

# **Managing Hegemony in East Asia: China's Rise in Historical Perspective**

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**Yuan-kang Wang**

Western Michigan University


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The East Asia Institute  
909 Sampoong B/D, Euljiro 158  
Jung-gu, Seoul 100-786  
Republic of Korea  
Tel. 82 2 2277 1683  
Fax 82 2 2277 1684



## Managing Hegemony in East Asia: China's Rise in Historical Perspective\*

Yuan-kang Wang  
Western Michigan University

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MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT CHINA'S RISE, BUT FEW ANALYSTS HAVE EXAMINED THE ISSUE FROM A HISTORICAL perspective. Short-term analyses, important as they are, lack the depth and breadth of longitudinal studies. Both the academic and policy communities are in need of a long-term view of the impacts of a rising power in East Asia. As we assess the influence of China's rise on East Asia and beyond, what can we learn from the past? Can international relations (IR) theory offer guidance? East Asian history contains rich, yet mostly untapped, deposits of empirical data for IR scholars to build and test their theories. Employing IR theory, this article examines the experience of the latest East Asian regional hegemon, Qing China (1644–1912), and uses insights gained from the research to shed light on China's broad international behavior today.

The central question is two-fold: How does a state become a hegemon in its region of the world? And once it becomes dominant, what strategies does the hegemon employ to maintain supremacy in the international system and minimize resistance by lesser states?

In the aftermath of the Cold War the field of international relations began an intense debate about balance of power theory. Realists and their critics have argued over whether balances of power recurrently form in general, and specifically whether a balancing coalition against the United States, the current hegemon, will emerge.<sup>1</sup> Some argue that the "unipolar moment" of American preponderance of power will be short-lived due to the tendency of states to balance

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30, no. 1 (2005): 7-45; T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2004); Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little, and William C. Wohlforth, *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).



power,<sup>2</sup> while others consider that American primacy will be enduring because the balancing mechanism is weak. An important but oft-neglected question is how a hegemon maintains, and prolongs, its leading position in the system. The focus on power balancing, however important, only tells half the story; it neglects how states pursue power and maintains dominance. Classical realist Hans Morganthau sees international politics as a “struggle for power.” Offensive realist John Mearsheimer views “maximizing relative power” as the primary behavior of states.<sup>3</sup> A domination-seeking state can maneuver to expand its power while preventing a counterbalancing coalition from forming. In contrast to strategies of resistance, strategies of domination have received scant attention in the international relations literature.<sup>4</sup> This is unfortunate because domination, along with resistance, is an integral part of international politics. International relations theory should seek not only to analyze a state’s decision to resist and balance power, but also to explore how a state becomes dominant and maintains hegemony.

The People’s Republic of China inherited much of the territories of the Qing empire. The Manchus of the Qing dynasty expanded from a small area in present northeastern China to become “the most successful dynasty of conquest in Chinese history.”<sup>5</sup> The territorial reach of the Qing empire more than doubled that of its predecessor, the Ming dynasty. The Qing conquered vast swaths of territory and became a regional hegemon. It established a hierarchical tribute system to manage its foreign relations. For foreign polities, interactions with the Qing followed tributary “rules of the game.” The Qing empire was a multiethnic state comprising Manchus, Han Chinese, Mongolians, Tibetans, Uighurs, and other minorities. Qing China enjoyed two centuries of preeminence in East Asia, with lesser states deferring to its power. It was not until the Opium War in 1839 that Qing power was substantially challenged.

The next section proposes a theory of hegemonic management. I argue that a hegemon will expand political interests abroad and establish rules of the game for the system. I then examine the Manchu state-building process, conquest of China, consolidation of conquest, and westward expansions. Upon becoming the regional hegemon in Asia, Qing troops marched westward and conquered a vast swath of territory in Inner and Central Asia, doubling the size of Ming China. To dictate the boundaries of appropriate behavior, the Qing adopted the tributary rules of the

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000): 5-41; Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security* 17, no. 4 (1993): 5-51; Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States’ Unipolar Moment,” *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): 7-41.

<sup>3</sup> Hans J. Morganthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1978); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> One notable exception is Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Ping-ti Ho, “The Significance of the Ch’ing Period in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1967): 189-95 at 191.



game to govern diplomatic interactions between Asian polities. Finally, I discuss the implications of this study for understanding China's rise today.

## A Theory of Hegemonic Management

The term “hegemony” is used in different and confused ways. Some use it interchangeably with “empire,” others consider it as a form of legitimate authority, and still others views hegemony as morally repugnant. In this article, I adopt a narrow definition of “hegemony” and distinguish it from “empire.” Hegemony rests on material power. For a state to be a hegemon, there must be a preponderance of military force over other political actors in the system. John Mearsheimer defines hegemon as the great power that dominates the system and enjoys so much military supremacy that “no other state has the military wherewithal to put up a serious fight against it.”<sup>6</sup> Except for the hegemon, there are no other great powers in the system. In addition to military superiority, hegemony is also about possessing a preponderance of economic resources, such as raw materials, capital, market access, and productive capacity.<sup>7</sup> These economic resources are necessary to support the hegemon’s military capabilities. Having preponderant power, however, does not mean that the hegemon will always get the outcome it prefers, but it certainly creates unprecedented opportunities to do so.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis on material capabilities does not rule out the social dimension of hegemony, such as authority, legitimacy, status, or prestige. These social aspects do not operate in a vacuum; they are usually derivative of the power relations underlying interactions among political units. Material resources are the necessary condition for a hegemon to exercise authority, enjoy prestige, or generate legitimacy. Compared to non-material factors, material power has more causal weight in producing the desired outcome.

Hegemony should be distinguished from empire. Hegemony is about possessing an overwhelming power advantage over others. A hegemon’s military power and wealth must be “stronger than all second-ranked powers acting as members of a counterbalancing coalition.”<sup>9</sup> An empire, on the other hand, is about relationships of political control. It is the rule exercised by one political actor over subordinate ones in order to regulate their external and internal behaviors.<sup>10</sup> A state can have an empire without itself being a hegemon. For instance, Britain had an overseas empire in the nineteenth century, but its land power and share of world GDP was far from hegemonic. The United Kingdom built a large formal empire, covering nearly a quarter of the

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<sup>6</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 40.

<sup>7</sup> Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited,” 12.

<sup>9</sup> Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States,” 11.

<sup>10</sup> Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 30; Stephen Peter Rosen, “An Empire, If You Can Keep It,” *The National Interest*, no. 71 (Spring 2003): 51-61.



world's land surface, while indirectly ruling parts of Asia and Africa through local potentates. Yet, it was "never truly hegemonic."<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the United States was a regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere, but its direct imperial reach was much more limited, covering only fourteen dependencies throughout the world, about one-half of one percent of the world's land surface.<sup>12</sup> A hegemon can have a small formal empire, or none at all, but it can still exert significant political influence in the system. Hegemonies require more material capabilities than do empires. Compared to empires, regional hegemony is more difficult to achieve, but it is still possible. Recent examples of regional hegemons include the Mughal dynasty in South Asia (1556–1707), the Qing dynasty in Asia (1683–1839), and the United States in the Western Hemisphere (1900–present).<sup>13</sup>

A hegemon enjoys numerous security benefits. In an anarchic system with no central authority to enforce order, states wishing to protect themselves will seek to accumulate as much power as possible relative to others. In general, powerful states have a better chance of defending themselves and getting their way in the system. In international politics, prudence dictates that a state not trust its security to the goodwill of others but instead rely on its own military capabilities. The intentions of other states are difficult to fathom and even if known may change in the future. Power thus becomes essential for survival-seeking states operating under anarchy. For great powers, the pursuit of power is a continuous process, with becoming a regional hegemon as the preferred outcome. The more power a state has, the more secure it will be.<sup>14</sup> The overwhelming military capabilities of the paramount state can be used to attack a security threat or to defend against an attack. More often than not, weaker states defer to the wishes of the hegemon, knowing that their odds of prevailing in a fight are too small. In most occasions, preponderant power enables the hegemon to get what it wants without having to fight for it.

As power preponderance brings a high level of security, a hegemon will work to maintain the existing balance of power that favors its dominance.<sup>15</sup> Managing hegemony is a dynamic process that requires constant attention to the distribution of power between the hegemon and potential rivals. A hegemon will strive to maintain a favorable power advantage and defeat rivals that threaten its preeminence. To maintain its lead, the hegemon will try to excel in power-generating capabilities such as technological innovation and military breakthroughs, control the political environment in its region by establishing a sphere of influence, and maneuver to forestall a counterbalancing coalition from taking shape. The hegemon's preponderant capabilities give rise to a large repertoire of external interests, which requires projection of power to protect. Hence,

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<sup>11</sup> Niall Ferguson, "Empire or Hegemony," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 2003): 154-161 at 156.

<sup>12</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 15. The fourteen dependencies are American Samoa, Baker Island, Guam, Howland Island, Jarvis Island, Johnston Atoll, Kingman Reef, Midway Island, Navassa Island, Northern Marianna Islands, Palmyra Atoll, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and Wake Island. *Ibid.*, 311n66.

<sup>13</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 212.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



hegemony will not stop at the border and will expand political interests abroad.<sup>16</sup> The acquisition of external interests helps the hegemon control the international political environment that better prepares itself to deal with the various contingencies that may arise. The United States, for instance, has overseas interests in many parts of the world, has stationed troops in Europe and Asia, and has constructed an extensive network of alliances throughout the world.

Expansion, however, does not necessarily mean acquisition of territory. Although technological advances today have reduced the utility of territory in generating power and the rise of nationalism has made conquest difficult, control of territory, especially strategic chokepoints, remains an important objective of states.<sup>17</sup> In addition to territorial control, expansionist activities may include establishing a sphere of influence, dictating the boundaries of acceptable behavior, grabbing resources beyond the frontiers, and using military means to advance security interests or resolve disputes. The case of American hegemony is illustrative. The United States did not control the territory of Caribbean states, yet between 1898 and 1934 it intervened over 30 times to dictate their internal affairs. President Theodore Roosevelt, following the Monroe Doctrine, declared that the United States had the right to exercise "international police power" over the domestic and foreign affairs of its southern neighbors. As David Lake points out, these activities and a subsequent series of U.S. military interventions in Central America in the mid-1980s, in Panama in 1989, and in Haiti in 1994, together with opposition to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, economic sanctions on Cuba, and support of the coup against Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, are evidence that these southern neighbors are not free to defy the authority of the United States without punishments.<sup>18</sup>

Second, for a hegemon wishing to stay at the top of the international pecking order, it can implement and enforce "rules of the game" that will be conducive to its political, economic, and ideological interests. These rules help the preeminent state consolidate hegemony and prolong dominance. A hegemon has a vested interest in the governance of the international system and will take steps to shape and control the processes of interactions among political units in a way that benefits the dominant power. Hegemonic power is agenda-setting power, allowing the dominant state to shape the diplomatic environment and limit the range of choices for lesser states. Of all the states in the system, the hegemon is profusely equipped with the material wherewithal for shaping their political environment. Power can help create, mold, and sustain rules that are accepted by lesser states.<sup>19</sup> Through its overwhelming power, the hegemon sets up political and economic institutions that govern the rules of interactions among political units as well as how they trade with one another, disproportionately serving its self-interests. As the

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<sup>16</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited," 13.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> David A. Lake, "American Hegemony and the Future of East-West Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 7(2006): 23-30.

<sup>19</sup> Brooks and Wohlforth, *World out of Balance*, 171, 181.



hegemon maintains security and economic order in the system, the provision of public goods gives lesser states an interest in following its lead.<sup>20</sup> In the absence of viable alternatives to the hegemon's preferred order, lesser states accept these rules of the game centered on the hegemon.

As the hegemon seeks to maintain its preeminent position, it will take steps to reduce the incentives for lesser states to resist its dominance. To minimize resistance, the hegemon promotes an ideology that justifies its dominance in the eyes of lesser states.<sup>21</sup> Such an ideology promotes the legitimacy of hegemonic rule. This ideology usually takes the form of an argument that the hegemon's continued dominance and the international order it has created will benefit all states in the system by providing security, stability, and prosperity. The United States, for instance, promotes an ideology of free trade, democracy, and liberty. Official U.S. policy statements are often couched in the language of protecting freedom and justice, spreading democratic values, and promoting free trade as the foundation of the U.S. national security strategy.<sup>22</sup> Officials and commentators argue that American leadership helps ensure peace and stability around the world. As Samuel Huntington describes, "A world without U.S. primacy will be a world with more violence and disorder."<sup>23</sup>

Robert Gilpin notes that the rules of the system govern or at least influence the diplomatic, economic, and military interactions among political units and may cover the recognition of spheres of influence, the exchange of ambassadors, the conduct of commerce, and international law. Creating rules of the system is an important part of the hegemon's statecraft, as such rules influence the behavior of other states. Compliance is largely a function of power asymmetry. Having a preponderance of material resources gives the hegemon a range of tools with which to reward or punish lesser states. When lesser states share common values and mutual interest with the hegemon, compliance will be even stronger. Nevertheless, even in cases in which rules and norms are built on consensual acceptance, the power and interests of the hegemon remains the principal beneficiary of those rules and norms. As Gilpin argues, "Although the rights and rules governing interstate behavior are to varying degree based on consensus and mutual interest, the

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<sup>20</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 30; Michael Mastanduno, "System Maker and Privilege Taker: U.S. Power and the International Political Economy," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 121-154.

<sup>21</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the White House argues in the 2002 U.S. *National Security Strategy* that it plans to create "a balance of power that favors freedom." Similarly, the Pentagon's *Quadrennial Defense Review* of 2001 makes the point that America's global leadership "contributes directly to global peace" and that "precluding hostile domination of critical areas" is one of the enduring U.S. interests. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington: White House, Sept. 2002); Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington: Department of Defense, Sept. 30, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "Why International Primacy Matters," *International Security* 17, no. 4 (Spring 1993): 68-83 at 83.





primary foundation of rights and rules is in the power and interests of the dominant groups or states in a social system."<sup>24</sup>

In the next section, I test the two hypotheses—that the hegemon will expand political interests abroad and establish “rules of the game”—in the case of Qing China (1644–1912). The Qing dynasty is the last regional hegemon to rule over most of the Asian continent. Its founder, the Manchus, originated from a small area later known as Manchuria and rose to establish the most powerful state in Asia. As we shall see later, conquests and institutional innovations were critical to the Manchu success.

## The Rise of the Manchu State

The Manchus, a semi-nomadic people, originated in an area northeast of China. Their forbears, the Jurchens, destroyed the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) and established the powerful Jin dynasty (1115–1234) in northern China. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Jurchens were divided among several tribes. They paid tribute to the Ming court, receiving Ming official titles. They also paid tribute to the Korean court and received titles for being vassals of Korea, but it was clear that the Ming court sat at the top of the tributary hierarchy.<sup>25</sup> The Jurchens shared similar culture and customs with the Mongols, priding themselves in horsemanship, archery, and falconry. In the late sixteenth century, Nurhaci (1559–1626) conquered and unified various Jurchen tribes and began a state-building process. To forge a nation, Nurhaci undertook social and political restructuring of the Jurchens. In 1599 Nurhaci had his advisors create the Manchu script by adapting the Mongolian alphabet. Although the Jurchens were small in number, the empire that Nurhaci’s descendants built, called the Qing, would be “far larger than the present United States.”<sup>26</sup>

One of the most important innovations that would have a lasting influence on Jurchen military power was the creation of the banner system. The Eight Banners that eventually emerged, in the words of historian Mark Elliott, “provided an efficient means of mobilizing an army and made the integrated Jurchen military virtually unbeatable.”<sup>27</sup> As the old clan-based tribal units were not suitable for a large conquering force, in 1601 Nurhaci organized his followers into “companies” (Ma. niru), each consisting of 300 armored soldiers. The soldier’s entire household

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<sup>24</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 24, 34-35. For an alternative view emphasizing the social aspect of hegemony, see David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 22-23.

<sup>25</sup> Gertraude Roth Li, “State Building before 1644,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 9, Part 1. The Ch’ing Empire to 1800*, ed. Willard J. Peterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>26</sup> Mark C. Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 126.

<sup>27</sup> Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 57.



was also registered as members of the company. Several companies were then grouped into four banners (Ma. gusa; Ch. qi), each flying its own color (yellow, white, red, and blue). In 1614, four more banners, each flying a flag with bordered color, were created to make a total of eight banners. The banner system gradually transformed Jurchen tribes and villages into units of roughly equal size, providing an expandable organization to incorporate newly conquered people. With more people and territories under his rule, Nurhaci's power continued to grow. In 1616, Nurhaci declared independence and proclaimed the Latter Jin dynasty, formally cutting off ties with Ming China. He used a reign title tianming (heavenly mandate) in the Chinese fashion and addressed himself as Heavenly Mandated Khan of the Jin State (tianming jinguo han) in communications with the Ming and Korea.<sup>28</sup>

The Manchu state grew by conquest and expansion. The process of state formation is consistent with Charles Tilly's oft-cited observation that "war made the state and the state made war."<sup>29</sup> War was central to Manchu state-building and its conquest of China. Nurhaci built a formidable war machine to defeat and unify the various Jurchen tribes, extracted taxes from conquered territories, and organized conquered people into the Manchu social and military structure. As his territory expanded, the need for more arable land to feed his increasing population also rose, giving rise to an economic crisis. In 1615, Nurhaci commented: "Now we have captured so many Chinese and animals, how shall we feed them? Even our own people will die."<sup>30</sup> By 1618 food shortages had become a serious problem and the state could not grow without further conquest. The declining Ming China stood as a lucrative target. In 1618, Nurhaci declared war on the Ming by announcing his Seven Great Grievances and set out to attack Ming forces in Liaodong, thus starting a process that would eventually culminate in the Manchu conquest of China.<sup>31</sup>

Nurhaci quickly occupied Liaodong, but he faced the challenge of incorporating conquered Chinese into his new state. He initially attempted to integrate Chinese and Manchus by asking them to cohabitate under the same household, but rising ethnic tensions caused two Chinese revolts in 1623 and 1625. Nurhaci was forced to abandon ethnic integration and switched to a policy of segregation and unequal treatment. The expanding Manchu state required a centralizing

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<sup>28</sup> Roth Li, "State Building before 1644," 27-37; Qiu Xintian and Kong Deqi, *Zhongguo Junshi Tongshi [General Military History of China]*, vol. 16, Qingdai qianqi junshi shi [Qing military history in the beginning period ] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1998), 27-28; F.W. Mote, *Imperial China: 900-1800* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 786-788.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Tilly, "Reflections of the History of European State-Making," in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42.

<sup>30</sup> *Jiu Manzhou dang* [Old Manchu Archives], Vol. 1, p. 103, quoted in Roth Li, "State Building before 1644," 40.

<sup>31</sup> The Seven Grievances included the Ming killing of Nurhaci's father and grandfather, border incursions, Ming killing of Jurchen envoys, and Ming assistance of Nurhaci's adversaries. *Qing Shilu, Manzhou shilu*, 4:198-201; Qiu Xintian and Kong Deqi, *Zhongguo Junshi Tongshi [General Military History of China]*, 16, Qingdai qianqi junshi shi [Qing military history in the beginning period ], 30; Roth Li, "State Building before 1644," 41.



government to incorporate its newly conquered people and to increase agricultural production, and Nurhaci undertook measures to centralize power. In 1626, Nurhaci led his forces to attack the Ming stronghold at Ningyuan, which was heavily fortified and defended with Portuguese cannon. Nurhaci suffered a major defeat, with he himself perhaps having been wounded. He died a few months later. The humiliating defeat made Jurchen leaders realize the technological importance of cannons in siege warfare, and the Jurchens would proceed to build their own cannon force. Although Nurhaci did not succeed in conquering the Ming, by the time of his death, he had left a solid foundation for a Manchu state.<sup>32</sup>

Nurhaci's eighth son, Hong Taiji (1598–1643), succeeded to the throne and endeavored to expand the domain of the Manchu state. His strategy was to secure the eastern and western flanks before embarking on the conquest of Ming China. He sought control of Korea on the eastern flank and the Mongol polities on the western flank to prevent them from allying with Ming China. "Taking Peking [Beijing]," Hong Taiji commented, "is like felling a big tree. One needs first to start from both sides and then the big tree will fall."<sup>33</sup> An insubordinate Korea increased the risk to the Manchu's eastern flank should it decide to invade the Ming. During Nurhaci's reign, Korea had joined forces with the Ming in the failed attack on Manchu positions at Sarhu in 1619. In Hong Taiji's strategic calculations, Korea had to be brought under Manchu control before he could launch a frontal attack on the Ming. He also needed Korean grain and materials to supply the expanding Manchu army. In 1627, he negotiated a temporary truce with the Ming and invaded Korea. Hong Taiji instructed his generals before they departed for the military campaign: "If Korea can be acquired, then proceed to acquire it."<sup>34</sup> Manchu troops soon occupied Pyongyang and other Korean towns and advanced toward the capital at Seoul. Under duress, Korea was forced to agree to a "brotherly covenant" that required it to send annual tribute to Hong Taiji, extend tributary protocols to Manchu envoys the way it did to Ming envoys, and reduce ties with the Ming.<sup>35</sup>

To the west of the Manchu homeland were the Mongol polities who remained a formidable force. Both Nurhaci and Hong Taiji used marriage alliances between the ruling elites to strengthen their ties with the Mongols. Nurhaci exchanged wives and concubines with the Khalkha Mongols, and Hong Taiji married twelve of his daughters to Mongol chieftains. The technique of marriage alliance was supplemented by "gifts, stipends, tax exemption, education, [and] access to official posts" to create more incentives for the Mongols to cooperate with the

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<sup>32</sup> Roth Li, "State Building before 1644," 46-51; Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 135-136.

<sup>33</sup> Roth Li, "State Building before 1644," 52; Qiu Xintian and Kong Deqi, *Zhongguo Junshi Tongshi [General Military History of China]*, 16, Qingdai qianqi junshi shi [Qing military history in the beginning period ], 57-58.

<sup>34</sup> Qing Shilu: Taizong, 2:31.

<sup>35</sup> Qing Shilu: Taizong, 2:40.



rising Manchu state.<sup>36</sup> This approach allowed the Mongols to share the spoils of Manchu conquest, while taking advantage of internal Mongol divisions to prevent their unification under a powerful national leader. This “divide-and-rule” strategy bore much resemblance to the Chinese strategy “using barbarians to control barbarians.”<sup>37</sup> As a result, a large number of Mongol polities joined the Manchus and became their allies. By Hong Taiji’s time, one major group, the Charhar Mongols, continued to steadfastly resist growing Manchu power and refused to cooperate. Their leader Ligdan Khan was the last descendant of Chinggis Khan and held the official Mongol seal that bestowed upon him an aura of legitimacy that no other Mongol leaders could claim.

With Korea subdued, Hong Taiji proceeded to consolidate his western flank and attack Ligdan Khan. Manchu forces, joined by friendly Mongol polities (the Five Khalkas, Ordos, Karachins, and others), fought the Charhars in 1628 and 1632, forcing Ligdan to flee west to Qinghai. After Ligdan’s death in 1634, his son surrendered to the Manchus and offered up Ligdan’s seal, thus ending the Mongol khanate that began with Chinggis Khan. The Manchu occupation of Inner Mongolia gave them access to Beijing from the north and forestalled a Ming-Mongol alliance against the Manchus. The capture of Ligdan’s seal allowed Hong Taiji to style himself as successor to the Mongol khans and ruler of the nomads. Hong Taiji enrolled the conquered Mongols into the banner system, gaining 384 niru with 19,580 Chahar and Khalkha families and 448 niru with 22,308 Khorcin families. In addition to serving a military purpose, the enrollment of the Mongols in the banner system eliminated the original tribal authority structures, making it difficult for ambitious chieftains to build coalitions. The Manchus appointed top leadership in the Mongol banners and held ultimate authority. The successful incorporation of eastern and southern Mongols greatly strengthened Manchu military power and allowed Hong Taiji to proclaim a three-nationality empire (i.e., the Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese).<sup>38</sup>

Korea remained a problem for Hong Taiji. The Choson court continued to maintain relations with the Ming and reduced its tribute to the Manchus. To completely cut off the Ming-Korean ties, in 1636, Hong Taiji personally led an army of 120,000 men in an attack on Korea. Qing forces quickly occupied Seoul in two months. Faced with overpowering foreign troops, the Choson court had no choice but to surrender. King Injo was forced on numerous occasions to perform the full kowtow (kneeling three times, each time tapping his head to the ground three times) before Hong Taiji and became a subject of the Qing. A stele, with inscriptions in Manchu, Mongolian, and Chinese, was erected on the spot to commemorate the Korean surrender. Korea was forced to cut off all ties with Ming China and became a Qing tributary state. The Qing demanded a heavy amount of annual tribute from Korea, including 100 taels of gold, 1,000 taels

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<sup>36</sup> Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 122-125.

<sup>37</sup> Mote, *Imperial China*, 869.

<sup>38</sup> Roth Li, “State Building before 1644,” 55-56; Perdue, *China Marches West*, 125; Qiu Xintian and Kong Deqi, *Zhongguo Junshi Tongshi [General Military History of China]*, 16, Qingdai qianqi junshi shi [Qing military history in the beginning period ], 67-73; Mote, *Imperial China*, 870.



of silver, 10,000 bags of rice, and other materials, a burden so heavy that the Korean king would later request a reduction. To ensure Korean loyalty, King Injo's two sons and the sons of high-ranking officials were sent to the Qing capital at Shenyang (Mukden) as hostages.<sup>39</sup>

Although Hong Taiji died before Manchu troops entered Beijing, he was credited for the success of Qing conquest of China.<sup>40</sup> In 1635, Hong Taiji officially changed the name of his people from Jurchen to Manchu. To further distance his state from the Jin dynasty of Song times, he proclaimed in 1636 a new dynastic name: Qing or Great Qing. The Manchu administration that he set up was modeled on the Ming government and adapted for a multiethnic empire. Hong Taiji centralized political power, adapted Ming laws, and instituted the civil service examinations to recruit officials. To help Qing rulers manage a large empire, in 1636 he created a new organization that had no Ming precedent: the Mongolian Bureau (menggu yamen), subsequently renamed the Court of Colonial Affairs (lifanyuan) two years later. The function of this new office would later expand to include Tibetan and other Inner Asian affairs. In terms of military structure, Hong Taiji organized the surrendered Mongol forces into eight banners and put them under Manchu command. The Qing army would gradually become a multiethnic conquering force, with the Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese armies each having their own separate eight banners.<sup>41</sup>

During Hong Taiji's reign, the expanding Manchu state suffered a series of economic crisis and "nearly collapsed."<sup>42</sup> Widespread food shortages drove people to banditry and even cannibalism. In addition to the strategic need to secure the eastern flank, the two Korean campaigns were partly motivated by the search for more grain and provisions. In 1641, Hong Taiji banned the hoarding of grain and the brewing of wine from grain. Construction projects were stopped during agricultural season to allow farmers to till their lands. Economic problems continued to plague the Manchu government up until the conquest of Beijing.<sup>43</sup> Until his death in 1643, Hong Taiji was unable to launch an invasion of the Ming because he needed to consolidate his enlarged domain. Nonetheless, his expansionist activities, the restructuring of the Eight Banners system, and the creation of cannon forces had laid down a solid foundation for future Qing conquest. His six-year-old son Fulin (1638–61) assumed the throne and became the Shunzi emperor, with Dorgon and Jirgalang as Prince Regents. Dorgon held real power and would soon carry out the conquest of Ming China.

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<sup>39</sup> Qing Shilu: Taizong 33: 430-433. Korea was asked to provide military assistance when the Qing attacked the Ming holdout at Kado located near the mouth of Yalu River. See also Kirk W. Larsen, "Comforting Fictions: The Tribute System, the Westphalian Order, and Sino-Korean Relations," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (2013): 233-257; Qiu Xintian and Kong Deqi, *Zhongguo Junshi Tongshi [General Military History of China]*, 16, Qingdai qianqi junshi shi [Qing military history in the beginning period ], 63-66.

<sup>40</sup> Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, 64.

<sup>41</sup> Roth Li, "State Building before 1644," 58-67.

<sup>42</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 121.

<sup>43</sup> Roth Li, "State Building before 1644," 68-70.



## Manchu Conquest of China

A fortuitous turn of events in the 1640s precipitated the Manchu conquest of China. While the Manchus were expanding their power base, Ming China was plagued with peasant rebellions wrought by rising economic problems, famine, heavy taxes, and administrative failures. Uprisings and rebellions broke out in the northwest and gradually spread to the rest of country. “Roving bandits” (liukou) looted and pillaged the countryside and attacked cities. The Ming government was unable to mount an effective response, itself weakened by factional politics and inept leadership. On April 26, 1644, rebel leader Li Zicheng occupied the Ming capital Beijing; Emperor Chongzhen, in despair, committed suicide. When news of Beijing’s fall reached the Qing court, Manchu rulers saw it as a great opportunity to launch their conquest of China. On May 18, Prince Regent Dorgon consulted with his Chinese advisor Hong Chengchou, a Ming official who had surrendered to the Manchus. Hong advised: “Our military forces are so strong that they have no rival in the world. If our generals are of the same heart and our troops are orderly and disciplined, we can eliminate the roving bandits in a single fight. Then the whole world can be pacified within a date.”<sup>44</sup> He urged Dorgon to swiftly march his troops to Beijing. To minimize resistance, Hong counseled Dorgon to instruct his troops not to loot and pillage like the rebels did and not to kill civilians. This Confucian approach would demonstrate to the people of Beijing that the Qing army was a righteous force dispatched to rescue them from the torments of the plundering rebels.<sup>45</sup>

The Manchu endeavors were aided by a critical turn of event. On May 20, Ming commander Wu Sangui, who guarded a heavily fortified Ming strategic pass at Shanhaiguan, sent a letter to Dorgon requesting a military alliance to expel the rebel forces from Beijing and restore the Ming court in return for wealth and land as reward. In his reply to Wu, Dorgon said he was “enraptured” at Wu’s letter and he immediately ordered his troops to march toward Shanhaiguan, carrying cannons with them. Using a historical metaphor in which the ancient statesman Guanzhong helped the Duke of Qi achieve hegemony, Dorgon urged Wu to switch loyalty to the Qing court, promising land and a princely title as reward. On May 27, the joint forces routed 200,000 rebel troops dispatched to attack Wu’s position. On that day, Wu Sangui was officially granted the Qing title of “Prince Pacifier of the West” (pingxi wang).<sup>46</sup> Rebel leader Li Zicheng fled Beijing before Qing forces arrived. On June 6, 1644, Qing army swept unopposed into Beijing. The city’s people had expected to see Wu Sangui arrive with a Ming heir to restore the dynasty and did not expect to see a large presence of Qing troops. Dorgon rode in the imperial palanquin into the Ming palace, announcing that the Mandate of Heaven had been transferred to the Qing dynasty. Thus began 268 years of Manchu rule in China.

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<sup>44</sup> Qing Shilu: Shizu, 4:53.

<sup>45</sup> Jerry Dennerline, “The Shun-Chih Reign,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 9, Part 1. The Ch’ing Empire to 1800*, ed. Willard J. Peterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 81; Mote, *Imperial China*, 820.

<sup>46</sup> Qing Shilu: Shizu, 4:54-55.





As an alien dynasty ruling over a large Chinese population, the Manchu rulers understood that they needed to find a way to justify their legitimacy. Confucianism provided such a tool. By the time they entered Beijing, they had already secured a large number of Chinese advisors who helped write imperial edicts in a way that conformed to the Confucian norm of benevolence and righteousness. As righteous avengers of the Ming emperor's death, Manchu troops were under strict orders not to loot or pillage in their advance toward Beijing. By expelling the rebels and restoring the people's safety, the Qing court suggested, it had inherited the Mandate of Heaven from the deceased Ming emperor. To win over large numbers of Chinese military leaders and civilian administrators, the Qing adopted a public stance that was "more Chinese than the Chinese" to sustain its claim as the legitimate ruler of China.<sup>47</sup> Dorgon ordered a state funeral for the deceased Ming emperor, rescinded the much-hated military surtaxes that had contributed to the rebellions, and announced an amnesty for Ming officials and literati.

The next stage in Qing expansion was to complete the conquest of China and to pacify resistance. The task was carried out mostly by Chinese troops under Chinese commanders and took eighteen years to complete, at which point the last pretender to the Ming throne was captured in Burma and executed in 1662. Qing forces engaged in a multipronged military offensive against the "roving bandits" who had fled westward to Shaanxi, Hubei, and Sichuan as well as various holdouts of the Ming regime in central and southern China. Ming loyalists hastily put together the Southern Ming regime in the southern capital Nanjing, hoping to continue the Ming dynasty in the way the Southern Song had been continued in the twelfth century when it faced military attacks by the Jin. However, this turned out to be false hope, as factional infighting, personal vendetta, and weak leadership severely crippled the Southern Ming resistance. As the formidable Qing army advanced south, a number of local officials opened the gate of their walled cities and surrendered without a fight. The Southern Ming's defense was severely undermined by repeated defections of generals, which brought 138,000 new troops under Qing command. Qing forces slaughtered residents of cities that had put up a serious fight, the most infamous of which was the "Ten Days' Massacre of Yangzhou." On June 8, 1645, the southern capital Nanjing, fearing more slaughter, surrendered to Qing forces without a fight. Many loyalists committed suicide rather than surrender.<sup>48</sup>

Qing armies quickly swept across southern China and occupied city after city. Manchu rulers ordered all Chinese males to shave their foreheads and wear their hair in a queue in the Manchu dress style. This order was a deep offense to Chinese cultural tradition and triggered widespread revolt. To force compliance, Qing forces violently cracked down on dissent and slaughtered resisting cities. The court appointed Hong Chengchou to oversee the pacification of the area south of the Yangtze, the richest region of China, from 1645 to 1648. The tax revenues and other material resources were used to support conquest of other regions. Prince Regent Dorgon died in 1651. The young Shunzi emperor and his advisors continued to carry out the conquest of China.

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<sup>47</sup> Mote, *Imperial China*, 818-819; Dennerline, "The Shun-Chih Reign," 83-84.

<sup>48</sup> Mote, *Imperial China*, 827-831; Dennerline, "The Shun-Chih Reign," 84-87.



The next target was southwestern China. The court appointed Hong Chengchou governor general of Huguang, Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi, and Guangdong. Through his political and military skills, Hong shrewdly brought the southwestern region under Qing control between 1653 and 1662.<sup>49</sup>

## Consolidation of Conquest

By 1662, most of China had been incorporated into the Qing dynasty. Although these conquests substantially enhanced the material resources at Qing disposal, they needed to be consolidated in order to strengthen the power of the Qing state. Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1772) assumed the throne at age seven in 1661, initially assisted by four regents. He turned out to be one of the most capable emperors in Chinese and Inner Asian history, presiding over sixty years of expansion and consolidation. He successfully put down an eight-year civil war (1673–1681) that might well have overthrown Manchu rule in China, eliminated the last remnants of Ming resistance on Taiwan in 1683, and expanded westward into Inner Asia.

The necessity to centralize power would soon be challenged by centrifugal forces in the localities. The Qing court rewarded Chinese collaborators with land and offices. Three Ming generals who had contributed enormously to the Manchu conquest were awarded permanent hereditary principedoms in the southern provinces, known as the “Three Feudatories.” The three were Wu Sangui in Yunnan and Guizhou, Shang Kexi in Guangdong, and Geng Jingzhong in Fujian. This expedient arrangement was “anomalous” as it bestowed principedom on non-Manchus and allowed the military and civilian governorship to become hereditary. The Three Feudatories functioned like “real principalities.”<sup>50</sup> The feudatories kept a large number of troops (more than 60,000 in the case of Wu), had their own rich tax bases and natural and mineral resources, controlled provincial and international trade, and yet required a large sum of financial support from the central government. In 1670, Wu Sangui was costing the Qing court approximately twenty million taels a year.<sup>51</sup> As these feudatories grew powerful, the Qing court became concerned that they might become unruly and difficult to control. When in 1673 Shang Kexi petitioned the court for retirement, Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722) seized the opportunity to eliminate the border principedoms.

Wu Sangui was the first to rebel, being joined later by the other two feudatories. Within six months, six provinces in the south and southwest defected to his camp, and by 1675, the area south of the Yangtze fell under his control. To make matters worse, the Mongol leader Burni rebelled in Manchuria in the spring of 1675, but fortunately this was quickly suppressed. But the

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<sup>49</sup> Mote, *Imperial China*, 832-833, 838-839.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 844.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Spence, “The K’ang-Hsi Reign,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 9, Part One: The Ch’ing Empire to 1800*, ed. Willard J. Peterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 137.





war against Wu Sangui's forces went badly. The situation was so dire that Kangxi would later tell his children that "this was the only period he could not prevent despair from showing in his face."<sup>52</sup> The course of the war began to turn in 1676, mainly because Emperor Kangxi controlled far more economic resources than Wu. Protracted conflict caused Wu's allies to quarrel among themselves. In 1677, Geng Jingzhong and Shang Kexi's heirs surrendered to the Qing court. Wu Sangui died of dysentery in 1678. His grandson continued the rebellion but was defeated and committed suicide in Yunnan in 1681.<sup>53</sup>

The Qing court faced another series of military challenges from the southeastern coast of Fujian and later from Taiwan. Led by Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga), the maritime rebel forces actively resisted Qing rule and strove to restore the Ming dynasty. In 1658, Zheng led a fleet of one thousand boats carrying 130,000 men in an attack on the cities in northern Zhejiang. The next year, he laid siege to the city of Nanjing but was forced to retreat to his base on the island of Jinmen (Quemoy). Zheng's attacks forced the Qing court to implement a draconian maritime ban, hoping to cut off the revenues of trade that had been a major source of income for Zheng's forces. The entire population in a twenty-mile-wide zone of coastal Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong provinces were ordered to abandon their homes and move inland. Qing counterattacks forced Zheng to retreat to Taiwan, which was then controlled by the Dutch as a station for its trade with China and Japan. Zheng defeated Dutch forces and forced them to withdraw from Taiwan in 1661.<sup>54</sup> He died in 1662, leaving the resistance movement and maritime trade to his son Zheng Jing.

Once the rebellion of the Three Feudatories was suppressed, the Qing court decided to attack Zheng's forces in Taiwan. In 1683, Emperor Kangxi dispatched Shi Lang, a naval commander under Zheng Chenggong who had defected to the Qing in 1646, to lead 300 ships with 20,000 marines in an attack on Zheng's forces. Shi quickly occupied the island of Pescadores (Penghu). A few weeks later, in October 1683, Zheng's descendant surrendered to the Qing. The Qing court entered into a debate about whether to keep or abandon Taiwan. Emperor Kangxi saw little value in the newly conquered island: "Taiwan is a tiny piece of land like a ball of mud. We gain nothing by acquiring it and lose nothing by not acquiring it."<sup>55</sup> But Shi Lang forcefully presented an argument in favor of Taiwan's strategic importance: "If we abandon Taiwan, it will be occupied by foreign countries."<sup>56</sup> He noted that foreign occupation of Taiwan would threaten China's coastal area in the way Zheng Chenggong's navy did. Shi Lang was able to persuade the Qing court to formally incorporate Taiwan as a prefecture of the Fujian province in 1684.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>53</sup> Mote, *Imperial China*, 846-848; Spence, "The K'ang-Hsi Reign," 142-146.

<sup>54</sup> Mote, *Imperial China*, 839-840, 848-849.

<sup>55</sup> Qing Shilu: Shengzu, 112:155.

<sup>56</sup> Qing Shilu: Shengzu, 114:176.

<sup>57</sup> Mote, *Imperial China*, 849.



## Qing Regional Hegemony

With the successful suppression of internal rebellion in 1681 and the acquisition of Taiwan in 1683, the Qing dynasty faced no serious threat to its survival. By this time, the size of the Qing empire had far exceeded that of the Ming dynasty. As a regional hegemon, the Qing court undertook measures to protect and maintain its dominance in the system. Any threat to Qing hegemony had to be eliminated or at least minimized. As the Qing was building an empire in East Asia, Tsarist Russia was expanding its empire into Siberia and northern China, and the Zunghars (Western Mongols) were engaged in their own state-building in Central Asia. Russia founded Nerchinsk in 1658 and Albazin in 1665, both close to the Qing frontier. The main threat to Qing hegemony, however, came from the Zunghar Mongols. A unified Zunghar empire under an ambitious leader would pose a serious threat to Qing security. The Zunghar's ties with Tibetan Buddhism enhanced their appeal all over Mongolia, where the Tibetan religion was venerated. Rising Zunghar power threatened the Qing northwestern frontier and could jeopardize the allegiance of the Mongol population within the Qing empire.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, controlling Mongolia was crucial to containing the expansion of the Russian empire into Qing territory.<sup>59</sup>

The Qing court was aware of Russian activities on the northern frontier along the Amur river but decided to wait until the domestic rebels were crushed. Once the country was stabilized, the Qing quickly turned its attention to foreign policy. Concerned about an increasing number of Russian settlers and fortifications along the Amur river, Emperor Kangxi sent letters to the Tsar asking for clarification regarding the role of the settlers in the region. In late 1682, Kangxi ordered border commanders to undertake reconnaissance missions and military preparations. The Qing destroyed Russian settlements in Albazin in 1685, burning the wooden walls of the settlements and capturing 600 defenders. Kangxi, who took a personal interest in the campaign, was “overjoyed” at the victory, yet was soon disappointed by news of Russian reconstruction of the Albazin settlement the next year, this time reinforced with earth walls. The Russians killed Qing patrol troops. Emperor Kangxi ordered another siege of Albazin but Qing troops faced fierce Russian resistance. When Kangxi received a letter from Tsar Peter seeking peace, he decided to look for a diplomatic resolution.<sup>60</sup>

Emperor Kangxi's main strategic concern was that the Zunghar Mongols might seek an alliance with Russia.<sup>61</sup> A wedge strategy would sow the seeds of discord between these two adversaries and improved Qing strategic environment. In Kangxi's calculation, peace with Russia would allow the Qing to concentrate on the rising Mongol threat. While the Qing had strategic

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 871; Spence, "The K'ang-Hsi Reign," 154; Peter Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900-1795* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 161.

<sup>59</sup> Pamela Kyle Crossley, "The Conquest Elite of the Ch'ing Empire," in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 9, Part One: The Ch'ing Empire to 1800*, ed. Willard J. Peterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 336-337.

<sup>60</sup> Spence, "The K'ang-Hsi Reign," 150-152.

<sup>61</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 166; Mote, *Imperial China*, 874.



interests in the Amur region, Russian interest there was mainly economic. For Russia, the Amur frontier was too far to defend; a negotiated peace would allow it to establish profitable trade in the region. In 1689, negotiators from both countries signed a historic treaty at the town of Nerchinsk, aided by two Jesuit missionaries who had come to China. The treaty, written in Latin (the authoritative version), Russian, Manchu, Mongolian, and Chinese, was significant in that it was the first treaty between the regime in China and a European power—and it was an equal one. The Treaty of Nerchinsk demarcated the common border in the Amur area, ordered the destruction of Albazin, permitted international trade in the region, and stipulated the appropriate diplomatic protocol for envoys.<sup>62</sup> The treaty helped the Qing to expand into Mongol territories by preventing Russia from assisting the Qing's archrival, the Zunghar Mongols.

The Zunghar leader, Galdan (1632?–1697), was a shrewd military commander devoted to building a Zunghar empire. His attacks on the Khalkha Mongols, a Qing ally, in the late 1680s pushed them to seek Qing protection. No sooner had the Qing settled its dispute with Russia than it launched a series of attacks on the Zunghars. In 1690, Emperor Kangxi led his first expedition to attack Galdan's forces, comprised of approximately 60,000 troops and bringing along cannon. He announced his war aim: "We must now consider how to pull up the roots entirely, wipe out the remaining followers, and clean up everything permanently with one blow."<sup>63</sup> In the battle of Ulan Butong (350 kilometers north of Beijing), Qing cannon pounded Galdan's encampment and the Qing army engaged Mongol forces. The battle, however, was indecisive as Galdan escaped north. The Qing army faced serious logistical difficulties and had to withdraw.<sup>64</sup> Thereafter, overcoming the problem of supplying a large number of troops over a great distance became a main focus of Qing strategic planning.

Emperor Kangxi proceeded to make preparations for the next attack. First, as the internecine warfare among the Khalkha khans had drawn Galdan to intervene, Kangxi convened a tribal meeting in 1691 at Dolon Nor (Kaiping), 175 miles north of Beijing, to organize the Khalkhas into banners and settled them permanently in fixed territories. The splendid display of Qing military parades and the firing of cannon caused the Khalkha Mongols to "tremble with fear and admiration" and then declare their allegiance to the emperor, receiving titles from Kangxi. Outer Mongolia became a Qing dependency.<sup>65</sup> Second, Kangxi sought to isolate Galdan from his potential allies. He obtained the Dalai Lama's neutrality in the conflict by threatening to cut off Qing trade relations with Tibet. He also reached out to Galdan's kinsmen and rival Tsewang Rabdan to divide the Zunghar homeland. Third, as Galdan's base in Khobdo was too far away and beyond the reach of Qing troops, Kangxi attempted to lure him closer to the Qing frontier. He

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<sup>62</sup> Spence, "The K'ang-Hsi Reign," 153.

<sup>63</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 155.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-161.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-176; Mote, *Imperial China*, 875.



vowed to “personally lead a large army thundering after him, so that he cannot escape. We will definitely exterminate him.”<sup>66</sup>

An opportunity came in the spring of 1696. Intelligence reported that Galdan had left Khobdo and led his forces to attack eastward. Kangxi decided to personally lead another campaign to attack Galdan, this time making more careful logistical preparations. He started to build a massive logistical network that could support a large expedition of troops, including supplies of horses, cannon, and grain. On March 26, 1696, he led three armies comprised of close to 80,000 men, carrying a variety of at least 339 cannons, which set out in three directions (east, central, and west) from Beijing. The West Route Army was to block Galdan’s escape route. By the time Qing forces reached Galdan’s camp near the Kerulen River in June, they had almost run out of supplies. The emperor himself had to turn back to Beijing. On June 12, Qing West Army met Galdan’s forces in battle at Jao Modo (near Urga), killing most of the Mongol troops. But Galdan escaped with only 40 to 50 men. Logistics remained a problem for the Qing. In 98 days the expeditionary forces traveled over 2,000 kilometers back and forth between Beijing and Kerulen River.<sup>67</sup> The Qing continued to pursue Galdan until his death in 1697. The Zunghar threat was not eliminated, however, as Galdan’s nephew and his descendants continued to lead the resistance against Qing rule until they were finally “exterminated” in 1757.

The growing power of Qing forces frightened Inner and Central Asian polities. Hami became the first Turkic oasis state to join the Qing tribute system. Kokonor (in present-day Qinghai), which had never been under imperial control except during the Mongol Yuan dynasty, was annexed into the Qing in 1723 when the latter sent troops to intervene in an internecine Mongol conflict. In the late nineteenth century, Qinghai was made a province and put under direct administrative control. Threatened by rising Qing power, the regent of Tibet expressed his gratitude to the Qing emperor for granting him the title “King of Tibet.”<sup>68</sup> Qing troops occupied Lhasa in 1720 and established a military presence there, ushering in a period of direct intervention in Tibetan affairs.<sup>69</sup> Gradually, the Qing increased its presence in Tibet and took over local administration under a caretaker official known as amban.<sup>70</sup>

The Zunghars remained a powerful force after the death of Galdan in 1697, controlling Zungharia and Turkestan. Qing Emperor Yongzheng (r. 1723–1735) launched a major attack in 1731. It was unsuccessful, however, costing eighty percent of his army. As the war damaged border economies, a truce was reached in 1739. Yongzheng’s successor, Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–1796), established regulated trade relations with the Zunghars, allowing embassies to the capital, border trade at Suzhou, and boiled-tea trade with Tibet. This policy of “loose rein” (jimi)

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<sup>66</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 180.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-190.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-200; Spence, “The K’ang-Hsi Reign,” 150-156.

<sup>69</sup> Spence, “The K’ang-Hsi Reign,” 160.

<sup>70</sup> William T. Rowe, *China’s Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 76.



had a security objective: by satisfying their needs for Chinese goods, the nomads would be less inclined to attack. Merchants also collected intelligence for both sides. But the Qing never gave up hopes of destroying the Zunghars. The death of Zunghar leader Galdan Tseren in 1745 sparked internecine conflict, tearing the Mongol state apart within five years. Seizing this opportunity of internal strife, the Qing finally eliminated the Zunghar state in 1757. Emperor Qianlong ordered the massacre of the Zunghars as a people. Peter Perdue calls the Qing's extermination of the Zunghars "ethnic genocide": "The Zunghars disappeared as a state and as a people, and the Zungharian steppe was almost completely depopulated."<sup>71</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Qing conquered Tarim Basin in Turkestan. A series of military conquests enlarged the territorial reach of the Qing empire to include present-day Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang, Manchuria, and the Chinese heartland.

Like his grandfather Emperor Kangxi, Emperor Qianlong was one of the most capable rulers of China, his reign lasting more than 60 years. Qianlong expanded the size of the empire by one-third, giving China its modern territorial shape. The logistical networks Qianlong constructed for the Zunghar campaigns were unprecedented, allowing his troops to travel 1,900 miles (3,000 kilometers) to the foot of the Tianshan Mountain to conduct a 15-month military campaign. The distance the Qing troops traveled far exceeded that of Napoleon's march to Moscow (1,500 miles) in 1812, and the Qing campaigns also lasted longer on average. In his later years, Qianlong prided himself as "The Old Man of the Ten Perfect Victories" (shiquan laoren). It is noteworthy that the ten military campaigns that he undertook all involved the frontier.<sup>72</sup> After eliminating the Zunghar state, the Qing promoted a large-scale resettlement program through coercive and material incentives to civilian and military settlers, who set up farming colonies in the remote regions.<sup>73</sup> The newly incorporated territory was renamed Xinjiang (New Dominion) in 1768.

The Qing's westward expansion is significant in two aspects. First, it destroyed the nomadic confederations that had dominated the history of east and central Eurasia for two thousand years. Second, it sent a strong signal to Tsarist Russia that the Qing was a regional hegemon in East Asia and should not be challenged. It would take another one hundred years for Russia to feel strong enough to challenge the Qing frontier.<sup>74</sup> Qing power was at an all time high during Qianlong's reign. As the emperor himself boasted:

The military strength of the majestic Great Qing is at its height. So much surplus [...] had we stored up in the granaries.... How can the Han, Tang, Song, or Ming dynasties, which exhausted the wealth of China without getting an additional inch of ground for it, compare to us? Adding it all up, within less than five years, our soldiers have covered more than 10,000 li on the western marches. No fortification has failed to submit, no people have failed to surrender.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 285, 256-289.

<sup>72</sup> Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong*, 87-88.

<sup>73</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 333-357.

<sup>74</sup> Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong*, 98.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*



Through a series of expansion from 1683 to 1759, the Qing empire had become the largest continental empire in the world. Its territorial size dwarfed that of any European country, its population was three times the size of Europe's total population, and its economy was estimated to be at least four times larger than that of Great Britain.<sup>76</sup>

[Map 1 Here]

## Establishing the Qing Tribute System

Conquest alone does not make for a lasting empire. To minimize resistance to the hegemon's preponderance of power, the threat of military force needs to be accompanied with reassurance of security protection and material benefits. The hegemon needs to provide an ideological justification for the legitimacy of its rule. Before the Qing came into existence, the international system in East Asia followed the tributary "rules of the game" that took shape in the Han dynasty.<sup>77</sup> Tributary rules based on Confucian ideology governed the interactions among Asian polities and helped reduce lesser states' resistance to Chinese dominance. China's preponderance of political, economic, and military resources enabled it to act as a system manager, rewarding those who followed the rules and punishing those who disobeyed. By submitting to the China-centered hierarchy, weaker polities gained security protection and the benefits of trade. Chinese military intervention was unnecessary as long as the tributary polities were aligned with Chinese foreign policy. Chinese rulers have long adopted the simultaneous use of "favor" (en) and "threat" (wei) to bring lesser polities into the tribute system. This carrot-and-stick approach helped Chinese rulers maintain their dominance and reduce incentives for lesser polities to challenge Chinese power.

John K. Fairbank coined the term the "tribute system" to describe imperial China's diplomatic relations with Asian polities. According to Fairbank, China's tributary arrangement with Asian polities was an outgrowth of Confucian thinking. Confucianism envisions a hierarchic political and social order within the state, characterized by ritual and harmony. This hierarchic and nonegalitarian order within the state was then projected onto foreign relations in the form of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 141. As historian James Hevia observes of Britain's failed mission to China in 1793, "By the time Lord Macartney arrived at the Qing court bearing George III's letter, the Qing empire was the largest, wealthiest, and most populous contiguous political entity anywhere in the world." James Louis Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 31.

<sup>77</sup> Ying-shih Yu, *Trade and Expansion in Han China: A Study in the Structure of Sino-Barbarian Economic Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).





the tribute system with China at the center.<sup>78</sup> For both China and its vassals, Confucian ideology provided justification for the hierarchical order of the tribute system: hierarchy was natural and stabilizing. The idealized tribute system was a result of cultural expansion, not military coercion, and the “Chinese world order” was benign and harmonious. Foreign polities, attracted by the superior Chinese culture and civilization, voluntarily became tributaries. Some tributary states, such as Korea and Vietnam, even adopted the Chinese writing system and other institutions. When a new ruler assumed power in a tributary polity, the individual had to obtain an imperial patent of appointment from the Chinese emperor in a process known as “investiture.” Leaders of tributary states could address themselves only as “king”; the term “emperor” was reserved only for China. Tributary polities periodically sent embassies to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor with goods produced in their own countries. In court meetings, tributary envoys performed certain rituals, including the full kowtow to symbolize their submission to the Chinese emperor and to accept their inferior status. In Confucian thinking, the influx of tribute-paying foreign envoys strengthened the legitimacy of Chinese emperor because the tribute symbolized his status as the accepted ruler of all-under-Heaven (tianxia). For the tributaries, Chinese recognition and investiture had the effect of enhancing the legitimacy of the local rulers, a process similar to the diplomatic recognition of states today.<sup>79</sup>

Chinese leaders used the tribute system to organize foreign relations in a way that helped the country gain security benefits and obtain deference from lesser states at cheaper costs than using force. In the Chinese view, the world was divided between a civilized center and an outer rim of “barbarians.” By allowing them to pay tribute, it was hoped, foreigners would be transformed into civilized peoples and pose no threat. This cultural transformation served as a “defense mechanism” to protect China from foreign attacks.<sup>80</sup> Tributary states could call for Chinese help if attacked. China, as the system manager, provided the public good of regional security. Trading privileges were either granted as reward to those who accepted the tribute system or were withheld as punishment to those who refused to obey. Many Asian polities wished to trade with the resource-rich China, but Chinese leaders restricted exchanges of goods and commodities to the tribute system, leaving little room for non-tributary trade. Foreigners wishing to trade with China had little choice but to accept the tributary arrangement.

The idealized tribute system places the attractiveness of Chinese culture as the primary reason for the system's existence; foreign tributaries were drawn to China by its high culture and superior civilization. This cultural explanation, however, overstates the symbolic value of the

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<sup>78</sup> John K. Fairbank, ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

<sup>79</sup> John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 30.

<sup>80</sup> Morris Rossabi, ed. *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1983), 1; J. K. Fairbank, “Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Feb. 1942): 129-149 at 137.



tribute system and thus disguises the reality of power. The tribute system cannot be separated from considerations of material power. A closer look at the tributary relationship reveals that, although economic and cultural considerations were at play, it was Chinese preponderance of power that made Asian polities accept the tributary rules and norms. Whenever not backed by military power, the system usually became unsustainable.<sup>81</sup> In other words, the material power of China was the decisive factor in creating and sustaining the tribute system, while Confucianism provided the ideological justification of the rhetoric and rituals of tribute. This is not to say that power was the only factor that explains the tributary relationship, but rather that, compared with economic and cultural factors, power carried more causal weight. As historian Wang Gungwu points out: “There could not surely be a stable [tribute] system without power, sustained power.”<sup>82</sup> Even though some states still paid tribute when Chinese power was in decline, notably Korea during the late Ming dynasty, by that time the system had become unstable and conflict-ridden. That is, some of the dyadic tributary relations might continue, but at the systemic level, the functioning of the tribute system would become unstable when the center was in decline.

Before they built the Qing state, the Jurchens were once a vassal of Ming China. Nurhaci, the Qing great progenitor, personally led eight tribute missions to Beijing between 1590 and 1611.<sup>83</sup> Once it became powerful, the rising Manchu state did not seek to overturn the international rules of the game and replace them with a new set of rules. Rather, they inherited the Ming tribute system and adapted it to serve their economic and strategic interests.<sup>84</sup> Like other Chinese dynastic rulers, Qing rulers saw the coming of tributary envoys as a way to strengthen the legitimacy of their rule. The construction of the Qing tribute system, however, was often accomplished by the threat and the actual use of military force.

Many considered Korea’s tributary relationship with the Qing dynasty exemplary. Korea was a highly sinicized state, and the Korean court frequently sent tributary missions to the Qing court. The Ministry of Rites hosted more tributary missions from Korea than from anywhere else. The appearance of tributary harmony, however, masked the violent beginning of Qing-Korean relations. The Qing used brute force to coerce Choson Korea into accepting the tribute system. As noted earlier, the Manchus invaded Korea in 1627 and forced the Choson court to send annual tribute. In 1637, when the Choson court refused to receive Manchu envoys demanding

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<sup>81</sup> Jing-shen Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven: Studies in Sung-Liao Relations* (Tucson, AZ.: The University of Arizona Press, 1988), 4, 8; Mark Mancall, “The Persistence of Tradition in Chinese Foreign Policy,” *Communist China and the Soviet Bloc* 349 (Sept. 1963): 14-26 at 18; Gari Ledyard, “Yin and Yang in the China-Manchuria-Korea Triangle,” in *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>82</sup> Wang Gungwu, “Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia,” in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 60.

<sup>83</sup> Roth Li, “State Building before 1644,” 29.

<sup>84</sup> J. K. Fairbank, and S. Y. Teng, “On the Ch’ing Tributary System,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1942): 135-246.





recognition of Qing suzerainty, the Manchus invaded again, capturing Seoul and forcing King Injo to perform kowtow before Hong Taiji, the Manchu leader. The Korean court was forced to renounce allegiance to the Ming dynasty and sent the crown prince to the Qing as hostage.

After having occupied Beijing, Emperor Shunzi issued an edict in 1647 asking Ryukyu, Vietnam, Siam, Japan, and neighboring countries to send a tributary mission to China. But only Ryukyu sent a mission in 1651. To show that the Qing had inherited the Mandate of Heaven from the Ming, the Qing asked its new vassals to return the Ming seal before granting investiture. Vietnam became a vassal in 1660 but returned the Ming seal six years later. By 1750, the Qing had seven officially enrolled vassals: Korea (1637), Ryukyu (1651), Vietnam (1660), Siam (1664), Sulu (1726), Laos (1730), and Burma (1750).<sup>85</sup> The Qing adopted a dual-track arrangement in its tribute system. Tributary diplomacy with the overseas states named above was conducted through the Ministry of Rites, while relations with Inner and Central Asian polities such as the Mongols, Tibetans, and Uighurs was handled through the Court of Colonial Affairs (*lifanyuan*). As we have seen above, war was central in the Qing's incorporation of these overland polities. These newly conquered territories were considered "outer dependencies" (*waifan*) and were not administered like an inland province except Xinjiang, which became a province only in 1884.

## China's Rise and the International System

War was central to the rise of Qing China. As Peter Perdue notes, "From the beginning, Manchu rulers organized their society to make war."<sup>86</sup> Manchu state-formation was accomplished by war. War-making significantly enlarged Manchu-controlled territory and enhanced the power of the Manchu state. The Ming-Qing power transition was completed when the rising Manchu state conquered the declining Ming China in 1644. Nonetheless, it took four decades for the Qing dynasty to consolidate its conquest. In the process, the Qing eliminated the resistance of Ming loyalists, put down an eight-year civil war by the Three Feudatories, and defeated naval resistance to Qing power on Taiwan. By 1683, the Qing was the only great power and the regional hegemon in the East Asian international system.

As a regional hegemon, Qing China sought to maintain its dominant position by eliminating any threat to its power. When the Zunghar Mongols threatened the Qing's western frontier, the Qing court launched a series of offensive attacks to weaken the Zunghars and eventually destroyed their incipient state. Prior to the attack, the Qing court actively sought to prevent the Zunghars from forming an alliance with Tsarist Russia by signing the Treaty of Nerchinsk. The Qing also isolated the Zunghars from Tibetan support. Through military force, the Qing

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<sup>85</sup> Li Yunquan, *Chaogong Zhidu Shilun: Zhongguo Gudai Duiwai Guanxi Tizhi Yanjiu (on the History of the Tribute System: A Study of Ancient China's Institution of Foreign Relations)* (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 2004), 136-140.

<sup>86</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 547.



expanded into Zungharia, East Turkestan, Tibet, and Kokonor, more than doubling the territorial size of Ming China.

War alone, however, was not sufficient for state formation; the state also needed institutional transformation to support expansionist activities and to integrate newly conquered land. To build an empire, the Manchus supplemented military force with institutional innovations and commercial and cultural integration. The Qing court embarked on a “civilizing mission” of the peripheries, setting up schools in minority areas and requiring the sons of native elites to attend.<sup>87</sup> They modified the Ming bureaucracy and added Manchu innovations such as the banner system and the Court of Colonial Affairs. As a multiethnic empire, the Qing used five languages in communications with its subjects: Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan, and East Turkish. The Qing ruler was an emperor to the Chinese, a khan to the Mongols, and a chakravartin (wheel-turning-king) to the Tibetans.<sup>88</sup> In this way, China could be seen as part of the Qing empire.

Although the rise of the Manchu state resulted in war, the tributary rules of the game endured. The tribute system continued to regulate how China conducted diplomacy with other Asian polities. Tributary rules notwithstanding, the Qing could be pragmatic in its diplomacy with states from afar. The Treaty of Nerchinsk, for instance, was negotiated without the trappings of the tribute system. While European states conducted diplomacy in accordance with the Westphalian rules of sovereign equality, Asian polities remained wedded to the hierarchical norms and rules of the tribute system. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the Westphalian system would eventually prevail. The triumph of the Westphalian system, however, was the result of European gunboats. Qing China’s defeat by Great Britain in the Opium War in the 1840s symbolized the beginning of the Century of Humiliation.

The decline of the Chinese state was finally reversed after the end of World War II. Chinese leaders and people understand well the imperative of power: national weakness begets foreign humiliation; national strength brings national security. As a result, Chinese grand strategy is designed to achieve one simple goal: the pursuit of power. A strong, prosperous China is the best way to ensure national security. Through a series of economic reforms, the People’s Republic of China is now the world’s second largest economy after the United States. Chinese military continues to modernize and upgrade its capabilities. After the rise of Han, Tang, Ming, and Qing dynasty, we are now on the cusp of another rise of the Chinese state. Needless to say, the rise of China will have a profound impact on international politics. How will China behave as its power continues to rise?

There is no reason to expect China to behave differently from other great powers in history. A nation’s foreign policy behavior is largely a function of its capabilities. Rising states tend to

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<sup>87</sup> William T. Rowe, “Social Stability and Social Change,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 9, Part 1. The Ch’ing Empire to 1800*, ed. Willard J. Peterson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 506; Peter C Perdue, “China and Other Colonial Empires,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16, no. 1-2 (2009).

<sup>88</sup> Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong*; Perdue, *China Marches West*.



expand their political interests abroad. States expand because they can, not because they must.<sup>89</sup> History provides numerous examples of rising powers expanding political interests abroad, including the Netherlands in the late sixteenth century, Sweden in the seventeenth century, Britain in the late eighteenth century, France in the early nineteenth century, Japan in the late nineteenth century, the United States in the early twentieth century, and Germany before the two World Wars. In pre-modern Chinese history, both the Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty expanded their political interests abroad at the height of their power.<sup>90</sup> In international anarchy, all great powers behave in the same way.

The best guide to China's broad international behavior today is the country's relative power. Strong powers tend to be assertive of their interests. They are more capable of shouldering the costs and risks associated with taking actions to protect their interests. Recent developments in the South and East China Seas, in which China drastically increased the frequency of maritime patrols near disputed territories, reflect China's rising capabilities and the resultant willingness to protect its interests. China's growing military power enables Beijing to resolve disputes in its favor short of a direct military conflict. China is now the primary trading partner of various countries in the world. The growing economic dependence of other countries on the Chinese market gives China unprecedented leverage over their foreign policy, allowing Chinese leaders to employ the techniques of economic statecraft.<sup>91</sup>

China's rising power is chipping away at the unipolar structure of the world. The power gap between China and the United States continues to shrink. China's rise will challenge the U.S. policy of maintaining the balance of power in Asia. President Obama's "pivot" to Asia is an effort to rebalance the distribution of power in the region. Most Asian nations prefer to have the United States as an offshore balancer, an option that they did not have in their pre-modern history. A security dilemma is operating in U.S.-China relations, causing a deepening strategic distrust between the two countries.<sup>92</sup> Yet, the greatest danger lies in accidental escalation of a minor dispute amidst rising nationalist sentiment in Asia. Although the probability of a conflict is increasing, it does not necessarily mean that war is inevitable. Two structural factors might modify the conflict-propensity in U.S.-China relations: nuclear weapons and bipolar stability. Nuclear deterrence can be stabilizing and constrain state behavior.<sup>93</sup> The emerging U.S.-China

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<sup>89</sup> Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*.

<sup>90</sup> On Ming China, see Yuan-kang Wang, "Managing Regional Hegemony in Historical Asia: The Case of Early Ming China," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 2 (2012): 129-153.

<sup>91</sup> David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>92</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust," in *John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series 4* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, March 2012).

<sup>93</sup> Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).



bipolarity will be tense but stable because balancing will be efficient and misjudgments about each other's capabilities and intentions will be minimized.<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusion

War was central to the rise of the Manchu state and enlargement of its territory. Through the use of military force and institutional innovation, the Manchus were able to achieve regional hegemony in East Asia and eliminate security challenges to its dominance. Qing grand strategy was dictated by its relative power: the country became more aggressive as its power rose.<sup>95</sup> To maintain hierarchy, Qing rulers adopted the tributary rules of the game to govern diplomatic interactions in the system. Lesser polities submitted to Qing authority and deferred to the interests of the hegemon, while Confucian ideology provided justification for the unequal, hierarchical order of the system. If we use the 1839 Opium War as the end of Qing dominance in Asian affairs, the Qing regional hegemony lasted an impressive 157 years. It is indeed the most successful conquest dynasty in Chinese history.

The case of Qing China demonstrates the primacy of power over norms. The strong exercised power through the imposition of a set of norms and their acceptance by other political actors. The threat of military force was often hidden in the background. Backed by preponderant power, the Qing established and sustained a tribute system in which lesser polities deferred to hegemonic interests, enabling the Qing court to define legitimacy and authority. When Qing power declined in the nineteenth century, the tribute system collapsed under European gunboats. Although the Westphalian system adopted the norms of sovereign equality, in practice Qing China was forced to sign "unequal treaties" with the European powers. In international politics, material considerations are more consequential than norms. As Stephen Krasner points out, in an anarchic system, "stronger states can pick and choose from among those norms that best suit their material interests, or ignore norms altogether, because they can impose their choice on weaker actors."<sup>96</sup>

China's current rise cannot be divorced from a consideration of relative power. The international distribution of power, not identity and cultural legacy, holds the key to understanding Chinese foreign policy. Beijing kept a low profile when the U.S-China power gap was large. Chinese leaders saw Washington's two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as creating a period of strategic opportunity to develop Chinese economic and military power. China has made significant progress in accumulating relative power and China's rise is expected to continue. A wealthy and powerful China will be capable of pursuing a growing repertoire of overseas interests

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<sup>94</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, M.A.: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

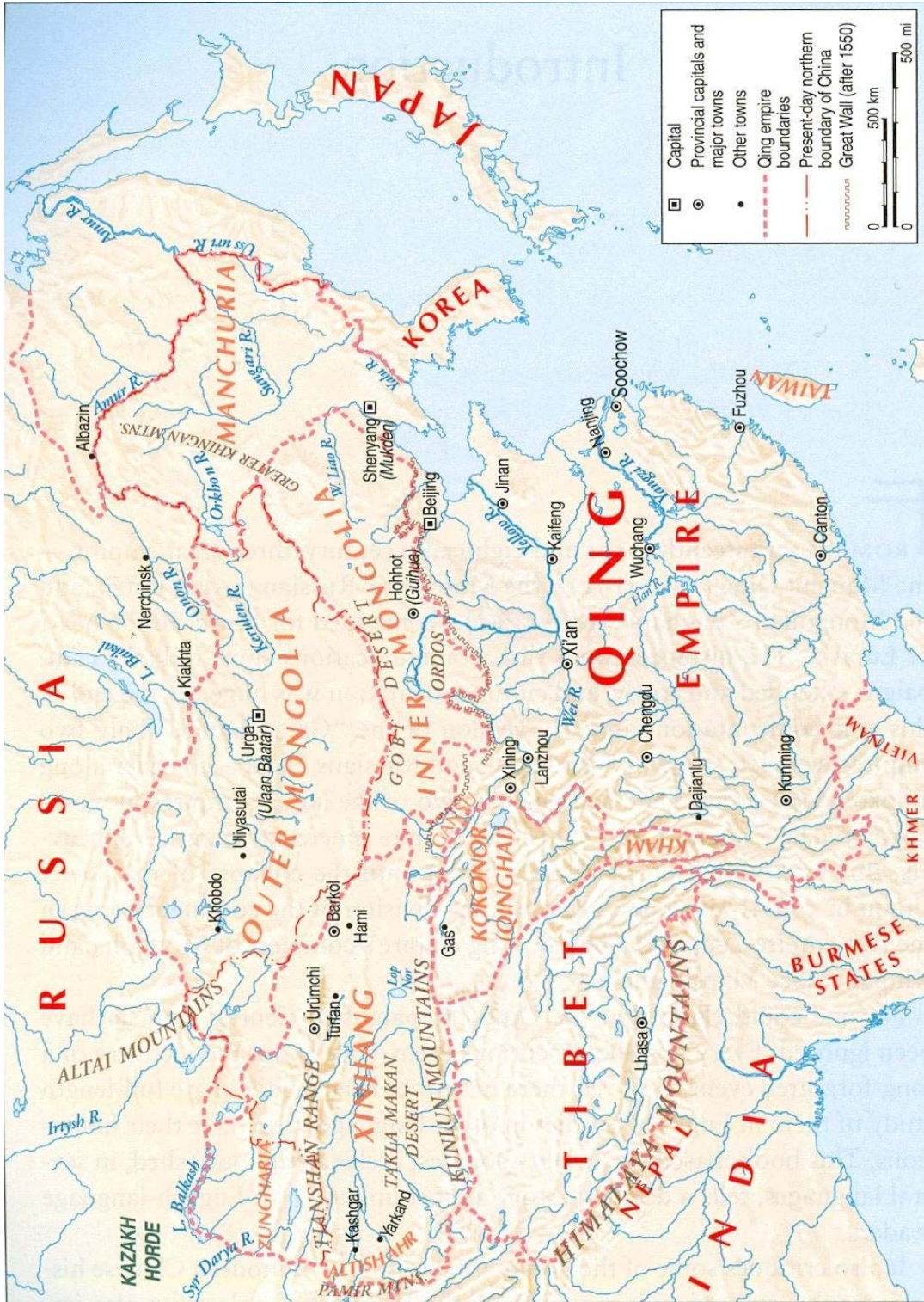
<sup>95</sup> This pattern is consistent with Song and Ming grand strategy. See Yuan-kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>96</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, "Organized Hypocrisy in Nineteenth-Century East Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 1(2001): 173-197 at 176.



that it previously was not able to. Reflecting its rising power, Beijing has become more assertive in its territorial disputes with Japan and Southeast Asian nations. To counterbalance China, Asian countries have made it clear that they would like the United States to be actively engaged in regional affairs. As the U.S.-China power gap narrows, the security competition between the two countries will intensify. Despite the rhetoric of mutual cooperation and strategic reassurance, the security dilemma of international politics is such that both the United States and China will be strategic competitors in the foreseeable future. ■





Map 1. The Qing empire, ca. 1800.

Source: Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 2.



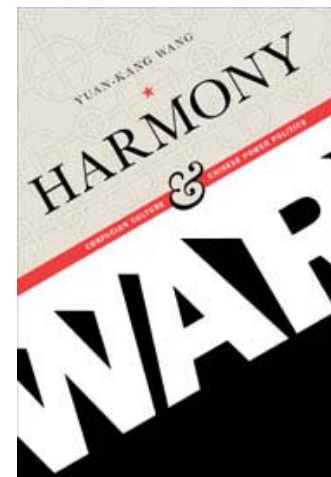
*Author's Biography*

**Yuan-kang Wang**  
Western Michigan University

**Yuan-kang Wang** is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Western Michigan University. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago, and was an International Security Fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and a Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution's Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies. Wang specializes in international relations, East Asian security, and U.S.-China relations. His research examines the nexus between international relations theory and historical China. He is author of *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2011), which examines the influence of Confucian culture on Chinese grand strategy, use of force, and war aims. Wang has published articles on peripheral nationalism in China, nationalist mobilization during Taiwan's democratization, and U.S. extended deterrence in the Taiwan Strait.

Recent publications include:

- *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011)
- "Managing Regional Hegemony in Historical Asia: The Case of Early Ming China," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 129-153.
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- Young-Hwan Shin, the Executive Director of EAI Fellows Program  
Tel. 82 2 2277 1683 (ext. 112)      [fellowships@eai.or.kr](mailto:fellowships@eai.or.kr)
- Typeset by Young-Hwan Shin

