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NEW APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF BUREAUCRATIC
FACTIONALISM IN SUNG CHINA: A HYPOTHESIS

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In a recent article, I presented certain results of a study of the collective biographies of fiscal and policy-making officials in China, 960-1165.¹ The analysis of this quantitative data yielded many by-products that might lead to new ways of looking at other aspects of Chinese political and social behavior during this period of two-plus centuries. The objective of this essay is to suggest some new approaches to the investigation of the causes, processes, and effects of bureaucratic factionalism in Sung China.²

In "Transformations of China," I argue that an endogamous social group consisting of professional bureaucratic elite lineages dominated the Chinese fiscal and political bureaucracy between 980 and 1100. It was able to maintain hegemony through marriage alliances and control over the civil service procedures for recruitment and promotion. But the legislative process itself, in combination with the ideological orientation of individuals, personal ambition, and family and regional interests, made informal associations within the bureaucracy a functional requisite to the continued operation of the political system. Ultimately, this factionalism, together with a breakdown in status-group endogamy, effectively destroyed the professional bureaucratic elite that had integrated the empire through a hierarchy of kinship ties linking villages to towns, towns to cities, cities to regional urban centers, and regional urban centers to the imperial capitals.

1. Robert M. Hartwell, "Demographic, Political and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, December 1982, pp. 365-442. The biographical histories of the 5,500 individuals and families mentioned on p. 405 of this study provided the empirical evidence for most of the data I offer in the present essay.
2. Marianne Hartwell proposes a typology of Chinese factionalism in "Interest Groups, Informal Political Structures and Factional Power Struggles in Eighth- and Ninth-Century China," Paper presented at AAS Annual Meeting, Chicago, 1973.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Law-making in Sung China was a complex procedure that required each piece of legislation to pass through successive stages of review. Almost any civil servant could propose a new law, but the right to directly memorialize the emperor normally was limited to officials of the rank of prefect or higher. After passing through the appropriate forwarding agencies, a proposal would be considered by the members of the Council of State. Usually a majority vote by this body was all that was needed to gain the emperor's approval. The provisions of the new law were then sent to either drafting officials or academicians (depending upon its importance) who prepared a formal written decree, which was subsequently referred to the policy critics or executive censor (again depending upon its importance) for approval. Finally, the approved legislation received the imperial seal and copies were sent to the appropriate implementing agencies, e.g., the finance commission, prefects, etc. What is of crucial importance for an understanding of the functioning of this process is the fact that any official in these bureaus--prefect, finance commissioner, censor, drafting official, or academician could delay the execution of any law by sending the edict back to the Council of State accompanied by a document recording his objections. Furthermore, any one of these officials could indefinitely delay the execution of a law through the system allowing for the resubmission of memorials as long as each resubmitted memorial presented new reservations. And every edict of appointment to office was subject to the same process. It should be clear from this brief description that any unresolved disagreement among functionaries in the various bureaus and agencies could effectively paralyze the imperial administration. One method developed to prevent paralysis was the appointment of ad hoc committees composed of expert representatives from these different review bodies.³ The chief instrument insuring the smooth operation of the bureaucracy for relatively extended periods of time, however, was the informal associations of like-minded bureaucrats who were frequently linked to a particular leader by personal or dyadic ties and to other officials through agnatic or affinal ones. Control over the respective legislative review bureaus and agencies guaranteed that the leaders of these coalitions could either execute or prevent the implementation of any specific piece of legislation and was a

3. Robert M. Hartwell, "Financial Expertise, Examinations, and the Formulation of Economic Policy in Northern Sung China," Journal of Asian Studies, XXX (Feb. 1971), pp. 293-294.

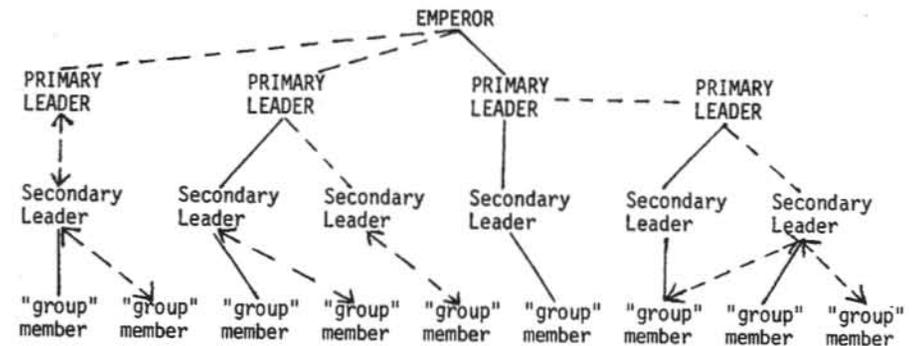
crucial factor in the efficient operation of the imperial state. But in Sung China, and probably in every other non-democratic political bureaucracy as well, such factionalism led to the division of the elite into separate and, especially at times of transition of leadership, increasingly hostile groups. Why and how did this happen?

FACTIONALISM AND POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLES, 983-1101

1) Causes of Periodic Factional Power Struggles

Power struggles in non-democratic political bureaucracies are essentially crises in the transfer of leadership. The informal organization of the Sung bureaucracy can be characterized as hierarchies of interest, kindred and ideological "groups" of officials who were linked together by various leaders through kinship, dyadic and personal ties (see Diagram 1). The elimination of an informal leader from a formal position in the government

DIAGRAM 1
THE STRUCTURE OF THE INFORMAL ORGANIZATION OF THE
SUNG BUREAUCRACY: HYPOTHETICAL MODEL



Dyadic Ties (Patron-Client) ← — — — — — →

Personal Ties (Loyalty,
Friendship, Ideology) — — — — —

Kinship Ties —————

by transfer, dismissal or death often precipitated a crisis, both because it severed the bonds that held the separate groups together and because there were no formal procedures for succession to positions of informal leadership. The severity of the crisis depended upon the importance of the eliminated leader, the amount of vacant leadership positions, the number of officials competing for these vacancies, and the nature of the several constituencies. The two chief causes of a change in an existing leadership were 1) disgrace, normally owing to a loss of confidence in its ability to handle a specific crisis and 2) death. The critical power struggles of the Sung dynasty occurred at times of 1) clear foreign or domestic policy failure--the Hsi Hsia campaigns and the humiliating peace with the Tanguts in the late 1030's and early 40's, the increasing chorus of complaints against Wang An-shih's "new" laws which resulted in his transfer to a provincial post in 1076, the rebellion of Fang La in the early 1120's, the Chin invasions in 1125-26 and the failure to reconquer North China in 1140-41; 2) the death or abdication of an emperor or the end of a regency--the death of Shen-tsung in 1085, the majority of Che-tsung in 1093, the death of Che-tsung in 1100, and the abdications of Hui-tsung (1126) and Kao-tsung (1152); and 3) the successive deaths of a number of top officials within a relatively short span of time. The nature of the first two types of leadership crises requires little elucidation. The third phenomenon, however, was as critical as lineage segmentation was in fragmenting the bureaucratic elite. It frequently accompanied the other two categories of crises, increased the severity of a power struggle and intensified the significance of its effects.

Formal hierarchical organizations based upon seniority and tenure more often than not pass through cycles in which the age composition of their members gradually increases to a point where there is a high mortality rate thereby providing the opportunity for the rise of a new and younger age cohort which initiates a new cycle. Between 960 and 1175, there were twelve clusters of years in which the mortality rate of bureaucrats was considerably higher than the norm (Table 1). Hsüeh Chü-cheng 薛居正 and Ch'u Chao-fu 楚昭輔, whose continuous terms in the Council of State began in 964 and 973, died in 981. And Lu To-hsün's 盧多遜 thirteen years of service in the highest imperial advisory body ended when he passed away in 985. These representatives of the military associates of the founders were replaced by the first of the members of the hereditary bureaucratic elite lineages in 983 and in the years following. Other periods of political instability also were associated closely with years of high mortality among fiscal office-holders and the cyclical deaths of famous statesmen. Lü

TABLE 1
YEARS OF HIGH MORTALITY AMONG FISCAL OFFICE-HOLDERS

Reference Period			High Mortality Years	
Dates	Number of Deaths	Average Deaths per Year	Dates	Average Deaths per Year
960-986	51	1.89	983-986	3.50
987-1013	57	2.11	1003-1004	4.50
1014-1067	221	4.09	1039-1045	6.59
1014-1067	221	4.09	1066-1068	9.33
1068-1094	180	6.67	1073-1076	11.81
1068-1094	180	6.67	1085-1087	14.67
1068-1094	180	6.67	1090-1093	12.61
1095-1121	103	3.81	1097-1099	9.00
1122-1148	107	3.96	1126	7.01
1122-1148	107	3.96	1140-1142	5.66
1149-1175	125	4.63	1148-1150	8.01
1149-1175	125	4.63	1153-1157	7.78
960-1175	844	3.91		

I-chien 呂夷簡 died in 1043, Hu Su 胡宿 in 1067, Han Ch'i 韓琦 in 1075, Wang An-shih and Ssu-ma Kuang in 1086, and Ch'in Kuei in 1155--political leaders whose respective careers in the Council of State were twenty, six, fifteen, two and twenty-one years.

Political crises and the death of senior leaders not infrequently signaled the beginning of power struggles. And the methods used by the successful contenders for succession to consolidate and perpetuate their position ultimately led to the elimination of the losers and their families as effective political actors.

2) The Process of Leadership Transitions

The crucial element in a power struggle was seizure of positions in the bureaus in charge of personnel, law-making and legislative review. This undertaking involved: 1) persuading the existing functionaries to appoint one's own associates, rather than those of a real or potential rival, to the posts vacated by the dismissed or deceased leadership, 2) placing loyal followers in springboard positions so that they would be available for key

offices as the terms of service of their incumbents came to a close, and 3) purging potential opponents. The pervasiveness of kinship linkages among members of the bureaucracy frequently allowed the heads of contending factions to take advantage of their agnatic or affinal bonds with the remnants of the previous administration which, although weaker and more distant than those with the dismissed or deceased leadership, were closer and stronger than those of their rivals. At the same time, other kinds of pre-existing or newly-established personal or dyadic ties with members of the transitional administration permitted the formation of alliances during the interim period that normally were abandoned when the new leadership consolidated its position. Trusted followers were rewarded with take-off posts that often were created specifically for the purpose. For example, the number of positions in the financial bureaucracy increased from 55 to 94 between 1068 and 1069 and reached a high-point of 123 in 1075-76. The functionaries appointed to these newly established offices predominately belonged to lineages affinally linked to Wang An-shih and his allies. As soon as regular posts opened up, they were filled with Wang's factional associates and many of the ad hoc bureaus were abolished--an average of only about ninety existed between 1079 and 1085. The abolition of long-established regular offices was also an effective tool used to purge entrenched opposition party-leaders. In 1085-86, the so-called "anti-reformers" reduced the number of posts in the fiscal bureaucracy from 90 to 73; the Shao-shu 紹述 clique increased the available fiscal jobs to 92 in 1094, and Ts'ai Ching reduced the number to 80 in 1102. In fact, purging the opposition was the weapon of factional power struggles that ultimately destroyed the political position of hitherto powerful elite lineages.

3) The Political Decline of the Professional Bureaucratic Elite Lineages and the Rise of the Local Gentry, 1102-1165

The yin 蔭 privilege, control over recommendation, and position in the various bureaus charged with personnel administration all depended on the multigenerational persistence of office-holding by lineage members and their close affinal kin. To an increasing degree, the purges conducted by the victorious partisans in the political power struggles of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries were characterized by a growing harshness. Transfers to provincial posts were progressively replaced by separate appointments to temple sinecures, simultaneous proscription of large groups, and even discharge, incarceration and physical punishment--all of which disqualified the members of important lineages and their affinal kin from office-holding for periods of time long enough to effectively destroy their ability to

maintain a multigenerational presence in the higher levels of the bureaucracy. A political mortality schedule of sixty-three elite lineages which charts the years of last significant fiscal office-holding by their members shows that they occurred in clusters of years that either immediately preceded or followed major leadership crises. The victory of the anti-reform faction (1085-86), the rise to power of the Shao-shu clique (1093-94), the emergence of Ts'ai Ching and the proscription of 1102, the disgrace of Ts'ai Ching (1125-26), the ascendancy of Ch'in Kuei (1141-42) and the political upheavals that followed his death (1155) all took their toll on the political fortunes of this group. Only twenty-four of these original sixty-three sample elite lineages managed to continue to provide incumbents in fiscal office after 1165; and these functionaries were scions of geographically dispersed segmented lineages who owed their position far more to affinal and interest group bonds with the local gentry than to a distinguished genealogy. The only possible exceptions were those families that had affinal ties with the imperial clan such as the An-yang Hans 安陽韓, Wu-yüeh Ch'iens 吳越錢, and Po-chou, Meng-ch'eng Kao 亳州, 蒙城高.

TABLE 2

POLITICAL MORTALITY SCHEDULE OF SIXTY-THREE HEREDITARY ELITE LINEAGES:
YEAR OF LAST NOTICE OF FISCAL OFFICE-HOLDING

1075	1090	1096	1123	1135	1154	1165+ (24)
1077	1091	1097	1126	1139	1154	
	1092	1098	1127	1140	1156	
1083	1092	1098		1141	1156	
1086	1093	1099		1143	1156	
	1093	1099		1144	1156	
		1099			1157	
		1100			1157	
		1100			1158	
					1159	

Any tie--agnatic, affinal, ideological, or personal--linking a family with a defeated clique was sufficient cause for the leaders of the winning factions and their associates who controlled the recruitment, promotion and legislative machinery of the imperial government to distrust its members. In these circumstances, the corporate bonds of mutual political advantage that sustained a secular identification among segmented lineages and the affinal ties that joined them to other elite families became liabilities. Even the

successful factional leaders tended to be wary of their more powerful kin since these families inevitably were tied to those of their rivals as well. They preferred to rely upon their affinal kin among the local elite or gentry who were tied to them alone. Indeed, many of the victors were scions of such regional affinal lineages rather than the sons of professional bureaucratic elite families themselves--e.g., Ts'ai Ching and Ch'in Kuei. Both caution and the future security of the segmented lineage made abandonment of the marriage practices that had given preference to the maintenance of national kinship bonds with other families in an empire-wide elite in favor of those placing a premium on local alliances a more desirable strategy. Interregional marriages, which had accounted for more than half of all matches of fiscal office-holding lineages between 960 and 1221, fell to an insignificant five to ten percent of the marriages contracted between 1122 and the end of the dynasty.⁴ The national elite kinship system that had integrated the empire during the first 150 years of Sung rule collapsed and a new system of local networks of family connections appears to have taken its place. The resulting localism shaped the character of Chinese society and politics in subsequent centuries.

I have endeavored to show in this essay how the quantitative data of collective biographical research can, at the least, suggest new lines of inquiry into various aspects of Chinese social and political history. I hope that in the future cooperative effort will lead to a more widespread use of these techniques.

4. Hartwell, "Transformations," p. 423.