A World Trimmed with Fur

WILD THINGS, PRISTINE PLACES,
AND THE NATURAL FRINGES OF QING

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STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA
To Max & Marie
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Introduction

In 1886, H. Evan James discovered pristine nature in Manchuria. As he breathlessly reported to the Royal Geographic Society, “The scenery . . . is marvelously beautiful—woods and flowers and grassy glades—and to the lover of nature it is simply a paradise.” A glimpse of this world was a glimpse before the Fall: “It was like being transported into the Garden of Eden.” Climbing Changbaishan, he recalled,

We came upon rich, open meadows, bright with flowers of every imaginable colour, where sheets of blue iris, great scarlet tiger-lilies, sweet-scented yellow day-lilies, huge orange buttercups, or purple monkshood delighted the eye. And beyond were bits of park-like country, with groups of spruce and fir beautifully dotted about, the soil covered with short mossy grass, and spangled with great masses of deep blue gentian, columbines of every shade of mauve or buff, orchids white and red, and many other flowers.¹

The land was a cornucopia of nature. Other European travelers marveled that Manchuria had been “hardly touched by man”; it seemed “uninhabited,” having long been “evacuated.”² A contemporary Russian explorer “encountered such an abundance of fish as he had never before seen in
his life. Salmon, trout, carp, sturgeon, husos,7 shad, sprang out of the water and made a deafening noise; the [Amur] river was like an artificial fish-pond.4 In the skies, when the salmon and shad made spawning runs, "the swan, the stork, the goose, the duck, [and] the teal" followed them "in numberless flocks."7 Forests were so thick and untamed one needed a hatchet to cut through them. Gustav Radde, having chopped his way through the Hinggan Mountains, declared after his triumphant assault that "nature in her full virgin strength has produced such a luxuriant vegetation" that it was "penetrated . . . with the greatest trouble."6 As A. R. Agassiz advertised, "Now that game is rapidly disappearing from most places, except where it is rigidly preserved, few countries offer the sportsman the attractions offered by Manchuria."7 The forests teemed with wild animals: tigers and bears, elk and boar, foxes and sable. The only order in Manchuria was Nature itself.

Two centuries earlier, in his 1743 Ode to Mukden, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–1795) celebrated Manchuria's bounty with similar language. Like James, Qianlong was taken by the divinity of native life, the "tigers, leopards, bears, black bears, wild horses, wild asses, [four kinds of] deer, wolves, wild camels, foxes, and badgers." He celebrated the lushness of plants (reeds, thatch, water scallion, safflower, knotweed, and so on) and the multitudes of birds (pheasant, grouse, geese, ducks, herons, storks, cranes, pelicans, swallows, and woodpeckers).8 Yet to Qianlong, Manchuria's generative power did not end with its flora and fauna. Its power touched the human realm: "Established on a grand scale, it promulgates the rule of great kings . . . Such a propitious location will last forever, generation after generation. It surpasses and humbles all [other] places and has united [lands] within and [lands] without."9 Being himself a "great king" of Manchu descent, Qianlong thus shared something in common with the region's tigers, leopards, and bears. He surrounded himself accordingly with Manchuria's finest things: sable- and otter-fur robes, dishes of steppe mushroom, and hats encrusted with freshwater pearls. There was power in Manchuria's nature.

Both Qianlong and James published their writings because Manchuria seemed unique; its environment and its products stood out in their respective worlds. Both men celebrated the land as a catalogue of resources and a fountain of natural vitality; the land had a creativity unto itself, apparently free from human intervention. And both men understood its nature to be atavistic; the land was uncorrupted by time. Yet where James and his contemporaries saw a land before history, and a landscape divorced from human agency, Qianlong saw Manchuria as a timeless source of sustenance and secular power. For James, Manchuria was another frontier. For Qianlong, it was home: It nurtured civilization like the emperor himself. We may recognize James's vision from similar accounts of Asian, African, and American wilderness. What, though, do we make of Qianlong's vision? Did Manchuria produce kings, or did kings produce Manchuria? What constituted pristine nature in the Qing empire, and how did it come to be?

This book uses Manchu and Mongolian sources to rethink the environmental history of China under Qing rule. China's frontiers, such as Manchuria, occupy an ambiguous position in environmental history: They are a chief topic of research, and yet most sources they produced are utterly ignored. Many have studied frontiers as outlets of agricultural and commercial expansion or as objects of the literary imagination; most have done so from the vantage of the Chinese record and in service of a larger narrative about China. Such approaches miss half the story: The Qing empire's Manchu and Mongolian archives paint an altogether different picture of the frontier from the ones we find in published Chinese accounts. New histories can emerge from a synoptic perspective. We must learn, then, to see both ways across the frontier: There is more to Chinese history than a story about China.

This book reveals the story in particular of the environmental changes Qing Manchuria and Mongolia witnessed in the period from 1760 to 1830, when an unprecedented commercial expansion and rush for natural resources transformed the ecology of China and its borderlands alike. That boom, no less than today's, had profound institutional, ideological, and environmental causes and consequences. Amid the ensuing turmoil, anxieties about the environment and a sense of crisis mounted. Petitions poured into Beijing: Sables, foxes, and squirrels had vanished from forests; ginseng had disappeared from the wild; mushroom pickers had uprooted the steppe; freshwater mussels no longer yielded pearls. The court did everything in its power to revive the land and return it to its original form. It drafted men, erected guard posts, drew maps, registered populations, punished poachers, investigated the corrupt, and streamlined the bureaucracy. It razed ginseng plantations, raided the camps of mushroom pickers, and created territories where no person could enter, kill, or even "spook" wildlife. "Nurture the mussels and let them grow," the emperors ordered. "Purify" the Mongol steppe.
The resulting "purity" of Mongolia and Manchuria was not an original state of nature; it reflected the nature of the state. The empire did not preserve nature in its borderlands; it invented it. The book documents the history of this invention and explores the environmental pressures and institutional frameworks that informed it. To illustrate its unfolding, the book focuses on three events that dominate the archival record: the destruction of Manchurian pearl mussels, the rush for wild mushrooms in Mongolia, and the collapse of fur-bearing animal populations in the borderlands with Russia. Each of these events belonged to a broader spectrum of commodity booms that swept from the Qing borderlands to Southeast Asia and the greater Pacific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By 1800, that is, fur trappers from Mongolia to California were operating in the same world, facing common problems, and meeting a common demand. Such an environmental history becomes evident, however, only with a multilingual and multiarchival approach.

THE CHINA STORY ON THE FRONTIER:
FROM EMPIRE TO NATION

In most Chinese history textbooks, the natural world serves as a setting or an original condition; it is a drumbeat of recurring floods, droughts, and plagues, or it is the loess soil from which civilization emerges. In such accounts, China's frontiers are no different. In some cases, frontiers represent, like loess soil, an environment in which Chinese civilization will take root. In this mode of history, frontiers tend to follow a common trajectory, and their distinctiveness progressively vanishes into the past. In other cases, frontiers are perennial; like floods and plagues, they embody timeless limits and perennial threats.

Most scholarship on Manchuria after 1644 treats the region's past like loess soil: It becomes Chinese. Today, Manchuria is a bastion of nature but of industry; homesteaders cleared its forests long ago for farmland. Most historians no longer even use the word Manchuria, and we call the region, more simply, "Northeast China." When and how did Manchuria become Chinese? For most, the answer lies in the historical legitimacy of modern borders: Some argue the Northeast was always Chinese; others that it became so only in modern times. The stakes of the dispute are high—for many they speak to the historical legitimacy of the region's Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian states—and in studies of the Qing empire's northern borderlands in particular, conflicting claims to territory have left the field fragmented into competing national schools. In terms of China-centered scholarship, scholars make two types of claims. The first is statist: The Qing state, like the Ming and Yuan states before it, was China, and thus its boundaries provide a basis for modern claims. The second is nationalist: Modern claims derive not from the presence of the state, but of people. National histories of Manchuria thus have a strong demographic focus.

Such national histories note, for one, that the Qing dynasty's Manchu emperors tried to preserve Manchuria as an imperial enclave and so instituted "policies of closing off" (Ch: fengjin zhengge) to restrict Chinese immigration. These policies, however, proved unworkable: Particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, land-hungry farmers, pushed by China's enormous demographic and commercial expansion, overwhelmed the imperial infrastructure. In the final decades before its fall, the court recognized a fait accompli: The frontier had become Chinese and thus had to be governed so. The empire collapsed, and the nation-state was born. The story of the Manchurian frontier, in this sense, is similar to that of other frontiers that became part of the modern Chinese nation, including Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan. Its historiography likewise dovetails with accounts of state building in the American West, Australia, the Russian Far East, and other settler frontiers of the same period.

Some of the most productive work on China's environmental history has operated within this "China-centered" paradigm. The framework has allowed us to connect the histories of the interior and borderlands in new ways, while creating common ground for rethinking the global and comparative dimensions of the past. As historians such as Kenneth Pomeranz and Peter Perdue have argued, putting China at the center challenges environmental histories that argue for the stand-alone importance of the Enlightenment, the British economy, or European-centered capitalism in the making of the global environment. We know now, for one, that well before the Opium Wars Qing society was pushing its natural limits. Indeed, a combination of peace, prosperity, and (New World) potatoes allowed for unprecedented commercial and demographic expansion under Qing rule. The changes that ensued were immense. After taking over a millennium to double, between 1700 and 1850 alone the population of the Qing empire nearly tripled. At the same time, the acreage of cultivated land doubled, as settlers from the agricultural heartlands migrated into new wetlands,
highlands, and borderlands at the edges of the empire. To what degree did the Qing state align itself with this frontier expansion? For many historians, that has become the question. The answer requires a thesis about the nature of the state: Did the court support pioneering settlers and attempt to integrate the polity through a "civilizing mission," as in European colonial empires, or did it back native claims to land and defend internal pluralism? Did China belong to a larger zeitgeist of "developmentalism" in the early modern world?28

Embedded in China-centered histories are key but problematic assumptions that wed national identity to natural environment. Too often, wilderness represents the natural border of the Chinese nation and state; it is the point where the dynamism of the core can no longer support the extension of political control.29 Agriculture accordingly serves as shorthand for Sinicization, wild forests and the steppe as outposts of native life. Even in critiques of these accounts, the alignment of China with agriculture and development usually remains in place. In some nationalist Mongol scholarship, for example, Chinese merchants and farmers are alien minorities, and Mongols are the majority, grounded in the land and its values: The terms of the debate are the same, but the moral framework is reversed. This "antidevelopmentalist" scholarship has repackaged Mongol and minority folk traditions as a type of historical environmentalism; scholars are mining tradition for solutions to environmental crises in much the same way as some American environmentalists, who idealize the Native Americans' relationship with the land, and prewar German environmentalists, who emphasized the rootedness of the German Volk.30 National histories continue to structure environmental ones.

FROM NATION TO EMPIRE:
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE QING

Although useful in some contexts and time scales, the "developmentalist" narrative of Chinese environmental history poses critical problems in others. For one, not all frontiers were equal in the Qing period. State policies represented complex imperial hierarchies. "Native officials" (Ch: tushu) in the southwest, for example, had a relatively limited stature and significance at court, and the court increasingly pursued civilizing missions in the region.31 The context was radically different in Mongolia and Manchuria: Mongol

and Manchu bannermen did not need civilization; they defended civilization. Sitting at the apex of the imperial order, their classical ways of life (pastoralism and hunting) were instead promoted and protected, and assimilation was discouraged.32 Pluralism, if not equality, was the norm in Qing Inner Asia: Chinese language and institutions governed the Chinese interior; Mongolian institutions, Mongolia; and Tibetan institutions, Tibet.33

Migration and land reclamation are thus important stories, but they are not the only ones: Each frontier was also a homeland, and each homeland had its own dynamic history. As in accounts of the American West, when we frame Chinese settlers as the sole agents of change, Manchus, Mongols, and other indigenous people of the frontier tend to become undifferentiated. In some accounts, Manchus and Mongols disappear altogether. Their land becomes a "vacuum," and its environment becomes a wilderness peculiar to settler colonialism: "wilderness in its ideal form ... free of people," with territories "empty and wild so that anyone can come to use and claim them."34 Yet farmers never expanded into a vacuum, and nowhere was the land unclaimed. The Qing court, moreover, cared about local claims. When we misconstrue the nature of Chinese frontier, we thus not only skew aspects of a regional history but also blind ourselves to the nature and structure of imperial power as a whole.

Recognizing the plurality of Qing rule, and taking the Qing empire seriously as an empire, have been at the heart of much recent Qing history. Historians have uncovered how efforts to define, delimit, and maintain ethnic groups—such as Manchus, Chinese, and Mongols—were woven into the ideological and institutional fabric of the empire.35 Indeed, as Manchus, the emperors considered the maintenance of ethnic and regional difference to be central to the imperial project, both to preserve their position as conquest elite and to consolidate expansion. Questions of identity were inseparable from the institutionalization of the imperial hierarchy: The more privilege lost its distinctive marks, the more the court strove to uphold and define it. The Qing empire, in this sense, was like other empires: Territorially large states engaged in "self-consciously maintaining the diversity of people they conquered and incorporated."36 It was not, however, the same thing as "China": Neither the nation nor the civilization map onto an entity ruled by Manchus and simultaneously legitimated with Confucian, Chinggisid, and Tibetan Buddhist ideologies.37

Manchuria and Mongolia in particular held a special place within the imperial order. In part their special stature was strategic. They had value,
first, as military buffers between neighboring states, such as Russia and Korea, while also providing seemingly ideal terrain for soldiers to train and hone their skills as warriors and men. For this reason, emperors had cause to maintain a northern "wilderness" (Ma: bigan): The denser the forest, the stronger the defensive deterrent. 20 Manchuria and Mongolia also had unique stature as the homelands of the Manchus, the ethnic group to which the emperors belonged, and the Mongols, who had unique historical and personal ties with the court. 21 The emperors took pride in their origins in the Manchu homeland. 22 Ordinary Manchus celebrated the ancestral homeland too in literature, from popular folktales to poetry, and in their material culture, from fur clothing to distinct foods and medicines, such as elk tail and wild ginseng. The court, in turn, codified and promoted Manchu and Mongol identity through segregation, sumptuary laws, mandatory language instruction, and special schooling. It likewise took steps to militarize, monopolize, and conserve the natural frontier in its image. Movement into, or even through, Manchuria or Mongolia was strictly monitored and regulated, and both frontiers ultimately came under the administration of military institutions: the military governors in Manchuria and the Mongol banner system in Mongolia. Reflecting the multiethnic character of the state, there was never a single governing language.

To understand identity and ideology, then, the field is increasingly turning to not only sources in Chinese but also to materials written in the court language, Manchu, and regional languages like Mongolian. 31 Scholars of the Qing empire’s northern frontiers in the PRC already have published significant works using the Manchu and Mongol archives since the 1980s, as have scholars in Mongolia, Taiwan, Japan, the United States, and elsewhere. Yet most studies of Qing frontiers continue to rely on published Chinese-language accounts, such as the Versatile Records, local gazetteers, and the diaries of exiles. 32 The results of such studies have proved to be limited, as they only can say so much: In both Mongolia and Manchuria, an extreme minority of archival documents were ever written or translated into Chinese until the second half of the nineteenth century. In the case of Outer Mongolia, for example, only trade registers and travel permits for merchants were consistently in Chinese; local officials wrote in Mongolian, and the region’s highest officials—the military governor in Ulaanbaatar and imperial representative in Khüree (modern Ulaanbaatar)—used Manchu to communicate with Beijing.

Given the structure of the state, Qing rule is thus indecipherable without a multilingual approach. The court intentionally never translated whole genres of state documents on the frontiers, such as confidential military communications. 33 When Manchu-language memorials were translated, their nuance and tone was often lost. Qing writers and translators elided or transformed the meanings of Manchu words and phrases in Chinese, as Manchu terms and styles could lack easy analogues. Translation, that is, was a fundamental interface through which the Qing empire was integrated; the unity of its disparate realms was structured around such choices of translation. 34 It is only through the study of the extensive non-Chinese materials, however, that the peculiar lens of the Chinese sources is revealed as a historical reflection of empire. 35 By recovering such sources, we might also humanize voices once relegated to the realm of “birds and beasts.”

Following this logic, research for this book has relied heavily on Manchu- and Mongolian-language materials held at the Mongolian National Central Archive (MNCA) in Ulaanbaatar, the First Historical Archive (FHA) in Beijing, and the National Palace Museum (NPM) in Taiwan. In Ulaanbaatar, the Manchu and Mongolian records of the office of the imperial representative in Khüree (the “ambans”) and the military governor in Ulaanbaatar served as central pillars of the research (see Figure 1.1). In Beijing, two additional Manchu-language sources proved invaluable: the Accounts of the Imperial Household Department (Ch.: Ntirwul suowixesung) and the Copies of Manchu Palace Memorials of the Grand Council (Ch.: Jungiich Matswu lafu zongze). Taken together, the archival record presents a fuller, more detailed, and more complex picture of the frontiers; allows us to triangulate among texts; and challenges us with perspectives lacking from conventional accounts. It is not too much to say that without these documents it would be impossible to reconstruct the story that is told in these pages.

From the vantage of these documents, and with the insights of a multilingual and multiarchival approach, does the history of Qing frontiers appear different? We have discussed two distinct but productive fields of inquiry: The first delves into commercial expansion in the Chinese interior and the problem of resource depletion; the second investigates how the Qing empire institutionalized ethnic and territorial distinctions. Both processes were simultaneous. How, then, were they related? How do we make sense of the economic, environmental, and political geographies of the Qing empire?
Markets, in turn, helped define places. By the late eighteenth century, merchants from Inner Asia to the Pacific had oriented themselves toward the Chinese interior. Close to the heartland, grains and bulk items dominated trade. Further afield, high-end luxury items were paramount: swallows' nests and gold from Borneo, sea cucumber from Oceania, turtle shells from Sulawesi, sea otters from California, sandalwood from Hawaii, jade from Xinjiang and Burma, sable furs from Russia and the northern borderlands, mushrooms from Mongolia, ginseng and pearls from Manchuria. Facing unprecedented abundance, scholars, consumers, and shop owners found themselves coining new words for once exotic products; the lexicon of earlier times simply could not account for the bounty.

Qing documents accordingly focus not only on people and places but on things. Especially in regions beyond the agricultural core, high-end commodities loomed large in the imperial gaze. From Manchuria to Xinjiang to Yunnan, state finances, legal precedents, and anxieties about crime often centered around high-end commodities such as ginseng, pearls, fur, deer horn, jade, and copper. In some cases, the court claimed a monopoly on such goods through a "tribute" system. In others, commodities provided a logic for Qing rule that transcended territorial and constituent boundaries. Indeed, when we take commodities as our starting point, we discover places and subjects that do not fit easily into any conventional ethnic category or territory at all.

 Handlers of commodities included people who identified not only as Mongols, Manchus, or Chinese, but as Uirankhai, Ula, Solon, and Daur. Too many of the latter types of people are ignored in conventional histories; they did fit easily into any popular model of Qing history. Qing writers found them confounding as well, and so reduced them to types of Mongol or Manchu. We should not follow suit. Just as the American frontier was not comprised of "whites" and "Indians" but of a complicated matrix of distinct groups and polities, so too was the world of the Qing.

Unconventional geographies emerge as well when we pursue a history of commodities. Some goods, like fur, traveled on global circuits. Producers like the Uirankhai and Oroncon were enmeshed in networks that extended from Beijing to Lake Khövsgöl, the Amur delta, Sakhalin Island, Siberia, Hokkaido, Alaska, and even Baja California. Others, like mushroom and ginseng pickers, served local and regional markets. Yet whether global or local in scale, high-end commodity trade and production proved central to the business of everyday life and the work of empire: Increasingly, the most...
intimate contact with the wider world came in the form of a migrant mushroom picker, a fur trader, or a soldier razing your ginseng farm.

Since Owen Lattimore, scholars of the Great Wall frontier have emphasized its material dimensions; above all, Lattimore argued, the frontier was an effect of economic specialization; it was less the point where China met Mongolia than where the sown world met the steppe.31 Provocatively, William Cronon converged on a similar conclusion for the American frontier, arguing that it too represented a spatial projection of market dynamics.32 Whether in Beijing or Chicago, the farther one lived from an urban center, the more production favored goods with low transportation costs and high values. In ideal conditions, then, the limits imposed by transportation costs yielded concentric belts of land use around major urban centers: first a belt devoted to agriculture, as the harvest is difficult to transport, then a belt devoted to ranching or pastoralism, and finally a distant belt producing the lightest, most movable goods, such as wild herbs and furs.33 In this fashion, a predictable sequence from trapping, to herding, to farming, to urban commerce can represent less a teleology of development than a description of synchronous responses to commercial growth.

Such commercial approaches to Inner Asia can overstate the dependence and orientation of the steppe toward China, as Inner Asian political and commercial life was often more autonomous and complex than Chinese sources might suggest.34 Yet the focus on material exchanges allows us to see how environmental concerns and commodity politics might come to overlap. It also suggests how the expansion of markets had unique consequences in the even most distant peripheries, from the oceans producing whale oil and cod to the mountains yielding musk and wild medicine.35 No place, no matter how obscure, was left untouched.

ON NATURE

Ultimately, when the markets for high-end commodities boomed, the nature and structure of imperial power shaped the response. Qing observers were anxious about material changes happening before their eyes: the raking away of mussel beds, the uprooting of the steppe, the hunting of animals to near extinction. To the Qing court, it seemed where the world was not being destroyed, it was being perverted: Squirrel fur was made to look like sables; cultivated ginseng was represented as wild; Mongols, Manchus, and Chinese were “mixed up in chaos.” None of these alterations seemed natural; all of them seemed deviations from an original state. Yet recreating ideal subjects, territories, and landscapes was difficult—and often beyond the capacity of the Qing state. It seemed to demand, on one hand, the manipulation of physical environments: creating zones where hunting was illegal, instituting moratoriums on resource exploitation, or destroying artificial ginseng fields. It also called for enhanced discipline conducting trials, cashiering bureaucrats, punishing poachers, and repatriating undocumented workers back to their (purported) homelands. The Qing court pursued this work on both the environmental and human fronts, and it is through this work that this book finds an increasingly defined, institutionalized, and politically charged world of “nature” in the Qing.

It is impossible to map the English word nature onto Qing discourse, and it is not the intention of this book to do so. The word is unusually multifaceted. It can mean the nature of all of things—that which has been since Creation and always will be—or, more humbly, it can suggest local and contextual states: natural foods, wild places, untamed hearts. As Raymond Williams famously argued, nature is “perhaps the most complex word in English language.” Yet efforts to distinguish between quintessentially “Western” and Chinese attitudes toward nature have underlain much Western philosophical and historical discourse since at least the sixteenth century. Nature, according to this view, is a notion peculiar to the West; it is a product of Western Enlightenment, capitalism, science, or Romanticism. In Asian studies, conversely, many agree that modern or Western understandings of “nature” did not exist in Chinese until the late nineteenth century, when they were imported from Europe and Japan. Although China’s intellectual history in particular points to fascinating points of comparison with West’s, nature as such did not animate minds; diverse and situational concepts of heaven, qi, and fengshui governed thought instead. Through a close reading of Qing documents, this book puts these claims to the test and shows that amid the upheaval of the early nineteenth century the Qing world imagined a distinct vision of pristine nature. This Qing invention of “nature” was less metaphysical and lexical than narratological and ideological. Nature often implies a story: To know whether something is natural requires knowing its original state and subsequent history. How was it created? Where did it come from? Has someone modified it, or is it free from human alterations? When we assert that natural landscapes are primordial, or describe a territory as virgin wilderness, we make claims
about the past and our power to create anew. Such questions about origins and alterations mattered tremendously in the Qing: They served as arbiters of moral, aesthetic, political, and commercial value. There was no one word for “nature” in Qing China; there were, however, congruent narratives about who we are, where we come from, and how the material world changes about us. The environmental crises of the boom years made these questions of essence and origins pressing and imbued them with new meaning. The demands of the multiethnic empire structured their solution: Those advocating for a strong imperial response promoted the idea that the Manchu and Mongolian homelands were once unspoiled and pristine and acted to restore their natural states; poachers, collaborators, and the corrupt claimed and acted otherwise. In the archives, we can witness this imperial vision of untouched nature at the moment of its creation.

The Qing vision overlaps with a nostalgic sense of “nature” that emerged in English in the late eighteenth century: the sense we use today to describe an unspoiled landscape. This nature resonates with what William Cronon has called the “wrong” nature: an ideal of uncorrupted realms, divorced from human history, that has long animated environmental thought in the United States. Indeed, led by historians such as Cronon, we have come to recognize that this “nature” is itself artificial; on closer inspection no environment lacks a human history, and no dimension of our humanity is divorced from the material and biological sides of life. The natural world informs our own; we are all, in this sense, “hybrids.”

At its core, environmental history challenges human–nature dichotomies and finds ways to transcend them: It can show the profound impacts humans have had on past environments; reveal how we are immersed in a larger ecology like other creatures; or explore the ideologies that shape our perceptions of the nonhuman world. By doing so, environmental history allows us to question persisting premises: that humankind progresses to a mastery over nature, that some people are closer to nature than others, that some places are more pristine. Led by scholars such as Mark Elvin, one of the great contributions of “China-centered” historiography has been to demystify Chinese views toward the natural world, challenge Orientalizing scholarship, and find common ground for cross-cultural comparisons. Newer work by scholars such as David Bello has begun to see Chinese “developmentalism,” in turn, within a broader matrix of environmental practices across the Qing empire. Ultimately, if we are to transcend entrenched distinctions and build more rigorous frameworks for understanding the environmental history of China, we must more fully account for the contested, plural, and variable dimensions of China’s past. This book turns, then, to a wider, more complex world: not to China but to the greater Qing empire.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The book has four chapters. Chapter One investigates the timing and ideological dimensions of growing consumer demand for frontier resources. Chapters Two, Three, and Four examine production zones transformed by the resource rushes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Manchuria, where the rivers ceased to produce pearls; Mongolia, where mushroom pickers uprooted pastoral life on the steppe; and the borderlands with Russia, where the fur trade destroyed fur-bearing animal populations. In each case, Qing documents reveal how, through congruent processes, all three regions of the Qing empire became at once ethnic homelands, administrative territories, and environmentally “pure.” Each chapter analyzes the networks that underlay the great resource rushes, the perceptions of environmental crisis they produced, and the efforts to reestablish the original nature of the affected territories.

Before we visit the mussel beds, the mushroom-picking fields, and the fur-trapping zone, to understand what they shared in common, and to begin to assess the stakes of their environmental ruin, we must start in Beijing. We can appreciate the Qing invention of nature best if we approach it first as an emperor or poet might, in the most intimate of ways: as the pelt on the back, the mushroom on the plate, and the jewel on one’s winter hat.
The View from Beijing

"Ah, it is lamentable! It has been over a hundred years since China fell but, remarkably, the mode of dress is still the same as before the downfall. It has come down through actors in the theater." So mused Pak Chiwon (1737–1805), a Korean polymath and satirist, who visited China in 1780 and realized, to his horror, that there were but two types of men dressing in a civilized manner: Koreans and period actors. Everyone else in China dressed rudely, like barbarians, in furs. He had come from Seoul to pay tribute to the Qing emperor, Qianlong (r. 1735–1796). Yet the emperor himself seemed to dress the part of a barbarian ruler: He not only wore furs but mandated others at court do so as well. Indeed, when the diplomacy was concluded, Qianlong sent Pak Chiwon home with a signature token of Qing generosity: sable pelts. To be Manchu was to wear fur, and, by the late eighteenth century, not only Manchu elites wore it; Chinese elites did so as well.

Pak Chiwon knew something had changed: Prior to the Qing conquest, one could see the difference between Manchus and Chinese. Their bodies were distinct: Chinese men grew out their hair; Manchu men wore the
queue. Chinese women bound their feet; Manchu left them natural. Their clothes differed as well. Manchu elites wore fur; Chinese wore silk. Manchus wore riding boots and jackets cut with "horse-hoof" sleeves; Chinese elites dismissed equestrian fashions. By the eighteenth century, 100 years later, the external marks of difference had begun to vanish: One could not so easily tell a Manchu from a Chinese by their looks. In part, this shift in material culture reflected the Manchus' gradual assimilation to life in Beijing; in part, it reflected the fact that, for Chinese elites, furs no longer marked a Manchu sensibility but a broader imperial one.

Indeed, a sea change occurred in eighteenth-century China: Frontier products like fur became markers of elite Chinese fashion. By 1800, visitors to Beijing marveled at what the city had to offer: marten and ermine jackets, steppe mushrooms from Mongolia, freshwater pearls from Manchuria, vendors of game meat, men and women in "horse-hoof" cuffs, and sometimes live elephants, tigers, and bears. In the Ming period (1368–1644), no Chinese word existed for products such as "marten" and "ermine." In the Qing, connoisseurs, pawnshop owners, and the court filled the blanks: Real knowledge of the marketplace demanded not only a new vocabulary but new stories about the meaning and provenance of such products. Faux furs, farmed ginseng, and imitation steppe mushrooms flooded the streets, but consumers wanted the real thing: undyed, uncultivated products from unvarnished frontiers.

From the mid-eighteenth century, as the following chapters will show, such sensibilities and shifts in consumption helped transform the empire's frontiers. To understand that process, however, we must begin in the imperial center first. Critically, the stories people told about frontier products dovetailed with stories they told about each other: Qing subjects were making sense of their place in the empire, of who should rule, of history, and of untouched nature.

THE MEASURE OF THINGS

It is easy to take for granted how the objects of our lives mark the passing of time. Technology and design are indicative of the age, of course, as are fashion and materiality. It is not only the form of things that marks time, moreover: Their variety and quantity are telling, too. Yet looking back we can only generalize so much: To be without the latest technologies or fashions, or to lack material wealth, is hardly atavistic, and our material legacy, no less than our written one, is neither simple nor one directional. Diversity and inequality have been the norm.

Yet, historiographically, a generalization that seems to hold is that the amount of things in our lives has been growing since the sixteenth century, particularly in centers of commerce and production, such as in China. From the late fifteenth century onward, Ming China had flourished. Consumption surged, markets grew, land use intensified, and industries and agriculture expanded to new frontiers. People in China produced and consumed as many things, or more, as those in Western Europe. Compared to earlier periods in Chinese history, people in the late Ming had more choice and owned more than ever. The luxury consumer had access to products from throughout the Ming empire and from throughout the greater region: wools and felts from the Mongol steppe, musk from Tibet, deerskins from Taiwan, silver from Japan, and ginseng from Korea. After 1571, with the establishment of peace with Altan Khan, who ruled in today's Inner Mongolia, the pace of trade with Inner Asia only increased. That same year, with the founding of Spanish Manila, products from the Americas, too, became accessible via the galleon trade: Silver from Mexico and Potosi came to serve as a new basis for currency and taxation; tobacco smoking went viral; farmers began to plant potatoes, corn, and chili peppers. The global age had begun.

As consumption accelerated, older markers of status grew less important. It became difficult to gauge someone's status simply by looking at him or her. "Nowadays . . . the very servant girls dress in silk gauze, and the eunuchs look down on brocaded silks and embroidered gowns." To maintain their distinction, elites turned to connoisseurship. Guides for cultured living, such as A Treatise on Superfluous Things (Zhangwu shi), became bestsellers, offering advice on what the proper gentleman should buy and collect; what made one civilized, such works suggested, was in part a function of what one consumed. As Timothy Brook has shown, maintaining high status required purchasing not just a Ming vase but acquiring the proper Japanese table to place it on and putting the appropriate number of flowers inside ("any more than two stems and your room will end up looking like a tavern").

When the Ming dynasty collapsed in 1644 and the Manchus marched on Beijing, they seemed to belong to a different world. They looked nothing like the people they conquered; rather then dressing like elites, they
appeared like “barbarians” (Ch: hù). Other differences stood out. They spoke and wrote in a foreign language. Their men shaved their hair in the front and let it grow in the back into a long ponytail (the “queue”). Their women refused to bind their feet and so kept them natural. Their aristocracy rode horses, celebrated warrior culture, and wore furs and freshwater pearls. For all these reasons, European witnesses to the Qing conquest described the Manchus as accessible and natural: “They rejoice to see Strangers; they no way like the grimmness and sourness of the Chinese gravity, and therefore in their first aborts they appear more human.” The Manchus inspired the opposite reaction in Ming loyalists. Some died rather than become their subjects: Wen Zhenheng, the writer of Superfluous Things, committed suicide by starvation in 1645 after the Qing conquest of Suzhou.

For their own part, the Manchus intended to look different. The early Qing court worked to win over as many loyalists as possible, and it adopted much of the governing language, institutions, and dress of the Ming court before it. Yet it also attempted to keep Manchus distinct, and although the court embraced classical Chinese political traditions, it simultaneously promoted certain Manchu ones as well. To become Chinese was taboo: The court sponsored organized hunts to encourage proper Manchu values and military élite, and it disciplined Manchus who lacked the required skills in archery, horsemanship, and the Manchu language. In time, as Manchu assimilated, the Qing court under the Qianlong emperor (r.1735–1795) would demand that Manchus compile and submit written genealogies to establish their line of descent. Through such efforts, it was hoped, the Manchus could preserve their unique “Manchu Way.” Those who most embodied it were the best at resisting the luxury and decadence of urban commercial life: Like unbound feet, the “Manchu Way” was unadorned, rustic, and “pure” (Ma: guo or nombon; Ch: chun or pu).

The very fact that the Manchus rose to conquer China reveals, of course, that they were hardly so simple. Manchuria, as much as China, participated in the global moment: like their Chinese neighbors, the people of Manchuria, too, had unprecedented options as consumers by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and they too smoked tobacco, traded for silver, and used cannons. The Manchurian economy turned on exports and was similar in this sense to other regions that boomed in the “silver belt” around Ming China, from Mongolia to Taiwan. From as early as the fifteenth century, long-distance fur trade had grown, and Manchuria’s southern border regions had become home to merchants and intermediaries that connected Ming and Choson consumers with trappers in Siberia, Sakhalin, and Outer Manchuria. The ginseng trade was even more lucrative than fur. Nicola Di Cosmo estimates that perhaps one-quarter of all silver imports from Japan and the New World found their way to Manchuria and the early Qing courts through ginseng purchases alone. Trade in high-end commodities, in turn, helped finance the rise of agriculture, which expanded in the sixteenth century to the point, as one historian put it, that “no field was left unplowed” in the south. At the same time, the region witnessed the growth of local markets and, by 1599, the creation of the first iron foundries. The Manchus were neither so simple nor unusually rustic: They were farmers, merchants, trappers, smelters, and soldiers.

The founder of the Qing imperial family, Nurhaci (1559–1626), drew from this economic and cultural diversity in his rise to power. The “Manchuria” of his time was notably diverse: It included myriad clans of Jurchens, who became the foundation of the later Manchu people, as well as Mongols, Chinese, and Koreans. Between 1599 and 1613, Nurhaci successfully incorporated peoples today who are largely forgotten: the Ula, Hada, Hoifa, and Khalkha in the watershed of the Sungari River; the people known as “Hūrcha” and “Warka” farther to the east. By 1616, through military campaigns, marriage alliances, and careful diplomacy, Nurhaci had consolidated control over the border region between the Ming and Choson states. That year, he announced the founding of the “Later Jin” dynasty, in homage the first Jin dynasty (1115–1234), a medieval Jurchen state from which he claimed descent. In 1635, Nurhaci’s son, Hong Taiji (1592–1643), proclaimed that all Jurchens would henceforth be known as “Manchus,” and in 1636 he changed the dynasty’s name to the Da Qing, literally the Great Purify, from Chinese. The year after his death, the Ming emperor committed suicide, Qing armies crossed the Great Wall, and Qing rule in China began, though it would take almost four decades of further conflict to consolidate control.

RUSTIC ROOTS AND THE QING COURT

We thus can imagine two Manchus. The first, sponsored by the court and central to the Manchu’s own sense of identity, draws from the idea of Manchu difference and emphasizes the recovery of a singular and timeless “Manchu Way.” The second, reconstructed by later historians, emphasizes
the Manchu's place in the larger early modern world, their cosmopolitan connections to greater Northeast Asia, and their adaptability, dynamism, and variability. The Qing court itself reflected the double image, one natural and one historical. The emperors lived as lavish consumers amid incredible opulence, in the center of the largest city in the world, surrounded by dazzling architecture, silks and satins, astrolabes, clocks, and books written in Manchu, Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongolian. Yet amid its opulence, the court also presented itself as the epitome and embodiment of rustic and natural living.17

In homage to their Manchu roots, the emperors hunted. The Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722) personally shot countless stags and deer, 1,353 tigers, twenty bears, twenty-five leopards, twenty lynx, ninety-six wolves, and 132 boar; we know about his hunting prowess because literati cited and republished his kill tally throughout the Qing.18 Kangxi's grandson, the Qianlong emperor, gained fame at age eleven for (supposedly) standing down a charging bear that his grandfather had wounded with a musket.19 The court established a hunting reserve north of Beijing, in Muhan, and summered in its forests each year. There, they rode on horseback, led sprawling, thousand-man hunts, slept in yurts, and enjoyed the splendors of nature. Although they understood hunting as good training for war and rule, they also appreciated its health and psychological benefits. It was always best to be outside. As Kangxi wrote: "In spring and summer the little ones should play outside in the garden. There's no need to stop them. Don't keep them sitting around on the verandah."20

Thus, amid lacquer and silks and others signs of opulence, Nurhaci sat in a throne crafted from stag antlers and used tiger and bear skins as decoration.21 The emperors likewise reserved a special place on the menu for game meats. The court consumed delicacies from every region of the empire, matching a taste for wild Manchurian honey with an urbane sophistication for Chinese cuisine, Mongol liquors, and Central Asian melons. Yet wild game was best. Before the Qing conquest of Beijing, imperial chefs served tiger, bear, roe deer, elk, mountain goat, boar, wild duck, and pheasant; recipe books record how palace staff cleaned and cut the meat into big hunks, then prepared it in stews of sea salt, soy sauce, green onion, ginger, Sichuan peppers, and star anise.22 As Wu Zhengge, historian of imperial dining and Manchu foods, explains, "This way of cooking was a little savage, but it expressed the ruggedness, bravery, and straightforward nature of the Manchu nation's traditional culture."23 It also reflected ideas about Manchu health. The Kangxi emperor was particularly adamant in this regard: "The people of the North are strong; they must not copy the fancy diets of the southerners, who are physically frail, live in a different environment, and have different stomachs and bowels." For elderly Manchus he thus recommended "unrefined milk, pickled deer tongues and tails, dried apples, and cream cheese cakes."24

Empresses, concubines, and favored officials received annual allotments of venison that the emperor personally bagged.25 Whenever the emperor killed a deer, the Imperial Household Department prepared six cuts: tail, breast meat (Ma: keren), croup (Ma: kangama), ribs, strips, and scraps (Ma: fars). Though both Manchu and Chinese officials received such cuts, the ethnic background of the food would not have been lost on anyone: The words used for "breast," "croup," and "scraps" lacked Chinese translations altogether, and Chinese archives record only their transliteration: ke-er-seh, ka-er-ha-ma, and fa-er-shi.26 Game meat, it seems, was served in Manchu. Game birds claimed a similar place on the imperial menu; they, too, embodied the Manchu way.27 Each pheasant came with a story: The court recorded who killed each bird and how, including whether the hunter had used falconry. The Imperial Household Department often bundled venison and pheasant together as gifts.28 Court women received regular allotments of each, including an annual gift from the emperor of two cattles of pheasant, venison, and fish.29 The Summer Palace similarly maintained a menagerie of live pheasants and deer for the court's enjoyment.

Certain wild plants and fungi carried a similar charisma. Thus palace chefs often paired game meats with "steppe mushrooms" (Ch: koumo, lit. "mushrooms from beyond the [Great Wall] pass"): It only added to the wild flavor of its dishes. Qianlong, along these lines, savored "venison tendon with braised steppe mushroom" (Ch: lajun koumo) and "salt-fried meat with steppe mushrooms" (Ch: koumo yangjiaonou) on his tour of Mukden, the Manchu homeland.30 His son, the Jiaqing emperor (r. 1795–1820), likewise ate steppe mushrooms while out on hunts.31 Steppe mushrooms, in fact, never went out of fashion at court. In 1911, on the eve of revolution, the four-year-old emperor Pu Yi ate steppe mushrooms four times in his final month in power.32 Palace food, of course, was hardly primitive; though wild in spirit, its production required learning and craft. The recipe for the hearty "venison tendon with steppe mushrooms" was typically cosmopolitan:
Ingredients: 150 grams (5 oz) of tenderized venison tendon; 150 grams tenderized steppe mushrooms; 40 grams soy sauce; 1 gram of salt; 75 grams of hot bean oil; 20 grams white sugar; 15 grams of liquor (shaojiu); 4 grams of flavored powder (suojing); 150 grams meat broth; 3 grams onion tips; 2 grams ginger; 40 grams starch.

Directions: Soak the venison tendon and (dried) mushrooms in water. When tender, put them on a high flame, pour in the oil, and let it sit until hot. Add the onion and ginger. Add soy sauce, liquor, broth, salt, and sugar. When it comes to a boil, add the tenderized tendon and steppe mushrooms, and let simmer for another 10 minutes. Add flavored powder, bring the fire to high, add starch, sprinkle fragrant oil, and serve.

It was the wild ingredients that made this dish special; venison tendon and "steppe mushroom" said something larger about the Manchu and their rule: They indicated that the emperors were in touch with their roots. Venison, pheasants, and mushrooms, along these lines, formed only part of a larger suite of products associated with Manchu identity; other objects embodied the hunter's tale as well and were prized accordingly as "things hunted" (Ma: buahua jaka) by the Qing court.

Fur fashions spoke to this sensibility. Before the conquest, Manchu rulers ordered that the silken dragon robes they received from the Ming court be trimmed with sable—a barbaric choice by Ming standards; after the conquest, they continued to wear Ming-style dragon robes altered to have fur collars and cuffs and sable-fur skirts. The early court celebrated the Manchu character of furs with formal dances at the palace, where groups of attendants dressed in leopard-skin robes and sable-fur hats and sang of the founding of the dynasty. The writer Tan Qian (1593–1657) witnessed the spectacle and described the "Manchu dance" in his diary in detail: Twenty to thirty people dressed in leopard-skin costumes waved fans as four others dressed in sable-fur costumes danced with poles. In winter, Qing emperors wore hats fashioned from black sable pelts, and in the last two months of the lunar year they donned hats of black fox fur. Atop such hats stood a three-tiered finial studded with Manchurian freshwater pearls. Their winter jackets matched: Qing emperors wore black sable in early winter and black fox in the two months before New Year's. In other winter months the emperors wore dragon robes trimmed with sea otter fur (see Figure 1.1). In summer, such furs went into storage, but freshwater Manchurian pearls remained prominent parts of their ensemble, including on hat ornaments and
in their prominent 108-bead, Buddhist pearl rosaries. Imperial princes dressed with similar elements: sable, sea otter, and Manchurian pearls.

Gifting practices of the early Qing court reveal the intimate nature of these objects. Through the early eighteenth century, the court gifted furs to those with a close connection to Manchu rulership: members of the inner court, banner elites, Mongol allies, and prominent military men. The Manchu nobility and members of the imperial family in particular received gifts befitting their identity: sable, Manchurian pearls, horses, and engraved saddles. The brides of imperial grandchildren similarly received gifts of sable fur (for making either clothing or hats), fox fur (for sitting mats), and sea-otter fur (for trimming). Fathers of the bride, too, received a fox-fur robe, a black sable-fur hat, a robe made of fox-underbelly fur, and six sea-otter fur pelts for trimming and interior lining. Such gifts were typical for members of the inner court. When in 1665 two young women, including the Kangxi emperor’s wet nurse, accompanied the emperor on a hunt, he put in a special request to fabricate two preconquest “Jurcen-style sable jackets” for the occasion; such jackets suited them “when going out to the wilderness.” The empress dowager advised against his generous gesture, noting that “it was not yet the season for wearing sable jackets.” Thus the slave instead received a wool-lined silk gown and sable-lined, black-satin coat and the wet nurse a sable neck warmer, a gown of wool, and “a coat of extra quality sable.” The emperor awarded more modest sable hats and coats to two additional young women in this intimate party as well.

Similar gifting practices extended to the Mongols. The founder of the imperial family, Nurhaci, justified alliances between Jurchens and Mongols on grounds of common dress: “Only the speech of our two nations (Ma: gerun), Mongol and Jurchen, is different; in the clothes we wear and our way of life, we are alike.” Chinese and Koreans, in contrast, wore different clothing and had different ways of life. According to this contrivance of fellowship, the Qing court invited Mongol noblemen to banquet at annual feasts of “wild animals” (Ma: gurgu) during the Lantern Festival (the fifteenth of the first month) in Beijing. As part of the festivities, the court served game meat with bread and fermented mare’s milk, or kumiss, and all Mongol guests received sable coats and coarse woolens for making the trip. The court reinforced the rustic and rural associations of furs by bundling them with gifts of a similar spirit: knives, golden sash rings, and “rump leather” boots. In the Kangxi period, the highest-ranking Mongol aristocrats received the venerable “Jurcen style sable-lined” fur jackets. It was not uncommon, on the other hand, for Mongol nobility to reciprocate with a tribute of hunting falcons and other birds of prey.

Indeed, some of the most prized gifts the court received were the most wild. The emperors sought out such exotic items. Thus in 1760, an envoy dispatched from Ilan Hala to northern Sakhalin purchased live reindeer for the Qianlong emperor, and in 1819, an envoy on tour to the village of Kołman, on the Amur River about 100 miles upstream from the mouth, purchased a set of eighteen live black and arctic foxes. The fiercer and wilder the beast, the more it warranted attention. The Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796–1820) was typical in this regard. In 1804, he received two adult Manchurian tigers from the military governor of Jilin. He was overjoyed; as the emperor enthused, the Manchus of Jilin must truly be “well endowed with manly virtue” to catch such creatures. “I know well that hunting is difficult,” he explained, “but you not only captured tiger and bear cubs as usual, you even got two adult tigers alive—how fierce and manly!” Rewards were in order; he needed details. Who were the hunters, and how had they accomplished the feat? The value of the tigers was inseparable from the hunter’s tale: the characters who did the work, the forest setting, and the skill and brawn that led to heroic success.

Pressed for more information, the military governor of Jilin, Siolin, sent a special memorial with the relevant details. Jilin had a terrific amount of snowfall that winter, he explained. One day, hunters had passed cub prints in the snow and began tracking. They knew that “if there was a fully grown tiger, it could not be caught with brute force,” so the hunters relied on “cunning” instead. When the time was right, they built wooden cages, dropped piglets inside, and raised a trap door. When the tigers walked in to find food for their cubs, they sprung the trap and had their prize. It had taken “fierce and manly” character as well as inside knowledge of the forest. Three years later, in 1807, Siolin sent another gift of live tigers and bears, and again the emperor demanded a story; this time, however, Siolin admitted the hunters’ names “had not been clearly recorded,” but an investigation was underway. A month later, the Grand Council’s Manchu Affairs Office received word that yet another tiger cub was being transported to Beijing. A patrolman in Jilin’s imperial ginseng fields, Sicimbo, was making rounds through the “restricted mountains” when he had spotted its tiny tracks. Again, the Jiaqing emperor was overjoyed: Live tigers embodied the ideal life of the Manchu homeland and the skill and fortitude of the best Manchu bannermen.
Wild things in this way suggested a subjectivity: a tough, intimate, honest, virile, and rustic way of interacting with the world; ostensibly, they represented a man in touch with his original nature. Likewise, the value of the object was inextricable from its provenance and the story of its production. "Steppe mushrooms" had to come from north of the Great Wall; Venison required hunting. Tigers required trapping. To taste a wild mushroom, dine on game meat, or visit the menagerie was to travel in time: to touch something uncorrupted, unaltered, and pristine Manchu. They invoked a consistent constellation of objects associated with the Manchu Way and Qing rule: manliness (Ma: liba erdenia), martial vigor, unadorned "plainness" (Ma: gule), and "purity" (Ma: nombon). All of these values implied a vision of history; to wear pearls and fur was to allude to Manchu origins and an older age.55

Of course, the Manchus’ origins were not so simple, and their lifestyle was never so rustic. Nurhaci’s court depended less on the hunting of furs than on their trafficking.56 A Japanese sailor shipwrecked off the Pacific coast of Manchuria in 1644 described the ubiquity of fur hats among the Manchus but noted that commoners wore wool, whereas only noblemen dressed in the fine furs unavailable in Japan.57 Not surprisingly, fine furs—the product of conquest—belonged to the conquest elite, not the common Manchu. The fur they wore came from neighboring communities to the north and east, such as the Hūrha, Warata, and Ula.

The products of the Qing court, that is, were emblematic of the structure of the imperial hierarchy. Many wore furs, but color, species, and cut defined one’s place in the empire. In Nurhaci’s time, the highest-ranking elites wore Manchurian pearls, sable, and lynx, and lower noblemen dressed in sable and weasel.58 Among the highest-ranking noblemen, still finer grades of distinct differentiation ranked: The top ranks wore plaited sable jackets, black sable robes, "Chinese"-style raccoon-dog robes (Ma: nikan elbihe dabā), or lynx robes; men of the second rank wore plain raccoon-dog robes or coats lined with sable; and men of the third rank wore dragon robes lined with sable in the "Jurchen" style.59 As it consolidated rule in the Northeast, the early Manchu court institutionalized these social and political hierarchies through sumptuary laws. In 1627, the court ordered all Manchu noblemen and women to wear freshwater Manchurian pearls in their hats and hairpieces; the highest one’s rank, the larger and more numerous the pearls one wore.60 After 1644, when the court revised sumptuary laws again, first-rank princes henceforth wore ten Manchurian pearls atop their head, second-rank princes eight, third-rank princes seven, and so on down to the lowest-ranking aristocrats, who wore one.61

Even after the Qing conquest of China, the project of standardizing Manchu attire continued unabated. In the early days, there were still some in Beijing from the "forests" (Ma: woji) of the Northeast who wore fish skins in their capacity as officials; the empire made these men, too, wear proper clothing at court, not the skins.62 We should be careful, then, in labeling a "Manchu" fashion. It was. Yet it was also the projection of an ambition, an image of the ideal Manchu Way, and—particularly for the people of the Northeast—a homogenizing project. Fur and silk befitted the court; fish skin did not.

Can Chinese Wear Fur?

In the Qing empire, clothing and material culture were inseparable from personal identity; one could not separate the fur from the man.63 Clothing represented one’s person as much as the color of one’s skin or the pockmarks on one’s face; standard "name-age-appearance" bulletins for escaped slaves, runaway wives, and military deserters mixed physical and sartorial descriptions, as if one’s outfit never changed.64 By law, fugitives were "captured and investigated according to their physical appearance and clothing."65 It was illegal to knock off someone’s hat (or tug on his tassels) during a fight.66 When a foreign man died in Qing Mongolia, his body and clothing alike were returned to his home jurisdiction.67

It was because clothing represented identity, and because furs represented Manchu identity in particular and frontiers more broadly, that the fashion aroused such strong reactions. Even today, wearing fur is a loaded practice: Is it civilized or brutal? In our world, we debate fur in terms of enlightened liberalism: The value of fur hinges on questions of rights and abuse. In imperial China, fur commanded a similar position as a civilizational flashpoint; as with the Romans, Byzantines, and Umayyads, pelts in China represented barbarity, with the politics of fur refracted through the politics of foreignness and the frontier.68 It is a reminder that there is nothing inherently precious about furs or any other material object: Functionality does not determine value; furs do not simply give warmth in winter or resilience in rain.69 When the frontier epitomized war and exile, and furs
represented hardship, loneliness, and brutality, they could lose their value altogether; furs became “skins” or “hides.”

Tropes of the fur-clad barbarian abound in the classical Chinese literary canon, and as Antonia Finnane has documented, the barbarian in furs was a recurring element in frontier literature throughout the imperial period. From Sima Qian (135?-86 B.C.E.), who described the Xiongnu “dressed in skins” and sleeping on “fur quilts” to the most celebrated Tang poets, who commemorated the wars with the Turks, the Inner Asian frontier proved inseparable from its material culture. The Tang poet Liu Shang (fl. eighth century) captured the spirit of the metaphor in his Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute (Ch: Huaju shiba pai), which recounted the tragic fate of Lady Wenji, a Han noblewoman forced into a Xiongnu marriage. As the lady laments:

I clean my hair with mutton fat, but it is seldom combed
The collar of my lambskin robe is buttoned on the left;
The fox lapels and badger sleeves are rank-smelling
By day I wear these clothes, by night I sleep in them.25

Literate of the Southern Song (1127-1279), writing after the rival Jin state conquered northern China, similarly associated fur with Jurchen and barbarity. Xu Mengxin (1126-1207) painted a typically vivid—and absurd—picture of Jurchen life; in his words, “Even if they catch one single mouse they strip off its skin and keep it.” After the Mongols conquered the Jin and Song states, literati associated Mongols, too, with furs. Xiongnu, Khitan, Jurchen, Mongol, and Manchu were all alike: They all trafficked in the product.

To be sure, Chinese elites wore fur as well, and historians could write a parallel history of Chinese fur fashion to match the Inner Asian. In the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.E.), for example, two headpieces for officials incorporated elements of sable fur: the duanjuan (lit. sable “cícà”-style hat) and the erdiao (lit. “sable earring”), two hats that featured a sable tail dangling from the cap. Literary tradition held that King Wuling of Zhao (r. 325-299 B.C.E.) invented the duanjuan as part of an effort to build esprit de corps: “Dress as a barbarian, fight as a cavalryman” was the axiom of his day.26 The duanjuan remained fashionable in the Tang empire (618-907 C.E.) as well; Edward Schafer noted how the headpieces were for “daring youths who went out to the Tatar frontier, or returned to their native soil for hawking and hunting.”27

Likewise, from the Han dynasty onward, the dynastic histories faithfully record the submission of tribute from people of the Northeast, showing how fur could represent Chinese imperial power too. Furs also had a certain popular appeal, especially after the Mongol conquest. Mongol influences on Chinese fashion proved strong into early Ming times, including in Ming fashions such as the bijia (a type of long vest), the zhishi (a single-colored court robe, from the Mongol jušin), and the socalled hmonao, or barbarian hat.28 In 1430, the Chosŏn court in Korea noted that “the people of China treasure above all leopards and sable furs”; the Chosŏn court itself soon required sable-fur ear-warmer hats for its highest-ranking nobility and squirrel fur hats for the rest.29 Fashion and material culture crossed political and ethnic boundaries; dressing like a barbarian did not necessarily entail being one.

Thus in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, fur fashions endured in Ming China and Chosŏn Korea alike. Through tribute and trade with Mongols and Jurchens, with a commercial network that extended to Siberia and Sakhalin Island, new volumes of furs began to reach the two courts and, Northeast Asian elites. The far Northeast increasingly specialized in fur: Beginning in the 1460s, for example, the Veritable Records of the Ming court cease to record Jurchen deliveries of horses and other “local products” (like pearls) and instead document the delivery of sable pelts (Ch: diaoguo).30

Consumers came to know fur more intimately. Li Shizhen (1518-1593), in his Bencao gangmu (Compendium of Materia Medica), described sable fur as if he had inspected it himself: “The fur is used for coats, hats, and neck-warmer...” During the winter months. One can stay warm in the wind and dry when it is wet. If there is snow, [the fur] will dissolve it like a flame brushing across ones face.”31 As a doctor, he recommended using the sleeve of a sable-fur coat to brush dust from one’s eyes.32 Other fur-bearing animals make an appearance in his work as well, including sea otters, of which he noted: “Today they are used for neck-warmer, but they are second-rate compared to sable.”33 Fur was popular enough in Ming Beijing to create a backlash. In 1506 the Ming court issued a new sumptuary law that prohibited servants, courtiers, and people of low status from wearing sable-fur coats (Ch: diaoguo).34 A century later, strategists at the Ming court warned that fur was funding the rise of Nushachi and Hong Taiji.35
To other thinkers, the primary threat of fur was that it debased Chinese culture. In one striking document, dated March 6, 1491, a Ming censor warned ominously of "foreign dress and language" among the men and women of Beijing and of Chinese men wearing sable- and fox-fur hats like "nomad barbarians" (Ch: hu). Demanding the "restoration of pure Chinese culture" (Ch: fu huaxia zhi chunfeng), he urged the Ming court to "sweep away the mean customs of the barbarian Yuan" and "make customs and practices pure and correct" (Ch: xiu chunfeng). Chinese people were wearing fur, but wearing fur was not Chinese. To purge China of foreign influences and reestablish its original culture, all foreign clothing, particularly fur, would have to go. Thus if Manchu fur fashion was a political project, so too was the Chinese aversion to it. Both projects, in their own ways imagined a timeless and original purity.

For this reason, fur remained a flashpoint well after the Qing conquest. Tan Qian, writing in his Record of Travels North (Beijing lu) a decade after the Manchu's arrival in Beijing, found himself in a new and frightening world. In a journal entry from March 15, 1645—the Shunzhi emperor's birthday—he recorded how officials at the Board of Rites honored the occasion by spending a week dressed in either sable- or fox-fur coats. To Tan Qian, it was enough to drive a poor bureaucrat to ruin. "I heard the emperor dressed in a black fox-fur robe, valued upwards of 3000 jin, and that all the various ministers wore black robes worth no less than a 1000 jin." Yet nothing could be done about such waste: Fur was the new order.

Although Tan Qian critiqued fur as wasteful, others emphasized that ethnic or civilizational pride was at stake. The Jesuit Father Pierre Joseph D'Orléans (1641–1698) noted the indignity of Chinese having "to cut off their hair and adopt the Tartar dress." Korean travelers, who continued to abide by Ming sumptuary standards, lampooned the rise of fur in China. After sneaking into the palace's New Year's ceremony, the Choson emissary Kim Ch'ang-gop (1658–1721) was struck above all by the small carpets Qing officials used to bow and kneel: "The rug for the highest rank was a tiger skin with the head and claws on it. The next rank down had a tiger skin without head and claws, the next had a wolf skin, the next a badger skin, the next a raccoon-dog skin, the next a wild sheepskin, then a dog skin and lowest of all a mat of white felt." Kim had disguised himself as a servant, but the plan backfired: He misguidedly had adorned himself in "a leopard fur that attracted the attention of some of the barbarians," and, as he later wrote in his diary, "I had to take it off in the end to get rid of them."

Chinese voices that would have been censored in the Qing ring out in such Korean travelogues. An official at the Board of Rites, Pan Deju, wrote to Kim Ch'ang-gop, for example, of the Kangxi emperor's favoritism toward "Tatars," using the character ta, or "otter," for "Tatar." Accusing the emperor of being frugal in word but not in deed, he derided the court for wasting money on Mongol "Otters" who lived "somewhere beyond Ninggutu" to receive nothing but fur and ginseng in return. Manchu ritual life was impenetrable; rifling on puns and mistranslations, Kim found himself wondering about the difference between "otters" and "Tatars":

The Korean interpreter asked who was the General Deng [Ch: Deng changjun] in whose shrine the Emperor prayed at the beginning of each year. The Chinese explained that Deng changjun did not mean "General Deng," but was the name of a cap that had belonged to Nurhaci's father, the ancestor of the Manchu Emperors. It was kept in this shrine and the Emperor went to burn incense to it at the beginning of every year. The Koreans thought it must be precious, but the Chinese said that on the contrary it was nothing but a moth-eaten piece of otter-skin. And they all laughed about it.

Travelers like Kim Ch'ang-gop were quick to draw conclusions about the Manchus based on their dress, just as later Choson emissaries generally focused on clothing as well. In his descriptions of various ethnic groups and foreigners living in Beijing, the envoy Hong Taeyong (1721–1783) recorded the color, cut, and fabric of everyone's gowns and hats. Ambassadors from the Ryukyu Islands pleased his eye with their long, flowing satin robes. Manchus and Mongols produced the opposite effect. At best absurd, they otherwise appeared terrifying and "fierce."

THE QING INTEGRATION

It is difficult to imagine how exotic, novel, and beastly these fashions would have seemed to Chinese, Korean, and others steeped in the classical tradition; they had no language to describe some of the more nuanced aspects of Manchu fur culture that the Qing conquest had introduced. Neologisms proliferated. As with game meats, where new words emerged for certain
cuts of venison, so too did the Chinese lexicon expand to describe furs and other exotic objects from the far north. Lynx, for example, lacked a Chinese character, and a new word for the animal was coined only after 1624: shelun, from the Mongolian silgėr. The same held for Manchurian freshwater pearls (Ma: tana), which became known as “eastern pearls” in Chinese (Ch: dongsha). “Steppe mushroom,” or konna, was another neologism of the Qing: no references to the product exist before the late seventeenth century.

Translation proved to be a constant problem, and in the generation after the Qing conquest, literati struggled to bridge the gap between Manchu and Chinese words and to standardize terminology. Shen Qiliang (fl. 1645-1693) tackled the problem most directly in his Da Qing qianshu (1683), the first Manchu–Chinese dictionary. He compiled the dictionary for practical reasons: the ruling elite spoke and wrote in Manchu, whereas their subjects lived and worked in mostly Chinese or Mongolian. Yet the lexical differences between these languages proved formidable. Pointedly, Shen Qiliang included in his dictionary roughly 300 Manchu words that lacked known Chinese translations; in his dictionary, he left the space for these translations blank. Many of these untranslated words, in turn, were flora and fauna common to the far north, including corsac fox (Ma: kirsa), marten (Ma: harne), and saltbush (Ma: ule). Animal anatomy and behavior proved similarly obscure. There was no Chinese equivalent for the Manchu words for “hair on a sable’s chin” (Ma: hatshua) or “deer brushing against trees during mating season” (Ma: gijanmi). Other untranslatable terms encompassed objects familiar to Manchurian households: rush or reed baskets for holding sewing materials (Ma: kipj), millstones (Ma: niyelehu), and sleighs (Ma: buncu).

Other bilingual texts of the early Qing similarly lacked one-to-one translations for Chinese and Manchu words that described the natural or built environments. In his Record of a Mission to the Distant Border (Lakescha jeen de tahleedhaha bkek ejheh bikel Vesulu, published 1722), Tuliien provided more detail and clarity on the things he encountered on his journey to Russia in his Manchu text than in his Chinese: He left some Manchu words in Chinese transliteration; he translated other words inconsistently or omitted altogether. Thus, while traveling through far northern Manchuria, Tuliien noted in Manchu seven different types of fish found in the rivers: salmon trout (jela), salmon (niomoleu), golden carp (ongoleu), “yellow fish” (mushrank), tench (lico), dragon liver fish (cun nimah), and sturgeon (kiri). His Chinese version, however, lists only five fish, and they were different: te, carp, crucian carp, ed, and (Yangzi) sturgeon. Flora similarly proved a problem: Japanese larch (Ma: is) became a fir in Chinese. Still other exotics included salmon trout (Ma: jelaj), dragon liver fish, reindeer (Ma: onun bubu), and moose (Ma: kandahan), all of which Tuliien left in transliteration.

In contrast, a contemporary Manchu–Mongol dictionary, the Han-i eraha Manju Monggo giunu buleku bihe (Mo: Qaunan-n biqgen Manju Monggol ijen-+i nil biqgi) (1717), included sentence- or paragraph-length definitions for all of the terms missing from texts like the Da Qing qianshu. It identified the corsac fox (Ma: kirsa; Mo: kirsa), for example, as “similar to the fox, but with a whitish hue.” The text provided comparable detail for the marten (Ma: harne; Mo: havar): “Its length is like the sable. It has a foul odor and a thick black tail, and it catches and eats honey by dipping its tail in it.” Other animals, such as the moose (Ma: kandahan; Mo: ganagatsi), which lacked Manchu and Chinese entries alike in the Da Qing qianshu, also receive extensive treatment. Moose, for example, “belong to the deer family. Their body is big with a bump on the back. There is a skin under its throat like a bridle decoration [Ma: hendarahe], the neck is short, and the antlers flat and wide. The females are called cviwen.” The dictionary includes further entries for adult moose (Ma: toba; Mo: togji), the moose’s young (Ma: niyarboca; Mo: qotul), and abnormally large moose (Ma: anamu; Mo: manji).

Manchus and Chinese, it would seem, lived in different worlds, populated by different creatures and things: Manchus knew of moose and marten; Chinese did not. Ultimately, it was the imperial encounter that led these two worlds to overlap more fully and for new translations to arise, as fur and other wild objects became part of a larger, shared, and peculiarly Qing material culture. We can chart this imperial integration through shifting sumptuary laws and gifting practices. The nascent Qing empire faced formidable challenges in integrating its disparate realms; it is easy to forget, nearly 400 years later, the dislocation, violence, and anguish that the Ming–Qing transition produced. Yet we cannot understand the seemingly trivial focus on fur in politics without invoking it. Looking back, the stakes for combatants were no less than those of Western religious and colonial wars of the same period; for those who fought through them, civilization itself was on the line. Looking back from the twentieth century, many scholars have portrayed
the Ming–Qing conflict as a national war between Manchus and Chinese. Many oversimplified: The battle lines of the seventeenth-century crisis never aligned cleanly with any national blocs. Different localities experienced different traumas and were moved by different political dynamics; elites and the poor did not always agree on why they fought. Survivors often depicted their struggles in terms more personal than national; one chose not just between Manchu and Chinese but between loyalty and expediency, right and wrong.

The Manchu identity of the conquest elite mattered nonetheless, and in the immediate aftermath of the conquest, the perception that the Manchus were “barbarians” (Ch: 胡人) lingered in many minds.107 There were those, like the influential writer Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692), who argued on principle that Manchus were barbarian from birth, and thus perpetually rooted in alien lands and customs.108 For others, their problem with Manchus stemmed from specific policies or experiences: Some witnessed the massacres in the towns of Qian’an, Yongping, and Yangzhou; others were the victims of “Manchu apartheid” and displaced from their homes in cities like Beijing and Hangzhou in the creation of banner neighborhoods. Still others objected to the edict of 1645 ordering all Chinese men to wear their hair like Manchus, in a queue, on pain of death.109 It was this last policy, a sumptuary law, that aroused the greatest resistance among civilians. In Jiangnan in particular, the edict united scholars and peasants alike against Qing rule.110 As one scholar remembered, “We young men cherished our hair, and when we saw people with shaven heads, they didn’t seem human.”111 In practice, material culture localized the question “Who am I?” like nothing else; the queue represented an affront to the body and so served as the ultimate symbol of barbarism. Indeed, it is no accident that the Qing court put so much weight on sumptuary laws: Rooting out resistance was in part the point.

In 1644, a year before the queue proclamation, the Qing court issued new sumptuary laws for proper dress at court, ordering all aristocrats to wear both Manchurian pearls and fur according to rank.112 In 1651, it further mandated that all visitors to the palace use fur floor mats in winter. Fur would symbolize rank: princes of the first rank would use mats of sable, princes of the second degree sable-trimmed lynx, princes of the third degree undressed lynx, and so on down to the lowest-ranking visitors, who would sit on goat pelts and deerskin mats (see Table 1.1).113 The regulations held until 1765, when the Qianlong emperor slightly modified the law and ordered princes of the first rank to use lynx fur trimmed with sable and princes of the second degree to use sable trimmed with lynx.114

At the same time, the Qing court began gifting fur pelts, robes, and jackets to favored Chinese officials, particularly those involved in successful military campaigns. Ming military defectors were the first to receive such gifts. Kong Youde (d. 1652), Chi Zhongming (1604–1649), and Shang Kexi (1604–1676)—the great Chinese “feudatories” of the preconquest generation—received twenty sable pelts each in 1637 on the occasion of Emperor Hong Taiji’s birthday; they further received ten pelts in 1638 and eighty pelts in 1642.115 In the final stages of the Qing conquest, in 1654, both Kong Youde and Geng Jiaozhi accepted dyed sable-fur hats and fox-belly and sable-lined robes.116 In a similar spirit, the Kangxi emperor began awarding sable pelts to exceptional soldiers he inspected during his imperial tour of 1704, as did the Yongzheng (r. 1722–1735) and Qianlong emperors on their own tours of 1728 and 1739.117 Indeed, most decorated military men received comparable gifts until the end of the dynasty. From the Drungar campaigns and expansionary wars of the eighteenth century to the civil wars and rebellions of the nineteenth, honored soldiers received precious furs: otter-fur “war-shirts,” black fox-fur hats, and sable riding gowns and floor mats.118

At the same time, the number and type of civilians receiving gifts of fur expanded. The Yongzheng emperor began a new tradition of gifting furs to Qing subjects who lacked any association to the military or the inner court whatsoever.119 He signaled a shift in this regard in 1724, when he awarded sable pelts to the living descendants of Confucius. No longer bundled with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank (Chinese)</th>
<th>Type of fur</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prince of the first rank</td>
<td>Sable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of the second degree</td>
<td>Lynx with sable trim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of the third degree</td>
<td>Lynx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of the fourth degree</td>
<td>Snow leopard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of the fifth degree</td>
<td>Red leopard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of the sixth degree</td>
<td>Leopard (minus head and tail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesser aristocratic ranks</td>
<td>Tiger (minus head and tail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First rank (Barnacurata)</td>
<td>Wolf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second rank</td>
<td>Badger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third rank</td>
<td>Racoon-dog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth rank</td>
<td>Goat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth rank and below</td>
<td>Deer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
horses or armor, the pelts came instead with fine tea and ink—objects befitting literati.115 The palace’s New Year’s celebrations similarly became more mixed and eclectic in their material culture. In 1726, with his highest Chinese and Manchu officials assembled, the Yongzheng emperor ordered that all attendees receive sable pelts, silk, and copies of the Kangxi edition of the Essentials of the Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Government (Tongjian gangmu).116 Yongzheng’s son, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1795) followed this precedent, and at the New Year’s celebration of 1738 again awarded the assembled officials sable, silk, and the book.117 In 1754 (QI.19), the Qianlong emperor further mandated that for the two and a half months surrounding New Year’s, from the first of the eleventh month to the sixteenth of the first, all those participating in court sacrifices wear sable-trimmed court clothing.118 That same year, he bestowed sable fur caps on the descendants of the Song scholar Fan Zhongyan.119

At court, that is, while furs continued to resonate as Manchu and military garb, they also became symbols of imperial prestige more broadly. From the Yongzheng reign onward the court gifted pelts to Manchus and Chinese, military generals and civilians, men and women alike. The National Palace Museum in Taiwan holds fifty-six palace memorials from the Yongzheng reign in which officials in the field thanked the emperor for gifts of sable. Of these, the emperor sent seventeen pelts to officials serving in northern China and thirty-nine to officials serving in the south: Fourteen pelts found their way to tropical Yunnan and Guangzhou, eight to Guangdong, six to Fujian or Taiwan, and four to Guangxi. Of the fifty-six memorialists, twenty-two were officials serving in a military capacity; the rest were mostly civil governors or governors-general.120 Sable fashion was no longer confined to the northern frontiers, the inner court, or the military; it transcended old dichotomies and belonged to all the empire’s elites.

Fur in time became a favored symbol of filial piety. The Yongzheng emperor set another precedent when he gifted four sable pelts to an elderly mandarin on her one hundredth birthday.121 Thereafter, the Qianlong emperor took up the practice with gusto and similarly awarded such pelts to prominent men: One governor’s mother received four pelts, another ninety-one-year-old mother received ten, and many more received pelts on the occasion of their hundredth birthdays.122 The practice crossed conventional boundary lines: In 1781, news of a 108-year-old Muslim woman in Xinjiang received a gift of sable and satin; in 1797 a 106-year-old Kyrgyz woman received the same.123 And although venerable mothers were the most common beneficiaries, after 1751 the occasional elderly father also received a package of sable and silk, bundled up in the wrapping and seal of the Qing court.124

Fur thus became a symbol of the emperor’s grace, power and largesse. Just as tribute bearers to Beijing were expected to carry characteristic gifts (rhinoceros horn from the Liao, horses from Kazaks, and so on), the Qianlong court represented itself with telling gifts in return: a mix of sable and silk. Korean tribute missions received fur at every lunar New Year’s, on the emperor’s birthday, at imperial weddings, and at other holidays and special events.125 In 1743, when the Qianlong emperor met with Korean emissaries on his imperial tour of Mukden (Shenyang), in explicit homage to his heritage he presented the Koreans with 100 sable pelts together with bows and arrows and saddled horses.126 Into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, participants in the tribute system returned home with gifts of fur, and tribute missions from Choson Korea, the Lao Court of Lan Xang, the Ryukyu Islands, and Annam (Vietnam) all received pelts of sable or fox.127

THE NEW NORMAL

By the late eighteenth century, the material distinctions between Manchu and Chinese was collapsing; by and large, one could not tell a Manchu from a Chinese by looking (see Figure 1.2).128 Manchu continued to take pride in their imagined history and identity; to receive stipends as bannermen; to speak, read, and write Manchu; and to wear the queue and dress in furs. Yet in Beijing by the late eighteenth century every man wore the queue; almost everyone spoke Mandarin Chinese; and everyone marked high status with once exotic products, such as furs, freshwater pearls, and steppe mushrooms. For the right price, one could simply buy all the wild emblems the imperial imagination conjured: jet-black Urankhai sable; wild Ginseng from Manchuria; mushrooms from Xanadu. For less, one could own dyed or cultivated fakes that resembled the original.

Fur moved from the court to the streets. The Jesuit missionary Jean Baptiste du Halde tantalized European readers of the mid-eighteenth century with descriptions of fur treasures, where there "are kept many Habits lined with various Furs of Foxes, Ermine, or Zibeline [sable], which the Emperor sometimes bestow on his Servants." Outside the palace, too, he saw "a vast Quantity of the finest Sort of Skins."129 Describing the city in
At the close of the old year, and the beginning of the new, huge heaps of game and fish are exposed for sale in the streets, and it is surprising to see how cheap they are sold. For seven or eight silver cehens, which are equivalent to four shillings, one may buy a stag; for trifle more a wild-boar; for five half-pence, a pheasant; and so on in the same proportion.\(^{190}\)

Local residents, too, enjoyed the spectacle at Beijing's game markets. Casually, one seven-year-old child recorded in a Manchu schoolbook, which most likely dates to the mid-eighteenth century, that "there is lots of stuff coming from Mukden this year. On the streets are piled up roe deer, four-year-old wild boar, deer, pheasant, hare, geese, and ducks, and other such things." He was not overly impressed: "While there are lots of people looking, few people are buying. I don't value these kinds of things too much. But I am very fond of eating sturgeon and crane."\(^{192}\) Wild animals were at your fingertips—whether you desired them or not.

Beijing became particularly famous for its fur markets. By the early nineteenth century, the biggest markets had emerged just outside Qianmen gate, on the south side of the inner city wall where the Manchu and Chinese cities converged.\(^{193}\) The most active market, the Beijing Pearl Market, specialized in not only pearls, but furs and wild ging. A traveler's manual, the Guide to the Capital (Dumen jihoe, published 1849) detailed the locations of each of the main markets for new tourists and sojourners. For newcomers, the book explained: "The wealthy of the capital—including those famous for finishing first in the exams—regularly wear sable-fur robes and palace pearls."\(^{134}\) The guidebook promised a bustling scene at the Pearl Market: "Pedestrians crowd and squeeze, people laugh and rub shoulders, and everywhere merchants are calling out to sell something. One cannot help but smile."\(^{135}\) Notable shops specializing in fur hats and neck warmers were located nearby; so too were specialty ging shop.\(^{136}\)

 Pawnshops, so ubiquitous in the Qing world, thrived on the used fur market.\(^{137}\) A seasonal rhythm dictated their business in Beijing: In the spring, bannermen pawned fur coats and hats; in the winter, they redeemed them. Later, the pawned fur coat became a metaphor for the old guard; the writer Lao She (1899–1966) thus lampooned an opium-addled magistrate in his story "Also a Triangle," in which the bedridden man is too weak to even pull on a loving-fur coat and so pleads for understanding: "Sure would save me from making a fool of myself running all over town trying to get rid of a lamb-fur jacket. No one's wearing lamb now, or even fox leg!"\(^{138}\)
(Lao She himself once claimed "with tears in his eyes" to have sold his own fur coat to provide food and clothes for his mother in winter.)

One sign of this fashion shift appears in the language and spirit of late-eighteenth-century sumptuary laws: The court no longer worried about Chinese officials dressing like Manchu elites but common subjects dressing the part, too. From its inception, the Qing court proved sensitive to complaints of overindulgence in luxury. Kangxi and Yongzheng in particular prided themselves on frugality; fur was regal, but only in moderation. In 1664, the Kangxi emperor decreed that new gray fox-fur hats, often awarded to favored officials of the inner court, be given only to officials who truly needed them: "Cancel [the new order] if [their existing hat] is a good one. Replace it with a new one only if it is worn-out." The emperor similarly halted the annual gifting of sable pelts to favored officials during the Three Feudatories Rebellion (1673–1681), as sable's decadence "portended trouble from within Yunnan." No virtuous generals or officials received pelts until victory was in sight, in 1680, when victory was in hand. It was easy to overstep one's bounds. In one instance, Kangxi tut-tutted to a coterie of lavishly dressed officials after a policy discussion:

Now about your clothing and headgear. Your fondness for expensive things made of sable and silk is a minor detail, but it is a matter of being economical. Don't you know how many fox-fur hats one sable hat could buy? Or how many sheepskin coats one silk garment is worth? Why do you wear such costly items?

Despite such injunctions, many Manchus ignored sumptuary laws and dressed beyond their rank. To Yongzheng, it was a sign of profligacy: Buying furs was beyond the means of ordinary Manchus, and overspending would ruin them. The debates at court on what to do revealed the degree to which fur fashion was outpacing courtly norms. As one official protested:

Laws must be enforceable for prohibitions to work. If the laws are clearly known but unable to be successfully applied, then prohibitions cannot work. If former prohibitions have been failures, how can they be reissued?

The Yongzheng emperor dismissed such arguments: "High ministers and officials can buy [satin and furs] when the price is low and after their households have earned money and become rich," he explained. Common soldiers, in contrast, could not afford to be "profligate." To protect their

livedhood, the emperor argued, the court had a moral duty to admonish "those who overstep their bounds," to teach and to guide them, so that they may "come to their senses." He recognized it might take generations: Eventually, "years in future, people will reform themselves on their own accord" and be frugal. Thus, in 1725, he reissued the sumptuary laws for bannermen that prohibited the wearing of satin, sable, and lynx robes.

Yet extravagance could not be contained. One measure of fur's newfound popularity was its increased stature in popular literature. The charged symbolism surrounding sable made it fit for caricature and absurdity in ways almost difficult to imagine outside the Qing context. Li Liyuan's novel *Lantern at the Road Fork* (*Qiluandu*, published c.1777) includes a character that is nothing less than a walking, talking sable pelt. Not surprisingly, characters with strong connections to the court typically wear furs. A *Romance to Awaken the World* (*Xingzi yinian chuan*), a novel popularly attributed to Pu Songling (1640–1715), thus opens with a prince hunting in sable fur and shifts to a discussion of ambitious officials worried about their need to wear fine furs. It was not easy to dress the part in this world. The novel provided the outrageous figure of fifty-five silver tael to buy a single sable fur hat.

Fur in Cao Xueqin's *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*HongLoumeng*)—published almost a century after a *Romance to Awaken the World*—is even more ubiquitous. By day characters slip into fur to entertain guests and by night to ward off cold. They gift fur to friends and relatives and discuss the quality, warmth, and upkeep of their jackets and robes. The text delights in the variety and style of fur fashions: Lady Xifeng has a sable overcoat, squirrel jacket, and ermine skirt; Baoyu dresses in a fox-fur–lined archer's vest and a dark sable robe. The identity-bending possibility of dress was always at play: In one scene, Baoyu pushes Fangguan to experiment with her hair style and try on a sable-fur hat—then whimsically imagines she is a frontiersman named Yeli Xiongguo: a Khitan Hun. At its height, Baoyu's family keeps a treasure box filled with gold, silver, jade, ivory, and nine strings of Manchurian pearls. Their savings also included a bewildering embarrassment of furs:

Eighteen black fox pelts, six dark fox pelts; thirty-six sable pelts, thirty yellow fox pelts, twelve lynx pelts, three nape pelts, sixty imported squirrel pelts, forty pelts of squirrel and fox legs, twenty reddish-brown sheep pelts, two bull fox pelts, two yellow fox leg-fur pelts, twenty pieces of small arctic fox pelts, thirty pieces of foreign wool... ten mountain weasel...
tubes, four pieces of doushu pelts . . . one piece of meitu fur, two cloud-fox tubes, one role of badger cub fur . . . 160 grey squirrel pelts, eight badger pelts, six tiger pelts, three fur seal pelts, sixteen sea otter pelts . . . ten black fox-fur hats, twelve woudao hats, two sable hats, sixteen small fox pelts, two aquatic raccoon dog pelts, two otter pelts, [and] thirty-five cat pelts.\footnote{131}

Yet another measure of the popularity and marketability of furs was the proliferation of counterfeit.\footnote{132} In A Romance to Awaken the World, Pu Songling imagines a harter named Luo Jiachai who makes his fortune peddling fakes:

He was a sable-fur artisan. For years sable was extremely expensive. He would construct hats by taking the most pretty part of the sable's spine, stretching it out as big and wide as possible and piling a great many together. Then, to cobble together the hat, he stitched the insides together with a string of dark raimie. People see only that the fur is plush and the color is black; nobody knows that myriad strips of shoddy pelts compose the interior and fringes. He made twenty to thirty taels silver selling each and so gradually built up the family business.\footnote{133}

As we shall see in the coming chapter, counterfeit ginseng proliferated as well, as did fake steppe mushrooms. Around Beijing, as one late nineteenth-century gazetteer recorded, everyone knew that real steppe mushrooms (Ch. : koumo) "grew on the bones of cattle and sheep," but that "these days local people call all of our local products 'steppe mushrooms.'"\footnote{134} If customers knew the origins of these koumo, they would plummet in value. Origins mattered.

If wild frontier objects thus had once been reviled for their provenance, they were now celebrated for it: Their value continued to derive from stories of their origins and alterations. Where did they come from? How were they created, and how had they been changed? It took a considerable amount of knowledge about the nature of pelts to appraise them; those without any market knowledge were likely to get duped. The problem was acute enough to inspire a new genre: appraisal manuals for pawnbrokers. Given the dominance of fur in the pawn market, guidebooks proliferated for pawnshop owners to help with appraisal. At least one manual, the Rules for Fine Furs (Lu : pici cuci maofu), published in 1843, specialized entirely in fur appraisal.\footnote{135} The text lists dozens of types of furs, divided into animal types (marmot, fox, steppe fox, Solon gray squirrel, imported squirrel, and so on) and parts of the animal (whole pelts, underbelly fur, leg fur), then provides information on the number of units necessary for producing a robe (Ch: pao), gown (Ch: tao), jacket (Ch: magou), coat (Ch: dalai), or overcoat (Ch: waishuo). Vivid details of fashion and craft emerge from the text. We learn that most animal pelts figured exclusively in robes, gowns, and jackets, but some, such as western fox, steppe wolf, and black fox, were used mostly in jackets and overcoats. We learn that gowns and overcoats were relatively lavish: It generally required twelve as many pelts to make a gown or overcoat than a jacket. Full-length robes (see Figure 1.2), however, usually required 30 percent more pelts than a gown or overcoat. The results could be extravagant: 180 fox-heads, 180 Solon squirrels, or 160 leopored pelts per robe.\footnote{136}

Although larger animals, in turn, tended to command higher prices than smaller ones, such as squirrels, a pelt's value was only in part a function of its material qualities. Size and other physical properties, such as waterproofing, weight, and weight, mattered as well: Furs were winter wear, meant to keep one warm and dry, and certain pelt types, such as sea otter, were more dense with hairs and so at once more waterproof and sensuous.\footnote{137} Yet value reflected a discourse of provenance more than materiality; stories as much as sensuality structured the Qing valuation of furs. According to the Rules for Fine Furs, for example, "top-grade" furs invariably derived from "east of the [Great Wall] pass," in Manchuria. The finest sables came from "Solon" lands and the worst from Korea (Koryo). The best squirrels came from Solon lands as well, as did the most luxurious river otters and lynx, though Russian varieties of the latter two species were of comparable value. Steppe foxes were best if from "beyond the Great Wall": black fox, black wolf, fire fox, chuamen, dark fox, saohe, badger, ermine, wolf, river otter, and marmot were all most valuable when from "East of the Pass," in Manchuria. In a catalogue of fifty types of animal pelts, only two were top grade if from China proper: yellow foxes from Hubei and Hunan and flying squirrels from Shaanxi and Gansu.\footnote{138}

Where the provenance and history of products was unclear, or when a product seemed to lack a pedigree, scholars and connoisseurs invented one for it. Some people had intimate firsthand knowledge of where products like fur came from. In his Talks with Guests over Tea (Chayu kehua), for example, the former President of the Board of Punishments Ruan Kuisheng (1727–1788) devoted an entry in his notes to "[animal] types such as sable and fox."\footnote{139} As a participant in the Four Treasures project and a compiler of the official history of the Drungar campaigns, Ruan could write about fur with unique authority. As a wealthy consumer, he also knew the luxury
marketers. Thus in discussing the marten (Ch: sasuke)—an animal that lacked a Chinese translation altogether in the Da Qing quanshu—Ruan easily explained, "It is bigger than the sable. Its fur is white and the hairs are long, and its luster is inferior to them. The price is also lower." In his discussion of martens (Ch: diaesuh), he drew inspiration from more scholarly sources, including the Guangzehi, a Jin dynasty (265–420) encyclopedia by Guo Yigong, who associated sable with ancient Fuyu (a contemporary Manchurian kingdom of the far northeast), and the Shengjing tongzhi, an imperial gazetteer of Mukden produced during Kangxi’s reign. He cites both texts, while adding new information of his own:

[Martens] prefer eating pine-seeds and [so are found] in pine forests. One type is called the "pine dog," of which there are yellow and black varieties. The jet-black ones [have fur that is] luxuriant but not shiny, and are especially difficult to procure. Its den is either dog into the earth or hollowed from a tree. Trappers rig a net at the entrance to the den, then smoke [the animal] out. It fears the smoke and flies into the net. There are also dogs that hunt martens. The dogs sniff out the location of its tracks, guard [its den] without leaving, [then] wait for [the marten] to come out to catch it in its mouth. Some people also use slings or snares. The Shengjing tongzhi names one marten the "pinecone dog," as it prefers to eat pinecones and bark. There are many of these throughout the mountains of Ul. Their pelt is light and warm, and can be made into coats or hats. The Guangzehi states that martens come from Fuyu.

In establishing a deeper genealogical connection between the animals of the present and those referenced in China’s deeper literary tradition, Ruan Kuisheng was not alone: In this same era the Qing court was writing histories of the origins of the Manchus, which connected the Manchus themselves to the ancient Fuyu, and scholars were recovering a Han dynasty past for the newly conquered cities of Xinjiang. When, in this spirit, scholars sought Qing exotics in older texts, many found precedents in the Liao (907–1125), Jin (1115–1234), and Yuan (1271–1368) periods, when the conquest dynasties of the Khitan, Jurchen, and Mongols ruled. As interest in precedents grew, publishers reprinted the poetry of the Liao, Jin, and Yuan courts that celebrated hunting, wearing fur, and luxurious sable fur yurts. The retrospective Yuan poetry compilation, Yuanshihuan (1798), was particularly rich with literary references to sable coats in the era of the Mongol empire. Fur remained indelibly linked with the frontier, the court, and the north—but now it was celebrated as such.

Other products, including the Manchurian freshwater pearl and the steppe mushroom, received similar treatment, as scholars turned to classical texts for precedents. Prior to the conquest, for example, Manchurian freshwater pearls (Ma: tanu) were so exotic that scholars and consumers had difficulty locating them in earlier texts; the Chinese term “eastern pearl” (Ch: dongshuh), in fact, was a seventeenth-century neologism. They did, however, find “northern pearls” (Ch: beishuh), which were distinct from “true pearls” (Ch: zhenshuh) and which Song literati associated with the Khitan Liao (907–1125) and Jurchen Jin courts (1115–1234). Unlike “true pearls,” “northern pearls” had an air of exoticism. Song-period accounts describe how, in the early twelfth century, during the final days of the Liao court, “Extravaganze was unbridled, and the imperial palace vied only for northern pearls.” The marvel of the pearls, as always, lay in their origins. As one such account recorded:

Northern pearls all come from due north, from the frontier-market trade... [They] are beautiful. Big ones are like marbles, and small ones are like tung nuts. All come from Liaoqiong’s rivers and coastline. On the fifteenth of every eighth month, there is a bright full moon, and thus a great opening, and in the tenth month one can collect the pearl oysters. However the north is freezing cold, and by the ninth or tenth month the ice is already a chi [approx. 14 meter] thick. [So] they bore a hole through the ice, descend into the water, and hunt them, which causes the [peelers] to become sick. There are also swans that can eat the oysters and gobble down the treasure, as well as great birds of prey called “gyrfalcons” (Ch: baiduongying) that can attack the swans. People thus use the birds of prey to catch swans, and so they [obtain] the pearls sucked inside them.

Medieval precedents and similarly fantastical stories dominated descriptions of steppe mushrooms as well, as they too earned a historical pedigree. Like “eastern pearls,” the Qing “steppe mushrooms” was a neologism, and scholars had no luck finding them in earlier texts. There were, however, mushrooms called “sand fungi” (Ch: shajun), and in the 1780s scholars, poets, and gourmards began to equate the two. The first text to define and elaborate on the keun’s pedigree at length was the Imperially Commissioned Rehe Gazetteer (Qinding Rehe shi), the gazetteer for the jurisdiction encompassing the court’s hunting grounds. Completed in 1781 under the guidance of two of the closest associates of the aging Qianlong emperor—the Grand Councilors Liang Guozhi (1723–1786) and Heshen
(1746-1799)—the text featured, like all gazetteers, descriptions of local flora and fauna, which in this case included steppe mushrooms. The entry required a bit of explanation. What was a steppe mushroom? It was a “fungus” (Ch: jun) similar to Hericium erinaceus (Ch: houtou, lit. “monkey head” mushroom). The text elaborated that “the best ones are the most valued in China proper (Ch: zhongguo) and are called ‘steppe mushrooms’” (Ch: kuomao). It claimed further that the enormous manure heaps outside a military camp produce “especially delicious” ones, and for this reason steppe mushrooms had the nickname “encampment mushrooms” (Ch: yingguan moga). It then explained that “steppe mushrooms” were also known as “sand fungi” (Ch: shajun).60

It was an important claim: Sand fungi had a particularly close association with the rustic summer palaces of the Liao court, at Shangjing, and the Mongol Yuan court, at Shangdu—the “Xanadu” of Marco Polo’s Travels. The Rehe Gazetteer thus cites two poems celebrating “sand fungi” in connection to these Yuan retreats, the antecedents to the Qing complex at Rehe. The first poem, by Zhou Boqi (1298–1369), a compiler at the Yuan Hanlin Academy, derived from his “Miscellaneous Poems of the Upper Capital” (Shangjing zaobi), his celebration of Shangdu’s own literary predecessor: Shangjing, the Liao dynasty’s summer retreat. In one verse, Zhou wrote concisely that “fungi that emerge from sand are delicious” (Ch: jun chu shazhong mei). A second cited poem belonged to Xu Youren (1287–1364), an assistant grand councilor in the Yuan secretariat and husband to Zhao Huai, the famed Mongol calligrapher and musician. His verse, like Zhou Boqi’s, derived from another commemoration of the Liao retreat, Xu’s “Ten Songs of Shangjing” (Shangjing shiye). He titled his poem “Sand Mushrooms”:

Moisture by the hooeves of cattle and sheep,
The product of the land is flowering.
At the foot of the tent, on ground stamped by horses,
“Nail-heads” are gaily capped with sand.
The kitchen offers golden delicacies,
Fur ropes unfold from the felt cart,
No one can but drool thinking about it,
No one in the family will be late.61

In a personal annotation to the poem, Xu Youren explained the allusions to hooves and horses: Mushrooms grew in rings in the stOMPing ground around tents.

In time, Qing scholars collected more verses on sand fungi. An updated version of the Rehe gazetteer, the Chengde Prefecture Gazetteer (Chengde fubu, published 1826), added two extra lines on sand fungi by Yuan-period literati. The first, by the scholar-official Liu Guan (1720–1754), derived from his Houchunshi qingfeng shi (“Poems on Autumn Wind on the Lower Luan River”) a third collection honoring summer retreats. The second belonged to Yang Yunfu (fl. fourteenth century), a Yuan poet who praised mushrooms in his own “Mixed Songs of Shangdu” (Lusoujia zaiyue).62

The Chengde gazetteer included a final line of verse from the early Qing period, from a poem by Zha Shenzheng (1659–1727, jindi 1703), who served as tutor to the Manchu Grand Councillor Menglin’s children.

Such literary references helped connect the Qing “steppe mushroom,” which lacked a clear precedent, to China’s past, Inner Asian courts, and imperial hunting grounds, from Liao Shangjing to Yuan Shangdu to Qing Chengde. Through their imagery, they also connected the mushrooms to the wider world of the steppe and the outdoors, with allusions to the frontier, livestock, and military life. Whether Qianlong and Khubilai tasted the same thing we will never know; we may even doubt whether “steppe mushroom” itself was a singular, material entity. What is certain is that Qing writers took the historical and contemporary mushrooms to be identical, and they established a textual genealogy that linked the steppe mushrooms of the present with those of an imperial and Inner Asian past.

The gazetteers had an impact: Through the course of the eighteenth century, the language and imagery found in them began to resonate in other genres of writing, from poetry and biji to cookbooks. Literati elaborated on the newly invented tradition, emphasizing its Inner Asian aspects, its imperial antiquity, and the mushrooms’ rustic origins amid dung heaps and trodden grass. The Hangzhou poet Wu Xiqi (1746–1818, Jindibì 1775) celebrated kuom “like nails in the ground” in his “Mixed Songs of Rehe” (1808), which included a typical annotation that identified steppe mushrooms with sand mushrooms and encampment mushrooms, citing Zhou Boqi (“fungi that emerge from sand are delicious”).63 Bin-lin (1771–1847), a Manchu poet with personal administrative experience in Mukden and Rehe, wrote of kuom in his own nostalgic take on Mongol Shangdu. In one annotation, he elaborated in detail: “Local people say that mushrooms produced
beyond the Great Wall grow when a drip of milk falls from a horse or a cow to the grass, then is infused with the steamy mist after a summer rain. The especially sweet and crisp sprouts of the ones that grow by a planted tent are famously called "campfire mushrooms." 71

Although associated with the frontier, by the late eighteenth century steppe mushrooms had become one of the most famous and coveted delicacies in the empire, particularly in the North. To Bin-liang, the steppe mushroom was every bit as good as other delicacies; he described it as the "companion" of elm oyster, water chestnut, and tender bamboo shoots. 72 By 1800, others enthused that the steppe mushroom was a product whose "name rang out above all." 73 Into the late Qing and early Republican periods, steppe mushroom would continue to serve as a symbol of excellence in north and northeast China, one which local gazetteers measured all other mushrooms against. 74 Although associated with China's Inner Asian past, they had earned a reputation as products desirable to everyone, not just Manchus or Mongols.

A WORLD BOUND BY SUPERFLUOUS THINGS

If Qing consumers reimagined the provenance and antiquity of frontier exotics, we should not follow suit: There is no evidence that medieval "sand fungi" or "northern pearls" were the same as the Qing period's "steppe mushrooms" or "eastern pearls." At the very least, their very ubiquity in the Qing marketplace suggests differences between their value in the eighteenth-century world and previous eras. Even in the Qing, of course, these products remained luxurious goods, and only a tiny fraction of the Qing populace had access to them. Yet even if they were discussed more than consumed, demand for them by the late eighteenth century rose high enough to create unprecedented ripple effects throughout the empire and, ultimately, across the wider world. Donald Worster once powerfully argued that environmental history in its first iteration should be a history of food: "Humanity shares no more profound connection to the land than the work we do to produce our daily bread." 75 The history of staple goods, to be sure, matters tremendously. Yet people have died for and found meaning in far less existential pursuits. Mushrooms and fur may have been luxuries, but their existence in material culture provides a powerful standard for the historian: They too can serve as measures of an age. Ultimately, they also provide the vital material links between local, Qing, and global histories.

As demand for natural resources in the Qing world surged between 1700 and 1870, new commercial networks emerged that transformed relationships across the empire and between China and seemingly disparate realms. As commerce intensified, the empire's population roughly tripled and the amount of land under cultivation doubled. 76 Some agricultural expansion occurred in forested uplands; some through clearing and reclaiming land by lakes, rivers, and the coast; and some in external frontiers, as in the empire's Southwest, western Taiwan, and the plains of Mukden in southern Manchuria (from the seventeenth century), and in Xinjiang and parts of Inner Mongolia (from the mid-eighteenth). Homesteading proceeded at a relatively steady pace: In 200 years, from roughly 1650 to 1850, the amount of land under cultivation within the Qing empire rose from about 100 million to 200 million acres, or a rate of 500,000 acres per year. The modern expansion of agriculture, by comparison, proved significantly faster: In the sixty-four years between 1893 and 1957 alone, China's total farmland grew to 280 million acres, with average growth at 1.2 million acres per year, or 250 percent faster. 77 In some regions, including Outer Mongolia and the territories of Heilongjiang and Jilin, homesteading remained negligible until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or never took hold at all.

In many regions it was instead the rushes for luxury commodities such fur and mushrooms that dominated local economies, especially from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. 78 International trade with China boomed in this period. At the Russo-Qing border town of Kiakhta, trade had stalled for much of the 1700s, the result, in part, of disputes that had led the Qing court to embargo the trade through the years 1764–1768, 1779–1780, and 1785–1792. After 1792, the Kiakhta trade took off, and trade thereafter grew exponentially; its value quadrupled in the years 1775–1805 alone. 79 Overland trade with Burma followed a similar trajectory. As in the North, a series of conflicts in the Southwest between the Qing and Konbaung courts, which had culminated in the Sino-Burmese War of 1765–1766, led the Qianlong court to embargo this cross-border trade as well, and commerce plummeted as a result. 80 When the Qing court finally lifted the ban in 1790, imports of jade, bird nests, thincorosus tusk, deer horn, and shark fin grew rapidly. Overland trade with Luang Prabang, in modern Laos, likewise accelerated in this period, buoyed by demand for a similar array of products: ivory, peacock feathers, rhino tusk, and deer
horn. On the coast, the Chinese junk trade with the Sulu Sultanate, in the modern Philippines, doubled between 1760 and 1814, and, between 1750 and 1820, seaborne trade with Cochinchina (southern Vietnam) quadrupled. Amid the boom, the port city of Canton, spurred in part by the massive growth of the Pacific sea otter and Hawaiian sandalwood trades, witnessed a dramatic rise in American and British shipping.

Natural resources, such as furs, minerals, ocean life, and forest products were at the heart of this new trade, which arose only as the wars of the eighteenth century came to their conclusion. The “jade rush” for nephrite in Xinjiang peaked between 1776 and 1821. The jadeite trade with Burma followed a similar timeline: its “booming period” lasted from 1760 to 1812, as the value of Burmese jade “soared.” In Xinjiang and Mongolia, authorities fought to control the growth of new Chinese gold mining camps in the 1770s and 1780s. Copper production on the Southwestern frontier began notably earlier, starting in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Yet the golden age of copper production in the Southwest began only after 1760, when production reached unprecedented peaks; production there, too, remained high until roughly 1820. Chinese-run mines moved across the border into northern Vietnam in this era, and by the early nineteenth century, Chinese mines dominated the economy of the Vietnamese highlands. At the same time, in maritime Southeast Asia, new Chinese mining operations for gold and tin began to dot the landscapes of Borneo, Phuket, Kelantan, Perak, Selangor, and Bangka.

Rushes for pearls, sea turtle shells, and sea cucumber (also called trepang or beche-de-mer) likewise defined the period. Chinese merchants on the Tumen and Yalu rivers had long bought sea cucumber at the Korean border market towns of Kyŏngwŏn and Hoeoryŏng, and Koreans brought sea cucumber to Beijing as tribute throughout the eighteenth century. Sea cucumber poaching, however, became a recognized issue on the Pacific coast of Manchuria only in the period from 1785 to 1818, when beachcombing took off. In the South China Sea, sea cucumber harvesting grew from the 1760s in the Sulu Sultanate and from the 1780s in Sulawesi, in the Dutch East Indies. In both locations, trade peaked in the early nineteenth century: By the 1820s, sea cucumbers rivaled pepper in the Dutch East Indies as the most valuable export. Sea cucumber production for the China market expanded in these years to the coast of northern Australia, and, by the 1820s and 1830s, the industry had moved to distant Fiji and other islands in Oceania.

Much of Southeast Asia and the Pacific as a whole experienced resource rushes. Between 1760 and 1835, mother-of-pearl exports to China from the Sulu zone increased sixfold, from 2,000 to 12,000 pincas a year. The sea turtle trade out of Sulawesi similarly boomed from the 1780s, despite repeated attempts to curtail and control it by the Dutch. The bird’s nest trade with China boomed too, particularly on the east coast of Borneo, where, until the trade devastated its swallow populations, the birds roosted in prodigious numbers. The better-known sandalwood trade with China followed a similar trajectory from the 1750s, as Europeans and Americans entered the business. Sandalwood harvesting shifted first from Malabar and Timor to Fiji in the early 1800s and to the Marquesas and Hawaiian Islands in the 1810s and 1820s. Under the leadership of King Kamehameha I, who established a royal monopoly over the product, a quarter to a third of all Hawaiians were participating in the trade by the late 1820s.

Though some of these trades would endure, in diminished form, into the modern period, overexploitation had doomed most of these booms to bust by 1840. Swallows were “plundered ad libitum” and disappeared from Borneo; Sulu’s pearl oyster beds were picked bare; Hawaiian sandalwood stands were logged away. Indeed, as we shall see, freshwater pearl mussel, wild ginseng, sea otters, and sables would suffer a similar fate in these same years. Some of these commodities were hunting, others mined or logged. Some came by the hands of European or American shippers, others by way of Chinese merchants. Some came from Inner Asia, others from Southeast Asia, Oceania, or the Americas. Yet similar patterns and challenges emerged from the booms and busts in their production. Of course, China’s economic peripheries were hardly untouched before the late eighteenth century. Yet the “ecological shadow” of the era’s rushes was unprecedented. There was no extensive sea cucumber trade in 1700; no Pacific fur trade; no sandalwood trade beyond Southeast Asia; no large-scale jade mines in Xinjiang or Burma; tin mines on the Malay peninsula, or significant gold mining in Mongolia, Hii, or Borneo; and no Chinese copper mines to dominate northern Vietnam. Pearl oysters abounded on the shores of Borneo and the Philippine Islands; turtles and sea cucumber thrived throughout the seas of Southeast Asia. Fueled by the Qing demand for natural resources in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Inner Asia, Southeast Asia, and the greater Pacific began to face similar challenges.
CONCLUSION

A history of this wider region lies beyond the scope of this book. The following chapters focus instead on the story of the fur, freshwater pearl, and mushroom trades of this period. They were different from other products: All of them shared a close association with the court, and the court maintained special controls over their production. They were valued, in large part, because of this imperial connection: Consumers appreciated their special origins in nature and in Qing frontiers. Like the Jiaqing emperor, who treasured live tigers for the method of their capture, or the pawnshop owner, who priced pelts by their provenance, consumers made sense of objects in terms of the people and places that produced them. The nexus that bound products to places and people was not lost, for example, on Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, writing of Beijing in 1735. As he explained to his European audience, the Manchus were "lately come from the midst of Woods and Forests." Their love of furs, to him, was thus only natural. Yet the history of the Manchus and their possessions is hardly so simple. The very ubiquity of products like fur, pearls, and mushrooms suggests a less innocent reality: They were, after all, produced en masse.

We imagine the early modern period as a time when nature and culture became distinct; when science, statecraft, or rationalization created a civilization unto itself. Everywhere modern people were draining swamps, cutting down forests, and reclaiming land. Cities were rising, the wild frontier receding, and humanity for the first time dreamed of a distant and unspoiled nature. Yet the stuff of nature was more part of our lives than it would ever be again: pelts around our necks, horses and camels on the streets, sturgeon, venison, mushrooms, and pearls. The period did not witness just a romance of nature but an economy of it: wild things circulating from hand to hand, from imperial frontiers to the centers of empire. The domains of neither nature nor culture were entirely pure; the world was trimmed with fur.

TWO

Pearl Thieves and Perfect Order

Something strange happened in Manchuria between 1785 and 1810: Its precious freshwater pearls disappeared. Perhaps stranger still, the Qing empire did everything in its power to preserve them: It erected guard posts and customs barriers, kept registers and tallies, punished poachers and pearl thieves, disciplined the corrupt, and empowered the military to take charge. A new concern about nature emerged. "Nurture the mussels and let them grow," the emperor ordered; let Manchuria have pearl mussels. What had happened, and what could be done?

We often tell the environmental history of early modern China as a frontier story, in which commercial growth pushed Chinese society past the artificial bounds of empire. In Manchuria in particular, we read, Chinese homesteaders transformed the land from a wilderness to an agricultural breadbasket, prefiguring national revolution and empire's end. The story is simple, clear, and progressive: Manchu emperors vainly preserved the old order; Chinese settlers ushered in the new.

Based on Manchu-language archives, this chapter pursues a different type of story. Pearl mussels fit uneasily into the progressive narrative;
and in much the same spirit. Douglas Carruthers, in a pioneering British-led expedition in 1910, captured the mood at that time:

Swampy bottoms, half lake, half forest, looked so mysterious, that if some prehistoric monster had raised its snaky head to have a look at us, it would not have been surprising. We should have felt its presence was all in keeping with its surroundings, and was, in fact, more natural than our own.

There were, of course, people indigenous to this cut-off borderland. But as Carruthers dryly observed of them, "In such a secluded region a peculiar inhabitant can be guessed at." They were the Tannu Uriankhai, and, like their homeland, they seemed from another era. In Carruthers's world, untouched nature and its inhabitants were anomalies; they were atavisms in a world of imperial intrigue, industrial output, and revolutionary growth. To a British adventurer, it was as if the Qing empire had never truly ruled the region, or changed it, at all.

Yet Uriankhai territory was neither isolated nor unaltered. Power, of course, has a way of diluting time: Those perceived to have it see themselves as agents of change; those without can become icons of the unchanged. In the case of Lake Khövsgöl, it was wishful thinking to see it as timeless: The nature of the Uriankhai and their homeland reflected more an imperial artifice than a permanent neglect. If the Uriankhai lived in a world apart, that is, it was because empire helped facilitate the distinction; if their land seemed untouched, it was because guards and bureaucrats helped make it so. The region was not a "wilderness" (Mong. bigan) at all; it was, in Manchu terms, a bolgo jeven, a "purified borderland." To cross the boundary into Uriankhai land was never to exit time; the boundary itself, like the nature it protected, was an imperial response to a global crisis.

Conclusion

Bannermens razing ginseng fields; mushroom pickers hauled before the Board of Punishments; ambans "purifying" the borderland: How do we make sense of these episodes? So much Qing history focuses on the court's efforts to transform the imperial frontiers by making them more productive, more civilized, and more Chinese. Yet none of these events quite fit into that story. What, then, do they tell us, and to what history do they belong?

Manchuria, Mongolia, and the northern borderland all had a special significance to the court; their status was different from other parts of the empire. Although, within each territory, the court governed in diverse ways, aspects of imperial rule converged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Manchuria, the ideal of the unspoiled Manchu homeland came to overlap with the jurisdictions of the territories' military governors, tying Manchu origins to the Three Eastern Territories. In Mongolia, anxieties about "mixing" provoked new efforts at "purification" and territorial defense. In the borderland, the court remapped the boundaries of the Uriankhai. Imperial representatives established karaan, compiled
registers, dispensed silver, reformed tribute, and empowered territorial authorities to take charge. The empire culled the land of undocumented migrants and punished collaborators.

The territorial project, in all of these ways, involved attempts to remake Qing subjects. The work required more than the removal of pearl thieves, undocumented migrants, and mushroom pickers: It also demanded a changing of hearts. More insidious than "mixing" and migration, it seemed, was the possibility that Mongols and Manchus were losing their ways. To the court, the people of these fringes were simple; they were hunters, breeders, and bannermen, and thus by nature temperate and sincere. To protect their original dispositions, the court condoned only a limited participation in markets; these subjects were supposed to be frugal. Imperial discourse invoked the Spartan spirit of Mongols, Manchus, and "hunters" with words like innocent or pure (Ma: gulu; Mo: tulaqun; Ch: chun). Those who succumbed to the temptations of the times were fallen; they were "negligent," "blind," or "reckless.

In practice, however, the court's efforts to strengthen territorial rule and reform its subjects were inseparable from an environmental project. To the court, the Uriankhai depended on fur-bearing animals, Manchuria was the land of ginseng and pearls, and Mongols needed mushrooms, marmots, and fish. Yet the nexus between people, place, and product seemed broke: Fur-bearing animals were gone from the taiga, mussels had vanished from riverbeds, and poachers had stripped the steppe of mushrooms, marmots, and fish. Such a transformation was unheard of: There was no precedent for such reckless exploitation. It upended the livelihood of subjects, disrupted the flow of high-value and courtly goods, and violated an imperial "love" of natural things, like mussels.

People, place, and product: The Qing empire reimagined and newly defended the three together amid the great uprooting of the boom years. Ideologically, they proved inseparable; the court defended the difference between pure and corrupted at a territorial and ethnic boundary. It was in its pursuit of "purity," where the native had come to overlap with the alien or altered, that the Qing state produced a type of nature: pristine realms to be unspoiled by the intrusions of time.

Critically, we only see this process unfold with a multilingual and multiaxial approach. Qing elites and the court had strong ideas about what it meant to be a proper Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, or Uriankhai, and they went to great lengths to articulate and maintain the boundaries between them. In court documents especially, the archives tend to reveal where the ideals fell short. The people who emerge from the documents are thus rarely ideal subjects: They are Mongols who sold out for the mushroom trade, Uriankhai who worked the black market, Ulus who stole pearls, greedy merchants, debt peddlers, undocumented migrants, farmers of ginseng, poachers, intermarried couples, and vagabonds. It is at the fringes of the Qing world that the distinctions that constituted the empire become clearest.

Along these lines, we can read the specters of planted ginseng, mushroom pickers run amok, and other such impurities as nightmares of a peculiarly imperial mind; they recur so frequently in the archives because they set the gears of empire into motion. In Mongolian lands the discourses of ethnic and environmental "purity" were paramount; in the Northeast, invoking the word purity was rare. Yet the demands of empire led to convergent institutional and ideological responses in both cases; in both, the court worked to reconstruct the territory as an embodiment of uncorrupted nature.

Perhaps nature is not the best word to describe this reconstruction. In English, the word can obscure as much as it reveals: It can mean all that we are, and all that we are not; it can invoke a specifically Christian teleology, a Romantic imagination, or describe the domain of science. Even in the more limited sense of an "unspoiled place," as what William Cronon calls the "wrong" nature, the English nature has nuances that Qing constructions certainly lacked; we cannot equate the modern English word, with all its nuances, with any one word from the early Qing. The same holds for purity: No one English word captures the nuances of the Manchu bolgo or Mongolian ariigen.

At the same time, Qing terms were not so exotic. To know whether something, someone, or some place is "natural," we often ask questions about its past: How was it created? Where did it come from? Has someone modified it, or is it free from human alteration? These questions, and what they tell us about the past, deeply informed the court's responses to its environmental crises: Whether in Manchuria, Mongolia, or the borderlands, it seemed the ideal and original order had been altered. Each memorial inscribed this sense of change over time into writing: each raid or reform imbued it with concrete meaning. When we read Qing documents against the grain and seek out documents from alternative archives, it becomes all the clearer that the purity of earlier times was a phantom: Chinese mushroom pickers had been active for generations; fur trapping and ginseng picking extended back centuries; Mongols and Manchus were never so simple; Chinese were never
so foreign; the land was never so pristine. Such a reimagining of history, however, should not sound exotic at all: Across Eurasia in this same time period, others were reimagining nature and nation in congruent ways. The Qing state, put simply, was not so unique.5

UNspoiled Homelands Beyond the Qing

If we step back to consider the Qing invention of nature in a larger, historical context, what do we see? Historians of Europe might find a parallel in the German experience. As the rush for “purity” was underway in the Qing world, Germans, like Mongols, began to insist that production and commerce were severing their connection to the nature of the Heimat, or homeland. In response, Romantics reacquainted themselves with the homeland’s natural wonders and attempted to recover their lost ways. From the fifteenth century onward, Germans had strived to reconnect to an earlier, more sylvan era.6 They rediscovered, for example, the Germania of Corneliaus Tacitus (c. 56–117 CE), which described Romans as luxurious and sensual and Germans as a more simple kind “without craft or cunning.”7 By the eighteenth century, against the rationalizing tide of the Enlightenment, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) could look back on Germany’s “unspoiled native landscape” for inspiration.8 A new environmentalism was born: Heimatschutz, which gained strength and organizational durability in the late nineteenth century during the second Industrial Revolution. The movement endured into the Nazi era, to an age when national toughness and rustic hardness again seemed entwined. In Germany, as elsewhere, national and environmental movements went hand in hand.9 Problems of borders, environmental hazard, moral decline, and political identity were animating the Qing discourse of “purity.” They were producing a similar effect among German landscape preservationists; a reimagining of people and place was central to both.10

A similar imagined nexus between people and place consumed modern Poles and Lithuanians, who celebrated the forests of Bialowieza as the lifeline of the nation. On seeing the forests for the first time in 1820, Julius von Brincken regarded them as “the very picture of ancient Sarmatia: a sylvan arcadia.”11 Amid the November Uprising of 1830–1831, the poet Adam Mickiewicz likewise celebrated the forests as the vital setting of

both his childhood innocence and the nation’s primordial past.12 The early Polish nobility had once dressed in “Sarmatian costume,” like nomads, and their early modern successors celebrated them for doing so.13 (Perhaps we should not be surprised, then, that the Qing emperors saw something of themselves in Poles: An album of tributary nations to the Qing, the Zhìgōng shù, described the Poles [Mā: bo lo ni ya gurun i niyalama] as being “like Mongols” and noted their fame for bearbaiting and outfits made from fox and badger furs.14)

Such efforts to connect to one’s natural, national past were hardly unique: Many sensed that something essential was being lost. On the continent, Goethe (1749–1832) saw in the “second creation” of the human world a Faustian deal with the devil; in England, William Wordsworth (1770–1850) brooded that humanity had sold its soul:

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon15

Those with power and means reconnected in an old-fashioned way: They hunted and adorned themselves with furs, and like Mongols and Manchus, German, French, Polish, and English elites all used fur to help represent themselves as elite, rustic, martial, and manly. Like emperors, German noblemen consumed imposing quantities of game meat and lavished outsized attention on their Jagdschloß, or hunting lodges. Their hunts were lavish: In 1782, for example, Duke Karl Eugen of Württemberg celebrated the visit of Grand Duke Paul of Russia with a hunting trip that bagged 6,000 deer and 2,500 wild boars. Louis XV once purportedly killed 318 partridges in a mere three hours; Louis XVI killed 8,424 animals in a year.16 Vivre en roi, c’est chasser, et chasser régulièrement: “To live as a king is to hunt, and to hunt regularly.”17 It was true throughout Eurasia: Qing, Mughal, Safavid, and European rulers all agreed.18

Early American sensibilities toward the natural environment were no less of the moment: They too were entangled with broader concerns of identity and power. Amid the colonial and industrial transformations of the American landscape, Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), too, yearned for a purer, simpler, and more virile past: “When I consider that the noblest animals have been exterminated here,—the cougar, panther, lynx, wolverine, wolf,
bear, moose, deer, the beaver, the turkey, etc., etc., — I cannot but feel as if I lived in a tamed, and, as it were,缰束ed country.” Of course, the land was “tamed” before the colonists arrived, as the American wilderness, too, required as much a rewriting of history and political action as it did Qing purity. As Ansel Adams wrote of Yosemite on its founding as a national park: “Unfortunately, in order to keep it pure we have to occupy it.” In America, pure and unspoiled nature was elusive without the state.

Unspoiled nature is but an idea and an ambition; no places on Earth are untouched by human agents. We cannot understand even prehistoric landscapes without a human impact, and modern attempts to read humans out of landscapes, without understanding the roles we play in local ecosystems leads to problematic results. As William Cronon argued of modern wilderness: “Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history.” Although we may imagine a total distinction between the natural and historical worlds, the two are inseparable. From the American park, to the German forest, to the Soviet reserve, modern nature has survived because, as A. R. Agassiz suggested, states “rigidly preserved” it, whether for participatory politics, primordialism, or technocratic rule. Untouched nature is something created, not destroyed; total wilderness can exist only in a context of total control.

The Qing experience suggests the need to rethink the global history of nature outside of a Eurocentric paradigm. So many attempts to understand “nature” in both China and the West have focused on the term’s metaphysical and semantic dimensions, and, on this front, the differences separating Qing and the Western terms are many: When modern translators settled on the Chinese ziran and the Mongolian baigali to denote “nature,” they utterly transformed these words’ original meanings. Yet we blind ourselves to parallels between the Qing and wider worlds without better tools for comparison. There were no equivalents for “mile” or “century” in the Qing world either, but people measured distance and time all the same.

Untouched “nature” too serves as a type of standard: We use it to measure and differentiate. In its very juxtaposition with the social and historical, it implies an understanding of origins, creation, permanence, and change; it is neither a domain nor an essence but a relationship to origins; it invokes a type of history. As Carolyn Merchant and William Cronon have argued, stories imbue this nature with meaning. In Europe and America, biblical tales and the Edenic myth provided an early touchstone for understanding our natural origins and humanity’s “second creation.” In the Qing, they did not. Yet, if we insist that the invention of “nature” was peculiar to the modern West, we must also allow that this “nature” belonged to a larger matrix to which Qing “purity,” too, had a place. Modern Western debates over “nature,” no matter how central they were to the identity of the West, were never entirely unique. We need not understand Mongolia in terms of German or American history, nor argue that the invention of nature must follow a single historical arc. Rather, more modestly, we might begin to see how Germany and America were not so unlike Mongolia, and how they belonged to a common world. Without pigeonholing the Qing, then, we might help provincialize the West.

**Imperial Legacies**

We also may doubt whether modern environmentalism in China and Mongolia is wholly a Western import. For men like H. E. M. James and Douglas Carruthers, who discovered nature in Qing Manchuria and Mongolia in the late nineteenth century, wilderness lacked history; it had survived through time in an original primordial form. Later scholars came to a similar conclusion: The Manchu court preserved these lands from the world beyond, and only with the arrival of homesteaders did history progress. Yet, as this study has emphasized, they were wrong: Qing Manchuria and Mongolia were no less of their time than China proper.

James and others were instead witness to the end of an era. The demographic, political, and economic transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were astounding, and they have captured the imaginations of scholars ever since. The crises of the mid-nineteenth century struck Mongolia and Manchuria particularly hard: When in 1850 troops began to be drafted into the Taiping conflict, participation in the Ciaqigulun dropped in half. In 1858 and 1860, with the signing of the Treaties of Aigun and Beijing during the Second Opium War, the Qing court ceded all territory north of the Amur and east of the Ussuri to Russia. In 1881, with the Treaty of St. Petersburg, it granted rights to Russian merchants to live and work in Mongolia. The opening of the treaty ports and the lowering of foreign customs put merchants at new disadvantage to foreign competitors, scrambling commercial networks throughout the North. As the treaty
ports grew in stature, so too did their cultural influence; new approaches to nature emerged that represented the power of the sciences. The Qing state struggled to regain control. In 1881, the court signaled a major shift when it legalized ginseng farming to create a new tax revenue in the Northeast.

The opening of state-sponsored gold mines in Mongolia and Manchuria in the following decades signaled further change, as the central government entered the business of frontier development. From the 1890s to the 1930s, roughly 25 million people from the Chinese interior immigrated to Manchuria. Commercial and state developers from foreign states built railroads, opened coal mines, industrialized farms, and connected local ecosystems to international wool, lumber, and fertilizer markets. Ginseng pickers became farmers; deer hunters started ranches; saddle hunters found new trades.

Yet, despite these myriad changes, the northern reaches of the Qing empire still remain bastions of unspoiled nature in the popular imagination. Associations between national minorities (Ch: xiao bao minzu) and unspoiled nature (Ch: da xianzhu) in these regions are boilerplate in the modern People’s Republic of China: Buses and clubs play karaoke paans to Mongolian culture and the степь; posters depict minorities dancing under the pristinely snow-capped mountains; minority-themed restaurants serve wild salmon horoos; and textbooks describe the Qing emperors as descendants of forest-dwelling tribes. Such stereotypes, of course, are not peculiarly Chinese: They dovetail neatly with the expectations and imagination of foreign tourists who travel to Mongolia and western China. Just as the territorial boundaries of the Qing have gained new meanings in modern times, so too have older divisions between the pure and the corrupted.

Indeed, amid the staggering environmental changes of the post-reform years, many are turning to the “ecological wisdom” of Mongols and other minorities to critique developmentism. As with Native Americans in the Americas, the invocation of “ecological minorities” in China invokes a specific vision of national heritage. Framing environmental concerns in this way, in fact, carries political weight: China’s first environmentalist non-governmental organization (NGO), Friends of Nature, found a place in politics during a campaign to save the Tibetan antelope, or chiru—an animal hunted for its underbelly fur to make shangshah scarves. Moved by the chiru’s looming extinction, and outraged by reckless overhunting, Liang Congjie, the grandson of the famed revolutionary writer Liang Qichao, helped organize the NGO in 1994; it has worked productively within China ever since. Environmental protection dovetails with a politics of national renewal.

The national and the natural are everywhere intertwined. In Mongolia, amid a mining boom geared toward the China market, many fear that the most valuable natural resources are being harvested away, and that Mongols themselves are becoming "Chinese": a crude stereotype of a rootless, urban, and emasculated subject. As Frant Bilé has argued, many now turn to nature in response: As in the Qing, Mongol identity continues to be rooted in the natural environment and the Mongol countryside (Mo: hülde); it remains the bastion of traditional, rustic, and masculine heritage. Just as striking are efforts to protect this national heritage, in part, by creating nature reserves. Indeed, the expansion of the national parks and reserves in Mongolia and China has almost matched their countries’ stunning economic growth over the past two decades: in China alone, the number of these restricted spaces grew from thirty-four in 1978 to over 2,759 by 2014.

Many of these modern parks sit conspicuously on land that the Qing court also attempted to set apart. In China they include Changbai Mountain National Nature Reserve, which encompasses the mythical homeland of the Manchus, and where the court prohibited any form of hunting, ginseng picking, or pearl collecting. Today, too, government prohibits any form of entry into the reserve except with tickets along designated routes. Likewise, in Mongolia, Gorkhi-Terelj National Park encompasses the old military hunting grounds where no animals could be “spooked,” and Bogd Khan Uul, the holy mountain where the anciks fought to protect deer and wood from commercial exploitation, is protected as well. Indeed, much of the Left-Wing Front Banner, where Liu Deshan illegally picked mushrooms, today forms Nömör Strictly Protected Area, a Mongolian natural heritage site. Though grumblings about Chinese poaching continue to be heard in the region, it is difficult for travelers to assess: The Mongolian military maintains a border station nearby, and only licensed biologists may enter the park. The fur-trapping zone of Lake Khöögöl is protected, too: It sits now within Khöögöl National Park and houses the Khöögöl Long-Term Ecological Research Site, one of Mongolia’s premier bases for scientific research; tourists generally enter the park via Hargal, the town built at the haren where Uriankhai trappers registered for the annual hunt. In the twenty-first century, visitors can take pictures for cash with a descendant of the Tannu Uriankhai: a reindeer herder who lives in a teepee-shaped tent
within the park.\textsuperscript{42} In all of these locations, modern "nature" shares a genealogical link to Qing purity.

In all these ways, the Qing empire continues to leave its mark on our modern, globalized world. In The Unending Frontier, a pathbreaking work of environmental history, John Richards showed how shared environmental dilemmas transcended national and imperial boundaries in the early modern period, and in a similar vein, scholars such as Kenneth Pomeranz have shown how Qing society inched up to its ecological limits in the early nineteenth century. Across the empire's frontiers—and across what John Richards described as the "unending frontiers" of the early modern world—the production of natural resources boomed, and from Inner to Southeast Asia, and across the Pacific to the Americas, Chinese consumers stood at a pivotal center. A series of commodity rushes enveloped this enormous and diverse region, as consumers gained newfound access to an unprecedented range of goods: sandalwood from Hawaii, bird nests from Borneo, mother-of-pearl from Sulu, copper from Yunnan and Vietnam, nephrite from Xinjiang, jadeite from Burma, sea cucumber from Sulawesi and Fiji, sea otter from California, sable from the Uriankhai, mushrooms from Mongolia, pearls and ginseng from Manchuria. The riches from these trades challenged states to respond. King Kamemeha I in Hawaii; the Thonburi, Nguyen, and Konbaung kingdoms; the Dutch East India Company; the Russian Empire; and the Qing empire each drew sustenance from, and struggled to claim authority over, the great challenges and opportunities of the age. Each in their own way responded to common dynamics: an expansion of trade; intensified production; new pressures on the land; and, in the most dramatic cases, the extirpation of species.\textsuperscript{43}

We cannot understand this history without Qing history and vice versa. Ultimately, frontier history is international history, only without the teleology of the nation state and the European states system.\textsuperscript{44} Further research on the greater Pacific could offer insights into how to transcend entrenched distinctions between foreign and frontier, north and south, and coast and continent in Chinese history. So many institutions that we associate with border control in the Pacific emerged within Qing territory, only earlier. From California to Australia to Mongolia, nativists even imagined the same Other: the undocumented Chinese migrant.\textsuperscript{45}

Much, then, is familiar about the imperial arrangements of the past. Borders and passports, poaching and smuggling, migration and exchange:
Notes

INTRODUCTION

3. "Huosi" are a type of sturgeon.
7. Agassiz, 540.
8. Quoted and translated in Elliott, "The Limits of Tartary," 615.
9. Ibid., 616.
10. Chinese history textbooks accordingly begin either with the first human beings or with the advent of agricultural civilization. For Chinese history beginning with human sapiens, see Roberts, A History of China, and Bai, Outline History of China, 12–13. For recent textbooks that begin with farming, see Huang, China, 6, 23, and Ropp, China in World History, xiv.
11. For a critical discussion of the region's historical nomenclature, see Elliott, "The Limits of Tartary," 603–646. On the centrality of Manchuria in modern Chinese nationalism, and the resonance of the claim that it is Northeast China, see Minter, The Manchurian Myth.
12. Uyama, "Research Trends," 51. Uyama argues that "the dominant research trend here should be called not only nationalist but also explicitly statist.
13. For works operating in this paradigm, see Lin, Qingdi dongbei yimin she-bian zhengce zhi yanjiu; Xu, "Qingmo Heilongjiang yimin yu tongye kifa"; Yang, Qingdi dongbei zhi; Zhao, Jinshi dongyang zhe tongxiu lunnweiji; Guan, Dongbei shibao mingzhu liushi yu wenhua yanjiu; Wei, Qingdi jingji xinran wenti yanjiu; and Liu, "Quan-Guoerluo jianshi." For examples of works operating in the statist paradigm, see Wang, Dongbei diqu she zhenhao she; Yang, Qingdi dongbei jiangwu yanjiu; Isett, State, Peasant, and Merchant; Reardon-Anderson, Reluctant...
Pioneers; Gottschang and Lary, Swallows and Settlers; and Lee, The Manchurian Frontier. Chinese scholars have more disagreement on the timing of the rise of agriculture in the "Northeast," with many emphasizing that agriculture has existed in the region since prehistoric times and thus was always Chinese.

14. For the most recent treatment of Manchuria as a frontier that captures this comparative element, see Richards, The Unending Frontier. For critical appraisals of the frontier paradigm in the historiography of the American West, see Cronon, Nature's Metropolis; Cronon et al., Under an Open Sky, Worster, An Unsettled Country; White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own"; and White, The Middle Ground. See also Tsing, "Natural Resources and Capitalist Frontiers," 510.

15. The field of Chinese environmental history has grown quickly over the past two decades. The most up-to-date critical overviews of the field can be found in Marks, China; Wang, Zhenqiu lihui bang de huanying yi shenhua; and Chao, Shengtai huanying yu Mingqing shenhua jingyi, 1-54. For recent environmental histories of northern frontiers in particular, see Zhao, Qingbai xibei shengtai bianqian yanjiu; Zhu, 18-20 ti jian chu daohu Neimenggu nongyang liushu yanjiu; and Han, Caoyuan yu tianshu. For suggestive publications in English, see Elvin and Liu, Sediments of Time; Elvin, The Retreat of the Elephants; Marks, Tigers, Rice, Silks, and Silk; and Perdue, Exhausting the Earth.


17. Ho, Studies on the Population of China, 279. Ho Peng-ti estimates that the population of China rose from roughly 150 million in 1700 to 430 million in 1850. For estimated acreage, see Wang, Land Taxation, 1.1, p. 5.

18. The "developmentalist" framework is laid out in Burke and Pomeranz, 31. and Pomeranz, Empire and "Civilizing" Missions, 3.4-47. The idea of "natural borders" was first formalized by Friedrich Ratzel in his influential work, Politische Geographie (1897). For contemporaries in agreement, see Brubak and Vaillant, La Geographie de l'Histoire, 329-364, and Curzon, Frontiers. As August Lösch described the project: "Impressed by the accidental way in which states are created and smashed, we are looking out for a more natural and lasting spatial order of things... It is independent economic regions that we here discuss, regions not derived from but equivalent to those political, cultural, and geographical units." Lösch, The Nature of Economic Regions, 107.

19. For a critical survey of the idea of "natural borders," see Fall, "Artificial States," 140-147.

20. See Boldbaatar, "Mongolchunduy Beigal", 80-98; Gagangawa and Wuyunbataar, Mengyu mira tu shengtai wenshu; Ge, Zhidu shiyicu de caoyuan shengtai huanying baosu; He, Huanying yu xiamiunzhi shengcen; and Wu and Bao, Mengyu shengtai shirishou. For a parallel project on Chinese heritage, see Tucke and Berthrong, Confucianism and Ecology. On the German case, see Lekan, Imagining the Nation in Nature, and Schama, Landscape and Memory.

21. On the southwest, see Giersch, Asian Borderlands, and Herman, Amid the Clouds and Mist. For Ming precedents, see Shin, The Making of the Chinese State.

22. On the spectrum of state building and identity formation patterns in Qing frontiers, see Cosselky et al., Empire at the Margin, 1-24.

23. This is not to claim that Chinese and Mongols, for example, did not share a common governing vocabulary. See Atwood, "Worshipping Grace," 86-119.


25. Major works on this front include Elliott, The Manchu Way; Croxley, A Translucent Mirror; Perdue, China Marches West; and Rawski, The Last Emperors. For a review essay, see Guy, "Who Were the Manchus?" 151-164. For the work that branded this scholarship, see Waley-Cohen, The New Qing History, 193-206. For recent scholarship from the PRC, see Liu Fengyun, Qingdai shengzhi yu guoji yingying. 26. Burbank and Cooper, Empires in World History.

27. For a recent examination of Islam and the Qing, see Brophy, "The Junggar Mongol Legacy." On deconstructing the nation in Chinese history, see Diara, Rescuing History.

28. Nineteenth-century thinkers held the opposite view: Strength lay in mass militias, so densely populated frontiers were ideal.


31. For a fascinating new study of Qing environmental history using Manchu-language archives, see Bello, Across Forest, Steepe, and Mountain.

32. For recent publications using Manchu sources to write the history of Manchuria, see Tong, Manyuwen yu Muyuen dang'an yanjiu; Wang, Ying denggang longting de minzu; and Ding et al., Liangzong yimianzhe de giren shenhua. For scholars using Mongol and Manchu to study Inner Mongolia, see Liang, Mairan Mengyu yanjiu; Warenpgi, 18-20 ti jian chu Gaibucheng Tumtech caisheng yanjiu; and Oyunkhig "Wuyunbataar, Shigu shiyi Mengwu bunhao. 33. Bartlett, "Boo's of Revelations," 31; and Croxley and Rawski, "A Profile of the Manchu Language," 63-102.

34. Historians have tackled this issue from multiple perspectives. See Miyazaki, "Shinchô ni okuru kokugo mondai no ichinen," 1-10; Mosca, From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy, and Atwood, "Worshipping Grace," 86-119.


36. For a brief overview of the archives at the archives at Mridi, see Miyawaki, "Mongol koksunkuru chu monjakan shobô no Manjöko, Mongorugo shirô," 133-141; and Miyawaki, "Report on the Manchu Documents," 6-7.
37. For a critical description of Manchu language archives, see Elliott, "The Manchu-Language Archives," 1–70.
38. I use "eighteenth century" here to refer to China's long eighteenth century, roughly 1681–1840.
39. On the rise of consumer objects as focuses of concern, see Brook, The Confusions of Pleasure, and Chinas, Superfluous Things. For a fascinating exploration of objects in medical culture into the high Qing, see Bian, Assembling the Cure.
40. Relevant, destabilizing works in commodity history are voluminous. For the most recent work in the field, see Boettner, Empire of Cotton.
41. Lattimore, Inner Asian Frontiers; Khazanov, Nomads and the Outside World; Barfield, The Perilous Frontier; and Di Cosmo, Ancient China and Its Enemies.
42. See Cronon, Nature's Metropolis.
43. Ibid., 48–49.
44. On the problematic assumption of the economic view and nomadic dependence, see Di Cosmo, Ancient China and Its Enemies.
45. Richards, The Unending Frontier.
47. For a survey of ideas along these lines, see ibid.; Cronon, Changes in the Land; Guha, Environmentalism; Soulé and Leake, Reinvigorating Nature?; Descola, Beyond Nature and Culture; and Morton, Ecology without Nature.
48. Weller, Discovering Nature, 1–18, and Bol and Weller, "From Heaven-and-Earth to Nature," 473–502. Although a constellation of terms circulated in the Qing world that resonated with aspects of the modern idea of "nature"—including "Heaven" (Ch. tian; M. shen; Mong. tahai), "landscape" (Ch. liangtian), "inborn nature" (Ch. zeng; M. banin), "environment" (M. bajaran), and so forth so forcefully argued, it is simply impossible to map the European world of "nature," with all its semantic diversity and implications, nearly onto the Chinese context. For multiple critical looks at the problem of comparison in the history of science and intellectual history, see Vogel et al., Concepts of Nature.
50. The literature on the relationship between identity and origins in the Qing is large. On ethnicity and race, see Crouse, "Manzhou Yuanruo Kao," 761–790; Crouse, A Translucent Mirror; and Elliott, The Manchu Way. On the interconnections between ethnic, familial, and corporate associations, see Faure, Emperor and Ancestor, and Snowy, Practicing Kinship.
51. Williams, Keywords, 169.
54. Elvin, The Retreat of the Elephants; and Burke and Pomeranz, The Environment and World History. The important concept of "China-centered" history derives from Cohen, Discovering History.
55. For recent work based archival research on Chinese and Manchu documents, see Bello, Across Forest, Steppe, and Mountain. For research that captures the diversity of Qing environmental politics, see Perdue, "Nature and Nurture," 245–267.

Chapter One

1. Pak, The Jehol Diary, 189.
2. The queue was a hairstyle marked by a tensured forehead and braided pigtails.
3. Finnane, "Fashion in Late Imperial China."
4. Difference, at this point, became more genealogical. Crosby, Orphan Warrior, 267.
6. For overviews of commercial and social dynamics in the late Ming, see Chinas, Superfluous Things, and Brook, The Confusions of Pleasure; for the global dimensions of late Ming history, see Brook, Vermillion Hat.
7. Quoted in Finnane, Changing Clothes in China, 47.
9. Struve, Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm, 51.
11. These issues are addressed in depth in Elliott, The Manchu Way, and Crosby, A Translucent Mirror. On the qualities "plain" (puhu) and "pure" (mcnom), see Elliott, 284.
12. On the "silver belt" and shared dynamics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Kidokoro, "Chinesische Geschichte und die Konzepts von Early Modernity."
16. For a summary description of these events, see Wakeman, The Great Enterprise.
17. The sensibility was not unique to the Qing; it was common throughout Eurasia. Allen, The Royal Hunt. See Conclusion.
19. Elliott, Emperor Qianlong, 8. All ages in this book are converted from mi, which counts the first year of life as year one, the second year as year two, and so on.
20. Spence, Emperor of China, 123.
22. Wu, Qianlong lushi juyuan yuanshu, 27.
23. Ibid., 28.
25. On venison trays to members of the Imperial Household Department, see NEWZFXD 133.461.26 (QJ8.93); on gifts to emperors and concubines, see 123.461.7 (QJ8.9.9). On the prestige surrounding imperial gifts of deer tail, see Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*, 58, 220.
26. NEWZFXD 134.471.57 (QJ20.8.23). The Imperial Household Department (Ch: `Niruwsulu, Ma: Dorgi bai ta be weri kudalara yamun) managed the emperor’s personal finances, the imperial family, and members of the inner court, among other activities. See Torbert, *TheCb ’bog Imperial Household Department*, and Qi Meiqin, *Qingdai niruwsulu*.
27. NEWZFXD 132.460.777 (QJ28.7.50), and NEWZFXD 134.471.13 (QJ20.2.22).
28. NEWZFXD 132.461.79 (QJ8.9.3).
29. NEWZFXD 133.462.236 (QJ28.12.15).
30. He ate the salt-fried neat with steppe mushrooms on the afternoon of October 16, 1778 (QJ43.8.26).
32. Yashendar, *passim*.
34. MBRT 1.45.653.
38. Xu, *Qinghai leitsho*, 6126. See the case of the Yongzheng emperor’s 108-head rosy oriole made of eastern pearls, which in 2010 sold for 8.7 million HKD at a Sotheby’s auction in Hong Kong. "A Very Important and Magnificent Imperial Pearl Court Necklace.”
40. See, for example, MBRT 3.32.1360–1361.
41. DQHDSL 4: 839a-b.
42. The Manchu word julen is usually translated as "slave," not "Jurchen." "Jurchen" may serve as a better translation in this case. In 1661, the Kangxi emperor presented a sable gown, described as a julen seke deboi undorasa sikkipo, to a Mongol nobleman (Ma: *Kalkat dargan ein wum*) on the occasion of a New Year’s banquet. The man received a range of other precious gifts, including a dyed sable-fur hat and gold. In this context, it seems unlikely julen meant "slave." See NEWZFXD 3.17.233 (KX11.12.27).
43. NEWZFXD 1.17.183 (KX11.10.3).
45. NEWZFXD 134.461.229 (QJ29.12.8), and 133.461.279 (QJ29.1.2).
46. NEWZFXD 131.461.110 (QJ28.12.11). Like precious furs, these woolens were kept in the Fur Treasury. Three types of wool were given: coarse wool, sateen, and Tibetan wool.
47. NEWZFXD 3.17.233 (KX11.12.27). Another standard gift that came with fur was the kaarii, a nookpick box hung from one’s belt.
48. See, for example, the list of items presented in NEWZFXD 3.19.71 (KX4.7.3).
49. For extensive lists of tribute items for each individual for each year, see *Daiying gairin tu dosuguda yamun* 21: 209, 218, 243, 245, 278, 383, 386, 473, 475, 477–480. In 1680 (KX19), for example, Kuarachin, Qoqgirite, Khordzin, and Jalald Mongola all presented birds of prey as tribute.
50. Matunura, 409. The price of the boxes was 263.1 taels.
51. MWL 3667.47.171.261 (QJ5.4.8).
52. Ibid. The document fails to discuss what happened to these tigers in Beijing. Further research will be necessary into the lives of living animals presented as tribute.
53. MWL 3734.45.176.2118 (QJ2.5.10). Two months later, when the names arrived, the emperor finally bestowed his gifts: Five men received a large roll of alkun guise; nine received small rolls. MWL 3734.45.176.2166 (QJ2.7).
54. MWL 3723.48.176.3985 (QJ2.8.17).
58. MBRT 1.45.653.
59. Ibid., 1.40.592.
60. Ibid., 1.12.1036–1057.
63. Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*.
64. MiDi: 3823.35 (DG6.9.29).
65. MiDi: 3833.33 (DG6.10.1).
67. MiDi: 3697.344 (QJ25.3.1).
68. James Howard-Johnston argues that, prior to the Abbasid revolution, with its roots in Khorasan, the classical Mediterranean empresses associated fur less with legitimate power than with Goths, Huns, Franks, and Vikings. Howard-Johnston, *Trading in Fur*, 70–74.
71. Ibid., 37. Translation by Rorex and Pong, *Fifteen Songs of a Nomad Prince*.
72. Translated in Franko, *Chinese Texts on the Jurchen*, 137.
74. Schaller, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 107. See also Li Qi’s "Song below the Border," which commemorated "a thousand horsemen in black sable
furs." Quoted in Ibid., 108. The poem is from the Quanzangang, ban 2, cx 9, 1:
1a. Schafer's use of "Tatar" is more literary than historical; "Tatar frontier" is
anachronistic for the Tang period.
75. Finnane, Changing Clothes in China, 136; Finnane cites Chen Baoliang,
Mingdai shihui shenghuo shi, 306–307. I thank Christopher Atwood for the con-
nection between shiun and jisun.
76. Sejong silleok, 50. In a debate three years earlier, in 1427, on the appropriate
role of sable at the Choson court, it was noted that "previous courts valued sable for
silk.‖ Ibid., 38. On amputary regulations see Kwakuchi, "Mindai ihooku
Ajia chōhi bōeki," 67.
77. Ch‘iu, "Bouquan, huizuo yangban.‖ 553–561. See also Faqhar, "Oirat-Chinese
Tribal Relations," 60–68.
79. Li, Bencao gangmu, 511: 2910. Li Shizhen also quotes the Song dynasty
scholar Luo Yuan in 1136–1138 to characterize sable: "This rodent (Ch: shu) likes
to eat millet and pine bark. Barbarians [thus] call it the millet rat or pine dog."
On categorization and empirical observation in the Bencao Gangmu, see Nappi,
The Monkey and the Inkpot, 13–49.
80. Li, Bencao gangmu, 511: 2910.
81. Ibid., 51: 2896.
83. See the observations of Zhang Tao in Mitozuma, Shinshō senni no
bunka, 174–177.
84. Huang Ming tingfa shihai zuow, in Liu and Yang, Zhongguo shenhui felai
lianji jicheng 22.16, 4.98–1. I thank Michael Szenyi for generously providing the
reference.
85. On the Mongols as focal points of early modern resistance, see Atwood,
The Mongol Empire.
86. Tan, Beiyinshu, 383.
88. Ruth, "James Gale’s Translation," 102. Kim Ch’anggū went on the solis-
tial embassy to Beijing in 1713–1715 and kept a record of the trip in his Kajjar
yinbaergnom; his older brother Kim Ch’anggū was the ambassador. See Ledyard,
"Hong Tae-yong." 85.
89. Ruth, "James Gale’s Translation," 103.
90. Translated in Ruth, "James Gale’s Translation," 111–112.
91. Ibid., 143.
94. I have been unable to identify any use of the word prior to the Qing
period; though given its Mongolian etymology, shekhan may have had earlier
predecessors in the Yuan or the Ming periods. Cf. the Manchu word sibun.
95. On Shen Qiliang, see Szarka, "Shier xizun jishun," 10–11.
96. DQS 3.7a, 3.8a, 3.41a, 4.44a, 4.28b, 5.7b, 5.8a, 5.32b, 6.7a, 6.38a,
6.43b, 11.14a, 11.6b, 13.8a, 13.22a, 13.38b.
97. Tulên, Lakana jewn de taburaba haba yebbe biebe, 23. The character used
for is not listed in the Henyu dictionary. It is composed of a fish radical on the
left and the character lu on the right.
98. Ibid., 52, 54, 61. Chuang Chi-fa notes the discrepancy for is and ching-
song, pointing to hongg song (lit. "falling leaf pine") as a more accurate translation
of the Manchu. Tulên, 54155.
99. Ibid., 52.
100. Ibid., 54.
101. The following discussion is based on the Han-i ansha Munja Monggo
giam-i hulbe bihe, 2: gregi i hucin 2–4. For a description of the text, see
Volkova, Opisanie Man’churskikh khizologov, 89. The bilingual edition of
1717 is based on a monolingual 1708 Manchu edition. I thank Baozystegazi at
Inner Mongolia University for the reference.
102. Strube, Voices from the Ming–Qing Cataclysm, 1–2.
104. On "Manchu Apartheid," see Walkeman, The Great Enterprise, vol. 1,
476.
105. Ibid., 647–650.
106. Strube, Voices from the Ming–Qing Cataclysm, 64. Compare with a mis-
ionary’s claim that the Manchus looked more human.
107. Fuge, Tingyu congatan, 2: 47. Beyond hats and hairpieces, Manchurian
peels came to figure into a range of jewelry and decorative and ritual items, such as
rosaries.
108. QSL, 57: 453.
109. QSL, 745: 211b.
111. QSL, 81: 657.
112. QSL, 212: 181; QSL, 55: 1126; QSL, 106: 156.
113. See, for example, QSL, 113: 509, 111: 476, 112: 439–446, 113: 509,
114. There were only a few notable cases of Chinese civil officials receiv-
ing furs in the seventeenth century. In 1646, in the immediate aftermath of the
conquest of Beijing, the court presented eminent Ming scholar-statesmen who
had come over to the Qing, such as Hong Chengchou, with 200 sable pelts for
his service. QSL, 8: 85.
115. QSL, 57: 284.
116. Ibid., 50: 586. From the entry in the Veritable Records, it is unclear
whether the Tangian gymus was in Manchu, Chinese, or both languages. On the
Inner Asian history of the text, see Mosca, "The Manchu Ziashe tangjian
gangmu."
161. On the cartographic project, see Millward, "Coming onto the Map," 61–98.


163. Gu, Yuanxishuan, chajji 54, 66, 97, 109, 164, 405, 879, 904, 925, 974; 1079, 1095, 1128, 1269, 1326, 1336, 1459, 1489, 1525, 1765, 1891, 1896, 2082, 2190, 2328, 2391; chunul: 163, 466, 522, 590, 680, 827, 1361; anche: 328, 447, 579. For sable coats in a Yuan biography, see Li, Taiping guangji, 323:

164. See Ye, Qidan guanxi, 10: 102, 26: 246; Da Jin guanshi jianzhang, 5: 11; Tuo-tuo, Sengeji, 147: 3407. In the late Ming, the court assumed that the peals came from saltwater pearl oysters and called them “sea-peals” (Ch: hatulun). Ming Shenzong shilu, 519: 9775 and 284: 7223.

165. Da Jin guanshi jianzhang, fulu: 3, 613.

166. Ibid. On gyrfalcons, see Allen, The Royal Hunt, 246.

167. Qinding Rehe shi, 91: 32b. The Qinding xianshi (1931), the gazetteer for a Liaoning county located halfway between Chifeng and Chaoyang in the heart of mushroom-picking country (see Chapter 4), mentioned these three names for the mushroom but added the colloquial “horse dung buds” (Ch: man fen hao) as another, elaborating that they were “a type of white autumn mushroom.” See Qinding xianshi, 3: 9a.

168. Qinding Rehe shi, 91: 32b.


170. Wu, Youbenweiqu chaizi, 8: 9a.


172. Ibid.

173. Cai, Wuwenji, 5: 15a. The quotation belongs to the historian Cui Shu (1740–1816). Although he wrote that Kalgan’s imported steppe mushroom’s “name rang out above all,” he personally thought the local “chicken leg” mushrooms in Hebei were superior.

174. In Zhili, the gazetteers of Fengrui, Mizhi, Ba, Xiaxian, Ninghe, Shunyi, Shunmian, Haiying, and Chaoyang counties all compared their local mushrooms to the homoe; they were either as good or purportedly better. Fengrui xianshi, 9:44a; Mizhi xianshi 9; Baxian xianshi 4,441; Ninghe xianshi 1534a; Shunyi xianshi 9:9a; Shunmian fushi 506b; Haiying xianshi, 15:6b; Chaoyang xianshi, 27:5a.

175. Wörster, “Transformations.”

176. For a recent overview of agricultural expansion and its environmental context, see Marks, China: In Environment and History, 169–223. A touchstone study remains Perdue, Exaluting the Earth.

177. Wang, Land Taxation, 6–7.

178. For a recent critical survey of the “ecological shadow” of high-Qing consumption, see Marks, China: In Environment and History, 224–247.


181. Ibid., 172–173.


184. Millward, Beyond the Pas, 18. On jadeite versus nephrite, see Millward, 185. In 1821 the Daoguang emperor canceled the jade tribute on grounds that the treasury already was overstocked.


188. Sun, "Cix’ing Government and the Mineral Industries before 1800," 840–842. Qing policies mattered on this front: The Qing government mandated that officials promote the opening of “auxiliary mines” if older ones failed to make quota in 1777, contributing to the growth.


192. HFYD 14: 236; 16: 80, 219; 316; 53: 90, 28: 64, and 29: 156.

193. Sutherland, "A Sino–Indonesian Commodity Chain," 185–188. In the Sulu Sultanate "itotikas of fifty to one hundred” small boats scoured the coast in early summer, with 20,000 men involved in its production. Warren, The Sulu Zone, 70.


195. Sutherland, "The Sino–Indonesian Commodity Chain," 177–178, 185. The trade had begun as early as the mid-sixteenth century and survived multiple attempts by the Dutch East India Company, beginning in 1727, to restrict it.

196. Warren, The Sulu Zone, 62. Bird’s nest trade with Borneo, like other trades, had roots that extended back to at least the early eighteenth century.

197. Gibbon, Otter Skin, 355.

198. Ibid., 354–357; Warren, The Sulu Zone, 72–74, 83; MeNeill, "Of Rats and Men," 322; and Matsuda, Pacific Worlds, 189.

199. Marks, China, 224. On the concept of “shadow ecologies,” see Daenverge, Shadows in the Forest.

200. We can integrate, that is, the histories of Southeast Asia’s "Chinese Century," the "world that Canton made" in the Pacific, and the histories of Qing frontiers in the post Dzungar period. See Matsuda, Pacific Worlds, 176, and Blussé, "Junks to Java," 223.
132. Based on a comparison of Tannu Uriankhai sale submissions recorded in MWLF (see Appendix) and the statistics on the annual value of the Khakha trade supplied in Konnak, *Khakha-statistikheche obzravienia*, 67, 73, 97, 105. Between 1792 and 1809 the Pearson coefficient is 0.62; between 1794 and 1810, the Pearson coefficient is 0.80. Given the limited data, however, more research is needed into the problem. Note that Japanese junk boat trade in sea otters peaked in this period as well. Nagazumi, *Tannu yushuunoyuki saryo ichiran*, 254–328.

133. The comparison is not extreme; people saw Manchuria in exactly such terms in the late nineteenth century. See Gunsa, *California on the Amur*, 236–266.


135. On such "crops of anomachromism" in the Qing, see Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography*, 60–80. For the broader historiographical dimensions, see Goody, *The Theft of History.

CONCLUSION


2. On the connected processes of making bordered space, consolidating sovereignty, and streamlining government hierarchies, see Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, 100–107.


5. We should not expect it to have been unique, either. On the integrative and comparative dimensions of the history of the Qing empire, see Perdue, *China Marches West*, *Cosmology, A Translucent Mirror*; and Di Cosmo, *Qing Colonial Administration*.


7. Ibid., 77.


10. On German landscape preservation, see Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature*, 4.


12. Ibid., 57.


18. Allen, *The Royal Hunt*, Just as Qing subjects knew the number of tigers and deer the Kangxi shot, soo did Mughal and Safavid subjects circulate stories about their own rulers: Thus we know that the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), for example, shot 17,167 animals in his lifetime.


27. For an overview, see Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*; see also Hughes, *Human-Built World*, 17–43, and Nye, America as Second Creation.


29. The touchstone theoretical analysis of such a project remains Chakrabarty, * Provincializing Europe*. European exceptionalism remains dominant in theoretical scholarship; Descola, for example, not only argues that nature was wholly a product of the modern West, but claims has been the "idea of nature is unknown" in China and Japan. Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, 82. For countercurrents perspectives from Tokugawa Japan, see Thomas, *Reconfiguring Modernity, and Marcot, The Knowledge of Nature*.


31. The literature on this topic is large. For critical entry points, see Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity, and Fan, British Naturalism*.


33. For a synopsis of this event, see Lee, The Manchurian Frontier. On domesticated deer and deer-horn production in the Altai region among descendants of the Alkan Nuur Uriankhai, see "National Treasures."

34. For a critical overview of such representations, see Gladney, *Dislocating China*.

35. Much work exists on the legacies of the Qing. On the enduring importance of the empire's territorial boundaries, classification schemes for people, and legal system, see Ho, "The Significance of the Qing Period," 189–195;