THE SEARCH FOR MODERN CHINA

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For my students
Contents

I  CONQUEST AND CONSOLIDATION  1

1 The Late Ming  7
   THE GLORY OF THE MING  7 • TOWN AND FARM  12 • CORRUPTION
   AND HARDSHIP  16 • THE MING COLLAPSE  21

2 The Manchu Conquest  26
   THE RISE OF THE QING  26 • CONQUERING THE MING  32
   ADAPTING TO CHINA  38 • CLASS AND RESISTANCE  44

3 Kangxi's Consolidation  49
   THE WAR OF THE THREE FEUDATORIES, 1673–1681  49 • TAIWAN AND
   MARITIME CHINA  53 • WOOGING THE INTELLECTUALS  58
   DEFINING THE BORDERS  64 • A MIXED LEGACY  69
II | FRAGMENTATION AND REFORM  137
7  The First Clash with the West  143
   THE RESPONSE OF CHINA'S SCHOLARS  143  •  CHINA'S POLITICAL RESPONSE  147  •  BRITAIN'S MILITARY RESPONSE  152  •  THE NEW TREATY SYSTEM  158
8  The Crisis Within  165
   SOCIAL DISLOCATION NORTH AND SOUTH  165  •  THE TAIPING  170
   FOREIGN PRESSURES AND MARX'S VIEWS  170  •  THE MIIAN REBELLION  184  •  MUSLIM REBELS  189
9  Restoration through Reform  194
   CONFUCIAN REFORM  194  •  DEFINING FOREIGN POLICY  199
   THE MISSIONARY PRESENCE  204  •  OVERSEAS CHINESE  210
10  New Tensions in the Late Qing  216
   SELF-STRENGTHENING AND THE JAPANESE WAR  216  •  THE REFORM MOVEMENT OF 1895  224  •  THREE SIDES OF NATIONALISM  230
   EMERGING FORCES  238
11  The End of the Dynasty  245
   THE QING CONSTITUTION  245  •  NEW RAILWAYS, NEW ARMY  249
   NATIONALISTS AND SOCIALISTS  255  •  QING FALL  262

III  ENVISIONING STATE AND SOCIETY  269
12  The New Republic  275
   EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY  275  •  THE RULE OF YUAN SHIKAI  281
   MILITARISTS IN CHINA AND CHINESE IN FRANCE  288
   THE POLITICAL THINKING OF SUN YAT-SEN  294
13  "A Road Is Made"  300
   THE WARNING VOICE OF SOCIAL DARWINISM  300  •  THE PROMISE OF MARXISM  305  •  THE FACETS OF MAY FOURTH  310  •  THE COMINTERN AND THE BIRTH OF THE CCP  319  •  THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR  325
14  The Clash  334
   THE INITIAL ALLIANCE  334  •  LAUNCHING THE NORTHERN EXPEDITION  341  •  SHANGHAI SPRING  348  •  WUHAN SUMMER, CANTON WINTER  354
15  Experiments in Government  361
   THE POWER BASE OF CHIANG KAI-SHEK  361  •  MAO ZEDONG AND THE RURAL SOVIETS  370  •  CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES  379
   CHINA AND JAPAN  388  •  CHINA AND GERMANY  396
16  The Drift to War  403
   THE LONG MARCH  403  •  THE NATIONAL MOOD AND GUOMINDANG IDEOLOGY  410  •  CRISIS AT XI'AN  418  •  THE CHINESE POOR  424

IV  WAR AND REVOLUTION  435
17  World War II  443
   THE LOSS OF EAST CHINA  443  •  CHINA DIVIDED  450  •  CHONGQING AND YAN'AN, 1938–1941  456  •  CHONGQING AND YAN'AN IN THE WIDENING WAR  466  •  WAR'S END  474
18  The Fall of the Guomindang State  484
   THE JAPANESE SURRENDER AND THE MARSHALL MISSION  484  •  LAND
THE GLORY OF THE MING

In the year A.D. 1600, the empire of China was the largest and most sophisticated of all the unified realms on earth. The extent of its territorial domains was unparalleled at a time when Russia was only just beginning to coalesce as a country, India was fragmented between Mughal and Hindu rulers, and a grim combination of infectious disease and Spanish conquerors had laid low the once great empires of Mexico and Peru. And China’s population of some 120 million was far larger than that of all the European countries combined.

There was certainly pomp and stately ritual in capitals from Kyoto to Prague, from Delhi to Paris, but none of these cities could boast of a palace complex like that in Peking, where, nestled behind immense walls, the gleaming yellow roofs and spacious marble courts of the Forbidden City symbolized the majesty of the Chinese emperor. Laid out in a meticulous geometrical order, the grand stairways and mighty doors of each successive palace building and throne hall were precisely aligned with the arches leading out of Peking to the south, speaking to all comers of the connectedness of things personified in this man the Chinese termed the Son of Heaven.

Rulers in Europe, India, Japan, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire were all struggling to develop systematic bureaucracies that would expand their tax base and manage their swelling territories effectively, as well as draw to new royal power centers the resources of agriculture and trade. But China’s massive bureaucracy was already firmly in place, harmonized by a millennium of tradition and bonded by an immense body of statutory laws and provisions that, in theory at least, could offer pertinent advice on any
problem that might arise in the daily life of China’s people.

One segment of this bureaucracy lived in Peking, serving the emperor in an elaborate hierarchy that divided the country’s business among six ministries dealing respectively with finance and personnel, rituals and laws, military affairs and public works. Also in Peking were the senior scholars and academicians who advised the emperor on ritual matters, wrote the official histories, and supervised the education of the imperial children. This concourse of official functionaries worked in uneasy proximity with the enormous palace staff who attended to the emperor’s more personal needs: the court women and their eunuch watchmen, the imperial children and their nurses, the elite bodyguards, the banquet-hall and kitchen staffs, the grooms, the sweepers and the water carriers.

The other segment of the Chinese bureaucracy consisted of those assigned to posts in the fifteen major provinces into which China was divided during the Ming dynasty. These posts also were arranged in elaborate hierarchies, running from the provincial governor at the top, down through the prefects in major cities to the magistrates in the counties. Below the magistrates were the police, couriers, militiamen, and tax gatherers who extracted a regular flow of revenue from China’s farmers. A group of officials known as censors kept watch over the integrity of the bureaucracy both in Peking and in the provinces.

The towns and cities of China did not, in most cases, display the imposing solidity in stone and brick of the larger urban centers in post-Renaissance Europe. Nor, with the exception of a few famous pagodas, were Chinese skylines pierced by towers as soaring as those of the greatest Christian cathedrals or the minarets of Muslim cities. But this low architectural profile did signify an absence of wealth or religion. There were many prosperous Buddhist temples in China, just as there were Daoist temples dedicated to the natural forces of the cosmos, ancestral meeting halls, and shrines to Confucius, the founding father of China’s ethical system who had lived in the fifth century B.C.E. A scattering of mosques dotted some eastern cities and the far western areas, where most of China’s Muslims lived. There were also some synagogues, where descendants of early Jewish travelers still congregated, and dispersed small groups with hazy memories of the teachings of Nestorian Christianity, which had reached China a millennium earlier. The lesser grandeur of China’s city architecture and religious centers represented not only a lack of civic pride or disrespect of religion, but rather a political fact: the Chinese state was more effectively centralized than those elsewhere in the world; its religions were more effectively controlled; and the growth of powerful, independent cities was prevented by a watchful government that would not tolerate rival centers of authority.

With hindsight we can see that the Ming dynasty, whose emperors had ruled China since 1368, was past its political peak by the early seventeenth century; yet in the years around 1600, China’s cultural life was in an ebullient condition that few, if any, other countries could match. If one points to the figures of exceptional brilliance or insight in late sixteenth-century European society, one will easily find their near equivalents in genius and imagination working away in China at just the same time. There was no Chinese dramatist with quite the range of Shakespeare, but in the 1590s Tang Xianzu was writing plays of thwarted, youthful love, of family drama and social dissonance, that were every bit as rich and complex as A Midsummer Night’s Dream or Romeo and Juliet. And if there was no precise equal to Miguel de Cervantes, whose Don Quixote was to become a central work of Western culture, it was in the 1590s that China’s most beloved novel of religious quest and picaresque adventure, The Journey to the West, was published. This novel’s central hero, a mischievous monkey with human traits who accompanies the monk-hero on his action-filled travels to India in search of Buddhist scriptures, has remained a central part of Chinese folk culture to this day. Without pushing further for near parallels, within this same period in China, essayists, philosophers, nature poets, landscape painters, religious theorists, historians, and medical scholars all produced a profusion of significant works, many of which are now regarded as classics of the civilization.

Perhaps in all this outpouring, it is the works of the short-story writers and the popular novelists that make the most important commentary about the vitality of Ming society, for they point to a new readership in the towns, to new levels of literacy, and to a new focus on the details of daily life. In a society that was largely male-dominated, they also indicate a growing audience of literate women. The larger implications of expanding female literacy in China were suggested in the writings of late Ming social theorists, who argued that educating women would enhance the general life of society by bringing improvements in morals, child rearing, and household management.

These many themes run together in another of China’s greatest novels, Golden Lotus, which was published anonymously in the early 1600s. In this socially elaborate and sexually explicit tale, the central character (who draws his income both from commerce and from his official connections) is analyzed through his relationships with his five consorts, each of whom speaks for a different facet of human nature. In many senses, Golden Lotus can be
read as allegory, as a moral fable of the way greed and selfishness destroy those with the richest opportunities for happiness; yet it also has a deeply realistic side, and illuminates the tensions and cruelties within elite Chinese family life as few other works have ever done.

Novels, paintings, plays, along with the imperial compendia on court life and bureaucratic practice, all suggest the splendors—for the wealthy—of China in the late Ming. Living mainly in the larger commercial towns rather than out in the countryside, the wealthy were bonded together in elaborate clan or lineage organizations based on family descent through the male line. These lineages often held large amounts of land that provided income for support of their own schools, charity to those fallen on hard times, and the maintenance of ancestral halls in which family members offered sacrifices to the dead. The spacious compounds of the rich, protected by massive gates and high walls, were filled with the products of Chinese artisans, who were sometimes employed in state-directed manufactories but more often grouped in small, guild-controlled workshops.

Embroidered silks that brought luster to the female form were always in demand by the rich, along with the exquisite blue and white porcelain that graced the elaborate dinner parties so beloved at the time. Glittering lacquer, ornamental jade, feathery latticework, delicate ivory, porcelain, and shining rosewood furniture made the homes of the rich places of beauty. And the elaborately carved brush holders of wood or stone, the luxurious paper, even the ink sticks and the stones on which they were rubbed and mixed with water to produce the best and blackest ink, all combined to make of every scholar's desk a ritual and an aesthetic world before he had even written a word.

Complementing the domestic decor, the food and drink of these wealthier Chinese would be a constant delight: pungent shrimp and bean curd, crisp duck and water chestnuts, sweetmeats, clear teas, smooth alcohol of grain or grape, fresh and preserved fruits and juices—all of these followed in stately sequence at parties during which literature, religion, and poetry were discussed over the courses. After the meal, as wine continued to flow, prize scroll paintings might be produced from the family collection, and new works of art, seeking to capture the essence of some old master, would be created by the skimming brushes of the inebriated guests.

At its upper social and economic levels, this was a highly educated society, held together intellectually by a common group of texts that reached back before the time of Confucius to the early days of the unification of a northern Chinese state in the second millennium BCE. While theorists debated its merits for women, education was rigorous and protracted for the boys of wealthy families, introducing them to the rhythms of classical Chinese

around the age of six. They then kept at their studies in school or with private tutors every day, memorizing, translating, drilling until, in their late twenties or early thirties, they might be ready to tackle the state examinations. Success in these examinations, which rose in a hierarchy of difficulty from those held locally to those conducted in the capital of Peking, allegedly under the supervision of the emperor himself, brought access to lucrative bureaucratic office and immense social prestige. Women were barred by law from taking the state examinations; but those of good family often learned to write classical poetry from their parents or brothers, and court ladies in the city pleasure quarters were frequently well trained in poetry and song, skills that heightened their charms in the eyes of their educated male patrons. Since book printing with wooden blocks had been developing in China since the tenth century, the maintenance of extensive private libraries was feasible, and the wide distribution of works of philosophy, poetry, history, and moral exhortation was taken for granted.

Though frowned on by some purists, the dissemination of popular works of entertainment was also accelerating in the late sixteenth century, making for a rich and elaborate cultural mix. City dwellers could call on new images of famed nature to contrast with their own noise and bustle, and find a sense of order in works of art that interpreted the world for them. The possibilities for this sense of sentiment was captured to perfection by the dramatist Tang Xianzu in his play The Peony Pavilion of 1598. Tang puts his words into the mouth of a scholar and provincial bureaucrat named Du Bao. One side of Du Bao's happiness comes from the fact that administrative business is running smoothly:

The mountains are at their loveliest
and court cases dwindle,
"The birds fly off at dawn,
at dusk I watch return,"
petals from the vase cover my seal box,
the curtains hang undisturbed.

This sense of peace and order, in turn, prompts a more direct response to nature, when official duties can be put aside altogether, the literary overlays forgotten, and nature and the simple pleasures enjoyed on their own terms:

Pink of almond fully open,
iris blades unshut,
fields of spring warming to season's life.
Over thatched hut by bamboo fence fans a tavern flag,
rain clears, and the smoke spirals from kitchen stoves.
It was a fine vision, and for many these were indeed glorious days. As long as the country’s borders remained secure, as long as the bureaucracy worked smoothly, as long as the peasants who did the hard work in the fields and the artisans who made all the beautiful objects remained content with their lot—then perhaps the splendors of the Ming would endure.

Town and Farm

The towns and cities of Ming China, especially in the more heavily populated eastern part of the country, had a bustling and thriving air. Some were busy bureaucratic centers, where the local provincial officials had their offices and carried out their tax gathering and administrative tasks. Others were purely commercial centers, where trade and local markets dictated the patterns of daily life. Most were walled, closed their gates at night, and imposed some form of curfew.

As with towns and cities elsewhere in the world, those in China could be distinguished by their services and their levels of specialization. Local market towns, for instance, were the bases for coffinmakers, ironworkers, tailors, and noodle makers. Their retail shops offered for sale such semispecial goods as tools, wine, headgear, and religious supplies, including incense, candles, and special paper money to burn at sacrifices. Such market towns also offered wineshops for customers to relax in. Larger market towns, which drew on a flow of traders and wealthy purchasers from a wider region, could support cloth-dyeing establishments, shoemakers, iron foundries, breacake makers, and sellers of bamboo, fine cloth, and teas. Travelers here found bathhouses and inns, and could buy the services of local prostitutes. Rising up the hierarchy to the local cities that coordinated the trade of several regional market towns, there were shops selling expensive stationery, leather goods, ornamental lanterns, altar carvings, flour, and the services of tailors, seal cutters, and lacquerware sellers. Here, too, visitors could find pawnsops and local “banks” to handle money exchanges, rent a sedan chair, and visit a comfortably appointed brooked. As the cities grew larger and their clientele richer, one found ever more specialized luxury goods and services, along with the kinds of ambience in which wealth edged—sometimes dramatically, sometimes unobtrusively—into the realms of decadence, snobbery, and exploitation.

At the base of the urban hierarchy, below the market towns, there were the small local townships where the population was too poor and scattered to support many shops and artisans, and where most goods were sold only by traveling peddlers at periodic markets. Such townships housed neither the wealthy nor any government officials; as a result, the simplest of teahouses, or perhaps a roadside stall, or an occasional temple fair would be the sole focus for relaxation. Nevertheless, such smaller townships played a vast array of important functions, for they served as the bases for news and gossip, matchmaking, simple schooling, local religious festivals, traveling theater groups, tax collection, and the distribution of famine relief in times of emergency.

Just as the towns and cities of Ming China represented a whole spectrum of goods and services, architecture, levels of sophistication, and administrative staffing, making any simple generalization about them risky, so, too, was the countryside apparently endless in its variety. Indeed the distinction between town and country was blurred in China, for suburban areas of intensive farming lay just outside and sometimes even within the city walls, and artisans might work on farms in peak periods, or farmers work temporarily in towns during times of dearth.

It was south of the Huai River, which cuts across China between the Yellow River and the Yangzi, that the countryside was most prosperous, for here climate and soil combined to make intensive rice cultivation possible. The region was crisscrossed by myriad rivers, canals, and irrigation streams that fed lush market gardens and paddies in which the young rice shoots grew, or flowed into lakes and ponds where fish and ducks were raised. Here the seasonal flooding of the paddy fields returned needed nutrients to the soil. In the regions just south of the Yangzi, farmers cultivated mulberry trees for the leaves on which silk worms fed, as well as tea bushes and a host of other products that created extra resources and allowed for a more diversified rural economy. Further to the south, sugarcane and citrus were added to the basic crops; and in the mountainous southwest, forests of bamboo and valuable hardwood lumber brought in extra revenue. Water transport was fast, easy, and cheap in south China. Its villages boasted strong lineage organizations that helped to bond communities together.

Although there were many prosperous farming villages north of the Huai River, life there was harsher. The cold in winter was extreme, as icy winds blew in from Mongolia, eroding the land, filling the rivers with silt, and swirling fine dust into the eyes and noses of those who could not afford to shelter behind closed doors. The main crops were wheat and millet, grown with much toil on overworked land, which the scattered farming communities painstakingly fertilized with every scrap of human and animal waste they could recycle. Fruit trees such as apple and pear grew well, as did soybeans and cotton; but by the end of the sixteenth century, much of the land was deforested, and the Yellow River was an unpredictable force as its silt-laden waters meandered across the wide plains to the sea. Unhindered
by the dikes, paddies, and canals of the South, bandit armies could move men and equipment easily across the northern countryside, while cavalry forces could race ahead and to the flanks, returning to warn the slower foot soldiers of any danger from opposing forces or sorties from garrison towns. Lineage organizations were weaker here, villages more isolated, social life often more fragmented, and the tough-minded owner-cultivator, living not far above subsistence level, more common than either the prosperous landlord or the tenant farmer.

China’s rural diversity meant that “landlords” could not be entirely distinguished from “peasants.” For every wealthy absentee landlord living in one of the larger towns, for example, there might be scores of smaller-scale local landlords living in the countryside, perhaps renting out some of their land or hiring part-time labor to till it. Similarly, there were millions of peasant proprietors who owned a little more land than they needed for subsistence, and they might farm their own land with the help of some seasonal laborers. Others, owning a little less land than they needed for subsistence, might rent an extra fraction of an acre or hire themselves out as casual labor in the busy seasons. And in most peasant homes, there was some form of handicraft industry that connected the rural family to a commercial network.

The social structure was further complicated by the bewildering variety of land-sale agreements and rental contracts used in China. While the state sought extra revenue by levying a tax on each land deal, in return for which it granted an official contract with a red seal, many farmers—not surprisingly—tried to avoid these surcharges by drawing up their own unofficial contracts. The definition of a land sale, furthermore, was profoundly ambiguous. Most land sales were conducted on the general understanding that the seller might at some later date reclaim the land from the buyer at the original purchase price, or that the seller retained “subsurface” rights to the soil while the purchaser could till the land for a specified period. If land rose in price, went out of cultivation, became waterlogged, or was built upon, a maze of legal and financial problems resulted, leading often to family feuds and even to murder.

For centuries, whether in the north or the south, the peasantry of China had shown their ability to work hard and to survive even when sudden natural calamities brought extreme deprivation. In times of drought or flood, there were various forms of mutual aid, loans, or relief grain supplies that could help to tide them and their families over. Perhaps some sort of part-time labor could be secured, as a porter, an irrigation worker, or barge puller. Children could be indentured, on short- or long-term contracts, for domestic service with the rich. Female children could be sold in the cities; and even if they ended up in brothels, at least they were alive and the family freed of an extra mouth to feed. But if, on top of all the other hardships, the whole fabric of law and order within the society began to unravel, then the situation became hopeless indeed. If the market towns closed their gates, if bands of desperate men began to roam the countryside, seizing the few stores that the rural families had laid in against the coming winter’s cold, or stealing the last seed grain carefully hoarded for the next spring’s planting, then the poor farmers had no choice but to abandon their fields—whether the land was rented or privately owned—and to swell the armies of the homeless marchers.

In the early 1600s, despite the apparent prosperity of the wealthier elite, there were signs that this dangerous unraveling might be at hand. Without state-sponsored work or relief for their own needy inhabitants, then the very towns that barred their gates to the rural poor might erupt from within. Driven to desperation by high taxes and uncertain labor prospects, thousands of silk weavers in the Yangzi-delta city of Suzhou went on strike in 1601, burnt down houses, and lynched hated local tyrants. That same year, southwest of Suzhou, in the Jiangxi province porcelain-manufacturing city of Jingdezhen, thousands of workers rioted over low wages and the Ming court’s demand that they meet heightened production quotas of the exclusive “dragon bowls” made for palace use. One potter threw himself into a blazing kiln and perished to underline his fellows’ plight. A score of other cities and towns saw some kind of social and economic protest in the same period.

Instability in the urban world was matched by that in the countryside. There were incidents of rural protest in the late Ming, as in earlier periods, that can be seen as having elements of class struggle inherent in them. These incidents, often accompanied by violence, were of two main kinds: protests by indentured laborers or “bondservants” against their masters in attempts to regain their free status as farmers, and strikes by tenants who refused to pay their landlords what they regarded as unjust rents. Even if they were not common, there were enough such incidents to offer a serious warning to the wealthier Chinese. In that same play, _The Peony Pavilion_, in which he speaks glowingly of the joys of the official’s life, Tang Xianzu gently mocks the rustic yokels of China, putting into deliberately inelegant verse the rough-and-ready labor of their days:

—Slippery mud,
—sloppy thud,
—short rake, long plough, clutch ‘em as they slide.
—After rainy night row rice and hemp.
The verses sounded amusing. But Tang’s audience had not yet begun to think through the implications of what might happen when those who labored under such conditions sought to overthrow their masters.

**Corruption and Hardship**

In the midst of the rich cultural and economic life of the late Ming, therefore, there were dangerous hints of weakness in the social structure. Part of the trouble sprang from the very center of the state. The emperor Wanli, who reigned across the long span from 1572 to 1620, had started out as a conscientious young ruler, guided by intelligent and experienced advisers. But from the 1580s onward, Emperor Wanli spent more and more time behind the innermost walls of the Forbidden City. He had grown agitated by quarrels with bureaucrats about which of his sons should be named heir apparent to the throne, frustrated by overprotective couriers from carrying out his desires to travel widely and command his troops in person, and disgusted by the constant bickering among his own senior advisers. For years on end he held no court audiences to discuss key political events, gave up his studies of the historical and philosophical texts that lay at the heart of Confucian learning, refused to read state papers, and even stopped filling the vacancies that occurred in the upper levels of officialdom.

The result was that considerable power accrued to the court eunuchs—the castrated male attendants whose official job was to supervise the management of day-to-day business in the palace. The practice of using eunuchs in Chinese courts had existed for more than two thousand years, but Ming rulers employed many more than their predecessors, and by Wanli’s time there were over ten thousand in the capital. Since the emperor would not come out from the inner recesses of the Forbidden City—an area closed to all save the imperial family and their personal attendants—the eunuchs became crucial intermediaries between the outer bureaucratic world and the inner imperial one. Any senior official with business that demanded the emperor’s attention had to persuade a eunuch to carry the message for him; the eunuchs, naturally enough, asked for fees in return for such service, and soon the more powerful ones were flattered and bribed by ambitious officials.

In the 1590s, the eunuchs, many of whom were identified with certain court factions, began to play a central role in the political life of the country. Their influence grew as Emperor Wanli assigned them to collect revenues in the provinces. In many cases they acted in a high-handed way, tyrannizing wealthy provincial families, and using an elite group of military guards to enforce their will and to imprison—even torture or kill—their political enemies. The most spectacular example of these abuses occurred in the person of the eunuch Wei Zhongxian, who cleverly rose to power by obtaining a position as purveyor of food to the concubine of Emperor Wanli’s son, and later, in the 1620s, dominated the court life of Wanli’s grandson. At the peak of his influence, Wei was able to publish historical works belittling his bureaucratic enemies, and to order that temples in his honor be erected all across China.

Although it was always dangerous to criticize the emperor and his favorites, certain officials and prominent scholars were deeply disturbed by the situation. As scholars will, they sought a theoretical cause for the trouble; many of them concluded that the corruption sprang from a breakdown of the general ethical standards, from flaws in the educational system, and from the growth of an unbridled individualism. The villain, to many of these critics, was the earlier Ming philosopher Wang Yangming, who had argued in his writings that the keys to ethical understanding lay in our own moral nature and, hence, that any person had the power, through innate knowledge, to understand the meaning of existence. As Wang expressed this in a letter to a friend:

> Innate knowledge is identical with the Way. That it is present in the mind is true not only in the cases of the sages and worthies, but even in that of ordinary people. When one is free from the driving force and observations of material desires, and just follows innate knowledge and leaves it to continue to function and operate, everything will be in accord with the Way.¹

“To learn,” Wang added, “simply means to learn to follow innate knowledge.” But Wang also advocated a creative blending of knowledge with action, and, in the teachings and practice of some of his more extreme followers, Wang’s doctrine led to eccentric behavior, the rejection of normative forms of education, and the call for a new egalitarianism.

To combat these trends, certain late sixteenth-century scholars who held a rigorously moral view of the significance of Confucian thought began to gather in philosophical societies. Here they prepared for the state examinations and heard lectures on ethics; from ethics, their debates inevitably spread to politics; and political debate, in turn, began to generate a desire for political reform. By 1611, the most famous of these societies—founded
in 1604 and known as the "Donglin Society" for the building where it was based in the Jiangsu city of Wuxi—had become a major force in politics. Donglin partisans used all their influence to have corrupt officials removed from their Peking posts. Their status rose enormously after Emperor Wanli’s death in 1620, when many of them were called to serve in the bureaucracy under Wanli’s son and grandson. Their task was to put their moral premises into practice and to strengthen China’s frontier defense and internal economy. But their constant moral exhortations wearied the new emperor: after a Donglin leader criticized the most notorious of the eunuchs, Wei Zhongxian, and Wei had a senior official at court beaten to death in retaliation, the emperor did not censure Wei.

Emboldened by the emperor’s tacit acquiescence, between 1624 and 1627 Wei and a group of court officials led a concerted campaign of terror against the Donglin members, many of whom were killed or driven to suicide. Although Wei himself was eventually condemned, and took his own life in 1627, the damage to the state’s prestige had been severe, and was perhaps irreparable. As one of the Donglin leaders—having heard that mounted guards from the eunuch’s inner circle had come to arrest him, and knowing that this could only mean his death—wrote in a farewell letter to his friend: "I formerly was a great minister, and when a great minister accepts disgrace the state is also disgraced."

All this intellectual and political ferment exacerbated an already dangerous situation in the fields of foreign policy and the economy. China had faced a number of threats during the sixteenth century, most prominently from the nomadic tribes of Mongols who raised their horses and flocks of sheep on the steppes to the north and northwest of Peking, and from pirates on the southeast coast. Mongol forces, which earlier in the dynasty had been controlled through trade and diplomacy, now raided China regularly. On one occasion they captured a Ming emperor campaigning against them, and on another they rode almost to the gates of Peking. By the late sixteenth century, despite imperial attempts to strengthen the Great Wall and its military garrisons, the Chinese managed to hold the Mongol raiders in check only by paying them regular subsidies. On the southeast coast, Chinese cities were ravaged by pirate groups, sometimes numbering in the hundreds and including a great many Japanese as well as Chinese fugitives, and even black slaves who had escaped from the Portuguese outpost at Macao. These pirate groups looted almost at will, seizing men and women for ransom.

Although the worst of these pirate attacks had been stopped by the 1570s, Japanese military power grew stronger, and in the 1590s a major Japanese army invaded Korea. Fighting was heavy; and since the Ming regarded Korea as a loyal and dependent ally to be protected at all costs, Chinese troops were sent in force to help the hard-pressed Koreans. The war might have continued, at terrible cost to all three countries, had not domestic turmoil in Japan, coupled with effective disruption of Japanese supply lines by the Korean navy, led to the recall of Japanese troops from Korea in 1598. As it was, the strains of the war fed a growing crisis in Manchuria, where groups of Jurchen tribesmen were beginning to coalesce in armed bands under the leadership of a talented chieftain named Nurhaci, and to challenge Ming authority in the region of Liaodong. Although it was not clear at the time, Nurhaci’s troops were beginning a process that was ultimately to bring down the Ming dynasty itself.

Macao also represented a new kind of problem for China. This town, on the tip of a peninsula to the southwest of Canton, had been occupied by the Portuguese with China’s tacit consent in the 1550s. By the 1600s, following the emperor’s ban of direct trade by Chinese merchants with belligerent Japan, the Portuguese had moved into the resulting commercial vacuum as middlemen. They made fortunes by buying up Chinese silk in local markets and shipping it to Japan, where they traded it for silver from Japanese mines. With this silver, which was valued more highly in China than in Japan, the Portuguese returned and bought larger stocks of Chinese silk.
The steady flow of silver brought by the Portuguese into China was itself just one element in the larger pattern of silver shipments that brought major economic effects to all parts of the world in the sixteenth century.

At the heart of this global network lay the fantastic silver riches of the mines in Mexico and Peru, which were being exploited under royal license by the Spanish conquerors of those territories. Silver from the Americas began to reach China in the 1570s, when Spain established a new base at Manila in the Philippines. Swift to seize the demand in the Americas for their textiles, thousands of Chinese traders began to congregate in Manila, selling cloth and silk in bulk and speeding the flow of specie back to their homeland. As silver circulated more widely, commercial activity spread, and the silver-bullion deposits available to Emperor Wanli grew impressively. At the same time, however, the massive influx of silver to China brought a range of problems that included inflation, speculation in business, and an erratic economic growth in several cities that disrupted traditional economic patterns.

Thus, before Wanli's reign ended with his death in 1620, China was beginning a complicated economic slide. The thriving world of the Ming merchants, which had led to the efficient distribution of luxury goods on a countrywide basis and had spawned an effective proto-banking system based on notes of exchange, suffered from the military troubles of the times. And China's trade—while never effectively taxed by the state, which concentrated mainly on the agricultural sector—was extremely vulnerable to extortion and confiscation by corrupt eunuch commissioners in the provinces, or by their agents. Government inefficiencies in flood control and famine relief led to further local crises, which, in turn, reduced the amount of prosperous land that could be taxed effectively.

During the last years of Emperor Wanli's reign and under his successors, the situation for China's peasants grew critical. International trade patterns changed as raiders from the Protestant Dutch and British nations sought to expand their own trading empires by wrecking those of the Catholic Spaniards and Portuguese. This led to a massive drop in silver imports into China, which encouraged hoarding and forced the ratio of copper to silver into a decline. A string of one thousand small copper coins that had been worth around an ounce of silver in the 1530s had become worth half an ounce by 1640, and perhaps one-third of an ounce by 1643. The effect on peasants was disastrous, since they had to pay their taxes in silver, even though they conducted local trade and sold their own harvests for copper.

As if these new "hidden" costs were not enough, the expenses of the widening war in Manchuria against Nurhaci and his followers prompted the court to raise the taxes payable on each acre of land no less than seven times between 1618 and 1639. Famines became common, especially in north China, wornied by unusually cold and dry weather that shortened the growing season for crops by as much as two weeks. (Sometimes termed the "little ice age" of the seventeenth century, similar effects were felt in farming areas around the world during this period.) When these natural disasters and tax increases are set alongside the constant strains of military recruitment and desertions, a declining relief system for the indigent, and the abandonment of virtually all major irrigation and flood-control projects, the pressures on the country and the tensions they began to engender can be well imagined. And as rapidly became apparent, neither the court nor the bureaucracy in Peking or the countryside seemed to have the ability, the resources, or the will to do very much about it.

**The Ming Collapse**

In the early decades of the seventeenth century, the Ming court slowly lost control of its rural bureaucracy and, as a result, of its tax structure. Pressed at the same time for more money to pay and supply the troops needed to counter the attacks of the Jurchen leader Nurhaci in Manchuria, the court both increased extra levies on those populated areas that it still controlled and laid off many employees in the northwest, where the danger to the state seemed less pressing. One of those laid off in this economy move was a post-station attendant from a rural family named Li Zacheng.

Li had worked previously in a wine shop and as an ironworkers' apprentice, and was typical of a number of rootless, violent men who lived in Shaanxi province at the time. Shaanxi, a barren province of northwest China, covered the area within the great bend of the Yellow River and ran through bleak mountain countryside up to the Great Wall. About as far from Peking as Chicago is from Washington, D.C., but ringed by mountains and difficult of access, Shaanxi province had in the past proved a natural bastion where groups of rebels had built up their forces prior to breaking out and attacking the richer and more populated lands to the east and the south.

In 1630 Li Zacheng enrolled in a military unit in western Shaanxi, but once again the government let him down. Deprived of promised supplies, Li and other soldiers mutinied, and over the next few years Li slowly emerged as a natural leader among a group of uprooted men that numbered in the thousands, proving himself an intuitively skillful tactician. In 1634 Li was captured near the southern Shaanxi border by a capable Ming general, who bottled up the rebel forces in a mountain gorge. Li was released after promising that he would take his troops back into the barren northern part of
the province, but the agreement fell apart after a local magistrate executed thirty-six of the surrendered rebels. Li and his men retaliated by killing the local officials and taking over more to the hills. By 1635 he was stronger than ever, and was a leading representative at an extraordinary conclave of rebel leaders that took place at the town of Rongyang in central Henan province, just south of the Yellow River.

At this conclave, some of the most powerful rebel leaders assigned different regions of north China to their armies and tried to coordinate an attack on the Ming capital of Peking. But coordinated military activity proved difficult with such motley and undisciplined forces. By the end of the year the alliance was breaking apart, though not before the rebels had captured and looted some of the imperial Ming burial grounds outside the capital and imprisoned the attendants who worked there. The emperor now on the throne, Wanli's grandson Chongzhen, responded by denouncing mourning, apologizing to his ancestors in special temple ceremonies, arresting several of his commanding officers, and executing the eunuch guardian of the royal tombs. For his part, in a bitter quarrel that showed how swiftly violence flared and how easily the rebel alliance could fragment, Li Zicheng demanded of his fellow rebels that he be given the captured eunuch musicians whose job had been to play ritual music at the tombs. The rebel leader who held the musicians, Zhang Xianzhong, reluctantly complied, but smashed all their instruments first. Li then killed the unfortunate musicians.

Over the next few years, the armies of these two leaders, Li and Zhang, roamed over much of northern and central China, shifting from base to base, occasionally cooperating with each other but more often feuding as they competed with both the Ming and other rebel bands for terrain and followers. By the early 1640s, each had seized a base area for himself: Zhang Xianzhong, who like Li had once served in the Ming forces in Shannxi before deserting, was in the city of Chengdu in the prosperous heartland of Sichuan province, deep inland along the Yangzi River; Li was established in Hubei, but his jurisdiction included most of Shannxi and Henan provinces as well. Perhaps without unconscious irony, but rather looking ahead to a final conquest of all China, Li called his new kingdom Doshun (大顺), "the Region of Grand Obedience." Zhang, in Sichuan province, responded later by naming himself the "Greatly Obedient Ruler" of a new "Great Western Kingdom."

The ravages caused by the armies of Li and Zhang were augmented by epidemics that struck China at this same time. Some estimates, noted by Chinese observers, suggest that these epidemics caused many communities to suffer losses of half or more of their inhabitants. One scholar wrote of Zhejiang province in 1642 that "the symptoms of pestilence arose again on a large scale, affecting eight or nine out of every ten households. It even reached the point where in a household of ten or twenty people a single uninfected person could not be found, or where in such a household there was not one saved. Therefore at first the bodies were buried in coffins, and next in grasses, but finally they were left on the beds." An observer in Henan province noted that in one big city there in the summer of 1643 "there were few signs of human life in the streets and all that was heard was the buzzing of flies."

So serious was the loss of life that it prompted a rethinking of traditional Chinese theories of medicine, and although no solutions were found, medical books of the time began to develop a new theory of epidemics. One doctor, living near the Yangzi delta area, wrote in 1642 that China was obviously being affected not just by variants in weather or temperature but by a change in the balance of Heaven and Earth caused by "deviant Qi;" Qi being the normally neutral forces within nature. Such deviant Qi, he wrote, "appear mainly in years of war and famine." Unseen and unheard, they struck apparently at will; any response by the people was in vain. "If the people clash against them, they produce the various diseases, each according
to its nature. As for the diseases produced, sometimes everyone has swollen
neck glands and sometimes everyone’s face and head swell up. . . . Some-
times everyone suffers from diarrhoea and intermittent fever. Or it might
be cramps, or pus-tules, or a rash, or itching scabs, or boils.”

The weight of
description and analysis suggests that China suffered some form of plague
during the 1640s, although its exact nature cannot be determined. Possibly
the Manchus in their earlier raids introduced microbes for which the Chinese
had no natural antibodies, leading to a catastrophic loss of life similar to
that caused by the Europeans’ spread of measles or smallpox among the
indigenous Indian populations of Mexico and North America.

The Ming dynasty, during these closing years, was not completely with-
out resources. There were loyal generals who led their troops against the
rebels and occasionally inflicted defeats on them—or at least forced them
to retreat or into temporary surrender. There were also semi-independent
naval and military leaders, with bases in Shandong or on offshore islands,
who launched damaging raids on the Manchu forces in Liaodong. And in
many areas the wealthy local elites recruited and armed their own militia
forces so that they could defend their estates and hometowns from rebel
attacks. Emperor Chongzhen himself did try to bring some order to the
Peking government; he sought to repress the worst excesses of the eunuchs,
and unlike his grandfather Wanli, he met regularly with his ministers. But
much of his attention was focused on Manchuria, where Nurhaci and his
son were steadily widening their power base, seizing Shenyang (Mukden)
in 1625, taking much of Inner Mongolia in 1632, and subduing Korea in
1638. During this period China produced some remarkable generals who
fought bravely in Manchuria, especially in the mid-1620s, inflicting heavy
losses on Manchu forces and recapturing several cities. But factional fight-
ing in Peking and a constant shortage of funds hampered the Ming cause.

Foremost among the Ming generals was Yuan Chonghuan, whose career
may be seen as exemplifying some of these late Ming tensions. A classically
educated scholar from south China, Yuan entered the Peking bureaucracy
as a young man. In 1622 he went on an inspection tour of southern Man-
churia and grew convinced that he could defend the crucial passes that led
to Peking. As a staff member in the ministry of war, with a good knowl-
dge of European firearms apparently garnered from his cook, who knew
some Westerners, Yuan was able to hold the Liao River against Nurhaci.
In 1628 he was named field marshal of all northeastern forces, but for
reasons of jealousy he executed one of his most talented subordinates the
following year. When, in 1630, Manchu raiding parties appeared near Peking,
Yuan was falsely accused of colluding with them and was tried on a trumped-
up charge of treason. With hostile courtiers, friends of the man he had
killed, and groups of eunuchs all arrayed against him, Yuan had no chance
of clearing himself. Instead he was condemned to death by way of the most
publicly humiliating and painful punishment that the Chinese penal code
allowed for: being cut to pieces in the marketplace of Peking. Later scholars
mounted him as one of China’s greatest generals. No one of his talents
came forward to succeed him; on the contrary, though some northern gen-
erals remained loyal to the Ming cause after his death, many others began
to surrender to the Manchus, taking their troops over to the enemy with
them. The charges falsely leveled at Yuan now began to come true in ear-
nest.

Finally it was not the Manchus, but the rebel Li Zicheng who brought
down the Ming dynasty. In 1644 Li mounted a huge attack on Peking,
moving across north China with hundreds of thousands of troops, sacking
the towns that resisted him, and incorporating into his own army the forces
of those that surrendered. He waged a skillful propaganda war, pointing
to the excesses and cruelties of the Ming regime and promising a new era of
peace and prosperity to the exhausted Chinese people. In April 1644 his
armies entered Peking without a fight, the city gates having been treach-
erously opened at his coming. It is recorded that Emperor Chongzhen, after
hearing that the rebels had entered the city, rang a bell to summon his
ministers in order to get their advice or assistance. When none of them
appeared, the emperor walked to the imperial garden just outside the walls
of the Forbidden City. In this garden was a hill, from the crest of which
the emperor and his consorts had been wont to look out over the panorama
of Peking. This time the emperor did not mount the hill, but attached a
cord to a tree at its foot, and there hanged himself. So died the last ruler of
the dynasty that, for better or worse, had ruled China since 1368.
While the Ming dynasty was sliding into a final decline, its eventual successor was rising in the northeast. The people known now as the Manchus were originally tribes of Jurchen stock who lived in the areas currently designated as Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces. In the distant past, between a.d. 1122 and 1234, the Jurchen had conquered northern China and combined it with their own territory under the name of Jin—or "golden"—dynasty. After their defeat in 1234, they had retreated northward to the Sungari River region, but by the late Ming they were once more pressing on the borders of China and Korea. The policy of the Ming was to control the Jurchen by formally defining their territory as a part of China's frontier defensive system, by offering them honorific titles, and by granting them trading privileges.

By the late sixteenth century the Jurchen had followed various paths. Some of them had stayed in the Sungari region and lived mainly by fishing and hunting. Others had established a firm base along the northern edge of the Korean border in the region of the Changbai Shan (Long White Mountain), where they developed a mixed agricultural and hunting economy. Yet others had moved to more fertile, open land east of the Liao River, where they mingled with Chinese emigrants and practiced a settled, arable agriculture, or thrived as traders in furs, horses, and luxury goods. Those in this third group had essentially become detribalized: they largely adopted Chinese ways, even though the towns in which they prospered, such as Fushun and Shenyang, had been in the very heartland of the old Jin Empire.

Nurhaci, who was to lay the groundwork for the Manchu conquest of Ming China, was born in 1559 to a noble family of the Long White Mountain group of Jurchens. As a young man he traveled to Peking to pay ritual homage to the Ming rulers and to trade, and received honorific Ming titles in return for his offer to help them against the Japanese in Korea. But around 1610, he broke his relations with the Ming on the grounds that they had attacked or humiliated members of his family and had tried to wreck his own economic base.

Over the next decade Nurhaci steadily increased his power at the expense of neighboring Jurchen and Mongol tribes, either dominating them by warfare or allying with them through marriage contracts. He organized his troops and their families into eight different groups of "banners," which were distinguished according to color (yellow, red, blue, and white, four plain and four bordered). The banners served as identification devices in battle, and membership in a given banner was used as the basis for population registration in daily life. He also assembled large numbers of craftsmen to manufacture weapons and armor, and, in his strongly defended headquarters, developed a written script for transcribing the Jurchen language. In 1616 he took the important symbolic step of declaring himself the "khan," or ruler, of a second "Jin" dynasty, thus evoking the past glory of
the Jurchen people and issuing a provocative challenge to the Ming state. Two years later he launched a series of shattering military blows at mixed Chinese and “detrabalized” Jurchen settlements east of the Liao River, in the region known as Liaodong.9

The Ming rulers had regarded Liaodong as essentially Chinese territory and maintained strong garrisons there under their own generals. But Nurhaci used a mixture of threats and blandishments to induce the garrison commanders to surrender, sending them elaborate messages written out for him by Chinese advisers in his employ. As he wrote to the Chinese officer commanding Fushan, for instance: “Even if you fight, you certainly will not win ... if you do not fight, but surrender, I shall let you keep your former office and shall care benevolently for you. But if you fight, how can our arrows know who you are?”9 Nurhaci also tried to undermine Ming influence in Liaodong by posing as a reformist ruler who had come to bring a better life to the Chinese, and he urged those who lived west of the Liao River to join him in his new kingdom. “Do not think that the land and houses will not be yours, that they will belong to a master,” he wrote in another message that was distributed out in the countryside. “All will equally be the Khan’s subjects and will live and work the fields on an equal basis.” On other occasions, Nurhaci claimed he would take over the charitable functions of the ideal ruler that had so obviously been neglected by Wanli in his waning years, saying that he would never let “the rich accumulate their grain and have it rot away,” but would “nourish the begging poor.”

Nurhaci rigidly disciplined his troops and tried to stop all looting or harming of the Liaodong civilian population, publicly punishing guilty soldiers. To those Chinese with education who surrendered, he offered a chance of serving in the growing Jurchen bureaucracy, and senior Chinese officials who came over to his side were offered marriage into his family, honorific titles, and high office. Shenyang and Liaoyang fell to his troops in 1621, and in 1625 he made Shenyang (the modern Mukden) his capital. Soon all the territory east of the Liao River and some land west of the river were in his hands.

Despite his orders that males who surrendered to him must imitate Jurchen practice and shave the fronts of their foreheads and braid their hair into a long pigtail or “queue,” Nurhaci initially faced little overt opposition from the conquered Chinese settlers, though receptions were often mixed. For instance, while the officers of the Haizhou garrison welcomed the Jurchen with flutes and drums, some of the Haizhou town dwellers poisoned the wells in a desperate attempt to kill Nurhaci’s troops. Nor is there any easy way to categorize the fates of those Chinese or detrabalized Jurchen who were now in Nurhaci’s power. Some were rewarded as promised, others were moved from their city homes to work for the Jurchen on the land. Some were enslaved or forced to work under contract, others—most notably those with some knowledge of artillery—were placed in new military units and incorporated as a “Chinese martial” banner unit. Although still in an embryonic state, these artillery units were later to play a critical role in the Manchu victories.

As early as 1622, Nurhaci had expressed his intention of attacking China by sending an army down through the strategic pass of Shanhaiguan, where the Great Wall ends at the North China Sea. He might well have done so the following year had not a serious rebellion against his rule broken out among the Chinese in Liaodong. What prompted the uprising is not known, but there were many possible causes. With the arrival of large numbers of Jurchen troops in Liaodong, there was intense pressure on the available farmland. Shortages of grain and salt grew to crisis proportions, and famine was reported in some areas. Compulsory grain rationing was introduced, and Chinese under Jurchen control had to spend a portion of their time giving free labor to their masters, working in squads of three on specially designated five-acre parcels of land. In many areas of Liaodong, partly as a control measure and partly because there was a housing shortage, the Jurchen moved into Chinese homes to live and eat as co-occupants. The Chinese responded by setting fires, poisoning wells once again, killing Jurchen women and children, hiding their grain from the Jurchen, and fleeing into the mountains. Some Chinese killed border guards and tried to escape to the south; those caught were killed in turn by the Jurchen.

The Ming court did not try to take advantage of the uprising, however, and it was soon suppressed by Nurhaci’s troops. The Jurchen were warned to “be on their guard day and night and not associate with the Chinese of the villages.” They were now lodged in separate quarters in the towns, and even forbidden to walk down Chinese streets or visit Chinese homes. The Jurchen were ordered to carry arms at all times, while possession of any weapons by the Chinese was made illegal. In criminal cases Nurhaci urged leniency for all Jurchen, while full rigor was to be used against convicted Chinese, including death sentences for them and their families in cases of theft.

A second revolt of the Chinese took place in 1625, and was even more savagely repressed. There were widespread executions of the educated Chinese in the area, whom Nurhaci believed were fomenting the resistance. In an attempt to control the common people, Nurhaci marshaled them into registered groups, each containing thirteen households under a Chinese head-
man, with their work supervised by officials of the eight Jurchen banners. On paper, at least, each grouping was allowed seven oxen and one hundred acres of land, and had to return 20 percent of the yield to the Jin state, although it is not known how often these demands were fulfilled.

The Ming generals had failed to respond to either of these uprisings, but late in 1625 these generals began a series of vigorous counterattacks and, under Yuan Chonghuan's leadership, Chinese forces achieved their first serious victories over Nurhaci in 1626. Later that same year, Nurhaci died. In accordance with Jurchen custom—a custom derived from the Mongols of central Asia—he had not left his dominions and the title of khan to any one man, but instead had ordered them divided among his most able sons and nephews.

Not surprisingly, there followed a protracted struggle for power. The victor was Nurhaci's eighth son, Hong Taiji, who had been the general commanding the plain yellow and bordered yellow banners. This son was helped to power by Chinese advisers, and he responded by taking a more favorable view of the Chinese and their traditional institutions than his father had done. Six ministries, in exact imitation of those at the Ming court, were established, and Chinese were employed throughout this new bureaucracy. Nominally, the senior ministers were all Jurchen notables, but they were often absent on military or other business, leaving the practical running of affairs to their Chinese subordinates.

On the grounds that it was punitive to the Chinese, Hong Taiji abolished the thirteen-household registration system instituted by Nurhaci; he also held competitive examinations for the civil service in Liaodong, again following the traditional Chinese model; and he ordered reforms in the Jurchen written language to make it more serviceable in a new era of record keeping, census taking, and tax gathering. A swelling number of Chinese defectors from the Ming cause, many of them officers who had brought their own troops along with them, sought service with the new khan, who welcomed them generously—too generously, thought some of his advisers, who protested that Chinese "boors without character" were filling the court.

Boors or not, the defection to the Jurchen of the senior Chinese generals assigned by the Ming to defend the area near the mouth of the Yalu River, and the northern areas of Shandong province, brought new power to Hong Taiji. In 1637 he established two full Chinese "banners" on the lines of Nurhaci's earlier system, increasing the number to four in 1639 and to eight in 1642. There was already a parallel structure of eight Mongol banners, formed in 1635, from Mongols who had turned against the Ming and pledged themselves to Hong Taiji's service. So by the early 1640s, the Jurchen leader had constructed a complete military and administrative structure, which was used to provide soldiers for active combat on a rotating system, to register and protect their wives and children, and to supervise work on the land.

Even before this, in 1636, Hong Taiji had taken a symbolic step that went beyond that taken by Nurhaci in establishing the Jin dynasty in 1616: Hong Taiji decided to abolish his fledgling state's connection with the tribal past that was associated with the Jurchen name, and the memories it evoked of friction with the Ming (98) dynasty. He declared the formation of a new dynasty called the Qing (清), which henceforth would rule over the Manchu and neighboring peoples, claiming greater power and a wider mandate than the Jin had done. Qing (pronounced "Ching") literally means "pure" or "clear" and, from 1636 until the final abolition of the Manchu in 1912, was used as the dynastic term for the successive Manchu rulers and for the China over which they ruled. Instead of Jurchen, Hong Taiji's people were now to be called Manchu. Manchu was a new term; though its exact meaning is not known, it was probably taken from a Buddhist term for "great good fortune," and implied a new measure of universality for the Qing state.

Hong Taiji now seemed poised for wider conquests. He had conquered Korea in 1638, forcing the king to renounce his loyalty to the Ming and to give his sons to the Manchus as hostages. Inside China, the Ming failures were everywhere evident, with the rebels Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong in control of much of the western and northern parts of the country. Manchu raiding parties had crossed the Great Wall north of Peking and looted the area near the capital, along with wide swathes of land in Shandong province. They seized women and children, draft animals, silk, and silver, and left burnt-out, devastated cities in their wake.

Yet at the same time, there was disturbing evidence that the Manchus, despite their newly coined name with its grand pretensions, were themselves turning soft. Some of them were growing weary of war and used to the pleasures of Liaodong city life. Luxuries they had never known surrounded them, while agriculture faltered because the men-at-arms, although not fighting as well as before, still did not deign to work in the fields. The young men did not even like to go hunting anymore, sighed Hong Taiji, but "hang around the marketplaces and simply amuse themselves." If summoned to battle, "the soldiers stay in camp and just let the flankers go on." When the strategic Ming city of Jinzhou, south of the Dadong River, fell to the Manchus in 1642, it was only after a sporadic ten-year siege in which the Manchus had been repulsed again and again by the Ming garrison troops. The victory came none too soon to boost Manchu morale. Two of the last few talented Ming generals surrendered after the battle and were suitably rewarded. But the mainland route to Peking through the pass at Shanhai-
guan was still guarded by the redoubtable Ming general Wu Sangui, and in 1643 Hong Taiji suddenly died, leaving his younger brother Dorgon as a regent for the compromise choice as heir, Hong Taiji's ninth son, a five-year-old boy.

The chance for further Manchu expansion looked frail indeed, but in the spring of 1644 Li Zicheng led his rebel army out of the Peking he had just seized and advanced across the plains east of the city to attack General Wu Sangui, whom Li saw as the last major defender of the Ming cause. General Wu turned from the Shanhaiguan pass and marched westward to confront Li. Seizing the incredible opportunity, the regent Dorgon rallied the troops of the boy Manchu emperor and led the armies of the Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese banners swiftly down the coast, crossing the border into China unopposed. Nurhaci's dream had suddenly become a reality.

**Conquering the Ming**

With the Manchu armies to his east and Li Zicheng's forces to his west, General Wu Sangui was in a desperate situation. His only hope to survive was by allying with one of his opponents. Among arguments for joining Li were the fact that he was Chinese, that he promised to have the support of the local people, that he promised to end the abuses that had marked the late Ming state, and that he held Wu's father as a hostage. Otherwise, Li was an unknown quantity, violent and unexpected; moreover, the behavior of his army in Peking after he took the city in April 1644 was not encouraging to a wealthy and cultured official like General Wu. Li's troops had looted and ravaged the city, attacking and pillaging the homes of senior officials, seizing their relatives for ransom, or demanding enormous payoffs in "protection money." Even though Li had declared the formal founding of a new dynasty, he was unable to control his own generals in Peking, and Wu might well have wondered how effective Li would be in unifying China.

As for allying with the Manchus, there was the disadvantage that they were ethnically non-Chinese, and their Jurchen background included them in a history of semicivilized frontier people whom the Chinese had traditionally despised; furthermore, they had terrorized parts of north China in their earlier raids and had virtually wiped out some of the cities they had occupied. Yet in their favor was the early development of their embryonic regime, the Qing, which offered a promise of order: the six ministries, the examination system, the formation of the Chinese banners, the large numbers of Chinese advisers in senior positions—all were encouraging signs to Wu. And their treatment of senior Chinese officials who surrendered had been good.

For a combination of these reasons and, according to popular tales, because Li had seized one of Wu's favorite concubines and had made her his own, General Wu Sangui threw in his lot with the Manchus, fought off the army that Li sent against him, and invited Dorgon to join him in recapturing Peking. Li retaliated by executing Wu's father and displaying the head on the walls of Peking. But the morale of Li's troops was fading fast, and not even his formal assumption of imperial rank on June 3, 1644, could shore him up. The next day he and his troops, weighted down by booty, fled to the west. On the sixth of June, the Manchus and Wu entered the capital, and the boy emperor was enthroned in the Forbidden City with the reign title of Shunzhi. The character for Shun (順) was the same term of "obedience" that Li had used for his brief dynasty; the addition of -shi (世), "to rule," showed that the Manchus now formally claimed the mandate of heaven to rule China.

Although the reigning Ming emperor had hanged himself in April, and the Manchu Shunzhi now sat on the throne, this did not mean the Ming cause was dead. Many members of the imperial family had fled the capital at Li's command, and hundreds of princes of various collateral branches of the family were living on their vast estates throughout China. The sanctity of their dynastic name, which had endured since 1368, was not to be lightly dismissed. Wu Sangui, in desperation, might have allied himself with the Manchus; but for hundreds of thousands of Chinese scholars and officials, the Ming name remained worth fighting and dying for.

It was to take the Manchus seventeen years to hunt down the last Ming pretenders, but since they also claimed to have entered Peking as the righteous avengers of the martyred Ming emperor, they also had to hunt down and destroy the leading anti-Ming rebels. Li Zicheng was their first target, as he fled southwest with his army to the Shaanxi city of Xi'an, where his career as a military rebel had commenced some twenty years earlier. After consolidating their hold on Shaanxi* province, the Qing forces, in the spring of 1645, closed in on Li with a skillfully executed pincer movement. Forced out of Xi'an, Li fled with a dwindling number of followers southeast along the Han River to the city of Wuchang, crossed the Yangzi, and was finally cornered by the pursuing Manchus in the mountains on the northern border of Jiangxi province. In the summer of 1645, he died there—either by

*Note the similarity of Shun and Shunzi—highly confusing in English. The Chinese characters for the first syllable are quite different, though both names -sh stands for "west."
suicide, according to one source, or beaten to death by peasants from whom he was trying to steal food, according to another.

While this campaign was under way, the second major rebel leader, Zhang Xianzhong, had moved away from his base in central China and traveled westward up the Yangzi River, through its steep gorges, and into Sichuan province. After briefly seizing the river town of Chongqing, he made his capital in the wealthy and well-protected city of Chengdu. It was there, in December 1644, that he declared the formation of a new “Great Western Kingdom” and bestowed on himself the reign title of “Greatly Obedient ruler, using the same “Shun” ideograph that Li Zicheng and the Manchus had adopted. But Zhang was not destined to rule much longer than Li had done, although he did establish a civilian bureaucracy staffed by scholars (many of whom were coerced into service), held examinations, and minted coinage. Zhang also set up a complex system of 120 armed military camps for the protection of his kingdom, which initially was threatened more by the armies of fleeing Ming princes than by the Manchus.

But in the ensuing years, Zhang seems to have gradually drifted into some bizarre private world of megalomania and cruelty. He laid long-range plans for his armies to conquer not only southern and eastern China, but also Mongolia, Korea, the Philippines, and Annam (the present Vietnam). He inflicted terrible punishments on those he believed were trying to betray him in Sichuan, beheading or maiming thousands of local scholars and their families, and even decimating whole regiments of his own armies. He finally abandoned the city of Chengdu in late 1646, burning much of it to the ground, and conducted a scorched-earth campaign of appalling thoroughness as he marched eastward. In January 1647, he was killed by Manchu troops.

The elimination of Li and Zhang was essential to the long-range success of Manchu conquest plans, but most of the energies of the Manchus had to be spent on suppressing those members of the Ming ruling house who might be able to rally a viable national resistance to the conquest. Considering the strong sense of loyalty that Chinese scholars were taught to feel toward their ruling dynasty, and their natural inclination to protect their ancestral homes and estates from foreign aggressors, a skilful survivor of the Ming ruling house should have been able to assemble millions of supporters. The first man who tried to rally the Ming armies against the Manchus was one of Emperor Wanli’s grandsons, the prince of Fu. As a young man, this prince had been raised on his family’s great estates in Henan province, but his palaces had been burnt and his father killed by Li Zicheng in the early 1640s. Once the news of Emperor Chongzhen’s suicide in Peking was confirmed, a group of senior Ming officials named the prince of Fu as his successor, and he was enthroned as “emperor” in the Yangzi River city of Nanjing. This was symbolically an important choice, since long before, in the fourteenth century, Nanjing had been the Ming capital, and it had remained the secondary capital throughout the whole dynasty. The prince of Fu tried to make a deal with the regent Dorgon, offering the Manchus enormous presents and an annual subsidy if they would return beyond the Great Wall to Liaodong. Dorgon responded by saying he would allow the prince to maintain a small independent kingdom if he abandoned his imperial claims. The prince rejected this offer on the advice of his most patriotic generals.

Over the next few months, when the prince of Fu should have been preparing Nanjing’s defenses, his court was torn by the bitter squabbles, recriminations, and inefficiencies that had so plagued Emperor Wanli, including internecine struggles for power between pro- and anti-eunuch factions that echoed the battles between the Donglin partisans and Wei Zhongxian. While the Ming generals and senior officials bickered, a Manchu army advanced south down the line of China’s great man-made inland waterway, the Grand Canal, and besieged the wealthy commercial city of
Yangzhou in May 1645. The Ming troops, who had carefully prepared batteries of cannon to defend the city walls, held out there for one week. But they were finally defeated by the superior cannon power and the remarkable courage of the Manchus, and the city was sacked for ten terrible days as a warning to the rest of China. The defenders of Nanjing, by contrast, put up almost no resistance, and the city surrendered to the Manchus in early June. The prince of Fu was captured and sent to Peking, where he died the following year.

With the prince of Fu’s death, the situation grew more complicated as new claimants to the throne appeared. Two brothers, who were descendants of the founding Ming emperor, attempted successively to lead resistance against the Manchus on the eastern coast, first in Fuzhou (across from the island of Taiwan) and then in the rich southern trading entrepôt of Canton. The Fuzhou ruler was caught and executed in late 1646; his younger brother was executed in 1647, when Canton fell to the Manchus. Another descendant of the Ming founder led a series of unsuccessful attempts to rally resistance against the Manchus up and down the east coast, basing his court for a time at Amoy (Xiamen), as well as on Chusan (Zhoushan) Island,
Inkstone, late Ming dynasty. The inscription on its side reads: "I give myself to you / To be treated like jade. / To place me among gold and grain would be to insult me."

Inkstick, late Ming dynasty. Composed of molten pine soot and animal glue, this inkstick shows a plum blossom on one side and on the other the title of a poem, "Falling Are the Plums."

Woodblock prints of porcelain production at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, late Ming dynasty. Although the distinctive blue-and-white porcelains they fashioned became valuable export commodities, low wages drove porcelain workers in Jingdezhen to riot in 1601. Top: workers decorating porcelain with painted cobalt designs; bottom: two men dipping the painted porcelain into a bowl of glaze before firing.
A Jurchen warrior, depicted in a woodblock print of the late Ming dynasty. During the late Ming the Jurchens expanded their power in the Liaodong region under the leadership of Nurhaci and his son, Hong Taiji.

The emperor Wanli seated on a royal barge. Wanli's inactivity allowed power to devolve to the court eunuchs.

Woodblock illustration of farmers celebrating a good harvest, late Ming dynasty. The inscription reads in part, "Drinking to a staple. / The old sat dumbs his lunch. / Clap hands and sing at the side."
The Ming defenders of Liaoyang abandon their guns in flight from the attacking Manchus.

The emperor Shunzhi in court dress

Father Johannes Adam Schall von Bell, Shunzhi grew close to the Jesuit missionary Adam Schall, whom the young emperor called "Grandpa" and appointed court astronomer.

An armed Chinese junk, observed near Canton in 1637.
The Peking Observatory  Schall's Jesuit colleague Ferdinand Verbiest refitted the observatory on Peking's eastern wall with a sextant, quadrant, and other astronomical instruments.

A portrait of the emperor Kangxi at his studies  Through his study of the Confucian classics, Kangxi took on the aura of a "sage ruler."
Illustrated example of filial piety, 1688. In this woodblock print a filial son melts the ice on a frozen river with his own body in order to provide his parents with fresh fish in the winter.

A page from the "Gujin suku jicheng," printed in 1726. This immense encyclopedia, set with movable copper type, was compiled by scholars during Kangxi's reign.

"The veins on the fan are still very bright. I'll paint a few leaves and twigs around them." Kong Shangren's The Peach Blossom Fan, a drama set in the Ming court of the prince of Fu, became a palace favorite under Kangxi.

Candidates for scholarly degrees anxiously await their examination results, Ming dynasty. It was critical for Kangxi to inspire scholars to confer on the Qing dynasty the loyalty they had given the Ming.

Bada Shuren's "Birds and Rock," 1692. Bada Shuren and other painters of this period expressed their defiance of the Qing obliquely through their art.
"Emperor Kangxi's Tour of the South" (detail)  Inspection of Water Dikes on the Yangzi

"Kangxi Southern Inspection Tour" (detail), by Wang Hui and assistants, c. 1695  A scroll showing Kangxi about to disembark at Suzhou.
Silk reeling. This detail of a woodblock print from an imperial picture album of the Kangxi period depicts women reeling silk thread after plunging the cocoons into boiling water.

Another leaf of the same album shows peasants giving thanks to the god of grain after a bountiful harvest.

Chinese beggars. Yongzheng sought to emancipate beggar groups, such as those depicted in this early handscroll, from institutionalized discrimination.
and even for a short period on a boat. He abandoned his title in 1653, and thereafter resistance to the Qing on the east coast passed into the hands of supporters of the last Ming claimant, the prince of Gui.

After the failure of the Yangzi valley and coastal regimes, this prince of Gui became the final hope of the Ming imperial cause. The last known surviving grandson of Wanli, the prince was a pampered twenty-one year old when Peking fell, and had no experience in governmental or military affairs. Forced to flee from his ancestral estates in Hunan* when the rebel Zhang Xianzhong attacked the area, he moved southwest to Zhaoqing, west of Canton. Over the objections of his mother, who warned that he was too young and delicate for the role, a group of fugitive officials named him emperor there in late 1646. Forced out of Guangdong province by Qing forces, the prince of Gui and his court spent the next year and a half roaming across Guangxi province, based most often in either Guillin or Nanning (near the border of Annam), as a number of Qing armies pursued him.

Despite the amazing feats of the Qing armies, which had campaigned successfully over the fifteen hundred miles separating Peking from Canton, their conquest of this huge area was inevitably partial, and patriotic Chinese who bitterly resented the Manchu invasion and the Ming humiliation had time to collect their forces. In 1648 a number of former Ming officials who had been collaborating with the Manchus threw off their allegiance to the Qing and declared themselves dedicated to the cause of Ming restoration. The prince of Gui, whose southern court had been described by a contemporary as being filled with “all manner of betel-nut chewsers, brine-well workers, and aborigine whorehouse owners,” suddenly found himself welcomed back to Zhaoqing by numerous and enthusiastic supporters, while the Manchu troops in Canton were massacred. As had earlier fugitive regimes, this “emperor” sought to reassemble a working bureaucracy organized on hierarchical lines, to hold examinations, to set up a viable military command, and to construct some kind of provincial administration that could control the countryside and collect taxes. But his court, like all the others, was torn by factional strife among rival groupings of ministers, generals, and eunuchs, and failed to lead a concerted opposition to the Manchus.

By early 1650 the Qing forces had rallied and suppressed the key central China areas of declared support for the prince of Gui’s regime, and had launched a two-pronged counterattack on his southern base. These thrusts were coordinated by several of the powerful Ming generals who had defected to Hong Taiji back in 1653. In December 1650, the Ming court of the prince of Gui fled from Guangdong province, traveling down the West River into

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*Note also in English the closeness of Hunan and Hunan. In Chinese, He means “river.” He means “lake.” In both names, the syllable two means “south.”
Guangxi. For the next decade, no longer a court in any institutional sense but simply a band of fugitives held together by a shared wish to resist the domination of China by a foreign power, they retreated steadily westward—from Guangxi into Guizhou province, from Guizhou to mountainous Yunnan, and finally across the Chinese border into Burma.

The king of Burma, who initially offered sanctuary to the Ming but changed his mind, massacred most of the prince of Gui’s followers, and thereafter held the “emperor” and his family virtual prisoners. It was General Wu Sangui, once the Ming guardian of the Shanhaiguan passes, who in 1661 spearheaded a final attack by the Qing armies into Burma. The Burmese handed over the sad remnants of the Ming court to Wu, who had them transported back into Chinese territory. There, in Yunnan province early in 1662, the last “emperor” of the Ming and his only son were executed by strangulation. The Qing state needed to fear no more “legitimate” rivals to its rule.

ADAPTING TO CHINA

The Manchus had seized Peking in 1644 with startling ease, and by 1662 had killed the last Ming claimants, but the succession of military victories did not mean that they had solved the problem of how to rule China. Dorgon, as regent for the child emperor Shunzhi, inherited a hybrid system of government, developed in Liaodong, in which a tentative version of China’s six ministries was combined with the military and administrative eight-banner organization of the Manchus. He now had to adapt these institutions to the task of controlling a continent-sized country.

On one issue at least—that of Manchu dress and hairstyle—Dorgon was determined to make the Chinese adapt, rather than the reverse. Only a day after entering Peking, he issued a decree stating that, henceforth, all Chinese men should shave their foreheads and have their hair braided in back in the Manchu-style queue, just as Nurhaci had ordered in Liaodong. A storm of protest led Dorgon to cancel the decree, but the following June another order was issued that Chinese military men must adopt the queue; this was to make it easier for the Manchus to identify their enemies in battle, and assure them that those who had surrendered would remain loyal to them in the future. But senior advisers of Dorgon’s felt that this did not go far enough; in July 1645, Dorgon reissued the order that every Chinese man must shave his forehead and begin to grow the queue within ten days or face execution. The Chinese faced a stark choice: “Keep your hair and lose your head,” as this order was summarized in popular parlance, “or lose your hair and keep your head.”

Ming Chinese men had prized long and elaborately dressed hair as a sign of masculinity and elegance, and they bitterly resented Dorgon’s decree. In many areas the order led them to take up arms against the Manchus even when they had already formally surrendered, but this time Dorgon stayed firm. Further decrees ordered the Chinese to adopt the Manchu style of dress—high collar and tight jacket fastened at the right shoulder—rather than wear the loosely hanging robes of the Ming. In another departure from Chinese custom, Manchu women were forbidden to bind their feet to make them smaller, as Chinese girls and women had been doing for centuries. Despite the pain caused by this practice, the custom had spread from the elite to the peasantry, and tiny feet had become the measure of feminine beauty to the Chinese. Millions of women suffered as a result. In refusing to go along with the custom, the Manchus both asserted their cultural independence and created an effective barrier to the intermarriage of Manchus and Chinese, since Chinese men professed to find the Manchu women’s normal-sized feet sexually unattractive.

At the Peking court, the Manchus cut back on the thousands of eunuchs who had filled the Ming palaces and whose intrigues had been so harmful to the regime. Though eunuchs remained as supervisors in the imperial women’s quarters, other court duties and special financial tasks were assigned to Chinese bondservants who had been captured and enslaved in Liaodong in the 1620s and 1630s. The eunuchs were also deprived of the quasi-military status they had had as palace guards under the Ming; instead, an elite corps of bannermen, many of them descendants of warriors who had helped found the original Jurchen state under Nurhaci, were appointed to special guards divisions to patrol the palaces.

Each of the eight banners was settled in a territorial zone outside the Peking palace walls, so that the emperor and his family lived literally surrounded by their most loyal troops. The Chinese inhabitants of Peking were forcibly relocated to the southern part of the city; although this initially caused much suffering, the southern area swiftly became a thriving commercial and residential quarter. In addition, the Manchus confiscated hundreds of thousands of acres of good farmland in northern China to provide food and rewards for the garrison armies. Much of this land had belonged to members of the Ming imperial family, although estates of wealthy former Ming officials were also confiscated. In all, some forty thousand Manchu bannermen received approximately six acres each, with much larger estates being granted to senior Manchu officers.
In a further attempt to segregate the Chinese from the Manchus, Dorgon ordered the removal of many Chinese farmers in this north China area. Shrewd Chinese landlords, realizing the possibilities of exploiting this period of dynastic transition, seized unclaimed or abandoned land for themselves. The result was widespread chaos and devastation. Thousands of former farmers became vagabonds or bandits, or fled the area altogether. Many Manchus, however, were incapable of farming the land themselves, and they soon made their plots over to Chinese tenants on various types of contracts. Some of these contracts reduced the Chinese to an almost serflike dependency on their masters, and when draft animals were not available, the tenant farmers were forced to drag the plows themselves. Within twenty-five years of the Manchu invasion, about 5 million acres of land in a huge swath some 150 miles in radius around Peking had been taken over by the Manchu. Still, neither a full-fledged feudal system nor any form of slave labor ever grew ensconced, and traditional Chinese patterns of agricultural work, tenancy, and even independent ownership slowly revived.

In most areas of governmental and intellectual organization, the Manchus were content to follow Chinese precedents. The six ministries, which were in charge respectively of civil affairs, finance, rituals, war, justice, and public works, were retained intact, although the leadership of each ministry was placed in the hands of two presidents, one a Manchu and one a Chinese bannerman or a civilian Chinese. A similar multiethnic duchy of four men (two Manchus and two Chinese) held the title of vice-president in each ministry. As liaison between the ministries and the emperor’s immediate circle, the senior positions known as “grand secretaries” were also perpetuated. There were seven grand secretaries serving together in the early years of Shunzhi’s reign: two were Manchu, two were Chinese bannermen, and three were former Ming officials who had recently surrendered.

Accomplished Chinese scholars who offered their loyalty to the Manchus were given staff positions in the various ministries and in the Grand Secretariat. To bring new men into the bureaucracy, the national examinations on the classical literary tradition were re instituted in 1646, when 373 degrees were awarded, mainly to candidates in the Peking area or the bordering provinces of Shanxi and Shandong. To broaden the geographical spread another 298 degrees were given in 1647, mainly to candidates from the reconquered provinces of Jiangsu and Anhui. The choice of senior examiners showed Dorgon’s awareness of Chinese sensibilities: although two were Chinese bannermen and one a scholarly Manchu, the fourth was a classical Chinese scholar and official who had surrendered only in 1644.

The Manchus could consolidate their administration in the provinces only after their armies had destroyed the Ming opposition, but slowly they installed their own officials on a system similar to that of the Ming. They initially subdivided the fifteen main provinces that had existed under the Ming into twenty-two units, but eventually they cut back that number and simply divided in two each of the three largest Ming provinces, so as to make them easier to administer. Each of these eighteen provinces was under a governor, and in the early Qing most of these governors were Chinese bannermen. Dorgon clearly believed these men had proven their loyalty to his regime, and the fact that they were ethnically Chinese and spoke the Chinese language would make them more acceptable to their compatriots across the country. Under each governor were two officials who supervised respectively the economy and the practice of justice in his province, and a number of supervisory censors and inspectors. Then came the prefects, based in the larger cities, who supervised, in their turn, the local county officials—known to Westerners as “magistrates”—who were in charge of day-to-day administration and tax gathering in the towns and countryside.

Manchu power was spread very thinly over China’s vast territory, and though the Qing established military garrisons in most of the key provincial cities, the new dynasty survived basically by maintaining a tenuous balance of power among three components of its state. First were the Manchus themselves, the former Jurchen, who had their own language and their own aristocratic rankings based on earlier Jurchen connections or on descent from Nurhaci. The Manchus tried to maintain their martial superiority through such practices as hunting and mounted archery; and they emphasized their natural cultural distinctness by using the Manchu spoken and written language. Though for practical reasons they had to use Chinese officials use Chinese for administrative documents, all important documents were translated into Manchu. The Manchus also kept to their own private religious practices, which were conducted by shamanic priests and priestesses in temple compounds to which the Chinese were denied access.

Second came the other bannermen, both Mongol and Chinese, most of whom were from families that had surrendered well before the conquest of 1644. With the Mongol bannermen posted mainly on the north and northwestern border regions, it was the Chinese bannermen who played the greater part in ruling China. They had their own elaborate hierarchies, based partly on noble titles granted by Nurhaci or Hong Taiji and partly by the date on which they had surrendered—those who had surrendered earliest often had the highest status. Many of these bannermen spoke both Manchu and Chinese, and had absorbed the martial culture of the former while retaining the social mores of the latter. Their support was invaluable to the Manchus; without these bannermen, there would probably have been no conquest and certainly no consolidation.
Third came the ethnic Chinese—usually known as the "Han" Chinese—raised in China proper. These Chinese essentially had four choices: they could be either active or passive collaborators, or they could choose to be resisters, again either actively or passively. Some of them, like Wu Sangui, were active collaborators with the Manchus (though never enrolled as bannermen); some defied the Manchus as active resisters and died fighting them; some, as we will see, chose passive resistance. But most, seeing the way the wind was blowing, passively collaborated with the new order.

Those from wealthy backgrounds tried to make sure that they could hold onto their ancestral lands and, if successful, proceeded to enroll their sons in the state examinations and to apply for lucrative bureaucratic office under the new regime. But the Manchus had reason to be cautious about the loyalty of this group, as they had learned in 1648 when thousands of surrendered Chinese had risen to defend the Ming cause against the Manchus in the Canton area. Millions more in the rich farmland south of the Yangzi sought to cast off their allegiance when the famous warrior general Zheng Chenggong (often called Koxings by Westerners using a romanized form of his honorific name) launched an attack on the crucial city of Nanjing in the late 1650s. Though their resistance was rapidly suppressed by Qing troops, it had been a dangerous moment. In the south, the Manchus initially made no attempt to establish a strong presence. Instead, once the Ming claimants were dead, they let Wu Sangui and two other Chinese generals who had long before gone over to the Manchus administer the huge territories as virtually independent fiefdoms.

The Manchus were conscious that the Ming dynasty had fallen in part because of factional battles and court intrigues, but they were not immune to the same weaknesses. For instance, both of the nobly born generals who had been pivotal in the suppression of the rebel regimes of Zhang Xianzhong and Li Zicheng were later arrested on trumped-up charges of inefficiency and treachery, and died mysteriously in Manchu prisons in Peking. The regent Dorgon himself behaved extravagantly and outrageously, arrogating to himself nearly imperial powers, seizing control of several banners and ousting their generals, marrying the widow of one of his dead rivals, demanding concubines from Korea, and planning to build a palace fortress in Rehe (Jehol), north of Peking. When Dorgon died in 1650 on a hunting trip, the Manchu nobles fell to fighting over his inheritance, and the Qing regime was in danger of fragmenting.

By clever maneuvering, however, the young emperor Shunzhi, now aged thirteen, was able to consolidate his hold on the throne. Though raised as a Manchu in a Manchu court, Shunzhi seems to have been far more adaptable to Chinese ways than most of the senior Manchus around him. Astute enough to avoid being dominated by the magnates who succeeded Dorgon, and militarily shrewd enough to push the attacks on the last Ming supporters through to a successful conclusion, he also studied the Chinese language carefully, became a lover of Chinese novels and plays, and was deeply influenced by a number of devout Buddhist monks with whom he studied at court. For the last year of his life, Shunzhi grew passionately enamoured of one of his junior consorts and completely neglected the reigning empress. At the same time he returned considerable power to the palace eunuchs and revived several eunuch bureaus that had been disbanded at the time of the Qing conquest. The reasons for this are not clear, but possibly Shunzhi wanted to make the inner court more privately his own, without Manchu bodyguards and bondservants to report his movements back to the nobles of his entourage.

In another unusual development, Shunzhi became close friends with a Catholic Jesuit missionary, Father Johann Adam Schall von Bell. Jesuits from Europe had been actively preaching and seeking converts in China since the late Ming. Some Jesuits had been captured by Zhang Xianzhong and marched with his armies in Sichuan; others had accompanied the fleeing troops of the southern Ming pretenders. Schall von Bell was one of a small group that had been in Peking in 1644 and had decided to risk staying there. Because he had a high level of scientific skill, Dorgon appointed him to direct the Imperial Bureau of Astronomy. Since the imperial court was expected to determine the calendar for the entire country, it would greatly reinforce Shunzhi's claim to be Son of Heaven if the calculations were as precise as possible. Schall von Bell's favored status may also have been another way for Emperor Shunzhi to express his independence, or even to rediscover the father that he had lost so young. For Shunzhi called the sixty-year-old Schall von Bell "Grandpa" (mafa), summoned him regularly for conferences on religion and politics, and even allowed him to build a church in Peking.

Shunzhi died suddenly in 1661, probably from smallpox, not long after his beloved consort. But far from mourning his passing, the four senior Manchus who took over as regents for Shunzhi's young son almost immediately vilified his memory. Claiming that they had Shunzhi's last will and testament in their possession, they publicized this document to the country at large. According to the regents, Shunzhi blamed himself for betraying the military norms of his Manchu ancestors, for favoring the eunuchs, and for valuing Chinese advisers more than Manchus. "One reason that the Ming lost the empire," said the document, "was that they made the error of relying on eunuchs. I was clearly aware of their corruption, but I was unable to heed this warning... I have caused the Manchu statement to
have no desire to serve and their zeal has been dissipated.19

The four regents—among whom Ohoi, a veteran general, rapidly became the most powerful—moved decisively to change the policies of Shunzhi. They executed the leading eunuch and abolished the eunuch offices, establishing in their place an effective imperial-household system supervised by Manchus. They insisted on much tougher tax-collection policies throughout the Chinese countryside. In one famous case in Jiangsu, they ordered the investigation of over 13,000 wealthy Chinese declared delinquent in their tax payments; at least 18 were publicly executed and thousands more deprived of their scholarly degrees.

In other developments, Schall von Bell was arrested and thrown into prison, Manchus were promoted to high positions, and senior Chinese scholars were humiliated. In an attempt to starve out the last anti-Manchu rebels on the island of Taiwan by depriving them of all support from allies living along China’s eastern coast, the regents rammed through a savage policy of moving the Chinese coastal population twenty miles inland, despite all the suffering such an order caused. In Fujian province, for example, 8,900 farmers and fishermen were reported to have died between 1661 and 1663 as a direct result of this order. By the end of the 1660s, it looked as though the policy of peaceful adaptation to China that in various ways had been developed by Nurhaci, Hong Taiji, Dorgon, and Shunzhi was about to be abandoned in the name of a new Manchu nativism.

Class and Resistance

During these early years of Qing dynasty consolidation, there were numerous occasions when different economic and social groups seem to have been pitted against each other. We noted briefly how Li Zicheng spoke of a new era of peace and prosperity for the Chinese, and how both he and Zhang Xianzhong, hating the scholars and officials, had many of them killed. In other parts of China, the news of the Ming emperor’s suicide in 1644 had been enough to trigger actions that point to deep and underlying levels of hostility: peasants killed their landlords, for example, and sacked or burned the homes of the wealthy; townspeople turned on the officials within their walls or fought openly with peasant armies in the countryside. The inden-
tured servants in some great households rioted in groups, killing their masters, looting their property, terrorizing the local communities. Poor soldiers mutinied. Fishermen joined pirate groups and raided up and down the coast. Scattered squads of peasant irregulars fought on long after leaders like Li Zicheng had been killed, continuing to cause panic and trouble throughout Shunzhi’s reign. Women emerged as military leaders and won brief moments of fame. Junior officials turned on their seniors, and insisted on policies of resistance that led to the sack of the towns they defended.

But the idea of class warfare presumes a level of economic cohesion and self-consciousness concerning one’s role in society that seems to have been lacking in China at the time. For each occasion on which one can find social tension, one can point to others in which the lines were crossed. Li Zicheng had several successful scholars from wealthy backgrounds on the staff of his Shunzhi regime. Rich landowners fighting off peasant rebels might be protected by peasant militias. Scholars escaping to the hills used local villagers to develop defensive networks against the advancing Manchus. Fleeting Ming princes were aided by the dispossessed and the poor in the mountainous coastal terrain of the east. Townsmen defended their magistrates. On some of the Ming estates they seized, the Manchus gave the land to the poor tenants who had worked it, offering them hope for economic advancement that they had never dreamed of before.

As we have seen, class lines in seventeenth-century China are difficult to unravel. They blurred and crossed in ways that are confusing to those of us whose historical sense of “class” may come largely from the study of the transition from feudalism to capitalism by means of an urban bourgeoisie who gradually won power—through force and representative institutions—from a reluctant nobility.

In Ming and Qing China, there was almost no aristocracy as such. The descendants of the ruling families of even the greatest dynasties did not retain their titles and prestige once their dynasties had fallen. Thus during the life of the dynasty the descendants of the Ming founder, as well as all other male children of the successive Ming emperors, had enjoyed honorific titles and lives of leisure on great estates—the prince of Pu and the prince of Gui were two such men—but they had not coexisted with aristocratic survivors of the previous Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). Similarly, after 1644, the former Ming aristocracy was not preserved. The Manchus had their own aristocracy of a kind, formed from the descendants of Nurhaci and other famous warriors, and from the powerful Chinese generals who had submitted early to the rising Qing state. But the Manchu’s ingenious policy held that, within a system of nine aristocratic ranks, a given family dropped one rung on the ladder with each noble incumbent’s death: thus, a title of the third rank would be inherited as a fourth-rank title and then drop to the fifth. Ultimately—unless the emperor repromoted a member for conspicuous merit—the once-noble family would re-enter the ranks of the commoners.

Yet there was certainly an “upper class” in China—even if this class
cannot be defined in terms of aristocratic connections, nor in terms of precise economic status—and the Manchus chose to perpetuate the system that they encountered when they conquered the country. Upper-class status came from an amalgam of four factors: wealth, lineage, education, and bureaucratic position. The type of wealth most valued continued to be agricultural land, but the Qing upper class might also possess large amounts of silver ingots (which served as China’s official means of exchange), large libraries of classical works, collections of paintings, jade, porcelain, bolts of silk, large homes, holdings in urban real estate, or interests in commercial ventures ranging from pawnshops to pharmacies.

Lineage systems—sometimes called class or common-descent groups—bound extended families together in a network of mutual support. A certain amount of wealth might be pooled and transmitted to later generations in the form of lineage land, the income from which would pay for the upkeep of ancestral temples and graveyards, and for teachers who served as instructors in lineage schools. Marriages between the children of powerful lineages were carefully negotiated by the parents, and the survival of large numbers of meticulous genealogies shows how seriously the whole system was perpetuated and supervised.

The dominant role of education in Qing China was the result of the power and prestige attached to holding office in the bureaucracy, entrance into which was governed almost entirely through competitive examinations run by the state. In normal times few people rose to high office via a military career, and fewer still just because their families had money or imperial connections. Qing rulers perpetuated the Ming curriculum for the examinations. It was a difficult one, based on memorization and analysis of a group of prescribed texts attributed to the sage Confucius, or to some of his early followers, and a small number of approved commentaries on those texts. The texts were written in classical Chinese, which was different grammatically and structurally from the everyday spoken language. Hence if a family had the money to send their sons to a good teacher who had himself passed the higher examinations with distinction, or if they ran a lineage school and hired their own private teachers of similar status, then obviously their children had a better chance of passing the examinations and entering high office. Even if they did not get official posts, passing the examinations brought them exemption from corvée labor dues and from corporal punishment in the courts.

Finally, even though it might be risky to hold bureaucratic office in a faction-torn court, or in a countryside threatened by bandits or civil war, it was still possible in a few years of officeholding to make enough money from salary, perquisites, special fees, and perhaps outright graft to repay all the costs one had incurred in obtaining the position, and retain a hefty surplus to invest in more land and in educating one’s own children. Furthermore, the mere fact of prior membership in the bureaucracy was enough to bring a measure of protection from other local officials whom one could meet as social equals after retiring and returning home to enjoy the fruits of one’s labors.

Since this upper class drew much of its wealth from land, there was always a chance for friction with tenants on that land. As Ming officials had discovered, if rents grew too high, tenants might practice rent strikes or even take up arms against their landlords. If evicted, they might turn to banditry or other forms of social violence. But there was no simple landlord-tenant warfare in seventeenth-century China, since there were so many different strata of people working the land. Thus whenever the “peasants” took up arms against the “gentry” in the 1640s, the reasons have to be sought in precise gradations of local economic and personal relationships. The rage of Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong and their followers against the privileged came from a diffuse sense of frustration and a desire to share in the good life, rather than from a landlord/tenant antagonism.

And yet there were some broad shifts in social and economic relationships during these transitional years. The Oboi regents might employ intimidation or force to coerce the local gentry of Jiangsu into paying their taxes on time, but the Manchus conspicuously failed in their attempt to have an efficient, up-to-date survey made of the landholdings of the wealthy Chinese, a survey that alone might have enabled the Manchus to institute an equitable land-tax system. The task was a vast one, and the paradox was that it depended on local Chinese, knowledgeable about local conditions, to carry it out. By means of endless delaying tactics, evasions, and complaints of the cost involved, the landlords prevented an adequate survey from being made. The failure to reform the land-tax system left those families who had been able to accumulate large landholdings during the era of turbulence in the position of acquiring yet larger holdings in the years that followed.

Some modern Chinese historians have argued that there was essentially an alliance between the Manchu conquerors and the Chinese upper class that led to the perpetuation of a set of “feudal relationships” in the countryside, and that squashed latent “sprouts of capitalism” that had been developing in the cities. This is hard to prove. Although Manchu policies did allow some families to grow far richer, many Chinese gentry reformers—often intellectually linked to those earlier Donglin reformers of the late Ming—protested these policies and sought to gain fairer tax systems in the areas where they held office, even at the expense of their own class. The initial failure of these gentry reformers can be traced to the fact that the
post-1644 Peking bureaucracy was no longer staffed by their friends, many of whom had died in 1645. But later, in the eighteenth century, some of their recommendations were implemented, even if the reformers were not given the credit.

Especially in the area of Jiangsu, the lower Yangzi River province which was China’s richest and where educated scholar-officials were concentrated in great numbers, opposition to the Manchus was mainly ideological. In this region, the leaders of that opposition were sometimes able to rally the local peasantry and townpeople behind them. With charismatic upper-class leadership, in other words, class divisions could be bridged in the name of ethnic solidarity. The Manchu haircutting order was a catalyst, in many cases, but beyond that there was a pervasive sense among some scholars that loyalty was due the Ming whatever the cost: an ethos of service and duty to the dynastic ideal had developed that transcended the shortcomings of any dynastic incumbent and united, even if fleetingly, the rich and the poor. It was this type of alliance that the Manchus had to banish forever if they were to feel completely secure in their conquest; yet it was precisely this type of alliance that the Manchus seemed once again to encourage by their tough anti-Chinese policies of the 1660s.

CHAPTER 3
Kangxi’s Consolidation

THE WAR OF THE THREE FEUDATORIES, 1673–1681

Qing emperors had to grow up fast if they were to grow up at all. Shunzhi had been thirteen when, taking advantage of Dorgon’s sudden death, he put himself in power. Shunzhi’s son, Kangxi, was also thirteen when he first moved to oust the regent Oboi; and he was fifteen when, with the help of his grandmother and a group of Manchu guard officers, he managed to arrange for Oboi’s arrest in 1669 on charges of arrogance and dishonesty. Oboi soon died in prison, and Kangxi began a reign that was to last until 1722 and to make him one of the most admired rulers in China’s history.

The most important of the many problems facing the young ruler was that of unifying China under Manchu control. Although in 1662 Wu Sangui had eliminated the last Ming pretender in the southwest, the region had not been fully integrated into Peking’s administrative structure. The enormous distances, the mountainous semitropical country that made cavalry campaigning difficult, the presence of hundreds of non-Chinese border tribes who fought tenaciously for their own terrain, the shortage of administrators of proven loyalty—all these made both Shunzhi and Oboi unwilling to commit further Manchu forces to the area. Instead, the whole of south and southwest China was left under the control of the three Chinese generals who had directed most of the fighting there in the late 1650s.

Two of these men, Shang Kexi and Geng Jinmao, were Chinese bannermen of distinction who had surrendered to the Manchus in 1633 and thereafter been essential allies in the conquest; both had repeatedly proven their
loyalty to the Qing, especially in 1650 when they had recaptured Canton from the Ming supporters and massacred the city’s defenders. The third was Wu Sangui himself. These three were named as princes by the Manchu court and honored by having their sons married to the daughters of Manchu nobles; each of the three was granted what amounted to an almost independent domain, and in Western histories Shang, Geng, and Wu are named the “Three Feudatories.” Wu controlled the provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou as well as sections of Hunan and Sichuan; Shang ruled Guangdong and parts of Guangxi from his base in Canton; and Geng controlled Fujian from the coastal city of Fuzhou.

Together they were virtual masters over a region equivalent in size to France and Spain combined, or to America’s southern states from the Georgia coast to Texas. Within these areas, despite the nominal presence of Qing bureaucrats, the Three Feudatories supervised all aspects of military and civil government, the examination systems, relations with the indigenous peoples, and the collection of taxes. Not only did they keep the local revenues for themselves and control lucrative trade monopolies, they also constantly demanded lavish subsidies from the Qing court as the price of their continued loyalty. By the 1660s, they were receiving more than 10 million ounces of silver every year.

It soon became apparent that they also considered their feudatories hereditary. When Shang Kexi fell ill in 1671, he passed the supervision of military affairs in Guangdong over to his son, Shang Zhixin. That same year Geng Jinmao died, and his son, Geng Jingzhong, took over Fujian province. Although the records are fragmentary, it is clear that Emperor Kangxi began discussing what to do about the Three Feudatories early in his reign and that his advisers, both Chinese and Manchu, were torn about how to proceed. Unlike many of his more cautious advisers, Kangxi was bold enough to recommend confrontation if it became necessary for the long-run strength of the country. Thus when Shang Kexi, who was indeed old and ill, inquired in 1673 if he might be allowed to retire back to Manchuria, Kangxi leaped at the chance and graciously gave his permission. He responded with equal enthusiasm when Wu Sangui and Geng Jingzhong made similar requests as feelers. These requests were intended to test Kangxi’s general feelings about the continued existence of the feudatories; after his answer, it was obvious that an open break was coming.

Despite an attempt by some of Kangxi’s most trusted confidants to persuade Wu Sangui to leave his base peacefully, Wu threw off his allegiance to the Qing in December 1673, declaring the formation of a new dynasty, the Zhou, and march his armies deep into Hunan. Geng Jingzhong rebelled in 1674, and his armies consolidated their hold in Fujian and moved into Zhejiang province. Shang Zhixin imprisoned his father (who stayed steadfast in his loyalty to the Qing) and joined the rebellion in 1676, consolidating Guangdong and sending troops northward to Jiangxi.

This War of the Three Feudatories confronted the Chinese in the south and southwest with an agonizing test of loyalties. Those who had survived the years of fighting in the 1640s and 1650s and had made their peace with the Qing now had to decide whether to remain true to that allegiance, or to pin their hopes on Wu’s Zhou dynasty. Wu played on their sense of Chinese loyalty by ordering the restoration of Ming customs and the cutting of queues. He also left open the question of who the first emperor of the Zhou should be, implying that if a survivor of the Ming ruling house could be found, that man would be enthroned. Furthermore, the name “Zhou” itself evoked one of China’s most revered earlier dynasties, which had ruled over northern China in the first millennium B.C. and was celebrated in several of the basic Confucian texts. Wu offered Emperor Kangxi an amnesty if he would only leave Chinese soil altogether and found a new kingdom in Manchuria and Korea. Predictably, Kangxi refused, and to underscore his anger he executed Wu’s son, who was being held hostage in Peking.

With their huge standing armies and sound administrative and economic
base, Wu and his supporters had a better chance of success than the Ming loyalist princes of Fu and Gui before them. Furthermore, throughout the south and west, the Chinese loyal to the Qing were surrounded and outnumbered; although there is evidence that many tried to resist service to the rulers of the Three Feudatories—some by fleeing to the mountains, others by feigning illness or even by mutilating themselves—most felt they had no choice but to submit. The result was that the rebellion almost succeeded in destroying the Qing. At the very least, it looked as if the Manchus would lose control of all of China south of the Yangzi River, and that permanent partition of the kingdom would be the result.

China remained a unified country (with all the significance that has for later world history) as the result of five crucial factors. One was Wu Sangui’s indefatigability in not driving across the Hunan border and up to the north when he first held the initiative in 1674. A second was Kangxi’s ability, despite his youth, to rally his court behind him and to develop a long-range strategy for conquest and reenforcement. A third was the courage and tenacity of a number of Manchu generals—some also young and untried in battle—who spearheaded the Qing counterattacks. (Kangxi did not campaign in person.) A fourth was the inability of the Three Feudatories to coordinate their endeavors and to mount a sustained campaign against the Qing on any one front. A fifth was their inability to appeal to the most loyal of the Ming supporters, who were fully aware that the Three Feudatories had previously been active collaborators with the Manchus.

Nor were the Three Feudatories well suited for their new roles as restorationists. Wu Sangui grew ever more absorbed by luxurious living and the trappings of grandeur, while Shang Zhixin exhibited much of the crazed cruelty of the earlier rebel Zhang Xianzhong, going so far as to have his personal enemies torn apart by drowning dogs. Geng Jingzhong seems to have been incompetent and ineffective, and it was he who ruined any chance of concerted action when he surrendered independently to the Qing in 1676. Shang Zhixin did the same the following year, apparently because Wu Sangui insisted on making appointments of officials to posts in Guangdong province, which Shang considered his own preserve.

Wu finally declared himself emperor of the new Zhou dynasty in 1678, but the gesture came too late to be meaningful. Wu died of dysentery later that same year, ending a stormy sixty-six years of life. His grandson fought on in his name for three more years, but committed suicide in the Yunnan capital of Kunming when a number of Manchu generals trapped him there. Wu’s followers were executed, as were Geng and Shang, despite the fact that Emperor Kangxi had accepted their surrenders and restored their princely titles to them. The emperor could not afford to leave such men around.

At the war’s end, in 1681, the advisers who had urged the “hard” line against the Three Feudatories became Kangxi’s close advisors; although he and they had nearly lost the kingdom, their final victory meant that China would henceforth be stronger. Kangxi was ruthless to those in senior positions who had supported the rebels, but ordered more compassionate treatment to those who had been caught up in the fighting through no fault of their own. As he put it, they had just shown “a natural desire to hang on to life and avoid being killed. If my armies arrive and execute them all, this contradicts my desire to save the people, and denies them any chance to reform.” The emperor showed similar sympathy for women and children trapped in the fighting with the “bandits” (as he usually called the rebels): “The women in the bandits’ camps were often initially taken there by force—so after the bandits themselves have been destroyed, let the other local people have a chance to identify and reclaim the refugees and their children—don’t just arrest everyone indiscriminately.”

With the leaders dead, all traces of the feudatories were abolished. New governors-general and governors—mostly Chinese bannermen—were appointed to the rebellious provinces to integrate them firmly into Kangxi’s realm. Revenues once again began to flow from these areas to Peking, and with the revenues came a resumption of the examination system in the south and southwest, and the beginning of a trickle of successful candidates. But life had been too seriously disrupted to be speedily repaired. Hunan, Guangxi, Yunnan, and Guizhou all remained peripheral to the main life of China for the rest of Kangxi’s reign, and distrust still ran deep. Few men from those provinces were given higher degrees, and even fewer were appointed to high office. Kangxi himself, although a great traveler, never ventured more than a few miles south of the Yangzi. It was the now-prosperous Yangzi delta towns of Nanjing and Suzhou that he referred to as “the South,” with the implication that the more truly southern and western provinces remained somehow beyond his range. Throughout his life he reminisced about how shaken the war had left him, and how bitterly he regretted the loss of life that had followed his decision to let the heads of the Three Feudatories “retire.” But he never regretted the decision itself.

**T A I W A N AND M A R I T I M E C H I N A**

The integration of Taiwan into China’s history dates from the early seventeenth century. In the later years of the Ming dynasty, Taiwan was still largely unknown: dangerous seas, typhoons, and sand shoals protected its coasts; flat, malarial plains along the west, backed by inhospitable mountain
Koxinga’s fleets fought the Manchus along China’s east coast all through the 1650s, and under his control Amoy became an international entrepôt. Koxinga even organized ten trading companies that dealt in silks and other luxury goods, as well as sugar, in exchange for the naval supplies and gunpowder he needed to keep his fleet in fighting shape. It was not until he tried a decisive frontal assault on Nanjing in 1659 that he was seriously defeated. As the Qing armies closed in on his main Amoy base, Koxinga made the bold decision to attack the Dutch fortress of Zeelandia. Probably aided by a former Chinese interpreter who had worked for the Dutch and knew the details of Zeelandia’s defensive system, Koxinga pressed the siege; but although he conquered the surrounding countryside easily enough, killing the Dutchmen there and enslaving their women, the Dutch defenders of the fort held out for an astonishing nine months. Only in February 1662 did they surrender, under an agreement that allowed them to retire to Batavia in the Dutch East Indies, leaving Koxinga trade goods and cash estimated to be worth over 1 million ounces of silver.

Koxinga did not enjoy his success for long. The news that his father and brothers had been executed in Peking because of his insubordination (his Jap-

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The Ming gave him their imperial surname, a title pronounced in Fujian dialect as "Kuk-sing-iu," transformed by Westerners into the word Koxinga.
ance mother had been killed long before by Qing troops) perhaps exacerbated his already unstable mental condition. He began to follow a destructive pattern of abusing his subordinates and directing passionate rages against his own children, and died later in 1662.

Despite the savage efficiency of their policy of removing the Chinese coastal population, initiated in 1661, the Oboi regents failed to bring Taiwan into submission. They did form a brief alliance with the Dutch to smoke out the last Zheng-familyholdouts on the Fujian coast, but two expeditions against Taiwan planned in 1664 and 1665 both fizzled out. The Manchus, after all, were inexperienced at naval warfare and, after 1673, were largely preoccupied with the civil war of the Three Feudatories. This allowed the Zhengs in Taiwan to continue developing a prosperous trade and commercial empire: first Koxinga's sons and then his grandson supervised a Chinese population that swelled through emigration and flight from the mainland to over 100,000, produced large quantities of rice and sugar-cane, and conducted considerable business in salt, refined sugar, and shipbuilding.

Even after the war of the Three Feudatories was over, Kangxi still found it hard to assemble the necessary forces to capture the island from the Zheng family. The emperor's final strategy was to appoint one of Koxinga's father's former admirals, Shi Lang—who had surrendered long before in the 1650s—to be the senior admiral of an expeditionary force. The choice was an excellent one, for not only was Shi Lang a fine commander, but his father, brother, and son had all been vengefully killed by Koxinga when Shi joined the Manchus; he could be counted on to push the battle to its limits.

Shi Lang planned methodically for his campaign, and the scale of his fleet—three hundred war vessels—reminds us of how strong a potential sea power China was, even though its naval resources were not usually exploited. Leading his fleet from Fujian province in early July 1683, Admiral Shi won a crushing victory in the Pescadores over the last Zheng forces.

Taiwan surrendered three months later, and Kangxi, perhaps wearied by the bloodbaths of the earlier civil-war period, treated the fallen Zheng family and their leading officers graciously, ennobling some and allowing them to settle in Peking. Most of Koxinga's troops were moved from Taiwan and used to strengthen the garrisons against the Russians in northern China. There were heated debates at the Qing court about what should be done with the island. Some courtiers suggested that it be abandoned altogether, whereas Admiral Shi urged that it be made a fortified base to protect China from the "strong, huge and invincible" warships of the Dutch. Kangxi decided to incorporate Taiwan firmly into his empire. It became a prefecture of Fujian province, with a capital at Tainan, and was divided into three counties, each under a civilian magistrate. At the same time, Kangxi ordered that a strong Qing garrison of 8,000 troops be left permanently on the island, and that the tribal lands and hunting grounds of the aboriginal inhabitants be respected. Further Chinese emigration to Taiwan was to be carefully limited.

By these rather conflicting responses, Kangxi was reflecting the ambivalence that the Qing state (like the Ming before it) felt about overseas trade and colonization. There was a basic distrust of trade among China's leaders, who saw it as conducive to unrest and disorder. They feared it would lead to the dissemination of secret information about China's defenses to foreign powers, cause a drain of precious silver from the country, and encourage piracy and other forms of crime. Accordingly, even though the coastal-evacuation policy was abandoned after the fall of the Zheng family, Qing officials continued to control contact with Taiwan through licensing rules and limits on ship size, enforced by government agents in Amoy and other coastal cities.

But this policy was unrealistic in the vigorous entrepreneurial world of east-coast China. Its main result was to allow huge profits to flow into the hands of the senior east-coast bureaucrats who were in a position to control the maritime and coastal trade. A Chinese bond servant, Wu Xingzuo, who had risen through the bureaucratic ranks in Fujian because of his father's contacts, in the early 1680s allegedly paid bribes well in excess of 10,000 ounces of silver in order to win the post of governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, which would allow him to supervise most of the trade out of Canton city. In a massive relocation of the population back to the coastal regions, Wu Xingzuo, with the aid of special commissioners appointed to the task, reassigned almost half a million acres of land to more than 30,000 people. His colleagues in Fujian reappropriated more than half a million acres to over 40,000 former locals. Governor-General Wu also supervised the seizure of holdings from the defeated feudal Shang Zhixin's client-merchant in Canton: the fortune accumulated by this one merchant was apparently in excess of 400,000 ounces of silver.

The potential returns of careful state-run taxation of legitimate foreign trade were clearly vast and had been effectively exploited by some rulers in earlier dynasties. But beyond setting up four maritime customs offices (one each in Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu) and trying to enforce an across-the-board tariff of 20 percent on foreign imports, the Qing state failed to develop the necessary mechanisms, preferring instead to work through systems of kickbacks or purchased monopolies. With the arrival of more powerful Western traders in the eighteenth century, this decision was to be a fateful one.
Similarly, by forbidding emigration to Taiwan but failing to enforce the order adequately, the Qing ensured Taiwan’s development as an unruly dependency, a kind of rough-and-tumble frontier society, only peripherally bound to the administrative structure of the Qing state. Records from the Kangxi reign give a few glimpses of the men who developed the island: a group of immigrant brothers from Fujian who rented land cheap from local aborigines and improved it spectacularly by applying Chinese irrigation procedures; a relative of Admiral Shi who settled in north Taiwan and spent his own money to open up virgin land there, using the labor of vagrants from the more crowded south; and a young Chinese from Guangdong who married an aborigine chief’s daughter and became his father-in-law’s interpreter, profiting thereafter from renting tribal lands to other Chinese immigrants. These were not exactly exemplars of conventional Chinese behavior, but they helped make an important addition to China’s traditional empire.

**Wooing the Intellectuals**

The protracted resistance of the Ming claimants, the support given to Kangxi and his descendants, the swift spread and near-success of the Three Feudatories: all these pointed to a lack of support for the Qing among the Chinese. From the beginning of his reign, Emperor Kangxi addressed himself to this problem by trying to strike a balance in which he reassured the Manchu nobles as to his martial vigor and political firmness on the one hand, and tried to convince the Chinese of his respect for their traditional culture on the other.

Appealing to the Manchus turned out to be comparatively simple. Kangxi was a strong young man whose survival of a childhood bout of smallpox was a factor that led to his being chosen as Shunzhi’s heir. He early developed a passion for hunting and for archery, and his skill at riding meant he could go on long excursions into the ancestral homelands of Manchuria. The elite guards-officers and Manchu nobles who accompanied him on these journeys were bonded in loyalty to their ruler; and though there were serious differences of opinion over national policy, they stood behind him in all his early crises. His grandmother, Hong Taiji’s widow, who doted on him, was also a powerful political figure through her family connections, and the family of Kangxi’s successive empresses and consorts (he had first been married, at eleven, to the granddaughters of one of the regents opposed to Oboi) gave him valuable contacts. He was meticulous, too, in carrying out ceremonies at the Manchu shamanic temples in Peking, in promoting Manchus to high office along with the Chinese, and in holding back eunuch power by placing the imperial-household organization in the hands of Manchu nobles and by using Chinese bondservants rather than eunuchs for many menial palace functions.

Appealing to the Chinese was more complex. The Manchus claimed that they had entered China in 1644 to avenge the Ming emperor Chongzhen, but numerous Chinese did not accept this. Even if they did, the ties of loyalty to one’s ruler were so strong that many Chinese committed suicide when they heard of Chongzhen’s death; many took up arms, though certain that resistance would ultimately prove fatal; and many more simply removed their talents from the Qing state, refusing to serve the government in any form.

This refusal to serve was rationalized on grounds of Confucian principle, and it was on these grounds that Kangxi chose to meet the opposition. The teachings of Confucius had an undisputed place in Chinese society, although by the mid-seventeenth century there was considerable difference of opinion about what those teachings were. In essence, during the fifth century B.C., Confucius had been the spokesman in China for the values of morality and dignity in private life and in government. He had argued for the importance of righteousness and loyalty, reinforced by correct rituals that would place a given individual in proper relationship with the cosmos and with his contemporaries. He had stated that worthy men should not serve unworthy rulers and must be ready to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, in the defense of principle. He argued further that humans should concentrate on the problems of this world and, while paying proper respect to the memory of their own deceased ancestors, should not seek to understand the forces of heaven and the realm of the spirits.

A collection of dialogues that Confucius held with statesmen and students, known as the Analects, portrayed him as a shrewd and vigorous man, constantly testing himself and those around him for flaws of character while never losing faith in the possibilities of virtuous action. His belief in the powers of moral example and in the central importance of education was absolute. Confucius held that humans did gain in wisdom as they grew older, and charted the steps for this development of self-knowledge. Some centuries after Confucius’s death, five of the works he was believed to have edited were hunched together as the “Five Classics” of the Confucian canon. One of these works was on rituals, two were on history, one on poetry, and one—the Book of Changes or Yiying (I-ching)—on cosmology and divination. Subsequently, in the twelfth century A.D., the Analects, along with the sayings of Confucius’s later follower Mencius and two selections from the ritual classic that dealt with human nature and moral development, were
similarly grouped together as the "Four Books." Cumulatively, these nine works were believed to contain the basic precepts needed for leading a moral life, and to offer a valid record of an earlier utopian period of Chinese history that had reached its apogee of enlightened government and popular contentment during the early Zhou dynasty, some fifteen hundred years in the past.

Over the ensuing centuries this body of material was swollen by floods of commentaries, glosses, and reinterpretations, and modified in subtle ways by elements drawn from the Buddhist faith—which flourished in China after the fifth century A.D.—and from other traditions within Chinese philosophy. At the same time, this diversity of "Confucian" material was turned into "doctrine," and the Four Books and Five Classics became the basis for the state examinations that led to government service. Confucianism was now construed in a hierarchical way and used to support the absolute rights of parents over their children, of husbands over their wives, and of rulers over their subjects. (The domination of the examination system by Confucianism and the restriction of the bureaucracy to males meant that women still generally received little or no education.) The prevailing school of Confucianism in the Qing was one that emphasized the force of principle or reason (li) in the world but placed it outside and above life energy (qi), leading to a dualistic interpretation of human nature and of the whole metaphysical structure of the Chinese world.

From the moment he imprisoned the regent Oboi, Kangxi showed the utmost respect for this complex legacy. In 1670 he issued to the nation a series of sixteen maxims that were designed to be a summation of Confucian moral values. Known as the "Sacred Edict," these maxims emphasized hierarchical submission in social relations, generosity, obedience, thrift, and hard work. Kangxi subsequently named a team of Manchu and Chinese tutors, with whom he read meticulously through the Four Books and then the Five Classics. In the official court diaries, one can chart his progress from chapter to chapter and watch him debate knotty points with his teachers. Judiciously "leaked" to the court, the news of these studies, along with Kangxi's intensive work on Chinese calligraphy, gave the young monarch the aura of a "sage ruler." At the same time, popular versions of the Sacred Edict, prepared in a homely, colloquial style by Manchu and Chinese scholars, ensured the wide dissemination of Kangxi's ethical views to the people as a whole.

One of the great powers of the Chinese state lay in its control of the examination system. Shunzhi had revived this system, and Kangxi continued to hold the exams every three years—even during the civil-war period. But he was vexed at the number of accomplished scholars who refused even to sit for the examinations on the grounds that to do so would be to betray the memory of the Ming dynasty under which they had grown up. As an ingenious solution to this predicament, Kangxi, in 1679, ordered that nominations be sent from the provinces for a special examination—separate from the triennial national exams—to be held for men of outstanding talent. Although some austere scholars still refused to come to Peking for this exam, and others would not permit themselves to be nominated, the venture was a success. Fifty special degrees were awarded, mostly to scholars from the Yangzi delta provinces; and, in a tactful gesture to their past loyalties, these scholars were put to work helping compile the official history of the defunct Ming dynasty.

Despite these gestures, many Chinese retained an ambivalent attitude toward the new dynasty. Some scholars privately accumulated materials on the Ming so they could write their own histories away from government supervision. The heroic, though futile, resistance to the Manchu of cities such as Yangzhou and Jiangyin were written up and preserved for posterity. Some philosophers who had taken part in the defense of their native regions retreated from political life and wrote careful accounts of the morbid and reformist scholars who had been members of the Donglin and similar societies in the late Ming.

Three scholars stand out both for their actions and their writings in this period. One was the Hunanese Wang Fuzhi, who spent years with the fugitive court of the prince of Gui in the southwest before returning home in 1650. He devoted much effort thereafter to attacking the individualistic philosophy of the followers of the mid-Ming scholar Wang Yangming, claiming that their insistence on finding the source of morality within the individual conscience had wrecked the moral fiber of the time. Wang Fuzhi also wrote a history of the prince of Gui's court as well as critical appraisals of former "barbarian" regimes, which would have led to his execution had the Manchus discovered them.

The second scholar, Huang Zongxi, a Zhejiang native whose father had been killed in 1626 on the orders of the eunuch Wei Zhongxian, was a passionate partisan of the Donglin and other reformers. Huang Zongxi fought for years alongside the Ming claimants on the east coast and built barricades in the mountains to slow the advance of Manchu troops. Finally, after 1649, he retired to a life of scholarship. Not only did he write careful historical biographies of major Ming figures, he also tried to analyze the structure of government itself. Huang suggested that an alternative to the overcentralization of the present lay in an earlier ideal Chinese society that had been governed by the moral force of scholars working as administrators in their own communities. Whereas most other Chinese political thinkers
tended to ponder ways of reforming the behavior of the eunuchs and officials who stood between the emperor and the people, Huang believed that the emperors themselves should have less power.

Most famous of the three scholars was Gu Yanwu, born in 1613 in Jiangsu and raised by his widowed foster mother, a remarkable woman of great moral rectitude who was determined that Gu follow correct Confucian ethical precepts. In the late Ming, Gu Yanwu passed the lower-level examinations and responded to what he saw as the political and moral collapse of his times by a program of intensive study of traditional Chinese economics, government, and military defense. In 1644 he served briefly with the prince of Fu against the Manchus, and was deeply moved by the example of his foster mother, who starved herself to death rather than submit to the new conquerors. In her dying words to Gu, she declared: “Although only a woman, I have received favor from the [Ming] dynasty. To perish with the dynasty is no more than my duty. Do not serve another dynasty.”

Though Gu declined to emulate her action, he took her words to heart and spent the rest of his life (he died in 1682) in travel, reflection, and scholarship. He even abandoned the lush Yangzi plains of his native Jiangsu for the harsh northwest terrain of Shaanxi province. Gu sought to develop a body of writings that would counter what he—like his contemporary Wang Fuzhi—saw as the moral hollowness of the dominant schools of Confucianism, with their emphasis on metaphysical dualisms and intuition. Gu traveled over much of north China on horseback, examining farming practices, mining technology, and the banking systems of local merchants. In a series of essays drawn from his observations, he tried to lay the basis for a new kind of rigorous and pragmatic scholarship.

In his voluminous writings, Gu focused on such themes as government, ethics, economics, geography, and social relations, and paid special attention to philology, which he saw as a fundamental tool for evaluating the exact meaning of China's earlier scholarly legacy. He especially praised the scholars of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to A.D. 220) for their absence of literary adornment, their intellectual rigor, and their lack of metaphysical pretensions. Despite Gu's growing fame, he refused all invitations to take the Ming examinations—including the honorific one of 1679—or to work on the Ming history sponsored by Kangxi. After his death, Gu was revered by many scholars who saw him as a model of scholarly precision and integrity; and in the eighteenth century, his works came to have a profound influence on Chinese thought.

It was not only soldiers and scholars who resisted the Manchus. Many early Qing painters used their art to show their agitation and lack of faith in the regime. Through boldly innovative and eccentric brushwork, and the use of empty space in their compositions, they portrayed a world that was bleak or out of balance. Lone and twisted pine trees, desolate, angular mountain ranges, images of tangled foliage laid on paper in thick, wet strokes, isolated birds or fish—such were the subjects these artists often chose. Some of the most brilliant of these painters, like Shitao or Bada Shanren, were related to members of the fallen Ming ruling house and retired to isolated monasteries in the conquest period. Bada Shanren (his self-selected name, meaning “one who dwells in the eight great mountains”) made silence his gesture of defiance to the Qing. After writing the Chinese character for “dumb” upon his door, he refused to speak anymore, though he would still laugh or weep extravagantly when drunk or caught in creative fever. But Shitao slowly edged back into society, began to mingle with other scholars and artists even if they had served with the Qing, accepted occasional commissions designing landscape gardens for wealthy urbanites, and ended up on the outer edges of court circles.

One could, indeed, write a history of the period by tracing the coopting of the intellectuals by the Qing court. Those who would not serve in administrative office and would not take the examinations could still be lured by the promise of good company and hard cash. Literary compilations especially proved a fine focus for their energies. Kangxi assembled several groups of scholars and hired them to write dictionaries, encyclopedias, records of imperial tours, and collections of classical prose and poetry. Other senior ministers sponsored massive geographical studies and local histories, which enabled restless scholars to travel the country in search of material and then to return to a comfortable home base to write it down. Yet other officials gave promising writers jobs as private secretaries with light duties, which allowed them ample time for pursuing their own creative paths, whether as novelists, short-story writers, poets, or dramatists. The result was a flowering of Chinese culture in the later seventeenth century, despite the recent bloody imposition of alien rule.

Finally, the very act of Ming resistance and loyalty became an accepted topic at Kangxi’s court through the artistry of Kong Shangren. A descendant of Confucius in the sixty-fourth generation, Kong was born in 1648, after the Qing conquest. His father had been a prominent Ming scholar, and Kong Shangren became fascinated with the Ming dynasty’s fall and the people who had been caught up in it. During his forties, he composed a popular drama, The Peach Blossom Fan, about an upright scholar, the woman he loves, and their trials in the Ming court of the prince of Fu. The heroine resists the advances of a wicked Ming minister, attacking him with her fan, which gets shattered with blood. A painter transforms the blood drops into part of a design of peach blossoms, giving the play its title
and providing a brilliant metaphor for the mixture of violence and beauty that Kong saw as lying at the heart of late Ming moral and intellectual life. At the play's end, with the Ming resistance in ruins, the lovers agree to take monastic vows, while the surviving virtuous officials retreat deep into the mountains to escape a summons from the Qing that they take up office. In one of the last scenes, the lovers and a friend join in a grand aria:

This tale of the southern court will resound forever,
And tears of blood will swell the streams with woe,
We raise to Heaven our “summons to the soul”
As mist obscures the mighty river’s flow.3

By the 1660s, this aria was being sung at Kangxi’s court, and Kong Shangren’s play had become a palace favorite. In an essay written at this time, Kong caught the emotion of the audience:

Famous aristocrats, high officials, and talented literati gathered in such a crowd that it was impossible to find space for one’s legs. The furnishings formed an embroidered universe, and the banquet a landscape of jewelled delicacies. . . . Yet in the midst of this dazzling theater, there were a few who sat quietly weeping behind their sleeves—former officials and ‘survivors’. When the lanterns flickered out and the drinking was over, they uttered sighs and went their ways.4

Such men might still be nostalgic, but they had made their peace.

Defining the Borders

Foreign pressure, and at least some elements of foreign technology, were becoming commonplace in early Qing China. Even those Chinese with no knowledge or interest in foreign lands could have their lives abruptly changed. Kong Shangren, for instance, had been slowly losing his sight for some years before he wrote The Peach Blossom Fan; he recorded his resumption of scholarly activity in an ecstatic poem:

White glass from across the Western Seas
Is imported through Macao:
Fashioned into lenses big as coins,
They encompass the eyes in a double frame.
I put them on—it suddenly becomes clear;
I can see the very tips of things!

Kong gained this clarity of vision, fruit of a European technology exported through Macao, thanks to the Qing decision not to destroy the Portuguese base. During the 1660s, as part of the coastal-withdrawal policy linked to the suppression of Taiwan, Qing naval forces blockaded Macao, and all Chinese were ordered to leave. Portuguese ships were banned, and there was a threat that their buildings would be razed. But for reasons of local economic self-interest, Qing officials in charge of carrying out these orders failed to do so. Through subsequent diplomatic embassies, the support of the Jesuits in Peking (now returned to favor), and the judicious gift in 1678 of an African lion—which fascinated Kangxi—the Portuguese persuaded the Qing to allow them to retain Macao as the base for their east Asian trade.

The same tolerance was not extended to the Russians. Late Ming officials and advisers to Emperor Shunzhi were aware of the spread of Russian hunters and settlers into the northeast border region. A Russian embassy had negotiated with the Manchus for permission to send regular trade caravans into China, but Kangxi, too, was uneasy about the influence the Russians were having on the allegiance of the border tribes. An attempt to withdraw several border tribes south of the Russian line of advance, and to establish a kind of no man’s land to isolate the Russians from China—perhaps in deliberate imitation of the coastal policy to destroy the Zhengs—was abandoned as being too costly and impractical.

Kangxi had in fact been preparing for some years to launch an attack on the Russian outpost of Albazin, on the Amur River. When Taiwan was finally captured by the Qing in 1683, as we saw above, some of the surviving Zheng family troops were sent to the north to participate in the border campaigns against the Russians. The maritime skills of the Zheng troops were valuable to Kangxi, who needed naval forces to navigate the northern rivers. With the southern wars safely over, Kangxi ordered a concerted assault on Albazin, which, after stiff fighting, was seized by Manchu forces in 1685. Abandoning the town—really more a large, fortified stockade in those days—and pulling back as the emperor had instructed, the Qing commander inexplicably disobeyed the order that he destroy the abundant crops planted by the Russian settlers in the area. Accordingly the garrison commander of Nerchinsk, the second Russian trading base located to the west down the river Shilka, sent men to gather in the crops before the winter and to reoccupy the city.

Furious, Kangxi ordered a second attack on Albazin in 1686, which met
suffer Russian opposition. The Russian rulers were worried, however, over their ability to hold the huge territory in the face of determined Manchu opposition, and had already decided to sue for peace. The two sides, with the Jesuits using their knowledge of Latin and Manchu to act as interpreters, met at Nershin in 1689 and hammered out a treaty that, in its long-term effects, was one of the most important in China's history, fixing the northern border in substantially the same place it is today. In the most disputed area, the basic north-south demarcation line between the countries was fixed at the Gorkitsa and the Argun rivers. Albasin was to be abandoned by the Russians and destroyed, and the whole watershed area of the Amur River was to be Chinese. Fugitives from each side were to be extradited, and trade was to be permitted, though only to those merchants who had been issued valid documents by the Qing.

So whereas Taiwan had been reduced to Chinese territory by conquest, and the Portuguese in Macao were allowed their semi-independent status by an act of generosity unsubstantiated by treaty, in the Russian case the Chinese signed a treaty between equal sovereign states. Though this was a major departure from traditional Chinese practices, it is worth noting that from the foundation of the Qing dynasty dealings with the Russians had been conducted not through the Ministry of Rites, which handled the so-called tributary relations with such countries as Holland, Spain, and Portugal, but through a special bureau, the Lian Yuan. This bureau had been an invention of Hong Taiji and dealt originally with problems of diplomacy and commerce with the Mongols. By putting Russian affairs under this bureau, the Manchus tacitly admitted that their northern neighbors were a special case and that matters on the long northern land frontier required different handling from those in the southeast.

Much of the impetus for the Qing to sign a Russian treaty had come from the danger posed by the Zunghar tribes in western China: the Qing feared that the Russians might ally themselves with these dangerous nomadic warriors. Under a brilliant leader, Galdan, and drawing added unity from their deep devotion to the Dalai Lama in Tibet (whom they regarded as their spiritual leader), the Zunghars had been roaming at will over the largely unsettled lands known now as Outer Mongolia and Qinghai. In the late 1670s, by seizing Kashgar, Hami, and Turfan in turn, Galdan imposed his rule over the largely Muslim inhabitants of those cities and over their prosperous caravan routes linking China and the Mediterranean. The tribes hostile to Galdan and defeated by him in battle fled eastward, pressing into the western Qing province of Gansu. This massive migration of warriors deeply worried the emperor, who feared the possibility of a Russian-Zunghar alliance.

But such an alliance was not made, and after the Treaty of Nershin was safely signed Kangxi sent an army (under his own brother) to attack Galdan. After several more years of inconclusive fighting between Galdan and certain rival tribes to his east, Kangxi decided to lead a major campaign in person, apparently prompted to such daring by his feeling that it was he—not his generals—who had correctly conceived the successful Russian war. In a logistical triumph for the Qing armies, some 80,000 men advanced westward on three fronts: Kangxi's army crossed the Gobi and pushed the Zunghars north of the Kerulen River, where Galdan was cornered and defeated at the great battle of Jao Modo in 1696. He died the following year, abandoned by most of his followers.

This successful campaign marked the pinnacle of Kangxi's career as emperor. Now forty-two years old, he took an active delight in the excitement and danger of the war; after it was over he wrote back to his court favorites in Peking that the sparkling weather, the new foods, the unexpected scenery—all filled him with joy. "Now Galdan is dead, and his followers have come back to our allegiance," the emperor wrote in a letter in the spring of 1697. "My great task is done... Heaven, earth, and ances-
tors have protected me and brought me this achievement. As for my own life, one can say it is happy. One can say it’s fulfilled. One can say I’ve got what I wanted. In a few days, in the palace, I’ll tell you all about it myself. It’s hard to tell it with brush and ink."

But in foreign policy, each solution leads to a fresh problem. The power politics of the region were not resolved by Galdan’s death, and Kangxi found himself drawn into complex struggles with other Zungar leaders when the Dalai Lama was murdered and an improperly chosen successor named in his place. This gave Kangxi the opportunity to invade Tibet in the name of righteous retribution (just as the Manchus had entered China in 1644); he dispatched two armies, one of which entered Tibet through Koko Nor, the other through Sichuan province. In the autumn of 1720, the two armies joined forces in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, and a new Dalai Lama, loyal to the Qing, was installed. Thus began the Chinese military intervention in the politics of Tibet.

At about the same time, the unsettled nature of life in Taiwan and serious misgovernment there by the Qing prompted a Fujian native named Zhu Yigu, who had traveled to the island as an official’s servant, to raise a flag of revolt along with some fifty blood brothers. Aided by the turbulent conditions of the time and by the fact that he had the same surname—Zhu—as the former Ming imperial family, Zhu Yigu attracted hundreds of followers and seized the prefectural capital, declaring himself king of Taiwan. His reign lasted only two months, until he was captured by an expeditionary force led by one of the sons of the same Admiral Shi who had first captured the island thirty-eight years before.

The Qing had shown that they could respond with alacrity and efficiency to two crises on distant fronts, even if they had not solved some of the basic problems that made trouble endemic. When Kangxi died, in 1722, the Tibetan and Taiwan campaigns effectively marked the limits of Qing power to the southwest and east. With the Treaty of Nerchinsk holding firm and Manchuria securely engrafted as their ancestral homeland, the Qing had reached a depth and extent of power matched by only a few rulers in times of China’s earlier greatness.

**A Mixed Legacy**

Kangxi owed much of his fame to the firmness with which he pursued national unity and to the vigor of his foreign policy. Priding himself on his decisiveness, he often overrode his senior advisers, both Manchu and Chinese; and when he was successful, he claimed the credit. In several important ways, however, the results were less happy, and he left a tangled legacy to his successors. This was especially true in three areas: the dispute surrounding Yinseng, the heir apparent to the throne; relations with the Catholic missionaries; and rural administration.

From early in his reign, Kangxi clearly wanted to avoid a repetition of the regency interlude that had led to the domination of the court by Dorgon in the 1640s and by Oboi in the 1660s. Accordingly, when his first emperor bore him a son, Yinseng, in 1674, Kangxi moved rapidly to have the boy named heir apparent. Since Yinseng’s mother died in childbirth, his birth had strains of fate around it and set Yinseng even further apart from his half brothers, whom Kangxi was to father with other consorts or concubines.

The upbringing of Yinseng was designed to be a model in which all the precepts of moralistic Confucian education would be followed, and the Manchu virtues instilled. Wise tutors were chosen, and the heir’s progress was watched with close attention, as were his deportment and literary skills. He was introduced slowly to the problems of governance, and was left as acting ruler in Peking while Kangxi was away on the long campaigns.
against Galdan in 1696–1697, Kangxi even announced his intention of abdicating early so that Yinreng could take over the kingdom as emperor.

But on his return from the west, Kangxi began to hear disquieting rumors about his son’s behavior. Yinreng showed signs of being erratic, violent, and cruel. When the emperor took his various sons with him on the imperial tours he loved to make—to the west, to Manchuria, or to the once again prosperous towns on the Grand Canal and on the Yangzi River—Yinreng again began to disturb others with his willful behavior.

One difficulty Kangxi faced was getting accurate information about the situation. Not surprisingly, factions began to develop at court around either Yinreng or one of the seven other imperial sons who were old enough and shrewd enough to be possible rival candidates for the throne. In these conditions, few courtiers and officials, Manchu or Chinese, were willing to speak frankly. As a result Kangxi began to use a new communications system so that he could cut through the haze of rumor.

Information for the emperor from his capital and provincial officials came, most commonly, in the form of “memorials.” These were carefully written documents that were carried to the court by government couriers and processed in the Grand Secretariat, where they were copied and evaluated before being passed on to the emperor with suggestions as to the responses he might suitably make. But this was a relatively public system, and Kangxi, in the 1690s, had begun to develop a truly secret system of “palace memorials,” which would be delivered to the palace by the writers’ own household couriers, brought unopened to the emperor by his most trusted eunuchs, and read, annotated, and sealed by him in private. The route was then reversed, the writers’ couriers carrying the memorial, which now bore the emperor’s secret seal on it in vermilion ink, back to the original writer.

Kangxi had first used this system in an informal way, telling certain trusted bond servants stationed in the provinces to send him lists of current grain prices, so that he could check the accuracy of his senior officials’ reports and follow up on possible causes of future unrest. Early in the eighteenth century Kangxi began to expand the system; by 1707, a handful of trusted advisors were using palace memorials to tell the emperor secretly the details of Yinreng’s conduct. They reported how Yinreng preyed himself on his future role as emperor, how he tyrannized his subordinates and household, and how he ordered his agents to buy both boys and girls in the south and to bring them to his palace for his private sexual débaucheries. Though it took Kangxi a long time to act, by 1708 so much negative evidence had piled up that he could delay no longer. Hystericized with anger, Kangxi ordered Yinreng disbarred forever from his heir-apparent status and placed under house arrest, to be guarded by Kangxi’s fourth son, Yin-
of the missions in China and effectively prevented the spread of Western teaching and science. Had either side been more flexible, then later in the eighteenth century, when the Catholic church accepted the findings of Galileo and the missionaries started to introduce up-to-date Western astronomy to the Chinese, the new knowledge and techniques might have led to significant changes in Chinese attitudes about thought and nature.

In the crucial realm of taxation and rural administration, finally, Kangxi failed to make constructive changes. He seems to have accepted the position that no comprehensive new survey of landholdings was possible under existing social circumstances; he also perpetuated the late Ming system in which the taxes formerly paid in kind and through labor services were commuted to silver. Only a small amount of this money stayed in the counties to pay for the salaries of local magistrates and their staffs, and for the carrying out of local relief and construction measures. Local officials sought to supplement their resources with a wide range of extra surcharges, much of which they pocketed for themselves, gave to their superiors as gifts, or sent as presents to Peking to make sure that the relevant ministries did not investigate their conduct too closely.

As a consequence, despite Kangxi's dramatic successes in political unification and border consolidation, life in the rural areas remained a grim struggle for millions of Chinese. Small gangs of bandits could roam almost unopposed in many parts of China, since there was no paid and armed militia to oppose them. Corrupt junior staff from the magistrates' offices could bully farming families into paying a variety of taxes for which receipts were never issued. Legal battles over land contracts dragged on for decades, and there was little recourse for minors or widows when harassed by the adult males of their clans. Private feuds led often to violence and homicides that harassed officials had neither the time nor the staff to investigate.

Perhaps because he realized the strong support that the Xingtao had received from the local Chinese in his 1659 campaign or because the area was regarded as the central heartland of Confucian culture, Kangxi was particularly lax about prosecuting tax delinquents in the rich provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. To preserve an appearance of harmony, he was constantly urging leniency in tax-deficiency cases and regularly gave generous tax rebates to large areas that were not suffering serious hardship. Although he did continue to enforce the "law of avoidance," which stipulated that senior officials could never serve in their home provinces (so as to avoid their abusing their position while in office), he often ignored confidential reports that pointed to flagrant abuses by the family members of his favored officials, or by those who had retired home after years of service in the capital.

In the last decade of his reign, Kangxi seems to have genuinely believed that the restoration of prosperity in rural China was now complete, and that the bureaucracy could handle its assignments with the resources at hand. The court itself appeared comfortably solvent, since along with the land-tax revenues it received considerable extra income from monopoly control over salt, ginseng, and jade, as well as from allegedly "voluntary" payments by wealthy merchants, and from transit dues on commerce. Since Kangxi also believed that China's prosperity was measured by the size of its population, and that the true size of that population was being hidden by local officials who feared that if they reported rising numbers the Ministry of Revenue would respond by raising their tax payments, he decided to take dramatic action. In 1712 he froze the assessments of able-bodied men registered as working a given area of agricultural land and decreed that however much the population increased in a particular area, the state would not thereby raise that area's taxes. Local officials could thus report population increases accurately, without fearing the burden of a raised assessment at a future date.

Since Kangxi—like Shunzhi before him—had given up on attempting a national survey of landholdings, China's land-tax system was now doubly frozen: land in the provinces remained registered according to the last reasonably full survey made in 1681 during Emperor Wanli's reign, and the numbers of per capita units subject to tax assessment were henceforth based on the 1712 figures. This was seriously to impede any attempt by Kangxi's successors to rationalize China's finances. Although higher population estimates did now begin to flow into Peking, gratifying the emperor with a sense of China's prosperity, none of the basic fiscal inefficiencies had been eliminated.

"Now that I am ill I am querulous and forgetful," Kangxi told his kneeling curators and officials in a self-revelatory edict of 1717, "and terrified of muddling right with wrong, and leaving my work in chaos. I exhaust my mind for the country's sake, and fragment my spirits for the world." Kangxi lived on for another five years after these melancholy words, the longest rule in the history of China up to that time; but longevity brought him diminishing solace. He had still not publicly named an heir when he died in December 1722, of natural causes, in his Peking palace. It is hard, in retrospect, to gauge the level of despair that had led him to neglect such a fundamental obligation.
CHAPTER 4  Yongzheng’s Authority

QING POWER AND TAXATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The brief reign of Emperor Yongzheng, successor to Kangxi, was stormy, complicated, and important. It was clouded in controversy from the first, when Yongzheng himself announced that he was the dying emperor’s choice as heir. Since his other brothers and half brothers were not present at the scene, and since Yongzheng’s close friend was commander of the Peking guards division, there was no one to dispute his claim publicly; but throughout his reign (1723–1735), he was troubled by charges that he was a usurper.

There is little evidence that he had usurped the throne, however, and some evidence to show that Kangxi had trusted Yongzheng more than he had most of his other sons. Kangxi and Yongzheng (then known by his ordinary family name of Yinzhen) frequently discussed policy matters together and shared mutual entertainments. As we’ve seen, Yongzheng, for a time, was even made the jailer of his elder half-brother, the deposed heir apparent—a delicate and dangerous task, considering the politics of the time.

Once installed as emperor, Yongzheng did expend considerable effort cementing his position by arresting those of his brothers whom he believed most resented his rule. (He had quieted their suspicions by promoting them first!) The former heir apparent, Yinzeng, and two other brothers died in prison shortly after their arrests (whether they were killed or died from mistreatment is not known). Several others were put under house arrest or close surveillance. Yongzheng completely trusted only Kangxi’s thirteenth son, Yinxian, whom he promoted and retained in the highest offices.

Whether one interprets these actions as evidence of a guilty conscience or as practical steps taken to prevent later trouble, Yongzheng showed himself deeply committed to the craft of government. He had a passion for detail and a willingness to spend long hours every day at work, usually reading history texts from 4:00 A.M. until 7:00 A.M., when he breakfasted, meeting with his advisers into the early afternoon, then reading documents and commenting on them, often until midnight. He took neither lengthy hunting excursions to the north nor leisurely tours of the Yangzi delta cities, as his father had loved to do. His main recreation seems to have been the practice of Buddhism, of which he was a devoted and scholarly adherent, and relaxing in the scenic garden of his palace in northwest Peking. Whereas his father had often written in Manchu, and had written Chinese slowly and carefully, Yongzheng seems to have preferred Chinese. His Chinese calligraphy, clearly written with great speed, was accurate and idiomatic.

Emperor Yongzheng concentrated on a number of central problems in Chinese government that were crucial in his own day and have remained so to the present. These included the structure of Chinese bureaucracy and finance in the countryside, the development of an effective and confidential information system, and the strengthening of the central executive branch of the state. These three were (and are) tightly interconnected; success in managing them would go far to ensure more efficient control of China’s enormous territory.

From the beginning of his reign, Yongzheng seems to have had a clear vision of how to proceed. He was not a child under the supervision of regents when he ascended the throne, as his father and grandfather had been, but an experienced man of forty-five who had watched his father’s reign begin to fall apart. The system of secret palace memorials was made to measure for him, and he extended and coordinated the informal structure that Kangxi had initiated. Apart from routine matters, which were reported, as in the past, in open memorials to the ministries and to the Grand Secretariat, most senior provincial officials now reported confidentially to Yongzheng on the details of their administration and on each other. As the emperor began to realize the size of the tax deficits and the casualness with which the fiscal crisis had been treated in his father’s reign, he urged his officials to suggest means of reforming the financial structure, and established a small executive office of financial review to stand separate from and above the Ministry of Revenue. In charge of this office he placed Kangxi’s thirteenth son, Yinxian.

The financial crisis was too complicated for even an absolute ruler to solve with an edict or two. The central budget of China in 1723 was about 35 million taels (ounces of silver), of which about 6 million came from
commercial taxes of various kinds and 29 million from the “land and head tax” (diying). Anywhere from 15 to 30 percent of this 29 million was retained in each province for “local use,” while the rest was sent to Peking; but nearly all that “local use” percentage was spent on projects that were really national ones, such as military supplies and imperial post stations. Less than one-sixth of the total was available to local officials for projects in their own areas. One might have thought it simple to increase income by raising the number of land-tax and head-tax units; but here the obligations of filiality to Emperor Kangxi were too strong, and Yongzheng did not attempt to change his father’s 1712 ruling. Moreover the central premise of Chinese political theory, which the Manchus had also made their own, was that a low tax base was essential to the well-being of the country and the true proof of an emperor’s benevolence. Another obstacle to reform was posed by the officials in the Ministry of Revenue, who had their own procedures and protocols, and drew large sums in “gifts” from the accepted practices, which they were understandably loath to change.

The current tax system was not only entrenched but full of abuses. Members of the upper class were often wealthy landowners, and, as in Kangxi’s reign, many of them concealed their tax responsibilities in a maze of false names, misregistrations, transferred holdings, mortgages, and so on, which made it almost impossible to trace their exact holdings. Furthermore, much of the economic power in the countryside was in the hands of small landholders who tyrannized the local villagers. These landholders colluded with the clerks in the provincial magistrates’ offices in order to evade paying their own taxes and to force the poorer peasants to assume a disproportionate amount of the tax burden for the whole community. In such situations, the peasants had little redress, and money that had in fact been embezzled was counted as being in “arrears”—that is, owed by delinquent farmers.

Between 1725 and 1729, Yongzheng reversed his father’s casual approach and made a concerted effort to reform the land tax and to break the power of the local intermediate groups. He was determined to extend the power of the Qing state more effectively into the countryside. As he expressed himself in an edict of 1725: “When the flesh and blood of the common people is used to rectify the defects of the officials, how can there not be hardship in the countryside? I am deeply concerned about these abuses.”

He began by slowly accumulating accurate information through palace memorials and by appointing new men—often Manchus or Chinese bannermen who would be less influenced by the local elites—to the key offices of provincial governor and financial commissioner. Yongzheng then moved to establish an official consensus that a fixed rate of surcharge should be levied on the basic land-tax (di) and head-tax (ding) quotas, that all of this surcharge should be passed on to the provincial financial commissioners’ offices, and that all other supplementary fees and gifts should be declared illegal. The tax money gathered by the financial commissioners’ offices would then be reallocated within the province on an equitable basis. Part would be used to give far higher salaries to the local officials than they had ever received before (this was called “money to nourish honesty”), and part would go into county funds for the support of irrigation works, road and school building, and other worthy or necessary local needs that did not come under the purview of the central Ministry of Revenue budget. These included provision of draft animals for disaster victims, jail improvement or gazetteer printing, city sewers or charity graveyards, examination cubicles, and candles and incense for local temples.

In assessing the effects of these reforms, one can get a brief overview of China’s regional variations at this time. The reforms were most successful in the northern provinces of Shansi, Honan, and Hebei, where independent landholding peasant cultivators were common, land registration was comparatively easy, and magistrates could be closely supervised and forced to give up their traditional perquisites. Virtually everyone in this region benefited from the reforms except for the corrupt middlemen landlords and some of the ruthlessly greedy clerks and magistrates. The flat surcharge of 15 to 20 percent on the basic land tax proved much less burdensome to the peasants and even to the larger landholders than the endless rounds of overlapping fees that had prevailed. And the new salaries gave the officials a more regular and higher-level income than they had previously enjoyed: 600 to 1,000 taels a year in the case of county magistrates, as opposed to 45 taels before the reforms. Offices were now better run, business was conducted faster, and there was real local autonomy and initiative for dealing with specific projects.

In the south and southwest, however, the reforms went much less smoothly. Here the basic tax-quotas figures were far lower because there were many recently settled, sparsely populated areas; but since the number of officials was still high, the surcharges did not bring in enough money to pay the same high levels of salary as in the north. The system could be made to work only by granting the local officials some of the tax revenues from such commercial enterprises as mining, salt production, or transit dues at checkpoints on China’s roads, canals, and rivers. Even so, because of the great distances and expense involved, many magistrates failed to forward all their surcharge money to the financial commissioners of their provinces, pleading instead to be allowed to withdraw their new salaries and the local expenses money before they forwarded the rest. Predictably this led to renewed local graft, and precluded the commissioners’ making a full and equitable distri-
The Center and Channels of Power

Rulers are rarely free to concentrate on one problem at a time, and Yongzheng was never able to give his full attention to the problems of rural taxation and administration in China’s central provinces. It became necessary again to reinforce Qing power on the borders. Zhu Yigu’s rebellion in Taiwan had been swiftly suppressed in 1721, but effective pacification was complex. After lengthy consultations, Yongzheng decided to strengthen local control there by subdividing several of Taiwan’s counties into smaller units, and by allowing the pioneer emigrants in Taiwan to be joined by their wives and children to make for a more settled social environment. He also permitted Chinese to rent land on contract from the original Taiwanese inhabitants, while setting aside certain formal reservations for the aborigines.

There was need as well for careful new negotiations with Russia to prevent the Treaty of Nerchinsk from falling apart over arguments concerning the border tribes, trade caravans, and clashes sparked by the discovery of gold in southern Siberia. A senior negotiating team, consisting entirely of Manchus, worked with the Lifan Yuan to draw up a supplementary treaty, signed at Kiaitka in 1727. The Treaty of Kashaan drew a line between the two countries from Kjakhta to the Argun, and stated which tribes should be based in Chinese territory. Kjakhta was to be one of two new border trading towns, one Russian caravan was to be allowed to trade in Peking every three years, and a Russian Orthodox church was to be maintained in Peking. Most members of the small Russian community in the capital had been captured in earlier wars and were now incorporated in the banners. (The treaty specifically stipulated that they were to be encouraged to learn the Chinese language.) Yongzheng also consolidated his hold over the last of the Manchu banners still controlled by Manchu princes and noblemen, and began to take serious note of problems in Tibet and among the Miao aborigines in China’s southwest.

Yongzheng saw the renewed Zunghar threat as the most serious one in the long term, despite their defeat by Kangxi’s forces in 1696. He was convinced that the Zunghars could be suppressed only if he meticulously prepared a major military buildup in the far west. But the supply lines were immensely long, and it was hard to keep the preparations secret. The court was full of ears, and the emperor’s main policy discussion group—the Deliberative Council of Princes and High Officials—proved unable to keep its proceedings confidential. Peking was also full of Mongol princes and
princesses, banner generals, traveling merchants, and lamas loyal to the Tibetan Buddhist church, any of whom might spread news of Qing intentions. So Yongzheng initially kept much of his military planning private by limiting discussions to a small group of his most trusted grand secretaries, whom he came to call the "inner grand secretaries." (The title distinguished them from those who worked in the "outer" court with the regular bureaucracy.)

The three key members of this group were his trusted younger brother Yinxian (who was also running the revenue-auditing bureau) and two Chinese grand secretaries, Zhang Tingu and Jiang Tingxi. Zhang Tingu, son of one of Kangxi's most trusted advisers, was fluent in Manchu and had served as minister of revenue; Jiang had also been in charge of that ministry and was a nationally prominent painter as well. Both men also held the senior (jiushi) examination degree, had served in the prestigious imperial Hanlin Academy on the basis of their scholarly excellence, and came from the prosperous Yangzi delta provinces. Zhang from Anhui and Jiang from Jiangsu. They may be seen, therefore, as representing the most talented upper levels of the traditional Chinese bureaucracy who now, more than eighty years after the conquest, were firmly loyal to their Chinese-seeming Manchu emperor. By 1729 the three men were overseeing a secret new bureau, the Office of Military Finance, aided by a small group of experienced middle-echelon officials, both Manchu and Chinese, who were drawn from various ministries—especially the Ministry of Revenue—and were trusted to be discreet. Not even all the other grand secretaries knew the details of their work, and only in the reign of Yongzheng's son, Qianlong, was this office to gain public notice and prominence as the Grand Council.2

So once again, as he had in the matter of finance, Yongzheng created an informal yet efficient network to enhance his own power and to deflect certain information and decisions away from the regular six ministries and their staffs. Why the secretive departure from conventional channels? Part of the answer is probably that Yongzheng and his advisers feared there would be questionable financial dealings in the complicated and expensive logistical preparations for the western campaigns, and wanted to keep their inquiries concealed from the formal ministries. It is also likely that they wanted to keep the scale of their operations secret. Hence we find the Office of Military Finance keeping the most detailed accounts on such items as the number of mules or camels and carts that might be needed to transport the supplies for a given number of troops.

Another reason for these new arrangements was that the inner grand secretaries frequently needed to deliberate over secret palace memorials. In some cases these had to be filed; for the emperor, after all, could not keep all these details in his head, and the only safe place to file them was in a specially staffed office under tight security. Yongzheng could also communicate with his generals at the front through so-called "court letters" drafted for him, after discussion, by the inner grand secretaries, and dispatched swiftly and secretly to the recipient. This saved time for the emperor, who was already rescripting in person, and often at great length, from fifty to a hundred palace memorials a day. With court letters drafted for him in secrecy, the emperor could now take the time to add personal notes to show his frontier generals how he trusted them. "How are you after riding your horse through wind and snow?" the emperor wrote to General Yue Zhongqi, stationed in the far western provinces. "Are the officers, troops, and animals in good condition?" Or, again to Yue: "I have made a selection of auspicious days for you to start on your journey from Xi'an to the front, and am sending it to you."

Finally the new measures were prompted by considerations of state security as they related to the safety of the emperor from his own forces. Potential threats abounded. For instance, one of Yongzheng's least trusted brothers
had been serving as a general in the Tibetan campaigns when Yongzheng ascended the throne. One of Yongzheng’s closest friends, while serving as commanding general in Sichuan and Gansu, had also been implicated in the plots of Yongzheng’s brothers and ordered to commit suicide in 1727. And the new commanding general in the region, Yue Zhongji, though given the just-quoted marks of affection and appreciation by the emperor, was a descendant of Yue Fei, famous to all Chinese as a great patriot who, in the twelfth century, was killed in prison by his own Song dynasty rulers despite his courage in fighting Jurchen invaders. To avoid any or all of these potential threats from his own military, Yongzheng would have had cause to tread cautiously.

The long-planned campaign against the Zuanghs went badly. In 1732 General Yue Zhongji, from his forward headquarters at Barkul, was able to raid the enemy in Urumchi but could not protect his own forces in Hami from enemy counterattacks. Yue’s fellow senior general rashly led his army of ten thousand troops into an ambush near Khobedo; although he escaped, he lost four-fifths of his men and most of his officers. Both generals were sentenced to death by Yongzheng for these failures and related charges of corruption, although he later commuted the death sentences. As a result of these failures, it would take another thirty years to settle the border problems in this region.

Yongzheng also employed some of his new communication channels to coordinate the fighting in southwest China against the indigenous Miao peoples. Chinese settlers had been pressing into the provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou since the suppression of the Three Feudatories, pushing the local valley dwellers up into the hills and disrupting local society by opening silver and copper mines. In 1726 Yongzheng made Oertai governor-general of the entire region. An experienced administrator, from a warrior family in the blue banner, and fluent in Chinese as well as Manchu, Oertai kept constantly in touch with the emperor through his palace memorials. These traced his efforts to break the power of the local Miao chieftains, to confiscate their tribal lands, and to have them reregistered and administered as part of the Chinese prefectoral system. Those who resisted were surrounded and killed by Qing armies; those who submitted still lost the rights to their land but were often reinstated as administrators with their own stipends.

In 1728, in a highly unusual move, Oertai was also named governor-general of Guangxi to speed the suppression of the tribesmen there. Yongzheng’s long comments on the palace memorials constantly spurred Oertai on, debated knotty problems, and discussed the performance of other officials in the area. In 1732 Oertai, having been largely successful in pacifying the southwest, was recalled to Peking to serve concurrently in the Office of Military Finance. He took the place of Prince Yinxian and Jiang Tingxi, both of whom had died while Oertai was in the southwest. Thus he and Zhang Tingyu became Yongzheng’s most trusted advisors in the capital.

Surveying these developments in the supervision of finance, the communication system, and military affairs, we can see how the Qing Empire was developing in terms of unity and autocracy. In the near century since the QIng conquest, the power of great Manchu regents or noblemen to rule the country—or even their own banners—had waned. Royal brothers could still be a danger to the emperor, but they could be manipulated or suppressed. The regular bureaucracy was considered useful in many ways but a hindrance in others, especially when speed and confidentiality were required. Yet Yongzheng did not take the route, as autocrats so often do, of simply forming an important new office, staffing it with his own men, and insisting on its monopoly over important decision making. Instead he chose a more roundabout way, establishing an undramatic-looking office with a nondescript title, and having those who worked in it hold other jobs at the same time; thus their salaries and official ranks derived from other, more
conventional bureaucratic functions. Yongzheng was a remarkable tactician with a flair for—and a belief in—informal and secret structures. Domi-
nance of those structures was, to him, the essence of power.

Moral Authority

Emperor Yongzheng's interests took in more than matters of administra-
tion. He had a far-ranging concern for moral and cultural values, and many
of his major decisions were affected by his moral convictions. He was a
man who seems to have been convinced of his own rectitude, and his pro-
nouncements indicate a link between his basic conception of power and his
idea of the emperor's superiority. One can gauge this in his handling of a
wide range of issues: the Catholic church, the Lu Liuang affair, his ampli-
fication of the Sacred Edict of his father, the printing of the great encyclo-
dedia Gujin tushu jicheng, his interest in Buddhism, the problems of industrial
laborers and of opium addiction, and his emancipation of the so-called "mean
people." At one level, he was playing the role of Confucian monarch; at
another, he still bore the autocratic impatience of his conquering Manchu
forebears.

With the Catholic missionaries, Yongzheng was even sterner than his
father had been in the later years of his life. Not only was the rites contro-
versy still splitting the Catholic community in China, but at least two Jesuits,
perhaps believing there was a chance of converting the emperor, had been
in correspondence with one of the brothers Yongzheng most distrusted,
using the Roman alphabet as a form of code. When Yongzheng discovered
this, his anger spread to other scholars who knew the missionaries and to
the Catholic church as a whole. Except for the few missionaries on duty at
the court in Peking, all the others living in various provinces were ordered
to assemble in Canton or Macao; several of the provincial churches were
converted to use as schools or as hostels. Since Yongzheng had committed
himself publicly against political in-groups and parties by his often-repeated
attacks on the whole idea of "factions," he spoke out angrily against the
factional influence of the church. Still, he held back from a final ban, taking
a high moral stand: "The distant barbarians come here attracted by our
culture," he noted in 1726. "We must show them generosity and virtue."

Although only one missionary was actually executed in this period, the
missionaries as a group had to be extraordinarily circumspect in their behavior.
Their influence waned to the point that their only remaining roles of signi-
ficance at court were as directors of the astronomical bureau and as paint-
ers in the imperial studios.

The Lu Liuang affair produced a similarly complex imperial reaction,
involving both vengeance and compassion. Lu was a bitterly anti-Manchu
scholar, medical doctor, and monk who had died in 1683 stipulating in his
will that he not be buried in clothes of Manchu design. Some of his writ-
ings, containing scathing remarks about Manchus and other barbarians,
circulated in central China and were read by, among others, an impression-
able young schoolteacher named Zeng Jing. Fired with anti-Manchu ardor
by Lu's writings and believing the rumors that Yongzheng was a usurper,
1728 Zeng tried to convince General Yue Zhongqi, who was in Sichuan
preparing for the anti-Zunghar campaign, to rebel against Emperor Yong-
zheng. Yue responded by feigning sympathy until he had unraveled the
details of the plot, and then informed Yongzheng of what he had learned.
Checking into the case, Yongzheng was enraged to discover Lu's writ-
ings, and how widely rumors of his usurpation had circulated. The imperial
response was threefold: to order the exhumation and dismemberment of
Lu's corpse and the enslavement or exile of all his surviving family mem-
bers; to write an angry and detailed rebuttal, attempting to prove that he
was indeed his father's chosen successor, a rebuttal that every holder of a
state examination degree was required to read; and to make a dramatic
gesture of pardoning Zeng with no more than a reprimand on the grounds
that he had been young and gullible.

Yongzheng deliberately projected this image linking Confucian benevo-
ence to paternal sternness in other ways, including his amplifications to the
Sacred Edict of his father. Kangxi had been content to give a brief summary
of sixteen moral points to help his subjects lead obedient and peaceful lives.
But Yongzheng elaborated on each of his father's maxims at great length,
preparing lectures that were to be delivered by local scholars twice a month
right down to the village level. In his elaborations, Yongzheng especially
emphasized the need for integrated local communities that would pay their
taxes promptly, avoid feuds, and protect themselves from outlaws; the role
of thrift and hard work in an agricultural economy; avoidance of litigation;
and the fostering of an educational system that taught moral conduct and
orthodoxy while renouncing "false doctrines." All examination candidates
at the county level had to know the expanded maxims and the emperor's
commentaries on them. Simplified versions were also prepared, composed
by some of Yongzheng's officials, so that the horsemens could be delivered
even by those with limited education and to minority peoples who spoke
their own non-Han languages. It was a serious and thorough attempt at
nationwide indoctrination, which, Yongzheng believed, would improve
people's thoughts and behavior, and intensify their loyalty to the state. Such
patterns of moral indoctrination would become a recurrent theme in later
Chinese history, both after the great rebellions of the mid-nineteenth century and under the successive governments of the Chinese Nationalists and the Chinese Communists.

The emperor Yongzheng’s behavior over the publication of the Gaijia tuhua jicheng marked an apparently petty side of the imperial nature, but the seriousness with which the emperor pursued the project is an important indicator of the interconnection of political and cultural values during the Qing. The Gaijia tuhua jicheng (“Complete Collection of Illustrations and Writings from the Earliest to Current Times”) was an enormous encyclopedia, the fruit of decades of scholarship by the scholar Chen Menglei. Chen, helped by scores of other scholars, by Emperor Kangxi’s third son—who became his patron—and finally by the patronage of Kangxi himself, sought to assemble all the finest past writings on natural phenomena, geography, history, literature, and government. The result, surely one of the largest books in the history of the world, filled 800,000 pages and contained over 100,000,000 Chinese characters. The copper type for printing this vast work was already set when Kangxi died.

Yongzheng, determined to ensure that credit for this great undertaking should not go to this particular brother, whom he hated, used the fact that Chen had once been forced to serve in the rebel Geng Jiazhong’s Fujian feudatory to declare him a traitor and banished him to Manchuria. Yongzheng then erased all signs of Chen’s editorship and all mention of his elder brother’s involvement with the project. After a lapse of four years, which allegedly was used to “correct” the encyclopedia, it was issued as the work of Kangxi himself; one of Yongzheng’s most trusted inner cabinet secretaries was listed as editor-in-chief of the “revision.”

In the realm of Buddhism, one can again see the polarities in Yongzheng’s behavior as he played out the dual roles of ardent believer and autocrat. The school of Buddhism that most attracted Yongzheng was Chan, which had first begun to flourish in China a millennium earlier. Chan devotees practiced an austere program of meditation and introspection so that they would ultimately understand that the so-called “practical” world they inhabited was in truth a realm of illusion. They believed, too, that the Buddha nature was immanent in all beings and that enlightenment could be obtained by all individuals with the requisite faith and concentration. True to this set of beliefs, Yongzheng met regularly in his Peking palace with a fourteen-person Chan study group, consisting of the five brothers he still trusted, select senior officials, one Daoist, and five Buddhist monks. He also authorized a Buddhist press to print sutras—passages from Buddhist scripture. Yet when Yongzheng disagreed with the doctrinal interpretations that had been put forth by two Buddhist monks of the late Ming and

were still adhered to by many Chan believers in his own day, he ordered the two monks’ controversial books burned and compelled their later followers to renounce the monks and their works.

One can see Yongzheng’s social values emerge in the area of labor relations as well. The territory around Suzhou, south of the Yangzi, was famous in eighteenth-century China as a center of the silk- and cotton-cloth trades. Among the area’s large labor force were men, legendary for their great physical strength, who used huge rollers, weighing a thousand pounds or more, to press and finish the cloth. These “calendriers,” as they were called, worked furiously hard for poor wages: it took almost a day to process a 68-foot length of cloth, for which each worker received 11 copper cash, or just over one-hundredth of a silver tael. This was barely enough to survive on at a time when the basic price for a picul of grain (approximately 130 pounds weight) was around 1 tael on the open market.

In Kangxi’s reign these calendriers went on strike several times, demanding not only better wages, but also the right to build a hospital, an orphanage, and a meeting hall. The strikers got nowhere and their leaders were beaten, but the calendriers rose in protest once more in 1723 and again in 1729. Since there were more than eight thousand of these tough and committed laborers around Suzhou, Yongzheng took the matter seriously, but he was much more concerned with their possible links to outside rebels and agitators than he was about their poor economic conditions. He praised the governor who arrested and interrogated twenty-two of the workers.

Through surviving palace memorials bearing his lengthy interlinear inscriptions, we can see how carefully Yongzheng followed the investigation, which yielded the unsettling news that some of the workers were involved with martial-arts experts, fortunetellers, physicians, owners of male and female brothels, and even some alleged allies of a claimant to the Ming throne who had fled to the Philippines. Only when all these elements had been unraveled in 1730 and the conspirators punished did the emperor write his informant the veritable notation “Good, now you can send a public memorial.” In other words, only now would the ministries in Peking and the grand secretaries be allowed to share in the full details that the emperor and a few favored officials had been brooding about for seven years.

In the area of opium addiction, the emperor was on new and untested terrain. Although some use of opium for its medicinal and narcotic properties had been recorded since the eleventh century, it was only after tobacco smoking had become popular in China during the seventeenth century, and after knowledge of opium-smoking techniques had been brought back from Taiwan by the soldiers who had been sent to suppress the Zhu Yigu rebel-
tion of 1721, that opium addiction spread to the Chinese mainland. Yongzheng was alerted to the extent of the problem early in his reign and determined to ban opium smoking, but since there was no clear precedent in the Chinese legal code, a number of different clauses had to be invoked by analogy. Thus opium dealers were to be sentenced, like those selling contraband goods, to wear the heavy wooden collar called the “cangue” for one month and then to be banished to a military frontier garrison. Those who lured the innocent into their opium dens were to be punished, like those preaching heterodox religions, to strangulation (subject to mitigation after review). Those smoking or growing opium were to be beaten with one hundred strokes in accordance with penalties for those who violated imperial orders.

But in 1729 a long memorial reached Yongzheng and persuaded him to think the whole opium problem through with greater care. The memorial concerned an opium seller named Chen, who had been sentenced under the laws to have all his stock confiscated, to wear the cangue, and to be banished. But the opium seller protested his innocence on the grounds that he had only been selling medicinal opium for health reasons and not for smoking. Reviewing the evidence, Yongzheng acknowledged that this was indeed a valid distinction and that officials should always ascertain motivation in actions under investigation. This Chen, a Fujian shopkeeper who had traded his “dried orange cakes” with a merchant in Guangdong for some forty pounds of opium, might well be a legitimate businessman or pharmacist, not a crook. As the emperor sensibly observed: “If the opium is contraband, then Chen should not be grudgingly pardoned. If it is not contraband, then why have you stored it in the provincial treasury? This is the hard-earned capital of the common people. How can you deal with an error by committing another error, and thus deprive him of his livelihood?” Here was a concrete example of a situation in which the absolute ruler of the world’s largest empire could still keep a close watch on social problems, attempt to enforce a measure of economic equity, and pose as a supreme cultural arbiter.

Perhaps Yongzheng’s most dramatic gesture in this direction was his decision to emancipate the “mean people” of China. This designation was applied to several groups who were considered social outcasts and were forbidden to serve in any government capacity or take the state exams: the “singing people” of Shaanxi and Shanxi, who sang and played music at weddings and funerals; the so-called “fallen people” of Zhejiang; the hereditary servants of Anhui and the hereditary beggars of Jiangsu; the boatmen, oyster gatherers, and pearl fishers from certain local tribes who worked in the dangerous seas off the southeast coast; the humble “but dwellers” who gathered hemp and indigo on the Zhejiang-Fujian border; and others who worked as domestic slaves. Perhaps Yongzheng was moved to change their lowly status more from his desire to establish a unified code of public morals than from genuine compassion, but the fact that he issued a whole series of edicts between 1723 and 1731 to free them shows his consistency and tenacity in seeking to end this type of discrimination.

In the short run the edicts had less effect than he hoped. Many of the “mean people” stayed in their lowly occupations out of choice, while many others were used to their degraded status and simply accepted it even though the laws had changed. Members of the general public were not eager to accept these outcasts as equals, despite the emperor’s edicts. But over the long term his pronouncements had the desired effect, and slowly many of the despised groups were able to take a more settled place in Qing society.

Here, as at other times in his reign, Yongzheng had a chance to learn that human nature could be obdurate, and that public pronouncements of moralistic concern did not necessarily change ingrained patterns of behavior; but we cannot tell if he took the lesson to heart. His belief in his own powers of persuasion remained intact, and he continued to exhort his officials and his subjects until the day he died. His practical moralism is a sign of how deeply the conventional Confucian virtues had been internalized by the Manchu rulers of the Qing state.
CHAPTER 5
Chinese Society and the Reign of Qianlong

SOCIAL PRESSURES AND POPULATION GROWTH

The reign of Qianlong, from 1736 to 1799, was the longest in the history of China. When one combines this period with the almost equally long reign of Kangxi, and adds Yongzheng’s reign, one sees that just three emperors ruled over China during the entire span extending from 1661 to 1799. Comparing the events of their reigns with the developments in North America over a similar stretch of time, from the founding of New York as an English colony to the death of George Washington, or in Britain from the Restoration of Charles II to the industrial revolution, one can see why China has presented such an extraordinary picture of stability and continuity to foreign observers.

But this apparent stability, and the remarkable successes of the emperors Kangxi and Yongzheng in consolidating China’s borders and centralizing the administration, should not blind us to the fact that China was still far from being a fully integrated or homogenous country. China’s vast expanses allowed for endless variations in such areas as pace of economic change, types of lineage organization, efficiency of transportation, religious practices, sophistication of commerce, and patterns of land use and landholding. A complete history of China would ideally include information on all these variables on a district-by-district basis, so that precise patterns of change could be charted and connected with political decisions made at the center.

Doubting though this task is, various studies have begun to show that it is feasible. In particular, by analyzing late imperial China in terms of units of economic integration rather than through the traditional provincial and prefectural subdivisions, we gain a different perspective on the society based on a body of data that was not available to the rulers and bureaucrats of the time. Scholars employing this approach have identified nine “macroregions” (as they term them), each embracing parts of several provinces. Each macroregion had a “core” defined by heightened economic activity in major cities, high population density, and comparatively sophisticated transportation networks for conveyance of food and merchandise. And each core was surrounded by a “periphery” of less populated and developed areas, which isolated the core of a given macroregion from the cores of its neighbors, and also provided a loosely policed area where illegal sects or bandit elements could develop in comparative freedom.

Of these nine macroregions one was in the northeast, in the area coterminus with southern Manchuria, the Qing’s preconquest heartland. Two were in the north, in the Xi’an region of Shaanxi and the Peking–western Shandong area. Three extended at different points along the Yangzi River—one on the east coast around Nanjing, one halfway upriver around Hankou, and one deeper up the river in Sichuan. A seventh was on the lower east coast in the Fujian region. An eighth was in the far southeast, centered around Canton. And the last was in the southwest, in the provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou. Without launching a detailed exploration of all nine macroregions, we can take a brief look at three of them to determine what kinds of factors were affecting their patterns of social and economic development in the eighteenth century.

First, the northern macroregion—centered around Peking and western Shandong, and extending into Henan and northern Jiangsu—was, despite the presence of the capital, less urban than most other macroregions: small independent holdings were the economic norm. Flooding was common, brought on by the silt-filled Yellow River, but flood-relief measures and emergency grain distribution in times of famine were more effective than in regions farther from the capital. Cotton was becoming a valuable cash crop of this macroregion as both spinning and weaving techniques grew more efficient, often carried out in home-based household workshops that provided a “climatized” environment of controlled dampness to prevent the fragile strands from breaking. Tobacco cultivation was spreading, too, along with glassmaking, coal mining, and brewing. Shifting social conditions, the presence of the many laborers and boatmen who serviced the grain barges on the Grand Canal, overworked soil, and fragmented landholdings all contributed to make this an area where crime and local violence were common.

By contrast, the middle Yangzi macroregion, with its comparatively low population density and its untilled land, was at this time experiencing a
massive in-migration from other regions. The area developed a population of "sojourners" with divided loyalties to their new base and their old ancestral homes, and of disaffected local minorities pushed off their former lands. The booming Yangzi River city of Hankou, a commercial rather than an administrative center with complex systems of banks and guilds, was becoming the focus for a truly interregional long-distance grain trade. To the southeast, Jingdezhen expanded as an industrial city, making porcelain for the export markets of the West as well as for the Chinese elite. Yet along with this commercial growth, peasant strategies of building new dikes in the area of Dongting Lake to protect their tiny plots of farmland from floods, along with larger-scale land-reclamation projects engineered by the elite, led ultimately to terrible flooding by the rivers, which had been deprived of their natural runoff areas by man's hard work and ingenuity.

A different series of factors dominated our third example, the lower-east-coast macrolegion that centered around Fujian province and incorporated parts of southern Zhejiang and eastern Guangdong. The coastal location gave this macrolegion's merchants a host of profitable trade contacts with Taiwan and Southeast Asia, which brought a certain cosmopolitanism and a highly developed system of credit and banking particularly to the port of Amoy (Xiamen). Further prosperity came from the rich tea farms of the region. But for a mixture of historical and geographical reasons, this macrolegion was also riven by fierce localisms. Powerful lineages controlled whole villages, and feuds between them were deadly and frequent. Many richer homes were heavily fortified. Tenancy rates were high, and there were violent tensions involving recent immigrants or the poorer inland farmers on their terraced mountainsides. Strong local accents and dialects made contact with outsiders difficult. The region's elite were sliding in the scale of national prestige, as the area produced fewer and fewer holders of the coveted highest examination degree, the jinshi. The Qing government identified the region as a potential trouble spot and kept it heavily garrisoned with both banner forces and local Chinese troops known as the Green Standard armies.

Since each of the macrolegions had its own internal economic logic, there was always danger that differences with other macrolegions might escalate into conflict. If the centralizing state proved unable to mediate or control these conflicts, the result might be either fragmentation or civil war. Something close to this had occurred between the 1630s and 1680s, when peasant rebels, Ming loyalists, Koxinga's forces, and the Three Feudatories had each found temporary bases in different macrolegional cores. The task of the state, therefore, was to bond the macrolegions together by ideological and administrative means—backed if necessary by military force. This task would be eased if trade links between separate macrolegions also developed, as began to happen in the later eighteenth century. With economic bonds reinforcing political ones, the nature of Qing state and society might eventually be transformed.

Another factor complicating the mid-Qing society and economy was China's rapidly rising population. Despite Kangxi's attempts through the head-tax registration reforms of 1712 to get a more accurate count of his country's inhabitants, the figures still remain shadowy, and comparisons with earlier periods are hard to make with precision. We can be fairly sure, however, that China's population in the early Ming dynasty, around 1390, was somewhere between 65 million and 80 million. By the end of the reign of Yongzheng's son Qianlong in the 1790s, it had passed the 300 million mark. But the demographic significance of the Ming-Qing transition period is that it interrupted any pattern of steady, moderate growth. In fact the period from just after the Ming emperor Wandi's death in 1620 to the end of Kangxi's war against the Three Feudatories (1681) witnessed a catastrophic drop in China's population overall, the result of foreign invasion, civil war, bandit upheavals, natural disaster, irrigation-system failures, and
**Age of Women Giving Birth: Daoyi, 1792**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Women Giving Birth</th>
<th>Number of Sons Born</th>
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<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>87</td>
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<td>20–24</td>
<td>226</td>
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<td>25–29</td>
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<td>68</td>
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<td>45–49</td>
<td>23</td>
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Life, and half before they were twenty. The average life expectancy for the men of Daoyi was around thirty-two years, and some 4 percent lived past sixty-five. The age span for women was comparable.

An unusual aspect of the Daoyi figures is that they enable us to see the ages at which women bore their male children. Surprisingly, these figures indicate that women in their later twenties were the most likely to have children. This suggests that because of scarce food supplies there was parental and economic pressure to hold off having children during the early years of maximum female fertility.

The social and cultural consequences of one final demographic factor can be drawn from these figures. Because of childhood illnesses, a less-than-adequate diet, even infanticide in time of famine—and because wealthy men tended to keep several female consorts—there were many fewer marriageable women than men in Daoyi, as in so many other areas of China. The effects of this on family patterns are telling: although almost every woman in Daoyi over thirty was married or widowed, 20 percent of the adult men never married at all. The Chinese idealization of the family, the attention paid to children, and the insistence that descendants practice ancestor worship to keep forebears from suffering in the afterworld—all these deeply held beliefs must have seemed a cruel jest to these millions of men. For women, any attempt to avoid marriage must have been out of the question. This was just one more of the many areas in which sources of social discontent were always present, and yet could seldom be articulated because of China's prevailing social beliefs.

*These detailed figures are for the birth of sons only. Since Daoyi was a village owing military service in the banner system, the focus of census takers was on potential recruits. But elsewhere in China also, more attention was paid to accurate counting of males than females.*

"Like the Sun at Midday"

Oblivious to many of the broad problems that were beginning to plague his country, Emperor Qianlong began his long reign (1736–1799) in a spirit of forceful optimism. Yongzheng's fourth son, Qianlong, came peacefully to the throne at the age of twenty-five, having been spared the factional battles that plagued his father's youth. Yongzheng had had the foresight to write down his choice of heir in secret and to lock the designated name in a casket in the palace so that there could be no dispute. Qianlong had been carefully groomed for the role of emperor, and had no doubts about his abilities nor the grandeur of the dynasty over which he presided.

Qianlong's most important achievement was the conquest and integration of huge areas of western territory—the region later known as Xinjiang, the "New Territories"—into the Chinese state. By doing this he doubled the territorial extent of China, finally ended the Zungar troubles, and fixed a firm western border with Russia to go along with the northern borders settled by treaties at Nerchinsk and Kiakhta. The achievement of this vast task took much time and money, and was linked (as it had been in Kangxi's and Yongzheng's time) to the progress of campaigns in western Sichuan and northeastern Tibet.

Qianlong put much of his faith for leadership of the western battles in a previously obscure Manchu bannerman named Zhaohui, who had risen through the bureaucratic ranks in the Grand Secretariat during the 1730s and become quartermaster of the Qing armies in Sichuan before being sent to the Zungar front in the same capacity. There he volunteered for active duty. After a series of extraordinary adventures between 1756 and 1759 that included the defection of his key allies, the murder of his emissaries by Muslims in Turkish, deprivations that reduced his troops to cannibalism, and forced marches of hundreds of miles in difficult terrain, Zhaohui was able to capture the cities of Kashgar and Yarkand in 1759. Qing troops slaughtered the last Zungar forces with great cruelty. The new territories were henceforth run by a military governor stationed in Ili and a second-in-command based in Urumchi, and the tribes of Mongolia were drawn closer in their allegiance to the Qing. When General Zhaohui returned to Peking, Qianlong came out beyond the city gates to welcome him in person, an almost unparalleled honor.

Just as all the diplomatic negotiations with the Zungars and the Mongols had been handled by the Manchu staff of the Lijian Yuan, so now the administration of the new territories in the west was kept in the hands of...
the Manchus and a few experienced Chinese bannermen. The region was not thrown open to Chinese colonization and settlement, but was maintained as a strategic frontier zone. It was occupied by massive Manchu and Chinese banner garrisons of 15,000 to 20,000 troops, with 100,000 dependents, at an annual cost to the Qing of at least 3 million taels. The largely Muslim inhabitants kept their own religious leaders and followed their own strict dietary practices; the Manchus also excused them from shaving their heads and growing the queue. The civilian Muslim leaders, known as the Bega, were bound by salaries and titles to the Qing state. Trade was expanded in such items as copper, precious stones, salt peter, shawl wool, and slaves, although the Manchu court preserved a virtual monopoly over the mining of jade and gold, the most valued minerals from the region.

These immense campaigns had not been conducted from the small, secretive Office of Military Finance, as in Yongzheng's reign. Although the office through which the campaigns were coordinated bore the same name in Chinese as Yongzheng's, its scope and personnel had vastly expanded, as had its power and visibility in the government as a whole. For this reason, from Qianlong's reign onward the office is translated as the "Grand Council" in English, for it now transcended in power all the six ministries and even the Grand Secretariat itself. Among the first of Qianlong's grand councilors were his two trusted advisers, Oertai and Zhang Tingyu. They gave continuity to the government, and were gradually joined by a small number of hand-picked ministers, the total remaining at around six or seven during most of Qianlong's reign. The grand councilors were backed by a secretarial staff of 250 or more, who served in rotation and round the clock so that the key offices were never empty.

The Grand Council now became the filing center for the crucial palace memorials conveyed by senior officials throughout China. As these memorials were copied out, evaluated by a wider circle of advisers, and often passed on to the ministries for discussion, both their symbolic and their real functions as special devices bonding official and ruler began to fade. As if recognizing this, Qianlong's comments in vermilion ink on the memorials were usually perfunctory—"Noted," "Read," "Send to the relevant Ministry," etc.—and conveyed little of the sense of warmth and intimacy, nor indeed of anger or concern, that had characterized the comments of his father and grandfather.

This is not to say Qianlong was not a conscientious ruler, for he was. He met senior officials regularly in audience, read the documents submitted to him, traveled extensively both to the Yangzi delta cities and in Manchuria, coordinated military campaigns, and issued numerous edicts on important policy matters. It was rather that he left a great deal of the actual decision making to his grand councilors, and allowed the sense of dynamic central leadership that had characterized the reigns of Kangxi and Yongzheng to fade away.

This loss of impulse can be seen in his approach to the reform of rural tax collection that had featured so largely in Yongzheng's thinking. Although Qianlong had ordered all candidates for the senior level jinshi exams in 1742 to write essays on the provincial revenue retention system, and asked the same of his senior officials, slowly—almost casually—the key elements of that tax strategy faded. The wealthy provinces that had surplus local revenue were made to hand it over to the poorer provinces. The result was that the rich provinces lost the opportunity to take important local initiatives that might have strengthened their government, while the poorer provinces lost any incentive to expand their collection system or reform their economic base.

More and more often, magistrates kept the local taxation surpluses to themselves rather than forwarding them to the provincial financial commissioner. The old abuses of extra fees, payments, and illegal surcharges crept back in. The Ministry of Revenue slowly instituted a system by which every item of local expenditure had to be approved by members of its Peking...
staff before the money could be spent. This led to an avalanche of paper work and an absurd system in which trivial matters were held up for years and important ones never got done at all. One Ministry of Revenue document of this time from the capital province of Hebei shows that provincial officials had to clear such items as 48 taels to pay some guards on a bridge, 105 taels for sailors’ wages, and 12 taels as pension allowance for two widows.

In cultural affairs, Qianlong’s approach was similar to his father’s. He made a public show of his filial piety, particularly in his ritualized treatment of his own mother, the dowager empress. He pampered and flattered her to an extraordinary degree, taking her with him on lavish tours to the Yangzi delta region and even building a copy of southern streets in the northern palace after she was no longer able to go on her travels. Claiming filial loyalty to his insulted father, he reversed Yongzheng’s edict of clemency and ordered the unfortunate Zeng Jing—that inept popularizer of Lu Lüliang’s ideas back in 1728—sliced to pieces in the market square of Peking. He gave additional examinations to scholars of outstanding calibre who had been unsuccessful in the regular state exams, made much of the local lecture systems that promulgated Confucian values and the Sacred Edict, celebrated the aged in special festivals, and praised virtuous wives and widows.

In some areas he took new initiatives. He expanded the imperial collection of painting and calligraphy enormously, drawing into the court many of the finest works from the previous millennium. (He has been blamed, by later councillors, for writing elaborate poems on many great paintings in his neat but undistinguished calligraphy, thus ruining the subtlety of the original compositions.) He patronized a number of Jesuit painters at the court, especially the talented Italian Giuseppe Castiglione, whose royal portraits and large panoramas of hunts and processions marked a unique blend of Chinese composition with Western perspective and coloration. Qianlong employed Jesuit architects and designers to work on a magnificent European-style summer palace, the Yuan Ming Yuan, erected in a lakeside park just outside Peking. He ordered the compilation of a number of important works—genealogies, histories, accounts of rituals—that would accurately preserve and enshrine the Manchu heritage. And to emphasize the power of the Qing as religious patrons, he had a replica of the great Tibetan lamaist temple, the Potala, built on the grounds of his extensive summer palace in Rehe (Jehol).

To preserve the greatness of Chinese culture, Qianlong also ordered a massive compilation to be made of the most famous literary and historical works of the past. Known as the Four Treasures from its four main components of classics, histories, philosophy, and miscellaneous literary works, this was not just a selection of passages on given topics, as was the Gujin yuexu jicheng, (the encyclopedia brought forth under Qianlong’s grandfather and father); rather, it was a complete anthology, with learned introductions, into which the works selected were copied in their entirety. The assembling of this collection, which ended up comprising 3,450 complete works and commentaries on 6,750 others, filled 36,000 manuscript volumes and took ten years to complete. It is one of the great achievements of Chinese bibliography.

Compiling the Four Treasures also served some of the functions of a literary inquisition, since private libraries were searched and those people owning works considered to be slighting to the Manchus were strictly punished. Such books, along with volumes of geography or travel containing information considered harmful to China’s defenses, were destroyed. So thorough was this campaign that over 2,000 works that we know were scheduled for destruction by Qianlong’s cultural advisers have never been rediscovered. Some of Qianlong’s senior editors on the Four Treasures project were also able to support the schools of philosophy they espoused by omitting the works of major rivals, or by emphasizing their own philosophical views in their commentaries.

One can trace, running through many of Qianlong’s pronouncements and actions, an undercurrent—faint yet disturbing. It is that of a man who has been praised too much and has thought too little, of someone who has played to the gallery in public life, mistaken grandeur for substance, sought confirmation and support for every routine action, and is not really equipped to make difficult or unpopular decisions. In the midst of Qianlong’s many glories, signs of decay and even collapse were becoming apparent. One of the five Chinese classics, the Book of Changes, had anticipated this, as any educated Chinese would have known. The fifty-fifth hexagram of the Changes is zeng (盈), meaning “abundance” or “fullness” (盈), and its main description says:

ABUNDANCE has success.
The king attains abundance.
Be not sad.
Be like the sun at midnight.

But the ancient commentary on this passage adds:

When the sun stands at midnight, it begins to set; when the moon is full it begins to wane. The fullness and emptiness of heaven and earth wane and
wax in the course of time. How much truer is this of men, or of spirits and gods!

**Eighteenth-Century Confucianism**

If questioned, Qianlong would surely have insisted that he presided over a Confucian system of government with Confucian means, and there were many ways in which he could have justified such a claim: the works of Confucius were regarded by the emperor and his officials as the key repositories of ethical wisdom; the Confucian Classics formed the basic curriculum in schools and were central to the competitive state examination system; Confucian values of loyalty and filial piety bound officials to rulers and children to parents, just as lectures on Confucian topics by scholars and officials in the countryside were aimed at unifying the populace in obedience to the state. Yet "Confucianism" was constantly changing as accretions were adopted or swept away. In the eighteenth century, the doctrine began to develop in new directions, paralleling changes in the society and the economy.

During the second half of the seventeenth century, scholars had been absorbed in searching out the reason for the collapse of the Ming dynasty, and many of them found a satisfactory explanation in the extreme individualism and belief in innate moral knowledge that had been so popular in the late Ming. Senior scholar-officials under the early Qing emperors Shunzhi and Kangxi—as well as those emperors themselves—sought to counter what they considered decadent Ming trends by reasserting the central values of Song-dynasty (960–1279) Confucianism. They emphasized the Song because it was then that the philosopher Zhu Xi (d. 1200) had given prominence to the view that there were indeed underlying principles (li) that explained heaven's actions and guided human conduct. Understanding such principles, Zhu Xi and his later followers believed, would help men to live rationally and in tune with heaven, and would justify the attempts of moral men to find meaning in a public career. Thus there was a state-oriented tilt to Song Confucianism, even though the elaboration of such beliefs demanded multifaceted levels of cosmological speculation as individual thinkers probed for heaven's purposes. Furthermore, the realization that even the most moral of men might never be able to fathom the dictates of heaven and would, therefore, inevitably fail in their duties to state and community led to complex levels of anxiety and guilt among Confucian thinkers.

Just as early Qing scholars in state positions had rejected elements of Ming thought and had found security in the earlier texts and interpretations of the twelfth-century Song dynasty, so did later Qing thinkers reject these Song norms and search for certainty elsewhere. By the time of Qianlong, many scholars had begun to find a new security not so much in particular texts as in a methodology. This methodology, which they called *kaozheng* (考證), has been usefully translated as "practicing evidential research," because it involved the meticulous evaluation of data based on rigorous standards of precision. Kaozheng scholars sought to get away from speculation altogether, to root their studies in "hard facts." They devoted their energies to studies in linguistics, mathematics, astronomy, and geography, confident that these would lead to greater certainty about what the true words and intentions of China's ancient sages had been and, hence, to a better understanding of how to live in the present. 3

The most important precursors of the *kaozheng* movement, and those its followers spoke of with greatest awe, were men who had lived during Kangxi's reign. One of the *kaozheng* heroes was Gu Yanwu, the Ming loyalist who had sought to defend his home territory against the Manchu forces. As noted above, Gu eventually made a tactful peace with the new Qing dynasty, and spent the last part of his life traveling across north China to study aspects of local technology as well as to track down old steles, from which he took careful rubbings that would help scholars with their philological research. Gu also kept the most careful record of his work in notebooks which, unlike the moralistic or metaphysical "diaries" of speculative Confucians, were jammed with precise notes on texts, rare sources, geographical observations, and ancient artifacts. (It is worth noting that elements of Western scholarship brought by the seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries, especially in the realms of mathematics and computational astronomy, may have affected the *kaozheng* scholars' research methodologies and given them confidence that there was a realm of "certainty" that lay above individual philosophical schools.)

Yan Ruoju, a friend of Gu's, applied similar techniques to collating the chronology and linguistic structures of part of the Confucian classic of historical documents. His conclusions, though circulated only in manuscript until the 1740s, had a shattering effect on many intellectuals of the time. Yan proved, with carefully marshaled evidence, that several sections of this major work (on which generations of state examination questions had been based) were a later forgery and thus did not deserve the reverence that scholars ascribed to it.

By the 1740s the examinations as a whole were coming under attack as sterile exercises that failed to select the finest scholars for office, and Yan's work heightened this sense of state Confucianism's weakness. Social tensions further undermined confidence in this system, for by the mid-eighteenth
century the state had not increased quotas of examination candidates proportionately to the rise in China's population. The consequent pressures on students and the difficulties of finding employment even if one passed the exams brought frustration and disillusionment to many members of the educated elite.

Eighteenth-century scholars used kaozheng insights and methodologies to begin a profound exploration of the Confucian past. Many spent much of their time reading texts and commentaries from the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 220), since these were so much nearer to Confucian's time than the Song texts still used in the state's schools and, hence, were believed to be nearer to the true sentiments of the sage himself. Partisans of the Han texts subsequently divided into groups, according to whether they placed more faith in scholarship done earlier or later in the Han dynasty. These were not just abstruse debates, but explorations of the past that began to approach the Classics as history and to treat history itself with a sharp and penetrating skepticism. The work of the kaozheng scholars also had major implications for eighteenth-century policy, since the scholars' "ant-like accumulation of facts"—as one of them described his studies—brought insights into hydraulics, astronomy, cartography, and ancient texts on government that enabled the scholars to evaluate Qing reality with a shrewder eye.

Kaozheng scholarship became so influential by the mid-Qianlong reign that it was supported by an interlocking infrastructure of book dealers and publishers, printers, library owners, and professional teachers of the many skills needed for advanced research of this kind. Often the lines between scholars and the commercial world blurred, since many merchants became patrons of kaozheng learning and accumulated huge libraries that they put at the scholars' disposal. Other kaozheng scholars were descended directly from merchant families, reflecting the growth of new urban centers in China and the blurring of previously sharp occupational categories.

In Emperor Qianlong's massive compilation project of the Four Treasuries, kaozheng scholars dominated the editorial process, using their new learning to denigrate speculative Confucian theories of the Song period (even though those theories remained "orthodox" in the examinations as a whole) and to boost the reputations of writers working in a kaozheng vein. Qianlong, in return, was so grateful for the amount of rare material that these scholars made available to him that he ordered officials to write out three extra manuscript sets of the rarest works included in the Four Treasuries compendium. These were to be deposited in libraries at the three main centers of kaozheng learning—Yangzhou, Zhenjiang, and Hangzhou—so that area scholars could consult them.

There was something highly intellectualized and even ingrown about all this work. It was extraordinarily difficult, for one thing, and hence enabled kaozheng scholars to reframe a vision of a scholarly elite that had become endangered by the swelling number of unemployed degree candidates in the eighteenth century. (The plight of that elite, and the corruption and pomposity of many self-satisfied scholars, were poignantly and amusingly caught in a novel entitled *Unofficial History of the Scholars* (Rulun waishii), written between 1740 and 1750 and first published in 1768.) The elite world of kaozheng scholarship was largely closed to the poorer, self-educated scholars and to women. Certain theorists in the eighteenth century had once again been advocating the education of women with a vigor that had not been seen since the late Ming dynasty. Several women did achieve some prominence as poets during Qianlong's reign, but the new techniques and the need for decades of intense research demanded by kaozheng skills ensured that women would remain outside this self-defined intellectual elite, as indeed would any scholar without the necessary leisure, teachers, or wealthy patrons.

At the same time, by late in Qianlong's reign, even devotees of the kaozheng tradition were beginning to find that their techniques had limitations. One of the most brilliant scholars, Dai Zhen, while allegedly staying within the kaozheng camp, also began to write in purely philosophical terms, returning to an era of speculation about human goals, motivations, passions, and the meaning of moral action. It is significant that his closest friends refused to acknowledge the importance of this work, although exploration of these problems was central to his vision of himself.

But Confucianism was not just a matter of philosophy. Painting and calligraphy had always been essential adjuncts to the Confucian value system, and here again there were significant eighteenth-century shifts in style and matter. Conventional techniques of Chinese painting had been put in the hands of just about any moderately educated person by the production of "how to do it" painting manuals like the *Mustard Seed Garden of 1701.* From such a book, one could quickly learn to render a passable branch of plum blossom, a thatched cottage, or a distant mountain range, allowing any member of the educated public to produce a reasonable painting. In response, the literati painters now began to cultivate a greater sense of eccentricity, deliberately violating the norms of composition and color to show an "amateurism" that was in fact highly planned. Such eccentricity had been a feature of Ming loyalist painting in the seventeenth century, when it was used to convey a political position; by the eighteenth century, it showed a more class-conscious face.

Significant changes also took place in calligraphy. Kaozheng scholars' discoveries and reprints of archaic scripts, and the circulation of careful rubbings of stone engravings, enabled the cult of the far past to dominate
The present. At some extremes, painters would render the calligraphy on their paintings as if it were carved with a chisel, managing to be evocative and erudite at the same time. Thus by the end of Qianlong's reign, as literacy spread in the largely peaceful and cultivated Chinese world, it was perhaps no coincidence that the most highly educated men developed new modes of cultured expression that were out of the reach of almost everyone else.

The Dream of the Red Chamber

The Dream of the Red Chamber, China's greatest novel, was written in the middle of Emperor Qianlong's reign. The author, Cao Xueqin, was descended from one of the Chinese bannerman-bondservants who had enjoyed wealth and influence as a favorite of Emperor Kangxi. But the Cao family, which had lived for years on a grand scale in Nanjing, was subsequently punished for dishonesty and incompetence by Emperor Yongzheng and suffered confiscation of most of its holdings. Cao Xueqin was thus thoroughly familiar with the Sino-Manchu tensions that persisted through the Qing dynasty and, by the time of his death in 1763, had tasted the nectar of luxurious living and the gall of bankrupt gentility.

The Dream of the Red Chamber—often known by its alternate title, The Story of the Stone—presents a meticulous description of the Jia, a wealthy Chinese extended family who occupy a series of linked mansions in an unnamed big city that seems to have some elements of Nanjing and some of Peking. Many aspects of the fictional Jia family's story are clearly drawn from the history of Kangxi's reign: the Jias are aware of Manchu culture and deportment, carry out confidential financial assignments for the emperor, and have a favored relationship with the court, where one of the Jia daughters is a secondary consort. Yet the novel is not content to offer a realistic portrayal of Qing life. Each of the novel's two titles points to different and complex elements in the novel's structure: the "dream" that is ascribed to the "red chamber" constitutes an elaborate yet mysterious foretelling of the fates of the main female protagonists who are related or linked to the Jias in some way; the "stone" whose "story" is to be told is a miraculous artifact, empowered by the gods with a magical life of its own, and living out its existence on this earth through the religious mediation of a Buddhist and a Daoist priest.

In simple outline, The Dream of the Red Chamber is a love story. The fate of the novel's hero, Jia Baoyu ("Jia of the Precious Jade"), is closely entwined with the lives of two young women, Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai, each of whom bears one of the elements of his name in her own. The three grew up in the Jia family mansions with a host of other young companions, but their idyllic relations come to a sharp end when Jia Baoyu, who deeply loves Lin Daiyu, is tricked by his parents into marrying the wealthier and stronger Xue Baochai. This deceit leads to Lin Daiyu's death; at the novel's end, Jia Baoyu—although he has just passed the highest level of the state examinations—leaves his young wife and the spacious grounds of his crumbling estate to seek the pure life of a religious pilgrim.

Cao Xueqin had a serious purpose in writing the novel, as well as the simple desire to entertain. Beyond its plot, the Dream is a story of the quest for identity and for an understanding of the human purpose on earth. The novel also explores the different levels of reality and illusion that lie entwined inside so-called success and failure. In Cao's words in the introduction to the book, "From the Void (which is Truth) we come to the contemplation of Form (which is Illusion); from Form is engendered Passion; by communicating Passion we enter again into Form; and from Form awake to the Void (which is Truth)." Or, put another way in the same introduction, "Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true."

Although this suggests that Cao intends to disavow "realism," so rich are the texture and structure of the novel—which is 120 chapters long and contains hundreds of richly drawn characters in addition to the main protagonists—that it can nevertheless be seen as a kind of summation of the many elements of mid-Qing elite life, including family structure, politics, economics, religion, aesthetics, and sexuality. Even allowing for all the freedoms of the creative writer's imagination and for the rich allegorical overtones that pervade the whole work, a look at each of these six categories can still tell us much about the grandeur of Qing society in the mid-eighteenth century, and about its underside.

In the realm of family structure, Cao Xueqin points to the immense power of the father over his children, especially on questions of their moral growth and education. It is the Jia father who chooses the schoolteacher for the local lineage school, who grills Jia Baoyu over the progress of his studies in the Confucian classics, and who punishes him for negligence or immorality. So terrible is the father's anger that the mere mention of it reduces the son to abject fear. The mother, in this context, is comparatively powerless; but the matriarch of the family, Jia Baoyu's grandmother, is shown as having great economic and intellectual strength, and as being able to moderate family behavior on the basis of the respect owed her for her advanced age and generational seniority. Similarly, generational hierarchies give Jia Baoyu prestige over younger siblings or cousins, while forcing him to defer to those older than he.
In political terms, the Jias are powerful not just because a member of their family is a consort to the emperor, nor because they hold high office in the bureaucracy and undertake imperial commissions. Their real power is local, in that they can use their prestige to bend the judicial system to their advantage. Any country magistrate knows better than to prosecute one of the Jias or their friends—it would be more than his job is worth. The family is thus subject to a kind of corrupting influence, which leads its younger members to believe they can break the law with impunity, even to the extent of husting up homicides in which family members have been involved. This political power is potentially self-perpetuating, since the web of princely friends and the patterns of examination success will propel the younger men of the lineage into positions of influence, and the young women of the family into powerful marriages.

Economically, the Jia family can call on resources that would be beyond the imagination of most Chinese families. Their home is full of silver bullion, bolts of silk, paintings, and scrolls. Their grounds and buildings are spacious, and their coffers constantly replenished with the rents brought by loyal bailiffs from urban holdings and from far-off farms that the Jias own as absentee landlords. They indulge in profitable business deals of great complexity, and gain additional income from carrying out imperial commissions and acquiring exotic goods from merchants who trade with Western countries. They also have scores of indentured servants, male and female, who perform all duties in the family compound and act as retainers whenever the Jias go outside the walls.

In matters of religion, the Jia family are as eclectic as Qing society was. Central to the family’s prestige and sense of fulfillment is the meticulous worship, in the Confucian tradition, of their own ancestors. Funerals, like marriages, are occasions for intense, careful pomp and ritual performance. But the Jias also call, as necessary, on priests of the Daoist and Buddhist religions; they follow the prescribed ceremonies of these religions, and even keep a group of young female Buddhist novices in the purdah of their own home. The Jias practice both Buddhist and Daoist rites in times of fear or illness, and on occasion have priests conduct exorcisms to rid the family houses of harmful spirits and malignant influences. Jia Baoyu himself is, for a long period in the novel, immobilized by an enemy’s use of black magic, against which not even his precious jade can protect him. One senior member of the family has withdrawn to a temple to follow his own pattern of religious enlightenment. (He later dies from imbibing too many magical Daoist elixirs of immortality.)

Aesthetically, the life in the Jia mansions is a joy, recalling the range and elegance that typified elite life in the late Ming dynasty. The high level of literacy of the young men and women makes possible an endless array of poetry games and the exchange of crude jokes and riddles. The clothes, decor, gardens, and accouterments of the main characters are exquisite; the preparation of tea, drinking of wine, and eating of an evening meal are a triumphant blending of taste and artifice. Music and drama are also an integral part of life for the Jias; the family keeps its own troupe of actors and actresses who, whenever they are requested to do so, perform scenes from now-classic works such as The Peony Pavilion, by the Ming dramatist Tang Xianzu.

Finally, in the realm of sexuality, there are few limitations on the behavior of the Jia family members. The children and adolescents may live together in a youthful world where banter is essentially innocent even if full of sexual innuendo, but their elders are lustful creatures, and the children are growing up to be like them. Both men and women use their powers in the family hierarchy to obtain their sexual pleasures. Jealousy goes with adultery, love affairs lead to murders. Servants and female slaves become sexual objects and are powerless to protest except by flight or suicide. Erotic paintings stir up great passions, as in the case of Jia Baoyu’s initiation into sexual life. Jia Baoyu falls asleep after viewing a sensual painting and has a complex yet graphic erotic dream. His awakening is followed by a re-enactment of the dream experience, but this time in literal terms with his own favored serving-maid. Novice nuns or young male actors are also caught up in the patterns of seduction and deceit, and even in the schoolroom, where Confucian precepts are allegedly being internalized, homosexual liaisons flourish among the young male scholars.

Cao Xueqin had not completed his novel when he died in 1763, and for several decades it circulated in various manuscript editions among his family and friends. Only in 1792 did a “full” version, with lacunae filled in by later hands, appear in published form, and it became an immediate success. One may speculate that the novel’s wide readership was composed of men and women from the upper class, of underemployed scholars, and also of those with some education who lived and worked as merchants and traders in the flourishing cities of the largely peaceful mid-Qing world.

Although The Dream of the Red Chamber is full of echoes from the great plays and novels of the late Ming and from earlier Chinese poetic traditions, and although we cannot be sure which sections of the last forty chapters were the author’s personal work, the novel remains a dazzling and original triumph, anticipating in its subtlety and scale many of the great works of the nineteenth-century Western tradition. Cao himself was tongue-in-cheek about his achievement, and in a passage that he puts into the mouth of the Jia family grandmother, he speculates on why most conventional Chinese
tales and dramas written prior to his novel were so repetitive and unconvincing:

'There's always a reason for it,' the old lady went on, 'in some cases it's because the writer is envious of people so much better off than himself; or disappointed because he has tried to obtain their patronage and failed, and deliberately portrays them in this unfavourable light as a means of getting his own back on them. In other cases the writers have been corrupted by reading this sort of stuff before they begin to write any themselves, and, though totally ignorant of what life is in educated, aristocratic families, is really like portray their heroines in this way simply because everyone else does so and they think it will please their readers. I ask you now, never mind very grand families like the ones they pretend to be writing about, even in average well-to-do families like ours when do you ever hear of such carryings-on? It's a wonder their jaws don't drop off, telling such dreadful lies!'7

Cao Xueqin might have been disappointed in his life, but it is unlikely that he was envious of those in power and certain that he was not corrupted by the fiction of the past. His triumph was his own. The only real irony, perhaps, is that his great novel adds luster to the reign of Qianlong, although Cao's own sharp gaze was able to see that so much was wrong underneath all that grandeur.

Qianlong's Later Years

As if echoing the warning note sounded by the feng hexagram, in Emperor Qianlong's later years a series of crises erupted. There was no particular pattern to these troubles; it was rather that a series of misjudgments on the government's part coincided with previously unsuspected levels of domestic resentment to produce a tense situation overall. Bungled military border campaigns, local rebellions, bureaucratic corruption, and imperial favoritism were all part of the story, which took place in a context of intellectual uneasiness over traditional scholarly values, the state's failure to address pressing financial and administrative needs, and a steadily growing population that put unprecedented pressures on the land.

In public pronouncements, Qianlong prided himself on his sagacity as a coordinator of military campaigns, and the conquest of Xinjiang in the 1750s—although owing a good deal to luck—had indeed been a great achievement. But a campaign against Burma in the 1760s was badly mismanaged, in sharp contrast to the efficiency with which Wu Sangui had pursued the last Ming prince in the same region a century before. And the brief war that China waged against Vietnam in 1788 and 1789 throws a sharp light on the inadequacies of Qing policy.

In 1788 the ruler of Vietnam's Le dynasty fled with his family from the usurping Nguyen family, who had seized Hanoi. Taking refuge in Guangxi province, he begged for Qing protection. Qianlong responded swiftly, ordering a three-pronged attack on Vietnam, with one army marching south from Guangxi under General Sun Shyi, a second southeast from Yunnan, and a third transported by sea from Guangdong. The Chinese armies under General Sun entered Hanoi in December 1788 and declared total victory and the restoration of the Le dynasty. Qianlong at once promoted General Sun to ducal rank. But just one month later, while Sun and his troops were in Hanoi celebrating the Chinese New Year festival, the Nguyen armies counterattacked, killing over 4,000 of Sun's troops and forcing his ignominious flight back to Guangxi. Qianlong pragmatically commented that the Le had been fated to fall, and he acknowledged the succession of the Nguyen victor as Vietnam's legitimate ruler. At one level this showed that Chiutu still had the prestige to confer title on border rulers; at the same time, however, Chinese military leadership was called into question. (This misadventure marked the end of China's attempts at direct military involvement in Vietnam until their equally unsuccessful invasion of 1799.)

That some Manchu generals could still muster amazing military skills was shown by the Qing victories over the Gurkhas of Nepal, who attacked Tibet in 1790 and 1791. Qing troops under Manchu generals reached Tibet in 1792 and defeated the Gurkhas in a series of battles, forcing them back into Nepal through the Himalayan passes. The Qing troops showed
remarkable skills at logistics and at fighting in some of the harshest terrain in the world. In the ensuing peace treaty, Nepal agreed to send tribute to China every five years, a promise that they kept up until the year 1908. But the campaign had been extremely expensive for the Qing, and a great deal of the money expended was never accounted for satisfactorily. The man in charge of writing up the accounts was that same General Sun Shiyi who had bungled the Vietnam campaign. Despite Sun’s failure there, Qianlong had transferred him to Lhasa, demonstrating more the strength of the emperor’s will than the shrewdness of his evaluation of character.

These long-range campaigns against foreign states were conducted in an unsettling context of indigenous rebellions, which began to occur in different parts of the Chinese Empire during the later eighteenth century. One major uprising took place not far from Peking, in Shandong province near the city of Linqin, a key point on the north-south grain-transportation axis along the Grand Canal. This was an area near the periphery of the northeast macroregion, where population had been rising sharply and where disaffected peasants mingled easily with the restless barge pullers and coolies who kept the Grand Canal in operation. In 1774 Chinese rebels under the leadership of a martial-arts and herbal-healing expert named Wang Lun rose up against the Qing, invoking the support of an “Eternal Venerable Mother” goddess. In this way the revolt showed its links to a tradition of underground or sectarian White Lotus folk-Buddhism, which venerated the same female deity and was based on a millenarian view of catastrophe on earth that reached back to ideological roots at least five centuries earlier.

Wang drew his followers from a wide variety of occupations: many were peasants or other rural laborers, but there were also traveling actresses, carters, fish sellers and dealers in bean curd, monks, vegetable-oil retailers, and a moneylender. We cannot say that Wang Lun had a firm political agenda: although some peasants did support him, he never talked of abolishing rent, or helping the poor, or dividing the land equally. His followers rose in rebellion not in response to some specific political program for social and economic amelioration, but from general feelings of antagonism to the dominant forces of society, reinforced by simple forms of spiritual euphoria.

Wang Lun’s teachings convinced the rebels that they could withstand all Qing attacks. As he told them, “If I call on Heaven, Heaven will assist me; if I call on Earth, Earth will give me magical strength. Their guns will not fire. What men will dare impede me?” In early fighting, some of Wang’s predictions seemed correct: he captured several small towns and even parts of Linqin city, and many Manchu and Chinese troops sent against him fled or deserted. But the state called up massive forces, including banner troops and local armies of Chinese soldiers known as the Green Standard troops; Wang Lun and his various “soldiers,” armed mainly with spears or knives, could not withstand the coordinated attacks of these Qing troops. Despite brave street fighting, often house to house, the rebels were pinned down and slaughtered with their families. A vivid rendition of Wang Lun’s final apocalyptic was given to Qing authorities by a captured rebel who fled his leader’s burning headquarters. Wang Lun, he testified, met his death wearing a long purple robe and two silver bracelets, his dagger and double-bladed sword beside him. He sat cross-legged in the corner of the room, motionless, his clothes and beard aflame.

Wang Lun’s uprising was more important as a symptom of deep underlying discontent than for its immediate effects, and it should be considered along with other rebellions that erupted elsewhere in China, often with no precisely stated grievances or goals. In the 1780s, members of a group known as the Heaven and Earth Society, which had its own religious rituals and social bondings through oaths of allegiance, rose in revolt on Taiwan, seizing several cities and declaring a new dynasty with the reign title of Shun Tian (顺天), “Obedient to Heaven.” Echoing the reign titles used by so many claimants in the 1640s, this one suggested that the Manchus had
somehow been outraging Heaven, but in actuality the uprising seems to have been more a battle between different groups of emigrants from Fujian province for dominance over Taiwan's economy. The rebels were suppressed and their leaders executed in 1788.

Also in the 1780s, in Gansu province, there were two major revolts of the Muslim communities, sparked by adherents of a fundamentalist “new sect” who opposed the local Muslim officials appointed by the Qing. Both Muslim uprisings were suppressed after heavy fighting, as were a series of revolts by Miao tribesmen in southwest China. But the fighting was costly to the Qing, who despite their victories did not eradicate the underlying causes of religious, economic, and ethnic resentments. In 1799, as Qianlong's reign ended, rebels claiming the same White Lotus affiliation that had animated the followers of Wang Lun were rising up all across central China and were actively fighting Qing troops in many areas of Sichuan, Hubei, Shaanxi, and Henan.

Can one link these outbreaks to specific Manchu policies that alienated the people? The evidence is not clear on this, but it is certain that in the late eighteenth century many Qing government institutions began to falter: the emergency granaries were often empty, sections of the Grand Canal silted up, regular banner troops behaved with incompetence or brutality, efforts to stop ecologically dangerous land-reclamation projects were abandoned, the bureaucracy was faction-ridden, and corruption ran deep. It is also possible that Qing reluctance to create new county governments in areas of new settlement or dense population put impossible stresses on officials in the bureaucracy. Moreover, the intense pressure for jobs meant that those who had finally obtained office sought a swift return for all their waiting and anxiety, pressing local peasants in their jurisdictions for speedy tax payments and for supplementary charges. The White Lotus insurgents of the 1790s, for instance, stated categorically that “the officials have forced the people to rebel.” It is also true that in the conduct of the border campaigns, as in the suppression of local rebellions, Qing officials indulged in an unusually high level of graft. This was made possible by collusion between high figures in military and civil government, who often hid the real situation from Emperor Qianlong. And Qianlong, having allowed the secret palace memorial system of his father Yongzheng to become impersonal and routine, now had no reliable, confidential sources from which to learn of his officials’ malfeasance.

There is no doubt that this pattern of corruption grew worse after 1775, when a young Manchu guards officer named Heshen became entrenched as the elderly emperor’s court favorite, although Heshen was not responsible for everything that was going awry. At that time Heshen was twenty-five and the emperor sixty-five, and the following year the favorite received an extraordinary series of promotions: Qianlong named Heshen a deputy lieutenant general of the Manchu plain blue banner, a minister of the imperial household, vice-minister of revenue, and a grand councilor. There were no parallels in Qing history for giving so many powerful appointments to a young man, and Qianlong later piled honor on honor. Heshen was made minister of revenue (and, for a time, minister of civil office), a grand secretary, a director of the Four Treasuries compilation project, commanding officer of the Peking troops, supervisor of transit dues at the Peking gates, and a baron. His son was married to Emperor Qianlong’s tenth daughter in 1790.

It is not surprising that rumors swirled around the emperor’s relations with his favorite. A homosexual liaison was implied in popular stories, such as one suggesting Heshen was the reincarnation of one of Emperor Yongzheng’s concubines, with whom Qianlong had been infatuated as a youth. A Korean diplomatic official on a visit to China, perhaps influenced by such rumors, described Heshen at thirty as “elegant in looks, sprucely handsome in a dandified way that suggested a lack of virtue.” In 1793 Lord Macartney, who was visiting China as ambassador for King George III, described Heshen as “a handsome, fair man about forty to forty-five years old, quick and fluent.”

There is, in fact, no clear evidence about the relationship one way or the other. Certainly Qianlong trusted Heshen implicitly for the rest of his life. It is possible that Qianlong initially wanted Heshen to be the emperor’s “ears and eyes” that Kangxi and Yongzheng had found in the servants and officials who used the palace memorial system in its earlier days. Thus in 1780 the emperor sent Heshen on a confidential mission to Yunnan province to investigate corruption charges against the governor-general there, and in 1781 sent him to assist in suppressing the Muslim uprisings in Gansu. But Heshen, who was often ill, mainly stayed in Peking as Qianlong’s chief minister and confidant. Heshen’s physicians concluded that his “symptoms were owing to a malignant vapour or spirit which had infused itself into, or was generated in his flesh, which shifted itself from place to place,” and were unable to help him. Bedded turning to Western medicine as an alternative, Heshen summoned Lord Macartney’s Scottish doctor Hugh Gillan for a consultation. Gillan found that Heshen was suffering from acute rheumatism and a serious hernia, conditions that had plagued him since childhood, and arranged for him to be fitted with a truss.

In various comments on Heshen, both Macartney and Gillian showed that they found him to be forceful and intelligent, if evasive. Moreover, miscellaneous Chinese sources also show that Heshen possessed a lively intelli-
gence, keen curiosity, tact, and a high level of literacy. But he did use his offices to make prodigious amounts of money for himself and his cronies. He took on himself nearly imperial pretensions, coerced favors, and demanded fees for all services. He raked in extra millions by misreporting the needs for supplies and services on the numerous campaigns conducted during Qianlong's later years, especially the protracted, savage, and badly executed forays against the White Lotus rebels. By all these actions, Heshen compounded the problems of the time and contributed to a growing demoralization among the bureaucracy and the people.

Heshen's dominance was even stronger after 1796. In that year, Qianlong "abdicated," an action devised as a "filial" one to show that he did not consider himself worthy to reign longer than the sixty-one years of his famous grandfather, Kangxi. But Qianlong did not allow his son to exercise power, and during this twilight period, even though Qianlong's name was not used in dynastic titles, it was his will that was manifested through Heshen's continuing official power. When Qianlong died at last in 1799, Heshen's base crumbled. He was charged with corruption by Qianlong's son and forced to commit suicide. It was a melancholy yet somehow fitting end to one of the richest centuries in China's long history, an end that highlighted the curious mix of strength and weakness that was now emerging as lying at the heart of the Qing dynasty.

**Chapter 6**

**China and the Eighteenth-Century World**

**Managing the Foreigners**

The Qing state had no Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Relations with non-Chinese peoples were instead conducted by a variety of bureaus and agencies that, in different ways, implied or stated the cultural inferiority and geographical marginality of foreigners, while also defending the state against them.

In the north and northwest, relations with the Mengols, Zhungars, and Russians were handled mainly by the Lifan Yuan, or Office of Border Affairs, which had been founded by Hong Taiji in 1638. Staffed exclusively by Manchus and Mongols, the Lifan Yuan's task was to keep things quiet in China's dangerous northwest crescent, whence so many of her conquerors in the past had come. To this end, the office forged an elaborate system of agreements regulating the visits of central Asian caravan traders to China. Imperial daughters were commonly married off to influential Mongol princes, forming a protective network of personal alliances, bolstered by Qing garrisons located at strategic points in the region. Muslims, some of whom were of central Asian origin and some Chinese, were watched with care but generally allowed to practice their religion in peace; and after a Qing military presence in Lhasa became established under Yongzheng, the tribes that owed religious allegiance to the lamaist Buddhist hierarchy of Tibet ceased to be a grave threat. The variety of tasks coordinated by officials in the Lifan Yuan did, therefore, give the bureaucrats considerable skill and breadth of experience in dealing with "foreign policy" problems, and made
muddled freely with Qing scholars and officials, and left vivid accounts of the social and cultural life in Peking and of the political attitudes of the Confucian literati. Embassies from Japan, however, had completely ceased during the later Ming, and Japan's continuing refusal to acknowledge China's ritual superiority, when combined with the Tokugawa government's decision to restrict all foreign residence and trade to Nagasaki, meant that formal Qing relations with Japan were minimal. The military dimension of "tributary" relations emerged in 1788, when the Chinese invoked their right and obligation to go to the aid of the ruling Le in Vietnam. As we have seen, the Chinese swiftly switched their support from the Le to the Nguyen ruling house when the Nguyen accepted the traditional tributary position of deference to the Qing state. In the Ryukyu Islands, there was a curious case of divided loyalties. The islanders were in fact controlled by the southern Japanese lords of Satsuma, but on ritual occasions continued to profess themselves loyal tributary subjects of the Qing. Contemporary eighteenth-century accounts show Japanese ships retreating discreetly out of sight when Chinese diplomatic missions visited the islands, only to return promptly as soon as the Chinese left.

These three broad patterns of foreign management—-with the northwest, the missions, and the south—shared some fundamental Chinese premises of great importance. At their root was the assumption that China was the "central" kingdom and that other countries were, by definition, peripheral, removed from the cultural center of the universe. The Chinese, therefore, showed little interest in precise information or detailed study of foreign countries. Even during the peak periods of eighteenth-century "evidential" kuoheung research, the interest of scholars in geography and linguistics was largely concentrated on Chinese territory. Chinese descriptions of foreign countries continued to contain an exotic blend of mystical tales and fantasy in which foreigners were often likened to animals or birds and were described in patronizing or deliberately belittling language.

Those Chinese who chose to leave China and go overseas for trade or travel were seen as having abandoned their country, and even though an extensive Chinese trade developed with Southeast Asia, the Qing state showed no interest in standing up for Chinese rights there or elsewhere in the world. (An exception was the case of Taiwan, but that had been formally incorporated as a part of Fujian province.) The Qing were basically uninterested in the potential governmental gains to be made from foreign trade, although they were willing to skim a certain amount off for themselves through the imperial household. They distrusted traders and—as in the 1660s—were willing to take harsh measures against their coastal populations in order to achieve military or diplomatic goals. They reserved for
themselves the absolute right to regulate foreigners trading with China, not only as to location and frequency, but down to the smallest details of personnel and goods involved.

This body of Qing beliefs and practices was bound to clash with those of the Western powers, especially after the newly expanding states of Britain, France, and Holland all began to develop major overseas empires at the expense of the earlier dominant partners, Spain and Portugal. One can trace this process of cultural opposition through the gradual emergence in China of a fourth type of “foreign management” structure, commonly known as the “Canton System.” In the early Qing, Dutch and Portuguese embassies both tried to establish broad trading privileges with China but had to be content with the status of “tributary nations,” registered with the Ministry of Rituals and permitted to send trade missions only at stipulated intervals. British ships sporadically appeared off the east China coast beginning in 1635; and under the Qing, perhaps because the British had the sense not to seek formal relations, British merchants were permitted to trade with the Chinese in Zhoushan (Chusan), Xiamen (Amoy), and Canton. All the Western powers benefited when the Qing ended the coastal trade restriction policy in the 1680s and the idea of their “tributary” status was generally dropped.

In this attempt to control foreign trade and increase their profits by regulating prices, in 1720 Chinese merchants in Canton formed their own monopolistic guild called the Cohong (from gonghong, 桂江 or “combined merchant companies”). In 1754 these “Hong” merchants were each ordered by the Qing to stand surety for the foreign crews’ good behavior and for the payment of transit dues.

The British East India Company, founded in 1600 and granted a monopoly of east Indian trade by the British government, was now rising rapidly from a small operation to a position of global significance as it attracted sizable new investments and started to conquer territories in the subcontinent of India itself. During the Qianlong reign, its directors began to chafe at Qing restrictions, as did the British government itself. In 1741, the British discovered the importance of having a Far Eastern base (the Portuguese already had Macao, the Spaniards Manila, and the Dutch Batavia) when a commodore in the Royal Navy, George Anson, on assignment to attack Spanish shipping in the East, put into Canton harbor after his flagship suffered severe storm damage. Anson apparently believed that the Chinese, following the international laws of the sea now prevalent in the West, would treat him hospitably as a benevolent neutral. But the Canton bureaucracy erected dozens of administrative hurdles, refused to meet with him or acknowledge his messages for weeks on end, charged him what he considered outrageous prices for the shoddy supplies they provided, and refused to let him make any of the repairs he wanted. Anson’s published account of his alleged mistreatment was widely circulated and translated into several European languages, helping to build a ground swell of anti-Chinese feeling in Britain and elsewhere in the West.

The East India Company tried to enlarge the scope for China trade and negotiation in 1759 by sending James Flint, a company trader who had learned Chinese, to present complaints to the Qing court concerning the restrictions on trade in Canton and the rampant corruption there. By dint of tenacity and a certain amount of bribery, Flint, sailing first to Ningbo and then to Tianjin in a small 70-ton vessel, the Success, was able to have his complaints carried to Peking. The emperor initially seemed to show flexibility, and agreed to send a commission of investigation to the south. But after the Success, sailing back to Canton, was lost at sea with all hands except for Flint (he had traveled south independently), the emperor changed his mind. Flint was arrested and imprisoned for three years for breaking Qing regulations against sailing to northern ports, for improperly presenting petitions, and for having learned Chinese.

The Qing response to the growing number of foreign traders who began to push at their doors in the later eighteenth century was to reinforce all the preceding rules, while protesting that they wished justice done to all foreigners. All European trade was restricted to the one port of Canton after 1760, and foreigners were forbidden residence there except during the trading season, which ran each year from October to March. The Europeans now had to deal exclusively with the licensed Chinese Hong merchants—of whom there were normally around ten—despite the indulgence of many in sharp business practices and the considerable number who went bankrupt by overextending their resources. Westerners could communicate their grievances or petitions only to these Hong merchants, who in turn forwarded any written materials to the Hoppo, the court-appointed trade official. (Like Cohong, Hoppo derived from the Western pronunciation of a Chinese word—in this case, for Qing government personnel). The Hoppo, if he chose, might then communicate with the provincial governor or with Peking; or he might, on a myriad grounds of procedure or impropriety, refuse to forward the documents at all.

It was a complex and exasperating procedure, far from the kind of diplomatic and commercial equality among nations that Western powers were beginning to take for granted. Tensions on both sides increased after the 1770s as British traders in particular, worried by the trade deficits that forced them to offer hundreds of thousands of pounds’ worth of silver bullion each year in exchange for Chinese silks, porcelains, and teas, began to ship opium grown in India to southern Chinese ports and to exchange it
there for Chinese manufactures and produce. The stakes became higher each year as the passion for tea drinking grew in both Britain and America. By 1800, the East India Company was buying over 23 million pounds of China tea at a cost of £3.6 million. (From 1784 onward, merchants in the newly independent United States, free now to trade where they chose, began to send their ships to the lucrative China tea market directly; but they too were subjected to the restrictions that bound Europeans.)

It was near the end of Qianlong’s reign that the British East India Company, acting in agreement with King George III’s government, decided to try to rectify the situation in a direction they believed was consonant with the new dignity of Britain as a world power. They selected as their emissary to China Lord George Macartney, a politically well-connected peer from Northern Ireland who had had diplomatic experience at the court of Russia’s Catherine the Great. Macartney had also gained practical experience as governor of Grenada in the Caribbean and administrator of the region of Madras in eastern India. The British embassy traveled in a man-of-war of 66 guns, with two support vessels, each loaded with expensive gifts designed to show the finest aspects of British manufacturing technology. Macartney was accompanied by a retinue of almost 100, including scientists, artists, guards, valets, and Chinese language teachers from the Catholic college in Naples.

Leaving London in September 1792, Macartney’s ships touched briefly at Canton in June 1793, but were allowed to proceed directly to Tianjin and land there since they claimed to be saluting Qianlong on his eightieth birthday. Once ashore, the embassy was escorted to Peking with much pomp but with the official status of “tribute emissaries.” Macartney managed to persist in his refusal to prostrate himself full-length on the ground before the emperor in the ritual kowtow, agreeing instead to bow on one knee to Qianlong as he would to King George. Despite this stubbornness, Macartney was courteously received in September 1793 by Heshen and by the emperor at the northern summer palace of Rehe (Jehol). In his audience, Macartney asked for British rights of diplomatic residence in Peking, the ending of the restrictive Canton trading system, the opening of new ports for international commerce, and the fixing of fair and equitable tariffs. Unfailingly bland, neither the Qing emperor nor his minister would yield to any of the British requests.

Qianlong instead sent an edict to George III explaining that China would not increase its foreign commerce because it needed nothing from other countries. As Qianlong wrote, “We have never valued ingenuous articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country’s manufactures. Therefore, O king, as regards your request to send someone to remain at the capital, while it is not in harmony with the regulations of the Celestial Empire we also feel very much that it is of no advantage to your country.”

Macartney had no counterforce to employ. He could only leave China by the designated land route to Canton, taking as many notes about the country as he could along the way and jotting in his journal his personal view that this awesome-appearing country had grave internal weaknesses that threatened to destroy it. He drew his main metaphor, suitably enough, from the sea across which he had traveled with such cost of time and discomfort. “The Empire of China,” he wrote in his journal, “is an old, crazy, first rate man-of-war, which a fortunate succession of able and vigilant officers has contrived to keep afloat for these one hundred and fifty years past, and to oversee their neighbors merely by her bulk and appearance.” But with lesser men at the helm, Macartney added, China would slowly drift until “dashed to pieces on the shore.” China’s opposition to British goals was ultimately futile, wrote Macartney, since it was “in vain to attempt arresting the progress of human knowledge,” as the Qing were doing. “The human mind is of a startling nature and having once gained the lower steps of the ascent, struggles incessantly against every difficulty to reach the highest.”

The entire venture had cost the East India Company a small fortune, for which the company had received no return. It was not an auspicious opening to the era of face-to-face diplomatic relations, although Macartney himself did nicely. He had insisted on an annual allowance of £15,000 before undertaking the venture, and had cleared a profit of over £20,000 from his mission. At least China had not stood in the way of his own personal progress.

**Aliens and Chinese Law**

One of Lord Macartney’s more interesting acquisitions in China was a copy of the Qing dynasty’s legal code. When this code was brought back to England and translated by a scholar who had learned his Chinese as a member of Macartney’s retinue, it made clear what had seemed probable to generations of British traders—namely, that the Chinese and the Europeans had very different views of what constituted “the law” and, accordingly, that recourse to legal expedients might exacerbate rather than lessen international tensions.

Although based on a wide range of prior experience and precedent, Chinese law was codified and interpreted by the state. There was no independent judiciary either in the provinces or in Peking: it was the county magistrate who acted as the local representative of justice. A series of reviews by the
prefect and the judicial intendant of a given province could bring a case to the Ministry of Punishments in Peking. Appeals by plaintiffs were also possible but only within a rigorous hierarchy that culminated in a “court” of senior officials. Death sentences did have to be reviewed by the magistrate’s superiors, and technically the emperor himself passed final judgment on all crimes meriting execution. But that was not always possible in practice and often arbitrary. In local insurrections, rebels were customarily executed immediately to discourage their followers and to prevent the possibility of their being freed from jail by other dissidents. In cases involving foreigners, summary executions were also common.

The county magistrates acted essentially as detectives, judges, and jury. They accumulated the evidence, then evaluated it, and finally passed sentence. Punishments for particular crimes were prescribed in the legal code, which magistrates had to follow. Although these officials often relied on a member of their clerical staff who was allegedly “expert” in the law, there was no independent profession of law and no lawyers. Those who tried to intervene from outside in criminal cases were castigated for their interference. Suspects were routinely treated with great harshness in jail, and often beaten or tortured with wooden prozes if they refused to confess. Confession always preceded the “trial,” the result of which was therefore a foregone conclusion unless some startling new exonerating evidence could be produced. Since the beatings with a heavy wooden pole sometimes used to extract confessions could lead to a suspect’s death or cripple him for life, it is not surprising that many Chinese feared the local structure, although they did use the magistrates’ courts in serious disagreements over real estate, inheritances, and other economic matters.

In most other disputes the Chinese had recourse to mediators who were either respected members of the local community or leaders of influential lineage organizations. Those threatened with suit in such cases might well pay to hush a case up; and the junior personnel of the magistrate’s official staff—the so-called “yamen runners”—routinely supplemented their meager incomes by accepting bribes to keep matters quiet. Those accused of committing criminal acts such as theft, rape, or homicide would also try to pay their way free, with gifts to the magistrate’s staff or even to the magistrate himself. The grim and possibly fatal experience of a stay in prison (which description, of course, applied as well to the filthy, crowded prisons of Europe at the time) could be ameliorated by regular payments to one’s jailers and by distribution of food to one’s fellow inmates.

The Qing penal system also maintained the hierarchical social values that were propagated through the state’s Confucian teachings. Crimes against the emperor and his family were the most serious, and crimes against bureaucrats or state property were also severely punished—by execution or prolonged periods of exile. Within the family structure, fathers committing a given crime against their sons were punished far more lightly than sons who committed the same crime against their fathers, and the same was true of husbands harming their wives, or older relatives their younger ones. In one case in which a father killed his son by burying him alive, the Ministry of Punishments carefully reviewed the facts and concluded that the governor had acted wrongly in sentencing the father to be beaten for the crime. Fathers who killed sons should be beaten only if they had acted “unreasonably,” argued the ministry. In this case, the son had used foul language at his father, an act that deserved the death penalty: “Thus, although the killing was done intentionally, it was the killing of a son who had committed a capital crime by reviling his father.” The father was acquitted.

Had the Ministry of Punishments not intervened, the father could have avoided punishment nonetheless. After trial and sentencing, a great many punishments could be commuted for cash, depending on the severity of the offense: ½ tael of silver for twenty blows with the bamboo, 3 taels for sixty blows, 10 taels for one and a half years’ exile, 720 taels for perpetual banishment, and 1,200 taels and up for strangulation or beheading. Although such commutations were based on sliding scales according to an individual’s official rank or assumed ability to pay, the system clearly benefited the wealthy, to whom such sums were comparatively trivial. For a poor peasant or urban worker they might constitute several weeks or even years of income. Furthermore, those scholars who had passed the lower-level Confucian examinations were exempt from corporal punishment and, hence, escaped the fearsome beatings that often forced confessions from terrified commoners.

The Qing judicial structure received reinforcement from a community mutual-responsibility system known as the baojia. A bao, a group of 1,000 households, consisted of 10 jia, each of which contained 100 households. All Chinese households were supposed to be registered in jia and bao groups and supervised by a “headman” chosen from among their own number on a rotating system. These headmen were expected to check on the accuracy of each household’s registration forms, which listed family members by gender, age, relationship, and occupation, and to ensure local law and order. The headmen also supervised community projects such as dike repairs, crop watching, or militia operations. In cases of serious crime or suspected rebellion, these men called in help from the magistrate’s office. The headmen were also meant to enforce prompt tax payments from the members of their own baojia. Their job was difficult, frustrating, and sometimes dangerous; in many communities, the system grew moribund because no one wanted
to serve as headman. But of most importance to foreigners was the overall concept represented by the kange—namely, that members of a given community were all responsible for the good order of that community and that neighbors or friends of guilty parties might be held equally liable for illegal acts and penalized for them.

Although China’s penal system was harsh, its standard of law and order was probably comparable to that prevalent in Europe or the United States at the time. But there was really no room within the system for special treatment of foreigners. In all routine matters, foreigners fell within the jurisdiction either of the Liaoifu Yuan, the Ministry of Rituals, the Hoppo, or the imperial household. If they transgressed, the Chinese assumption, at least initially, was that they would be handled by the Chinese courts in the conventional way.

Several cases in which the crews of foreign ships accidentally killed Chinese show that the local Qing authorities were at first content to accept cash payments in restitution. In Kangxi’s reign, Qing authorities demanded 5,000 taels after the crew of a British ship killed a Chinese near Canton harbor in 1689. When the British counteroffer of 2,000 taels was rejected, the ship abandoned its trading plans and sailed away. At the end of the reign, in 1722, the Chinese accepted 2,000 taels from the captain of the King George after his gunner’s mate accidentally killed a Chinese boy while out hunting. In 1754, when an English sailor was killed by a Frenchman in Canton, Qing officials showed their determination to intervene in cases occurring within their jurisdiction even when no Chinese were involved. All trade with France was stopped until the French officers yielded up the killer. Ironically, the killer was shortly thereafter released because the emperor Qianlong, to celebrate the twentieth year of his reign and the Qing victories in the Zungar wars, had ordered a general amnesty for all convicted criminals.

More ominous for Westerners were a number of legal cases that occurred in the later years of Qianlong’s reign, after the cementing of the Cohong monopoly. In 1773 the Portuguese authorities in Macao tried an Englishman who had allegedly killed a Chinese; they found him innocent and released him. But Qing officials, insisting on their right to intervene in homicide cases in which the victim was Chinese, retried the Englishman and had him executed. Seven years later, Qing authorities successfully reasserted their right to intervene in cases in which foreigners killed foreigners on Chinese soil: a Frenchman who had killed a Portuguese sailor in a fight was forced out of his refuge with the French consul and publicly executed by strangulation.

The two cases that made the greatest impact on Western thinking and forced a serious reconsideration of how to deal with the Qing at the international diplomatic level were those involving two trading vessels, the Lady Hughes and the Emily. The first of these occurred in 1784, nine years before Lord Macartney’s embassy arrived in China. The Lady Hughes, one of the so-called “country ships”—that is, owned by private business interests but trading between India and China under license to the British East India Company—fired a salute near Canton, and the discharge from the shot killed two Chinese bystanders. When the captain of the Lady Hughes declared to the Chinese that he could not tell which gunner had fired the fatal shot, the Chinese, following their ideas concerning mutual responsibility, arrested the ship’s business manager. They also threatened to cancel all trade with the West. In an attempt to cow the Chinese, the crews of most foreign ships then trading at Canton—British, French, Danish, Dutch, and the first Americans in Chinese waters, from the New York—registered Empress of China—took up arms and posted themselves around their warehouses on shore. But the Chinese stood firm. Facing disruption of all trade and the possible execution of the business manager, the Lady Hughes surrendered the gunner probably responsible. He was strangled in January 1785.

The case of the United States merchant ship Emily, which occurred in 1821, was the first to involve American interests in a central way. A crew member on the Emily (ironically, he was named Terranova, “New World” in English) dropped an earthenware pitcher onto the head of a Chinese fruit seller in a boat below; he fell overboard and drowned. When the Chinese demanded Terranova’s surrender, the Americans at first held firm, insisting that the trial be held on the ship. But after the Qing ordered the cessation of all American trade in the Canton region, the captain of the Emily wavered, perhaps because his ship had a hold full of illegal opium, which he feared would be confiscated. Terranova was handed over to the Chinese authorities. At a trial at which no Westerners were allowed, he was found guilty, and executed the next day. This sentence and the rapidity of the execution violated Qing procedures in cases of accidental homicide.

Cumulatively these trials, clashes, and executions convinced Western nations that the Chinese must be compelled to yield up jurisdiction over cases involving foreign nationals. Yet this was the very point on which the Chinese sought to hold firm. Misunderstanding helped fuel the dispute, for the complexity of the Qing legal position could not be fully gauged from a quick perusal of their statutes; it demanded careful study, which few Westerners were then equipped to give. Moreover, the legal position of foreigners in China had evolved over time. Under Ming-dynasty law, for instance, it had been declared that “all aliens who commit offenses shall be sentenced according to the Chinese Penal Code,” if such offenses took place on Chinese
in Europe and America for Chinese teas, porcelain, silks, and decorative goods had not been matched by any growth in Chinese demand for Western exports such as cotton and woolen goods, furs, clocks and other mechanical curiosities, tin, and lead. The result was a serious balance-of-payments problem for the West. Westerners had to pay for Chinese goods mainly in silver, and this steady flow of silver into China—one of the causes of the general prosperity in Qianlong’s reign—became a source of alarm to the British government. In the decade of the 1760s, for example, silver flow into Qing China exceeded 3.0 million taels; in the 1770s, the total grew to 7.5 million, and by the 1780s, 16.0 million taels. By the late eighteenth century, however, the British had developed an alternative product to exchange in China for Chinese goods: opium. Although the trade was subject to severe fluctuations, figures for sales of opium to China show the overall trend with bleak clarity. Each chest contained between 130 and 160 pounds of opium, depending on the area of origin, so that by the 1820s enough opium was coming into China to sustain the habits of around 1 million addicts. When one adds to this supply a certain amount of domestically grown opium (although this was still on a very small scale), one can begin to sense the extent of China’s opium problem.

For opium to sell steadily in China, several factors were necessary: the narcotic had to be available in large quantities; there had to be a developed means of consuming it; enough people had to want to smoke it to make the trade viable, and government attempts at prohibitions had to be ineffective. It was the conjunction of all these elements that brought China into this particularly agonizing cycle of its modern history.

### British Sales of Opium to China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of chests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1739</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>600 (est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>4,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>4,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>4,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>5,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>7,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>13,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>23,970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Opium**

The captain of the *Emily*, in offering up the sailor Terranova to Chinese justice so that the ship’s cargo of opium could be safeguarded, was very much a figure of his times. Over the previous century, the growing demand for opium in Europe and America, particularly in the United States, had precipitated a campaign in Britain to regulate the flow of opium to China. The British East India Company had a monopoly on the trade and was the main supplier of opium to China. The Company, however, was reluctant to sell opium to the Chinese, as they believed it would lead to addiction and the decline of the Chinese population. The Chinese government, on the other hand, was determined to end the opium trade, as they believed it was a major cause of the decline of the Qing dynasty. The issue of opium became a major source of tension between China and Britain, leading to the Opium Wars in the 19th century.
The British conquest of large areas of India first spurred the organized production and sale of opium. At the instigation of the East India Company's directors, and speeded by the brilliant generalship of Robert Clive and the administrative skills of Governor-General Warren Hastings, between 1750 and 1800 the British had gained control of much of northern India, from Bombay in the west to Calcutta in the east, and with additional bases in the south at Madras (where Lord Macartney had once served as governor). Eager to find a cash crop that would earn revenue through export sales, the British discovered that the opium poppy grew especially luxuriantly in certain areas of India. Moreover, there was an abundant supply of labor to collect the sap from the incised poppy pods and to process it (by boiling) into the thick paste that was best for smoking.

The East India Company established a monopoly for the purchase of Indian opium and then sold licenses to trade in opium to selected Western merchants known as the "country traders," preferring this indirect means of profit making to getting directly involved in the shipment of the narcotic. Having sold their opium in China, the country traders deposited the silver they received in payment with company agents in Canton in exchange for letters of credit; the company, in turn, used the silver to buy tea, porcelain, and other Chinese goods for sale in Britain. Thus a triangular trade of goods from Britain to India, India to China, and China to Britain developed, at each step of which high profits could be made.

The consumption of opium was perhaps a simpler aspect of the process. History offers examples of many ways of taking opium derivatives—from steeping them in potions or smoking them mixed with other herbs, to the concentrated morphine tablets of the late nineteenth century and the heroin injections of our own day. The style of opium smoking favored in China—-heating a tiny globule of refined opium paste over a flame and then smoking it from the bowl of a long-stemmed pipe—may have been initially popular because tobacco smoking had become a craze in the early Qing. Tobacco plants had been introduced into Fujian province from Latin America and had spread swiftly from there to Shandong and other parts of China. In scrolls from Kangxi's reign, scores of Chinese smoking tobacco pipes can be seen strolling down city streets; and the brand names of popular varieties were displayed in front of stores. The practice of smoking opium mixed with tobacco probably came to China in the 1720s, brought there by troops returning home from Taiwan after having suppressed Zhu Yigu's rebellion of 1721. By the middle of Qianlong's reign, detailed accounts of the drug and how to prepare it for consumption were available to anyone who could read. Small public rooms where, for a few coppers, people could get a pipeful of opium and smoke it as they reclined in comfort brought the drug in reach of urban dwellers and the poor.

Why did the Chinese of the mid- and late Qing begin to smoke so much opium? Since there is no contemporary Chinese literature on this, we can only speculate; but we know that the taking of opium derivatives has the effect of slowing down and blurring the world around one, of making time stretch and fade, of shifting complex or painful realities to an apparently infinite distance. Chinese documents of the time suggest that opium appealed initially to groups confronting boredom or stress. Eunuchs caught in the ritualized web of court protocol smoked opium, as did some of the Manchu court officials, who often had sinecures or virtually pointless jobs in the palace bureaucracy. Women in wealthy households, deprived of opportunities for education and forbidden to travel outside the walls of their homes, smoked opium. Secretaries in the harried magistrates' offices smoked, as did merchants preparing for business deals and students preparing for— and even taking—the state examinations. Soldiers on their way into combat against groups of rural rebels smoked.

Later on in the nineteenth century the practice spread, especially among the leisured classes seeking a means of social relaxation. Coolie laborers also began to take opium, either by smoking it or by licking tiny pellets of the drug, to overcome the drudgery and pain of hauling huge loads day after day. Shrewd yet ruthless employers, observing that the coolies could carry heavier loads if they were under the influence of opium, even made the drug available to their workers. By the end of the nineteenth century, many peasants also became addicts, particularly those who themselves had begun to grow the poppies as a cash crop to supplement their tiny incomes.

The Qing government was not sure how to handle the problem. As we saw above, Yongzheng, the first emperor to pronounce on the narcotic, was aware that there was a legitimate need for opium as a medicinal drug—it could be particularly valuable in stemming the effects of diarrhea or dysentery—but that nonmedicinal uses of opium seemed to be harmful. His compromise was an uneasy one in which "pushing" the drug to potential users and running public opium dens were strictly punished, while "medicinal" sales continued openly.

During the eighteenth century, most of the wholesale opium purchases were handled by the Cohong merchants. But the trade became more indirect after 1800, when an edict forbade both opium imports and domestic opium production in China, and especially after 1813, when further edicts banned opium smoking altogether. Chinese smokers could be punished with 100 blows of the bamboo and with the public wearing of the "cangue," a heavy wooden collar, for a month or more. The Cohong merchants no longer dared deal in opium, but foreign traders found that if they anchored at selected spots off the China coast, there were plenty of Chinese adventurers willing to come out and purchase their opium stocks. Large fortified
hulks anchored off Lintin Island in the bay below Canton also formed a convenient distribution point for the drug. Sailing or rowing in swift, shallow-draft boats, Chinese dealers could elude all attempts by the sparse provincial Qing naval forces to intercept them. Thereafter they distributed the opium through the network of local trade routes, by road, river, and track.

As the Qing government tried to enforce its ban by punishing pushers severely and rigorously questioning smokers as to their sources of supply, those involved in opium deals grew more circumspect, covering their trail through numerous intermediaries. The 1831 transcript of an arrested-court eunuch’s testimony to officials in the imperial household succinctly illustrates this:

At first we bought the opium we smoked in small quantities directly from the Muslim Zhu Da. Then I learned that when the sea vessels came into Tianjin, the opium pills got cheaper, so I asked Kekebornku for a loan of 100 strings of local cash, and I also sold my mule cart for money. I took my servant Qin Baocun and got Qin’s old friend Yang Huiyun to act as my agent. Yang bought 160 ounces of opium from Zhang for 240 strings of cash. I gave Yang a commission of 3.8 strings of cash.¹

If the Qing authorities ever did pursue this case with vigor, they might have gotten past the two intermediaries and reached the local pusher, Zhang. But Zhang himself was probably only a small dealer, and by the time he was arrested, the larger distributors and the foreign vessels that supplied them would long since have gone on their way.

Western Images of China

Until the middle of the eighteenth century, China generally received favorable attention in the West. In large part this stemmed from the wide dissemination of books and published correspondence by Catholics, especially the Jesuits, who saw in the huge population of China a potential harvest of souls for the Christian faith. Although mindful of some of China’s problems, most Catholic observers followed the example of the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, who had lived in China from 1553 to 1610 and admired the industry of China’s population, the sophistication of the country’s bureaucracy, the philosophical richness of its cultural traditions, and the strength of its rulers.

The French Jesuits, who dominated the China missions late in Kangxi’s reign, presented an even more laudatory picture of the early Qing state, one deliberately designed to appeal to the “Sun King,” Louis XIV, and to per-

"Mucking Chasing the Enemy," detail of a handscroll by Giuseppe Castiglione. Castiglione (1688-1766), a talented Jesuit painter at the court of Qianlong, depicts here a Qing general famous for his victories over the Uighurs in Xinjiang.
"Kazakh Presenting Horses in Tribute" (detail), 1737. Castiglone shows Kazakhs from the northwest offering tributary gifts to the emperor Qianlong.

The Yuan Ming Yuan, the summer palace designed by Jesuits in China for Qianlong, located just outside Peking. This engraving shows the Hall of Peaceful Seas.
Qianlong's greatest achievement was the conquest and integration of huge territories in the west now known as Xinjiang. This engraving shows Qing forces encamped during their drive to take Kashi and Yarkand in 1759.

The emperor's helmet. Qianlong's helmet is made of lacquered leather, sable, pearls, and precious stones, and decorated with Buddhist invocations in gold Sanskrit characters.

"The Dream of the Red Chamber". This painting shows a scene from China's greatest novel, written by Cao Xueqin in the middle of Qianlong's reign.
Celebration of Qianlong's birthday, from the Wényuán edition of the "Four Treasures". The compilation of the massive anthology called the "Four Treasures," which comprised 36,000 manuscript volumes, was in part a literary inquisition in which works critical of the Manchus were destroyed and their owners punished.

"Chinoiserie" While Jesuit architects were designing Qianlong's summer palace, Europeans of the mid-eighteenth century were swept by a fascination with Chinese design expressed in the fashion called chinoiserie. Here a French tapestry entitled The Audience (c. 1725) shows tributaries kowtowing before the emperor in a fantastic setting.

A painted fan depicting foreign factories along the Canton waterfront, c. 1750. In 1760, the Qing restricted all European trade to the port of Canton in an effort to control the growing numbers of foreign merchants.
Lord Macartney's embassy of 1793 sought diplomatic and commercial concessions from the Qing. The ritual exchange of gifts included three jade rods, or scepters (top), presented by the emperor to Macartney, and a gold-plated, enamelled, jewelled telescope with clock (middle) offered in return along with the scientific and technological instruments depicted in this Chinese tapestry (bottom). But Qianlong's response in an edict to King George III was "We have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country's manufactures."

"The Decline of an Opium Smoker," c. 1860. From a series of twelve Chinese watercolours. Top: "This is the first step toward the vice of opium smoking accompanied by women, music, and singing"; bottom: "While his [the opium smoker's] mother is belying him with a cane to the great delight of his father, his wife is cutting the opium-smoking pipe to the great horror of his child."
made him back the missionaries with money and personnel. Central to these flattering presentations was the idea that the ethical content of the Confucian Classics proved the Chinese were a deeply moral nation and had once practiced a form of monotheism not so different from that found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. With a little effort, therefore, the Chinese could be brought back to the true values they had once espoused, and did not have to be forced to convert.

Although the Jesuits rapidly lost influence in China during the last years of Kangxi’s reign, and declined in prestige in Europe during the eighteenth century until suppressed altogether in 1773, their books on Chinese government and society remained the most detailed available. The German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz read them and became deeply interested in the structure of the hexagrams in the Book of Changes. Even the anticlerical philosopher Voltaire was intrigued by what he read about the Chinese. Since Voltaire was intent on attacking the power of the Catholic church in eighteenth-century France, he cleverly used the information about China provided by the Catholics to disprove their more extreme claims. If, argued Voltaire, the Chinese really were so moral, intelligent, ethical, and well governed, and if this was largely attributable to the influence of Confucius, it followed that since Confucius had not been a Christian it was obviously possible for a country to get along admirably without the presence of Catholic clerical power.

In a series of influential works written between 1740 and 1760, Voltaire expounded his ideas about China. In one novel he presented his views on the parallelism of moral values in different societies, European and Asian. In a play he suggested that the innate moral strength of the Chinese had been able to calm even the Mongol conquerors led by Genghis Khan. And in an unusual historiographical gesture, Voltaire began his review of world history—Ensay sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations (“An Essay on the Customs and Spirit of Nations”)—with a lengthy section on China. He did this to emphasize the values of differing civilizations and to put European arrogance in perspective: “The great misunderstanding over Chinese rites sprang from our judging their practices in light of ours: for we carry the prejudices that spring from our contentious nature to the ends of the world.” Unable to find a “philosopher-king” in Europe to exemplify his views of religion and government, Voltaire believed Emperor Qianlong would fill the gap, and he wrote poems in the distant emperor’s honor.

Voltaire’s praise for Chinese institutions appeared in a cultural context that was intensely sympathetic to China. During this same brief period in the mid-eighteenth century, Europe was swept by a fascination with China that is usually described by the French word chinoiserie, an enthusiasm
drawn more to Chinese decor and design than to philosophy and government. In prints and descriptions of Chinese houses and gardens, and in Chinese embroidered silks, rugs, and colorful porcelains, Europeans found an alternative to the geometrical precision of their neoclassical architecture and the weight of baroque design. French rococo was a part of this mood, which tended to favor pastel colors, asymmetry, a calculated disorder, a dreamy sensuality. Its popular manifestations could be found everywhere in Europe, from the “Chinese” designs on the new wallpapers and furnishings that grace middle-class homes to the pagodas in public parks, the sedan chairs in which people were carried through the streets, and the tinselwork that surrounded ornamental gardens.

Yet this cult of China, whether intellectual or aesthetic, faded swiftly as angry and sarcastic accounts like George Anson’s became available. Voltaire’s very enthusiasm made him the object of sarcasm or mockery as other great figures among the French Enlightenment philosophers began to find his picture of China unconvincing. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Baron de Montesquieu worried that the Chinese did not seem to enjoy true liberty, that their laws were based on fear rather than on reason, and that their elaborate educational system might lead to the corruption of Chinese morals rather than to their improvement. Other writers declared that China did not seem to be progressing, had indeed no notion of progress; from this it was but a short step to see the Chinese as, in fact, retrogressing. In the somber words of the French historian Nicolas Boulanger, written in 1763 and translated from the French the following year by the English radical John Wilkes:

All the remains of her ancient institutions, which China now possesses, will necessarily be lost; they will disappear in the future revolutions; as what she hath already lost of them vanished in former ones; and finally, as she acquires nothing new, she will always be on the losing side.5

Reflecting on these arguments concerning China and the Chinese, some leading European thinkers labored to assess the country’s prospects. One of these was the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith, who wrote on China in *The Wealth of Nations*, first published in 1776. In his analysis of the productive capacities of different countries, Smith found China useful for comparative purposes, especially with the nations of Europe and the developing societies of North America. Examining population growth as an index of development, he concluded that in Europe, where countries doubled their populations every five hundred years, growth was steady if undramatic. In North America, where the population doubled every twenty or twenty-five years, there was instant employment for the entire new work force; the New World was therefore “much more thriving, and advancing with much greater rapidity to the further acquisition of riches.”10

China, however, “long one of the richest, that is, one of the most fertile, best cultivated, most industrious, and most populous countries in the world,” had reached that stage in the cycle of growth where it had “acquired that full complement of riches which the nature of its laws and institutions permits it to acquire.” In such a situation, continued population growth brought serious economic repercussions: “If in such a country the wages of labour had ever been more than sufficient to maintain the labourer, and to enable him to bring up a family, the competition of the labourers and the interest of the masters would soon reduce them to this lowest rate which is consistent with common humanity.” The result was that “the poverty of the lower ranks of people in China far surpasses that of the most beggarly nations in Europe” and infanticide became an integral social practice. As Smith acidly phrased it: “Marriage is encouraged in China, not by the profusion of children, but by the liberty of destroying them.” China was exacerbating these problems, according to Smith, by refusing to consider change. By staying aloof from the growth of the world economy, China was sealing its fate: “A country which neglects or despises foreign commerce, and which admits the vessels of foreign nations into one or two of its ports only, cannot transact the same quantity of business which it might do with different laws and institutions.”11

In a famous series of lectures delivered by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in the early 1820s, the various critical analyses explored by Boulanger, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Smith were synthesized in such a way that “Oriental Civilizations”—China pre-eminent among them—came to be seen as an early and now by-passed stage of history. The view of “Asiatic Society” synthesized by Hegel was to have a profound influence on the young Karl Marx and other later nineteenth-century thinkers. History, to Hegel, was the development of what he called the ideas and practices of freedom throughout the world. Freedom was the expression of the self-realization of the “World Spirit,” and that spirit was reaching its fullest manifestations in the Christian states of Europe and North America. Optimistic about his own time, Hegel developed a theory that downplayed China’s past. He described China as dominated by its emperors or despots, as typical of the “oriental nations” that saw only one man as free. In the West, the Greeks and Romans had come to see that some men were free; and, centuries later, Hegel’s generation had come to see that all humans were free. Lacking an understanding of the march of Spirit in the world, even the Chinese emperor’s “freedom” was “caprice,” expressed as either
"ferocity—brutal recklessness of passion—or a mildness and tameness of the desires, which is itself only an accident of Nature."13

Part of China's fate, Hegel wrote, turned on geographical factors: "The extensive tract of eastern Asia is severed from the general historical development." In a powerfully worded passage, Hegel explained that China had lacked the great boldness of the Europeans in exploring the seas and instead had stayed tied to the agricultural rhythms of her great plains. The soil presented only "an infinite multitude of dependencies," whereas the sea carried people "beyond these limited circles of thought and action... This stretching out of the sea beyond the limitations of the land, is wanting to the splendid political edifices of Asiatic States, although they themselves border on the sea—as for example, China. For them the sea is only the limit, the ceasing of the land; they have no positive relation to it."13 Though such a statement would have startled the wealthy ocean-going merchants of Fujian had they seen it, Hegel was basically correct that the Qing state itself was not interested in maritime exploration.

In a series of bleak conclusions, Hegel consigned the Chinese permanently to their space outside the development of the World Spirit. Although China had historians galore, they studied their country within their own limited preconceptions, not realizing that China itself lay "outside the World's History, as the mere presupposition of elements whose combination must be waited for to constitute their vital progress." Although Chinese emperors may speak words of "majesty and paternal kindness and tenderness to the people," the Chinese people "cherish the meanest opinion of themselves, and believe that men are born only to drag the car of Imperial Power." In a passage that moved beyond anything Lord Macartney had opined about the fate of the Qing dynasty, Hegel mourned for the Chinese people themselves: "The burden which presses them to the ground, seems to them to be their inevitable destiny: and it appears nothing terrible to them to sell themselves as slaves, and to eat the bitter bread of slavery."

Yet perhaps China was not caught forever in a metaphysical and geographical isolation. In one of his most ambiguous asides, Hegel added that "a relation to the rest of History could only exist in their case, through their being sought out, and their character investigated by others."14 The question of by whom or how that seeking out was to be done was left open by Hegel, but the Western powers, with their ships, their diplomatic missions, and their opium, were rapidly beginning to provide an answer.