

Week 27 High Qing

CHINA TODAY AS A WORLD POWER

Hello again. I'm Mark Elliott. Back for the last of the four lectures I'm giving on the Qing period for ChinaX.

Our previous lectures have covered the rise of the Qing state, the last imperial dynasty. And the challenges faced by the Manchus in establishing themselves as the legitimate rulers of China. We've discuss the choices faced by the Han literati in trying to come to terms with Manchu rule,

and we've also explore the tensions from the Manchu point of view, from the point of view of the minority rulers of China, where the pressures of acculturation that built up over years of living in China made the preservation of a distinctive Manchu identity extremely challenging --

though not, as we have seen, impossible, even if things did not go entirely according to plan.

Today we're going to focus on the 18th century, which represents the last period of imperial splendor, a time of cultural efflorescence, economic power, a period of military expansion, generally we sometimes call this period the "high Qing," in reference to its status as the apogee, the last apogee of imperial China.

This is in clear distinction to the period following, a period starting really in the middle of the 19th century with the Opium Wars and then the Taiping Rebellion, a time of decline, which Professor Kirby will discuss in the next part of course.

Now there's a lot of discussion today about the "Rise of China," "China as a superpower," where China is going in the 21st century, but a look back at the 18th century reminds us that China's assuming a prominent place in global affairs is by no means unprecedented; in fact quite the contrary:

what we are seeing today is if anything a return to a more "normal" situation, which, as you have seen in the previous parts of this course, China has always been a dominant power regionally, if not globally, in terms of culture, in terms of politics, economy, and so on.

This point is not lost on China's leaders today, and on Chinese thinkers today, who frequently look back to this last period in the 18th century, the glory days of the Qing, as a touchstone for modern political and cultural identity in China now.

And sometimes they even make use of the same phrase that we have seen, the phrase meaning a prosperous age, or shengshi, a phrase that was used in the Qing, and the phrase that we have seen used in more recent times as well.

Now we saw many signs of plenty in the "Prosperous Suzhou" scroll, for instance, that Professor Bol talked about in the preceding lecture. The streets of the city filled with people, going from shop to shop, the stalls there selling goods from all over the empire, that had been brought there by ship or camel caravan, along a highly evolved transportation network of roads, and canals, maritime routes, and post relay stations.

In the major cities of the 18th century, one could buy rare and potent herbs from the southwest, silks from Jiangnan, furs from Mongolia, tea from Fujian.

camphor from Sumatra, ginseng from Korea, jade from Turkistan, porcelain from Jiangxi, status-conscious families could even buy clocks and furniture imported from Europe.

Now another striking sign of China's prosperity at this time was the demographic boom that was experienced across the whole country. And let's just put these numbers out for you to see. In the late 17th century, around 1685, our best guess is that the population of China, the population of the Qing Empire was somewhere around 100 million people.

By the middle of the 18th century, so about 60 years later or so, the population had grown to around 178 million people. Near the end of the 18th century, not very many more years later, it had grown by almost another 100 million to around 270 million people,

this in the year around 1780, and over 300 million by the late 1790s. By 1850, we believe that the population of the country had risen to around 410 million, which is where it would stay for the next century.

This made China, of course, the home for about one quarter of the world's population at the time. Now this population growth was a major driver of the economic boom that I just referred to, kept labor costs down, and enabled the growth of agricultural sectors, and commercial sectors.

It spurred huge waves of internal migration, so that parts of the country previously unpopulated, or under populated, now filled up with people moving from the centers in the east into the hinterlands and into the frontiers, particularly in the southwest, and in Taiwan, and in Manchuria.

And it resulted also in a doubling of the amount of land under cultivation, from somewhere around 470 million mu in 1685 to about 950 million mu in 1770.

The opening of new lands was also facilitated by the arrival of new crops, like the sweet potato, and peanuts, and corn, crops that could be grown in poor soil, where previously nothing had been able to be cultivated. Farmers as well go in much more for cash crops, such as cotton, peanuts, sugar, oil seed, tobacco,

and, later in the 19th century, also opium. More about this in a minute.

Now China has always had a large population as you know. And the reasons for the 18th century demographic boom are not entirely explained. Fertility, as far as we can tell, does not seem to have changed much, and was not especially high in comparison with fertility rates in other parts of the world.

Some people think that maybe the increased prosperity led to a decrease in mortality, in other words, people living longer. But the evidence for this is also not terribly clear. Perhaps the rise in population owed to the fact that there was more food around.

Or perhaps, the fact that the population had risen meant that people had to grow more food, so there's a chicken and egg problem here, that doesn't really seem to satisfy us either. It may well be that what seems to be a very rapid rise in population is not as rapid as all that.

And that it reflects more an inaccurate recording of populations in the 17th century that is made up for in the 18th century. But however it happened, one thing is clear, which is that people living at the time definitely believed that the population was growing, and the numbers are going up.

There are plenty of references in contemporary documents to people remarking on the fact that there are just more people now than there were before. This is one thing that historians are still working on.

But whatever the explanation is no development in the 18th century influenced society more than the enormous growth the population of the country. And this basic fact underlies many of the developments that we will be following from here on out, in the 19th and in the 20th centuries.

QING ECONOMIC GROWTH

_[MUSIC PLAYING]

Let's return again to the theme of China's rise. When we speak of economic dynamism in China today, when we talk about the Chinese economy overtaking the US economy as the largest GDP in the world, it always seems like a surprise, as if the current impressive rates of growth were somehow anomalous or unprecedented.

But this has everything to do with the lenses through which we look at China, lenses that were for the most part really still crafted during the last years of the Enlightenment and during the Industrial Revolution, that is to say in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Another way of saying this is that we still look at China, many of us anyways, popularly through the eyes of people like Hegel or the German historian, Ranke, for whom China was a land where nothing ever changed, in Ranke's words a land of eternal standstill.

But if there's one note that's consistently sounded in pre-19th century accounts left by visitors to China, whether they be Westerners, or Koreans, or Vietnamese travelers, that note is the remarkable productivity, the industriousness, of the population, the thriving marketplaces, the scale of production, the quality of goods, the variety of foods, and so on.

To quote from one Jesuit account from the 18th century, "The inland trade of China is so great that the commerce of all Europe is not to be compared therewith; the provinces being like to many kingdoms, which communicate to each other their respective productions. This tends to unite the several inhabitants among themselves and makes plenty rain in all cities." (Eastman 102)

Now, we may ask, is this simply a case of overexcited imagination. Maybe, but recent work on the 18th century and 19th century Chinese economy suggests that that economy in fact either equalled or outstripped the aggregate European economy and that the richest urban areas of China, such as Jiangnan or Beijing, boasted a standard of living, whether it's measured in terms of diet, lifespan, clothing, furniture, luxury, consumption, a standard of life that was by no means inferior to the standard of life, say, in southeastern England or in the Netherlands.

What was the source of this wealth? Well, the answer to this question is quite simple. On the one hand, land, on the other hand, commerce.

Now, just now I emphasized the growth of China's agrarian base. And this was key, because it turns out that even though many of the newly opened lands in the 18th century were never fully registered and were taxed often very imperfectly, two thirds of government revenue before 1800 came from the tax on land. This was the source of the empire's great wealth, by far the most important source.

Now, while that was the traditional basis for the status of the scholar-elite for their way of life; the blurring of social status and the impossible odds of succeeding in the examinations, which Professor Bol has already talked about, meant that more and more literati would-be officials gave up going into officialdom and instead became involved in commerce. And we see a big increase in economic activity of this sort in the 18th century, the biggest boom really since the 15th and 16th centuries, which have already been introduced in a previous part of this course.

So this warns us against, among other things, against taking the Confucian prejudice against profit and against money making too seriously. The state often encouraged commercial activity, not so much by things that it did as by things that it did not do, what you might think of as benevolent neglect and lenient taxation. Tax rates were extremely low. Although, there were some places where the state did step in, for example, in approving contracts and allowing commercial cases to be prosecuted through the courts.

There was also a big technical improvement in the handling of money that was a very important part of the boom of the High Qing period. Banking mechanisms, for instance, become much more sophisticated. As far as we know, about one third of all the money in circulation in China in the early 19th century was circulating in paper form, not in silver or in other kinds of specie.

And much of this paper money was in fact private money, private banking, not government banking, the so-called piaohao most of which were based in Shanxi where family firms, they facilitated the movement of goods and the completion of transactions all across the country.

So what we see here actually is an interesting kind of contrast with the state-led growth that we've seen in China in the last 30 years, where in Qing China, this growth was really led more by laissez-faire types of policies on the part of the Court. With growing commercialization came the development of regional specializations in different kinds of products. So rice, and tea, soy sauce, lumber, cotton, and so forth all came to be grown or processed or produced in specific parts of the country and then were moved around in large quantities, large volumes, to different markets around the country or in some cases even around the world.

There was a huge long-distance domestic trade in Qing China. The estimates are that the volume of grain-- so we're talking mainly rice, but also other kinds of grain-- that entered the long-distance trade domestically in the 18th century was five times the total amount of grain being traded in Europe at this time, five times as much. There was major growth as well in foreign trade, particularly in tea but also in cotton, silk, porcelain --

Jingdezhen, the main porcelain-producing center in Jiangxi province, exported about a million pieces of porcelain a year, much of which went to Southeast Asia. But a lot of it went to Europe, and, of course, to North America. And tea drinking becomes all the rage in many European and North American homes around this time.

This trade helped create great wealth. And the richest men in China were those men who were involved in foreign trade. Some of the richest men in the world, in fact, were these men. This was a time of plenty for those who were well-off enough to do enjoy it.

There was a shared cosmopolitan urban culture, stores and shops with branches in different cities, restaurants, bars, tea houses, theaters, temples, tourist sites, people traveled for fun. It's a world that, although removed from ours, wouldn't be entirely unfamiliar to us in many respects.

There are brand names that circulate around the country. About 7% of the country lives in these cities, so it's not everybody, of course, it's a small number of people who are able to enjoy it. Nonetheless, life in the city in China in the 18th century was pretty comfortable, even by European standards.

And the opportunities and experiences that were open to people in the cities cut across many of the traditional divides of status between gentry, say, and merchants. And this had the effect bit by bit of transforming society, and loosening traditional methods, and means of local control.

Even some of the less well-off in China still found that they were taken care of. So in cases of extreme drought or floods, the state was there with what they were called "ever normal granaries," storehouses of grain that the state could release either at reduced prices or given away to help alleviate famine in times of need. And this-- again, a fair amount of research has been done on this-- seems to have been quite effective in limiting the effects of natural disasters, wherever they might occur.

Money makes all things possible, of course, well, many things possible, not all things. Let's not get too carried away. And here we find another connection to the one aspect of the High Qing which is the territorial expansion of the empire in the 18th century.

There were many, many military campaigns carried out during the 1700s. Each one cost between 10 and 70 million taels of silver, ounces of silver each. And it used to be thought that this bankrupted the Qing state which ended up at the end of the 18th century in much less strong, financial, fiscal condition than it began.

But actually, that's probably not the case. The empire was able to afford these wars. What it could not afford was the massive corruption that set in by the last couple of decades of the 18th century. And I'll say something about that in just a bit.

First though, I want to talk about the growth of the empire and the people who led the growth of that empire in the late 1600s and in the 1700s.

THREE KINGS

Although I say the "18th century," this was not a category that anybody in China thought in at the time; what we call-- what Westerners call the 1700's-- was in China referred to by the names of the emperors who ruled during this time. And in particular, we have three men who ruled between them for a period of about 130 years. These were the Kangxi Emperor, Yongzheng Emperor and the Qianlong Emperor. Between them, they ruled between 1662 and 1795, or 1799 if we wanted to stretch it a little bit, and they were the ones who presided over really an unprecedented era of expansion of population and wealth and territory.

It's hard for us to imagine what it means for somebody, I think, to rule for such a long time. So sometimes, I like to ask students to do a little thought experiment and imagine it's 1960 and John Kennedy has just been elected President of the United States. And right now it's 2014, and John Kennedy is still President of the United States, and he will be President of the United States for another six years. That's what I'm talking about when I talk about continuity. And both the Kangxi Emperor and the Qianlong Emperor ruled for that long. So that kind of thing makes other sorts of developments possible. And because they ruled for such a long time, I want to spend a little bit of time talking about each of them before we talk more about the expansion, the territorial expansion that they helped lead. Kangxi was the first of the three great Emperors of Qing China.

His reign was the longest of any emperor on record. And he was regarded in his own lifetime as one of the great Chinese emperors, maybe the greatest emperor since Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty some 2000 or so years before. He had an intelligent, inquiring mind. He was very interested in Western mathematics and astronomy. He kept a number of Western missionaries at court to answer his questions about these things.

He was interested in mapping, music. He even learned to play a little bit on harpsichord, although not very well, we're told.

He disliked being cooped up in the palace and he was often away. He loved to go hunting. And he built for himself a small hunting resort north of the Great Wall kind of on the southern rim of Inner Mongolia, and frequented that place very often. Well, Kangxi was very active on other fronts as well. He had 55 children, for example, which led to a lot of disputes among them when he became old and there were controversies about who would succeed him. We'll talk about that in just a second.

Kangxi is considered to have pursued a middle course between bending to the will of the Chinese literati and maintaining martial traditions. So he was able to reassure the Han Chinese that the Manchus were honest brokers and that they took ruling seriously, but also able to reassure the Manchus that power was going to stay in their hands. So he combined those two things. He also combined the ideal of a sage ruler in a Confucian style, with a step warrior on the Inner Asian style.

He was one of very few emperors in Chinese history, actually, to claim personal success on the battlefield. So where the Ming Emperor had been captured by the Mongols and 1449, the Kangxi Emperor led successful campaigns against the Dzungar Mongols, the Western Mongols in the middle 1690's, against his sworn enemy, Galdan, the leader of the Dzungars, which threatened the northern border of the Qing. Kangxi had a long-running feud with Galdan, who was also seeking the support of the Dalai Lama, the leader of the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

Kangxi also wanted the support of the Dalai Lama. He was worried about what the Dzungars might be doing in concert with the Russians, and Kangxi had just signed a treaty in 1689, the Treaty of Nerchinsk with the Russians. So he was concerned for what possible threats the Dzungars might pose there in terms of foreign policy.

So in 1695, he led an army, an army of about 107,000 soldiers, with another 300,000 men behind, leading the supply train. 750 miles north, across the desert, in pursuit of Galdan, three armies set out and ultimately defeated Galdan in the Battle of Jegun modu in near what's modern Ulaanbaatar in 1696.

He wrote letters home about this campaign to his son, who was back-- his eldest son, who was back in Beijing. When he defeated Galdan, he wrote-- these are letters in Manchu that we have preserved "tell grandma," who was a Mongolian, Kangxi's own mother, "tell grandma what I've done, and let me know what her reaction is." Well, this is representative of the confidence and the power radiated, the energy radiated by the Qing through Kangxi personally.

As I said, when Kangxi became elderly, there were conflicts over who would succeed him. And the problem of the successor became quite divisive. Ultimately, these selections fell upon the fourth son of Kangxi, a man who was known to history as the Yongzheng Emperor. But his rise to power was always clouded a bit by the circumstances of his succession, and many historians have said that they believe that Yongzheng was a usurper.

I, myself, don't think so, but what this meant was that even in his own time, Yongzheng labored to persuade people that he, indeed, was the real, legitimate successor of Kangxi, and he devoted himself even more than Kangxi had to carrying out the duties of ruler, of emperor. Ultimately, he really worked himself to death. He died in his late 50's, probably from overwork.

He was up every morning extremely early. He would be up late at night reading reports sent to him from officials near and far, writing his own personal responses in red ink on these reports. He was a real micro-manager. And he also spent a lot of time meeting with people. He believed a lot in cultivating personal relationships with each of the men whom he had entrusted with whatever duties, whether it was a magistrate or a general leading an army, and this was one of the real important features, most important features of Yongzheng's reign was the attention to detail.

Yongzheng, as I say, his reputation is a bit mixed. Vengeful, jealous sometimes are words we see associated with him. But more recent work on Yongzheng leads us to think he was also something of what 18th Century thinkers might call an enlightened despot.

He was very much concerned with restoring the dynasty's fiscal health. And the steps that he took as emperor in fact made a huge difference in China, and the Qing Empire went from being in deficit to having an enormous surplus by the end of his reign, just a short 13 year reign. But it really was a crucial time, a kind of a re-foundation of the empire on stronger financial ground.

And this laid, then, the basis for the second of these long reigns that I've referred to, the reign of the Qianlong Emperor, which goes from 1736 to 1795. Now, Qianlong, as I say, inherited both from Yongzheng and Kangxi. He wanted to be known as a kind of generous man that Kangxi had been. But he was also eager to have officials somewhat in fear of him.

Yongzheng had done a lot to stamp out corruption, which began to grow in late Kangxi. This was really turned back by Yongzheng and Qianlong benefited from this in trying to carry this on. So he was also doing a kind of a balancing act in that way.

That was, for most of his reign, at least the first two thirds of this reign, pretty successful. He came to power when he was just 25. So he was a very young man, very energetic, very serious and earnest as everything we can tell about his education indicates.

He didn't want to be unfilial, so when he had ruled for 60 years, he decided to step down, to step aside in favor of one of his other sons, one of his own sons. But in fact, he held on to power kind of behind the scenes for another four years. So we sometimes say that Qianlong, in fact, ruled until 1799, which would mean that he has the longest reign of any emperor in Chinese history, although he himself would be at pains to say, no, no, no, no, it was my grandfather.

Like Kangxi and Yongzheng, Qianlong took this job very seriously, up early every morning, spent the first part of the day from dawn until mid-morning attending and handling official business. Only then would he have breakfast. His afternoons were devoted to poetry, to reading, to calligraphy, and painting.

He was especially fond of writing poetry. In fact, he may have been the most prolific poet in Chinese history. Some 44,000 poems are credited to his name. Whether he really wrote them all or not is another question.

He remained in pretty good shape all of this life. He was out regularly like Kangxi. He was very active. Up until the age of 87, he was going on the hunt, riding and shooting. He never needed glasses. He could read and speak three or four languages. He was an avid art collector, and a great patron of letters. He had his hands in many, many things, and was really a model for both Chinese and for Manchus, and, to some degree, also for Mongols as well as for Tibetans. He was a very serious student of a Tibetan Buddhism and underwent many Tantric initiations.

If there's a hallmark of the Qianlong reign, it's this idea of universal emperors-- a man who ruled over all the peoples and all the territories of the empire evenly and dispassionately, and benevolently-- the image, anyway.

And he was larger than life. Like I say, he ruled for such a long time that he really set his stamp on the 18th Century, and we can fairly call the 18th Century the age of Qianlong if we wanted to. Under Qianlong, the Qing vision of empire that I talked about in the very first lecture in this series came to fruition.

This saw the combination of traditional areas of Chinese rule, China proper, with the vast areas of inner Asia, Manchuria, Mongolia, the eastern parts of Turkistan, what we now call Xinjiang, as well as Tibet,

Taiwan, areas of the southwest. All of this was rolled together into a vast empire, a Pax Manjurica, the largest China-based empire, really, since the Tang dynasty. It was this imperial order that dominated affairs in eastern and central Eurasia for a good 150, 200 years. It was this empire that laid the foundations for modern China.

TERRITORIAL EXPANSION UNDER QIANLONG

The Qianlong emperor was himself quite conscious of his own historical image, his place in history. And he self-avowedly wished to rank along his grandfather as one of the great emperors of Chinese history. Emperor Wu of Han, Tang Taizong, Kublai Khan. He wanted to be remembered as the "Old Man of the Ten Great Accomplishments," shi quan lao ren in Chinese.

These ten great accomplishments were all military deeds, all campaigns that occurred under his reign, mostly in the second half of his reign. They included the suppression of rebellions in Taiwan, in Burma, Sichuan, and Guizhou, border incursions from Nepal, and the final defeat of the Dzungar Mongols, which I talked about with respect first with the Kangxi Emperor. That's a story that actually continued under Qianlong, and the denouement of that story really is key to our understanding of the expansion of Qing empire under Qianlong in the 18th century.

Kangxi's defeat of Galdan in 1696 did not put an end to the Dzungar problem. The Dzungars continued to retain control over Western parts of Mongolia and over the Tarim Basin, south of the Tianshan mountains after this time. They even exercised control in Lhasa for a few years in the 17-teens until Qing armies sent by Kangxi threw them out in 1720.

This initiated the beginning of a lasting presence of the Manchu empire in Tibet that would gradually be enforced over the course of the 18th century. The next to Dzungar leader after Galdan was named Galdan Tsereng, similar name. He defeated a large Qing army in 1731, and a peace treaty was actually signed by Qianlong with the Dzungars in 1739, demarcating a territorial border between them.

But Galdan Tsereng died very soon after this, and once again tensions broke out over the successor to the Dzungar Khanate, and these troubles threatened to spill over into Qing territory.

Qianlong moved into action. He found a diplomatic solution, what he thought would be a diplomatic solution, but the two men entrusted with keeping a lid on things in Dzungaria in fact turned on each other, and one of them appealed to Qianlong for assistance. So Qianlong sent an army out, put things back under control.

But then that fellow, in turn, reneged on his arrangements with Qianlong, and Qianlong had to send another army out, particularly given that the garrison that Qianlong had placed in the Dzungar capital in Ili had been killed by Amursana, the name of his erstwhile ally. He needed to take matters really firmly in hand. So he sent a large army in 1756 and another one in 1757 to finally put an end to the Dzungar menace once and for all. Amursana himself fled, he fled into Russian territory, where he is thought to have died of smallpox the following year.

The punishment meted out to the Dzungars was severe. Many were killed, many were enslaved and sent back into other parts of China or deported to Heilongjiang. But the idea that the Dzungars were massacred as a people, that there was a genocide, is probably an exaggeration left over from Qing histories themselves, which wanted to emphasize the complete success of the Qing in defeating Dzungars.

We know actually now from more recent work that man Dzungars in fact returned after having fled to different parts of the world, some even coming back from northern India once they heard that Qianlong had issued an amnesty and was welcoming these people back to the Qing.

So we still have Dzungars today. Qianlong did not allow them to call themselves Dzungars anymore, though. He was a little sensitive about this name. And so from that point forward, they were to call themselves Oirats. We still have Oirats, today. This is the people that are still a very proud people, living in mainly in Mongolia, also some in parts of Xinjiang today.

The victory over the Dzungars drew the Qing into a part of the world it knew little about. Not Mongolia, it knew Mongolia quite well. But the area south of the Tianshan mountains, the area that is sometimes called Altashahr, the Tarim basin, the silk road cities that circle the Taklamakan desert.

This added a new and much more complicated dimension to the inner Asian politics of the Qing. Now, Xinjiang today is of obvious strategic importance, but in the late 18th century, few Chinese, few Han Chinese officials in the Qing saw it this way. They thought of it as a massive waste of resources. They thought it was not worth fighting for, not worth keeping. Nobody knew what to do with it.

It was a couple of generations before people back in Beijing began to think about this as something that could bring benefit to the empire, whether it might be a commercial benefit or political benefit. Still, there was not universal agreement on how important the region was to the Qing. So that in 1864 when there is a rebellion, a major rebellion breaks out led by a man named Yaqub Beg, who sets up an independent khanate in Muslim inner Asia that lasts for about-- centered near Turpan-- lasts for 13 years, and the regime is recognized by the Ottoman Empire and even by the British.

There was not immediate agreement among leaders in Beijing whether this was territory that should be taken back or not, and there was a pretty vigorous debate about whether the Qing dynasty, whether the Qing court, should be investing more resources in getting this territory back or whether it should be investing and paying more attention to its maritime frontier, which was becoming a very serious problem by this time, the 1870s.

Ultimatley, the decision was made to send an army out under Zuo Zongtang, and the reconquista of the region was carried out. In 1884, the consolidation of Xinjiang was complete and it was formally integrated as a province into the empire.

INNER ASIAN EMPIRE AND THE UNITY OF CHINA

The conquests in the 1750's-- first of Dzungaria and then of Kashgaria -- were the defining moment for the expansion of the Qing empire as the most powerful continental empire in the world. The recognition came that the great enterprise had been pushed as far as it could be. And the country was given its final shape, really, under Qianlong, tianxia had been fixed and unified.

You might be wondering, how was this accomplished? Well, we don't have time to go into the whole story. But a few things we could say. First of all, the timing was good. We have the expansion at the same time, of course, of the Russian empire eastward. The Qing empire was pushing westward. The steppe is gradually being closed. And so powers like the Dzungars who had been trying to reestablish a great, unified, Mongolian state ultimately got caught in the middle of this and ended up crushed. So the world is getting smaller and this was a good time for big empires to be expanding, the Qing took advantage of that.

The Qing were also quite well-organized. So we have to think of this in some measure as a logistical triumph and a military triumph of the fielding of these large bodies of men, feeding them across hostile terrain that stretched out for hundreds and hundreds of miles was no mean feat. And it certainly if this were a European story, it would be something that every schoolchild would know a lot about in Europe and in North America.

Another thing that the Qing had going for them is that the Manchus themselves were part of the inner Asian world in which they were acting, not so much of the areas south of Tianshan but these other places, Mongolia, Tibet, this was their world. They swam in this water and they were able to deal with Mongolian princes and Tibetan Lamas in a way that the Ming really had not been able to.

That's not to say that there was any natural alliances formed, just because of the fact of the so-called common inner Asian background-- nothing quite so simple. But in terms of doing politics, the Qing understood the dynamics of this world much better, I think we could say, then certainly the later emperors in the Ming had, or other emperors in previous Chinese-based dynasties-- that is to say, native dynasties.

And then the last thing I'll mention is that they were pragmatic. The Qing did not attempt to control every aspect of local politics, local economics, local religious matters, land disputes, those sorts of things. The court left the management of day to day affairs pretty much in the hands of local elites, whoever those might be. They might have been monks in powerful monasteries in Tibetan regions. They might have been Islamic elders in Xinjiang, princes of various sorts in Mongolia. They worked through these intermediaries-- kind of a pattern we see in empires in other parts of the world, as well. The Qing took advantage of these sorts of mechanisms in place. They governed lightly is another way of putting it. They governed lightly in these frontier areas. And I think partly for that reason, they were able to govern long and for the most part, pretty successfully.

So let's say that the extension of the empire this far to the west was in some degree an unintended consequence of Manchu policy toward the northern frontiers. But you'd never know that from the huge PR campaign that Qianlong conducted after the consolidation of his territorial gains first in Dzungaria, and particularly in the area around the Tarim Basin.

Now unlike Kangxi, Qianlong personally did not go on campaign. But he certainly made sure that people thought that he did. He had himself portrayed in battle gear. He was frequently out at the same hunting retreat that his grandfather had built, meeting with representatives from different parts of inner Asia, and doing his political dealings there. They did not come to Beijing. They did not meet in the palaces there, rather in the more casual, rustic environment of Chengde and the hunting grounds in Mulan, which were even further to the north where everybody would be sitting around in the tent eating roast lamb and listening to Mongolian music being played while wrestlers were competing with each other nearby.

That was the kind of world in which Qianlong operated, as well as the more refined areas, of course, in Jiangnan where he traveled frequently too when he was dealing with the Han literati. But the expansion of the empire required to be able to play this other role, as well, and to do so convincingly. He wanted the world to know about the expansion of the Qing.

So he had maps made. He had stele erected, marking the places of important battle sites. He had paintings made of the 100 most brave men, from generals down to common soldiers who had fought in the campaign against the Dzungars and against the Khojas. He had engravings made. He sent artists out with the army to sketch the battle. Then these artists would come back to Beijing. More complete drawings would be made. And then on the basis of these drawings, copper plate engravings were made in Paris and then brought back to China. These became collector's items.

The growth of the Qing empire was world news. This was something that Qianlong really wanted to advertise to people and to make sure that his fellow rulers, whether it was Catherine the Great or the French King knew about what he had done.

What did the expansion of the Qing empire mean in the long term? How do the incorporation of the inner Asian frontier, the final incorporation of this frontier into Qing shape the course of modern Chinese history? How is it seen? How is it reflected in politics and society in China today? These territories, along with Tibet, which also comes, as I mentioned earlier, under more and more direct authority of the Manchu Emperor through the course of the 18th century. These territories comprise a pretty significant part of modern Chinese territory, the lands of the People's Republic of China. And they set the mold. The Qing shape sets the mold then for what will become the shape of the modern Chinese nation. These territories also represent a continuing problem of governance for the PRC.

And so the relevance of Manchu empire to modern China, I think, is hard to exaggerate. Inheritance of these territories has been very effectively naturalized by the leaders of China under the Republic of China, as well as under the People's Republic of China. And so it's easy, in a way, for us to forget that this was the result of an imperial expansion, a project of imperial expansion that took place in the late 1600's and then in the 1700's. But if it hadn't been for this project of imperial expansion, we could be pretty sure that China today would be half the size that it is now.

An awareness of the Qing imperial enterprise during the High Qing reminds us that while much is made of the continuity of China as the last of the antique empires to survive into the modern era, this is something of a misunderstanding. That is to say, China today is the successor state, we can say of "imperial China," but more specifically, it is the successor state of the Qing empire which was a vast, hybrid, polyethnic, multinational state that brought peoples from very different backgrounds, with different religious traditions, different languages together in a kind of gunpowder empire of the type that is quite comparable to say, the Ottoman Empire, the Mughal empire, the Romanov empire. It represented the synthesis of centuries of interaction between China and inner Asia. It wasn't just another Chinese empire.

In the next part of the course, when Professor Kirby will be tracing the shifts from empire to nation, it's good for us to think about-- good for you to think about the challenges that inner Asia and its peoples have posed to the congruence of lands, and peoples, and languages that we commonly associated with nation, and how this is mapped onto the territories of the modern Chinese republics. They remind us of the difficulties of defining clearly what we mean when we say, China, or Chinese-- and also, the wonderful line from Benedict Anderson who talks about, when he's discussing the movement from empire to nation, the difficulty of stretching the "short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of empire."

THE MACARTNEY MISSION

In 1793, Qianlong was 82 years old. He'd been emperor since he was 25. He was a little old, he was little tired. He'd seen a lot. Many of his kids hadn't turned out quite the way he had hoped. But one thing he had never seen before was an Englishman. The arrival that year of an embassy from Great Britain changed that and offers us a glimpse into the very last years the Qing, the high Qing period, and I want to finish this lecture with some thoughts on that.

Now the visit that I'm talking about in 1793 was the famous embassy of Lord George Macartney who had been dispatched by the crown to negotiate a commercial treaty with the Qing. He had been asked to try and get permission for a permanent British embassy in Beijing, and also to secure residency for English traders somewhere in China so they wouldn't have to constantly be going back and forth. Also was trying to hope to create a market in China for British goods.

He didn't succeed in really any of these goals, but the visit nonetheless was a landmark in terms of the relationship between the Qing and Europe. The mission consisted of 84 people, including artists and doctors and all kinds of folks. Lord Macartney came with a letter from George the Third offering his compliments to Qianlong. And they came with all kinds of gifts, globes and planetarium, mathematical

instruments, silver from Sheffield, and Wedgwood pottery, which is like bringing coals to Newcastle really, but there it was.

They came in three ships. They arrive in Canton in June of 1793 and announced they had learned that the emperor would be celebrating his birthday before long and that they had come to bring birthday wishes. And so they were given permission by the emperor, who expressed his pleasure at their have come such a long way just to wish him a happy birthday. And they were told to come up to the capital and to present their gifts to the emperor there.

When the embassy arrives in the north, and they track out over the Great Wall to the summer palace in Chengde, Macartney and a few of his men are given the instructions, guidance, as to how court ritual works, and the etiquette of the Kowtow and things like this. And there were some discussions about the Kowtow.

I mentioned earlier the idea of Qianlong as a universal ruler, but you should not think that the Qing notion of universality meant the Qianlong really thought he ruled over the whole world, because that's not what he thought. He was perfectly aware of lands beyond his power. He recognized the Empress of Russia as something of an equal. He knew a little bit by 1793. He'd heard about the French Revolution. He recognized the equal authority also of spiritual figures like the Dalai Lama. And although the Qing spoke about itself of course as the center of the world, it didn't necessarily act this way in every circumstance, and its foreign relations, if you can call it that, were quite pragmatic as we have seen in other respects Qing policy tended to be. And not all of the rules for handling foreign embassies conform to the strict notions of the tributary system.

There are a variety of means, ritual and political, to construct relations with people on the outside depending on the circumstance and depending on the advantage. So these rules were brought into play with the arrival of Lord Macartney, where a considerable amount of flexibility was shown actually. Macartney was not forced to perform the Kowtow. The audience went forward even though he was not going to kneel and strike his head on the ground three times. He was permitted to get down on one knee to genuflect as he would have before his own King. He was allowed to present the box with the letter from George the Third directly into the hands of the emperor, something that was entirely exceptional according to the rules of protocol that governed the way that foreign representatives should behave at court.

The Qing accepted Macartney's kneeling as the equivalent of the Kowtow, that it had the same significance for him, the genuflection, as the Kowtow did for them. And they were satisfied at this expression of respect for the Qianlong emperor. The English, though, thought that they had won in this battle of protocol, that their dignity had been preserved. There's a bit of orientalism here about the oriental being so obsessed with ritual. But it's worth remembering that ritual mattered a great deal as well to the Europeans, and in packing his bags for the trip Macartney did not forget to bring the scarlet silk habit of the doctor of laws that he held from Oxford, a very fine hat with an ostrich plume, what seems to be an ostrich plume, and the ribbons and badges signifying his membership in the Order of the Bath.

So he was himself pretty concerned to put on a good ritual show. So we don't want to take the English supposed disdain for ritual too seriously in all of this, I don't think.

Probably the most revealing difference between the Qing and the British approach to all of this was that once the audience was over-- there were actually two audiences between Macartney and Qianlong-- the British were themselves ready to get down to the business of the embassy, which was to negotiate about trade agreements and so forth. But from the Qing point of view, the embassy was over. The embassy was the audience. And that was it.

So there were many conversations with Macartney kept on trying to find someone who could talk to him, with whom he could broker some sort of an agreement. And in the end he really didn't get very far. It soon

became clear that it was time for him to go, and generous provisions were made for escorting the embassy through the center of the country down to Canton where they eventually left.

The most that the Qing made a few concessions to offer medical assistance to British traders, and they also promised to try and not confuse British with Americans.

Qianlong did write a response to George the Third, a letter that much later became quite famous, particularly for its phrase about we have no need of your country's manufacturers, a line that has been pointed to hundreds of times as an example of outrageous Chinese arrogance and its ignorance of the importance of the rest of the world, its inability to adjust its focus on itself as China as the center of everything.

It's interesting that this letter did not create a lot of stir at the time it was received. It was regarded as the proper statement of sentiment of the man who was, after all, the emperor of China. It was only about 100 years later, after 1900, that people begin to focus on this letter as an example of everything that was wrong with China. And in fact, in 1920 Bertrand Russell wrote a famous piece called "The Problem Of China" in which he said, no one understands China until this document has ceased to seem ridiculous.

And that's probably true, and I hope that you will, now that you understand a little bit about the size, the scale, the wealth of the Qing empire, that this letter maybe doesn't seem so ridiculous to you. It's a reasonable response to somebody coming from a very small country from very far away, who really didn't have anything to offer the Qing in 1793. This would be very different just 50 years later, but in 1793, not so unusual. In fact, I think we can say Macartney was given a very generous welcome. He crashed Qianlong's birthday party after all.

THE QIANLONG TWILIGHT

During his time in China, Lord Macartney traveled a fair bit, and he recorded a lot. There was an artist with him who produced a best selling album of pictures of China, actually. It sold quite well across Europe later in the 1790s. He kept a diary of his impressions, as did other members of the mission, and these are fascinating, really fascinating to read.

His observations offer a glimpse of late Qianlong's China, and they end-- his observations, the diary ends-- with a comment on what he saw as the near future for the Qing that is worth quoting.

He wrote, "The empire of China is an old, crazy, first-rate Man of War, which a succession of able and vigilant officers have contrived to keep afloat for the 150 years past, and overawe their neighbors, 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 out right; she may drift some time as a wreck, and will then be dashed to pieces on the shores; but she can never be rebuilt on the old bottom."

These comments by Macartney are quite prescient, really, and foreshadow a lot of the transformative changes that are going to be taking place in China, particularly in the 20th century. For us, they allow a different perspective on this prosperous age, this Shengshi that I've been talking about at the high Qing, when the signs of internal strain, fragmentation, and institutional weakness begin to take their toll.

Let's go back to the population boom that we started with. This is a sign of prosperity, but it also put great strains on society and on the institutions for governing society. Competition for jobs became sharper, for degrees became much sharper, the examination system made it almost impossible for people to succeed.

And the number of dissatisfied would be literati increases, and the cynicism around the examination system as you saw from the section on The Scholars really becomes just a symptom of the age.

The administration of the dynasty was not able to keep up, didn't appoint more officials to govern even though the population in many counties had doubled or tripled from what it had been a century or so before. There's no increase in taxation. There's no overhaul of the legal system. The granary system starts to fall apart. People are forced to rely more and more on themselves, on their families, or on their lineages. Sometimes those are inadequate, particularly for people who migrated into new parts of the country where their lineage structures are weak.

And then they bind together in other ways, such as in religious sects, to provide themselves solidarity and support. The state was particularly fearful of these kinds of organizations, because they brought together people from across different status groups in ways that the state was not really able to see very well or control. This trend, as I say, was most pronounced in peripheral areas which were less well integrated into existing economic and administrative structures. Life was harder there on the frontier. The risks were greater. Conflict became endemic, and when conflict arose, it was harder to suppress.

Alternative forms of community building became much more widespread, particularly those centered on popular forms of Buddhism, such as the White Lotus sect, that offered spiritual support and social community to the disenfranchised, to the poor, the marginalized in society, people who'd been left out of the generation of prosperity in China's cities. For them, the promise of a better life in a future age was very appealing, and they took part in rebellions that became increasingly common as the 18th century wore on into the 19th century. These rebellions occurred across the empire, north and south, often in more remote hinterlands, but also in Taiwan, and in the southwest, later on in the Northwest where Muslim rebellion certainly in the 19th century become very widespread.

And this takes a lot of resources. A lot of the empire's manpower is devoted then to suppressing these rebellions. In the 19th century, the biggest rebellion of all, the Taiping rebellion, starts in the south in Guangxi, a peripheral region, and envelops the entire southern half of the country. Nearly brings the dynasty down. It's the largest civil war, not just in Chinese history. It's the largest civil war in world history.

So this is the roots of these sorts of rebellions then we can see in some of the weakening that's brought on in the later years of the high Qing. All of these trends then, administrative strain, social strain, endemic rebellion where worsened and abetted by the problems that begin to emerge in the state itself, particularly evidenced in ever increasing corruption in the late 18th century.

Now, we get into difficulty when we try and define corruption, because as you know, officials working for the Chinese government for any dynasty, not just the Qing, were never paid very much. And some degree of skimming was built into the system, and it was by reigning in that amount of skimming that the Yongzheng emperor was able to restore some financial discipline to the state.

But that discipline had been lost by the 1780s, and we see a rise in dishonesty, the formation of factions, and the more systematic practices of fraud and embezzlement become pretty common in the later years of Qianlong's reign. The most notorious case is that of Hesen, best known as the most corrupt official in Chinese history. Hesen was a Manchu.

He was a young officer in the guards from a family of no special distinction, but he caught the eye of the emperor when he was just in his 20s, and the emperor quickly promoted him to more and more important positions alongside men who had been serving him for decades. This created a great amount of controversy, and suspicion, mistrust. He was given all sorts of titles. Later on, his son marries a daughter of the emperor, so then he becomes in-law of Qianlong.

And he then occupies a position in which he is able, essentially, he has the trust of the emperor. He's able to do whatever he wants. And his corruption became quite, quite well known. He had many people under him

who were beholden to him, worked with him. And they worked the system pretty effectively until finally when Qianlong dies in 1799. Within five days, the son of Qianlong, the Jiaqing emperor who'd taken power in 1795 but waits until Qianlong dies. He arrests Hesen right away, and within a month Hesen is permitted to hang himself.

When they finished the inventory of Hesen's estate, well you won't believe what they found. They found that his fortune was greater than that of the emperor himself, 800 million ounces of silver, one half of the state income during this time. The annual income had gone-- the equivalent was in Hesen's purse. This included jewels. They counted now 4,288 gold bowls and dishes; 600 silver pots; 119 golden wash basins; and 5.8 million ounces of gold.

This was graft on an industrial scale, and the immunity from prosecution made it possible for scores of people like Hesen to profit from the system in similar ways. Not to the same extent. Nonetheless, the extent of graft and corruption was really completely out of control by the time Qianlong passes from the scene.

There were campaigns that the Jiaqing emperor-- the emperor who succeeded Qianlong-- undertook to try and reign in this corruption. They were not very successful. The campaigns against corruption remind us a little bit of the campaigns against corruption that are going on right now, being led by Chinese president Xi Jinping. And these campaigns, in fact, at least in the popular mind, make reference back to Hesen and to the late Qianlong era as a cautionary tale of what might happen if corruption by the state, by people serving the state, if that's not brought under control.

So ultimately, it was impossible to bring the vast network of patronage that Hesen had put in place, to take this out. And there was no real transformation, no purge, no rejuvenation of the dynasty after Qianlong dies. And we might put that blame on the shoulders of the Jiaqing emperor. It would have been very hard to do, and he does not have the same kind of power. He did not command the same kind of authority as his father had, or his grandfather, or going back to his great grandfather, Kangxi.

So the weakening of the center is often dated then from these last years, the last years at the high Qing, the last couple of decades of the 18th century. And this weakening, as you will see in the next part of the course, left the country ill equipped to deal with the unprecedented challenges that would come in the 19th century when the British would arrive, not just with embassies and gifts for the emperor on his birthday, but in warships and with demands for trade and for other kinds of diplomatic concessions. And those challenges would materialize first in the 1840s, early 1840s, in a sleepy fishing village called Hong Kong.