Thus moral degeneration of every type took hold throughout Hellas due to factional strife, and simplicity of character—with which a concern for honor is intimately connected—became an object of mockery and disappeared. People were ranged against one another in opposite ideological camps, with the result that distrust and suspicion became rampant. For there was no means that could hope to bring an end to the strife—no speech that could be trusted as reliable, no oath that evoked any dread should it be broken.

—Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War

During the late Northern Song dynasty, factional infighting divided the empire’s sociopolitical elite into ministerial coalitions that battled for executive authority over the central government bureaucracy. At the imperial court in Kaifeng, officials formed factional affiliations (dang or pengdang) in order to implement their policy agendas across the empire and to promote their own members to positions of power. Because Song monarchs generally delegated considerable executive authority to their state councilors but reserved final approval over policy and personnel choices, only they could mediate intrabureaucratic disputes. Before the outbreak of conflict in the late 1060s, emperors had usually endeavored to impose monarchical authority over the bureaucracy and attempted to ensure that their ministers were broadly representative of elite interests, while remaining relatively aloof from bureaucratic debates over politics and policy. Earlier Northern Song monarchs had generally pursued an overarching monarchical interest of preserving the dynastic polity and ensuring the loyalty of the empire’s elite by preserving an elaborate system of “checks and balances” among their ministers and by appeasing the losing side in policy debates.

But in the latter decades of the dynasty, political inclusiveness no longer prevailed at court, once monarchs and regents began to identify themselves
personally with the ideological and policy agendas of their chosen ministers. State councilors formed vertical alliances with their monarchical patrons, seeking and frequently gaining imperial approval to silence opposition and dissent, thereby associating dynastic interests with those of a narrow segment of the sociopolitical elite. In this ideologically polarized atmosphere, frequent monarchical transitions exacerbated political instability, destabilized policy debates, and intensified partisan conflict. Between 1068 and 1104, a period I will refer to as the late Northern Song, three emperors and two regents presided over the imperial bureaucracy, each of them promoting a new coalition of state councilors who overturned the preceding ministerial regime and its policies. Spanning the Shenzong (r. 1067–1085) and Zhezong (r. 1085–1100) reigns and running into the first five years of the Huizong (r. 1100–1126) reign, the factional conflict of this period can be conceptualized as a bounded historical process and shaped into a coherent narrative arc.

Starting with Wang Anshi’s (1021–1086) rise to power at the beginning of Shenzong’s reign, a series of influential grand councilors gained monarchical approval to pack the bureaucracy with like-minded subordinates who would implement their shared policy agenda and to marginalize the bureaucratic opposition who obstructed it. Consequently, factionalists appealed directly to the throne to promote their allies and to purge their adversaries, employing rhetoric that imagined the court as the ultimate source of ethical and political authority and empowered the monarch as the ultimate arbiter of personnel and policy decisions. Despite being embroiled in a protracted ideological and political conflict, Northern Song bureaucrats shared a common rhetoric of factionalism and a common repertoire of political practices, which they employed to promote their comrades and purge their adversaries. Divided by a common language, factionalists used the same polarizing rhetoric to vilify their opposition, who rejected their exclusive claims to ethico-political authority as well as their ideological program, as a treacherous and disloyal faction.

Faction theorists and factional rhetoricians assumed that their monarchical audience shared, or should share, their own intellectual and linguistic assumptions about the inherent unity of ethics and politics and their belief that political institutions and their administrators existed to loyally serve the dynastic polity, which in turn ordered society from the top down and the center outwards. In late Northern Song factional rhetoric, the imperial bureaucracy was imagined to be divided between ethical exemplars who acted independently and a malign faction who were organized in opposition against them. It was generally assumed that monarchs who employed loyal ministers (“superior men” or junzi) would stabilize governing institutions and uplift civic mores, but if rulers mistakenly delegated authority to nefarious ministers (“petty men” or xiaoren), they would
be held responsible for dynastic ruin and socio-moral disorder. Faction theorists and factional rhetoricians assumed, but rarely acknowledged, that they and their colleagues were superior men, who affiliated on the basis of ethical dispositions and ideological visions that united them in the service of the dynastic polity. Throughout the factional conflict, political theorists and rhetoricians persuaded and empowered rulers to assume their primary responsibility as arbiters of faction, urging them to distinguish superior men, who were assumed to be acting alone in service of the “public good” (gong), from petty men, who formed factions to advance their own “private” or “selfish” (sì) interests.8 Ministers pressured emperors and regents to identify the malign factions that were spreading at court, and expel them from the metropolitan bureaucracy before these subversive cells undermined the dynastic polity.

In the polarized view of factional ideologues, political divisions at court were invariably destructive, and ministers with opposing ideological visions and moral endowments could not possibly coexist. Only a narrow segment of the sociopolitical elite, described as loyal superior men, deserved to serve the dynastic polity, and monarchs could no longer accommodate a diversity of political opinion amongst officialdom. The intellectual assumptions of this court-centered discourse of authority generally prevented ministers from publicly acknowledging or justifying the existence of ministerial factions, and no late Northern Song monarch ever did so. In an era of political and ideological divisiveness, ministers persuaded monarchs to implement their factions’ ideological agendas as state policy, while using accusations of factionalism to expel the opposition. In this study I will demonstrate how and why members of the sociopolitical elite of the late Northern Song, in their public role as imperial bureaucrats, employed a shared discourse of authority that imagined political authority from the imperial court’s perspective and almost unequivocally condemned ministerial factions as disloyal and treacherous.

**Social Networks and Bureaucratic Competition**

Accumulating, monopolizing, and fusing political, social, and intellectual capital, members of the Northern Song elite shared a bureaucratic and centralist outlook, defining themselves through their political and administrative service to the imperial state. Referring to themselves as “gentlemen” (shì), members of the Northern Song elite attained and preserved their economic dominance and cultural hegemony over the lower orders of society by seeking and holding office in the imperial bureaucracy.9 Economically dependent upon bureaucratic salaries to supplement their land-based and commerce-derived wealth, members
of the gentlemanly elite who served the dynasty as officials (shidafu) also derived social status and cultural capital from governmental service. By educating their members for the empire-wide civil service examinations that qualified successful candidates for bureaucratic careers, elite families aspired to maintain and upgrade not only their economic support systems, but also their social and political influence on the national stage. Once a bureaucrat had achieved high office, his descendants were entitled to such privileges and advantages as facilitated examinations and direct entry into officialdom. Hence, the attainment of high political office for its members allowed an elite lineage to reaffirm its social status and to solidify its economic base for another generation.

In its officeholding persona, the shi elite was the creation of the Song dynastic founders, who sought to centralize their executive authority over central government administration and to establish civil and civilian dominance within it. Early Song monarchs were reacting to the political instability of the eighth and ninth centuries, when aristocratic lineages had rivaled the prestige of the Tang imperial house, and autonomous militarists had dispersed the authority of the Tang central government. The Song dynasty reunified the realm after a period of rebellion and fragmentation that destroyed the Tang and later destabilized the subsequent Five Dynasties that ruled North China in the first half of the tenth century. In order to recentralize imperial authority, Emperors Taizu (r. 960–976), Taizong (r. 976–997), and Zhenzong (r. 997–1022) endeavored to staff their bureaucracy with a subordinate and dependent elite that lacked an independent military or economic power base. They expanded the civil service examination system as the predominant mechanism for bureaucratic recruitment, so that degree-holding civil officials comprised the majority of government administrators by the middle of the eleventh century. Rightly or wrongly, historians have long blamed the Song court’s weak military position against the Khitan Liao (907–1125) and Jurchen Jin (1115–1234) empires, powerful border states that increasingly dominated North China in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, on the overcentralization of military authority in the hands of civil officials.

Gathering force by the dynasty’s latter half, the intensification of elite competition for degree-holding and officeholding contributed to the formation of factions within the imperial bureaucracy. Prospective bureaucrats focused their energies on examination preparation in the hope of attaining official postings and, subsequently, promotions upward through the ranks. But as the number of examination degree-holders rapidly outstripped the relatively stable supply of official positions, elite demand for official appointments intensified. Consequently, members of the sociopolitical elite formed marriage and patronage networks in order to maximize their chances of achieving bureaucratic postings.
Overlapping with and inseparable from these affinal, agnatic, and patronage ties, factional affiliations provided further competitive resources for prospective officials. When ministerial coalitions contended for a greater share of bureaucratic positions, they attempted to distribute the spoils of office to their protégés and kinsmen, building factional patronage networks in the process. Hence, the intensification of the factional conflict within the late Northern Song bureaucracy was a direct effect of heightened competition for examination degrees and official connections, as ambitious officials staked their careers on the political fortunes of their chosen faction and its leaders.

**Ideological Schisms and Institutional Breaches**

But the late Northern Song factional conflict was not simply the cascading consequence of thousands of elite individuals pursuing social status and cultural capital by political and institutional means. Entrusted with formulating, implementing, and interpreting state policy, the central government bureaucracy was the institutional arena in which members of the Song sociopolitical elite articulated ideological positions on statecraft and governance. Grand councilors formed bureaucratic coalitions and appealed for monarchical patronage in order to tighten their control over the state administrative apparatus, but always in the service of specific political and ideological aims. Late Northern Song statecraft experts, regardless of ideology, generally attempted to persuade monarchs to restructure the empire’s fiscal system in order to enhance its efficacy, to strengthen its military establishment in order to roll back external threats, and to recruit capable administrators in order to administer the government bureaucracy. The policy debates and factional conflicts of the Northern Song generally revolved around the ideological means of achieving these ends through central government institutions.

In both theory and practice, the emperor (huangdi) was the Song empire’s ultimate and unitary legislative, executive, and judicial authority; he presided over the imperial bureaucracy that formulated, implemented, and monitored state policy. Even though they delegated a substantial measure of policy-making influence to their state councilors and entrusted routine operations to an extensive metropolitan and regional bureaucracy, monarchs and regents reserved the final right to review and approve the policy and personnel decisions their ministers had proposed. While Song emperors possessed the authority to create new governing institutions or modify old ones as they saw fit, they usually chose to function within established bureaucratic structures and information flows. They sat at the apex of the governmental pyramid, receiving reports and
recommendations from their officials in the form of memorials (zouyi), and then conveying their directives back down to their bureaucratic servitors as edicts (zhao). In order to prevent ministers from monopolizing executive authority and to solicit a range of opinions from a broad cross-section of elite interests, the dynastic founders had built checks and balances into the structure of the Song bureaucracy. Two grand councilors (generally referred to as zaixiang), the highest advisory officials at the imperial court, could override each other’s decisions with monarchical approval, and several junior state councilors and civilian defense ministers were intended to balance their superiors’ authority on the Council of State, the central executive organ. Ministerial powers over the deliberation, investigation, and implementation of state policy were further compartmentalized into the Three Departments (Sansheng)—the Secretariat (Zhongshu sheng), the Chancellery (Menxia sheng), and the Department of State Affairs (Shangshu sheng)—whose directors generally served on the Council of State. Providing another check on the power of state councilors and executive-level officials, two separate investigation and surveillance agencies, the Censorate (Yushitai) and the Remonstrance Bureau (Jianyuan), were endowed with the authority to critique state policy, supervise governmental operations, and impeach incompetent or corrupt officials. Using the examples of Emperors Renzong and Yingzong, Xiao-bin Ji has hypothesized that earlier Northern Song monarchs generally tolerated policy and ideological debate among their ministers and has concluded that transcending their ministers’ policy and personality conflicts further strengthened imperial authority, so that rulers could “take advantage of the service of officials of all policy positions without becoming fully dependent on any individual or faction.”

When factional conflict broke out during the late Northern Song, these institutional restraints and consensual arrangements no longer limited state councilors’ executive authority. Under a series of factional ministerial regimes, state councilors promoted their exclusivist ideological visions with monarchical patronage and approval. Starting with Wang Anshi’s rise to the councilorship in 1069, powerful ministers attempted to pack the bureaucracy with like-minded allies and subordinates in order to push through an ideological agenda over the objections from the disunited opposition. Court politics became ideologically polarized when a series of grand councilors monopolized power over state policy-making, with the consent of the monarchs and regents they served, severely restricting the ambit of the Censorate and the Remonstrance Bureau. In his role as the emperor’s grand councilor, a factional leader could dominate and manipulate the imperial bureaucracy from above, forming a vertical alliance with the throne in order to implement his coalition’s ideological and political goals. Grand councilors appealed to rulers to take their side in policy and personnel
disputes by exclusively employing their loyal allies while purging their disloyal opposition, thereby ensuring that the bureaucratic arena no longer accommodated ideological diversity or a broad range of elite sociopolitical interests. From Shenzong to Huizong, late Northern Song emperors and regents were complicit in the factional conflict, for they personally associated themselves with their councilors’ policy programs, allowed their councilors to monopolize executive authority, and assented to their remonstrators’ expulsion of the ministerial opposition on charges of disloyalty and factionalism.

The intellectual production of Northern Song elites revolved around the ideological question of how to employ political institutions to properly govern the empire and its subjects, and whether existing or restructured institutions would best accomplish these goals. Peter Bol has theorized that the Northern Song sociopolitical elite shared a common sense of cultural values and intellectual identity and a common commitment to government service. The era’s most prominent intellectuals and literati served in the metropolitan bureaucracy, where they formed loosely bounded ministerial coalitions that struggled for authority over state policy. For the moment, let us assume that these ideological divisions can be reduced to a binary opposition between “reformist” and “antireformist” factions, which articulated distinctive visions of statecraft and political action. Their leaders devised ideological programs that employed institutional mechanisms to enhance governmental efficacy, increase state revenue, and strengthen border defenses. Inspired by Wang Anshi and his New Policies (Xinfà), reformist ideology (Xinxue) intended to maximize state revenue by collapsing distinctions between state and society and using centralized institutions to unify and uplift moral values for the betterment of the whole of society. Antireformism, as represented by its conservative standard-bearer, Sima Guang (1019–1086), was bluntly opposed to Wang’s expansion of the activist state, advocating the moral renewal of pre-existing bureaucratic institutions and the restoration of proper hierarchies within them, instead of inventing new ones. Bol has demonstrated that both Wang’s reformist and Sima’s antireformist ideologies were to some degree centralizing; they aimed to employ state institutions for the ethical revival of society in order to revive the perfect ethical and political order of antiquity. But their developers, followers, and successors sharply disagreed about how these ends could be accomplished politically and institutionally and formed bureaucratic factions to implement these conflicting ideological objectives over their adversaries’ objections. In political practice, however, this binary distinction between reformists and antireformists was frequently subject to blurring and fissuring and elides the complexity and contingency of actual political practice during the late Northern Song factional conflict. Within both of these large, unstable political blocs, ministers frequently debated policy deci-
sions, disagreed over personnel choices, and engaged in personal disputes, seeking to ally their splinter groups with the throne against the others. Moreover, despite their state of political and ideological conflict, both reformists and antireformists empowered the emperor as the ultimate source of authority and argued that members of the elite should loyally serve the dynastic polity in order to unify and uplift civic culture. Thus members of the Song sociopolitical elite also shared a higher level of cultural uniformity: the common political language with which they articulated claims to authority in their role as government bureaucrats, and with which they denied authority to their political and ideological adversaries.

As their conflict escalated, late Northern Song factionalists used the same court-centered discourse of authority with equal divisiveness, urging the monarch or regent to implement their coalition’s ideological vision as state policy and persuading him or her to eliminate their opposition from court. After each abrupt monarchical and ministerial transition, deposed grand councilors and their followers were expelled from court and demoted to regional administration, thereby ensuring ideological uniformity within the metropolitan bureaucracy. Undertaken with monarchical complicity, the brutalization of political practice was a gradual process, involving the increasingly frequent and widespread application of such punishments as movement restrictions (anzhi), exile to the far south, and partisan proscription to uproot the ideological opposition from the bureaucracy. By the final factional blacklists (dangi) that effectively ended the conflict in 1104, nearly the entire antireform coalition, and many prominent reformists, had been proscribed. Until almost the very end of Emperor Huizong’s reign, the long-serving councilor Cai Jing (1046–1126) built an enduring factional patronage network that pushed its opposition outside the imperial bureaucracy altogether. The Cai Jing ministry achieved two decades of political stability and ideological consensus, until the Jurchen invasions of 1126–1127 resulted in the fall of Kaifeng and the re-establishment of the Song dynasty in the south.

**Early Northern Song Factional Conflicts**

Conceiving of the rise and fall of dynasties as a recurring natural pattern, Northern Song political theorists and rhetoricians recognized that factional conflicts had caused the collapse of previous imperial regimes. They attributed the decline and fall of the Han and Tang dynasties to malevolent factions of petty men, and they also recognized that factionalism had been a recurring phenomenon since the inception of their own dynasty. In the dynasty’s early de-
decades, war and peace factions contended for influence at the courts of Emperors Taizong and Zhenzong, debating the continuation of hostilities with the Khitan Liao empire. The Khitans had exploited the political weakness of the Five Dynasties to wrest away the Sixteen Prefectures of the Yan-Yun region, which had served as the Tang empire’s northern defensive perimeter and protected the North China plain from invasion. In his ignominious invasion campaigns of 979 and 986, Emperor Taizong twice failed to retake these disputed territories, before his death in 997 deferred the choice of whether to attack or appease the Khitans to Zhenzong and his ministers. In an era when civil and civilian domination of the imperial bureaucracy was still being consolidated, these factional conflicts between irredentists and appeasers involved both military and civil officials. After several years of debate, the war faction led by Kou Zhun (961–1023) convinced Zhenzong to mobilize imperial forces for an offensive strike upon Liao border positions, a strategy that ultimately pulled a diplomatic triumph out of the jaws of military defeat, after the Khitans mounted a preemptive assault on Kaifeng. Zhenzong’s conclusion of the Song-Liao Treaty of Chanyuan in 1005, which established an indemnified peace with the Khitans and equal diplomatic relations between the two empires, effectively concluded the earliest factional conflict at the Northern Song court. While state councilors continued to debate geopolitical strategy throughout the eleventh century, their disputes generally revolved around domestic policy initiatives, which their advocates insisted would eventually strengthen the empire’s fiscal and military position.

By the middle of the eleventh century, factional conflicts at the Song court were almost exclusively limited to coalitions of civil officials, which had come to dominate the central government bureaucracy. The discourses and practices of late Northern Song factionalism emerged from the political and intellectual milieu of the Qingli era (1041–1049), when a coalition of reforming ministers, led by Fan Zhongyan (989–1052), first came to prominence at the court of Emperor Renzong (r. 1022–1063). Renzong’s court faced a deteriorating budgetary situation, caused by the rising costs of funding a costly military establishment to passively defend the empire’s borders and exacerbated by a shortage of capable officials. In order to resolve these crises all at once, Fan Zhongyan overrode criticism at court from conservative elements to implement the Qingli Reforms (Qingli xinzheng) of 1043–1044. An advocate of a re-energized activist government, Fan intended his reforms of fiscal policy and personnel administration to improve the moral character of officialdom and to transform the civic culture of the empire. Fan and his ally Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) pursued an ideological vision that incrementally reformed state institutions, and they urged like-minded officials to join them in implementing this shared vision, even if it
excluded and antagonized other interest groups and coalitions within the imperial bureaucracy. Hostile court conservatives persuaded Renzong that Fan had formed a treacherous faction that had monopolized executive authority and infringed upon monarchical prerogatives. After Fan admitted to having formed a benign faction, Ouyang proposed in his “Discourse on Factions” (Pengdang lun) that true factions were affiliations of superior men who served the public good. These self-incriminating polemics sealed the reformers’ fate, providing their adversaries with a sufficient pretext to purge Fan and his allies from court and abolish his reform policies in 1044. The factional conflict between advocates and opponents of the Qingli Reforms was short-lived, and the former were marginalized from court politics for more than a decade, while a bloc of conservative officials regained Renzong’s patronage. But it foreshadowed the ideologically driven factional politics of the late Northern Song, when a series of grand councilors pursued policy agendas that both antagonized and marginalized opposition within the metropolitan bureaucracy. Fan Zhongyan’s institutional reform movement had once been the banner of a much broader ministerial coalition, influencing future reformists like Wang Anshi, but also many of his eventual antireformist opponents.

Politics and Ideology in the 1050s and 1060s

When they returned to court after a decade in regional administration, the younger members of Fan’s reforming cohort became the dominant political force at court. In the late 1050s, Renzong rehabilitated Ouyang Xiu and other former Qingli reformers to serve on his Council of State, where they focused their efforts on shoring up the empire’s sagging fiscal, military, and administrative positions. In the intervening years, their ideologically confrontational political style had mellowed. Learning from the failure of the Qingli Reforms, the ministerial regime of Han Qi (1008–1075) and Fu Bi (1004–1083) advocated the evolutionary adaptation of political institutions instead of sweeping reform programs. Controlling the Council of State throughout the early and mid-1060s, these advocates of bureaucratic hierarchy and efficacy bridged two generations of scholar-officials: the reforming generation of the 1040s and a rising generation of officials who had come of age during the Qingli Reforms.

More immediately, court debates over imperial ritual during the brief reign of the hapless Emperor Yingzong (r. 1063–1067) in some ways prefigured the factional conflicts of the early Shenzong reign. The biological son of Renzong’s uncle Zhao Yunrang (995–1059) and the imperial prince of Pu (Pu wang), the future Emperor Yingzong had been formally adopted as Renzong’s son and in-
vested as his heir apparent. For over a year after his enthronement at age thirty-one, Yingzong’s state councilors debated the issue of how their monarch should formally recognize his natural father.48 Ultimately, the grand councilors Han Qi and Ouyang Xiu persuaded the emperor that he should refer to his natural father as his “parent” rather than as an “imperial uncle” in his ritual observances. Resisting what they believed to be a violation of dynastic ritual protocol, Sima Guang and several censors were dismissed for their opposition to the move. In Bol’s interpretation, Han and Ouyang promoted institutional innovations in the mold of Fan Zhongyan, whereas Sima and his allies sought to preserve existing ethical and political institutions in a failed bid for political power.49 Even though it did not escalate into a full-blown factional conflict, the rites controversy was a hinge issue that highlighted the growing political and ideological divisions within the imperial bureaucracy between advocates and opponents of comprehensive institutional reforms. These schisms deepened with the death of Yingzong and the accession of his son, the reform-minded Emperor Shenzong, in 1067.

Wang Anshi and Sima Guang, the political luminaries who led the reform and antireform factions of the late Northern Song, shared the institutional focus and centralizing impulse of the Qingli reformers. In the 1060s, Wang and Sima became the standard-bearers of two opposing schools (but not, as we will see, the only two) of statecraft, developing and promoting political programs that diverged over both bureaucratic means and ideological ends, and emerged as the leaders of contending ministerial coalitions during the early years of Shenzong’s reign.50 In 1069, the idealistic young monarch appointed Wang as his state councilor and implemented Wang’s New Policies, a comprehensive package of institutional reforms, over the objections of Sima and the antireformist majority at court. Then, after more than a decade in exile, Sima Guang finally attained the Council of State in 1086, after Shenzong’s death, and his faction abolished Wang’s reforms and initiated eight years of antireformist dominance. Both Wang and Sima articulated comprehensive ideological visions that won them monarchical patronage and attracted a coalition of bureaucratic allies to serve them, while simultaneously antagonizing and marginalizing opposition elements. Hence, in the very broadest of strokes, the factional divisions between reformists and antireformists emerged from the intellectual and political conflict between Wang Anshi and Sima Guang and among their colleagues, followers, and successors. Common threads in the political theory and factional rhetoric of the late Northern Song can be traced back to the grand coalition of the 1060s and even further back to the reforming cohort of the 1040s. Yet, as I will demonstrate below, the political history of the late Northern Song was far more complex and contradictory than a simple bipartite conflict between reformists and antireformists.
The Polarizing Rhetoric of Factional Politics

Court Factions in Political Practice

Northern Song factionalists, as well as later historians who interpreted their conflict, used the terms dang and pengdang to denote a concept of political association that has been conventionally translated into English as “faction.” But since these words were deployed in different contexts, court factions in political practice must be distinguished from their representations in both political and historiographic discourse. The factions of the late Northern Song were limited partnerships and unstable affiliations, loosely bounded ministerial coalitions rather than monolithic political blocs. Northern Song factions were limited to the highest echelons of the metropolitan bureaucracy, usually comprising those who served within the Council of State, executive-level posts, the Censorate and Remonstrance Bureau, and the imperial academies. When one of these top-heavy political networks held power with imperial approval, its membership was generally coextensive with the current ministerial coalition. Because elite social networks centered on the imperial capital, and elite advancement strategies centered on bureaucratic officeholding, political affiliations were likewise limited to the metropolitan bureaucracy in Kaifeng. Since transregional patronage, marriage, and kinship ties provided the building blocks for political affiliations, the personalized nature of these bureaucratic networks limited their long-term survival and continuity, and ministerial squabbles led to factional fractioning. Hence, the “reform” and “antireform” factions should be conceptualized as loosely organized court coalitions, subject to fragmentation over a wide range of personality and policy issues. To be sure, the ministerial associations of the late Northern Song did not resemble early modern North Atlantic or modern East Asian political parties, with policy manifestos, polity-wide organizations, and centralized discipline.

If the political organizations of the late Northern Song penetrated down to the regional or local level, little evidence exists to corroborate this possibility. Drawn from official histories that stress court politics at the expense of regional and local developments, the standard chronicles of Northern Song history rarely illuminate societal occurrences below the highest ruling circles. Moreover, based on available sources, it cannot be persuasively confirmed that the membership of factional affiliations was defined from within these organizations. When ministers accused their adversaries of factionalism, and ministries blacklisted their opposition, there is no reason to conflate these condemnatory claims with actual factional membership. In Chapter 7, I will demonstrate that the political organizations of the late Ming dynasty, which reached down from the imperial court to local academies throughout the empire, were more broadly based than
Northern Song factions, which comprised a small circle of ministers attached to one or several state councilors. Moreover, the survival of these factional ministries was contingent upon continued monarchical support and patronage. When monarchs accepted arguments for their grand councilors’ impeachment, factional affiliations could still maintain a degree of coherence under new leaders. But when emperors or regents died, often prematurely, their chosen ministries did not long survive them, especially when their successors personally associated themselves with a single faction’s policy program. Over three decades of factional conflict, institutional contingencies within monarchical-ministerial regimes threatened the survival and undermined the coherence of political affiliations at the Northern Song court.

**Court Factions in Factional Rhetoric**

In political practice, factional affiliations were fissiparous and factional divisions were blurry, but the opposite prevailed in political rhetoric, where a faction was treated as an easily describable, identifiable, and knowable unit. Factional rhetoric was a set of vocabularies, definitions, and usages that political practitioners employed to define and interpret political discourse and practice.\(^{55}\) Eschewing ambiguity and uncertainty, faction theorists and factional rhetoricians represented factions as sharply bounded and easily identifiable organizations, which they defined in all-or-nothing ethical terms. Thus, the polarizing rhetoric of the late Northern Song factional conflict reduced the complexity, chaos, and contingency of political practice to a binary opposition between factious petty men and factionless superior men. With the rare exceptions of Fan Zhongyan and Ouyang Xiu in 1044, no minister ever admitted to having formed a faction in publicly circulating forms of rhetoric such as court memorials or policy essays. Exemplary ministers were deemed incapable of forming factional affiliations, because their vertical loyalty (zhong) to the dynastic polity was imagined to override all other horizontal ties of obligation. Recently, Naomi Standen has argued that eleventh-century historians like Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang reconceived of the concept as demanding “unwavering loyalty to a single master,” as a hierarchical ruler-minister relationship rather than a reciprocal and equal one.\(^{56}\) My study of political theory and rhetoric will build upon Standen’s hypothesis and demonstrate that ministerial proclamations of loyalty, and accusations of disloyalty, were central elements of late Northern Song discourses of authority.

I will explain how reformist and antireformist factional affiliations, as well as their splinter and successor groups, shared a common language of faction that belied their state of political enmity and ideological conflict.\(^{57}\) Councilors and remonstrators from all sides of the conflict produced a discourse of authority that operated according to similar rules, employed similar vocabularies, and
invoked similar classical and historical authorities. After the failure of Ouyang Xiu’s “Discourse on Factions,” the polarizing rhetoric of faction was resistant to redefinition and reinterpretation. From 1068 to 1104, both reformist and anti-reformist rhetoricians, as well as members of their respective splinter groups, urged the ruler to eliminate their factious opposition, while maintaining that they were loyal ministers acting alone in service to the dynastic polity. Factional rhetoricians assumed that they and their allies shared a common ideological vision and a sense of individual loyalty to the throne that justified the marginalization of their bureaucratic opposition as a “faction” of petty men. So prevalent was this court-centered discourse of authority that when both the broad reform and antireform factions splintered over personal and ideological disagreements in the 1070s and 1080s, they used the same polarizing rhetoric against their former colleagues. Throughout the late Northern Song factional conflict, a time when ministers actively engaged in ideological battles and monarchs personally identified themselves with policy programs, political actors could not publicly acknowledge the existence of their own factional affiliations or publicly advocate concerted ministerial action that could serve the common good of the polity.

**Court Factions in Historiographic Discourse and Practice**

Official historians of the late Northern Song factional conflict recycled a similar court-centered discourse of authority as factionalists themselves once had; both imagined factions as malevolent associations that undermined the public good and threatened the dynastic polity’s survival. And as the conflict escalated, its official history became a bone of contention after every monarchical and ministerial transition. Since court historians were entrusted with compiling the history of the previous monarch’s reign, political pressures interfered with the compilation of the official histories of the Shenzong, Zhezong, and Huizong reigns. By selecting which foundation texts to include into or exclude from the authoritative court chronicles—the detailed Veritable Records (Shilu) and the compressed State History (Guoshi)—court historians attempted to influence posterity’s judgment of past ministerial coalitions. Reformist and antireformist ministers condemned the revisionist historiography of their adversaries as both ethically flawed and factually incorrect, while claiming that their own side presented veracious and verifiable narratives of the recent past.

After nearly every monarchical transition, the official history of the factional conflict’s first chapter—the Veritable Records of Emperor Shenzong (Shenzong shilu)—was repeatedly revised and recompiled in order to accord with the current state policy consensus. First, the antireform ministry of the Xuanren Regency rewrote the official history of the reform era to condemn the New Policies and the reformists. Next, under the reformist ministry of Zhezong’s personal rule,
court historians revised the Shenzong shilu in order to denounce the antireformist opposition as a nefarious faction, and Huizong’s reformist ministers extended this condemnatory narrative when they compiled the Veritable Records of Emperor Zhezong (Zhezong shilu). After Kaifeng fell to the Jurchen invasion of 1127, official historians of the Southern Song court blamed Cai Jing and his fellow reformists for the collapse of the Northern Song, rather than holding Emperor Huizong, the direct ancestor of the current imperial line, directly responsible for the dynastic calamity. When they assembled and reassembled the Veritable Records of the Shenzong, Zhezong, and Huizong reigns, the court historians of the Gaozong (r. 1127–1162) and Xiaozong (r. 1162–1189) reigns condemned the reformist ministerial coalitions of the late Northern Song as treacherous factions. Fashioning a teleological narrative of the factional conflict, Southern Song court historians read the collapse of the dynasty back into the political history of the Shenzong and Zhezong reigns, presenting the reformists’ domestic and border policies as the root causes of the Jurchen invasion. This antireformist interpretation eventually won the acceptance of Xiaozong’s court and was enshrined in the State History of the Four Reigns (Sichao guoshi), which was intended to serve as the final version of the conflict’s official history. The Southern Song court historians who compiled these texts rigidly divided late Northern Song officialdom into two rival camps: reformist petty men, who destroyed the dynastic polity, and the antireformist superior men, who loyally but unsuccessfully opposed their traitorous designs.

In the early fourteenth century, when Yuan court historians compiled the official history of the Song dynasty, the Song History (Song shi), they intensified these ethical and political contrasts. The bulk of the Song History text pertaining to the late Northern Song factional conflict was replicated and condensed from works of official historiography compiled during the early Southern Song. The Song History compilers physically removed the biographies of the reformist grand councilors of the late Northern Song (with the exception of Wang Anshi himself) from the main body of the biographical (liezhuang) section, categorizing them instead as “treacherous ministers” (jianchen). With the completion of the Song History in 1345, the revisionist historiography of the late Northern Song factional conflict was complete, imprinting a polemically antireformist interpretation upon the authoritative documentary record. Chinese historians of the late imperial period generally replicated the moralistic biases of Southern Song and Yuan official history, demonizing the reformists as felons, while honoring the antireformists as martyrs. Because historians vilified Wang Anshi and his reformist heirs as the embodiment of corrupt and malevolent governance, post-Song politicians were justifiably wary of committing themselves to activist governance in emulation of the New Policies.
While some Chinese-language historians have approached their sources with admirable skepticism, most modern scholars have generally replicated the moralistic biases of traditional historiography, reading these as accurate representations of political discourse and practice, even as these same scholars have performed the praiseworthy and indispensable task of painstakingly examining and comparing every shred of historical evidence for the period. Yet some contemporary Chinese historians still employ the moralistic discourse of late Northern Song factional rhetoric, reproducing the dichotomy between superior men and petty men as they retroactively assign praise and blame, thereby replicating the moralistic biases of the Southern Song and Yuan official historians who refashioned the narrative of the factional conflict. In his pioneering English-language study of Wang Anshi, James T. C. Liu transposed these moralistic dichotomies into Western social science typologies, distinguishing among “idealistic scholar-officials” and “career-minded bureaucrats,” and “abusive bureaucrats.” When analyzing primary sources, I will attempt to reconstruct native categories and terminologies from within and will avoid replicating the polarizing language of my historical subjects and the historians who have judged them.

Methodological Approaches and Theoretical Departures

The persistence and virulence of the Northern Song factional conflict has long been acknowledged by the historical community, so this study will employ a different road map to explore this well-traveled territory. Twentieth-century East Asian historians generally have explained the political and ideological schism between reformists and antireformists as reflections of socioeconomic and intellectual divisions within the Song elite. In their exhaustive examinations of the sources of late Northern Song social and political history, mainland Chinese scholars have been forced by political pressures to conceptualize the factional conflict as a superstructural one, reflecting socioeconomic contradictions within “feudal” society and the persistence of “feudal” autocracy. Japanese and North American historians have also proposed that the factional conflict was the result of socioeconomic changes—bureaucratization and commercialization—that transformed the outlook of the Song elite. Along these lines, scholars have claimed that the antireform faction drew its membership largely from the established landowning class of the north, while their reformist adversaries represented the upwardly mobile classes of the commercializing south. In the past thirty years, North American Song specialists have conceptualized factionalism as one primary cause of the shift in elite orientations and strategies from national bureaucratic officeholding to local political involvement, from Northern
to Southern Song. Both Robert Hartwell and Robert Hymes have identified the escalating factional conflict as one of several disincentives that made officeholding appear less attractive and more risky to prospective bureaucrats. A final resolution of these issues of Song social history is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will examine faction theory and factional rhetoric as court-centered discourses of authority, as cultural phenomena with a primacy and logic of their own.

In so doing, I am certainly not disconnecting this discourse of authority from the social, political, and institutional contexts of factionalism, to which I will reconnect political theory and rhetoric throughout this study. In the ideological vision of Northern Song factionalists, authority was seen to emanate vertically downward from the imperial court, and ministers portrayed themselves as loyal servants of the throne, who worked for the public good of state and society rather than for the private interest. My goal is to reconstruct the linguistic rules and intellectual assumptions that shaped faction theory and factional rhetoric in the late Northern Song and that prevented ministers from publicly acknowledging the existence of their own factional affiliations, while they simultaneously accused their adversaries of factionalism.

In choosing to focus this study on the politics of factional theory and rhetoric, I hope to elucidate the linkages between Northern Song political and intellectual history, by explaining how conflicting factionalists could share a common language of faction. I will analyze the political writings of such intellectual and literary luminaries as Ouyang Xiu, Wang Anshi, Sima Guang, Su Shi, Cheng Yi, and many others, rather than their philosophical or literary writings, in an effort to reconstruct the intellectual contexts within which ministers produced faction theory and factional rhetoric. Since the distribution and survival of the corpus of collected works (wenji) of late Northern Song authors has been skewed by political and ideological factors, very few editions of reformist-authored collected works are now extant, while those of antireformists now number in the dozens.

Consequently, any attempt to reconstruct the rhetoric of politics must consist of a reading of other textual genres, augmenting theoretical discourses (lun) with court memorials and transcripts of court audiences (dui) in order to illustrate how Northern Song political actors publicly articulated the concepts of factions and factionalism. Aside from the “Discourses on Factions” (Pengdang lun) discussed in Chapter 3, which have been preserved in their authors’ collected works, almost all of the pieces of Northern Song factional rhetoric to be analyzed in subsequent chapters have been drawn from court chronicles and collections of memorials that were assembled during the Southern Song from surviving court records. While the late Northern Song Veritable Records are
no longer extant, a large fraction of these texts have survived, having been copied into privately compiled works of historiography in the late twelfth century. The major chronicle of Northern Song court politics is the *Long Draft of the Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance* (*Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*) of 1183, which Li Tao (1115–1184) distilled from the *Veritable Records* and *Court History* of the period and from a wide variety of unofficial sources. But several lacunae in the *Long Draft*, which is missing chronicles of the early Shenzong reign, parts of the Zhezong reign, and all but one year of the Huizong reign, limit its usefulness as a source of late Northern Song factional rhetoric.

I have filled these temporal gaps with memorials collected in Yang Zhongliang’s (n.d.) *Topical Narratives of the Long Draft of the Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance* (*Xu zizhi tongjian changbian jishi benmo*) of 1253, a thematic compilation of and companion to the *Long Draft* that preserves many of its now-lost entries. Other Northern Song memorials have been preserved in Zhao Ruyu’s (1140–1196) topically organized collection *Memorials of Various Song Dynasty Ministers* (*Songbao zbuchen zouti*). When combined in a mutually reinforcing fashion, these three texts provide a much broader and deeper cross-section of factional rhetoric from the late Northern Song than do the collected works of leading literati, and the first two include a large number of memorials by reformists whose collected works no longer survive.

By explicating the linguistic rules according to which court politics and factional rhetoric operated, I hope to capture their contingencies, contradictions, and complexities. Throughout the factional conflict of the late Northern Song, ministers from both camps shared a common intellectual inventory and linguistic vocabulary that shaped the way they articulated and defined political action and affiliation, despite their fundamental disagreements over political ideology. Hence, factional rhetoric revolved around the making of contending claims to ethico-political authority and the elaboration of condemnatory or admonitory arguments against factions and factionalism. However, I am not arguing that political practices are essentially reducible to discourse, for factional rhetoric was certainly not the only dimension of political practice. Nor am I advancing an arch-relativist interpretation that these discursive representations of political authority were arbitrary and slippery figments of language. Northern Song factionalists were working within a shared intellectual framework of classical hermeneutics and historical analogy and chose their words and concepts according to pre-existing rules for maximum political and rhetorical effect. Nor can my argument be mischaracterized as linguistic determinism, because I am not claiming that factional discourses limited what could be conceived, but rather only what could be publicly articulated. I will consistently demonstrate that the prevailing discourses of authority did not prevent ministers from forming
bureaucratic coalitions, even if they did restrain them from publicly advancing a neutral or positive vision of ministerial affiliations. Nor did the shared languages of factionalism prevent ministers from defending different policy programs or from clashing over ideological positions. The formation and manipulation of factional rhetoric was an inherently significant and signifying practice, by and through which political practitioners engaged in the construction of political and ideological meaning. Factionalists of the late Northern Song used this court-centered discourse of authority to persuade monarchs to purge the factious opposition while retaining loyal and factionless ministers like themselves. Factional rhetoric represented the continuation and extension of the factional conflict by other means, even as this political discourse became increasingly decoupled from political practice and became increasingly resistant to redefinition.

The Thorny Path Ahead

In Chapter 2, “Frames of Reference,” I will establish the broad parameters that bounded the political imaginations of the Northern Song by demonstrating how factionalists defined and interpreted factionalism in public and private rhetorical settings. By rereading and reinterpreting a shared corpus of classical and historical texts, faction theorists and factional rhetoricians manipulated these textual authorities to demarcate the boundaries of the political community between factions of petty men and factionless superior men. First, they interpolated fragments of classical texts as authoritative injunctions against factionalism, frequently decontextualizing them and reading them anachronistically, in order to claim that factionalism was a deviation from ancient ideals of rulership and ministerial loyalty. Second, faction theorists and factional rhetoricians compared the present to past factional conflicts, which they blamed for undermining and destroying the Han and Tang imperial polities, and warned that factions of petty men would do the same to the Song dynasty. Reformist and antireformist ministers, along with their monarchical audience, shared these classical and historical frames of reference, which bounded their conceptions of political action and organization by locating the imperial court as the central source of authority, and by empowering the monarch as the ultimate arbiter of faction.

Each of the following chapters begins with what I think of as a moment of persuasion, a brief narrative about a rhetorical exchange between ministers and their monarchical audiences. In order to introduce readers to the historical background of each stage of the factional conflict, I will explain the political stakes and policy choices behind each exchange as well as the intellectual
contexts that were shared by its participants. These narratives will demonstrate how ministers persuaded their ruler to expel their opposition and retain their allies and, furthermore, how skeptical or amenable rulers responded to these polemical and divisive claims. In each case, ministers admonished the emperors and regents they served to identify the factions in their midst and urged them to exercise ultimate authority over personnel and policy decisions.

In Chapter 3, “Categorical Propositions,” I undertake a broad diachronic study of Northern Song “Discourses on Factions,” explaining how five representative faction theorists imagined the hierarchical relationship between monarchical and ministerial authority. The chapter opens with a court dialogue of 1044, in which Grand Councilor Fan Zhongyan admitted to Emperor Renzong that his Qingli reforming coalition was indeed a faction. In his exceptional “Discourse on Factions” (Pengdang lun) that followed, Ouyang Xiu used classical hermeneutics and historical analogies in a game-changing attempt to normalize and justify the existence of factional affiliations in the service of shared ideological aims. He theorized that true factions of superior men served the public good of the dynasty, as opposed to the false factions of petty men. But after Renzong dismissed Fan’s reforming bloc from court, theorists unequivocally condemned factions as malevolent and destructive. In their “Discourses on Factions,” written subsequently, Sima Guang, Su Shi, and Qin Guan all warned of the danger that bureaucratic factions presented to dynastic survival, taking the perspective of past, current, and future rulers. While each of these theorists defined and interpreted faction in different ways, they employed similar classical authorities and historical analogies in a court-centered discourse of authority, in which they urged monarchs to employ factionless superior men and expel factious petty men to ensure dynastic survival.

In the next three chapters, I broaden my focus to analyze an extensive sample of memorials, edicts, and court debates from the three phases of the factional conflict. Chapter 4, “Unified Theories of Division,” surveys rhetoric during the reform phase of the factional conflict, which originated in 1069 when Emperor Shenzong formed a vertical alliance with Wang Anshi and personally associated himself with the New Policies. Wang implemented his ideological vision of state activist institutions with substantial backing from junior associates, and over the vociferous objections of the opposition; he exacerbated pre-existing intellectual schisms within the political elite and sharply polarized the imperial bureaucracy between reformists and their somewhat united opposition. Wang Anshi used polemical rhetoric to persuade the amenable Shenzong to silence dissenting voices by expelling this “faction of conventionalists,” while claiming that ethically and ideologically unified superior men could not possibly be factious. The antireformists similarly maligned Wang’s bureaucratic coalition as a self-serving
faction, but Shenzong pressed forward with the New Policies, and most of the opposition resigned from their posts. When Wang was forced to resign in 1074, his reform coalition splintered over personal and policy conflicts, and his successor Lü Huiqing (1032–1111) used polarizing rhetoric to purge his reformist rivals from power, as did a vengeful Wang Anshi upon his return to the councilorship in 1075. Throughout the reform era, both reformist and antireformist rhetoricians identified themselves as factionless and loyal ministers, while they attempted to persuade the emperor to purge their adversaries as alleged factions of petty men. But with Shenzong’s personally identifying himself with the reformist ideology and agenda, the imperial court no longer accommodated a diverse range of elite opinion.

In Chapter 5, “The Closed Circle,” I explain how the antireform coalition returned to power after Shenzong’s death in 1085 and used a similar court-centered discourse of authority to justify their political agenda and similar polarizing rhetoric to eliminate their adversaries. Empress Dowager Xuanren (1032–1093), Yingzong’s widowed consort, was appointed regent to her grandson, the eight-year-old Emperor Zhezong, and identified herself with the antireform ideological vision of “reversion” (genghua). Sima Guang returned from exile to become grand councilor, leading a bureaucratic coalition that expeditiously abolished the New Policies within a year. Pressuring the regent to dismiss the reformists as a faction of petty men, the antireform coalition expelled the reformist leaders Cai Que (1037–1093) and Zhang Dun (1035–1105) from court. But after Sima Guang’s death in 1086, his bureaucratic coalition foundered over personal animosities and policy disagreements, and three regional factions of ministers contended for power at court, each accusing the others of factional treachery. This internal conflict sputtered out by 1089, when the antireformist ministry instigated a literary inquisition against Cai Que, the exiled leader of the reform faction, charging him with slandering the empress dowager. Antireformist remonstrators persuaded a willing Xuanren to order Cai’s banishment to the malarial wastes of Lingnan, in the empire’s far south. The pronouncement of this virtual death sentence upon a leader of the opposition was the first step in the brutalization of the factional conflict. Under the vertical alliance of Xuanren and her chosen councilors, ideological intolerance drove antireform rhetoricians to accuse opposition elements both inside and outside their coalition of factionalism, using the same divisive language that the reformists had used against them.

The reformists fought their way back from exile to dominate the post-reform phase, a period of sudden political reversals whose rhetoric I analyze in Chapter 6, “Retributive Justice.” When Xuanren died in 1093, Zhezong inaugurated his personal rule and committed himself to an ideological program of “res-


toration” (shaochu), rehabilitating the reformists and reviving the New Policies. Seeking revenge for Cai Que’s death, Zhang Dun formed a vertical alliance with the emperor and persuaded him to systematically purge the antireformists from court, by first demoting them to prefectural administration. The surviving antireformists were later blacklisted, and their leaders were indicted on trumped-up charges of treason and factionalism in the Korean Relations Institute (Tongwen guan) inquisition; they were ultimately deported to Lingnan. When Zhezong died without an heir in 1100, Shenzong’s consort Empress Dowager Qinsheng (1045–1101) assumed the regency for his younger brother Emperor Huizong and began to rehabilitate a new generation of antireformists. Inaugurating a short-lived period of factional reconciliation, the antireformist Han Zhongyan (1038–1109) and the moderate reformist Zeng Bu (1036–1107) presided over a fragile, short-lived bifactional unity ministry that was besieged from both sides. Then, when Qinsheng died in 1101, Huizong began his personal rule, resolving to revive and expand reformist governance under the influence of his councilor, Cai Jing. Prosecuting the most brutal and comprehensive political purge in the history of the dynasty, Huizong promulgated three separate factional blacklists (dangji) between 1102 and 1104, banning more than 300 antireformists and their descendants from officeholding as a “faction.” In these proscriptions, which represented the endgame of the factional conflict, most of the antireform opposition—as well as Cai’s major reformist rivals—were exiled en masse to fringe prefectures, where they were subject to movement restrictions, and an unknown number died. The silencing of political and ideological dissent enabled the Cai Jing ministry to revive and extend the New Policies and to build a patronage machine that monopolized power for twenty-five years, with minimal interruptions, almost until the fall of the Northern Song.

In Chapter 7, “Discourses of Authority and the Authority of Discourse,” I embed the findings of this study about Northern Song factionalism within a broader historical context. I will explain how and why the factional rhetoric and political associations in late imperial Chinese history can illuminate the boundaries of Northern Song discourses of authority. First, I will compare the language of the Northern Song factional conflict with the political rhetoric of the True Way Learning (Daxue) fellowship of the Southern Song. Zhu Xi (1130–1200), this intellectual and political movement’s self-proclaimed leader, frequently described his emerging movement as “our faction” (wudang), employing a shi-oriented discourse of authority that enabled horizontal affiliations of gentlemen to operate autonomously from the imperial court. Second, I compare the political organizations of the Northern and Southern Song with those of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, which were dramatically different in both kind and scale. When Yuan ministerial associations engaged in policy conflicts, self-consciously repli-
cating Song reformist and antireformist political rhetoric, these court coalitions were limited to members of the Mongol aristocracy. The ministerial associations of the late Ming were more horizontally and vertically integrated than those of previous dynasties, and their members employed a court-centered discourse of authority that described their movement as a faction working for the public good. In the early seventeenth century both the Donglin Academy (Donglin shuyuan) and the Restoration Society (Fu she) organized a cellular association of local academies into a disciplined opposition faction that was active at the imperial court. In the middle and late imperial periods of Chinese history, intellectual and linguistic constraints illegitimated horizontal ministerial affiliations and reinforced the vertical loyalties between monarchs and ministers. I will also briefly explain how the term dang re-entered modern Chinese as a neutralized descriptor of political “parties” in the early twentieth century, how the Nationalist and Communist leaders envisioned the party as the central organizational element of a modern Chinese nation-state, and how the one-party states they built could not tolerate the existence of autonomous political associations. However, the political discourse of the modern Chinese nation-state was a different language from the factional rhetoric of the late imperial period, when the persistence of a court-centered discourse of authority restrained members of horizontal political affiliations from articulating interests that were independent from, or in opposition to, the dynastic polity.