5

The Foundation and Rise of the Qing Dynasty

The Defeat of the Ming, and the Founding of the Qing

Nurhaci and the Later Jin dynasty

The founders of the Qing dynasty were members of the Nuzhen (or Jurchen) tribe that inhabited the forests and steppes of northeast Asia. During the early decades of the twelfth century, the scattered Nuzhen tribal groups became united under a strong leader, who established the Jin dynasty, which lasted for about a century. After the Ming dynasty (1368 – 1644) took over from the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368) in China, it tried to control the vast territory inhabited by the Nuzhen tribes outside the Great Wall and placed military garrisons at strategic places. At the same time, the Ming made the leaders of the different Nuzhen tribal groups its vassals, giving them official titles to govern their own people. These tribal leaders were expected to demonstrate their loyalty to the Ming through participating in the 'tribute' relationship, visiting the Ming Court periodically to acknowledge their fealty and to exchange gifts. They were also expected to cooperate with the Ming officials to capture fugitives and offenders. This was the normal policy that had been enforced by the Ming in its relationship with the tribes or states along its borders.

The spectacular rise of the Nuzhen in late Ming not only formed a sharp contrast with the precipitous decline of the Ming: the two movements were actually closely connected. In earlier Ming times, the Nuzhen people were fragmented into tribal groups of various sizes that carried on continuous fratricidal wars of raids and vendettas against one another. They had long felt the oppression of Ming officials and resented the Ming policy of 'divide and rule'. To throw off the Ming yoke, they needed to unite, and strengthen themselves politically and militarily under a strong leader.

Nurhaci (1559-1626), who sensed this need, emerged as just such a leader around the middle of the corrupt and self-indulgent reign of Emperor Ming Wanli (r. 1573 – 1620). Nurhaci began his career as the head of an insignificant Nuzhen tribal group. He had only a few tens of fighting men under him. He was, however, an ambitious and gifted man, in the mould of an empire-builder or dynastic founder. He also harboured a personal grudge against the Ming for the death of his father and grandfather. His lack of military manpower

did not deter him in the least from attacking and overcoming far more numerous foes. Besides being a brave and skilful warrior, he was also a brilliant military strategist and tactician, often winning battles against overwhelming odds. When going to war, he took the initiative of when, where, and whom to attack, and chose his targets carefully, to overpower the weak and avoid premature confrontation with a strong enemy. Little by little the territory and people under his control grew. Besides conquering other tribal groups, he also built alliances as a peaceful means of expansion. Many leaders of small tribal groups flocked to him with their followers. attracted by his reputation for invincibility in war and benevolence towards those who came to join him. Their motives might have been to seek a protector, or for upward mobility. Nurhaci's patient build-up of power and influence, and his persistent pursuit of increasing the territory and the number of people in his domain, bore fruit. Ten years after he started his expansionist movements, all the Nuzhen tribal groups in his ancestral region of Jianzhou came under his rule. This provided him with a far more promising foundation to challenge the relatively strong and numerous Nuzhen communities further away.

Before he was ready to challenge the Ming, he avoided arousing Ming suspicions of his intentions by personally bringing tribute to the Ming court and paying homage to the Ming emperor on many occasions. He also cooperated with the Ming officials in apprehending and even killing Nuzhen tribal chiefs who plundered Han settlements, and by returning the Han captives. He volunteered to fight Japanese pirates on the side of the Ming. Because of these acts and his persistently professed loyalty, the Ming court promoted him to become the highest official of his region, thus conferring legitimacy on the dominant position he had achieved among the Nuzhens. This development was a result of his judicious policy because he was aware that the high status and power given to him by the Ming greatly enhanced his authority and prestige in the eyes of his own people.

Between 1601 and 1625 Nurhaci displayed his organizational genius through establishing and perfecting the Banner system, whereby the entire Nuzhen population was grouped into Eight Banners of different colours, each with its own leader and a hierarchy of subordinate officers under his overall direction. This apparently militaristic organization was also political in terms of authority, and financial as regards taxation. This system not only provided him with a formidable fighting force with clear lines of command and ease in mobilization; it also gave him a rough-and-ready functioning government, managing the affairs of a population which was in the process of being moulded into an orderly society, obeying the rules and regulations laid down by him.

Recognizing the need for a written language, at least for governmental administration if not for other purposes also, he authorized the adoption of the Mongolian alphabet to express the Nuzhen native tongue. He prescribed a hair style for men that required shaving the hair from the crown and the two sides of the head, while leaving the rest to grow long enough to be braided into a plait at the back. Women were

forbidden to bind their feet in the manner of the Han Chinese. He also laid down rules on the style of dress for the people in his territory because he apparently saw clothing as a matter of identity or solidarity rather than merely fashion. After more than three decades of ceaseless struggle, military as well as political, he accomplished the seemingly impossible task of uniting the fractious Nuzhen tribal groups into one cohesive ethnic entity, spreading over a vast territory in northeast Asia. In 1616, the 57-year-old Nurhaci proclaimed the establishment of the Later Jin dynasty (1616 – 1636) - or simply Jin as it later became - with himself ruling as the Yingming (meaning wise or sagacious) Khan (r. 1616 – 1626) of this new and expanding empire.

Map showing the location of the Later Jin Empire (*Wikipedia*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map-Qing_Dynasty_1616-en.jpg)

In 1618, as the head of a unified Nuzhen tribe controlling the formidable army of the Eight Banners, Nurhaci decided that the time was ripe to challenge the Ming, by openly declaring his hatred for the Ming, and his intention to attack them, and by capturing several Ming towns with tens of thousands of people and livestock. The Ming responded with an army of 100,000 including 10,000 Koreans, supported by canons, against 60,000 Banner troops. The high morale of the Banner troops, fighting for ethnic survival and ascendancy, together with their superior military tactics, won the day. This major victory whetted Nurhaci's appetite for making further advances into Ming territory. In 1621, he captured the important garrisoned cities of Shenyang and Liaoyang, which enabled him to control a large swathe of the territory of the

Liaodong (meaning Eastern Liao) peninsula, together with its people and resources. During the same year, Nurhaci moved his capital to Liaoyang, and four years later to Shenyang (later to be known as Mukden).

After these important victories against the Ming and having brought more Han population into territory under his control, Nurhaci showed a tyrannical side of his character. He became mistrustful of the Han people, persecuting his own Han official staff and mercilessly slaughtering large numbers of people in Han villages and towns. Those who were not killed were made into slaves of the Nuzhen aristocracy, working on the land taken away from themselves or other Han landowners. This was a radical change from his previous policy of being benevolent to the Han people and of employing the Han elite as officials. The enslaved Hans tried to escape if they could, and many fled in advance of an approaching Jin army. Within a few years, more than three million people had left Liaodong.

In 1626, Nurhaci decided it was time to make further inroads on Ming-controlled territory. With 130,000 troops he marched towards the Ming garrisoned city of Ningyuan outside the Great Wall. The Ming official in charge of the security of Liaodong, Sun Chengzong, was a very able and patriotic man. He made thorough and painstaking preparations to defend against attack and was ready to resist the enemy strenuously. However, he was removed from office, at the instigation of the powerful eunuch Wei Zhongxian, and was replaced by a man who had ‘the courage of a mouse’ and was as ‘fearful of the enemy as if they were tigers’. The new head ordered the defenders, together with the people of a large surrounding area, to retreat behind the Great Wall. A relatively low-ranking but courageous Ming official, Yuan Chonghuan, defied his superior’s order and took over the defence of Ningyuan himself. He and other like-minded officials, after putting in place many strong defensive measures, were ready to lay down their lives for their country. As Nurhaci moved rapidly with his troops towards this city without any interference, he expected an easy victory against a relatively small force of less than 20,000 defenders inside the city. The over-confident Nurhaci ordered wave after wave of his infantry and cavalry to advance against heavy barrages of well-directed salvos from Western cannons and other types of firearms. After sustaining heavy losses, he had to retreat, because the defenders had scorched the earth of the surrounding areas to make sure that there was nothing to sustain his troops. For the first time in his 42 years at war Nurhaci suffered defeat. It was a first great victory for the Ming, and a serious setback for Nurhaci. He died later that year at age 68.

Hong Taiji (Emperor Chongde)

Nurhaci’s death left the Jin in a perilous state, not least because he had not appointed a successor. In the Jin domain in Liaodong, good arable land became wilderness, because the Han majority, the sedentary tillers of the soil, continued to flee as a result of Nurhaci’s policy of turning them into landless agricultural slaves.

This situation led to famine, high inflation, and social disorder. The hitherto fearless Jin forces seemed to suffer a loss of nerve. The Jin's enemies - the Ming to the west, the kingdom of Korea to the East, and hostile Mongols to the north - were all poised to deliver it a crushing blow.

In the face of these challenges, the heads of the Eight Banners agreed to appoint Nurhaci's eighth son, Hong Taiji, as the head of a collective leadership. The social stability and the economy of Liaodong improved after Hong Taiji gave the land back to the Hans and ended their slavery. Then he proceeded to tackle his enemies one by one. He led his troops inside the Great Wall, attacking the Ming at its weaker points rather than stoutly defended cities such as Ningyuan. The easy victories raised the morale of the Jin troops. The Jin cause was no doubt helped by the death of Yuan Chonghuan, who had hurried back from Liaodong to the capital to organize the Ming defence. Hong Taiji, wishing to avoid another hard fight with heavy losses, plotted to eliminate Yuan by framing the latter as someone who had a secret agreement with him to betray the Ming. The Ming emperor fell into the trap, and executed Yuan Chonghuan, wrongly, as a traitor.

In 1627, the Jin forces rapidly occupied a large part of the Korean peninsula. The king of Korea was forced to sign a treaty with the Jin, whereby the king of Korea or his representative was obliged periodically to pay respect to Hong Taiji at his court with tributes. This was the procedure used by the Ming to maintain symbolically the suzerainty and vassal relationship between itself and its less powerful neighbours, a system the rising Jin empire also found it convenient to adopt. This treaty also obliged Korea to sever all contact with the Ming, its former suzerain. The Ming, hardly able to keep its own borders intact, was in no position to defend its former vassal.

Hong Taiji next focused his attention on subjugating various Mongol tribes, particularly those in northeast Asia, by force and diplomacy. This was a challenging task: it took eight years of fighting and negotiating for him to unite all the Mongol tribal groups in Nan Mo (south of the desert) under Jin leadership. These eastern Mongols became Jin loyal allies or subjects because the Mongol aristocrats were allowed to join the Nuzhens as ruling elites. Hong Taiji established a set of laws and regulations to govern the Mongols through their own leaders. The setting up of an Eight-Banner Mongol force greatly strengthened the military power of the Nuzhens.

Hong Taiji realized that during the military campaigns, the collective leadership proved, at times, an obstacle to unified command and decisive actions. He found ways to concentrate power in his own hands at the expense of the other collective leaders. After having so successfully increased the position, power, and territorial extent of the Jin, Hong Taiji became dissatisfied with his own title and position. In 1636, he became formally the Emperor Chongde (r.1636-1643), thus elevating himself far above those who had been almost his peers during the collective leadership phase. He changed the dynastic name from the Jin to the great Qing (meaning pure). He also changed the name of his ethnic group nation from Nuzhen to Manchu,

the name of the tribal group that formed Nurhaci's core supporters at the start of his campaign for unification. Emperor Chongde made the most powerful and meritorious Manchu military commanders into princes. Several Mongol and Chinese military leaders were also given princely titles.

Although conquering China and replacing Ming rule with his own was his ultimate goal, Chongde needed to proceed step by step. A priority at that point was to strengthen his rule politically, economically, and administratively over the Qing domain, which had by then expanded to cover a considerable area northeast of Ming China and northward deep into the lands of the Mongols, while sharing a common boundary at the Yalu River with Korea at its southeast. To do so, he set up a central administration with six ministries, or boards, with rules and regulations modelled on those of the Ming and run by top Manchu aristocrats. He enlarged the number of soldiers in the Eight Manchu and Mongol Banner forces by incorporating suitable males of each of these ethnic groups from newly acquired territories. He also formed an Eight Banner Han force from the Han population in his domain. The building of an enlarged military force, particularly the inclusion of the Hans, undoubtedly improved his chances of accomplishing his ambitious enterprise. Although the Ming could muster armed forces many times those of his, Emperor Chongde, a keen student of the history of the Middle Kingdom, must have taken courage from historical precedents of the successful conquest and subsequent rule of the Middle Kingdom by dynasties established by nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples, who had also started from relatively small domains of limited population and with greatly outnumbered military forces.

Having put his own house in order, Emperor Chongde's plan against the Ming was first to take over any remaining pockets of Ming garrisoned cities in China's northeast, and then conquer the territory north of the Yellow River, before attempting to conquer all of China. Before he was ready to proceed with this plan, from 1636 to 1640 he despatched tens of thousands of his troops several times to invade Ming territory through weakly guarded points of the Great Wall, further to the west. The purpose of these military expeditions was not to capture Beijing and overthrow the Ming at this stage, but to gain riches through looting, to wreak havoc on the targeted areas, and to probe the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. To prevent too much sacrifice of scarce manpower, the Qing commanders were instructed not to try to capture strongly defended cities. Their armies ranged far and wide, inflicting defeat on Ming forces that dared to fight them. Many Ming officials commanding thousands of troops would shelter behind city walls rather than engage the invaders in combat. After several months, the army would return to the Qing capital at Shenyang with much treasure (gold and silver), and large numbers of captives and livestock, while leaving the Ming cities and villages through which they passed in ruins.

Between 1641 and 1642, the Qing emperor fought the fierce Battle of Song-Jin to take over Songshan and Jinzhou, Ming strongholds outside the Great Wall. The capture of these cities further consolidated the Qing control of China's northeast, and it also removed a major obstacle to the invasion of Beijing through the strategic but fiercely guarded Shanhai Pass, the breach of which would amount to a stranglehold on the Ming. These and further aggressive military actions against the Ming in 1642 demonstrated fully to the Qing emperor the military weaknesses of the Ming, despite the larger forces his more populous neighbour could muster.

In 1643, Emperor Chongde suddenly died before he was able to realize his goal, and without having chosen a successor. Prince Dorgon, one of the most powerful members of the Manchu aristocracy, proposed to appoint Chongde's ninth son, a six-year-old boy, as a compromise candidate, to succeed him as the Emperor Shunzhi (1643-1661), with himself and another prince as co-regents.

Prince Dorgon and the fall of Beijing

Soon after settling the issue of succession, an unmissable opportunity for the Qing presented itself from developments inside the Great Wall. In the spring of 1644, the Ming capital Beijing had fallen into the hands of the peasant rebel leader, Li Zicheng. The closeness of the Shanhai Pass to Beijing - about a week's march - and the tens of thousands of Ming soldiers garrisoned there guarding this vital pass under the Ming general Wu Sangui, prompted Li to send an emissary, bringing 40,000 taels of silver, to persuade Wu to surrender to his new regime. Knowing that the Ming court officials at Beijing had mostly surrendered to Li, Wu did so also to preserve his own position. Then he heard that his father in Beijing was among those who had been forced to hand over money to the new regime. Adding insult to injury, he learnt that one of Li's generals had taken possession of his beautiful concubine, Chen Yuanyuan. Thus outraged, general Wu turned against Li and proclaimed himself as a loyal Ming subject. Aware that his forces were no match for those of Li's, his only recourse for survival was to turn to his erstwhile enemy, the Qing, for military support. He contacted the Qing, as a Ming official, offering an alliance with the Qing to fight the peasant army, and adding the inducement of 'splitting territory' with the Qing. The plan he put forward to the Qing was to let the Qing army enter China, not through the Shanhai pass guarded by himself, but through other weakly defended points to the west, to engage Li's main forces stationed in northern China. If the Qing proceeded with this plan, he planned to keep his own army intact and wait for opportunities to display his strength after the belligerents had exhausted themselves.

Shortly before general Wu approached the Qing, Prince Dorgon had already recognized the fall of the Ming at Beijing as destiny, calling for the Manchus to fulfil their ancestral ambition of ruling China. He accepted

the advice of his Han official, Fan Wencheng, who urged him to despatch troops to inside the Great Wall, this time not to loot and pillage, but to win the people over to the Qing side, and to fight the *liu kou* (‘roving bandits’) - a derogatory term for the peasant army - for mastery of north China. Still avoiding the Shanhai Pass, the quickest route to Beijing, the Manchu troops were again going to use the weak spots where they had entered northern China many times previously. The Qing plan happened to coincide with General Wu’s suggestion.

At this point, the initiative passed from Wu to Li. After Li Zicheng realized that general Wu was not going to surrender after all, he led several thousand troops himself, starting on 13 April 1644, to the Shanhai Pass to fight Wu. Alarmed at the news that Li was coming towards the Shanhai Pass, Wu was forced hurriedly to alter his plan. Aware that he might well be defeated and meet his death in combat against Li’s forces, he realized that asking the Qing to fight the peasant army in north China would not save him from the danger he was facing. In desperation, he sent one letter after another, asking and then begging Prince Dorgon to move the Qing troops speedily, not in the direction he had originally suggested, but towards the southeast, straight to the Shanhai Pass, where the gate would be opened to welcome them in. This invitation was almost too good to be true - one Dorgon was certainly not going to refuse. Because it had been so strongly defended in the past, the Manchus had not even attempted to force their way through this pass for some time, for fear of heavy losses. It was the ideal route to invade Beijing. Dorgon quickly accepted Wu’s invitation, promising a princedom to Wu and his descendants. Gathering all the Manchu forces, Dorgon promptly changed the direction of their march to the Shanhai Pass.

Li had not considered the possibility that Wu might seek help from the mighty Manchus outside the Great Wall. Had he anticipated Wu’s move, he might not have tried to force Wu’s hand so lightly. He probably would have moved much more of his force stationed in northern China and made more thorough preparations for taking on the combined forces of the Qing and general Wu Sangui. En route to the pass, Li met elders from there sent by Wu, who pretended to surrender so as to delay the progress of Li’s army, in case it arrived at Shanhai too much in advance of the Manchu rescue force. When Dorgon’s forces did arrive at the Shanhai Pass on 21 March 1644, the armies of Li and Wu had already been in battle for one day. Dorgon massed his troops a few kilometres outside the gate, behaving more like an observer than a participant. The next day, after fighting resumed between the two sides, Wu’s side was showing signs of being overwhelmed and disintegrating. Sensing Wu’s desperate plight, before Dorgon would agree to help he pressed Wu to accept terms of surrender to the Qing as a subject, rather than representing the Ming as an ally. Wu had no option but to comply. When Dorgon threw his army into the fray the next day, the combined forces of Wu and the Qing outnumbered those of Li’s, which were defeated decisively. Li

hurriedly retreated to Beijing, with the victors following close behind. Back in Beijing, Li hastened to ascend the throne of his new dynasty, the Great Shun (Shun Dynasty), and left the very next day, taking his army westward to his old base at Xi'an. Thereafter, his movement declined. Had Li reached the Shanhai Pass without the delay, and crushed Wu before Dorgon's arrival, the history of China might have turned out very differently.

Shortly after Li left Beijing, but not before he had set the palaces on fire, Prince Dorgon entered the city with his soldiers under strict orders not to loot or plunder the inhabitants. The Qing prince took the advice of his Han official, Fan Wencheng, to use a 'softly, softly' approach towards the ex-Ming officials. To this category of people, the prince offered, if they would surrender to the Qing, to give back to them their official positions, and their land and properties taken away by Li Zicheng, regardless of whether they had surrendered to that regime. Many surrendered gladly. In northern China, several of the ex-Ming generals, who had surrendered to Li Zicheng earlier, responded positively to the Qing invitation to surrender, bringing with them their troops and the cities they were guarding to the Qing side. Then Dorgon sent out armies to destroy Li Zicheng.

This first stage of the Manchu conquest of China went extremely smoothly. The gentle approach adopted by Prince Dorgon stabilized the situation and made Beijing and a large part of northern China sufficiently secure to enable the Emperor Shunzhi (r. 1643 – 1661) to ascend the dragon throne, on 8 October 1644, as the first Manchu ruler of the Qing dynasty in China. It would be the last of the Chinese imperial dynasties.

Unifying the country under the Qing

Ming resistance

The most important task now facing the Qing was to unite China under its rule. Among its major enemies, besides the peasant-led regimes of Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong, there was also the Southern Ming, formed by loyalists, who rallied around a Ming Prince Zhu Yousong as the Emperor Hongguang (r. 1644-1645), reigning at the old Ming capital of Nanjing from June 1644. Without sufficient manpower to fight on all fronts, Dorgon concentrated his military efforts first on crushing Li Zicheng. Although Li still had a multitude of troops in his movement – an estimated total of over 200,000 at one point – Li did not have a breathing spell to work out a coherent strategy, and continued setbacks had lowered his soldiers' morale. The combined forces of the Qing commanders and Wu Sangui continued to take the initiative, attacking, pursuing, and beating Li's army until Li retreated to a mountain south of Wuhan, where, in May 1645, a

group of peasants or local vigilantes killed him (the exact cause of death was unconfirmed). The Southern Ming regime at Nanjing lasted only a year to June 1645, despite the heroic effort of the patriotic Shi Kefa to salvage the situation. It was defeated first by the old habits of corruption, starting with the emperor himself who sold offices to raise money, and by factional squabbles, before being overwhelmed by the Qing military force. The Qing then concentrated its attention on conquering Zhang Xianzhong's regime in Sichuan. Although Zhang was killed by an arrow fired from the Qing side in 1647, his generals continued to lead peasant armies to resist the Qing.

The deaths of the Emperor Hongguang and the rebel leaders did not end resistance to Qing rule. One after the other, three other Ming princes became (some very briefly) the emperor of the Southern Ming, with temporary capitals driven further and further south or southwest. The last one, the Yongli Emperor (r. 1646 - 1662), lasted the longest – for sixteen years. The remnants of Li Zicheng's and Zhang Xianzhong's rebel armies came over to Yongli in large numbers to fight against the Qing army, who were increasingly looked upon as alien invaders, because the Manchus were trying to submerge the Han identity in a brutal way. The power struggle between the two army commanders, and lack of cooperation between the armies of the peasants and officials, severely weakened this resistance movement. Qing military pressure forced Yongli to retreat to Burma in 1658. In late 1661, the Burmese handed him over to general Wu Shangui, who was in charge of the territory bordering Burma as a princely vassal of the Qing. Wu had him executed. His death ended the Southern Ming, but still not all armed resistance or revolt against Manchu rule.

Before the remnant of Li Zicheng's peasant army was completely wiped out, many fresh uprisings broke out against Qing rule. These were precipitated by Dorgon's policy of forcing his Han subjects to dress and wear their hair like the Manchus. Ever since Nurhaci had laid down rules for clothing and hairstyle for men and women in his domain, the dynasty forged by his descendants forced all peoples under their rule to dress and wear their hair like the Manchus. The Han men found it objectionable to have to wear their hair in the peculiar and distinctive Manchu style. But the Manchu rulers took their conquered subjects' willingness to make this change in their appearance extremely seriously. Those who complied were deemed submissive, while those who refused, or were just slow to make the change, would be regarded as enemies, punishable by death.

In 1644, after the Qing took over Beijing, sensing the Han peoples' strong sentiments against shaving their heads, Dorgon decided it was expedient not to force the issue at that point, and risk antagonizing the people whose support he needed. A year later in June 1645, after the Qing's victories against Li Zicheng and the Southern Ming regime at Nanjing, the overconfident Dorgon no longer felt any constraint on the matter. He decided to impose the Manchu style of hair and clothing in all the area under Qing rule. Edicts commanding men to shave their heads went out everywhere, with a limit of up to ten days at most for

compliance, and a threat of ‘killing those who would not follow the regulations of our dynasty’. The choice, as it was put succinctly to the public, was between ‘keeping your hair, or your head’. This demand stirred up enormous anger among the people. Reactions were particularly violent in the newly conquered Yangtze River region. Outraged residents of several cities in that area rose up in revolt with cries of ‘take off our heads, but not our hair’. They killed many Qing officials, manufactured weapons, and organized armed resistance movements to fight the Qing armies sent to suppress them. Dorgon’s reply was brutal: he sent in troops to crush the uprisings and butchered the people of these cities en masse.

There was another Qing policy that was even more tyrannical. As the Qing army advanced into northern and central China in 1644, Dorgon adopted a policy of ‘enclosing’ huge areas of land belonging to the Han people and making them into estates for the Manchu royal family and their relatives, the Manchu military aristocrats, and the Banner forces. About one million people were thus rendered landless and reduced to working as agricultural slaves on estates owned by others. As mentioned previously, this practice, which was introduced by Nurhaci after he successfully invaded large areas of Han settlements in the northeast outside the Great Wall, was discontinued under Hong Taiji, because the economy of his state was seriously damaged by the loss of such slaves escaping in large numbers. Dorgon’s reintroduction of this extremely oppressive policy, but now on Han lands inside the Great Wall, was on a much larger scale. Once again many of the enslaved attempted to escape, despite the risk of terrible punishments if caught. There were also severe reprisals against those who gave shelter to, or were even suspected of aiding, the escapees. These harsh measures, brutally enforced, added fuel to the fire of Han resistance, and may have delayed the unification of all fragments of the broken Ming empire under Qing rule for over a decade.

During the critical first seven years of Manchu rule, since Shunzhi was in his minority, prince Dorgon had managed the affairs of the state on his behalf. As we have seen, the harshness of some of the Qing measures introduced during this period alienated the Han population and rendered it more difficult for the new dynasty to unify the country. Although the Manchu conquest was for the benefit of their own people, and their military aristocrats formed an uppermost stratum of ruling elites, they were too small in number to administer and control the vast Chinese lands without Han Chinese collaboration. Soon after the takeover, many Ming officials in both the central and local government were temporarily retained. Examinations were held as soon as possible to replace the old Ming officials with a new crop of candidates who had gained their degrees under the Qing. The transition was made easier by the fact that the Qing had adopted, by and large, the Ming political and administrative institutions even before the dynasty established itself in Beijing. This was achievable because the Manchu dynasty already had the service of its own loyal and well-educated Han subjects, who had settled outside the Great Wall and who threw in their lot with the Manchus. Later, the Qing rulers introduced important changes and innovations according to their lights. Even the

oppressive prince Dorgon tried to win Han support by propagating the idea that 'the Manchus and the Han were members of one family'. To supplement the Banner forces, he organized a new military force, known as the 'Green Battalion', made up of surrendered Han soldiers and officers. This Han army later played an important part in the war against Wu Sangui.

Soon after Dorgon's death in 1651, when Shunzhi himself began to rule, he tried to give the Han officials more authority, even though he continued to uphold the principle of Manchu dominance. Throughout the Qing, the dynasty enforced a policy of having its government offices, both central and provincial, run in tandem by both Manchu and Han officials. However, the system discriminated in favour of ethnic Manchus, who were often in a position of greater authority over their Han colleagues until the second half of the nineteenth century, when many Han officials gained dominant positions at the court and in the provinces. Those who had resisted Manchu rule were treated more leniently by Shunzhi. Rather than resorting to military suppression and killing all rebels, especially the 'small bandits', he preferred to offer them pardon if they would surrender. His reign, however, did not last long, for he died at age 24 of smallpox. His heir, who became Emperor Kangxi, was chosen partly because he had already had smallpox. The choice, however, turned out to be very good one. In 1669 Kangxi (r. 1661-1722) would order an end to the inhumane practice of 'enclosing' Han land, as well as the return to its owners of the land already seized. He cited his pity for the suffering of the victims as a reason for this act. For an astute ruler like Kangxi, he must have been aware that by freeing the 'enclosed land' and the labour force, his government stood to collect more tax revenue.

Although unification was effectively achieved in 1663, after the elimination of the last of the peasant rebel forces that once fought under the banner of Li Zicheng, the peace that prevailed was fragile and tentative. Less than a decade later, the 'Rebellion of the Three Feudatories' (*san fan zhi luan*) flared up in the outlying provinces. The *san fan* referred to the three Han princely commanders of garrisons, Wu Sangui in Yunnan and Guizhou, Shang Zhixing in Guangdong, and Geng Jingzhong in Fujian, who were elevated to the position of princes by the Qing in recognition of their meritorious services during the Manchu conquest. They were exceptional because their princely positions were combined with having possession of their own troops as well as territory bases, which they each ruled and taxed as if these were their own fiefdoms. Of the three, prince Wu Sangui was the most powerful, with 90,000 troops and a network of high officials over whom he exercised control. Financially they were a burden to the Qing central government, which, in addition to being deprived of the tax revenues of their areas, had to support them with large subsidies. Besides, their military power and lawless behaviour were posing a threat to the central government. In the interest of the dynasty's security, Kangxi decided to remove these princely, semi-independent, 'military governors' from their posts, even if doing so might lead them to revolt, which indeed they did.

In 1673, Wu Sangui was the first to raise the flag of rebellion. Later, from 1674 to 1676, the other two princes, as well as many other disaffected Han military officials, joined Wu in revolt against the Qing. The rebel forces made rapid progress at first: in a little over a year, most of the territory south of the Yangtze River was lost to the Qing. Kangxi used the strategy of isolating Wu Sangui. He successfully induced Wu's collaborators to return to the Qing fold with rewards, while focusing the main military thrust largely on defeating Wu Sangui's own forces. Although the plan worked well, the Qing failed to crush the rebel regime entirely until 1681, three years after Wu's death. While the initial phase of the Manchu conquest - the establishment of Qing rule in Beijing in 1644 - had been relatively easy, the later phase, that of unifying the country, was an uphill battle, full of challenges. Wu Sangui's rebellion was the most serious threat the Qing had to face up to this point.

Taiwan

But there was yet another threat to Qing rule, and it came from the direction of Taiwan. The last bastion of anti-Qing movement was based in Taiwan, the large island off the coast of the Fujian province. The Ming did not try to occupy or colonize this island, though it had the military capacity to do so. Both the Dutch and the Spanish did colonize it, the Dutch forcing out the Spanish in 1642. In 1661, Taiwan was drawn into the military conflicts of the Ming-Qing transition, because Zheng Chenggong retreated there with his armed forces after having failed in his military campaign against the Qing. Zheng, the son of a powerful pirate chief turned Ming loyalist, raised a 'righteous army' to fight for the Southern Ming, motivated either by opportunism or patriotism, or both. Emperor Longwu, delighted with Zheng's support, granted him the use of the royal surname Zhu. Since Taiwan was in Dutch hands at that point, Zheng - known to the Dutch as 'Koxinga' (the lord with the royal surname) - and the Dutch fought over the possession of the island. Both sides used cannons, and the Dutch also had other types of firearms. Having a naval force of 200 ships and 25,000 troops under his command, Zheng overwhelmed the Dutch, whose forces were outnumbered and whose reinforcements from the Dutch East India Company in Batavia failed to materialize. The Dutch survivors of a nine-months' siege were allowed to depart from Taiwan with some money, while leaving the bulk of their treasures and weapons behind them.

In Taiwan, Zheng Chenggong ruled under a princely title granted by the Southern Ming. He continued to use restoration of the Ming to legitimize his regime, and to gain Ming loyalists' support. After his death in 1662, his son Zheng Jing succeeded him. Zheng Jing's army invaded the mainland whenever an opportunity arose. Unable to dislodge the Zhengs from Taiwan, the Qing pursued at first a scorched earth policy along the shores of the five coastal provinces, stretching from Shandong to Guangdong, to make the coasts secure, and to prevent collaboration between the local inhabitants and the Zheng regime. To enforce this *hai jin* (sea ban) policy, the residents along these coasts were forced to move from 15 to 25 kilometres inland, and

they were also forbidden to cross a fixed line of defence to reach the sea. This was a draconian measure that inflicted great economic hardship and personal losses on a multitude of people who depended on fishing and trade. In recognition of that, from 1664, during the reign of Kangxi, fishing was allowed to resume in certain coastal towns in Shangdong, and in 1668 the *hai jin* was relaxed altogether.

Having so much difficulty in achieving peace and stability after taking over the Ming Empire, the Qing court put off resolving the Taiwan question until after it had suppressed Wu Sangui's rebellion in 1681. Before that time, after typhoons foiled various Qing attempts to invade the island, the court supplemented a defensive policy with repeated attempts to send people there to persuade its leaders to surrender to the Qing and return to the mainland peacefully. As China became increasingly united and stable under the Qing dynasty, the hope of restoring the Ming grew dim. Over the years, many military commanders leading tens of thousands of soldiers accepted the Qing offer to return to the mainland.

In 1681, Kangxi decided the time was ripe for a military solution, and appointed Shi Lang, who among the surrendered military officers was exceptionally qualified, as Marquis Jinghai to command a naval force to capture Taiwan. Combining his knowledge of the conditions of the weather, wind, and ocean currents, with his experiences of naval warfare off the straits of Taiwan, he adopted, in June 1683, an appropriate strategy to fight and win a decisive battle at Penghu, a small offshore island that provided a stepping stone to Taiwan. Then at Shi Lang's urging, the government in Taiwan surrendered to the Qing. In August 1683, the Qing troops went ashore, and they were welcomed by the people there.

Then the question arose at the Qing court as to whether to keep Taiwan as a part of the empire. Such a question would have surprised those at the courts of European countries then striving to carve up the world into their possessions. There were many officials, particularly those controlling provinces opposite Taiwan, such as Fujian and Zhejiang, who argued for abandoning the territory, probably because they did not want the responsibility of having to defend it. Shi Lang presented a strong case for keeping the island, and several other high officials also favoured keeping Taiwan. Kangxi, at first hesitant, was eventually persuaded by the merits of the case for keeping Taiwan. This island, about the size of Belgium, became a Qing prefecture to be administered by the provincial government of Fujian, with military garrisons stationed both in Taiwan and on the island of Penghu. With the pacification of Taiwan, the Qing was at last enjoying a period of internal peace and stability, almost forty years after its army had marched into Beijing to put Shunzhi on the throne as the first Manchu ruler of China.

The High Qing era: the Kang-Qian 'Age of Prosperity'

Let us now return to the start of the reign of Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661-1722). Like his father, Emperor Kangx also ascended the throne as a child, at seven years old in his case. A panel of Regents chosen by his father managed the affairs of the state on his behalf until 1669, when at the age of fifteen, he officiated at the early morning daily court meetings, and took over the reins of power personally. After suppressing the revolt of the 'Three Feudatories' and taking over Taiwan, Kangxi was the first Qing emperor to reign over a united China with internal peace. He was an outstanding ruler, who, in his sixty-one-year long reign, effectively consolidated the dominant position of this foreign dynasty in the economic, political, and cultural life of China. We will now consider several of his important policies.

In the economic sphere, Kangxi presided over a country the agricultural economy of which had been seriously damaged by over a century of war. This situation left an enormous amount of uncultivated land accompanied by a large floating population without reliable means of livelihood. He set about restoring the damaged agricultural economy to health by encouraging people to return home, or to move to remote regions, to cultivate land or to reclaim wasteland. People who had done so were generously rewarded with three to five or even more years of tax remission, and possession of the land in perpetuity. Those who responded to the court's initiative, but lacked the means, were aided with seeds, cattle, and ploughs, and in some cases with money for the journey. Those who had the capacity to reclaim more than thirty acres of land had the opportunity to serve as local officials if they were sufficiently literate. As a part of the programme of stimulating agricultural production, the estates of the Ming royals and aristocrats were sold cheaply to the public. Although his successors, Emperors Yongzheng (r. 1722-1735) and Qianlong (r. 1735-1796) continued to pursue this policy of land reclamation and the promotion of agriculture, the most striking results occurred mostly under Kangxi's auspices. In a little less than 40 years, from 1685 to 1724, cultivated land increased by more than 116,000 *qing*, or the equivalent of over 2.6 million acres. By 1726, four years into Yongzheng's reign, the land under cultivation exceeded that at the end of the Ming by around 20.6%.

Other measures that enhanced agricultural production included the above-mentioned prohibition against 'enclosing' land belonging to the Han people by Manchu aristocrats. Another was large-scale work on flood control. Kangxi allocated large sums of money and appointed a very able official to successfully accomplish the task of restoring the flow of the Yellow as well as the Huai River, each through its former bed, and to prevent the frequent inundation of enormous areas of fertile crop land from the flooding of these rivers and their tributaries. His two successors concentrated their efforts on large scale repair of coastal embankments against flooding from the sea.

From the time of Kangxi's reign, agricultural production grew enormously, no doubt greatly helped by the increase in the amount of cultivated land and by effective flood prevention. There were other factors that contributed to this period of over one hundred years' time of plenty, celebrated as the 'High Qing era' or

the 'Kang-Qian Age of Prosperity', which spanned the reigns of Kangxi through Yongzheng, to the last twenty years of that of Emperor Qianlong. There was a drive to increase the productivity of the land through refinement and improvement in agricultural techniques. Chinese agriculture had reached the most advanced level of development before the arrival of modern agronomy. The spread of early ripening rice led to twice-yearly harvests that doubled the yield of rice in southern China. There were fruitful experiments with drought-resistant rice. Farmers from the south successfully grew rice in many areas in northern China. Food became more plentiful through the widespread propagation of foreign food crops – maize, sweet potato, sorghum, and peanuts, some of which had high yields, or ripened at different seasons to achieve a year-round harvest or thrived on marginal land. The increase in the production of industrial crops such as cotton, tea, tobacco, sugar cane, and mulberry trees (for silkworms) led to an expansion of craft production as cottage industries or in workshops, and to factories processing these products as raw material. Trade flourished under these circumstances. Commerce, both internal and with foreign countries, grew to an unprecedented scale.

In summary then, China in the eighteenth century was by no means an economically backward country. Its economic and population growth was the most rapid in the world, according to Jacques Gernet[1], who also held the view that the Chinese peasants were more comfortably off and better educated than their counterparts in the France of Louis XV.

These Qing emperors' energetic promotion of agriculture naturally benefited the state treasury in terms of the increased collection of taxes, and its success also conferred greater legitimacy on their (albeit non-Chinese) rule, as they fulfilled so well their traditional leadership role in strengthening food production and water engineering. The acceptance of their rule was surely helped by the fact that they also adopted a policy of exceedingly generous tax remission, not just to start people off on land reclamation, or in areas hit by droughts or other natural disasters, but as a regular measure for improving the livelihood of the people. These rulers certainly understood the link between economic wellbeing and social stability.

Despite the lenient tax regime and heavy military expenditures, the Qing treasury remained in surplus during this period of unprecedented economic boom. The expansion in agricultural production and its subsidiary industry and trade enabled the Qing treasury to retain a balance of over 50,000,000 *liang* (1 *liang* = 50 grams) of silver in 1706 under Kangxi. During the middle period of Yongzheng, the surplus increased to over 60,000,000 *liang*. From the thirtieth to the sixtieth year (1766 - 1796) of Qianlong, the surplus remained above 60,000,000 *liang*, reaching over 80,000,000 *liang* at times.

---

[1] See *A History of Chinese Civilization* by Jacques Gernet, Second Edition 1996, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York.

This early Qing period of relative peace and prosperity enabled the population of the empire to grow by leaps and bounds. The population of China recovered somewhat from 152,500,000 at the end of the Ming in 1644 to 160,000,000 in 1679 during the eighteenth year of Kangxi. Less than one hundred years later, in 1776, it had nearly doubled to around 311,500,000. Even after the economy and administration of the empire started to decline towards the end of Qianlong's reign, the momentum of population growth continued from this large base. By 1851, during the reign of Emperor Xianfeng (r. 1850-1861), the population in China had reached a record 436,000,000.

In the political sphere, although the Qing government modelled itself on the Ming, the early Qing emperors including Kangxi had to share power to some extent with the Manchu military aristocracy, particularly those on the Committee of the Princes. This committee was normally made up of the most powerful Manchu aristocrats, with whom the emperor consulted and deliberated on important political matters, both legislative and judicial. The power of Ming emperors had been unconstrained by such a group of hereditary aristocrats. The early Qing emperors exhibited a tendency towards enhancing their own autocratic power at the expense of the hereditary Manchu aristocrats and other high officials. Although Emperor Kangxi managed the affairs of state with the Committee of the Princes, Emperor Yongzheng bypassed it by the creation of the *Junji Chu* (The Grand Council), where all important affairs of the state, including military matters where speed and secrecy were at a premium, were decided by the emperor with the assistance of its members. This relatively unstructured office was made up of high officials from the regular bureaucracy, both Han and Manchu, chosen, dismissed, or changed at will by the emperor, to advise him and to assist him in drafting and transmitting edicts. This Grand Council had neither a regular office building nor an address. Its meetings usually took place somewhere in the inner palace near the emperor's actual residence, at any time when the emperor felt the need to call a meeting. By exercising power through an instrument entirely under his direction and in his control, the emperor's autocratic power was greatly enhanced.

In 1791, Emperor Qianlong abolished the Committee of the Princes, which had in fact become obsolete. The cabinet, also known as *dorgi yamum*, that had been powerful under the Ming lost its monopoly to transmit memorials to the emperor. Many high officials were given the privilege of transmitting their memorials directly to the emperor, for his eyes only. The route and procedures for transmitting edicts and memorials were tightened and institutionalized, to protect confidentiality and prevent tampering, through a succession of reforms carried out by each of the Qing rulers since Shunzhi. The lessons of the Ming eunuchs' intercepting and tampering with edicts and memorials were apparently taken to heart by the Qing rulers, who did not give eunuchs much opportunity to abuse power. The Qing was relatively free of examples of eunuch usurpation of executive power. The reforms that created the *Junji Chu*, and which facilitated direct communication between the emperor and any of his high officials in private, gave rise to

an unprecedentedly high degree of concentration of power in the hands of the emperor. The cabinet effectively became redundant. These measures, in addition to the use of the traditional devices of surveillance and control, such as the censors for checking up on the officials, made the Qing emperors even more absolutist than those of the Ming.

Nevertheless, these early Qing autocrats successfully pursued enlightened policies which benefited the people through unprecedented economic growth coupled with an extraordinarily mild tax regime. They might be described as *ming jun* (enlightened despots). Before the onset of administrative decline during the last decades of Qianlong's reign, the authors of the Kang-Qian age of prosperity made serious efforts at reforming the bureaucracy, with a view to curbing corruption and abuse of power, with considerable success. Other enlightened measures included Kangxi's edicts against agricultural slavery, and Yongzheng's decision to elevate various hereditary categories of *jian min* (debased people), such as entertainers, bonded servants, and people who lived on boats or shacks, from their lowly classification. Their inclusion in the general population registers helped to remove the stigma and the social and judicial discrimination traditionally attached to them.

As a foreign dynasty that lasted 267 years, the Qing had far greater staying power in comparison with the Mongol Yuan dynasty which ruled all of China for only 89 years. It compared well with the 276 years of the indigenous Ming. While the Mongol rulers were relatively alien to the Han Chinese culture and employed Han governance only to a limited extent, the Manchu emperors embraced the Chinese Confucian culture wholeheartedly, and broadly took over the Ming or Han Chinese governmental institutions before they inserted their own modifications. By the same token, the Yuan had failed to support in a serious way the Chinese traditional state-sponsored system of examinations. In contrast, the Qing appreciated the vital importance of this institution and made full use of it for recruiting officials and qualifying the gentry. This policy served the interest of the foreign rulers by providing them with a pool of well-educated Chinese to run the state in addition to the Manchus; it also won them the support of the Chinese gentry, whose cooperation was essential for the smooth functioning of the state. Furthermore, the rulers' control of the content of the examination helped them to promote a cultural orthodoxy they favoured. The enlightened measures of the early Qing rulers, together with the foreign dynasty's ability to win the Chinese gentry's cooperation, must have contributed to the longevity of Qing rule.

Challenges to the Qing, and territorial expansion in the nineteenth century

Xinjiang and Tibet

In contrast to an image of weakness and decay which China presented to the world by the middle of the nineteenth century, China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under Qing rule was a vital country rising to its zenith of wealth, power, and territorial expansion. It was strong politically and powerful militarily, possessing a thriving economy that supported a rapidly growing population. But even though the Qing originated as a power from the steppe zone, it was not spared the usual military harassments and threats from China's restless nomadic neighbours, who, during this time, were the Dzungar Mongols of China's northwest. The Mongol tribes in the northeast of China, known as the Khalkha, were no longer troublesome to the Qing, because they had been subjugated or won over by the Manchus during their rise to power, as previously discussed. The western Mongols began to pose a challenge for the Qing when an ambitious and aggressive empire-builder called Erdeniin Galdan or Galdan Boshugtu Khan (1644 - 1697), rose amongst Dzungars, one of the four subdivisions of western Mongol tribes known together as the Oirats. Galdan allied himself to the eastwardly expanding Czarist Russia, and mounted, in 1688, a major invasion of the territory of the Khalkha Mongols. Being obliged to protect the Khalkha Mongols, the Qing had to act. After his warning to the Russians and his request to Galdan to withdraw westward were ignored, Emperor Kangxi personally led, from 1689 to 1697, three victorious military expeditions against him. During the last of the Qing military campaigns, Galdan ended his own life after his movement disintegrated.

Galdan's defeat and death did not end the Dzungar challenge to the Qing. During the first decades of the eighteenth century, Tsewang Rabtan, Galdan's nephew, established a huge empire that ran from southern Siberia through to the south of Lake Balkhash and to the frontiers of Tibet, covering the valley of Ili and western Mongolia. During this time and for over a century previously, power politics among the western Mongols were intimately bound up with the control of Tibet, because Buddhism of the Tibetan Lamaist variety had grown, since Yuan times, into the dominant religion of the Mongols. The power vacuum in Tibet left by the decline of the Ming, and before the Qing asserted its authority in this region, made this theocratic land vulnerable to Mongol military invasions and political domination. Since the middle of the seventh century, Tibet had been overrun and controlled first by the Khoshut Khanate and then by the Dzungar Mongols. There was enormous prestige attached to the Mongol leader who became the protector of the Dalai Lama. After the Dzungars occupied Lhasa and other important centres in Tibet in 1717 and 1718, the Qing saw the importance of wresting Tibet from the Mongols as a part of the effort to contain the Dzungars. In 1720, a Sino-Manchu force from Sichuan ascended the high Tibetan plateau in the company of the seventh Dalai Lama and drove the Dzungars from Lhasa. The challenge posed by the Dzungars continued until, in 1756 and 1757, Emperor Qianlong waged the ferocious military campaigns that resulted in their near extinction.

After the destruction of the Dzungars, the Moslem Uyghurs, newly emerged from Dzungar domination, took up arms against the Qing in 1758. The Qing force sent to suppress this movement eventually took over control of the Islamic oases of the Tarim basin. Qing victories in the wars against the Uyghurs and the Dzungars greatly enlarged the territory of the Sino-Manchu Empire in its northwest towards Central Asia. This vast area was given the name of Xinjiang (New Territory). For over a century, the Qing placed it under military rule with garrisons at many strategic points. Its remoteness made it a place for exile of those who committed criminal or political offences. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Qing hold on this territory was rendered insecure by large scale Moslem rebellions and Russian incursions. After suppressing the rebellions, the Qing made it into a province and lifted the ban on Han immigration to that region. Today it is known as the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XAR).

After removing the Mongol overlords from Tibet by force, the Qing set about re-establishing control over this snow-bound region of high plateaus that had been incorporated into the territory of both its Yuan and Ming predecessors. In 1751, the Qing quelled an armed rebellion by a Tibetan prince with the help of the Dalai Lama. The lesson of the rebellion taught the Qing the importance of curbing the power of the Tibetan aristocracy. To prevent any single individual from having too much power, in 1751 the Qing abolished the old institution of the King or Prince of Tibet. In 1787 and again in 1791, Nepalese Gurkhas invaded Tibet. On receiving the news, Emperor Qianlong mustered an impressive force that drove the invaders back to Nepal. This move was very popular with the Tibetans, and it helped the Qing court win local cooperation to put forward the '29-Article Ordinance for the More Effective Governing of Tibet' in 1793, which the Qing had long considered necessary for bringing order to this region, and for consolidating the Qing's hold on it.

This document, which set down in writing the framework for the governance of Tibet, was the result of mature considerations based on over one hundred years of Qing experience of dealing with this region. In brief, it spelt out that Tibet was to be governed by a group of three leaders of equal status: the Tibet Amban (a Qing imperial commissioner-resident appointed by the emperor), together with the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas, who were respectively the first and second highest ranking lamas of the *Gelug* (Yellow Hat Sect) which had dominated Tibetan Buddhism since the Ming. On the matter of appointing government officials of Tibet, a list of candidates, drawn up by the Amban and the Dalai Lama, was presented to the Qing government, which made the actual appointments. Although the act of appointment itself was a formality only, it nevertheless signified that the Qing central government was the ultimate authority on Tibetan affairs. The Amban also held the power to promote, transfer, reward, and punish these officials. On security matters, a force of three thousand troops was to be stationed as a permanent garrison distributed among several important cities in Tibet. On foreign affairs, only the Amban had the authority to deal with foreign

countries. It was also his job to audit the income of the local government and supervise the minting of silver currency.

Clearly the sustainability of the Qing control over Tibet was not entirely a matter of its miliary prowess, although being able to protect Tibet against its powerful neighbours and to keep its internal peace and order was important for the Qing to gain a foothold there. The Qing was able to consolidate its dominant position in Tibet through establishing practical institutions and regulations, and through exercising its authority in a judicious manner.

Perhaps the most important element that sustained Qing control over Tibet was the support of the Dalai Lama. From the beginning of the dynasty, the Qing tried to build a special relationship with the Dalai Lama of whichever reincarnation, investing him with florid, honorific titles and recognizing his position as the highest religious authority in Tibet. A visiting Dalai Lama was normally received with great pomp and ceremony and showered with gifts. The Qing recognition strengthened and reinforced the position and authority of the Dalai Lama, and the *Gelug* headed by him. After the Qing court did away with the Prince of Tibet in 1751, the Dalai Lama no longer needed to share power with a temporal head of Tibet. This was during the time of the Dalai Lama of the Seventh reincarnation. From then on, he and his successors became the theocratic rulers of Tibet, along with the Amban. His *Gelug*, already enjoying a position of predominance, squeezed out or absorbed other competing Buddhist sects such as the Red Hat to become, with Qing support, the sole spiritual authority of Tibet. Since the Amban, being an outsider, had to rely heavily on the cooperation and support of his Tibetan colleagues and underlings, the Dalai Lama and his establishment were left to manage the internal affairs of Tibet with a good deal of autonomy. Since the Qing presence and power ensured peace, security, and stability of a theocratic social order in his favour, the Dalai Lama and his flock willingly cooperated with the Qing to remain under its protective umbrella. What did the Qing get out of this? Stability and peace in this border region, and the prestige of extending the territory under its control. The Qing, however, did claim sovereignty over Tibet. The mere fact that all those who governed Tibet, from the highest officials downwards, received their appointment or authority to rule from the Qing court justified this claim, which ultimately originated from military conquest. From the point of view of seventeenth century Tibetans, the lack of sovereignty might not have seemed a high price to pay, considering that from the middle of the twelfth century onwards, Tibet had been subject serially to the Yuan, the Ming, certain Mongol tribes, and from 1720 onwards to the Qing.

Colliding with an eastwardly expanding Russia

The seeds of the Russian conquest of Siberia starting from the sixteenth century had long been sown by the Mongol conquest of Russia in the thirteenth century. The empire of the Golden Horde that subjugated the

Russians had established steppe routes with postal stations which facilitated communication and trade between European Russia and China. The easy flow of products from China over vast distances on land routes rendered safe and security by the Pax Mongolica whetted the Russian appetite for luxury goods, such as silk and tea, from the east. In due course, the Russians, like the Europeans who circumnavigated the world to trade with the east by sea, went directly to the source of the goods themselves, cutting out those who collected taxes or took profits in the middle.

Besides opening up communications and trade, the Mongol conquest was credited with the transmission to Europe of an extremely potent Chinese invention – gunpowder. The result of the acquisition of this knowledge by the Europeans was to have far-reaching consequences that tipped the balance of power between the steppe and the sown in favour of the latter. The Europeans were amazed by the explosive force of cannon balls, which had been used in siege warfare by the Mongols. Recognizing the potential of gunpowder, the warring Europeans strove to develop the technology of manufacturing firearms. Their success soon led to the spread of a variety of firearms: muskets, handguns, cannons and so forth. By the middle of the fourteenth century, firearms became as familiar as any other kind of arms in Europe. The Russians used cannons in 1376 for the first time, and in 1450 they were producing light handguns in Moscow and Tver. By the end of the fifteenth century, the Europeans were better at making cannons than the Chinese. This revolution in military technology rendered the military supremacy of the warriors of the steppe a thing of the past, since bows and arrows were no match for guns. In 1558 the Russians, under Ivan IV (r. 1547-84) also known as Ivan the Terrible, overthrew the last of the Khanates of their erstwhile Mongol overlords, and were poised to expand eastward into the Siberian steppe, the heartland of the pastoral nomads, including the Mongols.

The spearhead of the Russian expansion into eastern Siberia was formed by bands of Cossacks rather than the regular Russian government troops. But the lands which the Cossacks had tamed would sooner or later be claimed by Russia, which would set up a government apparatus to administer and control, and then tax, these areas. In Russia, the Cossack communities developed around the sixteenth century from groups of people on society's fringe – outlaws, deserters, peasants fleeing from the oppression of serfdom, and spirited individuals who would not bend to the Russian autocracy. These people banded together for mutual protection and support. Some had settled along certain stretches of the Dnieper and the Don rivers, and others wandered around Russia's borderlands, where policing was relatively relaxed. Their ethnic origins were diverse: Russians, Ukrainians, nomads of different tribes, or people of mixed races were all included. Those who had drifted to the wide-open spaces of Siberia, could lead a freewheeling existence, and make a living from trading, hunting, river piracy, or even agriculture. Some ranged far and wide along the rivers of Siberia on wooden rafts and built their *ostrog* and *stanitsa* (log fort and settlements of wooden huts) as

bases from which to spread out further. The Cossacks brought with them firearms, especially muskets. When they came into close contact with nomadic tribal peoples, their 'magic bullets' often prevailed, even when they were outnumbered. Despite their spreading in this diffuse fashion, in less than 100 years from the time of Ivan IV, Cossack pioneers had reached the shores of the Pacific and sailed into the Bering Straits that separated Asia from America. By the 1640s, advance parties of the Cossacks had been traversing the river Amur. They reported back to the Czar, enthusing about the agricultural wealth and the abundance of game of this region, and strongly recommending Russian occupation.

Conflicts soon broke out between these two expanding empires, because the territory the Cossacks would like to claim for Russia was already a part of the Manchu empire. Before the arrival of the Cossacks, Hong Taji's armies, starting in 1634, had reached this region, and the inhabitants there, being similar in language and culture to the Manchus, readily submitted themselves to his rule. In 1650, reports of Russians burning, looting, and kidnapping from the local population alerted the Qing to send troops to repel the intruders. Over a period of ten years starting from 1652, several skirmishes took place between the Qing forces and the Russians until, by 1660, the latter were driven away from the middle and lower reaches of the Amur.

In 1665, the Russians returned and redoubled their efforts to take possession of this region. They recruited more Cossacks and built more forts. One located strategically at Yaksa (known also as Albazin), a centre of transportation or communication, was made into a military command post. After Emperor Kangxi took over the reins of the state in 1667, he did not want a piecemeal response: an endless replay of Russian incursion and Qing repulsion. Furthermore, he found that the Russians were sheltering a rebellious Mongol chieftain and his followers, who had escaped in 1667, and had been helping the Russians. This was a provocative act, because it undermined the peace and order the Qing had established in the territory of its Mongol subjects. Kangxi sought a permanent resolution of the frontier conflicts with Russia through diplomatic negotiation. For this purpose, he sent letters repeatedly to the Czar, requesting the latter to keep the Russians in check, stop the incursions, hand over the fugitives sought by the Qing, return the occupied Qing territory, and send representatives to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the issues raised.

Moscow ignored Kangxi's requests but kept on sending embassies to Beijing for trading purposes, the beginnings of which could be traced back to 1619 during the reign of the Ming emperor Wanli. The Russian court eagerly sought trade with China because the Chinese products, such as silk and cotton goods, and tea (starting from late seventeenth century), were in great demand in Russia. Those who were sufficiently privileged to be included among the Russian delegations could make handsome profits, and the Russian authorities could raise significant amounts of taxes, from the process of exchanging the Russian products, such as fur, skins, woollens, and clocks, for those from Qing China. From the 1660s to the 1750s this trade grew from 4500 roubles to over 1.4 million roubles. Although the Qing court had little need for these

Russian goods, it permitted the Sino-Russian trade exchanges to use this trade as an incentive for Russia to settle the border issues raised by the Qing. Dismissing the Russian fondness for sending large embassies at frequent intervals, the Qing government limited the frequency, size, and the length of stay of the Russian delegations to Beijing: for example, to 200 people once every three years, staying no longer than 80 days. The embassies to the court of Kangxi had been a disappointment to him because Russian delegates focused so narrowly on trade that they had neither the interest nor the authority to discuss the border issues he wanted raised.

Frustrated by the lack of positive response from the Czar towards his proposals, Kangxi was prepared to use force against the Russian-occupied Yaksa. He was not going to do it precipitately, but in a decisive way to convince the Russians that the Qing had the military capacity to defend its territory against their aggression. In 1681, he even visited this border region personally to inspect the situation. He made preparations for the supply of an army of 3,000, complemented by a newly trained maritime force, and transported firearms - cannons and guns - for a prolonged military struggle against an enemy which, though not numerous, might prove formidable. In 1684, the Qing commander assaulted Yaksa with both land and marine forces after warning the Russians of the coming attack unless they retreated to Irkutsk. The outnumbered and severed battered Russians surrendered. After burning Yaksa, the Qing forces retreated to nearby towns. They clearly had no plan to advance further into northern Siberia. In 1685, Russian reinforcements and the remnants from Yaksa reoccupied the town. The Qing forces returned and surrounded the town tightly in all directions for five months, inflicting heavy losses on the Russians. Those who surrendered to or were captured by the Qing were incorporated into the Banner forces. When the 800 Russian defenders had dwindled to nearly 100, and the town was on the point of being taken, messengers from the Czar hastily arrived and begged the Qing to raise the siege, while promising to send negotiators to discuss the border problems. Thereupon Kangxi ordered the siege to be lifted.

Why did the Russians drag their feet on negotiating a border settlement? Before the time of our contemporary interest in oil and mineral extraction, most of Siberia was an under-populated wilderness, not worth the cost of sending an army to conquer it and then keep it secure. But it suited the Russian government to support the self-financed informal expansion of the Cossacks into this region, and their nibbling away at, or advancing by stealth into, the territory of the neighbouring Qing. Kangxi's strong stance and the Russian interest in trade eventually prompted the Russian authorities to abandon this approach during the reign of the Russian Czar, Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725), and negotiate in earnest with the Qing.

The first item the negotiators had to agree upon was the common border between the two states. After much haggling over a period of three years, the multilingual Treaty of Nerchinsk, signed in 1689, fixed the frontiers at the far eastern end of the two countries from the Heilong Jiang (Amur River) to the Pacific,

although there was a small area south of the Wusuli (Ussuri) River that remained to be settled. In addition, it also addressed the issues of concern to both sides. Two decades later, the Qing, troubled by the intrigue between Russia and its Dzungar enemies at its frontier further to the west, recognized the necessity for a well-defined boundary between the two countries in that region. The problem of Russian protection of Mongol escapees was also an issue. The Qing court stopped the Sino-Russian trade after its request for a negotiated settlement made little headway. Russia's desire for a resumption of the commercial relationship led it to conclude, in 1727, the Treaty of Kiakhta with the Qing. This treaty determined the Sino-Russian boundary further to the west in present-day Mongolia. It also gave the Russians access to commercial exchanges at the border town of Kiakhta, in addition to the regular trade missions to Beijing. On Russia's request, it included a new provision allowing delegations of Russian Orthodox clergy to visit and stay in Beijing. During the negotiation of both treaties, the Qing negotiators yielded a certain amount of territory to Russia for the sake of clinching the agreements on the boundaries concerned. These treaties concluded between the Qing, at the height of its power, and Russia, in the throes of modernization, on the basis of equality and mutual respect for the sovereignty of one another, were unprecedented and constructive. They brought about 150 years of peaceful relationship at their mutual borders, and regularized the commercial, diplomatic, and cultural exchanges between the two countries over that period.

The zenith of Qing power

Having gained control over Mongolia, Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang, and having fixed its frontiers with Russia, Qing China's territory from the 1760s to the 1840s covered around thirteen million square kilometres. The Qing possessed more territory than any dynasty preceding it, with the sole exception of the Yuan, another alien conquest dynasty. Its domain included Mongolia in the north, Lake Balkhash, and the land south and east of it through the Pamirs to the Himalayas in the west, and along its east seaboard, the islands of Taiwan and Sakhalin. The Qing might well have been able to extend its boundary further north into the relatively empty Siberian steppe at the height of its military might in the 1750s. It could have insisted on preserving the land on which it had a reasonable claim, instead of yielding to Russia's demands during the negotiation of the above-mentioned treaties. But the Sino-Manchu empire had reached a point of conservative self-containment and consolidation rather than expansion. The smaller countries around, and some beyond, its borders, such as Nepal, Burma, Siam, Ryukyu, and Korea acknowledged its influence or suzerainty by maintaining the tribute relationship with the Qing, until it became engulfed in a series of catastrophic events coming from within as well as from abroad from the 1840s onwards. After its military weakness was revealed during the First Opium War (1840-42), the territory of the Qing shrank considerably due to foreign aggression, as we shall see.

The Qing dynasty acquired its vast domain by its military prowess, subjugating both the sedentary Han areas as well as the homeland of the nomadic herders. Many Han Chinese dynasties had been able to conquer the regions where the nomadic herders roamed, but they had difficulty in retaining control over enormous stretches of arid to semi-arid or forested areas, where the people they wanted to tax would vanish with their livestock, and then return to attack their garrisons. Chinese rulers from the Tang to the Ming all had to relinquish territory they had acquired by force in the steppe zone when it became too costly for them to keep it. The Yuan had no trouble holding on to their Mongol homeland, whence the Mongols returned when their dynasty came to an end in China. The steppe origin of the Manchus probably helped the Qing to retain permanent control of the vast regions of Mongolia, Manchuria, and much of western China through institutions such as the Mongol Banners, and through establishing long-term bonds using patronage and loyalty as cement between the dynastic house and the tribal ruling elites. These bonds were formed from special audiences for the tribal chiefs, leading celebratory gatherings of nomadic peoples in steppe settings, marrying Manchu princesses with the heads of the nomadic tribes, and cultivating good relations with the powerful theocratic leaders of Tibet, the Dalai Lama in particular.

Map of the Qing Empire and adjoining lands (*Wikipedia*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Qing_Empire_circa_1820_EN.svg)

Despite the brutality of the original conquest, the alleviation of tax burdens and economic growth under the High Qing era must have gone a long way to win Han acquiescence to Qing rule among the general population. The dynasty also tried to gain popular support through its involvement with popular religions. It deified folk heroes and heroines, elevating their worship into state-sponsored cults, which flourished. The popularity of these cults was indicative of a level of integration of the state and the society, as well as popular acceptance, at least initially, of their rulers from outside the Great Wall.

As regards the Chinese gentry, they were mostly won over by the Manchu rulers' wholehearted adoption of Han governance and imperial Confucianism. Although the dynasty openly discriminated in favour of the Manchus, it supported the traditional examination system, thus fortifying the social status of the Chinese gentry as well as providing the scholar-gentry opportunities to participate in government. The Qing emperors, particularly the early ones from Kangxi to Qianlong, immersed themselves in the Chinese cultural tradition and endeavoured to play the part of proper *Tianzi* (Sons of Heaven) in the Confucian mode. They became the guardians and upholders of the China's traditional Confucian social and moral order. Peace and stability depended in the first instance on this self-regulating order imbedded in tradition and culture, before resorting to the strong arm of force. For example, in 1670 Kangxi issued the Sacred Edict as a 16-maxim embodiment of orthodox Confucianism for instructing people how to behave in an ethical manner. Later, in 1724 Yongzheng issued an amplified instruction. These were read by local officials at public gatherings accompanied by music, incense, and audience participation, such as bowing and kneeling as in services in Christian churches. While the alienated Chinese gentry had remained aloof under the Yuan, they mostly cooperated and supported the Qing, and played the traditional and important role of being the interface between the government authorities and the people.

The early Qing rulers took seriously their role as guardians of China's cultural heritage, and they provided energetic leadership, outdoing even Emperor Yongle of the Ming, in sponsoring major projects involving the collecting, compiling, cataloguing, copying, and printing of valued written works. The writing and publication of the voluminous Ming history, an enormous illustrated encyclopaedia, and the famous Kangxi dictionary, among others, under Emperor Kangxi was succeeded by an even more ambitious undertaking that resulted in the *Siku Quanshu* (Complete Books of the Four Imperial Repositories), during the reign of Qianlong. The material of the *Siku Quanshu* was gathered, over a period of thirteen years, from all manuscripts and printed works preserved in private collections all over the country, as well as those kept in the public libraries. The entire work contained 79,070 volumes divided into four subject categories: canonical, philosophical, historical, and literary. These projects, in addition to their cultural benefits, provided much employment for scholars.

However, there was another and more negative side to the early Qing emperors' involvement with cultural matters. This was their prerogative in determining what was culturally acceptable and what was not. Subversive writings were weeded out and the writers punished. The exercise of this prerogative was by no means peculiar to the Qing: it went as far back as Emperor Qin Shi Huang, the first unifier of China. But because of the origin of the Manchu dynasty, the early Qing emperors were extremely sensitive to any suggestion in a piece of writing that could be construed as questioning their legitimacy, or being disloyal to the dynasty, denigrating nomadic peoples in general and Manchus in particular, and being disrespectful

in the slightest way to themselves. The ‘literary inquisition’, or the search for offensive written works and the imprisonment and investigation of their authors, started in the reign of Emperor Kangxi and increased in intensity and thoroughness under Emperor Qianlong. During the more than one hundred and thirty years of their rule, the number of people affected ran into thousands. Not only did most of those convicted of such cultural ‘crimes’ lose their lives: their close relatives, scholarly associates, or even printers of their works suffered the fate of banishment, enslavement, or even death in some cases. These tyrannical acts of the Qing autocracy caused not only personal suffering of the victims; they also created an atmosphere of fear and an unhealthy intellectual climate, where many scholars would play safe, limit their intellectual horizons, and go along with the soporific orthodoxy of their rulers. In addition to destroying the authors, works were condemned as ‘banned’ books, which were gathered for burning or alteration. The books that were burned or ‘revised’ ran into tens of thousands, roughly equal to the variety of subjects and number of volumes of the *Siku Quanshu*. This was a serious and irredeemable loss to China’s cultural heritage.

References for the Qing will be found at the end of chapter 7.