The study of the late imperial Chinese state and its relationship with the society it governed has been a field of great dynamism in the last couple of decades. Hence developed a more sophisticated understanding of the actual operations of institutions, and of the ways in which individuals pursued careers and social groups sought to maximize their interests in contention with each other and with the powers of the state itself. While some of this scholarship has taken earlier dynasties as its focal point, it has been the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) which has been most thoroughly investigated and which has come to yield perhaps the most substantial analysis.

The Burdens of Economic Growth

Prior to World War II already, Japan was the first non-Western country to become successfully industrialized. From the 1950s onwards, Japan again transformed its backward position, which resulted from the War, into one of world leadership in terms of its economy, its wealth, and its position at the forefront of technology and science, but not, or much less so, of its political institutions or culture. During the 1970s and 1980s, there was widespread belief that Japan's economic model was far superior to both the European Rhinelander model and the free market ideology and practices of the United States and Great Britain. Only in the 1990s, when Japan's growth faltered, was this assumption superiority called into question.

By Kenneth Hammond

Three members of the Grand Council sitting outside a pavilion, most likely in a garden in Beijing.

Liufrano traces the development of the use of merchant petitions by urban commercial groups; Zhang Zhongmin looks at informal government in Shanghai; and R. Keith Schoppa discusses water management in a micro-region of Zhejiang. To cite only one example from among these, Liufrano's paper highlights the contribution this collection makes to a more subtle and nuanced understanding of late imperial relations between state and society. In exploring the use of petitions from merchant groups to influence local government officials, he argues that we need to see these activities as part of a nexus of interest negotiations incorporating local commercial groups, government officials at the lower level (local government officers), and the overarching perspective of the imperial state. Rather than a simple clash of government intervention and merchant resistance, Liufrano reveals a certain convergence of interests which allowed the Qing to promote economic development and support local administration at the same time.

Chapters 2-5 are case studies of situations which called for particular responses from state administrators, and how those were handled. Nancy Park presents two corruption cases from the Qinglong era; Jane Kate Leonard revisits her analysis of the Daoguang era grain transport crisis, focusing here on the most crucial phase of this crisis in 1846; Joseph Tsi-hsi Lee explores the roles of Christian communities in dealing with collective violence in Guangdong; and Nawal looks at ethnic violence in Yunnan; and Dorothy Bound addresses ethnic conflict and land policy in Xinjiang. The final chapter is a comparative study by Zheng Shigang which traces the lingering influence of Qing administrative practice on local governance in post-1949 China.

Two major themes emerge from these papers. The first is that, while the Qing imperial state was willing and able to adapt to local conditions and to changing circumstances, it did not do so by making radical breaks with established practice or existing institutional systems. Qing officials continued to rely on the weight of precedent and experience, which was available to them from previous administrative experience and from local informants. At the same time, in recognition of the structural limitations of the imperial bureaucracy, there was an increasing tendency to turn to extra-bureaucratic agents in the resolution of problems. In some instances these were traditional local elites or partners in the examination culture who had not found places in the official hierarchy. In others they were newer manifestations of economic developments such as merchants' associations, which both facilitated the articulation of commercial interests and extended the reach of the state into the expanding economy. In other words, if a simple clash of interests characterized the Qing state as revealed in these papers it would be 'flexible'. In conjunction with works such as William Rowe's study of Chen Hong-mou as an exemplary administrator, or Brady Reid's work on county clerks in the Qing, the papers in Dragons, Tigers, and Dogs do a great deal to strengthen our understanding of, and appreciation for, the sophistication and modernity of government in the late imperial age.


Prof. Kenneth J. Hammond is Associate Professor and Department Head in History at New Mexico State University. Past President of the Society for Ming Studies, he is the editor of the Human Tradition in Post-modern China. His research deals with the culture and politics of the Ming dynasty and late imperial China. Starting this issue, Ken Hammond is the IAS newsletter regional editor for China. "khammond@nmsu.edu"

Bibliography


Professor Benno Galjart is Emeritus Professor of Development Sociology at Leiden University. His latest book is entitled Dreams and Deadlines. In 2003 he co-edited a reader on comparing development in Latin America and East Asia. galjart@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

Dr. Benno Galjart is a sociologist who specializes in the sociology of development. He has taught at several universities in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and has published extensively on the topics of development, globalization, and social theory.

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The British sociologist Runciman has pointed out that, in a social science there are four different meanings of understanding something: to report what happened, more or less as a journalist does, to explain why something happened; to describe how what happened was experienced by the people concerned (that is, how it felt), and, finally, to evaluate whether what happened was a good thing or a bad thing. This book is a mixture. It concentrates on what happened; to describe how what happened was experienced by people in a society, but it also creates hardship because some people find work too expensive for certain types of work that they are willing to do. Growth, however, not only helps the political elite but, also, of the Japanese themselves, led to speculation and, eventually, sanctions. Japan did not do so by making radical breaks with established practice or existing institutional systems. Qing officials continued to rely on the weight of precedent and experience, which was available to them from previous administrative experience and from local informants. At the same time, in recognition of the structural limitations of the imperial bureaucracy, there was an increasing tendency to turn to extra-bureaucratic agents in the resolution of problems. In some instances these were traditional local elites or partners in the examination culture who had not found places in the official hierarchy. In others they were newer manifestations of economic developments such as merchants' associations, which both facilitated the articulation of commercial interests and extended the reach of the state into the expanding economy. In other words, if a simple clash of interests characterized the Qing state as revealed in these papers it would be 'flexible'. In conjunction with works such as William Rowe's study of Chen Hong-mou as an exemplary administrator, or Brady Reid's work on county clerks in the Qing, the papers in Dragons, Tigers, and Dogs do a great deal to strengthen our understanding of, and appreciation for, the sophistication and modernity of government in the late imperial age.


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