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Indoctrination or Participation? Community Schools and the Ming State

Written for conference Imperial Identity: Construction and Extension of Cultural Community in the Early Modern World (University of Minnesota, Center for Early Modern History, November 2004)

The focus of the Imperial Identities conference was to compare the cultural orientations of early modern empires around the world and to see how they promoted core values over the territories and populations they ruled. Special attention was paid to the "cultural imprint" of these imperial cultural systems which remain to varying degrees in the contemporary world. This four-day conference involved over two dozen presenters and featured papers which consisted of comparative overviews of two or more empires, programs of empire designed to rationalize and legitimate imperial projects, and local accounts of how imperial rule resonated with the cultural scene at the local level. Papers consisted of case studies of these themes from all portions of the early modern world. See <http://www.cemh.umn.edu/news/conferences.html#past>.

The volume never came into being, but here is the final version of my paper for it.

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The ruling elites of early modern empires used a variety of means to maintain political control, from military muscle to cultural prestige. Yet as much recent scholarship has made clear, looking only at what the center did or called for cannot explain how empires cohered. The Ming dynasty, for instance, is frequently described as autocratic, and so we might assume that its long reign of 276 years sprang from tight control over state and society. I argue instead that the Ming state as a whole drew strength from its ability to provide fields of social competition, from the civil service examination system to the army to the bestowal of honors for chastity and filiality. Local institutions prescribed by the center elicited or channeled official and popular participation because they could be manipulated to serve a variety of functions. Community

schools, which might be understood as increasing cohesion through top-down imposition of cultural norms or particular texts, instead were flexible institutions that served different purposes in different eras, as their sponsors changed.

The usual story told about community schools is that they were promoted by the Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368-1398), as a part of a renewed commitment to Chinese culture after the Mongol Yuan dynasty. Because of the founder's command, community schools were widely established all across the empire. They provided Ming boys in towns and villages with an elementary classical, Confucian education (or indoctrination) based on ritual practice, ethical training, and memorization of and writing about the Four Books and Five Classics, the dynastic histories and poetry. The schools not only increased literacy, but also gave farm boys a chance to move into the civil bureaucracy through the examination system. This picture is not only too simple, but also inaccurate in many ways, from the account of the policy's origins to the explanation and assessment of its success, to the claims about its impact.

The Early Ming Community School Policy

The inaccuracies begin with culturalist assumptions about the origins of the community school policy. The term translated "community school" is *she xue*, or *she* school. *She* is a very old term referring to an altar at the heart of a small community such as a village or hamlet, but also built at higher levels of government up to the capital. *She* altars originated in ancient, pre-bureaucratic times, when each feudal lord built one for sacrifices connected with the harvest, incorporating some soil taken from the altar on which the emperor made such sacrifices. The

altars expressed a connection between an ideal of unity focused on the center and an ideal of local organization. Over time, local associations centered on these altars assumed a growing range of community services and also became a basic unit in the emerging imperial bureaucracy. Farmers were organized and organized themselves into associations centered on these altars, associations that registered families for taxation, assured joint worship and mutual aid, and defined in- and out-groups. These associations were then used by the Yuan dynasty (1234-1367) in a broad program of rural reconstruction. Khubilai Khan decreed in 1270 that every 50 families should form a *she*, headed by local elders, to promote agriculture and sericulture. About two decades later each *she* was also required to have a school and to select a local man who thoroughly understood the classics to teach farm boys during slack periods in the agricultural cycle. Such schools were actually founded in at least a few places during the Yuan period. The early Ming policy of requiring a community school for every fifty families was certainly drawn from the Yuan precedent: the term *she* was not used for any Ming administrative unit, yet the term *she*-school was used; no other early Ming law was based on group of 50 families; and *she*-schools were founded before Zhu Yuanzhang's 1375 edict, by officials who presumably were just acting on common ideas, inherited from the Yuan period, of what good resident administrators did besides encouraging agriculture and collecting taxes. The common idea association of community schools with a Chinese culturalist policy of the early Ming is complicated by their Yuan origins.

In establishing community schools for elementary education in 1375, Zhu Yuanzhang did

not stress cultural renovation as much as law-abiding morality and control. In Yuan law, the *she* (community) itself had selected the teacher; under Ming law he was to be chosen by the resident administrator (magistrate, subprefect or prefect). The community schools, according to the edict of 1375, were to “guide the people to good habits” and “to teach [boys] to read,” and the names of teachers and pupils were to be reported to the government.¹ The teachers were indeed to be “Confucians” and students registered in the county schools, “of learning and deportment,” but the only specific comment on curriculum, coming later in the reign period (1386-7), required boys to study the law and the *Grand Pronouncements*.² The *Grand Pronouncements* were a series of short contemporary anecdotes and exhortations written by the founder himself, which stressed not the finer points of Chinese culture or morality but the harshest points of Ming law, with tales of how the emperor himself deal with wrongdoers, making the punishment fit the crime. It was obedience to the law, not Chinese cultural renovation, that Zhu Yuanzhang promoted through community schools.

When Zhu discovered, in 1380, that the community schools were spawning new opportunities for illegal activities, he unhesitatingly abolished them. As he explained in the *Grand Pronouncements*, resident administrators and government underlings had been accepting bribes from wealthy subjects to excuse their sons from attendance and were forcing poor boys to attend. It is not at all clear how widespread the corruption was, but Zhu felt the need to abolish the community schools. Preventing collusion between officials he did not trust and subjects he was coming to distrust was more important to Zhu than any cultural integration the schools might

have achieved. Zhu revived the schools a few years later, but on a strictly voluntary basis to prevent corruption: the schools were to be run by villagers as they saw fit, and officials were forbidden to “interfere.”³ When one adds to Zhu’s rapid abandonment of the universal community school policy the fact that few counties indeed — perhaps as few as one or two percent — actually established even one community school when required by law to do so between 1375 and 1380, let alone one in each village, it becomes hard indeed to credit Zhu Yuanzhang with the spread of community schools later in the Ming.⁴ A meaningful policy of empire-building through culture at the level of elementary education cannot be traced back to the Ming founder.

Despite their shaky start in the early Ming, community schools proliferated after about 1430, and especially after 1460, as a series of imperial edicts reinstated them as a central policy. But just as the origins of the schools did not lie with the Ming founder’s commitment to implementing the institutions of the classics, so the longer history of the Ming community school is by no means bounded by such centrally produced or directed texts. Rather, the development of Ming community schools falls into several phases, driven by the shared concerns and individual actions of upper- and lower-level officials and subjects. During the mid-Ming (c. 1430-1470), higher or central officials were the most important figures in defining community schools; during the high Ming (c. 1470-1530) the most active figures were magistrates and prefects operating at the lowest level of the centrally-appointed bureaucracy; and in the late Ming (c. 1530-1644) local subjects themselves played a greater role.

The Mid-Ming Bureaucratic Agenda

During the mid-Ming (1430-1470), imperial edicts about community schools were stimulated by recommendations submitted in memorials from officials. Officialdom reasserted control of these local institutions with which the Ming founder had forbidden it to “interfere.” New edicts required community schools for every village and town (1439) and put the schools under the control of both resident administrators and a new provincial official, the Education Intendant (1436). As schools were taken up by high-ranking bureaucrats, they naturally reflected the concerns of those men with increasing their own control. During the mid-Ming, those who sponsored schools saw them as the solution to a particular problem: inadequate numbers of candidates properly prepared to hold public office. The Ming founder had specifically commanded that pupils return to their father’s occupations.⁵ Yet mid-Ming community schools were conceived of as providing not just training in good behavior but a real classical education that would offer boys a place in the great tradition and a means of intellectual and moral cultivation. Ye Sheng, a bibliophile of great stature who early in his career was entrusted with reconstructing and fortifying the northern border in the wake of the Tumu incident, wrote a poem stressing the important of the difficult Confucian classics to community school education.

Providing books for a community school

A military Guard promotes civil teaching,
collecting money to provide books.

The ancient *Odes* sets forth models and warnings;

the great *Changes* speaks of waxing and waning.

If one wishes to give the three constant bonds weight,

how can one allow the neglect of rites and law?

Honorable talents are like pure jade --

we need to buy a whole storehouse full.⁶

In theory, such a curriculum opened the way into the examination system and into officialdom.

As one gazetteer explains, “Community schools are how one trains youth and teaches young lads, as the basis for advanced study.”⁷ Another writer says: “Community schools are established for the purpose of teaching youngsters. The people who start schools want to correct their thinking and behavior. Later they can enter the national school and be employed by the dynasty.”⁸

Reflecting the views of the high officials who sponsored schools in the mid-Ming, a 1462 edict permitted the selection of community school pupils for the county schools, allowing them to move up into the examination system that selected officials for the great bureaucracy of the Ming state.⁹

This policy has assimilated the community schools into the larger story of the “Chinese dream” of social mobility; as a Qing historian wrote, because of the community schools “from the countryside one could become chief minister!”¹⁰ Yet Benjamin Elman’s magnum opus on the civil examination system argues that the “Chinese dream” of the poor boy who rises to become Prime Minister through sheer talent was a mere illusion. The examination system, theoretically open to nearly all men, in Elman’s view served most fundamentally to exclude, not

include, those whose family backgrounds, cultural literacy, speech, understanding of etiquette and ritual, personal deportment, and connections were not high-class enough.¹¹ And in fact, the Ming men who actually progressed from community schools to office can be counted on one's fingers. The mid-Ming center's promotion of community schools as a way to bring up bureaucrats was a solution to a personnel problem, rather than an attempt to draw all of China's people together through education and opportunity.

High Ming Activism

In the six decades of the high Ming (1470-1530), during which about 40% of Ming community schools were established, it might have been hard to remember that recruitment had once been a problem. As the Ming economy flourished and the printing industry expanded, more and more hopeful candidates tried to register in county schools, pass the three levels of examination, and win attractive government positions. Community school sponsorship and purposes changed again. While high officials had been the most prominent sponsors of mid-Ming schools, most high Ming schools were established by resident administrators¹² -- the magistrates, subprefects and prefects who constituted the lowest layer of the centrally-appointed bureaucracy. While they still wrote of schools as preparing boys for the examination route, improving morality took precedence over literary ability and familiarity with the classics. One county gazetteer reported that its schools were intended

to gather the sons and younger brothers of the county's people and teach them...

Establishing schools is to expand *jiaohua* (transformation through education), to

make clear the proper relationships among people... The responsibility of the students is to correct their own behavior and approach goodness and honesty.¹³

The concerns of these men were reflected in a new imperial edict that violated the Ming founder's final decision that attendance should be voluntary, as well as his concern with teaching the law. The 1504 edict, impossible to enforce, required the teaching of ritual and imposed mandatory attendance at community school.¹⁴

Competing in a crowded field, the high Ming resident administrators who sponsored schools often had only one chance to make their mark in history. Many are recorded not in the official *Ming History* but only in the local gazetteers of the places they worked and of their home towns, and in the commemorative steles those gazetteers incorporate. They often wrote or sponsored these publications themselves, to broadcast and immortalize their own accomplishments in the local arena: founding community schools, equalizing taxes, rebuilding walls, repairing county schools, restoring City God temples and state altars, and setting up shrines to local men and former administrators who could serve as moral exemplars. Yet the program was not set by the center; each activist administrator (and they were a tiny proportion of magistrates and prefects at any time) individually selected institutions from among the many that were laid out in Ming law and in the Confucian classics, or that their recent predecessors and their contemporaries were establishing and writing about. This kind of state-building was experimental and dispersed, dependent on individual effort.

High Ming activist administrators were zealous Confucians who also attacked local religious institutions they labeled “improper shrines.” They not only criticized popular religious, Daoist and Buddhist institutions and practices in print, but also confiscated ritual implements, melted down or burned icons, tore down buildings, and defrocked clergy, returning them to lay life.¹⁵ (In contrast to the English state religious police active at roughly the same time, they rarely burned them at the stake or stretched them on the rack.) Activists also converted religious buildings into community schools and other Confucian or state institutions, and confiscated monastic estates for their support. Community schools were to replace Buddhist and other institutions in a number of ways: physically replacing the site; morally replacing the scriptures and the message; corporeally replacing the ritual; financially usurping the income; and in terms of personnel replacing monks with Confucian teachers. Again, these activities were not directed by the dynasty or the central government. After nearly two decades of activity, in 1488, reformers finally got their program onto the imperial agenda, only to be instructed that extreme measures against important or long-standing cults were impractical and were not approved.¹⁶ In fact, the activists did not even agreed with one another over precisely what cults to attack. Their arguments generally rested on their individual ideas about what was right, and which gods were genuine and efficacious, not on what was required by law as a uniform set of deities for the whole empire.

Popular Responses

The populace never whole-heartedly embraced community schools, as the early Ming

evasion and bribery that drove Taizu to make them voluntary community institutions instead of universal, officially-run institutions suggest. As administrators promoted community schools to improve adherence to Confucian rituals and ideals, parents argued back and pupils voted with their feet. A 1574 gazetteer complained that far from appreciating the classical education their sons were receiving, “fathers and elder brothers... regard [the canonical beginnings of elementary education] sprinkling and sweeping as menial labor and do not let their sons carry them out.”¹⁷ In many, many cases, schools failed after the activist administrator had left (and it was rare for a magistrate or prefect to hold one post for more than three or at the most nine years), suggesting a lack of interest or even active hostility, as school buildings and lands were taken over for homes and gardens. In some documented cases, and probably more not documented, clergy and believers reclaimed community schools, turning them back into shrines and temples.

Yet local people did involve themselves in community schools and promote their growth and spread. They did so even though there were other names for elementary schools available: there were lineage schools, and some local men followed an old institutional model to educate their neighbors and kin by building and funding non-official *yixue* or “charitable” schools. Although this other sphere for action by locals was available, commemorative records celebrating administrators’ achievements sometimes acknowledged local assistance in establishing community schools, such as land or buildings donated or teachers recommended. Some reported enthusiastic attendance. Doing ritual correctly – as was taught in the schools – could be part of a claim to high status locally, and some accounts of schools report that they had

changed local customs. But such reports, even if completely true, do not show obedience to the law or acquiescence in the activist program. They do not necessarily show effective top-down state-building.

The situation is more complex. When schools were not satisfactory because magistrates had given teaching jobs to decrepit or dishonest literati, families sometimes took over their management, compromising official control over what was taught.¹⁸ Some pupils used their attendance at school to agitate for privileges; in the early 1500s, for instance, Education Intendant Gu Qian admitted a whole cohort to the county school despite his worries that they were only trying to get out of tax obligations, and a late Ming law suggests that community school pupils as a whole, as well as their teachers, had won some tax exemptions.¹⁹ The material benefits of schools for locals become even more evident in the fourth phase of Ming community school history, in the late Ming (1530-1644), when more community schools were built by subjects themselves. Some such schools housed granaries.²⁰ Some were run by and for lineages as lineage organizations solidified: a grateful Fujian man built a community school for the maternal relatives who had raised him.²¹ Some become less like elementary schools and more like *shuyuan*, private or semi-private academies for advanced study; these became increasingly important for advanced study as the county schools deteriorated into little more than places of registration for the examinations.²² When academies were outlawed because they were seen as hives of political opposition, some community schools may even have stood in for them, camouflaging the same activities behind a safe name. Some late Ming “community schools”

focus on a shrine to Song literary figures or to the god of literature and examination success, Wenchang, and host poetry clubs and meetings of men studying for the examinations.²³ Such schools served the local gentry, and when the last Ming emperor called again for the broad establishment of community schools, his rhetoric reflected that reality: he lamented that “gentry customs” had declined and proposed schools as the solution.

Rather than obediently flocking to community schools to be turned into good Chinese subjects, people often shunned schools, or dismantled them, or used them as a means to privilege or to power. Imperial and official sponsorship contributed to the spread of a local institution that could be turned to the promulgation of imperial ideology. But such sponsorship does not explain the establishment and maintenance of those institutions, nor was imperial power or the spread of Confucian ideology their only result. In this final Ming incarnation, community schools indeed expressed the involvement of society in the state, but hardly state control over society. Speaking of a different local institution, Katherine Carlitz shows that “Local officials and gentry in the late fifteenth century were very active in establishing *ru* or ‘Confucian’ shrines to men *and* women, but they did not do so in response to directives from the state. Rather, the localities themselves took the initiative and used state-sanctioned rhetoric to aggrandize themselves.”²⁴ Identifying with the Ming empire, at least as it appears through community schools, did not mean buying into the details of a centrally-promoted ideology. Rather, it may have come to mean, in part, identifying with a dynasty whose state one could manipulate, whose institutions could be turned to varying purposes by many different parties, from emperor to high

officials to resident administrators to local gentry to commoners.

But perhaps one can still talk about community schools as part of a straightforward central policy of cultural domination and top-down state-building in border areas and towards ethnic minorities. After the Ming founder had abolished state-run community schools in 1380, they reentered imperial policy as a way of pacifying a difficult border area in Sichuan in 1431. Thereafter, in addition to the edicts ordering community schools to be established everywhere, they were deployed at specific imperial command in border areas: along the northern border after the Tumu disaster in 1449, in which Mongol troops captured the emperor; and among aboriginal people seen as rebelling against Ming rule in Guangxi in 1439, in Yunnan in 1481, in Guangdong and Guangxi in 1489 and 1538, and on Hainan island in 1539, 1549 and later. It seems reasonable to discuss the founding of schools in these areas (real or merely required) as part of the very old Chinese method of expanding political control by extending “civilization” along with military conquest. Patriarchy, agriculture, private property, taxation and other boons of civilization were promoted in border areas to swamp local cultures and bring people into the Chinese world.²⁵

Ming officials and generals deployed community schools in this process in combination with varying degrees of violence. But it was not just a one-way mission. For the schools were sometimes proposed by border people themselves. When Hai Rui and Wang Honghui, two men from Hainan, suggested strategies for incorporation of the island into the Ming empire that include community schools alongside economic development and improved administration, we

may align them with the center's civilizing urge, because both were of Han ethnicity.²⁶ But when, for instance, a headman in Guangxi, Mo Zhen, petitioned the throne for community schools to "change customs" in every village, alongside land distribution, mutual security groups and other measures, the civilizing mission appears less as, in William Rowe's words, something elite men did to their subordinates, than as a way for newcomers to join the biggest game in town.²⁷ Both on the borders and in the perhaps equally variegated and refractory heartland, Ming subjects sometimes willingly recognized the dynasty and participated in building its institutions (including community schools). They did so because those institutions, in local hands, could confer local prestige, legitimacy on the national stage, and material benefits, without demanding much conformity in practice. State-building took place not only from the throne down, but from the grassroots up.

Concluding Questions: From Loyalism to Nationalism?

Ming subjects not only acted on a sense that they possessed the state; they also asserted, against the contrary claims of Ming emperors, their right to influence state decisions, right down to matters involving the royal family. An early Ming memorialist, Ye Boju, responded to a call for constructive criticism of the state by raising problems with the community schools, but he also criticized Zhu Yuanzhang's enfeoffment of his sons in areas away from the capital. Although his worries proved justified when one of the princes later rebelled against his nephew, leading to a major civil war, Ye's comments infuriated the Ming founder. "Roaring 'He is trying to stir up dissension within my own family!'" he had Ye thrown into prison, where he shortly

died.²⁸ Later Ming officials continued to assert their right to interfere in matters of succession, and later Ming rulers continued to deny it. In 1402, when Zhu Di usurped the throne to become the Yongle emperor, Fang Xiaoru pushed him to restore his nephew or put his nephew's son on the throne until Zhu Di finally stated his position: "This is my family matter." Again, in 1468, two high officials took the appearance of a comet as an opportunity to repeat advice to the Chenghua emperor that he should spend time with consorts other than his aging favorite, in order to produce an heir. The state was worried, they said, about who would succeed to the throne. Echoing his ancestors' words, the emperor angrily replied "This is a domestic matter in which I will make the decisions!" In the Great Ritual Controversy of the 1520s, the Jiajing emperor asserted, over the objections and eventually the dead bodies of numbers of officials, that family affection took precedence over the bureaucratic interpretation of rules about succession. Wang Si, who had earlier been exiled for reprimanding the Zhengde emperor in a familial tone as a son reprimands a father, accused the Jiajing emperor of putting a narrow personal filial piety above public order, above the survival of civilization itself. In his turn, the Wanli emperor so believed in his right to choose his heir that he totally withdrew from contact with the bureaucracy when thwarted.²⁹ Despite imperial insistence, not only officials, but even ordinary subjects thought they had a right to speak about royal family matters. When the Jiajing emperor toured the south in search of an appropriate tomb site for his mother, a small religious sect put up posters announcing their intent to stop him.³⁰ As John Dardess has shown, other actions of the Ming center, such as the exile of prominent officials, also called forth mass demonstrations.³¹

This sense of rightful involvement in the state, from its cultural enterprises to its institutions to its very decisions about appointments and royal succession, may have played a role in Ming loyalism. Many of those who struggled and died as Ming loyalists in the period of the Qing conquest had been reformers, such as Chen Zilong, who had seen the failings of the Ming emperors and government all too clearly.³² Yet they also understood themselves as partners in the enterprise. Loyalists at lower levels of society too, I propose, may have identified with the Ming state in similar fashion: they contributed to it, and, in turn, it recognized them and allowed them their ways of life. The Ming state was a public possession, whose shape had been determined by the actions of officials and subjects using and bending its framework to their own purposes. While the Ming imperial order was oppressive, while secret police did carry out arrests and murders, while moral codes did drive women to suicide and men to despair, I think we do have to recognize that the system was strong, and that its strength lay in part in its flexibility and ability to invite participation, not in unity imposed by force from the top down.

Is it possible that this kind of loyalty, not to a royal house *per se* so much as to the state centered on that house, laid the foundation for a certain kind of nationalism? For a nationalism that was tied not only to rejection of the Other – for Ming people perhaps the Mongols and Manchus, for Qing loyalists subjects the Taiping and the 1911 revolutionaries, for May Thirtieth demonstrators, Communist and Nationalists the imperialist powers – but also to a positive identification of self with the Chinese state more generally, with state institutions and ideological norms? That style of loyalty might explain the openness of many twentieth-century Chinese

people to nationalist rhetoric and ideology, to statist solutions and regimes that spoke of the Chinese people as a whole, that slighted individual rights while giving (or forcing on) people new ways to imagine themselves in connection with China and its state.

There is at least one serious problem with this argument: three hundred years of Qing rule intervened between the Ming and the 20th century. As an outsider to Qing history, I will here venture some tentative ideas about how to bridge the gap. Ming state-building, I have argued, -- despite the despotic imperial institution that tried to refuse even many officials a legitimate voice in making policy decisions -- took place in some instances from the bottom up. As individual resident administrators and local people drew on the prestige and form of centrally-mandated institutions for their own purposes, they themselves effectively lengthened the reach of the state (in Vivienne Shue's phrase). But the Ming state as a whole, and certainly the Ming court, did not effectively use that extension of its presence to enforce uniformity through local institutions.

The Qing did. As well as inheriting the bureaucratic structure of the Ming, the Qing capitalized, I propose, on the extension of the state that Ming subjects themselves had created. Ming community schools had survived on the ground and in the repertoire of governance not because of Zhu Yuanzhang's dictum, and not even because of later Ming imperial sponsorship, but because of the isolated activities of committed administrators who built schools and wrote about them, and because of popular participation. In Qing law, community schools were lumped together with charitable schools, which in Ming had usually been established by locals to educate their relatives and neighbors. Qing community schools and charitable schools were both

supposed to be funded by the gentry but run by the state.³³ Institutions that in Ming had often in effect become local, voluntary institutions were reincorporated into the state structure of the Qing. While the Ming founder had ordered that an elderly person walk through villages reading his “Six Instructions,” and had also required various kinds of county-level and village-level community ceremonies, Joseph McDermott has shown that perhaps the most widespread of such meetings, the community compact, was first imposed by a few resident administrators, without court sponsorship, and then became popular as a way for local gentry to enforce their power by enhancing organizational structure and associating themselves with the emperor.³⁴ The Qing adopted and expanded Taizu’s “Six Instructions” into the “Sacred Edict,” and tried to assure that it really was read everywhere, resulting in what is sometimes called the “lecture system.” In fact, in the 1380s, Zhu Yuanzhang had required every subject to own and memorize his *Grand Pronouncements*, but Lu Rong in 1494 commented that the people hardly got a look at it.³⁵ Judging by Jonathan Spence’s account of the Yongzheng emperor’s promulgation of his refutation of the views of Lu Liuliang, the Qing was much more successful at rooting out subversion and promulgating its own propaganda: an attack on, rather than a management of, diversity. .³⁶

Turning from political thought to customs, the Qing emperors seem also to have had a more direct personal impact and to have enforced more uniform practices. Janet Theiss has recently shown how the Yongzheng emperor’s personal intervention in chastity norms had a great effect on village women.³⁷ Matthew Sommer has argued that the Qing period saw a shift

towards requiring adherence to patriarchal norms of all Han subjects, regardless of status. Standards of behavior once expected only of the elite were now applied even to the recently “emancipated” mean people, such as musicians’ households. Katherine Carlitz’s review of Sommer’s book argues that since the gentry standards of propriety were too expensive to uphold, peasant households may have felt additional pressure, contributing to tensions.³⁸ As neo-classical ideologues stressed the value of women weaving and men growing grain, the large numbers of people whom commercialization and poverty had removed from these activities may have felt alienated from a system that officially did not value their other activities.³⁹

Moving into an even more speculative mode, and with apologies to my Qing colleagues, I hypothesize that Qing uniformism meant that it was harder for people to feel a part of the state enterprise.⁴⁰ Unease with uniformism may account for the appeal of the Taiping movement of the mid-19th century, which offered participation to men and women, and membership in other sectarian movements of the time. In turn, Taiping gender norms and religion threatened not only the power but also the underpinnings of prestige of the Confucian statesmen who rallied around the dynasty. In response they narrowed and tightened their doctrine, making it more hierarchical, more sexist, more ageist, more classist than it had ever been, crystallizing all the most exclusionary aspects of Confucian ideas. Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), a Qing official, in his 1898 “Exhortation to Learn” argued that even as reforms were made, Confucianism, which defined Chineseness, must be preserved. And the essence of Confucianism, Zhang argued, was the “three bonds”: the subservience of minister to ruler, child to parent, and wife to husband.

This version of Confucian teaching omitted the reciprocity of older formulations, in which parent and child, ruler and minister, husband and wife, brother and brother, and friend and friend had mutual responsibilities. It omitted the fundamental teaching of self-cultivation and standing up for the right, even when that meant remonstrating with an erring father or husband or ruler.⁴¹

This kind of simplification may have come partly from the need, in the methods of Zeng Guofan and the other Qing loyalists, to teach a catechism to the soldiers who were working for them, to inoculate them against Taiping blandishments. More generally, as challenges mounted – from Christianity, from the rapid changes in Meiji Japan, from socialism, from new styles of literature, and so on – the late Qing conservatives, their backs against the wall, defined and articulated an “essence” of Confucianism, a simplification that forced the omission of complexities and grey areas. “The tradition,” now in its most oppressive guise, was vulnerable to attacks from anarchists and revolutionaries.

Qing autocracy, apparently so much more effective at its height than was Ming autocracy, may have lessened the participation of many people in state institutions and ideology. The rebellions that threatened the Qing were not those of mere brigands, like Li Zicheng, but were messianic and revolutionary movements that promised followers a sense of involvement. Disillusioned gentry of the late Ming took two courses: turning away from the state into the arts and private life; or, with their eyes wide open, continuing to offer their services and lives to press the crazy and incompetent Ming emperors for reform, restructuring, renewal. Disillusioned gentry of the late Qing turned to local activism and began to demand a voice in policy through

democratic mechanisms, which had become available in world cultural technology at just about the right time. Those demands may be seen, not only as echoes of Western democratic ideology or a revived Chinese localism, but perhaps as a memory of the possibilities for participation and cultural autonomy within the institutions of the Ming state.

¹. The material on community schools in this essay is taken from my book, in process at the time of the conference and now in print: *Community Schools and the State in Ming China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). For the edict, see chapter two, and *Ming Taizu shilu* 96/1655.

². *Mingshi* 93/2284.

³. *Yuzhi Da Gao* 1.44, reprinted in Yang Yifan, *Ming Dagao yanjiu* (Research on the Ming “Grand Pronouncements”). Nanjing: Jiangsusheng renmin chubanshe, 1988. Wang Lanyin, *Mingdai zhi shexue* (Community Schools of the Ming Dynasty), two parts. In *Shida yuekan* 21 (1935):42-102 and 25 (1936):62-129. 1/50.

⁴. This conclusion is based on a survey of about 600 local gazetteers in addition to the survey conducted by Wang Lanyin (see previous note).

⁵. For this provision in the original community school edict, see 1524 Jiangxi *Dongxiang xianzhi* 1/55; 1574 Guangdong *Dongli zhi* 107; and 1609 Guangdong *Xinhui xianzhi* 3/10a.

⁶. Ye, *Luzhutang gao*.

⁷. 1751 Guangxi *Taiping fuzhi* schools/2.

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- ⁸. 1552 Fujian *Anxi xianzhi* 4/43.
- ⁹. *Ming huidian* 78/454-5.
- ¹⁰. Quan Zuwang, *Jiqiting ji waibian*, 22/949-950.
- ¹¹. Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2000), 277.
- ¹². Before 1465-1470, provincial level education intendants were responsible for about 45% of 47 datable cases of community schools being founded in a county or prefecture. After 1465-1470, resident administrators (magistrates, subprefects and prefects) were credited with about 85% of about 330 datable community school foundings.
- ¹³. 1541 Sichuan *Yunyang xianzhi* 1/24.
- ¹⁴. *Ming huidian* 78/454-5.
- ¹⁵. On this movement, see Sarah Schneewind, “Competing Institutions: Community Schools and “Improper Shrines” in Sixteenth Century China.” *Late Imperial China* 20.1 (June 1999): 85-106.
- ¹⁶. *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 13/0305.
- ¹⁷. 1574 Guangdong Raoping *Dongli zhi* (1990 reprint): 107.
- ¹⁸. 1530 Fujian *Hui'an xianzhi* 9/8-9.
- ¹⁹. Gu Qian, *Jingguantang ji* 8/9a. *Ming huidian* 78/455.
- ²⁰. 1603? Guizhou *Qian ji*. 1678 Nanzhili *Hong xianzhi* 2/88. 1684 Jiangxi *Dexing xianzhi* 3/20.
- ²¹. 1637 Fujian *Youxi xianzhi* reprint p. 644.

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- ²². Yang Jisheng, “Yang Zhongmin nianpu” *Yang Zhongmin ji* 3/26, reprinted in *Siku quanshu*.
- ²³. 1890 Guangdong *Gaozhou fuzhi* 14/8-9; 1688 Guangdong *Xin ’an xianzhi* 5/7 reports a literary association whose meetings are held in a community school that was established in 1566. The 1553 Fujian *Jianyang xianzhi* reports that “gentry meet here for literary purposes.”
- ²⁴. Katherine Carlitz, “The Daughter, the Singing-Girl and the Seduction of Suicide,” *Nannü* 3.1 (2001): 22-46, p. 25.
- ²⁵. On the Song, see Richard von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes* (Cambridge: Council of East Asian Studies, 1987): 15, 137-8, 212. Also Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).
- ²⁶. 1892 Guangdong *Lin ’gao xianzhi* 19/25; Hai Rui, *Hai Zhongjie gong quanji* (reprint Taipei: Hai Zhongjie gong quanji yiyin weiyuanhui, 1973) 1/4.
- ²⁷. *Mingshi* 27/317/8209. William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001): 406.
- ²⁸. Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1573-5. Edward Farmer, *Early Ming Government: The Evolution of Dual Capitals* (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1976), 78-79. John D. Langlois, Jr., “The Hung-wu Reign,” in Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 7., *The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Part I*, 136.
- ²⁹. F.W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800*, 589, 638. Dardess, *A Ming Society*, 227-9. See also Alexander Woodside, “Emperors and the Chinese Political System,” in Kenneth Lieberthal et al.,

eds., *Perspectives on Modern China: Four Anniversaries* (East Gate, 1991), 5-30, 22.

³⁰. Carney Fischer, "Center and Periphery: Shih-Tsung's Southern Journey, 1539," in *Ming Studies* 18 (Spring 1984):15-34.

³¹. John W. Dardess, *Blood and History in China: the Donglin Faction and its Repression, 1620-1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

³². F. W. Mote, *Imperial China: 900-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 779, 850-1.

³³. Barry C. Keenan, *Imperial China's Last Classical Academies: Social Change in the Lower Yangtze, 1864-1911* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1994): 24.

³⁴. Joseph P. McDermott, "Emperor, élites and commoners: the community pact ritual of the late Ming," in McDermott, ed., *State and Court Ritual in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁵. Lu Rong, *Shuyuan zaji* (1494; reprint Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985): 122.

³⁶. Jonathan Spence, *Treason by the Book*.

³⁷. Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 33ff.

³⁸. Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Review by Katherine Carlitz, *Journal of Asian Studies* 60.1 (2001):

186-7.

³⁹. On women and weaving, see Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) and Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁴⁰. Tobie Meyer-Fong has warned me against oversimplifying Qing history in this way, so these comments should be understood only as proposals awaiting correction and refutation.

⁴¹. Translated in de Bary, et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, second edition, volume 2, pp. 244-9. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.