

Week 23: The Qing Vision of Empire

Historical Overview

In the 1630s, a peasant rebellion led by an aggrieved former functionary in the Ming postal system, Li Zicheng, spread throughout central China. By the early 1640s, having drawn the support of many thousands of ordinary people dissatisfied with life under the Ming, Li's rebel army began to move towards Beijing.

Meanwhile in northeast China, the Manchus, descendants of the Jurchens-- the semi-nomadic people who founded the Jin dynasty in the 12th century-- were building their own state to rival the Ming. Their leader, a man named Nurhaci, united the tribal groups of the region, developed strong alliances with the eastern Mongols, and began raiding deep into Ming territory.

By the late 1620s Ming control over northeast China had collapsed and organizational innovations undertaken by Nurhaci's son and successor, Hong Taiji, significantly strengthened the new state. The military conquest of Korea in the early 1630s brought strategic security and greater prestige. And in 1636, Hong Taiji gave the Manchu state a new name, Great Qing, or da qing.

In April 1644, Li Zicheng's rebel army conquered Beijing and occupied the capital. The Ming emperor hanged himself while the remnants of the court fled to the south. A month later, the Ming general Wu Sangui opened the gates of the Great Wall at Shanhai Pass and struck an alliance with the Manchus against Li Zicheng. The two armies met at a great battle east of Beijing, with Qing forces sweeping Li from the field.

On June the 4th, the Manchus marched into Beijing and declared themselves the new masters of the empire. The Qing conquest did not end with the Battle of Beijing. It was a drawn out and bloody affair that lasted many years. Though most parts of the country surrendered without a fight, in the face of local Chinese resistance, such as that mounted in Yangzhou or Jiading, the Manchus did not hesitate to slaughter entire cities.

Section 1: Patterns of Alien Rule

1. Conquest Dynasties - 1

My name is Mark Elliott, and together with Peter Bol and Bill Kirby, I'm one of several historians at Harvard who specialize in the history of China. My main interest is China and inner Asia and in particular the history of the Qing dynasty, the last imperial dynasty before the founding of the modern Republic of China.

As part of this course, Professors Bol and Kirby have asked me to present a few lectures on the history of the Qing, of which this is the first. For this lecture, I'll focus on the Manchus and the Qing vision of empire in the very first years of the establishment of the Manchu state. Here I want to ask who were the Qing founders, the Manchus, and what was their vision of empire?

What did they have in mind when they undertook to develop the political and military structures necessary for the conquest of China? But before I describe the rise of Manchu power in China, I want first to provide a larger historical context for thinking about the Qing by laying out some of the features of a particular imperial type, what is sometimes called the Conquest dynasty.

You may recall Professor Bol discussing the Salt and Iron Debates of the Han era. In those discussions, when the Lord Grand Secretary was asked why state monopolies were necessary, he responded by saying that the money from those monopolies was required to supply the army and defend the border in the north against the barbarian.

I bring this up to emphasize that from the beginning of the imperial state, one of the great challenges facing China has been managing relations with the peoples on its northern frontiers. In this respect, China shared similarities with other ancient empires such as Rome and Persia where relations with the so-called barbarian other were frequently a major problem in what we call international relations.

The frontier in the Chinese case that mattered the most, I would argue, in terms of state formation, in terms of political problems was the northern frontier, the Inner Asian frontier. Now Inner Asia is a term that I will use to refer to the lands that link China to the rest of the Eurasian continent beyond its northern and western frontiers.

This includes Manchuria to the northeast, what is today Northeast China, Mongolia to the north and northwest of the Great Wall, Eastern Turkistan or what is modern Xinjiang, the northern part of modern Xinjiang, and the different Tibetan regions in Amdo or modern Qinghai province, Kham, or Western Sichuan province, and the central part of Tibet, the Tibetan autonomous region today.

The ethnic makeup of these areas, their religious, linguistic, and cultural structures, and their economic, social, and political practices were all very different from those of China as well as from each other. And these differences plus the powerful cavalry forces of the nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples who lived in those frontiers were often seen as threatening to the Chinese way of life.

As Inner Asians became more deeply involved in the Chinese world over time, these relations in turn grew more complex and more important to our understanding of what we think of as Chinese history. This is most obvious with the successive emergence in the 10th to 13th centuries of three different dynasties, the Liao, the Jin, and the Yuan, which were all founded by non-Chinese peoples whose power spread ever further across what we typically think of as Chinese territory.

As you will remember from previous lectures, these states were multi-ethnic states founded and controlled by ruling families that were not Chinese but which exercised dominion over people who were Chinese or who thought of themselves as Chinese. And they controlled territory that, again, we think of as China today all while continuing to maintain or trying to maintain their own distinct ethnic identity.

Together, these so-called Conquest dynasties had a great impact on Chinese political consciousness, on Chinese governing institutions, and on food, dress, language, music, art, and so on. What I want to suggest here is that we can think of the Qing, the Manchu dynasty in this same context as another one of the Conquest dynasties, another one of the alien regimes that ruled all or part of China for about 800 of the last 1,100 years.

2. Conquest Dynasties - 2

In thinking about the Conquest dynasties, we can start by asking apart from their shared origins in Inner Asia, what do these non-Han regimes have in common. The most basic similarity is the fact of minority rule. Whether it's the Khitans in the Liao, the Jurchens in the Jin, the Mongols in the Yuan or the Manchus in the Qing, all of these people were very, very few in number compared to the majority Han Chinese populations that they ruled over. And since maintaining permanent military control was impractical-- it was too expensive, they didn't have enough manpower for that kind of thing-- all of these regimes had to develop civilian forms of government. And for this, they had to recruit the help of Chinese literati.

Now, not everyone among the Chinese was willing to accept the idea that the non-Han had a right to hold the Mandate of Heaven. So to overcome this resistance and to gain political legitimacy, non-Han rulers in the different Conquest dynasties all had to make some compromises as to how they governed. That is to say, they had to share power with the Han elite.

Such compromises ran directly counter to the natural inclination of many of the conquest elites themselves, who felt that they had to hold on as tightly as possible to military and political power in order to maintain group solidarity. So this created a natural tension in all of the Conquest dynasties. And in their responses to these common challenges, we can identify structural similarities across them that point broadly to a greater tolerance for variation and heterogeneity in the alien regimes.

I'll mention four areas where we can see some commonality in these responses. These areas are martiality, polyethnicity, multilinguality, and what I call administrative promiscuity. Very briefly, martiality simply refers to the fact that all of these regimes began as what we'll call war machines. They were highly militarized and mobile societies that prized the virtues that we typically associate with warfare, and they were geared for making war pretty much full time. By polyethnicity, I refer to the fact that under the Conquest dynasties, it was a given that the population of the state consisted of a lot of different kinds of people, not just people who thought of themselves or were regarded by others as Chinese, but lots of other kinds of people as well. So there were multiple options for how people might go about identifying themselves.

This connects directly to the next aspect of the Conquest dynasties, multilinguality. Under all of these regimes, there were a number of different languages that were in common use very frequently, both at official levels as well as at popular levels. The government kept large numbers of interpreters and translators on hand to carry out its business. And non-Chinese scripts were often on display, carved on stele or on the money, reminding people that it was a non-Chinese elite that was in political control. So for this reason, actually, sometimes the Conquest dynasties are also referred to as the translation dynasties.

And finally, the fourth aspect that I want to draw your attention to is administrative promiscuity. And all I really mean here is the willingness of the governing body to adopt differentiated legal systems for different groups of people and different regions. This flexibility was reflected, for example, in the maintenance of several capitals simultaneously, with the court rotating seasonally between each of these capitals, a northern capital, southern capitals, western capital, and so on. This was a legacy of their nomadic heritage. And we will come back to these four qualities of martiality, polyethnicity, multilinguality, and administrative promiscuity a little later on in our discussion.

Section 2: The Rise of the Manchus

1. Who Were the Manchus

The Manchus then, the founders of the Qing dynasty were the last in the long line of Inner Asian peoples who took over, and ruled in Chinese lands. We can think of them as the successors of the Khitans, the Jurchens, and the Mongols. In fact, they were quite likely descended directly from the Jurchens, who founded the Jin.

Now, we can think of them this way-- not only because they share many of the characteristics of the Conquest dynasties, as I've already suggested-- but also because the Manchus themselves thought that they were the successors of the Liao, the Jin, and the Yuan. And they indicated as much in the very early records we have, from the early years of the 17th century-- when they began to organize.

Now they ruled longer than any of those people, and more successfully, I would argue. The empire that they created led directly to the birth of modern China. So for these reasons, the Manchus merit our special

interest, and special attention. The first question that arises, then, is who were they, and where did they come from?

Well, there are various ways to approach an answer to these questions. We could say that the Manchus originally came from the region between Siberia, Mongolia, China, and Korea-- what's today Northeast China. We can say that they descended from the Jurchens, the same people who founded the Jin, and who returned to their homeland-- some of them, anyway-- after the fall of the Jin in the early 1200s.

We can say that the Manchus were ethnically not Han, but a Tungusic people. And that they spoke a language that was very different from Chinese-- the Manchu language is related to Mongolian, and Turkish, much more than it's related to-- well, it's not related to Chinese at all. We can say that they practiced a Shamanic religion-- again, a kind of religion unknown among Han Chinese.

And we should also point out that they were not nomads. They had a simple economy, they lived in villages, they practiced agriculture, they did engage in hunting, and some pastoralism but they had a lifestyle that was quite different, in fact from the Mongols, or from the Khitans, who were more in the type of pastoral nomads. Now, after the fall of the Jin, and the fall of the Yuan, the Jurchens who lived in this region came under the rule of the Ming in the late 14th century. They remained in their tribal groupings, for the most part, living, as I say, in small villages.

The region-- this region of the Ming was under military administration for most of the Ming dynasty. The different Jurchen groups would send embassies regularly to Beijing to offer local products in tribute to the Ming emperor. And in exchange, they would receive patents of nobility that would be conferred upon them by the emperor, in exchange for their continued loyalty to the Ming throne. There were a few Chinese officials-- military officials in supervisory positions-- in different places around the Northeast, around Manchuria at this time.

Their main job was to ensure that rivalries between the different tribal groups did not entirely fade away. They didn't want them to get too out of hand, of course, but they also wanted to make sure that the tribes did not join up together to threaten the Ming. And this system worked relatively well for about 200 years or so, until the late 1500s, when it began to break down. And as we will see, the Jurchens succeeded in uniting once again.

2. Origin Stories

So that's one story that we can tell about the Manchus and their origins. But it's also worth presenting a different story, the story that the Manchus themselves told about who they were and where they were from. According to this story, the Manchus-- and specifically here, I'm referring to the clan that would eventually become the ruling family of the Qing dynasty-- the Manchus traced their origins back a few hundred years to an ancestor by the name of Bukuri Yongson, who was born in the Changbai Mountains, the ever-white, snow-covered peaks that separate today China from Korea.

Now this Bukuri Yongson was no ordinary child. His mother was a heavenly maiden. Her name was Fekulen. She'd come down from heaven to bathe in a lake in the Changbai Mountains with her sisters. And when she got out of the lake to get dressed again, she noticed that atop her clothes was a small red fruit, beautiful, magical, red fruit. And she picked up this fruit, and she didn't want to put it on the ground for fear that it would get dirty.

So she placed it in her mouth just to hold it there while she put her clothing back on. And once she did that, the fruit of its own accord jumped down her throat, landed in her stomach, and immediately she became pregnant. Her sisters left her behind. And very soon afterwards, she gave birth to a son, none other than Bukuri Yongson.

He was possessed of supernatural powers. He could speak, for example, as soon as he was born. And he could understand human speech as well. She took him to the edge of a stream, put him in a little boat, and explained to him that he had been born on this earth to bring peace to a group of people who lived in a little village just a few days' float down the stream.

And she pushed him off and told him that he could land there, people there would take care of him. And at that point, she returned to Heaven, and she pretty much drops out of our picture. So Bukuri Yongson floats in his boat down the stream for a few days until he gets to a village called Odoli. The boat pulls up against the side of the river. And the people there who had gone to draw water found him there.

And they were, of course, amazed at the fact, first of all, that there was a small child alone in a boat and that this very small child could talk and that he had this mission, which was to bring peace to them. And they, in fact, were experiencing a great deal of unrest and discord in this village. So they made a little chair for him out of willow reeds and carried him back to the village where they presented him to all the people, and he was proclaimed their prince.

Now Bukuri Yongson and his descendants ruled peacefully for a long time, until they became arrogant and violent too, just like the people that they had originally replaced. And this eventually led to a rebellion against their leadership in which all the members of the clan were killed. All the members except for one, a young boy named Fanca.

Fanca managed to escape from the village. The soldiers were chasing him. He was out in the middle of a field. The soldiers were looking around for him. And he had nowhere to hide. So he stood stock still, and a magpie, which is the Manchus' totem bird-- a magpie landed on his head.

The soldiers spotted him, but thought, well, there's a bird on his head. It couldn't be a person. It must be a withered tree. And they turned away and left him. And he was able to run away, and his life was spared.

He later became the ancestor of the founders of the Qing dynasty. So that is the story that the Manchus told of who they were and where they had come from.

3. What's In A Myth?

An origin myth of the sort I just described is, of course, one of many things that goes into making up group identity. What does this story tell us about the Manchus? Well, we get the idea of an ancestor with supernatural capabilities, born to a goddess, able to bring peace to a group of people in trouble. We get a sense of geographical origin-- in this case, placed high up in the Changbai Mountains, a place that's now a UNESCO reserve.

In fact, this place became so important to the dynasty that after the Qing was founded, the emperor sent a group of men up to map the whole place and chart it. He wrote poems about it. Sacrifices were performed to the mountain. And later in the Qing, many Manchus continued to identify themselves as "old man of the Changbai" or something like that, even though they might never have been anywhere near these mountains. So this myth continued to serve for a long time as an important marker of Manchu identity.

I'm calling it a myth, but in fact it's not entirely without its historical background. We do have a record of a Jurchen tribesman named Fanca from around the year 1412 who led his people away from the Changbai Mountains, away from the Korean border, a little bit to the west, to settle at a place called Hetu Ala, where we know that later on the Qing began its development.

These sources also indicate that among Fanca's later descendants were indeed the immediate ancestors of the Qing founder, Nurhaci. The place where Fanca eventually settled was within the lands that the Ming

governed, this military region in the Northeast. And it was a place called Jianzhou, and the people who live there came to be known as the Jianzhou Jurchens. There were different branches of the Jianzhou Jurchens, three different branches. There were rivalries between them, as we might expect. Fanca pledged his loyalty to the Ming emperor. He was confirmed as the leader of the left branch of the Jianzhou, and his descendants inherited this position for more than a century.

In the mid-1500s, violence erupted between the different Jianzhou groups, and in 1574, Ming forces were compelled to intervene to try and settle this conflict. And in doing so, they supported the claims of this left Jianzhou branch, at that time led by two men, Giocangga and his son, Taksi, who brought temporary peace and were confirmed in their positions as the preeminent Jurchen leaders with Ming backing.

But just a few years later in 1582, while working together with Ming forces against another Jianzhou group, Giocangga and Taksi were killed in action by their Ming allies. The Ming claimed that this was an accident. Other people had different opinions about it. The result was that it gave an opening to the enemies of the left Jianzhou to assert their supremacy, and it put the son of Taksi in a very weak position.

But within a couple of decades, this son of Taksi had emerged from the crisis as the strongest figure in the entire region. And all the different Jurchen groups, and even some Mongols, had begun to coalesce under him into a single military and political entity. The name of that son was Nurhaci, the supreme ancestor of the Manchu imperial line and the founder of the Qing dynasty.

4. The Career of Nurhaci

When he succeeded to become head of the Jianzhou Left Branch in 1583, Nurhaci was just 24 years old. The death of his father, his grandfather, and other senior clansmen put him at a serious disadvantage and meant it was unlikely he would ever really be able to reclaim his inheritance. But his leadership and charisma allowed him to turn adversity to his benefit and launch a truly remarkable career.

According to the story, he began with just eight suits of armor. But within five years, he was strong enough and rich enough that he was able to build his own small walled city-- walled with earth and wood, not with stone, but still a walled city. Warfare against rival clans and other tribes occupied Nurhaci for most of the next 20 years-- in fact, most of the rest of his life. This involved making alliances, taking lives, giving daughters away, winning engagements against his enemies, and trading in material resources, such as ginseng, for which the northeast was particularly famous and which allowed him to expand his economic base.

By the 1590s, he had about 15,000 men under his command, and he was able to take on rival tribes outside the Jianzhou area to broaden his control over larger and larger parts of the region. In 1607, when he won his first allies among the eastern Mongols, he was proclaimed Khan, which indicated he had risen to a very high level of prestige in the inner Asian world. You can probably see where this story is going. Nurhaci eventually managed to combine all the Jurchens into one confederation which was, of course, the realization of the Ming's worst fears. And later, he was able to bring other Mongols and Han Chinese under his sway as well.

By 1600, he had also created a script for the Manchu language and had laid the foundations for a very powerful military organization, the Eight Banners, which was central, in fact, to the success of the Qing and deserves a little bit further explanation. The Eight Banners were distinguished by color primarily-- yellow, white, red, and blue, some with borders, some without. They were also distinguished by ethnicity, with Manchu Banners, Mongol Banners, and eventually later on also Han Chinese Banners.

Starting in around 1600, these banners became the foundation for the growth of the Qing military. They took their form from the hunting companies that the Manchus originally used when they would go out hunting, but these were temporary. Gradually, they became permanent. And these companies, which were

called arrows, were organized into larger units, and the largest of these units was called a banner. Each banner was under the control either of the Khan or one of his relatives or some very powerful noble, and they functioned more or less in a feudalistic fashion.

After the foundation of the Qing-- that is to say, after it asserted control over China in 1644-- the Eight Banners continued to function as a kind of military caste. Not only did it include the warriors who were fighting for the dynasty, but all of their family members and household members as well, young and old, male and female alike. And the Eight Banner institution survived, in fact, all the way until 1924.

Now, the banners were one aspect of institutional growth that were very important at this time of the Qing, but Nurhaci remained a loyal subject of the Ming all the way up until the 1610s. He made three visits to Beijing that we know of. But in 1616, he rejected his status as a Ming subject and openly declared his own imperial ambitions. He declared the establishment of the Latter Jin state-- again, patterning himself directly after the first Jurchens. And he issued in 1618 seven grievances against the Ming justifying why he was going to take up arms against them, and among those reasons was the fact that the Ming had killed his father and grandfather.

At this point-- again, we're talking about 1618, 1619-- Nurhaci commanded a force of about 100,000 men. So this is a fairly substantial army. And in 1619, at a place called Sarhu, he engaged the Ming army in a major battle which he won. And at that point, the fortunes of the Jin state under Nurhaci began to improve quite rapidly.

So that by 1626, when Nurhaci dies, Ming control over the entire eastern portion of the northeastern region that it had formerly controlled, Ming control there had collapsed entirely. And this territory was now in the hands of the Jin state which Nurhaci ruled, again, until he died in 1626. And then, it was passed on to his son, Hong Taiji.

Section 3: The Creation of the Manchu State

Institutions Under Hong Taiji

After Nurhaci's death, the question of further expansion of the Jin State was resolved under the guidance of Nurhaci's eighth son, Hong Taiji. Hong Taiji was the only one of Nurhaci's sons who was literate, which may have been one reason why he was selected.

But I draw your attention also to the fact that he was the eighth son, not the first son. In the Inner Asian political tradition, the leadership role passed not to the eldest son, as it would have in China, but to that son or nephew, somebody in that generation, maybe even to a brother, who was considered to have the qualities required of a leader. And this decision was made in a council that met at the time of a ruler's death.

This is one way in which we can see that the political traditions of the Manchus were quite distinct from those of the Chinese. And it led, in fact, to a succession of very remarkable men who were very capable and helped to lead the state to its very successful development in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Hong Taiji realized quite well the circumstances he faced-- the problems he faced. And he was also quite conscious of replaying the role of earlier Inner Asian conquerors of the Liao, the Jin, and the Yuan. He faced a very different set of challenges than Nurhaci had.

The Jurchen victories against the Ming in the late 1610s and early 1620s had brought over 1 million Chinese civilians under Jurchen control. So that in addition to running a military type state, the Jurchens now had also to figure out how to run a civilian state as well. This created a variety of different problems, including ethnic tension between Jurchens and Han.

For about 10 years after he took over in 1626, Hong Taiji went easy on very large-scale military conflicts against the Ming. For one thing, he didn't have the artillery needed to break down the strong Ming fortresses that lay between him and the Ming capital in Beijing.

But for another thing, he also knew he had to consolidate his frontiers on the east and the west. He needed to build the institutions of state that would allow him to rule effectively.

So we see during this period a lot of institutional development, the expansion of strategic alliances, the beginnings of a master plan, if you will, for the eventual takeover of China. Although this was never explicitly stated as such. The Jurchen State under Hong Taiji therefore became much less feudal, or feudalistic, more bureaucratic. The power of the Han grew considerably under Hong Taiji. He was ruthless in eliminating any rivals who might have threatened his position as the supreme leader.

He expanded administration on a Chinese model and created new kinds of offices that looked a lot like Ming government did. He brought in Chinese advisers. He began systematic record-keeping. He even built himself a palace complex with Chinese style architecture, although there were some twists that gave it a particularly Manchu flare.

The civilian institutions that he created, as I say, some of them were on the Chinese models. Some were not. Among those that were not were three institutions he created in 1629, a secretariat, a historical office, and a literary office.

The literary office was primarily there to translate. He began the project of translating large amounts of philosophical and historical, some strategic works, in the Chinese language into Manchu. And there were some significant linguistic reforms at this time to cope with the influx of many, many more Chinese words into the Manchu language at this time.

In 1635, the Manchus also found that a special office to deal with Mongol affairs, which actually handled relations both with Mongols and with the few Tibetan visitors that they had who were coming to their capital at this point in the city of Shenyang, which had been renamed Mukden-- Mukden meaning arising-- kind of a portent of where they were going. But on a Chinese model, Hong Taiji also established Six Boards, with which you are already familiar, and a censorate, and Han Chinese officials were appointed to many offices serving the Jurchen Han.

Perhaps Hong Taiji's greatest innovation, though, was to rename his people and rename his state-- two steps that he took. One, in late 1635, and the other later in 1636. So in late 1635, he proclaimed that the Jurchens would henceforth be called by what he said was their real name, their original name, that name being Manchu, or "Manju" in the Manchu language. This new name provided a way of covering up a lot of the old tribal rivalries that had plagued the Jurchens in the preceding 30 to 40 years. In a way, it was similar to Temujin's proclaiming the name Mongol for all of the Mongol tribes that were under his control in the early 13th century.

And then the second renaming happens in May 1636, where Hong Taiji rejects the name of Later Jin, the name that his father had given to this state. And he instead gives it another name. He calls it to the Great Qing, the "Da Qing" state, the "Da Qing" country. And this was a way of saying that he was not going to be just another version of the Jin Dynasty. He had greater ambitions.

Now, we don't really know what Manchu means, the word Manchu. There are all kinds of theories. None of them has been really proved. But the name stuck. It clearly resonated with people. And very quickly this name is the name by which they call themselves and by which others are calling them, as well.

We do know a little bit more about the name Great Qing, however. So in Chinese, the name Great Qing-- Qing means pure. And the idea was that this dynasty was pure. The water radical, which is included in the name for Qing, was chosen to extinguish the fire element that was associated with the name of the Ming Dynasty, Ming meaning bright.

But there was another meaning to Great Qing in the Manchu language, because this word "daicing," it was called daicing gurun in Manchu. Daicing means warrior in the Mongol language and in the Manchu language. So, Hong Taiji was really renaming his state the warrior country. And that was, if anything, a signal that he meant, indeed, to go on the warpath when the time allowed.

All of these moves indicate, I think we can say, a growing imperial vision on the part of Hong Taiji, a vision that would be realized shortly after his death in 1644.

Section 4: The Creation of the Qing State

The Qing Conquest

The reign of Hong Taiji was a time of consolidation and expansion during which the institutional foundations were laid that would carry the Qing forward. And military expansion carried out on all sides-- in the East against Korea, in the West against some resistant Mongol groups, and in the North against some recalcitrant Jurchen groups that had yet to be brought firmly within the Qing embrace.

By the 1640s, these problems had been mostly resolved, and importantly the skills and artillery had been located through the recruitment of Han Chinese who were skilled in using the cannon that were required to help reduce the defenses of the major fortified cities that lay between the Manchus and the borders of the Ming state. This was crucial for any further expansion to the southwest toward Beijing.

By this time, then-- by the early 1640s-- the Daicing Gurun, the "Warrior state", was able to make a play for the mandate of heaven, particularly as the Ming state was now seriously weakened from within by rebellion.

However, Hong Taiji himself did not live to oversee the conquest. He died in 1643. And at that time, a council was held to decide on who should succeed him. The Manchus did not practice primogeniture like the Chinese did. It was not necessarily the eldest son of the deceased ruler who would assume power.

Instead, like the Mongols, they convened a meeting of all the powerful senior members of the ruling clan and all the collateral members as well to decide on which person was most qualified. This might be a brother or a cousin-- could be a nephew. Which person was most qualified to serve as the Khan in place of the one who had just died?

And the decision was made to elect a son of Hong Taiji-- not his oldest son, one of the sons of Hong Taiji named Fulin-- make him the new Khan, the new emperor. He was still very, very young. He was just five. And his uncle, Hong Taiji's brother, Dorgon, was named as regent until the time that Fulin, who was given the name the Shunzhi emperor, would be old enough to rule in his own name.

So it was Dorgon, then. Dorgon, incidentally, means "badger" in Manchu, so he was a man of some fierceness. And it was he who led the negotiations with the Ming general, Wu Sangui, at the gate of the

Great Wall at Shanhaiguan and who persuaded Wu to open the gates to Qing troops in June of 1644 that fateful day when the Manchu conquest of China officially began.