

The Qing Dynasty's Cultural-Political Conciliatory Policies towards Mongolia

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ABSTRACT

This essay aims to first provide a brief background on Qing's history prior its entering to Beijing to explain its early ties with Ming and Mongolia. The essay will then explore the social-cultural, diplomatic, and religious facets of Qing's approach toward different central Asian ethnics---mainly between the Kangxi and Qianlong Period (1660-1800) emphasizing on Mongolia---and evaluate, on a contemporary perspective, their worth and uniqueness contributing to the dynasty's successful diplomatic relationships and stability. The conclusion, derived from mainly primary resources, confirms the core position and effectiveness of conciliatory policies toward Mongolia in Qing's political strategy.

Introduction

The Qing dynasty had historically been recognized by the consecutive diplomatic catastrophes, oppressive society, and collapsing economy which resulted in the semi-colonization and descent of China in its late years. Notorious for its senseless pride, delusional political view, and weak military. Late Qing, same as its predecessors, has often been misidentified as an arrogant, ignorant, and quite typical Chinese authoritarian regime. Hence, in the public's eye, it might be counterintuitive to praise the conciliatory policies of an authoritarian regime in ancient China.

This view, as well as the Eurocentric perspective on history, was challenged recently as scholars looked deeper in to Qing's origin and contemporary knowledge. Near the latter half of the 20th century, a new, more Manchu-emphasized analysis on the Qing dynasty, named after its pioneering publication "The New Qing History"¹, led to the inclination of historians today to view the dynasty on a more context-bond and cultural-social perspective.

Though it is undeniable that Late Qing, left behind during the industrial revolution, was a weak player in the world, to evaluate it as politically incompetent simply based on that would be somewhat unfair. Historical study today encourages scholars to bypass presentism², and to accomplish an objective evaluation of Qing, instead of judging its performance on a retrospective view, it would be more beneficial for one to ponder: Was Qing a leap from the dynastical loop of self-destruction that symbolized Imperial China? Did Qing perform to the best of its ability given its contemporary set of value and information?

Looking pass its tragic surface, one can actually see an unprecedentedly progressive set of policies and views on diplomacy compared to its predecessors, especially in its approach toward its neighboring political entities. While other dynasties chose to war against them, Qing preferred forming alliances, using them instead to ward off its enemies. It had adopted an entirely different strategy toward its bordering nomadic ethnicities that even past minority-ruled dynasties failed to consider and accomplish.

With this mindset, the Qing dynasty was able to create the strongest bond a dynasty had ever had with its surrounding ethnicities, and thereafter, achieve the most wide-spread and stable regime in Chinese History---with the

exception of Yuan, whose identity as a Chinese regime is still debatable due to the fact that it didn't much assimilate to Chinese, or Han culture (many still prefer to call it as “the first foreign-led dynasty in ancient China”)³. Hence, on a certain perspective, one could call it the most internally-successful dynasty in Chinese history, as the structure it implemented had---again, internally---worked until the end of its regime.

A Context Preview

Being one of the strongest Chinese dynasties to exist, Qing had undoubtedly managed to conquer, with force or with diplomacy, most of its neighboring tribes and nations, expanding the Chinese territory to an impressive mass that closely resembled that of today's. Despite the many advantages that it consisted which symbolized a prosperous and wise regime, it is inarguable that Qing owes its success to forming bond with one specific ethnicity: the Mongolians---the fierce riders up north that once terrorized the entire Eurasia.

Before diving deep in to the specifics of Qing's diplomatic policy toward the Mongolians, however, it is essential for one to gain some basic historical context. The Dynasty's relationship with the various tribes of Mongolia precedes far before its formal establishment. For unlike most other Chinese dynasties who are ruled by the Han people, the ancestors of Qing's ruling class, the Manchus, belonged to a group of ex-ethnic minorities residing in northeastern China neighboring the Mongolians known as the Nvzhen.

Early conquering by the Qing

The Nvzhen began their rise in 1616, when Aisin Gioro Nurhaci united the various Nvzhen tribes and created a political entity known as Later Jin (the predecessor of Qing) in the Manchuria region. By then, Mongolia was split in to three major factions (with other smaller individual tribes): the Chahar (south), Khalkha (north), and Oirat (west) Mongols. Threatened by the rising presence of Jin, and encouraged by Ming, the Khalkha tribes first formed alliance to strike the newborn regime in 1619, only to be defeated by the military genius of Nurhaci near the Liaohe region⁴. The defeat of Khalkha marked the official beginning of Jin's full-fledged expansion, and the turn in various Mongolian tribes' attitude toward Later Jin.

After Ligden Khan, the 35th Khan of the Altan Urugh Mongolian Empire, along with his effort to stop the impending Jin, died while fleeing in what is now the modern province of Gansu in 1634, his son Ejei Khan yielded to Jin in the following year. Around the same time, Hong Taiji, Son of Nurhaci (who died in 1626), changed his domain's name to Man Qing (with respect to its geological position in Manchuria). The following year, symbolized by the passing of the Mongolian Heirloom Jade Seal from Ejei to Hong Taiji and his ascendance as the new Mongolian Khan (the official ceremony happened in 1636, a year later), marked the official alliance between Qing and Chahar Mongol, who will prove to be one of the dynasty's most loyal allies in the future. With the Chahar setting an example, the majority of Mongolia sent emissaries paying tribute (a sign of submission in Chinese culture) to Qing in the following 3 years. By 1658, Qing had taken the whole of Chahar, Khalkha, and the southern part of Oirat Mongol under its dominion as “Fan Guo”---vassal states of the dynasty.

Yet, for a regime established by whom middle plainer would call uncivilized barbarians, Qing's management over the Mongolians was by no means impetuous. After seizing the Mongolian tribes, the Qing's first action was to categorize and register the citizens while quickly implementing a functional judiciary system, meanwhile establishing “tulergi golo-bi dasara jurgan”---a Ministry specifically in charge of diplomatic and cultural affairs of its vassal states and allies

(inaccurately dubbed by later translations as “Court of colonial affairs”)⁵

It is appropriate here to explain that Qing’s approach, though often granted the same name, differs fundamentally from European colonization. The term “colonialism” refers to the “policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.”⁶ Qing does not fulfill these requirements. Aside the reservation of few key privileges, for instance emperorship, Qing granted the Mongolians political independency, economic prosperity, and racial equality⁷---none of which can be seen in European-occupied colonies. The relationship between Mongolia and Qing was more of a vassal-ship. Understanding this point is crucial to this essay’s discussion.

All of the said policies were done within 2 years and maintained well until the last years of Qing regime, with the last court official Liang Fu being appointed in 1905⁸. Visibly, the dynasty’s procedure in overtaking the Mongolian regions did represent a civilized or “authentic” Chinese regime, for it was able to efficiently bring the region under its legal confines, establish a clear head-count of the state, and create a sub-branch of government for the region. Even before majorly engaging in Ming affairs and takeovers, the Manchus had already built for themselves an ever-steadier foundation through its inseparable ties with Mongolia.

Ming’s situation at the moment

Now, to examine the conditions of late Ming simultaneous to the said events: From Zhou to Ming, the emperor’s power has demonstrated a steady growth through the expanse of Imperial Chinese History. From a leader of the public to a beneficiary of political oppression, this “devolution” in imperial China’s political structure symbolized by to the increasing authoritarianism peaked in the Ming Dynasty. Historically, there was a time when the emperor and his ministers managed the state in cooperation⁹. The Tang dynasty, for example, was known for its “enlightened” political structure, when officials of all kinds were (relatively) encouraged to share criticism and insight to the emperor. There once was a phrase repeated and paraphrased by various historical records: “The three councilors sit to discuss matters of governance, the nine ministers sit to manage specific affairs, and the emperor only needs to restrain himself to sit facing the south.”¹⁰---The phrase emphasizes the distribution of power and duties among different classes of officials in the earlier Chinese dynasties, and their relatively equivalent position compared to each other and the emperor.

Such sights grew rarer as time progresses. By the late Ming, the emperor’s power and authority has evolved to a point when it is the only defining factor in the entire hierarchy system. Ming minimized the power of all roles in court in its very beginning. In the year 1381, Zhu Yuanzhang, the very first emperor of Ming, took advantage of the Hu Wei Yong Case---a case involving the emperor executing an allegedly treacherous chancellor along with around 30,000 people---and abolished the system¹¹. With such a violent display of authority, the emperor seized full control over the realm. The palace’s officials do of course, still oversee different aspects of governance, but none was beyond the emperor’s authority to directly alter or object. The government’s main concern since had shifted from running the nation to pleasing the emperors, as the slightest discomfort incurred may result in deaths. With full control over what modern US would call all three branches of government, Ming’s emperors had completed their role’s ascension to total domination and signaled the prime of Chinese authoritarianism. Such immense accumulation of power is unprecedented in Chinese History and had wrought terrible consequences.

The results of this political depravity, saturated and condensed through the entirety of Ming’s regime, are quite classical in the dynasty’s later years. Mainly, there were intense conflict between political factions, accumulation of power among eunuchs, severe economic corruption & depression, and a fragile military. To further worsen the situation,

the last emperors of Ming are all either incompetent or careless toward politics---the fault of an education that “was devoted precious resources but yielded unsatisfactory results.”¹² The time the last Emperor Chong Zhen succeeded throne roughly matches the time when Nurhaci died and the acceleration of Jin expansion began. Therefore, not only was Chong Zhen left with decades of political instability his predecessors passed down and the famine resulting from crippling crop production during the Little Ice Age (Cui), he must now face both the fierce Mongolians and the impending Manchus, who, unlike the sorry state of Ming, were in the prime of their time.

Even before Chong Zhen became emperor, Ming had already lost several major battles to Jin. Starting with the battle of Fushun, which resulted in the loss of Fort Fushun and captivation of more than 300,000 Ming men and livestock. Afterwards, Ming quickly gathered all 200,000 of its elite troops across the nation in addition of Joseon---Korean vassal state soldiers---and prepared to confront the Manchus in a final showdown. The battle of Sarhu was another grand victory for Jin. The majority of Ming’s troops were eliminated, disabling it from any further large resistance. What followed was a chain of defeat on Ming’s side---the Battle of Kaitie, the Battle of Guanning, the Battle of Songjin. Eventually, Ming retreated back the Shanhai Lockdown, relinquishing its control over the entirety of China’s northeastern region. At this point, Qing has officially possessed the power needed to, and later did, enter the middle plain and claim “Tianxia”---the domination of China...

The true mistake of Ming was neither its faulty leadership or severe authoritarianism, they merely serve as catalysts for its fall. Instead, Ming’s mistake lies within the discontinuity between its status quo and the policy it adopted towards its neighboring political entities. Fragile, depressed, and corrupted as it is, Ming failed, or did not wish to recognize the need for peace and prosperity that can be done with diplomacy and assimilation. It, much like its predecessors, went down the pride-driven path of war and alienation, rigidly adhering to the ancient model of Han Monarchy until it eventual led to the dynasty’s doom. Ming was no exception in Chinese History, for it too was felled by its own political instability and stubbornness.

Qing Political approach & structure regarding Mongolia

After the rather long digression, now to redirect the focus of the essay to its thesis: the situation with Late Ming provides an excellent contrast to Qing, who was unique and successful regarding the said issues. Qing was able to claim what puzzled all other dynasties for thousands of years: Mongol, Tibet, and Xinjiang, keeping them tightly under the grasp of one central political entity. Having defeated Mongolia, who once brought devastation to the entire eastern Europe, with mere military strength, Qing was, of no doubt, a powerful player in the contemporary world. However, its leaders were familiar with the ancient Chinese phrase: “to conquer is easy, to guard is hard.” They knew brute force was not the key to prolonged stability. To truly maintain their domain, they must politically ensure the subordination of its subjects.

Among all of its allies, Qing was well aware that the Mongolian tribes were the pillar bone to its prosperity and was willing to go to great lengths to preserve its ties with them. Much like emperor Kangxi once said: “our dynasty needs no defense, for we have the Mongolian tribes as barrier.”¹³ Yet, to defeat the Mongolians once is one thing, to tame them is a whole other, and it’s by no mean an easy task. There had been countless attempts to make ally with these nomadic riders that backfired in Chinese History. The question then, is: How was Qing able to maintain and further expand the support it receives from Mongolia---its most loyal and powerful ally? The reason behind it was rather simple.

It’s a consensus in Qing study to conclude Qing’s approach with the phrase “giving grace and intimidation

simultaneously"¹⁴. Aside from continuing the conservation of power and military might, what Qing valued most was the control and unification in thought and culture. Therefore, the prosperity of Qing doesn't come only from its reinforcement on a centralized political structure and a firm military basis, but also its acceptance to highly-advanced Han culture and respect to each ethnicity's religion and tradition. Qing's approach overall, can be summarized into three facets: military-political, social-cultural, and religious.

Military-political

Mao Zedong commented in his prime: "Politics is war without bloodshed, while war is politics with bloodshed."¹⁵ The two are almost inseparable in nature. Indeed, Qing's relationship with Mongolia exceeds any past dynasties, but having Mongolia as a powerful ally did not slow Qing's development in a military-emphasized government in its early years. The space for Qing's cultural inclusiveness and freedom does not come from mere good will, they are built on a foundation of formidable military strength, and solid political structures. Before any humanitarian or progressive actions can be implemented, Qing must guarantee absolute superiority and respect from the Mongolians. When facing the Mongolians and other non-Manchu ethnics, Qing has gone far to concentrate power to its ruling class, often using its outstanding early militarism power and knowledge.

The Eight Banner system

The Manchus were always renowned for their military discipline and strength. Such virtues were well preserved even after they've entered the middle plain. During Huang Taiji's reign, he established a military structure named the Banner system (previously the four banner). The Banner system refer to eight differently colored banners under which different sections of the Manchu military are commanded. The system was originally constructed to structuralize the Manchu military for better command and coordination but remained after the war and was extended and converted into a political system of identification, segregation and control.

Despite being called the eight banners, there are in fact, triple the amount of classifications. The eight banners are separated into the Hanjun (Han military) Eight Banners, the Mongol Eight Banners, and the Manchu Eight Banners. To clarify, there aren't 24 distinct banners, but rather 3 subgroups in each banner. Due to its military origin, the Eight Banner system consisted of a clear hierarchy of command. First there is the banner's leader. Then, each of the eight banner has an officer called the "Gusai Ejen", below him is the "Jalan Ejen", and below him the "Niru Ejen" (the word "Ejen" mean "lord" in Manchu). The different levels of Ejens each directly command and is responsible for a number of people. All people in the dynasty, royalty or peasant, are registered under a banner¹⁶. With a glance, the Banner System seems just another average registration system with a rather simple structure designed solely for the identification of the dynasty's population.

It is, however, not to be mistaken as such. Emperor Yong Zheng, among other emperors, gave the system very high regards: "The eight banners system is our dynasty's foundation, the nation's existence depends on it"¹⁷. Above defending the Manchus in their earlier years, the system's brilliant simplicity and clear-cut segregation continued to demonstrate its worth. A never-changing threat in any Chinese dynasty is usually not an outward foe but internal instability and coup. Such event can occur either due to an over-accumulation of power to one individual, or the unification of one ethnicity/region/religion against the central government.

The Eight Banner system effectively reduces the chance of those occurrences: The eight banners are designed in a way to have equal power and population. The emperor himself control three among the eight, giving him absolute advantage against the other Gusai Ejens and guarantee of available troops all times. The rest of the banners' leader position were distributed to princes or the emperor's closers (The role "leader" mustn't be mixed with "Gusai Ejen", the latter is the former's subordinate). Furthermore, unlike most Chinese hierarchy structure, the role of Gusai Ejen is not inherited, instead, each succession is picked by the contemporary emperor himself.

The banners, as previously mentioned, are also separated based on ethnicity. Yet, counterintuitively, the banners are not assigned based on ethnicity but instead separated among the ethnicities. The members of banners were ordered to live in the same regions and were technically forbidden to have outside contact (this line was not strictly enforced or followed). The banners were closely monitored at all times. The Gusai Ejens take command directly and only from the emperor, serving as his constant eyes beside the various lords of the dynasty.

The Banner system, especially the parts involving strict military segregation and control, were very suitable toward the Mongolian factions, as the Mongolians were one of the largest and arguably most unstable population under Qing's rule, who also happens to be the main component of Qing military. Proven by history, the Mongolians were undoubtedly loyal, as they were the first to charge even in the face of European muskets later to come. Yet, however much trusts the emperors of Qing put to Mongolia, the presence of necessary contingencies, such as segregation and close supervision, is always a wise consideration.

The majority opinion focuses on the system's effect on fostering ethnic-cultural fusion¹⁸. However, if one is to focus on a governing perspective, the system was highly centralized and controllable. The banners were led by the most trust worthy individuals to the emperor, there's no guarantee or conservation of power, and it decreased the likelihood of an organized disobedience by separating potentially unifiable groups, evenly distributing them in every banner. All of these were designed to quicken the process of ethnic-cultural assimilation, reduce the chance of instability within and among the banners, and ensuring maximum loyalty and centralization of power to the emperor's bloodline.

The Mulan Paddock

Given the distant geological positions between Beijing and the Mongolian Subgroups, it's crucial for Qing to ensure regular communion between the emperor and the Mongolian royalties. For such purpose, a hunting ground named "Mulan Paddock" was constructed in 1681 roughly around Chengde (a small town in the province of Hebei). Each year autumn, the emperor invites court officials, relatives and Mongolian royalties to engage in a grand hunt. The eight banner's armies ride and shoot by the emperor's side, as he competes, chats, and entertains with his kin and allies. The hunt's yields are then prepared into a grand feast, where the emperor and royalties party for days.

The autumn hunt was far more than mere entertainment, of course. It was an annual diplomatic convention, meant to enhance the bonds between Qing and Mongolia. Each year, the emperor and the Mongolian leaders meet to socialize, negotiate, and strategize, finalizing treaties and policies face to face. For Qing and Mongolia, the hunt is an annual reminder and reinforcement of their ally-ship and consensuses. After all, in person communication is always more efficient, either it's for exchanging information or maintaining relationships.¹⁹

The autumn hunt, under its peaceful surface, was also a demonstration of strength, and to some, loyalty. An interesting side note, perhaps off the books, to prove this point: Each year, there would be a wrestling competition held during the great feast. The emperor selects his champion, and the Mongolian royalties does the same. Interestingly, the emperor's champion, seldom the strongest or nimblest, rarely lose. It was a wordless agreement, a display of submission through defeat, such practices can be stunningly common in Imperial Chinese History.

On the side, the event was a great opportunity for the emperor to gather information. Ever since the role of emperor accumulated absolute power, the hierarchy of information delivered to him tends to be unreliable, filled with deception, filtering, and white-washing. The emperors of Qing are grateful of the Mongolians' loyalty, but they too share certain precautions and fear towards them. A chance for the emperor to commune with the Mongolians leaders in person means a rare chance to obtain unbiased information. Status of development, inter-faction relationships, re-sents, etc. The emperor makes use of these information to monitor the Mongolian's movements, ensuring there are no signs for alliance against court. After all, the Mongolians, fearful as they are, are no match for Qing so long they are separate.

Aside from its diplomatic functions. The Mulan Autumn Hunt also has great military value. As previously mentioned, the Manchu cherishes their valor and skill on the battlefield. Ever since entering the central plain, the abundant resources and luxurious lifestyles have raised concerns of losing this virtue. Empress Xiaozhuang, Kangxi's grandmother, often reminded him during his childhood: "Our ancestors rode and shot to open our foundation, the preparation in military must not be remised." Qing's traditional education led emperors of Qing grew up to value military power and practice. The process of the hunt is not chaos, but a tactical assault. Each action was planned, rehearsed, coordinated. The emperors, key officials, and royalties ride first, freely traversing the paddock while putting down beasts. After their entertainments are complete, up comes the soldiers of the eight banners. They chase the beasts into a predesignated trap, purposely leaving a gap within their formation, and narrowing their passage until they eventually hit a dead end. The remaining beasts are surrounded and left to the mercies of the army's sharp shooters and rains of arrows. The procedure demonstrates to the largest extent the military discipline, strength, and command of the Manchu eight banners. Compared to a hunt, the whole event was more similar to a modern military drill.

And indeed, it was, the hunt consisted of every function and purpose a military drill ought to have. It is by no means unnecessary too, for Qing was under pressure from both Mongolia and the tsarist Russia during Kangxi's reign²⁰. The hunt proved an excellent chance to sharpen the skills of Qing's soldiers. War is the most effective training a soldier can receive, and ever after claiming China, Qing's soldiers lacked this opportunity. The experience of daily practice and lectures cannot compete with chasing and attacking mobiles targets in real-life landscapes. The annual hunt provides a sufficient simulation of actual combat, effectively evading the situation of a "virgin army".²¹

Above all, dedicated entirely to Mongolian diplomacy, the hunt was a display of power, a military deterrence, meant to keep the Mongolian ambitions at bay. There is a jest told around China: "Ever since the invention of the Maxim machine gun, the Mongolians' expertise turned to songs and dances." As proven by history, Qing's muskets and blades did their own part, though in an unconventional way, in maintaining the friendship between Mongolia and Qing. Before the hunt's fall in late Qing, when European colonization had greatly disrupted Qing politics, the Mulan Autumn Hunt was valued as one of the most important annual event in the Qing calendar.

Cultural Conciliations

"The whip and the sugar", if military deterrence and conquer by force to those who stand against Qing was the whip, then Qing's cultural adaptations to Han and Mongolia was the sugar. To compensate for the lack of humanity in military monarchy, the Qing heavily emphasized on gaining cultural and ideological approval from the ruling class of the ethnicities. Respecting and promoting cultural ideals, practices, works under the premise of no subversive potential, Qing was able to stabilize its regime even without heavy military investment within. Qing's cultural inclusiveness does not only grace upon the Mongolians, it reached out to all ethnicities it ruled: Han, Mongol, Chinese Muslims, and the

Tibetans, accepting and combining all their specialties in its reign.

Han Culture

The majority of Chinese population, the Han people, based their civilization on Taoism, Buddhism, and most of all, Confucianism. The teachings of Confucius had profound impact on Chinese history before Qing and had extended its roots to even illiterate peasants. After indulging knowledges of Confucianism, Emperor Kangxi concluded that its teachings and traditional Chinese (Han) values---which emphasized the importance of a clear-cut hierarchy system, loyalty, and strict courtesy---were the most fitful for the dynasty's governance. Furthermore, it was a system of study accustomed by Han nobles and officials for thousands of years. Despite being notoriously known for its continuous hunt for the Ming royal bloodline, Qing was exceptionally kind to the Han scholars and officials. After entering the middle plains, Qing chose to assimilate with instead of overthrowing Han culture, following the principle of "change their education but not their culture, adjust their politics but not their traditions."²² ---to promote Confucianism.

The Manchus, although surprisingly liberal, lacked the fundamental knowledge in governing an empire. They required the assistance of experiences individuals; they required the wisdoms of Han's old ruling officials. Qing has been utilizing the knowledge of surrendered Han officials long before Ming's fall. It was also one of its first priorities after claiming China²³. In 1645, the very year after claiming Beijing (Shunzhi 2nd year), Qing had appropriated the Keju system---a long-existing system in Han culture, involving an examination on Han or Confucian classical literature that can grant any citizen the opportunity to become a government official. The reintroduction of the Keju system granted Han people the chance, and possibly the edge, to participate in politics by bringing back a system which they are familiar with. Qing's ruling class were aware that the key to controlling a population lies in pleasing its educated section. The occasional but expected outbursts of regional revolutions cannot stand long without an educated mastermind to organize them, and as long as the Educated Hans are given enough respect, hope, and systematic support, they will remain settled and satisfied.

Second to the intelligentsias, it's also crucial for Qing to gain support from the Han's previous officials. Qing did not devastate and rebuilt a political system when entering the middle plains, it simply replaced itself on top of it. To please the Han officials and ensure political stability, the Manchu emperor must do his best to accommodate to the Han' pre-existing etiquettes and practices to appear "civilized" in front of them. Promoting and governing based on Confucianism, a subject the Han officials knew too well, was the most efficient option for the Manchu. Such activities include hosting multiple grand memorial ceremonies for Confucius and building many Confucian Temples across the nation. One of them, the Jehol Confucius Temple, was the 2nd largest monument of Confucianism in history, the first being the National Imperial Academy in Beijing. Emperor Qianlong himself wrote the engravings on the temple's monumental pillar, and kneeled twice (in Han culture, kneeling represents subordination and the highest level of respect) to Confucius to demonstrate his faith and respect. Whether out of belief or political gesture, the Emperor went to great length pleasing the Han ethnic.

Not only did the Manchus embraced Confucianism, it was spread to all other ethnics under Qing's rule, the most significant being Mongolia. The introduction of both an unfamiliar educational, cultural, and political system gave the Mongolians a terrible disadvantage in political participation. Cherishing the highly-efficient system while unwilling to diminish Mongolian participation in court, Qing initiated an entire educational reform for Mongolia to assimilate to Han/Confucian teachings. The reform mainly involves the establishment of different levels of schools across Mongolia, with the syllabus focused on Han classics and the three main languages. Crude and unreasonable it may seem, by implementing the reform, Qing was undergoing the necessary process of culturally acclimating Mongolia by merging

it with Han culture and practices.

The reform proved successful. Following the arrival of the Keju system, Mongolian royalties studied the said subjects to maintain their social status, and other peasants soon followed for a chance of elevating their positions. Offspring of nobles and wealthy houses indulged themselves in Han teaching since birth, spending their entire childhood preparing for the one examination that will define their career. Before long, Qing was able to elevate the general level of education, unify ethical and political concepts in its domain, and continually obtain capable and trustworthy talents from Mongolia. Surely the reform was not to the Mongolians' comfort, yet still, there was an inseparable relationship between Mongolia's relative stability during early Qing and its Sinicization²⁴.

Qing's approach toward Han culture does not directly correlate with their treatments toward Mongolia. But it did help Qing establish a political system fit for the governance of its vast territory and apply a thought construct that's supportive to its regime. Until the end of Qing, Han culture and Confucianism remained in the center of Mongolia's politics. It had a profound role in directing the belief of court officials and royalties and were often the first things princes learned during their education.

Mongolian Inter-marriage

The Qing dynasty was a regime established and dominated by ethnic minorities, allowing them to govern China on a unique perspective. As a result of their origin, Qing viewed other ethnics with greater tolerance and acceptance. The biggest reason behind Qing's prolonged domination lies with the fact that it was able to properly handle its relationships with Mongolia and gain prolonged support from its royalties and nobles. Some scholar would even agree that Qing was an "political entity co-dominated by the Manchu and the Mongolian." From a utilitarian view point, the Mongolians were the backbone of Qing politics, Chahar (south) Mongol most of all. The Mongolian riders were the absolute main force of Qing's army during all its early conflicts. During the battle of Ulan Butong against Oirat Mongol (the last and strongest branch of Mongolia to submit to Qing) in 1690 (Kangxi 29th), only 20,000 out of 120,000 soldiers, one-sixth, were actually Manchu.

Qing wanted its strongest ally to flourish, but it also needed guarantee of its loyalty. In Chinese history, the ethnic minorities, so-called "barbarians", were not renowned for their ability to settle and prosper. They were known to repeatedly invade south whenever there was a shortage of food or cold weather. The need for resources was one thing, but historical documents have shown another clear-cut reason: the prosecution and despise of ethnic minorities were severe in Imperial China. Lines in a piece of literature in the Sui dynasty noted:

"Those who aren't of our kind, will never unite with us in thought. Our predecessors took them into our borders to Jingji when they were weak, officials and peasants alike mocked them, driving loathing into their spines... Vile, greedy in nature and filled with anger, they shall seize the first chance given to bring mischief to our land." ²⁵

Apparently, the segregation between Han and the ethnic minorities was a lasting and irredeemable issue in Chinese History. Qing however, saw this issue from both perspectives.

Qing knew the despise from Han, for it was once subject to it as well. Perhaps out of the sentiments of a shared hardship, the Mongolians were given great privileges and power, their position lower only than the Manchus and higher than all other ethnics. Their impressions were lifted from uneducated barbarians to a prestige, respected warrior's bloodline---Brothers in arms with Qing. The Mongolians were granted the maximum amount of freedom: In most Mongolian regions, instead of direct control, Qing's implemented instead an ally-ship/vassal-ship, allowing the

Mongolian leaders to govern the land to their preferences. The regions were also alleviated of tax duties and received various economic benefits to encourage commerce. Qing treated the Mongolians not as outsiders, not even as allies, but as family. And to some degree, one could argue that they indeed, are.

People say: “Blood is thicker than water.” Political marriage played a big part in Qing-Mongolian politics. The foundation of Mongolian-Manchu diplomacy was hardened by a series of early inter-marriages. The tradition grew larger overtime, until it evolved into an institutionalized, prolonged, and multilayered political practice (Hua). Before Kangxi broke the rule, every emperor had a Mongolian princess as their empress. Afterwards, the emperors continued to include many Mongolian females in key positions of their harem. Other royalties, too, often married Mongolians, sometimes even below their league, to enhance this political bond. Mongolian men were welcomed too, the sons-in-law of the Qing dynasty were named “efu” (Manchu for husband of princess). Despite not born royalties, they were nonetheless granted respect, power and a seat in Qing’s court. The exchange was not one-sided: according to statistics, there were a total of 432 princesses and “Geges” (daughter of prince or lord) married to Mongolian royalties²⁶. As a result of this rapid inter-marriage, most Manchu and Mongolian royalties, a few decades into Qing’s reign, were in fact relatives. Emperor Qianlong, one time during a feast, truthfully proclaimed: “They who arrived are all sons and grandsons (of the Great Qing).”²⁷

Qing was able to gain support from the various ethnicities under its domain because it had provided them an unprecedented level of equality. Mongolia, despite being the most significant, was but one in many. Such view on ethnics was prolonged in Qing, or later Jin history, as it manifested in the earliest times of its regime. From Mongolians to Hans, Qing undeniably owes its prosperity to the satisfaction to their ruling class.²⁸

Religious adaptations

And finally, religion, the most crucial part of Qing’s conciliatory strategy toward Mongolia. Religion was by no mean absent in history’s development. It usually functioned as a significant catalyst in history’s conflicts. But Qing’s take on it was somewhat unseen before. The middle plane and Mongolia both worshipped Buddhism. Yet, the Mongolians worshipped Lamaism, while most Chinese dynasties worshipped Mahayana (with few southern ethnics worshipping Theravada). Despite sharing the same category, the two were vastly different in specific codex, deity, restraints, and practices (similar to different factions of Christianity). If one is to apply the Eurocentric perspective, which the majority of history studies still base on, to this situation, there were bound to be, perhaps not war, but at least some sort of religious confrontations ending with the triumph of one faction above the other. But there was no such thing in Qing, instead, the dynasty happily welcomed Lamaism into its regime, including it within its own religious practices.

There was no “holy crusade” because Qing did not view religion as most other empires in history did. To the dynasty, religion was but a malleable and fluid tool which can be adjusted to political needs. In fact, the assimilation to Lamaism wasn’t even the Manchu’s first major change in religion for political purposes. In their early days, the Manchus worshipped shamanism, this religion was quickly abandoned, and replaced with Han teachings during the Sino-transition period of Qing under emperor Kangxi’s reign. The letter “Jiao”, which was used to refer all beliefs in imperial China, can translate either to schools of thought or religion, such distinction was vague in imperial China, commonly, it was perceived to represent both.

Therefore, there were no fundamental differences in the position between religions such as Taoism and Buddhism and schools such as Confucianism and Taoist school when it comes to governance. In addition, some religions, such as Taoism, base themselves on early schools of thoughts, which, like religion, often provides explanations to

supernatural phenomenon. They mean little difference to Qing, in its eyes they were but different manifestations of control. Much like Qing's approach toward Han culture, all domestic beliefs were tolerated and promoted across the land, while under most circumstances they remained without great political influence. Qing's generous adaptation to different beliefs showed its utilitarian point of view toward tradition in general. It held a welcoming perspective to all religions, so long as they don't possess the potential to undermine/alter the dynasty's control or lead to great waste to resources.

Lamaism was somewhat an exception to the said rule. Qing heavily emphasized on the promotion of Lamaism, heavily investing financial and capital power in its sake and including it as one of the dynasty's lasting fundamental policies. Emperor Qianlong, the initiator of most early Lamaism related projects, commented: "the promotion of the Yellow Sect, and the use of it to appease Mongolia, is of great importance, and mustn't not be protected"²⁹---the Yellow Sect was a faction of Lamaism that Qing and its allies worship. Qing even went as far as anointing Lamaism, an inherently foreign religion, as it's official state religion as a mean to conciliate and control Mongolia and Mongoliaruled Tibetan region. Such an act would be almost unimaginable anywhere else in the world, yet due to Qing's unique view on religion, it was able to take advantage of it with flexibility.

The religious leaders of Lamaism were also given political authority. The Qing court anointed the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, the twin apprentices of Yellow Sect leader Tsongkhapa and two living Buddhas of Lamaism, with the duty of managing Tibetan political & religious affairs. The two Lamas were said to be avatars of bodhisattvas (accomplished practitioners of Buddhism that had ascended to the heavens). They were widely respected in the Tibetan regions and held tremendous rallying power. To Qing, having them rule Tibet would promote loyalty better than it would have Qing decided to directly rule the area. Furthermore, the position of Lama is "reincarnated", meaning that a random newborn child would be selected as the new Lama when the old one dies. One thing to be noted: as a gesture of control, the emperor, not the religious leaders of Tibet, was responsible of selecting the next Lama. Living Buddhas--Jebsundamba Khutuktu and Changkya Khutukhtu---were also implemented into the Mongolian region by Qing and charged with the duty of managing religious affairs in these regions (most political powers were reserved to Mongolian royalties). Through the conciliation of these key religious individuals, Qing was able to gain voluntary submission from its controlled regions.

During Kangxi's reign (two emperors before Qianlong), Beijing was suffering from small pox, and the officials from Qing's allies (who mostly reside in cold regions) often find the capital too hot, moist, and feverish. To better convene with official from various regions, Emperor Kangxi built a grand palace in Chengde, named the Summer Resort. The summer resort provides a cooler area covered with vegetation and ponds for the emperor to work during the summer. Most of the times, the emperor stays there almost half of the entire year.

Despite being called a "resort", The Summer Resort actually served as a secondary political center, its construction was done mainly for the purpose of better managing Qing's various ethnic affairs. The emperor meets officials from all its territories there, Tibet, Mongolia, Xinjiang, even later emissaries like McCartney. Chengde's geological position is closer to Mongolia and the Mulan Paddock, it has a relatively similar landscape to the endless grass field the Mongolians reside, and the weather is much more tolerable. Normally, it would be outrageous even for the emperor to build the nation's second largest palace just to meet with vassal state officials. But Qing's uniqueness and dependency on Mongolia justified the cause. The Summer Resort is a symbolization of the tremendous weight Mongolia has in Qing's heart.

The construction in Chengde doesn't end with the Summer Resort itself, for it is not just a political center, but also a religious center. Around the palace, Emperor Qianlong took 20 years to build twelve Buddhist Temples. Most

temples are hybrids of different Buddhism subsections, usually with the front being Chinese Traditional (Mahayana) and the back being Tibetan (Lamaism). These temples together were referred to as the “Outer Eight Temples” (Only eight of them were directly controlled by the ministry of minority affairs, hence the number was based on them). The purpose of the temples’ construction was explained clearly by emperor Qianlong in his engravings on the stone pillar of Anyuan Temple:

“The purpose of their (the temples) establishment, are not only for the promotion of the Yellow Sect, but also to ease the far lands, and conciliate the people afar.....These constructions are done because of the old vassals’ return to us in a hurried fashion. Their tradition is to worship the Yellow Sect. Hence (We) use the construction of these temples, to show our grand courtesy, and to conciliate, but not for aesthetics and luxury”³⁰

Emperor Qianlong was truthful in his statement. The temples are religious constructions, but they are political in nature. They often serve as symbols for religious freedom, monuments for military success, or places for royal religious activities. Their names reflect this notion, examples include: “Puning”---peace in the realm, “Pule”---joy in the realm, “Anyuan”---ease the far, or “Dalai Palace”---Literally the Dalai Lama's traveling residence. The temple of Potaraka doctrine was modeled directly after the Potala Palace, Tibet’s religious and political center. In every temple’s front yard sat a stone pillar, on it engraved the reason for its construction in four languages: Mongolian, Tibetan, Han, and Manchu. The names and the pillars clearly signified the true purpose of these temples: to celebrate Qing’s prosperity and might, and to please the vassal leaders by showing respect to their beliefs.

The temples are not acts of public charity, though. The Outer Eight Temples are royal temples, meaning only royalties may enter. The cultural and religious tolerance of the great Qing was limited within the confinement of its palace walls. The stone plate outside the temple of Potaraka Doctrine engraved:

“From now on when Mongolian officials come to worship, those who are below lords, and are Lamas or Top-tier Taijis, are allowed to board the great red platform and pay their respect, those of other positions, are allowed to watch outside the jade archway, the rest are not permitted to enter.”

(“Great Red Platform”: Da Hongtai---a construction that holds the inner, most prestige section of a Lamaism temple)

The purpose of these temples are not to actually promote the practice of Lamaism in the society, but to create a display of care for Mongolia’s tradition to appeal to their ruling class, and ultimately achieve the goal of, as Qianlong put it: “promoting what they solemnly respect, granting them what they desire, so that there may be no second thoughts.”³¹ Instead of spreading the spiritual and philosophical teachings of Lamaism, Qing was really more interested in its political capabilities.

The most ironic part of all, perhaps, was that the person putting in most of the effort, the emperor himself, does not believe in Buddhism. Qianlong once revealed his true sentiments toward Lamaism in his writing: “The Buddha never lived, how could he reincarnate? But call a Khutugtu un-reincarnated today, and the millions of our vassal’s monks will have nothing to worship, it is but an act of necessity.”³² This is the most brilliant of political manipulation and Qing’s ultimate display of what Chinese call “the theory of monarchy”. Again, to Qing, Buddhism, or any other religion, was but a handy tool to ensure submission by will from Mongolia and stabilize Qing’s regime.

The modern views of history emphasize on a Eurocentric perspective, and religion was of no doubt a dominant factor in one’s understanding of its progression. Islam, Catholicism, Hinduism, religion was the mother to many conflicts. In the commoners’ eye, they shaped politics, and was a belief worthy of lives and fortunes to defend. On a realistic perspective, though, all spreads of religion either were or were permitted by the ruling class to foster control, its idol of belief simply managed to accumulate power in the west. But Qing’s view and actions on the subject exceeds most European nations on a utilitarian perspective. And it was exactly this point of view that allowed Qing to take

advantage of the concentrative nature of religion and convert it into a valuable political tool, and effectively use to strengthen the bonds with Mongolia.

A Short Summary and Reflection

The Qing dynasty in its early years sets an example for the best among empires. It was the most widespread Chinese regime that had established a stable and comprehensive political structure. Surely, many factors are present for Qing to succeed, such as valuable products granted by its geological position, strong military based on its nomadic background, or educated emperors thanks to a well-preserved tradition. All of these are either crucial or indispensable to a dynasty's success. Yet, none of them are exclusive to the Qing dynasty.

Qing's single, unique edge lies in its excellent strategy and adaptations toward its surrounding cultures, which far exceeded its predecessors in both calculation and execution. Integrating beneficial cultures, practices, and religions from both Han and the nomadic tribes. The Qing dynasty was able to organically extract the specialties of both worlds, having them all serve its own benefit. This advantage was most clearly demonstrated with Mongolia, whom they were able to civilize, utilize, and integrate with. Through brilliant diplomatic manipulations, powerful military deterrence/preparation, and fluid cultural adaptations, Qing had managed to, for the first time in Chinese history, truly preside over its neighboring tribes, turning them in to an invaluable asset to the dynasty's reign. It is without question that Qing was near flawless in its strategic approach over Mongolia, to whom it dearly owes its prosperity.

Despite Qing's undeniable success, one should not mistake political triumph with the general happiness of the contemporary society. Admittedly, for countless times, starting with the same-named book, people had described the flourishing dynasty during Qianlong's reign as a "starving prosperity", a false mirage of national strength veiling the impoverished public (Hongjie). Indeed, the scenes within and beyond Qing's palace walls exceeds the most drastic measures of inequality.

The message is clear: When evaluating any Chinese Dynasty, the crucial distinction between politics and society must be made. This essay based itself on the perspective of the ruler, and hence it painted an image of progress and prosperity. However, if one was to observe in the eyes of the governed, the result would surely be vastly different. Yet that would be irrelevant to the essay's thesis here and must depend on other researches to be revealed. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this particular discussion, it would still be safe to acknowledge, on a political and diplomatic stand point, the power and diversity that forged Qing's prosperity.

It is important, in the end, to ponder: what exclusive contribution can the above evaluation of Qing history bring to our insight to the Chinese history? Qing was not the most educated, nor the strongest militarily in Chinese history. What it had was a unique and unprecedented historical and world perspective that enabled the fusion of two quite different traditions---the Inner Asia (symbolized in its relationship with the Mongolians) and Central Plain (the stereotype of Sinicization).

The unique, creative heritage of the Manchus allowed Qing to view China both being an ethnic minority under persecution, and a Han-educated ruling class, whose Sinicization began long ago with its very first emperor. Qing stood out from both the nomadic tribes from which it grew, and the central dynasties from which it learned. Not a minority dominated dynasty like Yuan, nor a Han-governed regime like Song, but rather a curious singularity in Chinese history unlike any before. In a word, the Qing dynasty served as a tie between Inner Asia and the Central Plain, a hybrid of two cultures. Being the only one capable, and as a new phenomenon in the Chinese history of unification, it merged the culture and politics of itself and its neighbors into one single entity.

If one wish to examine the historical facets of China's current cultural and geopolitical accumulation, he or she should not seek them from the times of Tang or Han rule, the pivots of Chinese prosperity, but rather in the creativity of the Qing Dynasty, for example its diplomacy. It must be understood that this creation made by Qing was not a temporary measure, nor mere politics, but the condensation of thousands of years of Middle Plain-Inner Asia relations and an inevitable step in China's historical progression to unity, compressed into the cultural-political agenda that shaped China as it is today. The meaning behind it--the creation of the first true unified regime, also the biggest one, both beyond and within the Great Wall--was what actually formed and passed down the identity of "China" that we are familiar today. Hence, in a manner of speaking, the Qing Dynasty, rather than anyone before it or those who succeeded it, was the real origin of the concept of "New China", and the set of beliefs and values it represents.

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