

The Development and Evolution of Scholar-bureaucrat Politics in the Northern Song Dynasty

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Abstract: The literati and officialdom in the Northern Song Dynasty developed a political consciousness and demands that had not existed among their predecessors. They established political identities and cultivated a strong sense of political subjectivity. This paper mainly examines how the literati and officialdom politics developed and evolved in the Northern Song Dynasty. Using the research method of literature reviews, the paper focuses on the following questions: how the emperors of the early Northern Song Dynasty designed and constructed governing structures, how these structures affected the literati and bureaucratic system, and how literati and officialdom politics developed based on their acceptance and rejection of these ideas. The Northern Song literati showed their unique cultural profile as they ruled together with the emperor and, as a result, created a peculiar literati bureaucratic politics. The Northern Song literati bureaucrats evolved and strengthened their subjectivity both through the political status they acquired and through their political participation.

Keywords: literati, officialdom, northern Song dynasty, political subjectivity

1. Introduction

Chinese intellectuals have always been very enthusiastic about politics throughout the centuries, but the Song Dynasty transformed this political interest into political subjectivity. The intellectuals in the Song Dynasty could face imperial power and actively participate in political affairs, giving full play to their positive role as political subjects. However, the political subjectivity that transcended the previous generations of scholars was not only developed by the intellectuals themselves but also closely related to the tone of cultural governance laid by Song Taizu and the adherence of his successors to this ancestral teaching. The state policy of cultural governance provided scholars with a favorable environment to participate in decision-making and govern state affairs. The monarchs' courtesy to intellectuals also encouraged literati and officialdom to participate in cultural governance. As the most powerful actors in political and social life, literati and officialdom were way ahead of their time, driven by the state policy of cultural governance. The literati and officialdom of the Song Dynasty gradually established its unique political subject consciousness in relying on the state and rebuilding the order of civil governance.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the political responsibility of intellectuals in officialdom and the formulation of national policies and the exercise of the power of the monarchy. In ancient China, the relationship between intellectuals and political power was always one of attachment and dependency. From the perspective of the ecology of intellectuals in the Song Dynasty, if there is no support from the state policy of cultural governance, there is "no literati." Without the relatively relaxed cultural atmosphere, the intellectuals of the Song Dynasty could not

have achieved such distinct political subjectivity. However, unlike other dynasties, literati and officialdom in the Song Dynasty still showed strong political subjectivity. On the one hand, the new literati were completely different from those in any previous dynasty. The literati and officialdom class assumed the important task of revitalizing the literati and Taoism, which deeply instilled in people's minds or heaven and earth, for living people, for passing on learning, and for peace for all eternity. Chinese literati and officialdom took on a new position and height from then on. On the other hand, literati and officialdom were able to participate in political and social affairs actively and display their political ambitions in the political field. Literati and officialdom politics existed out of the need of the authorities in the Northern Song Dynasty to maintain the monarchy. Still, in the process, literati and officialdom helped purify and promote the political system of the time. The marriage of cultural governance and literati and officialdom politics, to some extent, promoted the political ecology at that time and had a certain spirit of innovation. The significance of this study lies in that, through the analysis of the evolution of the scholar-bureaucrat class, it is helpful to analyze the significance and influence of it as a whole to clarify the change of the relationship between the intellectuals and the regime in ancient China during the Northern Song Dynasty, and the role and subjectivity of the scholar-bureaucrat class at that time. In addition, as a model of literati governance, the study of the scholar-bureaucrat class in this period also helps analyze the characteristics, advantages, and historical limitations of the whole literati governance.

2. Data And Method

A Draft on the History of Steer-Rat's Political Performance written by Yan Buke fully absorbs previous achievements and takes political culture into a perspective [2]. The literati and officialdom politics and its evolution are systematically illustrated vertically and horizontally, using the theory of "social differentiation," that is, society's structural and functional differentiation. In the interpretation of literati and officialdom politics, the author focuses on the separation of Confucian scholars and literati with emphasis on the three distinctions of law, ceremony, and custom, thus providing a new interpretation of the proposition of "harmony without uniformity" and the theory of "literary quality." Zhao Yuan's Study on Literati During Ming and Qing Dynasties investigates the inner world of literati and officialdom scholars during the Ming and Qing Dynasties from the perspectives of the history of thoughts, psychology, and memory [3]. The words and deeds of scholars are no longer surface-surly but a struggle to find rationality for their existence in the face of a survival dilemma.

The Historical World of Zhu Xi – A Study on the Political Culture of Literati and Officialdom in Song Dynasty is a comprehensive study of the cultural and political history of the Song Dynasty. Its focus is on the cultural development centered on neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty and the political dynamics based on reform [4]. In the book, Mr. Yu Yingshi draws the outline of literati and Song Dynasty officialdom political culture structure and form of the general theory. He also introduces the Song Dynasty general political culture psychology and associates with Confucianism. The piece focuses on the analysis of hierarchy class components change, resulting in the Song Dynasty's power structure adjustment and political operation mode of the emergence of new factors, namely the rise of Song Dynasty literati politics led to its political subject consciousness. Therefore, imperial power, literati and officialdom rule the world together. In its power structure, the monarch is the symbol of power, and the stage of power represents sovereignty. The period surrounding the scholar-official clique created a new form of politics in the Song Dynasty, the "Guoshi," with increasingly divided internal struggles. At this stage, the conflict between the two neo-Confucianism and the bureaucratic non-commissioned officer group began to appear. Celebrating the prohibition of the Party and emphasizing the role of the emperor in restoring the lost link was the fierce party rivalry of the Southern Song and The Three Dynasties. Mr. Yu points out that the Song Dynasty was the first dynasty in Chinese history to institutionalize and legalize the "state" and guarantee the political

system, daub the color of morality in political debates and polarize parties. In addition, he analyses specific examples of how the emperor and his ministers used rhetorical power to manipulate it to suppress objections from other literati and officialdom literati and officialdom.

In addition, Li Tao points out in the book *Subsequent of Zi Zhi Tong Jian* that during the reign of Song Taizu, a series of measures were carried out to reorganize the bureaucracy in terms of consciousness and spirit. He ordered the expansion of Confucian ancestral shrines, personally wrote praises for Confucius, and led officials to pay respects to Confucius's temple [6]. These actions conveyed respecting Confucianism and emphasizing literature to the world. Ebrey further demonstrates that scholar-bureaucrat politics played a great role in improving the political subject status of the scholar-bureaucrat class and their enthusiasm for political participation [1]. Schneider studies and analyzes the continuation and improvement of the imperial examination system since the Sui and Tang Dynasties, which was a basic measure for the reuse of civil servants and scholars, and points out its advantages and disadvantages [7]. On the one hand, the implementation of fair competition and equal selection of scholars was largely conducive to the rise of humble scholars. In addition to the expansion of the number of imperial examinations, the literati from the middle and lower levels were enough to compete with the upper scholar-officials in the Song Dynasty bureaucratic regime. The interests of all classes of the masters were closely linked with those of the dynasty, which enhanced their consciousness and sense of responsibility to participate in politics. On the other hand, it points out that although the Song Dynasty vigorously carried out the imperial examination to select scholars, the consideration of the selected talents in the process of selecting scholars was directly related to the preference of the monarch, that is to say, there was a strict boundary between who could become a scholar and enjoy the honor, and who could play a role in the national governance. Zeng Zaozhuang and Liu Lin's *Song Taizu* and Lu Zhong's *Handout on Song Memorabilia* have both noted that cultural governance is not only a requirement for vassals but also a requirement for the royal family as rulers themselves [9, 10]. As the first emperor of the Song Dynasty, Song Taizu summed up the lessons of the prosperity and collapse of the previous generation and believed that since the end of the Tang Dynasty, the state had been in a situation of "weak king and strong minister," and the social atmosphere had turned to advocate force because of the weakness of the state. Wang Yuji took Chenqiao Mutiny as an entry point to introduce the historical origin of the cultural governance strategy adopted in the Northern Song Dynasty [5]. Wu Ruilai demonstrates the disadvantages of the scholar-bureaucrat system in power distribution and national governance system from the perspective of taxation [8].

These studies are all special studies from a certain aspect of scholar-bureaucrat politics but not systematic from the whole development context. In order to better clarify the internal relationship and development of the scholar-bureaucrat political system in the Northern Song Dynasty, this study will explore the causes of scholar-bureaucrat politics, its specific organizational structure, and its internal contradictions and integration based on the theoretical results of these studies.

This study mainly adopts the literature review research method and forms its own research system and framework by searching, reading, and analyzing relevant literature. Drawing upon the concept of cultural governance and its specific implementation rules, the paper first examines the origin and connotation of imperial examination, its interaction with scholar-bureaucrat politics and its drawbacks. It then discusses the specific examples of scholar-bureaucrats participation in politics and how the scholar-bureaucrats politics increased their enthusiasm for political participation. The paper further analyzes the contradictions brought by scholar-bureaucrat politics to the rule of the Northern Song Dynasty, such as the specific internal troubles and external aggression, the malpractices exposed by scholar-bureaucrat politics in the process of development, and how the rulers dealt with these issues.

3. The System of Government and Literati and Officialdom Politics in The Northern Song Dynasty

After the Han and Tang dynasties, the Northern Song Dynasty was another prosperous period. Northern Song Dynasty was able to achieve such high achievements due to the governing ideas of Zhao Kuangyin, the first emperor of the Song Dynasty. In the early days of the Northern Song Dynasty, in order to prevent the formation of a military separatist force that threatened the central government, Song Taizu adopted the political strategy of ruling the country jointly with literati and officialdom. Under this strategy, literati and officialdom in the Northern Song Dynasty were not only direct participants in state politics but also creators and inheritors of literature and art. In this context, literati and officialdom assumed more important social responsibilities.

3.1. Cultural governance and imperial examination system

After the War of Song Liao, the country was poor and weak. From the fall of the Tang Dynasty to the establishment of the Song Dynasty, China experienced half a century of infighting, during which Kings succeeded frequently, military conquest replaced civil rule, and the state ruling system collapsed. Zhao Kuangyin launched the “Chenqiao Mutiny” and Zhao joined the establishment of the Northern Song Dynasty [5]. In the aspect of the ruler’s personal tendency, the rulers of the Song Dynasty made their fortune in the military service, experienced the military career of fighting among warlords and becoming the king fiercely, and knew well the threat of military generals to the regime, which showed the danger of military generals in power. Coupled with the historical experience that generals controlled the country during the Five Dynasties, the state policy of cultural governance formulated by Zhao Kuangyin has conveyed the Song Dynasty’s strong desire for capable people. Therefore, Song Taizu “explained military power by drinking wine” and determined the state policy of “establishing the country with Confucianism” and “emphasizing literature to restrain military power.”

In Song Taizu’s time, the choice of political force was still in the stage of preliminary integration. At that time, the regime was faced with a complicated situation of internal order rectification and external unification. Zhao Kuangyin, a professional general, had to focus on practical results to achieve his goals. Therefore, Song Taizu has the characteristics of eclectic in employing people and does not explicitly choose a specific group or stratum to rely on. Those who successively replaced the remaining ministers of the Later Zhou as the assistant ministers were Zhao’ original cronies, either from the imperial examinations or from the literati. As for generals who successively replaced former generals and assumed important military posts, loyalty and ability were also considered. However, Song Taizu was superior to the warlords of the Five Dynasties which made him understand the historical experience that “it is possible to attack the world at once, but not to rule the world at once” while guarding against the malpractices of his commanders. Therefore, to maintain the regime’s stability and the operation of administrative organizations at all levels, Song Taizu paid full attention to the serious problem that military officials had dominated the political situation for a long time and adopted a series of measures to reverse this pattern. The key to its reorganization lies in making civil officials and military generals take charge of their own affairs, deliberately favoring and supporting the civil officers who belong to the weak ranks, and restraining the groups of military generals with super influence, especially stripping the civil powers and powers of military attaches.

Under the action of Song Taizu, the central government established the principle of civil servants handling administrative affairs. The ruling *zaizhi* (a title of officer) appointed civil servants naturally and even installed cronies in the Councils on military decisions to influence military officials, thus preventing their interference in politics. Civil servants were appointed as prefectural and county officials in the local organs to replace the generals and officials under the original military districts.

Zhao Kuangyin's view of this is: in the Five Dynasties, people suffered from the abuse of the Town called Fang. Song Taizu also took care to protect his civil servants from the military generals. For example, he derogated Wang Yansheng, the hero who extorted the prime minister Wang Bo, and the protection and support of Liang Mengsheng after the conflict between the civil official Liang Mengsheng and the military general Guo Gui in Dezhou. Emperor Taizu of the Song Dynasty even erected a monument in his court, urging posterity not to kill literati officials.

At the same time, Song Taizu further reorganized the bureaucracy ideologically through many actions advocating Confucianism. For example, shortly after Zhao Kuangyin ascended the throne, he ordered the expansion of Confucian temples, personally wrote a tribute to Confucius, and led his officials to pay respects to the Temple of Confucius. Later he ordered the Temple of Confucius to exercise a product of etiquette and erected 16 halberds on both sides of the temple [6]. These actions clearly conveyed to the world the message of respecting Confucianism and valuing literature and were also a sign of ending the phenomenon of "rites collapsed, and music was in ruins." What the Song Taizu asked for was not, of course, to improve the cultural quality of the generals in the general sense but to have them deeply understand the righteousness of the ruler and his subjects.

In the Northern Song Dynasty, one of the basic measures for reusing civil servants and worshipping Confucian scholars was to continue and improve the imperial examination system since the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Song Taizu laid the tone of cultural governance, but his efforts did not really touch on the key of establishing cultural governance. His efforts were only the beginning of cultural governance, and the implementation of Song Taizu's state policy depended on the continued efforts of his successors. Under the reign of Emperor Taizong of the Song Dynasty, the imperial examination received more attention, and the number of people who entered the official ranks through the imperial examination increased greatly. During the 22 years of Emperor Taizong's reign, a total of 1399 scholars were recruited, a great expansion compared with 173 scholars recruited during the 15 years of Song Taizu's reign. "Only in the second year of Taiping Xingguo (977), the first imperial examination after Taizong ascended the throne, there were 109 jinshi and no. 1, accounting for 63% of the total during Taizu's reign" [7].

Moreover, Emperor Taizong of the Song Dynasty surpassed Song Taizu in the number of official candidates. The Song Dynasty established a system of imperial examinations, expanding the number of candidates for the imperial examinations, awarding officials immediately after passing the examinations, and raising the status of officials from the imperial examinations. Every year, there were no more than one hundred people who were qualified for the two subjects of jinshi in the Ming dynasty. However, there were about two or three thousand candidates for the examination, and even fewer of them were admitted. In addition, they had to pass the Ministry of Civil Affairs examination before they could be granted an official.

In the Song Dynasty, the enrollment was very large. Jinshi took three or four hundred students every year. Therefore, the officials of the Song Dynasty mainly came from the scholars of imperial examinations. A large number of Wenyan bachelors passed the imperial examination, benefiting themselves in the ranks of the ruling class, realizing the ideal pursuit of "learning and being an official." literati and officialdom, combined with imperial power, maintained the political functioning of feudal states.

The imperial examination system of the Song Dynasty also adopted a series of measures to restrict the monopoly of the powerful and influential people on the imperial examination, such as the system of confusing one's name, recording as soon as possible, and implementing fair competition and equal selection of scholars, which greatly benefited the rise of the scholars from humble backgrounds. This, combined with the expansion of the number of officials selected by the imperial examinations, meant that the literati and officialdom from the lower and middle classes could compete with those of the

upper classes in the Song Dynasty bureaucracy. The interests of each class were closely linked to those of the dynasty, raising their sense of responsibility for political participation.

Although imperial examinations were widely promoted in the Song Dynasty, the selection process was also directly related to the preferences of the monarch. That is, there were strict boundaries as to who could become a literati official and enjoy honor and who could play a role in the governance of the court. For example, the famous poet Liu Yong had to “endure the floating name in exchange for a shallow and low singing” and became a “white-robed minister,” the poor and ordinary people did not have that opportunity.

3.2. Reform of the system and participation enthusiasm of literati and officialdom

The literati government was established: changes in social realities led to a reshuffle of the political class, with the newly emerging literati and officialdom class having strong political aspirations. Literati and officialdom obtained official positions through the imperial examinations and were promoted by the emperor. Many literati and officialdom officials became prime ministers, while some literati and officialdom were demoted out of political reasons. Although they had different political philosophies, they always shared the ideal of benefiting the world with the goal of “worrying about the world before them and enjoying the world after them.”

The process of self-realization in Confucianism is “self-cultivation, family order, governance, peace of the world,” “If poor, they attended to their own virtue in solitude; if advanced to dignity, they made the whole kingdom virtuous as well.” Literati and officialdom in the Northern Song Dynasty truly took on the mission of “making the whole kingdom virtuous” and “attending to their own virtue in solitude” no matter they were “poor” or “in power,” or whether they were promoted or demoted by officialdom. Fan Zhongyan was the representative of the literati in the Northern Song Dynasty. His wise words are “the first to worry over the problems of the world, and the last to enjoy its benefits.” It fully reflects the scholar-bureaucrats characteristic of worrying about the country and the people and completely surfs the Confucian scholar’s idea of “better their own condition.” After the failure of the “New Deal,” he was banished from Beijing, but he still did not forget to seek well-being for the country and the people. The literati of the Northern Song Dynasty did not pursue official careers, fame, and wealth as their goal. They were not only in the bureaucratic system but also cared about the world. Even if their career was in crisis, they could not stop them from speaking out. Therefore, “better the condition of the whole world” and “better their own condition” were the biggest characteristics of the scholar-officials of the Northern Song Dynasty.

Cultural governance is not only a requirement for the subjects but also a requirement for the royal family as a ruler. As the first emperor of the Song Dynasty, Song Taizu summed up the lessons of the prosperity and collapse of the previous generations and believed that since the end of the Tang Dynasty, the state had been in a situation of “weak king and strong minister,” and the social atmosphere had turned to advocate force because of the weakness of the state. Therefore, Song Taizu of the Song Dynasty tried to turn to the rule of “culture rule” by substituting civil officials for generals. In the process of “transferring from force to culture,” Song Taizu of the Song Dynasty set up the ancestral motto: “do not kill the literati and remonstrated officials” [9]. This made the scholastic officials dare to expostulate in the process of political participation, thus providing a guarantee for the establishment of scholastic subjectivity. This is a profound impassioned summary not only of himself but also of those who inherited the past and carried on in the future. An official should take the world as his own duty and should not be afraid of the imperial power on his personal future. However, it is worth pondering that this “daring to speak” is endowed by the imperial power. Song Taizu of the Song Dynasty also attached importance to the collation and revision of books, and “in his leisure time of listening to political affairs, he read classics and history day by day, and when he was young, he was consulted by Lv Wenzhong, the author of Zuo Lang” [10]. In the process of

reading together with his court officials, Song Taizu of the Song Dynasty “observed the successes and failures of the past and present, followed the good advice and corrected the mistakes,” which was the beginning of the Feast of Scriptures for the Song Dynasty. This substantive action to “revitalize the way of literature” made the academic trend in the Song Dynasty from the time of Emperor Taizong. Scholars acquired knowledge from books and applied it to academic research, which promoted the great academic development.

Literati and officialdom in the Northern Song Dynasty were comprehensive talents, outstanding literati, and statesmen. Among the eight famous people of the Tang and Song dynasties, six were from the Northern Song Dynasty. Ouyang Xiu, Wang Anshi, Su Shi, Su Xun, Su Che, Zeng Gong, they were not only a prominent advocate of the ancient prose movement but also the officer politicians. They cared for society to participate in the political reform during their official career. Fan Zhongyan was not only a famous statesman but also a writer, poet, artist, etc. Ouyang Xiu was a famous writer, historian, and statesman who initiated the academic atmosphere of practical application. He served for Renzong, Yingzong, Shenzong, and other emperors, official to Hanlin bachelor, Shu Dense deputy, political participation governor, had actively participated in the New Deal reform led by Fan Zhongyan. In literature, Ouyang Xiu made great achievements as the inheritor and promoter of the ancient prose movement. Wang Anshi was a famous politician, scholar, and reformer. During the three years of the Song Dynasty, Emperor Renzong jiyao wrote tens of thousands of letters, advocating reform, demanding to change the “poor and weak” situation, carrying out the policy of enriching the country and strengthening the army, and restraining the annexation of bureaucrats and landlords. Su Shi was a writer, calligrapher, painter, essayist, and poet who became three sons together with his father and brother. His achievements in calligraphy, together with Huang Tingjian, Mi Dai, and Cai Xiang, were known as the Four Families of the Song Dynasty. Su Shi was one of the greatest statesmen in ancient China. During the Period of Song Che-jong, he served as an academician, assistant scholar, and Minister of Rites. Sima Guang was a famous statesman, historian, and litterateur. He presided over the compilation of the first general annals in Chinese history, *Zi Zhi Tong Jian*. Huang Tingjian was a famous poet, poet, calligrapher, and the founder of the Jiangxi poetry school. He was also known as “Su Huang” for his poetry achievements and Su Shi. He was also known as “Qin Huang” for his calligraphy achievements and qin Guan for his lyricism.

Literati and officialdom in the Northern Song Dynasty were mainly ordinary people from low-income families who studied hard to bypass the imperial examinations and entered the imperial court. They are not only writers but also politicians. When the country was troubled at home and abroad, they led reforms regardless of personal gains and losses. In literature, they advocated the ancient prose movement, advocated the practical application of literature, entrusted literature with the task of moral education and political reform, and dared to challenge the old political structure in politics. Although the two reforms failed, they had a profound influence on the later generations. With the accumulation of internal and external difficulties, the Song Dynasty bred a lot of comprehensive talents who were literature masters and politicians in one. Although they had different political views, they all had the mind to help the world and took it as their own responsibility.

3.3. Conflicts and power struggles

Song Taizu’s emphasis on literati and militancy raised the status of literati and officialdom, but there were also many aristocratic officials who took advantage of their privileges to secure positions for their children and grandchildren. In the middle of the Northern Song Dynasty, the bureaucracy was huge and social conflicts were intensified. At the same time, the Northern Song also faced threats from Liao and Western Xia. It can be said that the whole Northern Song was in the midst of internal and foreign troubles, which threatened the rule of the northern Song regime. In September of the third year of the Qingli era, Fan Zhongyan submitted to Song Renzong Ten-Point Memorial putting

forward Qingli New Deal to rectify the local governance as the center of the reform proposition [8]. The New Deal quickly failed because it touched the vested interests of the aristocracy and other bureaucrats, but it also foreshadowed changes to come. After the failure of the Qingli New Deal, the domestic social conflicts and foreign invasion were not solved. Under the urgent call for reform, Wang Anshi came to Beijing in the third year of the Jiayou era to work on “To Emperor Renzong,” but it did not get the attention of Song Renzong at that time.

In the second year of Xining, Song Shenzong officially appointed Wang Anshi as a chancellor in charge of the reform. The content of the reform mainly includes three parts, respectively: enriching the country, strengthening the army, and selecting officials. The measures for enriching the country include the Green Sprout Law, the Enlistment Law, the Square Field Tax Law, the Farmland Water Conservancy Law, the Market Exchange Law, and the Law of Transferring. The methods of strengthening the army included protecting armor, cutting troops, commanding troops, protecting horses, and supervising military instruments. The selection of officials included reforming the imperial examination system, reorganizing the imperial college, and appointing only talented people. Wang Anshi’s reform lasted until the death of Song Shenzong in the eighth year of Yuanfeng. Although the two reforms of the Northern Song Dynasty ended in failure, they both involved political, military, and economic reforms. The ideas of the reforms affected not only the Song Dynasty but also the later generations until now.

The formation of literati and officialdom politics led to the strengthening of political subjectivity, which inevitably led to the division of monarchical power and the struggle for power between the monarch and his subjects. Although the emperors of the Song Dynasty “governed the world together with literati and officialdom,” the desires of the literati and officialdom were never simply unified in purpose with those of the emperor. In fact, the imperial power refused to compromise in the balance and control of the ministers, which gradually evolved into a power struggle between the imperial power and the scholar-officials. The consequence was that the monarch was overly sensitive to the “party struggle” and to the increasingly tension between the officials and the centrifugal forces. This was contrary to the idea of “integration of rulers and ministers.” For example, the ruling of Song Dynasty was praised by later generations for its full of system creation. Still, in essence, it was trapped in the stalemate between imperial power and ministerial power. Originally, the imperial chancellor, who was in charge of impeaching the emperor, was given the power of supervision but turned to impeach the officials because of the great pressure imposed by the imperial power. The chancellor was the head of the officials, and as the greatest divider of imperial power, he naturally became the first shocker of the system. This “rich and creative system” created the “Wutai poem case,” which cannot be ignored in both political and literary history. Behind this case, the complex clique relationships cannot be concealed.

The overall consciousness of the scholastic officials in the Song Dynasty was also reflected in their understanding of cliques. “Clique” has existed in ancient times. Confucius said: “the superior people do not belong to the party but to the group” (“The Analects of Confucius, Duke Ling of Wei”). Therefore, the feudal emperors and ministers who took the Confucian traditional thought as the guide to governing the country only believed that only small people form parties and gentlemen disdain to do so. But in the Song Dynasty, the tradition of denouncing Clique changed, and some bureaucrats and scholars put forward a new view that “a gentleman also has a party.” Ouyang Xiu openly acknowledged the legitimacy of Clique’s existence, taking “advocating moral” and “advocating benefit” as the fundamental difference. Therefore, the literati and officialdom in the Northern Song Dynasty were openly divided into political parties under the banner of “co-religion” and competed for political power in order to realize their own political views. In the traditional society, cliques sometimes took like-minded people as the criterion for selection, but it did not develop to select officials according to the criterion of meritocracy. Closeness and exclusivity are the general

characteristics of a clique. Even if it is sometimes necessary to distinguish and classify, it is also based on the traditional moral standards, such as the distinction between the gentleman and the villain as the standard to distinguish the different camps within the party, and even takes the gathering and scattering of the gentleman and the villain as the number to control the disorder. With the increasing conflicts within the ruling clique, all opposing factions regard the gathering of Clique forces as a means to achieve political goals, and the clique dispute has become a negative factor affecting the political field. In the country of “rule of man,” power means the private ownership of political resources so that the bureaucrats do not hesitate to form factions for personal gain in order to fight for power. Most cliques in traditional Chinese society did not form factions because of different policy strategies but for personal gain. It can be said that the clique was formed on many occasions in response to the need for a “man regime,” a power struggle between factions. The combination and differentiation between Cliques were constantly changing around the need for a power struggle. The prevalence of voice made officials actively contact their colleagues while pursuing their own political interests or even the idea of governing the country. They formed a powerful public opinion forces and groups to reform the defects and bring forth new ideas in the process of impeachment. These groups, which were intended only to increase the weight of opinions, became the origin of cliques. The literati and officialdom political clique with increasingly centralized imperial power consumed the vitality of the Song Dynasty. When the Southern Song Dynasty was not at peace and faced external threats, Emperor Gaozong had to change his tolerant cultural and political style and kill scholars in violation of ancestral instructions to avoid disputes in emergency times. Thus, the influence of monarchs on literati and officialdom was always fundamental.

4. Conclusions

With the disappearance of family politics, the literati and officialdom class gradually changed from the literati and officialdom class of the past to intellectuals promoted through imperial examinations. The new political mainstream no longer asked about their origins but focused on learning. This resulted in a large number of literati and officialdom candidates, but it also increased the spread of knowledge across generations and professions. This contributed to cultural prosperity and brought the political aspirations and living conditions of all levels of society into the new literati and officialdom communities. Therefore, the new classes inevitably produced a corresponding new subjectivity. In terms of social responsibility, it is said that “the country’s misfortune is a poet’s fortune.” The Northern Song Dynasty constantly experienced crises. It created a situation of “a weak country and rich people.” “The scholar is dedicated to the moral” for the intellectuals is a long-standing literati tradition. When the status of the scholar was increasing day by day, but the country was still facing domestic troubles and foreign invasion, the feelings of the literati “dedicated to the Tao” were extremely intense. Most of the literati rising through the imperial examination in the Song Dynasty came from the common class and had a deep understanding of the sufferings of the people, so they could integrate the Confucian idea of administering the world for the benefit of the people into their political practice. A better political ecology and a better mode of power operation promoted political subjectivity of the literati and officialdom. The Song Dynasty set cultural governance as the state policy and promoted the selection of scholars by the imperial examination. Its essence was to restructure the national management system with intellectuals, to get rid of the disadvantages of the previous generations, and to begin a new political pattern.

In the era of monarchy, the political sense of responsibility of scholar-officials was closely related to the state policies and the exercise of monarchical power. In ancient China, the relationship between intellectuals and political power was always one of attachment and dependency. From the whole ecological environment of the intellectuals in Song Dynasty, without the support of the state policy of cultural governance, without the constraint of the ancestral motto of “not killing the literati and

officials,” and without the nourishment of the relatively loose cultural atmosphere, the intellectuals in Song Dynasty could not have obtained such a distinct political subjectivity. Therefore, the scholar-officials in Song Dynasty were able to show strong political subjectivity because: on the one hand, the new literati were completely different from those of any previous dynasties. The literati and officialdom class assumed the important task of revitalizing the literati and Confucianism, which deeply instilled in people’s minds “for heaven and earth, for living people, for passing on learning, and for peace for all eternity.” Chinese literati and officialdom have since taken on a new path and height. On the other hand, literati and officialdom were able to actively participate in political and social affairs and fully demonstrate their political ambitions in the political arena. Literati and officialdom politics existed out of the need of the authorities in the Northern Song Dynasty to maintain the monarchy. However, in the process, literati and officialdom helped purify and promote the political system of the time. The marriage of cultural governance and literati and officialdom politics promoted to a certain extent the political ecology and was also innovative.

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