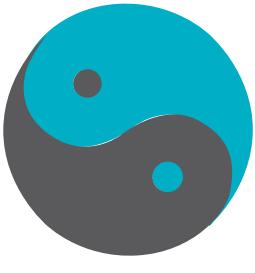
STATE VERSUS GENTRY IN EARLY QING DYNASTY CHINA, 1644-1699



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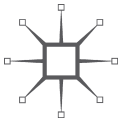

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by Harry Miller

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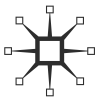

STATE VERSUS GENTRY IN EARLY QING DYNASTY CHINA, 1644–1699

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Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

1 The Dorgon Regency, 1644–1650 15

2 The Shunzhi Emperor, 1651–1661 47

3 The Oboi Regency, 1661–1669 79

4 The Kangxi Emperor, 1669–1699 107

Epilogue 133

Notes 139

Bibliography 157

Index 167

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Introduction

The predecessor to this volume, *State versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572–1644*, argued that the rise of commerce and its attendant social fluidity in the sixteenth century compelled many members of China's amalgamated scholar-gentry bureaucratic elite to take refuge in one of two philosophical sureties: a chauvinistic Legalism, which insisted that sovereignty resided in the imperial state; or an equally fundamentalist Confucianism, which held that sovereignty resided with the gentry class itself. While individuals proceeded to band together in cliques, either as zealous operatives of the state or as gentlemanly civilizers of it, the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) lost its governmental effectiveness and, with it, its capacity for dealing with internal and external threats. The Ming finally succumbed to both, eviscerated by roving bandits of the interior and then finished off by alien Manchus from north of the Great Wall. The new Manchu, or Qing, dynasty (1644–1911) would be engaged in the difficult task of reconstruction for most of the latter half of the seventeenth century. As the new dynasty labored to establish itself and restore order, it grappled with many of the same bureaucratic, fiscal, and other difficulties that had doomed its predecessor. The questions therefore raise themselves: Did the dispute over sovereignty, which had played such a huge role in the unraveling of the Ming, continue to rage in the early years of the Qing? Furthermore, if nonresolution of the controversy had proved fatal to the former regime, did the settlement of it herald the success of the latter one?

As the present study will show, the issue of sovereignty did continue to dominate Chinese statecraft well into the new dynasty. Indeed, the vicissitudes of early Qing politics followed nearly seamlessly the late Ming pattern of a sine wave or swinging pendulum as alternating subregimes, favoring either the state's or the gentry's interests, exchanged the initiative. The narrative of the Ming-Qing transition offered here is one of basic continuity, with a new dynasty stepping onto the shoes of the old one in 1644 to fight the same see-saw battle. As was the case in the Ming, the state and the gentry continued to

be complex, overlapping entities. While emperors, court aristocrats, and bannermen (a special group of officials peculiar to the Qing, to be discussed in what follows) were inherent parts of the state, the rest of the historical actors in this book belonged to a hybrid class whose individual members could take the part of the gentry or of the state. Often known as scholar-officials, these personages are more accurately labeled scholar-gentry-officials, reflecting their advanced education, ownership of landed estates, and qualification for bureaucratic service. To avoid the clumsy overuse of hyphens, individual scholar-gentry-officials will sometimes here be referred to according to the weight they assigned to the different parts of their identities, which was a subjective, not institutional, determination. For example, a man such as Wu Weiye (1609–1671), who will be discussed in Chapter 2, always saw himself as a member of the gentry, despite his becoming a minister of state. Others, such as Wang Yun (1619–1693?), who appears in Chapter 4, identified reflexively with the state, though holding no official post at all. Absent any class differences or institutional loyalties, the conflict among the various scholar-gentry-officials was philosophical: they surged against each other in the abstract, with partisans embracing the *idea* of state or gentry ascendency but (usually) without actual violence between the state and the gentry. In this basic sense, then, late Ming and early Qing factional strife was of a piece, with the same central issue, the same kinds of participants, and the same alternating rhythm.

Summary of the Late Ming Context

Since the context of late-Ming partisanship is so essential for understanding the vicissitudes of early Qing history, a brief synopsis of what has gone on before would probably be beneficial, especially for those readers unfamiliar with this book's Ming prequel. The state's and the gentry's struggle for sovereignty began in 1572, when the domineering minister Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582) became the de facto regent for the young Wanli emperor (r. 1572–1620) and began fighting obsessively to assert the symbolic prerogatives of the imperial state. In diverse policy areas such as education, personnel selection, tax collection, and even tax relief, Zhang worked to ensure that the state was always seen to be calling the shots. On the receiving end of Zhang's zeal were the equally self-conscious leaders of China's Confucian-educated scholar-gentry-officials, who were accustomed to believe that they themselves knew what was best in such matters and preferred to shape policy as an informal fellowship of gentry. To Zhang,

they were insubordinate and effectively treasonous, "willing to resist the edicts of the Court but unwilling to resist peer pressure, willing to violate the laws of the government but unwilling to refuse a private request," and he palpably despised them. Although, like his rivals, he was trained in Confucianism himself, Zhang occasionally used Legalist phrases to reiterate the irreconcilable conflict between the state and the gentry, such as, "Private families are becoming daily richer, while the public house is daily poorer." Zhang drew lines of opposition in the sand of China's ancient political culture, just as the bulk of China's elite in the socially jumbled world of the sixteenth century, wondering what they stood for, also tried to find their feet there. Indeed, many were the men who now ranged themselves opposite Zhang, requiting his fundamentalism with their own, and his vision of enmity was soon fulfilled.[1]

After Zhang's natural death in 1582, this opposition coalesced. Led by Gu Xiancheng (1550–1612), the fundamentalist Confucian gentry spent over a decade purging Zhang's remnants and otherwise ensuring that a centralizing, statist regime would never again take shape. True to their belief in the gentry's sovereignty, Gu and his associates kept up their struggle against the Wanli emperor himself, ridiculing his every assertion of authority.[2]

Wanli turned the tide against his disparagers in 1596. Facing increased military and other expenditures, and having no confidence that Gu and his faction of righteous gentry-officials would be of any assistance, he ordered a thuggish legion of eunuch-led "mine tax commissioners" into the countryside to seize the gentry's wealth without asking for it. Wanli's resort to economic warfare, a desperate solution to the perennial problem of gentry tax evasion, necessitated that the gentry be politically silenced as well, as Wanli naturally turned a deaf ear to the gentry's complaints and stripped them of much of their official power. For all they lost at Wanli's hands, the gentry seemed most galled at their loss of authority, complaining that they had "ceased to be lords of the people." After Wanli called off his assault (disappointed that his goons had kept for themselves too much of what they had stolen), the gentry hastened to reassert their lordly bearing.[3]

From the Donglin Academy, a Neo-Confucian school that he restored in 1604, Gu Xiancheng assembled the righteous gentry and sought with much fanfare to enthrone them as the country's moral leaders. Gu's crusade reached new heights and began to extend its influence into the central government, but the unaffiliated part of the bureaucracy, alarmed at the so-called Donglin faction's pretentions, soon began maneuvering against it. By the mid-1620s (after Gu's

natural death some years earlier), the Donglin gentlemen had overplayed their hand, and the initiative passed to their opponents, now organized under the protection of the court eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1568–1627). In a series of purges in 1625–1626, Wei's adherents decimated the Donglin partisans—whom they referred to as gentry even though they were technically gentry themselves—and looked more to the security of the Ming state, which was now threatened by the rising Manchu power in the northeast.[4]

Wei Zhongxian's group did not long survive the death of the Tianqi emperor (r. 1620–1627), and the pendulum swung again. A new assemblage of zealous gentry, known as the Restoration Society, succeeded to the interrupted work of the Donglin faction. Throughout the reign of the Chongzhen emperor (r. 1627–1644), this federated organization of scholar-gentry dedicated itself to the political and economic advantages of its members, as justified by the philosophical principle of gentlemanly sovereignty. As it turned out, the Restoration Society's gains came largely at the expense of the Ming state, which was destabilized by the gentry's political campaigning and further hobbled by its tax evasion. The heavier taxes occasioned by the Manchu threat were deflected by the gentry onto the shoulders of the poor, resulting in the roving banditry that would embroil all of China and trigger the change of dynasty in 1644.

The Meaning of the Dynastic Transfer

Although the year 1644 would bring no closure to the struggle for ascendency between the Chinese state and the gentry, it would, however, introduce some new complexity. In the first place, the Manchu origins of the new Qing state would add a cultural dimension, most notably centered on clothing and hairstyle, to the gentry's struggle against it. Emphatically, however, the establishment of the Qing state was a transnational enterprise in which many Han Chinese played a part. Second, the roving banditry that was a by-product of the conflict between the state and the gentry had nearly come to overshadow it, as both state and gentry continued to be threatened by restive commoners. Eradicating the brigandage that destroyed the Ming state became an obvious object for its successor, and the gentry, too, struggled to fight back against the renegades' onslaught. In this complicated situation, state and gentry would seem to have been natural allies against popular insurgency, but the sense of common cause was often obscured, even under the desperate circumstances, by the state's and the gentry's need to reassert their own particular sovereignty over

the people. Would the "black-haired masses," once brought to heel, resume their status as the servile tenants and dependants of the gentry, or would they revert primarily to a source of revenue and manpower for the state? In sum, although the state and the gentry had long contested for sovereignty over the common people, even as they sought to dominate each other in the years surrounding 1644, the passivity of this disputed constituency could not be taken for granted, and it functioned as something of a third player.

The People versus the Gentry and the State

The remainder of this introduction will examine this three-way standoff, beginning with the conflict between the people and the gentry. One representative arena of strife was Tongcheng County, Anqing Prefecture, in Nanjing (later Anhui) Province. The modern scholar Hillary Beattie has described the popular uprising there as a campaign of "reprisal" against members of the gentry whose evasion of taxation resulted in a crushingly heavier tax burden for commoners. One source that apparently was unavailable to Beattie (but confirms many of her findings) is the *Chronicle of the Tongcheng Mutiny* (*Tong bian ri lu*), by Tongcheng native Jiang Chen. Tongcheng, according to Jiang's account, became embroiled in strife in 1634, when angry peasants rose up in revolt. Their specific aim was to plunder the gentry (*xiang shen*), and the latter became nearly crazy with fear, unable even to agree on a strategy for defense. Some among the "great families and big houses" wanted to man the walls; others preferred to patrol the streets or simply to defend their homes. The reason for this disconcerted response was that the gentry were as fearful of their own house servants—who seemed to be smelling blood—as they were of the actual bandits, and guarding against outside attackers thus seemed somewhat pointless. In fact, as the nightmare deepened, the masses became indistinguishable. Two leading members of the gentry were caught outside the wall by a circling, jeering mob, and there was no telling commoner (*min*) from bandit (*zei*). While local officials swore to truces with the bandits at a nearby temple, the two gentlemen, escaped from their ordeal, urged townspeople to pile up a ransom—in precious metal, silken fabric, livestock, and spirits—and the response was panicked, with everyone, both gentry and commoner, coughing up as much as they could as quickly as they could. The rebels went right on murdering and plundering. A dubious relief finally came from the outside, when troops under the command of a regional official broke in on the rebels, but the soldiers also failed to distinguish commoner

from bandit and plundered and took hostages wherever they went. Understandably, the law-abiding people feared the soldiers more than they feared the rebels, as an uneasy peace was briefly restored. Plainly, Tongcheng society had been reduced to a state of utter chaos.[5]

One commentator on the Tongcheng affair wrote of the instigators of the uprising:

> In making "Plunder the gentry!" their rallying cry, [they] were simply employing their talent for enticing greedy people, for playing on the simplicity of ignorant people. Some of them stared down at the servants of great families, compelling them to join in the mutiny. Some called what they were doing revenge. Some played on popular resentment. Indeed, the cause of any disturbance like this one is invariably found to be some unresolved dispute between the gentry (*shen*) and the commoners (*min*). The gentry will always endeavor to overpower anyone bringing complaints against them, and sometimes the discipline they wield in the process is disproportionate and creates a sense of injustice. Matters come to a head, and soon arms are bared for a fight.[6]

However, if disproportionate applications of force often incited peasant uprisings, overwhelming applications of force remained the best means of suppressing them. A local official who dealt with the renegades noted the basic requirement of keeping the common people in line—by peaceful means if possible but by force if necessary. Though employed as an officer of the state, he spoke with the gentry's prejudice against the common people, accusing them of a failure to know their place socially rather than of mutiny against the state's authority:

> The most distressing thing about the recent disturbance was not the obdurately evil nature of the rebels per se but the increased difficulty in controlling the latent ambitions of the common people. Of course, given the perfect ignorance of the little people, the poor will always envy the rich, and bandits will always ape the ways of the noble. During times of peace, the common people show their betters great deference; but when evil arises, they become infected by it, not only imitating but surpassing the bad elements in their depravity. Thus, when they are living peacefully, the common people may be regulated by ritual; but when there is trouble, they must be restrained by law, and in cases of actual mutiny, there is no alternative but to awe them with military force. When the troops move in, the common people will revert to their timid ways and will thus be pacified—no one will dare be stubborn then. Cowing the common people into docility, even as they are premeditating something reckless, is really as easy as teaching a monkey to climb a tree. As it is said in the *Book of Changes*: "The gentleman

(*jun zi*), by making a clear distinction between above and below, sets limits to the people's ambition." When no clear distinction is made between above and below, how can ambition be controlled?[7]

Many gentry families, including nine out of ten of the wealthy families of Tongcheng, fled their strife-plagued rural homes and sought refuge in the southern capital of Nanjing. Yao Wenxi, who left behind another chronicle of this disturbed time, was a twelve-year-old boy when his family fled Tongcheng for Nanjing in 1634. Returning briefly to check on things in Tongcheng in 1643, Yao found it an armed camp, with two of the generals in charge behaving with exceptional arrogance and cruelty. Yao was actually in Nanjing on April 25, 1644, when the primary capital, Beijing, was overrun by the rebel army of the furloughed soldier and postal courier Li Zicheng (1606–1645) and the Chongzhen emperor committed suicide. The remnant Ming soon rallied in Nanjing under the Ming prince Zhu Yousong (1607–1646), who reigned as the Hongguang emperor, but the hold-out regime had trouble finding its feet. Yao wrote that beggars were put to work as government clerks, an expediency that didn't augur well for the success of the regime—or for the maintenance of firm social distinctions. Indeed, there seemed to be as much thievery in Nanjing during the so-called Southern Ming as there was in Tongcheng.[8]

Thus, by the late spring of 1644, unruly commoners had sent many members of the Chinese gentry fleeing their homes, and they had also raised the flag of insurrection over the corpse of the Ming state in its dead emperor's capital. Both of China's rival sovereigns had been overthrown, and the situation was very fluid indeed. In the event, Li Zicheng's force was spent in a disordered orgy of looting in Beijing, as former Ming officials were compelled under torture to contribute to Li's treasury, and the violent shakedown soon spread to the general population. Failing to capitalize positively on its victory, Li's movement lost its impetus and became, finally, a passive thing, a problem to be solved by state and gentry. The all-important question was how state and gentry would contrive to do so.[9]

The (Southern) Ming Solution

One plan of action originated with the Ming gentry huddled together in Nanjing, many of whom petitioned the Hongguang emperor to "punish the bandits and exact revenge" for the dead Chongzhen. One of these was a retired prefect named Qian Jingzhong, and

his missive contained some very telling philosophical references. Describing himself with perfunctory modesty as a "benighted Confucianist" (*mao ru*) who knew something of the classics despite his ignorance, Qian recalled two lessons from antiquity. First, he told a story from the *Analects* in which Confucius asks his prince, Duke Ai of Lu, to launch an expedition to punish a regicide in a neighboring state. Duke Ai, however, proves unable to take direct action. Instead, he sends Confucius, as it were, on to another department, directing him to tell the news of the rebellion to the Chiefs of the Three Families, who hold effective power at the time. Confucius thereupon mutters under his breath, "My responsibility was to report to the Duke, and as for the Duke, he sends me to tell it to the Chiefs of the Three Families!" The latter, of course, also do nothing, leaving Confucius repeating his sarcasm about how he himself, at least, had done his job. "Who's in charge here?" Confucius, and perhaps Qian Jingzhong, seemed to be asking.[10]

Next, Qian Jingzhong cited the "Duke Wen of Teng" chapter from the *Mencius*, perhaps the most subtle examination of the question of "Who's in charge here?" that appears in the Chinese classics. In the story, young Duke Wen seeks Mencius's advice on how to grieve for his own father, and Mencius prescribes a mourning regimen sharply at variance with Teng's ancestral usage. The Teng elders object, but Mencius, fortifying the young Duke's resolve, insists on the rightness of his counsel, saying, "The solution cannot be sought elsewhere." With a figurative pat on the shoulder, Mencius says, "It rests with the crown prince." The latter responds to the patronization with an ironic "That is so. It does, indeed, rest with me"—ironic because his newfound assertiveness is borrowed entirely from Mencius.[11]

"It," we may suppose, means the decision, the power, the authority, or, for purposes here, "sovereignty." Investing "it" so ostentatiously in their respective dukes, Confucius and Mencius suggested that it was they themselves who possessed "it" originally. In the disordered spring of 1644, Qian Jingzhong followed the same script. "All Your Majesty's power to act," he implored Hongguang, "is contained in that simple phrase: *It does indeed rest with me*." A few lines later, he elaborated on Hongguang's historical task: "*Never Share the Empire with Bandits*—let that be the name of Your Majesty's ship, and *It does indeed rest with me* shall be the tiller; *Never Share the Empire with Bandits* shall be Your Majesty's horse, and *It does indeed rest with me* shall be the switch." Like his classical antecedents, Qian Jingzhong was leading his leader, commanding him to take command. Also, like his more recent, Ming predecessors, Qian seemed aware of the

philosophically partisan nature of his position. "Serving officials will slander me, calling me a 'corrupt Confucian'" he said, "but so be it. I am indeed a 'corrupt Confucian.' Taking the discourse of Confucius and Mencius as my standard, I earnestly hope that Your Majesty will become the great sage king Shun in spirit."[12]

But the great sage king Shun had ruled without any "corrupt Confucians"—not even Confucius or Mencius themselves—telling him what to do. In fact, as Qian Jingzhong may have known, the Chongzhen emperor, for his part, had been so vexed by his gentlemanly advisors that he had accused them in his suicide note of "interfering with Us at every turn." The sharp bifurcation of sovereignty, to which Qian Jingzhong, with his Confucian parables, continued to be a party, had paralyzed the Ming dynasty. Gradually, however, many, like Qian, who were witness to the debacle of the mid-seventeenth century were realizing that they were paying what the late Frederic Wakeman Jr. called "the price of autonomy," reaping the whirlwind for presuming to rule China through their monarchs or in lieu of them. When Qian invoked the image of the all-effective Shun, he was conjuring up a monarch who, unlike Duke Ai, Duke Wen, Chongzhen, or Hongguang, needed no reminder that "it" resided with him. He was admitting, under the duress of reality, that "corrupt Confucians" could not save China by themselves. In his dreaming of a new sage king, Qian was following the pattern established by Confucian scholars at the chaotic close of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), who anticipated the all-powerful monarchy of the early Ming. Following the co-optation and dissolution of that monarchy by a later generation of scholars, Qian and others of his chastened generation sought to reconstitute it.[13]

The Qing Solution

As it turned out, the Southern Ming, as coached by its gentry, was not the only candidate with a chance to "punish the bandits and exact revenge." While Qian Jingzhong and other gentlemen continued to exhort the Nanjing-based Hongguang to take action, far to the north, beyond the Great Wall, the Qing ministers Fan Wencheng (1597–1666) and Hong Chengchou (1593–1665)—who were former Ming officials, surrendered to the Manchus—likewise urged their prince, the Manchu regent Dorgon (1612–1650), to consider the critical nature of the situation. The Manchus, of course, had been bitter enemies of the Ming even before Chongzhen's time. Led by military aristocrats, they were prepared to raid northern China as they had done in 1642–1643, and

when the Ming general Wu Sangui (1612–1678) invited them south of the Great Wall to help him deal with Li Zicheng, he, too, imagined that the Manchus would accept plunder as their compensation before retiring. With Chongzhen dead, however, Fan Wencheng and Hong Chengchou perceived that the situation had changed and that the moment for realizing the Qing's imperial ambition was at hand. Realizing that "punishing the bandits and exacting revenge" was basic to the entire enterprise, they quickly recast the Manchus as Chongzhen's dutiful avengers. "The coming of our righteous troops is to take revenge for your emperor-father," Fan propagandized, and the Qing army, accompanied by Wu Sangui's army, descended on Beijing in June 1644, put Li Zicheng to flight, and occupied the capital. It was a moral victory as well as a military one, as the new rulers explained to Beijing's denizens the day after entering the city: "The Empire belongs not to any particular man but to whoever possesses virtue; the army and the people, likewise, are ruled not by any particular man but by whoever possesses virtue." By taking advantage of the shifting situation, and by carefully choreographed righteousness, including the ceremonial interment of Chongzhen's corpse, Beijing's Manchu occupiers were welcomed as liberators.[14]

The Qing regime, having "punished the bandits and exacted revenge," had emerged as a viable alternative to the Ming survivor government in Nanjing. As Dorgon would soon be explaining to the Southern Ming minister Shi Kefa (1601–1645), the Hongguang court was illegitimate, for it had proved unable to punish Li Zicheng. "Having failed properly to bury the old monarch," he wrote, "you may not rightly enthrone a new monarch." At any rate, a showdown between the rival claimants to the empire was now inevitable, for "just as there are not two suns in the sky, there may not be two sovereigns of the people." In truth, there were more than two suns in the sky, for there were more parties to the contest than just the Ming and Qing imperial states. Qian Jingzhong's memorials to Hongguang have already highlighted the confused philosophy of leadership on the Ming side, and in fact the Nanjing regime was finding itself paralyzed by the same sort of partisan squabbling that had ruined its predecessor in Beijing. The Southern Ming army was larger than the Qing's, and the Nanjing court was firmly under the control of military men—but that was precisely the problem, for the fundamentalist Confucian echelon, the self-supposed upright men or gentlemen, mostly refused to cooperate with them. The most famous example of gentlemanly recalcitrance was Liu Zongzhou (1578–1645), who, evidently believing himself capable of bestowing legitimacy upon princes, declined

to do so in the case of Hongguang. As was the case with the Ming dynasty in general, the Southern Ming was ill-equipped to save China, because no consensus could be reached concerning whose prerogative it was to save it. As for the Great Qing, it was a frontier confederation with a six-year-old emperor and a horse-riding regent, but its Confucian advisors, Fan Wencheng and Hong Chengchou, were happy to lend whatever unique assistance they could. It was they who made the Qing army righteous; thus it was they who made the Qing state legitimate. While Qian Jingzhong and Liu Zongzhou could only dream grandiosely of wielding Confucius's or Mencius's powers over their princes, Fan Wencheng and Hong Chengchou were content to make a more practical contribution. Confucian scholars though they all may have been, Fan and Hong were prepared to be helpful, whereas Qian and Liu were prone to hectoring. The Qing men placed their moral learning at the disposal of their prince; the Ming men brandished their moral learning above theirs.[15]

The Special Characteristics of the Early Qing State

With the Qing regime, as it were, announcing its dynastic candidacy so compellingly in the summer of 1644, it is worthwhile to consider how it had evolved prior to that time. One important fact about the early Manchu polity is that it was designed for plunder. In intertribal struggles over resources in Manchuria, and in later raids on the Chinese frontier, the acquisition and satisfactory distribution of loot—in the form of human as well as material resources—was a priority. Rather suddenly deciding to assume the overlordship of all of China, Manchu leaders such as Dorgon issued, as part of the new imperative of humane government and the need to nurture a stable traditional tax base, strong prohibitions against looting. Old habits, however, died hard. An officer involved in the Qing conquest of Henan Province in the autumn of 1644, for example, warned indiscreetly of the challenges: "Officially, there are no supplies we can move in; and unofficially, there is nothing there to loot." Throughout the early years of Qing rule, civil officials and military personnel were repeatedly advised to discontinue their "molestation," "extortion," "arresting and plundering," and so on. While it is unsurprising that seventeenth-century armies found it difficult to behave themselves, it is still important to consider that the early Qing leaders would face special challenges in the area of discipline. The new regime's extractive and nurturing tendencies would frequently be at odds.[16]

Another special characteristic of the early Qing state was the banner system. The Qing population was organized into a number of hereditary units, which were named for the colors and borders of their banners as well as race (the Han Bordered Yellow Banner, for example). Originally designed to facilitate the distribution of plunder, the banners after 1644 served as a pool of loyal talent, including Han Chinese or transnational elements, affording the early Qing state a basic freedom from overreliance on the conventional gentry-officials, especially those from Jiangnan (meaning "south of the Yangzi river"), who dominated the Ming. It provided, in other words, a reliable local bureaucracy, an administrative technocracy relatively immune to partiality—both economic and philosophical—toward the gentry. The Qing state's potential independence from the gentry was a great advantage over it in the continuing argument over sovereignty.[17]

At the same time, though, the Manchus were at least somewhat beholden to Chinese scholar-gentry-officials. It was, as already described, Fan Wenheng and Hong Chengchou who got the Manchus into Beijing in 1644. Additionally, Chinese scholar-officials as a class were available to help the Manchus counteract some of the more disharmonious tendencies of their own polity, which had been problems before 1644. While on the frontier, the Manchu state was only barely consolidated, overly susceptible to princely or aristocratic influences, especially during tense leadership transitions, and consequently fraught with faction. By seizing the Chinese throne in 1644, the Manchu chieftain became the Son of Heaven, radically enhancing his power vis-à-vis his fellow aristocrats. After 1644, Qing emperors would have the option, perhaps the imperative, of neutralizing their own state's latent aristocratic tendencies by employing more and more Chinese while at the same time taking great pains to avoid becoming overly reliant upon the latter. Early Qing governance would prove a very delicate balancing act indeed, with the state reorganizing itself internally and employing more gentry as officials, even as it continued to contest sovereignty with them. [18]

The following four chapters correspond to the continued vicissitudes of the contest. Chapter 1, covering the years 1644 to 1650, discusses the Dorgon regency, during which the ascendency of the Qing conquest state and the suppression of Chinese (and Manchu) factional strife were matters of the highest importance. Next, Chapter 2 examines the more tentative Shunzhi subregime of 1651 to 1661, when that very young monarch lost the initiative and factions of gentlemen resumed the infiltration of the state that had characterized previous decades. Reacting strongly against the gentry's continued refractoriness, the

Oboi regents, whose administration from 1661 to 1669 forms the subject of Chapter 3, launched a direct attack on the southern gentry that was every bit as harsh as anything that had occurred under the Ming. Finally, as is explicated in Chapter 4, the Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722), upon attaining his majority in 1669, replaced aggression with co-optation, adeptly patronizing the Chinese gentry and reclaiming the civilizing force of Confucianism for the throne. When Kangxi toured southern China at the close of the seventeenth century, he was grandly, and without contestation, wielding sovereign power over the gentry's own territory, signaling that the long disagreement concerning the proper locus of sovereignty was at an end.

A brief epilogue, following the formal narrative, will endeavor to sum up the Ming-Qing transition era by comparing sixteenth-century China with early eighteenth-century China and considering what meaningful transition actually occurred. The generations who advocated either institutional or cultural sovereignty as Ming gave way to Qing were dealing with issues of tremendous, perhaps even capital, importance. Their experience should count among the handful of equally weighty moments in history when basic principles of statecraft were paramount. It cannot be ignored that other civilizations were undergoing similar trials at about the same time, and we will consider a few theories on how China's experience compared with the experiences of others. Chinese conceptions of sovereignty, highlighted in conflict, should not be viewed as so exotic that they bear no correlation to any other people's. On the contrary, they can only be variants of other people's (and vice versa). The story of China's struggle for sovereignty, in its protraction, intensity, and familiarity, should be considered a part of the universal narrative of statecraft.

Chapter 1

The Dorgon Regency, 1644–1650

Dorgon entered Beijing through the Chaoyang Gate on June 6, 1644, with the old and the young offering incense and prostrating themselves as he approached. Eunuchs soon emerged from the imperial palace, surrendering the dead Chongzhen's formal insignia and placing at Dorgon's disposal the royal palanquin. Dorgon refused to ride in it, saying, "I follow the Duke of Zhou. It is inappropriate for me, merely the assistant of our Young Sovereign, to travel by palanquin." Spokesmen for the multitude, however, replied, "The Duke of Zhou, while 'merely assisting' with affairs of state, sat with his back to the king's silken screen. It is quite appropriate for you to ride." Dorgon said, resignedly, "Having come to pacify the Empire, I can only accede to the people's will," and making obeisance also to Heaven, amid much ceremony, he rode in the palanquin to the Wuying Palace and ascended the throne.[1]

The Duke of Zhou, a storied personage of the early Western Zhou period (1046–770 BCE), was a tricky antecedent. Having ruled on behalf of his young nephew, the Duke of Zhou was the prototypical regent. The phrase *she zheng*, often associated with the Duke and used by the welcoming committee in the aforementioned exchange, formed part of Dorgon's official title and is commonly rendered into English as "regent." Beyond this simple occupational linkage, however, lay a more ambiguous philosophical one, for the Duke of Zhou was China's original wielder of borrowed authority. Though of royal blood, he was not the true king and ruled with ritual and morality—helping to author, along the way, the concept of the Mandate of Heaven—and he was a great favorite of Confucius and his followers. The philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200), outlining the important

Neo-Confucian doctrine known as the Succession to the Way (*dao tong*), traced knowledge of the kingly Way from the legendary sage kings to the Duke of Zhou, to Confucius, to Mencius, and ultimately to himself. The Duke was therefore an important conduit by which the sages' moral authority came to be transferred from kings to scholars. Dorgon identifying himself so blithely as a devotee of the Duke (and his evident belief that doing so constituted a modest gesture) was a bit ironic, considering the complex notions of power embedded in the Duke's story. Were there any Neo-Confucian scholars among Dorgon's greeters, they were perhaps being a bit ironic in reminding the regent that he had the formal power of the throne behind him, as they held strongly to the conviction that moral power trumped it. Though they admitted that Dorgon possessed the one, they may have doubted his claim to the other.[2]

Quelling Faction or Suppressing the Gentlemen?

Feeding the Neo-Confucians' skepticism, one of the first things Dorgon did in Beijing was to recruit a retired Ming official named Feng Quan (1595–1672). Feng was a controversial figure, having been an associate of the court eunuch Wei Zhongxian and an enemy of the upright Donglin faction in the disharmonious 1620s. Inheritors of the righteous Donglin tradition regarded Feng as a morally compromised man. Dorgon's motive for elevating Feng is obscure. Ostensibly, Dorgon wanted Feng's advice on court ceremonial and other matters. More strategically, Dorgon might have approached Feng for the broader purpose of signaling indifference to Feng's Ming-era factional affiliation in order to remove such a thorny criterion from the process of personnel selection in general—to demonstrate neutrality, in other words—and thus to bring the sorry history of Ming factional strife to an end. Certainly, a neutralized bureaucracy would have been an object for Dorgon, who needed no persuasion, as he surveyed the wreckage in the capital, that faction could be fatal. At the same time, though, it is worthwhile to consider that the factions Dorgon sought to balance were not qualitatively alike. On the one side were the heirs of the Donglin coterie and the Restoration Society, who had endeavored to rule Ming China with their own righteousness and who were rather cool to the concerns of the state. On the other were the self-identified "true-hearted and for the state," who were correspondingly skeptical of the pretensions of their righteous competitors, whom they often labeled "gentry." While Dorgon may have reactivated

Feng Quan to appear impartial, he may also have strongly preferred the statist faction, believing it more responsive and less recalcitrant than the righteous echelon. The latter, as Frederic Wakeman Jr. suggested, viewed Feng Quan's rise with much alarm, for he was poised to exert great control over the process of bureaucratic selection and was unlikely to further their interests.[3]

It was immediately obvious that Dorgon had found his man. After a court audience on July 1, 1644, he remarked to Feng Quan and the other assembled officials, "Were I to perceive any fault on your part, I would certainly rebuke you; but ever since I became Regent, not one of you has ever remonstrated with me. Has my policy really never diverged from the Way, not even once?" Feng and company responded: "Everything Your Excellency does is benevolent and unimpeachable. And if ever Your Excellency proposed something that seemed at first to be inappropriate, we would still keep our silence." Dorgon replied: "You are all talking nonsense. Not even the most sagely sovereign could be perfectly benevolent in every aspect of his governance. He would know to accept remonstrance. And as for me, there is no way everything I do is as beyond reproach as you say. You, skilled in government, who exerted yourself mightily on behalf of the Late Emperor, if in the future some aspect of our policy seems amiss, then you must lay out your objections. I am indeed counting on you all, in this respect."[4]

Affecting not to appreciate his officials' extending him the benefit of the doubt, Dorgon was probably pleased that at least he would not be subject to the condescending lecturing of Liu Zongzhou or Ni Yuanlu (1593–1644), much less the outright derision of Gu Xiancheng, which had plagued late Ming rulers. Dorgon's subsequent reference to the "Late Emperor," though primarily denoting the recently deceased Manchu leader Hong Taiji (1592–1643), might also have been an oblique invocation of Chongzhen and the Ming legacy of failed ministerial devotion, stingingly rehashed as an object lesson. Above all, Dorgon's demand for remonstrance effectively anticipated it. Remonstration was now an obligation, a bureaucratic function. It was no longer to be considered a gentlemanly prerogative. Dorgon's claim in an edict a few days later that "our country does not rely on military force; it is wholly concerned, rather, with moral power," was a similar reclaiming of a kind of authority recently asserted by Neo-Confucian gentlemen. Perhaps Dorgon, in aspiring to moral power, understood the story of the Duke of Zhou more than might have been expected. Those from whom he claimed the power, however, never forgave him for

elevating Feng Quan. When an official suggested at this time that candidates for office be more thoroughly screened—to weed out the corrupt as well as, implicitly, the unrighteous ones such as Feng Quan—Dorgon rejected the implied criticism of his policy (the kind of criticism he had just solicited), citing the need to recruit talent liberally. Dorgon liked the composition—and the amenability—of the "corrupt" bureaucracy just fine. Besides, Dorgon claimed the right to punish any official corruption himself, preempting once again any gentlemanly inclination to do so.[5]

Although Dorgon voiced no explicit suspicion of "gentlemen" or "gentry," as he endeavored to manage the various officials in Beijing, he did use these terms disparagingly in his letter to the Southern Ming minister Shi Kefa, sent on August 28, 1644 (and previewed in the introduction of this book). "It's amazing," Dorgon chided, "how you gentlemen (*junzi*) of the south are whiling away the time, refusing to heed the import of this historical moment. In pursuit of meaningless fame, you seem ignorant of the true harm you are doing." Again: "You gentlemen (*junzi*) supposedly are sensitive to changing situations and to the shifting of the Mandate. If you really cherished the memory of your late sovereign, if you really revered the Sages, then you would urge your prince to give up his imperial title, resume his proper status as fief holder, and so enjoy endless happiness." Dorgon's use of the term "gentlemen" (*junzi*), which for Confucius and Mencius had signified the moral prime movers of the world, was notably irreverent, placing him far outside the circle of Confucian fundamentalism that had recently inspired the Donglin and Restoration Society movements of the late Ming, whose adherents had veritably rhapsodized about the gentlemen's power. It was, furthermore, common for the opponents of these groups to dismiss their righteousness, as Dorgon did, as part of a simple quest for fame. Continuing with a different word for the elite, Dorgon leveled another customary charge, that they were useless to the state: "The gentry (*shi da fu*) of recent vintage, enamored as they are of lofty eminence and celebrated righteousness, are oblivious to national emergencies. At every crisis, they can only deliberate endlessly." By the end of his missive, treating his interlocutors almost entirely as caricatures, he traced their historical antecedents even further back in time to the Song dynasty (960–1279), the age that had given rise to Neo-Confucianism and that was in fact nearly synonymous with it. Plainly, Dorgon had left the simple issue of Ming versus Qing far behind and was speaking, in obvious, portentous phrases, of state versus gentry. His equation

of gentlemen with southerners, furthermore, would set the tone of Qing administration for years.[6]

As much as Dorgon plainly enjoyed mocking the pretentions of southern gentlemen by addressing them as *junzi*, Qing authorities soon began referring to them as *chen* or *chen zi*, as though deciding on second thought to cut them down to size with literal precision rather than sarcasm. *Chen* means "minister" or "subject," the inferior counterpart to *jun*, which properly means "sovereign" or "lord." Confucius's and Mencius's use of the term *junzi*, which literally means "son of the sovereign," to connote nonroyal moral leaders, or "gentlemen," laid the enduring groundwork for the Chinese scholar-gentry's claim to power. Resisting this lexicological coup, partisans of the state would often insist that *jun* could signify only the actual ruler and that the cultural elites were mere *chen*, emphatically subordinate to the former. Adopting this standard tactic, the young Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644–1661) proclaimed, on November 11, 1644, "For every generation of rulers (*jun*) responding to the exigencies of their times, there is a generation of subjects (*chen*) responding to their rulers." In conformity with this nomenclature, subsequent warnings directed at the Southern Ming were addressed to the "various subjects (*chen*) of the south" and the "various civil and military subjects (*chen*, here meaning "minister" or "official" as well) of the south." Armies were then heading southward to enforce the doctrine of submission implied by these words.[7]

Shifting connotations of this kind were taking place outside official pronouncements and interdynastic propaganda. The *Zhi zhong tang ji* is a miscellaneous set of short philosophical lessons from the transition era. Its anonymous author named it for the classical text known as the *Zhong yong*, or *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and many of its passages seem at least mildly condemning of the immoderate Confucian fundamentalism of the late Ming. The writer frequently used the words *jun* and *chen*, making very clear the proper subordination of the latter to the former. In one section, he equated the relationship between lord and subject to that between father and son. By employing the compounds "lord-father" (*jun fu*) and "subject- (or minister-) son" (*chen zi*), he left no room even for the word "gentleman" (*junzi*), which, in this context, would signify a monstrosity—literally, a "lord-son." The passage in question reads as follows:

> When the righteousness of the subject-son remains under the control of the lord-father, then order is the result. But when the honor of the lord-father becomes subject to the constraints of the subject-son, then

> chaos is the result. As it is said in the *Book of Changes*, "What is rooted in Heaven draws close to what is above; what is rooted in Earth draws close to what is below." But drawing close to what is above is invariably difficult; drawing close to what is below is invariably easy. Distinguishing between the heavenly and the earthy is the essence of wisdom, and maintaining the distinctions is the essence of constancy. Eschewing the easy and embracing the difficult—only the real heroes are capable of it.[8]

These lines could be read as a postmortem on the Ming, when some of the subject ministers refused to harmonize with the emperors above and instead formed cliques with others of their kind below. By adopting the lord-minister or sovereign-subject paradigm then preferred in Beijing, the unknown compiler of the *Zhi zhong tang ji* showed a disciplined willingness to "embrace the difficult," to take the path of philosophical and hence political submission, and to avoid the easy temptation of gentlemanly faction.

Others, however, even though they conformed to the ruler-minister scheme superficially, were slow to internalize its true meaning. On November 12, 1644, a supervising secretary in the Ministry of Revenue named Hao Jie (d. 1659) memorialized, "Since ancient times, rulers (*jun*) in possession of the Way bring lasting peace and enduring order. Rarely are they able to do so, however, without cultivating the true worthies and keeping a safe distance from the artful talkers. When considering civil officials, one must employ ministers (*chen*) of immutable virtue." Although he used the word *chen*, Mr. Hao assigned them the leading roles in the civilizing process and limited the rulers' responsibility to choosing the virtuous and banishing the crafty. With its stress on personnel selection, Hao's memorial offered more factional strife and was probably another veiled attack on Feng Quan, supposedly an artful talker and not a true worthy.[9]

On December 17, Gong Dingzi (1615–1673), an official in the Ministry of Personnel, asserted the following in a memorial:

> After a new country is established, it is advisable to be liberal and magnanimous. The ancients said, "Just as courtesy is inappropriate when dealing with commoners, so too are punishments inappropriate when dealing with the elite (*da fu*)." Publicizing the achievements of exceptional ministers (*chen*) is the best way to bring honor to the court. When the desire for fame prevails among the top ministers, they will be thoroughly bound by it, and even inferior officials will be enslaved by it. By comparison, the coercive power of criminal punishment is negligible, life itself being rated much more cheaply than fame; in fact,

> people will gladly exchange the former for the latter . . . I beg that Your Majesty enlist the talents of heroic men, as the best means to lay the foundation of our great project. Establishing sincerity and openness is the way to calm the fears of the gentry (*shi da fu*). It will secure for the Court the devoted loyalty of its various subjects (*chen*).

The loyalty Gong described was clearly conditional, and his request that "heroic men" be treated indulgently earned a crisp rescript. Dorgon admitted no special need to "calm the fears of the gentry," which would have been deferring too much to their sensibilities.[10]

The State's Tentative Accommodation with the Gentry in the Provinces

While the Qing state endeavored to subdue the gentry with words in the capital, Qing authorities in the countryside also encountered the gentry as part of their pacification effort. In some cases, especially in places where Li Zicheng had recently been active, it was easy to view the gentry as victims. In one town, Li's men "murdered the innocent and took hostages from among the wealthy houses . . . The gentry (*shen shi*), military, and civilians cry out repeatedly for relief." However, in Hebei Province, not yet surrendered to the Qing, the gentry were portrayed less sympathetically: "false officials (*wei guan*, presumably invested by Li Zicheng) still exert their pernicious influence, and gentry (*shi shen*) persist in their evil." As the process of conquest wore on, it became conventional to refer to Qing-collaborationist gentry as "righteous gentry" (*yi shen*) and to recalcitrant, Ming-loyalist gentry as "ex-gentry" or "defrocked gentry" (*fei shen*). With these terms, the state was reasserting its role as the conferrer of gentry status.[11]

In other sections of China's convulsed countryside, the gentry had taken more assertive roles to provide for their own security, presenting Qing administrators with dicey management problems. Sometimes the gentry's local improvisations were seamlessly incorporated into Qing rule. On September 7, 1644, a military official named Wang Jing memorialized from Zhending Prefecture, near Beijing, describing how the inhabitants of that place had to fend for themselves in the interval between the departure of Li Zicheng and the arrival of the Qing army. Li's plundering had been especially harsh, leaving the local elite—a retired official (*xiang guan*), a censor, and Wang Jing himself—no choice but to draft a militia and support it with personal contributions. The latter came from

a retired official, a holder of the penultimate civil service degree (*ju ren*), registered students (*sheng yuan*), and a couple of merchant commoners (*shang min*). The money, the equivalent of some seven thousand taels of silver (a tael is a Chinese ounce), was managed by the censor who commanded the militia. Perhaps because he had been involved in their effort, Wang sympathetically effused: "The town and its people were kept safe and secure only by the contributions to the militia made by the gentry and commoners (*shen min*). Their merit should not be overlooked." In addition to requesting that responsibility for the militia's accounts be assumed by the government, Wang also asked Dorgon to bestow some form of official encouragement upon the contributors. Both of Wang's wishes seem to have been granted. While the Ministry of Revenue (*hu bu*) was notified about the account book, Dorgon (or someone) called the militia sponsors' actions "commendable," though it is unclear how they were actually rewarded.[12]

Shandong Province posed a greater challenge, for it had been embroiled in brigandage for several years. Desperate for order, local gentry there had revolted against Li Zicheng's rapacious minions in the summer of 1644, flirted with Southern Ming allegiance, and finally surrendered to the Qing. Governor Fang Dayou (d. 1660), in a September 24, 1644, memorial, was concerned with Shandong's legacy of lawlessness. He complained:

> Many, indeed, have welcomed our rule with heartfelt gratitude; but many others are superficially yielding yet secretly mutinous. Not a day passes without some members of the population—gentry (*xiang shen*), local bullies (*tu hao*), official family dependents (*huan yi*), renegades (*hui zi*), and even Li Zicheng's remnants—enlisting soldiers and buying horses. No one seems to have any regret for the continual disruption to agriculture. The militias do whatever they please. They are outside the command of the local government and are prone at any time to launch vendettas against each other. It might have been acceptable for each to see to his own security a brief time ago, when this region was outside any sovereignty (*zhu quan*). But now, the law of the state (*guo*) has returned, and officials have taken up their posts. The militia should be brought under control.[13]

Fang requested permission "to investigate and punish all unlawful militias, with a view to preserving peaceful governance—the benefits of which, the gentry (*shen jin*) will share." Permission was granted, and Fang seems to have brought the situation under control. Formalizing

plunder after the fact, he paid off the newly responsive militia with repatriated bandit loot. He also defended minor officials who were popular with the people but who had incurred the ire of local elites. Postulating that "whoever is loved by the common people will be hated by the gentry (*xiang shen*)," Fang believed it was only natural that a certain tax collector, who had charged gentry and commoners the same rate for a carriage tax, would earn himself powerful enemies. It was essential, however, to put the ordinary people first, to "cherish them as the sovereign (*ai min wei zhu*)." This last expression seems more paternalistic than democratic, but the point is that the gentry's obstreperousness was intolerable. Fang Dayou, and the Qing state he represented, had embarked upon the perilous enterprise of moderating social discord in Shandong and beyond. Invited by the local gentry to preserve order, the new government required the gentry to curb its excesses before the promised stability could be delivered. The gentry, as Fang somewhat reflexively affirmed, were to be the chief beneficiaries of *pax Manchurica*, but they could not ride roughshod over it. They were to be rewarded, but only upon condition of their submission.[14]

As it was, officials like Fang, as well as the Qing state in general, were beholden to local gentry, not merely to guarantee law and order, but also to provide skilled bureaucrats. The state could not really function without them, even as they so obviously mistrusted them. In the summer and autumn of 1645, Qing officials in Shandong and elsewhere were being asked to compile lists of degree-holding gentry "for ease of selection," and the men so liberally recruited were sent to serve in Beijing or in the growing number of the Qing's loyal provinces. At the same time, amusingly, similar registers of degree holders were compiled in order to facilitate the commandeering of their horses, not only to increase the state's supply of horses, but also "to anticipate rebellion." These policies serve to illustrate the state's ambiguous attitude toward the gentry. Even as the gentry were recruited as officials, they were regarded as potential outlaws.[15]

Dynastic and Social Warfare in Jiangnan

Meanwhile, Qing armies had arrived in the south, and the showdown with the Hongguang regime was at hand. Yangzhou, the headquarters of Shi Kefa, represented the largest and most responsive concentration of Southern Ming military forces north of the Yangzi River. It was Shi Kefa who had endured the taunting missives of the previous autumn, in which Dorgon had chided the Nanjing regime for its

failure to avenge the Chongzhen emperor. Finding the problem of legitimacy framed as a matter of devotion to Chongzhen, Shi Kefa could only resolve to die for him. On May 20, 1645, the Qing army captured Yangzhou, honored Shi's request for death, and punished his futile defiance by massacring the population. This violent act, the bloodiest in the campaign, discouraged further resistance. Qing forces crossed the Yangzi on June 2 and learned the next day that the Hongguang emperor and many of his closest advisors had abandoned his capital. Bowing to the inevitable, the remaining adherents of the disgraced regime, led by the righteous scholar Qian Qianyi (1582–1664), opened the city gates and went out to meet the new order on June 8. It must have seemed to the gentlemen residing in Nanjing, including refugees from the surrounding area, that service in Manchu robes could only compare favorably to the inglorious failure of Hongguang. They presented their conqueror, Manchu Prince Yu (also known as Dodo [1614–1649]), with a mountain of calling cards.[16]

No doubt these southern gentlemen were attracted by the prospect of employment, but it is clear also that Dorgon's (and Fan Wencheng's and Hong Chengchou's) initial determination to avenge Chongzhen and suppress the bandits had a salutary effect. Qian Qianyi, exhorting other literati to surrender, asked rhetorically, "Is there anyone else who mounted such a campaign against banditry and saved the world with their sense of obligation, who routed the rebels who defied Heaven and avenged the unthinkable death of our emperor, who cleared away the shame and expelled the evil, surpassing in eminence all that has gone before, as the Great [Qing] has done?" The Qing state had seized the moral initiative and won the day, while the Hongguang court had presented only a factious spectacle. One may ponder whether the "shame" and "evil" from Qian's broadside referred more to Li Zicheng's driving Chongzhen to death or to Chongzhen's own officials doing so.[17]

The decision to avenge Chongzhen was not the only one of Dorgon's resolutions that would produce effects in the south. On July 8, 1645, one month after the capture of Nanjing, Dorgon decreed that the Manchu hairstyle, shaved in the front and braided in the back, would be uniformly required of all men. The haircutting order is the clearest example of Manchu customs being forced on the Chinese, and it certainly lends to the Ming-Qing conflict an ethnic or cultural dimension. It has been blamed for spectacular acts of Chinese defiance against the Manchu conqueror, most notably the July–August uprising in Jiading County, Suzhou Prefecture, in the critical Jiangnan

region. However, the logic behind the haircutting order is imperfectly understood.[18]

Dorgon's motive in promulgating the hair regulation was political, not ethnic or cultural, and his chief concern was to impose conformity upon the bureaucracy in Beijing, not upon the population in general. Once again, the preempting of factionalism was imperative, and uniform enforcement of the Manchu hairstyle would deprive partisan snipers of ammunition. Dorgon had initially kept the hair policy ambiguous (some say that this vagueness was designed to encourage, in bad faith, the defection of Southern Ming officers). However, a few Qing ministers, like Dorgon's unpopular favorite Feng Quan and Feng's protégé Li Ruolin (d. 1657), had taken the Manchu tonsure voluntarily. Soon enough, other officials began complaining about the hair policy (even while compliance was yet optional) as a means of aspersing these men. "The protocol official has acted hastily and without discussion," read one such insinuation. "In the Inner Court, too, there is submission [to the Manchu practice] that is equally haphazard." Dorgon resolved on June 22 to demand general adaptation of the Manchu hairstyle in order to silence this bickering. The July 8 edict itself followed the now well-established practice of associating sovereign (*jun*) with father (*fu*) and subject (*chen*) with son (*zi*), in a scheme that left no room for gentlemen (*junzi*)—especially, we may presume, the gentlemanly critics of Feng Quan, Li Ruolin, and other eager servants of the Qing state.[19]

Once again, Dorgon's neutralization of factional impulses amounted to throwing his weight behind the statist faction, as symbolized by Feng Quan. Dorgon finally invalidated his neutrality during a consultation with his grand secretaries on August 3, 1645. The conversation on that occasion may seem strangely academic considering the crisis then developing in Jiading and other places, yet to Dorgon's mind, it was quite apropos.

"The Ming dynasty," Dorgon remarked, "is said by everyone to have been riven by faction; but if members of a given faction are united in mind for the good of the Court, then isn't that particular faction a *good faction*?"

Stepping forward to answer was "Grand Secretary Li," probably Li Jiantai, a grand secretary of the Chongzhen court, who had somewhat quixotically raised an army to fight Li Zicheng during the renegade's final advance on the Ming capital. "Gentlemen (*junzi*) harmonize without conspiring," Li said. "Mean men (*xiao ren*) conspire without harmonizing."

These words smelled of the old pedantry that had wasted the Ming dynasty, and Dorgon perhaps braced himself for a typical lecture, following the rationalization of the Song scholar-official Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) that was taken up by Gu Xiancheng and other upright men of the Ming, according to which coalitions of gentlemen were justified and those of mean men were not.

At this juncture, however, Grand Secretary Li redeemed himself by twisting the old rationalization in a novel, statist direction. "Those acting in concert to serve the country (*guojia*) and the people are harmonizing," Li said. "Those acting in concert to serve themselves, their families, or their selfish desires are conspiring. Harmonizing and conspiring are thus utterly at variance."

Li's justification for faction was slightly more erudite than Dorgon's, but it was certainly something Dorgon could work with. Perhaps Li Jiantai, the man who had sallied out from the capital to save the Ming state, spoke Dorgon's language after all. Of course (as Dorgon saw it), only those gentlemen who served the state were worthy of the name; the rest were merely serving their own reputations. It was easier, after all, to identify a true gentleman by his devotion to his sovereign than by his abstruse moralizing.

Feng Quan knew what to say: "Your Excellency can take accurate measures of the various ministers (*chen*), based on their utterances as well as their actions."

"As a matter of fact," returned Dorgon, "though I make no other claim to cleverness, I have invested some time in the art of knowing men."

But "knowing men" was different from judging them by their service to the state. The former was all that Confucian scholars, such as Gong Dingzi, in the previous memorial, expected of his ideally rather passive ruler—namely, that he recognize the moral greatness of Confucian gentleman like himself. The latter was what the Legalist ruler did in order to reward or punish the state's servants.

Sure enough, Li Jiantai now took the wrong fork in the road:

> Indeed, kingly governance is basically a matter of knowing men and pacifying the people [he said]. As it is the essence of wisdom, the art of knowing men is the most important thing for the ruler to master. When the ruler recognizes the worthy and employs them, then the people are pacified. When he fails to recognize the unworthy and employs them, then the people are vexed. Your Excellency has a natural endowment of wisdom and bravery but even so should not presume to rely overmuch upon it. A ruler should still hear all sides before concluding that he knows his man.[20]

Li Jiantai's gentlemanly condescension finally revealing itself, Dorgon decided he'd had enough of it (maybe Li had only been trying to rescue his home province of Shanxi, not the Ming state; at any rate, he was soon cashiered). "Of course you are right," said Dorgon, but then he continued in a very different direction, one that was perhaps deliberately jarring to his ex-Ming interlocutors, one that made crystal clear his own very particular criteria for "knowing men," and one that edged closer to the elephant in the room, the disturbances in Jiangnan:

> Whenever we took a Ming city, there would always be a few people who preferred death to surrender. No doubt this admirable tendency was owing to the fact that the various officials of the Ming had learned something of Principle in the course of their studies. The Ming dynasty certainly had good people, or else it would never have lasted the three hundred years that it did. Having said that, though, I must add that the righteous disregard of life I often observed in Ming officials reflected a desire to achieve posthumous fame, rather than true gratitude for their sovereign's gracious patronage. When Chongzhen was dead, not a single official died with him. Yes, many died for fame, but none really died for him.[21]

As he spoke, people were indeed dying all over Jiangnan. Some of them, especially those with reputations as righteous gentlemen, chose the path of "Ming loyalism" and set new standards of heroic sacrifice, ostensibly for the Ming cause. Much of this "loyalist" blood was expended so ostentatiously, however, that one wonders if Dorgon might not have been right to conclude that the effusion was intended more to exemplify righteousness than to join Chongzhen in death. Along these lines, it was suggested in the predecessor to this volume that the Ming loyalists, in going down so nobly with the ship, were effectively usurping that prerogative from its titular captain.[22]

Besides, Jiangnan in the 1640s was the scene of a general social conflagration, not merely a simple conflict between Ming and Qing, occasioned by the haircutting order or any other cultural imposition. The riotous conditions seen ten years earlier in places such as Tongcheng County (described in the Introduction) came after 1644 upon the region at large. Taking the collapse of Ming authority as their signal, unruly bands of commoners, including tenants and others with binding obligations to the gentry, began to rise up in revolt, demanding their own emancipation or even social equality with their erstwhile superiors. For every glorious example of Ming loyalism listed

in Zhang Huijian's modern reference work chronicling the activities of southern literati, there may also be found cases of individual gentlemen caught on the wrong side of this violent social revolution. In Rugao County, Yangzhou Prefecture, angry salt distillers, in combination with soldiers from a Ming training division, ran rampant. One night in June 1645 (before the haircutting order), they killed Rugao's first Qing magistrate, along with one of his clerks. The local populace fled or hid, and Rugao gentleman Mao Xiang (1611–1693) took refuge in a salt administration office before leaving the area entirely. The arrival of more Qing soldiers brought only continued looting, and Mao did not come back for another year. Also having a difficult time was Changshu native Feng Shu (1593–1649), who wrote that after the fall of Nanjing, "righteous uprising furnished the pretext for extorting the property of the wealthy." Sun Zhiwei (1620–1687), after having failed to hold off bandits by means of a militia trained by rich families in his home province of Shaanxi, sought refuge in Yangzhou, of all places. In Taicang, Zhang Cai (1596–1648), cofounder of the Restoration Society and presumably a very influential man, was dragged from his home by a mob and beaten nearly to death a mere four days after the fall of Nanjing. Jerry Dennerline suggests that Zhang was the victim of a power struggle between "pirates, secret societies, slaves, elite families, [and] armed and angry groups of every color" at a time when "the authority of the [Nanjing] government's regular administrators had not clearly passed to anyone," and his description accurately captures the Hobbesian nightmare that was Jiangnan in the mid-1640s.[23]

Under such conditions, Ming loyalism, whatever its motivation might have been, was often not even an option. Perhaps the most telling case in point was that of Zhu Xiangsun, a 1636 *juren* (in other words, the holder of the penultimate academic degree) who was endeavoring to organize a "Cherishing Loyalty Society" in the Nanhui district of Shanghai sometime in 1645. When local bondservants wished to join in his restorationist enterprise, Zhu forbade their participation. Thus rebuked, the frustrated bondservants launched a general uprising against their would-be leader, Zhu, whom they summarily killed. Plainly, transition-era gentry were in a very precarious position, as any meaningful restorationist activity they might have contemplated would require them to join forces with the mob. Confucian gentlemen did not particularly like mobs, and, as Zhu Xiangsun discovered, mobs did not particularly like Confucian gentlemen. In other words, attempts at Ming restoration ran the risk of prolonging the already unacceptable social disruption then prevailing in Jiangnan.

Frederic Wakeman Jr. described this predicament as "gentry ambivalence," and it certainly disconcerted resistance to the Qing conquest. The historian Guo Songyi has asserted that the Jiangnan gentry of the transition years really acted in concert with commoners only once—namely, during the aforementioned uprising in the city of Jiading, in resistance to the Manchu haircutting order, which, perhaps significantly, applied to gentry and commoners equally.[24]

However, even Jiading is a questionable example of cooperation. After resistance leader Hou Tongzeng (1591–1645) committed himself to restoration on August 5, he was dismayed to find part of the local defense corps composed of "gang leaders and village rascals" bent on riot and militarily useless. Ultimately, Hou, an extremely well-connected man, with ties to Donglin and Restoration Society veterans, was able to mollify the rabble only by means of bribery, paying the city's defenders with his own family fortune and with contributions he implored from leading families. Militias from the surrounding area sent representatives to Jiading to claim their share of the largesse. But the peace was purchased too late. Qing forces led by Li Chengdong (d. 1649), recently the lieutenant and betrayer of Shi Kefa, took the town on August 24 and immediately began plundering and massacring the population. Most of the high-gentry leaders of the resistance committed suicide, but minor militia leaders staged a "counterterror," killing the new Qing civil administrator as well as anyone with a shaved head. Of course, Li Chengdong responded with yet more violence, and he ultimately left the area under the control of an irregular militia that had recently suppressed a bondservant revolt. These "vigilantes," in their turn, murdered anyone they found with long hair, and they also raped and plundered freely throughout the vicinity, piling up an impressive amount of loot consisting of movable goods (some of which they justified as taxes) and kidnapped women. Distinctions between rich and poor were said to have been lost in the despoliation, hardly an acceptable outcome for the gentry, among all the other horrors.[25]

Hong Chengchou and Qing Control over Jiangnan

It was to this anarchic scene that Dorgon dispatched Hong Chengchou, the announcement of Hong's appointment coming on August 3 during the symposium on faction rehearsed earlier in this chapter. Hong's tenure as governor of Jiangnan lasted from 1645 to 1648, and it showcases the tremendous difficulties inherent in the

Qing state's mission of imposing political and social order on the region. Ultimately, of course, political and social pacification would prove to be the same task, as *pax Manchurica* offered Jiangnan gentry the only guarantee of social stability. In the short term, however, establishing Qing rule necessitated more war, and, again, nothing surpasses war as a catalyst of social disruption. Hong's role as governor was thus mostly diplomatic and propagandistic. He would provide cover for the Qing pacification effort, giving it a southern, gentlemanly, Chinese face (Hong was a native of Fujian and a civil official). He was, in effect, the Manchus' public relations generalissimo.[26]

One of Hong Chengchou's more difficult tasks in this regard was to whitewash the toxic reputations of Qing captains who had been so brutally efficient—and notoriously rapacious—as they expanded Qing power. Sometime in 1646, Hong Chengchou investigated complaints that Jiangnan's various military commanders were largely "insensitive to the region's condition" and prone to "overbearing military harassment" of the people. One set of allegations focused on Li Chengdong, the conqueror of Jiading, who was allegedly abusing the gentry and commoners (*shi/min*) in his new jurisdiction of Songjiang Prefecture. On pretext of bandit suppression or intelligence gathering, Li and his subordinates rode out and went to work "burning houses and digging through fields and walls" for plunder, harming gentry (*shen shi*) and commoner (*ren min*) alike. Also under suspicion was Suzhou-based provincial military commander Wu Shengzhao, who, it was charged, "without fighting the real bandits, instead murdered innocent people, and without catching a single rebel chief, instead looted the houses of the rich." Hong freely recounted the accusations against Li and Wu, signaling that he took them very seriously; but he also seemed overly fastidious about the need to gather proper evidence against them. He demanded a complete list of the names of all gentry and commoners who had suffered unjustly at Li's hands. As for the allegations concerning Wu Shengzhao, Hong needed a lot of convincing: "There are so many complaints; how come there is no proof?" Hong demanded an extensive investigation as to when, precisely, the alleged events occurred; whether Wu or some subordinate was in command; why government troops entered the city (of Wujiang), when the enemy had supposedly left; and what plunder and murder Wu's men had perpetrated, when the enemy had supposedly done nothing. Hong warned his investigators, "No shielding wrongdoers or concealing evidence will be tolerated!" However, in spite of this very ostentatiously righteous and thorough inquiry, neither Li Chengdong nor Wu Shengzhao was ever punished. In fact, Hong

seems himself to have definitively cleared Wu Shengzhao of wrongdoing, admitting only that a few gun-shy residents of Wujiang had at one point abandoned their houses in the general chaos, allowing some of Wu's command, under a minor commander, to help themselves to the property left behind. Otherwise Wu's hands contained "no bloody knife . . . Of the charge of murdering the innocent and plundering the wealthy, [Wu Shengzhao], from the beginning to the end of the campaign, is completely innocent, and what is more, he never killed a single person."[27]

It is ironic that Hong Chengchou went to such lengths on behalf of Li Chengdong and Wu Shengzhao, for both men were to prove unreliable. Wu would betray the Qing almost immediately, in May 1647, when he joined the Ming restorationist conspiracy in Songjiang. Hong suspected Wu's loyalty by then though he remained, apparently, indifferent to Wu's bloody reputation per se. In any case, the Songjiang restoration was unsuccessful. Li Chengdong was transferred to Guangdong, where he would mutiny in 1648 and die by accidental drowning the next year. The undoubtedly quite irksome necessity of turning a blind eye to Li's and Wu's conduct while they were still on the Qing side perhaps contributed to Hong's request to be relieved of his command on the grounds of his worsening vision. This request, made in late 1646, Dorgon could not grant, presumably because there was no one with similar qualifications to take Hong's place.[28]

Aside from the showy and ultimately pointless criminal investigations of Li Chengdong and Wu Shengzhao, it was fiscal matters that demanded most of Hong Chengchou's time during his tenure in Jiangnan. Many of his memorials to Beijing contain statistical reports on his jurisdiction's ability to produce revenue, with the stabilization of the new regime's income being an obvious necessity. Hong matched this focus on the bottom line with an anxious desire that the region's long-suffering peasantry be protected from excessive extraction. Hong reported in August 1646 that Anqing Prefecture in the interior, especially the two counties of Qianshan and Taihu, had suffered greatly at the hands of renegades, including Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong (1606–1647), for about ten years. Hong estimated that Taihu County was approximately 80 percent barren, owing to the death or displacement of much of its population. The area was plainly in need of relief and resettlement, for humanitarian as well as for fiscal reasons, as tax grain would "not be forthcoming any time soon," at least from these places, while it was already becoming clear on the national level that "expenditures [were] beyond enumeration and daily proliferating."

Protecting himself by carefully noting a consensus among Han and Manchu officials, Hong recommended several years of tax waivers in order to encourage people to return to their fields and remain there. He also urged that local officials' traveling and lodging expenses be put on the account of the relatively unscathed Jiangning County (i.e., the city of Nanjing) so that "not a single coin be extorted from the local people," for Hong feared that the residents of Qianshan and Taihu would now be subject to abuse from Qing officials. He asked for a strictly limited number of officers from the prefectural seat, subject to the abovementioned travel and lodging procedures, to begin work on a new land survey for the area. The latter would be needed at some future date when the two counties began to produce enough grain to be taxed, but Hong was well aware of the unfairness that had long plagued the process of tax collection. Starting, as it were, with a clean slate, Hong urged the surveying officials, "Take great care while investigating and make your report based on reality. You must not conceal the lands [of some people and thus deflect the tax burden onto others]. Anyone who tries it will be severely punished. For that matter," Hong went on, "all Han and Manchu officials and soldiers are strictly prohibited from molesting the people in this place. We must avoid compounding their misery."[29]

Qing Fiscal Policy and the State's Sovereignty over the People

Hong Chengchou's sympathy for the common people could only go so far. The imperative of revenue collection, in a time of incessant military campaigning, was overriding. It is not too harsh to conclude that Hong Chengchou was engaged in another whitewashing, just as he had been in the case of the indispensable marauders Li Chengdong and Wu Shengzhao. In this respect, Hong was simply following the pattern set by his superiors in Beijing, according to which protestations of humaneness on behalf of the common people only thinly disguised the government's desperate effort to secure enough revenue to complete the conquest. Almost immediately upon entering Beijing, for example, Dorgon had announced the abolition of the heavy surtaxes of the late Ming, but by restoring the supposedly moderate "Wanli tax quota," Qing officials in fact incorporated the Wanli-era *Liaoxiang* surtax into the new framework. Before too long, in 1647, the new government stopped even pretending to be nice and brought back *Liaoxiang* under a new name, *jiu li yin*, though the hand-wringing about overtaxed commoners would continue.[30]

Indeed, *Liaoxiang* was a red herring. Surtaxes or not, applying the "Wanli tax quota"—which had been hard enough for the Ming government to collect even in prosperity—to the war-ravaged reality of the Shunzhi period, with its ruined, abandoned farms and its missing population, was a tremendous imposition. To dress such a policy in the clothes of compassion was to take the dictates of humane government to surrealistic extremes. Even in theory, it meant that a decimated economy was subjected to the tax burden of a thriving one; and the improvised process of tax collection under these conditions was often heavy-handed enough to embarrass the officials in charge. "We say we have waived one third of the taxes," one of them memorialized, "but in reality, one or two acres supply the revenue of five or six . . . Our tax amnesties exist in name only." Really, the only true policy was to collect as much revenue as was necessary to provision the army, which often went unpaid, just the same. When this level of extraction surpassed even the Wanli quotas, the supervising officials rationalized that they were collecting the next year's taxes in advance. This tactic had been employed in the late Ming, and it became even more common in the early Qing.[31]

The picture gets gloomier the longer one looks at it. The revenue of the Ming and Qing consisted chiefly of a land tax and a set of labor service levies. Under the terms of the "single whip reform" of the late Ming, the latter was supposedly converted to a lump-sum silver payment and prorated onto the former. Like the land tax, the commuted labor service payments were collected from the early Qing population according to late Ming quotas, with the living, in effect, inheriting the service obligations of the dead. The resulting burden, according to one fiscal historian, was "vastly more onerous that that of the Ming." Worse, even as China's peasants were taxed at the inflated rates of the prosperous past, they suffered acutely under the harsh demands of the war-torn present, frequently conscripted to serve as military auxiliaries such as boat builders, sailors, grooms, porters, canal diggers, wall builders, lumberjacks, and other laborers. These services were demanded on an ad hoc basis, unregulated by the single whip reform or any other formal procedure, and they would hang over the peasantry for decades, as long as the wars continued. The Jiangnan literatus Xing Fang (1590–1653), in his 1649 poem "A Few Lines on Commandeered Boats," immortalized the lament of an old boatman whose two sons were pressed into service, along with the barge they were working, on the Yellow River. Discharged, they were on their way home when officials forced them back to the Yellow River to become pole handlers on

another boat. Finally unloading their cargo and free to go, they were once more stopped and made to work on a troop carrier. This last job would take the two unfortunate young men to Huguang Province, from whence, their father supposed, they would never return, alive or dead. Such stories were typical at a time when "all the world between the seas was armed to the teeth."[32]

To this catalogue of exploitation must be added certain Manchu policies that carried over from their raiding days. Land enclosures (*qian*) were abandoned estates that were taken over by Qing banners or aristocrats. Gradually Qing authorities became less scrupulous about ensuring that the lands were in fact abandoned and began evicting the original owners. The dispossessed were at first given lands elsewhere as compensation, but these new fields were often so remote that it was scarcely worth the trouble of taking possession of them, and soon, the practice of offering compensation was discontinued. The Qing also brought bondservants (*nu*), people taken captive in battle, as well as their descendants, with them from Manchuria, and soon they began taking bondservants generally from among the Chinese. A 1645 edict magnanimously permitted destitute Chinese to become bondservants voluntarily, and such commendations continued legally through 1647 and informally thereafter. Escaping bondservants, as well as anyone who helped them escape or failed to report them, became liable for harsh punishment under a fugitive persons law promulgated in 1644 (supposedly by the Shunzhi emperor himself as he progressed to Beijing) and strengthened in 1646.[33]

As these examples should show, the Qing rulers' frequent reiterations of the principles of "humane government" were rather lacking in sincerity considering how mercilessly these same rulers were taxing, dispossessing, impressing, and enslaving the Chinese people. Clearly, the Qing state was endeavoring to establish its commanding sovereignty over the common people in as straightforward a fashion as possible, humane government be damned, and it is important to point out that this zeal in establishing lordship over the little people was based on the need to deny it to another pretender—namely, the gentry. Again, the late Ming context should not be forgotten. During the previous dynasty, it was usually the gentry that claimed sovereignty over China's villages. Couched, of course, in the most humane terms, gentry sovereignty during the Ming translated into unrivaled power over commoners. The gentry seized neighbors' lands, reducing their former owners in many cases to tenancy or serfdom. This control over both land and people was disastrous to the Ming revenue as the gentry shielded more and

more land and people from taxation, and it also gave individual gentlemen the ability to marshal small armies of tenants, bondservants, or other retainers in campaigns of intimidation or violence, even against the local authorities of the state, in order to protect or advance their interests. Breaking the gentry's general recalcitrance had been the goal of the Wanli emperor and his "mine tax commissioners," and the gentry had fought back, inciting mobs against Wanli's henchmen and those of his successors while continuing to dodge their taxes. Now the new Qing state, having replaced the Ming and learned the appropriate lessons, lost little time securing its own land, demanding high taxes, and acquiring its own bondservants and unpaid laborers.

Options for the Gentry: Holding on to Local Power

Although staggered by recent events, some members of the gentry retained a firm and potentially disruptive grip on their underlings. In the fall of 1647, in Tangyi County, Dongchang Prefecture, Shandong Province, a *juren* named Lu Shen employed a bondservant to assemble a fearsome gang. Mr. Lu gathered this force of "family dependants" outside the county seat on the pretext of harvesting crops. Then, assisted by another house servant and at the command of about three thousand other followers, Lu stormed the town. However, the valiant county magistrate Wen Shuguang, though wounded, led the civil militia in a counterattack, driving the desperados away. Wen subsequently called a meeting of prominent gentry (*xiang shen*), petty gentry (*shi min*), and village security associations. This esteemed citizens' committee, perhaps miffed that two of their number, a student and a retired official (*xiang huan*), had also been wounded, quickly indentified Lu as the criminal, and his little army was soon hunted down. In the official correspondence, Lu was termed an "evil scorpion Ming dynasty *juren*," though he seems to have been uninvolved in any Ming restorationist activity. His case was a throwback, following the Ming pattern by which powerful people, or at least the family members or servants thereof, terrorized their neighbors. The episode contains much ambiguity and defies easy interpretation, for Lu Shen was perhaps simply an unpopular person and a lightweight who bit off more than he could chew. Also worth considering is the Shandong setting and the unpredictable nature of the gentry there (as was explored earlier in this chapter). True, Lu Shen was suppressed with the help of his own gentry neighbors, but the latter's mindfulness of the new

regime's imperative for order perhaps encouraged them to settle the issue in house, before the Qing came in to settle it for them.[34]

Gentry troublemakers were not generally called ex-gentry (*fei shen*) or rebellious gentry (*ni shen*), unless they were supposedly plotting a Ming restoration. Often the gentlemen so incriminated, however, were guilty only of indiscretion. On one occasion, a pair of ex-officials from Zhejiang had gotten mixed up with enthusiastic commoners who claimed to be Ming princes. On another, a gentleman from Jiande County (in Chizhou Prefecture, Jiangnan Province) had been caught with a stockpile of banned Ming clothing. Perhaps more seriously, though, in late 1649, Dorgon ordered the cashiering of the *juren* Yu Zhiyin, son of the ex-gentry (*fei shen*) Yu Zhishu, who by then was deceased. The Yus were suspected of general sedition, including collusion with the previous dynasty, and Qing officials were traversing Rugao and Taixing Counties, in Yangzhou Prefecture, Jiangnan Province, investigating Yu Zhiyin's "sons and brothers, powerful servants, and personal retainers" in an effort to uncover the conspiracy. The search for evidence was frustratingly inconclusive, though stripping Yu Zhiyin of his *juren* degree was a reasonable precaution, for, guilty or not, it was only on the strength of his official status that he could conceivably "abet evil by deceiving and harming the people of the villages." Obviously, Qing authorities remained greatly apprehensive about the gentry's enduring influence among the population.[35]

Options for the Gentry: Reclusion or Service?

Meanwhile, the Chinese gentry of the late 1640s, particularly the southerners, adjusted to the slowly crystallizing reality in various ways—assuming they did not choose the paths of Ming restoration or local domination. One traditional option was to become a wanderer or a recluse, perhaps while writing bitter poetry about the conquest. Xing Fang, who rhymed about the bereaved old boatman (as discussed earlier in this chapter), fell into this category. Another possibility was to make a dramatic renunciation of status. After the fall of Nanjing, Shen Zijin (1583–1665), of Wujiang County, gave up his academic credentials, and his brother Shen Ziji went so far as to become a monk. In Huating County, Xiao Zhongsu became a woodworker. Jiangpu native Chen Suoxue took the fall of the Ming very badly. With his own hands, he shredded his Ming scholar's hat, which he had worn by virtue of his being an academic stipendiary (*zhu sheng*). Then, snatching up a huge mallet, he demolished his

own house, and he also ordered his servants to raze the "several tens" of dwellings in which they lived. After donating the wreckage of his estate to a Daoist master, he moved to the poor inland prefecture of Luzhou and spent what turned out to be the rest of his life, more than forty years, living in a thatched hut on the bank of the Sancha River. While the state of Chen's mind can only be imagined, it is interesting to note that although he did not, apparently, believe he owed his life to the Ming dynasty, he did believe that he owed it his wealth—of which his middling stipendiary status had allowed him to amass a great deal. Other modes of detachment were also available, however, in which the operator was permitted to retain and enjoy both his status and his wealth. The unflappable Jiang Shaoshu, for example, spent the chaotic year 1646 collecting antiques, and he managed to obtain a piece of rare Song dynasty jade, right in Nanjing. The painter Lan Ying (1585–1664) went right on working for the upscale Hangzhou art market, which, despite the wars, remained thriving.[36]

As opposed to those gentlemen who chose to sulk or luxuriate on the sidelines (and again, excepting those who continued to resist the Qing more actively), others, even southerners, decided to enter Qing service. The new government certainly welcomed their help: Hong Chengchou had begun recommending talented people for government offices even before arriving at his post and memorialized on the subject throughout his term; and Hong's subordinate, Jiangning governor Tu Guobao (d. 1651), worked on compiling lists of registered gentry (*shen*)—in other words, holders of Ming civil service degrees—"for use as tools (*qi*) for our sacred dynasty," stressing the need "to expedite, with the utmost public spirit, the gentry's immediate mobilization, to support the founding of our state." Emphatically, however, the gentlemen so recruited, despite making the seemingly momentous resolution to support a foreign dynasty, had little intention of becoming its "tools." The strength of their vocational interest in social order, and their yet unshaken conviction that the social order revolved around them, made it possible for Confucian gentlemen to believe that they were restoring it themselves without a great deal of consciousness that they were working for the new dynasty.[37]

Gentry in Magistrate's Robes: The Case of Gu Yuxian

One of these men was Gu Yuxian, who was a native of Changzhou County, in Suzhou Prefecture. The description he leaves of his services as transition-era magistrate contains not a single "long live the

Great Qing" nor, indeed, any mention of the Qing state, except the Shunzhi reign name for the purpose of rendering dates. A Confucian student in the last years of the Ming, he failed several times to obtain his *juren* degree and then was compelled to flee the "thieves of righteousness" who came into the open as the Ming collapsed. Perhaps his lack of a Ming degree gave him no stake in the dying dynasty, and he probably had little love for the rabble, either. In any event, he was soon able to return home and quickly took advantage of the new civil service examinations offered by the new regime, earning his *juren* in 1646 and his *jinshi* (the superlative degree) the next year. Assigned as magistrate to Ningjin County, in Jianding Prefecture near Beijing, he might have viewed his responsibilities with some trepidation, but he (or at least his memoir) exuded confidence. He predicted that starting his job from scratch, as it were, in a new dynasty actually gave him a certain freedom from the entanglements and complications he might have encountered in a more mature administration. A more sober local welcoming committee warned him of the difficulties he would find—namely, meeting his tax quota and quelling banditry. Focusing on the latter, supposedly easier task, Gu framed it as a simple process of "extending the law to the bandits' lairs." The problem was that the bandits' lairs contained looted wealth, and this wealth was what enabled the bandits to evade the law at every level. "Those captured are soon released: if they are captured below, they are released above; if they are captured in daylight, they are released in the shadows; if they are captured by officials, they are released by civilians." Magistrate Gu thereupon resolved to employ material inducements of his own in order to firm up the process of law enforcement. He deputized all persons who could ride and shoot and took pains to feed and clothe them "to show closeness and trust." For those who proved themselves diligent at capturing renegades, Gu waived the monthly and annual "guarding [against] bandits" and "arresting bandits" fees. (Apparently, conscripted deputies were ordinarily obliged to pay their own expenses, or perhaps such expenses were assessed on the general population, as part of the service levy.) As for the bandits taken into custody, they were encouraged to bring in their former confederates in exchange for amnesty. By this method, seven ringleaders were apprehended in the space of a month, and they were actually co-opted into the militia, passing from part of the problem to part of the solution.[38]

Gu Yuxian wound up his successful stint in Ningjin and returned home to Changzhou in 1648. Although he now wanted to spend more time with his mother, the good woman bundled him off to his

next job, which chanced to be in Qiantang County, Hangzhou Prefecture, in Zhejiang Province. The recent arrival of Qing armies had forced the "Plain Clothes Righteous Army" into the river lands and hills, and Gu's job was to help mop up. In this campaign, Gu made himself known mostly for his compassion. After one successful battle, Qing soldiers threw the children of the vanquished bandits into the river to drown. Moved by their cries, Gu ordered them to be fished out, but the brutish soldiers used their swords to do so. Flushed with rage, Gu declared that he counted himself the innocent children's father and them his children, and he threatened to give up his post if any were harmed. His anger, perhaps more than his threat, had some restraining effect on the men, but dealing with them continued to be a problem. That night, unruly waterborne troops took advantage of a dim moon to plunder the surrounding villages, pilfering everything of value they could find—including over a hundred women, whom they packed into their boats. Drenched by the morning rain, the women were extremely miserable. "Their cries of hurt and cold veritably flooded my ears," Gu wrote, and he seemed equally concerned that his marines, now sated with plunder, were getting set to retire from the unfinished fight. Ordering them to the riverbank, he swore he would make no report of his men's plundering, either of the property or of the women, provided they refrained from villainy upon the latter.[39]

Gu's promised complicity induced the men to follow him, but it was a delaying tactic, designed to buy himself and the captive females more time. While he was careful never to be seen entering a government building (and thus falling under the suspicion of tattling), Gu did encounter a minor military officer, and he handed this man a hastily written report to the provincial military commander, Xiao Qiyuan, in which he detailed everything that had happened and shared his views on the general situation. He expressed more paternal sympathy for the rebels, saying that they were at heart simple peasants, not dyed-in-the-wool insurrectionists. He next outlined his correspondingly (and understandably) poor view of constabulary, blaming them for much of the local agitation. "We've got to find some way to get the soldiers away from here," he wrote. "If the soldiers aren't removed, the people will never return to their peaceful occupations. It's when they can't return to their peaceful occupations that they turn renegade." Gu begged Xiao to set a one month time limit for settling the military issue and then disbanding the army. If no solution was found by the end of the month, "then execute me," Gu suggested, "to satisfy all the voices in the Empire calling for 'bandit eradication.'"[40]

Xiao Qiyuan was moved by Gu's eloquence and ordered the soldiers to be pulled back, even before one month had passed. (Gu's account does not mention the fate of their captives and other plunder.) Somewhat disrespectful of Gu's good intentions, however, an unreconstructed Plain Clothes bandit also named Gu (Gu Jieao) decided to take advantage of their departure by launching an attack on the town (presumably Qiantang) with several tens of thousands of desperados. Gu Yuxian was thus forced into battle, on horseback and in command of his braves from Ningjin, including the seven former bandit ringleaders, now apparently employed as Gu's personal retainers. Gu acquitted himself valorously, dispatching a bandit with his own sword and casting his body off the battlements. The Plain Clothes bandits were driven back.[41]

Gu's narrative of his own exploits shows an obvious tendency toward self-promotion that is perhaps unsurprising. Gu was most careful to explain that the Plain Clothes attack was brought on not by his own suggestion to remove the army but through the treachery of a minor military officer (probably the same man employed by Gu as messenger) who leaked Xiao's demobilization order to the wily Plain Clothes, welcoming the resulting attack as an opportunity to censure Gu's sentimental policy and thus argue for the deployment of more troops. There is no reason to doubt that such villainy occurred, even if Gu's account is something of an apologia. What is especially noteworthy, however, is Gu's narration of the aftermath of the battle, which develops into a formidable autohagiography.[42]

According to Gu, the leaked intelligence that incited the bandits' attack also acquainted them with his own remarkable humaneness, especially his protective concern for the kidnapped females. The chastened Plain Clothes became overcome with gratitude and remorse. "How could we have made trouble for such a magistrate as this?" they berated themselves. As soon as it was safe to open the city gates, these desperately penitent people swarmed in and headed to the county office, where Gu ventured bravely out to meet them. He dismissed his usual retinue and was conveyed by the adoring multitude, via sedan chair and boat, to a nearby village, where he was feted in a simple hut with his humble hosts kneeling all around him. Gu bestowed upon them a heartening lecture, until all present, Gu included, were in tears. Before he had even finished his speech, though, he was again taken by the hand and led through a continuing triumphal ordeal that lasted about a week, saw him visit about 15 villages a day, and deposited him finally in Zhuji County, in Shaoxing Prefecture, where the locals explained, "We heard of Your Excellency's humane way of

governance and wished to pay our respects, though we are hundreds of [miles] outside your jurisdiction."[43]

When Gu finally returned to Qiantang, local officials there had been mounting an increasingly frantic search for him. In fact, they had assumed that he had been kidnapped and were busily assembling his ransom. Now it was Gu's turn to play host, treating his brother officials to a few toasts, in order to thank them for their trouble. Gu also took the occasion to ask Xiao Qiyuan to issue full pardons to thousands of local people, and his request was granted. This time, Gu's humaneness was properly rewarded, as the area quickly became pacified. Gu recorded Xiao Qiyuan's awestruck sigh: "That Gu Yuxian is truly a marvelous man!" In consideration of the fact that the local people were newly returned from brigandage to agriculture, marvelous Magistrate Gu waived seven months of their taxes.[44]

One more thing remained to be done. After restoring the common people to their proper place on the land, Gu restored the local gentry to their proper place above the common people. During the general uprising of the Plain Clothes, the bandits had mercilessly extorted from the gentry (*jian shen*), leaving them broke but counting their blessings to be alive. "The vicious human tigers," Gu wrote, referring to the same simple farm folk he had eulogized before, "eyed the gentry as so much fresh meat on the table." Grateful for Gu's magnanimous tax policy, the impoverished gentlemen perhaps recognized a kindred spirit and hastened to call on him. They explained that during the change of dynasty and the subsequent local disturbances, the area had seen five of its brightest lights extinguished; these were the righteous suicides Liu Zongzhou, Qi Biaojia (1602–1645), Yu Huang, Ni Yuanlu, and Zhou Fengxiang (d. 1644). Magistrate Gu, as he wrote, listened very perceptively to the gentlemen's story, offered sacrifice to assuage the danger-scorning souls of the Ming martyrs, and then solicited the assistance of the ever-serviceable Xiao Qiyuan in the construction of a "gentry shrine" (*shenshi ci*) next to the Confucian temple, to be called the Shrine of the Five Worthies. This last action—conducting rites, as it were, for the previous sovereigns—paralleled Dorgon's ceremonial interment of the Chongzhen emperor upon first securing Beijing. In fact, Gu Yuxian's whole story counts as a rival narrative of the dynastic transfer, one in which a newly minted gentleman, not the newly founded state, "punishes the bandits to exact revenge," restores the proper social order, and does so in such a manifestly humane fashion that the people far and near all tender their obeisance, like blades of grass before the wind. Plainly, Gu Yuxian saw himself as the true father of his people. Magistrate though he

may have been, he was certainly, at least in his own eyes, a sovereign gentleman and not a tool of the state.[45]

Dorgon's Enduring Suspicions and Vainglory

Thus, even though peace was brought to northern Zhejiang in 1648, the key question of who had brought it, the state or the gentry, remained unsettled. Of course, self-important Confucian gentlemen like Gu Yuxian may have been functioning in a sort of denial, and one might assume that Qing leaders would learn to tolerate or even encourage their pretentions as long as local stability was the result. As has already been shown, however, Dorgon, for one, was acutely sensitive to the sovereignty issue. Avoiding gentlemanly lectures and thwarting gentlemanly factional influence was clearly as important to him as the success of Qing armies. He even went so far as to virtually ban the word "gentleman" for the negation of state sovereignty it implied. If Dorgon was unable to be everywhere at once (Qiantang County, for example), he was still master of events at the capital, and he continued, as long as he was alive, to fight tooth and nail against Confucian self-righteousness.

Dorgon's attitudes had been recently reiterated on April 19, 1647, at the announcement of the topic of the palace examination (the imperially proctored examination of successful *jinshi*, used to determine ranking), which contained the following passages:

> For an emperor desiring to bring peace to all under Heaven, no task is more important than the selection of personnel. We deeply cherish true talent, and yet the art of knowing men is difficult. Were We to employ a man on the basis of his speech, We could never be sure that it reflected his true mind and that he would not prove duplicitous. Were We to employ a man on the basis of his recommendations, We could never be sure that We were not encouraging faction and thus confounding true and false. If We employed a man for his broad learning and persuasive prose, We would expect him to bring it all to bear on his work; but he would end up doing nothing but composing screeds of thousands of characters, overflowing with [reference to the sage kings] Yao and Shun yet insinuating much villainy, spreading corruption from office. What, then, must We do, to obtain true talent?
>
> Lately, as is commonly seen and reported, serving officials, their family members and kinsmen, as well as defrocked gentry (*fei shen*) and evil gentry (*lie jin*), all do the common people great harm. Continually, they expropriate farmlands and dwellings and seize wealth

> and property. They treat innocent people with contempt and violence, and hamper the collection of the national revenue. Local officials are afraid of them and do nothing. The little people have only bitterness as their compensation. As a result, the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. The evil habits of the Ming dynasty are still with us. What, then, must We do to eradicate them?
>
> Today, we are still in the first phases of unification, still in a time of military mobilization. The army must be supplied, and its supplies must come from the people. We would like nothing more than to reduce taxes to benefit the people but remain concerned about depriving the army. We would like nothing more than to collect sufficient supplies from the people but remain fearful of prolonging their hardship. What, then, must We do, to realize the twin benefits [of a well-provisioned army and an unvexed populace]?[46]

It was a breathtakingly admonitory welcome for the new *jinshi*, an uncanny mix of exhortation and indictment. Among this class sat Gu Yuxian, who believed himself capable of solving problems wherever he went. As seen from the palace, however, the gentry were the common element linking all China's problems together. They formed bureaucratic cliques and village gangs. They were local officials and local bullies. They did just as much damage in official Qing robes as they did as "defrocked" Ming-loyal gentry. There was no way to isolate the evils about which the emperor (or the regent) spoke, but they all came to mind at once when he looked out at the assembled candidates. The suspicion of the gentry so abundantly obvious in the aforementioned passage was inherited directly from the statists of the late Ming. As long as it persisted, and as long as the vanity of Confucian gentlemen like Gu Yuxian remained likewise so palpable, then the argument over sovereignty would continue.

For the duration of his regency, Dorgon consistently favored those officials who would remain responsive to his directives while remonstrating with him as seldom as possible (despite his early invitation for them to do so). He defended the ever-amenable Feng Quan from a blatantly partisan impeachment attempt back in 1645 and continued to sustain him through thick and thin. In the long term, however, people like Feng Quan, willing as they were to be useful tools of the Qing state, were not numerous enough to staff the entire bureaucracy. Over the 1640s, the acute need for talented officers, as well as Dorgon's preference to reduce his reliance on Manchu princes, meant that employing more and more southern Chinese was unavoidable. They began to show up much more frequently among the ranks of successful examination candidates, even at the palace level, where, despite

the aforementioned haranguing, Jiangnan scholars earned the bulk of the honors in 1647. These southern literati had a leader in Minister of Personnel Chen Mingxia (d. 1654), and they even partly revived the Restoration Society to serve as a patronage network. Was not Dorgon alarmed at the southern gentlemen's resurgence?[47]

Although he was on his guard, Dorgon refused to panic, because he held all the strings, and, once again, his "balancing" of various factions assured the ascendency of that particular faction most subservient to him. The influence of the Restoration Society was confined to the grass roots and did not in any way extend to the heights it had attained during the Ming. Chen Mingxia came in handy for neutralizing the princes, but he was simply outranked by Grand Secretary Feng Quan. The grand secretaries as a group, which also included Fan Wencheng and Hong Chengchou, were Dorgon's most reliable men. In 1648, they were entitled to wear pearl and jade ornaments on their clothing in order to show the special esteem with which they were regarded. On the occasion, they were cautioned only "not to monopolize power, as was done in the Ming." Sure enough, the next year, they obligingly embellished Dorgon's role in the dynastic chronicle they were editing, perhaps abrogating even their scholarly integrity as a means to disavow any intention of monopolizing power. Also significant, Dorgon resisted any motion for the grand secretaries to take up their customary roles as preceptors in daily lectures for the young emperor.[48]As it happened, Dorgon himself received a valedictory lecture from a novel source during what turned out to be his last military campaign. General Jiang Xiang had mutinied in Datong in early 1649, probably because he resented the appointment of the Manchu prince Ajige (also known as Prince Ying) as his overseer. Dorgon personally took to the saddle, besieged Datong, and implored Jiang Xiang to surrender. One of Jiang's replies, recorded in the Qing *Veritable Records* (which does not usually give the rebels' side of the story), made an interesting case for the moral high ground. Jiang claimed to be an early convert to the Qing cause and to have cheerfully complied with the haircutting order. Still, Jiang felt that "those above" had withheld their full confidence. Besides, "It's not just that I myself have been denied promotion and encouragement," Jiang wrote, perhaps a bit unconvincingly, "but also that the loyal and faithful people are in desperate jeopardy." Then Jiang broadened his focus:

> Each and every local official sent to serve here conducts himself in an unrestrained, contemptuous, and cruel manner. The people have had more than their fill of abuse at official hands. Recently, the troops of

> Prince Ying arrived, and taxation became at once even more pressing. The gentry (*shen shi*), as well as army personnel, are finding it unbearably hard, with the Prince's troops apparently ready at any time to go on a murderous rampage, if they are not provisioned.
>
> The common people of Datong are, like myself, the innocent ones. How can we be expected to do nothing but await death? I fear that there is no way, even for one as divinely intelligent as Your Excellency the Regent, to form a complete picture of our pain and suffering; but if, perchance, the officials could be made to appreciate Your Excellency's benign intentions, if they would only carry out Your Excellency's directives, reform themselves and calm the people, then wherever the writ of the state went, throughout Shanxi and Shaanxi, the embers of rebellion would be immediately extinguished.[49]

Of course, it was Jiang Xiang's life that was shortly to be extinguished (he was betrayed by one of his lieutenants), and his appeals to Dorgon's "benign intentions" were especially unmerited, for the regent was by then wholly devoted to the symbolic enhancement of his own majesty. He planned in late July 1650 to construct a new summer palace for escaping the heat of Beijing. Fully cognizant of the previous dynasty's palace construction projects and the resulting "great burden on the common people," Dorgon insisted that he was contemplating only "one small palace." He listed the additional funds in silver that were to be collected from each province, describing them as augmentations of existing levies (as opposed to a new levy, supposedly), and then he threatened with capital punishment any official who took an ounce of silver more than he himself was taking. "I'm above all anxious to avoid overburdening the common people and piling injury upon injury," he said. "I wish to lessen, not augment, the load that they bear." Perhaps weighed down by his own hypocrisy, Dorgon died on December 31, 1650, while on a hunting expedition.[50]

The empire Dorgon left behind was obviously far from settled. Aside from the persistence of Ming loyalists, Qing mutineers, roving banditry, fiscal insufficiency, and popular misery, China's greatest problem, perhaps, was arrogance, the unabated double-headed arrogance of its dynasts and its gentry. Each of the two persuasions continued to claim for itself, and to deny to the other, the greatest philosophical importance, as they struggled with and against each other to recreate the most favorable order. Now a tower of state supremacy had fallen, and the situation was pregnant with uncertainty and anticipation. Would China's troubles ever be remedied if there was still so much disagreement as to who should remedy them?

Chapter 2

The Shunzhi Emperor, 1651–1661

Grieving officials lined the road by which Dorgon's body was returned to Beijing on January 8, 1651. The Shunzhi emperor was not yet 13 years old, but there would be no second regency. As early as January 17, the young monarch ordered that "all the business of the country's governance be referred via memorial to Us," and some weeks later, on March 12, he undercut the whole notion of princely rule by anathematizing Dorgon posthumously and indicting a few other Manchu aristocrats for, among other things, hijacking imperial communications and ruling in the shadow of the throne. The pendulum of political fortune, swinging violently since the late Ming, thus continued to operate in the early Qing. Yet this 1651 oscillation, which seemed to be in intra-Manchu politics a shift toward direct imperial control, would prove in the Chinese context to be a confused lurch in the other direction, toward some form of gentlemanly rule. The sword of power that Shunzhi grasped so impatiently turned out to be double edged, and neither he nor the gentry-officials who also aspired to it were ever fully able to wield it effectively. Shunzhi's reign would end in considerable disappointment and frustration.[1]

The young emperor seemed almost to recognize that his declaration of majority was premature and that the crowning prerogative of personnel management would turn out to be especially daunting. In his January 17 edict, he admitted, "We are still young and thus unable to identify worthies (*xian*) among men," but then he quixotically requested that such men nonetheless be recommended to fill assorted vacancies. Clearly, he was inviting factional chaos, provoking legions of Chinese scholars to rise up and provide him with all the perspective on worthiness he would ever need. On April 7, acting ostensibly on

his own authority, he conducted an evaluation of bureaucratic personnel, singling out for dismissal Dorgon's old crony Feng Quan, who "lacked the substance of a statesman" and who "never disagreed once," as well as Feng's ally Li Ruolin. Actually, Shunzhi's impeachment of Feng and Li seems to have been framed by Chen Mingxia, who thereupon advanced into Feng's place, and the emperor would soon come to regret the loss of the agreeable Feng and the influence of the intriguing Chen. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Shunzhi had become the pawn of those he claimed to rule.[2]

Shunzhi's adolescent majority opened the door for a surge of gentlemanly influence in government, carried out by different individuals utilizing different modi operandi. Some of these plans of action were recycled from the Ming dynasty, and some were newer. Four distinguishable approaches seem to have been adopted. The first method entailed the rebuilding of comradely support through local literary societies, of which the most exemplary practitioner was Wu Weiye. The second strategy was to exploit a powerful court position, and this was the path taken by Chen Mingxia. The third option, explored by a rising star in the Censorate named Wei Yijie (1616–1686), involved the careful husbanding and application of moral power. The final mode of behavior was simply to be eminently serviceable, and Hong Chengchou continued to excel in this regard. These four plans of action, together with their respective actors, appeared on the stage more or less simultaneously in the early 1650s; for ease of narration, however, they will be discussed in this chapter one at a time.

Wu Weiye: Organizing from the Ground Up

Wu Weiye had first earned fame in the 1620s as one of the keenest talents in the complex federation of scholar-gentlemen known as the Restoration Society. When, despite the ascendency of the Restoration Society, the Ming fell in 1644, Wu first joined and then abandoned the doomed Hongguang regime in Nanjing, before spending the next five years as a reclusive poet. In 1650, as part of the revival of southern literary societies that took place in the last years of Dorgon's rule (discussed in Chapter 1), Wu journeyed from his hometown of Taicang (where the founders of the Ming Restoration Society had lived) to Jiaxing, in the northern part of Zhejiang, to organize the Great Society of the Ten Districts (apparently a reference to the ten home counties of the leading participants). He welcomed into this group new men, such as You Tong (1618–1704) and Xu Qianxue

(1631–1694), who had won their civil service credentials in the Qing, though You had been a Ming stipendiary student (*shengyuan*), signaling by this gesture a certain inclusiveness. Several hundred boatloads of people attended, and the meeting lasted for three days. Ominously, however, Wu's fellowship could not count as *all*-inclusive, because the renowned Ming survivors Gui Zhuang (1613–1673) and Gu Yanwu (1613–1682) formed a separate group, the Startled Reclusive Poets Society, in the same year.[3]

On the eve of the next lunar new year, a date corresponding to January 20, 1651, Wu claimed poetically to have "dreamed again of apricot blossoms," a metaphor for successful civil service candidates, and he also reflected symbolically on his "ten years living among the carts and horses of Changan," referring to an ancient capital and thus indirectly to his prior career in Ming Beijing. It makes a great deal of sense for Wu's ambition suddenly to have rekindled at this opportune time, with the commanding Dorgon dead and the young Shunzhi so vulnerable. Sometime during the year, moreover, Wu composed a preface for an edition of the Confucian Four Books annotated by the imperious Ming minister Zhang Juzheng. Zhang had been the bête noir of Wu's righteous predecessors in the earlier dynasty, and although grudging admiration for Zhang was not unknown, Wu's expressed esteem for him was rather remarkable and perhaps telling: Wu specifically praised Zhang for his tutelage of the young Wanli emperor, which Wu rated as superior to the pedagogy of the venerated Neo-Confucian philosopher Cheng Yi (1033–1107). Wu's rather unorthodox praise of Zhang Juzheng might plausibly be ascribed to simple envy, for, according to Wu, Zhang "worked hard for his emperor, who was only a beginner in the study of the classical works," and Wu might have pictured himself doing the same thing for the latter-day novice Shunzhi. The desire to educate rulers of all maturity levels was of course basic to the Confucian persuasion.[4]

It would be helpful at this point to consider Wu Weiye's late Ming background and his early Qing situation as guides to his subsequent behavior. One may first of all ask why, if Wu hoped to become an "apricot blossom" in Shunzhi's court, he did not simply pack his bags and head off to Beijing. The reason he did not proceed so directly is that it was uncommon—perhaps almost impossible—for officials who came of age in the late Ming to enter officialdom without a patronage network or comradely cohort. All the various cliques and parties that convulsed late Ming politics were organized for the purpose of assisting their members through the civil service

examination regimen and on through their bureaucratic careers. In many cases, furthermore, these political factions were organized ideologically so that their cohesion and expansion became nearly ends in themselves, eclipsing in importance their more prosaic, careerist functions. During the late Ming, it was the Donglin faction and the Restoration Society that had epitomized this type of righteous, ideological organization, while rival factions had tended to be composed of individuals who were put off by and even fearful of the former groups' righteousness and ideology.[5]

The process by which the Donglin faction and the Restoration Society had coalesced was known as *jiangxue*, meaning Neo-Confucian lecture and discussion. On one level, *jiangxue* can be viewed simply as a practical networking tool by which the leaders of the Donglin and Restoration Society groups marshaled their confederates and protégés. On a deeper level, however, *jiangxue* represented the civilizing force of the sagely Way itself, a power to be wielded not only to build an alliance of scholars but also to bring order to society and the world at large. Donglin Academy founder Gu Xiancheng wrote, "From childhood to adulthood to old age, a scholar will not pass one day without *jiangxue*. From the family to the village to the nation to all under Heaven, there will be no place without *jiangxue*. From the gentry (*jinshen*), no farmer, artisan, or merchant shall not receive *jiangxue*." The idea that Confucian gentlemen and not kings or emperors were in possession of the sagely Way—the magical potion to which Gu Xiancheng referred—was the founding principle of Neo-Confucianism and the cornerstone of the doctrine of gentry sovereignty. It had inspired two generations of Ming gentry to concentrate their civilizing powers, rise up in wave-like surges under the Donglin's or the Restoration Society's banners, and contest sovereignty with the Ming state. Wu Weiye himself left no doubt as to who held the initiative in these surges. Looking back on the success of Restoration Society members in the provincial examination of 1630, Wu wrote, "Some might say [that the state had] 'recruited' us gentlemen, but we great gentlemen had already risen en masse in the country. The ruler only discovered us by rifling through some old exam papers." Now greatness was again on the march, with Wu in the vanguard. He had already begun building his following, the Great Society of the Ten Districts, even while Dorgon was still alive, and now that Dorgon was gone, he planned to expand and consolidate it until it was ready to subdue the entire bureaucracy and the state with it. He would no more have sought office in the capital without his cultured fellowship

than a general would have attempted to capture an enemy fortress without his army.[6]

As for the special set of circumstances prevailing in the early Qing, they would make *jiangxue* more difficult and yet more essential. The most important was the opprobrium attached to "twice-serving ministers"—in other words, former Ming officials who became Qing officials. No matter how assiduously (or perfunctorily) they had served the previous dynasty, twice-serving officials forfeited much of their reputations by taking up with the new dynasty, falling under suspicion of careerism, opportunism, and a general lack of integrity. The modern scholar Bai Yijin, analyzing the psychology of such men in the transition era, reports that many of them developed strong feelings of guilt for donning Qing robes and gave vent to these feelings in a very understandable way: by ruminating, incessantly and ostentatiously, about the Ming. These expressions of Ming nostalgia on the part of Qing officials (or potential Qing officials, in Wu's case) served not only to assuage their own consciences but also to disarm their Ming-loyal brethren, by focusing attention on the shared pleasures and struggles of yesteryear. As such, Bai suggests, they could in many cases be fairly described as performance. Wu Weiye would become a gushing font of Ming nostalgia in the months and years ahead, and while none can definitively pronounce his feelings counterfeit, it remains very possible that his reminiscences were intended to camouflage his ambition, expressed poetically in 1651 and never alluded to again, as he advanced, circuitously but inexorably, toward Beijing. The recent biographer Sun Kekuan has diagnosed Wu Weiye as hopelessly oversensitive and cautious, an assessment that would certainly accommodate such calculating behavior. Moreover, the very act of communing with otherwise like-minded gentlemen tended to create a sense of class consciousness that helped to neutralize the issue of dynastic loyalty. "By cultivating an entourage," said one contemporary poet, "the gentleman (*shi*) reverts to form." The intersection of these realities yielded a very crooked line that nonetheless showed Wu Weiye the path ahead. While Ming nostalgia might have made it more difficult for a handful of die-hards to support Wu as he drifted ever closer to Beijing, it also provided him with much of the language he would need to build his fellowship, a fellowship that would, in turn, reaffirm the sovereignty of Neo-Confucian gentlemen through the process of *jiangxue* and thus make the whole question of Ming versus Qing an empty one.[7]

Accordingly, Wu spent the next few years enlarging and consolidating his comradely network through the process of lecturing, poetizing,

visiting, and receiving visitors, and he soon began to act as a champion for the entire gentry class. In 1651, he enlisted his friend Lu Yuanfu to write a few lines of commendation for Kunshan County Magistrate Deng Bingheng and his granting of tax waivers for drought relief. Through Lu, Wu claimed to speak for "all those among the gentry (*shidafu*) who feel that the magistrate's virtuous government should not pass unmentioned," and the role of gentlemanly policy critic, all the more fitting for being played through a surrogate, was evidently a very comfortable and natural one for him. In the next year, contrariwise, when Wu was recommended for official service by the governor of Jiangnan and Jiangxi, Ma Guozhu (d. 1664), he reported being literally sickened at the thought. He declined Ma's offer by pleading illness, an act that can be interpreted as a means to advertise his pure Ming spirit and thus augment the righteous community he had already presumed to represent.[8]

It was also for tactical reasons that Wu Weiye held his cards very close to his chest and refrained from enunciating, á la Gu Xiancheng, any great scheme of rallying the gentry through *jiangxue* or any other method. That he nonetheless harbored such a design in his heart is evident in how readily he responded to its articulation by another gentleman in a similar position, Qian Qianyi, the man who had surrendered Nanjing to the Manchus in 1645. It is from Qian's brush that we learn of the glorious project of uniting all the Jiangnan gentry under Wu Weiye's leadership. (Qian's position in the Qing bureaucracy perhaps disqualified him from doing the job himself.) After Wu and Qian met in Suzhou to discuss the resurgent literary societies, Qian asked Wu, in a letter sent in the summer of 1652, to help patch up the differences between two organizations that had recently been one, the Prudent Associators (*Shen jiao hui*) and the United Voice Society (*Tong sheng she*). Solidarity was essential, Qian wrote, because "the empire flourishes (*sheng*) when the elite gentlemen (*shi-junzi*) are united, and it declines when they remain divided into camps." Qian believed that the Jiangnan gentry were facing a historic opportunity. "Although today's literati (*wen ren*) lack the perfect philosophical unity of the ancients," he enthused, "the bright lights are, nevertheless, nearly all converged. The potential for flourishing (*sheng*) is as high as it's ever been since the days of Hongzhi, Zhengde, Jiajing, and Longqing." The latter were the four reigns of the Ming dynasty that preceded the bitter factional strife of its last decades. They seemed to evoke for Qian a golden age of gentlemanly harmony, now hopefully on the verge of reprise. "Jiangnan (*Wu*) is the best hope of the empire," Qian concluded, "and the Prudent Associators and United

Voice Society are the best hopes of Jiangnan." They also seemed to offer the best hopes for Wu Weiye.[9]

Absorbing Qian Qianyi's contagious fervor, Wu wasted no time embracing the leadership role Qian envisioned for him. Soon after receiving Qian's epistle, Wu wrote his own "Letter to the Gentlemen of the Assembled Societies of Songjiang," and its tone was palpably exhorting:

> The worthy one (*xian*) is liberal concerning the Way and keeps the public weal (*gong*) foremost in his heart. Never forget it. You should swear your allegiance as plainly as the bright sun, as did the feudal lords when they pledged their friendship on the blood of the Red Ox . . . We are united in spirit and equally fearless of death, renowned for our talent the world around. With so much in common, let's not stoop to ally against ourselves. Let us rather extend to each other our utmost sincerity and put aside all suspicion and doubt. From this day forward, with one heart, let us cease forever from idle quibbling. I, Wu Weiye, turn my eyes to face you, open my ears to hear you. What is your reply?[10]

It was a bold step forward, and Wu would spend a few tense months waiting to see if the local gentry fell in behind him. While he waited, during the autumn, Chen Mingxia wrote from the capital, inviting Wu to contribute a preface for his collected works. Exchanging prefaces was a common form of relationship building, and while it is impossible to know what Chen had in mind, it was probably no mere coincidence that he would soon (early in the next year) be raising a new call for Wu to enter Qing service. It seems likely that Chen was trying to recruit Wu—and, perhaps, Wu's burgeoning circle of friends—into his own faction in Beijing preparatory to Wu's expected arrival there. Wu did not immediately comply with Chen's request for a preface, perhaps out of a reluctance to show his cards too soon. He tried to remain focused on his local networking in Jiangnan, with Chen's overture remaining on the table.[11]

The response to Wu's venturesome call for unity came on March 31, 1653, when the Prudent Associators and United Voice Society convened on Tiger Hill in Suzhou for a spring purification ceremony and feast. The venue was doubly significant: Tiger Hill was where the Restoration Society used to meet at the end of the Ming, and it was also the scene of a 1647 reconciliation between sentimental adherents of the Ming and converts to the Qing. Participants arrived by the boatload, and Wu Weiye presided over the festivities, which

lasted for two days. Wu's leadership seemed to be vindicated, and it might have counted as a time of triumph, with Wu's reassembled cohort boldly facing the future under his command. Any expression of this anticipation, however, still needed to be concealed under layers of Ming longing, as the following poem, composed by Wu on the spot, reveals:

> Who yet lives among the palace ministers of old,
> Like Cao Pi and his confidantes, musing wistfully?
> With friends all gone, astonished at the passing of the years,
> Ye men of talent linger on, defying wind and waves.
> Though ten years past, our country's fall still haunts our history.
> All my new friends, from many towns, laugh at my white hair.
> They pass the cup, yet with each round, I grow more lost in thought.
> I spill a drop in sacrifice, the north wind at my face.[12]

As Wu Weiye surely foresaw, his position on center stage exposed him inevitably to criticism, despite the aforementioned humble tribute and many like it. In fact, disapprobation was immediately forthcoming. During the Tiger Hill proceedings, a young man deliberately provoked Wu by pointing out the mixed dynastic affiliations of the assembled luminaries, passing him a note saying, "Half are from the Qing; Half are from the Ming," and asking rhetorically if Wu could really count himself as "one dynasty's minister" in such an assembly. Of course, others who disapproved of Wu's actions could express their reproach simply by staying away, but one of them, a Wujiang native named Ye Fuxia, pointedly refused to join Wu's organization, and he outlined his rationale in a poem called "Answer to the Gentlemen of the Prudent Associators," a direct riposte to Wu's earlier "Letter to the Gentlemen of the Assembled Societies of Songjiang." In his criticism, Ye did more than simply question Wu's loyalty to the Ming. Wu's more basic fault, Ye claimed, was that he had succumbed to the temptation to build a political faction, and a faction permitted no other loyalty but to itself. "A gentleman (*junzi*) selecting his comrades might as well be selecting his lord (*jun*)," Ye warned, implying that Wu was being both politically careless and morally cavalier, for there was no virtue in numbers, only danger for the self and for the state. Ye boasted indiscreetly of his full head of hair before lodging his final indictment: "The determined man walks his path with every footstep sure; / Corrupt Confucians vie for fame in company impure." He seemed to be blaming Wu and others like him for indulging the factional ambitions that caused the fall of the Ming and

for learning nothing by the experience. Ye's position, it is important to emphasize, stood largely outside the dynastic paradigm and was instead based—as his remark about corrupt Confucians (*fu ru*) would seem to imply—on a deeper suspicion of gentlemanly associations and their threat to the state.[13]

Undeterred, Wu Weiye stayed on message. He spent most of the rest of the spring visiting Ming ruins in Nanjing, and while there, he paid a visit to Ma Guozhu, thanking him for his recent recommendation but declining it anew. That autumn, however, the motion to recruit Wu finally resulted in an official summons to service. Upon hearing of it, Wu again pleaded physical discomfort and feelings of worthlessness, but by now his increased exposure and fame ensured that he would be subjected to increased pressure, and it was probably time for him to put up or shut up. Many people in government, perhaps Ming survivors themselves, resented his sanctimonious Ming melancholy and grumbled that he should get off his high horse. Wu's parents, furthermore, feared trouble if he refused the summons, and several other officials simply thought it would be a good idea for Wu to join the government. Wu Weiye thereupon turned his face to the north wind and embraced his destiny. His elaborate efforts to build a local following had certainly not been in vain, for they had indeed resulted in the long-desired gathering of men of the gentry (*shi shen*) to see him off, though unavoidably there was some dissent as well. At a stage play in Wu's honor, one of the actors changed his character's name from Zhang to Li in order to avoid committing an impropriety against Zhang Lian, one of the guests, and the convivial Wu made light of this conscientious act, gesturing with his fan and calling out, "Well done!" Then, later in the play, a different character explained the need to avoid using the name Zhu, the name of the Ming royal family, and the sarcastic Zhang, gesturing with his fan, muttered, "Also well done." The other guests were most discomfited since Zhang was ribbing Wu for his betrayal of the Ming, but Wu himself took no offense.[14]

Wu's northward march to Beijing contained the same mixture of heroic and discordant notes as his Jiangnan sendoff. In Gaoyou Subprefecture, in smoldering Yangzhou Prefecture, Wu tried to rally the local people, intoning, "You who kept to your posts for so long / Remnant subjects, still suffering from wrong." With every utterance, Wu Weiye seemed to be promising, even as he joined the Qing bureaucracy, that he would be serving not the Qing but the Ming—or, more precisely, the gentry class that had come so close to realizing its sovereign ambitions during that earlier, glorious age. When he rhymed,

"I'll put my cap on in Changan, yet many have I known / Who with white hair are scattered now, friendless and alone," he identified his true constituency, his true compatriots, his true cause, and his true kingdom. Thus had it always been for gentlemen like him, rising in waves of righteous comradeship all the way to the capital; and the fact is, it mattered very little what dynasty reigned there or what nationality its emperors were. The massing of gentlemen through *jiangxue* had been every bit the insurgent act in the Ming that it was now in the Qing. Though Wu Weiye was able—perhaps bound—to disguise his 1653 advance on Beijing as a mission of Ming vengeance, it was in fact a repeat of his 1630s campaign with the Restoration Society, which had required no such pretext. Granted, the change of dynasty did introduce some complications, and Wu's triumphal march to Beijing was occasionally the target of heckling by the unreconstructed; but it is equally true that spoilsports would have rained on Wu's parade under any circumstances, even as they did in the 1630s. The problem was that marshaling the gentry through the process of philosophical or literary association was a strategy that had failed to yield irresistible majorities in Ming times and was at least as unlikely to do so in the Qing. The acceptance of the Neo-Confucian concept of the sovereign gentry was as incomplete as it always had been, even among the gentry themselves. In the Qing, as in the Ming, there would always be critics like Ye Fuxia, who saw nothing sublime in the machinations of "corrupt Confucians" and deemed them, rather, a treason against the state.[15]

Still, Wu Weiye had tried one more time to realize the Ming-era dream of assembling a grand congregation of the gentry at the local level and acting as its champion in Beijing. Simultaneously, Chen Mingxia, in the capital already, had been endeavoring to organize the gentry from there. The results of both men's efforts would become known at pretty much the same time.

Chen Mingxia: Organizing from the Top Down

Chen Mingxia hailed from Liyang, near Nanjing. He had been a Restoration Society affiliate and scored first in the palace examination of 1643, becoming as a result a Hanlin compiler (effectively, a top minister in waiting) in Beijing. When Li Zicheng captured Beijing, Chen attempted suicide but subsequently agreed under coercion to join Li's short-lived regime. Upon the overthrow of the latter, Chen found himself blacklisted by the Southern Ming (owing

to his factional alignment, his surrender to Li Zicheng, or both) and ended up submitting to the Qing. Chen Mingxia was thus a *thrice*-serving official.[16]

The Shunzhi emperor seems to have liked Chen Mingxia personally and enjoyed consulting with him, perhaps because doing so made him feel more like the acculturated Chinese emperor he wished to be. It also appeared to Shunzhi that Chen and other bureaucrats like him would prove more useful in their service to the government—and to him—than the young emperor's formidable rivals in the Manchu aristocracy, and thus their interests seemed to dovetail. On February 2, 1653, an associate of Chen Mingxia named Wei Xiangshu proposed reviving the Ming practice of the "great reckoning," the triennial evaluation of bureaucrats by their immediate superiors, controlled ultimately by officials in the capital. Wei Xiangshu framed the measure as one that would improve bureaucratic efficiency. "With our sagely government still young," Wei argued, "there is all the less reason to tolerate the sort of irresponsibility and passing blame to others that goes against Your Majesty's intention to seek officials' honest opinions and monitor officials' actual performance." It all sounded very promising to Shunzhi, and he approved the motion. In his rescript, he empowered the Ministry of Personnel and its Office of Scrutiny of Civil Appointments to notify him of any cases of "wanton pursuit of private gain or conspiracy." With this change, Manchu nobles were cut out of the loop, and Shunzhi had compelled all officialdom to inform on itself and report to him.[17]

Almost immediately, though, Shunzhi perceived that the reliability of the bureaucracy was far from assured and that Chen Mingxia was emerging as a big potential troublemaker. The emperor grew suspicious of Chen for tendering devious, perhaps biased, judicial advice in the beginning of 1653, during the trial of an influence-peddler named Li San. Chen seemed not to think that Li was a significant problem; it was only natural for someone so well connected to hold such sway over the bureaucracy. In Shunzhi's mind, of course, an official in awe of someone like Li San was insufficiently in awe of him and became effectively Li's man and not his. "The reason We keep bringing this up," Shunzhi explained, in the midst of prolonged bickering with Chen Mingxia, "is that We desire you, Our ministers (*chen*), to change your attitude. You must become *Our* eyes and ears." It was actually in the aftermath of the Li San case that Chen Mingxia was promoted to grand secretary (taking the place of someone implicated in the affair). The uneasy Shunzhi warned Chen, even upon his promotion, not to form factions with other officials.[18]

The warning was evidently unheeded, for Chen Mingxia was now in a position to review candidates' essays in the palace examination (the test, proctored by the emperor, of the successful graduates of the metropolitan [*jinshi*] exam), and rumor had it that Chen made the most of it. Chen was, after all, a Restoration Society veteran, and the members of that society had often used the examination process to favor their associates and build factions in Ming times. It was believed that he was biased toward those examinees with striking literary talent, as opposed to practical acumen, and these men often turned out to be southerners connected to him. Therefore, to reintroduce balance, Shunzhi used exactly the same method that Dorgon had used: he reactivated Feng Quan. Returning once more to official service on April 25, 1653, Feng was summoned to join Chen Mingxia, Hong Chengchou, and Shunzhi himself at a special session dedicated to grading examination essays. When Feng on this occasion suddenly began speculating about literarily endowed southerners versus administratively skilled northerners, he was implying, subtly yet pointedly, that he was on to Chen Mingxia's act. Shunzhi promoted Feng Quan to grand secretary on the spot.[19]

The modern historian Wang Chenglan has studied the physical placement of Chen's and Feng's social circles in Beijing. Chen Mingxia's group, consisting mostly of southerners, lived near the Baoguo Temple, also known as the Ciren Temple, outside the Xuanwu Gate in the outer city, where all Han officials generally had to live, the Manchus having taken over the inner city in 1644. Chen had, however, also received as a favor a house in the inner or imperial city, giving him additional access to inner court connections and thus enabling him to put in a good word for his southern friends seeking office or promotion. Rumors insinuating that Chen accepted bribes would seem to have been based on this exceptional residential arrangement and the influence it provided. (The contemporary observer Tan Qian [1594–1658] perhaps put the cart before the horse, believing that the house was built with dirty money in the first place.) Meanwhile, Feng Quan and other prominent northern Chinese officials also lived outside the Xuanwu Gate but tended to congregate at the old Chongxiao Temple, the better to ruminate on times past. Both northerners and southerners indulged heavily in the same sort of Ming nostalgia that preoccupied Wu Weiye, but the shared reminiscences actually served to divide them rather than unite them, because most of the northerners had belonged to the so-called eunuch (or Wei Zhongxian) faction in the old days, while the southerners were led by Donglin and Restoration Society men. Wang Chenglan opines that the disagreement

between the Northern Party (*bei dang*) and Southern Party (*nan dang*) in the early Qing was but a continuation of the bitter disharmony of the late Ming. Although Chen Mingxia was not above trying to cultivate Feng Quan and other leading northerners politically, he seems to have regarded them as hopelessly unwashed—as he put it, "fond of dropping words and phrases they cannot read." Feng Quan suggesting practical knowledge as an alternative to literary skill may have been intended as an answer to Chen's insufficiently concealed disdain, and Wang Chenglan suggests that Feng was consciously though clandestinely maneuvering to thwart Chen's influence.[20]

Chen Mingxia's poor appraisal of northerners' literary accomplishments was no mere snobbery, for Chen believed that a man's ability to express himself in letters was indistinguishable from the admirable moral sentiments he chose to express. Chen was a well-known critic of "eight-legged essays," the regulated form of expository writing that was used in the civil service examination. According to Chen, a good essay could only be written by one who had established a direct intellectual and moral sympathy with the ancient sages, meaning that his writing became a reflection of their thought. "The great challenge attendant to the production of good essays," Chen wrote, "is that the scholar must first seek in his heart what he wishes to express in words," and if he has done the right kind of seeking, "then his words will reflect the hearts, or the minds, of the Sages." Elaborating on this process elsewhere, Chen explained that "the scholar's writing depends for its success or failure upon his ability to cultivate a reverential attitude. If he grounds himself in reverence, then his attention becomes fixed. If his attention is fixed, then his spirit becomes settled. His attention and his spirit thus mutually conserving each other, they may then be sent out in the form of writing. By then, the scholar has entered into the Way of the Sages."[21]

Communing with the sages was obviously a worthy end in itself, not only a means to secure government office through the exam system. The more men who were capable of it, the greater the condition, not only of China's government, but also of Chinese civilization itself:

> Alas, the success or failure, the flourishing (*sheng*) or withering of an entire age, is evident in the essays written during that age; and yet some will still wonder, because essays are merely the means to examination success, why labor to perfect them? If all one wished to do was to dazzle one's peers with [fashionable essays], thus placing well on the civil service examination and securing high office, and thus bringing renown to his family and descendants, then yes, it would indeed be enough to

> care only about the exam per se. But saying that one wishes to dazzle one's peers is really another way of saying that he cares about them and their opinions, and he who cares for others is really a Sage incarnate. Furthermore, his desire to place well on the exam and attain high office really echoes what the current king (*shi wang*) expects of him; and to earn esteem for family and descendants is really to appeal to people's goodness. All three of these desires rely on the writing of essays for their fruition, but if one frantically pursues only the latest technique, he will neglect the true meaning of what he is doing. Would a true gentleman (*shi*) really approach the task of essay writing lightly and seek to capture through approximation what can only be mastered through the deepest seriousness?[22]

Chen Mingxia's notion that a gentleman in the Qing dynasty could write with the authority of the ancient sages was, ipso facto, a Neo-Confucian idea. Chen's rating of essay writers over the centuries resulted in a parallel version of the *dao tong*, the Neo-Confucian theory of the Succession to the Way, which narrated the transmittal of the way of the sage kings from kings to scholars and thence across a dark age to its devotees in the Song dynasty and after. In Chen's retelling, there were some notable luminaries in the benighted period, such as Han Yu (768–824) and Ouyang Xiu, and he also believed that a relative culmination of brilliance had occurred in the mid-Ming with the advent of his hero, Gui Youguang (1507–1571); but it was an important tenet of Chen's theory that the quality of writing declined again with the Wanli period, a trend confirmed by the chaotic politics of that time. While Chen's list of approved writers was nominally nonpartisan, including such anti-Donglin figures as Tang Binyin (1559–?), it still tended to favor the righteous element, as Chen wrote that Donglin founder Gu Xiancheng's essays were second only to Gui Youguang's in their faithfulness to the ancient form, their close approximation of the minds of the sages.[23]

It should be quite clear by now that essay writing was but another version of *jiangxue*, or lecture and discussion. They were two related methods by which latter-day gentlemen wielded the civilizing power of the ancient sage kings according to the doctrine of Neo-Confucianism. Chen Mingxia, though specializing in essays, actually had some words to say about *jiangxue* as well in this eulogy of the Ming philosopher and statesman Wang Shouren (also known as Wang Yangming [1472–1529]). "Many writers of the past," Chen wrote, "have emphasized Wang Yangming's official achievements and denigrated his *jiangxue*. I, on the other hand, have always believed Wang Yangming's *jiangxue*

to have been prerequisite to his official achievements, prerequisite even to his essays." As these words are scarcely needed to confirm, both examination essays and *jiangxue* were manifestations of the sages' moral power, to be exercised by gentlemen, outside the auspices of the state. Yet both also served as means by which the gentlemen could infiltrate the state and channel the sages' power through it. Chen Mingxia (and, as we have seen, Wu Weiye) viewed *jiangxue* as a "prerequisite to official achievements," and the examination essay was of course institutionally defined in the same way. "Examination essays," according to Chen, "are the means by which the gentleman (*shi*) makes of himself a ceremonial gift. In ancient times, for entering the presence of the sovereign (*jun*), propriety demanded a ceremonial gift. Today, in our country (*wo guojia*), the gentleman (*shi*) has only the civil service examination. It matters not how talented he may be; there is no other way for him. The gentleman (*junzi*) therefore, makes examination essays an object of great care."[24]

In Chen Mingxia's conception, the gentleman (*shi* or *junzi*) was neither a minister (*chen*) nor a tool or utensil (*qi*); he was a gift, tendered by himself, to the titular sovereign, on the condition that the latter recognize his sagehood. Chen's use of the term *jun* in this passage referred only to the *ancient* sovereign, and other choice phrases like "current king" (*shi wang*, in a previous excerpt) and "our country" helped him to denigrate the sovereignty of all rulers since the ancients and to sidestep the whole dynastic issue altogether. Obviously it was Chen Mingxia himself, as the connoisseur of the examination essay, who singlehandedly conferred sagehood on the gentlemen, whether the "current king" happened to be in the room or not. In short, Chen had tremendous power, both in his own imagination and in the Qing court, where he plainly thought nothing of usurping the prerogative of personnel selection from the barely literate Shunzhi and from uncouth northerners like Feng Quan. As the arbiter of sagehood, furthermore, Chen was in a stronger position than Wu Weiye, a mere aspirant to it, who had to court and flatter his constituency and always risked being found wanting. Working together, though, to bring about the gentlemanly convergence from opposite directions—Wu pushing, Chen pulling—the long dreamed-of "flourishing" seemed to be at hand.

Alas, however, it was not to be, for Chen was playing the same kind of hopeful but losing game that Wu was. In neither instance was there a unanimity of Neo-Confucian enthusiasm sufficient to clothe a naked power play in sacred scholars' robes. In the case of Chen Mingxia, the agnostics like Feng Quan and the other northerners were

huddled at the Chongxiao Temple, watching his every move, and the emperor himself was getting tired of him. As it turned out, it was Feng Quan who sabotaged the grand alliance between Chen and Wu Weiye, even before the latter finally arrived in Beijing in the first days of 1654. Although Chen Mingxia had first moved for Wu's recall, by the time the order was drafted, it appeared over Feng Quan's signature. This seemingly insignificant detail made it harder for anyone to keep pretending that Wu was gracing Beijing as Restoration Society member, Ming avenger, gentry champion, and Chen's honored guest, which made it harder to ignore the fact that Wu was abjectly reporting for duty at the official request of a notorious Qing collaborator and former adherent of the eunuch party. Although Wu did belatedly carry out the ritual of writing a preface for Chen's collected works, the spell was broken. He had been brought to serve the state on its terms rather than to save it on the gentry's terms, and whatever moral authority he may yet have possessed was entirely forfeited. Shunted off to serve as a court compiler, he was effectively co-opted by the Qing state. As a gentleman, Wu Weiye was a lame duck.[25]

Chen Mingxia was a dead duck. In April 1654, his indiscreet complaint about Manchu clothing and hair regulations might have been the straw that broke the camel's back, but the fact is that he simply had too many enemies, men who, like their late Ming antecedents, deeply distrusted his Neo-Confucian pretensions. The fatal indictment came via Ning Wanwo (d. 1665), who, like Hong Chengchou, was a pre-1644 Ming captive. More important, Ning was an associate of Feng Quan, long eying Chen warily from across the aisle. It was to Ning that Chen had addressed his desire to revive Ming clothing and hair customs, perhaps as a means to coax Ning over to his side, but Ning instead denounced Chen for his crimes, which went far beyond "despising our country's shaved hair and denigrating our country's robes and caps." In a general way, Ning charged, Chen had "incited the Ming gentry (*Ming shen*) by calling together a Southern Party (*nan dang*)." Significantly equating the gentry, the Ming, and the south, Ning viewed his opponents not grandly, as they viewed themselves—as a league of world-saving gentlemen—but crudely, as a detestable faction of influence peddlers, shakedown artists, and local bullies. Once again, a gentlemanly crusade had been thwarted by those who didn't believe in its magic. Chen Mingxia defended himself glibly at his trial, was found guilty, and was strangled to death on April 27.[26]

With the shaming of Wu Weiye and the execution of Chen Mingxia ended the last mass surge of the "Ming gentry," so named for

its behavior—its propensity for philosophical crusade—rather than its chronological or political placement. Its remnants lingered for a time at the local level and would have to be finished off later. In the meantime, the Qing gentry, with ideas just as grandiose but a shade more conciliatory, was taking shape.

Wei Yijie: Hints of a Negotiated Sovereignty

Wei Yijie was a northerner and a top degree holder (*jinshi*) of 1646. He was thus a Qing man, with no significant local constituency or patronage network, whose chief arena of activity was the central government (specifically, the Censorate). Although he may have lacked some of the bona fides of gentry status that mattered more in the Ming, he actually exalted the gentlemen every bit as much as his Ming forebears. In fact, his standing slightly outside the Ming gentry milieu made his ennobling of the gentry rather an abstract exercise, and as an abstraction, it actually became even more intense and pure. After all, Wei could make a stronger case for gentlemanly holiness without having to attend to the sordid details of gentry alliance building that had so fatally compromised the moral pretentions of Wu Weiye, Chen Mingxia, and their earlier Ming predecessors.[27]

Indeed, one of the first times Wei hung a halo on the gentry, he was actually eulogizing a group to which he could not possibly have belonged: the Ming martyrs. The importance of the issue of Ming martyrdom to the local gentry was apparent in Gu Yuxian's magistracy of Qiantang, covered in Chapter 2. In August 1652, the issue went national when Shunzhi was persuaded to bestow honors upon Ming loyalists who had died at the hands of Li Zicheng. Wei Yijie was one of the chief persuaders. In a brief memorial, Wei opined that, in prosperous times, virtuous ministers (*liang chen*) might manage to record various achievements, but in lawless times, heroic gentlemen (*lie shi*) grow weary with a sense of futility. Many of them then elect to "cut their throats and soak their robes with their blood, to requite the grace they have received, to burn their bodies and drown their families, in order to repay the state (*bao guo*)." Wei's vivid images of loyalty might appear at first glance to have heralded a new trend of gentlemanly devotion to the state, and one ponders if the late Dorgon would have been impressed. Probably, however, he would not have been, for the loyalty Wei touted was purely theoretical, not even mentioning the Qing dynasty per se. Furthermore, in full accord with Dorgon's past skepticism (and, perhaps, Shunzhi's

own growing skepticism), Wei's "loyalty" only served to glorify the righteous gentlemen as a class. In his zeal, Wei lost control of his metaphors: "The gentlemen (*shi*) are like the grass that stands inflexible despite the wind. Their true hearts are manifest in later ages, by which time their reputations tower like trees, a forest of humaneness and righteousness. They are like the famed whetstone in the Yellow River in Henan, unmoved by the torrent. Magnanimous and accommodating, they do not insist that *all* men embody the righteous essence of Heaven and Earth. They do not require *all* men to compete with the sun and the moon for brilliance."

Wei's remark about the gentlemen being like the unbending grass in spite of the wind was a sly modification of the Confucian trope about how the gentleman was like the wind and the common people like the grass, the full lesson being that the gentleman never sways, though others are swayed by him. He went on to inform Shunzhi that no founding emperor had ever failed to honor loyalist holdouts, even those who had resisted the founding emperor himself. As an example, Wei cited the case of Zhu Yuanzhang commemorating the bravery of one of his own enemies, Yu Que (1302–1357), who had died resisting the establishment of Zhu's own Ming dynasty. With this last point, it should be noted, Wei had subtly broadened the scope of Shunzhi's policy, for the emperor had intended only to acknowledge the righteousness of those who had died for the Ming in defiance of Li Zicheng, not those who had held out (and continued to hold out) for the Ming in defiance of the Qing. We can safely conclude that Wei's and others' invocations of loyalty would have given Shunzhi little confidence that the luminous genies of the gentlemanly class, competing as they did with the sun and moon for brilliance, had been put safely back in the state's bottle.[28]

Sure enough, Wei Yijie was a devout Neo-Confucian, who could almost be classed as a theologian because of how minutely he dealt in his writings with the subject of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. He took special pains to trace the Succession to the Way (*dao tong*), much as Chen Mingxia had discerned its transmission in essay writing. Curiously, Wei outlined not one but two chains of transmission. The first, noncontroversial version showed the knowledge of the Way passing from the sage kings to the Duke of Zhou, to Confucius and Mencius, and then across the dark age to the Song Neo-Confucians, after which it was again lost, but Wei also offered a second, supplemental line of transmission that included the Han dynasty Confucian Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE) and more recent personages, even including Donglin leader Gu Xiancheng. Wei's Neo-Confucianism certainly

provided the theoretical framework for the claim of gentlemanly sovereignty—indeed, the gentlemen's claim to celestial gravity—implied in his memorial about Ming martyrs, and in this respect, it requires no stretch to place Wei in the same category as Donglin firebrand Gu Xiancheng or contemporary insurgents such as Wu Weiye and Chen Mingxia.[29]

Although Wei Yijie claimed the same powers as these other gentlemen, he was at the same time offering to wield them in a novel way—novel for the Ming-Qing transition, at least. Wei proposed to shine the glowing light he believed to emanate from the gentry class upon the emperor. It was actually a little before his aforementioned panegyric on Ming martyrs that Wei took up the issue of Shunzhi's Confucian education in the following memorial, shown here in its entirety:

> I presume to have observed in my studies that since ancient times, there has been no worthy, sagely sovereign who has not assiduously esteemed learning. So did the Duke of Zhou repeatedly urge King Cheng, so did Fu Shui repeatedly urge Wu Ding, with the result that, punishments being unnecessary and quiet reverence prevailing, the Shang and Zhou kingdoms lasted, rock-solid, for hundreds of years.
>
> Ever since, when new states have been born, though they may be founded by conquerors on horseback, the conquerors themselves, in all their raw power, must sooner or later climb down from the dusty saddle and begin talking instead of the *Book of Poetry* and *Book of Documents*. From the time they settle down to rule, they become accomplished in study. From this it can be seen: the lord (*jun*) being pure and luminous in his morality and strong and sturdy in his body is truly the foundation of ten thousand generations of long peace and lasing rule.
>
> Today, august Heaven grieves that the people remain troubled by war. Your Majesty, favored of Heaven, should unloose a moral force to sweep away evil, a force extending far and wide, reaching all of humanity. I daresay the court officials, though bowing their heads with the utmost reverence, nonetheless cast furtive glances upward at Your Majesty's countenance, and, seeking to anticipate Your Majesty's pleasure, collect taxes far beyond their quotas, saying it is all for the cause of peace and for the Son of Heaven. And, while 'reforms' of this kind have been proceeding all year, I have yet to hear it proposed that Your Majesty meet with top ministers to discuss and inquire about learning (*jiangxue*). I am afraid, in fact, that with the realm finally beginning this year to prosper, Your Majesty might give way to sensual desires, and as these indulgences increase, Your Majesty's intelligence may wane.
>
> Not even a sage with miraculous intelligence and wisdom can be appreciated, much less cultivated, by ignorant, lowly, inferior officials.

> If, however, Your Majesty is diligent in study while still young, then You will acquire all the radiance and vigor of the Ancients. Great efforts will be requited five-fold with great rewards. In the past, whenever the various ministers raised the subject of Your Majesty's lessons, it was always said to be too early to begin them. Now, Your Majesty has been on the throne for more than five years, and the entirety of officialdom regrets the delay. The matter can no longer be put off. Moreover, the Hanlin scholars close to the throne, unanimous in their concern for Your Majesty, as well as the great literati of our day, all welcome it. Brother ministers, aged and gray, all desire to make their sovereign (*jun*) a Yao or Shun. Facing the sun like its namesake flowers, with loyalty, sincerity, and faithfulness, we beg Your Majesty, in turn, to look upward and appreciate the gravity of having received the Mandate, and then to look downward with compassion at us your subjects (*chen min*), our thoughts full of adoration and respect. Please summon your top ministers and with them fix a schedule for the lectures. Forsooth, it will have the excellent effect of making the dynasty last forever.[30]

Indeed, this memorial on court lectures was packed with at least as much arrogance as Wei's discourse on Ming martyrs and loyalty. Shunzhi undoubtedly found Wei's concern with his personal life meddlesome, his indifference to fiscal exigencies cavalier, and his reference to the Manchus' frontier origins rather insulting, and the aggregate implication of these affronts was that Shunzhi was a tabula rasa, or even a barbarian, whose Confucian scholars were required to shine the "radiance and vigor of the Ancients" upon his empty soul. Wei's petition to civilize him was but one part of the deluge of condescension that rained upon the young emperor upon the death of Dorgon, as many Confucian gentlemen, including both Wu Weiye and Chen Mingxia, as we have seen, sought to realize the dream of an imperial preceptorship. Joining Wei Yijie in this chorus was an official named Zhu Yunxian who memorialized, "The governance of the empire comes from the ruler's virtue, but the ruler's achievement of virtue comes from his study sessions (*jing yan*)." Another scholar-official, Cao Benrong, wrote, "I propose to dedicate myself to learning. Learning honors my pure and simple efforts and is thus its own reward. Moreover, if I should find myself able to extend learning to my ruler (*jun*), so as to make him a Yao or Shun, then all of the hunger, cold, and trouble I encounter will be worth it." Zhu's and Cao's phrases speak volumes about where the Confucian scholars supposed civilization, legitimacy, and (as we would argue) sovereignty to originate. They originated, of course, with the scholar-gentry themselves, though they could be "extended" to the ruler, ideally through the

study sessions many of them now advocated, making him a sage like Yao or Shun. To Shunzhi, determined to rule on his own despite his inexperience, it could only have been a bunch of bewildering hokum. Couldn't he be a Yao or Shun all by himself, without anyone *making* him one?[31]

Had he known better, Shunzhi should have counted his blessings that he figured in his ministers' plans at all. He was unable to see, through the chauvinism and condescension, that Wei Yijie and the others were conceding to the emperor some role, albeit a passive one, in the civilizing enterprise. It was just this small concession that distinguished Wei Yijie's doctrine from that of late Ming predecessors and survivors. The key to the puzzle is the term *jiangxue*, or Neo-Confucian lecture and discussion, in which Wei Yijie begged Shunzhi to participate, together with his top ministers. The title of Wei's memorial, in fact, was "Reverence *Jiangxue* in order to Enlarge the Holy Virtue." In late Ming times, and in the later writings of Wu Weiye, Chen Mingxia, and others, *jiangxue* had been the exclusive province of gentleman scholars and was entirely off limits to emperors. (In one interesting exception that proves the rule, Restoration Society founder Zhang Pu [1602–1641] seemed to grant some role in *jiangxue* to the Chongzhen emperor when he said, "A new Son of Heaven is on the throne who will personally engage in *jiangxue* in the imperial lecture hall and thereby transform our people." But he snatched back this transformative power in the next sentences: "Those born during these times all desire to render a small particle of assistance in this process, to encourage a little respect for the received classics, to refute vulgar doctrines, and to create brilliant written works to surpass those of the Ancients. It rests with my faction [*wu dang*] to accomplish these tasks.") It is indeed practically impossible to insert the emperor anywhere into Gu Xiancheng's vision of gentry leadership through *jiangxue* ("From the gentry [*jinshen*], no farmer, artisan, or merchant shall not receive *jiangxue*"), and again, most Ming writers equated *jiangxue* (or skill in composition, per Chen Mingxia) with the sagely Way, supposed by Neo-Confucians to be transmitted from scholars to scholars and not from scholars to kings. The novelty of Wei's position, that scholars could potentially transmit the Way back to the ruler, was in fact implied in his Neo-Confucian theory, which suggested that scholarly trusteeship of Confucian civilization was at best a necessary evil in the face of unreceptive or hostile government. He blamed Legalist regimes such as the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) for alienating the "men of the gentry" (*jinshen zhi shi*, a fascinatingly anachronistic usage), and he

eulogized Gu Xiancheng and his comrades as *junzi*, or gentlemen, by virtue of their being frustrated ministers, victims of "injustice of a sort never known before" (not since the Qin dynasty, anyway) who were forced to take up *jiangxue* at home as a last resort. Wei's admiration of the Han Confucianist Dong Zhongshu may have been grounded on Dong's willingness to exalt the emperor provided the latter recognize Confucian truths. Wei Yijie was, after all, making a similar offer, and significantly, he offered to call himself a simple subject (*chen min*). While he certainly presumed enough to focus his energies on civilizing his sovereign (*jun*), he did not presume so much as to endeavor to civilize the people without the emperor's help. He was conferring just as much recognition upon the emperor as Confucian tradition allowed, admitting that the new dynasty, at least after Dorgon was gone, was a power to be reckoned with, a power that he was willing to help become sagely.[32]

Shunzhi, however, was reluctant to accept that kind of help. As long as he could, he fended off Wei's and the others' petitions to begin his studies, at one point using the weak excuse that the palace lecture hall had fallen into disrepair. He was simply too put off by the Confucians' condescension to appreciate their invitation to rejoin the civilizing enterprise as the concession—and the opportunity—that it was. When Shunzhi's lecture and study sessions (*jing yan*) finally began in the fall of 1655, it was clear that he had only been dragged into them. He was unable or unwilling to use them as a forum for reinventing himself as an enlightened monarch, and he was never recognized as one. There would be no reconciliation between state and gentry along these lines in the 1650s, and mutual frustration continued.[33]

Hong Chengchou: Sage or Servant?

The emperor's disinclination to be civilized as Wei Yijie suggested should not be taken to mean that he conceived of government as a one-man show. On the contrary, even as he resisted the imposition of the lectures, Shunzhi continued to consult closely with old Hong Chengchou and clearly held him in great esteem. Shunzhi even went so far as to give Hong the nickname "Mencius," which was terribly ironic considering how many would-be Menciuses, like Wei Yijie, were lined up so impatiently outside Shunzhi's door. Hong earned Shunzhi's respect by recognizing Shunzhi's majesty, at one point calling the emperor the "master of gods and men," a compliment Shunzhi returned by saying that Hong "had the ability to administer the universe."[34]

Wei Yijie's cohorts hoped to compel Shunzhi's respect by dazzling him with their own majesty, which would then flow through the emperor and enable him to order the universe on their behalf. The different statesmen imagined the electrical current of sovereignty to flow in different directions. Hong Chengchou, of course, was a twice-serving minister: he had won for the literati class no gleaming aura of Ming martyrdom that could be reflected enlighteningly upon the prince. Instead, he served the Qing patently on the latter's terms, a tool, not a gentleman, and certainly not a "Mencius." Having come, by such disreputable means, directly to the position of influence that the Confucian gentlemen so fervently envied, Hong Chengchou remained the perennial target of cordial scorn. It was at this time that Gui Zhaung composed his six "Odes to the Dog," excoriating Hong Chengchou. Plainly, the precise mode of state-gentry rapprochement remained a subject of bitter dispute: Should the gentleman enlighten the young monarch like the sun from on high or wait on his master like a hound at his heels? In late 1653, Hong the running dog was again dispatched to the front, this time to Southwest China, where he would spend the rest of the decade orchestrating the campaigns that would ultimately exterminate the Southern Ming, although final victory came under the command of Wu Sangui, shortly after Hong's worsening eyesight forced him at last to retire. The Shunzhi emperor must have been very lonely without him. Sometime after 1657, he was alleged to have climbed to the top of Ming emperor Chongzhen's tomb, wailing, "Big brother, big brother! We are both the same: rulers without ministers!"[35]

It is worthwhile to pause and consider what Shunzhi could have meant by such a despairing complaint. Obviously, he could not have been speaking literally, for the Qing duty roster (or for that matter Chongzhen's Ming duty roster) would have listed thousands of ministers and officials serving in a bureaucracy that since 221 BCE was the envy of every polity in the world. To all appearances, Shunzhi commanded a legion of ministers and officials all assiduously dedicated to carrying out his policy. However, the appearances were deceptive. For years, Shunzhi had watched the maneuverings of Wu Weiye and Chen Mingxia, had endured the condescension of Wei Yijie, and now regretted the absence of Hong Chengchou, whose usefulness contrasted so sharply with the self-importance of the others. Shunzhi evidently decided that, with the notable exception of Hong, very few of his supposed ministers were dedicated at all to carrying out his policy, and thus, since none of his ministers was behaving like one, none was worthy of the name. In fact, nominal officials though they

were, more often than not, they identified themselves differently, as gentlemen (*junzi*) or gentry (*shi*, *shidafu*, etc.), and they were clearly working only for themselves. Even Wei Yijie, who at least called himself a minister (*chen*), only imagined Shunzhi to be an empty conduit through which the other so-called ministers' civilizing powers would flow. It is no wonder that Shunzhi felt so forlorn and that he identified with the similarly forsaken Chongzhen.

Shunzhi's mortifying realization, that the very people he considered to be loyal ministers often considered themselves to be noble gentlemen, serves as an important reminder about the indeterminate nature of Chinese historical actors, and it also provides important evidence of the struggle for sovereignty that forms the subject of this book. References to ministers or subjects usually assumed a philosophy of the sovereignty of the state, and references to gentlemen or gentry usually presupposed an alternate philosophy, in which sovereignty was wielded by these personages themselves. Again, it was not that there were separate classes of ministers and gentlemen; it was rather that individuals took one of these names, or used one of these names to describe others, according to where they believed sovereignty to lie. This renewed caution about nomenclature, that it shifted with one's conception of sovereignty, is essential to an understanding of the following account of the situation of the Chinese countryside in the 1650s, when it seemed on the surface that there were two classes of people in opposition, "officials" and "gentry," when in reality there was only one class of people with two opposing ideas as to how it should behave.

Identifying the Villains of the Countryside: "Corrupt Officials" or "Powerful Gentry"?

In official documents of the 1650s, the words for gentry tended to be used in a laudatory fashion if the individuals in question were engaged in behavior that was universally regarded as salutary or at least sympathetic. When gentry helped defend city walls during bandit attacks, when they made donations to defray military expenses, or even if they were the victims of banditry, they were treated in the documentary record as personages of special importance, and they were usually noted as *shen*, *xiangshen*, *shenjin*, or *shimin*. Some nuance was possible, with partisans of the gentry stressing their nearly magical leadership qualities (e.g., their calming effect on the militia, as they defended the Huizhou prefectural seat) and partisans of the state

writing about them more clinically, but in these cases, touching on the general stability of the realm, the interests of state and gentry were nearly identical, and thus there was little reason for the gentry to have been disparaged by anyone.[36]

A parallel logic applied to local elites who were actively engaged in the overthrow of the dynasty. These traitors continued to be called *feishen*, meaning defrocked gentry. A few defrocked gentry who had survived previous Ming loyalist campaigns remained at large throughout the 1650s, and a new crop of them appeared at the end of the decade, when the merchant prince Zheng Chenggong (also known as Coxinga [1624–1662]) invaded the Jiangnan region and attracted a number of local notables to his standard. As for the defrocked gentry, although the statists probably execrated them more than their Qing-loyal cousins, the latter for the most part kept their distance, and thus there was little controversy surrounding the term *feishen*. Incidentally, gentry who happened to be serving officials at the time they defected to Zheng Chenggong were said to be "disgraced" (*shi shen*), implying a loss of integrity and status similar to the defrocked gentry's.[37]

Absent common cause joining state and gentry, however, the terminology pertaining to the various elites in the countryside became much more subjective and problematic. Usually the divisive issue was money, for sitting officials were required to collect taxes, even from fellow gentry, in their districts, and sometimes, they did it too well. In 1651, a county magistrate named Sun Erling was accused of extorting over 1400 taels of silver from students (*qing jin*) and higher gentry (*xiangshen*) in his unnamed jurisdiction. For his zeal in meeting his tax quota, Sun was labeled a "corrupt magistrate" (*lan ling*). Later, in 1655, a magistrate somewhere in Shandong named Ma Chengrui was impeached for a paradoxical combination of incompetence and overly efficient taxation, his indictment alleging "muddle-headedness, arbitrary ruling in lawsuits, incompetence, and over-collecting 260 taels' worth of rice." Apparently, Ma lost control of his underlings, who, in the process of their procurements, beat people to death and, "forgetting taboo, chagrinned and insulted the gentry (*shenjin*), creating disaffection."[38]

The use of the word "corrupt" in both these cases is extremely interesting. While it is true that magistrates Sun and Ma were accused of keeping much of what they had extracted or sharing it with their cronies rather than entering it into the state's treasury, it is also true that this sort of peculation or "squeeze" was more common than not, given the meager operating expenses allowed to local officials.

It could not have been damning in itself. As for the magistrates' use of violence to motivate taxpayers, it was not dissimilar to the methods used unapologetically by the gentry to collect rent from tenants. The magistrates were considered corrupt because of their unnatural attacks on other gentry, their own kind. They were traitors to the gentry cause because they had forgotten their roots and had become tools of the state. Moreover, they had perpetrated a serious indiscretion by implying through their actions that the gentry were recalcitrant hoarders of wealth in the countryside rather than the natural leaders of the people there. Qing gentry resented the implication every bit as much as their Ming predecessors (if they weren't in fact the same people), because it was based in truth.[39]

The more the Qing state sought the elusive prize of fiscal balance in the 1650s, the more it came into conflict with the gentry over its accumulated wealth. As a response, the gentry party launched unceasing accusations against "corrupt officials," outraged, defensive, and preemptive. The *Veritable Records* for the Shunzhi reign are chock full of them. In the autumn of 1660, Fengyang governor Lin Qilong (like Wei Yijie, a northerner and a *jinshi* of 1646) alleged that "corrupt officials" (*tan guan*) and their rapacious clerks and runners were harming the people and leading to shortages of military supplies simultaneously. Lin's memorial echoed the complaints that had been directed not too long ago at the Wanli emperor of the Ming, who had tried to fill budgetary shortfalls by dispatching "mine tax eunuchs" into the countryside, where they did indeed find plenty of silver but ended up keeping most of it themselves. The point was that an emperor's preoccupation with the budget sent the wrong signals to miseducated (gentry) officials and their uneducated lackeys, inciting them to plunder the populace, with no benefit to the treasury. The reference to fiscal balance was manipulative and disrespectful, dangling the promise of more revenue to disabuse Shunzhi of his preoccupation with revenue, as though he could comprehend no other appeal. The Ministry of Punishments largely endorsed Lin's reasoning, alluding to the negative effect of official corruption on the military budget, and Shunzhi, in turn, endorsed the Ministry's endorsement, calling for corrupt officials to be punished. Confirming Lin's poor opinion of him, Shunzhi appended a special, apparently fruitless, directive that the corrupt officials' ill-gotten loot be remitted to the state's coffers.[40]

Even as Lin Qilong and many more like him addressed (or obscured) the issue of fiscal insufficiency by pointing their frantic fingers at corrupt officials, others were building a case specifically against

the gentry. Sometime after 1655, a minor official in the Ministry of Revenue named Hu Shenzhong (whose background is unknown) argued in a memorial that the gentry were exploiting their legal exemption from taxes derived from manual labor in order to engage in more general tax dodging (the tax system was part land tax and part service levy, gentry being exempt from the latter, according to a theoretically fixed schedule). As an example, he cited the case of Sun Yihuan, a gentleman (*shenjin*) of Xing County in central Shanxi Province who extended his so-called *youmian* tax exemption to lands not formally covered by it, resulting in a revenue loss of 398 *shi* (stone) of grain. Hu named a few other local instances in which land was hidden fraudulently under the gentry's tax shelters before concluding that the problem was an empire-wide one. "Powerful gentry (*shi hao shenjin*) or other kinds of bullies rely on their privileges to act recklessly. Civilians dare not report, and officials dare not investigate, their abuses." Hu alluded ominously to rising military budgets before admonishing, "Those of the upper and lower gentry (*shenjin* and *shimin*) would do well to reflect on His Majesty's benevolent and nurturing intentions and to remember that if one [Chinese] acre of land is planted, one acre's worth of taxes must be paid."[41]

A 1660 memorial by Jiangnan regional inspector Ma Tengsheng (another man of obscure origin) emphasized how inflated or fictitious claims of *youmian* exemptions on the part of "gentry (*shenjin*) or rich civilian households" were hurting poor people by leaving them liable for the bulk of the various districts' service levy quotas. "Those with land escape their obligations, and those without have to take up the slack." In his reiteration of the problem of the tax burden's "unevenness" and his urging that *youmian* privileges be regulated more strictly, Ma referred to "degenerate customs prevailing since Ming times" still uncorrected in the Qing. Actually, even before Ma's writing, a solution to the problem of gentry tax dodging slowly began taking shape, starting in Jiading County and soon to be applied to all of Jiangnan. This "Tax Clearance Case" (*zou xiao an*) will be discussed in Chapter 3, but it is interesting to observe here that whereas those inveighing against corrupt officials expressed concern with budget shortages, those indicting tax-dodging gentry expressed concern with the plight of the common people. The argument between the partisans of state and gentry was not without rhetorical strategy.[42]

In order to turn the argument fully against the gentry, high-ranking Manchus may have been required to tip the scale, if only to bolster the skepticism toward the gentry that was entertained by many Han statists. In 1656, Manchu minister of punishments Tuhai (d. 1681)

forwarded to the throne a list of charges compiled by two Han officials concerning an apparently awful man named Zhao Yu who lived in Tangshan County, Shunde Prefecture, in the Northern Metropolitan Region (around Beijing). Zhao was termed a *feishen*, or defrocked gentry, for having engaged in anti-Manchu activity in the shadow of the capital in 1644. Zhao had called himself the "field marshal of the heavenly army" and had plundered grain stores and courier stations with the assistance of his brothers and sons. After two of the latter were killed, though, Zhao and the rest of his family faded back into the population and were never dealt with by the authorities. Afterward, in 1654, Zhao adopted a son, whom he claimed to be the third crown prince of the Chongzhen emperor, somehow eluding punishment for this offense as well. It should be noted in both these cases that Zhao Yu created his own "Ming loyalism." He did not become suddenly restive at the approach of an actual Ming prince or army and was plenty disruptive on his own.

Zhao Yu's subsequent crimes were committed under the cover of peace, not war, and the allegations read as follows:

- Zhao harbored common outlaws among his housemen or henchmen, including several who on one occasion roughed up a travelling cloth merchant, relieving him of his property.
- Zhao occupied farmland reserved for the military and paid no taxes on the produce. When local officials questioned him about it, he set his housemen upon them. The housemen made spurious counteraccusations against the local officials and kidnapped and beat the father of one of them, until a settlement of 100 taels and two oxen was paid.
- Zhao failed to remit taxes on his own land. When pressed by the precinct head, a man named Chen Denggao, he led armed henchmen into town, where they murdered Chen's son.
- Zhao expropriated 120 *qing* (Chinese hectares) of farmland in Tangshan County and withheld the more than 300 taels of tax payments attendant thereto.
- Zhao sent henchmen onto Manchu enclosures, where they divided territory among themselves and began collecting rent. Some 842 *qing* of land and 6,730 taels of silver were involved.
- Zhao coerced another landowner named Wang Fengxian into commending his land to him so as to enjoy the tax shelter Zhao was granted as a member of the gentry. For this favor, Wang agreed, under detention and beating, to deliver up 200 taels of silver and two horses, and Zhao took over five buildings belonging to Wang.
- Zhao initiated a false lawsuit against two men surnamed Zhang. His henchmen tied the Zhangs up, broke their legs, and force-fed them dog dung. The Zhangs coughed up 200 taels of silver.

- Zhao built a private pleasure garden, using over a hundred poplar trees and more than 500 taels of silver stolen from a man named Yan Shiwei, who may literally have died from his resentment.
- Zhao refused to allow two butchers to conduct business unless they gave him cash tribute and free pork every month.
- Zhao denied five years of wages to two of his workers, a married couple named Cui. When Mr. Cui requested his salary, Zhao had him flogged thirty strokes and accused him of stealing 50 taels of silver. Cui's relative, surnamed Zhang, was incarcerated at the county yamen (a sign of Zhao's influence over the local government) until 50 taels of restitution was made to Zhao.[43]

The litany of allegations goes on and on and includes reports of violence against women not recounted here.

We will refrain from commenting on the typicality or even the morality of Zhao's alleged behavior. For the purposes here, these charges against a member of the gentry are significant only in their forming a counterpoint to the denunciations of corrupt officials heard at least as frequently in the 1650s from across the aisle. Tuhai himself exemplified the moral equivalence of the state's and the gentry's advocates when he wrote, "Everyone knows about shameful cases of corrupt officials (*tan guan*) abusing the common people, but aren't the cases of abuse by defrocked gentry (*fei huan*, equivalent here to *fei shen*) even more shameful?" Of course, it is not impossible that the accusations against Zhao were fabricated or exaggerated to justify the confiscation of his property by the acquisitive Qing state. Indeed, Tuhai's recapitulation of the blame game between "corrupt officials" and "gentry" is a subtle reminder that both state and gentry were taking from the common people as much as they could, with partisans of each side believing their own extractions to be legitimate and those of their rivals to be illegitimate. In the foregoing example, Zhao Yu was accused of keeping taxes the state wanted for itself, encroaching upon lands the Manchus had already stolen, raiding businesses the state might otherwise have raided, exploiting unpaid labor the state might also have had for nothing, and using physical violence, a prerogative also claimed by the state, to accomplish these aims. Even Zhao's collecting of women should be viewed in this context—not necessarily as a crime but as a trespass upon the state's operations. For every indictment against Zhao or other bad gentry, a charge against the state's rapaciousness, such as Wu Weiye's contemporary exposé of merciless taxation of farmers and conscription of boatmen in Jiangnan, was registered on the other side. The

point, again, is that the state and the gentry were engaged in a tremendous competition over human and material resources as part of their larger struggle for sovereignty.[44]

The convergence of these two battles—the material and the philosophical—hopefully explains to the curious reader why celebrated statesmen like Wu Weiye, Chen Mingxia, and Wei Yijie are included in the same chapter with an alleged thug like Zhao Yu. In point of fact, all four had more in common with each other than with any other element of Chinese society; they were identified, often by themselves, as gentry (*shen*, *jinshen*, etc.); and, most important, they extolled and exploited the same kind of power, albeit with some variation of emphasis between the extolling and the exploiting. Chen Mingxia is perhaps the best example of the sovereign gentleman and evil gentry man combined in one person, for even as he sought for sagely syntaxes in examination essays, he was also, according to Ning Wanwo, accepting payoffs, subverting government, and covering up the brutish behavior of his father, children, and in-laws, who occupied public property, extorted money, and threatened officials in Nanjing and elsewhere. The state's and the gentry's claims to sovereignty were, after all, absolute, with few meaningful constitutional or other legal limits, circumscribed only by the competing claims, and neutralizing power, of the other side.[45]

As the decade drew to a close, a power shift was taking place. On August 4, 1660, the Manchu official Soni (1601–1667) weighed in on the question of who the biggest troublemakers were, the officials or the gentry. He came down decisively against the latter, though he also had some choice words for the former. An outsider to the debate—in other words, not himself a gentry-official—Soni was spared the psychological necessity of identifying chauvinistically with either half of such a split personality. Soni didn't bother to use the conventional words for the gentry in any positive or negative connotation, instead referring to them just as what he thought they were, as "strongmen" (*hao qiang* or *shi hao*). Nor did he follow the manipulative script of the blame game by accusing them of hampering revenue or oppressing the little people; instead, Soni charged the strongmen with encroaching (*ba zhan*) upon the general economy and victimizing merchants in particular. "They impose upon businesses and market places, taking every advantage they can. Their crafty and degenerate lackeys are everywhere giving orders, concocting hundreds of extortions, plundering goods and wealth." It was the same sort of arraignment that had been directed at Zhao Yu, but Soni was talking more about a systemic problem than the wickedness of a single bad egg. In his view,

anyone with political power could encroach upon the economy for private gain, and in this regard, he drew no distinction between Manchu officials and Han Chinese strongmen. Even more important, he believed the officials in the bureaucracy to be so sympathetic to the strongmen as to erase any meaningful differentiation between them and to render them equally part of the problem. "The court establishes the various officials (*guan*), but still the strongmen (*hao qiang*) go from bad to worse," he wrote. "I beg for an imperial rescript, warning officials to act with regard to the public (*gong*) and to justice, prohibiting them from showing favoritism (*xun qing*) or accepting bribes." In his urging that officials respond to bureaucratic discipline rather than gentry peer pressure, Soni was issuing a tall order, indeed echoing Zhang Juzheng and other statist managerial reformers of recent turbulent generations. However, Soni wasn't merely arguing for more bureaucratic discipline, which for Zhang Juzheng was both an end in itself and a means to a full treasury. Soni was taking aim at privilege in general.[46]

The Shunzhi emperor, who as a boy had wanted nothing more than to be in charge, was by now a passive figure. Not only could he see no ministers at his beck and call, but he had no control over events. He obligingly seconded both Lin Qilong's and Soni's memorials, like a blade of grass blown in different directions. Soon he contracted smallpox, and he suddenly passed away on February 5, 1661. Upon his death, a regency was established to look after the young heir apparent. The regency consisted of the Manchu officers Oboi, Suksaha, Ebilun, and Soni. The curtain had come down on the veteran cast of gentlemanly actors, who had tried without success to reprise their near-hit of the previous season (Wei Yijie's script was somewhat revised). Now a new set of statists, responding to the situation in the countryside, would have their moment on the stage. Would they, too, revive an old favorite, or would they produce a new play?[47]

Chapter 3

The Oboi Regency, 1661–1669

The Shunzhi emperor was manipulated in death as well as in life. Practically before his corpse was cold, an imperial will was promulgated in his name, and although emperors' last words were often ghostwritten by top ministers in those days, Shunzhi's will was such a mea culpa that it is especially tempting to conjecture that it was fabricated by a group of people eager for a change of policy, and here, the finger of suspicion points to the regents themselves. It was not that there was anything controversial about the selection of Shunzhi's six-year-old son, Xuanye, to be the succeeding Kangxi emperor, for Shunzhi had no adult children, and the boy was an obvious choice, having already survived the smallpox that claimed his father. Since a regency of some kind was inevitable, moreover, there was no reason at the time to disqualify Oboi, Suksaha, Ebilun, or Soni or even, in hindsight, to view the regents as having been latently hostile to Shunzhi. The events of February 1661 were no coup d'état.[1]

All the same, Shunzhi's presumptively forged will confessed not faults but crimes (*zui*), portending a radical change of course. Some modern scholars have suggested that the regents were appalled at the creeping Sinification of the Shunzhi regime and have characterized the Regency as a Manchu reaction to it, and the regents did indeed abolish several Chinese bureaucratic institutions dating from the previous decade, restoring Manchu ones in their places. But as far as this book is concerned, it was the regents' determination to thwart gentry influence that counts as the most decisive policy shift. Shunzhi, as we have seen, was no lover of the gentry, but he was thoroughly flummoxed by them. He always acceded to their complaints against "corrupt officials," though he seemed at least equally receptive to Soni's depiction

of the "strongmen" and their official sympathizers. As he twisted in the wind, this crucial aspect of policy, embodying the state's attitude toward the gentry, was marked by paralysis and drift. Whoever wrote Shunzhi's guilty testament did not mention the gentry by name, but he (or they) did bemoan this indecisiveness, especially as manifest in fiscal matters. "Whenever financial officials reported deficits," ran the apology, "We called meetings of the various princes and chief ministers, but We never formulated a sage solution." As Soni had already telegraphed, the regency of which he was a part would act vigorously, not simply to strengthen tax administration but ultimately to crush the power of the gentry that had so often frustrated it.[2]

Discouraging Officials' Affinity with the Gentry

As they settled down to work, the regents followed more or less the same course that had been taken by the Ming grand secretary Zhang Juzheng during his unofficial regency of 1572–1582: they exerted pressure on the bureaucracy, particularly on regional and local officials, to discourage them from their natural identification with local gentry and to compel them instead to make sure the latter paid their taxes in full. Soni, as has been described, had already voiced his displeasure about local officials showing "favoritism" (*xun qing*, literally "following one's feelings") and acting out of sympathy for the strongmen. It was the same problem that Zhang Juzheng had called bureaucratic "laxity" (*gu xi*). Modern students, drawing too much of a distinction between gentry and officials, might wonder what all the fuss was about, for surely the officials could not have been ignorant of their own job descriptions, which included collecting taxes from the gentry. Once again, however, the officials *were* gentry, with the same scholarly background and interest in landed property (although serving officials were away from their own estates, of course). Beyond having a basic affinity with the gentry in their jurisdiction, local officials, strangers to the area, in practice became very dependent on them for their commanding influence in local affairs. It was a simple case of regulatory capture, with the gentry in office failing to govern the gentry in their jurisdictions and ending up being governed by them. Following Zhang Juzheng, Soni appealed to officials' public spiritedness (*gong*), but this abstraction only went so far—and besides, the gentry claimed to represent the public, too, often in heroic resistance to supposedly selfish or corrupt officials who forgot who their friends were. It was obviously a very stubborn problem.[3]

Zhang Juzheng had dealt with bureaucratic laxity by instituting a system of performance evaluations for officials (*kao cheng*), assigning them time limits for carrying out bureaucratic directives, including those related to taxes. The Oboi regents devised new means to enforce such standards. In an edict of February 27, 1661, they noted, "It has always been standard practice that tax arrears would result in the fining of the administering officials and the disallowing of their further promotion; but for ranks of prefect or higher, promotion and transfer are still possible, even if old taxes in their area are not paid in full." Loose enforcement of the rules might have been abetted by Shunzhi, who was prevailed upon to "favor the gentry and succor the local officials," the latter benevolence to be accomplished by relaxing the performance evaluation system. But it was also Shunzhi who had called for the enforcement of fiscal discipline in Jiading County toward the end of this reign. Resolving this contradiction in favor of strictness, the regents now "universally blocked" the promotion or transfer of all local officials, regardless of their bureaucratic level, until tax arrears in their districts were paid in full. In other words, no official could serve out his term and leave unpaid accounts for the next man. Furthermore, a one-year time limit was imposed for the payment of all arrears, with failures warranting demotion or cashiering, and if either the Ministry of Personnel or the Ministry of Revenue approved the transfer or promotion of a local official with unpaid arrears in his books, then the officials in that ministry would also be punished.[4]

Such draconian provisions had actually been approved by Shunzhi as early as 1658 but never apparently enforced. In reenacting them, the regents showed their determination to exert their control over China's ambivalent bureaucracy, to make it more responsive to the needs of the state and less amenable to the interests of the gentry. Presumably, the regents anticipated a violent reaction, and in fact, the reaction actually anticipated the regents; for just as the regents were endeavoring to cure officialdom of its sluggishness in tax collection, members of the Jiangnan gentry were agitating against a local official for his overzealousness in the same pursuit.[5]

The Gentry's Preemptive Strike: Lamenting in the Temple

On March 4, 1661, a large group of protesters in Suzhou barged into a makeshift temple that had been set up near the prefectural seat where a memorial ceremony was being held for the Shunzhi

emperor. Its object was to call attention to the excesses of Wu County magistrate Ren Weichu, whom they alleged had mercilessly flogged people and confiscated and resold official grain stores in order to make his tax quota. They beat gongs and made a woeful racket, while a second group posted written grievances against Ren on the temple gate. Jiangnan governor Zhu Guozhi (d. 1673), who was presiding over the service, was not amused and called for arrests. Eleven persons were caught; the rest of the crowd, which had numbered more than a thousand, scattered. The incident was known as the "Lamenting in the Temple" affair (*ku miao an*), and with it, the gentry—following the regents, using Shunzhi's dead body as a platform from which to air their side of the story—raised the ante in their contest with the state.[6]

On what grounds can the gentry be accused of instigating the March 4 demonstration? In most sources, the temple lamenters are identified as students (*zhu sheng*), stipendiary licentiates eligible to sit for the provincial civil service exam. One might feel obligated to split hairs as to whether or not these students qualified for gentry status, and of course the students themselves claimed to be acting as advocates for oppressed commoners, not for tax-dodging gentry. However, in the context and culture of the times, the gentry's fingerprints in the Lamenting in the Temple case would have been very clear. In the first place, students were apprentice gentry, and they held many of the same privileges, including the tax immunity discussed in Chapter 2, as their degree-holding seniors. The students' advocacy for the little man can alas be dismissed as a rhetorical device, for again, both the state's and the gentry's partisans, including students, routinely accused each other of oppressing the common people, even as they did it themselves. Most important, it was an open secret that students were often employed as foot soldiers in the gentry's struggles with the state, especially in the late Ming, when they orchestrated riots against Wanli's mine tax commissioners and other government agents sent by Beijing to prosecute gentry. Students, as well as commoners under gentry control such as tenants and housemen, constituted a last line of defense for the gentry during those dark times when the statist element rose to dominate the chambers of government and gentry influence there correspondingly waned. The Oboi regency was shaping up to be one of those times, and thus the gentry's student surrogates were called to action.[7]

Like the regents themselves, however, Governor Zhu Guozhi was unlikely to be moved by the students' caterwauling on behalf of the gentry, for he was a transnational bannerman, a ringer of sorts for

the state, from outside the conflicted gentry-official tradition. His ancestors hailed from Fushun in the Liaodong region of Manchuria and had actually been made bondservants (*bao yi*) before 1644. Zhu Guozhi himself was counted as a member of the Han Solid Yellow Banner. He became a tribute student (*gong sheng*), recommended by a local official to study in Beijing, and on the strength of that status earned a county magistracy in 1647. He had been serving as governor in Jiangnan since the time of Zheng Chenggong's attack and had acquitted himself well under the circumstances. The concurrence of a regency of Manchu military officers in Beijing with a bannerman's term as governor in Nanjing promised to add some weight to the state's case against the gentry, in fiscal and other matters, for its claimants were prepared to advance their arguments unambiguously. It was at best, though, a relative advantage. The state's use of unconventional officials to attack the gentry was not unprecedented, for Wanli's mine tax commissioners were eunuchs and imperial bodyguards, and emphatically, extreme statists like Zhang Juzheng could always be found among nominal gentry. Ren Weichu, incidentally, was a northern tribute student, though not a bannerman.[8]

Governor Zhu's preliminary inquiry was a festival of bureaucratic finger-pointing, though it is possible that its unsympathetic, anonymous chronicler was exaggerating Zhu's and Ren's irresponsibility. After hearing a full recounting of the charges against him, Magistrate Ren—himself in custody, pending the investigation—could only plead not guilty by reason of desperation, for he had been on the job for only two months and believed he had no hope of meeting the strict revenue quota set by Governor Zhu without resorting to drastic measures. Finding the spotlight now shining on him, Zhu covered himself by producing an imperial decree calling for stricter tax collection to meet the needs of the military. One source alleges that Zhu predated it to the time of Ren Weichu reporting for duty, in an effort to show that both magistrate and governor were only following orders. Perhaps the source's author, sometime after, was thinking of the regents' harsh edict of February 27, which could not possibly have arrived in Suzhou by the first week of March, in time for Zhu to predate it. In fact, pressure from Beijing to improve tax performance had been building for years (see Chapter 2), and Zhu would have been able to show evidence of it without recourse to forgery. The original written complaint against Ren, apparently the work of more than one person but by now associated with the prefectural school teacher Cheng Yicang (a *jinshi* of 1652), was also alleged to have been altered for the inquest, presumably to dilute its force. When appraised of this bit

of clumsy editing, the famous literatus Jin Renrui (also known as Jin Shengtan [1610?–1661]), whose involvement in the affair is uncertain and who was not yet under arrest, supposedly smirked.[9]

After the hearing, on March 5 or 6, Zhu Guozhi called together a group of local notables, said to include both officials (*guan*) and gentry (*xiang shen*), to inform them of his intentions. He mentioned nothing about the students and their clamorous demonstration in the temple and spoke mostly of Ren Weichu, explaining that while he had little choice but to refer the complaints against Ren to Beijing, his preference would be to deal leniently with him. At this declaration of misplaced sympathy, the officials and gentry began murmuring worriedly, as though perceiving already that their version of justice would not be upheld. Sure enough, in the memorial to the regents he wrote the same day, Zhu actually credited Ren with making some progress against Wu County's notorious tax resistance, and then he launched into a thorough denunciation of the "evil students" who, by organizing a "violent gang" of several thousand people, had committed three specific crimes: startling the spirit of the late emperor; defying the magistrate and, by extension, the court; and knowingly breaking the law by anonymously posting slanderous handbills. Zhu's indignation at state-sponsored students engaging in political agitation was common currency among Ming (and now Qing) statists, and his association of their activities with tax resistance would also have found in the regents an especially receptive audience.[10]

The State's Policy of Zero Tolerance toward the Gentry

The regents received Zhu's report on March 11, and they drew two conclusions from it. The first was that the disruption at the Suzhou temple fell into the same category of insubordination as the recent collaboration with Zheng Chenggong. To quench the fires of disloyalty as rapidly as possible, the regents dispatched four Manchu investigators to Suzhou, but Governor Zhu feared that riots (perhaps student-led) would break out there if the law tried to lay its hands on influential local gentlemen. Our source reports, furthermore, that authorities in Suzhou had begun to commandeer private buildings, including the residence of a "rich man," for use by the investigators in what is also hinted to have been a dangerous provocation. Zhu thereupon changed the venue to Nanjing and hustled the prisoners there, allowing them to speak neither to friends nor family en route. Ren Weichu was permitted to go on horseback. Safely in Nanjing, the

prosecution team went to work in the beginning of May and would ultimately combine the Lamenting in the Temple case with the cases of collaboration with Zheng Chenggong.[11]

The regents' second conclusion about the Lamenting in the Temple case was that it was nothing but a smokescreen for tax resistance and that the gentry were definitely behind it. On April 7, they took more specific aim at the problem, identifying the gentry specifically:

> Tax collection . . . is rife with evasion and arrears, and it has recently been proving difficult to collect all the money that is owed. This problem is caused by the gentry (*shen jin*) who think little of the laws and refuse to pay their land tax. Local officials (*di fang guan*) are partial (*xun qing*) to the gentry and do not collect the taxes demanded by law. Henceforth, it is ordered that the various governors take command of all the officials on each subordinate administrative level and direct them to eliminate all abuses and redouble accounting and control. Cases of continued tax resistance should be punished harshly. Local officials who do not monitor and report offenders will themselves be reported, impeached, and severely punished along with the tax resisters.[12]

Poor revenue performance on the part of local officials was now a crime rather than grounds for an unfavorable performance evaluation. The new discipline was to be enforced by regional governors in such a way as to deprive local officials of any discretionary latitude. Apparently, the regents deemed them fundamentally untrustworthy, congenitally prone to favoring their friends among the gentry. They determined to operate the bureaucracy like a machine and to treat its functionaries as cogs within it, making it fully responsive to the state's institutional directives and wholly immune to the gentry's social pressure. In sum, all the power of government was wrested from the gentry class and turned decisively against it. Regulatory capture was at an end.

The regents doubling down on the tax issue amounted to an out-of-hand dismissal of the Lamenting in the Temple petitions, making it very clear that no complaints about corrupt officials would be heard or even tolerated. Accordingly, the investigation of the Lamenting in the Temple affair proceeded in an extremely arbitrary and draconian fashion, as anyone suspected of raising a peep against official authority was made a wretched example. On May 10 came the arrest of Gu Yuxian, whose heroic deportment during the Plain Clothes outbreak of 1648 was related in Chapter 1. Gu had returned home pleading ill health and had founded a literary society for young people (*shao nian*

wen she; it might actually have been called the Youth Literary Society) in which he functioned as mentor. Although he was known to keep a low profile, he supposedly remarked indiscreetly to an official that Ren Weichu was unfit to be a magistrate (the term he used was *mu min*, or shepherd of the people, which was what he imagined himself to have been). Governor Zhu thereupon ordered him brought in, although Gu seems also to have been identified by one or more of the original temple lamenters under torture. Another group implicated at this time consisted of eight more students, including one of the drafters of Cheng Yicang's accusation and a father and son said to have come from one of the county's wealthy families. Another son in the same family held the intermediate *juren* degree but was not arrested. While being led in for interrogation, Gu Yuxian had his hands tied by his own scholar's belt, which had been stripped off him. When Gu pointed out that he had not been officially cashiered and that the treatment was therefore illegal, the arresting officer said he had no choice, "now that things have come to this."[13]

The focal point of the prosecution was Cheng Yicang's list of grievances against Magistrate Ren together with the various denunciatory handbills posted and circulated at the temple on March 4. Gu Yuxian was the highest-ranking suspect accused of setting eyes on the handbills as they were being prepared, and he was consequently sentenced to death. Reportedly, however, Gu had thrown the bills to the floor, and this indignant act ended up saving his life when the regents reviewed his sentence. After a midlevel minister suggested that Gu merely be cashiered instead of executed, it was the regents themselves who pointed out that not guilty meant not guilty, and Gu was thus spared any punishment. Perhaps unaware of this clemency, however, authorities in Suzhou had already ransacked Gu's house and confiscated his property in routine but now mistaken enforcement of the sentence against him, and apparently, the clerks and runners kept what they took without ever returning it. Gu Yuxian could consider himself lucky to be alive, though he was not out of the woods yet, as will be described.[14]

Meanwhile, because Cheng Yicang's petition had mentioned that "several thousands" of discontented people had premeditated to converge on the temple on March 4, the apparently obsessed Governor Zhu was exerting tremendous pressure on Cheng to produce a massively comprehensive list of the conspirators. This persuasive pressure is noted in the sources as "exhaustive," though the typically vivid descriptions of gruesome beatings are somehow absent in this instance. Howsoever, it appears that Cheng at this point revealed the

names of two individuals who had helped him compose his missive, and one of these men was Jin Renrui. Perhaps Jin's reported chuckling at the court's modified version of the fateful document can be taken as an indication that he was indeed all too familiar with the original. Cheng Yicang was on the verge of implicating the cohort of confederates whose heads Governor Zhu demanded, but a friend paid Cheng a midnight visit and convinced him to clam up, because even though a few dozen innocent people were going to die, there was no reason it had to be a few thousand. Furthermore, the friend conjectured, with Jin Renrui and the other ghostwriter in hand, the prosecution would be satisfied. In this respect, Cheng's friend was quite right, for Jin Renrui was the perfect scapegoat for a wrathful imperial state determined to silence all voices that impugned its sovereignty.

Jin Renrui was a Ming *shengyuan*, or student, who sought neither a Qing academic degree nor office. He was famous for his annotations of various texts, both ancient and modern, and he insisted somewhat controversially that recent works such as novels be treated as latter-day classics, for they contained the same timeless sentiments expressed by the ancients. One of the modern writings he especially prized was the popular Ming novel *Shui hu zhuan* (known in English as *Water Margin*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, or *All Men are Brothers*). In one of four prefaces to the edition he annotated, he theorized about the bifurcation of political and moral power and the transmission of the latter through writing. "When a Sage is not given a formal place [as king], then he has no power," Jin expounded. "Lacking power, he has no choice but to write, and this is what Confucius did. Confucius, lacking the Sage [king]'s formal position, possessed himself, regardless, of the Sages' virtue . . . He refused to acknowledge the feudal lords' power to write books, and this is why writing books remains the business of Sages." As should be easy to recognize by now, Jin's was yet another Neo-Confucian conception of true power emanating from sagely books and not from lordly thrones. It was similar to Chen Mingxia's discovery of sagehood in examination essays, and in fact, Jin did edit a book of essays, now apparently lost. As for *Water Margin* itself, Jin deemed it to be a book about loyalty and righteousness. In government, these qualities were the "stuff of prime ministers," but privately, they were also the "servants of sages and worthies." The novel, following the Neo-Confucian conceit, describes how the state banishes its loyal and righteous ones to the private sphere, a low place of exile in a marsh, which becomes in effect a rival kingdom. "If loyalty and righteousness live in the marsh," Jin mused, "are they then gone from the country (*guo jia*)? If lords (*jun*) remain lords and ministers (*chen*)

remain ministers, then how can it come to pass that the country be without loyalty and righteousness?" Indeed, it cannot, allowed Jin, "but the lord who scorns his ministers' [or subjects'] words will find it difficult to remain *my* lord, at any rate." It should also be noted about the novel that it showed the state at its rapacious worst, its hideously corrupt officials driving the people to righteous rebellion.[15]

Uncannily, *Water Margin* supposedly featured as tangible, if circumstantial, evidence of Jin Renjui's criminality, for some of the handbills denouncing Ren Weichu were written on the backs of the pages of Jin's edition, ripped out by the temple lamenters and reused to convey their propaganda, owing to the high cost of clean paper. Whether or not this story is true, the real propaganda value of *Water Margin* was to be found on the fronts of its pages, not the backs; Jin Renrui was doomed by what was written on the recto, regardless of what was written on the verso. Neither the regents nor anyone else would have had any trouble connecting Jin's Neo-Confucianism to the insubordination displayed in the Lamenting in the Temple case. Though Jin may have played a small personal role in the affair, he embodied the philosophy of defiance that inspired it. He, and it, had to go.[16]

Jin Renrui was brought to Nanjing a prisoner on May 25 and promptly tortured. He cried out for the "late emperor" (*xian di*), which might have meant Shunzhi but could conceivably have meant any former ruler going back to the sage kings. It could not have meant the current emperor, Kangxi, and the four Manchu inquisitors became angry at the slight, saying that Jin was imprecating the imperial person—as well he might have been. The sorry business finally ended on August 7, 1661, when Jin Renrui and 17 other temple lamenters were executed in Nanjing, their property confiscated and their families enslaved.[17]

A total of 121 persons were put to death on that August 7, including Zheng Chenggong's collaborators and a few tax delinquents. The prosecution of the Lamenting in the Temple conspirators was but a part of an all-fronts campaign launched by the Oboi regents immediately upon assuming power to punish the gentry for its general insubordination and recalcitrance. Defecting to Zheng Chenggong, dodging taxes, or wailing in the temple were, in the regents' eyes, three modes of that same insubordination. The latter two were especially interrelated, for the regents, together with their Jiangnan point man, Zhu Guozhi, viewed the temple lamenters as deputies of the entire gentry class, employed in this instance to challenge the specific statist prerogative of tax collection. As evidenced by their April

7 edict, the regents showed no reluctance to identify the gentry and tax resistance as the instigators and the motive, respectively, of the Lamenting in the Temple demonstration, and Zhu Guozhi, following this line of reasoning perfectly, immediately resolved to uncover the gentry's tax dodging conspiracy as assiduously as he worked to eradicate the Lamenting in the Temple conspiracy. He proceeded to compile a list—Zhu Guozhi sure liked lists!—of 13,517 civil and military gentry and 254 local government staffers who were involved in tax nonpayment. He sent it off to Beijing, where it arrived on June 28, 1661, to a warm reception by the regents. Thus began the Jiangnan Tax Clearance case (*zou xiao an*), which is best understood not simply as a fiscal measure but as an offshoot of the Lamenting in the Temple case and a part of the regency's broader effort to break gentry power.[18]

Zero Tolerance in Fiscal Matters: The Tax Clearance Case

In their rescript to Zhu's memorial, the regents wrote, "Tax resistance by the gentry (*shen jin*) is especially despicable. Apply punishments strictly, according to the established schedule." The "established schedule" to which the regents referred had already been developed in Jiading County in 1658. Indeed, modern writers have traced the origins of the Tax Clearance case to that earlier date, well before the regency. It seems clear, however, that the prosecution of tax arrears, though announced in 1658, certainly took a long time to gather administrative force. It is even more dramatically obvious that the Jiangnan gentry, still far from compliance in 1661, entertained not the slightest inkling that rectification was coming. Plainly, the regents and Governor Zhu had made a novel and decisive determination to enforce what was admittedly an old law in order to serve their larger purpose of bringing the gentry more generally to heel. Under the regents' direction, Zhu applied the "established schedule" of coercive measures to the prefectures of Suzhou, Songjiang, Changzhou, and Zhenjiang as well as to Liyang County, still considered part of Yingtian Prefecture. All tax delinquents, regardless of the amount of their unpaid accounts, were to be deprived of gentry status and made commoners. They were then subjected to corporal punishment, up to forty strokes of the bamboo and two months in cangue based on the percentage of taxes due that had yet to be paid. A special punishment of forty strokes of the bamboo and three months in cangue was established

for unauthorized tax farming (*bao lan*), in which gentry assumed the taxes of others and thus extended their tax shelters illegally (recall the case of Zhao Yu in Chapter 2). As for the status of the people on Zhu's list, 2,171 were *jinshi* or *juren*, and the remaining 11,346 were students or relatives of students. Ming degree holders, incidentally, were supposed to be exempt. (The original list of names and arrears does not seem to be extant.)[19]

Under these harsh conditions, most of Jiangnan's gentry tax arrears were cleared, in the autumn of 1661 through the summer of 1662, by Zhu Guozhi and his successor Han Shiqi (another bannerman [d. 1686]). Four gentlemen were actually transported to Beijing for failure to settle their accounts. Nearly everyone else paid in full, sometimes after a harrowing local imprisonment. There were a few obvious cases of fuzzy justice, such as one instance of mistaken identity and another in which a gentleman was prosecuted for a miniscule underpayment (if he could pay 99.9 precent of his arrears, how and why would he be 0.1 percent short?). In general, Han Shiqi was said to be more precise in the application of the law than Zhu Guozhi, but Han's slightly better reputation among literati historians may simply be a reflection of Zhu's rotten one, a point to be explored more in what follows.[20]

That the Tax Clearance case subjected the gentry to loss of status and to corporal punishment is extremely significant. In the first place, the two penalties were effectively one, for, gentry being statutorily exempt from physical punishment, it was necessary that they be made commoners before becoming liable to it. Furthermore, though primary and secondary sources contain voluminous descriptions of the gentry's legal tax shelters, often listing in minute detail the exemptions to which they were entitled, the gentry's practical ability to avoid paying taxes often rested on their simple power to awe or intimidate their neighbors or local officials. Even if the latter were inclined to press local gentry to pay their taxes, lacking recourse to the bamboo, they literally couldn't make them do it. Immunity from corporal punishment really placed the gentry beyond the reach of the law, which should count as yet another reason that the distinction between gentry and officials was illusory. Since the officials' authority didn't concretely extend to the gentry, it cannot really be said that they exercised official power over them, and thus they could only relate to the gentry as colleagues. The Tax Clearance case, in granting local officials the same powers of enforcement over the gentry that they wielded over everybody else, converted the gentry into common subjects. They were locked up, beaten, and shaken down, just

like common people, and nothing is more galling for elites than to be treated like common people.

One man who underwent this bathophobic demotion was the Shanghai gentleman Ye Mengzhu, whose notebook, the *Yue shi bian*, remains a compelling account of what it was like to be on the receiving end of the Tax Clearance case (few other private or public records of this event survive, for it was so cataclysmic as to be nearly taboo). As might be imagined, Ye's narrative is suffused with nostalgia, both for the Ming and even for the early Qing before 1661, and his innocence of fiscal imperatives is especially telling. He described the Longqing and Wanli years as abundant and prosperous, a golden age in which "officials were not punished if their tax quotas were unmet, and the people were undisturbed by tax prompting." Specifically, "officials who delivered eight tenths of their tax quotas were allowed to pass their service evaluations, and among the people (*min*), those families who paid eighty percent of their taxes were said to be good households (*liang hu*); anyone who paid just sixty or seventy percent was not really considered obstinate or obstructive." Ye credited the Qing for reducing its budget to essentials after the exigencies of the late Ming, but these expenditures being mandatory, tax collection correspondingly became stricter. Even before the Tax Clearance case, Ye wrote, the pressure on local officials to meet their revenue quotas had already produced some distortions in local social relations, as the comradely liberality ordinarily shown by officials (toward the gentry, Ye all but noted) became difficult. It may be best to follow Ye's aggrieved narrative verbatim:

> Officials in charge of taxation were required to collect their full quotas, if they were to pass their performance evaluations. Those failing to meet their quotas by small margins, even if their families had been meritorious officials for generations, were punished. Officials became nearly panicked about following the procedures, which really only meant timely tax collection. All of the officials' other responsibilities, relating to nourishing their constituencies, became neglected, and all special considerations, such as the character of a given subject, the quality of his land, and the success of the harvest, became lost in the finality of the tax quota.[21]

Then, with the Tax Clearance case, it all came to a head, with haphazard and unjust results:

> At the close of the Shunzhi era, Jiangning governor Zhu Guozhi, in order to evade his responsibility, blamed the gentry (*shen jin*) and

> yamen clerks [for the arrears in the region] . . . At the time, while there were certainly gentry and yamen clerks who were in arrears on tax payments, they could not have totaled ten percent of arrears attributable to common people (*min*). Furthermore, when the [Tax Clearance] order went into effect and the officers began to assemble their tax registers, nobody knew the seriousness of the situation [in which case, they would have paid immediately]; they simply reported whatever arrears were known on that particular day. Some accounts were actually paid up but were reported as in arrears; some accounts were only moderately in arrears but were reported as seriously in arrears. Some accounts were described as paid in the book but lacked the name of the taxpayer, which was supposed to have been filled in later. Some accounts were paid after having been listed as in arrears. The memorial [listing the arrears and those responsible] was routed through the bureaucracy without being considered by the top bureaucrats, and the details were not closely examined. Rather, all gentry were summarily stripped of their status, and all serving officials were demoted and transferred. As a result, country gentlemen (*xiang shen*) like Zhang Yuzhi, a total of 2,171 people, and students (*sheng yuan*) like Shi Shunzhe, a total of 11,346 people, were all degraded and deprived of rank.[22]

As the new policy gained traction, desperation, violence, and ruin increased apace:

> Officials took advantage of the strict atmosphere and collected ten years' taxes at once. People (*ren*), gripped by fear, virtually tripped over each other to pay their taxes first. They tried to liquidate their property but found no buyers . . . Tax collectors were especially fierce, and the arrest and imprisonment of gentlemen (*shi zi*) was not uncommon.
>
> For a time, the only way out for some people was to resort to moneylenders. Monthly interest rates for loans could be as high as twenty or thirty percent. The delay of repayment by even a single day would immediately incur additional penalties . . . Interest payments were often deducted up front, so that a ten tael loan would only amount to nine taels by the time it was delivered, and other charges would reduce the amount to eight or not much more than seven taels. Likewise, late fees would be assessed on tax payments by yamen clerks, and even if the tax owed was not that much, lateness of even one month was sufficient grounds for sending soldiers after the delinquents, and the soldiers engaged in even more extortion informally. Under these conditions, even farms of 100 [Chinese acres] suffered losses by confiscation of essential articles, houses, and people (*renkou*, presumably servants). Furthermore, those who could not pay their taxes were routinely

> flogged and could do nothing to avoid the punishment. Of course, many chose to abandon their fields (and their productive occupations) and run away. The evils of taxation were never as severe as during this time.[23]

As Ye summed up the Tax Clearance case, the pursuit of some fifty thousand taels of arrears had resulted in the cashiering of thirteen thousand members of the gentry (*shen jin*). Assuming that the persecution was all about money, Ye and others were hopeful that once the arrears were paid, gentry status would be restored. Ye referred to this expected reinstatement as "returning to Heaven." However, it did not come to pass. In spite of the pleadings of the friendly grand secretary Jin Zhijuan (1593–1670, a Ming *jinshi* of 1619), the regents—as well as a number of Han Chinese statists—insisted on the uniform and strict application of the law. Although restoration of status would finally be offered in exchange for cash payments under very different circumstances in 1675, only a handful of the gentlemen who fell from Heaven in 1661 would respond. Ye Mengzhu was not one of them. He had suffered an egregious indignity, for which he was careful to blame the regents and not the emperor, and he would never be able to let bygones be bygones: "Even though the new offer of reinstatement was no doubt quite benevolent, even though it would have been rather easy for me to make a contribution, and even though time had healed the old wounds, I still didn't heed the call. I was getting long in the tooth and no longer had the old ambition of making a name for myself. Was I supposed to invest the wealth of ten families in an attempt to win my youth back? This episode still provokes my feelings."[24]

In his despair, Ye confessed to having cherished, as least in his youth, a bit more of a desire for fame than a gentleman would have admitted under more confident circumstances, but at any rate, his sense of demoralization is palpable. (He also admitted that it would have been easy for him to make a cash contribution equivalent to the wealth of ten families.) Taking a more flippant attitude toward his implication in the Tax Clearance case was Wu Weiye. Despite suffering arrest and the near total bankruptcy of his family, Wu wrote that it was only his official status that exposed him to such abuse in the first place (though his Ming status was supposed to have been irrelevant), and thus he was actually glad to be rid of it. Although the two gentlemen spoke in very different tones, they were both at least indirectly acknowledging that they had suffered for their earlier ambitions. More important, they were declaring that they had given them up.[25]

The Novel Finality of the Tax Clearance Case

The epochal significance of the Tax Clearance case can be found in Ye's and Wu's attitudes of surrender, for, gloomy or glib as they might have been, they were starkly unfeigned. The "Ming gentry," named here for their embodying the self-importance and aggressiveness of its Ming forebears rather than for their technical affiliation with the previous dynasty, were now, having failed to infiltrate the Qing state in the 1650s, no longer sovereigns even of Jiangnan. As the modern scholar Fu Qingfen has put it, "Under the power and intimidation of the Qing government and its strict prosecution of tax arrears, the decadent Qing literati-gentlemen were as good as dead, and the heroic bearing of the Ming gentry was no more." In Ye Mengzhu's recollection, Zhu Guozhi's mass impeachment of the Jiangnan gentry was like a Chinese version of the Arthurian Dolorous Stroke. "All it took was that one act of defamation," Ye wrote, "careless and clumsy as it was, and the ill effects were permanent. Talented and promising gentlemen (*shi*) were forever sunk into ignominy. The happy strains once heard from every household became suddenly and permanently cut off. The area's literary and cultural fortunes grew instantly insipid and remain listless. How can this malaise not be a product of the decline of the culture and teaching, under the stranglehold of the local officials?"[26]

Neither Fu Qingfen today nor Ye Mengzhu of yore exaggerated the gentry's loss of power, and in the context of the Ming-Qing transition, the dethronement was indeed unprecedented. Of course, advocates of state power since the late Ming had often *tried* to bring the gentry low, but they had always failed. Zhang Juzheng had anticipated the regents by demanding the bureaucracy to forsake its intrinsic leniency toward the gentry and to carry out its fiscal responsibilities mechanically, but Zhang's officials remained hopelessly in cahoots with the gentry, compromising with them on their tax compliance and sometimes abetting further fraud. Next, the Wanli emperor, taking the unreliability of gentry-officials as a given, simply bypassed them, unleashing upon the gentry an ad hoc goon squad of eunuchs, bodyguards, and thugs. The gentry did complain that, more than the loss of their property to Wanli's henchmen, it was the loss of authority to them that signified that they were "no longer the lords of the people." However, the uncouthness of their attackers merely served to galvanize the gentry, and immediately upon the inevitable collapse of Wanli's policy, the gentry organized a mass movement under the Donglin banner to

capture the state from within. Setbacks at the hands of Wei Zhongxian's eunuch faction only called forth a fresh surge of gentry power, reconstituted as the Restoration Society. Indeed, it can be argued that not even the advent of the Qing state in 1644 did anything to stop the gentry's countermoves against the state per se, for, as we saw in Chapter 1, Wu Weiye and Chen Mingxia continued to follow the old pattern. What, then, was different about the state's 1661 attack on the gentry that made it so effective as to preclude the usual gentry counteroffensive?[27]

Already mentioned was the possibility that some elements of the Qing state, particularly Manchu regents and transnational bannermen, functioned outside the traditional gentry-official ambiguity and might have been able to deal with the gentry as officials without pulling any punches. Could this novel composition of the Qing state have made the difference in 1661? While it is obvious that the regents and Zhu Guozhi acted against the gentry with a grim dispassion, the point remains that Wanli's mine tax commissioners were likewise very straightforward attackers of the gentry from outside the gentry-official milieu, and thus it could not simply have been that the unconventionality of the state's 1661 attack on the gentry decided its success. The failed hypothesis, however, does lead to a promising question: Given that both Wanli's and the Oboi regents' attacks on the gentry were largely carried out by special state functionaries unsympathetic to the gentry, why did Wanli's offensive provoke the gentry's righteous outrage and swift counterattack and the regents' charge result in the gentry's abject defeat and demoralization? The answer to this question, if it cannot hinge on the shared unconventionality of Wanli's and the regents' assaults, must therefore hinge on their differing airs of legitimacy. True, the victims of 1661 grumbled about the regents, Ren Weichu, and Zhu Guozhi as though they were incompetent, and they lamented their fates as unjust, but charges of incompetence, with the implication of illegitimacy, had always been leveled by the gentry against their opponents, and every injury suffered by the gentry was considered, by them, to be the definition of injustice. In the past, though, the gentry's complaints were righteous and incendiary; now they were merely sullen and spiteful. Only in 1661–1662 did the gentry accept their cruel fate. Their act of acceptance conferred legitimacy upon it and, by extension, upon the authority that dealt it to them, in spite of their resentful words. The next question to explore is why the gentry under the regency accepted their fate, and their persecution, as legitimate.

The reason is twofold. In the first place, the regents framed their actions more confidently and conscientiously than any of the Ming statists or Dorgon, and legitimacy grew from these qualities. Zhang Juzheng thought himself the underdog and actually set his sights low, despite his combativeness; Wei Zhongxian and his faction never had a chance; and even Dorgon gave the gentlemen too much credit by debating with them and remaining content to neutralize their influence via bureaucratic balance. As for Wanli and his setting the mine tax commissioners on the gentry, it was an especially desperate experiment, one the gentry freely scoffed at even more than they suffered by it. The regents, by comparison, though they doubted the responsiveness and diligence of the gentry-official bureaucracy as much as Wanli did, nonetheless refused to take Wanli's easy way out by going around it. Instead, they took command of the bureaucracy, accepting no excuse for laxity or leniency, insisting that it serve its statist purpose. It is interesting to consider that the regents, despite their employing a field of ringers like bannermen (and despite their supposed hatred of Chinese administrative forms), nonetheless employed them as Chinese officials rather than as satraps, professional tax farmers, or mine tax commissioners and directed their actions through the traditional imperial bureaucracy, legitimizing it and deriving legitimacy in return. Of course, the regents' harsh prosecution of the Lamenting in the Temple affair signaled, in advance of the Tax Clearance case, that no conflicting interpretation of the bureaucracy—that its officials, if not lenient to the gentry, were therefore "corrupt"—would be allowed. The gentry's student surrogates were summarily cut down—chief among them, Jin Renrui, who had wielded the Neo-Confucian philosophy of gentlemanly sovereignty to undermine the legitimacy of the state-serving bureaucracy.

The second reason the gentry accepted the rightness of their persecution in 1661 was that many gentry had claimed an interest in practical statecraft since at least 1638 and the publication of the *Huang Ming jingshi wenbian*, a collection of memorials and other documents dealing with various subjects pertinent to imperial and local administration, such as efficient tax collection. The evolution of this "statecraft school" and its recognition of the importance of official travails represented the Confucian gentleman's attempt to supplement his philosophical asseveration of sovereignty over the state with a commitment to master its practical workings. It signified, in other words, the gentry-official's resolution to cultivate the official part of his personality in order to rule less ethereally and more concretely. Ultimately, of course, the movement could only accentuate

the contradictions inherent in the gentry-official persona, for as the gentlemen began to descend from the ether and view the world more as officials did, they would come to see the members of their own class less grandly as moral centers of the universe and more earthily as big landlords and tax dodgers. The bifurcated Jekyll-Hyde characterization of the gentry that Martin Heijdra has noted as making its appearance in the sixteenth century, in which the gentry were viewed either as saints or scoundrels, was thus largely resolved, with the help of the statecraft school, in favor of the latter archetype. The gentry's pretentions to administrative statecraft had invalidated their pretentions to sagely sovereignty. By 1661, when the regents' attack on the gentry's tax mischief came, the gentry could no longer pretend that it wasn't a problem. They had met the enemy in the pages of the statecraft writers, and the enemy was them.[28]

Evidence of the gentry's concurrence that their own punishment constituted good statecraft would include prefaces written by gentry victims in praise of their punisher. Zhu Guozhi remained unforgivable in the eyes of most gentry-officials, and his leaving his post before being properly relieved also lowered his stock in the eyes of the regents. He left no record of his tenure in Jiangnan for any gentlemen there to preface, even had they so wished. However, Zhu's replacement, Han Shiqi, left a massive collection of his memorials, the *Fu Wu shu cao*, or *The Memorials and Other Writings of the Governor of Wu*, in 1666, and this work contains the prefaces of five Jiangnan scholar-gentlemen, including Wu Weiye and Gu Yuxian, who, after preserving his gentry status in the Lamenting in the Temple case, immediately lost it in the Tax Clearance case.[29]

Wu Weiye seems to have drawn this assignment on the strength of his earlier duties as a compiler under Shunzhi, with the loss of his status in 1661 apparently doing nothing to disqualify him. Wu identified himself as a *bu min*, or citizen of Han Shiqi's jurisdiction, charged with writing a preface to the tome, which he ascribed not to the regents (whom he never mentioned) but to the "Son of Heaven," Kangxi, who wished to circulate instructive examples of strength and weakness in administration, exhibiting specifically the new procedures Han created and the old ones he abolished. After perusing the contents, Wu marveled at "how much the Emperor added to Han Shiqi's labors and how much of himself Han put into his responsibilities." Indeed, at the beginning of Wu's preface, the emperor figures mostly as a passive employer, and the Governor emerges as the true sage. Wu traced these roles to antiquity and described the process of employment in terms that were a bit degrading for the governor

so employed. "The Son of Heaven makes a tool of his ability," Wu wrote, using the uncomplimentary word *qi*, meaning tool or utensil. Once the man of ability is established as a governor, however, the local people in his jurisdiction all look up in reverence, subtly suggesting that they might be revering him, the supposed tool, rather than the Son of Heaven, who presumed to make a tool of him. In Jiangnan in the 1660s, according to Wu, it was "only Governor Han who was able to bring the entirety of a vast administration under his mastery, reducing burdens, supplying deficits, wielding discipline, and bringing all to order. Unhurriedly, meticulously, perspicaciously, he untied all the knots." Han Shiqi certainly loomed in Wu Weiye's eyes as the kind of omnicompetent Confucian gentleman who could work miracles.[30]

In so eulogizing Han Shiqi, Wu remained faithful to the basic precepts of Neo-Confucianism, for he was depicting a type of sagehood that was independent of kingship. However, Wu's position had evolved somewhat from that of earlier days, for he was now bestowing sagely qualities on someone inside the government—a bannerman, an official. Han's sagehood was manifested not in the gentlemanly company he kept in Jiangnan or anywhere else; he was not part of a movement to civilize the government from the outside. On the contrary, he was bringing order to Jiangnan from his position in the government, imposing discipline, ironically, on its would-be civilizers. True, the Neo-Confucian gentlemen of the crusading Ming type had always held out the hope that the state (Ming or Qing) would recognize them and grant them a wider scope of action, but the hope had never been realized, not least by Wu Weiye himself, because the state had always proved too stubbornly resistant to gentlemanly cooptation. Now, however, the state, in the person of the emperor, seemed finally to have employed a decent man. It was not, alas, Wu Weiye, nor was it anyone he would have recognized as a fellow gentleman, but Wu could not fail to be impressed, because Han was such a gifted practitioner of statecraft. With the advent of the statecraft school, the Neo-Confucian gentlemen had introduced a new set of practical criteria for excellence in leadership, and now, they found themselves disqualified from leadership according to those same criteria. Having allowed a slight variation of the rules, the Neo-Confucian gentlemen had lost the game. Wu Weiye could only applaud—even from the penalty box of the losing team.

The rest of Wu's preface shows even more clearly how thoroughly things had changed. Wu identified as Governor Han's historical antecedents the Tang and Song officials Han Yu, Fan Zhongyan (989–1052), and Ouyang Xiu, three men standing slightly outside

the Neo-Confucian pantheon. These "great Confucians," Wu wrote, "made financial administration and the material sufficiency of the state (*guo*) their chief concerns. In serving the sovereign (*ren zhu*)," Wu continued, "the first task is to make him know the virtue of economy, in order to control expenditure and achieve a sufficient income. Only after these goals are met should one present advice concerning humaneness, righteousness, and virtue." It was just the sort of priorities for which the righteous Ni Yuanlu, the last Ming minister of revenue, had despairingly pitied the Chongzhen emperor, and old Zhang Juzheng couldn't have said it any better.[31]

By the end of his contribution, Wu was flirting with true heresy. He heaped extraordinary praise upon the Han and Tang dynasties, claiming that the government of a certain Han reign surpassed that of the fabled Three Dynasties (when "sage and worthy rulers" yet lived, according to Neo-Confucians), while suggesting also that, at one point in the Tang, government "wielded humaneness and righteousness to great effect upon the rich and powerful." With this last remark, Wu came as close as he ever did in this preface to mentioning the gentry, and he showed them being civilized by, and not civilizing, the state. It was a complete reversal of Wu's earlier conception of the state-gentry relationship, and he confirmed it by finally conceding that the "sagely sovereign (*sheng zhu*) and the worthy minister (*xian chen*)" had equal parts to play in good government. Indeed, in the space of Wu's preface, his conception of the emperor had evolved from employer to pupil to equal partner in the civilizing process (although only in the first case was the emperor a living contemporary; the others were theoretical).[32]

As for Gu Yuxian, he actually mentioned the "gentlemen" (*junzi*), significantly, not as the instruments of civilization but merely as the recognizers of Han Shiqi's genius. No matter where the gentlemen were—in the capital, in Jiangnan, or elsewhere in the countryside (in other words, in or out of office)—they all realized that there was no one save Han Shiqi who was up to the task of governing the "destitute, distressed, and hopeless" land south of the Yangzi River. Han Shiqi himself was in Gu's eulogy a paragon of moderation, "unwilling to terrorize but unable to relax regulations, careful not to hamper tax collection but incapable of milking the taxpayers, nurturing of the tall rice stalks but mindful of the weeds." As a result, Han's administration was "neither heavy- nor light-handed."[33]

Perhaps next to the "bad cop" Zhu Guozhi—who had, after all, nearly killed him—the "good cop" Han Shiqi seemed to Gu Yuxian to be a relatively restrained man. Both cops, though, were enforcing the

same laws, and Han had very energetically followed up the attack on the gentry that Zhu had launched. Han took Zhu's mass indictment of the local gentry as a starting point, inheriting his predecessor's list of gentry suspects and checking names off only when the specified person had paid his taxes in full (or in rare cases when he discovered a clerical error). He was extremely strict with his subordinates, very frequently bringing charges against them for slowness to adhere to administrative procedures. In one of these cases, he accused a regional tax administrator of "shielding and showing leniency" (*yin xin*), which could only have referred to favoritism, now strictly forbidden, on behalf of the gentry. Han Shiqi was no different from Zhu Guozhi in his determination to extend the law to the gentry, and in fact, he was probably better at it than Zhu, who had abandoned his post with the work unfinished. In sum, Han Shiqi was a master enforcer who would in fact earn his share of enemies and be impeached for being "corrupt and despicable" in 1669 (significantly, when the regency ended), though he would later be reinstated. That Gu Yuxian should consider his inflexible administration to be the essence of moderation speaks volumes about the gentry's tame submission to it.[34]

Constituting but one of the several attacks the regents launched against the gentry in the early 1660s, the Tax Clearance case, because it was played out on the field of tax policy, was especially effective, owing to the importance conceded to tax policy by the gentry themselves. In other words, it was on the Tax Clearance front that the gentry's defenses were weakest. It can also be said, however, that the gentry, under attack on many fronts simultaneously, were ill equipped to defend themselves on any one of them. Ironically, considering that with the preemptive Lamenting in the Temple demonstration they had actually struck first, the gentry were now reeling from the blows that had rained upon them.

Indeed, since the Oboi regents had come out swinging, most of the major action of their administration seems to have taken place in its first year or so. With the gentry on the ropes, or perhaps even on the mat, by 1662, the regents were able to spend the balance of their time in power in unchallenged ascendency, ruling according to their statist philosophy with little or no gentry opposition. To be sure, the Neo-Confucian philosophy of gentry sovereignty was not fully extinct, as the continued publishing activities of righteous Ming survivors like Huang Zongxi (1610–1695) continued to attest, but Huang's 1662 *Ming yi dai fang lu*, with its strong criticism of imperial authority, is rightly described by Lynn Struve as "the swan song of the Donglin and [Restoration Society] movements." Its remaining adherents in

government had been neutralized, and one of its most boastful advocates on the sidelines, Jin Renrui, was dead. The turbulent history of the Ming-Qing transition thus seems to have paused for a time, as the titanic struggle between the state and the gentry devolved into a mop-up operation, conducted by the former against the latter.[35]

Further Innovations of the Regency

During the mid-1660s, the regents followed through on their earlier attacks by greatly weakening the governmental institutions that had facilitated gentry influence. Ruling through the Manchu Council of Deliberative Officials, the regents eclipsed the conventional Six Ministries as a policymaking body. Unwilling to entertain the righteous remonstrance of Chinese gentry-officials, the regents truncated the power of the Censorate and reduced the number of censors so that few discouraging words were heard from this venerable body of critics for the duration of the regency (the pile of corpses from the Lamenting in the Temple and other cases no doubt further discouraging most censors from voicing such discouragement). The regents made the performance evaluation of judicial and especially fiscal efficiency the chief component of each official's bureaucratic standing. Other procedures for grading officials, which in the past had occasioned large-scale factional purges, were placed under the regents' direct control or abolished. Most significantly, the regents reformed the official (and gentry) recruitment system, replacing the eight-legged examination essay that Chen Mingxia and Jin Renrui liked so much with a more practical format, which included a sample memorial and nearly cutting in half the number of degrees to be awarded in a single exam year. All these adjustments represented sweeping qualitative and quantitative curtailments of gentry power both inside and outside government.[36]

Robert Oxnam, whose study of the regency remains the most comprehensive, argues that the regents were Manchu die-hards single-mindedly upholding the purity of Manchu traditions and institutions and the ascendency of Manchus over Chinese. It seems at least as plausible, though, that the regents were really determined to safeguard the ascendency of the state over the gentry, in a way that actually borrowed heavily from the statist tradition native to China. Perhaps the regents equated the gentry with China, owing to the almost stereotypical centrality of the gentry in Chinese culture, but the regents actually accommodated themselves quite well to those Chinese institutions that were outside the gentry's milieu. Chief of these exceptions was the Chinese military, particularly the so-called

Three Feudatories of Wu Sangui, Geng Jimao, and Shang Kexi. The regents relied heavily on the three to suppress sporadic rebellion in the south, and their strength greatly increased. Wu obtained the power to appoint both civil and military officials in his territory (Yunnan and Guizhou), received considerable disbursements of Qing revenue while also levying taxes himself, and, together with the other two feudatories, maintained wide-ranging business interests. By the end of the 1660s, especially after the majority of the Kangxi emperor in 1667, there was a growing movement to curb the feudatories, but the regents always resisted. As Oxnam has explained, the regents might have been eager to avoid a rupture, but they also respected the feudatories as "comrades-in-arms" and never believed that they posed a serious threat. The regents' support for the feudatories is evidence of the acceptability of any nongentry system of governance in their eyes, even if it was Han and not Manchu.[37]

Instability of the Qing State under the Regents and the Search for New Leadership

Of course, the prominence of the feudatories in the regents' administration is also a sign that, in spite of having overthrown gentry dominance, the particular form of state sovereignty the regents offered in its place would prove to be unsustainable. Not only were the aggrandizing feudatories poor guarantors of long-term stability; the real problem was with the regents themselves. Although they had refuted with great severity the gentry's claim to sovereignty over the state and had gone on to subject the gentry unambiguously to the authority of the state, they themselves could claim no sovereignty over the state. Their power rested on an imperial will of dubious authenticity, and it grew even less legitimate every day the Kangxi emperor matured. On such shaky footing, the regents sought to buttress their positions by forming power blocs with other officials, and a new round of factional maneuvering was thus opened. The current outbreak was very ironic considering that the regents had been so fearful of the factional tendencies of Chinese gentry-officials. Evidently, however, faction could thrive whenever bureaucrats made claims to power that could be contested: when gentry-officials claimed the authority of the sage kings and not everybody believed them, or when top ministers or aristocrats claimed the authority of their young emperors and not everybody believed them. In the case of the 1660s regency, it was actually Oboi who began scheming against Soni when the latter's granddaughter

was married into the imperial house in 1665. To compensate for Soni's newfound closeness with the emperor, Oboi found power and influence where it was to be had, strengthening his own Bordered Yellow Banner and placing his cronies in several important ministerial posts. By the time Soni sickened and eventually died in 1667, Oboi had effectively taken over the regency.[38]

As was customary for the Ming-Qing transition, reaction to the power grab was swift. This time, however, with the gentry having been placed so decisively on the defensive in the first days of the regency, there would be no gentlemanly organizing and counterattacking as in the past. Instead, individual gentry-officials memorialized to beg for the Kangxi emperor to take command, and Kangxi began to manage and co-opt their efforts for his own purposes. After a metropolitan censor wrote, on August 30, 1666, that the time was right for personal imperial rule, Kangxi himself began to issue edicts critical of the regents' policies, especially the diminution of the Censorate and the lack of moral criteria in the evaluation of officials. Then, on July 27, 1667, a minor clerical official in the capital named Xiong Cilü (1635–1709; a *jinshi* of 1658), following the tone of Kangxi's edicts, ventured to write a long, lamenting memorial on the pitiable state of the empire under Oboi.[39]

Xiong's memorial took aim at the regency by calling attention to excessive taxation, arbitrary and self-interested enforcement of the law, and the stifling of dissent. He complained of the regents' pro-Manchu bias, not on the grounds of racial fairness but because it seemed somehow to have triggered a more general disaster, afflicting the gentlemanly class, its cherished vocation, and its root philosophy.

> The morale of the gentlemen (*shi*) is collapsing, as their vocation becomes degraded. In the country's bureaucracy, Manchu and Han should be subject to the same regulations equally. They should perform the same way if working in the same office, laboring together for a common goal and judged by their performance alone. [In the absence of these uniform standards], most officials at all levels are cowed into silence and will go along with anything. Very few are those who speak their true minds on the job, and many simply cling selfishly to their posts and salaries, making a false virtue of caution. Those who speak out righteously are considered to have committed a breach of etiquette. Diligent administrators are dismissed as competitive go-getters. The quietly incorruptible are shunned as affected. The upright and respectable are mocked as pedants. In sum, all those who cultivate themselves to internalize the Way, all the gentlemen (*shi*) who search for principle in books, are ridiculed by the multitude as Neo-Confucians (*dao xue*).

Unsurprisingly, Xiong linked these symptoms to a decline in education for which only the regents could have been responsible. With "young gentlemen" (*shi zi*) focused solely on examination success, he sighed, "They are cut off from all knowledge of book reading or lecture and discussion (*jiangxue*) as means to recover the Sages' Way of Principle. If there are any bright ones, they succumb to the verbosity of the miscellaneous philosophies or drown in Daoism and Buddhism, troubling the world and deceiving the people. No problem is more serious than this one."[40]

Thus did Xiong Cilü characterize the regency, correctly, if melodramatically, as a disaster for Neo-Confucianism. Indeed there is nothing remarkable about Xiong's expression of indignation on behalf of a philosophy, for persecuted gentlemen had been complaining about the philosophical biases of their persecutors since the days of Zhang Juzheng, and adherents of the true teaching were more or less bound to view themselves as embattled guardians of sacred lore in degenerate times. As was the case with Ye Mengzhu, however, Xiong Cilü's mood was one of despair and desolation. Nowhere did he evince any sense of righteous revenge in the (former) style of Wu Weiye, nor did he hold out any hope of a new worldwide flourishing brought about by a convergence of gentlemen. Even more significant, his attitude toward the emperor was very different from that of Wei Yijie in 1652, though Wei's emperor, Shunzhi, and Xiong's emperor, Kangxi, were roughly the same ages (14 and 13, respectively). Wei had likened gentry-officials to celestial lights and begged leave to shine some of their sacred learning upon Shunzhi's empty Manchu mind. Xiong, conversely, desired Kangxi to rescue the teaching himself. "I beg Your Majesty," he said, "to exalt the teaching of Confucianism, to establish schools . . . and education officials, and have them take command of our young gentlemen (*shi zi*)." In this formulation, the gentlemen would be on the receiving end of an education process initiated by the emperor. Toward the close of his memorial, Xiong did indeed echo Wei Yijie's call for the emperor himself to be educated, but he used none of the words denoting the formal court lecture (*jing yan* or *ri jiang*), and he seemed rather deliberate in letting Kangxi have all the action verbs: "Carefully *select* old Confucians and the eminently virtuous. *Keep* them at your side, and their service will resemble that of the Shang dynasty chancellor Yi Yin in its excellence. *Make* them, naturally and leisurely, to discourse on reason, in order to open and enrich (*qi wu*) Your Majesty's mind and nurture Your Majesty's virtue." [Emphases added.] Then Xiong hastily reiterated that it was the emperor's

prerogative to select talented and heroic officials to spread the law and the learning throughout the land. By the end of his memorial, Xiong dispensed with all references to any external assistance and voiced his expectation that "the sovereign's (*jun*) intentions be clear and distinct and his body strong and sturdy. He need only sit and, with regal bearing and manly posture, reap the rewards of success. Thus, Your Majesty will have *directly* (*zhi jie*) received the thought and the methods of the Ancient Sages." [Emphasis added.] In sum, Xiong Cilü was nominating Kangxi for sage king.[41]

It is interesting to consider that for the Confucian gentlemen, the shock of the Qing conquest actually paled in comparison to the trauma of the regency, for Wei Yijie had viewed the conquest years as having enhanced, through the occasional martyrdom, the majesty of the gentlemanly class, while for Xiong Cilü, the usually nonfatal punishments of the early 1660s brought degradation and ruin. Apparently, being killed and being spanked yielded very different fruits of righteousness and shame. Accordingly, Wei was emboldened to condescend to Shunzhi, whereas Xiong ran to Kangxi for redress.

As for Kangxi, although he declared his majority shortly after receiving Xiong Cilü's memorial, he chose not to not to repeat his father's mistake of wading into the scholarly throng expecting it to respond immediately to his command. Instead, he proceeded very slowly, working within the context of aristocratic or banner factionalism, balancing various groups, of which Chinese gentry-officials were one, against each other. Xiong Cilü, perhaps sensing a new gentlemanly ascendency now that Kangxi ruled personally, memorialized again, on October 22, 1668, now calling specifically for the resumption of the royal lecture (*jing yan*) and discussion (*jiangxue*), but Kangxi did not respond as Xiong hoped. Instead, Kangxi summoned Xiong to explain his still quite gloomy assessment of the country's governance. He allowed Xiong to state one more time that the people were waiting for Kangxi to rule like a Yao or Shun, but when Xiong became short on specifics, Kangxi accused him of memorializing recklessly in a quest for fame and importance. Demotion of two steps in rank was recommended for Xiong, but Kangxi pardoned him, signifying that it was better for the gentleman to be obliged to the emperor than vice versa. If China at the close of the regency was experiencing another rotation of the revolving door, by which statists and gentlemen had periodically exchanged the initiative since the troubles began in the late Ming, then Kangxi was determined to manage it more effectively than had Wanli, Chongzhen, or Shunzhi, who had all presided over the collapse of statist subregimes only to be overwhelmed

by the gentlemanly countersurge. Hence Kangxi put Xiong Cilü off rather brusquely while continuing to string him along.[42]

Kangxi's preference was that he himself emerge as the patron of Confucianism without becoming the mere pupil of Confucian scholars like Xiong Cilü. With this end in view, on May 14, 1669, Kangxi led a delegation of officials from the Ministry of Rites on a tour of the Imperial University. Kangxi on this occasion began stealing pages from the Confucian gentlemen's script, elaborating on the virtues of sagely governance in his own words rather than having them recommended to him in a lecture. "The Way of the Sages!" he acclaimed, "Expansively illuminating to the farthest reaches of posterity! Only by raising its banner on high can I, your Emperor, perfect government, strengthen social relations, and improve customs. There is no other way." Kangxi's assertion of the imperial prerogative in the Confucian civilizing project is most striking. At around this time, the emperor also arranged for the descendants of Confucian worthies like Confucius and Mencius to attend the university, again anticipating a likely demand of the gentry-officials.[43]

In the meantime, the surviving regents continued to serve as Kangxi's advisors, and their byzantine maneuverings against each other, struggles for personal power, with the various banners as power bases, intensified. Oboi actually had Suksaha arrested and executed in September 1667, further elevating his own Bordered Yellow Banner. Deaths and bureaucratic turnovers in 1668 and 1669, however, foreshadowed new political alignments, and by the summer of 1669, the Plain Yellow Banner, under the direction of Soni's nephew Songgotu, was on the rise. Kangxi thereupon made his move, and with Plain Yellow support ordered the arrest of Oboi and others of his faction, including Ebilun, on June 14. Oboi's fall was precipitous. He probably died in jail, though the precise cause of his death is unclear.[44]

While this sudden eruption of Manchu names and colored flags may seem tangential to the narrative here, it can nonetheless be gleaned from it that the political situation of 1669 was very fractured and fluid, and this fragmented state of things probably worked to Kangxi's advantage. The young emperor, now 15 years old, was unlikely to get swept up in the tug of war between state and gentry, because both sides had lost so many players or were demoralized or bickering or divided against themselves. With little concerted pulling in either direction, Kangxi would be able to assume the initiative, and as Chapter 4 will show, the various arrangements he effected would result in the final settlement of the state-versus-gentry controversy.

Chapter 4

The Kangxi Emperor, 1669–1699

Among all Chinese autocrats, the Kangxi emperor has secured perhaps the best reputation. His reign was long, and while it was not perfectly peaceful, his rule was roundly accepted as legitimate and even sagely. In fact, it was probably the absence of peace, or stability, in the early years of Kangxi's tenure, that contributed most significantly to his acceptance as a sage. While it may be a cliché to say that Kangxi was a political genius, he certainly proved to be a remarkably dexterous manager of shifting political landscapes, and his ascendency came during a time of great flux.

The preceding Oboi Regency had done its work. The gentlemanly elite, or at least its pretention to sovereignty, was smashed, and the sovereignty of the state itself was much in doubt, having endured a regency of questionable legitimacy and a degeneration into aristocratic factionalism. It fell to the Kangxi emperor to pick up the pieces, the institutions with which he had to work being so weakened by the disruptions of the previous years that they were to prove especially malleable in his hands. This narrative will take 1669 as the start of Kangxi's regime, even though his formal majority was declared in 1667, because 1669 marks the first occasion the young ruler threw his weight into court politics. The intervening two years, which had given Oboi more time to run amuck, were actually very fortuitous, for they degraded aristocratic institutions yet further, heightened the chaos to which Kangxi could introduce order, and gave him a chance to declare his majority, as it were, for the second time. Even so, the removal of Oboi was only the first step on Kangxi's path to sagehood. Years of innovation and improvisation were ahead. Indeed, Kangxi's sagehood came from his being able to take nothing for granted. He inherited

neither peace and prosperity nor the more recent intense strife of the statist and gentry partisans, either of which would have made him passive and of no account. Fate had given him the initiative, but he had to strive to keep it.

Kangxi's Reestablishment of the Court Lectures

The purge of Oboi in 1669 was not accomplished by Kangxi singlehandedly but was largely facilitated by the Plain Yellow Banner, leaving Kangxi obliged to it and somewhat subjected to its expanded power. Rather than tying his fate to the Plain Yellow Banner forever, Kangxi sought to escape its influence. He began moving closer to his Chinese scholar-officials in the same careful way as described at the close of Chapter 3—just close enough to benefit from their philosophy but not so close as to become their mascot. In the late summer of 1670, he summoned the ever-ready Xiong Cilü to deliver talks on two passages from Confucius's *Analects*, neither of which afforded much opportunity for hectoring. The first one dealt wholly with kingly governance: "In ruling a state of a thousand chariots, one is reverent in the handling of affairs and shows himself to be trustworthy. One is economical in expenditures, loves the people, and uses them only at the proper season." The second was about kingly wisdom: "He who devotes himself to securing for his subjects what it is right they should have, who by respect for the Spirits keeps them at a distance, may be termed wise." Pleased with Xiong's performance, Kangxi promoted him, on November 22, to the Hanlin Academy and Ministry of Rites. Then, on November 25, Kangxi issued an edict to the latter, in which he said that the time was right to reinstitute the court lecture (*jing yan*) and the daily lecture (*ri jiang*). "The emperor," he explained, "desiring to rule, must examine into ancient precedents and learning, to help reach the goal of an open and enriched mind." This last phrase (*qi wu*) followed the wording of Xiong's 1667 memorial, signaling that Kangxi was responding to it belatedly, perhaps even sarcastically. The Ministry of Rites proceeded to schedule the biannual *jing yan* and the daily *ri jiang*, and Xiong Cilü became one of several lecturers for the former. The first biannual lecture took place on March 27, 1671, and the daily lectures began on May 18. Sacrifices to Confucius took place on the days before both of these events.[1]

Why the timing for instituting the lectures was now right, whereas so recently it had been wrong, can perhaps be explained by the fact that they would have done Kangxi no good in his showdown with

Oboi, for which the strong support of a rival banner was necessary. Now, however, it was time for Kangxi to expand his own power base, and Chinese gentry-officials would come in handy. It is important to emphasize, though, that Kangxi took pains not to encourage them too much. His promotion of Xiong Cilü and authorization of the lectures came on the heels of a generally negative state of the empire edict in which he make it quite plain that he was no patsy for the gentry per se, especially as "the powerful and rich tread upon the humble, the evil gentry (*lie shen*) tyrannize the villages, worthless students corrupt local government, and rapacious lackeys swindle the innocent." Furthermore, in 1671, Kangxi embarked on a tour of Manchuria that had been initially proposed in 1668 and effectively vetoed by a group of officials that included Xiong Cilü himself, who viewed the trip, planned at first as a hunting expedition, as dangerously deviant from Confucian norms. When refashioned as a filial visit to ancestors' tombs, the trip finally garnered the approval of the Confucian element, though its completion was regarded as a victory for Manchu customs. The episode shows how intricate the negotiation between Kangxi and Xiong Cilü was, with each grudging concession balanced by a dogged insistence. It is also evident that Kangxi was becoming adept at advancing Confucian arguments for his own purposes.[2]

It is in this latter aspect that Kangxi's insight appears most profound. The emperor must have seen how futile it would have been to resist Xiong Cilü's entreaties forever, and he must have divined also how easy it would be to beat not only Xiong but also all the Neo-Confucians at their own game simply by wielding the power of civilization that they were so eager to bestow on him. It was not only that Kangxi had studied the history of the last hundred years and perceived the great danger to the nominal sovereign posed by the quasi-religious Confucian "clergy"—that, in approximation of the later realization of Adam Smith, "should the sovereign have the imprudence to appear either to deride or doubt himself of the most trifling part of their doctrine," they would "proscribe him as a profane person"; but he also realized that "though this order of men can scarce ever be forced, they may be managed as easily as any other." Nay, Kangxi meant not only to manage his Confucian clergy, nor even to anoint himself as their high priest, but to canonize himself as their saint. The Neo-Confucian theory of *dao tong*, or Succession to the Way, taught that a sacred body of sagely knowledge resided not only in certain people but also in certain books. Very well, then; Kangxi would read the books and receive the transmission from the sages himself. The scholars who proffered the magic texts could make no

objection, their current lack of a factional or even of a legitimate economic agenda in their own villages leaving them little else to hope for. It would be like taking candy from a lonely grandmother.[3]

"There is never a moment without my having a book in hand" was a refrain in Kangxi's life (and it became a prominent theme in imperial portraiture). He said it around this time, in 1673, and again, in exactly the same words, much later, toward the end of his years, when he compiled a book of lessons for the education of his sons. With allowances for anachronism and self-promotion, the latter source still conveys quite well the primacy of book learning in Kangxi's own education and the awareness that sagehood, and thus sovereignty, could be derived from it. "The *Book of Documents*, [according to Kangxi], contains the method of imperial governance used by the [sage king Shun's] kingdom of Yu as well as the Shang, Xia, and Zhou kingdoms. As [subsequent commentators on the classic] have said, the government of the Ancient Sages was grounded in the Way, and the Way of the Ancient Sages was grounded in their minds and hearts. Therefore, if you come to know their minds and hearts, then you will infallibly master both their Way and their government."[4]

This method of enlightenment conformed exactly to Chen Mingxia's and Xiong Cilü's conceptions, though Chen had recommended it to other gentry-officials and Xiong had recommended it to Kangxi himself. At least as important, the combination—actually the recombination—of the sagely Way and sagely governance to which Kangxi alluded meant the end of the long dark age of unenlightened kingship in which Neo-Confucian scholars alone possessed the Way. The advent of a sagely emperor would be of epochal significance in Neo-Confucian philosophy, in some ways signifying its completion and obsolescence.

"The classics of the Sages," said Kangxi again, "in their every sentence and in their treatment of every subject, are the perfection of principle. When you read them, you must fully internalize them. Take this as my method. Take this as my injunction." Once more: "When you read a chapter, you benefit by one chapter. When you read for a day, you benefit by one day. Thus did Confucius, in his eagerness to study, forget to eat." Kangxi's identification with Confucius provides another potent image of Confucius enthroned and another case also of Kangxi's reclaiming sagely status from the gentry, for the gentleman-firebrand Gu Xiancheng had aspired to be this same single-minded and hungry Confucius in the late Ming.[5]

True, Kangxi was getting lectured on the Confucian classics all through the early 1670s, but, by various gestures, he anticipated the

imputation that he was being culturally force-fed and insisted that, on the contrary, his appetite for Confucian learning was so ravenous that he craved more than his tutors were providing. "When the sovereign of men (*ren zhu*) comes to rule the empire," he lectured his lecturers early in 1673, "mastering the Way in perfect measure comes first from lecture and discussion (*jiangxue*) and the grasping of principle. During pauses in Our travail, We read the classics in the palace. We cannot help but be struck by the inexhaustible supply of righteousness and principle there is to be found in such reading; in fact We take inexhaustible pleasure in it." He ordered his teachers, heretofore appearing before him once a day, henceforth to attend upon him all day. Ready at any time to discuss classical passages at Kangxi's request, they were effectively reduced to the seventeenth-century equivalent of books on tape, more so walking libraries than imposing schoolmasters. The arrangement was the polar opposite of that envisioned by Huang Zongxi in the previous decade in which the lecturer sat facing south (in the emperor's position) and the emperor sat facing him, "among the ranks of the students." Kangxi also claimed enough of his own authority as a Confucian to disparage the Confucianism of others, particularly when it degenerated into flowery literaryism. Twice in 1673 he declared his aversion to "empty talk" and the "perfected artifice" of "annoying wordsmiths." Elsewhere he wrote, "From a tender age, though I labored happily at reading, I never took an interest in literature . . . The learning of the emperor is far-seeing and all-seeing. It cannot be surpassed by Confucian scholars (*ru sheng*), with their parallelisms, embellishments, and cuteness."[6]

Kangxi was well on the way to asserting himself, when, in late 1673, all hell broke loose. Although the Qing empire would face its most existential challenge to date, Kangxi's position was destined to improve even further. The gentry, meanwhile, would be forced to adapt to an even more dependent reality.

The Rebellion of the Three Feudatories and Its Effect on the Gentry

On December 28, 1673, Wu Sangui, the feudatory of Yunnan and Guizhou, revolted against the Qing. His mutiny came after years of intense diplomacy with authorities in Beijing, including Kangxi himself, who were attempting to curb his power; it finally burst into the open when Kangxi accepted Wu's insincere offer to resign. In time, the two other feudatories, Shang Kexi and Geng Jingzhong

([d. 1682], who had inherited the post from his father, Geng Jingmao), rebelled as well, and the Qing dynasty was in serious trouble.

Hundreds of senior Qing officials in southern China, the clear majority there, joined Wu Sangui's standard. Many of them had been Wu's lieutenants in earlier days and chose to follow their former boss, while others were simply swept up in the tide of the mutiny. Regardless of how cheerfully they submitted, the majority of Wu Sangui's coconspirators were former Ming officials. Their support gave him control of nearly all the southern provinces by 1675.[7]

Jiangnan, however, home of the majority of China's eminent gentry, remained steadfastly loyal. It may have been that Wu Sangui, the man who had aligned with the Manchus as they entered the country in 1644, now looked like a "double turncoat," whom few trusted to be rebelling for any cause but his own. It could also be argued that the military situation determined everything and that the Jiangnan gentry didn't join the feudatories' revolt, while so many others did, simply because the mutineers never made it to Jiangnan. In fact, however, the Jiangnan gentry sided with the Qing very early in the war, when the issue was still greatly in doubt. Furthermore, they actively provided the Qing with crucial support rather than waiting disinterestedly for the military situation to resolve itself one way or the other. The reason they did so, as the following case will illustrate, is that they were deeply fearful of social unrest.[8]

After the mutiny of Geng Jingzhong in Fujian in mid-1674, the Manchu governor-general of Jiangnan and Jiangxi, Asisi (d. 1681), felt compelled to forward troops to threatened areas, which now included Jiangxi and Zhejiang, and he seems, at approximately this time, to have been ordered to see personally to the defenses of Raozhou Prefecture, in northern Jiangxi. Many members of the Jiangnan local elite, apparently panicked at the prospect of Asisi's absence, imagined that their Manchu governor-general had been permanently shifted to the front lines in Jiangxi. Various petitions for Asisi's retention in Jiangnan, originating from the gentry (*xiang shen*), Confucian students, tax captains, and villagers of Shangyuan and Jiangning Counties (in other words, the city and environs of Nanjing), were summarized in a report by a group of local officials, including the provincial administration commissioner Mu Tianyan (*jinshi* 1655, d. 1696), on July 18, 1674. The document paints an extraordinarily vivid picture of the Jiangnan gentry's disposition at that moment.[9]

The petitioners spent equal time reminding the authorities of Jiangnan's strategic importance for the dynasty and begging for the protection of their special interests as a class. Naturally, they described

Jiangnan as the crossroads of everywhere. The sagely Son of Heaven, recognizing Jiangnan's advantages, wisely dispatched Asisi to serve as governor-general, and in a short time, according to the petition, "officers were orderly and the people pacified." With the advent of Wu's and Geng's revolts, soldiers had arrived en masse, and the need to keep them constantly provisioned and housed was paramount. Even under these pressures, however, the Four Classes (*si min*) remained secure in their occupations, and the little people (*xiao chou*) manifested no signs of alarm. For all these blessings, the credit belonged to the governor-general.[10]

Then came word that Asisi was to be sent to defend Jiangxi. All the gentry and commoners (*shi/min*) in the whole of Jiangnan wailed and howled in surprise and shock as though they had lost the favor of Heaven itself. With the governor-general gone, "who would restrain the several ten-thousands of soldiers? Who would pacify the entire province's poor common people?" It was truly feared that some of the gentry and commoners in the city and the countryside would scatter like frightened birds, and some of the "stubbornly uncivilized," lurking in the mountains and forests, would become "brutal and unreasonable" in Asisi's absence. Whether the governor-general was to stay or go was therefore the key question determining the region's peace and stability. If Asisi were really to be transferred away, for instance, then "the gentry (*shi min*), merchants, and great names—all now enjoying good reputation and esteem—would gather their families and take up their capital and come seek refuge in the city." This fear was of course grounded in precedent, for regional elites had indeed abandoned their homes and sought refuge in Nanjing during the 1630s and 1640s.[11]

In spite of the usual, formulaic expression of socially universal lament about how both gentry (*shen jin*) and commoners (*bai xing*) would be alarmed at Asisi's departure, the concerns of the former group clearly outweighed those of the latter. Whenever the Jiangnan petitioners lauded Asisi as one who "restrained the soldiers and pacified the people," they were, of course, referring to Qing soldiers and Qing subjects. No reading between the lines is required to conclude that the Jiangnan gentry of 1674 were much more concerned about keeping soldiers, local officials, and poorer neighbors in line than they were worried about Wu Sangui or Geng Jingzhong. As the July 18 petition loudly proclaims, the Jiangnan gentry had had enough of the Ming-Qing transition, especially the social disruption it incited. The very rumor of their Manchu governor's absence was enough to engender terrifying visions of peasant bandits springing from their hiding places. In the event, about a month after the petition was forwarded,

either in response to it or remarkably coincidental with it, the government appointed an independent governor-general of Jiangxi, and Asisi was left in command in Jiangnan.[12]

If this petition was an instrument of negotiation, then the gentry's bargaining position was manifestly very weak, for they were beseeching the Manchus for protection from undesirables and offering in exchange the strategic advantages and economic resources afforded by their home region. "The significance of Jiangnan in terms of its wealth and revenue is considerable," they reminded Kangxi. Furthermore, the gentry were pleading for something that would really cost the Manchus nothing (the retention of Asisi). Of course, it is distinctly possible that the gentry's pledge of Jiangnan's wealth for the war effort was equally meaningless, because they must have known that the common people would bear the brunt of the state's increased extractions in wartime. Indubitably, commoners suffered tremendously. They were drafted en masse to build boats, working under the whip in waist-deep water until flesh rotted away, so that, in the words of one poet, "of ten men taken, nine die." You Tong (one of Wu Weiye's associates in the 1650s) noted how local government clerks employed cruel beatings to obtain villagers' more liquid assets as well. Although You claimed also that yamen lackeys were "wantonly prideful" toward the "great houses," it is hard to imagine any of these local elites being "tied up and led away" as the more common people were. Certainly the Jiangnan gentry were able to deflect the heaviest burdens of the rebellion years.[13]

However, if the Jiangnan gentry expected to remain materially unaffected by the war, they were mistaken. Evidence suggests that they were indeed forced to contribute more of their own treasure for the security they demanded. This contribution, moreover, took an extremely novel and even revolutionary form—namely, progressive taxation.

Three examples will be considered. The first comes from You Tong. You wrote that in his native Changzhou County, Suzhou Prefecture, imperial soldiers were "requested" for garrison and defense in the winter of 1674, in another example of the preponderance of security concerns. In the next sentence of his account, You reported that a progressive real estate tax called *jian jia*, based on the number of rooms and roof beams in each dwelling, was assessed on local households. The passage is grammatically sparse, and the logical connection between the two sentences is unclear, but it seems as though the Yous (and other wealthy households, presumably) relied on government soldiers to guard their property, paying the *jian jia* tax as a sort of

protection money. Ye Mengzhu, the chronicler of the Tax Clearance case, also noted market and real estate taxes taking effect empire-wide in 1676, and he also referred to the *jian jia* tax, which was only supposed to last one year but may have lasted longer. Interestingly enough, Jiangnan governor-general Asisi was supposedly rebuked for insufficient collection of real estate taxes, suggesting that his laxity in this area recommended him to the local gentry as much as his diligence as a provider of security.[14]

The second instance of progressive taxation was a 30 percent surtax on all gentry households, collected annually from 1676 until the suppression of the rebellion. The surtax is noted only anecdotally, in the informal writings of Ye Mengzhu, You Tong, and Dong Han (1624–1697?), but among the Qing *Veritable Records* (*Shi lu*), the semiofficial *Dong hua lu*, the court's account of the rebellion (the *Ping ding san ni fang lue*), and any local history yet seen by the current writer, none contains any mention of it. As was true with the Tax Clearance case, the subject of the gentry's economic interests, especially when they conflicted with those of the state, remained a formidable taboo. It is Ye Mengzhu's chronicle that excerpts the 1676 memorial from a censor named Zhang Weichi that called for the surtax, and it is Ye who leaves the least doubt that the measure was enacted and uniformly enforced. "Whether serving at their posts or registered in the countryside," Ye wrote, "among the gentry (*xiang shen*), tribute students (*gong*), and national university students (*jian*) . . . none was unaffected." Dong Han's chronicle includes a paraphrased memorial begging for the exception of tribute students (*sui gong*) from the special assessment, implying that tribute students were indeed being taxed; and Dong also imagined a gruesome scene depicting Zhang Weichi's insanity (perhaps through haunting) and wretched death, showing that the author of the 30 percent gentry surtax was cordially hated for what he wrought. Ye Mengzhu went the farthest in elaborating on the revolutionary potential of the surtax. "Cases of commoners' land registered under official households (*guanhu*) were now also assessed for the surtax," he wrote. "As a result, the cry went up that official status had become less desirable than commoner status . . . The tax system was completely changed." Ye's last remark exaggerated nothing, for the results he described—making the gentry pay even a small part of their tax to say nothing of a surtax—had eluded fiscal reformers for many generations. A polar shift had indeed taken place, catalyzed by the desperate circumstances of the Three Feudatories Rebellion.[15]

The third imposition of progressive taxation was the *jun tian jun yi*, or "equal field, equal service" reform. *Jun tian jun yi* was an extension

of the Single Whip reform of the late Ming, which had commuted various service levies originally assessed on households to silver and absorbed them into the land tax. In recognition of the fact that land, not population, was now the main object of taxation, *jun tian jun yi* reformers, in the early 1660s, began transforming the units of population registration (known as *li* and *jia*) into units of land registration, apportioning land equally among them. As of 1665, furthermore, *jun tian jun yi* entailed the abolition of the gentry's tax exemption, or *youmian*, privileges, which, as was explicated at the close of Chapter 2, had long facilitated the gentry's consolidation of land and other abuses. During a court audience in February 1674, Mu Tianyan, soon to help the Jiangnan gentry field their petition to keep Asisi in the area, advised the application of *jun tian jun yi* to all Jiangnan, claiming that the measure would finally put an end to the perennial abuses of gentry privileges. The implication was that the gentry would be made to pay more for the defense of the state during the rebellion.[16]

Dong Han maintained that *jun tian jun yi* was a failure because it enabled corrupt officials to reassess taxes to the gentry's advantage, resulting in a regressive, rather than progressive, shift in the tax burden. The local gentry's influence over local officials had long been irresistible, as we have discussed, and Dong's skepticism about progressive taxation in such a reality should not be dismissed. It must also be considered, though, that the relationship between local officials and gentry had changed under the regency, owing to the former belatedly responding more to bureaucratic discipline than to social pressure and the latter belatedly admitting that their own tendencies toward economic engrossment were incompatible with good statecraft. Dong's hostility to the idea of taxing the gentry is evident in the ghastly demise he dreamed up for Zhang Weichi, and he may have lapsed into the old pattern of disguising opposition to a given policy as a professed doubt as to its efficacy. The argument that it was impossible to curb gentry power had been enlisted against any attempt to do so, at least since the late Ming, and it is possible that Dong was merely reprising it.[17]

In contrast to Dong Han, Ye Mengzhu wrote almost glowingly of *jun tian jun yi*. "The traditional recalcitrance and stubbornness," he said, "the loss of wealth and labor by the poor, the deflection of the tax burden from the strong to the weak, the tax dodging through false registration—all these evils were swept away at once." Ye did indeed acknowledge that some stubborn Shanghai gentry (*jin shen*), irked at the "erasing of the distinctions between noble and base, nearly succeeded" in overturning the reform. But, as he

explained, his friend Zhou Ziying persuaded them to desist from their intractability, using the argument that economic aggrandizement was a distraction from moral self-perfection. If the gentleman "remains cruelly fixated on persecuting the myriad poor masses in his home village," Zhou supposedly warned, "he will lose his place of calm and leisure and will sink into the mire. Is this really what people want?" Zhou's argument summed up the case for gentlemanly self-control that had first made its appearance with the Single Whip reform and that now seemed to have mostly prevailed. Perhaps Ye was being a little rosy, and the truth about *jun tian jun yi* may lie somewhere between his positive assessment and Dong Han's negative assessment. It is indeed somewhat hard to believe that the gentry's "influence and privileges" had disappeared overnight, and Harold Miller has suggested that they did not. However, it still seems reasonably clear that in *jun tian jun yi* the gentry agreed to what Frederic Wakeman called a fiscal "compromise" with the state. And Jerry Dennerline, while conceding that *jun tian jun yi* brought about no great "reform of the wealthy families," argues strongly that the policy did in fact "limit . . . the privileges of the gentry," who realized that "they could ill afford to risk losing their influence by evading taxes."[18]

In sum, the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories made the gentry realize just how much they depended upon the state for protection: enough to pay handsomely for it, even including cherished privileges as part of the price. These crass realities, commonsensical and increasingly obvious even before the 1640s, finally became inescapable in the 1670s, and they had a devastating effect on whatever pretentions to sovereignty the gentry may yet have entertained. It was no longer possible to imagine an Arcadian community of faithful commoners ruled only with the magic of morality by Confucian gentlemen. It was now undeniable, rather, that the state had to rule the people by force and that the gentlemen had to pay the state to do so. The gentry's role in the civilizing project, therefore, had been reduced from a leading moral part to a supporting economic part. Since the gentry's claim to sovereignty had been based, in the sixteenth century, on the opposite assumption—the denial of their economic nature and insistence on their moral nature—it was now dead. The incidence of progressive taxation during the rebellion could only have driven home the fatal message that the gentry were economic creatures, outstanding in their wealth, not in their virtue.

The Gentry's New Priorities during and after the Rebellion

It is interesting to note that the transformation of civil service status during the rebellion, from one of tax exemption to one of added tax liability, did nothing to reduce its appeal. On the contrary, men still rushed to take the exams, even if success meant, at least in theory, a higher tax bill. Ye Mengzhu's claim that "official status had become less desirable than commoner status" was an exaggeration. He probably was observing only the situation in the villages, where, as recent research suggests, civil service status was indeed no longer the prerequisite for a large estate. If the degree-holding gentry could aspire at most to a more moderated local influence than previously, then there must have been a different species of attraction attendant to civil service status. It would seem, in other words, that the meaning of civil service (or gentry) status changed at this time. Given that while in their villages, the gentry had been demoted from moral luminaries to taxpayers, then while on duty, in parallel fashion, they would come to act less like moral leaders and more like practical administrators. Together with the statecraft ethic and the imperative of helping the Qing state defeat rebellion and chaos, the breaking of the dream of gentry sovereignty caused the gentry-officials to view themselves even more as officials.[19]

One of these more practical men was Wang Yun (also known as Wang Shengshi [1619–1693?]), a native of Songjiang and a disciple of the Ming statecraft scholar and martyr Chen Zilong. Wang seems never to have even taken the civil service exam. Instead, after a period of wandering in the 1650s, he became a private secretary to the director general of grain transport, Cai Shiying (d. 1674), who had surrendered to the Manchus in 1642 and belonged to the Chinese Plain White Banner. During this time, Wang took an interest in the administration of the Grand Canal and the logistical and fiscal procedures related to it, going so far as to advise on reforms. He then became secretary to Cai Shiying's son Yurong (1633–1699) when the latter became governor-general of Hunan and Sichuan.[20]

Wang Yun had actually already retired to Songjiang, and was hoping to remain there, when Wu Sangui revolted and Cai Yurong asked his old secretary to come back. Wang reflected on the strong ties of friendship connecting him to the Cai family and was moved also by Cai Yurong remaining at his difficult post instead of mourning for his father. He resolved to answer the young Cai's call and made his way to the front lines in Hunan by boat, at one point having to sail upstream

in order to bypass a disturbed area. While en route, he contemplated a few lines of poetry by the Ming martyr Ni Yuanlu, which had been written on a painting given to him before his departure. The poem referred to the famous recluse Tao Yuanming (365–427)—"As I hide in the mountains, drunk as Tao Yuanming / A solitary boat plies the river with the wind"—and was perhaps written by Ni during a few years' seclusion before he went back to serve the doomed Chongzhen right at the end of the Ming. "It's like he was trying to repent for something," Wang wrote in his travelogue.[21]

Wang's remark remains cryptic, and it is uncertain what he thought Ni Yuanlu had to repent for, but there were some obvious differences between the two men. Despite a shared interest in reforming the Grand Canal tribute system, Ni was a moralist first and an administrator second, while Wang seldom held forth on moral issues. Wang's account of his arrival in Hunan is confined to a few observations of military matters, including the chronically insufficient budget for the army. He wrote nothing about the suffering of the common people that one might expect from an old-school Confucian, and in this regard, the contrast between Wang's narrative and Gu Yuxian's account of his experience during the Plain Clothes revolt, discussed in Chapter 1, is most striking. Gu Yuxian, it will be recalled, took the Confucian gentleman's typically paternalistic attitude toward the common people, and he was especially desirous of protecting innocent villagers from unruly soldiers. Wang Yun, on the other hand, complained only of the army's disinclination to assume the offensive. He was especially critical of the Manchu contingent, not because it was violent or barbarous but because, on the contrary, its officers lacked military initiative and were given over to music and debauchery. "I think to myself of the history of the frontier," Wang mused. "It used to be a matter of us and them, and now the two enemies [Manchu and Han] are supposed to stand together. What can one make of this timidity? The old generals are doing nothing but wasting supplies." In the event, Wang went home to stay before the end of the campaign, reasoning that he was doing no good under the circumstances. As he was careful to record, however, the turning point came in 1678 with the death of Wu Sangui, and the Qing army finally advanced deeper into Hunan. Wang's frustration with the predominantly Manchu military leadership was shared by Kangxi himself, and the latter began to rely more and more on Han Chinese civil and military officers, like Cai Yurong, who were continuing to step forward in great numbers.[22]

Among them, one notch up from Wang Yun in terms of academic credentials and administrative responsibility were the Xings

of Gaochun County, near Nanjing. The Xing family's most eminent representative had been the Ming loyalist poet Xing Fang, whose lines about the poor boatmen of the transition years appeared in Chapter 1. More generally, however, the Xings maintained their prominence by competing for tributary degrees (*gong sheng*) or sometimes the penultimate "elevated man" (*juren*) degrees, thus classing themselves as midlevel gentry, and they tended to serve in minor county-level offices, though they occasionally rose to the level of magistrate or prefect, and one man served in the Ministry of Revenue in the capital during the late Ming. After the dynastic transition, during which one member of the family earned martyrdom, Xings began winning tributary degrees again. They took four tributary degrees during the rebellion, including an unprecedented two in the same year, 1677, just as the surtax was being applied to them. Meanwhile, Xing Zhenyan, a tribute student of 1654, was magistrate of Jinhua County, in Zhejiang. He was known for prohibiting usury and reducing the tribute shipments that impoverished the inhabitants of that place during the panic occasioned by Geng Jingzhong's mutiny in neighboring Fujian.[23]

Jerry Dennerline has described a similar interest in tributary degrees among the gentry in Jiading County, and Lynn Struve has referred especially to "consolidation tasks," such as the suppression of the rebellion, as possible employments for men of talent serving in hands-on, middling capacities (including tribute students, whom she discusses in a related context). As for the more conventional country magistrates, they became, according to Frederic Wakeman, the backbone of the Qing local bureaucracy, particularly given the primacy, established during the regency, of their fiscal responsibilities. Finally, civilian officials began to find more opportunities as governors during this period, taking the place of bannermen and first-generation collaborators, mostly of military background. However, this aspect of the gentry-officials' renewed commitment to the state can perhaps best be understood from the perspective of the state.[24]

Kangxi's Co-optation of the Gentry-Officials

As far as the Qing state was concerned, the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories highlighted the regime's overreliance on military and other hereditary officers, as some of them had revolted and others were slow to suppress the revolt (and at least one was killed in the revolt: Wu Sangui's first victim was the bannerman Zhu Guozhi, who

had worked so zealously for the Oboi Regency). As Frederic Wakeman summed up the Qing's very limited options, the only real alternative to the unstable statist solution of feudatories, aristocrats, and "praetorian" banners was "a completely civil bureaucracy." It is evident from his subsequent policy that the Kangxi emperor took this same view at the time. It is important to emphasize, however, that the emperor was far from desperate. On the contrary, it was the gentlemanly members of the civil bureaucracy who by now, as has been described, were most discomfited at the prospect of the instability of the state. Kangxi, perceiving that the gentry were, as the saying goes, "grasping at the Buddha's feet" for protection, realized that the rebellion had weakened their position much more than it had weakened his. Accordingly, he made his overtures to the civil elite in his own time—after the surge of the rebellion had crested in 1676—and on his own terms.[25]

In the autumn of 1677, Kangxi called for the creation of a special pool of literary experts to be stationed inside the palace so as to better help him with his studies and his paperwork. The rationale for the new office followed the emperor's desire, as has already been explicated in the case of his daily lecturers, to keep his scholars close at hand, and the result was the Southern Study or Imperial Study (*nan shu fang*), which was indeed just a new designation for his staff of lecturers. Although its first two appointees, Zhang Ying (1638–1708) and Gao Shiqi (1645–1703), were drawn from the formal Hanlin Academy of superior examination graduates, in practice Kangxi was able to recruit members from any other bureaucratic position, of any academic rank, even tribute students and *juren*. The men of the Southern Study answered only to him and were not procedurally subject to any other institution.[26]

The Southern Study was a masterpiece of co-optation. Naturally, its invitees were personally and philosophically very flattered. "Our Emperor looks to the Ancients and venerates Confucianism," noted a pleased Xu Qianxue, who was himself chosen for the Southern Study. "He summons to the palace many eminent gentlemen (*shi*) from the various regions, and diligently do they come, afraid to be late. Gao Shiqi was the first to be so favored for his culture and learning . . . Daily is he consulted in the heart of the Forbidden City." Furthermore, the emperor bestowed on his scholars various favors, such as silver and other presents, houses in the imperial city, and the privilege of riding on horseback there. "Morning and evening, I can ride, over the gilded bridges," Gao Shiqi glowed. "The Emperor treats us, his top ministers (*chen*), to sumptuous feasts—a sign of his personal trust."[27]

One might be tempted to conclude that the favored men of the Southern Study were finally in a position to capture their emperor's ear and rule through him as Confucian scholars had always dreamed. It is true that they ended up drafting Kangxi's edicts on his behalf, and they sometimes remonstrated with him, but they were subject to so many rigorous formalities in the imperial presence that there was little doubt as to who was working for whom. "Awaiting the Emperor's pleasure," recalled a Southern Study scholar named Zhan Tubing, "standing for long periods with bowed head, my blood stayed down in my legs, and my toes felt swollen. If called upon to write something, then I would be bent over the desk all day, unable to stretch my feet." On one occasion, in fact, Zhan had to copy the lengthy *Avatamsaka*, or *Flower Garland Sutra*, in its entirety. Images of Louis XIV's courtiers come to mind, and it would appear that the Frenchmen got off easy by comparison, at least in terms of physical discomfort, though perhaps their degradation was of a different kind. In the Chinese context, affairs seem to have come full circle since the late Ming, when the young Wanli emperor was rebuked by his lecturers, albeit gingerly, for crossing his legs during his court tutorial.[28]

Beyond the lack of bodily freedom, Kangxi's bookish attendants lived in constant fear that they would commit a fatal slip of the tongue in his presence. Zhang Ying found his position vertiginous and precarious, as he wrote: "The lofty perch is naught but the focus of retribution . . . the razor edge between profit and ruin, the cage of anxiety." Zhang was also fearful of incurring the jealousy of other officials, which the shower of presents from Kangxi only served to inflame. In fact, Kangxi sometimes ordered the Censorate to investigate his Southern Study scholars for corruption just to ensure that they stayed on their toes. Finally, the men of the Southern Study served only for brief periods of time before being transferred elsewhere so that any power they might have wielded there was soon lost. As the modern writer Song Yi concludes, the Southern Study represented a concentration of power in Kangxi's hands, offering little or no added influence for the scholars themselves.[29]

Another attempt to bring gentlemanly luminaries more firmly into the Qing orbit was the special examination for "Great Confucians of Broad Learning" (*bo xue hong ru*), announced in 1678 and held the next year. Since the main crisis of the rebellion had by then passed, it is unlikely that Kangxi was seeking talent to help him with its suppression; it is more probable that he was endeavoring, as Harold Miller has averred, to sooth resentment for the harsh measures, such as increased taxation, that had been initiated in the late 1650s and extended by

Kangxi himself to deal with the rebellion. It was focused mostly on the remaining sentimental Ming loyalists of the south and amounted to an elaborate invitation for them to compile the official Ming dynasty history. Employing such people for such a purpose was another common form of co-optation, which had been used by the Ming's Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424) to patronize the leading literati of his time. Moreover, as R. Kent Guy asserts, the special exam served to separate the die-hard loyalists from the more open-minded, who could be coaxed into government just as Kangxi was seeking a more civilian administration. Guy cites the example of Tang Bin (1627–1687), who, although he already possessed a Qing *jinshi* degree, used the special exam to recredential himself. After a brief stint as editor of the Ming history, he ended up in 1684 as "the first true scholar-governor in Jiangsu," which was the new name for the province forming most of Jiangnan region. Again, no desperation on Kangxi's part is discernible here. The mostly southern literati were being rewarded for the loyalty they had already demonstrated during the early stages of the rebellion, and Kangxi was eager to shepherd them into government for purposes of his own.[30]

Kangxi's Coronation as Sage King

Concurrent with the Kangxi emperor recruiting more gentry-officials for his bureaucracy was his redoubled assertion of sagehood. In 1677, the *Annotated Explications of the Daily Lectures on the Four Books* (*Ri jiang si shu jie yi*) was published by imperial command. By this act, Kangxi transformed himself from the recipient of the daily lecture to its deliverer, from pupil to master. The first words of the book were from his preface: "Only by Our Heaven-born sageliness and worthiness have We become both sovereign (*jun*) and teacher (*shi*); only thus do We combine the sagely Way, transmitted across ten thousand generations (*dao tong*), with the kingly Rule, likewise inherited (*zhi tong*)."

Zhu Xi, in crafting the basic doctrine of Neo-Confucianism, had referred to the ancient Sages as "sovereign-teachers" or "ruler-teachers" (*jun shi*). After their time, their authority became bifurcated: there were only rulers who inherited and passed down their political authority (*zhi tong*) and teachers like Confucius who inherited and passed down their moral authority (*dao tong*). Now Kangxi, favored by Heaven, had rewoven the loose strands of political authority and moral authority into one. With him, the sagely ruler-teacher was reborn. "From [the Sage Kings] Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, Wen, and Wu,

to Confucius, Zengzi, Zisi, and Mencius; from the *Book of Changes*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Poetry*, *Rites of Zhou*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, to the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and the *Mencius*; like the light of the sun and moon shining from Heaven, like the mountains and the rivers encircling the Earth; how it flourishes!"

It was the same flourishing (*sheng*) that Qian Qianyi and Wu Weiye had expected to emanate from their assemblage of Jiangnan gentry. Kangxi had appropriated the gentry's moral power and was, as it were, flourishing it himself.

> These Sages' admonitions for posterity [Kangxi continued], were all for the sake of the ten thousand generations to come. They contain the moral authority of the Way (*dao tong*), and they also contain the political authority of the Rule (*zhi tong*) . . . For this reason, verily, do We cause its great meaning to be compiled, so that the subtlest utterances of the Sages may be pondered. With the goal of transforming the people and perfecting their customs, We will use this one Way to rule universally; and thus it may be that a flourishing of the civilization of the Sages will be at hand![31]

What was the response to Kangxi's assertions, which, according to the modern scholar Kong Dingfang, were exceptionally bold? The court lecturers and other officials, having received Kangxi's charge to publicize the lectures, replied as follows:

> We daresay that Your Majesty, in your profound veneration of the holy learning, uniquely surpasses all predecessors. How can we ministers, deficient in the classical arts, presume to assist Your Majesty in even the slightest way? It is the learning of Confucius and Mencius, in its greatness and the subtlety, that is as bright as the stars and the sun; and all we Confucian lecturers (*shi ru*) have done is to consult amongst ourselves on how best to reproduce it in edited form. We presumed to be as the old minister Zhao Pu [916–992, who helped each of the two founders of the Song dynasty with one half of Confucius's *Analects*]—to assist Your Majesty by half, perchance.
>
> The former luminaries were devout, self-respecting, humane, and studious. Zhu Xi advised us all to "make our intentions sincere" and "rectify our minds and hearts." Wishing to make our own age as sagely as the Ancients' requires us to promulgate virtue and to renovate the people; and wishing to make our sovereign a Sage requires us to "take him to task" and to "discourse on the good."
>
> With reverence do we reflect that, only by Your Majesty's diligent and ceaseless labor, only by Your Majesty's reading and reciting in the

> palace, have the ever-radiant canonical injunctions been made known as patterns for your ministers and subjects to follow. We, though inept, have endeavored to complete the tasks of editing, compilation, annotation, and binding, and we beg leave to show Your Majesty the finished product. Perhaps Your Majesty can keep it by your bedside, as you continue your studies late at night, and then, with Your Majesty's heart full of the Way of the Sages, you may even meet the host of them in visions. Let the reign of culture and virtue shine upon the Empire! Let illustrious governance (*zhi*) embrace ten thousand generations![32]

True, Kangxi's courtiers did not exactly ask for bells to be rung to celebrate the emperor's sagehood before retiring home to live happily ever after. They rather retained their right to nuance and referred to Kangxi's sagehood as a potentiality, not an accomplished fact. At the same time, though, they made tremendous concessions to Kangxi's pretentions, and in a general way, they refrained from insisting or even implying that Kangxi's enlightenment could come only from them. By means of the clever reference to Zhao Pu, they claimed to have influenced the emperor at most only by half, and the notion that the ruler was a clean slate, as Wei Yijie imagined Shunzhi to be, was not reiterated. While the ministers' invocation of Zhu Xi in the second paragraph did raise the specter of their own Neo-Confucian power to civilize the people, a few lines later, they refocused their attention upon the ruler. The reference was to Mencius, and the original passage reads, "To take one's prince to task is respect; to discourse on the good and keep out heresies is reverence; to say 'My prince will never be capable of doing it' is to cripple him." It seems almost an apology for presuming to make the sovereign a sage, attributing the effrontery to occupational habits and reminding the emperor that it was a sign not of contempt but of respect. More important, the unquoted final clause, conspicuous in its absence, introduces the concept of the emperor's own capability, which dominates the remainder of the ministers' remarks. The ministers clearly suggested that it was the emperor himself, through his diligence, who set the civilizing pattern for his ministers and other subjects and whose own ardor could bring him into the phantasmic company of the assembled sages. In their last two sentences, they finally alluded to Kangxi's claim to have recombined moral and political authority, and since the classical verb tense is ambiguous, it is not impossible to conclude that they accepted it. They paraphrased, furthermore, a line from the *Book of Documents*: "The reign of culture and virtue extends throughout the Empire, *received with reverence from the Emperor*." [Emphasis added.][33]

Aside from these circumlocutions from Kangxi's advisors, there is evidence that the emperor's sagehood was readily affirmed by the scholar-official class in general, and this evidence comes from someone who was most unpleased to admit it. Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692) would never be reconciled to Manchu rule. In his view, not only the rightful moral succession to the Way (*dao tong*) but even the rightful political succession to the Rule (*zhi tong*) remained unattainable, not only for barbarian rulers, but also for the "mean people" (*xiao ren*) among the Han Chinese. His exclusion of all but the favored few from the possession of the Way was typical of the immoderate, partisan Neo-Confucianism of recent times. It enabled Wang to disparage the "degenerate Confucians" of his day, especially when they made themselves accessories to the theft of the Way by foreigners.

> Even though degenerate Confucians may try to sell the Succession (*dao tong*) to alien bandits [Wang wrote], thus becoming their accomplices, how can they really steal the perfected doctrine of the sage kings? Though they be blind to its essence and ignorant of its structure, those who remain as tools of the palace through the endless vicissitudes of politics convince themselves by a tortuous reasoning that they have uncovered the wondrous secrets of the Sages' success. Armed only with these rationalizations, far-fetched and grandiose, they cannot actually penetrate these secrets, of course; but finding themselves in control of [the country's] wealth and the people's labor, they imagine that they have already done it. So too, then, do the foreign bandits delight in how easy a thing it seems to be able to steal the Succession to the Way; so too do they presume to have attained our ancient model of governance.[34]

Wang Fuzhi was clearly writing about contemporary developments, although he took pains to disguise his criticism of the present as criticism of the past. Attacks on earlier Confucians who lived under non-Han Chinese rule served his purpose: "The Jurchen and the Mongols were able to conquer China only by taking advantage of worthless gentlemen (*yi guan*, *shi*) who sought glory in their service. People like Lian Xixian [1231–1280], Yao Shu [1201–1278], and Xu Heng [1209–1281], at the critical time, employed Neo-Confucianism most ingeniously, allowing the [foreign rulers] to promote themselves to stand beside [the Sages] Yao, Shun, Tang, and King Wen. How exceedingly unconscionable! Of all the disasters that may befall the freelance gentlemen (*you shi*), none surpasses this one."[35]

Wang Fuzhi was quite right. The age of the freelance gentlemen, of the sort exemplified by the die-hard Wang Fuzhi himself,

was indeed at an end. The Way had finally been stolen from them by foreign bandits, with the connivance of degenerate Confucians, otherwise known as mean people (*xiao ren*), who, since late Ming times, had been execrated by righteous, upright men like Wang for being lackeys of the state. Of course Wang insisted that the mean people, ignorant as to what they were after, had really stolen nothing. However, all too many of them, Wang complained, *thought* that they could identify the Way of the sages and were prepared to deem Kangxi at least a potential aspirant to it, and Wang Fuzhi could only deplore their self-deception as a member of an enraged minority. (Wang wrote the aforementioned passage in 1692.) The point is that aside from Wang Fuzhi and perhaps a few other holdouts, there were no more freelance gentlemen to proclaim that they alone wielded the Way of the sages and keep it from the grasp of imperial pretenders. Most of the rest of the scholar-official class had by then loosed their grip, and before the end of the century, significant Confucian scholars such as Li Guangdi (1642–1718) and Li Fu (1673–1750) were happily acknowledging that Kangxi had recombined the Rule and the Way. Kangxi's sagely reputation endured to the end of the dynasty.[36]

Why spill so much ink on the question of Kangxi's sagehood? Because sagehood in China was the philosophical basis of legitimate rule—or, as it might also be termed, sovereignty, and more besides ink had been spilled in contestation of sovereignty in the late Ming and early Qing. This strictly demarcated time frame is most important. Founding emperors of the past—for example, the Mings—had often claimed something akin to sagehood status, and their scholarly ministers had largely endorsed their claims, with varying degrees of calculation, for reasons of their own. However, Kangxi's assertion of sagehood, in its historical context, was far more pointed: it was directed squarely at the sort of people—Neo-Confucian scholars—who had long claimed it for themselves. Calling themselves gentry, they had started in the sixteenth century to trumpet their sagehood in order to legitimize their considerable social, economic, and political prerogatives, which became in their eyes sovereign rights, to be wielded against the counterclaims of the state. The state's counterclaims, indeed, had also come in waves. They were based on an ideology alien and hostile to Neo-Confucianism, usually a fundamentalist Legalism, and they resulted in a century of conflict that spanned two dynasties. Finally, by the late 1670s, shaken by recent events and philosophically demoralized, the gentry lacked the confidence to press the argument any further. Thereupon seizing the

initiative, the Kangxi emperor exploited the gentry's own Neo-Confucian ideology, manipulating the language of sovereignty and inserting himself into its story to emerge as its rightful wielder. Most of the gentry—to the dismay of the surviving freelance gentleman Wang Fuzhi—were content to let him do it. Whatever Kangxi's proclamation of sagehood meant in the broad expanse of Chinese history, in the more immediate context of the Ming-Qing transition—which is to say, the struggle for sovereignty between the state and the gentry—it meant that the storm was finally over and that the monarchial state had won.[37]

The meticulous reader may insist on making a distinction between the monarchy and the state and argue that the gentry had surrendered to the former but not the latter. To be sure, the institutional dimensions of the question are quite complex, but it is the philosophical aspect, as convoluted as it may be, as well as the timing, that provides the clarity. We have seen (in Chapter 3) that the gentry were finally brought under the control of the state during the first years of the Oboi Regency. The basic mechanism of their submission was the bureaucratic performance evaluation (*kao cheng*), which reduced them to the status of responsive officials in government and compliant taxpayers on their estates. The imposition of the state's discipline in this way was a Legalist project, first attempted by Zhang Juzheng in the 1570s in the first thrust in the battle for sovereignty between state and gentry. The gentry finally succumbed to it in the 1660s but only by justifying their capitulation as Confucian statecraft. Conditioned to assimilate every part of wisdom as a Confucian wisdom, the gentry could really do no different, but the point is that the same Confucian philosophy that had inspired the gentry to seek dominion over the state now induced them to submit to it, and submit they did.

Sizing up the situation in the 1670s, when the state's internal structure was shown to be precarious, the Kangxi emperor had only to seize the leash that the gentry had already fastened on themselves. He incorporated more gentry into the state's bureaucracy and ensured the continued docility of the gentry in the countryside, appealing not to Legalist arguments, which would have been resisted, but to Confucian ones, which were irresistible. The result was a Qing state, perhaps even a Chinese state, that was better managed and more respected than it had ever been. At its head sat a sage king, yes, but among its lesser functionaries, lest it be forgotten, were men, like Han Shiqi, who had already proved worthy of the gentry's homage. Kangxi was, of course, a grander embodiment of sovereignty than Han Shiqi had been, and his majesty as sage king was undeniably superlative; yet it

was of the same kind, the Confucian kind, that had formerly been used to justify the gentry's sovereignty over the state and that more recently had come to rationalize the reverse. Kangxi's wielding it so dramatically over its former owners was a poignant touch.

Aside from this review of recent history, another facet to consider is that Qing emperors sought to reduce even their most learned ministers to simple bureaucrats. Doing so was a perennial Legalist dream, best realized via the attainment of Confucian sagehood on the part of the emperor, for again, what gentleman in the bureaucracy would presume to civilize a sage? On a final, technical, point, the monarch is certainly an essential, perhaps the essential part of the state, in Legalist or Confucian China or anywhere else, and Kangxi, claiming to be the *ruler*-teacher, to have recombined the rightful *Rule* with the rightful Way, could rule from nowhere else but from the state.[38]

Kangxi's Southern Tour of 1699

If Kangxi's brandishing of the gentry's former authority can be classed as a "poignant touch," then his southern tour of 1699, with which this narrative shall end, should be counted as a poignant knockout. The dramatic effect of Kangxi's triumphal progress through the dethroned gentry's former Valhalla of Jiangnan cannot be surpassed.

As summarized by the Hanlin bachelor Shen Zongjing (1658–1725), who chronicled the tour, Kangxi recorded twelve achievements in Jiangnan: "He personally completed river conservancy works, reduced local grain taxes, eliminated additional customs duties, restored the tomb of the Ming founder, founded new schools, encouraged fishermen, nurtured the people, abolished salt surtaxes, bestowed gifts on officials and commoners, provided relief for the hungry, donated to monks, protected boat trackers, proclaimed tax amnesty, proclaimed judicial amnesty, inscribed calligraphy for officials, succored the elderly, cheered the soldiery, gave alms to beggars, bestowed charity upon the poor, and extended kindness even to the grass and trees."[39]

Almost every item denotes a local initiative that had been cherished by the gentry since Song times. Kangxi had stolen the gentry repertoire from which the local elite had derived its very identity. He had usurped their prerogatives, in their own kingdom, and the significance of this lost importance cannot be overstated.

Of course, Kangxi's very presence in Jiangnan was bound to cast the local gentry in shadow. "When the imperial barge reached the Wu River," wrote Shen Zongjing, "the common people crowded together for a look. They knelt down in rows along the banks." Humorously,

Shen believed that Kangxi was actually travelling modestly and that this supposed lack of spectacle actually enhanced his sagely dignity. "The Son of Heaven refrains from flaunting his power with banners in any sort of prideful show," he declared. "Truly does he carry the old aura of the rulers of Antiquity, and with what economy!" It may be supposed that the adoring masses along the riverbanks were genuflecting at a procession that was in reality none too shabby, but Shen, in his Confucianism, had the common people bowing to his ancient simplicity.[40]

Whether Kangxi's southern tour was bold or subtle in its majesty, the gentry, naturally, tended to be more seen than heard when it passed. It is remarkable that the most portentous word for gentry, *jinshen*, intoned reverently by the gentry's chauvinists and shrieked bitterly by its condemners during more turbulent times, appears not once in Shen Zongjing's record. Its slightly tamer variant, *xiangshen*, meaning "country gentry," as though knowing its place, appears a few times, usually denoting only a certain portion of Kangxi's eager constituency. When Kangxi's barge approached the south gate of Wuxi, for example, "the civil and military officials, as well as the country gentry and the elder people and so forth, accompanied His Majesty as far as the north gate." On more than one occasion, Kangxi's welcoming committee included gentry whose names had been stricken from the books during the Tax Clearance case. Somewhere between Wuxi and Suzhou, for instance, "the civil and military officials, together with the gentry-officials residing in the town or country (*cheng-xiang guan*), cashiered officials (*fei yuan*), education officials, and other miscellaneous functionaries," met at a temple to organize a reception for the emperor's party. Kangxi reinstated one defrocked *juren*; otherwise he made no restitution.[41]

Even before reaching Jiangnan, in fact, at Confucius's hometown of Qufu, Kangxi met a victim of the Tax Clearance case: a man named Sun Zhimi who had held what was probably a minor clerical post in the Hanlin Academy before losing his credentials in the crackdown. He appears to have subsequently regained his status, possibly by making a cash contribution during the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories, but he was working as a private teacher near the Confucian temple when Kangxi found him. Of all the things Kangxi could have chatted with Sun about—say, Confucius or the Tax Clearance case—Kangxi instead made the following conversation: "Have you written any poems in the time you've been here?" The question was not as out of the blue as it would seem, for the underlying purpose of Kangxi's southern tour,

evidently, was to reduce the once-formidable gentry to the status of quaint, innocuous literati.[42]

Poetry—and calligraphy—were apparently safe frontiers of interaction between lord and minister (or subject). Kangxi offered to restore the aforementioned *juren*, Wu Tingzhen, if the latter produced a poem on the theme of ringing bells. Delighted by Wu's impromptu lines, Kangxi asked him to write them in small cursive characters on a fan. Impressed with the fan, Kangxi called for a large sheet of paper and tested Wu's skill at bold official script. Satisfied with this effort, too, Kangxi finally smiled: "Now I am going to give back your *juren*. What do you say to that?" Wu said, "Thank you," and then he was presented with a golden arrow as well. Aside from the fortunate Wu Tingzhen, Kangxi exchanged poems and calligraphy with old hermits, monks, gifted children, and the chronicler Shen Zongjing himself. It was like an extended literary party, serving very well to lower cultural and other barriers between Kangxi and his subjects and incidentally giving Kangxi an opportunity to play the part of artist and patron of the arts. The old literatus You Tong was graced by imperial favor when Kangxi made a sign with the name of You's studio. "The poet can easily stand with the worthies, the gentlemen, and the reclusive moral men," wrote You Tong proudly in a brief essay included by Shen Zongjing in his account, marking the only time the classical word for gentlemen (*jun zi*) was used therein. Considering how little Kangxi really thought of literary, as opposed to sagely, attainment, You's boastfulness was very ironic. His attempt to elevate the status of the poet to that of moral worthy only accentuated the magnitude of the imposture under the circumstances. Kangxi was patronizing the Jiangnan gentry with an almost appalling facility, and You responding to the condescension by pretending precisely to the moral power Kangxi denied him should come across to the reader as more than a little pathetic. How low the mighty had fallen.[43]

The only vestige of the gentry's old prowess came in the form of a diminutive Shaoxing student who approached Kangxi with a six-item remonstrance about the extravagance of Kangxi's three southern tours. When guards began abusing him, the emperor stopped them, saying, "He's just a crazy student." Later, though, he proclaimed, more eloquently, "The young student dared to speak out like a gentleman (*shi*). How admirable."[44]

The Shaoxing lad, being only one person, was as easy to manage as he was to admire. What, meanwhile, had become of Jiangnan's vaunted gentlemanly associations? All through the region were famous places overflowing with stirring memories of glorious gatherings where

constellations of righteous gentlemen had sworn by their fellowship to shine their civilizing light across the benighted land—by infiltrating and bending the state to their will, by remaining aloof from it, or by thwarting it. None was as celebrated as Suzhou's Tiger Hill, where the leaders of the Restoration Society, Taicang-born Zhang Pu, Zhang Cai, and Wu Weiye, staged mass gatherings of gentlemen in the Ming and (as has been described) in the Qing. On April 16, 1699, the imperial entourage reached Tiger Hill, and this chapter will close with Shen Zongjing's account of what happened:

> Halfway up the hill, some people from Taicang had gathered to present the Emperor with precious curios and rare delicacies. There were one hundred and twenty trays of them, even including walnuts, in rows that covered the whole hill. In one building were exquisite flowers and plants. One by one, the people carried the trays to the Emperor on the tops of their heads. He ordered the guards to tell all of them to come the next day to the imperial encampment, and at that, they all dispersed.
>
> The procession reached the top of the hill. It was utterly quiet, with not a soul there, and the Emperor thought it exceedingly strange. What had happened was that, since the party included imperial consorts, officials and outriders had cleared the place of all the monks and local residents. The only people left there were women. All that could be seen on the hill were splendid lanterns and myriad lamps, hanging from every conceivable place. The air was auspiciously moist and generative. The light shone on the birds in their cages, and they chirped and chirped. Fallen flower petals covered the ground.
>
> An old woman approached, bowed, and began talking about how the officials had ordered the people away so as to prevent their gawking at the Empress Dowager and other court ladies. The Empress Dowager nodded her head and asked her to lead the way, pointing to the vista ahead; but the woman was afraid and would not approach, much less lead, the party. She was given an ingot of silver and a few coins.
>
> Meanwhile, the Emperor reached the Studio of the Awakened Stone and took the main seat. Calling for brush and ink, he wrote the characters for "Connected Clouds," as well as "Mirror of the Immortals," and "Mirror of Azure Clouds." He gave them to the guards, instructing that officials copy them onto wooden tablets, with which to grace the surrounding hill.
>
> He passed the Thousand Stones and the Sword Pool, and suddenly, it was twilight. The emperor descended the hill and got back on the imperial barge.[45]

Epilogue

The Meaning of the Ming-Qing Transition

What is meant by the term "transition," besides the obvious passage between the Ming and Qing dynasties? How did China really change during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?

According to at least a few historians, it would appear that China changed very little and that the little that China did change seemed to leave it, in the long term, somewhat for the worse, including in comparison to Western countries during the same tumultuous time period. The subtitle of Frederic Wakeman's study of the transition, "The Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China," suggests a simple righting of something fallen, a return to the status quo. Even if the new Qing state was demonstrably stronger than the Ming state, the improvement nonetheless reads like an irony, bespeaking a patched-over weakness (as though all the king's horses and all the king's men really did put Humpty back together again) instead of starting a new project with better materials. Wakeman referred to this "paradoxical price to the *PaxManchurica* of the High Qing," relating it to "the sheer success of the early Qing state in recovering political stability through the use of remarkably advanced but still quite traditional institutions and techniques . . . Tragically," as Wakeman concluded, "the very success of the Manchus' initial reconstruction of imperial order in the seventeenth century made it difficult to contemplate institutional alternatives when formidable external challengers appeared once more in the nineteenth century." Qing China, then, won the game just as the rules were being changed, meaning that its victory was really a defeat.[1]

S. A. M. Adshead has focused on the divergence of the histories of Europe and China after the seventeenth century, in which "Europe heads into the civilization of the Enlightenment, something essentially new in structure and values; China heads into her eighteenth century, for all its splendours, a recapitulation of old themes. Though both societies escaped from the seventeenth century general crisis, they had escaped in different ways, Europe undergoing a profound institutional transformation, China making only minimal adjustments to her traditional system."[2]

Adshead suggests that the reason for this divergent development can be found in "the capacity of each society to produce from within, alternative centers of power." As this theory goes, Europe possessed such a capacity, evidenced by its "parliament, law courts, Church and nobility," whereas China did not. Its society remained "basically bureaucratic, dependent on state power," rendering it "impossible to build up a viable alternative to the existing authorities from within China." Effectively dismissing the entire notion of transition, Adshead surmises that when the Ming state collapsed, a nearly identical one needed to be imported from Manchuria, there being no viable internal candidate to take its place. Adshead's conception of China as a stifling, institutional monolith was largely shared by the late Fernand Braudel, who saw medieval and early modern Western towns as having enjoyed "unparalleled freedom" as "autonomous worlds" where new sets of values, identifiably capitalist or bourgeois, had a chance to develop. In China, however, the town and the city never attained their autonomy, for "the state usually won and the city then remained subject and under a heavy yoke . . . With the Manchu conquest," Braudel summarized, "the Chinese crisis was resolved in the seventeenth century in a direction completely opposed to urban freedoms."[3]

Recent research on China suggests that Adshead and Braudel may have been painting with overbroad brushes. William Rowe has argued strongly for the existence of new commercial trends in nineteenth-century Hankou, pointing toward "the urban merchants' economic independence—particularly as exercised by their collective self-regulatory organs," all of which would seem to present a challenge to the generalizations of Braudel and others. Separate studies by R. Bin Wong and Kenneth Pomeranz highlight the similarities between China and Western Europe, especially in the economic sphere, well past the seventeenth century, in sharp contrast with the narrative of China falling behind the West at that time. As these and other studies demonstrate, Qing China was certainly no stranger to institutional

innovation, economic rationalism, or the basic autonomy prerequisite to them. The victory of the imperial state in the seventeenth century did nothing to preclude them.[4]

Nevertheless, the critics of China's seventeenth-century performance, though wrong about the Qing state preventing all innovation and autonomy, stand on firmer ground when they point to stagnation or regression in the intellectual sphere. Though Adshead may overstate the case by complaining about a lack of "alternative centers of power," it does seem true that China failed during the seventeenth century to develop an alternative *philosophy* of power. It is on this subject that the current research can perhaps shed some light.

This volume and its predecessor have argued that late Ming and early Qing China was the scene of a long political struggle between partisans of the state and partisans of the gentry, with each side animated by its own philosophy of authority, or sovereignty. Both philosophies of sovereignty (a fundamentalist Legalism supporting the authority of the state and a devout Neo-Confucianism arguing for the authority of the gentry) were already, at the time of their appearances in the sixteenth century, reactionary doctrines—attempts to solve the problem of prosperity and its attendant social fluidity by reassuring norms of leadership and order. The conflict lasted into the Qing with undiminished intensity until the state prevailed by the end of the seventeenth century.

It is the precise nature of the state's victory that now commands our attention if we are to determine what, if anything, transitioned on either side of 1644 and how the result turned out to be as bad a deal for China as Wakeman and Adshead have written. First of all, the triumph of the Qing state was indeed an institutionally conservative triumph of the Ming-style Chinese state, for whatever innovations the Manchus might have brought to the table, such as bannermen and feudatories, proved to be short lived. Second, the state retained control of the Chinese bureaucracy through the strict application of performance evaluations by the Oboi regents. The performance evaluation was a Legalist procedure first introduced by Zhang Juzheng in the Ming. Confucian gentlemen both within and without the bureaucracy, as has been speculated here, may finally have accepted the state's discipline, owing to their exposure to the statecraft branch of Confucian thought, which legitimized rational administration, including tax collection. However, the most interesting aspect of the state's ascendency, which might have anticipated a Confucian backlash against Legalist insinuations, is the Kangxi emperor's interception of the Neo-Confucian transmission of the

Way, which deprived the gentry of their claim to sovereignty. By 1699, what had been the gentry's philosophy of sovereignty had become the state's, or at least the emperor's, philosophy of sovereignty. It is this aspect of the Ming-Qing "transition" that is emphasized by this book.

Most of the implications of this particular transition are indeed rather negative. Confucianism, never a populist philosophy, was now defunct even as an elitist opposition philosophy, serving instead to justify what amounted to a divine right monarchy that China never really had before, at least not recently. It no longer fueled the saucy assertiveness that had distinguished not only Gu Xiancheng in politics but also Jin Renrui in literature. On the contrary, "the merging of the tradition of the Way and that of governance," according to Jinxing Huang, "was the last step in the growth of autocracy," because "no independent ground was left for Confucians to oppose political power." Huang goes on to discuss several cases of censorship, self-censorship, or enthusiastic embrace of autocratic principles on the part of high-Qing Confucians. In general, the scholar-gentry remained quite docile through the Qing, eschewing the literary societies and other organizations that had become by then synonymous with the chaotic late Ming. Intellectually, they came to regard the Confucian classics as virtually the only repository of absolute truth, and they occupied their time with hair-splitting textual research. While some modern scholars have found occasional flashes of cleverness in their endeavors, especially in the later Qing, it is still hard to avoid characterizing the age as a time of nearly immovable intellectual conservatism. Moreover, because this conservative Confucianism remained the only practical course of study for career preparation, the Confucian career tended to dominate all the others. In this respect, Huang cites Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801) and his concept of the "unity of state and education."[5]

As many students know, it was the all-powerful Confucian echelon—now encompassing both state and gentry—that proved most resistant to change in the nineteenth century as China failed to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities afforded by Western contact. Confucian scholar-officials such as Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) waxed apoplectically against the Western notion of equality that they perceived to be infecting China during and after the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864). In the crisis, they became caricatures of reaction, equating Chineseness with Confucianism and further reducing Confucianism itself to the bare bones of the threatened social hierarchy. Even when they conceded the desirability of

studying Western subjects, the primacy with which they invested Confucianism nearly guaranteed that those who had mastered Western affairs would never be able to compete professionally with the Confucian educated. On the highest level of government, Confucianism became locked in what Joseph Levenson considered to be an unnatural death embrace with the monarchy, but as the forgoing study has shown, the two had already been married long before—in the seventeenth century. As the twentieth century turned, reformers such as Kang Youwei (1858–1927) saw correctly the necessity of liberalizing Confucianism if both the social and the political orders were to be modernized, but the liberalization encountered staunch resistance, and all three finally collapsed together.[6]

Or did some form of Confucianism survive? After the briefest dalliance with Western liberalism in the mid-1910s, Chinese intellectuals became largely disillusioned with it, turning instead, with many other intellectuals of the world, to communism. It may be hypothesized that communism's preoccupation with social classes and the revolutionary student's desire to protect and lead the people meshed well with Confucian sensibilities. Mao Zedong (1893–1976), arguing for the spontaneity of massive popular uprisings in his *Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, torpedoed his whole case with a quotation from Mencius: "Draw the bow but do not release the arrow, having seemed to leap." It was a very old-fashioned formula for influencing or inciting the people. Meanwhile, Mao's rival, Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), employed a resuscitated Confucianism so that the people might behave themselves.[7]

It is perhaps beyond the topic to ponder on the meaning of Confucianism in the present day, just as it may be too wildly speculative to insist on untried alternatives to it in the Ming-Qing transition. It must be remembered, of course, that Confucianism is a centuries-old doctrine, which could only have survived as long as it has by being remarkably adaptable and receptive to outside influences, such as Legalism, Buddhism, and communism. The story in this book has paralleled the course of Confucianism's development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, showing how it was used to justify the leadership of the gentry class over the community and the state; how it ran afoul of a rival philosophy, Legalism, which granted the gentry no such majesty; how partisans of the rival schools traded political blows for approximately one century; how Confucianism lost its old function as the gentry gave up its pursuit of sovereignty over the state; and how it took on a new function as the emperor's source of sovereignty over the gentry as well as the state. It evolved,

in other words, from a theory of gentry leadership to a theory of gentry loyalty, passing from a philosophy of strife to one of peace. Whatever it meant for China's future, the new version of Confucianism meant that an important chapter was closed on China's past: the Ming-Qing transition was over.

Notes

Introduction

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Chapter 1

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Chapter 2

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Index

Adshead, S. A. M., 134, 135
Ajige. *See* Prince Ying
All Men are Brothers. See *Water Margin*
Analects of Confucius, 8, 108, 124
Annotated Explications of the Daily Lectures on the Four Books, 123
Anqing Prefecture, 31
aristocracy (Manchu), 9, 12, 34, 44, 47, 57, 102, 105, 121. See also *Manchus*
Asisi (d. 1681), 112, 113, 114, 115, 116
Avatamsaka (*Flower Garland Sutra*), 122

Bai Yijin, 51
banditry,1, 4, 5–7, 27–29, 38–40
banners (bannermen), 2, 12, 34, 82–83, 90, 95, 96, 98, 105, 106, 108, 118, 120, 121, 135
Baoguo Temple, 58
Beattie, Hillary, 5
Beijing, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18, 21, 25, 38, 49, 55, 56, 58, 74
boatmen, 33–34
bondservants, 28, 29, 34, 35, 83. *See also* housemen
Book of Changes, 6–7, 20, 124
Book of Documents, 65, 110, 124, 125
Book of Poetry, 65, 124
Braudel, Fernand, 134
Buddhism, 104, 137
bureaucracy, 69, 85, 94, 96, 101, 102, 120, 121, 129, 134, 135. *See also* civil service examinations; faction; great reckoning; performance evaluations

Cai Shiying (d. 1674), 118
Cai Yurong (1633–1699), 118, 119
calligraphy, 131
Cao Benrong, 66
Cao Pi (187–226), 54
Changshu County, 28
Changzhou County (Suzhou Prefecture), 37, 38, 114
Changzhou Prefecture, 89
Chen Denggao, 74
Cheng Yi (1033–1107), 49
Cheng Yicang, 83, 86–87
Chen Mingxia (d. 1654), 44, 48, 53, 56–63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 76, 87, 95, 101, 110
Chen Suoxue, 36–37
Chen Zilong (d. 1647), 118
Cherishing Loyalty Society, 28
Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), 137
Chiefs of the Three Families, 8
Chizhou Prefecture, 36
Chongxiao Temple, 58, 62
Chongzhen emperor (r. 1627–1644), 4, 7, 9, 10, 15, 17, 24, 25, 27, 41, 67, 69, 70, 74, 99, 105, 119
Ciren Temple, 58
civil service examinations, 38, 42, 43–44, 49–50, 58, 59, 82, 101, 118. *See also* examination essays; Great Confucians of Broad Learning

commoners, 4–7, 20, 23, 27–29, 34–35, 45, 75, 82, 89, 90, 113, 114, 119, 129, 137
communism, 137
Confucianism, 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 18, 19, 26, 49, 54–55, 56, 64, 68, 106, 109, 111, 119, 121, 128–29, 130, 135, 136, 137–38. *See also* Neo-Confucianism
Confucius, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19, 64, 87, 96, 106, 108, 110, 123, 124, 130
corporal punishment, 72, 90, 93, 114

Daoism, 104
Datong, 44
Deng Bingheng, 52
Dennerline, Jerry, 28, 117, 120
Doctrine of the Mean, 19, 124
Dodo. *See* Prince Yu
Dongchang Prefecture, 35
Dong Han (1624–1697?), 115, 116, 117
Dong hua lu, 115
Donglin Academy, 3, 50
Donglin faction, 3, 4, 16, 18, 29, 50, 58, 60, 64, 65, 95, 100
Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE), 64, 68
Dorgon (1612–1650), 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16–17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24–27, 29, 31, 32, 36, 41, 42–45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 58, 63, 66, 68, 96
Duke Ai of Lu, 8, 9
Duke of Zhou, 15–16, 17, 64, 65
Duke Wen of Teng, 8, 9

Ebilun, 77, 79, 106. *See also* Oboi regency
eight-legged essays. *See* examination essays
Enlightenment, 134
eunuchs, 3, 15, 58, 62, 83, 94. *See also* mine tax commissioners; Wei Zhongxian
Europe, 134
examination essays, 59–61, 87, 101

faction, 1, 12, 16–17, 20, 25–27, 42, 43, 47, 49–50, 54, 57, 58, 102, 105, 106, 107
Fang Dayou (d. 1660), 22
Fan Wencheng (1597–1666), 9, 10, 11, 12, 24, 44
Fan Zhongyan (989–1052), 98
Feng Quan (1595–1672), 16, 17, 18, 20, 25–26, 43, 44, 48, 58, 59, 61, 62
Feng Shu (1593–1649), 28
Fengyang Prefecture, 72
Four Books, 49, 123
Fujian Province, 30, 112, 120
Fu Qingfen, 94
Fu she. *See* Restoration Society
Fu Shui, 65
Fushun, 83
Fu Wu shu cao, 97–100

Gaochun County, 120
Gao Shiqi (1645–1703), 121
Gaoyou Subprefecture, 55
Geng Jimao, 102, 112
Geng Jingzhong (d. 1682), 111–12, 113, 120
gentlemen, 18–19, 25, 42, 50, 51, 52, 54, 60, 61, 63–64, 68, 70, 92, 94, 98, 99, 103, 104, 121, 126, 131
gentry, 2, 16, 18, 21–23, 34–37, 41–43, 45, 50, 52, 55, 56, 62, 63, 67, 70–76, 79, 84, 90, 102, 106, 107, 109, 110, 111, 112, 129, 130, 131; "defrocked gentry," 21, 36, 42, 71, 74, 75; degradation and accommodation with the

state during Three Feudatories Revolt, 114–20; degradation during the Oboi Regency, 94–101, 128; loyalty to Qing in Three Feudatories Revolt, 112–14; pretentions to sovereignty of, 1, 50, 52–53, 117, 124, 127, 129, 131, 136, 137; as targets of popular uprising, 5–7, 27–29, 41; tax evasion of, 4, 5, 73, 74, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 90, 92, 94, 95, 97, 116, 117. *See also* gentlemen; *jiangxue*; officials; Succession to the Way
Gong Dingzi (1615–1673), 20, 26
Grand Canal, 118, 119
Great Confucians of Broad Learning, 122–23
Great Learning, 124
great reckoning, 57
Great Society of the Ten Districts, 48, 50
Guangdong Province, 31
Gui Youguang (1507–1571), 60
Guizhou Province, 102, 111
Gui Zhuang (1613–1673), 49, 69
Gu Jieao, 40
Guo Songyi, 29
Gu Xiancheng (1550–1612), 3, 17, 26, 50, 52, 60, 64, 65, 67, 68, 110, 136
Guy, R. Kent, 123
Gu Yanwu (1613–1682), 49
Gu Yuxian, 37–42, 43, 63, 85–86, 97, 99–100, 119

haircutting order, 24–25, 28, 29, 44
Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), 64, 99
Hangzhou Prefecture, 37, 39
Hankou, 134
Hanlin, 56, 66, 108, 121, 129, 130
Han Shiqi (d. 1686), 90, 97–100, 128
Han Yu (768–824), 60, 98
Hao Jie (d. 1659), 20
Hebei Province, 21
Heijdra, Martin, 97
Henan Province, 11
Hong Chengchou (1593–1665), 9, 10, 11, 12, 24, 29–32, 37, 44, 48, 58, 62, 68–70
Hongguang emperor (r. 1644–1645), 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 23, 24, 48
Hong Taiji (1592–1643), 17
Hongzhi era (1487–1505), 52
housemen, 74, 82
Hou Tongzeng (1591–1645), 29
Huang, Jinxing, 136
Huang Ming jingshi wenbian, 96
Huang Zongxi (1610–1695), 100, 111
Huating County, 36
Huguang Province, 34
Huizhou Prefecture, 70
Hunan Province, 118, 119
Hu Shenzhong, 73

Imperial University, 106

Jiading County, 24, 25, 29, 30, 73, 81, 120
Jiajing era (1521–1567), 52
Jiande County, 36
Jianding Prefecture, 38
Jiang Chen, 5
Jiangnan, 12, 24, 27–32, 36, 44, 52, 53, 55, 71, 73, 75, 82, 83, 88, 89, 90, 94, 97, 98, 99, 112–13, 115, 116, 124, 129, 131
Jiangning County, 32, 91, 112
Jiangpu, 36
Jiang Shaoshu, 37
Jiangsu Province, 123
Jiang Xing, 44–45
Jiangxi Province, 52, 112, 113, 114

jiangxue (Neo-Confucian lecture and discussion), 50, 51, 52, 56, 60–61, 65, 67–68, 104, 105, 111
jian jia (tax), 114–15
Jiaxing County, 48
Jinhua County, 120
Jin Renrui (a.k.a. Jin Shengtan [1610?–1661]), 84, 87–88, 96, 101, 136
Jin Zhijuan (1593–1670), 93
jiu li yin (tax), 32
jun tian jun yi (equal field, equal service), 115–17
Jurchen, 126

Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722), 13, 79, 88, 97, 102, 103, 104–5, 106, 107–8, 111, 114, 119, 121; and court lectures, 108, 109, 110; political acumen of, 108–10; sagehood of, 107, 109–10, 123–29, 135; Southern tour of 1699, 129–32. *See also* Great Confucians of Broad Learning; Southern Study
Kang Youwei (1858–1927), 137
King Cheng, 65
Kong Dingfang, 124
Kunshan County, 52

labor service levy, 33–34, 38, 73, 116
Lamenting in the Temple Case, 81–82, 85, 88–89, 96, 97, 100, 101
land enclosures, 34, 74
Lan Ying (1585–1664), 37
lectures (court), 44, 66–67, 68, 104, 105, 121, 123. *See also* Kangxi emperor
Legalism, 1, 3, 26, 67, 127, 128, 129, 135, 137
Levenson, Joseph, 137
Lian Xixian (1231–1280), 126
Liaodong, 83
Liaoxiang (tax), 32–33
Li Chengdong (d. 1649), 29, 30–31, 32
Li Fu (1673–1750), 127
Li Guangdi (1642–1718), 127
Li Jiantai, 25–27
Lin Qilong, 72, 77
Li Ruolin (d. 1657), 25, 48
Li San, 57
Liu Zongzhou (1578–1645), 10–11, 17, 41
Liyang County, 56, 89
Li Zicheng (1606–1645), 7, 10, 21, 22, 24, 31, 56, 63, 64
Longqing era (1567–1572), 52, 91
Louis XIV, 122
Lu Shen, 35–36
Lu Yuanfu, 52
Luzhou Prefecture, 37

Ma Chengrui, 71
Ma Guozhu (d. 1664), 52, 55
Manchus (Manchuria), 1, 4, 9, 17, 32, 34, 58, 62, 73, 75, 77, 79, 83, 84, 88, 95, 101, 102, 103, 106, 109, 112, 114, 119, 126, 133, 134. *See also* aristocracy (Manchu); bondservants; haircutting order; land enclosures
Mandate of Heaven, 15, 18, 66
Mao Xiang (1611–1693), 28
Mao Zedong (1893–1976), 137
Ma Tengsheng, 73
mean men, 25, 126, 127
Memorials and Other Writings of the Governor of Wu. See *Fu Wu shu cao*
Mencius, 8, 9, 11–12, 16, 18, 19, 64, 68, 106, 124, 137
Mencius, 8, 124
merchants, 22, 76, 113

militia, 21–23, 28, 29, 35, 38, 70
Miller, Harold, 117, 122
mine tax commissioners, 3, 35, 72, 82, 83, 94, 95, 96
Ming dynasty, 1, 2–7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 25–27, 32, 33, 34–35, 37, 38, 43, 44, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 67, 73, 82, 91, 94, 96, 100, 110, 112, 116, 119, 122, 123, 127, 132, 133, 134. *See also* Ming loyalism; Southern Ming
Ming loyalism, 27–29, 31, 35, 36, 41, 63, 69, 71, 74, 119, 123
Ming yi dai fang lu, 100
money lenders, 92
Mongols, 126
Mu Tianyan (d. 1696), 112, 116

Nanhui. *See* Shanghai County
Nanjing, 7, 9, 10, 23, 24, 28, 32, 37, 48, 52, 55, 56, 76, 84, 88, 112, 113, 120
Neo-Confucianism, 3, 16, 17, 18, 49, 50, 51, 56, 60, 61, 62, 64, 67, 87, 88, 96, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 109, 110, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128, 135. See also *jiangxue*; Ningjin County, 38, 40; Succession to the Rule; Succession to the Way
Ning Wanwo (d. 1665), 62, 76
Ni Yuanlu (1593–1644), 17, 41, 99, 119
northerners versus southerners, 58–59, 61
Northern Party, 59

Oboi, 77, 102, 103, 106, 107, 108, 109. *See also* Oboi regency
Oboi regency, 13, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 88–89, 93, 95, 97, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 116, 121, 128, 135
officials, 23, 32, 37, 43, 44–45, 70–72, 75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 81, 84, 85, 90, 91, 92, 94, 97, 98, 116, 118, 130
Outlaws of the Marsh. See *Water Margin*
Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), 26, 60, 98
Oxnam, Robert, 101, 102

performance evaluations, 81, 91, 101, 128, 135
Ping ding san ni fang lue, 115
plunder, 11, 21, 23, 28, 29, 30–31, 39, 74, 76
poetry, 49, 51, 54, 55, 130–31
Pomeranz, Kenneth, 134
prefaces, 53, 62, 97–100
Prince Ying, 44
Prince Yu (1614–1649), 24
Prudent Associators, 52–53

Qian Jingzhong, 7–9, 10, 11
Qian Qianyi (1582–1664), 24, 52–53, 124
Qianshan County, 31–32
Qiantang County, 39, 40, 41, 63
Qi Biaojia, 41
Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), 67
Qing dynasty, 1, 2, 9, 10, 11–12, 24, 38, 54, 55, 56, 57, 63, 91, 94, 112, 128, 133, 136
Qufu, 130

Raozhou Prefecture, 112
Red Ox, 53
Ren Weichu, 82, 83, 84, 86, 88, 95
Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan, 137
Restoration Society, 4, 16, 18, 28, 29, 44, 48, 50, 53, 56, 58, 62, 67, 95, 100, 132

Rites of Zhou, 124
Rowe, William, 134
Rugao County, 28, 36

sages (sage kings), 9, 16, 18, 42, 50, 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 67, 87, 88, 97, 98, 99, 102, 104, 105, 106, 110, 123, 124, 125, 126. *See also* Kangxi emperor; Shun; Yao
salt distillers, 28
Sancha River, 37
Shaanxi Province, 28, 45
Shandong Province, 22–23, 35, 71
Shanghai County, 28, 91, 116
Shang Kexi, 102, 111
Shang kingdom, (c. 1600–c. 1046 BCE), 65, 104, 110
Shangyuan County, 112
Shanxi Province, 27, 45, 73
Shaoxing Prefecture, 40, 131
Shen Ziji, 36
Shen Zijin (1583–1665), 36
Shen Zongjing (1658–1725), 129, 130, 131, 132
Shi Kefa (1601–1645), 10, 18, 23, 24, 29
Shi Shunzhe, 92
Shun (sage), 9, 42, 66, 67, 105, 110, 123, 126
Shunde Prefecture, 74
Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644–1661), 12, 34, 47–48, 49, 57, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66–70, 72, 77, 79–80, 81, 82, 88, 91, 97, 104, 105, 125
Sichuan Province, 118
Single whip reform, 33, 116, 117
Smith, Adam, 109
soldiers, 5–6, 11, 28, 32, 39–40, 45, 92, 113, 114, 119. *See also* militia
Song dynasty (960–1279), 18, 64, 124, 129
Songgotu, 106
Songjiang Prefecture, 30, 31, 53, 89, 118
Song Yi, 122
Soni (1601–1667), 76, 77, 79, 80, 102–3, 106
Southern Ming, 7, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 56, 69
Southern Party, 59, 62
Southern Study, 121–22
Southern tour of 1699. *See* Kangxi emperor
sovereign-teachers (or ruler-teachers), 123, 129
Spring and Autumn Annals, 124
Startled Reclusive Poets Society, 49
state, the, 1–2, 50, 55, 56, 70–71, 75, 82, 83, 88, 94–95, 96, 98, 101, 102, 105, 106, 107, 117, 120–21, 127–29, 133, 134, 135, 136
statecraft school, 96, 97, 98, 116, 118, 135
Struve, Lynn, 100, 120
students, 82, 84, 86, 90, 92, 109, 112, 131
Succession to the Rule, 123, 124, 126, 127, 129, 136
Succession to the Way, 16, 60, 64, 109, 123, 124, 126, 127, 129, 135–36
Suksaha (d. 1667), 77, 79, 106. *See also* Oboi regency
Sun Erling, 71
Sun Kekuan, 51
Sun Yihuan, 73
Sun Zhimi, 130
Sun Zhiwei (1620–1687), 28
Suzhou Prefecture, 30, 37, 52, 53, 81, 84, 86, 89, 114, 130, 132

Taicang Subprefecture, 28, 48, 132
Taihu County, 31–32
Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), 136

Taixing County, 36
Tang (sage), 123, 126
Tang Bin (1627–1687), 123
Tang Binyin (1559–?), 60
Tang dynasty (618–907), 98, 99
Tangshan County, 74
Tangyi County, 35
Tan Qian (1594–1658), 58
Tao Yuanming (365–427), 119
Tax Clearance case, 73, 89–101, 115, 130
taxes, 4, 5, 29, 31–35, 38, 41, 45, 52, 65, 71–76, 80, 81, 82, 83, 91, 102, 103, 114–17; surtaxes on gentry, 115, 122. See also *jian jia*; *jiu li yin*; *jun tian jun yi*; labor service levy; single whip reform; Tax Clearance case; *youmian* tax exemption
tax farming, 74, 90
tenants, 27, 35, 72, 82
Three dynasties, 99
Three Feudatories (including Three Feudatories Rebellion), 102, 111, 120, 122, 130, 135
Tianqi emperor (r. 1620–1627), 4
Tiger Hill, 53, 54, 132
Tongcheng County, 5–7, 27
tribute students, 83, 115, 120, 121
Tu Guobao (d. 1651), 37
Tuhai (d. 1681), 73, 75
twice-serving ministers, 51, 69

United Voice Society, 52–53

Veritable Records, 72, 115

Wakeman, Frederic, Jr., 9, 17, 29, 117, 120, 121, 133, 135
Wang Chenglan, 58, 59
Wang Fengxian, 74
Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692), 126–27, 128
Wang Jing, 21
Wang Shouren (a.k.a. Wang Yangming [1472–1529]), 60–61
Wang Yun (a.k.a. Wang Shengshi [1619–1693?]), 2, 118–19
Wanli emperor (r. 1572–1620), 2, 3, 32–33, 35, 49, 60, 72, 82, 83, 91, 94, 95, 96, 105, 122
Water Margin, 87–88
Way, the, 53, 103, 127. *See also* sages; Succession to the Way
Wei Xiangshu, 57
Wei Yijie (1616–1686), 48, 63–68, 69, 70, 72, 76, 77, 104, 105, 125
Wei Zhongxian (1568–1627), 4, 16, 58, 95, 96
Wen (sage), 123, 126
Wen Shuguang, 35
West, the, 133, 134, 136, 137
Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE), 15
Wong, R. Bin, 134
Wu (sage), 123
Wu County, 82, 84
Wu Ding, 65
Wujiang, 30, 31, 36, 54
Wu River, 129
Wu Sangui (1612–1678), 10, 69, 102, 111, 112, 113, 118, 119, 120
Wu Shengzhao, 30–31, 32
Wu Tingzhen, 131
Wu Weiye (1609–1671), 2, 48–56, 58, 61, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67, 69, 75, 76, 93, 94, 95, 97–99, 104, 114, 124, 132
Wuxi County, 130

Xia kingdom, 110
Xiao Qiyuan, 39, 41
Xiao Zhongsu, 36
Xing County, 73
Xing family, 119–20
Xing Fang (1590–1653), 33, 36, 120

Xing Zhenyan, 120
Xiong Cilü (1635–1709), 103–5, 106, 108, 109, 110
Xuanwu Gate, 58
Xu Heng (1209–1281), 126
Xu Qianxue (1631–1694), 48–49, 121

Yangzhou, 23–24, 28, 36, 55
Yangzi River, 23, 24, 99
Yan Shiwei, 75
Yao (sage), 42, 66, 67, 105, 123, 126
Yao Shu (1201–1278), 126
Yao Wenxi, 7
Ye Fuxia, 54, 56
Yellow River, 33
Ye Mengzhu, 91–93, 94, 104, 115, 116–17
Yingtian Prefecture, 89
Yi Yin, 104
Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424), 123
youmian tax exemption, 73, 74, 82, 90, 116
You Tong (1618–1704), 48–49, 114, 115, 131
Yuan dynasty, 9
Yue shi bian, 91
Yu Huang, 41
Yu kingdom, 110
Yunnan Province, 102, 111
Yu Que (1302–1357), 64
Yu (sage), 123
Yu Zhishu, 36
Yu Zhiyin, 36

Zeng Guofan (1811–1872), 136
Zengzi (sage), 124
Zhang Cai (1596–1648), 28, 132
Zhang Huijian, 28
Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582), 2, 49, 77, 80, 81, 83, 94, 96, 99, 104, 128, 135
Zhang Lian, 55
Zhang Pu (1602–1641), 67
Zhang Weichi, 115, 116
Zhang Xianzhong (1606–1647), 31
Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801), 136
Zhang Ying (1638–1708), 121, 122
Zhang Yuzhi, 92
Zhan Tubing, 122
Zhao Pu (916–992), 124, 125, 132
Zhao Yu, 74–76, 90
Zhejiang Province, 36, 37, 42, 48, 112, 120
Zhending Prefecture, 21
Zheng Chenggong (a.k.a. Coxinga [1624–1662]), 71, 83, 84, 85, 88
Zhengde era (1505–1521), 52
Zhenjiang Prefecture, 89
Zhou Fengxiang (d. 1644), 41
Zhou kingdom (c. 1046–256 BCE), 65, 110. *See also* Western Zhou
Zhou Ziying, 117
Zhu Guozhi (d. 1673), 82–83, 84, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 94, 95, 97, 99, 100, 120
Zhuji County, 40
Zhu Xi (1130–1200), 15–16, 123, 124, 125
Zhu Xiangsun, 28
Zhu Yousong (1607–1646). *See* Hongguang emperor
Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398), 64
Zhu Yunxian, 66
Zisi (sage), 124