



Men, Ghosts, and Social Organization in South China

Migrants carried not only concrete objects like coffee, letters, and clothes across the oceans, but also less tangible assumptions, organizational practices, and desires. Economic gain was one of the prime reasons for migration, but migrant networks and institutions were not merely built from scratch in order to attain money in the most rational manner possible. They were extensions and adaptations of institutions and assumptions about social order that had developed (and were still developing) in South China. Some of these institutions, such as families and lineages, expanded and changed with the migrants. Others, like native place *huiquan* and sworn brotherhoods, were reconstituted anew in migrant communities on the basis of familiar precedents. In order to fully understand the trajectories of Chinese migrant adaptation, we need to understand a history of social organization in China.

The articulation of state and local society in late imperial China was not centered on the rule of officials and threat of armed repression—although their distant presence was indispensable for the maintenance of state interests—but on a nexus of symbolic and ritual practices mediated through institutions and individuals.¹ This vertical state-local nexus overlapped with a horizontal nexus of relationships between local groups. These relationships and practices constantly shifted over time, in the context of changing ideologies, imperial policy, economic circumstances, and local interests. The expansion and adaptation of institutions abroad is linked to history in South China as part of a single continuum.

Existing alongside this shifting social landscape were ritual practices that portrayed a timeless cosmological order. To be sure, from the perspective of an outside observer these rituals were far from eternal. They varied over time and in the interpretations of different participants. Yet, their predictability and claims to absoluteness, combined with this adaptability, made them into useful tools of rulership and the organization of human

relations. More specifically for our purposes, rituals associated with the cosmological realms of men, ghosts, and gods suggest ways in which Chinese constructed relationships with non-Chinese. Chinese already had ways to account for and deal with outsiders (usually through the services of mediators) even before they left China. Prolonged contact always challenged those assumptions, but because they shaped a field for action rather than a list of inflexible rules, they could actually promote rather than restrict adaptation. What emerged was a pattern of intercultural relations that can be understood as the stabilization of distinction and mutual misunderstanding, rather than a progressive transition toward assimilation.

GUANGDONG AND EMPIRE

One of the more remarkable features of late imperial China was the high level of cultural homogeneity and stability over a vast territory, despite minimal administrative apparatus and infrequent resort to military force. By the late eighteenth century, the population of China had increased to the extent that the lowest official, the county magistrate, was expected—with the assistance of a few runners and clerks notorious for putting more effort into their own interests than those of the state—to be judge, tax collector, upholder of order, and representative of the state for an average population of about two hundred and fifty thousand.² This success was due in no small part to long-standing factors such as the common written language; a well-organized bureaucracy with widely recognized symbols; an exam system which accepted and co-opted ambitious young men from throughout the empire; and, as many Chinese scholars themselves insisted, tireless attention to the ordering and reordering of society through the study and reinterpretation of ancient texts and performance of proper ritual.

At the same time, the Qing dynasty—ever conscious of its own origins as seminomads from the northeast—built a consciously multicultural empire. Emperors readily adopted methods and symbols of rule that were appropriate for non-Han peoples, such as claiming to be a descendant of Genghis Khan to the Mongols or a reincarnated Buddha to the Tibetans. Thus, coexistence of local society and the imperial government was not merely predestined by common cultural fate but a constantly negotiated process in which all sides struggled for recognition and control. Local interests were able to carve out their own spaces, assisted by imperial willingness to selectively incorporate cultural variations generated from below. On their part, local elites appealed to the recognition and symbolism of the imperial government to legitimize their own power in

the face of local rivals. Cultural negotiations, however, always took place with the knowledge that the state could and would resort to physical force when it felt sufficiently threatened.

Like other regions in China, the Pearl River Delta had its own unique relationship to the Chinese state. Throughout much of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Canton was the only port through which tribute missions and foreign traders from the south were officially allowed to proceed. The delta was also an important commercial center in its own right. Its main exports included sugar, silk, and textiles sold abroad and to other parts of China, while cotton came in from India and the Yangtze Delta, and rice from Guangxi province and, occasionally, Siam.³ Thus, the Pearl River Delta was an important node in the imperial state, precisely because it was a cosmopolitan link to areas beyond the empire. The services of Canton merchants were of great value to bureaucrats in Beijing. As long as tribute missions and a significant portion of foreign trade were channeled through Canton, the material interests of Cantonese elites existed comfortably with the bureaucratic order.

Despite the relatively high profile of foreigners in Canton, Cantonese commoners were noted (especially by Westerners) for their strong xenophobia. Of course, contempt is as much a form of accommodation as mutual understanding, but such sentiments must also be placed in the context of a localism that was common throughout China. Cantonese also looked upon Chinese elsewhere with suspicion, some contempt, and occasional fear. In return, other Chinese looked at Cantonese (and each other) in much the same way. This mutual distaste was often measured in terms of purity of cultural lineage and practice. By the late nineteenth century, other Chinese slandered Cantonese as “foreigners’ dogs” and “Guangdong sluts,” while Cantonese claimed that Chinese in the north had been contaminated by centuries of barbarian invasion and dominance, and only Guangdong was a site of truly unvarnished Chinese culture (a debate that resonates with Hakka claims of ultra-Chineseness).⁴ The most passionate hostility in Guangdong, however, was reserved not for northerners, officials, or foreign barbarians, but for close neighbors who belonged to a different lineage or spoke a different dialect. Feuds involving lineages, villages, sworn brotherhoods, and subethnic groups were endemic throughout South China in the Qing dynasty, a product of increased commercialization and social mobility.

The imperial government rarely interfered in local violence unless it perceived a direct threat to its own sovereignty. The Chinese bureaucracy and imperial armies were a distant presence in the affairs of South China but rarely fell completely below the horizon of local conscious-

ness. Cantonese villagers often spoke of the emperor and his government as a sleeping dragon: quiet and distant when not aroused but vengeful and destructive when awakened, capable of sending armies to destroy villages, lineages, and all that represented local order and human community.⁵ Nonetheless, as we shall see, these units of local order all took shape in conjunction with the imperial presence, just as particular migrant networks all emerged in conjunction with larger global forces.

The interests of the imperial state and the bureaucratic order it created were complex, taking on different manifestations from different vantage points. In its most ideological manifestation—more associated with Han officials than Manchu—it was an order of centralization, cultural superiority, and agricultural stability. In this manifestation the emperor was at the center of the earth, mediating between Heaven and the World of Men. Non-Chinese people were one step further removed from this fount of civilization. Europeans and other distant peoples were barbarians from “outside the pale . . . entirely unversed in the forms of edicts and laws,” and grateful to the mercy of the emperor for assisting them in their “turn towards culture.”⁶ According to this perspective, merchants were relegated to the lowest of the four classes of society, under scholar-officials, peasants, and artisans, and emigrants were labeled as unfilial traitors.

On the other hand, the day-to-day policies of the empire presented a flexibly practical face. Officials were aware of the necessity of tailoring diplomatic relationships to particular situations, and they took pains to develop economic policies that recognized local interests, most notably in their dealings with non-Han portions of the empire. Their choices were not always appropriate, and official communication was not always ideal, but the eighteenth century turned out to be one of the most expansive and stable periods of Chinese history. As concerns attitudes toward Chinese who traveled overseas, in practice any condemnation was implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, directed toward those who chose to reside abroad, not those who left for temporary trading voyages. Most hostility toward emigrants had roots in the legitimate, if sometimes exaggerated, fear of pirates and invasion. Officials appointed to the southern coast dealt with these traders in a variety of ways, including the writing of memorials in support of commercial activities, turning a blind eye to them, or profiting from them through open or clandestine collaboration and extortion.⁷

The different manifestations of bureaucratic order were often harmonized through ritual. Successful rites presented a facade of timeless order despite, or perhaps because of, constant adjustments to take concrete situations into account. Ritual was thus a practical method of both controlling and responding to a social world in flux.⁸ It was an important

complement to practical statecraft, especially when many state functions had to be delegated to other semiautonomous institutions.

ASSOCIATIONS

Lineage and Empire

Migrant associations overseas were frequently established on the basis of native place and kinship. These organizations and the particular forms they took did not emerge spontaneously as a consequence of natural affection. They drew upon a variety of organizational precedents from China and had concrete links to some of those organizations. Overseas associations emerged from the same process by which migrants to urban and rural areas in China created merchant organizations and sworn brotherhoods. The maintenance of links to home villages was a primary function and resource for these associations.

In the villages of southeast China, lineages were one of the most pervasive organizations, structuring much of rural society. Lineages were extended kinship groups, usually claiming patrilineal descent from a founding ancestor. Larger lineages almost always held some form of corporate property, usually land, using the income for rituals, ancestral halls, and charitable activities. Like other associations, they did not merely appear as spontaneous expressions of cultural values but were adaptations to the political and social conditions of late imperial China.⁹ Lineages promoted the material interests of local farmers and elites within the trappings of ancestor worship and patriline that were both long-standing aspects of Chinese daily life and activities sanctioned and supported by Qing ideology.

The proper performance of filial piety and ancestor worship marked much of what was seen as the fundamental cultivation of humanity, defining the civilized from the barbarian. Nonetheless, the proper forms of filial action and ancestor worship had long been the subject of debate and transformation. For example, the privilege of worshipping ancestors back five generations (now the standard for all family worship) was originally reserved to nobles. Similarly, extended corporate lineages were often looked on with suspicion as a potential threat to the state. During the Song Dynasty (960–1279), reference works and practical handbooks began spreading information and guidelines for proper ritual performance at home, as scholars tried to propagate moral activity beyond the confines of the elite.¹⁰ This project included discussion of the proper forms that lineages and ancestor worship could take. A consensus gradually emerged among scholars which included many elements of a previously

unformalized vernacular repertoire, such as grave offerings, charitable estates, family instruction, genealogies, and ancestral halls. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, scholars repeatedly attempted to stem what they saw as growing trends of immorality by reformulating ritual and lineage organization in order to obtain a balance between popular custom and cosmic order. By the beginning of the Qing dynasty, the lineage had emerged as one of the primary institutions through which morality was institutionalized and moral example exerted.¹¹

Scholarly effort was only one influence behind the strengthening of corporate lineages at the beginning of the Qing. The commercialization and monetarization of the Chinese economy from the late Ming onwards, the general social turmoil accompanying the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty in the seventeenth century, and the land and tax policies of the new Qing government further promoted this consolidation. The disruptions of the transition were particularly acute in southeast China, where the evacuation of a zone of twenty-five kilometers in from the coast as a buffer against pirates was enforced from 1662 to 1681. As the Qing slowly extended its control over China, it imposed land and taxation policies aimed at breaking down the power of large landholders and encouraging the establishment of small farmer-taxpayer households. The decline of large estates worked by bonded labor, which had already begun during the commercialization of the late Ming, was further hastened by Qing laws abolishing servile labor, curbing elite privileges, and replacing corvée labor requirements with a land tax. These policies contributed to the emergence of the household farm as the primary unit of taxation and surveillance in China, as well as to increased physical mobility and urbanization. These, in turn, led to growth in the kinds of social organizations described in this chapter and to the increasing delegation of government responsibilities to these organizations and the elites who dominated them.¹²

Lineages were excellent institutions for local conflict resolution, social control, and mutual protection in periods of disorder. Other nonstate institutions could have fulfilled these roles, but lineages had the advantage of official recognition as institutions established for orthodox purposes.¹³ Their cultural legitimacy and appeal to past ancestors also helped buttress land claims when the coastal zone was reopened. In the context of Qing labor and taxation policies, they were also excellent vehicles for the exercise of elite power. They brought together peasants, tenants, and landlords in the cause of mutual protection. Small households could benefit from the protection of wealthy landowners and officeholders through the lineage without having to indenture themselves. In turn, corporate lineage property and complex land-tenure rights that made it difficult to

transfer land to outsiders facilitated the control of land and collection of rents, while maintaining a landscape of independent household cultivators. Both the poor and the wealthy benefited from working together to defend their land and water rights against the incursions of neighboring lineages, villages, and bandits.

As lineages became recognized as institutional manifestations of order and morality, they increasingly shaped both the past and the physical landscape. While formal kinship networks had, since at least the Song, structured settlement and facilitated mutual aid, they were now made increasingly prominent through the institution of lineage halls, common worship, corporate estates, and genealogies. Much energy and calculation was also put into the retroactive creation of a lineage in response to contemporary political needs, as a variety of possible patrimonies were selected and excluded in order to create alliances that could be beneficial in the present. Some genealogies reached aggressively into the distant past, claiming origins in North China and searching out nobility and degree holders to occupy revered places as pivotal ancestors, while any suggestion that early lineage founders were culturally assimilated aboriginals was buried.¹⁴ Ancestors were selected and excluded not only with an eye toward imperial approval, but also in order to affect the hierarchy of relationships among local lineage branches. But even an unassailably respectable lineage history was not enough to ensure a lasting lineage. Segmentation, fusion, alliances, and internal differentiation continued as various branches became wealthy through commerce, produced imperial degree holders, reached out to subordinate neighboring branches, or resisted such subordination.

The emergence of lineages created an enduring balance between local interests and the interests of the state. The embodiment of imperially sanctioned morality in lineages both legitimized the government and lent power to the lineage leaders. This balance was personified in the mediating roles of successful scholars and officials produced by many lineages. From the state's point of view, these scholar-officials—all well educated in the classics—were charged with presenting a moral example that could mitigate the conflicts, hustling, and self-interest of the populace. From the lineages' point of view, a successful scholar meant privileged access to prestige, influence, riches, and self-perpetuation. The roles of imperial representative and filial son subjected officials to conflicting pressures, and few officials completely rejected opportunities to channel influence in the service of family and lineage, even when their role as moral exemplars could suffer as a result.

These bifurcated interests were not necessarily experienced as a con-

flict. Service to family and lineage on the part of a scholar-official was an expression of the same filial piety that was promoted by the state as a bedrock value. Speaking in more general terms, Frederic Wakeman wrote, "Local social organizations therefore embodied contrary principles: integration into the imperial system and autonomy from it. The dynamic oscillation between these poles created the unity of Chinese society, not by eliminating the contradictions but by balancing them in such a way as to favor overall order."¹⁵ Idealistic scholars might have agonized over these contradictions, but they were usually forced to live the contradictions out as mediators who both embodied and dissolved that tension. Of course, the bureaucracy was aware of the subversive potential of piety and kinship and generally took pains not to post officials in their home provinces. But the checks and balances of the bureaucracy never went so far as to create a completely autonomous official class. The state was always dependent on the continued production of meritorious officials with the help of lineage and family resources, and could not afford to alienate the lineages.

As the Qing economy and population grew over the eighteenth century, so did feuds, exploitation, endless litigation, and other conflicts between increasingly powerful lineages and other groups in South China. The imperial government limited itself to moral condemnation and rarely intervened unless it was petitioned to do so or the violence directly threatened the state.¹⁶ It was in the state's interest to accommodate the lineages and lineage elites. Despite their proclivities to fight with each other, lineages still fulfilled many of the functions of individual conflict mediation and tax collection at levels beneath the reach of the state. Magistrates even encouraged lineages and villages to resolve their own disputes and use the court only as a last resort. With the great rebellions at the middle of the nineteenth century, even much of the responsibility for raising and maintaining armies was delegated to locals. After the rebellions were subdued, the Qing continued to incorporate these potentially disruptive local power-holders into the structure of the empire through the increased sale of imperial titles and the delegation of tax-collecting and commercial regulatory power. Not only did these methods relieve the administrative burden in the waning years of the Qing, but incidents of organized rural violence also decreased by the 1880s.¹⁷

Lineages after the Empire

Although established with reference to the moral order of the empire, lineages remained relevant after the fall of the Qing, despite competition

from other organizations and ideological attacks on the lineage system. Lineages had become rooted as a part of the daily perspective of many Chinese that was not easily discarded. Moreover, the property, social connections, and influence controlled by lineages continued to insure their relevance as social institutions, inasmuch as they could respond flexibly to new sociopolitical situations. Even during the Empire, lineages had adopted a variety of functions other than the organization of territorial settlement. For example, the lineages which ran the salt yards of Sichuan province resembled corporate business enterprises, with lineage members occupying various executive positions.¹⁸ In the early twentieth century, the Guan lineage in Kaiping county derived much of its wealth from commercial activities, with lineage connections at home and abroad playing crucial roles in the recruitment of employees, the supply of capital, and the social connections needed to develop monopolies. Other lineages maintained corporate bases in racketeering, mercenary activities, or access to official connections.

Some of these endeavors were managed by the lineage as an institution, but more often individuals, families, and businesses utilized the services and connections of the lineage for their own benefit. Even emigration could be a communal strategy based on the resources and maintenance of a lineage. Nearly all the active male members of the Wen lineage of Hong Kong in the 1960s operated a network of restaurants throughout Britain and Europe, as well as maintaining a travel agency to Europe and an extensive range of connections in the passport bureau of the Hong Kong government, all of which were jealously guarded from outsiders. The profits made from these activities were used to maintain a traditional lifestyle in the home village that was noted throughout the New Territories of Hong Kong.¹⁹ On the other hand, some twentieth-century lineages dropped the ritual trappings of ancestor worship in favor of a managerial structure that revolved around republican vocabularies of local self-government, rural reconstruction, progressive reform, a leadership institutionalized as a board of directors, and leaders whose prestige was based on commercial rather than landed wealth. Although the rhetoric of such a lineage could seem radical and modernizing, in practice it rarely amounted to more than an up-to-date gloss on business as usual. Political and material success, more than modernizing rhetoric, were still necessary for a viable lineage.²⁰

Some lineages did not successfully adapt to changing conditions. Destruction of corporate property, changing relationships with new power holders, and challenges from competing organizations were not always

successfully negotiated. Many lineages of the Pearl River Delta crumbled in the face of dwindling income during the Depression, the chaos of the Japanese occupation, and the challenges of local strongmen and other paramilitary groups taking advantage of these situations.²¹ The wage labor opportunities offered by urban Hong Kong also disrupted the territory-based hegemony of many lineages in the New Territories after the Second World War. Families became more oriented toward outside job opportunities and used their new-found wealth and independent means of support to confront the old status quo.²²

Lineages rarely flourished in urban or overseas settings. A few wealthy Chinese in Southeast Asia (or their children) tried to establish themselves as founders of lineages with corporate property, but this rarely led to more than a temporary family solidarity that disintegrated along with the family fortune.²³ In one sense, founding a lineage in this manner was going about it backwards. Starting with a founder and working down rather than reaching back into the past to legitimize contemporary claims and alliances just made a lineage more inflexible in the face of future contingencies. Moreover, the advantages of official recognition and status were not forthcoming from most non-Chinese governments. Outside of China, lineages were not so useful for maintaining local order and a tax base of independent farmers as they were in China.

Chinese organizations that were more flexible in their membership and corporate structure proved to be much more adaptable to these new situations. Perhaps most significant, however, was the fact that many Chinese migrants already felt they belonged to a lineage in their home village, even if they had been born abroad and never been to China. Many of the primary symbols of the lineage—the ancestral hall, gravesites, and corporate land—were fixed in place. Involvement in native place and surname associations abroad provided the link that maintained involvement with the lineages. This long-standing attachment to lineages based in home villages can still be seen today: much investment in the Pearl River Delta area by overseas Chinese is made with the stipulation that some money be spent in restoring ancestral halls, genealogies, and lineage consciousness among younger members.²⁴

Huiguan

Lineages attained great importance as an intersection of Chinese rural life, official moral discourse, and the day-to-day familiar bonds of kinship. Some lineages reached out beyond the locales in which they were

rooted, building apical ancestral halls in county towns or provincial capitals and maintaining urban schools and dormitories for the support of aspiring young lineage scholars. In general, however, other institutions emerged as more appropriate to urban settings and the needs of migrants in cities and towns, such as merchant associations, guilds, and sworn brotherhoods. Although these other institutions were less in harmony with imperial ideology than the lineages, they were equally important components of Chinese life. They were independent of lineages but still drew upon kin networks for recruitment and maintained close links to particular lineages or villages. They also drew upon the model of kinship as a legitimizing principle as well as upon a variety of less orthodox shared resources, such as native place, ritual oaths, common worship, and the search for material profit.²⁵

Merchant and trade associations, often generically referred to as *huiguan*, were one of the most widespread forms of migrant association in China.²⁶ The earliest *huiguan* were hostels for scholars residing temporarily in Beijing. Merchant *huiguan* became increasingly prominent over the Qing. The earliest merchant *huiguan* were chartered as semiofficial organs to promote state interests in the commercial sphere, but by the late nineteenth century they had become dominated by private interests. Many crafts, services, and trading networks were dominated by people from the same native place, and *huiguan* played a critical role in protecting and promoting such monopolies. These associations were mediums through which merchants could collaborate to stabilize prices, regulate trade, limit competition, mediate disputes, and deal with officialdom. In doing so, the *huiguan* became closely linked to networks and institutions at home, and their services often expanded beyond a focus on commercial activities to a more general assortment of native place interests.

Growth of the *huiguan* corresponded with the increasing delegation of official functions such as tax collection and market regulation to their management, in part as an attempt to harness merchant energies that had grown independently of official control. *Huiguan* officials had better access to their constituencies than officials, saved them the dirty work of becoming directly involved with money and commerce, and were glad to accept the increased prestige and control that came with such responsibilities. The role of *huiguan* as native place associations was even stronger in resettlement *huiguan*, which were associations formed to organize the interests of merchants engaged in the recruitment and funding of settlers to frontiers and depopulated lands, like Sichuan province after the depredations of the Ming to Qing transition. The loans and dormitories provided by these associations involved them in extensive mutual aid activities that

served the interests of all migrants from a single locality rather than specialized trade interests.

Sworn Brotherhoods

Wealthy merchants were best positioned to maintain and benefit from ties to home, and to attract the symbols of imperial approval. Less powerful migrants also formed associations, but these tended to be small, marginalized, or persecuted as subversive. Rotating credit associations, burial societies, crop-watching societies, and irrigation cooperatives were common village associations that were often patronized by local elites.²⁷ By the time of the Ming-to-Qing transition in southeast China, the functions of small mutual aid associations had begun to merge with traditions of sworn brotherhood rites that drew on the rhetoric of popular novels, magic, and apocalyptic religion. The fact that incorporation came through initiation rituals meant that a wide variety of people could join, and these brotherhoods were much more extensive than other mutual aid associations in their scale of membership, alliances, and common ritual symbolism. They also tended to be relatively independent of state and local power structures.

Sworn brotherhoods in South China grew increasingly common during the commercialization and increased labor mobility of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Many of the early extensive sworn brotherhood associations were made up of rural migrants and transportation workers coming together in mutual protection against often hostile locals. This self-protection could easily turn into predation in the form of bandit or criminal gangs. Some sworn brotherhood associations also recruited men who were not migrant laborers but were at the margins of local power where they lived. Such organizations usually drew from several neighboring villages and lineages, thus crossing the boundaries of officially legitimate organizations.

These societies drew upon ideologies of kinship in their internal organization, dividing themselves into master-disciple generational groups that mirrored the father-son relationship and consistently using the metaphor of brotherly relations to characterize ties between members. Nonetheless, Chinese officials disparaged them as vehicles for the destruction of families and obscuring of bloodlines. The government was easily alarmed by any sign of violence from associations considered heterodox and often responded with suppression rather than the tolerance given to the orchestrated violence of recognized lineages.²⁸ In their public stances, lineage elders usually joined in the marginalizing of these alternative organi-

zations, but in practice they often acquiesced and even cooperated with such organizations. Illegal profit and mercenaries to aid in lineage feuds were two possible benefits. By the mid-eighteenth century, as sworn brotherhoods became involved in some well-known local uprisings, names like the Heaven and Earth Society (Tiandihui) and the Hongmen became notorious throughout southeast China as carrying the taint of rebellion, disciplined organization, and subversive secrecy. Although the various organizations which carried these names were probably not coordinated in any but the loosest manner, groups claiming formal investiture and rights to the symbols and reputation surrounding these names (often glossed as Triads in English) became increasingly widespread.

Official distrust was not completely misplaced. Sworn brotherhoods could be more demanding of exclusive loyalty than could lineages and *huiguan*, as is evident in the dialogue of an initiation ritual of the I Hing (Yixing) Society in Philadelphia in the 1880s: "Have you a father? No! Have you sisters? No! Brothers? Only my brothers the Patriots!"²⁹ Indeed, the very act of initiation marked a line of separation from and even opposition to surrounding society. Violence was not integral to the constitution of sworn brotherhoods, but in many contexts they proved more willing than other groups to protect their interests by violence, especially as they had less access to legitimate means of domination. The mere knowledge by outsiders that secret rituals and procedures existed was often enough to create a mystique around sworn brotherhoods that easily translated into a sense of threat and intimidation on which they could capitalize.³⁰

Sworn brotherhoods organized on principles that were independent of official patronage found their most active membership among displaced young men and could easily be used in the service of economic interests. *Huiguan* could also draw on a legacy of practices designed to facilitate the economic and social interests of migrants. Both organizations were easily adapted by migrants to areas outside of China but often with different results. Kinship and native place organizations established abroad tended to engage in transnational activities based on simple links between home village and migrant settlement. Sworn brotherhoods, on the other hand, rarely maintained links to home villages, except when involved in labor recruiting. They were primarily a means by which previously unrelated people could institutionalize newly formed relationships. As such, they often expanded to create links between different migrant communities. As we shall see below, however, the distinctions between these two types of association are only a rough abstraction, and the boundaries between them were far from clear.

Associational Ideologies

Chinese organizations of all kinds drew upon a common fund of images and organizational practices. Many of these appear in the preamble to a list of regulations for the Zhigongtang, a Chinese sworn brotherhood society in the mining areas of western Canada in the late nineteenth century:

It is said that a well-organized society is ruled by reason and that the security and harmony of society depend on the cultivation of harmonious sentiments. The nation treats peace and prosperity as matters of paramount importance: the cangue is moistened by rain. In a hostel a friendly relationship among the lodgers is of paramount importance: the gentle breeze is important on a sea voyage. If everything is carefully planned at the beginning, there will be no regrettable results at the end. One must straighten out one's own life before one can straighten out the lives of others. . . . The purpose of forming the *Chi-kung T'ang* is to maintain a friendly relationship among our countrymen and to accumulate wealth through proper business methods. . . . Among travelers there is no distinction between host and guest. When there is a common purpose we should work together; we arrive at the principle by being aware of the basic situation; we shall not be confused or shaken by slander; we act in the name of justice. In this way our organization shall enjoy a flourishing future; peace shall reign permanently within our hostel; members who are disciplined shall enjoy living together. There is a method in the making of money; one also enjoys the profit which is inherent in the rare items one has for sale.³¹

This preamble was a typical selection of moral homilies, literary images, calls for discipline and solidarity, and promises to serve the profit motive that had brought most of the migrants to Canada in the first place. The list of regulations following it described the keeping of association records, explained the regulation of mining claims and business transactions between members, outlined the rules of residence at the association hostel (one of a network of hostels throughout western Canada), and banned excessive intercourse with outsiders. These concerns depict the Zhigongtang not as hostile to outside authority (indeed, the references to harmony and discipline were quite in line with the interests of any government official) but as self-reliant with no expectation of help from the outside.

The Zhigongtang was a large and powerful organization with a membership developed through an initiation ritual. However, smaller associa-

tions, like surname associations, rotating credit clubs, and even business partnerships used much of the same vocabulary and assumptions about organization for mutual profit. A membership and rule booklet for a small rotating credit association in Chicago in the 1930s had less recourse to allegorical language but still used a similar vocabulary of discipline and morality as the basis of its operation:

I have heard that this kind of righteous association was established by Lord Pang [a legendary philanthropist who became a bodhisattva] in order to provide comfort in adversity and mutual aid in the creation of equally shared interest payments. This is the gentleman's great way of getting rich. This member and his close friends will exercise mutual love and assistance in closely following and implementing the regulations of this association. It must be pledged that unity will be carefully maintained from beginning to end, so that profit will not all go to one man. Nobody will fail to be moved by this lofty friendship between the members.³²

Although individual members occasionally cheated other members, these credit associations were usually successful in generating capital for individual migrant enterprises, especially when they were under the patronage of a wealthy and well-known guarantor. This success resulted not only from their practicality, but also from the precedent of responsibility and unity called upon in the formation of the association and, ideally, embodied in the presence of the guarantor.

The proprietors of laundries, restaurants, shops, rice farms, and other migrant enterprises also organized capital, attracted workers, and harmonized potentially disruptive relationships through the organizational and moral potential offered by sworn brotherhood and kinship. For example, the partnership papers for a Chinese commercial house established in Hawaii in 1901 appealed to literary precedent in its preamble, comparing the way of getting rich through the formation of a company to the "old history of Hon. Bow Suk, in Kuang Chung times."³³ The word *gongsi*, which now means a business enterprise, was widely used in previous centuries to denote agricultural, mining, and trading collectives in China and Southeast Asia that maintained traditions of initiation, symbolism, and violence commonly associated with sworn brotherhood societies.³⁴ Despite the exhortations for mutual support, small businesses could not depend only on the social pressures of their relatively small memberships to maintain social control. Therefore, most migrants chose to establish equal partnerships with men to whom they were already linked through ties of kin or native place. If problems arose with kinsmen, they could be referred to

the mediation of a native place or surname institution. Workers who did not have ties of kinship with the partners were usually incorporated as wage earners rather than on a profit sharing basis and often treated with suspicion.³⁵

The overseas organizational attempts of the imperial state were also framed within the same general discourses, although with less emphasis on brotherly cooperation in search of profit and more on the radiating moral benevolence of the emperor in the creation of mutual aid as a manifestation of righteousness. Many overseas CCBA's were created or reorganized in the 1880s under the patronage of Chinese diplomats. Ambassador Zheng Zaoru is credited with creating the Sociedad de Beneficencia China (SBC—the local version of a *zhonghua huiguan*) in Lima in 1884 and writing the following charter:

The benevolent thoughts of the Sage Son of Heaven generate such mercy for the common people that they even radiate across the seas. He has especially appointed an important official to establish friendship with all the countries, to inquire about the welfare of his people, and comfort them. . . . [The Chinese in Peru] did not understand the urgency of creating networks of solidarity and have not used their capital to maintain security and uphold benevolence. Therefore, it has been ordered that the men concerned establish a Sociedad de Beneficencia China. This will necessarily unify the ambitions of the many as one and make it possible to order affairs such that they may be acted upon. This purpose is deep and far-reaching. . . . The first thing to be done after the establishment of the society will be to encourage the writing of letters home [on behalf of illiterate migrants] to inquire about their relatives and express our people's longing for their roots. Then a hospital, a graveyard, and an old persons' home will be discussed, thus encouraging concerned men of the urgency of finding a way to establish them. It can then be expected that the good deeds of men who desire righteousness will increase, creating a pattern which will benefit the development of brotherly assistance, and of connections with China. This vigorous and excellent tide will spread through foreign lands. In this way, the will of Lord Zheng can be established in order to repay the mercy of the Son of Heaven in not forgetting those who are far away. As this could not be achieved through the grace of only one man, the names of those who contributed should be recorded so they may be remembered a long time.³⁶

Despite the credit claimed by the emperor and his representatives, this document actually recorded not the establishment of the SBC, but the

cooptation and reorganization of a previously existing association under imperial patronage. Many of the projects it suggested had already been undertaken, even before the radiating mercy of the emperor had illuminated the way. This official co-optation, however, helped to prioritize projects that pointed back to China and to encourage migrant elites to identify their interests with those of the state.

Nationalist organizers other than the Qing government utilized similar vocabularies of loyalty and mutual protection in creating their first associations overseas. Like Qing officials, they had to deal with the organizational precedents already in place and find ways of redirecting them toward their own interests. The reform leaders Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao had been quick to join fraternal societies in their travels abroad after 1898, hoping both to make connections with their members and to benefit from the reputation of patriotic rebellion associated with the sworn brotherhood tradition in China. Their dependence upon the organizational precedents of these associations is evident in the charter for a branch of the Emperor Protection Society in Honolulu in 1900: "Those who have been admitted as members are termed 'brothers'. They ought to love each other as brothers from the same parents so as to exert themselves to take necessary steps in regard to political affairs of the country. If anyone do any harm or injury to our brothers we must retaliate the same."³⁷ As more branches were established, the assertions of brotherhood gave way to an increasingly political rhetoric that had an eye to "strengthening the nation" and earning the respect of the international community.

Migrant Associations as Modernity

At different times and places, migrants chose to define their associations as merchant, native place, kinship, fraternal, political, or occupational groups, but in practice no hard distinctions characterized any of them. Investment pooling, profit sharing, mediation, economic regulation, labor coordination, and representation through rotating officerships were common functions of all these associations. Kinship, native place, and sworn brotherhoods were widely understood symbols by which men could be brought together as well as ideological mediums for the further enforcement of trust. In return, the very institutionalization of kin, native place, and brotherhood oaths in these associations increased their salience as factors shaping the lives of Chinese migrants.

The continuing importance of these institutions should not be understood merely as the persistence of traditional values. Even lineages, which were firmly anchored in the control of land and the legacy of the

past, grew in a context of changing government policy and increasing commercialization, and have continued to adapt and include the influence of migrants living thousands of miles away. The rise of *huiguan* and sworn brotherhoods was even more closely linked to the commercialism and physical mobility of the late imperial era, reaching a zenith of importance amidst the urbanization, migration, and political turmoil of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were an important part of general dislocations that could be grouped under the label of modernity. Their creation of extra-official solidarity, their role as mutual aid organizations for mobile people, and their frequent appeal to personal interests and profit meant that they were even more able than lineages to respond flexibly and productively in new situations outside the orbit of the Qing government.

Gary Hamilton has made a similar argument about the role of native place associations among Chinese in Southeast Asia.³⁸ He notes a general trend in the nineteenth century away from migrant power based on clientele networks with local royalty who granted privileges and monopolies in exchange for Chinese labor and trade services. By the end of the century, the power of migrant elites was based on the control of money and the circulation of goods within an expanding market. This shift coincided with an increase in overseas populations, the gradual urbanization of overseas Chinese migrants, an occupational shift away from laborers to petty merchants, and a replacement of sworn brotherhood associations with native place and surname associations as the primary migrant institutions. He argues that all of these changes were aspects of the growth of colonialism, capitalism, and economic activities throughout the Pacific. In terms of colonialism, this shift was a result of government penetration and suppression. In efforts to expand their control, colonial and native governments stopped dealing with and even criminalized the associations that had once dominated rural labor, trade monopolies, and revenue farms. The rituals and violence of sworn brotherhoods were increasingly portrayed as subversive, especially in comparison to the seemingly parochial and benign organizational bases of kinship and native place associations.

By the early twentieth century, the image of Chinese around the world as coolies was replaced with the image of Chinese as small shopkeepers, extending their marketing networks deep into the interiors of many lands. Urban Chinese merchants were in a position to benefit most from the increased trade and migration that came with the expansion of capitalism. Control of debt and distribution networks was rapidly becoming more profitable than control of labor. As "respectable" businessmen, they cooperated with local governments in pushing out contenders for

power. They also dominated the native place and surname associations that were emerging in greater numbers. Kinship and native place links were strong and flexible means of mobilizing business connections and supervising credit relationships.

Hamilton's argument should be qualified by noting that the decline of sworn brotherhoods in favor of surname and native place associations was particular to the history of Southeast Asia. In California, *huiguan* organized the first flows of labor to the gold mines in the 1850s. As Chinese were pushed out of most laboring occupations in the 1870s, sworn brotherhoods emerged to challenge the *huiguan* hegemony, which was no longer able to serve migrant interests.³⁹ This qualification reminds us not to erect any absolute distinctions between the characteristics of different Chinese associations and that such organizations are always embedded in larger socioeconomic contexts. The point remains that the mobilization of "traditional" and "parochial" Chinese bonds could be a practical response to changes brought by capitalist expansion and competition.

Lineages, *huiguan*, and sworn brotherhood associations were not merely a cultural background that was transplanted and adapted to new situations abroad. They were linked and expansive organizations that reached out from China and defined a global field of activity. They were the very fabric by which migration was made possible. Moreover, their support of migrant interests was inseparable from their mediation of modernizing changes.

COSMOLOGY AND RITUAL

The coexistence of official and local institutions can be described in terms of realist politics and economic shifts. Yet tension remains despite these practical accommodations. The creation of an ideological order can often prevent this tension from bursting into open conflict. In China, ritual practice was an important means of creating ideological order. It functioned well not because it demanded conformity of perception, but because it created a space for both the coexistence and confrontation of differences.

The Importance of Form

Proper ritual and behavior were very important in imperial China, from the emperor down to peasants in British Hong Kong. Scholar-officials often started from the assumption that correct comportment was the very basis of human society. The *Book of Rites*, one of the most popular ritual reference books of late imperial China, had this to say about ritual:

Ceremonies form a great instrument in the hands of the ruler. They provide the means by which to resolve what is doubtful, clarify what is abstruse, receive the spirits, examine regulations, and distinguish humanness from righteousness. To govern a state without ritual would be as if to plow a field without a plowshare.⁴⁰

In orthodox ideology, rites created order in the world of men that corresponded to the order of heaven. Virtue was perfected through the performance of rituals. Status distinctions and obligations were made clear, and stability and harmony were perpetuated. Ignorance of proper forms signified an undeveloped intellect and low cultural level—a gap separating one from the true nature of things.

The correct ritual deportment of rulers was only the tip of the iceberg. Everyday social interaction in China (e.g., greetings, speech, dress, and writing) was also highly ritualized. Widely available handbooks outlined how rites should be performed in the household; gave detailed standards of behavior for the relations between husband and wife, father and son, and official and commoner; provided models for invitations, welcomes, good-byes, and other social interactions both written and oral; and offered descriptions of the gifts appropriate to particular occasions, often with reference to local dialect terms and customs. Public ritual events like naming ceremonies and funerals were often choreographed all the way down to the wording of personal conversations. Documents and petitions, presented to mortal officials or to the gods, would only be considered if properly drawn and sealed.

A successful ritual was a properly performed one. The meaning of the ceremonial actions and symbols was of little importance in comparison to their correct ordering and placement. Investigators both in China and overseas have reported that different ritual participants and social groups often had widely differing interpretations of common symbols. Sometimes, participants had no interpretation at all, nor any interest in having one, usually assuming that some expert somewhere knew the correct meaning. Nonetheless, participants were still greatly concerned that the parts of a ritual come together and proceed in the proper order.⁴¹ This emphasis on proper performance helped bridge the gap between imperial ideology and local practices, creating a field within which differing interests could be articulated.

James Watson's discussions of orthopraxis elaborate on the importance of ritual form in China as a tool of political and cultural integration across geographical and social distance.⁴² He argues that many ritual symbols and procedures are common throughout China. His own research has

attempted to show the similarity of ritual procedures surrounding marriage and death that have been performed throughout China, even by Christians. This did not come about only by imitation, but also through the intervention of the state and local elites searching for recognition from the state. For many officials (as for Watson), identity as Chinese (and therefore as civilized humans) was based more on the proper performance of key rituals than on any racial or political distinctions. They made constant efforts to standardize ritual practice throughout the realm and among foreign tribute missions. This meant not only the propagation of ritual norms, but also the harmonizing of local variations and the revision of rituals that were no longer suitable to the times. The vigilance of the Chinese state against heterodoxy entailed not the monitoring of thought but the suppression of military threat and harmonization of public behavior. Even emperors patronized Buddhist sects and eclectic folk religions. If they continued to perform and promote the rituals required of their position, no contradiction existed. As long as external order was manifested through acceptance of proper symbols and individuals were fulfilling their proper roles in relation to others, the imperial government did not need to exact ideological conformity from its subjects. Merely taking part in a ritual was submission to its authority.

Watson's argument comes from the perspective of an outsider who can transcend many of the differences in ritual interpretation. Different actors within Chinese society held different views on what really held it all together. Scholars generally claimed the empire was held together through the moral virtue cultivated by rites and often assumed that conformity in ritual led to conformity in values. Local communities, on the other hand, rarely looked much further than the relationships created around particular gods, ancestors, and material concerns. They assumed that proper ritual created a relationship of mutual obligation between god and petitioner, thus effecting the granting of favors and protection. The role of brute force in maintaining the power of the imperial state was more openly acknowledged than bureaucrats were wont to do. Rambunctious local gods could even invert the norms of the imperial bureaucracy. Even single individuals could hold contradicting views on the meaning of ritual and religious matters, such as the fate of the soul after death. In various contexts, informants have told anthropologists that dead souls inhabit the ancestral tablets, pass their days endlessly in the underworld, and are reincarnated after a period of judgment, feeling little pressure to reconcile the differences.⁴³

These differences highlight the importance of ritual. Different in-

terpretations could coexist because they were rarely made to account for themselves, except by nosy ethnographers. At the same time, ritual brought these differences together in a single order. Participation in a ritual was (at least temporary) submission to the world that it created. The standardization of ritual in China did not eradicate unorthodox ritual; it was a constant process that incorporated and transformed local rituals in the name of updating and harmony. The result was not moral conformity, so much as the arrangement of order between conflicting interests.

My point is not that the elaborate development of ritual was a unique characteristic of Chinese society. The feelings and knowledge of contemporary Americans are equally shaped by etiquette and form. Legal procedure and jargon, table manners, business correspondence, job interviews, and the plot structure of fiction are just some of the more obvious examples, all with reference manuals available for guidance. Without the familiar structure of thesis and supporting arguments, academic prose such as this would convey no knowledge to its intended audience.⁴⁴ The most notable characteristic of China in this respect was the sophisticated understanding that many scholar-officials had of ritual and how to manipulate it. They knew that bureaucratic order, local solidarities, and individual desires all came together through ritual. Like associations and institutions, rituals at any moment were embedded in particular historical contexts but also provided precedents for reproduction and adaptation. Of particular interest are local rituals involving ghosts and gods which defined the relationships between inside and outside, and channeled interactions between groups.⁴⁵

Gods

The politically integrating power of ritual came to the forefront in the official temple system and worship of gods. The worship of officially recognized and unrecognized gods provided a forum for the negotiation of social integration and differentiation. This took place both through the simultaneous existence of different interpretations and through the services of particular gods who were efficacious mediators. Imperial cosmologies emphasized a vertical structure in which local units were distinguished hierarchically along lines that were ultimately integrated at the center. The gods of households, towns, cities, and the capital occupied different levels in that hierarchy. Local communities, on the other hand, engaged in communal rituals as acts of solidarity and differentiation from other groups, including the negotiation of relationships with bureaucratic and military

powers. Thus, the official pantheon did not impose a set of homogeneous interpretations. Rather, it laid out a set of widely recognized symbols that made communication, accommodation, and resistance possible.

Heaven was often depicted as a bureaucratic realm comparable to and perhaps mirrored by the bureaucracy on earth.⁴⁶ Officially, the temple system and its corresponding rituals were the keys to establishing harmony in the world of men. The emperor was at the center performing the rituals that mediated with heaven at the Temple of Heaven; city gods were worshiped by city magistrates, local gods by local communities, and the last five generations of family ancestors by individual households. In this model, the relationship between the units was a vertical one of nested hierarchy, with the increasingly numerous subdivisions spread out in relationship to the center. Order was most highly manifested at the center, and became increasingly diffuse as one moved farther away. Nonetheless, disorder was held in check by properly ranked incorporation into the hierarchy. Thus, the perpetuation of appropriate rites by suitable representatives at each level of the hierarchy was of paramount concern. Commoners were excluded from official rites performed at the city and imperial temples, and officials tended to ignore local festivals, except to criticize the wanton ways in which they were performed.

The worship of gods had a different political significance from local perspectives, where it unified groups and distinguished them from outsiders. Temples and gods were important as centers of territorial, kin, and occupational groupings, and as sources of magical power, rather than as branches of a central power structure radiating out from Beijing. Communal worship often took the form of temple fairs and processions through a local territory. The leadership and financing of these festivals were mediums for the competition and distribution of terrestrial power. The gods protected local communities against threats from the outside. Groups thus distinguished themselves by their particular relationship to a god, and their particular method of worship. These particularities were tied to specific historical memories: perhaps a temple had been established by the founder of the community, the founder himself had become a god, or a particular miracle or act of domination had tied the god and community together. The possession of spirit mediums by gods (or, more commonly in the Pearl River Delta, by ancestors) kept the past relevant through continuing dialogue. The distinction between groups was horizontal, and the rising and waning fortunes of a group were thought to be related to the powers and accessibility of the god associated with it.

Many local temple gods belonged to the official pantheon of state-approved gods, and the state was usually ready to co-opt any new god

that was rising in popularity. Local groups recognized that a celestial hierarchy existed, and individuals interacted with many gods on the basis of that assumption. The more bureaucratic gods required name, address, and date of birth in order to find the file of the petitioner and consider his request. From this perspective, Chinese worship can be seen as an extension of imperial order beyond the limits of the terrestrial bureaucracy or as a process of learning the kinds of procedures needed to interact with bureaucrats in the world of men.⁴⁷ Officials often promoted ritual as a memorializing action, an orderly procedure which put the mind at ease and created morality in accordance with the order of heaven. They publicly condemned the magic, superstition, waste, and self-interest they perceived in local worship. Nonetheless, locals did not sacrifice total control of the celestial bureaucracy to the official ideology. The hierarchy itself remained stable, but the identities of the gods who filled the positions were often disputed and subject to local interpretation, as were the meanings of rituals used to worship them. Local worship was generally quite pragmatic, assuming that gods were motivated to perform favors based on the same feelings of greed and reciprocal obligation as men. Worshipping a god was not presenting tribute, as an official might have it, but making a deal or, alternatively, taking part in a nurturing exchange similar to parent and child relationships.

Another significant divergence in local and official interpretations was that the government presented the heavenly hierarchy as a structure of radiating moral example that ensured civil harmony, whereas many local representations gave it a much more military cast that emphasized the hierarchy of command and the ever present threat of violence. The city god was a prominent site for these contradictions between official and local views. For officials, he was the final dependable representative of morality and rectitude. Locals, on the other hand, often depicted him as a general in charge of a host of demonic powers, a force to be feared. These contradictions had no real ideological resolution, but neither were they totally incompatible, enacted as they were with respect to commonly shared symbols of authority.

From local perspectives, gods lower in the celestial bureaucracy were more efficacious at protecting communities and granting personal favors than higher ones because they were much more approachable and responsive to the needs of commoners. Higher gods, like great bureaucrats in the world of men, were far too distant, surrounded by red tape, and morally demanding to be of much use. The gods most often considered to be of greatest efficacy were officially recognized, but not quite orthodox enough to be completely identified with the heavenly bureaucracy.

They were often female gods, like Guanyin, a Buddhist goddess of mercy, and Mazu, a very popular goddess in coastal areas, who was not only a woman but also a virgin and thus very unfilial and immoral because she produced no sons.⁴⁸ Guandi, a very popular god in many parts of China and overseas, was a famous soldier from the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* who died childless. He was considered to be the god of wealth, brotherhood, and war. As we have already seen, brotherhood and the search for riches have much in common with each other (the military aspect of migrant associations is elaborated in chapter 6) and have the potential to form power bases that could be subversive to the imperial state.

Such gods had been accepted into the imperial pantheon as a result of widespread popular worship but were rarely found in any of the higher bureaucratic positions. They had one foot in the bureaucratic system and the other foot in the popular world. They were both flexible in response to human demands and well connected in the celestial bureaucracy, and thus well suited to act efficaciously as mediators between the world of men and the underworld. Many Daoist priests also bridged the gap between officialdom and local community by asserting that their rituals involved a specialized knowledge of the procedures necessary for navigating the underworld bureaucracy, often comparing their services to those of lawyers in the world of men. They rarely earned the respect of the popular gods, but could earn a good living nonetheless.⁴⁹

The bureaucracy was not the source of all power. Gods identified with the Buddhist tradition were also often treated with slightly more respect than those associated with Daoism because of their special connections to foreign sources of power and prestige.⁵⁰ In more peripheral parts of China, distant from the reach of the imperial state and its favors, popular gods frequently mocked and inverted official order, acting out the corruption and arbitrariness of the bureaucracy in practice. While abroad, Chinese were rarely shy about worshiping any local god they thought would be responsive to them. Local gods had local jurisdiction and the connections necessary to grant local requests. Chinese in nineteenth-century Philadelphia built small altars in their shops dedicated to the "Chinese and Foreign Lord of the Place."⁵¹ Chinese in Bangkok have long visited a temple that houses what the Thais believe to be the spirit of San Bao He, a famous mendicant monk. The Chinese claim this name refers to the eunuch admiral Zheng He, who commanded the early Ming Dynasty fleets that sailed through the Indian Ocean. Chinese are aware of the Thai interpretation and figure that it only makes this spirit better connected and more efficacious.⁵² Only small adaptations in sacrificial procedure

had to be made in response to local tastes, such as not offering pork to the Islamic saints.

The simultaneous tension and collaboration between lineages and the state reappears again in relationships between local communities of worship and the imperial pantheon. The role of efficacious gods brings out the importance of mediators in bridging these tensions. Few economic and social transactions in China could be carried on without the assistance of a third party whose reputation was well known to all concerned. The third party made connections where no previous relation existed, and used his influence to guarantee the outcome. Skinner's work on the Chinese elites of Thailand in the 1950s shows in great detail the mediating role of men who were skilled in two cultural idioms. He concluded, however, that their situation was paradoxical—that these men could not persist and were vanguards of assimilation.⁵³ I would argue, on the other hand, that these men embodied what Wakeman called the "dynamic oscillation" between integration with and autonomy from the local state and its cultural hegemony. Indeed, recent scholars have shown that Skinner's prediction of Chinese assimilation has not come to pass, and that a recognizable Sino-Thai identity has emerged.⁵⁴ The existence of gods and men that straddled boundaries was both expected and desirable for the maintenance of local groups, a stable yet dynamic form of adaptation.

Men who could act as intercultural mediators for overseas communities tended either to be respected and central to the community or despised and marginalized—and sometimes a bit of both. While the boundaries themselves were blurred within the persons of the mediators, the profits and prestige that could be gained by controlling access across those boundaries meant that mediators had a strong interest in maintaining them. Because their prestige arose from their ability to bridge differences and ease tensions, they depended on the continued existence of those tensions and differences, however they might be defined.

Ghosts

In Thailand and other overseas countries, Chinese migrants were not trying to deal with the imperial state and its stabilizing ambitions but with the obscure and disordered habits of barbarians. Direct dealings with outsiders were risky, unprotected by the encompassing institutions and bonds of family or sworn brotherhoods. They were discouraged by lineages or associations that wanted to keep wealth within the unit and by elites who wanted to keep such interactions under their control. On the other hand,

outsiders offered opportunities not readily available within more familiar relationships. In this sense, the relationship of men with ghosts is a more appropriate metaphor to describe Chinese relations with non-Chinese than the relations of men and gods. Gods (although, as we shall see, the distinctions between gods and ghosts were often blurred) were associated with the bureaucracy, order, and civilization of the Empire. Ghosts were the results of breakdowns in moral order; in this case, the order of filiality, proper ritual, and proper accommodation for death. They were tangible examples of disorder, of civilized ways in abeyance, and the hassles that arose as a consequence. Yet this very alienation from the restrictions and violence of imperial order meant that ghosts could also be more approachable and easy to deal with than gods, sometimes providing favors that would be difficult to obtain elsewhere. These favors could be obtained through the establishment of formalized and predictable relationships of exchange.

Chinese often directly applied the term *ghost* to non-Chinese, marking them as people of unfamiliar cultural practices, if not "beyond the pale" of civilization. One missionary traveling through Canton in 1835 was particularly distressed by this practice, here using the word *devil* rather than *ghost*:

In addition to the word "barbarian," which is liberally bestowed on all without the pale of Chinese civilization, a more offensive epithet is not infrequently employed. On passing through the suburbs of Canton, or up and down the river, the cry of "foreign devil" salutes the ear on every side. Even mothers may be seen teaching their infants to point and to shout the offensive epithet as the stranger passes by. Some will even go out of their way or desist from their work to gratify their railing propensities.⁵⁵

The term was still in common usage in 1930s Chicago. Americans were known as "Flowery Flag ghosts" (*huaqi gui*)—the Flowery Flag being a Chinese name for America—postmen as "letter delivery ghosts" (*songxin gui*), bartenders as "bar ghosts" (*jiuba gui*), farmers as "potato ghosts" (*shuzi gui*), and bank tellers as "bank room ghosts" (*bank-fang gui*).⁵⁶

Most Chinese could probably not have explained their use of *gui* as anything more than a habitual stereotype. Nonetheless, the use of this particular word draws attention to its metaphorical appropriateness in understanding Chinese views of non-Chinese, and the relationships implied by the label could be found in many of their actions. In earlier usage, *gui* was a generic term for animals, sometimes extended to denote people of alien origin.⁵⁷ It was often difficult for Chinese to observe and

describe foreigners without being shocked at their disregard of the norms of human culture and resorting to images of disorder and bestial appetites. The reminiscences of a Chinese migrant in New York at the turn of the century of how foreigners had been spoken about in his home village illustrates this shock:

I listened and heard much concerning the red-haired, green-eyed foreign devils with the hairy faces. . . . They were wild and fierce and wicked, and paid no regard to the moral precepts of Confucius and the Sages; neither did they worship their ancestors, but pretended to be wiser than their fathers and grandfathers. They loved to beat people and to rob and murder. In the streets of Hong Kong many of them could be seen reeling drunk. Their speech was a savage roar, like the voice of the tiger or buffalo. Their men and women lived together like animals, without any marriage or faithfulness, and even were shameless enough to walk the streets arm in arm in daylight.⁵⁸

Ghosts, gods, and ancestors had all started out as men. After death, some men were promoted to the status of gods due to some mixture of uncommon virtue and widespread popularity. Ancestors were given material support in the underworld through family worship and continued to influence the well-being of the family. To become an ancestor, the dead needed money, contracts, servants, clothes, and furniture in order to navigate the underworld bureaucracy and exist in comfort. Ideally, descendants were expected to continue providing these necessities by worshiping the dead souls, as embodied in a tablet on the family altar, for five generations. Untended souls not properly incorporated into a family line would become ghosts. Ghosts wandered around the world of men, anguished, hungry, and restless, causing trouble and worry to the living. Dying with no sons who could continue the family line, dying in a foreign country, dying by suicide, drowning, or violence were common ways in which men could end up as ghosts.

The identities of ancestors were clearly demarcated, but ghosts were the spirits of individuals whose names and positions had been forgotten, entities who had no relationship with a living human. Gods and ancestors were worshiped individually, each one represented by a tablet or idol. Ghosts were worshiped in mass, anonymously. Large communal ceremonies for ghost propitiation were carried out in many parts of China during the seventh lunar month, when the gates of hell were opened and ghosts roamed the face of the earth. The offerings given to the ghosts were not later eaten by the ritual participants as in other sacrifices but were left to the local beggars. The chaos that usually ensued after the gates were

opened and the beggars let in was considered to be a fitting counterpart in the world of men to the chaos of ghosts being let loose in the spirit world.⁵⁹ In their domestic worship, families put a snack or meal at some undistinguished place outside the back door to propitiate any ghost that might happen to wander by. Taiwanese informants in the 1960s said that a ghost should be treated much as one would treat a local hoodlum or policeman: "You have to give them something to eat so that they will go away and not cause trouble."⁶⁰

Hints of such relationships could be detected in the ways that migrants dealt with non-Chinese abroad. Migrants in Philadelphia in the 1880s often told stories of the midnight visitations to their laundries of un-laid spirits that were usually non-Chinese. During the Hungry Ghost Festival, clothes, the object most frequently provided by laundry workers to non-Chinese, were burnt in laundries as sacrifices to the local ghosts.⁶¹ A scene very evocative of the feeding of small snacks to ghosts in order to keep them in good temper was described in a newspaper account of Chinese New Year's festivities in Stockton, California, in the 1880s:

The Chinese were well-behaved, orderly and not drunk or riotous; however, there were white drunks about Chinatown. . . . Cigars, drinks, candies, and so forth are passed to the visitors by smiling Celestials, and all is hospitality and good will. . . . When a Chinaman receives a visitor, he first offers him a small cup of tea, then a cigar, and then anything else that is about that the visitor desires.⁶²

The association of ghosts with chaos was not absolute. Injuries inflicted by a ghost on the health or fortunes of living family members or people living near the site of their death were usually a means of attracting attention to their plight, with the goal of reincorporation into a worship structure through processes such as spirit marriage or adoption. In these instances, the status of ancestor or ghost was defined by integration or lack of integration into proper family relationships. Such ghosts were usually looked upon with pity more than fear, despite the trouble they caused. Nonetheless, the order created through family integration was not absolute. Souls that were adequately worshiped by one family could still be considered ghosts by the members of other families.⁶³ In this case, the label *ghost* just marked out a realm of outsiders not linked through kinship ties, without any ultimate implication of disorder. Such a "ghost" was still recognized to be part of the order of a different family.

Despite efforts to maintain order and boundaries, ghostliness could

even penetrate the heavenly bureaucracy. Most households had altars to the kitchen god, the lowest member of the imperial hierarchy. Worshipers have described the kitchen god in a variety of ways: as a minor clerical functionary, an informant, a voyeur, a gossip old woman, a guest, and even a suicide. Sacrifices to him were sometimes perceived as bribes that would fill his mouth and render him unable to make his report to higher-ups. In most of these cases, he was depicted more like a ghost than a Confucian official. Hardly a moral exemplar, or even an efficacious mediator, the kitchen god embodied the dissipation and corruption of imperial order when spread thin at the lowest levels.⁶⁴ More telling, however, were aspects of the ghostly world commonly depicted in a military idiom that emphasized a confluence of rigid order, threat, and the ultimate chaos of pillage and violent destruction. Many community and territorial gods, including city gods, were seen by locals as celestial generals commanding fearsome ghost armies that were far more threatening and demonic than the slightly pathetic and outcast hungry ghosts. From this perspective, the basis of bureaucratic power was not its manifestation of heavenly virtue, but its marshaling and control of potentially chaotic and destructive forces. Even gods based power on ghosts.⁶⁵

Most ghosts, such as the spirits of dead soldiers and drowning victims, had little hope of incorporation as ancestors. Other means of differentiating themselves from anonymity were available, however, usually based on the creation of exchange relationships with humans. Some ghosts just started causing trouble to strangers and making their demands for worship known through spirit mediums. When worship was obtained, these ghosts reciprocated by providing protection to their worshipers and becoming "little gods."⁶⁶ In this sense they were in a position similar to renegade gods who had gained power by flaunting and circumventing moral standards. Many ghost shrines, particularly the burial sites of unknown soldiers, grew extremely popular because of the willingness of the ghosts to respond to petitions for personal favors without the troublesome procedures and moral requirements of the bureaucrats. Relationships with ghosts or with renegade gods who stood completely outside of the bureaucracy were based on relatively straightforward and egalitarian forms of reciprocity, accessible to anyone and uncomplicated by the demands of hierarchy and formalized morality. The unspecified nature of ghostliness provided more room for exchange than the clearly delineated structures of the bureaucracy, and the willingness of ghosts to grab any opportunity to be worshiped overcame the constraints of adhering to a moral ideology. Knowledge of the desires of ghosts and the ability to control, deploy

and strike bargains with them were possible routes to wealth and power, free from the intervention of mediators.

Cosmologies of Migration

Rituals and depictions of the netherworld were arenas for the articulation of imperial control and local autonomy in China. Common symbolism did not so much reconcile differences as place them in relation to each other. The imperial cosmology arranged these symbols vertically in a hierarchical relation to the center, whereas the popular cosmology depicted the world horizontally as a collection of autonomous units struggling and negotiating for their own benefit. Conflicts rarely came to a head because integration into the imperial system was ultimately an abstract and distant process, achieved only in the person of the emperor. Daily life had to negotiate the challenges of neighbors and the immediate physical environment.

Efficacious gods, Daoist priests, and other ritual specialists acted as points of communication between different worlds, such as state and locality or the underworld and the world of men. By providing services that crossed those boundaries, they helped bridge the gap between them. At the same time, the very necessity of their services perpetuated the differences. From most perspectives, ghosts inhabited a realm of disorder and mild danger. Although official ideologues tended to dismiss belief in ghosts as degenerate local custom, the renegade status of ghosts confirmed the official ideology of the family as a basic unit of worldly order, condemning the souls who fell outside of the family as illegitimate and dangerous. Yet humans could take advantage of this renegade status by establishing exchange relationships with ghosts that could circumvent more restrictive official channels to opportunity and power. Many even suspected that official power was dependent on ghosts in the end.

This structuring of social relationships can be used to depict the experiences of Chinese migrants outside of China. Non-Chinese were often seen to embody a kind of social disorder similar to that represented by ghosts: a sphere that was threatening yet rich with opportunities and sources of power. If exchange relationships could be established with non-Chinese, profit and prestige could result. On an individual level, the establishment of such relationships was facilitated by the development of formalized methods of exchange, such as the simple vocabulary necessary for basic business transactions. Yet the disorder of ghosts could also be relative. The barbarians were members of strong and threatening states (sometimes so strong that migrants came to doubt the strength of the Chi-

nese state) against which migrants needed to position themselves. They also had customs that could be learned. Men who became skilled in those customs could act as crucial mediators, protecting the integrity of the Chinese community through the channeling of services and favors. That is to say, patterns of social relations from China provided a template by which the increased integration of migrant communities with their surroundings would mean their identification not as individualized objects of assimilation but as a distinct corporate unit that could interact with outsiders through predictable channels of communication.

This model can help to understand much about Chinese migrants, such as the important roles of cosmopolitan elites and the ways that interactions between Chinese and non-Chinese may have been differently interpreted. Yet such a mapping of ritual order onto social behavior must be made with great caution. It becomes particularly problematic when we note that many of the rituals described here are embedded in the framework of the imperial Chinese state. Of what relevance were these rituals and cosmologies in the context of post-1911 China, not to mention overseas environments?

Ironically, the majority of the material used in this chapter was drawn from ethnographic research in post-1950s Taiwan and Hong Kong. The imperial framework of the rituals has obviously retained some significance in changing political environments. Although scholars have noted some adaptations in post-imperial times, available historical research confirms a broad area of continuity.⁶⁷ The failure of early republican governments in China has been explained in part by their inability and disinclination to engage in expected ritual exchanges.⁶⁸ Maurice Bloch has also noted the stability of ritual practices over two hundred years of political change in Madagascar. He argues that the vagueness and illogic of rituals makes it possible for their representations of power to remain stable through different actors and governments.⁶⁹ The very purpose of ritual is to depict ideologically the continuity of power despite contingent events. Adjustments are made, but the basic relationships remain the same.

Yet the large, rowdy festivals, orchestrated rituals, and territorial processions that still have symbolic and organizational importance in Taiwan and the People's Republic of China in recent years had largely disappeared from the Western Hemisphere by the early twentieth century. Most migrant associations maintained altars, but they were almost all dedicated to Guandi, which emphasizes how little attention was given to the marking of community through histories of association and reciprocity with different gods.⁷⁰ The more secular rituals of migrant associations—mostly banquets and speeches—had become the main symbolic markers of differ-

entiation among Chinese. Traditional calendric festivals such as Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn festival were celebrated primarily as occasions for family reunions, relaxation, personal visits, and more associational banquets.⁷¹ Funerals of migrant elites were perhaps the largest communal ritual to be regularly encountered in the Western Hemisphere, usually as a display of the wealth and prestige of the man who died. Why were the rituals rarely reproduced abroad? Without the rituals, what happened to the kinds of social relationships that were played out through them?

Paul Siu recorded a young migrant in Chicago in the 1930s as saying, "The ancestor, if he is really a spirit, can't come over here with us, can he? This place is not suitable for him. Things in this foreign land must be different."⁷² Unfortunately, the context of this comment was not enough to determine if the speaker was a believer speculating on the physics of spirit mobility or a skeptic influenced either by his experience in America or by the anti-superstition trends then popular in China. In all these cases, however, this comment assumed that Chinese religion, like the lineages, had fixed territorial moorings. Ancestors, territorial gods, and even ghosts were associated with land, gravesites, and shrines. Although the migrant had moved, his territorial base had not. Was it not pointless to perform ancestral and territorial rituals abroad when they were being performed at home, often with the continued participation of the migrants through financial contributions and decision making?

Religious practice did persist abroad in more individualized forms, regardless of whether or not the gods were able to travel across the ocean to hear personal petitions. Most patrons of temples and altars sought personal divinations and individual favors for luck in gambling and business. Similarly, graveside rituals and care for the bones of the dead continued to be performed at least until the Second World War. Belief was not gone, but the context for communal worship was. Chinese migrants and non-Chinese states had no common symbolic language by which they could engage in ritual discourses.

Even if it had been possible, it may not have been desirable to reproduce Chinese rituals in non-Chinese states. In the eyes of foreign states, the relevant units of group solidarity were not clans and villages, but ethnicity, class, or even occupation. At the level of local ethnic politics previous rituals became useless and even detrimentally divisive in the face of larger threats. Not only were the Chinese dealing with governments that cared nothing for their ritual symbolism (as was officially the case in Taiwan and Hong Kong), but also with neighbors who did not share their ritual practices. The secular associations proved more adept at adapting to these new conditions than did religious ritual. Chinese who were most

attuned to local assimilationist rhetoric were even inclined to reject the usual migrant associations in favor of new ones like the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, Tayouk Tennis Club of Miraflores, or Chinese Rotary Clubs. The rhetoric and rituals of nationalism also provided a common means of interaction with neighbors and local states, although this could backfire when the loyalty of the Chinese was called into question. New Year's parades and Chinatown arches are other examples of how Chinese have defined their identity and territory in ways that local states and neighbors could appreciate. All of these approaches involved the re-formulation of group solidarity and individual ambition in terms of local and global power structures.

Although this secularization of social relations can seem like a pragmatic reaction to new social environments, we may still ask about the continued relevance of rituals in China among migrants who still contributed financially to their perpetuation. Hill Gates has suggested a twist on the Chinese ritual cosmologies that may help address this issue. More strongly than I have done, she depicts two ritual ideologies in opposition to each other, sharing a common commitment to the family. Official Confucianist ideology was a manifestation of the interests of the tributary state (which includes Taiwan and the PRC). Popular rituals made up an ideology of petty capitalism that was in opposition to those states. She argues that relations with ghosts are actually an idealization of petty capitalist relations that cut across officially approved hierarchy. They represent exchange relationships entered from positions of equality, in which money is a purifying medium that opens up the lines of communication between the dead and the living. "Money subverts the rigid rules of tributary inequality, offers greater distributive justice, and thus glows with a luster brighter than virtue."⁷³ Thus, in the context of the imperial state, ghost worship was a manifestation of a transcultural petty bourgeoisie ideology. This suggests a variation on the idea that foreign governments merely could not understand Chinese rituals. Starting from the idea that migration itself was a family strategy in pursuit of gain, it could follow that once Chinese were abroad they could openly devote their daily lives to petty capitalist transactions. The ideology of tributary power that had compelled negotiations to take place in ritual form no longer existed as a significant force in the lives of migrants.

Difficulties arise with this explanation when we note that, even if the rituals tended to disappear abroad, the ghosts did not. More so than with ancestors and gods, ghosts were likely to be found in inhospitable places. Migrants were surrounded by ghosts and were not necessarily happy about it. Petty capitalist or not, they wanted to carefully regulate their relation-

ships with those ghosts. Not only did migrants resist becoming ghosts themselves by dying abroad with nobody to take care of their souls, but even the experience of living abroad was akin to an experience of ghostliness in this world. In Shanghai, enormous territorial rites and festivals to feed the hungry ghosts were sponsored by native place associations on into the twentieth century, despite the objections of officials. They were instrumental in demarcating and expanding the prestige of competing native place interests, but also provided rites of incorporation that dealt with the worries of the many rootless and indigent men in the city.⁷⁴ The daily life of isolation and frustration described by Paul Siu also resonates as a kind of ghostliness on earth. Despite the potential benefits of interacting with ghosts, migration remained a risky flirtation with all the negative aspects of ghostliness.

Gates's logic might explain this as the alienation that results when petty bourgeoisie ideology is carried to its extreme. If money and exchange carried the luster of egalitarian virtue, they also brought the isolation of atomized self-interest. The main protection that migrants had against this atomization was the maintenance of networks linking them to their homes. Individuals were willing to confront the risks of the outside only if they were assured of the backing and stability of family and other corporate units. An individual fraternizing with ghosts on his own without any corporate support was likely to become little more than a ghost himself (as with the many bicultural individuals who were despised and mistrusted despite the services they performed). The ritual cosmology within which migrants were embedded must be understood on a transnational scale. Migrants were not merely relocating themselves in a new setting where ritual relations had to be reconstructed. They were entering the ghostly margins of a cosmology centered on their families in China and had to put effort into maintaining those links.

As these networks expanded, they adapted situationally to local sociopolitical contexts, as discussed in the following three chapters. The challenges of nationalism and of modernizing and localizing identities were not always successfully accommodated by these transnational networks. Also, the transnational links could be brittle, and migrants occasionally broke off and fell out of their networks. Adjustments were made, however, differently in each of the three locations, but all connected to the same economic and cultural interests in Hong Kong and villages in South China.



CHAPTER 5

Becoming Foreigners in Peru

They have come from Canton
even blind men and babes,
and now they are dressed for respect.
Today, in Peru
the Chinaman wants to be somebody.

Today many are plantation managers
and owners of shops,
and through pure plunder
have earned lots of cash.

They have earned to the point
they can kick back and grow fat.
This thing so disgraceful
is the obvious truth.
They desire to be somebody
but they never will be.

"El chino quiere ser gente," Peruvian folksong

THE CONSTITUTION OF A BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Wu Tingfang's Agenda for the Chinese of Peru

The visit to Lima of Wu Tingfang, the minister plenipotentiary and envoy extraordinary of the Chinese Empire to the United States, Cuba, and Peru in 1909 was a significant social and diplomatic occasion for Peruvians and Chinese alike. Chinese in Peru have remembered this visit as a political and social success reflecting on them and on China as a modern nation. The Porras-Wu Protocol that resulted from this visit left little basis for such a proud memory. At best, the voluntary suspension of emigration to

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