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Li Shiyao and Qing Frontier Governance
From Sea to Tropics

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An abstract of

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the

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Abstract

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By Jonathan Bonsall

From Sea to Tropics argues that Qing officials, during the dynasty's rapid eighteenth century expansion, developed a cross-frontier political culture based on commerce and urban geography rather than Confucian acculturation. High officials such as Li Shiyao granted internal autonomy to prominent local merchants in exchange for political loyalty, by merging privileged access to lucrative markets and security obligations to combat illicit trade. The clientage arrangement sped frontier expansion by relieving the Qing state of logistical and administrative burdens. Qing officials, in turn, sought to control a frontier's extra-provincial links by funneling outside trade through their political clients. Economic malaise diminished clientage arrangements by weakening incentives for clients to cooperate with provincial officials. This in turn strengthened illicit markets both by actively drawing client merchants into illegal trade and weakening the political will to combat it. The thesis concludes that Li's frequent reference to other frontier zones, whether he had previously served in them or not, demonstrates that he contemplated frontier policy in a cross-frontier context as he strove to maintain control over transprovincial links, illustrating the formation of a cohesive frontier political culture rooted in commercial access.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Qing dynasty's eighteenth-century expansion has become increasingly prominent in Late Imperial Chinese historiography since the late 1980s, as it doubled the empire's territory and brought a host of frontier peoples at least nominally under Qing rule, with lasting implications for various groups' relationship to Chinese imperial and, later, national identification. It is through this process that scholars, chiefly historians and historical anthropologists, trace the emergence of heterogeneous, locally negotiated styles of government that varied widely between the Qing's major frontier corridors of the arid northwest, tropical southwest, and maritime southeast. Yet one strand of this research, apparent in the work of historians such as Dennis McMahon, Matthew Mosca, and Peter Perdue, discusses the exchange of officials and governing methods between the far northwest and the southeast coast. Do such cross-frontier exchanges allow us to discern a common governing strategy? That is, did they collectively amount to a coherent frontier system, albeit one admitting of immense cultural variation, or did Qing officials govern each region more or less separately, with little reference to the others?

From Sea to Tropics argues that Qing government employed a cross-frontier strategy of merging commercial privilege with security obligations in the hands of frontier urban clients as it consolidated its conquests—on the frontier, "loyalty required compromise," historian John Herman observes.[1] At its largest scale, negotiated frontier rule granted a high degree of internal autonomy to local elites—fusing commercial privilege with market security obligations in lieu of the state—while imperial officials exerted contol over urban-based extra-provincial connections

[1] John Herman, "De-Centering Chinese History," in *The Journal of Chinese History*, 2 (2018), 194.

by funneling outside trade to favored merchant groups. The clientage strategy was an expedient of frontier consolidation. Although it sped expansion by relieving the imperial state of some military and police burdens, and streamlining crucial sources of tax revenue, it hobbled the state's ability to counter frontier social unrest, including piracy, smuggling, and banditry born of economic disaffection, when clientage relationships were weak, which also tended to result from economic malaise.

Qianlong era leaders understood their major frontier zones as deeply interrelated, and they acted on this understanding through policy. Records reveal that the Qianlong Board of Appointments cultivated a corps of officials to serve exclusively in frontier regions and not on the central China plain, suggesting the emergence of a cross-frontier political culture with unique norms governance, commercially-minded and culturally eclectic, distinct from those of the imperial core.[2] Frontier officials became adept at negotiating local power through targeted experience. On each of its frontiers, the Qing regulated Chinese merchant access to specialized trade regimes to cultivate local clients, but existing scholarship on cross-frontier political exchange concerns the northwest and southeast, especially the Kiakhta and Canton Trades, respectively. This study incorporates the Qing southwest into the discussion by examining the transfer of one long-serving governor-general, Li Shiyao 李侍尧, between maritime Liangguang 两广 and tropical Yungui 云贵 and his relationships with *hang* 十三行 and *tusi* 土司 clients in each place, allowing a more complete consideration of cross-frontier exchanges and the common governing practices that

[2] Qian Shifu 錢實甫. *Qing Dai Zhi Guan Nian Biao 清代试管年表*， Di 1 Ban. 第 1 版..; Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju: Xinhua Beijing Shudian Beijing Faxing Suo Faxing 北京：中華書局：新華書店北京發行所發行, ; 1980.

they produced. Li was in many ways a typical frontier high official, so his term of government service is an appropriate vehicle by which to examine the growth of a common frontier political culture. Firstly, he met the court's standards of loyalty. Although Han Chinese, Li was a trusted Han Chinese whose great-grandfather had aided the Manchu Qing during their initial conquest of the central China plain, earning banner status and the right to hold high office. Li Shiyao's early career trained him for frontier leadership. He proved himself first under the court's watchful eye in the imperial household department before transferring to Guangdong as an assistant governor and governor, with the independence and opportunity for personal enrichment these positions offered. From Guangdong governorship, the Board of Appointments promoted him to his first governor-generalship, that of Liangguang, encompassing Guangdong and neighboring Guangxi.

In his communications with the court, Li frequently referred to other frontiers, showing that he thought about current policy in context of his previous frontier assignments and demonstrating the practice and growth of an interfrontier political culture arising from the assignment of top officials exclusively between frontier provinces. Li, did not invent the clientage strategy, but he intensified it, especially in Canton after he assumed the Liangguang governor-generalship immediately before the court's formal confinement of Western commerce to that port. I hope this study will work toward a more definitive answer to the questions of whether or not Qing frontier government employed a unified strategy, or at least a shared set of norms, amid the diversity of frontier "governing environments," and if so, how it shaped the process of expansion.[3] The thesis examines in detail Li's oversight of the eighteenth century Canton Trade as well as the copper transport from Yunnan to Beijing before turning to a historiographic comparison with the

[3] Robert Antony and Jane K. Leonard, eds. *Dragons, Tigers, and Dogs: Qing Crisis Management and the Boundaries of State Power in Late Imperial China*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2002), 16.

political life of frontier marketplaces on the Qing border with Russia, namely in Kiakhta. Whereas frontier studies often examine the role of frontier governance in shaping Qing foreign relations, this thesis asks how the Qing manipulated foreign trade toward its objectives of domestic frontier consolidation beyond the cognizance of foreign merchants at its doors.

From Sea to Tropics seeks coherence amidst the immense local variation of frontier governance that Qing clientage practices produced, coherence rooted in commercial privilege and security obligation rather than acculturation. In a 1996 critique of Sinicization theory, Evelyn Rawski disputes that the expansionist Manchu Qing employed a uniform strategy of adopting Confucian cultural and political norms itself and gradually compelling frontier peoples to do the same, effectively becoming Han Chinese to rule imperial China and expand its borders. Qing frontier rulership, according to Rawski, instead recognized multiple local traditions of rule as officials incorporated diverse populations into the imperial fold, irreducible to a single strategy.[4] Rawski's formulation has held sway in Qing historiography since its first presentation contra Ho Ping-ti's 1967 articulation of Sinicization theory. *From Sea to Tropics* does not dispute Rawski and others' notion of the Qing's pluralistic approach to frontier rule, but it attempts to define some limits of Qing pluralism, arguing that Li did employ a general approach to frontier rulership in different provinces, but one founded in commerce and urban geography rather than Confucian acculturation. Patronage of prominent urban merchants was a flexible method of accommodating local social traditions, but it was limited in its ability to reconcile conflicting social forces locally, or to uphold the benefits of clientage during economic downturn. Qing frontier governance was

[4]Ho, Ping-ti. "The Significance of the Ch'ing Period in Chinese History." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1967): 189-95.; Pamela Kyle Crossley and Evelyn S. Rawski. "A Profile of The Manchu Language in Ch'ing History." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53, no. 1 (1993): 63-102.; Evelyn S. Rawski "Presidential Address: Re-envisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (1996): 829-50.; Ho, Ping-Ti. "In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's "Reenvisioning the Qing"" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 1 (1998): 123-55.

politically and economically systematic but culturally heterodox, as this study of two frontiers illustrates. The asymmetric structure of frontier marketplaces—sharply limiting Chinese merchant access to relatively open foreign trading environments—allowed the state to grant significant internal autonomy to favored merchant elites, funneling lucrative trade to them in the expectation of political cooperation, while exerting control over a frontier's extra-provincial connections.

The system's success in economic health and its complexity veiled its potential hazards, however. Clientage underestimated how deeply extra-provincial trade relied on local coordination. On the southeast and southwest frontiers, Li sought to grant local autonomy to select, loyal clients by bestowing commercial privileges on them in exchange for security obligations, obligations which probably enhanced their local power. Clientage fused commerce and security in the hands of loyal clients such as the *hang* and *tusi*. Li then sought to secure a frontier's external commercial links, directing the flow of commercial wealth throughout the frontiers, concentrating it in parts of the empire perceived to be loyal. A weak economic environment could unravel clientage relations and leave Qing officials with little recourse against their erstwhile collaborators, whose local power would have remained more or less intact, with help from the very privileges and obligations Li and other governors had conferred on them, while that of the imperial state diminished, with merchants seeking more profitable trade outside of state regulation.

Delegating commercial privilege and security obligation to local clients risked strengthening local power at the expense of the imperial state. Because clientage systematically linked commercial to political power, state atrophy began on the frontiers, working inward from the margins precisely when the empire had reached its greatest extent. Economic decline compounded into political imbalance between the imperial state and local society. Historians typically locate the fragmentation of Qing imperial rule in the nineteenth century, resulting from

the triple crises of the Taiping and Nian Rebellions and the Opium War, but it was rooted in divisions of power that took shape during the High Qing period, so-called because it was the apex of imperial vigor, and which granted significant autonomy to frontier clients such as the *hang* and *tusi*. Philip Kuhn observes of the White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1804): "The White Lotus Rebellion uncovered startling weaknesses in the apparently powerful Qing military system." [5] The decentralizing of martial power on the frontiers corresponded to a more general eighteenth century ebb of Qing militarism.[6] The state was still vigorous enough, however, to intervene in local affairs during Li's time as a governor-general, whereas its capacities to do so had withered by the mid-nineteenth century, beset by internal upheaval and foreign conflict, but that story is beyond the range of this study. This initial exploration dilates only on Li Shiyao's career, but its line of inquiry would strengthen with similar studies of other Qianlong-era governors who served exclusively on the Qing frontiers, officials such as Ma Ertai 马尔泰, Su Chang 苏昌, and Fu Kangan 福康安, among others, to appraise how they considered frontier policy in terms of other frontier zones, leading to the rise of a cross-frontier political culture.

The Canton Trade

In 1759, the British merchant translator James Flint directed his vessel toward the port of Ningbo 宁波 to seek more favorable terms of trade than he could find in Canton. Not only did Qing officials rebuff him, but the imperial court formally confined Western commerce to Canton in

[5] Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), P. 37. For a summary of Kuhn's argument, see also his chapter on the Taiping Rebellion in the Cambridge History of China, Philip A. Kuhn, "The Taiping Rebellion," in *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 10*. Denis Crispin Twitchett and John King Fairbank, eds,. (Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978). See also, Frederic E. Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate : Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Joseph Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China : The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
[6] Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

response. Scholarly opinion on the Flint Affair varies widely. Why did the court react to it by confining Western trade to Canton, and what was its immediate and long-term impact? Historians such as John Fairbank and Jane K. Leonard separately argue that it was almost solely responsible for the Canton System that formally confined Western trade to the city and instituted draconian regulations on the movement of Westerners in the Pearl River Delta because Flint had stoked imperial caution toward unchecked European influence in China.[7] Drawing influence from Fairbank, Leonard imagines an essentially conservative and cloistered Qing coastal administration driven by defensive concerns against perceived external threats. Other scholars, such as Paul Van Dyke and Zhao Gang, limit the Flint Affair's importance, dating the opening of the Canton Trade to around 1700, as European merchants had naturally concentrated there without state compulsion, and arguing that by 1759 the intricate system of tidewaiters, translators, compradors, and customs officials had long existed to accommodate them. The confinement of Western trade to Canton codified what had been a de facto local reality, with occasional exceptions such as Flint's abortive excursion.[8] The eventual decision to confine the trade to Canton was one of administrative convenience. E.W. Cheong avers that both European merchants and the Qing court preferred the *hang* to manage Western trade because the latter had accumulated vast experience of it, and so understood European commercial culture. The concentration of Western trade in a single port, moreover, streamlined imperial tax collection.[9]

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[7] John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), Ch. 3; Jane Kate Leonard, *Wei Yuan and China's Rediscovery of the Maritime World*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 153.

[8] Paul Arthur Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 14.; Zhao Gang. *Qing Opening to the Ocean Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684-1757*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013).

[9] Eang Weng Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton: Chinese Merchants in Sion-Western Trade*, (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1997), Ch. 1.

From Sea to Tropics agrees that core elements of the Canton Trade already existed by the early eighteenth century but argues that the Flint Affair's longer-term consequences were significant for state-*hang* relations, strengthening official control over the southeast's long-distance connections and bolstering the *hang*'s commercial stature at government behest. Flint's example risked devaluing *hang* clientage. The *hang* already dominated global trade locally, but the court's 1759 decision shielded them from the competition of other coastal Chinese merchant, strengthening the *hang*'s grip on global trade and buffering the clientage relationship in the act. Li's subsequent regulations, moreover, deepened links between commerce and security in clientage, expanding *hang* liability for the legal conduct of the Western merchants whose business they uniquely enjoyed. Although Li intended to enlist the *hang* against smuggling, his regulations as likely spurred novel means of avoiding detection when profit was at stake, especially during economic downturn.[10] Local recession both devalued the clientage relationship, made illicit trade a more profitable alternative than the legal variety, and weakened policing in the delta. Thus, while Li's regulations aided state anti-smuggling efforts when legal commerce was strong, the new trade regime compounded illicit trade when it was not—financial malaise at once enticed merchants toward smuggling and even piracy and weakened local partnerships that the state designed to combat it.

The clientage system met both political and commercial needs for the Qing state and the merchants themselves, respectively. *Hang* ranks were exclusive enough to ensure them the benefits of clientage, but diverse enough to diffuse vast commercial wealth and its attendant social

[10] For examples of how *hang* and their smuggling contacts changed strategies to evade law enforcement, see, Paul A. Van Dyke, "1842 Nian Zhujiang Sanjiaozhou Diqu de Zousi Wangluo: Aomen yu Meiguo dui Zhongguo Neidi Maoyi de Nei Zai Lianxi 1842 年珠江三角洲地区的走私网络：澳门与美国对中国内地贸易的内在联系," in Haiyangshi Yanjiu 海洋史研究 (Dec 2012), 223-47.

influence across multiple merchants, defending against any one of them becoming too powerful for others to counter-balance. In daily affairs, they were effectively a self-regulating, mutually accountable group. Van Dyke argues that the Canton Trade was not a monopoly. The *hang* legally capped membership at thirteen, but its numbers usually ranged from five to ten.[11] In his definitive study of *hang* debt, he argues that merchants measured debt by interpersonal trust rather than monetary amount.[12] Merchants could operate for years while technically in the red if their customers remained confident that they could reliably secure desired goods at desirable prices. Debt was nonetheless the leading cause of merchant failure throughout the eighteenth century, and when debt failure occurred, the responsibility for outstanding payments fell to the merchant community. It was then up to governors-general to apportion responsibility for repayment and approve a corresponding plan. Officials intended it to uphold consumer confidence in the Canton Trade to preserve the massive tax revenues that the imperial state gained from it, but it expanded the *hang*'s legal responsibilities that combined with their commercial privileges.

Hang clientage presented a dilemma, entrusting much of its anti-smuggling efforts to merchants who often profited by illicit trade, but its resources were too limited for purely centralized law enforcement efforts. In such an exclusive urban economy, highly concentrated in select industries, recession could swell illicit trade. Robert Antony argues that the Qing state's reliance on local society to suppress banditry, smuggling, and piracy made the licit and illicit economies inversely proportional, but inseparable—economic downturn made local communities more tolerant of illegal trade, and this thesis argues that the same was true of the *hang* merchants.[13] Most cases ascended a legal chain that included the governor-general's office and ended with the

[11] Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, 14.
[12] Van Dyke, *The Merchants of Canton and Macao*, Introduction.
[13] See, Robert J. Antony, *Unruly People : Crime, Community, and State in Late Imperial South China*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).

imperial government. The anti-bandit and anti-piracy work of local officials and community organizations, then, bolstered the provincial government's authority at the local level. As it did so, it reinforced the use of local autonomy as a tool of imperial power that dampened the threat of rebellion and the outright use of force against local populations by enlisting at least some of those populations in the cause of empire. Qing provincial government-maintained inroads deep into Guangdong's local communities, but its relations were always contingent on economic livelihood.

From Sea to Tropics resituates the Flint Affair and its consequences in the context of Li's relationship with the *hang* merchants, whereas other scholars have already considered it in relation to Qing foreign affairs or the internal structure of the Canton Trade. The Qing court's initial confinement of Western trade to Canton shielded the *hang* from external competition but did not substantially alter the internal functions of the trade. Li's subsequent reforms, on the other hand, deeply merged commerce and security in the *hang* merchants in a way that relieved financial and personnel burdens on the state but threatened to swell the illicit economy in times of economic hardship, when clientage was relatively weak and therefore so was Qing law enforcement.

Empire and Clientage in Qing Yungui

Li's career demonstrates that Qing officials employed a similar clientage strategy, joining commerce and security, to meet divergent objectives in the southeast and southwest. Historians generally agree that the Qing southwest was only loosely incorporated into the eighteenth century empire, but why?[14] To answer this question, I re-evaluate imperial objectives in the southwest and

[14] Bello, David Anthony. *Opium and the Limits of Empire: Drug Prohibition in the Chinese Interior, 1729-1850*. Harvard East Asian Monographs; 241. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005.; Bello, David Anthony. *Across Forest, Tropics, and Mountain: Environment, Identity, and Empire in Qing China's Borderlands*. Studies in Environment and History. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016.; Crossley, Pamela Kyle, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton. *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*. Studies on China; 28. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.; Giersch, Charles Patterson. *Asian*

how state-*tusi* clientage advanced them, arguing that full incorporation was not an imperial priority, content as officials were to gain control of mineral markets, secure tax revenue, and cultivate local clients who could maintain frontier security, transforming the region into a semi-autonomous extraction zone and defensive buffer. These objectives prompted a spatial reorganization of power within clientage. Qing government could meet its objectives from urban enclaves, so the eighteenth century saw the urbanization of formal clientage, with the *tusi* preserving near total autonomy in rural and wild areas. The *tusi* played dual roles as they faced both the imperial state and local society. Yungui did not hold the same symbolic import for imperial legitimation as did Liangguang, with its longer history of integration into the Chinese empire, entrenched traditions of Confucian learning, and potential competitors for imperial power. As Bin Yang contends, Qing conquest of the southwest followed the non-state influx of Han Chinese settlers, especially miners, into the region in a bid to stabilize a frontier made volatile by rapid demographic shifts.[15] Although social unrest was both more intense and frequent in the southwest than in the southeast because of the Qing state's disruption of local power relations, and its shallower reach there, Li secured mineral sources and tax revenue and preserved a defensive buffer in the region by leaving rural politics mostly in the hands of *tusi* clients, who the Qing state supported but could nonetheless replace with regularized Qing officials (*gaitu guiliu*) if a client acted too autonomously, a contingency measure that minimized the costs of expansion while safeguarding Qing political control.

Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006.; Herman, John E. *Amid the Clouds and Mist: China's Colonization of Guizhou, 1200-1700.* Harvard East Asian Monographs. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007.; Hostetler, Laura. *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.; Perdue, Peter C. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*. 1st Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2010.; Weinstein, Jodi L. *Empire and Identity in Guizhou Local Resistance to Qing Expansion*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014.

[15] Bin Yang, *Between Winds and Clouds: The Making of Yunnan, Second Century BCE to Twentieth Century CE* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014,) Ch. 6.

By the middle to late eighteenth century, the Qing did not strive for full incorporation of the southwest into the empire because urban-based clientage granted the state the mineral access, tax revenue, and elite cooperation that it prized. The urbanization of formal clientage, evident in the expansion of *gaitu guiliu* into non-rural districts, served imperial objectives and left rural governance largely outside the pale of Qing concerns. As in Liangguang, however, dependence for security on highly autonomous frontier clients left the Qing state ill-equipped to confront social unrest when those relationships weakened. To encroach on the *tusi*'s rural and wild power would have been unduly provocative and therefore counterproductive. Historians Bin Yang and C. Patterson Giersch both note a statistical increase in *gaitu guiliu* as the Qing state formalized its previously loose associations with local headmen throughout the eighteenth century. They argue that this trend represents growing Qing power in the southwest, but what else might it represent? Expanding *gaitu guiliu* cyclically caused and resulted from spatial shifts in divisions of power in *tusi*-state clientage, with the urbanization of clientage itself while *tusi* autonomy ruralized largely beyond the state's grip. Urbanization served state purposes of streamlining tax collection and securing the loyalty and security services of the *tusi*. While Giersch and Yang emphasize the growing influence of the imperial state through negotiated encounters with frontier societies, other historians such as David Bello, John Herman, and Yang Yuda highlight the ways that local actors retained political autonomy despite the imperial advance and often beyond the imperial state's reach. David Bello posits an ethnic bifurcation of High Qing governance in Yungui, with the threat of malaria, real or exaggerated, confining Han and Manchu officials to the cities and forcing them to rely on *tusi* with rural links to administer rural outlands.[16] Although John Herman traces the

[16] Bello, "To Go Where No Han Could Go for Long: Malaria and the Qing Construction of Ethnic Administrative Space in Frontier Yunnan," in *Modern China,* Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 2005), 283-317.

Qing's increasing control over *tusi* selection through Confucianized education, he concludes that the *tusi*'s relationship with the state granted them more local autonomy than ever before.[17]

The statistical increase in *gaitu guiliu* that Yang and Giersch observe reflects the qualitative division of frontier rule between urban and rural areas that Bello identifies. Court appointed Qing officials established themselves in cities, where they preserved their clientage relationships with local headmen, but ceded almost complete autonomy to these same headmen in rural and wild regions of the province. Li's clientage efforts in Yungui, and particularly Yunnan, revolved around licensed access to copper, silver, and salt mining.

Comparison with Northwest-Southeast Political Exchange

And the New Qing History

After examining the southwest and southeast frontiers separately, *From Sea to Tropics* returns to initial questions: do instances of cross-frontier exchange amount to a coherent governing strategy and, if so, what advantages and disadvantages did it hold for Qing frontier consolidation? How do its findings fit into previous research on exchanges between the northwest and southeast? This study argues that the abundant examples of cross-frontier exchange between the southeast, southwest, and northwest throughout the eighteenth century, of which Li Shiyao's career is an especially lengthy example, produced a frontier style of government that merged commerce and security in clientage, bolstering clients' local stature, but left the imperial government vulnerable to social unrest when these relationships deteriorated under economic strain. Local favoritism both stoked resentment toward Qing officialdom and left the state dependent on local actors who usually

[17] John Herman, "Empire in the Southwest: Early Qing Reforms to the Native Chieftain System," in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (February 1997), pp. 47-74.

cooperated with it more out of self-interest than genuine allegiance to imperial objectives on the frontier, certainly a precarious arrangement. The clientage system, while remarkably effective during times of abundance, laid a fertile ground for the local factionalism that it intended to prevent during economic downturn.

By examining political exchanges between Liangguang and Yungui, this study introduces the Qing southwest into a small but ongoing discussion about similar exchanges between the northwest and coastal southeast, giving rise to a coherent frontier strategy. Eric Widmer first referred to a "Kiakhta System" in his 1976 monograph *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking During the Eighteenth Century*. In it he described a land-based trade regime between Qing China and Romanov Russia that bore similar features to what we find in the southwest and on the southeast coast: a privileged relationship between provincial government and select local merchants that coalesced around an urban market and combined commerce and certain security responsibilities in the hands of the local client.[18] As this thesis stresses, however, such features evince not just similarity but concrete exchange between the Qing frontier corridors. Matthew Mosca notes that northwest and Liangguang governors were in frequent and direct contact during the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth about matters of trade.[19]

Dennis McMahon, too, notes somewhat later political exchange between frontiers, demonstrating that Qing official Yan Ruyi's misapplication of "Qing highland precedent" failed to vanquish Canton's early nineteenth century piracy problem.[20] Steppe communities, existing

[18] Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking during the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1976).
[19] Matthew Mosca, "The Qing State and its Awareness of Eurasian Interconnections," in *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Winter 2014), pp. 103-116.
[20] McMahon, "Qing Highland Precedent: Yan Ruyi and the Defense of the Guangdong Coast, 1804-5," in *Asia Major*, Third Series, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2010), 1-32.

between mountains and vast stretches of desert, were more atomized than their coastal counterparts were. Ease of local and regional maritime travel, as well as the southeast coast's rugged geography, enabled outlaws to furtively embed themselves with local communities, whose economic hardship they often shared.[21] McMahon concludes that differing frontier conditions stymied Yan's efforts, but urges further research to determine if this failure was systemic to transfrontier exchange or more historically contingent. He stresses sociogeographic factors, but Yan served in Canton during an economic downturn that severely weakened officials' ability to enlist the support of local communities and their leaders, including the *hang*, against illicit economies. McMahon's observations thus support this thesis' argument that the combination of commerce and security roles in clientage impaired the Qing state's efforts to confront social unrest when clientage relations were weak, usually during times of economic distress.

On each frontier, clientage was an urban affair, urbanites being prone to imperial collaboration. James Scott argues that cities, with highly standardized nomenclatures and measurements, are more "legible" than are rural and wild areas to expansionist states and therefore more susceptible to imperial subjugation.[22] Qing Guangzhou was an imperial core city, a seat of economic and political power exerting dominance over a less developed and more ethnically mixed periphery.[23] While the *hang*, heralding originally from coastal Fujian, had long been urbanized by the time the Qing assumed power, Qing government constructed cities in the southwest specifically to install *tusi* clients there, as Giersch observes.[24] And again, as Bello argues, the threat of malaria

[21] McMahon, "Qing Highland Precedent"; Robert Antony makes a similar observation in *Unruly People.*
[22] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), Introduction.
[23] Robert J. Antony. *Unruly People: Crime, Community, and State in Late Imperial South China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016.

[24] C. Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 2-3.

divided ethnic rulership in the southwest between city and country, confining the state's Han and Manchu representatives to urban enclaves.

Clientage could destabilize local society as well as it could pacify local power elites, contrary to imperial intentions. Spatial status divisions deepened fissures within local society between clients and non-clients. di Cosmo writes of the northwest: "The abusive and exploitative attitude of the high-ranking Muslim officials became the primary cause of social unrest in Kashgaria, and was denounced by Qing officials. Of course, the local population saw the rapacity of the *begs* for what it was: a form of oppression by people elevated to a position of power by alien rulers."[25] John Herman and Yang Bin separately observe similar dynamics unfolding outside of imperial view on the southwestern frontier. Qing intervention heightened pre-existing tensions between favored elites and local communities. Herman argues that elite frontier Confucian education, instead of spreading Confucianism through the local population, created markers of division between elite and commoner populations, so it was often shallow and ephemeral.[26] The region's inclusion in the empire depending more on bloody conquest than cultural suasion.

From Sea to Tropics depends on reading historical sources in a specific way. The interpretation that this thesis advances rests on Li's references to other frontier areas in his official reports, showing that he contemplated current policy on one frontier in a cross-frontier context and demonstrating the growth of an inclusive frontier political culture centered on the fusion of commercial privilege and market security obligations in the hands of local clients, who enjoyed substantial local autonomy while Qing officials strove to control extra-provincial links. The argument becomes more cogent with the increased frequency of such references and ultimately

[25] di Cosmo, Qing Colonial Administration, 305.
[26] Herman, "Empire in the Southwest," pp. 52-3.

depends on whether or not the records of other top frontier officials contain similar comparisons, or if Li's cross-references are peculiar to him.

Although this study employs only Chinese and English language sources, primarily Li's voluminous palace memorials and scholastic writings, to discuss the adaptation of governing methods between Liangguang and Yungui, it's indebted to scholars who have worked extensively with minority language documents, revealing ethnoimperial biases by the contrast with Chinese. Herman notes that "seismic" changes in Qing frontier historiography have emerged from greater attention to such documents, initially in Manchu.[27] Indeed, Evelyn Rawski and Pamela Crossley's early article of the New Qing History details discrepancies between Chinese and Manchu court documents, a fact that has launched continuing reevaluation of Qing frontier rule.[28] A question naturally follows: how do we re-interpret Chinese documents, specifically Li Shiyao's, in light of the historic and historiographic "de-centering" that Herman identifies? Peter Perdue has advised reading "against the grain" of imperial intentions to discern deeper struggles over frontier power beneath the veneer of Qing hegemony. This study stresses patterns in the way Li wrote about the *hang* and *tusi*, at times explicitly referring to other frontier zones, suggesting that Li thought about current problems of frontier governance in terms of his previous service, and the existence of cross-frontier political norms. Qing frontier governance was multiple but coordinated.

[27] Herman, "De-Centering Chinese History," 191.
[28] Pamela Kyle Crossley and Evelyn S. Rawski, "A Profile of the Manchu Language in Ch'ing History," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Jun., 1993), pp. 63-102.

CHAPTER ONE

Li Shiyao and the Canton Trade, 1758-1765

Although the internal organization of the Canton Trade had existed in its basic form since roughly 1700, the years from 1758 until 1765 saw Li Shiyao strengthen official control over Guangdong's external commerce by confining European traders to the Pearl River Delta and limiting their interaction with inland Chinese merchants, largely resulting from the Flint Affair. In 1759, the British merchant James Flint defied a norm of Sino-Western trade by embarking from the Pearl River Delta to Ningbo 宁波 in pursuit of more favorable terms of trade than were available in Canton, already saturated with European commerce. Upon his arrival, Qing officials rebuffed him: "The authorities [in Ningbo] according to law expelled Flint and we confined him to Macao for a period of three years."[29] *Hang* merchants already dominated European trade in Guangzhou by 1759 and were heavily involved in customs administration, as well. The aftermath of the Flint Affair did not qualitatively change the internal dynamics of the Canton Trade. Stricter regulations in the wake of the Flint Affair enhanced Li's control over coastal Guangdong's extra-provincial links and enlisted the *hang* in his efforts to enforce this control, strengthening commercial privilege while deepening the *hang*'s market security obligations.

Li had acted to shield the *hang* from competition outside of the Pearl River Delta. The *hang* merchants of Canton, already well-versed in negotiating power within the imperial system, did not require as formal clientage relations as the *tusi* did in Yungui. Though the maritime southeast had

[29] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Jincheng Fangfan Waiyi Guitiao 近呈防范外夷规条," in Ming-Qing Goncang Zhongxi Shangmao Dangan 明清宫藏商贸档案 (Zhongguo Dangan Chubanshe 中国档案出版社), pp. 1,447.

been an historically restive region with maritime connections unique in imperial China, it also claimed a long pedigree of integration with imperial government, especially having been a major source of civil service examination candidates since the Song Dynasty. Despite lacking formal title, the *hang* exercised immense informal power politically through the clientage relationship. Given their history of imperial integration, they were adept through experience at pressing for their interests within the imperial system, and for that reason gravitated to it naturally, readily accepting collaborative relations once the state had guaranteed their privileged access to Western trade, which Li's actions in response to the Flint Affair reinforced. They did not require the additional impetus of formal entitlement because they could obtain their objectives informally, whereas the entitlement of Yungui's headmen was a more formal attempt to co-opt an elite social subset more prone to resist imperial entanglements without it.

Scholarly opinion varies as to the Flint Affair's significance to Qing relations with the West. Jane Leonard refreshes John Fairbank's view that xenophobia and cultural conservatism prompted the Qing's reactionary response of confining Western trade to Canton—it was easiest to manage the Western presence while still garnering the economic benefits of Western trade, including taxation, if the court confined it to a single port. Flint spurred a radical change in Sino-Western trade and diplomacy, based on the Qing court's wariness of Western influence on Chinese local societies. Other scholars minimize the Flint Affair's importance to the local organization of Delta trade, stressing practical over cultural concerns. Paul Van Dyke and Zhao Gang, respectively, argue that the basic organization and daily functioning of the Canton Trade had been in place for at least a half century by 1759, and that Western Trade had naturally concentrated there because of the city's proximity to other Western entrepôts in East Asia such as Macao and Manila—the

new regulations codified an informal reality.[30] This chapter argues that the Flint Affair aided Li's clientage relationship with the *hang* by strengthening his control over Guangdong's coastal, extra-provincial links and therefore his ability to shield them from the competition of Chinese merchant communities elsewhere on Qing imperial shores. Li's reforms were more consequential for Chinese merchants than they were for Western merchants, who only occasionally ventured away from Canton, because they accentuated the asymmetrical structure of the Canton Trade—generally open to foreigners while strictly limited among Chinese merchant—heightening Li's ability to funnel profitable trade to his favored local clients and drawing them into collaboration with the imperial state.

The *hang* underwent an evolution throughout the eighteenth century that saw their local influence expand vis-à-vis Qing officials so that, by Li's time, they exercised responsibility for much of daily trade administration, such as documenting and reporting European cargos to the customs house. The *hang* merchant class began its existence as a group of itinerant Fujianese traders who sought more profitable seasonal commerce in Guangzhou than they could find in their home ports, already saturated with unregulated merchants from a wide swath of local society. Historian Ng Chin-keong considers Qing Fujian to have been the heartland of southeast China's distinctive maritime culture due to its far-reaching influence, largely through migration, on other Chinese ports, as well as on overseas Chinese communities.[31] Guangzhou indeed derived much of its late imperial maritime identity from Fujian. As European commerce in Guangzhou regularized during the Yongzheng reign (1722-1735), the *hang* relocated to the city full time and specialized in the trade. Cheong observes that the *hang* accrued increasing responsibility over customs

[30] Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, 15.*;* Zhao Gang, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean*, Introduction
[31] Chin-keong Ng, *Trade and Society*: The *Amoy Network on the China Coast, 1683-1735*. (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2015), Introduction.

operations throughout the late 1700s, or what he identifies as the third phase of their evolution as a merchant class, when they became merchant-administrators.[32] Customs administration always involved a crucial security aspect: it allowed officials to track legal trade, and any trade beyond its parameters was by definition illicit. Qing officials increasingly merged commercial privilege with market security obligations—protection against smuggling and piracy—in the belief that *hang* self-interest would compel them to combat illicit trade, since they enjoyed exclusive access to legal trade. The Flint Affair was a significant turning point the merging of these two trends. The court protected the Canton trade for reasons of profit and for the political relationship. Li's explicit concern was to protect the customs house, which had increasingly become the physical and administrative nexus of state-*hang* relations, and opposed any trend to bypass it and thus weaken local clientage. Foreign trade was useful for frontier consolidation.

Clientage depended on exclusivity, and the trickle of merchants from Fujian to Guangdong opened opportunities both for the merchants and for the Qing state. Guangzhou's relatively small merchant community was amenable to the exclusivity of clientage, as too large a merchant community would dilute the advantages of the arrangement, both to the state and to its hang partners, and complicate state tax collection. Canton, in contrast to Fujian, had fewer maritime merchants who could conceivably interfere in the trade on which clientage depended. The state was therefore reluctant to permit Western trade at Ningbo, for example, where Flint attempted to open a trade entrepot, because the raw numbers of independent merchants residing there made it difficult for the state to regulate market participation. Ng observes that mountainous Fujian's coastal topography and ecology all but guaranteed that the province would produce vast numbers

[32] Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton: Chinese Merchants in Sino-Western Trade*. (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, No. 70. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1997), Introduction.

of maritime workers, often small-scale because market access was so broadly diffused. He further notes that Fujian was a center of maritime influence, transforming the economies of other coastal Chinese cities, including Guangzhou, as its merchants sought more lucrative commercial opportunities elsewhere. Cheong's study corroborates Ng's argument. Cheong observes that the *hang* originally hailed from Fujianese ports, evolving from seasonal to resident merchants during the early eighteenth century—and into quasi-bureaucrats by century's end. It appears that coastal Fujian supported a critical mass of seafaring population before, exceeding a threshold, some of its merchants diffused elsewhere along the imperial coast in search of greater opportunity than their home ports availed to them. From the state's perspective, it was easier to guarantee privileged access to these smaller markets of opportunity than to attempt to restrict an already teeming maritime commercial scene in Fujian. Large numbers devalued the worth of access to merchants and diminished the state's ability to document, regulate, and tax the market. It was bureaucratically most efficient to concentrate trade in a single city to meet the imperial objectives that global merchants knowingly or unknowingly served. Competition among many Western merchants advantaged the relatively few hang merchants—this is why Western merchants quickly adapted by setting aside national rivalries to adopt a collective approach to negotiating with the hang.

Besides the natural concentration of Western merchants in the Pearl River delta and *hang* experience with them, the choice of Guangzhou as the West's exclusive Qing port was practical. Qing officials could not secure the loyalty of each inland merchant who wished to profit by Western trade, so it concentrated a small, urban coterie of intermediary merchants whose loyalty as a group was far easier to obtain by the fact of their already exclusive ranks. Westerners' ability to change prices through competition weakened the market in Guangzhou and therefore lowered the hang's profit from it. Profit was the price of loyalty and the ensuing tax revenue.

The Flint Affair marked a turning point in *hang*-state relations, prompting Li to tighten the relationship that he had already been cultivating with the *hang*. Flint's northern excursion was already illegal, but Li urged the court to enforce regulations against extra-provincial trade more strictly. On Li's recommendation, the court formally confined Western trade to Guangzhou by more strictly enforcing existing regulations against trade in other coastal cities and by promulgating a few new ones that limited the movement of Westerners inside the city itself. Additionally, *hang* merchants became liable for the legal conduct of their Western counterparts, as well as the inspection of their cargos to prevent smuggling: "*Hang* merchants should inspect foreign ships."[33] Li sought to confine Western trade to Guangzhou because Flint's example risked devaluing his favored relationship with the *hang*, drawing commerce away from the *hang* merchants he was trying to entice into clientage by guaranteeing privileged access to trade, sustaining a relationship that consolidated imperial rule in Liangguang.

The Flint Affair wasn't a singular incident, but it heightened Li's awareness of a trend that, unchecked, would endanger the local revenue sources that underpinned his burgeoning political relationship with the *hang*. Li foresaw the strengthening of this trend unless Qing officials cooperated to tighten existing regulations:

> Previously, all foreign ships have entered China by Macao or other harbors of Guangdong. Very few went to Ningbo or Zhejiang. Occasionally foreign ships have been blown in that direction by storms, and had to stop there for repairs. However, during recent years, ships have gone there mostly because they wanted to trade. In the future, as they become familiar with this water route, the number of their ships entering China will inevitably increase daily.[34]

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[33] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Jincheng Fangfan Waiyi Guitiao 近呈防范外夷规条," p. 1,449.
[34] Lo-Shu Fu, *A Documentary Chronicle of Sino-Western Relations, 1644-1820: Translated Texts* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1966), 200.

The regulations that followed it bolstered a system of control over a subject population and resulted less from cultural chauvinism toward Western merchants than from the demands of frontier governance. Li's regulations deepened the fusion of commercial privilege with security obligations in the *hang* and asserted control over trade routes leading away from coastal Guangdong. They grew out of an imperial will to grant broad local autonomy to favored elite merchants—the *hang*—while controlling the extra-provincial connections that fed into the local market.

Li and the Qing court's response to the Flint Affair resulted from a convergence of proximal causes. A temporary lull in Western trade to Canton already hampered Li's client-building efforts, adding urgency to the situation that Flint had instigated. A November 1756 memorial reports, "At the Guangdong maritime customs station only fourteen foreign ships have arrived since the sixth month. Previously foreign ships were rather numerous. But this year they are quite few."[35] Again, clientage depended on the promise of profits to sustain its value for the *hang*. Both the dwindling of Western trade at Canton and its dispersal elsewhere along the Qing coastline threatened to subvert Li's strategy for inexpensive imperial consolidation in the southeast. Although officials had previously discouraged Western trade outside of Canton, Li's report indicates that they generally tolerated it; such instances were rare enough that the potential costs of enforcing against it surpassed the benefits of doing so. With Li's new clientage efforts underway as well as a general decline in Canton's western trade, the crux of the clientage relationship, the Flint Affair became a potent catalyst for new commercial restrictions.

[35] Lo-Shu Fu, *Documentary Chronicle*, 201

The impetus for strengthening restrictions on European trade originated with Li, not the Qing court, and his efforts in that direction date to the years immediately before the Flint Affair. As noted above, Li had urged fellow high officials in Zhejiang and Jiangsu to help police against European trade outside of the Pearl River Delta in August 1759, a month before the Flint Affair. The responsibility fell to Li to make his case for the court's official response to Flint's transgression, and he did so according to the demands of his ongoing policy projects regarding the Guangdong coast, the most important swath of land under his aegis. His initial report to the emperor is a policy recommendation that the court followed in observance of frontier governors' typical independence. The report notes that Flint had "repeatedly" attempted to trade at more northerly ports than Guangzhou throughout his years as a guest merchant in the Pearl River Delta.[36] The Flint Affair was not an isolated event, so why did it provoke such dramatic legal restrictions upon Western trade when earlier instances did not? That Flint's 1759 excursion coincided with the beginning of Li's term in Liangguang, and the consolidation of his government's relations with the *hang*, distinguishes it from earlier attempts. Li sought to align the *hang*'s interests with those of the state, mobilizing its vast social influence in the service of imperial consolidation within Qing borders. Li's report brands inland merchants "traitors" for dealing with Europeans who circumvented more established channels of commerce in Guangzhou, even though the court had not yet formally confined the trade to Guangzhou. Flint's behavior was not a radical break from custom, but the political environment in which it occurred had changed with the ascent of Li Shiyao to the governor-generalship.

The court's response to the Flint Affair—more regularly enforcing restrictions on Western movement along the coast and in Canton, as well as making the *hang* legally responsible for the

[36] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Jincheng Fangfan Waiyi Guitiao 近呈防范外夷规条," p. 1,448.

conduct of their Western customers—was more a reflection of Li's provincial policy objectives than it was of inherent prejudices within the imperial court. The Flint Affair occurred just after Li assumed the governor-generalship and as he began cultivating stronger relations with the *hang*. Governors-general exercised unique authority within the declension of Qing power through imperial institutions, especially in frontier regions, where distance from the imperial court required independence and initiative in regional decision making, with events sometimes unfolding more rapidly than officials could convey information to Beijing, much less wait for court instructions. Besides rotating governors-general between frontiers, the Qing court also preferred to promote officials to this top position internally—it wanted appointees who had served in lower frontier posts and who were thus acclimated to the norms and demands of frontier governance. The relative independence of frontier policy making suggests that governors-general, as the most senior officials on site, are key figures in the study of Qing frontier expansion because they directly linked the imperial court with local society.

Previous research often examines how the structure of frontier marketplaces influenced the conduct of Qing foreign trade, but how did Qing officials such as Li Shiyao use foreign trade to structure frontier marketplaces and, beyond them, state-society relations on the frontier? The Flint Affair illustrates how Li granted substantial internal autonomy to favored merchants, the *hang*, while controlling Guangdong's extra-provincial links as he endeavored to manage the flow of private capital within the empire and concentrate it in politically loyal areas of the realm. The new regulations shielded the *hang* from external competition, enhancing the value of foreign trade in Canton and therefore of the clientage relationship. The Canton trade was asymmetrical: it was open to any and all Western merchants who possessed the means to trade there, but the Qing tightly restricted Chinese merchant participation in it. High volumes of Western trade generated vast

commercial wealth, and the exclusive ranks of domestic merchants allowed Li some influence over its concentration within Qing borders through clientage arrangements. His regulations shielded the *hang* from extra-provincial competition, preserving clientage.

In Guangzhou as in Yungui, Li was pointedly aware of how events and conditions in other provinces shaped his ability to construct clientage relations in the frontier markets under his supervision, an expression of his efforts to control a frontier's extra-provincial links. Li formed his Liangguang policies with reference to other frontier zones, signaling the emergence of a coordinated, cross-frontier political culture. Perhaps expectedly, Li linked policy in Yungui to its northern maritime neighbor Jiangzhe 江浙, modern Jiangsu and Zhejiang, exhorting provincial officials there to assist him in combating prohibited European trade outside of the Pearl River delta: "Every Jiangzhe official should enforce order in Binhai 滨海. Civil and military departments should strictly inspect for illegal trade."[37] His coordination with Zhejiang officials apparently succeeded, since only the next year officials apprehended Flint and confined him to Macao. Li strove to control Liangguang's extra-provincial links by concentrating them in his favored local merchants and, conversely, preventing outside merchants from bypassing clientage arrangements. Crucially, he determined that he could meet local policy objectives only through coordination with neighboring provinces.

Li formulated policy in Liangguang not only in relation to maritime frontiers such as Zhejiang and Jiangsu, but also with reference to inland frontiers such as Yungui, where he would later serve as governor-general, showing that he contemplated contemporary policy in an inclusive, cross-frontier context. A 1765 reflection on his service in Liangguang states: "The Liangguang

[37] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Qing Zhun Wai Shangmai Sihuo Chukou 请准外商买絲货出口," in Ming-Qing Goncang Zhongxi Shangmao Dangan 明清宫藏商贸档案 (Zhongguo Dangan Chubanshe 中国档案出版社), 1,376.

governor-general [Li himself] has copied a page from the history books of Qing Guizhou" in his organization of tax administration in Liangguang. Li adapted his tax collection practices in Guangzhou from similar arrangements in the southwest. He states later in the same document, "The *hubu* reviewed the records of Guizhou toward the *yuehaiguan*'s tax collection."[38] Tax collection in both provinces funneled revenue to the state customs house through select merchants with privileged access to local markets, but who it also relied upon to secure those markets against illicit trade.

By the time of Li's service, the Guangzhou customs house, or *yuehaiguan* 粤海关, was inseparable from state-*hang* clientage, serving as the physical and administrative nexus of the privileged relationship. Li framed the controversy in his appeal to the court as one of taxation, but concerns about taxation were implicitly concerns about clientage: "English merchants repeatedly violate the prohibitions. They proceed toward Ningbo to open a port, and from there depart straight for Tianjin. I petition for help controlling the defrauding of the customs house."[39] The customs house was a physical nexus of state-*hang* relations, especially given the *hang*'s increased role in its functioning by Li's time of service. The *hang*, as the city's key brokers of Western trade, funneled the vast majority of the province's tax revenue to the imperial government through the *hubu*, or customs house, and by Li's time they were, of course, already responsible for much of customs reporting. Trade outside of Canton circumvented the clientage relationship, which included customs arrangements. The *hang*'s role in simplifying imperial tax collection from global trade reflects in the fact that the Guangzhou-based *hubu* was responsible both for tax accounting

[38] Li Shiyao,"Yuehaiguan Guili Bufen Juan 粤海关规例不分卷," in *Guangzhou Dadian* 广州大典, Vol. 37 (Guangzhou 广州: Guangzhou Tushuguan, Guangzhou Dadian Yanjiu Zhongxin 广州图书馆，广州大典研究中心, 2015), 11.

[39] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Jincheng Fangfan Waiyi Guitiao 近呈防范外夷规条," p. 1,446.

and for issuing official permission to engage in direct Western trade. Li knew that the court's primary concern was to preserve the Canton Trade as a conduit of tax revenue, much of which supported the Qing's concurrent expansionist projects in the northwest and southwest. The customs house mediated the *hang*'s state-supported dominance over Western trade in the delta. When Li spoke of defrauding it, he not only meant its threat to tax revenue, but its threat to *hang* privilege that secured that revenue and earned the state a powerful local ally in an historically restive province. Clientage enhanced tax collection by creating a single, manageable collection point consisting of more or less loyal merchants and granted the state inroads to local society.

A common explanation of Qing ire toward the Flint Affair is that the court wished to prevent Westerners from gaining knowledge of their internal affairs, but from Li's standpoint, the real risk was that Flint's example would allow Western merchants to trade directly with China's "inland merchants," undercutting his government's clientage relationship with the *hang*.[40] If Li had primarily wished to avoid exposing Western merchants to sensitive intelligence about China's domestic circumstances, he would have been far more concerned about Westerners learning Chinese than about Qing subjects learning Western languages, but he warns against them equally. As it was, he was most concerned about how the widespread ability to communicate subverted the favored state-*hang* relationship, allowing commerce outside of it and devaluing the relationship both for the *hang* and for the state.

The customs house's relationship with the *hang* was complex, entailing competition within, ideally, a mutually beneficial framework. The house both enabled state-*hang* collaboration and policed its boundaries. The *hubu*, for example, regularly extracted unofficial gifts—bribes—from

[40] Ibid., p. 1,450.

the *hang* merchants, but this was a price of official favor. The language Li used to explain the Flint Affair to the Qing court demonstrates that control of commerce was not just a matter of securing private trade but of imperial governance. Li so conflated *hang* commercial clientage with provincial governance and social stability that he deemed "traitorous" the Chinese merchants willing to do business with Europeans outside of government approved channels.[41] European trade outside of clientage disrupted not just Canton's local commercial wealth but the political and social stability that emerged from Li's ability to direct its flow into Guangzhou society.

Li paired concerns about the defrauding of the customs house with those about communication between European and inland Chinese merchants, specifically foreign language learning. Li was concerned that Flint's language ability would allow him to establish direct contact with inland merchants and bypass the customs house and the clientage relationship that it integrated. Li made his case to the imperial court by warning both against Westerners learning Chinese local and official languages, and against Chinese merchants learning Western languages: "If the foreign merchant Flint can understand the spoken language of inland leaders, and even the written Chinese characters, then foreign merchants such as Flint's translators will be numerous and cultivate traitorous inland collaborators to teach them about our books."[42] Li paired his complaint with his exhortations against the defrauding of the customs house, suggesting that his objection to foreign merchants learning Chinese was commercially based. Knowledge of Chinese cultural norms could diminish Qing officials' and the *hang*'s ability to dictate the terms of trade with Europeans. He warned against how direct trade between Europeans and inland merchants diminished state tax revenue as the flow of profits diffused over a broader area among unlicensed

[41] Ibid., p. 1,447.
[42] Ibid., p. 1,449.

merchants, making it more difficult to account for. It subverted the objectives of clientage to prevent the accumulation of wealth and power outside of government awareness, and to tax approved marketplaces to support both imperial expansion in the west and expenses of the imperial household.

Although imperial clientage was commercially based, that does not mean that culture was unimportant. On the contrary, clientage depended on varying degrees of local merchant autonomy, making local cultural adaptation extremely important. The arrangement required two main concessions to local elite merchants in order to work: local cultural adaptation; and commercial exclusivity. These two requirements together ensured that client merchants found their best prospects in imperial collaboration, especially for a merchant class well-integrated already with the Chinese imperial state. Although clientage relations centered around more material factors such as commerce and security, culture was at the crux of the state concession that allowed the entire arrangement to work. The most recent scholarship on the Qing maritime southeast has cast the region as more connected to the commercial world of the South China Sea than to the agrarian civilization of the central China plain, and especially the land-based Manchu culture.[43] In this sense, Guangdong was a remote frontier requiring special governing arrangements with local commercial and political leaders. The *hang* as a merchant class were ideal candidates for clientage because of their long experience with Western commerce, as well as the relative scarcity of large merchants in Canton in contrast to Fujian, Guangdong's coastal neighbor with a more established seafaring population and history.

[43] John Herman, "De-Centering Chinese History," pp. 200-1.

The state acted to protect the region's maritime history and identity. Herman has recently observed that the Qing southeast was as much linked to maritime Asia as it was to land-based imperial civilization of the central China plain, if not more so.[44] Still, as a long-standing province of imperial China, as well as a leading source of successful imperial exam candidates, maritime southeast elites were adept at imperial communication and policy making. Local cultural accommodation of the kind that New Qing historians tend to emphasize was crucial to local alliance building, symbolically as much as practically. Cheong argues that the *hang*'s long experience of maritime trade, particularly with Westerners, made them obvious candidates for client status.[45] Li seems to have been concerned, too, that extra-official commerce would slacken the standards that made the Canton Trade an attractive option for Western merchants and insured their repeated business. Inland merchants were less well-versed in the norms of Western commerce and therefore more prone to cultural misunderstanding. The alternative to allowing the *hang* to trade was to severely restrict the southeast's maritime trade altogether, as the Kangxi and Yongzheng courts had done at different times, but doing so would have displaced a historically volatile regional population from its traditional livelihood. The court found it more advantageous to collaborate with a narrow group of elite merchants within the southeast commercial environment, directing its profits toward imperial ends as far as possible.

By enhancing the *hang*'s status as influential middlemen between China's inland merchants and Western traders, Li could control not only Guangdong's sea routes to other provinces and Western merchants' use of them, but also the land-based trade routes from Chinese merchants who arrived in Guangdong to market their commodities to Europeans through the *hang*.

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[44] John Herman, "De-Centering Chinese History," in *The Journal of Chinese History*, 2 (2018), p. 200-1.
[45] Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton*.

Physical limits on merchant movement in Guangzhou prevented non-*hang* merchants from trading directly with Westerners. Privileged *hang* access to the customs house heightened the merchants' influence over smaller Chinese merchants who either resided in Guangzhou or traveled there for the sake of commerce.[46] The *hang* had a personal stake in policing the movements of the European merchants because the state had designed its regulations to concentrate the trade at Canton and therefore in the hands of the *hang*. The *hang* arrangement enabled the Qing to control Guangzhou's extraprovincial links over land as well as sea. In this sense, the *hang* were imperial gatekeepers to trade who gained immensely by their role, helping the imperial government control the spread of wealth throughout the empire while enjoying a substantial share of that wealth themselves.

The post-Flint restrictions were more consequential for Chinese merchants than they were for Western merchants because they intensified the asymmetrical structure of the Canton trade. Any Westerner whose country was permitted to trade in Canton could participate in commerce there, but Li's regulations attempted to funnel all of this trade exclusively through the *hang*, whose numbers were always small—usually 5-10 merchant houses operated at one time, according to Van Dyke.[47] The argument that xenophobia fueled restrictions on Western trade doesn't explain why the port was so open to foreigners while restrictive of Chinese merchants. The market's asymmetry—open to foreigners, restricted among Chinese merchants—maximized the commercial, political, and social advantages of trade to Qing government. The point of clientage was to consolidate wealth and political power in the right hands for the purpose of frontier political and social consolidation. The Qing confined Western trade to Canton because it heightened profits

[46] Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Success and Failure in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade*, (Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2016), Ch. 2.
[47] Ibid., Ch. 1.

in that marketplace, empowering Qing levers of persuasion toward the *hang*, who officials wished to entice into partnership.

If the fear of foreign influence and intelligence gathering was so great, why not restrict foreign presence in Guangzhou, as the Qing easily could have done? Because xenophobia wasn't a strong motivating factor. Client cultivation was, to cement imperial claims. Under this view, Western merchants were not the primary threat to regional stability. The notoriously fractious local population was, and the hang ideally served both as an avenue into Cantonese society and as a magnet of local resources, well concentrated and therefore more easily controlled from the center. At the same time, the *hang* helped police illicit economies to prevent the dilution of their relationship with Qing officials, and the diffusion of resources that could bolster local power centers outside of state-sanctioned clientage. During economic recession, however, the *hang*'s responsibility to monitor Western merchants, born mainly of the state's limited ability to do so, enabled the *hang* to avoid official trade channels more effectively, engaging in smuggling, for example, and weakening the clientage relationship central to the governance of frontier Liangguang. The rapidity of Qing expansion, requiring thin, negotiated administration in frontier provinces, diminished the government's ability to achieve its ends of profiting from frontier markets as local merchants sidestepped the official relationships that ostensibly structured those markets.

The danger was that Flint's missions would become routine and upset pricing in the Pearl River Delta as merchants in other cities increasingly competed with the Canton Trade, devaluing clientage for the *hang*. A wide dispersal of Western trade in China would make it nearly impossible to maintain the clientage relationships that underpinned Qing imperial conquest and rulership.

Qing officials did not object to the raw numbers of Western merchants trading in Canton, as Van Dyke clarifies.[48]

The reforms generally achieved Li's objectives to reconcentrate Western trade in the Pearl River Delta. The number of Western commercial ships arriving in Canton averaged between thirty and thirty-seven each season throughout the 1760s, more than doubling the number for 1756 and in the years leading up to the Flint Affair.[49] The confinement of European commerce to Canton was essential to shielding the *hang* from extraprovincial competition, maximizing its profitability for them, and drawing them into concert with Qing officialdom to preserve the privileged relationship. The asymmetric structure of the Canton Trade insured the clientage relationship. Restrictions on Chinese merchant access to the trade funneled the possible trade of three provinces—Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang—through Canton's *hang* merchants.[50]

Scholars have argued that the Qing court sought to limit Western permeation of Qing territory to prevent Western intelligence gathering on Chinese internal affairs, but the sheer diversity of the Canton Trade undercuts this argument. As Van Dyke observes, 18th century Canton was one of the most open commercial ports in the world, allowing all comers regardless of national ship size or trade volume, in contrast to the exclusive access to trade that the *hang* enjoyed. The Qing court, furthermore, still employed court Jesuits as scientific advisers by the 1750s and 1760s who were free to return to Macao. Why would they have been exempt from imperial suspicion of espionage when other Westerners were not, especially given the sensitive technological and

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[48] Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, Introduction.
[49] Paul Van Dyke, "A Reassessment of the China Trade: The Canton Junk Trade as Revealed in Dutch and Swedish Records of the 1750s and 1770s" in *Maritime China in Transition*, edited by Wang Gungwu and Ng Chin-keong (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 152.
[50] Huang Guosheng, *Maritime China in Transition, 1750 to 1830* in *Maritime China in Transition*, edited by Wang Gungwu and Ng Chin-keong (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 188.

bureaucratic knowledge that they were privy to? Although it's true that the court had expelled Catholic missionaries from the interior during the Yongzheng reign, some thirty years before the 1760 Canton edicts, that was because of a theological conflict between Catholic and Confucian ritual—the Rites Controversy—in which priests forbade local ancestral rituals among Chinese converts. It was not for fear of trafficking imperial secrets, and not due to the corrupting influence of Western ideas in themselves, but to the exclusivity of then prevailing Catholic doctrine.

The fusion of commercial privilege and security obligations in the hands of client merchants carried a double risk of heightening illicit commerce during economic recession: lower profits weakened the merchants' incentives to imperial collaboration, both enticing the *hang* into illicit trade and diminishing the government's ability to combat it, since enforcement against smuggling relied on a partnership with merchants who were then more likely to engage in it. The *hang* had every interest in securing imperial power in their region because it granted them the commerce that created their social stature, but these incentives worked best during times of abundant trade, which was most of the time. Because Li's reforms had also outsourced much of the Qing's security responsibility to the merchants, however, economic downturn compounded coastal security threats first by driving locals into piracy and smuggling for livelihood, and second by diminishing the *hang*'s motivation to combat it, and even driving them to participate to compensate for their reduced trade volume. By making the *hang* responsible for the legal conduct of their Western counterparts, the state intended to draw them into common cause against smuggling and other illegal behavior. It was just as likely, however, to prompt them to innovate new means of skirting the law for profit's sake, such as through smuggling or even piracy. Economic malaise presented a dual threat, both compounding illicit trade and weakening means to combat it through local cooperation.

A central paradox of clientage was that while an exclusive group of influential merchants strengthened the state's territorial grip, it bred economic disaffection among locals excluded from the favored partnership. The greatest threat of piracy and smuggling to Guangdong's maritime trade was not the loss of specific cargos or tax revenue stemming from them, but the long-term weakening of clientage relations, underpinning regional political stability, that resulted from skirting the legal trade that Li and other officials used as a lever of influence over its preferred clients. Clientage not only granted privileged commercial access to the global market, but restructured a regional economy around this trade. Richard Marks contends that the Canton Trade diminished agriculture in Guangdong and transformed adjacent Guangxi province into its wealthier neighbor's storehouse.[51] Market exclusivity contained the causes of regional instability, especially because its dominant actors were responsible for enforcing against the "shadow economy" that unavoidably arose out of economic marginalization and compounded, often with *hang* complicity, during economic downturns. Piracy depends on support from landed entities—communities, merchant groups, states. Antony notes that, although clientage presented problems of enforcement, illicit trade declined over the eighteenth century, which he attributes to the merchant-state partnership.[52] But economic downturn exposed potential weaknesses in the structure of clientage. In a case of past as prologue, merchant involvement in smuggling later created tensions that partly led to the Opium War and the Canton Trade's decline.

Li's term coincided with the last years of a phase of local stability and seasonal, small-scale piracy. The increase of banditry, piracy, and smuggling at the end of the eighteenth century evinces entropy of the state's "coercive ability," an early precursor of terminal decline at the

[51] Robert Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China*, (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Chs. 3, 9.
[52] Robert J. Antony, *Elusive Pirates, Pervasive Smugglers Violence and Clandestine Trade in the Greater China Seas*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010.)

fringes of empire that gradually worked toward the center.[53] Although Li's purview included both the provinces of Guangxi and Guangdong, Guangdong commanded most of his attention because of its commercial status, and because Guangxi by that time played a secondary role as its larger neighbor's agricultural supply base.

The most important legacy of the Flint Affair was to strengthen official control over Guangdong's extra-provincial connections as Li strove to effectively prohibit European commerce to Qing ports outside of the Pearl River Delta, shielding *hang* clientage from external competition. Viewing the Flint Affair in terms of *hang* clientage with the Qing state reveals that it spurred a period of reform under Li Shiyao's aegis with far reaching consequences for the distribution of local power between provincial government and its *hang* clients, merging commercial privilege and security obligations in the hands of the *hang* merchants. Li used his control over Guangdong's extra-provincial relations to fortify *hang* commercial dominance within maritime Guangdong. The Qing court confined Western trade to Canton because Flint's example risked diluting the value of the clientage relationship as the *hang* would have to compete with merchants in other coastal cities. The *hang* already enjoyed special access to Western trade within Canton, but now the state moved to protect it from competition elsewhere along the coast, increasing official influence over the extra-provincial flow of commercial wealth and its concentration in particular corners of provincial society.

The Flint Affair threatened the asymmetric structure of the Canton Trade, on which *hang* clientage depended. Clientage, in turn, garnered the state a powerful collaborative base in

[53] Robert J. Antony, *Unruly People: Crime, Community, and State in Late Imperial South China*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016,) Introduction.

Cantonese society and, by easing taxation, played a crucial supporting role in financing imperial expansion. By delegating security and administrative responsibilities to the *hang*, clientage arrangements relieved the expansionist state of logistical burdens, freeing state resources for more urgent use elsewhere in the realm. Li's actions in the wake of the Flint Affair deepened the fusion of commerce and security in the hands of *hang* clients in order to preserve that clientage relationship. These actions served primarily to consolidate imperial expansion rather than to limit foreign influence within China, already abundant in other ways. The convergence of commerce and security, however, risked defeating its own purposes, sowing the local factionalism that Li was striving to prevent in times of economic downturn, which devalued cooperation with the imperial state from the standpoint of the *hang* merchants and enticed them into illicit trade. During economic malaise, the *hang* and their western counterparts deepened networks of smuggling and even piracy that would continue to defy state intervention. The clientage relationship was inherently precarious. The *hang* ensured tax revenue to the state and served as a bridge to local society.

The Canton Trade is well-known today among historians and a general audience alike as a site of early modern globalization, where European, American, and Chinese merchants extensively interacted and on terms of rough parity or even Qing dominance, since the imperial court dictated the formal rules of trade. Why did the Qing court arrange access to the trade as it did? Resonances with present-day Sino-Western relations are obvious, but the motivation for the Canton Trade were markedly different than those of our time. This chapter explains the Flint Affair's impact on the clientage system by linking the Canton Trade to a wider frontier system that organized Qing participation in global commerce around the demands of inland expansion. The Canton Trade was the southeastern hub of a frontier system that included Luzhou in the southwest and the Kiakhta

trade in the northwest. The Qing sought to use its control of global marketplaces to expand and consolidate the empire, so it expediently concentrated these markets in single locations where imperial officials could easily funnel tax revenue to the state and entice a reliable corps of local clients into imperial collaboration, offering sole access to certain kinds of trade free from external competition. The Canton Trade, like its analogs in the southeast and northwest, was asymmetrical: tightly restricted on the Chinese side but open and eclectic on the outward side so long as visiting merchants did not attempt to open competing trade venues elsewhere along the coast, defeating the Qing's broader strategy. Flint's example risked upsetting the internal regulations that maintained the *hang*'s unique status during the height expansionism.

CHAPTER TWO

Clientage in the Southwest, 1777-1780

The most salient difference between the Qing's southeast and southwest frontiers was that, while the southeast claimed a long history of imperial integration, Yungui was a recent addition to the imperial fold, though its Western neighbor Sichuan had long been part of the empire. Two differences extend from this basic fact: 1) The incorporation of Liangguang was a legitimating necessity; and 2) the *hang* more readily gravitated toward imperial cooperation than southwestern elites did. Li employed a more formal clientage structure, with its formal guarantees of local autonomy, in Yungui than in Liangguang because its elites were not well-versed in pursuing commercial and political objectives within normal imperial governance, so the state conferred extra incentives on them and offered tutelage in the culture of imperial governance in the form of official title. The *hang*, by contrast, gravitated toward the imperial state because of their ability to extract favorable guarantees from both formal and informal interaction with it, requiring little additional integration. Clientage in both places nonetheless combined internal elite autonomy with imperial control of extra-provincial connections—internal autonomy with external control—as Qing officials sought to influence the circulation of wealth inside Qing borders, concentrating it in loyal quarters of the empire. Although this strategic dichotomy perilously neglected the dependence of external trade on local markets and production, it reached the limit of the Qing's governing capacity, given the extent of its contemporary frontier conquests, ranging from the southeast coast to the central Asian plateau. Li's efforts to discipline the Yungui copper market's rural supply chain met with continued frustration due to the state's shallow reach in non-urban regions.

Similar forms of clientage met divergent ends in Liangguang and Yungui under Li's aegis. Despite the *tusi*'s formal entitlement, full incorporation of Yungui into the empire was not an important objective of imperial expansion—formal entitlement enhanced the semblance of integration, which was nonetheless always loose during the eighteenth century. Rather, the imperial state relied on the spatial reorganization of state-society relations between the rural and urban, granting local clients near total autonomy in the countryside while the state consolidated its grip on cities to control Yungui's extra-provincial connections, and clientage linked them. This arrangement relieved logistical burdens on the imperial state, its resources spread over an enormous land mass, but failed to account for extra-provincial trade's necessary links to local production. As long as this arrangement allowed Qing officials to control market access and rely on local clients to offer security in lieu of the state, territorial and cultural assimilation were not as important for Yungui as they were for Liangguang, with its longer history of integration into the empire. The division of local power between city and country reflected and strengthened the region's perpetual outsider status. This division was not a failure of Qing governance because, unlike in Liangguang, imperial officials were content to extract mineral resources and tax revenue while leaving local clients to quell social unrest and struggle through local rivalries. The Qing conferred title on its southwest clients to create the impression of consolidated power where it was at best tenuous, with political authority sharply divided between city and country.

By the time of Li's Yungui governor-generalship, from 1777 until 1780, the state-*tusi* relationship had undergone a radical transformation from its roots in the headman system, with the Qing state now selecting local *tusi* clients itself and investing them with official title. Historians such as C. Patterson Giersch and Bin Yang construe this formalization as an advance of Qing political dominance on the southwest frontier, but it actually disguised a strategic retreat of Qing

officialdom from rural areas and its consolidation in the cities. As John Herman observes, non-urban reaches of Yungui remained beyond imperial control, and local, titled clients were unaccustomed to imperial norms of government. The Qing's entitlement of *tusi* clients actually strengthened local autonomy because, after the initial selection of local clients, Qing officials were but scarcely involved in rural affairs. The Qing's ability to confer local political caché on local clients served as an additional inducement to collaboration for a social class prone to stray from participation in clientage for lack of enduring historical ties to the imperial state. The state, in turn, sought *tusi* collaboration because local leaders controlled many of the regional copper mines that competed with those operated by Han migrants and from which the state derived copper to mint currency.[54] After Tokugawa Japan placed a ban on copper export, Yungui became the Qing's sole source of copper.[55] High numbers of official title give an artificial impression of imperial integration, as local clients were quite happy to observe the formalities of imperial office while wielding title for local influence apart from direct Qing intervention.[56]

While Liangguang was central to Qing consolidation because of its deep historic and cultural ties to imperial officialdom, Yungui had only a loose history of association with imperial China, so its conquest and occupation were circumstantial, not ideological imperatives. The formalization of Yungui clientage through official title was a form of tutelage for a frontier elite whose natural inclination, which the lure of state-backed profit and power attenuated, was to resist imperial influence, whereas the *hang* were centripetally drawn to state collaboration. The urban/rural division of power loosened state oversight of the rural supply chain, however, and

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[54] Yang Yuda 杨煜达, "Diantong, Hantong yu Qingdai Zhongqi de Hankou Tongshichang 滇铜，汉同与清代中期的汉口铜市场," in Qingshi Yanjiu 清史研究, (May 2013) (No. 2), 88-100.

[55] Bin Yang, *Between Winds and Clouds: The Making of Yunnan, Second Century BCE to Twentieth Century CE* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.)

[56] Herman, "Empire in the Southwest: Early Qing Reforms to the Native Chieftain System," in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Feb., 1997), 47-74.

opened opportunities for local interests to circumvent official trade channels, threatening clientage relations. As Yang notes, illegal mining groups ranged from locals and Han migrants to the local headmen themselves, bypassing the clientage relationship of which they were part. Li's various reports from Yungui evince a near singular focus on disciplining the copper transport to Beijing and reducing shortages and delays of supply. Official aversion to the rural southwest allowed inefficiency in copper's rural supply chain to expand, stoking Li's concerns about illegal copper markets, which he was more or less helpless to combat given his government's limited reach in the province. Yang Yuda argues that illegal copper mines run by a variety of local actors including the Qing's local clients did, in fact, feed into legal copper markets in Hankou, which then marketed the product to the imperial capital in Beijing.[57] This diversion of copper away from official channels within Yungui partly subverted Li's efforts to sustain a dominant hand in the Yungui clientage relationship, yet local clients could use the Qing imprimatur against local rivals. The benefits of southwest clientage skewed in favor of local clients.

The internal autonomy-external control model was nonetheless the best strategy available to Li under the circumstances. Yungui not only lacked the ideological import that lent urgency to Liangguang's imperial integration, but Qing officials also considered it biologically inhospitable to Han and Manchu populations, including government officials. David Bello argues:

> The frontier order was indeed constrained by a combination of human and environmental factors so unmalleable that Qing state elites viewed them almost as a conspiracy against Qing rule. The mutually conditioned cultural and biological diversity along the Qing empire's southwestern fringes was resistant

[57] Yang Yuda 杨煜达, "Diantong, Hantong yu Qingdai Zhongqi de Hankou Tongshichang 滇铜，汉同与清代中期的汉口铜市场," in Qingshi Yanjiu 清史研究, (May 2013) (No. 2), 88-100.

> to centralized domination by virtue of both nature and culture, forcing state power to adapt and compromise to survive.[58]

Li easily ceded broad matters of internal governance to local leaders and concentrated his efforts on the imperial state's extractive motives without violating preconceived, culturally grounded notions of unitary imperial rule. Yungui's sharp urban-rural division practically necessitated Li's policy thrust of ceding internal autonomy while attempting to control the frontier's extra-provincial links. Still, he struggled to balance Yungui's semi-civilized image among Qing officials with his duty to supervise a functioning copper market, restricted access to which underpinned state-society relations through clientage. Qing officials did not view the region as a natural extension of the empire, inimical as it was to Han and Manchu habitation and despite bordering imperial possessions on three sides—east, west, and north. Li reports in one memorial that he had ordered officials to routinely measure the copper cargo at each transfer station to defend against theft: "Along the two eastern river routes, every station official should inspect Luzhou-bound cargo for the sake of tax revenue."[59] His caution stemmed from an intense focus on disciplining the rural copper supply chain, as his most important task was to buffer mineral trade routes against shortages, delays, and illicit trade.

Biological deterrents dictated that the Qing state relied on the *tusi* for local security. Han and Manchu officials, soldiers, and settlers were loath to venture far from urban centers due to the real, but probably exaggerated, threat of tropical diseases, such as malaria, to which they lacked immunity, leaving rural and wild parts of the frontier only loosely under the Qing yoke. Qing

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[58] David Anthony Bello, "To Go Where No Han Could Go for Long: Malaria and the Qing Construction of Ethnic Administrative Space in Frontier Yunnan," in *Modern China*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July, 2005), 285.

[59] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Zoubao Diansheng Wuxunian Er Yunjingtong Zai Luzhou Riqi Shi 奏报滇省戊戌年二运京铜在泸州日期事," Zhongguo Guojia Diyi Lishi Danganguan 中国国家第一历史档案馆, Doc. No. 04-01-35-1308-004.

government found it more expedient to leave such areas under the control of the local headmen, the *tusi*, with deep ties to local society, rural and urban. The *tusi* commanded private militias for the task and, John Herman observes, Qing garrisons in the region were often undermanned and possessed outdated equipment.[60] The presence of Qing armies in Yungui was most of the time a symbol of imperial hegemony.

The Yungui *hubu*—the customs house under Li's control—reflected official attitudes toward the southwest in that it existed to support the empire's extractive economy and had an antagonistic relationship with rural mining groups, ever suspicious of their subversion of official copper transport. Its main function, as in Liangguang, was to enforce the fiscal interests of the imperial government in the form of taxation and of investigating delays and shortages in Yungui's copper supply. The Yungui *hubu* was more powerful and independent of local influence than was its counterpart in Liangguang, since it was often the sole lever of state power in Yungui against illegal mining that subverted the efficiency of legal trade, whereas the Liangguang *hubu* was heavily enmeshed with local merchants. In several memorials bemoaning inefficient copper supply to the Luzhou copper depot, Li notes that investigators he dispatched to assess the supply line would lodge reports with the *hubu*, who then reviewed the reports on behalf of the imperial government. A typical command read: "Report the inspection of Luzhou copper to the *hubu*."[61] In Liangguang, in contrast, the Qing state usually entrusted the *hang* merchants themselves to report cargo shipments to customs house.

[60] John E. Herman, *Amid the Clouds and Mist: China's Colonization of Guizhou, 1200-1700*. (Harvard East Asian Monographs. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007.)
[61] Li, "Report on Supporting Beijing Shipment Route," Zhongguo Guojia Diyi Lishi Danganguan 中国国家第一历史档案馆, Doc. Nos. 04-01-35-1308-021; 04-01-35-1306-021; 04-01-35-1307-014; 04-01-35-1308-004.

The Yungui *hubu* had a more adversarial relationship with local society than did its analog in Liangguang. In Liangguang, the *hubu* was responsible for record keeping and conferring commercial licenses on the *hang* merchants. In practice, however, the *hang* enjoyed an informal patronage relationship whereby they influenced the *hubu* through gift-giving or bribery. Thus while the *hang* did not hold formal title, as southwest clients did, they nonetheless exercised a degree of informal political power that rivaled that of southwestern leaders, but derived through different means. *Hang* and *tusi* power was more similar in practice than official designations suggest, despite substantive differences. The *tusi* were more prone than the *hang* to act outside of the clientage relationship, perhaps because their lack of experience with state involvement diminished their trust in imperial officials, and their confidence that they could acquire their desired ends through collaboration.

The urban concentration of imperial officialdom shrouded imperial views of the rural and wild southwest. "Because service is slack, there is a shortage of copper," Li reported to the Qianlong court in 1780.[62] Li's complaint reflects the duality inherent to southwest clientage, with local leaders paying ceremonial loyalty to the Qing but pursuing local agendas outside of state auspices, since the Qing state's reach into rural areas was weak. He took an interest in rural copper production, dispatching subordinates to inspect production delays, because it stalled the extra-provincial supply chain. Li suspected theft was a cause of shortage in the rural copper supply, a reflection of limited Qing reach into rural Yungui and the imperfections inherent in a system reliant on commercial self-interest with limited or wholly absent oversight. In a remarkable circular to the court, Li recounts his struggle to find reliable inspectors to diagnose the copper supply's shortages and report them to the *hubu*. The Qing's limited reach into local affairs was inherent and endemic

[62] Li, "Report on Supporting the Beijing Shipment Route," No. 04-01-35-1308-021

to clientage practices, but it was starkest in the southwest, where Qing officials avoided local involvement not only because of tacit agreements with local clients and formal entitlement, but because of official attitudes that culturally marginalized southwest people and subordinated the region to other, more integrated regions of the empire. Yungui was important to Li as a source of copper and tax revenue, not for political or cultural cohesion, unlike Liangguang. While this selective focus relieved the Qing of some logistical pressures by delegating them to local leaders, speeding frontier expansion, it could also undermine imperial objectives of securing Yungui's extra-provincial commerce, since it had limited means of swaying local populations, including their clients, outside of the urban seats of imperial authority.

Qing objectives on the southwest frontier were to grant internal autonomy to local clients while securing control over extra-provincial links by concentrating imperial power in urban centers of long-distance trade. Li's term in Yungui saw the 1779 rejuvenation of Luzhou 泸州, a copper trading depot at the confluence of regional rivers and a hub of long-distance trade. With its ease of extra-provincial transport, it was a natural choice for a government presence: "To support the copper transport to Beijing, in Qianlong year forty-four we established an economic marketplace in Luzhou."[63] The urbanization of Qing provincial government created opportunities for inefficiency in the rural copper supply chain and, according to Li, theft in the hinterlands. Li gave standing orders that any shortage or delay of copper deliveries should automatically prompt an investigation into the causes, dispatching investigators to rural supply depots and reporting their results to the *hubu*.[64] Evincing a transfrontier outlook, Li was concerned with efficient copper

[63] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Report on Investigative Plans 奏为审明懔具," Zhongguo Di Yi Lishi Danganguan 中国第一历史档案馆, No. 04-01-35-1308-023.

[64] Ibid., "Report on Investigative Plans," 奏为审明懔具, No. 04-01-35-1308-023; "Report on Supporting the Beijing Shipment Route 奏为恭报京运开帮日期," Zhongguo Di Yi Lishi Danganguan 中国第一历史档案馆, Doc. Nos. 04-01-35-1308-021; 04-01-35-1306-021; 04-01-35-1307-014; 04-01-35-1308-004.

transport beyond the borders of Yungui. Because his chief governing objective in the southwest was to secure extra-provincial trade, he conceived of Yungui in terms of frontier coordination. In 1779, he wrote: "Every provincial official should attend to the speedy transport of copper to Beijing to ensure against delays."[65] Yungui's status as the Qing's sole copper supply, enabling the minting of imperial currency, mandated its at least partial incorporation not only into the empire but into a cross-frontier system of commerce and governance.

The increase of titled offices in the southwest during the Qianlong reign, which Giersch observes, reflects the process of ceding rural power to local leaders while granting them official status within Qing government to preserve a semblance of integration, when in fact these leaders were largely autonomous from imperial oversight. John Herman observes that "Qing expansion into and annexation of the southwest frontier should be seen as a transition from jurisdictional sovereignty to territorial sovereignty and from informal to formal empire, and this transition was embedded in the *tusi* office."[66] The transition marked a spatial reorganization of local power that ceded rural autonomy to Qing clients while concentrating and fortifying imperial power in the cities, where officials could most easily regulate the extra-provincial flow of extracted commodities such as the copper they transferred to the imperial capital of Beijing. In sum, the Qing used clientage and respatialization to establish a system under which the internal and domestic remained under local contol, but extra-provincial links fell to provincial officials appointed from the center, in contrast to the headman system that prevailed through the early Yongzheng reign, in which Qing officials actively tried, but generally failed, to acculturate southwestern populations. The Qing contained local power at the borders, creating an

[65] Li, "Report," Doc. No. 04-01-35-1308-004.
[66] Herman, "Empire in the Southwest," 50.

interprovincial network with urban nodes under the aegis of the centrally appointed officials such as Li. The local and the extra-provincial were mutually dependent, however, so state absence in the far interior enabled disruption of longer supply routes with minimal imperial regulation.

Li's limited, urban perspective in Yungui, confined primarily to copper traffic, both caused and resulted from disruptions in the metal's supply route to Beijing. Li established an official outpost in the transfer city of Luzhou, in the riverine lowlands connecting Yungui and Sichuan, to oversee a copper depot on the Beijing transfer route in Xiongzhou: "Xiongzhou's experimental commerce official XXX reported a delay."[67] Li's missives evince a near singular focus on the efficiency of the copper transport route to Beijing, showing frustration at delays and shortages, so absences in his records are revealing. In his court memorials, his strict focus is on insuring the punctual delivery of copper to the imperial capital, the smooth functioning of the Beijing copper route. To this end, he established new administrative units near copper depots to ameliorate delays in deliveries of the metal to Beijing.

As Li worked to secure state control of copper transport, he sought lessons from other frontier regions where the Qing was implementing a similar governing strategy of granting local autonomy to privileged merchants while exerting control over long-distance trade routes, showing that he contemplated policy in terms of cross-frontier experience. He incorporated into his governing circles voices from other frontiers who could help adapt solution between regions: "According to a new official transferred from Xinjiang, we should inspect all trade toward the Myanmar border."[68] Despite regulatory problems, state copper consumption guaranteed the Yungui market and therefore the clientage relationship, as well. Li's job there was to supervise a

[67] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Report on Investigative Plans."
[68] Ibid.

steady supply of the metal from local miners and merchants. Reliable copper transport to Beijing proved so important that its functioning constituted the central purpose of local officials' postings. Li Shiyao transferred to Yungui largely to discipline the transport network linking rural and urban Yungui to the capital. He frequently transferred local officials to other frontier posts such as in Xinjiang, where Li himself would soon spend a short term as governor, if the provincial government sought to blame them—such transfers were common enough, however, that inefficiency was probably more systemic than the result of individual malfeasance. Yang notes that illegal mining fed into legal copper markets in Hankou.[69] Such illicit markets resulted from the Qing's shallow or non-existent reach into the rural southwest and the willingness of local collaborators to pursue personal livelihoods in opposition to imperial objectives. The spatial division of southwest rulership yielded complex results, in which rural realities interfered with urban imperial designs on extra-provincial control. The real risk, which Li's memorials reflect, was the state's inability to defend its rural supply chain of copper against exploitation by local leaders over whom it exerted little or no control, weaknesses that disrupted Yungui's distant, extra-provincial trade routes.

The potential for profit may have eased collaboration between imperial officials and select local leaders, but it did not erase pre-existing cultural tensions. The High Qing clientage strategy attempted to circumvent cultural tensions in the southwest as far as possible by foregrounding common commercial interest and spatially separating domains of power, with the state infringing as little as possible on local society while meeting its production needs. The state could meet its needs from the cities without much involvement or concern for the rural and wild outlands, but Qing officials felt little pressure to incorporate peoples whom they viewed as beyond the pale of

[69] Yang 杨, "Diantong, Hantong 滇铜, 汉铜," 91.

Chinese civilization, so long as they maintained mineral access and tax revenue from trade, simplified through the funnel of clientage. As abundant research has revealed, efforts at acculturation were in general too costly and troublesome to sustain in earnest. Absent from Li's communications is mention of rural politics or acculturation efforts toward non-urbanized and allegedly uncivilized local tribespeople. Li's is a staunchly urban perspective, preoccupied with city affairs, according with the spatial divisions of rulership that other historians have delineated and which appear in the historical record. [70] As the New Qing model would predict, state efforts at Confucianizing southwest frontier society were generally shallow and ephemeral, but it provided a language of legitimation between local clients and the Qing state, demonstrating loyalty to the imperial government but of limited value in local politics outside of direct Qing involvement. The acceptance of some Confucian trappings functioned as a signal of collaboration with the imperial house, assuring provincial officials of clients' will to cooperate.

Acculturation efforts offering Confucian education to the children of local leaders created a common language of legitimation between Qing officials and their clients, although it didn't reach the broader population. Jodi Weinstein and John Herman have respectively characterized Qing acculturation efforts in the southwest as futile from the beginning, but the empire required a bridge to the limited, elite segment of society that would essentially subdue and rule wild areas in its stead, so it offered access to Confucian education and entitlement. Even without the broad dissemination of Confucian learning that Qing officials may have sought, imperial governance still gained by the more limited transfer of state education to its elite clients. After Qing education efforts during the eighteenth century, written records become more abundant in China's southern

[70] Li Shiyao 李侍尧, "Report on Investigative Plans."

frontier regions, though as Herman says, this doesn't mean that indigenous groups internalized Confucian values.

Historians have recounted the enormous expense of trying and failing to Confucianize southwest elites in the hope that the new converts would disseminate imperial culture to the rest of the population. Shared access to Confucian culture created a basis for collaboration by establishing mutually intelligible signals of loyalty between Qing officials and an influential section of southwest society crucial to frontier consolidation. Qing officials sought to use this connection to steer local leaders toward forms of local relations favoring the imperial state, even if these local relations occurred outside the language and ideology of imperial rulership. Still, the state's shallower reach in Yungui and its inattention to non-urban affairs exacerbated the copper transport's inefficiencies. Primary sources from local headmen, the Qing clients, are scarce where they exist at all, but other research allows a few conjectures. Qing favoritism could cloak efforts to circumvent the narrow funnel of official trade for greater, untaxed profit.

One justification for acculturation that the Qing state eventually abandoned was not so much to spread imperial ideology among the broad populace, but to enhance imperial cultural influence among pivotal local actors along transportation routes that stretched from urban imperial power centers deep into rural areas beyond imperial reach. Li's reports illustrate the narrowing focus of a provincial government in strategic retreat and consolidation from an onerous and perhaps futile civilizing project in the southwest interior. What historian Jodi Weinstein describes as a "hegemonic project with incomplete results" in neighboring and co-governed Guizhou transformed into a more limited and practical drive to secure regional commerce and tax revenue, abandoning acculturation efforts that were ultimately unnecessary to the political cohesion of the

region.[71] Weinstein concludes that, for all of its administrative and military prowess, the Qing state never fully dominated local livelihoods in Yungui by, conversely, imposing imperial order on the region. By the time of Li's service, provincial government had contracted its functions to securing and managing only urban marketplaces linking the region to extra-provincial trade routes, relatively isolated from non-urban matters. Li's government in Yungui was commercially extractive without the legitimating ideological import present in Liangguang, as evident in the ease with which the Qing delegated authority to local clients nominally grandfathered into the Qing governing structure.

Li's struggle to discipline copper transport was closely bound to Qing military presence that underwrote by force the clientage relationship. They recall other imperial efforts to bend local economics to the imperial will, with little success. Weinstein applies livelihood analysis to Qianlong-era Guizhou. She asks how the Zhongjia (Buyi) people preserved their livelihoods in the encounter with an expansionist, centralizing Qing state that sought to impose its imperial order on the region. She proposes that the Zhongjia selectively followed state laws on practical grounds. Sometimes it made sense to follow them because it kept authorities at bay, while other times subverting the laws allowed for greater profit and social mobility (including opium production). Weinstein's account culminated in the Nanlong Rebellion, in which local armies reconquered nearly 2/3 of Guizhou before the Qing suppressed them. Historian David Bello's research on southwestern opium production supports Weinstein's conclusions. A shallow Qing reach on the southwestern frontiers made it difficult for imperial officials to eradicate local livelihoods that conflicted with state designs. The Qing measured assimilation across a range of cultural adoptions,

[71] Weinstein, Jodi L. *Empire and Identity in Guizhou Local Resistance to Qing Expansion*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014,) Introduction.

including language and dress. Still, even complete adoption of Han customs didn't enable Zhongjia to overcome their peripheral status to become participants in empire.[72] Therefore there was less effort to assimilate and more tendency toward autonomy. Peoples adopt those strategies of accommodation or resistance that best promote their livelihoods. The rural/urban, internal/external distinctions were not as straightforward as Li's preoccupation with extra-regional copper shipments suggests. Local clients' dual roles frequently conflicted and when they did, local leaders were often, perhaps as a rule, willing to sacrifice professed loyalty to the remote imperial government in favor of sustaining local power against local rivals.

If Yungui was not an indispensable part of the empire, and if the state presumably could have obtained copper through trade alone, why did it bother occupying the southwest? The reconquest and incorporation of Liangguang was an imperial necessity, but in Yungui, where Han migrants led, the state followed. Yang argues that Qing armies initially occupied Yungui to stabilize a border made volatile by a rapid influx of Han Chinese mining groups seeking profit in the region, so even the Qing military presence was closely tied to resource extraction, particularly of copper.[73] The *tusi* were better suited by historical experience to military demands than to the demands of a commercial bureaucracy—that was the *hang*'s strength in Guangzhou—so they functioned better within the system of formal oversight that came with entitlement, by which the Qing exercised greater control in selecting and elevating its frontier clients.

The military aspects of clientage bear on the *hang* and *tusi*'s different evolution toward favored status. While clientage combined commercial and security functions, the *hang* had

[72] Laura Hostetler has researched the emergence of ethnography and cartography as tools of imperial subjection, but ones that served to further distance southwest indigenes from imperial identity. Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.)
[73] Yang 杨, "Diantong, Hantong 滇铜, 汉铜.".

historically been more commercial and the *tusi* more militaristic before their alliances with the Qing. Yingcong Dai argues for a "strategic turn" in southwest governance that included not only Sichuan but its eastern neighbor, Yungui, that prompted Qing conquest as the imperial state created a defensive buffer from incursions from the central Asian steppe through Tibet and Xinjiang, before the Zunghar conquest eliminated the last viable, nomadic rival the Qing faced from the steppe.[74] It relates both to Qing officials' external understanding of the south-west's role within the empire and the internal history of the *tusi*'s evolution toward clientage. The Qing state primarily valued the southwest as a defensive buffer against military incursions from the steppe and southeast Asia, and as a source of valuable metals such as copper and iron, as well as salt. Its full integration into the empire was not an important imperial objective as long as the Qing state could secure the frontier and its access to mining by co-opting the Tusi. The *tusi*'s progress toward clientage was an inversion of the *hang*'s. The *tusi* had been primarily military leaders who gradually acquired commercial roles, while the *hang* were initially merchants who gradually acquired security responsibilities. The *tusi* therefore bore broad and deeply rooted military responsibilities.

China dealt with "multiple sovereignties" on its borderlands.[75] The *tusi* and *beg* systems were unwilling to enforce opium laws because the crop was so ingrained in the local economy. We can see *gaitu guiliu*—the formal entitlement of local leaders—as an attempt to streamline multiple sovereignties, easing frontier rule. Parallel frontier administrations made opium suppression difficult. The normal Junxian and complementary Baojia systems did not work as well there, so the state bureaucracy had limited means to enforce opium laws. *Gaitu Guiliu* was a means

[74] Dai Yingcong. *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing*. China Program Book. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009.)
[75] David Anthony Bello. *Opium and the Limits of Empire : Drug Prohibition in the Chinese Interior, 1729-1850.* (Harvard East Asian Monographs ; 241. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005.)

to formalize a sometimes chaotic local political scene, allowing the Qing a greater hand in selecting its collaborators, rewarding them with imperial title and market access, which clarified who the empire's local allies were.

If steppe peoples actively adopted state structures to preserve their autonomy against powerful sedentary states, and highland Southeast Asians retreated into hill country to escape the state, then the kingdoms of southwest China either ceded some autonomy to preserve limited sovereignty or faced annihilation at the hands of imperial armies. The late Ming and early Qing saw the progressive formalization of state-society relations in the southwest. Yi relations with imperial China changed from those based on personal connections and control of people under the Yuan, to those based on control of land under the Ming and Qing. The *tusi*, or liaison between the Yi tribe and the Chinese state, went from being an office based on personal relations with the ruler to one installed in the bureaucracy and circumscribed by law. Herman brings a historian's institutional approach to the study of southwest frontier society in Late Imperial China while remaining in conversation with the substantial anthropological research on the topic. Doing so allows him to reconsider how we read Late Imperial official documents, more sharply delimiting the official perspective with reference to the outlook of non-Han frontier peoples.

Li used clientage to grant internal autonomy to local leaders while controlling extra-provincial linkages extending from urban marketplaces. The increasing partnership between native chieftains and the Qing state strengthened local clients' hand in southwest society. Paradoxically, the formalization of state-society relations in the southwest, and the entitlement of local clients, gave favored leaders freer rein locally than they had possessed under the native chieftain system because their reliance on Qing legitimation made them more reliable subjects from the outset, and delegated official powers to them, powers that under the native chieftain system belonged to the

central government. Thus while Giersch and Liang document the spread of formal entitlement throughout the mid-eighteenth century, Herman argues that this trend resulted from a diffusion of title and state power among new local subjects who previous imperial rulers had considered beyond the pale of civilization.[76] The spread of Qing power into the southwest may be illusory, since many of the new official titles belonged to men with perhaps only opportunistic loyalty to the Qing, lacking deep historical investment in relations with the imperial state that surrounded them.

As in Liangguang, the clientage strategy granted commercial privilege to local headmen in exchange for loyalty to the Qing state, recruiting local collaborators, securing tax revenue, and delegating significant security responsibilities to these men, but different imperial objectives cohered to different security environments. Illicit markets were more prevalent in Yungui, with illegal mining, than they were on the southeast coast during the late nineteenth century.[77] The Qing state cultivated deeper rural links and a readiness to intervene in local affairs. From the imperial perspective, the clientage framework sufficiently secured border security in a region undergoing rapid demographic flux.

Li's clientage in the southwest was an attempt to concentrate wealth in trusted but autonomous hands locally while controlling the extra-provincial flow of trade. Because the tusi lacked extensive integration or even interaction with the imperial state, however, Li's arrangements were always more tentative than they were in Liangguang. Yungui clients lacked the

[76] Herman, *Qing Southwest,* 48.
[77] Excluding the 1790s, when the southeast experienced a surge in banditry and piracy during an economic downturn due partly to the sudden withdrawal of European trade as the Napoleonic Wars beset continental Europe.

integration with the Qing state that the *hang* merchants possessed. The spatial reorganization of political power, granting native autonomy in the hinterlands and fortifying imperial control of the cities, with clientage linking these political spheres, allowed the state to control extra-provincial commercial connections and use them to co-opt its local elite clients, who in principle would act according to imperial will. Market access was a tool of imperial client-seeking and local dominion. The transition from tusi to gaitu guiliu marked a spatial reorganization of local power that ceded rural autonomy to Qing clients while concentrating and fortifying imperial power in the cities, where officials could most easily regulate the extra-provincial flow of local commodities, such as the transport of copper to Beijing. In short, the Qing used clientage and respatialization to establish a system under which the internal and domestic remained under local control, but extra-provincial links fell to provincial officials appointed from the center. The Qing contained local power at the borders.

The urbanization of imperial officialdom in the southwest strengthened imperial control of Yungui's extra-provincial links and sources of tax revenue, served as a lever of influence over local clients, and minimized local political and logistical costs of imperial occupation. However, it ill-equipped the state to regulate the long distance copper routes that extended from rural areas, traversed frontier cities such as Luzhou, and eventually passed beyond provincial borders to link frontiers to imperial markets connecting to Beijing. Clientage practices of accommodating local autonomy while securing extra-provincial links were flexible enough to support varying degrees of Qing state intervention in local society. Qing officials such as Li in effect employed similar clientage strategies to meet divergent objectives on each frontier, but in practice this was largely a matter of degree. Qing rule in Yungui ceded far more formal political autonomy to its clients than it did to its *hang* clients in Guangzhou, but crucial elements of the clientage relationship remained

in place, differing more in degree and nomenclature than in kind. This was because the *hang* were simply more accustomed to pursuing their commercial objectives within the framework of imperial politics due to their longer history imperial integration, so they did not require such formal guarantees of autonomy or displays of political loyalty. Nonetheless, they achieved an informal autonomy comparable to the formal autonomy of southwest clients. Central to the state-*tusi* bond were the Tusi's special access to mining, especially of copper—the state used copper to mint coin for local and transregional trade, respectively. [78] During Li's term as Yungui governor-general, Luzhou was a crucial nexus of clientage, combining imperial and local power and serving as a portal of extra-provincial trade, especially copper transport to Beijing for the minting of imperial currency. It was where imperial and local power objectives met. The geography of political power in Yungui followed trade. The city of Luzhou, for example, experienced a political transformation due to its strategic position on the copper transport route to Beijing. The division of hegemony between city and countryside granted the tusi cultural and political autonomy and disposed them to imperial collaboration but also provided them and other locals ample opportunity to seek profit outside of official relations.

[78] Guan Xiying 关溪莹, "Lun Qingdai Qianliang Zhidu Dui Guangzhou Shiju Manzu de Yingxiang 论清代钱粮制度对广州史居满族的影响," in Huanan Nongye Daxue Xuebao 华南农业大学学报, No.3, Vol.5, 2006, 102.

CHAPTER THREE

Sea, Tropics, and Steppe: A Frontier System?

The New Qing History asks a sweeping central question: How did the Manchu Qing consolidate power on the steppe more effectively and for longer than any preceding imperial Chinese dynasty? An established explanation, evident in Peter Perdue's magisterial *China Marches West*, is that Qing rulership mobilized its deep cultural links with steppe polities to divide and conquer within the complex milieu of steppe politics, drawing on shared, non-Confucian political traditions. "The Qianlong Emperor could boast that he had achieved something that none of his predecessors had done: ending the two-millennia-long threat from the Central Eurasian Steppe," observes Perdue.[79] *From Sea to Tropics* advances a complementary explanation: Clientage in the southwest and southeast granted collaborators local autonomy by merging commercial privilege and security obligations in their hands while tightening imperial control of extra-provincial commerce, relieving logistical burdens on the imperial state and freeing human and material resources for more urgent use elsewhere along imperial frontiers. Clientage therefore allowed Qing officials to influence the circulation of commercial wealth within the empire, directing it toward imperial expansion or concentrating it in at least nominally loyal hands.

Clientage required the incentive of exclusive access to global markets, arranged to merchant clients' commercial advantage. The Qing fashioned asymmetric frontier marketplaces to maximize profit as an inducement to loyalty, offering both vast profits and the social prestige of exclusivity: The Canton Trade, for example, was open to all comers of European origin but restricted direct Chinese merchant participation to the *hang*, concentrating the vast fortunes of

[79] Perdue, *China Marches West*, 551.

global trade in a few hands toward expansionist ends. Openness to foreign trade generated vast wealth. Limited access to this wealth among Chinese merchants allowed the state to cultivate local frontier clients willing to accept local political responsibilities in the government's stead. Clientage strove to accomplish three crucial ends: simplifying tax collection; granting Qing officials inroads to local society; and co-opting the empire's centers of commercial wealth. Direct interactions between Chinese and foreign actors do not alone explain Qing foreign policies such as the "one country, one frontier" system.[80] Domestic politics, too, shaped life in the Qing's foreign entrepôts, often beyond the awareness of contemporary foreign actors in China. Imperial efforts to control commercial links between frontiers while preserving large measures of internal autonomy forged a frontier superstructure that organized commerce and the transfer of both personnel and equipment between urban frontier nodes. The state sought to sustain frontier rule by concentrating commercial wealth in loyal corners of the empire and restricting its flow elsewhere. The circulation of high officials exclusively between these frontier zones both mirrored and maintained the structure. The system's success in prosperity, however, obscured its potential pitfalls in recession. The system left the Qing little recourse against commercial fragmentation when the structure weakened, leaving local power bases more or less in tact as erstwhile clients and other local merchants who had previously profited by restricted market access now strove to circumvent officially sanctioned trade.

Although the New Qing History has rightly stressed the cultural plurality of Qing rulership, appealing to different ethnic constituencies in different, locally defined ways, it's fair to ask if there were other bases of frontier cohesion that lent themselves to conscious, transfrontier strategizing. Perdue argues: "Current scholarship has blocked our ability to examine China's

[80] Mosca, "The Qing State and its Awareness," 111.

frontiers in relation to one another. Discussions of Qing relations with foreign peoples generally consider each relationship in isolation, so that, for example, the Canton trade system on the south coast is viewed as completely separate from the Russian trade in the north."[81] Most frontier scholarship focuses on imperial relations with specific foreign powers, important research that shifts focus away from how the imperial court integrated its distant frontiers to achieve similar domestic goals. Were there cross-frontier patterns to how Qing officials managed foreign relations toward internal governance? How did similar domestic conflicts unite the frontiers and lend themselves to concerted solutions? This thesis examines how the Qing wielded its control over globalized marketplaces within its borders toward the consolidation of its internal frontier regions. The marketplaces yielded broadly similar tools of consolidation to imperial officials. This historiographic chapter aims to synthesize the relatively sparse scholarship about cross-frontier exchange to help us consider the existence of a purposeful frontier system in depth.

Scholars might object that the *hang* and *tusi* are incomparable, residing on vastly different frontiers, but this thesis emphasizes commonality amidst such difference. In his typology of Qing imperialism, Nicola di Cosmo equates imperial expansion in the west and southwest to forms of European overseas colonization, with its flexible institutions and often formal enlistment of subject elites in the cause of imperial expansion. The Qing maritime southeast, in di Cosmo's estimation, was akin to the nineteenth-century American west, where the state gradually replicated political structures of the imperial center.[82] The *hang* and the *tusi* were more similar in practice, however, than their formal roles were. The *tusi* enjoyed greater formal political autonomy than the *hang* did in Liangguang, but like the *hang*, much of their local stature arose from a privileged stake in the

[81] Perdue, *China Marches West*, 558.
[82] Nicola di Cosmo, "Qing Colonial Administration in Inner Asia," *The International History Review*, Vol. 20, No.2 (June, 1998), pp. 287-309.

region's most profitable markets, in their case copper, silver, and salt mining. Although the *hang* did not hold political title, their unique access to global trade granted them outsized influence on provincial politics, much of which revolved around stabilizing global trade and garnering the tax revenue that, among other things, underwrote Qing expansion in the interior. E.W. Cheong notes that, by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, *hang* merchants had even acquired daily administrative responsibilities that once fell to provincial government, such as inventory accounting, gradually increasing their sphere of authority as that of local government receded.[83]

Peter Perdue suggests that the Qing drew upon Northwest colonization to consolidate the Canton System: "…the [steppe] frontier served as an experimental zone for adapting precedents to local circumstances."[84] Both the Canton and Kiakhta Systems used exclusive commercial licenses to favor particular merchants, in effect purchasing their loyalty and access to local society, helping to integrate frontier areas into the empire. While Russia and China settled the Kiakhta treaty by 1727, it was not until thirty years later in 1757 that the Qing court codified the Canton System into law, around the conclusion of its inner Asian expansion. Although the Canton System was basically in place by the early 1700s, Qing officials recognized that a similar regime of accommodation to what existed on the steppe could also work on the southeast coast.

The existence of a mutually reinforcing frontier system did not require perfect transferability of specific governing practices between frontier venues, but more generally the experience of local power sharing, revolving primarily around commerce and local market security. The commercial and security functions were frequently linked in the suppression of illicit trade, which undercut clientage relations but which clients sometimes engaged in, especially under

[83] E.W. Cheong, *The Hong Merchants of Canton,* Introduction.
[84] Peter Perdue, *China Marches West*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 551-5.

economic distress. Several studies argue that specific cross-frontier transfers failed due to frontier incomparability. As Perdue states, "What worked in the north didn't work in the south."[85] But the broadest value of circulating officials such as Li Shiyao between frontiers was not to transplant specific practices, although that sometimes occurred, but in the improvisational experience that frontier officials garnered and brought to new assignments. The frequently incomparable conditions between frontiers is why local cultural adaptation is paramount to the model of frontier governance that this thesis advances. The exchange of officials experienced in adapting clientage to local social traditions outweighed the importance of any single transfer of policy. Cultural flexibility is what made the clientage system work. Culture was a key factor in clientage precisely because of the absence of effective cultural suasion toward Confucianized imperial culture. Qing frontier governance, and Li specifically, employed a negative cultural policy of accommodation and non-interference. Clientage required both commercial privilege and cultural recognition to work properly. The promise of cultural accommodation removed significant barriers to imperial collaboration.

Some scholars have observed individual transfers of officials and governing practices between frontiers without, however, linking them to a general culture of frontier governance that made such exchanges conceivable. However successful these transfers were, they demonstrate that the board of appointments as well as the officials it commanded often contemplated regional frontier policy in terms of and in relations to other frontiers, that is, holistically. Cross-frontier exchange was common and similar enough to have constituted a frontier system. Most important among them was the regular transfer of top provincial officials exclusively between frontiers

[85] Ibid.

because it gave rise to shared norms of imperial governance and to the development of clientage practices:

> Many governors who served in the northwest also served on China's south coast. Continuity of personnel, common policies, and common languages unified frontier policies. The regulated caravan trade with the Zunghars of the early eighteenth century explicitly invoked the Russian precedents, and the south coastal trade with the British of the late eighteenth century built on this experience.[86]

Absent from Perdue's sharp analysis is consideration of the Qing's southwest frontier, necessary for integrated generalizations about Qing frontier governance. Frontiers were mutually reinforcing. How did China's participation in three distant frontier markets—Canton, Luzhou, and Kiakhta—shape the process of frontier expansion during the Qianlong reign? On each of its frontiers, Qing officials granted favored elites internal autonomy while attempting to control extraprovincial links, especially commercial ones in an arrangement that allowed officials to influence the flow and concentration of commercial wealth on the frontiers, by definition the empire's most volatile regions. Frontier strategy in the south was inseparable from expansion in the southwest and on the steppe. Together they constituted a frontier system that allowed for significant local variation, but by which frontiers were mutually reinforcing. Clientage sped frontier consolidation. It also provided space, however, for favored frontier leaders to develop local power without state interference. When economic recession devalued the benefits of commercial clientage, clients employed this power to act toward their localized interests outside of clientage and at the expense of imperial objectives.

[86] Perdue, China Marches West, 553.

Some recent studies of individual cross-frontier exchanges likely corroborate the notion that, due to the clientage environment, state efforts to coordinate with local society depended on economic conditions, with failure more likely during economic distress. Daniel McMahon states that, in the case of official Yan Ruyi, maritime geography rendered "highland precedent" of bandit suppression inapplicable to the southeast coast's piracy problem.[87] McMahon argues that this shows the dangers of cross-frontier exchange, but Yan's efforts occurred during a period of sharp economic downturn that led to a surge in illicit markets, due to the absence of European merchants. Historian James Fichter notes an ebb in Sino-European trade resulting from the Napoleonic Wars then embroiling the European continent.[88] Robert Antony observes in contrast that piracy and banditry were quite subdued from the late 1750s, the time of Li's service, until approximately 1790 because the *hang* had chosen to partner with the Qing state in exerting control over the Canton global marketplace. Cross-frontier political exchange wasn't in itself doomed to failure, flexible enough as it was to account for local variation, but economic malaise disrupted clientage relations because it devalued the commercial incentives on which clientage depended. Economic vigor made the system work well. Under any condition, the local merchants and local communities gravitated toward the most lucrative alternatives, or at least the ones that best insured local livelihoods. The most important skill a frontier official could possess was an understanding of the general environment in which he operated and how best to negotiate and coordinate with local communities under rapidly shifting conditions in the absence of central oversight—improvisation.

Mosca argues that unexpected events on the frontier demanded swift, localized improvisation on the part of provincial officials as the highest on-site authority, especially

[87] Daniel McMahon, "Qing Highland Precedent: Yan Ruyi and the Defense of the Guangdong Coast, 1804-5," in *Asia Major*, Third Series, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2010), 1-32.
[88] Fichter, *So Great a Profit: How the East-Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), Introduction.

considering Beijing's long distance from frontier areas.[89] The Qing Board of Appointments sought frontier officials of demonstrated loyalty who it could cultivate to be as prepared for contingency as possible. The great advantage of the rotation system was that advanced officials grew accustomed to fast, independent decision making in unusual situations. Clientage practices were a central part of the improvisational repertoire. As R. Kent Guy argues, the Board of Appointments often assigned its most trusted and loyal officials to frontier posts because the court believed they would most reliably understand and uphold the imperial will as they improvised frontier policy: "Canton, where Li [Shiyao] served, was sufficiently far from Beijing that officials there were accustomed to acting independently…"[90] The effect of the palace memorial system was to maintain a near constant circulation of official missives between the court and remote provinces, producing shared norms of governance through systematic communications.

In his article "The Qing State and its Awareness of Eurasian Interconnections," Mosca evaluates Qing knowledge of the global geopolitical and economic environment in which foreign empires were primary entities, but Qing officials need not have been fully aware of global interconnections in order to shape them for domestic ends through client building at the empire's points of interface with foreign actors. Mosca observes that Qing officials coordinated trade policies between its frontiers, understanding that Russian empire could potentially tap trade routes springing from Canton, besides the Kiakhta trade. Due to a paucity of research on interfrontier connections, past scholars have understated the extent to which Qing officialdom perceived its empire to be surrounded by and enmeshed in global imperial systems. The Qing, however, used its knowledge of global trade and its control over interempire marketplaces to integrate frontiers

[89] Matthew Mosca, "The Qing State and its Awareness," 104.
[90] R. Kent, Guy, "Qing Imperial Justice? The Case of Li Shiyao," in *Law and Empire: Ideas, Practices, Actors* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 200.

into the realm through systematic clientage practices of local merchants. Qing foreign relations was closely tied to domestic frontier objectives of conquest and rulership through the asymmetric structure of its key marketplaces, funneling bustling foreign trade to a few favored merchants.

Mosca contends that "Officials on one frontier were not required to have detailed knowledge of conditions on other frontiers, nor was this normally facilitated," but that's true only in relation to the Qing's foreign relations, not to its mechanisms of governing a local society of Qing subjects.[91] From the standpoint of domestic policy and frontier integration, the systematic rotation of high officials exclusively between frontier zones all but guaranteed that governors-general, including Li, built a holistic understanding of frontier social conditions throughout their periods of service. The Board of Appointments frequently transferred officials between frontiers to relieve a central contradiction of the rule of avoidance: a prohibition on top provincial officials from serving in their home province or in the same province for too long a term clashed with the need for officials with regionally specific expertise. Without minimizing the vast differences between frontiers, I argue that the ability to negotiate—and occasionally improvise—clientage relations was a common and crucial skill on each frontier, one requiring both general experience and local knowledge of commercial, social, and cultural traditions. The cross-frontier circulation of provincial officials was the adhesive that held together the frontier system. That the Qianlong Board of Appointments regularly circulated top provincial officials exclusively between the empire's three major frontiers indicates that officials were conscious of this deep frontier interconnection. Transnational markets in each venue were crucial levers of local state-society

[91] Mosca, "The Qing State and its Awareness," 109.

relations, and therefore of Qing frontier expansion and consolidation. Qing access to global markets enabled the consolidation of its frontiers.

Qing frontier rule depended on asymmetric marketplaces, relatively open to all members of certain nationalities but closely regulated among Chinese merchants, employing a licensing system to limit their numbers. The Qing used its foreign relations as a lever in domestic governance. Mosca observes:

> If one country could be limited to only one point of access to the Qing frontier, this would greatly magnify Beijing's ability to comprehensively supervise and control the situation. Just as important, this approach streamlined the bureaucratic apparatus and communication channels that would be necessary to gather intelligence and devise and execute policies.[92]

Mosca emphasizes the Qing's foreign links, but the same principle applied to the domestic scene, and its implication were at least as important for internal rulership. The concentration of foreign trade at a single location impacted Chinese merchants and frontier political organization just as profoundly as it did the foreign merchants, if not more so, usually in ways beyond the cognizance of those foreign merchants. The concentration of China's global merchants in a single city made them easier to monitor, control, lure into collaboration, and tax than if any merchant was free to trade directly with foreigners. As James Scott avers, cities are especially prone to imperial domination because of their rational design and standardized nomenclature and systems of measurement that make them legible to outside political

Domestic politics and foreign relations through frontier zones were "Breaking connections and segmenting the frontiers, and forging connections and integrating the frontiers, were simply

[92] Ibid., 112.

two competing ways of redesigning global trade in a pattern that served imperial interests."[93] The cross-frontier rotation of officials is an example of the latter. Mosca argues that the Qing adopted "one country, one port" to gain diplomatic leverage and obviate the effect of integrated world systems on Qing sovereignty, but they also did it for domestic reasons. Therein lies the chief difference in emphasis between Mosca's publications and this thesis: Mosca emphasizes the Qing's knowledge of its own foreign links, while *From Sea to Tropics* focuses on how the Qing managed access to these links for domestic control over the privileged groups of merchant intermediaries who were the first line of contact for foreign merchants who wished to trade with China. "One country, one port" enabled Qing officials to tangibly dispense imperial favor in the form of commercial privilege in lively and lucrative frontier marketplaces. In this sense, the Qing progressively discovered how to mobilize its global connections in service to internal political control, of which foreign merchants such as James Flint may have possessed but scant awareness when they chafed at restrictions limiting them to a single port.

Perdue, commenting on the legacy of the Qianlong expansion, remarks that modern day nationalist historians in China and Taiwan "build on what they reject," normalizing China's present boundaries in an ineluctable progress toward nationhood.[94] The Qianlong expansion set the stage for basic territorial claims of modern Chinese nationhood, which superseded the Qing imperial system that reached apotheosis during the expansion. The frontier system rooted in clientage set the stage for nationhood in another way, too: It risked a speedy devolution toward provincialism when and if clientage relationships began to unravel under economic strain or military weakness, empowering provincial elites against their erstwhile imperial patrons. It

[93] Mosca, "The Qing State and its Awareness," 113.
[94] Peter Perdue, *China Marches West*, Introduction.

hastened the collapse of the imperial state, opening the way for nation builders to fill the breach. Philip Kuhn located the origins of regional separatism in the late eighteenth century, and other historians have elaborated on ideas he first expounded in his seminal monograph *Rebellion and its Enemies in Late Imperial China*.[95] *From Sea to Tropics* finds similar trends during Li's career as a client-building governor-general, but they were less evident than they later became because the imperial government was still vigorous enough to intervene in local affairs and defend its interprovincial links. The success of the clientage system, however, tracked closely with economic conditions in the empire because clientage appealed largely to economic self-interest. Economic slump weakened that appeal, and the consequences risked unraveling the security arrangement, too. By the late eighteenth century, however, the fiscal crises that plagued the Qing empire during the succeeding century, robbing the Qing government and its frontier officials of their ability to coordinate frontier policy, had not yet taken full form.

The very success of clientage practices hid the incipient threats that they posed to imperial frontier governance and social stability. The military division of labor between the Qing state and local clients had mixed results for the occupation of frontier lands, especially in the southwest. It worked well in times of economic stability but left the Qing with limited recourse against its erstwhile clients when poor economic conditions unraveled clientage relations. The appearance of military might obscured the decline of the Qing's frontier coercive power. Stressing the "importance of armies," distinct from commerce and culture, Peter Perdue argues: "…, but neither could work without effective displays of coercive power."[96] Perdue's observation holds true in times of general peace, too: the mere presence of a frontier army tacitly impressed the empire's

[95] Kuhn, *Rebellion and its Enemies in Late Imperial China*.
[96]Perdue, *China Marches West*, 547.

coercive potential on local populations even without activating it in conflict. The delegation of security functions to local clients reinforced Qing military supremacy, or its appearance, both practically and symbolically. Practically, it preserved frontier military resources through selective use. Symbolically, it intimidated local populations, underscoring the alliance between local clients and the Qing state, and even checking separatist tendencies among clients themselves with the threat of force. As Perdue suggests, military coercion can be either actively or potentially violent at different times. Active state violence on Qing frontiers was usually intermittent during the late eighteenth century, but the potential for it was constant. "The iron fist always was held in reserve behind the smooth ritual mask."[97]

However, the frugal use of Qing armies risked diminishing imperial military might through disuse and complacency. The Qing had so effectively quelled its frontier rivals in the west, eliminating large military rivals, by the 1770s and 80s that Yungui and Sichuan became obsolete as defensive buffers against steppe incursion through present-day Tibet and Xinjiang. The Qing's strategic tendency to allow client armies to pacify local disturbances held two disadvantages: It denied banner armies the combat experience that their client armies were gaining, and it allowed clients to consolidate their local power along with their growing military prowess. A future avenue of research could be to ask whether the outsourcing and dispersal of frontier coercive power, and the withering of Qing imperial might, prolonged frontier uprisings such as the White Lotus Rebellion, among other factors.

The superstructure of Qing frontier rule, organized around urban nodes such as Guangzhou and Luzhou, was always more volatile than the local power bases that flourished under the

[97] Ibid., 547.

clientage arrangement with the government's direct support. When that superstructure began to weaken, local clients stood to passively benefit, since their local power did not directly depend on it. "The end of military challenges on the frontier let much dynamism ebb out of the bureaucracy."[98] Qing administration declined through disuse while that of its small-scale clients remained active locally. Local clientage hastened expansion, and expansion ultimately empowered local clients especially vis-à-vis local power rivals. There is a good case to be made that the long-term beneficiaries of clientage arrangements, at least through the nineteenth century, were the clients themselves, more so than the Qing state. In terms of internal autonomy and external control, extra-provincial links were more volatile than internal cohesion was under local leaders. Frontier expansion contained the seeds of imperial decline and fragmentation that reached full expression in the late nineteenth century.

Sociopolitical order on each of the Qing's major frontiers coalesced around lucrative trade regimes that Qing officials such as Li Shiyao discovered they could wield for political control. In exchange for the abundant wealth that this relationship conferred, Qing officials asked not just for political loyalty but for security commitments, differing on each frontier according to local circumstances but following a distinct pattern of frontier rule that amounts to a coherent strategy, rooted in commerce and the division of security functions and broadly tolerant of local political and cultural traditions, if the clientage relationship met the state's needs. When it did not, the state possessed means to intervene in local affairs to re-establish imperial order, such as *gaitu guiliu,* and Li's establishment of the *gonghang* in Guangzhou.

[98] Ibid., 548.

The way officials moderated relations with local society on each frontier directly influenced the course of conquest and governance on other frontiers. "One powerful autonomous official from the imperial household, the Hoppo [hubu], supervised the Canton trade, while several governors, governors-general, and the Lifanyuan watched over the northwest. These were on the whole, however, differences of scale, not structure."[99] The effective rule of one frontier saved resources for rule on the others. One signal of the system's efficacy was the length of time the Qing maintained its rule on each frontier simultaneously, despite significant obstacles including frequent smuggling, which subverted the basis of clientage, and banditry and piracy, which infringed on the profits of trade.

The existence of common trade regimes on each frontier and the fusion of commerce and security primed frontier government for the frequent rotation of officials, of whom Li was one, between frontier posts where they negotiated state relations that ceded internal autonomy and left the state to control external connections. These common practices and exchanges generated, over time, a frontier political culture that was commercially minded and culturally eclectic, and which facilitated the rotation of frontier officials between each region, relieving the imperial state of logistical burdens and freeing it to consolidate the sweeping territorial gains it accomplished throughout the mid-eighteenth century, yet it created similar problems on each frontier. Most persistent of these was the incentive for non-clients and clients alike to work outside of the clientage relationship, circumventing established price structures as well as taxation, in search of greater profit at the expense of the common but exclusive system. Piracy and smuggling in Guangzhou and illegal copper mining and transport in Yungui, for example, weakened the

[99] Ibid., 553.

clientage relationship whose underlying justification was more political than commercial: to secure the cohesion of the realm by sowing seeds of loyalty among potentially restive frontier elites.

The frontier system, with commercial clientage at its core, brought cohesion to an ethnically and culturally diverse empire, giving subject elites a vested stake both in the security of the realm and in its wealth as they partnered with the Qing state. Herman notes that commercial preference was an elemental part of the *tusi* system. The prospect of profit was enough to surmount cultural differences on the frontier between ruler and subject, but it would oversimplify to claim that it suppressed these differences. Negotiation channeled them into new, localized agreements. Commercial incentive removed obstacles to local cultural accommodation and adaptation, forging the basis for shared interests between the Qing state and local frontier communities.

From Sea to Tropics opened by prodding some limits of Qing pluralistic governance, which the New Qing History has advanced as a complex, realistic paradigm of the dynasty's dramatic eighteenth-century expansion, one of its most important legacies for Chinese and world history. How have the preceding chapters further defined limits of Qing frontier governance? What do these limits tell us about the nature of Qing imperialism? Although the imperial state was a pluralistic one, it still sought to create a mutually reinforcing frontier system and therefore laid related demands on each frontier venue, demands that were often difficult to reconcile both with local sociopolitical traditions and the desire for personal enrichment on all sides of negotiated regimes. The empire's frontiers were mutually sustaining and mutually demanding. The needs of one frontier required strengthening of rulership on another frontier.

The overarching objective of the frontier clientage strategy, as Li's service illustrates, was to influence the flow of commercial capital within imperial borders, and as far as possible direct wealth toward projects of imperial expansion through taxation, or to concentrate it in the nominally loyal hands of private clients through an exchange of commercial privilege for political submission and security obligations. The Qing adopted a general frontier strategy of granting local autonomy while controlling extra-provincial connections and expecting clients to perform local security functions in lieu of the state, to varying effect on each frontier depending on imperial officials' ability to intervene in local affairs. We see similar types of negotiation in the southwest, southeast, and northwest, using asymmetric marketplaces to funnel lucrative trade to local merchant collaborators, securing tax revenue and enhancing local clients' already formidable social prestige. The clientage system was vulnerable to factionalism, however, and to what Qing officials considered corruption during economic malaise and where the Qing employed only a shallow reach, chiefly in the southwest. Still, the clientage strategy generally held the empire's frontiers together through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Its subtle flaws, easily escaping official notice, were not glaring enough to overwhelm the clear advantages that officials and clients gained through collaboration, if at the expense of broader segments of frontier local societies.

The line of interpretation that *From Sea to Tropics* advances calls for additional investigation of frontier high officials and the ways that they wrote about contemporary problems in a cross-frontier context, that is, with reference to other frontier zones, as they developed a common frontier political culture. Governors-general who fit this description during the Qianlong reign include, among others, Ma Ertai, Su Chang, and Fu Kangan, all of whom held governor-generalships exclusively on the Qing frontiers, although such an investigation could easily include lower ranking officials, as well. Documents written by and about such appointees are abundant in

the large late imperial archives in Beijing and Taipei. If such studies generally reinforce the idea of a frontier system and political culture centered on commercial clientage, they would raise questions about the political motives for state intervention in local capitalist economies and prompt a reconsideration of the Qing as a commercial and expansionist imperial dynasty.

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