Chinese Society
in the
Eighteenth Century

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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.

2

Social Relations

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
had a common budget and common property. Daughters married out of the patrilineal group, while sons (and their wives) shared the residence of their fathers. Popularly translated as “family,” the jia was upheld in traditional China as a metaphor for the state and the foundation of correct—and hierarchical—relationships. Because the normative ideal admitted no room for historical change, Chinese commitment to it has tended to hide from the historian developments in familial structure over time and differentiation according to class.

The pooling of resources and energies into a corporate economy at the household level and the concerted effort to maintain the patriline were characteristic of families at every level of society in the Qing. For a significant portion of the population, however, merely sustaining the jia resources and the patriline from one generation to the next was a terrible struggle. Small fragmented families were especially common among the poor, where family cycles were short and relationships simple.

Among the wealthy and in certain types of farm economy, families were larger and more complex. A rich man could afford to marry young, remarry if his wife died, and take secondary wives even as an old man; consequently, the wealthy fathered more surviving children. The Chinese ideal was just such a family of multiple conjugal units of many generations. Including servants, the size of a rich household could total several hundred persons. These joint families had characteristically complex internal dynamics. Family affairs were typically controlled by the patriarch, head of the jia, who had extensive powers backed by law over members. The patriarch divided up the budget among the constituent conjugal units, assigned his sons to different careers, arranged his children’s marriages, and punished them at will. With each member working for a common goal, the jia at its best was a powerful institution for achieving and perpetuating wealth and status.

Judging from developments in fiction, where the household becomes an enveloping world in itself, domestic life among the wealthy appears to have become more absorbing and more important to personal development. Indeed, one of the best introductions to life among the Chinese elite in the eighteenth century is the long novel Dream of Red Mansions (also translated as The Story of the Stone), which describes in remarkable detail the enormous household of a wealthy family in slow decline. Family life was a microcosm of the larger society, with deep ties of affection constantly threatened by sibling rivalry, inappropriate sexual attraction, bickering among concubines and wife, and skirmishes between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The social gap between first and secondary wives—the latter were usually purchased and came from a lower social stratum—was paralleled by the different regional and social origins of the domestic servants.

Despite these undercurrents of potential conflict, the overriding contrast lay between the secure domestic milieu and the outside world of men, where the family’s fortunes had to be made and defended. The pampered upbringing given to sons of elite households was frequently antithetical to the self-discipline and personal exertion required to move ahead in the larger society. The immense popularity of Dream of Red Mansions suggests that the great reluctance felt by its teenage hero to leave his sheltered life in Prospect Garden and go out into the world of adult men was shared by the book’s elite male readers. The sympathetic portrayal of women in this novel, and the dozens of popular plays of the scholar-beauty genre, in which the stranger with whom one falls in love turns out to be an eminently suitable marriage partner, suggest a tension between individual preference and family interests that was not so easily resolved in real life, where arranged marriages and submission to parental authority was the accepted norm.

Economic trends also threatened solidarity. Most households, especially in the more commercially prosperous parts of China, diversified the occupations of their members. Although cash crops and the spread of markets allowed individuals to develop their own (sometimes seasonal) contributions to jia income, successful pursuit of family strategies demanded the cohesiveness and solidarity of the family unit. Geographical mobility, especially sojourning by males (which was so common in this period) rested firmly on jia and lineage solidarity. But unless shored up, the entrepreneurship encouraged by mobility and opportunity could work against the expected domination of both women and younger men by their elders and by collective interests.

The family was the central, all-encompassing institution for the women and children who made up fully 65 percent of this society. Social organizations beyond the family were run by and for men. This male world began with the extended family. Households were organized and property inherited through the patriline, and agnatic descent was a venerable and orthodox basis for public action. Lineage organizations based on descent from a common ancestor were the natural extension of the jia and, in the Qing, developed a range of activities in response to local conditions and needs.

The repertory of collective actions engaged in by agnates (males related to one another through the male line) in this period followed
enduring patterns. Shared graveyards and rituals, ancestral tablets and halls, written genealogies, and corporate income-producing property used to support education, charity, and rites were hallmarks of family organization at least as early as the Song (960–1279). They also characterize the lineages created in the late seventeenth century, when the end of the conquest phase stimulated an increase—as documented in the number of genealogies and in the acquisition of corporate property by kin groups—of this form of family organization. Different forms and degrees of cooperation were to be found in different parts of China among different social classes, but in general terms, it was shared property that enabled a descent group to act as a corporate organization.

The Chinese patriline emphasized continuity between the living and the dead over the generations and created this community through regular religious rituals known in English by the misnomer ancestor worship. (Because ancestors could help their descendants, offerings and prayers were made to them, but they were not worshiped as gods.) Annual ancestral rituals and common grave sites were the cheapest and probably most ordinary form of agnostic cooperation; they were found throughout China among all but the very poor. Responsibility for such rituals was inherited by the eldest (often the only) son. It was more difficult for most people to gather enough money to purchase land whose income could be used to finance the rituals; but ownership of ritual land was an ideal, and it was the most common form of corporate property. Literacy and wealth were required for the compilation of genealogies, which can be seen as social charters for these kin groups. Even more money was necessary to endow and build ancestral halls, so the appearance of these magnificent edifices was a public declaration of wealth and local power.

The forms of lineage organization were differentiated by region and to some degree by class. The dominant lineage type, which owned large corporate properties, exercised extensive control over its constituent jia, and subordinated lesser surnames, was rare in North China and the Northwest and common in Lingnan and the Southeast Coast. Such lineages, typically found in rural areas, maximized their local dominance through the collective action of rich and poor relatives. Although they presented a united front to the outside world, they were at the same time highly stratified internally and rife with competition among branches and subbranches. Periodic endowments to support separate branch ancestral halls reflected (and contributed to) the continuous process of internal segmentation and the growth of some branches at the expense of others.

The more open, inclusive, prestige-oriented lineages of Tongcheng county in Anhui studied by Hilary Beattie appear to be typical of areas (like the Lower Yangtze) that had better opportunities for entry into elite circles beyond the rural village. By contrast, the boundary-conscious, defensive, exclusionist, and highly corporate nature of twentieth-century Guangdong lineages may reflect, in addition to their local orientation, the intense competition for resources characteristic of the economic downswing this region had experienced since the early nineteenth century. The Tongcheng lineage was composed of only the most successful lines (in terms of holding office) within the descent group. This type of lineage owned relatively little corporate property (when measured against the holdings of individual households), exercised weak authority over members, and directed strategies toward national rather than local prominence. Oriented toward degree-holders who were part of the Qing national elite, they competed (and intermarried) not with their neighbors but with these other more distant prominent families. Such an organization enabled elites to tap a very large and dispersed network of agnates: the Hengyang (Hunan) Wei lineage studied by Liu T'ou-jung, for example, had five branches that had spread throughout this Middle Yangtze region and extended into the Upper Yangtze, the Southwest, Lingnan, and even Northwest China.

Outside parts of central and south China, lineage organization tended to be even more attenuated and rudimentary. Many North China descent groups, even those boasting degree-holders and officials, possessed only miniscule parcels of corporate land. Few compiled printed genealogies, and the primary purpose of the lineage seemed to be to make good marriages and so create useful networks of affines (relatives through marriage).

Public forms of lineage collective action appear to have been affected also by the varying types of status competition found in different localities. In places where lineages were strong and visible, higher-order lineages united component lineages to attempt to dominate marketing areas or even a whole county, encouraging the formation of competing same-surname organizations based on fictive kinship. In places where genealogies were commonplace among the elite, no respectable descent group could be without one; where ancestral halls were public symbols of a lineage's longevity and prosperity, any rising group needed one. When some elite families demonstrated their public spirit by building orphanages, schools, roads, bridges, or granaries, other families did likewise. Some activities served best to enhance the status of a group as it grew and acquired prestige, others served to protect its resources in hard
times. But many elite families found that the lineage did not fill their need to create broad alliances with other powerful elites or to narrow their obligations to poor kinsmen. Such households found their strongest allies among affines rather than agnates.

Marriage, as Maurice Freedman has noted, was "by far the most important contractual relationship in Chinese society.") It took place through a variety of arrangements that displayed considerable flexibility in constructing predictable relationships between families. At all levels, moreover, ties between affines—although not part of the patrilineal model—were important grounds for cooperation through other corporate and voluntary institutions.

Because access to women was unequal in this society and males outnumbered females, marriage patterns varied with class as well as with conditions in the society at large. In general, the Chinese preferred to select brides from families that were slightly lower in social status than their own; this custom helped promote docility in brides (and thus a peaceful household). People of higher social position, however, found their marriage partners among a more exclusive set of families spread over a wider geographic range; they had a preference for what Arthur Wolf calls the "major" form of marriage, in which the wife came as an adult to join her husband's household. Wealthy households were able to provide secondary wives for their men and preferred to keep widows of deceased male members from remarrying, as symbols of fidelity and chastity. Sustained intermarriage between certain surnames supported a corresponding intensification of relations with affines among literati and merchants of the eighteenth century, as among earlier elites. The noted scholars Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801) and Liu Fenglu (1776–1829) were among many men of the period whose ties with their maternal relatives were strong and decisive in their careers. Naturally the bride, protected by prominent parents and brothers, was able to hold a position of considerable authority and respect in her husband's household. As a first wife, she would never have been given as a secondary wife, she would eventually become the matriarch of the jia, with control of the household. She would receive ritual homage from any secondary wife chosen by her husband and be ritually acknowledged as mother by all offspring, not just her own. She brought in a considerable dowry if she came from a well-to-do family, and at least a portion of that dowry was her own, to dispose of as she pleased. Occasionally, the sums over which women exercised control were extremely large; it was not just in novels that women lent out money at high rates of interest or invested in commercial ventures.

Among the poor and in areas and times of economic contraction, a reverse pattern existed. Men, if they married at all (they had to be able to pay the brideprice), had fewer wives and were more likely to remain widowers; widows, on the other hand, were in great demand as wives, and their kin were eager to be paid to see them gone. Wives of humble households came from nearby communities, and the less prestigious but economically advantageous forms of marriage in which brides were acquired as children or men married into a woman's family were much more common. Finally, even when poor men married, their poverty hindered their chances of perpetuating their line. Only the wealthy could afford to buy an infant son as heir, and a man with no estate could not hope to find an adult male to take on the role of heir and make offerings to his dead spirit. Without sufficient means, a man with a daughter and no sons could not expect to attract a husband-by-adoption into the family and thereby perpetuate the descent line. Enforced celibacy among poor men and the misfortune of having no heirs worked to ensure that the poorest strata in society did not reproduce themselves; polygyny (the custom of a man having multiple wives at one time) and partible inheritance resulted in a process of downward rather than upward mobility for Chinese society as a whole.

Like its predecessors, the Qing government viewed all forms of social organization beyond the family with suspicion, even those based on agnatic descent. Although the existence of some exceptional kin groups among the elite (like the ruling Aisin Gioro lineage) clearly demonstrates the potential for powerful patrilineal organization, dominant lineages were, as we shall see, often criticized and survived best in localities that were out of the reach of the state. Also, the number and extent of the hereditary fiefdoms in the Qing, as compared with other eras, were small and getting smaller.

Kinship organization had other limitations as well. For men who were working away from home—an increasingly common phenomenon in the eighteenth century—ties with one's immediate relatives were of limited use and grew fragile with time and distance. Lineages took time to develop strength and were not always effective organizations for uprooted individuals in cities or on the frontiers. In the fluid society of the eighteenth century, both for those with and without large kinship networks, patrilineal descent came to be supplemented regularly by other forms of voluntary association.

RESIDENCE AND COMMUNITY

The most common grounds for association among people who were not related was proximity of residence. The primary residential unit appears
to have been the neighborhood, whether village hamlet or urban ward. Although we have few detailed accounts of such neighborhoods, we can perhaps infer their centrality to the daily activities of peasants from modern studies on the importance of small voluntary mutual-aid teams in agriculture and of hamlet divisions (identified with competing surname groups or lineage segments) in village politics.

Anthropological studies of villages in China, Taiwan, and in the New Territories of Hong Kong indicate the great range in residential patterns. Some villages were inhabited by a single surname group (although these were a minority even in Lingnan and the Southeast Coast); here village and kinship boundaries were identical. When villages were home to several surname groups, solidarity was often weakened, and the lineages were the primary units of social action. In other cases, coalitions of competing surname groups divided and rotated collective responsibilities. In some multisurname villages, lineage identities were not strong, and inhabitants emphasized solidarity through temple associations or militias. And the same village might pass through different phases depending on the external environment: stressing village solidarity during times of disorder, surname competition during periods of prosperity.

The specificity of the social scene in late imperial cities, which had highly differentiated clusters of elite, business, and poor neighborhoods, may also have tended to make urban wards an important unit of human interaction and may have influenced intercourse among wards within a city. Temples served as foci for neighborhood solidarity in cities as well: natives of Suzhou, for example, identified themselves not with a residential address but with a particular earth god, and in Quanzhou, Fujian, factional conflict was heightened during the festivals of the competing earth gods who reigned over the east and west portions of the city. For the most part, however, we are ignorant about these small residential communities. We must turn instead to the larger unit, the village or town.

Although we also know too little about Chinese villages in this period, it appears that, unlike villages in some peasant societies, they were not self-sufficient, closed, corporate worlds. The development of market networks that had paralleled the growth of a commercial economy in China had been accompanied by the emergence of marketing communities as active foci for peasant social life. As the work of C. W. Skinner has suggested, periodic markets, held on regular interlocking schedules, drew villagers into sustained trade and social interaction with those in the same standard marketing area. These market areas tended to be linguistically homogeneous, set the regional boundaries within which non-

elite marriage alliances were formed, and defined the recreational, religious, and social community of the peasant.

Unlike the Ming, the early Qing state had not been willing to empower natural village leaders with delegated responsibilities for tasks like tax collection; even the successful eighteenth-century efforts to establish the constable as a government agent in villages and cities did not strengthen indigenous organizations. The village as such was probably most organized where it overlapped with other, more powerful forms of affiliation. Single-surname villages in the Canton delta, Ningbo, and Huizhou gained their solidarity from kinship structures, and Hakka villages from subethnic homogeneity (the Hakka being among the most sharply differentiated minorities in the Han Chinese population). On the undeveloped peripheries of the empire, however, where new institutions were created with difficulty, the village unit had some useful organizing potential even among heterogeneous groups. The militarization, economic hardships, and elite encroachment on government functions that began at the end of the eighteenth century thus accompanied and stimulated the later emergence of villages that were armed and walled. Within a hundred years, a major transformation of the countryside would produce fortified and much more solitary villages across much of China.

Given the relative weakness of the village (and of the urban ward, which was likewise rarely empowered by the state), a common focus for community organization beyond the kin group was the temple. A 1667 census (surely incomplete) listed nearly eighty thousand temples and monasteries (for a population of perhaps a hundred and fifty million), and by the eighteenth century, cities and countryside were dotted with places for worship of an array of deities. Represented variously by slips of paper, prints, or statues, Chinese gods were housed on altars in homes, small shrines, and temple buildings of all sizes. A great many spirits were unknown beyond a single locality, some had demonstrated their powers within a larger region, and a few were worshiped throughout the empire. Loosely related to one another through a celestial bureauarchy that mirrored the imperial government, these deities were somewhat interchangeable in behavior and function; commitment to one god rather than another was usually a matter of perceived differences in efficacy and convenience, not doctrine. (Government policy, expressing an entrenched fear of organized religion, encouraged such fragmentation.)

In fact, household, neighborhood, village, and city were all communities within a religious hierarchy: the local earth god acted as an intermediary between the stove god found in each household and higher
authorities. In cities, earth gods were under the authority of the city god, who was the celestial equivalent of the county magistrate. All births and deaths were reported to these territorial gods, while annual festivals reinforced the bonds of their communities. Beyond the hierarchy of territorial gods, however, was the vast array of other deities who united other groups of believers.

At one level, temples could be used for any public purpose. They doubled as inns, community schools, soup kitchens, and public parks. Temples were the sites for annual festivals and fairs, even the locus for confrontations between citizenry and officials. To this extent, they belonged to everyone.

Nevertheless, temples were actually the collective property of the communities that periodically invested in them. The construction, renovation, and maintenance of a local temple, as well as its regular festivals, required organization and money. Fund drives were used to solicit contributions from those who lived nearby; ideally, an endowment would be set up so that a regular income could be used for rituals and maintenance. Not everyone had to participate equally, however, and it was usually the wealthy and prominent members of the community who took the lead in giving money and land. They were the majority shareholders, we might say, and leadership posts rotated among them. Although many temples had a religious professional in residence (usually a Buddhist monk), these men (in contrast to the European parish priest) were not essential to community worship or important in temple management. They existed at the sufferance of temple managers, objects of public charity who were easily replaced.

The principles behind these temple organizations (called by a variety of local names) were similar to those at work in many other social organizations in Qing China. Like well-established lineages, temples shared property and collective rituals, were concentrated in a loosely defined territory, and although dominated by local elites were multiclass in their constituencies.

These highly personal and somewhat ad hoc organizations functioned best for small communities where decisions could be made by consensus among a few leaders. Most temple communities were relatively small in size and territory. Moreover, each was a separate, independent unity; there was little relationship between temples, even those of the same deity. (It is not clear if the idea that we see in Taiwan of newer temples being the offspring of older temples from which their incense had come was commonplace elsewhere.) Temple organization thus provided no framework for linking large numbers of people and worked poorly when the community was not a homogeneous one.

Temples could, nevertheless, be important to community formation, as in resettled areas on frontiers and among urban immigrants, since they provided a manageable structure for incorporating newcomers and carried with them the promise of supernatural assistance. But because their management reflected existing structures of power, temples could also become the foci for community rivalries. Harmless competitions of display between neighbors during festivals could turn violent when other tensions were at work. In the fragmented world of the Southeast Coast, subethnic rivalries were frequently manifested in this manner. Houses of worship for other religions (Islamic mosques, Lamaist monasteries, White Lotus sutra halls, and Catholic churches) similarly generated solidarity and hostility in equal measure.

In the Qing, both state intervention and the circulation of people throughout China contributed to a growing standardization in the physical structure, iconography, and organizational mechanisms of temples. Although government measures to register all temples and religious personnel were finally abandoned in the 1770s, the elevation of certain regional cults to national prominence and the stipulation that local officials throughout the empire would perform a fixed set of rituals of worship for official cults did encourage some uniformity. In some cases (e.g., at city-god temples and Confucian shrines) officials were actually part of the temple communities, contributing public funds and taking a corresponding lead in collective decisions and annual rites. Pilgrimage sites attracted groups who traveled to temples famous for their crowds, scenery, and historic monuments as much as for their efficacious deities. Travel was relatively easy (route books that provided maps and tourist information were increasingly available), and emperors and common people, tribes and Han Chinese, made pilgrimages to the most famous mountain sites. (See plate 2.)

Temple organizations, however versatile, did not meet all local community needs. Irrigation in particular posed difficult problems for collective action beyond the household or village, although here too a local cult could serve to organize an entire irrigation community. The construction of dikes, canals, and polders involved cooperation by owners of adjacent properties along waterways, often over a large area, while the need for access to water frequently generated competing demands that were difficult to reconcile. Yet the model for constructing, maintaining, and renovating waterworks was similar to that of the temple association.
to protect the public interest, by maintaining drainage canals and reservoirs to alleviate drought and flood, against the private interests of increasingly land-hungry communities eager to turn lakes into fields. Privately run corporations that took charge of irrigation, unlike those that ran temples, neither reflected local solidarities (which they frequently superseded) nor had clear-cut collective goals. Because the private interests of members undermined these projects, disputes over waterworks were most likely to be solved by litigation or violence. Such private structures were not usually enduring, and in many places they could not replace the officially managed organizations that weakened as the government became overburdened during the middle Qing.

The need for other public services put similar demands on local communities as well as local government. Welfare activities, originally associated primarily with Buddhist institutions, had been taken over by the government in Song times and included orphanages, hospitals, dispensaries, public baths, toilets, wells, garbage disposal, and public cemeteries. In the late sixteenth century, as financially strapped magistrates gradually abandoned these tasks, many were taken over by local elites inspired with a desire to stabilize social relations within their communities. The eighteenth century saw this trend toward private philanthropy continue.

Articulation of this renewed interest in philanthropy was voiced in both Buddhist and Confucian terms. Buddhist activities flourished in the late Ming and into the early Qing, when shelter temples used the revenues from endowed lands given as donations not only to house Buddhist clergy but also to succor the elderly, the poor, and the socially isolated. The inspiration for this charity was the bodhisattva ideal of compassion and empathy with all sentient beings that had long been part of Chinese culture. Among Confucian writers, unease at the social mobility and social unrest produced by the post-sixteenth-century economic boom stimulated degree-holders who were temporarily out of office to act directly to ameliorate social problems. Charitable deeds became acts of Confucian self-cultivation, and Confucians began to organize "benevolent societies" in order to promote long-term stability and harmony in the community.

After an initial period of government leadership in the early Qing, we see the steady growth, particularly in cities, of residentially oriented philanthropic organizations funded by private groups and persons. Orphanages, for example, began to be established in major urban centers in the Yangtze delta almost as soon as the military phase of the Qing

Members donated either money or labor, and a manager was designated to take charge of the project.

As with tax collection, the early Qing had moved away from the Ming model, which had placed responsibility for water management with local elites, and tried to rely instead on local officials. In the first century of Qing rule, when the agricultural infrastructure had to be rebuilt, it was local officials who took the leading role in waterworks. They solicited contributions, managed labor, and oversaw construction. By mid-century, the effectiveness of their leadership was inhibited by population increase and a divergence between public and private interests. The state, as Morita Akira and others have argued, attempted with decreasing success

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PLATE 2. This large porcelain figure, made in the Kangxi reign in the factories at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, represents the goddess Guanyin seated on a lotus throne. A popular deity worshiped by Chinese women of all classes, Guanyin was also a protector of seafarers. The temple complex at Putuoshan near Ningbo off the Zhejiang coast was dedicated to her cult. Reproduced from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Edwin C. Vogel, 1964 (64.279.9ab).
conquest was over. From the early eighteenth century, every county was supposed to support a home for the poor, disabled, and aged. As in other activities, local officials initially took the lead, cooperating with local landed and mercantile elites in raising endowments. In time, merchants and degree-holders increasingly bore the burden of responsibility and reaped the rewards of local prestige. From the more traditional schools, granaries, and public graveyards, local officials and elites went on to fund fire-fighting brigades and local militias. (Merchant associations called huiguan, which we shall discuss below, often played prominent roles in such public works.) A great many of these activities, like the elites who organized them, were urban based and were usually aimed at the urban public.

Emergency relief during natural disasters was usually paid for by contributions of grain, labor, or ready cash. More enduring relief organizations were funded through the ubiquitous institution of the endowment. The interest or rent from landed property (increasingly urban real estate) could be used not just to provide services but to hire a permanent manager. In contrast to the late Ming when foundresses of benevolent societies were high elites, Qing managers tended to be commoners without even lower-level degrees who used this activity as a means of upward mobility. As the endowment was used up and services dwindled, new donations would be sought and the organization revived. It was this expanding sphere of ad hoc public activities that took the place of formal city government.

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS

As we have indicated, there seems to have been unprecedented geographic mobility in eighteenth-century China. In addition to the scholar-officials who had long been drawn out of their local communities to take examinations and pursue official careers, merchants and entrepreneurs, skilled and unskilled workers, and land-hungry peasants (usually all males) left home in search of opportunity. Sojourning, a type of sustained migration that involved explicitly temporary but often effectively permanent movement from villages to large cities within one region and from less urbanized regional systems to more urbanized ones, became commonplace. The expansion of regional economies and the emergence of a national market in bulk commodities stimulated a shift in the scale of formal economic organization, leading to the creation of larger structures that could make possible mutual trust and cooperation among unrelated individuals.

In China, as in other premodern economies, the basic business unit had been an extension of the jia economy through the family firm. In the late Ming, as market expansion provided opportunities for traders to increase the scale of their operations, the need for capital and coordination had stimulated use of the share partnership. Based on principles quite similar to those underlying lineage and temple endowments, the share partnership allowed persons who were not blood relatives (often affines, it seems) to pool resources to establish a business. The form of the business could shift flexibly to accommodate changing economic conditions: a recent study of a Chinese medicine store in Peking, the Wanchuangtang, shows that the firm began as the family enterprise of a Ningbo (Zhejiang) merchant named Yue in the early eighteenth century and became a share partnership in the 1740s as the firm expanded. Its sister firm, the Tongrentang, went through three phases: originally owned by the Yue, it was opened up into a share partnership in the mid-eighteenth century but reverted to Yue family ownership in the early nineteenth century.

During the early Qing, economic opportunities encouraged the spread of this share partnership. It was used to finance and manage a variety of enterprises: theaters, copper and other mining ventures, coastal and overseas shipping, commercial agriculture, and money shops. The trading empires built by Anhui and Shansi merchants in the late Ming and extended in the Qing are the most successful examples of networks of such partnerships cemented by kinship and native-place ties.

Native place was the principle most often invoked as grounds for affiliation and assistance by men who left their homes to work in an alien environment. Firms sought trustworthy and skilled managers (who often received a share of the business) from among fellow natives. The Wanchuangtang hired either relatives or men who were also from Ningbo. The survival of the firm over several centuries, even after the Yue stopped managing it personally, rested on effective recruitment and incentives for employees. The key employee, the manager, while not a shareholder, was given favored treatment: six months' home leave with travel expenses once every two years and retirement at age seventy with a lump-sum gift. Store clerks and apprentices were hired employees, but their loyalties were assured by shared kinship and native place. These personal and paternalistic relationships made for firm solidarity and cut across potential class cleavages.

In the Qing, the jiaxiang, the place where one's family roots were and