

SPECIAL ISSUE: TRADITION: THINGS THAT COULD BE INTERPRETED

Expounding Neo-Confucianism: Choice of Tradition at a Time of Dynastic Change—Cultural Conflict and the Social Reconstruction of Early Qing

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明清鼎革之际，满汉之间政治体制、统治方式、生活方式和经济生活组织方式的矛盾和冲突，构成了满汉文化冲突的主要内容，加剧了顺治和康熙初年的社会矛盾。面对激烈的满汉文化冲突，清初理学既不批判现实，也不反传统，而是致力于社会重建，力图通过合法的渠道，按照儒家的正统模式，重建中国社会伦理道德秩序，并借机恢复自己在意识形态中的独尊地位。在以熊赐履为代表的一批理学名臣真正将理学推向朝廷之后，理学在清朝政治中的影响随之急剧扩大，以理学为代表的儒家思想逐渐成为清朝政权的指导思想，成为清朝社会中占统治地位的官方意识形态，从根本上解决了清初社会政治演变方向问题。在此过程中，清朝政治逐渐完成了从满洲传统政治向中原政治的历史性转型，而皇帝转向儒学，为清朝内部持续数十年的文化纷争画上了圆满的句号，使满汉间全方位的深层次的民族融合成为可能。与之相应，遗民政治态度从复明到重建的改变，则是清初中国社会由乱到治的标志性政治和文化现象。

关键词：满汉 文化冲突 社会重建 理学 儒家 遗民

During the Ming-Qing dynastic transition, the contradictions and conflicts arising from the different political systems, ways of rule, living styles and organization modes of economic life between the Manchu and the Han constituted a central part of Manchu-Han cultural conflicts, and intensified the social contradiction during the earlier years of emperors Shunzhi and Kangxi. Against this background, the early-Qing Neo-Confucianism neither criticized the reality nor rejected the tradition, but attempted to reestablish the moral and ethical order of the Chinese society in accordance with orthodox Confucianism. With its introduction into the imperial court by famous Neo-Confucianists such as Xiong Cilü, Neo-Confucianism began to enjoy increasing influence in Qing politics, and became the dominant official ideology in the Qing society. With this, the Qing dynasty gradually completed its historical transition from traditional Manchu politics to Central-plains politics. Moreover, the emperor's turn

to Confucianism also put a good end to the decade-long cultural conflict within the Qing dynasty, thus making possible the ethnic intermingling between the Manchu and the Han. Accordingly, the change in Ming loyalists' political attitude was a political and cultural indicator of the disorder-order transition of the early-Qing Chinese society.

Keywords: Manchu-Han, cultural conflict, social reestablishment, Neo-Confucianism, Confucianism, loyalists

For scholars and commoners in the Central Plains, 1644 was a year of suffering and conflict. First, the Ming dynasty crumbled, and then came invasion by the “barbarians.” Within the short space of a few weeks, they underwent the kind of revolutionary change that happens once in several hundred years. Over the following twenty years, the flames of war raged across Chinese soil, corpses lay unburied and the rivers ran with blood. Civilization and barbarism, loyalty and treachery, integrity and conspiracy, progress and regression were interwoven, forming a pictorial scroll depicting a history of acute conflict, volatility and complexity. In all these conflicts, the crucial element was undoubtedly the way the Manchu ruling stratum, Han Neo-Confucian officials and Han loyalists of the former dynasty retrieved, deserted or changed their own traditions, and the decisions they made. These choices concerning tradition, together with perspectives differing with the times and different degrees of intensity, together with the absence of a resort to force, subvert our stereotypical judgments about Chinese tradition.

At a particular time, the logic of power can outweigh the logic of morality. The Qing regime constituted by Manchu nobles eventually triumphed over the antagonism of the Han Chinese and established the Manchu rule over the whole country. Nevertheless, this political power, from the very beginning, was confronted with many questions of principle in politics and culture that dynasties dominated by Han Chinese never encountered and never would have encountered. Among them, the questions of what kind of social ideas should be adopted to reconstruct the Chinese society in the early Qing period, what sort of social ideals should be taken as the evolutionary direction of Qing society, and what sort of political principles should be used to govern the country and win rule over the Central Plains were of fundamental significance for the political life of the times and became the focus of heated debate for the ruling class and the Ming loyalists.

I. Manchu-Han Cultural Conflict at a Time of Dynastic Change

In my view, the word “nation” (*minzu*) is quite different from race. Different races have not only cultural but also physical and physiological differences. Nation is different in that, to a large extent, it is a cultural concept based on the distinctive ways of life, value concepts, moral customs, and historical traditions that shape different peoples. The opposition and conflict of interest between nations has always been a product of the interplay of cultures, for

people's understanding and judgments about "interests," or the very locus of these interests, are the result of particular cultural concepts. Some Manchu nobles, proceeding from their own interests as a nation, attempted to impose their own cultural model on the Han Chinese and rule over the Central Plains according to their own traditional ways of thinking and acting. This produced in the main body of local inhabitants, the Han, an intense sense of cultural crisis, of "what is barbarian being used to change what is Chinese," as if "the skies were falling and the earth cracking." Therefore, Han intellectuals represented by Gu Yanwu and others saw the Qing forces' eruption into China as the "loss of all under Heaven," and hence raised the warning cry that "Every man is responsible for the fate of his country."¹ They had no choice but to rise in resistance, so there came into being a sharp opposition between the two nations in terms of basic underlying culture. Such cultural conflicts mainly revolve around the following points.

First, in terms of political structure, the ruling privileges of the Manchu nobles occupied a high place in their ancestral system of family law. Under it, the princes joined in deliberation on state affairs, unlike China's autocratic government. According to the political thinking of Nurhaci, the Deliberative Council of Princes and Ministers was not only the top decision-making body but also the supreme organ of power. If an emperor or a ruler did not accept advice from a court official or flouted morality, someone else who possessed virtue and morality could be crowned in his stead.² The political system established on the basis of this ancestral system could only be a monarchy tempered by aristocratic republicanism rather than an absolute monarchy. This was the opposite of the Confucian political tradition that had grown up since the Song and Ming dynasties, which promoted autocratic rule and emphasized the rigid political hierarchy separating subjects and their ruler. They proposed an official autocracy with imperial power at its heart. On this matter, the two systems basically had no room for compromise.

Second, on methods of rule, around the time they entered China through the Shanhai Pass, the Jin dynasty (1616-1636, later called the Qing dynasty) announced that "The state will use both military and cultural means; with the former to suppress calamity and chaos and with the latter to maintain peace in the society." This indicated their wish to "develop statecraft,"³ and they did introduce some Chinese institutions into their government and social construction. However, in reality, the influence of the Han system was still slight. Han officials who served the Qing dynasty often feared that "Should any disruptive person claim that the Han system is not applicable to the Qing dynasty, a new system would be created and Han ways would be discontinued."⁴ For quite some time after entering the Pass, due to the influence of the

1 Gu Yanwu, "Zheng Shi."

2 *Veritable Records of Emperor Taizu of the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Wu*, vol. 4, the 3rd day of the 3rd month in the 7th year of Emperor Taizu's reign.

3 "Election One."

4 *Veritable Records of Emperor Taizong of the Qing Dynasty*, vol. 10, the renchen day of the 12th month in the 5th year of Emperor Taizu's reign.

“family rules of the present dynasty” and the “existing ancestral rules,” there still existed a contradiction within the Qing regime between valuing horsemanship, archery and bravery on the one hand and, on the other, esteeming civilian government based on education; between the various Manchu beliefs and exclusive veneration of Confucian teachings and Confucian statecraft; and between the Manchu nobles’ monopoly of political power and their respect for Han scholars and use of Han learned in the Confucian classics and statecraft.

Third, in terms of way of life, there existed contradictions between Manchu customs and Han traditions, embodied in clothing and hairstyles. In the first year of Emperor’s Shunzhi reign (1644), when the Qing court first moved to Beijing, the Han Chinese were allowed to retain their own costumes and hairstyles since the Manchus’ grip on power was still shaky. However, in June 1644, with the victories achieved by the Qing forces in the southern expedition, Dorgon (the then Prince Regent) strictly enforced the tonsure.

This measure reflected the fact that the Qing rulers of the time were anxious to replace the Ming system with that of the Qing and to strengthen their political intent through “uniformity” in dress and hairstyle. Nevertheless, as a crucial aspect of a people’s way of life, hairstyles and dress have always been important symbols of history and cultural tradition. For this very reason, the order that men should shave their heads and wear a queue made the Han Chinese feel strongly that they had been conquered. Impelled by earnest and solemn national sentiment, men and women, young and old, rich and poor and high and low, all rose in resistance. “Their feelings of grief and indignation about keeping their dress and hairstyles and their readiness to fight were even stronger than their feelings about protecting the state and the emperor. Often they would rather die than follow Tartar custom”⁵ to the extent that Secretary of the Grand Council Chen Mingxia said that “If the Ming hairstyle can be kept and the Ming style of dress can be restored, the world will rest at peace.”⁶ Even in the flourishing Qianlong period, there were still episodes of Han resistance to the Manchu-decreed hairstyle. In the 31st year of Qianlong’s reign, an outbreak of queue-cutting, in which men’s queues were cut off after they had been drugged unconscious, caused quite a stir. Such cases appeared in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Zhili (the present Hebei), Shandong, Hubei and elsewhere. Such conflicts could be resolved by military means, but opposition and contradiction in other aspects of the Han nation’s way of life (their wedding and funeral customs, festivals and eating habits) lasted for a long time and frequently erupted. In the case of funerals, for example, Manchu funerals and burial ceremonies were quite simple. When Nurhaci died, he was coffined and buried the next day. After entering the Pass, the Manchu funerals became more ceremonious, but they were still not comparable to the Han ones. Some Manchu officials even refused to observe the Confucian rules on funerals and violated the “prohibition on celebrating feasts or festivals during the mourning period.” The Han officials had always chastised such phenomena. For instance, in the 25th year of Kangxi, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Rites Xu Qianxue criticized Manchu

5 Martino Martini, “Tatar Wars,” p. 31.

6 “Chen Mingxia.”

officials in Beijing for “following the old customs,” “taking off mourning dress after a hundred days,” “watching plays in the mourning period,” and “behaving most indecorously.”⁷

Fourth, with regard to the organization of social and economic life, there were contradictions between the serf system and the landlord system, contradictions exemplified in the sharp conflict over the enclosure policy introduced in the early Qing dynasty. In the twelfth month of the first year of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign, the Qing court issued a decree of enclosure on the grounds that “The Manchu princes, officials who have rendered meritorious service, and rank-and-file soldiers have no place to settle down.” A large quantity of “unclaimed land” in the provinces and counties near Beijing was assigned to the Manchu nobles⁸ in the first act of the early Qing enclosure movement.

The nominal purpose of these enclosures was to occupy “unclaimed land,” but their actual purpose was to seize land belonging to the Han. What the Qing referred to as “lands in and around the royal capital were enclosed and assigned to the Eight Banners and handed to estate managers for supervision”⁹ was typical of the policy of seizure of Han property, a policy that caused intense suffering for Han Chinese in the enclosed areas.

It is noteworthy that the enclosures were not only a matter of the struggle between Manchu and Han. It operated by destroying existing economic relations in the enclosed areas and replacing them with the backward system of serfdom. This resulted in a huge number of Han Chinese farmers losing both their lands and property and their personal freedom, as they were made serfs or slaves. The enclosure of land, the decree that allowed the Eight Banners to seize Han property and the Law on Escapees were strongly opposed by Confucian officials from Emperor Shunzhi’s reign on. Though the Qing denounced opposition to the enclosures and calls for reduced punishment for runaway slaves, on the grounds that those who spoke up were “favoring the Han, seeking to make the Manchus suffer, and plotting and being disloyal,”¹⁰ and tried to suppress them with high-handed measures, opposing voices could still be heard in the Kangxi era. “While praying for rain to relieve the drought, the Imperial Censor Xu Yue pleaded for those implicated in such escapes to be treated leniently as such a policy would lead to peace.” “Public opinion considered him right though his plea was not successful.”¹¹ Fan Chengmo, Governor of Zhejiang province, presented a memorial to the throne on “the great harm caused by the ‘Law on Escapees,’” saying: “Unless the law is changed, the common people’s lives and those of their families will have no security.”¹² The struggles over the enclosures and fugitive slaves involved not only the opposition of two

7 Li Yuandu, “Biography of the Minister Xu Jian’an.”

8 *Veritable Records of Emperor Shunzhi of the Qing Dynasty*, vol. 12, the dingchou day of the 12th month in the 1st year of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign.

9 Huang Zongxi, “Biography of Taiyuan Jin Gong, Senior Official of Ministry of War.”

10 *Veritable Records of Emperor Shunzhi of the Qing Dynasty*, vol. 90, the jiawu day of the 3rd month in the 12th year of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign.

11 Jiang Chenying, “Inscriptions of Mr. Xu, the Former Commissioner of Government to Zhejiang Circuit.”

12 Fan Chengmo, “Petitioning for Extricating the Southeast from Its Predicament.”

modes of production, but also the opposition of the Confucian policy of benevolence and the Manchu political tradition.

The fierce conflict between the Manchu and Han cultures intensified the contradictions of the early years of the Shunzhi and Kangxi eras. Under the high-handed rule of the Qing court, the great majority of the Han were in dire straits. In these circumstances, they had no choice but to rise in resistance, not only for the sake of their people's dignity, but also for their own survival and for the sacred and inviolable rights belonging to all humanity by birth.

The anti-Qing struggle in the Shunzhi and Kangxi eras is a solemn and stirring epic of heroism. In those decades, so many men forsook their homes and children, recklessly seeking danger and watering the Central Plains with their blood! Crisis reveals the true character of a man as high winds prove the sturdiness of the grass. Horsemen speed amid the harsh winds of autumn, their heroic spirit filling our divine land and outshining the sun and moon. Qian Chengzhi said that "Since the disturbances and bloodshed, many people have died in different ways, but their deaths were not commensurate: some resolutely died a martyr's death, displaying an indomitable spirit in the face of adversity; some calmly committed suicide, and could not be dissuaded; and some died after vainly seeking a way of surviving."¹³ Chen Que gave a grief-stricken and indignant description of the tragedy of 22 "unusual men," who were still resisting the Qing in the 3rd year of Shunzhi's reign in his work *Record of the Unusual Men of Dongming Temple*. With no way out, but unwilling to cause trouble for the common people or live a hole-and-corner life, "They all sought death in the waters of the Bilang Lake."¹⁴

Though the anti-Qing struggle failed, reluctance to succumb to the Qing and accept the Qing's rule lived on in the hearts of the Han. In the second year of Shunzhi's reign, Gu Yanwu's mother sheltered herself at Changshu from the Qing forces, telling her son that "Though as a woman, I have received the grace and favor of the Ming dynasty. Therefore, I'd rather die than suffer humiliation.' When learning the news that both Beijing and Nanjing were captured, she began to abstain from food and died in her dwelling on the thirtieth day of the seventh month. In her dying words to her son, she asked him to study hard and live as a recluse in the countryside, never to become an official of Qing dynasty." 35 years later, recalling his mother's last words, Gu was still filled with deeply sorrow: "Every time I think of her, tears well up in my eyes."¹⁵ In his poem "On the Sea," Gu Yanwu wrote: "Ascending the mountain, I enjoy the distant view; the gathering mist hangs low over the sea, the autumn sun shines bright. Ten years of clashing spears all around; the bitter suffering of the living in the four seas. On the clashing waves, we yearn for a 'white bird' general from the holy mountain; in the floating clouds, we seek the 'glittering gold' of a commander from the fairy pavilion; yet our lofty aspirations and ambitions could hardly be realized on such a void tiny

13 Qian Chengzhi, "Preface to *Records of Righteous Men in Late Ming Dynasty*."

14 Chen Que, "Record of the Unusual Men of the Dongming Temple."

15 Gu Yanwu, "Letters to the Official Historians in the Office of Historiographer."

plot.” This vividly reflects the anguish of many intellectuals over the loss of their country.¹⁶ It was precisely this anguish and profound nationalist feeling that led to the emergence of large numbers of Ming loyalists.

As the Qing succeeded the Ming, the emergence of a great number of Ming loyalists can be seen as a major historical event. At the time, many of them left their homes and lived in solitude in remote areas to maintain their loyalty. Qian Chengzhi said that “If a superior man should unfortunately encounter a change of dynasty and die together with his emperor, this would be considered an act of great righteousness. If an emperor were to die for his country, he would die a worthy death. But if an emperor dies for his country and few follow him in death, people may say: ‘Ministers in the court ought to die for the country, but how can private people be obliged to do so?’ Those who had been officials of the former dynasty are another case again. As for those who neither died nor took an official post, but eked out an existence, they were simply mediocre and weak and are not worth mentioning. Then there were nobodies who had never held office, who, however, hearing with dismay the change of dynasty, had the courage to drown themselves or calmly refuse food till they starved to death, while yet others forsook their wives and children, and with lean and haggard mien escaped beyond the borders and wandered hungry and homeless until they died. All this could not have been stopped. Alas! All these people sprung up in imitation of the loyalty of Bo Yi; one can call them righteous men.”¹⁷ For instance, the renowned scholar Sun Qifeng was filled with sorrow and indignation over the Qing dynasty’s succession to the Ming. He sighed, “We may not be able to use the culture of Xia [China] to civilize the Eastern barbarians, but never shall we allow them to destroy it.”¹⁸ In the early years of Shunzhi’s reign, these people lived a secluded and self-sufficient life as farmers and firmly refused to serve as local officials.¹⁹ Reflecting on the past in the light of the present, Huang Zongxi could not but sigh with deep emotion, “Since the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, no one has been an equal to the eastern and northern barbarians in throwing our country into disorder.”²⁰ These loyalists of the Ming dynasty harbored deep sorrow and anger over the fall of the country and the break-up of their families. They withdrew from the society and lived in solitude; decades later, they still bore in mind the favor bestowed on them by the Ming, nor did they forget the dress and culture of the country they had known.

It was this deep emotional attachment that became a major spiritual support for the Ming loyalists in the early Qing. The fact that the movement to restore the Ming dynasty in the early Qing lasted as long as it did was actually closely related to the support of these loyalists.

It is important to note that amid the clash of cultures, even the Han who were willing to cooperate with the Qing court, and particularly those officials who had gone over to the Qing,

16 Gu Yanwu, “On the Sea.”

17 Qian Chengzhi, “Records of Righteous Men.”

18 Sun Qifeng, “Prose of the Yangtze River Crossing.”

19 Wei Xiangshu, “Epitaph of the Hermit Sun Zhongyuan.”

20 Huang Zongxi, *Poetry Addendum of Huang Zongxi*, p. 7.

had difficulty forgetting the old order; they frequently felt weary of life, and sighed over their country's decline. Hou Fangyu, for example, was made by local officials to take the provincial examination in the 8th year of Shunzhi's reign; the following year, he built the Hall of Repentance (*Zhuanghuitang*), lamenting: "My whole life is full of regrets and repentance."²¹

The vicissitudes of Wu Weiye in the early Qing reflect, to some degree, the feelings of those scholars who had surrendered to the Qing. As a renowned scholar in the late Ming, Wu naturally became a leader among southeastern scholars at the beginning of the Qing. He was acknowledged to be "a learned and eminent talent, who is second to none in the southeast."²² Such abilities could never be overlooked by the Qing government, so court officials tried by inducements or coercion to get him to give in. In the end, he was unable to refuse the summons and had to take office under the new dynasty, first as an expositor-in-waiting in the Secretariat, where he compiled the imperial decrees of emperors Taizu and Taizong, and then as a Chief in the Imperial College.

Though he was serving as a Qing official, Wu felt increasingly regretful and guilty. In his last poem, he wrote, "I have crept along from day to day for over twenty years; how can I eradicate this wrongdoing? One should repay favors received and debts owed in full, but all I have done has been lighter than a feather."²³ When he was arranging his affairs, he said briefly, "I have encountered nothing but cares and dangers; I have never had a moment free from troubles or a place away from bitterness. Indeed, I am a man of great sorrows. After I die, bury me near Deng Wei and Ling Yan with a gravestone in front of my tomb inscribed 'The Tomb of Poet Wu Meicun.'"²⁴

To a large extent, we can say that Wu Weiye's suffering reflects the distress of those Han officials who served the Qing regime. Their bitterness stemmed not only from their nostalgia for the Ming dynasty and their yearning for their former master, and the deep regret and grief they felt over their "treachery," but also from Manchu-Han cultural clashes. In the Shunzhi and early Kangxi eras, even those Hans who had gained official rank through the standard examination route and who were not burdened by the idea of "betrayal," and therefore served the Qing with loyalty and diligence—even they were concerned about the fact that the Manchu nobles' unique politics and culture "failed to observe the Way." When they experienced discrimination and slights, they were "resentful but not indignant on their own behalf"; but when there were many absences at the suburban sacrifice, the ceremonies and rituals fell short, the bell and drum accompaniment was not to be heard, and no table was set in the hall of the temple, they feared that the "faint ray of hope" for the "Sacred Learning" might eventually be cut off.²⁵ It is easy to understand why former Ming officials like Wu

21 Hou Fangyu, "Records of *Zhuanghuitang*."

22 "Wu Weiye."

23 Wu Weiye, "Latter Collection of Poems · Four Poems before Death."

24 Gu Shishi, *The Chronicle of Wu Meicun*, vol. 4, the 16th year of Emperor Kangxi's reign.

25 The Neo-Confucians in Qing dynasty had intense sense of crisis in such matters. They were forced to take a range of actions due to the harsh realities. This will be dealt with later.

Weiye, who had no alternative but to serve the Qing, had complex and painful thoughts and feelings. They were sacrifices on the altar of the changing times. Their emotions were far more complex than those of the “righteous loyalists” who shed their blood on the battlefield or withdrew from the world, and were harder for their contemporaries and later generations to understand.

II. Neither Criticizing the Realities nor Opposing Tradition: The Political Stance of Neo-Confucianism in the Early Qing Dynasty

The early Qing dynasty saw three influential trends in political thought. The first was the ancestral system of the noble Manchu families, the second was the radical political ideas represented by Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi, and the third neo-Confucianism as represented by the philosophy of Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi. Among these three intellectual trends, the radical political ideas were sharp rather than profound and incoherent rather than systematic. Their advocates were mostly Ming loyalists who dwelt in seclusion in the mountains and the wilderness, and who had little chance of influencing state affairs, let alone of taking up the historical responsibility of guiding the reconstruction of the society. Therefore, in early Qing political circles, the political and cultural conflict we are referring to mainly existed between Confucian orthodoxy and Manchu tradition.

A striking phenomenon in the early Qing was that the most active advocates of “rules handed down from ancestors” were often high-ranking Manchu nobles rather than the supreme ruler. There was a simple reason for this: the emperor’s interests and those of the Manchu nobles were not entirely congruent and their perspectives on issues were not identical. Much of the content of the “rules handed down from ancestors” that had taken shape outside the Shanhai Pass suited the nobles’ interests but was not conducive to strengthening the ruler’s power (such as the principle that all the princes participated in the deliberation of state affairs). In particular, it did not facilitate the establishment of a stable regime in the interior. Some nobles, out of narrow Manchu chauvinism and self-interest, feared that though they had gained an empire, they were losing Manchu traditions; they gave no thought to the future of the dynasty. In the case of the emperor, his special status as “Lord of all under heaven” determined that his interests and those of the dynasty coincided almost exactly, so what most concerned him was not “family law,” but strengthening the monarchy and laying the foundation for his lasting rule. This marked difference between the political interests of the emperor and those of the Manchu nobles created important historical preconditions for raising the position of Neo-Confucianism at court and thus exerted a profound influence on the direction of early Qing politics.

The flourishing of Neo-Confucianism in the early Qing stemmed from the political needs of the time, but it also owed much to the fact that it acknowledged and supported the Qing’s rule and took the political position of devoting its efforts to the reconstruction of the society.

One fact deserves our attention: the early advocates of neo-Confucianism were mostly loyalists of the former dynasty. Despite sectarian disputes like those between followers of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi and followers of Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming, almost all without exception had dropped their anti-Qing stance²⁶ and shared common views on a series of important social and political issues. They felt nostalgia for the Ming dynasty, but did not attempt to change the reality of the Qing's rule. On the contrary, directly or indirectly they collaborated with it, striving to bring a speedy end to the state of turmoil that had prevailed since the late Ming and to create a stable and harmonious social environment. For example, when the Qing's rule was established, Sun Qifeng was engaged in farming and lecturing. "He had scores of students. They built a place for their gatherings and he expounded scholarship. This often went on until midnight, but no one felt tired."²⁷ Interestingly, Sun maintained close contact with some of the officials at court. A typical example is that the famous neo-Confucianism ministers Wei Yijie, Wei Xiangshu, and Tang Bin all had dealings with him and were influenced by his learning. Wei Xiangshu said that he "had regarded Mr. Sun Qifeng as his teacher for 20 years,"²⁸ while Tang Bin, "when declining office on the grounds of illness and returning to farming, took Mr. Sun as his teacher. When reading, his use and rejection of the materials were appropriate and his ideas were concise and to the point; I was fortunate in receiving face-to-face instruction from him."²⁹

In short, early Qing Neo-Confucianism aimed neither to criticize reality nor to oppose tradition. It attempted to reconstruct the moral and ethical order of the Chinese society through legitimate channels according to the orthodox Confucian model, seizing the opportunity to restore its ideological preeminence. An indispensable precondition for accomplishing this historic mission was the recognition and support of the Qing court. Clearly, such work could not be completed by the famous Neo-Confucian recluses; its only hope was the Neo-Confucian officials at court.³⁰ This may be the major reason why Sun Qifeng, Li Yong and others were willing to keep close contact with scholars making their careers at the Qing court.

26 It should be noted that among early Qing Neo-Confucian scholars, Lü Liuliang rather stands out. Though he did not oppose the Qing openly, he was quite concerned about the state of affairs between the Chinese and the "barbarians" and was also against the autocracy that had prevailed since the Qin and Han dynasties. He believed that from the Qin dynasty on, "the intention to found a state has mostly proceeded from selfishness and self-interest. Institutions and decrees all stem from this." He emphasized that "Heaven's order and heaven's punishments are not obtained by the ruler and his ministers but happen for their own reasons" (Cf. Lü Liuliang, "The Great Learning"). His ideas were to some extent at odds with the Neo-Confucian tradition of upholding the ruler's power that had operated since the Song and Yuan dynasties. Although similar views are not hard to find among early Qing Neo-Confucian loyalists, they did not represent scholarly opinion and hence did not have much influence on society.

27 Huang Rong, "Sun Qifeng."

28 Wei Xiangshu, "Letters to Sun Zhongyuan."

29 Tang Bin, "Preface to *Biographical Account of the Masters of Neo-Confucianism*."

30 It should be noted that the Neo-Confucian officials here refer mainly to those officials who espoused Neo-Confucianism. They were not necessarily Neo-Confucians with deep learning.

The facts bore this out. In the early Qing, those who promoted Neo-Confucianism at court so that it gained the status of orthodoxy were not the famous recluses like Sun Qifeng and Lu Shiyi, but the Neo-Confucian high officials represented by Xiong Cilü, Wei Yijie, Wei Xiangshu, Tang Bin and Li Guangdi.

A careful examination of early Qing political history reveals a striking phenomenon: not long after the Manchus came through the pass, some Han officials, faced with Manchu-Han cultural clashes, called for the Manchu nobles, especially the emperor, to learn Confucianism. The long-standing and well-established Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism became their most important instrument in propagating Confucianism, and the emperor became their most important target audience. The reason for this is very simple. The Shunzhi and Kangxi emperors both ascended the throne at a tender age, so they were pliable. Moreover, in the eyes of Neo-Confucian officials, the emperor's cultural choices were to a large extent the cultural choices of the regime. "If the emperor's heart is upright, the country will be in good order, in the same way as the Celestial Pivot brings all the other stars along with it."³¹ "What is fundamentally important in the country is the emperor himself. He attends to everything in person. All matters are decided by him and all the things are at his disposition."³² On the issue of encouraging the emperor to dedicate himself to studying Confucianism, Neo-Confucian officials were in full agreement, considering it their "top priority."³³ Led by this guiding principle, from the beginning of the early Shunzhi era, the Han officials in the court, most of whom were Neo-Confucians, tried strenuously to instill Confucian thinking into the emperor. Such efforts lasted nearly thirty years, and eventually paid off. After Kangxi came into power, the Manchu nobles around him began a process of comprehensive study of Confucian culture. A group of important Neo-Confucian officials at court became the close advisers and assistants to the Emperor Kangxi. The political influence of Neo-Confucianism expanded dramatically under the Qing and the Confucianization of the Qing regime proceeded apace. This opened up a new vista in Chinese politics and society.

III. Confucianization: The Qing Regime's Cultural Choice

In a traditional society, a regime's cultural choices influence and even determine the direction of cultural evolution. In terms of overall historical trends, we may say that in the Qing, the all-round integration of Han and Manchu culture began with the court and ended among the people. The most important indicator of the former was the fact that the Qing court under Kangxi gradually executed the basic political principles of neo-Confucianism. This process was accompanied by a historic changeover in Qing politics from traditional Manchu politics to the politics of the Central Plains. In terms of culture, the core content of the changeover

31 Qian Yiji, ed., "Peng Shaosheng's Writings on the Tang Bin Affair."

32 Xiong Cilü, "A Ten Thousand Words' Memorial Submitted upon Acceptance of an Imperial Edict."

33 Qian Yiji, ed., "Peng Shaosheng's Writings on the Xiong Cilü Affair."

was that the fact that the Qing emperors and Manchu nobles gradually became followers and implementers of the Confucian teachings represented by neo-Confucianism. This historic change made possible the overall integration of the Han and the Manchus at a deeper level.

Emperor Kangxi's systematic study of Confucian teachings was a major event with far-reaching influence on the history of the early Qing dynasty. The emperor had been keenly interested in studying Confucianism since his boyhood. After taking power, at the urge of such Confucian officials as Xiong Cilü, Zhang Ying and Chen Tingjing, he studied harder, with the result that both his knowledge of the teachings of neo-Confucianism and his administrative ability showed a noticeable improvement. The neo-Confucian officials at court, in particular, constantly cherished high hopes that the young emperor would combine Confucian orthodoxy with orthodox governance.

Indeed, the young emperor did live up to the expectations of his neo-Confucian officials; he was an avid student of Confucianism. It was when he took the reins of the government that Confucian thought, represented by Neo-Confucianism, gradually became the guiding thinking of the Qing regime and the dominant official ideology in Qing society.

1. From Kangxi on, the Qing sovereigns systematically accepted the basic teachings of Neo-Confucianism and strove to put them into practice, achieving the integration of Confucian orthodoxy and orthodox governance

In terms of guiding thought, this decided the direction in which Qing politics evolved. Unlike Emperor Shunzhi, Emperor Kangxi had never been interested in Buddhism in his boyhood, but was set on the study of Confucianism. After taking the reins of government, and particularly after having wiped out the forces of Oboi, he studied Confucianism even more avidly, while Xiong Cilü, Chen Tingjing and others worked hard to instill in the young emperor the basic propositions of Confucianism and the way to administer state affairs and ensure peace and security; what is called "Being cautious day and night, I have never forgotten the principle of being a sage within and a king without, or the basic precepts of correcting and cultivating my moral character, discussing and expounding them straightforwardly to understand these great principles."³⁴ Chen Tingjing said, "I used to admire those officials of the Song Dynasty who, by half of *The Analects*, were able to explain the principles of respect, good faith, chastity, benevolence and studiousness distinctly. Master Zhu used four words in his report: 'Good faith, upright heart.' This means that the principle of ruling the world peacefully is none other than understanding virtue and renewing the people, making our sovereign as virtuous as Yao and Shun. Who would dare forget the idea of pointing out mistakes and remonstrate with our sovereign?"³⁵ Chen emphasized what is called "the Way of Great Learning," which means "understanding the bright virtue, renewing the

34 "Oral Order Sent to the Ministry of Personnel on the 20th Day of the 4th Month in the 51st Year of Emperor Kangxi's Reign." Emperor Kangxi also said, "How could I forget Mr. Xiong's kindness? Thanks to him, I have learned a few characters and principles." See Li Guangdi, "Current Affairs of the Dynasty."

35 Chen Tingjing, *Collection of Wuting*, vol. 30.

people, and resting in supreme goodness.” “A great man’s way of learning lies in resting in supreme goodness; this is the perfect achievement of cultivation of the self and governance of the people, as well as an important path to becoming a sage within and a king without.”³⁶

Reverence was an important feature of early Qing Neo-Confucian learning. In interpreting Confucianism to Emperor Kangxi, Xiong Cilü, Chen Tingjing and others were very prudent and dared not readily give an interpretation lightly. Xiong Cilü said, “Whenever I had to report to the emperor I always quoted the classics directly, lest one or two words might deviate from the teachings of the sages of the past.” “I dared not act or speak wrongly or invent a different interpretation that would dishonor the words of the sages and betray the emperor’s gracious inquiry.”³⁷ Emperor Kangxi accepted this idea of reverence for Confucian classics in its entirety and used it in combination with his position as lord over the people. We may say that it ran through his whole life. Looking back over his achievements in the third month of the 50th year of his reign, he said: “I have studied since childhood and know something of the classics and the history. In personal affairs I take sincerity and respect as the foundation, and in governing the country I attach great importance to benevolence and lenience. Although my virtues are faint and my wits are slow, I have meticulously adhered to this idea and this intention for 50 years, night and day, never daring to neglect the slightest business in the least.”³⁸

Like such Neo-Confucians as Xiong Cilü and Chen Tingjing, Emperor Kangxi not only esteemed reverence in academic terms but also put great emphasis on personal implementation, which he took as a basic principle of governance and endeavored to put into political practice. He held that out of knowing and doing, doing is more important than knowing. Seeking to compare their relative merits, he said: “After all, doing is more important than knowing. If something can’t be done, knowledge is empty.”³⁹ He warned the official in charge of the daily exposition, “Reading the classics aloud should not be abandoned. Personal implementation and practice is of utmost importance.”⁴⁰ In the sixth month of the 43rd year of his reign, he particularly mentioned his high esteem for personal implementation in a conversation with Kui Xu, Hai Bao, and other officials charged with recording his movements.

He also stressed, “Understanding principles is the most important. In my daily studies, I make a thorough inquiry into the principles therein, and am always particular about the ways of governance and like to see them in the measures taken. Therefore, once you are clear about the principles, you must put them into action. If you don’t, your talk is empty.”⁴¹

It is worth noting that not only did Emperor Kangxi implement Confucianism in everything

36 “The Great Learning.”

37 Xiong Cilü, “Postscript to ‘On the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate.’”

38 “Oral Order on the 3rd Day of the 3rd Month in the 50th Year of Emperor Kangxi’s Reign.”

39 Wang Shizhen, “Q&A in Classes for the Emperor,” p. 60.

40 “Oral Order to Scholar Niu Niu.”

41 *Record of Emperor Kangxi’s Daily Life*, vol. 1, the 26th day of the 9th month in the 12th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, p. 116.

he did, but also, proceeding from his position on personal practice, he reprimanded the Confucian officials whose deeds failed to match their words. He said: “I see that there are too many people whose words do not match their deeds. They talk about Neo-Confucianism all day long, but all their actions run counter to their words. How can this be called Confucianism? True Confucianism is when someone doesn’t talk, but always acts strictly in accordance with Confucian principles.”⁴² Aiming at the word “heresy,” which appeared in the notes for daily lectures, he asked, “What is heresy? In my opinion, disloyalty by ministers who foster their own men and engage in malpractice for the selfish ends of their disciples, former followers and fellow townsmen while bragging about morality and justice – now, that’s really heresy.”⁴³ He also said: “What is valuable in those who study neo-Confucianism is that they practice what they preach and translate what they say into actual achievements, not just empty words. Today, many people style themselves students of neo-Confucianism, but in reality their words and deeds contradict with each other.”⁴⁴ It was since early Qing that “Everyday affairs without exception followed this principle,” and part of the value of Neo-Confucianism was that it put this popular view into practice. Emperor Kangxi believed that the Han neglect their real work but set great store by undeserved reputation. Among the Manchus there are still genuine students of neo-Confucianism. He had redoubled esteem for such upright officials as Yu Chenglong, praising him by saying: “A Neo-Confucian dare not use empty words. Yu Chenglong is absolutely clean and honest in his official post, although he does not talk about Neo-Confucianism. And this is true Neo-Confucianist.”⁴⁵

In the 12th month of the 16th year of his reign, emperor Kangxi personally wrote the Preface to *Explanation and Argumentation of Four Books during Daily Tutoring*. In this programmatic document, he stressed “The orthodox Way that is handed down through a myriad generations is bound up with orthodox governance.” He unequivocally declared that the Qing government should promote Confucianism and use virtue and ritual to govern the country. In fact, he was using the preface as a guideline for Neo-Confucian thinking on personnel selection and administration. He took the idealized society of Yao, Shun and Yu in remote antiquity as the direction for development and took Confucian orthodoxy as the basic guiding principle for governing the state.

The policy of taking Confucian ideas, particularly Neo-Confucianism, as the basic contents for educating the emperor’s sons was formally decided on in the reign of Emperor Kangxi and followed closely by later generations. For instance, Emperor Yongzheng chose Zhu Shi and Cai Shiyuan, both noted Neo-Confucians, to be the teachers of his heir, the future Emperor Qianlong, despite his own lack of interest in Neo-Confucianism. Likewise, Zhu Gui,

42 *Record of Emperor Kangxi’s Daily Life*, vol. 2, the 24th day of the 10th month in the 22nd year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, p. 1089.

43 Li Guangdi, “Eminent Persons of the Qing Dynasty.”

44 “Tang Bin.”

45 Li Yuandu, “Official Affairs of Yu Qingduan.”

the teacher selected by Qianlong for Emperor Jiaqing, was famous at the time for his Neo-Confucian learning. From the point of view of intellectual transmission, teaching the princes Neo-Confucianism in fact ensured that Neo-Confucianism occupied the dominant position in the Qing regime for a long time and became its dominant ideology.

2. The general strategy of Confucian governance was gradually accepted and implemented by Qing rulers

In the course of Kangxi's Confucian studies, Confucian officials such as Xiong Cilü lost no time in persistently instilling in the young emperor the Confucian art of government, thus gradually turning him into a practitioner of the Confucian strategy for governance. Specifically, this involved:

(1) Energetic promotion of moral education. Emperor Kangxi once asked Xiong Cilü: "How can the actions of the court win people over?" Xiong answered, "Among the people there are high and low, but their hearts are all the same. Only when everything conforms exactly to the principles of neo-confucianism will the people gladly submit of their own accord. Otherwise, the plain and honest masses will have to be forced to obey." Emperor Kangxi readily agreed, saying: "Winning the hearts of the people should be taken as the foundation of governance; once this is done, nothing else remains."⁴⁶ Moral education had to be promoted to win the people over. Xiong Cilü and others repeatedly emphasized the extreme importance of moral education, advocating building schools and distinguishing between different levels of authority. The Kangxi Emperor attached great importance to these propositions and fully accepted them.

(2) The people form the foundation of a country; they must be allowed to recover and build up their strength. In winning the people over, the most important thing is to enable them to live peaceful and contented lives. In the ninth year of his reign, Emperor Kangxi ordered Xiong Cilü to write some large characters. He immediately wrote eight characters to the effect that, "Respect heaven; model yourself on your ancestors; know your subordinates; give peace to the people."⁴⁷ Chen Tingjing encouraged Emperor Kangxi to become a benevolent monarch and wise ruler who would cherish and nurture his people. He said: "Of all things under heaven, the greatest is to win the hearts of the people, and the way to do this lies in the constant attention to having a sage monarch and wise ministers who implement solid policies with sincerity. No expedient measures will do. For instance, the Han Emperor Wendi stopped his chariot to accept appeals, and Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty received advice with an open mind. This is what is called listening to admonition for the benefit of the people; this is just what "yao" means."⁴⁸ We could say this proposition of Chen Tingjing's reflected the common view held by early Qing Neo-Confucians.

46 *Record of Emperor Kangxi's Daily Life*, vol. 1, the 8th day of the 7th month in the 12th year of Emperor Kangxi's reign, p. 105.

47 Qian Yiji, ed., *Biographies from Stone Tablets*, vol. 11, a chronicle of Xiong Cilü's life.

48 Chen Tingjing, "Records of Answers to the Emperor in Classes for the Emperor."

(3) Having a pure heart and few desires and dealing with subordinates with simplicity. In discussing ways of government with Xiong Cilü at the Hall of Diligence on the 17th day of the twelfth month of the 11th year of his reign, Emperor Kangxi said: “At all times the way to give the people a respite has been not to trouble them. We would rather omit a superfluous action than take one. As I review the monarchs of the previous generations, I see that very often they would crave greatness and success, harass the people and waste money, disturb old rules and regulations, and engage in internal strife and clamor while the life of the people fell into deeper and deeper straits. This is a serious warning for us.” Xiong Cilü admonished: “The *Book of Documents* says one should meet subordinates without pomp and should examine the fundamental government systems established by previous rulers. This view of your Majesty’s is truly an important method for maintaining the achievements of your predecessors in all ages. However, in order to save trouble it is necessary to save worry first. It is possible to succeed by letting things take their own course only when we make unremitting efforts to improve ourselves. It is possible to rule with one’s arms folded only when each person gets on with his own job and works hard to render meritorious service. When a ruler makes constant progress with a pure heart and few desires, then his foundation is established and all his measures and facilities can be managed without an effort. Labor is lost when frequent changes and repeated disturbances are made. Nothing will be accomplished if one is dejected and apathetic. As we look back to previous generations, this is confirmed by clear evidence.” Emperor Kangxi readily subscribed to the idea, saying: “I know what you mean: the right way is for the emperor to be serious at heart but concise in administrative affairs.”⁴⁹

(4) It is necessary to be prudent in choosing an official, enquiring into and examining him in detail. Selecting an official is in fact granting him political power. The issue of whether officials are properly chosen directly concerns the rise and fall of states; this is something to which every generation of rulers has attached great importance. Xiong Cilü concentrated his energy on instilling Confucian principles for employing people into the mind of Emperor Kangxi. He said to the emperor: “Behavior is of first importance in the selection of personnel. As for their abilities, each person is different and it is hard to have a general criterion. How many people with both political integrity and ability have we seen from ancient times to the present day?! An emperor makes use of an official according to his abilities, using his strong points, but not asking for perfection. For instance, all of the myriad phenomena in the cosmos are different. They become useful as soon as they enter the great world. Nothing under heaven should be abandoned, and men of virtue do not discard anyone. The logic is the same.” Emperor Kangxi readily agreed.⁵⁰ Emperor Kangxi and Xiong Cilü shared the same opinion, both stressing that imperial censors “are the detectives of the court. With the authorities above, they correct misconduct and commend good conduct. With the common people below, they

49 *Record of Emperor Kangxi’s Daily Life*, vol. 1, the 17th day of the 12th month in the 11th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, pp. 68-69.

50 *Ibid.*, the 12th day of the 8th month in the 11th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, p. 52.

castigate the bad and extol the good, and make every effort not to hold back anything they know and to be exhaustive in their reporting. This way, they can be said to be filling their post with credit.”⁵¹ “Providing wide opportunities for airing views is a matter of first importance for governance.”⁵²

3. *Confucian officials occupied prominent positions in the Qing regime and became an important force of influencing the direction of political evolution.*

Once the Kangxi Emperor took the reins of government, the position of Neo-Confucian officials in the Qing regime rapidly improved. Most of those greatly trusted by the emperor had the power to take real action; they participated in policy-making and directly influenced the establishment of the general and specific policies of the regime. Xiong Cilü and Li Guangdi, the two most famous Confucian ministers under Kangxi, both rose to the position of Prime Minister (*zai fu*). The Southern Study was a newly established political body which was directly involved in policy-making. “It is often consulted on imperial decrees and secret matters. No one except the highest ranking ministers, trusted followers of the emperor, is allowed to enter.”⁵³ At that time, the Southern Study was basically staffed by Neo-Confucian officials. Zhang Ying and Chen Tingjing, the two ministers in charge of its affairs, in particular, were both famous Neo-Confucians. Chen was a minister on whom Kangxi Emperor relied most heavily. Others, such as Gao Shiqi, who was from a poor family, gained the emperor’s trust because he worked in the Southern Study. Although the high position of Confucian officials in Qing political life could not fundamentally change the basic Qing policy of “top honors for the Manchus” or the political reality that the core ruling stratum was composed mainly of Manchu nobles, it did mean that the influence of Confucian political ideas expanded under the Qing. Seen in the light of the distribution of power and assignment of personnel, this indicates that the politics of the Qing regime were gradually dovetailing with those of the Central Plains.

4. *Summary*

In the course of the Confucianization of the Qing regime, the bannermen, particularly the Manchu nobles, took up studying Confucianism with a vengeance. Many people became followers and propagandists of Confucianism. Take Tong Guowei, the emperor’s maternal uncle, for example. It was said that, “He does not treat arrogating power to himself as an important matter. In his leisure time, he finds pleasure in engaging scholars to lecture on literature and art.”⁵⁴ Although he was suspected of fishing for fame, this does indicate the fashion for studying Confucianism among the Manchus. At this time, a large number of Confucian classics were translated into the Manchu language and became teaching materials for the bannermen. In the 25th year of his reign, Emperor Kangxi sighed with emotion, “Because

51 *Veritable Records of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty*, vol. 83, the wuzi day of the 8th month in the 18th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign.

52 *Ibid.*, vol. 180, the yiyou day of the 2nd month in the 36th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign.

53 Xiao Shi, *Records of Yongxian*, vol. 1.

54 Zhao Lian, “Tong Guowei’s Explanations to *Zuo Zhuan*.”

of the books in the Manchu language, the Manchu military officers can read works on history and quite a number of them have become knowledgeable about justice and principles. Few Han military officers have had much education and some of them are even illiterate.”⁵⁵ He ordered the Grand Secretary and the nine ministers to do their best to instill in the latter a knowledge of justice and principles. Even the Empress Grandmother, who had never been interested in Han culture, began to leaf over *The Amplification of Great Learning (Daxue Yanyi)* in her palace and expressed approval of the basic views of Confucianism. She believed that the master of the people (the emperor) “acts for heaven; what is important is for him to attend personally to affairs. To govern the country and transform the people, he must first practice self-cultivation.” She praised the book, saying: “The laws and prohibitions are all laid out. They are really extremely important.”⁵⁶ Among the Manchu nobles there appeared some men of letters and scholars with high reputations. For instance, Ahshitan Wanyan “is proficient in Confucian classics and sincerely implements them.” When Oboi was in power, “The Counselor was ordered to have an audience with Oboi, but in the end failed to turn up.” When Emperor Kangxi took the reins of government, Ahshidan chided him in Confucian terms: “Saving expenses is not as important as having few desires, and partiality should never take precedence over employing the virtuous.” He was praised by Kangxi as “a great Confucian scholar of this dynasty.”⁵⁷ Another instance is that of Gu Badai, who devoted himself to the study of Neo-Confucianism for a long time. “Although he is sick, his hearing and sight are not weakened and this is good for studying Confucian classics.” Emperor Yongzheng commended him, saying “He grasped the nub of the matter with regard to the overall laws of loyalty and filial piety. In studying the minute details of the classics, his understanding of principles reaches the level of former Confucian scholars.”⁵⁸ Kuixu, the son of Academician Mingzhu, had even greater talents and learning: “His learning has surpassed that of the Manchus and there are few like him even among the Han.”⁵⁹ At that time, it was more common to see Manchu nobles who were proficient in writing poetry and essays. Take Guo Zi, half-brother of Emperor Shunzhi, for example. “He was fond of reading, good at playing the lute, proficient in melody and happy to get along with men of letters; by nature he was like an old Buddhist monk, not interested in seeking fame or wealth.”⁶⁰ Imperial clansman Yue Rui was skilled at poetry and painting and wrote the *Yuchi Sheng Collection*. “Another was General Bo Wenting, who styled himself Master of Donggao. He was also noted for his poems, which were printed

55 *Record of Emperor Kangxi's Daily Life*, vol. 2, the 10th day of the 4th month (intercalary) in the 25th year of Emperor Kangxi's reign, p. 1474.

56 *Veritable Records of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty*, vol. 41, the jiwai day of the 2nd month in the 12th year of Emperor Kangxi's reign.

57 Chen Kangqi, “Shengzu Called Wanyan Jijian ‘a Great Scholar.’”

58 Qian Yiji, ed., “Biography of Gubadai.”

59 *Record of Emperor Kangxi's Daily Life*, vol. 3, p. 2351.

60 Wang Shizhen, *Collected Remarks on Poetry*, p. 9.

in a number of volumes in *White Swallow Tower Poems*.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the Eight Banners' cruel customs of burying servants and concubines alive with the dead were gradually abolished.⁶² The process of Manchu-Han convergence had begun.

The Qing sovereigns took Confucianism as their intellectual guide and made a comprehensive study of Confucian statecraft. This was of great significance for the seventeenth century Chinese history. Talking about the contribution of Xiong Cilü to the early history of the Qing dynasty, Peng Shaosheng remarked: "Submitting a memorial to the emperor in response to an imperial rescript, Xiong for the first time emphatically stated that to study the teachings of Confucius was an affair of utmost importance. Later on, he often repeated the same statement. Emperor Kangxi grew ever more diligent in studying. He set up a pulpit for lectures on the Confucian classics before the throne and devoted his heart to the doctrines of Yao, Shun, Fuxi and Confucius. He also consulted and discussed the books of five learned men: Zhou Dunyi, Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, Zhang Zai and Zhu Xi, and applied what he had learned to political affairs. He was thoroughly benevolent and achieved great things. In fact, we can find the clues to these from him. Talking of the ministers who looked after his studies after Xiong resigned, the emperor often praised his loyalty and value."⁶³ These words can be considered as an affirmation of the early Qing Neo-Confucians. The emperor's turning to Confucianism put a complete end to the decades of cultural dissension (which was also over statecraft) within the Qing regime. After this, Confucianism gained an orthodox and legitimate dominance in the Qing society, particularly in the political life of the state. This major historical turning point meant the Qing regime, as a central government, had gained richer cultural content by absorbing the broad and deep political traditions of the Central Plains while maintaining its unique ethnic character. The Confucianization of political ethics gave the regime systematic and clear theoretical guidance and fundamentally solved the question of the direction of the political evolution of the early Qing society, laying a solid intellectual and institutional foundation for a period of a coordinated and stable development in the Chinese society under the Qing.

IV. From Restoring the Ming to Reconstructing the Society: A Change in the Political State of Mind of Ming Loyalists

As we have noted earlier, Emperor Shunzhi's ruthless oppression of the Han meant that the contradictions between the Han and the Manchu intensified sharply. Such contradictions began to ease after Emperor Kangxi took the reins of government, and accelerated the process of Qing Confucianization. At the time, some Han officials clearly understood the epoch-making significance of the fact that Manchu nobles, headed by Emperor Kangxi, were

61 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

62 Wang Shizhen, "On Burying Living People with the Dead," p. 24.

63 Qian Yiji, ed., "Affairs of Xiong Wenduan, the Late Minister of Personnel."

studying Confucian teachings. Li Guangdi hailed this development, saying, “Five hundred years have elapsed from Zhu Xi to our emperor. As expected of a true king who personally studies the teachings of the sages and men of virtue, we may expect heaven will reinstate the happy days of Yao and Shun, combining morality with governance. Therefore, as the emperor accepts the mandate of heaven, Confucian orthodoxy has risen to the position of a grand strategy for building the country. Although I may be ignorant, I may be able to use my waning light to hear about important points in the Great Way. I am extremely sincere about this.”⁶⁴

The change in the political attitude of the Ming loyalists was a political and cultural phenomenon that marked the change from chaos to order in Chinese society in the early Qing.

Most Ming loyalists at this time experienced a change of heart, from wanting to revive the Ming to wanting to rebuild the country. By “rebuilding,” we mean cooperating with the Qing regime to rebuild the Chinese social order. At its heart was recognizing and supporting Qing rule and solidly establishing as the dominant ideology the cardinal guides and constant virtues of Confucianism.

In the eyes of many in the early Qing, the Ming loyalist were the flower of their times and important symbols of the culture of the Central Plains. In the early days of the Shunzhi and Kangxi emperors, they were the backbone of support for the Ming in Chinese society, an important auxiliary force that cherished the memory of the Ming dynasty and endeavored to restore it. As we observed earlier, at that time quite a few people resorted to various moves to try to turn back the tide. For instance, in the Hunan region, many scholars took part in a movement to restore the Ming dynasty which constituted a serious threat to the Qing’s rule for a time. The Qing court said, “The scholars are making trouble and the situation is worse than banditry.”⁶⁵ In the 10th year of Shunzhi’s reign, in reporting on Hunan scholars’ participation in the restoration movement, Jin Tingxian, the Governor in charge of Hunan, Guangdong and Panyuan, reported the names of some of the intellectual elite who had become the backbone of secret anti-Qing resistance in Hunan. Of course, the majority of Ming loyalists were not drawn into the brutal struggle against the Qing. However, their resolute loyalty and their determination not to serve the new regime were quite shocking. At that time, quite a few scholars refused to cooperate with the Qing, stressing that “Not taking imperial examinations is not necessarily a righteous act, but attending the imperial examination is particularly harmful to righteousness.” Some even “left dying injunctions that their descendants should abstain from taking part in such examinations, saying that this order must never be disobeyed.”⁶⁶ One of their descendants wrote: “Since the Song and Ming dynasties, our ancestral state has been subjugated and those loyal to the previous dynasty have slept armed

64 Qian Yiji, ed., “Peng Shaosheng’s Writings on the Li Guangdi Affair.”

65 In the 6th month in the 10th year of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign, Jin Tingxian, the Governor in charge of military and political affairs for Hunan, Guangdong and Panyuan reported that holders of examination degrees, from the lowest to the highest, had joined with peasant militia to fight the Qing and had been defeated. See *Selected Materials on Peasant Resistance in the Qing Dynasty*, p. 242.

66 Chen Que, “Letter to Wu Pouzhong.” (year of Bingshen)

and wept blood with iron resolve. They bore it in silence and lived from hand to mouth, dying in poverty and hunger. Among those who became martyrs for the sake of the country, Ming loyalists were particularly heroic.”⁶⁷ Indeed, this is an accurate comment.

However, “loyalty to the former dynasty was not inherited.” Indeed, from the time of Emperor Shunzhi, as the Qing adjusted its policies, some people began to change their attitude and embarked on cooperation with the Qing government; further, they obtained preferment under the new regime.

Ordinary scholars who did not consider themselves Ming loyalists had great expectations for the Qing court. Not long after the Qing troops entered the interior through the Shanhai Pass, knowing that the government was about to enlist talent through the civil service examination system, “Expecting the rising regime to recruit talents, they rose up in spite of themselves at cockcrow to practice sword play,” bidding farewell to their hometowns and travelling on public vehicles to take part in the examinations.⁶⁸ However, generally speaking, cooperation between the Ming loyalists and the Qing regime was not typical of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign. Rather, repugnance and resistance to Qing control were the rule. Noticeable changes in these attitudes began with Emperor Kangxi’s assumption of power. This was particularly so during the period in which the “rebellions of the three vassal kings” were quelled.

The imperial examinations, held to enlist men of wide learning, recruited a good number of influential personages into the system. This marked the advent of a new period of social harmony. In fact, not being a Qing official cannot be equated with non-cooperation. No later than Kangxi’s assumption of power, following the adjustment of the regime’s policies, several noted scholars who enjoyed great influence all embarked on the path of recognizing and even cooperating directly or indirectly with the Qing policy of civilian rule.

Among Ming loyalists, Huang Zongxi had once kept up resistance against the Qing and had chosen to live in seclusion and devote himself to learning only when the anti-Qing struggle was declining. This has been referred to as “The turmoil in the coastal areas disappeared. Having no further hope, Mr. Huang returned to his hometown to attend to his mother and devoted himself to writing.”⁶⁹ However, with the lapse of time, the recluse’s attitude gradually relaxed and even became cooperative. Huang was deeply grateful to the Qing government for having on many occasions sent official requests to invite him to take a government post. Once, in a letter to a friend, he wrote: “I’m indebted to his Majesty for sending me a special invitation to work in the National Archives. The common people, when called on to provide a service, have to do so. The job of writing is also a kind of service. I always refused on the grounds of old age and illness, and his majesty took pity on me and allowed me to do

67 Sun Jing’an, “Citizen Mrs. Shi’s Letter to Followers.”

68 Wei Xiangshu, *A Chronicle of Hansong’s Life*, item of year of Bingxu.

69 Quan Zuwang, “Tablet Inscription of the Holy Path of Huang Zongxi.”

so.”⁷⁰ Although Huang Zongxi refused to work in the archives, he actively supported the Qing regime’s compilation of *The History of the Ming Dynasty*. His son Huang Baijia and his disciple Wan Sitong both joined the work of “historical compilation.” In writing to Xu Yuanwen, Huang jokingly wrote: “I once learned that after commending his son to the care of Zhou Luwang, the two revered hermits at Shouyang had the common vetch as food for three years and remained fairly healthy. Today, I’m sending my son to your honor to replace me.” “Although he did not participate in compiling the history, the National Archives would consult him whenever it met with major or tricky problems.”⁷¹ Huang answered all their questions and gave as much advice and suggestions as he could. For instance, he once wrote to the Archives to suggest that the *Chapter on Neo-Confucianism* should not be compiled. He also sent some of the historical records he had prepared, including his “Records of Mrs Yao, My Late Mother” to the Archives and wrote to Xu Yuanwen, the Supervisor, saying, “I have done so in order to have it included in the *Stories of Famous Women (Lienü)*, because my mother suffered injustice in her life that should be redressed in death; her descendants should never forget her.”⁷² The fact that some of his later writings show a clear change in his views on the Qing provides much food for thought. For instance, he referred to the Qing as “our national dynasty”⁷³ and even speaks of “his sacred Majesty.” For instance, “The Biography of Chaste Woman Zhou,” written when he was 79, reads: “Today our sacred emperor does not light a candle when it is not dark. He has made it possible for information about the rural areas to reach the top. Must not the great teachings of cardinal guides and constant virtues be enhanced thereby?”⁷⁴ His “Letter to Mr. Xu Jian’an (Qian Xue)” in particular is full of high praise for Emperor Kangxi, expressing the earnest expectation that the Qing’s rule would realize peace under heaven.⁷⁵

This letter shows no trace of a loyalist complex in Huang Zongxi. On the contrary, it gives us the impression that he was a “docile citizen” who whole-heartedly supported the Qing’s rule. When we compare this with his earlier anti-Qing struggles, these changes in his words and deeds are remarkable.

Among Ming loyalists, Gu Tinglin (Gu Yanwu) has always been regarded as a resolute opponent of the Qing dynasty. Looking back into history, this appears to be a foregone conclusion. The *Records of the Ming Loyalists* by Sun Jing’an says: “When the Ming National Archives opened, Xiong Cilü of Xiaogan was in charge of them. He wrote to invite Gu Yanwu, who replied: ‘I would thank you with my death.’ In 1678, when great scholars were being enlisted, those concerned vied to respond. Gu Yanwu wrote to a disciple in the

70 Huang Zongxi, “Letter to Li Junhou.”

71 Sun Jing’an, “Huang Zongxi.”

72 Huang Zongxi, “Records of Mrs Yao, My Late Mother.”

73 Huang Zongxi, “Biography of Taiyuan Jin Gong, Senior Official of Ministry of War.”

74 Huang Zongxi, “Biography of the Faithful Wife of Zhou.”

75 Huang Zongxi, “Letter to Xu Jian’an.”

capital, saying: ‘The knife and rope stand ready. I can die immediately.’ The next year, when a full-scale effort was being made to compile the Ming dynastic history, the official in charge again wanted to recommend him. At this point he wrote to Ye Ren’an that he was determined to die. As a result, he was exempted.”⁷⁶ In his “Letter Answering Cigeng,” Gu Yanwu also mentioned his refusal to join the National Archives to work on the Ming history, saying: “My late mother had rare moral integrity, integrity that was known throughout the Wu region [today’s Suzhou and its vicinity] and was honored with a memorial. As soon as she heard of the national calamity, she fasted unto death. Before dying, she warned me repeatedly not to serve the alien regime. In the summer of 1671, or the tenth year of the reign of Emperor Kangxi, a special invitation was sent from Xiaogan to invite me to help compile the history. I replied if I received such an order I would either die or run away.”⁷⁷ However, even if this was true, Gu’s political performance still shows an obvious change in his attitude towards the Qing regime. We can see this clearly from two aspects: first, like Huang Zongxi, he did not join the National Archives to work on the history of the Ming dynasty, but he did pay close attention to its compilation and provided advice and suggestions. He wrote to Xu Yuanwen, saying: “Compiling history is difficult, as those engaged in it must know. The idea of collecting materials from different parts of the country is not bad, but the prefectures and counties in those places find it a burden. As soon as the order comes down from above, they report back that they have no material. This is because it gives them a pretext to demand a fee for dispatching it. Current affairs and human relations are mostly like this. I venture to think that the Archives can prepare a rough draft for this compilation on the basis of the Capital Gazette and leave the rest to future generations. Something like Liu Xiangzhi’s *Old Tang History* is good enough.”⁷⁸ He also wrote to Pan Lei, one of the compilers, warning that “In today’s compilation of the history, the major part should be based on the Capital Gazette. The similarities and differences between the two sources should all be kept and not erased lightly. Judgments should be minimized; let future generations draw their own conclusions.”⁷⁹ It is worth mentioning that like Huang Zongxi, Gu Yanwu also asked the National Archives to record the deeds of his mother in the History that they might long be remembered, saying: “I’m approaching 70 and shall die soon. I know I have nothing to merit fame or bring honor to my parents. I dare to express myself with sorrowful sincerity, hoping that a few words may be kept in the abridged edition; then her noble behavior will have an elevating effect for thousands of years.”⁸⁰ In actively collaborating with the Qing regime in compiling the Ming history, people like Huang and Gu were admittedly still cherishing the memory of the former dynasty, but this also reflects the fact that in their heart of hearts, they realized that it was

76 Sun Jing’an, “Gu Yanwu.”

77 Gu Yanwu, “Letter Answering Cigeng.”

78 Gu Yanwu, “Letter to Nephew Gongsu.”

79 Gu Yanwu, “Letter Answering Cigeng.”

80 Gu Yanwu, “Letters to the Official Historians in the Office of Historiographer.”

impossible to revive the Ming and recognized the orthodox position of the Qing dynasty as successor to the Ming. Gu's pleading with the Qing regime to put his mother in the History was the best proof of this mentality. Secondly, Gu cooperated with Qing local governments in certain areas. A typical instance was his letter to the official in charge of Jimen Pass, written shortly after he had recovered from illness, in which he took the initiative in proposing an economic policy to the local government: "Today, I want to say something which will save the lives of myriad people, and nowhere is it more applicable than in the Qinling mountains and Mount Long regions. If you agree, you will have stored up huge merit for the next world. Please levy tax by collecting the summer wheat and autumn rice as well as beans and hay, each in their natural colors, from the people in the Qin area. Store these in official granaries and sell them the next year between harvests when food is in short supply. Then the money for officials in charge of agriculture will be secured while the common people will save their outlays several times over. One year may be insufficient, but ten will be more than enough. If we begin the effort in the Qin region, we can popularize it in the rest of the country. But why is it that the people of the Qin region have particularly pressing needs? I have seen with my own eyes how the people of Fengxiang borrow from the powerful. For each tael of silver they borrow, they have to pay four *dan* (about 240 kilos) of rice. Can they live on this for long? This could be applied particularly to nominal accounts from which tax money cannot be obtained. State revenue would lose nothing from this change. And yet I fear it will not be done. *I Ching* (The Book of Changes) says: "A goat lost on the way; a warning not heeded. Once all resources are exhausted, with the rivers breached and fish rotting, it will no longer be possible to tax the crops as they are brought in. Nothing is more important than saving the people from calamity."⁸¹ Although this cannot be mentioned in the same breath as Huang Zongxi's statement praising the emperor, it is not far off the mark to say that in making the difficult choice between restoring the Ming and rebuilding the country, Gu came to choose the latter.

Huang Zongxi and Gu Yanwu represent a change in attitude that occurred in the early Qing. There are numerous similar cases. Chen Que was an influential Ming loyalist at that time. He was deeply distressed at the change from the Ming to the Qing and expressed sentiments like "1696 and 1697 saw the change of dynasties; this shook me to the core."⁸² Although he did not become an official, Chen also gave advice and suggestions to the Qing regime; he was not really "poor and hungry" in barren mountains and wild valleys, with no contact with the outside world. For instance, he wrote to the government of Hangzhou with many suggestions on local government affairs. In the second year of Kangxi's reign, he again wrote a "Letter to the Authorities," making suggestions on local water conservancy, burial matters, etc. Here he presents himself as "a silly scholar" in modest and courteous language. There is nothing here to suggest he was loyal to the former dynasty.

Li Yong was a highly influential Neo-Confucian in the early Qing, a man esteemed for

81 Gu Yanwu, "Letter to the Official in Charge of Jimen Pass Shortly after Recovering from Illness."

82 Chen Que, "Affairs of Qianchu."

his integrity and rectitude. He refused to serve the Qing, but when Emperor Kangxi made an inspection tour to the western regions in the 42nd year of his reign (1703), Li Yong presented him with his *Records of Reflections on the Four Books* and *A Collection of Two Melodies* in compliance with an imperial order and received a board inscribed by the emperor. Qian Chengzhi was pledged to resist the Qing dynasty, but when he saw this was impossible, he maintained close contact with some important ministers in the Qing government such as Xu Yuanwen. The first and second sections of Qian's "On Orthodoxy" merit particular attention. In the first, he advances the idea that the orthodoxy or legitimacy of political power "should be judged by people's confidence"; and "As long as the confidence of people is not forgotten, even for a day, the mandate of heaven has not gone and legitimacy is not lost."⁸³ On the face of it, he appeared to be defending the Southern Ming, but he expressed his true thoughts in the second section: "A country is like a big house whose owners change from time to time." "Everyone would be indignant if robbers entered a house and killed the owner and his children and grandchildren, taking possession of all they had. If at this point a great hero should rise and wipe them out and take over everything that the robbers had taken possession of, no one in the world could fail to applaud. Commentators would say: 'Heroes and robbers both want the owner's property. If the robbers don't seize it, the heroes will. Heroes take over the property in the name of seeking revenge, but if one examines their motives, they're the same as the robbers.' Is that right?"⁸⁴ Even if this proposition is not an apologia for the Qing dynasty's replacing the Ming, it does at least indicate that Qian did not agree with the earlier idea of "seeking revenge" for the deaths of one's sovereign and father and did not simply place the Qing dynasty, which "no one in the world could fail to applaud," outside the pale of orthodoxy.

As for the high-minded Lu Shiyi, he was filled with enthusiasm for statecraft and gave the Qing advice and suggestions on how to win over the Ming loyalists and reestablish the ethical and moral order of the society. At the same time, he also actively urged the Ming loyalists to make use of their abilities in government, saying: "Examining the past and the present, generally when the dynasty changed, the virtuous would live in seclusion or commit suicide out of loyalty. Most often, they would become Buddhists. Because the relationship of the ruler and the subject was decided, there was no question of changing to a new master, but those who had long cherished lofty aims were not willing to become old alongside ordinary people. They fled Buddhist doctrine and proposed family honor. This is what superior men did when they failed to achieve their ambitions. However, the Sacred Way becomes ever more obscured and the world is worsening. I would say that once the dynasty changes, it would be a pity if the victorious dynasty did not use the talents of loyalists of the former dynasty, old and young...Inviting them to teach in the schools benefits the new dynasty and does them no harm. Perhaps these principles may be put into practice in the

83 Qian Chengzhi, "On Orthodoxy." (part 1).

84 Qian Chengzhi, "On Orthodoxy." (part 2).

world, so that when the mandate changes, the virtuous will not be abandoned.”⁸⁵ Obviously, Lu Shiyi’s words reflected the mentality of a large number of Ming loyalists who were unhappy over the fact that “neither their undertakings nor their writings could find a use.”⁸⁶ In circumstances where the Qing regime had been radically Confucianized and intensified efforts were being made to win over the Han intellectual elite, it was historically inevitable that large numbers of Ming loyalists would change their attitude and entrust their careers to the new dynasty.

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