The People’s Republic of China Taking over the Whole of the Qing Empire:

End of the Tripolar Framework of Analysis[[1]](#footnote-1)

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1. Twilight of the Old Order

**the Manchu banner’s invincibility completely lost**

After the emperor Qianlong died in 1799, Waley-Cohen (2006: 17) states, “the escalating struggle against internal uprisings, dramatic economic downturn, and the western imperialism that resumed in earnest after the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, combined forces to put an end to the extraordinary imperial dynamism of the high Qing era, even though the empire itself lasted for another century.”

The Qing rulers were able to co-opt the Mongols as a junior partner for their empire building, but then there appeared the Czarist Russians on the trans-Siberian frontier.1 There was no longer any Xianbei-Tungus antagonist challenging the Qing empire in the east, but then there appeared the maritime Western imperialists with gunboats, together with their brand new imitators, the *Japanese Devils*, who were much more organized and better equipped than the former pirates. 2 The White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1804), in the words of Fairbank and Goldman (1992: 191), had already “destroyed the Manchu banner forces’ reputation for invincibility.”The tripolar framework of analysis, as such, apparently became irrelevant to an understanding of the evolution of East Asian history.

From the Opium War against the British in 1839-42 to the Taiping rebellion of 1851-64 which followed the flood and famine of 1846-8, the Qing dynasty was overwhelmed by the Han Chinese peasant rebellions and ruthless incursions by Western commercial interests, the *Foreign Devils*.

A mighty “Christian” army of peasants and workers, led by Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全 1813-64, born near Canton, South China), a failed examination candidate and the self-claimed younger brother of Jesus Christ, swept north in 1851 from Guangdong to establish the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (太平天國) with its capital at Nanjing in 1853.According to Rowe (2009: 187), the Taipings believed that “southerners were the ‘true’ Chinese, since northerners had been contaminated by centuries of mixed blood from … conquest dynasties. … Confucius was … his major doctrinal enemy… ” The Taipings were the greatest threat to the Manchu dynasty’s survival. In order to free the government and its generals to deal with the southern rebels, the Qing rulers negotiated a settlement with the *Foreign Devils* by submitting to an unequal treaty system specified by the Tianjin Treaty in 1858 and the Beijing Treaty in 1860.

Any lingering relic of the reputation of invincibility of the Manchu banner forces was now completely lost. 3 When the Taipings swept further north into numerous provinces, it was the village militia spontaneously raised by the Confucian landed-gentry degree-holders in defense of their home communities that fended off the pseudo-Christian onslaught from the cherished Confucian social order.The Manchu rulers had no alternative but to make use of the regional Han Chinese armies of village militia in order to defeat the Taipings, and thus brought about the prototype of latter-day warlords.

**confucian scholar-gentry fight pseudo-christian taipings**

The backbone of the Qing bureaucracy in mainland China had been the Han Chinese scholar-gentry, which provided the base of talent for national, regional, and local administration. Passing the Confucian examinations, the Han Chinese gentry were able to become functionaries in the Qing dynasty and move up the ladder through the system, acquiring due privileges. The Taiping Rebellion was a peasant rebellion. The Taiping leaders attacked not only the alien conquest dynasty but also the Neo-Confucian ideology and the Confucian socio-political order.4

Li Hongzhang (1823-1901) was born in the province of Anhui (安徽 合肥), North China. Li won the provincial *juren* degree at twenty-one and the terminal degree *jinshi* three year later in 1847. He was chosen Bachelor (*shuji-shi*) of the Hanlin Academy and then promoted to a compiler (*bian-xiu*) in 1851. As an exemplary upper gentry-scholar, Li managed to launch himself on an official career when only in his twenties.5 Many gentry-officials selected from the holders of high literary degrees, such as Li Honzhang, proved not only their loyalty to the Manchu dynasty but also their outstanding capability in administrative and military operations during the Taiping Rebellion.

When the Taiping Rebellion broke out in 1851, Li and his father, like many other Han Chinese gentry, organized a local militia to protect their native province. Zeng Guofan, a Confucian scholar-stateman who had served as vice president of the Board of Civil Office, had created the Xiang Army (湘軍) in 1853 with the financial support of the Hunan gentry, and at that time was organizing the anti-Taiping forces in central China outside his native Hunan. Li, who had studied for several years in the Hanlin Academy under Zeng, joined his personal staff.6

Due to the expanding financial needs of his army, Zeng sought an imperial appointment as the official governing the area under his control. When the Eight Banners were destroyed by the Taipings, the Manchu rulers had no alternative but to appoint such loyal upper gentry leaders of regional private forces (called Brave Battalions 勇營 *yong-ying*) as governor-generals (督撫) or “governors of the provinces their armies defended,” enabling them to establish their own administrative organizations with the power of taxation, most notably on commercial trade. Zeng Guofan was appointed to governor-general of Jiangnan, Anhui, and Jiangxi in 1860. The regional gentry leaders, many of them widely respected *jinshi* scholars, controlled their own armed forces, appointed their own administrative staff, and raised their own funds. Such a regional administrative organization became, Michael (1964: xl-xlii) says, “a part of the official bureaucracy undermining its central control. This development tended to dissolve central authority and create new regional nuclei of power, as dangerous to the dynasty as open rebellion.” 7 The Brave Battalions, in the words of Ho (1998: 147), “marked the beginning of a process in which the main army system was ‘sinicized’ in the sense of its being completely dominated by the Chinese.”

In November 1861, Li was asked to recruit a new army from the northern Anhui area. Leading his new Huai army, the Local Braves, Li rescued Shanghai in April 1862, and became the governor of Jiangsu in December. Li recaptured Suzhou and Nanjing in 1863-4, together with the band of the Chinese army equipped with rifles and howitzers and officered by Western volunteers, called the Ever-Victorious Force, led by the legendary General Charles George Gordon.8 In June 1864, Hong Xiuquan died and his kingdom was obliterated.

Beginning in 1862, Chu and Liu (1994: 18) note, Li was “the foremost champion of China’s self-strengthening (*Zi-Qiang* 自强新改), a policy calling for development of China’s military and financial power, primarily through the adoption of Western technology, so as to enable her to cope with future aggression.” Li emphasized the training of the youths in mathematics and sciences as the prerequisite to building up armaments and modern industry. The *Zi-Qiang* movement originated chiefly in the local provinces in the early Tongzhi period (r.1861-74), but came to enjoy the strong support of the Manchu rulers. 9

In 1870, Li began a twenty-year term as Governor-General of *Zhili*, the province surrounding Beijing (直隸總督), and also as imperial commissioner of trade for the Northern Ports. 10 Li arrived at *Zhili* with one-third of the Huai army (numbering twenty-five thousand men), armed with Western weapons and trained by foreign instructors. The Qing rulers wanted to use the Anhui Army, Chu and Liu (1994: 50-1) write, “which had proved so effective in fighting the Taipings” for the “defense of the metropolitan province against possible invaders.” Li enjoyed independent military power as “a proto-warlord,” and made energetic efforts to modernize the Qing Empire. 11

The Manchu rulers had vigorously enforced the Neo-Confucian socio-political order tailored for the Han Chinese to realize personal success and power, identifying loyalty to the Manchu emperors as the loftiest sentiments of the Confucian tradition. According to Chu and Liu (1994: 25), Li Hongzhang continued “to identify the Qing dynasty with China, as he would do throughout his life,” and was never “conscious of any conflict between his loyalty to the reigning dynasty and his concern for China as a country (ibid: 39).”

**fanatically confucian socio-political order**

Under the Manchu Qing regime, Spector (1964: 17) notes, “it was necessary for an official to retire and enter a [3-year] formal period of mourning”upon the death of a parent. The Manchu rulers made it an unchallengeable social norm that may be remitted only by the special order of the emperor. Under an exceptional circumstance of national emergency, the emperor could formally “permit” the official “to carry on his duties unofficially, or as a member of the gentry.” When Li Hongzhang’s father died in 1855, Li’s elder brother “gave up his office, in conformity with regulation, and returned to Luzhou to observe a period of mourning … Li Hongzhang also gave up office, but since he was serving near…Luzhou, he merely remained on the job [as a member of the resident local gentry] and designated his activities as ‘unofficial.’ ” In case of emergency, the emperor’s permission was readily granted. This was “particularly true for local activity, such as the management of defense corps. Not only Lis, but Zeng Guofan as well, had served with distinction in local military efforts during mourning periods (ibid).”

In July of 1855, Chu and Liu (1994: 20) note, “just after his father’s death, Li had to interrupt his mourning to help Fu-ji [the Manchu governor of Anhui] repulse a severe Taiping attack. He was allowed to resume mourning for only one hundred days and, upon his return, worked in the governor’s military secretariat and also helped to direct a fleet of war junks on the Lake Chao.”

In 1882, Yuan Shikai was dispatched to Chosun by Li Hongzhang, who tried to control Korean affairs through Yuan from 1885 to 1894. On December 26, 1891, Yuan’s (adoptive) mother died. Yuan telegraphed Li, informing his intention to retire from his office and enter the three-year mourning period. The Korean Peninsula was at that time on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War. Li appealed to the court, and the emperor thereby ordered Yuan to observe only 100 days of mourning and to return immediately thereafter to his office in Korea. 12

**birth of the proto-warlord: a new generation of confucian gentry leaders**

The Taipings’ attempt “to overthrow the ruling elite,” Michael (1964: xxxviii) points out, “required the ability to build up a counter-elite of their own for their government.” The Taiping leaders indeed attempted “to create such elite,” but failed. The Qing managed to overthrow the pseudo-Christian Taipings with the help of foreigners and hundreds of local militia organized by the Han Chinese landed-gentry elite to defend their homes and Confucian tradition.The new gentry leadership, Michael (1964: xIii) says, “remained loyal to the Qing dynasty because the Taiping uprising had been directed not merely against the dynasty but against the social system itself. …[T]he regional power, once established, carried on; and the central government failed to regain that crucial part of its military, administrative, and financial authority that it had lost.” The regional military forces and the organizations soon deteriorated into warlordism.

The progressive-minded leaders of both the Manchus and Han Chinese at Beijing were able to give the Qing dynasty a new lease on life by supporting the conservative Han Chinese scholar-generals in the provinces and, at the same time, by submitting to an unequal treaty system with the Western powers, whereby the Qing unilaterally surrendered the tariff autonomy and granted extraterritorial jurisdiction. The Qing court, however, could not function as a modern central government at all. The Qing rulers including the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) were incapable of exerting positive leadership to introduce Western technologies and institutions *à la* the contemporary Meiji Restoration under way in the Japanese Islands.13 Even erratic Westernization, if any, was left largely to the provincial authorities where the Han Chinese power had become dominant. Simply by relying on the loyal Chinese lord protectors such as Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang, and Yuan Shikai, the Qing dynasty survived the occupation of Beijing by the British forces in 1860 and also by the Allied Expeditionary Forces in 1900, and lingered on until 1911.14

Chinese historians, as Waley-Cohen (2006: 5-6) says, view the Manchus as the alien rulers “whose wholesale adoption of China’s culture and institutions was the leading reason that they had been able to govern its vast territories and populations for so long.” That is, to fashion “a thoroughly Confucian dynasty” was the primary reason for their success in conquering and ruling mainland China. At the same time, they accuse the Manchu conquerors of failure to get rid of the “archaic” Confucian socio-political system to enable modernization, and thereby make the Manchu responsible for all the misfortunes which the Chinese suffered from the Western and Japanese imperialism after 1800. In other words, the becoming too thoroughly a Confucian dynasty for too long was the primary reason for the failure of the Manchus to modernize China.

2. Yuan Shikai Succeeds Li Hongzhang: The Last Confucian Gentry-Official

**the suzerain-subject relationship redefined by the new han chinese gentry leaders**

Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) was born to a distinguished scholar-official family of Henan Province (河南 項城), North China. Because he was a man of action, he tried but could not succeed at even the lowest provincial examination (鄕試) in 1876, and also in 1879. 15 Yuan began his military career in 1881 in an army unit under the command of Li Hongzhang.16 Owing to Li’s favor, Yuan Shikai was able to rise in the ranks of Li’s military organization to a position of strategic power. Yuan was dispatched to Chosun in 1882 as a leader of the six-battalion Qing force that was to prevent the encroachment of the Japanese into the Korean Peninsula. The political crisis in Korea offered Yuan opportunities to prove his talent in making quick judgments and improvising actions to address the moment.

The Manchu rulers had followed the traditional provisos of a suzerain-subject relationship with Chosun, according to Chu and Liu (1994: 177), which was understood as “courtesy, tribute, investiture, and compliance with the Chinese calendar,” without interfering “in a tributary’s internal and external affairs.”With the ever-increasing presence of the Western powers in the Korean Peninsula, and Japan’s annexation in 1879 of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, another of Qing’s tributaries, Li Hongzhang came to regard the Korean Peninsula as “the protective fence,” and “the first line of defense” for the security of Manchuria which, in turn, directly affected the security of the Qing Empire. Yuan Shikai also regarded the Korean Peninsula as “the shield next to China, holding the key to the door of the Northeastern provinces,” justifying an active intervention in Chosun’s internal and external affairs. In 1879, “the management of Korean affairs was transferred from the Board of Rites to the direct supervision and control of the commissioner for the Northern Ports,” leading to a redefinition of the traditional suzerain-subject relationship between Qing and Chosun (ibid: 178).17

Yuan Shikai was made the Qing commissioner at Seoul in 1885, and his energetic intervention in Korean affairs contributed to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. 18 Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 threw mainland China and the Korean Peninsula into a decade of imperialist rivalries. In order to block the encroachment of Japan, the Qing court invited Russia into Manchuria, but Japan won the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, taking over southern Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula.

Yuan Shikai had slipped out of Seoul in disguise on July 17, 1894, and assumed the task of training the new *Beiyang* Army (北洋新軍) equipped with modern rifles and artillery pieces. As the new army under the command of Yuan was the only remnant of the Qing military forces that survived the Boxer Rebellion (1898-1901), Yuan’s political stature became the greatest. He was Governor-General of *Zhili* from 1901-7. On the death of Cixi on November 15, 1908, which followed by one day the death of Guangxu (r.1875-1908), the regent who was the younger brother of the late emperor and father of three-year-old Puyi (r.1909-11) stripped Yuan of all his offices. The tide of revolution, however, threatened the very existence of the Qing, and the regent had to recall Yuan to office once more. At this critical juncture, Yuan appeared to the Manchu rulers and the Southern revolutionaries alike as the only man who could lead the country to unity without a massive bloodshed. Yuan managed to negotiate the abdication of Puyi with the provisional revolutionary government in Nanjing, and emerged as the first President of the Republic of China (r.1912-6) on February 14, 1912.

Yuan Shikai was the first Han Chinese to hold a viceroyalty and become a grand councilor without passing any Confucian examinations, symbolizing the twilight of the old order. Yuan enjoyed the unflinching support of the Empress Dowager until her death and, in return, recompensed the doomed Manchu rulers with respect, allowing them a graceful finale, quite unlike the execution of the Romanov family by Lenin in 1918.

3. New Chinese Leadership from the Merchant-Peasant Class of South China

**demolition of the old order**

The abolition of the civil examination in 1905 to be replaced by schools offering a Western-curriculum, Elman (2000: 622) says, implied the destruction of “a millennium of elite belief in literati values and five hundred years of an empirewide Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. The legacy of destroying that cultural *cum* creedal system…should not [have been] underestimated.” When the Qing rulers abrogated the traditional civil examination system in the name of “Westernization,” Elman (ibid: xxxvi) states, they “effectively lost one of its key tools of social, political, and cultural influence. In the absence of viable educational replacements, the abrogation of civil examinations accelerated the demise of the Manchu dynasty.

Elman states that “in the last years of the Qing dynasty, the civil examinations…became…the object of ridicule (ibid: 569) …while modern science…was championed by new intellectuals as the path to knowledge, enlightenment, and national power. … By dismantling…the civil examination system…before they provided suitable alternatives, the late Qing reformers and early Republican revolutionaries underestimated the public reach of historical institutions that had taken two dynasties and five hundred years to build (ibid: 621).”The “well-intentioned radicals who no longer understood the full implications of what they were doing,” replaced the exam degree so abruptly with the modern school diploma for entering government service and attaining social status. They were in a “race to nurture new forms of legitimation before they were overwhelmed by the forces of delegitimation that they themselves had unleashed (ibid: 622).”They were, in fact, completely overwhelmed within fifty years by the hitherto unforeseen forces, and the whole empire came to be ruled by the dictatorship legitimated by the Mao-style communist ideology.

The intrusion of western powers illuminated many new sources of wealth for a nation and families, but these did not provoke the gentry-scholar class to rebel against the Manchu rulers. “The first signs of conversion came from the middlemen-merchants,” explains Lattimore (1944: 33), “who were able to serve the foreigners as brokers if that service offered them more profit than their old function as the agents of the scholar-gentry.” Some landed-gentry families also participated actively in trade, industry and banking. The peasants, however, were held down to the old way of life and became the grassroots of the communist revolution. According to Ho (1998: 149), “not until the…Manchu court had clearly and repeatedly demonstrated its utter inability to overcome inertia and to ‘self-strengthen,’ especially after…defeat by Japan in 1895 and further humiliation consequent upon the Boxer uprising in 1900, did some Chinese intellectuals begin to launch a revolution aimed at the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty.”

**leadership from the bottom class of the social order**

Sun Wen (Sun Yatsen, 1866-1925) was born to a poor peasant family in Guangdong. In 1879, his brother, who had earlier emigrated to Hawaii as a laborer, brought him to Honolulu, where Sun attended a British missionary school for three years and Oahu College for another year. Sun returned home in 1883, went to study in Hong Kong, was baptized by an American missionary in 1884 (or in 1885), and eventually graduated from the College of Medicine for Chinese in 1892.

Experiencing the Boxer Rebellion (1898-1901) and observing the humiliations inflicted on the Qing regime, many Han Chinese went to Japan for education and military training, and then formed the core of the anti-Manchu revolutionary force. Sun Wen operated freely in Japan, plotting revolts against the Qing over a long period of time (after 1896 until 1907). Rowe (2009: 270) notes that, unlike the *jinshi* degree-holder Kang Youwei who also was born in Guangdong, “Sun self-consciously identified himself as a southerner, stressing his link with the southern anti-Manchuism of…the Taipings,” and that “in Tokyo in 1905 … representatives … organized the most inclusive and significant anti-Qing front yet put together, the Revolutionary Alliance (同盟會), with Sun as their leader (ibid: 272).”

On January 1, 1912 (by the solar calendar), Sun Wen was elected as the Provisional President of the Republic of China (中華民國臨時大總統) in Nanjing by the Revolutionary Alliance.19 Sun relinquished the title to Yuan Shikai on the day after the abdication of Puyi on February 12. 20 In order to unify all of the republican factions, Sun transformed the Revolutionary Alliance into the National People’s Party (國民黨 Guomindang, GMD) under the leadership of Song Jiaoren, Sun’s most trusted lieutenant. Song Jiaoren managed to score a clear victory in the December 1912 elections, only to be assassinated on March 20, 1913, presumably by Yuan Shikai. Yuan Shikai became emperor on January 1, 1916, five months before his death on June 6.

Sun Wen was able to reestablish his Southern Government at Guangzhou in 1923. Sun’s chief concern was the reunification of China, which had become divided among the warlords. 21 Sun restored the GMD in Guangdong, and accepted the Comintern offer of financial and military aid.22 In October 1923, Lenin sent Mikhail Borodin to Canton as the chief Comintern agent in China in order to reorganize the GMD coalition into a centralized and disciplined party organization, and to finance, train, and equip an entirely new GMD army on the Soviet model. The Chinese communists were to coordinate with the GMD to become the central force of the revolution.

Sun propagated multiracial national unity, flying the first five-barred republican flag of red, yellow, blue, white, and black horizontal strips representing the federation of the five races: the Han Chinese, the Manchus, the Mongols, the Muslims, and the Tibetans. The Qing rhetoric of the “single family of Manchu and Han Chinese” may have been the source of inspiration for Sun to propose “the single family of the five races (五族共和),” which strongly echoes the Qing formulation of empire and corresponds to the five official languages of the multilingual dictionary (*Wudi Qingwenjian* 五體淸文鑒) that was compiled at the order of the Qianlong emperor. 23 Sun proclaimed that, Elliott (2001: 359-60) quotes, “The root of a nation is its people. National unity means unifying the areas where Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans live as a single nation, and the union of these peoples as one people.”

According to Lattimore (1934: 103), the GMD, “during the phase of its greatest power, from 1927 to 1931, discarded the five-barred flag symbolizing a union of races, and undertook to impose Chinese standards on all Mongols, Tibetans and Moslems …with the intention of transforming them all…into Chinese-speaking, Chinese-thinking Chinese.” Jiang Jieshi, with the new *Sun-in-the-Blue-Sky* flag (靑天白日旗) adopted in 1928, proposed “five peoples,” denying that there were “five races” at all, says Elliott (2001: 359-60).24 Hence Lattimore (ibid: 131) asserts that “the Mongol policy of the GMD [was] essentially the…policy of exterminating the Mongols, or forcing them to turn into Chinese.”

Jiang Jieshi (蔣介石 1887-1975) was born into a salt-merchant family of Zhejiang province. Jiang’s father and grandfather sold salt, wine, rice, and sundry goods. In 1907, he entered an army school (保定軍校) in North China, and then in 1908 a military school (*Shimbu Gakko* 振武學校) in Tokyo, where courses for Chinese students were paid for by the Qing government. He served in the Japanese Nineteenth Field Artillery Regiment from 1909-11. Deserting his regiment, he sailed back to Shanghai to join the 1911 Revolution that led to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. Jiang also joined the 1915 Revolution against Yuan, who had declared his intention to become emperor.

Jiang began his public life in 1917 by joining Sun Wen’s GMD. Sun sent Jiang to Moscow in September 1923 to study the Red Army. Jiang was not received by either Lenin or Stalin, but he met Trotsky and received advice from the Comintern. Jiang also learned the methods of Cheka, the Bolshevik organ of state security and organized terror. Jiang came back in three months to head the new Whampoa Military Academy (黃埔軍官學校) that was established in January 1924 on the Soviet model at the site of an old Manchu fort and naval training center on the Whampoa Island in the Pearl River. 25 Stalin financed the Academy, sending Soviet instructors and Red Army generals as military advisers. At that time, the GMD party itself was being organized on Leninist lines, bringing in a large number of communists, including Zhou Enlai (周恩來), who became Borodin’s secretary and deputy director of political department, Mao Zedong (毛澤東), who headed the propaganda department, and Lin Biao (林彪) who graduated from the Academy in 1925.26

When Sun Wen died in March 1925, Jiang succeeded him as leader of the GMD, and launched the Northern Expedition in the summer of 1926. Stalin, ignoring Zhou Enlai’s proposal for a Communist own army, supported Jiang until April 12, 1927 when he engineered a coup as the commander-in-chief of the revolutionary army and carried out a violent purge against the Communists.Jiang had let the Bolsheviks and the Chinese Communists build a modern army for him to eliminate the warlords, and then started fighting against the Communists.

Jiang’s Northern Expedition in 1926-7 subdued more than thirty warlord forces in South China, terminating the warlord era of 1916-27. Jiang became the head of a new central government established at Nanjing in October 1928.27 In the face of the GMD’s military superiority, the Communists withdrew to the countryside and formed their own army and own government. By November 7, 1931, a communist soviet area was established in Jiangxi with Mao heading its government. When Jiang was to renew a full-scale assault against the communists, the Japanese invaded Manchuria, giving Mao a breathing space.

4. Intermezzo of Manzhouguo: A Pseudo-Qing Restoration

**Puppet Manzhouguo established by the japanese**

The staff officers of the Japanese Guandong Army in Manchuria engineered an attack on the Zhang Xueliang’s troops in Fengtian (Mukden/Shenyang) on September 18, 1931. After occupying the whole of Manchuria (down to Shan’haiguan) and a portion of Inner Mongolia, they established the puppet Manzhouguo (1932-45) in March 1932, with a national flag, an anthem, a capital (Xinjing/Changchun 新京/長春), a reign title (Datong 大同), and even a declaration of independence, installing the last emperor of the Qing dynasty, Puyi (1906-67 r.1908-11), as Chief Executive. The GMD-connected former warlord army was dissipated by 1933. In April 1933, the province of Rehe (Jehol) was annexed, and Japan withdrew from the League of Nations. Puyi was crowned emperor in March 1934 at Changchun. 28

The Qing rulers had treated Manchuria as their sacred homeland, and the Qing restorationists pursued independence through Manzhouguo. Rowe (2009: 285) notes that “As early as 1913 efforts were made to establish a sovereign homeland in the northeast for the ‘Manchu’ people, and various ‘Manchukuos’ were intermittently declared.” The Japanese rhetoric was also “Manchuria for the Manchurians [*Manchukuoans*],” but they never supported Puyi’s dream of restoring a Manchu’s Manchuria.29

The Han Chinese migration from the Hebei-Shandong area to sparsely populated Manchuria amounted to only 0.7 million between 1891-1916, but as much as 18.3 million between 1917-42.30 The imperialist Japanese “perceived the migrants as fleeing the nightmare of China [with its warfare, banditry, famines, and excessive taxation] for the joys of Manchuria,” taking advantage of the prosperity and economic opportunities created by the Japanese (ibid: 6).The Japanese historians saw the full-fledged Japanese invasion of mainland China from 1937 to 1945, in the words of Fairbank and Goldman (1992: 312), as “Japan following in the footsteps of the Manchu conquerors of 1644. … But the times had changed.”

**inner mongolian autonomous region**

Lattimore (1934: 45) writes that Manchuria “was overwhelmed by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, in the course of the conquest begun by Chinggis Khan,” and further states that the Mongol tribal migration “spread first over Southern Xing’an, occupied the whole great central plain of Manchuria, and then extended east and north until they were held up by heavy forests, which were unsuitable both for the movement of Mongol cavalry and for permanent Mongol occupation.” By the mid-seventeenth century, “the Mongols occupied about one half of Manchuria and nearly the whole of what is now the province of Jehol (ibid: 57).”The Qidan-Xianbei of western Manchuria apparently began to call themselves Mongols at this time and ever since, leaving no one to be registered officially as the Qidan-Xianbei in the PRC Northeast in our time.31

By the late nineteenth century, the Mongol frontier in Manchuria reached as far east as Harbin and Changchun, and to within 80 miles of Fengtian (Mukden). The Japanese set aside the Mongol territory in Manzhouguo in which the Han Chinese do not outnumber the Mongols (i.e., the wild territory west of the railway network in which troops could not be moved easily), as an autonomous Mongol province under the name of Xing’an province. “Its main axis was the Xing’an range, which ran from the Amur basin southward all the way into Jehol province” that had been almost completely occupied by the Mongols. It was meant to be a buffer state. The Mongols were “ruled partly by their hereditary princes and partly by elective and appointed officials,” and were allowed “to maintain their own troops,” free of the Manzhouguo army. Xing’an province had Japanese advisors, but they exercised a less minute control, for the Mongol position was virtually one of alliance.32

Manzhouguo held “about half of Inner Mongolia, consisting of Barga (the western part of Heilungjiang province), part of the Nonni valley, Jerim League (covering practically all of Fengtian province west of the Shan’haiguan-Mukden railway), and Josoto and Jo’oda Leagues in Jehol province,” Lattimore (1934: 25) notes, excluding only the area “thickly settled by Han Chinese.” The Manzhouguo Inner Mongolia was about as large as the Chinese Inner Mongolia.33

5. The PRC Inherits the People and Territory of Manchu Qing

**the qing legacy: prc as a unified polyethnic state**

Japan had occupied Manchuria in 1931, but Jiang Jieshi decided to fight against the communists first. After waging a series of battles against Jiang, Mao was forced to retreat in October 1934 with an army of 200,000 men from southeastern China all the way to the northwestern mountains of Yan’an in what came to be known as the Long March. Communist forces retreated 6,000 miles into northern Shaanxi province.

The Communist Party had been gaining local peasant support after the Long March of 1934-5. Mao Zedong, having emerged as the undisputed leader of the Communist movement, placed the peasantry rather than the proletariat in the vanguard of revolution. When the war with Japan broke out in 1937, the Communist army made a tactical decision to cooperate with Jiang’s forces and the Allies, but upon Japan’s surrender, the Communists defied Jiang’s command. Civil war raged in China from 1946-9. Mao brought an end to Nationalist rule at Nanjing in April 1949. Jiang’s nationalist forces were routed and fled to Taiwan. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established on October 1, 1949.

The PRC inherited all of the territories conquered by the Manchu Qing, together with the Manchu homeland itself. The Manchu rulers eventually provided modern China with a territorial unification of much greater extent than that achieved by the Han and Ming dynasties. The inclusion of Manchuria was a direct consequence of Manchu rule.

The legacy bequeathed to the PRC by the Manchu Qing does not seem to be confined to its territory. The PRC seems to have inherited, first of all, the spirit of imperial territorial expansion from the Manchus. Soon after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the Tibetans began fighting for their independence, but the PRC army managed to subdue the Tibetans by 1969, showing off the success of its own effort at conquest.

The PRC government, Elliott (2001: 360) states, had pushed the idea of a “unified polyethnic state” (*Tongyi Duominzu Guojia* 統一多民族國家/多元一體格局), stating that the PRC is “a state in which many nationalities are united,” and promising equality between the Han Chinese and all of the fifty-five minority nationalities.The modern Chinese national myth is that China is “a grand harmony of many lands and many peoples unified under the name *zhong-hua* (中華),” and the foundation of this myth “rests in the specific territorial and ethnic legacy left by nearly three centuries of Manchu rule (ibid: 361).”

The Manchu had initiated the redefinition of the Chinese people, the Chinese nation, and the Chinese territory, apparently preferring the concept of a “national family” dominated by the Manchu. The former peoples of the Qing dominions became the modern Chinese people. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has attempted to redefine the Chinese people, the modern Chinese nation, and the Chinese territory, apparently preferring the concept of a “national family” dominated by the Han Chinese, and believing in eventual Sinicization, culturally and genetically. 34

5. Active Partner, Passive Partner, and Hostile Partner

The evolution in the China-Mongolia-Manchuria triangle left only Outer Mongolia and the Korean Peninsula to maintain independent polity on the Northeast Asian continent.

**outer mongolia and the western mongols**

Ledonne (2004: 33) notes that “The basin of the Selenga — its tributaries, notably the Orkhon, descend from Khangai plateau overlooking the lower ranges of the Mongolian and Gobi Altai to the south — was the land of the Eastern Mongols. The Selenga flows into Lake Baikal, from which the Angara…begins its long northward curve to meet the Enisei which, like the Ob, empties into the Arctic Ocean.” The Eastern Mongols in Inner Mongolia (including the Mongolianized Qidans) were fully co-opted into the Eight Banner system before the conquest of 1644, but the Khalkha confederation in Outer Mongolia did not accept the suzerainty of Qing until 1691, 47 years after 1644.

The Western Mongols (also called Oirat or Zungars) had occupied the area around Lake Balkash and west of the Altai Mountains north of Tianshan. Lattimore (1934: 73) says that “the Manchus especially feared that the Western Mongols might create an independent military power capable of challenging their own.” Galdan, the leader of the Western Mongols, conquered Hami and Turfan in 1679, and destroyed the Khalkha Mongols around the old Yuan capital of Karakorum in 1687. In 1690-7, Emperor Kangxi personally led four expeditions against Galdan and drove his forces out of the Outer Mongolian steppe. 35

After submitting to the Qing at the Dolon Nor assembly (held from May 29 to June 3, 1691), writes Perdue (2005: 276), “the Khalkha Mongols had been incorporated into a ‘banner’ system … These banners, however, performed quite a different function than the Mongol, Manchu, and Han banners that had created the Qing conquest elite. … [They] had become territorial units … [obliged] to provide corvée duties at guard posts and postal relay stations and to sell their livestocks to officials for military campaign use.”

The Eastern Mongols in Outer Mongolia, writes Perdue (2005: 286), “had given the Qing the right to allocate their pasturelands, … settle their disputes, and levy troops and animals from them for its wars … but they survived as a people.” The Western Mongols, on the other hand, had ferociously resisted the Manchu rule and faced extermination: they simply “disappeared as a state and as a people (ibid: 285).” 36 The Mongols of Outer Mongolia were belatedly forced to join the Qing Empire but, with the fall of the Manchu Qing, were able to create the Mongolian People’s Republic (蒙古人民共和國) on November 26, 1924 with the help of the Soviet Union.

**inner mongolia**

Lattimore (1934: 16) explains: “There has always been a cleavage between Inner and Outer Mongolia, which goes back to fundamental factors of geography and tribal history.” 37 The Mongol princes of Inner Mongolia had been an active partner of the Manchus from the very beginning. With the fall of the Qing, they were afraid of the loss of “their powers and revenue,” and hence collaborated with the GMD authorities who encouraged the hereditary aristocracy “to assume absolute powers” greater than those they had exercised under the Mongol traditions at the price of yielding “fresh grants of land to the Han Chinese every year.”38 They could establish the *Mengjiang* United Autonomous Government (蒙疆連合自治政府) in 1939 and the Mongolian Autonomous Federation (蒙古自治邦) in 1941, but eventually vanished into the poverty-stricken Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (established by the CCP in 1947) of the PRC.

The aggressive colonization of Inner Mongolia by Han Chinese farmers, Lattimore (1934: 22) states, let the “first-rate pasture land be ploughed under the crops and exhausted within a few years, by the blowing away of the top soil, after which it is unproductive either for farming or for pasture.” 39 Overwhelmed by the massive influx of Han Chinese, the Mongols now constitute less than 18 percent of the total population of Inner Mongolia. 40 The tragic destruction of the Inner Mongolian steppe continues to aggravate the damages inflicted by the floating yellow dust blown by the spring air stream.

**korean peninsula**

The Three Kingdoms, Unified Silla, and Koryeo in the Korean Peninsula had been ruled by the hereditary aristocracy and dominated by Buddhist ideology. During the fourteenth century, the Koryeo aristocrats and Buddhist temples had rapaciously expanded their holdings of private lands and slaves, depleting state revenues. The reform-minded scholar-officials used the military strongman, Yi Seong-kye, to put their ideas into practice. Yi established the Chosun dynasty (1392-1910), setting up the structure of government and society according to Neo-Confucian ideals and wiping out the political influence of the Buddhist establishment. Chosun could obtain the Ming’s help in repulsing the Japanese invasion in 1592-8. On the other hand, the Qing invasion force of 1636 took a great many Chosun people as prisoner-slaves, thereby nurturing an enduring hostility against the Manchus. The Chosun people regarded their Manchurian cousins as shameful barbarians. They placed no value on their feats of conquering and ruling mainland China. The Chosun people fancied themselves heir to the orthodox Confucian tradition of the Ming dynasty and obliged to carry the torch of Confucian civilization in place of the hapless Han Chinese then under the yoke of the Manchus.

As of the twenty-first century, only the Mongols of Outer Mongolia (who had belatedly become a reluctant partner with the Manchus after 1691) and the Yemaek cousins of the Korean Peninsula (who had nurtured hostility against their Manchu cousins) are maintaining their ethnic identity as independent nation states. The irony of history seems to be that, had the Koreans identified themselves with their Manchurian cousins and were they actively supportive of the Manchu cause, they could have been a partner with the Manchus, as were the Mongols of Inner Mongolia, only to be buried in oblivion as inhabitants of one of those PRC Autonomous Regions.

Appendix 13.1. What Part of Manchuria Could Be Ruled, Even Intermittently, by the Han Chinese?

After the Han Wudi’s conquest of Old Chosun in 108 BCE, the Han Chinese began to inhabit the fertile Liao River basin called Liaodong. Lattimore (1940: 107) notes: “The climate of lower Manchuria does not differ from that of North China; the crops and agricultural conditions are the same. Everything favors intensive cultivation…”41 It was the only part of Manchuria that could be put under the direct control of the Han Chinese dynasties, off and on, for about 840 years at most out of the last three millennia (1000 BCE-2000 CE). The Han Chinese settlements were localized almost entirely in a triangular area in southwestern Manchuria centering on the alluvial basin of the Liao River and the uplands of the Liaodong Peninsula. This area came to be surrounded by a militarily guarded line marked by trees and ditches and punctuated with fortified gatehouses.

As a major way of preserving their identity and their control of mainland China, the Manchu Qing rulers tried to maintain their homeland as a base separate from Han Chinese life and culture. In order to prevent Chinese immigration from the Liao River basin northward, northern and eastern Manchuria were closed to Chinese immigration as early as 1668. 42

A long ditch with an embankment, repeatedly repaired and expanded, was built across southwestern Manchuria during the early days of the Qing dynasty. It ran from the Great Wall at Shan’haiguan, crossed the Liao River to the north of Mukden (Shenyang), and then returned to the coast near the Korean border down at the Yalu. It marked the boundary of the pale beyond which the Han Chinese should not expand, the statutory limit of Chinese settlement.43

The big ditch with an embankment several hundred miles long and lined with willows is known as the Willow Palisade (*Liutiao Bian* 柳條邊). The Qing pale surrounded by the Willow Palisade is a little bit larger than the Ming pale surrounded by the *Bian Qiang* (邊墻) that was constructed by the Ming military households of Liaodong from 1437-42 and 1479-81 to defend the Liaodong area from the intrusion of the Mongols (that included the Mongolianized Qidans) and the Nüzhens.The Inner Willow Palisade (老邊) extending from Shan’haiguan to the mouth of the Yalu River (遼寧東溝縣) was intended to keep Han Chinese out of north and east Manchuria, and the Outer Willow Palisade (新邊) connecting the Liao River (at Kaiyuan 開原北威遠堡) and the Songhua River (at the northeast of Jilin 北法特) was to keep the Mongols out of Manchuria. The Manchu and Mongol bannermen were stationed at twenty outposts (*karun*) to patrol its perimeter.

On the interior, the Willow Palisade was administered by the Mukden (Fengtian) military governor where the Han Chinese commoners could live legally. On the exterior, it was administered by the Ningguta (寧古塔 in modern Jilin Province) military governor where the Chinese commoners were not allowed to settle. “Heavily garrisoned and mostly off limits to Han Chinese,” in the words of Elliott (2000: 605), “access was controlled by a pass system and inspections at gates along the Willow Palisade” which surrounded the Qing pale. The cultivable land in Manchuria outside the Willow Palisade was either granted as bannerland to the decommissioned bannermen to farm along with their families (forming the rusticated bannermen households of the farming colonies) or provided to the Qing aristocracy and the imperial families, and regional government bureaucracy as manors (*zhuang* 莊), binding the land’s former cultivators to the new manors as estate serfs, enabling them to garner rental incomes and operational revenue.44

The Manchus tried to close their homeland to Chinese immigration and maintain Manchuria essentially as a hunting land outside the Chinese agricultural economy. Most of Manchuria, with its forests, streams, and hunting lands, was thus preserved for the tribal Manchu peoples for a long while. 45

Lattimore (1940: 107, 109) observes that it is easy “to cut off lower Manchuria from China. Land communication with China included several routes that could be used by armies but only one that is profitable for trade---the narrow coastal plain running to Shan’haiguan, a corridor that could be easily closed. The routes…across the hills of Jehol made cart haulage too difficult and expensive. … The Chinese Pale of lower Manchuria therefore remained isolated. [The] land communication with China through Shan’haiguan gap would be threatened from the flanking Jehol hills.” 45

If we look back over the past three millennia (1000 BCE-2000 CE), we see that the Han Chinese were able to rule the Liaodong area for less than 840 years: at most 328 years during the Han dynasties (206 BCE-220 CE) after Wudi’s conquest of Old Chosun in 108 BCE; 45 years during the Cao Cao’s Wei dynasty (220-65); less than 51 years during the Western Jin dynasty (265-316); 89 years after the downfall of Koguryeo in 668 until the An Lushan Rebellion (755-57), should one take Tang (618-907) as a Han Chinese dynasty; 276 years during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644); and 51 years under the People’s Republic of China (1949-2000).

During the 364-year period after the beginning of the Era of Five Barbarians and Sixteen States (304-439) until the fall of Koguryeo in 668, Liaodong had been occupied briefly by the Murong-Xianbei (Former Yan, 337-70) and then for a long time by Koguryeo. Liaodong had subsequently been occupied by such “barbarian dynasties” as Parhae (after the An Lushan rebellion in 757 until 926) for 169 years; Qidan Laio (907-926-1125) for 199 years; Nüzhen Jin (1115-1234) for 119 years; Mongol Yuan (1206-1234-1368) for 134 years; and Manchu Qing (1616-1911) for 295 years until at last it was taken over by the modern (People’s Republic of) China.

Appendix 13.2. Russia’s Conquest of Outer Manchuria

In Russian historiography, the Time of Troubles began at the death of Ivan IV (the *Terrible* r.1547-84) or at that of his son Fyodor I (r.1584-98) which was brought to a close with election to the throne of Michael Romanov. 46 Michael (r.1613-45) was elected by the advisory assembly of representatives (traditionally appointed by the government) of landed aristocrats, merchants, tradesmen, and *dvoriane* (the landholders subject to the hereditary obligation of military service), to become the founder of a dynasty destined to reign for three hundred years. 47

Driven by the lure of “soft gold,” the furs of beavers, Arctic foxes, and sables, Ivan the Terrible had let the Cossacks adventure west of the Urals across the Siberian wilderness, using the rivers as highways.The Cossacks ruthlessly extracted tributes of furs from reindeer herders, nomadic natives and hunter-gatherers.48 The annexation of western Siberia by 1583 was, in fact, carried on by private initiative and [fur] trading activities, employing private army recruited largely from the Cossacks.49 Immense territories extending to the North Pacific and the Arctic Ocean gradually came under the control of the czars.

According to Florinsky (1947: 249), Michael was elected to be czar primarily because of his utter insignificance, and his son (Aleksei r.1645-76) and grandson (Fyodor III r.1676-82) were also singularly free from any pretensions to actual leadership. Regardless of the leadership of the reigning czar, however, Russia’s eastward expansion in Siberia in the seventeenth century met much less resistance than its attempt at expansion in Europe.

The Russians made an appearance at the East Asian theater when the Manchus were conquering China. A group of Cossack adventurers floated down the Amur in 1649 and managed to reach the Sea of Okhotsk. The Russians built and garrisoned a fort on the site of a local town called Albazino in 1669, and began settling colonists there. According to Beckwith (2009: 224), the Manchus “considered the territory to be theirs due to campaigns of conquest undertaken by Huang’taiji between 1641 and 1643. They strenuously objected to the Russian action.” Emperor Kangxi (r.1661-1722) finally sent troops in 1685 and captured Albazino. 50 The Russians retreated to Nerchinsk on the Shilka River. Intermittent hostilities between the Russians and the Manchus led to the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689 that set the border along the Stanovoy Range and the Argun River, compelling Russians to remain out of sight behind the trackless forested buffer region. The Treaty, however, obliged the Qing, able to crush the Three Feudatory Rebellions (1673-81) only to face the growing threat of Galdan’s (r.1671-97) Western Mongols, to open trade in furs and other goods at Kiakhta near Orkhon-Selenge. 51 “After 1760,” Ledonne (2004: 40) states, “the Manchu dynasty was at the height of its power, and…their overwhelming power blocked any Russian intentions to force their hands in the matter of navigation on the Amur.”

Russians were able to maintain themselves at Okhotsk on the Pacific coast, while the Czar obtained a firm hold over Siberia, which remained unexplored for a long while. Drawn by the fantasy of mineral and agricultural wealth in New World facing the Pacific Ocean, Russians pushed north and east to the Kamchatka Peninsula, and Vitus Bering found Alaska in 1728-41. On the other hand, Emperor Qianlong (r.1735-96) conquered and exterminated the Zungars by 1759. The Khalkha Mongols were responsible for the logistics of the long wars against the Zungars, bearing the brunt of the Manchu war effort.52 “The Russians were not strong enough militarily” to establish a protectorate in Mongolia, Ledonne (2004: 38-9) notes, “and the Khalkha aristocracy, no matter how irritated by the high-handedness of the Manchus, was not willing to risk its substantial privileges for an uncertain future under Russian overlordship.”

“In May 1732,” Ledonne (2004: 40) notes, “the [Russian] Senate had authorized a second ‘Kamchatka expedition’ led by Captain Vitus Bering for the purpose of discovering islands between Kamchatka and America.” Following Bering’s voyages, Russians began to settle in Alaska. An imperial decree in 1799 established the Russian American Company, granting “exclusive jurisdiction of the American coast north of the fifty-fifth degree north latitude, and the right to occupy further vacant territories in the name of the Russian Crown.”53

Nikolai Muravev, Governor-General of Eastern Siberia from 1847-61, let a 800-man Cossack expeditionary force float down to the Amur’s mouth, giving explanation to the Manchu commander at the Aigun Fort that they were on their way to the Pacific to defend the Manchu-Russian interest against an Anglo-French force. In 1850, the port of Nikolaevsk (named after Nikolai I, r.1825-55) was established at the mouth of the Amur River. The Russians crossed to the Sakhalin Island in 1852-3.54

According to Florinsky (1947: 978), the Manchu commander at the Aigun Fort, “yielding to Muravev’s persuasion and threats, signed the Treaty of Aigun [in May 1858], which recognized Russian sovereignty over the left bank of the Amur from the Aigun River to the sea.” The Qing court did not ratify the Aigun treaty, but having been driven to extreme by the Taiping Rebellion, signed the Treaty of Beijing on November 14, 1860, recognizing “Russian sovereignty not only over the territories ceded by the Aigun treaty but also over the vast region between the Ussuri River and the Gulf of Tartary (ibid).” The Russians had already founded the city of Vladivostok (which means in Russian *Conquer the East* or *Rule over the East*) in July of 1860 that became the Russia’s ice-free Pacific port.

<http://www.WontackHong.com/homepage1/data/1150.pdf>

<http://www.HongWontack.com/homepage1/data/1150.pdf>

<http://www.HongWontack.pe.kr/homepage1/data/1150.pdf>

1. See Wontack Hong, *East Asian History: A Tripolar Approach*, Seoul: Kudara, 2012, Chapter 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)