

PART ONE

Context

Introduction

Li and the Qing State

Li is the ultimate principle. When all things are embodied by this principle, then there is order.

—RITUAL MANUAL FOR THE QIANLONG EMPEROR,
HUANGCHAO LIZHI, 1.1.

On the eleventh day of the fourth lunar month of 1636, in the cool spring dawn of Mukden, the Manchu capital, Hong Taiji adopted the title of emperor and announced the founding of the Qing empire. This double proclamation—that a new empire was born and its sovereign was to be known as emperor (Chinese, *huangdi*; Manchu, *hūwangdi*)—was made amid a scripted ceremony to legitimize the act and lend authority to political actors. As the sky began to lighten in the pale morning hours, Hong Taiji led all his officials—Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese—out the palace gates to the suburban Altar of Heaven and Earth.¹ Participants dismounted from their horses and took positions according to rank. Hong Taiji ascended the altar and stood in the center facing north, where he occupied a symbolic position at the center of the universe—a place only the emperor could take to represent the human link between Heaven and Earth. He placed three sticks of incense in the burner and bowed; he presented three bolts of silk, and made three offerings of wine.² After each presentation, all in attendance performed a rite of obeisance of three genuflections and nine prostrations.³

Hong Taiji read a statement. It had been prepared for the ceremony, and its intended audience was no less than Heaven. “I humbly inherit the enterprise of my forbearers,” he began, and went on to express his constant devotion to and vexation of ruling over the past ten years. With the blessing of Heaven and the ancestors, Hong Taiji professed, he had been able to oversee accomplishments worthy of imperial formation: the subjugation of Chosŏn Korea, the pacification of the Mongols and bringing them under Manchu rule, expanding borders, and establishing territorial rule. Furthermore, all this was legitimized when he obtained the Yuan dynasty state seal from conquered Mongols. “Officials and people have promoted

my accomplishments and asked that I take the title of emperor . . . but I have repeatedly declined doing so. They have insisted, and so I submit to their entreaties. . . . I take the position of emperor and establish the Qing state [*jian guohao*].⁴

This proclamation was undoubtedly the climax, but the ceremony did not end there. Rites continued for the rest of the day and carried on for the duration of the following day. The founding announcement was repeated in Manchu, Mongolian, and Chinese. More prostrations were made to Heaven and to the new emperor. Small precious gifts were given to Hong Taiji by his immediate relatives and Manchu leaders, and sacrifices were made at his father's tomb. The next day, plaques were set in the ancestral temple, and posthumous titles were given to Hong Taiji's ancestors going back seven generations to the founding ancestor, Möngke Temür. One black ox and one sheep were sacrificed before each ancestral placard. Hong Taiji again announced the founding of the Qing empire and his ascension to emperor, although this time not to Heaven but to his ancestors.

The ceremony was well attended. At hand were Manchu, Mongolian, and Chinese political and military officials of the fledgling state, as well as foreign dignitaries and local Manchu leaders. These men both observed and participated; they not only witnessed the founding event but also, through their very presence, helped define the meaning of politics and society. The ceremony constructed a political world where ethnically diverse and independently ambitious men bound themselves in an ever-tightening bond in service of a common goal. This goal was expressed most immediately for the political community through state-prescribed socialized forms of interaction done in repetitive ways—that is, ritual.⁵ In this case, on this day, it was the ceremonial proceedings to announce the founding of a multiethnic empire.

STATE-MAKING THEORY AND THE QING STATE

The moment of the founding ceremony had been long in the making, and it would continue to reverberate for centuries throughout Eurasia. Before becoming the Qing, the Manchu—previously called Jurchens—were seminomadic and non-intensive agrarian peoples living in autonomous organizations and villages in northeastern Eurasia.⁶ In the late sixteenth century they began to organize under Hong Taiji's father, Nurhaci, who placed them into socio-military units called banners. As military successes mounted and their numbers and territory grew, Nurhaci established a governing apparatus that relied on Manchu norms and laid the foundation for Hong Taiji's Qing. A small bureaucracy was created and examinations administered; a tax-office state oversaw conquered territory and extracted agricultural surpluses. This furthered military conquest, enabling the expansion of territory, the subjugation of Mongol tribes, and the invasion of Korea, where the Chosŏn king was forced to recognize the Manchu rulers over the Ming dynasty.

Simultaneously, Han Chinese political and military subjects were absorbed, and Qing armies went on to capture Beijing and then take all of China proper, eventually becoming one of the largest land-based empires in the early modern world. In many ways, the coronation ceremony confirmed the state-making enterprise and initiated what was to be nearly three centuries of Qing rule over China and parts of Inner Asia.

The significance of the Qing empire in Chinese history cannot be overstated. Like their early modern counterparts, Qing state-makers consolidated foreign kingdoms, developed new forms of imperial rule, incorporated different ethnic groups, and embraced various cultural practices. In governing, much like their contemporaries in the Ottoman, Mughal, and Russian empires, Qing statesmen further centralized power and focused greater authority in the sovereign; they built up a robust administrative apparatus and staffed it with multiethnic personnel, enabling effective responses to new challenges; they created a sophisticated communications and reporting system and extended far-reaching control throughout their realm. In addition to shaping the early modern world, the Qing also bestowed a legacy upon modern and contemporary China. As the last imperial dynasty to rule China, the Qing court abdicated in the early twentieth century only after losing the support of the gentry and military, and even then negotiated favorable terms for the imperial family. Such longevity and influence meant that remnants of the imperial state and its accomplishments would continue to cast a shadow over its successors, right up to the present day.⁷

A central aim of the present study is to explain the workings of the political system that made all this possible. The book takes as its subject not the institutions and activities of the military or bureaucracy, as has been most conventional. Instead, the focus is on the symbolic practices that structured domination and legitimized authority. The chapters that follow show that the ritual and disciplinary practices developed in the mid-seventeenth century not only defined power and authority but also played a key role in the construction of the Qing state and the shaping of the political system.⁸ In contrast to nearly every other aspect of the state-building process, no detailed examination has previously been made of the system of Qing political domination in what is widely considered to be a formative moment in early modern China. Even where discipline and symbolic power are central to the organization of diverse political actors and their obedience, as well as to legitimization, the subject is almost exclusively explored from the perspective of the high Qing, rather than the early formative years.⁹

One reason for this neglect is that scholars have been focused on the processes of war making and bureaucracy. In most accounts of Qing state-formation, historians emphasize these aspects of the story, military conquest and administrative rationalization. Often weaving these two developments in a single narrative, scholars highlight the innovative social organization of the banners, which rendered a

society mobilized for war and enabled the conquest of not just China but also parts of Inner Asia, greatly expanding the territorial control and ethnic composition of the empire. In most narratives, this historical development was accompanied by the implementation of administrative institutions and procedures required to govern a vast territory: a bureaucracy based on the model of the Ming's six boards and field administration, a censorate to oversee officials and remonstrate, examinations to staff positions, and a judicial system with comprehensive legal codes. Together, the conventional story goes, these two developments—conquest and bureaucracy—produced the Qing state.¹⁰

The focus on military and state capacity is not surprising. The most influential theories on state-formation point to the emergence of early modern and modern states by way of military competition in the Western European theater. As rulers waged war, the theory goes, they needed to raise money, increase taxes, conscript men, register and keep track of populations, control unrest, and administer both new and old subjects. Concurrently, the development of more robust administrative and financial apparatuses furthered the capacity of the state to wage and win wars. In the words of Charles Tilly, "War made the state, and the state made war."¹¹ Although early modern China differed from the European states that Tilly and his interlocutors have discussed, historians of China have for good reason found the theory useful in analyzing the Qing, both to understand the rise of a powerful and expansive empire, and to place China in comparative perspective with the rest of the world.¹² To this end, historians of China have succeeded in utilizing these general social theories to chart the rise and development of the Qing, just as historians of other non-European states have also done.¹³

This book is concerned with a third aspect of state-formation: discipline and domination. Recent work on other early modern states shows war and bureaucracy to be necessary but insufficient in state-building. Moreover, the discovery of new documentary sources and a reexamination of old ones point to other, simultaneous concerns and problems.¹⁴ The time is thus ripe to review our understanding of the making of Qing China. Doing so will not only help to explain the rise of the Qing empire but also shed light on more general trends occurring throughout early modern Eurasia.

Something more than war and institutions are required to produce social and political order: namely, coercion. Taking up the cases of early modern Germany and the Netherlands, Philip Gorski argues, "What steam did for the modern economy . . . discipline did for the modern polity: by creating more obedient and industrious subjects with less coercion and violence, discipline dramatically increased, not only the regulatory power of the state, but its extractive and coercive capacities as well."¹⁵ To complete a ruling apparatus of military and administrative institutions, other techniques were needed to compel and coerce individuals and groups to partake in certain types of political and social activities linked to the

abstract concept of the polity defined by the amorphous idea of the state beyond the ruler. In addition, legitimacy had to be sought, constructed, and conferred, and done so in ways that not only justified existing social relationships but also helped create new ones. In short, people had to obey, and to do so not because of any threat of force, but because they wished to do so.¹⁶

This matter is not simply the abstract speculation of the modern-day historian; it goes to the heart of some of the most fundamental concerns of early modern actors. In the case of the Qing, contemporary sources show that simultaneous with the determination of military power and the establishment of an administrative apparatus, relational and organizational problems vexed state-makers—problems of rulership, for one. An emperor stood at the top of a hierarchy and could theoretically do things others could not, such as issue orders and sacrifice to Heaven. How, then, should he interact with his relatives and other civil and military officials? How might he greet others in passing, or speak about affairs of the state? As the final arbiter of political matters, he was to make and issue policy decisions; but how to promulgate them? How would political meetings take place? In short, how to be emperor? Similarly, there were questions about politics and the political order: How to invest a diverse group of actors, possessed of individual interests, with a sense of common purpose to conquer and rule? What means of political organization could keep internal personal and political tensions at bay and mitigate factional dispute, especially in the face of policy debates with the potential to disturb the social and political structures of the state? Even more critically, how to not only dampen the inevitable challenges and disruptions of political actors but at the same time harness their energy and ingenuity in the running of the state? And what to do with the imperial relatives, who could help the ruler but also undermine his position? Should they be exiled, politically castrated, or made to serve?

As solutions to these problems were devised and agreements reached in the 1630s and 1640s in conjunction with waging war and institution-building, state-makers' efforts gradually shifted to solidifying gains and making arrangements permanent. Guarantees were needed to secure the existing settlements of power and position, and to give the emergent system and those operating within it some degree of predictability. Actors not only demanded stability in their daily operations but also called for generational guarantees for the future of their families. The overriding concern was how to turn normative agreements into objective institutions that structured political and social relations and defined the state.

For the historian to understand the answers that contemporaries arrived at, it is not enough to chart military accomplishments, outline bureaucratic efficiency, or analyze legal codes; in addition, disciplinary practices and the nature of domination must also be considered. Power begets authority, but not without discipline and legitimization, for naked force cannot produce domination.¹⁷ In the words of

Max Weber, “Every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an *interest* (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience.”¹⁸ For such consideration, however, the Qing political system as a whole needs to come into focus, not just a single aspect divorced from the totality of its operations. This is to acknowledge that the forms of discipline and domination in the Qing were intertwined with the emergence of the relations of power; they were not the adopted vestiges of Han Chinese culture, nor were they practices imposed once the political regime was set up. Rather, domination was an integral part of the system itself.

Accounting for this aspect of the Qing political system compels one to rethink the dynamics of the state-formation process. Identifying the emergence of new practices of discipline and the establishment of new institutions of domination shifts the emphasis from the Qing state as a phenomenon of late imperial China—where there is a fluid transition from the Ming, and innovation and empire commence in the eighteenth century—to the process of the construction of rulership, administrative practice, and politics.¹⁹ The tendency of the former position to regard the rise of the Qing and its conquest of China as historical fact overlooks the ingenuity applied in that rise and the innovations that fueled it.²⁰ While it does offer an explanation of how a small band of seminomadic warriors built an early modern empire, it is a regrettably linear one that focuses on the ability to make war, and to borrow and wield Chinese organizations and practices; it misses the equally important reshaping of the political order and its culture. To take into account the nature of the internal struggles for power and direction, the molding of authority, the imposition of legitimacy, and the processes of institutionalization not only provides a key part of the explanation of the making of the Qing empire but also illuminates the nature of politics and the structure of domination in late imperial China.

Recognizing the importance of discipline and culture in early modern state-formation also helps explain political and social developments in the early modern world. The number, frequency, and impact of formal ceremonial and behavioral activities in everything from political and social stratification to circumcision ceremonies grew throughout Eurasia from approximately 1400 to 1800.²¹ Rulers, ministers, officials, and other state-makers, from Tudor England to Tokugawa Japan, became increasingly concerned with aspects of rank and status, as well as with the upholding of norms assigned to those positions and titles; they held state ceremonies more frequently, and prescribed and self-regulated standards of social ceremony and activity with greater devotion. In Bourbon France, for example, status interaction took on an unprecedented immediacy and became of the utmost importance among officials and elite. This resulted not only in the creation of new administrative positions for ceremony and behavioral regulations in political courts but also in interpersonal tussles over dress, gestures, and epistolary style.²²

Similarly, in the Ottoman empire, a new ceremonial culture emerged in the sixteenth century, which worked to bind political and social actors through symbolic and performative acts.²³ At the same time, in Russia, wedding proceedings and ceremonies were held at shorter intervals and in grander style as they emerged as political events to be relied on and manipulated by both rulers and officials in the construction and disciplining of political order.²⁴ Even in the New World, the employment and practice of ritual and ceremony by Spanish administrators helped shape the structure of authority in colonial Mexico.²⁵

Such events were not discrete, symbolic proceedings extraneous to other kinds of political activity; rather, they were central in the construction and maintenance of political orders. In the early modern world, political and social transformations necessitated new forms of rulership, the integration of different political and social groups, and the creation of administrative organizations and practices to conquer and rule vast territories.²⁶ Institution-building performed only part of this work, however; the employment of ritual and disciplinary practices furthered statist projects and helped construct authority. Indeed, such endeavors of rulers and state-makers worked not only to direct militaries and build bureaucracies but also to develop systems of political discipline that would craft domination out of the immediate political and cultural contexts. In fact, as the following chapters amply demonstrate, in the case of the Qing empire, the latter facilitated the former.²⁷

THE ARGUMENTS

This book makes three interrelated arguments to show how seemingly straightforward symbolic acts, like the ceremony outlined above, worked to both shape political order and inform the choices of organizational actors in the making of Qing China.

The first argument is that there was an articulated system of social domination and political legitimization. It was called “*li*” in Chinese, and “*doro*” or “*dorolon*” in Manchu.²⁸ It consisted of rituals, ceremonies, and rites, as well as behavioral practices, administrative norms, and sumptuary; it placed political and social actors into certain relationships, which structured the organization and operations of the Qing state. *Li* articulated the role and position of the emperor; it instructed officials in communication and interactions; it informed an administrative hierarchy and enforced the chain of command. In short, it was the foundation of the Qing political system.

The second argument is that the rules of this system—that is, the particular practices entailed by *li*, were constructed simultaneously with the Qing state. Symbolic forms and imposed practices cannot be separated from the conflicts over naked power and control for political resources. It is not the case, as is often assumed, that political power was first fought over and won and only afterward, in

the wake of the settlement, symbols and practices of legitimization were imposed on top of institutional arrangements. Nor was it the case that preexisting cultural and institutional systems were used to structure the emergence of new political leaders and guide their ambitions. Rather, culture and politics informed each other as they came into being over the course of the mid-seventeenth century before being articulated as an integrated and complete system in the administrative code, or *Da Qing huidian*. The intertwining of the reciprocal influence of politics and culture played out as Manchu relatives first clashed over different ideas of the state, and subsequently in struggles for power for political position in the institutional variation of the emergent political structure. Rituals, ceremonies, rites, clothing, and political norms came to inform these struggles, and at times even embody them; meanwhile, the settlements for power shaped the cultural forms so that *li* was no more distinct from the institutions and personnel that made up the Qing state than the state was from *li*. Both emerged simultaneously and constituted the Qing political system.

The system, once formed, was then codified.²⁹ The third argument is that the production of the administrative code in 1690 completed a phase in the institutionalization of authority. The rules and regulations that had formed over the past sixty years were put together as an integral set of normative practices that were socially and politically sanctioned and upheld with the force of punishment. In other words, it became law, and in this case particularly, administrative law, whereby the *Huidian* represented the culmination of the development of the administrative organization and its operating procedures.³⁰ It is not the case that the *Huidian* was copied from previous dynasties, as conventionally understood, nor did Qing state-makers adopt the administrative apparatus of the fallen and then vanquished Ming. Rather, politics were constructed anew out of the political struggles and cultural contexts of the Manchus, and the *Huidian* reflected the emergent settlements over state structure and political power that actors had waged. Not until the state had stabilized and was rendered secure against both internal contestation and external threats, could such a text be produced, for it expressed not simply a normative command but the institutional and imaginative arrangements of society, where political action became socially sanctioned and legal articulation had binding force as a political ethic. This was the case precisely because contestants had already internalized the political and social order. Thereafter, routine politics and internal conflict could not easily challenge the structural arrangements of authority.³¹

These three interrelated arguments are derived from the documentary record of the period. An exhaustive survey of Chinese- and Manchu-language court records, memorials, edicts, regulations, and legal codes reveals an overwhelming concern with *li* as distinct from military and administrative matters. From roughly 1631 to 1690, monarchs, ministers, state-makers, and contenders concerned them-

selves not just with questions of military maneuvers and state offices, but also with how to establish authority, construct legitimacy, and secure compliance. They invoked and spoke frequently about *li* and discussed the scope and limitations of politics. This is evident in early Manchu-language court records and memorials to Hong Taiji, which were put in narrative form in the Dorgon-era draft of the *Shilu*, or Veritable Records, of Hong Taiji's reign.³² Further, much of the sixty-year period under consideration here was filled with rule-making efforts to guarantee the settlements of power and obviate abuses of the emergent system. It is thus not surprising to find the largest section of the *Huidian* devoted to the activities and practices of the Board of Rites. To the student of Chinese history what is most useful about these regulations is that they are both prescriptive for the organization and activities of the political actors, as well as descriptive of developments and precedents.³³ Such sources help answer questions about political discipline and investiture that conventional state-making theory and analysis do not address. Within these documents, it becomes clear that in organizing politics and political relations, *li* furnished state-makers with a means to resolve key problems of authority and legitimacy.

A word about what this study is not. This inquiry and the sources that drive it point to the workings of the Qing political system, not the disciplining of the individual body or psyche. At root, this study is concerned with understanding the practices of the Qing political system, how they arose, and why the system worked the way that it did. The subject here is the rules and regulations that comprise the Qing political order, not the individual actor subjected to the system and its rules.³⁴ Even if evidence existed for a type of Foucauldian analysis of the individual within a disciplinarian regime, such an approach is beyond the purview of this study.³⁵ Rather than individual response to disciplinary practices, the inquiry here is concentrated on the emergence and institutionalization of a stable and effective regime that guided all political and social actors for over two and a half centuries. Individuals are part of the story insofar as attention is paid to the choices they made in constructing the practices of the system, how some interacted with the system during its emergence, and the extent that others used and shaped it once in operation.

WHAT IS *LI* AND HOW DID IT WORK?

Before entering the world of the early Manchus and the formation of the Qing state, the question of *li* and how it worked must first be addressed. Often translated as "ritual" or "rites," *li* has long been understood as the organizational principle of moral and social action in China.³⁶ As early as the Western Zhou (1045–772 BCE), ceremonial and ritual practices in annual sacrifice and daily comportment emerged both to segregate elite from commoner and to distinguish civilized from barbarian. In the age of the Hundred Schools (sixth to third centuries BCE),

Confucius placed *li* at the center of his teachings, emphasizing proper practice and ritual observance as the cornerstone to navigating human relations and social cohesion. Around the third century BCE, Xunzi refined the concept, giving it an institutional form that subsequently served as the inspiration for the organization and operation of the imperial state from the Han onward.³⁷

At the most basic level, *li* was a means of social and political organization and comportment. It organized social hierarchies through a system of ranks with clear delineations for promotion and demotion, as well as honorary labeling and titling. This organizational scheme was complemented by practices that included ceremonial rites, greetings, welcoming, banqueting, annual observations and celebrations, and political meetings and negotiations. More than just a collection of random events and activities that were referred to with a common term, however, these things all shared certain attributes: They brought people together, occurred regularly and in the same way at various intervals, remained fixed in format and often formalized, and involved hierarchy. In this way, *li* served to create a particular kind of social order and facilitate interpersonal interactions. An eighteenth-century compendium put it this way: “Through *li*, [the positions of] superiors and inferiors are fixed, intimate and distant separated; Heaven is served above and Earth below; ancestors are respected, and sovereigns and teachers are glorified. . . . In the end, *li* is what distinguishes humans from beasts.”³⁸

Working from this basic definition cast by Chinese thinkers and officials, modern-day scholars have come to understand *li* in one of five different ways: as ritual, cosmology, social order, law, or administrative order.³⁹ None of these interpretations are exclusive of the other, and scholars working within one interpretation make the case for understanding that particular aspect of *li* over others as the core of *li*, orienting their investigation and analysis accordingly. For example, those works that equate *li* to ritual will acknowledge aspects of *li* that appeal to cosmology and social order but cast these characteristics in terms of ritual activity, whereas those scholars that emphasize cosmology will interpret the ceremonies accordingly. Of these different categorizations of *li*, those that gloss it as ritual or rites are the most prevalent—most plausibly the result of an influential school of anthropology which conceives of ritual as social order.⁴⁰ The construction of *li* as the basis of law in imperial China has also been frequently employed, especially by scholars in search of an understanding of China’s peculiar legal development.⁴¹ What has not received much attention is how political institutions, practices, and norms fit together as a complete system that informed politics and administrative activity. Often noted by scholars merely in passing, or stressed by means of rich quotations but lacking further substance, this aspect of *li* has yet to be explored and revealed in the detail it merits.⁴²

The analytical emphasis of this book on *li* as politics emerges organically from primary source materials on seventeenth-century state-formation. Documents

show early Qing rulers and officials speaking frequently of *li* in political terms and in direct reference to administrative order and political relations. Rather than the philosophical logic of previous Chinese thinkers, who might cast *li* in terms of metaphysics or cosmology, Qing state-makers often sought to situate their political reality in a conception of *li* as an administrative ideal. What the emperor should wear, for example, or how he should interact with his ministers, was informed by given concepts and practices derived from *li*. At the same time, these same state-makers reshaped political relations and practices as a recast prescription of *li*. In struggles for power with his brothers, for example, Hong Taiji recrafted ceremonies to subjugate some actors and elevate others; and he called it *li*. In other words, in the act of political contestation and state-building, state-makers were both informed by *li* and wielded it as a tool to shape relations of politics and power. Here *li* was simultaneously a normative description of political relations, and a device for political struggle—it was both a concept and an instrument.

In the course of the Manchu state-building process, the organization of politics and its operating principles were cast in terms of *li*. These terms were articulated and enforced by the Board of Rites and then codified as administrative law in the *Huidian*. This defined what could and could not be done in the political environment fixing rewards and punishments for complying or deviating from those rules, and constructing a community of political actors that accepted the norms. Here the imposed practices of *li* help determine the range of the organizational response. As taken up fully in chapter 6, the Qing imperial relatives, after being empowered by the ascendancy of their patron, Hong Taiji, quickly found themselves constrained by their positions in the political hierarchy and the norms, rules, and practices attached to those positions—that is, *li*. Similarly, administrative officials worked tirelessly for recognition and promotion, coveting their positions and the advantages attached to those positions. As discussed in chapter 5, they took great offense when others donned the wrong clothing, greeted one in a manner incongruent with his rank, or stood out of place in a ceremony. It was not uncommon for personal denunciations over these issues to become so emotionally charged that physical confrontation and fistfights broke out.

The form, application, and practices of *li* aided in the creation of a system of domination—where domination is not the imposition of wills but rather the construction of institutional constraints and the guiding of opportunity. Such analysis goes beyond the legitimizing function of *li*, as enunciated by some historians, and greatly complicates the equation of *li* as the constitution of political and social power, a position maintained by other scholars.⁴³ Rather, *li* must be seen as an expression of what Steven Lukes refers to as three-dimensional power, or the ability to secure consent to domination of willing subjects, where “those subject to it are led to acquire beliefs and form desires that result in their consenting or adapting to being dominated, in coercive and non-coercive settings.”⁴⁴ To understand

how this worked in Qing China, and why it worked the way that it did, it is imperative to look at the particularities of *li* in the Qing.

RETHINKING LI IN THE QING

There is a misconception about *li* still pervasive in our historiography. This misconception renders *li* a Chinese cultural concept possessed of a timeless form. Beguiled by such a notion, scholars often analyze *li* as a singular idea or static practices that was employed by rulers and state-makers from the Han to the Qing. Such a position also bolsters the claim that the adoption of *li* helped Sinicize conquest dynasties. This assumption has led to analyses emphasizing the philosophical logic behind *li* and the roots of particular practices of *li*, often by drawing it back to origins and initial articulations in early China.⁴⁵ While this scholarship retains value, as it affords us a richer understanding of Chinese states and the logic of the forms of symbolic power and ritual acts, it overlooks the reality of the indeterminacy of the practices of *li* and the constantly shifting cultural landscape in imperial China. What was extraordinary about the Qing was not that state-makers emphasized *li* as the basis of political order—for this was the case of nearly all imperial formations in premodern China—but rather how they transformed the various practices of *li* in the construction of a distinct political system that could conquer and rule a vast multiethnic empire at the heart of the early modern world. In this way, the specific practices of *li* must be separated analytically from the general concept.

In the Qing, there were three key changes in the practices of *li*: the nature of sovereignty, the expansion of rule, and the composition of the political order.⁴⁶ Historians have outlined many of these transformations, especially as characteristics of the Qing as a multiethnic empire that developed new institutions and innovated in governing practice. The focus of much of this literature has been on political or military institutions, however, without proper recognition of the significance of *li*. For example, the role and practices of the emperor, the extension of rule over new territory and peoples, the balance of increasingly complex and diverse sets of political actors—everything the Qing experienced in the early and middle years of the dynasty—are not simply disconnected aspects of disparate trends; they are, in fact, all linked to transformations in state practice and political culture.

The first shift in *li* was an increase in the position and power of the sovereign. Changes in the conceptions and practices of *li* in the Qing helped strengthen the patrimonial state, where the ruler's authority is personal and his household established for political administration.⁴⁷ For example, a shift in the concept of social relations occurred in the Qing, where loyalty to the sovereign in the ruler-minister relationship was emphasized and then standardized at the expense of filial piety, or the father-son relationship. Whereas competing loyalties of an official to his sover-

eign and his parents framed ideas and conduct in previous dynasties, and the Ming even made a point of placing the father-son relation before the ruler-minister relation, the Qing emphasized the primacy of the ruler-minister relation over the father-son relation. This became manifest in mourning rites, or the proper *li* upon the death of one's parents. In the Ming, the standard was for an official to take leave of office for three years while he mourned his dead parents; during this time, his behavior was subject to regulations like wearing certain clothes or prohibitions against remarriage. Ming Taizu outlawed the practice of *duoqing*, or mourning while in office, and demanded the upholding of proper filial relations. This shifted in the Qing, at first slowly, as the Kangxi emperor allowed then encouraged *duoqing* on a case-by-case basis in his communications with his officials, before it became instituted as regular practice by the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors in the eighteenth century. The effect was a transformation of the meaning of *li*, both in terms of the conception of proper relations and the customs of mourning.⁴⁸ A new emphasis on such practices in the Qing put the administration in direct service of the emperor as a kind of heightened patrimonialism, whereby the Qing emphasized loyalty and service to the emperor at the expense of an ideal of a moral standard.

The second change was the use of *li* to integrate different social groups. In an ethnically homogenous Han-Chinese dynasty like the Ming, *li* meant adherence to a particular interpretation of the classics along with ethnic exclusivity in the social hierarchies.⁴⁹ The composition of the Qing state, however, included other ethnic groups with an expanded jurisdiction to embrace surrounding states. Evelyn Rawski argues that the Qing was successful in its enterprise because of its flexibility and capacity to accommodate other, non-Han cultures. She shows how Manchu institutions, including state ritual, were built around Inner Asian cultural practices and traditions.⁵⁰ An apt symbolic expression of this phenomenon was in military rituals, which were reconfigured through Inner Asian traditions. Ritual inspection of the troops, for example, saw the emperor donning a ceremonial helmet with Sanskrit inscriptions, the use of a Mongol horn in addition to the usual conch shell, and a display of horse riding and archery skill.⁵¹ This all expressed what Mark Elliott calls "ethnic sovereignty," defined as, "the special position of the Manchu emperor at the apex of a universal empire composed of multiple hierarchies of lordship based on differing types of authority."⁵²

In terms of foreign affairs, this meant transforming *li* from an exclusive practice of keeping foreign states at arm's length to one of integrating them into the Qing empire. To this end, the Qing conducted intimate "guest rituals" (*binli*) that were hierarchical in nature and placed the Qing emperor in a position of supreme ruler vis-a-vis the lesser rulers of the periphery. *Li* here entailed receiving the rulers of foreign states, and proceeded from distinct Qing notions of rulership and the inclusion of surrounding territories in the purview of the Qing imperial system.