

Early Ch'ing Guilds

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The vigorous guild activity that marked the first two centuries of the Ch'ing had its origins in the flourishing economy of the late Ming. There is little evidence to support the suggestions of some authors that these Ch'ing guilds had a continuous history stretching back to the well-known merchant *hang* and craftsman *tso* associations of the Sung,¹ but careful combing of Yüan and early Ming sources may yet turn up more than the few ambiguous texts now available to testify to the persistence of active guilds throughout this period. Until then, however, the benefit of the doubt must lie with the traditions of the early Ch'ing guilds themselves, which never claimed an origin earlier than the second half of the Ming.

From that time onward, the expansion of domestic and foreign trade gave a powerful impetus to handicraft and industrial production. Luxury products (such as the fine silks and cottons of Soochow, Sung-chiang-fu, and Hangchow; the pottery of Ching-te-chen and Li-ling [Hunan]; the silk thread of Hu-chou-fu) as well as more mundane items (such as the iron pans and hemp products of Kwangtung, the farming implements of the cities and villages of Kiangnan, and the bean oil and straw products of Kiangsu) entered into what was becoming an empirewide trading system. Soaring demand led not only to bigger and more sophisticated enterprises but also to a sharp increase in the number of merchants needed to move the ever greater quantities of commodities to their markets.

At first, this transport was largely in the hands of traveling merchants, or *k'o-shang*, who picked up commodities at their point of production and delivered them to brokers or warehousemen at the markets. While the brokers and warehousemen handled further distribution and sale,

the merchant returned for another shipment. In time, some of these merchants, and often fairly large numbers of them, succeeded in bypassing the middlemen and establishing their own permanent shops in the cities to which they had been making deliveries. For instance, during the Ming, much of the population of Lin-ch'ing in Shantung consisted of merchants from Hui-chou in Anhwei.² These Hui-chou or Hsin-an merchants, together with the Shansi merchants from the north,³ spearheaded the expansion of commerce until few important trading centers were without their merchants from one or the other group.

Business may have been lucrative, but life was often difficult for those first small groups of entrepreneurs who settled in a strange city. Without the intricate web of long-established family and personal ties that trapped the Chinese but at the same time gave them strength and comfort, such merchants were outsiders to a degree difficult for us to imagine. In many cases, even their dialect and customs differed radically from those of the natives. As strangers and outsiders, they often met with discrimination at the hands of the local populace and naturally preferred to associate with others who shared the same hardships.

Out of this desire there gradually emerged in trading centers across the empire associations of alien merchants intended to promote friendship and mutual aid among their members. The spirit behind them appears succinctly in the 1721 regulations of the Peking silver shop owners, natives of the Shao-hsing-Ningpo region in Chekiang. They called their association the Cheng-i Tz'u, after Cheng-i Hsian-t'an Ts'ai-shen, one of the deities they worshiped. "The good people from our area who carry on business at the capital are scattered like men on a chessboard or stars in the sky. If they are not able to assemble regularly, how will they be able to know each other well and be unified as fellow-countrymen? In this changing, unpredictable life, if one suffers misfortune, how will the others be able to come to his aid? We have therefore established the Cheng-i Tz'u to show gratitude to the gods for their protection and to strengthen our cohesion."⁴ The desire to present a common front against discrimination by natives is vividly emphasized in the preamble to the rules of the Ningpo merchants' association at Wen-chou-fu: "Here at Wenchow we find ourselves isolated; mountains and sea separate us from Ningpo, and when in trade we excite envy on the part of Wenchowese, and suffer insult and injury, we have no adequate redress. Mercantile firms, each caring only for itself, experience disgrace and loss—the natural outcome of isolated and individual resistance. It is this which imposes on us the duty of establishing a Guild."⁵

The sense of alienation prompted by life in a strange city affected not only merchants but also officials. The latter, too, responded by forming fraternal associations. As early as the Ming Yung-lo period (1403-24), clubs whose membership consisted of officials originally from a single region had begun to appear at Peking. Furthermore, Ho Ping-ti has shown that from a very early period these merchant and official associations were by no means mutually exclusive.⁶ In Peking, with its multitude of government offices, officials founded most of the early *hui-kuan* (the most common term at this time for both official and merchant associations as well as for the buildings that housed them) or *Landsmannschaften*.⁷ But many of these Peking *hui-kuan* also included merchants, and some even owed their halls to merchant contributions.⁸ In other cities it was typically merchants and craftsmen—the two roles often met in the same person—from a particular area who organized the *hui-kuan*, though officials often took part.⁹

From the Wan-li period (1573-1619) on, and especially during and after the K'ang-hsi period (1662-1722), *hui-kuan* of both kinds began to proliferate. At the same time, the character of those *hui-kuan* in which merchants made up the major element was slowly changing. Katō Shigeshi pointed out in his study of Peking merchant *hui-kuan* that he often found it impossible to sort out the motivations behind the founding of early *hui-kuan*.¹⁰ Economic and fraternal concerns were mutually reinforcing, and it is difficult to assign a priority to one or the other. Eventually, however, from an emphasis on serving social needs, *hui-kuan* increasingly turned to promoting the one or more economic activities in which their members engaged. The permanent meeting places they established proved very useful as centers of business activity, as hostels for merchants coming in from the road, and as secure storehouses. A 1772 tablet inscribed by the famous scholar Hang Shih-chün to commemorate the establishment of the Ch'ien-chiang Hui-kuan for cloth merchants at Soochow illustrates this trend. It emphasizes that *hui-kuan* founded by merchants in cities and towns throughout the empire differed from those in Peking that existed for officials. The latter were social, whereas merchant *hui-kuan*, like this Ch'ien-chiang one, were primarily places of business. In 1774, the same Ch'ien-chiang merchants found themselves seriously inconvenienced when a new official arrived with his family and took over more than 30 rooms of the *hui-kuan* for what appeared to be an indefinite stay. The merchants protested to the authorities, claiming not only that the residence of their deity had been defiled by the birth of a baby there but also that they had been deprived of the only available place for storing their wares.

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They won a decision prohibiting officials from using the *hui-kuan*, since it was "absolutely essential for the carrying on of the [cloth] trade."¹¹

With the accent on economic activities, interest in restricting membership to people from a single geographical area declined. From the Yung-cheng period (1723-35) on, merchant associations tended to bring under their wings all the people in a single trade, regardless of their origins.¹² Some, like the traveling pig traders of Wu-yang and surrounding districts (Su-chou fu, Kiangsu), went so far as to forbid the use of their hall by fellow countrymen in other trades.¹³ These changing attitudes were reflected even in the names given to those *hui-kuan* that served mainly economic purposes. Less and less did they contain geographical references (the *hui-kuan* of tobacco merchants from Ho-tung, the *hui-kuan* for natives of Lin-fen and Hsiang-ling [Shansi]); instead, they tended to use the name of the trade or craft of their members (the hatmakers *hui-kuan*, the paper trade *hui-kuan*). Furthermore, in some areas at least, the term *kung-so* was increasingly used instead of *hui-kuan* for those associations, with or without special geographical ties, that were primarily economic.¹⁴ Even established *hui-kuan* sometimes changed their names to reflect the growing importance of their economic function. Thus in Soochow, for example, the Tung-yüeh Hui-kuan became the La-chu Kung-so (the candle dealers *kung-so*).¹⁵

Associations
In China as in Europe,¹⁶ the emergence of associations limited to workers lagged behind the development of merchant associations. In the more advanced sectors of the economy, such as cloth production in the Soochow area, workers had to wage a long and bitter battle against the combined power of merchants and officials before winning the right to organize and act together to obtain higher wages and improved working conditions. At the same time, probably in response to increasing economic differentiation, many of those *hui-kuan* and *kung-so* that had included both producers and sellers began to split apart, with merchants and shopowners forming their own associations and, not long afterward, workers doing the same. The end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries saw this process occurring in such widely separated and economically disparate areas as Soochow¹⁷ and Kuei-sui,¹⁸ suggesting that this was an empirewide phenomenon. Meanwhile, other groups—such as brokers, transport workers, cooks, barbers, actors, and even those engaged in such marginal economic activities as gambling—began to form associations to protect their interests.

Thus far I have avoided designating *hui-kuan*, *kung-so*, and similar associations as "guilds" in order to be able to construct a definition of the Chinese guild based on its real functions rather than on the termino-

logical tangles that often screen those functions. The foregoing capsule history has described, first, the emergence in late Ming and early Ch'ing cities of various fraternal associations of nonnative officials, merchants, and craftsmen, and, second, how these were followed by similar associations of natives and nonnatives or, sometimes, associations reserved for natives only. For purposes of the definition, we can range these associations along a continuum. At one end are the *hui-kuan* and, in some cases, *kung-so* that primarily served officials, scholars, and examination candidates who shared a common geographical origin. These associations had little or no economic function. As one moves along this continuum, economic functions become increasingly prominent; the importance of common geographical origin, on the other hand, tends to diminish. I prefer to reserve the term "guild" for those associations where economic goals play a major role¹⁹ and to define a Ch'ing guild as "an urban fraternal association²⁰ whose members usually engaged in a single economic activity; often, but not necessarily, shared a common geographical origin that was not the city in which the guild was located; and joined together under the protection of one or more patron deities to promote their common economic and other interests."²¹

The decision to limit this discussion to the first two centuries of the Ch'ing is not entirely arbitrary.²¹ I believe that, judging from their frequent statements on the subject, guildsmen in the second half of the nineteenth century often found it necessary to reconstitute their guild and update its practices.²² In part, this was owing to the Taiping Rebellion, which brought about the temporary decline or dissolution of many guilds, especially in the economic heartland areas of central China that had been occupied by the rebels. To this was added the disruption brought about by the introduction of foreign techniques and competition.²³ Although these two factors explain in large part the need for changes in the guilds at this time, they tell us nothing of the extent and

* I am not unaware of the objection that may be raised against the use of the term "guild." It *does* tend to carry certain connotations from European history that do not apply in the Chinese context. Against this objection, however, is the weight of a tradition in which all non-Chinese scholars have used the term "guild" (Japanese *girudo*) when referring to these associations. This unanimity makes one hesitate before doing battle for a more neutral term, especially when it would have to be something unwieldy like "urban economic associations." Furthermore, one should not harp excessively on the dissimilarities with European guilds. There is no reason to expect that Chinese guilds were any closer to their European counterparts than Chinese "feudalism" was to French "feudalism," or the Chinese "gentry" to the English "gentry." There were, however, many important similarities. The term "guild" can therefore serve as a reminder that our grasp of either Chinese or European guilds will likely be stronger for having kept in mind both the similarities and the differences between them.

significance of those changes. Earlier studies, drawing heavily on the far more abundant documentation available for the guilds of the late Ch'ing and Republican periods, have generally avoided this question. This paper takes the opposite approach and relies especially on pre-1850 materials. In this way it becomes clear that, contrary to the impression left by later documents, all the major indigenous elements in guild organization had appeared, often in highly developed form, before 1850. The changes that occurred after this time were either elaborations and minor modifications of earlier practices or, more significantly, innovations prompted by Western models.

The remainder of this paper will consider (1) the structure of the guilds, including the recruitment of members, the role of the leadership, meetings, and finances; (2) the economic and mutual-aid activities undertaken by the guilds; and (3) the nature and relative importance of cohesive and coercive forces in the guilds' actual functioning.

Before turning to these questions, however, it may be useful to consider the kinds of materials available on early guilds. By far the most valuable sources are the many surviving stone tablets commemorating the building or repairing of a guildhall, listing the regulations adopted by a guild at a certain point in its history, or recording an official decree on behalf of a guild. Many of these materials were collected before and during the Second World War by indefatigable Japanese scholars such as Katō Shigeshi, Niida Noboru, and Imahori Seiji, and have made their way into their writings, unfortunately usually in bits and pieces. A happy exception is the final section of Professor Imahori's book on the guilds of the Kuei-sui region, which includes 136 pages of primary materials.²⁴ By far the richest collection of materials yet to appear, however, is the volume of Ming and Ch'ing stone inscriptions from Kiangsu that was published in China in 1956.²⁵ It is especially useful for the study of early guilds because the inscriptions record conditions in the most economically advanced region of the empire, where guild organization was correspondingly well developed.

The commemorative tablets usually provide relatively little concrete information except a reaffirmation of the guild's devotion to its patron deity or deities, perhaps a thumbnail summary of the early fortunes of the guild, and a list of those whose contributions made the present construction possible. Many of the earlier guild regulations are hardly more informative, for an obvious reason: early guild rules were never meant to stand as the only, or even the major, precepts governing guild members. In China's cities as in its villages, oral traditions passed on by elders played a dominant role in the daily life and actions of the people.

Guilds therefore did not feel the need of modern organizations to begin their existence with a set of bylaws. Instead, most of them functioned for many years without written regulations and many even built their own guild halls before adopting any formal written rules. During this time, an ever more elaborate oral tradition determined the actions of the guild and its members. This reliance on tradition also helps account for an increased emphasis during the early Ch'ing on age as a qualification for guild office.²⁶ Greater age presumably meant not only greater general wisdom but also, and perhaps even more importantly, greater familiarity with the traditions, customs, and precedents of the guild. When the writing down of detailed regulations became increasingly frequent, age as a qualification for holding office declined in importance.

It is only with difficulty that we can piece together even a tentative and incomplete picture of the traditional practices of the guilds, especially those practices that never made their way into written regulations. The 1721 regulations of the southern silver shops in Peking illustrate the problem: the guild threatens to "drum out" any member who engages in improper business practices but neglects to define these offenses in any but very general terms, such as activities that cause the guild to lose face.²⁷ Of course, many later regulations surely embody long-standing customs, but even here we encounter the same problem pointed out by Sylvia Thrupp for European guild rules: "Statutes may claim to state ancient custom, but there is a fair presumption that the transition from oral to written rules forced a clear and hence a novel definition of many customs that had previously been left ambiguous."²⁸

Until it became a regular practice for all guilds to establish fairly detailed, written rules (not until well into the nineteenth century), it was usually the need to solve one or more fresh problems that prompted a guild's decision to commit its regulations to writing and perhaps to have them inscribed on stone. Often the motivation is given only in very general terms: the observance of earlier customs and rules has become lax, the people of today do not measure up to the standards of our predecessors, we are afraid that the younger generation may not uphold the customs of the guild if they are not written down. Without other evidence, it is often difficult or impossible to assess what these phrases really meant. Sometimes the content of the rules themselves will suggest either (1) that the guild was in or just emerging from a period of relatively low interest on the part of its members, and that this had resulted in widespread neglect of earlier customs; or (2) that all or part of the membership of a flourishing guild had decided on a new tightening-up of guild practices and, in good Chinese fashion, was appealing to earlier

precedents, real or imagined, to support the change. On the other hand, the very frequency with which certain phrases appear has the ring of cliché and suggests that they were sometimes nothing more than custom-hallowed verbal icing.

Sometimes the purpose in formulating a set of rules was merely to make explicit an established but complicated practice. This seems to have been the case in 1793 when the Soochow paper shops defined the complex piecework system, complete with incentive payments, used for calculating workers' salaries.²⁹ Or the guild might be attempting to counter a specific problem that had arisen. In 1828, for example, the Peking Dyestuffs Guild adopted its regulations to deal with controversies that had arisen about weighing practices in the trade.³⁰ The 1829 regulations of the Guild of Building Craftsmen of Kuei-sui allowed nonmembers of the guild to work in the trade provided they came to the guild to get a bamboo permit slip; this practice assured that they would make a payment to the guild. The practice had existed in theory before the posting of the rules, but the guild was afraid that some outside workers had in fact found employment without picking up their permits.³¹

This emphasis on solving particular problems accounts for the fragmentary and varied character of guild regulations before the late nineteenth century. Problems that were obviously of the keenest concern to one guild receive no mention in the regulations of another. In the absence of a statistical study of all the regulations extant from this period, it appears that the major problems to which the guild regulations addressed themselves were the standards for carrying on the trade or craft, the time and manner of worshipping the guild's patron deity or deities, and the means of financing the guild's operations. Treated less often or in more general terms were the obligations of the members to help one another, and the charitable activities of the guild as a whole (e.g., maintaining a cemetery for indigent members); the holding of guild meetings; and the management of the guildhall, if there was one. The activities of guild officers are often spelled out but, in contrast to the regulations of European guilds, their manner of selection is usually passed over in silence. Finally, even regulations that are quite explicit about what was expected of guild members usually provide little information on enforcement procedures.

Guild Structure

The "members" of a guild might be either individuals or shops. In merchant guilds and in guilds of both merchants and craftsmen, each

shop in the trade often held a single membership regardless of how many people it contained. In craft and service guilds, as well as in some commercial guilds, membership was individual. These two systems of membership continued to exist side by side throughout the later history of the guilds. Even in Peking in the 1920's, as Burgess pointed out, craft guilds tended to include both managers and workmen whereas shop managers alone tended to represent their entire shop in the commercial guilds.³²

Guilds usually sought to draw their membership from the people engaged in a single economic activity, or what the Chinese texts frequently refer to as *t'ung-yeh*. To attempt a precise definition of this term would be both frustrating and pointless, for it was broad and flexible. Usually, however, it meant those people producing and/or selling a certain product—e.g., cloth, paper, tea, pork, silver, leather and furs, tobacco, leather boxes, lacquer, dyes—or those engaged in providing a single service—e.g., carpenters or barbers. Sometimes not all the groups dealing with a single product belonged to the guild. A merchant guild, for example, might include brokers, wholesalers, and retailers, but brokers increasingly came to have guilds of their own. Moreover, some merchant guilds limited membership to resident merchants (*tso-ku*), excluding traveling merchants (*k'o-shang*). In the crafts, too, various combinations were possible. A carpenters' guild, for instance, might include only those engaged in carpentry and woodworking; at other times, masons and plasterers also joined.

Where membership was by shop, shops that were sold or that were passed on through inheritance carried guild membership with them, either automatically or by the payment of a reduced entrance fee.³³ Otherwise, the two major criteria for guild entry were that new members come from a particular native area (some guilds only) and that they pass through a period of apprenticeship (most guilds).

The requirement in many guilds that members be natives of a single area other than the city in which the guild was located provides one of the most striking contrasts between European and Chinese guilds.³⁴

The size and makeup of this native area varied greatly from guild to guild, conforming not to any ideal concept of what constituted a native area but rather to an existing reality. If the guild had developed from a *Landsmannschaft*, it would ordinarily continue to draw members from the same area originally represented. If, on the other hand, the guild originated in a trade or craft that happened to be dominated by nonnatives who came from a single, fairly well-defined region, it might

continue to reflect this existing geographical base. In either case, the native area might be as small as a single *hsien* or might consist of two or more neighboring *hsien* or even one or more provinces.

As we have already noted, the interest of the guilds in geographical homogeneity gradually declined. Nevertheless, there are many examples of guilds that very successfully resisted this trend. In his research in Peking during the Second World War, Niida Noboru found that the Leather Box Guild, which had been founded in 1689, still consisted exclusively of people who had originated in Shantung.³⁵ This is only one among many examples, not only in Peking but in other cities as well.³⁶ Why then did geographical homogeneity decline in most guilds but survive in some?

Ho Ping-ti has discussed some of the reasons for the strength of the concept of "geographical origin" among the Chinese, especially among the elite of scholar-officials. The strong customary and even legal emphasis on *hsiao*—the filial love and respect due to parents and ancestors, requiring a man to care for parents in life, bury and mourn them properly in death, and see that their graves and the graves of his ancestors are kept up—reinforced the ties to one's place of origin. The geographically based examination system, the law of avoidance that kept officials from serving in their native provinces, and the empirewide system of local schools (from the Ming and Ch'ing on) also served as periodic reminders that a man's anchor remained firmly embedded in the place where he was born.³⁷ There were other reasons, too, why not only the elite of scholar-officials but other Chinese as well retained a strong attachment to their native area, even after having lived away from it for long years. The alien often found considerable discrepancies between the life-style of his native area and that of his adopted city. Differences in language, food, clothing, customs, and religious beliefs served to remind him constantly that he was away from "home." Moreover, the scholar-officials were not the only group with special reasons for a strong attachment to their place of birth. Merchants and craftsmen in an alien city often had a clear economic stake in limiting a trade to natives of their particular region. Against these tendencies to preserve geographical homogeneity, however, must be balanced a variety of forces, growing stronger with time, that tended to erode and often destroy a guild's links with a particular area. Economic considerations were perhaps the most corrosive. Particularly when several geographically based guilds divided a single craft or trade among them, they might well decide that their interest in gaining greater control over the trade and in securing everyone's livelihood dictated a merger into a

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single guild. This happened, for instance, in the Soochow cloth and printing trades.³⁸ In particular, traveling merchants, accustomed to a high degree of mutual cooperation on the road, were prone to submerge concern with geographical origin in order to promote their common economic interests. This was the case with the Kiangsi and Fukien merchants at Hankow.³⁹

Sometimes a guild's control over an occupation had to give way to determined competition from outsiders. If these competitors were capable of establishing themselves independently, as happened with the influx of Peking and Tientsin merchants into Kuei-sui, the result was either a new guild lacking a well-defined geographical base or a division of the trade among several geographically based guilds. Indeed, in any trade that was lucrative enough to tempt outsiders to compete,⁴⁰ a geographically based guild could preserve its monopoly only if it enjoyed special economic advantages. If, for instance, substantial capital investment was necessary to open a new shop, the guild members might control enough of the available capital to make it impossible for anyone to begin business without their approval.⁴¹ Or natives of a particular region might have a skill that enabled them to monopolize an occupation, as in the case of the Ningpo sailors.⁴² Where a single region dominated production of a given product or its raw materials, people from that region or traveling merchants who could establish firm contacts there had a particularly good chance of maintaining a monopoly.⁴³

But economic considerations do not tell the whole story. If outside competition was a threat, so too was the possibility that a guild's geographical consistency might break down from within. Immigrants tend to be assimilated, in China as elsewhere. Frequent association with natives over the years and intermarriage could not but weaken the attachment of many merchants and craftsmen to their home area, especially where this attachment had not been hardened by a particularly strong animosity against the natives.⁴⁴ Furthermore, if guild members did not rigidly limit all jobs in the trade to people from their area of origin and instead hired natives to fill some positions, the inevitable result would be the gradual infiltration of the more outstanding natives into higher positions and even partnerships, causing a breakdown of the geographical character of the trade.

The apprenticeship system was often used to maintain geographical exclusion, though it served other equally important or more important purposes. Some sort of apprenticeship seems to have been present in almost all the early Ch'ing crafts. Many merchants also required new workers to serve an apprenticeship. Beyond this, however, the paucity

apprenticeship

of information in pre-Tao-kuang (1821-50) materials makes it difficult to generalize with confidence about the system. Imahori, who has done the most significant work on apprenticeship during the Ch'ing, feels that it underwent little change throughout the dynasty.⁴⁵ The increasingly frequent regulations after the mid-nineteenth century were, according to him, an attempt to shore up long-established customary practices that were beginning to disintegrate. The sources do provide some evidence for this view, especially in their references to attempts by workers to eliminate the apprenticeship system.⁴⁶ On the other hand, it is also possible that we have more rules on apprenticeship from the mid-nineteenth century on primarily because guild rules in general became more numerous and more detailed at this time. In any case, what evidence there is from the earlier period suggests that many basic elements of the apprenticeship system did in fact remain largely unchanged through the Ch'ing.

One point seems beyond dispute. The existence of an apprenticeship period and its length had usually only a very remote connection with the time required for a novice to learn a given trade. Notwithstanding the varying complexity of different trades, there was a high degree of standardization in the length of the apprenticeship period: the great majority of guilds fixed it at approximately three years.⁴⁷ This arbitrary period, together with the extremely low status of apprentices and the fact that they ordinarily received no wages,⁴⁸ indicates that apprenticeship represented primarily a custom-sanctioned initiation, as it were, before one could enter a trade.

Some guilds made efforts to limit the exploitation of apprentices. In 1793, the Paper Shops Guild of Soochow specifically forbade shop managers or foremen from taking advantage of apprentices by demanding banquets or monetary contributions from them.⁴⁹ But in general, the ideal held out to the apprentice was total submission to those above him. He was locked into a fictitious family relationship that required him, in house and shop, to address associates with kin terms appropriate to their status and seniority.⁵⁰ His work was to leave nothing to be desired. When his period of apprenticeship was over, he still carried the same obligations toward his master as a son toward his father.⁵¹

Thus, the apprenticeship system did not serve as a means of determining who had the requisite ability to enter a trade. Most of the tasks in this relatively uncomplex economy could be performed by anyone with the will to do so. I know of no case where a worker who had completed his apprenticeship was required to present evidence of his ability to carry on his craft satisfactorily; entry into the guild was automatic on

the payment of the required fee.⁵² From another point of view, however, the apprenticeship system insured that most of those who survived it possessed the requisite character traits to fit smoothly into the paternalistic structure that prevailed in shop and guild.

Leadership in both Ch'ing and Republican guilds was usually vested in a group rather than in a single person.⁵³ The group might consist of anywhere from two to thirty members,⁵⁴ but three or four officers serving simultaneously was especially common. Guild officers regularly filled a ~~one-year term~~, reflected in early guild rules by such modifiers of *hui-shou* (guild head) as *tang-nien* (current year), *hsien-nien* (present year), and *chih-nien* (annually rotating).⁵⁵ It is not at all certain, however, that these positions were always rotated and that one year's officers stepped down automatically at the end of their term. Sometimes, and perhaps often, the yearly selection must have resembled a simple expression of confidence in the existing leaders and a request that they continue for another year. (Martin C. Yang has described this procedure in a modern Chinese village.⁵⁶) There were also guilds where the fixed term was longer than a year and others where leaders were chosen to serve for their lifetime.⁵⁷ In some cases, the term was not specified.

The qualifications sought in guild leaders varied from guild to guild and even in the same guild often changed over the years. In the early Ch'ing, age, as we have seen, and moral prestige (the latter often synonymous with economic and social standing) were the most important qualifications. Later, as guild organization and activities became increasingly complex, ability to handle the job grew in importance.⁵⁸ In the Peking craft, commercial, and professional guilds studied by Burgess in the 1920's, "capability" had become overwhelmingly the quality most looked for in guild leaders.⁵⁹

Apart from these general qualifications, a number of guilds established, either formally or by custom, specific requirements for their officers. Occasionally these might be based on kinship. Among the Peking oil merchants from the early Ch'ing on, ten families monopolized the privilege of providing guild leaders.⁶⁰ The Dyestuffs Guild restricted its leadership on a geographical basis, requiring that its eight officers be members of families that had originated in P'ing-yao *hsien* in Shansi.⁶¹ Furthermore, in guilds consisting of both shopowners and workers, it was not uncommon, especially toward the later Ch'ing, for offices to be restricted to shopowners only. In many cases, too, shopowners monopolized the privilege of selecting leaders.⁶²

Leadership of a guild was not always synonymous with the holding of an office, however. The right to carry on guild business was sometimes

leadership

a source of personal advantage for guild officers, but the offices were often primarily a burden and probably were assiduously avoided by those who exercised real power in the guild. Most of the normal business was mainly routine chores: seeing that the guildhall was kept in repair; keeping check on the watchmen, making sure they did not drink and gamble; limiting use of the guildhall to members; handling minor disbursements of guild funds and having them properly recorded in the account books.⁶³ The guild officers were also sometimes charged with collecting dues at regular intervals and with other supervision of the trade,⁶⁴ as well as with resolving minor disputes among members.⁶⁵ Some guilds created two or more levels of offices, reserving the higher ones for the real leaders and assigning the lower ones to their "aides," i.e., the people who really did the work.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, assuring that officers carried out their tasks was a major problem for the guilds, and it required them to resort to fines and other sanctions for neglect of duty.⁶⁷

Many guilds also had provisions to prevent their leaders from assuming too much authority. For instance, in the southern silver shops at Peking, any serious matter that concerned the common good, a breach of the law, or a large contribution by the members required a meeting of the full guild for open discussion.⁶⁸

Regular guild meetings were usually held once a year—although prosperous guilds that could afford the banquet and theatrical performance that ordinarily accompanied the meeting might meet more often.⁶⁹ The meeting opened with sacrifices to the patron deity or deities of the guild, either by the officers on behalf of the whole guild or by officers and members alike. Then followed the banquet and the performance of a play in honor of the guild god or gods. These plays, unlike those of European guilds, did not have religious themes but were merely chosen from the standard repertory of the actors' companies, probably on the assumption that the gods would enjoy the same fare that pleased the members.

Between the acts of the play and the courses of the banquet came reports on guild affairs and discussions of important matters, including the selection of the next year's officers (if that were the practice of the guild), contributions for guild expenses, and revision of rules governing the trade. Disputes might be arbitrated, if necessary, or sanctions imposed on those members who had violated the rules. Some guilds also had more frequent regular assemblies of members to offer sacrifices on religious festivals. The 1835 regulations of the Peking Dyestuffs Guild fixed six days in the course of the year on which all members were to

assemble by 9 A.M. in order to offer sacrifice in common. Each member was to contribute one thousand *cash* for the cost of the ceremony, with the entire expense to be borne by anyone who came late or not at all.⁷⁰

Because normal expenses were ordinarily small, obtaining sufficient funds does not seem to have been a major problem for the guilds, although many of them took great pains to see that everyone contributed his share. The largest expenses of any guild usually came in building or buying a guildhall and in providing for its upkeep afterward. Only a lucky few had a hall donated by a wealthy member.⁷¹ Otherwise, collecting the money to establish a guildhall usually required many years. Even in the prosperous Soochow cloth trade, ten years of contributions were necessary before the guild had amassed the money to establish the Ch'ien-chiang Hui-kuan.⁷²

The most frequently mentioned regular expenses were the sacrifices and yearly play and banquet "to honor the spirits."⁷³ Where there was no great difference of wealth among members, or where the amount asked of members was small in proportion to their wealth, members might be asked to contribute equally.⁷⁴ In other cases, contributions were often scaled to the member's financial status, for instance by assessing shops according to their size⁷⁵ or by collecting a percentage on all sales.⁷⁶ In guilds of craftsmen and workers, occupational status and salary determined the fees. For instance, in the 1857 rules of the Kuei-sui Fine Hides Guild, tanners were assessed 250 *cash* yearly, sewers 400 *cash*, and masters 500 *cash*. A boy or man accepted for apprenticeship had to contribute 400 *cash* initially and another 3,000 *cash* when he became a master. Those who completed their apprenticeship elsewhere and came to work in Kuei-sui were charged 5,000 *cash*.⁷⁷

Economic and Mutual Aid Activities

The ultimate economic goal of the guilds was the preservation of a stable economic environment where each member could carry on his activity free from competition by outsiders and undercutting by fellow members. Ho Ping-ti, speaking of the wealthy merchant princes of the Ch'ing, has noted: "These immensely rich individuals not only failed to develop a capitalistic system; they seldom if ever acquired that acquisitive and competitive spirit which is the very soul of the capitalist system."⁷⁸ If this was true for the wealthiest Ch'ing merchants, the economic activities of the guilds show that it was equally true for less wealthy merchants and for craftsmen. In rules designed not only to keep outsiders out but also to inhibit competition among members, the unspoken law of the guilds was that each member had a right to at least

a small piece of the cake and that no one was entitled to nibble on his neighbor's portion.⁷⁹

The success of the guilds in establishing and preserving monopolies against outsiders differed from trade to trade. Various tactics were used with varying effectiveness. Although a firmly established guild could usually count on custom to induce most of those eligible to join, few guilds relied on custom alone. Especially in craftsman and worker guilds, checks to see that no unauthorized workers were employed and fines on those shops violating the rule appear frequently. For instance, the Kuei-sui Fine Hides Guild, in its regulations of 1857, stated specifically that it was the responsibility of all members and not just of the officers to check that all workers belonged to the guild. Only in this way could it continue to maintain its perfect monopoly. The fine set for any shop that employed nonguild workers was 3,000 *cash*.⁸⁰

Of course, a guild's ability to preserve a monopoly was that much stronger if peculiar economic circumstances hindered outside competition. Special craft secrets, such as those of the southerners making cakes and beancurd in Peking,⁸¹ enabled a guild to maintain its monopoly by limiting this knowledge to guild members. In the same way, those crafts that required complex skills could and did demand that all new workers serve an apprenticeship with a guild member, who would then be responsible to see that the apprentice joined the guild at the end of his training period.⁸² If a guild dealt in a product that came from some distance, it might effectively preserve its monopoly by controlling either the source of supply or the transport network necessary for delivery, secure in the knowledge that no individual or group would have the resources to arrange for a competing supply. In this way, the dyestuff merchants in Peking and the Hupeh tea merchants in Kuei-sui maintained very effective monopolies.⁸³ Obviously, many of the same conditions also helped guilds preserve the geographical homogeneity that often went hand in hand with economic monopoly.

Merchants had to be prepared to counteract the efforts of various kinds of middlemen or brokers to carve out a part of the trade for themselves. Around 1735, the tung-oil merchants of Peking faced the problem of brokers from Tung-chou-fu in Shensi who relied on forged documents to try to insert themselves as middlemen between the Tung-chou-fu and Peking merchants. The Peking merchants appealed to the authorities and won a decision excluding the brokers from the trade.⁸⁴ Sometimes the collective strength of the guilds enabled them to win this kind of battle without government help. For instance, in 1780, the Peking Ho-

tung Tobacco Guild won a long-standing dispute with the tobacco brokers at I-chou (Chihli) by carrying out a year-long boycott.⁸⁵

A wide variety of measures restricted competition among members. Here, too, customary rules played an important part. Each occupation had a number of generally observed practices that posed no particular problem of enforcement and therefore never came to be written down in guild regulations. For instance, standard working hours, varying according to the season, must have prevailed in most trades, but they are seldom the subject of specific regulation by the guilds.⁸⁶ Rules on the setting up of new shops, too, were often customary.⁸⁷

Controlling prices was one potentially effective way of minimizing competition among members. Mention of guild-enforced prices occurs less often than one might expect, however. Apart from the fact that customary rules were probably particularly strong in this area, the silence on prices may result from the fact that so much of our information on guilds comes from stone inscriptions. Fixed prices inscribed on stone would ordinarily be incompatible with the need to react to fluctuating market conditions, though there are examples of guilds that tried to give their price scales this permanence.⁸⁸ A procedure for setting prices and modifying them at regular intervals might or might not be described in the written regulations. One mention, from the second half of the nineteenth century, is found in the rules of the Wen-chou dyers: "Owing to the fluctuating price in indigo, it is to the interest of all concerned that charges for dyeing should be fixed twice a year; that during the semestral period, the tariff should undergo no change whatsoever."⁸⁹

The guilds sometimes sought to minimize competition among members by regulating the quality of their service or product. A Western observer described with a dash of satire the very specific rules governing barbers: "Barbers . . . are in many parts of the country forbidden to add the art of shampooing to their ordinary craft, it having been determined by the union that to shampoo was beneath the dignity of the knights of the razor. During the last six days of the year, when the heads of the whole male portion of the empire are shaved, barbers are forbidden to clean the ears of their customers, as it is their wont to do during the rest of the months. Anyone found breaking this rule is liable to be mobbed, and to have his tools and furniture thrown into the street."⁹⁰ Money shops often led the field in the regulation of products, with controls on the content and weight of metals and currency, conversion rates, and the like.⁹¹ The standardization of products, together with the emphasis on moderate profits, accomplished a dual purpose: it not only

made it easier to limit competition among members but also created a "good image" for the guilds, both among the people, who wanted honest goods at fair prices, and among the officials, who might step in at any time that the guild's practices threatened the common good or public order. Many guilds, in their regulations, stressed that members should take only a just profit and inveighed against those who would violate this rule and stain the guild's reputation.⁹²

The same concerns, together with the further desire to facilitate business transactions, lay behind the frequent efforts of the guilds to standardize weights and measures. Niida Noboru has argued against putting too much emphasis on the variety of weights and measures in traditional China and underestimating the standardization that lay behind the apparent confusion. For instance, there was a Soochow "foot" used for measuring Soochow silk; guild rules saw to it that this measure and none other was *always* used for Soochow silk.⁹³ Many guilds had official steel-yards and sometimes issued one to each member who joined the guild.⁹⁴ Guild regulations even fixed the tare, or weight of different containers, that was to be deducted in determining the price of goods sold by weight.⁹⁵ Guild efforts at standardization extended even to complex business practices. Shansi and southern bankers had different procedures for the issuance of drafts, but all Shansi and southern banks used the methods of their respective regions exclusively.⁹⁶

The varying size of the shops represented in any guild effectively precluded attempts to limit expansion by imposing a ceiling on the number of workers who could be employed, although there were often either customary or written rules against luring away the workers or apprentices of a fellow member. Moreover, some trades (such as the Wuhan Weighing Scales Guild and the Leather Box Makers of Kanchou-fu, Kiangsi) limited, very often to one, the number of apprentices that could be taken on at any one time.⁹⁷

Finally, many guilds even forbade their members to entice away each other's customers. The most common measures were strict limitations on the opening of new shops and surcharges to be levied on customers who transferred their patronage. The Peking Barbers Guild, for instance, required that any customer of one shop who went to another be charged an extra ten percent for a haircut or shave.⁹⁸

also - many internal conflicts
 Apart from unrestrained competition, the greatest potential threat to the stability of a trade or craft was the conflicting interests of employers and workers. Both MacGowan in the 1880's⁹⁹ and Burgess in the 1920's¹⁰⁰ felt that relatively little strife occurred between employers and workers in China. However true this may have been for the post-

1850 period, serious clashes were certainly not uncommon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in Soochow, where invective-laden documents record long and bitter struggles by workers to better their wages and working conditions.¹⁰¹ More work will have to be done on the economic and social history of the early Ch'ing before we can be certain, but it appears that the most severe conflicts arose in a few relatively advanced industries, such as cloth and papermaking, that were marked by sizable factories employing large numbers of workers, many of them brought in from other areas. The government played a prominent role in these struggles. Ever alert to the dangers inherent in organization by the lowest elements in society, it viewed with suspicion what it considered the similarities between workers' organizations and secret societies.¹⁰² As a result, employers and officials often formed de facto coalitions against workers; this is testified to by frequent official decrees forbidding them to organize or to strike and setting a ceiling on their wages.¹⁰³

The kind of control that shopowners sought over their workers and undoubtedly sometimes achieved is vividly described in the rules for the Soochow paper trade, approved by the authorities in 1793. First, all workers had to be registered. In theory, no worker was to be hired until it was established that he had a clean past. In order to guard against workers who got into trouble and were fired only to change their names and go to work in another shop, the workers themselves were held responsible for checking on their fellow workers. Second, the shops were to appoint inspectors who would regularly check stirrings of unrest among the workers. Third, the workers were to have periodic indoctrination to make sure that they understood the rules of the trade and to encourage them to work diligently, confine themselves to their own business, and not associate with bad elements. Fourth, if a worker contracted a debt at his shop and then stayed away from work or went to work for another shop, his guarantor was to be punished and the worker returned to his shop in order to pay off the debt. Fifth, shop managers were to see that all workers slept in the shops every night in order to keep them from gambling, whoring, and robbery. Workers who stayed away from their shops overnight were to be flogged and fired. Managers who did not report their absence were also to be punished.¹⁰⁴

Despite the efforts of shopowners and officials, in Soochow and elsewhere, workers did gradually win the right to bargain over their wages and working conditions. In time, too, many of them formed guilds limited exclusively to workers, although guilds of this type remained relatively few compared to merchant, merchant-craftsman, and professional

workers' guilds

guilds. Where the workers did succeed in creating their own guilds, they usually considered the ability to obtain decent wages as the main benefit of the guild.¹⁰⁵

mutual aid
While struggling to organize, workers often downplayed their desire for better wages and stressed instead their interest in creating an association to look after those members who, through no fault of their own, had fallen on bad times.¹⁰⁶ In this way, they identified their efforts with one of the most widely practiced and irrefragable guild activities, mutual aid among guild members. We have seen the importance of mutual aid among the early alien merchant associations, and it is possible that this spirit of helping one's fellows was never again as strong as among those early groups of entrepreneurs who found themselves left to their own resources in a "foreign" city. Nonetheless, mutual aid became a regular component of all guilds—merchant, craftsman, and worker, alien and native.

Some authors have professed to see a greater emphasis on mutual aid in craft than in merchant guilds.¹⁰⁷ This contrast may be more apparent than real, depending on what one views as mutual aid. Those craftsmen and workers who lived close to the subsistence level naturally were very much concerned with how they and their families would survive if they became sick or unemployed. Even more important, could they look forward to a proper burial when they died?¹⁰⁸ To help meet this latter need, many guilds even had their own cemeteries, reserved for the burial of members.¹⁰⁹ The more prosperous merchant guilds, however, would have fewer destitute members requiring a subsistence dole or having to rely on the contributions of their fellow members for a proper burial. In these guilds, helping out members who had run afoul of the officials or who had become involved in legal disputes was of far greater concern; this kind of mutual aid is frequently mentioned in the regulations of merchant guilds.

A characteristic of the mutual-aid activities of guilds for nonnatives was the provision to send destitute members back to their native area where, presumably, they would have family ties to fall back on. The main point was not to allow a fellow member to become a drifter.¹¹⁰ These same guilds also often had a room reserved for the storage of coffins awaiting shipment home for burial.¹¹¹

Though mutual aid is one of the most frequently mentioned subjects in the guild inscriptions, it is difficult to say how effective it was in practice. Many references to it have a seemingly perfunctory character. Even more significant, penalties are not usually outlined for those who fail to render aid when they should. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ac-

count for the frequency of references to the obligation of guildsmen to help one another if this was a mere cliché. Moreover, in some cases the rules become considerably more explicit, outlining precisely what members are required to do in given circumstances and fixing penalties for those who fail to do so.¹¹² Here at least, it is reasonable to suppose that the agreement by the members to institute such specific provisions must have led to at least some action.

Of considerably greater importance to the general life of the cities where the guilds were located was the sporadic assumption of responsibility by the guilds for fire-fighting, policing, and other municipal functions. We have only scanty evidence for this kind of guild activity before the late nineteenth century, which suggests that the practice developed rather late. What is clear from the evidence we do have, though, is that even in an earlier period it would be more likely to be a federation of several guilds rather than an individual guild that took on these functions. Writing in 1909, Morse could cite only three well-confirmed guild federations in all of China.¹¹³ More recent studies have turned up a good many more, especially in smaller central places, which suggests that merchants were to a large extent the local government in those economically vigorous towns that were nevertheless too small to be presided over by an official from the central government.¹¹⁴

Cohesion and Coercion in Ch'ing Guilds

One of the most striking characteristics of early Ch'ing guilds was their attempt to achieve a wide range of goals with only very rudimentary organizational structures. What this meant in practice—i.e., when actual measures were taken to implement the goals—was that the large number of general goals were narrowed to a small number assigned high priority. In the long run, the attempt to resolve the incongruity between ambitious goals and limited means available to achieve them brought about what was probably one of the key trends in the history of Ch'ing and early Republican guilds: the parallel shift from simple to more complex organization and from general to more limited goals.

One should perhaps not underestimate the ability of the guilds to achieve their goals merely because of the poor organizational means available. To begin with, most of the goals were of a kind that could well be accomplished, at least in part, with a low level of organization. Few of them required an intensive and continuous effort over a period of time. One sacrifice each year, or at most a few, satisfied the guild's obligation to its patron deities. Mutual aid, too, was viewed as a sporadic obligation. Where achievement of the guild's goals required a more

sustained effort, as in standardizing trade practices, the guild's role was still usually intermittent. It established standards and only periodically took measures against those who did not conform. Finally, the very variety of goals at which the guilds aimed probably aided the achievement of each individual goal. Even among modern organizations, "it appears that many multi-purpose organizations tend to serve each of their goals separately and all of them together more effectively and efficiently than single-purpose organizations of the same category."¹¹⁵ This was probably also true of the guilds, since their various goals were ordinarily compatible and mutually reinforcing. For instance, ties of friendship promoted by the guild made common action for economic goals easier.

In any discussion of how effectively the guilds achieved their goals, the question inevitably arises: whose goals? Some authors, especially those of a Marxist bent, have assumed that the stated goals of the guilds, looking to the interests of all the members, were merely a smoke screen to disguise the real goal of furthering the interests of the richest and most powerful members. Although this interpretation usually results from arbitrarily forcing the data on guilds into a wholly inapplicable, a priori class analysis, the question is nevertheless valid and important. It is also extremely difficult to answer. In frustration, the historian asks what really happened, and his materials insist on telling him what was supposed to have happened or what someone wanted others to believe happened. Nevertheless, the right questions and a willingness to settle for less than absolute certainty make it possible to hazard a few answers.

A distinction must be made at the outset between a group's domination of decision-making power and the misuse of that power to further the group's own aims at the expense of others. We shall never be in a position to study in any detail the actual allocation of power in the guilds; that would require a great deal more documentation, and much of it of a different kind than we possess. We can assume, of course, that the more prosperous and prominent members tended to dominate guild decisions. Nevertheless, we find little evidence that they used this power to promote their own interests at the expense of the other members. Even in those guilds that included employers and workers, there is little indication of specific measures designed to exploit the workers, such as limits on wages, restrictions on the freedom of the workers to change jobs, penalties that applied only to workers, and the like. In general, guild regulations and their enforcement seem to have been directed to the general good of all the guildsmen, in opposition to outsiders. This is not to say, of course, that there was no exploitation of the

weaker by the stronger. Rather, the point is that the guilds themselves do not seem to have been notably an instrument of this exploitation.

To assess the ability of guilds to realize their goals, one must also appreciate the complex mixture of cohesive and coercive forces acting to secure the allegiance of members to the guild and its goals. By cohesive I mean those forces that prompted a largely voluntary, unconstrained acceptance of the guild and its rules by the members. This occurred when there was a high coincidence between the goals of the guild and the personal goals of the members. Coercive forces operated in those cases where the guild found it necessary to devise sanctions to assure compliance by the members. Coercion was especially necessary where a member might be tempted to violate the guild rules out of a feeling that his personal interests ran counter to the interests of the guild. This distinction will become clear as we look at the simultaneously cohesive and coercive role of religion.

Religion was very important in the life of the guilds. Probably most of the guilds arranged for their first meeting place by renting a temple or a room in a temple. Since only a small minority eventually succeeded in building their own guildhall,¹¹⁶ many never knew another meeting place. At best, they might succeed in reserving all or part of the temple for their exclusive use. This practice accounts for the frequent occurrence in guild names of various words meaning "temple," especially in North China.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, no guild ever built its own guildhall without providing a place for its patron deity or, usually, deities. Just as the guilds described themselves as associations for carrying on religious worship, so too the most common characterization of the guildhall was as a home for its deities. Misuse of the guildhall was usually condemned as profanity. The southern silver shops in Peking, in their rules of 1721, made this clear: "This temple was built as a place for honoring the spirits. It is not a place for amusement and feasting. No people from outside the guild may borrow or rent it to present plays." These same rules also prevent women from entering the guildhall, since that would dishonor the spirits.¹¹⁸

Guild meetings were regularly timed to coincide with the birthday of one of the patron deities and, as we have seen, usually included a simple sacrifice, a banquet, and a play in honor of that deity and the others. Sometimes sacrifices were held more often,¹¹⁹ and a special ceremony before the gods was often an integral part of the acceptance of new members into the guild. Even standard fees, such as the three or five *cash* that had to be paid to the Peking Dyestuffs Guild for each basket of tung oil that came from outside, were frequently referred to

religion of
guilds

as "incense money" to provide for sacrifices to the spirits.¹²⁰ Guilds also contributed in times of plague and other catastrophes to special sacrifices for appeasing the relevant gods; this was one of their very few "philanthropic" activities on behalf of nonmembers.¹²¹ All of this seems to add up to a recognition by the guildsmen that they had a certain obligation to propitiate the heavenly powers, especially those responsible for the establishment and protection of their own trade or craft.¹²² To those for whom this was a genuine conviction, the guild provided a welcome opportunity to fulfill their responsibilities.

The sources are not without their complaints that members have not taken their religious duties seriously.¹²³ These must be weighed, however, against a good deal of evidence suggesting very real devotion on the part of some members. Niida, for example, describes the fourth month pilgrimage to the shrine of the goddess Pi-hsia-yüan-chün at the Miaofeng Shan west of Peking, during which those believers who were shoemakers repaired the shoes of pilgrims free of charge, tinkers repaired pots at the roadside inns, and paper workers put new paper in the windows of the temple's halls.¹²⁴ Guilds also looked to their patron deities to help them in times of difficulty. In the 1779-80 dispute between the Peking tobacco merchants and the I-chou brokers, the tobacco merchants finally "relied on the efficacy of the Three Sages" to help their boycott. When the dispute was won, they contributed for the renovation of the "shelter for the spirits," i.e., the guildhall.¹²⁵ Religion could also bolster, and be bolstered by, the geographical solidarity in those alien guilds that maintained religious beliefs and customs brought by the members from their home area.¹²⁶ Even in the twentieth century, not a high point in Chinese religious fervor, many guildsmen still considered religious worship an integral part of guild life and felt that the guilds might not have endured had it not been for religious bonds.¹²⁷

To the extent that members took their religion seriously, it could also be used as a coercive force against them. Ch'ü T'ung-tsu has described how a magistrate arriving at a new post gained "a measure of supernatural sanction" by sacrificing at the temple of the City God, taking an oath that he would be honest and just in his administration and asking that he be punished by the god if he violated his oath. The magistrate later often asked the aid of the City God in deciding legal cases, in "the belief that a man's crime could escape the eyes of human beings but not of the gods."¹²⁸ The same kind of attitude prevailed in the guilds. For instance, the 1828 rules of the Peking Dyestuffs Guild warned the members: "Be cautious. Take care. If our investigations do not reveal those who, with evil heart, have violated the guild regulations,

then the gods will find them out and cease to aid them."¹²⁹ Moreover, the punishments levied on members, such as the obligation to pay incense money or provide for the performance of a play, were often described as expiatory offerings to the gods as well as to the guild and fellow members.¹³⁰

Among other predominantly cohesive forces in the guilds, we have already discussed the feeling of common geographical origin. Common ethnic grouping was also a cohesive force in those areas where two or more ethnic groups, each having its own guild, engaged in the same trade or craft.¹³¹ Tradition and custom not only encouraged entry into the guild but also promoted conformity to its practices.¹³² Finally, the stress on consensus that prevailed in the guilds, together with the high value placed on respect for authority in China, was also a strong cohesive force. It must be remembered that most guilds were small associations, seldom with more than 30 members. Under these conditions, each member was personally acquainted with all the others.¹³³ Face thus played an important role in the guilds. Given the loss of face that would result from clear disagreements requiring a decision against one of the parties, the Chinese deployed a great deal of skill to avoid such confrontations. This, together with the real interests that the guildsmen had in common, suggests that most guild decisions did arise out of a genuine consensus.¹³⁴ This stress on consensus occurs again and again in the guild documents. Even if we agree with Imahori's contention that, in practice, this meant that a handful of people initiated policies with which the rest of the members usually went along,¹³⁵ it must still be noted that this procedure did usually include an open discussion that continued until some sort of genuine agreement was achieved. If such agreement proved impossible, the guild might even specify different courses of action among which the members could choose.¹³⁶ The decision-making process of the guilds was therefore probably more of a cohesive than a coercive force.

In few guilds, however, did the interests of the members coincide so completely that the guild was able to forgo coercion entirely. The most common means of coercing recalcitrant members was to levy fines on those who violated a specific tenet of the regulations. These fines might be either money for the general use of the guild or an offering in the form of incense money, a play, or a banquet in honor of the gods. MacGowan pointed out the suitability of the latter forms of punishment to the purposes and spirit of the guild. "Although these compulsory entertainments and feast [*sic*] involve a certain degree of discredit to the host, yet he has the satisfaction as host of being treated with decorous politeness, a thing so dear to this ceremonious people."¹³⁷ Only in rare

cases and for the severest offenses did the guilds envision application of the most extreme punishment available to them: expulsion from the guild, which deprived a man of his livelihood.¹³⁸

Various other measures were used from time to time to enforce observance of the guild's rules. Government approval of the goals and regulations of the guild and cooperation in enforcing them were sometimes sought and obtained, but this means was resorted to rather seldom, the guilds preferring to settle their problems internally and with their own resources. Carving regulations on stone tablets and setting them up in public view was also a means of providing an extra aura of authority for guild decisions.¹³⁹ These and other measures, however, remained clearly of secondary importance as means of coercion.¹⁴⁰

Finally, a note on the overall importance of guilds in the lives of their members. Most members probably had little connection with the guild outside of special occasions. General meetings, as we have seen, were usually held only once a year. Even in the minority of guilds that had their own halls, the hall does not seem to have served as a social center in the sense of, say, the hyphenated "national homes" of immigrant groups or the V.F.W. halls in the United States. With the exception of occasional references to guild members using the hall for a party and, in certain merchant guilds, references to its serving as a center of business activity, the guildhall seems to have been relatively unused between meetings.¹⁴¹ One should probably not assess very highly, then, the importance of guilds in the daily life of the cities during the early Ch'ing. They did introduce a principle of cohesion among the members that would otherwise have been absent, but they did not replace or even greatly affect the more basic ties of home and shop.

School-Temple and City God

STEPHAN FEUCHTWANG

When I started to research the "state cult" I had very little idea what it might have been. I knew that it was centered in the administrative capitals of China, i.e., in cities. Now that I have done some research,* I find it difficult to make my report of it directly relevant to the quality of urban life in traditional China, although it is entirely relevant to the relations between rulers and ruled in traditional China and therefore in some degree to the power structure within cities and to urban-rural relations. The state cult was of course closely related to sociopolitical control, but the objects of control were not so much the populace at large as the bureaucracy and local elites. The use of religion to control the common people may have been legitimated by the state cult, but in manipulating the masses, the managers of society necessarily looked to religious arenas outside the strict confines of official religion.

A second source of difficulty lies in the number of gross misconceptions of Chinese religion that have grown up over the years as a result in part of overcategorization, by which (for example) we have too easily identified Confucianism with state orthodoxy. The official religion as I found it in my research is not the same as the Confucianism we associate with the Confucian classics or with the schools in which they were studied. Faced with the problem of how to describe the state orthodoxy, I decided to focus on documenting the religious attitudes of officials and on discussing the place of the official religion in Chinese religion as a whole. This is not, therefore, a strict account of the rites, deities, and edifices of the official religion, although these are all mentioned in the course of the discussion.

I have translated and studied as the official religion (1) what is written

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