

Abstract
Between Family and State:
Networks of Literati, Clergy, and Villagers in Shanxi, North China, 1200-1400
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Over the past several decades, American historians of medieval China have reached a consensus about social change between 1200 and 1400. Drawing mainly from documents written by Confucian-educated literati in southern China, they have argued that the major shift in medieval Chinese society occurred in the strategies by which elite status was achieved by the highest status social groups, from the pursuit of high office at the national level to seeking leadership in local society.

This picture of social change leaves out the very different forces at work in north China during the same time period. By employing the abundant epigraphical evidence available from Shanxi province, much of it newly uncovered, and looking at the networks that bound northern Chinese society together rather than focusing on individual social groups, like the literati, we see that existing interpretations are inadequate. These inscriptions from Shanxi depict a medieval local society very different from that described by literati writings, in which literati elites dominate. In north China, the Mongol conquest disempowered literati, and clergy and villagers acquired greater influence. New Buddhist and Daoist institutions rose to prominence, and villagers organized themselves through irrigation societies. Through new networks built around these institutions, the men and women in Shanxi remade local society and transformed the relationship between local communities and the state.

Under Jurchen rule (the Jin dynasty, 1115-1234), Confucian-educated literati generally retained their status as political and social elites. Nation-wide literati networks

were partly organized around the civil service examination and school education systems. They functioned to place educated men in schools and, ultimately, into political office.

The Mongol conquest dramatically changed the social order by destroying the literati networks, and contributing to the rise of new social groups. The clergy of Complete Realization Daoism was one of the new emergent social groups. During the catastrophic Mongol invasion, Quanzhen Daoist networks filled an important function by providing havens for diverse groups, including former literati and women. In Shanxi, Quanzhen Daoist monks and nuns formed extensive networks through many Quanzhen projects—such as printing a new Daoist canon and building Quanzhen institutions like the Palace of Eternal Joy. The Mongol rulers from Khubilai (r. 1260-1293) onward established many pro-Buddhist policies that resulted in the rise of a new nation-wide Buddhist network.

Under the Yuan dynasty (1270-1368), the Mongol state granted official positions and rank to religious clergy just as they did for civil officials. Buddhists and Daoists exercised state power through personal connections to Mongol rulers and autonomous systems of religious administration. The clergy's networks also connected to lay families through kinship networks surrounding powerful monks and nuns, who used their official status to provide economic advantage and social prestige to their lay families. In addition, both Daoist and Buddhists modified the concept of filial piety, an originally Confucian ideal concerning relations between parents and children, to create fictive family ties that helped the clergy reinforce cross-regional religious lineages spanning generations or to reconcile the clergy's obligations to their families with their religious vows.

Additionally, Buddhist and Daoist churches played crucial roles in rebuilding local society in north China. Many powerless villagers sought protection from Buddhist and Daoist monasteries, which had massive landholdings, including farm land. Buddhists and Daoists participated in agricultural production in association with local residents. In the recovery of local agricultural economy in Shanxi, both Buddhists and Daoists helped repair and develop irrigation projects, and they acted as heads of local irrigation associations. By doing so, the clergy extended their influence in social institutions beyond monasteries, such as village organizations.

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1200-1400**

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by
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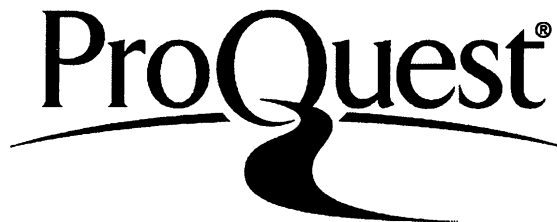
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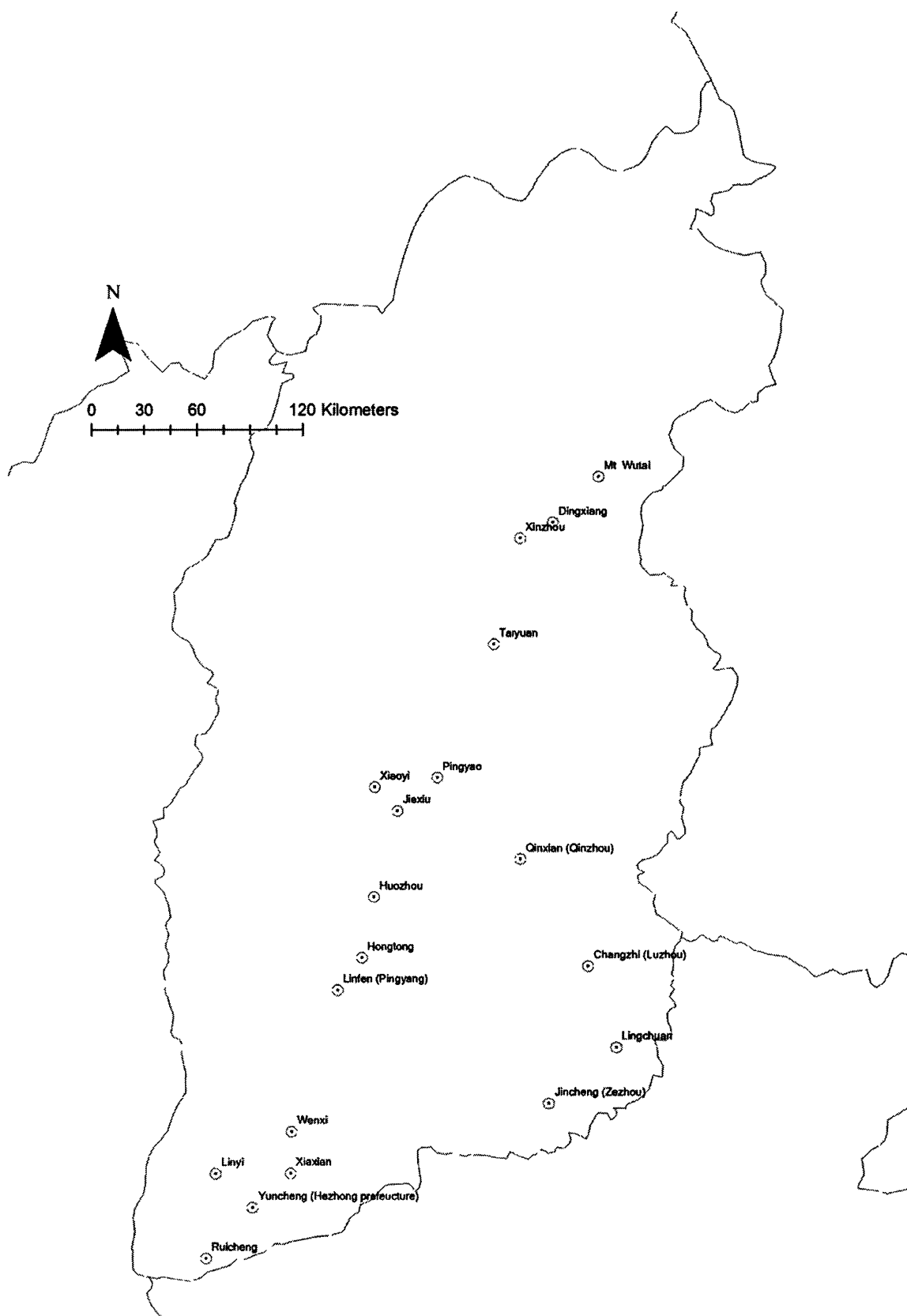
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Map 1: Shanxi in China



Map 2: Prefectures and Counties of Shanxi appearing in the dissertation

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Method

Most historians believe that education and learning held traditional Chinese society together and that literati (*shi* 士), men who studied the classics, were the dominant force in state and society. Scholars often cite Northern Song China (960-1127) as a paradigmatic example of this social arrangement. This trend, however, did not hold in north China after 1127, when the semi-agricultural, semi-nomadic Jurchen (ancestors of the Manchus) invaded from what is now northeastern China and began two hundred years of foreign rule—first by the Jurchen and then after 1234 by the Mongols. In this dynamic society, non-literati made their presence strongly felt at the local level.

This study investigates how non-literati formed networks to provide necessary social services in troubled times, to increase their families' access to political office, to improve rural economies, and to organize collective social and cultural life in their village communities. My research goal is to overturn the current near-exclusive focus on scholars and to examine other important social groups including religious clergy, villagers, and women.

The year of 1127 marked a watershed in medieval Chinese history. In the century to follow, China was split into the south under the Southern Song (1127-1276) and the north under non-Chinese rule. This historical division also shapes modern studies of medieval Chinese history. Focusing on the south, Robert Hartwell and Robert Hymes, among others, argued for a transformation of Chinese society in 1127: before, the civil service

examination system granted Chinese literati both a chance to hold office and a privileged legal status. After 1127, under the influence of the Neo-Confucian movements and increasing competition in the examinations, most scholarly families shifted their attention from the pursuit of high office in national centers of power to seeking leadership in local society.¹ From these literati elite emerged the local gentry, the characteristic social group in late imperial China. For a long time, the interpretation advanced by Hartwell and Hymes represented the dominant way of understanding social transformation of China from the middle to late imperial periods. Regional differences find no place in their view.

In addition to its regional bias, this historical hypothesis has two more critical weaknesses. First, it is hardly convincing to prove the transformation of elite family strategy from one focused on the court to one locally focused by comparing high-ranking official families in the Northern Song to lower-ranking (even not office-holding) families in the Southern Song.² Second, Hymes relies on writings by Neo-Confucian thinkers to portray the society of Fuzhou under the leadership of local-oriented literati elite families. This image is ideal rather than real. To what extent Neo-Confucian literati cared more about their home locality than national politics is still an open question. Scholars now debate whether Neo-Confucian thinkers like Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) were committed to a social reform program no different from that of Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086)—

¹ Robert Hartwell, "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.2 (1982): 365-442; Robert Hymes, *Statemen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fuzhou, Chiang-hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

² If, as Hartwell argues, the crucial transformation of Song literati elite happened among a Northern Song "professional elite" of long-lived office-holding families that merged into the locally oriented gentry in the Southern Song, we would expect the disappearance of such families in the Southern Song. Yet, scholarly studies on powerful families like the famous Shis in Siming County reveal just the opposite. Beverly Bossler points out that office continued to be appreciated as an indication of an individual's place in the Southern Song. See Beverly Bossler, *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, and the State in Sung China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

the representative of the Northern Song “professional elite” in Hartwell and Hymes’s definition.³ Huang Kuanchong’s case studies of many elite Song dynasty families demonstrate that under both the Northern and Southern Song these families based their social networks in local society and aimed at office in the central government; there was no important difference in family strategies between the two periods.⁴ It is clear that an exclusive focus on the writings of literati elites, especially Neo-Confucian thinkers from the south, results in an incomplete, even mistaken, understanding of traditional Chinese society.

In the recently published collection *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, scholars seek to modify the hypothesis of social transformation after 1127 advanced by Hartwell and Hymes by highlighting regional features and by emphasizing historical changes across the dynastic transitions from Song to Yuan to Ming.⁵ As Paul Smith states in the introduction, these authors see the salient identifying feature of the Song-Yuan-Ming transition as the “localization to Jiangnan of the most important social, economic, and cultural trends of the Tang-Song transformation.”⁶ One important reason for this is the continuity of Neo-Confucian literati’s leadership in local society after the

³ Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Zhuxi de lishi shijie: Songdai shidafu zhengzhi wenhua de yanjiu* 朱熹的歷史世界：宋代士大夫政治文化的研究 (The historical world of Zhu Xi: A study of the political culture of scholar-officials in the Song dynasty) (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2003).

⁴ Huang Kuanchong 黃寬重, *Songdai de jiazu yu shehui* 宋代的家族與社會 (Family and society in Song China) (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2009).

⁵ Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

⁶ Paul Jakov Smith, “Problematizing the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition,” in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, 8.