PORTRAIT OF THE IMPERIAL BODYGUARD HU ERH CH'A
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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Comparing Empires: Manchu Colonialism

THE QING EMPIRE of China was a colonial empire that ruled over a diverse collection of peoples with separate identities and deserves comparison with other empires. This claim is more problematic than it seems. The reigning tradition of nationalist historiography, practised in both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, rejects the comparison in principle. Nationalist scholars argue that China is not like other imperialist powers, because all of its peoples were 'unified' (*tongyi*), not conquered, under the aegis of an inclusive culture-state. The modern Chinese nation-state, which inherits nearly all of the territory and peoples of the Qing, thus defines itself as a 'multinationality' state that represents the culmination of millennia of Chinese imperial history.

Traditionalist historians, who take the line taken by the Qing empire itself, also reject the validity of the comparison, to the extent that they argue that Chinese imperial domination of non-Han peoples was based not on coercion, but on cultural assimilation. From this perspective, frontier peoples willingly accepted the norms of the orthodox Confucian culture because they recognized its superiority. The Chinese empire was a universalist civilization, not an ordinary state, because it claimed legitimacy on the basis of humanist cultural foundations, not on the contingencies of military conquest or material interest. Only rebels and bandits, whose sole interest lay in creating disorder, could reject the claims to domination of the imperial state, and they deserved ruthless suppression.

Despite obvious deficiencies, these views remain influential in studies of China.[1] Nationalist historians take the essentialist view that all the basic features of the contemporary nation-state are found in the distant past without fundamental alteration. They turn a particular moment of imperial expansion – the maximal borders attained by the Qing empire in the mid-eighteenth century – into ideal boundaries defining a timeless national culture. They ignore the contradictions between imperial pretensions and the peoples under Qing subjection, and they do not take serious account of heterodox, autonomous rivals to official ideology. Likewise, traditionalists,

1 Pamela Kyle Crossley, 'Thinking about Ethnicity in Early Modern China', *Late Imperial China*, xi (1990), 1-35.

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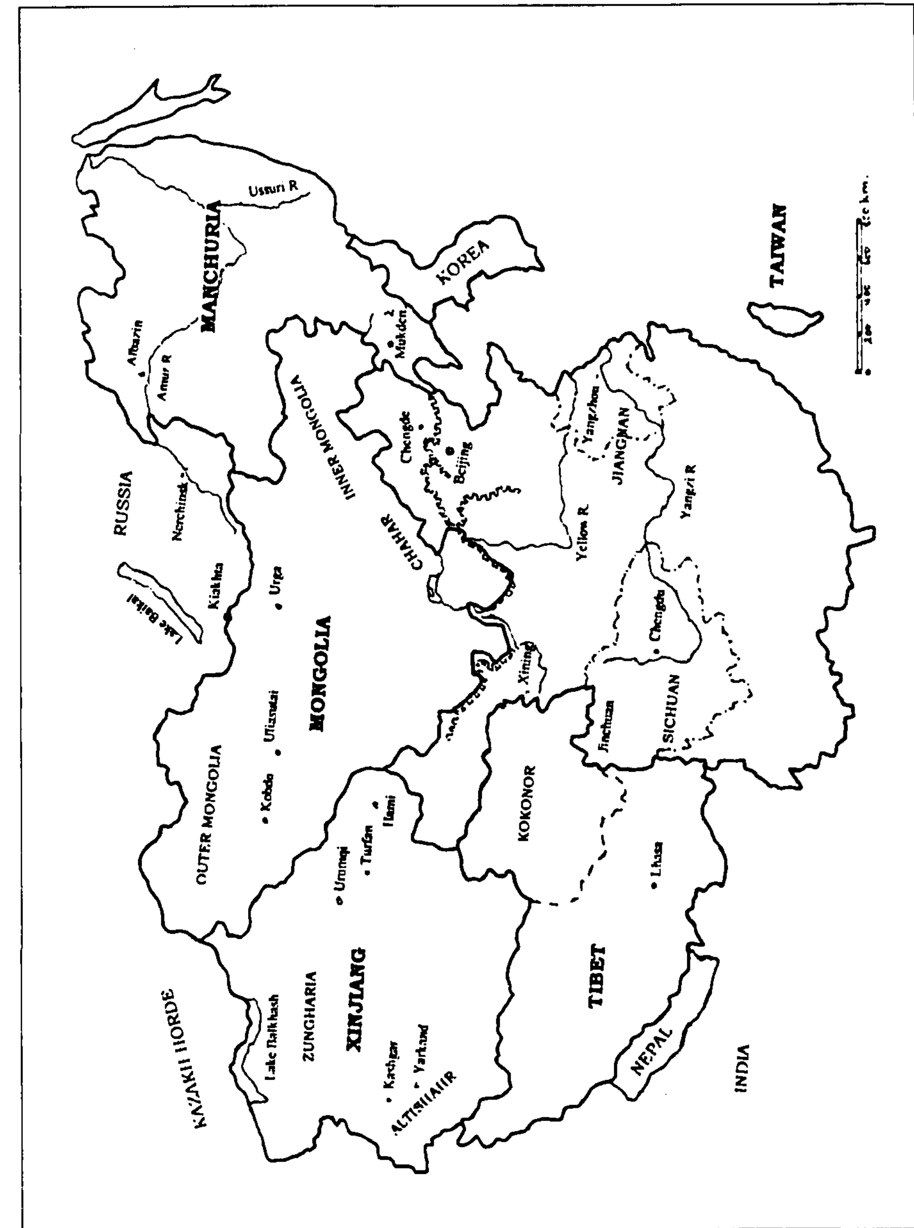
with their assumption of easy assimilation, play down the brute facts of conquest, or the effective use of material lures to induce subject peoples to take on new cultural forms. Both place the Chinese empire beyond the reach of comparison by pointing to its unique features: the long, continuous evolution of classical culture and the imperial bureaucratic state, the large Han population facing a more sparsely populated Inner Asian frontier, and the relative isolation of China from global currents of change.

A comparative approach points to different aspects of Chinese imperial rule, highlighting those in which it resembled other empires. Like other empires, the Chinese rulers had to maintain large military forces for domestic repression and frontier defence. They had to collect taxes from the agrarian population, ensure the obedience of local élites, and preserve social order with a minimal administrative apparatus. They had somehow to reconcile the great diversity of local practices and cultures with the bureaucratic impulse to uniformity. And they had to win over, or at least gain grudging acceptance of their rule from subject peoples who, if unconstrained by threats and promises, would have preferred much greater autonomy.

A comparative approach will help to integrate the study of China into world history. China was never completely isolated from global processes, although its links with western Eurasia were usually more tenuous than those of western Eurasia with the Middle East, Africa, or South Asia. Central Eurasian nomads introduced horse riding and the chariot into China after they brought the same crucial military technologies to the Near East. The Silk Road linked Chinese exports along the caravan route to the Roman and later empires, although it suffered frequent interruptions from upheavals in central Eurasia. Maritime contacts of China with South and South-East Asia flourished especially from the tenth to fifteenth centuries. By the sixteenth century, the global flow of New World silver connected China's economy, even if only marginally, to South America and the financial centres of Europe. In this context, the growth of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century opium-centred trade was not a great rupture. Like other early modern empires, China engaged in active trade and diplomatic relations with widely dispersed states and peoples. Jerry Bentley argues that 'processes transcending nations' should be the main factor determining the periodization of world history.[1] The three main processes he invokes are imperial conquest, migration of people, and cultural and commercial exchange. All these took place between China, Russia, and Mongolia in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

1 Jerry Bentley, 'Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History', *American Historical Review*, ci (1996), 749-70.



QING CHINA: THE FRONTIER REGIONS (*c.* 1800)

The inherited tradition of comparative empire studies, as practised by certain sociologists from Max Weber to Shmuel Eisenstadt, has, however, gone down the wrong road, because these comparativists isolate their empires from history. Although any entity can be compared with any other, the most useful comparisons come from examining units that follow diverging paths from a common origin, or whose evolution is driven by common processes (for example, demographic or economic), or have extensive interactions with each other.[1] It is not profitable, for example, to erect ideal-typical models of agrarian empires, as Weber and Eisenstadt have done, and compare the Chinese empire as a timeless entity with these static models. This approach both ignores the great transformations of the Chinese empire over time and assumes that it is isolated from significant interactions with other states.

Some recent studies point in more profitable directions. Jack Goldstone's comparative examination of demographic-structural processes underlying the breakdown of early modern states discovers parallel processes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[2] He finds that England, France, Ming China, and the Ottoman Empire followed similar paths of state breakdown in this period. The three parallels he finds are, first, population pressure producing subsistence crises and agrarian unrest; second, fiscal crises producing incapacities of the state to finance international security and repress domestic dissent; and third, excess competition for élite posts among the younger generations, producing movements of dissident intellectuals. Most of Goldstone's argument focuses on England and France, and much of it was anticipated and applied more directly to Eurasia by Joseph Fletcher in a brilliant paper on integrative history in the early modern age.[3]

Finally, the concept of 'gunpowder empires' put forth in Marshall Hodgson's vast survey of the Islamic world, and summarized by William McNeill, resembles in a general way the comparative approaches mentioned above.[4] Hodgson found common structures and processes in the three great Islamic empires that emerged from the collapse of Chinggis Khan's Mongol empire from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries: the Mughals in India, the Safavids in Iran, and the Ottomans in the Middle East. I would argue that three more empires can be added to this list: the Muscovite-Russian, the Ming-Qing, and the succession of Mongol states in central Eurasia in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

What these approaches have in common is that, first, they are limited to a particular period: they do not try to erect models removed from historical time; second, they are based closely on empirical examination of political, economic, military, and cultural institutions, not generalized from purported cultural ideals found in classical texts; and third, to some extent (McNeill more than others), they recognize the significance of interaction between empires.

The essays that follow all contribute to a comparative understanding of the Qing empire governed by these principles. Three of them analyse the relationship between central and local élites and institutions, a common subject of study for all imperial governments.

Nicola Di Cosmo focuses on the local administration of the newly conquered frontier regions by the Qing, unified by the Lifan Yuan, the court for the administration of the outer provinces, an unprecedented institution in Chinese dynastic history. In each of the outer provinces of the empire – Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia – the Manchu rulers set up different kinds of local administration, adapted to the special features of the local society. Local administration was also heavily shaped by how the expanding empire took over these regions: imperial residents and small garrisons combined with selective delegation of powers and allocation of privileges to native élites to tie the regions to the centre in a different fashion from the regular bureaucratic structure of the interior. Dorothea Heuschert's study of Mongolian law codes complements Di Cosmo's essay by demonstrating the interaction of Manchu and Chinese concepts of legal order with local Mongolian cultures. Similarly, Elliot Sperling explores the ambivalent position of local élites in the frontier territories by analysing the autobiography of one Tibetan noble who played an active part in supporting Qing efforts to win legitimacy from the Tibetan Lamaist aristocracy. The Qing rulers adapted legal and bureaucratic structures, as well as personal relationships, to native customs in a sophisticated manner so as to accommodate difference within a unified empire.

Di Cosmo points to contrasts between Qing rule of the north and north-west regions and its policies towards the south-west border. The work of Jon Herman, Pat Giersch, and John Shepherd shows that Qing rulers faced similar issues of variant local administration and accommodation to native élites in Yunnan and Taiwan, but dealt with them differently, because the Manchu conquerors had no historical tradition of interaction

1 Marc Bloch, 'Toward a Comparative History of European Societies', in *Land and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1967), pp. 44-81; Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (New York, 1968); Shmuel Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1993).

2 Jack A. Goldstone, 'East and West in the Seventeenth Century: Political Crises in Stuart England, Ottoman Turkey, and Ming China', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxx (1988), 103-42 and *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, 1991).

3 Joseph Fletcher, 'Integrative History: Parallels and Interconnections in the Early Modern Period, 1500-1800', *Journal of Turkish Studies*, ix (1985), 37-57.

4 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*: III: *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago, 1974); *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke III (Cambridge, 1993); William H. McNeill, *The Age of Gunpowder Empires, 1450-1800* (Washington, 1989).

with the south-west.[1] Although Qing policies towards the south-west are not discussed here in detail, we should keep in mind that imperial treatment of different regions varied significantly.

My essay focuses on interaction between empires. The evolving empires of central Eurasia in the early modern period shaped each other's political and military structures; they were not driven entirely by independent internal dynamics. All three shared common technologies, such as surveying and artillery, which linked them to the Jesuits, geodesists, and military technicians produced by the developments of seventeenth-century science and technology in Europe, particularly France.

Two of the essays look at symbolic and cultural configurations of empire. Emma Jinhua Teng's analyses Qing travel literature about Taiwan from a perspective influenced by recent developments in literary studies.[2] Chinese concepts of gender, expressed in accounts of Taiwan, show the mainland élite scholars using Taiwan as an arena to define their own gender identities. They used tropes of 'feminization of the male' indigenous population, and eroticization of the feminine, to mark off the orthodox culture from the 'barbarian' one they perceived on the island. Much interesting comparative work on empires has focused on their use of gender categorization, and recent studies of early modern English literature have looked at the relationship of gender and power in travel writing.[3] Teng combines the two perspectives to bring imperial China within the orbit of discussions that have focused mainly on the New World.

Joanna Waley-Cohen examines the role of religious belief in Qing colonial conquest. Again, comparatively speaking, the relationship between material and religiously inspired motivations has been a constant theme in discussion of early modern European imperial conquest, whether Spanish, English, French, or Dutch. Waley-Cohen focuses on the complex relationship between the Qing state and the Tibetan Lama Buddhist institutions by looking at a specific campaign from the mid-eighteenth century in which Tibetan religious influence was particularly strong. The Qing emperors' attitudes towards Buddhism may have ranged from sceptical and

1 C. Patterson Giersch, 'China's Reluctant Subjects: The Qing Quest to Control Yunnan' (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale, 1996); John E. Herman, 'Empire in the Southwest: Early Qing Reforms to the Native Chieftain System', *Journal of Asian Studies*, lvi (1997), 47-75; John Robert Shepherd, *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600-1800* (Stanford, 1993).

2 See also, Emma Jinhua Teng, 'Travel Writing and Colonial Collecting: Chinese Travel Accounts of Taiwan from the Seventeenth through Nineteenth Centuries' (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard, 1997).

3 Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, 1991); Mary C. Fuller, *Voyages in Print: English Travel to America, 1576-1624* (Cambridge, 1995); *Domesticating the Empire: Languages of Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism, 1830-1962*, ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (Charlottesville, Va., forthcoming); Lora Wildenthal, 'Race, Gender, and Citizenship in the German Colonial Empire', in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler (Berkeley, forthcoming).

manipulative to genuine personal belief, but they also had to reckon with the influence of Central Asian religious traditions on their Mongolian, Manchu, and possibly even Han Chinese soldiers. As long as shamans could invoke the terrifying 'storm magic' (*jada*) in the midst of a battle, their sources of power had to be controlled. On a higher plane, the Dalai Lama could not be allowed to claim independent access to authority outside the realm of the Qing state, so the Qing rulers made careful efforts to tighten their hold over the Tibetan Lamas through both coercive means – military invasion – and extensive monetary and symbolic rewards.

These essays mark only the beginning of a path leading to closer consideration of China in the context of the other great colonial empires. Despite the apparent differences between China and Europe, there are enough common traits to inspire further discussion. Instead of 'East is East, and West is West, and ne'er the twain shall meet', think of the Chinese proverb, 'Under Heaven all humans are kin' (*Tianxia zhi nei, ren jie xiongdi*).

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Later Chinese Dynasties	
Sui	581-617
Tang	618-907
Five Dynasties	907-960
Liao	916-1125
Northern Song	960-1127
Southern Song	1127-1279
Yuan	1271-1368
Ming	1368-1644
Qing	1644-1912

Manchu Khans	
Nurhaci	1583-1626
Hung Taiji	1627-1643

Qing Dynasty: Reign Titles	
Shunzhi	1645-1661
Kangxi	1662-1722
Yongzheng	1723-1735
Qianlong	1736-1795
Jiaqing	1796-1820
Daoguang	1821-1850
Xianfeng	1851-1861
Tongzhi	1862-1874
Guangxu	1875-1908
Xuantong	1909-1912

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Boundaries, Maps, and Movement: Chinese, Russian, and Mongolian Empires in Early Modern Central Eurasia

COMPARATIVE STUDIES SHOULD examine the parallel and divergent responses to global processes that affected China and the other early modern empires. Central Eurasia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries offers one important site because three agrarian states contended for power: the Muscovite/Russian empire, expanding eastwards across Siberia; the Manchu Qing expanding first south-east, then north-west into the Central Asian steppes, deserts, and oases; and the Mongolian empire of the Zunghars, who created an autonomous state in western Mongolia, Turkestan, and Tibet. Although, between the mid-seventeenth and the mid-eighteenth centuries, the Zunghars rivalled Russian and Chinese power, by 1760 the Qing had crushed the state and exterminated the Zunghar people. The Qing then established permanent control, which lasted until the fall of the empire in 1911, over all of present-day Mongolia (Inner and Outer), Xinjiang, and Tibet.

The elimination of a powerful, independent Mongol-nomadic state in the steppe was a world-historical event. The closure of the steppe frontier meant the end of an age of fluidity, ecumenical exchange, fighting, and shifting of boundaries, and the division, dispersal, and extermination of the Mongols, who are now scattered from the Volga river to North China, one of the widest involuntary diasporas to occur on the continent. The outcome was the bipolar division of Central Asia between two empires, marked by a border delimited in treaty negotiations between the Chinese and the Russians. The bipolar division effectively lasted from 1760 until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Outer Mongolia, despite proclaiming its independence in 1911, became a Soviet satellite under Red Army occupation in 1921.[1]

The division persists conceptually in the terminology generally used to describe the broad, physiographically unbounded region lying between

1 C. R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (London, 1968), p. 188.

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the Amur river and the Ural mountains. Inner Asia usually refers to the territories on the Chinese side of the border after the mid-eighteenth century (Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet), while Central Asia refers to those on the Russian side. Now, with central Eurasia occupied by five former Soviet Republics, the (truly) independent Mongolia, and the Chinese and Russian empires, we have returned to a historically more usual situation, replacing the three-hundred-year interlude. How the Asian border was constructed is one theme of this comparative study.

Borders are often defined first by military confrontation, then by negotiated treaties, then by inscription on maps.[1] Map-makers and surveyors shore up the abstract verbal descriptions found in treaties; boundary markers and maps inscribe physically and visually the words written in agreements; and military and trading posts line up at the frontiers demarcated on maps. All three competing states – China, Mongolia, and Russia – produced important maps as a weapon in their struggle for control of central Eurasia, maps of unprecedented scale and accuracy. The maps served the same purpose as maps did in Europe, and although the style of production varied according to local circumstances and knowledge, all of them applied seventeenth-century western European knowledge, transmitted through Jesuits, Swedes, and other 'geodesists' (the practitioners of geodesy, the seventeenth-century term for land surveying). Thus, all three states expanded scientific knowledge of the globe in the early modern world.

Before the seventeenth century, the rulers of European and Asian states did not have clearly delimited conceptions of the boundaries of their domains. During the seventeenth century, however, as the result of mutual contacts, the major states of Eurasia negotiated fixed, linear borders. In 1639, the Ottomans negotiated a treaty with the Safavids that divided the contested frontier zone between them. In 1683 and again in 1699, after the failure of the Ottomans' siege of Vienna, the Ottomans and Habsburgs negotiated a peace treaty defining the boundary between their territories that is said to have marked the beginning of the decline of Ottoman power.[2] From the mid-seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries, Russia began to mark its boundaries with the Ottomans, Tatars, Kalmyks, and other peoples living on its southern frontiers by negotiating treaties and constructing fortified defensive lines.[3] Russia defined its boundary

1 Michel Foucher, *L'Invention des frontières* (Paris, 1986).
2 Foucher, *L'Invention*, pp. 58-95; Paul Hofmann, *The Viennese* (New York, 1988), p. 59; Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: III: The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times* (Chicago, 1974), pp. 131-3.
3 Carol Belkin Stevens, *Soldiers on the Steppe: Army Reform and Social Change in Early Modern Russia* (DeKalb, 1995), p. 137.

with China by treaties in 1689 and 1727. As Michel Foucher concludes, the modern bordered state was invented during the seventeenth century on the frontiers between the giant Eurasian empires.

New surveying techniques supported the newly defined borders, not always to their rulers' advantage. Louis XIV is said to have told his cartographers that they had cost him one-third of his kingdom, after he found that more precisely measured lines of latitude and longitude considerably reduced the area of France.[1] But the techniques, developed under royal sponsorship to a new peak of accuracy in seventeenth-century France, helped the states to increase their control over their territories.

Maps control people, not just land. Drawing a line in the sand prohibits your opponent from crossing it without permission. As the Asian states drew lines across the steppe, they also controlled the movement of populations: refugees, nomads, tribes, traders, soldiers, and other highly mobile groups. Not only did the states need to constrain movement, but they also needed new classification systems to define who lived inside and who outside the new borders. Vaguely defined frontier zones gave way to clearly marked lines; fluid ethnic identities were sharpened into more rigid definitions. Ethnographic atlases, like their later counterparts the cadastral survey, the census, and the imperial atlas, fixed peoples, lands, and identities in new ways.[2] In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century central Eurasia, boundaries and maps combined to restrict mobility.

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All states distrust people who move freely from place to place.[3] As the mobile are difficult to tax, draft into the army, interrogate for crimes, or mobilize for forced labour, states try to define their permanent inhabitants. Tax registers, land registers, censuses, border controls, passports, and visas all attach a person to a time and place, even if his right to move is not constrained. Every early modern state, struggling to build new bureaucratic apparatuses to contain resistance from localities, had to pay special attention to mobile, unregistered peoples. In eastern Eurasia, however, states faced greater difficulties in capturing human resources owing to the much lower population densities: villagers in the forests and steppes could easily flee to escape military service and taxes. The Ukrainian steppe

1 Foucher, *L'Invention*, p. 28.
2 On maps, censuses, museums, and surveys, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), pp. 163-95, and, for China, Laura Hostetler, 'Chinese Ethnography in the Eighteenth Century: Miao Albums of Guizhou Province' (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania, 1995).
3 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998); Peter C. Perdue, 'Military Mobilization in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century China, Russia, and Mongolia', *Modern Asian Studies*, xxx (1996), 757-93.