

records in both official histories, the *Liaoshi* and *Jinshi*, and unofficial histories such as the *Qidan guozhi*, *Songmo jiuwen*, and *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, important cultural relics as well as major Liao and Jin archaeological discoveries since the last decades are also extensively consulted. For instance, the scrolls of *Wenji guiban* and *fanma tu*, the tomb of Liao Princess Chenguo, the tombs of the Zhang family in Xuanhua, and the murals of the Yanshan temple. This endeavor is of special significance to the study of Liao and Jin history because literary sources on the two dynasties, in comparison to that on the Song, are extremely limited, whereas extant material culture can offer much more detailed information, especially in the case of the Liao.

Apart from occasional minor errors (e.g. pp. 82, 85: page number of their sources are wrongly given for the figures; p. 63: the later Jin principle capital Zhongdu 中都 is erroneously interpreted as Zhongjing 中京; p. 199, n. 75: the article of Holmgren does not have page 42 and 43, whereas it does have pages 142 and 143 but the original article does not mention the Khitan; p. 201, n. 43: the correct source should be *Liaoshi*, *juan* 10, 110, and *juan* 64, 1003, rather than *juan* 10, 109, and *juan* 65, 1001), *Women of the Conquest Dynasties* is in general an indispensable scholarship in the study of the women of non-Han peoples in the Chinese history and it is bound to appeal to readers from diverse fields of not only Chinese studies, but also gender studies, history, archaeology, art history, as well as cross-cultural studies and ethnography.

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HARRY MILLER. *State Versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572–1644*. 220 pp. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. ISBN 978-0-230-61134-4.

In its last decades the Ming Dynasty suffered under dramatic factional struggles. While it is generally accepted that this constant unrest was one important factor among others that weakened the Ming and would eventually lead to the fall of the dynasty, so far there was no real explanation what this factional strife was really all about. Harry Miller, associate professor in the department of history at the University of South Alabama, offers a new interpretation on the background of this factional strife in late Ming China. The general thesis in his book is that below the struggle on questions of education, moral standards, court ritual and bureaucratic appointments lay a basic dissension on the origin of sovereignty. The fundamental disagreement was on the question of the proper locus of authority. Did it emanate from the court/state or from the landowners/gentry? As the involved parties all belonged to the gentry serving the state, Miller speaks of a conflict that was theoretical and symbolic. It was for the most part a conflict within the gentry itself, which has its origins in their double character. Members of the gentry were on the one hand landowners and on the other officials serving the bureaucracy. These are also the central points in defining gentry for the author. This inner tension is well captured in the generally applied English terms for them, such as landlord-officials, scholar-officials or gentry-bureaucrats.

In the introduction Miller traces the roots of this symbolic struggle for sovereignty back to the ancient dichotomy between Confucians and Legalists. While Confucians saw the authority with the Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) stemming from his moral superiority, Legalists held that all authority emanated alone from the emperor. The author then gives a brief survey on the historical development of this struggle. He states that with the establishment of the Qin up until the Song Dynasty it was the concept of the sovereignty of the state that prevailed. It was not until the crisis of the Song state, the rise of the gentry and the emergence of Neo-Confucianism, with Zhu Xi's ideology of the "succession to the Way" (*dao tong*),

that the idea of an imperial sovereignty was challenged. This at the same time led to a bitter factionalism similar to the one in late Ming times. After the Confucian gentry's flirt with the Mongol Khans - an attempt to instrumentalize the foreign emperors for their own causes - came to an end, they turned to Zhu Yuanzhang to get rid of the Mongols and regain control. But instead it was the founder of the Ming, who instrumentalized the gentry-scholars in his search for an ideal polity. In the end they played only a minor role in what Edward Dreyer called "quasi-Legalistic managerial despotism" that Zhu established. The Confucian scholars did only start to regain influence under the Yongle emperor and then under the following emperors gradually came to dominate the political process.

The old dichotomy revitalized in the wake of the growing influence of the gentry which was attended by a growth of the gentry itself. New ascending and economically successful social groups (merchants) increasingly became part of the gentry which prompted the established gentry to distinguish themselves by turning to morality and criticizing the pursuit of profit. So it was not the fight for economic interest that stood at the beginning. It was rather generally accepted to restrain from the pursuit of private interest. But the central question was: "Where should the restraining power come from?" (p. 18). Initially a "gentry self-reform" (p. 22) was practiced, which meant an increasing engagement of the gentry in their local communities. Then they started criticizing other gentry members for their excessive conduct. This "gentry versus gentry," which according to Miller ultimately reflected the psychological tension within the gentry originating in its double character as landowners and bureaucracy, was the initial spark that resulted in the "state versus gentry" explosion (p. 19). It was under Zhang Juzheng's administration that this conflict first erupted.

This is where the author begins with the main part of the book. It is divided into six chapters that chronologically deal with "six alternating regimes," "in which either the Legalist idea of the sovereignty with the state or the Confucian idea of sovereignty of the gentry prevailed" (p. 28). Besides examining the events in the capital Miller also gives examples of how the conflict was fought on the local level. Furthermore he interprets the repercussions of it on the state's financial situation at the end of every chapter (except chapter I), observing that the situation was better when the advocates of a strong central government were at the helm, although they too never found a real remedy to the chronic financial problems of the state.

Chapter I begins with Zhang Juzheng's administration (1572–1582). It was Zhang, who brought the inner-gentry conflict to develop into the state versus gentry antagonism that would continue until the end of the dynasty. He was convinced that the dynasty's problems were due to the growing private interests (*si*) of the gentry and a lack of dedication to the public interest (*gong*). For him the remedy was a strengthening of the state's authority turning to the Legalist approach. Being Senior Grand Secretary at the time the Wanli emperor was still a minor he was the strong man in the administration. With a series of reforms, e.g. the "single whip tax" and a general land survey, he tried to solve the problem of tax evasion and abuse of tax exemption by the gentry, which had resulted in a growing tax burden on the rest of the population. But his effort to implement reform from the top down led to vigorous protest on the side of those that wanted to reform gentry from the bottom up. Zhang's stern oppression of his critics resulted in a deepening of the antagonism and the formation of a lasting opposition.

This opposition Miller calls the Righteous Circles (1582–1596) and they are subject of Chapter II. After Zhang Juzheng's death this new movement led by Gu Xiancheng engaged in its effort to negate or reverse the centralist trend of the former administration. They found ways to dismiss Zhang's adherents and replace them with their own followers. With their new power they then dedicated themselves to prevent the rise of another strong, centralized regime like Zhang Juzheng's. Just like Zhang they claimed

to represent the public (*gong*) and denounced private interest (*si*). The difference was that Gu Xiancheng used *si* “to describe a selfish abuse of power or position in part of central government officials” (p. 57). He ultimately demanded a weak central government to realize normative gentry leadership. In this context Miller argues against the proposition that sees a proto-democrat in Gu Xiancheng. He was as authoritarian as the other side - wanting “gentry power” (*shen quan*) instead of “imperial power” (*huang quan*) (p. 71). The Righteous Circles continued to dismantle Zhang Juzheng’s legacy. With their influence rising the central government lost more and more ground in the country resulting in decreasing tax revenue. This financial crisis intensified with the Chinese military intervention in Korea after the Japanese invasion 1592 led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The Wanli emperor, who had condoned the action taken against Zhang Juzheng and his adherents earlier, had to find a solution for the growing deficit. Since the Righteous Circles activist, who by now dominated the central bureaucracy, by program didn’t believe in institutional reforms, they didn’t bother to deal with fiscal details.

Chapter III examines the measures taken by the Wanli emperor (1596–1606) to meet the state’s financial problems resulting in an aggravation of the state versus gentry antagonism. With the introduction of the so-called “mine tax” (*kuangshui*), in fact a surtax on the rich gentry, he tried to remedy the general problem that the tax burden would be passed onto the poor. The levy of the tax was managed by so-called “mine tax commissioners” (*kuangshi*), who were eunuchs thus bypassing the conventional bureaucracy. Eventually these commissioners would even be in charge of all tax collection. The fact that traditionally detested eunuchs were now in such a powerful position as well as their ruthless enforcement of the new policy led to harsh protests. Petitions were sent to the emperor complaining about assaults and extortions on part of the mine tax commissioner’s teams. In some places local gentry rioted against the mine tax. For Miller this is the hottest phase of the state versus gentry conflict, closest to an actual battle state versus gentry. But since local bureaucrats protected the mine tax commissioners thus backing the new policy, the conflict ultimately retained its “fratricidal character” (p. 82). At the end Wanli, who at this stage was far away from the inattentive ruler as he is often depicted, had to abandon his mine tax policy. The reason for this was not so much the gentry’s protest - the emperor didn’t trust the news from the gentry-officials - but the eunuchs misuse of power embezzling large parts of the taxes.

Following the failure of Wanli’s new tax policy it was again the turn of the adherents of a gentry rule around Gu Xiancheng who had reestablished the Confucian Donglin Academy (*Donglin shuyuan*) in 1604, out of which grew the so-called Donglin Faction (1606–1626), that lends Chapter IV its name. Although the academy’s members’ main activity was to indulge in scholarly discussions and moral instructions, it was quite clear from the very beginning that Gu also pursued political goals. Being convinced of the gentry’s claim of sovereignty, based on a conviction of its moral superiority, his strategy was to unite the gentry to reach his ultimate goal of a normative gentry leadership. Gu’s network gained substantial influence within the bureaucracy. And he then endeavored to make Li Sancai, who had made a name for himself with his fight against the ruthless eunuch tax mine commissioners, a member of the powerful Grand Secretariat. But this ambitious Li Sancai was also known to be quite corrupt. He took part in the game of embezzling tax money in the same scale as the eunuchs did, who he had fought against. It was against this move that a strong opposition emerged. This anti-Donglin faction, as it is generally named, coined the term Donglin faction (*dang*) in the first place. They used the traditionally pejorative term *dang* to denounce Gu’s network, accusing him of attempting to bring court politics under his control. Gu on the other hand embraced the term. In a recourse on the Song scholar Ouyang Xiu Gu stated that “political factions

formed by gentlemen were good and those formed by mean people were evil" (p. 97). Miller argues that this confrontation is a continuation of the state versus gentry antagonism. While the Donglin faction's position is quite clear their opponents is not. This is due to the fact that most sources side with Donglin and the lack of sources of their antagonists. Using the example of Tang Binyin's writings, who belonged to the anti-Donglin faction, Miller shows that it were different positions on the proper locus of the state's authority that divided the two camps. After a setback for Donglin with the failure to push through their candidate Li Sancai and the death of Gu Xiancheng in 1611 there was stalemate. While the dynasty's problems grew, especially with the Manchu's attacks in the north, the factions quarreled over the so-called "Three Cases" (*san an*). After the passing of the Wanli emperor the Donglin faction temporarily was able to get the upper hand. But then they turned against Wei Zhongxian, the eunuch who was the new strong figure under the succeeding Tianqi emperor.

Wei Zhongxian's era (1626–1628) is discussed in Chapter V. The attack on his person by the Donglin faction is followed by a purge. The Donglin Academy is shut down and demolished. Officials who belonged to the Donglin faction get dismissed or even arrested, some die in prison or commit suicide. Miller puts it straight that the picture of Wei Zhongxian as an evil tyrant, which is how he is depicted in Chinese historiography, results out of the suppression of the Donglin. The positions of the two sides in the state versus gentry antagonism become even more entrenched. Texts like the *San chao yaodian*, which gives the anti-Donglin version of the "Three Cases," or the *Yujing Xintian*, a history of the Wei Zhongxian era from the Donglin perspective, show the uncompromising stance prevalent on both sides. Both saw the other as traitors. In the eyes of the Donglin the eunuchs betrayed the "country-party ideal of an imperial state ruled by country squires" and for the anti-Donglin their opponents didn't fulfill their "expectation of simple loyalty and obedience to the emperor" (p. 138). It was in this atmosphere that the picture of the tyrant eunuch was created. In fact Wei Zhongxian never was as almighty as he is represented by his enemies. He couldn't even read. A look at administrative sources of the time reveals that officials were working quite actively on the dynasty's financial and military problems. And they achieved a rise in revenue during these years, which however was consumed by rising expenditures.

After the passing of the Tianqi emperor the adherents of gentry rule were again on the rise. Chapter VI is on their new movement - the Restoration Society (1628–1644). The Restoration Society (*Fu she*) formed an amalgamated federation uniting the many scholarly discussion groups (*she*), which rapidly spread all over the country at this time. Though theoretically a literary society in reality it became a political patronage network, which had great influence on the selection of personnel within the administration. Their leader's, Zhang Pu, declared goal was to bring together as many "good gentry (*shi*)" as possible to rescue the country (p. 140). Despite a plea for unity by the new Chongzhen emperor they soon took revenge on Wei Zhongxian and his adherents. They made them responsible for the suppression of the Donglin, whose ideology of a decentralized, gentlemanly sovereignty they shared. The newly inflamed factional strife with its fight over influence on the administration and the ceaseless mutual denunciation paralyzed the central government thus obstructing necessary reforms. In the course of this the gentry's tax evasion augmented. Generally the state gentry cooperation increasingly unraveled over the fight against the spreading peasant bandits. In the end the court didn't have adequate means to put down the peasant uprisings and meet the Manchu's challenge. That after the Ming's fall numerous members of the Restoration Society chose to sacrifice their lives instead of serving the Manchu was, according to Miller, last

expression of their claim on sovereignty. They didn't die to serve the Ming Dynasty but for their own honor and to demonstrate their independence.

Miller's book gives an interesting new account of late Ming Dynasty. His thesis of the underlying state versus gentry antagonism generates a clear structure to this otherwise seemingly chaotic and blurry time of factional strife. Particularly laudable is his approach to question the biased sources, generally siding with Donglin, and not to blindly trust their interpretation in order to look for the origins of the conflict from a different perspective.

Although the argumentation remains coherent throughout the book, there is one minor point of criticism. As Miller acknowledges himself, one problem is the lack of sources from the anti-Donglin point of view. Due to this fact the examination of the Donglin opponents' positions is based exclusively on the writings of Tang Binyin. However, it remains quite unclear how representative Tang's writings are. It is further quite surprising that the author doesn't quote his own earlier article on Tang Binyin.¹² Another weak point is the brief part on the history of the state versus gentry struggle. It is too short and in part too simplistic. I disagree about the statement of the Legalist view prevailing from the Qin onward. It would be more appropriate to diagnose a synthesis of the two ideologies under the Confucian label under the imperial system. This would also give further credit to the inner-gentry character of the conflict. I would assert that the two views were always existent among the gentry-elite.

An interesting question, to which the book doesn't give a sufficient answer, is why members of the gentry with the same background came to have so substantially different views on the question of sovereignty. To take the example of Zhang Juzheng and Gu Xiancheng, who both had a very similar background as relative newcomers to the gentry's milieu (p. 60), but ended up exactly on opposite sides. Miller vainly tries to find reasons for Zhang's turn to the state. In the end he concludes that it was "determined chiefly by his subjective temperament" (pp. 25–26), which is not a convincing answer. The question remains, what was the actual reason for someone to seek salvation in a strong state and another to seek it in gentry leadership. To give an answer to this question will have to be the task of further studies.

Altogether Miller's book is an important contribution to the study of late Ming history. It unites many new insights on the background of the factionalism of the time and offers a convincing thesis on the actual reason for the factional struggle. It is highly recommendable for anyone who wants to better understand late Ming politics.

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12 "Opposition to the Donglin Faction in the Late Ming Dynasty: The Case of Tang Binyin," *Late Imperial China* 27.2 (Dec. 2006), 38–66.