

Dragons, Tigers, and Dogs in Late Imperial China

Review >
China

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

By Kenneth Hammond

The present volume, a collection of eleven essays on various aspects of late imperial administration and social intervention, brings together many of the authors of major works which have already greatly expanded our knowledge and interpretive comprehension of the period, as well as new work from scholars exploring the vast reservoir of Chinese local history. It is an exceptionally strong anthology, with a clear focus on the practical workings of the Qing state in its management of daily affairs across the empire. The title reflects the book's concerns: from the lofty realm of dragons, representing the emperors, to the quotidian activities of officials in the bureaucracy; either fierce, superior tigers or subordinate dogs.

The book is functionally organized into four parts. The first is the editors' introduction, which provides an overview of the individual chapters and draws out the themes and analyses which run through the volume. Chapters 2-6 are studies of the development of particular institutions during the Qing. Robert Antony deals with sub-county bureaucracy in Guangdong; Philip Yeun-sang Leung studies the 'expectant official' system in the period after the Taiping Rebellion; Richard



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

Lufrano traces the development of the use of merchant petitions by urban commercial groups; Zhang Zhongmin looks at informal government in Shanghai; and R. Keith Schoppa discusses water management in a micro-region of Zhejiang. To cite only one example from among these, Lufrano's paper highlights the contribution this collection makes to a more subtle and nuanced understanding of late imperi-

al relations between state and society. In exploring the use of petitions from merchant groups to influence local government officials, he argues that we need to see these activities as part of a nexus of interest negotiations incorporating local commercial groups, government officials at the *yamen* level (local government office), and the overarching perspective of the imperial state. Rather than a simple clash of gov-

ernment intervention and merchant resistance, Lufrano reveals a certain convergence of interests which allowed the Qing to promote economic development and support local administration at the same time.

Chapters 7-11 are case studies of situations which called for particular responses from state administrators, and how those were handled. Nancy Park presents two corruption cases from the Qianlong era; Jane Kate Leonard revisits her analysis of the Daoguang era grain transport crisis, focusing here on the final phase of this crisis in 1826; Joseph Tsi-hei Lee explores the roles of Christian communities in dealing with collective violence in Guangdong; David Atwill looks at ethnic violence in Yunnan; and Dorothy Borei addresses ethnic conflict and land policy in Xinjiang. The final chapter is a comparative study by Zheng Shiping which traces the lingering influence of Qing administrative practice on local governance in post-1949 China.

Two major themes emerge from these papers. The first is that, while the Qing imperial state was willing and able to adapt to local conditions and to changing circumstances, it did not do so by making radical breaks with established practice or existing institutional systems. Qing officials drew on the wealth of precedent and experience which was available to them from previous administrative experience and from local informants. At the same time, in recognition of the structural limitations of the imperial bureaucracy, there was an increasing tendency to turn to extra-bureaucratic agents in the resolution of problems. In some

instances these were traditional local elites or participants in the examination culture who had not found places in the official hierarchy. In others they were newer manifestations of economic developments such as merchants' associations, which both facilitated the articulation of commercial interests and extended the reach of the state into the expanding economy. In other words, if a single term were needed to characterize the Qing state as revealed in these papers it would be 'flexible'. In conjunction with works such as William Rowe's study of Chen Hongmou as an exemplary administrator, or Bradley Reed's work on county clerks in the Qing, the papers in *Dragons, Tigers, and Dogs* do a great deal to strengthen our understanding of, and appreciation for, the sophistication and modernity of government in the late imperial age. <

- Antony, Robert J. and Jane Kate Leonard (eds), *Dragons, Tigers, and Dogs: Qing Crisis Management and the Boundaries of State Power in Late Imperial China*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (2002), pp.xiii + 333, ISBN 1-885445-14-8

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Goodrich, L. Carrington and Nigel Cameron (eds), *The Face of China*, New York: Aperture (1978), p.97.