

RU SCHOLARS, SOCIAL NETWORKS,
AND BUREAUCRACY: DONGHAI 東海
MEN AND MODELS FOR SUCCESS IN
WESTERN HAN CHINA (206 B.C.E.–9 C.E.)

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Abstract

In this study I take men from Donghai, a region of northeast China, as a case study for examining models of success in the Western Han (206 B.C.E.–9 C.E.). Employing digital tools to mine data from *The Grand Scribe's Records (Shi ji)* and *The History of the Western Han (Han shu)*, I explore the social networks and career patterns of men from a region that enjoyed a reputation for producing a remarkable number of high officials and celebrated *Ru*. I focus on three questions. First, what was the social mechanism that enabled people to distinguish themselves at both the local and the imperial levels? Second, did these celebrated men from Donghai serve as bridges connecting the local to the capital, directing resources back to their hometown and helping their local fellows achieve success? Third, did their positions in the central government remove them from local society by transforming them into capital-dwelling elites primarily concerned about the success of their families in the central court? In addressing these questions, I probe the dynamics between bureaucratic hierarchy, social networks, and the flow of talent and resources. I investigate various understandings of prestige and the strategies for climbing the ladder of success. Furthermore, I ask which forms of social prestige—for example, academic reputation, wealth, social networks—could bypass the hierarchical system imposed by the imperial bureaucracy, providing direct access to lofty positions. Did the patterns of success seen in the Donghai group reflect a bias built into the sources, constitute a regional variation, or provide a universal model for success in early imperial China?

In early imperial China, fortunate *Ru* who secured the sponsorship of powerful men rose high in the bureaucracy, but no institutionalized avenue had yet been established that regularly and predictably selected *Ru* for office.¹ To win political power, most *Ru* had to accumulate

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1. Western scholars have debated the terms “Confucian” and “*Ru*,” with some holding that the *Ru* constituted an intellectually heterogeneous group in the Han dynasty. Although not all *Ru* were necessarily followers of Confucius, the term was

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administrative experience, climbing the ladder of the bureaucratic hierarchy, and thereby becoming bureaucrats. In the first half of the Western Han dynasty (206–87 B.C.E.), *Ru* accounted for only a minority of those at the upper levels of the ruling group, and their communities of disciples suffered fragmentation. By contrast, when the most powerful families were eliminated in the wake of a witchcraft scandal (91–87 B.C.E.), a power vacuum in the central court emerged and the influence of *Ru* started to rise.² They both entrenched their positions at the top of the bureaucracy and built consolidated communities defined by teacher–disciple relations. Those ties evolved into networks, channels through which flowed power that enabled them either to obtain direct appointments by the emperor or to defeat thousands of contenders in climbing the bureaucratic hierarchy, ascending to positions near the top of the power pyramid.³

used in a rather consistent way in pre-Han and Han texts, designating men who immersed themselves in the Five Classics. Echoing *Han Feizi* 韓非子, Ban Gu 班固 explicitly defined *Ru* as the bearers of Confucius' heritage. In this article, all men called *Ru* were experts in at least one of the Five Classics, and they were connected with each other through teacher–disciple relationships; several of them—such as Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 and Zhang Yu 張禹—were famous scholars of *The Analects*. For Sima Qian's creation of *Ru* identity, see Liang Cai, *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), chap. 2, esp. 47–53. For modern scholars' discussion of *Ru* and Confucianism, see Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 6–7; Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), esp. 3–28; Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now,” in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 17–56; Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 32–33; Nicolas Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism: The Ru in Pre-Qin Times and during the Early Han Dynasty* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 165–375; Anne Cheng, “What Did It Mean to Be a Ru in Han Times?” *Asia Major* 14 (2001), 101–18; Liang Cai, “When the Founder Is Not a Creator: Confucius and Confucianism Reconsidered,” in *Varieties of Religious Invention*, ed. Patrick Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 62–82.

2. Cai, *Witchcraft*, esp. chaps. 1 and 4.

3. Ban Gu estimated that in 2 C.E. the imperial bureaucracy of the Western Han consisted of 120,285 officials, a number that may not include some of the functionaries directly employed by magistrates and governors. A recently excavated bamboo manuscript shows that the number of officials in the Donghai commandery was either 2,203 or 2,202. See Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), 7a.743; Denis C. Twitchett, John K. Fairbank, and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, *The Ch'in and Han Empires: 221 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 466; Michael Loewe, *The Government of the Qin and Han Empires: 221 B.C.E.–220 C.E.* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2006), 47.

This article treats men from Donghai as a case study to examine models of success in Western Han officialdom. During this period, Donghai commandery 東海郡—the area now comprising Linyi 臨沂 in Shandong 山東 and Lianyungang 連雲港 in northern Jiangsu 江蘇—produced a remarkable number of officials and scholars who achieved empire-wide fame. Almost two millennia ago, Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 C.E.) noticed this extraordinary phenomenon, pointing out that “since the establishment of the Han dynasty, men from Donghai in the Lu region have frequently become chancellors and other high officials” (漢興以來，魯東海多至卿相).⁵ In his “Treatise on Geography” 地理志, Ban differentiated the Lu 魯 area from the neighboring Qi 齊 region, explaining that they could be traced back to the creation of two vassal states during the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–771 B.C.E.).⁶ People from the Western Han on often mentioned Qi and Lu together. Reasons included linguistic similarities, a shared reputation as a place of righteousness and rituals (*liyi zhi xiang* 禮義之鄉), and the large number of scholars both regions produced—*Ru* in particular.⁷

Modern scholars often study Qi and Lu as one region. An Zuozhang 安作璋 and Liu Dezeng 劉德增 have shown that from the time of Emperor Wu 武帝 (141–87 B.C.E.) of the Western Han dynasty through that of Emperor Xian 獻帝 (ca. 189–234 C.E.) of the Eastern Han, over a span of more than three hundred years, 171 erudites (*boshi* 博士) were appointed by the central government based on their profound understanding of the Five Classics. Of that number, the origins of 128 men can be identified, and 60, about 47 percent, were from the Qi-Lu region.⁸ From the time of Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74–49 B.C.E.) through that of Emperor Ping 平帝 (r. 1 B.C.E.–6 C.E.), a total of eighty years, eighteen chancellors served the rulers; ten of them came from the Qi-Lu area, among whom three were from Donghai.⁹ Although the study of China’s local culture has grown into a lively field in Western academia, few scholars have

4. Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 中國歷史地圖集 (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu, 1982), vol. 2, 7–8. See also http://maps.cga.harvard.edu/tgaz/placename/hvd_91265, accessed 7 March 2017.

5. *Han shu* 28.1663.

6. *Han shu* 28.1659–62.

7. See the *Fangyan* 方言 and *Shiming* 釋名, in CHANT (CHinese ANcient Texts), edited by Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo 1998–2000), www.chant.org.

8. In particular, forty-one came from Lu and nineteen came from Qi. See An Zuozhang 安作璋 and Liu Dezeng 劉德增, “Qi Lu boshi yu Liang Han ruxue” 齊魯博士與兩漢儒學, *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊 2000.1, 12–20.

9. The three chancellors who came from Donghai were Yu Dingguo 于定國, Kuang Heng 匡衡, and Xue Xuan 薛宣.

examined the ties between a particular region and the imperial capital. In China, a large number of articles and books have been devoted to the Qi-Lu region. Typically focusing on its general characteristics, they describe Qi-Lu as a cultural zone that preserved the legacy of the Zhou dynasty and produced people deeply versed in the classics.¹⁰ While the big picture provides historical background, the social and political mechanisms that helped individuals achieve success have not yet been fully examined. This article argues that social networks based on teacher–disciple relationships facilitated geographical mobility, helping men from Donghai transform their *Ru* learning into social capital that in turn helped them achieve political power. The main social network these men from Donghai exploited was based on the transmission of *Ru* learning, yet their success was primarily defined by their position in the bureaucracy. In contrast with what we find in Eastern Han sources, which openly discussed social networks, the records left by Donghai men are rather quiet about their ties to each other.¹¹ Their complicated connections need to be mined by searching and closely reading various narratives. Furthermore, unlike the powerful social networks formed in the Eastern Han that could challenge the government, Donghai’s community of disciples had not yet achieved autonomy—it maintained a symbiotic relationship with the rulers.¹²

10. In China, Qi-Lu studies is a lively field with its own journal—*Qi-Lu xuekan* 齊魯學刊—and a good number of monographs. Japanese scholars have also devoted some articles to Qi-Lu culture. Notable articles by Chinese and Japanese scholars include Meng Xiangcai 孟祥才 and Hu Xinsheng 胡新生, *Qi Lu sixiang wenhua shi* (*Xian Qin Qin-Han juan*): *cong diyu wenhua dao zhuliu wenhua* 齊魯思想文化史 (先秦秦漢卷) —從地域文化到主流文化 (Jinan: Shandong daxue, 2002); Wang Zijin 王子今, “Qin-Han shiqi Qi-Lu wenhua de fengge yu ruxue de xijian” 秦漢時期齊魯文化的風格與儒學的西漸, *Qi-Lu xuekan* 齊魯學刊 1998.1, 49–53; Wang Zhiming 王志民, *Qi-Lu wenhua gaishuo* 齊魯文化概說 (Jinan: Shandong wenyi, 2006); Sun Jiazhou 孫家洲, “Lun Qin-Han shiqi Qi-Lu wenhua de lishi diwei” 論秦漢時期齊魯文化的歷史地位, *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao* 中國人民大學學報, July 2001, 107–13; Nagai Mizuto 永井彌人, “Seishi gakuha to Sei-Ro gakuha” 齊詩學派と齊魯學派, *Chūgoku koten kenkyū* 中國古典研究 46 (2001), 99–105; Yanaka Shin’ichi 谷中 信一, “Kandai shisōshi ni araware ta Sei-Rokan” 漢代思想史にあらわれた齊・魯觀, *Tōhōgaku* 東方學 73 (1987), 18–33; Saiki Tetsurō 齋木哲郎, “Sei-Ro Santō no Jōyō-Moku to hōshi tachi jukyō kokkyōka zenshi” 齊魯・山東の儒墨と方士たち—儒教国教化前史, *Tōhō shūkyō* 東方宗教 5 (1990), 42–60; Kamata Keiichi 釜田啓市, “Zenkan Tōkaigun no gakujuutsuteki dōkō” 前漢東海郡の學術的動向, *Machikaneyama ronsō: Tetsugaku-hen* 待兼山論叢. 哲學篇 32.12 (1998), 41–53.

11. For a discussion of social networks, especially those of the Eastern Han, see Mark Edward Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 216–19.

12. Patricia Ebrey, “Patron–Client Relations in the Later Han,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103.3 (1983), 533–42. Miranda Brown argues that those social networks were structured both hierarchically—teacher/disciple, official/

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Social-Network Analysis: A Relational Perspective

I adopt the perspective provided by social-network analysis theory to examine the career paths of officials whose hometowns were in Donghai.¹³ As Karl Marx said, “Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.”¹⁴ The intricate connections among historical figures, serving as a social structure, not only channeled the flow of information, resources, and political power, they played a crucial role in geographical and social mobility.

Sorting out the connections among historical players also helps to identify political cliques and social groups. Dividing historical actors into groups is not a new approach, and conventional wisdom generally classifies men into different groups according to their intellectual orientations and political agendas. For the period in question, the standard paradigm portrays the political realm of the early Han in terms of struggles between *Ru* and Huang-Lao adherents.¹⁵ In line with this substantialist approach, Michael Loewe uses different criteria to divide Han officials into modernists and reformists.¹⁶ While both of those approaches provide useful perspectives to understand early Chinese empires, social-network analysis offers a different way of identifying social groups, by teasing out connections such as teacher–disciple, superior–subordinate, patron–client, and kinship- or friendship-based ties. It helps us map the configurations of power and explain individuals’ behavior and political attitudes.¹⁷

subordinate—and horizontally, through relations among friends and colleagues. See Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), chap. 4.

13. For an introduction to social-network analysis theory, see John Scott and Peter J. Carrington, *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2011), esp. chaps. 2, 4, and 7.

14. Karl Marx, “Grundrisse,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 247.

15. For example, Hans van Ess, “The Meaning of Huang-Lao in ‘Shi ji’ and ‘Han shu,’” *Études chinoises* 12.2 (1993), 161–77; Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 338–52.

16. Michael Loewe is famous for labeling as “modernists” those who promoted military campaigns and the state monopoly on major commodities such as salt. The label “reformist” he applied to those who overturned these policies, favoring a nonexpansionary foreign policy, a frugal budget, and lower taxes. See Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), 162, 185–206; Donald B. Wagner, *The State and the Iron Industry in Han China* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2001), 16–19.

17. For more on the difference between a substantialist approach and a relational one, see Mustafa Emirbayer, “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 103.2 (1997), 282–89.

Historical research never ignores relationships, but the systematic excavation of the links among major historical figures has not yet been carried out for early Chinese dynasties. If we consider the ruling class of the Western Han, we soon see that hundreds of historical actors were connected through a great variety of ties. Evidence is scattered. To assemble all the relevant data and overcome the limits of our conventional reading habits and cognitive capacity, historians have turned to special tools. Traditional reference books, such as concordances and indexes, can be helpful. Thanks to the digitization of vast amounts of historical documentation and the creation of new text mining tools, we can now more efficiently reconstruct and visualize the complicated and multidimensional social networks in which historical figures were embedded.¹⁸ Such reconstructions help us comprehend history in its richness, but they do much more, revolutionizing our reading habits, transforming our focus from the linear narrative of primary sources to the dynamic play between a range of related stories.

Let me dwell for a moment on a well-known statement regarding Emperor Yuan's promotion of *Ru* officials. Ban Gu wrote,

Because Emperor Yuan loved *Ru*, Gong Yu, Wei Xuancheng, and Kuang Heng served successively as chancellors.

元帝好儒，貢禹、韋玄成、匡衡等相繼為公卿。¹⁹

Although Yuan's fondness for *Ru* is presented as the main reason for the success of the three officials, and examination of their social networks reveals other crucial factors. Gong Yu was a classmate of Yan Pengzu 嚴彭祖, a high official,²⁰ and his crucial career step was facilitated by Shi Xian 石顯, a powerful eunuch.²¹ Wei Xuancheng's father, Wei Xian 韋賢 (fl. 67–70 B.C.E.), was a chancellor,²² and Kuang Heng started his remarkable career journey after he became the confidant of Shi Gao 史高, a relative of Emperor Xuan.²³ Without such connections, few managed to climb very high in the power pyramid. As important as

18. Traditional reference tools help researchers to approach their sources as multi-dimensional narratives. Digital tools, including searchable texts, make possible broader, more efficient interrogations of documents. This article is based on a set of data from a group of men who lived in Donghai. The attributes of individual historical figures and a visualization of the relationships among them are essential to my conclusions.

19. *Han shu* 25.1253.

20. *Han shu* 88.3616–17.

21. *Han shu* 93.3729.

22. *Han shu* 73.3107.

23. *Han shu* 81.3332.

social connections were to personal success, their significance was often concealed by the rich flow of narratives. Social-network analysis offers a new way to interpret our sources.

In the present study, I do not orient to quantitative analysis; instead I focus on a prominent case, scrutinizing primary sources in light of newly discovered social networks.²⁴ I ask, first, what kinds of social factors—family wealth, educational credentials, bureaucratic rank, social networks, or something else—allowed people to distinguish themselves at both the local and the imperial level? I ask whether the officials with roots in Donghai served as bridges connecting the local area to the capital, directing resources back to their hometown and helping their local fellows achieve success. Finally, did assignments to the central government sever their ties to local society, transforming them into capital-dwelling elites who only cared about seeing their relatives take up posts alongside them? I believe that these questions will allow me to explore the relationship between bureaucratic hierarchy and the flow of talents and resources, and to discover which forms of social prestige—academic reputation, wealth, or social networks—could bypass the hierarchical system imposed by the imperial bureaucracy and provide direct access to high positions. I also assess whether the apparent patterns of success of men from Donghai arise only from a bias in the sources, constitute a regional aberration, or suggest a general pattern about success in early imperial China.

Social Networks of Donghai Men

The Donghai commandery consisted of thirty-eight counties inhabited by 358,414 households—around 1,559,257 people.²⁵ During the 180 years of the Western Han, twenty-three men from this region achieved empire-

24. Social network analysis, a well-developed field, is informed by a range of complicated theories and employs a large number of technical terms, such as homophily (the extent to which actors share significant traits), multiplexity (the range of relationships connecting two people), and centrality (the importance and influence of a person within a network). When we deal with large amounts of information, such as when we quantify the social networks of the upper class of the Western Han, these technical terms serve as useful analytical tools. But if we are studying only the Donghai group, that jargon will not facilitate our analysis—I will not use it. When a great deal of data is compiled, text-mining software is sometimes deployed. Rather than do that, I have looked for evidence of social networks by performing regular searches of the digitized primary sources. Nonetheless, I did find that the relations among Donghai men evolved into complicated networks, visualizations of which have been created for me by the computer scientists Jun Tao and Jiang Meng (see Figures 1b and 3; more fully elaborated figures can be found at www.meng-jiang.com/demos/chnhistory).

25. *Han shu* 28.1588.

wide fame and left their names in *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of the Western Han*. Eleven of them came from Lanling 蘭陵 County, and twelve came to prominence simultaneously during the fifty-year span when Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan reigned (87–33 B.C.E.) (see Table 1).²⁶ Among these twelve, two ascended to the top of the bureaucracy, becoming chancellors; three served among the Nine Ministers, officials who occupied the top of the power pyramid along with the Three Dukes; two were appointed as erudites at the Imperial Academy;²⁷ and two served respectively as grand tutor and junior tutor to the crown prince. During the period in question, China had a total population of around 57,671,000 (another estimate is 59,594,974),²⁸ produced twelve chancellors, and had seventy-four identifiable high officials (Three Dukes and Nine Ministers).²⁹ The Donghai region accounted for 2.6 percent of the total population, produced 16 percent of the chancellors and 6.7 percent of the high officials. These dozen Donghai men offer us an excellent opportunity to study how people realized their political aspirations in the Western Han, and how talents and resources flowed between center and periphery.

First and foremost, those twelve Donghai men were connected to each other. Nine were bound by teacher–disciple relationships. Meng Qing 孟卿, from Lanling, was deeply learned in the *Rites* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and among his students were Meng Xi 孟喜, Shu Guang 疏廣, and Hou Cang 后倉; the former was his son, while the latter two were from his hometown.³⁰ Hou Cang taught the *Book of Songs* and the

26. Most of the twenty-three men came from five counties: Lanling 蘭陵, Tan 鄆, Xiapei 下邳, Cheng 承, and Qi 戚. Fu Zhongweng 馮中翁, a native Donghai man, was said to have served as a tutor to Emperor Xuan before he succeeded to the throne. Except for that information, we know little about him. See *Han shu* 8.237 and also Table 1.

27. With power second only to the emperor's, the Three Dukes occupied the apex of the Han bureaucracy. The Nine Ministers constituted the second-highest stratum. The Three Dukes comprised a chancellor (*chengxiang* 丞相), a commander-in-chief (*taiwei* 太尉; later the title was changed to *da sima* 大司馬), and a grandee secretary (*yushi dafu* 御史大夫). The Nine Ministers were a grand master of ceremonies (*taichang* 太常), a superintendent of the imperial household (*guanglu xun* 光祿勳), a commandant of the guards (*weivei* 衛尉), a grand coachman (*taipu* 太僕), a commandant of justice (*tingwei* 廷尉), a grand herald (*dahonglu* 大鴻臚), a director of the imperial clan (*zongzheng* 宗正), a grand minister of agriculture (*dasinong* 大司農), and a privy treasurer (*shaofu* 少府).

28. Ge Jianxiong 葛劍雄, *Xi Han renkou dili* 西漢人口地理 (Beijing: Renmin, 1986), 12. The population of the Western Han is based on information drawn from *Han shu* 28a.1543–1608.

29. For a list of the chancellors and the other identifiable high officials, see Cai, *Witchcraft*, 116–17.

30. *Han shu* 88.3599.

Table 1. Men from Donghai in the Western Han Dynasty

	Lanling 蘭陵 11 men	Xiapei 下邳: 3 men	Tan 鄒 2 men	Cheng 承 1 man	Qi 戚 1 man	Unknown counties 5 men
Emperor Wu (141–87 B.C.E.): 3 men	Wang Zang 王臧					
Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan (87–33 B.C.E.): 13 men	Miu sheng 繆生					
	Chu da 褚大					
	Meng Qing 孟卿	Yan Yannian 嚴延年	Yu Dingguo 于定國	Kuang Heng 匡衡		Fu Zhongweng 馮中翁
	Meng Xi 孟喜	Yan Pengzu 嚴彭祖				
	Bai Guang 白光 Hou Cang 后蒼 Shu Guang 疏廣 Shu Shou 疏受 Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之	Yi Feng 翼奉				
Emperors Cheng, Ai, and Ping (33 B.C.E.–8 C.E.): 7 men	Wu Jianglong 毋將隆		Xue Xuan 薛宣		Ma Gong 馬宮	Fang Shang 方賞 Jiao Wang 矯望 Wei Zhangzi 魏章子 Shen Xian 申咸

* We can identify twenty-three men who came from Donghai commandery throughout Western Han times. Three men emerged under Emperor Wu’s fifty-four-year rule, thirteen under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan’s fifty-four-year rule, and seven under Emperors Cheng, Ai and Ping’s forty-two-year rule. Examining the geographical regions within Donghai, we find that eleven men came from Lanling county, three from Xiapei, two from Tan, one from Cheng and one from Qi. There were five Donghai men whose native county we cannot locate.

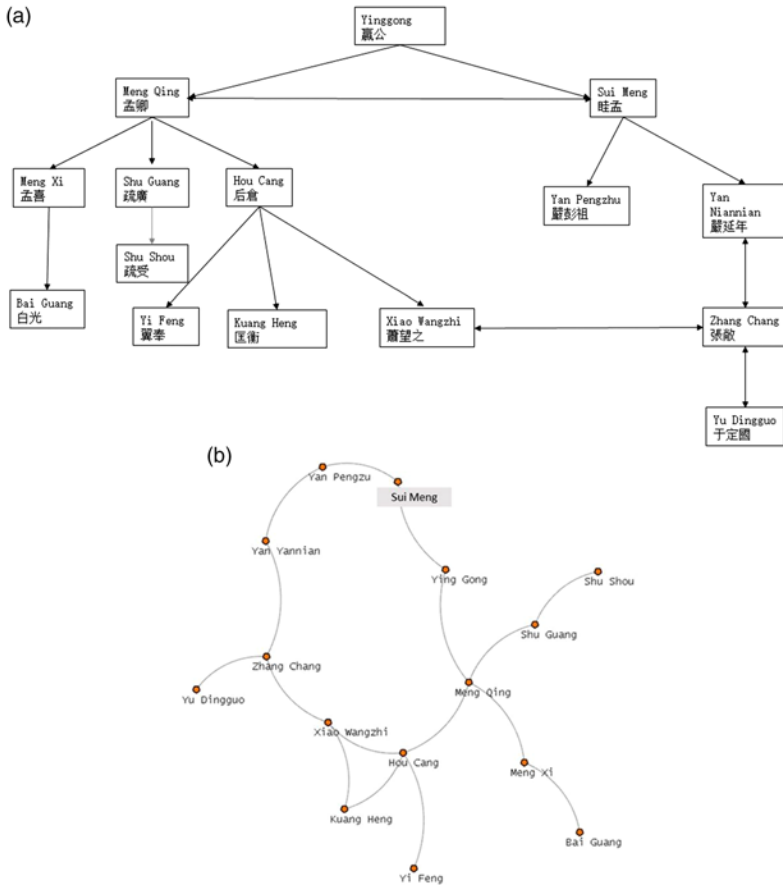


Figure 1. (a) Donghai Network Core Circle: Hierarchical Visualization and (b) Donghai Network Core Circle: Non-Hierarchical Visualisation.

Rites to Xiao Wangzhi 萧望之, Kuang Heng, and Yi Feng 翼奉. Hou and Xiao came from the same town, while the other two were from neighboring counties. Yan Pengzhu received the teachings of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* from Sui Meng 眭孟, a master who was both the classmate and the disciple of Meng Qing (see Figure 1 and Table 3).³¹

In addition to the nine men connected via their schooling, three more natives of Donghai rose to official prominence at the same time—Yan Yannian 嚴延年, Shu Shou 疏受, and Yu Dingguo 于定國. Yan and Shu were linked to some of those mentioned above via family ties: the former

31. *Han shu* 88.3613.

was the brother of Yan Pengzu,³² and the latter was the nephew of Shu Guang.³³ Yan Yannian and Yu Dingguo were legal experts, and both were friendly with Zhang Chang 張敞, a colleague and a good friend of Xiao Wangzhi (see Figure 1).³⁴ Judging by their shared hometown, educational backgrounds, and the ties connecting them, the twelve Donghai men composed a relatively coherent social group.

Donghai men established relations with other *Ru* communities of disciples by studying with different teachers. Meng Xi was sent by his father to study the *Changes* with Tian Wangsun 田王孫, a mentor to renowned *Ru* scholars who established three major interpretative schools of the *Changes*.³⁵ Among those twenty disciples of Tian, one became chancellor and six achieved high positions in the latter half of the Western Han. Another Donghai man, Hou Cang, studied with Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌, and Hou's classmate Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 taught Hou's own disciple Xiao Wangzhi. Xiahou Sheng presided over a community of disciples devoted to the *Documents* which extended over three generations and comprised seventeen members.³⁶ Among those, six labored at the center of imperial politics, becoming members of the Nine Ministers and confidants to emperors (see Figure 2).³⁷

To judge from the success of officials from Donghai, Hou Cang appears to have been a crucial figure in this scholarly community. He was the first among them to be named an erudite, and the first to rise to the top level of the power pyramid, appointed as privy treasurer (*shaofu* 少府)—one of the Nine Ministers—in 72 B.C.E..³⁸ Thereafter, his disciples played important roles in both the political and intellectual worlds. Xiao Wangzhi served as one of the Nine Ministers for decades, and Kuang Heng became a chancellor. Three others among his disciples—Dai De 戴德, Dai Sheng 戴聖, Qing Pu 慶普—created their own interpretive schools on *The Rites*, and two of Hou's students, Yi Feng and Dai Sheng, were appointed erudites.³⁹ Also, Hou Cang's classmate, Shu Guang, was

32. *Han shu* 90.3672.

33. *Han shu* 71.3039.

34. *Han shu* 76.3223, 88.3616, and 90.3670.

35. *Han shu* 88.3598–600.

36. *Han shu* 75.3155 and 88.3604–5.

37. On the *Ru* disciple communities and the high officials they produced, see Liang Cai, "Excavating the Genealogy of Classical Studies in the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131.3 (2011), 371–94.

38. No sources indicate how Hou Cang rose to power. But he was among the group of *Ru* who ascended to high positions after the five-year-long witchcraft scandal eliminated the most powerful official families and created a power vacuum at the court. For the rise of *Ru* officials in the Han dynasty, see Cai, *Witchcraft*, 113–53.

39. *Han shu* 10.1710 and 75.3167–78.

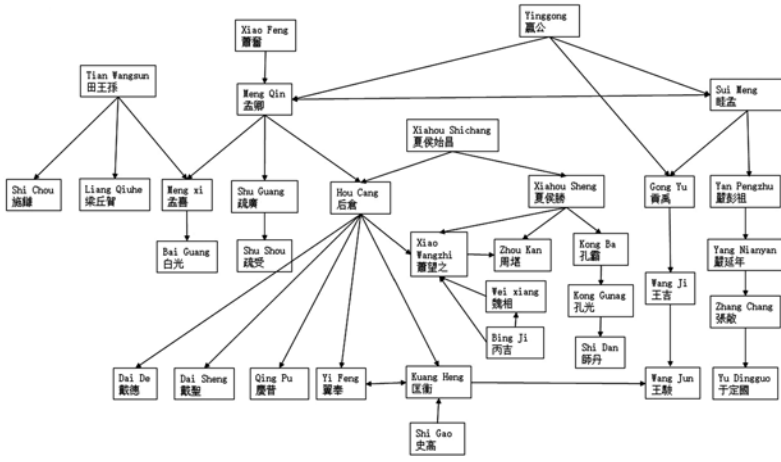


Figure 2. Donghai Networks: Main Connections.

appointed to serve as the crown prince’s junior tutor seven years after Hou became one of the Nine Ministers.⁴⁰

Once the Donghai *Ru* were in power, they endorsed each other and expanded their network by forming alliances with other *Ru* officials. They recommended each other, recruited disciples of their fellow classmates as their assistants, and supported each other’s political proposals.⁴¹ Xiao Wangzhi, for instance, recommended his classmate Kuang Heng to the emperor. Kuang recommended Kong Guang 孔光 as a man of sincere and upright virtue (*fangzheng* 方正). Kong Guang’s father, Kong Ba 孔霸, was a classmate of Hou Cang, Kuang Heng’s own teacher. Also, both Kong Ba and Xiao Wangzhi studied under Xiahou Sheng. When Kong Guang became grand secretary, he collaborated with Chancellor Zhai Fangjin 翟方進 to recruit Kuang Heng’s disciple Shi Dan 師丹 to serve as a counselor of the palace (*guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫) and deputy to the chancellor (*chengxiang sizhi* 丞相司直). Xiao Wangzhi and Zhou Kan 周堪, both students of Xiahou Sheng, formed an alliance to resist the Shi Xian 石顯 eunuch group during Emperor Yuan’s reign (see Figure 3).⁴²

The correlations between endorsements from *Ru* and their success in officialdom shows that the social network built by officials from Donghai

40. *Han shu* 71.3039.

41. This does not mean that all *Ru* belonged to a single interest group. There were cases of *Ru* belonging to opposing political cliques. See Liang Cai, “The Hermeneutics of Omens: The Bankruptcy of Moral Cosmology in the Western Han China (206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.),” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25.3 (2015), 439–59.

42. On the political struggle between Xiao Wangzhi’s group and Shi Xian’s group, see Cai, “Hermeneutics of Omens.”

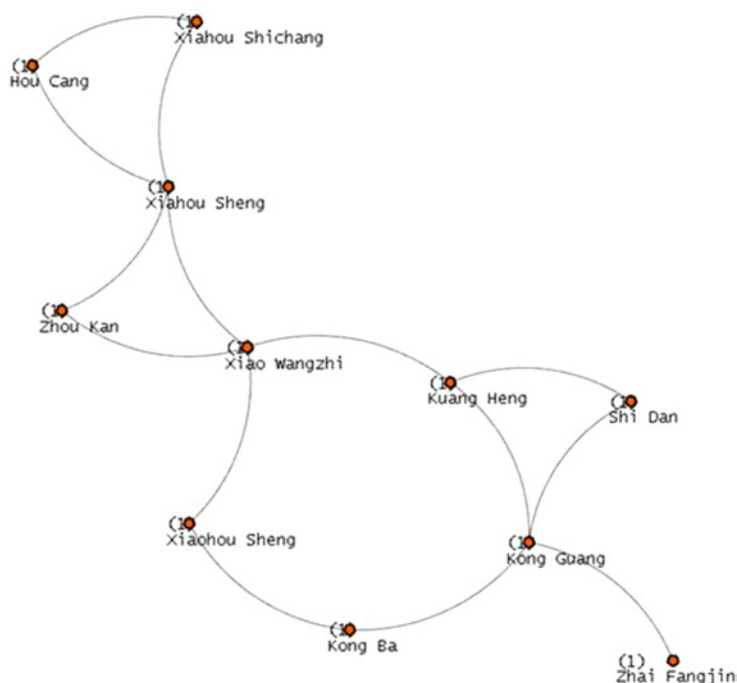


Figure 3. Networks of Recommendations.

greatly contributed to their bureaucratic rise. Their mutual recognition vividly publicized the power of their social circle. Both their *Ru* learning and their connections with high officials who shared their intellectual predilections became social capital, helping them win sponsorship outside the *Ru* community.⁴³

Ru Networks as Social Capital

The core members of the Donghai group were *Ru*, defined by expertise in one of the Five Classics and membership in a teacher–disciple network. In our sources, their success, however, was measured by their official positions. The group’s first victory occurred when Hou Cang was named to a high position. The prosperity of this group was revealed by

43. Pierre Bourdieu defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.” See Bourdieu, “The Form of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1985), 248.

the prominent official positions its members achieved, and the group's academic fame expanded as members won official posts as erudites at the Imperial Academy and as advisers to the emperor. Officialdom became the arena where their aspirations were realized.

While Donghai *Ru* benefited from mutual support, their entrenchment at the top of the bureaucracy also resulted from the sponsorship they won from powerful men. After graduating from the Imperial Academy, Xiao Wangzhi and Kuang Heng were given insignificant assignments—only with the endorsement of those close to the emperor and other high officials did they start their brilliant careers. As their intellectual community gained visibility, other officials wished to make alliances with them. After working for several years as the captain in command of the east gate to Small Park (*xiaoyuan dongmen hou* 小苑東門候) did Xiao get a boost from Bing Ji 丙吉, a confidant of Emperor Xuan. Recommended to the regent, Huo Guang 霍光, Xiao failed to make a good impression. Later, Xiao Wangzhi was demoted and served as a functionary in the local county (*junli* 郡吏). His distinguished career started with the support of Wei Xiang 魏相. The grand secretary recruited Xiao as his own assistant and subsequently recommended him for the post of aide for ceremonial in the Messengers' Office (*daxing zhili cheng* 大行治禮丞), a position in the central court charged with managing communication with the kings, marquises, and leaders of other regimes. Thereafter Xiao came to the attention of Emperor Xuan and moved to the center of the political stage.⁴⁴

The story of Kuang Heng resembles, in outline, that of Xiao Wangzhi. On graduation from the Imperial Academy, Kuang was appointed a literary functionary (*wenxue* 文學) in Pingyuan commandery, a low-ranking position in the local government. But the sources indicate that by that date Kuang was already regarded as a refined scholar—*Ru* scholars in the capital had noticed him. Ban Gu stated,

Scholars have frequently submitted memorials recommending [Kuang] Heng as one who illuminates the classics, and the world has few of his caliber. [They declare that Kuang] should be promoted to the office of literate functionary and serve in the capital. . . . [The emperor] asked [Xiao] Wangzhi, grand tutor to the crown prince, along with Liangqiu He the privy treasurer, to assess [Kuang Heng's] learning. Heng responded by citing the fundamental principles of the *Songs*, a profoundly beautiful reply. Wangzhi reported to the emperor that Heng's classical learning was refined and polished, that his discussions followed the way of the Master; he opined that he deserved to be interviewed.

44. *Han shu* 78.3271–72.

學者多上書薦衡經明，當世少雙，今為文學就官京師... 事下太子太傅蕭望之、少府梁丘賀問，衡對詩諸大義，其對深美。望之奏衡經學精習，說有師道，可觀覽。⁴⁵

When probing beneath the surface of this anecdote, which adds to the luster of Kuang's reputation as a scholar, we should recall that Hou Cang, a prominent *Ru* official, was Kuang's teacher and that Xiao Wangzhi was his classmate. Both Xiao and Kuang studied with Hou for years. Kuang's reputation must have resulted from his teacher-disciple relationship with renowned *Ru* officials. His fame as a fine scholar in turn attracted the attention of other powerful men. Later, Shi Gao, a relative of the emperor, wished to be known as a patron of talented men, so he recruited Kuang as a functionary in the Consultation Bureau (*yicao* 議曹) and later recommended him to the emperor. From that launching pad, Kuang soared to his final post as chancellor.⁴⁶

Just as economic capital generates more capital, valuable social networks attract outsiders, creating new social connections. Because *Ru* erudition required many years of study, teacher-disciple relations amounted to a stable form of social capital. When Shi promoted Kuang, he not only obtained a reputation for promoting a bright young man, he also tapped into Kuang's network. As Ban Gu mentioned, at that moment Shi served as commander-in-chief (*da sima* 大司馬); he felt overshadowed by Xiao Wangzhi, because the latter had once tutored Emperor Yuan. Yang Xing 楊興, the magistrate of Chang'an, persuaded Shi to recruit Kuang as his subordinate, saying,

Kuang Heng, now serving as literary functionary in Pingyuan, possesses abundant talent and wisdom—his classical learning is matchless. But there is no path along which he might advance to the central court, so in keeping with his appointment he remains in a remote place. If you, my general, sincerely summon him to your office, this man of letters will happily return to the site of benevolence. Allow him to participate in political discussions, observe his abilities, [then if you] recommend him to the court, he will prove himself a great asset to the state. You will thereby display your merit to the populace and your great renown will be transmitted to posterity.

平原文學 匡衡材智有餘，經學絕倫，但以無階朝廷，故隨牒在遠方。將軍誠召置莫府，學士歛然歸仁，與參事議，觀其所有，貢之朝廷，必為國器，以此顯示衆庶，名流於世。⁴⁷

45. *Han shu* 81.4069

46. *Han shu* 81.3331–32.

47. *Han shu* 81.3332.

Whereas Yang praised Kuang for his classical learning, *The Grand Scribe's Records* indicated that Kuang failed the graduation examination several times at the Imperial Academy.⁴⁸ Our sources often conclude that Xiao and Kuang enjoyed great reputations and eventually achieved high positions because of their *Ru* learning. But when Wei Xian promoted Xiao, both of Xiao's teachers, Hou Cang and Xiahou Sheng, held important positions in the central court. When Kuang was recruited by Shi, his teacher Hou and his classmate Xiao had already ascended to the top level of the bureaucracy. In fact, in the latter half of the Western Han, we find that famous *Ru* scholars generally had teachers or classmates active in the central court. Xiao and Kuang's reputations resulted from years of study with renowned *Ru* officials, and their fame as fine scholars in turn expanded the social capital of their new patrons.

The success of the Donghai group, as our sources indicate, was measured by acquiring a high position in the central government. I would like to propose three different models for the dynamic relation between social networks based on *Ru* learning and the bureaucracy: controlling the positions of erudite and grand tutor; bypassing the low and middle levels of bureaucratic hierarchy; and facilitating regular promotion.

Social Networks and the Positions of Erudite and Grand Tutor

An education in the *Ru* classics was the sine qua non for being a fine scholar, but empire-wide acknowledgement of scholarly excellence depended on recognition from the emperor, or appointment as erudite at the Imperial Academy.⁴⁹ In our sources, I cannot identify one renowned *Ru* scholar who had no connections with officialdom. Indeed, *Ru* scholars became renowned precisely because they occupied official positions or taught the crown prince or the emperor. Instead of achieving political power by virtue of fame in the intellectual realm, cases show that it was political power that endowed *Ru* with authority in the intellectual world. Teacher–disciple connections established through prolonged study with famous *Ru* officials helped six men from the Donghai circle rise to serve as erudite and two as tutors to the crown prince.⁵⁰

48. *Shi ji* 96.2688.

49. Erudites at the Imperial Academy had no administrative power; their rank within the bureaucratic hierarchy must be said to have been either low or middle. But they were close to the political center and had routine contact with the emperor. Some of them served as tutors to the crown prince, a position that assured them of glory after the prince succeeded to the throne.

50. The distinguished six were Hou Cang, Feng Yi, Dai Sheng, Bai Guang 白光, Zhai Mu 翟牧, and Kuang Heng. Hou and Kuang later rose to high posts. *Han shu* 88.3599.

In fact, in the latter half of the Western Han the positions of erudite and grand tutor were generally controlled by *Ru* teacher–disciple networks. Although *Ru* communities were of no importance in the first half of the dynasty, after the witchcraft scandal reshuffled the power of the upper ruling group, several intertwined *Ru* teacher–disciple networks, including Donghai’s, emerged and thrived.⁵¹ While the core members of the Donghai group all came from the same commandery, other groups might comprise men from a variety of regions. But the structure of every network was similar, and was mainly defined by teacher–disciple ties. Little is known about the teachers of the men who served as erudite at the Imperial Academy in the first half of the Western Han era: few names are known and other information is sparse.⁵² By sharp contrast, we know that the majority of recorded erudites in the latter half of Western Han dynasty came from *Ru* circles; they had famous teachers and classmates active in the political realm.⁵³

Much the same can be said about the grand tutors who educated crown princes. Before Emperor Zhao took the throne, only two out of eleven tutors were *Ru*; the rest came from various backgrounds, ranging from merchants to meritorious generals who had helped establish the dynasty. In sharp contrast, in the latter half of the Western Han, with only one exception the twelve grand tutors we know of were all *Ru*, and all were from flourishing teacher–disciple networks (see [Table 2](#)).

There are only two possible explanations for this stunning dichotomy. First, the major *Ru* teacher–disciple networks formed a relatively closed circle and controlled the evaluation of fellow scholars. Only those in their circle could be elevated to the positions of erudite and grand tutor. Second, the bias of our historian, Ban Gu, may account for the dichotomy: he omitted the erudites and grand tutors who had no connection with major *Ru* teacher–disciple networks. But one might say that choosing to name certain people itself attests to the dominant role of prominent *Ru* circles at the Imperial Academy; any erudite or grand tutor who could not lay claim to membership in a major network was marginalized and neglected by his contemporaries.

51. Those networks grew up around teachers devoted to *The Changes*, *The Documents*, *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, *The Songs*, and *The Rites Classic*. See Cai, *Witchcraft*, 88, 92, 94, 98, 100.

52. Cai, “Excavating,” 372–75.

53. *Han shu* 88.3589–3620. I have also charted the disciple communities surrounding *The Changes*, *The Documents*, *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, *The Songs*, and *The Rites Classic*. See Cai, *Witchcraft*, 88, 92, 94, 98, 100.

Table 2. Grand Tutors and Junior Tutors to Crown Princes in the First Half of the Western Han (206–87 B.C.E.)

Names	Position	Reigns	Identity	Sources
Lü Chan (呂)產	Grand Tutor	Emperor Dowager Lü	Unknown	SJ 9:404
Shusun Tong 叔孫通	Grand Tutor	Emperor Gaozu	ru	SJ 55:2045
Zhang Xiangru 張相如	Grand Tutor	Emperor Wen	Non-ru/Meritorious official	SJ 103:2764
Shi Fen 石奮	Grand Tutor	Emperor Wen	Non-ru/Meritorious official	SJ 103:2764
Zhou Jiande 周建德	Grand Tutor	Emperor Jing	Non-ru/Descendent of Meritorious officials	SJ 57:2080
Wei Wan 衛綰	Grand Tutor	Emperor Jing	Non-ru/High Official	SJ 103:2770
Zhuang Qindi 莊青翟	Grand Tutor	Emperor Wu	Non-ru/High Official	SJ 22:1134
Zhao Zhou 趙周	Grand Tutor	Emperor Wu	Non-ru/High Official	SJ 22:1139
Shi Qing 石慶	Grand Tutor	Emperor Wu	Non-ru/Descendent of Meritorious official	HS 19b:777
Bu Shi 卜式	Grand Tutor	Emperor Wu	Non-ru/Merchant/High official	SJ 30:1441
Zhang Liang 張良	Junior Tutor	Emperor Gaozu	Non-ru	SJ 55:2046
(Ren) An (任)安	Junior Tutor	Emperor Wu	Non-ru	SJ 60:2105
Wang Zang 王臧	Junior Tutor	Emperor Jing	ru	SJ 121:3121
Shi De 石德	Junior Tutor	Emperor Wu	Non-ru	HS 17:663
Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝	Grand Tutor	Emperor Xuan	ru	HS 75:3159

Shu Guang 疏廣	Grand Tutor	Emperor Xuan	ru	HS 71.3039
Bing Ji 丙吉	Grand Tutor	Emperor Xuan	Non-ru	HS 19b.803
Huang Ba 黃霸	Grand Tutor	Emperor Xuan	ru	HS 19b.809
Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之	Grand Tutor	Emperor Xuan	ru	HS 8.272
Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成	Grand Tutor	Emperor Yuan	ru	HS 19b.813
Yan Pengzu 劉彭祖/嚴彭祖	Grand Tutor	Emperor Yuan	ru	HS 19b.816
Shi Dan 師丹	Grand Tutor	Emperor Cheng	ru	HS 19b.841
Lin Zun 林尊	Grand Tutor	Emperor Yuan?	ru	HS 88.3604
Zhao Xuan 趙玄	Grand Tutor	Emperor Cheng	ru	HS 19b.840
Xiahou Jian 夏侯建	Junior Tutor	Emperor Xuan	ru	HS 75.3159
Shu Shou 疏受	Junior Tutor	Emperor Xuan	ru	HS 71.3039
Zhou Kan 周堪	Junior Tutor	Emperor Xuan	ru	HS 36.1929
Kuang Heng 匡衡	Junior Tutor	Emperor Yuan	ru	HS 12.820
Tang Tan 張譚	Junior Tutor	Emperor Yuan	not clear	HS 19.822
Zhen Feng 甄豐	Junior Tutor	Emperor Ping	not clear	HS 12.353
Xiahou Qianqiu 夏侯千秋	Junior Tutor	?	not clear	HS 75.3159
Yan Chong 閻崇	Junior Tutor	Emperor Cheng	not clear	HS 97.4000

Social Networks and Bypassing the Bureaucratic Hierarchy

The education provided at the Imperial Academy or from a renowned teacher did little for those who aspired to high office: it allowed them, perhaps, to serve as low-level functionaries. Their deep knowledge of the *Ru* classics could provide them with a competitive edge, pushing them ahead of other functionaries, but that was only true when this credential was recognized by powerful officials.

As I have mentioned, two of the seven *Ru* high officials who emerged from Donghai shared a similar career trajectory: Xiao Wangzhi and Kuang Heng graduated from the Imperial Academy, served as low-level functionaries in local government, were recruited as confidants by powerful officials, caught the eye of the emperor, and obtained direct appointments as high officials. Their contemporary Chu Shaosun 褚少孫 noted,

Over a period of ten years, [Kuang Heng] never passed out of the gates of Chang'an, rising to the position of chancellor. Was this not a case of good timing and destiny!

以十年之間，不出長安城門而至丞相，豈非遇時而命也哉！⁵⁴

Note that they were not distinguished by administrative competence, and in fact they accumulated little experience as bureaucrats. Both Xiao and Kuang were stranded as low-level functionaries for years, unable to advance through administrative merit (*gonglao* 功勞). This squares with Wang Chong's observation on *Ru*. He said that when dealing with the trivial daily of the bureaucracy—investigating crimes, keeping records on households, or even checking for mouse holes at the state granaries, expertise in the Five Classics did not offer *Ru* much advantage at all.⁵⁵ Instead of climbing the ladder of success step by step, Xiao and Kuang leapt directly from the low level of the bureaucracy to great heights. Their meteoric ascents depended on both their *Ru* expertise and the sponsorship of prominent officials.

Once *Ru* dwelt in Chang'an and had access to the center of politics, their learning—which was of little use in handling the nitty-gritty of local affairs—became a valuable asset. Both Xiao and Kuang expressed

54. *Shi ji*, 96.2689.

55. For the daily tasks a functionary in local government performed, see Anthony J. Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb No. 247* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). On the discussion of relative merit of *Ru* and technical bureaucrats, see Wang Chong 王充, *Lun heng jiao shi: fu Liu Pansui jijie* 論衡校釋·附劉盼遂集解, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), vol. 2, 533–89. Chapters in question are: “Weighing Talent” (*Cheng cai* 程材), “Measuring Knowledge” (*Liang zhi* 量知), “Apologizing for Weakness” (*Xie duan* 謝短), and “Rendering Service” (*Xiao li* 效力).

political opinions grounded in cosmological theory and carefully reasoned morality. Xiao impressed Emperor Xuan by analyzing omens that indicted the regent Huo Guang for overplaying his hand. Kuang secured a promotion by elaborating the political significance of an earthquake and a solar eclipse, and by advising the emperor both to live frugally and to promote rituals in order to transform the behavior of the people.

While he admired their learning in the Five Classics, the emperor had not overlooked their lack of practical experience in administration. He mentioned it. Instead of feeling shame, they lambasted the triviality of administrative work and stubbornly defended their backgrounds. Emperor Xuan once appointed Xiao as governor of Pingyuan in the hope that he might benefit from practical experience. But Xiao refused to accept this appointment, insisting in a memorial that running a commandery was of no importance:

Your Majesty has sympathy for the people, and out of a concern that moral transformation cannot be accomplished you have sent remonstrating officials to fill the vacancies in the commanderies. This action is what people call “worrying about minor details and forgetting about fundamental concerns.” If no minister can provide forthright admonishment in court, then [the emperor] will not know what is wrong. If the state lacks insightful literati, then [the emperor] will not hear what is good. Your majesty, please choose as your most trusted officials in the court those who understand the techniques of the classics, those who [are able to] draw new insights when reviewing old materials, and those who fully grasp subtlety, and are resourceful and astute—have them participate in government affairs. When the various regional lords hear what you are doing, they will conclude that the state accepts remonstrance and cares about major policies, having nothing left incomplete or abandoned. If you pursue this relentlessly, then you will not be far from the way of King Cheng and King Kang of the Zhou dynasty. [When that comes to pass,] even if the outer commanderies are not ordered, how can that be a worry?

陛下哀憫百姓，恐德化之不究，悉出諫官以補郡吏，所謂憂其末而忘其本者也。朝無爭臣則不知過，國無達士則不聞善。願陛下選明經術，溫故知新，通於幾微謀慮之士以為內臣，與參政事。諸侯聞之，則知國家納諫憂政，亡有關遺。若此不怠，成康之道其庶幾乎！外郡不治，豈足憂哉？⁵⁶

Xiao might have been applying realistic calculations, as serving in a commandery far away from the capital meant being excluded from

56. *Han shu* 78.3274.

the political center of the capital. But he tried to persuade the emperor by distinguishing “remonstrating officials” (諫官) from “commandery bureaucrats” (郡吏), and by contrasting “formulating political principles” (政事) with “administration” (治). He aggressively claimed that the state relied on remonstrating officials’ critique of politics and the formulation of correct political principles, while administration of a local region was of no significance.

When the emperor read this bold exhortation, he summoned Xiao back to the court and promoted him to privy treasurer. Ban Gu said that while Xiao’s talent was suitable for the position of chancellor, the emperor still wanted to test his administrative ability, which may be why he then demoted Xiao to eastern supporter of the capital, one of the three administrators of the metropolitan area. When Xiao concluded that the ruler was displeased, he used illness as an excuse to resign. This led the emperor to address the following message to his trying subject:

Those we have employed all deal with the people and prove themselves by their administrative accomplishments. You formerly served as governor of Pingyuan for a short time, so we are setting you an additional test as a guardian of the capital. We have heard nothing [bad] about you.

所用皆更治民以考功。君前為平原太守日淺，故復試之於三輔，非有所聞也。⁵⁷

Whereas the emperor acknowledged Xiao’s expertise in the *Ru* classics and was impressed by his eloquent discussion of policy issues, he was also concerned with Xiao’s lack of administrative experience. Appointing Xiao governor of Pingyuan and later governor of the capital would enable him to observe how this promising official could implement his political ideas in daily administration (欲詳試其政事).⁵⁸ Those arrangements were consistent with the emperor’s standard for promotion—employing men who proved themselves as competent administrators (所用皆更治民以考功). However, Xiao took a strong stance, refusing to be evaluated by his administrative performance. According to Xiao, helping the emperor create proper policies for the empire far outweighed the administration of a single region.

Xiao not only disdained bureaucratic skills, he scoffed at those who advanced by accumulating administrative merit. Emperor Yuan once asked him whether an old friend of his, Zhang Chang, might be suitable to serve as the tutor of the crown prince. He replied that Zhang “is

57. *Han shu* 78.3274.

58. *Han shu* 78.3997.

a capable bureaucrat, assuming responsibility for managing chaos and handling complicated administrative affairs." But, he added, "his talent is superficial, and he is not suitable to serve as a mentor" (以為敵能吏，任治煩亂，材輕非師傅之器).⁵⁹

Generally, expertise in the Five Classics helped little when it was time to control bandits, investigate crimes, collect taxes, or submit an annual report of expenses and revenue. Instead, classical learning, as embodied cultural capital, could realize its value when *Ru* contributed to realizing major political principles and designing general policies. Xiao Wangzhi's and Kuang Heng's stories represented gradually routinized career patterns of *Ru* success: by serving as the confidant or teacher of the emperor they secured high positions. Direct access to the throne or to those with power helped *Ru* bypass the bureaucratic hierarchy and realize their political dream—direct promotion to the center of the political world.⁶⁰ But this model of success required a crucial factor: an existing social network comprising prominent *Ru* officials.

Throughout the two centuries of the Western Han, there were men who rose to power without a family history of official service, without much administrative skill or military accomplishments. However, those lucky men were a minority, accounting for less than ten percent of hundreds of recorded officials, and their careers typically followed one of three paths:

- 1) *Vaulting promotion during a political crisis.* Half of the cases of direct appointment resulted from brilliant accomplishments during political crises or close connections to the emperor. For example, Wei Buhai 魏不害 (fl. 87 B.C.E.), working as a prison clerk, helped to capture the leader of a rebellion—he was made a marquis and later served as one of the Nine Ministers.⁶¹ Huo Guang was the confidant of Emperor Wu; he was appointed regent to the crown prince when the aged emperor was approaching death.⁶²
- 2) *Direct appointment due to special skills or beauty.* Emperors seem to have been impressed by alchemists who claimed to be able to fashion gold and elixirs—and by men of great beauty. Often such men were regarded by contemporaries as crafty and fawning (*jianning* 奸佞), likely to corrupt the emperor. While they often received generous salaries and high-status posts, their political power was

59. *Han shu* 76.3226.

60. On *Ru*'s political ambition, see *Analects*, 13.10; *Mencius*, 4.13; and "Efficacy of *Ru*" 儒效 in *Xunzi*. See CHANT, www.chant.org.

61. *Han shu* 60.3664.

62. *Han shu* 90.3664

negligible. As soon as the emperor died, such men were deprived of their positions—some were even executed.⁶³

- 3) *Direct appointment due to literary accomplishments.* These were generally *Ru* who produced distinguished statements on policy issues. Without a powerful family to provide access to power and without administrative or military accomplishments to attest to their merits, candidates for office could rely on writings, particularly writings on political principles and major political issues, to prove their talent and intelligence. These *Ru* were widely acknowledged to be able; their memorials to the emperor were preserved, and their stories became models to be emulated.

The last group can be in turn divided into two. *Ru* obtaining vaulting promotions in the first half of the Western Han had generally been recommended to the emperor by officials employed by local counties—I could not identify one who had a significant social network in the capital. Relying on the emperor to secure an important position was not a safe career strategy. One famous example is the story of Gongsun Hong 公孫弘. The first time this *Ru* was recommended to the central court, he was quickly dismissed after being sent on a diplomatic mission to the Xiongnu 匈奴; his report left the emperor unsatisfied, and he concluded that Gongsun was incompetent. An unusually long-lived man, he was recommended once again in his seventies, and on that occasion Emperor Wu, previously unimpressed, appointed him to an important post.⁶⁴ Dongfang Shuo 東方朔, celebrated for his prose, moaned with frustration when he failed to gain the recognition of the emperor. How could it be, he wondered, that he was never entrusted with any mission, never appointed to an administrative position, even though he, as a gentleman-assistant, had constant access to the throne?⁶⁵ In the first half of the Western Han, a bit more than one hundred years, fewer than ten men recommended to the court by local counties became imperial confidants, and those who did seldom rose to top positions.⁶⁶

Ru obtaining direct appointment to high positions in the latter half of the Western Han were a different story. First, they had already established networks in the capital, with teachers or classmates serving in prominent positions. Second, there were far more of them than there

63. *Han shu* 68.2931–32. Among the executed were Deng Tong 鄧通, Luan Da 樂大, and Dong Xian 董賢. See *Han shu* 93.3722–23 and 93.3733–39.

64. *Shi ji* 112.2949.

65. *Han shu* 65.2841.

66. Cai, *Witchcraft*, 32. Most of them were recommended to court as “able and virtuous” (*xianliang* 賢良).

had been in the first half of the dynasty. As mentioned, *Ru* frequently endorsed or recommended men within their networks. It became common for promising men to begin their rise to prominence by securing posts as advisors to those with power or as tutors to the crown prince, using proximity to the throne to catapult to high positions. Social networks predictably channeled the flow of information and power.⁶⁷

While the vaulting path from advisor or tutor occurred often enough to become a recognizable strategy, it was never exactly popular. Not only were advisory and tutoring positions limited in number, mastering the *Ru* classics was a serious challenge, requiring intellectual talent and more than ten years of commitment. The sons of *Ru* high officials seldom embraced the challenge. Among the forty-seven pairs of teacher–disciple relationships connected to Donghai, I have been able to identify only four father–son pairs. In some cases, the sons studied with their own fathers, but this was not always the case (see Table 3). Without prolonged training in the *Ru* classics, the majority of *Ru* officials’ sons simply sought modest bureaucratic offices, climbing the ladder of success from the county level via their networks as well as their administrative accomplishments.⁶⁸ Xiao Wangzhi’s sons are cases in point. Although Xiao was a prominent *Ru* official, none of his three sons was interested in the classics. Instead, their career paths closely resembled those of descendants of non-*Ru* high officials. Serving as a gentleman-attendant at a young age, Xiao Yu 蕭育 rose to serve as vice commandant (*fu xiaowei* 副校尉), then magistrate, then governor of various regions; eventually he was promoted to high positions in the central court. Xiao Xian 蕭咸 and Xiao You 蕭由 also served in commandaries for years and enjoyed the reputation of being “capable bureaucrats” (*nengli* 能吏). While the network the Xiao brothers had enjoyed from a young age secured their ascendance in the bureaucratic hierarchy, they spent decades in different regions accumulating administrative experience before graduating to the center of politics and becoming high officials.

Social Networks and Technical Bureaucrats

Three high officials from Donghai accumulated administrative experience in local areas before they secured their positions in the central court. Yan Pengzu was a *Ru*, whereas both Yan Yannian and Yu Dingguo

67. Among those who began by serving as tutors to the crown prince, then ascended to high positions, were Cai Yi 蔡義, Wei Xian, Kuang Heng, Liangqiu He, Zhou Kan, Ouyang Yu 歐陽餘, Kong Guang, Shi Dan 師丹, Ping Yan 平晏, Zhang Yu 張禹, Xu Shang 許商, and Peng Xuan 彭宣.

68. *Han shu* 81.3492.

studied law as young men. They all served in regional governments for decades; two of them started out as functionaries in commanderies. Two factors helped the three men distinguish themselves from thousands of contenders: their administrative accomplishments and their connections with officials in the central government.⁶⁹ All exhibited talent in and considerable knowledge (*caigao* 材高) about legal affairs, and the evaluations of their administrative performance were often laudatory (*gaodi* 高第). Besides their membership in the Donghai circle, Yan Pengzu was a classmate of Gong Yu, who once served as chancellor; Yu Dingguo and Yan Pengzu were good friends of Zhang Chang, who served as governor of the capital for nine years.

The sources show that no one from Donghai achieved fame or social prestige independent of officialdom. Whether a devotee of the *Ru* classics or a legal expert, all relied on a position in the bureaucracy to define their success. Interestingly, the sources on Donghai seldom mention family wealth. We do know that Kuang Heng came from a poor family: he labored with his hands to support himself when pursuing studies at the Imperial Academy.⁷⁰ Xiao Wangzhi must have come from a rather wealthy family. The Han court forced the powerful and rich local families to relocate to the suburbs of the capital—site of the mausoleums of the deceased emperors—and Xiao's family was among them.⁷¹

Networks and Regional Identities

The Donghai group was defined by geographical origin, but winning distinction depended on transcending both regional boundaries and regional identity. The first step was to leave one's hometown and take up residence at the capital, where the most important networks were generally established.

Born in Donghai, Xiao Wangzhi moved with his family to Duling 杜陵, a suburb of the capital.⁷² That permitted him to study with

69. As mentioned in note 3, the imperial bureaucracy of the Western Han was a giant hierarchical organization, and the number of officials across the empire was said to exceed 120,000.

70. *Han shu* 81.3331. In our source, Kuang Heng was famous for his humble circumstances. Yet his family presumably could afford to send him to the capital, where he spent years at the Imperial Academy.

71. *Han shu* 78.3271.

72. Powerful families from throughout the empire were forced to move to the suburbs of Chang'an by the imperial court; one destination was Duling, site of the mausoleum of Emperor Xuan. Although this famous policy was meant to prevent powerful families in local areas from challenging imperial power, it seems to have transformed men from a variety of locations into capital elites. A better understanding of geographic

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Hou Cang, his fellow townsman, and Xiahou Sheng, a native of the Lu region. When the father of Yan Pengzu and Yan Yannian was named assistant to the chancellor (*chengxiang yuan* 丞相掾), the family moved to Chang'an. Yan Yannian is said to have studied law in the office of the chancellor (*chengxiang fu* 丞相府), and Yan Pengzu, as previously mentioned, studied the classics with Sui Meng.⁷³ Kuang Heng's family resided in Donghai, but the promising young scholar followed Hou Cang to Chang'an after the latter was appointed an erudite.

Meng Xi's training with Tian Wangsun reinforced the links between the Donghai group and those who studied *The Changes*. Two pieces of evidence pinpoint the site where this crucial teacher-disciple relationship was formed:

Shi Chou ... was a native of Pei.... When Chou was a child, he studied the *Changes* with Tian Wangsun. Later, Chou moved to Changling [a suburb of the capital], and Tian Wangsun served as an erudite. Therefore [Chou] resumed his studies, becoming, along with Meng Xi and Liangqiu He, a disciple [of Tian].

施讎 ... 沛人也.... 讎為童子，從田王孫受易。後讎徙長陵，田王孫為博士，復從卒業，與孟喜、梁丘賀並為門人。⁷⁴

Liangqiu He ... was native of Langya ... He served as a mounted warrior in the palace. From Jing Fang, the grand counsellor of the palace, he received the teachings of *The Changes*. When Fang left the capital to serve as the governor of Qi commandery, He began to study with Tian Wangsun.

梁丘賀 ... 琅邪諸人也.... 為武騎。從太中大夫京房受易 ... 房出為齊郡太守，賀更事田王孫。⁷⁵

Shi Chou went to the capital to resume his studies with Tian; Liangqiu He 梁丘賀 served in the palace while studying with Tian; Meng Xi was their classmate. Therefore, we can assert that Meng must have been in the capital when he studied with Tian.⁷⁶

mobility will help us understand how the Han dynasty was able to integrate different regions into a unified empire, and this topic calls for separate research.

73. Sui Meng served as prefect of insignias and credentials (*fujie ling* 符節令) in the central government. His teacher, Ying Gong 嬴公, was the advisory counselor (*jian dafu* 諫大夫) to Emperor Zhao. See *Han shu* 75.3153.

74. *Han shu* 88.3598.

75. *Han shu* 88.3600.

76. There is more indirect evidence to confirm that Meng Xi's network focused on the capital area. Meng served consecutively as gentleman-attendant, captain in charge

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By now it should be apparent that traveling to Chang'an to pursue *Ru* studies was not uncommon. Wang Ji 王吉, a native of Langya 琅琊, started his career in local government, but as a young man he studied in the capital. He, in turn, ordered his son Wang Jun 王駿 to study with Liangqiu He, a powerful *Ru* official in the central government.⁷⁷ Zhai Fangjin was a low-ranking functionary in the office of a governor (*taishou fu* 太守府) when his ambition drove him to resign so that he might relocate to Chang'an in order to study with an erudite.⁷⁸ Zhang Yu 張禹 was a native of Zhi 軹 County in Henei 河內 commandery; he too made his way to Chang'an, where he studied with several erudites.⁷⁹ Wang Jun became one of the Nine Ministers, and both Zhai Fangjin and Zhang Yu rose to become chancellors. The famed *Ru* scholars who converged upon the Imperial Academy and took posts in the central government attracted brilliant young students to the capital from all over the empire. This appears to be confirmed by the fact that teacher-disciple relationships usually crossed regional boundaries, and by the habit of prominent *Ru* of studying with different masters.⁸⁰

Once the Donghai group appeared in the capital, it exerted itself to absorb members from other regions. Whereas Meng Qing—the Donghai pioneer—and his students came from a single county, the next generation recruited students regardless of their geographical origins. Among Hou Cang's seven students, three were from Donghai; the other four came from Pei 沛 and Liang 梁. Meng Xi taught three disciples, only one of whom was said to be a native of Donghai. Within two generations regional identity had ceased to matter in the network.

Center and Periphery: Becoming Capital Elites

Of the various *Ru* groups active in Chang'an during the Western Han, the Donghai circle was probably the most prominent in terms of its regional identity. Did these *Ru* officials direct resources back to their native region, helping their fellows achieve success? Or did their positions in the central government alienate them from local society so that

of the office of the Qutai Palace (*Qutai shuzhang* 曲臺署長), and assistant to the chancellor; all three offices were based in the capital. See *Han shu* 88.3599.

77. *Han shu* 72.3066.

78. *Han shu* 84.3411.

79. *Han shu* 81.3347.

80. David Elstein argues that one could shift one's scholarly affiliation without shame. See his "Friend or Father? Competing Visions of Master-Student Relations in Early China," PhD dissertation (University of Michigan, 2006), 183–86.

they focused almost exclusively on giving their descendants opportunities in the imperial bureaucracy?

Available sources lead to one conclusion: after leaving their hometown for the capital, those Donghai men drew others from the same region into their social networks, helping them achieve success. But their focus was on the capital. Four of the ten disciples of Meng Xi and Hou Cang came from Donghai, but even they first encountered their masters in the imperial capital, and they themselves soon became members of the capital elite, spending little time in their hometown.⁸¹

The families of three Donghai natives—Xiao Wangzhi, Kuang Heng, and Yu Dingguo—evolved into powerful capital elites. Yu and Kuang served as chancellors and were enfeoffed, their lands drawing them far from their home counties. Their sons inherited the rank of marquis, making them candidates for high officialdom in the central court.⁸² Xiao's three sons all chose to become bureaucrats at a young age, serving as magistrates or governors in the different provinces for decades before they became prominent officials in the central court. None of them were said to have expertise in the *Ru* classics. In fact, the true focus of the network built by the children of men from Donghai was primarily concentrated on men in the capital from other powerful families. Few *Ru* were mentioned as their cronies, not even the disciples of their *Ru* fathers.⁸³

Of the Donghai dozen, we know of one, Shu Guang, who quite exceptionally retained a close tie to his native place. After serving as grand tutor to the crown prince for five years (his nephew became a junior tutor), he returned to Donghai, where as a teacher he attracted students from near and far. We know little of the life he led there, except that every day he invited relatives and old friends to a banquet where they feasted and entertained one another.⁸⁴

A few others preserved connections with their hometown. After acquiring legal expertise at the office of the chancellor, Yan Yannian returned to Donghai to start his career as a functionary.⁸⁵ While both Yan Yannian and his brother Yan Pengzu assumed various positions throughout the empire, their mother seems to have lived in Donghai.⁸⁶ Yu Dingguo once expressed a desire to recommend those from his native county to the governor of Donghai but failed.⁸⁷

81. They are Xiao Wangzhi, Kuang Heng, Bai Guang, and Yi Feng.

82. *Han shu* 71.3045–46.

83. *Han shu* 78.3289–91.

84. *Han shu* 71.3040.

85. *Han shu* 90.3667.

86. *Han shu* 90.3671–72.

87. *Han shu* 76.3207.

When one reflects that the study of *The Ritual* during the latter half of the Western Han was entirely based on the teachings of one resident of Donghai—Meng Qing—it seems reasonable to imagine that an active intellectual community flourished there, with links to many powerful local families. But we will never know whether this was the case, as the authors of all extant documents cared little about any place but the imperial capital. Those who never won glory in the imperial capital remain shadowy figures.⁸⁸ This observation can be further confirmed by another example. Wei Xian was a renowned *Ru* scholar from the Lu region who specialized in *The Songs*. It is said that because Wei became renowned as a great master, he was summoned to Chang'an to serve as an erudite and eventually ascended to the post of chancellor. His son Wei Xuancheng followed him to that post. This inspired the people of the Zou-Lu 鄒魯 region to frame the adage “Better to leave your children a single classic than a basket full of gold” (遺子黃金滿籩，不如一經). But we know nothing about the *Ru* community of Zou-Lu, nor has the name of a single one of Wei Xian's hometown disciples survived.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Social-network analysis allows us to identify the otherwise ignored Donghai circle and examine its success stories, attesting to the high levels of social and geographical mobility found in Western Han China. Discussions of family wealth and its relation with social prestige seem to have been intentionally left out of the historical record. One's position in the bureaucratic hierarchy became the primary measure of personal success. Therefore, the capital became a magnet, attracting our historical actors to leave their hometowns and transform themselves into capital elites. For men who lacked a family history of official service, social networks—especially teacher–disciple connections—turned out to be crucial factors that helped them distinguish themselves and rise high in the pyramid of power. As they established a significant presence in the capital, officials from Donghai generated two different political circles: the circle of their descendants and the circle of their disciples (see Table 3).

88. Many bamboo-strip manuscripts found in the Donghai region have been dated to the Han dynasty. Those newly discovered texts are primarily concerned with the daily operation of local government; they include the names of local functionaries and officials. But we have not yet discovered any direct connections between them and the men active in the central court. See Li Mingzhao [Lai Ming Chiu] 黎明釗, “Handai Donghai jun de haozu daxing: yi ‘Donghai jun xia xia zhangli mingji’ ji ‘zengqian mingji’ wei zhongxin” 漢代東海郡的豪族大姓：以「東海郡下轄長吏名籍」及「贈錢名籍」為中心, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 9 (2000), 47–96.

89. *Han shu* 73.3107.

Table 3. Donghai Expanded Network: Disciples

Names	Related persons	Relationships I	Relationships II
Xiao Fen 蕭奮	Meng Qing 孟卿	Teacher-Disciple (<i>shi-sheng</i> 師生)	
Meng Qing 孟卿	Shu Guang 疏廣	Teacher-Disciple	
Meng Qing 孟卿	Meng Xi 孟喜	Teacher-Disciple	Father-Son
Meng Qing 孟卿	Hou Cang 后倉	Teacher-Disciple	
Meng Xi 孟喜	Jiao Yanshou 焦延壽	Teacher-Disciple	
Meng Xi 孟喜	Bai Guang 白光	Teacher-Disciple	
Meng Xi 孟喜	Gai Kuanrao 蓋寬饒	Teacher-Disciple	
Meng Xi 孟喜	Zhai Mu 翟牧	Teacher-Disciple	
Hou Cang 后倉	Dai De 戴德	Teacher-Disciple	
Hou Cang 后倉	Dai Sheng 戴聖	Teacher-Disciple	
Hou Cang 后倉	Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之	Teacher-Disciple	
Hou Cang 后倉	Tong Han 通漢	Teacher-Disciple	
Hou Cang 后倉	Qing Pu 慶普	Teacher-Disciple	
Hou Cang 后倉	Kuang Heng 匡衡	Teacher-Disciple	
Hou Cang 后倉	Yi Feng 翼奉	Teacher-Disciple	
Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌	Hou Cang 后倉	Teacher-Disciple	
Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌	Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝	Teacher-Disciple	
Jian Qing 蒯卿	Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝	Teacher-Disciple	
Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝	Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之	Teacher-Disciple	
Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝	Xiahou Jian 夏侯建	Teacher-Disciple	
Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝	Kong Ba 孔霸	Teacher-Disciple	
Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝	Zhou Kan 周堪	Teacher-Disciple	
Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝	Huang Ba 黃霸	Teacher-Disciple	
Tian Wangsun 田王孫	Meng Xi 孟喜	Teacher-Disciple	
Tian Wangsun 田王孫	Liangqiu He 梁丘賀	Teacher-Disciple	

(Continued)

Table 3: (Continued)

Names	Related persons	Relationships I	Relationships II
Tian Wangsun 田王孫	Shi Chou 施讎	Teacher-Disciple	
Shi Chou 施讎	Liangqiu Lin 梁丘臨	Teacher-Disciple	
Shi Chou 施讎	Zhang Yu 張禹	Teacher-Disciple	
Shi Chou 施讎	Lu Bo 魯伯	Teacher-Disciple	
Liangqiu He 梁丘賀	Liangqiu Lin 梁丘臨	Teacher-Disciple	Father-Son
Liangqiu He 梁丘賀	Wulu Chongzong 五鹿充宗	Teacher-Disciple	
Liangqiu He 梁丘賀	Wang Jun 王駿	Teacher-Disciple	
Liangqiu He 梁丘賀	Zhang Yu 張禹	Teacher-Disciple	
Jing Fang 京房	Liangqiu He 梁丘賀	Teacher-Disciple	
Wang Ji 王吉	Zhang Yu 張禹	Teacher-Disciple	Father-Son
Wang Ji 王吉	Wang Jun 王駿	Teacher-Disciple	
Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之	Zhu Yun 朱雲	Teacher-Disciple	
Yan Pengzu 嚴彭祖	Wang Zhong 王中	Teacher-Disciple	
Kong Ba 孔霸	Kong Guang 孔光	Teacher-Disciple	Father-Son
Qing Pu 慶普	Xiahou Jing 夏侯敬	Teacher-Disciple	
Qing Pu 慶普	Qing Xian 慶咸	Teacher-Disciple	
Dai Sheng 戴德	Xu Liang 徐良	Teacher-Disciple	
Dai Sheng 戴勝	Qiao Ren 橋仁	Teacher-Disciple	
Dai Sheng 戴勝	Yang Rong 楊榮	Teacher-Disciple	
Wang Ji 王吉	Wang Jun 王駿	Teacher-Disciple	Father-Son
Gong Yu 貢禹	Wang Ji 王吉	Teacher-Disciple	
Sui Meng 睢孟	Gong Yu 貢禹	Teacher-Disciple	
Yan Anle 顏安樂	Leng Feng 冷丰	Teacher-Disciple	
Leng Feng 冷丰	Ma Gong 馬宮	Teacher-Disciple	
Shu Guang 疏廣	Wan Lu 筦路	Teacher-Disciple	
Wan Lu 筦路	Sun Bao 孫寶	Teacher-Disciple	
Wang Shi 王式	Xue Guangde 薛廣德	Teacher-Disciple	
Ying Gong 嬴公	Gong Yu 貢禹	Teacher-Disciple	

(Continued)

Table 3: (Continued)

Names	Related persons	Relationships I	Relationships II
Ying Gong 嬴公	Meng Qing 孟卿	Teacher-Disciple	
Ying Gong 嬴公	Sui Meng 眭孟	Teacher-Disciple	
Sui Meng 眭孟	Yan Pengzu 嚴彭祖	Teacher-Disciple	
Sui Meng 眭孟	Yan Anle 顏安樂	Teacher-Disciple	
Wei Xian 韋賢	Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成	Teacher-Disciple	
Wei Xian 韋賢	Wei Shang 韋賞	Teacher-Disciple	
Xue Guangde 薛廣德	Gong Sheng 龔勝	Teacher-Disciple	
Mou Qing 牟卿	Kong Guang 孔光	Teacher-Disciple	
Kuang Heng 匡衡	Shi Dan 師丹	Teacher-Disciple	
Kuang Heng 匡衡	Kuang Xian 匡咸	Teacher-Disciple	
Kuang Heng 匡衡	Fu Li 伏理	Teacher-Disciple	
Kuang Heng 匡衡	Man Chang 滿昌	Teacher-Disciple	
Bai Qi 白奇	Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之	Teacher-Disciple	
Ouyang Gao 歐陽高	Xiahou Jian 夏侯建	Teacher-Disciple	
Zhou Kan 周堪	Mou Qing 牟卿	Teacher-Disciple	
Zhou Kan 周堪	Xu Shang 許商	Teacher-Disciple	
Zhang Yu 張禹	Peng Xuan 彭宣	Teacher-Disciple	
Zhang Yu 張禹	Chong Ziping 崇子平	Teacher-Disciple	
Zhang Yu 張禹	Dai Chong 戴崇	Teacher-Disciple	

The sons of these officials from Donghai neither studied *Ru* teachings nor built strong ties with other *Ru*—they seem to have enjoyed little intercourse even with their fathers' disciples. Instead, these descendants created social networks consisting primarily of the sons of other prominent officials. Their career paths followed the routinized patterns established by powerful families. Those who inherited marquis status directly became candidates for high positions in the central court; those without launched their careers by serving as gentleman-assistants, hoping to develop personal ties with the emperor and other power brokers. Later

on they acted as magistrates and governors in different regions throughout the empire; some of those local officials worked their way back to the capital, joining the central government.

Conversely, the disciples of Donghai *Ru* lacked any detectable family history of official service, though some came from relatively rich families. Furthermore, these disciples came from a variety of regions to the capital, where they formed the crucial teacher–disciple relationships. These connections, and their *Ru* expertise, constituted priceless social and cultural capital they might translate into posts as high officials or as prominent scholars.

As I have indicated, the biological descendants of Donghai officials seem to have grown up in the capital only to forsake it when it was time to put in their years as local officials. They generally ascended through the bureaucracy step by step, taking advantage of both their administrative achievements and their social networks. By contrast, disciples of Donghai men grew up in the provinces, making their way to the capital later. Instead of serving as administrators in local areas and climbing the ladder of success step by step, the luckiest ones vaulted through the bureaucratic hierarchy, leaping from a role advising or tutoring a member of the imperial line to a prominent position in the central court.

Based on social network data I have collected and the stories examined in this article, men seem to have easily transmitted their political power and social prestige to their descendants. But their *Ru* expertise went elsewhere: to their devoted disciples. The sheer difficulty of mastering the canonical texts forced communities of disciples to open themselves to new blood, absorbing talented men from throughout the empire. The bond between teachers and disciples gave the latter, young men from unknown backgrounds, the boost they needed to achieve success in the political realm.

Once *Ru* occupied important positions in the central court, learning networks became a tool that increased social mobility in the Han empire. By contrast, the bureaucratic hierarchy seems to have helped powerful officials provide their children with positions in the power pyramid, increasing reproduction rather than mobility. It was as true two millennia ago as it is today that men without prestige seldom penetrate into the top echelons of the state. One might argue that an unintended consequence of elevating *Ru* learning—with its many challenges—to a place of some political significance was the opening up of society to new men. Presented with that opportunity, learned men formed networks that furthered the enterprise. But merely using a bureaucratic hierarchy to produce elites would lead to the formation of a relatively closed upper class. Whether that was the case in the Western Han is not yet clear; more data need to be collected and examined.

儒生，社交網絡，與官僚等級制度：以西漢東海儒生為研究中心
蔡亮

提要

西漢時期，數量可觀的高層官員和儒生來自東海郡。以他們為研究中心，本文旨在探討西漢儒生的成功模式（公元前 206 年—公元前 9 年）。利用數字人文挖掘《史記》和《漢書》中人物傳記的數據，本文重現了來自東海地區官員和儒生的社交網絡和仕途模式。在本文中，我專注於三個問題。首先，什麼樣的社會機制能夠讓沒有顯赫家庭背景的人取得政治上的成功，爬上權力的金字塔。第二，這些來自東海的官員和儒生是否成為連接當地與京城的橋樑，是否將資源引向家鄉，並幫助同籍貫的人取得成功？第三，東海官員在中央朝廷任職之後，是否逐漸脫離了地方社會，而成為以京城為中心的精英。通過回答這些問題，我探討了官僚等級制度，社交網絡，以及人才和資源流動之間的動態關係。本文研究了西漢時期各種對資源的理解以及攀登成功階梯的策略，探尋哪種形式的社會資源—學術聲譽，財富，社交網絡—可以幫助西漢儒生跨越官僚等級制度，直接進入高層職位。最後本文討論了東海集團的成功模式是否僅僅反應了一個地區的特例，還是提供了早期帝國儒生成功的普遍模式？

Keywords: Confucians, Ru, Western Han, social network, bureaucratic hierarchy, tutors to crown prince, erudite, chancellor, high officials, Donghai, imperial capital, social mobility

儒生，西漢，社交網絡，官僚等級制度，太子太傅，博士，丞相，三公九卿，東海，長安，社會流動