

Analysis of the practice of integrity of Anhui officials in the late Qing Dynasty

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Abstract: Anhui officials were a group of officials who cannot be ignored at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and their integrity practice was an important variable affecting the political ecology at the end of the Qing Dynasty. The clean government practice of Anhui officials in the late Qing Dynasty was based on the science known as neo-Confucianism and personal self-discipline. In terms of specific measures, they took the management of officials and the cleaning of evils as the first priority, and took pragmatism and diligence as the inevitable choice. The integrity practice of Anhui officials in the late Qing Dynasty was essentially a continuation of the traditional Chinese integrity practice, which could not reverse the corrupt officialdom at the end of the Qing Dynasty.

Keywords: at the end of the Qing Dynasty, Anhui officials, integrity practice

Among the officials at all levels in the late Qing Dynasty, Anhui officials were a group of officials that cannot be ignored. In particular, with the rise of the Huaijun Group, a group of elites from Anhui, represented by Li Hongzhang, Zhang Shusheng, Liu Mingchuan, Zhou Fu, Tu Zongying, Liu Bingzhang and Ni Wenwei, held important positions in the central and local governments, which determined that the integrity practice of Anhui officials in the late Qing Dynasty was an important variable affecting the political ecology of the late Qing Dynasty. Therefore, exploring the integrity practice of Anhui officials in the late Qing Dynasty can not only understand the integrity practice of officials in the late Qing Dynasty, but also help to deepen the understanding of the political ecology in the late Qing Dynasty.

I. First, Take Neo-Confucianism and Self-discipline as the basis for the practice of integrity

Neo-Confucianism was a new Confucianism formed by integrating Buddhism after the Northern Song Dynasty. It was identified as the official orthodox philosophy in the three dynasties of the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. Its classic works were the basis and standard for imperial examinations and were a must-read books for scholars at that time, so they had a profound influence on politics. By the end of the Qing Dynasty, although some Western ideas and doctrines began to spread to China under the influence of Western powers and impacted the

official orthodoxy of science, the important position of Neo-Confucianism was not completely shaken and still deeply affected the vast number of scholars and people with insight at that time.

Neo-Confucianism, despite being an official philosophy and ideology that upholds the ruling class's dominance, is a new form of Confucianism that places great emphasis on personal moral cultivation and the selflessness and integrity of officials in governance. Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi believed that "the essence of benevolence can be summed up in the word 'gong' (public spirit). 'Gong' is simply the principle of benevolence." "When 'gong' is embodied in the human body, it becomes benevolence. Only when one is 'gong' can one see both oneself and others, hence benevolence, which enables forgiveness and love."^① This not only points out that 'gong' is the principle of benevolence, but also that 'gong' means 'embodied in the human body' and 'seeing both oneself and others'. It reveals that 'gong' involves treating others and things with a heart of benevolence and care. On this basis, Zhu Xi believed that "gong is the ultimate realm of self-restraint."^② "If someone builds up the backbone of this work, then there is no selfishness and benevolence."^③ "Officials are not big or small, everything is just a public. If done during public hours, it is also wonderful. Like a lowly official, even a person is afraid of the wind and submission." ^④ This not only points out that the public is the result of restraining one's desires and restraining one's words and deeds, and selflessness and benevolence are considered public, but also emphasizes that officials should follow the public in their political governance, believing that as long as they do so, regardless of their official position, they can handle things well and establish a good reputation. Therefore, as an official philosophy, Neo Confucianism will inevitably profoundly shape the integrity concept of Anhui intellectuals in the late Qing Dynasty, and Anhui officials who adhere to Neo Confucianism will inevitably use Neo Confucianism as the ideological foundation for their anti-corruption practices.

The sources of officials in the Huai Army Group are relatively complex, with not only those who joined the group after passing the imperial examination, but also those who did not have any imperial examination achievements or even received formal education and became members of the Huai Army Group. Officials from Anhui who joined the Huai Army Group through the imperial examination system and rose to various levels of official positions naturally relied on Neo Confucianism as the ideological foundation for their anti-corruption practices. At the same time, due to the emphasis on personal moral cultivation and self-restraint in Neo Confucianism, officials from Anhui who are deeply influenced by Neo Confucianism are often more self disciplined and able to maintain integrity and self-discipline in their political and administrative processes. For example, Tu Zongying, who came from a juren background and adhered to Neo Confucianism, successively became a subordinate of Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang. Later, under the recommendation of Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang, he successively held official positions such as governor, prefect, Taoist, inspector, governor, and

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^① Erchengji ", Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2004, p. 153.

^② Volume 6 of "Zhu Zi Yu Lei", Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986, p. 116.

^③ Zhu Ziyu Lei "Volume 95, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986, p. 2454.

^④ Volume 112 of "Zhu Zi Yu Lei", Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986, p. 2735.

general. Tu Zongying's continuous promotion is not only due to his outstanding talent and the endorsement of Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang, but also because of his integrity and self-discipline. Peng Yulin, who was ordered to investigate Tu Zongying, pointed out in his report to the Qing court that Tu Zongying was "upright and capable, clean and guarded"^①, "He is actually an honest and diligent employee"^②. Anhui officials who became members of the Huai Army Group and held various levels of official positions based on their merits without any imperial examination achievements or formal education, although they did not have a foundation in Neo Confucianism and did not receive systematic Neo Confucianism education, were able to maintain integrity and self-discipline after serving. For example, Liu Mingchuan, a famous general of the Huai Army, did not receive any imperial examinations or specialized education in science. Instead, he was continuously promoted and advanced mainly due to his repeated military achievements, and eventually became the first governor of Taiwan as a military officer. However, during his tenure as an official at all levels, Liu Mingchuan neither bribed his superiors nor accepted gifts or bribes from his subordinates, always maintaining integrity and self-discipline. In his memorial to the Qing court, Li Hongzhang evaluated Liu Mingchuan as 'upright and not greedy or possessive'. It can be said that Tu Zongying and Liu Mingchuan were excellent representatives of honest officials from Anhui province in the late Qing Dynasty.

II. Second, Taking the governance of officials and the elimination of corruption as the primary measures for anti-corruption practice

"Officials are the backbone of the people, hence the sage governs officials rather than the people." Since the unification of China by Emperor Qin Shi Huang, who established a bureaucratic and centralized state, rectifying the behavior and style of officials at all levels and ensuring clean governance have become important and priority tasks for successive dynasties. As high-ranking local officials in the Qing Dynasty, such as governors, provincial governors, political advisors, and judicial inspectors, who wielded great power on behalf of the emperor to rule a region, they not only had the authority and responsibility to rectify the behavior and style of officials under their jurisdiction and ensure clean governance but also had an urgent need in this regard. This is because by the end of the Qing Dynasty, local officials at all levels were mostly indolent in politics, negligent of their duties, incompetent and corrupt, diligent in embezzlement, enriching themselves, bending the law for personal gain, often resulting in financial deficits and numerous local governance malpractices that remained unrectified for a long time. Therefore, in the practice of integrity, officials from Anhui Province who served as governors, provincial governors, political advisors, and judicial inspectors in the late Qing Dynasty often took rectifying governance and clearing up malpractices as their primary measures.

For example, after Tu Zongying took office as the Provincial Military Commissioner of Hunan in June 1871, he discovered that the Supervisor of the County in Mayang County, Hunan, often delayed the submission

^① (Qing Dynasty) Peng Yulin. Peng Yulin Collection (Part 1) [M]. Compiled by Liang Shaohui et al. Changsha: Yuelu Book Society, 2003, p. 336.

^② (Qing Dynasty) Peng Yulin. Peng Yulin Collection (Part 2) [M]. Compiled by Liang Shaohui et al. Changsha: Yuelu Book Society, 2003, p. 672.

of case-related materials, sometimes for as long as three months. Therefore, on the one hand, Tu Zongying punished the Supervisor of the County by recording a major demerit against him. On the other hand, in order to prevent state and county officials from neglecting their duties and dragging their feet in government affairs, he formulated a merit and demerit system for judicial trial work, in order to urge state and county officials to be diligent in their duties and handle judicial trial work in a timely and effective manner. After being promoted to the position of Provincial Military Commissioner of Hunan, Tu Zongying revised and improved the merit and demerit system to enhance its operability. At the same time, in response to the situation where "yamen officials and bailiffs colluded with the people of the contracting households" and "used the situation to enrich themselves" in the collection of grain taxes in Hunan, Tu Zongying not only clearly stipulated the specific amounts and types of grain taxes to be collected, but also reduced unnecessary expenses and severely punished yamen officials and bailiffs who violated orders and laws^①.

During his tenure as the Political Commissioner and Governor of Jiangxi, Liu Bingzhang started by addressing the long-standing fiscal malpractices in Jiangxi, namely the arrears of taxes and grain. On the one hand, he strictly established and enforced regulations for recovering arrears of taxes and grain, targeting the issue of officials in various prefectures and counties failing to hand over clear accounts of taxes and grain upon leaving their positions, which led to shortages and arrears. He strictly ordered that outgoing and incoming officials in various prefectures and counties must promptly reconcile the accounts of taxes and grain. On the other hand, he strengthened the collection and management of tax revenues such as land tax and local sales tax, requiring that all tax revenues be collected under his supervision. At the same time, he continuously intensified the rectification of bureaucratic governance, firstly targeting officials involved in arrears of taxes and grain. After being promoted to Governor of Jiangxi, he not only punished corruption among officials, strictly promoted or impeached them based on their performance, but also vigorously rectified prison work, strictly prohibiting favoritism and corruption in judicial trials and prison management^②.

Although Zhang Shusheng was born into a military family and was a renowned general in the Huai Army, having achieved numerous military achievements, he had a scholarly background and had received systematic Neo-Confucian education. Therefore, Zhang Shusheng transitioned from a Huai Army general to a civil official serving in the local area at a very early age. After being promoted to the position of Zhili Provincial Military Commissioner in 1869, Zhang Shusheng, based on the backlog of litigation cases in Zhili, planned and formulated the "Regulations on the Deadline and Merits of Clearing Litigation Matters" with Zhili Governor Zeng Guofan. These regulations required Zhili officials to complete the trial of cases within a specified time limit and also prohibited them from bending the law for personal gain during the trial process. After serving as Governor of Jiangsu in 1872, Zhang Shusheng, on one hand, rectified the military and political situation in Jiangsu, ordering the Huai Army stationed in Jiangsu to strictly enforce camp rules, military discipline, and rewards and punishments. On the other hand, due to the excessive number of officials appointed as alternates through donations

^① Liu Feng Tu Zongying's Neo Confucianism Thought and Political Practice [D]. Master's Thesis, Anhui University, 2018.

^② Zhao Yaonan Liu Bingzhang's Military and Political Career Review [D]. Master's Thesis, Hebei Normal University, 2008.

in Jiangsu, which could easily lead to "corruption in official administration" after filling vacancies, Zhang Shusheng petitioned the Qing court to suspend the appointment of alternates to Jiangsu. After being promoted to Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi, Zhang Shusheng placed greater emphasis on official administration. He began to inspect his subordinates and focus on rectifying the official administration in Guangdong. After a period of inspection, Zhang Shusheng impeached officials who were neglectful of government affairs, corrupt and incompetent, and ignorant and mediocre. He impeached high-ranking civil and military officials such as the Military Commissioner, General, Deputy General, and Salt Transportation Commissioner, as well as many mid- and low-ranking officials in office or as alternates, including supervisors of the county, instructors, recorders, and inspectors. This led to a significant improvement in the official administration in Guangdong^①.

III. Third, Pragmatism and diligence are the inevitable choices for practicing clean governance

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, most officials at all levels were skilled in corruption, bribery, and plundering, but short in governing affairs and ensuring the well-being of the people. Only a few officials were able to care for the people, apply their knowledge to the world, be diligent in serving as directors, and focus on governing officials and improving people's livelihoods. Affected by the corrupt political ecology of the late Qing Dynasty, although not all Anhui officials were honest and capable, there were still many officials, especially those who held senior positions such as governor, governor, governor, and inspector, who were able to care about the people, perform their duties seriously, and devote themselves to solving practical problems and handling various government affairs diligently. On the basis of rectifying official governance and cleaning up drawbacks, they vigorously developed industries, built water conservancy, established education, pursued Westernization, and prepared for coastal defense within their jurisdiction.

Zhou Fu was a native of Jiande County, Anhui Province during the late Qing Dynasty. He followed Li Hongzhang for a long time and successively held important positions such as Yongding River, Jinhai Pass Road, Bingbei Road, Inspector and Governor General of Zhili, Acting Governor General of Zhili, Governor General of Shandong, Governor General of Liangjiang, and Governor General of Guangdong and Guangxi. He was known for his practicality and diligence in governance. During his tenure under the supervision of Li Hongzhang, Zhou Fu, with Li Hongzhang's support, vigorously managed the Yongding River, which was prone to frequent floods. On the other hand, he established the Tianjin Telegraph Bureau, created the Tianjin Machinery Bureau, and the Wubei School, and proposed the construction of the Jixian Academy and the Bowen Academy to develop the Westernization Movement and new-style education in Zhili. After serving as the governor of Shandong, personally surveyed the water conservancy situation of the Yellow River and its tributaries in Shandong, and proposed and implemented corresponding governance measures. At the same time, we vigorously developed modern education and industry in Shandong, not only further developing higher education in Shandong, but also establishing various primary and secondary schools, industrial schools, teacher training schools, military preparation schools, and

^① Thank you A Brief Account of Zhang Shusheng's Achievements in Supervising Guangdong Province [C]. Paper presented at the Third International Symposium on "Late Qing Dynasty State and Society" in October 2009.

patrol police schools. We also established farmers' associations, founded tree art companies, fishery companies, as well as industrial organizations such as craft bureaus, glass companies, spinning companies, and weaving companies in various parts of Shandong, vigorously developing agriculture, industry, and commerce^①.

Liu Mingchuan was one of the few high-ranking officials in the Huai Army group who was both skilled in martial arts, pragmatic and diligent in governance, and embraced modernization ideas. After serving as the Governor of Taiwan, he, on the basis of Shen Baozhen and Ding Richang's governance of Taiwan and the promotion of modernization in Taiwan, on the one hand, reorganized Taiwan's finances, vigorously fought for Fujian's salary and expanded financial resources on the basis of economic development, and improved Taiwan's administrative structure to further lay the foundation for Taiwan's modernization construction. On the other hand, as a soldier, he attaches great importance to the construction of Taiwan's defense, optimizing the allocation of Taiwan's military forces, establishing military factories, and improving the construction of military facilities. At the same time, funds were raised to vigorously build railways, develop shipping and postal services, and establish a large number of industrial and mining enterprises, especially the Keelung coal mine, which achieved significant development results. In addition, the issue of indigenous peoples in Taiwan was resolved, and a large number of indigenous peoples were appeased with kindness and power, promoting the sinicization and progress of Taiwan's ethnic minorities^②.

The anti-corruption practices of Anhui officials in the late Qing Dynasty undoubtedly helped purify the corrupt political ecology of the Qing Dynasty and injected a certain amount of adrenaline into the turbulent Qing government. However, the anti-corruption practices of Anhui officials in the late Qing Dynasty were essentially a continuation of traditional Chinese anti-corruption practices in modern times. In the context of the corruption of the entire officialdom in the late Qing Dynasty, traditional anti-corruption practices could not effectively solve the problem of widespread official corruption and could not change the fate of the Qing government's eventual downfall.

^① Fang Ying Zhou Fu's Thought and Practice of Diligence in Government and Benefiting the People [J]. Anhui History, 2001, Issue 2.

^② Liu Hairong Liu Mingchuan and Taiwan's Modernization [J]. Journal of Chifeng University, Issue 2, 2007.