

Chapter 16: Russia, Central Eurasia, China, Japan, 1500- 1700:

Centralization and Commercialization

Peter C. Perdue

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The reconstruction of Eurasian states in the wake of the disintegration of the Mongol empire has been described in Chapter 13. By the mid-fifteenth century, their stability was precarious. China's emperor had been captured by a Mongol Khan, and Japan and Russia were immersed in civil war. The remnants of Chinggis Khan's empire still challenged the settled states. By 1700, both ends of the continent had been stabilized by strongly centralized, expanding empires, and Japan had unified. The autonomous presence of nomadic states had nearly ended. The economies of the fifteenth century were still overwhelmingly rural, and the agrarian static ideal reigned. Over these two centuries, commercialization driven by demands of domestic trade, aided by global silver currents, took over as the primary economic driving force. Even the most reactionary rulers had to respond to the rising importance of trade.

Europe-centered historians generally focus on the □discoveries□ of the New World, the gunpowder revolution, and the spread of European empires to Asia. It is worth keeping in mind the relatively peripheral position of all the Europeans within the dense Asian trade networks, and the great inferiority of European military power on land. Only in long-range naval gunnery could the Portuguese and Dutch claim decisive superiority. That was enough to guarantee them small footholds on the continent, but not enough to ensure any commercial or political dominance. By 1700, China and Japan had ousted, or severely curtailed the penetration of Western projects of Christian conversion and mercantile penetration. Only Russia, under Peter I, took the radical step of reorienting the country away from the East and toward the West. But internal developments, from the center of Eurasia, were more decisive than the Western European maritime impact on the edges.

I. Sixteenth-Century China

China's economy reached a new peak of development in the sixteenth century. Commerce flourished on the rivers of the lower Yangzi valley [Jiangnan]. Here large cities stood at the top of an extensive hierarchy of market towns, extending into the highly productive countryside. China's population reached 150 to 175 million people by 1600, or 25 to 30 percent of the world. China was unquestionably the richest and largest economy in the world, united by the vital lifeline of the Grand Canal. The Ming empire was not expansive: instead it used its formidable logistic capacities to complete a continuous defensive barrier across the northwestern steppes of unprecedented scale: the Great Wall. Merchants large and small scuttled around the transport network, which reached from Jiangnan's riverways to the Southeast coast, the interior Yangzi valley, North China's dry fields, and out to the garrisons along the wall in the Northwest. Many of these merchants were literate.

They generated demand for new material goods and new literature in the vernacular language. The great Chinese novels and short stories of the period exhibit the disturbing consequences of economic growth. Because commerce so decisively shaped politics and culture, we can call this China's
 □Early modern□ era, in many ways similar to Europe.

Nostalgic Confucian literati thought that something had begun to go wrong since the 1520s. As they saw it, the early Ming [fifteenth century] preserved a simple, rural, self-sufficient economy, where there was just enough for each family, and little need for trade. □Men plowed and women spun cloth□, maintaining the orthodox separation of gender roles. Taxation was light, and paid only in kind. Officials were revered as paternalistic figures; no one had ambitions to move, or sufferings to flee. As one local gazetteer writer put it: □Most rural residents are simple, upright folk, whereas in the city □ some are fond of cheating others, dressing in fancy clothes and taking pleasure in making luxury articles□ [Brook 124]

But now, money ruled. In the words of Zhang Han [1511-93] : □Human disposition is such that people pursue what is profitable to them□ they rush after it like torrents pouring into a valley: coming and going without end, never resting day or night, never reaching the point at which the raging floods within them subside.□ [Zhang Han; in Brook, frontispiece] This obsessive drive for wealth corroded social values. Exchanging goods in the market gave simple people surplus money to buy fashionable items. The elite embraced conspicuous display of □superfluous things□. Writers denounced the craze for exquisite collections of rocks, porcelain, gardens, and paintings as a vulgar display of wealth by nouveau-riche classes aiming beyond their station.

Were they right? More objective data shows that market forces were in fact in play. These backward looking scholars invoked myths of an agrarian past in vain, because they could not stop change. We should not fall into the common trap of viewing Chinese society as hostile to commerce. In fact, vigorous pursuit of monetary gain pervaded Ming China, as markets ran roughshod over ineffective official prohibitions.

Contrary to stereotype, Ming China never completely banned maritime trade. Only exports of strategic goods like horses, weapons, silk, and large boats were prohibited. Foreign imports were permitted when licenses were obtained and import duties paid. But until the mid-sixteenth century, many officials disdained foreign trade and suspected merchants of improper diplomatic dealings with foreigners. The arrival of the Portuguese in the Philippines from 1500 to 1520 confirmed their worst fears. The Portuguese, whose only advantage lay in their long range naval guns, plundered or sank nearly every trading vessel to force out competitors, and butchered Chinese merchants in Malacca in 1511. As the regional economy connecting China and Southeast Asia fell into a slump, violent trade conflicts increased. Bans on foreign trade had no effect. The traders simply moved to offshore islands.

So-called □dwarf [Japanese] pirates□ raided the coast in the 1540s and 1550s, when famine drove

Chinese sailors, Japanese, and other foreigners to □raid where they could not trade□. [1] But gradually, profits overcame prejudice, and regular trade replaced piracy and suppression. In 1557 the Portuguese established a legal treaty port in Macao. The ban on overseas trade was lifted in 1567, after officials in Fujian pleaded to be allowed to capture tax revenue from foreign trade. This happened just as the Spanish conquered the Philippines in the late 1560s and the great silver mines of Potosi, Bolivia, opened in 1570s. Thus began the global flow of silver that tied together the world economy.

Silver flows

The demand for silver, the indispensable lubricant for trade, grew steadily even before the opening of the New World mines. Chinese first obtained bullion from Japan, but then the opening of the route across the Pacific via Manila greatly stimulated the economy of the Southeast coast. The classic Chinese exports of tea, silk, and porcelain flowed out through Southeast Asia to European consumers. In return, the Europeans had little to offer besides bullion and guns. Anxious discussion among statesmen and economic commentators focused on their deficit with Asia, stimulating the rise of mercantilist policies in Europe. In China, by contrast, it was the influx of silver that caused concern.

Many villagers still remained outside the silver economy. Their world was dominated by copper cash, used on local markets. Their main economic contact with the outside world came from taxes they paid in kind and corvee labor services. But this began to change, as officials moved toward monetizing the fiscal system. The □Single Whip□ tax reforms consolidated many small, variable payments into one or two lump sums in silver levied in approximate proportion to land value. It is one of the only major fiscal reforms in China to be driven from the bottom up, by local officials struggling to render their collection methods more efficient. Zhang Juzheng, the great reforming Prime Minister, finally made silver taxes compulsory in 1582, after nearly a century of local evolution. Early in the century, the contracting system to supply the Northwest frontier, described in Chapter 13, had also been monetized. Under the old system, merchants purchased monopoly licenses to trade in salt, and in exchange delivered bulk grain and cloth supplies to the Northwest garrisons. Now, the government simply paid them in silver to perform the task.

With these changes, the state actively promoted the dispersal of silver throughout the country, pushing the flow from the Southeast coast and Japanese entry points into the small

capillaries of rural trading systems and the underdeveloped frontiers. China sucked up increasing amounts of global silver, but did not freeze it in hoards, as Adam Smith thought; instead, the silver flow fueled an active, expansive money economy that knitted her regions more solidly together. Silver plus the Grand Canal ensured that China would never break apart again economically for long, despite the collapse of two dynasties and twentieth-century revolutions.

The Grand Canal and Great Wall

China's two greatest civil engineering projects culminated in this period. Economic historians who claim that China lost momentum in technological change after the cancellation of the early Ming ship voyages forget that the Great Wall and Grand Canal demanded tremendous technical creativity. All of China's major dynasties built great canals to supply their capitals with grain from distant production areas. The Sui – Tang in the eighth century were the first to establish a long-distance transport route from south to north, and the Yuan, in the thirteenth century, extended the canal to reach its maximum length.

Dredging and maintaining the canal required huge amounts of labor: 165,000 men worked to dredge the canal bed in Shandong between 1411 and 1415. Wherever possible, the route used existing river beds, but at crucial points, it had to cross over major rivers. The crossing of the Yellow River, "the throat of the realm" was especially vulnerable to flooding. At first, special military detachments took primary responsibility for grain transport, but when the soldiers were needed in frontier wars, civilians provided valuable supplementary services. By 1430, 160,000 transport soldiers carried from five to 6 million shi annually to the capital, or over 350,000 metric tons. A standard barge carried 30,000 kilograms of grain. The civilian operation was run by local "grain administrators", chosen from prominent families, who delivered up to 10,000 shi annually in taxes. They were wealthy people, but they also suffered from extortion by military officials and fines for failing to deliver their quota. By the end of the sixteenth century, this post was no longer profitable, but a burdensome duty. To avoid abuses, grain administrators contracted with "bullies" to protect and levy grain shipments. This form of illegal subcontracting, called baolan, became an increasingly prominent feature of imperial China's fiscal system. It reflected the precarious balance between the small number of salaried officials and the private actors who used the opportunities of the market to hire agents to perform their tasks.

The only way to keep the system from collapsing was to allow private transport of goods along with the official levies. These private goods occupied up to ten or fifteen percent of the total fleet. Transport soldiers could not survive without the profits of this trade. Even so, many of them deserted, turning to piracy or smuggling. Canal transport, a vital lifeline, gradually slipped out from under imperial control. But the new silver economy changed its structure, too. By the sixteenth century, the government paid soldiers silver to ease the burden of delivery. Yet total shipments to Beijing dropped. Several officials tried to revive sea transport, but the dangers of piracy ended these attempts. On the other hand, higher local production of grain and the circulation of silver made the canal shipments less necessary.

Under the Qing, the canal continued, but in much simpler form. The boats were not built by the government, but hired from private builders, and civilians replaced soldiers. More and more, the transport of private goods, not official grain, became the mainstay of the system, as boatmen, transport officials, and powerful merchants colluded against local people and provincial officials. The great imperial project of the Ming, which constructed the largest state-led logistical network in the world, ended up in the eighteenth century as a flourishing, but corrupt and violent, network of private transport businesses.

The canal became China's greatest North-South commercial artery, promoting the expansion of trading networks throughout North China, by linking cotton growing regions to the mills of Jiangnan. It carried private letters and official communications as well as visiting foreign embassies and official delegations. One could travel the total length from Ningbo to Beijing of 2340 kilometers in 49 days, at an average of over 45 kilometers per day. The canal ensured that China's poor north and rich south both gained by trading in their best products, but it also fostered mobility, crime, and disease. Great epidemics in 1641-42, originating in the northwest, spread rapidly south along the Canal, killing up to half the population in some southern counties.

The Great Wall has served for centuries as the central image of China's mythistory. In the popular imagination, it was a continuous barrier, built in the third century B.C. at immense human cost, lined with towers, beacons, and horsemen, which held off the dreaded nomadic conquerors from China's heartland. In fact, most of this conventional wisdom [including the idea that it is the only man-made object visible from outer space] is historical myth. Nearly all dynasties built long

walls of varying length in different places for strategic purposes, and Qin Shihuangdi in the third century BCE did link together many of the extant walls of his time. But it was not until the sixteenth century that a dynasty built a genuinely continuous defensive barrier along the northwest frontier.

The distinctive characteristics of Ming China made this immense feat feasible. More aggressive dynasties, like the Tang and Qing, drove back nomads so far that there was no need for a wall. The defensive Song dynasty, after losing control of North China, kept away its enemies with river barriers and heavy tribute payments. Ming China, ruled by Han Chinese from the south who had little familiarity with the north and nothing but contempt for nomads, could never pursue aggressive military campaigns into the steppe after the fifteenth century. The expensive Great Wall strategy was only a fallback when trade and war failed.

Wall building was no one's first choice. The massive recruitment of peasant labor, creation of brick kilns and quarries, and development of transportation was only possible once the government could pay workers with silver. In this way, the Great Wall, too, was a product of China's commercial society. The Wall ran from Jiayuguan in the west, in modern Gansu province, through Ningxia, south of the great bend of the Yellow River, in the Ordos region, across northern Shanxi, around Beijing, to meet the sea at Shanhaiguan in Liaodong, Manchuria. Nine Border Garrisons occupied key defensive positions. At Badaling, forty miles northwest of Beijing [where most tourists visit the wall today], there still exists a great ceremonial arch built by the last Yuan emperor with inscriptions in Sanskrit, Tangut, Uighur Turkish, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese. The Ming also created the long stretch across Manchuria from the capital city to the sea, site of another impressive gate.

Plausible estimates of the wall's length range from 1500 to 2500 miles. At its best spots, the wall itself was wide enough to allow horses to ride on top of its solid brick paths, but in many parts, it was only made of earth. Garrisons of men and horses ranged from several hundred to several thousand. Firearms also helped to terrify the Mongols and to support raiding parties. The towers spaced along the wall were, however, the most important part. Communications mattered more than defensive brickwork, because the nomads moved so rapidly. Beacon fires alerted the garrisons to a raid on a vulnerable spot, so that forces could be concentrated there.

By the mid sixteenth century, Beijing and the northern plains were surrounded with several layers of defensive barriers, but the Mongols soon found ways around it. In 1550, they went around the wall to the northeast, camped in the suburbs of Beijing, and looted the surrounding countryside. In response, the Ming further extended walls across the northeast, at very high cost. They temporarily held off Mongol raids, but they never established diplomatic or commercial relations with their neighbors in the steppe. Like France's Maginot line, China's wall was a temporary political solution, and an inadequate strategic defense work. It epitomized Ming China's greatest strengths: its massive commercial wealth and its great expertise in logistics, and its greatest weaknesses: its exclusionary policy toward frontier peoples, and its lack of strong leadership.

Crops and Trade

Other commodities besides silver came in through the southeast coast. The most important ones were crops from the New World. Maize, tobacco, the chili pepper, and sweet potato in particular, drastically changed the Chinese diet and made possible further population growth. Maize and the sweet potato produced large nutritional benefits without as much backbreaking labor as rice or millet. They would grow on the poor eroded hillsides of South China where no other crops could be planted. Their spread encouraged migrants to leave overcrowded valleys for the mountains. Tobacco offered large prospects for commercial gain, especially in Fujian. The Chinese diet became more varied because of these imports, and because fruits and vegetables were added. Sugar, too, complemented well the chilies and peanuts from the New World: The popularity of peanut brittle candies exemplified the new foods now available from foreign contact. Gongbao jiding [Chicken with chilies and cashews], a classic dish well known to any regular Chinese restaurant goer, gets its main flavorings from the New World.

Sugar itself became an important export product at this time. Of Indian origin, it was brought to China by Buddhist missionaries as early as the eighth century CE. By the thirteenth century Chinese doctors knew that it rotted the teeth, but only in the sixteenth century did it become a common part of the Chinese diet. In Fujian and Guangdong, sugar cane production grew rapidly, and by the eighteenth century China was one of the world's largest sugar producers. Her per capita consumption of about 2.0 pounds was comparable to that of France (2.2 pounds in 1788). Only England and the Netherlands were ahead. Sugar exports formed a significant part of the Southeast Asian trade networks dominated by Chinese junks.

The arrival of the Dutch in Asian waters increased demand for China's sugar. The Dutch transported over 4 million pounds to Amsterdam in 1637. They sponsored cultivation in Batavia and Taiwan, but China's exports still dominated the home market. Europeans did not bring global trade to Asia: they only entered as marginal actors in already thriving, large scale, intra-Asian networks. The Dutch and British soon discovered that the biggest profits lay in the trade between Asian ports. In the 1630s maybe 40,000 tons of goods were transported in Chinese ships in Asian seas as compared to between 12,000 and 14,000 tons on Dutch ships. Thus China's southern and southeastern coastal regions continued and increased their close involvement in global trade routes, defying the frowns of officials.

China's domestic crops -- cotton, silk, and grain -- still remained the dominant products, but each of them became much more highly commercialized. When cotton production spread from the Yangzi valley to the North China plain, type of plantation production developed there, based on larger estates and hired labor. Managers exported the raw cotton to the spinning and weaving centers in Jiangnan. Although monetized tax demands and the Grand Canal fostered commercialization everywhere, the center of textile weaving remained in the lower Yangzi valley, where peasant producers increasingly specialized in just one crop. Songjiang county [now Shanghai] planted as much of 90% of its land in cotton. Each of the links of the production network was now separate; seldom did one peasant household grow, spin, and weave its own cloth according to the Confucian ideal. Merchants bought ginned cotton, sold it to spinners, bought the yarn to distribute to weavers, and sold the cloth to wholesale dealers. This production process looks like the "putting-out" system of early modern Europe, which many historians see as the "proto-industrial" stage leading to full-fledged capitalism. But it was not exactly the same. No one group of merchants controlled the entire production process, nor did merchant capital genuinely drive the peasant producers' activities. Instead, many merchants bought and sold in many markets; some could monopolize the peasant's output with usurious loans, but none could truly eliminate the independent peasants' control over relations of production.

Conversion to commercial crop production brought risks, as well as gains. Lower Yangzi cloth producers now depended more heavily on grain exports from the middle Yangzi valley. A failed harvest, or floods on the Yangzi, could easily cause famine. Heavily indebted peasants could be bankrupted by price fluctuations. They could mortgage their land, but they might lose it forever, and be forced into the roving life of the hired labor, refugee or bandit. It is probably too soon to speak of "proletarianization" of the rural labor force, but there is clearly greater concern about mobile populations and anxiety about the insecurity of rural life.

Popular and Elite Culture

The spread of markets changed popular and elite culture, by expanding the distribution of printed

books. Chinese had, of course, invented printing in the eighth century CE. The first mass produced religious literature was not the Gutenberg Bible, but Buddhist sutras. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, books on a wide range of religious and secular subjects served the literate elite who studied for examinations, wrote poetry and letters, investigated agriculture and technology, and debated philosophy. During the Ming, the volume and variety of published material expanded to reach a large urban population beyond the scholarly elite. The basic technology did not change, but the supply of booksellers, paper, ink, and woodblock carvers increased. Publishing centers emerged in surprising places. Suzhou, the mercantile and artistic capital of Jiangnan, produced the highest quality books, at the highest prices, but the cheapest, lowest quality publications were printed in the interior of Fujian, in the midst of bamboo forests that supplied abundant raw material for paper. From there, books were sent 1000 kilometers north to Nanjing, where they reached a mass public that wanted language primers, moral tracts, novels, erotica, jokes, route books, and all sorts of useful knowledge.

Erudite gentry looked down on this vulgar ephemera, but they themselves were caught in a collectors' frenzy. In the sixteenth century, one earned fame by amassing one thousand volumes in a private library; by the seventeenth century, collections of up to five thousand volumes were not rare. The distribution of knowledge was, however, uneven. In rural areas, farmers suffered from not knowing about advanced plowing techniques used nearby. Officials tried to help them by publishing agricultural manuals and promoting demonstration fields. On the other hand, specialized craftsmen jealously guarded their professional secrets, and passed them on only to apprentices. Publishers of herbal manuals criticized doctors who concealed their healing techniques.

China did not experience a radical breakthrough from oral to literate culture with the wide onset of printing, as has been claimed for sixteenth-century Europe, nor did printing undermine the empire's unity. China already had a substantial literate elite, who favored wider dissemination of knowledge. Vernacular literature did flourish, and populist sects of Buddhism and Confucianism spread to new audiences, but the strong economic ties and the cultural unity of the elite held the society together. With a few exceptions, the emperors did not try to censor this flood of information. Because printing was so cheap and widespread, they realized, it was hopeless to restrict publication to a few authorized printers. In Europe, printing required substantial capital investment in metal presses, but in China, simple woodcarving sufficed. The Chinese solution to the dangers of heterodoxy was to drown the people in more information. So the first Ming emperor had his pronouncements against evil and corruption printed on a wide scale and made required reading for examination students. Classical texts, law cases, and administrative handbooks provided guidance on bureaucratic precedent for officials, while morality books and stories of exemplary men indicated proper behavior to the public. Officials printed multiple copies of blank forms for registering land. Still, the reading public wanted more than the official word. They wanted almanacs to foretell auspicious days,

divination rituals, religious tracts, erotic stories, etc., and there were plenty of booksellers to satisfy the demand.

Private letters also grew in popularity. Aided by the courier services and trade routes, scholars could exchange ideas, and merchants could make deals over long distances. Often literary exchanges were then collected into published works. The notorious eccentric philosopher Li Zhi published his debates with his opponents before he committed suicide. Women profited especially from access to epistolary networks. Living mostly in seclusion in their households, they could contact an outside world of fellow artists, poetry writers, and religious believers by writing, even if their male kinsmen discouraged them from travelling or gathering together. Publications of letters by talented women poets provide us with a small window into this world.

The official world maintained a common culture by reasserting the values of the classical Confucian texts. The Ming dynasty was the period when the Zhu Xi version of Confucianism first became undisputed orthodoxy, enforced in the examination system. The examination halls were □cultural prisons□ where students aspiring to degrees had to memorize and reproduce the accepted interpretations. Out of 50 to 75,000 candidates taking the provincial examinations every three years, only a few hundred would receive the prestigious juren degree, and most of them would never get an official post. The intensive mass competition for degrees did focus the minds of China□s most talented literate people on the single goal of gaining bureaucratic positions, helping to unify the elite and maintain social conformity, but it had other disruptive effects. The intense frustration of failed scholars found outlets in dreams and devotion to magical arts. Far from turning into dedicated rationalists, these students tried desperate measures to get ahead, including well known cheating techniques [inscribing characters in one□s robe] and appeals to divination and magic. Examiners, as they do everywhere, condemned students□ efforts to beat the system, and tried hard to remove favoritism and arbitrariness, but inevitably, popular novels and advice books saw the examination system not as a smooth selection of the most talented, but as an arbitrary, capricious institution that raised a few to the heights of power and dashed most into despair.

Within the system, however, there was considerable flexibility. The exam questions themselves did not simply ask for regurgitation of acceptable responses. Although a substantial part of the exam consisted of fill-in-the-blanks or multiple choice questions [no novelty to us today], the policy questions varied over time. A surprising amount of the questions in the Ming concerned investigation of the natural world. Questions on astronomy, calendrical calculation, mathematical harmonics, and philology all allowed promising candidates to demonstrate mastery of technical intellectual skills, akin to the scientific method. The exams and their examiners reflected broader intellectual trends of the sixteenth century that were open to new views of the natural and human world. This openness disappeared after the Qing conquest, when the Kangxi emperor banned questions on heavenly portents and the calendar, fearing challenges to the legitimacy of his

dynasty's rule. Chinese concern for systematic investigation of the natural world continued, but not in the examinations.

The sixteenth century produced unusual ferment in philosophy and scholarship. Wang Yangming [1472-1509], the restless, rebellious scholar and official, shook up orthodox philosophy as radically as Martin Luther. At the precocious age of twenty, he obtained his juren degree, but unlike the typical student, he tried to test Zhu Xi's ideas in practice. Zhu Xi's central principle of gewu [investigation of things] required, he thought, intensive examination of objects in the world to discover the rational principle [li] beneath them. But after intensive meditation in a bamboo grove for seven days, he fell ill, and suffered a spiritual crisis. Although he passed the metropolitan examination and obtained important official posts, his philosophical doubts continued. In 1506, he was exiled to Guizhou province, in the remote southwest. There, living with poor aboriginal peoples, he suddenly realized that the true source of understanding was not in the world, but in the mind [xin]. "My own nature", he said, "is, of course, sufficient for me to attain sagehood. And I have been mistaken in searching for the li in external things and affairs".^[2] Rejecting Zhu Xi's separation of the mind and the world, Wang began to promote the radical doctrine that the mind is the origin of principles, and, even more shocking, that knowledge and action are one. Scholars must reject dry scholasticism and put their deepest moral beliefs into practice.

Wang, unlike most philosophers, was in fact a talented administrator and even military strategist. He defeated rebellions, relieved tax burdens, and gained fame for benevolent action combined with moral instruction. His "community compact" marked a new step toward connecting officials with their subjects, by gathering villagers together for collective "self-criticism" sessions to reward good deeds and punish the evil, including detailed reports and confessions, and a banquet.

Wang collected hundreds of loyal disciples who helped to spread his doctrine of "innate knowledge of the good" found in the mind. To critics, this internal focus and stress on sudden enlightenment looked suspiciously like wild Chan [Zen] Buddhism. Disciples of Wang Yangming pushed his ideas even further in the direction of self-oriented liberation from social norms, and organized mass preaching assemblies. His ideas of action flowing from thought had great influence in Tokugawa Japan, where they later inspired the leaders of the Meiji Restoration, and in China they inspired political leaders like Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong. The powerful influence of Wang and his followers has led scholars to claim that this period displayed analogous trends of individualism and liberalism in Confucian guise, driven by new social mobility and intellectual development.

Wang Yangming devoted himself intensely to becoming a sage. Like Luther, he suffered serious spiritual crises which led him to reject the orthodox road to salvation, and he developed a highly original philosophy that attacked established moral conceptions. He, too, gathered many followers and spread his doctrine by the printed word. Just as Catholics attacked Luther for dividing

Christendom, seventeenth century thinkers blamed Wang and his disciples for causing the moral degeneration that led to the collapse of the Ming dynasty. But Wang became an honored official and scholar by the end of the Ming, and the dynasty fell not because of him but because of deeper fiscal and institutional weaknesses. No nation states and vernacular scriptures replaced the imperial order; the center still held, although under new rulers.

The passionate, bitter skeptic Li Zhi [1527-1602] carried these self-seeking ideals to their ultimate extreme. He came from a commercial family with Muslim roots in Quanzhou, Fujian, where Ming suppression of foreign trade forced the hard driving merchant classes into black markets and smuggling. He hated all organized creeds, and resented the mechanical memorization demanded by the examination system. Unlike Wang Yangming, Li did not throw himself into service to the common people, but withdrew from the world and became a monk. In his famous work □A Book to Be Burned□, he attacked Confucian rationalist metaphysics and forcefully asserted his independence of received wisdom. An angry mob burned down his temple home, and a memorialist at Beijing attacked him, leading to an order for his arrest. Li committed suicide in protest in prison by slashing his throat.

Li's Nietzschean attack on conventional morality insisted on the uniqueness of the individual and the need for heroic, strong men to defy social norms. He even admired the despotic emperor of Qin, who set things right by force. Many modern scholars see Li as a martyr in the cause of intellectual freedom, but he himself did not favor personal political freedom. His books circulated widely in the late Ming atmosphere of tolerance, skepticism, and decadence, but by seventeenth century scholars attacked him for undermining civic and ethical responsibility.

Vernacular Literature

In the late Ming the popular Chinese novel came into its own. It originated in the storytellers' booths on the streets of Song China, where fast talking raconteurs turned sages, warriors, and statesmen into lovers, gods, and heroes. Elite guardians of propriety looked down on this lively tradition, but several eccentric scholars wrote novels derived from the storytellers. Filled with details about daily life, the novels are especially revealing about familial relations. Of the six most famous Chinese novels, four were published in the sixteenth century: *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*; *Outlaws of the Marsh* [or *Tales of the Water Margin*, or *All Men are Brothers*]; *Jin Ping Mei* [or *The Golden Lotus*]; and *Journey to the West*, [or *Monkey*].

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms is a popularized chronicle of the battles and intrigues following the fall of the Han dynasty, when good king Liu Bei, a descendant of the Han royal house devoted to justice, lost to the arch villain Cao Cao. Liu Bei's blood brothers Guan Yu and Zhang Fei serve as

the model of courageous, honorable strongmen, who are defeated by those with greater intelligence and guile. Popular tradition deified the heroic warrior Guan Yu. Liu Bei's master strategist Zhuge Liang has become renowned for his clever schemes that defeated a superior foe while minimizing the use of force, as recommended in Sunzi's Art of War. He is the ultimate master of cunning wisdom, or "metic intelligence" celebrated by the Greeks in Odysseus and his patroness Athena. Later military commanders, including Mao Zedong, studied the stratagems of the Three Kingdoms as a guide to guerrilla warfare.

The Golden Lotus expands upon an episode of *Outlaws of the Marsh*, in which the the upright Wu Song's wife Lotus is seduced by the unscrupulous Ximen Qing when he is away. One hundred chapters describe in detail life in a wealthy merchant household, including graphic sex scenes so explicit that until recently these passages were translated only into Latin. In the end, the innocent Lotus becomes a nymphomaniac who literally arouses Ximen Qing to death with her passion. Then Wu Song returns, like Odysseus, to his endangered household, and commits slaughter to set things right. The strange, to us, combination of businesslike description of merchant affairs with equally clinical pornography indicates the wide ranging tastes of Ming readers, who formed a genuine middle-class, but far from Victorian, audience.

Journey to the West unites a deep spiritual quest with magic, violence, adventure, comedy, and picaresque travel. Nominally, it portrays the historical journey of the monk Tripitaka to India to obtain sacred scriptures, but Tripitaka is accompanied by two animal characters who steal the story. Pigsy represents the human lust for pleasure. A fat hog with a vicious rake for weapon, his greed constantly gets Tripitaka into trouble, but he fights valiantly to rescue him. Monkey, the most brilliant creation of the Chinese novel tradition, represents the spiritual guide for the weak human monk. The story probably originates in the popular jataka stories told by Indian Buddhists, and Monkey may have a connection to the Hindu deity Hanuman. Monkey's cunning is most highly praised in the Indian Buddhist concept of upaya, or "skillful means", which strongly influenced Chan Buddhism in China. His transformations also evoke Middle Eastern parallels. His enormous magical powers are often misdirected into mischief. When he stole the sacred peaches from Heaven, he was banished to earth to help mortals find salvation. Despite demons and seductive women, ultimately Guanyin, the Buddhist manifestation of compassion, guides the pilgrims to their goal. This fantastic and humorous novel is much more entertaining than Pilgrim's Progress and almost as rambunctious as Rabelais. Monkey's clever tricks, like those of Zhuge Liang, exalt the role of cunning in the service of a higher ideal. Monkey's sharp eyes, like "glinting-eyed Athena", perceive the demonic traps missed by the obtuse, blind Tripitaka. Guan Yin, however, even more perceptive, uses deception and coercion over Monkey to convert him to a saint. Monkey is really an allegory for the "monkey-Mind": the novel exalts the creativity of human intelligence.

II. The Seventeenth-Century Crisis and the Ming-Qing transition

Neglected by the capital officials, local administration suffered from serious structural weaknesses by the end of the sixteenth century. Local officials could not collect even minimal taxes from the powerful landed elite. We suspect that Ming population had grown to a new peak of 150 to 175 million by 1600, but the registered population remained only a little over 60 million, as it had been in 1400. This de facto light taxation did not earn the officials any appreciation; on the contrary, the obvious inequalities in tax levies caused resentment. Rent resistance movements and uprisings by bondservants threatened to tear apart the rural social order, but the dynasty lacked the forces to suppress them. On the northwest frontier, garrisons held much fewer men than the records claimed, either because of desertion, or because commanders inflated the rolls and pocketed the absent men's rations.

Clearly, reforms were needed. Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng took office in 1572, determined to enforce austerity on the court and efficiency in the provinces. His first target was the imperial household, consisting of 20,000 eunuchs and 3000 palace women. As tutor to the emperor, Zhang insisted on economies. He also insisted on full payment of existing tax quotas, and launched a new national land survey to uncover concealed land, generating a storm of criticism. Hanlin scholars attacked him for refusing to leave office on the death of his father; he had them beaten with clubs. Zhang himself was no ascetic; he lived in high style and cultivated his own favorites to offset the patronage networks of his enemies. Although his harsh methods, in retrospect, could have saved the dynasty from collapse, few grieved at his death in 1582. Instead, the young Wanli emperor [r. 1573 – 1620] recalled the victims of his persecution and confiscated Zhang's property. The next Grand Secretaries were much more accommodating to the interests of local officials and elites.

But without a strong person at the top, the bureaucracy fell apart into factionalism. The sensitive, intelligent, but feckless Wanli emperor was not the man to enforce discipline. Devoted to his beloved concubine, not his official wife, he insisted in defiance of convention that her son succeed him to the throne. His second great interest, at the young age of twenty, was in his own tomb, built at colossal expense in the outskirts of Beijing, where tourists still flock to see it. Bored with rigid ceremonials, he refused to confirm appointments or give direct orders; eunuchs took care of official business for

him. The bureaucrats themselves did not want an active emperor who learned too much about how the country really ran, so they made sure to keep Wanli confined as much as possible to the palace compound.

A small group of public-minded officials, however, formed "righteous circles" who collectively discussed public affairs. Their perceptive diagnoses of moral and fiscal failure sound remarkably similar to critics in the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires. Like the Ottoman Katib Celebi, they invoked the trope of decline and called for reform. The Donglin academy in Jiangsu province became an autonomous voice of scholars determined to reform public life. Insisting on high moral principles, they conducted lectures, held annual meetings, and even sang together to reinforce their solidarity. Gradually the Donglin grew close to becoming an organized party, but their critics at court attacked them for improper interference in political affairs. Most notorious was the powerful eunuch Wei Zhongxian, the *de facto* policy maker in Beijing from 1612 to 1627. He had several Donglin supporters killed, purged the organization, and stripped its members of their degrees. In 1626 he ordered the academy destroyed. In 1627, however, a new emperor dismissed Wei, restored the academy, but eliminated its political influence.

After the suppression of the Donglin, a new academy movement, the Fushe, took up the challenge in the 1630s. They aimed to create a true national political organization by developing fund-raising techniques, communication networks, and organizational solidarity. They focused more on concrete policy issues like famine relief, tax reform, and public works than the Donglin, and they sponsored important collections of writings on statecraft. They gained substantial regional power in Nanjing in the last years of the Ming, but most were executed or driven into exile under the Qing.

The Donglin and Fushe movements stand out as rare examples of collective political organization by the literate elite outside the official bureaucracy to promote reform. Confucian political teaching supported the right of the individual scholar to remonstrate against improper behavior by the ruler, but ever since the vicious political battles of the eleventh century, "factionalism", or group dissent, had become suspect. These scholars were hardly democrats or liberals: their philosophy was completely conventional, and they advocated only moral transformation, not institutional change. But like the "individualist" followers of Wang Yangming, whom they detested, they represented new possibilities of political change in a fluid, contested environment. China had its "sprouts of liberalism" in these efforts to limit or escape bureaucratic power, but they withered under the

turmoil of the last years of the dynasty.

Some elites engaged in active philanthropy, inspired both by Buddhist ideals of compassion and by Confucian goals of harmonious social relations between rich and poor. Their acts of compassion included purchasing and releasing birds and fishes, and feeding rice gruel to the starving. Elites and officials cooperated to sponsor orphanages, old age homes, and homeless shelters. Qi Biaoja [d. 1645] wrote a two-hundred page diary about his relief activities during a famine in his home town. Putting humanitarian ideals into practice caused him immense anxiety. Relief workers today face many of the same practical dilemmas: how to purchase grain, how to set up soup kitchens, how to regulate grain prices, and how to coordinate the activities of local elites. In these troubled times, at least some of the Ming literati felt a strong personal responsibility to improve their society.

The Collapse of the Ming

Following a classic dynastic pattern, Ming China collapsed from a combination of internal unrest and external invasion. Across Eurasia, states everywhere faced major challenges to their legitimacy in the seventeenth century, enough to lend plausibility to the concept of a general seventeenth-century crisis. The English Civil War, French religious wars, the Thirty Years War in Europe, rebellions in Spain, Russia's Time of Troubles, and the military upheavals in China and Japan may not be all be produced by one cause, but similar patterns do appear. Scholars have argued for a number of different underlying factors, including climatic change [the Little Ice Age], population pressure, fiscal limitations, decline in silver flows, and blocked mobility of aspiring elites. Somewhat neglected are the specific military and state formations that interacted to produce the general upheaval. For Ming China, the crucial arenas of conflict were the northwest and northeast frontiers.

Central Eurasia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Rise of the Manchus

After the debacle of 1449, when the emperor was captured by his Mongol adversary, the Ming did not pursue any aggressive campaigns into the steppe. For a century, no leader arose among the Mongols, either, but frontier raids continued. In the mid-sixteenth century, Altan Khan emerged as a leader with the potential to create another Mongolian tribal alliance, but his real goals were not conquest but trade. He repeatedly raided the frontier, then requested trading relations on the Chinese border, which Ming officials indignantly refused. This cycle of raid, request, and refusal continued for decades, inflicting serious costs on the frontier defense and economy. Finally, in 1570, the astute

Zhang Juzheng negotiated a sensible truce. Altan was given the title of "Submissive Prince". In return, he gained the right to "offer tribute", that is, to sell poor quality horses to the Chinese at high prices in exchange for valuable supplies of metal goods, silk, tea, and farm tools. Turning toward settlement, he founded a city which became modern Hohhot, capital of Inner Mongolia. Most important, in 1578 he received the monk Sodnam Gyamtsho, leader of the Yellow Sect of Tibetan Buddhism, and granted him the title of "Dalai Lama" [Oceanic Teacher]. The Dalai Lama declared Altan Khan to be a reincarnation of Kublai Khan. Soon after, the Ming also gave the Dalai Lama a Chinese title. Thus began a triangular strategic relationship between Tibet, Mongolia, and China that affected frontier policy for the next two hundred years. The Dalai Lamas now secured control in Lhasa, the Mongols converted enthusiastically to Buddhism, built monasteries and supported Lamas, and the Chinese attempted to use the Buddhist church to gain Mongolian loyalty. Upon Altan's death in 1582, the Mongols fell apart again, and the northwest frontier remained relatively quiet. Like the Mongols and Tibetans, other Central Eurasian regimes were moving toward centralization based on religious alliances. The Shaybanid Khans of the Uzbek state, which ruled much of Central Asia in the sixteenth century, had close ties to Sufi Islamic orders, as the Tibetans and Mongols relied on Buddhists. These movements paralleled the general trends toward cultural integration across the continent.

The most successful Central Asian challengers to Ming rule came from the Northeast. Manchuria's broad lowlands are ringed by mountain ranges separating it from Mongolia, Russia, and Korea. Rainfall is generous, the climate is temperate to cold, and the Amur, Liao, Sungari and Yalu rivers provide ample support for forests, fish, and agriculture. The Jurchen peoples [they were not officially called Manchus until 1635] were dispersed in tribal settlements there, living mainly from hunting, forest products, and fishing. The Ming stationed a commander in Liaodong, in southern Manchuria, to defend Beijing, and granted trading licenses to local Manchu chieftains. Nurhaci [1559-1626], the builder of the Manchu state, was a chieftain of the Aisin Gioro clan, who prospered from his close contacts with the Ming. Nurhaci's rise as a frontier chieftain on the border of a rich empire, with patronage from its frontier commanders, recalls the methods used by Muscovy to grow under the Mongol empire, and those of the early Ottomans in relation to Byzantium. In 1583, at age 25, he took control of his clan and began to attack his kinsmen. As his following grew, he gained support from the Ming for maintaining order on the frontier, and was given the rank of brigadier general. He

also drew in some pastoral Mongols, who named him Kundulun Khan. For proposing [but not actually fighting] to help rescue Korea from Hideyoshi's invasion in 1592, the Ming gave him the highest military title ever given to a Manchu, and Nurhaci profited from exporting ginseng, fur, and pearls to Korea and China. The growing Manchu state, even in the remote Northeast, thus used international trade routes.

The invention of the Manchu alphabet also depended on global communication technology. In 1599 Nurhaci ordered his advisors to create a new phonetic script for the Manchu language. Manchu is an Altaic language, part of the broad family of languages that includes Turkish in the West, Mongolian in the center, and Tungusic languages like Manchu in the East. Altaic languages have distant connections with the Uralic languages [Hungarian, Estonian, Finnish] farther west, and Japanese and Korean farther east. Across Central Eurasia, nearly all aspiring state builders established scripts in their native languages as their communication needs grew, or they borrowed from available trading languages. Sogdian, the primary trading language of medieval Central Asia, derived its script from Syriac, and ultimately from Aramaic and Phoenician. The Turkic Uighurs in the eighth century turned the script ninety degrees counter clockwise, imitating the up-and-down Chinese characters, but keeping the phonetic alphabet. The Mongols adopted this script, and the Manchus then modified it to fit their language. Manchu was the last of the new phonetic scripts of the world, all of which can trace their roots back to the Phoenicians of the first millennium BCE.

Now armed with wealth, large populations, and writing technology, Nurhaci created his most brilliant organizational innovation, the "Eight Banners". Adapted from the Mongolian military organization of thousands and ten thousands used by Chinggis Khan, the Banners were comprehensive military units, each with its own flag, subordinate companies ["arrows"], and commander. They included not only soldiers, but entire families and villages, along with artisans and farmers. Most important, by cutting across the strong clan ties of the Manchus, they allowed Nurhaci to build a powerful state and war machine. Mongols and Chinese who joined the expanding state formed their own banner companies. The banners served as a flexible mechanism for uniting the diverse ethnic groups of Manchuria under a single coordinating leadership. Along with the Ottoman devshirme, it was the most powerful creation of the Central Asian military state building tradition.

The Manchu Conquest

In 1616, with his entire population organized as a war machine, Nurhaci proclaimed himself Khan of a new dynasty, the Latter Jin. His ancestors, the Jurchens, had created their own regional dynasty, the Jin, that controlled Manchuria and Northern China in the twelfth century, until it was destroyed by the Mongols in 1234. At first, Nurhaci looked backward to this regional regime and not forward to the conquest of China. But the persistent incompetence of Ming frontier policy offered great opportunities in the south. Moreover, to keep his alliance together, Nurhaci, like conquerors before him, had to keep expanding. He successfully stormed the major Chinese city of Shenyang [Mukden], and made it his capital in 1625, but died soon after losing a major battle in the next year. His son, Hung Taiji, completed the autocratic centralization of the Manchu state and continued the "great enterprise", the conquest of China.

Hung Taiji rejected his father's concept of collective leadership, soon expelling his brothers from power and confiscating their banner properties. He raided North China and invaded Korea in order to overcome the Manchus' shortage of silver currency. Unlike Hideyoshi's invasion, no one rescued the Koreans this time, which is why they remained hostile to the new rulers of China for the next two hundred and fifty years. Once replenished, he openly declared himself the emperor of a new dynasty, the Qing, in 1636, prohibited the humiliating term Jurchen, and renamed his people "Manchus". Once he had captured the seal of Chinggis Khan's Mongol dynasty, he could now claim a universal lordship that united Chinese, Manchu, and Mongol under a single regime. He pillaged many Chinese cities, but died in 1643 before the final conquest. That was executed by the regent Dorgon in 1644, after internal rebellions had destroyed the remnants of Ming power.

While the Manchus grew, Ming power weakened. Because of the failure to reform the tax system after Zhang Juzheng's death, frontier desertions and unequal pressure on the poor peasantry of the northwest created military weakness and agrarian unrest. In the backwaters of Northern Shaanxi, a horrible famine in 1628 drove desperate farmers to form bandit gangs. Over thirty of them, with 200,000 followers, spread all over the province. Two ex-soldiers turned these gangs into large rebel armies that brought down the Ming regime: Li Zicheng [1605-45], a postal courier and skilled horseman, and Zhang Xianzhong [1605 - 1647], a strong, hairy, garrison soldier.

After rebelling in 1630, they moved east to plunder richer territories. Incompetent military officers concealed Beijing's defeats, as rebel mobility outwitted the government's superior, but slow troops. As Li rampaged back and forth across North China, Zhang headed south, pursued by Ming

troops, to security in isolated Sichuan. In the midst of terrible drought in 1639, Li promises of tax relief attracted local gentry support. In 1641 he besieged the key city of Kaifeng for a month. Its defenders cut the Yellow River dikes to drive him away, killing several hundred thousand innocent victims. Beijing's officials were too divided and too busy holding off the Manchus in the northeast to act. In 1644, Li proclaimed himself emperor of a new dynasty, the Da Shun, designated ministers, coined money, drew up calendars, and handed out titles. He marched his army into Beijing on April 25 to establish his reign, which would last less than two months.

Meanwhile, in Sichuan, Zhang Xianzhong likewise proclaimed a new dynasty, and launched a terror campaign against wealthy families and Ming officials. Unlike Li, he made no effort to attract scholars to his side, and remained little more than a plunderer during his devastating rule. He abandoned the province in 1646 after inflicting a scorched earth policy on it, and was killed in 1647 by Manchu troops.

The last Ming emperor had called on Wu Sangui, former brigadier general of Liaodong, to save the capital, but abandoned his palace compound and hung himself from a tree when Li invaded. Wu arrived at Shanhaiguan, the critical pass where the Great Wall joins the sea, only to learn that the emperor he served had died and rebels controlled the capital. Dorgon appealed to Wu to join him, arguing that the Ming had lost the Mandate of Heaven, and only the Manchus could restore order. Wu made the fateful decision to ally with the Manchus, allowing them through the pass to drive out Li from the capital. On June 6, 1644, the Manchu leaders declared the establishment of the new Qing dynasty.

Wu Sangui has been condemned as a traitor for helping the barbarian Manchus, but neither Wu nor the rest of the Chinese thought in such racial terms. These are late nineteenth century concepts. Confucian principles of loyalty could either lead one to support a defeated regime, hoping to restore it, or, like Wu, turn to the new conquerors who promised to bring order. Other Ming officials followed the fleeing princes of the imperial family south, hoping to create a viable regime in the South. Christians in the Ming court even appealed to Pope Innocent X for aid. But this Southern Ming lasted only until 1662, when the Manchu armies drove the last Ming pretenders into oblivion in Burma. On Taiwan, meanwhile, the merchant pirate adventurer Zheng Chenggong [Koxinga] drove out the Dutch, and his son held out until 1683.

The Manchu military leaders used exemplary terror to enforce submission. At Yangzhou they

inflicted a devastating massacre on the city to punish its resistance. Eyewitnesses described □ piles of corpses everywhere...babies lay everywhere on the ground. The organs of those trampled like turf under horses □ hooves ... were smeared in the dirt, and the crying of those still alive filled the whole outdoors □. [3] At the end of the nineteenth century, this massacre became prime evidence for Manchu barbarity, but many others perpetrated violence. Roving bands of soldiers, refugees from famines, peasants fleeing the land, and rampant epidemics were common signs of social disintegration for nearly a century. Ultimately, only the disciplined Manchu armies, not the ragtag Ming troops, showed any promise of being able to knit the social fabric back together.

Like the diagnoses of decline, the late Ming revolts had parallels across the Eurasian continent. In France, Russia, and the Ottoman empire, serious uprisings threatened the stability of agrarian autocratic regimes. The Celali revolts in Anatolia, lasting from the 1590s into the early seventeenth century, like those of the Ming, were led by unemployed, unpaid soldiers. Both created autonomous regional regimes, but only the Chinese rebel leaders directly challenged the center. China □s rebel armies had more peasant participation, while the Ottoman rebels relied on soldiers, students, and provincial magnates. Ultimately, the rebels failed in China because of foreign intervention by the Manchus, while the Ottomans coopted their rebels into the existing structure and survived as a dynasty. In Russia, the Cossacks of the southern steppe rebelled to assert autonomy against the centralizing Muscovite state, and eventually worked out a measure of independence. French peasant revolts attacked both landlords exacting excess dues and state officials whose tax collecting powers were seen as illegitimate. All these agrarian empires overcame major attacks and stabilized themselves by the mid-seventeenth century.

III. The Kangxi Emperor □s Reign [1661 - 1722]

In 1661 the young Shunzhi emperor died of smallpox, and the regents chose his robust brother to succeed him. This boy grew to become the famed Kangxi emperor [r. 1661 □ 1722], who inaugurated a time of glorious achievement for the Manchu regime. In 1667, at the age of fourteen, he defied his conservative uncles and faced the greatest challenge to the newly unified state: the independent power of Wu Sangui and his fellow Chinese military leaders in the South. They had been rewarded with autonomous regional commands for their support of the Manchu conquest, but the emperor knew well how Nurhaci, his grandfather, had used his patronage by the Ming to

overthrow his benefactors. Kangxi, instead, provoked these rulers of the "Three Feudatories" into revolt and suppressed them vigorously.

By 1683, after capturing Taiwan, he had created a truly centralized regime, very different from the late Ming, and larger in size. He restored the economy by investing in water conservancy and giving peasants tax breaks to cultivate wasteland. He cultivated the support of the local elite by maintaining low Ming taxation levels, but enforcing equitable payment. And he welcomed Ming scholars into the new state, offering them a special exam that would give them elite privileges. It was a dilemma for these "holdover" literati: what did true loyalty mean? Adherence to the ideal of the vanished Ming, or surrender to the non-Chinese, but disciplined Manchus, who promised to restore the classical order? Confucius himself, facing a similar dilemma, provided ambiguous advice. Most chose the easier path, and convinced themselves that it was the moral thing to do. They joined actively in projects of "statecraft", aiming to reform the system from within.

Three men, however, refused to serve the Qing and wrote daring critiques of the autocratic state. Huang Zongxi [1610-95], in *Waiting for an Enlightened Prince* [1662], attacked the excessive centralization of dynastic China, which made the emperor think that the entire realm was his personal property. Anticipating the French liberal philosopher Montesquieu, he argued for local freedoms based on the security of a hereditary elite, one closer to the "feudal" nobility of ancient China. Huang's text outlines the institutional basis for a liberal regime. Gu Yanwu [1613-82] also looked to localities to resist autocratic power, by investigating the topography of regions suitable for guerrilla warfare. More influential was his devastating attack on Ming philosophy, which he blamed for the decadence that brought down the empire. Instead, he promoted detailed philological study. The most eccentric of all, Wang Fuzhi [1619-92], found an unbridgeable divide between barbarian Manchus and civilized Han. In his defiant, openly racist categorizations, he rejected the Manchu project of multicultural integration and laid the basis for virulent anti-Manchu nationalism.

Jesuits and Chinese in the Ming and Qing Courts

The Kangxi emperor, on the other hand, embraced learning from many cultural sources, including Westerners. This period marks the peak of European influence, brought by Jesuit missionaries during the late Ming. The Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci [1552 - 1610] arrived in Macao in 1580, and after twenty years of effort, accomplished the incredible feat of learning classical Chinese on the level of

top ranking scholars, publishing works in Chinese, and gaining the right to live in the capital and enjoy frequent access to the emperor. The most brilliant cultural mediator of all time, he raised the status of Christian missionaries to the highest level and converted many prestigious scholars. At the same time, his key tactic of "accommodation" of Christian teachings to the Chinese literati's received views brought attacks both from purist Christians and suspicious Chinese.

Ricci's success was a result of his unique personality, not of the innate appeal of Christian doctrine. Ricci inveigled himself into court circles by espousing the essential harmony of Confucian and Christian traditions. His adroit translations of Christianity into Chinese focused on the common themes of moral quest and respect for a common "Heaven". Quite a few erudite scholars believed that Christianity only carried on the original wisdom of the sages: Confucius and Laozi had "gone West" in ancient times, and the Westerners were now bringing them back.

The Hanlin scholar, Xu Guangqi, baptized "Paul", author of *A Complete Book of Agricultural Management* and translator of Western texts on mathematics and astronomy, was Ricci's most famous convert. Xu presided over the famous competition between Chinese, Moslem, and Western astronomers in 1629 to predict a solar eclipse. Proper regulation of the calendar was a vital function of all imperial rulers, because the order of government had to be closely aligned with that of the heavens. The victory of the Jesuit calculators led to reforms of the Chinese calendar on Western principles.

Ricci was careful to avoid stressing features of Christianity that would shock his Chinese audience, like the cannibalism of the Eucharist, or the intolerance of other Gods announced in the Ten Commandments. The discovery of a tablet describing Nestorian Christianity in the Tang dynasty also helped to show that Christianity was a familiar, ancient faith. It had first come from the northwest, along the Silk Road, and now it arrived by sea, just like Islam.

The canny Jesuits knew that it would take more than philosophy to win China for Christendom. They offered practical skills, like gunpowder and navigation, to all sides during the Ming "Qing" transition. Both the Ming and the Manchus used cannon obtained from Jesuit and Portuguese agents. These cannon helped the Ming win a battle against Nurhaci in 1626. Since the fleeing Ming court had written letters to the Pope appealing for more missionary aid against the Manchus, anti-Christians had good reason to suspect "foreign interference in China's internal affairs", as the modern Chinese put it.

Adam Schall von Bell [1591-1666] gained enough trust from the Manchu regent Dorgon to be named Director of the Board of Astronomy. The young Shunzhi emperor, who called him "grandfather," for a time expressed serious interest in conversion. But Schall had to undergo virulent attacks from the irascible Yang Guangxian, who castigated the Jesuits and their "millions" of Christian converts for plotting to take over the empire. Schall was sentenced to death in 1665, but freed when an earthquake indicated inauspicious results. By 1668 Yang had been exposed as incompetent in astronomy by Ferdinand Verbiest, and the Jesuits enjoyed renewed favor. The young Kangxi emperor developed a lifelong interest in mathematics and astronomy, which he studied with Jesuit tutors. These skills proved very useful to him in the field when he led troops on his northwest campaigns, and once again, the Jesuits were useful in obtaining cannon.

Perhaps the greatest Jesuit contribution came after the victory over Galdan in 1697. Louis XIV had sponsored cartographic projects for his empire in order to give the absolutist ruler a transparent, rationalized perspective on his realm. Tax collectors, military recruiters, and administrators could now extract uniform levies unimpeded by customary practices. Kangxi had similar aims in mind when he commissioned Gerbillon and his Jesuits to conduct a comprehensive survey of the entire empire, using the geometrical mapping techniques recently developed in Europe. From 1707 to 1717, the Jesuits and Chinese assistants created the "Comprehensive View of Imperial Territory," or "Jesuit Atlas," a beautiful cartographic achievement, displaying on the uniform latitude and longitude grid the administrative centers and terrain features of the whole empire.

The Jesuit introduction of Western science to China is filled with irony. In 1616 the Catholic Church had condemned Galileo's teaching as heresy, so the Jesuits in China could not openly espouse the Copernican system, even though they knew it was correct. Their Chinese astronomer colleagues, who had no fixed ideological views on the immobility of the earth, were impressed by the Jesuits' accurate data and baffled by the theoretical contortions forced on them by the Pope. Ultimately, it was Western religious dogmatism that defeated this great effort at bridge building. When the Papal legate declared in 1705 that Christian converts could not practice ancestral rituals, he exposed the heavy dependence of Christians on Rome, undermining the evasive Jesuit efforts at accommodation. After the death of the Kangxi emperor, the wrangling between rival Dominicans

and Jesuits before the suspicious Yongzheng emperor ensured that Christianity could only be seen as a subversive sect outside Beijing, while a few privileged missionaries under close control in the capital still enjoyed imperial favor.

Chinese, Russians, and Mongols in the Northwest

After restoring central power, the young emperor turned to the vital northwestern frontier. Here he faced two strong rivals. Cossacks had been moving rapidly across Siberia since 1582, establishing fortresses on major rivers and extracting tribute from local tribes to furnish valuable furs for the Russian treasury. Reaching the Amur river in 1652, they established there the fortresses of Khabarovsk and Albazin. In the mid seventeenth century, as well, the Western Mongols [Zunghars] began to form a powerful new state, under the leadership of Galdan [1644-1697]. Galdan returned from a Tibetan seminary in 1670 to avenge the assassination of his brother, and soon achieved substantial military victories, expanding the scope of the state over much of western Mongolia, and into the oases of Turkestan. Galdan was the last of the great steppe leaders to create an autonomous state in Central Eurasia. Mongolian historians praise his valor, while Chinese nationalist historians deride him as a "bandit" who, they claim, allied with the Russians to split the "natural unity" of the Mongols with the Chinese nation. Only the vigorous military campaigns of the Kangxi emperor, combined with a Russian choice of Chinese trade over a Mongolian alliance, could ensure his defeat. Kangxi conducted four personal campaigns against Galdan, travelling farther into the steppe than any emperor before him, with enormous logistical burdens inflicted on hundreds of thousands of troops. Galdan could have retreated in the face of superior forces, but just as intransigent as the Chinese emperor, risked his fate in fixed battle twice, and was nearly wiped out. Still, his Mongols could replenish their supplies and live off the grasslands, while the Chinese troops, near starvation, depended on precarious supply routes from interior China. In 1697, Galdan died, probably killed by his remaining followers, giving the emperor an unprecedented victory. Kangxi had expanded the empire to unheard-of size and justified enormous risks, defying the cautious advice of his ministers. He could now legitimately claim to be a sage king, who best understood the will of Heaven. Clever diplomacy supported military valor. The Treaty of Nerchinsk, negotiated in 1689 after the Chinese twice destroyed the fortress of Albazin, established fixed borders with the Russians, and promised them regular trading privileges in Beijing, secured in the Treaty of Kiakhta of 1727.

China's first treaty with a Western power was a triumph of intercultural communication. The Jesuits, again, played the key role, as they were masters of Latin, the one language that could mediate between Russians on one side and Manchus and Chinese on the other. Just as Latin was declining in Europe in the face of rising national languages, it served a key role of cultural mediation on the other end of Eurasia. The Russians needed the China market for Siberian furs; this cash income was an important part of the treasury. The Chinese needed most of all, Russian neutrality in the wars with Galdan, and they used, as they do today, access to China's great markets as a lever in the negotiations. The Chinese got the better of the deal in the long run. Fur trade receipts proved disappointing, but Galdan's Zunghar state was finally exterminated, despite desperate appeals for Russian aid.

With the definitive defeat of Galdan, the border negotiations with the Russians, and successful interventions in Tibet, Kangxi at the end of his reign could convincingly claim to have created a larger, more stable, and more prosperous empire than any other in history. In 1700, he ruled nearly 200 million people of many different ethnic allegiances, who flourished under light taxation, extensive land clearance and commercialization on a scale far beyond that of the Ming. These two centuries saw China, like most of the rest of Eurasia, traverse extreme upheaval, followed by restoration of order and extensive international economic and cultural connections. Foreigners who saw the great empire were still struck with awe. A century later, very few were impressed. Then, they saw weakness and potential decline, though not yet actual decay. By 1900, Chinese civilization itself was desperately struggling for survival. In the face of later humiliation, the glories of the early high Qing still stand out as a source of pride.

I. The Unification of Japan

Powerful military leaders also centralized Japan in this period. In the sixteenth century, known as the "Age of Warring States", regional lords [daimyo] and their military servitors [samurai] fought incessantly, but in the midst of this turmoil, Westerners arrived bringing Christianity and gunpowder weaponry, domestic and foreign trade flourished, and Japanese armies intervened with disastrous results in Korea. By the early seventeenth century, the new Tokugawa shoguns had expelled foreigners, ruthlessly suppressed Christianity, and nearly shut off foreign trade, inaugurating the "Period of Seclusion" that lasted nominally until 1868. Japan was, however, not entirely cut off

from global developments. Commercial change and creeping bureaucratization paralleled other Eurasian states, though in a distinctive and much more gradual form.

In the mid-fifteenth century, like Muscovy, Japan was engulfed in violent civil war. The main actors were the same groups established in the twelfth century: the emperor in Kyoto, the shogun, or military commander, also centered in Kyoto, who ruled the bakufu [□tent government□], several hundred lords [daimyo] who controlled independent estates [han], and their military followers, or samurai. Tens of thousands of soldiers battled in the streets of Kyoto, leaving the capital in ashes, the emperor impoverished, the shogun very insecurely in power, and most of the country under autonomous military governors. This constant violence laid the groundwork for unification. Old regional families were wiped out, and new men rose from obscurity: it was the age when □inferiors overthrew their superiors□. Warring lords built thousands of castles across the country, and nearly everyone was armed. The most crucial technological change was the arrival of firearms, brought by the Portuguese in 1543 and first used in 1575. Foreign traders also established outposts, and Japanese merchants prospered in foreign trade. Some of them joined the pirates raiding and smuggling along the China coast, others at home ran important cities independently through collective decision making by guilds. Sakai, on the Inland Sea west of Osaka, looked very much like Venice to the Portuguese observers, with its conciliar rule by a merchant oligarchy. After the arrival of the Jesuit Francis Xavier in 1549, Christianity also began to take hold in the west and south, supported by lords looking for foreign aid.

Just as in Europe, the development of effective gunpowder weaponry made obsolete the old style of samurai warfare based on personal challenges by horsemen wielding swords. Foot soldiers with muskets were much more effective, and favored those with larger commercial resources. A brutal, powerful warrior, Oda Nobunaga [1534-82] began to form a winning coalition. He consolidated his position in central Japan, then marched triumphantly into Kyoto in 1568, and seized Sakai in 1569. He became notorious for burning to the ground two thousand buildings in the huge Buddhist monastery on Mt. Hiei, for the Buddhists like everyone else had large threatening armies of retainers. But Nobunaga was killed before he could claim to be shogun of unified Japan. At his death, he controlled one-third of Japan, but it was Toyotomi Hideyoshi [1536 □ 98] who completed the unification. Hideyoshi had no family lineage at all; he lived only by the sword. At first an enemy of Nobunaga, he then allied himself with Nobunaga and expanded his base in central Japan. By 1590, he had effectively conquered all the major lords in the country. Hideyoshi had gained most of his power by gathering followers into large coalitions; he fought few major battles. He had a gift for diplomacy in this treacherous age.

Hideyoshi's administrative reforms had more lasting impact than his battles. In 1588, he ordered the Great Sword Hunt, stating that □the farmers of the various provinces are strictly forbidden to possess long swords, short swords, bows, spears, muskets, or any other form of weapon□.[\[4\]](#) All

metal weapons would be melted down and cast into a Great Buddha. Daimyo and samurai gave up the gun, but kept their honorific swords. Thus he ensured that only lords and samurai could possess military force, and no one could recruit a mass army to oppose him. He then froze the social order by prohibiting farmers from going into trade or leaving the villages and samurai from accepting hired labor. Samurai were separated from the land, so they could not hold independent fiefdoms, and farmers were bound to the soil like serfs. A comprehensive land survey exposed the agricultural resources that could be captured by the state and the lords; unlike Ming China, Japan's militarized regional rulers could enforce reliable registration. Taxes were assessed according to the productive potential of the land, measured in koku. Of the national total of 18.2 million koku for 12 million people, Hideyoshi controlled approximately 2 million koku in his own domains, plus gold and silver mines.

Hideyoshi pressed hard on the peasantry, but he left the lords alone. Daimyo owed soldiers to the shogun in proportion to the size of their domains, but they were otherwise free. Unlike Peter of Russia, Hideyoshi stopped short of nationalizing the army; daimyo maintained their followers, but the shogun could confiscate and rearrange their fiefs. His final campaign destroyed the castles that had sprouted like mushrooms during the century of civil war. By 1615, daimyo were reduced to only one castle each, where they concentrated all their samurai and kinsmen. Foreigners, and their Christian followers, were also threatening, because they bolstered the position of the Western daimyo. Hideyoshi banned proselytizing in 1587, and crucified many Japanese Christians when he became suspicious of the quarrels between the Franciscans and Jesuits. He began to put controls on foreign commerce, and strictly suppressed piracy.

The growing Japanese state could not confine itself to the islands. Near the end of his life, in 1592, Hideyoshi launched an almost inexplicable campaign against Korea. As in 1895, Japan's intervention on the continent brought disastrous results for everyone. Was he trying to divert the attention of his domestic rivals, or was he driven by a megalomaniacal ambition to conquer the East Asian continent?. In 1590 he announced that "My wish is nothing other than that my name be known throughout the three countries [of Japan, China, and India]." The Jesuit Luis Frois remarked that Hideyoshi wanted to "Immortaliz[e] himself with the name and fame of his power".^[5] When a Japanese army of over 200,000 men took Seoul, Hideyoshi envisaged an easy conquest of Beijing, but the Korean admiral Yi Sunsin, with his famous armada of "turtle-clad boats", the first armored ships in naval warfare, decimated the Japanese navy, while Korean guerrillas harassed the occupying troops. Chinese troops crossed the Yalu River and quickly drove out the Japanese army in 1593, inflicting a humiliating defeat. The consequences for Japan were short-lived, but Korea was devastated, and the fiscal strains on the Ming, noted above, aided the expansion of the Manchu state. Koreans remained resentful for the next three centuries. They, the true Confucians, hated both barbarians: the Japanese and the Manchu conquerors of the Ming.

Tokugawa Ieyasu [1542 – 1616] put the finishing touches on the structure that Hideyoshi had begun, as illustrated by the Japanese proverb: “Oda Nobunaga assembled the ingredients, Hideyoshi baked the bread, and Ieyasu ate it”. Unlike his predecessors, Ieyasu could claim descent from a prestigious military family. At Hideyoshi’s death he had the largest holdings in the country, 2.5 to 3.0 million koku. During Hideyoshi’s Korean venture, he avoided action, and strengthened his domains at home. After Hideyoshi’s death, Ieyasu carefully maneuvered to make himself the supreme leader. At the critical battle of Sekigahara on October 21, 1600, 80,000 supporters of Hideyoshi’s heir faced off against Ieyasu’s roughly equivalent forces for the ultimate prize: the title of shogun. Ieyasu’s victory entitled him to claim the shogunate in 1603. He concluded the civil war in 1615 when he captured Osaka castle from the last holdouts. He moved the bakufu’s capital to the small fishing village called Edo [now Tokyo] in his domains in the Kanto plain. It grew to become the largest city in the world by 1700, with over one million people, including the shogun’s retainers and officials, merchants, daimyo and their attendants, artisans, and construction workers. The control system established by Ieyasu and his successors was an extraordinary balance of feudal and bureaucratic elements. The sankin kttai hostage system required all the daimyo to maintain costly residences in Edo and to spend up to half the year living there, closely watched by the shogun’s inspectors and spies. When they returned to their domains, they had to leave their wives and children behind. Not only did it keep the daimyo under close watch, but the large expenses of travelling with their retinues to and from Edo used up much of the daimyo incomes. Daimyo had been divided into three classes depending on their loyalty to Ieyasu. The 23 shimpan daimyo, relatives of the shogun, provided heirs when the Tokugawa line was empty; the 145 fudai daimyo, loyal but unrelated, formed the linchpin of regional administration; and the 98 tozama daimyo, mostly hostile to Ieyasu, were carefully monitored for any signs of disloyalty, while they continued to secretly nurse grudges.

The shoguns effectively suppressed opposition, but they never went so far as to eliminate the daimyo class. After much land confiscation and domain transfer, the shogun himself held 6.8 million koku, the fudai and shimpan 9.3 million koku, and the tozama 9.8 million koku. Two of the most powerful tozama daimyo, Satsuma and Choshu, led the Meiji Restoration movement that overthrew the bakufu two and a half centuries later.

To be a daimyo required a minimum of 10,000 koku, and assessments on the peasantry were regularized at 2/3 to the lord and 1/3 to the farmer, probably the most intensive agrarian extraction rate in the world. The disarmed and immobilized peasantry were nearly helpless in the face of the lords and their arrogant sword-carrying samurai, but thousands of peasant protests did occur. The shoguns appointed the daimyo’s heirs, but within the domains, the lords had complete power over justice, tax collection, and internal affairs. Shogunal law evolved from vassal oaths into formalized codes, which emphasized strict frugality and a static, agrarian economy, much like the first Ming

emperor. The emperor himself, the source of legitimacy for the shogun as military ruler, received large land grants and a lavish new palace in Kyoto, but he was kept out of any access to power. Japan's state structure puzzles analysts accustomed to European institutions, inspiring contradictory phrases like "bureaucratic feudalism". On the one hand, the vassal oaths, independent lords, service ethic of the samurai, and military ideology evoke the European Middle Ages, but the growing bureaucratization, pervasive control measures, and commercial growth look like versions of absolutist regimes. Yet Russia, too, baffled Western visitors with its combination of service nobility and apparent absolute power granted to the Tsar. These examples ought to undermine our natural assumptions of sharp oppositions between "feudal" and "modern [bureaucratic]" society, and lead us to reconsider the real nature of state development in the West, which also blended medieval and centralizing elements.

The military leaders needed a new ideology to legitimize their rule during peacetime. Chinese Neo-Confucianism offered the most convincing answers. In its Japanese version, it stressed the strict social hierarchy dividing shi [scholars in China; samurai in Japan]; merchants, artisans, and peasants, and the obligations of filial piety, meaning obedience of inferiors to superiors within the family and the polity. The scholar Hayashi Razan [1583-1657], well-versed in Chinese texts, developed this official ideology, which identified the samurai with the Confucian 'gentleman' and stressed the transformation of men of war into literate scholar-officials and loyal bureaucrats. Japan's active publishers disseminated these ideas in thousands of copies. Printing and literacy spread widely, and schools proliferated, but not every rough warrior could make the transition.

The episode of the forty-seven ronin, which occurred from 1701 to 1703, epitomized the changes of the century, and became widespread in plays, tales, and later films. When Asano, the backwoods daimyo, was insulted by the urbane Kira, protocol officer at the bakufu, he drew his sword and slightly wounded him. It was a capital offense to draw a sword at the shogun's court, so Asano was sentenced to perform ritual suicide [seppuku]. Asano's retainers, deprived of a lord, became masterless samurai [ronin], whose primary duty under the traditional code was to avenge their lord's death. They carefully bided their time, feigning dissoluteness to throw their enemies off guard. Twenty-two months later, they stormed Kira's mansion in Edo, cut off his head, and presented it to their lord's tomb. The bakufu was thrown into extensive debate. The ronin had admirably followed the traditional code of loyalty, but they had disrupted the bakufu's interest in law and order. Finally, they were not condemned as criminals, but allowed to perform honorable seppuku. The courage of the ronin won them great acclaim from both samurai and commoners, at a time when the growth of commercialized pleasures led many to be concerned about the softening of the nation's moral fibre. Confucian popularizers, like Kaibara Ekken [1630-1714] explained the classical texts simply for rural people, women, and children, and wrote practical works on agronomy and childbearing. But the awkward fit between China's bureaucratic state and Japan's special hybrid stimulated vigorous

controversy. The Wang Yangming [Ytmeigaku] school became especially powerful in Japan, and equally controversial. Kumazawa Banzan [1619-91], a fervent believer in innate knowledge and the unity of theory and practice, ended his life under house arrest after attacking the sankin kttai system as an excessive burden on the daimyo. Nakae Toju [1608-48] abandoned government service to teach in village schools, modelling himself on Wang Yangming's exile in Guizhou. The native Japanese religious cults, systematized as "Shintt" , as well as the Buddhist sects, offered alternatives and possibilities for syncretism. Beneath the surface of the isolationist, repressive shogunal regime in the seventeenth century there bubbled an effervescent intellectual culture. Japan was never truly isolated in the sakoku ['closed country'] period.

Despite a long dominant image of the Tokugawa as a backward, stagnant era broken by the dramatic Meiji reforms, scholars now recognize that many of the conditions facilitating Japan's rapid breakthrough into the industrial age were generated in these centuries. In this way, historiography of Japan has paralleled that of Russian scholars who find in seventeenth-century Muscovy the germs of Peter's reforms. Even without the stimulus of foreign wars, extensive foreign trade, or religious controversy, Japan still displayed an active cultural life, a growing economy, and gradual moves toward the creation of a literate, mobile, inquisitive population directed by a strong central state. Rather than stopping halfway between feudalism and an autocratic state, it fashioned a creative balance between local autonomy and central control.

VII. Commonalities and Contrasts

All the societies of Eurasia were following comparable, though of course not identical, paths during these centuries. The central trends cohere around the creation of centralized state power, the spread of bureaucratic techniques, the diffusion of a commercial economy, and cultural integration.

1. Environment, Transportation, and Communication

The agrarian environment fundamentally shaped all these societies. In this pre-industrial age, peasant farmers remained the vast majority of the population. Without them, the states had no taxes, the merchants had no goods, the armies had no soldiers, and the cities had no food. Climate and location fixed basic features of the landscape. For Russians, northern climate set a short growing season, which severely limited agricultural yields. Trees and rainfall were abundant, but soils were heavy, infertile, and difficult to plough. Travel was easiest in the summer, feasible on the frozen ground in the winter, except during blizzards, but impossible in the spring thaw, which immobilized vehicles in mud. The widely dispersed Russian villages, with extensive fields and low yields, could be nearly

self-sufficient, but the princes had to exert tremendous coercive powers to get them to yield their surplus. Russia's best soil and climate was in the South, but most of this land was under the control of Cossacks and independent farmers, and not available to the Muscovite state.

Weather fluctuations were even more severe in the center of the continent. Nomads, however, did not depend primarily on agriculture, although most of them did have supplementary fields. For them, the critical factor was the grass, and the critical variable was rainfall. When rainfall was abundant, they moved their herds in carefully prescribed seasonal patterns in search of the richest pastures. Scarcities forced tribes to struggle with each other, or to raid the neighboring settled societies. Historians have repeatedly suggested that desiccation drove nomadic invasions; without accurate climatic data, we cannot be sure of this, nor can we forget the role of charismatic leadership and political organization.

Manchuria was a forest and agricultural zone, in close contact with the steppe. The Manchus were mainly hunters and fishermen, who built their massive state out of primitive resources. But they also adroitly exploited their neighbors: trading with richer Korea and China, allying with nomads, and using their fairly limited cultivated fields. Food supply was a serious limitation, as the state's subject population grew: in the early seventeenth century the Manchus were several times on the brink of starvation until they won a decisive battle. The conquest of China came not a minute too soon. North China, although much richer in land than Manchuria, and in a more temperate climate, also faced limits to growth. The loess soil was very fertile, given sufficient rainfall, but rainfall was unpredictable, and concentrated only in a few months of the year. Floods and droughts were both major threats, and the North China plain was highly overpopulated. Northwest China, source of the rebellions that overthrew the Ming, was even more precarious, subject to famine and Mongol raids. It was the abundant agriculture of South China, developed since the tenth century, that held the empires together. South China's paddy rice agriculture was the most productive of calories per acre in the world, but also the most labor intensive. Shipping its grain to the north on the Grand Canal, and shipping the population to the south, via migration, resolved the basic food problem and helped to balance the regions. Clearance of South China's hill country, an area of soils very vulnerable to erosion when the forest cover was stripped, began in this period with the introduction of New World crops, accommodating more Han immigrants.

Japan had some of the most favorable agrarian conditions. Most of its islands were in a mild temperate zone, rainfall was adequate, and forests were plentiful. The plains and rivers were much smaller than China, but supported dense peasant populations under the watch of local lords. Japan's main vulnerability was fragmentation, because the small valleys separated by mountain passes formed worlds of their own, and constant warfare between the lords brought destruction. Fires constantly devastated the structures of this wooden-based society. Unification under the Tokugawa finally allowed Japan's great potential for production and trade to flourish. But the seventeenth

century brought substantial loss of forest cover and threats of erosion.

For self sufficient agrarian communities, long-distance transportation is not a major constraint. Local markets can take care of most basic needs. Larger commercial networks of basic commodities, however, face several obstructions. Classifying transportation in descending order of convenience, cost, and security, riverine transport stands out across the continent as the easiest. Inland seas [the Baltic, the Mediterranean, the Inland Sea of Japan] come second. China lacked such a sea, but coastal shipping on the Southeast, which had many good harbors, served as a substitute. On land, costs rose dramatically, for very few roads were passable year round. Horse-drawn carts could provide significant supplies, but usually this was worth it only for major military expeditions. Human porters were abundant where population was dense, and a chain of them could bring goods to riverbanks for bulk shipment by boat. Least attractive of all was the open sea, menaced by pirates, storms, and poor navigation.

The relative importance of these different forms of transportation determined the nature of each state's linkages to its neighbors. Russia's major trade routes linked it by river to the south: the glittering riches of Byzantium, the Ottomans, and Persia. An alternative link developed in the sixteenth century with the appearance of the British at Archangel, but only the forcible mobilization by a series of expansionist Tsars culminating in Peter created a sustained breakthrough directly to the Baltic. At the same time, the Russian state drove eastward and southward to take command of Siberia, the Volga and Don away from Turks and other nomads. Central Asian rulers were driven to the interior, deprived of control of river trade, except in Bukhara-Samarkand. They could still profit from shipment of luxury goods on the caravan route between oases: overseas maritime trade had still not displaced the Silk Road, contrary to what many assume. It was, however, the Manchus who took greatest advantage of the multiple routes available to them when they conquered China. The Ming had harmed itself by attempting to seal off the Northwest frontier and the Southeast coast. Its primary achievement was to develop the Grand Canal as a major domestic commercial artery. The Manchus, by contrast, opened up both external arenas and profited from them, while also continuing the Grand Canal. Japan's seclusion from the continent was not as damaging economically as it seems: a considerable trade flow still moved to China via Kyushu and Okinawa, but most important, internal trade networks developed rapidly under the Tokugawa peace. Both the Inland Sea and the Tokaido Road routes became the major arteries tying the Tokugawa realm together.

It is much easier to send messages rapidly than to send goods. Communication routes followed commercial transport routes for the most part, but the relative hierarchy was not so significant. Two technologies accelerated the transfer of information: postal couriers and mass printing. Both Russia and China used the Mongol postal courier system as a primary mode of state communication. The most rapid communications were between major cities, but provincial centers were also drawn into the network. Japan created an equivalent communication apparatus using the inns of the Tokaido

Road. State and commercial communications coexisted and aided each other. Private letter deliveries in Ming China followed the same routes as government couriers. Printing spread more unevenly. China had long had printed books, and the Ming-Qing period developed distribution networks to a new peak, as regional publishers produced materials for a much more broadly based reading public. The new Manchu script greatly served state centralization. Japan likewise, followed similar trends, expanding its output of materials for both urban and prosperous rural readers. Russian officials and churchmen were quite suspicious of giving the people access to print. Muscovy was a much more illiterate society than East Asia; only a very small stratum of bureaucrats communicated with each other; much of the literate culture was isolated in monasteries. Printing did have broad cultural effects in China and Japan, but they were not as dramatic as Europe, because East Asia started from a higher level. The divergent linguistic impact in Europe was accommodated in East Asia, but not because of Asian "homogeneity". China had six or more different printed languages in circulation, and Japan and Korea had two [Japanese and classical Chinese]. Qing sponsorship of multilingual scriptures, dictionaries, and atlases brought printed works with powerful impact to Central Asia. State sponsored cultural integration using the printing press held together a classical Chinese ecumene.

China set the pace, as its new dynasty built upon the fertile hybrid of Central Asian multicultural emperors and Chinese bureaucratic and literary arts to create her largest, most dynamic, and wealthiest empire. Japan and Russia represented even more original creations from scarcer natural and cultural resources. Out of destructive civil war, they emerged as powerful, pacified states by the early seventeenth century. Russia, like China, built an enormous empire on a much poorer agricultural base by ruthlessly focusing its efforts on military power concentrated in a supreme leader. Peter demonstrated the enormous potential of this combination for driving not only imperial expansion but internal social change. Japan's experience shows that bureaucratization and commercialization do not have to be driven by military competition, contrary to the European, Russian, and Chinese experience. After a brief, humiliating international episode, Japanese rulers militarily turned inward, but they gradually absorbed and adapted from China much of the same bureaucratic philosophy to serve their purposes. The inexorable flow of silver around the globe from the New World energized China's economy; Japan had its own abundant sources of precious metals, while Russia could plunder Siberia's furs and obtain its bullion from trade with China and the Mideast.

Military technology, in the form of gunpowder weaponry, significantly affected all these areas. The 'military revolution' of sixteenth century Europe stimulated by gunpowder has been exaggerated. It did not give Europeans unquestioned superiority in any realm, certainly not in continental warfare, and technology alone did not determine the fate of any of these 'gunpowder empires'. But the warfare techniques originally discovered by the Chinese, then abandoned by them, were reintroduced by

Portuguese and Jesuits to East Asia. They stimulated more efficient killing, favored those with more money, and led to reorganization of military forces along more impersonal, less class stratified lines. Every military competitor had to respond to this impact. Japan and China at first eagerly adopted, and then repressed or neglected, the technology, in the interests of establishing social peace. They all too rationally realized that powerful armaments are an unfortunate necessity in times of turmoil, but should be abandoned in times of peace. Japan successfully gave up the gun for nearly two hundred years, and Chinese emperors found little effective use for them after 1760. Their domestic enemies were not a great enough challenge. In Russia Peter had no choice but to modernize the military against great internal opposition. One lesson we may draw is that military technologies do not progress smoothly and inevitably along a single track; most people, including generals, prefer predictability, and only brutal competition forces the struggle between innovation and tradition, whose outcome is not determined in advance.

History is not only a story of winners, even though they dominate the written record. The losers in the power struggle have equally valid stories to tell. Let us not forget those who suffered most in this period: the independent nomads of Central Asia, the hill peoples, the enserfed Russian peasantry and Japanese community bound villagers, and to some extent, women everywhere. State builders were most afraid of people who were free to move. Their empires and bureaucracies were designed to track down, register, and control their millions of subjects, whatever their wishes. The defeat of Galdan marked the end of the last serious effort by a nomadic leader to construct an autonomous state in the steppe. China had begun to incorporate Eastern Central Eurasia [Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet], and would finish the process in the eighteenth century. In Western Eurasia, independent oasis kingdoms remained, but Russia would swallow them up in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By eliminating the steppe frontier through negotiated treaties, the Chinese and Russians ensured that nomads had nowhere to flee: both agrarian empires agreed to deport refugees, tribesmen, and deserting soldiers back home to prevent unrest. Russian serfdom was the most extreme example of the power of an autocratic state to stop movement; it did not, fortunately, encompass the entire empire, but left some room for the Cossack communities, and Siberian peasantry, at the margins. China had no comparable institution, but the officials also feared mobility, and attempted to control it with a collective registration system. Tokugawa Japan succeeded even better than Russia in tying down villagers to tightly organized communities collectively liable for taxation.

2. Gender Relations

Women's experiences remain quite obscure, but we have information at least for some elite women. Printed texts, legal cases, along with the proliferation of woodcuts and popular imagery, give us many more sources. Women, like men, were strongly affected by the common trends of state

centralization and commercialization.

These were all highly patriarchal societies. Russian Orthodoxy, Confucianism, Buddhism, and samurai norms all insisted on the absolute domination of men over women, and on women's duty to obedience. Christian clerics saw women as weak, doomed to sin ever since Eve; Confucians located the yin, or weak force, predominantly in females and infants. Women were necessary for procreation, but they were feared as sexual temptresses. Most of these elite women were kept in seclusion for nearly all of their life. Until marriage, they were carefully sheltered by their families from outside contact. Their most traumatic journey was on their marriage day, when they traveled from the protection of their natal family to their husband's home. Parades and ceremonial celebrated the transfer of the bride, who had never met her prospective husband. Olearius's description of seventeenth-century Russia could apply almost as well to China: "Generally, even the lesser notables raise their daughters in closed-off rooms, hidden from other people, and the groom does not see the bride before he receives her in the marriage bedroom. Thus some are deceived, and instead of a beautiful bride are given an ugly and sickly one.."^[6] Most of the time, however, the family of the groom carefully examined the bride, and especially the size of her dowry, before agreeing to a contract. It was a family contract, not up to individuals to decide.

After marriage, women remained at home. Russian boyar women were secluded in separate living quarters called terem. They could receive visitors and manage the household, but they only went out in public to churches, in closed carriages. Because marriage politics were crucial to the status of the boyar elite, the noble men carefully insulated their women from inappropriate contact. As wives and regents, Russian women appeared sporadically as Tsar-makers on the top-level political scene, but their position was dangerous: ousted regents could be killed, or sent to distant convents.

Chinese elite women were kept in special quarters of the family estate. Worse yet, their feet were bound, preventing them from doing more than hobbling around outdoors. This crippling custom had begun in elite circles in the Tang and Song dynasties, but had made its way down the social scale in the Ming and Qing. It was another example of emulation and status-seeking: only women with dainty feet could expect to marry men of talent and means.

Manchu and Mongol women were freer than women in settled societies. While the men engaged in battle on their dashing, but economically useless, steeds, the women and children performed the vital economic tasks of tending herds of sheep and cattle. They were highly mobile, accompanying the flocks to their customary pastures. As mothers, they had vital roles in arranging marriage alliances and watching over new brides. Unlike their Chinese counterparts, they did not bind their feet. The greater freedom of the non-Chinese women of the frontier was another reason for orthodox ideologists to regard these peoples as barbarian and dangerous.

The strict bonds of patriarchy were not all encompassing. Within their separate spheres, women could exert considerable autonomy. They controlled childbirth, a process shielded from men's eyes,

known to midwives alone. Once they produced children, especially male heirs, their status rose considerably. Once their sons married, they could look forward in middle age to nearly absolute power over the new brides, returning the same abuse they had suffered when they arrived in a strange household. As widows, they earned great respect, as long as they did not remarry, and could even inherit property.

Centralization of state power and commercialization transformed women's lives by imposing new obligations on the men. When Russian or Japanese men were away from home on service to the ruler or in war, women ran the estates. In mercantile households, they often balanced the books and participated actively in the business of the shop, while the husband travelled. Chinese popular literature features stories of men on the road whose wives were seduced while they were away, but also notes the women's considerable independence. Markets also gave Asian women some economic autonomy, when they could sell the textiles they wove outside the home. In China and Japan, a substantial fraction of women [up to ten percent] were literate. Through letter writing and book reading, they could keep in touch with a wide network of fellow poets, travelers, and religious believers. Itinerant preachers found their greatest audiences among women at home.

Male powerholders reacted to signs of growing freedom with repression. The witchcraft crazes of Western Europe and New England, in which 80% of the accused were women, have been seen as attacks on marginal women who seemed to threaten social order. Russia offers an interesting contrast, because only 32% of witchcraft cases involved women. The tightened bonds of local community inflicted by the legal imposition of serfdom constricted women, but protected them from attack. In East Asia, there was no general witch craze, but the reasserted central power of the Manchus and shoguns put the mark of Zhu Xi's highly patriarchal orthodoxy into family law, reasserting the male head's power over property and women. In Russia, the cult of family honor allowed raped women to bring suit against their abusers for "dishonor", but Chinese law allowed no such claims.

Peter's greatest contribution to women was to liberate them from the terem, which he abolished as part of his attack on the boyar clans. Russia's eighteenth century brought much greater exposure to Western European norms, which favored cultivated, educated women. In China, by contrast, the increasing attractions of leisure, literacy, and commerce struggled against efforts of the male rulers to confine and isolate their women. Some of the fluidity and flexibility for multiple gender roles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was stamped out.

The eighteenth century, a much more peaceful age, saw populations grow, civil arts flourish, commerce spread, and literacy grow. This time of "dappled sunshine" built on the important bases of global economic integration, state centralization, and domestic commerce established in these two violent, but dynamic centuries.

Glossary of Terms, Names, Dates

Terms

China:

haohan

Donglin academy

Fushe

beile

Liaodong

Shanhaiguan

Zunghars

Jiangnan

shi

baolan

Gongbao jiding

juren

gewu

xin

li

Dao

Japan

Tokaido

shi

Zaibatsu

Genroku era [1688 □ 1704[1703?]

Bakufu

Shogun

Han

Daimyo

Samurai

sankin kttai

gekokujt

za

Names

China

Altan Khan [1507-82]

Zhang Juzheng [1525-82]

Wanli emperor [r. 1573 □ 1620]

Gu Xiancheng [1550 □ 1612]

Zhu Xi

Wei Zhongxian [1558 □ 1627]

Nurhaci [1559-1626]

Li Zicheng [1605-45]

Zhang Xianzhong [1605 □ 1647]

Wu Sangui [1612 □ 1678]

Dorgon [1612 □ 1650]

Kangxi emperor [r. 1661 □ 1722]

Huang Zongxi [1610-95]

Gu Yanwu [1613-82]

Wang Fuzhi [1619-92]

Matteo Ricci [1552 □ 1610]

Galdan [1644 □ 1697]

Japan

Toyotomi Hideyoshi [1536 □ 98]
 Tokugawa Ieyasu [1542 □ 1616]
 Oda Nobunaga [1534-82]

DatesChina

Ming dynasty [1368 □ 1644]
 Qing dynasty [1644 □ 1912]
 1555 Pirates besiege Nanjing
 1557 Portuguese permanent settlement at Macao
 1560 Jin Ping Mei published
 1582 Jesuit mission in China begins under Matteo Ricci 1552-1610
 1592-3,97-98 Japanese invasions of Korea repelled
 1616 Nurhaci declares Latter Jin dynasty
 1636 Manchus declare Qing dynasty at Mukden
 1644 Conquest of Beijing by Manchus
 1662 Accession of Kangxi emperor, age 8, personal rule 1669 -1722;
 1674-81 Revolt of Three Feudatories
 1693-1700 Rites controversy 1722 Yongzheng emperor ends Jesuit mission
 1697 Kangxi emperor defeats Galdan

Japan

1467 Onin War
 1543 First arrival of Portuguese, with firearms in Japan;
 1549 Arrival of Francis Xavier in Japan
 1600 Battle of Sekigahara
 1603 Ieyasu claims shogunate
 1637 Shimabara Rebellion; Final suppression of Christianity; restriction of foreign trade

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- [3] Lynn Struve, *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers' Jaws*, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 36.
- [4] Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi*, Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 102.
- [5] Berry, pp. 208, 213.
- [6] Olearius, p. 164-5.