

Faction Theory and the Political Imagination of the Northern Song

During the latter part of the Northern Song dynasty (1068–1127), the imperial bureaucracy was riven by factional conflict, as a series of alternating coalitions fought bitterly for power and patronage at the imperial court. Executive and remonstrance officials formed factional affiliations (*dang* 黨, or *pengdang* 朋黨), packing the bureaucracy with like-minded subordinates, in order to consolidate and leverage their authority over the formulation and implementation of state policy. The coalition leaders articulated distinctive and divergent visions of statecraft and devised institutional mechanisms to enhance bureaucratic efficacy, increase state revenue, and lift public morality. During this period of escalating factional conflict, political theorists and practitioners employed a dichotomizing discourse of politics to demarcate the ethical boundaries of the political community.¹

In the course of these struggles for court dominance, leaders and followers made polemical and contending claims to political authority, positing rigid ethical distinctions between themselves and their adversaries. Political theory consisted of an overlapping set of vocabularies, which theorists manipulated for political and ideological purposes. Through factional rhetoric, political theorists articulated discriminative claims that were both inclusive and exclusive. This polarizing language of politics was inherently moralizing: it assumed the inherent unity of political and ethical concerns, and imposed binary ethical oppositions

THIS ARTICLE is adapted from chapter 5 of my doctoral dissertation, “A House in Darkness: The Politics of History and the Language of Politics in the Late Northern Song, 1066–1104” (New York City: Columbia U., 2002). I have presented earlier versions of this paper at the Columbia University Seminar on Traditional China and at the Faculty Research Colloquium of the Department of History, University of Georgia. I would like to thank Sarah Schneewind, Murray Rubinstein, Moss Roberts, and Wu Pei-yi, as well as my departmental colleagues Thomas Whigham, Karl Friday, and Michael Winship, for their constructive comments. The comments of two anonymous referees and *Asia Major*'s editors were also indispensable in preparing this article for publication.

¹ For the term “dichotomizing discourse,” I am indebted to James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1988), p. 268.

between political actors. By condemning adversaries as treacherous and factious, rhetoricians by default claimed ethical superiority.

In the time period being considered, the key term was the word “faction” itself, which during the classical era could be neutrally employed to denote a neighborhood or a similarly-sized administrative grouping of households, a kinship circle, or a group of comrades-in-arms.² In several influential passages, the term *dang* was, however, employed with unequivocally pejorative shadings, to describe partisanship in the abstract sense: a clique (*dang* 黨) of associates (*peng* 朋). The second-century AD Eastern Han etymological text *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (*Expositions of Words and Explications of Characters*), the oldest lexicon of classical Chinese, simply defines the character *dang* as literally “not bright” (*bu xian* 不鮮);³ but a possible reading is “unsavory.”⁴

By the end of the Han, the character had acquired more negative shadings – an improper faction at court, an aberration within the ethico-political order.⁵ In the scholarly and political discourse of the Tang 唐 (617–907) and Song 宋 (960–1279) dynasties, the character’s neutral connotations and denotations were largely abandoned, and when it was employed in political discourse, *dang* invariably denoted a “faction,” with opprobrious connotations. When they accused each other of factionalism, or defended themselves against these accusations, Northern Song political practitioners employed the term *dang* as the first-strike weapon in their rhetorical arsenals.

Through a close reading of contemporary historical writing, the “language” of late-Northern Song factional conflicts can be reconstructed.⁶ Its rhetoric was a set of vocabularies, definitions, and usages

² In the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou li* 周禮), the word *dang* denotes a subunit of territorial administration, equivalent to 500 families. *Analects* VI/5 has this usage: “Can you not find a use for it in helping the people of your neighborhood? 毋以與爾鄰里鄉黨乎?” See Cheng Shude 程樹德, ed., *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990; hereafter, *Lunyu jishi*), p. 374. In the ancient historical text the *Narratives of Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳), the character *dang* simply connotes a fellowship of comrades: “They subsequently killed Pi Zheng, Qi Ju and seven charioteers... they were all the comrades of Li Ke and Pi Zheng 逐殺丕鄭祁舉及七輿大夫皆...里之黨也.” See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed., *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981; hereafter, *Zuozhuan*), Xi gong 僖公, year 10, p. 336.

³ Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972) 10A, p. 26a.

⁴ Many thanks to Moss Roberts for providing the alternative “unsavory.”

⁵ In *Han shu*, the character *dang* is employed as both noun and verb, as “faction” and “to form a faction.” See Ban Gu 班固, comp., *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 36, p. 1945; 43, p. 2118. In *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, the word *dang* repeatedly denotes a court faction. I discuss the historiographic and linguistic context of Han factionalism, below.

⁶ My definition of a language of politics rests upon that of J.G.A. Pocock, who maintained: “The language of politics... is rhetoric, the language in which men speak for all the purposes and in all the ways which men may be found articulating and communicating as part of the activity and the culture of politics”; *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought*

that political practitioners employed to define and interpret political associations and practices. A reconstruction of the history of the theory and rhetoric of politics necessitates not only a reconstruction of authorial intentions, but also the contexts in which monarchs and ministers interpreted such language.⁷ During the Northern Song, the elaboration and manipulation of political theory was an inherently significant and signifying practice, by and through which political practitioners and theorists engaged in the construction of political and ideological meaning. Furthermore, in the sphere of intellectual production, textual authority was in many ways a representation of political authority.⁸ By taking both political theory and political rhetoric as my object of analysis, I will be focusing on a discourse that made political authority a conceivable notion in the first place, and on the discursive constraints and intellectual contexts that limited the agency of political theorists and actors. Throughout the factional conflicts of this time, political theorists worked within a shared intellectual context, a narrow field that informed their conceptions of political association, and their attempts to delineate the legitimate boundaries of political practice.

FRAMES OF REFERENCE: TWO CONCEPTUAL INVENTORIES OF FACTIONALISM

In our given time-period, the term faction was located within two sets of overlapping conceptual enterprises: classical hermeneutics and historical analogism.⁹ In both of these frames of reference, a faction was

and History (New York: Atheneum, 1972), p. 17. For the first application of Pocock's concept to Song intellectual history, see Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, "Introduction," in Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer, eds, *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1993), pp. 5-9. To focus upon the politics of discourse is not to radically sever political history and political culture from their intellectual contexts, and I believe that such an interpretive strategy is extremely ill-advised.

⁷ In a later essay, J. G. A. Pocock has argued: "to situate the text (and the author) in a context is necessary in order to reconstitute the text as a historical event... it seems evident that the primary component of this context has to be language. There exists a language, or a complex of more than one language, with which things can be said or illocutionary acts reformed, within which (it is the next step to add) they must be performed"; "Texts as Events: Reflections on the History of Political Thought," in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, eds., *The Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1987), p. 25.

⁸ In Peter Bol's explanation: "Literary composition was the most common way of connecting learning, values, and social practice, and changing the way men wrote was the common way of influencing intellectual values"; Peter K. Bol, "*This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Sung China*" (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1992), p. 27. According to Susan Cherniack's analysis of textual and political authority in the Song: "authority is an attribute granted by the party or parties who control the text," namely the imperial court; "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," *HJAS* 54.1 (June 1994), pp. 26-27.

⁹ For the term and concept of "historical analogism," I am indebted to Robert Hartwell's

conceptualized as an illegitimate affiliation of ethically inferior ministers who subverted the dynasty, monarchy, and polity. Since political authority was in some sense a function of linguistic authority, political theorists and rhetoricians availed themselves of these conceptual resources, manipulating classical and historical texts in order to construct authoritative definitions of the term. Through a process of textual *bricolage*, they defined the boundaries of legitimate political action and association in the present. Using these classical and historical interpretive frames of reference, late-Northern Song political rhetoricians accused their adversaries of the crime of factionalism while steadfastly maintaining their own innocence. Both of these discursive enterprises overlapped, and were sufficiently overdetermined, complex, and contradictory, so as to allow Song faction theorists a degree of interpretive leeway, while constraining the limits of interpretation.

Classical Hermeneutics

In the contemporary discourse on classical hermeneutics, factions were defined as political coalitions formed by *xiaoren* 小人, that is, ethically deficient, “petty men” (literally, “small men”), whose nefarious practices made them politically illegitimate. If “factions” were the exclusive preserve of “petty men,” who were constituted by their destructive relationship with a legitimate political authority, then *junzi* 君子, “superior men” (literally, “sons of lords”) could, would, and did not form factions, and were constituted by their support of legitimate political authority.¹⁰ Northern Song political theorists and rhetoricians mined the classical canon for authoritative allusions that would justify their own claims to ethico-political authority while denying it to their adversaries. While the character *dang* was very often applied neutrally in pre-Qin texts, the rare pejorative usages of the character in the classical canon were far more useful to the intellectual-political elite of the middle imperial era. During the late Northern Song, those who shaped

formulation that “from the eighth through thirteenth centuries, emperors, statesmen, and historians avowed that history provides the means to understand the success and failure of different forms of governmental organization, the rise and fall of dynasties, the evolution and transformation of laws and institutions,” among other ethico-political concerns. See Robert M. Hartwell, “Historical Analogism, Public Policy, and Social Science in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century China,” *American Historical Review* 76.3 (June 1971), pp. 694–95.

¹⁰ In his seminal analysis of the *Analects* of Confucius, Benjamin Schwartz translated *junzi* as “noble men,” ethical exemplars who internalized the prime virtue of human-heartedness (*ren* 仁). He explained that *junzi*, “like our own terms ‘noble man’ and ‘gentlemen’ was of course, initially social rather than ethical in meaning. Like ‘gens’ or ‘nobilis,’ it referred to high birth and social rank”; *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1985), p. 76.

the discourse on factions deployed and alluded to several canonical texts from such disparate genres as history, philosophy, and divination: the *Book of Documents* (*Shang shu* 尚書), the *Narratives of Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳), the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) of Kongzi 孔子, and the *Book of Changes* (*Yi jing* 易經). When juxtaposed and recombined, these disparate textual fragments provided the basis of a vocabulary and a frame of reference for establishing interpretations.

A collection of ancient royal orations purported to date from the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the *Book of Documents* shaped the political imagination of the Northern Song by providing a classical vocabulary for making claims about monarchical authority and ministerial associations. An oration from the “Great Plan” (“Hong fan” 洪範) chapter of the *Book of Documents*, in which the sagely and martial king Wu 武王 of Zhou (r. 1122–1115 BC) sermonizes about the true and only Way of ethical rulership, was frequently imbedded in Song political discourse.¹¹ To be worthy of his throne, a monarch must uphold the prime monarchical value of the “public good” or “public-mindedness 公,” which overrode the “private interest 私.” In rhyming couplets, king Wu defined the basis of ethical kingship as the transcendence of partiality:

Without deflection or unevenness,
Pursue kingly righteousness.
Without selfish likings,
Pursue the kingly Way
Without selfish dislikings,
Pursue the kingly road.
Without deviation or partiality 無偏無黨,
The kingly Way is vast and far-reaching.
Without deviation or partiality,
The kingly Way is level and balanced.
Without contrariness or one-sidedness,
The kingly Way is right and straight.¹²

Reading the character *dang* as “faction” would have probably been anachronistic in a classical intellectual context; in the “Great Plan,”

¹¹ In her analysis of the “Hong fan” chapter, Michael Nylan has argued that its central meaning is the articulation of royal power; *The Shifting Center: The Original “Great Plan” and Later Readings*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 24 (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1992), pp. 23–32. According to Mark Edward Lewis, it “offers a comprehensive model of government supposedly presented to king Wu by a virtuous noble of the Shang.” For a treatment of the *Book of Documents* as a textual source of political authority, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1999), pp. 101–9.

¹² Kong Yingda 孔穎達, ed., *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (SSJZS edn.; hereafter *Shangshu*) 12, p. 14a. My translation has been adapted from that of Nylan, *Shifting Center*, pp. 27–28.

dang denoted an abstract sense of “partiality” or “deviation” from the public-minded Way of governance.

Another fragment from the *Book of Documents* transmitted a similar message about the insidious dangers that partiality posed to a dynastic monarchy’s survival. In the “Luo Announcement” (“Luo gao” 洛告), the sage-regent Duke of Zhou warns his ward, the young king Cheng 成王 (r. 1115–1078 BC), of the destructive consequences of straying from the kingly path: “My young son, can you indulge partiality 孺子其朋? If you do so, the consequences will be like a fire that begins as a mere spark, but then blazes up until it cannot be extinguished.”¹³ Here, the character *peng*, a component of the later term “faction” (*peng-dang*), most likely denoted partiality of word and deed. In the officially standardized Tang-era commentary to the *Book of Documents* by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), this passage is interpreted as a warning from the Duke of Zhou to king Cheng about the perils of ministerial factionalism, glossing *peng* as *pengdang*.¹⁴ As we see, Northern Song political theorists continued to read these passages from the *Book of Documents* anachronistically, as an explicit admonition against factionalism. They alluded to the “Great Plan” and “Luo Announcement” to claim that the classical ideal of governance was nonpartisan and “public-minded,” and that an ideal monarch should stand above factionalism, lest nefarious factions subvert the dynastic polity.

A mythic narrative embedded within the *Narratives of Zuo*, the pre-Qin commentary to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), provides concrete classical analogies for the interpretation of political practice. In the Northern Song discourse of factions and factionalism, the mythical past could be reinterpreted to provide illustrative examples that political affiliations were not necessarily factious, or even unethical, if their members loyally served the public good of the polity instead of the private interest. A passage from the *Narratives of Zuo* describes two political affiliations of ethical exemplars during the reigns of the sage-kings Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, whose monarchical authority they had loyally and selflessly supported:

In antiquity, Gao Yang 高陽 had eight talented descendants... they were centered, sagely, broad-minded, profound, enlightened, truthful, magnanimous, and sincere. The people of All Under Heaven called them the Eight Paragons 八愷. Gao Xin 高辛 had eight talented descendants ... They were loyal, wise, restrained,

¹³ *Shangshu zhengyi* 15, p. 17b. My translation follows that of James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (rpt. Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1960) 3, p. 440.

¹⁴ *Shangshu* 15, p. 17b.

pure, receptive, benevolent, gentle, and harmonious. The people of the empire called them the Eight Primes 八元. As for these sixteen, subsequent generations have praised their excellence, and have not allowed their names to fall. When Shun served as minister to Yao, he promoted the Eight Paragons, appointing them as regional administrators to regulate the myriad affairs, none of which was not arranged in the proper season. Earth was pacified and Heaven was established. [Shun] promoted the Eight Primes, deputizing them to disseminate the five teachings to the four quadrants. ... The interior was pacified and the exterior was stabilized.¹⁵

Later interpreters of political practice invoked the names of the Eight Paragons and the Eight Primes as models of ministerial conduct, who extended their ethico-political qualities to the state. Their example justified Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007–1072) argument in 1044, discussed below, that officials could loyally unite for the good of the state without succumbing to the evils of factionalism.

On the other side of the ethico-political divide, a corresponding passage in the *Narratives of Zuo* provided examples of a malevolent political affiliation that subverted monarchical authority. Shun wisely expelled the Four Fiends 四凶 from court and exiled them to the fringes of the realm:

In antiquity, Di Hong 帝鴻 had a descendant without talent, who concealed righteousness and embraced villainy, who delightedly abominated virtue, and who were among the wicked things. Unruly, recalcitrant, and uncompanionable, he affiliated with his own kind. The common people of All Under Heaven called him Chaos 渾敦. Shao Hao 少皞 had a descendant without talent, who injured the sincere and forsook the loyal and ornamented his evil words... slandering those of abundant virtue. The common people of All Under Heaven called him Monster 窮奇. Zhuan Xu 顓頊 had a descendant without talent, who could not be educated or instructed, and did not understand good words... The common people of All Under Heaven called him Blockhead 檮杌. As for these three men, their contemporaries abetted their fiendishness and enhanced their reputation for evil, until the time of Yao, who could not expel them. Xian Yun 緡雲 had a descendant without talent, who had an insatiable appetite for food and drink, and coveted goods and wealth... The common people of All Under Heaven grouped them with the Three Fiends and called him Glutton 饕餮.¹⁶

¹⁵ See *Zuozhuan* (Xi gong 18), pp. 636–38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 640–42.

Each of the Four Fiends embodied discrete qualities of unethical political practice – factiousness, slander, treachery, and avarice – offering later rhetoricians a rogues’ gallery of political villainy. In the Northern Song, political practitioners would liken their affiliates to the Eight Paragons and Eight Primes, urging the retention and promotion of these worthies, while they compared their enemies to the Four Fiends, urging the immediate expulsion of these monstrous evildoers from the imperial court. Continuing the analogy one step further, they asserted that the ethically enlightened ruler, a modern-day Yao or Shun, possessed the sagely judgment to distinguish ethical and unethical political affiliations, retaining the former and expelling the latter. In the political imagination of the Northern Song, classical allusions to the mythic narratives of the Sixteen and the Four were common, as rhetoricians judged present-day ministers and rulers against the allusive standards of distant antiquity. More important, they used the *Book of Documents* and the *Chronicles of Zuo* to imagine the monarch as the sole source of political authority, transcending ministerial partisanship.

Fragments of the *Analects* (*Lunyu*) of Kongzi were possibly the most significant component of the classical frame of reference through which Northern Song theorists interpreted and defined political associations. *Analects* IV/16 draws a clear distinction between *junzi* and *xiaoren*, defining a strict moral standard to separate the two: “The superior man understands what is righteous 君子喻於義; the petty man understands what is profitable 小人喻於利.”¹⁷ In Song factional rhetoric, affiliations of superior men were rhetorically associated with steadfast righteousness, while the factions of petty men were described as amoral advantage-seekers.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in the above passage, Kongzi was not speaking of factions of *junzi* and *xiaoren* per se, but rather positing an ethical dichotomy between individual “superior” and “petty men.” Perhaps the most influential classical reference point for Song political practitioners was a single line in *Analects* II/14: “The superior man enters into associations but not cliques 君子周而不比; the petty man enters into cliques but not associations 小人比而不周.”¹⁹ While this passage did not explicitly employ the character *dang*, Kongzi’s usage of the term “clique 比” was generally assumed to be synonymous with the term “fac-

¹⁷ *Lunyu jishi* 7, p. 267.

¹⁸ Hoyt Tillman has asserted: “Ever since Confucius’ warning about factions (in *Analects* xv/22), the term carried extremely negative political and ethical connotations”; Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch’en Liang’s Challenge to Chu Hsi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1992), p. 131.

¹⁹ *Lunyu jishi* 3, pp. 100–1.

tion” (*dang*) in subsequent commentaries on the *Analects*.²⁰ According to classical hermeneutics, then, factionalism was defined as the sole practice of “petty men,” and as a political practice to be shunned by those who would call themselves “superior men.” More problematically, this textual fragment alluded to the possibility that ethical exemplars could legitimately affiliate with one another, while unethical political practitioners formed illegitimate cliques. From the *Analects* onward, factionalism was defined through the use of a binary vocabulary that diametrically opposed factionless superior men against factious petty men – guardians of righteousness against seekers of profit. Northern Song political theorists invoked this fragment of the *Analects* in polarizing rhetoric that would leave out every shade of gray in political practice.

The above passages are disparate in genre and mode; they are insufficient to provide an explanatory framework for discussing the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of political affiliations. But when juxtaposed and recombined by Northern Song political practitioners, they were formed into the armature of faction theory. The Duke of Zhou’s orations from the *Book of Documents* offered abstract political philosophy, the belief that factional biases deviated from the public-minded Way of kingship. When lifted from the *Narratives of Zuo*, the mythic tale of the Eight Paragons and the Four Fiends served as a historical testament to the destructiveness of unethical political factions and the propriety of virtuous associations. And the keystone to the intellectual edifice was Kongzi’s statement that factiousness was the exclusive domain of “petty men,” to be avoided by “superior men.” By interpreting such classical fragments, Northern Song political practitioners formed a consensus definition of factions as malign affiliations of petty men, whose very existence compromised the Way of rulership and undermined the ethical foundations of the state. Intriguingly, some of these classical fragments alluded to the possibility that “superior men” could serve the public good of the polity by forming ministerial affiliations that channeled their loyalty upward to the throne. While alternative readings of early classics texts could condone, or even justify, the existence of factions, all but one Northern Song faction theorist held to the standard Confucian claim that only “petty men” could form factions. Based on their interpretations, the majority saw factions as affiliations of “petty men,” whose very existence undermined the dynastic polity.

²⁰ According to the *Lunyu jijie* 論語集解 of He Yan 何晏 (ca. 190–249), the meaning of this passage is: “The loyal and the sincere form associations, the obsequious and the factious form cliques 忠信爲周，阿黨爲比。” In his *Lunyu yishu* 論語義疏, Huang Kan 黃侃 (488–545) generally concurred with He Yan’s interpretation; *Lunyu jishi* 3, pp. 101–2.

Historical Analogism

Overlapping with the discursive frame of classical hermeneutics, classical and post-classical historiography provided a second set of textual precedents that determined definitions of factionalism. While the character *dang* possessed mostly neutral connotations in classical texts (with two significant exceptions discussed above), used in the sense of court faction it had acquired a generally negative connotation in the official historiography of the Han dynasty. The authors of the two Han dynastic histories deployed the abstract terminology of classical hermeneutics to offer a moralistic commentary on political developments in the declining years of both the Western and Eastern Han.²¹ In the *Former Han History* (*Hanshu* 漢書), compiled in the first century AD, the historian Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) narrated an account of an imperial-ministerial dialogue in the court of emperor Yuan 元帝 (r. 48–33 BC). Warning of the political danger posed by the rising influence of eunuchs and the empress's clan, the grand councillor Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BC) cited the *Analects* to posit a binary ethical distinction between ethical and unethical political affiliations:

In antiquity, Kongzi and [his disciples] Yan Yuan 顏淵 and Zi Gong 子貢 acclaimed one another, but they did not form a faction (*pengdang*). [The mythical sages] Yu 禹, [Hou 后] Ji 稷 and Gao 皋陶 promoted and recommended one another, but they did not form cliques 比周. Why was this? Because they were loyal for the sake of the state, and their hearts were without wickedness 忠於爲國, 無邪心也.”²²

Even as he focused more on individual intentions than affiliational principles, Liu Xiang unequivocally equated the term faction with disloyalty and wickedness, and contrasted factionalism with noble political affiliations of the classical past. And by extension, while wicked, petty men formed factions, superior men like Kongzi and the sage-kings clearly did not. The vocabulary employed in the above passage follows that of the *Analects* and foreshadows the political language of the Song, providing the bipolar coordinates by which factions were defined – loyalty versus wickedness, petty men versus superior men.

In the waning years of the Eastern Han dynasty, contending coalitions at court consistently accused each other of having formed “factions,” *dang* or *pengdang*. During the reign of emperor Huan 桓帝 (r.

²¹ Also see Luo Jiaxiang 羅家祥, *Bei Song dangzheng yanjiu* 北宋黨爭研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1993), p. 3.

²² Ban Gu, comp., *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 36, p. 1945.

147–167), when the power of eunuchs was in the ascendant, the ministerial opposition led by Li Ying 李膺 (110–68) was proscribed *en masse* as a slanderous faction. In an incident referred to by historians as the “Great Proscription” (*danggu* 黨錮), about two hundred scholar-officials and students were banned from officeholding and in some cases jailed.²³ When Li Ying and his cohort were reemployed at court by emperor Ling 靈帝 (r. 167–89), they vengefully plotted to kill the entire cohort of court eunuchs, until eunuch subterfuge foiled their schemes. In the end, Li and six or seven hundred others were either executed or imprisoned, in a case of systematic political persecution that informed later political and historical discourse. When Northern Song political practitioners employed a historical frame of reference to discuss factions and factionalism, they invariably referred to this Great Proscription as an illustrative example of the dangers that factionalism posed to the survival of dynastic polities.

Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), the compiler of the *Latter Han History* (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書), composed the first known essay devoted to the subject of factions and factionalism, his influential “Preface to the Biographies of the Great Proscription” (“*Danggu liezhuan xu*” 黨錮列傳序). Echoing Kongzi’s dictum in *Analects* xvii/2 that “[Men] are close to one another in nature, and in diverge from one another in practice 性相近也，習相遠也,” Fan asserted that evildoers shared the same basic natural endowment, but “followed different roads” of unethical conduct.²⁴ Fighting an endless battle against them in every generation were noble ministers who pursued the path of loyalty to monarchy, dynasty, and polity. (Employing classical hermeneutics himself, Fan Ye likened the victims of the Han Great Proscription to the Eight Paragons and Primes, among others.) The pattern of political history was a variation on a single theme: the ability or inability of men to overcome the evil influences of their respective environments and “to be cautious about their affiliations and to restrain their deviations.” The political fortunes of superior and petty men were destined to wax and wane throughout history, as state ministers struggled against, or succumbed to, their natures.

²³ For the standard English translation of *danggu* 黨錮 as Great Proscription, see Michael Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1994), p. 266. For a narrative treatment of factionalism in the latter years of the Eastern Han and the “Great Proscription,” see B. J. Mansvelt Beck, “The Fall of Han,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1986) 1, pp. 328–30.

²⁴ *Lunyu jishi* 34.1177; Fan Ye 范曄, comp., *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965) 67, p. 2183. Also see Luo, *Bei Song dangzheng yanjiu*, p. 3.

Interpreting the history of the past millennium, from the Spring and Autumn period to the Latter Han, Fan Ye described the oscillating pattern of malicious factions who undermined the foundations of the polity. Ever since the hegemon (*ba* 霸) system collapsed, opportunistic and treacherous ministers had seized upon the political chaos of the Warring States period to “ornament themselves in cleverness and propagate disputatiousness... motivated by a fondness for honors, they snatched them from each other.” Even the Former Han founder, emperor Gaozu 高祖 (r. 202–195 BC), had not been immune to the threats and blandishments of factious elements “who harbored a heart to usurp the ruler.” Wang Mang’s 王莽 (45 BC–23 AD) usurpation of the Han throne had been only the most egregious example of treacherous ministers who monopolized power and expelled the righteous and the loyal from court. In Fan Ye’s judgment, the prevalence of court factions (*pengdang*) was an ill omen of the impending collapse of the Han polity: “The decline of a dynasty is a time of degeneracy and deceit, when the kingly Way is decadent and deficient 叔末澆訛, 王道陵缺.” In more concrete terms, when emperor Huan and emperor Ling departed from the proper path of rulership, they permitted hostile factions to arise at court, to the detriment of the dynastic polity:

During the reigns of Huandi and Lingdi, rulers were neglectful and governance was erroneous. The mandate of the state was entrusted to eunuchs, and officials associated with each other. Therefore, commoners were resistant and indignant, and gentlemen were unreasonably disputatious 橫議. Consequently, they increasingly praised fame and reputation, and opposed one another.²⁵

The history of the Han illustrated Fan’s lesson that the monarchy, dynasty, and polity were constantly at risk of being subverted by factionalism.

While not explicitly linking factions with petty men, Fan Ye conceptualized factions as inherently unethical and illegitimate affiliations, which threatened the moral and political integrity of the empire. When offering his retrospective judgment of the Great Proscription, Fan Ye employed the moralistic terminology of the classical canon, associating “faction” with “wickedness” and “perversity.” At the courts of Huandi and Lingdi, if ministers “had simply been pure of heart and had shunned wickedness,” then the Han dynasty “would not have ultimately succumbed to factional polemics 終陷黨議.”²⁶ While Fan Ye was far more ambivalent about the morality of the words and deeds of Eastern Han

²⁵ *Hou Han shu* 67, p. 2183.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

court factions, Northern Song political theorists lionized the victims of the Great Proscription as exemplars of political rectitude who had been unjustly persecuted by sinister eunuchs.

While the Eastern Han factional conflict had pitted a bloc of officials against powerful eunuchs, the waning years of the Tang witnessed a partisan struggle between two ministerial coalitions. Raging at court from the early-820s through the late-840s, the “Niu-Li factional conflict 牛李黨爭” involved the coalitions of two rival grand councillors, Niu Sengru 牛僧儒 (778–847) and Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850), who both led a series of alternating ministerial regimes that also struggled with distaff families and eunuchs for influence.²⁷ These loosely-bounded ministerial affiliations overlapped with a complex network of social and scholarly connections, but lacked centralized organizational frameworks and stable policy programs.²⁸ After more than a decade of vicious infighting, in which both sides repeatedly accused one another of the crime of factionalism, Li Deyu ultimately succeeded in discrediting Niu Sengru, attaining the councillorship unchallenged in the 840s.²⁹ Bemoaning the virulent spread of factionalism at his court, emperor Wenzong 文宗 (r. 827–40) lamented that “eradicating bandits from Hebei 河北 is easy, but eliminating these factions from court is difficult,” famous last words that would frequently be invoked by political theorists in the Northern Song.³⁰

To defend himself from accusations of factionalism, Li Deyu wrote an influential “Discourse on Factions” (“Pengdang lun” 朋黨論), the first of a long-lived subgenre of political theory, in which he deflected accusations of factionalism by employing an argument grounded in historical analogism.³¹ Reinterpreting the history of the Eastern Han, Li saw the

²⁷ For an extended analysis of the Niu-Li factional conflict, see Michael Dalby, “Court Politics in Late T’ang Times,” in Denis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1979), pp. 639–69.

²⁸ Dalby has argued against conceiving of late Tang factions as “closely knit, well-defined, and well-disciplined pressure groups with a basis in common economic, political, or ideological interest.” Due to limitations in the primary sources for Tang social history, Dalby has cautioned against using ideological or social differences to explain the Niu-Li factional conflict. Instead, he has identified “a few leaders on both sides,” who were “in pursuit of political power, and they attracted supporters who hoped to share in the spoils”; Dalby, “Court Politics,” pp. 639–40.

²⁹ For a treatment of Li Deyu’s garden poetry and political fortunes, see Xiaoshan Yang, “Li Deyu’s Pingquan Villa: Forming an Emblem from the Tang to the Song,” *AM* 3d ser. 17.2, pp. 45–88.

³⁰ Wang Yucheng 王禹稱, “Pengdang lun” 朋黨論, *Xiaochu ji* 小畜集 (SKQS edn.) 15, pp. 9a–10a. The original source of this quotation from Wenzong is Sima Guang 司馬光, comp., *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) 245, p. 7899.

³¹ Also see Luo, *Bei Song dangzheng yanjiu*, p. 4.

concept of faction itself in relative terms, suggesting that factionalism was in fact a perspectival phenomenon subject to the abuses of court politics. He suggested that ministerial coalitions were not necessarily unethical political affiliations in and of themselves. He also lamented the fate of the victims of the Great Proscription, claiming that “their intention was to preserve fame and culture, and to expel flattery and wickedness; although they contradicted the Great Way, they still did not forsake rectitude.”³² Even if this anti-eunuch coalition might have employed collusive means and polemical language to purge the empire of malefactors, neither these ends nor means deviated from the path of righteousness.

Shifting his gaze from the past to the present, Li maintained that his adversaries at court were a faction in the true sense of the word: “they slander and frame superior men... they stealthily employ the methods of classical (*ru* 儒) learning to support great thievery.” In both the Eastern Han and in Li’s own time, moralistic polemics could be employed for sinister purposes to frame innocent men like himself: “the [victims of the] Great Proscription of the Eastern Han were criminals by the standards of their age, and the ‘wicked factions’ of the present are also like [them].” Deflecting their accusations of factionalism, Li Deyu argued that his powerful enemies were a true faction of petty men, who were “employing perverse ways to embark upon the paths of wickedness.” By creating binary oppositions between *junzi* and *xiaoren*, Li tarred his adversaries with the brush of factionalism and proclaimed his own innocence.

Li Deyu’s “Discourse on Factions” influenced Northern Song faction theorists and factional rhetoricians, who used a similar polarizing rhetoric to assert that their enemies were the ones who were truly factious. According to Li’s definition, petty-man factionalizers could manipulate accusations of factionalism for malign purposes, and could delude monarchs into purging the exemplary ministers whose presence could have prevented dynastic ruin. As early as the late-tenth century, the Niu-Li factional conflict would become a frame of reference for interpreting Song political practices. The histories of the Latter Han and the late-Tang served as analogies for Northern Song political theorists, who were certain that factionalism was both a cause and an effect of dynastic collapse, which was inevitable unless monarchs could select superior men who would selflessly serve the monarchy, dynasty, and polity.

³² Li Deyu 李德裕, “Pengdang lun” 朋黨論, *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983) 709, pp. 17b–18a.

NORTHERN SONG “DISCOURSES ON FACTIONS”

From the early-eleventh century onward, “Discourses on Factions” (*pengdang lun*) became a literary subgenre in its own right, as theorists directly responded to earlier ideas. The most salient examples from the Northern Song have survived in the collected works of five literati and statesmen – Wang Yucheng, Ouyang Xiu, Sima Guang, Su Shi, and Qin Guan (treated individually, below).³³ Veiling contemporary political debates beneath abstract political theory, these texts simultaneously functioned on two levels: as immediate political tools and as contributions to a larger intellectual tradition. Such authors used classical and historical references to create dialogues with the past. They returned to a handful of textual fragments from the *Analects*, the *Book of Documents* and the *Narratives of Zuo* (and, to a lesser extent, the *Book of Changes*) to offer authoritative definitions of factionalism. Historical analogism also came into play, as faction theorists provided interpretations of earlier factional conflicts of the Han, Tang, and even the early-Northern Song, as negative examples to be avoided in the present. Every Northern Song faction theorist worked within these two overlapping frames of reference to divide the political landscape between affiliations of petty and superior men.

Even though faction theorists were operating within a shared classical and historical context, their interpretations of the discourse of factionalism and definitions of the term faction reflected individual interpretations of the classics and history. Some authors of *pengdang lun* constructed objective definitions of the term *dang* that unambiguously linked names with things, the descriptor “faction” with past and present political affiliations. Others were far more subjective in their definitions, arguing that *dang* had little or no objective existence, possessing only subjective existence in the eye of the beholder. Some used “faction” to refer exclusively to malign political affiliations of petty men, while others exclusively employed it to refer to benign political affiliations of superior men. One arch-relativist went so far as to claim that factions

³³ A sixth example, Liu Anshi’s 劉安世 (1048–1125) “Discourse on the Harm of Factions” (“Lun pengdang zhi bi” 論朋黨之弊), covered similar ground as the *pengdang lun* of his intellectual and political mentor Sima Guang. Liu warned monarchs that their inability to discern *junzi* and *xiaoren* had been the root cause of the collapse of the Han and Tang dynasties: “There were true factions that could not be expelled, and false factions that could not be distinguished. This is truly the pivot between order and chaos, rise and fall.” During the Great Proscription of the Eastern Han, “treacherous men” falsely accused “the worthies of the empire” of factionalism, and the last monarchs of the dynasty could not tell the difference. In the Niu-Li conflict of the late-Tang, “true factions” of *xiaoren* struggled for control of the bureaucracy, until no *junzi* remained to stabilize the court. See Liu, “Lun pengdang zhi bi,” in Liu Anshi, *Jinyan ji* 盡言集 (SKQS edn.) 12, pp. 17a–17b.

did not exist at all, since superior and petty men themselves constructed variant definitions of factions and factionalism. But in every case, no matter the definitions, Northern Song faction theorists used polarizing language to posit binary distinctions between superior and petty men. Invariably, such representations justified the retention of the author's own court cohort, in contrast to the ranks of their adversaries, petty men who deserved to be expelled. Each "Discourse on Factions" was simultaneously a theoretical discourse on political abstractions and a calculated plea for continued monarchical patronage.

WANG YUCHENG: FACTIONS OF SUPERIOR MEN?

Late in the tenth century, the literatus and statesman Wang Yucheng 王禹稱 (954–1001) wrote the first major "Discourse on Factions" of the Northern Song. A predecessor of the Ancient Prose (*guwen* 古文) movement and a writer who bridged late-Tang and late-Northern Song faction theory, Wang elaborated upon the dichotomizing rhetoric of Li Deyu while formulating a more expansive definition of factionalism that influenced Ouyang Xiu.³⁴ Wang's essay cannot be dated conclusively, but was most likely written during the late 980s, when emperor Taizong's 太宗 (r. 976–997) court was divided by policy debates that were as much factional as generational.³⁵ The old guard of early-Song ministers squared off against a recently-promoted class of examination candidates to debate the policy concerning a second offensive against the Khitan Liao 遼 empire that would reclaim the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan 燕 and Yun 雲, unredeemed Tang territory that Taizong had failed to recapture a decade earlier.³⁶ A literary prodigy, Wang Yucheng earned the *jinshi* degree in 983, and was fast-tracked into academic and historiographic posts in the capital. According to his *Song History* biography, Wang participated in court debates over border policy in the late 980s, urging the emperor to adopt a more aggressive policy to deter Liao encroachment.³⁷ For the remainder of the reign,

³⁴ For a discussion of Wang Yucheng's role in the development of Northern Song faction theory, see Luo, *Bei Song dangzheng yanjiu*, pp. 4–5.

³⁵ Wang's modern-day biographer Xu Gui 徐規 suggests that Wang wrote his "Discourse on Factions" in 988, but affirms that it could not have been completed after 991. See Xu Gui, *Wang Yucheng shiji zhuzuo biannian* 王禹稱事迹著作編年 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), pp. 61–62. Also see Shen Songqin 沈松勤, *Bei Song wenren yu dangzheng* 北宋文人與黨爭 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 49–50 and Luo, *Bei Song dangzheng yanjiu*, pp. 11–12.

³⁶ For more information on the factional conflict of the early Northern Song, see He Guan-huan 何冠環, *Songchu pengdang yu Taiping xingguo sannian jinshi* 宋初朋黨與太平興國三年進士 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), pp. 24–40.

³⁷ Tuo Tuo 脫脫, comp., *Song shi* 宋史 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977) 293, pp. 9793–94.

Wang bounced between remonstrance posts at court and administrative posts in the provinces; unfortunately the exact political circumstances that informed his “Discourse on Factions” cannot be reconstructed with any degree of certainty.³⁸ Wang Yucheng’s essay was not an idle literary exercise, since it can be read as a guarded defense against accusations of factionalism, even if the identity of his accusers and the nature of the charges against him are uncertain.

Wang’s “Discourse on Factions” interpreted the recurrence of factionalism in the Song’s fourth decade as a sign of premature dynastic collapse. When Wang analyzed the history of factions from the distant antiquity until the late-Tang, he concluded that factionalism, at least in post-classical history, inevitably led to the victory of petty men and the decline of superior men. Offering a cursory reading of the political history of the late-Tang and the Niu-Li factional conflict, Wang intimated that factional conflict had precipitated the collapse of both dynasties. Warning of similarly dire consequences for the Song court, Wang echoed Wenzong’s famous last words, mentioned above, about the difficulty in “eliminating these factions from court.”³⁹

Aside from this single historical analogy, Wang Yucheng’s frame of reference was almost exclusively classical, since he maintained that “the origin of factions lay in distant antiquity.” Reinterpreting the *Narratives of Zuo*, Wang developed a teleological reading of ancient history, claiming that the origins of factionalism could be traced back to the enlightened reigns of Yao and Shun. Adopting the binary vocabulary of classical learning, he imparted an original spin to the classical narrative of the Eight Primes, Eight Paragons, and Four Fiends. In Wang’s retelling:

The origin of factions lies in the distant past, in the time of Yao and Shun. The Eight Primes and the Eight Paragons were factions of superior men. The lineage 祖 of the Four Fiends 四凶 was a faction of petty men. Only Yao possessed sufficient virtue to transform them so they would not harm governance. Hence, he retained both. Only Shun could manifest good and enlighten evil, and balanced their disorder and patterning. Thus, he distinguished both.⁴⁰

Here Wang interwove the disparate strands of post-classical faction theory – the concepts: superior men, petty men, and, most importantly, factions – into a new conceptual whole. He used *dang* in unprec-

³⁸ Luo Jiaxiang, “Bei Song ‘junzi you dang lun’ shuping” 北宋‘君子有黨論’述評, *Huazhong shifan daxue xuebao (zheshhe ban)* 華中師範大學學報 (哲社版) 1989.5, p. 70.

³⁹ Wang, “Pengdang lun” 15, pp. 9a–10a.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

edented ways, stretching the label to cover *junzi* like the Eight Primes and Paragons as well as *xiaoren* like the Four Fiends. His concession that superior men could form factions would be enormously influential to Ouyang Xiu, when he wrote his own “Discourse on Factions” a half-century later.⁴¹

For Wang Yucheng, “faction” was not necessarily a word loaded with negative connotations. But since factions of petty were far more prevalent and powerful than those of superior men, they would inevitably destroy the state, making factionalism, on the whole, a destructive phenomenon. Since no monarch since the time of Yao and Shun had fully embodied the Way of balanced and public-minded rulership, *xiaoren* would almost always defeat *junzi* one way or another. Wang Yucheng projected his faction theory into the future, predicting that all dynastic polities would self-destruct when factions of petty men deceived unvigilant monarchs. Consequently, since the time of Yao and Shun,

superior men have never emerged victorious over petty men. This is the reason why order 理 is rare and disorder 亂 is plentiful. Where a superior man remains upright, a petty man engages in flattery. Whereas flattery submits to the ruler’s will, uprightness displeases the ruler’s ears. The ruler of men despises what is unpleasant and delights in what is submissive. Thus, the Way of petty men waxes as the Way of superior men wanes.⁴²

Throughout history, Wang insisted, post-classical rulers had forsaken their chief responsibility and burden: to distinguish the factions of petty men from those of superior men. Hence, the waning of *junzi* and the waxing of *xiaoren* could be explained by the decline of the ancient Way of rulership. In Wang’s view, dynastic polities were extraordinarily fragile entities; once malign factions of petty men deceived rulers, superior men could not prevent the state from collapsing.

OUYANG XIU DEFENDS FAN ZHONGYAN: EITHER SUPERIOR MEN FORM FACTIONS, OR FACTIONS ARE FIGMENTS

Wang Yucheng’s concession that superior men could form factions proved useful to Ouyang Xiu, who attempted to neutralize the factious labels that his opponents applied to his reforming coalition. Written during the early-Qingli 慶曆 era (1041–1049), his “Discourse on Factions” is the next surviving example of the genre. During the late-1030s

⁴¹ See Luo, “Bei Song ‘junzi you dang lun’ shuping,” p. 67; Shen, *Bei Song wenren*, p. 49.

⁴² Wang, “Pengdang lun” 15, pp. 9a–10a.

and early-1040s, an affiliation of reform-minded officials led by Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052) came into prominence at Renzong's 仁宗 (r. 1022–1063) court.⁴³ Fan antagonized conservative elements in the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, harshly (and opportunistically) critiquing the grand councillor Lü Yijian 呂夷簡 (979–1044) for deviating from proper court ritual. In 1036, while serving as prefect of Kaifeng 開封府, Fan had accused Lü of monopolizing power and packing the bureaucracy with loyal subordinates. In engineering Fan's dismissal from the capital, Lü “accused him of increasingly occupying remonstrance posts, of recommending and promoting a faction (*pengdang*), and of sowing discord 離間 between the ruler and his officials.”⁴⁴ Within a month, most of Fan's court cohort – including Ouyang Xiu, Han Qi 韓琦 (1008–1075), Fu Bi 富弼 (1008–1075), Yin Zhu 尹洙 (1001–1047), and Yu Jing 余靖 (1000–1064) – had been demoted to regional administrative posts on charges of factionalism.⁴⁵ In James T. C. Liu's explanation, Fan Zhongyan's demotion “created an opposition faction within the bureaucracy, for the scholar-officials who sympathized with Fan now rallied to the cause of maintaining their ideological autonomy and to continue criticizing... Lü Yijian.”⁴⁶ A poem by Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012–1067) lionized Fan, Ouyang, Yin, and Yu as “four worthies 四賢” who defended the public good.⁴⁷ Cai's poem had the opposite effect, and in the intervening years Renzong vigilantly prosecuted ministers he deemed factious, issuing an admonitory edict against factionalism in 1038.⁴⁸ In the early-1040s, ministers who either were linked to Fan

⁴³ For an in-depth analysis of the political history of the Qingli 慶歷 era, see James T. C. Liu, *Ou-yang Hsiu: An Eleventh-Century Neo-Confucianist* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1967), pp. 40–64; For a more recent reassessment of Fan Zhongyan's political networks and reform policies, see Qi Xia 漆侠, “Fan Zhongyan jitian yu Qingli xinzheng, du Ouyang Xiu ‘Pengdang lun’ shu hou” 范仲淹集團與慶歷新政讀歐陽修‘朋黨論’書後, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 1992.3, pp. 126–40.

⁴⁴ Li Tao 李燾, *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979–1993; hereafter, *XZZZTCB*) 118, p. 2784. This is not a verbatim transcript of Lü Yijian's arguments before the throne, only a brief précis.

⁴⁵ *XZZZTCB* 118, pp. 2785–87.

⁴⁶ Liu, *Ou-yang Hsiu*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ *XZZZTCB* 118, p. 2787. The text of the poem “Four Worthies and One Unworthy” 四賢一不肖 can be found in Cai Xiang 蔡襄, *Cai Xiang ji* 蔡襄集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996) 1, p. 8. The eponymous “Four Worthies” were Fan Zhongyan, Ouyang Xiu, Yin Shu, and Yu Jing. The eponymous “One Unworthy” was Gao Ruonuo 高若訥 (997–1055), a lieutenant of Lü Yijian, who had been savagely lambasted by Ouyang Xiu, and summarily dismissed from court.

⁴⁸ In issuing the edict, Renzong was prompted by the state councillor Li Ruogu 李若谷, who memorialized the throne: “In recent years, civic mores have deteriorated into wickedness, exclusively using faction to the benevolent and good. Of petty and superior men, each have their own kind, and now as soon as they are seen as a faction, I fear that righteous ministers will not be able to support themselves.” See *XZZZTCB* 122, pp. 2881–82. A slightly different formulation appears in *Song shi* 291, p. 9740.

Zhongyan or opposed Lü Yijian continued to be demoted from the metropolitan bureaucracy on charges of factionalism.⁴⁹

Still, Fan's opposition bloc could be neither contained nor conciliated, and a military crisis made Fan's rehabilitation possible. In the midst of a border war with the Tangut Xi Xia 西夏, in which he successfully defended the northwestern frontier, Fan Zhongyan rose to the Council of State in 1043. Lü Yijian finally resigned from the councillorship on grounds of illness, preparing the way for Ouyang Xiu and many of Fan's other supporters to enter the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, where they formed a dominant, but short-lived, reforming coalition. Intent on shoring up the empire's administration, military, and finances, Fan proposed a package of ten reform policies in 1043.⁵⁰ Ultimately, these so-called Qingli Reforms (*Qingli xinzheng* 慶曆新政) alienated the old guard of officialdom and emperor Renzong, and fired the imaginations of the next generation of officials. Among other things, Fan sought to improve the workings of personnel administration by eliminating favoritism and incompetence, and to reconfigure the criteria of bureaucratic recruitment to stress statecraft skills. But after the border crisis abated, and Renzong decided to reach an indemnified settlement with the Tanguts, Fan's commanding role in the last border war became a political liability. With the frontier situation stabilized, the Qingli administrative and military reforms were placed on the back burner.

Moreover, Renzong had come to believe the allegations that Fan and his supporters were indeed a treacherous faction. In a court audience held in 1044, Renzong questioned his councillors if factions of *junzi* had ever existed.⁵¹ The usual answer to such a loaded question would have been a blanket denial. But Fan Zhongyan put his political future on the line by unexpectedly answering Renzong's question in the affirmative, challenging the conventional wisdom by claiming that political affiliations of superior men could indeed be called factions. Implicit in Fan's answer was the admission that he and his comrades comprised a faction of superior men, a radical notion that overturned the established definitions of factional rhetoric. Fan anecdotally argued that factionalism was a recurring natural phenomenon, but not necessarily a destructive one:

⁴⁹ In 1041, Ye Qingchen 葉清清, Wu Zunlu 吳遵路, Song Xiang 宋庠, Zheng Jian 鄭戩 were all dismissed to regional administration after Lü accused them of forming a faction; see *XZZTJCB* 132, pp. 3127–28.

⁵⁰ *XZZTJCB* 143, pp. 3431–44.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 148, p. 3580.

When Your servant was serving on the border, he observed that those who delighted in war formed a faction (*pengdang*) on their own, and that those who feared war also formed a faction on their own. When [Your servant] served at court, the factions of the wicked and the righteous 邪正之黨 are also like this. This is something that Your sagacious mind can scrutinize. If [officials] affiliate (*peng* 朋) beneficially, then how can they possibly harm the state?⁵²

In effect, Fan was insinuating that he and his cohort had formed a benign faction of superior men, which was perfectly natural. Neither cynical nor clumsy, his “superior men form factions” theory was consistent with the binary thinking of his earlier positions. In a piece of private correspondence from the early 1030s, Fan maintained that two factions 二黨 had always been in conflict throughout imperial history: one of “lofty words and conduct” 危言危行 and the other of “yielding words and conduct” 遜言遜行.⁵³ Factions of upright idealists ensured political stability, while factions of obsequious careerists were harbingers of dynastic disorder. While Fan Zhongyan did not explicitly identify the conflicting factions as “petty men” versus “superior men,” he was admitting that *pengdang* could be benign as well as destructive, in a departure from Wang Yucheng, who obliquely conceded that superior men could form factions.⁵⁴ But Fan rejected Wang’s fatalistic view that petty men would always win every factional conflict, instead asserting that enlightened rulers could distinguish benign and malign factions, thereby preserving the polity.

To support Fan’s theory of benign factions, Ouyang Xiu’s “Discourse on Factions” redefined factionalism by decoupling the term “faction” from its negative association with “petty men” he also reimagined factions as inherently ethical affiliations of “superior men.” First, Ouyang employed the binary vocabulary of the *Analects* to make the usual oppositions between superior and petty, and righteousness 義 and gain 利. We saw, above, that in the commentarial tradition of the *Analects*, only the petty made factions; thus it followed that superior men were by their natures not factious. Ouyang built an argument that reversed this classical message. He maintained that affiliations of

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹, “Shang zizheng yanshilang shu” 上資政晏侍郎書, in *Fan Zhongyan quanji* 范仲淹全集 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2002) 10, p. 235–36; also Shen, *Bei Song wenren*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ Peter Bol’s analysis of this letter similarly distinguishes between idealistic and careerist officials. See Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, p. 168.

junzi “were based on a common Way 同道,” while those of *xiaoren* were “based on common gain 同利.”⁵⁵ Ouyang denied the label “faction” to associations of petty men:

Thus, Your servant maintains that petty men are without factions (*wu dang*), and that only superior men have them. Why is this so? Official salaries and profits are what petty men enjoy; wealth and commodities are what petty men covet. When they seek profit together, they will temporarily form an affiliation (*dang*), but it is erroneous to consider them to be a faction (*pengdang*). When they see profit and contend to be first to take it, or when the profits have been exhausted and they squabble over what remains, then they will cruelly injure each other.⁵⁶

Selfish gain could bring petty men together, but only on an *ad hoc* basis, and these cliques were not legitimate factions in the true sense of the word. While factions of petty men could not unite into true factions,

this is not so for superior men. The Way and righteousness are what they defend; loyalty and trust are what they practice; and fame and integrity are what they value. Since they have cultivated themselves, their common Way 同道 is of mutual benefit. Since they serve the state, their common hearts succeed together, and they are always as one.⁵⁷

Implicit here is the admission that while Fan Zhongyan and his cohort might have formed a faction, the affiliation was founded upon a shared ethical vision to preserve and defend the dynasty and polity. Ouyang implored Renzong to reject the accusations made by Fan’s political adversaries, and embrace this new definition: “To be a ruler of men, one has only to expel the false factions of petty men and to employ the true factions of superior men.” Since the subtext was obvious, Ouyang Xiu had no need to identify Fan Zhongyan or his comrades by name.

Ouyang Xiu was in effect reconfiguring the classical vocabulary and revising history to defend his revisionist faction theory. He reinterpreted the mythic narrative of the Eight Primes and the Four Fiends, glimpsed in Wang Yucheng’s “Pengdang lun,” as a confirmation of his *junzi*-oriented redefinition:

During the age of Yao, four petty men, including Gong Gong 共工 and Huan Dou 驩兜 [two of the Four Fiends] formed a faction. Sixteen superior men, the Eight Primes and the Eight Paragons,

⁵⁵ *XZZTJCB* 148.3580–2; *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 17, pp. 267–68.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

also formed a faction. Shun assisted Yao in expelling the Four Fiends, who were a faction of petty men, and in employing the Eight Primes and the Eight Paragons, who were factions of superior men. Henceforth, the empire of Yao was greatly ordered.⁵⁸

As Yao's loyal minister and future successor, Shun proved his worth by separating *xiaoren* from *junzi*, and perhaps Ouyang was subtly claiming a similar role for himself.

Ouyang interpreted the political history of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, gleaned from the *Book of Documents*, with fiendish ingenuity. He contrasted Zhou 紂, the depraved last ruler of the Shang 商 dynasty, with the sagely king Wu of the ascendant Zhou 周. The Shang ruler had employed a "myriad men, each of whom had his own different heart. One might claim that they did not form a faction, and thus, Zhou's state was conquered." In and of itself, factionalism had not doomed the Shang dynasty; rather, it was the tyrant Zhou's failure to expel these petty men from court that invited the Zhou conquest. On the other hand, the ministers of king Wu of Zhou, "formed one great faction... and when [the state of] Zhou employed them, it flourished." Thus Ouyang credited the presence of a faction of superior men for the inauguration and perpetuation of the Zhou ethico-political order. Factions of superior men, *dang* in the true sense of the word, had brought about a golden age of governance when Yao and Shun had been wise enough to employ them.

Fast-forwarding to the imperial era, Ouyang reinterpreted the political history of the Eastern Han and the late-Tang. Like Wang Yucheng, Ouyang admitted that petty men could slanderously apply the label of faction to purge superior men from governance, as during the Great Proscription of the Eastern Han, which had pushed the dynasty past the point of salvation. In the waning years of the Tang, the mass execution of "all of the famed gentlemen at court" during the reign of the penultimate emperor Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 889-904), a captive of eunuch misrule, had also triggered another dynastic collapse. In Ouyang's historical analogy, when rulers ignorantly purged factions of superior men, their states were invariably doomed to "chaos and collapse." Thus Ouyang was forced to reclassify some of the so-called factions of the Han and Tang as legitimate. The lesson for the present time was that "the clues to the rise and fall, order and chaos, of a state

⁵⁸ This extract and the following short quotations are all *ibid*. It is possible that by describing Gong Gong and Huan Dou as a "faction," Ouyang is contradicting his claim that petty men cannot form factions in the true sense of the word.

rest with the ruler,” and the supreme act of rulership was factional discrimination. Ouyang hinted that the Song could be exempted from the cycle of dynastic rise and fall, if only Renzong could retain factions of superior men and purge the pseudo-factions of petty men.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, their radical reconfiguration of the discursive field of factionalism, the court coalition of Fan Zhongyan and Ouyang Xiu continued to arouse Renzong’s suspicions. Unconvinced by Ouyang’s claims that the only true factions were affiliations of superior men, the emperor came to believe Fan’s chorus of critics, who accused the grand councillor of having formed a pernicious faction. Fan’s self-incriminating admission was all the excuse the eunuch Lan Yuanzhen 藍元震 (n.d.) required to accuse Fan Zhongyan of leading a faction of fifty or sixty officials, which would soon “fill all the vital positions, deceiving the court and deluding the state.”⁵⁹ Having self-applied the appellation *dang* to their own court coalition in self-defense, Fan and Ouyang were left vulnerable to allegations of factionalism from Lü Yijian’s followers.

In an imperial edict issued late in 1044, Renzong stated: “We have apprehended that in times of utmost order, the [Eight] Paragons and Primes served together at court, and did not form a faction.”⁶⁰ Two months after his contretemps with Renzong, Fan was dispatched to the northwestern frontier on a temporary assignment, and finally fell from the Council of State early in 1045, when Renzong demoted him to a prefectural intendency. Ouyang Xiu had been dismissed from the Council of State and demoted to provincial administration in mid-1044. Many of Fan’s supporters were likewise expelled from the capital by the spring of 1045, when Renzong made the final decision to rescind the Qingli Reforms.⁶¹

From 1044 to 1104, late-Northern Song political practitioners continued to define a faction as an affiliation of self-serving petty men. Subversively and creatively stretching both the classical and historical frames of reference past their breaking point, Ouyang Xiu’s “Discourse on Factions” represented a rhetorical dead-end. Once Renzong, the final arbiter of factionalism, had cast his judgment against Fan Zhongyan and Ouyang Xiu, it was generally understood that making a similar argument with similar rhetoric was an expeditious way to undermine an official career. Politically, Ouyang Xiu had failed to redefine ministerial factions as supporters of the public good, and as integral components of a unitary ethico-political order. As we see below, future political

⁵⁹ *XZZTJCB* 148, p. 3582. ⁶⁰ *XZZTJCB* 153, p. 3718. ⁶¹ *XZZTJCB* 151, p. 3684.

practitioners and theorists would reject, at least publicly, Ouyang's radical redefinition.

Ouyang Xiu provided both counterpart and counterpoint to his "Discourse on Factions" in another work – *New History of the Five Dynasties* (*Xin wudai shi* 新五代史). In a commentary to this masterwork of private historiography, written as a corrective to the *Old History of the Five Dynasties* (*Jiu wudai shi* 舊五代史) of 974, he presented a variant interpretation of factionalism in post-classical history.⁶² In Chapter 35, "Biographies of Six Courtiers of the Tang" ("Tang liuchen zhuan" 唐六臣傳), Ouyang rewrote the narratives of ministers who had disloyally forsaken the collapsed Tang to serve the usurping Later Liang 後梁 (907–923), the first of the Five Dynasties. In his epilogue, he reinterpreted the political history of the Eastern Han and late-Tang in a manner that was remarkably consistent with his "Discourse on Factions."

The question of ministerial disloyalty was a major ethical concern in the *New History of the Five Dynasties*, which covered a half-century of political instability. To cite an extreme and famous example, Ouyang Xiu condemned the minister Feng Dao 馮道 (882–954), who had served four out of the Five Dynasties as "a man utterly devoid of integrity or shame," qualities that formed the Way of exemplary officials.⁶³ Here, Ouyang not only overturned the praiseful judgments of the *Old History of the Five Dynasties*, but in addition used the contrasting example of a chaste widow in order to throw a harsh light upon what he saw as Feng Dao's political prostitution. The presence of cynical ministers like Feng Dao could (and frequently did) doom a dynasty: "Without integrity everything is acceptable, without shame anything is done... when high officials will accept or do anything, how can chaos in the empire, and the collapse of the state be eluded?"⁶⁴

In the epilogue to "Biographies of Six Courtiers of the Tang," Ouyang Xiu expanded his condemnation of ministerial perfidy to establish causal connections between court factionalism and dynastic instability. He condemned the six as a faction of petty men who had

⁶² According to Tze-ki Hon, Ouyang exhaustively revised Xue Juzheng's 薛居正 (912–981) original text to accord with his mid-eleventh century sensibilities. Among other things, Ouyang denied the Mandate of Heaven to the Five Dynasties, condemned Khitan perfidy, and moralized about the ethico-political obligations of classical scholars. See Tze-ki Hon, *The Yijing and Chinese Politics: Classical Commentary and Literati Activism in the Northern Song Period*, 960–1127 (Albany: State U. New York P., 2005), pp. 89–95.

⁶³ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin wudai shi* 新五代史 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 54, p. 611. See Richard L. Davis, trans., *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2004), pp. lxxi–ii, 438; Hon, *The Yijing and Chinese Politics*, pp. 22–25; Shen, *Bei Song dangzheng yu wenren*, p. 54.

⁶⁴ Ouyang, *Xin wudai shi* 54, p. 611; see Davis, *Historical Records*, p. 438.

falsely accused superior men of factionalism. Of course, in describing the petty men as a *pengdang*, Ouyang contradicted himself yet again, perhaps indicating how expedient his arguments of 1044 had been (or would be). In his “Discourse on Factions,” Ouyang had claimed that the victims of the Eastern Han Great Proscription, all superior men had been slandered with the false charges of factionalism. In his *New History of the Five Dynasties*, Ouyang turned this specific event into a historical principle: petty men could frame their adversaries with slanderous charges of factionalism.

Yet, when Ouyang the historian analyzed the causes and effects of Han and Tang factionalism, he deviated from his “Discourse on Factions.” While conceding that superior men could enter into benign affiliations, he refrained from defining these blocs as *dang* or *pengdang*. Ouyang acknowledged that the distinction between factions of petty and superior men was relative, and petty men could blur it even further. In his *New History*, Ouyang retreated from the definition of a *dang* as a benign affiliation of *junzi*. Instead, he embraced a subjectivist definition that depended upon the ethical character of those political practitioners who actually applied the label to adversaries.

In the epilogue to “Biographies of Six Courtiers of the Tang,” as in his “Discourse on Factions,” Ouyang Xiu attributed the fall of the Eastern Han and the Tang to the persistence and recurrence of affiliations of petty men at court:

At the end of both the Han and Tang, only petty men remained at court. Where were its superior men? As the Han faced imminent collapse, accusations of factionalism were first employed to ban and imprison the wise and superior men of the empire. Those who remained at court were all petty men; the Han dynasty followed them in perishing. As the Tang faced imminent collapse, factionalism similarly was employed first [as a pretext] to murder the court’s entire cohort of gentlemen. Those who remained were all mediocrities of little worth who exploited perilous times; the Tang followed them in perishing.⁶⁵

Notably absent here is any use of *dang* applied to either *junzi* or *xiaoren*. Furthermore, in his *New History*, Ouyang mentioned affiliations of superior men as “deriving from their common character 類同” as moral exemplars, but never explicitly called these “factions,” as he had in 1044. Moreover, he refrained from applying the appellation *dang* to

⁶⁵ Ouyang, *Xin wudai shi* 35, pp. 362–63. My translation is adapted from Davis’s *Historical Records*, pp. 293–95.

sinister cliques of petty men as well, suggesting that factions lacked objective historical existence. Perhaps Ouyang was moving toward treating “faction” as a flexible label and urging his readers to be suspicious of any historical use of it.

In his *New History*, Ouyang Xiu went a step further, claiming that the term had no objective referent outside of political discourse. Repeatedly, he insisted that *dang* was a false label, a pretext for slandering superior men:

Those intent on emptying the common people’s state and purging its superior men will invariably lodge accusations of factionalism; those intent on isolating the powers of the people’s ruler and masking his eyes and ears will invariably lodge accusations of factionalism; those intent on usurping the empire for surrender to another will invariably lodge accusations of factionalism.

When *xiaoren* purged *junzi* from court on such trumped-up charges, nothing could arrest the fall of dynasties. Superior men were always vulnerable to trumped up charges: any mutual affiliations whatsoever between superior men could serve as ammunition against themselves:

One’s relatives and old associates could be called one’s faction; one’s companions and friends could be called one’s faction; fellow officeholders and classmates could be called one’s faction; even student disciples and former clerks could be called one’s faction.

While coalitions of both superior and petty men possessed objective historical existence, “faction” was in fact a relative distinction that existed only within the bounds of political rhetoric. In his *New History*, Ouyang Xiu bitterly resented the way the term *dang* could be abused, and distinguished the word “faction” from the real-world political associations that this term could be maliciously used to describe.

Even though he invoked similar classical and historical authorities in the “Discourse on Factions” and the epilogue to the “Biographies of Six Courtiers of the Tang,” the two texts present contradictory definitions, indicating that Ouyang’s faction theory was evolving. The uncertain provenance of the epilogue’s composition further complicates matters. The dating of it is inconclusive, for Ouyang began working on *Xin wudai shi* between 1036 and 1039, during a period of exile from court. Thereafter, he revised the text sporadically during lulls in his bureaucratic career in the 1050s, and the finished work was not published until 1077, five years after his death.⁶⁶ If the epilogue predated

⁶⁶ Liu, *Ou-yang Hsiu*, pp. 106–7. The finished work was not published until 1077, five years after Ouyang’s death. Also see Davis, *Historical Records*, p.xlvii.

his “Discourse on Factions,” a hypothesis that is less plausible than the alternative, then Ouyang Xiu might have abandoned his relativist definition of factionalism to accept an absolute definition of a faction as an affiliation of superior men. Such a sequence would cast serious doubts upon the sincerity of Ouyang’s motives in rhetorically linking the term “faction” with the concepts of “superior men” and “righteousness” in 1044. If Ouyang’s “Discourse on Factions” represented merely a calculated attempt to save Fan Zhongyan from a near-fatal slip of the tongue, this could explain why later political practitioners refrained from claiming that superior men formed factions.

But if the epilogue postdated “Pengdang lun,” which seems more likely given the lengthy gestation period of the *New History*, then Ouyang Xiu probably revised his absolutist definition later in life.⁶⁷ Considering the length of Ouyang Xiu’s literary career, the *New History* preface probably represents a relatively mature and authoritative example of his thinking on factionalism. James T. C. Liu claimed that Ouyang’s revised definition of *dang* resulted from the circumstances surrounding his forced dismissal from court in 1044, when the opposition accused Fan Zhongyan of the crime of factionalism. In his recent translation of the *New History of the Five Dynasties*, Richard L. Davis has taken exception to Liu’s interpretation, arguing that Ouyang’s “Discourse of Factions” was not simply a ploy to defend Fan Zhongyan. Even so, Davis also believes that Ouyang’s approach to factions underwent “considerable evolution since 1044... with Ouyang Xiu warning against false labels even as he defends the right of moral men to associate.”⁶⁸ Having been slanderously labeled as a member of a malign faction, Ouyang might have abandoned his absolutist definition of “faction” to maintain that factions possessed no objective existence outside of political discourse, while defending the right of loyal ministers to affiliate.

Either way, the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in Ouyang Xiu’s two theories of faction illustrate just how slippery faction theory and factional rhetoric could be, and how a writer of such prodigious output could arrive at opposing definitions of faction at two points in his career. In both texts, Ouyang subtly manipulated both the classics and history to posit different sets of relations between the descriptor *dang* and the political affiliations it described. Yet, in both texts, Ouyang used the same polarizing rhetoric, and urged rulers to properly distinguish affiliations of superior men from those of petty men, and to discern

⁶⁷ James T. C. Liu has alluded to this possibility, interpreting Ouyang’s epilogue as a concession “that factionalism did not exist in most cases.” See Liu, *Ou-yang Hsiu*, pp. 54–55.

⁶⁸ Davis *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*, pp. xlix–l.

truthful from false political rhetoric. But Ouyang offered few specific criteria for rulers to use to discern loyal and treacherous ministers. Inside every court, petty men lurked while superior men fought for their political lives, and only the most enlightened rulers could discern the difference between the word “faction” and the thing itself.

SIMA GUANG: SUPERHEROES VS. SUPERVILLAINS

Ouyang Xiu’s “Discourse on Factions” stimulated a burst of interest in faction theory among the next generation of Northern Song statesmen who were active at court from the 1050s through the 1080s. Many subsequent *pengdang lun* were replies and rebuttals to one – or both – of Ouyang’s two written statements on factionalism. Even before the implementation of Wang Anshi’s 王安石 (1021–1086) New Policies in 1069–70, the origin-point of the factional conflict, leading literati were offering variant definitions. Learning from the failure of Fan Zhongyan’s Qingli Reforms, with which they were largely sympathetic, later political practitioners did not publicly admit that superior men could form factions and continued to interpret the problematic of factionalism to define the boundaries of the political community.

Possibly the most influential of these thinkers was Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086). He was a leading political figure at court and an eminent historian-in-exile. A member of the *jinshi* class of 1038, he began his political career early in the 1040s, in the wake of the failed Qingli Reforms. During the mid-1050s, when members of Fan Zhongyan’s reform coalition, such as Ouyang Xiu and Fu Bi, were rehabilitated, Sima made a name for himself as a potential candidate for the Council of State. Linked with conservative elements at court, he circulated his writings among the powerful to enable his rise in the Censorate. In influential essays and memorials written in the late-1050s and early-1060s, he postulated that ensuring “the moral order of the empire depended upon perfecting the institutions of government and that the principles for government could be known.”⁶⁹ Peter Bol has argued that the focus of Sima’s program for dynastic survival was to rectify the bureaucracy according to its existing personnel procedures and traditional hierarchical structures.⁷⁰ For Sima Guang, the rise and fall of polities was a function of the ethical composition and integrity of the bureaucracy.

⁶⁹ Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, p. 214.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 218–22.

Conclusively dated to 1058, the message and medium of Sima Guang's "Discourse on Factions" are consistent with his essays and memorials, mentioned above.⁷¹ Like Wang Yucheng and Ouyang Xiu, Sima used classical and historical allusions and conceived of the responsibilities of rulership as essentially discriminative: to distinguish superior from petty men. Both Sima and Ouyang shared a conception of the polity as a fragile enterprise, whose integrity and survival depended upon superior men.⁷² Peter Bol has concluded that Sima's conception of political theory distinguished between "public good 公" and "private interest *si 私*," enjoining officials to serve the state and disregard personal agendas.⁷³

Sima defined *junzi* and *xiaoren* according to a set of binaries different from those used by Ouyang Xiu, namely, virtue (*de* 德) versus talent (*cai* 才). In a commentary appended to his *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑), he insisted that petty men were all political skill and no ethical rigor: "Those in whom virtue triumphs over talent are called superior men; those in whom talent triumphs over virtue are called petty men."⁷⁴ In his "Discourse on Factions," Sima Guang used a second set of binary distinctions, equating *junzi* with "public good" and *xiaoren* with "private interest." Since he defined a faction exclusively as an affiliation of petty men, all factions pursued selfish expedients and usurped monarchical authority. Their presence was inimical to the public good, and rulers who indulged them would be complicit in their own downfall. While Sima unquestioningly accepted the *Analects'* linkage between superior men and righteousness, petty men and gain, he insisted that *junzi* could affiliate without being factious.⁷⁵ Sima explained:

When *junzi* cultivate themselves and regulate their hearts, their Way is one of collaboration with others... When their Way flour-

⁷¹ Sima Guang 司馬光, *Chuanjia ji* 傳家集 (SKQS edn.) 64, p. 10b. For a brief analysis of Sima's "Discourse on Faction," which roughly concurs with mine, see Anthony Sariti, "Monarchy, Bureaucracy, and Absolutism in the Political Thought of Su-Ma Kuang," *JAS* 32.1 (November 1972), pp. 53-76.

⁷² Xiao-Bin Ji corroborates my analysis, asserting that in his *Comprehensive Mirror*, Sima Guang "made it clear that the ruler's proper management of personnel played a pivotal role in the fate of the empire." See Xiao-Bin Ji, *Politics and Conservatism in Northern Song China: The Career and Thought of Sima Guang* (Hong Kong: The Chinese U.P., 2004), pp. 12-13.

⁷³ Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, p. 219.

⁷⁴ Sima, *Zizhi tongjian* 1, pp. 14-15; also see Luo, "Bei Song 'junzi you dang lun' shuping," pp. 69-70.

⁷⁵ In a letter to Wang Anshi, Sima directly quoted the *Analects*: "The superior man understands what is righteous; the petty man understands what is advantageous 君子喻於義，小人喻於利." See Sima Guang, "Yu Wang Jiefu shu 與王介甫書," in idem, *Chuanjia ji* 60, p. 5a.

ishes and their merit is made manifest, their reputation comes from their collaboration with others. This is not so for *xiaoren*.⁷⁶

For Sima Guang, “factions” were not simply figments of political discourse, and the term *dang* possessed objective historical reality, but in a limited sense: as destructive affiliations of petty men.

Ever the historian, Sima Guang began his “Discourse on Factions” by discussing the fall of the Tang. He asserted that “what caused the Tang to collapse was neither banditry nor eunuchs, but rather the maladministration of the factions of Li Zongmin and Li Deyu.”⁷⁷ The decadence and dissolution of the Tang polity had been a direct result of the Niu-Li factional conflict; the noxious spread of bandits and eunuchs were external and internal symptoms of the deeper malignancy of factionalism. Ultimate responsibility for it rested with emperor Wenzong.⁷⁸ Without an enlightened ruler-arbiter, Sima Guang believed that the bureaucracy would be engulfed by factional strife.

Invoking classical authority from the *Book of Documents* and the *Narratives of Zuo*, Sima used allegories to urge rulers to properly identify factions. Embracing a fatalistic view of factionalism, he asserted: “In ages of order and chaos, there have always been factions.” From the era of the sage-kings to the present, factions had always sabotaged the polity, “creating enmity and wrestling for power to eliminate each other.” In a flat reading of the *Narratives of Zuo*, Sima praised Yao and Shun for expelling the wicked faction 邪黨 of two of the Four Fiends. Yao and Shun “were able to distinguish clearly the good from the evil; their virtuous work flourished.” In a parallel argument, he attributed the success of the Zhou conquest to factionalism at the Shang court, whose kings were “obscure and muddled, unable to distinguish right from wrong 是非, and their dynasty fell.”

The remainder of the essay admonished rulers about the destructive potential of factionalism, warning that “the rise and fall of dynasties does not lie in factions, but rather in the obscurity and enlightenment of rulers.” In the process, he anachronistically misread textual fragments from the *Book of Documents*. When he cited two admonitions concerning the Way of rulership, Sima reinterpreted the character *dang* as “faction” rather than “partiality.” Sima reconfigured the rhetorical associations in king Wu’s oration, turning the words “without bias and without devia-

⁷⁶ Sima Guang, “Yuezhou Zhang tuiguan zixu” 越州張推官字序, in *Chuanjia ji* 64, p. 7b.

⁷⁷ Sima Guang, “Pengdang lun” 朋黨論, in *Chuanjia ji* 71, pp. 8a–9a. All subsequent quotations of Sima’s essay are taken from the same pages of this work.

⁷⁸ Sariti, “Monarchy, Bureaucracy, and Absolutism,” p. 63.

tion 無偏無黨” into a diatribe against factionalism: “Without bias and without faction, the kingly path is vast and far-reaching.” He reread the Duke of Zhou’s admonition “can you indulge partiality? 孺子其朋” in the “Luo Announcement” as a metaphor for the destructiveness of factionalism: “My young son, can you indulge factions? If you do so, the consequences will be like a fire that begins as a mere spark, but then blazes up until it cannot be extinguished.” By reinterpreting these abstract warnings against partiality as specifically anti-faction, even the dogmatic Sima Guang joined his fellow faction theorists in making creative use of classical hermeneutics.

Throughout his political career, Sima Guang’s black-and-white position on factionalism remained untinged by shades of grey. Resigning from court in protest in 1070 over emperor Shenzong’s 神宗 (r. 1067–1085) continued implementation of the New Policies, Sima accused the reformist Grand Councillor Wang Anshi of having formed a treacherous faction. For the next fifteen years, he lived in exile in Luoyang as the leader of an anti-reformist scholarly circle, devoting his later years to compiling his universal history, the *Comprehensive Mirror*. Like Ouyang Xiu, the other master historian of the Northern Song, Sima Guang retroactively reinterpreted the Tang through the perspective of Northern Song politics, drawing parallels between the two ages of faction.

In his commentary to chapter 245 of the *Comprehensive Mirror*, written at least a decade after his “Discourse on Factions” and during self-imposed exile, Sima hauled out his polarizing rhetoric. Following earlier theorists, Sima used the terminology of the *Analects* – *junzi* and *xiaoren* – to describe political affiliations. Due to variations in character among ministers, Sima Guang insisted, court politics was inherently conflict-prone:

Superior men and petty men cannot tolerate one another, just as ice and coal cannot share the same vessel. Hence, when superior men achieve positions, they expel petty men, and when petty men attain influence, they purge superior men. This is a natural principle.⁷⁹

Sima employed two parallel strings of binaries to describe conflicting affiliations, linking “superior men” with the “public good” (*gong*) and “truthfulness,” and associating “petty men” with “private interest” (*si*):

⁷⁹ Sima, *Zizhi tongjian* 245, pp. 7899–900.

Thus, when superior men promote the worthy and dismiss the unworthy, their hearts reside in the public good; their judgment of affairs is truthful 實. But when petty men praise what they enjoy, and defame what they despise, their hearts reside in selfishness; their judgment of affairs is erroneous 誣. Those who are public-minded and truthful are called the upright; those who are selfish and erroneous are called the partial 黨. This is why the ruler must distinguish between them.

For Sima Guang, factions were the exclusive domain of petty men, for it was unthinkable to him that “upright,” superior, men, endowed with the political virtue of public-mindedness, could ever form factions. The contemporary political implications of Sima’s faction theory were inescapable: the anti-reform opposition had been an affiliation of superior men, while Wang Anshi’s coalition was a pernicious faction of “petty men.”

He further insisted that the final responsibility for allowing Wang Anshi to remain in power rested with Shenzong, whom Sima not so obliquely equated with Tang Wenzong. Elaborating upon his earlier claim that only enlightened monarchs could preserve the ethical integrity of the polity, Sima suggested that the current monarch should have learned from the negative example of the late-Tang:

When an enlightened ruler reigns above, the virtuous are appointed to positions, the talented receive office, and the meritorious are praised. The guilty are punished, the treacherous cannot delude, and the obsequious cannot usurp. If this were so, then how could factions possibly emerge?

Plausible deniability aside, Sima Guang insinuates that Shenzong had missed the mark of enlightened rulership and imperiled his empire, just as the muddled Tang Wenzong had done:

The wicked and the righteous advance together, and defamation and praise intermingle; the choice of whom to retain and forsake does not lie with the ruler, and authority is subverted by men. Thereupon, calumny and iniquity succeed, and factional polemics flourish.

Succumbing to silver-tongued petty men, monarchs simply lost the ability to make these ethical distinctions. Such had been the case of Tang Wenzong, and, by implication, would happen to Song Shenzong:

When Wenzong was plagued by ministerial factionalism, how could he assess the truth and falsehood of praise and slander? ...

How could he ascertain whose hearts were public-minded, and whose were selfish? How could he distinguish who were the superior men, and who were the petty men?

Harping on Wenzong's famous last words, Sima Guang closed off with a rhetorical question: "If factions at court cannot be eliminated, then how can rebels in Hebei?"

Sima Guang's faction theory veiled contemporary politics with historical analogism. He used the descriptor *dang* to objectively and exclusively describe affiliations of petty men, as well as "erroneous" words and "selfish" deeds. Accepting the timeworn axiom that superior men did not form factions, Sima claimed that only affiliations of superior men who epitomized the value of public-mindedness rightfully deserved to serve the monarch.⁸⁰ For Sima's conservative vision of restoring institutional hierarchies to prevail, monarchs were required to be the final arbiters of ethico-political values. He admonished emperors to mark carefully the boundaries between petty and superior men, and to discriminate the claims of factional discourse, and of those making them, according to an objective and highly normative ethical standard.

SU SHI: FATALISTIC RESIGNATION AND DAMAGE CONTROL

Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), who rivaled Ouyang Xiu as the most gifted literatus of the Northern Song, wrote a "Discourse on Factions" that was equally original and anomalous.⁸¹ As the title of Su's "A Continuation of Master Ouyang's Discourse on Factions" ("Xu Ouyang zi pengdang lun" 續歐陽子朋黨論) makes clear, it was a riposte to the faction theory of Ouyang Xiu. In stark contrast to Ouyang, Su Shi used the term *dang* to refer exclusively to affiliations of petty men, implying that superior men could and did not form factions. Even if only superior men rightfully deserved ministerial authority, Su felt that it was historically inevitable that affiliations of petty men would subvert the polity, and he suggested strategies for reducing their impact.

Eliminating malign factions from court *en masse* was only a temporary solution. It could forestall, but never entirely prevent, vengeful recurrences. But if the leaders of malicious factions were purged from

⁸⁰ According to Anthony Sariti, "In his discussions of loyalty, Ssu-Ma pointed out that highly trusted ministers bore heavy responsibility for the continued prosperity and existence of the dynasty they served"; "Monarchy, Bureaucracy, and Absolutism," p. 61.

⁸¹ For two comprehensive literary biographies of Su Shi, see Michael Fuller, *The Road to East Slope: The Development of Su Shih's Poetic Voice* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1990) and Ronald Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Council on East Asia, 1994).

court, their followers could be contained and appeased, and their potentially destructive grievances defused. Su Shi built classical allusions into a historical framework to argue that petty men could indeed be employed at court, albeit under vigilant supervision. Even so, rulers could not afford to make hard and fast distinctions between illegitimate and legitimate political affiliations. While an objective ethical distinction certainly existed between *junzi* and *xiaoren*, the polity could not survive if rulers categorically excluded the latter. While petty and superior men could and should be distinguished in theory, to do so in practice was an ill-advised strategy of rulership.

Su Shi began his “Discourse on Factions” by quoting a fragment from Ouyang Xiu’s “Biographies of Six Courtiers of the Tang,” if only to declare his complete disagreement with his predecessor. He rebutted Ouyang’s claim that “those intent on emptying the people’s state [and expelling its superior men] will invariably lodge accusations of factionalism,” and argued the converse: that factions truly possessed objective, not subjective, existence.⁸² Su acknowledged that illegitimate factions of petty men could unjustly accuse superior men of factionalism, and that their presence at court was an unambiguous “sign that a state is on the verge of collapse.” Affiliations of superior men were not truly factious, but petty men were a true *dang*. These malefactors lurked in every court, employing all manner of subterfuge to attain and monopolize power; the danger they posed was immediate, and their triumph over superior men was all but assured. He explained:

As for the ruler, nothing is more perilous than the existence of factions in his state. When factions exist, they will certainly come into conflict. And when they come into conflict, petty men will certainly triumph... How can superior men avoid imperilment?

Here he implies that conflicting factions necessarily include superior men on one side or another. Still, superior men (whether factionalized or not) were defenseless against the attacks of petty men, who would stop at nothing to attain power. As opposed to *junzi*, who were loyal but not obsequious, *xiaoren* stooped to the basest flattery to insinuate themselves into the ruler’s good graces:

When superior men employ the Way to serve their lord, the ruler of men certainly esteems them and keeps them at a distance. When petty men simply offer mere words, none of which are in the least

⁸² Su Shi 蘇軾, “Xu Ouyangzi pengdang lun” 續歐陽子朋黨論, in *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986) 4, pp. 128–30.

disobedient, the ruler of men treats them with familiarity and makes them his favorites.

Rulers would readily expel councillors who offered them loyal but painful words of counsel, but would refrain from dismissing ministers who always told them exactly what they wanted to hear. In the rough-and-tumble world of power politics, petty men would use their silver tongues to win the ruler's ear, and then silence the righteous discourse of superior men.

As Su Shi saw it, petty men were far more persistent and unprincipled in their naked pursuit of power than their retiring and passive counterparts. Once forsaken by the ruler and bruised by the vicissitudes of court politics, a superior man tended toward reclusion, forsaking official service with a blithe sense of resignation: "When the superior man's ambitions are unfulfilled, he respects himself and retires. Delighting in the Way, he will not serve as an official." Petty men, on the other hand, would never think of removing themselves completely from the thick of political intrigue. Su Shi employed a horticultural analogy to contrast the fragile and stalwart natures of superior and petty men: "The superior man is like a rice seedling, difficult to plant, and easy to uproot. The petty man is like a noxious weed, growing without cultivation, and reviving soon after being uprooted."

No ruler of the past or present, Su claimed, had ever succeeded in completely eliminating factions of petty men from court. Expelling *xiaoren* would only leave them with unappeasable grievances, impelling them to seek vengeance at the expense of defenseless *junzi*:

For if one of them is expelled, then those who rescue him will be legion. When their kind is completely expelled, they will consequently harbor deep grievances. When the minor ones among them are reemployed, then they will engage in reckless intimidation. When the major ones among them fulfill their ambitions, they will usurp the polity. They will sweep away benevolent men, and push aside the rulers of the world.

Hence, eliminating a malign faction, whether a handful of scapegoats or an entire affiliation, would only deal them a temporary setback: "When a snake is beheaded but does not die, or a tiger is stabbed but does not die, then their victims become ever more numerous." Once purged, a faction, like a snake or tiger, would climb back into the highest reaches of the bureaucracy with an increased recklessness in pursuing usurpation.

Su Shi claimed that malign factions of petty men were nearly impossible to purge from court (just as Tang Wenzong's famous complaint had stated), and he argued that, to the contrary, "factions of superior men are easy to expel." Like other faction theorists, he employed "faction" in contradictory ways, using it to describe superior men, even as he argued that factions of *junzi* could not exist. According to Su, like-minded superior men would continue to associate with one another, even in the face of opposition from petty men and their accusations of factionalism. Just like every other faction theorist, Su thought that superior men were perfect targets for slander. But even though he held the fatalistic view that malign factions would triumph in the end, he still allowed for superior men to seize the advantage, as long as their ruler could minimize the threat posed by petty men.

Unique among Northern Song faction theorists, Su Shi did not harangue rulers to pursue an eliminationist policy towards malign factions, since doing so would actually result in the inevitable triumph of petty men. Su insisted that the only way to preserve the dynastic polity was to eliminate only the leaders of malign factions and to co-opt their followers into the current ministerial regime. Su maintained that individuals only resorted to evil means when they were denied their objects of desire, so if petty men were co-opted into the bureaucracy rather than being fired, jailed, or executed, "this would destroy their faction."⁸³

Unlike other faction theorists, Su claimed that rigid delineation and enforcement could never be a viable solution, in either the short or long term. He thought that the boundaries were relatively permeable, and the exercise of discriminative judgment – no easy task in itself – should not be the ruler's primary responsibility, and the survival of the polity thus hinged upon conciliation. Still, rulers needed to discriminate superior from petty in order to know how to respond to each type. Treachery was a natural component of the ethico-political order, and rulers who comprehended this fact had begun to understand the Way of governance. If the treachery of petty men was not conciliated, then the loyalty of superior men could not be ensured: "If treachery certainly does not increase, then it cannot but be tolerated. If treachery is not tolerated, then how can the superior man secure the Way for long?" Hence, for Su Shi, distinguishing petty from superior was possible in theory, but utterly inadvisable in practice.

However intriguing the implications in Su Shi's "Discourse on Factions," its provenance remains unknown. Since the essay lacks any

⁸³ Ibid., p. 129.

internal reference to contemporary political events, one can only speculate about the circumstances that influenced it. One obvious possibility is that Su might have written the essay after the premature end of his bureaucratic career, during a prolonged period of political exile in Lingnan, from 1094 to his death in 1101. Time and again during his lengthy official career, Su had been dismissed from the metropolitan bureaucracy on charges of factionalism. In 1080, Su was exiled to Huangzhou so that his dissent against the New Policies of Wang Anshi would be silenced. During the regency of empress-dowager Xuanren 宣仁太后, who dominated the Song court when her grandson, emperor Zhezong 哲宗 (r. 1086–1100) was a minor, Su was twice dismissed from court on framed-up charges of factionalism by enemies within the anti-reform coalition. And in 1094, when Zhezong's court began to be led by the emperor personally, Su Shi fell prey to factional purges at the hands of the restored reformist ministry, and was exiled to Lingnan for life. Perhaps these recurring experiences of political victimization influenced the composition of his “Pengdang lun.” During his bitter years in Lingnan 嶺南, Su assumed a fatalistic stance of resignation from the vicissitudes of court politics, portraying himself in poetry and prose as a Daoist-style recluse.⁸⁴ Having glimpsed the inevitable triumph of such petty men as Zhang Dun 章惇 (1035–1105) and Cai Jing 蔡京 (1040–1126), who returned to court to wreak vengeance upon the anti-reform coalition with which Su was loosely affiliated, perhaps Su interpreted these recent events as the inevitable political triumph of petty men over superior men. And having become a prominent victim of a brutal factional purge, Su might have arrived at the conclusion that appeasing and conciliating petty men was the only way to defuse and stall them. Perhaps his own eremitic ideas fostered acceptance of petty-man treachery as a necessary part of the ethico-political order.

Still, this is only a speculative explanation of why and how a literary and intellectual iconoclast constructed a variant discourse of factionalism that differed so markedly from those of his contemporaries. Like other faction theorists, Su deployed both the historical and classical frames of reference, and a similar dichotomizing vocabulary of politics. But he deployed these with prodigious originality, and rejected the prevailing theory of factionalism as myopic and dogmatic. For Su, attempts to distinguish and then eliminate the factions of petty men were misguided. Alluding to the factional conflict of his own time, he urged rulers toward a flexible strategy of governance that accommodated both camps.

⁸⁴ For an extended analysis of Su Shi's literature of exile, see Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, pp. 207–60.

QIN GUAN: THE WAXING AND WANING OF FACTIONS

Written in the wake of the anti-reform landslide of the Xuanren Regency, Qin Guan's 秦觀 (1049–1100) two linked “Essays on Factions” were another effort to rethink the typical binary distinctions. Qin can be located in the intellectual circles around Su Shi. He gained an academic court appointment after Shenzong's death in 1085, and after Sima Guang and his cohort staged a hostile takeover of the central government. As was typical, Qin Guan used classical hermeneutics and historical analogism to fashion a polemic, which in his case was fatalistic and ambivalent. Employing the descriptor *dang* to refer to factions of both superior and petty men, he maintained that an objective ethico-political distinction existed between them. Whether benign or malign, factions could not be simultaneously eradicated; expelling them from court would eliminate superior men in the process. The only choice for an enlightened ruler was to discern the righteous from the wicked, thereby forestalling the inevitable political triumph of petty men. Addressing the young emperor Zhezong and his regent, empress-dowager Xuanren, Qin Guan urged them to uphold the ethical distinction between superior and petty men, retaining the “righteous” anti-reform coalition while forestalling the inevitable comeback of the “wicked” reform faction that had recently been purged. As an anti-reform apologist, Qin used his faction theory to depict the current regime as a legitimate restoration of order at the hands of superior men.

Directly responding to Ouyang Xiu's “Discourse on Factions,” Qin Guan acknowledged that factionalism was a natural phenomenon. Unlike Ouyang, though, he did not employ “faction” in an exclusive sense, but he did call affiliations of superior men “factions,” acknowledging that “factions of superior men and petty men cannot be avoided.”⁸⁵ For Qin Guan, the recurrence of factionalism was an unstoppable historical force beyond the control of even the most enlightened of rulers. Since their elimination would be misguided and even impossible, all that rulers should do was to discern loyal and disloyal ministers:

If the righteous and the wicked are not distinguished when it is factions that one despises, then one may end up expelling both superior men and petty men, or retaining both superior men and petty men. Whether both superior men and petty men are expelled

⁸⁵ Qin Guan 秦觀, “Pengdang, shang” 朋黨上 and “Pengdang, xia” 朋黨下, in *Huaihai ji jianzhu* 淮海集箋注, ed. Xu Peijun 徐培均 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994) 13 (“Pengdang, shang”), p. 540.

or retained, in the end petty men will succeed in their ambitions, and superior men will meet with calamity.⁸⁶

In Qin's argument, furthermore, such discriminative judgments could only be exercised case-by-case, not through eradicating entire ministerial affiliations, which would only accelerate the ultimate triumph of petty men.

Unique among Northern Song faction theorists, Qin Guan's classical frame of reference was largely that of the *Book of Changes* (*Yi jing*), the early-Zhou divination manual. Drawing upon the commentarial tradition, he claimed that the interdependent waxing and waning of factions of petty and superior men was an unalterable natural pattern, much like the hexagrams patterns themselves. Both petty and superior affiliations were respectively symbolized by broken *yin* 陰 and solid *yang* 陽 lines. In Qin's scheme, the microcosmic ethico-political order resonated with the waxing and waning of *yang* and *yin* forces in the macrocosm. Building hexagrams with increasing numbers of solid *yang* lines from one to five, Qin claimed that the waxing of the Way of superior men at the expense of the Way of petty men was the crest of a natural phase-shift in the ethico-political order: "When five *yang* lines are at their utmost, this forms the hexagram (no. 43 ䷗) Kuai 夬, 'Resolution.' From this the Way of superior men can be observed, when they find others of their kind to triumph over petty men."⁸⁷ On the other side of the mirror, the waxing of the Way of petty men at the expense of the Way of superior men was the trough of the *yin/yang* wave form: "When five *yin* lines are at their utmost, this forms the hexagram (no. 23 ䷗) Bo 剝, 'Peeling.' From this the Way of petty men can be observed, when they find others of their kind to triumph over superior men."⁸⁸

Hence, macrocosmic processes drove the presence of factions of superior and petty men in the imperial court, and the wave pattern of their mutual succession. Qin explained these cyclical phenomena:

The interdependent waxing and waning of *yin* and *yang* becomes folding and unfolding, birth and killing. The mutual victory and defeat of superior men and petty men becomes rise and fall, order and chaos. Hence, I claim that factions of superior men and petty men cannot be avoided.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 541.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 540. For the corresponding *Yijing* passage, see Kong Yingda 孔穎達, comp., *Zhou yi zhengyi* 周易正義 (SSJZS edn.) 5, pp. 1a-b. My translation follows that of Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation* (New York: Columbia U.P. 1994), p. 404.

⁸⁸ Qin, "Pengdang, shang," p. 540. For the corresponding *Yijing* passage, *Zhou yi zhengyi* 3, p. 16b. My translation follows Lynn, *Classic of Changes*, p. 280.

⁸⁹ Qin, "Pengdang, shang," p. 540.

In short, Qin's view was that natural, cosmic patterns dictated that factions will always exist. Yet, it was still possible to bring objective ethical distinctions to bear. Thus, when superior men were in the ascendant, the ruler could follow nature's pattern to his advantage, and thereby discern the righteous from the wicked, realizing that factions could not be eliminated.

After an extended digression into the *Book of Changes*, Qin Guan's "Discourse on Factions" rejoined the mainstream of the subgenre. He turned to the *Narratives of Zuo*, retelling the story of the Eight Primes and the Four Fiends to justify his arguments. His reading of the story was a compromise, somewhere in between those of Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang. For Qin, both the Eight Primes and the Four Fiends could be properly described as *dang*. Identifying the Eight as a "faction of superior men" and the Four as a "faction of petty men," Qin extolled Yao and Shun for their enlightened ethical and political judgment. When retaining *junzi* and expelling *xiaoren* from Yao's court, Shun "did not permit the factions to be conjointly expelled, nor did he permit them to be conjointly retained. Thus I state that the methods of the ruler and his ministers must not discourage factions and must serve to distinguish between the wicked and the righteous."⁹⁰ Rather than distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate factions, Yao and Shun clearly ascertained the moral character of their ministers before purging the Four Fiends and retaining the Eight Primes, for factionalism in itself was not a punishable offense. As exemplified by Yao and Shun, the enforcement of ethical distinctions between individuals, not factions, was the ultimate responsibility of rulership.

Turning from the classics to the later histories, Qin Guan's reading of the political events of Han and Tang was equally revisionist. In his interpretation, the last emperors of both dynasties had doomed their empires to collapse when they mistakenly banned factions *en masse*, rather than simply distinguishing superior men from petty men. Qin believed that factionalism itself was insufficient to destroy a polity; only the unchecked spread of factions could do so. He blamed the Eastern Han Great Proscription for creating a state of political and ethical confusion. When eunuchs successfully banned high officials, as a faction, they upset the ethico-political balance of the empire: "When cliques and factions were proscribed, all within the seas was greatly ravaged for twenty years... Rulers could never again assess the righteous and the wicked."⁹¹ The last emperors of the Han dynasty had failed to ex-

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

ercise their discriminative responsibilities. Qin incorporated fragments of Fan Ye's "Biography of the Great Proscription" from the *Latter Han History* as a lesson in how not to rule: "When inferiors disparage their superiors, and base men plot to become powerful ministers, then the state will become agitated and the people will be disquieted." A similar situation had prevailed during the declining years of the Tang, when "rulers did not ascertain the wicked from the righteous," the Li and Niu "factions battled one another, and the gentry could not avoid calamity for more than forty years."⁹² In a time when emperors like Tang Wenzong shirked their responsibilities, it was only natural that in the state of confusion that resulted, "eradicating rebels from Hebei" would become the relatively easier task. Qin Guan maintained that both the Han and Tang dynasties had been destroyed by their rulers' failure to enforce moral distinctions, not their inability to eradicate factions per se. If the last emperors of the Han and Tang had looked past the simplistic label of "faction" to distinguish superior men from petty men, then their empires would not have collapsed on their watch.

By the 1080s, the historical frame of reference of faction theorists had expanded to include the present dynasty. In the second half of his "Discourse on Factions," Qin Guan reinterpreted the history of the Qingli Reforms of the mid-1040s, with which he sympathized, to accord with his own theory. Qin praised Renzong for his judgment in employing such superior men as Fan Zhongyan, Fu Bi, Han Qi, and Ouyang Xiu during the Qingli Reforms. But the emperor's judgment ultimately failed him, for he neglected to eliminate petty men from court "who could not contain their resentment, and framed them as a faction."⁹³ With myopic judgment, Renzong could not look past the descriptor *dang* to assess the moral character of Fan Zhongyan and his cohort when they were unjustly accused of factionalism. In other words, Renzong "discouraged factions in name only (*ming* 名), but did not distinguish the righteous from the wicked in fact (*shi* 實)." Ultimately, at the end of his reign, Renzong attained "enlightened sagacity," and chose to rehabilitate the reformers. Qin Guan thus uniquely, if implicitly, posited a genealogical link between the anti-reform coalition of the Xuanren Regency and the short-lived reformers of the Qingli era, whom he praised as "eminent statesmen and great *ru* 儒, as ministers in support of the state and dynastic altars." While factions possessed objective historical existence, the term itself could be employed by petty

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ All quotations from Qin in this paragraph are, "Pengdang, xia," pp. 546-47.

men as a weapon with which to smear superior men such as Fan Zhongyan and his cohort, who were referred to “as men of faction in their own time.” Forty years before Qin wrote his “Discourse on Factions,” Renzong had mistakenly confused names and their facts, discouraging factionalism while failing to distinguish superior men from petty men. By purging legitimate political practitioners from court, Renzong had detracted from, if not invalidated, the legitimacy of his reign.

Qin Guan’s faction theory also had contemporary relevance. In the transitional years of the Xuanren Regency, emperor Zhezong and empress-dowager Xuanren were faced with a pivotal choice, just as Renzong had been during the Qingli era. But they succeeded where Renzong failed, by purging reformist “petty men” and retaining the anti-reform coalition of “superior men.” Like Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang before him, Qin Guan obliquely described his own faction as a legitimate association of superior men. For Qin, the Xuanren Regency represented a golden age of governance, in which the ethico-political order had finally been restored after decades of reformist misrule:

Ever since Your Majesty ascended to the throne, public discourse has been broadly investigated without ulterior motives or bias. The famed gentlemen of the empire have been promoted to participate in statecraft. Those who had once been dismissed to scattered territories now grasp ministerial power, and those who were demoted and exiled have been rehabilitated to hold auxiliary posts.⁹⁴

But current events were adhering to the natural pattern of the *Book of Changes* and post-classical history: the resurgence of superior men met with an equal and opposite reaction. The petty men worked stealthily “day and night to tumultuously hatch plots that were not only improper and baseless but also delusive and slanderous, and accusations of factionalism have emerged.”⁹⁵ Qin implored the empress-dowager to draw contemporary lessons from the *Book of Changes* and the *Narratives of Zuo*, and to recognize the root causes of the collapse of the Han and Tang if the Song dynasty was to survive. He hoped that the superior affiliation not be considered a faction in the true sense of the word.

Yet, how could a faction of superior men not be a faction in the true sense of the word, if they naturally formed factions just like petty men? Dodging the question, he assured his readers that the judgment of posterity would concur with him: “In future generations, those who are called ‘men of faction’ in the present day will certainly be referred

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 546.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

to as eminent statesmen and great *ru*, and as ministers in support of the state and dynastic altars.” He continued:

I wish that Your Majesty (addressing Zhezong) would put an end to these attacks and heal these slanderous rifts, seeking out worthies with increased urgency, and employing worthies with increased resoluteness. If sincere worthies become increasingly forthright, this will cause the spirits of the treacherous and the wicked to be crushed, and their plots will come to nothing.⁹⁶

Qin urged the emperor to look beyond the pretext of factionalism and perform the far more demanding feat of discerning who was superior. But who were the members of the petty faction under Zhezong? And who were the unnamed superior men who were the subjects of accusations of factionalism? Everyone must have known, since Qin Guan mentioned no names. In hindsight, there are two possible readings of the contemporary implications of Qin’s essay. One is that Qin was referring to the recently deposed reformist regime of Cai Que 蔡確 (1037–93) as a faction of petty men, while describing his own anti-reform coalition, which had recently returned to favor in the early years of the Xuanren Regency, as an unjustly maligned affiliation of superior men. But since the reformists had already been purged from court more than a year before Qin authored his “Discourse on Factions,” and were held in utter contempt by the Regent, such a possibility is improbable.

The most probable political context for Qin’s essay is the period of factional infighting that plagued the anti-reform coalition in the early Xuanren Regency. In what was later referred to as the “Luo-Shu factional conflict” (*Luo-Shu dangzheng* 洛蜀黨爭), two political splinter groups, led by Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1108) and Su Shi, contended for power at court, hoping to fill the power vacuum left behind by the death of Sima Guang in 1086. In 1086 and 1087, remonstrators loyal to Cheng Yi had accused Su Shi and his comrades of slandering both Emperors Shenzong and Zhezong, and of the even more heinous crime of factionalism. It is tempting to conclude that Qin Guan authored his “Discourse on Factions” in defense of his mentor Su Shi, to counter the accusations hurled by Cheng Yi’s Luo pressure group. Hence, Qin praised Su Shi and his followers as a benign affiliation of superior men, and maligned Cheng Yi’s disciples as an illegitimate faction of slanderous petty men. Rather than being employed in the conflict between the reformist and anti-reform factions, Qin’s essay had been a political weapon in the struggle between rival wings of the anti-reform coalition.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 547.

The conflict between the Luo and Shu splinter groups had become so acrimonious that its participants accused one another of the heinous crime of factionalism, accusations that had once been exclusively reserved for reformists. In the end, Qin's essay ultimately failed to sway the mind of Empress Dowager Xuanren, who ultimately dismissed the leaders of both splinter groups, along with their most prominent followers, from court.⁹⁷ Unconvinced by Qin Guan's "Discourse on Factions," the Regent had exercised her powers of discrimination, somewhat indiscriminately, to purge both the Luo and Shu wings of the anti-reform coalition from court. In her eyes, factions were factions, regardless of their ethical character or purported legitimacy.

CONCLUSIONS AND DEPARTURES

These *pengdang lun* (essays, or discourses, on factions) are valuable sources of Song political and intellectual history, illustrating the ways in which five Northern Song political practitioners and theorists interpreted "faction" and "factionalism." The texts were not just abstract political theory but also opportunistic rhetoric that addressed specific political situations. The political functions of the genre might become clearer, however, if the historical circumstances under which they were written were less ambiguous.

Working within, yet reconfiguring, classical hermeneutics and historical analogism, authors in the genre during Northern Song attempted to delineate the boundaries of the ethico-political order, and to define political discourse and practice. While these theorists posited a sharp ethical distinction between "superior men" and "petty men," they constructed variant interpretations for the fact of the recurrence of factionalism. Regardless of their different definitions, they all urged rulers to uphold the absolute distinction between *junzi* and *xiaoren*. Although they operated within classical and historical contexts that were more or less shared, they constructed unique associations between the word "faction" and the past and present political affiliations that it indicated. Diametrically opposed were the competing notions of Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang. For Ouyang, *dang* exclusively and objectively denoted benign factions of useful "superior men"; in the eyes of Sima Guang, it was a malign faction of "petty men" to be purged. Su Shi and

⁹⁷ In 1087 Cheng Yi was dismissed from his court post as imperial tutor, and his protégé Jia Yi 賈易 (n.d.) was dismissed from the Remonstrance Bureau; see *XZZTJCB* 404, pp. 9828–30. After two years of being accused of literary sedition, Su Shi resigned from court in 3.1089 and demoted to regional administration. See *XZZTJCB* 424, pp. 10251–3.

Qin Guan offered both definitions of factionalism and strategies of rulership that were less dogmatic than those of Ouyang and Sima. While Su Shi concurred with Sima Guang's objective definition of factionalism, he argued that the boundaries of the ethico-political order should be permeable, incorporating both *junzi* and *xiaoren*. Qin employed a relativistic definition of "faction," asserting that "factionalism" was a perspectival phenomenon. Despite their variant definitions of factionalism, all of the authors employed similar polarizing vocabularies to define the legitimate boundaries of the political community.

In the political and historical imagination of the Song elite, no monarch was considered infallible in judgment or immune from the judgments of history. Past rulers had fallen prey to malign factions who destroyed the polity from within, and rulers of the present dynasty were equally vulnerable. The ethical integrity of the state was a function of those who staffed and administered the imperial bureaucracy. But while monarchs were fallible, they alone possessed authority over personnel. Subtly persuading their monarch to retain their own allies, and to purge their adversaries, faction theorists claimed authority for themselves, and offered to extend their loyalty upwards to the throne.

In short, the claims of these political theorists and practitioners to political authority and ethical legitimacy cannot be imagined outside of ad hoc political contexts. When they claimed legitimacy for themselves and extended it to the polity, the intellectual context was insufficiently elastic to allow any reinterpretation of the age-old phenomenon of factions as benign affiliations, or as a fusion of the interests of state and society. Even when they claimed ethico-political authority for themselves and their allies, political theorists of the late-Northern Song envisioned ministerial authority from the other end of the telescope, from the perspective of the dynastic polity and the imperial throne. During an escalating factional conflict, only petty men were imagined to form factions that undermined the public good, never their adversaries who accused them of factionalism.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Zuozhuan</i>	Yang Bojun 揚伯峻, ed., <i>Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu</i> 春秋左傳注
<i>Shangshu</i>	Kong Yingda 孔穎達, <i>Shangshu zhengyi</i> 尚書正義
<i>Lunyu jishi</i>	Cheng Shude 程樹德, ed., <i>Lunyu jishi</i> 論語集釋
<i>XZZTJCB</i>	Li Tao 李燾, <i>Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian</i> 續資治通鑑長編