

SURVEY

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A GUIDE TO THE "NEW" CHINESE HISTORY: RECENT PUBLICATIONS CONCERNING CHINESE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BEFORE 1800

SUMMARY: During the last 15 years or so, the study of Chinese history in the United States and Europe has been transformed through new foci of interest as well as the employment of social science methodologies. This article surveys a selected number of recent publications and categorizes them according to five themes: "commoners, women, and outsiders", "the structural approach", "state and society", "China and *l'histoire globale*", and "China and the West". It is demonstrated that the continuities within Chinese development, including the progressive demographic expansion of the Chinese population, the formulation and exercise of gentry rulership, the general vigour of the economy, and increased regional and subregional agricultural/industrial production and distribution are not confined to specific dynastic periods and should be viewed in a long-term context.

During the last fifteen years or so, the study of Chinese history for the period between the year 1000 and 1800, or in dynastic terms, from the Sung, through the Yüan and Ming, to the mid-Ch'ing, has developed at a rapid and progressive pace.¹ As contemporary historians build upon the investigative achievements and theoretical paradigms of their predecessors, they have succeeded in making this once elusive, 'static' period into one of great intellectual dynamism. Not only has the quantity of secondary writing concerning this period expanded, but also the quality has improved. Western-trained Chinese historians now employ a variety of methods involving precise quantitative techniques and/or analytic expertise in the theories of the social sciences. They have exploited methodologies derived from an-

¹ The relevant Chinese dynasties and their dates, including names of barbarian ruling groups where relevant, are:

Sung 960-1279
Northern Sung 960-1125
Southern Sung 1125-1279
Liao (Khitans) 946-1125
Chin (Jürcheds) 1122-1234
Hsi-Hsia (Tanguts) 1038-1227

Yüan (Mongols) 1271-1368

Ming 1368-1644

Ch'ing (Manchus) 1644-1912

thropology, demography, psychology, rural sociology, and labour economics. This is not to say they have rejected the traditional chronological emphasis with its venerable preference for Chinese texts; Chinese historians still must be masters of documentation, but they no longer simply examine events. They investigate social groupings and economic processes as well. In sum, they have been able to reorient many of the traditional subjects of Chinese history in terms of interdisciplinary accent and create a "new" Chinese history.

An important feature of this "new" Chinese history is its rejection of holistic models or cliché-like generalizations which attempt to characterize hundreds of years of middle-imperial (as opposed to late imperial or modern times, i.e. post-1800) history, based on a few key propositions such as "bureaucratic despotism", "change within tradition", or "feudal mode of production". In recent published work, as we shall demonstrate, even the most obvious symbol of continuity in Chinese development between 1000 and 1800, i.e. the imperial form of government, has been proved an institution of changing forces and inner-alliances. The Chinese government no longer takes on the stance as an unchanging monolithic giant, hostile or indifferent to the forces of individuals or local power structures. A last special point about the "new" history is its subject matter. The stress has shifted from the traditional sinologist's concern with the philosophical "Great Traditions" of the elite to themes in which the broad masses of the Chinese people and the institutions affecting their day-to-day existence are pre-eminent.

The reasons for these developmental changes in Chinese historical writing since approximately 1970 are complex, but most of them can be attributed to three factors: better training, both in history and language (not only in modern and classical Chinese, but also in modern Japanese), easier access to sources held in both Taiwan and the People's Republic of China, and a familiarity with the achievements of European and American historians, who utilize theoretical and methodological approaches of the *Annales* school or concepts within an implicitly Marxist-influenced framework. Other factors worthy of consideration are the crisis engendered by the war in Vietnam and the "radicalization" of universities in both America and Western Europe during the late '60s and early '70s. Both these developments indirectly took reference to contemporary events in China. As curiosity about modern China increased, the relevance of Chinese history became more obvious. Thus, one may attribute the attention given to pre-1800 Chinese history as an extension of an already developed interest in modern China.

At this point one might ask, when exactly does "modern China" begin? For some "new" historians modern China commences as "early" as the mid-16th century, while for others, it is the 18th century which inaugurates

a new era. The expression “pre-modern China” may also present some difficulty since for some scholars the entire period between the 1550s and the 1930s constitutes one coherent era. Rather than continue this type of discussion, it would seem more helpful to concede for purposes of convenience that “modern China” simply refers to China in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Our understanding of the basic assumptions which have underlined much historical writing on modern China has recently been examined by Paul Cohen in his important book, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York, 1984). This work is the first book-length summation of the conceptual frameworks used by three generations of historians since World War II. Cohen argues that until recently the study of modern China was formed out of three “Western-centric” paradigms: (1) impact-response; (2) modernization; (3) imperialism. The problem with these intellectual constructs, he notes, was that they all claimed Chinese society incapable of generating real change on its own, and that much of China’s experience in the last 150 years was caused directly or indirectly by Western influences. However, as Cohen clearly indicates, since the 1970s there has been a general shift in historical writing on modern China, a movement which he summarizes as the “China-centered approach”. The “China-centered approach” is, just as the name says, a view which focuses on the regional and hierarchical divisions *within* China and their effect on China’s past, often measured by the use of social science methodology in combination with traditional historical text analysis.

Unfortunately, for the period of Chinese history before 1800, no study like Cohen’s has appeared. It is not easy to demarcate historiographical phases for writing about this era, as Cohen did for post-1800 developments. Although there certainly exist generational differences between post-war Western trained Chinese historians, they are not so clearly recognizable. The “pre-modern” field has never had the benefit of one principal organizing figure like John K. Fairbank, Cohen’s mentor at Harvard University in the 1950s. With the death of the great French “giants” of sinology by the early 1950s, the slow but certain shift of the center of Chinese studies in the West from Europe toward America was completed.² There in many university centers during the 1960s the “problem of communist China” still took priority over other aspects of China’s development. One might postulate that it was only after the political atmosphere in the United States changed that the study of pre-modern China “took off”. The publications

² Compare how Georges M. Schmutz in “Sociologie de Chine; une perspective européenne”, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, XXV (1987), pp. 199-246, traces the move of the study center of the sociology of China from Paris to the United States.

which are discussed below, one might argue, are the product of all these forces.

It is not my intention in this essay to provide a comprehensive bibliographic survey of the "new" Chinese history.³ The sheer volume and diversity of these studies render such a task near impossible. Rather I shall attempt to evaluate some of the most obvious shifts which have helped further our understanding of Chinese society and economy before 1800, and to suggest some of the problems which have been associated with these advances. In particular, I wish to explore the ways in which historical writing on China during the last decade and a half has exploited theoretical innovations which facilitate easier comparison between earlier and later phases of Chinese history or, in other words, which help detect points of change and lapses of continuity within the chronology between 1000-1800. The structure of my survey is as follows:

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Commoners, Women, and Outsiders

There is no question that one of the major achievements of the "new" Chinese history is to bring long-neglected or ignored groups into the histor-

³ Admittedly, the list of references is arbitrary and should not be considered inclusive of all the fine and stimulating publications that have appeared since 1970 (and including works up to and through 1986). However, the following types of works were definitively excluded: (1) unpublished Ph.D. dissertations; (2) textbooks; (3) works concentrating on the 19th century and beyond; (4) translations of well-known early European works on China, e.g. Juan Gonzales de Mendoza. There is some discussion in this essay of certain Chinese and Japanese authors whose works have been translated, but even these are by no means inclusive. For a survey of the extensive scholarship in Japanese, the reader is well advised to turn to Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (eds), *State and Society in China: Japanese Perspectives on Ming-Qing Social and Economic History* (Tokyo, 1984).

It is hoped that the choice of works discussed and cited in this article will represent the widest possible range of recent publications to illuminate the "new" Chinese social and economic history. The demarcation between these two kinds of history and other types is "foggy", and I regret, for reasons of space, I was unable to incorporate all those published studies which tie elements of Chinese intellectual and political life with social and economic matters.

ical mainstream. Not just peasants but also the urban classes, merchants, craftsmen, and shop-keepers, as well as women and other “outsiders” such as slaves, bondservants, and ethnic minorities have all received attention. These groups have been examined in the contexts both of specific historical events and more general economic, ecological, and political forces which shaped their lives. As these studies mark a tendency away from an elite-centered history, they also at the same time demonstrate the necessity of a broadening concept of elite, not just those who belonged to the numerically tiny, one or two percent of the society’s degree-holders. In the “new” history the elite may include power brokers of all social backgrounds, e.g. military warlords, merchants, religious specialists, and even slaves. The history of bondservants during the late Ming period is a case in point. McDermott (1981), investigating bondservantry in the Ming, has shown how this group of people, without any legal status in Chinese society, had considerable power not only over those low in status, but also landlords, and even officials. Recent published work also had demonstrated the complex layering of different social groups: a peasant might be someone’s tenant as well as another peasant’s landlord (Chao 1986).

In general, studies of these lower groups fall under one of two main themes: those publications which give evidence of their state of repression in both political and economic senses, and those which are concerned with the role of these people in the expansion or “transformation” of the Chinese economy. In the first category belong a varied selection of published works, including all those focusing on the *chien-min* (demeaned people). As James Cole (1982, p. 101) points out, *Chien-min* included:

[. . .] the “musician households” of Shansi and Shensi, [provinces] the Tanka (boat people) of Kwangtung [province] and the “shed people” of Fukien [province] to name (only a few), were ethnically Han Chinese but had been relegated for reasons unknown to the very bottom of the social order. Barred from participation in the examinations, registered separately from respectable commoners (*liang-min*), their women forbidden from gaining status by binding their feet, indeed constituting a virtual caste, [. . .]

Cole himself describes one specific group of these outsiders, the *to-min* of Shaohsing, while Averill (1983) has written on the shed people (*peng-min*) who inhabited the Yangtze Highlands. Aside from locating *chien-min* in various regions, historians have also been able to relate the role of these people to specific events (Mixius 1980) as well as to particular dynasties (Ebisawa 1983). Understanding the legal status of *chien-min* is especially relevant. Although during the Ming and Ch’ing the law discriminated against them in matters of punishment, *chien-min* had the right, nevertheless, to move, to own property, and even to build their own ancestral worship temples, a privilege once accorded the elite only (Fu I-ling 1980a).

The taxonomic classification of these people is a key factor in linking their social status with their economic environment. Wiens (1976b) has conscientiously analysed the economic functions of bondservants from the late T'ang through the Ch'ing in order to distinguish their role in agricultural production from other labourers and, in the process, has demonstrated the complexity of the rural order. She contrasts bondservants' economic functions with those of tenants and hired workers. Golas (1980), unraveling agricultural relations for the Sung, has made similar careful distinctions. Mark Elvin (1973) has connected bondservantry with the general state of peasantry in China between 1000 and 1650. He addresses the problem of "serfdom" and draws on many publications of the Marxist-inspired Tokyo school of sinology which characterizes a high proportion of the peasantry during the Sung, Yüan, and early Ming dynasties, as "bound" to cultivate the land of the rich. His arguments have received their relative share of criticism and commentary (Myers 1974).

At the same time Elvin's study directed attention to the opposing view of Chinese history based on the Kyoto "school" which claims that the Sung was the beginning of China's modern period (*kinsei*).⁴ According to Naito Konan and Miyazaki Ichisada, the leading progenitors of this school, the disappearance of the aristocracy by the late T'ang (ca. 800) and the establishment of meritocratic official recruitment in the Sung ushered a new era of Chinese history whereby commoners gained greater rights. The controversy between the Kyoto and Tokyo schools hinges upon the economic and social power of agricultural workers as well as upon another central issue of Chinese history: the nature of land tenure from the Sung onward (see Elvin 1970). To date, information on both labour relations and land tenure for the Sung remains a matter of "charting blank spaces" (McDermott 1984). Scholars are agreed, however, that the sixteenth century marks a turning point in regard to both these matters in the development of China (see Chao 1981). The commercialization of agriculture through intensive cash cropping (Rawski 1972), new forms of agricultural management and tenure (Chao 1986 and Yuan 1978b) and rural-based handicraft industries (Chao 1984 and Wiens 1974) all contributed to the reformulation of the Chinese social and economic order in the Ming. Moreover, scholars have also been able to draw the connections between changes in agricultural production with other developments: industrial specialization (Dillon 1978 and Yuan 1978a); the expansion of marketing networks and merchant activities (Brook 1981a and 1981b; Finnegan 1978; Rawski 1972), and the formulation and improvement of contractual agreements (Chen and Meyers 1976-

⁴ For a helpful introduction to the controversies between the Kyoto and Tokyo schools, see Denis Twitchett, *Land Tenure and Social Order in T'ang and Sung China* (London, 1962), pp. 14-35.

78). Together these studies give evidence how both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors of the economy could support a population of about 350 million people by 1800. They also indicate the importance of regional specialization in the second half of the Ming. Particular items were traded in large amounts on an interregional basis: sugar, fruit, tea, salt from the southeast coast; salt, silk, cotton from the Yangtze delta; tobacco, cotton, silk from the northeast; grain from the provinces of Hupei, Hunan, and Kiangsi; porcelain from Ching-te-chen in Kiangsi; copper, lead, iron, coal, timber, and paper from the northwest and Szechwan province; copper from Yunnan province (Metzger 1977).

Although no one would disagree that the degree of economic expansion occurring in the Ming surpasses the "commercial revolution" of the Sung (Lewin 1973; Shiba 1970, 1971 and 1975; Lawrence Ma 1971; Sung 1977), it remains problematic to what extent peasants and other low-ranking groups were "transformed" by these changes. The commercialization of Chinese agriculture in the Sung may have indeed added to the general wealth of Chinese life but to what degree these developments entailed fundamental organization of the economy and society is still debatable. If one attempts to relate wealth to the frequency of peasant unrest, then the effects of these changes would seem minimal. In the Ming, the peasantry in particular locations continued "to rage", i.e. to pursue better social and economic conditions through rebellion and violence (Wiens 1979 and 1980); moreover, the institution of bondservantry endured well into this century (Ye 1981). At the same time, however, it also seems unlikely that the concentration of landownership in a few hands increased from 1600 onward (Ray Huang 1983).

Of all the groups at the "bottom" of Chinese society, "women" seem to have been the one to have lost out the most over time. Studies of Chinese women for the period under review here cover the entire social spectrum, from those centering on ladies of the court (Chung 1981; Greiner 1984) and the upper class (Ebrey 1981) to female peasants (Spence 1978). Moreover, they have focused on a whole variety of issues: household maintenance (Ebrey 1984b and 1984c), literacy (Handlin 1975), emotional life (Leung 1983 and 1984), and even the dynasties of conquest (Franke 1980). As the virtue of Chinese women became more and more a matter for official scrutiny (Elvin 1984; Mann 1985), their position in society deteriorated. Waltner (1984) has shown how the pressure on widows to remain chaste or even to commit suicide increased. Ropp (1976) had indicated how the increasingly low status of women was in fact a result of the diffusion of commercial wealth.

Ropp's theorizing here is expressive of the type of problems which historians of the "bottom" social groups face. Because bondservants, peasants, or women left little or no written documents about themselves,

contemporary scholars must manage inquiry about these groups through "indirect" sources of available information, e.g. for women, literature which clearly shows the spread of elite values to lower groups in society or, in the case of peasants, land tenure documents which describe arrangements between land owner and cultivators. But even such methodology has its limitations, and in order to overcome these problems, more and more Chinese historians have come to adopt and utilize, when possible, a "structural approach".

The Structural Approach

The structural approach to Chinese history may be defined in terms of the stress placed on a particular feature of Chinese social, economic, or cultural life which, more often than not, may be studied within a specific geographical region of China. This way of viewing Chinese history does *not* represent a distinct intellectual system; publications which seem to fall within this category do *not* reveal a particular philosophy or even a characteristic interpretation. Rather, the structural approach is indicative of a certain kind of methodology, sometimes involving quantification, but almost always based on the positivistic idea that Chinese society may be understood in concrete forms, such as "material life". The choice of subjects for examination is wide in scope, from demographic patterns to popular culture. The particular details about these topics are less important than their analysis within the contours of Chinese history. The structuralist does *not* ask what makes Chinese civilization so unique, but rather how did it function. By looking at Chinese history in this way, the structuralist may also avoid issues of causation; understanding a certain event becomes secondary to comprehension of its position or function within the wide spectrum of Chinese life. The structuralist approach may be likened to seeing the history of China as a multi-dimensional Cubist painting. The accent is on the internal relationships within each cube, not the external relations between them.

One of the advantages of the structuralist approach is that a particular aspect of China may be focused upon without reducing the vital cohesion of the civilization as a whole. In this way, problems of climate (Chu Ko-chen 1973), disease (Dunstan 1975), nutrition (K.C. Chang 1977), food supply (Wang Yeh-chien 1986), literacy (Rawski 1979), the social welfare of children (Leung 1985) and even popular culture (Johnson, Nathan, Rawski 1984) have been examined over continuous dynastic eras and/or in the context of regional comparison. The tendency to use quantification is common to these studies and is even more pronounced in another subject studied in structuralist fashion, i.e. historical demography. Scholars disagree about where to place the roots of the 18th century population boom

which set the stage for the 19th century situation whereby the population exceeded the supply of cultivable land. They have undertaken long-term (Cartier and Will 1971) and short-term (Cartier 1973b and 1979; Ho Ping-ti 1975; Zhou Yuanhe 1982) studies to trace the origins of this issue. Other scholars have regarded Chinese population in specific time and place (Dardess 1983a; Marmé 1981), and have reviewed birth control (Eichhorn 1976) and migration (Entenmann 1980; James Lee 1982b; James Lee and Eng 1984) in relation to demographic figures. In a pioneering study James Lee (1982a) tied long-term population expansion with food supply. Conversely, Yun Shu-yen (1978) has estimated population figures through famine relief statistics. Liu Ts'ui-jung and Fei (1979) developed a formal code to relate population growth on the national level with per capita consumption standards, but did not include any discussion of individual crops. As mentioned above, one of the criteria by which studies seem to fall under the category "structural" history is their delineation of specific aspects of Chinese development without a link (necessarily) to causal issues. There is at least one exception to this general trend: in one of the most significant structural studies to date, Hartwell (1982) has attempted to tie demographic changes to political and social transformation between the years 750 and 1550.

In general, none of these demographic studies has challenged the Malthusian dilemma of population pressing on a limited food supply for the Chinese case. Nor have they sought to qualify for Chinese historical conditions the most important corollary of Malthusianism: the notion of stagnation. China may or may not have experienced what the great French historian Le Roy Ladurie has termed *l'histoire immobile*; he claims "secular stagnation" or agrarian cycles based on a general low level of agricultural production and productivity held back European urbanization and general economic development.⁵ Moreover, western scholars to date have not attempted to elaborate upon the broad relationship between the introduction of new world food crops, maize, sweet potatoes, and peanuts brought to China via the Philippines in the 16th century, and high population levels thereafter. In the future, the next logical step for Chinese historians is to join demographic analysis with studies of the economic use of land so that the interplay between peasant, physical environment, and the development of the agrarian system is better delineated.

⁵ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "L'histoire immobile", *Annales E.S.C.*, XXIX (1974), pp. 673-692. This is a written version of his 1973 inaugural lecture to the Collège de France in which he supports a stagnationist interpretation of agricultural production. As he notes in this article: "Beginning with a high point in the late 13th and early 14th centuries, the "crowded world" of the French countryside plunged, bottomed out, and recovered, only to repeat the cycle again with appropriate adjustments in the size of farms, agricultural production, average age at marriage, etc."

Historical demography has also been applied to the study of the Chinese family through the original work of Ts'ui-jung Liu (1978; Liu and Fei 1982 and 1985). Her statistical analysis of information derived from Chinese genealogical registers has set certain parameters of birth, marriage, and death rates for lineages in Central China before 1800. Telford (1986) too has clearly illustrated how demographic data may be gleaned from genealogical resources. Harrell (1985) has also explored the relationship between fertility and social status through genealogies. His findings, that the rich produce more children, stand in contrast to the published results of studies on the family in the West and underline the basic difference in the units of study. Historical studies of the family in the West firmly place the nuclear family as the significant social unit for analysis. In contrast, these new studies show that in China kinship organization differences were so variable to make generalization about ideal units difficult (Ebrey 1983).

Besides quantitative studies of Chinese familial units, there also exist a whole series of social, economic, and legal studies which add much to our understanding of the role of this particular form of social organization. With a greater awareness of the interplay between history and anthropology, scholars have come to criticize stereotyped familial models, derived in part from fieldwork among living peoples and in part from the strong influence of the British structuralist anthropological tradition on the pioneering work of Maurice Freedman (Sangren, 1984; J. Watson, 1986); instead they chose to rely more and more upon written historical evidence in order to explore the variations of Chinese familial life in the past. They have investigated what specific local conditions supported the development of a particular type of extended family or lineage (R. Watson 1982; Zurndorfer 1984); demonstrated the role of descent as only one specific factor in the development of lineages (Johnson 1977); examined how crucial land or other forms of property ownership were to lineage development (Beattie 1979b; Hazleton 1986; Naquin 1986; Potter 1970; Shiga 1978) and suggested alternative methods by which corporate unity was achieved, e.g. the sharing of imperial privilege (Davis 1986a and 1986b), or marriage alliances (Dennerline 1981 and 1986; Hymes 1986a). As Walton (1984) argues, marriage alliances were also an important way for Chinese lineages to gain social status in local society. Finally, they have evaluated whether Neo-Confucian ideology influenced lineage development since the Sung (Dardess 1974; Ebrey 1984a). Ebrey (1984d) is particularly occupied with the problem of cleavage between Neo-Confucian prescription and the realities of family management in the Sung. In this last study she argues that the values and ideas of leading Sung philosophers and thinkers were in contrast to the practical goals of the same class.

From these recently published studies on a wide range of kin-related issues, two things have definitively emerged. First, there is no such entity as

a “typical” Chinese historical lineage. Regional differences no doubt have something to do with this, but the variations of lineage groups from the same place (Zurndorfer 1981b) indicate that other factors, and especially those of an economic basis, may also influence the internal structure of an extended Chinese family. And secondly, Chinese family history is also involved in the greater issues of change and continuity within Chinese society. Future research should suggest what role kin-related networks played in the commercial revolutions of the 12th and 16th centuries, how Chinese society came to expand if mortality rates were high over long periods of time, and how private property could be inherited without a comprehensive legal system to protect the rights of the individual.

Urbanization is another topic upon which structuralists have focused. There are excellent studies of specific cities in particular dynastic periods: on K’aifeng in the Northern Sung (Jiang and Xiao 1981; Kracke 1975) and in the early Ch’ing (W. W. Lo 1975b) or Suchou in the Ming (Enoki 1978). More general studies of urban development during the Sung (Elvin 1978; Lawrence Ma 1971) have shown how cities in that time changed from being administrative centers to relatively large-scale commercial and industrial conglomerations; at certain points, both K’aifeng and Hangchou had populations of one million residents each, requiring various urban “services” (Jeffcott 1976; McKnight 1970). But scholars admit that Chinese cities of the Sung period or later could not advertize the type of civic awareness with which one associates the great Mediterranean urban regions. In Chinese cities there was no “municipal art” or other manifest aesthetic aspirations. Perhaps, the one display of local pride which city dwellers did advertize was their allegiance to city gods (Johnson 1985).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that one of the most important contributions to our understanding of urbanization in China is that made by G. W. Skinner (1977). From viewing the Chinese village as an integral part of the Chinese “structure” as opposed to a self-contained community (Skinner 1971), he has developed a spatial, temporal, and hierarchical map of China which transcends dynastic and provincial configurations of Chinese history (Skinner 1985). In his schema:

The “Chinese” city is no less a constructed ideal type than the “preindustrial” or the “Oriental” city. And when we survey the range of premodern cities – from imperial capitals to lowly subprefectural seats on remote frontiers; from great commercial emporia such as Soochow, Canton, and Hankow to central market towns; from the relatively spacious cities of the Lower Yangtze region to the congested cities of the Lingnan region, where intramural areas were on the average one-sixth as large – when we comprehend this varied array, we run into the same difficulties that beset generalizations about more inclusive constructed types. Unless we are prepared to fudge, almost any general propositions about Chinese cities must be spec-

ified, qualified, and so burdened with exceptions and contingencies as to frustrate sinologist and comparativist alike (1977, p. 5).

Skinner claims that the levels of urbanization reached in the Sung were never exceeded in Chinese history.

The most significant aspect of his work is his tri-part spatial conceptualization: macroregions, cores, and peripheries. Accordingly, cities become a part of broader regional systems. Although his approach has been directed mainly to determining the extent of urbanization in 19th century China, his formulations are useful in explaining how China's tremendous population boom before 1800 was accommodated by a minimal amount of administrative readjustment. In "core" areas, usually highly urbanized regions, the local elite performed many services for the state such as those related to fiscal matters, while in "peripheral" regions, the state was relatively more conscientious in its supervision of local government, particularly with regard to military matters. The implication is that the execution of certain lower-level administrative functions in densely populated regions was performed by the local elite in cooperation with, or in certain matters such as tax collection, to the consternation of the local magistrate (Dennerline 1975). Similarly, Rozman (1974) has given an overview of urban development prior to the 17th century based on spatial hierarchy and also shows that the ability of Chinese administrators to control both cities and the countryside declined from the Sung through the Ch'ing.

Most recently, Skinner (1985) has analyzed how the economic development of specific areas, or in his terminology, "macroregions" may be independent of economic "cycles" occurring in other regions. In this way he is able to offer an explanation of Chinese regional development which is independent of political events; in other words, his macrocycles supersede the dynastic cycle, i.e. the rise and fall of dynastic houses.

The structuralist approach to Chinese history has proven useful because it can explain so much about the stability and institutional continuity of Chinese society and its economy over hundreds of years. There is a kind of built-in "openness" implicit in this view. Studies which seem to conform to this category do not presume, for example, that Confucian ideals were the only cultural values practiced by the elite. In general, mapping regional differences in the development of China's social and economic structure is an integral part of this approach. It should also be understood that Chinese historians who practice the structural method do not necessarily negate the existence of contradiction and conflict. But given their preference to establish the specific conditions of Chinese civilization, they more often than not defer the issue of "change" as an outcome of "continuity". In other words, they do not subscribe to the "old-fashioned" idea that Chinese history since

the year 1000 is a series of crises and revivals which ultimately compose a single line of continuity.⁶

State and Society

Despite these important efforts to shift the re-orientation of Chinese history, the majority of publications since 1970 still fall under the rubric “State and Society”. This relationship draws upon the polarities between those who ruled and those who were ruled. Readers, unfamiliar with the contours of Chinese history, might assume that this paradigm is an expression of contempt toward Chinese political development. It is true that many 19th century observers claimed the roots of China’s weakness then lay in basically “deficient” political institutions which, supposedly, had never changed since the “ancient” days of the empire. In their view China was “one more” peculiar “Oriental society”, characterized by sedentary agriculture and state-supervised irrigation works. In a certain sense the “state-society” paradigm is, indeed, a legacy of an era when Chinese historians in the West tended to employ broad systems of explanations borrowed largely from western social thought, such as the concepts of the “Asiatic mode of production”, or its derivative, “Oriental Despotism” (Soullière 1984). However, as we shall demonstrate below, recent publications concerning state-society relations display a level of sophistication which is clearly distinguishable from that of earlier writings on this theme.

Although scholars writing in the 1960s were already moving away from such simplistic analytic polarities, the “state versus the society”, by examining the significance of the gentry or local elite to the complexity of Chinese political structure, the role of the State was still central to their explanation.⁷ The gentry gained its authority through state institutions, i.e. the examination system and office-holding within the bureaucracy, and through its proclamation of official ideology. Furthermore, according to their explanations, as dynastic strength weakened, gentry “power” increased, especially with regard to this social group’s control over local fiscal

⁶ For a general discussion on the concepts of “change and continuity” in history, see the essay by Peter Burke, “Introduction: Concepts of Continuity and Change in History”, in Peter Burke (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 13 vols (Cambridge, 1979) 13, especially pp. 3-10. In my own recent study of a Chinese community before 1800, Hui-chou, I approach the problem of “change” and “continuity” through an analysis of population growth, commercialization, and class differentiation over a period of 1000 years. I attempt to show that change here occurred only when these three factors acted in concert with each other, i.e. not independently. See *Change and Continuity in Chinese Local History: The Development of Hui-chou Prefecture 800 to 1800* (Leiden: E.J. Brill) forthcoming.

⁷ This point is well-explained by Philip Kuhn and Susan Mann Jones in “Introduction”, *Select Papers from the Center for Eastern Studies III* (1978-1979), pp. v-xix. The authors here trace the historiographical development of the gentry theme and state-society relations, found in the important studies of Wolfram Eberhard, Chang Chung-li, and Franz Michael.

matters. State centralism and regional localism were correlatives of the traditional dynastic cycle.

Since the early 1970s Chinese historians have pursued even more sophisticated versions of the gentry-society paradigm. With easier access to local history materials, they began to differentiate by region the intricacies of local stratification relations. In some works, such as those of Beattie (1979b), Dennerline (1975 and 1981), Fitzpatrick (1976), Higgins (1980), Hymes (1986b), and Zurndorfer (1981b), the accent was on the definition and functioning of the local elite. These publications have demonstrated beyond a doubt that elite status in China may not be assessed by success in the examination system and office-holding alone. Moreover, they have shown the long-term stability of certain groups in a given locale; China was not the highly "mobile" society that scholars once alleged. In other new works, the emphasis has been on the functioning of the state at the local level, as expressed in the writings of Brook (1985), George Jer-lang Chang (1978), Kornbluth (1975-76), Littrup (1982), and W. W. Lo (1978). In sum, these studies have demonstrated the *variety* of relations between the state and society: corporate groups such as lineages, educational officers, merchants, Buddhist and Taoist priests all had some connections with the local elite which at a given time could affect and, in some cases, displace the power of either or both the state and gentry, and not necessarily at the end of a dynastic cycle.

Understanding the relationship between the government (the State) and local administration (the Society) is only one facet of the state-society nexus. Recent publications which fall under this category have focused on three main areas where the State's power may or may not have exerted an impact: (1) the economy, including fiscal matters; (2) military and frontier supervision; (3) social control. In the "new" Chinese history the state-society paradigm remains important because it is unjustifiable to claim that the state did not affect Chinese life. On the other hand, it is fair to regard the "new" Chinese history as something more than normative Confucian historiography preoccupied with imperial politics and court personalities. Recent studies have also lent depth to a fourth area of concern in state-society relations, i.e. the state's role in "legitimation", the process by which rulership in China was rationalized in terms of the dominant cultural traditions of the society.

(1) The State and the Economy

Most recent publications about the Chinese before 1800 have stressed the limited role of the public sector; the State allowed the private sector to evolve by its own momentum. While the State controlled a major portion of the transport and communication system (Aoyama 1976; Hoshi 1980), managed certain small luxury-producing organizations (Santangelo 1985;

Symons 1981), secured horses for public use (Adshead 1978), and operated the salt monopoly (Chiang 1975 and 1983), its total involvement in economic activity was relatively restricted. The State confined itself to collecting grain price data (Ch'üan and Kraus 1975; Wilkinson 1980) and controlling famine through water conservation works (Flessel 1974 and 1976; Hamashita 1980) and grain distribution (Buck 1980; Scogin 1978; Will 1980a and 1983). It was an important government function to monitor seasonal food-grain and fiber prices in order to predict potential shortages. But it is also known that when enterprising officials tried to do more than just monitor agrarian production, they usually met with failure. Brook (1982) has discussed the case of unsuccess of officials who tried to promote rice cultivation in North China. The Imperial Household also owned properties and managed a number of organizations but also with certain limitations (Chang Te-ch'ang 1972; Torbert 1977). In sum, the Chinese imperial government did not take an activist role in regulating the economic environment but it did aim to create a favorable one.

Since the Sung there had been incremental transference from state to private entrepreneurship of basic economic activities such as grain, tea, and salt distribution, mining and pottery manufacture (Myers 1974 and 1975; Zurndorfer 1981a). In the second half of the Sung, the government salt monopoly was proven ineffective in the control of illicit salt production and sales (Worthy 1975). Recognizing the increased "collusion" between producers and merchants in the second half of the Ming, the State legalized this direct trade (Metzger 1973). The Ch'ing government made commercial transaction between these groups even easier through minimizing bureaucratic interference even more (Metzger 1970). Metzger (1972) argues that Ch'ing officials tolerated salt smuggling because it helped relieve shortages.

In the matter of water control, the government's role was also limited. It passed through cycles of administrative efficiency, roughly corresponding to the rise and fall of dynasties (Will 1980b). In some cases, hydraulic works were constructed and maintained largely by local societal initiative, and more often than not in direct opposition to the interests and directives of the State (Perdue 1982). One may then question how committed the State was in fact to relieving distress caused by natural disaster. Writing about this matter for the Ch'ing, Evelyn Rawski (1975, p. 81) has concluded: "Projects to relieve disasters brought on by crop failure were merely attempts to soften the harshest aspects of a system in which the fruits of agriculture went to the diligent, the lucky, and the strong."

Perhaps, the most critical remarks concerning the limitations of the State's involvement in the economy have been made by the leading Ming economic historian, Ray Huang. In his judgment (Ray Huang 1970 and 1974), incoherent organization and general mismanagement paralyzed the Ming's capacity to mobilize its own resources. However, from a historical

point of view, this was not always the case. We know that during the Northern Sung the political management of the economy was relatively centralized (Schifferli 1986); it was conducted with an application of "scientific" theory (Hartwell 1971a) and executed through fiscal specialists (Hartwell 1971b). In the provinces, fiscal intendants worked under the direct supervision of the imperial court (W. W. Lo 1975a). Nevertheless, supervisory "decline" may have set in, as economic prosperity gained momentum. Brian McKnight (1975) has studied the way in which the Sung government regulations treated various categories of rural households. According to his analysis, the tendency for the "rich" (and educated) to hold more positions of power came to an abrupt halt with the Mongol conquest. The implication is that the Mongols incurred a "northernization" or reinfusion of values where privilege and discrimination based on race once again became common. As the Mongols invaded and eventually conquered all of China, they had to implement new policies of economic management; they relied on Muslim intermediaries to supervise the financial system (Rossabi 1981). Thus, by the time of the Ming founding, supervision of the economy had taken an entirely different turn from its Sung period centralization.

Ray Huang (1974) ascribes the Ming economy's lamentable organization to the founder of the Ming, the infamous Hung-wu emperor, a man of peasant origins with a despotic personality. The fiscal system which he enforced was aimed specifically toward the development of agricultural land (Watt 1972). Local control systems, based on divisions of the general populace into what is known as *li-chia*, collected gran taxes and other charges and mobilized corvée labour. The idea of such an arrangement was to reduce the number of regularly appointed civil administrators throughout the empire. The problem, as Huang emphasizes, is that there was little transaction between the local base and the central depository. The lines of supply and distribution remained very short during most of the dynasty. Moreover, despite the "commercial revolution" of the Ming (see above), the government made no effort either to promote it or capitalize on it. When, in the 16th century, the government did make a number of reforms, culminating in the Single Whip whereby all taxes were combined into one annual payment assessed and paid in silver, no real modification was made to change the agricultural base of the system. The Ministry of Revenue did not become an operating agency responsible for the distribution of the empire's wealth; it remained an accounting organization incapable of directing its own revenue.

The Ch'ing government did very little to modify this system. It removed corvée obligations with a single poll tax on males, but this did not change the basic structural foundation of the Ming fiscal system. By 1700 all fiscal obligations were converted into grain tax dues, which ultimately were

assigned in silver payment. The only real reform which the Manchu rules did introduce was the regularization of the melting charges on the collection of these silver dues (Zelin 1984). What is also remarkable about Ch'ing fiscal management was this government's attitude toward the rise in population. Rather than take advantage of the enormous population expansion, the government in 1722 ordered that taxes never be increased (*ying-pu chia-fu*). Throughout most of this dynasty the tax "burden" remained relatively light (Wang Yeh-chien 1971 and 1973) and in terms of the amount due per taxable unit may have in fact actually decreased (Liu and Fei 1977).

Like the Ming dynasty before it, the Ch'ing government maintained a bimetallic system of copper and silver throughout the empire (Wang Yeh-chien 1977). Since the Sung, the government had taken an active interest in the regularization of money circulation (Ferenczy 1974) and there is sufficient evidence to measure currency issues for the Yüan period (Steinhardt 1980). Nevertheless, despite this relatively sophisticated appreciation of money-related matters, neither the Ming nor the Ch'ing government made any attempts to coordinate money supply with what knowledge it possessed about the total production of grain or grain prices (Nakayama 1979; Wang Yeh-chien 1972).

We may conclude that these recent publications on State-economy relations demonstrate the limited role the State held in the functioning of the economy before 1800. The State secured the welfare of the people through flexible organizational control, low taxes, and the maintenance of a working money system. Furthermore, even if a centralized economy was difficult to achieve, there was little sign of major economic breakdown during the 800 years under review here. In general, China experienced relative growth in non-agricultural production, especially manufactures; general sustained growth of agricultural production; more even distribution of income, and specialization and proliferation of organizations which helped economic stability. All of this was accomplished with minimal involvement of the State.

(2) The State and Military and Frontier Supervision

It might be conjectured that the most obvious way the State dominated the Society was through its role in military and frontier control. But here again new publications indicate that even with regard to this matter there were limitations to how far the government could maintain military supremacy.

China's military strength lay in the level of sophistication of its defense strategies, both technological and logistical, and its general ingenuity in the arts of war. Both Franke (1974) and Hana (1970) have written about the Chinese experience of "total war" in their studies of the sieges and defense of Sung cities based on diary and handbook accounts of the Chin offensive. From Franke's description of Chinese catapults operated on levers to

his discussion of how dogs were butchered (lest they alert the enemy), we have in detail the working of the Chinese military establishment during the 12th century. Even "foreign" dynasties built upon Chinese ways in warfare. Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing (1978) has shown how the Yüan conquerors used the experience of the preceding T'ang and Sung dynasties for their own purposes. The Ming government developed a system of rigid classification of military households by hereditary status (Liew 1974) to defend its northern borders which had its origins in the Yüan (Wu Ch'i-hua 1978). While Chinese military strength lay in its land corps, naval forces could also be employed. Dreyer (1974) has explored the intricacies of a waterborne army during the Lake Poyang Campaign in 1363.

Despite their military talents the Chinese historically did not like to secure their borders through martial means. The foundations of the imperial institution were strongly antimilitaristic; military force was not theoretically justifiable as more than a secondary sanction. Nowhere is this clearer than during the Ming period when the basic foreign policy attitude was peaceful coexistence (*t'ai-p'ing kung ts'un*) (Wu Ch'i-hua 1981). The dynasty tried to ensure that there should be no aggression by any country against another, that each should live in peace of itself, so as to bring about peaceful co-existence. The consequence of this policy manifested itself fairly clearly within 100 years of the dynasty's founding. The Ming army was totally unprepared for challenge on several occasions. Mote (1974) has shown how a surprised eunuch commander in 1449 was confronted by Mongolian hordes who had been menacing the frontier (compare Serruys 1970 and 1975). They kidnapped the emperor and proved the shortcomings of the imperial army. This over-confident eunuch led an unmanageable entourage of personnel directly into the path of these barbarians. In another instance, 100 years later, Japanese-Chinese pirates, known as *wok'ou*, made continual raids along the coast (So Kwan-wai 1975) and embarrassed the supreme Ming military commander in charge by revealing that he had neither the ordinary resources nor the proper guidance to carry out a defense mission (Hucker 1974). Looking at this episode in broader perspective, John Wills (1979a) has posited that this particular crisis was only the beginning of a 100 year "militarization" process along the Chinese coast which ultimately ended with a prolonged battle over Taiwan and by which the Manchus finally secured the coastal periphery of China (Wong Young-tsu 1983).

In China as elsewhere (compare Clausewitz) warfare was an extension of politics; there was generally a reluctance to seek military solutions to problems. Since the beginning of the Sung, each dynasty has shown to be more concerned with stability at home than military expansion abroad. The one exception to this generalization may be the early Ch'ing emperors who extended Chinese borders further than any other government since the T'ang (Wakeman 1971). The Ch'ien-lung Emperor who reigned from 1736

through 1796 was in particular a great “campaigner”. After defeating the Western Mongols in the 1750s, he took over the Tarim Basin by 1760. He used military force against Burma (1776-1770), Vietnam (1788-1790), and the Gurkhas of Nepal (1790-1792) and made these states “protectorates” of China.

But the fact remains that in the long term the Chinese have been reluctant to employ military force. It was not theoretically justifiable as more than a secondary sanction. When the Sung state was surrounded by numerous powerful barbarian groups, Khitans, Jürcheds, Mongols, and Tibetans (Kwanten 1979), the government signed a great number of treaties as a concession to both security and reality (Franke 1970; Thiele 1971). Embassy exchanges were also part of a general “appeasement” policy and often supplied the Chinese with excellent opportunity to gather intelligence (Franke 1981). One may consider the great State-sponsored maritime expeditions of Cheng Ho which reached Southeast Asia, South Asia, and even the coast of Africa in the 15th century as indicative of the Ming dynasty’s attempt to extend imperial influence through the rest of the known world by “peaceful means” (Lo Jung-pang 1976; Wang Gungwu 1970). The voyages helped spread the news of the new Ming dynasty to the kingdoms beyond the Great Wall. It was along here where China’s traditional foreign neighbors lived, and during most of the time under review, China avoided armed conflict in this region by trading precious goods, i.e. Chinese luxuries such as tea and silk for horses (Rossabi 1970). Moreover, certain Central Asian states became “buffers” between China and its enemies, preventing direct attack by these groups on the Central Kingdom (Rossabi 1973).

In the Chinese concept of world order, trade and warfare formed two sides of the same view. The structure of this order integrated the practical realities of security and power with the theoretical and ideological assumptions of centrality. The institutional expression of China’s cultural power was the tribute system. This term refers to the process whereby the middle country allowed culturally “deprived” dependencies to accept Chinese recognition and investiture. In exchange, the dependencies were awarded the “privileges” of tribute and trade. “Security problems” within this world view could arise when any one of the many surrounding subordinate states no longer followed the tribute policy; as their demand for Chinese goods became greater than the amount of protocol prescribed, the chance for military conflict increased.

Although the tribute system may seem a uniform structure built upon a maze of expressions supporting a framework of inequality and hierarchy, recent publications show it was not a monolithic policy in operation from the second century B.C. to the 19th century. At least, from the 10th to the 14th centuries, China functioned within a multi-state system which forced

leaders to concede their military and political weaknesses in the face of a variety of barbarian peoples (Rossabi 1983). Trauzettel (1975) has drawn a careful portrait of those Northern Sung statesmen who were realistic enough to maintain a less grandiose vision of China's place in the world. Theorizing on the differences between the tribute system during the Ming and early Ch'ing, John Wills (1984) notes how the Court in the 1660s quickly overcame any "illusions" about the realities of foreign policy making. The Manchus met potential threats from Mongols and Russians with military advances while employing the old "tricks" of issuing gifts and honorific titles as a further means of pacification. Wills' argument that the Chinese diplomatic tradition should not be stereotyped under the name "tribute system", a theme already developed in his earlier book (1974), draws attention to the complexity of Chinese defense methods as well as to the requirements for regular trading privileges.

We see then how the Chinese state could hold its military position on such a spectacular scale, both in terms of territory and effectiveness by providing structures for interaction which purported strength, even in times of weakness. Moreover, that the State could do so for such a long time is indicative of the force of its military institutions and diplomatic policies. At the same time we have also shown how specific situations could yield unique reactions.

(3) The State and Social Control

One important reason why so much writing on China, both past and present, has focused upon the State-Society paradigm is related to the primary sources themselves. The bulk of the extant Chinese documentation for the pre-1800 period is political narrative in which the parameters of Chinese history are set forth in terms of the dynastic cycle. Successive political regimes repeated a repetitious story: a spirited founding usually under violent circumstances, a period of strong and effective central-government control, then a long decline during which violence and political protest once again became frequent, and finally total collapse (Zurndorfer 1983).

When western sinologists first began to write about Chinese history in the 19th century, they too adapted the concept of dynastic cycle, and consequently their publications were also oriented in this way. In recent years, as increasing numbers of western-trained scholars have become acquainted with Chinese "statecraft" collections such as the *Huang-chao ching-shih wen-pien* (Collected Ch'ing essays on statecraft), they have been able to explore on an even more sophisticated level the intricacies of state-society relations. As mentioned above, one of the most important contributions of revisionist writing has been the exposition of the gentry-local society theme. From these new publications we gain further insight into the super-

visory aspect of rural government as well as the nature of local conflict.

The role of the local elite in rural control is a subject which has many ramifications. An obvious problem is simply one of definition: who was the local elite? McKnight (1971) claims there was yet no “gentry” in the Sung – the local elite consisted of the “rich”. At that time village government was formally conducted by wealthy peasants who as local service officials managed tax collection and militia organization. But as the Sung government started to ‘streamline’ household registration (So Kee-lung 1982) and as it checked stability on a larger basis through a system of supervisory territorial administration (W.W. Lo 1974-75; 1978), the nature of the local elite changed. Success in the examination system and the prestige of office-holding tended to become important factors, although not the only ones, for the attainment of status in a local community. Those who came to positions of local power by way of bureaucratic holding in the Southern Sung, Yüan, and Ming had endured a highly competitive exam system. By around 1550, the competition had become so fierce that those who had succeeded in some way in the exam system and those who had not, despite similar degrees of wealth in the same local region, formed two distinct groups: the upper-level gentry and the lower-level gentry. Moreover, as Wakeman (1975a, p. 4) points out, the “higher gentry” played conflicting roles in the management of local affairs:

A (higher) gentryman might well serve as an incorruptible magistrate outside his native place, but once retired (the average tenure of office was remarkably brief), that same person was likely to use his bureaucratic influence and social status to acquire property, finagle favorable tax rates, and protect his kin’s interests. The gentry’s public interest in waterworks, charity, and education also accompanied a private interest in corporate trusts and income. Local social organizations therefore embodied contrary principles: integration into the imperial system and autonomy from it. The dynamic oscillation between these two poles created the unity of Chinese society, not by eliminating the contradictions but by balancing them in such a way to favor overall order.

Wakeman’s analysis here also recognizes the changes concerning the duties of the local elite. Mori Masao (1980) has also commented on this phenomenon; he sees a division between an “old-style” local elite who once had managed the *li-chia* based tax collection system with relative honesty and, from the 16th century, “newcomers” who with their exam success behind them returned to their home districts to reside but lacked a sense of community responsibility. For Mori the differences between these two groups caused a definitive break in the fabric of local society.

There is no question that the gentry’s involvement in tax collection became a source of great dissatisfaction. Recent studies have approached

this problem in a variety of ways. Wiens (1976a) has shown how the *li-chia* system entirely lost its vigour, not just through excessive abuse of exemption privilege by the local gentry, but through the rise of private landlordism. Dennerline's (1975) publication explains how sophisticated the late Ming practices of false registry were. His study gives further clues to the various interests involved: landlords, gentry, and local government. Unfortunately, to date there have been only a few regional studies on how the Ming government worked to improve tax collection through the Single Whip (Cartier 1973a; Littrup 1977 and 1982). This is clearly a topic that requires further investigation.

How relevant these changes concerning the local elite and its management of local affairs were to a series of massive revolts that ravaged Northwest and Central China (Parsons 1970) has been an important focus of study in the last few years (Wakeman 1985). Scholars have written about the transformation of local social organization as a result of the sense of crisis which the Ming collapse and the Manchu invasion engendered. Paramilitary organizations, anti-bandit crop-watching corps, and professional police forces incorporated common people and the local elite into joint service in the Chiangnan region (Dennerline 1979). In other regions, such as Northern Anhui, the local elite dismissed any form of coalition with the populace and, in fact, welcomed the Manchus as restorers of local order (Beattie 1979a). But there was, as Wakeman (1975b) writes, much more to overt local resistance than simply Ming loyalism, as in the case of Chiangyin. The forces of localism here were, according to him, here much more complicated than what one might first reckon.

In general, dynastic transitional periods draw out the most heterodox aspects of Chinese social disorganization. Messianic religion and local sectarian cults inspired rebelling masses. In the Yüan-Ming transition, Chu Yüan-chang, the first Ming emperor, initially pledged his avowal to the Buddhist White Lotus Sect but then became an orthodox Confucian ruler (Dardess 1970). The maintenance of orthodoxy, as we shall demonstrate below, was a constant preoccupation of the Chinese government which regulated certain values over the people; nevertheless, the State recognized the existence and persistence of folk ideology. Folk ideology could evolve into millenarian rebellion and in at least one case in 1774 was the cause of widespread destruction. At that time a thousand followers of a White Lotus sect leader, named Wang Lun, attacked three county seats on the North China plain in Western Shantung province (Naquin 1981). What makes this case so special for our understanding of local social disorganization is that it happened at a time when China was still in the midst of her Indian Summer; the period of corruption, weakness, and general "decline" so well-documented from approximately 1800 onward had not yet begun. Naquin has argued persuasively that the Wang Lun rebellion reflects the dynamics of its

sectarian organization and millenarian beliefs rather than crises in the society itself.

Social disorganization and violence in Chinese history then may derive from other sources than simply bureaucratic breakdown. Other interesting publications along these lines have focused upon the local feud (*hsieh-tou*). Lamley (1977) has investigated these "private" conflicts upon which neither local officials nor government installations were objects of attack. *Hsieh-tou* violence occurred frequently from the second half of the 17th century in Southeast China, in the regions of southern Fukien, eastern Kwangtung, and Taiwan. Such forays would involve a group of well-endowed, land-owning families fighting each other, usually organized in lineages. Clan "armies" composed of kin members as well as mercenaries would engage in extensive *vendetta*. The original circumstances giving vent to these feud actions would be over local contention: land and boundary disputes, controversies over water rights, competition for control of local markets, transportation systems, and labour forces. Kinship ties, common-surname identities, and village or territorial residence strengthened the cohesion within the contending groups. In general, government troops found these conflicts difficult to put down. It has been suggested that this type of violence may also be related to the general "militarization" process beginning in the late Ming (Wills 1979a).

Problems of local control were not confined to rural areas. Some of the most exciting new publications have attempted to comprehend urban violence as well. Yuan Tsing (1979), reviewing some fifty serious incidents occurring in some of the most important cities of Central China in the late Ming and early Ch'ing, has concluded that these incidents were undisciplined and badly organized. According to Yuan, none of these riots was consistently over one specific issue, such as lack of food. They displayed a variety of causes: opposition to a silk tax, to the idiosyncracies of an official, to administrative malfeasance, to the misdeeds of a eunuch who might be in control of a specific industry. R. Bin Wong (1982 and 1984) adds to this general description of violence by showing how food riots in China, like their counterparts in 18th century Europe, represented efforts to preserve local control over food in the face of increasing pressure by external market forces.

Throughout Chinese history "minority" groups were also known to cause disorder. Although many types of groups were involved, from tribes located in South and Southwest China to Uighurs in the Northwest, only Muslim uprisings before 1800 have had any real attention (Rossabi 1981). Maejima (1973-1974) has also shown how the Muslims' privileged financial position in Yüan society was the cause of some tension between themselves and the Chinese. For the later dynasties, Israeli (1978) has discussed the conflictual

relations between the government and Muslims whereby the only alternatives were assimilation, secession, or rebellion.

We see then how far Chinese historians have come since the 1970s in their evaluation of state-society relations. They have been able to examine critically the forces of the structure which bound the gentry and the people together as well as those which disconnected them. It was within the boundaries of this structure that the central government since around the year 1000 extended its control over the broader populace. However, the question remains what was the "despotism" of the Chinese state. We have already noted that the State played a limited role in the economy and that it enforced frontier supervision through a concept of world order that was not bellicose.

At this point it would seem worthwhile to review once again how the Chinese imperial state was representative of a type of "Oriental despotism". There is no question that this concept originated out of European self-idealization and a contrasting perception of Asian societies as repressive and unchanging.⁸ Wittfogel's work *Oriental Despotism* argued that in China the power of the ruler or emperor was unchecked. The imperial figure dominated a managerial bureaucracy and prevented any attempt by any group to challenge his power. Unlike Wittfogel's theory which has received enormous critique, the writings of the Japanese historian Naito Konan, which emphasize the increased power of the emperor from the Sung onward, have achieved widespread acceptance. His views (without mention of his name) have been incorporated into the two most popular textbooks on Chinese history, John Fairbank's *China: Tradition and Transformation* and Jacques Gernet's *Le monde chinois*.⁹ According to Naito, the complete disappearance of the aristocratic nobility in the second half of the T'ang permanently changed the power structure of the Chinese government. While previously the relationship of the emperor to his ministers had been that of *primus inter pares*, from the Sung onward, Naito argues, the exaltation of the role of the emperor and diminution of the bureaucracy in general and the prime ministers in particular became the pattern of rulership. Over time the bureaucrats' position declined to the point where they lost all formal rights to challenge imperial edicts. In the Ming and Ch'ing

⁸ Compare comments in William Rowe, "Approaches to Modern Chinese Social History", in Oliver Zunz (ed.), *Reliving the Past* (Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 236-296; especially his comments on pp. 260-61.

⁹ On this point, see Joshua A. Fogel, *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naito Konan (1866-1934)* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p. xv. Fogel's work contains important discussions on the influence of Naito and other Japanese historians upon the writing of Chinese history in the West.

periods they became mere servitors who owed unquestioned loyalty to the throne.

It has only been most recently that specialists have begun to question Naito's hypothesis. They began by attempting to define more closely how the imperial institutions operated. More specifically, recent publications have examined the relationship of the imperial institution to the bureaucracy and the impact on the functioning of the government. For example, Ray Huang (1981) argues that in the second half of the Ming it was the bureaucrats who had become the real rulers of society and the emperor who developed into a mere instrument of the bureaucracy, virtually their "prisoner" in the Forbidden City. Huang's account, which is based on a masterly analysis of the Ming Court records, the *shih-lu*, demonstrates how the increasing availability of archival material has stimulated further historical revision.

In general, new publications stress the role of the State as a regularizing institution, an agent for the 'legitimation' of the entire political and social order within China itself, from the performance of ceremonies to the proclamation of an educational curriculum. To complete our review of the state-society paradigm, we will investigate how Chinese historians have tried to find change within the most enduring aspect of Chinese imperial history, the government and the institutions which supported it. We will focus on several specific issues concerning the State and its role in the process of legitimation: education and ideology, loyalty, ritual, bureaucracy, and the personalities of certain specific emperors.

(4) The State and Legitimation

In China, both past and present, education has played an important part in the dissemination of a specific ideology; formerly, education had a central role in the propagation of Confucian thought. The government fostered an educational curriculum based entirely on comprehension of the Confucian classics, and eventually on one man's interpretation of those classics, i.e. those of Chu Hsi (1120-1200). Until 1905 when the examination system was abolished, the only legitimate path to government office was through the formalistic mastery of these works. Recent publications have explored the relationship between education and the examination system and the implications it had for ideological control.

John Chaffee (1985) has shown that a major concern of Sung period intellectuals was how to find "morally" qualified men to hold office through a standardized system of government examinations that tested literary skills and "cleverness" at the expense of personal character. Chaffee has also argued that by the Southern Sung there was a 'bifurcation of education' between government schools and academies, the former for examination preparation and the latter for "true learning". This point is also confirmed

by Thomas Lee (1985) who attests that the rise of the Neo-Confucian doctrine, especially that perpetrated by Chu Hsi, with its emphasis on individual moral transformation, signalled the inevitable decline of government-sponsored schools as educational institutions. Chaffee's conclusion, that the Sung attempt to create a meritocratic state met only with partial success, in part because of the use and abuse of special privileges, is also confirmed by Miyazaki (1976) in another study on the examination system. He shows that as time passed, the cost of both education and taking the examinations became more and more pricey. Expenses for the highest level exams could total as much as 600 taels of silver, an amount Miyazaki (1976, p. 119) likens to "a sum today to enable a couple to take a trip around the world in comfort".

Thus, despite the expansion of educational opportunity in the Sung and later (Kracke 1977), there ensued a number of conflicts. The tendency for academies to become private repositories for the preservation and transmission of Confucian doctrines and/or centers for political agitation (rather than training institutions for the examination system) became more and more obvious. This state of affairs in turn drew attention to the matter of the relationship between intellectuals and the ideological authority of the State at given points in time. As Lao (1981) writes, participation in private academies in the Yüan became a practical response of intellectuals to alien rule. The importance of academies in Chinese intellectual life in the Ming period became greater while the examination system itself deteriorated (Ma Tai-loi 1975). By the 15th century, an examination candidate was allowed to present himself as prepared in only one Classic whereas earlier at least Five Classics were mandatory (Meskill 1982). Ironically, it was only during another alien dynasty, the Ch'ing, that education and teaching were once again restored to an honorable position. In two studies, Adam Lui (1971 and 1973) has shown how the Manchu conquerors stimulated the education system, in part as a way of integrating Chinese scholars into the mainstream, and in part to furnish manpower for the bureaucratic machinery of the State.

This "integration" process touches upon another crucial issue of legitimation, i.e. the concept of loyalty, and moreover, the role of loyalty in a dynastic transition period. "Loyalty" has evoked great tensions in China's past, not only from the elite but also for the masses. The tragedy of the peasant soldier Yüeh Fei whose heroic stand against the Jürched invaders during the transition between the Northern Sung and the Chin dynasties earned him a "generalship" but also his own death sentence by the Chinese authorities is one of the most important cases in Chinese history (James T.C. Liu 1972). Liu summarizes Yüeh Fei's drama as a contradiction embedded in the Confucian concept of political loyalty, the tension between "personal loyalty" and "conscientious loyalty". The Southern Sung

government had Yüeh executed for he was a potential “danger” to the government policy of appeasement. According to Liu, the Neo-Confucian ethic, prescribed personal loyalty (to the emperor) over loyal service to the state. “Absolute obedience to the ruler is a pre-requisite without which loyalty in whatever form was simply inconceivable.” (Liu 1972, p. 297).

As John Haeger (1978) notes, “loyalty” in China is an “associative” virtue, it “guards” a relationship between men; he also maintains that “loyalty” is more a primary concern in times of tension than in those of peace. In China loyalty had nothing whatsoever to do with joint or concerted action. While early Confucian political theory identified the emperor as an ideal type who deserved no loyalty if his behavior did not confirm to the ideal, the political reality of later periods was something different. In the Northern Sung-Chin, Southern Sung-Yüan, and Ming-Ch’ing dynastic transitions, many officials who were unable to switch loyalties from one emperor to another simply withdrew from government.

In recent years, as archival collections have opened, it has been this last dynastic transition period which has received an enormous amount of attention. Several scholars have preoccupied themselves with the relationship of loyalist scholars and the Manchu state (Tom Fisher 1984; Kessler 1971; Wakeman 1984). They have been able to distinguish between dynastic loyalty, which can be compared to the loyalism of Yüan or Ming officials refusing to serve the Ming or Ch’ing respectively (Langlois 1976 and 1980), and ethnic hostility to the alien Manchus (Roth 1979). Struve (1979 and 1982) has analyzed differing literati response to the Manchus as a generational one: the degree of compromise tended to vary according to their age of birth. As she writes, famous Ming loyalists such as Huang Tsung-hsi and Ku Yen-wu who refused appointments encouraged their sons and nephews to work for the Ch’ing government. Tom Fisher (1977) has discussed the famous case of Lü Liu-liang who gave up his *sheng-yuan* degree (the first examination grade) and proposed the next generation should not compromise itself by serving foreign conquerors.

Ming loyalism also had its regional character. Struve’s (1984) study focuses on those regimes in the South which battled on after Peking fell to the Manchus. The anti-Manchu resistance was particularly strong in the South where the loyalist leader Cheng Ch’eng-kung (Koxinga) had a considerable following (Crozier 1977). Crozier’s investigation of Cheng as an archetypal hero figure refers to the Great versus Little Tradition dualism. On the one hand, Cheng is the unswerving loyalist Confucian hero, swearing allegiance to the Ming restoration; on the other hand, Cheng represents the popular god-hero whose roots lie deep in the local Min-nan culture of southern Fukien and Taiwan.

The process by which the Manchus won the loyalty of the Ming elite, and Ming officials is the central theme of Frederic Wakeman’s massive, two

volume work, *The Great Enterprise* (1985). He carefully details how collaboration and resistance compete with each other from region to region, and documents the complex range of choices, surrender, suicide, resistance, and withdrawal. This work clearly formulates the complications of the situation, not just "good guys versus bad guys", but also the place of moral ambiguity and ethical relativism in one of the most troublesome, as well as fascinating periods of Chinese history.

Dynastic transition periods are crucial in many ways for they tend to test the basic tenure of Chinese political institutions; they illustrate most obviously how legitimation is a principal concern both for the conquerors and the conquered. In the case of barbarian conquerors recent published work has attempted a certain revision. For example, Langlois (1981) has posited it is worth knowing how Chinese life may have actually benefitted from Mongol rulership; in his view, the Mongol conquest helped stimulate a revival of interest in Chinese values and institutions. Similarly, Tao Jing-shen (1970, 1974, and 1976) has asked if the Jürcheds, in the process of becoming Chinese rulers as founders of the Chin dynasty, also "barbarized" Chinese political institutions.

Barbarian states just like Confucian regimes had to confront the issue of legitimacy, or more precisely, *cheng-tung* (orthodox succession). Dardess (1973) argues that the Mongol conquerors, by accepting the premises of the Chinese state's existence, had for all intents and purposes become "Confucian". But as other scholars had demonstrated the issue of Confucian legitimacy had many ramifications, not the least being the writing of history itself. For the Mongols this matter was especially problematic. As Chan (1981, p. 106) writes: "The issue at stake was which of the three states they had subjugated – the Liao, the Chin, or the Sung – should be considered as legitimate, and to which of these the Mongols should claim to be the legitimate successor in the Chinese dynastic order." Similarly, historiographical issues of dynastic transitions take on ideological overtones for the both the first Ming and Ch'ing emperors (Hok-lam Chan 1975; Dardess 1984; Struve 1979).

The State's performance of ritual was another crucial aspect of the legitimation process. Every imperial court in China had a 'ceremonial regime' by which the social and political order was reinforced. Wills (1979b) brief but extremely useful sketch of state ceremonial history from the Han through the Ch'ing dynasties summarizes the central themes of Chinese state ritual: land and fertility, family, vertical political relations, and cosmic harmony. Wills and other scholars also draw attention here to another relevant matter, how ceremony is related to the despotism of the ruler over his ministers. The consolidation of the Ming dynasty was in part based upon Ming T'ai-tsu's successful attempts to change the nature of the state sacrifices from those of separate to unitary worship and thereby strengthen his

own political power. This emperor no longer allowed “suburban sacrifices”, those formal ceremonies usually conducted by local administrators outside the capital; instead, Ming T’ai-tsu performed and officially endorsed what local ceremonies he thought proper and relevant within the capital (Ho Yun-yi 1979; Taylor 1977). In this way the complete power of local administration over local ritual was broken. Ritual debates continued throughout the Ming dynasty, the most famous one, the Great Ritual Controversy, concerned the proprieties within the imperial family (Carney Fisher 1979). Greiner (1977) has also thrown some light on the enthronement ceremonies and succession processes of the Ming imperial court. Other scholars have approached the place of ritual in the Ch’ing legitimation process, first by defining ritual itself and then analysing its function inside and outside the imperial court (Jochim 1979; Zito 1984).

The personalities of dynastic founders (as well as their successors) and their relationship to the formation of bureaucratic government are also part of the legitimation process. To date we have specialized studies on the first Yüan emperor (Dardess 1972-73; Franke 1978), the first Ming emperor (Hok-lam Chan 1975; Dardess 1970, 1983b, 1984; Farmer 1976; Taylor 1976), and the first Ch’ing emperors (see below). The transformation of a rebel leader into a Confucian imperialist emperor is by no means a simple routine (Wakeman 1979). No doubt part of the difficulty in unraveling this process has to do with the fact that Chinese historians in the past tampered so frequently with the record. For example, Chan (1975) demonstrates how Ming historiographers synthesized the pseudo-historical expressions in the popular tradition with the deliberately fabricated falsehoods of their own doing to conjure up an inflated portrait of the Ming founder, transforming him from an illiterate, beggar mendicant monk and rebel leader into the stereotype of an exemplar ruler in traditional official historiography.

In the case of the Manchu rulers we have more primary documentation at our disposal to evaluate the transformation process. The Manchus conducted a successful campaign to overcome issues of ethnicity between themselves and their Chinese supporters even before the conquest of China (Farquhar 1971; Roth 1979). They also carefully utilized certain institutions of the Chinese bureaucracy like the Censorate to their own advantage (Adam Lui 1978). Under Dorgon’s regency (1644-1650), they welcomed (Chinese) censors’ advice on the ways to set up and consolidate the new regime. While problems of corruption did evolve during these early years of the dynasty, the Manchus did do their best to eliminate the worst excesses and set up the foundations of a regime which was to last some 250 years (Adam Lui 1979).

From Oxnam (1975) a political narrative emerges over the first crucial years of K’ang-hsi’s reign (r. 1662-1722). K’ang-hsi ascended the throne at the age of seven and had no influence until 1669. Then at the age of fourteen

he arrested his regent Oboi and directed his own administration (Kessler 1976). Kessler explores in detail the consolidation of this brilliant figure – his military victories against three Ming loyalist leaders, known as the Three Feudatories, his conquest of Taiwan, and his successful battles against the Russians and Mongols in the North all ensured his military, political, and psychological confidence. It is generally believed that K'ang-hsi reasserted the centralization of state power by bringing important government decision-making functions back under the personal control of the emperor and streamlining the communications system (Spence 1974; Silas Wu 1970).

His successor, Yung-cheng (r. 1723-1735), who caused quite a rift in coming to power (Tom Fisher 1978; Silas Wu 1979), clamped down on bureaucratic dissent even further. He also promoted a system of secret memorials which bypassed the Grand Secretariat and Grand Council (Pei Huang 1985). Because these memorials were secret and based on a one-to-one relationship between sovereign and official, the emperor was able to keep a closer eye on the activities of his opponents, as well as slowly cut them off from their supporters. Yung-cheng also helped advance the sinification of Manchu rule. Although he proudly asserted his Manchu heritage, he abolished and modified several Manchu institutions by bureaucratizing the banner system (the original civil-military units for the registration, conscription, taxation, and mobilization of both the Manchu and the non-Manchu population who joined together before 1644 and who eventually became the basis of the Ch'ing military force), and by rebuking Manchu officials who advocated discrimination (Pei Huang 1974; compare Feuerwerker 1976).

In contrast to his father Yung-cheng, the last of the great Ch'ing emperors, Ch'ien-lung, who ruled during the second half of the 18th century, warned that the Manchus were becoming too sinicized (Kahn 1971). Although he completed a strictly formal Confucian education, duly recorded in his pre-monarchical collected writings, the *Lo-shan T'ang ch'uan-chi* (Complete Selection of Prose and Verse from the Lo-shan Hall) (Chang Ch'un-shu 1974), he had the history of the eight Manchu banners written, fixed the Manchu shamanistic tradition in written form, and had memorials written in Manchu (Farquhar 1978).

The history of central decision-making and control since the Sung has had a waxing-waning effect on Chinese political development. How bureaucratized and how centralized a particular regime maintained itself depended on many factors. Hartwell (1986) argues that the 'professionalization' of the Sung bureaucratic elite was not possible given the pervading influence of localist ties in Chinese society and politics. According to Farquhar (1981) the Mongol conquerors did not centralize China as much as others would have led us to believe. He argues that the Yüan state was so structured and

staffed as to administer the Metropolitan Province, the regions around Peking, rather than the empire at large. The Ming, usually characterized as one of China's most despotic governments, had its limitations (Grimm 1985). While we know that the early Ming emperors wielded power to an extreme degree (Dreyer 1982; and Hucker 1978) and that the later emperors' reliance on eunuchs disrupted the entire imperial power structure (Greiner 1975), the Ming emperors, with the exception of two, were in general a weak and ineffective lot (Albert Chan 1982). The fact that the Ming has been designated a "brilliant" and "vital" era, at least in terms of its economic performance, by both contemporaries and later observers, implies that the regime could continue to function and exist without autocratic modes of control from the throne. Legitimation was clearly something more than the simple exercise of personal imperial power. In short, the process of legitimation, as revealed in these recent publications, indicates both the strength and the continuity of Chinese political structure, despite all sorts of forces which potentially could have undermined that framework.

China and l'histoire globale

Of all the themes and methodologies which have emerged out of the "new" Chinese history none is more intriguing than that of the study of China in the context of global history. In basic terms, this paradigm refers to the study of Chinese history in the broadest possible context, where the focus is upon the lines which integrate China with other civilizations. "China and *l'histoire globale*" is neither a form of comparative history nor a sub-discipline of sino-foreign relations; it is a view toward evaluating those events and trends occurring within China with those happening outside its borders. "China and *l'histoire globale*" is also not the same as the structuralist approach. A "structuralist" values the cross-cultural 'universals', for example, the demographic statistics of births, deaths, and marriages. But these figures, interesting as they may be, do not link one civilization with another, they only indicate possible similarities between them.

"China and *l'histoire globale*" points to the "historical continuities" between Chinese history and that of the rest of the world (R. Bin Wong 1985). It proposes historical investigation of the paths of communication which join China with Jesuit missionary activity around the globe (Gernet 1982; Spence 1984), with world trade (Chang Kuei-sheng 1974; Lo Jung-pang 1970; T'ien Ju-k'ang 1982), or with Arabs (Vandermeersch 1973), and after the 16th century with European maritime trade (Boxer 1974), with advances in textile and military technology (Ch'uan Han-sheng 1975; Ray Huang 1970; Kuhn 1981), with the spread of diseases from either Europe or the New World (Dunstan 1975), with the transplantation of American food

crops (K.C. Chang 1977; James Lee 1982a), with the importation of silver bullion (Atwell 1982; Cartier 1981). Thus, attempting to understand the pivotal role of international groups like the Jesuits whose missionary activities in the 16th century extended the far ends of the earth, from Japan to the New World, or the trans-societal processes such as the export of East Asian pepper to the "old world", i.e. Europe (T'ien Ju-k'ang 1981; Ts'ao Yung-ho 1982) is the essence of this approach.

The study of bullion flows into China during the 17th century has been one of the important subjects linking the Middle Kingdom with the rest of the world. In particular, scholars have focused upon the world-wide dimensions of the 17th century crisis which affected both Europe and China (Adshead 1973; Atwell 1986; Wakeman 1986). For China, the crisis had its origins in the curtailment of silver imports that had regularly flowed since the 16th century into the country from: (1) Japan; (2) Europe via Central Asia; (3) Spanish America via Acapulco and the Phillipines. It is estimated that "half of the precious metals mined in the New World may have thus ended up in China" (Wakeman 1988). The import of such large amounts of specie had several effects on the Chinese economy. It caused widespread inflation to China's bimetallic copper-silver currency with grain prices especially affected; it caused the conversion of hitherto grain growing regions into silk producing regions which were dependent on foreign purchase; it contributed to further commercialization of the Chinese economy which made large numbers of regions within China inter-dependent (Atwell 1977).

When from about 1620 onward the total amount of imported silver was drastically reduced, China entered a "crisis" stage in its history. The curtailment of silver imports caused the depression in those areas dependent on the export of silk and porcelain, and other commercial items, and a simultaneous series of meteorological disasters exacerbated the state of affairs. Droughts and floods affecting regions all over China, accompanied by plagues of locusts and smallpox, caused death on a large scale. The government itself, tormented by insufficient funds caused by the hiring of mercenaries to put down the Japanese attempting to conquer one of China's dependencies, Korea, and overspending toward palace buildings and the income of imperial relatives (said to number some 100,000), could not help the worst-stricken areas. When peasant rebellions and city riots broke out in the 1630s and 1640s, the Ming government could do little to stop the violence and growing militarization of the populace. By 1644 the entire government structure broke down and rebel leaders contended for the throne.

What is significant about this episode for our understanding of China and its involvement in *l'histoire globale* is its cause and effect pattern. This particular predicament in China's history is similar to the series of crises

occurring in Europe about the same time, whereby economic problems and social unrest led to a breakdown in political leadership. Although it would be difficult to make a clear cut comparison between events in late Ming China and the 17th century political revolutions of Europe, both regions had experienced the effects of the “bullion flow”. It is this type of connection, whereby the lines of silver import may be traced and tied from China to Mexico and South America, to Europe, and back again, which makes Chinese history so much a part of world history.

The question of silver imports into China and developments in the rest of the world again arises when we examine China’s relative quick revival after the 17th century crisis. A number of scholars suggest that by the 1680s, as silver once again flowed into the country and grain prices stabilized, China could enjoy prosperity and relative peace (Atwell 1982; Ch’üan and Kraus 1975; Kishimoto-Nakayama 1984; Ng 1985). This time the problem became lack of vision. Historians ask whether the country’s general well-being and the successful extension of its frontier blinded Chinese leaders to events and activities related to the build-up of the British empire in Asia during the 18th century (Wakeman 1986). In other words, did China’s sheer success in the recovery of its political stability prevent foresight and initiative with regard to monetary policy for defense? For Moulder (1977), it was China’s actual “incorporation” into the world economy which set the stage for the disasters of the 19th century. Her study, however, does not concentrate on indigenous processes, but rather elaborates upon China’s “weak political structure”.

Moulder’s published research does not offer enough explanatory power to link the dynamic interactions between domestic and international factors of China’s development, and in general, exemplifies many problems of employing a ‘world-economy’ paradigm to Chinese history. Aside from the obvious technical historiographical difficulties such as reduction and oversimplification which practitioners of this paradigm tend to exhibit, they too often distort the importance of some factors as the expense of disregarding others. While they would not deny that Chinese history was part of world history, they are at a loss to explain the “little details” of history like plagues or the amounts of imported porcelain to Europe which in the long run connect China with Seville or Amsterdam.

The world economies which existed before the 16th century were always transformed into world empires – one thinks here not only of China but also Rome, Byzantium, and Persia. In the case of China, during the Yüan period, the Middle Kingdom was the core of a world-wide agrarian bureaucratic empire which stretched from what is now Hungary through the Soviet Union and the Middle East to Korea. By the end of that dynasty, in the mid-14th century, the steppe which had been its center had become its periphery (R. Bin Wong 1985). Nevertheless, as one keen observer has

written “[. . .] the processes of state-formation almost always appear to have begun on the periphery (or semi-periphery) rather than at the center of the declining power: in the small, lineally organized Northwest in the T’ang; in the central and lower Yangtze for the Ming; in southern Manchuria for the Ch’ing; then back to the periphery of the Northwest for the Chinese Communists.” (McDonald 1979, p. 539).

The continuum of China’s past and global history should be obvious – the problem for the historian is to design a framework which can both absorb the “little details” and provide flexible boundaries so that the significance of Chinese history for world history is made all the more clearly.

China and the West

In this last section we will consider what the “new” Chinese history has to say about a question which has bothered observers for quite some time. Given China’s relatively high-developed state and society, why did the country *not* follow a path of development similar toward ours? In other words, why did China fail to create an endogenous industrial capitalism? A great number of scholars, both in the past and present, have attempted to answer this question. Before further comment, we should note that this type of question represents a practice which began already in the 16th century, i.e. using China to examine Europe. One thinks of the rhetoric of Enlightenment scholars such as Leibniz, Montesquieu, and Voltaire. In the 19th century, writers extended this manner of discourse to ask why was China so backward. Western theorists of Chinese society, including both Weber and Wittfogel, utilized the conception of stagnation to label the economic development of the imperial era.¹⁰

Among the “new” Chinese history publications which examines this question, it is the work of Mark Elvin (1973), *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, that has drawn most attention. Elvin proposes that China failed to create an endogenous industrial capitalism because of economic and ecological restraints that resulted in a sort of pre-modern “overdevelopment”. He characterizes the long span of Chinese economic development from 1000 to 1800 as a paradox: while the Chinese refined their traditional technology and expanded their market organizations and transport systems, these improvements, he suggests, inhibited the appearance of ‘sharp price disparities’ which might have stimulated new inventive activity. Myers (1974, p. 266) summarizes Elvin’s argument:

¹⁰ Gary Hamilton, “Why No Capitalism in China? – Negative Questions in Historical, Comparative Research”, in Andreas E. Buss (ed.), *Max Weber in Asian Studies* (Leiden, 1985), pp. 65-89.

While the Chinese successfully were able to offset diminishing returns in the short run, they failed to make those technological improvements which would have enabled them later to increase their rate of output rapidly enough to support their growing population on a sufficiently high level of material satisfaction. Elvin conceptualizes this calamity as a “high-equilibrium trap”, a condition *non-existent* in the poor and backward countries of this century, because they lack the sophisticated organizations and high-level pre-modern technology that the Chinese possessed.

Elvin shows that despite “growth”, economic organizations in China before the 20th century remained small scale, labor intensive, and dependent upon complex inter-household relationships for resource exchange.

Similar to Elvin is the attitude of G.W. Skinner (1977) toward this question of China and its “lack” of capitalism; he sees that the Chinese economy, although market-oriented, was unlike a capitalist one. China’s landscape was filled with petty markets and complex systems of distribution that centered on regional urban hierarchies. Inhibiting “free-market” forces were particularistic merchant groups which developed rigid, guild-like organizations and monopolistic practices that prevented the free market flow of commodities and hindered the spread of exchange relations. Skinner assumes urban regional associations are manifestations of market town parochialism, or in his words, “local system loyalties” which contributed to parochialism, and hence in the long term, prevented a capitalistic economy.

Since the 1930s, the developers of Marxist historiography in China have debated whether China belonged to the “capitalist” or “feudal” stage during the long *durée* between ancient and modern times. Those studies by Chinese Marxist scholars which have been translated into English for distribution outside China reveal a variety of attitudes toward China’s “true” economic state in the past. As Hong Huanchun (1982, p. 214) writes:

After each peasant uprising, the small peasant economy was rehabilitated [by the state] and the social forces of production were improved while the feudal system remained intact. The changes of dynasties in Chinese history mark the cycle of destruction and rehabilitation. This cyclical crisis of the rural economy kept China’s feudal small peasant economy at a low level for ages and precluded steady growth of the forces of production.

Hong’s testimony here is clearly a reference to Wittfogel’s theory of cyclical crises and a strong plea for the role of an autocratic state as a major factor in the prolongation of China’s feudal past. Other Marxist scholars have distinguished variants of the “feudal mode of production”, between a feudal lord economy (*ling-chu ching-chi*) of ancient China [and medieval Europe] and the landlord economy (*ti-chu ching-chi*) of the late imperial period

(Fang Hsing 1981; Fu Zhufu 1981; Li Wenzhi 1981). Nevertheless, despite these distinctions, these historians tie the "strength" of the imperial state to the "failure" of Chinese economic development. Even in the important work of Fu I-ling (1980b), who has spent a lifetime tracing the "sprouts" of capitalism, one cannot find a link between the progress of China's small peasant economy and its inability "to take off".

A third explanation for China's lack of capitalism centers on the impact of China's bureaucracy on the economy (Needham and Huang 1974). These authors see "the fundamental institutional incompatibility between the centralized bureaucratic administration of an agrarian society and the development of a money economy." They argue that late imperial China was missing such "modern" facilities as a credit system, impersonal management, and a method of co-ordination of service facilities. Moreover, while Needham and Huang recognize the bureaucratic state as being responsible for great achievements in science and technology, "its agrarian bias and hostility to commerce prevented the emergence of modern Western-style science and industry". This view contradicts the work of Elvin, who completely rejects the idea that political factors obstructed economic growth – he argues that officials and merchants were always silent partners in business.

As mentioned above, the danger of the question "why no capitalism in China" is its Eurocentrism – what makes Chinese history cannot be learned from theories of European development. The distinctiveness of the West is a fact, reference to Chinese development in terms of "economic backwardness" seems inappropriate. It would seem more useful, as both Myers (1975b) and Metzger (1977) have pointed out, to determine those organizational structures which formed the background to Chinese development. These authors maintain that a major transformation in the organization of the economy occurred from 1500 to 1800 which made possible the enormous population growth of the period. Metzger (1972) argues that the "dynamism of the private" was reinforced by state fiscal policies and changes in the property and class structure. There was a shift toward a somewhat less hierarchical system of stratification. Accordingly, large private landholdings became more commercialized – "the privileged rural sector" of the Ming dynasty died out. The status of the local elite was lowered, the status of commoners was raised, as higher numbers of commoners bought property. There was increasing differentiation of the economy from the polity as a result of the "mediation between state and popular impulses" (Metzger 1977; compare Zurndorfer 1981a).

The Myers-Metzger approach offers a different line of inquiry when we attempt to detect lines of continuity and discontinuity between "premodern" and "modern" China. It suggests a whole range of questions which bear upon other features of Chinese development. For example, how did

management of China's complex bureaucratic organizations contribute or hinder the development of the Chinese economy in the 19th and 20th centuries? Was the passive role of the Chinese state (as argued in the section "State and Society") a negative or a positive asset?

"Why no capitalism in China?" may be an unthoughtful question but it should not deter us from making other queries which point to the similarities between the Chinese and ourselves. Some of the most exciting new research in the last few years has been the detailed investigation of the "emotions" of the literati. A recent publication on "Self-examination and confession of sins" (Wu Pei-yu 1979) or Angela Leung's (1983 and 1984) fascinating studies on women and physical love during the Yüan and Ming periods are examples of how the history of *mentalité* may be approached for China's past. In this way, the lives of the Chinese people may seem less removed, less 'exotic', and Chinese history more 'human'.

Conclusion: The Past and the Future of Chinese History

In this essay we have attempted to categorize and structure a number of possible approaches to the study of Chinese history for the years between 1000 and 1800. Although we have recognized dynastic periodization, our ultimate goal has been to transcend these temporal markers and to accent a number of continuities which span the 800 years under review. These continuities include: the general vigor of the Chinese economy, the sedentary outlook of both the government and the military, the progressive expansion of the Chinese population, and the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of both social and political relationships on a local basis. To these trends we should add that the "dynastic cycle" paradigm does not help to explain the general strength of the Chinese economy during this long time span – recent publications do not demonstrate that successive regimes followed the expected 'dynastic course' from vigor to weakness. Instead, we have learned that two important 'commercial revolutions', one occurring during the Sung and other beginning in the Ming [but whose origins in both cases are not understood], were manifested in changing landlord-tenant relations, increased regional and subregional agricultural specialization, the extension of marketing relationships, and the combination of bureaucratic and mercantile careers within elite families; all these changes developed over hundreds of years and were not limited to specific dynastic periods. The dynastic cycle also cannot account for the formulation, dominance, and exercise of gentry-rulership, a group who, over time, seemed to shirk more and more of its public responsibilities. Interestingly, this trend parallels the government's increasing "privatization" of the economy.

Traditional Chinese historians themselves have also insisted on the continuities within Chinese development but not for the same reasons – their

stress has focused upon the perpetuity of the cultural tradition, i.e. the persistence of language and governmental institutions, as well as the continuous occupation of a specific geographical region (Liu 1970). Thus, the continuity of Chinese civilization is not a matter of debate between the "old" and the "new" Chinese historians. What makes the "new" Chinese history different from what went before is the framework within which themes of continuity are studied. The "new" Chinese history is analytical – events, invasions, dynastic transitions, are investigated in a *context* where *particular* problems, involving *particular* persons, locations, within a *particular* time span. The "new" Chinese history asks new questions, not simply "what" and "how", but also "why" and "what were the consequences for Chinese development in the long term?" The "new" Chinese history is concerned with new subjects and problems, especially, the masses of the Chinese people and the ways in which cultural-social-political institutions affected their day-to-day existence, e.g. the two-way interaction between elite and popular culture, or the demographic limitations of Chinese agriculture.

With the advancement in our understanding of Chinese history, the possibility of incoherence and overspecialization looms on the horizon. One may also wonder if the proliferation of theoretical innovations, the expansion of subject matter, and general change of attitude toward events will cause permanent disruption to the traditional methods, tools, and bounds of the discipline of Chinese history, such as philological and textual analysis and bibliographical compilation. These new ways do not necessarily inviolate the old ones. The "new" historians must still be language "masters"; only now, they can conduct their search for deeper layers of meaning, "thick description", through the medium of semiotics and computer-aided textual analysis, a task first pioneered by the French sinologist Marcel Granet in the beginning of this century. Moreover, there is no evidence to date that the "new" Chinese historians have denied us the pleasures of history, like the drama of story. Works such as Spence's *Death of Woman Wang* (1978) or Wakeman's *The Great Enterprise* (1985) are proven feats of lively imagination and great rhetorical ability.

Admittedly, this discussion has neglected many other regions of the "new" Chinese history, for example, the nature of China's pre-modern juridical environment. The original and stimulating studies of McKnight (1981; 1982; 1985) have already indicated how significant this particular aspect of Chinese civilization has been to the making of a specific Chinese way of life. Rather than enumerate upon other noteworthy exclusions, all of which no doubt deserve recognition, I should prefer to end this discussion by reference to another historical problem, the dilemma of historical generations. It is a truism to proclaim that each generation writes its own history of the past generation. And yet it is the nature of history itself

which informs us when a generation is over. In the case of Chinese history, as we have tried to argue here, we are in the midst of one of the most creative and liveliest periods of historical writing. What direction future generations of historians will take is unknown, but surely a rich and stimulating foundation has been built in these last fifteen years.

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- AA – *Acta Asiatica*
 ADH – *Annales de démographie historique*
 AESC – *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*
 AHR – *American Historical Review*
 BEFEO – *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française l'Extrême-Orient*
 BSOAS – *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
 BSYS – *Bulletin of Sung And Yüan Studies*
 CC – *Chinese Culture*
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 HJAS – *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*
 JAH – *Journal of Asian History*
 JAOS – *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
 JAS – *Journal of Asian Studies*
 JESHO – *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
 JICSHK – *Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong*
 JOS – *Journal of Oriental Studies*
 KOLIC – *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China*, ed. by Patricia Ebrey and James Watson, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
 LIC – *Late Imperial China*

- MAS – *Modern Asian Studies*
 MC – *Modern China*
 MRDTB – *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*
 MS – *Monumenta Serica*
 MSt – *Ming Studies*
 OE – *Oriens Extremus*
 PFEH – *Papers on Far Eastern History*
 SSC – *Social Sciences in China*
 SSCRb – *Society for the Study of Chinese Religions Bulletin*
 SSPC – *The Scope of State Power in China*, ed. by Stuart Schram, London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 1985.
 TP – *T'oung Pao*

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