

ÉTUDES THÉMATIQUES

3

LA SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE FACE À L'ÉTAT

DANS LES TRADITIONS CHINOISE, JAPONAISE,
CORÉENNE ET VIETNAMIENNE

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THE UN-OPPRESSIVE STATE AND COMPARATIVE HISTORY

Some Observations on Ming-Qing Local Society

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The Chinese state in late imperial times has been and is occasionally still characterized as a centralized despotic monarchy. In modern Chinese historiography the centralized despotic monarchy is seen as a continuation of the feudal system from the Han and Tang dynasties,¹ while in traditional historiography the abolition of the office of Chief Councillor 丞相 as head of the bureaucracy in 1381 has been regarded as a major event in the development of despotism, as this office had functioned as a counterbalance to the absolute power of the emperor. There were few if any formal restrictions on the power of the emperor, and he was assisted by a bureaucracy which carried out his orders under threat of severe punishments. More recent research has, however, shown that in the actual administration of the empire the bureaucracy restricted the power of the emperor.² But it was still a centralized despotism if the bureaucracy behaved as if it represented the autocratic monarch with no external administrative or social forces to check the use and abuse of power by the alliance of the emperor and his family and the bureaucrats and their families.

This despotism was felt by many individuals, particularly those whose social status brought them in direct contact with the upper levels of government, either by birth or through the examination system. This is a theme for the Ming dynasty individuals mentioned in the magisterial study of Chinese autobiography by Wolfgang BAUER.³ During this period the ordinary citizens came into contact with the elite to a larger extent than seen before. They were also in contact with

¹ For example in one of the few comparative studies of Chinese and foreign history in this period. Qi 1987: 15, 19-20.

² I am thinking in particular of the Wanli 萬曆 emperor (1573-1620) in HUANG 1981, and the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (1736-1796) in KUHN 1990, particularly p. 227, but there are other examples.

³ BAUER 1990: ch. 6.

the lowest level of the imperial bureaucracy but this does not necessarily mean that they felt the despotism of the central government. We know that the local level of the bureaucracy did not always carry out the orders of the central government to the letter.

And despotism which is confined to the upper levels of state and society does not automatically make a despotic state, so it is not a very useful analytic tool, particularly if it is used to analyse social and economic development in a comparative perspective. I suggest to call a state a centralized despotic bureaucratic state only if the decisions and orders of the state are respected at all levels of society. The state must have the ability and capacity to carry out its intentions and policies, and its economic and social programmes, and to achieve this it must be able to reach down to and control, in another word oppress, each household and each individual. Only a state with such oppressive powers is a true centralized despotic bureaucratic state and, in my view, the Chinese state in late imperial times did not fulfil these requirements.⁴

What I am going to say follows a line of thought which started some time ago when I was discussing problems of modernization. To the question why the West modernized first I suggested that one reason might be, that the oppressiveness of the state in the West during the process of modernization was unequalled in any other part of the world. According to this interpretation it was not a centralized despotic bureaucratic state which impeded the modernization of the Chinese society. It was because the Chinese centralized despotic bureaucratic state was inefficient, immature, or premature, in other words un-oppressive, that it did not offer itself as the cradle of modernization.

In making these remarks I drew upon reflections on the reasons for and the consequences of the virtual disappearance in modern times of the concept of *fraternity* from the trinity of *Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité*⁵ and also on reflections on Danish history in the period of absolutism between 1660 and 1849, and in particular the role of the clergy in the oppression of the individual. I am here thinking of the minister of the church who lived in parishes of one or a few villages and was in charge of religious and educational indoctrination and supervision, and of population control etc. as the representative of the centre.

This paper presents some preliminary results of my attempts to elaborate further along these lines of thinking.

⁴ After analyzing Stuart England, Ottoman Turkey and Ming China in the seventeenth century, Jack. A. Goldstone concludes, that the crises in these countries were not isolated. They were multi-causal, and they shared some causes such as ecology, population increases, fiscal decay, elite alienation and factional conflict, and popular distress. To understand the differences, he suggests "that more attention needs to be paid to the role of culture in constraining state structure, particularly during reconstruction after a crisis." Where, in his opinion, such constraints are strongest, is not clear to me, but I imagine that an analysis of oppressiveness responds to his suggestion. Goldstone 1988: 133.

⁵ Democracy is often substituted for fraternity. This may be an obstacle for meaningful comparisons between East and West when the East is characterized e.g. by hierarchy, status, and authority and the West by liberty, equality, and democracy. Fraternity, as it was used in this trinity, may in fact include characteristics which we normally connect with the "oppressiveness" of the East. LITTRUP 1991: 90-91

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The approach is comparative, as have been many approaches to characterize Chinese society in the late imperial period. They have implicitly or explicitly borrowed concepts from Euro-American historical research and applied them to Chinese history. The question of democracy loomed in the works of QU Tongzu 瞿同祖 and XIAO Gongquan 蕭公權 on local government and rural control in the Qing period.⁶ They were apparently based on a mixture of the Chinese debates in the republican period over democracy and the *baojia* 保甲 system, and the authors' own experience of the special American brand of democracy which does not exist anywhere else in the world. Comparative studies such as these are mostly one-way. More reciprocal comparisons should be developed by consciously subjecting concepts, which foreign and Chinese historians have traditionally used for Chinese history, to a thorough scrutiny and then apply them to European history, before we draw our conclusions about the nature of Chinese and European society.⁷

In her recent review of Japanese research on the "feudal" or late pre-modern Chinese history (c. 1500-1900) Noriko KAMACHI notes that in spite of its search for a new universal scheme for world history, the Japanese research on Chinese history used surprisingly few comparisons with the history of other societies, neither Japanese nor European. Recent research does, however, include foreign historiography, particularly from the U.S.A., and at the same time it concentrates on in-depth research of narrower topics as contributions to our knowledge of the fabric of late pre-modern Chinese society.

The research which had dominated in Japan from the 1950s to the 1970s on the question of "feudalism" versus "absolute monarchism" may have been part of the Japanese historians' liberation from the ruins of a view of history which did not survive the debacle of 1945. Valuable research came out of this but at times also surrounded by a ring of futility which may have impeded the sprouting of new ideas. One important result of the debates was, however, a cohesion in the Japanese community of historians of China which still survives with annual reviews of the field, and which does not exist in western Sinology.⁸

In comparative historical research most of us are inclined to use the history of our own country for comparison. This is quite natural as very few historians have sufficient knowledge of two or more foreign civilizations to make comparisons meaningful.⁹ The history of our own country is, however, only useful if comparisons are based upon the latest research including the comparative approach and is not merely a repetition of clichés, as in some of the still relatively few attempts at comparative research which has so far been published by Chinese historians.¹⁰

⁶ CH'Ü 1962: 198 and HSIAO 1960: 264, 321.

⁷ To take up the challenge of John SCHRECKER when he characterized the West as "the most provincial of all great contemporary civilizations" as it "has no outside view of itself" in modern times. Quoted from COHEN 1984: 98.

⁸ KAMACHI 1990.

⁹ Exceptions are found but there is a tendency that multi-civilizational comparisons are made by social theoreticians rather than by historians with a solid foundation in the studied civilizations.

¹⁰ Qi 1987 seems to be a recent example of this kind of historiography. An example where the study of foreign history leads to new approaches to the study of Chinese history is the comparative study of Chinese and European feudalism by Professor MA Keyao. MA 1990. A sympathetic review of this brief volume concludes "Professor Ma makes a significant and original contribution to

So, unabashed, I will here use my knowledge of Danish history. I would, of course, like to include the history of other European countries, or for that matter the whole world but I am not prepared to do that at the moment. Also, I would like to stress the need for continental Europeans to infuse the historiography of their own country into the debates on Chinese history. Otherwise the Anglo-American angle to comparative research will become too dominant, not only because of the strength in these countries in the research of Chinese history, but also because Chinese historians who study world history, are so dependent upon sources in English that they can easily overlook other countries.¹¹ This problem may become more accentuated when the Chinese historians who specialize on Chinese history, begin their comparative studies. Few of them are unlikely to know any other foreign language than English, and perhaps Japanese.¹²

So here comes a dose of Danish history. The king, as king of Denmark (including the southern part of the present Sweden) and Norway (also including parts of Sweden), and with possessions in Germany, in the Atlantic and in the Baltic, was probably the most powerful ruler in Northern Europe around 1600. This changed with the Thirty Years War and three wars with Sweden between 1644 and 1660 with loss of territory. A consequence of these wars and the resulting public debts, was that the aristocracy who had dominated military and civil administration was weakened, and in 1660 the absolutist monarchy was introduced. It lasted to 1849 and was, at least on paper, the most absolutist among the monarchies of Europe.

The king had to belong to the Lutheran church and, as its head, keep his subjects to this faith and not tolerate heresy or atheism. He was the supreme judge in both religious and secular matters, had unlimited power to legislate, including fiscal legislation, and to make appointments of both civil and military officials. He did not have the right to confiscate private property, and he could not abolish absolutism, but these were about the only restrictions on his power. There may have been considerations also to control local administration with royal appointments, but manor-lords continued to collect taxes from the peasants in return for tax privileges. During the eighteenth-century the feudal state developed with local administration entrusted to these manor-lords who could, in some instances, also appoint local judges and ministers of the church. The peasants were mostly tenants and were bound to the manor from the age of four to sixty under the

comparative medieval history when he discusses the Chinese half of the material; this is clearly the better and stronger part of the study. His coverage of the western half is much weaker and questionable, because of serious omissions and misconceptions. Nevertheless, as the first serious attempt at comparative medieval history by a Chinese scholar, this book can be viewed as a harbinger of good things to come from the east." GUZMAN 1991: 245. As professor MA's papers are among the first studies of European history by Chinese historians that are available in English, these remarks on the work by the leading Chinese specialist on medieval European feudalism are a timely reminder for foreign students of Chinese history.

¹¹ GUZMAN 1991: 242 remarks that the volume by Professor MA "should have been titled *Chinese and English Feudalism*" rather than *Asian and European Feudalism*. Chinese historians cover most of the important languages which are necessary for the study of non-Chinese history but there are only a few for each language, except Russian, Japanese, and perhaps French.

¹² Comparative studies of Chinese and Japanese history appear to be as frequent as comparisons with Euro-American history.

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pretext that the landlord must have at his disposal the manpower necessary for his obligations to provide soldiers for the militia.

The feudal system culminated in the 1740s and then began a slow change. The main reason for the new trend was probably economic but humanitarian considerations are also found occasionally in the sources. The reforms took around fifty years, perhaps more, but the personal liberation of the peasants from the manors in 1788 has ever since been celebrated as the culmination of the reforms. *Corvée* was gradually reduced and the majority of the peasants became freeholders. These changes, in combination with changes in cultivation patterns and environmental control, and the boom in the international economy created in the second half of the eighteenth century an economic climate beneficial to reforms that are felt in Danish society to the present day.¹³

The history of the period has been written by the peasants and their representatives in the national-liberal traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and then followed by the historical materialists of more recent times. A folklore of the cruel oppression by the landlords with the king as the sole protector of the peasants has dominated. Pictures of the tenants sitting on a wooden horse as a punishment, and with the bailiff standing in front of him with a whip, were seen in every school book for generations. Recent research has questioned this. There were restrictions on the power of the manor-lord. He could, for example, not abolish farmsteads but had to find a tenant, preferably among the males of his manor, and a reputation for physical punishment was not conducive for recruiting good tenants. But this interdependence of mutual interests between landlord and peasants and its effect in daily life has only entered Danish historiography during the last few years.¹⁴

During the last twenty years several studies of local administration in the period have been published but there is so far no specialized study on the role and impact of the clergy in the administration of the country. We know that they had certain functions in civil and spiritual administration and that they supervised education and population registration etc., and we also know that the peasants in some periods were punished if they did not attend the Sunday service in the church. The pastors in the parishes had to be university graduates in theology. They were all, including those appointed by manor-lords, under constant supervision by the superiors in the church hierarchy who were in close co-operation with the state bureaucracy and, as we have seen, both the religious and the secular bureaucracy had the king as their common head. This is to me an indication that the control of the

¹³ KJÆRGAARD 1991 emphasizes the advances made in controlling the environment. This included sand-control, water-control, marling, fertilizing, in particular the cultivation of clover, and the substitution of iron and coal for wood and the beginning reforestation. He claims that these technical changes ante-dated the political and economic reforms but it has convincingly been demonstrated that the interactions between reforms and technological changes were much more complex and that, at least in some instances, the reforms created the conditions for the changes in technology.

¹⁴ FELDBÆK 1988: 20-23. See also FELDBÆK 1990: 53 ff. Here is an example that Danish history could have benefited from the study of Chinese history. See e.g. WILL 1990: 69 ff. He quotes HSIAO 1969: 427: "To begin with, we must dispel a misconception that tenants were necessarily and uniformly opposed to their landlords. In many instances under ordinary circumstances the tenant's attitude towards his landlord was one of placid submission or even cordial amiability."

individual by the state may have been efficient but we have to await further research to see if this view can be sustained.¹⁵ It is surprising that such problems have not yet been studied in depth for an area with a population of about 800,000 around the year 1800, with a very well documented history, and a group of professional historians devoted to the study of Danish history.

Before I concentrate on the oppression, or lack of it, in late imperial Chinese society a short note on Chinese scholarship on state control and oppression in other countries. A preliminary survey of the literature indicates a concentration on political events and changes in upper levels of government structure and, at the lower levels, a concentration on the economic changes in local society. The considerable Chinese literature which has been published in recent years on the French revolution does not seem to have taken particular interest in the conditions of local society in France and the changes which may have happened to it in the years preceding the Revolution, during the Revolution, or during the subsequent restoration.¹⁶

That the late Ming society developed towards more individualism, with private institutions resembling civil society, and with a spread of publishing and literacy has now been shown convincingly. Of particular interest is perhaps the development of the lineage as an important institution which had both gentry and commoners as members. The latter were permitted to worship in the ancestor hall in 1540. The visible paraphernalia of the lineage such as lineage halls and economic organizations to support schools and welfare for members of the lineage began to flourish as blood-relations weakened.¹⁷ At the same time there was a tendency that the fiscal duties of the subbureaucratic system were formally transferred to the bureaucratic level in the complex reforms that are grouped together under the heading Single Whip — 一條鞭法.¹⁸

Non-official benevolent societies were also organized from the late 1500s. Members were local degree holders and rich commoners who pooled resources for charitable activities and the societies also had a certain social function and even offered lectures on moral improvement. They were not merely continuations of previous institutions but "can justifiably be interpreted as a point of departure for new practices".¹⁹ The reason why they came at that time cannot have been the conditions of unrest, economic insecurity, and dynastic decline. Such conditions had existed at other times as well, and even if they might have been created in response to specific needs these societies

evolved into lasting institutions with enormous buildings, large endowments of land, and high visibility, institutions that came to have a special meaning even during the

¹⁵ Our knowledge is mainly based upon the official regulations. The effect the ministers had in the villages has not yet been studied. Thorkild KJÆRGAARD 1991 touches on history of mentality but does not treat this subject. He and other historians are aware of the importance of such studies and they have now been started by several people.

¹⁶ Examples of Chinese research on the French revolution has conveniently, but expensively, been collected in the volume edited by Professor ZHANG Zhilian (ZHANG 1990).

¹⁷ LI gives the date Jiajing 19 (1536). Jiajing 19 is 1540.

¹⁸ Examples are in LITTRUP 1981.

¹⁹ Handlin SMITH 1987: 313.

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stable years of the high Ch'ing [Qing]. Therefore these societies cannot be understood as responses to emergencies alone.²⁰

At the bureaucratic level there were at the same time efforts to reach directly down to the individual in each village. The Ming government had from its beginning a wish to control every household and even the members of the household directly without using the bureaucracy as an intermediary. The official local bureaucracy was reduced to a minimum, apparently in order to reduce possible abuse of power between the emperor and each individual. Later, when this policy had failed and the population began to increase, the official local bureaucracy remained at this minimum and had to be supplemented in other ways in order to cope with the increased burden.

The interest in the individual as a member of society is shown in various instructions for moral education, the Great Proclamation 御制大誥 from 1386 and the Placard of People's Instruction 教民榜文 from 1398,²¹ and in the ambitious population registrations of 1381 and 1391.²² They were perhaps too ambitious and were not continued, and serious attempts at registration are not found again until the eighteenth century. We do find references in Ming sources to attempts to renew the registrations every ten years, and in some place population figures may have been corrected after such new attempts, but most figures are more or less repetitions. Ho Ping-ti has convincingly shown that they represent fiscal persons rather than individuals of flesh and blood and also that there were considerable fluctuations in the size of the population during the Ming and Qing dynasties which are not revealed in these official sources.²³ But the official figures are exhibited in modern Chinese museums, and even used in parts of modern Chinese historiography, where we find the following remarks in an article on some basic questions in pre-capitalist Chinese society

The population of China fluctuated [at least from the Tang dynasty onwards] cyclically between 20 and 60 millions and it was not before the Qing that this figure was broken. During the Kangxi and Yongzheng eras (1661-1735) the population of about 20 millions of the Shunzhi era (1643-1661) increased to about 30 millions, and during the Qianlong period (1735-1796) the population further increased to about 300 millions, and laid the foundation for the large population of modern China.²⁴

Population registrations and population figures may be an indication of the emphasis a government puts on the control of each individual, and also of how modern historiography views such control.

²⁰ Handlin SMITH 1987: 315.

²¹ Chang 1978: 58-59; 66-72.

²² *Da Ming huidian* 1587: 20.1-3.

²³ Ho 1959: 264 ff.

²⁴ FENG 1990: 65. A reminiscence of such mistakes is also found in the history of modern China by Jonathan SPENCE which may become very influential, at least among non-specialists. Professor SPENCE mentions the accepted estimates for 1583 (150 mill) and 1685 (100 mill.) for the whole country but then he continues to give figures for two provinces. These figures are the official figures for fiscal population, and are without any connection to the estimates, or the actual population. SPENCE 1990: 93-94.

In Denmark, a comprehensive registration of the population was not done until 1769, a time when the state had the capacity to carry it out with some degree of accuracy, and to continue and improve registrations at more or less regular intervals up to the present day. This, of course, raises the question if the Chinese attempts at registration and modernization of society in the fourteenth century were premature for the technology, including the administrative technology, which was available to the government.

The instruments used in the late Ming to control the individuals were different but still very ambitious. Not merely mechanical registrations, they tried to embrace the spiritual life of the individual as a member of society, and also included aspects of social welfare. These instruments were the pledge groups (*xiangyue* 鄉約) with ceremonies and reading of Sacred Edicts of the Emperor, the village schools (*shexue* 社學) where village boys could learn the essentials of reading and classical learning and ethics, and the communal granaries (*shecang* 社倉). These institutions are recorded in Shandong 山東 for the 1580s and 1590s in such a way that it is difficult to believe that they were not taken seriously by those who were directly involved in their establishment. So they may have functioned for a short period, perhaps a few years, but any durable effect is doubtful.²⁵ This is an indication that the government and the officials of the time did think of the individual person as the basis of society but there was simply no way by which he (or she) could be controlled with the administrative technology available at the time.

One of the more ardent reformers LÜ Kun 呂坤 served as administration vice commissioner 參政 in Jinan 濟南 Prefecture, Shandong Province, from 1587 to 1589, and as governor 巡撫 of Shanxi 山西 from 1592-1594. He had a clear vision that each individual needed to realize his own nature, and of the possibility and need for educating and making demands on each individual. But perhaps he became disappointed, or did not have the personal qualities to promote a system which had the personal and social feelings of the members as its main target. Joanna HANDLIN says it in the following words

Because there are many ways of responding to emergencies, LÜ's choice of large-scale projects is significant. By centering everyone's attention on tasks, rather than on personal obligations, and by generating an atmosphere of urgency — which forced people to realize that their own survival depended on their cooperation — LÜ gave practical expression to his vision of a highly individuated but cooperative society.²⁶

This, of course, raises the question whether or not LÜ Kun and others only took these initiatives in order to raise monuments over their own efforts on behalf of the state. This is possible but in the case of LÜ Kun and I believe others as well, there was also a genuine wish to train and control each individual as a member of society.

The Qing dynasty tried to re-introduce the whole system of subbureaucratic control in local society immediately after it came to power in 1644. This included

²⁵ See LITTRUP 1981: 158 ff.

²⁶ HANDLIN 1983: 183, LÜ appears to have been a loner from childhood, an "independent spirit" living in "willing isolation from peer support". HANDLIN 1983: 117-18.

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the *baojia* for security in 1644 and the *lijia* 里甲 for fiscal services in 1648.²⁷ How they functioned is still a question which has not been answered satisfactorily. Xiao Gongquan's very thorough research was carried out more or less on the assumption that they served imperial control over the population, and it now needs to be supplemented by an examination of their possible role in local participation in government, including their role for informal and more or less private institutions, such as tax farming for fiscal duties.²⁸

The first orders from the central government for establishing institutions for spiritual control were issued in 1652. The Six Maxims 六諭 used in the pledge group 鄉約 ceremonies were sent to all provinces together with instructions for the local scholars,²⁹ and it was approved

to set up village schools 社學 in each subdistrict 鄉 and select those who are well versed in the meaning of texts and with a proper and respectful behaviour to act as teachers. They will be exempted from corvée and receive a plentiful grain allowance. When the day of inspection by the educational official comes they will make a list of their names and report on the examination.³⁰

Jining District 濟寧縣 had in 1652 received permission to set up village schools 社學 in each subdistrict. We do not know what happened to them. The 1859 gazetteer says that by 1686 they had sprawled all over the district, and the provincial educational commissioner 提學 was ordered to examine them and close them down.³¹ This was apparently a more wide-spread phenomenon as the government in the same year ordered all provincial educational commissioners to examine these widespread abuses in the schools.³² It is possible that the original schools in Jining only lasted a few years because of lack of funds. This is what the 1673 gazetteer says and it goes on to say that 2.4 *qing* 頃 of land was now laid out to pay for three schools.³³ These schools may be identical but another interpretation may be that they were not, and that the first schools had developed into more or less private institutions under the pretext of being village schools and outside the control of the local bureaucracy, and that this was the reason why they were closed down.

The pledge group 鄉約 became more institutionalized in 1659 when the reading and expounding of the Six Maxims was to take place at the first and fifteenth day of each month in each district. The purpose was to make the influence of teaching more widespread. With the introduction of the Sacred Edict in Sixteen Paragraphs 聖諭十六條 in 1670 it became clearer that participation by commoners were also expected in these ceremonies,³⁴ and this heralded renewed activities in this field in the 1670s continuing into the 1680s. In Mengyin District 蒙陰縣 magistrate LIU Defang 劉德芳 in 1684 donated funds to build six village schools 社學 and three pledge group halls 鄉約所 outside the Eastern Gate.

²⁷ Hsiao 1960: 43, 88.

²⁸ NISHIMURA 1976: 123.

²⁹ *Da Qing huidian* 1732: 77: 1.

³⁰ *Da Qing huidian* 1732: 76: 43.

³¹ *Jining zhili Zhouzhi* 1859: 5.1: 16.

³² *Da Qing huidian* 1732: 76: 43.

³³ *Jining xianzhi* 1673: 5: 11.

³⁴ *Da Qing huidian* 1732: 77: 1.

The students at the district school donated one *qing* of land. The magistrate donated one ox for its cultivation and the revenue was used to pay for the schools. Bright boys of poor families entered the school at the age of 8 and after seven years they could advance to the middle school. The lecture halls were built to have a place to perform the pledge group 鄉約 ceremonies which until then had taken place in the streets or in temples. This should encourage people to participate. Our source here is from the same year, or a year later, so there is no indication of the effect of these donations. But when reading the text I get a definite feeling that moral revival was necessary and to me this is an indication that LIU Defang did not regard these measures as futile.³⁵ And in Jining we find that magistrate WU Cheng 吳樞 in the mid-1690s re-wrote the Sacred Edict in a riming form and asked more than ten blind men to chant them morning and evening in towns and marketplaces.³⁶

What actually went on in these pledge group 鄉約 and village schools 社學 of Shandong, we do not know, but we may get an idea from the *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書 [A complete book concerning happiness and benevolence], a handbook written in 1694 by HUANG Liuhong 黃六鴻 who from 1670 to 1672 had been magistrate in Tancheng District 鄒城縣 in Shandong immediately to the south of Mengyin District.³⁷

HUANG devotes a whole chapter to education and village ceremonies. The purpose of education was to improve social customs. The people would prosper, become self-sufficient, and pay their taxes and there would be no crimes and punishments. The good magistrate should be as concerned for the welfare of the people as he was for his own welfare. His superiors should evaluate him on this point, rather than concentrate on minor infractions of the rules for tax collection and administration of justice.

The pledge group 鄉約 which HUANG recommended, included ceremonies at the level of the district with the participation of the magistrate and other civil or military officials and with the gentry and other civic leaders participating inside the lecture hall while the common people had to wait outside. Other regular ceremonies were conducted four times a year in the district capital and in each of the four sub-districts (*xiang* 鄉); and in each village and lineage there was to be a ceremony every month under the direction of the leader of the village or lineage. After the reading of the Sacred Edict and the accompanying ceremonies, the leaders, the gentry, and the elders would together deliberate on the behavior of the members and recommend them to be entered in the registers of good or bad behavior respectively. The result would eventually be public applause or humiliation. What we see here are efforts to imbue into each individual member of the pledge group 鄉約 the values of the Sacred Edict of the Kangxi emperor in a way which appears to have similarities to the work of a protestant pastor in a Danish parish.³⁸

³⁵ *Mengyin xianzhi* 1685: 2: 13 & 6: 21-25.

³⁶ *Jining zhili zhoushi* 1859: 6.6: 73.

³⁷ On Huang Liuhong, see the introduction to HUANG 1984 which includes a partial translation of the whole book. Unfortunately the reader cannot always see where sentences or selections have been omitted. For a thorough review, see WILL 1989.

³⁸ The individual may of course be only adult males, or heads of households. My point is that there is no intermediary between the basic unit and the emperor.

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HUANG also proposed to establish free, public schools (*yixue* 義學) for talented youngsters by private donations at the initiative of the magistrate. He may have preferred to revive the village schools 社學 for general education, but found such attempts futile as the affluent had hired private tutors and, anyway, there were no funds available for such schools.³⁹

From the Tancheng gazetteer it does not appear that HUANG's stay there had any significant impact with regard to education. There are no records, as there are in gazetteers from other Shandong districts at this time, of establishment of pledge groups and schools.⁴⁰

The handbooks of LÜ Kun and HUANG Liuhong were published in several editions under the Qing dynasty, and the government also continued after 1700 with measures intended for the spiritual control of the population. The Sacred Edict was expanded in 1724 for reading to the population in all districts,⁴¹ and from 1702 and well into the 1720s there were several government orders for the establishment of free, public schools 義學.⁴² The distinctions between village schools 社學 and free, public schools 義學 are not always clear. In 1723 the government also ordered the establishment of village schools 社學 according to the model from 1652 but only in the larger subdistricts and wards. They were for all boys between twelve and twenty who wanted to study, and there seems to be more emphasis on scholarship with a government student 生員 as a teacher who would also be rewarded if one of the students could go on to further studies.⁴³ Such schools were set up in Jining in 1724, most of them in towns and market-places.⁴⁴ The free, public schools 義學 may have been regarded as a supplementary system to the village schools as indicated by HUANG Liuhong. It is also noteworthy that many of the government orders on free, public schools 義學 concern their establishment among minority nationalities in the south. In Shandong we do not find many references to the free, public schools 義學. That some were established during the first half of the eighteenth century is clear. The examples we have indicate that there were only a few schools in each district for children of families who could not pay for the education.⁴⁵

The schools were no longer intended for the village level, and it appears that the government had in fact given up any wish to let education under official supervision penetrate into the villages, and this trend may already have been realized by HUANG Liuhong. At the same time the Danish government in 1724 granted land to establish and operate 240 primary schools in villages all over the country, as a beginning to a development which ended with compulsory, universal education in 1814. As religious instruction was part of the curriculum, and the schools were supervised by the church hierarchy from the minister to the bishop, these schools had a definite function in the spiritual control over the population.

Why was this beautiful blueprint of an affluent and orderly society with a certain degree of spiritual control down into the villages not put into practice all over China

³⁹ HUANG 1694: ch. 25. Translation in HUANG 1984: 525 ff. has many omissions.

⁴⁰ *Tancheng xianzhi* 1673: 5: 7.

⁴¹ *Da Qing huidian* 77: 1-2.

⁴² *Da Qing huidian* 76: 44-45.

⁴³ *Da Qing huidian* 1732: 76: 43.

⁴⁴ *Jining zhili Zhouzhi* 1859: 5.1: 16.

⁴⁵ *Yixian zhi* 1761: 2: 6; *Boshan xianzhi* 1753: 2: 8.

in the Qing dynasty? We know that HUANG Liuhong, and with him many other officials, were not aloof from the problems of the common people and that, in administration of justice, they spent both time and imagination to care for the individual.⁴⁶

I suggest that it was because the Chinese state was un-oppressive. The emperor could give orders but he and the bureaucracy did under normal circumstances not have the means to penetrate into the subbureaucratic level of local society. To do so, they had to circumvent the formal and informal administrative structures, and mobilize enough officials to reach each household, as is shown in the successful cases of disaster relief in the study by Pierre-Étienne WILL.⁴⁷ At the subbureaucratic level we may find private organizations with programs similar to official institutions. They could have formed the basis for participatory local government but the magistrate did not have sufficient supervisory power in the villages to permit their formal participation. So their participation became informal — sometimes illegal — and with insufficient supervision.

There were territorial divisions with a population counted in the hundreds or a few thousand with natural community functions and various administrative duties such as the parishes of Denmark, but graduates of higher education and examination were not appointed to such local positions by the magistrate or his superiors or, as in Denmark, by the religious hierarchy with interests similar to those of the government. In fact, there is no indication that the magistrate could send anyone out to organize such activities. He could encourage, and LIU Defang may be an example that a magistrate succeeded in this. Otherwise he could only approve or reject the people who were selected locally as leaders of the activities for moral, individual oppression.

The results would depend on the ability and capacity of the magistrate and how he rated these activities among his duties. And the duties were many, so many that Pierre-Étienne WILL concludes that the magistrate could only fill his office reasonably satisfactory on conditions which were not written in the statutes

that the magistrate have completely exceptional, not to say superhuman, qualities in his capacity to work, in organization, in strictness, in courage, in scheming, and is able to isolate from the beginning a certain number of positions and to discourage attempts to usurp their power.⁴⁸

HUANG Liuhong was keenly aware of this problem when he wrote

These days, unfortunately, all local administrative duties are defined by rules and regulations, and the magistrate is threatened with fines and impeachment if there is any mishap in administration of justice or tax collection. The provincial authorities supervise his activities and criticize him constantly. He himself is busy in handling documents and meeting deadlines, and is preoccupied with avoiding impeachments or censure. There is little time left to promote education, improve social customs, or plan economic welfare for his people.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See e.g. SPENCE 1978 which is basically built on two such cases from Tancheng recorded in HUANG 1694.

⁴⁷ WILL 1990: 94, 117 ff, 272.

⁴⁸ WILL 1989: 95.

⁴⁹ Quoted from HUANG 1984: 527-28. Differences with the original text are inconsequential, HUANG 1694: 25: 2.

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⁵⁰ HSIAO 1960:

⁵¹ MAIR 1985:

⁵² HABERMAS 19

One almost gets the feeling of a bureaucratic club which existed for its own benefit and pleasure, and separated from the local society.

Under these conditions we are left wondering why people cared about activities for moral control of the population. The fact that LÜ Kun and HUANG Liuhong, with about one hundred years in between, both wrote about them extensively in their handbooks is to me an indication that it was not totally impossible to start some kind of activity. They had their administrative experience from Shandong and other northern provinces (Shanxi 山西, Shaanxi 陝西, and Zhili 直隸 [Henan 河南]) and this may have influenced them. Until we have a clearer picture, and we may never get that, I suggest that such activities did occasionally spring up in different places all over China and may have lasted for a few years. Such periods may be too short for authors of local gazetteers and other sources for the history of local society, but for the people of that time who had the opportunity, or the obligation, to attend ceremonies and schools during their formative years it may have been crucial for their whole attitude to life and society. XIAO Gongquan thinks that the ceremonies did have some influence in local society,⁵⁰ and there are examples that the Sacred Edicts did leave traces in local society in the later part of the Qing Dynasty.⁵¹

In Denmark the clergy had both a "private" function in nurturing the religious feelings and worship of each individual, and a "public" function in the spiritual indoctrination and control. Most religious activities in European countries were, like in Denmark, subordinated to a church hierarchy. Some of these hierarchies were controlled by the state, others were not, but even if the independent church hierarchies were at times in conflict with the state, they had common interests in a centralized spiritual control; and the spread of education increased the opportunities to exercise this function.

It was a time when in Europe the private sphere became more intimate and a public sphere matured. This public sphere had the political role to regulate civil society (as opposed to "res publica"). With the experience from the private sphere so to speak in the back it defied the established monarchical authority and in this sense it was from the beginning both private and polemical in character.⁵²

The development of the public sphere was, in the opinion of Habermas, closely connected with the rise of the bourgeoisie, but the participants were also aristocrats and clergymen. They participated in the public discussions which at that time were allowed and even encouraged by many European monarchs. In Denmark all censorship was abolished in the period 1770-1799 and this coincided with the reforms mentioned earlier.

What we saw here was the emergence of a public sphere where individuals or groups, unrestricted by their duties in the daily operation of state and society, could contribute to the concerted efforts to reform society, in Denmark first of all in agriculture. Aristocrats, officials, and clergymen could have the double function of both reformers and of servants of the state in the spiritual oppression of

⁵⁰ HSIAO 1960: 194.

⁵¹ MAIR 1985: 349-55.

⁵² HABERMAS 1962: 70.

the people. With such control over the general population, the rulers had little to fear from public unrest which might otherwise have been the result of the outspokenness in the public sphere.

In China the notion that the public 公 was identical not with the state but with "all under heaven" gained ground during this period.⁵³ But the Chinese could not, like the Europeans, simultaneously be servants and critics of the state. As officials, or dependents on the bureaucracy as private secretaries etc. they had only limited contact with the life of ordinary citizens, and were of little use in the supervision of the villages. And when they served in official or unofficial functions in local society such as villages or lineages, they were busy keeping both the state and the local population content. This left little room for developments towards a public sphere and a civil society operating between the state and the private sphere, even if there had been institutional developments towards such a civil society.

Perhaps in Europe, the emergence of the public sphere was a reaction against the oppressive state which, assisted by the church, regulated and controlled the life of every single individual. But at the same time this oppression created the conditions for the development of civil society in a way which was not possible in the "un-oppressive" Chinese state.

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⁵³ ROWE 1990: 317; this article surveys the public sphere and its emergence in the study of Chinese society and begins with a short description of HABERMAS 1962.

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