

10.1: Military challenges in the late Ming

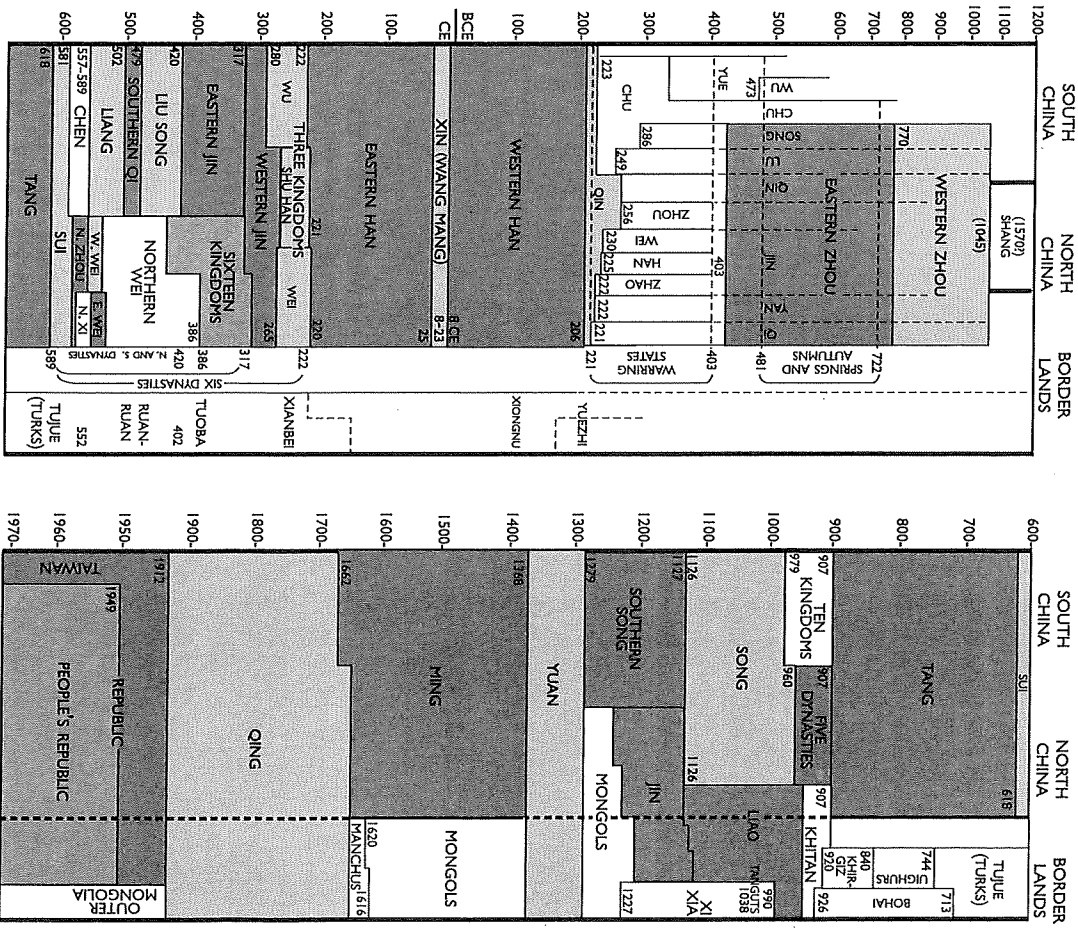
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11.1: The maximum extent of the Qing Empire, c. 1780.

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11.2: Patterns of migration in the 18th century.

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been one of the largest and most productive economies on earth and the dominant military and cultural power in East and Central Asia. Then, in the mid-19th century, came what Chinese history textbooks and politicians often refer to as a "national humiliation." The industrialized nations of the West and Japan invaded China, took its resources, dominated its markets, stunted its economic growth, and mistreated its people. Now, in 2008, after more than a century of poverty, war, and revolution in which it had been dismissed as the "sick man of Asia," China was back on the road to wealth and ready to join the ranks of the developed industrialized nations as an equal.

Most American spectators approached the Beijing Olympics with a very different idea of China's history. The American media portrayed the games as China's "coming-out party." The picture created for the American public was one of a country emerging from centuries of isolation and/or a country "opening" to the capitalist, democratic West after decades of control by an anti-Western Communist leadership. American journalists and spectators tended to interpret much of what they noticed in Beijing—Starbucks coffee, rock and roll, and Chinese fans' enthusiasm for American basketball stars like Kobe Bryant, for instance—as encouraging signs of "opening." Americans were also quick to point to evidence that China's Communist leadership had not completely signed on to the spirit of "openness." Much was made, for example, of continued government blocking of politically sensitive Web sites.

These two versions of Chinese history—one Chinese, the other American—are mutually contradictory. On the one hand, we have invasion; on the other, self-imposed isolation. Both stories are fundamentally wrong. China's history is not a drama of strength and glory, downfall at the hands of Western imperialists, and redemption through rapid economic growth, nor is it an object lesson in the dangers of isolation and the value of open doors and open markets.

The goal of this book, the first of two volumes, is to trace Chinese history from its beginnings around 10,000 BCE through the reign of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1796) of the Qing Empire (1644–1912). Volume Two will pick up the story in the Qianlong reign and take it into the first decade of the 21st century CE. Together, the two volumes will tell the story of China in a way that goes beyond the simple but misleading narratives of glory to downfall to redemption or of isolation to opening.

During the millennia covered in volume one there was, in fact, no one nation or state corresponding precisely with the people and territory of the contemporary People's Republic of China. The story of China's past presented

in these pages is not, then, the story of a single unchanging country. It is, instead, the tale of various Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures followed by a number of dynastic governments whose territories included various parts of what are now China, Vietnam, Korea, Mongolia, Russia, and the Central Asian Republics. ~~For~~ ^{But} is this the story of a single, unchanging Chinese people and culture? ~~Yes~~, rather, the story of how the Chinese people and their culture (including language, government, philosophy, religion, literature, architecture, art, and music) developed through centuries of interaction between the settled agricultural people of northern China's Central Plains and the peoples of Southern China, Southeast Asia, Korea, Central Asia, India, the Middle East, Europe, and especially, the nomads, and traders of China's Inner Asian periphery (see pg. 8). It is only appropriate, then, that we begin the story by looking at the land and its people and by asking: What is China? And who are the people of China?

The territory that we now refer to as China is vast: over 3,705,386 square miles (9,596,960 sq km), extending from over 50 degrees latitude in the north to below 20 degrees latitude in the south, from the alluvial plains and river valleys of the east to the forbidding mountains, high plateaus, and deserts of Tibet and Xinjiang in the west. This territory has been home to a variety of ethnic groups. Kingdoms and empires have risen and fallen on this huge landmass: in many cases, what we now refer to as "China" has been home to two or more different kingdoms or empires at the same time. In the 20th century, we observe the emergence of a unified, modern nation-state, the Republic of China, and then the People's Republic of China, dominated by a single large ethnic group—the Han, whom we generally call "Chinese." In addition to the Han (who comprise 91.5 percent of China's population), China has fifty-five other ethnic groups, or "minority nationalities" as they are called in China.

The unification of all the territory and peoples now falling within the borders of the People's Republic of China is the relatively recent product of a very long historical process. The origins of that territorial unity lie in the empire-building of the Han and later dynastic regimes and in waves of migration in which Han people, their agricultural civilization, and the power of their dynastic governments spread across the land. The process of migration

and government action and the ethnic, economic, and cultural transformations that follow continue in the 21st century as Han Chinese migration changes the ethnic composition of the western areas of Tibet and Xinjiang, and as the market economy and globalization change the lifestyles and customs of all Chinese, the Han majority and the many ethnic minority peoples.

The homeland of the Han people is that area which geographers refer to as "China Proper." The territory includes the drainage areas of three major river systems and their tributaries: the Yellow River in the north, the Yangzi River in the center, and the Xi (West) River in the south. The area includes the Central Plains, the Yangzi Valley, the Guangdong (Canton) Basin, and the Sichuan Basin—the latter relatively isolated behind mountain ranges and (until recently) the forbidding Three Gorges of the Yangzi River. China Proper is well suited to settled agriculture and is the area in which the Han Chinese came to be the dominant ethnic group by the tenth century.

China Proper itself may be divided into two parts, north and south. The line of division is created roughly by the Qin (or Qinling) Mountains, running along the Han River until the river turns south, and then cutting across to the Huai River and following its path to the Yellow Sea. North China is relatively dry and cool. The soil and climate are suitable for the cultivation of millet, barley, wheat, and soybeans. South China is a place of heavier rainfall and is blessed with an abundance of rivers and lakes. The soil and climate are suitable for irrigated rice agriculture. As we shall see, south China was originally home to many ethnic groups other than the Han. Some remain today as ethnic minorities; others were gradually absorbed or displaced as Han Chinese migration, supported by military force, changed the ethnic composition and the economy of this fertile area.

Standing in contrast to China Proper is a vast area that we will refer to as China's Inner Asian periphery. The Inner Asian periphery includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and Manchuria.¹ These areas have historically been the homelands of people other than the Han ethnic group. Relations between the predominantly Han people of China Proper and the various peoples of China's Inner Asian periphery have been characterized at times by trade, and at other times by warfare. Government based in China Proper sometimes conquered and administered parts of the Inner Asian periphery. At other times, nomadic confederations, kingdoms, or imperial states ruled over parts of the Inner Asian periphery, asserting their identity against and variously trading and/or fighting with the states of China Proper. Occasionally Inner Asian peoples subjugated and ruled northern portions of China

Proper or even, in the cases of the Mongols and the Manchus, brought all of China Proper under their control. Also peripheral to China Proper was the island of Taiwan, lying 150 miles (240 km) off the southeast Chinese coast. Only in modern times, under the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), did a government based in China Proper build an empire that included the entire Inner Asian periphery and the island of Taiwan.

People and Provinces

It would be historically inaccurate to assign a single ethnic identity to any one of the regions of the Inner Asian periphery or Taiwan and to assume that it has always been the homeland of that particular ethnic group. Many peoples have come and gone, fought, intermarried, and melded with one another, not just in these outlying areas, but even in China Proper itself. Nonetheless, it is useful to make some general statements about the major ethnic groups of Taiwan and the Inner Asian periphery.

Taiwan was originally inhabited by aboriginal people whose native languages are related to the Polynesian languages of the Pacific islands. Migration of Han Chinese from the mainland, gradual and small in numbers at first, increased markedly in the 17th century. Han Chinese migrants clashed with the aboriginal people, pushing them up into the mountains. In 1684, the Qing government incorporated the island as a prefecture of Fujian province, thus marking the beginning of Taiwan's administration from the mainland.² Before the third century CE, the southwestern areas of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Annam (now northern Vietnam) were also parts of the periphery of China Proper. The numerous ethnic groups of these areas, including Hmong (whom the Chinese refer to as Miao), Dai, and Annamese, interacted with Chinese migrants and with the imperial states that absorbed what became China's southwestern provinces and, at times, Annam as well.

To the west of China Proper, at elevations of 6,500 feet (2,000 m) and more above sea level, lies the area inhabited by Tibetan people. This includes the contemporary Xizang Autonomous Region (Tibet), Qinghai province, some of the western fringes of Sichuan and Gansu provinces, and parts of northern Yunnan province. The Tibetan region consists largely of sparsely inhabited plateaus on which nomadic herders of sheep and yak eke out a living. In river valley areas, sedentary farmers cultivate barley, potatoes, and other crops. Over a period of time, but particularly in the eighth century, the

Tibetans converted from their animistic religion, Bon, to Buddhism—although retaining many of the elements of Bon, so that the resulting variety of Buddhism has distinct Tibetan characteristics.

To the northwest lies the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. This area has been home to various people, including Buddhist kingdoms (during the Tang period) and, more recently, to the Uighur and other Turkic peoples whose religion is Islam and who sometimes refer to the area as "East Turkestan." The center of Xinjiang is dominated by the forbidding Taklamakan Desert. At the outer edges of this desert area are rich oases fed by run-off from the snow-covered Tian and Kunlun Mountains. In the northern corner of Xinjiang the Zunghar Basin (Zungharia) is defined and watered by the Altai and other mountain chains. Together, these various mountain chains define Xinjiang, dividing it from the other Central Asian Turkic lands, while the trade routes across the desert and down through the Gansu Corridor (that finger of Inner Chinese cultivated land lying between the Gobi Desert and the Tibetan Plateau) bring the area into commercial and cultural contact with China Proper. Thus the people of Xinjiang have functioned as middlemen, agents of trade and cultural exchange between Turkic Central Asia and Han China Proper, developing their own mixed cultural identity in the process. The independence of the Central Asian states after the fall of the Soviet Union reinvigorated the old trade routes: Xinjiang once again functions as a route of contact between China Proper and Central Asia.

To the north of China Proper is Mongolia—an area that includes both the contemporary Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and the republic of Mongolia. Mongolia includes the Gobi Desert, mountains in the northwest, and, in between, vast grasslands that have supported nomadic pastoral peoples, most recently the Mongols, but in previous centuries others, including the Uighurs (during the Tang dynasty) and the Xiongnu (during the Qin and Han periods). The nomadic economy relied on a triumvirate of animals: sheep for wool and food, horses for warfare and communications, and camels for transport. The tribal peoples of the grasslands would sometimes form larger federations, the largest and most significant being that formed by the Mongol leader Chinggis Khan. The relations of the nomads of the steppe with the settled agricultural people of China Proper have varied from trade to raiding to conquest. To the east of Mongolia lies Manchuria. In pre-modern times, this area was populated by tribal peoples who practiced a combination of farming, animal husbandry, hunting, and trading.

As we move on through the histories of the peoples and kingdoms, the wars, the cultures, and the remarkable individuals who came and went on this

vast stage that we call China, we will be harking back to these basic geographical areas and features, adding refinements here and there and taking note of change over time. We will also be referring to China's provinces.

From the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) through the present time, Chinese governments have divided their territories into larger administrative units that we generally call "provinces." In some periods, two or more provinces and their governors would be grouped together under a governor-general. Each province was subdivided into a number of counties. At times there would be an administrative layer consisting of a number of counties between county and province. Provincial and county boundaries and even names changed over the years. Nonetheless, there is enough stability in enough of the provincial names that it is useful to become familiar with them as they appear on a contemporary map of the People's Republic of China. The names and boundaries of China's provinces reflect the country's multi-ethnic character and the way in which China Proper became the economic, political, military, and cultural center of a country that includes the Inner Asian periphery.

China Proper consists of nineteen provincial-level units. In the north are Shandong, Hebei, and Shanxi, with Shaanxi and Gansu in the northwest. Gansu is the province whose "corridor" reaches up toward the oases of Xinjiang and thus carried trade over the famous "Silk Road" to and from the Central Asian kingdoms and beyond. Straddling the border of north and south China are Jiangsu, Anhui, Henan, and Hubei provinces. The Yangzi River flows through all four, bringing with it the blessings of irrigation and transport and the curse of periodic floods. Firmly in the south we have Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hunan, Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan. In the mountainous southwest lie the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan.

Also in the southwest is the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a mountainous region with a sizeable population of non-Han peoples collectively referred to as "Zhuang." China's "Autonomous Regions" (there are five of them) are provincial-level units whose populations have a majority or a very sizeable minority of non-Han people. The logic behind the autonomous regions is to provide a degree of self-rule to the non-Han people who have historically been the majority population in these peripheral areas. In the same way, ethnic minority areas within some provinces have been designated as autonomous counties or autonomous prefectures. In practice, the "autonomy" has been largely ceremonial, as Han Chinese Communist Party bureaucrats hold real power.

China's Inner Asian periphery includes both provinces and autonomous regions. The Tibetan ethnic area is divided among the Tibet (Xizang) Autonomous Region, the province of Qinghai, and a number of autonomous

counties and prefectures in Yunnan, Sichuan, and Gansu provinces. In the extreme northwest, the Uighurs and other Turkic Muslim groups make up a slim majority of the population of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, bordering on Gansu and Shaanxi, is home to a large population of Hui people—Chinese Muslims who trace their descent from Arab and Central Asian Muslim traders who came to China centuries ago. The Hui are a minority even within Ningxia. Mongols likewise are a minority in the Inner Mongolia (Nei Menggu) Autonomous Region. Manchuria, where the overwhelming majority of the people are Han Chinese, is divided into China's three northeastern provinces: Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning. A few rural areas that have Manchu communities have been designated as autonomous counties or prefectures.

Villages, Towns, and Cities

For all of Chinese history, the vast majority—eighty percent or more—of the Han people of China Proper were farmers. Their world was the world of the village—but not merely of the village itself, but also the standard marketing area within which the males of the family, in particular, were accustomed to doing business with men from other villages and even from one of the larger cities that served as the intermediate markets to which the standard market towns were attached.

Certainly, farmers spent most of their time in their home villages and found their identity in "family, fields, and ancestors."³ For most of Chinese history the best arrangement, from the point of view of both government and the farmers, was a system of independent land holding by small family farmers. Family identity and solidarity was very strong—the ideal was to have "three generations under one roof." In practice, this was rarely achieved for long, as families went through natural cycles of growth and contraction. But even when most families were nuclear families most of the time, they were knit together into clans. Clan organizations were stronger in the south than in the north. Throughout China, however, clan identity was symbolized and maintained through ancestral temples and sometimes through clan leadership, commonly held land, and other clan-run institutions.

For all their deep rooted roots, Chinese farmers were not self-sufficient peasants, living their lives in the narrow confines of their fields and villages. Instead, they were actually attached to a wider community—the standard marketing area, in which they traded not only goods, but culture. These

marketing areas ranged from 5 or fewer square miles (approx. 15 sq km) to over 60 square miles (150 sq km) in sparsely populated mountainous and infertile border areas. Market systems and market towns grew in numbers over time, so that by the Qing period (1644–1911), virtually every farming household lived in an area that was accessible to a market town. These market towns were not grand places. Typically, they would have one real street, some permanent shops, and various discrete market areas, each dedicated to a particular product or craft. Marketing would be on a regular schedule, generally once every three or five days, for a few hours on each designated market day.

Each of these standard market towns would be linked to two or three larger "intermediate" market towns, which occupied a position between the central and the standard markets. It was in the intermediate market towns that one would expect to see members of the landholding local elite—those families who had accumulated larger amounts of agricultural land, which they rented out to farmers who had little or no land of their own. There, these elite families would have access to books and writing implements, fine fabrics, and other luxury goods that would not be found in a humbler standard market town.

Above the intermediate market town one would find the central market towns and, above them, focal and regional cities. These larger and more sophisticated central market towns, local cities, and regional capitals would typically be located at important transportation junctions and would be the sites of warehousing and wholesaling. The higher one went in this hierarchy of central places, the more likely it would be that one would find fully walled cities that not only had marketing functions but also served as administrative centers. These were Chinese cities in the real sense—urban settlements with walls and a government office. It is to the cities that we shall now turn our attention.

The productivity of Chinese farmers supported one of the most sophisticated and, in terms of sheer numbers, one of the largest urban civilizations in world history. China's cities were the natural environment of the elite, the centers of trade, administration, and higher culture. Towns and cities and town and city people thus take up a disproportionate amount of the attention of students of Chinese history.

China's towns and cities are as varied as its landscape—from the flat, dry, and dusty cities of the north, laid out in squares, to Sichuan's Chongqing in the southwest, where the streets writhe up and around (and, in the future, will punch through) the hills, to canal-laced southern cities like Suzhou and Ningbo.

Some towns had exclusively commercial functions, while other towns, and virtually all cities, were both administrative and commercial centers.

There was an ideal model, informed by cosmological principles, according to which a city should be constructed.⁵ This model called for walled and moated rectangular cities laid out on a north-south axis, horizontal and vertical streets, palaces in the center of the city facing south, and markets in the shady position to the north. When it came to real-life urban construction, Chinese rulers were practical, not slaves to tradition or to one ideal model. Some capital cities more or less approximated the ideals expressed in the classical model; others followed quite different plans.⁶ Some cities, for example, had designated marketplaces (but generally not in the north), while in others (such as the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng), business took place everywhere. City walls often departed from the ideal square model to accommodate natural features like rivers or hills. Tang Chang'an had the imperial palace on the northern edge of the city, facing south. The Mongol Yuan capital of Dadu placed the imperial palace in the center, according to the classical model. So too did Ming-Qing Beijing, which was built on the site of Dadu. Smaller cities were often walled (some were not), and could be roughly square, rectangular, or even round.

Whether it is the urban environment and its culture, the world of the walled areas and small towns, or, indeed, the land itself, we need to be aware of the great variety and the significant changes that have taken place over thousands of years. But for now, let us return to the land and the first people on it.

The Origins of the Chinese People

Where do the Chinese people come from? How did they become "Chinese" in terms of appearance (race) and culture? These questions are inextricably intertwined with the larger question: Where did we all come from? What evolutionary process led the earth to be populated by groups of *Homo sapiens* of a variety of skin colors, hair textures, cranial and facial configurations, languages, and cultures?

In 1921, archaeologists discovered the fossilized remains of over forty *Homo erectus* individuals in a cave at Zhoukoudian, near Beijing. "Peking Man" and other *Homo erectus*, whose fossilized remains have been discovered at other sites in China, were once thought to have been the ancestors of the modern Chinese. More recent scholarship argues that the Chinese like all the world's

contemporary human populations are the descendants of *Homo sapiens*—a hominid that evolved in East Africa around two hundred thousand years ago and spread to the rest of the world in the last hundred thousand years.⁸

The evidence for this hypothesis includes both the fossil record and studies of mitochondrial DNA. The latter studies indicate that all humans—Chinese included—share a common ancestral origin in Africa. If this is the case, then "Peking Man," like *Homo erectus* elsewhere around the world (the Neanderthals, for example), was an evolutionary dead end: a variety of advanced hominid that was replaced by the new wave of *Homo sapiens* coming out of Africa, and who thus did not contribute to the genetic makeup of the people of modern China.⁹ This suggests that the physical characteristics—shapes of noses, eyes, and so on—that we use to place people in racial categories are a fairly recent development.¹⁰ Related research indicates that China Proper may have been populated by migrations from two separate directions. One route brought people from Africa to the Eurasian continent, across Central Asia and Siberia and thus down into northern China. Another route brought people to South China via Southeast Asia.¹¹

Some archaeologists and anthropologists in the West and in China reject the "out of Africa" theory; they prefer to interpret the fossils discovered in China—Peking Man and various other *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens* remains—as evidence that *Homo erectus* in the area that we now call China evolved independently into the modern Chinese people. This interpretation fits well into contemporary Chinese nationalist ideology, since it suggests that the people of all the various ethnic groups of China (including Taiwan) evolved together, on the territory of the modern People's Republic of China, share common ancestors, and are therefore members of the same big family.¹²

Neolithic Cultures and the Beginnings of Chinese Civilization

Whatever their origins and genetic background, modern humans inhabited numerous regions of China before and during the time of the Neolithic Revolution when, some ten thousand years ago, humans around the world, including China, made the drastic leap from hunter-gatherer economies to the settled agricultural lifestyle.

Archaeological discoveries of Neolithic settlements allow us to piece together the story of the development and interaction of more than a dozen distinctly separate Neolithic cultures in China. Cultural interaction led to the