Introduction

Guanzhong was the realm of the ancient emperors (gu diwang zhi zhou). From the time of Zhou and Qin to that of Han and Tang, it was always the location of the capital. It is situated centrally and is an excellent control center for its surroundings. Not only did everything that represents the great spirit of our nation—the cultural establishments, the institutions, and the arts—find its origins here, but mountains, rivers, cities, palaces, gardens, and other beautiful and famous scenic sites are everywhere. Moreover, books [about the geography and history of Guanzhong] such as the \( \text{Sanfu Huangtu} \), the \( \text{Sanfu Juelu} \), and the \( \text{Yonglu} \) all confirm that Guanzhong is the place where the culture of our country originated. Since the last days of the Tang dynasty, the political center has been abandoned [and as a result, Guanzhong] has fallen into a state of collapse. After the Southern Song, it fell [into the hands of alien regimes and became] foreign territory for almost three hundred years, and the accomplishments of our forebears (xianmin) were completely destroyed. In the Ming and Qing, it was considered merely an important region in border defense. Few paid attention to the subtlety of the innovations of our civilization and the grandeur of the natural landscape. Is this not lamentable?\(^1\)

According to this passage, taken from a preface written by Guo Yingfu in 1934 for a modern edition of Bi Yuan’s (1730–97) \textit{Illustrated Record of Famous Sites in Guanzhong} (\textit{Guanzhong shengji tuzhi}), Guanzhong—the region where Chang’an (present-day Xi’an) was located—began to decline

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after Chang’an lost its status as the national capital at the end of the Tang dynasty, and it never recovered its past glory. Writing in an era marked by a heightened sense of nationalism, Guo was not asking the readers of Bi’s work to think of post-Tang Guanzhong, trapped in a prolonged period of decay; rather, he wanted them to remember the glory of Guanzhong’s national past and to appreciate the accomplishments of the local luminaries who had defined and perfected Chinese culture. His goal was to inspire them to rebuild the northwest and revitalize the nation.2

Fast-forward to the year 2003. In the preface to a recently published series on the history of Xi’an, Cui Lintao, secretary of the Xi’an municipal committee of the Chinese Communist Party, comments:

“The history of a city is the history of a people.” The historic city of Xi’an, like a living history, has put on record, scene by scene and page by page, the great changes experienced by the Chinese people over the course of time. It had witnessed the great eras of [Emperors] Wen and Jing [in the Han dynasty] and Zhenguan and Kaiyuan [both in the Tang dynasty]. However, this Chang’an city, which emperors in the past had hoped to keep prosperous forever, was plagued by wars and disasters, and unfortunately sunk into a prolonged period of decline. . . . When speaking in Xi’an on the strategy of developing the western regions of China, General Secretary Jiang [Zemin] noted that China had witnessed the great prosperity of the High Tang era but declined after the An Lushan Rebellion. Today, our mission is to realize the great resurrection of the Chinese people. Therefore, he has time and again emphasized to political leaders of all levels and to the younger generation the importance of absorbing cultural resources through the learning of history.3

Writing almost seventy years apart, Guo and Cui present two strikingly similar pictures of Guanzhong in history: a glorious Han-Tang era followed by an extended period of decline. In this view, the history of Guanzhong is construed as a microcosm of the history of the Chinese nation as a whole. Underlying such nationalistic discourse lies a pragmatic consideration: the history of a particular place is seen as worth highlighting only when it has a glorious past that can both contribute to an ahistorical definition of Chineseness and be summoned to rally

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2. Ibid., pp. 1–2.
nationalistic sentiments among citizens. Post-Tang Guanzhong signifies all that has gone wrong for China in the past millennium. In this new era, when China is trying to catch up with the rest of the world, Cui Lintao pronounces that the party is making every effort to right the historical wrongs done to the western regions. But in order to understand what went wrong, he implies, the history of post-Tang Xi’an should be studied so that mistakes will not be repeated.

For a succinct discussion and critique of such a nation-centered perspective, it suffices to turn to Prasenjit Duara’s monumental study, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. Duara argues that a historical narrative of China (or any other country) based on the teleological assumption that it is a nation-state with a long and unbroken history tends to suppress other narratives and therefore fails to do justice to the complexity of history. The historical narrative of post-Tang Guanzhong is one that has been suppressed and marginalized in precisely such a way by nationalistic discourse. The “decline” paradigm that has dominated understanding of the history of that region since the early twentieth century is at best one-sided, if not misleading.

That said, to question the usefulness of the nation as a starting point for historical analysis is not to deny that, as political entities, the empires that ruled what we now call China played important roles in shaping the historical consciousnesses of those they ruled. In fact, as the title of this present book suggests, its main theme is about the interaction between two places, “Guanzhong” and “China.” By situating the history of Guanzhong within the history of China, I am suggesting that people in the past always thought of Guanzhong in terms of this greater political and cultural system that we retrospectively call China.

The name “Guanzhong” (within the passes) suggests the strategic position of this area. Since the Warring States period, numerous passes in the surrounding mountains were fortified to deter invasions. The term “Guanzhong” first appears in the *Intrigues of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo Ce*), which was compiled in the first century BCE from earlier materials. Initially, “Guanzhong” referred to the region west of the Han’gu Pass; therefore it is sometimes known alternatively as Guanxi (west of the
pass). “Guanxi” has no connotation of a fixed boundary. As time went by, however, people tried to define the region in a more precise way by adding more passes to delineate its edges. A third-century source identified Guanzhong as the region between Long Pass in the west and Han’gu Pass in the east. Later, some defined the region by four passes, others by five. In any case, the region within these passes is about 39,200 square kilometers in area, slightly more than twice the size of the state of New Jersey. Historically, this was known as Yongzhou in the Book of Documents and the location of the Qin state in the Warring States periods. It has thus been referred to frequently in shorthand as Yong or Qin. It begins around the present-day city of Baoji in the west and ends at Tongguan county in the east, stretching across a total distance of about 360 kilometers. In the west, a narrow passage through the Qinling range provides access to Guanzhong from Sichuan through the southern part of Shaanxi. This route is guarded by the Dasan Pass. In the eastern part of this region, the southbound Yellow River turns eastward after its obstruction by Qinling at Tongguan. It thence flows into the North China plain through the Han’gu Valley, where the famous Han’gu Pass fortifications once stood, and is flanked by the Qinling, Zhongtiao, and Yao mountain ranges. The river’s course provides natural boundaries for the modern provinces of Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Henan. To the south, the Qinling range historically served as a natural barrier that prevented easy access to the upper and middle Yangzi regions. Thus, seizing control of the numerous routes that run through the mountain valleys was crucial to military success. North of Guanzhong lies a chain of mountains running from west to east, which includes Mount Qishan, Mount Huanglong, and the Ziwu ridge. Further north, beyond present-day Yan’an, the great Hengshan range, on

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5. Liu Qingzhu, Guanzhong ji jizhu, p. 1. The complete text of Guanzhong ji, which is often attributed to Pan Yue (247–300), is not extant. This modern edition puts together surviving passages of the work found in other sources.
6. The four passes were Han’gu in the east, Wuguan in the south, Sanguan in the west, and Xiaoguan in the north. See Xu Guang’s commentary in Sima Qian, Shi ji, 7.315.
7. The additional pass was Linjinguan in the north. See Hu Sansheng’s commentary to Sima Guang, Zizhi tongjian, 8.282.
which several states built sections of the Great Wall, once served as a natural boundary separating pastoral from agricultural society.  

Several major rivers—the Yellow River, the Wei, the Jing, and the Luo—run through this region. In ancient times they provided convenient transportation in and out of the region. As time went by, however,

water transport became less popular. Changes in the courses of some rivers altered the structure of the water system drastically. A more important reason was a decline in water levels and river flow. A number of smaller rivers simply dried up. For example, the Hao River, one of the eight rivers flowing around Chang’an up until the Han dynasty, had disappeared by the Sui-Tang period. Even larger rivers such as the Wei gradually became more shallow. During the Warring States period, the Wei River could transport heavy vessels carrying grain even during winter, when water levels are generally low. In the Sui and Tang, when Chang’an was the national capital, this river was often used to import grain from the east. Harbors were set up along its banks near the capital. But apparently even then the water level was already considerably lower than it once had been, since canals had to be dug to the south of the river to make up for its reduced depth and significantly decreased flow. By the Song, whose main capitals were situated downstream from Guanzhong at Kaifeng and Luoyang on the North China Plain near the Yellow River, the Wei River was used mainly to transport grain and other supplies eastward out of Guanzhong, but only occasionally. After the Song, there is little evidence to indicate that the river was used as a major water route for grain transportation. There are several possible contributing factors, one of which might be that the river was now too shallow to be suitable for heavy vessels.

The growing desiccation of the area had, as we might expect, an adverse impact on agricultural production. Nevertheless, this region, which is now the central part of Shaanxi province and commonly known as the Guanzhong Plain (Guanzhong pingyuan), is far better endowed with natural resources and a climate favorable for human activities than are the northern and southern parts of the province, known as

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10. Shi Nianhai, “Lun Xi'an zhouwei zhu heliu de bianhua.” In 1220, Bahulu, then a senior provincial-level official in Shaanxi, recommended that the Wei River, rather than roads, be used for transporting grain from Shaanxi eastward. The suggestion was implemented, and it was thought to have relieved the people doing the transportation from exhaustion; see Tuo’tuo et al., Jin shi, 108.2390. This incident implies that water transportation via the Wei River was an exception rather than the norm by the early thirteenth century.
Shaanbei and Shaannan, respectively. Although called the Guanzhong “plain,” the landscape of central Shaanxi is nothing like the seemingly endless and flat North China Plain. In fact, yuan here should be construed not as “plain” but as “plateau”—one Qing source counts about fifty plateaus named in ancient times. Toward the north, the landscape elevates gradually but steadily until it reaches the Shaanbei highlands, which are part of the Loess Plateau. A region characterized by numerous hills, infertile land, and poor drainage systems, it is unsuitable for agricultural production and thus one of the poorest regions in China. To the south across the Qinling Mountains, Shaannan is a region full of valleys and basins with relatively flat and fertile land, as well as fairly good water systems. Compared to Shaanbei, it is better suited to agricultural production, yet rapid development took place only in the early Qing dynasty, although it was incorporated into Shaanxi province as early as the Yuan dynasty.

In G. William Skinner’s celebrated scheme for regional analysis, central Shaanxi constitutes half of the core area of the Northwest macro-region. The other half extends into modern Shanxi province, along the Fen River, up to the city of Taiyuan. Skinner’s analysis has far-reaching implications for our understanding of the role of Shaanxi province in the spatial structure of the Chinese empire. The Shaannan area, although administratively part of Shaanxi province since the Yuan, is separated from the rest of Shaanxi by the Qinling range and lies in another of Skinner’s macroregions. Skinner thus reminds us that administrative boundaries might not be the most natural way of defining a region, especially when we consider economic and other interactions. Yet, in the case of Guanzhong, state-sanctioned administrative units did and still do have significant impact on how the region is conceived. Originally used to denote the region “within the passes,” which, as we have seen, covers roughly only the territory of present-day central Shaanxi, “Guanzhong” has often been used instead as a synonym for the entire province of Shaanxi, whose boundaries stretch well beyond the passes. For instance, when the Shaanxi scholar Li Yuanchun (1769–

1854) compiled *A Collection of Prose from Ming-Qing Guanzhong* (*Guanzhong liangchao wenchao*), he included writers from all parts of Shaanxi province, both “within” and “without” the passes. Indeed, the territory of Qing Shaanxi was only half that of Ming Shaanxi, half of which was split off to establish Gansu province in the Qing. When Li compiled the Ming section of his anthology, he did not hesitate to include writers from places that during his own time belonged administratively to Gansu.13

In a sense, to name the entire province Guanzhong is absurd, for central Shaanxi, the region that is literally “Guanzhong,” is in some ways culturally quite distinct from other parts of the province. For instance, the ceremonies celebrating Lunar New Year conducted throughout central Shaanxi during the Ming-Qing period were relatively uniform and distinct from the comparable ceremonies in Shaanbei and Shaannan.14 Similarly, the researches of linguists suggest that the dialects of central Shaanxi, compared to those of Shaanbei and Shaannan, show more internal coherence and should be treated as a unit of analysis.15 This implies that, as a province, Shaanxi was melded into an administrative unit solely by the action of the state. Li Yuanchun obviously subscribed to the state-sanctioned boundaries, for the contents of his compilation comprise materials not only from “within the passes” but from the entire province.

However, it is worth considering that instead of using the official name Shaanxi, Li chose to call the province Guanzhong in his title. In a sense, this was a logical choice. The very name Guanzhong immediately evokes a sense of history (the term has been in use since the Warring States period) and peculiarity (it denotes a well-defined and unique territory). It also carries with it a powerful sense of cultural tradition that transcends the history of the contemporary era. This very tradition was thought to have been initiated and passed down by ancient sage-kings such as Fuxi, Kings Wen and Wu, and the Duke of Zhou. In short, Li Yuanchun recast a political entity (Shaanxi) into a cultural one (Guanzhong). This immediately raises the question: What defines a locality in this case—administrative boundaries, natural landscape, cultural heritage, or all of the above? Li Yuanchun probably did not envision this

14. Zhang Xiaohong, “Ming Qing shiqi Shaanxi suishi minsu de diyu chaju.”
15. See, e.g., Yang Chunlin, “Shaanxi fangyan neibu fenqu gaishuo.”
question as one he needed to pursue. For modern historians who claim to be writing about the history of a place, however, this important conceptual question warrants careful scrutiny. To ask it in a different manner: What do we mean by “local,” and why was Guanzhong a locale?

Evidently, a place is “local” only when it is construed as part of a whole. To say that a place has a “local” history is to grant that it has a particular identity that has persisted over time and that the locality exists, either alongside other particular places with their own particular identities, or within a larger place with a more general identity. When the locale is understood as “local,” the search for it entails a probe into the process of identity construction. Two questions that we need to ask when writing local history as such are: Did the people of a locality, however defined, subscribe to the idea that being “local” required natives of that locality to assume a certain identity? If they did, in what forms did they talk and write about the “local,” and were there spatial and temporal differences in the ways they represented locales?

John Dardess’s book on Taihe county during the Ming explores how the identification of a place as a locale was predicated on the self-definition of the literati inhabitants of the area. Dardess argues that in the early Ming, when Taihe men enjoyed extraordinary bureaucratic success, a Taihe identity was something to boast of. However, later in the Ming, when the area no longer generated as many officeholders, being from Taihe ceased to be a source of pride, and Taihe men stopped laying claim to their local identity. In particular, Dardess observes that an important way in which Taihe literati identified with their hometown was by showing appreciation of the local landscape. In the early Ming, local scenic spots were promoted broadly through poetry and painting. These media served as means of asserting Taihe’s place within the larger national aesthetic tradition. In the late Ming, however, as local identity ceased to be useful in the national context, writings on the local landscape largely disappeared.16

Dardess’s observation brings to the forefront the relationship between the national and the local. Put simply, in Dardess’s opinion, the local became meaningful to Taihe men only when success at the

national level was secured. Without national success, the local as a source of pride disappeared from their writings. This prompts Dardess to argue that “perhaps inevitably in the case of late imperial China, there is no such thing as pristine local history” because the existence of the local depended entirely on what happened at the national level.17

Did localism really disappear in Taihe in the late Ming? Peter Bol argues that what we see among the Taihe elite is a change in the scope of discourse rather than the disappearance of localism. As evidence, he points to the regionalization of Wang Yangming–ism. In contrast to Dardess, who suggests that sixteenth-century Taihe philosophers engaged the intellectual world as individuals rather than with a collective Taihe identity, Bol notes that Taihe men did promote their version of Wang Yangming–ism as having a regional “Jiangyou” characteristic, set against the “Jiangnan” variety, which they construed as being dominated by Taizhou thinkers. In Bol’s view, changing circumstances in Taihe resulted in the replacement of one particular form of local identity by another.18

Bol does not, however, deny the importance of national considerations. In fact, his own researches on Jinhua show that the construction of a local identity within a literati community was usually inseparable from what members of that community wanted to achieve nationally. He argues that the Jinhua case in the late Ming “reminds us that local identity discourse was understood to exist in relation to the national, and that the (re)construction of local identity was intended to be a means both of transforming local society and of increasing the locale’s participation in national life.”19 In other words, the rise of localism in late Ming Jinhua was in fact a response to a national surge in demand for local identity. Similarly, as the studies of Antonia Finnane on Yangzhou and of Steven Miles on Guangzhou show, the construction of local identity among scholars of the nineteenth century was shaped by evolving transregional dynamics in a changing Qing world.20

In light of the ways in which recent historical studies of localities have alerted us to this complex relationship between the national and the local, the case of Guanzhong is particularly interesting. Although many places in China have at some point in history claimed political or cultural centrality or supremacy, such as northern Henan as studied by Roger Des Forges or Hunan as studied by Stephen Platt, Guanzhong can, in comparison, claim a national past as its own local identity in a way few other places can. It was, as noted above, home to several legendary sage-kings, it was the site of many dynastic capitals and of the tombs of many emperors and great officials, and in relatively recent times, it produced a national figure in the person of Zhang Zai (1020–77), whose orthodoxy was endorsed by the state beginning in the Yuan. Natives can therefore conceive of the historical-cultural landscape of Guanzhong both nationally and locally. He Ruilin (1819–93) expressed the view of many when he proudly claimed that

In the land of Guanzhong, the earth is thick and the water is deep. The natives are decorous and forthright, and it has been customary for the literati to emphasize moral integrity and to encourage [the awareness] of honesty and honor. Therefore, those who have the aspiration [to learn about] the learning of the sages [of antiquity] will regard this [i.e., Guanzhong] as the base.

Declarations such as these provided readers with a reason why Guanzhong is unique and yet universally relevant. The essence of Guanzhong culture, according to He Ruilin, lies in its very depth and substance. This culture, though local, is where the transformation of national customs should begin. The tradition of Guanzhong is the tradition of the sages. It is the tradition of the literati across time and space.

He Ruilin’s emphasis here is on the literati, or shi (also called shidaifu, shiren, and shishen, among other terms, depending on the context). He reminds us that the “local” is the shi’s local. Any study of local identity construction must thus take into account the self-representation of the shi.

Although for the sake of convenience, I generally use “literati” to translate shi, scholars have used other terms, such as “aristocrats,”


“scholars,” “scholar-officials,” and “gentry,” to denote and highlight different characteristics of the shi in different periods. These efforts have provoked much debate. Especially problematic has been the issue of what characteristics qualify a person as a shi. One obvious qualification is, of course, office- and/or degree-holding. This enabled an individual to attain a prestigious status endorsed by the state. In this book, I use the expression “Guanzhong literati” loosely to describe those individuals with a strong Guanzhong connection (by virtue of native-place identification or in-migration) who belonged to this prestigious class. It has never been my intention, however, to imply that there was a historical group of people who were distinctive because of their “Guanzhongness” or that membership in this group was always clear-cut. In other words, using “Guanzhong literati” in a shorthand manner does not excuse us from confronting difficult conceptual questions. For instance, can a person whose ancestors had migrated to Guanzhong one or two generations earlier be considered a Guanzhong native? How about a person registered as a Guanzhong native who spent most of his lifetime outside Guanzhong or whose forebear left Guanzhong long before he was born? Or in terms of occupation, does a merchant in the Ming who bought himself an office title qualify as a shi? Does a civil official in the Song who becomes a military official retain the right to be called a shi? How about a man in the Yuan with an education in the Confucian canons who opted to become a clerk? We will encounter all these cases later, and a close study of them should inform us of the complex political, social, and cultural settings in which the term shi was discussed and defined. Some questions that inform the discussion in subsequent chapters are: What did it mean to be a shi in Guanzhong? Did the meaning change over time, and, if so, under what circumstances did it change?

To ask these questions is to probe the issue of social mobility. Among Western sinologists, interest in the social history of localities in China was triggered largely by an intense discussion of social mobility in Chinese history. Hilary Beattie wrote her thought-provoking work on the elite of Tongcheng, Land and Lineage in China, mainly to challenge

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23. The usefulness of the term “gentry,” for example, has been contested; see Ho Ping-ti, The Ladder of Success in Imperial China, pp. 37–38.
the earlier view that social mobility in late imperial China was predicated chiefly on degree- and office-holding. Noting that some elite lineages could maintain their dominance for hundreds of years without having to rely solely on members’ passing the examinations or holding office, she argued that land was a more reliable asset for the lineages she studied.

The controversy between these two perspectives has far-reaching implications for understanding the relationship between the literati/gentry and the state. If passing the examination and subsequently obtaining an office were the only route to success, we would expect elite strategies to center around forming national networks; if the elite could rely on other means such as maintaining possession of a reasonable amount of land to uphold their social status, then establishing a national network might be less important. How Chinese local elites from different areas during the Ming and later periods developed their patterns of dominance is the subject of the essays collected in *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance*, edited by Joseph Esherick and Mary Rankin. One conclusion that emerges from the collective effort of the contributors is that elite dominance was subject to regional variations. It is therefore important neither to anticipate that “all county elites will be basically similar just because they operate in the same administrative subdivision, nor to expect that all holders of the lower *shengyuan* degree will act in the same way because they have the same formal rank.” As such, attempts to carry out substantial research on regions become crucial if we are to appreciate the diversity of Chinese local elites.

Similarly, Robert Hymes embarked on his influential study on the elite of Fuzhou, Jiangxi, because he was uncomfortable with existing scholarly discussions of social mobility in the Song. The collapse of the aristocracy and the increasingly important role the civil examination played in recruiting ambitious men into officialdom have led some scholars to argue that social mobility in the Song was considerably fluid and others to attempt to show that social stratification was much more

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rigid than it appears to have been.\textsuperscript{26} Hymes entered the debate by focusing on changes in elite strategies in the Northern and the Southern Song. His answer to the scholarly controversy over social mobility in the Song implies that elites were capable of maintaining dominance through various strategies, thus making it difficult for the relatively humble and obscure to enter their circle. Far more important, however, is Hymes's contention that a phenomenon he calls “elite localism” arose during the Northern-Southern Song transition. He is, as he states in the introduction to his book, concerned mainly with providing a microscopic study to support Robert Hartwell's observation that the “professional elite” who dominated court politics in the early Song gradually became indistinguishable from the “local gentry” over the course of the eleventh century. Put differently, the professional elite ceased to exist as a distinct social group by the Southern Song and was replaced by the local gentry.\textsuperscript{27}

This social transformation of the elite, Hymes believes, can account for many phenomena that arose in the Southern Song and later. In essence, he argues that in the Northern Song, elites were more nationally oriented and identified court service as the ultimate career choice. Thus they preferred to establish social networks nationally through marriages and other social engagements. In contrast, beginning in the Southern Song, elites pursued a far more localist strategy by, for instance, forging marriage ties locally and broadening the scope of their class to consider nonbureaucratic “occupations.”\textsuperscript{28}

In his earlier work on Fuzhou, Hymes treated elite localism solely as a social phenomenon and did not take into account the intellectual and cultural endeavors of those he terms “elite.” He was concerned primarily with how the elite employed different strategies to move up or maintain their positions on the social ladder of success. Later, in the introduction to an essay collection co-edited by Conrad Schirokauer and himself, Hymes drew on the findings of various scholars to restate his earlier hypothesis with more emphasis on the cultural and intellectual

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} See the debate between Edward Kracke and Robert Hartwell: Kracke, “Family vs. Merit in Chinese Civil Service Examinations Under the Empire”; and Hartwell, “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China.”
\item \textsuperscript{27} Hartwell, “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China.”
\item \textsuperscript{28} Hymes, \textit{Statesmen and Gentlemen}.
\end{itemize}
Introduction

To some extent, Hymes was responding to one of the paramount issues that has occupied historians of the late imperial and modern periods—the state-society relationship. The rise of elite localism as depicted by Hymes is in fact a phenomenon that points toward the rise of “society” as a “public” space that is under not the direct control of the state but, rather, the direction of a local elite. Whether we should call this space the “public sphere” as some historians of the late imperial and modern periods have suggested is open to debate, but Hymes’s conclusion indeed allows us to appreciate the fact that the Song elite were not always as oriented toward the state as we have thought.

Since its formulation, Hymes’s hypothesis has for the most part been tested with case studies on places in southern China. A question that eventually has to be asked is: What happened in the north, where the people had a totally different experience after the fall of the Northern Song, when land to the north of the Huai River and the Qinling range was occupied by alien regimes? Unfortunately the question has been left unexplored because we know little about conditions in this region. The present study therefore zooms in on Guanzhong and discusses the various strategies adopted by its elites in different periods, as well as local views on the relationship between state and society.

An important point to note is that Hymes has taken the concept of “local” as a given. For Hymes, the local simply represents an administratively bounded place—Fuzhou, for example—and “local elite” refers to those who lived most of their life in that place and who, in their nonofficial capacities, assumed the role of leadership in the local community. The “local” used in this way is essentially identical to a space at the local level left vacant by the retreat of the state. From the discussion above, it should be apparent that we are in fact dealing with two very different concepts of the “local” here: (1) a space that allows the nonofficial elite to

29. “Introduction,” in Hymes and Schirokauer, Ordering the World. This introduction was co-authored with Conrad Schirokauer, but the part about a shift in elite strategy was probably by Hymes.
operate with some degree of freedom outside the direct intervention of the state; (2) a consciousness that historical actors display in constructing the tradition, history, and identity of a place. With this understanding in mind, we should not be surprised to find that a person can remain in a place and be a leader of the local community for his entire life and yet show no interest in the local being “local.” Ultimately, place might be completely irrelevant to his self-definition. On the other hand, a person and his family can live far away from a place for an extended period of time (a case of out-migration) or have moved from elsewhere to the place (in-migration) but still consider the locality as a source of pride and make efforts to construct their identity based on it.

To avoid confusion, I reserve the term “local” for the second case and situate it in the national/local binary. Because the first case is mainly about state-society relationships and because the terms “state” and “the national” are often thought to be synonymous, I will often use the term “official” (in quotation marks) to denote what is normally known as “state” and “unofficial” (again in quotation marks) to denote what is normally known as “society.” I hope this system, although awkward, will make it clear that when employing the “official”/“unofficial” binary, I am actually concerned with the tension between the government and the society that it governs.

It is vital to remember that the state, or the “official,” was never an undifferentiated whole. This tension between different sectors and levels within the “official” gives rise to the third dimension of the “local,” namely, the local government offices and the corresponding officials-in-charge. Again, for the sake of clarity, I will use “regional” to denote all governmental offices from the county to the circuit or provincial level, as well as, in some periods, the offices of an appanage, such as a Yuan princely establishment. At the other end of the administrative spectrum is the central government or the court, which I denote by the term “central.” Conflict and cooperation between regional officials and local elites is a recurring theme in Chinese history and by no means a new subject of inquiry in modern scholarship. Scholars have focused explicitly on the variety of ways in which the regional government re-

30. See, e.g., Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, Local Government in China Under the Ch'ing, pp. 168–92.
lated to the central government, but less attention has been paid to the multiple ways in which the role of the regional government was perceived vis-à-vis the central government. In postulating this central/regional binary, I am suggesting that neither the regional officials themselves nor the people under their jurisdiction held a homogeneous or unchanging view on the issue of whom the regional government actually represented, the state or local society. It is, however, important to point out that, in advancing this binary, I am not assuming either that we can treat the central and the regional as coherent units without internal contradiction, or that the central and the regional were necessarily at odds. What I am suggesting is simply that in most cases the central government and its regional agents had different priorities and that the existence of these differences permits us to treat them as separate, though by no means exclusive, entities.

In the chapters that follow, I trace the transformation of the Guanzhong literati and their culture from the tenth to the twentieth centuries in hopes of providing a picture of post-Tang Guanzhong that is more complex than the one offered in nationalistic discourse, as found in the quotations at the beginning of this Introduction. I also examine how these literati conceptualized three sets of relations: national/local, “official”/“unofficial,” and central/regional. Essentially, the purpose of this study is to examine the formation (or regression) of a critical communal self-consciousness among Guanzhong literati over time, its role in constructing a local identity and promoting an “unofficial” space for nonofficial elite activism, and the effect of the presence (or absence) of this consciousness on literati views of the relationship between the central and regional governments.

Admittedly, the “pairing” of these three sets of relations is to a great extent arbitrary. To begin with, it should be clear that the components

31. For an example of this kind of study, see Endicott-West, Mongolian Rule in China. In this book, the author examines how the appointment of overseers (darubashi) influenced the functioning of regional government and its relationship with the center. See also Joseph McDermott’s suggestion that we should examine the central government’s relationship to local administration in his review of Hymes’s Statesmen and Gentlemen.

32. Robert Hymes remarks in passing in Statesmen and Gentlemen (p. 125) that Fuzhou elites in the Southern Song tended to view local officials as advocates of the areas they were governing.
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of each of these pairs are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A person
with a strong sense of local consciousness might, for example, see him-
self as a member of a national community of the learned and champion
a shared national culture. The issue here is not whether there can be a
shared national culture, but whether this culture can be perceived as
having regional variations and therefore contributing to the formation
of a local identity.

We also need to ask whether the historical actors themselves made
the distinctions proposed here. As will become clear, the answer varies
with place and time. For example, the Chinese term *gong* was sometimes
used to refer to a national community of the learned; at other times it
was used to denote the public-spiritedness invested in local projects
such as the compilation of local gazetteers, a kind of historical-
geographical work that often carried a strong sense of local identity. In
the second usage, the “unofficial” and the “local” were often fused into
a single stance that stood in contrast to the center. Instead of trying to
rigidly define what is “unofficial” and what is “local,” we might better
identify how historical actors conflated and/or separated the pairs in
different historical settings and to examine their reasons for doing so.

The present study covers a long period, almost a millennium, extending
from the tenth to the early twentieth century. For my purposes this
span of time can be subdivided into three shorter periods, namely,
the Five Dynasties–Northern Song period, the Jin-Yuan period, and the
Ming-Qing period. It would, of course, be absurd to assume that there
is uniformity in any given sub-period or complete change from one
sub-period to the next. Nevertheless, one can make a sufficient case for
considering each sub-period as a unit. In other parts of China it might
be less than ideal to periodize historical development according to dy-
nastic change, since this form of periodization privileges the center as
opposed to the local and accentuates political history at the expense of
social and cultural history. But in the case of Guanzhong, dynastic peri-
odization is appropriate because, as will become clear, the imperial state
essentially always played a crucial role in defining the historical con-
sciousness of the Guanzhong literati. A full demonstration of this claim
is made in subsequent chapters, but in essence my argument is that there
were major changes in the ways Guanzhong literati perceived the three sets of relations (national/local, “official”/“unofficial” and central/regional) from one sub-period to another.

Chapter 1 treats the Five Dynasties–Northern Song period. I show that during the tenth and the first half of the eleventh century, as aristocratic families were gradually replaced by bureaucratic families who relied on the civil examinations and office-holding to maintain their successes, prominent Guanzhong literati were for the most part interested in making their presence felt at the court and were content to let the state control most local affairs. Over time, however, elite families, led mainly by Zhang Zai and his students, became increasingly willing to exert their influence on local society. Perhaps ironically, this happened at a time when the state was also trying to expand under the statist New Policies initiatives of Wang Anshi (1021–86). As we shall see, members of the Zhang Zai school rejected the New Policies vision. They were concerned primarily with figuring out a constructive way to integrate the state, elite families, and society into a coherent whole.

Chapter 2 moves on to the Jin-Yuan period, during which Guanzhong came under the rule of foreign regimes. The Jurchen invasion in 1126 caused great destruction to local society. All the old elite families basically vanished, and for various reasons, new families were unable to establish a solid foundation on which to sustain their success. Furthermore, the status of the shi as a class plummeted. They were no longer able to claim political and cultural superiority over other classes, as had their predecessors in the Song. Predictably, the development of literati culture was disrupted.

It is not until the late twelfth century that we begin to see important literati surfacing again in Guanzhong. Even then, the Northern Song heritage, and Zhang Zai’s vision in particular, appears to have been abandoned. The first generation of literati to emerge during the Jin is remembered in history primarily for poetry. In the thirteenth century, we observe more diversity in cultural production as local literati began writing extensively on history, historical geography, and literature. By the late thirteenth century, Cheng-Zhu Daoxue Neo-Confucianism

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33. Here, “school” is used to refer to a social organization whose members were connected through master-disciple relationship.
began to take center stage, but it subsequently suffered a decline from the 1330s on. Under these circumstances, the literati of Guanzhong perceived the three sets of relations in a way fundamentally different from that of their Northern Song counterparts.

Chapter 3 deals with the Ming and Qing. The founding of the Ming marked a new era for Guanzhong literati as they were presented with new opportunities created by favorable state policies. The mid-fifteenth century witnessed the emergence of a handful of powerful families who were able to reproduce their success for centuries. Accompanying the rise of these families was the emergence of nationally renowned statesmen and scholars. As a consequence, literati culture flourished. We see in this period vibrant development in the realm of Daoxue, and it quickly became the central issue to which all literati, regardless of their intellectual orientations, had to respond. Unlike the Song-Jin transition, the fall of the Ming did not end this trend. Many *shi* families survived the dynastic transition, and so did their culture. Although certain aspects of literati culture did change with the founding of the Qing, the Ming vision of the three sets of relations was essentially continued by Qing literati.

I end this study with a concluding chapter that recaps the ways in which Guanzhong literati perceptions of these binary relations changed over time and explores the implications of such changes. I also suggest the possible contributions of this study on Guanzhong to the study of Chinese history in general.