Interlocking Patrimonialisms and State Formation in Qing China and Early Modern Europe

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Familial power contributed to binding territories together and systematically severing them in both China and early modern European states. In the early Qing (1644–1911) Empire, Manchu conquerors met the challenges of securing and expanding rule by discovering ways to use laterally related brothers and imperial bondservants to hold Chinese bureaucrats in check, while deploying bureaucracy to restrain princely brothers from partitioning the state. The ensuing interlock of patrimonial practices and bureaucracy, developed in a style similar to ancien régime France, stabilized political power for centuries.

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To the Chinese today, the Qing Empire represents a conquering dynasty. It was established by Manchus—the seminomadic tribes inhabiting China's northeast frontier. Its tribal origin led the Qing Empire into composite forms of rule, demi-"barbarian," demi-Chinese. In this article, we argue that bureaucratic state expansion in Qing China rested on interlocked patrimonial

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practices. That conjunction parallels selective aspects of state formation in early modern Europe.

The case of early Qing state formation shows that as the Qing conquerors were relocated from peripheral, mountainous Manchuria to the populous, fertile land of China, they rapidly discovered the availability of rich military, economic, and administrative resources. Yet they just as quickly learned that without a powerful state apparatus channeling and regulating these resources to service the center, their influx merely consolidated and fortified dispersed chiefly strongholds. Complex maneuvers were undertaken to establish Chinese-style bureaucracy to curb the decentralization of power inherent in the original tribal organization of the Qing conquerors. As the conquest of China eventually took shape, however, Qing state-makers realized that without an additional layer of Manchu patrimonial control, the Chinese bureaucratic state—however effectively it monitored administration and taxation—would become unwieldy and unmanageable, hostile to foreign rulers like themselves. The early Qing rulers resorted to—and switched among—different patrimonial tools and strategies as they struggled with tendencies that threatened to demolish the nascent empire. In this process, the rulers welded together multiple forms of patrimonialism and thereby succeeded in restoring an uneasy equilibrium, preventing the empire from splitting.

If readers are willing to overlook some marked discrepancies of conceptual language, they will see a connection between our argument and S. N. Eisenstadt's (1963) analysis, in what he called "centralized historical bureaucratic empires or states," of the tense dialectic between basic ascriptive kinship and territorial groups on one hand and the more generalized forms of power and power-holders who capitalize on "free floating resources" on the other. Under this overarching rubric, Eisenstadt includes China, from Han to Qing; the European absolutist states and their imperial extensions; and many other political systems. Similar to Eisenstadt, we see the equilibria on which such political formations depended as fragile but eminently reproducible; after all, early modern European patrimonial states endured for centuries, and the Qing Empire lasted from 1644 to 1911. Unlike Eisenstadt, though, we see rulers' familial actions and strategies with respect to competitors and allies as a crucial causal factor in the rise and fall of such formations.

While most contemporary studies focus on how Western and non-Western states are facilitated/constrained by the accumulation/depletion of fiscal and military resources, we find that such a focus elides the crucial variable of patriarchal patrimonial power. Our focus enables us to underline an aspect of Chinese state formation that has not been adequately explored—how state expansion itself brings about disruptive dangers of partition, to which actors sometimes respond by launching counteracting strategies, including familial ones, to attempt to restore stability.

We are not the first to point to familial power in Chinese state-formation. Gary Hamilton (1990) draws a strong contrast between premodern Europe and late imperial state-building in China. According to Hamilton, the Roman Empire was characterized by a two-track development in which complex political units of the

state grew in competition with powerful patrilineages while Roman law preserved and codified the patriarchal authority of family heads. Yet as Europe Christianized and Rome fell, he argues, the European family gradually lost its patrilineal character and became more truncated in the Middle Ages and positively nuclear in modernity. Consequently, familial authority became more and more disconnected from the political authority of the state. In China, elite familial possession of offices likewise diminished in the late imperial period, which saw an intensification of a highly sophisticated bureaucratic officialdom. Yet familial power—conveyed through elaborate familial, ethical codes—regulated the relationship between the bureaucratic officialdom and the emperor, as well as that between the subjects and their magistrates.

While we certainly sign on to some of Hamilton's arguments, we disagree strongly with his characterization of early modern European states as shorn of family. In that era, as Adams (2005) has shown, states remained to a large extent intergenerational lineal preserves and laterally interconnected holdings of elite families, and at the upper reaches relations between states were conducted on frankly dynastic principles. Familial power cannot serve as a static variable marking the difference between China and Europe; the differences are more variegated and subtle. To continue to move beyond the dichotomized typological thinking that still dominates the comparative study of China and Europe, therefore, we begin by exploring the dynamics of familial power in the process of consolidating the Chinese state, with selected targeted comparisons to Europe.

The Qing: Competitive Brothers and Loyal Slaves

The tribal origin of the Qing is most obvious in two kinds of familial ties—competitive brothers and loyal slaves—both of which played key roles in variegated tribal politics but were marginalized in pre-Qing Chinese dynasties. Chinese monarchs had conventionally acknowledged the transfer of authority exclusively through the patrilineal tie between father and son, closely resembling European elite traditions of patrilineal primogeniture. Normally the emperor, while still alive, named his eldest son as heir. Neither the emperor's brothers nor the brothers of the heir apparent could openly compete for legitimate succession. On the other hand, slaves and servants were marginalized in Chinese families, especially in the late–imperial period. One reason was the gradual disappearance of great manors since the Song Dynasty, which greatly reduced the existence of dependent laborers—working slaves (see Elvin 1984).[1] Second, household slaves/servants in China were not property possessed and freely disposed of by their owners. Rather, they possessed their own legal personality in that they could make money and buy their freedom. They had their own surnames, for example, which were registered in local government. They were also protected and punished by state law, and not entirely under the jurisdiction of their master (see Torbert 1977, 55–56).[2]

This was also true in the imperial household. Thus, the Ming emperor heavily relied on eunuchs—castrated males—to carry out many important missions. The eunuchs were socially marked by their physical distinction, and without alternative places in society or the capacity to reproduce, they were more likely to be loyal to their masters. As Lewis Coser (1964, 880) noted, "Men who are less than men have performed essentially similar political functions in a variety of different cultural settings." The functional substitute in early modern European courtly politics and state-building was of course the priestly stratum.

Note that the Qing Empire differed in both respects. Proximate to steppe tribes, the Qing founders bolstered a rulership similar to the Mongols' that acknowledged significant roles played by lateral brothers. As Thomas Barfield (1989) points out, Mongols intermittently switched between lateral and lineal principles when deciding the succession of khan. Although it was prescribed that the new Great Khan must be a male member of the House of Chinggis Khan—most probably sons by his principal wife—initially Chinggis Khan's brothers were also counted as eligible candidates. Moreover, no son was designated beyond all doubt as the heir. The insecure nature of steppe politics also favored, if not demanded, that the successor khan be endowed with charismatic power that could serve to overawe and subdue enemies. This emphasis on bellicosity diluted the legitimacy of a fixed succession between the ruler and his designated heir and created chances of "usurpation" by more capable and politically agile lateral brothers.

Furthermore, steppe polities generally maintained fragile autocratic control, which was undercut by tribal cleavages and conflicts. Chinggis Khan divided the empire among his four sons, each being entitled to rule designated territories and tribes. The tribal assembly Khuriltais had to be convened and attended by each major line of his sons to elect the legitimate heir. To which line the title of Great Khan went was therefore highly contingent on particular coalitions and schemes undertaken by these lateral brothers (see Barfield 1989, 206–18; Fletcher 1986, 17, 24–28).[3] This structure of decision-making, with its agonistic and strangely egalitarian features, also left a large space for lateral competition. In all these ways, lateral ties were more or less embodied in the construction of Manchu rulership, especially before and during the establishment of the Qing.

Similar to the Mongol Empire, the early Qing frequently suffered from transitry crises caused by maneuvers among powerful brothers. The Qing founder, Nurhaci (1559–1626), began military conquest in 1583 in alliance with a few hundred men of his own tribe. Then his force expanded into a confederation with his eldest son, Cuyeng, and his younger brother, Shurhaci. He at first wanted to make Cuyeng his successor but then had him killed in 1615. He had not named his successor upon his death in 1626. As Peter Perdue argues, no clear, exclusive rule of succession was practiced in the inchoate Qing Empire (Perdue 2005, 607 fn 34). The uncertainty of succession was intensified by the actual division of power among princely brothers. In 1601, at the beginning of his conquest, Nurhaci enlisted four banners (the Yellow, Red, White, and Blue) and appointed his sons Daishan, Manggultai, and Hong Taiji and his nephew Amin (Shurhaci's son) to rule them. Then he appointed four of his other sons to lead another four banners.

Thus, eight *beile* (princes)—each in command of a banner—constituted a ruling council, and each banner rotated in turn as council leader (Barfield 1989, 258–63). Aside from the eight-*beile*-collective-rule, in 1615 Nurhaci also established the *sunja amban* (Five State Councillors) and invested leadership in five of his sons-in-law (Perdue 2005, 111; see also Roth-Li 1975, 18–19).[4] These ruling councils made important decisions regarding military expeditions, but their structure obstructed the formation of a unified center. As a result, Nurhaci's death inaugurated bloody competitions among multiple eligible candidates. Eventually, his eighth son, Hong Taiji (1592–1643), successfully eliminated the domination of his three most competitive brothers—the eldest brother, Daishan; the fifth brother, Manggultai; and Nurhaci's nephew Amin—and subordinated other senior banner *beile* by force. Hong Taiji managed to end the policy of rotating the Eight Banner council leadership. Nonetheless, bloody transitry crises due to the intrusion of powerful brothers had not subsided even under the reign of Emperor Kangxi (1662–1722).[5]

The second major feature distinguishing the Qing imperial household from previous Han Chinese dynasties was its heavy reliance on slave bondservants. In this respect, the Qing rulers followed the steps of their tribal ancestors as well. As Joseph Fletcher succinctly points out, tribal chiefs and nobles usually maintained personal retinues or *nökör*, who "served their master as his eyes and ears and hands—as military commanders, administrators, secret or public agents, and specialists of all kinds who formed the nucleus of what could become, if need be, an extended imperial administration" (Fletcher 1986, 20). These personal retinues were obliged to serve their master's household as well as to take on external missions, and being simultaneously his slaves and companions, their power was straightforwardly derived from an intimate personal relationship with their master. They match the prototype of patrimonialism that Max Weber describes: "Everywhere the objective basis of solidarity is the permanent sharing of lodging, food, drink and everyday utensils" (Weber 1978, 1008). This intimate household relationship granted the *nökör* a potentially vast authority in spite of their servile status. Yet unlike the noble chief leaders, they lacked independent power bases, and their prestige was entirely correlated with their loyalty and the will and even whim of the ruler. The Qing imperial bondservant (*boo-i*) belonged to this general category.

"Bondservants" normally refers to the slaves kept within the Manchu imperial household. They existed even before the Manchu banner organization. In the early Manchu conquest (before 1624), most Chinese captives were enslaved and distributed to individual Manchu households. They were channeled toward menial labor, especially in agricultural production (Torbert 1977, 16).[6] Sometime between 1615 and 1620, bondservants were also organized into fighting companies and battalions on the model of the Manchu Eight Banner to facilitate the Manchu conquering enterprise. The bondservants of the Lower Five Banners gradually turned into household servants of princes, whereas those of the Upper Three Banners became the household servants of the emperor. Gradually the bondservants of the emperor were institutionally incorporated into the newly established

Department of Imperial Household—the emperor's privy government (Spence 1988, 7). Not being tied to the routine bureaucratic system that the Manchus inherited from the Ming dynasty, the Department of Imperial Household was mainly in charge of "inner court" functions—housing, feeding, and clothing and guarding the emperor, his family, and his entourage. It occupied enormous landed estates and had its own treasury.[7] The department also staffed and managed enterprises outside the palace, such as lucrative salt, ginseng, and jade monopolies as well as the collection of both inland and foreign custom dues (B. Bartlett 1991, 24; see also Chang 1972).[8] The imperial bondservants thereby became key agents in the operation of imperial industries and commerce.[9] The functions of those agents were similar to those favored by, for example, the French Crown in the eighteenth century. In this century the Crown pursued what Gail Bossenga called the "extended patrimonialization" of the state, whereby "bundles of privilege, status and governmental functions were, for all practical purposes, owned by the elite" (Bossenga 1991, 31) but with the very important difference in independent family-lineage power and capacity.

For example, imperial bondservants were often appointed as textile commissioners. They used the money distributed by the Board of Revenue and the Board of Works to buy raw silk and recruited high-standard artisans to weave textile products needed by the emperor and officials. The textile commissioners managed several revenue sources in addition to the sum allocated by the Boards of Revenue and Works. They loaned money from the Department of Imperial Household and drew income from great customhouses on the Yangzi River and the Great Canal. A 1699 statute even gave the rights of purchasing and minting copper to the merchants and textile commissioners from the Department of Imperial Household, rather than leaving them in the hands of private merchants (Spence 1988, 104, 109).[10] Manipulating these different revenue streams evinced the superb financial capacity of imperial bondservants, who extended the emperor's economic control beyond strictly bureaucratic channels.

The imperial bondservants were also appointed as salt censors. In 1691, 1692, 1694, and 1695 the salt censors—especially in the Liang-Huai region—were all bondservants from the imperial household (Spence 1988, 174). They took charge of issuing certificates to salt merchants who paid taxes for the right to sell salt in designated markets. They created the reports of all levied salt taxes based on the records sent in by lower-level officials and functionaries—mainly the salt controller, salt intendants, the officials at the salt treasury, and various inspectors at the salt factories. The reports were then sent to the Board of Revenue, which examined the reports in collaboration with officials from the Censorate. As the emperor's intimate dependents, however, the imperial bondservants were not wholeheartedly subordinate to bureaucratic control. Instead they were obliged to directly report the tax income to the emperor by sending private palace memorials (Spence 1988, 178). Moreover, surplus money was often collected from salt merchants who were granted the right to transport extra salt in return for extra payments. By appointing the imperial bondservants as salt censors, the emperor was also able to keep a close eye on the flow of this

surplus money, which was loosely controlled by stipulated bureaucratic means. The emperor thus managed to use imperial bondservants to tap into the lucrative tax resources and divert them into the treasury of the inner court (Spence 1988, 191–92).

The posts of textile commissioner and salt censor provide a window into the pivotal role of imperial bondservants in Qing state-formation. The slave bondservants were deprived of any independent livelihood, which made them dependent on the grace and favor of the emperor. Their servility increased their trustworthiness in the eyes of their master. The imperial bondservants were trusted by the Manchu emperor to assume crucial provincial posts. They helped to extend imperial supervision into internal bureaucratic processes in revenue collection and to increase the revenue flowing to the emperor's private treasury. These functions were especially indispensable in early Qing state-formation, when the Manchu inner court and the Han Chinese state bureaucracy had not been conjoined harmoniously. Perhaps that is one reason why, in decrees, the servant-master relationship was cast in a light of paternal love and close interdependency within the rubric of autocratic control.

> The master should love the slave, and the slave should love the master. The master is to eat the same food as the slave and share the booty of a campaign or hunt with him. If the master receives new cotton and grain but does not feed and clothe the servants well, he is to be reported. His servants will be taken away and be given to better masters. If the servants are treated well, all will be happy. (Manzhou Jiudang II, cited in Roth-Li 1975, 57)

Our discussion thus far has explored the operation of two important patrimonial forms in Qing state-formation. Having originated from a free confederation of tribes led by independent sons and brothers, the Manchu regime was not sustained by a clearly defined succession rule, whether of primogeniture or anything else. In the absence of a stable autocratic center, the egalitarian tradition of political council further dispersed sovereign power among the lateral princes. Fierce competition among brothers eliminated the less capable (or more unlucky) ones and helped to ensure that the successor ruler possessed at least a modicum of military competence and personal charisma. Yet such struggles also sowed the seeds of bloody transitry crises and endangered overall political stability. In contrast, the imperial bondservants were slaves primarily fed by and working for the imperial household. When the imperial household was institutionalized as an official organ of the inner court, the imperial bondservants were also entitled to be inner court officials, who were detailed by the emperor for important missions. They thus expanded the personal dominion of the emperor vis-à-vis his brothers.

Before we open the discussion of how these different forms of patrimonialism were interlocked in the evolving Qing state, however, we need to introduce the curious form of bureaucracy that Manchus inherited from their Chinese predecessors.

Ming Bureaucracy?

To rule the vast territory of China, the Qing state-makers overhauled rather than demolished Ming bureaucratic officialdom—a modular form of Chinese bureaucracy under development since the Song Dynasty. The Chinese system had constantly suffered, as do many such regimes, from the proliferation of corruption and private embezzlement, but did not hinge upon patrimonialism in a narrow sense. Patrimonialism indicates a set of (familial) practices and forms of conduct that amalgamate private property and public office, as we often see in the forms of tax-farming and venal officialdom common in early modern Europe. These "liturgical methods" of governance, in Weber's words, prevailed in early modern European states before a stricter separation of private person and office was implemented. The ruler customarily granted a monopoly on the respective economic pursuits to the individual and his heirs, who managed the endowed office as private and, often, lineage property (Weber 1978, 1023). In countries and regions such as France, England, the Netherlands, Iberia, and elsewhere in Europe, as Adams (2005) has argued, patrimonial officialdom was a core building block of early modern European states, in which state offices and privileges were monopolized, and sometimes owned, by prestigious elite families.

Judged by strictly Weberian criteria, the Chinese bureaucratic system had been visibly at odds with patrimonial forms of power ever since the Song Dynasty. The deployment and maturation of the imperial civil examination opened channels of political participation to a wide population, rather than restricting them to a few elite families. The institution of avoidance and rotation procedures separated officials' bureaucratic networks from their clan and native-place networks. Kiser and Tong (1992) note that there was not any strong class or familial monopoly on state office in China. In Frederic Wakeman's words, "At any single time, one-third of the examination gentry was fresh blood—people whose immediate ancestors had never held a degree" (Wakeman 1986, 22). So although the Chinese state was never rid of factionalism produced by competitive clustered interests that were formed and preserved throughout the long process of education and official career (Kiser and Tong 1992), the bulky bureaucratic machine of China did not operate according to the patrimonial principles of their European counterparts.

Nevertheless, Chinese dynastic rulers gravitated toward, and actively endorsed, abstract, codified principles of paternal love and filial piety that concentrically patterned the relationship between the emperor and his subjects, as well as that between the magistrate and the governed, as the domination of the father upon his sons. So the Manchus inherited from their Chinese predecessors a bureaucratic system grafted to the patriarchal patrimonial authority of the emperor. Bureaucratic officialdom was characteristic of the developing state at only the center and provincial levels. Traditional Chinese rulers maintained a very modest bureaucratic administration that was not sufficient to govern the population. The local administration had to be extensively assisted by clerks, secretaries, and runners recruited on the spot, who aided but also obstructed the supervision of local

magistrates (Mann 1987; Duara 1988). These informally recruited functionaries coalesced into patrimonial enclaves at the lower reaches of the state.

Moreover, gentry families in local society expanded the reach of an elastic bureaucratic state. Unlike the informal functionaries, gentry families were not delegated power by the local administrators. Both Xiao Gongquan's (1960) and Qu Tongzu's (1969) classic studies have delineated how the exercise of gentry power was decoupled from the local bureaucratic apparatus. In fact, gentry families were legally prohibited from occupying any state posts. Their reputation was associated with their endeavors to maintain local welfare and nourish the local community. In times of peace, they were actively engaged in running social charities, religious ceremonies, schools, and famine relief. In times of war, they were entrusted with the task of organizing local militias, exterminating bandits, and pacifying localities.[11] Deeply immersed in classic education, gentry families were exemplars in spreading orthodox Confucian familial doctrines in local society. In a fashion parallel to what Philip Gorski (2003) describes in the early modern Netherlands, they factually extended the arms of a disciplinary state that meticulously regulated the rituals of birth, marriage, education, and death of the common people.

A good example is the promotion of a women's chastity cult in late imperial China. Emphasis on women's chastity highlights the fidelity to husbands' patriline. However, as Katherine Carlitz (1997) argues, the moral requirement of women's chastity was celebrated only within upper-class families before the Song Dynasty. Local communities rarely congratulated themselves on their faithful widows, and the widows whom the emperor had honored were generally recorded in the dynastic chronicles rather than in local gazetteers. The change happened between late Southern Song and the early-middle Ming—from the late twelfth to the late fifteenth century—when the women's chastity cult was disseminated from the high elite to commoners. One reason for this spread was the decline of grandee families, which—as in certain European regions and countries, such as England—at the outset of early modern state-formation had been crushed by that process. In addition, gentry families whose prestige was built on education rather than noble pedigrees were doing well. In collaboration with local officials and village elders, gentry scholars inculcated the Confucian moral lessons of women's chastity to the commoners. They helped the state to expurgate the heterodox Buddhist and Daoist beliefs and practices that spontaneously shaped the conception of wifely fidelity in folk society and en route created a hegemonic political regulation of popular morality. Under their initiative, and beginning from the late fifteenth century, the state mobilized a widespread attack on "noncanonical" shrines in local society (Carlitz 1997; Theiss 2004, 135). Therefore, although gentry families mostly wielded nonstate power, their presence considerably extended the reach of a disciplinary state in imperial China.

While conquering China, in other words, the Qing state-makers obtained from their Chinese predecessors immense institutional resources to rule the empire. They acquired a well-crafted, even meritocratic, bureaucracy that drew officials from across provinces and via a highly refined examination system. Although

nepotism and corruption invariably crept in, and although an abstract familial code regulated the conduct of officials and commanded familial piety toward the emperor, this colossal bureaucratic machine was not in any simple sense either owned or possessed by elite families.

The bureaucracy, however, was supplemented at the bottom by patrimonial enclaves that humble functionaries formed. The menial clerks and runners hereditarily monopolized knowledge about local society. They were effectively used and scrupulously supervised in good times. But in bad times, they abused their power and pressed the people cruelly. Meanwhile, the state's local administration was also advanced informally by the representatives and activities of gentry families. The gentries were proficient in Confucian classics and actively contributed to the construction of local welfare systems. By promulgating orthodox familial rituals, they also extended the disciplinary control of the state into local communities. These different facets were permeated by conventional Chinese familial principles that accentuated both the patrilineal tie and the sway of the patriarch. The imperial vision of the Manchus was significantly widened by recognizing and absorbing these new institutional resources in the conquest of China.

Yet the early Manchu state-makers were also frustrated. They were aware that it was both necessary and difficult to counteract the fissiparous tendencies of their original tribal society and to graft Manchu ruling power onto the conventional Chinese state. They learned in this process how best to use forms of patrimonial power in conjunction with bureaucracy to achieve these two goals.

The Triple Threat: Conquest, Bureaucracy, Patrimonialism

In the prominent "fiscal-military model" of state-building, a direct causal link is drawn among war, resource mobilization, and the growth of state capacity. Yet this model, which lays great stress on bargaining between rulers and elites, does not account for how states come into being, subsist, or change. In the early Qing period, there was no established state, and a war of conquest provided the initial momentum for state formation. (Such a situation was also far more common in Europe than generally recognized, whether in the early modern era or earlier, for example in James Given's [1990] analysis of the incorporation, by conquest, of Gwynedd and Languedoc into the thirteenth-century English and French states, respectively.)

The early Qing state-makers launched wars of conquest and acquired booty and large territories, which did not, however, automatically create a stabilized state form. Adopting fiscal measures to solve the logistical problems occasioned by war indeed invested the Manchu polity with more state-like aspects. But similar to most tribal societies, the early Manchu state suffered continuously from two major vulnerabilities that intensified the partitioning crisis, particularly as the state expanded.

First, similar to most nomadic tribes, the Manchus entered the war for plunder rather than with the aim of expanding their control over territory. They continued their commitment to the war as long as the chances of obtaining plunder were expanded. Therefore in the early Manchu conquest (mostly before 1619), we see typical patterns of plundering campaigns, in which the Manchu soldiers were unrestrained in looting and killing the people, seizing their properties, and destroying production. In this phase, the Manchu chiefs maintained a flimsy contact with Chinese bureaucratic resources being proffered by the transfrontier men—Chinese acculturated as Manchus along the frontier (Wakeman 1986, 194–202). Most Chinese peasants and refugees were captured, enslaved, and distributed as plunder to the Manchu chiefs (Roth-Li 1975, 44).

Yet the more their conquest penetrated China, the more the Manchus felt obliged to supplant their rapacious habits with Chinese governance practices. After 1619, therefore, when the Manchus were marching toward Liao-dong, the first Chinese-dominated region, they shifted their approach as a large number of Chinese bureaucratic officials, Chinese subjects, and resource-rich Chinese cities were subordinated to their rule. The Manchu rulers began to seriously rethink their approach to the Chinese population, although nascent attempts at state-building threatened to fracture the Manchu ruling body that had been in accord about the desirability of rich plunder.

The distinctive inheritance pattern among Manchus—both egalitarian and diffuse—also endangered the integrity of the expanding empire. Chinggis Khan assigned his sons in an evenhanded manner to rule separate territories while maintaining thin central control. The unraveling of the Mongol Empire after Chinggis Khan's death taught the Manchu conquerors a hard lesson. Since Nurhaci's sons and nephew were trusted to lead the eight banners—the core army of the early Manchu state—these competitive brothers divided and dispersed the Manchu ruling authority. Upon Nurhaci's death, the early Manchu conquerors experienced strong centrifugal tendencies. Although Hong Taiji eventually won the upper hand in the competition for khanship, he was forced to handle the claims made by brothers such as Amin, who "offered Hong Taiji the title of Khan in return for a promise to let him depart" (Roth-Li 1975, 119–20). This centrifugal tension was accentuated as the Manchu army penetrated more deeply into China. At this moment, a wide gap appeared between the future Qing emperor—who wished to govern Chinese territory—and his competitive brothers, who desired to keep raiding the Chinese. The early Manchu state staggered under the pressure created by the rending relationship between the ruler and his equally powerful brothers.

These twin vulnerabilities exacerbated the crisis of partition as Manchus won battle after battle in China. Lacking a central state apparatus, the military and political resources that they seized were channeled to various power-holders. To reverse this trend, the Manchu rulers had to devise means to strengthen their autocracy; they gradually learned to make use of the now-unanchored or "free-floating" Chinese bureaucratic resources. After 1619, therefore, Nurhaci unswervingly encouraged enrolling subjugated Chinese as free households

registered by local governments and directly responsive to the authority of the khan, rather than distributing them as slaves among other princes and aristocrats (Roth-Li 1975, 44). In 1629, Hong Taiji enlarged and formalized the chancellery—a primitive bureaucratic institute containing Manchu scholars and Chinese bachelors—left to him by his father. He went further by setting up the Chinese-style Six Boards (Roth-Li 1975, 130). The former Ming Chinese officials were widely recruited to support the khan, and they became another important agency propelling the cultivation of an early Qing state form. To ensure their careers, these people were most enthusiastic about the conquest of China. They not only amplified the governing ability of the Manchu state but also consolidated the stronghold that Hong Taiji held, versus his brothers, who wished to partition the state and lead their own people away.

Following the establishment of Chinese bureaucracy, Confucian familial morality was also entrenched in the legal field. Gertraude Roth-Li (1975) underlines an important change in the law made by Hong Taiji in 1631–1632. Hong Taiji abolished the law that required the people to report the misconduct of their family members on the grounds that this action contradicted the Chinese concept of patriarchal authority. Traditional Chinese law did not allow the son to report his father nor the wife to report her husband, unless malicious crimes (such as rebellion) were involved (Roth-Li 1975, 149). By making this change, Hong Taiji showed himself inclined to win the hearts and minds of the Chinese subjects.

In sum, early Manchu state-formation suffered from the partitioning crisis engendered by the competition among ruling brothers, exacerbated by the expansion of the empire. To counteract the separation led by his brothers, the Manchu ruler arrogated Chinese bureaucracy. This measure increased the overwhelming autocratic power of the ruler and his leverage over his brothers, and it prevented the early Qing state from falling apart. However, the installation of Chinese bureaucracy did not imply that it could be wielded at will by any Manchu ruler; the emperor always lacked sufficient expertise to scrutinize the operation of state bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy strove to keep it that way.

Agency problems

When the Manchus took over the Ming bureaucratic system, they faced immediate challenges to their control. Under the Ming, routine memorials had been submitted by officials who specialized in various administrative affairs. The final decisions were made under the deliberation of the grand secretaries and ministers, to be approved by the emperor. The contents of memorials were openly circulated among the officials, and in making decisions, the officials constantly resorted to precedents. This transparent way of doing business restricted the emperor's capacity to intervene and increased the domination of the routinized bureaucratic administration (B. Bartlett 1991, 28–29). To harness the unruly bureaucracy, Manchu rulers first strengthened the role of Manchu nobles in the Six Boards initially installed. A prominent presence of Manchu nobles was discernible at the ministerial level, even though administrative staffs were largely

Chinese. Later the Manchu dominance gave way to the "diarchy," which divided the posts of ministers equally between Manchus and Chinese.

What is more important is that the Manchu ruler used the collegial princely powers that had initially threatened his autocratic rule to construct an informal mechanism of inner-court control over the state bureaucracy. This informal control was embodied in the various forms of political councils—sequentially, the Five State Councillors, the Deliberative Council of Prince Ministers, the Plenipotentiary Council, and so forth—which assembled on occasions to manage special tasks such as military expeditions as well as the problem of transition after the emperor's death. These informal political councils were placed above and oversaw the operation of the Six Boards (B. Bartlett 1991, 30–31, 48–49). In so doing, the Manchu ruler managed to deploy his brothers to rein in Chinese bureaucratic officialdom.

The Manchu ruler also used the imperial bondservants with tactical aplomb. The bondservants were trusted to enrich the imperial privy treasury as well as to inspect the operation of regular bureaucratic means in revenue collection. Seeing the imperial bondservants as having been widely corrupted by the lucrative businesses they ran for imperial industries and commerce, the Yongzheng emperor transferred the responsibility for collecting customs to the provincial governors, thus adumbrating a sharp rise of state bureaucratic power in revenue collection. However, he soon realized the necessity of restoring old practices in some places, because he could not afford the loss of control over the routinized bureaucracy (Torbert 1977, 101).

A final example of how the imperial bondservants were used to check the autonomy of state bureaucracy can be seen in Qianlong's campaign in the northwest during the 1740s and 1750s. The Department of the Imperial Household not only disbursed tremendous amounts of money to purchase the military facilities, it was also entrusted by the emperor to manage the funds raised by the Board of Revenue and to buy and transfer grains, horses, and armories needed by the soldiers in the frontier. On one hand, because the imperial bondservants usually had extensive ties with the merchants in the northwest who handled the military supplies on the ground, the department became the ideal agency to run the logistical operations of the campaign. On the other hand, because of the intimate relationship between the emperor and the imperial bondservants, delegating the management power to the department also helped the emperor to keep close control of the funds and personnel (Torbert 1977, 127–28). From these two examples, we learn that the Manchu rulers extensively used the loyalty of their slaves to counterbalance the autonomy of state bureaucracy.

The case of Qing China epitomizes a general problem faced by all monarchs in history: how to utilize patrimonial power to effectively solve the principal-agent problem. Unlike in poorly bureaucratized regimes in which density of familial networks mattered most (Padgett and Ansell 1993; McLean 2004), Qing China is a case in which the major agency problem is not caused by conflicts among various, clustered, familial networks, but by the competition between the levers of patrimonial power and state bureaucracy. Its Western European counterpart

would be the French ancien régime, which oversaw the entanglement and tension between a nascent bureaucracy and penetrating and multilayered patrimonial control (Bossenga 1991; Kettering 1986; Beik 1988; Root 1994). Even more than the French monarchs, the Qing emperor wielded patrimonial force (through the cooperation of the collegial princely powers and loyal imperial bondservants) to restrain the autonomy of state bureaucracy, while also drawing on the support of state bureaucracy to suppress centrifugal tendency within the court. The Qing Chinese solution to the state agency problem—creating a system that interlocked patrimonialism and state bureaucracy—helps to clarify the comparability, and limits, of European forms.

Conclusion

In sum, the early Qing state began but did not grow to fruition with the expansion of military conquest. On the contrary, each step forward in state-formation had to come to terms with a new threshold in state organization. When they were situated on the northeastern frontier, the Manchus first developed their state as a form of tribal confederation. As their conquest penetrated deeper into Chinese territory, the khan introduced Chinese bureaucracy to gain control over his contending brothers, and autocracy eclipsed traditional forms of collegial rule. However, governing the vast land of China with a primitive bureaucracy was not an easy task for the Manchu conquerors. The Manchu rulers therefore reshuffled the old collegial ruling councils and remade them into superior inner-court offices to supervise bureaucratic operations. In a nutshell, the emperor used his lateral brothers to counterbalance the autonomy of Chinese bureaucracy. Meanwhile, the Manchu ruler flexibly employed the imperial bondservants in important provincial posts, both to enrich his privy purse and to inspect the revenue collected through routinized bureaucratic channels. In this case, the emperor used the loyal slaves to curtail the bureaucrats' autonomy.

These practices helped the early Qing state to survive two major crises arising from state expansion—the partitioning of the state by princely brothers and the loss of control within Chinese bureaucracy. Early Qing state-formation, we have argued, was sustained by the interlock of two forms of patrimonialism, which effectively mingled the patrimonial resources drawn from the conquerors' tribal tradition with the Chinese bureaucratic state. Discovering that patrimonial practices and bureaucracy are mutually enmeshed rather than standing apart from or even against one another enriches our inquiry into the causes of and the solutions to the political principal-agent problem.

The challenge faced and surmounted by the Qing state-makers was how to hold together the multiple territories and peoples they obtained from the war, a typical trial for imperial conquerors. By no means have all empires so successfully integrated their conquered territories. The short-lived Yuan Empire (part of the

grandiose Mongol Empire) was quickly dissolved because the powerful brothers of the Mongol emperor were never controlled, and the Chinese bureaucratic system did not become the fulcrum of the state. But whether they succeeded or failed, these empires faced the general problem occasioned by conquest. Very often this problem was more acute than the problem of extracting resources. Given the lack of a comprehensive state apparatus and the heterogeneity of conquered domains, rulers or would-be rulers of empires often turned to patrimonial instruments.

We have examined here a special interlocking strategy that the early Qing state-makers adopted to arrest imperial fission. Another solution—and one adopted in Europe and China—is the intermarriage between ruling families, a cheaper and potentially more effective means than launching military campaigns. By just this means, the Manchus successfully turned Mongols from hostile enemies to loyal allies; the Manchus were thus able to secure Mongolia being only relatively lightly armed (Perdue 2005, 124–25). Likewise, French kings during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries used marriage and inheritance ties to rein in powerful vassals (e.g., Normandy, Savoy, and Champagne) who factually controlled local territories when France was not a uniform state but an assemblage of multiple lands (Clark 1995, 33–34). The "diaspora of nobles" (R. Bartlett 1993), which entrenched feudalism on the fringe of Christian Europe, provides another example. Overpopulation and the formation of a patrilineal inheritance pattern among the nobles displaced and impoverished aristocratic younger sons, who then found themselves leading conquering expeditions into southern Italy and the British Isles, east into the Holy Land, and farther afield. These newly conquered lands were thus connected to the center of the imperial Christendom via intensive familial ties (R. Bartlett and MacKay 1989, 23–47; R. Bartlett 1993, 50). And the enormous role of marriage and descent in early modern European politics is codified in the very names of the European and imperial wars that ensued from such arrangements, for example, War of the Spanish Succession, and so on.

That familial power contributes to both binding territories together, and systematically severing them is a common phenomenon for both China and European states, in both premodern and modern periods. Comparing China and Europe in this way helps us to avoid stereotypical contrasts between China, an exemplar of an old empire, and Europe, which generated modular forms of nation-states. As Krishan Kumar (2010, 124–28) points out, the often idealized European nation-states were not unified internally, which made them undistinguishable from the old empires.[12] On the other hand, old empires such as China were not always able to adjust to more decentralized modes of governing.

Our study shows that the Qing emperor absorbed heterogeneous patrimonial elements from the Manchu tribal organization and welded them to the conquered Chinese state to construct a surprisingly effective mode of central state control. Investigating how China, Europe, and other states in the making encountered the challenges and crises of governance and conquest—surmounting them, or not—propels research in new, increasingly transnational and global directions.

Notes

1. As Mark Elvin (1984) argues, the founders of the Ming Dynasty detested large-scale engrossing of landed property by elite manors. Under the Ming, multigenerational cohabitation among family members had been rare. The demise of manors and shrinking family size decreased both the number and importance of slave dependents in the Chinese family.

2. Torbert (1977) also gives a detailed account of a 1727 debate, under Yongzheng's reign, between the emperor and his Han Chinese grand secretaries. The debate was triggered by the adjudication of a suit in which a Chinese servant was reported to have killed his master. The emperor, in Manchu style, insisted that the servant should be severely punished, as would be a Manchu equivalent. Yet the grand secretaries proposed to mete out the sentence more deliberatively, according to the specific status of the servant. They underlined the complex, gradational definition of servants working among Chinese. Among the Chinese, the number of hereditary slaves and people with a notarized slave contract were few. The majority of the servants were bound more flexibly to their masters. They were thereby expected to be treated differently than the Manchu slaves.

3. Both Barfield (1989) and Fletcher (1986) mention two important institutional arrangements established to handle/confound the succession crisis of steppe empires. One is "ultimogeniture," which means the khan's personal property passed to his youngest son by his principal wife. The other is the regency, which was mainly presided over and supported by the principal wife of the khan before a new khan was elected or grew up.

4. The five councillors were the closest advisors to Nurhaci, and they also created an institutional model for the Council of the Princes and High Officials and the Grand Council.

5. Hong Taiji's death in 1643 opened another round of competition among brothers. Between Hong Taiji's death and the beginning of Shuzhi emperor's rule, for about eight years, the ruling seat was occupied consecutively by the imperial regents, first Hong Taiji's fourteenth brother, Dorgon, and later, most notably, by Amin's brother Jirgalang.

6. In the early Manchu conquest, agrarian slaves also included criminals and indigenous peasants within the Manchu society.

7. The landed estates of the emperor and other nobles grew spectacularly as Manchu troops marched into Chinese core provinces. The expansion of landed estates increased the indispensability of Chinese bondservants, who became the actual stewards of the land. Many big Chinese landlords also voluntarily commended their lands to the emperor and were endowed with perpetual tenancies on the imperial lands. They also constituted another source of imperial bondservants. See Torbert (1977, 18).

8. Gertraude Roth-Li has reservations about the military capacity of the bondservants' companies in the war. She also points out that not all Chinese captives were turned into slaves during the conquest. Very often the particular status of Chinese in the early Manchu state was dependent on their economic condition. Those who were able to provide the quota of grains demanded by the Manchu army were allowed to remain free people, whereas the poor Chinese were turned into slaves. See Roth-Li (1975, 55–56).

9. Unlike regular bureaucratic officials, the imperial bondservants had no fixed offices. They served in the palace as guards or maintenance men. They also took junior posts in the palace brigade or minor posts as clerks and sectaries within the Department of the Imperial Household. In the early Qing, when state bureaucracy had not been fully installed, the bondservants even temporarily served as subprefects and magistrates. But a more common career for them was to be imperial agents collecting revenue for the treasury of the imperial household. See Spence (1988, 14–15, 18).

10. The big merchants who directly collaborated with the imperial bondservants were called "official merchants"; they were different from the private merchants mainly because they were brokers. Usually the official merchants played a managerial role because they did not engage in actual production. For example, a prominent merchant called Fan Yung-tou maintained a house in Kalgan and enjoyed the privilege of being an official merchant under the Department of the Imperial Household. The Fan family maintained a hereditary monopoly in the copper trade. But the family mainly supervised and directed the trade. It pooled the capital from big official merchant families like itself and hired others to handle the actual conduct of commerce. See Torbert (1977, 95–96).

11. Philip Kuhn's study (1978) gives a nice example of how local militias were mobilized by the efforts of gentry families in a disastrous period of bandits and peasant rebellions. Kuhn's study focuses on the late

imperial Qing, but his arguments were equally true for other dynasties such as the Ming. Kuhn argues that there was a tradition for gentry families to organize local militia once the local community was threatened by bandits. The lineage was the basic unit around which militia were formed. Lineages then were grouped into a multiplex unit (*tuan*) according to preexisting patterns of intercommunal cooperation. As the military threats diminished, the militia disbanded and soon lost whatever military character they had been able to muster. But the organizational capacity of each militia was preserved by the local community's daily activities, in which gentry families played an important role. See Philip Kuhn (1978, 139).

12. Also see David Armitage's (2000) focus on the composite monarchies and Robert Bartlett's (1993) work on internal conquests within Europe.

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