Local Elites and Modernization in China in Late Qing Dynasty: Taking Wen Tingshi as the Example

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Zhou Jianxin

Introduction

Local elite is a social group with special status and privileges, which furthered the local welfare and protected the local interests as well as assumed the responsibility of promoting the modernization in their hometown. What is local elite? Dozens of experts in the study of Chinese local society and history attended a seminar held in Banff, Canada on August 1987. The subject of this seminar was “the local elites of China and their power”. Most participants of the seminar use a more comprehensive word “local elite” or “elite” as a substitute for the concept of “gentry”, which betrays the attention or focus of the international academic field switches from the power of imperial to the authority of gentry and from the gentry to the local elites. But what’s the relationship between local elites and gentry? According to Li Meng, “The research of local elites and gentry are of two different objects rather than one at different development stages. Gentry were a group who were granted the permission to participate in state administration by passing the Imperial Examination. Since their field was the state administration system, their symbols were fame as well as political identity. However, according to the definition of Xirui Zhou and Jing Lan, local elites refer to any individual or family that has predominance on “local affairs”. Therefore, its connotation covers far more than gentry. They include a variety of the so-called functional elites, such as the mediate-stratum, merchants, brokers of gentry in late Qing Dynasty, as well as the educators, military elites, bandit leaders in the era of the Republic of China. Their field was local authority and their all-important feature was the actual domination on local affairs (they played a very important part in local society and their most typical feature was
actual domination on local affairs.)”¹ The author believed that local elite is a class that plays an important role in the local society. “Elite” can be understood as a transformed continuant concept of gentry. The connotation of the local elites implies the localization of the gentry (such as squires), the broadening of the gentry (including government gentry, commercial gentry and landlords besides squires), and the modernization of the gentry.

Actually, the study of the modern local elites is closely linked to the study of the modernization of China. Since the mid-19th century, local elites play a variety of active roles in the local community. Their power has been enlarged in political, economic as well as social fields. As a result, more and more scholars have turned their attention to the interaction of Chinese local elites, local public sphere and the strengthening of the state power, trying to reveal the history of modern Chinese urban society from a different angle. Late Qing Dynasty is a transition towards modern society. The national crisis in that period was unprecedentedly grave, which promoted a part of advanced Chinese people to cast deep introspective looks at it. Meanwhile, the contemporary local elites began to explore ways to seek for a share in the national development and survival. They utilized their fame and privileges in the local community and their family influence to participate in the construction of local industry and modern education. Their action improved the development of local economy and education, thus objectively leaving some historic impact on the process of the modernization of Chinese society.

Ping Xiang, a city of Jiangxi province, enjoys the fame of “the cradle of modern industry of China”. Of all the local elites involved in promoting the local industry construction and educational innovation, Wen Tingshi should be the most distinguished one. He was a pioneer of modern times and he was glorious all his life especially during his last ten years (1894-1904). He spent his last nine years promoting the modernization of Pingxiang. After he was dismissed from his post, he utilized all his resources, including his fame, his family strength as

well as his good relationship with Sheng Xuanhuai and Zhang Zhidong, to develop the economy of Pingxiang. The focus of previous study of WEN was on his achievements in poems and the political field. I would like to analyze the influence of WEN in the process of promoting the modernization of Pingxiang, my view was based on the study of the hard experience of Wen’s involving in mine exploitation, running a business of Guangtaifu Firm, improving the social morality and so on. Focusing on the sufferings of WEN in the mine exploitation and business running of Guangtaifu Firm, and his advocating new education and changing thoughts and customs, this article attempts to offer an insightful probe into Wen’s promotion of the modernization of Pingxiang.

Wen Tingshi and Wen Family of Pingxiang

Pingxiang, named from a literary allusion telling that an ancient king got some mascots called pingshi here, is located in the west of Jiangxi province. It was built in the period of Three Kingdoms (A.D. 227), and has a long history of more than 1,700 years to date. It adjoins Yichun city to the East, Ji’an city to the South, Liling city to the West and Liyang city to the North. It lies at latitude 27°20′~28°0′ N, and longitude 113°35′~114°17′E. As one of the earliest developing national industrious areas of China, Pingxiang held an abundance of mineral resources and it had attracted capital and technology from the Western countries in the late 19th century. The Anyuan Coal Corporation, combined with Daye iron-ore Company and Hanyang iron-ore Company, formed the Hanyeping United Company, which was the first trans-regional and inter-trade enterprise in China.

Before the 19th century, Pingxiang was always under the political system of absolute monarchy based on a natural economy. Besides their farm work, peasants here also joined in the handicraft industry such as coal exploitation, porcelain-manufacture and manufacturing of paper, firecrackers and Chinese linen. The development of the productive force was sluggish then. Thanks to the development of Anyuan Coal Company and the construction of the railway
between Zhuzhou and Pingxiang, the economy of Pingxiang had been improved rapidly. About colliery, there were the two most famous ones in China –Kaiping in the North and Anyuan in the South, and later the latter made more progress and surpassed the former. As one of the ten largest collieries, Anyuan was known as “Little Shanghai”. The economic boom also brought about educational prosperity. A new modern school--Pingxiang middle school was built and senior primary schools were built in every village of Pingxiang. All of this contributed to the modernization of Pingxiang. At that time, there were “ten largest families” in Pingxiang, including Peng, Wu, Wen, Li, Zhang, Yao, Liu, Xiao, Duan, Huang, who lived in different places and dominated Pingxiang.²

Being listed as the first of “the ten largest families”, the Wen Family enjoyed high prestige in Pingxiang, whose clans lived in several different places of Pingxiang. According to the pedigree of the Wen Family in Pingxiang (the fourth edition in 1921) records, “we have good relationship with other gentry by affinity and we also have warm relationship with the other Wen Families living in the city, though we are far apart.”³ According to the memories of the Wen Family number, nearly two thirds of the clan shrines were built by the Wen Family. The Family had many martyrs in history such as TianXiang Wen, the man who gave up his life for justice in Song Dynasty and another one was Sheng Wen, Wen Tingshi’s grandfather, who sacrificed his life in defending Jiaying City of Guangdong province. It was recorded in the pedigree of the Wen Family in Pingxiang (the fourth edition) “the number of martyrs and government officials from the Wen Family is large”.⁴ Though the Wen Family did not live in Pingxiang for a long time, it was absolutely the noble family there. The reasons for this were not only because the Wen Family maintained a good relationship with other gentry, but also they had a glorious family history for their achievements made in the Imperial Examination and politics. The factors that

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³ 1923. The 4th Edition of the Wen’s Family Tree in Pingxiang vol.1. p.11(光绪十年《萍乡文氏三修族谱》)
⁴ 1885. The 3rd Edition of the Wen’s Family Tree in Pingxiang vol.1. p.11(光绪十年《萍乡文氏四修族谱》)
determined whether the family would be flourished or not were their achievements made in Imperial Examination and politics. Since Qing Dynasty, the number of the Wen Family who succeeded in Imperial Examination has increased. Since the middle of Qing Dynasty, the number of the Wen Family who succeeded in official career has been increased. They entered their official careers by passing Imperial Examination or military contribution or contributing property to the government. The number of positions at magistrate level and above was more than 455, which proved the strength power of the Wen Family.

Table 1 The number of Imperial Examination fame winners of the Wen Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperial Examination fame level</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JinShi</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data comes from local chronicles of Pingxiang and the pedigree of the Wen Family in Pingxiang (the 4th edition)

Wen Tingshi (1856-1904) was the outstanding person of his family. He was known as a prodigy for he could remember everything he had read. When he was 17, he learned from Feng Chen, a famous scholar of Yu Fan. When he was 20, he took service under a general and became good friends with Rui Zhi (the son of the general) and Jun Zhi (the nephew of the general). He met Chen Lisan (his father was Chen Baosheng, the military governor of Hunan province, and his son was the famous historian Chen Yinque). He succeeded in the Imperial Examination at the provincial level when he was 27. In 1890, he got the second place in the final Imperial Examination and was appointed with an important leadership of Han Linyuan. Four years later, he was appointed by Emperor

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5 This statistic was made the author according to *The 4th Edition of the Wen’s Family Tree in Pingxiang* vol.3. edited in 1923.
Guangxu as the top one of the final Imperial Examination and got a higher position. In the way, Wen Tingshi rose from modest origins to become an important person of the country regime so that he had the chance to communicate with the Emperor.

When he was young, Wen Tingshi lived in Guangdong, an open city. Influenced by both the traditional Chinese culture and the modern Western ones, he advocated learning from the West to develop the industry and economy as well as education. In terms of industries, he proposed that the government should develop commercial economy and protect the coal exploitation, because he held the view that “the coal industry concerned not only the base of economy but also the civil life”.6 As to how to develop the mine exploration, Wen said: “The government should: firstly, dispatch some messengers to the Western countries to hire mining engineers; secondly, send officials accompanied by the mining engineers to each province to explore ore exploration; thirdly, analyze the status of mineral and the feasibility of each mine exploration; fourthly, allow individuals to explore the mine and provide protection and help for them if they are underfunded and lastly, reduce the ore tax to 5%.”7 In terms of education, he insisted on the reform in Imperial Examination and establishment of modern school. As to how to develop the education, he said: “schools should teach their students not only book knowledge but also other knowledge involving industry, agriculture, commercial, military and law. The students should get the book learning as well as practices such as construction, shooting, medicine, boating.”8 Moreover, Wen Tingshi also stressed the importance of the children’s and women’s education. He remarked, “The children’s education affect the whole life of a person, while the most important educator of a child is the mother.”9 His thought on education happened to coincide with the reformation thoughts of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. His reformation thought was formed during his

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study and official career, but was not put into practice. In 1896, Wen Tingshi was exiled to his hometown for some trumped-up charge and then he began to practice his thought. Running the business of mine exploration and advocating to develop modern schools are the most typical ones of his practices.

**Wen Tingshi and the Modernization of Pingxiang**

**The modernization of industry**

The sign of modernization of Pingxiang’s industry was the exploration of mine. It was said that the exploration of the Pingxiang Mine was the harbinger of modern industrial revolution in the East. “Here are the new machines from Western country; here’s the unprecedented industrial scale”. The Pingxing Mine, having more than 30,000 workers, was the largest manufacturing sector at that time. With the development of Hanyeping United Company and the operation of the railway from Pingxiang to Zhuzhou, the economy of Pingxiang has grown rapidly. Due to this, Anyuan was then known as “the small ShangHai”. All of the changes in Pingxiang were related to an important person, Wen Tingshi. After his dismissal, he made great contributions to the development of coal exploration in Pingxiang.

The discovery and use of coal in Pingxiang has a long history. As early as Han Dynasty, people here had been using coal as fuel. At that time, however, people just got some coal from the coal seam above the ground, which was far from “coal exploration”. In Qing Dynasty, the exploration was made in a large scale, although the instruments were undeveloped. The coal miners often suffered from the accidents such as well bore sloughing and water leaking in the mine, so they couldn’t endure for a long time. Instead of on a family basis, in the middle Qing Dynasty, the coal exploration in Pingxiang began to be carried out on a clan basis with the fund support from the stock collected by several families or rich squires. With the development of national industry, the demand of coal was increased. The number of the mines, according to the record, rose to 200 in

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the reign of Emperor Guangxu in Qing Dynasty. There were several large mines in Pingxiang at that time. Some of them cooperated together into large firms such as MaoFu Firm, Tongfurong Firm, Guangtaifu Firm. These firms owned abundant funds and were considerably influential in the society. However, depending mainly on manual work, the coal exploration in this period was still technologically backward. Therefore, the output of the coalmines was rather small. The introduction of machines and modernized mine surveying, exploration and operation was inseparable from the Guangtaifu Firm managed by Wen Tingshi.

In February 1896, Wen Tingshi was dismissed from the government. He met Zhang Zhidong and Sheng Xuanhuai, and demonstrated to them the importance of introducing modern technology into coal development. The first thing he did was to found a new Firm, Guangtaifu, which had gained the financial support from Zhirui and Chen Baozhen. In addition, he encouraged other businessmen in Pingxiang to invest and build cokes. Soon the Guangtaifu Firm, managed by Wen Tingshi and controlled by him as well as the Zhang Family, the Zhong Family and the Peng Family, started its business. In order to improve the operating conditions of Guangtaifu Firm, Wen Tingshi had invested in buying land and building of coke oven body. “Wen Tingshi has bought a number of mines and many of them are of high quality” It was recorded that Wen Family had owned 18 mines and 7 coke ovens. “The coal of Guangtaifu sold well in Hubei Province, so they spared no money in building 8 coke ovens including Wang Jiayuan, Zia Jiachong, Xikeng, Anyuan, Tianzishan, Zhuwoli, Gaokeng, Longjiachong”. “Guangtaifu Firm built 50 cokes and the production was 1500T a month.” Wen Tingshi often Went to the mine personally to supervise the work. As to the introduction of technology in coal exploration, he decided to buy

12 Ibid. p.826.
13 Ibid. p.229.
14 Ibid. p.103.
some machines. Sheng Huanxuan said “Wen Tingshi intends to use new machines to increase production and bring benefit to the people in Pingxiang.”\textsuperscript{15} Wen Tingshi asked Zhang Zhidong to send an expert to solve the problem of water accumulated in the coalmine.\textsuperscript{16} All that Wen Tingshi had done in Guangtaifu Firm proved that he had made great contributions to the development of coal industry. But this process was very difficult. Unfortunately, the firm finally went bankrupt and was sold to the government though it was once a large-scale business owning mine exploitation, production and transportation. But for what reason did the firm go bankrupt?

On the one hand, the biggest problem was transportation. There were two routes leading to Hanyang: the east one was from Luxi to Nanchang via Yichun, then through the Yangtze River. The west route was from Pingxiang to Liling then reached Hanyang by water. They chose the latter for it was shorter, but that brought a lot of trouble. The peasants here had built many small dams in the river and the boat usually hit the dam when the river rose. As to the water transportation in Pingxiang, “the entrance of dams was too narrow for ships to go through. When the water rises, the dams are awash, which is dangerous to the vessels.”\textsuperscript{17} In rainy season, the dam opened and the water transportation was smooth, “From May to August as well as the whole winter, the dams were closed and the water transportation was obstructed. Therefore, the mine transportation was affected by seasonal rain.”\textsuperscript{18} The following table can give support to the above-mentioned fact.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. p.79.  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. p.766.  
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p.563.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p.585.
Table 2  The coal quantity transported to Hubei province copied by Wen Tingshi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>1894 (From January to September)</th>
<th>1895 (From February to April and September)</th>
<th>1896 (From January to March and May to August)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The output of coal</td>
<td>1935T</td>
<td>23073T</td>
<td>9979T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19402T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now that the water transportation was difficult, what not use the road transportation? According to a letter from Yinhui Xu “If we build road here, we have to pay a lot of money to the farmers, for the road building would occupy their farmland.”\(^{19}\) Wen Tingshi weighed the pros and cons and decided to transport coal both by water and by land-carriage. He invested in building the railway from dams Pingxiang to Xiangtang. This move was supported by Sheng Huaixuan and Zheng Guanying. According to a telegraph from Sheng Huaixuan to Zheng Shaotang, “Wen Tingshi asked several experts and engineers to build a railway during.”\(^{20}\) A foreign expert also supported him, saying, “The railway will reduce the cost of transportation”.\(^{21}\) But the railway was so difficult to build and it wasn't finished until 1905. Before it was opened to traffic, the transportation of Guangtaifu Firm relied mainly on water, while it was water transport that caused serious damage to Guangtaifu Firm.

On the other hand, Guangtaifu Firm had conformed many difficulties at the start. The followings are the main reasons. First, the firm employed wrong persons. As a result, the efficiency of the firm was badly influenced. Sheng Huaixuan said, “The quality of Pingxiang’s coal is better than Beiping’s. Wen Tingshi is an outstanding partner, but the only unsatisfactory is the

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19 Ibid. p.109.  
20 Ibid. p.899.  
21 Ibid. p.672.
management of the Firm.” An example was “there was once an old hand called XSP, who knew how to get more coal from the mine, but the department manager who wanted to reduced the cost get their own apprentices instead of XSP. At last, the coal production was reduced for they were inexperienced.”

Second, the system of internal management was disordered. For example, “the funds had done harm to the benefit of the Firm, the managers, most of which were relatives of Wen Family, took the rich coal wells into private own ship and left the exhausted coal wells to the Firm.” Another example of the Wen Family occupied most of the important positions of the Firm and because of their non-compliance, the management of the Firm was still a big problem.”

Third, Wen Tingshi, the head of Guangtaifu, was a scholar after all. He was only concerned about significant affairs and left the equally important daily work to his cousins. In addition, he was involved in a family disputes for he married another woman in Changsha and he was busy traveling among Changsha, Pingxiang and Nanchang. He had to delegate Wen TingJun, his cousin, to manage the firm. Fourth, Guangtaifu Firm suffered from nature and man-made disasters. In the 23rd year of the Emperor Guangxu, the mines were destroyed by heavy rainfall and a shipwreck happened then. In a letter from Xu Yinhui to Sheng Huaixuan was recorded “The main wells were destroyed by heavy rainfall. Of all the 50 wells owned by Wen Tingshi, only four wells were unspoiled.”

Then he said, “In these day, the river rose and the dams opened, so the water transport was smooth. Unfortunately, we had an accident for the river was too swift and ten boats turned over. All of the coal in the boats sank in the water and seven people have been killed.”

Fifth, to make the matter worse, Guangtaifu Firm was fined for its deferred coal supply. “We have suffered great loss by the slow supply mine service from Guangtaifu. We should have claim for indemnity.

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22 Ibid. p.660.
23 Ibid. p.203.
24 Ibid. p.606.
25 Ibid. p.114.
26 Ibid. p.136.
27 Ibid. p.136.
As they were introduced by Lu Xianchen and their transport cost was enormous, we decided to waive the claim.”28

For the above reasons, Guangtaifu Firm incurred heavy losses and went bankrupt in September 23rd in the reign of Emperor Guangxu. Consequently, it was sold to the government. Sheng Huaixuan wrote in his book the story of Pingxiang mine “In this early Autumn, Guangtaifu Firm went bankrupt and all of its workshops, ships, coal mines were sold to the government and the price was determined by the government.”29 Wen Tingshi was appointed as “the local senior squire “ of The Pingxiang Coal. Later, due to the deterioration of the political environment, he went to Japan for safety.

Wen Tingshi and the educational development in Pingxian

Wen Tingshi urged the abolition of the old Imperial Examination and the establishment of modern school. He was concerned about the education in his hometown. He wrote in his diary “I met Diguang on the way when I left JL. We talked about the education in Pingxiang and I was worried about that. I wanted to improve the situation, but my ability was limited.”30 When he Went back to Pingxiang to visit ancestral graves in 1895, he had discussed the plan of building school with other squires and the Magistrate, Gu Jiaxiang. But the plan had run aground, as they were short of money. When he managed the Guangtaifu Firm in 1898, he re-started the plan and succeeded at last. Pingxiang modern school was built in 1901 and Pingxiang middle school was built in 1906. He utilized his fame to persuade other elites to contribute money to the local education. “They organized fund-raising around Pingxiang for education development.”31 As a result, high primary schools were built in every village in Pingxiang, which highly improved the local education. We can get the same information from the following data.(Table 3)

28 Ibid. p.225.
30 Quoted from Jiang, Li. Approaching Wen Tingshi. P.153.
Table 3  The schools of Pingxiang in Late Qing Dynasty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The level of the school</th>
<th>The number of schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>primary school</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high primary school</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data comes from local chronicles of Pingxiang (recorded in 1935)

Wen Tingshi and the cultural development in Pingxiang

The development of mine exploration in Pingxiang not only prompted the modernization of industry, but also improved the general mood of the society. “The culture of Jiangxi province was backward and there are full of old customs”. Pingxiang was a typical area of these cultures and especially for the Fengshui beliefs.

It was recorded in local chronicles of Pingxiang “People in Pingxiang firmly believe in Fengshui. They even don’t bury the cadaver until they find a place of good Fengshui.” And, “People here are afraid of modern machines as they think their roar are terrible and may bring about a landslide.” 32 After three years of the coal exploitation in Pingxiang, when they began to build the railway from Zhuzhou to Pingxiang, they had to consider how to avoid the graves. Gu Jiaxiang suggested in a telegraph to Hanyang Ironworks, “As to the building of a railway, people support everything expect the relocation of graves. They oppose to moving their ancestral graves, which has delayed the railway project.”33 They strongly opposed Wen Tingshi and his firm’s mine exploration at this place for they believed that their exploration might offend the dragon sprit who lived in the deep mine. However, with the development of coal economy in Pingxiang, their view had been changed. They came to accept the new things gradually. It is recorded that “people here are not afraid of the dragon now. They begin to be interested in trade.”34 These changes were all inseparable from Wen Tingshi

32 Ibid. p.2360
The Relationship between Officials and Gentries during the Mine Exploration

Participants in the mine exploration included government officials, gentries, foreigners and others. Therefore the relationship among these people was very complex. All of their conflicts and cooperation had affected the development of mine economy. The development of relations can be divided into three main periods:

The first period was the time before the coal department of Hanyang Ironworks was set up. In this period, the gentries who owned private mines were in competition with each other. In 1740, private mine exploration in Pingxiang was developed, because the Qing government lifted the ban on mine exploration. The famous mines were under the ownership of several large families including the Wen Family, the Zhang Family, the Huang Family and the Ouyang Family. These private mines began to cooperate since the competition grown. Most of their cooperation depended on the relationship between the clans. The powerful clan would grab the coal mine formerly owned by the weak, but the government tended to ignore conflict caused by the competing for resources.

The second period was the time after the coal department of HanYang Ironworks was set up.

In 1890-1896, the HanYang Ironworks only bought a small amount of coal from the Pingxiang mine. The coal exploration rights were owned by the local gentries who got profits from the coal exploration or field-lease.

Sheng Huaxuan was appointed by Zhang Zhidong as the leader in charge of Hanyang Ironworks. In 1895, Ouyang Bingrong, a committeeman in Hunan province, successfully made coke from Pingxiang’s coal. Then the HanYang Ironworks bought more and more coal from Pingxiang mine and completely depend on Pingxiang coal in 1896. Therefore, Sheng Huaxuan decided to buy
coal only from Guangtaifu Firm. There are two reasons why he trusted Wen Tingshi. The first one is that “Wen Tingshi has an advanced transport system”. And the second is because Wen Tingshi had a high reputation as a local elite and he had a good relationship with the high court officials. Both Sheng Huaixuan and Zhang Zhidong supported Wen Tingshi to develop the coal exploration by modern machines, and they appointed a foreign expert Marx to survey and explore coal mine in Pingxiang, Mark’s arrival began the conflicts between Wen Tingshi and other local gentries.

There was a violent reaction among people in Pingxiang when the news was spread that Wen Tingshi had invited a foreign expert. “I heard that someone in Pingxiang was in league with a foreign man to explore the mine in Pingxiang. If they had had their way, our field, our ancestral graves, our mine would certainly be damaged.” “According to HAN Daily, Wen Tingshi, who was exiled to Pingxiang, has decided to explore the mine in Pingxiang with foreigners. They will destroy our environment that we are depending on for our existence. So I suggest that we should be allied to struggle against them.” “The government officials of Pingxiang are far from serving the people. Instead, they are badly damaging the interests of people in Pingxiang now. And they continue to destroy the mine there and even collude with foreigners. We must stop their crimes.”

It is obvious that the news had been spread all over Pingxiang before the foreigners came. And Wen Tingshi was believed to be condemned. More radically people posted a piece of paper on the door of Wen’s ancestral temple writing “Wen Tingshi, the man inviting thieves to enter”. That is a deep disgrace to the Wen Family. Rumors about Wen Tingshi were afloat. In order to eliminate their doubts, Wen Tingshi called a meeting at the ancestral temple to explain to his relatives of the clan the whole story of inviting foreigners.

36 Ibid. p.230
37 Ibid. p.232
38 Ibid. p.233
The situation in Pixiang was so tense that Gu Jiaxiang, the governor of Pingxiang, decided to end the Imperial Exam earlier in order to avoid the possible turmoil made by the pupils. At the same time, Gu Jiaxiang, the magistrate of Pingxiang, personally released a notice, “First, the foreign man’s work is mineral coal survey, which is different from mine exploration. Second, they don’t prospect for gold, silver and iron. Third, their work has nothing to do with Fengshui. Fourth, their work has nothing to do with missionary.” Moreover, he explained the advantages of using machines. And Gu Jiaxiang again summoned a meeting for all the gentries in Pingxiang and explained to them with the comment from HAN Daily. By this all the doubt were finally eliminated.

Why did so many gentries, students and other common people oppose the introduction of foreign expert and machines? In addition to the obvious problem-Fengshui, another major obstacle was that the gentries who owned the exploration rights were unwilling to share the rights with others. Some other gentries were afraid that Wen Tingshi, who invited a foreigner expert to investigate the feasibility of using machines, might infringe their interests. This shows the difficulty of mine exploration in Pingxiang. After experiencing the turmoil, the leaders of Hanyang Ironworks realized that they must obtain much more support from the local gentries. Consequently, this objectively triggered the conflicts between Wen Tingshi and other gentries. Therefore, Wen Tingshi chose to stand aside from the local affairs.

When Guangtaifu Firm was in trouble, Wen Tingshi was battling with Lu Guangchang for mine purchasing. All the gentries in Pingxiang chose to support Wen Tingshi. They complained to Sheng Xuanhuai about the wrongful act of Lu Guangchang. The reasons for their doing this is that it concerned their common interests. And they realized that Wen Tingshi was after all the representative who had been asserting that only the local people could lead the exploration.

After Pingxiang mine was built (1898-1982), the exploration rights were controlled by the government instead of the gentries.

Between the summer and autumn in 1897, Guangtaifu was nationalized.
and the coal mine began to be explored by the government. In the year of 1904 when Wen Tingshi died, Pingxiang mine lost its leading position in coal mining. In 1904, the HanYang ironworks, the Daye Iron and the Pingxiang Coal were combined into Hanyeping Mine & Iron Company. None of its managers were from Pingxiang. As Joseph W. Esherick, an American scholar, has put “They never employ local talents for operation and management”\(^39\) From that time on, local elites in Pingxiang lost their dominant position in mine exploration.

**Conclusions and Discussions**

The establishment of Pingxiang mine was the milestone for the development of the Pingxiang. It prompted the growth of economy and education of Pingxiang. The modernization of Pingxiang also made AY known as “the small ShangHai” in 1970s and became the center of Chinese Revolution in 1920s. Wen Tingshi was a pioneer of the modernization of Pingxiang. He was not frustrated after he was dismissed from the government. He devoted himself into the development of industry and education in Pingxiang. The establishment of Guangtaifu Firm, one of the most famous firms of northern China, not only prompted the coal industry of Pingxiang, but also improved the railway traffic, which had affected the railway building from Zhuzhou to Pingxiang. “When the mine exploration was beginning, people in Pingxiang opposed to it. Despite this, Wen Tingshi together with local officials as well as local elites assiduously propagated the benefits of mine exploration.”\(^40\) Wen Tingshi had done his best to persuade the government and other gentries to contribute money for the development of modern education. From 1903 to 1905, there was a craze for studying in Japan. Many of the students went to Japan and joined the United League, which provided strength for the later Pingliuli

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Uprising. Several leaders of the CPC such as Zhang Guotao, Kai Feng graduated from Pingxiang Middle school.

In conclusion, Wen Tingshi was a pioneer of promoting the modernization of Pingxiang. He played roles of pioneer and pathfinder and he was not only a famous scholar, poet, a prominent representative of the reformer’s thoughts, but also a practitioner of reformer’s thoughts.

From the exploration of the Pingxiang’s coal, we can see the complex relationship between the gentries, officials, business office and clans. It should be noted particularly that these different groups have their own internecine conflicts. They are not a community of common interests. In each group, there were not only unity and cooperation, but also differentiation and resistance. The main reason are the considerations of interest and benefit gambling, for example, the conflict between personal interests and collective interests, the interests of the part and the interests of the whole, the immediate interests and the long-term interests. As to the decisive reason of this, it is no more than the importance and timeliness of the interests.

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