The Politics of Higher Education

The Imperial University in Northern Song China

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Introduction

An emperor does not rule a country alone. He needs to recruit officials to assist in governing the realm. The Song founder inherited a civil service examinations system originating in the Sui dynasty (581–618) that rose to prominence in the Tang dynasty (618–907), whose chief purpose became the selection of deserving candidates for public service. Yet the extent to which the examination system could select genuinely capable and morally upright officials was always in question, since it evaluated candidates based primarily on written work, not personal conduct. In reaction, some officials in the Northern Song (960–1127) argued that government schools should play some role in the official recruitment process to better guarantee the moral comportment of students. Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052) and his fellow reformers in the mid-eleventh century were pioneers in this regard, as they reiterated the importance of a prolonged assessment of students' moral character at prefectural schools. He says succinctly in his 1044 memorial:

> Nowadays, teaching is not rooted in schools and scholars are not examined in villages, it is therefore impossible to investigate thoroughly the reality behind reputations. Examiners restrain candidates by proclaiming their philological shortcomings and students concentrate merely on recitation and memory, as a result human talent proved underutilized. This is common knowledge among critics. We have assessed various opinions and selected those most beneficial today. Nothing is better than making local scholars educate local students in schools. Prefectures and counties could then identify student conduct and cultivate potential. Thus we offer rules for establishing schools, executing guarantees and recommending candidates."[1] 今教不本於學校，士不察於鄉里，則不能覈名實；有司束以聲病，學者專於記誦，則不足盡人材。此獻議者所共以為言也。謹參考眾說，擇其便於今者，莫若使士皆土著而教之於學校，然後州縣察其履行，則學者修飭矣。故為設立學舍，保明舉送之法。

The eminent statesman Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), in his famous "Ten Thousand Words Memorial" (*Wan yan shu* 萬言書), submitted in 1058 to Emperor Renzong (1010–1063, r. 1022–1063), addressed the shortage of men of talent. He

1. *XCB*, 147.3563 and *SHY*, *XJ*, 3.23b. Translation is made with reference to Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 68.

proposed a personnel system based on the model of the ancient sage kings,[2] highlighting the historical mission of government schools as training grounds in statecraft for prospective officials:

> In ancient times, the Son of Heaven and feudal lords had schools extending from the capital down to the districts and villages. Officers of instruction were liberally selected with utmost care. Court affairs, rites and music, and legal punishments were all subjects that found a place in the schools. What the students observed and learned were the sayings, the virtuous acts, and the ideas underlying the governance of the entire empire. Men unqualified to govern the empire would not receive an education, while those able to govern never failed to receive an education. This is the way to conduct the education of men.[3] 古者天子諸侯，自國至於鄉黨皆有學，博置教導之官而嚴其選。朝廷禮樂、刑政之事，皆在於學，士所觀而習者，皆先王之法言德行治天下之意，其材亦可以為天下國家之用。苟不可以為天下國家之用，則不教也。苟可以為天下國家之用者，則無不在於學。此教之之道也。

Located in the Song capital of Kaifeng, the Imperial University (*taixue* 太學) was a testing ground for idealistic scholar-officials like Fan Zhongyan and Wang Anshi to put their educational visions into practice. Fan made studying at the Imperial University a precondition for participation in the civil service examinations; Wang transformed higher education in the capital into an alternative channel for recruiting officials, even as he elevated the university as the primary vehicle for promoting his own scholarship as orthodoxy. Reformers in the early twelfth century expanded the school promotion scheme to government schools countrywide, in an attempt to develop the schools as the sole channel for recruiting officials, and eventually displacing the examination system.

Yet many officials were skeptical about empowering government schools to select officials. In the views of two eleventh-century scholar-officials, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) and Liu Ban 劉攽 (1023–1089), the civil service examination system *per se* was not problematic in terms of recruiting talented officials. More crucial was that the emperor be prudent in appointing officials to oversee the selection process.[4] Su Shi argued that "schools nowadays should follow practices from the past, so that institutions of the former king are retained in our time."[5] 今之學校，特可因循舊制，使先王之舊物不廢於吾世 Contending that government schools were at best secondary sources for official recruitment, the Imperial University and local government schools, in the eyes of Su Shi, were nothing more than places for students to cram the necessary techniques for passing examinations. Liu Ban was even more pessimistic about the utility of government schools in cultivating talent: "Education

2. For a comparison between the educational ideals of the Qingli reformers and Wang Anshi, see Smith, "Anatomies of Reform," 157–61.
3. *WJGWJJZ*, 2.27. Translation is adopted and modified from de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 1:415.
4. Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji*, 25.725.
5. Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji*, 25.724.

that scholars receive at home is sufficient for them to become talented people. Why do they need to turn to teachers in government schools to do so?"[6] 士修之於家，足以成材，亦何待學官程課督趣之哉？ Hence, Liu strongly opposed government schools as places for recruiting officials.

Institutional changes at the Imperial University in the Northern Song vacillated between Liu Ban's conservative views and the enthusiasm of reformers in the early twelfth century who believed that government schools should play a positive role in official recruitment.[7] Such changes involved the various "cohabitants" of the Song state: the emperor, policy-making institutions like academicians and the council of state, plus the literati elite teaching at and students studying at the Imperial University.[8] How did these various groups interact and shape the Imperial University? This is the core question that this book aims to answer.

"Dynamic" institutional history

This book addresses the politics of higher education in the Northern Song. How did different agents—emperors, court officials, teachers, and students—compete over different agendas in the arena of metropolitan education? In other words, to paraphrase Harold Lasswell's (1902–1978) interpretation of politics, "who got what, when, and how?"[9] I focus primarily on the Imperial University and occasionally the Directorate School (*guozi xue* 國子學) and the School of the Four Gates (*simen xue* 四門學). But the other more technical institutions in metropolitan Kaifeng—painting, calligraphy, medicine, mathematics and law—lie beyond the scope of this study.

Previous studies of Song education have often conceived of the Imperial University as a static institution and have framed questions within the context of either institutional or social history. Scholarship in East Asian languages has discussed various institutional features of the Imperial University during the three periods of educational reform under Emperors Renzong, Shenzong (1048–1085, r. 1067–1085), and Huizong (1082–1135, r. 1100–1125), including its organizational structure and curriculum, the regulations governing the selection and appointment of staff members, and the admission and promotion of students.[10] Scholarly works

6. *QSW*, 69:29.
7. Lee, *Government Education*, 231–49.
8. For a discussion of the concept of "cohabitants of the Song state," see Smith and Ebrey, "Introduction," 5–7.
9. See Lasswell, *Politics*.
10. Sheng Langxi, "Songdai zhi daxue jiaoyu," 1–30, 1–22, 1–29 and 1–19; Zhao Tiehan, "Songdai de taixue," 317–56; Wang Jianqiu, *Songdai taixue yu taixuesheng*; Liu Boji, *Songdai zhengjiao shi*, 791–911; Song Xi, "Songdai taixue de qucai yu yangshi," 135–55; Zhu Chongsheng, "Songdai taixue fazhan de wuge jieduan," 445–86; "Songdai taixue zhi qushi ji qi zuzhi," 211–60; Lee, *Songdai jiaoyu sanlun*; Zhang Bangwei and Zhu Ruixi, "Lun Songdai guozixue xiang taixue yanbian," 241–71; Yuan Zheng, *Songdai jiaoyu*, 101–216 and "Beisong de jiaoyu he zhengzhi," 265–88; Miao Chunde, *Songdai jiaoyu*, 68–77; Chen Xuexun, *Zhongguo jiaoyushi yanjiu*, 231–301; Jiang Xiaotao, "Cong sanci xingxue kan beisong guanxue jiaoyu yu keju xuanshi de xianghu guanxi," 259–77; Terada, *Sōdai kyōikushi gaisetsu*, 1–208; and Kondō, *Sōdai Chūgoku kakyo shakai no kenkyū*.

in the West have gone beyond the study of institutional structures by discussing the social and intellectual impacts of Song educational institutions, covering not only the Imperial University but the civil service examinations, local government schools, and academies across the country.[11] The extent to which these institutions facilitated social mobility,[12] the development of local elites,[13] and the Learning of the Way (*Daoxue* 道學) has also been examined in existing scholarship.[14]

This study seeks to reframe discussions about the Imperial University within an intensely politicized context. It builds on recent insights into the "new political history" for the Song, which moves away from earlier scholarship that focused mainly on static institutions, major events, emperors, and ministers. The "new political history" focuses instead on the "social, political, and institutional processes (dynastic and cross-dynastic); on relationships and tensions between individuals, collectives, and institutions; on the networks within which and the places where politics were made; and on the impact of a broad range of factors on institutional development and political decision making including rituals, discourses, and political theoretical writing as well as the will and word of individual politicians."[15] In addition to political networking and power relations, the "new political history" emphasizes the political process behind decision-making at the national level through an examination of the conflicts and contests between power groups ranging from the sovereign above to the lowest-level bureaucratic institutions below.[16]

Influenced by the "new political history" paradigm, Hirata Shigeki 平田茂樹 adopted the Annales school's concept of "total history" to understand politics through the integration of multiple perspectives that include systems, places, and networks, while examining the concrete networks and relationships operating behind politics.[17] Fang Chengfeng 方誠峰 delineated how politics evolved in the late

11. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning* and "Sung Education," 286–320; Lee, *Government Education* and "Sung Schools and Education before Chu His," 105–36; Walton, *Academies and Society in Southern Sung China*; and De Weerdt, *Competition over Content*.
12. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 182–84 and "Sung Education," 286–320; Lee, *Government Education*, 209–15; Kracke, "Family Vs. Merit in Chinese Civil Service Examinations under the Empire," 103–23 and Chen Yiyan, *Beisong tongzhi jieceng shehui liudong zhi yanjiu*.
13. See Hartwell, "Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750–1550," 365–442 for an overview of elite localization in the Song period. For detailed case studies of elites in different localities, see Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen* and *Way and Byway* for elites in Fuzhou; Davis, *Court and Family in Sung China*; Lee, *Negotiated Power*; and Walton, "Kinship, Marriage, and Status in Song China," 35–77 for elites in Mingzhou; Bossler, *Powerful Relations* for elites in Wuzhou; Clark, *Portrait of a Community* for elites in Fujian; and Ong, *Men of Letters within the Passes* for elites in Guanzhong.
14. Walton, "The Institutional Context of Neo-Confucianism," 457–92 and *Academies and Society in Southern Sung China*; De Weerdt, *Competition over Content*; Chaffee, "Chu Hsi in Nan-k'ang," 414–31 and "Chu Hsi and the Revival of the White Deer Grotto Academy, 1179–1181 A.D.," 40–62.
15. Quoted from Watts and De Weerdt, "Towards a Comparative Political History," 3. See also Deng Xiaonan, "Zouxiang huo de zhidushi," 497–505; Hirata, "Riben Songdai zhengzhishi yanjiu shuping," 40–63; Huang Kuanzhong, *Zhengce*, *duice*, 1–14; and Wang Ruilai, "Duoyuan liti, tuichen chuxin, 411–20.
16. See Teraji, "Sō dai seiji shi kenkyū hōhō shiron," 80 for a definition of political process. Teraji used this concept of political process to study early Southern Song politics under the reign of Gaozong. See Teraji, *Nansō shoki seijishi kenkyū*.
17. Hirata, *Songdai zhengzhi jiegou yanjiu*.

Northern Song through a nuanced study of political culture and institutions,[18] while Zhou Jia 周佳 studied such factors as political situations and customs, prominent figures and events, as well as power relations to see how they impacted the daily operation of the state at the central level.[19] Two recent works by Hilde De Weerdt and Peter Lorge in the West have also adopted this new paradigm. The former delineated the structural changes in Song society at institutional, legal, and cultural levels and examined how the networks of information sharing among literati elites helped consolidate the Southern Song empire,[20] while the latter examined the political and military processes that created the Song dynasty and discussed how the interaction between war and politics formed Song culture and institutions.[21] This study of the Imperial University and the agents involved in its development has gained insights from the above works under the paradigm of "new political history."

Despite the sophistication of earlier studies on the Imperial University as an institution, they often slighted the roles that individual political actors played and the ways in which the Imperial University actually functioned. The ways in which the Imperial University evolved during the intervals between the three reforms—the two decades between the Qingli (1041–1048) and Xining (1068–1077) reforms and the Yuanyou (1086–1093) period between the reforms of Shenzong and Zhezong (1076–1100, r. 1085–1100)—have yet to be sufficiently addressed. This study aims to fill these gaps by emphasizing the continuous development of the Imperial University. It focuses on the process by which the institutions operated and elucidates upon the dynamic interplay among different political actors and their agendas. The institutional evolution of the Imperial University over the Northern Song is detailed in the sections on "Honoring Confucius" (*Chongru* 崇儒), "Official Functions" (*Zhiguan* 職官), and "Civil Service Selection" (*Xuanju* 選舉) in the *Draft of Documents Pertaining to Matters of State in the Song Dynasty* (*Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿, hereafter *Draft of Documents*). Although compiled in the Qing (1644–1911), the work is considered a primary source, as it draws mainly upon surviving court archives from the Song.[22]

Another frequently cited source is the *Long Draft of the Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance* (*Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編, hereafter *Long Draft*), the most comprehensive chronicle of the Northern Song by the highly regarded Li Tao 李燾 (1115–1184). Containing excerpts from official sources like the *Veritable Records* (*Shilu* 實錄) and *National Histories* (*Guoshi* 國史) compiled by the Song court,[23] the *Long Draft* not only delineates the political

18. Fang Chengfeng, *Beisong wanqi de zhengzhi tizhi yu zhengzhi wenhua*.
19. Zhou Jia, *Beisong zhongyang richang zhengwu yunxing yanjiu*.
20. De Weerdt, *Information, Territory, and Elite Networks*.
21. Lorge, *The Reunification of China*.
22. For a brief description of the *Draft of Documents* in English, see Hervouet, *A Sung Bibliography*, 177–78. For a detailed textual history of this work, see Wang Yunhai, *Song huiyao jigao yanjiu* and *Song huiyao jigao kaojiao*; Chen Zhichao, *Jiekai "Song huiyao" zhi mi*.
23. For a comprehensive survey of the development of Song official historiography, see Cai Chongbang, *Songdai xiushi zhidu yanjiu*.

context in which the institutional changes took place, but also depicts the roles of different political actors in connection with the changes.[24] Yet there are also limitations to surviving sources. Firstly, most parts of the *Long Draft* covering the reform eras—1068–1070 in the Shenzong reign, 1094–1098 in the Zhezong reign, and the entire reigns of Huizong and Qinzong (1100–1161, r. 1125–1127)—are no longer extant today. So, less comprehensive chronicles as well as other genres of historical works have to be consulted in order to faithfully reconstruct the past, including works in the formats of "Topical Narratives" (*jishi benmo* 紀事本末) and "Outline and Details" (*gangmu* 綱目).[25] Secondly, most surviving sources are deeply influenced by the Learning of the Way movement, popular in the Southern Song, which proved instinctively hostile to the reforms in general, often altering earlier texts to advance its conservative interpretation of the past.[26] Yet such biases in surviving texts do not completely thwart our ability to reconstruct Song political history. A nuanced comparison of these sources in factionalist rhetoric,[27] as shown in our treatment of the diverse assessments of the university's development in the 1050s (chapters 2 and 4), shows how the reformers and anti-reformers competed over historical interpretations, which deepens our understanding of Song factional politics. In fact, the transformation of the Imperial University in the Northern Song was a process of contestation and negotiation among different political agents whose interests often differed, details of which are scattered in voluminous biographical, epitaphic, and anecdotal sources.[28]

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24. See Hervouet, *A Sung Bibliography*, 72–75 for a brief bibliographical note of the *Long Draft* in English by Shiba Yoshinobu 斯波義信. For discussions of the compilation, structure, editions, and historical value of the *Long Draft*, see Hartman, "Chinese Historiography in the Age of Maturity," 51–52; Sudō, "Minami sō no sumomo tō to zoku shi osamu toori kan chouhen no seiritsu," 469–512; Pei Rucheng and Xu Peizao, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian kaolüe*. For detailed chronological biographies of Li Tao, see Wang Deyi, *Li Tao fuzi nianpu*; and Wang Chenglüe and Yang Jinxian, *Li Tao xuexing shiwen jikao*, 3–35.
25. The *Huangsong tongjian changbian jishi benmo* 皇宋通鑒長編紀事本末 by Yang Zhongliang 楊仲良 (thirteenth century), who rearranged chronological entries of the *Long Draft* into topical narratives, offers the most comprehensive thematic survey of late Northern Song history. For a detailed textual analysis of Yang's work and its relationship with the *Long Draft* and the Learning of the Way movement, see Hartman, "Bibliographic Notes on Sung Historical Works," 177–200. On the basis of Yang's work and other sources, a Qing scholar Huang Yizhou 黃以周 (1828–1899) reconstructed the lost entries of the *Long Draft* in his *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian shibu* 續資治通鑑長編拾補, which also serves as a valuable reference for late Northern Song history. For outlines of major events in the late Northern Song, see Chen Jun's *Huangchao biannian gangmu beiyao* 皇朝編年綱目備要 or shorter chronicles like the *Huangsong shichao gangyao* 皇宋十朝綱要 by Li Zhi 李埴 (1161–1238) and the *Songshi quanwen* 宋史全文 by an anonymous author. For studies of Chen Jun and his work, see Xu Peizao, "Huangchao biannian gangmu beiyao kaolue," 450–69, and Hartman, "Chen Jun's Outline and Details," 273–315.
26. For detailed discussions of how Southern Song Learning of the Way scholars and their moral values influenced Song historiography and projected an increasingly gloomy image of the subjects associated with late Northern Song reformist administrations, see Hartman, "The Reluctant Historian," 100–148; "Chen Jun's Outline and Details," 273–315; "A Textual History of Cai Jing's Biography in the *Songshi*," 517–64; and "The Making of a Villain," 86–105.
27. See Levine, *Divided by a Common Language* and "Terms of Estrangement," 131–70, for discussion of factionalist rhetoric in the Northern Song. Recently Cong Ellen Zhang has discussed how factional politics influenced the writing of epitaphs in the Northern Song. See Zhang, "Bureaucratic Politics and Commemorative Biography," 192–216.
28. In addition to the biographies in the official history *Song shi* 宋史, which was compiled in the Yuan period,

Competing agendas of different agents

The founding emperors of the Song were aware of the potential threat posed by their subordinates to their supreme authority over state administration. Hence, a constitutional division of civil and military authorities as well as "an institutionally embedded system of checks and balances" were installed for the sake of avoiding the arbitrary exercise of state power.[29] In the arenas of education and examination, Song emperors appointed examiners on an ad hoc basis and installed measures of anonymity in examinations in order to prevent their subjects from manipulating the recruitment channel to promote favoritism, the end result being a great aggrandizement of the emperors' power.[30] In addition, emperors also assumed direct control over the final selection and ranking of candidates after the palace examination (*dianshi* 殿試) was adopted in 973, which allowed the evolution of personal bonds between the sovereign and prospective officials.[31]

Yet some officials in privileged positions still managed to exploit the examination system to pursue their own interests, as John Chaffee has shown, managing to help their relatives obtain credentials through informal channels like "avoidance examinations" (*bietou shi* 別頭試) particularly in the Southern Song.[32] The emperor's dominance over the recruitment of officials was further challenged after implementation in the 1070s of the university's Three Hall system (*sanshefa* 三舍法). Under this scheme, students were divided into three categories: newly admitted students were assigned to the Outer Hall (*waishe* 外舍). They could then be promoted to the Inner Hall (*neishe* 內舍) and gradually to the Upper Hall (*shangshe* 上舍). Upper Hall students with outstanding academic results and proven moral conduct could be nominated for office without passing the civil service examinations. Teachers in the metropolitan schools, like examiners before them, were empowered to nominate outstanding students to become officials.

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some works by Song contemporaries like Zeng Gong's 曾鞏 (1019–1083) *Long Ping ji*隆平集, Wang Cheng's 王稱 (twelfth century) *Dongdu shilüe*東都事略, Du Dagui's 杜大珪 (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) *Mingchen beizhuan wanyanji* 名臣碑傳琬琰集, and a number of Southern Song local gazetteers 地方志 also contain more primary biographical accounts. For discussions of the historical value of the above works, see Wang Ruilai, "Long Ping ji shiyi," 8–34; Shu Renhui, *"Dongdu shilüe" yu "Songshi" bijiao yanjiu*; Cai Chongbang, "Songdai Sichuan shixue jia Wang Cheng yu Dongdu shilüe," 23–29; He Zhongli, "Wang Cheng he tade Dongdu shilüe," 249–68; Hargett, "Song Dynasty Local Gazetteers and Their Place in the History of Difangzhi Writing," 405–42; and Dennis, *Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700*. Apart from biographies, anecdotal as well as epitaphic sources that are either newly excavated or reprinted in anthologies of Song literati are also invaluable primary sources of Song people. See Huang Kuanchung, "Songshi yanjiu de zhongyao shiliao," 143–85 and Schottenhammer, "Characteristics of Song Epitaphs," 253–306. For studies of Song anecdotal sources as well as their compilation, circulation and historical value, see De Weerdt, "The Production and Circulation of "Written Notes" (biji)," 19–47 and Zhang Hui, *Songdai biji yanjiu*. See also Ding Chuanjing, *Songren yishi huibian* for an excerpt of anecdotal sources of Song people, which is translated as *A Compilation of Anecdotes of Sung Personalities* by Djang and Djang.

29. Smith, "Introduction," 21.
30. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 182.
31. Araki, *Sōdai kakyo seido kenkyū*, 284–89; Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell*, 74–75; Zhu Shangshu, "Songdai keju dianshi zhidu kaolun," 109–10.
32. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*, 95–115.

With university teachers diluting the sovereign's supremacy over official recruitment and senior officials exploiting the Imperial University to perpetuate their networks, how did Song emperors respond? The following dictum of Emperor Zhenzong (968–1022, r. 997–1022) suggests a common tactic of emperors to counter the problem: "It is important to have people of different opinions stirring each other up, so that no one dares to do wrong."[33] 且要異論相攪，即各不敢為非 Emperor Renzong skillfully implemented his father's teachings in the political realm by balancing the power of civil officials with that of imperial in-laws and military generals, to a degree that neither of them became dominant enough to undermine imperial authority.[34] To what extent did the successors of Zhenzong and Renzong adhere to this principle, which became enshrined in the "Family Instructions of the Ancestors" (*zuzong jiafa* 祖宗家法),[35] in order to counter their subjects' clout within the university?

The topic of the Song emperors' assertion of supreme authority in the educational realm raises the widely discussed but unresolved question of whether the Song period gave rise to autocracy,[36] and more specifically how autocracy evolved over the course of the Song. In an era when senior statesman Wen Yanbo 文彥博 (1006–1097) dared to proclaim, "Your Majesty does not share the country with the common people; your Majesty shares it with scholar-officials"[37] 為與士大夫治天下，非與百姓治天下也, how did Song scholar-officials, namely elites who helped

33. *XCB*, 213.5169. The translation is adopted and modified from Smith, "Shen-tsung's Reign and the New Policies of Wang An-shih," 363.
34. Ho Koon-wan, *Panlong fufeng*.
35. For discussions of how the "Ancestors' Family Instructions" of Song emperors impacted on Song political culture, see Deng Guangming, "Songchao de jiafa he Beisong de zhengzhi gaige yundong," 124–43; Deng Xiaonan, *Zuzong zhifa*; Lamouroux and Deng, "The 'Ancestors' Family Instructions,'" 79–97.
36. In his renowned periodization of Chinese history, Japanese historian Naitō Torajirō 內藤虎次郎 (1866–1934) highlighted the transformation from the aristocratic Tang dynasty to the autocratic Song dynasty as one of the most salient features of the transition from a medieval to modern China. This hypothesis was further elaborated by his student Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定 (1901–1955), who concluded that institutionalization of autocracy, signified by the emperor's assumption of ultimate responsibility over decision making, was completed in the early Song. See Naitō, "Gaigua di Tang Song shidai guan," 10–18; Miyazaki, "Dongyang di jinshi," 153–241; Lau Nap-yin, "Hewei Tang Song biange," 125–71; and Luo, "A Study of the Changes in the 'Tang-Song Transition Model,'" 99–128. For a recent discussion of how the hypothesis of Tang-Song transition evolved and its impact on the scholarship in connection with the Tang-Song period, see Li Huarui, *Tang Song biange de youlai yu fazhan*. Chinese historian Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990) also contended that over-centralization of power in the monarch at the expense of the chief councilor in the Song period was propitious for the later growth of despotism. See Qian Mu, "Lun Songdai xiangquan," 455–62; *Guoshi dagang*, 554–56 and *Zhongguo lidai zhengzhi deshi*, 76. In his critique against Karl Wittfogel's (1896–1988) environmentally deterministic proposition of oriental despotism in Chinese history, Frederick Mote (1922–2005) also showed the rise of autocracy in the Song period with reference to the realm of political thought. Echoing Qian Mu, Mote elaborated how the brutalization of the Yuan (1271–1368) government ultimately led to the peak of despotism under the founding emperor of the Ming (1368–1644). Contrarily, John Dardess argued that it is inappropriate to label the Song emperors, many of whom had obscure personalities and failed to exert able leadership during dynastic crisis, as autocrats, though he concurred with the view that autocratic rule had been entrenched under the Ming founder. See Mote, "The Growth of Chinese Despotism," 1–41 and Dardess, *Confucianism and Autocracy* and "Did the Mongols Matter?" 111–34.
37. *XCB*, 221.5370.

the emperor to govern, respond to the emperor's rising power? Case studies since the 1980s have offered a range of views on the matter.

Deng Xiaonan 鄧小南 and Christian Lamouroux have argued that the scholar-officials managed to limit the sovereign's power through their manipulation of the family instructions to which Song emperors needed to adhere.[38] Based on his comprehensive study of the interaction between Emperor Zhenzong and his councilors, Wang Ruilai 王瑞來 argued that the power of the emperor was in decline in the Song period, as the administrative role of the emperor was constrained by the bureaucratic system. In this way, the emperor had merely become the symbolic head of state.[39] Contradicting Wang Ruilai's supposition about the merely symbolic functions of the emperor, Zhang Qifan 張其凡 and Zhang Bangwei 張邦煒 stressed the emperors' dominance in political affairs as evidence of their rising power. At the same time, scholar-officials' power appears to have been ascendant, based on the added administrative responsibilities entrusted to them. It was the interdependence of their power relationship that explains why emperors and scholar-officials ruled the realm in complementary, rather than antagonistic, fashion.[40] Paul Smith argues that this "consolidation of executive authority in the inner court, comprised above all by the sovereign and his chief councilors," began to take shape when the New Policies (*xinfa* 新法) were launched in the 1070s and continued to grow till the end of the Southern Song.[41]

In contrast with views about the rising power of scholar-officials, the emperor's supremacy in Song politics has also been posited by many scholars, although consensus has yet emerged on when autocratic rule "matured" or reached its apex for the dynasty. Liu Jingzhen's 劉靜貞 study of the implementation of imperial power under the first four Song emperors suggested that autocracy was basically attained through the centralizing of monarchical powers by the end of the second reign, with this autocratic system of government winning a wide acceptance among scholar-officials.[42] Through a nuanced analysis of the palace examination questions from 1070 onwards, Peter Bol showed how autocracy rose to new heights when pro-reform emperors attempted to transform society through universal kingship and activist governance based on ancient models.[43] In his study of early Southern Song politics, James T. C. Liu showed how the imperial whim of Gaozong (1107–1187, r. 1127–1162) was realized through initially the rapid reshuffle of councilors and

38. Lamouroux and Deng, "The 'Ancestors' Family Instructions,'" 79–97; Deng Xiaonan, *Zuzong zhifa*; Lamouroux "'Old Models,'" 291–319.
39. Wang Ruilai, *Sōdai no kōtei kenryoku to shitaifu seiji*; "Lun Songdai huangquan," 144–60; "Lun Songdai xianggquan" 106–20; and "Zouxiang xiangzhenghua de huangquan," 208–31. For discussions of Song scholar-officials' attempts to restrain the emperor's power, see Cheng Minsheng, "Lun Songdai shidafu zhengzhi dui huangquan de xianzhi," 56–64.
40. Zhang Qifan, "Huangdi yu shidafu gongzhi tianxia shixi," 114–23; Zhang Bangwei, "Lun Songdai de huangquan he xiangquan," 60–68.
41. Smith, "Introduction," 26.
42. Liu Jingzhen, *Beisong qianqi huangdi he tamen de quanli*.
43. Bol, "Whither the Emperor?" 103–34 and "Emperors Can Claim Antiquity Too," 173–205.

subsequently the long tenure of the emperor's absolutist surrogate.[44] Gaozong's successor, Xiaozong (1127–1194, r. 1162–1189), also preferred to reinforce imperial powers, as seen in his personal involvement in personnel appointments at nearly all levels, ranging from fiscal management to military affairs and border policies. Xiaozong's absolutist rule, to employ Lau Nap-yin's term, can also be seen in his inclination toward favoritism, such that opposing views from his senior administrators or remonstrance officials received short shrift.[45]

Diverging views on the nature of Song government with respect to the power dynamic between emperors and scholar-officials, I suspect, may originate from different definitions of autocracy among scholars. As Bao Weimin 包偉民 has pointed out, "autocracy" in Western languages often "refers to a form of oligarchy in which a ruler takes direct control of administrative power," whereas in Chinese, it refers to a ruler who acts arbitrarily or presides over an absolutist political system.[46] This work engages the scholarly discussion of autocracy in the Song from the perspective of the emperor's involvement in the development and administration of the Imperial University, which can be characterized across the spectrum from noninterference in university affairs in the late reign of Renzong, to assiduous concern for educational development under Taizu (927–976, r. 960–976), who frequently visited the metropolitan schools, and ultimately to overwhelming dominance under Shenzong. Shenzong not only formulated a set of comprehensive school regulations to safeguard the emperor's supreme authority and limit the purview of university personnel over the recruitment of officials, but he also collaborated with his subordinate censors to remove potential challengers from the university (chapter 3). Shenzong's intervention in university affairs became a vehicle to enforce an absolutist government, one checked by neither nongovernmental nor intragovernmental forces. Unlike those censors who assisted the sovereign to assert imperial authority in exchange for political rewards, the group of anti-reformers of the Yuanyou reign chose to compete with the monarch in the educational realm intent on constraining unlimited imperial powers (chapter 4). Subtle contests and collaborations between emperors and scholar-officials, particularly in the last five decades of Northern Song, shows that autocracy did not develop in a linear fashion, while shedding new light on the power relations between rulers and subjects.[47]

Apart from addressing the struggle between the sovereign and scholarly elites, this work discusses how scholar-officials competed and negotiated among themselves, at both the individual and collective levels. Divided by ideological and political differences, senior courtiers like Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Wang

44. Liu, *China Turning Inward*.
45. Lau Nap-yin, "The Absolutist Reign of Sung Hsiao-tsung."
46. Bao Weimin, "Review of *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China*," 264–65.
47. For an analysis of the constraints of ministerial and monarchical power in the Song period, see Cheng Minsheng, "Lun Songdai shidafu zhengzhi dui huangquan de xianzhi," 56–64. See also Zhang Bangwei, "Lun Songdai de huangquan he xiangquan," 60–68 for a discussion of the power relations between emperors and councilors.

Anshi and eminent university figures like Shi Jie 石介 (1005–1045), Sun Fu 孫復 (992–1057) and Hu Yuan 胡瑗 (993–1059) attempted to exert their ideological influence at the university through the promotion of their preferred writing styles and/or classical exegeses. Some were more successful than others, depending on the support they garnered and the resistance they met. Besides, the ways in which their works and deeds were represented to posterity also affected their intellectual legacies, which varied from time to time. The developmental trajectory of the learning of Wang Anshi, which began to dominate the intellectual arena starting in the mid-1070s until its demise in the mid-1120s, helps to illustrate the matter. Drawing upon insights from earlier works that studied how institutions shaped the Learning of the Way movement in the Southern Song,[48] this book examines how Wang Anshi exploited the Imperial University to promote his own school of thought. It also discusses how "heterodox" scholars, such as some early thinkers of *Daoxue*, contested state orthodoxy.

Competition among scholar-officials at a collective level was exemplified by factional clashes between reformers and anti-reformers.[49] How far did factional politics filter down to the university campus? Driven by their vision to transform society through an expansion of state institutions, the reformers preferred expanding government education and transforming it into a channel to recruit officials. Contrarily, anti-reformers in the mid-1080s, under the lead of Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), generally revered the cumulative wisdom from the past.[50] Perceiving that social custom can be improved through the perfection of a government's structure and operation and deeming the creation of new institutions unnecessary, they opposed the launch of a school promotion system and advocated reforms within the existing examination system.[51] Institutional changes at the Imperial University from the 1070s onwards were partly driven by the contending views of the two factions and their relative power at court. The rise and fall of a particular faction was manifested not only in policy revisions, but also in the reshuffling of staff members in administrative bureaus. Personnel changes at the Imperial University (see chapters 3 and 4) suggested another common point among the reformers and anti-reformers alike. Apart from adopting a similar political rhetoric to denounce their political opponents,[52] the two factions were both keen to exert their influence on the university's environment through intermediaries—teachers in the school.

48. Linda Walton explored the relationship between the rise of the Learning of the Way and the academy movement, while Hilde De Weerdt examined how political and intellectual groups interacted in the examination field and shaped examination standards. See Walton, *Academies and Society in Southern Sung China* and De Weerdt, *Competition over Content*.
49. Levine, *Divided by a Common Language*; Luo Jiaxiang, *Pengdang zhizheng yu Beisong zhengzhi*; Shen Songqin, *Beisong wenren yu dangzheng*; Xiao Qingwei, *Beisong xinjiu dangzheng yu wenxue*; and Tu Meiyun, *Beisong dangzheng yu wenhuo*.
50. Ji, *Politics and Conservatism in Northern Song China*, 2.
51. Bol, "Government, Society, and State," 184–85. Bol's article offers a comparison of the political visions between Wang Anshi and Sima Guang, the respective leader of the reformers and anti-reformers.
52. Levine, *Divided by a Common Language* and "Terms of Estrangement," 131–70.

Yet teachers were not mere pawns of the reformist and anti-reformist leaders, as they did not necessarily agree with the values held by their superiors. Moreover, they had their own agendas in mind. How to better equip students for examinations, for example, was a common problem that many lecturers faced, since the reputations and career prospects of teachers depended on the performance of students in the recruitment exercises. The interests of teachers also diverged when some of them intended to impose upon the metropolitan schools their preferred literary style, classical interpretations, pedagogy and teaching style. Under such circumstances, teachers at the Imperial University needed not only to discuss, cooperate, or compete with their peers, but also to negotiate with higher authorities.

The primary objective for most university students was to enter officialdom. To maximize their chances of success in the school promotion system, some ambitious students exhausted every possible means, even bribery, to court the favor of teachers and influential officials. In contrast, some students withdrew from their studies and resorted to alternative channels when they perceived that the institutional settings of the metropolitan schools worked against their interests.[53] "Aristocratic" youths in the Directorate School, as we will see in the first chapter, preferred private tutoring and "protection privilege" (*yin* 蔭) to government education.[54] One student, Huang You 黃友 (1080–1126), even considered volunteering for war in the northwest against the Tangut Xi Xia (1038–1227) as preferable to studying at the Imperial University. [55] Other frustrated students, rather than withdraw from school, appealed directly to the throne proposing top-down reforms that could better serve their interests. More daring students criticized influential court officials and government policies, ignoring the potential consequences for their career prospects. Such diverse, sometimes contradictory, agendas not only shaped the behavior of students, but they also occasionally forced institutional change upon the Imperial University and elsewhere.

Over the course of the Northern Song, emperors, court officials, teachers, and students competed and negotiated over the above agendas in the university environment, which lead to changes in educational policies that occurred neither in a linear nor a progressive fashion but back-and-forth due to ongoing resistance. Policy changes at a politicized Imperial University to be discussed in this monograph shed light on subtle power struggles between emperors and their subjects as well as factional disputes within the bureaucracy over ways to perpetuate political influence. Apart from analyzing Song politics through a top-down perspective that

53. For studies of the lives and activities of students in Song government schools, see Miyazaki, "Sodai no daigakusei seikatsu," 365–401 and Lee, "Life in the Schools of Sung China," 45–60 and *Government Education*, 173–96.

54. The "protection" privilege allowed senior officials to confer official rank upon their kinsmen. See Lo, *An Introduction to the Civil Service of Sung China*, 102–9; Ebrey, "The Dynamics of Elite Domination in Sung China," 502–6 and Hartman, "Sung Government and Politics," 55–57 for brief surveys of this method of entry in English. For detailed discussions, see You Biao, *Songdai yinbu zhidu yanjiu* and Umehara, *Sōdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, 423–500.

55. *SS*, 452.13269.

focuses mainly on how court politics filtered into the university environment, this study also takes a bottom-up approach by exploring the responses of teachers and students to the state's imposition of political and ideological controls in order to see how they contested political authority. It aims to offer not only a more comprehensive understanding of Song politics on issues like the degree of autocracy and the complexity of factionalism, but also a new framework to analyze political institution and policy formulation in premodern China.

Structure of this book

The six chapters of this book follows largely a chronological order, which better contextualizes the interactions of different agents that shaped the institutional evolution of the Imperial University to avoid anachronistic arguments. Chapter 1 discusses how the Song court and university personnel responded to the diverse learning attitudes of two groups of students—scions of senior officials given to be dismissive of government education and commoners keen on pursuing education—for the first ninety years since the dynasty's founding. It shows that several "reforms" at the metropolitan schools in the mid-1040s, among them the detachment of the Imperial University from the Directorate School, the stipulation of a mandatory attendance requirement, and the convergence of school curriculum and examination topics, were in fact changes that evolved from earlier attempts to satisfy the needs of commoners while increasing the motivation to learn among "aristocratic" youths.

By the 1040s, the gap between the school curriculum and examination topics was gradually bridged. Thirty years later in the 1070s the reformers installed the Three Hall system at the Imperial University to combine government education with recruitment of officials. Through an examination of the roles that three prominent scholars—Hu Yuan, Sun Fu, and Ouyang Xiu—played in the university environment, chapter 2 considers the extent to which the Imperial University inherited earlier trajectories of development to lay the foundation for future political reforms. Ouyang Xiu's high-handedness in banning the Imperial University writing style (*taixue ti* 太學體) on the departmental examination (*shengshi* 省試), I would argue, represents a response to the pluralistic intellectual atmosphere at the university that the lecturers Hu and Sun had pushed to newer heights. The manner in which Ouyang advanced his intellectual agendas in the dual arenas of examination and education very likely inspired Wang Anshi to adopt similarly high-handed tactics two decades later.

Chapter 3 discusses the installation of a school promotion mechanism at the Imperial University in 1071 as a product of negotiation and compromise between emperor Shenzong and reform-minded scholar-officials. Implementation of the Three Hall system triggered an increasingly politicized Imperial University, signified by Wang Anshi's elimination of dissenting lecturers while exploiting educational institutions to promote his own school of thought. The final part of this chapter

discusses the response of the emperor to Wang Anshi's dominance. By removing Wang's disciples from teaching positions and installing a comprehensive regulatory framework to administer the metropolitan schools, the emperor reclaimed his authority over official recruitment.

After the death of Shenzong in 1085, most of the reform measures in education and examinations were abolished when the anti-reformers held sway in the court. Chapter 4 shows how the anti-reformers mythologized the Imperial University in the 1050s as an ideal prototype, which served not only as a basis to criticize the Three Hall system but also as a tool to limit the prerogatives of the teenage emperor Zhezong. Yet when Zhezong resumed personal rule in 1093, he reinstated and further expanded Shenzong's practices at the Imperial University, through which imperial authority was reinforced once again. Frequent reversals of university personnel, school curriculum, and examination topics in less than two decades are manifestations of fierce contests among different factions at court.

To recruit more morally upright officials, emperor Huizong, with the help of his chief councilor Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126), extended the Three Hall system at the Imperial University empire-wide in the early twelfth century. Chapter 5 traces the actual implementation of this recruitment channel in connection with the metropolitan schools. It reveals that some apathetic and corrupt administrators exploited the systems to pursue their personal agendas, thereby corrupting the idealistic policies of the Song court. In response to the dominance of court surrogates, Huizong initially attempted to reclaim imperial authority in the educational realm and ultimately abolished this idealistic project in 1121 as he could no longer benefit from it.

Chapter 6 offers a critical analysis of the effectiveness of the political and ideological control that Cai Jing imposed at government schools through a prosopographical survey of teachers and students in the Imperial University. Despite the fact that teachers were required to report the illicit deeds of students, some of them did not fully adhere to the regulations as prescribed by Cai Jing. As a result, some students were indulged to circulate prohibited works and even criticize government officials and policies, which culminated in student protests and appeals in 1126. Compared with Cai Jing's failure, Huizong's efforts to recruit morally upright officials proved not to be in vain after all, since some students demonstrated their loyal endeavors to save the Song in the midst of the Jurchen invasions.

After summarizing the principal findings and major arguments of this book, the concluding chapter discusses the legacy of the Three Hall system and the modern implications of the Northern Song experiments to recruit moral officials. The Imperial University was a site where different political actors competed over their agendas, which included the assertion of imperial authority, the elimination of political opposition, the imposition of strict morality, the nomination of outstanding students, and the hope to enter officialdom. Competition and negotiation over these agendas led to changes in educational policies that impacted on the university's development, which did not occur in a linear or progressive fashion, but rather

back-and-forth due to ongoing resistance. Moreover, how the Imperial University actually operated also redefined the agendas of different actors and influenced their decisions and behavior. This case study of the fluid political processes revolving around the Northern Song Imperial University showcases the subtle interactions between institutions and agents in pre-modern China.

4

Factional Politics and Policy Reversals

In 1085/3, the most powerful supporter of the New Policies, Emperor Shenzong, perished.[1] His nine *sui* son successor, posthumously known as Emperor Zhezong, was too young to govern. Dowager Empress Gao高太后 (1032–1093), the mother of Shenzong and grandmother of Zhezong, hence acted as regent. For the sake of establishing her own authority, she summoned veteran officials like Wen Yanbo, Sima Guang, and Lü Gongzhu who served in the court of her deceased husband, Emperor Yingzong, to lead the government.[2] Well-known for their aversion towards the New Policies, most of the reform measures were denounced and then abolished.[3] As for education and examinations, what critiques were launched against the Three Hall system and in its defense? The first part of this chapter discusses how the anti-reformers attempted to detach official recruitment from schools through an examination of their proposals to rectify the metropolitan schools.

Despite sharing an archenemy in common—the reformers under the lead of Cai Que—and a similar vision that school education should nurture moral integrity, the anti-reformers should never be treated as a coherent group. Instead it was a loosely organized coalition, within which three distinctive factions named after their geographical region had traditionally been identified, namely the Shuo 朔 faction from Hebei, the Luo 洛 faction from Luoyang 洛陽, and the Shu 蜀 faction from Sichuan.[4] The extent to which changes in educational policies and university personnel relate to the rise and fall of different factions, particularly at the beginning of Dowager Empress Gao's regency in 1085–1086 and Emperor Zhezong's assumption of personal rule in 1094, will be examined in this chapter.

1. *SS*, 16.313.
2. Fang Chengfeng, *Beisong wanqi de zhengzhi tizhi yu zhengzhi wenhua*, 8–10.
3. Levine, "Che-tsung's Reign (1085–1100) and the Age of Faction," 484–509; Ji, *Politics and Conservatism in Northern Song China*, 165–80; Luo Jiaxiang, *Pengdang zhizheng yu Beisong zhengzhi*, 84–145.
4. Levine, "Che-tsung's Reign (1085–1100) and the Age of Faction," 509–31 and *Divided by a Common Language*, 99–125; Luo Jiaxiang, *Pengdang zhizheng yu Beisong zhengzhi*, 146–71; and Wang Zengyu, "Luo, Shu, Shuo dangzheng bian," 114–34. Recently scholars have advocated revisiting the nature of factional conflicts in the Yuanyou period. See Fang Chengfeng, *Beisong wanqi de zhengzhi tizhi yu zhengzhi wenhua*, 59–80; Hirata, "Songdai pengdang xingcheng zhi qiji," 110–14; and Leung Sze-lok, "Beisong pengdang zhengzhi yanjiu moshi de huigu yu zhanwang," 47–62.

The previous chapter shows that Emperor Shenzong held sway over the process of recruiting officials after a comprehensive regulatory framework was installed to limit the purview of university professors. How did the anti-reformers react to such an autocratic legacy upon the death of Shenzong? This chapter discusses the ways in which the anti-reformers asserted their authority over the newly enthroned emperor, including the imitation of a "mythologized" Imperial University of the late Renzong era when the Song government maintained a laissez-faire attitude, the abolition of the regulations that were detrimental to learning customs in the metropolitan schools, and the restoration of the emperor's visit to the Imperial University. How successful were these attempts in limiting Zhezong's authority is then evaluated.

Critiques of the Three Hall system at the Imperial University[5]

In 1086/I2, right policy monitor (*you zhengyan* 右正言) Zhu Guangting, a disciple of Hu Yuan and a pioneer of the Luo faction, memorialized the emperor requesting to install prominent teachers as professors at the Imperial University. He detailed the reasons as follows:

> In order to establish a peaceful foundation for the country, your subject perceives that the most urgent need is talent. To successfully nurture all talent under heaven, nothing comes before schools. How could talent be available if the court focuses on recruiting them, but not nurturing them? Nowadays the Imperial University and local schools, despite promising to promote talent, fail to nurture them primarily for lack of prominent teachers. For prominent teachers, their classical knowledge enables them to understand thoroughly the meaning of the sages, their conduct and righteous deeds serve as an exemplar for others to follow, and they genuinely take teaching and nurturing as their own responsibility. 立國家太平之基本者，莫急於人材。養天下人材之成就者，莫先於庠序。朝廷務要廣求人材，而不素為之養，則何由而得？今上庠與州郡學校雖名為興賢，而無養人材之實，所以然者，盖無名師之故也。夫所謂名師者，其經術足以窮聖蘊，其行義足以為人表，又能至誠以教養為已任者是也。
>
> Previously during the reign of Renzong, Hu Yuan was ordered to oversee the Imperial University. At that time most scholars followed his example, and hence lots of talent was successfully nurtured. But this situation does not exist today. How could a vast country extending to the four seas suffer from an insufficiency of people? The problem lies in lacking the will to identify talent. Schools nowadays do not emphasize rites and righteousness in their teaching and nurturance, caring only for harsh prohibitions and punishments. For the Classics that students studied or the conduct that they exhibited, it is hard to distinguish students who genuinely understand from those who just blindly follow regulations. School officials

5. The following discussion of the metropolitan schools in the Yuanyou era has made reference to Terada, *Sōdai kyōikushi gaisetsu*, 112–21; Yuan Zheng, *Songdai jiaoyu*, 32–36.

> just care for themselves and act cautiously, trying to avoid infringing upon those prohibitions. They hardly have spare time to study rites and righteousness! This should not be the situation at the Imperial University, the vanguard for promoting virtue. Now the court has almost eradicated all problematic regulations, but the formulation of superior policies is still imperceptible. To establish superior policies, we must first and foremost appoint prominent teachers and promote schools that nurture talent. The vanguard for virtue should originate in the capital, and the wind will soon sweep all under heaven. 昔在仁宗朝，詔胡瑗典太學。當是時，天下學者翕然向風，所以成就人材為多，至今未見其繼者。豈國家之大，四海之廣無其人？患在不求之也。今庠序之中，不見以禮義教養，唯見以苛禁繩治。其所習經術，所修行義，孰為發明，孰為觀法，學官者區區自顧，苛禁之不暇，奚暇治禮義哉！甚非所以為首善之地也。今朝廷所去弊政幾欲盡，而所修善政未甚聞。臣以謂所修善政，莫先於置名師、興學校以養人材，首善自京師，而風動天下。
>
> I humbly beg Your Majesty to order officials to widely recruit true Confucian scholars of wide repute for appointment at the Imperial University, empowering them to take teaching and nurturing as their own responsibility. The problematic Three Hall system as well as those harsh prohibitions should be abolished. When rites and righteousness are emphasized in the teaching of scholars, talent would naturally be nurtured and Your Majesty's foundation for Grand Peace erected. Your subject sincerely hopes that Your Majesty can address this matter of benefit for all people under heaven.[6] 伏望聖慈詔大臣博求真儒為天下所共推者，使主太學，以教養為己任，罷三舍之弊法，去一切之苛禁，專務以禮義教養多士，自然可以成就人材，為陛下立太平之基本。臣願陛下留神，天下幸甚。

Hua Zhen 華鎮 (1052–ca. 1113), a former university student who was nominated by two anti-reformers Sun Jue and Feng Ji 豐稷 (1033–1107) for the post of university professor in the late 1080s,[7] also echoed Zhu Guangting's proposal to install prominent teachers at the Imperial University. According to Hua, the failure of government schools to nurture talent owes much to the marginal quality of teachers. As a result, students were not pleased to the depths of their hearts and hesitated submitting themselves to teachers who lacked virtues.[8] Instead of holding the teachers responsible, Zhu Guangting attributed the poor teaching at the elite institution to the harsh prohibitions and punishments imposed by the reformers. According to Zhu, these measures had inhibited the growth of a healthy learning environment. Partly for this reason, Zhu sought to abolish the Three Hall promotion system. So what were the harsh prohibitions to which Zhu referred? And what problematic elements in the Three Hall system necessitated its abolition? Although

6. *SCZCZY*, 79.861–62; *QSW*, 92:373.
7. See *QSW*, 122:359–60 for evidence of his study at the Imperial University. The biographical sketch of Hua Zhen, written by his son Hua Chucheng, recorded that he was nominated by Sun Jue and Feng Ji to serve as University professor in the late 1080s. See *QSW*, 192:56–57.
8. *QSW*, 123:76.

details are lacking in Zhu's memorial, the discussion of other officials will provide some clues.

Likely in response to Zhu's memorial, an edict was issued in 1086/I2, ordering leading officials to nominate two deserving candidates as teachers at the metropolitan and prefectural schools.[9] But the crucial issue of abolishing the Three Hall system had yet to be touched upon. Nevertheless, minor revisions in the Three Hall system were underway. On the recommendation of left policy critic (*zuo sijian* 左司諫) Wang Yansou 王巖叟 (1043–1093), a close ally of the leader of the Shuo faction Liu Zhi, the court ordered in 1086/3 that the vice-director of education and university professors be in charge of the university's yearly public test. As stipulated in the reform package in 1079, this examination related to promotion from the Outer to the Inner Hall. For the sake of impartiality and fairness, the court had designated officials other than directorate personnel to oversee its operation. However, Wang Yansou challenged the cost-effectiveness and worthiness of such arrangement, noting that 42 officials, 107 clerks, and 237 assistants were involved in the public test in 1086. As in the civil service examinations, students had to be sequestered for a month in the examination hall, with the court responsible for their subsistence. But only three, fourteen, and eight students were promoted from the Outer Hall to the Inner Hall in 1083, 1084 and 1085 respectively—a very modest yield. Moreover, the outcome of public test in the university appeared far less important relative to the civil service examinations, leaving costs unjustified by consequences. Wang therefore argued that the court should restore operation of the public test to carefully vetted directorate personnel.[10]

After persuading the court to revise the public test, Wang Yansou further proposed in 1086/5 rescinding the mandatory one-year attendance requirement at the Imperial University. According to existing regulations, students were required to study at the university for a minimum of one year in order to be eligible for the university's nomination examination, an easier gateway to the higher level departmental examination in view of its generous nomination quota of six hundred.[11] However, strict enforcement of the attendance rule led to delayed progress for certain students. Wang indicated that some poor students had to wait three more years for the next cycle of civil service examinations just because they failed to meet the minimum attendance requirement due to one day of absence. Some students who had returned late from their leave of absence were required to sit for the university's readmissions examinations, failure at which caused students to be disqualified from the university's nomination examination. Wang therefore requested that the minimum attendance requirement be abolished, and that all former university students be qualified for the nomination examination at the university. He further requested the Directorate of Education to allow students who had cumulatively

9. *XCB*, 370.8944; *SS*, 17.321.
10. See *XCB*, 371.8991–92; *SHY*, *ZG*, 28.11; *SS*, 17.321 and 165.3911.
11. *XCB*, 301.7325 and 310.7525.

studied for one year since 1080 to take the upcoming nomination examination. These several requests were approved and implemented in 1086/7.[12] Interestingly, history repeated itself. In the aftermath of the Qingli reform forty years ago, a similar minimum attendance requirement at the university was abolished. The lifting of the requirement implies that school education was no longer deemed necessary to cultivating moral virtues in examination candidates. Neither was the university *per se* the ideal venue for scrutinizing candidates' conduct. In the view of some anti-reformers, the role of the Imperial University should be similar to the Directorate School prior to the Qingli reform as merely a place to prepare students for the civil service examinations.

Paralleling the re-emphasis on the civil service examinations, the Three Hall system at the Imperial University became a primary target of the anti-reformers. Wang Yansou fiercely criticized it in a memorial in 1086/4. Echoing the view of Zhu Guangting as quoted above, Wang associated the Three Hall system with the poor learning customs at the Imperial University:

> There are regulations appealing in name, but tormenting in practice. There are actions with good intentions, but hard to implement. The Three Hall system is of this sort. After the establishment of the Three Hall system, despite having students of estimable talent and extraordinary abilities, we have yet to see them successfully selected and recruited for office. Nevertheless, the harmful effects of keen competition have surfaced. Rampant bribery, the downside of keen competition, results in a flourish of judicial reviews and litigations, which ultimately leads to complicated rules against suspicious deeds. As a result, professors are fatigued by clerical minutia while students are harmed by literary rules and regulations. The natural way of nurturing talent has yet to be revitalized, and wholesome learning at the school has nearly ceased to exist, which caused knowledgeable men to sigh.[13]
> 法有為名則美而行之則艱，事有用意則良而施之則戾者，三舍是也。三舍之法立，雖有高材異能，未見能取而得之，而奔競之患起。奔競之患起，而賄賂之私行；賄賂之私行，而獄訟之禍興；獄訟之禍興，而防猜之禁繁。博士勞於簿書，諸生困於文法，非復渾然養士之體，而庠序之風或幾乎息，此識者之所共歎也。

Wang then went on to express his vision of an ideal Imperial University:

> Your subject believes that schools are places to gather and nurture groups of talented men, shaping their career ambitions while cultivating their repute. In this way, students can study in a relaxed manner to prepare for the civil service examinations. No alternative recruitment channel to the civil service examinations should exist, as multiple paths distract students and incite competition. When students concentrate on the benefits or detriments of their daily activities, it proves detrimental to the ideal of nurturing virtue and the way, and fails to promote

12. *XCB*, 377.9149–50; *SS*, 165.3911.
13. *XCB*, 374.9059.

Conclusion

This book addresses the politics of higher education in Imperial China during the Northern Song period. Building on recent insights in new political history, this book focuses on the fluid political processes revolving around institutional changes and interactions between the different political agents involved. Similar to its European counterparts, where struggles between emperors and popes as well as chancellors and bishops helped shape universities in medieval Europe,[1] the development of the Imperial University in Northern Song China was a product of negotiation and competition between emperors, scholar-officials, teachers, and students. Different agendas such as the assertion of imperial power, the elimination of political opposition, the imposition of ideological control, the nomination of students, and the hope to enter officialdom competed in the university environment, which in turn shaped the development of the school. In addition, the way in which the Imperial University actually operated also redefined the agendas of different actors and influenced people's decision and behavior. Previous chapters have highlighted the inextricable ties between politics and higher education and illustrated the subtle interactions between institutions and agents in Northern Song China with reference to the Imperial University.

The development of the Imperial University did not occur in a linear or progressive fashion: it underwent gradual transformation for a century after the founding of the dynasty, then rapid growth in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries with several interruptions in between, and ultimate decline after the 1120s. The detachment of the Imperial University from the Directorate School in the 1040s was a continuation of earlier ad hoc measures of the Song court to satisfy the lower elites' demand for education, representing the transition from aristocracy to meritocracy. Another sign of ongoing transformation was the convergence of the school curriculum and examination topics, which was aimed at attracting more students to study at the metropolitan schools. In addition, reformers in the 1040s questioned the effectiveness of the existing examination system in selecting talented and morally upright officials. They proposed a mandatory attendance requirement for students who studied in government schools prior to examinations and envisaged

1. Pedersen, *The First Universities*.

that a prolonged assessment of students' moral character would better guarantee the quality of prospective officials. Despite the fact that this requirement had only been in force for less than a year, it laid the foundation for a radical reform at the metropolitan educational institutions in the 1070s.

With limited government intervention, university lecturers in the 1050s like Hu Yuan and Sun Fu put forward their preferred style of writing and classical interpretation without much constraint. Yet this pluralistic intellectual environment in the university was not appreciated by everyone. Some scholar-officials attempted to impose a standard to unify diverse practices, as Ouyang Xiu advocated his preferred ancient prose style of writing in the departmental examination in 1057. Such a vision to unify custom was partially realized after Wang Anshi came to power in the 1070s. With the help of his disciples who served as lecturers at the Imperial University and the full endorsement of Shenzong, Wang managed to promulgate his own classical interpretations as the state orthodoxy in 1075.

Around the same time, the majority of scholar-officials reached a consensus on reforming the education and examination system: they aimed to recruit officials with integrity by transforming the recruitment mechanism and making government education more universally available and morally informed. The collected appeal of the scholar-officials managed to convince Emperor Shenzong, who endorsed the implementation of a school promotion mechanism at the Imperial University in 1071, likely because he was reassured of his supreme authority over the recruitment of officials under the newly established Three Hall system. In reality, the disciples of Wang Anshi who served as lecturers at the Imperial University were actually in control of the recruitment process, as they were empowered to nominate outstanding students to become officials. In response to a student's complaint of unfairness in university examinations, Shenzong removed the lecturers who promoted favoritism and hence eliminated the residual influence of Wang Anshi that was a potential threat to his authority. For the sake of reclaiming power over official recruitment and preventing his subordinates from manipulating school promotions, Shenzong restricted the power of university personnel and installed a comprehensive set of school regulations in the early 1080s.

But the accession of a child emperor after the untimely death of Emperor Shenzong reignited the hopes of scholar-officials seeking greater autonomy from the monarch. Apart from downsizing the Three Hall recruitment channel, the anti-reformers, under the cloak of reviving the ideal of moral education in schools, also abolished restrictive regulations—the former emperor's tool to ensure autocratic rule. In order to exert their influence over the teenage emperor, the anti-reformers persuaded Zhezong to imitate certain mythologized practices of his great grandfather Renzong like studying diligently and adapting a laissez-faire attitude in governance. They also urged Zhezong to visit the Directorate of Education, during which the emperor's authority would be succumbed to the intellectual authority of the scholar-officials. Yet after the matured Zhezong assumed personal rule in 1093, he

reinstated and further expanded his father's practices at the Imperial University, through which imperial authority was reinforced once again. Fierce factional conflicts among scholar-officials also made the situation increasingly favorable to the emperor, as Ari Levine suggested, "factionalists appealed directly to the throne to promote their allies and to purge their adversaries, employing rhetoric that imagined the court as the ultimate source of ethical and political authority and empowered the monarch as the ultimate arbiter of personnel and policy decisions."[2]

Even though the Three Hall system was expanded to government schools countrywide under the reign of Emperor Huizong, apparently fulfilling the ideal of recruiting morally upright and talented officials through government schools, school officials in the early twelfth century could no longer manipulate students' promotion to officialdom as their predecessors did in the early 1070s. Yet Cai Jing managed to extend his political influence through his manipulation of recruitment channels like the Directorate School, placement examinations, and protection privileges. In response, Huizong exhausted other means to reassert the emperor's authority in education by way of repeated issuance of imperially handwritten edicts. The ongoing presence of palace examinations in the face of school reforms and the heightened presence of Daoism on the university campus were also manifestations of the emperor's authority in the educational realm. The ultimate abolition of the Three Hall system in 1121, I would argue, was a result of this subtle power competition between the emperor and senior officials such as Cai Jing, since the emperor no longer deemed the pragmatic educational institutions as essential to strengthen his authority.

The development of the Imperial University in the last five decades of the Northern Song unveiled subtle power struggles between emperors and scholar-officials in the university environment. Earlier depictions of either linear ascendance or decline in imperial power have oversimplified the conflict-riddled relationship between Song emperors and scholar-officials. Echoing a wide range of nuanced case studies about the relationship between rulers and ministers throughout the course of the Song period,[3] this study shows that the relative power of emperors and scholar-officials varied from time to time under different circumstances. Neither side dominated the political arena throughout the entire course of the Northern Song. The active engagement of Emperors Shenzong and Huizong in the university environment corroborates Peter Bol's suggestion that autocracy rose to a new height when pro-reform emperors attempted to transform the society through universal kingship and activist governance with reference to the ancient model.[4] In contrast, imperial authority was constrained under circumstances like the accession of a

2. Levine, *Divided by a Common Language*, 2.
3. See Wang Ruilai, *Sōdai no kōtei kenryoku to shitaifu seiji*; Liu Jingzhen, *Beisong qianqi huangdi he tamen de quanli*; Liu, *China turning inward*; and Lau Nap-yin, "The Absolutist Reign of Sung Hsiao-tsung" for examples.
4. Bol, "Whither the Emperor?" 103–34 and "Emperors Can Claim Antiquity Too," 173–205.

child emperor, as shown in the anti-reformers' attempts to exert their influence over Zhezong. These findings reveal the complexities of Song political culture and help integrate the Song period into the scholarly discussion of the relationship between rulers and ministers within the longer span of Chinese history.

Competition and negotiation existed not only at the level between emperors and scholar-officials, but also among scholar-officials themselves, depending on whether their agendas converged or diverged. The reformers who promoted the New Policies and the anti-reformers who criticized the reform measures are usually considered as two distinct groups with almost nothing in common in terms of their political agendas. This study shows that majority of scholar-officials in the court in the late 1060s, among them Wang Anshi and Lü Huiqing who fervently promoted the reforms as well as Sima Guang and Lü Gongzhu who later became leaders of the anti-reformers, considered that the education and examination system had to be changed, though their opinions differed in how the reforms should be carried out. Yet when educational reforms were still under deliberation, the New Policies launched in the 1070s under the stewardship of Wang Anshi had already invoked fierce criticisms, some of which came from university lecturers and students. As a means to silence opposition and ensure ideological conformity among the group of prospective officials, Wang Anshi replaced those incumbent lecturers who were skeptical of the New Policies with his cronies and students. This led to the Imperial University becoming a battlefield of factional contests, in which reformers and anti-reformers alike competed to promote their own interests. This is attested to by the reshuffling of teachers at the Imperial University whenever a faction gained or lost power in the court. After the anti-reformers came to power in 1086, they replaced lecturers who had been appointed by the reformist government with their own followers like Zhang Lei, Lü Dalin, and You Zuo. When the reformers regained dominance in the court in 1094, they removed from office the lecturers who were closely associated with the anti-reformist administration. Instead candidates who obtained examination credentials during the reform eras were appointed to teaching positions at the Imperial University, on the assumption that they would adhere to the reform measures and the teachings of Wang Anshi. In addition, the reformist administration also planned a reshuffle of university students in the late 1090s with an aim to eliminate potential challengers of the reforms. The subtle changes of personnel at the Imperial University were manifestations of fierce factional contests, which extended beyond the court and affected the intellectual engagements of late Northern Song scholars in general.

As discussed in chapter 3, Wang Anshi exploited the government education system and promulgated his own *New Commentaries* as the standard for the civil service examinations and school curriculum in the 1070s. After a brief suspension during the anti-reformist Yuanyou era, the scholarship of Wang Anshi continued to enjoy the state's patronage for another thirty years when the reformers were in power. The reformist administration in the early twelfth century even imposed

ideological control through the prohibition of other competing schools of scholarship such as the one of Su Shi and Cheng Yi. Yet certain school officials did not wholeheartedly support this reformist agenda. In turn, some students exploited loopholes in regulatory enforcement and smuggled works of prohibited writers into the school campus. Some disciples of the Cheng and Su brothers even managed to pass the examinations by slightly changing their writing style for the sake of appearances. All these show how "heterodox" scholars in the school environment contested the ideological orthodoxy.

Despite the differences in intellectual orientation between Wang Anshi and the Learning of the Way scholars—the former focused more on political reformism while the later emphasized moral cultivation,[5] their attempts to reform social mores and to promote their own ideological beliefs are similar. Cheng Hao had a vision of unifying morality somewhat akin to Wang Anshi. Yang Shi, director of education in 1126, set out to assert the supremacy of the Cheng brothers through his manipulation of the university environment. Even though the ideals of these forerunners had yet to be received positively by the court and society during their lifetimes, their efforts somehow shaped the strategies of their followers in the Southern Song to promote the Learning of the Way against its rivals.[6]

The primary objective of students was to join the civil service, and the court somehow satisfied their interests through the establishment of the metropolitan schools, initially preparing them for examinations and subsequently offering them an alternative channel to enter officialdom. Located in the heart of Kaifeng, south of the imperial palace, the Imperial University was close to the Song court. The state envisioned that students could get closer to government officials serving and residing in the capital, allowing the former group to familiarize themselves with the latter's lives and duties. Yet the agendas of the court and students did not always coincide, particularly between the group of outspoken students and the political authorities that attempted to suppress dissidents. Echoing the ascending status of policy essays in the civil service examinations and the rising power of speaking officials who concurrently supervised the Directorate of Education in the 1030s and 40s, the trend toward commenting on politics soon became in vogue at the metropolitan schools. The opinion power held by scholars inside the metropolitan schools remained a potential challenge to court officials and even emperors. The removal of directorate lecturers who were accused of indulging students' criticisms against the New Policies in the 1070s and the banishment of a university student named Chen Chaolao who outlined fourteen "crimes" of chief councilor Cai Jing in the 1100s were just two of the many suppressions initiated by the reformist administration against dissidents at the Imperial University. Yet stringent political measures

5. De Bary, "A Reappraisal of Neo-Confucianism," 81–111; Bol, *"This Culture of Ours"* and *Neo-Confucianism in History*.
6. For a detailed discussion of how the Learning of the Way dominated the examination field in the Southern Song, see De Weerdt, *Competition over Content*.

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