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# Interpersonal Networks Reflected in Eastern Han Stele Inscriptions

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## Abstract

The inscriptions on Eastern Han stelae reveal that their sponsors were familiar with one another and followed certain shared rules when erecting these monuments. Behind such activity lay interpersonal networks. Former subordinates and disciples not only erected stelae for their former superiors or teachers but could also transcend status and regional boundaries to jointly commemorate them in stone. Local elite clans participated in commemorative stele-building for senior officials in order to safeguard local and personal interests, and the administrators could respond in kind. Disciples and former subordinates made use of their networks to publicize the reputation of their patron through stele erection. Stele-building activity thus reinforced various social relationships centered on powerful lineages. Through the inscriptions, disciples and former subordinates also expressed political aims that transcended mere collegial or scholastic ties and influenced the political ecology of the time. In the Eastern Han, interpersonal networks constructed through stele-building helped to dissipate, to a certain extent, the centralizing force of imperial authority.

## Keywords

Eastern Han – stele – interpersonal networks – elite clans – politics

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## 1 Introduction

The custom of erecting stelae flourished during the Eastern Han period (25–220). The purpose of erecting a stele was typically to commemorate the deeds and virtues of its subject. In addition to recording the subject's achievements and the relationship between the sponsors and the subject, the inscription usually included an extensive list of the sponsors' names appended at the end. These name lists generally recorded official position, place of origin, personal name, courtesy name, and sometimes the amount of money contributed for erecting the stele, with the purpose of publicizing the donors' pious intentions and charitable contributions.<sup>1</sup>

Traditional epigraphers began paying attention to Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) stele name lists quite early, discussing their patterns and formats. Modern historians use these name lists to study local administrative institutions and former subordinate clerks (*guli* 故吏), noting the conventions governing how names were recorded.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, they have also recognized the social significance embedded within them.<sup>3</sup>

The name lists on Han dynasty stelae represent a convergence of one or multiple social relationships. By sorting through the background information of those who sponsored the stelae, one can discover explicit or implicit connections among them. Cheng Zhangcan 程章燦 has examined the interpersonal networks in Eastern Han society as reflected in these stele name lists.<sup>4</sup> In his discussion of the Wei–Jin (220–420) stele prohibitions, Xu Chong 徐沖 looked at the political groups formed through stele erection in the Eastern Han.<sup>5</sup>

Shifting the perspective, this article seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which interpersonal networks emerged and the internal order that governed them to analyze the relationship between stele name lists and

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- 1 Mao Yuanming 毛遠明, *Beike wenxianxue tonglun* 碑刻文獻學通論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 51, 305.
  - 2 Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi: Qin Han difang xingzheng zhidu* 中國地方行政制度史—秦漢地方行政制度 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 234–35.
  - 3 Martin J. Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China*, 1991, cited in Wang Jingfen 王靜芬, *Zhongguo shibe: yizhong xiangzheng xingshi zai Fojiao chuanru zhiqian yu zhihou de yunyong* 中國石碑：一種象徵形式在佛教傳入之前與之後的運用, trans. Mao Qiujin 毛秋瑾 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2011), 62; Yi Peixia 伊佩霞 [Patricia Buckley Ebrey], “Dong Han bihuzhe yu tuobizhe guanxi kaolun” 東漢庇護者與托庇者關係考論, trans. Fan Zhaofei 范兆飛, *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰綫, no. 1 (2013): 254.
  - 4 Cheng Zhangcan 程章燦, *Zuowei wuzhi wenhua de shike wenxian* 作為物質文化的石刻文獻 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2023), 207–33.
  - 5 Xu Chong 徐沖, “Beijin’ yu Cao-Wei Xijin de shibei wenhua” “碑禁” 與曹魏西晉的石碑文化, *Wenshi* 文史, no. 3 (2022): 69.

Eastern Han society and politics. This is achieved by drawing on stelae content, the places of origin (*jiguan* 籍貫) and official posts of those named, as well as the interconnections among different inscriptions.

## 2 The Conditions under Which Interpersonal Networks among Stele Sponsors Could Form

Erecting a stele required considerable financial resources. Therefore, it was often necessary for many people to pool funds.<sup>6</sup> Stele inscriptions frequently record the amounts contributed, arranged in a certain order. Such orderly arrangements suggest the involvement of behind-the-scene coordinators. This can be explained as follows:

First, stele erection was an organized activity. For example, the *Cangjie Temple* (*Canjie Miao Bei* 蒼頡廟碑) records that Sun Xian 孫羨, Magistrate of Yaxian (*Yanxian Xianling* 衙縣縣令), received an order from Liu Huan 劉桓, then serving as Guardian of the Left (*zuo fengyi* 左馮翊),<sup>7</sup> to carve a stele in honor of the glory of Cangjie 蒼頡, the legendary inventor of Chinese characters. The heading reads “Respectfully, those who contributed one thousand or one hundred coins.” It then goes on to give a neatly ordered list of donors. At the commandery level (*junji* 郡級), important clerks in the prefectural office (*menxia youzhi* 門下右職) are listed first, followed by administrative clerks (*yuanshi* 掾史). At the county level (*xianji* 縣級), assistant officials (*zuoguan* 佐官) come first, followed by important clerks in the prefectural office, then administrative clerks, cavalry officers (*qili* 騎吏), township officials (*xiangli* 鄉吏), and frontier-post chiefs (*houzhang* 候長).<sup>8</sup> The order follows the local bureaucratic hierarchy, and the donation amounts are uniform.

This clearly indicates that erecting a stele was a planned, organized effort. While it was undoubtedly influenced by the Commandery Administrator’s (*taishou* 太守) authority, it is also likely that subordinate clerks (*shuli* 屬吏) in the governor’s office who were familiar with one another acted as intermediaries in the coordination. After all, fundraising for a stele was not among the official duties of local subordinate clerks.

Stele erection by assistant officials and subordinate clerks relied on the administrative system as its foundation. Even in the lower social sphere

6 Zhou Yanbi 周巖壁, “Hanbei de jiage” 漢碑的價格, *Xungen* 尋根, no. 6 (2013): 95.

7 Translator’s note: In Han geography, “left” referred to areas east/northeast of the capital, Chang’an 長安 (modern Xi’an).

8 Mao Yuanming 毛遠明, *Han-Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu* 漢魏六朝碑刻校注 (Beijing: Xian-zhuang shuju, 2008), 1: 224–25.

outside the official administration, stele sponsors followed certain patterns. For example, the *Stele of the Shrine of Lord Xiaokeng* (*Xiaokeng Jun Shenci Bei* 嶠坑君神祠碑) records that a magistrate (*xianling* 縣令) named Pei Bi 裴畢 undertook major repairs of Lord Xiaokeng's shrine. More than 300 names appear as sponsors. When summarizing the arrangement of the list, Hong Kuo 洪适 noted that those holding rank and commandery-level clerks appear at the beginning, and commoners are listed afterward.<sup>9</sup> This ordering suggests that subordinate clerks played a leading role in organizing the stele-building activity.

Second, the stele sponsors were familiar with one another. The *Chengyang Lingtai Stele* (*Chengyang Lingtai Bei* 成陽靈台碑)<sup>10</sup> recounts how Zhong Ding 仲定, former Minister of Justice (*tingwei* 廷尉), recommended to the imperial court that the particular stele be repaired. The local governor of Jiyin 濟陰, Shen Huang 審晃, and the Magistrate of Chengyang County, Jian Zun 菅遵, each dispatched clerks to assist the Zhong clan in completing the project.<sup>11</sup> In his study of this stele, Ye Yibao 葉奕苞 counted the surnames in the inscription on the back of the stele and noted: "On the reverse side of the stele, 31 Zhong clan members involved in repairing the Yellow Chamber [*huangwu* 黃屋]<sup>12</sup> within the complex and erecting the stele are recorded, along with four individuals of other surnames."<sup>13</sup> This indicates that the primary sponsors were members of the local Zhong lineage, whose members would have been familiar with one another. The inscription also states, "Moreover, [the clan leader] led all the families within the clan." This clearly reflects that building the stele was a matter of collective importance.

Even among people who were familiar with one another, the erection of a stele still had to follow certain rules. Let us again take the example of the *Chengyang Lingtai Stele* and its structure of listing donors for the repair of the Yellow Chamber to analyze this.<sup>14</sup> Looking at the order, first come the senior officials (*zhangli* 長吏), who are listed before the District Magistrate of Lü (*Lü Zhang* 呂長) and the Chancellor's Clerk (*situyuan* 司徒掾); second are the commandery and county subordinate clerks (*junxian shuli* 郡縣屬吏); third

9 Hong Kuo 洪适, *Lishi-Lixu* 隸釋·隸續 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985 facsimile), 35.

10 A translation into plainer English could be *Stele of the Sacred Platform at Chengyang* or *Stele of the Spirit Platform at Chengyang*.

11 Mao Yuanming, *Han-Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu*, 1: 336.

12 Translator's note: The Yellow Chamber was a hall within the Lingtai 靈臺 (Numinous Platform) complex, likely the main shrine or sacrificial chamber dedicated to the Yellow Emperor.

13 Ye Yibao 葉奕苞, *Jinshilu xuba* 金石錄續跋, in vol. 2 of *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 1979 facsimile), 18: 13208.

14 Hong Kuo, *Lishi-Lixu*, 16.

are those with other surnames. Zhong Qiu 仲球, the District Magistrate of Lü, and Zhong Xin 仲訢, the Governor of Julu (*Julu Taishou* 鉅鹿太守), contributed significantly more money than the others. However, the chancellor's clerk is listed first, and the Governor of Julu, also listed before the District Magistrate of Lü, follows, even though the District Magistrate contributed the most. This shows that even within a clan, the ordering of names prioritized political status over the amount of money donated. Observing the list as a whole, all the members of the Zhong family who donated money for the stele held official positions, and the clan hierarchy was interwoven with political factors such as the rank of office and extent of power.

Furthermore, Han stele inscriptions document how subordinate clerks used stele erection as a medium to establish connections, forming close relationships beyond the formal bureaucratic order. For instance, the reverse side of the *Feng Sheng Stele* (*Feng Sheng Bei Yin* 逢盛碑陰), in addition to listing four "disciples from the same family/clan" (*jiamensheng* 家門生), also lists several individuals under the heading "Literati and Officials in the District" (*xianzhong shidafu* 縣中士大夫). These include two general-purpose clerks (*wuguan yuan* 五官掾) and five local inspectors (*duyou* 督郵), all of whom were subordinate clerks at the commandery level. The designation "Gentlemen and Officials of the District" suggests that they were likely natives of the same county serving in the commandery administration. Their participation in erecting a stele for the son of a colleague indicates a close personal relationship among them.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, the popular activity of voluntarily raising funds to erect stelae was realized through the coordination and mobilization of groups connected by interpersonal ties. Therefore, the erection of a stele invariably involved the participation of a group of mutually acquainted individuals who shared a common vision. Behind the orderly and repetitive rows of inscribed names lies a hidden network of relationships, arranged according to specific rules.

### 3 Former Subordinate Clerk Name Lists: Regional Identity and Cross-Regional Networking

The erection of stelae by clans or senior officials was based on relatively clear social relationships that tied participants together. From this perspective, when disciples (*mensheng* 門生) and former clerks jointly erected a stele, it was also premised on already-established interpersonal relationships. However,

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 115.

because disciples and former clerks' connections to their patrons were sometimes dislocated in time and space, these connections could lack the stable interpersonal ties found among subordinate clerks or clansmen. Therefore, we must examine their participation from the perspective of their erecting a stele for their patron in order to clarify the ways and characteristics of their network formation.

In the Eastern Han period, former clerks (*guli* 故吏) had a dependent status, sharing the loyalty expected between ruler and minister (*junchen* 君臣) with their patron, who had recommended them for office (as their *juzhu* 举主) or served as their superior (*fuzhu* 府主).<sup>16</sup> The lists of former clerks appearing in Han stelae reflect this relationship. Focusing specifically on the group of former clerks recorded on Han stelae, one can clearly see the motives and mechanisms through which they formed interpersonal networks. Former clerk name inscriptions mainly appear on merit stelae (*gongde bei* 功德碑) and tombstones (*mubei* 墓碑). On these two types of Han stelae, we can see certain differences in the purpose and form of stele erection by former clerks.

The content of merit stelae erected by former clerks mainly records the contributions made by senior officials during their tenure in a particular locality, as remembered by local officials and common people. For example, the *Yang Tong Stele* (*Yang Tong Bei* 楊統碑) records that Yang Tong served as Administrator of Pei (*Pei guoxiang* 沛國相). During his tenure, he was transferred to serve as a Court Gentleman for Consultation (*yiguan* 議官) due to obstruction from powerful relatives. He held several positions in his career, including Gentleman of the Interior (*langzhong* 郎中), Commandery Aide of Jianwei (*Jianwei Fucheng* 犍為府丞), Administrator of Tongyang Marquisate (*Tongyang Houxiang* 銅陽侯相), and Governor of Jincheng (*Jincheng Taishou* 金城太守). However, the stele's title, *Stele of the Late Administrator Yang of Pei* (*Han gu Peixiang Yangjun zhi Bei* 漢故沛相楊君之碑), emphasizes his role as administrator of Pei, highlighting his connection to Pei.<sup>17</sup> The reason for this can be seen from the inscriptions on the back of the stele: the ancestral homes of the listed former clerks were all in counties under Pei Commandery during the Eastern Han.<sup>18</sup> According to the Han dynasty restriction on the native place (*ji guan* 籍貫) of subordinate clerks in the local government, these individuals were Yang Tong's subordinate clerks when he served as Administrator of Pei. Some of them had since been promoted to positions elsewhere, such as Chamberlain for Attendants (*langzhongling* 郎中令) or District Magistrate

16 Zhao Yi 趙翼, *Nian'er shi zhaji jiaozheng* 廿二史劄記校證, coll. Wang Shumin 王樹民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 104.

17 Mao Yuanming, *Han-Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu*, 1: 270.

18 Hong Kuo, *Lishi-Lixu*, 88.

of Yilu (*Yilu Zhang* 宜祿長). However, their inscriptions still emphasized their status as Yang Tong's former subordinate clerks.

We find a similar example with the *Li Mengchu Ancestral Shrine Stele* (*Li Mengchu Shenci Bei* 李孟初神祠碑). The stele does not have a formal title at the top, but it begins in this way: "Stele of the ancestral shrine of Li 李 [personal name missing], styled Mengchu 孟初, former Wan County Magistrate, Regional Inspector of Yizhou, and a native of Xiangyang County, Nan Commandery."<sup>19</sup> Li Mengchu's official positions are not arranged according to rank. Zhao Shaouzu 趙紹祖 observes: "Mengchu held office as Inspector of Yizhou, but placing 'former Wan County Magistrate' first indicates that the people of Wan County appreciated his virtue and built a shrine and stele in recognition."<sup>20</sup>

From these two examples, we can make the following observations. First, former clerks emphasized the senior official's achievements in the locality where he served, demonstrating a strong sense of regional identity. Second, even when former clerks had been promoted and scattered to different places, they still maintained an interpersonal network with other former clerks who had served under the same official.

In addition to merit stelae, former clerks also erected tombstones for senior officials. Some of these former clerks came from the same commandery. For example, Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728–1804) summarizes the *Kong Biao Tomb Stele* (*Kong Biao Mubei* 孔彪墓碑) thus:

The stele was erected by former clerks from Boling 博陵, including Cui Lie 崔烈. The stele's title reads "Stele of Former Boling Governor Kong," and the text only records Kong Biao's achievements in Boling. Former clerks from Xiapi 下邳 and Hedong 河東 probably erected separate stelae, which are now lost.<sup>21</sup>

Similar to the inscriptions on merit stelae considered above, this particular inscription emphasizes Kong Biao's administrative achievements from when he served in Boling. The names inscribed on the back of the stele are all former subordinates from counties belonging to Boling Commandery. Some had already been promoted to posts elsewhere, while others remained local

19 Mao Yuanming, *Han-Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu*, 1: 185.

20 Zhao Shaouzu 趙紹祖, *Gumo zhai jinshi ba* 古墨齋金石跋, in vol. 2 of *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 1979 facsimile), 19: 1.14068.

21 Qian Daxin 錢大昕, *Qianyan tang jinshiwen bawei* 潛研堂金石文跋尾, in vol. 5 of *Jiading Qian Daxin quanji* 嘉定錢大昕全集, ed. Chen Wenhe 陳文和, coll. Zhu Zhudian 祝竹點 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), 1.21.

subordinate clerks.<sup>22</sup> They were brought together because they had all once served under Kong Biao.

A similar case appears in the *Stele of Lord Jing (Jingjun Bei 景君碑)*. The former subordinate clerks listed there were all natives of counties under Beihai Commandery 北海國. The inscription likewise focuses on Lord Jing's activities in Beihai.<sup>23</sup> Thus, even though the colleagues named on these tombstone inscriptions had dispersed to various places in the course of their official careers, they still remained within the same relational network.

However, unlike the merit stelae erected by local former subordinates, there were also cases in which non-local former clerks jointly erected a funerary stele for their former superior. On the back of the *Stele of Liu Kuan (Liu Kuan Bei 劉寬碑)*, the inscription lists several dozen former subordinates whose places of origin include: Henan 河南, the Kingdom of Qi 齊國, Shanyang 山陽, Nanjun 南郡, Donglai 東萊, Julu 鉅鹿, Nandun 南頓, Pingyuan 平原, Xiapi 下邳, and Nanyang 南陽.<sup>24</sup> This is connected with the stele subject's career history.

According to the inscription, Liu Kuan held numerous posts across the empire.<sup>25</sup> Because he had served in many regions and at the imperial court, the former clerks who erected his stele were geographically widespread. This raises the question: did these subordinates from different regions actually have connections with one another? Judging from a comparison between the former clerks' names recorded on the stele clerks and the total number of subordinates Liu Kuan ought to have had, those listed account for only a very small proportion.<sup>26</sup>

22 Mao Yuanming, *Han-Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu*, 1: 319.

23 Ibid., 1: 138–39.

24 Hong Kuo, *Lishi–Lixu*, 406–7.

25 See Ibid., 124. Attendant Censor (*shiyu shi* 侍御史); Magistrate of Liang (*Liang ling* 梁令); Court Gentleman for Consultation (*yilang* 議郎); Chancellor's Aide (*situ zhangshi* 司徒長史); Palace Attendant (*shizhong* 侍中); Imperial Secretary (*shangshu* 尚書); Administrator of Donghai (*Donghai xiang* 東海相); Governor of Nanyang (*Nanyang taishou* 南陽太守); Grand Master of the Palace (*taizhong dafu* 太中大夫); Commandant of the Garrison Cavalry (*tunqi xiaowei* 屯騎校尉); Chamberlain for the Imperial Clan (*zongzheng* 宗正); Chamberlain for Attendants (*guanglu xun* 光祿勳); Defender-in-Chief (*taiwei* 太尉); Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (*guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫); Chamberlain for the Palace Garrison (*weiwei* 衛尉); Chamberlain for the Yongle Palace Revenues (*Yongle shaofu* 永樂少府).

26 Zhou Changshan 周長山, *Handai difang zhengzhi shilun: dui junxian zhidu ruogan wenti de kaocha* 漢代地方政治史論：對郡縣制度若干問題的考察 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), 136.

We can see evidence of this phenomenon in epigraphic records. For instance, Qian Daxin remarks with regard to the *Stele of Lord Jing*: “On the right side are the names inscribed on the back of the stele ... a total of 54 people. The text below says that those who observed the three-year mourning period totaled 87 people. This means that the names of many former clerks who observed the mourning rites were not included on the back of the stele.”<sup>27</sup> This selective inclusion of stele-erecting former subordinates indicates that coordination was necessary and that at least some of them were acquainted with each other.

Moreover, stele inscriptions follow strict conventions. To successfully raise funds for constructing a stele, former subordinate clerks needed to have established relationships beforehand to coordinate the effort efficiently. Since the subject of the stele had already passed away, it was all the more necessary for them to take the initiative to contact one another. Thus, after Liu Kuan's death, his former clerks used the stele's erection as an opportunity to display a network of interpersonal relations that extended beyond regional boundaries.

Another example is the *Stele of Grand Tutor Hu (Hu Taifu Bei 胡太傅碑)*. The inscription records: “Accordingly, the subordinate officials Wang Yun 王允 of Taiyuan 太原, Bei Zheng 卑整 of Yanmen 雁門, the subordinate clerks Lu Zhou 魯宙 of Fufeng 扶風 and Dun Li 敦歷 of Yingchuan 潁川, and others ... jointly praised his virtues repeatedly, recorded his meritorious deeds, and had them engraved upon the stele.”<sup>28</sup> The phrase “jointly” (*xiangyu 相與*) literally means “together with one another.” This term shows that the content of the inscription resulted from joint consultation among Wang Yun and other former subordinates from different commanderies. Although these horizontal, cross-regional interpersonal ties were qualitatively different from vertical ties between former subordinates and their superiors, or the local bonds among fellow clerks from the same area, they nonetheless form an indispensable dimension in examining the interpersonal networks of the bureaucratic elite.

#### 4 Disciple Name Lists: Cross-Regional Interpersonal Networks

The relationship between disciples and their teachers was formed through the transmission of classical learning, transcending regional boundaries. Compared with interactions among subordinate clerks or former subordinates

27 Qian Daxin, *Qianyan tang jinshiwén bawei*, 1.10.

28 Cai Yong 蔡邕, *Cai Yong ji biannian jiaozhu* 蔡邕集編年校注, ed. Deng Ansheng 鄧安生 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 167–68.

from the same locality, creating connections as a disciple was more challenging. Although Confucian students sought instruction primarily to study the Confucian classics, cultivating friendships with like-minded peers was also an important goal.

Take the experiences of Li Gu 李固 (94–147) for example. His biography in the *Houhanshu* 後漢書 records that he “loved learning from a young age, and would regularly travel on foot to seek teachers, not shunning distances of a thousand *li* 里. He extensively studied ancient classics, and formed friendships with outstanding and virtuous individuals.”<sup>29</sup> The phrases “extensively studied ancient classics” and “formed friendships with outstanding and virtuous individuals” describe Li Gu’s dual purpose in seeking teachers and learning.

Disciples sometimes spent a long period in close contact with their teachers. When teachers relocated, some disciples accompanied them. For instance, in the biography of Cheng Gong 承宮, it is recorded that he “faced the empire’s chaos and thus brought his students to Hanzhong to take refuge.”<sup>30</sup> Such prolonged daily interactions between disciples and teachers naturally fostered opportunities for deeper connections among the disciples themselves, giving rise to cross-regional networks. The Japanese scholar Higashi Shinji 東晉次 summarizes the effects of cross-regional learning among Confucian scholars as follows:

The widespread practice of scholars traveling to study led to the growth and layering of teacher-student relationships. These, when combined with the empire-wide networks of friendships among scholars, extended beyond the confines of family and local communities, spreading across Eastern Han society and deeply permeating the social structures organized around family ties.<sup>31</sup>

While the formulaic nature of Han stele inscriptions limits their ability to fully describe the dynamic interactions among disciples, a careful analysis of the inscriptions can still reveal traces of their social connections. For example, the *Tomb Stele of Lu Jun* (*Lu Jun Mubei* 魯峻墓碑) states: “Thus the disciples ... three hundred and twenty in number ... proclaimed to the spirits and bestowed upon Lord [*jun* 君] Lu the title ‘Loyal and Kind Father’ [*Zhonghui Fu*

29 *Houhanshu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 63.2073.

30 *Ibid.*, 27.944.

31 Higashi Shinji 東晉次, *Dong Han shidai de zhengzhi yu shehui* 東漢時代的政治與社會, trans. Fu Chenchen 付晨晨, Xue Mengxiao 薛夢瀟, and Liu Ying 劉瑩 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2023), 131.

忠惠父].”<sup>32</sup> This shows that these disciples commemorated their teacher by privately conferring a posthumous title.

On the back of the stele, the inscription lists the names of those who contributed funds to erect the monument. Only 37 disciples appear among these names; the vast majority of the 320 disciples who participated in granting the posthumous title are not listed. This indicates that inclusion in stele inscriptions was a result of deliberate selection rather than simply reflecting participation in commemorative acts.

The involvement of Yang Tong’s disciples in raising stelae, as noted on the reverse sides of the *Stele of Yang Zhen* (*Yang Zhen Beiyin* 楊震碑陰) and the *Stele of Yang Zhu* (*Yang Zhu Beiyin* 楊著碑陰), further demonstrates this idea. The inscription on the *Tomb Stele of Yang Zhen* (*Yang Zhen Mubei* 楊震墓碑) records: “Yang Tong’s disciples, Chen Chi 陳熾 of Ru’nan 汝南 and others, adhered to the principle that father, teacher, and lord should be honored in the same way. Following the precedent set by the ‘new temple’ verses, as mentioned in the *Shijing* 詩經, they emulated Xi Si 奚斯<sup>33</sup> in honoring their predecessors by erecting a stone monument along the tomb path [*fendao* 墳道].”<sup>34</sup> Yang Tong was the son of Yang Mu 楊牧 and the grandson of Yang Zhen 楊震; the tomb stele was erected by Yang Tong’s disciples in honor of his grandfather, Yang Zhen.<sup>35</sup>

From the name inscriptions on the reverse side of the *Stele of Yang Zhu*, it can be seen that the monument was erected by the disciples of Yang Zhu’s 楊著 younger paternal uncle, Yang Bing 楊秉, and his cousin, Yang Tong. Among these, eight of Yang Tong’s disciples also appear on the reverse side of this stele. The fact that disciples jointly erected stelae for multiple members of their teacher’s family on more than one occasion strongly suggests they were not strangers to one another.

Could the disciples and former clerks of a stele’s honoree establish connections with one another? Indeed, since some stele subjects were both teachers and senior officials, both groups—disciples and former clerks—had reason to erect stelae in their honor. In some cases, stelae were erected separately by each group, while in others they collaborated. For example, the *Stele of Late Court Commissioner Zhong* (*Han gu Tingwei Zhongjun*

32 Mao Yuanming, *Han-Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu*, 1: 353.

33 Translator’s note: Xi Si 奚斯, a minister of Lu in the Spring and Autumn period, is traditionally associated with the “Bi Gong” 闕宮 hymn in the *Shijing*, which celebrates Duke Xi of Lu 魯僖公 (r. 659–627 BCE), and describes Xi Si’s construction of a “new temple.”

34 *Ibid.*, 1: 361.

35 Hong Kuo, *Lishi-Lixu*, 134.

*zhi Bei* 漢故廷尉仲君之碑) states: “Thus the disciples, fostered students [*yangtu* 養徒], former subordinates, and local villagers [*xiangdang* 鄉黨] carved the inscription on the stone and erected the stele to mark the path.”<sup>36</sup>

Sometimes disciples and former clerks were in the same region, and it is possible that some of them became acquainted. For example, the *Tomb Stele of Kong Zhou* (*Kong Zhou Mubei* 孔宙墓碑) records the origins of those who erected the stele: four former clerks and one disciple from Duchang 都昌.

Officials (*guanli* 官吏) also taught Confucian learning while in office. In the biography of Lu Pi 魯丕, we read: “Lu Pi was appointed Administrator of Zhao [*Zhaoxiang* 趙相]. His governance emphasized leniency, propriety, and deference. Even while holding office, he did not neglect teaching, and his students frequently numbered several hundred.”<sup>37</sup> As Jiang Xiaoliang 蔣曉亮 infers, the ways in which they (disciples) came into contact often involved them frequently entering and leaving government offices (*guanshu* 官署).<sup>38</sup> This gave them the opportunity to become acquainted with local powers as well as their teacher’s subordinates (*liaoshu* 僚屬).

Inscriptions also contain clear records of contact between disciples and former subordinates. For example, the *Stele of Wei Yuanpi, Inspector of Liangzhou* (*Liangzhou Cishi Wei Yuanpi Bei* 涼州刺史魏元丕碑) states: “Thus former clerk, a Flourishing Talent [*maocai* 茂才], who had served as Governor of Yunzhong Commandery [*Yunzhong Taishou* 雲中太守] and his home region was Hanyang Commandery 漢陽郡, came from a distance of more than ten thousand *li*, wearing mourning clothes, and, moved by gratitude, arrived to mourn. He then, together with the disciple Cao Mu 曹穆 of Pingyuan Commandery 平原郡 and others, erected a stele.”<sup>39</sup>

This account illustrates how the action of a former clerk traveling long distances to attend the funeral and erect a stele together with disciples naturally entailed contact and communication. However, according to Han regulations, senior officials could not leave their jurisdictions without authorization. According to Jiang Xiaoliang, in the Han period, subordinate clerks could act on behalf of senior officials to carry out non-official, cross-regional interactions,

36 Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠, *Jinshi lu jiaozheng* 金石錄校證, coll. Jin Wenming 金文明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), 309.

37 Liu Zhen 劉珍 et al., *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 東觀漢記校注, coll. Wu Shuping 吳樹平 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 13.479.

38 Jiang Xiaoliang 蔣曉亮, “Handai junxian guanli de guanxi wangluo yu zhengwu yunzuo: cong Chengyang sanbei tanqi” 漢代郡縣官吏的關係網絡與政務運作—從成陽三碑談起, *Wenshi* 文史, no. 1 (2021): 75.

39 Hong Kuo, *Lishi-Lixu*, 119.

and this was not an isolated case.<sup>40</sup> Former clerks who had been promoted to senior official, whether present at the stele erection site or not, could still maintain contact with other stele sponsors, including disciples.

The joint stele erection by two groups of different social statuses, as shown above in the case of the *Stele of Wei Yuanpi*, demonstrates that members of these groups had broken through their respective statuses and regional boundaries, forming a new interpersonal network centered on the stele's subject.

The *Tomb Stele of Kong Zhou* even provides a clear seal-script heading of the names of disciples and former clerks on its reverse side. This is followed by a detailed list. The former clerks were from Changdu 昌都 County within Beihai Commandery 北海郡 and Taishan Commandery 泰山郡. These former clerks formed a network that transcended regional boundaries, with disciples whose origins spanned Julu 鉅鹿, Dongping 東平, Wei 魏, Dong 東, Ganling 甘陵, Jinan 濟南, Anping 安平, Rencheng 任城, and Chenliu 陳留.<sup>41</sup> Of course, due to differences in social status and the constraints of the occasions in which they interacted, this network differed in character from other interpersonal relationships formed through daily close contact.

## 5 Stele Inscription Name Lists and the Elite Clans of the Eastern Han

Elite clans (*haozu* 豪族) were an important social group during the Han dynasty, and their power expanded even further during the Eastern Han period. They held advantages in economic, political, and cultural spheres, and were closely connected with the stele-erecting practices of the Eastern Han.

Cui Xiangdong 崔向東 divides the internal structure of elite clans into different levels according to the degree of power they possessed and whether they were proficient in the Confucian Classics. These included local elite clans at the commandery, county, township, and village levels (*jun xian xiang li haozu* 郡縣鄉里豪族), as well as bureaucratized clans (*guanliaohua de haozu* 官僚化的豪族) that combined with political power to form hereditary aristocratic lineages (*shizu* 世族).<sup>42</sup> Stele inscription name lists (*beike timing* 碑刻題名) had different meanings and functions for elite clans at different levels.

Besides carrying out their own stele-erecting activities, the local elite clans at every administrative level also participated in stele projects organized by senior officials. This was because, by that time, elite clans who had already

40 Jiang Xiaoliang, "Handai junxian guanli de guanxi wangluo yu zhengwu yunzuo," 73.

41 Mao Yuanming, *Han-Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu*, 1:242–43.

42 Cui Xiangdong 崔向東, *Handai haozu yanjiu* 漢代豪族研究 (Wuhan: Chongwen shuju, 2004), 190–91.

acquired economic strength had also widely embraced and promoted the study of Confucian learning. This produced large numbers of students of the Classics (*zhusheng* 諸生) and Confucian students (*rusheng* 儒生) from elite-clan backgrounds, who came to monopolize clerical positions in the commanderies and counties.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the county and commandery clerks had become the representatives of the elite clans within the local government. Their participation in stele-erecting activities can thus be seen as representing the will of these local elite clans.

It is through such occasions of stele erection that local elite clans formed ties with senior officials, a process that indirectly reflected their relationship with the Eastern Han central polity. During this period, the administrative focus shifted upward to the commandery level (*jun* 郡), the number of subordinate officials increased, and commandery governors (*junshou* 郡守)<sup>44</sup> gained expanded governing authority.<sup>45</sup> Governors possessed absolute control over both subordinate officials and local society.<sup>46</sup> Since the purpose of erecting a stele was to eulogize its honoree, in stelae erected by the officials and people of his area of administration, the governor was often portrayed as a virtuous official. Accordingly, commandery governors frequently appeared in contexts such as officiating at sacrifices to local deities and overseeing the repair of temples. The local officials and commoners responded to governors with cooperation, and there were quite a few members of local elite clans among the officials and commoners who participated in the erection of stelae.

The *Stele of the Cangjie Temple* records a neat and uniform list of subordinate officials who contributed funds. Certainly, part of this reflects the authority the commandery governor held over local officials. Yet subordinate officials donating money to support stele-erection initiatives promoted by the senior officials may also be viewed as local elite clans actively supporting the senior official and working to build a harmonious relationship with the local political authority.

43 Higashi Shinji, *Dong Han shidai de zhengzhi yu shehui*, 187.

44 Translator's note: The terms *junshou* 郡守 and *taishou* 太守 are often used interchangeably to mean "governor of a commandery." The difference is that *junshou* is an informal way of referring to the person who is the governor, whereas *taishou* is a formal title that refers primarily to the job itself and secondarily to the person performing that job. To further complicate matters, the author of the present paper, Shen Gang, appears to also use the term senior official (*zhangli* 長吏) interchangeably with *junshou* (governor).

45 Zhang Rui 張銳, *Qin-Han xingzheng tizhi yanjiu* 秦漢行政體制研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2017), 212.

46 Yan Gengwang, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi*, 76–77.

The participation of powerful local clans in stele-erection activities was mainly motivated by their desire to safeguard local interests. Senior officials<sup>47</sup> were especially attentive to the local deities, personally conducting sacrifices and carving stone inscriptions in commemoration. The local elite clans seized this opportunity to revive these deities as symbols of local identity, turning them into spiritual bonds connecting the local population, thereby consolidating the clans' influence in the locality. For example, both subordinate clerks and ordinary registered households appear in the list of names on the *Stele of the Shrine of Lord Xiaokeng*. Clerks played the leading role, organizing the common people into the worship activities of the local deity, which reveals the dominant position of elite clans in the local area.

For individual members of the elite clans, maintaining relations with the senior officials was also tied to their personal interests. The title inscription of the *Stele of Qin Xie, Administrator of Nanyang* (*Nanyang Taishou Qinxie Bei* 南陽太守秦頡碑) lists twelve filial and incorrupt (*xiaolian* 孝廉) men and five accounts clerks (*shangji li* 上計吏).<sup>48</sup> "Filial and incorrupt" was a recommendation-based qualification for office, typically initiated by the commandery governor. The "accounts clerk" was a position that carried with it a chance of being selected for promotion for higher office by the emperor. The governor played a decisive role at the beginning of these men's careers. Their joint participation in erecting the stele reflects that the senior official<sup>49</sup> provided them with access to the political sphere at the national level.

In stele-raising activities, the interaction between local elite families and senior officials was bidirectional. The *Chengyang Lingtai Stele* was primarily erected by local elite clans. However, the commandery governor and county magistrate actively dispatched important subordinate officials to assist Zhong Jun. Some scholars interpret such activities as indicating a convergence of interests between local senior officials and the elite clans.<sup>50</sup> The inscription records the merits of the senior officials alongside the contributions of the Zhong clan. This reveals a network of relationships interwoven between senior officials and local elite families.

The *Stele of Cao Quan* (*Cao Quan Bei* 曹全碑) specifically describes the detailed interactions between senior officials and commoners before and after

47 Translator's note: Contextually, "senior officials" here refers to regional administrator roles, such as "magistrate," "administrator," or "governor."

48 Hong Kuo, *Lishi-Lixu*, 174.

49 Here, "senior official" (*zhangli* 長吏) is being used interchangeably with "governor" (*junshou* 郡守).

50 Ge Shaoqi 葛少旗, "Donghan difang guojia jisi yanjiu: yi shike wenxian wei zhongxin" 東漢地方國家祭祀研究—以石刻文獻為中心 (PhD diss., University of Xiamen, 2020), 197; Jiang Xiaoliang, "*Handai junxian guanli de guanxi wangluo yu zhengwu yunzuo*," 66.

erecting a merit stele for a senior official. After Cao Quan 曹全 served as the magistrate of Heyang (*Heyang ling* 郟陽令), he carried out a series of administrative activities. This included: “consulting former elders [*gula* 故老] such as Shang Liang 商量, the talented Wang Chang 王敞, Wang Bi 王畢… hoping that scholarly men like Li Ru 李儒, Luan Gui 欒規, Cheng Yin 程寅 would each receive official appointments in return.” As a result, “The palace clerk, Wang Chang, recording official, Wang Bi, registrar, Wang Li 王歷, household office clerk, Qin Shang 秦尚, merit office scribe, Wang Zhuan 王顥… thus together erected a stele to commemorate Cao Quan’s achievements.”<sup>51</sup>

Several individuals mentioned in the inscription also appear in the name list: the county elder, Shang Liang, conscription erudite (*zheng boshi* 徵博士), Li Ru, former palace clerk, Wang Chang, former palace aide, Wang Bi, and former merit office clerk, Qin Shang. The “Elders” (*sanlao* 三老) held a unique position as mediators and buffers between local society and the state, enjoying high prestige.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, when a senior official first arrived at a post, they needed to visit these people. Wang Chang was previously given the accolade “talented and virtuous” (*jun'ai* 俊艾) and later became a subordinate official. The scholar, Li Ru, was also conscripted as a doctor. These men benefited from the senior official’s favor, reflecting the process and interest-based bonds through which senior officials connected with local elite families.

Local elite families, motivated by the desire to protect both local and personal interests, actively participated in erecting stelae for senior officials or commemorating them. Senior officials, for the purposes of local governance, also supported the stele construction activities of the local elites. This aligns with the overall trend in the administrative patterns of the Eastern Han period. According to the Japanese scholar Higashi Shinji, from the mid-Eastern Han onward, elite clans gradually established their regulatory authority within local societies, and local officials collaborated with these families to consolidate regional governance.<sup>53</sup>

Higher-ranking elite families, namely the aristocratic clans, often appear in stelae as patrons, while the names inscribed are those of their disciples and former subordinates. Unlike local elites, aristocratic clans wielded broader political and cultural influence. The mechanisms through which this occurred

51 Mao Yuanming, *Han-Wei Liuchao beike jiaozhu*, 2: 57.

52 Mou Fasong 牟發松, “Handai sanlao: ‘feili erde yulibi’ de dofang shehui lingxiu” 漢代三老: “非吏而得與吏比” 的地方社會領袖, in *Han Tang lishi bianqian zhong de shehui yu guojia* 漢唐歷史變遷中的社會與國家 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2011), 235.

53 Higashi Shinji, *Dong Han shidai de zhengzhi yu shehui*, 185.

relied on bonds formed between teachers and students or between senior officials and their subordinates, creating strong and durable connections. This relationship not only existed between individual family members and their respective disciples and former subordinates, but disciples and former subordinates were also obliged to serve other members of the patron's family. These kinds of relationships are exemplified in the inscriptions on the *Stele of Yang Zhu* and the *Stele of Yang Zhen* recording Yang Pei's disciples erecting stelae for Yang Zhen and Yang Zhu, as discussed above.

When disciples and former clerks commissioned stelae to enhance the reputation of their teacher or patron, they frequently coordinated efforts via their interpersonal networks in the absence of the patron. In addition to the direct ties between patrons or teachers and their disciples or former clerks, it is also important to consider the lateral relationships that existed among those disciples and former clerks themselves. These groups, operating through their own interpersonal networks, likewise helped aristocratic clans expand their reputation.

The development of elite clans was one of the important historical features of Eastern Han society. Different levels of these families played distinct roles in stele inscriptions, creating lasting records of social groups that have survived to the present. Returning to the historical context of stelae construction itself, the act of raising a stele may be interpreted as a deliberate effort by the involved parties to forge associations with the patron and contribute to the development of prevailing social norms. By collectively funding and carving inscriptions, praising the patron, or participating in stele-raising activities led by the patron, they strengthened interactions with both the patron and other participants. In this way, the involved parties consolidated social relationships centered around the various levels of elite clans.

## 6 Interpersonal Networks of Disciples and Former Subordinate Clerks and Eastern Han Politics

Teachers of the Classics and their disciples, as well as senior officials and their former clerks, were connected through the ideals of Confucian learning. Disciples and former subordinates participating in stele construction activities also relied on this foundation to establish ties that went beyond ordinary colleague or classmate relationships, forming closer connections.

The primary purpose of erecting stelae in the Eastern Han was to commemorate the person being honored and to display to the world the close relationship between the stele sponsors and the stele's subject. For those who

commissioned and carved these inscriptions, beyond personal affection for the honoree, they also shared similar values and convictions. For example, after Guo Tai 郭太 passed away, “more than a thousand scholars from all directions came to attend the funeral. Those of like mind then jointly carved a stone and erected a stele.”<sup>54</sup> Compared with those who merely attended the funeral, the ones who actually erected the stele emphasized being “those of like mind” (*zhitong zhe* 同志者), which naturally reflects deeper mutual understanding and shared ideals.

Participation in stele-erection by disciples and former clerks had a certain impact on Eastern Han politics. These disciples and former subordinates constituted an important source of officials within the Eastern Han bureaucracy, and this was closely tied to the system of official recruitment at the time. First, under the recommendation system (*chaju zhidu* 察舉制度), commandery governors nominated “filial and incorrupt” candidates from within their jurisdictions, and their subordinate clerks formed a major pool from which such nominees were selected. When a commandery governor was transferred to other regions, the number of his former clerks naturally grew as well. For example, in the “Hu Guang zhuan” 胡廣傳 chapter contained in the *Houhanshu*, the text records that after Hu Guang died, “several hundred former clerks, ranging from high ministers down to mid-level officials, all wore mourning garments and attended the rituals from death until burial.”<sup>55</sup> Some of these former clerks who joined the funeral rites would inevitably have been familiar to those involved in erecting the stele, and since they now held different posts and ranks within the bureaucracy, the varying closeness of their relationships would also shape the broader political environment.

Second, in terms of the social backgrounds of Eastern Han officials, most came from two groups: clerical functionaries (*wenli* 文吏) and Confucian scholars. As the distinction between these two groups increasingly blurred over the course of the Eastern Han,<sup>56</sup> more and more classical scholars entered government service, including many who were fellow disciples under the same teacher. Among them, some formed particularly close personal bonds.

These former subordinates and disciples, who held official positions and shared deep personal bonds, were also able to leverage their established interpersonal networks into the arena of officialdom. Based on excavated documents, the historian Hou Xudong 侯旭東 categorized official interactions

54 *Houhanshu*, 68.2227.

55 *Ibid.*, 44.1511.

56 Yan Buke 閻步克, *Shidafu zhengzhi yansheng shigao* 士大夫政治演生史稿 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996), 412–63.

in the Han period into two types: first, interactions among subordinate clerks within the same government office; second, relationships constructed between different, non-subordinate offices that were far apart, relying on pre-existing ties such as shared native place or former colleague status, thereby leveraging old connections to forge new ones.<sup>57</sup> Amidst this intricate web of bureaucratic relationships, bonds between disciples and former clerks naturally became another type of crucial link. Within such networks, disciples and former clerks would assist and promote each other. For instance, the “Biography of Huan Rong” in *Houhanshu* records that Huan Rong yielded an opportunity to fill a vacancy for an Erudite position to a fellow disciple, who consequently received the appointment and promotion.<sup>58</sup> This exemplifies how disciples looked out for each other to advance collectively.

Interactions among acting and former clerks, among disciples, and among disciples and former clerks, created tightly connected networks of like-minded individuals. When these combinations are considered together, they could form even larger relational networks. First, there were intra-family connections among disciples of different members of the same clan. For example, the case of the Yang family stelae shows that the disciples of Yang Bing and those of Yang Tong joined efforts to erect a stele for Yang Zhu, thereby establishing connections with each other. Second, when a master commemorated in a stele held office in different regions, multiple “master–former clerk” combinations could emerge. In addition to disciples who attached themselves to the master at the place of office, there were also disciples from the master’s home region who joined before the master officially entered government service, creating cross-regional connections. Moreover, former clerks who had opportunities for further advancement often had to leave their hometowns to serve elsewhere due to restrictions based on place of origin. Disciples, on the other hand, were not limited by geography, and likewise spread across different regions through official service. These complex combinations of relationships permeated the bureaucracy and formed one of the fundamental features of the Eastern Han administrative system.

The horizontal networks formed by disciples and former clerks, when projected onto the Eastern Han bureaucracy, had a certain influence on the political environment of the time. Returning to the activities of disciples

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57 Hou Xudong 侯旭東, *Chong: xin-renxing junchen guanxi yu Xihan lishi de zhankai* 寵：信—任型君臣關係與西漢歷史的展開 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2018), 191–192.

58 *Houhanshu*, 37.1250.

and former clerks in erecting stelae, we can further examine their political significance.

The dependent relationships between disciples and their teachers, as well as between former clerks and their superiors, were prevalent during the Eastern Han period. The principle of collective legal liability (*lianzuo* 連坐) among them was recognized de facto by the state. However, under real political pressures, such relationships could also exhibit a degree of flexibility.

In comparison, the activities of disciples and former clerks in erecting stelae had distinctive characteristics. The inscriptions on these stelae reflect voluntary choices made by the stele builders based on shared political ideals, particularly when the master was absent, having been either transferred to another post or deceased. These inscriptions thus served as a bond, forming a kind of community centered on the master.

Consequently, the act of erecting stelae and the texts inscribed upon them carry a dual significance. First, the carving of inscriptions was an act permitted under Eastern Han law and institutional practice. Within this framework, the inscribed names on stelae publicly signaled politically oriented groups, each centered around a master. Second, compared to the practical, reciprocal relationships between masters and disciples or masters and former clerks (where the latter offered gratitude and support), erecting a stele represents a ritualized expression of political relationships.

Groups of like-minded disciples and former clerks used the medium of stone inscriptions to display their interpersonal connections in a permanent and highly visible manner. Thus, grounded in shared political interests and ideals, they were able to express their political connections, and even their political orientations, over the long term through a lawful and orderly practice, rather than through immediate, concrete political action.

## 7 Conclusion

The flourishing trend of erecting stelae in the Eastern Han period reflected the political and social realities of the time. Beyond the primary relationship between stele sponsors and the stele honoree, there existed interpersonal networks of varying closeness among stele sponsors of different statuses. The interpersonal networks inscribed on stone were closely connected to real social structures.

Local elite families used stele construction as a means of cultivating good relations with local officials, thereby consolidating their power in the region. The disciples and former clerks of the aristocratic clans constituted the main

group of stele sponsors. As officials or potential candidates for office, they not only aligned with the stele honoree but also used stelae as a medium to seek out like-minded peers, placing their networks within the political sphere and mutually supporting one another. Consequently, the widespread practice of erecting stelae in the late Eastern Han partially mitigated the concentration of political and social power. Although the imperial authority made necessary responses, the inherent contradictions in institutional design and the influence of social customs prevented a fundamental resolution of the issue.

By the Wei–Jin period, the state implemented policies restricting stele erection. As Xu Chong points out, these measures targeted “non-kin political groups, such as disciples and former clerks, erecting stelae without imperial approval,” aiming to “institutionally incorporate these two mutually dependent groups within the emperor’s authority, based on the ‘instrumentalization’ [*zhongqihua* 重器化] of stelae, making them political resources controllable by the elite.”<sup>59</sup> As a result, the power to erect stelae shifted upward, and stele construction was no longer a sphere for disciples, former clerks, or local elites to establish interpersonal networks.

*Translated by Thomas McConochie*

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59 Xu Chong, “Beijin’ yu Cao-Wei Xijin de shibei wenhua,” 83.