

Chapter 1

Background: Chinese Foreign Policy before the Sui Period: Theory and Practice

In this chapter we examine the rich traditions of foreign policy-making inherited from their predecessors by the Sui-Tang rulers. First we look back to the distant past when Chinese civilization first took shape in the Yellow River basin of North China. In contrast to the variety of competing literate civilizations that came into existence in Western Asia and neighboring regions of Europe and North Africa during the bronze age, the Chinese enjoyed a monopoly of literacy in East Asia until well into the present era and, however much they may have derived indirectly from cultures farther west before the Qin unification in 221 B.C.E.—the first hints of the use of metal, the cultivation of wheat and barley in addition to millet and rice, the horse-drawn chariot—they were not consciously aware of the existence of organized states in other parts of the world.

It was natural, therefore, for them to assume that they occupied the center of the world and that they were surrounded by less favored “barbarian” peoples. Out of this developed the traditional sinocentric world view of orthodox Confucian thinking, which became the official ideology of the Chinese state down to the twentieth century. This ideology was embodied in the tribute system during Han, but by then, as we shall see, more realistic and pragmatic competing views towards non-Chinese peoples had also emerged—anti-sinocentric theories, realistic estimates of China’s limitations, and exclusionary, inward-looking attitudes. More profound challenges to the concept of a sinocentric world order and more sophisticated reinterpretations of this concept arose when non-Chinese dynasties emerged in North China during post-Han times. These contributed an equally sophisticated but non-Chinese component to the legacy inherited by the Sui-Tang rulers from the Period of Disunion. We also discuss the evolution since Han of the various non-Chinese peoples surrounding China, presenting Sui and Tang with new as well as old problems.

Finally we survey some general policy measures the Chinese evolved for dealing with their neighbors: aggressive military action,

strengthening of frontier defenses, forming of alliances, appeasement, and incorporation and assimilation. These had all been tried by previous Chinese rulers, and so were available for use by the Sui-Tang policy-makers in their new context.

Formation and Implications of the Myth of the Chinese World Order

The hierarchical principle of the Mandate of Heaven was devised by the early Zhou rulers to justify their conquest of Shang at the end of the second millennium B.C.E. It called for the universal rule of the Son of Heaven over All-under-Heaven (*tianxia*). "The king leaves nothing and nobody outside his realm" (*wangzhe wuwai*).¹ This universal power was matched by the ruler's responsibility for the welfare of the people.

Based on their already existing clan structure, the Zhou established a system called *fengjian* in Chinese and sometimes translated into English as "feudal," but perhaps better (or also) described as patrimonial. The most reliable of these so-called feudal lords (*zhuhou*) were established in strategic places, especially on the periphery as "a fence and screen for Zhou."² These feudal lords were linked by blood or marriage to the Zhou house. They had the obligation to carry out military activities ordered by the monarch, and to provide revenue as tribute to the king. Most important of all, their presence throughout the Zhou realm was intended to display the power of Zhou and to contribute to the stability of the Zhou authority.³

To ensure order in the political system and the unity of the Zhou house, a set of institutions, systems, stipulations, and ceremonial rules—"the rules of propriety" (*li*)—were worked out. These rules served as the foundation for the hierarchical structure of the Zhou realm, a structure which governed the relations of the extended family and regulated the relations between ruler and nobles. Within this structure, everyone was to act in accordance with the rules of propriety in proportion to his or her position, so that harmony could be maintained.⁴

During the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.E.) these Zhou political institutions disintegrated as a result of the increasing power

¹ *Gongyangzhuan*, p. 4, Yin 1/6; p. 35, Huan 8/6; p. 125, Xi 24/4; p. 232, Cheng 12/1.

² *Zuozhuan* (Xi 24), 189::192.

³ A detailed study of the feudal system is presented in Creel 1970, pp. 317-87. See also Lee 1980, chapters 1-3.

⁴ This ideal of harmony is stated in the *Zuozhuan* (Zhao 26), 715::718-719.

of the feudal states on the one hand, and the decay in the political and military might of the Zhou monarchy on the other.

Some modern scholars hold that during this time the Chinese feudal states were independent of the Zhou king and dealt with one another as sovereign equals regardless of their size. Even treaties made with "barbarians" outside the Zhou system were negotiated on a footing of equality since the treaties allowed these "barbarians" to retain their independence.⁵ The actual situation, however, was much more complex. It is true that forms of interaction between states were effectively as if among sovereign equals, equal in the sense that one state could not exert authority over the others except by force. Nevertheless, the predominant attitude was not egalitarian. The Chinese states still attempted to maintain the old hierarchical order, with the Zhou king as the supreme ruler. He was represented or supported by the strongest of the feudal lords, who, as "hegemon" (*ba*), assumed the power to assemble other feudal lords in a "treaty league" or "covenant" (*meng*). The dominant-subordinate form of relationship between the Zhou king and his feudal lords was still reflected in such a covenant. Small states were to pay respect and to serve the larger ones, who in turn would show benevolence to the smaller ones. The *ba* acted for the king and was in charge of collecting tribute for the royal house.⁶

By the time of the Warring States period (480-222 B.C.E.), as a result of wars, cunning diplomacy, and continuous annexations, only seven major powers survived. Relations among these great powers were more on an equal basis. The small states had either been "swallowed up" by bigger ones or become dependents of them. These seven powers struggled among themselves for supremacy, each trying to conquer the whole of the Chinese world by force of arms.

With the further decline of the Zhou house it was no longer deemed necessary to claim to be supporting the Son of Heaven. Rulers of all seven states assumed the title of king, a title which had formerly belonged solely to the Zhou Son of Heaven. This was a sign of the more equal basis on which they dealt with each other. In 288 B.C.E. the kings of the states of Qin and Qi even called themselves Emperor of the West and Emperor of the East, respectively, attempting to divide China into two spheres of power. They soon abandoned this plan, however, because the

⁵ Hong 1971, pp. 26-35; Walker 1953, p. 25.

⁶ *Zuozhuan* (Xi 7), 148:149.

time was not ripe for so revolutionary a step. Nevertheless there was even a suggestion, some two years later, that the king of Yan be made Northern Emperor, the king of Qin Western Emperor, and the king of Zhao Central Emperor.⁷ Had such notions taken root, China might have gone the way of Europe or India and remained permanently divided into a pluralistic world of competing states. But China was eventually unified under the First Emperor of Qin in 221 B.C.E. and the ideal of unity has dominated Chinese political thinking from that time onward.

In spite of the political disunity of the Warring States period, the idea of the absolute superiority of the Son of Heaven and the idea that stability could only be achieved through political unification of the Chinese people had become so deeply rooted that the concept of equality among sovereign states simply could not find much acceptance. The Chinese clung to their belief in a hierarchical order for their world and fought among themselves for supremacy.

The dominant schools of political thought, whether traditionalist like the Confucians or iconoclastic like the Legalists, all aimed at providing recipes for unifying China under a single ruler. The Confucians were the most wholehearted in their insistence on the need to look back to the founders of Zhou to provide a model for the ideal pattern of relationships between the Son of Heaven and his subjects, both Chinese and non-Chinese. In such works as the *Yugong*, the *Guoyu*, the *Zhouli*, and the *Xunzi*, detailed rules and regulations, which had supposedly existed in the early Zhou, were set out to adjust relations between the Son of Heaven and his subjects, including the non-Chinese, in the framework of a system of five or nine concentric zones, from the Son of Heaven in the middle, through the various classes of feudal lords to the outer "barbarians."

Inhabitants of each zone were to come and pay tribute to the king at specific intervals in what was known as the tribute system which was to regulate relations between the Zhou Son of Heaven and his dependencies. The lords of the outermost "barrier kingdoms or beyond" (*fanguo*) were to come once in a generation.⁸ The *Zhouli* or *Rites of Zhou*, an idealized reconstruction of Zhou institutions probably dating from the Warring States period, especially canonized the ideology of the Chinese world order and

⁷ Bodde 1938, p. 128.

⁸ *Shangshu*, "Yugong," p. 18, sections 33-9; *Guoyu*, "Zhouyu," p. 2; *Zhouli Zhushu* 37, pp. 1339-41; *Xunzi Jijie*, "Zhenglun," pp. 219-20. Yü Ying-shih (1986, pp. 379-80) also has a brief discussion of the zone-system.

established the idea of a unified Chinese empire with the Chinese in the center and the non-Chinese constituting a defense line around it.⁹ Fictitious as this reconstruction may have been, there did exist during early Zhou times a tribute system with court visits and payment of tribute by dependent states to the Zhou Son of Heaven.¹⁰ In particular, the concept of universal kingship was an extremely potent myth, one providing both an explanation of actual behavior and a rationale for later rulers to appeal to in formulating their foreign policies. It was, for example, often used as a justification for military conquest of non-Chinese for the sake of frontier security and for territorial expansion and cultural imperialism.

While the idea that "the king leaves nothing and nobody outside his realm" became one basic principle, there also developed an equally prevalent principle: "having the various states of Xia within, and keeping the Yi and Di barbarians without" (*nei zhu-Xia er wai Yi-Di*).¹¹

The Chinese world order was sinocentric in nature. At one level, sinocentrism was based on racial differentiation. The Western Zhou had a clear sense of community. They identified themselves with the Xia, a people who, according to the Chinese tradition, established the first dynasty.¹² The Zhou people, though adopting the Shang culture, political ideas and institutions, merged the Shang into a "new" larger grouping of people who differentiated themselves from other peoples. The Zhou referred to themselves and the Shang and their Xia predecessors as the Zhu Xia, "all the Xia," or Hua-Xia, a name that is still used for the Chinese people today, and which distinguishes them from non-Chinese.

As for the non-Hua-Xia people or non-Chinese, the Chinese did not have a single term for them. Instead several words were used, the most frequent and general ones being Man, Yi, Rong, and Di.¹³ These non-Chinese lived amongst, and in areas surrounding, the Chinese states and frequently engaged in wars with the Chinese. The Chinese looked down on them in the same way as the Hellenes looked down on the *barbaroi*. The word "barbarian" is therefore often used in English works to translate these terms for non-Chinese.

⁹ For more information on the tribute system see *Zhouli Zhushu* under the titles of Dazai, Dazongbo, Dasima, Zhifangshi, Huaifangshi, Daxingren, Xiaoxingren and Xiangxu.

¹⁰ Lee 1980, chapter 4.

¹¹ *Gongyangzhuan*, p. 239, Cheng 15/12.

¹² Creel 1970, p. 203.

¹³ Creel 1970, pp. 197-202.

Sinocentrism was, however, based more on cultural than racial differences. The languages of non-Hua-Xia people were different from Chinese. Though most of these people were eventually sinicized, their remnants are still sizable even today, inhabiting, as minority ethnic groups with their own languages, the upland regions of southern, southwestern and western China.¹⁴ Differences between the Chinese and non-Chinese also existed in material culture: clothing, food, style of hair, etc.

To the Chinese, such differences were not just a matter of external appearances, but also revealed differences in the level of civilization. The *Liji* records: "Where the statutory measures and the [fashion of] clothes had been changed, it was held to be rebellion, and the disobedient ruler was banished."¹⁵ In 307 B.C.E., when the king of the State of Zhao decided to adopt the dress of the Hu, a nomadic non-Chinese people, so as to facilitate horse-riding, he was strongly opposed by his uncle and other members of his court. They insisted that for Chinese to adopt the clothing of others would be tantamount to abandoning the old doctrine and the Way, to going against the will of the people and the wisdom of the learned, and to departing from the Central (that is, the Chinese) States.¹⁶

The third cultural difference was defined by the Zhou rules of propriety. These were believed to serve as the underpinnings of the institutions of the Chinese states, providing the basis for their social organization and their behavioral norms. They were not followed by the non-Chinese and, according to the traditional explanation, were not required of them since they did not qualify as civilized people. During the Spring and Autumn period, for example, the state of Chu referred to itself as Man-Yi and called their ruler king, and the States of Wu and Yue also took the title of king, which would have been unacceptable for one of the Zhou states.

To the Chinese their own culture represented a higher level of civilization. One important non-racist idea that derived from this sense of cultural superiority was that the non-Chinese could become Chinese by accepting Chinese culture. In the course of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the "barbarians" who had been interspersed among the Chinese states were either ejected or gradually became sinicized, as

¹⁴ Pulleyblank 1983, pp. 411-2.

¹⁵ *Liji* "Wangzhi," BK. III, p. 217, No. 15.

¹⁶ *SJ* 43, pp. 1806-8.

they accepted Chinese culture and the Zhou rules of propriety.¹⁷ The idea that Chinese civilization could be extended to other peoples in this way was passed on to later times and was applied as a justification for the cultural assimilation of still more remote non-Chinese.

But when hostilities with them prevailed, the Chinese called the non-Chinese birds and beasts or wolves with human faces. They applied the sinocentric principle to draw a boundary between themselves and the "barbarians". Already in early Zhou times the Chinese considered themselves as occupying the Central States (or Middle Kingdom) at the center of the world.¹⁸ In the *Zuozhuan* the Central States refer to the Chinese states as opposed to "barbarian" realms.¹⁹ Any Chinese struggle against invading "barbarians" was by definition a just war, a war to defend internal order.

After the steppe frontier was reached and the Chinese were confronted by the new menace of the steppe nomads, an attempt was made to establish an actual physical boundary to separate what was China and what was not. During the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., the states of Qin, Zhao and Yan built walls against the Hu nomadic "barbarians," and these were partially linked and extended by the Qin dynasty after its unification.²⁰

The Tribute System During the Han Dynasty

After the unification by Qin, the First Emperor lost no time in expanding his territory by a series of military campaigns. Through his success in driving the northern nomads, the Xiongnu, beyond the Ordos Bend of the Yellow River, and in bringing the southern and southwestern border areas under Chinese control, it seemed that the rule of the Son of Heaven was indeed extended to All-under-Heaven. The Chinese rulers were not, however, able to impose the tribute system immediately as a result of this success.

¹⁷ For a discussion on the origin of the myth of Chinese superiority, see Wang Gungwu 1968, pp. 36-8.

¹⁸ In the bronze inscription dated the fifth year of King Cheng of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1020 B.C.E.) the word "Middle Kingdoms" or "Central States" (*Zhongguo*) is first found referring to the royal domain, see Tang Lan 1976, p. 60.

¹⁹ The word "Middle Land" or "Middle Plain" (*Zhongyuan*) is also used in the *Zuozhuan* to refer to the Zhou realm. See *Zuozhuan* (Xi 23), 185::187.

²⁰ Yü Ying-shih 1990, p. 118; Waldron 1990, pp. 13-4.

The total collapse of the Qin empire in 207 B.C.E. threw China into disunity and civil wars. It was only more than half a century later that under Emperor Wu (r. 140-87 B.C.E.) of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) a reunified China could resume the offensive against the nomadic Xiongnu, and once again expand into the southwestern and southern frontier regions, as well as for the first time into the Korean peninsula to the northeast.

Through the famous exploration of Central Asia by Zhang Qian early in Emperor Wu's reign, Chinese contacts with other countries were greatly enlarged. Knowledge of foreign lands, gained via the transcontinental Silk Road to the northwest and then via the maritime trade route to the south, broadened the Chinese view of the world, but this broadening of horizons did not alter the belief that China was the center to which other peoples should come, and that Chinese civilization was superior to all others.

The expansion resulted, rather, in an extension of Chinese political and cultural influence and in the development of the tribute system, which helped consolidate the Chinese belief in the inevitability of their ideal world order. It also contributed to the weakening of the Xiongnu. In 51 B.C.E., after the Xiongnu empire was split into rival Southern and Northern states, the ruler of the Southern Xiongnu arrived at the Han court, and accepted tributary status.

Based on this framework and on a whole set of rhetorical propositions and vocabulary formed in pre-Qin times, the tribute system was fully developed in the Han dynasty. States along the Silk Road as far distant as India or Parthia are recorded as having despatched tribute-bearing envoys to the Han court. Practices under the tribute system as they pertained to Chinese relations with non-Chinese were as follows:

- 1) Rulers of non-Chinese states or their envoys came to the Han court to pay homage.
- 2) They presented symbolic tribute in the form of local products.
- 3) The Chinese emperor gave them imperial gifts in return.
- 4) The emperor conferred on the foreign rulers titles of nobility and bestowed seals on them and sometimes on their officials.
- 5) The foreign rulers sent their sons to China as hostages in return for Chinese protection against outside aggression.
- 6) The foreign rulers offered military service to the Chinese in return for Chinese goods.

The essential part of the practice consisted of items 1, 2, and 3. Any state, so long as it sent missions with gifts to the court, was recorded as a tributary. The tribute system thus developed into a network embracing all foreign states which paid official visits to Han.

To the Chinese rulers, the tribute system structured an ideal pattern for their relations with other peoples. It was, however, not a rigid pattern. Since the "acceptance of imperial rule" involved not only different levels of "acceptance," but also different categories of "rule," which varied from one group of people to another, different practices were applied to countries according to their distance from China and their relative importance in Chinese frontier considerations. All six practices under the tribute system were applied to the Southern Xiongnu and some oasis states in the Western Regions during Han. Just the first two or three requirements were applied to Japan.²¹

The tribute system, which regulated Chinese relations with non-Chinese, was an extension of the hierarchical system existing within China itself. During Han, princes and nobles were given feudal titles as rulers of their own regional and local states labeled as quasi-fiefs by the Son of Heaven. Ceremonial rituals and various laws were imposed to control these supposed vassals. They were to come to court regularly to pay homage and tribute.²² Han commanderies administered directly by officials appointed by the central government were also expected to present tribute to the court in addition to regular taxes.²³

Compared with the tribute system as it operated with foreign countries, however, there was a distinct difference. Failure of the Chinese local states or commanderies to present tribute, or failure to pay court visits at regular intervals implied an act of disobedience. In contrast, for the non-Chinese who were outer subjects, tribute was not compulsory. Though the absence of tribute payment could be, and was, used as a justification for Chinese aggression against non-Chinese peoples, the Han court would not feel obliged to launch a punitive attack if tribute was not regularly forthcoming. This policy towards non-Chinese tributaries was based on the maxim of "not interfering in the administration of those who had not been influenced by the rules of proper conduct." This policy was shaped

²¹ Yü Ying-shih 1967, p. 189. For a detailed examination of these practices, see Pan Yihong 1991, pp. 205-11.

²² Zhang Weihua 1980, pp. 185-244.

²³ *HS* 1B, p. 70; *HHS* 1B, pp. 60-1.

specifically as a response to the Xiongnu on the eve of the arrival at court of the Southern Xiongnu ruler, Huhanye *Chanyu*,²⁴ but it became a general policy towards all non-Chinese during the Han period.

Non-Chinese had their own motives for establishing relations with China, even if this implied an inferior status. Through receiving official titles from the Chinese emperor they could obtain Chinese political or even military support to enhance their own power, especially when they faced political rivals at home. Non-Chinese rulers also benefited economically from tribute and trade with China.

The payment of tribute in return for Chinese imperial gifts served the function of trade by political means, and appeared more like "gift trade" to the non-Chinese. It was usually equal in an economic sense since the Chinese tried to return gifts of the same, if not higher value as the tribute goods offered. Imperial gifts together with other financial support and the essential goods the non-Chinese obtained in this kind of "tribute trade" with the Chinese compensated for the less than exalted position they occupied in the tribute system.²⁵ The tribute-bearing missions from foreign countries were often accompanied by private merchants who came seeking purely economic profits. These merchants would be provided protection inside China and opportunities to trade in the capital.

In his book *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Edward N. Luttwak describes two models of empire, the "hegemonic" and the "territorial." The hegemonic empire is centered around a central zone of direct control, and includes 1) an "inner zone of diplomatic control," consisting of a series of client states surrounding the central zone, and 2) an "outer zone of influence," surrounding the inner zone. In the outer zone, client tribes defer to the power of the empire but are not under its direct control. Client states in the hegemonic empire function as buffer states in the system of imperial security. Their most important function, by virtue of their very existence, was to absorb the burden of providing peripheral security against border infiltration and other low-intensity threats.²⁶

The Chinese model of empire bears some resemblance to this hegemonic system. During the Han dynasty, some non-Chinese were brought

²⁴ HS 8, p. 270. The pronunciation *chanyu* is given in *Guangyun* which has three readings for the character chan: 1. dan; 2. chan in *chanyu*, as in Chan Buddhism; 3. shan as a place name, same as "abdicate"; see also Pulleyblank 1991, p. 48.

²⁵ Rossabi 1983, pp. 3-4.

²⁶ Luttwak 1976, pp. 19-30. Somers (1986, p. 98) gives a clear outline of these two models.

into the Chinese commandery-district system as part of what Luttwak characterizes as a territorial empire; some were incorporated into the Chinese hegemonic empire, with each state having different responsibilities to and connections with the Chinese suzerain, including, in some cases, military tasks. The Chinese tribute system also served to build a model of universal empire covering countries whose rulers sent embassies to China's court and received Chinese titles. Larger than Luttwak's hegemonic empire, this universal model embraced all kinds of states.

Other World Views—Practicality and Flexibility

While the sinocentric and hierarchical world view we have described above was generally dominant in Chinese ruling circles and especially so in the writing of the Standard Histories, it is important to note the existence of other views towards non-Chinese. During pre-Qin times scholars and philosophers of some non-Confucian schools held different ideas about society and the world.

The Agricultural School (*nong jia*) believed that rulers of worth should cultivate their own land, eat what they produced, and prepare their own meals while carrying on the affairs of government. Followers of this school even saw no need for Sage Kings. Asserting that both ruler and subject should plough together in the fields, they overthrew the order of upper and lower classes.²⁷

Hui Shi (ca. 370-310 B.C.E.), the leading thinker of the School of the Dialecticians (*mingjia*), talked about China as being at the center of the world which, according to one interpretation, might suggest the idea that the earth is spherical, and according to another interpretation, may imply that there were vast regions beyond the bounds of contemporary geographical knowledge.²⁸ Zou Yan (ca. 305-240 B.C.E.), the leading thinker of the School of Yin and Yang and of Five Phases, did not agree with the sinocentric idea. He maintained that there were "nine large continents" (*da jiuzhou*) in the world and each was divided into nine regions. What scholars called the Middle Kingdom was held to be but one part in eighty-one of the whole world.²⁹

Apart from such unorthodox theorizing, in their everyday dealings with foreigners the Chinese often recognized the limits of their strength

²⁷ Fung Yu-lan 1952, p. 144.

²⁸ Needham 1956, p. 192.

²⁹ *SJ* 74, p. 2344; Fung Yu-lan 1952, pp. 160-1.

and adopted pragmatic attitudes, which provided imperial rulers with justification for conducting foreign relations on an equal footing with their neighbors, or even for paying tribute to "barbarians." They used the principle of "having the various states of Xia within, and keeping the Yi and Di barbarians without" as a perfect ideological basis for retreat from claims of Chinese superiority and for adopting whatever measures were expedient for achieving China's own security and stability.

A prime example of Chinese pragmatism occurred in early Han when the powerful nomadic Xiongnu empire challenged Chinese superiority and authority. The Han court, which had not yet consolidated its power within China itself, adopted a policy of appeasement, and concluded peace treaties with the Xiongnu. The items in the earliest of these treaties were:

- 1) A Chinese princess was to be married to the *chanyu*,
- 2) Chinese annual payments of silk, liquor, rice and other kinds of food were to be made to the Xiongnu,
- 3) the Han and Xiongnu were to be "brotherly" states, and
- 4) the Great Wall was to be the border between Han and Xiongnu.³⁰

This was the famous policy of "marriage alliance" (*heqin*), although the giving of a Chinese princess in marriage was usually not its only feature. As one can see from the agreement, it was the Chinese who paid tribute to the nomadic Xiongnu empire. Until the beginning of Emperor Wu's reign (140-87 B.C.E.), *heqin* continued to be the main policy governing Chinese contacts with the Xiongnu. Although the whole practice was considered humiliating, economically costly, and unbearable by the Chinese ruling group, it did win time for Han to recover and to build up its economic and military strength, which in the end enabled Emperor Wu to engage in active diplomacy and military expansion aimed at defeating the Xiongnu.

Though, as supporters of the idea of the universal authority of the Son of Heaven, Confucianists might have been expected to approve of active measures to enforce it, Han Confucian scholars in practice mostly argued that a wise ruler should concentrate on defense against "barbarian" incursions and not try to extend his rule into their territory. In 135 B.C.E. Liu An, the Prince of Huainan, presented a memorial to Emperor Wu op-

³⁰ Yü Ying-shih 1967, pp. 41-2.

posing a military expedition against Min Yue in the south: "From the time of the Three Dynasties, the Hu and Yue have not gone so far as to receive our calendar; it is not that they are strong and could not be subdued and our awe could not control them; it is because we consider their land to be uninhabitable and the people to be impossible to govern. It is not worthwhile to disturb China over them."³¹

In the *Discourses on Salt and Iron* which record the famous debate on salt and iron monopoly policy in 81 B.C.E., Confucian scholars severely condemned the Qin and Han aggressions into foreign lands and advocated a pragmatic, inward-looking attitude for two reasons. First, they argued, these imperialistic endeavors damaged the welfare of the people, needlessly cost human lives and suffering, exhausted the economic resources of the state and yet could not drive the nomads away. Second, the conquered territories were useless either because they could not increase government revenues or because the maintenance of Chinese control over the areas depended on draining China's own economic, military and political power and therefore control could not be kept up permanently. Rejecting the use of military force to subdue the non-Chinese, they insisted on the Confucian idea: "If remote people are not submissive, all the influences of civil culture and virtue are to be cultivated to attract them to be so."³²

The Confucian historian Ban Gu also expressed this attitude, stating that the "barbarians" were outer people and therefore the sage kings of ancient times reared them like "birds" and "beasts," neither making treaties with, nor attacking them; that since their land could not be ploughed and made to produce food, and since one could not keep their people as subjects, they should be guarded against and kept at a distance, and punished only when they came to invade.³³

When Buddhism came to China during the first century C.E. it challenged all aspects of the native culture, including the sinocentric view. The Buddhist concept of "madhyadesa", referring to "middle country," that is India, was translated as "zhongguo," the same word meaning

³¹ HS 64A, p. 2777.

³² *Yan Tie Lun Jiaozhu* 1, p. 2, quoting *Lunyu* "Jishi," 4, pp. 114-6; 7, pp. 262-5, and passim. For a translation of the work, see Gale 1931.

³³ HS 94B, pp. 3833-4. Part of the translation is from Yang Lien-sheng 1968, p. 23.

"Middle Kingdom" used to refer to China. This locution appears frequently in Chinese Buddhist writings.³⁴

This Buddhist usurpation of the concept of centrality did not have much direct impact on the Chinese, but because of their much expanded contacts with foreign peoples, especially their close neighbors, the Chinese showed great interest in the outside world from the Han dynasty onwards. As is set out more fully in Chapter 2, information was continuously collected on foreign countries from Chinese envoys, Chinese frontier officials, foreign envoys to the Chinese court, and monks who had traveled abroad. Surely such intercultural links had some impact on Chinese thinking,³⁵ for it is obvious that the Han and especially post-Han Chinese were trying to expand their knowledge of the larger world, and that they knew and spoke highly of other great civilizations in India, Persia and at least the eastern part of the Roman empire.

Challenges to the Chinese World Order: Disunion and Non-Chinese Rule

During the Period of Disunion, which lasted from the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 to the reunification by Sui in 589, China was divided, first into three Chinese states, the so-called Three Kingdoms, and then after a brief period of unification by Western Jin (266-311), into a succession of Chinese dynasties in the south and the so-called Sixteen Kingdoms, ruled by various "barbarian" groups in the north. In 439 the Northern Wei, founded by the Tuoba lineage of the Xianbei "barbarians," unified north China and eventually competed with the contemporary southern dynasties for rule over all of China. About a hundred years later, Northern Wei was split into two rival dynasties: Eastern Wei, (534-550) with its successor Northern Qi (550-559), and Western Wei (535-556), with its successor Northern Zhou (557-581). The Sui dynasty that unified China in 589 was the direct successor of the Northern Zhou.

The long-term existence of disunion within China challenged the idea of universal kingship, the basic concept underlying the Chinese world order. There is an almost unanimous opinion in Tang historical writings that not one of the Sixteen Kingdoms was legitimate. The period before the Tuoba Wei's unification was, they reasoned, simply a time of alien

³⁴ Zürcher 1959, p. 266.

³⁵ An example of such a conclusion is found in Fitzgerald 1964, p. 9.

usurpation, a heaven-sent punishment for the decay and lack of virtue of the Western Jin rulers.³⁶

The legitimacy of the Northern Wei was a more controversial issue. Sui, Tang and Song scholars offered three different opinions: 1) the non-Chinese regimes were as legitimate as native ones as long as they cherished native Chinese culture and preserved it for posterity; 2) the Tuoba Wei were "barbarians" who did not practice propriety and righteousness, and therefore their rule was illegitimate; 3) legitimacy was always a variable depending on whether one did or did not rule over a unified empire. Any regime, be it Chinese or non-Chinese, was illegitimate if it did not rule over the whole empire.³⁷

During this period the "barbarians" in North China unavoidably underwent a process of sinicization and eventually were largely assimilated. All along the non-Chinese rulers utilized prevailing Chinese political theories to establish themselves and to cultivate a belief in the legitimacy of their rule in the minds of the population at large. They also preserved Chinese political traditions and norms. Their official histories were compiled by Chinese historians, who followed traditional rhetoric and patterns in recording court documents. In dealing with their neighbors, dynasties of non-Chinese origin like Former Qin in the Sixteen Kingdoms period and Northern Wei accepted the tribute system, with its hierarchical relationship between suzerain and subordinate, as the norm.

The Nomadic Legacy of the Northern Dynasties

As much as the non-Chinese rulers quickly became sinicized, they also introduced new perspectives which enriched Chinese tradition. These non-Chinese elements were visible in Sui's constitutional order and contributed to the strength and glories of the Tang dynasty, as Chen Yinke has shown in his insightful studies.³⁸

Creating a Multiethnic State

In consolidating their states, the non-Chinese rulers often resettled large numbers of non-Chinese, either directly from the steppe or from other parts of North China, into their territory. Especially around the Chinese capitals these new comers mixed with the Chinese, thus creating

³⁶ JS 122, p. 3072.

³⁷ See Rao Zongyi 1976; Zhao Lingyang, 1976; Wechsler 1985, pp. 16-8.

³⁸ Chen Yinke 1971.

multiethnic states. To establish their legitimacy, they promoted in their propaganda the idea of a universal empire in which non-Chinese and Chinese could exist side by side. In justifying his revolt against the Western Jin dynasty in 304, the Xiongnu leader, Liu Yuan, claimed that no ruler could be permanent and that even though, according to some traditions, Yu (of the legendary Xia dynasty) was said to have come from the Rong and King Wen (of the Zhou dynasty) was said to have come from the Eastern Yi, these sage rulers had derived their rule from Virtue (*De* 德). In spite of defending his "barbarian" origins in this way to win over the Chinese, Liu Yuan also claimed descent from the Liu imperial clan of the Han dynasty and named his rebel kingdom Han.³⁹

In trying to persuade a Jin official to join him, Murong Wei, another non-Chinese leader of one of the Sixteen Kingdoms, argued that his wish was to restore the Jin regime; Chinese who shared the same aim should support him without being troubled by the difference between Chinese and Yi. He too appealed to the traditions about the "barbarian" origins of the sage kings, Yu and Wen, arguing that the only concern should be about one's intentions and that differences in customs should not stand in the way of winning people's support.⁴⁰ Murong Wei belonged to the Murong lineage of the Xianbei, who founded successive Yan kingdoms centered on Hebei. They established a dual organization, with their tribal armies kept under the Xianbei elite and a Chinese style bureaucracy staffed by Chinese civil officials. This was an attempt to combine the strengths of Chinese administration with nomadic military power.⁴¹ While such a dual organization was intended to preserve the ethnic identity of the nomads, it could not prevent their eventual assimilation into Chinese life.

It was the Western Wei dynasty (535-556) under Yuwen Tai that made the most thoroughgoing effort to fuse the ethnic differences of non-Chinese and Chinese on a basis of equality and create a truly universal empire. Chen Yinke points out that Western Wei's northwestern location gave it an inferior economic and military base and weaker claim to legitimacy as ruler of China than the contemporary regimes, Eastern Wei in the north and Liang in the south. Yuwen Tai therefore felt it necessary to find a new way to fuse his Xianbei tribes and other non-Chinese groups with the Chinese to form a single entity, united by one system of beliefs and

³⁹ JS 101, p. 2649.

⁴⁰ JS 108, p. 2813.

⁴¹ Barfield 1989, pp. 104-5.

sharing a single cultural identity. In the interests of gaining legitimacy for his planned conquest of the south, Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-499) of the Northern Wei had attempted to sinicize the Xianbei aristocracy at his court, but his one-sided reform lost the support of the Xianbei warriors left behind on the frontier.⁴² Yuwen Tai adopted a variety of different measures to achieve his new program.

The centerpiece of his plan was to take advantage of his location in the Wei Valley, the heartland of the ancient Zhou dynasty. Though a backwater economically and culturally in the sixth century compared to both the lower Yangtze, where the southern, Chinese dynasties were in charge, and the Central Plain in the lower Yellow River Valley, where the rival Eastern Wei regime carried on the tradition of undivided Northern Wei, the northwest was where the institutions revered in the Confucian classics had first taken shape. The change of the dynastic name from Western Wei to Zhou which symbolized this appeal to Chinese tradition did not formally take place until after the death of Yuwen Tai but was already foreshadowed by his attempt to reform the administrative structure on the model of the *Zhouli*.⁴³ Yuwen Tai's Confucian adviser, Su Chuo (498-556), also tried to substitute the archaic style of the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing*) for the "decadent" current style when composing government documents.⁴⁴

Su Chuo has also been credited with having influenced the setting up of the military system known as the *fubing*, or "territorially administered soldiery" which incorporated a large number of the northwestern Chinese military elite with their local contingents of soldiers into the military forces of Western Wei. The essential aspects of the system at this time were as follows: 1) the soldiers, who were from hereditary military families, were exempted from taxes and corvée and expected to provide some of their own gear; 2) each of the units was placed under one of the ninety-six territorial military bureaus, which were ultimately under the control of the central government.⁴⁵

Another of Yuwen Tai's measures was to restore the surnames of those non-Chinese who had previously under Emperor Xiaowen adopted Chinese surnames. At the same time, all Chinese high-ranking military

⁴² Chen Yinke 1971, pp. 117-8.

⁴³ *ZS* 2, p. 36; *ZZTJ* 166, p. 5140.

⁴⁴ Goodrich 1953, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Goodrich 1953, pp. 50-1; Gu Jiguang 1962, pp. 50-6; Wright 1979, p. 98.

officers were given non-Chinese surnames. All soldiers serving under a particular officer were to assume the surname of that officer. Chen Yinke argues that this adoption of Xianbei surnames in the military was aimed at fusing the Chinese with the non-Chinese.⁴⁶ Another opinion is that the primary aim was to maintain and strengthen Xianbei identity.⁴⁷ Whatever the conscious motive, this policy had the effect of combining Xianbei tribal tradition and Chinese military practice, thus drawing strength from both sides. Moreover, it brought these territorially-based forces under the control of the central government, allowing them to function effectively in Northern Zhou's conquest of Northern Qi, in the Sui unification of China and in providing forces for the founding of Tang, as well as aiding in its consolidation and expansion.⁴⁸

Non-Chinese Rulers in China and the Nomads in the Steppe

Their own nomadic heritage conditioned the approach of the Northern rulers towards other nomads who remained on the steppe. That they viewed the nomads as part of their own group is shown in a 429 Northern Wei discussion on the feasibility of a military campaign against the Rouran. Cui Hao, an important Chinese adviser at the court, taking the standpoint of his nomadic lord, rejected the traditional Chinese idea that such a campaign was a waste since the steppe land could not be used for agriculture and the Rouran could not be made subjects. Cui argued that this view was a cliché from the Han period. The Rouran were rebellious slaves and should be punished. Then their land could be opened up for agriculture, their nobles could marry Wei princesses and the men of lower rank could be made generals.⁴⁹

The Northern Wei had a clear understanding of the complicated relations among different groups of nomads, such as the Rouran, Chile or Gaoche, and were able to take the initiative to form marriage or strategic alliances with one against another of them at different times. In command of superior cavalry troops, the Northern Wei rulers could inflict more effective blows on their nomadic rivals than the Han Chinese rulers were

⁴⁶ Chen Yinke 1971, p. 118.

⁴⁷ Dien 1977, p. 137; Wright 1979, pp. 98-9.

⁴⁸ For the Xianbei elements in the system, see Chen Yinke 1971, pp. 82-93; Gu Jiguang 1962, pp. 92-5.

⁴⁹ *WS* 35, pp. 815-8.

ever able to do.⁵⁰ Knowledge of the nomads' internal organization and strategy inherited from their non-Chinese background later helped the Sui and early Tang rulers to stir up dissension among the nomads. They also used non-Chinese allies in their campaigns.

The Non-Chinese Military Legacy

The military vigor of the horse-riding Tuoba ruling class was passed on to the Sui-Tang rulers. The Northern Wei emperors before 500 all took personal command of their armies during wartime. When at peace, they often went on hunting or inspection tours, organized regular military parades and esteemed military skills. In the disunited China of their day, military strength was the foundation on which the leaders of the Eastern and Western Wei and later of the Sui and Tang based their power. The military tradition was maintained in numerous families which provided generations of soldiers to the Northern dynasties and to the Sui and early Tang regimes. The tradition of the emperor's personal participation in war was continued by the Sui Emperor Yang, and by Tang Taizong. Northern women were influenced by nomadic traditions too. Two wives of Gao Huan, the actual ruler of the Eastern Wei, were excellent archers.⁵¹ Princess Pingyang, the daughter of Li Yuan, organized troops and battles that assisted her father's founding of the Tang dynasty.⁵² As witnessed by tomb murals, Tang women played polo from horseback.

The Patronage of Buddhism

The most obvious non-Chinese contribution to Chinese culture during the Period of Disunion was the spread of Buddhism. When chronic disunity undermined the orthodox status of Confucianism, Buddhism spread rapidly to fill the resulting vacuum and took root in both North and

⁵⁰ *WS* 103. In his study of the nomadic power, Barfield (1989, pp. 122-4) discusses some differences in the Tuobas' approach to the nomads as compared with a Chinese dynasty. Some of his points are not, however, accurate. For example, he says that the Tuobas' policy did not depend on destroying their nomadic enemies. This cannot be verified. The Tuoba did not destroy their enemies only because they were unable to. Barfield also says that Wei tried to control the steppe by removing most of the nomadic population to within its frontiers so as to use them as a military force and that such strategy would have been rejected by a Chinese dynasty. He forgets that the Han dynasty resettled the Xiongnu inside or near the frontiers and used their military force to defend against other nomads outside the frontier.

⁵¹ *BS* 14, p. 518.

⁵² *JTS* 58, pp. 2315-6.

South. The Northern rulers soon became patrons of Buddhism, because, among other reasons, it was foreign and it provided them an alternative belief system to the Confucianism which was being urged on them by their Chinese advisers. They used Buddhist monks as political, diplomatic, and military advisers because the monks were totally dependent on the rulers' favor and had no family ties. These monks were also much valued because they often claimed to be able to prophesy the outcome of battles and the success of projected expeditions.⁵³

Accounts by Buddhist travelers to the Western Regions and India, together with other Buddhist writings, broadened the minds of the Chinese. The most famous travel account was by Faxian who left China by land in 399, went to India to obtain Buddhist sutras and returned to China by sea in 414. His book, *Foguo Ji* (*A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*), is still extant and is an important source for information about India at that period.⁵⁴ It refers to central India as the Middle Kingdom (Zhongguo) and comments: "In it the cold and heat are finely tempered, and there is neither hoarfrost or snow. The people are numerous and happy."⁵⁵ Chinese scholars of the Qing period commented indignantly: "The book takes India as the Middle Kingdom and China as periphery because the Buddhist monks want to make their religion respectable. The absurdity is not worth arguing with."⁵⁶ Other books by Buddhist monks are discussed in Chapter Two.

The religious tolerance of the Northern rulers anticipated the great inflow of foreign religions and culture into China during the Tang dynasty. Acceptance of a foreign religion during much of China's middle period proves wrong the stereotype that the Chinese were always ethnocentric. More important, Buddhism was the first religion in China that cut through the lines separating the classes, unifying peasantry and elite in both North and South, among Chinese and non-Chinese. When added to the unifying force of the written language, Confucianism and Daoism, Buddhism contributed to the eventual reunification of China. The Sui and Tang emperors, while claiming to be Sons of Heaven in Confucian terms, also relied heavily on this alien religion to enhance their legitimacy, unlike their Han

⁵³ Wright 1959, p. 57; Ch'en 1964, pp. 78-80.

⁵⁴ For more discussion on Faxian, see Ch'en 1964, pp. 89-2.

⁵⁵ *Foguo Ji*, p. 6. For a translation, see Legge 1965, p. 42.

⁵⁶ *Foguo Ji*, p. 1, quoting *Siku Quanshu Tiyaol*.

predecessors, whose position had been rationalized solely in terms of the ideas and symbols of native traditions.⁵⁷

China's Neighbors

The Qin-Han unification established the tradition of unity under a centralized government as well as the limits of China's geographical reach. Sustained contact with its northern neighbors placed China in a new environment. To the north, the rise of the nomadic steppe empire of the Xiongnu mirrored the agricultural empire of Qin and Han. This confronted the Chinese for the first time with an organized non-Chinese polity that could successfully demand to be treated on a basis of equality.

In a sense this was the beginning of "foreign affairs" in Chinese history. Though even during the Spring and Autumn period, the Chinese states had from time to time included non-Chinese tribal units in sworn treaties or otherwise used diplomacy rather than war in dealing with them, this was considered just a stage in the ongoing process by which such peoples were gradually to be absorbed and sinicized. By the time of the Qin unification we no longer hear of "barbarian" Yi in Shandong and the Huai valley, Di in Shanxi or Man in the former territory of Chu in the Yangtze basin. Further south, much the same kind of process has continued to the present day.

The northern steppes and the mountainous and desert lands to the west were not, however, amenable to gradual absorption in this way and throughout pre-modern history remained hostile to the incursion of a Chinese civilization based on intensive agriculture.

In his insightful study of China's relations with its periphery, Latimore devised a grand scheme based on ecological/environmental principles, which divides East and Central Asia into five ecological regions: the Chinese agricultural region; the Manchurian steppe, comprising both agricultural and forest land; the Mongolian steppe land; Chinese Turkestan's oases and desert; and Tibet, where both agriculture and nomadism were practiced. The boundaries between each region were not fixed lines, but rather zones within which could be found cultural and ecological features of both regions. These marginal zones often became less buffers than the locations of military and cultural competition between China and its neighbors. China expanded into these marginal regions not just via migra-

⁵⁷ Wright 1959, pp. 66-70.

tion or cultural diffusion, but also by military means.⁵⁸ Different powers in each region raised different challenges to China in its role as the Middle Kingdom, and throughout its history China responded to these challenges with different kinds of policy measures.

The Nomadic Threat from the Steppe

In China's foreign policy the most abiding factor was the formidable threat of the nomadic peoples based on the Mongolian steppe. "Barbarian" invasions from the north were a major headache for the Chinese even in early Zhou times. With the coming of horse-rider nomadism to the eastern steppe during the Warring States period, China faced a more serious and intractable northern frontier problem, and one that lasted through late imperial times.

Modern scholars have offered various explanations for the ongoing conflicts between nomadic and agricultural societies, the constant nomadic raids and incursions across the frontiers of agrarian society, a phenomenon not just limited to China.⁵⁹ One underlying cause for the incessant conflicts between pastoral nomadism and agricultural society lay in the fact that they and the agricultural Chinese were in competition over the marginal regions where either agriculture and pastoralism could be practiced.⁶⁰ Another was the need of the nomads for agricultural products in order to sustain their economy and political structure.

Sechin Jagchid holds that nomads depended on sedentary China for grain to supplement their diet, for silk and cotton cloth to provide beauty and comfort, and for manufactured goods such as plows to break up the soil or to transform into weapons. If the nomads could not obtain these products through peaceful mechanisms of trade, bestowals, or court-to-court intermarriage arrangements, he concludes, they would be provoked into war. Often it was the ineffectiveness of Chinese dynasties and the Chinese sense of cultural superiority that broke down the peaceful mechanisms.⁶¹ Jagchid, however, underplays the role of the military advantage that the nomads enjoyed, and gives insufficient attention to the fact that even when the nomads could obtain goods from China by peace-

⁵⁸ Lattimore 1951, *passim*.

⁵⁹ Xiao Qiqing (1972) has a clear summary of these several explanations. See also Jagchid 1989, pp. 1-16; Waldron 1990, pp. 35-6.

⁶⁰ Lattimore 1951, *passim*.

⁶¹ Jagchid 1989, p. 1; p. 165 and *passim*. See also Jagchid and Hyer 1979, pp. 300-1.

ful means, they were tempted to raid the Chinese borders to seize Chinese products.

Nor does Jagchid give due weight to the fact that the nomads were normally more interested in trade than sedentary societies were.⁶² Chinese agreement to trade with the nomads was often obtained only under pressure. Such trade was not necessarily economically profitable for China's government. On the contrary, it tended to deplete the court's revenues.⁶³ In the tributary trade, under which foreign envoys presented tribute to the Chinese court, which in turn gave presents to the foreigners, the amount returned often exceeded the value of the tribute. Moreover, if trade could not prevent the nomads from incursions, the Chinese court would have to consider other alternatives, as happened in Han relations with the Xiongnu.

A. M. Khazanov gives a more nuanced and balanced analysis in his comprehensive study of pastoral nomadism. In agreement with Jagchid he argues that "nomads could never exist on their own without the outside world and its non-nomadic society."⁶⁴ Limited by their one-sided, specialized economy, the nomads needed products from sedentary society for their economic survival and for political stability, that is, for the aristocracy to sustain their control. To acquire these goods, Khazanov points out, different methods were used, including sedentarization, trade and mediatory trade, submission to sedentary societies by offering military service in return for payment of goods, and use of force whenever possible; raids and pillage were important supplementary means of livelihood. Nomads could also subjugate the sedentary population and make them pay tribute. Until the modern period, sedentary states were unable to find any permanent solution to the military problem of how to defend themselves against the raids of nomads.⁶⁵

Thomas Barfield argues that to the nomadic peoples, trade was not only for the sake of improving their standard of living or for establishing themselves as the intermediaries in profitable commercial activity between East and West, but also because Chinese goods were needed to maintain the large ruling class and nomadic state power. Barfield observes that in order to deal with their larger and more highly organized sedentary neigh-

⁶² Khazanov 1994, p. 202.

⁶³ Yü Ying-shih 1967, p. 12; p. 49; pp. 60-4; Ecsedy 1968, pp. 142-5.

⁶⁴ Khazanov 1994, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Khazanov 1994, pp. 222-3, and chapter 4.

bors, the nomads had to develop a new form of state organization, one more complex than would be needed to handle livestock problems and political disputes within a nomadic society.

Such nomadic states maintained themselves by exploiting China's sedentary economy, and not by exploiting the production of scattered shepherders. They did not attempt to conquer Chinese territory. Nor did they have the necessary administrative institutions to govern an agricultural society. The nomadic rulers' strategy was, through continuous raids and plundering or through providing military assistance to Chinese regimes, to use their strength to bargain with China for large quantities of Chinese goods as subsidies and force China to accommodate their demands for trade.⁶⁶

When the nomads were strong they followed an "outer frontier strategy,"⁶⁷ forcing the Chinese into accommodating their demands for subsidies and trade; when they were weak they chose an "inner frontier strategy" of submission to China in exchange for Chinese assistance in accumulating goods to allow their rulers to recover their strength.⁶⁸

Barfield seems to neglect two important points: one is that the nomadic "inner frontier" strategy also benefitted China and that is why China accepted the nomads' submission. The other is that there was a basic flaw embodied in the inner frontier strategy: by receiving support from China, the nomads could lose their independence and fail to restore their power on the steppe. This is what happened to the Southern Xiongnu during the Later Han dynasty. In his *The Perilous Frontier* Barfield applies his theory rather mechanically to all the nomadic regimes after the Xiongnu. This oversimplifies the complex history of China's interactions with the nomads.

In a more recent article based on archaeological studies, Nicola Di Cosmo stresses that the Xiongnu maintained their empire through political control and economic exploitation of sedentary communities and states from the oases of the Tarim Basin to Inner Mongolia, northern Mongolia, southern Siberia and Manchuria. Chinese goods further buttressed the power of the Xiongnu aristocracy. They were threatened not only by the Han Emperor Wu's cessation of payment of goods, but also by his efforts

⁶⁶ Barfield 1981; 1989, pp. 8-9 and passim.

⁶⁷ Barfield 1989, p. 91.

⁶⁸ Barfield 1989, p. 63.

to cut off their control over these sedentary communities in the Western Regions and in Manchuria.⁶⁹

Khazanov, Barfield and Di Cosmo examine the nomads' relations with agrarian society from the nomadic point of view. In this chapter and later chapters I focus on the Chinese side to see how in the context of the rise and fall of the nomadic Turkish and Uighur powers the Chinese attempted to respond to the various strategies of the nomadic political rulership, and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses as well as the various effects of the strategies and policies adopted by both nomadic powers and by China.

Xiongnu

The first organized nomadic power on the Mongolian steppe was the Xiongnu coalition. After unifying China, the First Emperor of Qin drove the Xiongnu north beyond the Great Bend of the Yellow River. But with the collapse of the Qin, the Xiongnu empire eventually established itself as a rival great power, challenging the Han dynasty's superiority and authority even inside the border zone. The early Han emperors followed an appeasement policy towards the Xiongnu. By the time of Emperor Wu, however, China enjoyed great prosperity, which enabled Emperor Wu to engage in prolonged wars against them.

However, it was not until Emperor Xuan's reign, after the Xiongnu empire was split into Southern and Northern rival states, and Huhanye *Chanyu* of the Southern Xiongnu, arrived in 51 B.C.E. at the Han court, that Han succeeded in making the Xiongnu accept the status of a tributary. The Han court provided economic and military assistance to the Southern Xiongnu in order to use them against their Northern cousins. The Northern Xiongnu were severely defeated by the Chinese in 36 B.C.E. The Southern Xiongnu had at first moved southward, close to the Han frontier, so as to have easy access to Han resources, but returned to the steppe shortly after 43 B.C.E. and restored their former power.

Even before this time, the Han government had set up dependent states to resettle Xiongnu who had come to the Han frontiers in the Ordos region and in the Gansu corridor to submit. When China was thrown into civil war at the end of Wang Mang's rule, ambitious people in the north-west sought an alliance with the Xiongnu for assistance in seeking power. The Xiongnu did not intend to occupy agricultural territory themselves.

⁶⁹ Di Cosmo 1994.

Instead they chose to take advantage of the situation to make raids and to try to establish a pro-Xiongnu regime in China.

When China was reunified by the Later Han dynasty, in its early days it did not have much advantage over the Xiongnu. In 48 C.E., however, the Xiongnu empire was again split between the Southern and Northern rivals. The Southern Xiongnu adopted a pro-Han policy and became a Han tributary. They moved inside the Han border and, unlike what had happened in Former Han times, they gradually lost their independence and were never able to restore their power in the steppe. The Northern Xiongnu met their final defeat, first at the hands of the Xianbei, another nomadic people, and then by the joined forces of Han and the Southern Xiongnu in 91.⁷⁰

Wuhuan and Xianbei

The Xiongnu's hope of restoring their former greatness was crushed by the nomadic proto-Mongolian Xianbei people, who, together with the Wuhuan, were referred to as the Eastern Hu in late Warring States and early Han times. Formerly subjects and foes of the Xiongnu empire, they inhabited the area from the Mongolian steppe to east of the Greater Xing'an Mountains. Their economy was less completely dependent on nomadism than that of the Xiongnu and included agriculture as well as herding of livestock. During the Han period the Wuhuan submitted to China and were resettled on the frontier, acting as watchmen for the Chinese, but they rebelled from time to time. The Wuhuan actively involved themselves in the civil wars at the end of Han. Eventually some of them were incorporated into China; but the Wuhuan as a whole ceased to be a real threat.⁷¹

During the first century C.E. the Xianbei alternated their allegiance between the Xiongnu and Han. To maintain their power; they sometimes sought Chinese recognition and assistance and helped the Han in wars against the Northern Xiongnu. When the Northern Xiongnu ceased to be a major power, the Xianbei occupied their territory and incorporated over ten thousand tents of their people. During the mid-second century, under their brilliant war leader, Tanshihuai, the Xianbei expanded all the way west to Central Asia, succeeding the Xiongnu as holders of the powerful

⁷⁰ For a more detailed description of the Xiongnu, see Yü Ying-shih 1967; 1990; Pan Yihong 1992b.

⁷¹ For a detailed study of the Wuhuan in the Han period, see Crespigny 1984, chapter 9.

nomadic empire of this region. It appears that part of the Wuhuan tribe also joined in this western conquest.

Unlike the Xiongnu, Tanshihuai relied solely on constant raids across Chinese frontiers and did not seek to make treaty arrangements. Tanshihuai refused a proposal of marriage alliance from the Han court soon after 166. The political organization of the Xianbei was still in a primitive stage; Tanshihuai's power derived from his ability as a war leader rather than from a hereditary tradition. Because his authority was based on his leadership in wars, he had no authority to make peace with China. To make peace with China would terminate his power as a war leader. His death around 180 ended the short-lived Xianbei empire. The Xianbei disintegrated into various tribal groups, and never became a unified steppe power.⁷² They instead turned toward China.

Xianbei Regimes in North China

In the course of time, some of the Xianbei tribal groups succeeded in forming political entities of a more lasting kind. In the third century the Murong in the Liao River valley served as auxiliaries under the Three Kingdoms Wei and their leaders received titles of investiture from both Wei and the succeeding Jin dynasty. During the civil wars of Western Jin, they provided a refuge for Chinese peasants and officials and took advantage of the situation to form their own regime with a civil administration run by Chinese officials, but with military control kept in their own hands. After the uprising of the Southern Xiongnu leader Liu Yuan in 304, which brought about the end of Jin rule in North China, the Murong, at first professing loyalty to the restored Eastern Jin dynasty south of the Yangtze, began to intervene in Chinese affairs, and in 337 established the kingdom known as Former Yan. They developed the ambition to reunite the whole of China; but their state was soon in chaos and dissolved under the attacks of the Jin and other non-Chinese in 370.⁷³ The remaining Murong royal leaders founded three short-lived states: Western Yan (384-394), Later Yan (384-409) in Hebei and Southern Yan (398-410) in Henan.

The Tuoba, who in the end were the most successful of the Xianbei groups, were similar to the Murong in that they first appeared as a tribe on the frontier, in this case on the northern border of Shanxi. For their assistance in providing auxiliaries to Jin, their leader received Chinese investi-

⁷² *HHS* 89; see also Pulleyblank 1983, pp. 452-4; Barfield 1989, pp. 87-90.

⁷³ *JS* 108-111.

ture, first, as Duke of Dai in 310, then as King of Dai in 314. In the chaos that followed the withdrawal of Jin power from the north, they established a regime in northern Shanxi. In 376 they were conquered by Fu Jian, of the Tibeto-Burman Di nationality, whose Former Qin kingdom centered on Chang'an briefly succeeded in reuniting all of North China.

After the disastrous failure of Fu Jian's expedition against Eastern Jin at the Battle of the Fei River in 383, Tuoba Gui reestablished himself as King of Dai, and soon changed his state's name to Wei. By 439 the Tuoba Wei had conquered the other contending non-Chinese regimes and achieved a more lasting unification of North China. The Tuoba were able to create an effective military and clan organization and, with the help of Chinese officials, learned how to exploit the agricultural lands that they had conquered. For nearly a century they confronted successive native Chinese states in the south.⁷⁴

Farther west in Gansu the Qifu branch of the Xianbei established a state known as Western Qin that lasted from 385 to 431 and the Tufa founded Southern Liang, which lasted from 397 to 414.⁷⁵ More successful were the Tuyuhun, a branch of the Murong Xianbei, who moved westward and established a tribal state around Lake Koko Nor in the present Qinghai province at the beginning of the fourth century. They had already received some cultural influence from the Chinese. Their administration was based on the Chinese model and made use of Chinese writing. Gradually they incorporated the local Tibeto-Burman Di and Qiang people.

During the fifth century the Tuyuhun strengthened their power through active interaction with both the southern and northern courts in China, obtaining trading benefits and political support. In addition to their adept manipulation of sedentary region politics, the Tuyuhun achieved relative stability based on combining a nomadic economy with some agriculture and profitable commercial links with both the Chinese and with Central Asia.

In 444-45, hard pressed by the Northern Wei, the Tuyuhun fled westward and occupied a weaker oasis state, Khotan, in the Tarim Basin, an important point on the Silk Road. Later they returned to their original territory, but their influence in the eastern section of the Tarim Basin continued and enabled them to control the caravan trade routes passing through that region. We read in Chinese sources that the Tuyuhun rulers

⁷⁴ *WS* 1, 2.

⁷⁵ *JS* 125, 126.

relied on rich families and merchants to meet their financial needs, and that in 553, when a Tuyuhun mission returning from Northern Qi was attacked by the Northern Zhou prefect of Liangzhōu he captured 240 merchants, 600 camels and mules and silk products amounting to ten thousand rolls.⁷⁶ Well protected by their distance from political and war centers in China, they were able to maintain their state until the seventh century.

Rouran

While the Tuoba Wei rulers occupied themselves with governing an agricultural China and became more and more sinicized, control of the steppe was taken over by the Rouran nomads. Their founder is said to have originally been a slave of the Tuoba. Though there is no explicit statement in the sources to show that they were of Xianbei origin, there is evidence that, like the Xianbei and Wuhuan, they spoke a language of the Mongolian type.⁷⁷ After several generations, at the beginning of the fifth century, the Rouran leader declared himself qaghan, the title later used by the Turks for the supreme ruler of the steppe, but also used among the Qifu and Tuyuhun.⁷⁸ They became a vigorous power, extending their control over the Mongolian steppe and Manchuria. They also became a fierce adversary of Northern Wei, constantly raiding the Chinese frontier.⁷⁹

The Northern Wei won a major victory over the Rouran in 429. In order to maintain peaceful relations the two sides arranged reciprocal marriages: Wei sent a princess to wed the Rouran qaghan in 434, while the Wei emperor himself married the qaghan's younger sister. But peace did not last long and conflicts continued until 449, when Wei won another decisive victory over the Rouran. In 506 the Rouran asked Wei for a peace agreement, but Wei insisted that the Rouran could expect no better fate than to become Wei subjects.

In 520 after internal struggles among the Rouran, Anagui Qaghan went to the Wei for protection. Following the Han pattern of resettlement of nomads who had submitted, the Wei court resettled him and his people outside the Wei frontiers north of Shanxi and another rival group of the Rouran in present Gansu, both to serve as part of the defense for Wei.

⁷⁶ *BS* 96, pp. 3178-87; Molè 1970, xii-xvi; his translation of the *BS* 96.

⁷⁷ Pelliot 1921; see also a note by Pelliot inserted in a book review in *T'oung Pao* 29 (1932) p. 261.

⁷⁸ Molè 1970, xxvii, pp. 68-71.

⁷⁹ *WS* 103.

Three years later, when the rebellion of the Six Garrisons of the Wei broke out, Anagui and his cavalry assisted in its suppression.

As a consequence, the balance of power began to tip in favor of the Rouran. To reward the Rouran for their assistance, the Wei court provided rich gifts and in 528 issued an edict granting privileged treatment to Anagui. He personally was not expected to refer to himself as "subject" when presenting documents to the Wei court.

Anagui reorganized his government based on the Chinese model and the Rouran became a strong power once again. He employed Chinese as his advisers and insisted on equal standing with Wei in the official correspondence between the two. In 533 Wei permitted the marriage of a Wei princess to the qaghan's son. The marriage, however, was called off after the split of the Northern Wei into the Eastern and the Western Wei. Enfeebled by their struggles with each other, both of the new states competed to conclude marriage alliances with the Rouran so as to maintain peace on their borders and concentrate their efforts against each other and their southern enemies. The relationship between the Rouran and the Wei states in North China became more equal, as shown by the fact that the rulers of the Western and Eastern Wei took Rouran princesses as empresses, rather than just sending their women to the Rouran.⁸⁰

Eastern Wei and the Rouran contracted three marriages: in 540 Eastern Wei agreed to send a princess to marry Anagui's son; in 542 Anagui asked to send his granddaughter to wed the son of the powerful minister Gao Huan. Wei agreed.⁸¹ Apprehensive of the Rouran's strength, Gao Huan requested a Rouran princess for another son, to which Anagui replied that the marriage would be possible only if Gao himself wedded his daughter. After some hesitation, Gao agreed. The marriage took place in 546. After Gao Huan's death, following nomadic practice, Gao's eldest son married the Rouran princess.⁸²

Western Wei also contracted reciprocal marriages with the Rouran. A Wei princess was sent to wed the brother of Anagui and in 538, at the request of Anagui, the emperor dismissed his Tuyuhun empress and took

⁸⁰ *WS* 103; *BS* 98.

⁸¹ *WS* 103, p. 2303; *BS* 98, p. 3265.

⁸² This is according to *BQS* 9, p. 124; *BS* 14, p. 517-8. The *BS* 98 (p. 3265) does not give these details.

Anagui's daughter as empress. The Rouran were still not content and pressed the emperor to force the previous empress to commit suicide.⁸³

Just when Anagui's power was at its height another nomadic power rose. This was the Tujue (Türk) state of the Ashina clan (hereafter referred to as the Turks), in the face of whose attack Anagui committed suicide in 552.⁸⁴

Tujue Turks

The sudden emergence of the Turks, who had not been heard of previously but who subsequently gave their name to all the Turkic speaking peoples, is wrapped in obscurity. They are said to have once been blacksmith slaves of the Rouran. Sometime before 546 their chief, Tumen (Bumīn), initiated trading relations with the Western Wei dynasty. When they became stronger, the Turks broke away from the Rouran and turned to Western Wei for political support. In 551 the two regimes, who both considered the Rouran a major enemy, formed a marriage alliance. A year later the Turks were able to defeat the Rouran. They asked the Western Wei to execute all the Rouran refugees, a grisly task which Western Wei carried out. The Northern Qi (successor of the Eastern Wei) at first adopted a pro-Rouran policy against the Turks but soon abandoned the Rouran, who were hopelessly weak by then.⁸⁵

In 552, Bumīn set himself up as Yili Qaghan. From 562 to 576, his younger brother Shidianmi (Istämi) ruled west of Altai as the chief of the western part of the empire. Actively engaging themselves in intermediary trade between China and the Eastern Roman empire and in the conquest of other peoples, the Turks built a steppe empire extending westward from the Mongol Plateau into Central Asia, including its oasis states, and had commercial contact with the Ephthalites, Byzantium and Sassanid Persia. Having replaced the Rouran, they next turned to North China, posing a great threat to the Northern Zhou (successor of Western Wei) and Northern Qi dynastic regimes.⁸⁶

As in their relations with the Rouran, the two Northern dynasties each had to buy off the Turks with frequent payments of silk and other

⁸³ BS 13, pp. 506-7; 98, p. 3246; ZZTJ 158, p. 4892.

⁸⁴ BS 98, pp. 3266-7.

⁸⁵ BS 98, pp. 3266-7; 99, pp. 3285-9; Ma Changshou 1957, pp. 12-8.

⁸⁶ Chavannes 1969, pp. 160-3; Ma Changshou 1957, pp. 16-20; Wright 1979, p. 107; Sinor 1990b, pp. 295-305.

products, and each had to compete to contract marriages with the Turks, all for the purpose of preventing the Turks from launching invasions and from assisting the other power. In 561, when Yuwen Yong came to the throne as emperor of Northern Zhou, he despatched three groups of envoys to the Turks. In spite of interference from the Northern Qi envoys, the missions succeeded in securing a Turkish princess for marriage to Yuwen himself. In the reigns after Yong's death, this Turkish empress was shown great favor and given honorific titles.

The Turks also assisted the Zhou in battles against Qi.⁸⁷ For its part, Northern Qi had to "empty its storehouses to supply the Turks." After Qi's conquest by Northern Zhou in 577, a Qi prince fled to the Turks. The qaghan then declared him to be the Qi emperor and planned to take revenge on his behalf. After several attacks, however, the qaghan decided it was not worthwhile to support Qi any further. Instead, he proposed a marriage alliance to Zhou, to which Zhou agreed on the condition that the Turks hand over the Qi prince. The Turks felt obliged to comply. In 580 Princess Qianjin of Zhou was sent to marry Shetu Qaghan.⁸⁸

The Turkish problem was to last into the following Sui and Tang dynasties until the mid-eighth century.

Gaoche

Another nomadic participant group in China's constant competitions with the Rouran and the Turks were the Gaoche, meaning "High Carts." They belonged to the Tiele tribes, who spoke a Turkic language but had been known to the Chinese much earlier than the Tujue. The name Tiele can be traced back to the Dingling who first appear in the *Shiji* as one of the northern peoples conquered by the Xiongnu when they first established their empire at the beginning of the second century B.C.E. From the fourth to the sixth centuries the name appears in various forms—Dingling, Chile, Tiele, and Gaoche.⁸⁹ Though sometimes subjugated by larger nomadic powers such as Xiongnu and Rouran, the Gaoche or Tiele people had always maintained a tribal identity of their own. Their allegiance in the competitions between China and its nomadic rivals was often an important factor for the side they joined. During the fifth and sixth

⁸⁷ ZS 9, p. 144; BS 99, p. 3289.

⁸⁸ BS 99, p. 3290; SUI 51, p. 1329. Lin Enxian (1988, p. 210) says that Qianjin was first married to Tabo (Taspar) Qaghan and then to Shetu. The supreme qaghan then was Tabo, but it was Shetu who requested the marriage.

⁸⁹ Pulleyblank forthcoming and 1990a.

centuries, they established their independence from the Rouran and were in constant contact with the Northern Wei regime, sometimes as allies against the Rouran. When the first Turkish empire was founded in 552, the Tiele were brought under its rule. The Tiele tribes would later play a decisive role in the Sui and Tang competitions with the Turks. It was from the Tiele that the Uighurs emerged and from the mid-eighth century replaced the Turks as masters of the steppe.

The Western Regions

To the west and southwest of the Mongolian steppes lay what the Han Chinese referred to as the Western Regions, which is what Europeans used to call Chinese Turkestan and is presently China's Xinjiang autonomous region. From early times there had emerged in this region small oasis states based on a mixed economy of agriculture, animal husbandry and trade. The region's people had a distinctive ethnic and cultural identity. They spoke Indo-European languages and the Chinese described them as having deep eyes and high noses. Their towns developed as trading centers along the two major branches of the cross-continental Silk Road that started from northwest China, passed through the Gansu corridor, then divided and went north or south of the Taklamakan Desert and crossed the Pamirs, after which they merged into routes heading toward South and West Asia.

Never during China's long imperial history did these oasis states pose a threat to the Chinese in the way the nomads did, as they were never able to form a united political entity. And yet the Western Regions were often an important target over which China contended with other states, first the Xiongnu, then from Sui onwards, the Turks and Tibet, and in later times, the Mongols, and Russia.

As far as recorded history is concerned, Chinese contact with the region started under Emperor Wu of Han with the famous expedition of Zhang Qian to the west in about 138 B.C.E.. Zhang's aim was primarily military and strategic: to seek an alliance with the Yuezhi, traditional nomad enemies of the Xiongnu who had moved to the west. The expedition failed in its immediate goal but in the end it had more significant results. Apart from the new knowledge that it brought, it led to Han expansion in that direction, aimed at depriving the Xiongnu of an important resource and making contact with the newly discovered world beyond. In 59 B.C.E. the Han set up the Protectorate of Western Regions (*Xiyu duhufu*) as its instrument for controlling the region.

The military significance of this region was obvious. Whenever the Chinese lost control over it, as during the interregnum between Former and Later Han, the Xiongnu would take over, thereby strengthening them in their competition with the Chinese. Another danger was that if the Xiongnu occupied the area they might enter into an alliance with the Qiang, the hostile "barbarians" living in Qinghai to the south, thereby posing a threat to the four commanderies that Han had established in the Hexi region in present Gansu and Ningxia.

The other significant consequence of the opening to the west was that it potentially connected China with South and West Asia. Maintenance of Chinese control over the Western Regions ensured the eventual opening of trade and diplomatic communications between China and these newly discovered countries. The trade brought impressive economic benefits; private merchants made handsome profits and emperors and their ministers were provided with luxuries and exotic goods by tribute-bearing missions to the Chinese court. Politically, the coming of foreign envoys from afar symbolized their acceptance of the rule of the Son of Heaven whose legitimacy within China remained bound up with the fiction that he was a world ruler.

Maintenance of Chinese control over the Western Regions, however, proved to be very costly. Nomads could more easily and naturally exert such control with their mobile and constantly ready military force and their geographical proximity. When China became weakened internally, it often had to withdraw from this extended frontier. Economic contact with the Western Regions mostly benefited emperors and a minority of private individuals rather than the state treasuries; so even if emperors and their courtiers retained enthusiasm for expansion to the west, Confucian bureaucrats strongly opposed such endeavors at the time and their criticisms were echoed by later Confucian historians. Yet the Han expansion into the Western Regions, together with its expansion into the Korean Peninsula, set up a goal for later rulers to reach and a model for them to emulate.

The oasis states in the Western Regions, through their contacts with China and the contending nomadic powers, became experienced in dealing with them and learned to play off one against the other so as to maintain their own political autonomy. They often took initiatives in the complex international environment, forming alliances or seeking military protection, or organizing resistance to foreign control. They played active roles which no larger power could afford to ignore. As foci where different

cultures coming from various directions met, they were able to in turn transmit some of these cultural elements to others while retaining their own cultural identities.⁹⁰

During the period of Disunion, Liangzhou was an important center for East-West communications. Located in present Gansu, west of the Yellow River's Great Bend, it controlled the Gansu corridor and was the gateway to the Western Regions. When China was in political turmoil, foreign merchants or envoys continued to arrive in Liangzhou and some continued on into China proper under the protection of the Liangzhou regime. Control of Liangzhou changed frequently from Chinese to non-Chinese hands before the Northern Wei's unification of the North, but all of its rulers tried to keep up and expand their contacts with the oasis states in the Western Regions through peaceful embassies or military expeditions. The benefits Liangzhou's rulers sought from trade with, or direct control over, the Western Regions were not just political prestige or the obtaining of luxury goods. These links were important for the survival or consolidation of their regimes.⁹¹ The most famous expedition during this period was the one despatched from Chang'an in 383 by Fu Jian of the Former Qin state, who had briefly reunited the whole of North China and was about to lead the disastrous expedition against Eastern Jin that ended in his downfall. From his point of view, conquering the Western regions was a necessary part of fulfilling the Mandate of Heaven that he had accepted.⁹²

In addition to keeping open trade and diplomatic communications with the Western Regions, another major accomplishment of the various regimes in Liangzhou was the establishment of direct control of Gaochang (Karakhoja) near Turfan, the first city on the northern branch of the Silk Road in the Western Regions. In 344 the Zhang power in Liangzhou (whose successor founded the Former Liang state, 354-376) established a commandery in Gaochang. The Former Qin state (351-394) continued to have an administration there. After Lü Guang founded his Later Liang state (386-403), he considered Gaochang to be a base for further westward

⁹⁰ Ise has a comprehensive study on China's interactions with the Western Regions from early Han to mid-Tang. For the Han period, see Ise 1968, pp. 1-21; pp. 37-89. See also Yü Ying-shih 1990 for the significance of the Western Regions in Han's relations with the Xiongnu.

⁹¹ For a more detailed account, see Ise 1968, pp. 95-116.

⁹² Mather 1959, p. 1.

expansion, appointed his son as the Protector-general of the Western Regions and stationed him in Gaochang.⁹³

Another highly significant development resulting from uninterrupted communications with the Western Regions and beyond was the inflow of Buddhism. When it was first introduced to China in the first century C.E. Buddhism spread along the routes of trade between Central Asia and China proper, and inside China the religion moved along the main routes of internal trade and communication.⁹⁴ Through a report by a Chinese monk who had traveled to Qiuci (Kucha), Fu Jian in 379 heard about Kumarajiva, a famous Buddhist monk then living there. One of the objectives of Fu Jian's expedition to the Western Regions in 383 was to bring Kumarajiva back to China. Lü Guang, the general whom he sent to accomplish this task, succeeded in defeating Kucha and subduing other states. He brought Kumarajiva back with him, but learning that Fu Jian had been fatally defeated in the Battle of the Fei River, kept the monk in Liangzhou for seventeen years. Kumarajiva was finally brought to Chang'an in 401, by which time he had fully mastered the Chinese written language, which allowed him to become the greatest translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese.⁹⁵

Since the Rouran nomadic empire by this time had already extended its influence to the Western Regions as far as Ephthalites beyond the Pamirs, the early Northern Wei rulers adopted an aggressive policy towards the Western Regions to weaken the Rouran, but also for the sake of political prestige and trading benefits. In 435 and 436 Wei sent several diplomatic missions to the region and, in 445 and 448, launched military expeditions to subdue Shanshan (Loulan), Yanqi (Karashahr) and Qiuci (Kucha). In 448 Wei appointed a Chinese as Commandant of Western Rong (*Xirong xiaowei*) in Shanshan, the first city state on the southern branch of the Silk Road beyond the Yumen Pass, and ran it like a regular tax paying commandery. During the same period, Northern Wei also launched direct attacks against the Rouran and conducted five military campaigns (in 444, 445, 460, 470 and 473) against the Tuyuhun, because the Tuyuhun had contacts with the Rouran and the Liu-Song dynasty, and they controlled the route south from the Western Regions.

⁹³ Ise 1968, pp. 95-114.

⁹⁴ Wright 1959, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Mather 1959, pp. 2-10; Ch'en, K. 1964, pp. 82-3.

Northern Wei relaxed its efforts in the Western Regions after 470. It appears that Shanshan was no longer under direct Wei control. In 471 Wei refused to assist Yutian (Khotan) against an invasion of the Rouran. In 516 the Wei emperor sent envoys into the region to acquire Buddhist texts, but apart from this Wei and the later Northern dynasties did not initiate any activities there. In contrast, countries in Central Asia continued to send envoys to Wei.⁹⁶

Manchuria in the Northeast

Northeast of the North China Plain is the area known in English language works as Manchuria, at present the three provinces of Northeast China. Like the Western Regions, Manchuria was an area of mixed economies and ethnic groups, but it was ecologically more complex. The Liaodong region in southern Manchuria, comprising the Liao River plain and the Liaodong peninsula, was suitable for agriculture. Liaodong's agricultural land tempted Chinese states to expand into the region, but since it was physically isolated from China by mountains and seas, the major link to the North China Plain being the Shanhai Pass, Chinese control in the region was not stable. Manchuria's open western plains were partly suitable for pastoralism and partly for agriculture. Nomads from the contiguous Mongolian steppe were often tempted to move down to subjugate the various native peoples. In the mountains and forests of the rest of Manchuria lived various groups of fishing-hunting communities.

Chinese expansion into the Liaodong region was first carried out by the state of Yan in the Warring States period and later by the Qin dynasty, which established a political administration over Chosŏn, a confederation of walled town states in the basin of the Liao and Datong (Korean Taedong) Rivers. In early Han a Chinese (or perhaps a Korean) known as Wei Man, associated with the King of Yan, rebelled, and fled to Chosŏn, where he succeeded in establishing his rule.⁹⁷ In 109 B.C.E. Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty decided to attack Chosŏn. His strategic purpose was to

⁹⁶ *WS* 102; Ise 1968, pp. 117-44.

⁹⁷ *SJ* 115, p. 2985, which merely associates Wei Man with Yan. Lee Ki-baik (1984, pp. 16-7) questions whether Wei Man was in fact a Chinese on the ground that his hair style was different from that of the Chinese, and because he dressed in Chosŏn style when he went to Chosŏn. He could, therefore, have been either a Sinicized Korean or a Koreanized Chinese. The distinction would not have been as important then as it would be now to modern nationalistic Chinese and Koreans.

“cut off the left arm of the Xiongnu,”⁹⁸ that is, to cut off any possible alliance between Chosŏn and the Xiongnu, who were expanding eastward in that direction. The attack was a success and, as a result, Chosŏn was incorporated into the Chinese commandery-district system under four commanderies, Lelang, Zhenfan, Lintun and Xuantu,⁹⁹ all north of the Han River.¹⁰⁰

One major unintended effect of the Han commandery system, which eventually ended at the beginning of the fourth century, was to stimulate the formation of native political powers. The state of Koguryŏ, which straddled the present boundary between Manchuria and Korea, captured Lelang, and another Korean state, Paekche, captured Daifang commandery.¹⁰¹ Koguryŏ was a semi-nomadic state that rose around 37 B.C.E. in Manchuria. It competed with the Murong and eventually annexed another Manchurian regime, Puyŏ and Liaodong in the fourth century C.E., expanding its sphere from Manchuria to the northern half of the Korean peninsula.¹⁰²

During the Period of Disunion, while China was under various regimes, most of the Korean peninsula was sub-divided into three states: Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla. Paekche was established by invaders from Puyŏ by the third century C.E. out of the walled town states in the southwestern part of the peninsula. Silla emerged as a strong power which evolved from the state of Saro in the southeast.¹⁰³ Both of these states were populated by agrarian people with economies similar to that of China. The three Korean kingdoms, especially Koguryŏ and Paekche, were continually fighting each other over territory and therefore were interested in gaining Chinese support in their struggles.

Through the tribute system, particularly the system of investiture, by which political titles were bestowed by the Chinese court on foreign

⁹⁸ *HS* 73, p. 3162.

⁹⁹ *SJ* 115, p. 2989; *HS* 6, p. 194; 95, pp. 3865-7. *HS* 28 (p. 1626) says that Xuantu commandery was set up in 107 B.C.E., which might not be correct according to other sources.

¹⁰⁰ In 82 B.C.E. Zhenfan and Lintun were abolished, and were partly incorporated into Lelang and Xuantu. See *HS* 7, p. 223; *HHS* 85, p. 2817.

¹⁰¹ Nishijima 1983, p. 419. Daifang commandery was set up at the beginning of the third century C.E. in the western part of Lelang.

¹⁰² Lee Ki-baik 1984, pp. 22-4.

¹⁰³ *WS* 100, p. 2217; Lee Ki-baik 1984, pp. 36-7; pp. 40-2. Ledyard (1975, p. 234), however, dates the conquest as between 352 and 372.

rulers, these states entered into a vassal-suzerain relationship with various regimes in China proper. Koguryō had relations with regimes in both North and South China and received official investiture several times, the first time from the Former Yan in 355. It had contacts with the Rouran as well. Paekche first appears in Chinese historical records in 372, when it sent a mission to the Eastern Jin and a Jin official title was conferred on its king. It, too, pursued an outward-looking policy through which it obtained political investiture from both the northern and southern regimes in the following centuries. Silla sent its first official mission to the Former Qin in 377. It did not join the political investiture system until the sixth century but Chinese influence is obvious in the forms of its state institutions.¹⁰⁴ Each of the three states was in reality independent of China, ruled solely by its own aristocracy, but in their constitutional and cultural forms all three kingdoms showed enthusiasm for the introduction of Chinese ways.

The Western Mountain Borderlands and Tibet

Lattimore's fifth region, Tibet, is separated from China proper by mountainous regions that are largely unsuited either to intensive agriculture of the Chinese type or to the extensive pastoral transhumance practiced by the nomads of Mongolia. It remained outside the Chinese sphere of influence and is scarcely referred to in Chinese sources until the Tang period when a Tibetan kingdom suddenly erupted and became a major power, contending not only directly with China but also with the contemporary nomadic powers for control of Central Asia, as we shall see in later chapters.

The intermediate lands were occupied by Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples known collectively to the Chinese as Qiang or Di (first tone—to be distinguished from Di, second tone, the non-Chinese people of ancient Shanxi), who lived in small unorganized tribal bands of hunters or small scale pastoralists. During Han they caused trouble from time to time by raiding their Chinese neighbors, sometimes provoked by oppressive treatment by Chinese officials. In the chaos at the end of Han, Qiang and Di living in the Nanshan Mountains moved into the Wei valley in considerable numbers and played a notable part in the "barbarian" overrunning of North China during the fourth century.¹⁰⁵ The most famous of these was

¹⁰⁴ Inoue 1972, pp. 82-3; Nishijima 1983, pp. 420-8.

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed study of Qiang during the Han period, see Crespiigny 1984, chapters 2 to 4.

Fu Jian, a much sinicized Di whose Former Qin kingdom's success in briefly uniting North China has been referred to above.

There was also a considerable Tibeto-Burman element in the Tuyuhun polity in Qinghai.

The Tibeto-Burman inhabitants of West China's borderlands came into their own with the formation of the Nanzhao kingdom in Yunnan during Tang and the Tangut (Dangxiang Qiang) Western Xia kingdom in Gansu and Ningxia during Northern Song.

The South and Southwest

In contrast to the "hard" intractable steppe frontier to the north, the "soft" southern frontier, where the land was suitable for Chinese-style agriculture, remained open to Chinese expansion and occupation throughout the imperial period. Sinification proceeded as in pre-Qin times, partly by absorption of the previous non-Chinese inhabitants and partly by immigration of Chinese peasants from the north. The unification and expansion of the Qin and Han dynasties meant the establishment of Chinese administration in all parts of south China, along the coast as far south as Hanoi in present northern Vietnam, and southwest into present Yunnan and Sichuan. The territories of non-Chinese aboriginal peoples were organized into the Chinese commandery-district system but were governed by their own chieftains who attached themselves to Chinese local government. They did not always submit peacefully to Chinese rule, and often caused disturbances that had to be forcibly put down, but control over them was regarded as a matter of internal security rather than "foreign affairs."

Chinese expansion into these areas during Han, like the expansion into the Western Regions, was also partly motivated by interest in making contact with foreign countries and establishing trading relationships. The opening to the west inaugurated by Zhang Qian brought back not only knowledge of India but also the idea that India could be reached by way of a southwesterly route through Sichuan. Efforts were then made to open up contacts in that direction.¹⁰⁶ By no means were moves made only by land. The Han period also saw the beginnings of seaborne trade to India and the West.

China's political center moved to the south during the Period of Disunion, with the capital of the Southern dynasties being located in Nanjing. Ever larger numbers of Chinese farmers migrated to the south. As a

¹⁰⁶ HS 95, p. 3841.

result the formerly underdeveloped South China underwent a gradual economic advance with population growth, agricultural, commercial and manufacturing development. Finally, during the Tang period, the South replaced the North as the economic center of China.

The Southern dynasties had contacts with more countries in South-east Asia than had their Han predecessor. Buddhism was now a bond between China and these countries, while private trade and trade through tribute-bearing missions provided a more practical motive for contact, and also contributed to the flourishing of seaborne trade during the Tang dynasty. The Southern dynasties retained some administrative control over the aboriginal peoples in frontier regions, but as in previous times, their administration was not stable, being affected by ethnic conflicts stated in political and economic terms. The Chinese were not able to establish a systematically firm control over these people until the early twentieth century.

General Policy Measures Towards Non-Chinese States

To the rulers of China, the tribute system, though ideal in conception, was inadequate in practice to deal with the many problems that arose in their intercourse with foreign states. To conclude this survey of the background to Sui-Tang diplomacy, it is useful to summarize the various policies, combining pragmatism with ideology, that had been developed over the years by imperial governments to deal with such matters before the Sui-Tang period.¹⁰⁷ The salient points of these measures are as follows.

1. Aggressive military action to expand Chinese territory.

War has always been the ultimate means to settle internal and external political conflicts in human affairs. Aggressive behavior towards neighbors is the common experience of mankind. Chinese history is not exceptional in this respect, but Chinese expansionist rulers did not openly glorify conquest as a legitimate ambition for its own sake; they always sought to give moral justification for their conquests.

The early Zhou rulers justified their overthrow of Shang with the Mandate of Heaven doctrine. Later militant rulers such as the First Emperor of Qin and Emperor Wu of the Han justified campaigns of expansion by appealing to the need for frontier security. Moral justification was

¹⁰⁷ For general surveys, see Yang Lien-sheng 1968, pp. 20-33; Wang Gungwu 1968, pp. 34-62.

based on the principle that "the king leaves nothing and nobody outside his realm" and belief that Chinese culture could convert other peoples to a higher civilization. In the famous debate in 81 B.C.E. on the salt and iron monopoly policy, the Legalist statesman Sang Hongyang praised Zou Yan's theory and claimed that it justified the Qin territorial expansion which was aimed at extending its power over the "nine large continents".¹⁰⁸ Another justification commonly employed was that expansion was not to enlarge territory but to create buffer zones for national defense, so as to prevent the disaster a barbarian invasion would cause and avoid the resulting harm to the common people.¹⁰⁹ Frontier expansion could also attract wealth in exotic goods and horses, thus benefiting the country.¹¹⁰

As we have previously noted, however, the Qin and Han expansion was severely condemned by the Confucian scholars who participated in these debates during the Han period and by their successors in later ages. These Confucians stressed an inward looking-attitude, arguing that imperialistic endeavors damaged the welfare of the people while failing to solve the problem of incursions, and that the conquered territories were useless, and not a source of enrichment for the Chinese nation.

2. Strengthening frontier defense.

While Confucianism tended to give more value to moral persuasion, it held that military force was legitimate if used for defense.¹¹¹ A Han Confucian minister, Wei Xiang, articulated the different justifications for using military force and favored the use of force for defense:

Forces used to settle chaos and to punish the tyrannous are righteous forces, which will dominate All-under-Heaven. Forces used reluctantly for self-defense are responsive forces, which will win. Forces used to release minor grudges or resentment are resentful forces, which will suffer defeat. Forces used to seize territory and wealth are greedy forces, which will meet destruction. Forces used to display great power and numerical strength to awe the enemy are arrogant forces, which will meet extinction. These five are not only matters of man but also the way of Heaven.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *Yan Tie Lun Jiaozhu* 9, pp. 331-2.

¹⁰⁹ *Yan Tie Lun Jiaozhu* 4, p. 114; 8, pp. 285-7.

¹¹⁰ *Yan Tie Lun Jiaozhu* 1, p. 12; 3, p. 105.

¹¹¹ Yang Lien-sheng 1968, pp. 24-6.

¹¹² Yang Lien-sheng 1968, p. 28.

In appealing to defense as a justification for the resort to force it was, of course, necessary to know where to draw the boundary line around China. In the classic pre-Han document, the "Yugong" in the *Shujing*, the realm subject to the Chinese Son of Heaven extends in concentric squares of diminishing influence to the Four Seas, that is, to All-under-Heaven, in effect, the whole world.¹¹³ The Qin-Han unification and confrontation with the nomad power in the north forced a more precise definition. In the debate on the salt and iron monopoly policy, the Confucian scholars defined the extent of China's territory in ecological terms, saying that the frontier commanderies were in the mountains and valleys, places not suited to agriculture because their *yin* and *yang* were not well balanced; China, the Middle Kingdom, lay in the middle between heaven and earth where *yin* and *yang* came together and made possible abundant production. They argued that China should not exert itself beyond its natural boundaries into these frontier commanderies.¹¹⁴

Defensive works defining the boundaries between Chinese and non-Chinese were built from early times. While the First Emperor of Qin was notorious for his military expansion he was equally known for the so-called Great Wall, which linked together earlier frontier walls built by Chinese states bordering on the steppe in a connected series of frontier fortifications.¹¹⁵ The project was meant to erect a boundary line between agricultural China and nomadic steppe land as well as to defend China from nomadic invasions. This was the policy of "having all the Chinese within and keeping all the barbarians without." During the Period of Disunion the alien rulers of the Northern Wei and Northern Qi continued such construction projects for the purpose of defense. Wall building was accompanied by establishment of garrisons, watchtowers and walled towns.

There were, however, serious difficulties with the policy of building and manning frontier fortifications as a means of controlling the nomads. First, it was impossible to have a sharply defined, physical boundary line as we can often (though not always) do in the modern world of nation states. The intermediary zones between China and its neighbors were always areas for competition. In practice it was impossible to prevent the nomads from crossing in and the Chinese from going out. Second, defending such boundaries placed a heavy logistical burden on the govern-

¹¹³ *Shangshu*, "Yugong," p. 18, sections 38.

¹¹⁴ *Yan Tie Lun Jiaozhu* 3, pp. 100-1.

¹¹⁵ Waldron 1990, pp. 13-29. On the policy of wall building, see also pp. 30-51.

ment to maintain large numbers of troops on or near the frontier. Conditions for agriculture were harsh in frontier regions, and population was sparse. The harsh environment adversely affected the morale of soldiers.

3. Alliance strategies.

Policy-makers in traditional China were clearly aware of the universal rule: my enemy's enemy is my friend. They were also aware of the underlying tendency for nomadic power to lack institutional cohesion. They therefore devised the strategy of "using barbarians against barbarians" or "using barbarians to control barbarians." The objectives were to play off one party against another so as to divide the parties and allow China to rule or at least maintain a balance of power, or to obtain foreign support for some specific purpose. Measures adopted to form alliances included offering political and military support, signing peace agreements, marriage contracts, establishment of fictitious kinship relationships, offering rich economic rewards, guaranteeing profitable mutual trade under the framework of the tribute system and in border markets.

The policy of making peace agreements or marriage alliances was often criticized by some as being as costly as the use of military force or more so. Sang Hongyang held that "barbarians" could not be bound by agreements; even the Chinese states in the Spring and Autumn period failed to keep peace agreements, let alone "barbarians."¹¹⁶ They believed that alliances with non-Chinese could only be temporary expedients. Fundamental conflicts of interest would inevitably generate mutual distrust and hinder any abiding alliances.

4. Appeasement policy.

The Chinese sometimes offered the above inducements in a positive way to secure alliances, but when China was weak and the balance of power had tipped in favor of the non-Chinese, the nomads in particular, such measures were forced upon the Chinese. China had to accommodate the demands of the nomads for payments of silk and other goods, and send princesses into marriage with their rulers in order to have peace on the frontiers, as the history of Han-Xiongnu relations during early Han demonstrated.

In effect, an appeasement policy would treat the foreign country as an equal or superior rather than as a tributary. To pay tribute in order to purchase peace was seen as humiliating politically, expensive financially and ineffective compared to use of military force. Jia Yi, an early Han

¹¹⁶ *Yan Tie Lun Jiaozhu* 8, p. 285; pp. 305-6.

scholar, attacked the appeasement policy as "hanging a person upside down." That is, the Son of Heaven as the head of the state was being made to serve the Xiongnu "barbarians," the feet of the state, through the policy of marriage alliance.¹¹⁷ But down through history such a compromise was made frequently and it often bought time for the Chinese to accumulate strength to compete with some foreign power.

5. Settlement and incorporation.

The Chinese also often attempted to bring non-Chinese who had submitted under Chinese administration, with a view to converting them to Chinese ways, and to utilizing their military force for frontier defense. The general spread of Chinese influence was seen not only in the establishment of the Chinese administrative system over the non-Chinese in the south and southwest where agriculture was a major way of life, but also in the resettlement of the submitted nomads on Chinese land in the north. This policy was actively adopted all through the Han dynasty but became particularly important in the Later Han after the submission of the Southern Xiongnu. It worked effectively, given the particular circumstances at that time, but later, it led to revolts by the settled nomads against their Chinese rulers. The resulting establishment of non-Chinese regimes inside China brought China into the Period of Disunion, when North China was under the control of the Five "Barbarians."

The ideal pattern of Chinese foreign relations called for the all-embracing rule of the Son of Heaven, to whom other peoples were expected to come and offer tribute. This ideal pattern grew out of the cosmic metaphor by which the early Zhou rulers justified their conquest of Shang, the idea that the ruler of the Chinese people was endowed with a mandate to rule the world (All-under-Heaven) as Heaven's surrogate. Despite fundamental challenges to these ideas during the Warring States period, this ideology became firmly established as a potent myth in all subsequent Confucian political philosophy. With the unification by Qin and the imperial expansion during Han the tribute system was institutionalized and implemented as a regular practice.

Foreign regimes acquiesced in this system in varying degrees according to the political, economic and military benefits that it provided for them. On the Chinese side, other more pragmatic and realistic views,

¹¹⁷ Yü Ying-shih 1967, pp. 11-2.

which recognized that China was not after all the center of the world, or that the Chinese Son of Heaven need not extend his rule over non-Chinese, also developed. Han Confucian scholars severely condemned the foreign aggressions of Qin and early Han. Pragmatism was most obvious and dominant in foreign policy when China was in a weak position, as we see in the policy of appeasement through marriage alliances and payment of large subsidies to the Xiongnu in early Han.

New challenges to traditional political doctrine emerged during the Period of Disunion, when North China came under alien rule. Although the various non-Chinese regimes adopted prevailing Chinese political theories as the basis for their legitimacy and treated the tribute system as the norm in their external relations, the fact that the throne was occupied by a non-Chinese required additional rationalization with additional emphasis placed on the doctrine that the mandate of the Son of Heaven depended on virtue rather than heredity.

Tensions also inevitably arose from conflicts between the need to maintain the loyalty of the nomadic warriors on whom the strength of the regimes depended, and the need to encourage the agricultural economy to provide a source of tax revenue instead of treating it simply as war booty, and to gain the cooperation of the Chinese educated class whose expertise was needed to administer the country. The attitude of non-Chinese regimes in China toward rival nomadic powers who remained outside in the steppe was also different from that of native Chinese regimes. Having come from the steppe, and with a more intimate knowledge of it, the nomad conquerors continued to regard it as their own sphere and to attempt, with varying degrees of success, to assert their hegemony there as well as within China.

After the chaotic political turmoil of the fourth century, the Tuoba Wei regime succeeded in uniting North China under a comparatively stable dyarchy between Xianbei rulers and Chinese bureaucrats that not only united North China but also attempted to draw on its nomadic traditions to exert control on the steppe. When contradictions between the sinicizing Tuoba rulers in Luoyang and their frontier garrisons led to civil war, Yuwen Tai, the founder of Western Wei-Northern Zhou, launched his more radical experiment, which attempted to fuse the leading Chinese and Xianbei families within his territory into a unified aristocracy combining military and civil functions.

The usurpation by Yang Jian, a member of one of these Chinese families, made the succeeding Sui dynasty, which proceeded to reunite North and South China after two and a half centuries of separation, more

acceptable to the Chinese, but both the Sui and Tang ruling houses were also heirs to this Chinese-Xianbei fusion. This mixed background contributed both breadth of outlook and military vigor to Sui and early Tang in their dealings with the outside world.

Buddhism, which was actively promoted by the non-Chinese regimes of the North and also took root in the South, was also an important legacy of the Period of Disunion that eventually worked as a unifying force for China, and contributed an important ingredient to the cosmopolitan, open-minded atmosphere that prevailed in Tang China and strengthened and rendered more subtle Tang's diplomacy.

In the second half of the chapter we discussed the evolution of Chinese foreign relations up to Sui-Tang from an external point of view. The Qin-Han unification created a new situation in which China no longer consisted of rival states looking inward and contending with each other. "Barbarian" internal enclaves had ceased to have much importance. China had come to comprise a unified empire looking outward on non-Chinese neighbors on the periphery, thus beginning the history of China's "foreign affairs."

Inescapable realities of geography meant that in some respects the problems that faced the Sui and Tang rulers were a continuation of those that had faced Qin and Han, but in other respects the situation had greatly evolved and become much more complicated. The most formidable and persistent problems facing Chinese regimes from Qin-Han onward came from the nomadic peoples of the North, beginning with the Xiongnu and ending at the time of the founding of Sui and Tang with the Turks. West of the steppe land were the oasis states of the Western Regions, whose strategic importance to China lay, as in Han times, in their potential role as allies and bases for outflanking the nomadic powers and for controlling the overland trade routes providing access to Western and Southern Asia.

East of the steppe were the Liaodong area in southern Manchuria and the Korean peninsula. Here significant changes had taken place between Han and Sui-Tang. Like the expansion into the Western Regions, the Han expansion in this direction was carried out for the military purpose of outflanking the Xiongnu. Those more southerly parts of the Korean peninsula not conquered by China were inhabited by unorganized tribal peoples. Withdrawal of Chinese colonial occupation from the north at the end of Han was followed, however, by nomadic invasions and the emergence of well-organized territorial states occupying most of the peninsula. By the sixth century the Korean peninsula was divided between

three competing kingdoms, all more or less influenced by Chinese civilization.

Directly to the west of China and south of the main trade routes to the Western Regions, Tibet remained outside the Chinese sphere of influence until the Tang period, while the intermediate lands continued to be occupied by Qiang and Di tribesmen as during Han. The Tuyuhun, a branch of the Xianbei who established themselves in Qinghai in the fourth century and absorbed Qiang and Di elements, were the main power in that region at the beginning of Sui and they acted as an intermediary in bringing Tibet onto the political scene as a rival of China during the following century.

During the Period of Disunion, a succession of native Chinese dynasties continued to rule in the south. The Chinese population in the south swelled with the influx of refugees and this led to economic advance in the Yangtze valley, foreshadowing its replacement of the North China plain as the economic center during Tang. The gradual sinification of the aboriginal peoples of South China, where the land was suitable for Chinese-style agriculture, proceeded as it had in pre-Han and Han times. The non-Chinese peoples did not always submit peacefully but, unlike the situation in the north, no organized non-Chinese state had yet appeared to confront the advancing Chinese before Sui times. The Southern Dynasties also actively encouraged overseas trade and so contributed to the flourishing of seaborne trade during the Tang dynasty.