

# THE TOYO GAKUHO

Vol.92, No.4 - March 2011

(THE JOURNAL OF THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT  
OF THE TOYO BUNKO)

Emperors and Aristocrats of the Early Eastern Jin Dynasty

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In contrast to the conventional research on the political history of the Eastern Jin 東晉 Dynasty, which tends to emphasize the involvement of the aristocratic families of the north and the powerful families of the south, the author of the present article focuses on the relationship between northern aristocrats and the emperors, in an attempt to better clarify the actual situation under what has been termed a system of "aristocratic rule" and "factional politics."

During the reign of the Dynasty's first emperor, Yuandi 元帝 (r. 318-323), close advisers Liu Wei 劉隗 and Diao Xie 刁協 were given the task of developing a legalistic framework of rewards and punishments, including a system of government oversight, that would lead to a legitimate system of imperial autocratic law. Although their efforts were thwarted by the rebellion of Wang Dun 王敦 in 322, both figures rose to power by virtue of their personal affiliation with Yuandi. At the same time, at the Eastern Palace (東宮), the residence of Heir-Apparent Prince Shao 紹, northern aristocrats, including Wang Dao 王導, Wen Qiao 溫嶠 and Yu Liang 庾亮, were appointed to the palace staff and formed close personal relationships with the Prince as his teachers of both Confucianism and Daoist-based discourses about world renunciation, called Qingtan 清談. The enthronement of the Prince as second emperor Mingdi 明帝 saw the political rise of Wang Dao and other former Eastern Palace officials through such developments as the pacification of the Wang Dun Rebellion and their successful utilization of the meritocracy (*lungong xinshang* 論功行賞).

Based on such developments, the author argues that during the early Eastern Jin Dynasty period, the destiny of aristocrats and government officials was

by and large determined by their personal relationships with the reigning emperors. This tendency was especially true in the case of Mingdi, who, in order to maintain his own position of political leadership, not only appointed his former Eastern Palace staff members to high level posts, but also on his death bed appointed a favorite member of the imperial family and one of their frequent rivals, Xiyangwang Yang 西陽王業, to act along with them as an adviser to the next Emperor Chengdi 成帝. The author adds that since this political state of affairs was mainly dependent on the personal character and political sagacity of each individual emperor, what was happening can by no means be termed a full-fledged system of imperial autocracy.

The Ming Dynasty's *Yanlu* System during the Wanli Era:  
The Shuntian County Examination Incident of 1588

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The debates that raged over policy concerning the *yanlu* 言路 system (the submission of opinions and proposals to the emperor) during the Wanli Era have been dealt within the research to date from the standpoint of the Donglin 東林 Faction, and have thus been framed in terms of an opposition between repressing input and facilitating it. However, from an examination of an incident regarding the Shuntian 順天 County Examination of 1588 involving Wang Xijue 王錫爵 and his son Wang Heng 王衡, the author of the present article shows that *yanlu* was not repressed as argued by the Donglin Faction. Rather the *yanlu* system found itself in a very overheated and chaotic situation characterized by advocates utilizing the forum for the purpose of taking revenge on political enemies or furthering their personal careers by reporting ambiguous or absolutely groundless facts that would hopefully incite negative public opinion.

Those officials who kept their distance from the Donglin Faction by no means disagreed with the proposition to open up the *yanlu* system; but rather sensed the danger of the possible social chaos that *yanlu* could cause by allowing irresponsible attacks on political opponents and opportunistic social climbing. Such measures as the Shen Shixing 申時行 Cabinet's moratorium