

Elman Review for

R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010). Hardback and Paperback: 512 pages; ISBN-10: 0295990198, ISBN-13: 978-0295990194.

In this volume, Kent Guy probes the role of provincial government during the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1911) under four reigns from 1644 to 1796. Provincial governors especially illuminate the institutional structure of the Qing state because the province emerged as one of the keys to managing the expanding Manchu-Chinese Empire. In charge of these increasingly influential administrative units, governors played key roles. While European monarchies perfected the structures and attitudes of absolutist rule, the Qing similarly embarked on "the first mature embodiment of the modern state." The early Qing also elaborated the structures of traditional absolutism. Common trends of commercialization prosperity, and population growth enabled the Qing provincial governors to hold together a huge physical territory for almost two centuries. Each component originated in Chinese history, but they were developed further by the Qing as needs arose. The Manchus could focus on the question of how to make the system work for them instead of being bound by the commitments of their Ming Chinese predecessors.

Guy usefully deploys the records of governors' appointments and the laws and practices that shaped them to reconstruct the development of provincial governors. Part I traces the

development of the office itself. Part 2 examines the history of governors' appointments in each of China's seventeen provinces. His prosopography of governors examines a group of Chinese and Manchu officials who have received little study to date. Less than half of the Qing provincial governors were high degree holders; many held lower-level or purchased degrees. Guy concludes that their capacity for accomplishment based on experience trumped civil examination qualifications.

In the midst of China's long eighteenth century, the period after the suppression of resistance to Qing rule in the 1680s to the beginning of rebellion against the dynasty in the last years of the eighteenth century, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-95) in particular built a multiethnic corps of governors who functioned within a standardized and regulated administrative world. Provincial administration became one of the central pillars of Qing rule. The remarkable stability of the first half of the Qing dynasty was achieved through governorships that both Chinese and Manchus were equally qualified to serve. The Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) had offered a model for delegating territorial authority, but the Ming (1368-1644) had instead appointed regular provincial officials for military coordination. The responsibilities of provincial officials before 1644 were ill-defined and often shifted.

By way of contrast, Guy shows that Qing governors were influential members of a formal administrative hierarchy and enjoyed the political and financial support of the central government. Initially, Qing procedures allowed the emperor to appoint anyone to a provincial post, regardless of the appointee's rank or service, by designating a special appointee.

Such appointees extended the court's influence into the most distant territories of the Manchu empire. Masters of routine administration and troubleshooters for the imperial court, Qing governors were economic and political administrators. They played crucial roles in managing a larger and more complex empire than the Chinese had known under the Ming. During the late stages of the Kangxi reign (r. 1662-1722), their positions were solidified when all territorial officials were subordinated to them.

This first period of political activism in the procedures established for appointing governors culminated during the Yongzheng reign (1723-35). The emperor fashioned the territorial service of his father's reign into an instrument for political reform. This process led to Yongzheng's development of the secret palace memorial system (a special means of communication by which the emperor maintained personal and confidential contact with his governors). He also increased salaries to "nourish virtue" for territorial officials and permanently shortened governors terms after establishing new mechanisms for appointing and evaluating them. His creation of the Grand Council, a small informal body of advisers who initially provided military counsel, led directly to its domination of Qing administration in the eighteenth century.

According to Guy, the evolution of how provincial appointments were determined was the key to how the empire was governed. Administrative concerns varied from region to region: the Yellow River dominated prone-to-flood Henan; the exchange of goods, ideas, and officials along the Grand Canal preoccupied the Shandong governor; relations between civilians and Qing

army bannermen in the strategic coastal plain were key in the Capital Region; Hunan became the middle Yangzi breadbasket for the empire; and Shanxi governors in the northwest had to deal with longstanding border issues that always threatened Beijing on the North China Plain. When civilian governors replaced military governors in Jiangsu province after tax riots in 1661, the character of appointments in the Yangzi delta abruptly changed from military to civilian and from Manchu to Han Chinese. Different logistical demands coupled with the varying natural ecologies produced different regions, which the Qing naturalized as provinces.

Negotiations between the center and the provinces were important for all provincial governors. The wealthiest provinces along the southeastern coast became the Manchu preserve of the Imperial Household Department. Court officials were not so much the inventors of corruption in the late eighteenth century as fortunate beneficiaries. Heshen, for instance, became the most famous court villain for appointing Manchu associates to provincial offices and then extorting wealth and possessions from them, which produced heated corruption prosecutions in the eighteenth century. Rich provinces earned the ire of Chinese governors of poorer provinces. While the richest provinces were growing richer, the poorer ones were growing poorer.

Special appointments had allowed for rapid and minimal central intervention in provincial affairs, but as the court lost the political initiative, Qing governance became increasingly systematic. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, nearly three hundred officials were promoted and transferred among the provinces. Patterns of circulation for officials were established that placed the court on the sidelines. Qing innovations during the first half of the

eighteenth century, such as relief granaries, famine-relief procedures, and dike-building along rivers and lakes, were accomplished at the initiative of governors as much as of the monarchy.

Once the pattern of provincial rule was established, special appointments declined. The secular decline of the latter marked the rise of a relatively independent provincial bureaucracy within which the circulation of experienced administrative personnel provided the core of the Manchu provincial design for empire. The legacy of Qing provincial boundaries and capitals is that they are still used in contemporary China. Other lasting innovations include: an appointment system for both routine and emergency actions; promotions offering local officials hope of upward mobility; a consistency of administration for those who reached the top ranks; and the circulation of talented administrative personnel from province to province.

Kent Guy has ably presented the efflorescence of the Qing state and its provincial governance in the eighteenth century. The voluminous sources and records he has reckoned with are enormous. For specialists the book is a mine of information and a reminder of the scale and magnitude of the Qing state and its empire by 1800. For non-specialists, Guy's historical analysis of Manchu and Chinese provincial governors in perpetual motion is the proper tonic to put out the still smoldering conceits that survive from Hegel's, Marx's and Weber's fantasies of an unchanging "Celestial Kingdom" going nowhere very fast.

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