

CONSTRUCTING DOMESTIC ORDER

European states in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had to make choices about how to relate to aristocratic, commercial, and clerical elites as well as to peasants and townspeople. Their options were shaped by the particular social structures and ideologies that defined proper roles and expectations for rulers and subjects. Would-be territorial states shared similar challenges and faced similar claims; the successful ones created similar capacities. The Chinese empire faced a different constellation of challenges. No elite or popular claims limited state authority. Rather than centralize power through compromise and conflict with other power holders, the Chinese state aimed to create institutions of social order at the same time as it avoided meddling in ways likely to stimulate hostile responses. Not surprisingly, the political ideology elaborated under these conditions differed dramatically from the political ideologies developed in European countries.

Social and Political Order in Europe and China

Looking across Europe in 1100 and viewing the large number of very small political units dotting the landscape, three types of elites can be easily distinguished—nobles, clergy, and urban commercial elites. Each had a distinct social role—to fight, to pray, and to make and move goods. Each was organized in a distinct fashion: nobles enmeshed in feudal relations, clergy organized by the Church, and commercial elites organized to pursue profit and power. Before territorial states were formed, the late medieval political order was largely a local or regional phenomenon with one of these elites at the center of overlapping jurisdictions: clergy in bishoprics, merchants in municipal governments, and aristocrats in feudal relations. The formation of territorial states created the challenges of defining local political order within a new larger state construct and of defin-

ing political roles for nobles, clergy, and merchants. Though no group was homogeneous and variations in composition and outlook gave rise to intra-European differences, the general social and political distinctness of these groups stood in stark contrast to Chinese social structure, in which such groups did not have corporate identities; there were consequently no struggles among them or with the state. The specific accommodations reached among these three elites and European political rulers, however much they varied among themselves, all addressed a particular problem in European state formation—how a centralizing state would establish territorial authority in concert or competition with elites that played changing political roles.

From the European state's point of view, its three kinds of elite each performed a distinct and useful function. Nobles, or at least a large percentage of them in medieval times, derived their *raison d'être* from supplying military service to the Crown. Merchants were useful because their activities were a source of tax revenue and loans for needy rulers. Clergy took on the duty of establishing moral order throughout the realm. Coercive, material, and normative components of constructing social order were associated closely with three institutionally distinct elites. The centralizing territorial state called on the three to play roles it deemed desirable, but the elites did not always agree with state preferences. These disagreements led to different kinds of accommodation and conflict between European states and their elites. In some cases, including a band in the north from England through Scandinavia and further south from Spain, east through Burgundy, the Swiss Confederation, and Italian city-states, parliaments representing elite interests achieved control over taxation and warfare in the late medieval period, though they were not always able to hold onto these powers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Downing 1992:10). Where absolutist states greatly increased central power, elites lost political power. But the contest continued as royal sovereignty was increasingly compromised and even replaced by various kinds of popular sovereignty after the French Revolution.

In late medieval times, European social order was imagined on two radically different spatial scales. At local levels, social order was created first in rural community settings, cities, and manors, and then in small territorial units of bishoprics, duchies, principalities, and the like. At a far grander level could be found the Church's mandate to order the world. European states emerged at an intermediate spatial scale to take on some functions encouraged by the Church, like providing justice, law, and sometimes charity. Elites of society, assembled into estates, negotiated with would-be territorial rulers (Poggi 1978, Dyson 1980). Within studies of European history, the distinction between estates and classes and the analysis of the shift from a social order based upon estates to one based on classes has long been a focus for research and debate.¹ But if we take a broader per-

¹The medieval materials that gave rise to an image of old regime society organized into orders has been studied by Duby 1980. Roland Mousnier has produced a detailed study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France centered on the concept of "orders" (Mousnier 1979). His principal intellectual

spective that includes the Chinese case, we see that estates and classes are intimately linked and in many ways the dynamics of change are historically particular to European cases.

Late imperial China had no estates, and notions of class did not matter to the construction of political order as they did in Europe. In China, the same ideological vision perceived local and central order to be of one piece. The units of social order were not estates but families, lineages, and villages. Elite families spanned different economic and social functions, but the vision of social order did not privilege those functional differences. While Chinese thought recognized functional differentiation into scholars, peasants, merchants, and tradesmen, these did not become the primary units for organizing social order. They were never accorded institutionally distinct corporate status. Elite families were those that managed to diversify the pursuits of their sons into government service, management of family lands, and commerce. At any point in time the basis of elite status for a particular family could be possession of a civil service degree and official post, wealth made from trade, or major landholdings. Some families were more likely to reproduce their success in one kind of elite activity than another. In general, there was a continuum of possibilities without any sharp distinctions among elite members that were reproduced over time. In Europe as well there was social mobility among aristocrats and men of commercial wealth, but these European elites possessed institutionalized voices which Chinese elites lacked. European elites also possessed military forces of their own; towns lost their own forces before aristocrats, who fielded independent armies in France as late as the Fronde rebellion of the mid-seventeenth century. Chinese elites lacked both military force to organize revolts and civilian voice to express their interests against those of the state. While European elites had institutionalized voices that circumscribed the limits of the ruler's authority, Chinese elites participated in extending the reach of state power and authority by sharing a common Confucian agenda for promoting social order. Where Chinese elites disagreed with the government, they depended in most cases upon the limitations of state capacities to avoid open confrontation. They did not set out to demarcate in sharp and explicit ways a space of their own. They did, however, set out to advocate a kind of localism in which elites and local officials could act more independently of the central government.

The emperor, for his part, worried about the danger of horizontal cliques compromising the vertical bureaucratic ties of the central government. Knowing that the fall of the Ming dynasty had been attributed to fighting among officials, eighteenth-century emperors may have opposed localism as a way to protect the dy-

antagonist has been the Russian scholar Boris Porchnev, who analyzed the old regime in terms of "classes" and class conflict. A convenient introduction to both perspectives as well as the work of other scholars is Woloch 1970. But not only Marxists have applied the concept of "class" to the ancien régime. The pioneering historian Marc Bloch devoted several chapters to "social classes" in the old regime in his classic work *Feudal Society* (1961, 2:283-358). Despite Bloch's use of "class," however, many later scholars have chosen to stress the differences between a society of "orders" under the ancien régime and a modern "class" society; see, for example, Blum 1978:418-41.

nasty. The differences between state–elite relations in China and Europe alert us to structurally distinct situations that provide frameworks within which domestic order was created.

In the early modern period, European states competed for power with aristocratic elites and watched, at times anxiously, for popular rural protests. But urbanization created an even more pressing source of concern for many governments: the domestic social order they aimed to create was largely an urban social order governed by the state's bureaucracy.

The problem of domestic order for the Chinese empire, in contrast, involved both urban and rural areas. Of the two, rural social order was much more important to Chinese rulers. They feared peasants, not as individuals, but as people drawn or even duped into rebellious roles by unscrupulous leaders who were always the prime targets for punishment. This perspective followed from Chinese principles that defined people by their social roles and relationships, not in terms of either corporate identity or abstract individuality. If the late imperial state did not face the difficult European problems of breaking the powers of aristocracies and free cities, it did nevertheless face its own serious problems. Unlike European rulers, Chinese rulers were not seeking in late imperial times to create new centers of power and authority, to subjugate groups that had previously been relatively independent elites. The Chinese challenge was to reproduce social order as an equilibrium condition within the limited technologies of rule available.

The constraints were several. The bureaucracy, a very large and complex organization, was nevertheless limited in size. Official presence was limited to the county seat, beneath which were several towns and hundreds of villages and populations ranging from several tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. But the state could not just increase the numbers of local officials and expect greater success; additional officials would not only have cost more financially, but have raised the organizational costs of vertical bureaucratic integration and control over personnel. Coordinating the roughly 1,300 county magistrates at the bottom of the hierarchy was difficult enough. The central state was limited in the amounts of information it could secure from counties across the empire. Rule making and policy implementation were repeatedly qualified by particular social and ecological conditions, making the task of creating domestic order far more complex than any simple application of the same principles and policies to all areas. The root of the empire's difficulties lay in the inadequate number of local officials to rule across an agrarian empire in the manner desired by the state. A solution to the problem of creating effective local rule was central to the states' success in securing the empire during late imperial times.

Domestic Order in Europe and China

During the Middle Ages, European government was largely local in scale. At one extreme was fragmented Italy with its many city-states. At the other extreme was England, where the king was crucial; there was no landownership without a lord;

there were no lords without royal recognition. In general, medieval continental Europe had no overarching authority to which lords or city burghers were subject. The early modern state-making experience changed this by creating absolutist states across Western Europe.

The experiences of local communities varied. In England, local authorities sustained a tradition of independence stretching back to Roman times despite the importance of the king. The imposition of local rule by central government meant the incorporation of power holders into a larger system. Justices of the peace were appointed by the Crown, but served without salary. Leadership was in the hands of gentlemen. The Prussian *Landrat*, like the English justice of the peace, was appointed by the central government, but unlike his English counterpart the *Landrat* was paid for his work, which centered on mobilizing and managing men and horses for the military, a function quite unlike the English focus on local peace and welfare issues (Bendix 1978:199–200, 329). Local government in France, in contrast, had been more formally organized under *parlements*, the members of which possessed wealth and/or noble birth. By the seventeenth century, the French Crown had succeeded in taking over many fiscal, military, judicial functions from the *parlements* in most of the provinces, if not without conflict, as the Fronde rebellions remind us.² Local administration in outlying areas like Brittany and Languedoc remained independent.

Political community in feudal Europe was rooted firmly in local settings. In all state-making efforts, centralizing governments faced local elites with independent claims to local power and authority. Some combination of cooption or displacement was pursued by centralizing states as elites generally aimed to protect their autonomy. Just as the English experience promoted the separation of the economy from the state, the English experience also promoted the separation of society from the state. A strong civil society could largely govern itself. Many affairs not in secular hands could be managed by religious organizations both in England and on the continent. The complement to a state that meddled little with the economy was a state that played a minimal role in matters of local welfare. In both France and German areas, the local autonomy of many cities continued through much of the absolutist period. Matters of local administration remained distant from the centralizing government. Despite important variations in state-making processes among European countries, certain themes are found to some degree in all cases.

The state-making process centralized the extraction and control over larger amounts of resources but did not create new kinds of political community. Resistance to centralizing efforts appealed to traditions of political autonomy that would later promote the expansion of political representation and democracy. Representation allowed elites to resist state demands.

Administratively speaking, local governments retained varying degrees of autonomy through the eighteenth century. In most of Europe, rulers established lo-

²The Fronde and other forms of tax resistance are addressed in chapter 10.

cal officials paid by the state. The French crown maintained authority over local officials even though those officials were not always responsive to the ruler's desires. In England, local government was more a creature of local society, staffed by unpaid local elites (Guenée 1985:117). European rulers formed territorial states by subordinating urban and rural populations near the capital and in peripheral areas, with varying degrees of local autonomy. The extreme case of local autonomy occurred as an offshoot of European political traditions.

The greatest local government autonomy was not in Europe but in the American colonies, as Tocqueville explained in his sharp and clearly idealized contrast between European, especially French, forms of local government and what he saw in Jacksonian America. Whereas in Europe, local government had been incorporated into centralized structures to serve national states, in America, government began with local townships, then built to the state level; the federal government came last, its powers limited by the authority already assigned to lower levels. The Anglo-American tradition of local self-government is consciously conceived as a participatory democracy quite separate from the state as a centralized bureaucratic machine. The degree to which representative democratic institutions developed in the nineteenth century was correlated with the strength of local government institutions able to define and defend spheres of authority separate from the central state. In the U.S. case, the discrete authority of local government became embodied in the tradition of local governments having their own taxes, usually property taxes, to support services and functions deemed local in nature (Wallis 1984).

Institutional differentiation among levels of government, each of which had distinct duties, may have become most fully developed in the United States, but differentiation existed throughout the West to some degree. Common to all Western cases was the creation of institutionally distinct political interests and power in society that became the basis for local levels of government and social order. Centralizing territorial states faced the challenge of establishing their authority over these units through some combination of persuasion, negotiation, and force (Blockmans 1994).

Not surprisingly, this European context for domestic political order does not prepare us adequately for considering the creation and reproduction of order in the Chinese case. The central Chinese state's concern for social order embraced rural society far more systematically than did that of European states. The degree of vertical integration necessary in the Chinese case to achieve central control over social order was far greater than in any European case, given the vast differences in the spatial scale of Chinese and European societies. China did not have an institutionally autonomous and ideologically articulated notion of local government founded on notions of democratic participation and opposition to the central government. Again not surprisingly, Europeans have not always been impressed with imperial Chinese approaches to social order.

Tocqueville was rather skeptical of the virtues that centralized administration had brought to China. European travelers often spoke approvingly of China's so-

cial order and harmony, but Tocqueville suspected they were achieved at great cost:

China appears to me to present the most perfect instance of that species of well-being which a highly centralized administration may furnish to its subjects. Travelers assure us that the Chinese have tranquility without happiness, industry without improvement, stability without strength, and public order without public morality. The condition of society there is always tolerable, never excellent. I imagine that when China is opened to European observation, it will be found to contain the most perfect model of a centralized administration that exists in the universe. (Tocqueville 1960, 1:94)

Tocqueville believed reports of Chinese central administrative control. But he suspected that having such centralized power reduced local initiative and popular enthusiasm. Tocqueville's vision of a Chinese emperor and central bureaucracy achieving a tranquil social order resembled the one that the ruler and officials themselves no doubt held, although they recognized it to be a goal, not a reality. The more common complaint of both Chinese officials and modern scholars has been the central government's various difficulties and limitations in trying to rule agrarian society in imperial times. The challenges faced by central state and county officials in late imperial China have alerted scholars to the fragile and, certainly by twentieth-century standards, limited capacities with which Chinese bureaucrats faced their mission of ordering society. Yet conventional wisdom fails to take the measure of the Chinese problem with social order: no other state in world history has confronted the challenge of creating instruments of domestic rule over two millennia. The very length of the empire's existence indicates that it succeeded to some degree.

The equilibrium political position for China was agrarian empire. Nor was this equilibrium stagnant. Territory, and especially population, expanded in late imperial times, in particular during the eighteenth century. We cannot hope to understand Chinese dynamics of state formation and transformation without considering this distinctive set of conditions.

During the second millennium of imperial rule, the settlement of growing numbers of people across ever-larger areas demanded innovative strategies for local government. While many techniques certainly elaborated upon older institutions and policies, at their core lay what we might call a Neo-Confucian agenda for social order which suggested to local elites new ways to promote social tranquility and popular welfare. Zhu Xi and his contemporaries championed the role of elites in buttressing social stability through good deeds, perhaps as alternatives to undesirable government activities.³ More generally, however, elite efforts were seen not as substitutions for but as complements to official efforts to maintain lo-

³For example, the replacement of Wang Anshi's green sprout loans (*qingmiaofo*) by Zhu Xi's community granaries (*shecang*) was conceived as a shift from government-sponsored monetary loans to grain loans by elites.

cal social order. In Qing times, this mix of official and elite efforts assumed particular configurations and reveal how political norms were translated into social practice across an agrarian empire.

Much scholarship on local social order in late imperial China has stressed the roles of nongovernmental actors. The state has often seemed inconsequential to analysts. The vast scale of the empire guaranteed that labor-intensive strategies of official rule and control were impossible. But while Neo-Confucian principles of social and political order created complementary roles for officials and elites, many interpretations look largely at elites. The importance of gentry households and other local elites to the maintenance of local social order has long been noted by scholars. Fei Xiaotong (1953) made the gentry the basic intermediary between officials and peasants well into the twentieth century. More recently G. William Skinner's (1977:19–20) observation that the size of the state, relative to its population, contracted over time has often been the point of departure for scholars who expected elites to play a greater role in local affairs than did local officials during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Japanese have examined more directly the interests and motivations of the gentry themselves; Shigeta Atsushi (1984) outlined a theory of gentry control over local society that others have elaborated since his death. The Japanese literature, highlighting the lower Yangzi experience, tends to stress the gentry's assertion of control over tax and welfare in local society. In certain ways this control came at the expense of the state in the late Ming as well as in the Qing dynasties, but in others gentry control represented state power in the countryside. While possible antagonists, gentry and officials shared enough common ground to make them jointly define the political elite (Mori 1975–1976).

The American literature has focused on nineteenth-century changes in state-society relations in which local elites assumed ever-larger responsibilities. William Rowe's two books (1984, 1989) on the central Chinese riverport of Hankow during the nineteenth century present the emergence of a new kind of city in which the management of urban social order rests crucially upon the efforts made by merchants and other elites to organize the city. Mary Rankin's work (1986) on parts of lower Yangzi China in the decades following the mid-century Taiping Rebellion (1850–64) tracks the activities of local elites who assert expanded roles for themselves as they re-establish social order after the largest civil war in world history, a conflict that crippled government control over the empire's wealthiest regions and caused several million fatalities. Rowe and Rankin have related their analyses of social change in nineteenth-century China to the concept of a "public sphere" in which elites gradually expand their activities (Rowe 1990; Rankin 1990). Using this concept, comparisons can be made with European social changes in the early modern and modern periods.

The distinguished German philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas analyzed the term "public sphere" (*Öffentlichkeit*) in his effort to clarify a realm of public opinion and political activity that emerged in postfeudal European societies. Habermas (1989) offers an explanation for the appearance and demise of the public sphere. The public sphere was the arena in which reason could be heard

and rationality could advance. The collapse of the public sphere has meant that irrationalities of increasingly powerful governments and consumer cultures have reduced social capacities to reason collectively and thus live democratically.⁴

Those who espouse a Chinese variant of the public sphere sometimes relate the nineteenth-century phenomena studied by Rankin and Rowe to the roles of the gentry in late Ming and early Qing society. The spatial dimensions of the arguments that move from the late Ming forward are generally confined to regions along the Yangzi River, especially to places in the lower Yangzi. A second key locus of evidence comes from new urban centers in the nineteenth century. Often omitted are less urban and less economically developed regions. Nor is a recognition of the eighteenth century as a period of state activism different from both the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries salient in discussions of a Chinese public sphere.⁵

Institutional Bases for Social Order

The variations in eighteenth-century China's granary system suggest that the public sphere some scholars have found in China needs clarification. The eighteenth-century civilian granary system suggests that officials depended on a public sphere where they could and substituted for it elsewhere. The awkwardness of speaking of officials "depending" upon a public sphere suggests that the concept may fit Chinese politics and society poorly. The Confucian agenda for local order in eighteenth-century China did not privilege either elites or officials as the guardians of local order. It recognized that either group could be important in particular situations.

The eighteenth-century state's system for subsistence management included monthly price reports for grains in every prefecture of the empire as well as weather and harvest reports. On the basis of information from these documents, officials made decisions on how best to use granary reserves and influence commercial shipments to equilibrate demand and supply within small locales and across great expanses. The collapse of this system in the nineteenth century created a range of scenarios similar to the conditions of the late sixteenth century. The decline of the granary system was occasioned by factors both within and without the system. From within, the granary system was undermined by difficulties officials faced in repeatedly mounting the organizational efforts needed to keep the system running. The Jiaqing emperor took an important step in 1799 when he freed local community granaries from having to report their activities to local officials, who in turn no longer reported on these granaries to provincial officials. From without, military demands for grain increased; the additional funding required for

⁴Habermas 1989. I offer an extended evaluation of the "public sphere" concept's application to Chinese history in R. B. Wong 1993.

⁵Keith Schoppa (1982:7-8), the first scholar to use the term "public sphere" in the China field, was in fact attentive to spatial variations, but others after him have not always shown the same sensitivity to spatial issues.

restocking rarely arrived. Gone was the eighteenth-century system of official monitoring and coordination of granary activities within provinces and between them (Will and Wong 1991:75–92). But this does not mean that officials and elites stopped building granaries.

Officials and elites in several provinces continued their efforts to fund and manage granaries during the nineteenth century. Compared to eighteenth-century practices, granaries in some places did become more of an elite responsibility, since officials by themselves became increasingly unable or unwilling to sustain granaries by themselves. But more salient on an empirewide level was the overall decline in reserves and the absence of a centrally monitored and coordinated system. Reliance on local elites to sustain rural granaries was hardly new in the nineteenth century. During the late Ming and even under the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors, community granaries in Jiangsu and Zhejiang were not subject to the kind of monitoring that became common for much of the empire. What the nineteenth-century granary situation suggests, however, is that a kind of Jiangnan model of elite activism may have become more common, along with less official leadership and certainly a collapse of systematic official oversight. Thus, if we want to imagine a Chinese public sphere, it emerges from the reduction of official activism rather than as a product of elite efforts to stake out a set of claims against the state, as happened in parts of Europe.

The history of local schools in the Qing suggests that variations in strategies of moral control resembled those of material control. The Chinese, more than any other state in the early modern world, made the principle of instruction (*jiao*) basic to its conception of political rule. During the Zhengtong (1436–1449) reign of the Ming dynasty, community schools (*shexue*) were established in many counties as an official undertaking (Igarashi 1979:296); by early Qing times only a few remained, at least in name if not always in practice. The most common form of local school in Qing China was called the “charity school” (*yixue*), established by the government in border regions to civilize local populations; in interior parts of the empire local elites responded to official exhortations to build charity schools (Ogawa 1958; Igarashi 1979). Angela Leung’s work (1994) on charity schools during Ming and Qing times demonstrates the central role played by the leaders of local communities rather than by officials in the creation and maintenance of these institutions. Though her research is focused primarily on lower Yangzi examples, she includes evidence from some other places as well that suggests a major role for local elites in local education outside the lower Yangzi as well.⁶ But how common was this lower Yangzi pattern?

⁶Certainly for the lower Yangzi, Leung (1994) has demonstrated that the nomenclature of community schools was more commonly employed in the Ming and charity schools in the Qing. She also finds for the lower Yangzi cases a clear shift in the relative importance of official and elite funding and management from Ming reliance on officials to Qing reliance on elites. But for other parts of the empire, such as Guangdong, the community school nomenclature is retained in the Qing dynasty (Guangdong TZ 1822:144.1–9).

In frontier provinces, the state clearly played a larger role in charity school formation. In the *Precedents and regulations of the Qing dynasty* (*Da Qing Huidian shili*) one finds frequent mention of official efforts to promote charity schools in Guizhou, Yunnan, and the more peripheral parts of other provinces like Sichuan, Hunan, and Guangdong (*Huidian shili* 396:1a-9b). Charity schools were especially associated with the education of minority peoples. The best-documented case of successful government promotion of charity schools is by the famous eighteenth-century official Chen Hongmou, who in Yunnan spearheaded the founding of 650 charity schools. As William Rowe's research (1994) has shown, Chen made his subordinate officials responsible for developing charity schools. Through repeated questioning, he made them increasingly uneasy about their failures to establish these educational institutions. He suggested that they turn to a variety of sources to fund the schools—local budget surpluses, customary fees, rents from estates attached to their bureaucratic posts, revenue from newly opened but previously concealed land, and contributions from local elites. Whenever possible, Chen sought land endowments for charity schools to give them a secure source of funding. Elites played a role in establishing charity schools through financial contributions as well as gifts of land, but their efforts were not the driving force behind the expansion of charity schools. In sharp contrast to the dynamics in the lower Yangzi, officials in Yunnan clearly played the leading role. The contrasting roles of elites and officials in charity school formation in the lower Yangzi and Yunnan parallel in their broad outlines the different roles that elites and officials played in community granary formation in economic cores and imperial peripheries during the eighteenth century. Between these two poles, charity school formation involved a mix of official and elite benefactors, just as community granaries did.

Schools and granaries complemented each other ideologically. The promotion of education and economic welfare were twin commitments of the local magistrate; thus the term *jiaoyang*, "to instruct and nourish," was considered a basic feature of government.⁷ Moreover, the variable roles of officials and elites across the empire were also similar in both systems. But the organizational formats developed in the eighteenth century to coordinate these activities were separate vertically structured institutions rather than a single horizontally integrated local system. The eighteenth-century state achieved greater oversight over education and more control over grain reserves than had been accomplished by earlier dynasties. Local community granaries fit within a larger granary system that was itself simply one major component of a broad repertoire of state options to

⁷In the explanation of contents (*jianli*) in his magistrate's handbook of 1694, *A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence*, Huang Liuhong (1984:61-62) shares with the reader his effort to gather materials on education and economic welfare for the topic of "instruction and nourishment" (*jiaoyang*); granaries are actually discussed in the next section of famine relief (*huangzhen*), as food-supply management for crises was a large enough subject to be distinguished from other policies for economic welfare.

influence food-supply conditions; local granaries had the straightforward function of feeding peasants during a particularly lean year and occasionally providing seed grain for the next year's planting. Local schools, however, had multiple functions. State-sponsored schools, especially in the empire's frontiers, were aimed at "civilizing" minority groups with indoctrination in Confucian moral and social order. In contrast, local schools in the interior were often conceived as the first step of study for boys with scholarly promise; some of those who did well in local schools could expect to continue their studies and pursue the greater goal of passing the civil service examinations. Because the state already controlled education through the civil service examination system, school administration itself needed less central control than the granary system.

Local efforts at creating and sustaining charity schools, like those aimed at mobilizing grain, involved both officials and elites. The fuzzy distinction between official and unofficial roles in education is visible in the county-level "studies official" (*xueguan*), whose position, in Alexander Woodside's words was "incompletely bureaucratized" (1990:182). Such vaguely defined roles confuse the distinction between official and unofficial.

Similar ambiguities may be seen in many societies. The parallel to the Qing studies official is the U.S. school board composed of elected representatives who are not clearly official or unofficial. In Western cases, the ambiguity between official and nonofficial is often tied to issues of representation, to the ways in which certain strata of society gain access to political participation. The ideological and institutional articulation of the continuum between official and unofficial was very different in China, where the concepts of representation and the separation of powers among levels or branches of government did not exist. The public sphere as an arena within which politically active populations can contest and influence state action was lacking in late imperial China. Instead, officials and elites jointly participated in the creation of institutions for social order. The particular inputs from each varied in different social, economic, and political situations.⁸ The significant difference between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practices was not between official and elite, but between practices monitored and even guided by the central government and those depending more completely on local initiatives from either officials or elites and usually from both together. What distinguishes nineteenth-century from eighteenth-century practices are the more explicit *local* limitations.

The Legacy of the Search for Material and Moral Control

Scholars have long noted the manpower and organizational limitations of the late imperial Chinese state that precluded its effective penetration of village society.

⁸My stress on a continuum between official and unofficial in China does not mean that the roles of officials and elites could not on occasion be contested; from Woodside's (1994) research on education, for instance, the role of "studies official" was subject to some disagreement. But such disagreements did not lead to the fundamental distinctions between state and society drawn in many parts of Europe.

This observation has often led us to expect, implicitly if not explicitly, that the state could succeed at few efforts to order local society and that, if the government did make such efforts, it would have to delegate responsibility to local elites. When joined to arguments that local elites had their own priorities and desires, this train of thought easily leads to the conclusion that the state was of at most limited relevance to local order.

The evidence for separate and even competing agendas is clearest on taxation issues.⁹ On other issues, scholars often assume that private funding means that the interests served must be separate from the state. This chapter argues that in the realms of material welfare and moral indoctrination the state and local elites shared an agenda which during the eighteenth century was implemented throughout the agrarian empire through a mix of official and elite efforts coordinated, if not fully controlled, by the central state through vertically integrated reporting procedures. Officials defined the dimensions of their involvement in these concerns according to their assessments of local social structures and economies. What distinguishes in general eighteenth- and nineteenth-century government efforts at sustaining social order is the degree to which and manner in which higher-level officials sought to monitor local society. The eighteenth-century granary system, for instance, demonstrates the state's capacity to construct a massive and sophisticated structure to influence material welfare across diverse locales. While certainly a fragile achievement in fiscal and organizational terms, it was nevertheless sustained for many decades as a complex system of grain mobilization, storage, transfer, and distribution. Not surprisingly, a government capable of this kind of success also attempted to impose vertical control in other areas as well.

In the realm of moral indoctrination, the Qing emperors paid considerable attention to implementing the village lecture system (*xiangyue*). The term *xiangyue* in Song and Ming times had referred to a local community organization within which social harmony was to be promoted through proper instruction and material aid. In the Southern Song, the *xiangyue* which can be translated as "village compact," was conceived as a unit within which people could organize to fight fires, repel bandits, and care for the sick and poor (Wada 1939:51-52). During Ming times, the Hongwu emperor called for establishing the *xiangyue* as a local education institution in 1388. Famous figures like Wang Yangming and Lu Kun also championed the *xiangyue* as a local institution that twentieth-century scholars have seen as an instrument of self-government or local elite control (Matsumoto 1977:131-38; Wada 1939:119-26; Shimizu 1951:338-60; Handlin 1983:47-51, 198-99). But as Maurice Freedman noted many years ago, the early and mid-Qing rulers gave the term new meaning as a kind of public lecture system subject to official oversight (1966:87). In his "Sacred Edict" the Kangxi emperor offered sixteen maxims which counseled people to work diligently, spend carefully, treat kin and neighbors with propriety, promote correct learning, remit taxes promptly, and organize into groups to prevent thefts. Through the village

⁹For instance, James Polachek's (1975) essay on the gentry in Suzhou during the Tongzhi restoration.

lecture system, people were to listen to lower-degree holders (*shengyuan*) who elaborated upon these themes (Hsiao 1960). Not satisfied with his father's maxims offered in terse classical Chinese, the Yongzheng emperor issued his own amplified instructions, later augmented by many popularizations (Mair 1985).

The lecture system depended on elites without formal bureaucratic positions who recognized their Confucian responsibilities to preach correct behavior. The state made efforts to organize and monitor the lectures as an activity distinct from other local operations. In certain cases, the magistrates themselves were expected to give the lectures.

Already in the eighteenth century there were complaints about the limited efficiency of the village lecture system. In part, the problem was the lack of an analogue to the granary accounts that tracked the mobilization and disbursals of grain. But even if the village lecture system could not claim the organizational sophistication and success of the granaries, the political intent remains clear—eighteenth-century rulers intended the village lecture system to be a vertically integrated system that specialized in moral indoctrination. Officials were expected to keep track of these lectures.

Apart from these material and moral systems, the eighteenth-century state mounted a considerable effort to implement the *baojia* system to provide for mutual surveillance and security. Registering households created an institutional nexus between family and state to regulate the people's virtue (Dutton 1992). This virtue, promoted through moral and material methods of control, was the conceptual center of a stable social order. For all three categories of local control—material, moral, and coercive—the eighteenth-century state aimed to create distinct vertically integrated and functionally specific institutions through which a centralized state could organize local social order. These systems created explicit roles for elites, whose levels and dimensions of participation varied across the empire.¹⁰

European state strategies to create domestic order did not reach the level of Chinese food-supply management policies. Nor did European states make the efforts at moral instruction typical of late imperial Chinese officials and elites. Churches were the institutionalized guardians of moral order; ministers and priests engaged in moral lecturing. Li Xinchuan's critique of religious moral instruction in 1234 would not occur in Europe for several hundred years: "The country establishes schools in the prefectures and counties in order to clarify human relationships; this is the proper business of Confucians. In establishing schools, is there any reason not to oppose the flourishing of monks?" (Chafee 1994:316). Less obviously, European churches also kept track of populations more closely than governments did. Church registers of population more closely

¹⁰Another indicator of political concern for official control over local institutions comes from Chen Hongmou's efforts in Jiangxi Province to utilize lineages more formally in local administration. Chen (1763, 14:35a) argued that a leadership position should be created in every lineage and filled by an individual whose responsibility it would be to report to local officials on local order.

resembled Chinese government *baojia* records than any European government practice.¹¹ European states in their period of major formation between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries did not imagine, let alone attempt, to implement the range of institutions of social order typical of China.

The success of high Qing Confucian strategies to promote local order clearly depended on official ability to convince elites to play roles defined for them by the state in accord with Confucian moral sensibilities. We might expect that the major weakness of these systems was the antipathy elites felt toward official efforts to bend their will to a state-defined social agenda; late twentieth-century social sensibilities resist political cooptation. Moreover, for the late imperial elite we know best, the gentry elite of Jiangnan, there is a record of resistance to official interference in local affairs that begins in the late Ming and certainly carries forward into the early Qing; gentry elites were able and willing to manage their own locales without state interference.¹² But the state may have perceived the situation differently. For if elites succeeded in sustaining the local social order without official participation, this merely simplified the tasks of ruling the agrarian empire and allowed official energies to be expended on other types of problems. The absence of official oversight would be least anxiety-provoking in those areas where elites were both able and willing to adopt Confucian social and moral outlooks. More generally speaking, the limits on eighteenth-century practices of sustaining local order were imposed less by antagonism between officials and elites than by constraints on bureaucratic capacities and shifting ideological commitments.

To return to food-supply management: the bureaucratic costs of surveillance over local operations could be substantial. In the case of granaries, gathering the accounts of many separate rural granaries, checking to see that the figures balanced each year, then aggregating them into reports was an operation that demanded skill and patience from local officials. As granaries became more common, the difficulties of performing these operations grew accordingly. If mistakes were made, it often became difficult to uncover them in future audits, so accurate monitoring became increasingly less likely.

The difficulties of monitoring local activities such as managing rural granaries were not merely an issue of organizational capacities. Higher levels of government might worry about the misappropriation of money or grain by local officials. Fears of potential meddling limited the role the Yongzheng emperor assigned to local officials in rural granary management. Worries again surfaced when the Jiaqing emperor decided in 1799 to end state monitoring of local rural granaries because he felt it was impossible to sustain official oversight without also suffering corruption in some county governments (*Renzhong shilu* 50.24b–26a). The central government had to decide whom it trusted more—local elites who, guided by the

¹¹European parish registers included more complete population data than Chinese *baojia* registers, which assists demographic analysis. In terms of population control, however, the Chinese system generated far more information than any Western government of its time.

¹²For examples using famine relief, see Mori 1969.

positive force of moral suasion channeling elite self-interest, would take care of local affairs on their own, or overburdened local officials who counted surveillance among their many duties.¹³

The relative importance of material and moral means to achieve local order, not surprisingly, varied over time. As China entered the mid-nineteenth century, state commitments to ideological and material order were overshadowed by threats of rebellion and the consequent challenges of mobilizing men into militia and extracting revenues to meet military expenses. The shift in fiscal priorities was accompanied by an increased reliance on local officials and local elites, who were expected to coordinate the many activities necessary to first defend and then sustain local order. This meant greater local coordination of material, moral, and coercive means of control and less vertical integration of functionally specific activities. These changes certainly diminished the central state's abilities to manage local affairs, though many provincial and local officials continued to confront problems of irrigation, river conservancy, and famine relief.¹⁴ Indeed, flanking the purely military crisis of rebellion were social problems that continued to demand state intervention. Because official actions in the more peripheral provinces were driven by military considerations, we conventionally consider these areas separately from the economically more central regions. We focus largely on what might be considered a Jiangnan model of local rule, in which elites play prominent roles in providing the services that create social order.

I use Jiangnan as a model because there elites had played a salient role in local affairs since the late Ming. The empirewide context that gave Jiangnan elite practices their social significance however, changed between the late Ming and the late Qing. In the eighteenth century the government subordinated elite efforts to official oversight: in areas without strong elites, officials played more active roles. The empire's political integration of vast territories at the local level was predicated on central government recognition of varying roles for elites and officials. The central government's success, however, required a degree of coordination, oversight, and control that proved impossible to sustain amidst changing social and political circumstances. Jiangnan elites were least affected by the bureaucratic changes of the eighteenth century, because they were already primarily responsible for maintaining local order. When the eighteenth-century system fell apart, the Jiangnan model of local order emerged as a clear alternative.

¹³Some nineteenth-century local officials, however, continued to promote local granaries; see Hoshi 1985:297-98.

¹⁴Lest the diminished coordination and monitoring of local government activities be taken as a more general indicator of state weakness, consider two features of state activity. First, the central government was able to expand fiscal extraction dramatically in the late nineteenth century. Revenues expanded from a range of 30-40 million taels in the eighteenth century to an average of 83.5 million in 1885-94 (Wei Guangqi 1986:287; Hamashita 1989:79). Second, the government continued to mobilize armies to put down uprisings. Following military victories, officials like Zeng Guofan and Zhang Zhidong mounted efforts to reestablish social order and extend political control in the northwest and the southwest.

As late nineteenth-century elites were drawn more firmly into local government, the Jiangnan model became ambiguous: Is this the strengthening of the state or the growth of elite power? Both? Neither? Again, there is a continuum between what is formally in official hands and what is in elite hands; distinctions can be drawn, but the sharp institutional differentiation typical of European cases is not found in China.

The structural interchangeability of officials and elites doesn't mean, of course, that the policies the groups pursue are always the same. Moreover, elites do not necessarily identify more closely with the local populations than officials do. The institutional changes in government organization and practice between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries included the central government's abandonment of such activities as granaries. What masks this institutional decline is the rhetoric of the Confucian agenda for local order which did not explicitly require any central government role. Zhu Xi's local institutions enlisted local elite participation in creating social order under local magistrates. The central state played an active role in promoting these efforts for much of the eighteenth century but played much less of a role in the nineteenth century. As a result, the Confucian agenda for domestic order could be articulated at different levels with no change in the basic rhetoric of presentation. In this sense, it possesses a "fractal" quality—at any level in late imperial China we may find expressions of a Confucian agenda for social order.¹⁵

This fractal quality admits no easy dividing line between state and society. The fractal quality of Chinese ideology allowed the principles of social order to be articulated by different levels of government. The institutions developed to implement local order could also be replicated on small or large scales. The elites and officials who created social order were linked in networks that also possessed a fractal quality. Local elites had connections within an area smaller than those of national elites, whose concerns for social order replicated local concerns on a grander spatial scale. There were, of course, disagreements over how best to achieve local order, many of which were articulated with respect to "feudal" (*fengjian*) and prefectural (*junxian*) ideals. But these alternatives were expressed within a common ideological terrain that included the same local institutions even if people differed as to how officials and elites would manage them.

The fractal nature of Chinese state-society relations meant that officials at all levels accepted the same agenda for social order. To be sure, preferences among material, coercive, and moral institutions of control varied over time and differed across regions. In general, the state's reliance on elites enhanced its capacity to rule, but relations with elites also highlight the chronic fluctuations in that ca-

¹⁵The term "fractal" was invented by the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot to refer to the replication of certain irregular geometric patterns on different spatial scales in which the degree of irregularity remains constant. Thus fractals look the same whether so tiny as to be viewed under a microscope or so large as to be recognizable only from an airplane. See Gleick 1987.

capacity. At the base of these fluctuations was the instability of public institutions such as granaries and schools, which depended on periodic infusions of new resources and constant organizational energy to run effectively. Because elites and the state shared overlapping sets of interests, elites sometimes welcomed the delegation of state responsibilities to them. But elites were also oriented toward local society and could fend off the state either to defend the common people or more often to protect their own claims on resources and to control over local society. There were no clear divisions of responsibilities either between elites and officials or among different levels of the bureaucracy. Even where there was some functional differentiation and specificity, such as in the reporting procedures for granaries, there was no delegation of authority, resources and responsibilities for granaries. Instead routine surveillance and extraordinary investigations flowed from the central government when the state had the capacities and commitments to do so. When these capacities and commitments were less present, the reproduction of social institutions like granaries varied more dramatically across the empire, dependent upon the initiatives and efforts of local officials and elites. But since the logic of constructing social order based on these institutions was the same whether articulated locally or by the emperor, the fractal quality of government masked actual changes in the way China was ruled.

Terms like "public sphere" and "civil society" are hard pressed to embrace this multifaceted fractal quality, which is foreign to the early modern European experience and which obscures the axis of change in the implementation of political norms. The axis of integration between center and locale forged during the eighteenth century collapsed in the nineteenth century without affecting the basic social principles composing the agenda for local rule and order.

An Agrarian Empire's Decline into Modernity

From the point of view of social institutions, China's nineteenth- and twentieth-century history first appears to affirm notions of modern social change predicated on European patterns. The further decline of the granaries, which in the eighteenth century had been organized into a system of reserves spanning most of the agrarian empire, removed from view a kind of institution quite foreign to our European-based notions of modern social change and their stress on sharp divisions between the state on one side and a private economy and civil society on the other. The image of modern society based on these notions no longer describes very effectively late twentieth-century conditions, but the power of the concepts continues to shape our expectations of social change. Thus the disappearance of rural granaries in China fits comfortably with our notions of the decline of "traditional" empires and the rise of modern states. Even if our initial skepticism of granaries is overcome by evidence of their operations and we acknowledge their implications for material welfare, we can dismiss them as "traditional" since they do decline in importance in the twentieth century.

Changes in education also fit the conventional story line of a collapsed empire. The demise of Confucian education and its displacement by Western subjects meant that education was no longer primarily moral indoctrination. Postimperial governments made great efforts to promote a redefined curriculum of knowledge combining Western subjects with Chinese ones. As with the granary situation, the twentieth-century Chinese government's recognition of Western-based education affirms our expectations about social change.

If we move forward just a few decades, the Chinese parallels to European changes become less complete and persuasive. Rural subsistence management reemerged after 1949 as a basic political challenge. Though the specific institutional arrangements and the ideological presentation of these activities do not closely resemble Qing practices, the persistence of food-supply issues in local agrarian society is unmistakable. Central government officials have faced difficulties moving grain surpluses controlled by powerful provincial leaders, raising questions about flows of grain similar to those of earlier centuries. Complaints about peasants forsaking agriculture for trade echoed those made in late imperial times.¹⁶ Politics and education have also become enmeshed again since 1949. The state's attitudes toward elementary education resonate strongly with late imperial perspectives as the state seeks to impose its own moral vision of society through the education of young children. Of course, elementary education now includes many kinds of instrumental knowledge first learned from Westerners. But the presence of these "Western" subjects doesn't speak unequivocally for a more general Westernization.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century social and economic changes with roots in the West are obviously different from earlier historical parallels. Such changes have become models, opportunities, and constraints on China, especially since the second half of the nineteenth century. Though China had a long history of urbanism, nineteenth-century treaty ports clearly added new dimensions to the scene. By the second and third decades of the twentieth century, Chinese cities were the sites of new social groups, including industrialists, workers, and students; new forms of economic production and consumption; and new kinds of political expression such as mass demonstrations and boycotts. Urban centers became the most obvious places to expect a public sphere and a civil society. Certainly in Europe it is the cities that house these social formations. But where politics in Europe always had a strong urban component with classical roots, Chinese politics had long been agrarian and imperial. The Chinese institutions reviewed in this chapter were rural in orientation or intended to blend urban and rural. The new Chinese urban developments, including twentieth-century analogues to civil society, had to be linked in some manner to the rural society which China had been for so many centuries. The basic problem with many discussions of a public sphere and civil society is not, therefore, that they have misidentified similarities, but

¹⁶These issues are addressed more fully in R. B. Wong 1988.

rather that they fail to situate the similarities in their respective contexts and thus draw out their implications. The danger of working with a term like "public sphere" is that insufficient framing will elicit expectations for patterns of social or political change that are not in fact well founded.

Differences between China and Europe can be as striking as the similarities posited by discussions of public sphere and civil society. Consider, for example, the role of kinship in state formation. As Lawrence Stone puts it: "The modern state is a natural enemy to the values of the clan, of kinship, and of good lordship and clientage links among the upper classes, for at this social and political level they are a direct threat to the state's own claim to prior loyalty" (1979:99). The Chinese state continued to rely on kin groups as it became "modern." Social and political changes created ambiguous roles for lineages through the first half of the twentieth century. Feng Guifen, a famous late nineteenth-century thinker, for instance, saw the lineage as the basis for state efforts to nourish and educate the people. He established a tight conceptual connection between the lineage and the state by appeal to the *zongfa* system of ancient times; as a kinship-based political system, the *zongfa* system did not distinguish kin group from the state. By promoting a larger role for lineages in local government, Feng affirmed the continuum between state and society at the same time as he made the lineage serve the state's efforts at local government. As he envisioned the local scene, the state could implement surveillance, community granaries, and militia, with lineages as a base. The lineage thus provided the organizational focus for the increased interactions of officials and elites whose activities were increasingly considered components of the state's strategies of rule (Feng 55:5b-6b). Feng's approach would not be found in any nineteenth-century European government.

Feng Guifen's approach, however, also differed from the positions that eighteenth-century officials and the Qianlong emperor had taken. Where eighteenth-century officials and rulers emphasized vertical control over locales, Feng suggested a "feudal" (*fengjian*) system of government predicated on a much greater degree of horizontal mobilization. Feng's promotion of lineages in the lower Yangzi called for recognition of the lineage as a multipurpose, quasi-official organization. He saw this as a development that would strengthen, not weaken, local government. But successfully strengthening local government reduced the vertical integration of state decision making. It is ironic that the absence of vertical integration makes these elite activities appear to some Western scholars to be public and hence modern, in contrast to what had been official and bureaucratic and hence traditional. In fact, the change lies not so much in what elites began to do as in the reduction of what officials had been doing to promote and control elite activities.

The relationship among Chinese elites, local governments, and central state continued to be contentious and uncertain in the first half of the twentieth century. Philip Kuhn's now classic article on local government set out clearly some of the likely possibilities for local government development in the early twentieth century (Kuhn 1975). He argued for the constraints imposed on participatory and

representative forms of local government by a national state committed to maintaining vertical control over local authorities. Other work appearing in English since Kuhn's piece has explored the interplay of Western political ideas and Chinese political concepts, as well as the institutional features of local government operations in the late Qing and Republican periods (Min Tu-ki 1989; Roger Thompson 1988, 1995; Duara 1988).

The same analytical tensions and choices between local participatory government versus subordination and integration under central government that Kuhn presents for Republican China confronted officials and elites during the French Revolution. In this European case, local representative government was affirmed. China's repertoire of ideological principles and institutional forms did not make the French outcome at all likely in the Republican period. The late empire had no set of representative institutions or a "public sphere" like those found in Europe. Both were key elements in the process of European state making, though they may not have been always complementary. Absolutist states seeking to bypass the *stande* encouraged a public sphere for expression of opinions (Poggi 1978:83). Yet, this same public sphere became an arena in which intellectuals pursued critiques of the state. Chinese social order lacked both representative local government and a public sphere. A Confucian agenda for social order committed officials and elites to the common construction of an ordered world. Chinese ideology and institutions of rule are sufficiently different from European ones to make analysis of Chinese state activities in late imperial times difficult, if not impossible, through exclusive appeal to Western categories of analysis. Yet these categories became increasingly relevant as postimperial state making problems and possibilities include Western inspired ones. The reproduction and expansion of empire depended upon a range of strategies in large measure foreign to European state making processes. For China the process of post-imperial state making combines issues on the agenda of agrarian empire and those created through contact with the West.

The presence of a Neo-Confucian agenda for local rule shared by both officials and elites does not mean that officials and elites always agreed upon their respective roles in local society. They could compete with each other as much as they might complement each other. Moreover, to stress the Confucian context of strategies for local order doesn't mean that Buddhist and Taoist elements are not present amidst the broader cultural sensibilities within which officials and elites acted. European cases display parallel features. Just as Chinese elite-official relations could range from antagonistic to complementary, so could relations between European elites and centralizing states vary between conflict and cooperation. The variations are important to explaining particularities within Europe and within China. But to compare China and Europe, the contrast between the politically institutionalized positions of European elites and the fractal quality of Chinese social order is more important. Within their respective ranges of variations, European elites were more likely to have antagonistic relations with their state makers than Chinese elites were to be in serious conflict with their state.

Europe's public sphere was an arena in which politically engaged populations could express their claims against states. Processes of formal and informal bargaining took place to create government policies and political practices that social groups found acceptable. Within the social space of the public sphere, groups with shared interests could establish an identity and pursue their claims against the government. A public sphere makes sense only where such claims are a salient feature of state-society relations. In late imperial China, claims were far less important than commitments. Officials and elites were connected not by competing claims but by common commitments to the principles and strategies formulated to construct social order. Western forms of local government developed a set of resources and responsibilities differentiated from other levels of government. These forms of differentiation complemented the separation of state and society by making the state a group of bureaucratically distinct authorities.

No comparable division of authority took place in late imperial China. The fractal nature of political rule in China means that the state was less clearly differentiated internally and that the lines between state and society were not drawn as sharply. When we consider how the creation of social order is tied to state formation and transformation in China and Europe, we discover important differences in the dynamics of state-society relations. Other important differences in state formation, reproduction, and transformation emerge when we turn to state relations with the economy.