Abstract

Li Guangdi (1642-1718) and his family was an influential clan in Hutou township in Anxi county, Fujian, during the Ming and Qing dynasties. My paper argues that the Lis underwent a transformation of strategy in their development. According to Robert Hymes, the transformations of the social elite started as early as the Song Dynasty. The transformation during the period of the Northern and Southern Song was one from a national strategy to a localist strategy, and the effectiveness of the central government normally had a huge bearing on the choice of strategy. Scholars felt that such transformations continued into the Ming and Qing dynasties. The local elites and clan actively sought to safeguard their positions, such as running private militia organizations and rural welfare institutions.

The Li clan built their wealth and prominence through both commercial and military might, and had always maintained good relationships with the local government. The peak of their influence was achieved during the times of Li Guangdi. Being the member to attain the highest bureaucratic position ever in the history of the Li clan, his reputation and prestige was undoubtedly a driving force behind the development of the clan. After successfully leading his clan members in putting down a revolt, Li Guangdi earned for himself and his clan a favorable recognition by the Qing emperor Kangxi. However, the Li clan did not pursue a path of military dominance. On the contrary, they emphasized the nurturing of their descendants to achieve success in the civil service examinations. Through the rise to bureaucratic positions of prestige and power, the Li clan then sought to safeguard their position in local society, thus transforming itself from a military clan to one of civility.