

26: LATE IMPERIAL CHINA (11/87r, 8/89e; 11/94e, 9/95e, 11/96e)

a. Why was there no stable “Southern Ming” after 1644 resembling the Southern Song after 1126? What relationship may this absence of a Southern Ming have had to China’s crisis of the second stage of its high civilization? In what ways did the Manchu takeover postpone the onset of that crisis? In what ways did it foreshadow twentieth century events?

b. What did the Europeans find admirable about 18th century China? What seems actually to have been happening to China’s state during that century? In what ways were the social and economic orders of 18th century Europe and China moving in parallel? In what ways were they becoming different?

A. Ming’s Fall and the Manchus’ Rise Postpones China’s Crisis of Civilization

1. Why there was no Southern Ming

a. failure of the Ming meritocracy

Back in chapter 10, when I last discussed Chinese politics, I suggested that some signs of the crisis of the second stage of high civilization appeared in the course of the Ming Dynasty. But that evidence for crisis remained ambiguous. At least some of it could also be taken as the normal vicissitudes of a heavily meritocratic state, or on the economic level, as anticipations of what would or might happen once early industrialization had given way to full industrialization. I nevertheless suggested then that sustaining full meritization might bring the crisis to the boil and interfere with full industrialization. The circumstances

of Ming’s fall support this thesis.

The behavior of the Chinese meritocracy during and after Ming’s fall to the Manchus during the third quarter of the 17th century suggests that the native Chinese ruling class was indeed moving into the crisis of civilization. But thanks to the success of the Manchu conquest, further unfolding of that crisis was postponed for a century and a half, until after 1800.

Comparison of Ming’s fall in the 17th century with Northern Song’s fall in the 12th century shows how far into crisis Ming had moved. After the Ruzhen (Jurchen) ethnic “cousins” of the later Manchus conquered north China from Song after 1126, remnants of the Song ruling house and ruling classes managed to slap together a Southern Song Dynasty that was robust enough to stop Ruzhen conquest of the south. Later on, Song staved off the Mongols for nearly half a century, a better record than any other long-term enemy of the Mongols.

By contrast, during the generation after Ming lost north China to the Manchu conquerors, its epigoni proved incapable of putting together a stable Southern Ming Dynasty or even a new Chinese dynasty controlling more than part of southern China.

In chapter 10 I attributed this difference between Song and Ming to differences in the composition of the Ming ruling class, differences also signaling the onset of a crisis of civilization.

Song’s ruling class still contained a mixture of aristocratic and meritocratic components. Its aristocrats retained at least a vestige of their privileged relationship to Heaven. This let them limit the number of factions that could develop within the meritocratic component of the ruling class.

The Ming ruling class was very nearly a pure meritocracy, all too subject to the chief ill of such a ruling class: mutual and destabilizing envy by the meritocrats. Uncontrolled by aristocrats, meritocrats engage in endless issue-free factionalism.

Because offices are scarce, a meritocrat normally envies some other meritocrat who is in office when he is out, and wants to get in by throwing that other fellow out. Once the first meritocrat gets

his way, the other fellow falls prey to the same envy, and tries to get back into power by excluding the first meritocrat.

Aristocrats are jealous of non-aristocrats who might challenge their Heaven-granted prerogatives. Because they are the descendants of the gods—even if only metaphorically—aristocrats need not be at the mercy of some ephemeral template of merit. They have divine sanction both to secure their own positions and to define the template of merit for others. This lets them decide which meritocrats get the limited number of meritocratic jobs available. Control by aristocrats of the template of merit limits the scope for meritocrats to form factions. These limits on factionalism also provide greater security for those meritocrats who have already managed to obtain government jobs.

b. the Manchu ethnic conquest aristocracy & its 20th century analog

Because the Manchus constituted an ethnic conquest aristocracy they could tame the Ming meritocrats. An aristocracy comprising people the Chinese deemed “barbarians” was not the most satisfactory kind of aristocracy for Chinese meritocrats, but they preferred it to the chaos of runaway factionalism.

Conquest by Manchus was preferable to conquest by Mongols. As denizens of the well-watered and densely treed subzone A3, the Manchus were more sedentary than pastoral-nomad. After conquering the heavily Chinese-settled border region of the Liaodong Peninsula between A3 and B2, they assimilated Neo-Confucian political values from Chinese living there.

As a consequence, though theirs was not an aristocracy for the ages, it (like that of their Ruzhen ancestors) would take a century or two before it lost its aristocratic aura. In the meantime, it could at least serve to tame the chaotic pure meritocracy of Ming.

The Ming meritocrats who fled south proved quite willing to abandon the several potential Ming governments in the south in order to go over to a government run by Manchus, so long as these foreigners respected the cultural principles of the current Neo-Confucian template of merit and offered them jobs in

the government. Indeed, those meritocrats who came over to the Manchus soonest, would get to fill the limited number of ruling class slots reserved for men of merit.

This 17th century development is interesting, not only in its own right but because it anticipated the shape of the party-state that was destined to take over both China and other nations during the 20th century.

In the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic, the role of the Manchu conquest ethnic aristocracy was played by a Communist Party hereditary *nomenklatura* aristocracy. The role of the Manchu banner garrisons was played by the Red Army of Russia and the People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China. The role of the native Chinese meritocrats docilely working for this conquest aristocracy and its army was played by the non-Party and lower-ranking Party intellectuals who staffed the bureaus and management ranks of the state factories of the Soviet Union, its satellites and the same entities in the People's Republic. The role of the Neo-Confucian vision of Heaven was played by the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist vision of Earth standing in for Heaven.

The historian can detect the same tension in both periods between the aristocrat who knows he alone has the right to act but may not know what to do and the meritocrat who is certain that only he knows what is to be done but is never certain he has the right to act.

c. China's lost plutocratic alternative

If we look at the history of Taiwan, we find another anticipation of what was to happen in the 20th century. Koxinga (Zheng Chenggong), the son of the richest Chinese overseas merchant of the first part of the 17th century, Zheng Zhilong, became a partisan of one of the potential Southern Mings, and was rewarded with the right to honorific use of the imperial clan's surname. (His title was Guoxingye 國姓爺—lord of the imperial surname—which his Dutch enemies transliterated as Koxinga.) The Zhengs had achieved formal recognition by the disintegrating Ming state as plutocrats.

Zheng used his mercantile fleet, the largest in East Asian waters, to conquer Taiwan in 1661. He envisioned Taiwan as only a temporary refuge for the Ming court and its southern partisans. He hoped to use it as a base for reconquering the mainland and perhaps, while he built up his strength, for establishing an Overseas Chinese empire, beginning with the conquest of Manila from the Spanish.

Much to the relief of the Manchus, Zheng failed. Like Chiang Kai-shek after 1949, Zheng could not use Taiwan as a base from which to return in triumph to the mainland. Nor could he unite Overseas China. Both goals were aborted by his premature death early in 1662. Though they still had a tame Ming prince to serve as the front man for their regime, the men of merit who had taken refuge with Zheng on Taiwan did not want to work for plutocrats, even if they were Zheng's descendants.

The Manchus cleverly exploited this antipathy between meritocrat and plutocrat. They used it to help bring Taiwan over to their side after they had knocked off their other, equally faction-ridden native Chinese rivals on the mainland.

Early in the 1680s, a generation after his death, the men of merit who had accompanied Zheng to Taiwan preferred to make a deal with the Manchus and to give up participation in an independent, partially plutocratic government on Taiwan.

The remnant of the Nationalist government took refuge on Taiwan from the Communists at the end of the 1940s, just three centuries after Zheng fled there from the Manchus. One wonders whether the fate of Zheng's movement foreshadows what will happen sooner or later to a similarly mixed 20th century meritocrat-plutocrat ruling class on Taiwan.

d. the failure of meritocratic loyalism

After Ming's defeat, a minority of the Ming meritocrats defiantly refused to turn their coats and join the Manchus. (In this case it would not have been a matter of turning their coats, but of letting down their hair from topknots and then braiding the hair into a "queue," in imitation of the standard Manchu hair

style.)

For a generation, at least, these Ming Loyalists kept to the old hair style and dress, refused offers of official positions, even to write the official dynastic history of Ming, and led the lives of genteel, clean hermits. Some of them became travelers, exploring the unknown valleys of southern subzone B3 and climbing its mountains. Eventually, though, their sons and disciples rejoined the ruling class of the Manchus' new Qing Dynasty.

A handful of these Ming Loyalists were genuine zealot meritocrats, determined to reexamine both Heaven and Earth to find out what had gone wrong.

Wang Fuzhi, for example, was both Ming Loyalist and one of the last of the great Ming intellectuals. He reacted against what he took to be the overemphasis on *li* (理, inner principle, the way of referring to Heaven by the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians) by the partisans of the 16th century philosopher Wang Yangming, and urged his fellow meritocrats to move back toward the *qi* (氣, the material of the cosmos, Earth) side of the philosophical spectrum.

In retrospect, Wang Fuzhi is now generally recognized as not so much a restorer of an earlier aspect of the Confucian tradition than as one of the founders of what amounted to a post-Confucian, secular materialist philosophy in China.

This would make him roughly comparable to his English contemporary, Thomas Hobbes. Wang, however, was the more versatile of the two. He was not just a political philosopher, but also an anthropologist and a historian.

Because he thought of himself as being primarily a Ming Loyalist, he spent much of the middle part of his long adult life with one of the rumps of the Ming state fleeing far into the southwest.

There he studied the local tribal peoples of southern subzone B3. The professional historian in him guided the amateur anthropologist. He noticed that these peoples' lives resembled the way the old histories described Chinese life as being like in the days of the Sage Kings of remote antiquity. Shennong and Fuxi must, he surmised, have ruled over simple societies like those of the

Yao and Miao peoples of the southwest.

Wang regretted that the Chinese were sitting upon the heads of these surviving primitives, trying to turn them into Chinese. The Chinese, he concluded, were just as sinful for once having tried to conquer and deracinate the Manchus. Now the Manchus had become civilized enough to conquer the Chinese and inflict their accursed northern customs on them.

Each ethnic group, he declared, ought to create its own state and should leave other ethnic groups free to do the same. The fact that this conclusion probably does not strike you as unusual should alert you to just how fully modern and un-Confucian (really post-Confucian) it was. Wang Fuzhi was inventing, on Chinese grounds and wholly independently of the Europeans, the most characteristic aspect of full modernity—ethnic nationalism.

This invention made Wang a very interesting figure for 20th century Chinese nationalists, including Wang's fellow Hunanese, Mao Zedong, who revered Wang as one of his intellectual forebears.

And yet Wang's ideas could not have done much good for a Southern Ming Dynasty. They would not have provided the basis for even a miniature Confucian universal state ruling over non-ethnic Chinese within its territory.

By philosophically justifying a modern ethnic Chinese nation-state, Wang defined the Confucian universal state out of existence some 250 years before it became practical to actually abolish it and replace it with a fully modern Chinese nation-state. So his career is both testimony to the existence of the crisis of civilization at the political level and provides clues for how China eventually tried to transcend it.

2. The rise of the Manchus

Nuerhaci (1559-1626) was the father of the Manchu state, and founder of the Manchu imperial clan. The Manchus were descendants of the Ruzhen (Jurchen) who had founded the Jin Dynasty in Manchuria and northern China during the 12th century. The Manchu remnant of the Ruzhen, however, had

never amounted to much before Nuerhaci's time.

Nuerhaci began as merely a local chieftain who lived in northeastern Manchuria, far to the north of the A3-B2 boundary zone, the eastern end of what Owen Lattimore has called the "Inner Asian Frontier." This was where the peoples of Zones A and B normally interacted. This Inner Asian Frontier's location and width varied as the climate changed and as centers of power in the nearby parts of Zones A and B waxed and waned.

Even after the Ming founders drove the Mongols out of Zone B during the late 14th century, the Chinese had trouble ruling directly over territory that lay beyond the middle reaches of the Inner Asian Frontier Zone. These lands lay out at the very end of their tether of communications technology.

Back home in metropolitan China, and in southernmost subzone A3, the Ming employed the sort of dual military-civilian hierarchical government which led down from center to provinces to localities that went back to the Qin inventors of bureaucracy 17 centuries before.

Out at that portion of the Inner Asian frontier comprising south-central Manchuria, the Ming used the much simpler *weisuo* system. *Wei* and *suo* were the names of military units. Out on the frontier, the Ming government had *wei* units perform provincial civilian duties and *suo* units perform local government civilian functions because it was too expensive to maintain a dual civilian-military administration that far away from the center.

Still further out, well beyond the Inner Asian frontier, in that outer frontier zone where the Manchus lived, the Ming could not even afford *weisuo* garrisons. They used only the titles of the *weisuo* system, which they gave to the local chieftains. Ming hoped competition for such titles would tend to isolate the chieftains from each other.

For several centuries, award of such titles did indeed focus the loyalties of individual chieftains on the capital of China and on the person of the Chinese Emperor, to whom they owed these titles, rather than on one of their own number.



Nuerhaci. (Immanuel Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th ed., after p. 122.)

Nuerhaci had the genius to notice that if he could take advantage of Chinese inattention to put together a series of local alliances in his home area, he could switch the focus of the chieftains' loyalties to himself as paramount chief by issuing *weisuo* titles. Later he came up with new titles for these ranks to create what came to be known as the "banner system."

He assigned eight differently colored "banners" to the armies of his frontier barbarian aristocracy. Each of these units drew men from all of the different localities over which he ruled.

His sphere eventually also included some Mongols and Turks from subzone A2. Because their membership transcended local boundaries, the banner units focused the chieftains' loyalty on Nuerhaci himself. Nuerhaci had replaced the Ming emperor as the focus for the loyalties of these border peoples.

Then, near the end of his life, in the teens and early twenties of the 17th century, Nuerhaci sent the banner armies south to begin to conquer the Inner Asian frontier zone's southern Manchurian quadrant extending into the Liaodong Peninsula.

Nuerhaci's son and successor, Abahai, r.1626-1643, completed this conquest of the southern border zone. He also learned the knack of how to use ethnic conquest aristocrat Manchus to run not just the banner garrison armies

but a complicated Chinese-style bureaucracy. This was necessary so as to rule efficiently over the Liaodong territory. Liaodong was far enough south to require use of the full double tripartite bureaucratic structure.

That meant it was full of Chinese civilian meritocrats ruling over many ethnic Chinese settlers when the Manchus conquered it. The price Abahai had to pay to rule this Chinese frontier province was to culturally sinify his Manchu aristocrats just enough so that they could win the respect of the ethnic Chinese men of merit, but not so much that they lost the distinctive Manchu ethnic traits which set them off as aristocrats defined in ethnic terms.

Only then did these border zone Chinese meritocrats become willing to yield aristocratic powers to the Manchus. They willingly took exams controlled by the Manchus to qualify for office. They were even willing to settle for rising to no higher than vice-ministerial rank under Manchu aristocrats at the head of every ministry. Executive and conformist Chinese meritocrats grudgingly changed their hairstyles and happily eschewed the right to marry the Manchu aristocrats' sisters.

These new arrangements worked out in southern Manchuria prepared the Manchus to rule China proper as well. Within a generation, they were given the opportunity to do so. In 1644, the year after Abahai's death, a Ming military meritocrat invited the Manchus across the border into subzone B2 to help him drive a commoner rebel out of Beijing.

The Manchus never looked back. Another son of Nuerhaci, Prince Dorgon, became regent for his nephew, the child Shunzhi Emperor (r. 1644-1662) of the Manchus' newly proclaimed Qing Dynasty. Dorgon began to apply the system that had been perfected in southern Manchuria to north China as the Manchus occupied that territory.

The south, however, remained in Chinese hands for nearly two decades after the Shunzhi Emperor's death in 1662.

3. The Manchus' consolidation of power

The Kangxi Emperor (r.1663-1723) eventually conquered the south and applied this system of dual Manchu-Chinese/aristocrat-meritocrat rule to southern China as well.

Jonathan Spence's "autobiography" of Kangxi, *Emperor of China*, is one of the great biographies written in the 20th century. Spence translated and artfully edited the Emperor's own diaries and edicts, and turned these primary sources into what amounts to an "as told to" autobiography. This is the only one we have for any of the Chinese emperors (except the last). Perhaps that is why Kangxi is so impressive. If we had similarly detailed primary sources for First Emperor of Qin, or for the founders of Han or Tang, we might be equally impressed.

Even so, a good case could be made for the Kangxi Emperor as the quintessential early modern chief executive within the Chinese imperial tradition. As warrior he was decisive, as administrator, he intuitively knew when to be magnanimous and when to be ruthless.

On the intellectual side, he became sinified enough to command the empathy of his Chinese subjects, and set a good example of balanced sinification for the other Manchu aristocrats. Though he never lost his Manchu accent, Kangxi became one of the best cultural athletes of his generation, capable of operating in both Chinese and Manchu cultural terms with almost equal facility.

He was also a brave warrior. While still in his teens, he goaded into rebellion (fortunately in succession rather than all at once) the rulers of the several native Chinese would-be successor states to the Ming in the south.

These men had tried to set up their own states rather than to rally around a single Southern Ming. This rendered them less legitimate than they might otherwise have been, and easier to defeat.

Only after picking these fellows off one at a time did he turn to the successors of Zheng Chenggong on Taiwan. He not only offered them participation

in the government of the mature, early modern Chinese-style universal state he was perfecting on the mainland, he also recognized their titles to the lands they had engrossed from the tribesmen on Taiwan. This constituted an un-turn-downable offer, which they did not turn down.



The Kangxi Emperor at age twenty. (Spence, *Emperor of China*.)

Taiwan, now slowly filling with Chinese settlers, mostly from Fukien Province on the nearby mainland shore, became a part of that province, and lapsed from independent state with promising connections with the rest of Overseas China into being a mere frontier backwater of the old continental empire.

Once he had conquered the south, the Kangxi Emperor tamed the last of the Ming pretenders by giving him a Manchu aristocratic title. He then invited the best of the Ming Loyalists, the men of Wang Fuzhi's generation and their sons and disciples, to come over to his side. His first ploy was to offer these intellectuals the opportunity to perform

the pious act of writing the official history of the now fully defunct Ming Dynasty.

Some of the men of Wang's generation took him up on this offer. Wang and the more zealous of the surviving Ming Loyalists did not. However, almost all of their disciples took up the Emperor's offer. They had not been metaphorically "married" to the Ming because they were too young to have served in its administration. So they were free to contract a legitimate bureaucratic "marriage" to the Manchus' Qing Dynasty.

The marriage metaphor for bureaucratic service was common by then. Since late Song times, a truly virtuous widow would not remarry. By analogy, the most principled Ming Loyalists felt they might properly stop fighting the Manchus, but should not join their administration. The executive, conformist and corrupt meritocrats had, however, long since gone over to the Manchus in large numbers.

B. China Becomes A Model For Europe

1. A "humane and enlightened despotism"

a. the Chinese Rites controversy

Europeans found the Kangxi Emperor and indeed all of the late 17th and 18th century culture of China highly admirable and believed it constituted a kind of model for Europe. Some of the Jesuit missionaries to the Ming court had stayed on in Beijing after the Ming fell. Their successors sent glowing reports home about the Kangxi Emperor's reign. By the latter part of the 17th century, such reports were going to France. France had become the successor to the much weakened Spanish as sponsor of the Jesuit mission to China.

One such report described China under the Kangxi Emperor as "a humane and enlightened despotism." These words caught on at the French court of Louis XIV. This was the first time that the words "enlightened" and "despotism" had been used together in this way in all of European political

history. The administration of Kangxi's French contemporary, Louis XIV, could only hope to match the enlightened despotism of Kangxi. Louis XIV, and his two successors, sometimes imitated such Chinese ceremonials as plowing the first furrow in spring, about which they read in the Jesuit reports.

The Jesuits had both good and not so good reasons for doing this public relations job for the Chinese court. One good reason was that the Kangxi Emperor was unquestionably the greatest monarch of his time, perhaps even the greatest monarch to have supervised a complex bureaucracy of all time.

The Jesuits were also, however, engaged in some very complicated religious politics. They were using their normal method for conversion of foreigners. This was to start at the top (in China, with the Emperor), and work their way down to the coolies (pidgin for the workers who unloaded ships). Their rivals, the Dominicans and Franciscans, applied to the Chinese their usual conversion method. They started with the coolies and hoped to work their way up to the Emperor.

If the Jesuits were to start at the top in China, they could not treat Confucianism merely as some pagan cult to be suppressed. Neither they nor anyone else was going to stop a Confucian universal state from practicing Confucianism.

So the Jesuits had to take a leaf out of the book of the early Christian Church Fathers. The Fathers had to accept the Greek thinkers whom the Roman rulers so respected, if they were to convert Rome. So they assured the Roman rulers that they need not give up Plato or Aristotle. The Greek philosophers, they argued, were as wise as one could be with the religious insights that are accessible to man's reason and his senses. All we Christians do, the Church Fathers claimed, is to add revelation to what reason has already provided. Gentiles could respect the Greeks and still become Christians.

The Jesuits wanted to do the same thing with Confucianism. They argued that what the Chinese actually did when they "reverenced" their ancestors was to engage in a purely civil, secular ceremony. The Jesuits even wanted to in-

corporate these "Chinese Rites" of ancestor reverence into the Mass, just as they were doing then in parts of Eastern Europe with Christian rituals originally evolved independently from those of Rome.

However, through their closer links to everyday Chinese practices, the Dominicans knew that the Jesuits, as usual, were being too clever by half. The Chinese were in literal fact worshipping their ancestors. Confucianism, the Dominicans could truthfully assert, was a religion, and a damnable pagan religion at that, and so a stop ought to be put to practice of it by Christians. Meritocratic intellectual fashion since the late 17th century had emphasized Confucianism's secular aspects, but the Dominicans knew better.

The Dominicans' motives were not entirely pure. They envied the Jesuits for usurping their role as the Church's intellectuals. (St. Thomas Aquinas had been a Dominican.) Eventually, they put their argument directly to the Pope.

This tripped off an enormous controversy during the 18th century, which ended with the Pope banning the "Chinese Rites" late in the Kangxi reign. In 1773, another Pope temporarily (until 1814) abolished the Jesuit Order.

b. role of the *philosophes*

The French *philosophes*—who were not philosophers, but secular public intellectuals—eavesdropped on every round of the quarrel between the Jesuits and their rivals. Voltaire and the other newly secularized intellectuals of France and the French-influenced courts of Germany and Austria, were the first large cohort in European history of non-priestly private and public meritocrats. These secular men of merit cackled gleefully all during the Chinese Rites scandal. They loved to point out that the Jesuits had proved more than they had intended. They had shown that China was getting by very nicely *without* a revealed religion. A natural religion and rationality were apparently enough to make them the best governed and most civilized people on earth. This was just what the *philosophes* had already been saying Europe could do too.

Hence it would be safe to do what

Voltaire had recommended in his *Philosophic Dictionary* as the recipe for good government—strangle the last Christian king with the entrails of the last Catholic priest. Not to worry, Voltaire assured his many readers. Europeans too could have post-Christian but nevertheless humane and enlightened despots modeled on the Kangxi Emperor. These perfect monarchs would be advised by fellows like Voltaire himself, France's equivalents of the wise and enlightened men of merit who advised the Kangxi Emperor in China.

Such ideas have proved very influential in the West ever since. China's example provided gave confidence to the men of the Enlightenment as they moved from "Enlightenment" to "Revolution" during the last decade of the 18th century. The search for the humane and enlightened despot continued to animate all subsequent modern revolutions well into the 20th century.

This phrase, "From Enlightenment to Revolution," is also the title of one of Eric Voegelin's key books. Voegelin argues that this confidence in the possibility of combining humaneness, enlightenment and despotism constituted the basis for meritocrats concocting during the 19th and 20th centuries ever more deformed ideas about Earth to replace the supposedly obsolete ideas about Heaven.

Eventually, the nightmare of 20th century European history that resulted from application of these deformed ideas about Earth suggested to philosophers of history like Voegelin that the Enlightenment's one big idea was not really new. It merely restated the heresy of ancient Gnosticism (which believed men could know everything), and deepened the crisis of the second stage of high civilization just as ancient Gnosticism had done to the crisis of the first stage. Voegelin suggested that the Jesuit and *philosophe* volunteer p.r. men for China, and the 20th century secular intelligentsia that has evolved from them, have much to answer for.

As students of Chinese history, we must first ask: How true was this 18th century picture of China? Was China truly a model for Europe?

2. The Kangxi reign

The Kangxi Emperor came closest to fitting the picture created by this Jesuit-*philosophe* p.r. job. Historically it was correct for Voltaire to have given Kangxi top billing, even in his *History of the Age of Louis XIV*. In some chapters of this work Voltaire devotes more space to the Kangxi Emperor than he does to Louis XIV. His conclusion is always that the Kangxi Emperor is the original and Louis XIV the imperfect copy. This is partly Voltaire playing the wise guy, setting Europe up for being run by European versions of Chinese meritocrats. Still, Voltaire's historical judgments are mostly correct in these comparisons.



The Kangxi Emperor at age forty-five. (Spence, *Emperor of China*.)

Voltaire even sensed that the Chinese Emperor was a newcomer to high culture, much as were most of Voltaire's fellow *philosophes*, who had just climbed out of the bourgeoisie. He notes how real a cultural athlete the Emperor was in working up Chinese culture, and how genuinely enthusiastic was his sponsorship of important cultural products, like the dictionary that bears his name.

Just as important, Voltaire accurately concluded, though he missed some of the details, that the Kangxi Emperor was a prudent statesman. Spence's account explains why. Unlike Louis XIV, Kangxi never tried to do two important things at once. He would take up one

important thing, finish it, and only then move on to the next big project. Modern management manuals give the same advice to the prospective CEO of a major corporation.

Kangxi did not try to conquer Taiwan until he had conquered the three disloyal feudatories of the south and removed the vestiges of Southern Ming regimes they embodied. Only then was he in a position to make the Taiwan meritocrats an offer that they could not turn down, and remove the last potential Southern Ming.

This freed him to move into Central Asia, where he was also careful never to overreach himself. He reduced the last of the independent Mongol states to tributary status, but otherwise left them alone so that they would not interfere with his pacification of the Turks to their west and south in what is now Xinjiang (Sinkiang) Province. He took over a few local states there, but only to keep the others in line as obedient tributaries.

He was also content with a voluntary tributary relationship with Tibet. The Kangxi Emperor needed substantial influence over Tibet because Tibetan Lamaist Buddhism had since the 16th century also become the national faith of Mongolia. Limited control over Tibet as a tributary enabled China to exert leverage over Mongolia as well.

In the 1980s and '90s, Deng Xiaoping and his successors probably wish they could go back to so less troublesome an arrangement for Tibet and Mongolia. So long as Tibet behaved itself and did not threaten Chinese interests, the Qing Dynasty Chinese avoided usurping any real responsibility for its internal governance. Nor did they interfere much with Mongolia's internal arrangements.

One of the key sources of instability in the Chinese imperial system was the succession to the throne. Though Kangxi ultimately managed to finesse the issue, he made a mistake at first. He followed the old, meritocratic procedure of naming a crown prince while he himself was still alive. This crown prince turned out to be a psychotic wastrel, and all of the factions of the Ming Dynasty spontaneously arose again at the Manchu court to compete for the crown

prince's somewhat whimsical favor. Eventually Kangxi had to eliminate the crown prince, which broke his heart.

The Manchus' traditional procedure was for the Emperor to yield the choice of his successor to a committee of upper aristocrats. This cabal would make a post-mortem choice of some very young prince to become the next emperor.

That, however, would have undermined the power of the new emperor. The complex Chinese state could not afford the delays post-mortem succession might involve, or the opportunities for renewed meritocratic factionalism and intrigues within the aristocracy a regency offered. The state needed a strong executive on the throne at all times to control so elaborate and faction-prone a government.

The Kangxi Emperor supposedly came up with an institutional novelty, which was colloquially called the "pillow edict." His successor, the Yongzheng Emperor, told the court that his father had secretly written out an edict of succession, but did not tell anyone what it said. He had merely assured his son that it would be available on his deathbed. He told the to-be Yongzheng Emperor, he should reach inside the dead emperor's pillow (in China a hollow ceramic box) and pull it out. Some historians believe the Yongzheng Emperor made up this story, but the method was used honestly thereafter.



The Kangxi Emperor at age sixty. (Spence, *Emperor of China*.)

Thereafter, announcement of a pillow edict's existence immediately ended all factional quarrels connected with a

succession. From that moment on, all the potential troublemakers within the imperial clan and their lesser Manchu aristocratic and Chinese meritocratic backers behaved themselves. They hoped they or their champion had been picked, and feared the Emperor might change the Pillow Edict if they formed a faction around their favorite.

The first successor to be chosen by this method, the Yongzheng Emperor, turned out to be a pretty decent ruler, and assumed the throne peacefully.

As Jonathan Spence describes him, the Kangxi Emperor represents the final perfection of the Confucian strong executive monarch. So far, at least, Voltaire's historical judgment can be confirmed. What Voltaire, who wrote during the reigns of Kangxi's and Louis XIV's several successors, did not notice was that there was never again thereafter to be another Qing ruler as good as the Kangxi Emperor.

3. First signs of later trouble

a. Yongzheng

The Yongzheng Emperor (r.1723-1736) soberly continued the Kangxi Emperor's policies, but he and his generation seem deficient in imagination. Some important philosophers and brilliant intellectuals remained active during his time, but these men had grown up under the Kangxi Emperor. No new important philosophers came to maturity during or for some time after the Yongzheng reign.

Another small sign of the bad times to come were the first reports of opium abuse amongst the elite. Opium had been known as a medicine for ulcers ever since the 7th century, but now, apparently, people in China were beginning to smoke the stuff, or at least the first reports surfaced of them doing so. The inventors of paper, printing, blast furnaces, gunpowder and canal locks had finally come up with a truly nasty invention: mainlining dope.

b. Qianlong

The Yongzheng Emperor's son, the Qianlong Emperor, reigned from 1736 to 1796. Though he nominally retired to avoid seeming unfilial by reigning

longer than his grandfather, he held onto power for three more years as retired emperor, making life miserable for his successor, the Jiaqing Emperor (r. 1796-1821).

Many historians, including Chinese writers who lived near his time, believe the Qianlong Emperor was in most key respects a vulgar imitation of his grandfather. Perhaps because the Manchus' cultural assimilation was nearly complete by then, he did not have to work as hard at being Chinese, and so his personal cultural attainments were lower. He did not really move as well in either culture as his grandfather had. Among other esthetic sins, Qianlong put his big, vulgar seals on all the paintings held by the court, spoiling the symmetry of many of them.

As a patron of intellectual life, he sponsored not a great dictionary, but a literary inquisition. He used the occasion of putting together a big collection of copied manuscripts as an excuse to check if there were any subversive books in the libraries of the great meritocratic families. If his collector/inquisitors found such a book, punishment of its owner might even be execution or exile to the frontiers.

Qianlong also corresponded with and flattered his contemporary, Voltaire. By contrast, the Kangxi Emperor had retained a dignified distance from his Jesuit p.r. men. When the Pope finally banned the Jesuits, Qianlong let them take refuge in Peking and continued to use them as calendar calculators, painters and architects. The only other places a Jesuit could still function as a Jesuit during the last quarter of the 18th century were St. Petersburg, the still rather barbarous Russian capital, and the raw frontier city, Baltimore, Maryland. Qianlong was not exactly traveling in very fancy company.

If he was just a middle-brow Chinese intellectual, he was not much better as a Manchu warrior chieftain.

The Qianlong Emperor had an excessively interventionist Central Asian policy. He conquered all of Chinese Turkestan, comprising what is now Sinkiang province, and thereby overextended China's frontiers and rendered China vulnerable to an expanding Russian empire during the next century.

c. Jiaqing

His successor, the Jiaqing Emperor (r. 1796-1820), was just as competent as the Yongzheng Emperor, but got the blame for all of Qianlong's bad policy chickens which began to come home to roost during the first quarter of the 19th century.

Some observers noticed deterioration even in Qianlong's time. Though the *philosophes* were mostly apologists for interventionism by their own kind—the first large crop of private and public meritocrats in Western European history—their number included a few thinkers who we might characterize as the first philosophers of the market and of history. Some of these noticed the limitations of the Chinese state and its ruling class.

Montesquieu, who unfavorably contrasted Chinese “despotism” with the “mixed” constitution of England), was the only Frenchman among this group of skeptics. Most of them were British, or more precisely, Scotsmen. David Hume, for example, preferred to celebrate the unique virtues that England's history had granted it, and which put it above all other countries, China presumably included.

Adam Smith read the Jesuit reports by way of the writings of the French physiocrat economists. He admired Mencius's emphasis on human nature's inherent good aspects, and welcomed the vast potential of China's market. He warned, however, that this potential might be blocked by China's unwillingness to engage in the free trade that his *Wealth of Nations* argued was the only basis for prosperity. Smith feared (all too accurately as it turned out) that Chinese “mercantilism” (the label then used for interventionism) might prove to be even more obdurate than the European version.

Edmund Burke, an Englishman from Ireland, was deeply suspicious of the French incarnation of Chinese-style “enlightenment.” When the French intellectuals tried to move even closer to their Chinese model by fomenting revolution in 1789, Burke promptly denounced that revolution. He accurately blamed its outbreak on the attempt of the *philosophes* to escape from France's and West-

ern Christendom's history into a mad dream of pseudo-rationality, a dream which we know was partly inspired by China, and which was destined to end in the 20th century's totalitarian nightmare.

Burke predicted the rise of enlightened despotism's true European successor—Bonaparte—who only appeared after Burke's death. We can extend that line of descent back to the Chinese institution of the strong executive emperor and forward from Bonaparte to Hitler, Lenin, Stalin and to Mao.

When Lord Macartney, the English diplomat, came to Beijing in 1793 to talk China into establishing normal diplomatic relations with England, he was already getting over what even the French would soon be calling the *rêve chinois* (Chinese dream) of humane and enlightened despotism. Europe was in the fourth year of the French Revolution, so Englishmen, at least, had seen what sort of revolution the Enlightenment had led to.

Macartney looked at China with a cold, judicious eye. He saw in China what he metaphorically but accurately described as a magnificent old ruin of a man 'o war, whose upkeep its owners had neglected during the past century, and which was about to be blown onto the rocks because of the neglect of its current officers. Macartney accurately predicted what was going to happen to China during the 19th century.

C. Parallels and Differences Between 18th Century China and Europe

1. Parallels

In many ways, however—social and economic and even intellectual—Europe and China remained similar and were still moving in parallel.

They were both, after all, at comparable stages of civilization. Both were maturing second stage high civilizations. China's ruling class had long since become predominantly meritocratic. Europe was finally maturing the meritocratic sector of its ruling class. This drew French attention to the details

of Chinese bureaucratic government for the first time between c. 1670 and 1780. Because they were beginning to develop the same sort of thing independently, European intellectuals thought they could use China as a model for Europe.

To be sure, at least the English part of Europe was finally pulling ahead of China economically, jumping from the early into the full industrial revolution. England's 17th century political revolution had pushed it into full modernity. Still, China was also continuing to advance. It was showing some signs, despite its hobbling by interventionist state policies, of advancing beyond the limits of an early industrial revolution. Admittedly, the Chinese were also going backward in certain economical respects.

By late Ming (though not for over a century before then) a dozen ports were legally open to foreign trade. However, the Kangxi Emperor restricted trade to three ports to isolate the Ming Loyalists in the south and on Taiwan. In 1757, Qianlong winnowed them down to only one, Canton. A shared licensed monopoly comprising thirteen import-export firms—the so-called Co-hong as it is called in English—preferred only one open port. That let it more easily enforce its official right to have all things exported or imported legally from or to China pass through its members' hands. You can imagine the corruption and the inefficiency that this privilege caused.

This partial closure of China was occurring at a time when England, France, Belgium and Holland were opening more of their ports to more foreign trade. It is true that their own growing mercantilist restrictions on other nations superficially resembled the Chinese restrictions. The privileges owned by the British East India Company and the comparable monopoly corporations licensed by the other European states were no less restrictive than those enjoyed by the Co-hong.

Nevertheless, even these monopoly companies were more creatures of the market than the state rather than the reverse, as was true of the Co-hong. Englishmen seeking ways around the British East India Company's monopoly became the leading figures in the Scandinavian countries' licensed monopoly

companies. The greatest of the Western trading nations one way or another were trading ever more with the rest of the world, including China. Their citizens were going out into the world to compete with their would-be monopoly rivals legally and illegally. This was more than the Chinese could risk doing. The British East India Company sent ships to China, but the Co-hong never sent its own ships to England.

China participated in this growing trade, but the initiative came from outside itself. So while Europe was consciously opening itself to the world, China was closing itself in, not because of the limits of its market sector, but because of the limitations placed on that market sector by the Chinese state.

Once these state-imposed limitations broke down in the 19th century, Shanghai would become one of the great world ports. During the 18th century, it was still a sleepy little provincial town of well under a hundred thousand people.

But not all the evidence is so gloomy. China's domestic trade flourished during the 18th century, and China was so big that what was domestic trade for it would have been foreign trade in Europe.

Hankow, thanks to the nearby convergence of the Han, Yangzi and Xiang Rivers was the Chicago of China, located at the crossroads at the heart of the country. It had spontaneously appeared as a commercial city only recently, during Ming times, and was growing rapidly all during the 18th century to become the big southern-central regional hub of the rice trade.

This internal rice trade along the rivers and the Grand Canal was far more massive than anything in contemporary Europe. Eighteenth century France still endured periodic famines for lack of such a domestic bulk trade involving important but low value commodities like grain. England was only beginning to get a comparably dense network of canals.

Likewise, early 18th century Europe still lacked anything comparable to China's vast, internationally marketed industry of porcelain manufacture. This was centered in Jingdezhen, in Chekiang (Zhejiang) Province just below the

mouth of the Yangzi River in the southern part of subzone C1.

The products of the great kilns of Jingdezhen could be found during Song through mid-Qing times from East Africa to Northern Europe to Colonial Williamsburg. An early 18th century observer described the kilns in terms comparable to Wordsworth's references to the "dark and satanic" mills in the factory towns of late 18th century England.

2. Seeming divergences

China's cotton trade was still decentralized, just as it had been during the Ming Dynasty. It still used the elaborate hubs and spokes of the early modern transportation route networks that linked the greatest cities to the lowest level village markets. Every housewife was within a two-hour walk of a village market that was linked up to all the other markets in China. During the 17th and 18th centuries, this hub and spoke network added hubs at lower levels in many more areas.

As a consequence, more housewives in more places could come into or go out of the cotton processing business depending upon the relative prices of her inputs and outputs. If the price of her raw materials went up, and/or the price she could get for her output went down, she could and would withdraw from that market, and do other things, such as spending more time helping her husband in the fields. If her raw materials declined in price, and/or the price she could get for her output went up, her husband would send her to market more often to engage in adding value to cotton products.

As a consequence, China seemingly fell into what Mark Elvin, the British economic historian, has called a "high level equilibrium trap." The Chinese cotton industry at least *looked* as though it could keep expanding indefinitely without ever going over to a centralized factory system of the sort that was coming into existence in the West after the 1750s.

The West could not use the Chinese system because it did not have a Chinese-style hub and spoke transportation

network. It would not get even the beginnings of one in most places until well into the full industrial revolution's second and third generations.

Elvin, mistakenly I think, gives the credit for transcending that supposedly more backward Chinese hub and spoke based system solely to the stimulus coming from the West during the late 19th century.

The Chinese cotton production system might have changed mainly for internal reasons without any Western stimulus. The appearance during the latter half of the 19th century of a bottleneck in the domestic production system in the form of a transient labor shortage caused by warfare in the lower Yangzi ultimately turned what economists call a "constant costs" situation into an "increasing costs" situation. The resulting increase in labor costs would have required either inventing or borrowing the new technology of centralized factories to economize on labor and break through into a "declining costs" situation.

In the next chapter I will narrate the story of how borrowed Western techniques turned "increasing costs" into "declining costs." But in principle the Chinese might have gotten around these bottlenecks by inventing or reinventing similar mechanical devices devised but not used to mechanize cotton processing during Song and Yuan times.

In any event, the divergence from the European economic and technological pattern lasted little more than 125 years, hardly long enough to be worth quibbling over in a course that covers more than eight hundred centuries in ten weeks.

3. Some cultural-economic differences

At the level of the economics of culture, Europe and China were also doing similar tasks of cultural consolidation during the 18th century, but did them with different institutions.

Consider the case of Sam Johnson and his famous dictionary. In the 1740s and '50s, the journalist and literary lion Samuel Johnson got a contract and an advance from half a dozen London

booksellers, hired a few clerks, and in less than a decade created the first widely used comprehensive dictionary organized along modern etymological lines. He illustrated the definitions of words by showing through apt quotations how the great modern and premodern writers actually used them.

His dictionary served as the model for the multi-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* during this century. That too was produced for the market. Johnson and his backers and their successors published not to fit some template of merit set by the state, but to seek profit in the market place. (Johnson once said that anyone who did not write for money was a fool.)

Contrast this with how the Kangxi Emperor sponsored a very similarly organized dictionary a generation earlier. Kangxi's meritocrats hired a whole bureau full of other meritocrats, had them work for nearly a generation rather than less than a decade, and came up with a dictionary that was no better (albeit no worse either) than Sam Johnson's dictionary. This is the difference between having a market for most of your culture and having much of your higher culture still tied to the meritocratic state sector.

Still, the English pattern was not universal in Europe. The French, with their Academy for rewarding and honoring intellectuals and determining which words are legal, were then and still are following a Chinese path. Conversely, some 18th century Chinese writers had to earn a living in the marketplace by selling their writings. They too were what Sam Johnson called "ink stained wretches" toiling for a living on the Chinese equivalent of Johnson's "Grub Street."

You could call such men private meritocrats, and if you do, you would have to characterize Sam Johnson the same way. The more commonly employed term for private meritocrats is "professionals." Johnson, like Voltaire, was a professional writer, a man who earned his keep with his pen.

China too produced such men. The 18th century poet Yuan Mei, for example, preferred to retire from office young. He kept himself in luxuries by writing for the market books of popular essays, ghost stories, and even the oc-

casional formal obituary for some middle class would-be gentleman's ancestral shrine.

Novelists, like Wu Jingzi, the unsuccessful meritocrat author of the great satirical novel about meritocrats, *Rulin waishi* (literally, "An Unofficial History of the Meritocrats") were often men shut out from meritocratic careers. Wu's novel was published posthumously. Cao Xueqin was an equally unsuccessful meritocrat, a drunk and sexually obsessive feminist. He wrote the greatest of Chinese novels, *Hongloumeng* ("Dream of Red Chambers"), an account of private life within a decaying meritocratic family. The ink stained wretch who finished it for him after Cao drank himself to death, had to earn an uncertain living from the sales of the book.

The worst that one might say is that the 18th century Chinese literary market was not quite as well developed as the English "Grub Street" was rapidly becoming. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, the first full-fledged English novel, was however, published for profit during the same generation as *Rulin waishi*.