

Chapter 12

Epilogue

By the end of the Tang dynasty, China's international situation had changed. The Korean problem had long been settled by China's abandonment of its earlier policy of military conquest of the peninsula. The Tibetan kingdom collapsed on its own and Tibet never afterwards became a threat to China. The Uighur steppe empire also collapsed and the Uighurs left the steppe and settled in the Western Regions and ceased to be a military threat. The Nanzhao royal family was overthrown in 902. Five other non-Chinese peoples, however, grew to the extent that they eventually became contenders for political supremacy inside China or on its borders.

One was the Shatuo Turks, whose rise and eventual establishment of three short-lived dynasties during the period of the Five Dynasties was an important consequence of the Tang resettlement policy. Of Western Turkish origin, the Shatuo submitted to Tang at the end of Taizong's reign. They took part in the Tang suppression of the An Lushan rebellion, but joined the Tibetans after 790. In 808 they again went over to Tang and settled in Yanzhou in the Ordos region. The following year 1,200 Shatuo cavalrymen were stationed in Taiyuan as part of a Chinese defense force. The rest were settled in northern Shanxi.

From then on the Shatuo played an important role in Tang northern frontier defense, but the turning point in their establishment of a power base in China came after they had taken part in the suppression of the Pang Xun rebellion. In 869, the court rewarded the Shatuo leader, Chixin, with the royal surname, calling him Li Guochang, and appointed him Military Commissioner of Yunzhou. After a period of hostility between Li and the court, he and his son Keyong came to terms with Tang and participated in the suppression of the Huang Chao rebellion. Both father and son were subsequently made Military Commissioners. It was from the Shatuo-Li that rulers of Later Tang (923-936), Later Jin (936-941) and Later Han (947-950) arose during the period of the Five Dynasties.¹ As at the end of Han, nomads who had been incorporated near the frontier under Chinese

¹ XTS 218; Pulleyblank 1953, pp. 592-7; Zhang Qun 1986, pp. 324-31.

administration were able to turn inwards and intervene in Chinese affairs during a time of dynastic collapse.

A second new power were the Dangxiang Qiang, a Tangut people, their rise was also related to the Tang settlement policy. They were originally from the Tao River region east of Koko Nor. In the seventh century, they came under pressure from the newly established Tibetan kingdom and were to resettle at Qingzhou, northwest of Chang'an in the upper Wei Valley.² From 758 onward, taking advantage of the disturbances of the An Lushan rebellion, they constantly raided nearby areas and even the metropolitan region.³ The Dangxiang Qiang joined the Tibetans and Uighurs in supporting Pugu Huairen in 764-765. After the defeat of Pugu Huairen, on the advice of Guo Ziyi, the Dangxiang Qiang tribes and the remnants of the Tuyuhun were removed into the Ordos east of Xiazhou and north of Yinzhou so that they would be cut off from the Tibetans. From then until the ninth century the Dangxiang remained on the whole peaceful.⁴

They kept their nomadic lifestyle while engaging in frequent trade with the Chinese, including illegal trade in weapons. They increased in strength and population. Friction often occurred between them and the Chinese government during the ninth century. Around 873, one tribal chief, Tuoba Sigong, occupied Youzhou and proclaimed himself Prefect. He helped suppress the Huang Chao rebellion by lending his military force to the Tang court, and was appointed general with the status of Military Commissioner in command of Xiazhou, Suizhou, Yinzhou and Youzhou. In 883 he was ennobled as the Duke of Xia and given the imperial Li surname.⁵ During the Five Dynasties, the Dangxiang Li regime maintained its position by accepting subject status to the successive dynastic powers in north China. Eventually, its ruler assumed the title of emperor and established the Xia state in 1038. Xia lasted until 1227, encompassing at the height of its power a vast area in the Ordos, Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai.⁶

A third power was created by the Khitan. The Khitan were subject to the Uighurs during the post-An Lushan period when relations between Tang and the Khitan remained peaceful, except for an isolated incident in 788 when the Khitan, Xi and Shiwei raided the Chinese Zhenwu Fortress.

² *JTS* 198, p. 5292; *XTS* 221A, p. 6215.

³ *ZZTJ* 220, p. 7060; 221, p. 7090; p. 7092; p. 7093; p. 7100; 222, p. 7105; 223, p. 7164; p. 7172.

⁴ *XTS* 221A, pp. 6216-7.

⁵ *XTS* 221A, pp. 6217-8; *ZZTJ* 254, p. 8249.

⁶ For the rise of the Dangxiang-Xia state see Wu Tianchi 1980, chapter 1; Dornet 1994.

When the Uighurs disintegrated, the Khitan turned to Tang, which conferred official titles on their chief in 842. From the 880's, the Khitan became expansionary, attacking the Xi and other tribes, and raiding the Hebei region. In 907, the year Tang ended, Yelü Abaoji became the qaghan of the Khitan, and in 916 he proclaimed himself emperor. It was under him that the Khitan developed their state organization.

For hundreds of years the Khitan tried to maintain their independence from the great powers surrounding them. They eventually succeeded in becoming an imperial power themselves, but only when there was no other imperial nomadic power on the steppe to oppose them and when China was in chaos. Just before his death in 926 Abaoji conquered the Parhae state. His successor changed the state name to Liao and gained a foothold in north China in 937 when the Later Jin regime ceded sixteen prefectures in northern Shanxi and Hebei to him. This powerful Liao empire confronted the Five Dynasties and then Northern Song for the next two centuries until 1125.⁷

The fourth new state was in the southwest. In 937 the Dali kingdom was founded in Yunnan. It was to last for the next three centuries until it was conquered by the Mongols.

The fifth power rose in the far south. After the fall of Tang, the Protectorate of Annan ceased to be under Chinese rule and in 939 the independent kingdom of Annam was founded. China lost the political control over what is now northern Vietnam that it had held for over a thousand years, though the new native regime remained thoroughly sinicized in its institutions and outlook.

At the end of the Tang dynasty in 907, a new international order emerged in East and Central Asia. China was internally divided as never before since Warring States or Northern and Southern Dynasties times, and far more sharply than during the civil wars at the end of Western Han, or at the end of Sui. This new period of disunity is called the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. Unlike the chaotic situation of the so-called Sixteen Kingdoms in the fourth century, which inaugurated nearly three hundred years of non-Chinese rule in North China, a regime of Chinese origin took over within a little over fifty years. Song succeeded in re-establishing a stable regime over most of Chinese territory in 960.

The Song empire (960-1279) was, however, hemmed in on all sides by newly developed non-Chinese states, whose emergence had been very

⁷ XTS 219, pp. 6172-3; Zhang Zhengming 1979, pp. 23-9; Barfield 1989, pp. 168-72.

much stimulated by frequent interactions with China during Tang, and which were much under the influence of the Chinese political system and Chinese culture. The most serious rival of Song was the Khitan-Liao empire (916-1125), occupying part of the former Tang territory in northern Hebei and Shanxi. To the west was the Tangut Western Xia state (1032-1227). The Jurchen, formerly subjects of Liao in Manchuria, overthrew their overlords and went on to occupy the whole of North China and found the Jin empire (1115-1234), challenging the Southern Song.

These non-Chinese dynastic powers, especially Liao and Jin, differed fundamentally from anything Sui and Tang had had to deal with. Although they had their own languages and scripts, they all adopted Chinese dynastic names and developed bureaucratic systems based on the Chinese model. Their rulers all aspired to be Sons of Heaven and, as Tang Taizong and the other early Tang rulers had done, to rule over the steppe land as well as China.⁸

Interstate relations were based on maintenance of a balance of power. Under the resulting multi-state international system, Song and Liao and later Jin had to accept the coexistence of two Sons of Heaven, and had to interact through negotiations, treaties, alliances, diplomacy, and trade, though interrupted often by wars. During this age of treaties, Song demonstrated tremendous pragmatism and flexibility, and increasing interest in foreign trade, not only as a means to facilitate peace but also as a way to profit the Song state, whose territory was much shrunken as compared to Tang.⁹ The expansion of the Tang dynasty was criticized by the Song Neo-Confucian scholar-officials.¹⁰ Yet, as during Tang, the traditional ideology persisted. Song still maintained its claim of superiority whenever it could.

Song followed three different patterns in its relations with these three neighbors. It maintained a relatively equal relationship with the Khitan-Liao empire as stipulated in the treaty concluded in 1005, under which the two states established a brotherly relationship. Song made annual payments of silver and silk to Liao as "military compensation" rather than "tribute."¹¹ Compared to the Tang-Tibet treaties, the first Song-Liao treaty and treaties concluded later were more specific in their terms and in specifying the rewards to both sides, and thus were more effective in keeping

⁸ Franke and Twitchett 1994, p. 16.

⁹ For Song foreign trade see Shiba, 1983.

¹⁰ Tao Jing-shen 1988, p. 41.

¹¹ For Song-Liao relations, see Tao Jing-shen 1983; 1988, especially chapters 2, 4 and 5; Twitchett and Tietze 1994.

the peace. Equality was carefully preserved in the official terminology employed in written and ceremonial communications.

The two states often addressed each other as “the northern dynasty” and “the southern dynasty.” Terms such as “Great Song” and “Great Liao” appear throughout Northern Song official writings, including state letters and imperial edicts. After 1005 Song abolished all place names containing degrading ideographs, such as “caitiffs” (*lu*) and “barbarians” (*rong*). Bilateral trade was regulated and was conducted on a regular basis.

In reality, however, Song was in an inferior position due to its relatively weak military strength. In the second peace treaty, concluded in 1042, the term for Song payment to Liao was changed from “give (a gift)” (*zeng*) to “pay” (*na*). Fully aware of the weakness of Song, most officials for most of the time favored the use of peaceful tactics in dealing with the “barbarians.” They preferred to believe that the “barbarian” menace was not as serious as internal problems. Moreover, Song Chinese officials commonly believed that Liao was to a large extent sinicized, and that the Khitan differed from the ancient “barbarians,” and thus that Khitans should be treated as equals.

While Song was highly realistic in its relationship with Liao and made a series of compromises in order to keep the peace, it did not make any marriage alliances with Liao. To some Song Chinese, a marriage alliance would have been more of an insult and humiliation than payment of goods.¹² This was in sharp contrast to Tang, whose ruling house was itself a mixture of Chinese and non-Chinese blood and hence was not prejudiced against marriage alliances with foreigners. The use of the language of equality in diplomacy did not mean that the Song emperors and their ministers had accepted the concept of equality and peaceful coexistence with other peoples. In documents meant exclusively for internal circulation among Chinese officials and in private writings, foreigners were still often referred to by the traditional degrading terms.¹³

In its relationship with the Western Xia empire, the Song dynasty insisted on assuming suzerainty as called for in the traditional Chinese world order. In the treaty with Xia of 1044 Song recognized the Xia emperor, but it was stipulated that Xia should retain nominal status as vassal to Song. In return, Song was to provide Xia with a large annual subsidy of silk, silver and tea. The two sides also resumed regular trade in the ten border mar-

¹² Tao Jing-shen 1988, pp. 60-2.

¹³ Tao Jing-shen 1983; 1988, chapter 4.

kets, but border warfare still erupted from time to time. Xia also accepted the status of vassal to Liao, and in 1124 became vassal to Jin.¹⁴

In 1123, not long after the rise of the Jurchens, Song made an alliance with them against Liao, but the collapse of Liao in 1125 was soon followed by the expansion of Jin farther into North China and the end of Northern Song in 1127. For the next hundred years, China was divided between Jin and Southern Song.

The relationship between the two was unequal from the beginning. Under the terms of the 1142 treaty, Southern Song had to make annual payments of silver and silk as tribute to Jin and the Song ruler accepted Jin investiture with the title of emperor. The treaty brought about a peace that lasted until 1160. After Jin failed in an attempt to invade the South in 1161, the two sides reached another peace agreement in 1165. This time the terms improved for Song. The Song emperor was no longer a Jin subject but a metaphorical nephew of Jin, which still implied an unequal status. The annual payments were reduced and were no longer referred to as tribute. A new treaty was concluded in 1208 after Southern Song's unsuccessful northern campaign. Song had to increase its annual payments and, as a guarantee of future peace, it also had to present to Jin the head of the councilor who was held responsible for the war. The two sides maintained the border on the Huai River.¹⁵ The Jin empire, however, was soon faced with a new challenge from the Mongols and collapsed in 1234.

After he assumed the supreme rulership over the Mongols in 1206, Chinggis Khan devoted his life to military conquests, and these were continued by his successors. When his grandson Khubilai became the great khan in 1260, the Mongol empire extended from Korea to Western Asia and had already occupied north and southwest China. Khubilai Khan, now supreme ruler of the steppes, adopted the Chinese title, Son of Heaven, when he founded the Yuan dynasty in 1271. He completed the conquest of Southern Song in 1279.

In contrast to Tang Taizong and Gaozong, who added the title of Heavenly Qaghan to that of the Chinese Son of Heaven and extended their rule over the steppes and the Western Regions through the system of *jimi*, or subordinated area commands and prefectures, it was now the Mongol khans who claimed universal rulership over the whole of agricultural China as well as the steppe. Both Mongol and Chinese rulers made a

¹⁴ Dunnell 1994.

¹⁵ Franke 1994.

similar ideological claim to universal rulership with the Mandate of Heaven, but in reality the Mongol concept was far more ambitious than that of any Chinese emperor.

To the Mongol khans, All-under-Heaven was not just the Middle Kingdom extending outward to the surrounding areas but meant any part of the world to which their military force could carry them, including all of Asia and even parts of Europe. While Chinese emperors such as Emperor Wu of Han, Emperor Yang of Sui and Tang Taizong only sometimes launched military campaigns to impose their demands, the Mongols relied almost exclusively on military force to establish their domain over foreign countries.

While the submission demanded by the Chinese was to a large extent only nominal, requiring foreign rulers merely to acknowledge Chinese suzerainty by making a symbolic payment of tribute and accepting Chinese investiture, the Mongol demand for submission was total, as can be seen in Khubilai's demands to Annam and Champa (present Vietnam). The ruler was to come to audience personally and to send sons as hostages. A Mongol governor was to be in charge of taking a census of the population, levying a military corvée and collection of taxes. When these terms were refused, Khubilai resorted to military force.¹⁶ These terms were also imposed on other dependent states such as the Uighurs of Turfan.¹⁷

The Yuan dynasty in China collapsed in the face of internal uprisings, and Mongol rule ended with the founding of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The Mongols, who had retreated to the steppe, resumed the role of a nomadic power threatening China and became the main perceived threat in Ming frontier policy. Before 1449, Ming foreign policy was primarily to engage in active campaigns striking at the Mongol capital in Khara Khorum, and attempting to destroy the Mongol force.

The Hongwu emperor (r. 1368-98), founder of the Ming dynasty, launched expeditions into the steppes and the Yongle emperor (r. 1403-24) personally led five campaigns to chastise the Mongols. The Yongle emperor also utilized the traditional device of divide and rule¹⁸ and sought to reduce Mongol raids by inviting the Mongols to trade under the tribute

¹⁶ Wang Gungwu 1968, pp. 48-9. For more on the Mongol-Yuan expansion, see Rossabi 1988; Franke and Twitchett eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, volume 6, chapters 4-6.

¹⁷ Allsen 1983.

¹⁸ Waldron 1989, p. 57; pp. 74-6.

system.¹⁹ These efforts, however, had little success in weakening Mongol power or in reducing Mongol incursions on the northern borders. By the early 1440's, the Mongols were again united under a leader from the Western Mongols. Because of disputes over trade, the Mongols launched a large-scale invasion of China in 1449. The young Zhengtong emperor personally led his armies into battle against the Mongols, and was severely defeated, taken prisoner and carried back to the steppe.²⁰

The active offensive policy towards the Mongols was part of the early Ming expansionism which began under the Yongle emperor. He moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing and made an unsuccessful attempt to conquer Annam. Both Hongwu and Yongle were also enthusiastic about enlarging the Ming tribute relationship with the East and Southeast Asian countries via maritime expeditions, and with the Central Asian countries through diplomatic missions.

By far the most spectacular endeavour under Yongle and his immediate successors were the seven maritime expeditions led by the eunuch Zheng He and his colleagues between 1405 and 1431 which went as far as the east coast of Africa.²¹

It has been argued that the early Ming military policies resembled those of its Mongol predecessors and that the Ming emperors were ambitious to incorporate Mongolia into the Chinese empire.²² It should also be pointed out that whether it was the Mongol model or traditional Chinese ideology or a combination of the two that inspired the aggressive policy of the early Ming emperors, the Mongol problem was a practical threat that had to be dealt with in order to maintain peace within the empire.

After the 1449 crisis, the Ming's Mongol policy alternated between offense and defense. In the decade from 1470 to 1480, China had several successful military encounters with the Mongols, who from the 1450's had disintegrated into different groups. As during Tang, when the government from the 670's on began building a strong defense system through permanent armies and garrisons, following a series of debates the Ming government decided on a defense policy focusing on repairing and extending the Great Wall.

Unlike Tang, the Ming Chinese chose not to keep up economic con-

¹⁹ Chan, Hok-lam 1988, pp. 264-6.

²⁰ Waldron 1989, pp. 88-90.

²¹ Chan, Hok-lam 1988, pp. 221-36.

²² Waldron 1989, pp. 72-6.

tacts with the nomads, since they considered that to do so would be like the humiliating compromises made in the Song treaties with the non-Chinese states and would strengthen their rivals. As a reaction to the Mongol conquest of China, the idea of keeping the "barbarians" out and the Chinese within was prevalent. The defensive policy was also preferred because Ming did not possess enough force to carry out effective offensives. It was ill-informed about the internal situation among the Mongols and hence unable to exploit internal divisions among them through the strategy of divide and rule.²³ For the rest of the dynasty, wall building and the garrisoning of the wall defense zone became the preoccupation of the Ming state. Chinese-Mongol relations were finally stabilized by a peace agreement in 1571. There were a few disruptions thereafter, but on the whole the new agreements ensured peace on the northern borders.²⁴

While the northern borders were a major concern, from the 1520's on, a new issue rose along the Chinese coastal line, piracy. The problem is traditionally known as that of the "Japanese pirates," although many Chinese joined the Japanese too. The Ming response to this growing disorder on the coast was to issue a prohibition of maritime trade. During the 1540's groups of pirates and traders became more organized, and their activities reached a peak in the 1540's and 1550's. At first, force was used to deal with the problem, but after repeated discussions, the Ming government finally decided to open up maritime trade in 1567. Thereafter piracy ceased to be a serious problem.²⁵

The last imperial dynasty, Qing, founded by the Manchus, who were semi-nomadic descendants of the Jurchen-Jin, displayed vigor in its foreign policy during its early years. Heirs to both nomadic and Chinese cultural and political traditions, the Manchu-Qing rulers developed the tribute system into an elaborate framework for China's relations with East and Southeast Asian countries, and one serving both political and commercial purposes. The early Manchu emperors secured control of their long Inner Asian frontiers through alliance, trade and force. In the eighteenth century, Qing managed to incorporate the Tarim basin into the empire as the province of Xinjiang, extended indirect control over distant Tibet, and brought the Mongol problem to an end after the Chinese and Russian empires through the Treaty of Kiakhtha in 1727 encircled Mongol territory and

²³ Mote 1988, pp. 389-402; Barfield 1989, pp. 248-50; Waldron 1989, pp. 95-139.

²⁴ Rossabi, 1975, 45-46; Waldron 1989, pp. 185-8.

²⁵ Geiss 1988, pp. 490-505.

thereby made the nomads lose their mobility.²⁶

A fundamentally new issue in Qing foreign policy was how to deal with the West. On the northern frontier, came the encounter with the Russian empire. In 1689 and 1727, Qing and the Russian empire concluded two peace treaties. The 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk is of significance to our story since it was signed as between two equal sovereign states operating in Inner Asia. On the southern coast, Qing was confronted by increasing demands for trade on the part of Europeans coming by the sea route. In the early dynasties, notably Tang, the Chinese empire was open to foreigners, who traded and resided not only in ports but also in the cities of the interior and the capital. Under the Ming and then the Qing Emperors, however, the Europeans were carefully restricted, eventually to a single city, Canton, and its immediate environs, and were prohibited from traveling or residing in other parts of the empire. Such restrictions, plus conflicts in culture, economy, political and legal institutions, caused tensions between China and the West that grew in the course of time and eventually led to military encounters in the two Opium Wars (1839-1842; 1856-1860), the outcomes of which forced China to open to the West.

The Chinese traditional theory of foreign policy underwent a painful process of rethinking which ended in its disintegration. In 1861 a new office to handle foreign affairs was set up in Peking, called the Zongli Yamen (Office of general management). In the early 1860's, international law was introduced into China. After 1876, Chinese diplomatic missions were established abroad. By 1880, China maintained legations in most of the leading Western states and Japan. The most significant change was the Chinese abandonment of the tribute system. This occurred after the Sino-French War of 1883-85 over the status of Annam, which China previously considered a tributary, and after the Sino-Japanese War with Japan in 1894 over the status of Korea, also a tributary state to China. Only after China was forced to acknowledge its loss of tributary overlordship in Annam and Korea did it finally acknowledge abolition of the tributary system in principle with the establishment of a Western-style foreign office in 1901.²⁷

By the end of the imperial era, the Chinese world order had broken down and the Chinese view of their superiority underwent a fundamental change. Chinese policy-makers during this century have had to accept the modern concepts of the nation-state and the equality of sovereign states.

²⁶ For details, see Fletcher 1978.

²⁷ For details, see Hsu 1980; Hao 1980.