism different from Christianity, Buddhism, and Taoism. In the doctrine of the latter systems, commoners are not considered lower than the nobles, gentry, and bureaucrats. People are treated as individuals rather than ranked into classes according to social status. Such a Confucian elitism is

compatible with political and economic totalitarianism. Civil society, non-governmental organizations and institutions, and individualism were difficult to develop when Confucianism was dominant. It was also logical that when China moved toward its modern age, criticism of Confucianism would occur every step of the process although these criticisms have all been radical.

The second problem of Confucianism with society is its idealistic nature. Confucianism is a system that emphasizes morality. The moral standard set up by Confucian sages is too high for most individuals to fulfill. Therefore, from Confucius himself to Zhu Xi and further to the late Ming thinkers, no one was satisfied with the moral and social reality of his time. It was actually impossible to get the largely illiterate commoners to establish Confucian moral consciousness. Disappointment and anxiety are, therefore, the destiny of Confucian thinkers. In this perspective, the emergence of *jingshi zhiyong zhixue* 经世致用之学 (practical studies) was an attempt as a limited reform of Confucian mentality. A meaningful idea of this attempt was to put away philosophical and ethical differences and

concentrate on resolving the current social and governmental problems.

The third problem of Confucianism with society is its dogmatism. Ancient sage's sayings, principles, and practices were highly respected. Reflected in statecraft, zhuzhi 祖制 (ancestors' instructions and systems) was repeatedly quoted by Ming officials as a sufficient reason to reject new policies and attempts of reform. This led to a contradiction between Confucians and the changing social reality.

Because of these problems, at least after the Song, to assume that great thinkers represent culture in China is an illusion. Till Wang Yangming, the last great Confucian thinker, Confucian elitism experienced its last peak and afterwards sharply declined. After that, Confucianism largely retreated to studios, and the role of popular culture became more essential.

In late imperial China, Confucianism represents the mentality of gentry and state domination. Although certain associations, such as Donglin Shuyuan 书院 (Donglin Academy), or Fushe 复社 (Restoration Society), existed among the gentry during the late Ming, they were

strongly oriented to participation of state affairs.⁴ The non-Confucian society, on the other hand, represents the raising of public freedom and the early development of civil society.⁵ Civil society, mainly non-governmental

⁴ See Xie Guozhen, *Mingqing zhiji dangshe yundong kao* 明清之际党社运动考 (A Study of the Movement of the Late Ming and Early Qing Parties and Societies) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982). The impact of the intellectual societies in the context of the development of civil society in late imperial China is an issue that requests further study.

⁵ John K. Fairbank discussed this issue and provided a sound definition. He says: "Civil society may be defined as the democratic type of society that grew up in Western Europe beginning with the rise of towns independent of the feudal system. It is a pluralist society in which, for example, the church is independent of the state, religion and government are separate, while civil liberties (recently expanded as human rights) are maintained under the supremacy of law. Civil society is a matter of degree, seldom neatly defined. It is a part of a country's state-and-society but has a measure of autonomy, freedom within limits". See Fairbank, *China: A New History*, p.257. David Strand defined and discussed "civil society" like the following. "'Civil society' connotes an organizational life separate from the 'state.' In European political and social thought, the term 'society' came to refer to 'an association of free men' as opposed to the 'state' as 'an organization of power, drawing on the senses of hierarchy and majesty.'" Williams 1976, 245. During this period of Chinese (1920s, note by Zhao), social organization, which once took its larger meaning from the sense of hierarchy associated with hegemonic Confucianism came to have a freer, more independent public profile. This shift in perception of the relationship between officialdom and public life did not constitute a clean break. Judging by the self-consciously independent stance taken by local elites and the corporate bodies they led, it was a break nonetheless." Strand, "Mediation, Representation, and Repression: Local Elites in 1920s Beijing" in Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, ed., *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press), p.384, note 52. Strand agrees with David Johnson's argument that the distinction "of the private institutions of 'civil society' and the public institutions of the State has little relevance for China where a single elite controlled all national institutions." However, Strand argues that such distinction became relevant for China during the 1920s when the local urban elite newly established independent associations and institutions. See Strand, p.225; David Johnson "Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China." In David Johnson, et al., ed., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp.34-72. By contrast, this study challenges the concept of the effectiveness of a "single elite" control of society in late imperial China.

associations, is essential in modern societies. In China, however, due to the highly centralized state power, civil societies were limited to a level of insignificance. In the 17th century, the growth of non-Confucian society, including the development of non-governmental organizations such as secret societies and popular religious institutions, and the increase of the number of individuals uncontrolled by the state, formed a condition that allowed non-governmental power to grow up.⁶ Many activities of the non-governmental organizations and rural commoners, especially those of rascals, rebellious organizations and secret societies, were not considered legal by the government. These were a natural phase of

Meanwhile, this study supports Johnson's suggestion that civil society did not develop out of such "single elite." As for Strand's "local elite" in 1920s, largely merchants, they were no longer the same "elite" we have been deal with.

⁶ An important part of the early civil society grown up during the 16th to 17th centuries was *gongsuo* 公所 and *huiguan* 会馆. Most *gongsuo* were merchant organizations. A *huiguan*, on the other hand, could be an organizations of merchants, or an organization in a city to provide commendations and general help for people from the same region. See He Bingdi 何柄棣 (Pingti Ho), *Zhongguo huiguan shi lun* 中国会馆史论 (On Chinese Huiguan) (Taipei: Tanwan xuesheng shuju, 1966); Li Hua, ed., *Ming Qing yilai Beijing gongshang huiguan beike xuanbian* 明清以来北京工商会馆碑刻选编 (Selected Tablet Inscriptions of The Manufactural and Merchant Huiguan in Beijing Area since the Ming and the Qing Periods) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980). Zhao Yifeng and Gao Eryin 高二音, "Zhongguo de hang he hanghui 中国的行和行会 (A Study of Chinese Hang and Guilds)," *Dongbei Shida xuesheng xueshu lunwen ji* 东北师大学生学术论文集, 1979, pp.41-50. These organizations were in urban areas and not discussed in this study.

the early civil societies in China. We should not forget that in China many new institutions and accepted practices in the 17th century were originally illegal and opposite to governmental policies. The monetary system with silver as the main currency, the abolition of land and residential registration systems, and the emergence of popular religious establishments are some examples. The growth of the non-Confucian society encouraged the development of non-governmental power in social, economic, and religious spheres and helped to institute social diversity. In this sense, a trend of movement toward a society of modern nature did exist in late imperial China.

Confucianism had systematically written doctrines and it was well institutionalized. Non-Confucian values, beliefs, and culture, on the other hand, were largely represented by the collective non-conscious, or less conscious, social activities of the commoners. Institutionalized theories, such as Confucianism, are a cohesive unity, which leads to consistence and conservatism. For this reason, Confucianism was hard to regenerate and failed to guide China to transfer to a modern pattern of society. For the same reason, it also

helped in preserving some valuable elements of the Chinese tradition. Non-Confucian values, beliefs, and culture were less cohesive, less consistent, and relatively receptive to other culture. This was a foundation for China to adapt itself to the changing world in the recent times.

This perspective provides some insight for understanding the post 17th-century history of China. From the 17th century, there were great Confucian scholars, such as Dai Zheng 戴震 (1723-1777) and Sun Yirang 孙诒让 (1848-1908), but there were no great Confucian thinkers or statesmen like Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. Confucianism further retreated to scholarship and the fashionable lifestyle of the gentry. The Qing government accepted Confucianism and encouraged its penetration to the bottom of society. However, in terms of statecraft, the last dynasty was much less Confucian than the Ming. It maintained Manchu and Han dual bureaucracy, which further blocked the upward mobility of the intellectuals to become members of the gentry. It regulated the sale of governmental positions that granted rich commoners, without qualified Confucian education, broad access to the gentry. The Qing practiced Shamanism

and Lamaism consistently as a part of state policy. Further, the establishment of the *muzhe* 密摺 (secret memorial) system, that required the bureaucrats to watch each other and secretly report their observations to the emperors, fatally damaged Confucian respect of *dao* 道 (principles) and demoted the bureaucrats to personal servants of the emperors. The Manchu bureaucrats even called themselves *nucai* 奴才 (lackies)--to the emperor. This type of master-slave relationship was contradictory to Confucianism. Confucianism respected the loyalty of ministers to their lords, kings or emperors. The rule is: *jun shi chen yi li, chen shi jun yi zhong* 君使臣以礼, 臣事君以忠 (The lords treat the ministers with respect and the ministers serve the lords with loyalty).⁷ There is a mutual respect and responsibility. In addition, on top of the lords, there was an even higher existence in Confucian concepts, namely *dao* 道 (principles). The core of Confucian principles in regard to the lord-minister relationship is *ren* 仁 (humanity). When a lord broke this principle repeatedly, the responsibility of the ministers

⁷ Confucius, The Analects. Among many versions of this Chinese classic available, I checked John H. Jenkins' internet version. Jenkins' input is based on Wenzhi chubanshe (Taipei) 1980 version and Zhongguo shudian (Beijing) 1990 version. It is very convenient to locate a known sentence in the electronic versions. The code of the section containing the quoted sentence is 319.

to the lord would be canceled. For this the typical Confucians maintained their self respect in front of their lords. The struggle of the late Ming Donglin Academy was a significant demonstration of this tradition. When ministers became *nucai*, the self-respect of Confucians was reduced to the lowest level during the Qing. Public education in Confucianism, in such a situation, became less effective. Commoners further got rid of state control. Secret societies, such as the White Lotus, Qing Bang 青幫, Hong Bang 洪幫, and merchant organizations became much more active than during the Ming.⁸ The rigid population registration system of the early Ming was not resumed by the Qing. Commercialization, on the other hand, developed to a higher level after the 18th century. The Chinese gentry as a whole became less intellectual, less idealistic, and became closer to the rich commoners. By the middle 19th century, when the Chinese as a nation confronted the Western challenge, the Confucian elite had lost its ability to handle such a crisis successfully. From this

⁸ Qing Bang and Hong Bang were both initialed during the 17th century. Probably related to Luo Qing's religious organization, Qing Bang were mainly jointed by boatmen. Hong Bang was also named Tiandi Hui 天地會 (The Heaven and Earth Society), a major anti-Manchu organization during the Qing.

point of view, the radical criticism of Confucianism in modern China, typically the May Fourth Movement, was largely inevitable. The Taiping and the Boxers were the attempts of the commoners to move to the front when the state and Confucian elite were doing nothing really effectively. It was in the name of serving the commoners that the Chinese Communists could mobilize millions of peasants, factory workers, and other lower classes in China to serve in its rivalry for power with the Nationalists. The failure of the Nationalists, on the other hand, was not by accident. Ignoring the role and interests of the commoners in China was a fatal problem of the Nationalists. After the 1950's, the Chinese Communists kept the interest of the commoners in propaganda but actually betrayed them and experienced consistent crisis. The recent economic boom of China is not a victory of Communism but an achievement of the commoners. The so-called reform since the 1980's has been largely a compromise of government with the commoners. In other words, giving the commoners more freedom and releasing their energy, rather than giving them more theory, instruction, or regulations, is the key to achieving economic development. The lack of a well integrated value

system in present day China, on the other hand, has played a crucial role leading to corruption and various other social problems. From the perspective of social history, the current trend in China is a further emergence of the commoners in the form of the development of individual rights, civil societies, a strong middle class, and public opinion. In this trend, Confucianism is merely a part of a tradition that the Chinese need to think about, not an overall guideline to follow. Marxism, just like Confucianism in late imperial China, is hopelessly in decline, not only because of the damage it has brought to China, but also because the Chinese commoners would not respect any "one and only" god.

An interesting phenomenon is that modern Neo-Confucian scholars still focus on Confucianism to interpret Chinese history and to explain the way of China's modernization. It is likely a modern reflection of Confucian elitism.

Even a preliminary study of the commoners in the 17th century requires the exploration of many aspects of history. It is clearer at the end of this study than at the beginning that the non-Confucian society is an huge subject of research which deserves further study. Many

related issues could not be included in this study. For example, the cultural meaning of the local bandit activities, neighborhood relationship versus clanship, the difference between lower level religious priests and the seriously dedicated monks, and popular entertainment, are each topics for lengthy treatment. This study has focused on rural areas. The picture of urban areas, such as in Beijing, could be very different. Accordingly, although the impact of urban culture on rural commoners existed, there were some differences between urban culture and rural culture.⁹ Non-Confucian society existed in urban areas too and that has not been examined. This study is, therefore, only a start. Perhaps, the angle of observation and the methodology applied in this study are more important than the opinions that have been provided.

⁹ Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski stated: "...we believe that by late imperial times, all Chinese culture was influenced by what was happening in China's towns and cities." See *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.55. Here is one conceptual problem to be clarified. In studies of urbanization of China, towns and even rural periodical markets have been viewed as the extension of cities. When we examine the rural world itself, however, we have to view periodical markets and the unwalled towns (usually towns without county level or higher governments) as unseparable parts of the rural areas.

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