

Between heaven and earth: Dual accountability in Han China

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Abstract

Scholars have noticed that centrally-appointed officials in imperial China were not only beholden to their superiors but also acted as brokers of local interests. We characterize such a structural position as ‘dual accountability’. Although accountability to superiors is readily understandable within the Weberian framework of bureaucratic hierarchy, the reasons behind local responsiveness bear explanation. This paper attempts to explain such responsiveness by investigating the larger ideological, structural, and institutional contexts of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). We explore two existing explanations – practical necessity and ‘Confucian’ or classical paternalism – and add a new explanation of our own: the emphasis on virtuous reputations in the system of bureaucratic recruitment and promotion. Our argument is supported by empirical evidence from a range of sources, including administrative records and inscriptions on ancient stelae. More generally, we question Weber’s hypothesis that the Chinese imperial system of administration fit the ideal type of traditional bureaucracy, and we examine the rational bases underlying an ‘inefficient’ system that was in place for two millennia.

Keywords

dual accountability, localism, bureaucracy

A field commander must decide even against king’s orders. (將在外君命有所不受)

(Chinese proverb)

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Theoretical issues

In the most influential account of China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jean-Baptiste du Halde (1674–1743) remarked, ‘One cannot help being surprised to see a people infinitely numerous, naturally unquiet, self-interested even to excess, and always endeavoring to be rich, nevertheless governed and kept within the bounds of their duty by a small number of Mandarins’ (Du Halde 1741, II: 32). To be sure, Du Halde was commenting upon the situation during his own lifetime; yet his observations arguably capture the situation for most periods of Chinese history. Indeed, the question of how an immense population was governed by a small state for over two millennia has intrigued generations of Western scholars since Du Halde (Chang, 1955; De Crespigny, 1981, 1995; Esherick and Rankin, 1990; Finer, 1999 [1997]; Hsiao, 1960; Hsu, 1965; Loewe, 1967, 2004; Kuhn, 2002; Mann, 1986; Min, 1989; Reed, 2000; Shue, 1988; Watt, 1972; Weber, 1951, 1978: 1047; Wittfogel, 1957).

The challenge of governing China can be illustrated with the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) as a case in point. In many regards, the Han period represents an ideal point of departure, as this was when most of the foundations of the imperial system were laid. Although the size of Han territory at its height pales in comparison to that of the Mongol Yuan (1279–1368) or Manchu Qing (1644–1911) empires, it was nevertheless vast. Han territory encompassed portions of Central Asia, Vietnam and North Korea, as well as much of what is now China proper (Loewe, 1986: 166–167).

Indeed, the difficulty of governing Han China may be characterized by what Herbert Simon (1954: 95) calls ‘the problem of control’ in large-scale organizations. By Simon’s account, problems of control stem from the fact that those who legitimately control it cannot cope with its size. As Simon writes, ‘They have time neither to find out in detail what is going on nor to decide what should go on’. As a result, the legitimate controllers (superiors) must delegate authority to others – the ‘designated controllers’. But delegating authority creates problems of its own. More often than not, designated controllers will take matters into their own hands and further their own interests, even at the cost of undercutting the aims of the legitimate controllers. Of course, all this is familiar to scholars of Han administration. Given the size of Han territory, the emperor and his senior ministers (or the ‘legitimate controllers’) had to delegate their authority to administrators (‘designated controllers’), many of whom were stationed in remote corners of the empire. Limitations of technology and communication further encumbered the ability of the capital to know about possible abuses of power. As historian Michael Loewe notes (1967, I: 43–44), news traveled slowly in the Han empire; months could easily pass before information about famines, rebellions, or invasions at the frontier would reach central authorities. Although Han rulers instituted a system of checks and balances within the bureaucracy, the situation nevertheless led to conflicts of interest between the capital and administrators. Given these conditions, the fact that imperial regimes, including the Han, governed at all remains something of

a puzzle (Balazs, 1964; Ch'ü, 1988 [1962]; De Crespigny, 1966; De Crespigny, 1981; De Crespigny, 1995; Bielenstein, 1980; Kiser and Tong, 1992; Hamilton, 1989; Hsiao, 1960; Shue, 1988; Wang, 1949 cf. Chang, 1955; Weber, 1978).

In his pioneering work on bureaucracy, Max Weber (1864–1911) furnished an influential account of how imperial rulers governed China. In *Religions of China* (1951) and *Economy and Society* (1978), he argued that China was governed *in spite* of its inefficient institutions, many of which made the central state ineffective. 'Until recently', he observed, 'subordinate authorities commonly considered the decrees of the central government as ethical and authoritative proposals or desires rather than orders' (Weber, 1951: 49). Such weakness, he argued, reflected the fact that the court 'failed to establish a precise and unified administration', for example, using a system of recruitment based on technical qualifications (Weber, 1951: 47–49: 56–60; 1978: 1028). In his view, concrete measures used by rulers for control – particularly, brief tenures in office, rules excluding officials from serving in their native areas, and surveillance by inspectors – were ineffective (Weber, 1978: 1048), because they 'handicapped administrative precision without contributing essentially to unity' (Weber, 1951: 48). To be sure, Weber did not see these problems as uniquely Chinese. On the contrary, they were typical of 'all far flung patrimonial states with underdeveloped techniques of communication' (Weber, 1951: 47). If anything, these problems were only especially marked in imperial China because its system of rule came the closest to approximating the ideal type of a traditional, or patrimonial, bureaucracy (Weber, 1951: 47–60; Weber, 1978: 229–234).

According to Weber, whatever effectiveness there was to imperial rule owed much to a single social value, filial piety (*xiao*) – which made up for the lack of unity or efficiency within the bureaucracy (Hamilton, 1984, 1990). 'Piety toward tradition and toward the master' was paramount in the Chinese system (Weber, 1978: 1008). More than a private or domestic virtue, filial piety – which called for personal subordination to the family patriarch – supposedly inculcated the population with an unconditional respect for hierarchical authority. In addition, it structured relations within the state, because it could be transferred to all relationships of subordination (Weber, 1951: 156–158). As Weber put it, 'Just as patrimonialism had its genesis in the piety of the children of the house toward the patriarch's authority, so Confucianism bases the subordination of the officials to the ruler, of the lower to the higher-ranking officials, and particularly of the subjects to the officials and the ruler, on the cardinal virtue of filial piety' (Weber, 1978: 1050).

It would be no exaggeration to say that Weber's views of the Chinese bureaucracy have been influential. Certainly, such views have shaped the work of countless scholars, including sociologist Michael Mann's *Sources of Social Power* (1986: 342). There, Mann (1993: 59–60) proposes two main dimensions of state power: 'infrastructural power' (the governing capacity of a central state) and 'despotic power' (the distributive power of the state elite over society). Like Weber, Mann argues that the imperial Chinese state had limited infrastructural power but strong

despotic power, power that derived primarily from state ideology in imperial China or Confucianism. Confucianism, Mann notes, reinforced the hierarchical power structure by promoting social harmony, ethical conduct, and secular education. Because of this, Confucianism represented 'a marvelous instrument of imperial/class rule', enabling Chinese dynasties to govern successfully and exercise despotic power (Mann, 1986: 342–344).¹

Weber's views of China have also been subject to criticism. To be sure, recent work by Dingxin Zhao (2004, 2006b) and Joel Andreas (2007) has called attention to Weber's useful but overlooked insights. Yet, these efforts to defend Weber should be interpreted in the context of several decades of criticisms of Weber, criticisms that have remained largely valid. To cite but a handful of examples, social historians working in the late imperial period have critiqued Weber's simplistic assumptions about the nature of elite status and power. The Chinese elite was not uniform in composition, as Weber thought, nor did it necessarily rule by virtue of its connection to the imperial state (Esherick and Rankin, 1990: 2–3). In addition, Philip C Huang (2001) and Robert M Marsh (2000) have criticized Weber's reading of the Chinese legal system, arguing that Weber exaggerated the arbitrary and irrational nature of the Qing-dynasty (1644–1911) legal code while overlooking the role that informal rules played in the 'regularization' of law in the late imperial period.

More pertinently, sociologist Gary Hamilton questions whether the imperial state was really as top-down as Weber would claim. For one thing, Hamilton (1984, 1990) argues, it is doubtful that fathers in imperial China ever enjoyed the scope of authority that Weber attributed to them. Thus it is doubtful that filial obligation – the social virtue Weber claimed cemented the bureaucratic hierarchy – ever functioned to inculcate officials with unconditional obedience to superiors. According to Hamilton (1989: 150), this Weberian formulation misses the extent to which classical thought emphasized the *reciprocal* nature of social obligations. Filial piety called for people to do more than blindly obey their superiors; such a value also required them 'to submit to duties of one's human roles, which also encompassed obligations to children, constituents, and subordinates – for the son to be a son, for the wife to be a wife, and for the official to be an official'. In addition, Hamilton challenges Weber's assumption that the imperial system should be seen as a primitive precursor to a fully rational, centrist state. According to Hamilton, efficiency was never a goal for imperial rulers; they did not seek to establish a hierarchical command structure for the purposes of implementing central directives (Hamilton, 1989: 162).

Indeed, Weber's emphasis on the top-down structure of the Chinese state has been largely superseded in the social scientific literature; more recent scholarship highlights what we will call the dual accountability of state representatives. Taking the broader view of the Chinese system of governance, Xueguang Zhou (1989: 172) argues that state representatives have long mediated between local interests and central authority. More often than not, Zhou explains, state representatives act as brokers of local interests, as the 'local bureaucracy is

not merely the mouthpiece for state interests but is closely allied with local interests and has its own agenda'. Arguably, this emphasis on dual accountability can be found even in works that elucidate the role that hierarchy plays in maintaining control. In this regard, consider Andrew Walder's (1986) pioneering work on neo-traditionalism, which takes as its primary focus the importance of urban work units (*danwei*).² To be sure, Walder's findings do not negate the Weberian model, as Walder calls attention to the role that vertical webs of dependency played in making workers compliant to the state (Walder, 1986: 5–6, 88). That said, Walder offers a more nuanced picture than Weber, because he highlights the dual accountability of state representatives. By his account, the leaders of *danwei* were also charged with insuring the welfare of workers on behalf of the state. In addition, such leaders were given enough discretion to serve as brokers of local interests (Walder, 1986: 249).

The emphasis on the dual accountability of centrally-appointed officials can also be found in political scientist Vivienne Shue's important monograph, *The Reach of the State* (Shue, 1988), a monograph that emphasizes the connections between contemporary China and its imperial past. There, she points out that imperial rulers had no intention of achieving efficiency – or, in her terms, total control. As she puts it, Chinese rulers 'did not, could not, and plainly often did not wish to, control everything' (Shue, 1988: 104). On the contrary, they accepted the necessity of local compromise and influence; and they permitted local pressure to shape the decision-making of state representatives. In this regard, Shue's account is consistent with the larger literature on China. This literature highlights the central state's limited control over the periphery while emphasizing how state representative often broker local interests (Ch'ü, 1988 [1962]; Fei, 1953: 84; Perdue, 1982; Reed, 2000; Oi, 1989; Tsai, 2002, 2007).

Indeed, historical evidence suggests that local accountability represents a long-standing feature of the Chinese system of administration. According to the *History of the Later Han (Hou Hanshu)*, a magistrate named Han Shao (circa 155 CE) was dispatched to a small county in the northeast, far from his home in Central China. As a result of a famine, tens of thousands of refugees poured into the area. Han Shao took pity upon them; over the protests of his deputy, he risked execution by opening the granaries to feed them. His superior later learned of his actions and shielded him from his punishment. Although Han Shao escaped punishment, he failed to advance from this modest position; sometime afterwards, however, four officials from Han Shao's area erected a stele monument to him, commemorating his bold deed (*HHS*, 1984: 62.2063; Wu, 1992: 218).

How are we to explain expressions of local accountability on the part of centrally-appointed officials? Of course, one might argue that there is nothing to explain; Han Shao's actions can be dismissed as an isolated example of altruism. Yet according to historians (Brown, 2007; Neskari, 1993; Will, 1990), recorded instances of local accountability were anything but isolated in Chinese imperial

history. A similar story is told of another official, Wang Wang (fl. 58–76 CE). Wang opened the granaries without permission during a drought, and when the court learned of his actions, they were bent upon punishing him severely. Luckily for Wang, a powerful patron managed to win a timely pardon for him (*HHS*, 39.1297). Later in the paper, we will supply more examples of Han administrators responding to local needs in different ways.

More importantly, Han Shao's actions cannot be interpreted within the traditional model of the bureaucracy sketched by Weber. Had Han simply been answerable to his superiors, we would not expect him to have violated the rules by opening the granaries. In addition, insofar as he was dependent upon his superiors for promotions or resources, Han Shao should have served the interests of those at higher levels in the chain of command – even at the expense of responding to the needs of those below. Moreover, if filial piety (and unconditional respect for authority) had been the dominant social value, Han Shao should not have won the praise of other officials, who went so far as to commemorate him with a *public* monument.

If the Weberian framework cannot be used to make sense of Han Shao's actions, then how do we explain instances of local accountability on the part of centrally-appointed officials in general? In this paper, we explain what motivated imperial officials to broker local interests through an examination of the institutions and cultural practices of the Han dynasty. Although this paper will focus on the particulars of the Han-dynasty case, we hope that our findings will pave the way for more expansive studies of the problem for the long span of Chinese history. This paper, in three parts, opens by reviewing the basic institutions of and sources for the Han dynasty. It then examines previous explanations of local accountability advanced by historians and sociologists, specifically arguments about the limited reach of the Chinese state and classical or 'Confucian' ideology. Scholars have argued that local responsiveness reflected practical necessity; the limited resources of the centrally-appointed administrator made local cooperation a necessity for carrying out his obligations to the state. Alternatively, they hypothesize that local responsiveness owes much to the influence of classical ideology, which inculcated administrators with a moral obligation to serve the population. Although both of these accounts have certain merits, we argue that they nevertheless leave certain facets of the Han case unexplained. We thus propose an additional explanatory factor, the Han system of recruitment. This was a system that made proof of exemplary virtue – or charismatic qualifications – the key to officialdom. In an age in which there were no hard or fast criteria for office, the administrator was dependent upon local constituents for a virtuous public reputation, since such recognition was crucial for improving the career prospects and standing of the administrator and his family. As such, the Han case suggests the need for future studies to take into consideration reputational mechanisms in fostering local accountability. More generally, it reveals the needs to reevaluate the role played by 'inefficient' elements, such as charismatic modes of domination, for integrating the periphery and center.

Historical contexts

Arising in the wake of the collapse of the Qin unifiers (221–206 BCE), the Han dynasty was the first Chinese empire of long-term stability (Zhao, 2006a). Scholars commonly divide the Han into two periods, the Former Han (206 BCE–9 CE) and Later Han (25–220 CE), also called the Western and Eastern Han, respectively. The latter set of names derives from the location of the capital, with the Former Han ruling from Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an) as its capital and the Later Han ruling from Luoyang. The Han dynasty did not represent a period of unbroken rule by a single clan; interregnums occurred twice during the dynasty. In the second century BCE, the consort dowager attempted to overthrow the ruling Liu family in favor of her natal relatives, resulting in a brief interregnum from 188 to 180 BCE. Later, during his self-styled Xin dynasty (9–23 CE), an imperial relative by marriage, Wang Mang (46 BCE–23 CE), briefly overthrew the dynasty. Wang's usurpation was never fully accepted, and it was not long before a distant relative of the last Former Han emperor made use of the opportunity to further his own claims to the throne. Rallying support around his cause, this Liu relative eliminated the Wang clan and 'restored' Han rule – or, more precisely, founded his own dynasty, known as the Later Han.

As with all imperial dynasties until the Republican Revolution of 1911, Han rulers used a mixed system of governance known as *junxian*. This was a system of rule whereby dynastic rulers dispatched a limited number of administrators, who were not native to the area, to administer the realm on their behalf. The name *junxian* originally derives from the basic organization of territory based on commanderies (*jun*) and counties (*xian*), with counties being sub-units within commanderies (the situation changed later, when the rulers of late imperial China reorganized their territory along the lines of provinces and counties). At the same time, some semi-autonomous, commandery-level units in the Western Han were run by members of the imperial clan or the comrades-in-arms of the Han founder, and they were also referred to as *guo* (kingdoms); their counterparts at the county level were referred to as *houguo* (marquisates). Yet by the end of the Former Han, the kingdoms and marquisates ceased to be semi-autonomous or administratively different from commanderies and counties (De Crespigny 1966; Bielenstein, 1980). See Figure 1 for a diagram of the administrative structure of the Han bureaucracy.

By the end of the Later Han, there were slightly over one hundred commandery-sized administrative units. The commandery or kingdoms were governed by a centrally-appointed official, the governor (*taishou*) or chancellor (*xiang*), who was responsible for all civilian and military affairs, as well as administering criminal and civil law (Bielenstein, 1980: 93). Below the level of the commandery was the county or marquisate, numbering over 1200, each of which was headed by another centrally-appointed official, known as the magistrate (*zhang* or *ling*) or noble (*hou*). The *junxian* system had a number of characteristics, which set it apart from other contemporary states, particularly the Roman empire. Chief among them was the

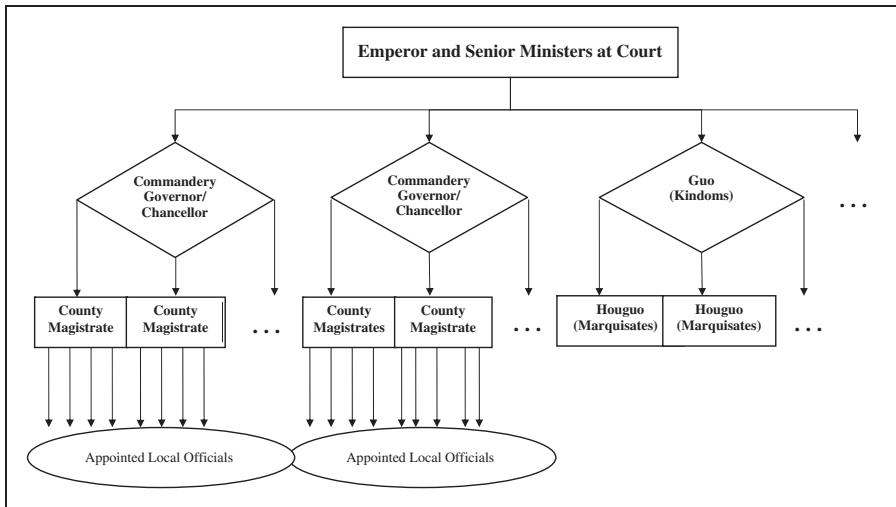


Figure 1. Basic outline of Han administration.

‘absence of self-governance’ in the Han (Finer, 1999 [1997]: 498). The absence of self-governance was epitomized by the ‘law of avoidance’, which barred centrally-appointed administrators from serving in their home jurisdictions. This was done for at least two related reasons. One was to prevent centrally-appointed officials from colluding with local interests. As historian Shigeta Atsushi (Shigeta, 1984: 351) puts it, ‘The government refused to send officials to their native areas precisely because they feared that retired officials or bureaucrats at home or on furlough would exert undue influence on them’. The other was to insure that state directives, particularly those that might come into conflict with local interests, could be implemented. ‘The purpose of the avoidance laws’, Thomas Metzger (1973: 37) writes, ‘was not only to prevent corruption but also to promote the officials’ ability to carry out harsh policies, which they might find difficult to apply to those close to them’.

Aside from enforcing the ‘law of avoidance’, the Han court sought to insulate administrators from local influence by shortening the terms of office to a few years (Ebrey, 1974). In addition, the Han court deployed a corps of inspectors (*cishi*), who were to look for signs that the administrator was fraternizing with powerful local people, as well as for abuses of power or departures from protocol (Wang, 1949: 160–61; De Crespigny, 1981: 48–49). Another notable difference had to do with the role of the emperor. Whereas Roman emperors were personally involved in governance and took tours of the empire, Han emperors had fewer opportunities to interfere personally with local governance, particularly after the mid-Western Han dynasty. Many of them, in the second half of Han, were mere infants, and even the adults tended to stay in the capital and largely relied on written communications for information (Finer, 1999 [1997]; cf. Weber, 1951; Nylan, 2007).

Two further aspects of the Han system of administration bear explanation, as they will become crucial to our discussion below. First, the single term ‘official’ may give the impression that the composition of the Han bureaucracy was homogeneous, but there was an essential distinction between commissioned and appointed officials. The former were elite officials who had received their appointments in the capital, and who were subject to the ‘law of avoidance’ (De Crespigny, 2006: 1232). (Throughout this paper, we will refer to such officials as ‘administrators’.) The latter, also referred to as ‘sub-bureaucrats’, were appointed by commissioned officials as junior staff. These officials served directly under county and commandery administrators, normally in their home jurisdictions, or under ministers in the capital (Liao, 1998: 3).

A word about the primary sources we will be examining is in order.³ Aside from the standard histories, which provide information about important court debates, policies, and memorials, there are a handful of social commentaries and several thousand records of administration. In particular, the records of administration discovered at two sites – Juyan or Edsin-gol (present-day Gansu province) and Yinwan (Jiangsu) – are of special relevance to this study. The former site, known to scholars since the early twentieth century, provides records dating to the first century BCE from a military colony in the Northwest frontier (Loewe, 1967). The latter, discovered by archaeologists in 1993, supplies information about local governance within the commandery of Donghai around 10 BCE (Loewe, 2004: 38, 43).

Stone monuments, which were erected in large numbers from the first century CE, represent the most important source for the political values of the Han local elite. To date, virtually all of the contents of 469 stone monuments have been compiled in four collections: (1) *Kandai sekkoku shūsei* (KSS) compiled by Nagata Hidemasa; (2) *Lishi* (LS) compiled by Hong Kuo (1117–1184); (3) *Lixu* (LX) also compiled by Hong Kuo; and (4) *Cai Zhonglang ji* (CZLJ), a compilation containing the works of the eulogist and official Cai Yong (132–192).

The 277 stele inscriptions (*bei*) of the 469 stone monuments (Brown, 2007: 140–41; Nagata, 2002; Ebrey, 1980) represent the most important source for this study. Of these, 48 survive with the contents of the backs of the stele or the stele reverse (*beiyin*) (see Table 1). The reverses of these stelae contain information about the names, places of origin, and official status of 1677 donors; a summary of the information will be given later in Table 1. Stelae are particularly useful for two reasons. First, a large majority of the stelae dedicated to individuals commemorate officials (170). Second, stelae largely resulted from local initiative. Members of the local elite and government would commission a eulogist—usually (but not always) a senior minister in the capital—to compose an inscription that would commemorate an individual, i.e., stele dedicatee (Brown 2007, Chart 2.2: 48).

No doubt, our sources have inherent limitations. Compared with those for the late imperial period and contemporary China, sources of Han local history are relatively thin. Our sources, furthermore, limit our view of the relationship between administrators and local interests to the wealthy landed segments and local representatives of the state, rather than to local society as a whole. Because of this, it is

Table 1. Breakdown of Stele Donors.

Romanized Name	Chinese Name	Total No. of Donors	Commissioned	Appointees
Baishishen jun bei	白石神君碑	22	4	16
Bajun taishou Zhang Na bei	巴郡太守張納碑	50	2	48
Beihai xiang Jingjun bei	北海相景君碑	53	0	52
Boling taishou Kong Biao bei	博陵太守孔彪碑	13	3	10
Cang Jie miaobei	蒼頡廟碑	27	6	21
Chengyang lingtai bei	成陽靈臺碑	33	9	15
Dangyin ling Zhang Qian bei	蕩陰令張遷碑	41	3	5
Di Yao bei	帝堯碑	7	6	1
Dunhuang zhangshi Wu Ban bei	敦煌長史武班(班)碑	4	4	0
Duxiang xiaozi Yan Ju bei	都鄉孝子嚴舉碑	33	2	9
Fanyang ling Yang jun bei	繁陽令楊君碑	121	1	85
Feng Huan canbei	馮煥殘碑	8	0	8
Fengqiu ling Wang Yuanbin bei	封丘令王元賓碑	4	0	0
Gaoyang ling Yang Zhu bei	高陽令楊著碑	46	0	0
Han Chi bei	韓勅碑	106	19	19
Heyang Cao Quan bei	郟陽曹全碑	53	0	49
Jicheng hou Zhou Fu bei	吉成侯州輔碑	46	30	10
Jizhou cishi Wang Chun bei	冀州刺史王純碑	193	0	0
Liangzhou cishi Wei Yuanpi bei	涼州刺史魏元丕碑	12	10	0
Liu Kuan houbei	劉寬後碑	162	67	9
Liyang zhang Pan Qian xiaoguan bei	溧陽長潘乾校官碑	13	3	10
Lou Shou bei	婁壽碑	31	1	16
Nanyang taishou Qin Jie bei	南陽太守秦頡碑	8	0	2
Pei xiang Yang Tong bei	沛相楊統碑	15	3	5
Si sangong shan bei	祀三公山碑	4	3	1
Sikong Zong Ju bei	司空宗俱碑	33	0	0
Sili xiaowei Lu Jun bei	司隸校尉魯峻碑	40	0	4
Songshan Kaimu miaoshi queming	嵩山開母廟石闕銘	9	3	6
Songshan shaoshishi queming	嵩山少室石闕銘	11	6	5
Suanzao ling Liu Xiong bei canshi	酸棗令劉熊碑殘石	71	11	59
Taishan duwei Kong Zhou bei	泰山都尉孔宙碑	56	0	0
Taiwei Yang Zhen bei	太尉楊震碑	172	1	0
Tangyi ling Bi Feng bei	堂邑令費鳳碑	8	0	4
Tongzi Feng Sheng bei	童子逢盛碑	11	0	7
Weishi ling Zheng Jixuan bei	尉氏令鄭季宣碑	25	2	19

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Romanized Name	Chinese Name	Total No.		
		of Donors	Commissioned	Appointees
Wudu taishou Li Xi xiasong	武都太守李翕西狹頌	13	3	8
Wuji shan bei	無極山碑	2	2	0
Xianren Tang Gongfang bei	仙人唐公房碑	16	4	5
Xianyu Huang bei	鮮于璜碑	5	2	3
Xiyue Huashan miaobei	西嶽華山廟碑	7	4	3
Xiyue Huashan tingbei	西嶽華山亭碑	10	4	6
Yangjia canbei	陽嘉殘碑	12	0	11
Yezhe Jing jun mubiao	謁者景君墓表	16	0	0
Yizhou taishou wuming bei	益州太守無名碑	3	0	3
Zhao xiang Yong Quan quebei	趙相雍勸闕碑	5	5	0
Zhao Yi bei	趙儀碑	8	2	6
Zhongbu bei	中部碑	9	0	9
Zhou Jing gongxun bei	周憬功勛碑	30	4	3
Total		1677	229	552

important to be clear about our sense of ‘local’ – local here merely refers to individuals and their interests in locations both geographically and administratively distant from the capital. In addition, our sources carry a certain degree of geographic bias: the most ample information comes from centers of Han settlement, that is, Northeast, North Central, and Southwest China (Bielenstein, 1947; Nagata, 2002). Like all historical data (Goldthorpe, 1991), the Han record is fragmentary and thus less reliable than other ways of doing research available to sociologists.

It is possible that our understanding of the Han past is distorted by the biases of our sources. As recent work by Michael Nylan (2005a) and Cary Liu (2005) show, stone monuments do not represent pristine sources of the Han past. In fact, the content of stone monuments has largely survived due to the efforts of Song-dynasty antiquarians (960–1279). As such, the specter of selection bias looms, raising questions about the extent to which our picture of the Han past has been mediated by the ideological biases of later scholars. While there is reason for caution, more recent work on Han stone monuments and the history of antiquarianism suggests that that these sources nevertheless provide a reliable, if not representative, picture of the values and activities of the Han political elite.⁴

Practical necessity and classical paternalism

With the Han period and its sources thus described, we now turn to our original question, that is, *why* Han administrators were locally responsive. One explanation that can be inferred from the secondary literature is that local responsiveness

reflected practical necessity; administrators were locally accommodating because it was in their interests. To be sure, representatives of the Chinese imperial state would not have been unique in this regard. As numerous scholars of bureaucratic organizations have pointed out, *some* degree of local compromise is always inevitable (Downs, 1967; Tarrow, 1977; Wilson, 1989).⁵ Scholars of China, however, have attempted to go beyond these general pronouncements to provide historically specific explanations of local compromise and responsiveness. They highlight three aspects of the Chinese system of rule, to be examined below, which fosters local accountability: the geographical origins of state representatives, the limited reach of the imperial state, and the weak monitoring capacity of central authority.

Turning to the first factor, scholars have argued that local accommodation can be seen as a manifestation of self-interest on the part of state representatives insofar as those representatives identify with the welfare of their constituents (Tsai, 2002, 2007; Tarrow, 1977; cf. Walder, 1986: 249; Zhou, 1989). Such a phenomenon is well documented. For example, in her work on modern rural China in the pre-reform period, Jean Oi (1989: 115–125) shows how brigade leaders – who controlled the production teams – brokered local interests by under-reporting to the state the amount of grain collected. Their actions, we learn, can be explained by self-interest; brigade leaders were local men, and thus the economic hardships of their communities affected them. ‘If brigades forced their teams to sell more surplus to the state, then less grain would be left in the team for either the teams’ or the brigades’ own use’, Oi (1989: 125) writes. ‘Brigades had an interest in allowing teams some leeway to keep more than the legally-allowed share of the harvest; otherwise, they cut off a major source of their own funding.’

Although this explanation has certain virtues, it does not explain the actions of *centrally-appointed* administrators in imperial times. To be sure, the lion’s share of officials in Han China – perhaps as much as 96% – were local to the areas in which they served. But commissioned officials, who were primarily responsible for administering counties and commandaries, were not. As noted above, commissioned administrators were barred from serving in their home jurisdictions for more than two millennia because of the ‘law of avoidance’ (Ch’ü, 1988 [1962]; Yan, 1961).

Aside from citing the origins of administrators, scholars also argue that local responsiveness owed much to the enormous size of the administrative burden faced by centrally-appointed officials. Certainly, imperial Chinese magistrates and governors faced a higher administrative burden than their French counterparts (Hamilton, 1989: 152; Esherick and Rankin, 1990: 3; cf. Kiser and Tong, 1992: 310). The most generous estimates of the Qing (1644–1911) dynasty administrative burden – which counts members of the sub-bureaucracy as part of the state – is 3 government-related workers per every 10,000 people. In contrast, there were 7.5 paid workers for every 1000 persons in the French state of the late eighteenth century. Given the situation, imperial administrators understandably became dependent on gentry cooperation for ‘such essential services as surplus extraction

and the maintenance of the social order' (Shue, 1988: 100). In other words, local cooperation was necessary for the imperial administrator to just do his job.

While the limited reach of the state certainly was one factor, questions nevertheless can be raised as to whether it was the only reason why centrally-appointed administrators were locally responsive. For one thing, the size of the Han administrative burden was much lighter than that of the late imperial period. Using the standards employed by Hamilton to calculate the administrative burden of the Qing, we estimate that there were between 2.2 to 2.6 state representatives for every 1000 people (compared with 7.5 officials per 1000 in seventeenth-century France and 3 per 10,000 during the Qing).⁶ Although Han administrators certainly required local cooperation to carry out their obligations to the state, this did not mean that they were entirely at the mercy of local elites either. Han administrators controlled the access of the local elites to office-holding and thus had leverage that their counterparts in late imperial China did not. For starters, governors could nominate local elites as 'Filial and Incorrupt' (*xiaolian*), thereby elevating them to the elite commissioned ranks. In addition, local staff positions were controlled by magistrates and governors in the Han, whereas members of the sub-bureaucracy acquired their posts through purchase or inheritance in late imperial China (Yan, 1961: 220ff; cf. Kiser and Tong, 1992: 312). To be sure, one might question the leverage gained by controlling staff positions in the counties and commanderies. Yet it is worth noting that the status of the Han men who held local staff positions were higher than those of late imperial times (Ch'ü, 1988 [1962]: 62; Watt, 1972; Will, 1990: 89; cf. Chen, 2003: 296–304). Members of the Han local staff were actually considered officials (*li*), paid government salaries, and eligible for commissioned posts. Indeed, as the Yinwan records suggest, most members of the commissioned ranks had begun their careers as local appointees in their home areas (Liao, 1998: 25). As such, the local posts controlled by commissioned administrators represented the first step to higher positions within officialdom.

If the local responsiveness of Han administrators cannot be entirely accounted for in terms of the need for local cooperation, then can it be explained as the consequence of the state's weak monitoring capacity, as Kiser and Tong (1992) have argued? Certainly, there is something to this argument; administrators had little to fear in terms of harsh sanctions for contravening central mandates or colluding with local interests. Although the Han court devised various measures to strictly limit the authority and power of administrators, the system of monitoring local administration in Han China was arguably weak. Information traveled slowly; thus it was unlikely that crimes or misdemeanors would ever come to light (Loewe, 1967, I: 43–44; cf. De Crespigny, 1995: 538). Worse still, only a few men with ties to the dynasty were responsible for monitoring administrators; for the empire as a whole, there were only 13 inspectors, each with a staff of nine men (Bielenstein, 1980: 91). Given the situation, it is unsurprising that several years could have passed before central authorities discovered that the governor of Yingchuan had become senile, and a lowly clerk had taken charge of the commandery (Nylan, 1996: 17). The court was even less likely to learn of

improprieties committed by county-level officials. Even in cases where the governors discovered dereliction of duty, they did not necessarily report to central authorities what they learned (*HHS*, 62.2063). One reason was that they knew that whistle-blowers were not necessarily rewarded. As one second-century investigator stated baldly to a governor, giving a poor performance evaluation of a magistrate could bring unwanted scrutiny to the governor's own administration (*HHS*, 56.1831).

While arguments about the weak monitoring capacity of the state can explain illegal forms of local responsiveness or accommodation, it is less illuminating for cases where the administrator was acting in a legitimate fashion. For example, how can the weak monitoring capacity of the state explain cases where Han administrators took special initiative to provide public goods to constituents by sponsoring projects to build or repair roads and temples? Han sources offer numerous examples of this phenomenon; the monument erected in 148 CE to Yang Huan, the Former Metropolitan Commandant (*sili xiaowei*), provides one such example. According to his eulogist, Yang attempted to improve the welfare of the region by rebuilding a tunnel through mountains that had been destroyed (Harrist, 2008). In addition, there is the case of an early second-century stone carving commemorating the road Zhao, a commissioned official, constructed over a dangerous precipice. According to the text of the carving, Zhao's efforts benefited the area as a whole, since the road curbed robberies (*LS*, 4.2b–3b).

With arguments about practical necessity examined, we now turn to another explanation that recurs in the literature, one that involves the ethical values of the administrator. Perhaps it can be argued that administrators like Han Shao saw local responsiveness as a moral imperative? Such a belief, scholars have argued, stemmed from what is sometimes awkwardly called 'Confucian' – and which we will refer to as classical – notions of political authority.⁷ As will be shown presently, such notions highlighted the importance of shepherding the population and represented the administrator as possessing dynastic authority in microcosm (Reed, 2000: 10–11; cf. Weber, 1947: 360–62).

To understand how scholars connect classical notions of political authority with local responsiveness, we need to review contemporary conceptions of political authority, since the two were intertwined. According to Nylan (2007) and Loewe (2004), Han conceptions of political authority did not give emperors *carte blanche* to rule. The ultimate justification for the Emperor's authority was the Mandate of Heaven, which was contingent upon his ability to shepherd the population. As a result, imperial rulers were forced to concede (at least publicly) two points. First, their right and even their ability to govern were contingent upon divine sanction granted by an anthropomorphic Heaven. Divine sanction, furthermore, was conditional upon the ruler's personal virtue – virtue being defined in terms of the ruler's ability to govern effectively and 'show himself to be the true "father and mother" of the people' (Nylan, 2007). Second, the failure to act in such a fashion would result in Heaven rescinding its mandate, making open rebellion and even regicide justifiable. Of course, this view was not without precedent, as some classical texts reminded

rulers that they exist not to be served but to serve (Pines, 2009). As the influential *Mencius* (4th century BCE) put it, 'The people are of supreme importance; the altars to the gods of earth and grain come next; last comes the ruler' (*Mencius*, tr. Lau: 68).

Although such a notion of charismatic authority originally applied to the emperor, some scholars have argued that centrally-appointed administrators also came to see their authority in the same terms (Metzger, 1973: 252). The administrator was not merely a bureaucrat who carried out the will of the emperor or superiors. As Hamilton (1989: 158) notes, officials did not see themselves as 'a group of functionaries, people with technical duties, as it was in the Western sense of the bureaucrat'. Instead, according to Metzger, the administrator was a microcosm of dynastic authority; as such, charismatic authority was '*diffused* throughout the bureaucracy instead of being *monopolized* by the one leader, the emperor' (Metzger, 1973: 252) [stress added].

Such notions of political authority had significant consequences for the Chinese imperial system of administration. Given that he could be seen as the emperor writ small, the administrator might have imagined that he was subject to the Mandate of Heaven. His authority too was contingent upon acting as the 'father and mother' of the people. If indeed local service was the sole basis of his authority, then an administrator understandably felt justified in violating rules that interfered with his Heaven-mandated obligations. We note that the arguments made about classical thought are inspired by the late imperial case, but what evidence exists that Han-dynasty officials saw local accommodation as a moral obligation?

The contents of stone monuments, which were commissioned by members of the local bureaucracy and elite, suggest in fact that this might have been the case. Let us explain how one might come to such a conclusion. Based on their highly formulaic contents, we divided all stelae dedicated to Han individuals into four categories: first, those that emphasize service to the dynasty or dynastic recognition; second, those that highlight service to the local population or recognition from the local population; third, those that stress political disengagement; and fourth, those that have no discernible message (for the most part, stelae that fall into the fourth category are highly fragmentary). One aspect of this four-part coding scheme deserves note: the four categories are not necessarily discrete, as a handful of stelae mention both imperial recognition and local service. Therefore, we have categorized stelae according to what values were *emphasized* most by the eulogist. In addition, we have erred on the side of caution: in the few cases in which it is unclear whether service to the dynasty or service to the local population is emphasized, we placed the inscription in the category of 'Dynastic Service'. By analyzing the stelae in this way, we find that 145 of the stele monuments have some kind of discernible message. Of these, 51 focus on a man's service to the dynastic court, whereas 94 celebrate his ties to the population. More strikingly, all but a small handful of the monuments that celebrate ties to the population extol service in an area that an administrator governed, rather than in his own native community.

The works of Han social commentators moreover lend support to the view that officials saw local service as a moral imperative. Consider the views of the

scholar-official, Cui Shi (d. 170) as presented in his *Discussion of Governance* (*Zhenglun*). There, Cui complained about the *junxian* system, arguing that its system of rotating administrators rapidly through different posts around the empire discouraged them from serving the people under their jurisdiction well. Although Cui recognized the impracticality of abolishing the *junxian* system altogether, he proposed extending the stay of administrators to several decades to allow them to become rooted in the communities they served (Yan Kejun, *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Lichao wen* 46.7a; cf. Ebrey, 1974: 178). By Cui's account, doing so would allow the administrator to identify personally with local interests and better serve the population under his charge. Cui's discussion captures many of the sentiments found in stele monuments: administrators should not only be concerned with the welfare of the population, but they should also become an integral part of the communities they administer.

Our foregoing discussion has revealed that Metzger and others are right to argue that local responsiveness was construed as a moral obligation, but how were officials inculcated with such values? In other words, how did Han administrators come to take these norms seriously? Clearly, such norms could not have been the byproduct of a classical education in the case of most Han administrators. As mentioned above, in contrast to the situation in late imperial China, there was no regular examination system in place during the Han. In effect, this meant that Han administrators, unlike their counterparts in late imperial China, did not undergo a long training period in which they would be inculcated with classical ideology. Yes, a small handful of the most famous scholars of the age acquired positions based on examination during the Han. And it is also true that the most senior ministers were highly literate. Yet it was rare for a minister or an official to win office on the basis of his command of the classics during the Han (Loewe, 2004: 128–129; Houn, 1956: 149–51; Nylan, 2000: 238). More problematic, many Han administrators were not highly literate, let alone thoroughly versed in the classics. The education of even members of the elite commissioned ranks was often practical and functional; it was comprised of basic training in reading, writing, accounting, and administrative procedure, rather than mastery of arcane classics (Hsing, 1987: 160; Nylan, 1996: 11; 12–15; 2000: 238; cf. Houn, 1956 p. 159).

Reputational mechanisms

As we have seen, local responsiveness on the part of centrally-appointed officials has been explained in terms of practical necessity or adherence to classical norms. In many ways, these arguments parallel those made by 'Analytic Weberians' and 'Cultural Weberians'. The former stress the role played by calculations of self-interest in the decision-making of officials; the latter highlights the importance of values and emotions – or 'non-instrumental motivations' (Kiser and Baer, 2005: 230–35). Though both types of explanations have their virtues, they also suffer from some explanatory limitations for the Han case. Arguments about practical necessity, for example, fail to illuminate the agency of local responsiveness, while

accounts that stress values cannot explain how Han administrators acquired norms emphasizing local responsiveness. To understand why imperial officials responded to the expectation that they be locally responsive, we need to look for other causal mechanisms. Towards this goal, we propose an explanation that synthesizes the analytic and cultural approaches to understanding bureaucratic decision-making – the role of reputational mechanisms. As will be shown below, the Han system of selection and promotion made it in the interest of administrators and their families to accommodate their most powerful local constituents and colleagues in exchange for public recognition of their virtue.

The Han system of recruitment made extraordinary virtue a *formal* criterion for selection and promotion (Nylan, 1996). Beginning in the early second century BCE, Han emperors issued proclamations calling for the ‘the Filial and Incorrupt’, the ‘Filial and Fraternal’, ‘Those Possessing the Way’, and the ‘Virtuous and Upright’, to be recruited into the bureaucracy (Yan, 1961: 88). Unsurprisingly, proof of extraordinary personal sanctity – as evinced through ‘going beyond the rites’ or being associated with miracles – became a standard pretext for recruiting a man into the ranks of officialdom (Brown, 2007: 46, 80–81).

Calls for the virtuous amounted to more than rhetoric; proof of virtue was treated by senior officials as a prerequisite for appointment. Judging from anecdotes recorded in the dynastic histories, administrators were required to investigate reputations for personal sanctity, particularly filial piety, before making official appointments (Brown, 2007: 52). In this connection, consider a memo used to recommend a thirteen-year-old clerk named Cheng Wei to the commissioned ranks. Interestingly, its author, the aforementioned Cai Yong, does not mention Cheng’s technical skills—his mastery of reading and writing or his knowledge of legal and administrative matters. Instead, Cai only emphasized Cheng’s personal sanctity—those things, as Weber pointed out, that cannot be ‘learned’ or ‘taught’ but only ‘tested’ (Weber, 1947: 367). This emphasis is seen by the space given to describing Cheng’s ‘outstanding filial conduct’ while in mourning for his great-uncle. According to Cai, Cheng was so moved with grief, he became distracted and emaciated. ‘Whenever the name of his uncle fell upon his ears’, Cai wrote, ‘Cheng’s eyes would respond with tears’. In addition, like other officials, Cai went to great lengths to verify Cheng’s sanctity; he interviewed eyewitnesses and devised various ruses to put the sincerity of the boy’s grief to the test. The importance of personal sanctity is also evident in the way Cai argued that Cheng’s ‘outstanding filial piety’ was the product of innate virtue, rather than education or upbringing. Pointing to Cheng’s rustic background, Cai argued that the boy’s conduct sprung from his natural dispositions and thus made him all the more qualified for office. As Cai put it, ‘Even men of mature years who are cultivated gentlemen, who conduct themselves in accordance with ritual propriety, and who are aware of their moral duties – none of them can rival this boy’ (CZLJ [wai] 8.4a–5a).

Just as demonstrations of virtue furnished proof of an administrator’s fitness to rule; evidence of a lack of virtue served as grounds for disqualification or removal. Assessments of the lack of virtue followed the same logic of dynastic legitimacy.

Bountiful harvests and general prosperity were signs of Heaven's approval of not only the emperor, but the administrator as well. Conversely, misfortunes—droughts, floods, famines, or other astrological portents—provided evidence that the emperor or administrator was lacking 'in the requisite charismatic virtue' (Weber, 1947: 360; cf. Eberhard, 1957; McKnight, 1981: 18–36; Loewe, 2004: 442–456). Such a system of assessment was institutionalized and incorporated into the regular evaluation of administrators. According to the *Han Protocols* (*Han yi*) of Cai Zhi (fl. 178 CE), inspectors dispatched by the imperial court to monitor governors were to watch for signs of Heavenly disapproval, such as 'mountains collapsing, stones splitting, and bad omens' (HHS, 128.3617–18). Such disturbances, furthermore, were to be reported back to central authorities and used as grounds for removing and trying a governor (De Crespigny, 1981: 49).

This emphasis on virtue also gave members of the local elite leverage over the administrator, since they were able to enhance his reputation for virtue by building public monuments. At least three kinds of monuments were erected for administrators in Han times: the aforementioned stelae, temples (*miao*), and shrines (*ci*) (Brashier, 2005; Harrist, 2008). As was the case with stelae, temples and shrines were erected largely on the initiative of local officials and locally-powerful men with no official positions. Table 1 shows that among the 1677 donors of the 48 donor lists in our study, 229 were commissioned officials, and 552 were locally-appointed officials. The rest of the donors were locally-powerful men with no official position (Brown, 2007).

The power of monuments to enhance a reputation becomes clear through a comparison of monuments to official dossiers. As Nylan (2000: 240–241) aptly notes, housed in the imperial library, official dossiers did not circulate, as they were the 'secret archives where materials of possible advantage to the throne were deposited to await the emperor's perusal'. In contrast, stone monuments were public. Consider, for example, the placement of stelae. Found alongside roads, in front of temples and tombs, and on the faces of bridges and sides of mountains, such monuments were designed to be seen, sung, and memorized by members of the population and travelers, as well as future administrators (Brashier, 2005; Harrist, 2008). The location of stone monuments is consistent with the aims of eulogists, who made no secret that the contents of their stelae should be read by posterity. 'Ah generations to come', the eulogist noted, 'This is your standard, your model' (CZLJ, 2.2b). Similarly, another eulogist insisted that his stele would no less than 'clearly instruct future brothers; extending and bestowing a mirror for reflection' (KSS, I: 192). Stone monuments also compared favorably to dynastic histories, which did not circulate widely. As AFP Hulswé (1975: 87; 1979: 21) pointed out, most of the celebrated *Historical Records* (*Shiji*) (c. 90 BCE) went unread during the Han.

Judging from internal evidence, the authors of stele monuments were particularly cognizant of the administrator's need for public proof of his virtue. This is evident from *who* was commemorated in stele monuments. Under half of all stelae were erected to dedicatees that were then living (118/277 or 43%). Interestingly, a

substantial proportion of the living dedicatees (16%) were officials under the rank of 600 bushels—i.e., men who were just beginning their ascent up the ladder of commissioned ranks.

In addition, the contents of monuments seem to have been tailored for inclusion in an official dossier. Some authors of monuments went so far as to highlight signs of Heaven's approval, thereby providing irrefutable proof of the man's exemplary sanctity. One example is the monument erected to honor Kong Zhou (d. 164 CE), chancellor of Beihai. Kong's eulogist highlighted the dead man's role in the area, ascribing to him nothing less than charismatic leadership: Kong Zhou was also able to make fertile fields out of barren wastelands. The officials under his charge reportedly ate and drank from gardens in the former wasteland (*KSS*, II: 148). The stele erected for Zhang Shou (d. 168 CE), Chancellor of Zhuyi, is still more striking; it reveals a clear awareness of the fact that superiors were on the look-out for reports of portents of disaster. Not only did Zhang show himself to be a true father and mother of the people—acts that won him the love and admiration of the commoners—he also exhibited considerable power over nature. He was so virtuous that the 'territory did not have portents of disaster and the yield for the year was bountiful' (*KSS*, II, p.166). The temple dedicated to Lu Gong (32–112), a magistrate in Zhongmou commandery, provides one final example of a monument that highlighted the administrator's charismatic authority. According to his biography in the *History of the Later Han*, the temple dedicated to Lu by his local constituents and colleagues recorded the auspicious portents associated with Lu's governance. For example, we learn that not only was his territory spared during a plague of locusts that inflicted the area in 82 CE and free of snakes, but auspicious grain also grew in Lu's place of residence (*HHS*, 25.873; De Crespigny, 2006: 615–16).

Much has been said about the reasons why the prospects of being commemorated in a monument would have incentivized administrators, but what evidence exists to suggest that such monuments facilitated promotions? For a start, dynastic histories (which were based on official dossiers) mentioned commemorative stelae, temples, and shrines in the biographies of officials; thus it is clear that the superiors of administrators incorporated such information into performance evaluations.⁸ Additionally, several cases suggest that conspicuous forms of local recognition could become a factor in a subsequent promotion. Consider the case of two brothers, who were recognized in stelae. The elder brother, Dong Hui (fl. 177 CE), had been the magistrate of Buqi county, where his administration appears to have been well received. According to one fifth-century historian, Dong Hui's good work was extolled in a stone ode (*gesong*) (Brashier, 2005: 263). As a result, Dong Hui was subsequently nominated by his superiors in the province of Qingzhou for his 'Exceptional Conduct' (*youyi*) and soon promoted to the position of Governor of Danyang (*HHS*, 66.2482). In the case of the younger brother, Dong Yi, the biographer suggests that a monument was a contributing factor in his promotion. While Dong Yi was the head of a county in Dongping, a stele was erected for him by a group of local donors. Dong Yi subsequently left office to wear mourning probably for a relative, but he later received a prestigious nomination for office.

The nomination would have undoubtedly translated into a promotion had Dong Yi accepted it (*HHS*, 76.2482).⁹ Temples and shrines also aided the administrator in his quest for a virtuous reputation. Two cases should make this clear. In the case of aforementioned Lu Gong, the public recognition he received in Zhongmou facilitated later promotions. After serving there, he left office to wear mourning for his mother (as was customary); when his period of mourning ended, he was reappointed as a censor and subsequently made Minister over the Masses. The case of Zhang Huan (104–181), who had served as the administrator of Wuwei, also reveals the power of temple dedications. There, local notables erected temples and shrines on his behalf. Zhang subsequently received a nomination for his ‘Exceptional Conduct’, the timing of which suggests that the monuments enhanced his standing with superiors (*HHS*, 65.2138–44; De Crespigny, 2006: 1052–53).

Our discussion thus far has focused on the positive incentives that the local population offered administrators as individuals. Yet it is important to bear in mind the admonitions of Julia Adams (1999), who warns that standard formulations of self-interest in rational choice theory are ‘too narrow to encompass’ the actions of many historical actors. Using Dutch patriarchs of the early modern period as a case in point, she further notes the importance of considering the role that familial identifications play in calculations of self-interest: ‘Family heads sacrificed *for* their children, actual and hoped-for, insofar as they represented the continuity of the patrilineage, which also—and this is a key point—organized the continuity of the pinnacle of the corporate state...’ (Adams, 1999: 108ff). Adams’s discussion raises the following questions of the Han evidence: to what extent did administrators see self-interest in terms of the larger kinship group, which included ancestors and descendants? And what benefits did monuments and other forms of public recognition provide for the kinship group?

At the very least, the public recognition received by an administrator enhanced the social standing of his family. To see how this might have been the case, several points need to be borne in mind. For starters, many of the monuments (particularly stelae monuments erected after death) were erected in the administrator’s home area, instead of the areas where he governed.¹⁰ According to Nylan (2005b: 28–37), such monuments should be seen as forms of display, akin to vaulted tombs, large crowds at funerals, and gifts. Such displays, furthermore, did not merely reflect the existing power or status of a single individual. ‘Calculated to impress upon other viewers the status of the family to which a person belonged’, Nylan writes, such displays were instrumental in enhancing the prestige and power for the larger kinship group by attracting new allies and clients.

The enhanced standing of the family no doubt improved the career prospects of the administrator’s relatives. In this connection, bear in mind that local appointments were made at the discretion of magistrates and governors, who consulted the native-born officer in the Bureau of Merit (*gongcao*). Many officials tended to take their first positions as staff while still in their early to mid-teens (Hsing, 1987: 141). Given the relative youth of most potential officeholders and the absence of hard criterion of selection, the administrator’s process of decision-making can only be

imagined. After all, how was one to decide between one twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy and another, especially when a reputation for virtue, rather than technical qualifications, was the issue? More likely than not, the administrator would have selected candidates from families with reputations for producing virtuous men – and not simply because of corruption. Indeed, Han elites commonly believed that virtue, as well as evil behavior, ran in the family.¹¹ While we have no direct evidence that administrators were appointed as a result of a monument being established to commemorate an older relative, a high proportion of our stele dedicatees had younger relatives who later became officials. Of stele dedicatees, we have the full names of 126, and among these, 44 (35%) had descendants or younger male relatives who later held office.

In summary, we propose that the system of recruitment and promotion, which stressed virtuous reputations, motivated administrators like Han Shao to serve local interests. As seen above, Han local elites had the power to shape the reputations of administrators by building monuments. Reputations, furthermore, mattered because of the system of official recruitment at the time. In an age in which there were no hard and fast qualifications for office, the reputation of a man among his peers and contemporaries was not only crucial for securing a post himself, but also potentially useful for helping his relatives get a foothold into officialdom.

Discussion and conclusions

Why were centrally-appointed administrators locally responsive in Han times? And why did they sometimes privilege the interests of their local constituents and colleagues over the prerogatives of their superiors? We argue that such actions reveal the existence of dual accountability, an institutional position that made administrators beholden to and dependent upon their powerful local constituents and colleagues, as well as superiors. In addition, we propose that a variety of ideological, structural, and institutional factors explain the existence of such a phenomenon. In this paper, we marshal historical evidence from Han China to document the explanatory power of two existing explanations, classical paternalism and practical necessity. In addition, we advance a novel explanation – local responsiveness on the part of officials owed much to the Han system of recruitment and promotion, a system that made a virtuous reputation the key criterion for selection and promotion. As such, it made the administrator dependent on his powerful constituents and local colleagues for public recognition.

Let us now turn to our original question: how was an immense empire governed effectively by a small state with primitive methods of communication? A lot depends on what is meant by effective. If by effective, we mean an efficient, centralist political organization – in other words, an organization designed to implement central directives down a chain of command – then the Han system of recruitment certainly fell short of achieving such goals. In fact, this system serves as a prime example of what Weber referred to as inefficiency in several ways. First, it eschewed specialists in favor of the cultivated man and thus did not foster

rationality or the ‘domination by means of knowledge’ (Ringer, 2004: 184). Instead, the goal was to recruit men who had achieved ‘a quality of life conduct which was held to be “cultivated”’ (Weber, 1978: 278, 1001). In addition, such a system did not contribute much to promoting ‘efficiency’ within the official chain of command. Indeed, our findings show that reputational mechanisms only worked *against* efforts to insulate officials from undue local influence and corruption. If anything, such a criterion put central directives at risk.

In fact, our foregoing discussion largely confirms that Hamilton and Shue were correct in arguing that creating an efficient power structure was not a primary goal for imperial rulers. Rather, the goal was to maintain stability and the status quo by regulating, correcting ‘inappropriate behavior’, and healing, rather than implementing directives from above (Hamilton, 1989: 162). If indeed stability was the goal, then the emphasis on virtue makes sense. As work by Sidney Tarrow (1977) and James Scott (1998) has suggested, there is often a tradeoff between efficiency and stability; systems of governance that implement central directives too efficiently are vulnerable to social unrest because there is less room for local accommodation. Seen from this light, the Han system of recruitment was effective in fostering stability; by taking into consideration local reputations, it encouraged local responsiveness and thus provided political stability. In addition, the Han system helped strengthen the court’s claim as the legitimate ruler of a vast but unified state by encouraging administrators to present the court as a benevolent ‘father and mother of the people’.

More generally, our findings suggest two broader implications for the Weberian thesis. The first has to do with the nature of political authority in China. Although Weber acknowledged the existence of charismatic elements in conceptions of imperial power, he tended to see the authority of Chinese rulers as traditional or patrimonial. In contrast, our findings reveal that earlier historians, including Metzger, were correct in arguing that the imperial system incorporated charismatic bases of authority. This is best exemplified by the Han system of recruitment and promotion, which made proof of exemplary sanctity the main criterion for selection. The second has to do with Weber’s assumption – recently confirmed by Andreas (2007) in his study of the Cultural Revolution – that charismatic authority is somehow intrinsically incompatible with stable organizations, which Weber thought could only be based on either rational (i.e., legal) or traditional modes of authority (cf. Shirk, 1982: 15–20). As Andreas puts it, Weber saw charisma as an ‘agent of upheaval’, one that periodically challenges conservative organizations with transformation or eclipse (Andreas, 2007: 435–437); in addition, the ‘advance of bureaucracy portends the extinction of charisma, and charismatic eruptions undercut bureaucratic authority’. Yet our findings reveal that charismatic modes of authority were far from incompatible with bureaucratic organization. On the contrary, such modes of authority were embedded in the system of recruitment and promotion for centuries in imperial China. They fostered stability by facilitating local responsiveness and forestalling organized resistance to central authority.

To what extent do our findings hold for other periods of Chinese history? Was the Han, in other words, something of an anomaly in that administrators were unusually accountable to their constituents? The question must be asked, since the Chinese bureaucracy was transformed not once but several times over the next two millennia. To name the most important change, administrators in late imperial China were selected not for their reputations, but rather for passing examinations (Ch'ü, 1988 [1962]; Watt, 1972). This development raises the question whether the relationship between administrators and their local constituents had changed, as political theorist Gu Yanwu (1613–1682) once suggested (Gu, 1969; Gu, 1991). If official appointment was less dependent on local recognition in late imperial China, were administrators less reliant – and hence less accountable – to the population?

Answering this question lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, we wish to briefly refer to the case of an early Qing magistrate, Yu Sen, which suggests that there was in fact local accountability in late imperial China. Like Han Shao and countless magistrates before him, Yu Sen faced a terrible dilemma: he had a choice between illegally opening the granaries, on the one hand, and waiting several months for proper authorization from Beijing, on the other. The former choice would have allowed him to save scores of starving people but incur dynastic sanctions; the latter would have saved his career but would have led to the deaths of countless men, women, and children. Faced with these choices, he decided to open the granaries. Afterwards, he forwarded a memorial to the court, retroactively appealing for three months of famine relief. In his official communications, he wrote that he had undertaken this course of action with full knowledge that he was in violation of protocol but that he was prepared to 'submit to sanctions with a tranquil soul' (Will, 1990: 93).

The parallels between this episode and that of Han Shao, spaced fifteen centuries apart, reveal that administrators of imperial China generally felt accountable not only to those above but also to those below. Dual accountability thus characterizes an important *structural* position of mid-level officials for most of Chinese history, and even perhaps in contemporary China. This, however, raises the question whether reputational mechanisms continued to play a key role in fostering dual accountability in later periods of Chinese history, particularly after the establishment of the examination system. There are indications that they did. As was the case with their Han ancestors, members of the local and political elites of the Song, Ming, and Qing erected shrines, temples, and stelae to centrally-appointed officials for their responsiveness and exemplary virtue (Neskar, 1993; Will, 1990: 93). And indeed, evidence exists that reputational mechanisms continue to exert influence on the political culture of contemporary Chinese politics (Shirk, 1982: 7–23; Tsai, 2007).¹² Yet the dramatic transformations in political system, economy, technology, and cultural norms over two millennia mean that the concrete ways in which reputational mechanisms work to reinforce dual accountability have changed. As a result, we await future work to illuminate what those mechanisms are and to enhance our understanding of China in general.

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Notes

1. The hierarchical structure of the imperial bureaucracy was widely accepted by earlier generations of China scholars. This was evident in Karl Wittfogel's 1957 book, *Oriental Despotism*, where it is argued that order was maintained in China by 'total submission' (Wittfogel, 1957: 149) and 'total obedience' (p. 151) within the confines of a 'monopoly bureaucracy' (Wittfogel, 1957: 367). Similarly, Étienne Balazs (1964) asserted that the 'cohesion of a vast agrarian empire' owed everything to Confucian ideology, which maintained a social hierarchy through 'respectfulness, humility, deference, docility, complete submission and subordination to elders and betters' (Balazs, 1964: 155).
2. Liu (2000: 85–102) draws an explicit analogy between modern danwei in contemporary China and ancient cities in imperial China. On p. 101, Liu observes, 'As a result, the establishment of the danwei system does not contradict the cultural and social logic of Chinese society. Instead, it is a structural manifestation of this logic. From ancient times, Chinese cities possessed a variety of the political, economic, and moral elements of danwei; these cultural properties have now been transplanted to the contemporary urban danwei. Thus, to understand the properties of the contemporary and urban version of the danwei system, one cannot overlook the historical tradition'. Although one might quibble with Liu's ahistorical representation of the imperial period, his view on the danwei system certainly has scholarly precedents. For exhortations to seek out the imperial roots of the danwei system, see Perry (1989: 586–587, 589). For arguments about the presence of some neo-traditional features in the Han bureaucracy, see Brown (2007), Ebrey (1983), Holzman (1976), and Nylan (1996).
3. Throughout this article we will refer to primary sources by their titles or abbreviations of their titles. All translations are ours unless noted. Appendix A provides a list of names in Chinese. Primary sources and their abbreviations are given in Appendix B.
4. Brown (2007, 2008) examines the claim that the current corpus is skewed by the biases of Song antiquarians and forgers but concludes that there is little evidence to this effect. Through a comparison of the current corpus of inscriptions to Han accounts relating practices of commemoration and third-century catalogues of stelae, she argues that the current corpus can be considered reliable. In addition, there is evidence that Song antiquarians were comprehensive in their efforts to retrieve all extant Han inscriptions – regardless of quality of calligraphy or the nature of their content.
5. Interestingly, the conditions of contemporary American forest rangers resemble those of Han-dynasty administrators. Like Han administrators, rangers work in remote areas, face high levels of uncertainty, require cooperation from the local population, and enjoy a high degree of autonomy from the central Washington office of Forest Services. As such, it is understandable why these rangers sometimes contravene central mandates (Kaufman, 1960: 211).
6. Demographic estimates put the figure somewhere between fifty and sixty million souls (Bielenstein, 1947, 1975); Loewe's figure (2004) for the Han bureaucracy is based on the Yinwan findings and traditional sources; he estimates that there were 130,000 officials total in the Han bureaucracy.

7. More recent works by Nylan (1999), Smith (2003), Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan (2003) have called into question the usefulness of 'Confucianism' as an analytic category for the Han periods on two grounds: (1) there were no organized schools of thought responsible for transmitting a body of texts or doctrines; and (2) there was no Han Confucian orthodoxy that enjoyed the state's exclusive sponsorship.
8. For information about the relationship between official dossiers and dynastic histories, see Brown (2007). For inscriptions mentioned in dynastic histories, see *HHS* (38.1606, 52.2063, 52.2067, 58.2227, and 72.2794). For references to inscribed stones (not stelae), see *HHS* (24.862, 43.1487, 43.1750). For a shrine dedicated to a deceased Governor, see *HHS* (71.2676). For temples and shrines, see *HHS* 31.1105–06; 41.1413; 42.1453; 56.1819; 62.2049.
9. For an analogous case, see *HHS* 86.2851 (reference to the Chief Commandant of Guanghan, Zheng Chun).
10. For examples of funerary stelae erected by former local constituents and colleagues for the administrator, which were erected in the administrator's home area, see the cases of Kong Zhou (LS 6.5b), Kong Biao (KSS II.192; LS 8.16b), Zheng Jixuan (LX 19.6b), and Liu Kuan (LS 11.4a; LX 12.5b).
11. For notions of hereditary guilt (chengfu) and virtue, see Cutter (2001) and Hendrischke (1991).
12. Drawing upon her own extensive research on village-level government in contemporary China, Tsai (2007) shows that official accountability owes much to the existence of local solidary groups, which incorporate officials. Such groups – which include temples, clans, and fraternal organizations – make officials accountable by awarding them with prestige or moral standing in exchange for local responsiveness. Tsai, however, leaves open the question whether informal institutions of local accountability provided by solidary groups exist at higher levels of administration – and even suggests that they are only effective at the village level (Tsai, 2007: 371).

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Appendix A: Chinese character list

bei 碑

beiyin 碑陰

Beihai 北海

Buqi 不其

Cai Yong 蔡邕

Cai Zhi 蔡質

Cao Quan 曹全

Chang'an 長安

Cheng Wei 程木

ci 祠

cishi 刺史

chengfu 承負

Cui Shi 崔寔

danwei 單位

Danyang 丹陽

Dong Hui 董恢

Dong Yi 董翊

Donghai 東海

Dongping 東平

duyou 督郵

gesong 歌頌

gongcao 功曹

Gu Yanwu 顧炎武

Guanghan 廣漢

guo 國

Han 漢

Han Shao 韓韶

Hanyi 漢儀

Hong Kuo 洪迺

hou 侯

houguo 侯國

Hsing I-t'ien [Xing Yitian] 邢義田

Jiangsu 江蘇

Juyan 居延

jun (lord) 君

jun (commandery) 郡

junxian 郡縣

Kong Biao 孔彪

Kong Zhou 孔宙

li 吏

ling 令

Liu 劉

Liu Kuan 劉寬

Lu Gong 魯恭

Luoyang 洛陽

miao 廟

Qin 秦

Qing 清

Qingzhou 青州

Shiji 史記

sili xiaowei 司隸校尉

Song 宋

taishou 太守

wang 王

Wang Mang 王莽

Wang Wang 王望

Tang 唐

xian 縣

Xi'an 西安

xiang 相

xiao 孝

xiaolian 孝廉

Xin 新

Yang Huan 楊渙

Yingchuan 潁川

Yinwan 尹灣

youyi 尤異

Yu Sen 俞森

Yuan 元

zhang 長

Zhang Huan 張奐

Zhang Shou 張壽

Zhao 趙

Zheng Chun 鄭純

Zheng Jixuan 鄭季宣

Zhenglun 政論

Zhongmou 中牟

Zhuyi 竹邑

Appendix B: Primary works cited and abbreviations

(Arranged by author or compiler)

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- HS*. See Ban Gu.
- HHS*. See Fan Ye.
- KSS*. See Nagata Hidemasa.
- LS*. See Hong Kuo.
- LX*. See Hong Kuo.
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- ZGC*: See *Zhanguo*.
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