Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century

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Preface

This book grew out of a collaboration on a chapter entitled “Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century” for one of the (as yet unpublished) early Qing volumes of the Cambridge History of China. At first skeptical that there would be enough secondary material for a chapter about a century on which extensive research was just beginning, we soon realized that we had more than enough for a book.

We also realized that it might be useful to present current scholarly views on the society of this period for intermediate and advanced students, China scholars who work in other disciplines or eras, and historians of Europe, India, or Japan. The secondary literature on this topic has not been recently synthesized, and it is not readily accessible to those who do not read Chinese and Japanese. Moreover, general surveys of modern Chinese history cannot usually devote much space to an era before (supposedly) the real beginning of the modern period—conventionally dated from 1840, when China was defeated in the Opium War. While specialists may find interpretations here that are not part of the received wisdom, our book is aimed at those who do not concentrate on the Qing period.

The eighteenth century was one of the most dynamic periods in China's early modern era, a time when rulers of the newly established Qing dynasty (1644–1911) tried to harness the surge of economic growth and social change that had been interrupted by the transition from the previous dynasty. The Manchu armies, seeking to consolidate control over Inner Asian frontiers, created the largest empire China has ever known. Expansion by conquest was matched by internal migration into frontier regions, generating enduring conflicts between Han Chinese and non-Han peoples and demanding new efforts toward integration.
As China became part of an emerging world economy, foreign trade stimulated a new sequence in the process of economic development. Commercialization, urbanization, and increasing social and physical mobility encouraged the relaxation of fixed statuses and produced a more and more differentiated society, marked by intense competition for wealth, degrees, and other concomitants of elite status. Highly educated scholar-officials built on the intellectual achievements of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) to secure the foundations for China’s modern academic disciplines. Merchants helped knit the empire together with interregional trading networks and their own urban culture.

Western views of the eighteenth century were first shaped by reports from the Europeans who were missionaries at the court in Peking and traders on the fringes of the empire. European eyes, still innocent of the industrial revolution that was just beginning to take shape in England, were dazzled by Chinese sophistication and splendor. To these outsiders, the high Qing of the eighteenth century was the dynasty, perhaps even the civilization, at its peak.

From the vantage point of the nineteenth century, however, the eighteenth century appeared a good deal less admirable. Chinese literati of the Daoguang reign (1821–1850), stung by the depression induced by the opium trade and the humiliation of defeat by European powers, saw the preceding century as a time of corruption, extravagance, and irresponsibility. Late Qing thinkers such as Liang Qichao (1873–1929) identified the eighteenth century as an era of intellectual stagnation when the literati, mindful of the intense factionalism of the late Ming and fearful of state censorship, had retreated into historicism and philological research.

Chinese scholars today cannot forget China’s failure, by comparison with Europe or Japan, to modernize rapidly. Many use Marxist models to show that Qing growth could not mature into a self-generating process of industrialization because it was not only stifled by the state and the ruling elites but also prevented by the conditions of Western imperialism. Thus, the failures of the late Qing were foreshadowed in the 1790s, when corruption, weakening central control, population growth, and a rising trade in opium became important and continuing problems.

It is against this backdrop of diverse interpretations, only in the last decade founded on extensive primary research, that we have turned to look again at the eighteenth century. We want to reexamine the major trends of the last four hundred years and reinterpret somewhat the ways in which the eighteenth century was connected to preceding and subsequent periods.

By “eighteenth century” we actually mean the early and middle Qing; our emphasis on the fundamental social changes over what Fernand Braudel has called the “longue durée” makes the “long” century between about 1680 and 1820 the most natural period for analysis. We begin with the Qing conquest in the seventeenth century and conclude by considering the implications of eighteenth-century developments on nineteenth-century history. We have taken great care to disaggregate temporally the conclusions drawn by earlier historians about the entire Qing period. Our ambition is not merely to depict the “longue durée” but to fit long-term gradual processes of change into the complex concatenation of middle- and short-run events in which history is enacted.

To escape the often misleading generalizations necessary if one speaks of China as a whole, we have divided this vast empire into component macroregions (each easily comparable in size to a European nation) and show how imperial policies and specific local conditions produced very diverse social patterns. We have also been concerned with the characteristics of this society as a whole, in particular the institutions and mechanisms that knit it together.

The eighteenth century was not simply a painted backdrop to modern times. We have tried to provide more than a static picture of traditional Chinese society, to show instead the ways in which the society was changing in this period. Only by understanding the trends then already in motion may we appreciate their impact on later events. But precisely because mid-Qing society was part of a continuum, its characteristic trends were not always unique to it, and not all important developments were new ones. Although the sources rarely permit quantitative comparisons, we have tried to chart the direction of change, signal what is significant, and be judicious in the use of the word new. We invite historians of earlier centuries to help distinguish, for example, Song and Ming urbanization from Qing urbanization.

How does this work fit into the genre of social history? In our individual research, we have both been committed to “history from the bottom up”—i.e., to studying the perspectives and life experiences of ordinary Chinese people. The influence of the Annales school of social history on our work is obvious, but in this book we have departed in some significant ways from social history as defined by the Annales practitioners. Many social historians ignore political history; we have explicitly included a description of the Qing political system and of Qing policies (including foreign policy) because we believe that the state’s actions affected the lives of even ordinary citizens. We have studied the entire social spectrum, from rulers and scholars to minorities and outcast.
groups. Because economic developments supplied the foundation and stimulus for many social changes, we have devoted space to the early Qing economy. Nevertheless, these other aspects of Qing history are introduced only as they affect social patterns and processes.

Although both of us have done primary research on eighteenth-century China, this book is built on the foundation of other people's work. We have shamelessly plundered the secondary literature on this period in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages, including as much as possible of the flood of recent research based on Qing government archives opened in the 1970s and 1980s in Taiwan and in the People's Republic of China—though often drawing different conclusions. Despite our considerable debt to others, notes are few and acknowledge only rare or very specific information. The reader looking for further information should turn to the annotated bibliography for the best and most accessible sources in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages.

We also refer to the provocative models for method and analysis provided by anthropology and modern European history. Of necessity, our conclusions are closer to hypotheses, and, writing as we do while the field expands around us, we fully expect our generalizations to be challenged and modified. At the same time, we believe that Chinese history needs to be set in a wide context and that the very dynamism of research in the early Qing calls for an occasional synthetic evaluation of past and current work, a look at what we know about Chinese society in the eighteenth century and at what we would like to know. If we can generate debate and stimulate further work on important topics, our efforts will have been well served.

This book is truly a joint effort: the entire manuscript has been thoroughly rewritten by both of us, many times. Such a close and satisfactory collaboration would not have been possible without computer technology, and we thank Robert Manson and Thomas G. Rawski for invaluable help on technical matters. We have been fortunate in receiving detailed comments from a number of colleagues at various stages in the writing of this manuscript. We would like to thank James Lee, Ramon Myers, William Rowe, Gilbert Rozman, G. W. Skinner, Jonathan Spence, James L. Watson, Pierre-Étienne Will, and R. Bin Wong for their advice. Jess Bell and Otto Bohlmann provided extremely useful suggestions for improvement of this manuscript. Many other colleagues have read parts of the manuscript or offered comments during colloquia at Berkeley, Columbia, Stanford, and York University; to them also we are most grateful. To Fred Wakeman, who dreamt up the topic and introduced us to one another, we are particularly indebted.

A Note on Chinese Terms

The Chinese terms and names in the text are rendered in Pinyin romanization, with the exception of Manchu names and some words that have long been standard English usage (Peking, Manchu, Taoism). For more on romanization, see p. 243. Macrotechnical names are taken with some modification from G. W. Skinner; the macrole regions, depicted on maps 1 and 2, are based on maps in G. W. Skinner, "Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-Century China," in The City in Late Imperial China, ed. G. W. Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 214–15.

Our references to Qing rulers use their reign names, which are listed on p. xviii.

In the text, we refer to the Chinese acreage measure, the mu, which was not standardized during the Qing, and to the modern standard measure, the shi mu, which was equivalent to .1647 acre or one-fifteenth of a hectare. We also refer to the Chinese measure of distance, the li, which was equivalent to .36 miles.
Qing Reign Periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign Name</th>
<th>Years of Rule</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shunzhi</td>
<td>1644–1661</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kangxi</td>
<td>1662–1722</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yongzheng</td>
<td>1723–1735</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qianlong</td>
<td>1736–1795</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jiaqing</td>
<td>1796–1820</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daoguang</td>
<td>1821–1850</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xianfeng</td>
<td>1851–1861</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tongzhi</td>
<td>1862–1874</td>
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<td>Guangxu</td>
<td>1875–1908</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xuantong</td>
<td>1909–1911</td>
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Qing Society

PART ONE
Few residents of the Middle Kingdom were unaware of the political system within which they lived. Like heaven, the emperor may have been far away, but people knew he was there; they could name the current dynasty and even number the years according to the length of each reign. A peasant did not have to understand the structure of the Qing bureaucracy to know that there were officials, somewhere, with the authority to make arrests, collect taxes, and lead armies. The precise impact of this state on its citizens is difficult to measure, however, and historians have probably assumed that it was more effective and more uniform than it in fact was. Nevertheless, the policies pursued by the Qing conquerors after 1683, when the first phase of conquest was completed, affected subsequent economic growth and social change, while certain political and military events shaped the context of eighteenth-century social life in crucial ways.

Just as Manchu innovations were grafted onto traditional institutions to reshape the mechanisms for governing this society, so some Qing decisions followed traditional precedents while others represented new solutions to both familiar and unfamiliar problems. Thus, while the eighteenth century witnessed the continuation of a number of long-term trends that had begun centuries before, Chinese society of the period also bore the imprint of the new dynasty that came to power in 1644.

We begin Part One with a look at the context provided by the state, specifically at early Qing attempts to restructure the polity, direct the society and economy, and regulate China’s relations with her neighbors. Chapter 2 then introduces the basic institutions characteristic of eigh-
The Manchu conquest of China was thus accomplished by a multi-ethnic army, controlled and led by Manchu nobles and aided by the Chinese generals and their soldiers who had abandoned the Ming cause. The distinction between Han (ethnic Chinese) and Manchu, the formal legal barrier between bannermen (Manchu, Mongol, and Han) and non-bannermen, and the heightened concern with ethnicity generally all became special characteristics of Qing society.

As their armies expanded, the Manchus were simultaneously studying Chinese institutions and creating copies of Ming central-government organs in Shengjing (Mukden), the capital they established in 1625. Because the Manchu language had no written form, they devised a new written script for record keeping based on Mongolian. Remembering their Jin ancestors, Manchu rulers had from the outset supplemented their considerable military power with explicit claims to legitimacy. In 1635, victory over the Chahar Mongols brought the great seal of the Mongol khan to Hongtaiji, who could now also claim to be the heir of the mighty Chinggis Khan, founder of the Yuan dynasty that had ruled China and most of Asia in the fourteenth century. Once they entered Peking in 1644, the new conquerors, unlike the peasant rebels who had immediately preceded them, bid for Chinese allegiance by espousing Chinese ideals of government. The rulers observed the Confucian rituals and procedures treasured by the Chinese elite, called their dynasty Qing, meaning pure and unsullied, and adopted traditional imperial roles as son of heaven and moral exemplar. North China elites, exhausted from the decades of war and disorder that had attended the Ming collapse, were quick to give allegiance to these Manchu claimants to the throne and were in consequence rewarded with preference in government posts.

Several Ming generals were granted wide regional powers in south and southwest China in exchange for their vital assistance in quelling the loyalist opposition that persisted there for several decades. Three of these generals turned against the Qing in the 1670s when the Manchus attempted to check their power. During the resultant Rebellion of the Three Feudatories, the Qing not only acquired their own loyalist martyrs, Chinese bannermen who gave their lives for the new ruling house, but also began finally to win over the powerful elites of the Lower Yangtze region. (For a map showing China's component macroregions in the Qing, namely, North China, Lower Yangtze, Middle Yangtze, Southeast Coast, Lingnan, Northwest, Southwest, Manchuria, and Taiwan, see p. xiv.) The further courting of these southern literati at the expense of those from other regions was cemented with imperial patronage of scholarly projects and
imperial visits to this area; by the early eighteenth century, the Lower Yangtze elites once more dominated the empire, as they had for centuries, both politically and culturally.

Manchu adaptation to the Chinese status quo was also reflected in the schools they established to educate princes, other members of the imperial clan, and able banner men. The banner elites were taught Manchu and Chinese and trained to compete in the civil-service examinations that led to a prestigious career in government. By the middle of the eighteenth century, as the intimacy between conqueror and conquered deepened, it was no longer necessary for the throne to rely so exclusively on imperial bondservants (who were personal slaves of the rulers) and banner men (who included Han Chinese as well as Manchus).

The collegial form of rule favored by the Manchus in their preconquest days was gradually replaced by the more autocratic imperial style of the Ming. The very formation of the Eight Banners under Nurhaci had shown the founder’s adherence to joint rule by his sons and nephews who commanded those banners. Between the 1620s and the 1660s, actual leadership came as frequently from these commanders as from the nominal ruler. Though subsequent purges put three banners directly under the emperor, reliance on collective leadership during several regencies for child emperors after 1644 perpetuated the Manchu system. The young Kangxi emperor (r. 1662–1722) reasserted the imperial prerogative against his regents in 1669, but the consolidation of imperial power at the expense of the princes was not finally completed until the 1730s when the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–1735) destroyed the power base of rival princes by placing the remaining banners under bureaucratic supervision.

As Qing rulers tamed the potentially dangerous princes of imperial blood through Chinese institutions, they also used their talents. A few princes within each generation served in the bureaucracy, not merely to oversee their relatives by presiding over the Office of the Imperial Lineage but to advise the emperor as part of a special Council of Deliberative Officials, work in central-government ministries, perform diplomatic services, and lead military campaigns. Although the privileges granted them reinforced the loyalty of imperial kinsmen to the throne, the bureaucratization of the imperial lineage and the banners checked the tendency (already far weaker in China than in Europe) for a hereditary aristocracy with significant political power to emerge.

If the Manchus were quick to assimilate and adapt to Chinese bureaucratic forms of government, their Manchu experience also led them to modify and improve the political structure of the empire. The Imperial Household Department shows this Manchu influence quite clearly. This new institution, formally established in 1661, was explicitly intended to prevent the well-known usurpation of power by eunuchs that had characterized the courts of Ming and earlier dynasties. Eunuchs were still to be used, of course, to attend to the women of the imperial family, but they were to be directly supervised by officials of the Imperial Household. This institution was staffed by men from bondservant companies that had been formed of Han Chinese captured by the Manchus in the Liao River basin of Manchuria before 1644. Ideally suited to be brokers between conquerors and conquered, these Chinese bondservants were used as managers both of household affairs within the palace (the so-called Forbidden City in the center of Peking) and of the private income and property of the ruling family. During the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, this department grew in size and function. Some sixteen hundred officials were employed by it in 1796, a figure that can be evaluated by remembering that county magistrates in charge of the basic territorial administrative units of the empire numbered, by contrast, fewer than thirteen hundred men.

In addition to providing for the emperor’s food, clothing, and shelter, the Imperial Household engaged in a wide variety of activities extending far beyond the precincts of the Forbidden City. Its printing bureau published superb editions of scholarly works, and its agents managed the large landholdings confiscated in North China and reallocated to banner men. Other units supervised various monopolies: the sale of ginseng, a rare root much prized for medicinal uses that grew in Manchuria, the early Qing trade with Japan in the copper needed for coins, the immensely lucrative salt monopoly, the imperial textile and porcelain manufactories in central China, and the customs bureaus throughout the empire. The Imperial Household lent its considerable capital to favored merchants and exchanged funds with the Board of Revenue, all the while remaining outside the control of the regular bureaucracy. Its importance in the early Qing period mirrored not only the general strength of the throne but also the tendency to create bureaucracies outside of (and on top of) bureaucracies.

But no great revolution in governance had accompanied the Manchu conquest. The regular Qing bureaucracy was patterned on Ming models and was outlined in repeated editions of the administrative codes of the dynasty. Government business was handled at the capital by the Six Boards, ministries that, together with the Censorate, formed the primary central government bureaus. The functions of the ministries were indi-
that the world at this time. Offices were ranked on an eighteen-point scale and staffed largely by civil servants recruited through regular examination. Thousands of men (these posts were not open to women) made this bureaucracy their career and lived with the constraints and opportunities of its many rules and regulations. Qing rulers modified the Ming system of personnel evaluation, reviving the use of a sliding scale of rewards and punishments predicated on an official’s record in tax collection and criminal prosecution. It is believed that these improvements in personnel evaluation were a key factor in the increased efficiency of government during the early Qing. Manchu rulers also perpetuated, of course, the powerful traditional ideal of government service as the most desirable career for the educated man.

The framework of the examinations remained unchanged from the Ming: there was an elaborate tier of tests leading from the lowest, prefectural level shengyuan degree, to the juren degree on the provincial level, and to the jinshi degree on the national level. Winners of the prestigious national degree were ranked at an additional examination held in the palace in Peking, with the very best receiving special honors and very rapid advancement in the civil service. At each level, the number of degrees to be awarded was set in advance; quotas were used to guarantee a balanced representation among regions. (Despite these measures, men from one part of China, the Lower Yangtze, were still disproportionately represented among jinshi, for reasons we shall explore below.) Bannermen competed in a separate examination system that was more slowly freed of patronage and special privilege. Although the two highest degrees were supposed to be the prerequisite for office, in practice bannermen and even Chinese without these degrees did receive appointments. Another examination track requiring other skills supplied military officers for the Chinese army.

The civil-service examinations had been criticized in the Ming period for insisting on a highly artificial prose style and thus rewarding mediocrity and stifling talent. Although virtually no scholarly work has been done on the subject, the received wisdom is that the Qing examination system was also rigid in its traditionalism. However, although Manchu experiments with abolition of the stilted examination prose in the 1660s were halted because of conservative Chinese protests, in the late seventeenth century the examinations included essays on contemporary administrative problems, the writing of judgments in judicial cases, and discussions of Confucian texts with commentaries by the renowned twelfth-century scholar-official, Zhu Xi. For reasons not yet fully un-
stood, a shift away from this practical orientation took place in 1757 and
away from emphasis on the thought of Zhu Xi in 1799.

The long-term trend in Chinese history toward centralization of state
power was continued and advanced under strong interventionist early
Qing rulers, notably the Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors. Tightening up
the Ming system, they brought important government decision making
back into their own hands by reorganizing and streamlining the commu-
nications system. Through deft placement of bondservants, who were out-
side the civil-service bureaucracy and personally loyal to them, they were
also able to check on official performance and supplement the information
obtained through regular channels. A system of secret memorials sent
direct to the emperor, bypassing the Grand Secretariat and Grand Coun-
cil, came into being. By the early Qianlong reign, a new dual system of
communications that sent routine business to the Six Boards and urgent
items to the throne was in place.

But the streamlining of documentary flows to the emperor should not
be taken (as it frequently has) as proof that the rulers had achieved
despotic control over the bureaucracy. The continuing bureaucratization
resulted in the would-be despot being engulfed in a sea of paperwork and
procedural consultation. Nor did these centralizing reforms automatically
make government more effective. The Qing system soon became so vast
and complex that it was hard to carry out any policy at a distance. Detailed
studies indicate that emperors and central-government ministers had to
defer to and consult with powerful governors-general and governors if they
wished particular policies to succeed. Success in some programs, for
example the Qianlong “literary inquisition,” depended also on the
assistance of members of the elite. Emperors frequently took out their
frustrations on individual officials (although the kind of personal abuse
that was legendary in Ming times was not part of the Qing scene), but they
could not remove the significant constraints to their personal power.

There is every evidence that Qing rulers were aware of their limited
power. When his bondservant Cao Yin wanted to try to curb official
corruption in the Liang-Huai salt bureau (see p. 26), the Kangxi emperor
privately counseled him: “Stirring up trouble is not as good as preventing
trouble occurring; just concentrate on matters of immediate concern.
Otherwise I’m afraid that you’ll get more than you bargained for and pile
up difficulties for your successors. This sort of thing is not practicable on a
long-term basis.”1 The assumption underlying the Kangxi emperor’s
remarks—namely, that the bureaucracy as a whole was resilient and
powerful in resisting either imperial direction or internal reform—is a
familiar one. China was perhaps unusual both in the sophistication of
bureaucratic power and in the limits on it.

Another source of unresolved tension was the discrepancy between
the state’s desire to reach outside the bureaucracy and control localities
directly and its inability to do so without the cooperation of local elites.
The Qing had gone further than previous dynasties in formally restricting
the privileges of degree-holders, officials, and their relatives. Local
milits, which had often been led by local elites, were abolished or
absorbed into the Army of the Green Standard, and officials were charged
with supervising local elite management of community business such as
irrigation, granaries, and welfare. The Yongzheng emperor made a par-
ticular effort to reform fiscal reporting and regain control of the delivery of
taxes. But local elites, while siding with the state against local dissidents
and playing an informal role in resolving disputes, effectively resisted
official attempts at new land surveys and revisions of the tax records.

As time went by, furthermore, the Qing state began to have difficulty
dealing with the growth that accompanied peace and prosperity. Limited
by the existing communications technology and in some danger of collaps-
ing under its own weight, the government was reluctant to expand and
resisted making the revolutionary changes that would have involved local
elites more formally in the extension of the bureaucracy at the subcounty
and county levels. Instead, as we shall see, the tasks of government began
to outstrip the staff and the budget, and, while officials turned to informal
methods of obtaining funds, local elites took on more and more govern-
ment functions.

Despite pronouncements that the new dynasty welcomed Chinese
scholars into its service, the Manchu insistence on a system of dual
appointments in the capital and the widespread use of bannermen in
strategic provincial posts had put ambitious Chinese at a disadvantage in
bureaucratic placement. The principle of dyarchy placed a Manchu and a
Chinese at the head of each of the Six Boards and balanced one against the
other at many other critical bureaucratic junctures. In 1667, after initially
relying on Chinese bannermen (frequently with low qualifications) to staff
the top provincial posts, the emperor opened these positions to the now
more sinicized Manchus. The higher the office, the more likely it was to be
filled by a Manchu. In the course of the entire dynasty, half of the powerful
governors-general were Manchus, one-quarter were bannermen, and one-
quarter were Han Chinese. The Court of Colonial Affairs (Lifan Yuan),
which was in charge of Inner Asian matters, was staffed exclusively by
Mongols and Manchus. And, of course, the military forces of the Eight Banners were always commanded by bannermen.

The Manchus never relinquished their control of frontier policy, but Chinese were gradually able to enter government in greater numbers, while the creation of the Grand Council institutionalized a kind of Chinese-Manchu cooperation at the top that lasted until the twentieth century. The Hanlin Academy in Peking regained its traditional importance as the prestigious first step in the careers of the brightest degree-winners: its members advised the emperor, tutored princes, participated in official scholarly projects, and administered provincial and capital examinations. A separate quota guaranteed that Chinese bannermen, Manchus, and Mongols would also be represented in the Hanlin.

In the Kangxi and Yongzheng reigns, the examination system that fed the bureaucracy and created the symbols of local status was reestablished, and state-sponsored schools were set up in the provinces. Quotas allowed disadvantaged areas and minority groups to compete and promoted the social and political integration of the empire. They also helped equalize regional access to degrees (and hence to government posts), thus working against wealthy urban regions like the Lower Yangtze and in favor of the newly developing regions in the west and southwest.

General prosperity and population growth enlarged the size of the wealthy and educated classes and put pressure on the government to increase the number of degrees and posts. As a result, quotas for all three levels of degrees, which had been drastically reduced in the 1660s, experienced a persistent (but small) expansion.²

Two special examinations were held in 1679 and 1736 in order to bring eminent scholars into government, and other additional examinations for degrees and posts were given from time to time. In the course of the eighteenth century, extrastatutory competitions expanded the number of jinshi degrees by fully one-third. Although these exams tended to favor the more developed regions, they did increase the number of high degree-holders even as population growth continued to make this group a smaller percentage of the total populace. As the system became increasingly elaborate, qualifying examinations for each degree tightened competition while marking ever more refined levels of success and failure. The number of ranked posts in the formal bureaucracy also grew in the first three reigns, especially under Yongzheng. In the course of the century there was a 13 percent increase overall in the number of county-level units, as well as a regular upgrading of existing offices and an expansion of personnel.³

An unrelieved tension persisted between the formal criteria for success based on merit and the informal connections that were spun like webs through the examination and bureaucratic systems. Ambitious candidates for degrees found many ways of improving their chances for success in the face of steep odds. Licentiate-by-purchase (jiansheng) degrees, which qualified buyers for the provincial-level examinations, were sold more or less continuously. The juren examination given at Shantian prefecture (Peking), for which any licentiate-by-purchase in the empire could register, thus became an important loophole in the system of provincial quotas. In the course of the eighteenth century, more men registered here received jinshi degrees than from any of seven other provinces in Lingnan, the Southwest, or the Northwest.⁴ The sale of low-level posts and preferments was permitted to a very limited degree, in response, for example, to an urgent need for revenue and local loyalty caused by major disturbances such as the Three Feudatories (1673–1681) or White Lotus (1796–1805) rebellions.

Sharpened competition for degrees and office enhanced the importance of patronage and factional alliances to a man’s career. The view from the throne was not sympathetic. An edict of 1729 explains:

You people with the jinshi and juren degrees ... like to form cliques to advance your own personal interests. In order to climb to high office you have given each other undue assistance and protection.... Since I have ascended the throne, many people have warned me not to trust officials with the two highest degrees. ... Now, if you choose to continue [these] evil practices, as your emperor, I will not be able to give you an official position even if that is my wish.⁵

Imperial countermeasures strove to limit the power of personal connections by raising the qualifications for the post of examiner, introducing more frequent personnel reviews (from 1723), and multiplying the administrative regulations that governed behavior in office. Yet the problem could only be contained, not eliminated. The Yongzheng emperor was particularly active in drawing the line between public and private interest and in reducing the possibilities for corruption by officials, but his efforts did not long outlast his reign.

In the course of the eighteenth century, service in extrabureaucratic appointments and employment on scholarly projects became more readily available for educated men who had sought a regular career. From the Ming History project of the 1680s–1690s through the Siku quanshu (“Complete Library of the Four Treasuries”) compilation of the 1770s–1780s, as we shall see, the state generated high-status oppor-
It should not be surprising that Qing attention was directed toward those elites on whom the state was most dependent. The eventual success of the Qing in winning over Han Chinese to its service involved both the carrot and the stick, and it was not achieved without some harsh measures to suppress those who appeared to express a preference for the fallen Ming. The spirited resistance that had been encountered in the conquest of the Lower Yangtze, a center of Ming culture, was no doubt a contributing factor in the famous Jiangnan tax case of 1661, a symbol of the antagonistic relations of this early period. The incident began when officials in a number of wealthy prefectures in southern Jiangsu province were promised promotions if they could make up the large tax arrears from these areas. Initial measures to collect the back taxes (many in arrears were degree-holders) brought protests from the local literati at the Confucian temple in Suzhou, protests that suggested rebellious intent to the Manchu regents in Peking. A nasty persecution followed; eighteen scholars were executed, and more than eleven thousand literati were punished—moves that engendered bitter resentment toward the conquerors. In 1662, the already tense atmosphere was exacerbated by Manchu investigations in nearby Hangzhou, where a history of the fallen dynasty, the “Abbreviated Compilation on Ming History” that referred to the Qing as “barbarians,” had been published. Those connected with this project were carefully tracked down (including even those who had merely purchased the book), and seventy individuals were put to death, their families exiled, their estates confiscated. The negative repercussions of this case extended, of course, to the entire scholarly community in the Lower Yangtze. These persecutions became the problematic legacy of the conquest decades; repeated for effect on a smaller scale from time to time in the eighteenth century, they were offset, slowly, by other more conciliatory gestures from the throne.

The Qing not only sought to cow the haughty elites of the Lower Yangtze; they moved—with care—to limit as well the power of local notables generally. The relationship of local elites to the state was an ambiguous one: educated men from wealthy families were both useful and dangerous. Their voluntary services as community leaders supplemented government action but could also usurp government functions. Though informal connections made through attendance at academies and examinations enabled individual officials to carry out their duties effectively, they also threatened the impartiality of the bureaucracy. Under the new dynasty, local-elite control over county-level appointments was virtually eliminated except in some frontier areas, while in 1657 the Qing narrowed

SOCIAL POLICIES

The Manchus brought about no social revolution. With regard to Chinese society, as to state structure, they emphasized restoration of the established order—or a more ideal version of it. This order locked the throne into an interdependent relationship with wealthy and locally powerful families. The state offered the prestige and rewards of examination degrees and government office, and families with resources educated their sons for such service. In return and within limits, the government did not interfere with the local elites; in fact, it relied on them to supplement the resources of local officials. The Manchus did not change this system, they reinvigorated it. But they also attempted to modify it and to limit the power of local notables wherever possible. This conservative commitment, together with the inherent limits on state power in this period, gave the new rulers rather little room either to manipulate social processes or to adapt the system to changing social forces.
degree-holders’ exemptions from tax and corvée from the household to the individual. Both measures represented the elimination of significant sources of local power and privilege.

The state kept a particularly wary eye on those horizontal elite associations that could serve political functions. As we noted, not only were factions among officials denounced, but the formation of political associations by men outside of office was forbidden. In the early Qing, this ban seemed appropriate to many Han Chinese who remembered well the events of the late Ming. Then, weak emperors could not stop literati cliques formed around academies from extending their competition into the bureaucracy. Men associated with the Donglin Academy in Wuxi, a county seat in the Yangzte delta, had legitimized their political activity by defining it as a Confucian crusade to clean up widespread corruption at court. They mobilized men inside and outside government while trying to control critical appointments and eliminate their enemies from office. Their aggressiveness hardened factional lines and provoked a wave of purges and counterpurges that only further weakened the dynasty and promoted internal disorder. Reading this lesson of the past, Qing elites thus felt considerable ambivalence toward political associations outside government and acquiesced to imperial prohibitions; it was not until the nineteenth century that they returned to this arena.

The eighteenth century was a time of considerable social mobility, made possible by a variety of new sources of wealth. In general, the state was rather successful in luring those with new money into the examination and office channels that it could control. But, as we have already pointed out, they were almost too successful; although these systems were expanded in response to increased demand, not everyone could be formally accommodated. Sensitive themselves to the condescension of those elites with old money and extensive education, Qing rulers appear to have been quite comfortable with nouveau-riche merchants and other arrivistes. As outsiders, it was easier for them to welcome such families into the ranks of the Qing elite, and they did so enthusiastically.

The Qing state found it easier to regulate social mobility than to control the geographic mobility of their citizens. In theory, every household was registered with a local official. When corvée tax quotas were frozen at their 1711 level, the purpose of household registration shifted from taxation to census; in 1741, the baojia system became the primary vehicle for population registration. This was a system originally imposed by the government to promote mutual security: in theory, one hundred households were designated a jia, ten jia made up a bao, and the households within a jia were held responsible for the lawful behavior of all members. (In reality, it is unclear if the baojia ever functioned as it was supposed to.) Each household was supposed to update a door placard enumerating all members, and these placards became the basis for counting the population. As their reports reflect, officials complained about the difficulty of making this system work when they had to keep track of a population that was frequently on the move. During the eighteenth century, a series of regulations tried to deal with this problem (e.g., separating sojourners from permanent settlers by specifying the waiting time before a registration could be changed), but exceptions were continuously being made. Moving within and between regions was easy and increasingly commonplace for people at all social levels. In this case, as in many others that we will discuss, bureaucratic measures, however energetically implemented, could not keep up with the far-flung and growing population.

Qing emperors, because they themselves were non-Han Chinese and because their reigns witnessed the incorporation of many tribal groups into the empire, took a greater interest in minority affairs than had their Ming counterparts. Their policies aimed at the somewhat contradictory goals of, on the one hand, integrating minorities into the polity and, on the other, protecting them from Han civilization. Institutions that encouraged assimilation were more appropriate, and thus more successful, in this era of expansive Han settlement.

The non-Han peoples who became part of the Qing empire—not just in name but also in fact—included numerous hill and mountain tribes of south and southwest China (the Miao, Yao, Lolo, and many other smaller groups) as well as the Tibetans, Uighurs, Muslims, Mongols, and Manchus of the far west, north, and northeast. In the south and west, the Qing relied initially on the tusi (tribal headman) system, a traditional institution that allowed considerable autonomy for minority communities under the leadership of local chieftains whose power was simply confirmed by the throne. As migration into minority areas proceeded, however, the Yongzheng emperor began to convert the tusi territories into regular administrative units and to bureaucratize the positions of the remaining headmen. The state also forced many communities to accept Chinese colonists, and it promoted sinicization by constructing schools and temples.

In the far west, governance of the major cities along the Silk Road was put in the hands of prominent Muslim families, and Chinese colonists were fewer. Among the nomadic and seminomadic tribes of the north, a modified version of the banner system identified leaders, divided up
existing tribes, and provided a framework for trade and tribute that was meant to channel contact with the Chinese world. The Qing court nevertheless encouraged (perhaps inadvertently) the trend toward a more sedentary and urbanized society on the steppes by actively promoting the monastic centers of Lamaist (Tibetan) Buddhism.

Backed up by the ready deployment of banner armies against the recalcitrant, these measures had the effect of tightening the administration of frontier areas, compromising indigenous leaders, and promoting trade and travel. It was perhaps in recognition of the vulnerability of frontier peoples that Qing rulers, as we shall discuss in more detail in chapter 4, attempted to segregate and protect minorities. But once border areas were peaceful, merchants and settlers were on their own. Government prohibitions on Han migration to Mongolia, Manchuria, and Taiwan were thus frequently ignored, while the ban on intermarriage between Han and non-Han was impossible to enforce. Despite the restrictions on frontier trade intended to slow the extension of the market economy, the Qing could not prevent tribal peoples from falling into debt to Chinese merchants, and the law against sale of tribal lands to Chinese was easily evaded through varieties of mortgage and permanent-tenancy arrangements.

Qing efforts to prevent the once martial bannermen now living in garrisons within China from adopting Chinese culture were even more vigorous. Banner soldiers made their homes in separate enclaves in cities, intermarriage with Han Chinese and any form of ordinary employment were forbidden. Yongzheng had succeeded in breaking the power of the Manchu clans; his son Qianlong soon worried that Manchus were becoming too sinicized. The basic traditional social unit, the clan, was becoming less important than the family, and Qianlong observed that some bannermen were adopting surnames like the Chinese (it had been customary for Manchus to use only personal names in public communications). Qianlong, frequently identified as a patron of Chinese arts and letters, was also the codifier of the Manchu tradition. Under his direction, Manchu genealogies that had begun to be compiled in his father's reign were published, a history of the Eight Banners was written, the Manchu shamanistic tradition was fixed in written form, and myths substantiating the origins of the imperial clan were elaborated. Qianlong corrected the Manchu used in written memorials and scolded bannermen who could not speak their native tongue. Qianlong was thus responsible for strengthening the foundations of Manchu identity at a time when Manchus were in danger of forgetting their roots. But the imperial payroll could not support the expanding banner population or screen out the attractions of Chinese culture. By the end of the century these all but fruitless attempts to prevent assimilation were abandoned.

Like all Chinese dynasties, the Qing government saw itself as the ultimate authority on personal and public morality. The first emperors followed the example of the Ming founder, whose hortatory Six Maxims had urged the populace to be filial to parents, respectful to elders, and amiable with neighbors, to instruct their children, remain in their place, and do no evil. In 1652, the Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644–1661) had these maxims carved in stone and posted in each prefecture. Kangxi issued his own Sixteen Injunctions in 1670, and Yongzheng amplified them in 1724. The Sacred Edict, as the injunctions were known, was to be read twice a month in every county of the empire. A great many other imperial pronouncements were issued to edify and instruct all segments of society, from bannermen (who were to preserve their Manchu virtues) to shengyuan and other lower degree-holders (who were to promote local law and order) to the common people (who were to avoid geomancy, pilgrimages, and heterodox religion). Nearly impossible to enforce, these pronouncements usually went unheeded: Manchu culture became a memory, lower degree-holders threw their weight around, and ordinary people went right on visiting sacred mountains and consulting geomancers about where to put houses and graves.

Nevertheless, ever optimistic about the power of the normative ideal, both emperors and elites took advantage of the expansion of the publishing industry to write books aimed at popular moral improvement. Chen Hongmou, for example, an eminent provincial official of the Qianlong reign, wrote a set of five books discussing not only proper official behavior but also community life, the raising of children, and the education of women. Though these didactic efforts were part of a venerable tradition, they were also specific responses to the geographic mobility and social change of this period. Frequent imperial injunctions about frugality and rationality naturally had a hollow ring in light of the extravagant rituals, unfilial sons, and fondness for pleasure typical of eighteenth-century court life.

In their policy toward religion, Qing rulers also combined Chinese tradition with a non-Han perspective. In principle, they tried to be impartial and to tolerate diversity. Certain Manchu shamanistic rituals were kept alive within the privacy of the Forbidden City, while Tibetan Lamaist Buddhism was adopted as a kind of imperial cult and promoted as an important facet of foreign relations with Central Asia. Within China,
Islam was given protection and Buddhism, Taoism, and most popular cults were encouraged.

The Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong emperors actively patronized Buddhism inside China. A "Dragon Edition" of the enormous Buddhist Canon was reprinted in 1738 under imperial sponsorship and then translated into Manchu in 1790. The emperors visited famous pilgrimage mountains such as Wutaishan in Shanxi (dedicated to the bodhisattva of wisdom) and showered the monasteries with gifts. Imperial calligraphers graced temples of the popular religion at famous sites like Mount Tai in Shandong and shrines dedicated to deities such as Guanyin, Tiantong (Empress of Heaven), or Guandi (God of War). They not only maintained the official cult but enlarged it, providing funds for designated deities in the budgets of officials from the emperor down to the county magistrate so that temples could be maintained and regular offerings provided. This kind of support both enhanced the prestige of selected temples and sites and created an atmosphere favorable for the growth of popular religious institutions generally.

There was, however, considerable imperial suspicion of religious voluntary organizations, which embraced temple fair and pilgrimages. Following Ming precedent, the government also firmly outlawed sects they perceived as heterodox. Here, as in other instances where popular behavior ran counter to government wishes, enforcement could only be selective. Sectarians were singled out for particular attention, but although the throne usually called for harsh punishments according to the letter of the law, local officials looked the other way if sectarian activity was not disruptive. Repression was more uniformly implemented during the series of small millenarian uprisings that took place in different parts of north China late in the eighteenth century and were seen as military emergencies. Qing policy toward Christian missionaries was two-stranded. Jesuits had been at the court in Peking since the sixteenth century, and some were permitted to remain as artists and consultants on condition that they refrain from preaching their religion. Those who tried to proselytize—and a small but persistent group of Catholic missionaries led hunted lives in order to minister to converts—were punished, when they were caught, with the same strictness as others who followed "deviant paths."

Despite its large and sophisticated bureaucracy, the Qing state's capacity to deal with social problems was actually quite limited. The traditional system worked because as long as the ideal of government service remained attractive and the Neo-Confucian philosophy on which the examinations were based remained convincing, the state could manipulate the symbols and the avenues to power and could use them to shape the behavior of would-be members of the elite. This symbiotic relationship with wealthy and learned families, renewed with each generation through the exams, assured a commitment to a loosely defined orthodoxy by the most powerful groups in this society. Standards dictated by the throne could thus be imposed with some hope of success upon those who sought degrees and office.

Aided by these elites, and with no church or aristocracy to rival its influence, the Chinese state could also define right and wrong for the society at large and could use both laws and moral suasion to enforce these norms. Emperors and elites found exhortation a congenial method for promoting right behavior among citizens, even though the results were not always discernible. The army was at hand, of course, to give muscle to the law, but even laws rested on some degree of social consensus. Whatever the statutes said, a county magistrate with a small staff found it quite difficult to deal with large social problems or to alter widely accepted behavior. It was one thing to arrest burglars or murderers, quite another to prevent changes in residence, restrict trade, eliminate ethnic hostility, or put an end to popular religious festivals. Thus, while many Qing social policies were quite distinctive, they were most successful when riding with, not against, developments that were largely outside their control.

**Economic Rehabilitation**

The health of this huge and diverse economy was obviously a critical concern to early Manchu rulers—and of fundamental importance to the health of society in general. In 1644 the Manchus found much to be done, but the initial stages of recovery were rather easy to promote.

Any new dynasty was expected to provide relief from the harsh corvée and taxes that accompanied the last decades of the preceding government. These were welcome responses to the general cry for relief and redress and to the devastation of localities involved in rebellions and wars of conquest. In the 1640s and 1650s, the Manchus abolished late Ming surtaxes whenever possible and granted tax exemptions to areas damaged by fighting, but remissions were eliminated by the urgent need for funds to finance the conquest. Attempts to recompile the tax registers were frustrated, and eventually registers based on inaccurate sixteenth-century quotas had to be used. In order to make sure that people paid and that officials relayed the monies, various decrees spelled out the con-
sequences for local magistrates who failed to collect their tax quotas. A sliding scale of punishments for gentry, degree-holders, and yamen (government office) personnel who consistently failed to pay their own taxes was institutionalized in 1658. The laws could be selectively enforced, as they were during the 1661 Jiangnan tax case, a clear demonstration of the state’s willingness to attack gentry prerogatives to obtain tax funds.

It was not until the 1680s, after the Ming loyalist and Three Feudatories uprisings had been quelled, that the Qing began to permit tax remissions on a significant scale. By 1711, the tide was running in the other way and total tax remissions exceeded one hundred million taels (ounces of silver), more than the annual central-government revenues. The dìng (corvée) and land taxes were merged into a single tax that was collected in silver and thus easier to assess and administer; this reform promoted the general transition from payment in kind, typical of the Ming, to payment in money. As many scholars have noted, the shift from registering people to registering land was a sensible adaptation to the long-run trend toward an increasingly commercialized and fluid society. The permanent freezing of the corvée tax quotas in 1713, hailed as a new symbol of imperial benevolence, not only reflected the government’s inability to rehaul the tax system but also blocked future increases.

In this huge agrarian economy the land tax was the largest single source of revenue for the government. Fiscal motives and the ideological priority long accorded to agriculture had prompted the Manchus to make early efforts to put abandoned plots back into production. Because about two hundred million mu, or more than a quarter of the total cultivated acreage ca. 1600, had slipped off government rolls by 1661, restoration of agriculture had been an important goal for the new dynasty. They had particularly needed the “tribute grain” that selected provinces in northern and central China supplied annually to Peking (one of the few Qing taxes still paid largely in kind) in order to feed the thousands of bannermen and officials in the capital area who depended on the throne for their livelihood.

Revitalization of crop production began with relocating wandering households and encouraging settlement of empty land through tax exemptions and grants of aid—oxen, tools, seeds, or simply money. These programs, which obviously met with popular approval, gained momentum toward the end of the seventeenth century, and in the Kangxi period they were carried out in the Chengdu basin of western China, in Hunan and Hubei, and in the far southwest. Despite their concern about unruly migrants, the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors nonetheless promoted projects to reclaim abandoned lands and settle new frontiers as the empire expanded through military conquest.

Both on the frontiers and inside China proper some new lands were opened for settlement with the aid of the New World food crops that had been introduced into China in the late sixteenth century and were simultaneously transforming the diet of people all over the world. It was in the Qing that the impact of these crops on Chinese patterns of land use became significant, largely through the actions of individual farmers. The cultivation of marginal lands expanded dramatically with the planting of maize and the white potato. The sweet potato, known as the poor man’s staple, provided insurance against famine, while peanuts, a new source of nutritious oil, caused a revolution in land use on hilly land and in the sandy soils along river banks. Tobacco, another sixteenth-century discovery to which the Chinese like many others were soon addicted, competed with rice and sugarcane for the best lands and became an important cash crop.

Less dramatic and equally pragmatic changes in cropping patterns were probably even more important than the American food plants in raising agricultural production. The southward migration of northern dryland crops such as wheat, the extension of rice cultivation to newly irrigated lands, the gradual increase in double cropping of rice in the south, and particularly the double cropping of winter wheat or barley with summer millet or rice all slowly but significantly increased output.

The construction and reconstruction of water-control projects went hand in hand with land reclamation. This kind of collective activity was so characteristic of the early phases of a dynasty that one can speak of hydraulic cycles moving in tandem with political consolidations in China. The importance of the state to water-control systems varied with agricultural and topographical conditions. In south and central China, where rice was the dominant staple crop, irrigation was essential to the agrarian economy; in consequence, elaborate systems had been devised by local communities to provide water to interconnected fields at appropriate points in the growing season. In north China, by contrast, control of the heavily silted Yellow River, which frequently flooded the eastern portion of the North China plain, required large-scale state management and coordination with the related water level of the Grand Canal, the major waterway supplying Peking.

The new dynasty restored water-control systems with great vigor, demonstrating the effectiveness of imperial action in this sphere. To the Yellow River, whose control was vital to their political survival, the Qing
devoted some 10 percent of their total revenues. During the late seventeenth century, the Yellow River Administration, which was made an independent agency by the Qing, had constructed the Qing River (1686) and had dredged the mouth of the Yellow River (1688) and strengthened its embankments (1699). These projects particularly benefited the vulnerable low-lying Huaiabei region (on the periphery between the North China and Lower Yangtze macroregions), whose damaged economy was successfully rehabilitated in the late seventeenth century. Elsewhere, and particularly in southern and central China, government encouraged private initiative and management. In these regions, it was peace and land reclamation that stimulated reinvestment in irrigation in the early Qing. Although the Qing record in construction of new water-control systems does not compare in number (except in Gansu and Shaanxi) with the peak of Ming activity in the sixteenth century, the scale of Qing projects may have been larger; certainly the repair of older works in developed regions took place continually throughout the eighteenth century.

Because of the importance of water transport to the economy, rehabilitation of water systems was beneficial for commerce as well as agriculture. Dredging to remove silt was essential if the river ports on the Yangtze, China’s major navigable waterway, were to be kept open to junks and so permit the flow of commodities required to sustain a population in the delta approaching a density of more than one thousand per square mile. These efforts were managed by local elites during the early Qing, while the government assumed more responsibility in the area around Peking. The Grand Canal was the key to grain transport to the capital, regarded by Kangxi as one of the three greatest problems of his early reign. Repairs to the canal, especially the critical junctures with the Yellow and Huai rivers, involved officials, merchants, and local elites, and were characterized by a mixture of public and private efforts. Imperial sponsorship of a large-scale effort to dig wells for irrigation in Shaanxi province in the 1730s, for example, was supplemented by private investment in well construction in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River drainage area.

This restoration of the economy in the early Qing, partially directed, partially spontaneous, laid the foundations for an enormous expansion not only of land under cultivation but also of population. One of the most important events of the Qing period was thus an unintended (but not unwanted) consequence of prosperity. From the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, China’s population tripled, from between one hundred and one hundred and fifty million to four hundred million, while its cultivated land doubled, from six hundred to twelve hundred million mu.9

Once the economy had been restored to working order, the Qing state attempted to keep it running smoothly. Following traditional practices of demonstrated effectiveness, early emperors acted vigorously to prevent the worst consequences of famine by setting up and actually maintaining a reserve granary system. Every province was supposed to purchase or retain reserve stocks in the “ever-normal granaries” located in each county, so named because they were meant to stabilize the supply and price of grain. During the eighteenth century, the granaries generally worked with remarkable efficiency. In the famine south of Peking in 1743–1744, for example, the government announced tax remissions, surveyed affected households, classified famine victims, set up settlement camps and gruel kitchens, and distributed relief to an estimated 1.6 million people. The court was able to bring additional grain into the famine area and devise long-term measures for agricultural reconstruction in rural areas. Such efficiency was, of course, dependent not just on available reserves and good transportation but on the quality of the government’s information network as well. During the eighteenth century, reports on local grain prices became a regular feature of county, prefecture, and provincial reports. Massive famine-relief operations in subsequent periods, reflecting continuing monetization of the economy, seem to have distributed cash for grain purchases rather than direct grants of grain.

Government efforts to ameliorate the disruptive consequences of famine did not, however, reflect a uniformly interventionist attitude toward the market. While emperors kept a wary eye on grain prices in cities, particularly those in key regions like the Yangtze delta, they and their advisers were very cautious about state intervention in general. One study of the debates over state grain policy in 1748 notes the Qianlong emperor’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (millions)</th>
<th>Cultivated land (mill. shiu)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td>120–200</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650</td>
<td>100–150</td>
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<td>200–250</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>1,210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

trade in rice along the Yangtze and along the coast. But the state barely began to tap the tax potential of the growing commerce, as it failed to tax the expanding agricultural base. When the state intervened in trade, moreover, it did so primarily to safeguard the stability of local economies. Such was the motive for the imperial ban on exports of raw silk from 1759 to 1762, when the emperor agreed with the Commissioner of the Imperial Silk Manufactory in Suzhou that foreign sales pushed up local prices and threw weavers out of work. Even after 1762 concern about unemployment brought restrictions on the type and amount of silk that could be exported and put a ceiling on raw-silk exports for the rest of the century.

Eighteenth-century urbanization also proceeded independent of government interference. A minimalist urban policy sought to dampen causes for unrest by ensuring stable grain markets through a system of reserves. Although the northern section of Peking (where most of the residents were bannermen) was an exception, the government generally stayed out of direct management and provision of urban services.

Nevertheless, the state’s role was essential, if not sufficient, for the economic advance that characterized the eighteenth century. As we shall see further in chapter 4, the Qing had established the preconditions for prosperity by imposing law and order, encouraging new settlement and agricultural rehabilitation, and opening up frontier regions. Moreover, the government was extremely attentive to the larger social effects of economic activity. The state sought to assure full employment where possible, but was concerned above all with social stability. Although economic growth was only a by-product of Qing policy, a by-product that brought problems as well as benefits, by the end of the century growth had come to be taken for granted. The jolt given by the depression of the 1830s and 1840s was thus all the more surprising and difficult to deal with.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

It was Qing success in managing relations with China’s neighbors that made possible a century-and-a-half of peace. To organize these relations, the Manchus perpetuated the tributary model inherited from previous dynasties. This model presumed the Middle Kingdom’s moral, material, and cultural superiority over other nations, and it required that those who wished to deal or trade with China had to come as supplicants to the emperor, Son of Heaven, ruler of “All Under Heaven.” This image—in part an illusion—of centrality, superiority, and self-sufficiency veiled considerable realpolitik in Qing behavior toward other countries.
We can see the tributary system in its fullest form in Qing relations with its model tributary, Korea. From the mid-seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century, the Korean court sent an average of three embassies a year to Peking to present tribute, proffer thanks for the imperial grace, congratulate the emperor on his birthday, offer incense on his death, and consult on the conduct of foreign relations. Korea's inferior status in this relationship was symbolized in various ways. When the Korean envoy was received by the Qing emperor, he performed the kowtow (complete prostration and knocking of the head on the ground) and addressed the emperor in terms appropriate for someone of lesser status. The Korean court employed the Chinese calendar, and Qing emperors confirmed the authority of Korean kings and bestowed noble rank on them. In fact, Qing approval was sought for the appointment of Korean royal consorts, the selection of an heir, and the creation of posthumous honors for rulers. As an act of Qing generosity, gifts were exchanged in the course of the tributary mission, while envoys were usually permitted to bring along goods to sell privately.

For its part, the Qing court accepted certain responsibilities to nurture and protect its tributaries. The implications of this role were clearly spelled out in the case of the northern Vietnamese kingdom of Annam, where the Qing intervened with force in 1788 to put down a local rebellion and restore the king to the throne. Although their protégé was later ousted, the next ruler reestablished the tributary relationship, accepted investiture by the Qianlong emperor, and even attended his eightieth-birthday celebrations.

The kingdoms along China's eastern and southern borders had rarely posed important military threats to China and were, moreover, sedentary agrarian societies that had long displayed a flattering readiness to adopt Chinese ideas and institutions. The elites of Korea, Japan, and Annam studied classical Chinese and considered themselves part of China's cultural system. Relations with these countries, administered through the Board of Rites, were much more likely to fit into the tributary model. Because the Qing court also tended to view maritime trade and traders as peripheral to its strategic and economic interests and as part of this manageable sphere, the European nations who came to trade at China's ports were handled within this same tributary framework.

Central Asia was another matter. Most military challenges had traditionally come from these Inner Asian frontiers, and the Manchus, who had followed this route to power, were acutely aware of the need for military supremacy in this region. Inner Asian matters were therefore handled, deftly and with careful attention, by a new and separate agency, the Court of Colonial Affairs, established even before the Manchus had entered China proper.

In the eighteenth century, the Qing attempted to secure control of its long Central Asian frontier by diplomacy as well as force. From Nurjagaci's time, there had been close ties between the Aisin Gioro and the chieftains of the eastern Mongol tribes, cemented by marriage exchanges that continued throughout the dynasty. The princes of the Mongol tribes in what is now Inner Mongolia had joined Hongtaiji when he proclaimed the Qing dynasty in 1636; in 1691 the khans or rulers of the Khalkha tribes in present-day Outer Mongolia submitted to Manchu overlordship. There was an intermittent state of war between the western Mongol tribes in Zungharia and the Qing that did not end until 1755, when the Chinese armies aided by their Mongol allies finally exterminated these rivals. But during this long period of hostilities, both trade and tribute from Central Asia continued. In the process of eliminating the Zunghars, the Qing also extended indirect control over distant Tibet, seized the Ili valley, some three thousand kilometers west of Peking, and in 1758–1759 conquered the oases in the Tarim Basin, incorporating this region into the empire as Xinjiang (New Dominions).

If force was an important component of relations with Central Asia, it was nonetheless tempered by other tactics and directed toward the expansion of the Qing empire. The Manchus, who like the Mongols had converted to Tibetan Buddhism, patronized and tried to control the Tibetan church. They invited the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama to Peking and sponsored the printing and translation of Buddhist works in Tibetan and Mongolian. A set of temples, including a replica of the Potala complex (the residence of the Dalai Lama in Lhassa) and a wooden statue of Guanyin more than thirty meters high, was built at the imperial summer retreat in Rehe ( Jehol) in northeast China to impress visiting Central Asians. (See plate 1.) Qing emperors portrayed themselves in the nomadic world as bodhisattva-rulers, reincarnations of Manjusri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, thus blending the Tibetan theory of the ruler as a living incarnation of a god and the Chinese Buddhist Manjusri cult identified with the sacred site of Mount Wutai in Shanxi. The Kangxi and Qianlong emperors both visited this mountain many times and encouraged pilgrimages by Mongols with publication of guidebooks in their language.

In their relations with Central Asia, the Qing showed a readiness to pursue flexible policies that were sometimes quite inconsistent with the tributary ideal. Relations with Russia differed from those with other
PLATE 1. Following the precedent set by Kangxi, Qianlong's sixtieth birthday in 1770 was the occasion for a grand celebration at the summer palace in Rehe attended by Mongol princes and other tribal leaders from Central Asia. To celebrate, a copy was built of the Potala Palace, residence of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa; this edifice was designed to impress the visiting dignitaries (believers in Lamaist Buddhism) with Qianlong's piety and power.

Western countries precisely because of Russia's strategic position in north Asia. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw Qing rulers attempt to check Russian advance into this region and to use the Russians as a buffer against the Mongols. Treaties in 1689 and 1727 fixed common borders and opened two markets for Sino-Russian trade. The Russians were permitted to open a small ecclesiastical mission in Peking and began to send a "tributary" mission to the capital once every three years (which they continued to do until 1755). When circumstances led the Chinese to put great importance on Russian agreement (for example, in their request that the czars remain neutral in the Chinese campaigns against the Zungghars), Qing ambassadors had been willing to perform the kowtow in Moscow (in 1731) and St. Petersburg (in 1732).

In short, the now legendary rigidity with which the Qing court seems to have responded to Western pressures for diplomatic relations on a basis of equality in the nineteenth century was not evident in the dynasty's position vis-à-vis countries along its sensitive Inner Asian frontier. Foreign trade was similarly not as restricted to formal ruler-to-ruler relations as might be implied by the tributary ideal, born centuries earlier in a less commercial era. Tribute missions were certainly occasions for trade, but extensive exchange was also permitted in markets on China's frontiers: on the border with Korea, on the Russo-Mongolian border at Kiakhta, and at selected ports along the coast.

Nor was trade always a matter of as much indifference to the Chinese as the rhetoric of the tributary model suggested: the trade between Chinese and Russians at Kiakhta, for example, allowed the Chinese to obtain the superior horses of the nomadic world in exchange for tea, textiles, and other products. Despite the inflammatory declaration by the ruling Tokugawa lords in Japan that the Qing was an illegitimate ruling house that did not have the Mandate of Heaven, a pressing need for copper motivated the Manchu court to send Imperial Household merchants to the southern Japanese port of Nagasaki during 1699–1715. Japanese insistence on trade permits after 1715 only temporarily halted the eager Chinese purchases.

In general, the importance of foreign commerce to the Qing state and economy before the nineteenth century has probably been considerably underestimated. Seaborne foreign trade, recovering from the seventeenth-century contractions, expanded to unprecedented volumes in the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as both Chinese and European merchants responded in ever more organized fashion to economic growth at home and the creation of worldwide trade networks. While the Qing state did not actively promote this trade, it was happy to benefit from a balance of trade that was consistently in China's favor. As a result, Chinese were drawn increasingly into the world market; coastal merchants dealt more frequently with foreigners, and Chinese producers tailored their goods for foreign sale.

The success of Qing foreign relations (measured by most standards)
could be judged by the expansion of empire and enlarged participation in world trade. But although these developments promoted diversity, they also enhanced China’s pride in her own culture and sense of invulnerability. These attitudes of complacency and self-confidence, characteristic of Chinese society in the eighteenth century, were a mixed legacy for the future.

Our survey of early Qing government policies to reestablish and maintain order underlines the importance of the state to social and economic developments in the early Qing. Although Chinese historians in their almost obsessive concern with the state may have exaggerated its power, Qing policies and programs did play crucial roles in securing the frontiers, rehabilitating the war-damaged economy, restoring the traditional status system, and reinvigorating the bureaucracy. Our assessment of the limitations of imperial and bureaucratic power does not contradict the undeniable role of the state in eighteenth-century history.

In our next chapters, we shall consider how social and economic institutions, systems of belief, and modes of action, not only directed by the throne but also inherited from the past, responded to the new order established by the Qing rulers and to the long-term economic growth that had begun in the late Ming. Later, when we shift from a national to a regional perspective, we shall see how government policies affected different areas very differently.

From very early times, the orderly management of human relationships has been a central concern of Chinese thought. Since at least the time of Confucius (who lived in the fifth century B.C.) hierarchical relations between individuals have been upheld as the source of social order, and the family has been a primary social institution. These ideals persisted even as social realities became far more complicated. A look at the Qing period will illustrate this complexity and will show how social relations beyond those created by family or state came to be extremely important.

Admirers of Chinese society have praised its ethics and family values, supportive kinship networks, and appreciation of the lubricating effects of etiquette and good manners. Critics have emphasized its social fragmentation, pervasive particularism and localism of social relations, lack of developed class consciousness, state intolerance of competing networks, and the excessive importance attached to kinship ties. Without denying the general validity of these views, we would prefer to emphasize here the basic versatility of the Chinese repertoire of social relationships.

This entire book is about Chinese society, but we shall begin with a look at the most important grounds for association and community in the eighteenth century. Future chapters will show in more detail not only how social relations responded to the events of this period but how they varied in different parts of China.

KINSHIP
The basic unit of production and consumption in Chinese society was the jia, the unit consisting of kin related by blood, marriage, or adoption, that