

Part 6: The Manchus and the Qing

23: The Qing Vision of Empire

Professor Mark Elliot taught most of this section, allowing us to benefit from his personal focus on the Qing and the Manchus. Professor Bol stepped in for one week to teach *The Scholars and Prosperous Suzhou*, which must have been his special interest. It was one of the most fascinating weeks of the course¹²⁹ and by far the toughest.

Historical Overview



Li Zicheng
李自成
1606–1645

The origins of the Qing dynasty date back to the 1630s with a peasant rebellion led by Li Zicheng, a former postal official. Indeed, this may be the first recorded instance of an individual 'going postal.'¹³⁰

Li's rebellion spread through central China, drawing upon the anger of farmers, clerks, and soldiers who were devastated by, among other things, the inflation of copper currency against the silver required for tax payments.¹³¹ By the 1640s, the rebel army was moving toward Beijing.



Hong Taiji
洪太極
r. 1626 – 1643

Meanwhile, the Manchus, descendents of the Jurchens of the Jin dynasty, were uniting tribal groups northeast of China, forging alliances with the eastern Mongols and raiding the Ming, all under the leadership of Nurhaci. By the late 1620s, the Ming had lost control of the northeast.

Hong Taiji, Nurhaci's son and successor, re-organized and strengthened the Jin state, and in the 1630s conquered Korea, bolstering Manchu security and prestige. In 1636, Hong renamed his dynasty the Great Qing (*da qing*).

In 1644, Li's rebels captured Beijing, leading the Ming emperor to hang himself. Shortly after that, the Ming general Wu Sangui, who was guarding the Great Wall at the Shanhai Pass, allied with the Manchus against Li Zicheng, deciding that he preferred the organized armies of the Manchus to the pillaging forces of the rebellion. He let the Manchus through the gates whereupon they defeated Li in a battle east of Beijing.

On June 4th, having conquered Beijing, the Manchus declared themselves the new masters of the empire, though the fighting continued for many years with the Manchus slaughtering the populations of cities that chose to resist, like Yangzhou and Jiading.

¹²⁹ It's hard to beat the early weeks discussing ancient China and philosophy, and especially the week on the Keightley article, but the week on *The Scholars* came close.

¹³⁰ Yes, that was a bad joke and I apologize to postal workers everywhere.

¹³¹ I'm ad-libbing a bit from information given earlier on the Late Ming. See pg 197, *Political Changes*.

Patterns of Alien Rule



Professor Mark Elliot's main interest is China and inner Asia, particularly the Qing, which was the last imperial dynasty before the modern Republic of China.

In this module we probe the Manchus for their vision of an empire, but before answering that question, we'll examine the type of imperial rule known as a Conquest dynasty.

Refer back to the Salt and Iron debates of the Han¹³². The Lord Grand Secretary asserted that state monopolies were necessary to fund the defense of the northern or Inner Asian borders. This challenge of the northern borders is similar to challenges faced by the Roman and Persian empires.

Liao dynasty
遼朝
907-1125
Jin dynasty
金朝
1115-1234
Yuan dynasty
元朝
1271 - 1368

Inner Asia refers to the lands that linked China to the rest of Eurasia, including:

- Manchuria (what is, today, NE China)
- Mongolia to the north and NW of the Great Wall
- Eastern Turkistan (modern Xinjiang)
- the Tibetan regions in Amdo (modern Qinghai), Kham (western Sichuan), and central Tibet (the Tibetan autonomous region).

The peoples, religions, languages, politics and cultures in these regions were all different from each other and from China. The Han Chinese saw these differences as threatening when juxtaposed with the powerful raiding cavalry of the nomadic peoples.

During the 10th through 13th centuries, the successive emergence of the Liao, the Jin, and the Yuan deeply impacted Chinese history. These were all multi-ethnic states founded by non-Chinese people that ruled Chinese territory while trying to maintain their own ethnic identities. These states are referred to as the *Conquest dynasties*.

The Qing, the Manchu dynasty, extends the context of Conquest dynasties, of alien rule, to a dominion over China held for 800 of the 1100 years of that period.

What do these non-Han regimes have in common? **Minority rule.**

The Khitans of the Liao, the Jurchen of the Jin, the Mongols of the Yuan, and the Manchus of the Qing all ruled China from the position of a small ethnic minority. To do so without the expense of a military occupation, they recruited the literati to administer a civilian government.

Not all Chinese were willing to accord a non-Han ruler the Mandate of Heaven. To gain legitimacy the minority rulers shared power with the Han elite. But to a militant cavalry, this loosening of the reins to increase control was counter-intuitive. The need to share rule with the Han elite created tension within the Conquest dynasties, highlighting structural similarities between them. These four similarities helped them all gain a necessary tolerance for heterogeneity.

Martiality

All of the Conquest dynasties began as war machines: societies that valued the martial virtues and maintained a constant military readiness.

Polyethnicity

The population included ethnic groups besides the Han Chinese.

Multilinguality

A number of different languages were in common use among the people and among the officials. The government kept interpreters on hand. Non-Chinese script was used in official capacity, carved on stele and on currency, to remind the populace of the ruling minority. These Conquest dynasties were sometimes referred to as the Translation dynasties.

Administrative promiscuity

The regimes did not impose a single set of laws over all peoples, but willingly applied different laws to different regions, maintained several capitals, and rotated the courts seasonally between the capitals. This was a legacy of their nomadic heritage.

¹³² This class had a simulation of the Salt and Iron debates. See page 80 in Part 2.

Rise of the Manchus

Ruling Lineage

Yuan dynasty 元朝 89 years
Liao dynasty 遼朝 218 years
Jin dynasty 金朝 119 years
Qing dynasty 清朝 276 years

The Manchus were the last in a long line of Inner Asian peoples who conquered and then ruled China. They thought of themselves as the direct successors in this line and were likely descendants of the Jurchens.

They ruled longer and more successfully than any of their predecessors; the empire they created led to the birth of modern China.

Nature of the Manchus

The Manchus came from the region that is today northeast China. They came from the Jurchens who had returned to their homeland after the fall of the Jin. They were not Han, but Tungusic¹³³. The Manchu language is related to Turkish and Mongolian, rather than Chinese. They practiced a Shamanic religion¹³⁴. They were not nomads, living instead in agrarian villages with a lifestyle quite different from the nomadic lives of the Mongols and Khitans.

Ming Administration of Jurchen Land

The Jurchens came under the rule of the Ming in the late 14th century and for most of that rule, were administered by the Ming military. The Ming maintained control by offering titles of nobility in exchange for tribute to the Emperor. The few supervisory military officials gently stoked rivalries between tribes to ensure the Jurchens couldn't unite in rebellion.

After about 200 years, in the late 1500s, Ming control broke down and the Jurchens began to reunite.

The Manchus Own Tale of Their Origin



The ruling family of the Qing traced their origins to Bukuri Yongson¹³⁵, born in the Changbai Mountains that separate China today from Korea. His mother, Fekulen, came from heaven to bathe in a lake in the Changbai and when she retrieved her clothes, she found a small red fruit. She placed the fruit in her mouth whereupon it leaped down her throat and made her pregnant. She gave birth to Yongson, a boy of supernatural powers who could speak upon birth.

¹³³ From the [Tungusic Research Group at Dartmouth College](#):

The term "Tungusic" refers to a group of twelve or so closely related languages spoken in Russia, China and Mongolia. These languages are relatively little studied, and for that reason they remain peripheral to western linguistics, and almost unheard of to the lay person. The obscurity of Tungusic languages is largely an accident of the location of their speakers and their social patterns. Most Tungusic languages were spoken by nomadic peoples who inhabited regions of the world which were poorly suited for the development of settlements in pre-industrial times; the harsh climate of Siberia and northeastern China and the remoteness of these areas from established cities served to protect their nomadism from external pressure. This same nomadism required relatively small clans, which were organized in terms of familial relations more than any sort of ethnic or political identity. The blend of such characteristics ensured that there was little internal pressure for Tungusic clans to grow, expand, settle, or conquer.

There's a lot more to this article (a preface to their language studies) and it's well worth reading.

¹³⁴ Perhaps of the sort we saw discussed in Part 5, under the discussion of Temujin, Church and State, pg 186.

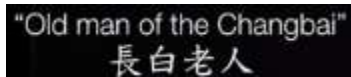
¹³⁵ The video notes that he's the 'mythical father of the Manchu people.'

She told him he was born to bring peace to the world. She put him aboard a small boat to drift downstream to the village Odoli, which was struggling with internal discord. He brought peace to the village and they made him their prince.

The village continued to live in peace through several generations before falling once again into discord which led to a rebellion. The rebellion was suppressed with all members of the rebellious clan slaughtered except for one boy. This boy, Fanca, fled to a field where the soldiers had cornered him. He froze in place while a magpie, the totem bird of the Manchus, alighted on his shoulder. The soldiers couldn't see him, mistaking his head for a tree.

Fanca was the ancestor of the Manchus who founded the Qing.

What We Learn from the Origin Tale



The Manchus gave their ancestor supernatural powers and an ability to bring peace to a troubled people. They had a geographical point of origin: the [Changbai Mountains](#), now a UNESCO reserve. The Manchu emperor sent men to map the region. He wrote poems about it. Sacrifices were performed. Manchus would compliment themselves as 'old men of the Changbai.' The Changbai myth became an important element of Manchu identity.

As much as it is a myth, there are historical records for a factual basis. Those records indicate that around 1412, a Jurchen tribesman named Fanca led his people from the Changbai to settle in Hetu Ala (*flat hill*), where eventually the Qing began its development. Nurhaci was a descendant of Fanca.



Fanca eventually settled within the lands governed by the Ming military, a place called Jianzhou¹³⁶, peopled by the Jianzhou Jurchens. Fanca pledged his loyalty to the Ming emperor and was confirmed as the leader of one of the three branches (the Left Branch) of the Jianzhou Jurchens. His family held this position for over a century.

In 1574, Ming forces intervened in the violence between the branches of the Jianzhou Jurchens, supporting the claims of Giocangga and his son Taksi, two of Fanca's descendants, who brought peace and were confirmed as the preeminent Jurchen leaders.

Nurhaci's Origins



In 1582, Giocangga and Taksi were killed by the Ming, putting Taksi's son, Nurhaci, in a weakened position, but he eventually emerged as the strongest figure in the region, uniting all the Jurchens and some of the Mongols.

In 1583, Nurhaci succeeded to the head of the Jianzhou Left Branch. He was 24 years old. His charisma allowed him to overcome the loss of his father and grandfather, who would have otherwise accorded him considerable prestige. Within five years, he built his own walled city of wood and rammed earth.

¹³⁶ I believe, but I'm not sure, that Jianzhou is also Hetu Ala, or that Hetu Ala is within the Jianzhou region. See [here](#).

For twenty years he dealt with tribal warfare, winning battles on the field and making alliances through the marriage of his daughters and through the trade of ginseng, a famous local product. By the 1590s he commanded 15,000 men, enough power to challenge tribes outside the Jianzhou. By 1600, he'd created a script for the Manchu language. Finally, having won allies among the eastern Mongols, he was declared Khan in 1607 and eventually combined all the Jurchens into one confederation.

The Eight Banners



Nurhaci created a powerful military, the [Eight Banners](#), which was central to the success of the Qing. The banners were distinguished by color (yellow, white, red, blue) and ethnicity (Manchu, Mongol, eventually Han Chinese). They began as hunting companies (called *arrows*) which were organized into larger units (called *banners*) with each banner under the control of the Khan or a Noble. Like a feudal army.

After the Qing conquered China in 1644, the Eight Banners functioned as a military caste with families built around the warriors. The Eight Banner Institution survived to 1924.

Nurhaci and Political Ambition

Up to the 1610s, Nurhaci remained a loyal subject of the Ming, making at least three visits to Beijing. In 1616, he rejected his allegiance and declared the founding of the Later Jin state. In 1618, he issued seven grievances against the Ming, including the death of his father and grandfather, and took up arms against them. At that time he commanded 100,000 men.

At Sarhu, in 1619, he defeated the Ming army. By 1626, when Nurhaci died, the Jin state controlled the entire eastern portion of the NE region formerly under Ming military administration.

Creation of the Manchu State



Hong Taiji inherited the Jin state in 1626. He was the eighth son, and the only literate son, of Nurhaci, which may have been why he was selected. The Inner Asian peoples differed from the Chinese in that they did not practice [primogeniture](#)¹³⁷, elevating instead the most qualified son or nephew in the descendant generation, or even a brother of the current Khan. The choice was made in council after the ruler's death¹³⁸. This difference from the Han Chinese led to a succession of capable leadership from the 15th through the 18th centuries.

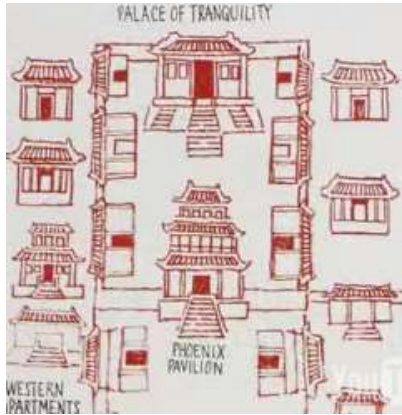
As he now had over one million Han Chinese in his territory, Hong faced different challenges than his father, having to administer a civilian state. For the first ten years after assuming the mantle in 1626, Hong scaled back military confrontation with the Ming, for several reasons:

- He lacked artillery to breach Ming fortresses.
- He needed to consolidate eastern and western frontiers.
- He needed to build his ruling institutions.

¹³⁷ **Primogeniture** is the right, by law or custom, of the firstborn male child to inherit the family estate, in preference to siblings (compare to ultimogeniture).

¹³⁸ Not sure, but this may have been the same kind of kurultai used to select a Mongol Khan. Page 187.

These ten years were for building the underpinnings of Hong's plan to take the rest of China.



Under Hong, the state became less like the warlike feudal tribes of the Manchus and more like the bureaucracy of a civilian Chinese state:

- The power of the Khan grew considerably.
- He ruthlessly eliminated his Manchu rivals.
- With the help of Chinese advisors, he created an administration that mimicked the Ming government.
- He began systematic recordkeeping
- He built a Chinese-style palace with a Manchu flair

In 1629, Hong created three institutions that were not of Chinese origin:

- A secretariat
- An historical office
- A literary office

The literary office had the role of translating the large volumes of philosophical, historical, and strategic works from Chinese to Manchu, an undertaking that required the addition of many Chinese words to the Manchu language.



In 1635, the Manchus created the Mongol Office to handle relations with Mongolian and Tibetan visitors to the capital city of Mukden (formerly Shenyang). Mukden was Manchu for *arising*, symbolic of the goals of the Manchu emperor. Again, taking the Chinese model, Hong established the Six Boards¹³⁹ and a Censorate.¹⁴⁰

In 1635, Hong renamed his people from the Jurchens to the Manchus and in 1636 renamed his state from the Later Jin to the Great Qing (*da Qing*). These two changes consolidated the many rival tribes as one, similar to Temujin proclaiming his tribes as the Mongols. In this way Hong declared that his dynasty was not simply another Jin.



There is no known historical record of the meaning of *Manchu* (or *Manju* in the Manchu language). On the other hand, we know that Qing means pure. The water radical was chosen to extinguish the fire element associated with the Ming, which means *bright*.

¹³⁹ I think we're supposed to know about the Six Boards or Ministries from previous lectures, but I scanned my notes and didn't find a reference to it. Wikipedia defines it [here](#) as first appearing in the Sui. Note that the number 6 has particular meaning from Cosmic Resonance Theory (pg 61, *Multiples of Six*). The ministries were: Personnel, Revenue, Rites, Defense, Justice, and Works.

¹⁴⁰ From Part 5, pg 194: The Censorate monitored and assessed officials in the bureaucracy for the quality of their work and their adherence to central policy - an arm of government that began in the Yuan and continued through the Ming and Qing.



Another meaning of Great Qing in Manchu was *daicing gurun*, which means *warrior country*, a clear signal of where Hong was eventually headed.

The Creation of the Manchu State

As we saw above, Hong rebuilt his government in the Chinese model of civil administration, with some Manchu differences. He also expanded his territory in the east against Korea, in the west against the Mongols, and in the north against the few remaining Jurchen tribes that were not yet in the fold. By the 1640s, these tasks had been accomplished.

Just as important to Hong's goals, the Qing had recruited Han Chinese with the artillery skills to breach the walled cities of the Ming. By the early 1640s the *daicing gurun* was ready to attack a Ming state weakened by internal rebellion.



After Hong Taiji died in 1643, the Qing council chose his five-year-old son Fulin, once again *not* the eldest son, to be the next Khan. Fulin's uncle, Dorgon, the fourteenth son of Nurhaci, was named regent.

It was Dorgon, in 1644, who persuaded the Ming general Wu Sangui to grant passage to the Qing troops through the Shanhai gate of the Great Wall.

Dorgon, the Manchu Regent

Discussion

The idea of the "conquest dynasty" -- a polyethnic state established by a non-Han minority elite maintaining political authority over a majority Han population and ruling over territories spanning both Inner Asia and lands considered part of China -- is controversial in some quarters, partly because it raises questions about how we go about defining "China" and "Chineseness" in history. Yet when we look at the institutions put in place by the rulers of the Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Qing, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that there was something different about these regimes as compared to, say, the Song and Ming regimes.

Consider the differences between the conquest dynasties and those of the Song and Ming. What features do the conquest dynasties share? In building their state, why would the Manchu founders of the Qing have chosen to identify with the Khitans, Jurchens, and Mongols? What potential problems or challenges can you predict might arise with such an identification?

My thoughts:

Origin story: the Han Chinese took their origin story from the Sages, with the values that come from ancestor worship, the Sages, and Neo-Confucianism. The Manchus and other tribes that conquered China had origin stories related to a nomadic warrior lifestyle that did not place the same moral value on agrarian life and the peasant farmer.

Mandate of Heaven: the Han Chinese dynasties took their mandate to mean some level of identification with the Sages of Chinese antiquity, which in the Confucian heritage necessarily elevated the literati. The Conquest dynasties took China by force and legitimized their rule through inclusion of the literati rather than through any philosophical belief in their intrinsic value. The result may have been similar, but the motivation was different and the Conquest governments didn't spend as much time in philosophical introspection.

Primogeniture. The Han Chinese practiced primogeniture while valuing meritocracy (what the Sages of antiquity declared as the correct way to pass the *tianming*). The Conquest dynasties had a cultural history of choosing by merit within the family in a tribal council.

Military. I'll borrow a page from pczhang. The Conquest dynasties put the military above the civilian, with the civilian administration an unfamiliar and necessary mechanism for organizing and taxing the vast millions of Chinese. From the time of the Qin, each Han Chinese empire seemed to be part of a progression of experiments in the integration of the military, either for conquest or for border protection, within the overarching civilian bureaucracy.

Multi-ethnic State. The Han Chinese were a single ethnic group that extended Chinese into other cultures and absorbed their cultures (e.g. in the Tang) into China. The Conquest dynasties maintained a multi-ethnic approach with language translation.

Conquest vs. Treaty. I'll borrow a page from dougma: the Conquest dynasties did not negotiate peace with the northern border - they *were* the northern border. A large factor in nearly every Han Chinese dynasty was managing the need for a strong military garrison to the north and in later dynasties, to negotiating peace with 'brother states' to the north.

Ostriches and Penguins in a Republic of Birds

This was posted as a discussion selection, from djeatonlisbon. I can't judge the validity of the allegory, but it's wonderfully creative and may, as Prof. Elliot noted, capture an essential point of [the yi vs. the hua](#) that dates back to antiquity.

If all the birds of the world came together and created their own republic – their own cultural and economic bird world – how would ostriches and penguins fare?

My guess is that they would soon become marginalized, socially and politically. This would result from their lack of a basic prototypical characteristic of birds – the ability to fly. A world created by the majority of birds would probably foster a collective self-image of birds as creatures of flight.

I imagine that, sooner or later, ostriches and penguins would not be content to be treated as second-class birds. They might develop a pride in their own distinctive characteristics while, at the same time, asserting their right to full membership in the bird community. They might, soon or later, succeed in moving themselves from the periphery to the center of the bird world. Then, the community's notion of birdness would have to altered to be accepting of flightless birds and the community, as a whole, would be more diverse and stronger.

Manchus saw themselves as marginal members of a large multilingual community of ethnic groups which had been closely interacting with each other for a long time. Furthermore, the Manchus saw themselves as descendents of people who had once been at the center of this community. It is to be expected, I think, that the Manchus would want to move from the margins to the center of this community and, doing so, give the community a more inclusive self-image.

24: Hearts and Minds

Conquest and Consolidation

A period of consolidation and upheaval persisted for roughly 40 years after the Qing invasion of China in the spring of 1644. It began with the battle of Beijing.

On April 24th, 1644, Li Zicheng led the rebel forces into Beijing, whereupon the Ming emperor committed suicide along with his concubines (did they do so willingly?). The rest of the emperor's court fled south.

Li failed to ally with the Ming general Wu Sangui, who chose instead to open the gates of the Shanhaiguan Pass allowing Dorgon, the Manchu regent, to bring his army through. On May 27th in the [Battle of Shanhai Pass](#)¹⁴¹ at the eastern end of the Great Wall, north of Beijing, Wu's army engaged Li's rebel forces. Wu did most of the fighting and took the brunt of the losses, with the Manchu cavalry waiting until Wu was on the brink of defeat before sweeping around Li's right flank under the cover of a dust storm, surprising Li's forces and driving him from the field.

Li retreated to Beijing and on June 3rd, took the throne only long enough to declare himself emperor before setting fire to the palace on June 4th and fleeing with his remaining men to the west.

On June 5th, Qing troops entered Beijing. Standing on the steps of one of the remaining palaces, Dorgon announced that:

The empire is not an individual's private empire.

Whosoever possesses virtue holds it.

The army and people are not an individual's private army and people.

Whosoever possesses virtue commands them.

My thought: In this speech, he arrogated Heaven's Mandate (*tianming*).



A year passed before the Qing, allied with Wu's army yet still outnumbered four-to-one, defeated Li's forces and killed Li. In 1645, the Qing crossed the Yellow River and then took Jiangnan. Most cities conceded defeat but some did not and their populations were slaughtered. Yangzhou was one of those, where 800,000 residents were reportedly killed in a [ten-day massacre](#)¹⁴² in May of 1645.

All of South China eventually fell to the Qing over the next five years.

Meanwhile, the refugees of the Ming court created the Southern Ming Dynasty in Burma, which lasted until 1661 when the last pretender to the throne was executed by General Wu.

¹⁴¹ [Wikipedia](#) has an excellent article describing the battle and the events leading up to it.

¹⁴² As an interesting side note to the relevance of Chinese history to modern events, the books written at the time to report on these massacres were used to win support for the 1911 [Xinhai Revolution](#) against the Qing.



In 1662, Zheng Chenggong (aka Koxinga) led a separate group of Qing loyalists to Taiwan where they expelled the Dutch colonists and founded the [Kingdom of Tungning](#). Supported by maritime trade with Japan and Southeast Asia, Zheng survived independently until the Qing assembled a navy to blockade Taiwan, forcing his defeat in 1683.

This was the first time in history that Taiwan was integrated into Chinese territory. I don't have to emphasize the importance of *this* event.

Resistance and Withdrawal

The Qing conquest shocked the Chinese and forced them to choose sides: to support the Qing, to resist, or to stand quietly aside. To those facing violence, the choice to stand aside was easy.

The Most Unkindest Cut of All



Queue (or "pigtail")
辮子



European illustration
of a viper seller
(1800)

In 1644, the Qing rulers ordered all adult males to wear their hair in the Manchu fashion, with the front of their scalp shaved and their hair grown long in the back and gathered in a tight braid called a [queue](#) (image on right).

With a glance, the Manchus knew who had submitted and who had not. But the order violated the ancient Confucian custom of [filial piety](#)¹⁴³, deeply offending the Han men¹⁴⁴. The traditional Chinese style was to gather the hair in a bun, or *ji*, atop the head (image on left).

The price of resistance was decapitation: *lose your hair and keep your head or keep your hair and lose your head*.

Thus, the queue became the hairstyle for all Han men through the late imperial period and became the source of a derogatory Western nickname for the Chinese.

¹⁴³ From [Confucius](#): "We are given our body, skin and hair from our parents; which we ought not to damage. This idea is the quintessence of filial duty." For its importance, see page 159.

¹⁴⁴ And yet Mouzi excused the Buddhist monks who shaved their heads by saying, *Taibo cut his hair short and tattooed his body, yet Confucius praised him*. See page 96.

Dissidents in Exile



On the left, [*Seascape with tree and boat*](#), on the right, [*Ducks and Lotus*](#), by Zhu Da (aka Bada shanren) 1626-1706

What choice did the dissidents have? Some committed suicide.

Others retired to monasteries to express their anguish in poetry and drama and especially art, where depictions of lone trees or desolation indicate the artist's mood. Bada shanren was famous for his fish and birds, the fish literally out of water, the word 'fish' a poignant homonym for 'leftover' or 'remnant.'

The Problem of Legitimacy



*The kingdom can be won on horseback, but cannot be ruled on horseback*¹⁴⁵.

The Qing rulers knew from the Yuan that they needed the literati and the gentry to rule China, to administer the provinces and cities and villages, and to collect taxes. Convincing the literati that the Manchus had the right to rule may have been the biggest challenge they faced. To the end of the dynasty, their Barbarian origins remained an issue.

To convince the literati that they had *tianming*, Heaven's Mandate, they need to assume the Confucian traditions of Chinese imperial orthodoxy (*my thought: a tad difficult after you stomped on the filial piety of every adult male*). But the early Qing emperors (Yongzheng, Qianlong and especially the Kangxi emperor) understood proper reverence to Confucius.

The Sacred Edict



Immediately after assuming power in 1670, Kangxi issued the proclamation of the Sacred Edict, sixteen maxims read twice a month to villagers by the gentry to instill Confucian values.

Complete Library of the Four Treasuries

Similarly, the Qing sponsored a major scholarly project to write The History of the Ming Dynasty, following tradition that a succeeding dynasty should compose the history of its predecessor. Some scholars refused to take part, but enough did to help convince the literati that the Manchu were serious in their commitment to Chinese values and at the same time recognizing in the History itself, the contribution of the Ming loyalists.

Under Qianlong, the Qing composed the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries ([Siku quanshu](#))¹⁴⁶.

Rather than transforming Chinese culture, the Qing reinforced traditional Confucian values.

¹⁴⁵ According to legend, an advisor said this to Kublai Khan. See [here](#) under the Yuan dynasty.

¹⁴⁶ See [Wikipedia](#). 361 scholars compiled 10,000 manuscripts for inclusion in the library. The largest collection of Chinese works in history. Note however that they also destroyed 3,000 works considered to be anti-Manchu.

The Limits of Success



Among the Han Chinese and particularly the elite, a profound ambivalence over whether they should resist the Manchus lasted through the early Qing period. This was at the heart of the refusal of Jiading to accept Qing rule, resulting in a siege lasting 80 days and costing a hundred thousand lives. And more famously, at Yangzhou, where the Ming loyalist [Shi Kefa](#)¹⁴⁷ led the [resistance](#)¹⁴⁸.

There's a [memorial to Shi Kefa](#) in modern day Yangzhou (#travelNote)

Cultural Ambivalence

The Exclusive View

Mencius said: *I have heard of men using the doctrines of our great land to change barbarians, but I have never yet heard of any being changed by barbarians.*

Non-Chinese could never rule the Middle Kingdom¹⁴⁹.

The Inclusive View

If barbarians could be changed by Chinese doctrines and thus became like the Chinese, then China is without borders and China counts among her sons all those who pursue Confucian virtue.

Political Ambivalence

Neo-Confucianism

The tie to a ruler is filial in nature, absolute and unmitigated by virtue. The idea of abandoning fealty to the Ming was unthinkable and cutting one's hair in the form of a queue only salted the Neo-Confucian wound.

Traditional Confucianism

Pre-Song Confucian tradition ascribed loyalty to a ruler in proportion to their virtue. The Ming ruler, with his destructive economic policies, lacked virtue so he deserved no loyalty. If the Qing ruler proved virtuous, there was no reason to deny him *tianming* any more than the Duke of Zhou.

Of course, those who found an argument that rationalized their support of the Qing could be accused of opportunism.

¹⁴⁷ From Wikipedia: *I fall together with the city. My decision will not change. Even if I'm torn to pieces, my feelings will be as sweet as [maltose](#). But do not harm the thousands of lives in Yangzhou!*

¹⁴⁸ From Wikipedia: Prince Dodo was infuriated by the heavy casualties sustained by his army in conquering Yangzhou, so after the city fell, he ordered a mass killing of the city's residents (the event is known as the [Yangzhou massacre](#)).

¹⁴⁹ The most common name for China is [Zhongguo](#), which literally translated means "central nation." See page 26.

Reclusion, Rebellion and Restoration



Not until 1681, 40 years after the fall of Beijing, did Han Chinese loyalty shift from the Ming to the Manchus of the Qing. Before that time, the Manchus almost lost control of China.

Following the Beijing conquest, the Manchus tolerated some of the cultural rebellion, like the paintings of Bada Shanren or plays like the [Peach Blossom Fan](#)¹⁵⁰. But they violently suppressed any outright challenges.

The Rebellion of the Three Feudatories (*San-Fan*)

Lasting from 1673 to 1681, the rebellion conquered the southern half of China and nearly undid the Qing dynasty. But the suppression of the rebellion stabilized Qing rule for the two centuries that followed.¹⁵¹

At the time of the rebellion, large parts of the Qing were under surrogate rule, that is, not directly under the control of the Manchu armies but under the control of Chinese forces. These were divided into three groups called feudatories:

Wu Sangui (he of the Shanhai Pass) in Yunnan and Guizhou

Shang Kexi in Guangdong

Geng Jingzhong in Fujian Province

These territories were run as fiefs, collecting 10 million taels of silver annually, a third of the Qing revenue. They had their own bureaucracy staffed with their own people. Their armies outnumbered the Qing, particularly Wu's.

To ensure Wu hewed the party line, the Manchus kept his eldest son hostage in Beijing.

In 1673, Shang Kexi asked to step down to allow his son to take his place. Wu and Geng similarly offered to resign. The Qing court accepted their resignations, at which point Wu announced he was in rebellion. The three feudatories declared their own dynasty, brought back Ming customs and hairstyles, and demanded the Manchus leave.

The Qing sent a combined Manchu-Chinese army against the three. They failed to turn the tide of the rebellion until 1676, when Geng surrendered, followed by Shang. Wu Sangui died in 1678, but his son held out until 1681.

In a sense, this was the true beginning of Qing rule.

¹⁵⁰ From Wikipedia: The play depicts the drama that resulted in the 1644 collapse of the [Ming Dynasty](#).^[3] The play recounts the death of the Ming Dynasty through the love story of its two main characters, young scholar Hou Fangyu ([侯方域](#)) and courtesan Li Xiangjun ([李香君](#)), the Fragrant Princess.^[4] The *Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* has called it "China's greatest historical drama."

¹⁵¹ Not until the [Taiping Rebellion](#) in 1850 was there another major threat to Qing rule. That rebellion cost 20 million lives and is (obviously) considered one of the deadliest conflicts in history.

Discussion

Consider these two paintings. The one on page 222, titled [Seascape with Tree and Boat](#), was painted by Zhu Da (1606-1705, also known as Bada shanren), who responded to the Qing conquest by withdrawing from society into a Buddhist monastery before he began painting years later.

The other, shown below, was painted by Qing court artist Wang Hui (1632-1717). Describe the images and what you find in them. What kind of aesthetic strategies has each artist employed? What kind of atmosphere does each image evoke, and what might that say about the artist's feelings about the new dynasty? Does viewing these images next to each other make their respective political messages clearer?



My thoughts:

The seascape is abstract, spare and stark burdened with a deep sense of loneliness: a single tree on a rugged coast with a mountain rising far in the background. Too far to reach. There are no people. No signs of life. The tree itself is only trunk and branch bare of foliage.

In contrast, Wang Hui shows two thriving communities, crowded and alive. There's a busy village to the left and throngs along the road traveling to and from another village with fine buildings on the right. Beautiful, forested craggy hills surround the villages, with farms and houses in the valleys alongside. It is life, it is full. The people, their lives and their structures blend in color and form with the land.

25: Manchu Identity and the Meanings of Minority Rule

The Problem of Manchu Identity



The Manchus were *yi*, barbarians from beyond the Great Wall. Who they were did not change despite the actions they took to rule in the Chinese way:

- proclaiming they had *tianming*
- adopting Neo-Confucian ideology and continuing Confucian ritual sacrifices
- retaining the exam system and the existing bureaucracy and taxation
- issuing the Sacred Edict to be read twice a month
- creating the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries

Manchu Nativism vs. Confucian Cosmopolitanism

The challenge lies with maintaining the unity of the ruling minority while operating within the indigenous culture of the majority. This is what Prof. Elliot refers to as Nativism vs. Cosmopolitanism.

This is not unlike the Normans under [William the Conqueror](#) who took England in the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Or the Turks ruling over [Constantinople in 1453](#). Both had to compromise to stay atop the political order.

Learning from the Past



The Khitans of the Liao, the Jurchens of the Jin, and the Mongols of the Yuan had the same problem of minority rule.

Among the earliest books translated into Manchu were the histories of the three preceding minority-ruled dynasties: the Liao, the Jin, and the Yuan. The prefaces clearly indicate that the translations were intended to help the Manchus learn from their predecessors how to maintain the proper balance.

One Jin ruler ordered all his Jurchen subjects to adopt

Chinese names and styles of clothing. The Qing regarded this as a step too far and one of the reasons for the fall of the Jin. The second ruler of the Qing, Hong Taiji, made a point of this to his ministers.

The Yuan, on the other hand, were seen as having made too little accommodation to the Chinese culture - a reason *their* dynasty was short-lived. The Manchus struck a different balance, between the disregard of the Yuan and the appeasement of the Jin.

Identity Mattered

Manchu identity mattered both to the Manchus and to the Han Chinese, both of whom discussed it, though the Han Chinese had to be careful in their public discussions lest they lose something other than their hair.

As much as the Manchus needed to preserve their origins they could not be perceived as inferior, as barbarians, by the Han Chinese. Especially considering they were outnumbered 250 to 1.

The Manchu Way



Retaining Nativism was more difficult than pursuing Cosmopolitanism. Members of the Eight Banners enthusiastically adopted Chinese and enjoyed the arts: painting, poetry, philosophy. This attraction went beyond the elite Manchus: ordinary Banner men enjoyed tea houses and theatre in the city. In the 1700s and 1800s, historical records show concern about preserving Manchu ways, particularly among the elite.

A True Manchu, a Manchu in Body:

- A true Manchu had martial skills, especially archery. Pulling a bow was a measure of a man's strength. The Manchu language has separate verbs for shooting from a stance and from horseback. A man could become an official *after* he proved his worth as a soldier.
- Manchus lived a simple, frugal life.
- A Manchu spoke the Manchu language, which is unrelated to Chinese, having its origins in the central Asian steppes, perhaps related to the other Altaic languages, including Mongolic and Turkic. The script is alphabetic with origins in the Middle East. Documents written as late as the 1920s were in Manchu.
- Manchus were brave.

The feeling of needing to preserve Manchu ways was strong among the elite. Knowing Manchu gave people a leg up in the bureaucracy.

See [here](#) for how Qianlong hewed to the Manchu Way.

The Old Boys Network - A Common Language



Roughly 2 million of the 10 million Qing documents archived in Beijing were written in Manchu. The Manchu documents have a different perspective on Qing rule than those written in Chinese. There's a sense of pride and of devotion to the imperial project begun by their literal ancestors. Manchus retained a disproportionate share of power in the Qing and were feared by Chinese locals.

German map of Beijing (1903)

Manchu (or "Tartar")
section

Chinese section



In the records of the 1793 English mission to the Qianlong court, Lord Macartney notes that Han Chinese were comfortable talking among themselves but stiffened perceptibly when a Manchu entered the room.

- Many government posts were reserved for Manchus or at least those in the Banners
- Manchus did not need examination degrees to rise in the bureaucracy. They could rise through the military or through the language translation exams.
- Bannermen received regular stipends of grain and silver.
- Bannermen were subject to lighter penalties under the law. For offenses committed in non-Chinese areas, they were not subject to Chinese law at all.
- Bannermen lived in garrisons in a part of central Beijing known as Tartar city, separate from the Chinese.

Many cities around the provinces were sequestered into garrisons for the Eight Banners and their families, servants, and horses.

Cultural Differences



Manchu women wore their hair in a distinctive style, with a large headdress, they wore earrings with three piercings, and they did not bind their feet. They had more freedom to move about the city.

Manchu names were different. A Chinese name was typically a surname and a given name. Xi Jinping has a surname of Xi. Manchus had names like Mujangga or Fashan, two or three syllables, and no surname.

The Manchu religion was Shamanic, a practice that continued into the 20th century. They kept genealogies to maintain ancestral ties which often determined the succession of posts in the bureaucracy.

Discussion

Write a paragraph describing why a historian of the Qing might find it valuable to learn the Manchu language.

My thoughts:

Because 1/5 of recovered documents were in Manchu and the Manchu were the ruling elite. Because the Manchu would express themselves differently in their own tongue than in Chinese so the feelings of the Manchu rulers are best known by reading those documents. Because the contrast between statements made in Chinese and in Manchu by the same writer may reveal more accurately what the ruling elite thought of the Han Chinese.

Manchu Insecurity

In this section, Prof Elliot talks about an "abiding insecurity," the result of the tension between nativism and cosmopolitanism, between assimilating and standing apart, between one's own culture and the attractive culture of the majority.

- They worried if they measured up to the expectations of the Han elite
- They worried if they were inferior, with their ancestral barbarian origins

Toward the end of the 1600s, the Kangxi emperor once wrote to an official, urging him to make sure the Han Chinese did not poke fun at him and take advantage of his lack of learning. He said, the Han do not want us to last very long.



Around 1730, the Yongzheng emperor issued a defense of Manchu rule, the Record of Great Righteousness to Enlighten the Confused. It was written in response to disparaging comments from a Han Chinese, asserting the Manchus were illegitimate usurpers of the Mandate of Heaven. The *defense* argued the Manchus had absorbed enough Confucian learning that they were now legitimate rulers.

Yongzheng's son Qianlong withdrew the document upon reaching the throne, but its content reveals the extent of Manchu insecurity. For his part, Qianlong confiscated books that he felt were disrespectful of Manchu rule.

The reasons for the insecurity were real. There was an unavoidable resentment due to the advantages the Manchus had in the bureaucracy in particular and China in general, as detailed in the previous section.

The resentment was evident in the propaganda of the Taiping Rebellion and grew stronger toward the end of the dynasty, during the birth of Chinese nationalism. Much of the feeling of Chinese nationalism was directed against the Manchus.

It remained, of course, politically dangerous to make overt anti-Manchu comments.

Acculturation and Its Limits

Ethnic prejudice against the Manchus lasted to the end of the dynasty.

The Han Chinese were disturbed that the Manchu rule had lasted so long and tried to explain it by saying the Manchus had become like the Han, that their secret for minority rule was to absorb the Chinese ways. This fit the adage that China may be conquered from the outside but China will always conquer its conquerors.

So how did they acculturate? By the 1880s, many Manchus had abandoned the "Old Manchu Way", that is, they had abandoned the court ideals of Manchu identity, by:

- Speaking Chinese on the street
- Weakening their pursuit of martial skills: riding and shooting
- Living extravagant lives, often in debt to others.
- Taking Chinese names
- Studying poetry, writing, and the fine arts and becoming patrons of the arts

They did not, however, intermarry to any great extent. Did they stop being Manchu? They must have preserved some difference to remain a target of anti-Manchu sentiment.¹⁵²

Manchus were the target, Prof Elliot explains, because:

- They lived in Banner garrisons
- They limited interaction with Han Chinese to commercial transactions, and were typically the victims of sharper businessmen.
- They practiced the Shamanic religion.
- Manchu women looked different with unbound feet and large shoes, distinctive headdresses, and three earrings.
- They held onto political and legal privileges until nearly the end of the dynasty.
- While they did speak Chinese, it was with a distinct Beijing accent rather than the local dialect.

Therefore, while they failed to live up to the court ideals of Manchu identity, they remained distinctive in their everyday lives, drawing resentment from the Han Chinese.

¹⁵² I'm not sure that's true. If they were ancestral Manchu and they were the ruling party, what other differences would the Han Chinese need to make them the target of anger, resentment, and prejudicial comments?

Sinicization and its Discontents

What were the implications for the Qing and for China today, of the sustained distinction of Manchu identity? The model of complete assimilation doesn't agree with the reality of the separate Banner garrisons, the distinct religious practices, styles of dress and special political privilege. Separate and not equal.

So the rationale that sustained Manchu rule succeeded because of acculturation is unsatisfying. Considered another way, perhaps Manchu rule succeeded because they did *not* acculturate. They successfully balanced the ancestral traditions that enabled them to maintain a distinct identity with the Confucian traditions required to rule the overwhelming majority of Han Chinese.

Changing Ethnicity of the Manchu

Consider ethnicity as the social organization and assertion of difference that is bound to ancestry.¹⁵³ You had to be born into the Banners. But that doesn't mean ethnic identity is fixed. It is bound to ancestry, but its manifestation can change.

This principle appears throughout human history, of a common thread of ethnic identity woven through a fabric that changes over time. The statement "we have always been this people, we have always lived in this land" is not always true but its assertion is part of the identity.

Ethnicity is a transaction: one party asserts who they are and the other party must recognize them as distinct, though perhaps not for the same reasons.

In the early Qing, a Manchu was a tough guy, knocking around the Han Chinese, and generally above the law. In the later Qing, a Manchu was someone who lived with a Bannerman's salary and bought an extravagant lifestyle from Han Chinese businessmen and had his salary garnished to pay for it. A very different Manchu in the two cases, but always distinct from the Han.

A Hybrid Dynasty

The Qing was a hybrid of Manchu and Chinese thinking about politics, governance, economics, and the frontier. That notion of a hybrid dynasty will be the subject of the next lecture.

¹⁵³ Wikipedia defines [ethnicity](#) as “a socially-defined category of people who identify with each other based on common ancestral, social, cultural, or national experience.”

Discussion: The Nature of Ethnicity

The primary focus of this module has been the shifting nature of Manchu identity in the Qing, and the main question has been to ask how the Manchus managed to hold on to a sense of themselves as a separate people, even as they adapted many cultural forms and practices from the Han Chinese. To address the apparent paradox of persistent identity in the face of acculturation (or "Sinicization"), Professor Elliott argued that ethnicity—that which makes a Manchu person "Manchu," a Chinese person "Chinese," or a Scot "Scottish"—is historically constructed, a universal social phenomenon, the product of a mutual constitution of "Self" and "Other" that is determined by particular contexts and that changes over time. Do you agree? Is ethnicity "primordial," fixed, and unchanging, or is it the outcome of a transactional process that is socially constructed? If the latter, then is ethnicity "modern"?

My thoughts:

Whereas ethnic identity is often focused on physical traits that distinguish one cohort from another (epicanthic folds, skin color, hair texture), it's the social boundaries that create the group. For the purposes of historical discussions concerning culture, politics, philosophy, commerce, warfare and so forth, these dimensions are controlled by geography and climate and natural events, and by how people relate to one another. If the physical characteristics of an ethnic group were to limit the ability of that group to engage in culture, politics, philosophy, commerce, warfare or any of the other human activities, then ethnicity would hinge on a persistent trait, the trait associated with that physical limitation. Perhaps Manchus were shorter, or stronger. But likely they weren't.

My feeling is that any physical differences in ethnicity merely provide a focal point for differentiating social groups, which then becomes the catalyst for the social differences (segregation within an Eastern European ghetto or a Banner garrison, privileges granted the ruling cohort). People use those differences (physical distinction or genealogy) to persist the social differences. Once that happens, the social differences take over as the basis for the ethnicity (political privilege, lifestyle, language), decoupled from any physical or genealogical distinctions.

Once the physical characteristics are decoupled, there's no reason the measures of ethnicity, that is, the observable differentiating characteristics of a cohort, cannot change.

So if the set of defining traits can change, will they change or will they crystallize? In this regard, there are competing forces. Stable traits give an ethnic group common practices to hold them together in the face of assimilation. Changeable traits adapt to modern pressures, keeping ethnic groups from dissipating as the youth 'leave' for happier circumstance.

26: The Scholars

Historical Overview



The three Qing emperors of the 18th century, Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, led a growing population through a time of stability and prosperity within China proper. Along the borders, however, Qianlong fought to expand his territory until he held Taiwan, Vietnam, Tibet, and Xinjiang, a vast empire of 13 million square kilometers.

Qianlong represented himself as a Confucian, a Buddhist, and a Chakravartin king, with his roots as Manchu warrior.

In his visit to Beijing in 1793, Macartney was impressed with China's vigor. Yet, beneath the apparent splendor lay bureaucratic corruption and deep social unrest which would bring disaster for the Qing in the following century.

Introduction to an 18th Century Novel: The Scholars



Prosperous Suzhou

On a tour of the south, Qianlong was so impressed by the City of Suzhou that he ordered a scroll to illustrate the city. Created in 1751, the scroll is 12 meters long and filled with detail. 4800 people and 2000 buildings.

The Scholars

Wu Jingzi, a literatus, set his novel, *The Scholars*, during the Ming dynasty, to avoid offending his contemporaries in the ruling Qing dynasty. Also known as *The Unofficial History of the Confucians*, the novel located its characters in Nanjing, the southern capital of the Ming, on the Yangtze not far from Suzhou. It focused on the lives of the literati as they revolved around the civil service exam.

Relating the Two Works

Besides coming from the same period and set in nearby places, the painting and the novel both claim to be a window on the social life of the people.

The Rise of the Novel and The Scholars

Provincial Graduate



When Xu Zhang finished painting the scroll he was given the rank of Provincial Graduate, an honor equivalent to passing the provincial exams, with the right to compete for the metropolitan level, freedom from certain taxes, eligibility for official positions, and immediate access to the elite of Suzhou.



In contrast, Wu Jingzi, author of *The Scholars*, never passed the exams beyond the county level, remaining at the bottom of the literati strata.

The Rise of the Novel



The first novels appeared in the Late Ming and by 1740, novels had found an audience among a wealthier population¹⁵⁴.

The Scholars appeared as a series of 56 acts, parsed into chapters. This sectioning was no coincidence considering the form of the novel derived from Chinese opera. By the Late Ming, operas comprised as many as fifty acts and were intended to be read as well as performed. In a sense, the novel was an opera in narrative and without song. It preceded the appearance of the short story.

Four Great Novels

These novels were written within a century of the emergence of the novel as literary form. The characters engage in natural dialogue rather than the stilted language of the elite, though they are targeted at an elite audience.

They draw upon the "minor tale tradition," *xiaoshuo*, which came to mean *novel* but first meant a record of gossip, a story told of the backdoor scenes that never reached the public eye.

[The Three Kingdoms](#)

Set in the Han dynasty, it centered around feudal power struggles and battles for primacy, in the fashion of *Game of Thrones*.

[The Water Margin](#)

aka *Outlaws of the Marsh*. Set in the Song, it told of 108 heroic men living on the edge of society, practicing their martial arts in defense of the meek.

[Journey to the West](#)



A book of fantasy about a Buddhist monk in search of the dharma who traveled to the west in the company of a pig, a horse, and a monkey, anthropomorphic companions with magical powers. The monkey remains a popular character in modern China.¹⁵⁵

It was translated as [Monkey](#), by Arthur Waley.

[The Plum in the Golden Vase](#)

The story of Ximen Qing, a corrupt merchant, and his seven wives. See page 200.

¹⁵⁴ Here's an essay on [The Genesis of the Chinese Novel](#).

¹⁵⁵ From Wikipedia: Enduringly popular, the tale is at once a comic adventure story, a spring of spiritual insight, and an extended allegory in which the group of pilgrims journeys towards enlightenment which each of them can achieve only with the help of all of the others. (my thought: sounds like the Wizard of Oz).

The Dream of The Red Chamber

After *The Scholars* was written, this novel appeared, arguably the most famous novel in Chinese history. The English translation by Hawkes and Minford titled *The Story of the Stone*¹⁵⁶, makes for good historical reading, if you like hundreds of characters and a dizzying array of obscure literary references.

It's the story of a family in decline, told by the children growing up in the garden. It draws upon the reader's strong knowledge of Chinese literature.

Prof. Wai-Yee Li on The Dream of The Red Chamber



The plot centers on the Jia family, where *Jia* is homophonic with fiction. The protagonist is a young man who was a stone in his previous life.

Two titans in heaven fighting a battle break one of the pillars supporting heaven and earth. To repair the break, a goddess needs 36,500 stones but she makes one too many. The remaining stone, touched by the goddess, becomes sentient with the intellectual powers of a human, but still merely a stone. One day a monk and a Daoist transmit the stone to the human world where he becomes the protagonist, with no memory of his previous existence.

This backstory of his life as a stone is not revealed until deep into the novel. Instead, we see the life of a boy from the age of 11 or 12, finding love and learning about life, until he's 19 and leaves the world. The Daguan Yuan, the garden where spends his youth, is a microcosm of a world free of adult responsibility, of social constraint (the garden isn't built until chapter 17 or so, which is at the very end of the first volume of the Hawkes translation).

The book has 120 chapters. It's widely understood that Cao Xueqin wrote the first 80. It embeds many literary references, to the extent that either you should know them before attempting to read it, or you'll know them by the time you're done. It both teaches you the life of the Chinese cultural elite in the eighteenth century, while expecting you to know it.

In contrast to *The Scholars*, which is critical of the elite, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* basks in literati culture. By the time Cao Xueqin began writing, his family had fallen from wealth into poverty, leaving him nostalgic for the cultured life they'd left behind.

The Dream of the Red Chamber had general popularity, not merely the popularity of an English classic, like *David Copperfield*, which is read primarily as a school assignment. The story is well-known, it's performed on stage as an opera and on TV as a soap opera and read in comic book form. Its tapestry of images and themes are woven into the cultural fabric of China.

¹⁵⁶ See [here](#) for review of the translation. *Few books can even be considered for the title of 'Book of the Millennium', but *The Story of the Stone* surely is a strong contender. This classic novel from the Qing dynasty, considered the greatest work of Chinese fiction, is a brilliant achievement and a marvelous read.* The book is available from [Amazon](#). Here's an [article by the author](#).

The Rise of the Meritocracy

Previous discussions of the Civil Service Examination

The exam was introduced in the Song for the recruitment of government officials: page 146.

It became a force for uniting families across genealogical boundaries: page 172.

Timeline

605 CE	Exam established in Sui
1000 CE	Exam expanded in Song
1075 CE	Exam system adopted in Vietnam
1392CE	Exam system adopted in Korea
1853CE	Exam system used as a model for the British civil service exams.

The Government Perspective

To recruit talent for government, officials need civil talents.

- Writing
- History
- Politics
- Philosophy

When the government chose to recruit through the exam, it forsook recruitment through personal connections and patrilineal heritage. This partly explains the disappearance of the great clans of the Tang.

Meritocracy promotes the idea that those who are good at learning should have political power.

Fairness

To make the exams fair, the government:

- Anonymized the exams (replaced the names with a number. See page 171, Exams and Elites).
- Copied exams to hide the original calligraphy.

Legitimacy

Although the emperor inherited his position, in principle everyone else received their government appointment by fairly administered exams, which helped legitimize government.

Ming and Qing Civil Service Exam

See page 171 for a discussion of the chances of receiving the *jinshi*, or Presented Scholar, degree, the highest degree. Only 600 every three years of roughly 450,000 candidates.

By 1600, roughly 800,000 had some kind of exam status and only 300 every 3 years received the *jinshi*.

By 1850, 1.4 million had an exam status and still only 300 every 3 years received the *jinshi*.

Why did people even try?

Because the lower levels of awards had merit, too. At the beginning of the Ming, the government decided to recognize people at the prefectural and provincial levels as well as at the capital level. Those recognized at the prefectural level were licentiates (*shengyuan*).

Over time, the number of statuses grew. Even without the highest official status, these lower statuses brought a stipend and freedom from labor service. Further, one's highest achieved exam level was the most important social status during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Social Mobility vs. Social Rotation



The story of Fan Jin comes up in *The Scholars*. Fan Jin was a poor young scholar whose father-in-law slapped him around and called him a fool. When Fan Jin passed the provincial exam, he collapsed unconscious in shock. The neighbors, thinking Fan Jin would die, urged his father-in-law to slap him around like he always did, just to wake him up. He refused, saying 'I dare not. He's going to be an official.'

In other words, exams granted social mobility with greater value than kinship, a mobility that transcended circumstance.

Was it truly social mobility?

Scholars today argue that social mobility is only real if the candidate who passed the exam had neither a father, a grandfather, or a great grandfather within the system. That is, the candidate is new blood.

These scholars argue that once a family established itself as a local elite, it was difficult to dislodge with new blood. That these elite families had great comparative advantage in getting relatives through the examination system.¹⁵⁷

Or was it social rotation?

While the exams may not have served to bring in new men from outside the wealthy families, they prevented one elite family from consistently dominating official appointments. The exams leveled the playing field, as it were, among those who could afford to step onto the field, rotating officialdom between those families.

¹⁵⁷ For more on comparative advantage, see footnote 103 on page 174.

The Civil Service Exam



Unfortunately, the text in this presentation never stayed on the screen for more than a half second. It was hard to understand. Sometimes the transliteration of the Chinese was shown and sometimes it wasn't. Sometimes the writing wasn't on the screen at all.

Three Formal Degrees

- Local
- Provincial
- National

Bureaucracy

- *tongsheng*: Apprentice Tests: Pre-school apprentice students who study at home

Once they pass the county/town/prefectural exam, they become:

- *shengyuan*: Licentiate:
 1. Exempt from corvee duty
 2. Late Ming and Qing licentiates were sold to raise money
 3. Addressed as Mister and considered scholar-commoners.
 4. No opportunity for official status / not considered local elite, e.g. Fan Jin was a licentiate - no respect

Once they pass the triannual qualifying exam (*keshi*), they become:

- *gongsheng*: Tribute student

Other ways to become *gongsheng* besides passing the exam

1. Purchase the degree
2. Be chosen from the prefecture school
3. Be chosen from school dept county school
4. *Some other ways that were said too quickly*
5. Grace tribute student chosen during imperial celebrations
6. Be chosen for literary talent
7. Imperial academy - privileged group among commoners - but not eligible for government positions - also sold for cash

- *juren* - Elevated man
 1. Eligible for 9th and 8th rank (asst or deputy magistrate, police master - local positions with official status)
 2. Part of the scholar class
 3. This is what Fan Jin became - a *juren*

Once they pass the Triennial Metropolitan exam:

- *huigongshi* - *Tribute Literatus Status*

Once they pass the Palace exam:

- *jinshi* - Literatus
 1. Middle strata, 4th - 5th rank, censor, magistrate
 2. Can be recommended to the emperor
 3. Parent of the People
- Highest level
 1. 1st to 3rd rank: grand secretary, prime minister
 2. Sons and grandsons are eligible for State Student by Inheritance, 2-3 generations

The Scholars

Zhou Jin

This was a guided reading on The Scholars. I found that trying to use the software to highlight the reading was a distraction, so I'm adding my notations here instead of through the software. These are my notes.

It's just after New Years at the temple and people are filing in. Shen Xiangfu berates the monk for not using the money people are donating. Village Head Xia struts in and boasts how everyone has invited him for dinner and how much of a chore it is to attend.

Constable Li is giving a feast at Bailiff Huang's house. The Bailiff is on official business.

Mr. Xun has donated much to the temple and now Xia is leaning on him for more for the lanterns.

Shen's son is Xia's son-in-law. The two were in cahoots to squeeze Xun for money, I think. Now they're asking for a teacher from the county seat. Xia recommends Zhou Jin, a 60-year-old man who hasn't passed the prefectural exam (i.e. not even a licentiate).

He tutors Gu's son and at Gu's graduation from the prefectural exam, Zhou toasts him with music from an opera about a man who passed the exam at eighty (who could be himself) but also about a boy who passed at 17 (who could be Gu's son). Xia, hearing the story, is obviously only concerned about himself, that is, educating Shen's son. No one seems to care about Zhou except how they can use him.

Mei Jiu graduated at the same time as Gu's son. Now that he's a licentiate and the village scholar, he treats Zhou as beneath him, rising slowly when the disheveled Zhou appears at feast which is, in fact, honoring Zhou's appointment as Shen's son's tutor.

(Perhaps I got that wrong. Mei Jiu explained that a licentiate is senior to one who has not passed the exam, regardless of age, but on this day honoring Zhou, he would bow to Zhou. Zhou refused to allow it. Mei Jiu argues to the villagers that he *must* bow to Zhou, and does so. Mei Jiu is showing great respect for his elder and is clearly a humble man, despite his rank.)

The point here is that the Ming exam system imposes a set of social rules that supersede the ancient Confucian rules of respect for elders - such is the power of the exam system in Chinese society.

At the feast, Zhou does not eat, he is fasting because of a vow he made to Buddha over his mother's illness. Mei Jiu made fun of him, telling a verse about a fasting scholar who couldn't succeed in the exams. So again, I am wrong about Mei Jiu, I thought he was respectful, but now he's boasting. He is merely pretending to be respectful.

Shen is embarrassed by the verse, Mei Jiu apologizes rather rudely, and Zhou is embarrassed by the apology, but maintains his fast.

Xia is not at the feast, he is at another feast with Constable Li. Li is wealthy, making 1000 taels a year, but gambles it away. He dreams of catching up in wealth with Huang. Mei, indicates his own visions of wealth and taunts Zhou with his success in the exams.

Zhou begins his teaching all the children and finds that Xun is contributing the most to him. The others contribute so little that he doesn't have enough to eat and is in debt to the monk.

Two months later, a boat comes downstream to the temple and a man disembarks with two servants. The man wears a scholars cap and without introducing himself, merely nodding to Zhou, he enters the school and asks for the monk. The monk treats the man, who is Wang Hui – a provincial scholar, with great respect. Wang assumes the respect without modesty and demands Zhou's name.

Apparently Zhou scored at the top of some test that Mr. Pai, Wang's patron, supervised. Zhou remarks that Wang's own examination essay was brilliant, whereupon Wang tells him that it was written by spirits, green-faced men. Wang has now become respectful of Zhou, urging him to attend to the children. Wang was visiting the graves of his ancestors (ah, a true Confucian!).

A seven-year-old boy was named after the pretender, Mei, who said his name was auspicious. Wang insists that spirits guided his exam as a way to deflect Zhou's praise: he is modest. Now Wang says achievement depends upon study and there is no magic to Mei's name - he is disparaging Mei. It's all about the context.

The meal comes and Wang eats a feast without inviting Zhou to join in. After he's finished, Zhou eats cabbage and tea. I'm not following this, as I thought Wang appreciated Zhou, but I believe the distance between student and provincial scholar is too great to bridge. Wang is overbearing.

Wang tells of a dream where Xun Mei passes the provincial exam at a ridiculous age. The villagers make fun of Mr. Xun (his father) and Zhou is ultimately dismissed, in part because he isn't obsequious before Xia.

Zhou goes with his brother-in-law, Jin, to the provincial capital as part of a merchants guild. The guild bribes the gateman at the examination school so Zhou can see it. Zhou sees the seat for Number One and falls to the floor as he imagines what might have been and hasn't been, for him. When he comes to, he beats his head against the desk, sobbing.

Jin remarks that Zhou has been unlucky. The guild decides to buy him a seat at the provincial exam. Zhou is eternally grateful, calling them his foster parents (there is no greater Confucian honor!). They pay 200 taels for him to take the exam.

Zhou eventually passed the provincials with distinction. Total strangers bowed before him. Shen and Xun paid their respects.

Zhou passed the Metropolitan exam in the capital and rose to the rank of censor and commissioner of education for Guangdong. He swears to read all the papers so no true scholar will be hidden from the light.

Later, at the county exam, he comes upon Fan Jin in a threadbare robe and sees his early self in the struggling man.

Fan Jin

This is a lighter and quicker story than the first one.

Fan Jin is talking to Zhou, telling him he lied about his age - he's 54 not 30 and that he's taken the exam 20 times and that his essays were too poor for him to pass. Zhou questions if that's the case, but reading the latest essay, he sees no clear statement or theme.

Wei Haugu appears, asking for an oral exam on ancient poetry, which is not the focus of the exams. Zhou sees it as superficiality and has him tossed from the building. Zhou relents and reads his essay after the man is gone and decides to pass him.

Now, upon reading Fan Jin's essay, he finds the theme deep within and declares it genius, *this shows how often bad examiners must have suppressed real genius*. He passes him first.

Fan Jin returned home to his mother and wife, who was the daughter of Butcher Hu. Disparaged by Butcher Hu, he finds a way to raise money to take the Provincial exam, passes it, goes a little nuts. The townsfolk ask Hu to slap a little sense in him and Hu refuses, he's so in awe of the 'stars in heaven.'

Prosperous Suzhou

- First thought: Suzhou is absolutely beautiful. If that's what China looks like, I want to go there tomorrow. What a magnificent city. I love the little walking bridge that crosses the river to the hilly island.
- Big boat for 10 guys to be poling or rowing on the river.
- Artwork of things and scenes was good. Of people, not so good, but not so bad given how many there were.
- Seeing the scroll is a great way to understand life in eighteenth century China. You can only learn so much by listening and reading.
- What's striking about the scroll where it shows human figures is the amount of action. One question is whether that's how busy Suzhou was, or if the paintings are an amalgam of many days plus imagination. People carrying wares, climbing masts, carrying all sorts of objects, playing games, crossing bridges. Nearly everyone is in motion.

Thoughts on the image tools:

- Resolution and panning and zooming of the image was excellent.
- Tags did not work for me. Couldn't tag anything.
- Sometimes the annotation cursor wouldn't turn off and then I couldn't pan or zoom.
- The highlighting of scenes is distracting. It would be nice to turn it off when you want to examine a highlighted scene.
- Might be nice to see other students' highlights, or just the students from a study group, or just one other student, if you're having a discussion.
- Because the scroll really needs a full screen, it's hard to anything other than move around the scroll and annotate. I think the software gets fouled up if you have two browsers open in edX. Would be nice if you could have both open and alternate between the image browser and a discussion browser.
- The scenes in the exercise took way too long to paint. The scroll seemed faster to view.

Scene Analysis

Scene 1

Dense population. Lots of occupations: merchants, farmers with pigs in the courtyard, fabric or silk weaving (the long white strip in the courtyard), home construction (dedicated craftsmen, or did everyone know how to lay roofing shingles?).

Scene 2

The crowd on the canal is almost too busy to be real. How does a boat get through it? I can't imagine transit is efficient and cost-effective on a canal like this. I'd like to know if that's an accurate depiction. In this scene there are two-story buildings, which you don't see elsewhere in the scroll, as I recall. So canalfront property was at a premium. Living quarters and restaurants above, storefronts below.

Scene 3

One common thread in this scroll is that it's true to its name. Everyone is prosperous and well-dressed. There are no scenes of desperate struggling peasants. I didn't see any beggars. People are hard at work, that's true, but people are also lounging in cafes and restaurants. I love the paintings of the trees. They're magnificent.

Scene 4

At first glance, this looked like a lock in the canal but I think it's just a bridge. Again, the canal traffic appears too dense for efficiency. On the large boats, there don't seem to be enough people to push them along the canal. I commented on one of the scenes that 10 oarsmen on one of those large boats isn't enough. As with many market cities, any common well-traveled passage, like a bridge, is also a center for commerce.

Scene 5

I'd love to know what all the banners mean. There's a lot of transport of things, wares, on people's backs. No vehicles. No carts. Is there a regulation against it? Why are there no wheeled vehicles, no pack or draw animals on the streets?

Concluding Discussion

What was Wu Jingzi's solution to the social ills that he perceived in eighteenth century China? Do you think Wu Jingzi's position was right?

My thoughts:

There are elements in *The Scholars* where he sees great hope for China. First, his view of people tended to be either black or white. There were many villains and they were venal, nasty men, full of pretension and disregard for others. There were brilliant artists, good men, driven to poverty or to isolation.

He was wrong about people, though he may have been right about society. People's traits are mixed, but a situation that rewards presentation, fawning, manipulation, false modesty, as rigid bureaucracies tend to do will highlight their traits and force people to emphasize the bad in their struggle to survive.

If it was true that the petty bureaucrats ruled China in the middle tiers of government, then it was indeed ripe with corruption and hollow inside. His solution, I believe, was to root out the petty men and replace them with the brilliant and thoughtful and honest men. But I didn't see in what I read exactly how he thought that was going to happen.

Further Discussion

Do you agree with Wu Jingzi's condemnation of Chinese society in the hands of the literati? The civil service examination was supposedly based on a principle of fairness. After this week's module, do you think social life in mid 18th century China was basically fair or unfair? Discuss

My thoughts:

****Consider The Ruling System As Well As The Meritocracy****

Prof. Bol points out that the exam system was used as a model for Korea, Vietnam, and for the British. We didn't live in Wu's time, we couldn't see it, but clearly others who were in power agreed with those of the Chinese government who were in power. With the understanding that those in power are only concerned with the utility of fairness.

When weighing the problems of the exam system, one has to consider the alternatives rather than simply comparing to an ideal. I feel that Wu is making an emotional argument based on the success or failure of characters with sharply contrasting virtue. This is not a balanced argument. He has a point, but it can't be considered in isolation.

So what is the alternative? What's missing from the meritocracy is a mechanism to root out corruption from the top (because you certainly can't root it out from the bottom). Autocracies are poor at rooting out corruption. The British took the civil service exam and applied it within a system of royalty, providing an administration beneath a regal system. I don't know enough British history to know how different this was from the Qing system. I certainly don't know anything about Korea and Vietnam and the systems within which their meritocracy was imposed.

****What's missing is some form of democracy above the meritocracy to promote fairness and root out corruption.**** This provides some rule from the bottom, from the 'people,' which is missing in all these 18th century systems where meritocracy exists primarily to create an effective bureaucracy.

A democracy threatens the magistrates at the top with dismissal, as they would be directly elected, or appointed by directly elected officials and therefore themselves judged by the people. Absent that, the magistrates retain in perpetuity their authority over the exam without oversight.

****There's one flaw in the picture Wu paints that I can't reconcile. The exam was anonymized**** - both the names and the calligraphy of the candidates was concealed. The novel doesn't indicate this at all. It shows the Magistrate considering the essays of candidates while knowing their identities. Considering that the anonymity is an historical fact, I have to question Wu's condemnation of the literati. It may well be true that 18th century Chinese society was unfair, but so was Wu's depiction.

27: High Qing

China Today as a World Power



The *High Qing* refers to that time in the 18th century when imperial China was at a peak, as opposed to the middle of the 19th century, when the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion drew China into decline.

There's talk today of China rising to a position as a superpower, but a look back at history shows that China has always been a dominant power, regionally if not globally, in culture, politics, and economy. The leaders in China today look back on the High Qing as a touchstone for modern political and cultural identity - as a *shengshi*, a prosperous age.



A sign of the prosperity was the demographic boom, from 100 million in 1685 to 410 million in 1850, where it would stay for the remainder of the century, about one-quarter of the world's population. This growth drove the economy, controlling costs of labor and commerce, spurring waves of internal migration to the frontiers, perhaps (my thought) similar to the US exploration of the west.

Land under cultivation doubled from 470 million *mu*¹⁵⁸ in 1685 to 950 million in 1850. New food crops appeared: peanuts, sweet potato, corn, as well as cash crops: cotton, oil seed, sugar, tobacco and, in the 19th century, opium.

The population increase has never been fully explained. Possible reasons include:

Fertility. But it didn't change much and wasn't particularly higher than the rest of the world.

Mortality. Little evidence for decreased mortality.

Inaccurate Recording. Perhaps the answer is that the census of the 17th century was corrected in the 18th century, leading to an apparent boom. People were remarking at the time on the apparent increase in numbers, so it's not fully understood.

No development in the 18th century was more influential than the dramatic rise in the population.

¹⁵⁸ A *mu* is Chinese areal measure. 1 mu = 0.16 acres, 1 acre = 6 mu

Qing Economic Growth

The Eye of the Beholder

Westerners tend to look at China through the lenses of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. [Ranke](#) said China was a land of eternal standstill. Yet visitors to China prior to the 19th century consistently remarked on the industriousness of the people, the vibrancy of the markets and the quality of the goods.

Basis for Chinese Productivity

Recent research indicates that the 18th and 19th century saw an economy that equaled or outstripped Europe, and that the wealthiest Chinese cities, Jiangnan and Beijing, were comparable in their standard of living to London and the Netherlands.

The wealth came from land and commerce. Two-thirds of government revenue prior to 1800 came from the land tax.

Because of the near impossibility of passing the civil service exam, many of the failed aspirants joined the merchant class, which helped create the boom in 18th century commerce.

Taxes

Despite Confucian proscriptions against commerce, the state promoted commerce by keeping taxes low on commercial activity.

Banking and Currency

Banking became more sophisticated, with a third of the money circulating in paper rather than silver. The paper was private money. Transactions were facilitated by family firms, *piaohao*, many of which were in Shanxi.

Contrast with the People's Republic of China

In the Qing, growth was led by private commerce, with the government adopting laissez faire policies, rather than the state-led growth of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Trade

Because different areas of China specialized in different kinds of agriculture, large volumes of grain (particularly rice) were transported domestically. The volume of domestic grain trade transfer was five times that of Europe. Further, Jingdezhen exported a million pieces of porcelain annually. The wealthiest men in China and for that matter, in the world, were these Chinese traders.

Cosmopolitan Life

The world of the wealthy (the 7% who lived in the cities, and the wealthiest among them) would be familiar to us today.

Ever Normal Granaries¹⁵⁹

Grain would be released during famine, at below-market prices, to help families survive drought or floods. This was effective in limiting the damage due to natural events.

Territorial Expansion

Many military campaigns were carried out in the 18th century, each costing between 10 million and 70 million taels of silver, amounts that the empire could afford. What it could not afford was the massive corruption towards the end of that century.

¹⁵⁹ It's an old idea, dating back to the [Han](#) and mentioned in the [Old Testament](#), of the government providing a physical grain buffer to ward against hard times. In more recent history, it was a prominent element of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, with the ever-normal granary promoted by [Mordecai Ezekiel](#).

Three Kings



Parsing Time

In the West, the period might be referred to as the 18th century, but in China, time was denoted by the emperors who ruled between 1662 and 1795 (1799):

- Kangxi, 1662-1722
- Yongzheng, 1722-1735
- Qianlong, 1735-1799

These emperors ruled over a period of unprecedented growth in wealth, population, and territory. They ruled with a continuity we can never experience in democratic countries.

Kangxi 1662-1722

The Man

Perhaps the greatest emperor since Wu of the Han, his reign was the longest in Chinese history to his day. He kept Western missionaries in his court to answer questions about math and astronomy and was interested in cartography and music as well. An aficionado of hunting, he built a resort beyond the Great Wall on the rim of Inner Mongolia.

He was known for expertly navigating between the Confucian literati of the Han Chinese and the martial traditions of the Manchus.

On the Battlefield



In 1689, Kangxi signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk with the Russians, and grew concerned about the Dzungar Mongols who were competing for the support of the Dalai Lama, the leader of the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism. In 1695, he led an army of 100,000 soldiers with an additional 300,000 men in support, through 750 miles of desert in pursuit of Galdan, the leader of the Dzungar Mongols. He defeated Galdan in 1696 at the [Battle of Jao Modo](#).

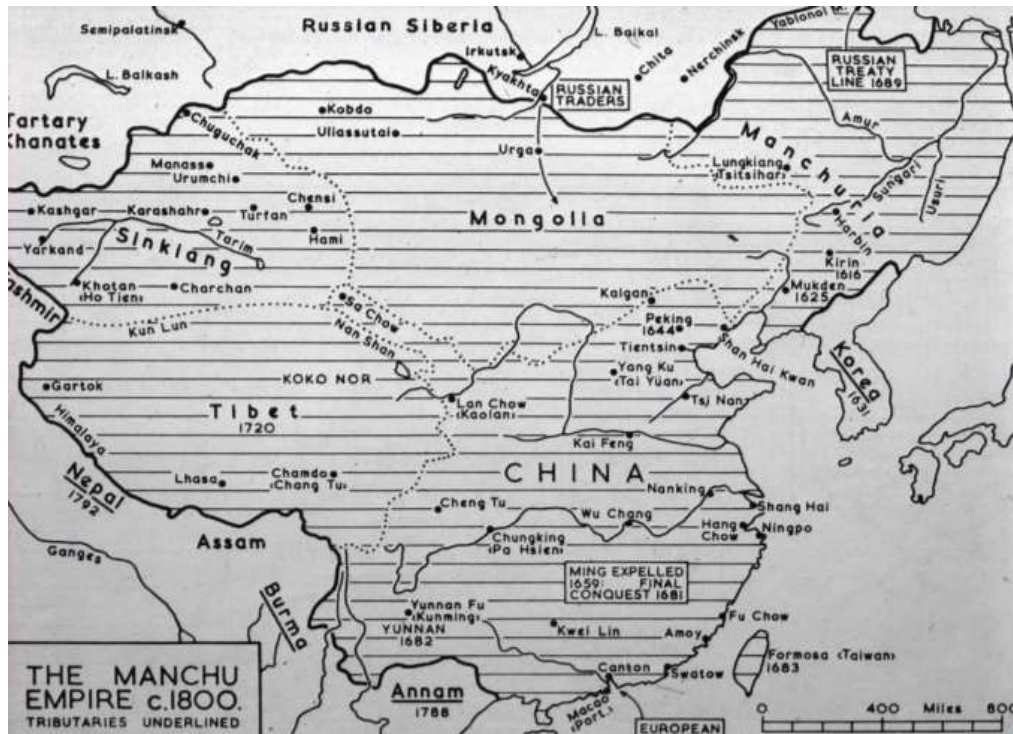
Yongzheng 1722-1735

Kangxi had 55 children, leading eventually to succession disputes. The fourth son ultimately became the next emperor, with some historians arguing that Yongzheng was a usurper, although Prof. Elliot doesn't agree with that characterization.

Even in his own time, Yongzheng felt he had to prove his legitimacy. He labored more than Kangxi over his duties, rising early and staying up late, micro-managing the empire, and overworking himself into an untimely death in his late fifties.

His reputation was mixed and he was often described as vengeful and jealous, but recent research indicates he was an enlightened despot, taking China from financial deficit to surplus in his thirteen-year reign, laying the basis for the Qianlong Emperor.

Qianlong 1735-1799



Qianlong wanted to be known as more generous than Yongzhen, but he also wanted officials to fear him. Yongzhen had done much to stamp out corruption and Qianlong continued those efforts. His reign was a balancing act between generosity and ferocity.

Coming to power at the age of 25, he stepped aside 60 years later to transition power to his son in 1795, though behind the scenes he continued to rule for another 4 years.

A serious ruler, he was up early like his father, eschewing breakfast until he'd completed his morning meetings and devoting his afternoons to poetry, reading, calligraphy and painting. He may have been the most prolific poet in Chinese history, with 44,000 poems in his name, though he likely did not write them all.

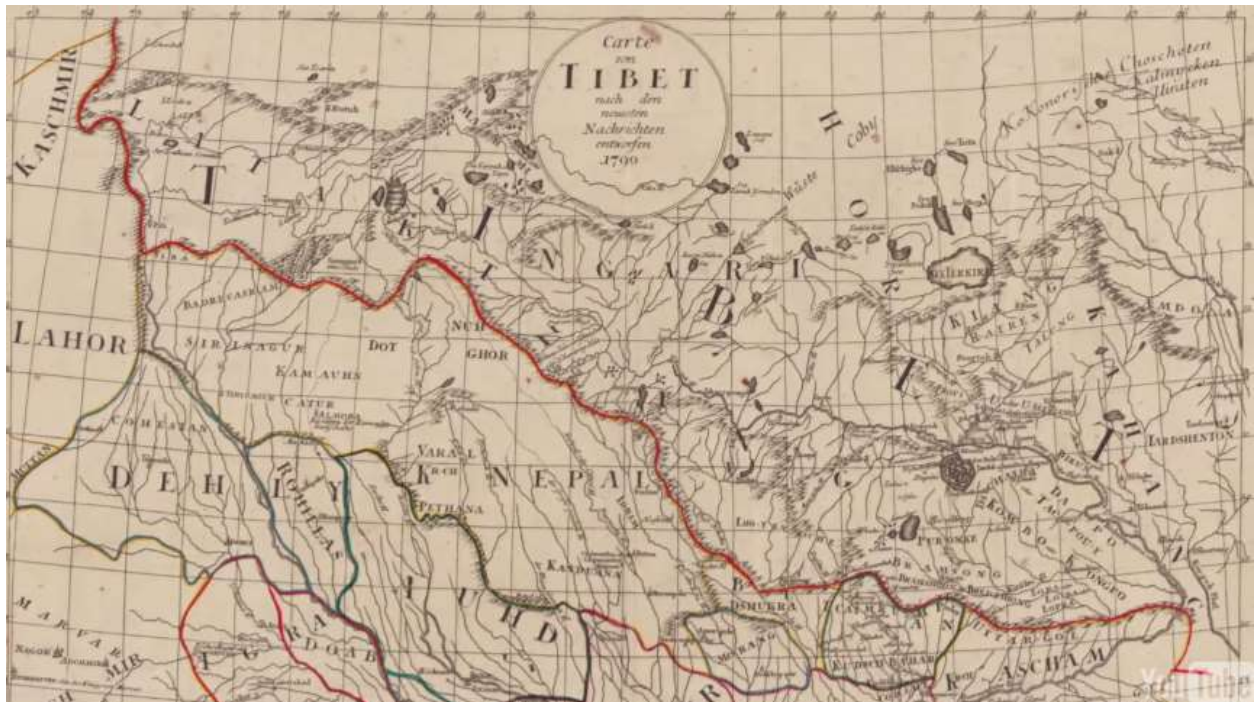
Like Kangxi, he was physically active, hunting, riding and shooting until he was 87. He read and spoke several languages. A student of Tibetan Buddhism, he took many Tantric initiations.

His talents as a polymath made him a universal emperor, one who ruled without favor over all the peoples and all the territories of his empire, making the 18th century truly the Age of Qianlong.

The Qianlong empire included Inner Asia, Manchuria, Mongolia, eastern Turkistan, Tibet, Taiwan, all rolled into a Pax Manjurica, the largest Chinese empire since the Tang, laying the foundation for modern China.

Territorial Expansion Under Qianlong

Old Man of the Ten Great Accomplishments



Qianlong was conscious of burnishing his legacy in the context of the great emperors like Wu and Kublai Khan. Specifically, he wanted to be remembered as the *Old Man of the Ten Great Accomplishments*, which were military deeds occurring in the second half of his reign. These included the suppression of rebellions in Taiwan, Sichuan, Burma, Guizhou, and the final defeat of the Dzungar Mongols, a conflict that began with Kongxi.

Even after Kongxi's defeat of Galdan in 1696, the Dzungars still held western portions of Mongolia along with the Tarim Basin. In 1720, Qianlong pushed the Dzungars out of Lhasa, extending his presence in Tibet through the 18th century.

Galdan Tsereng, the successor to the first Galdan, defeated a large Qing army in 1731 and signed a peace treaty with Qianlong in 1739. Galdan Tsereng died shortly thereafter, forcing a succession battle within the Dzungars that threatened the peace with the Qing. Qianlong's attempt at a diplomatic solution fell apart when two of his principal interlocutors turned on each other. Qianlong sent an army to restore the peace, but the leader of that army turned against Qianlong.

To correct this litany of miscalculations and disloyalty Qianlong sent two large armies, one in 1756 and the second a year later. Many Dzungars were killed, enslaved, or deported. The Dzungar name was disallowed and those formerly of the Dzungars who returned were called Oirats, a people who are still living today in Mongolia and Xinjiang.

Annexing Xinjiang



The victory over the Dzungars led the Qing into new and unfamiliar territory south of the Tianshan mountains, an area called Altashahr: the Tarim Basin and the Silk Road cities that encircle the Taklamakan Desert. Xinjiang today is obviously important, but in the late 18th century, few Han Chinese officials wanted to spend resources fighting for this territory.



In 1864, Yaqub Beg led a rebellion and created Kashgaria, an independent khanate near Turpan in Muslim inner Asia, that lasted 13 years. It was recognized by the British and by the Ottoman Empire. The Qianlong court could not decide whether to retake the territory or invest resources in the maritime frontier, which in the 1870s was becoming a problem.

Eventually, the court opted to send an army led by Zuo Zongtang, who in 1884 recaptured the territory and integrated it into China as the Xinjiang province.

Inner Asian Empire and the Unity of China

The conquests of the 1750's, of Dzungaria and Kashgaria, completed the expansion of the Qing empire and the unification of *tianxia*.¹⁶⁰

How was this expansion possible?

Timing. The Russian empire was pushing east while the Qing pushed west, closing the steppe and crushing the burgeoning Mongolian state between them.

Organization. Maintaining logistics for large armies over supply lines that stretched hundreds of miles across hostile terrain was a significant accomplishment deserving of some acclaim.

Local Knowledge. While the areas south of Tianshan were unfamiliar, Tibet and Mongolia was a world the Manchus knew. They could negotiate with Mongolian princes and Tibetan Lamas in a way the Ming could not.

Pragmatism. The Qing did not attempt to control all aspects of the local bureaucracy, leaving day-to-day administration in local hands. They governed lightly.

Portrayal of the Expansion



The extension to the west emerged from a general Manchu policy toward the northern frontiers, rather than a deliberate policy to expand the empire. Nevertheless, Qianlong conducted a massive public relations campaign after the consolidation of Dzungaria and especially after Kashgaria. He wore battle dress for portraits to imply that he personally led the military campaigns, though he was not militarily active like his grandfather Kangxi. He met representatives from Inner Asia in his hunting retreat instead of Beijing, and dine them on roast lamb in his tent while wrestlers competed outside. He portrayed himself as a true Manchu, a Manchu in body¹⁶¹ and portrayed his state the same way.

He had maps drawn and stele erected to mark battlegrounds. He ordered portraits of the brave and copper-plate engravings of the battles.

¹⁶⁰ From Wikipedia: [tianxia](#) literally translates as *under heaven*. In [ancient China](#), *tianxia* denoted the lands, space, and area divinely appointed to the Emperor.

¹⁶¹ See page 230 for what it takes to be a true Manchu.

Meaning of the Expansion



How was it seen worldwide, this incorporation of the Xinjiang province and the greater control of Tibet? The territories are today a major part of the People's Republic of China. How is that reflected in the politics of today's China?

These territories were naturalized under the Republic of China as well as the People's Republic of China and reflect a continuing problem of governance for the PRC. If not for the imperial expansion in the 16th and 17th centuries, China would be half the size it is today.

It's misleading, at the least, to say that China is the last continuous empire dating back to antiquity. It is, in fact, a successor to the vast hybrid state of the Qing, combining peoples of many backgrounds, languages, religions, and traditions - an empire of conquest comparable to the Ottoman and Romanov empires.

The Qing wasn't just another reign in a long line of Chinese dynasties, inheriting and preserving the land and traditions of Confucian times. Not at all. They wore the robes of Confucius in Beijing and the battledress of the Manchu warriors on the frontiers.

As [Benedict Anderson explains](#), it's difficult to "stretch the short, tight skin of the nation over the vast body of the empire."

The Macartney Mission



When Lord George Macartney arrived in China in June of 1793, Qianlong was 82 years old, having seen most of everything, but never having seen an Englishman. For his part, Macartney had been charged with negotiating a commercial treaty and establishing a permanent British embassy in Beijing. He failed in that attempt, though his visit was a landmark in Sino-European relations.

Protocol

They came to Canton in three ships, with eighty-four people, including artists and doctors, bringing exquisite gifts to celebrate Qianlong's birthday. They trekked out past the Great Wall to Qianlong's summer palace in Chengde, along the way receiving instructions in how to kowtow¹⁶².

Qianlong knew what he did and did not rule. He recognized the Empress of Russia as a political equal and the Dalai Lama as a spiritual equal. He knew of the [French Revolution](#) that was taking place in the same year. So Lord Macartney was permitted to kneel, rather than to kowtow, before the emperor.

Negotiation Spurned

After the exchange of protocol, which the British thought they'd won, Macartney wanted to negotiate, but from the Qing perspective, the visit was over and despite Macartney's repeated attempts to get a productive audience beyond the offering of gifts, the mission failed.

Qianlong wrote a famous response to George III, stating in particular that he had no need for British goods.

"As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious and have no use for your country's manufactures."

Perhaps bringing Wedgwood to the land of porcelain was a mistake.

At the time, the letter from Qianlong was seen as the proper response of an emperor, but a hundred years later it was construed as quintessential Chinese arrogance. In 1920, Bertrand Russell wrote a book titled [The Problem of China](#), in which he said that

... no one understands China until this document [Qianlong's response] has ceased to seem absurd. The Romans claimed to rule the world, and what lay outside their Empire was to them of no account. The Empire of Chien Lung was more extensive, with probably a larger population; it had risen to greatness at the same time as Rome, and had not fallen, but invariably defeated all its enemies, either by war or by absorption. Its neighbours were comparatively barbarous, except the Japanese, who acquired their civilization by slavish imitation of China. The view of Chien Lung was no more absurd than that of Alexander the Great, sighing for new worlds to conquer when he had never even heard of China, where Confucius had been dead already for a hundred and fifty years. Nor was he mistaken as regards trade: China produces everything needed for the happiness of its inhabitants, and we have forced trade upon them solely for our benefit, giving them in exchange only things which they would do better without.

¹⁶² See footnote 113 on page 194.

The Qianlong Twilight

Macartney's Diary

During his stay, Lord Macartney kept a diary of his travels, and one of the artists in his entourage later published a book of paintings that was sold across Europe. [Macartney wrote that](#):

The Empire of China is an old, crazy, first-rate Man of War, which a fortunate succession of able and vigilant officers have contrived to keep afloat for these hundred and fifty years past, and to overawe their neighbours merely by her bulk and appearance. But whenever an insufficient man happens to have the command on deck, adieu to the discipline and safety of the ship. She may, perhaps, not sink outright; she may drift some time as a wreck, and will then be dashed to pieces on the shore; but she can never be rebuilt on the old bottom.

His comments were prescient, a different take on the *shengshi*, the prosperous age of the High Qing.

Rebellion

The troubles originated in the same population boom that founded the Qing success.

- Jobs were scarce.
- Success was nearly impossible in the tightly restricted (and, according to *The Scholars*, corrupt) examination system.
- The bureaucracy failed to appoint sufficient administrators even as the population doubled and tripled.
- Taxes fell behind.
- The legal system stagnated.
- The granary system fell apart.

Looking for support in a system that was failing to provide it, they turned to their extended families and to religion, especially in the frontiers. These groups came in conflict with the government, particularly the White Lotus sect of Buddhism. Rebellions became common in the late 18th and through the 19th centuries, requiring considerable resources to suppress them.

The Taiping Rebellion of 1850-1864, the largest civil war in human history, began in Guangxi, in the south, eventually wracking all of southern China, nearly taking down the dynasty.

Corruption in the Qianlong

Officials were never paid much and some skimming was built into the system. Yongzhen brought the empire's finances under control with his strict policies that controlled graft, but this discipline was lost by the 1780s, with fraud and embezzlement common toward the end of the Qianlong reign.

Niohuru Hesen (1746-1799)

Known as the most corrupt official in Chinese history, Hesen was a young Manchu who received lavish attention from the Emperor, promoted beyond men senior to him, causing controversy and distrust. His son married one of the emperor's daughters, further establishing the trust and deepening the corruption. With many people beholden to Hesen, he continued to work the system to his advantage.

Within five days of Qianlong's death in 1799, the Jiaqing emperor arrested Hesen, who hanged himself a month later. When they examined Hesen's estate, they found his wealth exceeded the emperor's:

- 800 million ounces of silver, one half of the annual income of the state
- 5.8 million ounces of gold
- Almost 5000 gold bowls and dishes and 119 gold wash basins
- 600 silver pots

Campaigns against corruption

The Jiaqing emperor began campaigns against corruption that were largely unsuccessful. Even today, the campaigns against corruption led by Xi Jinping in the People's Republic of China make reference to Hesen as a cautionary tale.

Because Jiaqing failed to destroy the vast network of patronage that Hesen had put in place, there was no great rejuvenation of the dynasty after Qianlong died. This weakening of the center of the reign, which began at the end of the 18th century, left the country ill equipped to deal with the British in the 19th century when they came to the sleepy fishing village of Hong Kong, not with birthday gifts, but with warships.

Discussion

The Question

Following Lord Macartney's embassy to the court of the Qianlong emperor in 1793, Qianlong wrote two letters to King George III. In these letters – or “edicts” – the Qing emperor explained his reasons for declining the British government's offer of a commercial treaty between the two empires.

AN EDICT FROM THE QIANLONG EMPEROR TO KING GEORGE III OF ENGLAND

[September 1793, on the Occasion of Lord Macartney's Mission to China]

You, O King, live beyond the confines of many seas, nevertheless, impelled by your humble desire to partake of the benefits of our civilisation, you have dispatched a mission respectfully bearing your memorial. Your Envoy has crossed the seas and paid his respects at my Court on the anniversary of my birthday. To show your devotion, you have also sent offerings of your country's produce.

I have perused your memorial: the earnest terms in which it is couched reveal a respectful humility on your part, which is highly praiseworthy. In consideration of the fact that your Ambassador and his deputy have come a long way with your memorial and tribute, I have shown them high favour and have allowed them to be introduced into my presence. To manifest my indulgence, I have entertained them at a banquet and made them numerous gifts. I have also caused presents to be forwarded to the Naval Commander and six hundred of his officers and men, although they did not come to Peking, so that they too may share in my all-embracing kindness.

As to your entreaty to send one of your nationals to be accredited to my Celestial Court and to be in control of your country's trade with China, this request is contrary to all usage of my dynasty and cannot possibly be entertained. It is true that Europeans, in the service of the dynasty, have been permitted to live at Peking, but they are compelled to adopt Chinese dress, they are strictly confined to their own precincts and are never permitted to return home. You are presumably familiar with our dynastic regulations. Your proposed Envoy to my Court could not be placed in a position similar to that of European officials in Peking who are forbidden to leave China, nor could he, on the other hand, be allowed liberty of movement and the privilege of corresponding with his own country; so that you would gain nothing by his residence in our midst.

Moreover, our Celestial dynasty possesses vast territories, and tribute missions from the dependencies are provided for by the Department for Tributary States, which ministers to their wants and exercises strict control over their movements. It would be quite impossible to leave them to their own devices. Supposing that your Envoy should come to our Court, his language and national dress differ from that of our people, and there would be no place in which to bestow him. It may be suggested that he might imitate the Europeans permanently resident in Peking and adopt the dress and customs of China, but, it has never been our dynasty's wish to force people to do things unseemly and inconvenient. Besides, supposing I sent an Ambassador to reside in your country, how could you possibly make for him the requisite arrangements? Europe consists of many other nations besides your own: if each and all demanded to be represented at our Court, how could we possibly consent? The thing is utterly impracticable. How can our dynasty alter its whole procedure and system of etiquette, established for more than a century, in order to meet your individual views? If it be said that your object is to exercise control over your country's trade, your nationals have had full liberty to trade at Canton for many a year, and have received the greatest consideration at our hands. Missions have been sent by Portugal and Italy, preferring similar requests. The Throne appreciated their sincerity and loaded them with favours, besides authorising measures to facilitate their trade with China. You are no doubt aware that, when my Canton merchant, Wu Chaoping, was in debt to the foreign ships, I made the Viceroy advance the monies due, out of the provincial treasury, and ordered him to punish the culprit severely. Why then should foreign nations advance this utterly unreasonable request to be represented at my Court? Peking is nearly 10,000 li from Canton, and at such a distance what possible control could any British representative exercise?

If you assert that your reverence for Our Celestial dynasty fills you with a desire to acquire our civilisation, our ceremonies and code of laws differ so completely from your own that, even if your Envoy were able to acquire the rudiments of our civilisation, you could not possibly transplant our manners and customs to your alien soil. Therefore, however adept the Envoy might become, nothing would be gained thereby.

Swaying the wide world, I have but one aim in view, namely, to maintain a perfect governance and to fulfil the duties of the State: strange and costly objects do not interest me. If I have commanded that the tribute offerings sent by you, O King, are to be accepted, this was solely in consideration for the spirit which prompted you to dispatch them from afar. Our dynasty's majestic virtue has penetrated unto every country

under Heaven, and Kings of all nations have offered their costly tribute by land and sea. As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country's manufactures. This then is my answer to your request to appoint a representative at my Court, a request contrary to our dynastic usage, which would only result in inconvenience to yourself. I have expounded my wishes in detail and have commanded your tribute Envoys to leave in peace on their homeward journey. It behoves you, O King, to respect my sentiments and to display even greater devotion and loyalty in future, so that, by perpetual submission to our Throne, you may secure peace and prosperity for your country hereafter. Besides making gifts (of which I enclose an inventory) to each member of your Mission, I confer upon you, O King, valuable presents in excess of the number usually bestowed on such occasions, including silks and curios-a list of which is likewise enclosed. Do you reverently receive them and take note of my tender goodwill towards you! A special mandate.

(in E. Backhouse and J. O. P. Bland, Annals & memoirs of the court of Peking (from the 16th to the 20th century). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914. 322-325. <http://hollis.harvard.edu/?itemid=/library/m/aleph/001512019>)

In the early years of the twentieth century, this letter was seized upon as an example of outrageous Chinese arrogance and inability to adjust to the modern world. Then, in 1920, British philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote of Qianlong's letter, "No one understands China until this document has ceased to seem ridiculous. "

Does Qianlong's letter seem ridiculous to you? Why? Or why not?

My thoughts

****We don't need your customs, we've got enough of our own****

Qianlong is managing his relations with other Europeans. They must adhere to the Manchu style of dress. Since foreigners can never assimilate entirely, they must stay within their own compounds, they cannot correspond with their home country. Once in the dynasty, they may not leave. *They may not disrupt the self-contained world of China.*

Why the restrictions? While Qianlong is not unaware of the wide world, it is not a wider world, not for him. Qianlong runs a superpower. His one concern - his only concern - is the proper management of that vast Chinese empire. He's having enough trouble stretching a tight skin over it. **He's not about to denigrate his Court and threaten the solidarity of his nation with more foreign customs, especially those of nations that don't owe fealty to China.**

And of the goods they offer: Qianlong disdains these trinkets for natives offered by patronizing missions. China is an advanced and cultured state with more to offer the world than the world has to offer China.

(That's not to say that trade in a broadly diverse world doesn't benefit all parties - it most surely does - but Qianlong is already seeing the dangers of the internet, that is, of showing the possibilities of different customs and freedoms to his people and the instability that would ensue and he juxtaposes that against the benefits of trade. His empire is already a melting pot of many cultures that he's trying to shoehorn into the Manchu Way. The last thing he wants is to introduce even more variation.)

So, Qianlong says, take a few trinkets from us and go away.

Final Assessment Discussion

(Although I've added my thoughts here, reading the discussion posts it's glaringly obvious how little I know of modern China. I was only able to answer the question based on what we learned in the class so far. I have to wait for the next set of modules to learn enough to begin to engage the other participants in these kinds of questions.)

The question

Some historians have made the claim that the foundations for modern China were laid in the Qing period, particularly in the eighteenth century. Can you make the same or a similar argument, based on what you have learned in this mini-course? Do you agree?

My thoughts:

What I've learned so far...

Clearly, the territory of Modern China was laid in the Qing, but the foundation was laid with many bricks:

- Ancestor worship, a practice that may have begun in pre-historic periods, set the stage for the earliest dynasties and the concepts of tian and tianxia.
- The Zhou dynasty brought the concept of tianming.
- The Warring States period brought Confucius, who created the moral foundation for the elevation of scholars in society and into government. Many other great philosophies grew from this period as well.
- The Qin unified China.
- The Han ultimately defeated the feudal structure and extended the bureaucracy throughout unified China.
- Successive Chinese dynasties, the Neo-Confucians, Wang Anshi and Sima Guang all combined in different ways to create the civil service exam, promote education and lessen the power of the great clans, instituting enduring changes in Chinese bureaucracy from the inside out, structurally and philosophically.
- The conquest dynasties, particularly the Qing, extended the territory and cemented the unity of China, but not until a strong foundation of Chinese culture and administration created the means for them to do so.

The Qing could not have succeeded without the foundation laid by thousands of years of Chinese culture and philosophy.

...and yet, how little I know

Reading through the answers from other posters, I can see how they reference much of modern Chinese history that I haven't yet learned. I barely know the terminology.

I'm glad we've established a good foundation in the first six parts of the course. But to stop now, without learning what follows would leave me ignorant of all the important recent changes in Chinese history