Introduction

Chambers of commerce developed in early twentieth-century China as a key part of its sociopolitical changes. In 1902, one year after the Qing court launched the New Policy Reform (*xinzheng*), the first Chinese chamber of commerce appeared as the Shanghai Commercial Consultative Association (Shanghai CCA, Shanghai shangye huiyi gongsuo) and soon received official approval. In 1904, such chambers of commerce became the earliest nongovernmental organizations legitimatized by state law in Chinese history. When the Qing dynasty and two millennia of imperial rule ended with the 1911 Revolution, over 1,000 general chambers (GCCs, *shangwu zonghui*), affiliated chambers (ACCs, *shangwu fenhui*), and branch chambers (BCCs, *shangwu fensuo*) had been established throughout China. They achieved increasing integration, and their collective actions deeply influenced nationalistic, reformist, and revolutionary movements as well as economic modernization.[1]

These chambers of commerce could bring about broad sociopolitical changes beyond their business world, not only because they achieved a significant degree of organizational integration and expansion but also because their participants included varied merchants with widespread influence and relations in both business and politics. According to the commercial law drafted by the late Qing chambers of commerce and enacted by the Republican government in 1914, "merchants" included those in various businesses, industries, service trades, financial activities, brokerage, and the like.[2] Actually, the late Qing chambers of commerce were composed of more diverse merchants, such as gentry-merchants (*shenshang*) who owned commercial

wealth and official titles, leaders of urban guilds, merchant managers of semiofficial enterprises, and so on.[3] Based on the newly developed chamber networks, these elite merchants formed interconnections and greatly expanded their influences from local business into the larger society and state politics. Thus, these chambers of commerce spearheaded relational changes among social elites and in the society as a whole. Their networks also helped transform business-government and society-state relationships permanently in early twentieth-century China. Such profound relational change constituted an initial and also an important part of the general network revolution in modern China.

The historical significance of these chambers of commerce has manifested itself in the increasing number of monographs on their organizational development and activities at the national level or in large cities like Shanghai and Suzhou. However, the overwhelming majority of the chambers in small cities and market towns as well as their networks from the local to the national level have not received much attention.[4] This book fills this scholarly gap by examining more than 200 chambers of commerce within the Lower Yangzi region, the socioeconomic heartland of modern China, and it focuses especially on their network development and extensive influence on sociopolitical changes in the early twentieth century.

The Lower Yangzi region included Shanghai and two prosperous provinces of modern China, Jiangsu and Zhejiang, especially the highly commercialized and urbanized Yangzi delta. However, the socioeconomic conditions of the regional core in the Yangzi delta were still very different from those of the peripheral areas, and large cities like Shanghai and Suzhou also differed from smaller cities and market towns.[5] Therefore, this study covers the chambers of commerce in the entire region not for their environmental or organizational homogeneity but for their interconnections and network expansion. Furthermore, chambers of commerce also prompted sociopolitical change from the local to the national level because their networks had already expanded beyond the region itself and influenced the larger society and state politics in the early twentieth century.

Lower Yangzi Ecology and Elite Initiative in Chambers of Commerce

The Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce and their networks developed on the basis of long-established urban and administrative systems in this region. Lying at the mouth of the Yangzi River, Shanghai had become the national center of commerce and industry from the mid-nineteenth century. Its In-

The Lower Yangzi region in the late Qing period.

ternational Settlement and French Concession attracted radical reformers and revolutionaries because of Western cultural influence and the political protection under foreign administration there. Guarding the upper reaches of the Yangzi River within this region, Jiangning (Nanjing) was the seat of

the Liangjiang governor-general. This ranking official administered Jiangsu, Anhui, and Jiangxi provinces in eastern and central China, and he also held the position of imperial commissioner for treaty ports in southern China (*Nanyang dachen*). Linking the imperial capital of Beijing and northern China with the Lower Yangzi region, the Grand Canal cut across the Yangzi River and passed through Suzhou, a commercial center and the seat of the governor of Jiangsu Province. Standing at the southern end of the canal, Hangzhou was another commercial center and the seat of the governor of Zhejiang Province.[6]

While general chambers of commerce usually appeared in Shanghai and other metropolises, their affiliated and branch chambers further developed in smaller cities and market towns in the Lower Yangzi region. Such urban centers and marketplaces comprised dozens of prefecture-level cities, more than 100 county-level cities, and thousands of market towns.[7] By the 1910s, the population was about 1 million in Shanghai and between 170,000 and 270,000 in Jiangning, Suzhou, or Hangzhou. Within and near the Yangzi Delta, populations varied between 10,000 and 100,000 in most prefecture-level cities and between 1,000 and 10,000 in the county-level cities and large towns.[8]

The Lower Yangzi region had also been successful in producing the politically active gentry (*shenshi*) and wealthy merchants. The gentry included former officials and other titleholders who had earned academic degrees through civil service examinations, and all of them acted as elite leaders in local society. They became hybrid gentry-merchants because of their involvement in business, as did many rich merchants after their purchase of academic degrees and official titles from the government. This hybrid social group also developed through the division of gentry and merchant functions among the male members of a family or clan, through intermarriage between gentry and merchant families, and through their concurrent leadership in guilds and charitable institutions.[9] These wealthy and prestigious elite merchants had long dominated commercial and community organizations before they formed the chambers of commerce in Lower Yangzi cities and towns at the beginning of the twentieth century.

By the late Qing period, a majority of such elite merchants still combined their pursuit of community leadership and even Confucian scholarship with the management of old-style businesses in the Lower Yangzi region, especially in inland cities and towns. However, in modern cities like Shanghai, it was common for them to expand their economic activities into new-style industries and businesses, enter semibureaucratic services for governmental

enterprises, and serve as compradors for foreign firms. Because of their direct competition or contacts with foreign business organizations, these elite merchants made the earliest efforts to initiate Western-style chambers of commerce in China.[10]

One leading elite merchant promoter of chambers of commerce in the late Qing period was the well-known gentry reformer and industrialist Zhang Jian, a native of Tongzhou independent department in Jiangsu Province. Zhang spent more than twenty years to prepare for and pass the three-level civil service examinations, but he realized his dream to become the top scholar in the palace examination only in 1894 when Qing China suffered disastrous defeat in its war with Japan. In view of both the national crisis and new business opportunities in his home place, Zhang ended his official career in the Qing court and turned to the textile industry in Tongzhou. He succeeded in the industrial adventure because of his gentry connections with both officials and merchants.[11] Thus, Zhang decided to pursue his social and political ambitions by "facilitating the government-business linkage" (*tong guanshang zhiyou*). From the mid-1890s, he began to promote chambers of commerce as a device to unite merchants and officials for the vitalization of Chinese business.[12]

In contrast with Zhang, the major founder of the Shanghai CCA, Yan Xinhou, exemplified most elite merchants from the business world. Yan came from a poor family in Ningbo Prefecture of Zhejiang Province, but his native-place connections helped him become a Shanghai shop clerk at a young age. Through the recommendation of a Zhejiang native, he further entered the retinue of Governor-General Li Hongzhang, a major leader of military modernization and early industrialization in late Qing China. With Li's help, Yan received the title of expectant *daotai* (circuit intendant) and made a fortune by managing the Changlu Salt Administration (*Changlu yanyunsi*) in Zhili Province after 1885. However, he soon left officialdom for Shanghai, involving himself with both old-style businesses and new industries. Yan gained high social prestige as a leader of merchant guilds, charitable institutions, and semi-official enterprises.[13] From 1899 he joined Zhang Jian, other elite merchants, and Qing officials in establishing the Shanghai Bureau of Commerce (*Shanghai shangwuju*), an unsuccessful copy of Western chambers of commerce. Eventually, in 1902, Yan received governmental encouragement to found the Shanghai CCA, and his plan for the first chamber of commerce of Qing China expressed the aspiration to end the estrangement between Chinese officials and merchants in the face of foreign economic intrusion.[14]

Zhang and Yan's backgrounds illustrate the social diversity of the late Qing elite merchants in the Lower Yangzi region, but the two of them made common efforts to initiate chambers of commerce for the purpose of strengthening government-business cooperation against foreign intrusion. This fact raises questions about the class and organizational analyses of the late Qing chambers of commerce in previous studies, especially those in mainland China. This line of scholarship has usually stressed the common class interest or homogeneous identity of the merchant participants in these chambers of commerce and has focused on their hostile relationship with the state.[15] In order to go beyond such rigid class and organizational analyses, the present book adopts a new network approach in its examination of the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce and their sociopolitical influence in early twentieth-century China.

Network Dynamics and the Rise of Chinese Chambers of Commerce

The network approach has become an established paradigm in Western academia.

> It conceives of social structure as the patterned organization of network members and their relationships. Analysis starts with a set of *network members* (sometimes called nodes) and a set of *ties* that connect some or all of these nodes. Ties consist of one or more specific *relationships*, such as kinship, frequent contact, information flows, conflict, or emotional support.[16]

This approach has the potential to analyze interrelations between both individuals and organizations, and it could supplement the standard social scientific research that focuses on individual attributes and behaviors or organizational structures and functions.[17] In particular, an emphasis on interactive relations between both individuals and organizations can help reveal the full dynamics for the rise of the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce, the starting point of the network revolution in modern China.

Chinese scholars such as Liang Shuming and Fei Xiaotong noticed the predominance of *guanxi* or interpersonal relationships in Chinese society long ago. Recently, the Western network approach has been used to analyze such relationships.[18] This line of network analysis naturally shows a tendency to emphasize interpersonal ties at the expense of institutional links, and it has led scholars to focus on kinship and local fellowship in their studies of Chinese businesses, including *guanxi* capitalism.[19] Historical studies of labor unions and native-place associations in modern Shanghai have also shed light on the continuity and dominance of such primordial relations.[20] However,

the relational changes inside the new institutional contexts and especially dynamics for such changes still need to be examined beyond the limitation of conventional network analysis.

Previous analysis of personal networks in Chinese studies has also tended to stress their cliquish and corruptive orientations. Anthropological studies of Chinese interpersonal relationships have mainly treated them as the source of rampant corruption, although there have been discoveries of personal affection and social autonomy based on such relationships.[21] Historians and political scientists in Chinese studies have especially blamed personal relationships for factionalism and have affirmed their detrimental impact on political development.[22] By contrast, recent works on personal networks in modern China have paid more attention to their intersection with social organizations and business corporations.[23] This scholarly trend has led to the discovery of "the new style of networking" based on newly formed institutions in modern Chinese history,[24] although the trendy research still "focuses on personal networks."[25]

As a study of Chinese chambers of commerce in the late Qing and early Republican periods, this book expands network analysis from its focus on interpersonal ties to include the dimension of institutional links. In particular, it adopts the concept of "associational network" to denote particular groups of persons and their intertwined interpersonal and institutional relations, as well as their interactions with other socioeconomic and political forces. This expanded concept affirms the continuity of kinship, friendship, local fellowship, and other interpersonal relationships in chambers of commerce and similar associations. However, it also indicates that the new institutional norms, organizational principles, and hierarchical structures could incorporate, transform, and transcend interpersonal relationships.

Historically, preexisting organizations such as lineages, guilds, and charitable halls (*shantang*) had already achieved different degrees of relational institutionalization and expansion in China, but their organizational development was mainly based on the personal ties among the finite groups of kinsmen, fellow townsmen or provincials, people in the same trades or occupations, and other acquaintances in individual cities, towns, or rural townships. Their interrelations above the local level of urban and rural societies were usually sporadic, informal, and unstable.[26] In contrast, the chambers of commerce first developed formal membership, leadership, hierarchy, and other institutional relationships that retained the strength of interpersonal ties but also wove the latter into their organizational frameworks and widespread networks ranging from the local to the national level, as is detailed below.[27] Thus,

research on the associational networks of these chambers can combine network and organizational analyses but also go beyond their respective foci on either interpersonal ties or formal organizations.

Such a network approach can also assimilate valuable perspectives from the class analysis of the late Qing chambers of commerce but avoid overemphasis on common class interests of their merchant members and on their class struggles with the Qing government. Network analysis affirms that people with intimate kinship and shared economic relations could form personal cliques and social classes in pursuit of cliquish and class interests. But it also suggests that "as [relational] systems increase in size and complexity, organizational imperatives [could] surpass family and class interests."[28] Thus, as the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce expanded their associational networks beyond the limits of interpersonal ties, they could rally merchants, especially elite merchants, from different social backgrounds. Through the extensive chamber networks, these elite merchants could elevate their private interests into public concerns and effectively change their relations with the state through multiform interactions with officials, not merely class struggles.

A network analysis of such relational changes offers new insights into the origins of Chinese chambers of commerce in the Lower Yangzi region. Negishi Tadashi, Shirley S. Garrett, and other pioneer scholars had long stressed the organizational evolution from late Qing guilds to chambers of commerce under Western influence, and they even regarded these chambers as superguilds or as guild federations in "Western garb."[29] However, Wellington K. K. Chan's research on late Qing chambers of commerce basically regards them as the result of official efforts to expand governmental control from state-initiated enterprises and bureaus of commerce into the larger business community. By contrast, Mary Backus Rankin attributes the development of these chambers and other new associations mainly to social elite mobilization from the mid-nineteenth century.[30] All of these previous studies are instructive for further research on the issue. However, it is still hard to explain why centuries of guild evolution in the Lower Yangzi region and decades of reformist elite mobilization in the late nineteenth century did not produce any citywide merchant organization until 1902, but thereafter chambers of commerce and their networks suddenly spread to the whole region, especially the market towns beyond direct official control, in a few years.

From a network perspective, Chapters 1 and 2 present a comprehensive explanation for the origins of the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce through a broad analysis of long-term relational changes among both their institutional predecessors and their elite and official initiators. Both the old and new orga-

nizations within the business world provided an institutional foundation for elite merchants to expand their formal leadership and interrelations, to intensify interactions with other social elites and officials for business and public affairs, and to share a common concern about foreign economic intrusion, including that from Western chambers of commerce. The institutional development and expansion of guilds, semiofficial enterprises, and bureaus of commerce, especially the interactions of their merchant leaders with other reformist elites and officials, provided the fundamental dynamics for the rise of chambers of commerce and their networks among Lower Yangzi cities and towns during the era of the New Policy Reform.

These newly formed chambers of commerce in the Lower Yangzi region usually came under the leadership of their elite merchant initiators and relied heavily on the latter as linkage men in their continuous interactions with governments and other sociopolitical organizations. However, elite merchants not only dominated these chambers but also helped expand their relations with other organizations. Such network expansion influenced a broad range of social change within and beyond the business world. Thus, the emergence and development of these chambers reflected and further reinforced relational change in the society as a whole.

Chambers of Commerce, Elite Merchant Webs, and Social Integration

The late Qing chambers of commerce have aroused widespread interest in previous scholarship largely because they included so many wealthy, prestigious, and powerful merchants. While the aforementioned class and organizational analyses of these elite merchants have tried to define them as homogeneous members of a bourgeois class and even as identical participants in the organizations of this social class, another scholarly tendency is to depict them as diverse elites with different socioeconomic resources.[31] A network analysis of relational changes around the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce can reconcile and refine the two different lines of scholarship.

Actually, these chambers expanded their networks to integrate bourgeois entrepreneurs and more heterogeneous merchants through their relational diversification, especially through their incorporation of merchant leaders from different guilds and other business groups. The chamber networks also expanded beyond the business world through their links with diverse sociopolitical organizations. Thus, the network expansion and diversification of the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce constituted two interrelated aspects of

their relational revolution, but such highly diversified chamber networks could integrate their merchant participants rather than disintegrate into personal factions mainly because of their increasing institutionalization.

As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, all the chambers of commerce in Lower Yangzi cities and towns developed roughly similar structures to incorporate elite and nonelite merchant participants into different levels of membership, elections, meetings, and so on. Annual elections and other institutional devices for mandatory personnel change also enabled these chambers to recruit influential leaders from increasingly diverse guilds, other merchant groups, and commercialized gentry strata. Similarly, their links with different community and professional organizations gradually expanded from the personal to the institutional level. As a result, the chamber networks not only integrated diverse elite merchants beyond the cliquish limits of kin, local, and occupational groups but also promoted general social integration in their merchant community and the larger society.

Indeed, the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce incorporated not only wealthy and prestigious elite merchants but also their relations with numerous guilds and other merchant groups. Although these chambers have long been regarded as superguilds by Japanese and Western scholars, their relationship with merchant guilds has remained a major controversy among Chinese historians. Ma Min and Zhu Ying's collaborative study of chambers of commerce around late Qing Suzhou argues that they differed fundamentally from the closed and inert guilds because the chambers admitted all businessmen of the same trade, encouraged commercial competition and innovation, and granted their members democratic rights. On the contrary, guilds restricted themselves only to specific regional or occupational groups, prohibited merchant competition, and enforced feudal control over their participants.[32]

Most Chinese historians, however, hold that the preexisting guilds were incorporated into chambers of commerce, either because the former had modernized themselves as the latter or because both of them were traditional organizations to some extent. Therefore, all of these historians emphasize the distinction between traditional and modern organizations and agree that these chambers could admit only homogeneous members from the guilds of their own kind.[33] What they fail to notice is that these chambers were associational networks that could encompass diverse members from both "traditional" guilds and "modern" business institutions.

Another issue is whether these chambers admitted only the elite leaders or all participants of guilds into their membership. Ma and Zhu's aforementioned study has noticed the inclusion of guild leaders into full membership

(*huiyuan*) of the chambers of commerce around late Qing Suzhou. However, they argue that these chambers admitted common participants of guilds and other small merchants only as associate members (*huiyou*) or peripheral members (*waiwei chengyuan*) who did not have the actual right to take part in chamber activities. Ma's subsequent research still treats all such chamber members as gentry merchants, but Zhu's new study instead argues that the associate members of these chambers were "actual" participants.[34] Clearly such strict organizational analysis has difficulty lumping the varied merchants into homogeneous membership in these chambers.

The network approach to the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce challenges such organizational analysis, especially the conventional class analysis that identifies them with a small and impotent bourgeois class. In mainland China, historians used to regard the late Qing chambers as the instruments of the bureaucratic comprador bourgeoisie that controlled state-sponsored enterprises and served foreign imperialists. More recently, these scholars have instead emphasized the chambers' relations with a national bourgeoisie composed of anti-imperialist industrialists and commercial entrepreneurs, in particular, and of pro-revolution intellectuals and other social forces, in general. However, both the earlier and recent studies tend to stress the weakness of the Chinese bourgeois class and its chambers of commerce because of the small number of bourgeois entrepreneurs and the unsteadiness of their revolutionary spirit around the 1911 Revolution.[35]

By contrast, Marie-Claire Bergère defines the late Qing chambers as the organizations of a more inclusive bourgeoisie, the "urban elite connected with modern business," such as those in the manufacturing and transport industries and in Western-style commercial and financial activities. However, she still believes that this bourgeois class and its chambers of commerce were too immature and impotent to lead the 1911 Revolution, except in a few modern cities like Shanghai.[36] My study also finds that the late Qing bourgeois class was weak in the Lower Yangzi region because its members constituted only a minority in a small number of chambers even when Bergère's broad definition of an inclusive bourgeois class is used in statistical analysis. However, these chambers on the whole were not weak bourgeois organizations but powerful networks of more diverse elite merchants, including the wealthiest and most influential ones.

The emphasis on the diversity of the chamber leaders and members brings this research close to previous scholarship on the local elites at the county and lower levels of Chinese society. In North America, the gentry society paradigm had deeply influenced Chinese studies from the 1950s, and it also

led Edward J. M. Rhoads to depict the late Qing chambers around Canton as organizations of gentry-merchants, including commercial and industrial entrepreneurs with gentry titles. His point found an echo in Wellington K. K. Chan's more general discussion about chambers of commerce of late Qing China. The notion of gentry-merchants has recently been elaborated by scholars in mainland China to broaden their understanding of these chambers and the related bourgeois class.[37]

Meanwhile, Joseph W. Esherick, Mary Backus Rankin, and other scholars have redefined gentry-merchants, bourgeois entrepreneurs, guild leaders, and other social notables as local elites in terms of their dominance in the social arena at and below the county level. According to these scholars, these elites controlled varied material and social and symbolic resources and cannot be categorized simply as undifferentiated holders of state-granted gentry titles or members of a specific bourgeois class. Thus, the inclusive concept of local elites reveals their more diverse and changeable attributes than previous scholarship suggested.[38]

This book elaborates on the diversification and transformation of the elite merchant participants in the Lower Yangzi chambers, but its network analysis lays more stress on their interconnections. These elite merchants were more diverse than the local elites defined by Esherick and Rankin. They ranged from the local merchant notables in market towns to the gentry-merchants of provincial capitals and the bourgeois entrepreneurs in national metropolises like Shanghai. They could be classified as "local elites" only in the sense that their business dominance was concentrated on the "local" arena of their cities and towns. In fact, many merchants kept relations with their remote birthplaces and with long-distance trade, not to mention their new chamber networks.

Certainly, the hierarchical distinction among general, affiliated, and branch chambers in the Lower Yangzi region still affirms Philip Kuhn's hypothesis about social cleavages between elites at the national, provincial, and local levels. Their different degrees of network development between the regional core and its peripheral areas also reflected the social rupture between core and peripheral elites, as Rankin stresses.[39] Nevertheless, the primary impact of the chamber networks on these social elites was the intensification of their interconnections. The network expansion of such chambers allowed many of their elite merchant participants to act as local elites in their respective cities or towns and to pursue influence at the provincial and national levels at the same time. It also brought the elite merchants in core and peripheral areas into closer contact than ever before.

Furthermore, through personnel and, in particular, institutional interconnections, the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce and other new associations linked up elite merchants and more diverse elites in other social circles. As a result, these elites achieved unprecedented integration in spite of their geographical dispersion, social diversification, and professional specialization. In particular, the engagement of the chambers and their leaders in varied public activities, such as nationalist mobilization, municipal reform, and management of township charities, facilitated social integration of both elites and the populace. Such social transformation certainly influenced political change in society-state relations.

Chamber Networks, Elite Associational Activism, and Society-State Relations

The associational networks of the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce increasingly integrated their elite merchants and brought them into organized activities, including collective actions taken by themselves and joint actions undertaken with other sociopolitical forces. Such associational activism led the chamber leaders and members into more intensive and complicated interactions with both the populace and officials. It marked the climax of the relational revolution around these chambers of commerce in the early twentieth century because the tripartite interactions among their elite merchants, the general public, and the governments produced strong dynamics for sociopolitical change in this region and the whole country, including long-term transformation of the society-state relationship in modern China.

Because the Lower Yangzi chamber networks incorporated the kinship, local fellowship, and other personal relationships of their elite merchant leaders and members, their activities naturally reflected the familial, parochial, and other private interests of these elites. However, it is more important to note that the chamber networks also expanded the social relations of these elite merchants above the personal level, and the relational expansion naturally linked their private interests with their public concerns for the larger society. As a result, the chamber leaders and members engaged not only in collective actions by themselves but also in joint actions with the populace in some circumstances. Such relational change around the chamber networks has not received enough attention in previous studies of Chinese local elites or the bourgeois class.

Previous scholarship on the local elites in late Qing China has often shown a tendency to stress their pursuit of social dominance and their clashes with

the populace. As early as the 1960s, Chūzō Ichiko presented a well-known hypothesis that the late Qing gentry, especially those at the local level, supported official reforms and developed reformist organizations for the purpose of self-preservation. They increased their prestige, power, and profit at the expense of both governmental control and popular welfare. Edward J. M. Rhoads's research on the late Qing chambers of commerce around Canton reveals their more positive impact on industrial development and political change, but his work still stresses that their activities were mainly aimed at strengthening the dominance of the local elites.[40] To some extent, the motivation for local elite dominance can indeed explain many activities of these chambers, including their clashes with the populace in local markets. However, it fails to account for their collective actions over larger areas and especially their joint actions with the populace in social protests against governmental or foreign encroachments on their shared public interests.

Among scholars in mainland China, class analysis of the late Qing chambers of commerce has offered a more influential explanation for their activities. In particular, it uses the class interest of the new yet impotent bourgeoisie to interpret their limited participation in the 1911 Revolution and their eventual withdrawal from the revolutionary camp.[41] However, as noted before, bourgeois members never formed a majority among the late Qing chambers in the Lower Yangzi region. Thus, their class interest could hardly motivate a majority of chamber leaders and members into collective actions. Contrary to this assumption, the bourgeois members of the metropolitan chambers and most chamber participants in old-style businesses of small cities and towns did not share a common class interest. Nonetheless, they often took concerted action because the chamber networks coordinated their different interests and brought them together through public rhetoric that had wide appeal.

Evidently, the associational networks of these late Qing chambers transformed the pursuits of elite merchants by bringing them into collective actions beyond the scope of their personal, local, and even class interests. Thus, Mary Backus Rankin reinterprets such chambers and similar elite associations as a portion of the "public sphere" in which social elites managed public affairs distinct from their private pursuits and official administration. According to Rankin, the public activities of these elites and their associations increasingly involved conflicts with the Qing state and brought them into an irreversible process leading toward the 1911 Revolution.[42] Moreover, William T. Rowe, David Strand, and other scholars have further introduced into Chinese studies Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, a realm where

rational and critical discourse develops and defends society and the public good against state intrusion.[43]

Rowe and a few other scholars, however, still insist on the distinction of the Chinese public sphere from the Western idea of "a civil society autonomous and counterpoised to the state."[44] In contrast, Zhu Ying has directly interpreted the late Qing chambers of commerce as the main component of a Chinese civil society (*shimin shehui*), or the social associations embodying democratic principles, self-regulating authority, and organizational autonomy from the state. He argues that these chambers represented broad social interests in their increasing conflicts with the Qing court and especially in their eventual involvement in the 1911 Revolution.[45] His new interpretation downplays the bourgeois class nature of these chambers and echoes Edward Shils's notion of civil society. In Shils's opinion, such civil society differs from the family, the locality, and the state and rests on the civic virtue of its citizen members in giving precedence to the public good over individual interests and in following the law to regulate their own behavior and limit state power.[46] Thus, based on the public sphere or civil society model, recent works on Chinese chambers of commerce have highlighted the public and social motivations of their elite merchant participants as the new dynamic that drove their actions.

From the network point of view, however, the public motivations of these elite merchants developed in connection with, rather than separately from, their private interests. As Habermas's concept of the bourgeois public sphere in early modern Europe suggests, it was the realm of private persons of the bourgeois class who engaged in public discourse versus state authority.[47] By contrast, the chambers of commerce in late Qing and early Republican China were composed of diverse elite merchants with more differing personal, group, and class interests. Thus, they could bring their elite and even nonelite merchant participants into collective actions because their associational networks effectively linked up the different interests of such diverse merchants and further bound them together with public issues of wide concern in the larger society.

More important, the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce derived dynamics for their associational actions not only from the intertwined private and public interests of their elite merchant participants but also from their multiform interactions with the governments. In regard to this issue, previous studies under the influence of public sphere and civil society discourses have offered valuable insights into the vigorous struggles of the chambers and other

social organizations for public authority and associational autonomy from the state. However, their overemphasis on such society-state contention has also drawn criticism from other scholars. As one of their critics, Philip C. C. Huang instead treats the late Qing chambers as an example of the "third realm" in which state and society overlapped and cooperated.[48] Even though Kohama Masako uses the concept of the "public sphere" to depict varied social associations in modern Shanghai, her work stresses the collaboration of these urban organizations with officials and their failure to change society-state relations.[49] Xiaoqun Xu's study of professional associations in Republican China also deplores their "lack of complete autonomy" from the state and proposes the concept "symbiotic dynamics" to highlight their interdependent relations with the state.[50]

By contrast, my concept of associational networks stresses interactive dynamics and changeable relations between society and state. Specifically speaking, it focuses on dynamic forces generated by multiform interactions between social organizations and the governments and on subsequent relational changes beyond mutual cooperation or confrontation. Most important, my network analysis suggests that the chambers of commerce in early twentieth-century China did not simply seek "complete autonomy" from the state. In fact, what these chambers pursued in their relations with the state was "structural autonomy," by which network analysis denotes the ability of network members to acquire necessary resources while reducing control by other members through their interactive relations.[51]

Indeed, it was through different forms of interaction with the late Qing government that the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce acquired legal sanction and further developed their widespread networks beyond direct official control. The network institutionalization, expansion, and diversification in turn enabled these chambers to rally and represent their merchant community and even the larger society in their multiform interactions with the governments from the local to the national level. Thus, the chambers increased their structural autonomy and sociopolitical influence because their interactive relations with both the state and the general public progressively expanded in scale and complexity.

Chapters 5 and 6 respectively scrutinize the associational activities of the Lower Yangzi chambers and their influence in late Qing business and politics. These chambers expanded their activities from local markets to provincial railroads, a national fair, and Sino-American joint ventures because they actively pursued both the private and public interests of their elite merchants through cooperation, confrontation, or other forms of interaction with the

Qing officials and foreign capital. The chambers of commerce, especially those in the Yangzi Delta, also accelerated constitutional reform and facilitated the success of the 1911 Revolution through their multiform interactions with the Qing officials, varied reformist organizations, and the anti-Qing revolutionary parties. Their associational activities promoted economic modernization and political transformation and also enhanced their public image and authority, even though there was still class tension between their elite merchants and the populace at the local level.

Although the focus of Chapters 1–6 is on the associational networks of the late Qing chambers of commerce in the Lower Yangzi region, my documentary and theoretical analyses refer frequently to the influence of their network revolution beyond this region. In particular, Chapter 7 documents the nationwide network development of these chambers and their interactions with the various Republican regimes. In the Conclusion, a theoretical summary of such network revolution and its historical legacy in the late twentieth century further highlights how the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce influenced long-term social integration and society-state interaction in modern China.

Certainly, the associational networks of the Lower Yangzi chambers of commerce in the early twentieth century reflected only the beginning and a primary aspect of the relational revolution in modern China. Such network revolution did not happen in a historical vacuum but was based on centuries of relational evolution in Chinese society. In fact, even the Lower Yangzi chambers themselves were a product of long-term relational changes among urban guilds, elite merchants, and officials in late imperial China.