Introduction

Mingzhou 明州 (today’s Ningbo municipality in Zhejiang province, southeast of Hangzhou) was one of the most affluent localities in China during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries—much as it remains today. Well known at the time for the political success of its native sons, Mingzhou was celebrated both for its commercial wealth, gained through maritime trade, and for the maturity of its scholarly and literary traditions.¹ The area continued to prosper throughout the late imperial period, until Shanghai’s rise as a major harbor city began to eclipse its role.² But Mingzhou’s glory as an economic hub as well as a cultural and intellectual center during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) and the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) has never again been

¹ For the political success of a major Mingzhou kin group, see Davis, “Political Success and the Growth of Descent Groups.” For a socioeconomic history of the area during the Tang and Song dynasties, see Lu, Tāng Sòng shíqì Mingzhōu qūyu de shēhuì jìngjì. For a survey of education and scholarship during the Southern Song, see Chen Xiaolan, Nán Sòng Sìmíng dìqū jiàoyù hé xuěshū yánjiù. Linda Walton more specifically examines the place of the “four masters of Mingzhou” in Neo-Confucian learning in “‘The Four Masters of Mingzhou.’” For a study of the literary accomplishments of Mingzhou writers, see Yang, Sōngmó Yuanchú Sìmíng wènsī jì qí shìwén yánjiù.

² Tianyige 天一閣, arguably the most famous private library in premodern China, was established in this area during the Ming. In the early Qing, such erudite and nationally renowned scholars as Wān Sìtōng 萬斯同 (1638–1702) and Quán Zuwáng 全祖望 (1705–55) hailed from this area. Businessmen from Ningbo fueled the rise of Shanghai as a modern city in the late Qing and the Republican period. In the modern period, the area is perhaps best known for having been the hometown of Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975).
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matched. Nevertheless, unlike Nanjing, Suzhou, or Hangzhou, which have long histories of political and cultural prominence reaching back into the first millennium, Mingzhou was largely irrelevant in national politics and culture up until the end of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). What, then, accounts for its remarkable ascendency during and after the Southern Song? What sustained its continued prosperity in the mid- and late imperial periods? Answers to these questions will help us unravel the internal dynamics of this stretch of Chinese history.

At its most elementary level, this book is a local history of Mingzhou prefecture—composed of the six counties of Yin, Fenghua, Cixi, Dinghai, Xiangshan, and Changguo—during the Southern Song dynasty and the Yuan dynasty. In probing the historical trajectory of this area, however, I am ultimately interested in presenting an alternative understanding of the relationship between the state and the social elites in the middle period of Chinese imperial history. Mingzhou provides us with some of the best-preserved sources for examining the texture of local society and addressing the question of state-society relations in this time period. Six contemporary gazetteers from the period offer a reservoir of information about the structure and activities of local government as well as about major elite families of the area. Also extant are numerous private literary collections (wenji 文集) and scholarly monographs by native writers that show the ideas and actions of local elites and the networks among them. In addition, excavated epitaphs, stele inscriptions, and materials buried in family genealogies provide additional information that has not been available to scholars until recently. These sources allow us to

3. Mingzhou was redesignated as Qingyuan prefecture in 1195, and was renamed Qingyuan route under the Mongol conquest in 1277. For the sake of convenience and consistency, however, I will continue to use “Mingzhou” as a generic name to refer to the historically and geographically defined area. “Qingyuan” will be used only when I specifically refer to the administrative unit as defined in the Yuan dynasty.

4. They are Qiandao Siming tujing (1169); Baoqing Siming zhi (1227); Kaiqing Siming xuzhi (1259); Dade Changguo tuuzhi (1298); Yanyou Siming zhi (1320); and Zhizheng Siming xuzhi (1342). These account for 15 percent of all extant Song and Yuan gazetteers. See Chen Xiaolan, Nan Song Siming diqu jiaoyu he xueshu yanjiu, p. 3.

5. For excavated sources, see Yu Fuhai, Ningbo shizhi waibian; Zhang Guoqing, Tianyige Mingzhou beilin jilu; Zhang Guoqing and Qiu Yanping, Yongcheng xiancun lidai beijie zhi; and Zhang Guoqing, Ningbo lidai beijie muzhi huibian. See also Da-
enrich and complicate our image of Song-Yuan local society, and to map out the relationship between the state and society in greater detail than has been possible in previous works on the local history of this period.

As I will show, the relationship between the state and social elites is best understood as a constant process of negotiation in which these poles mutually influence each other in various fields of local governance. Cases from Mingzhou history highlight social elites’ connectedness to the state rather than their separation from it, and show that the presence of the state, rather than its absence, was essential to the rise of a flourishing local society during this period.

Part of the Lower Yangzi macroregion’s core area as defined by G. William Skinner’s famous classification, Mingzhou should not be taken to represent the period as a whole more than any other locality of the time. However, this locality is different from the areas on which modern scholars have largely based the prevalent understandings of mid- and later imperial social elites, their relationship with the state, and local society in general. Mingzhou’s local history shows us a wide spectrum of state-society relations that significantly varied from our conventional wisdom and brings into relief the complexity of such relations. Furthermore, because the area’s prominence continued through the mid- and late imperial period, this book not only delves into questions that have challenged Song and Yuan scholars for decades but also provides an early vantage point from which to view

vis, “The Shi Tombs at Dongqian Lake.” A considerable number of genealogies for Mingzhou families are held in the Shanghai Library, Tianyige Museum, and local archives across Ningbo. Although the vast majority of them are late Qing compilations, some of them still contain valuable materials for earlier periods. For an annotated bibliography of these genealogies, see Wang Heming et al., Shanghai tushuguan guancang jiapu tiyao; Zhejiang jiapu zongmu tiyao bianji weiyuanhui, Zhejiang jiapu zongmu tiyao.


7. Two of the most representative studies would be Hilary Beattie’s classic study of Tongcheng county, Anhui Province, during the Ming-Qing period (Land and Lineage in China) and Robert Hymes’s pathbreaking work on Fuzhou prefecture, Jiangxi circuit during the Song (Statesmen and Gentlemen). As major scholarly critiques of social mobility theory in the field of late imperial Chinese history, both books highlight the importance of landholding, one of the essential “localist” strategies, in maintaining elite status in local society, while downplaying the significance of the examinations.
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the long-term social and cultural development of the Jiangnan region.⁸

⁸ Although Jiangnan is largely interchangeable with the Lower Yangzi region in historiography, scholars disagree over the exact geographic scope of the Jiangnan region.
Introduction

A Familiar Story and Its Limits

Before attempting to unravel the issue of state-society relations as manifested in Mingzhou history, it is necessary to problematize a prevailing interpretation in the field. Here is an oft-told story about a sea change in middle-period Chinese history during and after the twelfth century: The transition from the Northern to the Southern Song was much more than a forced retreat of the dynasty’s capital to the southeast corner of China.9 The Northern Song, especially during the New Policies period (1068–1085, 1094–1126), was characterized by vigorous state activism. Its government showed a strong will and remarkable ability to interfere with local economy in pursuit of its goals. Practicing what a social historian has called “bureaucratic entrepreneurship,” the state aggressively sought to locate and secure every possible tax source, often at the expense of the very foundations of the local economy.10 After the humiliating loss of the north China plain to the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115–1234), however, the Southern Song government

Mingzhou is considered part of Jiangnan, for example, in Shiba Yoshinobu’s study. See Sōdai Kōnan keizaishi no kenkyū. Hamashima Atsutoshi, however, limits his use of the term to indicate the alluvial lands around Lake Tai (Suzhou, Changzhou, Songjiang, Jiaxing, and Huzhou). See Sōkan shinkō.

9. As is well known, the foundation for this prevailing interpretation of the Northern-Southern Song transition was laid by Robert Hymes. In his theoretically provocative and empirically meticulous research on the local society of Fuzhou prefecture, Hymes argues three major points, combining prosopographical analysis with an in-depth examination of activities of local elites as well as of changes in their ideal self-image: (1) From the end of the Northern Song, the elite of Chinese society shifted their primary attention away from government service to their own local society, largely separating themselves from the state; (2) state power retreated from local society in the Southern Song, creating a power vacuum to be filled by the activities of local elites; and (3) the local elite and their localist strategies managed to persist into later periods. Despite challenges by Richard Davis and Beverly Bossler and modification by John Chaffee and Hugh Clark, the general picture of a localist turn accompanying the Northern-Southern Song transition has become an established interpretation of the period in English-language scholarship. Peter Bol has extended the applicability of this framework to the fields of intellectual and cultural history. See Hymes, Statesmen and Gentlemen; Davis, Court and Family in Sung China, 960–1279; Bol, “This Culture of Ours”; Bol, Neo-Confucianism in History; Bossler, Powerful Relations; and Hugh Clark, Portrait of a Community.

gave up the ideal of being the sole planner and distributor of economic resources and cultural value.\textsuperscript{11} As a result, the power of the state in local society declined considerably. The power vacuum in local society created by the retreat of the state in turn offered various opportunities to local elites. Disenchanted with repeated, winner-take-all factional feuds at the court, and resigned to the fact that the “thorny gates” of the examinations gave them little chance of winning a government post,\textsuperscript{12} these wealthy, educated local families began to turn their attention away from the imperial center to their own locale in order to secure and perpetuate their positions in society. Taking the place of the now seriously weakened state, these local elites took it upon themselves to maintain local order and culture by becoming actively engaged in local defense, social welfare, and the patronage of local religion.\textsuperscript{13} As they became less and less dependent on the state for their status, the elite began to gradually yet inexorably separate from the state during the Southern Song, and this pattern continued to dominate the relationship between the state and elites through the later imperial period.

Reifying the macrohistorical insights of Skinner and Robert Hartwell,\textsuperscript{14} this narrative offers a compelling framework within which to interpret a larger set of fundamental social changes that took place in Chinese history during and after the twelfth century. The alleged retreat of state power at the grassroots level, the emergence of a “lineage orientation” among elite families,\textsuperscript{15} their heightened interest in local affairs, and the spread among literati of Neo-Confucianism, which offered a theoretical justification for their social existence, all find a place in this framework.\textsuperscript{16}

Even if we accept this neat and forceful narrative, however, it fails to consider two important variables. First is temporal and geographical scope. When we talk about “Southern Song,” what specific period or what specific region are we actually discussing? Can we simply take

\textsuperscript{11} Bol, “Whither the Emperor?” p. 134.
\textsuperscript{12} Chaffee, \textit{The Thorny Gates of Learning}, pp. 35–41.
\textsuperscript{13} Hymes, \textit{Statesmen and Gentlemen}.
\textsuperscript{15} Hymes, “Marriage, Descent Groups, and the Localist Strategy.”
\textsuperscript{16} Bol, \textit{This Culture of Ours}; Bol, “Neo-Confucianism and Local Society.”
the Southern Song to be a single unit of analysis? Can the retreat of the state be detected evenly throughout the dynasty and across the empire? Although the detailed official documents in *Huangshi richao* 黃氏日抄 by Huang Zhen 黃震 (1213–81) offer vivid accounts of various administrative challenges confronted by Southern Song local officials, giving this work tremendous value as an historical source for Southern Song local society, the problems discussed there convey a picture of the Southern Song on the verge of extinction. How far back in Southern Song history can we project the same picture? Is it possible to discern a meaningful change in the capacity of the state, and in how social elites related to it, over the course of the Southern Song? In the same vein, can we apply what Huang wrote about Fuzhou, Jiangxi circuit, in the 1270s to his native prefecture of Mingzhou five decades earlier?

Second, the above narrative lacks any serious attempt to shed light on the adaptation and response of the state to changing political and social realities. Any transition of power from the state to local society would have occurred in various stages, moving through a process of forming new social agreements among different sectors of society, giving rise to varied tensions and contested interpretations. The state’s role in this process has been largely ignored, however, or deemed important only in a negative sense. By the late Southern Song, the state may indeed have resigned itself to a more passive role in local society. It is doubtful, though, that the state ever “officially” gave up the idea of taking a leading role in society. We have yet to prove whether the Chinese state in this period actively sought an ideal of “lesser government.” Had there been enough resources in local society to channel into its coffers, and had there been a strategic imperative that required more of its presence, would local government still have been content with a passive role?

*Ordering the World*, a pioneering conference volume that delved into a rather drastic “social decision” that is alleged to have taken place in the Southern Song intellectual world, tells us little about either the initial role of the state in the process or its changed status as a result of such a decision. Although the volume editors define social decision as “the working out, in political conflict and then compromise, of a tacit yet negotiated agreement between state and elite,”¹⁷ the focus of the

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¹⁷. Hymes and Schirokauer, introduction to *Ordering the World*, p. 50.
collection falls lopsidedly on one party to the negotiations: the local elites. Even those who attempt to qualify this framework fall short of inquiring into the ways in which the state mattered in actual local society, aside from offering unparalleled prestige to those who passed the examinations.18

Are a flourishing local economy and culture always premised on weakened state power or the failure of state policies? Can the state’s power be measured only, or even most accurately, in its forceful suppression of the economic interests of elites and their self-consciousness? There is no question that contestation and negotiation over any kind of social power are inevitable among various actors in society. It is also true that not all the participants in these processes are equally powerful, so one can significantly overshadow the other at a given moment. The question at stake, however, is whether or not we need to acknowledge the state as a still-vital participant in these negotiations during this time period, and how the state affected the development of local society through these processes. For all the romanticized imagery of popular resistance to state intrusion,19 it would be impossible to understand the history of the longest-enduring bureaucratic country without a proper understanding of its state. In this sense, no country in the world needs “bringing the state back in” to understand its society more than does China.20

How, then, to understand the state in mid- and later imperial China? Historians have developed almost antipodal interpretations of the nature of the Chinese state in this period.21 The specter of “oriental despotism” that has haunted China scholars is now virtually exorcized, but for many scholars the concept of “autocratic state” (zhuanzhi guojia or sensei kokka) is still a rarely questioned descriptor of China’s later imperial formation. At the other end of the spectrum,

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18. See, for example, Davis, Court and Family in Sung China 960–1279; Bossler, Powerful Relations.
19. A typical example would be James Scott’s study on Zomia. See The Art of Not Being Governed.
20. I borrow this expression from Theda Skocpol. See her “Bringing the State Back In.”
21. For a debate on this issue in Japanese scholarship, for example, see Kamachi, “Feudalism or Absolute Monarchism?” See also Schneewind, Community Schools and the State in Ming China, pp. 1–2.
however, some view the later imperial Chinese state as an essentially passive and weak political organization that was able neither to encourage nor to suppress the commercial and industrial development of the society it was supposed to rule: such scholars might argue that it can be better understood, not as a despotic state, but as a “provisioning state.”

“The truth lies,” of course, “somewhere in the middle.” The real challenge in proposing such a middle path, it seems to me, is twofold. First, what concrete cases and examples demonstrate such “truth”? Second, more importantly, can such a golden mean provide a framework that bridges the strengths and overcomes the limits of the two accounts, thus having more comprehensive explanatory power than either of the existing interpretations?

**The State and Elites in Middle-Period China**

By the state, I simply mean the government. The government cannot be entirely reduced to the people who staff it. It has institutional structures, regulations, and precedents, which often limit and transcend the choices of individual rulers and policymakers. It would be seriously misleading, however, to assume that the government is an “undivided whole.” Despite a remarkable level of standardization in various administrative functions under the Chinese imperial state, tension and conflict were not uncommon among different branches and levels of

23. Paul J. Smith, “Problematizing the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition,” p. 23. Here Smith is referring to how his own view of state power during the Yuan and Ming dynasties differs from that of John Dardess.
24. In defining what I mean by the state, I have benefited from Quentin Skinner’s lecture “What Is the State?” Skinner classifies four competing trends in defining the state within the modern European intellectual tradition. One of them, represented by Jeremy Bentham and now largely used as a commonsensical definition, is to equate the state with the government. I attended this lecture at Harvard University’s Center for European Studies on December 3, 2008, but the same lecture was delivered on December 24, 2007, at the University of Cambridge, and the video and audio of the lecture are available at http://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/508596.
25. The same *problematique* is shared by Chang Woei Ong. See *Men of Letters within the Passes*, pp. 16–17.
state institutions. Internal diversification and competition in the bureaucracy did not simply stem from insufficient vertical control by the central government—at times they were partly intended, at least in the Song and Yuan periods. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish what level of government was at work at a given moment and to examine how it tried to achieve its perceived administrative goals and how its governance eventually acted on local society. Throughout this book, direct interventions of the central government in Mingzhou society will be examined whenever possible, but I am primarily interested in local government—the prefectural and county government in Mingzhou—because it was largely through the local government that people made sense of and interacted with the state in their everyday lives.

When I use the term society vis-à-vis the state, I refer to nongovernmental sectors represented by local elites. By local elites, in turn, I mean people influential in their locality who draw on a variety of sources of power such as officeholding, examination degrees, scholarship, and landed and commercial wealth. They were a far from homogeneous group and should be treated as such—otherwise we would lose sight of the diversity and internal stratifications among them and imagine middle-period local society as characterized by an impressive continuity of a certain number of dominant families.

26. Similar competition, conflict, and negotiation between the central and local governments is also to be found in the post-1980s People’s Republic of China. See Zhan, “Decentralizing China.”

27. A good example would be the post of vice prefect (tongpan 通判), also translated as controller-general. The tongpan was indeed referred to as “vice” (cui 佐) to the prefect in Song sources, but he held the same official rank as prefect. Most importantly, he had exclusive control over local finance and was directly accountable to the Ministry of Revenue. See Lau Nap-yin and Huang K’un-chung, “Founding and Consolidation of The Sung Dynasty,” p. 231. For the tongpan’s authority over matters related to prefectural finance, see Kusano, “Sō no tsūhan to zaisei.” Although there came to appear a sense of hierarchy among circuit-level intendants in the Southern Song, the four intendants were put in charge of different aspects of regional supervision and administration without stepping over others’ jurisdictions. See Kobayashi, “Sōdai no kōiki kukanu (ro) ni tsuite,” pp. 44–45; Yu, “Wanzhengzhi yu fenlizhi,” pp. 120–21. For the deliberate lack of unilateral decision-making structures in the Yuan bureaucracy, see Miyazaki, “Sō Gen jidai no hōsei to saiban kikō,” pp. 228–30.

28. For case studies that highlight remarkable continuity in elite status in local society, see Hymes, Statesmen and Gentlemen, p. 211. See also Brook, “Family Continuity and Cultural Hegemony,” pp. 32–33; Rowe, “Success Stories,” p. 51.
With these working definitions of the state and elites, it is crucial to note that the distinction between the two was not rigidly dichotomous. It is practically impossible to draw a clear demarcation in premodern China between the people who ran the government and local elites, especially those literati elites who recognized themselves as *shi* even if they were less dependent on the government for their status. Not every literatus was an official, but every official was from the literati elite. The state was little more than the aggregate voice of such officials. As R. Bin Wong aptly puts it, “Since officials join those not in office as members of the literati, the elite spans the state-society divide; both are part of a system that is neither solely governmental nor non-governmental.”

In this sense the relationship between the state and elites is analogous to that between a university’s administration and its regular faculty. Aside from some strictly administrative positions, the majority of those who determine and implement the major policies of a university come from the ranks of its faculty members. When their administrative terms are over, many of them return to their work as teachers and researchers, carrying with them a token of extra prestige and influence (or animus) accrued through their service in the administration. Such a background may empower them to work as mediators between the two realms. It would therefore be nonsensical to suggest that there is an ontological difference between these two groups, even if the exigencies of currently being in one camp or the other may affect one’s agenda priorities. For example, the president or the deans might suggest a salary freeze for other faculty members. In this sense, the university administration still can have its own “autonomy,” as can the state. Differing priorities often create tension between the administration and the faculty, and such tension affects the way a university operates.

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29. I thank Nicolas Tackett for alerting me to this fact. For the ambiguities in the relationship between the state and social elites, see also Golas, “Rural China in the Song,” p. 311.


To view the state and elites as entirely dichotomous not only obscures the historical reality of the relationship between the two, but also leads us to the fatal interpretive trap of imagining that there existed between them a zero-sum competition, a contest in which power gained by one side must be lost by the other. Wrapping up his findings on the Tea-Horse trade in Sichuan during the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, for example, Paul Smith writes, “The gap between elite and state interests at the local level widened, and elite status and social position became independent of the state. . . . As elites came to focus on mobility strategies that were independent of the state, the autonomous state of the eleventh century gave way to the autonomous elite of the late-imperial era.”

This zero-sum assumption gives rise to two related conundrums.

First, it predisposes one to ask the essentially counterproductive question of whether the later imperial Chinese state was strong or weak vis-à-vis elites. What is the index of state power at a given moment in history? G. William Skinner, the doyen of scholars who argue that the late imperial period witnessed a gradual decline of state power in local society, draws his insight almost entirely from the observation that the number of counties (xian), the lowest formal administrative unit in premodern China, remained more or less fixed despite the steady increase of population. Thus, he concludes that “a unified empire could be maintained into the late imperial era only by systematically reducing the scope of basic-level administrative functions and countenancing a decline in the effectiveness of bureaucratic government within local systems.”

For all its insight about the basic relationship between the largely stable state organization and the ever-expanding society of late imperial China, Skinner’s argument veils other important variables in gauging the effectiveness of the state.

32. Smith, Taxing Heaven’s Storehouse, p. 317. As Harrison Stewart Miller has shown, the Chinese did develop a dichotomous understanding of the state and the people, as is most clearly demonstrated in the Book of Lord Shang. See Miller, “State Versus Society in Late Imperial China, 1572–1644, pp. 1–2. It is important to remember, however, that the draconian vision of the relationship between the state and the people put forth by Shang Yang had been theoretically disfavored since the Han dynasty. Moreover, “people” here refers to commoners rather than elites.

As Ruth Mostern points out, “the county-to-population ratio is an excessively blunt measure from which to extrapolate state activism.”\(^\text{34}\) If one follows Skinner’s insight too blindly, the Yuan state, with its multilayered bureaucratic structure staffed with a greater number of civilian officials ruling over a stable population,\(^\text{35}\) should be judged the most effective government in later imperial Chinese history. Nothing could be farther from the truth. During the Southern Song, twenty new counties were established and twenty-two counties that had formerly been abolished were restored.\(^\text{36}\) Does this fact somehow automatically prove that the Southern Song state was more effective than its Northern Song counterpart? In the same vein, one can hardly argue that the state in the High Qing (1662–1820) was weaker than that of the late Ming, despite its vastly expanded population.\(^\text{37}\) More importantly, in Skinner’s equation neither the function of other levels of local and regional administration nor the county’s relationship with them appears relevant. Although the market town (zhen 鎮) was not a formal administrative unit, for example, the Song state established market town supervisors (jianzhenguan 鎮官) in order to administer their tax collection and local security.\(^\text{38}\) Especially during the Southern Song, market town supervisors came to take on various administrative duties similar to those of a small county’s magistrate.\(^\text{39}\) One county could include several market towns, and multiple officials could be assigned to one town.

The level of regional coordination should be taken into account as well. Mostern argues that regional cooperation was elevated during the Southern Song through the Superintendency of Tea and Horses.

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\(^{34}\) Mostern, “Dividing the Realm in Order to Govern,” p. 31.
\(^{35}\) Endicott-West, Mongolian Rule in China, pp. 10–11.
\(^{36}\) Maemura, “Nan Sô ni okeru shinken no seiritsu,” pp. 91–92.
\(^{37}\) The number of counties remained constant, but as Kent Guy has shown, the Qing state was able to achieve territorial rule that was “qualitatively different from that of any previous dynasty by creating the post of provincial governor and thus systematizing the structure of local governance. See Qing Governors and Their Provinces, pp. 8–9.
\(^{39}\) Maemura, “Sôdai no chin chûzaikan,” p. 48, 52–54, 65. As Timothy Brook points out, Skinner also does not take into account “the proliferation of subcounty units and offices between the Tang and the Qing, the manpower for which was entirely local.” See The Chinese State in Ming Society, p. 41.
(Duda tiju chamasi 都大提挙茶馬司) in Sichuan and the Maritime Military Commission (Yanhai zhizhisi 海制置司) on the eastern seaboard.\(^{40}\) Granted, as Yu Wei 余蔚 has shown, the expansion of the Pacification Commission (Xuanfusi 宣撫司) and the Military Commission (Zhizhisi 制置司) through the Southern Song reifies a decentralized power shift from the central government to “trans-high level administrative organizations” 跨高層行政組織. At the same time, as Yu has also pointed out, these organizations significantly consolidated regional administration, “centralizing” power from lower-level administrative units.\(^{41}\) Though power certainly may have shifted from the central government to regional governments, this by no means proves that it was devolved from the state apparatus to society. Likewise, despite debates over the nature of the General Commissariats (Zonglingsuo 總領所) in relation to the fiscal and administrative (de)centralization of the Southern Song, the main function of which was to collect and distribute monetary and material revenues for huge active combat troops (yuqian dajun 御前大軍) along the frontier, there is no denying that they contributed to the survival of the dynasty by reining in the centrifugal forces of such large armies.\(^{42}\)

Then what of the state’s power to tax? William G. Liu, who faults Skinner for having taken state capacity as “a fixed variable always remaining at a constant level” without taking into account the actual capacity of taxation, has tried to demonstrate the magnitude of state power in later imperial China based on each dynasty’s ability to tax its

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\(^{42}\) See Nagai, “Waitō sōryōjo no kinō,” p. 58; Lei Jiasheng, “Nan Song Gaozong shou bingquan yu zonglingsuo de shezhi,” p. 151. Hartwell sees the establishment of the General Commissariats as the beginning of a devolution of the central state’s fiscal power to regional centers. See “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations,” pp. 397–98. In contrast, Bao Weimin views them as an extension of the central government, a symbol of increasing centralization of its fiscal structure. See Songdai difang caizhengshi yanjiu, p. 81. It was Kawakami Kyōji who pointed out the highly regionalized “block economy” under the system of the General Commissariats. See “Nan Sō no sōryōjo ni tsuname,” p. 3. More recently, however, scholars have begun to highlight the economic interconnectedness among the General Commissariats. See Higuchi, “Nan Sō sōryōjo taisei ka no Chōkō keizai.”
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According to his calculation, the Qing state was able to collect significantly less tax per capita than the Ming. Can we then conclude that the power of the Ming state was simply greater than that of the Qing? With its enhanced bureaucratic efficiency backed up by a streamlined communications system, substantial granary reserves across the countryside, the ability to move more of such resources and other revenues around the empire, and a well-trained military force, the Qing apparently outsmarted its predecessor in its central and regional administration. During this same Qing dynasty, state revenue dramatically increased in the late nineteenth century, a period that has been conventionally recognized as witnessing a systemic devolution of state power. It appears that taxation alone can hardly serve as a yardstick for the effectiveness of the state at any given time.

Second, the assumption of zero-sum competition between the state and elites denies us an historical vantage point from which to understand an interesting situation in today’s China. In the aftermath of almost thirty years of Maoist state control over the economy and society, which some have compared to the situation under the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–98), we see an intriguing mixture in the post-reform era, where unprecedented growth in the nongovernmental sector accompanies an increasing sophistication of state power rather than its decline, defying the zero-sum competition paradigm. This contemporary phenomenon can thus be better understood when it is historicized in the Chinese context.

A more nuanced picture of state-society relations is being drawn by historians of the late imperial period, such as Michael Szonyi, Sarah Schneewind, David Faure, and Timothy Brook, among others. These scholars examine the means by which the state informed local society—not by the majestic power of imperial fiat nor by draconian bureaucratic intervention, but in a complex dance incorporating local people’s responses to state policies. More often than not, according to these scholars, the state failed, rather than succeeded, in implementing its

45. Wong, China Transformed, p. 120 n14.
46. See Szonyi, Practicing Kinship; Schneewind, Community Schools and the State; Faure, Emperor and Ancestor; and Brook, The Chinese State in Ming Society.
policies as they were initially intended, but even the unintended outcomes arising from people’s manipulation of state policies still deeply affected the local landscape. Building on this insight, this book demonstrates various ways in which the state acted on local society, and explores how local elites in Mingzhou made sense of the state.

“Long durée” vs. Dynastic Cycle

This book probes Mingzhou’s history during the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties. One of my goals is to arrive at a better understanding of this period in Chinese history. Fortunately, it is possible to examine Mingzhou society under the two regimes in relatively equal detail, enabling us to compare any significant differences arising from the dynastic change. If the Southern Song saw a seed of change in the nature of Chinese social elites and in the way the state mattered to local society, what happened during the following Yuan dynasty? Do we see a linear, evolutionary development of such change or unexpected twists and turns caused by the alien rule? In addressing these questions, I will engage with the “Song-Yuan-Ming transition” paradigm, which proposes that the period from the Southern Song through the middle Ming be seen as forming a historical continuum. Having a long-term perspective allows us to examine the deeper structures of a given local society to a degree that is difficult within the traditional dynasty-centered narrative. It aims to rescue “the temporal contours of regional development cycles” from a sweeping account of the dynastic-cycle model, thus helping “local historians . . . to situate their studies meaningfully in the structure of Chinese history.” However, as Si-yen Fei has persuasively shown in her study of late-Ming Nanjing, important policy

47. The paradigm was most clearly put forth in Smith and von Glahn, The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History. In his recent book, Itō Masahiko, although arguing from an exact opposite position, also stresses that the establishment of the Village Tithing system (lijia) in the early Ming should be understood from a Song-Yuan perspective. See Sō Gen gōson shakaishi ron. Few works explore developments of a single local society in the Southern Song and the Yuan periods. Notable exceptions include Hymes, “Marriage, Descent Groups, and the Localist Strategy”; Hymes, “Not Quite Gentlemen?”; Bol, “Neo-Confucianism and Local Society”; and Gerritsen, Ji’an Literati and the Local in Song-Yuan-Ming China.

decisions at the state level in the later imperial period could make meaningful changes in a given locality’s trajectory. Unless we naively assume that dynastic rule informed the entire empire in a uniform fashion, it is important to pay attention to the vicissitudes of policies and institutions specific to each dynasty, if we are to understand local society.

The history of the Southern Song and the Yuan does reveal a set of complex issues that cannot be readily explained by a linear decline in state power with correspondingly increasing independence of elites from the state. With its less than majestic foundation, the Southern Song was certainly a lesser empire. In its interstate policy, it had to make a series of ignominious compromises with its hostile northern neighbors; the Southern Song emperor had to refer to himself as “your minister” (chen 臣) when addressing his Jin counterpart. No Southern Song emperor dared to attempt the extravagant rites designed to display imperial grandeur and majesty, such as performing the Fengchan ceremony at Mount Tai (à la Zhenzong 真宗 [r. 997–1022]), projecting himself as an incarnation of a Daoist deity (à la Huizong 徽宗 [r. 1100–1125]), or personally leading a military expedition against the northern enemy (à la Taizong 太宗 [r. 976–97]). Nevertheless, it was far from a makeshift regime, doomed from the outset. Staffed with about forty thousand bureaucratic officials and guarded by nearly one million professional soldiers, the Southern Song lasted 150 years in the face of constant threats from unprecedentedly formidable northern dynasties. At no point during those 150 years of tense interstate confrontation did the Southern Song suffer from any major internal rebellion, a testament to the quality of its rule and the stability of its local administration. Indeed, it did not merely survive. As shown in Jacque Gernet’s classic study of Hangzhou in the dynasty’s last years, it was a period of economic fluorescence and dazzling urban culture. It would not be

50. For the number of officials and soldiers, see Shiba, “Sōdai shiteki seido no en-kaku,” p. 139. McKnight’s much lower estimate of a total of twelve thousand officials, which is not based on any Southern Song sources, seems untenable. See Village and Bureaucracy in Southern Sung China, p. 8.
51. For the remarkable quality of domestic security during Lizong’s reign, see Davis, “The Reign of Li-Tsung (1224–1264),” p. 912.
misleading to assume that this empire was sustained from the top as well as from the bottom.

After having conquered the Southern Song, the Yuan ruled south China for less than one hundred years. Among the major unified dynasties in Chinese history, only the Qin (221–206 BCE) and the Sui (581–618 CE) were shorter-lived. However, the frequently encountered gushing praise by Chinese writers of the time for the great achievements of this alien regime, which has bewildered at least one perspicacious modern reader, reflects an imprint on China’s later history that was anything but negligible, at least in the eyes of contemporaries. This imprint includes the establishment of branch secretariats (xing-sheng 行省), the prototype of provinces (sheng 省), the standard regional administrative unit in the late imperial period; the formulation of the principle of “beneficiary pays” in local infrastructure building; the institutional attachment of the literati elite to government schools; the state-sponsored Neo-Confucian conquest of the civil service examinations; and the conservative turn in women’s property rights. It is true, of course, that hardly anything here was an unprecedented feature of the Yuan dynasty, but the state’s institutional choices that led to those developments, and the sociopolitical factors that prompted such choices, were indeed new in the Yuan. In approaching Mingzhou’s history during the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties, therefore, I have hesitated to assume that the Mingzhou case seamlessly fits the “Jiangnan developmental cycle” before investigating this important dynastic transition and the new dynasty’s unique policies.

Organization of This Book

Chapter 1 examines elite families in Mingzhou and demonstrates that the main actors in, and recorders of, the remarkable growth of Mingzhou elite society during the Southern Song were closely connected to the state. It also shows that passing the examinations, a career option

53. See Qian, “Du Mingchu kaiguo zhuchen shiwenji.”
55. Smith, “Problematizing the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition,” pp. 7–19.
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that remained as honored and coveted as ever, was but one way of building connections to the state. Obtaining and maintaining the status of an official household (guanhu 官户) was important, not merely because of the time-honored ideals associated with government service, but also for its practical benefits to one’s status in local society. Chapter 1 also proposes a significant qualification of the prevailing paradigm of a linear shift in elite family strategy from national to localized marriage during the Southern Song. These findings are put in perspective by reflecting upon historiographical biases and regional differences.

Chapter 2 focuses on how local government administered local security and basic infrastructure construction and maintenance, accommodating elite participation in local projects while never losing an active role in negotiating with local interests. Under tight financial limitations, the Southern Song government managed to secure its operating budget by actively participating in the commercial economy. Through resourceful financial administration, it effectively improved local infrastructure. At the same time, great public demonstrations of consideration reflected the government’s stated intention to respect the interests of local people. Mingzhou’s government not only continued to provide various civic services during this period but appears to have been rather effective in doing so. The conventional image of a nearly moribund system of local government under the Southern Song must be amended. At the same time, based on a close reading of the ways in which the policies of Mingzhou’s government developed and evolved, chapter 2 also shows that the mutual convenience of public and private interests, rather than the strict imposition of the former upon the latter, was considered a prerequisite for any good policy. The government viewed itself as a participant in and caretaker of local society, not simply as its ruler.

Chapter 3 further clarifies the nature of local governance in Southern Song Mingzhou by revisiting the issue of elite activism, examining local government schools, the community drinking ceremony (xiang yinjiu li 鄉飲酒禮), community charitable estate (xiangqu yitian 鄉曲義田), and the charitable service (yiyi 義役), institutions that conventionally have been believed to be critical to local elite activism. A close examination of the creation and administration of these institutions reveals dynamic interaction, both cooperation and tension, between the elite community and the local government. Mingzhou’s government played an important role in these fields of “elite activism” because its officials
found the improvement and protection of elite society to be an integral part of their governance. At the same time, however, a tension between their visions of activism was inevitable, especially when local officials were committed to championing local activism, as reflected in different understandings of the concept of yi (righteousness). The upsurge of local activism during the Southern Song, which has often been understood as a logical outcome (as well as circumstantial evidence) of seriously weakened state power at the time, was actually the fruit of much more complex interactions between the state and elites.

Chapter 4 turns to the impact of the Mongol Yuan dynasty on Mingzhou society and its elites. Long-term perspectives on the Song-Yuan-Ming transition may inadvertently obscure the question of what was truly new and unique about the Yuan dynasty and the meaningful changes it imparted to local society. In Mingzhou, the dynasty’s new institutions not only transformed the fortunes of its established elite families but also created new elite families. Granted, the elite’s marginalization from government service was never more conspicuous, but through an analysis of the evolution of the Confucian household system, chapter 4 demonstrates that the elite’s negotiations with the state over status and legal privileges never ceased throughout the dynasty. The latter part of chapter 4 analyzes the paradoxical phenomenon of the lavish praise of local officials’ roles, recorded in contemporary documents, even in the midst of an obvious decrease in the local government’s financial and organizational capacity to administer local projects, as reflected in the popularity of quși bei (steles [erected] in appreciation of departing officials). The period brings into sharp relief the fate of most Chinese social elites in the premodern period: the reality of their alienation from the state dovetailed with their need to establish strategic connections to the state.

This is not, nor was it intended to be, a comprehensive history of Mingzhou society in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. A fair treatment of the space and social sphere of the Buddhist monasteries, crucial in understanding Song-Yuan Mingzhou society in its entirety, would require a separate book-length study. There is also an interesting question in

56. See, for example, Michael J. Walsh, Sacred Economies.
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intellectual history that this book does not address: Mingzhou was known as a hotbed of the teaching of Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–92), an archrival of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) within the Learning of the Way (Daoxue 道學) camp in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. According to Robert Hymes, Lu Jiuyuan thought of local community as an extension of the family and was not particularly committed to so-called elite activism in local society, preferring to leave the responsibility for most public projects in the hands of local administrators.57 Can we find a similar thread of social ideas among Lu’s followers in Mingzhou? If Mingzhou’s local government had the means to do things for the locality, how did Mingzhou thinkers make sense of the proper role of the state and try to justify their position in local society as responsible leaders? Yang Jian’s 楊簡 (1141–1226) opinion on “feudal” and “bureaucratic” rules, Shu Lin’s 舒璘 (1136–99) series of essays on welfare and famine relief, and Shen Huan’s 沈煥 (1139–91) active participation in the community granary offer some of the best examples through which future scholars of Mingzhou might address these questions.