China's Rise in Historical Perspective

Ch. 3 Chinese Strategy and Security Issues in Historical Perspective

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Contemporary perceptions of China's historical experience vis-à-vis its neighbors have tended to portray China as the regional hegemon in East Asia. Since the 1941 publication of Fairbank and Teng's study of the tributary system, many scholars inside and outside China have accepted the model of a Sinocentric world order as a reflection of reality. Although the authors focused on the evolution of a Sinocentric world order from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, Fairbank later placed the origins of the "Chinese world order" in the Warring States (403–221 B.C.) period. This world order was centered on Beijing (Peking), where the Son of Heaven, recipient of the Mandate to rule "all under Heaven" (the empire), received the heads of tribal groups and states. He invested vassals with hereditary titles and they in turn presented him with tribute (gong). Vassals were differentiated by the closeness of their ties to the imperial house. Members of the ruling lineage (zongfan) were first in rank; next came the heads of tribal groups within the territory directly controlled by the emperor, called neiyan (internal vassals); and last were the waiyan (external vassals), heads of states outside the dynasty's direct administrative control.

The idea of a Sinocentric world order persists, most recently in articles by scholars in the People's Republic of China (PRC), who cite tributary missions from vassal states to argue that the current territorial boundaries of the PRC extend backward in time. That actual historical circumstances frequently deviated from the tributary model was recognized in the secondary literature from an early point. The Chinese World Order (1968) noted that Chinese dynasties frequently could not control various Inner Asian peoples such as the Xiongnu, Uighurs, Mongols, Khitan, Tibetans, and Jurchen/Manchus. Essays in China
among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Centuries (1983) challenged the assumption of Chinese hegemony for the tenth to thirteenth centuries. Victoria Hui has recently argued that the decentralized multistate politics of the Warring States period resembled the situation in early modern Europe. Since no one state had the military power to impose its will on its neighbors, what emerged was an “amoral interstate system characterized by constant maneuver and ruthless competition.” State-to-state arrangements revealed “temporary accommodation, alliances made and broken, ambush and treachery, the careful cultivation of domestic resources and morale, psychological warfare, and ... raw military power.” These adjectives could also be used to describe the situation in Northeast Asia during the third to seventh centuries, when a multiplicity of states emerged in North and South China; the tenth to thirteenth centuries, when emergent states along China's northern borders successfully challenged Chinese regimes; and the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, when the Ming failed to suppress the emerging Northeast Asian state that ruled China as the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

The security issues accompanying periods of political decentralization or weak Chinese regimes were rooted in the geography of the North China plain, where the first Chinese states emerged. “Flat and featureless,” without natural defensive barriers, the North China plain rendered Chinese states vulnerable to attack, especially after the introduction of the horse transformed steppe nomads into a formidable fighting force. The Mongols were not the only steppe conquest group to rule China.

Potential challengers to Chinese security also arose in Northeast Asia. Stretching eastward from the Mongolian plateau north to densely forested taiga and south to the fertile Liao River plain, the region consisted of three ecosystems that brought nomads, hunting/fishing peoples, and sedentary agriculturalists in contact with one another. The Khitan Liao (907–1055), Jurchen Jin (1115–1260), and, five hundred years later, the Manchu Qing conquest dynasties remind us of the dynamic political forces emanating from Northeast Asia. Chinese states from the Han dynasty until the Qing were mindful of its strategic importance.

Powerful states like Koguryo and Parhae extended their control from Northeast Asia into the Korean peninsula during the fourth to tenth centuries. Although Chinese military campaigns were generally linked to the threat posed by the Northeast Asian states, the peninsula remained within the periphery of Chinese interest in regional security. Japan was another actor in regional geopolitics, from a period of intense interaction in the fourth to seventh centuries, to the “Japanese piracy” of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, the Japanese invasion of Korea in the late sixteenth century, and the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japanese invasions of Korea and China.

This chapter bypasses the contemporary perception of China as the historical regional hegemon in East Asia to argue that China's experience can equally well be presented as one in which China was forced to respond to security challenges from neighbors that it could not easily overcome by force. For over half of its recorded history, the Chinese heartland was ruled by non-Han peoples. As will be shown below, even during the Han and Tang dynasties, there were occasions when Chinese rulers negotiated with their neighbors from positions of weakness. The policies they adopted belie the assumptions of the tributary model, and included the use of trade as a foreign policy tool. Chinese strategies toward Northeast Asia during the fourth to seventh centuries responded to shifts in alliances based on changing geopolitical conditions. During the tenth to twelfth centuries, the Song attempted but failed to manipulate interstate rivalries on their frontiers to their advantage. These historical precedents can be compared to the interstate maneuvers of the early modern period, centered again in Northeast Asia, which brought about the fall of the Ming dynasty. A concluding section discusses the implications of these examples for understanding the repertoire of choices adopted by Chinese states facing security issues.

POLICIES ON NORTHERN BORDERS

China's weakness vis-à-vis neighboring steppe empires in North Asia is a persistent historical theme. Even unified regimes such as the Han (206 B.C.–8 A.D.; 23 A.D.–220 A.D.) and Tang (618–907) dynasties did not always possess the power to impose their will on their neighbors. Chinese courts were preoccupied with conditions on their Inner Asian frontier, where they confronted pastoral peoples whose military might equaled or surpassed their own. The Western Han state, for example, faced a Xiongnu empire that extended from the Great Wall northward past Lake Baikal, eastward to the tributaries of the Amur River, and westward past the modern-day border of Xinjiang: its territory included present-day Ningxia, Liaodong, and northern Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Hebei. To the west and south of the Xiongnu, there were the Wuwei, and to their south the Tibetans. The Xiongnu empire was bordered on its east by the Xianbei, the Puyi, and the ancestors of the Jurchen people, along the coast of Northeast Asia. As a result of the Han thrust into the northern half of the Korean peninsula, these tribes were all occupying territories bordering the Han lands.

Owen Lattimore observed that steppe power expanded when Chinese state power was weak. The demise of Qin in 211 B.C. allowed the Xiongnu to expand and reoccupy the Ordos. The Han dynasty had not yet consolidated control of its own territory and was uncertain of the loyalty of frontier gener-
als. When they came seeking peace in 198 B.C., Gaozu, the Han founder, signed a peace treaty that sent a Han princess in marriage to the Xiongnu ruler, and paid annual tribute to them. In return, the Xiongnu promised not to invade Han territory. This was the first he qin 和親 (peace) treaty.

Treaties involved an exchange of oath-letters (meng zhi 告信), which contradicted the tenets of the Sinocentric world order by constructing a bilateral relationship of equals.\(^13\) From 198 B.C. to 135 B.C., the Han signed ten he qin treaties with the Xiongnu, increasing the payments when Xiongnu military power grew stronger.\(^16\) These treaties would include “mutual recognition of equal diplomatic status even when the sedentary state was forced to pay tribute.”\(^17\) Later, treaties were signed by Chinese states that were “in great danger and under duress.”\(^18\) In 1005, fearful of a full-scale Liao invasion, the Song and Khitan Liao exchanged oath-letters to seal the treaty of Shanyuan, by which Song agreed to pay to Liao 200,000 silk lengths and 100,000 ounces of silver a year as “contribution to military expenses”—the euphemism adopted in the face of Song refusal to allow the term “tribute” (gong 稽) to be applied to these annual payments.\(^19\) These reservations fell in a treaty concluded in 1142 with the Jurchen Jin after the Jin captured the Song capital, Kaifeng. This treaty forced Song to use the self-deprecatory terms adopted by a tributary vassal in its communications with Jin; the annual payments made by Song to Jin were called “tribute,” and the Jin sent documents investing the Song emperor Gaozong as ruler of the Song state (these documents are preserved in the Jin history but not in Song records).\(^19\)

Chinese polities often referred to “using barbarians to govern barbarians” (yi yi Yi 義夷) and applying the “loose-rein” or jimi 龜糜 policy, which rationalized accommodations with border groups in terms of a long-range control strategy. Jimi first appeared in 52 A.D., after the Xiongnu confederation had split into two. The Southern Xiongnu became tributary vassals of Later Han in 50 A.D. and sent annual tribute to the Han court. When the Northern Xiongnu came seeking he qin in 52 A.D., a Later Han official, Ban Biao, recommended that the jimi policy be adopted: “If the barbarians came in accordance with li (rites and rituals), in no case should they be denied a response.”\(^19\) In actuality, however, the Han responded with coolness to the embassy and the Northern Xiongnu resumed their raids in the western regions until they were defeated by a Han army in 74 A.D.\(^19\)

Jimi was institutionalized during the Tang dynasty, when jimi prefectures and departments were created in regions with non-Han subjects, to be governed by local elites who handed down their posts to descendants and did not have to report on local population or finances to the central government.\(^22\) The jimi fu zhou (loose-rein prefectures and departments) seem to have been the forerunners of the tusi (native officials) system of the Ming and Qing pe-
DECENTERING POLITICS, FOURTH TO SEVENTH CENTURIES

The pace and content of interstate diplomacy in Northeast Asia was frequently determined not by China but by neighboring states. In the fourth to sixth centuries, a series of short-lived regional regimes ruled China, several states competed for supremacy in the Korean peninsula, and Japan was in the state formation phase. The primary arena was situated not in China but in the Korean peninsula, where Koguryo, Paekche, and Silla sought allies in their internecine struggles. The Chinese and Yamato states were important role players but not the main actors.

The Koguryo kingdom arose in the first century B.C. in the Hun River drainage (in present-day Jilin province). During the reign of King Kwanggaeto (391-413) its territory stretched westward to the Liao River, northeastward to the Sungari River, and southward to the Han and Nakdong rivers. Under King Changsu (413-449), Koguryo maintained diplomatic ties with both the northern and southern Chinese dynasties. Its shift of the capital southward to P'yongyang (427) spurred Paekche and Silla to form a defensive alliance (433). Koguryo's expansion southward in 475 came at Paekche's expense, but in the sixth century Koguryo lost territory to Silla.30

Each Korean state sought outside allies. Koguryo took advantage of China's decentralization and the rivalry between northern and southern dynasties to ally with distant southern dynasties while confronting the northern dynasty on its western border. The Chinese regimes for their part awarded Chinese titles to Korean regimes to reinforce their own legitimacy as recipients of the Mandate. Paekche formed alliances with both northern and southern dynasties and with Japanese regional leaders to strengthen its hand against its major threat. Koguryo, and Paekche enlisted Japanese soldiers in its quarrel with Silla. Silla, which was rescued from a Paekche-Yamato attack by Koguryo, later found it expedient to ally with Paekche against its erstwhile savior.

The Japanese were deeply involved in the interstate rivalries of the Korean peninsula in the fourth to seventh centuries A.D., in part because of their reliance on the peninsula for precious iron implements and iron ore.31 During this period, "wave after wave of ideas, institutions, technologies, and materials" flowed through the Korean peninsula into Japan.32 Especially in the fifth century, Japanese chiefdoms came to Chinese courts seeking Chinese titles to bolster their prestige and claims over territory, not only in Japan but also in the Korean peninsula.33 The Yamato state participated in the military struggles on the peninsula. It allied with Paekche (372) against Koguryo; a combined Kaya-Yamato force was defeated by Koguryo in 400; and Paekche, Yamato, Wa, Silla, and Kaya joint forces were defeated by Koguryo in 414. Yamato sent military expeditions to the peninsula six times in the sixth century. The final dispatch of military forces to assist Paekche ended in 663, when Paekche was defeated by a combined Silla-Tang army. Thereafter, the Yamato court continued to receive embassies from Parhae during the eighth and ninth centuries.34

The interstate rivalries in the Korean peninsula and northeast culminated in the seventh century. In the last decade of the sixth century the Sui, confronting the Turks and Koguryo as their rivals in Northeast Asia, attempted to subjugate Koguryo. Both Paekche (in 607) and Silla (608, 611) were eager to ally with Sui in a joint campaign against Koguryo, but the Sui military campaigns of 612, 613, and 614 resulted in Koguryo victories. In 626, Paekche and Silla also sent envoys to seek a military alliance with the new Tang emperors, but the Tang did not move against Koguryo until after the Eastern Turks were subjugated. In the interim, from 631 through 643, the Tang accepted sporadic tributary missions (four in twelve years) from Koguryo. In 644-648, Silla, Paekche, the Khitan, and several other allies joined Tang in attacks on Koguryo, but failed to obtain a decisive victory.35

The final round of hostilities was sparked by Koguryo's attack on the Khitan, who had become clients of Tang, in 654. The following year, Koguryo joined Paekche to capture over thirty Silla towns, causing Silla to turn to its ally, Tang,
which launched new campaigns against Koguryo (655, 658, 659, 661). Paekche, which was allied with the Japanese Yamato state, was defeated by Silla in 663. Silla then cooperated with Tang in the final military expedition that defeated Koguryo. Having eliminated its major rivals and "unified" the peninsula, Silla then shifted from alliance to resistance against Chinese military expansion into the Korean peninsula. The Tang court, beset with problems in Tibet, withdrew its troops and did not seek to consolidate its hold on the Koguryo territories.

The 668 demise of the Koguryo state permitted Silla to "unify" its control over the Korean peninsula, but from the Tang perspective, this did not resolve the strategic challenge posed by regional states occupying the territory between the Korean and Chinese borders. Parhae (698–926), founded in the late seventh century by a former Koguryo general, faced military pressure from Tang and Silla, but survived until its destruction by the Khitan in the early tenth century. Faced with opposition from Silla and from northern Chinese regimes, it attempted to ally with Japan. Parhae was eventually vanquished by the Khitan Liao, in 926.

DIVIDING NORTH CHINA IN THE TENTH TO TWELFTH CENTURIES

In contrast to the fourth to seventh centuries, where the military action took place on the northeastern frontiers of the Chinese states, the arena for multi-state rivalry in the tenth to twelfth centuries was the entirety of North China, from the coastline westward past the Jade Gate marking the end of the Great Wall, into the desert beyond. Leaving aside the Mongol conquest, which was part of an Eurasian "explosion of military power aimed at world conquest" that was "far grander than anything dreamed of by the Han, Tang, or Sung, or indeed by any other Chinese regime," the other three conquest dynasties of this period shared some commonalities, even though they originated in different environments: the grasslands of North Asia for the Khitan, the steppes around present-day Qinghai for the Tangut, and the mixed ecological zones of Manchuria for the Jurchen Jin. Each group was opportunistic in forming alliances. The Khitan, for example, were successively vassals of the Turks, the Sui, even (for some Khitan groups) Koguryo, Tang, and again the Turks, then the Uighurs, sending tribute-bearing missions to China while acknowledging Uighur overlordship.

The Tang military withdrawal from present-day Xinjiang, Turfan, Hami, and the Gansu corridor after the An Lushan rebellion (755) produced a power vacuum that was partially filled by the Khitan and the Tangut. In contrast to the fourth to sixth centuries, when, with the exception of Koguryo, China was surrounded by states without a permanent bureaucratic government, the Khitan Liao and Tangut Xia regimes each possessed literate elites who adopted a diplomatic rhetoric that drew on Chinese and nomadic traditions. The Tanguts had acquired knowledge of Chinese bureaucratic methods after the seventh century, when they had submitted to Tang and resettled in the Ordos, while the Liao and Jin were "dual-administration" empires, ruling their nomadic and sedentary subjects with separate administrative structures.

A stable international order in which Tang and its neighbors interacted on terms of equality was upset by 840 by the collapse of the Tibetan kingdom, followed in short order by the demise of the Uighur empire, and the destruction of Tang power stemming from Huang Chao's rebellion (874–884). Tang had disintegrated into a number of independent local regimes by the early tenth century, when states in Japan, the Korean peninsula, and Northeast Asia also faced a breakdown of central authority. The seeds of the loss of North China during the Song period were sown in the ninth century. It would take over a century from Huang Chao's capture of the Tang capital, Chang'an (880), to Song's conquest of the Northern Han (979) for a regime to successfully re-centralize the Chinese polity. During that period, China was divided into as many as nine or ten regional states.

The breakdown of strong centralized states throughout Asia provided opportunities for groups like the Khitan Liao and Tangut regimes to expand their power. Moreover, the Tang jinji policy resulted in commanderies situated along its Inner Asian borders that were staffed with non-Han tribal peoples: through embassies and other channels of contact, tribal leaders obtained knowledge of Chinese institutions, modes of government, and the Chinese political vocabulary. These were the peoples confronting the new Song rulers after 979. Founded by border generals based on the northern frontier, the Liao and Xixia states were not outsiders to the Chinese system but rather groups that used their familiarity of Tang Chinese customs to obtain support from Han and non-Han subjects.

The Song attempts to ally with non-Han states came after their repeated military defeats at the hands of the Khitan. The founder of the Song dynasty (r. 960–976) and his son Taizong (r. 976–997) had reunified the Chinese-speaking lands, but could not recapture the territory called the Sixteen Prefectures, going west from Datong to Yuzhou, which was ceded in 937, giving the Khitan Liao "control of all the strategic passes that defended northern China." When Taizong's expedition to subjugate Liao in 979 failed, he tried to draw Koguryo into a coordinated attack on Liao.

At first glance, such an alliance made sense: located on the southeastern fringe of the Liao empire; Koguryo could pose the threat of a two-front war in the event of a Song-Liao conflict. But neither Song nor Koguryo was actually
willing to come to the aid of the other: Koryo did not send military forces to attack Liao during the Song campaign of 986, and Song did not respond to Koryo requests for aid during the Liao invasion of 993. That invasion forced Koryo to become a Liao tributary vassal and removed the potential threat to Liao of a two-front (Song-Koryo) war. In 990, the Tangut Xia ruler submitted to the Liao and received their investiture as king in 990, freeing the Liao to focus on Song. A Song peace offer was rebuffed (994). Liao raids into Song territory in 999, 1001, 1002, 1003, and 1004 culminated in the Liao-Song treaty of Shanyuan (1005). The treaty of Shanyuan legitimized Liao occupation of part of North China. The Song next sent envoys to negotiate an alliance with the Jurchen Jin against the Liao. The Jurchen leader Aguda (r. 1115–1123) had been a Liao vassal; the Liao had appointed him military governor of the Shangjing region in 1113. Shortly thereafter Aguda defeated Liao forces and declared himself master of the northeast. In 1115 he assumed the dynastic name of Jin and the title of emperor. In his relations with the Liao court after this date, he followed their example, demanding land, annual subsidies approximately equal to the payments Liao received from Song, recognition, and exchanges in which Song would address Liao as “elder brother.” These demands escalated as he won more military victories. After 1117 the Jin received overtures from Song for a joint attack on Liao, which culminated in a formal treaty between the two states (1123). By that time, however, the Jin had already captured the Supreme Capital and Southern Capital of the Liao, and Song, which had hoped to recover the Sixteen Prefectures, was forced to accept Aguda’s conditions. In exchange for the return of some land, Song agreed to pay Jin a “huge compensation” for the loss of tax income from these lands, and to transfer to Jin the annual payments formerly sent to Liao. Not until it had obtained the submission of Tangut Xia as a waifan in 1124, and ensured that the former Parhae territory was under control, did the Jin begin their campaign against Song in the autumn of 1125. Laying siege to the capital, Kai-feng, the Jin emperor Wuqincai (Taiizong) demanded the cession of most of present-day Shanxi and Hebei, an indemnity that was equal to 180 years of annual payments, annual payments, and a princely hostage. In the first month of 1127, the Jin captured Kai-feng along with ex-emperor Huizong and emperor Qinzong. Further campaigns that followed the demise of the Northern Song dynasty brought the Jin to settle for all of China north of the Hua River, acknowledgment by Southern Song of its status as a Jin vassal, and tribute (gong) by Song to Jin. In contrast to the fourth to seventh centuries, more peoples surrounding China in the tenth to twelfth centuries had acquired written languages and political organizations based on the Tang model. Tang political collapse freed military leaders commanding border garrisons from central government control. The borderland “became the region from which new military and political forces arose to influence the rest of northern China.” Chinese regimes in South China could not prevail against these military regimes, and ultimately even the south was lost to the Mongols. As a consequence of the conquests, there was a permanent northeastward shift of China’s political center. Beijing, which had been a minor garrison center in the northern border region, became one of the five capitals of the Liao, remained a capital under the Jin and Mongol rulers, and, except for a brief interval in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, was the capital of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Chinese state was “recentered” geographically.

INTERSTATE RIVALRIES IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Unlike the fourth to seventh and tenth to twelfth centuries, China was not divided into a number of regional regimes in the late sixteenth century, when it participated in a trade boom that was stimulated by the appearance of European traders. Portuguese ships reaching the Pearl River Delta in 1517 encountered a lively intra-Asian maritime trade network, conducted outside the parameters of the tributary system, which sent dyestuffs, spices, and medicinal herbs from Southeast Asia north to Japan, Japanese copper, iron, and silver to China, Korean ginseng to Japan, and Chinese cotton and silk to Asian markets. The 1550–1650 period saw silver from Japan as well as the Americas flow into China. About “half the silver production accounted for in the world between 1500 and 1800” ended up in China, where it supported, even if it did not cause, the silver monetization of the Ming economy. Oda Nobunaga’s adoption of European firearms, introduced into Japan by the Portuguese, facilitated his (and later, Hideyoshi’s) military drive for hegemony. Japan’s century-long interval of civil war, 1450–1550, coincided with a decline in Ming power on its northern frontier, where Mongols under first Dayan Khan then Alta Khan raided Chinese territory with impunity. Revolts at the Ming garrison at Datong occurred in 1524–1525, 1533, and 1545; from 1550 to 1566, there were annual Mongol raids on the capital, Beijing. These military threats coincided with fiscal crises as the state failed to expand its revenues during the commercial boom and could not even collect agrarian taxes at previously achieved levels.

The emergence of powerful Chinese maritime traders (alternatively, pirates) like Li Dan (d. 1625) and Zheng Zhilong (1604–1661), father of Zheng Chenggong (otherwise known as Koxingga), is well documented from Eng-
lish, Dutch, and Japanese accounts. These men were products of what Iwai Shigeki has called China's frontier society of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Using the concept of frontiers as dynamic regions where different cultures mingle to produce new social forces, Iwai argued that the illicit trade of the 1550–1650 period also produced their counterparts in Northeast Asia, linking the inhabitants of Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, and Hokkaido with the Amur River basin. Sable, collected in the drainage of the Sungari and Amur rivers, and ginseng were valuable regional exports, and tribal leaders who held Ming patents or trade permits monopolized and taxed the commodities moving in overland trade.

The Northeast Asian economy also received Ming military silver shipments to support border defense. The Ming appointed individuals with strong local ties to regional military commands, and Ming military hereditary offices in border commanderies were filled by individuals whose loyalty to Ming wavered when asked to choose between their personal interest and the state's. Pübei, a Mongol implicated in the 1592 Ningxia uprising, Yang Yinglong, leader of a rebellion in the southwest during the 1590s, and Mao Wenlong, a Ming officer who eventually became a regional warlord on the Ming-Chosön-Jurchen border, are outstanding examples of such persons. The same generalization could, of course, apply to Nurhaci, who followed his father and grandfather in accepting titles from the Ming before he turned against them in 1616.

The sequence of events from 1592 to 1637, that is, from the Japanese invasion of the Korean peninsula to the second Manchu invasion of Korea, illustrates the strategic policy issues confronting the Ming state in Northeast Asia. The Ming response to the Jurchen/Manchu forces, which were emerging as a regional power, occurred within a larger context of military challenges on its southwestern, northern, and northeastern borders that stemmed from its institutionalization of border defense policies earlier in the fifteenth century.

THE JAPANESE INVASION OF KOREA

The precipitating event of a sequence that would ultimately involve Ming China, Chosön Korea, and the Jurchen/Manchu regime was the Japanese invasion of Korea, which was the first step toward fulfilling Hideyoshi's ambition to invade Ming China. What Korean historians call the 

Invasion of the Imjin year, i.e., Hideyoshi's invasion) occurred in two phases. In May 1592, over 150,000 Japanese troops landed at Pusan and began a series of victorious engagements with the Korean army. The Chosön king, Sŏnjo (r. 1567–1608), was forced to abandon his capital, Hansŏng (present-day Seoul), and flee to Uiju, right on the border with Ming. Sŏnjo then sought military aid from his overlord, the Ming Wanli emperor (Chosŏn was a Ming tributary since the late fourteenth century).

In the winter of 1591, receiving intelligence of Hideyoshi's invasion plans, the Wanli emperor ordered a strengthening of Chinese coastal defenses and increased surveillance of the situation in the Korean peninsula. Upon hearing that the Japanese army was rapidly advancing toward the Yalu River, Wanli ordered officials in Liaodong and Shandong to begin military preparations, but the Liaodong army was engaged in suppressing a major rebellion in Ningxia from late July to late October 1592. A Ming token force of 3,000 men was annihilated by the Japanese in late August. When the first Ming troops sent to Korea were annihilated by the Japanese, the Ming negotiator Shen Weijing engaged Konishi Yukinaga, the Japanese commander occupying Pyŏngyang, in talks, staving off further military action until new forces could be committed to the Korean campaign. A more substantial army of about 44,000 men was amassed after the successful conclusion of the Ningxia campaign, and in February 1593, a combined Sino-Korean army expelled the Japanese from Pyŏngyang, an event that marked the turning point of the first phase of the invasion.

After the Japanese defeat at Pyŏngyang and the subsequent Ming failure to expel the Japanese from Hansŏng, negotiations were revived, culminating in the audience of Ping envoy with Hideyoshi (October 1595). The failed diplomacy in 1593–1595 primarily involved representatives of Ming China and Hideyoshi. The interests of the negotiators on the ground in Korea diverged significantly from those of their principals: the Japanese generals “hoped to satisfy his [Hideyoshi’s] craving for power by offering him the illusion of victory,” while achieving a settlement that would allow the profitable trade to resume. For his part, Shen Weijing learned that Hideyoshi's true target was Ming China but concealed that from the Wanli court. The fabrications on both sides created the diplomatic facsimile of the Hideyoshi audience, but the Ming envoys falsely reported to the Ming court that Hideyoshi had accepted Ming investiture. When Hideyoshi discovered that the envoys had come to present him with Ming regalia and documents investing him as “king of Japan,” he flew into a rage and ordered another invasion. The second round of military conflict, 1597–1598, did not end until Hideyoshi's death, when Tokugawa Ieyasu and other senior leaders ordered the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Korea. The next stage in triangular interstate relations would come with the Ming response to the rise of Jurchen power in Northeast Asia. The narrative shifts to the origins of the Manchus, who would conquer the Ming and rule China as the Qing dynasty.
THE MANCHU TAKEOVER OF LIAODONG

The Manchu conquest was accomplished by a Jurchen tribal group with a long history of contact with Chinese, Korean, and Inner Asian regimes. The founder of the Qing ruling house, Nurhaci, was born into a family who were the hereditary heads of the left wing of the Jurchen people. Korean accounts furnish a great deal of information about their group, the Malgal, who were also the ancestors of the Jurchen Jin state, which ruled parts of Northeast Asia and North China (1115-1260). Under Koguryo rule, they were "a subject people, some of whom at times were reduced to forced labor or slave status and so became an unfree class serving masters who belonged to the ruling class of Koguryo origins" in Parhae.

Relations between Koryo and the Jurchen shifted in tone and intensity during the rise of the Wanyan clan under Wugunai (1021-1074), who extended Jurchen domination from the Changan dynasty's northward. Koryo's King Injong (r. 1122-1146) declared himself a vassal of Jin in 1126, even though "there were many in Koryo who were outraged at this," referring to the Jin demand that Koryo acknowledge its dominant status in the tributary relationship.

Both the Ming and the Choson attempted to win over the Jurchen tribes. The Ming invested Jianzhou Jurchen who submitted to Ming rule with presents and titles in military guard and battalion units designed to hold off "barbarians." In this manner Mongke Temur, leader of the Odor Jurchen who had previously allied himself to the Choson, became the head of the left wing of the Jianzhou guard in 1410. He and the Jurchen lived in a buffer zone between the Ming and Korean authorities. While they were subjected to pressures from both sides, the recurrent Mongol threat to Ming power enabled Jurchen leaders and their followers to exercise considerable autonomy. According to his own account, the Jianzhou Jurchen leader, Nurhaci, was a descendant of Mongke Temur.

Nurhaci's early career owed much to his patron, the Ming military official Li Chengliang (1526-1618). The fourth generation of his family to occupy military posts in the northeast frontier region, Li rose to become a Ming general who defended Liaodong against the Mongols and Jurchens. His authority was based not so much on the official troops under his direct command—those numbered only ten thousand—as on his private military followers, jia ding (several thousand in number), and on his network of real and fictive kinsmen who filled the military positions throughout the northeast. Nor did his influence stop at the regional level; he and his sons featured in virtually every major Ming campaign of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

As a Ming appointee, Li Chengliang was able to consolidate his own regional power and use about half of the government's military allocations for Liaodong for his personal use. In addition, he tapped the profits of the trade expansion, acquiring a percentage of the transactions on horses and other commodities. With the wealth and power gleaned from his official and unofficial activities, Li created a large patronage network in Liaodong. His example was emulated by the Chinese and Jurchens of Jianzhou Jurchen, who also obtained patents or trade permits in exchange for submitting to Ming rule.

Like Li Chengliang, Nurhaci acquired profits from the growing trade to support his military activities. Feng Yuan, who served on the Liaodong-Kaiyuan Military Defense Circuit, wrote in the early seventeenth century about the competition among Jurchens in the southern tier to seize such profits by acting as middlemen and interpreters for Jurchens bearing ginseng and furs from the Sundari and Amur rivers. First the Hada chieflain built a mountain fortress at a major pass on the transport route to monopolize trade products, but then the Yehe followed suit; now "the profits have all fallen into the hands of Nurhaci. The reason that disputes break out every year among the Jurchens is that they are fighting over patents, but in actual fact they are fighting over commercial profits."

By 1618, Nurhaci was the leader of a powerful Jurchen state. Two years earlier (1616), he had declared himself the ruler (Han, the Manchu equivalent of Khan) of the Later Jin state, which claimed to be a successor to the Jin dynasty (which had ruled part of North China from 1115-1260). Nurhaci proclaimed seven grievances against the Ming, and led a ten thousand man force against the Ming garrison at Fushun (May 1618). Its commander, Li Yongfeng, surrendered Fushun after one attack.

The fall of this strategic city aroused a military response from the Ming, who pressed the Choson court to contribute military supplies and troops toward a serious military expedition against Nurhaci. Since he would face armies on his western and southern flank if Choson entered the fray, Nurhaci urged Choson to remain neutral in the Ming-Later Jin conflict. Caught between the Ming and the Later Jin, the Choson king, Kwanghae, attempted to sit on the fence. His officials were split between a pro-Ming faction and a faction that urged caution for fear that the Jurchen would punish Choson if it sided with the Ming. Kwanghae eventually sent 13,000 men to join the Ming forces in an attack on the Later Jin, but the Ming-Choson forces were routed in an epic battle at Sarhū (April 1618). Nurhaci then seized control of Liaodong, the region east of the Liao River that lay directly north of Choson.

After Sarhū, Kwanghae successfully resisted pressure from Nurhaci for an alliance, but while remaining a tributary vassal to the Ming, he also did not respond to their demands for more troop and military aid. From a long-term perspective, Kwanghae's "adroit foreign policy" preserved Choson during extremely difficult times, but his fence-sitting provoked a successful coup d'état
MANCHU INVASIONS OF KOREA

The immediate stimulus for the final 1636/1637 Manchu invasion was Chosŏn's refusal to formally recognize Hongtaijí, Nurhaci's successor, as Son of Heaven. On the first day of the first lunar month in 1636, Hongtaijí took two major steps toward expanding the scope of his state-building activities. He adopted a dynastic name (Qing) and took the Chinese title of "emperor" (huangdi). Both steps directly challenged the Ming dynasty, which was thereafter referred to in Manchu documents (rejecting the Ming as Sons of Heaven) as the "southern dynasty" (nan chaot). It was impossible for Chosŏn to recognize the Qing dynastic name and Hongtaijí's new imperial title. Two Chosŏn envoys who were present at Hongtaijí's court refused to perform the ritual of submission that followed the dynastic proclamation. Fearing punishment from their superiors, they abandoned a Qing state letter to Injo in a hostel, and fled home. The following month the Injo court also rebuffed an embassy of Mongol and Manchu banner princes that arrived in Hansŏng to invite the king to send a royal kinsman to the Qing capital, Shenyang, to congratulate Hongtaijí on his imperial title.

Strategically, the invasion aimed to deny the Ming a potential military ally and thus secure the Manchu forces from an attack on their base area during their anticipated military campaigns against the Ming. Additionally, the Manchus hoped to obtain food and military supplies from Chosŏn that had been cut off by the diplomatic fracas. Finally, the subjugation of Chosŏn would be a further demonstration of Manchu charisma and military power to "the world."

The 1636/1637 invasion, known in Korean history as the Byongja koran, was short and decisive. The Qing army crossed the Yalu River into Chosŏn territory on December 27, 1636, and Injo surrendered on February 24, 1637, so the campaign lasted about two months. The military confrontation was lopsided in favor of the Manchu army, which advanced rapidly down the peninsula; Chosŏn appealed for but failed to obtain military aid from the Ming; and Injo was finally forced to agree to the Manchu terms for peace. The Qing conditions were that Chosŏn excise the Ming reign name from its official documents, discard the Ming documents and seals of investiture, and break relations with the Ming, and that it accept the Qing calendar, and with it the tribute obligations, the quantity and types of tribute goods and local products being specified, to be delivered by embassies sent on New Year's Day, the emperor's birthday, the winter solstice, and the annual tribute-bearing mission. Injo's eldest and second sons and the sons of some high ministers were taken to Shenyang as hostages. Hongtaijí also demanded that leaders of the major anti-Manchu faction be handed over to him for punishment. The 1637 subjugation of Chosŏn freed Hongtaijí from fears of a Ming-Chosŏn alliance that would threaten him with a two-front war. The actual invasion of China proper would not occur until a Chinese rebel, Li Zicheng, occupied the Ming capital (April 25, 1644) and caused the last Ming emperor to hang himself. The Ming general Wu Sangui went over to the Qing cause; Qing troops were in Beijing on June 6, entering the final phase of a conquest that would not be completed until 1683.

CONCLUSION

As Joseph Esherick pointed out in chapter 1, the rhetoric used in court deliberations has disguised the extent to which Chinese states responded with flexibility and pragmatism to situations where they did not enjoy a military advantage over their neighbors. We have tried to demonstrate that these situations were not a rare occurrence in premodern Chinese history, and deserve serious consideration in studies of China's historical strategies of interaction with neighbors.

Whereas describing the 198 B.C. Han treaty with the Xiongnu as the court's response to the Xiongnu embassy requesting he qin implies that the power balance lay in China's favor, the actual agreement, necessitated by the lack of Chinese military superiority in conducting war against mounted nomads in steppe lands, was one in which the Chinese court provided payments of silver and textiles in exchange for the Xiongnu promise to cease their raids into China. Chinese records of embassies from the Japanese archipelago, the Korean peninsula, the Ryukyu, and Southeast Asia similarly portray these events as evidence of the power of the Chinese Sinocentric world order, although a more detailed examination of the embassies themselves and the historical context suggests a more complex array of motivations on both sides: ambitious regional leaders seeking Chinese titles to wield against their competitors at home, and, especially in periods of political decentralization in China, Chinese courts using the embassies as confirmation of their political legitimacy in their own domestic political struggles.

By late Tang and Song times, the states surrounding China had absorbed the Chinese political vocabulary and used it in their own foreign relations,
even against Chinese states. The multistate maneuverings of the Tangut Xia, Khitai Liao, Jurchen Jin, and Song reflect a diplomatic world that employed a common language, as illustrated in the 1142 treaty that described Song as a vassal of Jin, and labeled its annual payments to Jin as tribute (gong). Chinese protocol was also used by other states against Chinese regimes. During the 1637 negotiations concluding the Manchu invasion of Korea, for example, Qing turned back letters from Chosŏn that did not use the same form Korean officials adopted toward the Ming emperor in addressing Hongtaiji. In the surrender ceremony, the Manchus forced the Chosŏn king, Injo, to publicly kowtow before the seated Hongtaiji to signify Chosŏn's status as a Qing vassal, and the Qing negotiators stressed that the ritual formalities must exactly follow the model stipulated by Ming.

Chinese terms like jimi (loose-rein), which reappear throughout Chinese history, incorrectly imply that the Chinese controlled their bilateral relations with tribal groups along the frontiers, whereas the three time periods that were surveyed demonstrate that the actual reality was much more complex. All of the states made decisions on bilateral relations based on shifts in the military and economic strength of their other neighbors, and China was frequently too weak to dictate terms to its neighbors, even if its officials described their policy as jimi. In the same way, long-term plans to administratively absorb non-Han populations into the Chinese bureaucratic order, embodied in the Tang jimi fu zhou and later in the Ming and Qing tsui system, sometimes backfired: the An Lushan rebellion and the rise of the Khitan Liao like the sixteenth-century Ningxia and southwest rebellions and even the Jurchen challenge of Nurhaci, are examples of what can happen when "loose-rein" policies allow tribal leaders to learn Chinese political and institutional practices and emerge as leaders of incipient states.

Into the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, when the tributary model is said to have peaked, China's neighbors challenged its claim to regional hegemony. Between 1637 and 1730, Korean officials and leaders contemplated a "northern expedition" against the Qing, erected altars to the Ming rulers, and reiterating their loyalty to the Ming by retaining the Ming calendar. In 1730, its embassy to Beijing was asked to explain why their identification plaques bore a Ming and not a Qing date. Japan not only refused to participate in the Chinese tributary system but constructed an alternate Japan-centered world order: in 1715 the shogunate issued tallies and specified that only Chinese traders holding them would be permitted to dock in Nagasaki. Since domestic shortages of copper, a money metal, had driven the Kangxi court to purchase supplies in Japan, the Qing throne tacitly acquiesced in what was a direct refutation of its tributary model. China's historical hegemony over Asia was by no means as complete as sometimes imagined, and China's foreign policy stances were not as rigid as many analysts of the mid-nineteenth century have supposed.

The examples provided in this chapter challenge the assumption that Chinese centrality, expressed in the tributary system model, was the operative concept shaping foreign policy through the long span of Chinese history. Especially in ancient and medieval times, when Chinese regimes were centered in the North China plain, China's vulnerability to attack from its northern and northeastern neighbors would have put such a notion to constant testing. From a Sinocentric perspective, the recurring sequence of cyclical disintegration during which Chinese regimes had to deal with their neighbors as equals might be called a process of "decentering." To describe the eventual reemergence of a unified Chinese state as "recentering," however, suggests that there was a core of continuity that persisted despite the dynamic cycle. Although this notion underlies the national history written in the twentieth century, it ignores the abrupt discontinuities created by conquest. As we have shown, the ruler of the new "Chinese" state often originated in the borderlands. These rulers used the Chinese tributary model in the conduct of interstate relations but the widespread dissemination of Chinese political rhetoric does not of course mean that Chinese models were adopted without modification. From the tenth century onward, conquest dynasties skillfully blended Chinese and Inner Asian practices in order to rule a diverse array of subjects. The impact of these Inner and East Asian leaders on the formation of subsequent Chinese security strategies is itself a topic demanding further future research.

NOTES

1. In this chapter "China" refers to states occupying the region of North China (zhongyuan, the "central plain"), which is identified as the Chinese heartland. On the historical evolution in the meaning of terms such as Hua or Xia, the first terms found in historical documents to refer to the peoples known in contemporary times as the "Han Chinese," see Tsung-T Dow, "The Confucian Concept of a Nation and Its Historical Practice," Asian Profile 10, no. 4 (1982): 547-61; and Frank Dikötter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), ch. 1. Also see Shao-yun Yang, "Becoming Zhongguo, Becoming Han: Tracing and Reconceptualizing Ethnicity in Ancient North China, 770 BC-AD 581" (MA thesis, National University of Singapore, 2007).


6. The innovations made by the Xixia, Liao, Jin, and Yuan regimes were later analyzed: see Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, eds., The Cambridge History of China, vol. 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).


10. Mark Edward Lewis, China between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), 4, writes: “The fact that the Yellow River valley, the traditional heartland of the Chinese empire, was ruled by foreign emperors for essentially nine of the eighteen centuries after the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 (and three more centuries if the Tang ruling house is considered ‘alien’) dramatically demonstrates the degree to which the government of China became detached from its people and society.”


13. Owen Lattimore, Inner Asian Frontiers of China (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988), of a work first published in 1940. Lewis, Early Chinese Empires, 133, observes that the he qin system entailed recognition by the Han of the Xiongnu ruler’s title of chanyu in exchange for the Xiongnu ruler’s recognition of the Han huangdi; further, Emperor Wen’s statement (162 a.c.) implied that the chanyu and huangdi shared “Heaven and Earth” (that is, they were on relations of parity).


16. Yü, “Hsiung-nu,” 122–25. Border markets were also opened during the second century a.c.

17. Nicola Di Cosmo, State Formation and Periodization in Inner Asian History, Journal of World History 10. no. 1 (1999): 23–24. Wang, “The Rhetoric of a Lesser Empire,” 58, cites the Tibetan protest when after agreeing to a treaty, Tang attempted to treat the Tibetan envoy as a tributary vassal in the late eighth century. He also contrasts the Chinese historical depiction of Tang Taizong’s marriage alliance with Tibet as sealing Tibet’s submission to Tang; the motivation for sending a Tang princess to marry the Tibetan king was the threat posed by the Tibetan state.


31. Farris, *Sacred Texts and Buried Treasures*, 51. Notes that the best source of iron was southern Korea and the demand for iron necessitated that Japan be closely linked with the states there.

32. Farris, *Sacred Texts and Buried Treasure*, 105.

33. Wang, *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals*.


38. See the essays in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6.


40. Di Cosmo, *State Formation*, 32–37. Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), had argued that only states emerging from the mixed ecological zones of Manchuria were successful in creating hybrid regimes that could rule both sedentary and nomadic subjects, but the essays in vol. 6 of *The Cambridge History of China* show that Inner Asian empires, including the Tangut Xia and the Mongol Yuan, learned from each other as well as from direct contact with Chinese regimes.


43. Twitchett and Tietze, *Liao*, 76.

44. According to Twitchett and Tietze, *Liao*, 103, a Khitan princess's daughter was married to the Koryô king in 996; his successor was formally invested as king by Liao in 998, and formally congratulated the Liao court on its victories over the Song in 999–1000 and 1004.

45. Twitchett and Tietze, "Liao," 104. Two years later, stimulated by news that the Xia were negotiating secretly with the Song, the Liao sent a punitive expedition into Xia territory and retained the king as a vassal. The Song refused to use the term "tribute" (gong) for this payment (108–10). See David C. Wright, "Party, Pedigree, and Peace: Routine Song Diplomatic Missives to the Liao," *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 26 (1996): 55–85, who analyzes the letters exchanged between Song and Liao to argue for a relationship of "diplomatic parity" after the Shanyuan treaty.

46. The Song refused to use the term "tribute" (gong) for this payment. Twitchett and Tietze, *Liao*, 108–10.

47. Twitchett and Tietze, *Liao*, 109, observe that the Song insisted that these payments not be called "tribute," but "a contribution to military expenses." The diplomatic exchanges between the two courts after this treaty were distinguished from the protocols imposed on other states.


59. Hawley, Injin War, 97, states that 158,800 men were earmarked for the Korean invasion.


63. Lee, New History, 89.

64. Lee, New History, 229, quotation from Lee, New History, 128.


