

*Classical Scholarship and Intellectual Debates: 1800–1864*

schools were established in competition with the existing missionary and private schools. For the first time, study abroad was supported by the state. In 1906 over 12,000 Chinese students lived in Japan.

The creation of chambers of commerce encouraged economic cooperation with foreign countries. To modernize the army, military academies and a military training system were established. Cixi's important contribution to developing China into a modern state during the last years of her life remained unrecognized for decades. Her continuing influence at court until her death is demonstrated by her personally naming the next emperor when Guangxu died on November 8, 1908, one day before her own death.

**RETROSPECT**

Throughout her life at court, Cixi secured her preponderant influence in Qing governance with the help of allies from three different power bases. First, she relied on members of the imperial clan, like Prince Gong, who mediated between the empress dowager and the Han Chinese official elite. After his dismissal in 1884, Cixi divided his tasks among three other princes: Prince Chun, the father of the Guangxu emperor, who rose to the position of consultant on national affairs; Prince Qing, who was appointed head of the Foreign Office; and Prince Li, who was entrusted with the Council of State. Second, Cixi's actions were backed by military power. Ronglu, who had grown up with her, commanded the banner troops in the capital and assisted Cixi whenever she needed the authority of the gun. Third, the empress dowager could also count on high Han Chinese officials like Li Hongzhang, who served her on the international stage and repeatedly stood the test in critical missions. After military defeats, Li negotiated the peace settlements with France (1884), Japan (1895), and the Eight Power Alliance in the aftermath of the Boxer War (1901). In 1896 Cixi sent him on a journey around the world to meet monarchs and statesmen and to gain an international reputation for Qing China. In her last years she increasingly turned to Zhang Zhidong and Yuan Shikai.

Cixi was respectfully called Old Buddha (Lao Foye) at court. This name aptly characterized her position. Though the empress dowager emitted authority, she was not formally legitimized to rule the empire. For decades she directed decisions at court through a network of her confidants. In 1910 the journalist J. O. P. Bland and the scholar Edmund Backhouse, in their book *China under the Empress Dowager*, created the myth of Cixi as an irresponsible despot. Though it was later revealed that some of their source material was spurious, their portrait decisively shaped the Western image of Cixi for a long time. In the negative judgment of Chinese authors, still prevalent today, Cixi is even blamed for the decline of the Qing state in general. In the search for reasons explaining China's failure to develop into a constitutional

monarchy and to come to terms with the West, Cixi, with her formally dubious status at court, is an ideal scapegoat. A balanced biography remains to be written.

**SEE ALSO** *Boxer Uprising; Emperors, 1800–1912; Hundred Days' Reform; Li Hongzhang; Qing Restoration.*

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## CLASSICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND INTELLECTUAL DEBATES

*This entry contains the following:*

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### 1800–1864

Those who have evaluated Chinese intellectual history have commonly blamed Confucian scholars of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) for creating a climate of effete textual criticism. Such accounts, for the most part, deny that Qing Confucians were concerned with larger social and political issues and overlook the significance of their discoveries. The general view is that Confucianism since the Song dynasty (960–1279), that is, Neo-Confucianism, was a synchronic set of classical concepts tied to Song interpretations. Although it showed signs of change (or “unfolding” as the conventional wisdom has it), the Confucian orthodoxy during the Qing period, according to this view, was essentially a reworking of

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themes and concepts set in place originally by Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Wang Yangming (1472–1529).

Yet in the early nineteenth century, Fang Dongshu (1772–1851), an advocate of the Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi orthodoxy known as Song Learning, condemned in ringing fashion the antiquarian currents of the Qianlong (1736–1796) and Jiaqing (1796–1820) reign periods known as Han Learning:

The Han Learning scholars all have evidence to back up every statement and research to support every word. However, they are only debating on paper with the ancients over glosses, phonetic elements [in Chinese characters], scholia, and textual corruptions. They adduce from various books ancillary evidence by the hundreds and thousands of items. Yet, if they were to apply to themselves their attitudes and activities, or extend them to the people and the country, it would be of no benefit whatsoever.

From the point of view of the twentieth-century Neo-Confucian revival, the Qing dynasty evidential-research movement (*kaozheng xue*) represented a break with the ethical values and humanistic ideals of imperial orthodoxy. From another perspective, however, this seeming betrayal of the Confucian philosophical tradition by Qing philologists can be turned inside out. Imperial orthodoxy, by the late Ming dynasty, had degenerated into a debilitating formalism dedicated to enhance the prestige and power of autocratic rulers, as first described by Huang Zongxi (1610–1695):

In antiquity, the people of the realm loved and supported their ruler. They compared him to their father. They emulated him as they do heaven and could not go far enough to demonstrate their sincerity. Today, the people of the realm harbor nothing but hatred for their ruler. They view him as an enemy. . . . Can it be that the greatness of the realm, with all its millions of people and myriads of lineages, is to be enjoyed privately by one man, by one lineage?

Dai Zhen (1724–1777), polymath and philosopher, continued, from a historical perspective, Huang's exposé. Using the text of *Mencius* as a foil to criticize the creeping autocracy since Song times, Dai contended that in the final analysis the fundamental problem lay with the ideological nature of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and its support for an autocratic state that dominated Chinese political culture:

The high and mighty use *li* [moral principles] to blame the lowly. The old use *li* to blame the young. The exalted use such principles to blame the downtrodden. Even if they are mistaken, [the ruling groups] call [what they have done] proper. If the lowly, the young, and the downtrodden rely on principles to struggle, even if they are right they

are labeled rebellious. . . . Those on top use principles to blame them for their lowly position. For these uncountable throngs of people, their only crime is their lowly position. When a person dies under the law, there are those who pity him. Who pities those who die under [the aegis] of principle?

Later, Fang Dongshu, outraged by Dai's audacious remarks, retorted,

[To say] that the principles of heaven are not dependable and that one should rely on the emotions and desires of the people, that they should have an outlet and be allowed to follow their desires, implies that *li* [moral ideals] are attained at the expense of *qi* [human desires] and brings disorder to the Way. However, [Dai Zhen] is merely trying to make it difficult for the Cheng-Zhu [school] without realizing that his is the way of great disorder.

In the twentieth century, the impact of Dai Zhen's political critique was acknowledged by radicals such as Zhang Binglin (1868–1936) and Liu Shipei (1884–1919). Before his turn to anarchism in 1907, Liu Shipei admired Dai's criticism of the oppressive aspects of Confucian orthodoxy. Liu agreed with Dai's account of the autocratic aspects of the Cheng-Zhu imperial ideology. Were Qing evidential-research scholars sterile philologists? Did they commit the crime of overturning Confucian ethical values, leaving a moral vacuum in their wake? Or did they challenge an ideology that, since the Song dynasty, provided theoretical support for the increasingly autocratic Confucian imperium?

#### STATECRAFT AND NEW TEXT STUDIES

Many scholars circa 1800 felt that the Han Learning attack on Song Learning ignored the theoretical import of the great principles (*dayi*) contained in the classics. The goal of these scholars remained the mastery and execution of concrete studies (*shixue*). In the Yangzi delta entrepôt of Changzhou, scholars called for more comprehensive literati thought, thought that would go beyond the limited textual studies in typical evidential scholarship by stressing the moral principles contained in Confucius's *Spring and Autumn Annals*, one of the Five Classics. In their hands, evidential research was informed by theoretical and ethical issues associated with Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) New Text studies of the classical canon and was not an end in itself. In the Han dynasty, scholars had to reconstruct the books burned by the First Emperor, and they did this by recovering the clerical script (*jinwen*). Hence, studying the new texts was called *jinwen jingxue*, i.e., "New Text Classical studies." New Text Classical studies of the Qing dynasty drew on these origins in order to revive "Han learning."

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The Yangzhou scholar-official Ruan Yuan (1764–1849) is a good example of those influenced by these currents of thought. Although his reputation was made in Han Learning, he was influenced by several New Text scholars who were more concerned with moral philosophy, including Liu Fenglu (1776–1829) and Kong Guangsen (1752–1786). Gong Zizhen (1792–1841), a follower of the Changzhou New Text tradition, praised Ruan's talents in the textual fields associated with evidential scholarship, but he also pointed out Ruan's considerable contributions to philosophy and literature. Ruan contended that Qing scholars did heed questions of human nature and the Way emphasized in Song Learning, and did use the principles of Han Learning to apply these questions to practical use. Yet Ruan went on to write:

To sum up, the Way of the sages is like the house of a teacher. The [study of] primary and derived characters and their glosses is the entrance. If one misses the path, all steps lead away from it. How can one reach the hall and enter the studio? If a student seeks the Way too high and regards with scorn the art of punctuating a text, it is just as if he were a bird soaring into the heavens from the roof of his teacher's magnificent studio. He gets high all right, but then he doesn't get to see what lies between the door and the inner recesses of the room.

Population pressures, accompanied by increases in competition for land, education, and official status, had a debilitating effect on all levels of Chinese society. Changes in the character of the elite and the increasing competition for access of the educated to power and livelihood produced serious social problems. An atmosphere of corruption pervaded the bureaucracy and the countryside. These were also the years when internal rebellions, especially the Jinchuan (1770–76), Wang Lun (1774), White Lotus (1796–1805), and Eight Trigrams (1813) uprisings, put an end to the long period of relative peace since the late seventeenth century. Foreign trade exacerbated these internal dislocations. The deflationary effects of a silver drain brought on by the British opium trade began to force the Qing state into serious economic depression.

The rise of New Text studies and Song Learning was paralleled and in part provoked by an intense moral concern for the state of the dynasty and involvement with its administrative problems in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These concerns made themselves felt in an overt attack on the apolitical stance of evidential-research scholars. In response to external and internal problems, scholar-officials such as He Changling (1785–1848) from Hunan began in the early years of the nineteenth century to emphasize proposals for statecraft (*jingshi*) in their attempts to shore up the sagging imperial bureaucracy. In 1821 He began to compile the *Huangchao jingshi wenbian* (Collected

writings on statecraft during the Qing dynasty) as an expression of revived interest in practical administration. Such pragmatically oriented scholar-officials believed that they were avoiding both the scholastic philology associated with Han Learning and the empty speculation of Song to Ming orthodoxy. They took as their inspiration early Qing scholars, such as Gu Yanwu (1613–1682) and Huang Zongxi, who, they argued, had not succumbed to the bookish orientation that plagued eighteenth-century scholarship.

Wei Yuan's (1794–1856) and Gong Zizhen's commitment to New Text classicism grew out of their interest in statecraft proposals. Jiangsu statecraft scholars in the early nineteenth century were not members of a scholarly movement but men who, according to James Polachek, "operated mainly within a framework of bureaucratic and political relationships—relationships, that is, which were structured through hierarchical ties contracted in office, and which functioned, at least in part, to promote the personal and career interests of these literati as a discrete group."

New Text classicism was also the outgrowth of two centuries of philological evidence that had been accumulating through painstaking research by Qing evidential-research scholars. The debate between New Text and Old Text learning was reconstructed by relying on philological and historical research. New Text scholarship during the Qing dynasty tried to revive the political activism of the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE). The debates between the various schools of evidential research reveal the more reformist intent among the Changzhou New Text scholars. Moreover, New Text philology abetted the reaction against what were considered sterile textual studies and helped to revive an orientation toward statecraft.

Wei Yuan also was dissatisfied with what he considered petty philology. Wei served at one time or another on the administrative staffs of several important provincial officials interested in statecraft. He was thus able to use these influential positions to blend his earlier concerns about statecraft with his later New Text notions of institutional reform. In 1825 He Changling, then financial commissioner of Jiangsu, invited Wei Yuan to become editor of the *Huangchao jingshi wenbian* collection, which became regarded by nineteenth-century scholars as a valuable source for Qing administrative history and an important starting point for the study of efforts to handle the dual problems of domestic unrest and foreign incursion.

Wei Yuan attempted to reverse what he considered the fascination with textual minutiae in evidential research. The ill-conceived debate over Han Learning versus Song Learning, he thought, was no longer relevant to the challenges that faced the Qing state. Writing in 1841, some time after studying with Liu Fenglu, Wei Yuan noted his misgivings about the status of China's elite class: "Since the middle of the Qianlong Emperor's reign, all literati in the empire have



promoted Han Learning. This movement is especially popular north and south of the Yangzi River [that is, Jiangnan]. . . . Such a state of affairs has confined the bright and talented of the realm and tempted them onto a useless path.” His intent was to initiate bureaucratic and moral reforms within the framework of the existing political structure.

#### THE ATTACK ON HAN LEARNING

Nascent statecraft groups emerged in the early nineteenth century in academies in Changsha and Guangzhou, where the administrative problems facing the empire were more evident. The statecraft movement was initially led by literati whose native origins were outside the Yangzi River delta. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Hunan scholar-official Zeng Guofan (1811–1872), a major exponent of “self-strengthening” in the wake of the intrusion of Western military power in East Asia, patronized Song Learning in local and national academics. Guangdong also emerged as a center for statecraft studies.

As the foreign threat in Guangzhou mounted in intensity during the 1820s, the attention of Ruan Yuan (then governor-general) and faculty members of the Xuehai Tang (Sea of Learning Academy) was drawn to foreign affairs and opium trafficking in Southeast China. In 1821 Ruan adopted what seemed at the time a strict policy toward opium, arresting sixteen opium dealers in Macau and temporarily forcing the opium trade out of the Pearl River. Although Ruan’s policy marked the end of the first phase of the trade, in reality opium trading continued uninterrupted, and in fact increased at Neilingding (Lintin) Island. The crackdown was a face-saving device for Ruan Yuan, after attention had been directed to the opium problem by the Daoguang emperor (r. 1821–1850). The latter had just ascended the throne in a reformist frame of mind, and the opium problem was one of his chief concerns.

In an 1824 letter to Ruan Yuan, Fang Dongshu made it clear that he blamed the chaotic situation in Guangzhou vis-à-vis foreigners, on the moral passivity and useless erudition that the Han Learning movement had fostered throughout China. Having personally perceived the effects of opium policies in the 1820s, Fang Dongshu recommended in the 1830s that Ruan’s failed policies be rescinded. Han Learning had shown itself to be morally bankrupt, according to Fang. He became associated in the 1830s with calls for the complete eradication of the opium evil. In Guangzhou, the teachers and students at the Yuehua Academy were the leaders of the anti-opium movement.

In a famous memorial of 1836, Xu Naiji (1777–1839) recommended legalizing opium for all except civil servants, scholars, and soldiers, and this was connected with the proposal by a number of directors at the Xuehai Tang that opium restrictions be relaxed. Ruan Yuan himself leaned

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toward legalizing the trade. These apparent capitulations angered Fang and others in Guangzhou who took a hard line on the opium question. It was no accident that when Lin Zexu (1785–1850), charged by the emperor with the task of eradicating the opium evil, took office in Guangzhou, he established his headquarters at the Yuehua Academy, where hardliners were in the majority.

The Legalizers versus the Moralists in the Guangzhou opium debate reflected in many ways the widening rift between Han Learning and Song Learning. Looking back on the Opium War, Fang wrote in the summer of 1842:

In my considered opinion on the basis of close observation, the disaster at the hands of the English foreigners was not the result of the recent policy of total prohibition and confiscation of opium. In fact, [the disaster] resulted because of the rapacious and corrupt behavior of the foolish foreign merchants, the vacillating policies of earlier governors-general [that is, Ruan Yuan] who have cultivated a festering sore, and the greed of Chinese traitors who sold out their country.

#### HAN AND SONG LEARNING SYNCRETISM

Advocates of Song Learning were not purists, however. Their methods of reasoning and manner of exposition had been heavily influenced by evidential research. Attempts to reassert the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy did not entail wholesale rejection of evidential-research scholarship. One important outgrowth of this challenge was the attempt to reconcile Han and Song Learning. Evidential research remained popular, but it was becoming difficult to justify in its own terms. Ruan Yuan’s increasing emphasis on philosophical themes in the last decades of his life was indicative of the tension within classical discourse in the nineteenth century.

Guangzhou also became a center for the movement to synthesize Han Learning methods with Song Learning political and moral concerns. In a work titled *Hanru tongyi* (Comprehensive meanings of Han scholars) printed in 1858, Chen Li, who by then was one of the most widely respected literati in Guangzhou, contended that the attack on Han Learning for its lack of theoretical significance was unfair. He outlined the philosophical issues that Han dynasty scholars had discussed. Chen also took the other side of the argument in his collected notebooks, published late in his life. He pointed out that those who criticized Zhu Xi for not emphasizing ancient glosses and etymologies in Han commentaries were equally mistaken. According to Chen, Zhu Xi was as concerned with philology as with philosophy, a line of thought later taken up by the modern scholar Qian Mu in his twentieth century study of Zhu Xi’s scholarly contributions.

Zeng Guofan, for example, adopted a conservative position in favor of Zhi Xi Learning in scholarship. Conservative

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scholarship was now tied to reformist politics. Despite growing dissatisfaction, particularly among Hunan and Guangdong scholars, evidential research was still defended by southern literati until the Taiping Uprising (1851–1864). In the nineteenth century, the defense of evidential research by political reformers such as Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909) and others was argued less and less in terms of the utility of an apolitical discourse in the “search for the truth in actual facts” and more in terms of statecraft goals and concerns.

Late Qing intellectual history was severely affected by the conflict between the Taiping and imperial forces. The lower Yangzi’s leading cities such as Nanjing, Suzhou, Changzhou, and Yangzhou were devastated. Their libraries and institutions of learning were destroyed. After the rebellion was suppressed, the evidential-research academic community of the Yangzi River delta largely perished, and this cleared the way for the emergence of Hunan and Guangdong gentry as the leading spokesmen for literati interests. The rise to power of such Hunan men as Zeng Guofan, Zuo Zongtang (1812–1885), and Hu Linyi (1812–1861) was thus made possible by the Taiping Uprising.

SEE ALSO *Taiping Uprising*; *Wei Yuan*.

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**1864–1900**

From the 1860s to the early twentieth century, there were several remarkable changes in classical scholarship in Qing China. Arguably, these changes irrevocably reoriented the Chinese attitude toward the time-honored Confucian tradition, and their cultural heritage in general vis-à-vis modern Western learning. The causes of the changes were both external and internal. Although the Qing, aided by the militia forces organized by local Chinese gentry from southern provinces, defeated the Taiping rebels, its rulers could not restore the traditional political order without reckoning the military and cultural infiltration from the West. As the regime looked for new ways to work with the Western powers diplomatically, the Chinese literati also sought ways by which they could accommodate Western influence rather than reject it outright. This gave rise to several new trends in classical scholarship. One developed new theories for reinterpreting the Confucian tradition in order to better address the problems facing China at the time. The revival of the New Text school (*Jinwen jingxue*) in Confucian learning from the Later Han period (25–220) was a notable example. Another trend expanded the scope of study by looking for useful intellectual resources in the Hundred schools (*zhuzi*), schools of thought that flourished in the age of Confucius but did not fall within the bounds of Confucianism. Neither interest was entirely new but built on or modified previous scholarly traditions. With respect to the study of the Hundred schools, in the eighteenth century some evidential scholars had already examined, out of their philological interest in textual criticism, several works by Confucius’ contemporaries for verifying and validating the Confucian classics. In the nineteenth century excellent philological studies of ancient texts, including those of the Hundred schools, continued to be produced by eminent evidential scholars such as Yu Yue (1821–1907) and Sun Yirang (1848–1908).

**THE NEW AND OLD TEXT SCHOOLS**

Nevertheless, as an intellectual trend, evidential learning unequivocally declined from the 1820s, owing largely to the changing cultural milieu that encouraged a new outlook on the Confucian tradition as a useful resource for solving the pressing issues associated with the Western intrusion. This new outlook was best embodied by the New Text school, which held that if *Chunqiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*) was the key to fathoming the Confucian teaching of the classics, then the *Gongyang zhuan* (*Gongyang Commentary*)—instead of the *Zuo Zhuan* (*Zuo Commentary*) favored by the Old Text school (*Guwen jingxue*) as well as by most evidential scholars—offered the best tool to unpack the enigmatic message Confucius supposedly embedded in editing the *Chunqiu*. In addition, the New Text Confucians challenged the authenticity of some Confucian texts, particularly certain chapters of the *Shangshu* (*Classic of History*) written in a