

KU YEN-WU'S BASIC CONCERNS AND LOCAL POWER IN CHINA*

by

WEI-YING KU

Social theoreticians have posed a dichotomy between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*: namely, a difference between "those naturally developed forms of organization which have intrinsic and non-logical values to them" and those "deliberately formed associations for rational achievement of mutual goals."¹ Many social theorists such as Karl Marx, Sir Henry Maine, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim saw the social changes of their time as moving the world from the former towards the latter.² In Karl Wittfogel's theory of Oriental Society, which attempted to analyze the Chinese empire, there was also a fundamental division between state and society; that is, between institutions "born of state prescription" and those "born of the needs of natural social unity." "According to this theory and its derivatives, a powerful despotic state seeks to impose its own forms of organization upon the natural units of rural society in order to control and tax them."³

The central government's progressive acquisition of local power since the Sui dynasty (589-619) can be seen as a process in which a powerful despotic state (the court) had sought to impose its own forms of organization (local governments) upon the natural units of rural society in order to control or tax them. In a way comparable to the Western social theorists' perception of social evolution, Ku Yen-wu also saw the social change of the last one thousand years in China as the eclipse of local community in favour of a

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1 Joseph R. Gusfield, *Community: A Critical Response* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 10.

2 Ibid., pp 4-5.

3 Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China, Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. 35.

centralized empire. One difference between Ku and some Western social theorists was his attitude toward social change. Marx and Spencer saw the destruction of the old world of communal patterns as the end of constraints on human equality and economic affluence, an end to the tyranny of custom, and a leap to the "Kingdom of Freedom."⁴ But Ku Yen-wu, like some other social theorists such as Comte, identified the loss of community with the destruction of a stable environment and an authority essential to human well-being. They saw chaos in the disappearance of a system of ordered and respectful relations between stable classes.⁵

In the late Ming, the development of local government seemed to point in this direction. The Ming local government always seemed to pursue the interest of national government at the expense of the feelings of local communities. Thus, Ku wanted reform. One thing we must bear in mind is that in seventeenth-century China, Ku Yen-wu, like many other scholars, made no distinction between local community and local government. In traditional China, instead of a theoretical distinction between "society" and "state," the familiar dichotomies were, for example, *feng-chien* versus *chün-hsien* or Confucianism versus Legalism. On balance, Ku did prefer *feng-chien* ideals and Confucianism to the others. However, he thought that law and central government were indispensable to the order of society.⁶ In short, he thought them necessary evil, but he wished for a minimum of centralized government and a maximum of local autonomy.

Ku did not prescribe an ideal local community, but rather a community-like local government. Ku seemed to think of a "good" local administration as the first step toward the ideal community, because most of his more explicit treatises on local affairs dealt with local government, especially at the county (*hsien*) level.⁷ Ku wanted to transform a self-centred local government into a local government more attuned to communal interests and local feelings. His design for local administration stressed the accommodation of community needs. Many scholars, including Ku, usually referred to the *hsien* when speaking of local government because in the *hsien* the government official were theoretically able to have personal contact with the people.⁸ To get a better

4 Gusfield, *Community: A Critical Response*, p. 5.

5 Ibid.

6 JCL, 8: 19b; SWC, pp. 12-17.

7 SWC, pp. 12-17.

8 Ch'ien Mu, *Cheng-hsüeh ssu-yen* (author's preface dated 1945, reprint Taipei, 1967), p. 46; John Watt, *The District Magistrate in Late Imperial China* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1972), p. 11.

understanding of Ku's proposal, it is worth looking briefly at traditional Chinese local government, particularly during its golden age and its decline after the Sung dynasty.

The Historical Model of Chinese Local Government

Many traditional thinkers in China looked to the text known as the *Rites of Chou* (*Chou Li*) for inspiration and support in reform. In the late Ch'ing, both orthodox Confucians like Feng Kuei-fen and their enemies the Taiping leaders, advocated the restoration of the "village official" (*hsiang-kuan*) according to the *Rites of Chou*.⁹ This text was so extensively and frequently referred to by such reformers that John Watt, a Western scholar of China has said:

For a guide to the policy of tranquilization, the *Chou Li* was the most persuasive source. It was the *Chou Li* which provided the classic precedents for systems for equitable land allotment registration systems, provision of famine relief, arbitration of minor litigation, or forensic techniques for solving criminal cases. Above all, the *Chou Li* was the classic source for the public security systems of later ages.¹⁰

Modern Chinese historians might dispute this statement on two points. First, the impeccable institutions recorded in the *Chou Li* had not actually existed in the Chou dynasty; they were only ideal versions of a government structure which gradually through many generations acquired an aura of perfection and were later mistaken for the real Chou institutions.¹¹ The *Chou Li* itself was not even purely Confucian.¹² Secondly, many historians would argue that although later dynasties could not be compared favourably with the golden age of China, there were good and effective institutions in some of the post-Chou dynasties from which people could learn and adopt ideas. The local administration of the Han dynasty, the recruitment of elites during the Han and the T'ang, the defense strategies of the reign of Sung T'ai-tsu,

9 Feng Kuei-fen, *Chiao-pin lu k'ang-i* (author's preface dated 1860-1861, Shanghai, 1884), pp. 10-12b; Chu Ch'ien-chih, *T'ai-p'ing t'ien-kuo ke-ming wen-hua shih* (Chiang-hsi, 1944), pp. 78-81.

10 John R. Watt, *The District Magistrate in Late Imperial China*, p. 168.

11 Hsü Fu-kuan, *Chou-kuan ch'eng-li chih shih-tai chi ch'i ssu-hsiang hsing-ke* (Taipei, 1980), preface.

12 The *Chou Li*, according to Hsü Fu-kuan, was filled with Legalist ideas. See *ibid.*, p. 96.

and the peasant-oriented policies of the first Ming emperor are but a few.¹³ The prefecture and county (*chün-hsien*) system was initiated by the Ch'in dynasty. Traditional scholars of later generations were reluctant to say anything good about the institutions of this first unified Chinese empire because the ill-fated Ch'in regime was notorious for its oppressive policies. The Han dynasty replaced the Ch'in and lasted more than four hundred years. The strength and glory of the Han empire became the pride of the Chinese people. Local administration was one of the most important legacies of Han rule.¹⁴ In his strenuous search for the ideal local government, Ku Yen-wu unmistakably singled out the Han local system as a model.¹⁵ To get a sense of comparison with Ku's ideas, it is necessary to set forth the basic features of the Han local government.

One prominent feature was the simplicity of the structure. There were only two levels of local administration: prefecture (*chün*) and county (*hsien*). The number of prefectures was slightly more than one hundred, and the number of *hsien* ranged from eleven hundred to fourteen hundred. In other words, each *chün* was responsible for the business of approximately ten to twenty counties. There were no provinces or circuits (*tao*) standing between the court and the prefectures, neither was there any unit between the prefecture and the counties. There were many lower officials (*hsiao-kuan*) and few high officials (*ta-kuan*) in the Han government which, according to Ku was a key requirement for a prosperous society.¹⁶

Another feature of the Han local government structure was the high status of the prefect (*t'ai-shou*.) The official salary for these officials was two thousand *shih*, equal to that of the "nine ministers" (*chiu-ch'ing*). In other words, the prefect was on the same status scale as a minister in the central government. Indeed, there are cases showing that some prefects were later transferred to ministerial positions or even appointed as one of the "three highest officials" (*san-kung*).¹⁷ The job of prefect was so financially rewarding and prestigious that it was in the best interests of the job holder to

13 These are the opinions of Ch'ien Mu, Meng Sen and Ku Yen-wu. See Ch'ien Mu, *Chung-kuo li-tai cheng-chih te-shih* (Taipei, 1955), p. 48; Meng Sen, *Ming-tai shih* (Taipei, 1957), p. 7; JCL, 8: 8-9.

14 Ch'ien Mu, *Cheng-chih te-shih*, p. 15.

15 This is indicated by the fact that Ku devoted much space to discussing the merit of the Han local system in JCL and Ku used the Han term for local government—*chün-kuo* (prefectures and kingdoms) as part of the title of his other very famous work: *T'ien-hsia chün-kuo li-ping shu* (*The Advantages and Disadvantages of Local Areas in China*).

16 JCL, 8: 5.

17 Ch'ien Mu, *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, (Ch'ung-king, 1940) p. 157.

achieve success. The simple structure of officialdom also facilitated interchangeability of posts between the central and local government.

The rights and powers which Han prefects enjoyed were also the envy of later local officials. Han local officials did not have to observe the "law of avoidance," which meant that a native of a locality could serve as a prefect in his own home town, and did not have to take his family to a post thousands of miles away. There was also a minimum of higher supervisory personnel (normally only one). This policy not only relieved local officials of the burden of flattering numerous higher officials as their counterparts in later dynasties were forced to do, but helped these officials keep the dignity and spontaneity which Confucianists so greatly cherished. Above all, the Han prefects possessed the privilege of hiring all the officials under them.¹⁸ In other words, the system provided much leeway for the local government leaders to initiate programmes whenever they saw fit.

These leaders avoided the problems of the prefects or magistrates of later dynasties who, when they took office, simply inherited a group of established, experienced strangers already well practised in the arts of manipulation. The Han *t'ai-shou* was the "head" of the local government in the true sense of the word. He also had the freedom to control local finances and local military forces. The relationship between the *t'ai-shou* and the local officials under him was equivalent to that between the emperor and his subjects, and in fact they addressed each other the way the emperor and the subjects addressed each other.¹⁹ In short, the Han *t'ai-shou* was very powerful. The tenure of the office was also very long. The only difference between a feudal prince and a Han prefect was the hereditary nature of the former's position.

The only evaluation of the merits or demerits of the prefect came from the "censors" (*tz'u-shih*), who were dispatched by the court to every corner of the country in August of each year. Their assessment of the prefects' achievements was mainly based upon the prefects' ability to manage the government, recruit talent and prevent the miscarriage of justice.²⁰ The *tz'u-shih* reported to the court at the end of each year. If charge were made by the *tz'u-shih*, the court would launch an investigation. The status and salary of the *tz'u-shih* was a very low six hundred *shih*, but he was powerful and respectable. "The low status but the powerful position of the *tz'u-shih* kept

18 JCL, 9: 9b.

19 Yen Keng-wang, *Chung-kuo ti-fang hsing-cheng chih-tu shih* (Taipei, 1961), pp. 77-78.

20 JCL, 9: 4b.

them in high spirits and at the same time enabled them to perform their duties."²¹ To keep the *tz'u-shih* from showing favouritism towards the *t'ai-shou*, the tenure for the post was only one year.

The relationship between the centre and its localities was enhanced by the prefect's yearly "presentation of statistics books" (*shang-chi*). The statistic book" (*chi-pu*) to the presented was the annual administrative record, which included sections on finance, economics, education, justice, civil affairs, social unrest and natural disasters. These books were sent to the imperial capital in September or October and subjected to the scrutiny of the central government. This action provided an opportunity for the prefect to demonstrate the achievements and failures within his locality. It also symbolized the subordinate position of his administrative role to the whole of China. As long as the prefect was in power, however, he had complete autonomy within his locale.

Although Ku praised the brevity and straightforwardness of some Han county magistrates, he in fact acknowledged that the magistrate was only the subordinate (*shu-li*) of the *t'ai-shou*, and that the prefecture (*chün*) in the Han dynasty was the real model for later local government.²² The reason for this is that in sixteenth-century China, the county, like the Han prefecture, was the basic government unit. Furthermore, the population and workload of a Ming county resembled those of a Han prefecture.

A remarkable feature of Chinese local government was the stable number of counties. Ever since the Han, there had been approximately eleven hundred counties, whereas the population had increased about six times by the seventeenth century.²³ This was one reason why the Chinese gentry vastly increased its influence in the Ming-Ch'ing era, a time when the county government could no longer handle all the business of such a large population. Thus, Ku wanted a powerful seventeenth-century *hsien*, firstly, to recapture the efficiency of the Han *chün*, and, secondly, to eliminate the influence of the *sheng-yüan* by formalizing the local power of the whole gentry class. Ku thought to achieve these goals by appointing members of the local gentry class to the county magistrate and other local positions.

²¹ JCL, 9: 5.

²² JCL, 9: 18b-20.

²³ Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 257-278.

The Decline of Local Autonomy

Even though the number of counties remained relatively static, local autonomy had waned in medieval China, and its decline was a powerful influence which haunted Ku's thought. The Han dynasty—in many ways Ku's model—had disintegrated into the Three Kingdoms, a time when real power was in the hands of several influential lineages. It was not until the Sui and T'ang dynasties that China was unified.

There was a change of policy in the Sui which Ku saw as a significant change in China's local power structure in favour of the central government. In 595, the system of the "village official" (*hsiang-kuan*) was abolished by the Wen Emperor.²⁴ The channel by which local voices could reach the court disrupted. It seemed that, however, local power itself remained intact, as, on the one hand, the influence of huge clans and aristocrats was still very visible,²⁵ and, on the other hand, the T'ang local warlords (*fan-chen*) could still appoint their own subordinates.²⁶ Dr. John Watt notes: "By all accounts civil administration of district government reached a low ebb in the period preceding the Sung dynasty. With the breakdown of central appointment procedures, local administrative authority had become hereditary."²⁷ This statement also suggests that one final era of strong local autonomy flourished before the Sung dynasty. It is from the Sung dynasty onwards that we see the gradual increase of the power of the central government. This trend toward centralization continued until the mid-nineteenth century.

With the diminishing influence of T'ang aristocrats and the institutionalization of the civil service examinations, the emperors of China were in a better position to effectively rule local areas by using the non-hereditary, and thus more manageable, degree-holders. This innovation, along with the deliberate anti-militarist policy of the Sung founder, put an indelible mark on Chinese history. Ku Yen-wu was very critical of the Sung emperor's policies. He even suggested that as Sung policies had reduced local power, they were responsible for the collapse of the Ming.²⁸ It may be worthwhile to briefly discuss the Sung local policies here.

Sung T'ai-tsu, himself a military man of the Late Chou (951-960), was suddenly established by his officers as a ruler when his subordinates declared

24 JCL, 8: 9.

25 Ch'ien Mu, *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, pp. 350-354.

26 JCL, 9: 6b.

27 Watt, *The District Magistrate*, p. 107.

28 JCL, 9: 30b.

their allegiance to him. The existence of other local warlords made the new emperor uncomfortable, because they were possible competitors for the mandate of heaven. In a dramatic move during a grand feast, the new ruler relieved all the powerful warlords their duties and gave them handsome pensions.²⁹ The warlords were forced to retire and the central government took over local government. Emperor Chao K'uang-ying also established a few precedents for his descendants to observe, such as prohibitions against killing high officials and censors; these carried much weight in a country which cherished filial piety as much as China. The positive effect of this policy is evident in the fact that many officials still identified themselves with the Sung and rose against the conquerors when the Sung succumbed to the Mongols.³⁰

It was during the Sung, however, that what remained of local autonomy collapsed. This was the first time in Chinese history that the local administration, the economy and the military establishment were controlled by the central government. This was a reaction to the disastrous military regionalism of the Five Dynasties period (*Wu-tai*, 907-960). Military men were asked to withdraw from the local government, and were replaced by civil officials sent by the court to local areas to assume the office of prefect or of county magistrate. The formal title for the office was merely "*chih-chou chün-shih*" or "*chin-hsien*," which meant "to manage the military affairs of the prefecture" or "to manage the county's affairs."³¹ In contrast to the Han titles *t'ai-shou* (the protector of the prefecture) or *hsien-ling* (the commander of the county), the Sung titles for local offices plainly showed that the new offices were not the real centre of local authority.

Basically, the Sung prefect and county magistrate were officials of the central government: they were assigned to local jurisdictions on a temporary basis. To protect the local leader from abusing power, the Sung court also established the office of vice prefect (*t'ung-p'an*) in each *chou*. Every decision on local affairs made by the prefect was not valid unless endorsed by the *t'ung-p'an*. The *t'ung-p'an* also had the right to make a secret report to the court.³² The dual leadership of the Sung *chou* government was another blow to local autonomy. The economic power of the locality was also taken away by the new office of "transportation commissioner" (*chuan-yün-shih*) in each

29 Ch'ien Mu, *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, p. 383.

30 Ibid. Also, see JCL, 13: 6b.

31 JCL, 9: 12b.

32 JCL, 9: 14b; Lü Ssu-mien, *Chung-kuo t'ung-shih* (Shanghai, 1939), p. 112.

chou. Whereas in the T'ang dynasty a fixed amount of taxation income was withheld for local use, the *chuan-yün-shih* of the Sung was responsible for forwarding all income except the most minimal financial necessities to the capital.³³

In order to eliminate the regional military threat once and for all, something had to be done about local military forces. The central government of the Sung issued an order to local governments which asked that the elite of the local military forces be sent to the court to be imperial guards. Only those soldiers who did not become part of the imperial guard stayed in the local forces.³⁴ Thus the administrative, economic, and military powers of the local government were all assumed by the new regime. Many historians view this as the beginning of increasing despotism by the Sung dynasty and of a centralization process which was to reach a climax during the Ming-Ch'ing period.³⁵

Ku's harsh criticism of Sung T'ai-tsu's centralization policies seems to have come from his preoccupation with the collapse of the Ming dynasty, especially the failure of local resistance to the external threat.³⁶ To be fair to Sung T'ai-tsu, these policies were not inspired solely by his narrow personal interests. Reaction to the preceding chaos created by military regionalism notwithstanding, the emperor had other practical considerations which impelled him to initiate the reform of local government. One reason for the filling of local offices by people from the central government was the need to correct the wrongdoings of the magistrates in the preceding dynasties. Often, these men were dishonest, incompetent, and even senile former government clerks. Given the need to rectify corruption among greedy officials, it was crucial to have tough regulations restricting expenditures. Lastly, it is certain that the Sung emperor did not want to see any residual power granted to regional military leaders. Keeping weak and old soldier in the local forces was more or less justified by the fact that those soldiers undertook the corvee which would otherwise have been imposed on the peasants, as had been the case in previous regimes.³⁷

Nevertheless, in the late tenth century, China had the most respectable central government it had had in the last 200 years. The axiomatic policy

33 JCL, 12: 5-6.

34 Ch'ien Mu, *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, p. 376.

35 Miyazaki Ichisada, tr. Ch'iu T'ien-sheng, *Chung-kuo shih* (1977; 1980 tr. Taipei), p. 443.

36 JCL, 9: 26-30b.

37 Ch'ien Mu, *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, p. 376.

of the new regime—"strong stem, weak branches" (*ch'iang-kan jo-chih*) was characteristic of the Sung dynasty.³⁸ It is significant that this regime was constantly plagued by external threats, lost half of its territory to the Jurchen, and later was destroyed by the Mongol invasion. The remarkable similarities between Sung history and Ming history forced Chinese thinkers to reflect on the causes of the tragedy. It is not surprising that Ku and many of his contemporaries thought that over-centralization was a major factor. Different people advocated different corrective reforms. Huang Tsung-hsi discussed the importance of the Prime Minister in restricting the arbitrary power of the emperor, whereas Ku Yen-wu looked into the reform of local government. The difference between these two will be discussed later in this thesis.

The short-lived Yüan dynasty left an enduring imprint upon Chinese politics with which Ku also had to reckon. With regard to local government, the Mongol "provincial system" (*hsing-sheng chih-tu*) stands out as an example. The provincial system was closely related to the frequent movement of Mongol military forces. In order to centralize and maximize the efficiency of the commanding power of the military commanders in the field, the Yüan dynasty set up a temporary "acting Central Secretariat" (*hsing chuug-shu sheng*, sometimes abbreviated as *hsing-sheng*) in the areas away from the capital where there were emergencies. With this new institution, the emperor or the commissioner could mobilize all the possible resources they needed to achieve their goals. Later this *hsing-sheng* became a permanent high-level local administration ruled by high officials dispatched from the court. Thus there was yet another institutional level of political supervision imposed upon the *chou* and *hsien* governments which Ku wanted to eliminate.

The Mongols' practices of ethnic and social discrimination also had a bearing on the local government. Their rigid organization of social and professional groups placed the Chinese intellectual very low in the social hierarchy.³⁹ Many scholars turned from politics to the study of the classics. Consequently, the study of the classics (*ching-hsüeh*) advanced considerably in the Yüan.⁴⁰ Most Chinese offices under the Yüan were filled by the traditionally despised yamen clerks. The low quality of the officials, together

38 JCL, 9: 30.

39 Ch'ien Mu, *Kuo-shih hsin-lun* (Hong Kong, 1966), p. 87.

40 In fact, two widely used books for the civil service examinations—the *Complete Volume on the Five Classics* (*Wu-ching ta-ch'üan*) and the *Complete Volume on the Four Books* (*Ssu-shu ta-ch'üan*) in the Ming were mainly copied from the works of a Yüan scholar Wu Ch'eng. See Li Tung-fang, *Hsi-shuo Yüan-ch'ao* (Taipei, 1966), pp. 341-343.

with the Mongols' suspicion of the Han Chinese, contributed to the corruption and inefficiency of Yüan administration. Two common descriptions of the government clearly reveal the characteristics of this regime: "Conquering from horseback, and ruling from horseback" (*ma-shang te-chih, ma-shang chih-chih*); and "ruling the country with yamen clerks" (*i-li chih-kuo*).⁴¹

The founder of the Ming dynasty can be compared in many ways to the founder of the Han dynasty, except in his policy toward local government. Ming T'ai-tsu, being the son of a poor peasant family, had more knowledge of the problems of the peasant and of agriculture than any other dynastic founder. As is well-known, Ming T'ai-tsu's major innovations in agriculture were the compilation of a Land-Tax Registry (*yü-ling t'u-ts'e*) and a Household Registry (*huang-ts'e*), and the creation of local unit chiefs (*chia-chang*) and land-tax coordinators (*liang-chang*). Wu Han, a famous modern Ming specialist, regarded these inventions as a renewal of exploitation of the peasant and as the betrayal of the peasant. Wu made the following comment:

(On the surface these policies) seemed to benefit the poor. But in fact, the poor could gain nothing, as those who executed the compilations of these Registries were landlords, those who collected taxes were also landlords, the *li-chang* and the head of *chia* again were landlords. The landlord class would never look after the interests of tillers or tenants.⁴²

Modern Western scholarship views these innovations differently. Dr. John Watt looked at the revision of local leadership as a deliberate attack on the local administrator's power: "The immediate aims of the *li-chia* system were to equalize the tax burden and to have the people collect it themselves... There is little doubt that the *li-chia* system was designed to diminish the power of officialdom over rural society."⁴³ Professor Jerry Dennerline also regards the *li-chia* system as a design "to allow local landowners to share the responsibility for distributing the other service obligations in their community." In other words, Dennerline thinks that "the Ming founder revived the ideal of participatory administration by reintroducing conscription for local services."⁴⁴

41 Meng Sen, *Ming-tai shih*, p. 26; Wu Han, *Tu-shih tsa-chi* (Peking, 1956), p. 318.

42 Wu Han, *Chu Yüan-chang chuan* (Peking, 1949), p. 140.

43 Watt, *The District Magistrate*, pp. 111-114.

44 Jerry Dennerline, "Fiscal Reform and Local Control," Frederic Wakeman, Jr., and Carolyn Grant, ed. *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, (Berkeley, University of California, 1975), pp. 90-91.

At any rate, it is true that the *li-chang* and *liang-chang* were rich peasants, and the people sent to the countryside to measure the land were also from landlord families.⁴⁵ The problem raised by the different interpretations is: to what extent can we say that in early Ming China a gentry family was by definition a rich family? This is not an easy question to answer. Suffice it to say that whatever else was in Chu Yüan-chang's mind, he stressed the importance of formalizing the previously informal local influence possessed by rich families.

This attempt obviously failed, because the *li-chang* and *liang-chang* system did not last very long. The magistrate became the agent of the central government with official powers, and the landlords and degree holders out of office possessed tremendous unofficial power in local areas. With this in mind, we can easily understand why the Ming authorities tried to prohibit the local *sheng-yüan* from banding together and voicing their political opinions. Having seen and even suffered from the wrongdoings of the rapacious *sheng-yüan* in local areas, it is not surprising that Ku wanted to create a new kind of *sheng-yüan* who would be more sensitive to the interests of the local community.

One source of the informal power possessed by the *sheng-yüan* in local areas was the private academies (*shu-yüan*). The academy system had become especially popular in the Yüan dynasty when many Chinese literati retired to set up private schools as a protest againsts Yüan alien rule. In the Ming period, the local *sheng-yüan* and other degree-holders also found a base in private academies. Not only did they preach their own ideals, but they also formed a climate of opinion which in turn became crucial in court politics. The Tung-lin movement of late Ming times was mainly a function of this academy system. Due to involvement in factional struggles the academies were banned in the late Ming, and the prohibition of *sheng-yüan* from meeting was re-confirmed. The local degree-holders thus lost the power which might have been used as a leverage against the ubiquitous and far-reaching despotic and centralizing influence.⁴⁶

Neither the local *sheng-yüan* nor the director of county schools had any power in the formal education system; it was the magistrate and the director

⁴⁵ Wu Han, *Chu Yüan-chang chuan*, p. 140.

⁴⁶ It is called *wo-pei* (laying tablet). There were twelve prohibitions inscribed on it which were issued in 1379. See *Ta-Ming hui-tien* (orig. pub. 1587; reprint Taipei, 1964), 78: 1808-1810. But the prohibitions were not enforced throughout the Ming, the *wo-pei* degenerated into "empty words" (*chü-wen*), *Ming-shih* (Teh-chih pub. co., Taipei reprint, 1962), 69: 8, p. 28887.

of provincial schools who were in charge of public education.⁴⁷ Furthermore, authority in the county government was very much concentrated in the hands of the magistrate, rather than being broadly distributed among the various sinecures at both the county and prefecture levels of administration. The magistrate, however, was kept under close restriction and surveillance. It was these restrictions and surveillance that Ku Yen-Wu disliked most. He believed these to be the major barriers against achieving an ideal, spontaneous, responsible local government. The magistrates were also under heavy pressure. Their authority was confined by a detailed system of disciplinary controls, and they were given little chance for promotion.⁴⁸

Simply put, the local administration from the county level upward had become very much centralized since the Sung dynasty. The central authority had taken over the administrative, economic and military power of local government. However, this was not the only cause for Ku's alarm. There was something far more ominous. Due to the insufficient number of county governments, the local areas of China has become more difficult to control. The centralization of local authority did not help to ease this predicament, because even at his best, the magistrate still could not handle the average two hundred thousand inhabitants of each county. The cooperation of the local scholar-gentry and powerful lineages was indispensable in keeping a *hsien* in order. The centralization of local economic and military power, however, made cooperation precarious because the resources which the local scholar-gentry or lineages could mobilize were limited. While the magistrate monopolized the formal administrative power, the local scholar-gentry and their lineages possessed informal authority. Both parties, doubtless, shared some common interests, such as maintaining the status quo, but when radical change such as dynastic change became inevitable, tension and strife emerged between them.

On the surface, the number of forces and the power at China's disposal were formidable, but China was riddled with such conflicts of interest that she could not summon any decisive strength with which to resist an organized outside attack. Being so huge, but at the same time so centralized in terms of governmental structure, Ku saw China as totally vulnerable to any invasion. Thus, he advocated the *feng-chien* ideal in order to inject some

47 Watt, *The District Magistrate*, p. 14; T'ung-tsu Ch'ü, *The Local Government in China under the Ch'ing* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 10.

48 Watt, *The District Magistrate*, p. 77.

communal spirit into this huge, loosely organized society. A few quotations from Ku may demonstrate my point:

The ancient sage kings treated the people of the world with public-mindedness (*kung-hsin*). They divided the country into several states and enfeoffed the overlords. The emperors of modern days take over the whole world within the four seas as their own prefectures and counties. And they are still not contented. The emperors of modern days are suspicious of everyone; they take charge of everything. The regulations and documents (in the local government) get increasingly complicated. Still the emperors impose the office of censor on the local governments, and again the prefects and magistrates can not exploit the people. What they do not know is that the local official are doing nothing but avoiding any trouble. The prefects and magistrates will congratulate themselves if they are replaced without any punishment. None of them would like to do anything beneficial to the people even for one day. How could the people not be poor? How could the country not be weak?⁴⁹

....Therefore the great need of this country is to have prefects and magistrates (more sensitive to the interest of the people). But today no one is more powerless than prefects and magistrates. The prefects and magistrates have no power, and the sufferings and complains of the local people are not heard by the central government. How can we expect to keep peace in the society and to prolong the mandate of heaven for the dynasty?⁵⁰

...and in the prefectures and counties of today, the local officials have no specific power and local people do not know what to do. That is why there are so many rebellions and barbarian invasions. (When they) come to one prefecture, this prefecture collapses; (when they) come to one county, this county falls.⁵¹

Ku's general principle, underlying his proposed reforms of local government, was to make the whole country into the magistrate's personal property which could be handed down from generation to generation. Then, in times of external threat, he was confident that there would be "some one who would

49 SWC, p. 12.

50 JCL, 9: 15b.

51 SWC, p. 15.

defend the country to the death, some one who would try to unite with other people to resist the invasion."⁵²

It is necessary to examine the problem of the failure of the resistance movement of the Ming loyalists. No more relevant questions are asked on this topic than those raised by Jerry Dennerline in a recent essay. Dennerline's three major questions are as follows:

Given the high rate of resistance throughout the Yangtze valley and the south, why was the native political structure unable to survive the Ch'ing challenge? If the resistance leaders were at once the representatives of Ming authority and the natural leaders of local society, why were they unable to retain control of their home districts when Ch'ing magistrates with no local reputation or connections arrived to take office? With such an abundance of Ming princes and pretenders, provincial armies and powerful warlords, loyalist ministers and gentry stalwarts roaming the south until the 1680's why did popular nativist sentiment not provide them with the strength to expel the invaders?⁵³

If we accept the premises which underline these questions, Professor Dennerline's answers are, first, that the interests of local officials were in conflict with those of the local magnates,⁵⁴ and furthermore, there was a hiatus in the political structure of local society: the Ming loyalists were in no way able to maintain effective control over the resistance forces.⁵⁵

The terms Professor Dennerline employs in his essay are not always clear, and his interpretation of the failure of the resistance movement lacks sufficient substance. He employs more than ten different names for important local people: local magnates, village landlords, village leaders, local leaders, bureaucratic leaders, paramilitary leaders, local elite, local strongman, rebellious magnate, powerful families...⁵⁶ Only one clear group emerges from among these many names—the "bureaucratic elite." Professor Dennerline uses this term to refer to the degree holders who were eligible for public

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Dennerline, Hsü Tu and the Lesson of Nanking: Political Integration and the Local Defense in Chiang-nan, 1634-1645," Jonathan Spence and John Wills, Jr., ed. *From Ming to Ch'ing—Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-century China*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 116, 112, 109, 118, 121, 102, 126.

office,⁵⁷ but his other categories are difficult to identify. On one occasion, Dennerline states: Hsü Tu may well have been typical of the local leadership."⁵⁸ But what is unclear here is which interest Hsü represented. If Hsü was representing local interest, then what segment of the local people did he represent? The local magnate? The bureaucratic elite? Or the village leaders?

Professor Dennerline's interpretation of the conflicts of interest is also somewhat vague. Conflicts existed everywhere, even among close relatives. What is crucial about the failure of the resistance here is why and how the local magnates would think they might be better off under Manchu rule. The temptation to accept the Ch'ing offer of surrender was open to everyone, no matter whether they were Ming loyalists or local magnates.

Ku Yen-wu did not consider the failure of the resistance movement to be the result of defects in the local political structure. On the contrary, he thought that local society would have been much stronger and better off if the central government had adopted a more less laissez-faire policy on local government. In Ku's eyes, the greater the integration of local and central government, the more vulnerable to external attack the county or prefecture would be. Ku thought that the failure of the resistance movement was caused by a lack of strength in the counties and prefectures. Yet many factors contributed to the weakness of local defence.

According to Ku, one point was crucial: the over-concentration of local authority in the hand of the central government. This being the case, there was no room or incentive left for local people to initiate defense programmes. Even if some people intended to do so, they lacked the indispensable economic and military resources to implement such programmes. In the *Jih-chih lu*, Ku quoted the words of Ch'en Liang of the Sung dynasty as a way of voicing his opposition to the centralization policy:

During the period of the Five Dynasties, the military and financial power were concentrated in the hands of local leaders. The First Emperor of the Sung dynasty reversed this trend and held these powers in the central government in order to suppress the rebellions. The emperors of later generations did not understand the motivation behind this policy and maintained their hold on these powers. This caused the emptiness and weakness of the

57 Ibid., p. 126.

58 Ibid., p. 125.

prefectures and counties. Thus the centre and the local areas are vulnerable.⁵⁹

For Ku, the first step toward a stronger local defence would be the establishment of autonomous local governments. Ku also wished to make administrative, educational, social, and economic reforms in order to consolidate local defence.

Certainly Ku did not have the exact questions raised by Professor Dennerline in mind when he set forth his ideas about local community and government. What Ku tried to answer was, more likely, the question of why the Ming court suffered and failed to hold off the Manchu invasion. But if we take a closer look at the questions raised by Dennerline, we notice that some of the premises are invalid, and that the questions themselves reveal the cause of the failure of the resistance movement. In the second half of Dennerline's second question, the premise that the new Ch'ing magistrates had "no local reputation or connections" is dubious. As a matter of fact, the first Ch'ing magistrate of K'un-shan, according to Ku's biography, was the former deputy magistrate Yen Mao-ts'ai. It is obvious that Yen must have had local connections and local knowledge. The Manchus did not build an entire empire from nothing. They conquered China and consolidated their power largely through the collaboration of Chinese officials and people.⁶⁰ And, more important, the Manchus basically inherited the established Ming institutions with which they could govern the whole empire.⁶¹ In other words, the Ch'ing dynasty was successfully established by utilizing the prestige, connections, and experience of prominent Chinese collaborators.

Dennerline's last question, referring to the "abundance of Ming princes and pretenders, provincial armies and powerful warlords, loyalists, ministers and gentry stalwarts roaming the south until the 1680's," asks why such people were denied sufficient support of popular nativist sentiment. But the very "abundance" of these partisans is the real crux of the matter. Ironically enough, the more Ming princes who claimed to be the legitimate heirs to the Ming throne, the fewer the resources which such princes could draw upon. At first glance, the sheer number of different loyalist forces and the areas they influenced looked formidable, but their lack of coordination left these

⁵⁹ JCL, 8: 21.

⁶⁰ The Manchus acquired various help from Chinese intellectuals throughout different stages of conquest. See Li Kuang-t'ao, "Lun Hung Ch'eng-ts'ou chih chao-fu Chiang-nan," *Ming-ch'ing shih lun-chi* (Taipei, 1971) pp. 468-487; and also Ch'ien Mu, *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, pp. 590-593.

⁶¹ Meng Sen, *Ming-tai shih*, p. 9.

resistance groups vulnerable to the more efficient Manchu-Chinese military opposition.

The Peculiar Tyranny of Clerks in Late Ming Local Government

Local defence was not the first priority of the magistrate. Formally, it was only one part of national defence. Collecting taxes and capturing law-breakers was more important to the county magistrate. Ming T'ai-tsu's failure to encourage local rich people's participation in government, as in the case of the *liang-chang* and the *li-chang*, meant that the magistrate had to rely more on the yamen clerks and runners. The yamen clerks and runners in turn depended largely on the informal influence of the local *sheng-yüan* to enforce the payment of taxes. Collusion between the yamen clerks and the local *sheng-yüan* was reinforced by the fact that the magistrate was an outsider, a non-native appointed by the central government according to the law of avoidance.

Since the Sung dynasty, local government had been plagued by yamen clerks (*hsü-li*). During preceding dynasties such as the Han or T'ang, the *hsü-li* had been less distinguishable from the formal officials.⁶² In other words, the possibility of *hsü-li* rising to the ranks of officials (*kuan*) had been high. As a matter of fact, a general term for officials in China had been *kuan-li*, a term which combined both categories. The habit of making a sharp distinction between the two started in the Sung dynasty.

The clerks gradually formed their own caste-like status. There are several reasons for this development including: first, more frequent recruitment of officials from among *chin-shih* degree holders; second, Sung T'ai-tsu's increasing reliance on yamen clerks and distrust for officials, and third, the tedious nature of the clerks' work. The *hsü-li* had no access to the channels of promotion. Their meagre salaries and low social status contributed to their corruptibility. Furthermore, the technicalities involved in the transfer of documents, government accounting, and various niceties of legal work all daunted outsiders and helped to make the jobs of yamen clerks hereditary, or at least passed on from masters to apprentices. Even in the Sung, this situation became so acute that the famous statesman and thinker Yeh Shih once remarked: "nowdays the officials are not feudalistic, but the clerks are

62 The *hsü-li* problem could be traced as early as in the Six Dynasties (222-589). But only in the Sung it became a major problem for the administration. See Miyazaki, tr. Ch'iu, *Chung-kuo shih*, p. 299.

feudalistic." (*chin kuan wu feng-chien, li yu feng-chien.*)⁶³

As mentioned earlier, the Mongols used such clerks to rule the country. However, the *li* were not admired, because the Yüan court adopted a discriminatory policy against Han Chinese, and many Chinese scholars did not want to serve as officials under alien rule. The situation was described as follows by the famous historian Wu Han:

After Yüan Shih-tsu (1280-1294) ascended the throne, the court even appointed a clerk Prime Minister. This became a fad. In the Central Plain (Northern China), a person could first be a clerk in the ministries and later become a high official and thus glorify his forbears and achieve fame as long as he knew characters and was able to handle documents. The scholars in the south would not participate in the civil service examinations, nor would they willingly be clerks. Their situation deteriorated. It was natural for them to harbour animosity toward the clerks in the north.⁶⁴

The founder of the Ming dynasty was a southerner who traditionally looked down on the *li*. Consequently, he undertook policies to reduce the importance of the clerks. The aforementioned *li-chang* and *liang-chang* systems are examples. By conferring administrative responsibilities upon local community leaders, the Ming government hoped to reduce the yamen clerks' opportunities to manipulate the governmental process. Another policy was the elimination of any possibility for a clerk to be promoted to the formal, more respectable bureaucracy. It was typical of the founder of new dynasties, and of Ming T'ai-tsu in particular, to appoint persons from different backgrounds to high positions en masse. Ming T'ai-tsu's imperial university students are well-known. However, the Ming founder decreed that everyone but the *hsü-li* would be allowed to participate in the examinations or be recommended to office. The *hsü-li* were rejected on the grounds their mentality had been corrupted (*hsin-shu i-huai*).⁶⁵ This policy was continued throughout the Ming dynasty.⁶⁶ Due to the Chinese practice of following ancestral precedents, the message from these incidents was clear: no clerks would be allowed to ascend to formal bureaucratic office.

63 SWC, p. 17.

64 This is quoted from Wu Han, *Tu-shih tsa-chi*, p. 318.

65 JCL, 17: 38.

66 JCL, 17: 38-39.

The *liang-chang* system was not successful, and it was later replaced by the *li-chang* system. The functions of the *li-chang* became such a burden that accepting them meant bankruptcy. Rich landlords avoided the problem by removing land from the land registers. Gentry families split their holdings, placing each piece of property in a different *li-chia* unit, thus qualifying for tax exemptions.⁶⁷ Thus, the rural government of the Ming still had to rely much on the yamen clerks in order to meet its tax collections quotas. Moreover, the Ming non-promotion policy toward the clerks drove them to seek even greater illicit profits, because there was no other means of furthering their careers.⁶⁸

Another policy that made the Ming clerks behave more disreputably was the punitive demotion to clerk status of disqualified imperial college students.⁶⁹ The clerks themselves formed a distinct group, and, being aware of their low social status, they indulged in loose living. Ming T'ai-tsu was worried that the clerks might lie, cheat, tamper with written documents, and manipulate regulations. In the long run, the clerks would have not only usurped the power of the bureaucrats, but would also have rendered the emperor's power ineffective.⁷⁰

The development of the Ming government to the sixteenth century did not entirely bear out Ming T'ai-su's worst fears. The clerks did expand their influence, but not so much at the expense of the emperor's power as at the expense of that of the officials. In Ming times, the emperors actually increased their power, but at the same time were greatly influenced by the eunuchs. The clerks became even more entrenched because the emperor did not completely trust officials at any level.⁷¹ In Ku's words, the yamen clerks were like "millions of tigers and wolves" who preyed on society.⁷²

The clerks' power increased not because the political attitude towards them changed, but because government power became centralized in imperial hands. To prevent officials at different levels from getting too much power, the Ming court sent out supervising officials to spy and report on other

67 Wakeman and Grant, ed., *Conflict and Control*, pp. 7-8.

68 JCL, 17: 38-39.

69 *Ming-shih*, 69: 6b, p. 28885. This edict was issued in 1383.

70 *Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu* (Taipei, 1962 ed.), 65: 3; 67: 3 and 160: 12. For an excellent discussion of the *hsü-li* problems in the Ming, see Miao Ch'üan-chi, *Ming-tai hsü-li* (Taipei, 1969), pp. 135-215.

71 JCL, 8: 17-18.

72 SWC, p. 17.

officials' behaviour, and also relied on established regulations (*fa*) to discourage undesirable actions by incumbent officials.⁷³ To avoid trouble, formal officials came to depend more than ever on clerks, who had experience with and knowledge of all the regulations.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the honouring of "precedents" (*li*) by the government put more power than ever into the hands of the clerks. While regulations were objective and visible, there was no way for officials to know all the "precedents." The clerks could monopolize and exploit their knowledge of the "precedents" from generation to generation.⁷⁵ Some of the more competent clerks were able to obtain transfers to posts in the prefectural government, where they were able to meddle from above in *chou* or *hsien* affairs.⁷⁶ Regulations and precedents stifled all the officials' creativity and, in practical terms, put them at the mercy of the clerks.

The general negative effects of the clerks' informal domination of local government were compounded by the self-serving *sheng-yüan*, whose role is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say here that many people tried desperately to obtain *sheng-yüan* status, not achieve success, but merely to enjoy the privilege of this status in their home towns. The privileges conferred on them by government statutes provided the *sheng-yüan* with means to interfere in local tax or legal affairs. Obviously, the problems of local administration multiplied when the local *sheng-yüan* consorted with the yamen clerks.

In short, local administration in the late Ming had totally lost all its real economic, political and educational power. It served the central government rather than the local people. The magistrate and formal officials had little practical maneuverability, usually following the established regulations and precedents whose interpretation was the specialty of the yamen clerks. The morale of the local officials was understandably low. At times of crisis, local officials did not have access to adequate resources and perhaps were not even strongly motivated to ward off external attacks. The local people were even less likely to identify themselves with the local government. This was exactly what happened when the Manchus took over rural China in the 1640's.

73 JCL, 8: 20.

74 JCL, 8: 10.

75 JCL, 8: 31.

76 JCL, 8: 19.

Ku's Ideal Polity and His Search for Ideal Institutions

Ku concisely summarizes the general principle by which China might be ruled effectively in a sentence in the *Jih-chih lu*: "If officials at the lower levels are numerous, the country is prosperous. If there are too many higher officials in a country, we know it is in decline."⁷⁷ In other words, Ku thought petty officials served the public best. By petty officials, Ku meant mainly those below the magistrate level, especially those bureaucrats working in the villages who had daily face-to-face contact with the people. Of course this excluded the yamen clerks, who had no official status. Ironically enough, Ku's inspiration came from Liu Tsung-yüan of the late T'ang dynasty, who was probably the most famous of all anti-*feng-chien* writers. Ku quoted what Liu said about the formation of a country:

There were local officials (*li-hsü*) first, after that came the county officials (*hsien-ta-fu*), and then came the feudal nobles (*chu-hou*), then the feudal princes and lords (*fang-po lien-shuai*), and then the son of heaven.⁷⁸

What Liu wanted to prove was that a centralized government system followed the natural tendencies of political evolution. The original small group had, by necessity, snowballed into a great state. Liu eloquently argued that since the institution of the son of heaven was a natural development, there was no point, as some Confucianists might argue, in turning back the clock and re-establishing the *feng-chien* system. Ku, however, took this passage quite differently, interpreting it as a kind of priority list for the institutions of an ideal government: "From this perspective, we might say that for effective governmental administration, local officials come first and foremost, and the son of heaven comes last. It is quite obvious."⁷⁹

To be sure, Ku's ideal order retained the position of emperor. But like many of his contemporaries, Ku held the emperor at least partly responsible for the demise of the Ming dynasty. A reevaluation of the role of the emperor was an essential part of the work of Ku and other theorists. Commenting on the various ranks and emoluments of the mobility in Chou times, Ku made it clear that the institution of the emperor was created on behalf of the people and was no different from that of the other nobles. The

⁷⁷ JCL, 8: 9b.

⁷⁸ Liu Tsung-yüan, *Liu Ho-tung chi*, (Reprint Taipei, 1974) p. 44.

⁷⁹ JCL, 8: 9-9b.

emoluments of all bureaucrats were actually supposed to be a substitute for harvests gained from working in the fields (*tai-keng*). Those in positions of power from the emperor down to ordinary bureaucrats did not receive their incomes for doing nothing. Everyone paid by the government should perform his proper duties. No one was supposed to presume himself naturally more worthy or eminent than others. Only when the emperor understood this, "would he not exploit other people in order to serve himself."⁸⁰ Since the Three Dynasties, many emperors had not understood their role and insulted and oppressed the people.

On another occasion, Ku made an even stronger criticism of later emperors. He argued that later emperors should have followed the example of their counterparts in the Three Dynasties, who had personally experienced the daily hardships and sufferings of the common people:

A person who wants to enjoy the greatest happiness has first to go through the greatest toil in the world; a person who wants to occupy the most eminent place in the world has first to experience the most despised job.... Earlier emperors in ancient times taught us that we had to learn how to serve other people before we could command them; that only after our mind was capable of attending to the "subtleties" of any small thing could we manage to handle "the vastness of the world's affairs." A holy man such as Shun ate rotten food, and grass; A holy man such as Yü worked so hard that he got calluses on his hands and feet and his face turned yellowish-dark. This was why such men could use the *Tao* to help the world and become the forebears of later emperors. But what would happen when later emperors appeared who were inferior to Shun and Yü;⁸¹

The messages from these passages are very clear. The emperor was to serve the people. He was to earn his pay. Furthermore, the emperor should share the experience of the poorest people in society. Nevertheless, the people needed to have an emperor at the apex of the ruling structure. This was a long-standing tradition. Unlike the rulers of the late Ming, however, an emperor had to behave responsibly with respect to the needs of the people.

The main difference between Ku and his famous contemporary Huang

⁸⁰ JCL, 7: 21.

⁸¹ JCL, 7: 25.

Tsung-hsi is that Ku devoted much of his knowledge to the delineation of a methodology by which local power could be strengthened, whereas Huang paid much more attention to the problems of central government, especially those problems at the Prime Ministerial level. This might have been because of Huang's personal involvement in court politics and the power struggle against the eunuchs. Huang acquired his first-hand experience of the late Ming trouble at the centre of national power; Ku's personal experiences were confined to local politics.

Ku did specify guidelines for the general political structure. He wanted all the super-county supervisory institutions abolished, because he considered these a major handicap to any creative developments on the local level. To serve the welfare of the people, Ku advocated fully institutionalized village, county and prefecture governments. Any level of local government beyond these, such as the province and the circuit, should be abolished and the number of higher officials supervising local affairs kept to a minimum. In order to make local officials more responsive to the people's needs, they should have the full trust of the centre. As for the central government structure, Ku preferred that Han or T'ang system in which, he argued, the Board of Rites—which was responsible for education—was more highly regarded than the Board of Finance.

People in ancient times looked down upon financial matters. When Emperor Shun appointed his nine ministers, there was no one responsible for handling finances. In the *Chou Li*, finance was administered by an assistant in the Heavens Office (*T'ien-kuan*); the six ministers had nothing to do with it. During Han times, there were nine ministers (*chiu-ch'ing*): The first was *T'ai-ch'ang* (Minister of Rites), the second *Kuang-lu-hsün* (Palace Doorkeeper), the third *Wei-wei* (Palace Security Chief), the fourth *T'ai-p'u* (Royal Chauffeur), the fifth *T'ing-wei* (Minister for Suppressing Crime), the sixth *Hung-lu* (Foreign Minister), the seventh *Tsung-cheng* (Minister of the Imperial Clan), the eighth *Ta-nung* (Finance Minister), the ninth *Shao-fu* (Court Treasurer). The *Ta-nung*, who was in charge of finance, was inferior to those seven who preceded him, and the *Shao-fu*, who handled the emperor's private income, was ranked last. The nine ministers in T'ang times were ranked from the *T'ai-ch'ang* to the *T'ai-fu*. This

situation was very similar to that of the Han. In T'ang times, the Board of Revenue (*Hu-pu*) was only a subordinate branch of the *Shang-shu Sheng* (Secretariats), and together with *Li* (Appointment), *Li* (Rites), *Ping* (War), *Hsing* (Justice), and *Kung* (Works), it made up the Six Boards.⁸²

Ku praised Ming T'ai-tsu highly, but he objected to the Ming founder's abolition of the office of Prime Minister (*Tsai-hsiang*) and of that of Education Minister (*Ssu-t'u*): "eliminating the Prime Minister and Education Minister, and promoting the Board presidents of the Six Boards to second rank officials was inconsistent with the principle of education first and finance last."⁸³

Ku had some ideas about reform of the recruitment of talent, and especially of the civil service examination system. One guideline of Ku's ideas worth mentioning here is that court officials should be chosen from the ranks of county magistrates or prefects. Ku gave many instances of the regulations of governmental appointments in previous dynasties which stipulated that the appointment of high central officials be from the ranks of those who had experience in local posts. In the Chin dynasty (264-420), only those who had served as county magistrate were eligible for the post of minister.⁸⁴ According to Ku, the famous T'ang Prime Minister Chang Chiu-ling (673-740) once said to the Hsüan-tsung emperor,

In the ancient times, when the prefect (*tz'u-shih*) was transferred to the central government, he became one of the three highest ministers. When a censor or a second-class secretary of the central government was transferred to the locality, he was always appointed magistrate. The basic idea of ruling a country efficiently is none other than to pay high regard to local officials. No one, although he places high in the court examinations, should be qualified to be minister unless he has been a prefect or a local governor (*tu-fu*). No one, although he be recognized as a good official, should be eligible to be a censor or a second-class secretary in the central government unless he has been

82 JCL, 6: 20.

83 Ibid.

84 JCL, 9: 20.

county magistrate. All the local officials, even if their posts are far away, should be transferred to the central government within no more than ten years.⁸⁵

The emperor accepted this suggestion. Ku could not agree more with this idea. The reasoning behind it was that a central official had to have experience in dealing directly with people in order to be proficient. In other words, an official had to understand the sufferings and hardships (*chi-k'u*) of local people in order to be worthy of obtaining a high position.⁸⁶

Before Ku commented on the Ming practice of governmental appointments, he again cited another instance from the Southern Sung dynasty.

During the reign of the Sung Hsiao-tsung (1163-1189), some officials said that a person had to have experience in order to know how to govern the people, and talent was to be discovered only through examinations. A person who had not been a local official should not be promoted too fast. Therefore, a regulation was made setting the tenure for a county magistrate at three years, and disqualifying a magistrate from the post of a censor unless he had finished two terms as a magistrate.⁸⁷

According to Ku, this and the previous T'ang example explained why these two periods in Chinese history enjoyed good governments. As for the Ming dynasty, Ku remarked:

In Ming times, a person had to be a *Han-lin* in order to get a high position in the central government. The post of county magistrate was filled by those who ranked third (*pin-k'e*) in the palace examination. As a result, the office of governing people was despised and the handling of local documents and land registers came into the hands of vulgar clerks (*su-li*).⁸⁸

To be sure, there were cases in the history of the Ming dynasty in which some high central officials had previously been local officials.⁸⁹ Nevertheless,

85 JCL, 9: 20b.

86 Ibid.

87 JCL, 9: 20b-21.

88 JCL, 9: 21.

89 For example, Ying Lu-p'ing was a *chin-shih* and appointed as Te-hua county magistrate; later he was appointed as a second-class secretary of the Board of Appointments, and again transferred to be prefect of Ch'ang-te. *Ming-shih*, 161: 3, p. 29779; Ch'en Pen-shen was a department director of the Board of Punishments and later appointed as the prefect of Chi-an. *Ming-shih*, 161: 5, p. 29781.

there was no rule which disqualified people who had not had local posts, from being made central officials. It is true that the *chin-shih* degree increasingly became the single qualification for any significant post, but, unlike what Ku claimed, the *chü-jen* or *kung-sheng* (licenciate by recommendation) was also eligible for the post of *t'ui-kuan* (prefect judicial official) or county magistrate.⁹⁰ At any rate, Ku's comment reveals his deep consciousness of the importance of local experience and his discontent with the Ming dynasty's overlooking holders of local posts.

Ku's Local Consciousness and His Attitude Toward Foreigners

The preceding discussion of local problems and of Ku's vision of an ideal polity points out one dominant theme: Ku's interest in local officials and local political organization. But why was Ku so preoccupied with local situations and local experiences? This question is clearer if we know Ku's basic concerns. As will be elaborated later, Ku's ultimate concern after the fall of the Ming was the salvation of China from another foreign conquest. Although in Ku's opinion a foreign conquest of China was initiated or pre-faced by upsetting the proper hierarchical relationships and the degradation of local moral customs, it was made possible only through the weakness of local government. It is significant that in his treatise "On the centralization system" (*Chün-hsien lun*), Ku attributed the late Ming disasters—the rebellions of roving bandits and the barbarian invasion—to the lack of strong orthodox local power.⁹¹ In order to understand the dynamics of Ku's reform ideals with respect to local community and government, we have to locate the priority of his concerns. This necessitates the study of Ku's attitude toward foreigners.

There is one widely held assumption about Chinese attitudes toward foreigners: Chinese do not behave in a prejudiced way toward aliens who accept Chinese culture. There is an oft-quoted Chinese saying: "If barbarians are willing to be submerged in China, then regard them as Chinese." This statement is ambiguous, in the sense that it does not make clear to what extent aliens will be tolerated in China. It is clear that an alien who wanted to be a subject of the Chinese empire was very different from an alien who wanted to be emperor of China. To some extent, the situation may be compared to that of Canada in the 1980's, where it was conventional to give citizenship

90 "The record of selection and recommendation," in *Ming-shih*, 71: 3b-4b, pp. 28897-28898.

91 SWC, p. 15.

to non-white peoples, but somewhat unthinkable, if theoretically legal, to elect a non-white Prime Minister. The same was true in pre-Ch'ing China. Some might argue that during the Yüan dynasty some Chinese officials found it "thinkable" enough to serve the Mongol emperors. Since the Mongol emperors imposed a new dynasty on the Chinese, however, the same logic does not apply in this. In other words, the Chinese people had no choice.

At the time the dictum about treating sinicized aliens as Chinese appeared, China had never been conquered by a foreign tribe. The only external threat was from the north. It is very unlikely that the Chinese would have believed that as long as barbarians accepted Chinese culture, they were eligible to be emperors of China. However, there had been a dramatic change since the Manchu invasion of 1644. Through heavy indoctrination and bloody suppression, the highly sinicized Ch'ing dynasty easily persuaded the Chinese scholar-gentry to believe in the legitimacy of Ch'ing rule.

A case in point is Tseng Kuo-fan (1811-1872). He was capable of overthrowing the Manchu regime in the 1860's, but he never made such a move. For Tseng, loyalty to the emperor was more important than doubts about serving a sinicized, non-Han regime. No one could seriously entertain the idea that Tseng Kuo-fan was not a Confucian. The Ch'ing was the only alien regime which seriously tried to solicit the cooperation of the Chinese scholar-gentry to whom both Ku and Tseng belonged. This was the result of Ch'ing policy, a result which Ku Yen-wu did not foresee or even expect to see. Consequently, Ku's reaction to the Ch'ing conquest was based on his knowledge of the Yüan dynasty, whose outright mistreatment of the Chinese literati was very different from Ch'ing policies. Although Ku experienced the Ch'ing dynasty's encouragement of Chinese participation in court politics, he did not live long enough to enjoy the unprecedented prosperity of the late K'ang-hsi period.

To be sure, Confucianists had no consistent attitude or policy toward barbarians.⁹² On the one hand, they took an idealistic "Mencian" view that barbarians could be easily "transformed" (*hua*) simply by exposure to Confucian culture. On the other hand, there was the emotional view of a Wang Fu-chih that it was not a violation of the virtues of *jen* and *i* (love and righteousness) to cheat and lie to barbarians.⁹³ On balance, the Chinese

92 Benjamin I. Schwartz, "The Chinese Perception of World Order, Past and Present," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 281.

93 Wang Fu-chih, *Ch'un-ch'iu chia-shuo*, in *Ch'uan-shan i-shu ch'üan-chi* (Taipei, 1972 ed.), vol. XII, 3: 16b-17, pp. 3648-3649.

accepted barbarians who wanted to be sinicized, but as subjects, not as emperors.

Only after the Ch'ing dynasty's successful self-sinicization did many Chinese scholar-gentry take for granted the idea that the Manchu emperor was the legitimate ruler of China. Of course there had been quite a few Chinese scholars who had helped the Manchus from the beginning, but the reasons why people such as Ch'ien Ch'ien-i (1582-1664) served the Ch'ing were very different from those which inspired Ku Yen-wu's nephews, the Hsü brothers, who, although born before the fall of the Ming dynasty, grew up in the early Ch'ing and thus took the Ch'ing for granted. Chinese acceptance of Manchu rule increased over the course of time. Its climax came in the early years of this century, when monarchists like K'ang Yu-wei (1858-1927) and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao advocated that the Manchu emperor become a figurehead ruler of the Chinese empire. They did not succeed in this, partly because anti-Manchu sentiment proved to be a stumbling block. Their failure indicated the limit of Chinese toleration of the Manchus. Also remarkable was the lack of violence during the changeover of regimes. Only a few Manchu Bannermen living in specific quarters in some cities were killed. This was the most peaceful dynastic change in the whole of Chinese history, thanks perhaps in large part to the successful sinicization policy of the Ch'ing. Nevertheless, it is misleading to state that traditional Chinese would easily accept any foreigner as the emperor of China.

Ku Yen-wu did not accept what was happening in the China of his time. He and his contemporaries experienced the second complete foreign takeover of China. The reaction of the Chinese to this foreign conquest varied from person to person; some reactions might be worth noting for purposes of comparison with Ku Yen-wu's.

For the first time during the Yüan period, the whole of China had come under foreign rule. It was difficult to see how historians could reconcile the Mongol conquest with the established myth of Chinese superiority.⁹⁴ But when it came to the second foreign conquest, the Chinese began to realize that China's fall to the Mongols was not a fluke. Many Chinese thought that something must have gone wrong within Chinese society. In trying to analyse and understand this second invasion, thinkers like Ku recognized the weaknesses of China and advocated some kind of reform. Judging from the

94 Wang Gung-wu, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: A Background Essay," in Fairbank ed., *The Chinese World Order*, pp. 45-46.

fact that the Yüan had ruled China without challenge for only 97 years (two hundred and fifty years were thought normal for a dynasty), the Chinese of the early Ch'ing could still believe in their ultimate cultural superiority. Ku made comments such as: "There is a time for courts to rise and to fall, but in any case China will restore her glories sooner or later."⁹⁵ "The bad luck is not to last more than one hundred years; then there will be a sage emperor to set up a new epoch."⁹⁶ In Ku's eyes, the new Manchu rulers would be overthrown in a short time like the Mongols before them. He dispensed profuse encouragement for himself and others in order to bolster the Chinese ethnic cause.

More importantly perhaps, Ku took pains to extensively research all the material in Chinese history which might enable him to record numerous ideas and principles for future rulers to utilize in order to prevent another foreign takeover. However, if we read only the modern-day edition of the *Jih-chih lu*, which is somewhat ambiguous, it is easy for some scholars to assume that Ku tacitly accepted Manchu rule. But a perusal of the "Original Copy" (*Yüan-ch'ao-pen*) will convince us that Ku's attitude towards foreigner was obviously different from that of a Tseng Kuo-fan.

To fully appreciate Ku Yen-wu's attitude toward foreigners, we must study the *Yüan-ch'ao-pen*, instead of the later editions of the *Jih-chih lu* which were heavily censored by Ku's disciple P'an Lei, or by Ku's nephews, the influential Hsü brothers.⁹⁷ There are some differences between the *Jih-chih lu* and the *Yüan-ch'ao-pen*. One of the most significant is that in the modern edition of the *Jih-chih lu*, all the words referring to aliens or to foreign tribes were altered to somewhat more neutral words, such as "foreign countries" (*wai-kno*), foreign invaders" (*wai-k'ou*), the "rival side" (*ti-pien*), or the "northern deserts" (*su-mo*). Some were transformed into more elegant characters, *i* (裔) instead of *i* (夷), for example. In the *Yüan-chao-pen*, on the other hand, the original terms for "barbarians" were rendered in common characters like *i*, *ti*, *lu* which would certainly have caused trouble in the Ch'ing.⁹⁸

95 YCP, p. 970.

96 SWC, pp. 416-417.

97 The latter day edition of the *Jih-chih lu* was first published by P'an Lei, who borrowed all the relevant materials and Ku's manuscript from Ku Yen-wu's famous nephews—the Hsü brothers. One of these people must have edited it. See JCL, preface, p. 2.

98 A famous classicist, Huang Chi-kang, studied the differences between the *Yüan-ch'ao-pen* and the *Jih-chih lu* and made a list of them. This list was further supplemented by Hsü Wen-shan. All the lists are the appendixes of *Yüan-ch'ao-pen*. See YCP, pp. 963-998.

Of the two items totally missing from the modern edition, one, significantly enough, dealt with the proper way of life under barbarian rule. The other discussed the costumes of the different barbarian tribes. Obviously, the ideas and implications of these two items would not have been tolerated in the early Ch'ing. However, an even more significant difference between the two editions lay in the lack of intensity of the distaste for foreigners which Ku expressed in the modern edition, as opposed to the *Yüan-ch'ao-pen*. In *chüan* twelve of the modern edition of the *Jih-chih lu*, for example, there is an item entitled "rivers and reservoirs" (*ho-ch'ü*) which looks non-political, yet Ku somehow managed to relate the topic to the troubles of this time: "Since the fall of the Sung dynasty, up to now, the head (Chinese) has been at the bottom, the feet (barbarians) have been unexpectedly at the top."⁹⁹

It is also very significant that an anti-Manchu revolutionary like Chang T'ai-yen felt so certain that Ku's anti-Manchuism would be consistently expressed throughout his original writings. Any perusal of the *Yüan-ch'ao-pen* will confirm my argument that Ku did not tacitly accept the legitimacy of the Manchu regime, either in his words or his deeds.

Ku's overall impression of foreigners was unfavourable. Generally speaking, Ku still believed that foreigners behaved like animals. Once, in the *Yüan-ch'ao-pen*, Ku said: "Those *i-ti* are human-faced but beast-hearted (*jen-mien shou-hsin*). They are greedy and look for profit."¹⁰⁰ On another occasion, Ku remarked: "The *Hu* are greedy and foolhardy."¹⁰¹ Drawing his example from the history of the Yüan dynasty, Ku made this comment on the swiftness of the fall of an alien regime: "...the fall of *Jung-ti* was especially fast, more so than any Chinese regime. That was because the Yüan had not studied enough (how to rule China).¹⁰² Evidence of the viciousness of a barbarian regime was shown, according to Ku, by their policy on horse-raising (*ma-cheng*): "...so in ancient times the emperor encouraged his people to keep horses. But barbarian emperors were jealous of the increasing power of the Han Chinese, and prohibited them from keeping horses."¹⁰³ Moreover, after Ku exposed the defects of the Chin dynasty (a medieval north China regime whose leaders were ethnically related to the Manchus), for the

99 YCP, p. 975.

100 YCP, p. 988.

101 YCP, p. 990; JCL, 31: 11b-15b.

102 YCP, p. 986.

103 YCP, p. 974.

first and perhaps the only time, Ku explicitly commented on the Manchus, stating that: "the Chin of modern days are even worse."¹⁰⁴

Following this line of reasoning, Ku vehemently refuted a prevalent interpretation of an ambiguous passage in the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Chung-yung*).¹⁰⁵ The passage stated: The superior man...situated among barbarian tribes, dose what is proper to his situation among barbarous tribes." The problem here is that "what is proper" can be interpreted both positively and negatively. One interpretation is that of "entering someone else's territory and observing the customs of the 'locality'" (*ju-hsiang sui-su*), while the opposite interpretation demand that one insists on continuing to live according to one's original customs, and transform all alien customs into those of the Chinese. In this item, *Ssu-i-ti*, *hsing-hu-i-ti* (Situated among barbarian tribes, one does what is proper to his situation among barbarous tribes.), which was completely deleted from the modern edition, Ku argued against the interpretation that suggested compliance with non-Chinese culture. Ku said in part:

Wen-chung tzu (Wang T'ung of the Sui dynasty) [d. 617]... held that as long as heaven and earth were worshipped regularly and the people were protected and taken care of, no matter who was in power, he was my emperor. What a distorted and rebellious statement this was. We should know that there comes a time for the rise or fall of a dynasty, but China is going to be restored to her former glories sooner or later. If we merely encourage each other to serve (the barbarians and their emperors), obeying their orders and conforming to their customs, or even helping them to ravage the Central Kingdom and then excusing ourselves with the teachings of "*ssu-i-ti*," we are indeed the real offenders against (the teaching) of Tzu-ssu.¹⁰⁶

One of Ku Yen-wu's legacies is that he spelled out the different levels of loyalty for the first time in Chinese history. The loyalty of officials to the emperor was an axiomatic virtue in Confucianism, one which has been especially emphasized by Neo-Confucianism since the Sung dynasty. Ku argued that there was a more serious form of undesirable behaviour than disloyalty to one's emperor. Ku made it very clear that disloyalty to the emperor was

¹⁰⁴ YCP, p. 987.

¹⁰⁵ James Legge tr., *The Chinese Classics: The Doctrine of the Mean* (1892, reprint Taipei, 1975), CH. XIV, p. 395.

¹⁰⁶ YCP, p. 970.

tolerable if it would help in resisting foreign invasion. To defend this argument Ku pointed to a famous statesman in the Ch'un-ch'iu period—Kuan Chung (d. 645 B. C.) of the state of Ch'i. Instead of being loyal to his master, Kuan served another prince, who was his former master's rival. Later, Kuan helped the Ch'i state repel foreigners and build up a strong country. Based on Confucius' comments on Kuan Chung, Ku drew the conclusion that "the Master thought the mishap of barbarian conquest was worse than the behaviour of forgetting one's master and serving his enemy.¹⁰⁷ The virtue of loyalty to the emperor came second to the virtue of preventing China from falling under foreign dominance. It is for this argument that Ku has been praised in modern China.¹⁰⁸ For many Chinese, Ku enlarged the scope of loyalty. He downplayed the importance of unconditional obedience to the leader, a principle which had been manipulated to the advantage of despots for two thousands years. The difference between Ku and his modern Chinese admirers is that Ku still considered serving another master to be basically wrong.¹⁰⁹

Compared to contemporaries like Wang Fu-chih (1619-1692), however, Ku was more tolerant of foreigners because he at least recognized the merits of some aspects of foreign customs and culture. Ku sometimes even praised those alien leaders who knew how to observe the prescriptions in the books of ancient times (i.e. the Chinese classics): aliens who kept a simple life, had communication between the emperor and the officials, and were considerate of their people. A case in point is the Wei of Hsien-pei, a tribe north of China which conquered part of the north in the third century A.D.¹¹⁰ Wang Fu-chih exhibited a much harsher attitude toward foreigners:

China does not apply the term "fight" to the foreign barbarian. You may kill them and still be called humanitarian; you may take away their land and still be called righteous. In cases where you have to fight them, you must defeat them. Then you kill them in order to protect our people; that is humanitarian. You cheat them in order to honestly practise what they dislike; that is faithful. You take away their land in order to transform their customs by education and snatch their property in order to

107 YCP, p. 971.

108 Hua Shan and Wang Keng-t'ang, "Lun Ku yen-wu ssu-hsiang," Orig. pub. in *Li-shih yen-chiu*, collected in Tsún-tsúi hsüeh-she, *Chung-kuo chin-san-pai-nien hsüeh-shu ssu-hsiang lun-chi* (Hong Kong, 1972), pp. 1-13.

109 JCL, 7: 10b-11.

110 JCL, 10-5b; 29: 24b-26b.

alleviate the burden of our people; that is righteous. With humanity, righteousness, and faithfulness, a prince is able to keep the world in order and rectify the "Way" of human beings.¹¹¹

In another famous book, the *Huang-shu* (*Book of the Yellow Emperor*) Wang Fu-chih states: "(The ruler of China) may abdicate, may be succeeded, may be overthrown, but must never be incarnated by a man of a different race (*i-lei*)."¹¹² It is clear that both Ku and Wang recognized the possibility and legitimacy of dynastic change, but the change of regime was tolerable only among Chinese, and was not to involve foreigners. However, Wang used stronger terms to define his prescriptions and had nothing positive to say about barbarians.

A comparison between Ku and one of his nineteenth century admirers, Feng Kuei-fen, also illustrates his attitude toward foreigners. Feng praised the merits of foreigners and was actually regarded as the progenitor of the Self-Strengthening Movement which advocated the adoption of things Western. The difference between Ku and Feng lies in what they praised about "barbarians." Ku Yen-wu talked about their good customs, the simplicity of their life, and the effective policies of barbarian leaders, but he held these to be beneficial because they were actually closer to original Chinese ideals. Thus Ku saw certain of the barbarians' features as praiseworthy only because of their presumed closeness to an ideal Chinese culture.¹¹³ In contrast, Feng Kuei-fen asked Chinese to study those aspects of Western civilization which China lacked. Even so, Ku oddly provided Feng with a very good starting point for recognizing the merits of the "barbarians."

Foreigners and Ku's Perception of Cultural Decay

With Ku's attitude toward foreigners in mind, we can now proceed to discuss his perception of cultural decay, which influenced the formation of his basic concerns, and consequently his proposal for local reform.

Like so many traditional Chinese thinkers, Ku thought the lack of men of talent (*jen-ts'ai*) was a typical omen of a political and social crisis. The following statements are very common not only in Ku's own works but also in the essays of other scholars.

111 Wang Fu-chih, *Ch'un-ch'iu*, 3: 16b-17, in *Ch'üan-chi*, vol XII, pp. 3648-3649.

112 Wang Fu-chih, *Huang-shu*, p. 3, in *Ch'üan-chi*, vol. XVII, p. 9827.

113 JCL, 29: 26b.

What explains why a country is stable and without disturbance is (the function of) human talent.¹¹⁴ The Way of the world is decaying and human talents are not propering.¹¹⁵

Those who are in charge of the country have sincerely to recognize that social customs are the breeding ground of human talent, and thus make education (*chiao-hua*) the first priority of the government. Then, people will be virtuous and human talents will appear.¹¹⁶

This is a conventional viewpoint. For many years and in many dynasties throughout Chinese history the issue of *jen-ts'ai* was raised time and time again whenever there were crises.¹¹⁷ In reality, however, the issue of *jen-ts'ai* is very hard to specify.

Almost every aspect of the country's difficulties could have been blamed on the lack of *jen-ts'ai*. There is an item in the *Jih-chih lu* in which Ku discussed the introduction into China of Catholic christianity. This item, significantly enough, was the only time Ku ever mentioned the Catholic church, which had been quite influential in the late Ming. He compared the inception of Chinese Catholicism with a contrasting and much more pleasing incident in the T'ang dynasty when an alien astrologer had been presented to the throne but had been rejected. Ku concluded that Catholicism was accepted in China because of the lack of *jen-ts'ai*.¹¹⁸ With his abhorrence of foreigners it is not difficult to understand that Ku viewed the entry of Catholicism into China as a sign of cultural decay.

What was the cause of the lack of *jen-ts'ai*? This is a topic which is beyond the scope of this essay. Essentially, however, Ku Yen-wu thought it was the result of the government's unsatisfactory recruitment methods. This included the examination system and attendant appointment procedures. Since the Sung dynasty, the recruitment of officials had been a matter of "whom the governments get is not whom they want, whom they want is not whom they appoint."¹¹⁹ Therefore, the issue of *jen-ts'ai* was not really the "scarcity"

114 SWC, p. 36.

115 JCL, 13: 18b.

116 JCL, 17: 5.

117 For example, numerous leaders in the Tung-chih Restoration often raised this issue of *jen-ts'ai*. According to Mary C. Wright, "One cannot open the memorials of any official without quickly seeing an example." See Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism, The Tung-chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1957), p. 328.

118 JCL, 29: 33b-34.

119 JCL, 8: 30b.

of human talent, but the failure to get the right men in the right offices. Commenting on the late Ming defense effort, Ku revealed his viewpoint about the use of human talent:

When the state was in a time of danger and rebellion, there was no lack of competent and responsible persons. But the problem was that these people were not appointed to the right positions. Even if they had been appointed (by the emperor), they were not endowed with full authority. Even if they were trusted and they proved efficient, the problem remained in the (Emperors') arbitrary transfers of offices. This resulted in a waste of human talents and thus their disastrous ending. The fall of the country followed.¹²⁰

The appointment of local officials was also involved in the fall of a state.

The reason why the people within China and outside joined the rebellion was that the government did not get the right people into local offices, and the common people could not endure their existence. Alas, wasn't that the cause of the short-lived mandate of the Wei dynasty?"¹²¹

According to Ku, all these problems of examination and appointment could be attributed to undesirable *feng-su* (social customs). The *feng-su* affected the mentality of student candidates. The social customs of the late Ming induced people to compete shamelessly for academic degrees. After they passed the examinations, they had to resort to various means of obtaining appointments which, in Ku's eyes, were far from ideal. The flow of genuine human talent was blocked by poor *feng-su*. Rectification of social customs was the prerequisite for the manifestation of genuine human talent. "I wish that those people of later days who are in charge of selecting and evaluating officials would always be concerned with the rectification of *feng-su*; then the country would be able to celebrate the full attainment of human talents."¹²²

There is a group of specific Chinese terms that describes social customs. If social customs are desirable, they are called *hou* (literally, "thick"), or

120 SWC, p. 139.

121 JCL, 8: 29.

122 JCL, 8: 39.

ch'un-hou (pure and thick); if undesirable, they are called *po* (thin) or *chiao-po* (perfidious and thin) or *fu-po* (frivolous and thin). Like many other Chinese thinkers, Ku Yen-wu discussed the "thickness" and "thinness" of social customs quite extensively in his writings. Generally speaking, Ku felt that desirable social customs included the provision that officials attend to their responsibilities, that magistrates and prefects care for the local people, that people in local communities help each other, that harmony rather than competition prevail in a society, that people act in good faith without resorting to litigation, that the tax burden be evenly shared, that people live contentedly in the countryside rather than go to the cities, and, last, but equally important, that literary style be simple and devoid of florid expressions.¹²³

The only way in which Ku Yen-wu differed from more conventional thinkers was perhaps in his extended theorization of foreign invasion as having occurred because of ominous and undesirable phenomena in Chinese society. With the benefit of hindsight, Ku, pondering the sobering fact of the Manchu conquest, began to piece together all the historic facts and thus to offer an interpretation of the entire history of alien invasions in China. The main point which Ku tried to establish in this theory was that the invasion of barbarians had always been preceded by an incubation period during which the Chinese people had actually imitated barbarian culture, by adopting, for example, their hairstyles and clothing, and by practising alien religions.

The first instance from Chinese history to which Ku referred was from Chou times, when China had faced an external threat from the Western Jung. Ku's argument was made an item entitled "*Hu-fu*" (barbarian costumes), which was completely deleted from the regular *Jih-chih lu*, but can be unearthed in the *Yüan-ch'ao-pen*. It states:

Since time immemorial, when peace has lasted for a long period, there has always been someone advocating a change of customs. The process whereby the Chinese are transformed into barbarians may well be initiated by one or two iconoclastic and unconventional people who are attracted by things foreign and strange. In the *Tso Commentary* of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, there is a record of the transfer of the Chou capital to the east by king P'ing of the Chou in the twenty-second year of King Hsi of

123 These "good" customs were recorded generally in the *Jih-chih lu*, particularly in the thirteenth *chüan*.

the Lu state. (This move was prompted by the fall of Western Chou to the Jung, an alien tribe.) Before this incident there was a certain Hsin Yu who went to I-ch'uan where he saw a person wearing his hair unbound offering sacrifices in the wilderness (a barbarian hairstyle and custom). Hsin Yu had a premonition and said that within a hundred years this place would be taken over by the Jung because of its practice of (barbarian) rituals ... If people of the Central Kingdom followed the style of barbarian dress, this was behaviour which was tantamount to giving up their higher cultural standards and adopting lower standards. What a shame...¹²⁴

On another occasion, Ku tried to show a relationship between the introduction of foreign religions and foreign invasion:

... there is also a passage in the book *Hsüeh-p'ou t'ung-pien* (*General Discussion of Unorthodoxy* written by a Ming scholar Ch'en Chien [1497-1567]), in which the introduction of Buddhism into China is said to have been the cause of an invasion by barbarians. Nowadays scholar-gentry acquaint themselves with Ch'an Buddhism and esteem the Lu (Chiu-yüan) school of Neo-Confucianism. This amounts to a resurgence of the ghost to Buddhism. I really worry about the situation today. Alas, Hsin Yu took a trip to I-ch'uan and was able to predict what was going to happen one hundred years hence.¹²⁵

With this in mind, it is not surprising that Ku launched a dogmatic criticism of the man whom Professor William de Bary calls an "unrestrained individualist" Li Chih:¹²⁶

In the time of the Chin dynasty, Yü Yü compared Juan Chi (210-263) to the person with the unbound hair in I-ch'uan, and Yü Yü attributed the irruption of barbarians into the Central Kingdom to these peoples; Yü Yü regarded the Chin as being worse than the decaying Chou dynasty. But if we look at what is

¹²⁴ YCP, p. 983.

¹²⁵ YCP, p. 979; JCL. 19: 23b-28.

¹²⁶ William T. de Bary, ed., *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, (N. Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1976) p. 28.

happening nowadays—people wearing the Buddhist monk hairstyle, people holding Buddhist prayer beads, men and women guest sleeping together on an earthen bed—which of these was not done first by Li Chih? Is it not that Heaven is going to have these people suffer the catastrophe of the broken cap and the left lapels (meaning barbarian conquest), which is preceded by these phenomena?¹²⁷

But Li Chih was not solely to blame. In Ku's eyes, it was Wang Yang-ming who should be held responsible for the corruption of moral customs and for the fall of the Chinese Ming regime to barbarians:

...But if we trace the origin of Li Chih's behaviour, we find that he dared to slander the sages and to set up an independent intellectual base as a result of the influence of the ideas of Wang Yang-ming, his disciple Wang Lung-hsi and the school of Ch'an Buddhism. The gentlemen of later days who regret the fall of the Divine Continent (*Shen-chou*, meaning China) and resent the usurpation of the Five Alien Tribes (*Wu-hu*) cannot help but trace the ultimate cause to Wang and Ho.¹²⁸

There is a subtle reference in the last sentence. Superficially, it refers to the fourth century A.D., when the northern part of China was taken over by the *Wu-hu*, an event for which the famous philosophers Wang Pi (226-249) and Ho An (d. 249) were supposed to be responsible. In reality, however, Ku was commenting on the Manchu takeover, blaming it on the thought of Wang Yang-ming and his follower Ho Hsin-yin (1517-1579). Ho Hsin-yin was the mentor of Li Chih.¹²⁹ and has been described by Professor De Bary as having had a "knight-errant" type of personality.¹³⁰ The coincidence of these two family names (Wang and Ho of past and present) suggested to Ku that the causes of foreign invasions had been repeatedly uniform.

Although the corruption of social customs and the introduction of foreign culture had initiated foreign invasions in Chinese history, these conquests were made possible only by the lack of local power. The reform of social customs and local government constituted the major part of Ku's programme because Ku's primary and central concern: foreign conquests of China.

127 YCP, p. 979.

128 YCP, p. 980.

129 JCL, 18: 27-27b.

130 De Bary, ed., *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, p. 28.

Ku Yen-wu's Basic Concerns

The preceding discussion helps us better understand Ku's basic concerns. There are inconsistencies in various scholars' evaluations of Ku's ideas and his behaviour and these are perhaps the result of a failure to identify Ku's basic concerns. Some scholars like Hou Wai-lu and Ho I-k'un have praised Ku's advocacy of such Enlightenment-style ideals as freedom, democracy and public opinion, but they have had difficulty explaining the cold fact that Ku resisted urbanization and was not comfortable about the use of money, especially the use of silver. There may be some truth to the theory that some forms of incipient capitalism "sprouted" in China in the late Ming, especially in the Kiangnan area, as many studies have tried to show.¹³¹ But many scholars, both Chinese and Western, fail to note the dramatic change of atmosphere in China during Manchu conquest.

After 1644, many Chinese intellectuals changed their general focus from how to further their own vested interests to the need to respond to the emergency of the Manchu conquest. It is significant that all of Ku's poems had been deliberately kept by Ku only since the fall of the Ming. The fact that Ku deliberately left only his poems of the post-Manchu conquest period to be published indicates the intensity of the impact of this conquest and his consciousness of the change of perspectives. The experience of the Manchu conquest and Ku's personal situation and frustrations contributed to the dramatic change in Ku's intellectual and political concerns and future plans. On many occasions, Ku did attack rebellious serfs, criticized the wrongdoings of local *sheng-yüan*, and advocated the reform of examinations and local government. All this supports the theory that Ku spoke and acted in the interests of the landlords and high level gentry. After the fall of the Ming, however, Ku almost lost all his inherited land and eventually left his hometown forever. Thus, there were few solid reasons for Ku to act as the direct spokesman for the big landlords. In fact, Ku Yen-wu himself was not a member of the high-ranking gentry. He was merely a *shen-yüan* with the purchased title of "imperial student." Furthermore, if we assume that Ku's basic concerns were related to China's sufferings in the aftermath of the second foreign conquest in its history, we can make much more sense out of the entire spectrum of Ku's activities.

131 Li Shu, "Kuan-yü chung-kuo chih-pen chu-i meng-ya wen-t'i te k'ao-ch'a," in *Li-shih yen-chiu*, 1956, 4, pp. 1-25.

There is a common interpretation of Ku's thought which focuses mainly on Ku's reaction to the increasing centralization of government. Dr. Joseph Esherick summarizes it as follows:

Reacting to the extreme policies of fiscal and administrative centralization of the Ming, Gu argued for the appointment of magistrates to districts within their own province (a practice ordinarily forbidden under the "rule of avoidance") for terms which might become permanent and even hereditary. The officials, furthermore, would be allowed to appoint their own subordinates, and move family and property to the district under their charge. While the official orthodoxy implied distrust of the private interests of officials, and sought to prevent an official from serving in an area where he might have private interests, Gu proposed to build upon the private interests of officials. In his view, a magistrate would be more likely to show initiative in improving the governance of a district if he had a personal stake in the community.¹³²

Ku Yen-wu did want to curb the absolute power of the monarch and the centralization of his time. Many of his reform ideas were oriented in this direction. However, it is misleading to suggest, as the preceding passage does, that Ku advocated greatly expanding local gentry power. Ku made at least as much, if not more, effort to attack the abuse of power by local *sheng-yüan* and *yamen* clerks. It is no coincidence that Ku's two most famous sets of essays were entitled "Chün-hsien lun" (On the centralization system) and "Sheng-yüan lun" (On the local licentiates) respectively. Ku's reforms had two sides. One was to limit centralization of power; the other was to keep the arbitrary power of the local gentry in check. In other words, Ku wanted to both strengthen the power of local government and also to formalize and regulate the informal local influence of gentry families.

A person's basic intellectual concerns are intimately related to his background and environment. Most, if not all, of Ku's activities can be identified as part of his conscious response to his situation. I would argue that the Manchu conquest was the greatest shock of Ku Yen-wu's life. Had it been merely a dynastic change and nothing more, most Chinese cities might have

132 Joseph Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1979), p. 8.

escaped destruction, and the Chinese people would not have experienced the humiliation of having to change their hair style. This was in fact the fall of a Chinese regime to a foreign people.

As discussed earlier, Ku personally did not like the idea of serving a second master. But compared to the humiliation of a barbarian conquest, even that idea was tolerable. Therefore, when the Manchus crossed the Yangtze River, Ku himself participated in the resistance movement. This resistance, was, however, ill-fated and short-lived. Ku experienced firsthand the total dearth of local resources and strength with which to fight for the anti-Manchu cause. On top of this, he suffered the loss of his best friends, relatives, and fellow villagers. With his domestic servant capitalizing on this sad situation, Ku also suffered financial loss and was implicated in a political legal case. All this personal trauma added to his resentment of the Manchu invasion. Reflecting on the sweeping victory of the Manchus and equipped with his personal experiences and historical knowledge, Ku Yen-wu proposed a series of reforms to strengthen local power in hopes of resisting future foreign invasions.

Why was Ku the only one among his contemporaries to offer such proposals? Huang Tsung-hsi, who had also witnessed the Manchu conquest and was involved in anti-Ch'ing activities, turned out to be a strong advocate of the reform of the central government. The stimulus may have been similar, but the response varied according to each person's background. Huang's father, Huang Tsun-su, had died in prison as a result of a power struggle with the eunuch faction. Huang made a name for himself later by actually striking and injuring the man responsible for his father's death. His familiarity with the decay of the central government naturally conditioned him to think of politico-social problems from the perspective of the metropolitan gentry-official.

Ku Yen-wu, on the other hand, was not a Ming official. Although he had been recommended and appointed, he was not officially obligated to the Ming court. However, Ku felt the duty to participate in the Southern Ming cause, as he clearly showed in some of his poems written around this period: "I am staying in an isolated border area participating in military struggles, but I dream that I am holding an office serving the acting Ming court (*hsing-ch'ao*)."¹³³

With the increase in the danger of involvement in explicit anti-Ch'ing

activities, the best contribution Ku could offer was to summarize his experience and knowledge and put it into words. This was the origin of Ku's ideals of local power. As a member of a prominent local clan, Ku had specific ideas about consolidating the community. As a non-official gentry, Ku had a different approach to tapping the resources of the people.

In an unprecedented appeal to the conscience of the people, Ku called for everyone's participation in the effort to save China from the foreigners. In a very famous passage, Ku differentiated the fall of a state (*wang kuo*) from the fall of the entire empire (*wang t'ien-hsia*). The fall of a state did not necessarily lead to the fall of China, as China had historically consisted of many smaller states (*kuo*).¹³⁴ In the fourth century A. D., for instance, there were kingdoms competed with each other to conquer the *t'ien-hsia*. Thus, to possess the *t'ien-hsia* meant to subdue all the states in China. According to Ku, the responsibility for the fall of a state lay with the officials of the regime, whereas for the rise and fall of proper rulers for *t'ien-hsia*, each member of the whole society shared the responsibility.¹³⁵

It was possible for Ku to make statement like this in order to awaken the common people's awareness of the shame and humiliation suffered by the whole Chinese community, but it is more likely that at the time when Ku wrote this, he had the Southern Ming in mind. In order to encourage the Southern Ming to compete with the Manchus for the hegemony of the *t'ien-hsia*, Ku may have made this statement to endorse the legitimacy of the Southern Ming and to enlist the efforts of the local common people. It seems safe to say that in order to turn away foreign invasions, Ku felt he had to form a sort of Confucian united front in which every member of the society participated, however unequally.

Most Confucian thinkers rarely, if ever, appealed directly to the common people for the salvation of the country, even though their sense of hierarchy did not militate against the idea of mass participation in social movements. Naturally, they wanted to see the common people unite to strive for goals, but they did not expect the common people to play any active vital role. "People can be asked to follow (policies), not to understand them" was a maxim of Confucian rule.

It is remarkable that Ku specifically announced that, as far as the preservation of the whole empire from alien rule was concerned, all the ordinary

¹³⁴ Yung Wei, *K'ue-hsueh, Jen-ts'ai, Hsien-tai-hua* (Taipei, 1980), pp. 366-367.

¹³⁵ JCL, 13: 5-5b.

people, rather than the officials shared the responsibility. Why did Ku deviate from other Confucian thinkers? Perhaps it was partly that his recognition of the strength of the common people was a result of the influence of the Yang-ming school, perhaps it was partly that Ku himself was outside the official and was in a better position to appreciate the potential of the common people. But, most important of all, it seems that it was the common people's massive participation in resistance movements after the fall of the Ming which prompted Ku to call upon them.

To mobilize the people effectively Ku had to not only bring them to a consciousness of the crisis, but to encourage them to identify themselves with some form of socio-political organization. Thus, it was in Ku's best interest to advocate the strengthening of local government to the point of semi-autonomy. In the short term, a powerful local government with a weak relationship to the uncertain centre might manage to mobilize a resistance movement to help restore the Ming. In a broader perspective, Ku hoped that his proposals might someday be adopted by a prince, so that, eventually potentially autonomous local governments might be the last strongholds of the empire's defense.

If we keep all these points in mind, we can better understand certain of Ku's points which might otherwise appear contradictory. In this light, Ku Yen-wu's harsh and often unconventional moral judgements of some historical figures like Wang An-shih, Ch'en Kou, and Wang Yang-ming were not a result of misinformation or misunderstanding,¹³⁶ but could be logically inferred from his assumptions. Consequently Ku's thought can be more satisfactorily explained along the lines of this hypothesis.

136 For example, Hu Ch'iu-yüan thinks that it was Ku Yen-wu's misunderstanding of Wang Yang-ming which led him to blame Wang for the downfall of the Ming dynasty. See Hu Ch'iu-yüan, *Chi-nien Wang Yang-ming wu-pai nien* (orig. pub. 1944; reprint Taipei, 1972), p. 25.

Notes Abbreviation Some Major Primary Sources

- JCL *Jih-chih lu chi-shih* 日知錄集釋 (Collection of Commentaries on *A Record of Daily Knowledge*) by Huang Ju-ch'en 黃汝成. Huang took pains to collect all the important commentaries on the *Jih-chih lu* and published them in 1834. In this collection we cannot only read the text of the *Jih-chih lu*, but also understand better what other scholars thought about this work. There are several editions published by several book companies. In this essay I used the edition published by Chung-hua Book Co. (1976, the third printing in Taiwan). The edition published by the Commercial Press in 1910 contains an appendix: *Jih-chih lu chih-yü* 日知錄之餘. (The *Jih-chih lu* Supplement), which is also used in this essay. This *Jih-chih lu chi-shih* provides us the framework of Ku's political theories.
- SWC *Ku T'ing-lin shih-wen chi* 顧亭林詩文集 (Collection of Ku T'ing-lin's Poems and Essays). This is the most complete collection of Ku's letters, essays, and poems. Originally published in Peking in 1961, it was later reprinted in Taipei in 1963, with the NP (Nien-p'u: Chronological Biography), the photocopy of *Chiang-shan yung ts'an-kao* 蔣山傭殘稿 (Remnants of Writings of Chiang-shan yung; this is a small collection of Ku's original letters.) and that of *Hsi-miao liang-yin chi-shih* 熹廟諒陰記事. (The Record of Events of the Hsi-tsung) attached to it. Many essays and poems are given different texts to be compared; and some new essays and poems which appeared in other places are collected in this volume. Some books such as *T'ing-lin shih-chi* 亭林詩集 (Collection of T'ing-lin's Poems), *T'ing-lin wen-chi* 亭林文集 (Collection of T'ing-lin's Essays), *T'ing-lin i-shih* 亭林佚詩 (Collection of T'ing-lin's Missing Poems), and *T'ing-liü yü-chi* 亭林餘集 (Collection of T'ing-lin's Other Essays) are edited and incorporated into this volume. This SWC, together with the next YCP, gives us the innermost thoughts of Ku Yen-wu.
- YCP *Yüan-ch'ao-pen Jih-chih lu* 原抄本日知錄 (The Original Copy of *A Record of Daily Knowledge*). This YCP was purchased by Chang Chi 張繼 in an antique bookstore of Peking in 1933 and published in Taiwan in 1958. This is the uncensored copy of the *Jih-chih lu*, whose authenticity was endorsed by Chang T'ai-yen 章太炎. To study Ku's political theories especially the intensity of Ku's anti-Manchuism, the YCP is indispensable.

提 要

古 偉 瀛

要了解一個人的政治行為可以從他的基本關懷出發。如果我們閱讀顧炎武的《日知錄》以及其他政治性隨筆可以強烈覺察到他對許多歷史及當時人物的強烈批判（例如他對三王——王夷甫、王安石、王陽明等幾乎不盡人情事理的苛責），以及對風俗與地方權力的重視，如果再進一步探索，在這些批判、重視的背後似乎可以找到顧氏的基本關懷——就是中國在第二次亡於非漢族之手——滿清的入主中國。如何在當時對滿清鬭爭以及將來如何避免異族之征服可以說是顧炎武參與政治行動及立言的主要課題，本文就想先從中國歷史上地方勢力的興衰以及顧氏本身對之趨勢的了解談起，再以這種了解如何與顧氏的對外觀念聯結而構成顧氏的政治理論基礎；最後提出並說明顧氏的基本關懷以及政治理論的展開。

簡單說來，顧炎武的政治理論的大要如下：在對中國第二次亡於異族的基本關切之下，顧炎武又引伸出幾個次級的關懷：明朝滅亡的原因何在？如何在短程內有效地配合自己的情況使局勢改觀？如何在長程的觀點下使異族的入主中國不再重演？顧炎武認為中國之被異族征服有兩個層面：在文化思想風俗上受到其他文化的污染腐蝕而遭到異族的入侵，（「如辛有適伊川，見披髮而祭於野者，曰不及百年，此其戎乎！其禮先亡矣」）；歷史上中國遭異族之入侵也有不少次，可是中國之被征服却是由於宋朝以來地方政府行政、財政、軍事方面各項權力的削弱以及民衆對其向心力之減低而成爲可能。（「今之州縣，官無定守，民無定奉，是以常有盜賊戎翟之禍，至一州則一州破，至一縣則一縣殘。」）其於此種整體的認識，顧氏在《日知錄》等作品中提出對地方政府的行政、教育、社會與經濟的改革方案。這些改革主張之間都有有機的聯繫、有互相增強的作用，使整個地方政府不但是一個强有力的政治結構，同時也是一個居民感到休戚相關、願意生死與共的一個共同體。

也許從這個觀點來看顧炎武的政治思想才能明白它們不但不是自我矛盾或是零亂無章，反而很有其一致性。