Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century

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encountered during the early eighteenth century by the calenderers of Suzhou, who performed the heavy pressing of cloth on large stone rollers to give it gloss. The growth of the cotton and silk textile industries in Suzhou had brought a large increase in related unskilled jobs such as calendering, and there were at least ten thousand calenderers in the city in 1720 (in some three hundred workshops). They had organized strikes in 1670, 1693, and 1701 to demand higher wages and in 1715 petitioned for the right to establish their own huiguan. Their employers, the contractors and cloth merchants, indignantly opposed the petition on the grounds that such permissiveness would encourage rascals to infiltrate the work force and increase labor unrest. Calenderers continued to riot into the 1720s but never won the right to organize.

The earliest and most effective worker organizations were not developed until the end of the eighteenth century and were not found initially among industrial workers. These groups were most usually called bang (frequently translated disparagingly as "gang"), a term that had originally referred to the fleets into which the boats that transported tribute grain along the Grand Canal were organized. By extension, bang had come to mean the hired laborers who manned those boats. Other eighteenth-century usages of this term appear also to indicate increasingly tighter, more self-conscious organizations among the other water-transport workers who were so crucial to long-distance trade in China. The organization of Grand Canal workers, influenced in part by the sectarian religion to which many adhered, eventually developed into the Green Gang, notorious gangsters of the twentieth century. Although by the 1820s bang could denote informal merchant alliances as well, other transport-worker associations also grew significantly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sometimes adopting Triad structures (which we discuss in chapter 4). In general terms, however, the development of economic organizations with the power to threaten established interests did not take place until the Qing state and the traditional elite had become much weaker than they were in the eighteenth century.

PATRONAGE

The most prestigious network that led out of local communities was through the imperial examinations and bureaucracy. Well before the Qing, a national elite of educated men had been created by the experience of this common career. In theory, it was the impersonal examination and bureaucratic structure that shaped the relationships between officials. In reality, particularistic ties entered the pristine structure of examination and bureaucracy thanks to the inherent instability of official life (where promotions, demotions, and transfers were routine), the need for cooperation between officials from different areas, and the built-in competition between bureaucratic units and between officials and emperor.

Government academies and the exams themselves generated a horizontal bond between fellow students and examinees as well as a vertical bond between pupil and teacher, examinee and examiner. Such connections lasted a lifetime. In addition, men who were both scholars and bureaucrats shared a common elite culture and found friends, allies, and patrons through similar intellectual, literary, and aesthetic interests.

The cultivation of connections (guanxi) was essential to the ambitious man, and among literati and officials in the eighteenth century relatively superficial connections could form the basis for large commitments of mutual assistance. The enormous number of relationships described in the classic satirical novel of literati life, The Scholars (written in the 1740s), indicates how the most casual of acceptable connections could generate the giving and receiving of very substantial gifts and the immediate inclusion of perfect strangers into existing scholarly communities. Fortunately for aspiring literati, patronage of scholars within and beyond the formal bureaucracy became a favored form of status display in the middle Qing. Imperially sponsored projects, of which the compilation of the 3,450-volume "Complete Library of the Four Treasuries" (Siku quanshu) is only the best known, were imitated on a reduced scale by education officials, well-to-do scholars, and rich merchants.

Although most scholar-officials used common origin, a teacher, or kinship to find friends in distant cities, the primary purpose of these contacts was to forge the alliances and patronage networks necessary to a career. These so-called factions were as old as the bureaucracy itself, and had been denounced for nearly as long. Early Qing emperors and officials both viewed with horror the violent conflicts between rival groups in the late Ming. Kangxi and Yongzheng (in 1661 and 1724, respectively) went on record against cliques, characterizing them as expressions of private rather than public interests. (See p. 13 above for some of Yongzheng's views.) Eighteenth-century literati were themselves quick to criticize factions in theory and to denounce the networks of their rivals.

Qing emperors continually attempted to tighten the system so as to discourage personal ties within the bureaucracy and to keep politics out of scholarship. At best, however, they were merely able to keep the forces of guanxi at bay. Not only were they endemic to the system, they were crucial
to emperors as well as officials. The largest and most powerful networks of the eighteenth century were those built around men who had become friends and confidants to rulers. Even Yongzheng, despite his mechanical vision of government and denunciation of factions, leaned heavily on a few men with whom his relations were intensely personal.

Our understanding of factionalism in Chinese history and culture is at best preliminary, for most accounts focus on individuals (painted in black-and-white language) rather than on basic principles and dynamics. Nevertheless, we can hypothesize about how the system worked in the Qing and analyze in terms of three phases those patronage systems that extended to the emperor and the changing arenas within which they operated.

In the first phase, ending in the 1730s, imperial princes and Manchu institutions were central. For the first century of Qing rule, there were two competing arenas for upper-level politics: the bureaucracy, recreated on the Ming model, and the Manchu banners, headed by imperial princes. Politics was characterized by a series of shifting alliances between Manchus and at first Liaodong Chinese (banner men), then northern Chinese who dominated the exams in the Shunzhi reign, and finally (after the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories) Lower Yangtze elites. Connections with banner men, especially the princes or the emperor himself, were crucial to career success, and the violence of repeated struggles over the succession and between princes continually spilled over into bureaucratic politics. This phase was effectively terminated by a series of measures in the Yongzheng and early Qianlong reigns: the banners were finally bureaucratized and the princes' power base eliminated; the Hanlin Academy was restored as a central channel for official careers; and the Grand Council became the focus for decisions at the highest level.

In the second phase, lasting into the 1820s, the examinations at one level and the Grand Council at another had become the main nodes for political connections. More extensive factions were created, and imperial favor continued to be crucial in generating these networks, but the primary access route to power for both Manchus and Chinese was now the examination system. Despite the quotas, the elites from the Lower Yangtze still dominated the bureaucracy. Creation of a national system of feeder academies for the exams (after 1733) and the simultaneous spread of evidential scholarship (which favored philological research) kept intellectual commitments generally divorced from policy debates. The bureaucracy, like the economy, was more commercialized, and profiteering by officials became easier. This phase is best known for Heshen, the favorite of the Qianlong emperor who built a clientage network of considerable size at court and within the bureaucracy in the last two decades of the century.

The third phase lasted from the 1820s through the end of the dynasty and witnessed the dominance once more of extrabureaucratic networks, the increased importance of provincial posts, and a resurgence of Manchu control at the very top. This stage developed in response to the crisis conditions of the early nineteenth century. Private academies devoted to classical and practical education such as the Xuehaitang (founded in Canton in 1820) encouraged the reunion of intellectual and political networks. Extrabureaucratic avenues into office were promoted by both emperors and officials, and in the middle of the century there was a dramatic and irrevocable shift in the political center of gravity from the court to the provinces. The power of Lower Yangtze literati, already challenged by Cantonese and Hunanese, was drastically undercut by the damages of the Taiping rebellion in the 1850s and 1860s. At court, a series of young or short-lived emperors brought about a revival of joint rule by Manchu regents and their favorites as well as the seizure of ultimate power by a woman, Empress Dowager Cixi.

Because it is the second period (ca. 1730–1820) that is most characteristic of the eighteenth century as a whole, we might look at it in more detail. Its crucial actors were metropolitan officials and holders of the highest examination degree, especially those who made it into the Hanlin Academy. From the Hanlin, called a "Taoist paradise" by the poet and official Yuan Mei, came not only officials but also examiners, the natural magnets for clientage networks. Like examiners, education commissioners were crucial to the careers of aspiring officials; they affected who entered the local academy and who was eligible to sit for exams, and they mediated disputes and legal cases involving degree-holders. Because of the income and leisure that this post could afford, education officials also became important patrons of scholarship in the eighteenth century. Even for men whose goals were not to join the immortals in Peking, these local patronage networks set up through the exams and schools were crucial to a career.

Money, usually in the form of gifts exchanged between patrons and clients, was an essential element in most networks. It became as important as the ascriptive ties that were the excuse for the relationships. Some of the money that flowed through these patronage networks came from the private incomes of individual members of the elite, who had their own agricultural, commercial, and investment income. The rest came from
“engorgement at the middle”—the shunting off by officials of revenues theoretically owed to the central government. (Sometimes officials handed Peking less than was due; sometimes they collected more than was owed.) The failure to control the growth of tax surcharges may not have harmed local communities in prosperous times and places, for everyone recognized the benefits of having good relations with local officials, but in bad times, the effects were more serious.

Taking the throne in 1736 at age twenty-five, the Qianlong emperor dominated the rest of the century. Like his predecessors, he had his personal favorites, Chinese and Manchu, who were likely to be well known to him through the private memorial system initiated by his grandfather. In the last two decades of his reign, Qianlong showered a handsome young Manchu named Heshen with extraordinary favor. Heshen, himself twenty-five years old when he first attracted the aging ruler's attention, was according to his jealous contemporaries a man of little culture or learning but vast ambition and greed. Within five years of his access to imperial favor, this man with no high degrees was catapulted into the presidency of the Board of Revenue. He was given noble titles, later married his son to the emperor's favorite daughter, and in the period 1797-1798 at the end of Qianlong's life exercised de facto control over three central-government ministries. Although Heshen's personal power was resented by some, others built extensive factional alliances around him and few dared to sound partisan or to question the emperor's judgment by speaking out against him. Not until Qianlong's death in 1799 removed his patron was Heshen arrested and his vast estates confiscated. (The vilification of Heshen by his rivals and their successors in the Jiaqing period remains a major impediment to our understanding of him.)

Kinship, common residence, and common occupation were the most widespread bases for bonds between men in Qing society, but they were used in a variety of combinations to secure employment, promote collective action, and provide assistance for those far from home. Many used an endowed fund as the basis for corporate activity and relied on such wealth to perpetuate the association over many generations. In the eighteenth century, the existence of lineages, temple organizations, large-scale businesses, and factional networks became commonplace. Although the state discouraged all forms of association beyond the family as a matter of policy, it in fact depended on a great many elite-dominated organizations to carry out the tasks of government. But, as we shall see in more detail in chapter 4, social and geographical mobility in the eighteenth century also helped create other, less manageable, forms of social organization.

CITY LIFE

We begin with urban culture, not because we do not appreciate the importance of the countryside but because we believe that by late imperial times, all Chinese culture was influenced by what was happening in China's towns and cities. The efflorescence of urban culture in the eighteenth century was based on the resumption of the cycle of urban growth that had begun in the sixteenth century and been temporarily disrupted by the dynastic transition. Although there was no significant increase in the general rate of urbanization in the Qing, a hierarchy of central places ("cities, towns, and other nucleated settlements with central service functions") was created in less developed regions and fleshed out in advanced areas. Administrative centers grew with official encouragement, while commercial towns flourished on their own. The population in
China's macroregions was spread along a spectrum from (in G. W. Skinner's terms) the more remote and empty periphery to the densely populated commercialized cores. The result was a more fully integrated system of central places, reinforced by the close relationship between village and market town and by regular urban migration and sojourning on the part of both rich and poor.

Nanjing, a national cultural center in the late Ming, had been eclipsed by Yangzhou, Suzhou, and Peking in the early Qing. These cities attracted educated men of both landed and mercantile backgrounds, many without degrees, who formed literary coteries, patronized the arts, and consumed on a lavish scale. They set an example for smaller cities and towns and were models for regional metropolises such as Chengdu, Xi'an, and Fuzhou, as well as for the rising cities of the next century—Hankou, Canton, and Shanghai. The growth of urban places facilitated what James T. C. Liu has called the "radiating diffusion" of urban culture.² It seems fair to say that in the eighteenth century we can speak of the culture shared by urban residents who came not only from different social strata but also from major cities throughout the empire. State patronage, merchant networks, and geographic mobility were the major ingredients in the process by which this culture was blended and diffused.

The sixteenth-century boom had tied rural markets more closely to cities through marketing networks and merchant associations. Rural elites were also drawn into town. Zhao Jishu, a Huizhou native of the seventeenth century, noted that his father used to say that persons living before the last quarter of the sixteenth century could spend their entire lives without entering the city walls, but that now “people laugh at those who close their doors and don’t go out; they consider them unsophisticated.”³ The money economy and its impersonal values penetrated even into remote regions. Commercial expansion was paralleled by increased written and oral communication within the empire: books written for varied audiences were printed and sold widely, popular drama flourished, and more men worked far from home. Sojourners disseminated culture from the countryside to the city and back again. The centralizing influence of the Chinese state, whose administrative centers were overwhelmingly in cities, also affected public behavior, family life, and personal morality. In short, urban culture was important not just for the 5 percent or so of the population that actually resided in central places but for virtually all Chinese.

Chinese society in the developed macroregional cores had its distinctive qualities. The Qing elite had long been concentrated in the densely populated commercialized lowlands and were increasingly attracted to cities and towns. In sharp contrast to the peripheries, where there were few established elites, the cores were only too full of powerful individuals and families jockeying for position. Although competing with one another for wealth and prestige, these elites were quick to unite against threats to their common interests.

Tensions among the degree-holding elite derived both from their attempts to perpetuate their descendants in this status and from conflicts with imperial authority. The dimming of prospects for government careers in the late eighteenth century was felt most strongly in wealthy urban areas. In the cities, upwardly mobile and wealthy merchants imitated literati life-styles even when they did not have official careers and consequently were a ready market for guides to correct behavior written by scholars. Partible inheritance made downward mobility more likely among large elite families, and most household heads were grimly aware of the prospects for family decline. The attitudes of the urban degree-holding elites toward the social mobility so apparent around them were thus profoundly ambivalent.

Literati, generally atomized in their stances toward imperial control, both acted and were acted upon in the struggles for national political power that were waged in prefectural and provincial capitals. Violent resistance was rare, but it did occur during occasional protests against examination corruption. When the list of successful candidates for the juren degree in Yangzhou in 1711 included many sons from salt-merchant families, the students who had failed accused the governor-general and the deputy examiner of accepting bribes. More than a thousand candidates paraded through the streets of the city, broke into the prefectural school, and held its director captive. The investigation, which lasted for nine months and became entangled in bureaucratic rivalries and Manchu-Chinese tensions, eventually found the chief examiner, his associates, and some of the successful candidates guilty and condemned them to death.

Such overt protest was unusual, and resistance generally took subtler forms. Local elites in the wealthy Yangtze delta managed, as we have noted, to resist early Qing attempts to carry out new land surveys, and many families not only influenced local affairs from behind the scenes but eventually began to organize and encroach on government authority. The relationship between the government and merchants was likewise an ambivalent one. Officials might informally code municipal authority to merchant organizations in cities that were not seats of government, but
such open concessions were slower to come in administrative centers. In the course of the century, however, merchant groups became the most dynamic community leaders and the source of numerous welfare and municipal services. By the nineteenth century, this process of literati and merchant usurpation of government functions in cities was well advanced.

Traditional urban landmarks were the city wall and moat, drum and bell tower, Confucian and city-god temples, magistrate's office, military barracks, and examination hall. Eighteenth-century cities and towns were also dotted with restaurants, theaters, merchant haiguan, and the mansions and villas of the elite. The value of urban real estate was climbing, and (despite high mortality rates) construction to keep up with business expansion and the tripling of population was probably continuous during the eighteenth century. Commercial activities within cities were also being intensified (the number of pawnshops may have tripled) and had long since spilled over beyond the walls along the roads and rivers. As we have suggested, city services such as relief, security, fire fighting, and road maintenance were gradually being performed by associations of sojourning merchants.

Excitement and entertainment was provided for city residents at public events such as the arrival and departure of officials, executions and funerals, temple celebrations and seasonal holidays. Monumental imperial constructions provided space for ceremonies in which community leaders participated (such as the rites celebrating Confucius' birthday), while public spaces for elite activities (like Tiger Hill in Suzhou or West Lake in Hangzhou) became more numerous as one moved from a market town up to a county seat and thence to a metropolis. Most temples had a courtyard in which members of the community could gather, and open space for markets provided meeting places in cities of all sizes for the populace at large.

One component of urban culture was literacy, stimulated by commercialization and urbanization. Of course, education was not restricted to cities: most elementary instruction was privately financed and took place within well-to-do households and in village and lineage schools. The narrowing of hereditary privilege and more open access to the examination system of the early Qing were important incentives for education, but there were also other rewards for literacy. Qing society relied increasingly on written records and signed contracts in the management of business, voluntary associations, lineages, and local affairs. The urban milieu particularly enhanced and encouraged literacy, even if one's sole motivation was to avoid being cheated. Cities had an abundance of posted regulations, shop signs, placards, advertisements, and other materials to read for profit and amusement. Literacy for women was also more likely in cities where there would be private tutors for the daughters of the elite and brothels specializing in educated courtesans for an elegant clientele.

The creation of Qing urban culture was stimulated in addition by some unintended consequences of educational expansion. Of course, there was a general correlation between urban prosperity and examination success; indeed, there are indications that in the eighteenth century even provincial degree-holders in the highly urbanized Yangtze delta came more and more often from cities. But in the most densely populated and prosperous regions, a sharpening of examination competition turned many intellectuals away from orthodox careers to activities in the cultural realm.

Book publishing took place across a highly differentiated spectrum in the Qing. While imperial patronage led to huge publication projects ranging from encyclopedias and histories to poetry and sutras, commercial firms from the Lower and Middle Yangtze produced primers, fiction, morality books, and plays. These in turn were imitated in cheaper form by printers in other regions and smaller towns. Ming novels that attained wide circulation in the Qing included Romance of the Three Kingdoms, a fictionalized account of the breakdown of central-government authority in the second century that immortalized the sworn brotherhood of Liu Bei, Zhang Fei, and Guan Yu (who later became the god Guandi), as well as Liu Bei's wily adviser, Zhuge Liang. *Water Margin*, "traditional China's best-loved novel," described a righteous brotherhood of outlaws who protected the humble and oppressed. *Journey to the West*, China's first allegorical novel about the seventh-century pilgrimage of the monk Xuanzang to India in search of Buddhist scriptures, presented unforgettable characters in the timid monk's companions, Monkey, the irrepressible hero, and Zhu Bajie, the greedy pig. These novels were extremely popular in the Qing; episodes appeared in drama and other forms of oral performance, in temple decorations, posters, and proverbs, so that even illiterate peasants knew the plots and major characters.

Urban elites had their own more exclusive urban culture. Rural residence could not match the lures of the large city, with its well-stocked booksellers, luxury goods, excellent food and drink, and above all the company of kindred spirits. Elite entertainment ranged from parties and outings to writing poetry, raising flowers, attending the theater, and traveling to visit friends and famous sites. The wealthy and cultured collected rare objects: books, paintings, calligraphy, seals, bronzes, curios, and rubbings. The rich did so on a grand scale; the others imitated
as best they could. Unlike the fine individualist painters of the seventeenth century, many amateurs were willing and—because of eager merchant patronage—able to paint for a living. Jin Nong (1687–1773), an artist whose calligraphy imitated the archaic inscriptions on bronzes then being collected and analyzed by scholars, took advantage of this public demand for his works, as did the other so-called Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou. Even more painters became professional academicians at court and enjoyed imperial patronage in Peking.

Sojourning merchants, who had come to regard their business residences as their homes, did not merely ape the literati life-style but were leaders in it. Huizhou merchants, simply to take the most prominent example, made up many of the eighteenth century’s preeminent book collectors and patrons of evidential scholarship, and they carried these activities to regions where they sojourned. The list of important eighteenth-century intellectuals and officials from the area is a long one. The Anhui style of painting, exemplified by the spare, geometrical work of Hongren (1610–1663) grew directly out of the woodblock printing and illustrating traditions of Huizhou itself (long a center for book and inkstone production). The local dramatic style, moreover, was actively promoted and diffused by private merchant companies; toward the end of the eighteenth century, the popularity of the Anhui acrobatic style made it a major ingredient in the development of Peking opera. These Huizhou merchants had also written and published the earliest guidebooks to domestic trade routes, promoted cultivation of the peanut, and set standards for huiguan organization and public mindedness. Their innovative activities were paralleled by those of other merchant groups who also operated on a wide scale—especially those from Shanxi, Guangdong, Fujian, and Jiangxi. These national merchants, as we may call them, took their foods, entertainment, and even their gods with them (it was surely no accident that imperially sponsored deities such as Guandi and Tianhou were the patrons of two of these groups); they were key actors in urban life in this period.

Drama (“Chinese opera”) was a vital part of Qing culture. The eighteenth century saw both an explosion of dramatic styles (Colin MacKerras has called it “the golden age of regional drama”) and the emergence of public theaters and enthusiastic urban audiences. Ming dramas written by and for literati had emphasized scripts and melody, but mid-Qing audiences were just as interested in performance and acting. Opera troupes no longer played just for religious festivals and in the homes of the elite but now moved from one permanent theater to another. Out of the play emporium located in the huiguan grew the theater that was a separate building open to the public. Actors had their own guild in Peking by at least 1732, the Imperial Household set up its large private troupe in 1740, and by 1816 there were twenty-one public theaters in the capital.

Imperial and merchant patronage both played key roles in the circulation of dramatic forms as well as in the growth of theatrical institutions. Merchants carried their own troupes and regional dramatic styles with them, while the emperor and metropolitan officials eagerly imported famous actors to the capital. By the end of the century, patrons in Peking were determining fashions for the cities throughout China from which aspiring actors and patrons came.

In the late Ming, the elegant and melodic Kunqu style that had originated in Jiangsu had attracted the energies of literati playwrights and the admiration of Lower Yangtze elites. Kunqu’s popularity continued in the early Qing, enhanced by Kangxi’s attentions on his southern tours and by the successful plays of Hong Shen (The Palace of Eternal Youth, 1684) and Kong Shangren (The Peach-Blossom Fan, 1699). Literati and official devotees kept the tradition alive in the eighteenth century, even though it yielded center stage to more upstart styles from other regions. Competition was offered mainly by the Yiyang style from Jiangxi and its numerous Lower Yangtze variants that emphasized noisy, faster music and colloquial prose sections popular with less refined audiences; it was carried by merchant patrons to Peking and beyond in the early Qing. Similarly, the Qinqiang of the Northwest was transported by the ubiquitous Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants. This dramatic style used very colloquial language and lewd innuendoes and was known for its reliance on seductive female impersonators in starring roles. It became immensely popular in the 1770s and 1780s when there were dozens of Qinqiang companies in many major cities, playing in public theaters to enraptured male audiences. Wei Changsheng, a Sichuanese female impersonator with a bewitching manner, was the most famous Qinqiang actor of his day, lionized after his 1779–1780 performances in Peking, probably on the occasion of the Qianlong emperor’s seventieth birthday.

The explicit sexuality of such performances offended conservatives in the capital, and in 1785 this Qin style was formally banned in Peking, making way for other regional styles. The “clapper opera” of the Northwest, with its reliance on loud instruments, and the acrobatic troupes of Anhui developed a wide following and reflected the new popularity of more martial subjects. By the 1830s, the ingredients of Peking opera were
in place, and it became the dominant theatrical form in the capital in the late nineteenth century.

Official denunciations of drama as a corrupting influence on public morals were belied by imperial enthusiasm and eager patronage even by members of the Hanlin Academy, but attempts to keep political topics off the stage were a good deal more successful. Subjects for drama that had flourished in the Kangxi period such as examination corruption, Manchu-Chinese relations, and late Ming history disappeared in the Qianlong reign. An immense repertory of scripts was nevertheless developed (more than one thousand were listed in a 1780 survey), and scholar-beauty romantic comedies and historical dramas became part of the common culture of urban audiences everywhere.

Drama of a popular sort lived side by side with the performances sponsored by the elite; indeed, the popular drama of the commercial urban theater had first grown out of and then in turn reinvigorated the local opera troupes that worked without fixed scripts or theaters. These troupes in their turn were intimately connected with street entertainers who featured story telling, puppet shows, instrumental performance, and ballad singing. Not only were there interlocking influences in terms of instruments and stage styles but also strong continuities in terms of the stories themselves. Tales from the Journey to the West and Three Kingdoms story-cycles were the basis of countless variations and levels of performance. Because some troupes went regularly into the countryside to perform at temple festivals where such performances were essential there was also a continuous transmission of urban drama into the countryside. More than any other activity, drama in the Qing period contributed to cultural integration and to the vitality of a Chinese culture in which all could share.

Drama was not the sole form of Qing urban culture that came under censure. Gambling—in the form of dice, cards, and betting on cock, quail, and cricket fights—was commonplace among all social classes, despite repeated official assertions that it was associated with crime and violence. Less troublesome but still distressing to some, the sexuality of the opera stage was reflected in the real world as well. Prostitutes and actors, overlapping categories and both supposedly degraded statuses, behaved as the social equals and bedfellows of the elite. Male and female prostitution were booming businesses, flourishing at all urban levels from Peking down to the remotest mining camp in the southwest. There was a national traffic in beautiful concubines and elegant male servants, in "jade cocoons" (young girls) and "little hands" (young boys).

The popularity of female impersonators in the Qianlong reign brought a new stylishness to homosexual relationships. Bi Yun (1730–1797), a respected scholar-official, had publicly installed a young male actor as a kind of wife, a relationship parodied in the salacious early nineteenth-century play, Precious Mirror for Gazing at Flowers. The fondness of the aging Qianlong emperor for Heshen and the latter's patronage of handsome actors gave an unspoken encouragement to such relationships.

"Decadence" and "extravagance" were already the objects of criticism by conservative officials such as Zhang Ying, who at the end of the seventeenth century had warned his descendants against the evils of urban residence. In 1781, Liu Tiancheng (probably a censor) memorialized about the social problems of the Qianlong reign. He criticized the wasteful expenditures that took place in inns, teahouses, and wine shops, where men were reckless with their money and indulged in drunken sprees, spending in a day what could suffice for several. The emperor replied by pointing to the peace and prosperity of the empire, noting that this admitted shift from frugality to extravagance could not be easily controlled by fiat. Nor would curbing wastefulness lead necessarily to the betterment of the populace. "I labor night and day; it is not that I do not desire that the people's mores become simple and pure.... But customs daily become more extravagant and the situation cannot be altered by law; just as the waters of the rivers flow east, who can block them and turn them westward?... Liu Tiancheng's memorial is acceptable as good counsel, but it is not a good method for ruling in today's world."

Qianlong realistically recognized that this style of life was imbedded in the conditions of the times.

But mobility and change—as well as prosperity—were reflected in the urban life of the eighteenth century, and mobility also meant insecurity. The highly commercialized ethos undermined traditional relationships and produced a stratified society rife with both opportunity and anxiety. The repercussions of market participation touched virtually every sphere of life: as peddlers, peasants, landlords, and others came together in periodic markets, the horizons of the peasant's vision were gradually broadened. Exposure to market forces tied household welfare to forces operating outside the village and raised the value of knowledge about the larger world. Money became the measure not only of exchange but of accomplishment as well.

While many sought upward mobility, others feared the loss of their wealth and status. Members of the old degree-holding elite looked with
alarm on the nouveaux riches who challenged their position as cultural and social arbiters. The anxiety of elite families as they contemplated strategies for maintaining their status struck a responsive note in more ambitious villagers too. Those who produced cash crops were exposed to price fluctuations beyond their control, and the risks and benefits of market participation must surely have sharpened the competitive environment in which villagers lived. Intergenerational mobility was probably enhanced: peasant households moved up and down the socioeconomic scale in their villages in response to market as well as domestic cycles. The impact of market participation on peasant mentality lies behind Elvin's observation that "society became restless, fragmented and fiercely competitive."

The system of spiritual credits expressed in late Ming morality books such as The Ledger of Merits and Demerits, widely reprinted, can be interpreted as an attempt to link charity and moral action to material reward and provide reassurance in a world that had grown more fluid and unstable. But the social problems created by a more complex competitive milieu continued to feed feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

Economic conflict and competition were endemic, particularly in expanding sectors such as the rice or soybean trades. Incidents that some see as class conflict were commonplace. Rice riots pitted consumers against merchants and potentially against landlords, who often stored grain in cities. Labor unrest was frequent in places like Suzhou, where, as we have seen, the expansion of the textile industry in the late seventeenth century brought a large and potentially menacing group of unskilled workers into the city. Such incidents, even if few in number, point to the problems of controlling a workforce under conditions of rapid growth in China's large cities.

LITERATI CULTURE

Although the literati acted as natural informal leaders in cities and towns and, together with merchants, played important roles in the creation of a distinctive urban culture, they also tried to maintain more refined traditions in scholarship, art, and entertainment—traditions nurtured at home in rural villas and academies, traditions that would distinguish the well bred and well educated from the merely rich. The realm of literati culture was both urban and rural. It was dominated by the households whose males prepared for and won degrees but in the Qing it was invaded more and more by the monied and leisureed.

In the 1680s to 1710s, after completion of the conquest, the Qing rulers had succeeded in bridging the gulf between their new regime and the Chinese scholarly community by relying on intermediaries like the three Xu brothers of Kunshan, Jiangsu, who won degrees under the Qing and then served as directors of the Ming History project, attracting and employing others who would never have served directly under the new dynasty. Many intellectuals found solace in comparing Manchu to Mongol rule, concluding that Chinese culture could not merely survive but indeed flourish under a foreign dynasty. The goal of preserving the culture under such conditions presented some with the rationale for serving the Manchus. Semi-official patronage brought the government and the intellectual community together and was "crucial to the legitimation of Qing rule."

Evidential (kaocheng) scholarship, the major intellectual movement of the early Qing, flourished in the Yangtze-delta cities where official and private patrons were located. Reacting sharply against Confucian developments of the preceding seven hundred years, scholars blamed the downfall of the Ming dynasty on literati pursuit of sagehood and involvement in factional disputes. Instead, early Qing literati sought to reconstruct the ideal Confucian order through philological attention to ancient texts. They searched for the Confucianism of an earlier age, before it had been sullied with Buddhist and Taoist notions. Rejecting Zhu Xi's method of interpreting the classics broadly, evidential scholars focused on close study of the texts themselves, subjecting the classics to rigorous philological tests. In the process, men such as Yan Ruoju (1636–1704) began to raise serious questions about the very authenticity of classics that had long been accepted as the source of enduring absolutes, although these doubts remained submerged in stronger currents of confidence in the heritage of the past. Similarly, although the methods of these evidential scholars were influenced by their knowledge of European mathematics and astronomy, and their academies included mathematics, astronomy, and geography in the curriculum, it would not be until the nineteenth century when the adequacy of the Chinese tradition was seriously challenged.

Philological studies went hand in hand with extensive printing and library building on the part of such men as Huang Peili (1763–1825) in Suzhou and Bao Tingbo (1723–1814) and his fellow bibliophiles in Hangzhou. In the Yangtze delta, these scholars formed what Benjamin Elman has called a unified academic community with a distinctly professional outlook. The men who were the leaders in evidential study were overwhelmingly degree-holders from the Lower Yangtze core: one study of 180 important works of evidential scholarship shows that almost 90 percent of
the writers were from Jiangnan, 92 percent held degrees, and more than half (53 percent) were jinshi.

The introversion of this specialized community, seen in its rejection of Socratic modes of discourse or any kind of lectures (to the public or one another), was in deliberate contrast to those Ming Neo-Confucian schools inspired by the sixteenth-century philosopher Wang Yangming that had been innovative in precisely these directions. Evidential scholars relied on the patronage of leading officials, but they generally did not become bureaucrats themselves; those who aspired to enter the civil service were still better off studying in the Zhu Xi tradition. Evidential scholarship still had a concern with government, however, and an interest in practical affairs that was developed in statecraft writings on hydraulics, cartography, and governance.

Compilation projects flourished in this intellectual milieu: local histories were compiled and published on a scale previously unknown. The government-sponsored Complete Library of the Four Treasuries project (1772–1782) was the most important and politically the most sensitive compilation effort of all. An imperial commission undertook to collect for reprinting the best editions of the most important books and manuscripts hitherto produced in China and arranged them in the four categories of classics, history, philosophy, and belles lettres. Several hundred literati participated in looking for and inspecting books from private libraries and the imperial collection. As R. Kent Guy has pointed out, under the direction of distinguished scholars like Dai Zhen (1724–1777), evidential methods of evaluating texts, collating variant editions, and revising or verifying errors were used in this effort, and the compilation may be seen as a cardinal achievement of the evidential school. Eventually seven sets of thirty-six thousand volumes each were reproduced, along with an extremely valuable annotated catalogue of the more than ten thousand works inspected by the compilers.

The darker side of the project, the ferreting out and destruction of some two thousand works deemed subversive by the throne, many of them dating from the late Ming, has prompted some scholars to call this project a “literary inquisition.” As Guy shows, however, a detailed study of this inquisition reveals the complexity of Chinese in it. Success in obtaining the best editions rested on the cash paid out for these tomes by salt merchants as well as provincial treasuries; moreover, the campaign to collect seditious materials had faltered until responsibility was turned over to expectant educational officials, who were to be rewarded with appointments for their diligence. Since such posts were very difficult to get, ambitious juren flooded provincial-government offices with books, only then permitting the inquisition to attain its full destructive potential.

Evidential scholarship and government projects were for the cream of the elite. Other important eighteenth-century literati activities had a broader spatial and social base, encompassing unsuccessful scholars and holders of lower academic degrees scattered across the country. These men defined themselves as much by contrast with the commoner populace as with the capital elite. They regarded the masses in highly ambivalent terms, seeing them both as the proper objects of elite and state paternalism, children who needed constant guidance and instruction, and as dangerous mobs, capable of spontaneous and unrestrained violence. In consequence, like their late Ming predecessors, these elites not only provided concrete assistance to the needy through philanthropy but also wrote and distributed morality books and manuals to indoctrinate and shape behavior.

The fluidity of social statuses and the acceptance of political censorship may have played an indirect role in provoking a pessimism about the ability to achieve sagehood that bounded intellectuals of this age. Pei-yi Wu has described this mood as “a deep awareness of the human proclivity to evil, an urgent need to counter this proclivity, a readiness for self-disclosure, and a deep anguish over one’s own wrongdoings”—an attitude revealed in unprecedented public confessions by Confucians of their sin and unworthiness that represent “a new development in the history of Chinese moral culture,” one that may be linked to the new emphasis on internalization of values and self-judgment seen in the morality-book literature of the time.

Alienation is an important theme in the eighteenth century, continuing into the late Qing. The increased dissonance between the difficulty in achieving the educational and moral qualifications theoretically necessary for high status and political leadership and the case with which money could now buy these privileges aggravated the frustrations of some failed scholars. They viewed official society with an increasingly critical and cynical eye. Wu Jingzi, author of The Scholars, is a case in point: a licentiate from a prominent literati family in Anhui, he could not win a higher degree and eventually squandered his family’s wealth. The novel Wu wrote in the 1730s and 1740s attacked an officialdom ratted by toadyism and corruption and an examination system that rewarded mindlessness and incompetence. Only a few decent individuals escaped his mockery. Wu’s relatively sympathetic portrayal of women—who were barred from the professional world of men and were thus in some sense
untainted by it—was later surpassed in Li Ruzhen's novel, *Flowers in the Mirror* (published 1828), a fantasy in which women are shown as capable bureaucrats and officials. In fact, the vernacular novel attained new stature in China in the eighteenth century as a respectable intellectual endeavor and a vehicle for the expression both of political criticism and orthodox values. The middle Qing witnessed the production of two other major works of prose fiction: the 445 short stories of Pu Songling in *Strange Stories from an Eccentric's Studio* (written 1669–1679, published 1766) and Cao Xueqin's *Dream of Red Mansions* (written 1754–1763, printed 1792).

For the authors of these and other, lesser-known works, literature itself was very nearly their career. Wu Jingzi subsisted in Nanjing on his writing, supplemented with gifts from friends and relatives. The successful poet and official Yuan Mei (1716–1798), like many literati, contributed to the growing corpus of short-story literature that included ghost, detective, historical, and romantic tales written and read by urban elites. But even Yuan, who was relatively successful at making money from his writings (which he published himself), had to rely on private commissions for a large part of his income. Not until the very end of the dynasty would it be possible for intellectuals to support themselves by writing for a mass audience.

In painting, the eighteenth century saw a reintegration of the court-sponsored style and literati painting that had followed separate lines of development in the Ming dynasty. Literati painters such as Wang Hui (1632–1717) and Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715) were invited to the Kangxi court and accepted imperial patronage. There, versatility, mastery of technique, and a willingness to work on a grand scale were preferred to the individualism of masters of the seventeenth century like Daqi and Zhu Da. Instead, the theories of the Ming painter Dong Qichang were enshrined as the new orthodoxy. The Qianlong emperor carried on the cultural and literary style of the Kangxi reign. He became the greatest imperial art collector since the Song, acquiring the masterworks of past eras, compiling catalogues, and—in this field as in many others—dictating taste from Peking, where literary and artistic talent gathered. Artists, even European Jesuits such as Giuseppe Castiglione (who painted under the Chinese name Lang Shining), were used to record the rituals at court and commemorate victories on the battlefield.

Art connoisseurs, and historians may depurate Qianlong’s own poetic and artistic abilities, but no one can deny the impact of his taste on his age. His preference for the monumental and the didactic, for art that was decorative, exotic, ornate, and extravagant, had an overwhelming influence. In addition, the objects gathered in imperial collections, although as various as the complex empire that Qianlong ruled, were limited by the safe confines of orthodox practice and further tamed by the stamp of the imperial seal or brush. Diversity there was, but diversity contained and homogenized.

Imperial patronage made possible greater access to the inspirational works of the past and encouraged a creative exchange of artists between the capital and the Lower Yangtze. There art collections were also a sign of culture, and paintings were in high demand among men of wealth and uncertain status. The intimacy and spontaneity of the centuries-old literati painting tradition were imperiled by these eager attentions, and, as we have noted, artists able to resist the lure of the court found their amateur status threatened by the temptations of professionalism at home. The gentleman invited to paint for a rich patron preferred not to be reminded that he was also being paid to do so. These uneasy distinctions were expressed not only in social relations but also in the subjects painted. Refined amateurs clung to landscape painting, following a long stylistic tradition of *fang*, or imitation of the ancients. The constant stylistic allusion to earlier paintings fed an intellectualized perspective characteristic of this whole period: style became subject, deliberately selected to express the artist’s position.

Merchant patrons, by contrast, wanted more accessible subject matter. They preferred portraits, intimate scenes of city life, or decorative pictures of birds and flowers. Many painters therefore practiced a kind of calculated amateurism, one that imitated only the forms of the past; others were unabashedly professional, selling seasonal pictures or paintings of a preferred style in city shops. Even the so-called eccentrics of Yangzhou were only able to present themselves as the heirs of past individualism by departing from the expected forms in accessible ways. Nevertheless, Luo Pings’s casual portraits of himself and his acquaintances presumed an intimacy and informality that would have been inappropriate at court and shocking to dignified literati of earlier eras. Even refined patrons, such as the Ma brothers (Yangzhou salt merchants), liked a straightforward and unpretentious style. Fang Shishu’s 1743 painting commemorating the visit of the scholar Quan Zuwang was actually no more than a kind of souvenir photograph of the occasion. That scholars, merchants, retired officials, and quasi-professional painters could meet as members of a poetry club, in a villa purchased with mercantile profits, is characteristic of elite life in this period.
PLATE 3. The poet Fang Shishu and the Suzhou portraitist Ye Fanglin collaborated to produce this momento of the double-ninth celebration in 1743 at the Yangzhou villa of the wealthy Ma brothers, Huizhou salt merchants who were patrons of the arts. Each guest wrote on the painting, and an essay describing the event was appended to the handscroll, which captures the mix of old and new money and the activities typical of the eighteenth-century elite. This detail from the painting depicts guests (including retired officials, poets, and painters) examining a scroll and listening to the zither in the garden. A colophon by the poet Li E captures their mood: “We are lucky in being born during a reign of peace, in a place of beauty, and in the company of friends who are cultured and understanding. How rare indeed are such gatherings in this world!” (cited in Ju-hei Chou and Claudia Brown, eds., The Elegant Brush: Chinese Painting under the Qianlong Emperor, 1735-1795 (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1985), p. 137. Reproduced from the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Severance and Greta Millikin Purchase Fund.

Would-be artists without connections could not study the great masterworks of the past, for there were no museums of public collections, but the vigorous Qing book industry popularized art as well as literature and philosophy. The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, first published in Nanjing in 1679, expanded in 1701, and thereafter republished many times, was intended to teach the fundamentals to anyone. Styles of the past were illustrated (not always correctly), and the method of painting different kinds of rocks, trees, animals, and so forth was shown step by step.

Even in poetry the privileged world of the scholar was opened up to a wider public. Of course poetry continued to be one of the hallmarks of high literati culture. The ability to compose and write elegant poems was considered essential to any young man’s education—and indeed to many young women’s. The literary man had to master a variety of complex rhyme schemes and verse forms, compose quickly in public, write elegantly in fine calligraphy, and sound original while alluding to a poetic tradition stretching back more than a thousand years. Those able to publish their verse did so, and in large numbers. A popular genre of this period was a kind of anthology of poetry (or sometimes an album of sketches or a combination of the two) that a man put together by inviting contributions from as many influential people as he could, usually on the pretext of honoring a teacher or friend, in order to display his connections and good taste.

For outsiders seeking acceptance and status in this society (Manchus, men from culturally deprived regions, upwardly mobile merchants), skill at poetry could be proof of social acceptability. In The Scholars a young man whose family’s shop sold incense and candles admitted, “Tradesmen like us can’t dream of passing the examinations. All I want is to read a few poems to acquire a little refinement.” When asked if he could understand these poems, he confessed, “Very few of them. But when I can understand one or two lines, that makes me very happy.”

Although some dour scholars and bureaucrats saw the writing of poetry as an expression of the frivolity of the young, Qing examinations in fact tested this skill; in 1757 poetry was made a still more important part of the exam curriculum. Poetry clubs provided occasions for drinking and conviviality among friends, but, because they were also one of the few acceptable informal associations among the elite, they also provided networks for more serious endeavors—preparation for exams, literary and scholarly discussion, or simply social and political advancement. In the early nineteenth century, the Xuannan Poetry Club in Peking served even more ambitious political purposes among its reform-minded members.

In poetry, as in painting, there were occasional eighteenth-century individualist poets like Yuan Mei, a number of important scholarly theorists and critics, and a great many of the ponderously erudite. (Qianlong was a model for the latter.) Those in the Changzhou (Jiangsu) school who were concerned with the poetic form known as the ci, for example, tried to analyze and shape this tradition by charting a course (as painters were also trying to do) between the accessible and vulgar, on the one hand, and the elegant and incomprehensible on the other. It is indicative of the increasing politicization of scholarship at the turn of the
century that Zhang Huiyan (1761–1802) and others tried to claim that the best use of the ci was actually for allegory.

The eighteenth century, like the seventeenth, was a great age of travel, and through travelers both urban and more narrowly literati culture were diffused throughout the empire. Not only did men of all social classes sojourn in search of employment, but many of the wealthy traveled simply for pleasure. Literary men visited friends, sought patrons, or undertook employment; officials were shifted from post to post; merchants inspected branch businesses and new opportunities. The explosion of local history projects under the patronage of Qing provincial officials sent scholars out to find stone stelae, abandoned monasteries, and famous pagodas. Others went in search of the sites of famous events, graves of historical figures, mountains painted by earlier artists, vistas commemorated in well-known poems, caverns and grottos noted for their mystery and beauty. The “jottings” literature of the period that circulated in manuscript and in print included accounts of these travels, generally making members of the educated class (and those who aspired to that status) better informed about the large and diverse empire in which they lived.

We have tried to indicate in this section the ways in which the fashions and activities associated with China’s degree-holding elite were opened up to the socially ambitious. In the process, attenuated literati arts and their defenders were nearly swamped in the sea of eighteenth-century urban culture, diluted but perhaps also reinvigorated in more popular and vulgar styles.

The literati and their imitators were the pacesetters for China’s urban culture, and they were certainly far removed from the culture of peasants in their commitment to the arts and letters. At the same time, it would be a mistake to think of the cultural gap between China’s highest social strata and the peasantry as a deep chasm. We have already pointed out that drama and storytelling gave literatus and peasant a shared knowledge of China’s past and helped create common values and ideals. When we turn to material culture and to life-cycle rituals, we see additional confirmation of the broadly based cultural practices that Han Chinese shared during Qing times.

MATERIAL CULTURE

The objects of daily life, from food and clothing to dwelling places, were yet further expressions of late imperial culture that reflected both the elaborate differentiation among social strata and their integration through a common core of symbolic meaning. In material culture, as in other spheres, the two centers of taste were the Lower Yangtze cities and Peking. Qianlong and his predecessors undertook construction and production of public architecture and the decorative arts on a lavish scale and were responsible for creating many of the monuments and treasures of this period. The literati artistic achievements of the stressful seventeenth century, though never equaled in the eighteenth, were, as we have seen, integrated and diffused in the Qing as part of a broader and less troubled elite culture. Just as innovations in drama and vernacular fiction became established as part of a nationwide urban culture, so regional cuisines, fashionable apparel, and elegant homes were made part of the common vocabulary and experience of a wider elite.

The broad divisions of China into dry cropland and irrigated lowlands underlay traditional divisions in staple foods: gruels, breads, and noodles made from wheat, millet, barley, and sorghum in the north; glutinous and non-glutinous rice in the south. The development of upland farming on the peripheries in the middle Qing added a third set of basic foods that made an immediate impact on Chinese diet (but not cuisine): maize, sweet potatoes, and white potatoes. The diet everywhere and for most people consisted primarily of cereals. Chicken and pork were luxuries, and as a consequence protein came mostly from beans and fish, while vegetable oil (including that of the recently introduced peanut) was an important source of essential fats. Fresh vegetables were available seasonally in colder climates and more abundantly in southern regions.

Regional and seasonal dietary patterns constrained those of modest means, but in the eighteenth century marketing networks provided an expanding variety of foods for the well-to-do. Emperors consumed delicacies imported from all over the empire and abroad, while some wealthy families enjoyed elaborate cuisines that combined subtle flavors and rare ingredients. Most householders lived on moderate and less varied diets. Peasants did not eat meat except during festivals, a time when everyone was supposed to enjoy special foods and eat until full. Even the relatively wealthy merchants in the Chinese community at Nagasaki, Japan, had a daily diet of rice with pickles and vegetables, supplemented with meat or fish twice a day.

Like every preindustrial cuisine, Chinese food was marked by distinctive seasonal and regional delicacies, but the circulation of officials and travelers through the empire and the increase in sojourners in the major cities spread consciousness and appreciation of different foods. One characteristic of Qing city life was its opportunities for eating out.
Restaurants catering to regional tastes served banquets for all levels of clients. It was probably in the eighteenth century that the American red pepper became established as a landmark of Hunanese and Sichuanese food. In Muslim restaurants, located throughout China, believers could observe religious prohibitions against eating pork, while others could sample beef and lamb dishes of Central Asian origin.

Tea was, of course, a universal beverage, and teahouses were to be found in most central places. A multiplicity of varieties, from the strongly fermented Puer tea of southern Yunnan to the light, fragrant, green teas of the Lower Yangtze, satisfied the tastes of different regions and social classes but also developed national constituencies. Chinese wine, always served warm, was likewise made and sold everywhere. Although perhaps not everyone was in the habit of drinking wine with every meal, as were nine out of ten families on the remote Penghu islands (according to the 1770 local gazetteer), it does appear that alcohol had become a regular part of the diet of most people. A great many varieties made from a range of grains were available, but only a few became nationally known—Fenjiu, a distilled liquor prized by Shanxi merchants, for example, or Shaoxing, a milder, sweet wine championed by its sojourners and officials.

The Chinese had eagerly adopted tobacco smoking in the late Ming and had already made it a national habit. Most people smoked it in a water pipe, but elites (possibly instructed by foreigners at court) began to take snuff. The sniff bottle, a small container made of some precious material (porcelain, glass, jade, and so forth) and carried on the person, was a Qing innovation. (See plate 5.) The eighteenth century also saw Chinese begin to be addicted to opium. Long used as a medicine and aphrodisiac, crude opium is was first mixed with tobacco and smoked in the seventeenth century by Chinese in Southeast Asia and then along the Southeast Coast and in Taiwan. Conversion to smoking pure opium seems to have occurred by the 1760s, and during the late eighteenth century the habit spread along the trade networks out of Fujian and Guangdong among transport workers, soldiers, merchants, and officials. Attempts to prohibit the drug (once in 1729 and repeatedly in the early nineteenth century) failed to dislodge opium from its new place as a food substitute, painkiller, and source of cheap pleasure.

The Chinese repertory of tools for mining, metallurgy, agriculture, food processing, textile production, transport, housing construction, and domestic chores does not appear to have changed significantly in the early and middle Qing—unlike in Europe and the United States, where a machine-tool industry that would speed industrialization was emerging.

But the printing and distribution of illustrated reference works, almanacs, and manuals of many sorts did make traditional techniques available throughout the length and breadth of the empire.

In clothing, the major textiles—silk, cotton, and hemp—had been known for some time. It was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, that cotton became universally available, displacing less satisfactory materials (rame, hemp, or bark cloth) and no doubt resulting in a major increase in comfort and convenience. Silk was no longer required for tax payments, and, stimulated by demand from appreciative foreigners, a range of weaves became available to others besides the rich.

The Manchus brought with them a tradition of nomadic apparel that was not only reflected in the mandatory queue (which necessitated a man’s forehead being shaved and his hair braided at the back of his head) but was also incorporated into court dress. A closely fitting jacket that was slit to allow riding in the saddle, with tight sleeves to keep out the wind and cuffs to protect the back of the hands; trousers to provide protection from the horse’s flanks; riding boots and fur-lined caps—these were now official garb. As in previous eras, the designs of all official and ceremonial garments were based on traditional cosmological symbols; rank was indicated by color, embroidered insignia, and jeweled knobs on hats. An elaborate code was issued in 1759 in an attempt to regulate the ceremonial dress of officials. Manchus adopted Chinese clothing in their private lives, and their large-footed women soon learned to wear platform shoes that simulated delicate bound feet. (See plate 4.) Ming-style clothing continued to dominate informal wear, wedding attire, theatrical costumes, and robes for priests and temple images.

The characters in the novel Dream of Red Mansions display not merely their considerable wealth but their imperial connections (the author came from a Han banner family) in their clothing: beautiful silks in an array of dazzling shades, boots and capes lined with exotic furs, and gold-and-pearl earrings. And yet, despite the imperial monopoly on the finest embroideries, silk weaves, and rarest gems (often given away as gifts), conspicuous consumption among the well-to-do was as common in clothing as in food and entertainment. Among the upper elite, changes in the length of the coat or width of the hat were dictated by fashion as the styles of the trend-setting elites of Peking, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Yangzhou were gradually diffused to urban and mercantile elites of other cities. Sumptuary laws attempted to regulate the dress of officials and degree-holders but, given the large number of social climbers, were
Imperially run factories turned out decorative objects in glass, metal, lacquerware, wood, ivory, and porcelain as well as jade. In the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, the expanding market was reflected in the wide variety of objects of daily use that were made of porcelain—lanterns, screens, chairs, vases, ceremonial objects, and boxes and containers of all kinds. In style, too, we see an eclectic taste founded on a wide-ranging familiarity with earlier periods, knowledge acquired through collecting (private and imperial) and scholarly inquiry. Early Qing monochromes imitated Song styles, but added new colors (purple and black, streaked flamé); like other collectors, the Yongzheng emperor ordered that antique bronzes and jades in the palace be used as models for new shapes. Motifs from one medium were borrowed and used to enrich others: the textures of silver, stone, laquerware, and wood were imitated in porcelain; brocade patterns were used for porcelain borders. The consumer demand for new forms, colors, styles, and textures was very great. This was an era when mirror arts such as lacquer and cloisonné and a taste for the rococo flourished.

Foreign demand for Chinese porcelain in this period stimulated production and encouraged the manufacture of objects in foreign styles (bowls with coats of arms, etc.). Though made primarily for export, they also shaped Chinese tastes. The delicate translucent enamels on white background known in the west as famille verte and famille rose were creations of the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns, the pink shade a studied imitation of European techniques. The milky white (blanc de chine) Dehua figures from Fujian included Chinese gods as well as Dutch horsemen. The reddish stoneware teapots from Yixing (Jiangsu), on the other hand, were made in a variety of irregular shapes highly prized by literati both in Japan and China. In addition to the many kinds of elite porcelain, Qing kilns produced chinaware and stoneware in bulk for the ordinary person at home and abroad. The production of wares of different quality in the same factories assured a diffusion of designs and styles between classes and between localities within China and beyond.

Qing architecture, by contrast, shows little foreign influence. European architecture, transmitted by the Jesuits at court, was the model for a complex of buildings constructed at the summer palace by Qianlong (and destroyed in 1860); but, like the clocks and other gadgets brought by tribute missions, these buildings were largely curiosities, seen by a few, with little influence on native traditions. Instead, Qing architecture had such continuity with a long and conservative tradition that had emphasized harmony with the environment and cyclical rebuilding rather than permanent structures. Wood was the preferred building material, but the
demand for lumber in the eighteenth century was so intense that it encouraged the substitution of brick and stone by the less affluent in Peking, and may have done so elsewhere. (One of the charges against Heshen was his extravagant use of the durable and finely textured nan wood of western China for his Peking residence.)

Qing emperors constructed a great many grand public buildings in and around the capital, at many national shrines, and in every important administrative center. This elaborate neoclassical style rejected Ming simplicity and was not remarkable for its originality, but it did provide models of traditional techniques and cosmological concepts throughout the empire. In these buildings, as in domestic architecture generally, we can see certain unifying ideas that underlie diverse forms.

Separated from the outside world by a wall, the Chinese house consisted of one or more courtyards between buildings that were usually one story high and one room deep. The layout, as Nelson Wu has noted, permitted “graduated privacy” from the public rooms near the gate to the private rooms at the rear.10 The Imperial City inside Peking followed this pattern on an enormous scale: a series of concentric walls enclosed the Forbidden City, differentiating between the public halls where the emperor met with officials and envoys and the Great Interior that was open only to the emperor, his women and children, and eunuch servants.

Although peasant homes might have only a few rooms, the number of component hearths, which defined the jia units in an extended family, increased as one ascended the social scale. Size and solidity distinguished a landlord’s home, walled to protect his wealth. Degree-holders residences in the Qing could be identified by the ostentatious horizontal plaque and tall flagpole at the main gate. Walled houses, some built with towers at the corners to facilitate defense, became common in areas of high militarization, increasingly so during the nineteenth century. Unusual round multistory houses that emphasized communal solidarity were built by Hakka (See plate 8.) Multistory buildings were rare except in cities where crowding and high real-estate values prevailed over a preference for the ground level. One such town, not surprisingly, was Huizhou, which featured many of these two- and three-story merchant houses, usually with the front and back wings of a room facing a central courtyard.

In buildings, as in other aspects of material culture, the life-style once restricted to a few became popular among a great many in the eighteenth century. One manifestation of this trend were the garden villas constructed by late Ming and early Qing elites. They too were built according to traditional formulae but emphasized a more refined taste for irregularity, asymmetry, and surprise. Extensive gardens with pavilions, bridges, ponds, and winding walkways, shut off from the noisy world by high walls and planted with trees and flowers, dotted the major Lower Yangtze cities and inspired imitation elsewhere.

These gardens created a microcosm of the natural world within a controlled environment, arranging earth, rocks, plants, and water around the buildings in ways (like poetry and painting) were replete with historical and literary allusions. Although the architectural arts were transmitted in an artisanal tradition, many literati designed their own gardens and considered them an expression of their character as well as their taste. Qing emperors imitated Lower Yangtze villas on a grand scale outside Peking and at their summer residence in Rehe, beyond the Great Wall. As wealthy families lost their riches and were forced to sell their bismes and properties, others eagerly clambered to become owners of famous sites. Some of these gardens survive today, but none achieved the enduring recognition of Prospect Garden in Dream of Red Mansions, inspired by the Cao family estate of the early eighteenth century but created in the imagination of Cao Xueqin.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the circulation of elites through the urban centers of eighteenth-century China had diffused to a widespread population a variety of different but now familiar regional variations on common themes in buildings, clothing, food, drink, and entertainment. Mercantile, literati, and imperial patrons, using their considerable wealth, had created enduring examples of this common culture. The vitality of eighteenth-century urban culture persisted, surviving the social conflict and crises of confidence of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

LIFE-CYCLE RITUALS

Life for all Chinese was punctuated by special days that followed the rhythms of the lunar month, the year, and the individual lifetime. Occasions for relaxation, entertain, visits, and feasts, these days marked the transition to new status, expressed please and gratitude for supernatural assistance, and reminded people of their identities as members of families, villages, and other groups. They were the quintessential expressions of popular culture, unifying Chinese of various social strata living throughout the empire. Indeed, one could say that performance of the crucial rituals of birth, marriage, and death in the prescribed manner was one of the key elements in popular conceptions of what it meant to be civilized, to be Chinese and not a barbarian. We present here the
normative rituals, bearing in mind that there were persistent subethnic and regional variations on these models; current research does not make it possible to say much about how these rituals were changing in the Qing period.

Weddings and funerals were unquestionably the two most important life-cycle rituals in China. Although birthdays were occasions for festivities for the elderly, most people simply counted themselves a year older at each new year. The first formal celebration of a child’s birth came at the end of one month with special dishes and the giving of gifts by friends and relatives. This was the point at which a child would be officially counted in the family register; boys would be assigned “milk names.” Infancy was in general an anxious period for parents, since mortality was very high for children of all classes. The child who survived infancy remained at risk until the danger of smallpox was past.

For boys and girls the transition to being a productive adult was gradual, but there was no period of adolescence, and the shifts from infancy to adulthood went unmarked by ritual or public display. The age of six or seven, however, was an important turning point for both sexes, marking for boys the onset of formal schooling, the removal from maternal to paternal authority, and the conferral of a formal name. For girls, foot-binding began at this age, the tight painful binding of the toes and wrapping of the feet to keep them the small size deemed desirable for wives. The onset of puberty was indicated by a change in a daughter’s hairstyle and decreased mobility outside the home; formal instruction in the arts of cooking and sewing, if it had not begun earlier, started now. For boys, the transition to work at the father’s occupation also began gradually at a young age, even among the elite for whom schooling started at home. Sexual maturity, once marked for men with the capping ritual that had died out by Qing times, was now signaled only by marriage. Even courtship, although a subject for folksongs and plays, took place within the strict confines of arranged marriages.

Although there was much variation in local custom, most young people were engaged and married in their late teens. The formal preparations were negotiated through a matchmaker; the betrothal was marked by an exchange of gifts between the two families and considered as binding as a wedding. Because of their importance in raising or lowering the social position of a family, marriages were arranged with great care. Surname exogamy was observed, differences of status were closely considered, and the boundaries between religious or ethnic minorities firmly defined. Marriage itself was a transaction between families, not individuals, and involved a further exchange of property (both dowry and brideprice) and the ritualized transfer of the woman to the home of her husband’s family. The wedding was an occasion for both families to win local prestige through lavish entertaining of relatives and friends.

In the course of a lifetime, there were various causes for the occasional celebration. Boatmen would celebrate the successful completion of an arduous voyage, scholars the passing of the examinations, parents their child’s recovery from a serious illness. For adults who had passed fifty or sixty years of age, birthdays became a cause for joy and (particularly among the elite, it appears) were remembered with gifts, feasting, and entertainment. (The birthday extravaganzas of Kangxi and Qianlong—and the latter’s mother—surpassed those of the local gods and may have set the style for Manchu nobility and high officials.)

Although ordinary government officials had formal ages at which they were expected to stop work, retirement from farm or manual work was probably involuntary on the part of most men, who had to earn a living or contribute to the household coffers for as long as possible. The abdication of the Qianlong emperor in a great ceremony on New Year’s Day, 1796, was as exceptional as his occupation. The marriage of a son or birth of a grandson may have been a private signal for a woman’s retirement from childbearing, but she would just be entering on the most glorious period of her life, when she ruled the household as matriarch. For the well-to-do, old age was the reward for a youth spent in diligence and obedience to elders; for others, it was a painful and insecure period of life.

A funeral was an even more important ritual than a wedding for a family in Qing times. Because of the centrality of filial piety in this culture, the mourning of a child for a parent took ritual precedence over other demands, and one did not marry, take exams, or contribute to community festivals while in mourning. Washing the corpse, placing it in the coffin, receiving condolences, chanting for the soul of the deceased, moving the coffin to the graveyard, and constructing the grave itself were all carefully prescribed by custom. Expenditures were supposed to be high (as a sign of respect for the deceased), and extravagance was generally encouraged. Most of a family’s network of friends and relations came to pay condolence visits and present gifts. For close relatives, funeral clothing and ritual defined what Maurice Freedman has called “the hard core of Chinese agnation.” After death, the spirits of deceased relatives (represented by wooden tablets) were cared for by their descendants on a daily basis, supplemented by offerings at the grave at regular intervals, and given special attention on the anniversaries of the death.
The death of the father usually meant a restructuring of family relationships. If the man was poor and left young or infant children, his jia was in great economic danger, since it lacked adult labor power to till fields or engage in other work. The widow would probably have to hire laborers to do the farm work, but most small farms could not be maintained with this added cost. The death of a father in a richer household brought other threats: a young widow would be vulnerable to attempts by her brothers-in-law to take her husband’s share of the estate away from her sons and force her to remarry and leave the family. In households with two generations of adults, the father’s death signaled the division of the family property when the sons finally became heads of households in their own right. This division, a crucial stage in the household cycle, was marked by none of the ceremony associated with individual rites of passage.

In general terms, clothing and hairstyle were the standard markers of new or special status. Women changed their way of wearing their hair at puberty and marriage. The shaving of the forehead and braiding of the queue, in addition to being an initial symbol of Manchu rule, seem to have indicated a boy’s progression to adulthood. Men and women who left their families to become monks or nuns shaved their heads entirely. During mourning, men were expected to unbraid their queue and forego any shaving as a sign of grief. Special clothing was worn by a corpse, bridal couple, nun, priest, monk, and of course officials. The distinctions between Han and non-Han were similarly marked by hairstyles and clothing.

Weddings and funerals were family affairs, and their ceremonial locus was the main hall of the home where the ancestral altar was located. Relatives and the personal acquaintances of the family were invited and cemented these ties with gifts. While there was usually a religious specialist at a funeral, a wedding was performed without any professional in attendance. No government validation or participation was necessary for either ritual. These crucial transitions—including betrothal and the birth or adoption of a child—were instead announced by the family to the ancestors and to the local earth god (and through him the celestial bureaucracy).

Both weddings and funerals showed considerable differentiation according to the status of the individuals concerned. Deviations from the major form of marriage, as, for example, when young girls moved to their future husbands’ homes as “little daughters-in-law” or when widows remarried, were, like the funerals of the unmarried or underage, celebrated with truncated ritual and only modest display. The amount of money expended also varied widely. Imperial life-cycle rituals became public events, although the casual involvement of the populace was not encouraged. Imperial rituals also revealed thorough acculturation and adoption of Chinese norms by Manchu rulers. Kangxi’s marriage at the age of eleven in 1665 was performed in a largely Chinese style. And after Shunzhi’s death in 1661, when the emperor’s orders that his corpse be cremated were obeyed, Qing emperors and their consorts were buried in the Chinese mode; indeed, Qing mourning observances were slightly more stringent than those during the previous dynasty.

Imperial ritual extravagance set a model for others to emulate. Yangzhou salt merchants flaunted their wealth in lavish weddings and funerals that involved huge processions and hundreds of guests. The government obliged even its soldiers by paying special allowances for these occasions (twice as much for funerals as weddings). Landlords called upon tenants for service at weddings and funerals. Merchant guilds frequently made provision for storage of the coffins of sojourner members and had charitable grave sites for the indigent. Ordinary people, who might spend the equivalent of a year’s income on these events, created marriage and funeral saving associations on which they relied for funds. The very poor were shamed by having to make do with the simplest of rituals and burying their dead in public graveyards.

ANNUAL FESTIVALS

It is not surprising that the Chinese calendar, whose promulgation and design had from earliest times been a function of the emperor, marked each year by the reign name of the current ruler. The eighteenth century of the Western calendar thus corresponded to the period between the thirty-ninth year of Kangxi and the fourth year of Jiaqing (r. 1796–1820). A year was divided into twelve lunar months of usually thirty days each, with an intercalary month inserted every three years to keep the lunar and solar calendars in synchronisation. The new moon fell regularly on the first of the month, the full moon (whose bright light permitted evening activities) on the fifteenth; each month was also divided into three periods of ten days each. Each day consisted of twelve periods of two hours each. Official calendars were issued in the tenth month of each year. They were probably the basis for popularly printed almanacs that also included information about religious holidays and noted for each day what activities were auspicious and inauspicious.

In the Ming and Qing periods this calendar, unlike that of Christian
Europe, had no scheduled day of rest. In earlier eras leave had been given to officials once every five or ten days, and in the Tang and Song dynasties there had been fifty-three or fifty-four holidays during the year. The number of holidays had been continually reduced, and, although the new-year break was lengthened to fifteen days in compensation, the Qing really observed only three major holidays, universal for all classes: New Year's, the fifth day of the fifth month, and the mid-autumn festival. The emperor himself adhered to a rigorous schedule of work. If he was conscientious (as eighteenth-century emperors were), for most of the year he was up and holding audiences with officials by 5 A.M. or 6 A.M., before breakfast; court officials were clocked in on a twelve-hour schedule, from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. Artisans seem to have worked equally long hours, while the only constraints to agricultural work lay in the hours of daylight available.

Chinese daily routines were punctuated by festivals that followed the changing seasons and were defined by both the lunar and solar calendars. These rituals reflected and shaped agricultural and business cycles. Some were associated with the repayment of debts, guild meetings, or the renegotiation of contracts; others with the planting or harvesting of crops. The New Year's celebration dominated the winter, lasted for several weeks, and was a holiday from employment for virtually the entire population. Families (including deceased ancestors) were reunited, and friends and relatives exchanged visits. New Year's was traditionally a time of reckoning, even in the spiritual world, as the kitchen god was bribed in order to sweeten his annual report to the Jade Emperor on the household's behavior. It was the one time when everyone tried to have meat on the table, in dumplings in North China and in other delicacies elsewhere. The lantern festival on the fifteenth day of the first month, when everyone went out into the streets to see the lantern displays, symbolized the end of the holiday and was one of the rare occasions when women of all classes were permitted to walk about in public. During the solar festival in the spring known as qingming, families again cemented links with their ancestors and one another by visiting and cleaning their graves. Duanwu (the fifth day of the fifth month) was a time for wearing certain prophylactic objects as the heat of summer approached, as well as for competitive community boat races on rivers and canals. The protracted Ullambana rites to appease the spirits of the unended dead that lasted (unofficially) most of the seventh month were a counterpoint to the family-oriented new-year holiday of the winter. These festive but worrisome rituals involved everyone in communitywide activities and necessitated the services of Buddhist monks and Taoist priests. The arrival of autumn was signaled by the moon-viewing mid-autumn festival of the fifteenth day of the eighth month, commemorated with moon cakes, while the double ninth (the ninth day of the ninth month) called for picnicking on a hilly spot with a view.

Intertwined with this cycle of holidays were the birthdays of China's many deities, whose celebrations prompted temple festivals and fairs. Although the worship of some gods had become standardized by their inclusion in the official pantheon, China had hundreds of deities, each with its own birthday (and some with more than one celebration a year), and so there was no single sequence of rituals in which the entire country shared. Each village, town, and city had its own set of important dates. At most temple festivals the community visited and made offerings to the god, watched the plays put on for the deity's benefit, and generally enjoyed the lively atmosphere.

Some ritual celebrations were generated by crises in the lives of communities. When there were devastating epidemics or droughts, officials led the populace in special penitential rites to seek relief. At long intervals, special rites of thanksgiving were performed in local temples by communities to thank the gods and request continued protection.

Although the constituencies of most temples were residential or occupational groups of a limited size, temples to the same god often celebrated on the same dates, and certain temples had in the course of time become pilgrimage sites that attracted tens of thousands of visitors annually. At the temples on Putuo Shan, an island off the coast of Zhejiang, for example, thousands of pilgrims came to worship the goddess Guanyin on the nineteenth day of the second, sixth, and ninth months.

Tai Shan, the sacred mountain in Shandong, was the site of a spring pilgrimage. A twentieth-century observer commented:

Every day during the spring pilgrimage season... is marked with the arrival of several thousand country folk. The red-bordered banners... carried by the venerable leaders of each band, indicate that they come from villages all over the face of eastern China... on the home journey the pilgrims... travel heavily with souvenirs in the way of shrubs from the sacred mount, alpenstocks with dragon heads, dolls and whistles for the babies, and pewter amulets or earrings for the wife at home.
intentions toward the gods." At the principal temple, the Palace of the Princess of the Azure Clouds, pilgrims threw their offerings into the main altar room through barred doors, believing that any that landed within the room and not on the porch were accepted by the goddess and her two female associates.

The celebrations of annual holidays and gods' birthdays had much in common with weddings and funerals. All were a respite from work, an excuse to enjoy many kinds of popular entertainment, and were times when traditional restrictions loosened. Women went out of the home more readily; gambling, shopping, drinking, and eating were encouraged; music filled the air, and there was much to look at. A sense of abundance reflected the real redistribution of wealth within the community that took place as the richer members contributed proportionately more to community festivities.

Children learned the rudiments of popular culture as they looked at temple decorations, the gods and their retinues on parade, the priests in their embroidered robes. The legends and quasi-historical stories associated with special days were retold to each new generation: the feats of the warrior god, Guandi; the piety of Mulan who journeyed to hell to save her mother; the virtues of the poet Qu Yuan commemorated in the dragon-boat races; and so forth. The associations between certain colors, foods, and directions of the compass, the distinctions between male and female behavior, the relations between generations—all were illustrated in ritual actions and thus handed down over the centuries.

Festivals themselves generated the need for specialized goods. Small industries throughout the country produced the ritual paraphernalia essential to these events: paper spirit money, candles, lamps, special food offerings, incense pots, banners, gods' statues, coffins, catafalques, shrubs, sedan chairs, and parasols. Special stores dealt exclusively in religious and ceremonial supplies: the production of new-year pictures and popular woodcut illustrations of the gods of happiness, emolument, and longevity was concentrated, for example, in Suzhou and several North China counties. Many people, especially those without regular work, depended on the sporadic employment and charity that accompanied public processions and feasting.

Although the basic unit of participation in these festivals was the household, not the individual, we have seen that many rituals celebrated and defined larger groups—"families" of affines and agnates, lineages, native-place associations, temple organizations, occupations. Where rival groups lived side by side (e.g., lineages, guilds, religious or ethnic minorities, even offices of the government), some rituals accentuated their differences and provided a framework for competition. At the same time, loyalties within groups at different levels of organization (e.g., neighborhoods within towns or villages, families within lineages) were cemented by the need for cooperation and collective endeavor. When loyalties competed, priorities could be defined; the centrality of family values in this society, for example, was emphasized by the suspension of all other activities at the time of the new-year holiday.

As we have noted, many of these rituals also marked the changing seasons of the year. Most festivals had some food or special product with which they were associated—the peonies of the late spring, charms purchased for the fifth day of the fifth month, moon cakes of the mid-autumn festival, chrysanthemums of the late fall, _labā_ porridge of the eighth day of the twelfth month, matched couplets and god posters of the new year. Indeed, there seems to have been an annual cycle of foods (different from place to place) loosely correlated with other festivals and the availability of the foodstuffs that gave variety to the diet. Certain games and sports were also associated with particular seasons and festivals—autumn cricket fighting in Peking, or spring dragon-boat races in central and south China. Festivals not only advertised the availability of seasonal goods but also promoted their sale. In less commercialized areas, temple fairs substituted for markets. In cities, these festivals were the occasion and place for the sale both of seasonal items and goods for which regular demand was weak (pet dogs, crickets, pigeons, and so forth).

Among the urban elite, an interest in the foods, flowers, and entertainments of the changing seasons may have been deemed more dignified than the worship of deities popular with the vulgar masses. In a Suzhou temple on the birthday of the dragon god of Dongting Lake, the prominent local families set up displays of glass lamps and flower arrangements in the temple where they gathered in the evening to sing, listen to music, and talk; ordinary people could only look on from afar, hanging over the railings erected to keep them out. Demand grew for decorative seasonal paintings and porcelain statuettes of deities with national reputations and comparatively high status, such as Guanyin or the god of longevity (for which the kilns of Dehua, Fujian, had recently become well known), a demand that seems to reflect elite absorption (and appropriation) of traditions associated with the lower classes.

The continuity of gods and the names of festivals over the centuries has masked both regional difference and temporal change. The same rites were performed by social groups that were unlike one another or were
different from what they had been a century before. More important, rites with the same names were in fact carried on in very different ways in different places and at different times. As Robert Weller's work on the rites of the seventh month has shown, the place and the meaning of the feeding of the hungry ghosts within this ritual was altered considerably as society in Taiwan changed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We might expect, for example, that the emphasis on competitive boat races as part of the dujuan festival was not equally strong all over China (we know that not all communities held them) and may have become prominent in places where competition between urban organizations was becoming more controlled. In the absence of further research, it is difficult to see exactly what changes were taking place during the eighteenth century. In general terms, there appear to have been long-range trends toward the standardization of festivals from the top by the elite and by the state, as well as toward the creation of urban organizations that emphasized cooperation rather than competition.

STATE RITUAL

Although state rituals were performed by a very few, they drew on the popular repertory, established the highest standards for these ceremonies, and reflected the seriousness with which ritual was regarded in Chinese society. No treatment of China's cultural system would be complete without consideration of this essential component of government. For the truth is that the Qing state was not a secular institution; rather, its legitimacy depended on assumptions about the ties between the Son of Heaven and the cosmos, and on his crucial role in creating harmony between human society and the natural and supernatural world. Expressions of order in the universe, such as the creation of a calendar and the recording of the movements of stars and planets, were, together with the recording of human events, state functions administered by the Board of Rites.

Anyone who has examined the detailed records of individual reigns, the Votable Records, will have noted the impressive number of ritual events in an emperor's schedule of work. The "grand" or first-rank state rituals were those performed in the capital at the Altar of Heaven, Altar of Earth, Temple of the Ancestors, and the Altar of the Land and the Harvest; sacrifice at these first-rank altars required the personal participation of the emperor. The grand sacrifice to Heaven was the first ritual act performed by the Manchus when they entered Peking in 1644; it was so fraught with political significance and so intimately linked with the imperial institution that for anyone else to worship Heaven was seen as an act of high treason. The accession of each new emperor was marked by his performance of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, symbolic acknowledgement of the notion that "the power to govern was not an affair among men, but an arrangement between Heaven and the ruling group."

The state ritual calendar marked the seasons of the year. The emperor worshiped Heaven at the winter solstice and Earth at the summer solstice; sacrifices to the imperial ancestors took place each quarter and at year-end, and sacrifices to the Altar of the Land and the Harvest once a year. Each sacrifice disrupted normal routines and required a three-day period of sexual abstinence preceded by ritual bathing. During this period, the whole court abstained from wine, meat, and strong-smelling vegetables like garlic. For the participants, no mourning was to be observed during this interval, no sacrifices performed, no music played, no invitations to feasts issued or accepted. Animals "without blemish" were selected for offerings: at the grand sacrifice to Heaven, for example, fourteen bullocks, a large number of sheep, and many pigs were among the offerings. Sacrifices of the first rank were marked by performance of the "three kneelings and nine prostrations" on the part of the emperor and other participants. Like everything else, the number of sacrificial offerings, degree of ritual action, and number and rank of participants in the rite were carefully graded. Correct performance was essential to ritual effectiveness.

The spirit tablets of the emperors and their consorts, beginning with Nurjaci, were placed in the Temple of the Ancestors, the Taimiao, located in the palace grounds just south of the Wu Gate. Worship here symbolized the emperor's rightful place in the imperial patrimony as well as his role as exemplar of filial piety. As in ordinary households, there were regularly scheduled rituals during the year; individual ancestral tablets would be brought out for offerings on the deathday. Imperial ancestral tablets were also placed in the sacrificial halls of the emperors' tombs in the two imperial cemeteries located in the mountains northeast and northwest of Peking. In order for the spirits of deceased emperors to participate in the ceremonies at the Altar of Heaven and the Altar of Earth, additional tablets were kept at those locations and brought out for the grand sacrifices, where they were placed second only to the tablets for Heaven and Earth.

The state religion observed at the highest, imperial level extended all the way down the administrative hierarchy to the level of the county. There the county magistrate was expected to make offerings to his spiritual
counterpart, the city god, and seek his cooperation in ensuring local peace and prosperity. He also conformed to a highly formalized schedule of ritual offerings to deities in the official pantheon, performed rites on imperial death days, and led the community in seeking relief from natural disasters.

These imperial and official rituals were directed toward communities defined by the state (the empire, the ruling house, the bureaucracy, the degree-holders). They were also distinguished by their reliance on written procedures for ritual and music, procedures in which great attention was given to the rank and position of the participants. These rites eschewed the use of Taoist or Buddhist professionals, did not include any of the ecstatic behavior associated with the mediumship or spirit possession common to many popular festivals, and relied on government employees as ritual actors. Ritual responsibilities were treated with great seriousness by emperor and bureaucrat alike. During the eighteenth century, members of the literati did intensive research on the rituals of “the ancients,” not only to perfect official ceremonies but also to standardize ordinary rites, especially those of the uneducated populace and non-Han communities. The guides and handbooks they wrote (and that others simplified in more popular manuals and almanacs) disseminated orthodox procedures and helped create ritual consistency among classes and in different parts of China across time. Bureaucratic standards came to permeate most ritual ideals. At birthdays, marriage, and death, clothing and transportation for men, women, and gods were supposed to be like those of an official.

VALUES AND BELIEFS

On the basis of our analysis of different elements in the eighteenth-century cultural system, what can we say about the values and beliefs shared by persons of different status in Qing China? As Annals historians have discovered in France, the shift from study of concrete behavioral patterns and on-the-ground institutions to values and beliefs is extremely difficult to make, and cannot be accomplished with any degree of certainty. The following speculations are offered in the hope that they will provoke the research and analysis required for illumination of this vital yet neglected topic.

Perhaps the most basic value that spanned diverse social strata and even groups marginal to Han Chinese society was identification with a model of Chineseness that was already broadly disseminated in early Qing times. Han Chinese, from officials down to peasants, identified their culture with civilization. Non-Han peoples on the peripheries of the empire were called barbarians, some of whom were “raw,” wild and unassimilated, others “cooked,” partially accustomed to civilized values and behavior. To be Chinese was to be a member of a superior civilization: ethnographers studying overseas Chinese communities, as well as contemporary anthropologists studying outcast groups, have commented on the pervasiveness of this sense of identity, which crossed regional and socioeconomic lines.

But what was entailed in being Chinese? Some might associate this identity with the written language that had linked the educated elite of this culture for millennia. Even the illiterate peasant had a profound reverence for the written word—written in Chinese characters of course—if not a passing familiarity with it. The near-magical power of writing was certainly common to Taoist rituals, imperial edicts, legal contracts, and fine calligraphy, while written materials were a shared language for educated people from across the empire. Despite differences between dialects that were virtually separate languages, being Chinese seemed to involve some commitment to the unified and standardized written character.

The classical formulation for Chineseness identified clothing, diet, and ritual as key components. China’s superior textile technology had long since become a hallmark of Chinese culture. The Chinese rejected the dairy products that the nomads ate and took pride in a culinary tradition that considered good eating essential to good health and placed eating at the core of community solidarity. Above all, to be Chinese was to value ritual and to follow tradition, especially in marriage and funerals.

Implicit in the centrality of ritual was a confidence in the linkage between external behavior and internalized values, an assumption by now so ingrained in Chinese culture that performance without belief could be seen to suffice. In a ritual, correct actions were thus more essential than the feelings of the participants. Individuals with widely different educations and backgrounds could invest the same ritual with different meanings. Ritual thus subsumed and harmonized differences even as it educated. Community rites cut across class and were not categorized as being associated exclusively either with the elite or with the masses, thus forming the basis for a truly popular (in the sense of pervasive) shared culture. Chinese followed Confucius not only in this faith in ritual but also in the core values expressed in such ceremonies: the asymmetrical and hierarchical relations between ruler and subject, father and child, husband and wife.
Proper behavior expressing orthodox values was associated in Confucian thought with a properly ordered and stable society presided over by a ruler who was in harmony with the cosmos. Harmony, order, and stability were goals not just for the state but for individuals as well. To the Chinese, civilization consisted of imposing order onto chaos, transforming societies in which individuals wore no clothing, “knew their mothers but not their fathers,” and made no social distinctions. The enemy of order was 乱, internal confusion and chaos. Not something imposed from the outside, 乱 was the disorder that could arise within the state, the community, the household, or the individual when ethical norms and correct ritual were not followed. The desire to promote order and prevent 乱 permeated Chinese society from top to bottom; most agreed that the nonviolent inculcation of values through a broadly educational effort, rather than reliance on coercion, was the best method of promoting order. Using the same paternalism with which children were socialized in each household, officials and literati attempted to indoctrinate the citizenry, beginning with an emphasis on proper action in a familial, social, and ritual context, because orthopraxy was seen as a means to promote orthodoxy among uneducated people. Crucial bulwarks against 乱 were the patrilineal family and the state.

By Qing times, filial piety meant a commitment to the patriline, living and dead, so profound that it affected not only behavior but also, as we have seen, many political and social institutions. Family identity was primary and central, and, as we have noted, individualism weak and undeveloped by comparison with the West. The concern with individual salvation that was so important in many Christian and Muslim societies was stunted in China. An emphasis on individual conversion was found primarily in heterodox sectarian religion, and it remained an anomaly in a culture where most religious activities were collective rituals and where salvation was muted by belief in cycles of karmic rebirth. Chinese were expected to seek individual fulfillment in carrying out the social roles and obligations learned in childhood. A crucial source of order was thus unity, loyalty to the group against the threatening outsider. Another was orthodoxy, the upholding of agreed-upon norms; deviations should be corrected, or at least ignored.

Family metaphors permeated the bureaucratic state: the emperor was called the Son of Heaven, the county magistrate the father-and-mother official, and yet the bureaucracy also presented a powerful alternative model for structuring social relations. The tension between particularistic and universalistic criteria for achievement, between public and private concerns, persisted of course, but acceptance of control based on objective yet correct standards and of a high-degree of impersonal regulation was a hallmark of the eighteenth-century citizen’s world view. Chinese took for granted the existence of this centralized state that administered a large empire and promoted Confucian norms, and government service was still the most prestigious career. It was no coincidence that the world of the gods was an otherworldly bureaucracy in which objective merit and personal pleas could both bring blessings.

Like the individual whose attempts to order his world were sometimes threatened by fate, so disunity in the state could also be caused by external disaster, but by Qing times the resilience of the state, even in the face of rapid social and economic change, was well established. At the level of both household and society, there was a pervasive confidence that almost anything could be achieved given the right combination of talent, connections, and luck. This was a complex society that promoted entrepreneurship and managerial skills at every social level. “Poverty comes not from [spending on] eating or clothing but from inadequate planning”—peasant proverbs like this testify to an emphasis on initiative and enterprise that complemented fatalism and resignation.

A belief system that de-emphasized personal salvation and stressed the collective patriline, that valued ritual and behavior based on venerable Confucian precepts concerning the sources of order in society and the cosmos, and that encouraged individuals to work hard and improve their lot in life—these are major elements found not just in the eighteenth century but in traditional Chinese society generally. The eighteenth-century exposure of Han Chinese to non-Han minorities merely drew the latter into the powerful orbit of Chinese culture. Even the doubts about the foundations of classical education that were planted by evidential scholars in the minds of their contemporaries grew very slowly into disbelief and rejection.

Despite intensified contact with other ways of doing things, confidence in Chinese core values seems to have been unshaken. A growing minority found this complacency cause for alarm, but it would only be later, with exposure to the technologically advancing and equally self-assured culture of the West, that Chinese would begin to question in earnest the superiority of the culture of the Middle Kingdom.