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Court and Family in Sung China, 960-1279: Bureaucratic Success and Kinship Fortunes for the Shih of Ming-chou. by Richard L. Davis. Durham: Duke University Press, 1986. Pp. xvi + 353. Appendixes, Abbreviations, Notes, Bibliography, Glossary, Index.

As its title suggests, Richard Davis' book is primarily devoted to tracing the political fortunes of a prominent Sung family, the Shih of Ming-chou (present-day Ning-po in northern Chekiang). Davis shows how Shih kinsmen, emerging from obscurity in the late Northern Sung, came to achieve unprecedented power at the Southern Sung court, only to decline back into relative obscurity in the Yuan.

The book opens with an introductory chapter on the relationship between society and politics in pre-Sung China, providing a clear and welcome summary of the current scholarship on this topic. Davis then reviews the changes in Sung bureaucratic recruitment policy, educational practice, and regional economy that helped make possible the rise of the Shih (and no doubt other families as well) into the Sung elite. Next, Davis turns to the Shih descent group itself, describing the earliest known members of the family and the political career of the family's first chin-shih recipient Shih Tsai (d. 1162). The three central chapters of the book focus respectively on the official careers of the Shih kinsmen who became Southern Sung chief councillors: Shih Ts'ai's nephew Shih Hao (1106-94), Hao's son Mi-yuan (1164-1233), and Mi-yuan's nephew Sung-chih (1189-1257). These chapters also include summaries of the political careers of other, less notable Shih descendants.

As Davis himself points out (p. 12), the main body of his work is concerned with politics rather than with family or social history. Shih kinsmen served as chief councillors to the emperors Hsiao-tsung, Kuang-tsung, Ning-tsung, and Li-tsung, and thus were able to dominate court affairs for much of the Southern Sung. Davis' discussion of the careers of these kinsmen doubles as a valuable chronicle of the complicated and tragic political history of the declining years of the dynasty.

The most striking point to emerge here is the extent to which position, power, and even policy at the Sung court were conditioned by personality and interpersonal relations. Davis shows that under a vigorous emperor, the purview of the chief councillor's office might be severely circumscribed (pp. 72-73), while under an inept or passive ruler the chief councillor could wield virtually unlimited power (pp. 84-87). He demonstrates that the personalities of the chief councillors themselves profoundly affected both their behavior in office and the policies they espoused (pp. 73-73, 105, 115-116). His evidence also reveals that imperial good will was overwhelmingly important to the long-term success of court officials. Thus the bureaucracy as a whole seems to have been powerless to dislodge unpopular ministers as long as the latter retained the support of the emperor. Imperial favorites (such as Han T'o-chou) were able to achieve position and power without benefit of degree-holding status (p. 86). And with imperial acquiescence, the standard bureaucratic policies concerning avoidance, retirement for mourning, and limits on "protection" privilege could be abrogated with impunity (pp. 77, 93, 136-137, 150). In short, Davis portrays a Sung government that, at least at its highest levels, was dominated by personality, political intrigue, and imperial

whim.<sup>1</sup> His account serves as a useful antidote to the widespread image of a highly "professional" or "rational" Sung bureaucracy.

Davis describes his book as primarily a political history, but he acknowledges that he is also interested in relating his findings to recent developments in Sung social history. Indeed, the three themes that he identifies as central to his work all involve issues that concern social historians. These themes, in Davis' words (pp. 12-13), are that:

- 1) The Sung was a period that, relative to the past, offered far greater opportunity for civil service aspirants.
- 2) The Sung civil service was largely a meritocracy and the Shih success therein derived largely from their extraordinary ability to produce an uninterrupted succession of degreeholders and proven officials.
- 3) Even under a system based upon individual merit, bureaucratic exposure and family reputation undeniably affected career promise.

For Davis, these three themes together point to "the highly precarious existence of the Sung dynasty's bureaucratic elite" (p. 13). He concludes that this precariousness distinguishes Sung elites both from the "great families" of early China (pp. 9-10, 13), and from the "local elites" of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties (pp. 181-182).

At the risk of treating Davis' work as something other than he intended (i.e., as social history rather than as political history), I feel compelled to give close attention to his observations about Sung society. I suspect that few historians would disagree with Davis' argument that Sung elites differed in important ways from the elites of the T'ang and earlier periods. The point has been demonstrated by numerous scholars, most notably Patricia Ebrey and David Johnson.<sup>2</sup> However, recent work on the social history of the Sung, particularly that by Robert Hartwell and Robert Hymes,<sup>3</sup> has suggested numerous similarities between Sung elites (especially those of the Southern Sung) and the local elites of later imperial China.<sup>4</sup> Davis himself notes that his findings differ markedly from those of Hymes and Hartwell and adds that "the discrepancies . . . are not easily explained" (p. 182).

At issue are the nature of elite status and especially social mobility in the Sung. Hymes' study portrays an elite that is "remarkably continuous,"<sup>5</sup> and that, like the Ming landowning elite described by Hilary Beattie, is largely independent

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted here that Davis himself prefers to emphasize the rational character of the Sung civil service, arguing that it "aspired to the ancient ideal of individual merit, even though reality often fell short of the ideal" (p. 169).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. David G. Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977) and "The last years of a great clan: the Li family of Chao Chün in late T'ang and early Sung" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37.1 (June 1977): 5-102; Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> See Robert M. Hartwell, "Demographic, Political and Social Transformations of China, 750-1550," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.2 (December 1982): 365-442; Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and also "Marriage, Descent Groups, and the Localist Strategy in Sung and Yuan Fu-chou," in *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China*, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and James L. Watson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986): 95-136.

<sup>4</sup> The seminal work on the subject of Ming and Ch'ing local elites is of course Hilary Beattie's *Land and Lineage in China: A Study of T'ung Ch'eng County, Anhwei, in the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also the work of Dennerline, Hazelton, and Naquin in *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China*.

<sup>5</sup> Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen*, pp. 1, 210.

of the state for the maintenance of its position.<sup>6</sup> Like Hartwell, who has argued that in the Sung rise to official status generally "followed intermarriage with one of the already established elite gentry lineages,"<sup>7</sup> Hymes suggests that elite status was usually established prior to entrance into the bureaucracy.

For Davis, the example of the Shih family stands in direct contrast to this model. He sees the Shih as first rising from obscurity into the elite because the family was able to produce a son sufficiently talented to pass the *chin-shih* examination. The family's status was thus from the beginning dependent on the state: "The Shih began with no base in landholding and a short and disesteemed history in their community" (p. 182). Whereas Hymes sees Sung elites engaging in marriage alliances and other strategies designed to enhance power and position in the local community, Davis argues that the Shih devoted themselves exclusively to politics, and even at the height of their power had "no strong sense of group consciousness . . . and more often fought than cooperated with one another" (182). For Davis, the Shih family's comparative longevity in the Sung was a result not of localist strategies but of their continued ability to produce officials and otherwise attract the favor of the state. When the dynasty fell, court connections became worthless, and the family declined into obscurity once again.

If Davis' analysis of the Shih experience is correct, then Hymes' generalizations about the nature of the Sung elite clearly stand in need of revision. But it seems to me that the discrepancies between the findings of Hymes and those of Davis are more apparent than real, and that most of the evidence presented by Davis is actually quite consistent with the picture of the Sung proffered by Hymes. In the remainder of this essay, then, by reviewing Davis' data and examining certain materials that he did not consider, I attempt to show that the Ming-chou Shih behaved very much like a local elite family.

At the base of Davis' representation of the Shih family experience is the conviction that the family rose to power from a position of utter obscurity. There is certainly no question that the origins of the family are historically obscure. The earliest identifiable ancestors of the Ming-chou Shih are known only from works composed during or after the heyday of Shih family power, more than a century after the events they describe. Davis shows that none of these sources is completely uncontroversial, and he neatly demolishes the family's claim to descent from a T'ang great-clan (p. 36).<sup>8</sup>

Very little is known even about the first datable Shih ancestor, a man named Shih Chien (1034?-58), other than that he was the grandfather of the family's first *chin-shih* recipient Shih Ts'ai. The earliest account of Shih Chien's activities dates from the early 14th century (p. 38). He appears to have been some sort of clerk (some sources say flogger) for the local sheriff (p. 37), but he is significant in the Shih family history chiefly for having died young, leaving

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 42-45.

<sup>7</sup> Hartwell, pp. 419.

<sup>8</sup> The claim to great clan status seems to have been created well after the Shih family's rise to power. Davis (p. 262-263, note 3) cites a Ch'ing genealogy and a Ming anecdotal collection for the great-clan claim: none of the Sung sources I have seen mention it. Davis shows the claim to be not only spurious, but above all irrelevant: even if the Shih were descendants of a T'ang noble house, by Sung times they had clearly ceased to derive any material or political benefit from this connection.

behind a daughter and a pregnant wife, the widow Yeh (1033-1118).

Somewhat more is known of the widow Yeh, for she became the subject of a biography in the "Virtuous Women" section of an early thirteenth century gazetteer. Here she is said to have been the daughter of a man of Tz'u-hsi (a subprefecture in northern Ming-chou) before her marriage to Shih Chien in Yin. The biography describes her in terms commonly found in accounts of virtuous widows: she resisted advice to remarry, lived frugally, and shut herself up at home, where she guided her daughter in weaving and taught her son to read. As the son grew, she encouraged him to attach himself to the teachers of the district. He repaid her efforts with diligence, ultimately earning a reputation for his erudition and virtuous behavior. The gazetteer notes that even when in her old age the family's financial situation improved, the widow Yeh retained her frugal habits, though she was generous when it came to aiding people in distress. She treated her sisters-in-law with friendliness and decorum, was strict but kind in directing the servants and concubines, and raised several orphan girls, making sure each was successfully married off.<sup>9</sup>

Now these are admittedly thin pickings from which to get any real sense of the social position of the Shih family during these early years, I think they admit of conclusions other than those drawn by Davis. That the widow Yeh was sufficiently well-off to have the luxury of not remarrying, that she was literate, and that she was able to arrange to have her son introduced into local literary circles, all suggest that her situation was far from desperate. Davis envisions the widow "living in virtual seclusion" (p. 42), but the reference to her "sisters-in-law" (*chou li*)—not to mention servants and concubines—suggests otherwise.<sup>10</sup> While the description of the widow's behavior toward her sisters-in-law conforms strictly to traditional biographical style (and thus should not be given too much weight), it does indicate that the widow's biographers envisioned her as part of an extended kinship network.

Similarly, though Davis makes much of references to weaving in this and later biographies of the widow, I think it unlikely that these were meant to suggest that the widow was involved in running "a small weaving enterprise" (p. 42). In one case (the thirteenth century biography), the text is clearly making a parallel between the widow's instruction of her son and that of her daughter: *pi nü tsu chih, chiao tzu tu shu*.<sup>11</sup> The other (much later) text merely says that the widow worked day and night at weaving and spinning: *chou ye kung fang chi*.<sup>12</sup> Chinese biographers had treated weaving as the female occupation *par excellence* long before Sung times: the "weaving day and night" trope appears in biographies of virtuous

<sup>9</sup> (Pao-ch'ing) *Ssu-ming chih*, in *Sung Yuan ti fang chih san shih chung* (Taipei, 1980) 9.28a-29b (5189).

<sup>10</sup> Note that the text cannot be referring to the widow's daughters-in-law, as she had only one son. While it might be possibly be construed as referring to her granddaughters-in-law, the terms "behave toward" (*dai*, which sometimes carries the sense of "to wait upon") and "decorum" (*li*) would not generally be used to describe actions toward inferiors of someone in a position of ritual superiority.

<sup>11</sup> (Pao-ch'ing) *Ssu-ming chih* 9.28b (5189).

<sup>12</sup> (Yen-yu) *Ssu-ming chih*, in *Sung Yuan ti fang chih san shih chung* (Taipei, 1980) 5.33b (5604).

women as early as the *History of the Latter Han*.<sup>13</sup> I see no reason to treat the reference here as other than a purely conventional reference to the widow Yeh's feminine diligence.<sup>14</sup> Davis emphasizes (p. 42) that the gazetteer makes no reference to land-holding or other means of support, but this is not surprising given the nature of the source—biographies of the virtuous focus on the hardships overcome by their subjects, not on the resources those subjects enjoyed. The very fact that compilers of the gazetteer saw no need to mention how the widow supported herself may suggest that such support was taken for granted. Finally, Davis theorizes (p. 42) that perhaps the widow's successful entrepreneurship made possible the "mysterious" improvement in the family's circumstances late in the widow's life, but I am not sure that the improvement requires explanation. The theme of frugality in the midst of abundance was a favorite of Sung biographers, and should probably not be taken too literally in the first place. But in addition, by the time the widow reached old age, her son Shih Chao had received imperial recognition for his (ostensibly) virtuous conduct, and at least two grandsons had entered the Imperial University. Certainly these events had a significant impact on the family's financial situation and social status.<sup>15</sup>

In sum, the biographies of the widow Yeh describe her in terms so utterly conventional that it is difficult to feel that one has learned much about her. At the same time, there is nothing in these descriptions to suggest that the widow Yeh belonged to other than a local elite family. Any hardship she suffered as a widow was hardship only relative to the comfortable life she might have expected had her husband survived, or had she been willing to remarry. If the family was not especially wealthy or prominent, neither she nor it were destitute, and there was no question that both her son and her daughter would receive a genteel upbringing.

Similar observations may be made about the social position of the widow's son, Shih Chao. Here again, there is little record of Shih Chao's activities, aside from his local reputation for erudition and virtue. In middle age he was nominated by officials in the region to receive an honorary appointment to the Imperial University, he was unwilling to leave his elderly mother and turned down the appointment. He was subsequently known in the community as "Mr. Eight Virtues" (pp. 42-43).

Davis concludes that, in the absence of evidence showing Chao to have been otherwise prominent in the community, the implication that Chao's "unusual filial devotion was alone responsible for enhancing his status . . . must be accepted as containing some kernel of truth" (p.43). This is, within limits, a reasonable conclusion. It may well have been that, in certain circles of Sung society, moral

<sup>13</sup> For example, cf. *Hou Han shu* (Chung hua shu chü edition, Peking, 1965, 1973) 84.2783 (*liên nü* 74.2783) biography of the wife of Chiang Shih. Here the woman weaves day and night in order to buy delicacies for her mother-in-law to eat.

<sup>14</sup> Nor do I find any evidence to support Davis' suggestion (p. 42) that the motive behind the widow's adoption of young girls was to secure help with her weaving. Girls were generally regarded as a drain on the household economy, and the marrying off of indigent young women appears as a standard charitable act in Sung biographies and eulogies.

<sup>15</sup> The biographies indicate that the widow died in 1118. Chao had received his recommendation to the court in 1107. Though exact dates of the grandsons' attendance at the Imperial University are not known, Shih Ts'ai attained the *chin-shih* degree in 1118, and it is likely that both he and his elder brother Shih-chung were at the Imperial University for some time prior to this.

conduct could help to enhance social prestige. But this should not obscure the more significant point that, whatever the reason, Shih Chao was prominent in the community: in order to recommend Shih Chao, local officials had to have had some knowledge of him. They had this knowledge, I would argue, because Shih Chao was already a part of the local elite circles these officials frequented.

Davis himself observes that Chao was "involved with the literati of his community," and associated with "an instructor at the prefectural school, Lou Yü."<sup>16</sup> Lou Yü came from a wealthy family in the neighboring sub-prefecture of Feng-hua. Sometime in the 1040's, he had become a professor at the prefectural school and had thereafter relocated to the prefectural capital. In 1053 he passed the *chin-shih* examination.<sup>17</sup> Thus by the time Shih Chao was born (in 1058 or 1059), Lou Yü was already a local notable of considerable standing. If as an adult Shih Chao was received into such distinguished company as this, it is not so surprising that he was able to make himself known to those in a position to recommend him to the court. The nomination to the Imperial University was highly prestigious,<sup>18</sup> and undoubtedly further enhanced the social standing of the Shih family. But I think the act itself is more accurately seen as a reflection of Shih Chao's pre-existing position in the community than as a signal of a major change in that position.

Nor, in fact, is Shih Chao's nomination the only indication that his family belonged to the local elite. In a eulogy for a young Ming-chou man named Yao Ying,<sup>19</sup> Lou Yueh describes the marriage between Ying and the daughter of the prominent official Wang Huai. This marriage is of interest here only because the go-between for the match was none other than Shih Hao, the most successful of Shih Chao's grandsons. Lou Yueh explains that Yao Ying's grandmother was an aunt (*ku*, father's sister) of Shih Hao. In other words, she was a daughter of of Shih Chao. This woman's husband (Shih Chao's son-in-law) at some point passed the *chin-shih* examination and became a low-level official. But even before this, his father had been an official, and had earned the gratitude of his kinsmen by founding a school to educate the males of the Yao descent group (*tsung tsu chih tzu ti*). In other words, Shih Chao married his daughter into a Ming-chou family that already held office and was of sufficient size and wealth to have established a private school. Though the exact date of this marriage cannot be determined, it is likely that Shih Chao's daughter married into the Yao family even before her brother Shih Ts'ai became the Shih family's first degree-holder in 1118.<sup>20</sup> Thus it may be that, like

<sup>16</sup> Davis (p. 41) notes that one source even suggests that Chao's father Chien was acquainted with Lou Yü.

<sup>17</sup> *Kung k'uei chi* (hereafter KKC) (Ts'ung shu chi ch'eng edition, Shanghai, 1935) 85.1151-1152. Lou Yü was Lou Yueh's great-great grandfather, and by the fall of the Northern Sung the Lou family was decidedly among the most prominent in Ming-chou.

<sup>18</sup> See John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 78 for a discussion of such nominations.

<sup>19</sup> KKC 107.1511.

<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, no information about the birth or death dates of any of the relevant individuals other than Yao Ying survives. Assuming that Yao Ying (b. 1150) was his parents' eldest child and that he was born soon after their marriage, it is possible that his parents were married as late as 1149, at which time his father was likely to have been about twenty. If similar assumptions are made about his father, then Yao Ying's grandparents could conceivably have married in the late 1120's, though probably not much after that. On the other hand, were Yao Ying the youngest son of a youngest son, it would be possible for his grandparents to have

the families described by Hymes and Hartwell, the Shih of Ming-chou had established kinship connections with office-holding families before they achieved such status for themselves. If so, such connections were undoubtedly useful in the Shih family's move into office in the generation of Shih Chao's sons.

When Shih Ts'ai became a chin shih in 1118, the Sung government had temporarily abandoned the examination system in favor of the "three-levels" or "three halls" (san she) method of official recruitment.<sup>21</sup> Davis credits the san she system with being an important factor in the Shih family's shift into office-holding. He emphasizes that the system spared the Shih the expense of private education, and thus made it possible for them to educate five sons in spite of the family's "political obscurity and lack of great wealth" (p. 44). I think that Davis is right to stress the significance of the san-she system: John Chaffee has suggested that the government schools created by the system were responsible for the huge expansion of the literati class that took place in the Sung,<sup>22</sup> and has also remarked on the prestige associated with attendance at government schools during the period in which the system was in effect.<sup>23</sup> But even if the san she system helped to lessen the burden of educating sons, Davis' scenario begs the question of how the Shih sons were able to enter the system in the first place.

Chaffee provides no information about initial entrance into the government schools, but he does observe that "promotion from grade to grade and school to school depended on periodic examinations and required guarantees from the preceptor and local officials."<sup>24</sup> The custom of providing introductions and recommendations was so fundamental to the Sung educational system<sup>25</sup> that it is extremely unlikely that admission to the government schools did not require similar guarantees. Undoubtedly the Shih—on good terms with the influential Lou family and possibly even connected by marriage to other members of the local office-holding elite—were particularly well-placed to take advantage of the san she system. Here again, it is possible to see the Shih family's ability to produce a chin-shih as a reflection of their local elite status, rather than the basis of that status.

been married even before 1110. There is some, admittedly circumstantial evidence to suggest that the latter scenario is closer to the truth. Shih Chao was born in 1058 and his only datable child, Shih Ts'ai's oldest brother, was born in 1082 (Davis, p. 225). Yao Ying's grandmother was of this same generation, and thus was likely to have been born in the 1080s or 90s, in which case she was probably married before 1118. Finally, Lou Yueh comments that Yao Ying was still quite young when he named his grandparents (KCC 107.1514), which suggests that his grandparents were already fairly old by the time of his birth.

<sup>21</sup> See Chaffee, pp. 77-84. Note that according to Chaffee (p. 78), the nomination to the Imperial University of individuals known for their practice of the "Eight Virtues" was part of the san she system.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. My work on Sung families in Wu-chou (present day Chin-hua in central Chekiang) indicates that there too, many families produced their first degree-holders by virtue of the san she system. Hymes sees an expansion of the Fu-chou local elite in early Southern Sung, (*Scholars and Statesmen* p. 35) which may also reflect the same phenomenon.

<sup>24</sup> Chaffee, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> In this respect the san she system was similar to the examination system, which stipulated that various sorts of guarantees and recommendations were necessary before an individual could be considered eligible to sit for an examination (cf. Chaffee, pp. 53-61). Some evidence suggests that even private teachers required a formal introduction before they would accept a new student. For example, Huang Tsung-hsi, *Sung Yuan hshueh an* (hereafter SYHA, in *Ssu-ch'ao hshueh an*, Shih chieh shu ch'u edition, Shanghai 1936) 82.1558 entry for Wang Hsiang, mentions that Chin Li-hsiang (Jen-shan) wanted to study with Ho Chi (Pei-shan), but could not do so without first obtaining a letter of introduction.

It should be noted here that Hymes' model of the Sung local elite does not conflict with Davis' suggestion that the Shih rose from obscurity: Hymes himself found that "a striking number of new families emerged or rose in the early decades of the Southern Sung."<sup>26</sup> Rather, the discrepancy arises in the analysis of when and how the Shih first entered the elite. I have suggested above that, as demonstrated by both their social and affinal connections, the Shih enjoyed some measure of elite status even in the days of the widow Yeh, and were certainly well established among the local elite by the time Shih Chao reached middle age. In other words, I believe that the Shih emerged from historical obscurity only after—and because—they had become part of the local elite. By contrast, Davis is convinced that the Shih rise was strictly a function of office-holding. Thus no matter what circles Shih Chao traveled in, for Davis the Shih family does not emerge from "the fringes of the local elite" (p. 44) until Chao's son Shih Ts'ai achieves office. This assumption contributes to Davis' surprise that "the Shih had already begun to play a leadership role in their community by 1130, even though, as novices to the civil service, they were lacking in political status" (p. 45).

Davis' conviction that social status in the Southern Sung was determined by political position is also reflected in his insistence that the Shih were socially distinct from other "local elites" around them. Though both the Lou and the imperial Chao clan produced more chin shih than the Shih (p. 126; p. 283 note 194), Davis argues that their "literary accomplishments were not matched in the political arena" (p. 31). He emphasizes that the Lou and the Chao both acquired elite status earlier in the dynasty (though in fact the Lou seem to have surfaced only slightly before the Shih).<sup>27</sup> And he stresses that, unlike other families, the Shih did not diversify into literary and other sorts of genteel pursuits: their status continued to be based strictly on political success.

It is impossible to deny that the political achievements—defined in the sense of advancement to high office—of certain Shih kinsmen were unusual, and that because of these kinsmen the Shih remained influential at court for an unprecedented number of years. But did this political success—the full magnitude of which would become apparent only after several generations had come and gone—render the Shih as a group somehow socially distinct from their neighbors? If intermarriage may be taken as an indication of social equivalence, then the answer is an emphatic no.

Davis chose not to examine affinal connections in his study, pleading limits of time, space, and source material (p. 12). Although the same limitations prevent me from pursuing the topic very far in this essay, I do think that a brief examination of some of the Shih marriage alliances is worthwhile. A quick survey of Lou Yueh's Kung k'uei chi determined that this work contains eulogies for roughly half-a-dozen affinal relatives of the Shih.<sup>28</sup> In conjunction with the

<sup>26</sup> Hymes, *Scholars and Statesmen* p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Lou Yü (cf. discussion p. 10) appears to have been the first degree holder of the Lou family. He was known as a prefectural teacher in the 1040's, and attained the chin-shih degree in 1053. Thus the Lou family could not really compare with the Chao, who as imperial relatives had been among the leading families of the dynasty from its inception.

<sup>28</sup> Affinal families were identified by the presence of Shih kinsmen in the lists of sons-and-grandsons-in-law included in most of Lou Yueh's eulogies. This involved a page-by-page search, and time unfortunately precluded a more extensive

extant eulogies for Shih family members, these provide a glimpse of affinal kin for four generations of the Shih family, and provide some sense of how the Shih saw themselves and their place in the community. Lou Yueh tells us, for example, that Shih Ts'ai's son Chün (1129-1203) married a woman née Shu, the great-granddaughter of Shu Tan (1042-1104) of Tz'u-hsi sub-prefecture in Ming-chou.<sup>29</sup> Shu Tan had held high office in the Northern Sung, but his career ended badly and the family does not seem to have produced another high official. Shu Tan's biography still appears in an early thirteenth century local history, so the family apparently maintained some measure of local status at least until that time.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, in the succeeding generation, the daughter of Shih Hao married one Li Yu-chih of Yü-yao subprefecture, just across the border in neighboring Shao-hsing.<sup>31</sup> The match was arranged when Shih Hao (a nephew of Shih Ts'ai, and ultimately a grand councillor in his own right) was serving as a sheriff in Yü-yao, and resulted from Shih Hao's friendship with Li Yu-chih's father. Like his own grandfather and father, Li Yu-chih's father held a low-level position in the bureaucracy, so this family too was solidly rooted in the local elite.

Another of Shih Hao's progeny, Shih Mi-yuan, married the daughter of P'an Chih. The P'an family, originally of Wu-chou, had first come to prominence in the late Northern Sung. At that time P'an Chih's uncle P'an Liang-kui became an official through the san she system.<sup>32</sup> P'an Chih was admitted to the bureaucracy due to "privilege" from his uncle, and eventually rose to mid-level rank, his career progress no doubt enhanced by his marriage to the daughter of Li Kuang.<sup>33</sup> Now this connection to Li Kuang is particularly interesting here because, as Davis notes (p. 46), Li Kuang was also instrumental in sponsoring Shih Ts'ai's early bureaucratic career. The situation becomes even more intriguing when P'an Chih's eulogy reveals that his wife's grandmother (i.e., Li Kuang's mother), was surnamed Shih. While the evidence is hardly conclusive, it is tempting to speculate that the Li and Shih families were connected prior to Li Kuang's sponsorship of Shih Ts'ai. At the very least, Shih Mi-yuan's marriage to P'an Chih's daughter would

survey. I suspect that an examination of eulogies in other Sung collections, particularly those by Ming-chou authors, would turn up many more such references. One case, that of Shih Chan(a) (KCC 97.1349), is ambiguous. Davis (p. 199) identifies a Shih Chan in generation Five of branch C, but the character (p. 317) for the given name is written differently. This may simply be a corruption in one or another of the texts, or Shih Chan(a) may be an otherwise unknown member of the family (the dates of Shih Chan(a)'s wife suggest that he was of a later generation than Shih Chan), or he may not even be a relative. Because of the ambiguity, I have not included Shih Chan(a) in the discussion of Shih affines.

<sup>29</sup> KCC 105.1479.

<sup>30</sup> See the biography of Shu Tan (also pronounced Ch'an) in (Ch'ien-tao) Ssu-ming t'u ching, in Sung Yuan ti fang chih san shih chung (Taipei, 1980) 5.2b (497) and (Pao-ch'ing) Ssu-ming chih 8.19a (5165). The Shu surname continues to be well represented on Ming-chou chin-shih lists down to the end of the Sung (cf. Yen-yü Ssu-ming chih 6.14b (5614), 15a (5614), 21a (5617), 27b (5620), etc.), but most of these men are natives of Feng-hua, and their connection to Shu Tan is uncertain.

<sup>31</sup> KCC 104.1472.

<sup>32</sup> Pan Liang-kui attained fairly high ranks, but his career ended badly, and he said to have spent his later years in poverty. Cf. Ch'ang Pi-te, Wang Teh-yi et al., eds., Sung jen chuan chi tzu liao suo yin (Revised edition, Taipei 1986), 5:3640.

<sup>33</sup> Chu Hsi, Chu Wen-kung wen chi (Ssu pu ts'ung k'an ch'u pien edition, (Shanghai, 1922)) 94.1a. The marriage may have been uxori-local, for P'an Chih moved from his ancestral home in Chin-hua to his wife's home in Shang-yü subprefecture in Shao-hsing. At least some of P'an Chih's descendants appear to have returned to Wu-chou, but when Shih Mi-yuan married P'an Chih's daughter, he was, like his sister, marrying just across the prefectural border.

seem to be related to the fact that both families were associated with Li Kuang.

In the same generation but a different branch of the family, Shih Mi-chin married a Ming-chou woman surnamed Chiang, the daughter of Chiang Hao.<sup>34</sup> Chiang Hao's eulogy indicates that the Chiang family originated in K'ai-feng, and had moved to Ming-chou at the fall of the Northern Sung. Lou Yueh asserts that in K'ai-feng the family had been exceedingly wealthy, and intermarried with the families of empresses and princes. However, they had evidently declined since their move south, for although Chiang Hao's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all held office, all were of very low rank.<sup>35</sup>

Two of the familial alliances described above were continued into the succeeding generation. Li Yu-chih's daughter married her cousin Shih Shih-chih,<sup>36</sup> and a granddaughter of Chiang Hao married a member of branch A of the Shih family, Shih T'ing-chih.<sup>37</sup> Another branch A descendent in this generation, Shih Hsuan-chih, married a woman née Hsu of his home district of Yin.<sup>38</sup> Like the Chiang, the Hsu were northerners, and had relocated to the south only toward the end of the Northern Sung. But where the Chiang had been wealthy, the Hsu had a fairly modest background, and Shih Hsuan-chih's wife's grandfather appears to have been the family's first chin-shih. Her father entered the bureaucracy by privilege, but later passed a law exam, and held several low-to mid-rank offices.

The next generation, the last documented by Lou Yueh, looks much like the others. Shih Wen-ch'ing, a branch A descendent, married a woman surnamed Fang of T'ung-lu subprefecture in Yen-chou (north-central Chekiang). Her ancestors too had held low- and mid-level offices.<sup>39</sup>

Another eulogist documents that Wen-ch'ing's distant cousin, Shih Meng-ch'ing of branch C, married the daughter of Lu Ho of Yin subprefecture.<sup>40</sup> Lu Ho ended his career in a position ranked 6a, thus surpassing his father and grandfather neither of whom rose above the rank of 9b. The same source reveals that Shih Meng-ch'ing married one of his daughters to P'an Shih-yen, a great-grandson of P'an Liang-kui. This marriage may represent a continued connection between the P'an and the Shih families, a connection that had begun two generations earlier with Shih Mi-yuan's marriage to P'an Liang-kui's grand-niece.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>34</sup> KCC 108.1421. I follow Davis in labeling the various branches of the Shih family.

<sup>35</sup> Chang Fu-jui, Les Fonctionnaires des Sung, Index des Titres (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1962) indicates that the position held by Chiang Hao's grandfather was usually held by eunuchs!

<sup>36</sup> KCC 104.1472.

<sup>37</sup> KCC 108.1421. Note that this was not a cross-cousin marriage.

<sup>38</sup> KCC 91.1249.

<sup>39</sup> KCC 106.1500.

<sup>40</sup> Ch'en Chu, Pen t'ang chi (Ssu ku chuan shu chen pen 2 chi edition, (Taipei, 1971), vol. 308-311) 92.2b-4b.

<sup>41</sup> The two marriages involved different branches of both families, and it is impossible to determine whether the parties involved were aware that other branches of their families were already connected. Note too that there is a generational anomaly here, in that Shih Meng-ch'ing was two generations junior to Shih Mi-yuan, and Meng-ch'ing's son-in-law only one generation junior to Shih Mi-yuan's wife. The situation derives from the fact that members of the same generation were often separated by a considerable number of years. But such mixing of generations was generally frowned upon (for example, cf. Hung Mai's I chieh chih (Chung hua shu chü edition, Peking 1981), chia 11.94 for an incident in which a man is appalled when a

Now it is true that these marriages involved a very small fraction of Shih family members. Still, the data are sufficient—and sufficiently consistent—to permit some observations about the Shih family's social life. For the most part, the Shih seem to have married within Ming-chou prefecture, and often within their own subprefecture. With one exception, even the affines who nominally lived outside of Ming-chou were located in districts that shared a border with Ming-chou. Virtually all the affines examined here came from office-holding families, but—whatever the family history—at the time of their alliances with the Shih the level of office held was never very high, and usually quite low. Most significantly, the political success of certain Shih descendants had no apparent effect on the marriage alliances they contracted. The marriage of Shih Mi-yuan is most illustrative here. Mi-yuan's father Hao had been a chief-councillor, and Mi-yuan was to follow in his footsteps. But though the marriage took place well after Shih Hao had achieved prominence,<sup>42</sup> Mi-yuan took a bride from a family that, however well-regarded in its native Chin-hua, was of no particular political note. None of the parties involved, of course, had any way of knowing what was in store for Mi-yuan—and this is precisely the point. Political success at court did not lead to meaningful social distinctions between the Shih and their neighbors in part because such success was utterly unpredictable. In marrying his daughter to the chin-shih son of a grand-councillor, P'an Chih could reasonably expect that his son-in-law would have a political career, but he could not foretell the level of that career. It made little sense for either the Shih or their affines to be overly concerned about current political clout when such clout was likely to be transient, and had only limited effects on the prospects of the succeeding generation. This is not to say that Shih affines were not pleased to find their connections to the Shih politically useful: they certainly did not hesitate, where possible, to take advantage of their in-laws' influence.<sup>43</sup> But the Shih, at least during the period before Shih Mi-yuan's rise to power, were attractive to affines not because a few kinsmen held very high office, but rather because most kinsmen could be expected to hold some office. In other words, the affinal families sought in the Shih the same thing the Shih sought in their affines: some evidence of continued access to official status.

And in fact, the great majority of identifiable Shih kinsmen held only low-level offices, and these often by protection. This alone casts some doubt on Davis' argument that the Shih family was completely dependent on the government for its livelihood. Davis' figures show that, during the Sung, only twenty-six (less than 9%) out of one-hundred forty-nine Shih kinsmen held chin-shih degrees (p. 171). Though protection propelled a few others into fairly high office, and in some generations as many as 75% of Shih kinsmen participated in the bureaucracy (p. 171), very few were ever in a position to receive the personal favor of the emperor. When ordinary official emoluments were barely sufficient to support the

former classmate of his own generation wants to marry his daughter), and may be a further indication that the two marriages were contracted independently.

<sup>42</sup> Shih Mi-yuan was born in 1164. Shih Hao first became chief councillor in 1163 (Davis, p. 56) and took that position again in 1178. Though the date of Shih Mi-yuan's marriage is uncertain, it was probably not much before 1184.

<sup>43</sup> Li Yu-chih, Chiang Hao, and Chiang Hao's sons all received recommendations from Shih Hao. Cf. *KKC* 104.1472 and 108.1521.

lifestyle an official was expected to maintain,<sup>44</sup> and with no record of official service at all for more than one-fourth of all Shih kinsmen, it is difficult to accept that all branches and generations of the family were able to rely exclusively on the support of the politically prominent, especially if the ties between various branches of the family were "actually quite loose" (p. 179). Thus despite the paucity of information about Shih involvement in landholding and other money-making ventures, it seems virtually certain that many members of the family were actively engaged in such activities (see further evidence of this below). When one member of the family is explicitly praised for not getting involved in property management or other interest-earning enterprises, the author makes it clear that such restraint was highly unusual.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, there is some evidence that while a few kinsmen were making their names at court, many were content to be minor officials and country gentlemen. The Shih did not ever produce a scholar of national renown, but Shih Mi-kung is said to have earned a reputation for Confucian learning,<sup>46</sup> and his grandson Meng-ch'ing spent his last years as a Confucian teacher, reportedly attracting numerous followers.<sup>47</sup> Huang Tsung-hsi's *Sung Yuan hshueh an* lists Mi-kung and several brothers and cousins as disciples of Yang Chien,<sup>48</sup> and details the scholarly affiliations of various other family members. At least some Shih kinsmen then, were active participants in local scholarly communities. By the same token, there is evidence that Shih kinsmen acted as local leaders in Ming-chou, and maintained a sentimental attachment to the ancestral home. Shih Ts'ai's son Shih Chün is praised for participating in various sorts of local relief efforts in times of famine or plague.<sup>49</sup> Three generations later Shih Meng-ch'ing, on his deathbed and far from Ming-chou, made his sons promise that they would carry his body back to be buried at the ancestral grave.<sup>50</sup>

But perhaps the best evidence of the Shih family's local-elite identity is found, ironically, in the same text which Davis uses to demonstrate the completeness of the family's decline. This text is a biography for a Yuan dynasty descendant, Shih Mao-tsu, who is sold into slavery as a child.<sup>51</sup> Mao-tsu was a sixth generation descendant of Shih Hao, through Shih Mi-cheng (rank 4b), Shih

<sup>44</sup> *KKC* 105.1479-1486 (1484) mentions that Shih Chün used only his emolument to support his family, and that the amount was barely sufficient to meet annual expenses.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Yuan Chueh, *Ch'ing jung chü shih chi* (Ts'ung shu chi ch'eng edition, Shanghai 1936) 28.494-496 (eulogy for Shih Meng-ch'ing).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *SVHA* 74.1406-1408. For other Shih kinsmen, see *chüan* 6, 40, 79, and 87.

<sup>49</sup> *KKC* 105.1479.

<sup>50</sup> Yuan Chueh, *Ch'ing jung chü shih chi* 28.496. In his article on "Political Success and the Growth of Descent Groups" in *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China*, Davis indicates (p. 88) that the Shih descent group did not maintain a common gravesite. It may well have been that not all Shih kinsmen were buried together, but this eulogy for Meng-ch'ing demonstrates that at least some members of the family acknowledged an ancestral tomb. Perhaps this was established late, or involved only certain subbranches. It is interesting to note that Shih Meng-ch'ing (of branch C) was interred in the same village (though not the same plot) as Shih Chün (branch B) had been (cf. *KKC* 105.1485).

<sup>51</sup> Ch'en Chi, *I pai chai kao* (Ssu pu ts'ung kan 3 pien edition, Shanghai, 1936) 34.2b-4a.

Ting-chih (5b), Shih Chi-ch'ing (7b), Shih Ho-sun (8b/9b), and Shih Kung-lin (no record of service). Now in the course of Mao-tsu's story, we learn that his grandfather, Shih Ho-sun, had held 8,000 mu of land that had been lost to encroachers from Ch'ien-t'ang.<sup>52</sup> When circumstances freed Mao-tsu from bondage and he was able to re-establish himself at home in Ming-chou, he decided to try once again to regain the family property:

Mao-tsu considered that it was due to [help from] his grandfather's spirit that he was again able to see his home and relatives. But for keeping up the ancestral sacrifices, only land could be relied on. If the land were not recovered, his grandfather's will would not be fulfilled.<sup>53</sup>

Here, then, is evidence not only of Shih involvement in land ownership, but explicit recognition that the maintenance of the ancestral sacrifices—in other words, the survival of the family—depended on that land. Mao-tsu was of course ultimately successful in his court battle to win the family land back from the encroachers, in spite of the fact that other relatives in the area were unwilling to help him.

In spite of Davis' emphasis on the ignominy of Mao-tsu's position, Mao-tsu's story is evidence that Shih descendants not only survived but were able to flourish after the fall of the Sung. Nor is this the only evidence of the continued presence of the Shih in the post-Sung local elite. Even as the young Mao-tsu shed tears over his humiliation,<sup>54</sup> several of his distant cousins were on their way to official rank (cf. Davis, p. 249). Centuries later, members of the Shih descent group were still able to muster enough wealth—and enough community spirit—to compile and print a genealogy.<sup>55</sup> Mao-tsu's example demonstrates that the Shih name was no guarantee of elite status,<sup>56</sup> but I suspect that this was not a new phenomenon. Even in the family's most prosperous years, it produced many individuals whose names survive only in genealogical records, and for whom there is no record of office holding.<sup>57</sup> Shih Mi-yuan's cousin Shih Chün is described as aiding relatives who could not afford to hold weddings and funerals.<sup>58</sup> Though this reference is conventional, obviously the author assumed that even at the height of its power the Shih descent-group encompassed individuals of varying economic and

<sup>52</sup> The text says "Ch'ien-t'ang fu-t'u"; "fu-t'u" usually means "Buddhist," but it can also be a surname. Thus it is not entirely clear from this text whether the land was taken by a powerful monastery or by another family.

<sup>53</sup> Ch'en Chi, *I pai chai kao* 34.2b-4a.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* Note too that even the step-grandmother who had abandoned Mao-tsu was found, upon the latter's return home, to be in good health and living with two of Mao-tsu's uncles. (Davis says Mao-tsu was abandoned by a step-mother, but the text says quite explicitly "step-grandmother" (tsu shu mu). This makes much more sense, for the woman is described as taking care not only of Mao-tsu and his sisters but of two males of Mao-tsu's father's generation. It is probable that these uncles were not much older than Mao-tsu, and they may have been the step-mother's own sons. Such a scenario would account for her keeping the uncles with her while abandoning Mao-tsu and his sisters.)

<sup>55</sup> Davis discusses this genealogy in note 3 on p. 262, where he indicates that it was still extant in the late nineteenth century. Note that Davis (p. 39) also rejects one Ch'ing historian's account of the Shih family history because of this historian's "close association . . . with several Ch'ing descendants of the Sung kin group . . ."

<sup>56</sup> Though one can also argue that Mao-tsu's comeback is evidence of the Shih family's continued political clout in Ming-chou.

<sup>57</sup> See Davis' Appendix four, pp. 225 ff.

<sup>58</sup> *KKC* 105.1479.

social status.<sup>59</sup> Evidently some Shih kinsmen were downwardly mobile even as others held the confidence of the emperor.

The social and political chaos that attended the fall of the Sung undoubtedly had an adverse effect on the fortunes of the Ming-chou local elite, and the Shih with them.<sup>60</sup> It is hardly surprising the descent group as a whole suffered decline at this point, or that this chaos hastened the natural process of family dispersion. What is remarkable, rather, is that a number of descendants managed to weather the crisis, and that the Shih were able to maintain a presence in elite society over a period of several centuries.

Above, I have tried to show that the surviving evidence about the Shih family is fully consistent with the picture of local elite society sketched by Hymes and other historians. Where Davis stresses that political position distinguished the Shih from their local-elite neighbors, I have argued from the conviction that Sung officials were not, as a group, necessarily socially distinct from non-officials, and still less were holders of high office socially distinct from those in less exalted positions. Here I would even go further, and suggest that the whole notion of a clear break between elite and non-elite status, or even between elite and non-elite society, may be inappropriate—or at least not very useful—in the context of the Sung. I do not mean to suggest that status was not an important element of Sung social life, but rather that the focus on examinations/office-holding as a measure of social mobility has badly distorted our understanding of how status operated in the Sung. Thus though I agree with Davis and others that the Sung was a time of extensive social mobility, I doubt that this mobility was characterized by a sudden move from one discrete level of society to another, or that was it usually, if ever, the result of a discrete occurrence (such as passing the examinations). Instead, I suspect that an individual's place in Sung society was a factor of varying combinations of several attributes, including office, wealth, education, family name—even moral behavior. Social mobility may be seen as the gradual process of acquiring some of these attributes. Most significantly, the context of this process, the arena in which individuals and families competed for advancement, was not the examination hall but the society itself.

Accordingly, I have tried in this essay to demonstrate that mobility and status in Sung society are best understood not by focussing on examinations passed and offices held, but by examining networks of social relations. In this case such an approach has shown that, high political status notwithstanding, the Shih were solidly tied to local elites in Ming-chou and the surrounding areas. My efforts here have been strictly preliminary: a more thorough study would uncover many more of the Shih social networks, and consider such complex issues as the boundaries of kinship connections (when was a Shih not a Shih?), and the effects of political success on the scope of social networks. My approach has led me to conclusions very different from those of Davis, but the picture is admittedly far from complete. We are undoubtedly still a long way from fully understanding the Shih

<sup>59</sup> Chaffee (p.12) has observed that lineage charity can be taken as evidence for the heterogeneity of lineage groups.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Davis p. 23 on the decimation of the Ming-chou local elite at this time.



family, much less Sung society as a whole.

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Characters

Terms/name

Ch'ien-t'ang fu-t'u/Fu-t'u 錢唐浮屠  
 Chiang Hao 姜浩  
 Chiang Shih 姜詩  
 Chin I-hsiang (Jen-shan) 金履祥(仁山)  
 Chin-hua 金華  
 chin-shih 進士  
 chou ye kung fang chi 晝夜工紡績  
 chou-li 妯娌  
 Han T'o-chou 韓侂胄  
 Ho Chi (Pei-shan) 何基(北山)  
 Hsiao-tsung 孝宗  
 Hsu (surname) 徐  
 ku 姑  
 Kuang-tsung 光宗  
 li 禮  
 Li Kuang 李光  
 Li Yu-chih 李友直  
 Li-tsung 理宗  
 lieh-nü 列女  
 Lou Yü 樓郁  
 Lou Yueh 樓鑰  
 Lu Ho 陸合  
 Ming-chou 明州  
 mou 畝  
 Ning-tsung 寧宗  
 P'an Chih 潘時  
 P'an Shih-yen 潘世演  
 P'an Liang-kui 潘良貴  
 pi nü tsu chih, chiao tzu tu shu 俾女組織教子讀書  
 san she 三舍  
 Shang-yü 上虞  
 Shao-hsing 紹興  
 Shih Chan 史浩  
 Shih Chan(a) 史浩  
 Shih Chi-ch'ing 史吉卿  
 Shih Chien 史簡  
 Shih Chün 史浚  
 Shih Hao 史浩  
 Shih Ho-sun 史賢孫  
 Shih Hsuan-chih 史宣之

Shih Kung-lin 史公麟  
 Shih Mao-tsu 史懋祖  
 Shih Meng-ch'ing 史蒙卿  
 Shih Mi-chin 史彌謹  
 Shih Mi-kung 史彌鞏  
 Shih Mi-yuan 史彌遠  
 Shih Shih-chih 史實之  
 Shih Sung-chih 史嵩之  
 Shih Ting-chih 史定之  
 Shih T'ing-chih 史挺之  
 Shih Ts'ai 史才  
 Shih Wen-ch'ing 史文卿  
 Shu Tan/Ch'an 舒蕙  
 tai 待  
 tsu shu mu 祖庶母  
 tsung tsu chih tzu ti 宗族之子弟  
 Tz'u-hsi 慈溪  
 Wang Huai 王淮  
 Wang Hsiang 王湘  
 Wu-chou 婺州  
 Yü-yao 餘姚  
 Yang Chien 楊簡  
 Yao Ying 姚穎  
 Yeh (surname) 葉  
 Yin (placename) 蕲

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 Chu Hsi, Chu Wen-kung wen chi 朱熹 朱文公文集  
 Hou Han shu 後漢書  
 Huang Tsung-shi, Sung Yuan hsueh an 黃宗義 宋元學案  
 Hung Mai, I Chien chih 洪邁 夷堅志  
 Lou Yueh, Kung k'uei chi 樓鑰 攻媿集  
 (Pao-ch'ing) Ssu-ming chih (寶慶) 四明志  
Ssu-ch'ao hsueh an 四朝學案  
Sung Yuan ti fang chih san shih chung 宋元地方志十三種  
 (Yen-yu) Ssu-ming chih (延祐) 四明志  
 Yuan Chüeh, Ch'ing jung chü shih chi 袁桷 清容居士集

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