

Coping with Poverty and Famine

Material Welfare, Public Goods, and Chinese Approaches to Governance

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This chapter on Chinese efforts to cope with the problem of poverty and the threats of famine differs from other chapters in this part of the book regarding the spatial scale on which it addresses the topic. It places local activities within a much larger spatial frame than even the English case study since England is spatially and demographically so much smaller than China. England's population of less than six million and China's some two hundred million around 1750 mean China's efforts at addressing poverty and famine affected a population many times the size of England's. The two other case studies of early-modern-era approaches to poverty and famine stress actions taken within small spaces—Japanese efforts within the village and Prussian efforts by lords spanning a number of villages. In China, most county-level officials in the eighteenth century organized their efforts far from the political center and relied in part on the organizational efforts and financial resources of people without any formal positions in the government; in this respect their activities resembled those we have seen in our other case studies. But because their efforts together were part of a virtually empire-wide system, certainly in terms of population if not including some of the newly subjugated Inner Asian components of the empire, the centrally coordinated activities created public goods on spatial and demographic scales dwarfing those found elsewhere. To understand how and why policies to address poverty and relieve famine occurred on such a large scale in eighteenth-century China, a brief introduction to the ideological foundations of Chinese approaches to poverty as part of a broader focus on issues of material welfare provides some background to eighteenth-century policies that are designed to sustain people through times of

harvest hardship, and that are especially mindful that poorer people needed help on a more regular basis.

THE IDEOLOGICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND TO FOOD SUPPLY POLICIES

Between the sixth and third centuries BCE, a number of Chinese political thinkers conceived social order and the viability of political rule to be linked in a direct manner that provided part of the basis for the subsequent imperial era's approach to governance. The ruler's political success depended on his ability and commitment to benefiting the people (利民 *limin*). By formulating policies intended to promote common people's material welfare, rulers could achieve both social stability and political acceptance. Governments could appeal to their subjects to support them in their competition with rival governments for territory and subjects during the Warring States era (475–221 BCE). Such demands for service in times of war made more sense when understood by people to be coupled with the means to secure a livelihood. This approach to governance recognized the limited organizational capacity that rulers could call upon to enforce their will through coercion and encouraged rulers to recognize that meeting their desires for wealth and power over the long run were more likely to be achieved by promoting the ability of people to produce more output than by impoverishing them in the short run through high taxation. Reputation as a benevolent ruler in a time of intense political competition made more likely that subjects would not flee and even encouraged those suffering hardship from other rulers to settle in his territory (El Amine 2015).

Chinese concerns for the material welfare of the people in subsequent centuries covered at least three areas—the circulation of resources and goods in society, the possession of the means to produce for one's needs, and intervention by the state when the production and circulation of grains failed to provide for people due to either poverty or dearth. Framing direct state interventions to address poverty and dearth became elements of an approach to governance known as *jingshi* (經世 statecraft) intended to foster “learning of practical use to society” (經世之用 *jingshi zhi yong*) in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries; the statecraft tradition informed policy discussions and choices in subsequent centuries, taking particular salience in moments of crisis but present as a backdrop to conceptions of state approaches to popular material welfare more generally (Hymes and Schirokauer 1993). To understand how the issue of poverty and dearth figured in the more general context of statecraft governance, this chapter considers the circulation of food supplies among resources more generally and efforts to promote common people's capacities to achieve material security through their own labors, before considering directly the eighteenth-century recognition of the desirability

to intervene against vulnerability to harvest fluctuations and, in extreme situations, famine.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETS AND THE
CONSTRUCTION OF AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
COMMERCIAL AGRARIAN EMPIRE

The notion of the emperor anchoring his authority and demonstrating his virtue (and hence legitimacy) according to his concern for popular material welfare began to be persuasive in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 AD), China's second imperial dynasty and the first to last beyond its founding emperor. A Confucian political logic of conceiving the state's support to rest upon a society of small-scale agriculturalists whose taxes would support the government depended upon insulating them from the predations of large land-owning lords to whom they could be reduced to some form of tenancy or servitude. Promoting popular welfare was thus one political strategy for creating a political base of support and avoiding the emergence of powerful families who could challenge imperial authority and power; at times more an aspiration than a reality, the logic nevertheless indicates a general frame of reference within which the use and hence flows of resources could be imagined and thus pursued. The fifteenth-century scholar Qiu Jun included in his discussion of the principles for the management of wealth a logic traced to what had initially been a divination text but became between the sixth and third centuries BCE a cosmological and philosophical text, the *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*), addressing the unity of opposites and processes of change moving both cyclically and through historical time. Using the *Book of Changes* as a reference point, Qiu Jun discusses the movement of resources from the government to the people and from the rich to the poor; both movements promise future increases in wealth from which either the government or the wealthy would benefit. Government financial management, in Qiu Jun's formulation, matters not only to a successful state but also to a prosperous society. Conceived properly and pursued effectively, state fiscal policies not only avoid harming the people greatly, but indeed also provide the basic conditions for increasing social wealth based on how resources flow within society and between the government and its subjects. Such resource flows became part of a far larger circulation of goods through markets in subsequent centuries.¹

During the Song dynasty (960–1279) China experienced what Mark Elvin famously called a "medieval economic revolution" based on improvements in agricultural productivity, largely owing to the expansion of paddy rice agriculture, the expansion of water transport for goods, and the emergence of merchants independent of the kinds of state regulation present in earlier centuries and the expansion of market networks (Elvin 1973). After 1500, regional merchant groups and two especially prominent merchant groups associated with the northern province of

Shanxi and Huizhou prefecture in the eastern province of Anhui with empire-wide networks moved increasing amounts of diverse goods between counties, across provincial borders, and even greater distances where riverine transportation was well developed and maintained. Craft production, which had been more town-centered than rural-based in Song times, had become increasingly common among rural households who pursued a combination of crops (including cash crops) and crafts for which market exchange was essential. This meant the economy was both largely agrarian and commercial at the same time. Moreover, this economic expansion took place within an empire that provided, over great distances for considerable segments of time, the relatively peaceful and secure conditions that enabled trade to proceed relatively free of disruption and dislocation caused by violence, be this widespread banditry or more problematic war making of the sort that became increasingly present across the European landscape of the early modern era (Rosenthal and Wong 2011, 89–91).

The contrast between European interstate competition and a largely peaceful Chinese empire became more vivid in the eighteenth century when two especially activist emperors dominated the country from the 1720s into the 1790s. The priority placed on the circulation of goods, in particular grain, was made plain by the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–1735), who often opposed the efforts by officials in the provinces to impede the commercial flow of grain for fear that exports from their jurisdictions could create shortages amid possibilities of poor harvest (Abe 1957). Since grain on markets flowed from areas with prices lower than those to which it was being shipped, it made sense from a supply and demand perspective to uphold the free circulation of grain. Chinese notions of circulation related the logic of circulation to that of balance, in this case balancing supply and demand indicated by price differences. Officials also had concerns regarding balancing grain prices through the year. Market prices were lower when the fall harvests were reaped and far higher in the lean spring season when the past year's harvests had been depleted. To meet this annual cycle of price fluctuations, ever-normal granaries (常平倉 *changping cang*) were established in each of more than thirteen hundred county seats and charged with selling grain in the spring to lower market prices and restocking in the fall after harvests brought prices down below those at which officials had sold grain the previous spring. These granaries in turn formed the core of a broader set of civilian granaries that were a major line of defense against conditions of serious dearth that threatened famine, a subject to be explored further in this chapter (Will and Wong 1991).

Another indication of the relatively favorable conditions for trade in eighteenth-century China compared to conditions in Europe was the low transit taxes levied in China. European rulers relied heavily on commercial taxation to satisfy their growing appetites for fiscal resources needed to pursue war making with one another. China lacked such demands as there were no threats of war making within China corresponding to the European space within which war making

was a chronic threat. With low commercial taxes, all domestic trade with the exception of salt avoided the heavy hand of the state. Salt production and distribution were administered by the state; production was legally limited to households registered for this purpose and distribution was limited in principle to merchants who had purchased licenses authorizing them to participate in the trade within the areas for which their licenses applied (Chiang 1983). Restricting legal participation in the salt trade to a small set of merchants fostered the emergence of a few very wealthy merchants, a common outcome of restricting access to a market—the state garnered revenues from these individuals, who in turn enjoyed the privilege of limited competition from other sellers of salt, much as Dutch and English merchants who were members of their respective chartered companies engaged in Asian trade benefited from the limits to competition from other Dutch and English merchants not part of the chartered companies. In China more generally, however, the state favored market competition and the presence of multiple buyers and sellers, which made less likely the presence of a few merchants able to manipulate prices by holding supplies off the market to drive up their subsequent profits. This was especially the case for the case of grain, the staple so basic to people's material security. Officials criticizing merchant hoarding of grain to drive up prices on local markets were simply one small part of a far larger set of policies intended to manage food supplies in a manner that assured poorer people access to grain at prices they could usually afford.

The eighteenth-century Chinese state's antipathy toward merchants manipulating prices to garner profits beyond those possible on markets with large numbers of buyers and sellers applied to domestic markets but not to those merchants licensed to engage in trade with foreigners. The Canton system (1757–1842) limited foreigners to the single port of Guangzhou, where they were allowed to do business with a specific group of merchants licensed for this purpose (Wakeman 1978). While the fortunes of these Chinese merchants certainly fluctuated, the possibilities of making large sums of money meant a few of them became famously wealthy. In the preindustrial era when trade was the likely arena in which money could be made, restricting access to markets usually in exchange for the state gaining fiscal benefits turned some commerce into a kind of capitalism, especially when we recognize as a key feature of capitalism the ability of a small number of firms or individuals to dominate leading sectors of the economy, which is seen among the early modern Dutch and English companies engaged in Asian trade and subsequently in the industrial era among the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American and German firms in chemicals, steel, and railroads. Eighteenth-century China's general antipathy to market concentration in the hands of a few entrepreneurs not only made the emergence of such key capitalist traits less likely, but also enhanced the likelihood ordinary people would benefit from markets as consumers. To assure that most farmers could enjoy opportunities to benefit from markets as producers who sold their crops and crafts commercially, officials also had to be

concerned about the impact of rents on tenants. Thus, eighteenth-century officials continued to recognize the ideal of limiting landlord exactions on tenants even as they proved unable to prevent the basic negative impacts that tenants could suffer at landlord hands. While landlords and market supply concentration in the hands of capitalists were both present possibilities, state policies to promote circulation of grain freely to benefit peasants who could be either producers or consumers for commercial grain were a key component of efforts to maintain a stable food supply. These were efforts designed to promote a well-functioning structure for circulation of grain. But as population rose, grain production also had to rise in order to meet increased demand. For this reason a second cluster of official efforts was directed to increasing grain production.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE MATERIAL WELFARE: SUPPORTING THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PRODUCTION

Officials supported both extensive and intensive increases in grain production. Extensive growth occurred when land-poor peasants migrated to areas with more abundant opportunities to open barren land and turn it into productive fields. The state at times offered a grace period before taxes would be levied on newly opened fields to facilitate owner investment in making the land productive. Migration was a form of circulation of people that complemented the circulation of goods, in the broad spirit of balancing people and resources through movements found in fifteenth-century Qiu Jun's remarks noted earlier. Where markets moved commodities from areas of low prices to those with higher ones, migration moved labor from areas with limited farm land to those places where land clearance for fresh cultivation was more easily pursued. Officials further supported such migrations by also encouraging the transfer of what were deemed the best technologies of crop cultivation and craft production from more developed areas to poorer ones. All these efforts entailed some form of circulation—of people and knowledge to complement market-based movements of commodities (Wong 2014). While our contemporary categories of analysis regard markets as the site for private transactions because ownership is vested in individuals or families and not the government, the eighteenth-century Chinese government played a significant role in assuring the success of markets as part of a larger vision of resources and people staying in balance through the movements of each.

Complementing extensive expansion of grain production was the intensified use of land through irrigation. This technology, virtually absent in Europe, but found in Northeast, South, and Southeast Asia, as well as China, depended on multiple levels of water control management and coordination among several parties. Given its far larger size and population, Chinese officials had more water control issues in general to consider on a larger spatial scale than did other Asian

countries. Not surprisingly, the historical importance of water management to China and to Asia more generally has long been recognized. We can divide the bulk of the literature into one of three categories—those stressing an authoritarian top-down perspective, those focused on local communities that have a bottom-up perspective, and those studies addressing interactions of local actors and state agents. Karl Wittfogel made famous the top-down perspective, while Japanese historians, notably Morita Akira, have contributed a community-centered bottom-up perspective for China (Wittfogel 1957, Morita 2002). Other scholars have either examined complementary and coordinated efforts of the Ming and Qing governments and elites to finance and organize the maintenance of water control works or noted the competition between elite efforts to create new polder lands and official priorities on assuring free-flowing transportation routes (Li Cho-ying 2012, Will 1985, Perdue 1982).

None of the scholarship on water control issues to date has been intended to highlight the public goods dimension of official interventions. Takehiko To's study in part 3 does this for China's capital region during the eighteenth century. The challenge for us more generally in a volume on public goods regarding water control is to discover relationships among different spatial levels of organization from those headed by state officials at the top to others managed by local villagers at the bottom. In the Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom's analysis of "common pool resources," the eighth and last principle for effective organization of activities such as water control, she speaks of "nested enterprises."² The "nested" nature involves the coordination above the level of different groups each organizing common pool resources drawing upon the same water sources. Some mix of state and local community efforts was present most everywhere irrigation was an important economic practice, but Chinese approaches to mobilizing and managing resources and labor needed to maintain water control works for irrigation and transportation also evolved across diverse kinds of terrain and on an especially large spatial scale. Chinese efforts also fluctuated over time, affected by a changing cast of competing priorities, especially clear after the mid-nineteenth century, when higher-level officials were more likely to be constrained in their resources and abilities to intervene in water control issues.

State efforts made at the center, provincial, and county levels to promote independent peasant household production of grain and its commercial circulation suggest political appreciation for a well-functioning economy based on private property. Clearly, some of these efforts, like the infrastructure for agricultural production that forms the subject for part 3 of this volume, entailed recognition of nonmarket and nonprivate property features of the economy. To address dearth and poverty directly, official and elite efforts beyond the production and commercial circulation of grain were mounted to form a separate kind of public goods provision.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EFFORTS TO RELIEVE
FAMINE AND MANAGE FOOD SUPPLIES

In preindustrial societies where the vast majority of sedentary populations are engaged in agriculture or, as in the Chinese case, in other craft-related pursuits, economic instabilities came in two temporal forms both tied to agricultural harvests. First were the annual variations in food supply availability tied to the harvest cycle—grain is plentiful and cheap after the fall harvests and scarce and dear in the months directly preceding the annual harvests. Second were the variations in the size of harvests, with a sequence of mediocre or bad harvests increasing the likelihood of severe dearth. Addressing seasonal fluctuations in grain availability targeted poor people specifically, seeking to assure them grain at lower prices or loans of grain. Severe annual shortages posed threats to people more generally and carried with them a potential to undermine social stability. Because the political legitimacy of Chinese governance depended in principle on officials averting or at least mitigating the impact of severe dearth, famine relief was a key component of effective food supply policies during the eighteenth century.

During this period, famine relief involved selection of multiple policies from a repertoire of techniques developed over the previous several centuries. These policies that were mobilized into an intensive campaign to relieve a famine were one kind of government provision of a social or public good. They were in turn embedded in a broader system of granaries utilized in a more routine fashion over more than a century, infused with new supplies of grain through major initiatives to augment granary reserves and with supplies reduced by both deliberate policy decisions and bureaucratic neglect. This apparatus was flanked by the grain price reporting system that provided officials from county to the capital with data on the conditions of grain supplies on markets across the empire (Will and Wong 1991).

Inspired by political principles defining a Chinese approach to governance first articulated roughly two millennia before and drawing on institutions formed over several preceding centuries, eighteenth-century policies formulated by the Chinese state reveal three important attributes of the Chinese state's approach to public or social goods. First, the state considered providing famine relief or building granaries to store grain to be a responsibility of officials across the empire, from those at the center to those in locales at opposite ends of the empire. Second, providing famine relief and grain storage was the shared responsibility of local elites, attesting to the elements of a governance agenda that they shared for maintenance of domestic social order. Third, in the extreme conditions of sequential bad harvests due to flood, drought, or pestilence, famine relief efforts required extraordinary mobilization of resources and human effort, creating a campaign-level intensity well beyond what routine bureaucratic or social action entailed. Food supply interventions were both a kind of social good and a social service

performed directly by various levels of the state and elites outside the bureaucracy. Their effectiveness made the economy work more smoothly.

Eighteenth-century institution building for grain storage and the implementation of famine relief drew more immediately and concretely upon policies formulated beginning in the Southern Song (1127–1279). The institutional basis for managing food supplies formulated during this period created an alternative to Northern Song (960–1127) “big government” associated with Wang Anshi, even as it affirmed the importance of popular material welfare. Almost all these efforts depended on the combined complementary efforts of local officials and local elites to forge and maintain institutions of local order. These included granaries to store grain, charitable estates the incomes from which went to aid indigent kinsmen or other local residents, and organizing emergency famine relief measures in times of acute harvest failure (Hymes and Schirokauer 1993). A similar reliance on local efforts to store grain and relieve famine that were part of late Ming dynasty (1368–1643) governance can be placed in a larger context to include social commitments to charity inspired by Buddhism (Smith 2009). This kind of situation is consistent with emperors and the central government bureaucracy being neither interested nor able to create much in the way of grain storage across the empire, a situation easily accommodated by an influential strand of late-twentieth-century scholarship that has claimed the late Ming government to be largely ineffectual (Huang 1981). But even as the Wanli emperor (r. 1472–1620), typically viewed as a weak and ineffectual ruler, was embroiled in major disputes with high-level officials over the selection of his heir apparent, leading to his refusal to meet with current officials or appoint new ones, the state ruling in his name was able to mount a famine relief campaign in 1592 that prepared local reports, released grain from the local granaries, and remitted land taxes in areas hardest hit by poor harvests (Des Forges 2003, 34–35).

However modest and infrequent local efforts to relieve potential famine in the late sixteenth century were, they appealed to principles and policies developed over earlier centuries. Their existence, in contrast to a total absence of grain storage and famine relief, made plausible the efforts to create more robust policies in the eighteenth century. These were pursued through the three kinds of practices introduced earlier—bureaucratic action, elite efforts, extraordinary campaigns—practices that were also responsible for eighteenth-century Chinese efforts to provide public goods and services more generally. For subsistence issues specifically, officials spearheaded, in response to imperial instructions, the formation of an empire-wide system of centrally monitored granaries storing hundreds of thousands of tons of grain both for annual use to mitigate seasonal fluctuation in grain prices and for relieving subsistence crises in more difficult years. Each of the empire’s more than thirteen hundred counties reported their granary reserves at the beginning and close of the year as part of an annual accounting of reserves, distributions, and replacements. Provincial governors summarized their

county reports and forwarded their summaries to the center. Behind this system of accounting was an even more remarkable bureaucratic procedure that entailed each county magistrate reporting to the provincial governor every ten days the high and low prices for each of the grains commercially available on markets within his jurisdiction. These reports were summarized on a monthly basis for dispatch to the center for central government officials to review and when necessary report to the emperor regarding extremely high prices over a widespread area that required a famine relief campaign (Will and Wong 1991). Pierre-Etienne Will has analyzed the famine relief campaign mounted in response to the famine of 1743–1744 in the capital province of Zhili. Officials conducted surveys of the severely affected locales to assess the number of victims and severity of the famine in particular areas. They implemented a range of policies including remitting land taxes, setting up rice gruel stations, releasing local granary reserves, and seeking to move grain themselves into the most badly affected areas (Will 1990).

The manner in which the eighteenth-century state provided grain as a public good qualifies in at least three ways sometimes skeptical and even negative views of the state. First, the state's chronic anxieties over big government and bureaucratic mismanagement, which historians have echoed, depended first on Chinese political leaders developing a rule-governed, vertically integrated bureaucracy that could identify violations of expected official behavior. The bureaucracy comprised highly educated individuals, increasing numbers of whom were selected based on their exam performance and were forbidden to serve in their home provinces and typically moved from post to post every few years so that they became less likely to promote local interests or develop long-standing relations to be exploited for illicit private gain. Chinese principles of governance in general and concern for material welfare more specifically could not have been pursued across such a large territory and impact such a large number of people without one of the world's largest and more effective bureaucracies operating virtually continuously for roughly a millennium before the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. Even though an activist central state had been soundly rejected in principle during the twelfth century, the eighteenth-century central state was able to build an empire-wide system of civilian granary reserves that enlisted the active commitments of local elites to contribute and manage some of those reserves.

A second way grain provision to address poverty and dearth qualifies images of a weak and ineffective state comes through understanding that the agenda constructed by the central government was largely shared ideologically and institutionally, not only with officials at lower levels of the bureaucracy, but also by local elites. This fact helps explain why it was still possible in the nineteenth century, when the initiative to sustain local institutions from the center waned and threats to domestic social order and new kinds of international political challenges both grew, for some local officials and local elites to keep up local granaries, and in moments of acute crisis for larger-scale efforts at famine relief to be planned and

implemented by higher-level officials. The elasticity and flexibility of Chinese governance in practice made the durability of its principles more lasting. The third possible revision to some of the conventional views of the early modern Chinese state considers how governance was not a matter simply for government officials but in practice a set of efforts shared with elites. Perhaps not surprisingly this meant there was no simple and sharp distinction between what was considered “official” and what was considered not “official,” suggesting the inability of our conventional notions of public goods based on our more general conceptual divide between public and private to help us understand how public goods were in truth conceived and created in eighteenth-century China.

The problems of poverty and challenges of famine relief were addressed by government and elites in ways that spanned any conventional distinction between public and private.³ The significance of famine relief and the maintenance of granaries officially managed and others officially monitored go beyond their being an example of public finance or more specifically the addressing of a basic human need as a social or public good. Because officials understood and undertook these activities in the context of both private market activities and local village-level informal exchanges, early modern Chinese conceptions of social or public goods continued to conform in important ways to ancient Chinese understandings of how state management of resources matters to social order and political legitimacy.

BEYOND THE BINARY OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC GOODS

The binary between public and private to describe the economic character of goods and services in modern societies is inadequate to address policies designed to prevent or at least reduce the problems of poverty and dearth in early modern China. Without a better taxonomy of methods for the allocation of goods and services beyond the conventional public-private dichotomy, it remains difficult to locate the related roles of officials from the center to the county level and of elites resident in their local communities in affecting the problems of poverty and dearth. For managing grain supplies, official actions complemented those of local elites and of merchants. From a vantage point of Chinese approaches to governance, the state’s water control efforts and grain storage policies were both conceived with the intent of creating benefits for the people. This principle certainly was not uniformly sustained through the centuries, across China’s vast territories, and for all of its large population. But it did shape early-modern-era policy intent and motivate multiple concrete attempts to provide famine relief, to create institutional structures to store grain in advance of extraordinary need, and to use such reserves on smaller-scale routine levels to aid poorer people on an annual basis. The central state’s specific efforts were located within a broader mix of official, local elite, and local community efforts.

Chinese sources on famine relief, granary storage, and water control suggest the limited legibility about their origins, intent, and impact that we can gain by limiting our analysis to the conventional categories of modern economics, in particular the division of all goods and service into either private or public. This chapter suggests that there was a broader spectrum of mechanisms to allocate goods and services in early modern China than the private-public binary can accommodate. At the same time it links the basic principle from ancient times of benefiting the people to (a) early-modern-era Chinese campaigns to relieve famines, (b) efforts to build and maintain granary reserves to help meet extraordinary events and intervene more routinely to help people through seasonal supply fluctuations, and (c) managing the economy's water control infrastructure. These activities exemplify key components of the Chinese understanding of governance. Before we formulate assessments of the successes and failures of this system of governance, this review of famine relief and food supply stresses a need to take its measure by combining an understanding of what governance principles led the Chinese to attempt their food supply interventions through categories of analysis not typically deemed relevant to our evaluations of early modern Europe.

In the Chinese case of addressing poverty and dearth, we can see behind these efforts a broader approach to promoting material welfare and benefits for common people that was inspired by an ideology of governance that linked the state's material resources (fiscal base) and symbolic viability (political legitimacy) to its performance of effective governance. These appear most clearly developed in the eighteenth century and rely on efforts of both officials and local elites, with officials themselves serving at different administrative levels. The diminished role of the nineteenth-century central state to monitor and control grain reserves across the empire did not prevent local actors from mounting their own efforts without higher-level supervision; indeed, the relative contraction of central efforts made regional and local efforts even more important and more salient. The effectiveness of local grain storage efforts was far less affected by what other locales did or did not do than were the efforts of local officials and elites facing water control issues because their concerns were connected to those of their neighbors in ways that depended to some degree on the nested enterprises of organized effort to manage water use, as Elinor Ostrom and her collaborators identified as a general issue around the globe, especially in more recent times. Because larger-scale coordination of dredging and dike repairs spanned many small communities and even crossed administrative boundaries, nineteenth-century officials remained more involved with larger water control projects than they did with coordinating the uses of granary reserves. Only after the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 did there begin roughly four decades in which the absence of much effective government at provincial or regional levels, not to mention at a national scale, meant that the provision of public goods by Chinese regimes was far more meager than typical in the early modern era. This situation would be reversed after 1949 when the

state took upon itself ever more responsibility for allocating resources, goods, and services, even as it curtailed the use of markets in the name of socialism, extracted surpluses from agriculture to fund industrialization, and, as part of the follies of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), seriously exacerbated the impact of natural disasters and bad harvests beginning in 1959.

From the vantage point of this volume, which highlights early modern Japanese practices as a baseline against which to evaluate and compare public goods provision in other countries, the Chinese case of addressing poverty and dearth doesn't fit the increased visibility of very local organizational efforts in Japan as a new early modern phenomenon that led to new kinds and scales of social or public services. Chinese practices, in particular those affecting poverty and dearth, involved official and nonofficial actors at central, provincial, county, and subcounty levels. The increased relative importance of lower-level official and local elite efforts in nineteenth-century China occurred in conditions quite different from those marking the earlier emergence of Japanese public goods provisioning considered in part 1 of this volume. What the Japanese and Chinese cases do, however, share in the provision of early modern goods and services is a poor fit with the conventional modern economics distinction between public and private goods. The same is, in fact, also true of early modern European efforts to address the increased insecurities of poorer strata of society because these activities tend to be overshadowed by the seemingly relentless expansion of fiscal extraction to finance growing military forces. It is too easy to imagine that in Europe military defense was the only public good being produced in the era rather than simply the most visible. When we step outside of Europe we have a better chance of appreciating more common economic challenges that people and their governments faced and the distinctive ways such challenges were met through the provision of public goods. The early modern ideologies and institutions responsible for addressing famine and poverty varied in scale and substance across Eurasia. Chinese practices creating what we consider public goods to address these challenges in the eighteenth century were notable for the unparalleled spatial and demographic scales they aimed to achieve and the results they did in fact produce. Even when falling short of stated ideals, they created material realities dwarfing those inspired and organized within any other polity of the era.

In conclusion, it may seem implausible that eighteenth-century Chinese policies toward dearth and poverty could matter to the modern era. Certainly from the vantage points of modern state construction in much of Europe and in Japan, nineteenth-century Chinese changes reduced the scale of intervention to relieve poverty and dearth. If, however, we move forward to consider policies toward food supply pursued at various points after 1949 we can identify a persistent concern regarding promoting production and availability of grain, especially for the poorer members of society, most vulnerable to subsistence challenges. These policies were, to be sure, quite different both among themselves and compared

to policies of earlier eras. But they stemmed from similar political anxieties and drew upon a menu of policy choices containing ingredients also found in early modern Chinese menus of policy choices. We can recall the slogan “take grain as the key link,” which accompanied policies to promote and even coerce the planting of grain crops begun in the early 1960s to achieve grain self-sufficiency across China’s many diverse locales in response to the recent disastrous famine years. We might also remember that China’s current era of economic transformation started simply enough in late 1978 as a kind of tweaking of the socialist planned economy designed to offer peasants greater incentives to increase grain production in order to stave off possibilities of dangerous levels of dearth. Such historically recent and yet very different kinds of reactions to anxieties about grain production and the possibilities of dearth are in fact responses to far older issues for which Chinese approaches to governance had already long grappled and in the eighteenth century specifically achieved considerable evidence of success.

NOTES

1. Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyibu* (Supplements to Expositions on the Great Learning), juan 21 “Licai,” part 2 (General discussion of financial matters, part 2). Siku quanshu edition. (Complete Library of the Four Treasuries.)

2. Ostrom (1993) formulated eight principles for the effective organization of common pool resources.

1. Clearly defined boundaries
2. Proportional equivalence between benefits and costs
3. Collective-choice arrangements
4. Monitoring
5. Graduated sanctions
6. Conflict resolution mechanisms
7. Minimal recognition of rights to organize
8. Nested enterprises

3. These and other traits of Chinese state activities and relations between officials and elites and common people, especially those related to political economy, are examined in Wong 1997.

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