

Waiting for the Barbarians:

A History of Geopolitics in Early Modern China, 1680-1850



October 1, 2023

By Minghui Hu

History, UC Santa Cruz

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# Chapter One: Who Were Barbarians?

China is big. How did it become so big?[[1]](#endnote-2)

Three colossal states in the global north—Russia, America, and China—boast vast territorial expanses, distinct from their counterparts in the global south, such as India, Australia, and Brazil, whose forms were influenced by colonial histories. These northern megastates have a shared history of intense territorial expansion during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, marked by state-endorsed violence, genocide, and displacement of indigenous populations. During the eighteenth century, China stretched its influence over Western Central Asia, Mongolia, and Tibet, while Russia extended its dominion over Eastern Central Asia, the Caucasus region, and Siberia. In the same era, the United States broadened its frontiers westward, seizing territories that once belonged to Native Americans and annexing New France (in 1763) and New Spain (in 1821). Consequently, these three land empires saw dramatic expansion beyond their original heartlands. Was the early modern territorial expansion a colonization process? How do we distinguish the early modern territorial empires from the modern industrial capitalist empires? Who were the barbarians during the territorial expansion?[[2]](#endnote-3)

The academic literature on the expansion of early modern land empires should be more consistent. There are plenty of historical documents and studies on the territorial expansion of the United States and Russia and the conditions of their frontiers. These studies provide critical information on how these expansive empires developed and evolved. Prior attention to Qing China’s territorial expansion was scarce, as compared with the United States and Russia.[[3]](#endnote-4) This book sheds light on the Qing’s territorial expansion and its lasting consequence in Chinese political culture, most notably the disappearance of “barbarian” regions from within the Qing realm.

## Middle Kingdom:

The phrase, “Middle Kingdom,” has found its way into several recent book titles, such as Kendall Johnson’s *The New Middle Kingdom: China and the Early American Romance of Free Trade*, John Pomfret’s *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, and Scott Kennedy’s *Beyond the Middle Kingdom: Comparative Perspectives on China's Capitalist Transformation*.[[4]](#endnote-5) The “Middle Kingdom” usage in these titles may carry a tint of irony, or perhaps the authors aim to evoke a sense of antiquated nomenclature. Regardless of the authors’ motivations, it is likely that most readers would readily interpret the Middle Kingdom as a historical reference to “China.”

The metaphor of the Middle Kingdom was the starting point of modern American Sinology. In 1848, the American Presbyterian missionary and sinologist Samuel Wells Williams (1812–1884) published his major work, *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Literature, Social Life, Arts, and History of the Chinese Empire and Its Inhabitants.* A revised edition with new illustrations and a new map of the Chinese empire appeared in 1871.[[5]](#endnote-6) During the period in which Williams was writing *The Middle Kingdom*, he saw the significant buildup of a British naval campaign against China. He witnessed how the British navy defeated its Qing Chinese counterpart during the First Opium War. In his own words, Williams' life in China overlapped with the opening of China.[[6]](#endnote-7)

In the preface to the first edition (1848), Williams defined two goals of writing this book. The first was to provide the “most authentic, important, and recent” information about China. The second was to dispel the caricature of the Chinese. The caricature went like this: “The Chinese were on the whole an uninteresting, grotesque, and uncivilized “pig-eyed” people, whom one run no risk in laughing at; an “umbrella race,” “long-tailed celestials,” at once conceited, ignorant, and almost unimprovable.”[[7]](#endnote-8) Williams wanted to scrutinize China’s geography and document every aspect of the Middle Kingdom to avoid such widespread and commonly held impressions of the Chinese people. It is critical to note that Williams deployed the description of the Middle Kingdom as a neutral name adopted from “the meaning of the most common name for the country among the people themselves.”[[8]](#endnote-9) It is equally critical to note that Williams was the pioneer to argue against the extensive racism and negative stereotypes of the Chinese in his times. As a protestant missionary, however, Williams considered the Chinese “holding a middle place between civilization and barbarism—China being the most civilized pagan nation in her institutions and literature now existing.”[[9]](#endnote-10) We may call Williams the pioneer of scientific sinology.

*The Middle Kingdom* was the first modern account of Qing China with a sweeping claim of China’s autonomy and isolation from the rest of Eurasia. And it continued to serve as an influential account of China in the Anglophone world until the end of World War II. In this provocative analysis, Williams portrayed Qing China for the first time as a geographically isolated “Middle Kingdom:”

Its civilization has been developed under its own institutions; its government has been modeled without knowledge or reference to that of any other kingdom; its literature has borrowed nothing from the genius or research of the scholars of additional lands; its language is unique in their own symbols, its structure, and its antiquity; its inhabitants are remarkable for their industry, peacefulness, numbers, and peculiar habits.[[10]](#endnote-11)

Williams's style of scientific sinology proceeded like that of Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975) in his *A Study of History*.[[11]](#endnote-12) Williams and Toynbee believed civilizations are rooted in their specific environmental conditions, born from the continuous interaction between the environment and human endeavors. In his condensed depiction and later detailed explanations, Williams shied away from conceit and focused on the empirical examination of Chinese civilization. His traditional Sinology encompassed numerous aspects, including geography, demographics, natural history, governance and law, education, language, architecture, attire, cuisine, and social norms. He posited that the Middle Kingdom had embarked on a self-sufficient and insular path, detached from the rest of Eurasia throughout its history. He was the pioneer in emphasizing how the geography of the Chinese subcontinent fostered a Sinocentric perspective. Williams's work profoundly influenced the field of Sinology, and his concept of China’s cultural distinctiveness became the foundation for many subsequent studies on Chinese civilization.[[12]](#endnote-13)

Among those influenced by Williams, John K. Fairbank (1907–1991) was the most consequential. The collection of essays edited by John Fairbank, dubbed *Chinese World Order* and published in 1968, recast Sinocentrism as an international order in East Asia. All societies in East Asia, including China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and the small island kingdom Ryukyu stemmed from ancient Chinese civilization.[[13]](#endnote-14) By this, Fairbank meant that the political elites in Korea, Vietnam, and Ryukyu shared Chinese culture’s core values (Early modern Japan did not fit this model) and belonged to a China-centered tributary system. The tributary system was hierarchical in which smaller states paid tribute to a larger, hegemonic state. This system provided several benefits for both the hegemon and the tributary states. For the hegemon, the tributary system provided a source of revenue and legitimacy. For the tributary states, the tributary system provided security and access to the hegemon’s markets. The tributary system upheld stability in East Asia for several reasons. First, the hegemonic state was always a major power that could deter aggression from other states. Second, the tributary system provided a set of rules and norms that governed relations between states. Third, the tributary system was flexible enough to accommodate changes in the balance of power.[[14]](#endnote-15)

John King Fairbank was more than just a scholar of history. His scholarship, mentorship, and public engagement significantly shaped American understanding of China in the mid-twentieth century, thus indirectly influencing U.S. policy toward China. In 1972, a significant event in U.S.-China relations occurred: President Richard Nixon’s visit to China, which marked the beginning of a new phase in relations between the two nations. As a leading expert on China, Fairbank likely commented on these developments and may have been consulted in an unofficial capacity. John Fairbank’s teachings and writings gave U.S. leaders, policy-makers, scholars, and the general public crucial insights into China’s history, society, and politics. Through his work, he helped to foster a more nuanced and informed understanding of China in the U.S. during a time of significant geopolitical change.[[15]](#endnote-16)

From Samuel W. Williams to John K. Fairbank, China’s image as the Middle Kingdom has persisted in North America. As suggested by Scott Kennedy, the issue may not lie so much in China’s historical reality but more in the collective Middle Kingdom complex that has been a part of our understanding for a considerable duration. The Cold War-era conception of the Middle Kingdom continues to linger in our minds. This age-old idea of the Middle Kingdom has recently uncorked a distinct specter—the so-called “China scares”—that has repeatedly obscured our perception of the world’s most densely populated nation.[[16]](#endnote-17) The Middle Kingdom complex may be nothing more than our collective harmonious illusion.

## The Rise of China:

The rise of China in our times has introduced new and sweeping perspectives for historians revisiting China’s past.

Unlike the conventional narratives of "the rise and fall of political powers,"[[17]](#endnote-18) outspoken scholars have argued that China is fundamentally a different state apparatus. Zhang Weiwei is perhaps the loudest theorist among recent apologetic scholars of China’s rise.[[18]](#endnote-19) In his book *China Wave: The Rise of a Civilizational State*, Zhang recasts China's rise as a civilization state beyond Western political concepts.[[19]](#endnote-20) For Zhang, the key to understanding China’s unique system is its long “civilizational state” tradition that goes back to at least the second millennium BCE. In his view, the civilizational state fundamentally differs from the Western sovereign state. The sovereign state is based on a contractual relationship between individuals, while the civilizational state is based on an organic relationship between the ruler and the ruled. The sovereign state is founded on individual rights, while the civilizational state is based on group rights. In Zhang’s view, the civilizational state has several advantages over the sovereign state. First, it is more efficient because it does not have to go through the cumbersome process of individual contract formation. Second, it is more stable because it is based on group solidarity rather than individual rights. Third, it is more just because it considers the group's interests rather than the interests of individuals. Fourth, it is more peaceful because it does not have to resort to force to maintain order. Finally, it is more sustainable because it takes a long view of history. So, what does all this have to do with China’s rise? Zhang argues that the civilizational state is uniquely suited to managing a large country like China. The key is scalability. The civilizational state can be scaled up to manage a large territory with a large population because it is based on group rights rather than individual rights. In contrast, the sovereign state is limited by the number of individuals who can fit into the contract. Therefore, the civilizational state is better equipped to manage a large country like China. The sovereign state, on the other hand, is better suited to managing a small country.

In contrast, Christopher Coker's *The Rise of Civilizational States* criticizes those states that claim to be civilizational states, such as Russia, India, Brazil, Turkey, and Iran.[[20]](#endnote-21) Coker believes these countries are sovereign states that have appropriated the language of civilizations to legitimize their rule. He argues that the civilizational state is a myth and that China is no different from any other sovereign state. In response to Coker's book, Zhang Weiwei wrote *The China Horizon: Glory and Dream Of A Civilizational State*.[[21]](#endnote-22) In this book, he argues that the civilizational state is not a myth but a forward-looking political system. Fin-de-siècle Japan, for instance, modernized itself by emulating Western powers despite its drastic differences in aesthetics, taste, culture, and languages from the West. Today, Japan is a member of the G7 and behaves like a Western power. And most scholars in Japan do not conceptualize it as a civilizational state.

The philosopher Zhao Tingyang was the most authoritative source of all apologists for China’s rise. His innovative and controversial book, *Tianxia tixi* 天下体系, was first published in 2005 and republished in 2011 by Renmin University Press.[[22]](#endnote-23) During this period (2005–2011), many critical philosophers and historians from the Anglophone world, France, Germany, Italy, Korea, and India seriously engaged in critical discussion of this book. The English translation appeared in 2021: *All Under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order*.[[23]](#endnote-24) Zhao's book is about how China can lead the world. He argues that the world is entering a new era in which China will be the dominant power, and the world needs a new form of global governance, which he calls *tianxia* (Chinese phrase for "All under Heaven"). Zhao argues that *tianxia* is the only form of global governance that can manage the challenges of the twenty-first century. The world needs a more multipolar form of global governance for regional cooperation. Given the Russian invasion of Ukraine and how the US has supported unjust regimes in the Middle East, Zhao argues that previous Cold War hegemons have lost their credibility to lead the world to a better future. He argues that only China, a hegemon with a different civilizational tradition, can lead the world to a prosperous future.

How did China achieve such a confident international presence? China has realized its industrialization on a systematic and massive scale and has come to challenge the technoscientific supremacy of the United States. However, China's economic expansion took time to occur.[[24]](#endnote-25) The People's Republic of China shocked the international community with its rapid economic expansion, based on its post-Soviet-style, free-market economy and primitive accumulation, in less than two decades. Unlike many postcolonial countries in Africa and Latin America, which have been hopelessly reliant on capital supply and control from the United States, China’s double-digit expansion has been self-sustaining. It made itself the world's largest factory and sold everything to the United States for three decades. In this sense, the two countries were economically linked. China's return to global capitalism was inseparable from American consumer demands. As the United States fell into its subprime mortgage crisis in 2008, everyone felt China's economic power worldwide, while the US-China symbiosis began to come undone.[[25]](#endnote-26)

In the years since 2008, China’s economy has slowed, but it has continued to grow faster than most industrialized countries. China's authorities have responded to this deceleration by investing in transportation and commercial and residential property, leading to debt problems and a housing bubble. The Chinese government has also been cracking down on dissent and increasing surveillance of its citizens. Yet, despite these concerns, Chinese society is still relatively stable, and the government's popular backing is unshakable. Nevertheless, recent trade conflicts with the United States have harmed the Chinese economy. For these reasons, many China observers are wondering if China will be able to maintain its economic expansion until 2035. Despite the slowdown, China’s economy is now the second largest, surpassing Japan.

The rise of China is one of the most significant geopolitical developments of the twenty-first century.[[26]](#endnote-27) China has transformed itself from a poverty-stricken backwater to a global economic powerhouse in just a few decades. China's diplomatic reach is expanding, its military capabilities are strengthening, and its international economic clout is growing. The energy of its youth and entrepreneurs, the dynamism of its markets, and the confidence of Chinese leadership all point to a country redefining what it means to be a major player in global affairs. The rise of China has had a profound impact on the world. It has shifted the global balance of power and raised concerns about China's intentions. However, it is also critical to remember that China is still a developing country and faces several challenges, such as inequality, environmental degradation, demographic contraction, and corruption. Although China is not currently considered a superpower, its potential has raised concerns for the world's only existing superpower and its dominant position.

The rapport between the US and China will be pivotal in shaping the twenty-first century, given that China has emerged as a strategic competitor and ideological adversary to the United States. A fresh wave of “China fear” and “China obsession” is currently permeating our intellectual discourse and public conversations.[[27]](#endnote-28) Some pundits perceive the United States as deeply anxious about China's potential to destabilize the U.S.-led world order. Simultaneously, China envisions itself emerging from historical ruins, seeking to recapture the golden era of the eighteenth century. The correlation I am illustrating here, between China’s ascendancy in the twenty-first century and the territorial amplification of Qing China in the eighteenth century, bears striking resemblances. China’s strategic aspirations often hark back to its past epoch of prosperity. However, I am not invoking China’s ambitions to validate my approach but rather to reveal it as a political aspiration embodied in the rekindling of past imperial grandeur. As President Xi Jinping encapsulates the China dream as a futuristic vision, his objective—unlike the shining city on a hill—essentially points towards the revival of China’s global pinnacle in the eighteenth century.

Given the current political environment, how can we reassess the history of eighteenth-century China while considering China’s ascent in the twenty-first century? We can now adopt a more balanced perspective that transcends the “Middle Kingdom complex.” Viewing China as an overly suspicious, egocentric, and patronizing superpower only fuels fear of China; projecting Sinocentrism onto Qing China is the first step towards misinterpreting its early modernity. Many historians believe that China has followed a hierarchical, ethnocentric, and concentric Chinese World Order when dealing with neighboring states and subordinate entities, starting from the Qing Empire and continuing to their current status as an economic superpower.

As China’s ascension counters certain orientalist preconceptions, such as the flawed belief that its written system or Confucian values might hinder the advancement of modern science, it has surprisingly reinforced the fear of China’s potential for global leadership. While I refrain from labeling this current surge of confidence in China as Sinocentrism, I suspect many in the West might be prone to such an interpretation. As we confront China’s impressive achievements and perhaps harbor more profound doubts about its global intentions than ever, dispelling myths about the Middle Kingdom complex and the Chinese World Order in its early modern history is imperative. Why is this crucial? Because now is the moment to demystify China’s early modern geopolitical mindset and to understand how they reached their current stature so rapidly and consistently. Until now, we in the West still lack the political lexicon to describe China’s Belt and Road Initiatives adequately.[[28]](#endnote-29) This Eurasian vision did not just materialize out of thin air. Only when we impartially comprehend China’s historical reality can we meaningfully engage with them?[[29]](#endnote-30)

This book proposes a new methodology to analyze early modern China’s geopolitical strategies and territorial ideologies. My approach constructs a historical narrative using three sets of binary distinctions: (1) demarcating the known world from the territory, (2) distinguishing agrarian regions from arid regions, and (3) distinguishing between civilization and barbarism. While these categories are crafted to be analytical, they often overlap and intermingle and can even invert. This book aims to show how utilizing these binary categories can provide a more accurate depiction of China’s geopolitics during the early modern era compared to the conventional analytical frameworks of the Middle Kingdom and the Chinese World Order.

## Territory versus the Known World:

Within the broad spectrum of ancient Chinese history and geography, there lies an understated obscurity between the actual territory where the state can exert its authority and the perceived “known world” or “all under Heaven” (Tianxia), encompassing regions acknowledged and comprehended by ancient rulers yet beyond their control. The differentiation between the tangible territorial space and the known world was not always explicit, possibly deliberately sustained to mask specific details. Max Weber, a notable German sociologist, economist, and political theorist, provided an influential and comprehensive definition of the state. He described a state as a “human community that successfully asserts the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”[[30]](#endnote-31) The ancient Chinese rulers understood the “legitimate use of physical force” was crucial in defining their territories. Still, they also project an ideological gesture to position themselves as the paragon of the Chinese civilization. This distinction becomes particularly noticeable when we consider the Han Empire’s sending of envoys to what they referred to as the “Western regions” (what we now call Central Asia). These Western regions were a part of their known world to the Han rulers, who lacked any means of asserting control over them.

Ancient rulers from the North China Plain claimed themselves as sovereigns of the known world—everything under Heaven from their perspective. This is primarily because they perceived these early Chinese states as exceptionally advanced and overwhelmingly dominant within their realm. Nevertheless, the ancient Chinese rulers’ authority was limited to several river basins on the North China Plain, and they often required assistance to manage their vassals. Their claim of being the protectorate of the known world was more symbolic than practical. Hence, it is crucial to comprehend the distinction between the areas under the ruler’s direct control and the “known world” (all under Heaven).

During the thirteenth century, from the viewpoint of Mongol rulers and their advisors, it appeared that the Mongol regime had successfully conquered the entire “known world.” However, this did not imply that they physically occupied or governed these territories. The Chinese and Persian advisors to the Mongols were amazed, and they attempted to record this unprecedented feat in any accessible written resources. Persian texts, in particular, detail West and Central Asia's human and cultural geography. The Persian and Chinese advisors thoroughly understood the known world, but that didn't imply that the Mongols could exercise control over their Central or Western Asian territories. The Mongols inherited the administrative system of the Chinese Song Dynasty and governed the Yuan territory within China but not Central Asia. It was not until the Qing Empire’s conquest of Central Asia that China could assert control and occupy the region.[[31]](#endnote-32)

In this book, I dedicate considerable focus to the political governance and military strategies of the Qing Empire, as well as the true geographical expanse under its control. Upon conducting a detailed examination of political entities and their relationship with the physical territories they govern, as it stood in eighteenth-century China, the “Middle Kingdom” notion gradually dissipates within the historical narrative. The idea of a Chinese World Order appears illogical in the face of the extensive Qing expansion in the eighteenth century. Consequently, the actual geopolitics comes to the forefront, providing meaningful context to present-day China’s territorial ambitions.

## Agrarian versus Arid Regions:

In 1923, the renowned Chinese sociologist and geographer Hu Huanyong (1901–1998) sketched a simple yet astonishing line that bisects China into two distinctly different geographical and demographic regions. Now referred to as the Hu Huanyong Line, this demarcation reveals a stark contrast in population density and land distribution across the country.[[32]](#endnote-33) The population is significantly denser to the east of the line, accommodating over 1.3 billion people. At the same time, the West is sparsely populated, housing only about 300 million residents—a stark ratio of more than four to one. The Hu Huanyong Line is a boundary that distinguishes the agricultural region from the dry and barren region of China.

The contrast between China's populous and less populated, or agricultural and arid, regions is further underscored by their differing population growth rates. Over the past four decades, China has made significant strides toward eradicating poverty. The number of rural residents living below the current poverty line has been reduced by an impressive 739.9 million. China’s efforts have accounted for over 70% of global poverty reduction. The methods China used to alleviate poverty included a development-focused approach, strengthening the self-improvement capabilities of impoverished populations, encouraging diverse entities to participate in poverty alleviation efforts, and maintaining a focus on innovation and the continuous improvement of these initiatives. Despite the remarkable successes of China's poverty alleviation programs, several imminent challenges must be acknowledged. These include the decreasing impact of financial contributions on poverty reduction, the potential negative impact on the internal motivation of the poor population, and the lack of adequate participation from market forces and social entities in poverty alleviation.[[33]](#endnote-34) Grasping the relationship between ecological circumstances and economic growth is essential to understanding how China’s contrasting regions—populous and less populated—remained politically significant today.

A close up of a map





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In his seminal work, "On the Population of China," Hu argued that due to the country’s vast size and diverse geography, any policy or development initiative would differentially impact each side of the Hu Huanyong line. Regardless of what transpires in China—war, famine, or natural disaster—the line, signifying China’s ecological and demographic structure, endures. The enduring simplicity of this structure is striking. China’s population has ballooned from 400 million in 1923 to 1.4 billion in 2020, yet the Hu Huanyong line, first conceived in 1923, remains as relevant today.[[34]](#endnote-35) Despite the country’s remarkable transition over less than a century from a war-torn, ecologically devastated nation to the world’s second-largest industrialized economy, the demographic structural confines identified by Hu Huanyong remain. Despite considerable investments in high-speed rail and genetically modified food, the Chinese population has not overcome these enduring boundaries. More importantly, the Hu Huanyong line also underscores the historical dichotomy between the Buddhist-Shamanistic Steppe world and Confucian China. How have these two worlds—with their distinct ecosystems, demographics, politics, economics, social structures, and cultures—continued to coexist and even integrate until today?[[35]](#endnote-36)

Given the structural and geographical constraints highlighted by the Hu Huanyong line, it is critical to examine how the Qing forces succeeded in conquering and occupying Central Asia and creating modern Chinese territory. At the dawn of the eighteenth century, the Qing military campaigns added more than 2 million square kilometers to China’s territory. However, integrating these newly acquired regions into the Qing Empire presented challenges due to their unique cultures, languages, and religions. The Qing rulers did not aim to unify their subjects under a singular Han Chinese identity. Instead, they pursued a cultural and religious tolerance policy, acknowledging the stark differences between the settled agrarian societies in the Chinese subcontinent and the nomadic societies on the Steppe. James Milward has called this the “ethnic policy” in his analysis. By the conclusion of the Qing territorial expansion circa 1820, most of the population resided in the eastern half of the country, east of the Hu Huanyong line, in an area conventionally referred to as China proper (which also included today’s Manchuria). The western half of the Qing territory, west of the Hu Huanyong line, including the expansive Tibetan highland, the Gobi Desert, and the Mongolian-Manchurian grassland, remained thinly populated.

The Qing rulers developed an innovative geographical viewpoint that set the stage for the Hu Huanyong line of the twentieth century. Initially, they introduced a unique understanding of space to define and comprehend Chinese territory. The previous Ming Empire’s spatial perception was anchored on the idea of a central point and its surroundings, designating Beijing as the nucleus and all other areas as dependents or vassals. However, the Manchus, who hailed from the northeast, naturally leaned towards viewing space in terms of northern and southern regions. They quickly acknowledged the need to update the Ming's conception of China's homeland to reflect its actual geographical reality accurately. As a result, the Manchus introduced a novel geographical structure based on the distinction between agricultural and arid regions. This model divided China into two segments, as clearly as the Hu Huanyong line did. On the agricultural and densely inhabited side, the Qing Empire termed it the "unity division," governed completely by the Confucian bureaucracy, consisting of approximately 1500 counties across eighteen provinces. In the sparsely inhabited area that was dry and lacking in resources, the Qing Empire referred to it as the "border division." The Qing army held sway over the region, while the influential local elites oversaw the political and legal systems. These two divisions—the unity and border divisions—together constituted the Qing territory.

Second, the Qing scholars developed a new temporal framework to situate their new territorial empire within Chinese history. How did the Qing ruling elites structure their political authority with overlapping associations of prestige, status, marriage, ethnicity, and honor among the Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese nobility? The Qing community of ruling elites were initially the rulers of a military confederacy—a military hierarchy born out of nomadic steppe-style warfare that had evolved along with the Qing's military success. After the Manchu conquest of China proper, the Confucian bureaucracy tinkered with a new formulation of the Mandate of Heaven to supply Manchu and Mongol political legitimacy. The Qing cosmopolitan monarchy required constant tinkering and adjustment to Confucian universalist claims based on classical scriptures and vice versa. Heaven’s mandate was undeniably the source of legitimacy for the Chinese, Manchu, and Mongol ruling elites. The cosmopolitan nature of the Qing rulership directed the Qing state to expand westward into Central Asia when the Qing ruling elites could seize a chance to do so.

Therefore, this book focuses on the Qing monarchy and its collaboration with the Confucian bureaucracy. The partnership of the Qing monarchy and Confucian bureaucracy reconceptualized the temporal periodization of Chinese history according to new exegeses of the Confucian Classics. Along with the new spatial framework, the Qing scholars formulated a new spatial-temporal framework to describe and celebrate the universalist nature of Qing rulership in their time and place. The Qing Empire reckoned the actual geopolitics of its position on Earth and reconsidered the temporal locus of the Qing Empire in Chinese history framed in Confucian language. The result was a tentative reconstruction of the spatial-temporal framework of Confucian universalism. Such a universalism could not be reduced to the *Chinese World Order*.

## Civilization versus Barbarism:

The title “Waiting for the Barbarians” was initially borrowed from a poem penned by Constantine F. Cavafy.[[36]](#endnote-37) I have adopted this title to communicate my central thesis: the Qing established a new geopolitical structure in East Asia, grounded in its universal perception of world order and political geography. The first thorough collection of Cavafy's poems was translated and assembled by the New York-based cultural critic Daniel Mendelsohn; upon whose translations I have relied. Mendelsohn adroitly and effortlessly navigates between ancient and modern elite and mainstream cultures. His astute analyses of popular films like *Avatar* and *I Am Legend and TV series such as Game of Thrones and Mad Men* have impressed me with his acumen. In the introductory section to his essay collection, which also shares the title “Waiting for the Barbarians,” Mendelsohn encapsulates Cavafy’s renowned poem, first published in 1904, and offers a reasonable interpretation.

Based on this perspective, Cavafy’s poem illustrates “the predicament of a precious civilization precariously threatened by the raw forces of barbarism.” However, it is crucial to note that the treasured civilization in focus may not necessarily be teetering on the brink of collapse or under threat from such crude forces of barbarism. Instead, the sense of looming danger and disaster might be more rooted in baseless apprehensions or misconceptions. J. M. Coetzee, the South African writer's novel, “Waiting for the Barbarians,” explores this ambiguity inherent in the poem's primary and more prevalent interpretation. In Coetzee’s award-winning novel, published in 1980, an unnamed narrator relates the tale of a middle-aged magistrate stationed in a remote desert outpost of an imperial colony. The magistrate’s position within the empire carries little authority or influence. The empire is suspicious of outsiders, often portraying them as brutal and hostile. The narrative commences with appointment of a new magistrate, keen to prove his worth to the empire. He gradually begins questioning the empire’s policy of vilifying and maltreating the barbarians. He connects with a young woman from a barbarian tribe, a tortured captive brought to the outpost. His conflicting non-sexual and sexual feelings towards this barbarian woman develop, as does his empathy for the barbarians. Over time, the magistrate recognizes the empire’s cruelty and injustice. His resistance to the empire results in his capture and torture. Ultimately, the magistrate is released from prison and returns to the outpost town, now decimated by the empire, with him being the sole survivor.

The title of Coetzee's novel, “Waiting for the Barbarians,” is ironic as it portrays a civilized empire fearful of being overwhelmed by supposedly barbarous external forces. The empire’s harsh and callous treatment of the barbarians stems from their perception of them as uncivilized.[[37]](#endnote-38) The central dilemma arises: what should be done in the face of supposedly inferior, barbaric outsiders? For the magistrate, what is the course of action when the cruelty and injustice of his people become apparent?

According to Mendelsohn, Coetzee’s reading was not the only interpretation of Cavafy’s poem. The second and more upbeat reading goes as follows:

In Constantine Cavafy's “Waiting for the Barbarians,” the representatives of a very grand and sophisticated culture, unnamed but apparently Rome, assemble at the city gate in great state, from the emperor to his various officials, awaiting the arrival of envoys of the (also unnamed) “Barbarians.” … Only in the final line of the poem does Cavafy give the proceedings an unexpected twist: the emperor and the rest, you learn, are looking forward to the barbarians’ arrival. "Perhaps these people," the narrator sighs in the last line, “were a solution of a sort.”

So, the poem is about confounded expectations in more ways than one. There are the disappointed anticipation of the waiting emperor and his people, of course, but even more, perhaps, there are the oddly thwarted expectations of the reader of the poem, which have been set up by that sonorous, portentous, and now famous title. Detached from its contexts, the phrase “waiting for the barbarians,” which has been used as everything from the title of a novel by J. M. Coetzee to the name of a chic men’s clothing store in Paris, seems to be about the plight of a precious civilization perilously under siege by the crude forces of barbarity. And yet Cavafy himself clearly saw it differently. A note he wrote in 1904, the year he published the poem, indicates that for him it was "not at all opposed to my optimistic notion”—that it represented, indeed, “an episode in the progress toward the good.”[[38]](#endnote-39)

The second interpretation is encapsulated in the poem’s closing couplet, representing Cavafy’s personal view, which Mendelsohn identifies as “an episode in the progression toward the good.” As Mendelsohn highlights, the poem embodies thwarted expectations. Rather than portraying the predicament of civilization under attack, it portrays advancement toward the greater good. In this interpretation, the title suggests a continuum from civilization to barbarism. The civilized, symbolized by the empire, have honed their culture and nurtured their civilization. They inhabit cities and maintain a complex social structure. They are also the ones who perceive the barbarians as lesser and threatening. As per this interpretation, Mendelsohn suggests that the title “Waiting for the Barbarians” symbolizes the hope of change in a stagnant and aging civilization, as the anticipated arrival of the barbarians represents progress towards a positive outcome. In this view, the waiting emperor and his citizens are not merely awaiting the barbarians’ arrival. They anticipate something entirely different. This unspecified expectation might be assumed as the onset of a new era. This interpretation aligns more closely with Cavafy’s optimistic progressivism during his lifetime.

The nuanced interpretations of “waiting for the barbarians” dovetail with the arguments presented in this book. The history of the Qing Empire can be seen as a chronicle of disrupted and ruined expectations, eventually leading to acceptance, adaptation, and overcoming the barbarian boundary. Are we reflecting on the Ming dynasty’s end instead of the Qing dynasty’s dawn? Or perhaps the ethnic tensions between the Manchus and Han during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Are we considering the military endeavors of the Manchu-Han against Central Asians, who were barbaric from the vantage point of the Qing Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? What about the clash of value systems between the Chinese and Europeans (and Americans) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Or are we comparing today’s China with its past versions in the twentieth century? These parallels indeed provoke thought, yet each comparison raises its unique questions.

The Ming Empire’s implosion was not due to the actions of perceived barbaric outsiders but rather because of its own self-centered and ruthless policies towards the so-called “barbarians.” The term “barbarian” was eventually reclaimed by those initially cast as outsiders. The Qing Empire was established based on the accomplishments of the “civilized and advanced Chinese” it subdued and colonized. The very individuals the empire sought to eliminate ended up laying the groundwork for its magnificence. As the Qing Empire expanded, its cosmopolitan vibrancy flourished. During Euro-American imperialism in the nineteenth century, coastal China was subjected to semi-colonialism, which stifled its once cosmopolitan spirit. The self-destructive tendencies of the empire ultimately led to its demise. There is a growing desire for a new form of cosmopolitanism amid the prevailing Chinese nationalism.

## Outline of the Book:

This book is divided into five chapters, starting with this introduction as the first chapter.

In the second chapter, "The Imagined Territory in Chinese History," I delve into China's complex narratives of landscape and politics. A deep dive into its imperial legacy reveals four distinct "imagined territories" that have left an indelible mark on China's cultural and political fields. Foremost among these territories is the revered *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. This ancient *Classic* has given rise to three primary interpretations: the Gongyang, Guliang, and Zuo perspectives. The Gongyang viewpoint draws a clear line between the sophisticated Chinese heartland and the outer regions deemed barbaric. This perspective highlights the cultural contrasts and introduces the concept of the "Grand Union." This concept encapsulates the idea of a centralized political authority in China that perceives itself as the epitome of civilization amidst surrounding barbaric regions.

The dawn of the eleventh century marked the emergence of the second imagined territory, coinciding with the ascendancy of Neo-Confucianism. This intellectual wave presented a heightened distinction between the revered Confucian ideals and the disparaged barbaric practices. Prominent figures like Zhu Xi, a cornerstone of this movement, introduced the idea that sagehood was within everyone's reach, a groundbreaking thought for its era. While Neo-Confucianism was not universally embraced, it wielded considerable sway, particularly among the elite echelons of early modern China. The philosophy underscored the continuity of values through generations, diminishing the importance of geographical boundaries. In this narrative, the political power perceived itself as embodying virtue, irrespective of its geographical domain.

In the thirteenth century, against the backdrop of the expanding Mongol Yuan Empire, the third territory took shape. Jamal al-Din, a Persian astronomer, championed the creation of *The Grand Union Documentation* for the Mongol Empire. This monumental work, enriched by Confucian scholar Xu Youren's insights, extolled the Mongol Empire's magnanimity. In Xu's introductory remarks, he drew comparisons between the territorial expanse of the Mongol Empire and its Chinese predecessors, underscoring the Mongols' unmatched reach. Through this narrative, the Mongol conquests were historical milestones and emblematic of virtue. This set the tone for future dynasties, where political authority equated territorial conquest and expansion with virtuous governance.

The Ming dynasty (1368–1644), under the leadership of emperors like Hongwu and Yongle, initially championed a philosophy of cosmopolitan rule. However, the landscape changed dramatically following the Tumu crisis, a pivotal event marked by the capture of the Zhengtong Emperor. This turning point gave rise to *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming*, which accentuated the distinction between the Chinese civilization and the perceived barbaric entities in Southeast Asia. This realignment shifted the focus from cosmopolitan interactions to fortifying the Chinese heartland versus Southeast Asian barbarians after a failed attempt to cross the grassland and remove the Mongol threat. In this narrative, the political power viewed itself as the beacon of Chinese identity, anchored within a defined realm.

Chapter three, "The Geodetic Survey of the Qing Empire," delves into the Qing Empire's efforts to enhance its territorial documentation through comprehensive geodetic surveys, especially during its period of swift territorial growth. The Kangxi emperor's reign played a pivotal role in unifying the vast Chinese territories. While confronting and overcoming obstacles such as the civil war against the alliance led by Wu Sangui, Kangxi also focused on the border regions where Wu might form alliances with the Romanov Russians. The emperor initiated journeys across diverse terrains, strategically positioning the military against the Zunghar Mongols’ forces. Acknowledging Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest's technical expertise, Kangxi tasked him with improving weaponry and crafting a global map. Verbiest's work, *A Complete Illustration of the World*, presented a cosmographical view grounded in Ptolemaic *Geographia*, emphasizing Eaarth’s sphericity and the importance of celestial cartography. This work also aligned with Kangxi's strategic vision for the frontiers.

As early as 1672, the Kangxi emperor showcased his keen interest in cartography, initiating measurements at the entrances of the Forbidden City. After triumphing in a civil war against Wu Sangui, Kangxi undertook the "Eastern Tour" in 1681, aiming to meticulously map the Manchu territories. The Institute of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* was instrumental in the empire's mapping initiatives. Amid escalating geopolitical challenges in Central Asia, the Kangxi emperor spearheaded a major military offensive against the Zunghar Mongols in 1696. Alongside this campaign, comprehensive surveys of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia were conducted. As the eighteenth century dawned, the emperor launched a succession of detailed geodetic explorations, which ultimately led to the creation of the Kangxi Atlas.

During the reigns of the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors, the dynamics between the Qing and the Jesuits evolved. While Yongzheng curtailed the Jesuits' evangelistic efforts, he valued their expertise in cartography. Under Qianlong, there was a noticeable move away from Jesuit influence, gravitating towards a more “central and orthodox method (zhongfa).”

Facing geopolitical complexities in Central Asia, the Qing Empire seized opportunities from internal discord, resulting in military conquest and ethnic annexations. The empire undertook three major geodetic explorations in 1756, 1759, and 1772, integrating Central Asia into their cartographic representations. These surveys, perceived as strategic military endeavors, were instrumental in shaping the modern boundaries of China. The Qing Empire's meticulous geodetic efforts reshaped its perspective of its lands and neighbors. The following chapters will delve deeper into this transformative journey for specific intellectual and political elites.Top of Form

Bottom of Form

In Chapter Four, "Exploring Yellow River’s Headwaters," I investigate the cultural implications of the geodetic surveys focused on the Yellow River's origins. The Yongzheng emperor's book, *Awakening from Confusion*, is central to preparing for this exploration conceptually, written as a counter to prevailing anti-Manchu sentiments. The emperor specifically addressed the views of scholar Lu Liuliang, who perceived the Manchus as barbarians. Through this book, the emperor defended the Manchu's legitimacy to rule and challenged the Confucian perspective that depicted them as barbaric. The publication underscored the Qing dynasty's determination against anti-Manchu resistance, reshaped the boundaries of Confucian criticism, aimed to garner support from local elites, and emphasized the contrasting priorities between national and local leadership.

The Yongzheng emperor questioned the idea that a ruler's birthplace determined their legitimacy, asserting that a magnanimous emperor should oversee agricultural and nomadic territories. He sought to shift the prevailing view of "barbarism" and argued that one's geographical roots should not dictate their right to rule. Yet, his successor, the Qianlong emperor, prohibited the book in 1735 because of its unfavorable depiction of the royal lineage. His talented advisor, Qi Zhaonan, supported the emperor's perspective on geography. In 1736, Qi distinguished himself in the special palace examination to serve in the Qing court. He wrote *The Essential Networks of Waterways* at the end of his career. This work details the waterways in China and Central Asia during the Qing Empire's peak, and it highlights the Qing Empire's extensive territorial expansion. Yet, Qi's reputation faced challenges due to the literary inquisition into his family.

In Qing China, Ji Yun's Circle, including Dai Zhen, introduced innovative approaches to geographical interpretations in historical records, shaping the Qing's territorial understanding. Ji Yun, after his Central Asian return, joined the team to compile *The Complete Collection of Four Treasuries* (Siku quanshu), a vast imperial library project, to fortify Qing monarchy-Confucian ties, meticulously excluding any anti-Manchu content. In 1782, the Qianlong emperor launched the project to trace the Yellow River's headwaters. Amita, a trusted imperial guard, pinpointed the Heavenly Pond as the river's headwaters. A new intellectual project ensued. Supervised by Ji Yun, this endeavor sought to rectify historical inaccuracies and show how the Yellow River started in Central Asia and winds its way across China. It underscored the significance of understanding territorial integrity and Central Asian region, marking a progressive shift in Qing's perspective towards the region.

In the fifth chapter, "Cementing Inner and Outer Realms," I examine the political significance of early modern geodesy by analyzing the book *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*. This book simplified geodesy for Confucian scholars. Michel Benoist, a Jesuit mathematician who arrived in Beijing in 1745, significantly influenced cartography and played a key role in designing the imperial Yuanmingyuan Garden. His work culminated in producing world maps for the Qianlong emperor and writing *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*. Ruan Yuan, born into a notable family in 1764, joined the prestigious Hanlin Academy in 1789. His close association with Heshen, a confidant of the Qianlong Emperor, boosted his influence. However, Heshen's downfall affected Ruan's career due to their close relationship. In 1799, Ruan sponsored the publication of *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*.

In the book's introduction, Ruan recognizes the European mastery of cosmic understanding. He encourages scholars to embrace this knowledge with an open heart. While many historians have mistakenly viewed Ruan's perspective as ethnocentric, it resonates more with Voltaire's principle of "tolerance" towards invaluable foreign insights. Ruan's objective was to elucidate the notion of a round Earth to local academics using Chinese astronomical and timekeeping methods. The work, *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*, provides a detailed portrayal of our planet, showcasing its form, meridian lines, and latitudinal divisions. With the Earth recognized as spherical and measurable, the Qing Empire reimagined its geopolitical boundaries, distinguishing between its agricultural (inner) and arid (outer) territories. The subsequent two instances demonstrate the Qing Empire's ideological unification of these inner and outer domains.

Despite facing financial constraints and political obscurity, Qishiyi authored a significant work on Central Asia titled *A Record of What I Heard and Witnessed in the Western Region*. This work provides a deep understanding of early modern geodesy, detailing the geography of Xinjiang, its neighboring polities, military campaigns, and cultural insights. Qishiyi's work emphasizes the strategic importance of regions like the Tianshan Mountains and highlights the Qing Empire's ambitions in Central Asia. Beyond the Jiayu Pass in 1777, three distinct groups existed: Mongols, Uighur Muslims, and Tibetans. Qishiyi's writings provide a detailed account of the Uighur Muslims, their customs, traditions, and history under the Zunghar Mongols. He portrayed the Qing Empire's conquest as a liberation for the Uighurs.

In 1787, Zhu Gui and Wang Zhong engaged in a dialogue about the strategic importance of the Lower Yangzi Valley. This geopolitical prominence was further highlighted by the Qing Empire's acknowledgment of nearby states like the Nguyen dynasty, Choson Korea, and Tokugawa Japan as integral to the Confucian civilization. Qing official Ruan Yuan, emphasizing the region's ecological and geopolitical value, shifted focus from traditional hierarchies to current geopolitical realities, drawing insights from the "Three Rivers" debate. Ruan Yuan advocated for comparing modern accounts with ancient texts to grasp ecological changes. He observed the growing significance of coastal trading hubs over traditional inland areas. The Qing Empire clearly defined its territorial boundaries, underscoring its cohesion and defined borders.

My book delves into the early modern geopolitical outlook of China during the ascent of the Qing Empire as a major power in Eurasia. However, with the decline of the Qing Empire around 1850, there was a pivotal shift in focus. As the twentieth century approached, the emergence of modern nation-states, expansive industrial empires, and unfettered capitalism began to mold the global landscape, and the threat of world wars loomed large. Consequently, modern geopolitics surged to the forefront of China's priorities, overshadowing the once-prevalent geopolitical visions of the Qing Era.

# Chapter Two: Imagined Territories in Chinese History

This chapter presents a history of four overlapping ways of seeing China’s “imagined territories” from the axial age to the early modern era. These imagined territories, compiled based on the measurements given by local authorities, were then legitimized and imposed on the people to support the existing order. In other words, the imagined territory in ancient China had empirical input. It was not a random or creative imagination of the cosmos or a deity, as in creational myth or poetry.[[39]](#endnote-40) The ancient Chinese states were deeply invested in charting the scope and influence of their political authority. While archaeological findings reveal that sundials and yardsticks were commonly used tools in these ancient states, the sheer scale of the ancient Chinese empire exceeded the capacity of these instruments to provide precise or dependable measurements, whether of the celestial realm or the geographical landscape. The limitation of cosmological measures was quite explicit, as shown in the *Mathematical Classic of the Zhou Gnomon* and the *Nine Chapters of Mathematical Classics*. Nonetheless, the political landscape of the Chinese empire emerged from a unique system of concentric layers of civilization, setting it apart from both the Mediterranean World and the Japanese archipelago.

The history of imagined territories includes four spatial representations that overlap in their chronological sequences. China's political powers centralized the spatial representations of their domains earlier than other regions, especially in the Mediterranean. The precocity of China's political powers is by now well-documented.[[40]](#endnote-41) As a result, China's spatial representations differ from the development of the territory in the West, which went through the stage of feudalism, such as the feudal or commercial ownership of land or the administrative illustrations of counties or regions in medieval Europe or Japan.[[41]](#endnote-42) The centralized bureaucratic state, on the contrary, did not share the Mediterranean or Japanese experience.

## A Civilizational Ideal?

Could the ancient wisdom continue to inspire us?

The German philosopher Karl Jaspers published *The Origin and Goal of History* in 1953, in which he introduces the idea of the axial period in the ancient world.[[42]](#endnote-43) The contemporary economist Jefferey Sachs echoes this idea with his periodization of the classical period.[[43]](#endnote-44) In the Axial Age, a diverse array of transcendental ideas emerged independently across all major Eurasian civilizations. According to Jaspers, the axial period “becomes a ferment that draws humanity into the single context of world history. It becomes, for us, a yardstick with whose aid we measure the historical significance of the various peoples of mankind as a whole.”[[44]](#endnote-45) Such a universalism was not a result of philosophical speculation but empirical research on world history's actual development. Jaspers outlines a schema of world history in three stages. He describes the first phase of world history as developing various civilizations across Eurasia. In the second phase, the axial period (roughly from the eighth to the third century BCE), in which the first unity of humanity took shape, erupted simultaneously across Eurasia and reached the highest universal philosophical reflection level. The philosophical reflection will serve as the basis of transcendental and universal ideas in the future. The world civilizations then underwent different routes with their tradition of high antiquity. In the third phase, the rise of European intellectual achievements from 1500 to 1800 (including modern science and technology) became unparalleled in the world. As a Jewish philosopher who witnessed the most destructive wars in human history, Jaspers speaks neither of the world's Europeanization nor the West's decline in the twentieth century. His philosophical yearning compels him to anticipate a "second axial period" that will reveal humanity's unity again.[[45]](#endnote-46)

The Axial Age in China coincided with the era commonly called the Warring States period, which spanned from 770 to 256 BCE. During this time, states of varying sizes and strengths coexisted, competed, and formed alliances across the North China Plain and the Yangzi Valley. Like the Greek city-states, this multi-state system in ancient China gave rise to a rich tapestry of events and figures, including kings and philosophers, warriors and assassins, and senseless cruelty and noble sacrifices. This was also the era that produced Confucius and other seminal thinkers, making it a pivotal period in China's intellectual history. The colorful inter-state politics ended when Qin’s ambitious king conquered all other political rivals and declared himself the First Emperor of the Qin Empire (221–206 BCE). It did not last long, however. Chaotic wars ensued again. The Liu family eventually defeated all their rivals, and the Han empire, founded by the Liu family, dawned around 206 BCE, marking the beginning of China’s imperial system. The era of disunity had concluded, and the age of unity had begun.

The Axial Age concluded when the Han Empire established a new epoch of political cohesion. Like the Roman Empire in the West, the Han Empire laid the groundwork for a centralized bureaucratic system in China, complete with a standardized administrative language.[[46]](#endnote-47) Stretching its political influence across most of the Chinese subcontinent, the Han Empire's core constituency consisted of a select group of noble families residing in the North China Plain. The Han emperor and these noble families canonized the Confucian *Five Classics* (elevated as the holy scriptures). They degraded other thought systems from the earlier period of warring states and disunity (the axial period). In so doing, the Han Empire created the first imperial orthodoxy in Chinese history. From the onset, the *Five Classics* project highlighted the difficulties in authenticating the “real” texts and discriminating them from forgeries. Several versions and ensuing interpretations of the *Five Classics* continued to coexist despite the canonization and standardization. Many of them contradicted each other. In the Han empire, scholars from the noble families described their hereditary scholarship in each family as “antiquity learning” (*guxue*), a blanket term referring to everything ranging from ancient tools, weapons, chariots, buildings, and ritual vessels to the political system in the ancient world before the axial period. The phrase antiquity learning became an indispensable category of classical studies over the next two millennia. It was invoked from time to time when controversies over the classical texts flared, as they often did.[[47]](#endnote-48)

The goal of antiquity learning had a clear political function. It was to discover the true and perfect design of the political and social system at the origin of the Sinitic civilization, which differs from Karl Jaspers’ description of the vitality and diversity of philosophical reflections in the axial period. One of the critical ideas in ancient China, which arose from the competition of multiple and coexisting states that lasted for a thousand years before the Qin-Han unification (namely, the axial period), was a new principle of differentiation: how to separate the Chinese civilization from barbarism.[[48]](#endnote-49) This idea, or political agenda, arose from a specific context of a perceived decline: The founding Zhou house had lost its respect from all states. To Confucius, the praiseworthy political advisor Guan Zhong (720–645 BCE), was credited and responsible for the rise of the Qi state in the east.[[49]](#endnote-50) It was time to call for rejuvenating the lost respect for the lord of the Zhou house. As a political strategy and a slogan—respect the [Zhou] king and push back the barbarians—it promoted the peaceful co-existence of multiple states. It elevated the Qi state to the leadership position. All Chinese and barbarian states coexisted under Heaven, but the civilized nations should differ from the barbarians. The motto was “Respect the king,” which served the helpful purpose of diverting attention away from potential and actual conflicts among competing states. The other half of the slogan, “push back the barbarians,” implied a clear and workable way for the system of multiple states in the North China Plain to distinguish themselves from the barbarians in the northern frontiers.[[50]](#endnote-51)

This type of ethnocentrism was not rare in the ancient world. It is critical to recognize that the historical landscape was far more nuanced and ambiguous than a simple division between agrarian civilizations and nomadic tribes on the frontiers would suggest.[[51]](#endnote-52) As historian Nicolas di Cosmo has illustrated, the development of China's civilizational center was a complex and mutual process, particularly from a Central Asian standpoint. In various regions of the North China Plain, multiple ethnic groups likely coexisted and intermingled for extended periods. The city-states often blurred the lines between agricultural and nomadic ways of life. People commonly identified themselves with specific states, such as Qiren (from the Qi state) or Zhaoren (from the Zhao state). Within the political boundaries of each state, it is probable that peripheral nomadic groups gradually transitioned to an agricultural lifestyle, becoming integrated as Qiren or Zhaoren. A unified "Chinese domain" was likely more of an aspirational ideal for city-state rulers than a political reality.[[52]](#endnote-53) The slogan, "Respect the [Zhou] king and push back the barbarians," was a lofty ideal and had specific strategic implications before the Qin Empire's unification. During the Han empire, the slogan took on a new life in canonizing classical scriptures. Such a political strategy became even more adequate to the Han bureaucratic state.

The Han’s bureaucratic state valorized and institutionalized the Confucian *Five Classics* as orthodoxy. Since then, the Confucian *Five Classics* have been a foundation for ideological orthodoxy for centuries and co-evolved with new configurations of China's political systems. The Confucian *Five Classics* were more variegated than the Bible and the Koran but less diversified than the Sanskrit scriptures, which served as sacrosanct texts for Hinduism, Jainism, and Mahayana Buddhism.[[53]](#endnote-54) More importantly, the *Five Classics* had become the source of the Confucian model of universal rule. To address critical notions like the mandate of Heaven and the distinction between civilization and barbarism, China’s political powers had always framed its legitimacy in terms of the *Five Classics*. When the steppe groups ruled parts of the Chinese subcontinent or its entirety, such as the Touba clan of Xianbei, the Khitans, the Jurchens, the Mongols, and the Manchus, they subscribed to the Confucian model of universal rule. And they justified their authority in the Confucian classical language. Consequently, classical studies (or its hermeneutics) had steadily become an arena of political debates, contentions, negotiations, and compromises. The interpretations of the *Five Classics* had also become a nexus of intellectual creativity in the realm of ideas and political logomancy in ideology. Studying imperial China's political or scholarly debates usually means deciphering classical studies and discussions in their adequate contexts.[[54]](#endnote-55) The unique significance of classical studies in politics is expressed in what historian Benjamin Schwartz has aptly described as the inquiry or field of intellectual and political history.[[55]](#endnote-56) It is also what historian Benjamin Elman has described in the triangulation of classics, politics, and gentry kinship.[[56]](#endnote-57)

The Confucian *Five Classics* included *Songs*, *Documents*, *Changes*, *Rituals*, and *Chronicles*. The *Book of Songs* was a collection of verses from farmers and nobility alike in China’s antiquity. The *Book of Documents* included different recorded functions and affairs of ancient states, such as wars, sacrifices, and tax. The *Book of Changes* is an ancient Chinese divination manual that uses binary symbols to represent all things in the universe. The *Book of Rituals* consisted of ancestral sacrifices, elaborate ceremonies, etiquette for special occasions, elders and virtuous, sky-watching, archery competition ceremonies, etc. The *Book of Chronicles*—called *Spring and Autumn* of the House of Lu (in today's Shandong Province)—contained brief records of inter-state politics from the House of Lu's viewpoints.[[57]](#endnote-58)

Where can one find the passages that are deemed most authoritative in distinguishing between civilized and barbaric realms? How do these texts function within real-world political processes?

Among the *Five Classics*, Confucius praised the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* as the most suitable vehicle to express his political views. Consequently, deciphering the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* became synonymous with interpreting the grand implications of Confucius' subtle innuendos and clues. To decode and unveil Confucius's political plan was to unfold a sacred political blueprint that had never been carried out or realized in Chinese history. The *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* inspired three interpretative traditions, or three competing interpretations of Confucius’ thinly veiled plan of ideal governance—the *Gongyang* tradition, the *Guliang* tradition, and the *Zuo Tradition*—in ancient China, each championed by one or several noble families in the Han empire.[[58]](#endnote-59) The perfect governance of the civilized realm also meant to disseminate its civility to the barbarians. In this regard, "respect for the king and push back the barbarians" became a central theme in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*and a fundamental idea of official Confucianism and the imperial orthodoxy of political power. Every political power in China since the Han empire had inevitably undergone the exercise of claiming to inherit and respect the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle's*veiled plan. It also became an unavoidable and intractable ideological problem for conquest dynasties—when the nomadic power conquered China—in history.

The *Gongyang* tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* was the first scripture to give the imperial orthodoxy an articulated distinction between the superior Chinese civilization and the inferior barbarian realm. The *Gongyang* tradition did so by simultaneously defining civilization in both cosmological and political terms.[[59]](#endnote-60) According to the *Gongyang* tradition, each king begins his reign in the first month of the first year of his reign. The initiation of political power happens in the spring when every living thing begins to grow, and the cosmic energy starts to regenerate. The polity should be synchronized with the cosmos to show its commencement and union. Such synchronization required an unparalleled level of cultural sophistication and ceremonial details in ancient China. The level of cultural sophistication was the sole *Gongyang* criterion for distinguishing civilization and barbarism.

Intimately related to the distinction between civilization and barbarism was the *Dayitong* ("grand union and commencement"), articulated by the classicist He Xiu (129–182) in the *Gongyang* tradition. He Xiu's interpretation meant both temporal and spatial unity.[[60]](#endnote-61) The cosmos must endow the Son of Heaven with a grand sense of union and commencement, from which the realm of Confucian civilization unfolds. The phrase had become intimately linked to Guan Zhong’s “respect the [Zhou] king and push back the barbarians.” The vague and ambivalent referent to the realm of grand union and commencement could be Chinese or Confucian. They were both vague and nearly interchangeable in the Han empire. The cultural uniformity of the imperial realm was initially secondary, and the yearning for such grandeur and display of power was a primary and recurring theme in the imperial discourse. Suffice it to say that, by the time of the second millennium of imperial China, the collective desire to reach the level of “grand union and commencement” had become nearly automatic and standard. Officials and bureaucrats, trained in the Confucian canons, often knew how to frame it with grace and elegance and paid lip service to the ruler about it.[[61]](#endnote-62)

The civilized realm was, therefore, the relative spatial definition of what counts as a Chinese domain. The “grand union and commencement” had become the desired outcome with the expansion of the Chinese domain. It had also become a calendrical and geographical extension of cultural unity. The definition of the “grand union and commencement” was perhaps the most accurate spatial metaphor in John Fairbank’s dynamic concentric circles of the Sinocentric world. In [identify his dates] He Xiu’s explanation of the *Gongyang* tradition, there are three consecutive stages of how Lu city-state expanded its civilized realm in an ethnocentric manner. The center, we should note, was the city-state Lu, not a political entity called ‘China’ or even the Chinese civilization:

* 1. Based on what had passed down generations ago, the ancestors saw the beginning of political order that just appeared from the chaos. The intention of the heart was still rudimentary. Therefore, only the Lu state belonged to the civilized realm, and all other city-states were not in it.
  2. Based on what had been heard from earlier generations, the forerunners saw the expansion of order and peace. Therefore, they included all city-states in the civilized realm and excluded the barbarians from the domain.
  3. Based on what happened in the current generation, we have achieved great peace and order. The barbarians have been civilized and joined our ranks. Everyone is now living within the enlightened realm. There is no difference between faraway and nearby, or between civilized and barbaric.[[62]](#endnote-63)

The prototype of this utopia in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* was indeed a civilizational ideal. The civilized domain began with only one city-state (Lu), and more city-states joined their ranks of civilization. Who decided which city-state could join the status of civilization? And eventually, even the barbaric could ascend to the levels of civilization. There were no biological or racial undertones in the potentials of the barbarians. The grand union and commencement were a spatial, temporal, and cultural unity wrapped in one civilizational ideal.

He Xiu’s spatial distinction between the inside and outside of the civilized realm became critical in China’s subsequent intellectual and political history.[[63]](#endnote-64) Despite the spatial definition of barbarism, He Xiu designed an important incentive for the political power to push back or assimilate the barbarians. The imperial power should protect the civilized realm from the barbarians or enculturate the barbarians into enlightened dominion by whatever means possible. It was an aggressive position to justify a civilizing mission for political power. Many historians also note that He Xiu’s revealing scheme here had much to do with the Later Han struggles with the nomadic Xiongnu mountain warriors.[[64]](#endnote-65)

The *Guliang* tradition painted an idealist and slightly different world in which the civilized and the barbaric could coexist and work together. The exemplar was King Fuchai of Wu (r. 495–473 BCE). The peripheral Wu, located in today’s lower Yangzi Valley, was considered barbaric by the standard of Lu in the central plain, a part of today’s Shandong province. The Duke of Lu had met Huangchi with the King Fuchai and the Duke of Jin, part of the central plain’s civilized domain. The unusual gathering of barbarian and civilized leaders was the highlight of the meeting, and they executed it with good etiquette and paid attention to the details. The wise teacher Confucius commented: King Fuchai did not speak of the protocol but performed it correctly. How great was that! Confucius praised the fact that the civilized and the barbarian could work together and understand the meanings and implications of proper rituals. The *Guliang* tradition prescribed an ideal world of politics in which the barbarians were no longer uncivilized. By implication, the *Guliang* tradition had the least resistance to barbarism and encouraged the political powers to tolerate the barbaric leaders.

According to the *Zuo* tradition, on the contrary, the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*described the Chinese city-states as found in the civilized realm. It regarded every political group outside the realm as barbarians. How the *Zuo* tradition distinguished the Chinese from the non-Chinese was quite like the second stage of the development of the *Gongyang* tradition. More importantly, the Zuo tradition paved the way to demonize the barbarians. For instance, the official historian of the Later Han, Ban Gu (32–92), was aware of the severe threat north of the Han Empire’s border—Xiongnu (the ancient nomadic empire considered as the nemesis of the Han Empire). Ban Gu besmirched the Xiongnu barbarians as “greedy and selfish.”[[65]](#endnote-66) The politics of such demonization bred division and fear.

Ban Gu elaborated with ugly detail on what these barbarian beasts were like: They let their hair down and wore their clothes incorrectly. They look like humans, but they have animals’ hearts and minds. They wear different clothes, eat different food, speak a foreign language, and have strange customs. They live in cold fields in the far north, chasing water and grassland. They hunt and sleep in a tent. Heaven and Earth separate them from us. Therefore, the ancient sage kings treated them like animals. The sage kings never made peace or went to war with them. Attempting to make peace with them would result in wasting money and being deceived anyway. On the other hand, going to war with them would result in exhausting our troops and gaining nothing in return. Their land is not cultivable, and their people are not civilized or obedient. Therefore, they are outside, not inside, the enlightened realm. They are mysterious creatures who are devoid of human emotion. Our politics and culture cannot reach them, and they disagree with our calendar and regulations. In other words, Ban Gu thought of the barbarians as the other, decisively different, and inferior to the Chinese. Ban Gu even degraded the barbarians to the level of the animal kingdom. Since Ban Gu’s classical formulation, however, the barbarians’ dehumanization became a recurring rhetoric in imperial China.[[66]](#endnote-67)

More importantly, Ban Gu noted a profound frontier reality with the nomadic powers. It was virtually impossible to defeat them. Environmental historian Kenneth Chase, who pays great attention to the bordering regions between agricultural and arid zones, has demonstrated this point in a more general and comparative manner across Eurasia.[[67]](#endnote-68)

All three *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* traditions subscribed to a metaphorical expansion of the concentric circles of the Chinese domain. Inside the civilizational circle was China, which the grand union commencement of the political power should govern. Those outside the Chinese realm were undoubtedly barbaric, in a broad spectrum of barbarism from the potentially civilizable subjects to untamable subhuman animals. Historian John Fairbank appropriated this classical model and turned it into a classical justification of Qing China's foreign policy. In *Chinese World Order*, Fairbank addressed both theory and practice of the expansion of the concentric circles of the Chinese domain. The *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* was its origin, and it later developed into a more sophisticated version but remained the concentric circles prescribed by the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. However, Fairbank noted a diversity of diplomatic and ritual actions in Qing China's foreign relations. Fairbank was quite cautious and called his theory a "preliminary framework." Most contributors in his volume, including Yang Lien-sheng, Wang Gungwu, and Mark Mancall, all expressed a certain healthy skepticism of this preliminary framework in their contributions.[[68]](#endnote-69) Some of Fairbank’s students, followers, and admirers often took it for granted. Instead of calling it a preliminary framework, let us call it what it was in ancient China. It was a civilizational ideal inscribed in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. More importantly, it was also a spatial imagination and territorial metaphor.[[69]](#endnote-70) As Li Ling has repeatedly argued from textual and archaeological evidence, such a spatial metaphor of expanding concentric circles or perfect squares was flexible and pervasive in ancient China’s cosmological and cosmographical imaginations. The flat and square earth was fundamental to the ancient cosmology of the inhabitants of North China Plain. And they demanded a center of this flat, square earth from which their civilization unfolded. The cosmological understanding in ancient times was less cohesive, more speculative, and less formalized than the standardized histories that later emerged in imperial China.[[70]](#endnote-71)

China’s ancient civilizational ideal has undoubtedly been valorized, appropriated, abused, and distorted in many ways and manners in Chinese politics over the next two millennia, including modern nationalism, socialism, and communism. John Fairbank correctly indicates how influential the civilizational ideal had become through its invocations in China’s imperial history. Now, at the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, John Fairbank's preliminary framework has undoubtedly outlived its useful purpose. The surge of recent academic works in modeling the "tributary relations" in East Asia has also departed from Fairbank's preliminary framework.[[71]](#endnote-72) The rest of this chapter will show how China's political powers have adopted different frameworks to imagine the imperial territory and explore their spatial imaginations in East Asia and the world.

## Traces of Yu the Great?

Great Yu controls the waters.

The legendary ruler of the Neolithic times—Yu the Great—has enjoyed the credit for managing the flood in China. On the eve of the Mongol invasion, while most land north of the Yangzi River had been conquered or controlled by nomadic rulers for centuries, it had become conventional for the Chinese to chart a map of China as “traces of Yu the Great” (Yuji).[[72]](#endnote-73) Such a spatial representation had the advantage of being vague and flexible in spatial terms.[[73]](#endnote-74) Unlike many historians who seem to take it for granted that the traces of Yu the Great had been accepted by the imperial states from 200 BCE to 1900, I argue that it was a distinctive invention and appropriation of its times in the thirteenth century.

To investigate such a spatial representation in China’s imperial history, we must explore different kinds of periodization of Chinese history to shed new light on this issue. The periodization of Chinese history has recently incorporated many insights from a global perspective. For example, historian Morris Rossabi has divided pre-Mongol Chinese history into two periods. The first period ranges from prehistory to 581, titled “China among Barbarians.” The second period is shorter but more intensive, from 581 to 1279, titled “China among Equals.” In Rossabi’s view, two utterly opposite political orientations prevailed in the second of these two historical periods. The first was Tang cosmopolitanism when the Tang dynasty (618–907) was militarily strong and strategically inclusive. The second was Song ethnocentrism when the Song dynasty (960–1279) was militarily weak and strategically exclusive. Then, the Mongols conquered the Chinese subcontinent and a substantial part of Eurasia. The new political framework of the Mongol empire effectively displaced Song ethnocentrism with a unique spatial ideology.[[74]](#endnote-75) However, when China saw itself among equals in the second historical period, a new moral philosophy called Neo-Confucianism emerged to excel as an ethnocentric form of Chinese superiority. The Neo-Confucian literati saw themselves as the standard bearers of China’s political tradition and as moral agents to carry out a semi-religious mission to preserve and promote an ancient system of Chinese value (*dao*). New-Confucianism, as historian Peter Bol [identify a bit] shows, gradually came to occupy a central position in the literati’s political and intellectual life in the second millennium of China’s imperial history.[[75]](#endnote-76)

The Tang cosmopolitan empire’s historical agency consisted mainly of classically trained men or military men from noble families in China or Central Asia. When the Tang imperial order collapsed in the tenth century, the aristocratic order also collapsed. A new intellectual and political elite rose from the landowning gentry class and gradually increased their participation in the Song imperial states. The gentry members’ socioeconomic status was distinctively above merchants, artisans, and peasants, and they functioned as the elites of local society. Modern scholarship calls these elites by different names. For instance, since Naito Konan (1866–1934), Japanese historians have named this group of landed, classically educated, and politically active elites as the “gentry,” and argued that gentry domination had become a structural feature of the Chinese society since the Song Dynasty. Other historians, such as Benjamin Elman, have described them as “literati,” a term devised to emphasize this group’s classical literacy. Other China historians have stressed the moral mission and obligation these elites assigned to themselves and called them “intelligentsia” (mission-driven intellectuals).[[76]](#endnote-77) Whatever name we may call them by, this group of intellectual and political elites started to rise as a significant historical agency at the end of the tenth century. They thrived and developed a sense of political activism, moral responsibility, and increased participation in the imperial state throughout the Song dynasty. At the same time, the political center moved from the old center Kaifeng (960–1127) in the central plain to two consecutive urban centers—Nanjing (1129–1138) and Hangzhou (1138–1276)—in the lower Yangzi valley. The gentry families moved with the Song dynastic court to the lower Yangzi Valley to escape the nomadic authorities’ occupation of the North China Plain. The immigration of the political and cultural elites to the south (middle and lower Yangzi valleys) and their permanent settlement proved irreversible in China’s cultural history.

Although the nomadic powers defeated and displaced the Chinese elites politically and militarily throughout the thirteenth century, the only workable way for the nomadic powers to declare their equal and rivaling status to the Chinese dynasty was to claim Heaven’s mandate.[[77]](#endnote-78) In a sense, the Mandate of Heaven, invented in the ancient Zhou house to justify replacing the Shang house, was universally accepted as political legitimacy in East Asia, except Japan. East Asia's agrarian and nomadic civilizations mutually recognized the Mandate of Heaven as the universal form of political legitimacy. For instance, the Khitan and Tangut regimes claimed a Mandate of Heaven and built a Chinese-style dynasty in the north to rival the Northern Song. More importantly, as Morris Rossabi and his collaborators have argued, the Northern Song behaved like an equal to the Khitan and Tangut regimes by, for example, sending a recurring payment to the Khitans as a peace offering. In this sense, Song China ceased to be the East Asian regional hegemon or the guardian of what Fairbank has called the *Chinese World Order*. It was clear that the East Asian political order had become a strategic balance of several contending political powers, including Khitans, Tanguts, and Jurchens in the north and Koryo on the Korean peninsula. By the eleventh century, the Khitans had occupied the northern half of the North China plain. By the twelfth century, the Jurchens defeated the Khitans, took most of the North China plain, and forced the Song to migrate to the south of the Yangzi River. The Southern Song state (1129–1276) set an important and unique precedent in China’s spatial history: The Chinese subcontinent was politically divided by the Yangzi River. The nomadic power occupied the North China Plain, and the Chinese regime ruled the territory south of the Yangzi River.

To resist and rival the military might of nomadic powers north of the Yangzi River, the educated elites in Southern Song developed a heightened sense of cultural identity, historical geography, and ethnicity.[[78]](#endnote-79) This new class of Chinese intellectual and political elites saw themselves as the vehicle of Confucian civilization. It was currently under existential threat from the barbarian states surrounding the Southern Song. The educated elites also intensively elevated the Spring and Autumn Chronicle to an unprecedented level. The *Zuo* tradition and the politics of demonization became the intellectual highlight for the Southern Song scholars. At the same time, they also invented a trans-dynastic genealogy delineating how the system of ancient and transcendental values had been transmitted to the present.[[79]](#endnote-80) This transmission process was supposed to have been independent of the rise and fall of the dynastic political powers, and the values it transmitted, outside of history, should remain as pristine as possible. The substance of these ancient and transcendental values was named the Way, or sometimes Heavenly principle. This new moral philosophy and metaphysics, or Neo-Confucianism, became a core value system of the new intellectual and political elites.

With the rise of Neo-Confucianism, a new and more radical understanding of barbarism had also come into being. Such a version of barbarism was a byproduct of the general trend of the Neo-Confucian movement. Pointing this out is by no means to reject or downplay the historical significance of Neo-Confucianism in history. Historian Ge Zhaoguang argues that the Neo-Confucians in the Song dynasty had increasingly come to share a heavy responsibility with the dynastic political power and felt anxious and threatened by the barbarians. They invented a genealogy of how the Way had become transmitted from ancient times to the present. They often argued intensively that the Way should be superior to, and separate from, barbarism. The Neo-Confucian invention of the Way and their demonization of barbarians were two aspects of the same historical process. It was a polarization process between the self (China, our culture and values, Confucian tradition, and history) and the others (barbarians, nomadic lifestyle and values, lack of tradition and history). The new intellectual and political elites drew a sharp line between the Neo-Confucian self and the barbarian others when Song China was under attack.

The Song Neo-Confucians adorned a new idea of “cultural China.” Unlike the earlier Han and Tang dynasties, which had proved their success by military might and institutions superior to the barbarian states, the Song Neo-Confucians argued that the intellectual and moral superiority lay in the intellectual and moral values they called the Way, and by its unique transmission in China. Historian Kojima Tsuyoshi agrees with Ge Zhaoguang’s view and argues that the Song Neo-Confucians positioned culture (ritual and music in the Confucian metaphors) at the center of the entire Confucian tradition and detached the transmission of Confucian values from that of political power. Moreover, they did so at the expense of barbarism. They had redefined the barbarians as materially different from the (Chinese) people and deprived them of the moral values essential to a civilized and enlightened society.[[80]](#endnote-81)

The Neo-Confucians reformulated their radical version of barbarism into their interpretation of the *Zuo* tradition.[[81]](#endnote-82) For instance, the scholar Sun Fu (992–1057) in the Northern Song had written an influential piece called *Explanation of the Subtlety of Respecting the King in the* *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* to explain why Confucius selected the starting and ending years of the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. The language of the *Chronicle* was terse and often obscure. It recorded the most important political events in Lu’s state during the reign of twelve dukes and interstate relationships between Lu and the other regional states of the Zhou realm. In this piece, Sun Fu argued that Confucius started the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* in 722 BCE (the first year of the reign of Duke Yin of Lu) for its cultural significance when most states still paid respect to the Zhou “son of Heaven.” When every lord addressed the son of Heaven with due deference, they would be in the political hierarchy’s proper places. Confucius never made this point explicit but subtly suggested it by praising Qi and Jin (both were civilized states) and blaming Wu and Chu (uncivilized states). Confucius stopped recording the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* in 481 BCE (the fourteenth year of the reign of Duke Ai of Lu) because it was the year that Duke Ai hunted a unicorn in the west field. A unicorn was a hopeful and humane animal, so it was an omen showing the end of a symbolic era of attributing the joint lordship of all city-states in China to the Zhou house.[[82]](#endnote-83)

Consequently, the civilized and barbaric states became indistinguishable and were trapped in chaotic power struggles. According to Sun Fu, Confucius started the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* in 722 BCE and ended it in 481 BCE to identify an age in which the Son of Heaven remained at the top with due respect, the Dukes knew their places in the realm, and the barbarians acknowledged that they should admire the Son of Heaven. The age was later named the “Spring and Autumn Period” after the *Chronicle* that Confucius had edited. After the Spring and Autumn Period, the central plain sank into chaos. Sun Fu argued that although powerful and barbarian enemies surrounded the Song regime, the Song imperial state should live up to Confucius’ ideal hierarchical order in the Spring and Autumn Period. In a way, Sun Fu enhanced the *Zuo* tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*by culturally elevating the ideal of “cultural China.”

By the time of the Southern Song, the Neo-Confucians collectively developed a theory of how every individual (man) could potentially attain sagehood. The attainability of individual perfection in the Neo-Confucian tradition has been a stark contrast with all three Abrahamic religions in world history. The Song moral philosophy was coupled with a new interest in natural studies and cosmology. The Neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi had, for example, studied the shape of the cosmos and left many comments resulting from his “investigation of things.” According to Zhu Xi, however, the possibility for everyone to become a sage was intimately connected with the claim that a barbarian has a different physical quality from a Chinese person. In his argument, Zhu Xi made a quasi-biological distinction between Chinese and barbarian. Recorded in his dialogue with a follower, Zhu Xi tried to clarify the differences between a Chinese person’s physical nature, a barbarian, and a primate. The Neo-Confucians, in general, believed that a Chinese person, a barbarian, and a macaque should share the same human nature (*xing*) endowed by Heaven. But the physical qualities of a Chinese person, a barbarian, and a macaque, on the contrary, would be different. How exactly did Zhu Xi understand the human body and its vital functions?

Zhu Xi and the Neo-Confucians held a view of what historian Charlotte Furth calls the Yellow Emperor’s body.[[83]](#endnote-84) The body has lines and conduits for fluid and *qi* (material forces or energy) to flow and circulate. The body’s fluid and *qi* could be clear or with various shades of turbidity. According to Zhu Xi, the Chinese body’s fluid and *qi* could circulate freely. When the circulation of fluid and *qi* is clogged or slowed, the body would be in disorder. The gorilla has the same fundamental nature as a Chinese person, but its fluid and *qi* cannot circulate like that in a Chinese body. To Zhu Xi, that was the primary difference between a Chinese person and a macaque. A macaque resembles a person, and its intelligence is higher than other animals. However, a macaque cannot speak like a person because its fluid, and *qi* cannot flow freely in its body. A barbarian, on the other hand, is somewhere between a person and a macaque. The halfway configuration of a barbarian body was decisively sub-human in Zhu Xi’s classificatory scheme. In such a formulation, Zhu Xi went beyond the *Zuo* tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* by rationally substantiating the differences between a Chinese and a barbarian.

Such an immanent and transcendental redefinition of a knowing subject and a moral agency became the cornerstone of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, which was subsequently magnified into a powerful tradition in East Asia. Zhu Xi had included a final chapter in his *Further Reflections on Things at Hand* (Jinsilu) dubbed "A General Discussion of Sages and Worthies." In Zhu Xi’s formulation, Neo-Confucianism's critical implication leapt to the foreground: the knowing subject and ethical practitioner's location is entirely irrelevant. Most historians and philosophers who have studied Neo-Confucianism in China ignore the absence of spatial coordinates of Heavenly principles. Intellectual historians have extensively commented and researched "the genealogy of the Way," which describes how the Way was transmitted in historical time regardless of specific places. It is fascinating to note the prominence of time and the disappearance of physical space in the Neo-Confucian imagination of how values passed down from antiquity. There was no need for any physical contact or even cultural connections from one sage to the next. Space or geography has become entirely irrelevant in transmission or genealogy. Zhu Xi and his intellectual nemesis, Liu Jiuyuan (1139–92), disagreed on the fundamental approach to attaining sagehood but tacitly agreed on the irrelevance of "place or physical location" for any knowing subject or moral agents. Liu's famous motto went as follows: "If a wise man arose from the Eastern Sea, at one end of the world, his profound consciousness would permit him to comprehend the world and deduce a set of abstract principles for understanding the universe. If another wise man arose from the Western Sea, he would comprehend the world with the same profound awareness and arrive at the same set of universal and abstract principles." Both utterly dismissed the relevance of physical location and, by implication, the intellectual and moral subjects' contexts, in their potentiality to achieve moral enlightenment and perfection.

We should immediately note that Neo-Confucianism was not the intellectual mainstream of dominant ideology in Song China. And there, a wide variety of geographical works and accomplishments have been documented by many. British historian Joseph Needham’s characterization of Song cartography was essentially a romantic glorification of the scientific achievements of Song China. American historian and sinologist Peter Bol reviews extensive scholarship on Song cartography and concludes that:

1. The distance measured and recorded on these maps was based upon the square grids and premodern cosmology of flat earth. It was not advanced spherical trigonometry based upon the spherical Earth.
2. Song cartography had quite limited influence and consequence on the Mongol and Yuan maps.
3. The trans-dynastic value of Song ethnocentrism was embodied in most maps, which showed the Central Country versus the peripheral “barbarian” tribes or states.

On the one hand, Song trans-dynastic ethnocentrism persisted in various degrees through its cartography. On the other hand, we can also detect in these maps the sophistication of the Song natural philosophy and cartographical techniques.[[84]](#endnote-85)

Neo-Confucianism was a social and cultural movement in Song China. But its legacy in the elite society of early modern China (1500–1850) was undoubtedly long-lasting and pervasive. By the seventeenth century, Neo-Confucianism diverged into broader cultural debates between the contrasting Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming paradigms. It continued to dominate the lives of the elite and the Confucian bureaucracy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I coin the term “Confucian bureaucracy” to refer to a broad spectrum of Neo-Confucian ideologies shared by local elites in the Chinese subcontinent, and to highlight how they brought with them their Neo-Confucian thoughts to the political factions of the Qing bureaucracy, as distinct from the Qing monarchy. Once having ascended to different levels of Confucian bureaucracy, these local elites became provincial and national players in the imperial politics. As a result, participation in the Confucian bureaucracy had become nearly an exclusive channel for any local elites to access political power. And Neo-Confucianism was their key to success in both institutional and ideological terms.

## Spatial Magnanimity:

No known world was outside of the land conquered by the Mongols!

Under the leadership of Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227) and his son Ögedei, the Mongol conquest of large cities and agricultural regions across Eurasia was horrendously destructive. But the destruction also swept away obstacles to transportation, communication, and the exchange of ideas. The Mongol empire split into four khanates after the rule of Möngke Khan (r. 1251–1259). By any historical measure, these four khanates were enormous. The Mongols, however, did not attempt to manage their conquered territory like a sedentary, cosmopolitan empire until Kublai Khan (r. 1260–1294) renamed his new Mongol khanate in northern China the Yuan dynasty and sought to refashion his image as Emperor of China in 1271. To build a Chinese-style dynasty and claim the universal mandate of Heaven, Kublai ruled from Xanadu and built his second capital city in Dadu ("Great capital", today’s Beijing) to rule China. As a contender for the Mandate of Heaven, Kublai Khan continued his vicious campaigns against the Southern Song state. Kublai’s campaigns succeeded in 1276, a momentous year for the Mongol Yuan dynasty.[[85]](#endnote-86)

The Great Khan started ruling the entire Chinese subcontinent from the steppe. With his conquest of Song China completed in 1276, Kublai officially claimed the Mandate of Heaven as the Emperor of China in 1279. This action meant Kublai Khan chose the Confucian model to describe his universal empire. The alternatives to the Confucian model, Islamic or Buddhist, were not attractive to the Great Khan. For Kublai, Confucian universalism was a convenient and persuasive option to rule the Chinese population.[[86]](#endnote-87)

Ten years after Kublai’s successful campaign against Southern Song China, in 1286, the Persian astronomer and scholar-official Jamal al-Din (fl. 1255–91), a man well-versed in advanced knowledge of spherical trigonometry, cartography, and mathematical astronomy during the golden age of Islamic science in the thirteenth century, and who had been overseeing imperial astronomy since 1267, proposed to compile a gazetteer to commemorate the grand union and commencement of the Mongol Yuan Empire in 1286. In Jamal al-Din’s proposal to Kublai Khan, he proclaimed: “Now every piece of land and everyone [in the known world] has been recorded on our map. We should make a book to illustrate the grand union and commencement [of our Mongol empire].”[[87]](#endnote-88) Jamal al-Din probably shared the geographical knowledge we see in Rashid al-Din’s *Compendium of Chronicles*.[[88]](#endnote-89) Jamal al-Din also included other “miscellaneous” maps beyond the Persian and Arabic sources. As far as Jamal al-Din could tell, the Mongols had conquered nearly the world. The Americas were not yet discovered, and most wooden globes showed the Eurasian landmass on the terrestrial sphere surrounded by four seas. More importantly, Jamal al-Din proposed to compile and create the genre of the first comprehensive gazetteer of a universal empire. According to the classical scholar and historian Qian Daxin (1728–1804), two manuscript editions of *The Grand Union Documentation* were produced in the Mongol Yuan dynasty. In 1291, *The Grand Union Documentation*, totaling 755 chapters, was sent to Kublai Khan. The second one started soon after the completion of the first. The scholar-official Zhao Bianzhi petitioned Temür Khan (1265–1307)—the successor of Kublai—to compile a new edition, which was completed and submitted to the Yuan court by the Mongolian scholar-official Boralqi (Ch. Pulanxi or Bolanxi) and the Chinese scholar-official Yue Xuan on April 7, 1303. Both versions of manuscripts were kept in the imperial library with limited access.[[89]](#endnote-90)

*The Grand Union Documentation* gave the Mongol Yuan Empire a different Confucian model. Accommodating various details of the Confucian model was not always smooth sailing for the Mongols. For instance, the Yuan court later adopted the Chinese civil service examination system and enshrined Neo-Confucian doctrines as the examination curriculum. The Chinese advisors persuaded the Mongol rulers to resume the Song imperial examination to recruit Chinese scholars in 1314. The Mongol Yuan state held fifteen metropolitan examinations and awarded only 1136 palace degrees between 1315 and 1368. The selection scope was much narrower than in the earlier Song regime and in the succeeding Ming state.[[90]](#endnote-91) However, the Yuan court ushered in a new and limited partnership between the conquest dynasty and Neo-Confucianism. The Mongols, of course, did not accept every Neo-Confucian idea into their examination curriculum. On the contrary, the Mongols crushed Neo-Confucian ethnocentrism derived from the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* and forced it to go underground. Neo-Confucianism's other components continued to develop under the Mongols, and the resistance movement to the Mongol conquest continued to promote a Song-style ethnocentric discourse. Those who passed the civil service examination and served the Mongol Yuan dynasty must have been hyperconscious of their role in helping a conquest dynasty to meticulously craft a new Confucian universalism.

Xu Youren (1287–1364) was such a Confucian scholar who passed the metropolitan examination and became a presented scholar (*Jinshi*) in 1315. He played a vital role in the print edition of *The Grand Union Documentation*. Four decades after it was completed, in 1346, the grand councilor Berke Bukha (Ch. Bierque Buhua) memorialized Toghon Temür (1320–1370), the last Mongol emperor of the Yuan dynasty, to print and circulate the entire set of *The Grand Union Documentation*. And the emperor ordered Xu Youren to write a prologue for it.

In his prologue, Xu Youren explained why the *Grand Union Documentation* could illustrate the Mongol Yuan Empire as a universal empire in two fundamental ways. First, Xu argued the Mongol Yuan empire exceeded the previous unified dynasties in geographical scope and political unity. Here Xu tackled the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. By Xu’s time, it had become conventional to designate the ideal ancient world as the Three Dynasties Model—the golden age (high antiquity) in Chinese history. It was said, Xu reported, that the grand union and commencement described a culturally uniform world within the six directions, up, down, east, west, north, and south. The Nine Regions (the civilized world) were all connected and ruled by one single sage king. Xu did not explicitly indicate that this lofty ideal of the ancient world was imaginary. But he immediately added that the historical records from the Three Dynasties model could no longer be retrieved and verified, and that we could only speak with confidence about what happened in the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties. He then examined them one by one.

According to Xu Youren, although the Han dynasty (206 BCE–202) expanded its territory far, its tactics alternated between correct and flawed ones. Their conquest was not always smooth. Not to mention that the Han masters disagreed on what *dao* is and had many different proposals. There were one hundred schools and many other methods and intentions. How could we call it "the grand union and commencement?" The Tang dynasty (618–907) lost its capital Changan to the rebels for several decades. How could we call it "the grand union and commencement?" The Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) attempted to cut a deal with the Jurchens but got the short end of the stick. And the Song eventually lost the middle earth. How could we call it "the grand union and commencement?" Our Mongol Yuan dynasty, on the contrary, had reached the ends in the four directions (east, west, north, and south), which was unheard of in history and not envisioned in high antiquity. We Mongols broke all groups within the four directions and unified them in one.[[91]](#endnote-92)

From a current perspective, I call the foregoing views of Xu Youren a form of transvaluation crediting the Mongol Yuan with spatial magnanimity—the unprecedented expansion of the territory became a virtue by itself. For the Mongol Empire, the immensity of territorial expansion resulting from the brutal military conquest of Eurasia should be extolled as the zenith of empire-building in Chinese history. Xu diverted his readers' attention from the blood and suffering to the mightiness and invincibility of the Mongol army. He measured three major ancient empires—Han, Tang, and Song—entirely on the scale of their military prowess and the size of their territory. In such a comparison, territorial expansion became a proxy measure of military success. Therefore, Xu argued that all past unified dynasties, namely Han, Tang, and Song, called themselves “the Grand Union” but did not deserve the title. Our Mongol Yuan dynasty truly matched what the title means. In this way, Xu dismissed the ideal in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* as lofty and farfetched. The “Grand Union” did not mean that all cultures within the six directions (up, down, east, west, north, and south) were uniform or that all people in the Nine Regions were already connected. Instead, it was the premise of such uniformity that mattered the most. The premise was nothing but the Mongol empire's military invincibility, manifested in the endless landscape depicted in the *Grand Union Documentation* for the first time in Chinese history.

There was, however, a second fundamental way for Xu to justify the Mongol's universal empire: Xu chose another Confucian *Classic* from the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. The flexible malleability of the Confucian *Classics* in supporting political legitimacy was not new to Xu and many Confucian advisors. Xu, who was echoing a tradition of Confucian advisors serving the Mongol Yuan Empire from the onset, avoided the three interpretative practices of the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*and chose the cosmology-inspired and awe-inspiring *Book of Changes* to articulate the Yuan's military success and territorial immensity. Xu argued that the Confucian scriptures' first mention of "unity" was not in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* but in the *Book of Changes*. The first hexagram (*qian*) consists of six straight lines: Heaven, pure yang, and the beginning of everything in the cosmos. The commentary of the hexagram reads: “How great is the first hexagram (*qian*) meaning the origin (*Yuan*)! All the ten thousand things shall thereby begin from it, and it will command (or govern) Heaven.”[[92]](#endnote-93)

We should also note that the Mongols took the dynasty name "Yuan," meaning the grand beginning, from this quote in the *Book of Change*. Xu then glossed Heaven as “shape or form” in general. Therefore, the first hexagram was to command and take charge of all conditions or states in the cosmos. Xu continued to cite the commentary of the *Book of Changes*: "Heaven moves in a strenuous manner. A Gentlemen should act accordingly and never cease to strengthen himself." Heaven (Qian) is the strongest in the cosmos. Heaven is the origin of ten thousand things, and empire is the lord of ten thousand states. Therefore, ten thousand things could originate from Heaven. The emperor should embody the strenuous. Heaven's motion is to rule ten thousand states. The so-called “grand union and commencement” was meant to convey such a powerful and grandiose beginning and meant that ten thousand categories could be unified and commanded by the emperor's power. It was indeed the trigger through which cultural uniformity within the six directions (up, down, east, west, north, and south) and connecting all people in the Nine Regions had been accomplished.

This being the case, Confucian advisors should document the Mongols’ grand union and commencement in a magnificent book. The word *documentation* (*Zhi*) had dual implications. On the one hand, it is an abbreviation for *fangzhi*, which refers to a local gazetteer. At the same time, *zhi* could refer to an official genre in China’s ancient historical writings. Both *Hanshu* (Book of the [former] Han) and *Hou Hanshu* (Book of the Later Han), the official histories of the ancient Han empire, include several *zhi* sections. The *zhi*sections provided information about the administrative policies and practices of the Han empire, such as mathematical harmony and calendars, rituals and music, law and punishment, management of food and goods, sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, celestial patterns or astronomy, the five phases of cosmic operation and divination, geographical patterns or geography, agricultural management, and arts and culture. Together these records of administrative policies and practices in the Han dynasty were grouped and labeled as “statecraft” by later scholars. Xu went on to suggest that the documentation of the Nine Regions could be found in the *Rituals of Zhou*, and that the so-called “external history” was the documentation of four directions outside the Nine Regions.

“Our Mongol Yuan empire accomplished the apex of the grand union and commencement and exceeded Han and Tang,” Xu claimed. The publication of this book, *Grand Union and Commencement Documentation*, was not merely for broadening people’s horizons. The book had a political and moral lesson. It showed the spatial magnanimity of the Mongol Empire for ten thousand generations. Everyone who grew up under the grand union and the commencement of the Mongol Yuan Empire should know how difficult it was to build the universal empire, so everyone could contribute one’s best to maintain the Grand Union. To conclude this prologue, Xu cited the *Book of Documents* in a eulogy, declaring that the Mongol Yuan Empire should last more than ten thousand generations.[[93]](#endnote-94)

*The Grand Union Documentation* evoked a hitherto unfulfillable desire of the collective unconscious in China’s political culture. It took the Mongol forces’ unprecedented military might, mobility, and organization to accomplish this ancient Chinese ambition. In one book, the Mongol advisors proposed territorial documentation of the vast land, “where no known world is outside it,” to demonstrate such a grand union and commencement. As a result of this global effort in the thirteenth century, *the Grand Union and Commencement Documentation* drastically expanded traditional geographical knowledge and toponyms in classical Chinese. Unfortunately, only a tiny fragment (1% of the whole collection) of *The Grand Union and Commencement Documentation* has survived to our time. But the Manchu Qing Empire in the eighteenth century would have learned from the Mongols and frequently referenced *The Grand Union Documentation*. Its historical impact on the Manchu Qing Empire would be massive and decisive.

More importantly, the Mongols had invented spatial magnanimity to extol their ideologies of territorial expansion and transcendence of landscape into an imperial virtue. The Son of Heaven would no longer attempt to demonstrate his moral perfection because his majesty could achieve grand union and commencement by bringing all people near and far into one political system, measured by the actual extension of physical geography. The idea of spatial magnanimity had unambiguously become an imperial goal and virtue. The Mongol Yuan state started the framework of The*Grand Union Documentation* and, by implication, invented a new classical vision of spatial magnanimity by turning away from the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. The alternative classical ideas, including Neo-Confucian ethnocentrism (articulated in the *Zuo* tradition), would remain outlawed and dormant in the gentry society, waiting to be rekindled by future sparks of “Chinese” passion.

Furthermore, the Mongol Yuan state had no cartographical ethnocentricity. It is important to note that the Mongol Yuan state established an ideological signpost in Chinese history to dissolve ethnocentrism. The spatial magnanimity, articulated by Xu Youren and understood by many, was the diametrical opposite of cartographical ethnocentricity. The earliest world map of East Asia that has survived to our time, produced by Korean cartographers and dated as early as 1402, shows an enlarged Korean peninsula, the Japanese archipelago, and the extensive waterways of the Chinese subcontinent. The map *Ryukoku Kangnido*, serendipitously discovered in a Buddhist temple called Nishi hongan ji 西本願寺near Kyoto, was one of many world maps produced at the beginning of the fifteenth century (dated around 1402). The map itself has generated many kinds of interpretations and speculations.[[94]](#endnote-95)

A map of the world

Description automatically generatedIt likely shared in the geographical knowledge of *The Grand Union Documentation* and drew information from other world maps made under the Mongol Yuan state. Most evidentiary studies of this East Asian world map have credited it to sources from the Mongol Yuan state.[[95]](#endnote-96) The map reflected the Southeast Asian Massif’s geographical isolating effect and other barriers such as the Gobi Desert, rugged terrain in the northwest, and Manchurian-Mongolian grassland in the north. It was slightly ethnocentric because the Korean peninsula is more significant than it should be. But most historians were astounded when they first viewed this map. The broad basis of geographical knowledge, merging the Chinese and Islamic geographies and presented in this map, must also have been reflected in *The Grand Union Documentation.*

What is the takeaway? What exactly was the ideology of spatial magnanimity? Briefly and pointedly, spatial magnanimity decentered the Han agrarian civilization and redefined the meanings of the Grand Union in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. It unraveled Song ethnocentrism and any form of cartographical ethnocentricity. It was the most significant *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* reconstruction since the Han dynasty enshrined it as part of the Confucian *Five Classics*. To probe deeper into the significance of the Mongols, historian Timothy Brook has recently produced a new periodization for understanding Chinese history: The imperial states in China had not always been big or unified, as many historians have postulated. The Mongol Yuan dynasty ushered in a new age of “Great States.” Three Great States—Yuan, Ming, and Qing—ruled the Chinese subcontinent during the next seven hundred years. The Great States started when the Mongols ended the north-south split of the Chinese subcontinent that had persisted for five centuries and built a unified state of the Chinese subcontinent and the Steppe. In other words, the Mongol Yuan state ended the period of “China among equals” (in Morris Rossabi’s periodization). All three Great States inevitably grappled with the connection between the Steppe and the Chinese subcontinent. And the pivotal link between the Steppe and China was the capital city of Beijing. If there was an ideological template for what Timothy Brook calls the “Great States” in Chinese history, then the spatial magnanimity in *The Grand Union Documentation* was it.[[96]](#endnote-97)

Historian John Dardess was one of the most influential scholars to document the transition from Yuan to Ming. He asks a rhetorical question: Did the Mongol conquest of China affect Chinese history’s later development? The answer is a resounding “yes.” Dardess perceptively lists three critical aspects of why the Mongol conquest meant a great deal when the Ming imperial house rebuilt political order in the fifteenth century:

1. How the Mongols drastically changed the Chinese sense of territory and historical geography.
2. The power of the central imperial state in relationship to territorial enlargement.
3. The rise of a national Confucian intelligentsia.[[97]](#endnote-98)

For my purpose, the Mongol Yuan state fundamentally reoriented Chinese political and cultural space. For the first time in China's imperial history, the Mongol Yuan state had inscribed the new spatial ideology in the imperially commissioned book *The Grand Union and Commencement Documentation*. It provided a governing framework for geographical writings and essays on territorial administration. The project was an apparent collaboration between Central Asian experts and Chinese Confucian scholars. With the assistance of Central Asian, Buddhist, and Confucian advisors, Kublai started this territorial documentation project and made it clear that the Mongol Yuan dynasty was a Confucian universal empire. It was not a “Chinese” dynasty per se. The Mongols had incorporated the Confucian tradition to proclaim its universality. Like the Khitans, Jurchens, and Tanguts who claimed the Mandate of Heaven before the Mongol Yuan Empire, they understood they did not sign up as a “Chinese” dynasty. Unlike the previous nomadic powers, the Mongol Yuan subscribed to a universal Confucian civilization and behaved like one. The Mongol's legacy weighed heavily in the succeeding Ming empire, more so than Neo-Confucian ethnocentrism.

## Chinese Homeland:

The Mandate of Heaven returned to the Chinese hand.

The day was September 10, 1368. The Yuan emperor, Toghon Temür, who had ordered the printing of *The Grand Union Documentation*, called the last meeting of his officials. He told them they all had to flee Dadu immediately and relocate to the summer capital, Shangdu, in the steppes two hundred miles directly north. The world empire of Chinggis-khan, and the China-based regime of Khubilai-khan, were no more. The Ming forces will have soon overtaken the capital and renamed the city “the northern peace” (*Beiping*) and then “the northern capital” (*Beijing*). New border regions between the Ming agrarian empire and the steppe world would soon take a unique shape.

Among many other things, the Ming Empire (1368–1644) inherited the essential genre, *The Grand Union Documentation*, from its Mongol predecessor. The first Ming work of this kind was a hastily put-together collection, titled *Documentation of the Great Ming,* in 1370, which mainly served to satisfy the founding Hongwu emperor’s vanity. The Yongle Emperor (r. 1402–1424), who had been stationed in Beijing for more than thirty years as a military commander before he usurped the throne from his nephew, moved the capital city from Nanjing (southern capital) to Beijing (northern capital) and maintained a system of two capitals. The Yongle emperor chose Beijing as his primary capital city, demolished everything Mongols had built there, and ordered the construction of today’s forbidden city. Such a critical move demonstrated the Yongle emperor’s keen sense of geopolitics. Hence it will not be a surprise that he commanded his most outstanding officials to compile *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming*. Yongle was also a more sophisticated patron of cultural projects than his father, Hongwu. The Yongle emperor sponsored an encyclopedia project called the *Yongle Dadian*, which was consequential in many aspects of China’s cultural history. Compared with *Yongle Dadian*, *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* appeared more coherent, magnanimous, and pragmatic. The Yongle emperor did not live long enough to witness its completion. *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* lingered for many years. Yongle’s grandson, the Xuande emperor (r. 1425–35), put this vanity project on the back burner. More urgent matters were happening on the northern border, and Xuande focused intensely on the border matters.[[98]](#endnote-99)

During the era from 1368—when the Hongwu emperor claimed the Mandate of Heaven—to 1435—when the Xuande emperor died—Ming China believed it was the world’s superpower and absolute moral center. At the time of Xuande’s death, the Ming Empire still shared the ideology of the Mongol Yuan Empire, understanding itself as a universal empire with a mandate to rule both the Chinese agrarian and the steppe worlds. Hongwu had launched two major campaigns in the steppe world. Yongle had conducted five staggering campaigns deep into the steppe and died in the last one. And Xuande had personally led three tours, in 1428, 1430, and 1434, to the steppe. After Xuande passed away, however, the era of the universal empire gradually faded away. Ming emperors no longer ventured to articulate belief in a universal empire as those three did. And no emperor after Xuande could make a credible claim to an ability to lead people and armies out in the field, beyond the palace walls. The whole Ming approach to the steppe world and the issue of border security underwent a shift. After 1453, Ming China spoke less and less directly to the steppe rulers. It took in fewer and fewer steppe refugees. It gradually ceased entertaining massive embassies in Beijing. It sent fewer envoys to the rulers in their encampments in the steppes. The rhetoric of benevolence, compassion and fair dealing, words characterizing the world as one family under an emperor acting on Heaven’s behalf—all that fades from the record. Gradually, what came to replace that worldview was something closer to a Han Chinese nationalism, a posture of fortress China pitting itself against the world.

The fortress mentality slowly took its initial shape over the reign of the Zhengtong emperor (1435–49), Xuande’s eight-year-old son, who ascended to the throne in 1435. Zhengtong’s formidable grandmother, a small group of eunuchs led by Wang Zhen, and three grand secretaries surnamed Yang worked together to run the Ming court. As of the mid-1440s, the frontier situation was becoming more complex. Early Ming rhetoric featured words of amity, referring to all of humanity as constituting one family and foreigners as being China’s children. But that sort of language was fading, being used less often and less confidently than in decades past. Gradually, it became supplanted by hostility, coldly pragmatic policies, and vengefulness. A sharper division separated those who subscribed to civilized values, from those who were deaf to ethical appeals and exhibited only wolfish greed. During this time, the westernmost tribes of Mongols, the Oirats, and three tribes of Uriyangkhad guards were enmeshed in ever more complex entanglements with the Ming and its allies. The relationship between the Oirat and the Uriyangkhad hordes was at times close, at times hostile. But the critical development was the ever-growing dominance of the Oirat grand preceptor Esen.

On July 28, 1449, the Oirats, under Esen’s leadership, indeed invaded. There was no declaration of war, no announcement justifying such an act. The Oirats coordinated incursions at four different points along the China frontier. As soon as the news arrived in Beijing, the Ming court mobilized its soldiers. Their weapons count came to eight hundred thousand. The Ming court then announced plans to put Zhengtong in personal charge of the expedition. The expedition was all arranged on the spur of the moment, prompted by a state of emergency. By comparison, Xuande’s tours of the frontier had been planned when the steppes were quiet. Zhengtong was now twenty-one, and it was his first act of public leadership in a time of chaos and emergency. The contrast between the experienced Xuande in his well-prepared tours and the inexperienced Zhengtong in his hectic rush into the battlefield was stark. Rumor had it that he was stepping into the spotlight not of his own volition but under the firm direction of his lifelong mentor, palace eunuch Wang Zhen. A regency under Zhengtong’s younger brother Zhu Qiyu—the future Jingtai emperor (r. 1449–57)—and eunuch Jin Ying was installed in Beijing to run things while the emperor was away. Seventeen high military officers and fifteen civil officials formed Zhengtong’s headquarters entourage. There was little time for fanfare. On August 4, the expedition departed the capital. They were headed north toward Xuanfu and Datong, where Esen was leading the raid and where the main threat was. The expedition never got there. Morale inside Zhengtong’s expedition was low. There had not been time for thorough planning. Zhengtong’s entourage was unsure why they were out there. The story of this unfortunate exodus ended in the massacre at Tumu post station on September 1, 1449. It culminated at Esen’s capture of the young Zhengtong emperor, known as the Tumu fiasco in Chinese history.

The Tumu fiasco of 1449 took place at Tumu Fortress (Today’s Zhangjiakou, bordering Inner Mongolia) between the Oirat tribes of Mongols and the Ming capital Beijing. The Oirat defeated the Ming army of 500,000 men (about half the population of Montana) with a smaller force and captured Zhengtong. The debacle grew into a constitutional crisis when the Ming emperor became a captive of the northern barbarians. The Tumu fiasco triggered an emergency response in Beijing. The high official Yu Qian (1398-1457) mobilized support in the Ming court to install the Jingtai Emperor, Zhengtong’s brother. At the same time, Esen’s forces remained a critical threat outside Beijing. But the Jingtai emperor’s court was able to turn aside Esen’s ransom request and negotiated with the Oirat with competence. Jingtai and the competent Yu Qian stepped in and saved the Ming Empire from collapsing under the pressure of a formidable foe. Esen held Zhengtong as a hostage in the steppe world for nearly one year while dealing with the new Jingtai emperor’s court.

In the end, Zhengtong returned to the court unceremoniously in 1450 and was put under house arrest with his household. Esen, meanwhile, died in 1455. Jingtai’s reign had been clouded by this uncommon and unhappy situation when the former emperor was under house arrest. Then suddenly, it ended. On February 11, 1457, four hundred soldiers forced their way into the former emperor’s prison compound at night and without warning. They seized the startled emperor, placed him in a sedan chair, and carried him to the main audience hall. In such a dramatic manner, Zhengtong came back to power while the Jingtai Emperor had been ill for some time and could not attend court. He was now demoted to his original rank of prince. Yu Qian was executed, and his collaborators, who helped save China by backing the enthronement of Jingtai, were removed from their offices. On March 14, 1457, the palace eunuchs strangled the Jingtai Emperor in his compound. But the regicide mattered little for the Ming bureaucratic state. The Ming ground on as a resilient empire. Despite the Tumu setback and the coup d’état in 1457, the Zhengtong emperor came back to power and began his second reign titled Tianshun (r. 1457–1564). As the Tianshun emperor assumed his business, the border violence intensified and accelerated.

In such a political and military climate, in the fifth year of the Tianshun reign (1461), *The Grand Union and Commencement Documentation of the Great Ming* came to fruition. The Tumu fiasco became a political taboo, because the presiding emperor was the captive who later returned to power and ordered the completion of the project. It would be an understatement to say that the Tianshun emperor, who spent one year as Esen’s hostage in the steppe and nearly seven years in house arrest, was sensitive about what kind of “grand union and commencement” his second reign would endure. It would also be an understatement to say that the Tianshun emperor no longer had the ambition to claim the universal empire of both the agricultural and the steppe worlds. It was not yet a full-blown fortress mentality, but the transition to it had irreversibly started. What would Tianshun say about *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming*?

Tianshun began by saying in the preface that the founding Hongwu emperor had received the Mandate of Heaven and unified the country under Heaven and that the Yongle emperor had sent delegates to collect gazetteers from all over the country. The Tianshun emperor remembered the ambition of his ancestors and was determined to complete their legacy. It was likely that Tianshun ordered the project soon after he started his second reign in 1457. The appointed team completed *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* in 1461 and stored it in the imperial library. Echoing what Xu Youren wrote in the preface for the Mongol Yuan’s *Grand Union Documentation*, Tianshun made the same point by praising it as a critical lesson for posterity to remember the achievements of the founders of the Ming dynasty. From Xu Youren to Tianshun, a clear precedent had been established. A “Grand Union” was the political achievement of founding a dynasty. The documentation of such an achievement would be for the later generations to remember, appreciate, and keep up.

*The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* has survived to our time. I use the version preserved in the Institute of Advanced Studies on Asia (*Toyo Bunka kenkyu jo*) at the University of Tokyo. It is a remarkable cross-section of Ming geopolitics, which presents the full spectrum of the Ming defense system and of the Ming’s relationship with neighboring states at a turning point in its history, as it was transitioning from a cosmopolitan to a fortress mindset. Later, It will serve as the template for *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* in the eighteenth century. The editorial team of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* retrieved its geographical knowledge from textual sources and the administrative and military system of the Ming dynasty. Although it was not yet based on geodetic surveys, *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* was the first systematic and surviving record of geopolitical documentation. It was the product of an extraordinary moment in a political circumstance just after the Ming dynastic regime had undergone the Tumu fiasco and the coup d’état of 1457.[[99]](#endnote-100)

How did the Hanlin editorial team handle this delicate matter? The chief editors of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* were three eminent scholars—Li Xian (1408–1466), Peng Shi (1416–1475), and Lu Yuan (1418–1462)—from the Hanlin Academy in the Tianshun emperor's court. Three associate chief editors and twenty-one Hanlin editors joined the staff, and thirty more scholars from the Hanlin academy served as clerks and copyists in the project. By default, the entire Hanlin editorial team was supporters of the Tianshun restoration since the job would have been a reward for their support and loyalty. When these Hanlin scholars wrote the preface for *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming*, they had no choice but to avoid any possible hints of the Tumu fiasco altogether, which, for better or worse, loomed large in the background of the entire compilation.[[100]](#endnote-101)

Consequently, in both the form and the content of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming*, the Hanlin team established two fundamental principles:

1. Unlike the Mongol version that promoted spatial magnanimity, the central message of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* was to remake the distinction between Chinese and barbarian. The Mongols became the “outer barbarians” who had conquered China. The cosmopolitanism of the early Ming had by now entirely disappeared.
2. The landscape of the North China Plain and the capital city of Beijing were so substantial and challenging that only Chinese civilization could counterbalance them. The barbarians could occupy China but could never overcome and match the advantages of China's landscape. The Ming Empire had succeeded in expelling the barbarians precisely because the founding fathers of the Ming dynasty had been able to rise and master China's remarkable landscape.

I call the entire political and symbolic construct created by *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* “Chinese homeland.”[[101]](#endnote-102)

The first editorial principle was a significant turn from the cosmopolitan mentality of the first three monarchs of the Ming dynasty. All three of them (Hongwu, Yongle, and Xuande) used Confucian paternalist language to claim and justify their campaigns, tours, and embassies to the steppe world, and maintained their ambition to govern as the universal ruler of both the Chinese agricultural and the steppe worlds. To recast the distinction between the Chinese and barbarism was not merely a return to the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* traditions but had the practical implication of elevating Ming China above the former Mongol Yuan Empire. The Hanlin scholars broadened the scope of the world of *yi* (barbarians), from a specific designation for the wide variety of steppe dwellers and nomadic groups on the northwestern frontier, to include all the new kingdoms and polities documented in Zheng He’s maritime expeditions and explorations from 1405 to 1433 in the Yongle emperor’s reign. They showed how the Ming imperial state had lived up to the expectation in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* by successfully pacifying the “island barbarians” of southeast Asia, presenting it as an accomplishment which the Mongols could not have equaled. The Yongle emperor was in the northern capital to “rule ten thousand countries and appease barbarians in four directions.” The Southern Ocean (*Nanyang*), which Zheng He had explored and documented, became a critical part of the four directions. Compared with both the cost and scale of the defense system in the borders of the north, the cost of Zheng He’s expedition to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean was relatively insignificant. In *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming*, however, Zheng He’s achievements were highlighted as an important and successful effort to bring the island barbarians into the scope of Ming’s sphere of influence.[[102]](#endnote-103)

In the preface of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming*, the Hanlin scholars gave a full elaboration to distinguish between the inner Chinese realm and an outer barbarian domain, as prescribed in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. They first described a history of spatial regions in China’s past. The Hanlin scholars argued that the emperor must unify all under Heaven to govern them well. The Son of Heaven must first unify the Chinese realm and pacify the barbarians to accomplish such a goal. It was more critical for these Hanlin scholars to argue how the Ming state had accomplished the great expectation of the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* at this historical junction. They glorified the unification of China under the Mandate of Heaven. Such a unification was exceptional because, like the lofty goal described in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*, the Ming imperial state had now included Chinese and barbarians in its vast territory. Although the Ming had failed to conquer the Steppe, the Ming state had controlled today’s Manchuria (called Liaodong) and secured Choson Korea’s support, defended the inner side of the Gobi Desert, and, most importantly, reached the southern tip of the Chinese subcontinent. The ideological goal was to claim the grand union and commencement for the Chinese and barbarians to co-prosper under Heaven. The inner Chinese realm and the outer barbarian domain were united under Heaven. The Ming Empire did not govern the island barbarians directly, yet they had now learned about Chinese civilization from the Ming Empire. The Ming disseminated the advanced culture of China to the far-flung island barbarians as the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle* had prescribed. The Hanlin scholars argued that the Ming had pacified the political units in Oceania, southeast, and South Asia. The voyages of Zheng He supplied indisputable evidence for such a grand union and commencement. Although the Oirats and Uriyangkhad now controlled more land in the Steppe, most island barbarians in the southeast had submitted themselves to the Great Ming Empire, as they had not to the Mongol Yuan dynasty before.[[103]](#endnote-104)

More importantly, *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* created imperial China’s spatial and administrative template for a Confucian bureaucracy. The Hanlin scholars described the territorial management units in Ming China, “the civilized and enlightened realm.” There were thirteen provinces; each of them consisted of prefectures and counties. There were 149 prefectures, 218 subprefectures, and 1105 counties. There were also many military stations and posts along the frontiers. There were illustrative maps in front of each provincial section to guide the readers. There was detailed documentation of physical, human, and cultural geography in each prefectural subsection. The template of local sections, prefectural subsections, and illustrative maps constituted the bulk of *The Grand Union and Commencement Documentation of the Great Ming.* Its last two chapters, titled “Outer Barbarians,” gave a list of all neighboring states known to the Ming. We should note that no “tributary states” were listed in *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming.*

Given the hostile confrontation between the Ming and the Steppe, they had no such tributary relationship. On the other hand, the political units in southeast Asia were just recently recognized and categorized after the voyages of Zheng He. Choson Koreans, Jurchens, and Ryukyu (Okinawa) were all trying to appease the Ming empire. No discernable tributary relationship was recorded in *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming.* Its basic framework was to follow the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*that discerned the Chinese homeland from outer barbarians in geopolitical terms.[[104]](#endnote-105)

The second editorial principle was more subtle and profound. The Hanlin scholars made a distinction concerning the Yongle emperor’s geopolitical choice in building a capital city and palace complex in Beijing. According to the *Gongyang* tradition, the son of Heaven, who was on top of the imperial hierarchy, should reside in a “grand and magnificent city” (*jing shi*). *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* gives a distinctive depiction of the capital city. The grand and magnificent city lies near the ancient *You* and *Ji*. [While the emperor faces south,] the ocean circles on the left, the Taihang mountain embraces it on the right, Juyong Pass mountain sits like a pillow in the north, and the Yellow River and Ji River flows like a collar in the south. When Kublai divided his headquarters between Xanadu and Dadu to rule China from the steppe from 1264 to 1271, it was the first time the ruling political power had selected China’s northeastern corner, a place near the rugged terrain adjacent with the Steppe and near a chokepoint for access to Northeast China (Manchuria).[[105]](#endnote-106) It was a marginal place from the viewpoint of Central Plain, where most of ancient Chinese history had unfolded. It was also the northeastern tip of the North China Plain and the estuary and flooded plains of the Yellow River. It was an entirely different environment from the Yangzi Valley, where the Southern Song had built its capital in a culturally thriving city called Hangzhou today. According to any historical precedents in China’s imperial history up to this point, it was a slightly odd choice for the capital city of a new and spatially enlarged empire in China. And yet, it served the purpose of being the place where the Steppe and the Chinese subcontinent would become historically inseparable.[[106]](#endnote-107)

The ancient toponyms *You* and *Ji* referred to marginal city-states of the ancient Central Plain. The descriptive statement was implicitly an acknowledgment of Beijing’s marginality in ancient China. However, after the Mongol conquest, such a historical marginality did not eclipse the northern capital’s strategic significance and remarkable landscape. In other words, geopolitical considerations were the primary rationale for why the Yongle emperor built his palace complex in Beijing. They suggested that the barbarians could have dominated China militarily and politically, but the barbarians could have never matched the advantage of the capital’s landscape. Why? Intriguingly, these Hanlin scholars did not go anywhere near Neo-Confucian ethnocentrism. They did not argue that the Chinese people were superior to the barbarians. Instead, they claimed the barbarians dominated China but could not match the capital’s landscape. To decode this geopolitical argument, we must refer to two thinly veiled events in the backdrop.[[107]](#endnote-108)

According to the Hanlin scholars, the advantage of the capital’s landscape is better than anywhere under Heaven, and it is truly a land of Heavenly mansion! Like the Khitans, the Jurchens, and the Mongols, the barbarian conquerors of the central kingdom all set their capitals. But the barbarian conquerors could not match the capital landscape’s advantage. The great Yongle emperor lay submerged here like a hidden dragon.[[108]](#endnote-109) His majesty later inherited the astounding unity and commencement [the code for the throne] and built the Northern Capital [Beijing] in this location. He was here to rule ten thousand countries and appease barbarians in four directions. His majesty could genuinely match the advantage of the capital’s landscape and build an excellent foundation for ten thousand generations. Ever since the three great ancient houses, there had never been such a prosperous city! The Chinese homeland would never succumb to barbarian conquest. Even if it did, the foreign occupation would be short-lived because as barbarians they could never appropriate the advantage of the Chinese homeland.[[109]](#endnote-110)

## Conclusion:

After its completion in 1461, *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming* went through several minor revisions before the Ming dynasty collapsed in 1644. *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* followed the template of the Ming version. It seems the Manchu Qing state had inherited the Chinese Ming’s documentation of their territory with remarkable continuity. All three Great States—Yuan, Ming, and Qing—had assigned their best and brightest minds to work on the ideological and territorial documenting of what they called the “Grand Union,” and historian Yuri Pines has perceptively called out its historical significance.[[110]](#endnote-111) After the Manchu Qing forces marched across the Sanhai Pass and occupied Beijing in 1644, the Qing rebuilt Beijing as its capital without hesitation. However, the Manchu Qing Empire accomplished such a universal rule over the Chinese agricultural and the steppe world.

More importantly, the Yuan and Ming *Grand Union Documentation* projects took about three to five years to complete. The Qing *Grand Union Documentation*, on the other hand, took about seventy years to come to fruition. And it took another twenty years to complete the revised edition. Why did it take so long to complete *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*?

This chapter shows that *Grand Union Documentation* embodied the Great States’ self-understanding of their “map of the population” (Bantu). The Mongol Yuan believed its political power had encompassed everyone in the known world. The map of the population under its control had exceeded anyone in history. The Mongol Yuan valorized the spatial magnanimity of its realm as a measure of political and military success and presented it in The Grand Union Documentation. In other words, the Mongol Yuan redefined the Grand Union as spatial magnanimity—the ultimate imperial virtue to trump others. Historian John Dardess calls the Ming “The Ming Great State” because it was a resilient empire that militarized an entire band of border zones to build a defense system from Manchuria to Central Asia. For John Dardess, it was a remarkable success for the Ming to uphold their defense system over such a long distance against the nomadic raiding and mobility. For historian Victor Lieberman, however, the Ming offense was significantly lacking since it failed to cross and conquer the steppe world. The diametrically opposite assessments of these two historians show the two sides of the same border reality of the Ming Empire. *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming*, compiled immediately after the Tumu fiasco and the coup d’état, presented the grand union and commencement as civilizational dissemination to all four directions as prescribed in the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. However, the main pacification occurred at the northern border zones and the Southern Ocean—the domain of northern nomadic and southern island barbarians. The grand union and commencement were to bring the less civilized and fortunate into a Chinese form of enlightenment and culture. Such an advanced form of civilization was only evident because the Chinese society could match and embody the landscape of the Chinese subcontinent. No one else could. Was it the Chinese World Order? As historian Wan Ming has demonstrated, the seemingly continuous façade of Ming China’s diplomatic protocols with neighboring states remained consistent with a language of a “tributary system.”[[111]](#endnote-112) However, the Ming and Qing foreign policies were pragmatic and flexible according to the actual conditions and politics. I build upon Wan Ming’s research and argue that the spatial representations (China’s diplomatic façade) were neither monotonous nor superficial. The language and politics of language worked closely for the Ming and Qing Great States. Each crafted their own *Grand Union Documentation* derived from the *Spring and Autumn Chronicle*. Consequently, spatial representations as the ideology of the Great States reflected both the self-understanding of the Great States and their symbolic interactions with neighbors.

All four spatial representations before 1700—the concentric circles from the Spring and Autumn Chronicle, Neo-Confucian ethnocentrism and disregard of spatial dimensions, spatial magnanimity as a measure of political and military success, and the Chinese homeland as a landscape ideology and source of superior values—became critical legacy to the Manchu Qing state. The Manchu military success in conquering both the Chinese agricultural and the steppe worlds brought about an essential change in redefining its spatial representation—the geodetic surveys carried out as part of the military conquest. *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* was entirely based upon the empirical results of the geodetic surveys. That is why the Qing *Grand Union Documentation* took nearly a century to complete. The unprecedented measurement and mapping brought a revolutionary change in Qing’s self-understanding of its size and location on the surface of the spherical Earth. It is to the geodetic surveys that we must now turn.

# Chapter Three: Geodetic Surveys of the Qing Empire

Contrary to the imagined territories discussed in the preceding chapter, the Qing Empire made significant strides in geodesy and cartography. This was achieved by adopting cartographic advancements from Western Europe and enlisting Jesuit missionaries to participate in geodetic surveys from 1708 to 1717. Throughout the eighteenth century, these three Qing rulers continuously surveyed the latitude and longitude points of their newly acquired land. Each of them—Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong—commissioned cartographical projects presenting “the Ptolemaic graticule and the quantitative expansion”[[112]](#endnote-113) within the Chinese subcontinent and Central Asia. 

Graticule points and the science of geodesy have their roots in early modern Europe. A recurring theme in Chinese historiography is why China did not embrace the West’s ostensibly more “advanced” scientific methods during the seventeenth century. Esteemed Marxist historian Joseph Needham, known for his expertise in Chinese science and technology, scrutinized Chinese geography and cartography in his seminal work, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Volume Three, 1959), laying a foundation for subsequent research. Needham proposed that Jesuits brought "post-Renaissance cartography" to Qing China, fundamentally transforming its imperial mapping techniques. However, in the second volume of *The History of Cartography*, Cordell Yee offers a revisionist perspective, suggesting that Needham might have exaggerated the Jesuits’ influence. Despite Yee's corrective take on Needham's narrative, this critical issue in Chinese historiography remains unresolved.[[113]](#endnote-114)

From my perspective, there are still two major concerns. The first revolves around historical agency, specifically addressing the query: “Who championed China’s cartographical endeavors?” Contrary to popular belief, the Qing monarchy, rather than the Confucian bureaucracy, steered this course. The second issue involves early modern geodesy, a discipline dedicated to accurately measuring and understanding Earth’s geometrical properties and orientation in space. Both Needham and Yee seem to have missed Geodesy’s pivotal role. This chapter delves into these dual concerns—examining the question of agency and underscoring the relevance of geodesy.[[114]](#endnote-115)

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## The Jesuit Geodesy:

Ascending to the throne at the young age of seven, the Kangxi emperor matured into a shrewd and pragmatic leader over his sixty-year reign, consolidating the vast Chinese territory. His initial years as a ruler were marked by a significant civil war, where the Qing Empire clashed with a coalition spearheaded by Wu Sangui (1612–78). Later in his reign, Kangxi confronted Romanov Russians and Cossacks near the northern Amur River, ventured across the Gobi Desert to the grasslands of Mongolia, and shifted his military attention from the Steppe to Tibet between 1696 and 1701. These campaigns spanned diverse and largely unfamiliar landscapes for the Manchus, with all but the civil war taking place in frontier regions.

The Kangxi emperor's role cannot be understated. While it's debatable whether he had a genuine interest in science, mathematics, or the well-being of his subjects, his determination and prowess as an empire-builder are undeniable. To earn the title of a warrior emperor, as described in Wei Yuan’s eulogy as both sagely and mighty (Shengwu), Kangxi had to place geopolitics, strategic foresight, and logistics at the forefront of his imperial endeavors. As a military strategist, he faced the challenge of thwarting Wu Sangui's attempts to forge a formidable alliance with the Mongols, Russians, and Tibetans, which threatened to encircle Qing territories. After triumphing over Wu Sangui and ending the civil war, the Qing Empire swiftly formulated strategies to manage potential threats from Wu’s allies, including the Russians, Zunghar Mongols, and Tibetans.[[115]](#endnote-116)

During Kangxi's early reign under the Oboi regency, Yang Guangxian accused the Jesuits of potential treason. This led to the exile of Jesuit leader Adam Schall and his followers. In their absence, Yang Guangxian appointed Muslim mathematicians and astronomers to oversee the Astro-Calendrical Bureau. However, when Kangxi assumed power in 1669, he questioned the harsh actions against the Jesuits, suspecting they were based on unfounded fears of the Jesuits threatening Qing's authority. As a result, Kangxi organized a competition in astronomical calculations to assess the Jesuits' capabilities, setting Ferdinand Verbiest's Jesuit team against the Muslim astronomers. This contest was crucial for Kangxi, who saw potential in leveraging Jesuit expertise in astronomy, weaponry, and geodetic surveys for warfare. He needed assurance of the Jesuits' technical prowess and their ability to fulfill their commitments. The competition took place in January 1670, shortly after the winter solstice, a challenging time due to the minute daily differences in the sundial shadow. The Jesuits, led by Verbiest, emerged victorious by a significant margin. By the end of 1670, they regained control over imperial astronomy and astrology. This result aligned with Kangxi's expectations and strategic plans.[[116]](#endnote-117)

Upon appointing Verbiest as the head of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau in 1670, the Kangxi emperor immediately tasked him with creating gunpowder weapons under the Ministry of Works and developing a global map.[[117]](#endnote-118) In the early 1600s, the Manchu Banner armies heavily relied on artillery when faced with formidable Ming infantry and massive walls. These gunpowder weapons were indispensable, outperforming catapults in both offensive and defensive scenarios. The recent unearthing of Adam Schall’s *Concise Essentials of Gunpowder Weapons* (Huogong qieyao), a guide crafted likely under the Ming dynasty in 1643, showcases the intricate design and potential of upcoming Qing artillery.[[118]](#endnote-119) Having studied the battles against Ming China, Emperor Kangxi recognized the strategic importance of these weapons. Verbiest, succeeding Schall, took charge of the artillery units during the campaign against the three Protectorates.[[119]](#endnote-120) By 1674, he had crafted a comprehensive world map, *An Illustration and Explanation of the World* (Kunyu quantu), accompanied by a detailed guide, *Illustration and Explanation of the Geodesy and Cartography* (Kunyu tushu).[[120]](#endnote-121)

*The Illustration and Explanation of Geodesy and Cartography* provided a detailed plan for geodetic surveys in subsequent years. Verbiest introduced the Qing monarchy to early modern geodesy using refined classical Chinese for the first time in Chinese history. He posited that the term grand terra (Dadi), occasionally shortened to di, referred to the spherical Earth in Jesuit writings. Unlike the Copernicans, the Jesuits viewed the Earth as the immovable center of the cosmos, not as a celestial body circling the Sun. On the other hand, in Confucian thought, the words Heaven (tian) and Earth (di) held intricate meanings and historical references. When translating into Chinese, the Jesuits used Tian to denote the Christian God and Di to signify the round Earth. For a Confucian scholar, each term was imbued with profound meanings and philosophical undertones, anchored in China's ancient teachings, the foundation of Neo-Confucian principles.[[121]](#endnote-122)

Verbiest encountered resistance from Neo-Confucian scholars, especially the young and accomplished Li Guangdi (1642–1718). Having secured the esteemed *Jinshi* degree in 1670 and later joining the renowned Hanlin Academy in 1672, Li was a rising figure in the Confucian world. When the two met, following Verbiest's appointment as the head of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau, they engaged in a respectful yet pointed exchange of views. This interaction left such an impression on Li that he chronicled it in his collection of essays. To Li, Verbiest seemed to challenge the foundational Neo-Confucian belief that Heaven is round while Earth is square. Verbiest perceived this as a literal representation of the universe, a viewpoint Li contested. In Li's academic upbringing, Zhu Xi (1130–1200), a prominent Song scholar, was the definitive voice on Neo-Confucianism. Zhu had clearly articulated a cosmos with a spherical Heaven and a flat, square Earth. To Li, Verbiest's critique was nothing short of blasphemous.[[122]](#endnote-123)

Verbiest likened Heaven and Earth to an egg, with Heaven as the shell and Earth as the yolk. This analogy contradicted the square earth doctrine. Where would Zhongguo (often translated as "the Middle Kingdom") fit if Heaven and Earth were spherical? Such a cosmology could diminish the central significance of Chinese civilization. While some Jesuits posited that the Earth's shape inherently made every location central, Neo-Confucians like Li saw this as mere sophistry. Verbiest's views posed a threat to the very essence of Confucian cosmography. To counter this, Li leaned into Neo-Confucian moral philosophy. He argued that the concepts of circle and square were symbolic of dynamism and stasis, respectively. Just because Heaven doesn't move in a circle doesn't negate its dynamic nature, and Earth being non-square doesn't alter its static essence. Even if the central state was not geographically at the world's center, its moral principles aligned it with the cosmic center. Drawing an analogy, Li pointed out that while the heart isn't the body's physical center (that's the navel), its importance is undisputed. Thus, Li believed that Neo-Confucians shouldn't fixate on Earth's physical centrality.[[123]](#endnote-124)

Contrary to Li Guangdi, who conveyed the core of the Confucian and bureaucratic opposition, the Kangxi emperor focused on a military objective. Verbiest would have had to work diligently to address the emperor's concerns and fulfill his request. In the same year (1672) as the exchange between Verbiest and Li took place, the grand secretary Wei Zhouzuo (1612–1675), a veteran from the Ming dynasty, recognized that the Kangxi emperor might appreciate the same indulgence all Ming monarchs enjoyed—a celebratory compilation of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*. Wei made a formal address to the emperor:

The Provincial Comprehensive Gazetteers (*Tongzhi*) often need more detail or are missing altogether, suggesting a need for regional authorities to undertake their compilation. It would be beneficial for Confucian experts to collect data about regional geography, advantages and disadvantages, population numbers, tax collections, local traditions, and the distribution of skilled individuals across the empire. All this data should be combined in one consolidated volume titled *The Grand Union Documentation* (*Yitongzhi*) for the emperor's examination.[[124]](#endnote-125)

The Kangxi emperor sanctioned the project, following the established models from the earlier Yuan and Ming dynasties. Subsequently, the Confucian bureaucracy initiated the work. However, unforeseen military actions by Wu Sangui in the south resulted in *The Grand Union Documentation* project being sidelined indefinitely.

In early 1673, Wu Sangui, who amassed tax revenues as wartime spoils and commanded a faithful army, dared the young emperor by petitioning to retire from his command position as Protector of the Realm. The young emperor accepted his resignation and appointed the Manchu official Samha to go to Yunnan, take over Wu Sangui’s military command, and relieve him of his title. However, it took only a short time for Samha to report that Wu Sangui had launched an anti-Manchu campaign and was poised to deploy his army against the Qing empire. Wu Sangui could form a formidable opposition to the Qing Banner army by joining forces with the other two Protectors of the Realm. The impending rebellion from Wu Sangui posed a catastrophic risk. By the end of 1673, Kangxi was on the cusp of turning twenty and faced a monumental decision in this precarious situation. Though he undoubtedly had a wealth of counsel from his family elders and relatives, his cabinet was divided into factions advocating for and against war. In English-speaking scholarship, most historians have understated the precarious nature of Kangxi’s campaign against Wu Sangui. I am aligned with the views of the modern Chinese historian Meng Sen in equating the risk of the civil war between Kangxi and Wu Sangui with that of the nineteenth-century Taiping civil war.[[125]](#endnote-126)

At the beginning of the civil war in 1674, Wu Sangui’s forces seized control of the provinces Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Guangxi. Over the subsequent two years, Geng Jingzhong, Wang Fuchen, and Shang Zhixin rallied to ally with Wu’s forces, extending the coalition-building process to include Tibetans, Mongols, and Russians. The Qing monarchy was teetering on the brink of disaster. What would the ramifications be if the Qing were defeated and forced to withdraw to the Manchu homeland? What about the Russians, who had already breached Manchuria? Were there any other powerful European armies besides the Russians? How distant were they? Could they traverse the Steppe to reach the Mongolian grasslands? Why had they not attempted a land route if they could reach China via sea routes? How diverse was the European population, and what set them apart from other peoples from Central Asia, Persia, or India?[[126]](#endnote-127) The geopolitical questions became urgent as Wu Sangui built his coalitions around the Qing territory.

           In 1674, Wu Sangui, when in a position of strength, proposed partitioning the Chinese subcontinent along the Yangzi River into northern and southern regions, with the Qing ruling the north and Wu Sangui the south. The Kangxi emperor, however, dismissed Wu’s proposition without a second thought, perceiving it as a mere distraction. He believed that Wu had covert plans to establish a new alliance with the Mongols, Tibetans, and even the Zheng regime in Taiwan to corner the Qing. Kangxi realized he had to dismantle Wu Sangui’s encirclement strategy! Eventually, the lower Yangzi Valley was spared devastation, and the Manchu army emerged triumphant. Nevertheless, the precarious nature of the Wu Sangui rebellion served as a geopolitical wake-up call. A world map of relatively accurate scale, produced by a trusted European advisor, would assist Kangxi in visualizing the terrain and identifying allies and adversaries in the surrounding regions.[[127]](#endnote-128)

In 1674, Verbiest completed his world map, *A Complete Illustration of the World* and his book *The Illustration and Explanation of Geodesy and Cartography*. At this time, the fifty-one-year-old Flemish missionary Ferdinand Verbiest was serving as the Director of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau in the Qing court. His duties included editing the imperial calendar and official almanac, including star charts and eclipse tables, and overseeing the refurbishment of the astronomical instruments at the imperial observatory in Beijing. In *The Illustration and Explanation of Geodesy and Cartography*, Verbiest suggested that geodesy was rooted in a time-tested Jesuit tradition. With the extensive history of Confucian resistance to evangelism in mind, Verbiest cleverly recast early modern geodesy in the enduring Jesuit practice of translating European world maps into classical Chinese. He employed a format introduced by Matteo Ricci, the first missionary in China to depict the European medieval world map on Chinese-style hanging scrolls. Verbiest’s style of world map echoed Ricci’s, using hanging scrolls to compile sheets of the world map, comprised of eight scrolls, each measuring 171 cm (roughly double the length of a baseball bat) by 51 cm (about half the size of a baseball bat). The map was rich in stories, sea monsters, exotic details, and ancient legends. It bore a distinct “medieval” aesthetic.[[128]](#endnote-129)

However, appearances can be misleading. Verbiest’s *A Complete Illustration of the World*, diverged significantly from Matteo Ricci's medieval world map by presenting two crucial aspects of Earth’s sphericity. Firstly, he proposed that the Earth's spherical surface could be translated onto a two-dimensional map. Secondly, he asserted that the Earth could be measured using “astronomical positioning.” The sphericity and astronomical positioning necessitated advanced spherical trigonometry to generate the maps mathematically. During this time, the Qing court also invested significant efforts in what French historian Catherine Jami calls the “emperor’s mathematics,” which evolved concurrently with the implementation of early modern geodesy in Qing China.[[129]](#endnote-130)

The Belgian and Jesuit mathematician, François d'Aguilon (1567–1617), who devoted his life to the composition of *Opticorum Libri Sex* (Six Books of Optics). Initially intended as an optics textbook for Jesuit institutions, it was later superseded in Western Europe by the notable contributions of astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630). However, due to the significant divide between Protestant reformers and the combatant Jesuits, Verbiest opted for d'Aguilon’s optics over Kepler’s. While there was considerable reciprocal influence between Jesuit and Protestant science in Western Europe, the combative Jesuit missionaries in South America or East Asia usually shied away from such a politically precarious stance. However, the mathematics of projection came through and became critical in making maps based on early modern geodesy in Qing China. The science of projection was illustrated in *Opticorum Libri Sex* with a vivid image: In the image, we see an elderly man holding a globe at a particular angle. A winged angel flies behind him, carrying a torch that illuminates the scene. The shadow of the globe is cast on the ground, and two angels are using a compass to measure and calculate the angle and arcs of the shadow.[[130]](#endnote-131)

A close-up of a book

Description automatically generated

This intuitive and telling illustration demonstrates the common mathematics of projection in early modern Europe. As historical cartographer John P. Snyder has demonstrated, early modern Europe had crafted sixteen map projections to address the challenge of depicting the round earth on a flat sheet by the end of the Renaissance. As a result, Verbiest could select a suitable one for his world map. Between 1670 and 1800, more accurate and intricate mathematical models emerged to serve many cartographical needs. Some well-regarded and reliable methods included the Equirectangular, Trapezoidal, Azimuthal, Mercator, Sinusoidal, and Bonne projections.[[131]](#endnote-132) The Kangxi Atlas eventually adopted the Sinusoidal projection to meet its demand for precision.[[132]](#endnote-133)

At this point, Verbiest continued to employ a Renaissance stereographic equatorial projection to draft meridians and horizontal circles parallel to the equator on his world map. The prime meridian, also known as the reference meridian, passed through the Taihe Palace in Beijing, marking it as the global center and the starting point of reference while plotting meridians. If there was ever a historical context that lent weight to the term “Middle Kingdom,” this was it—as asserted by a European missionary. Verbiest’s world map marked the first meridian passing through Beijing as zero, an emblem of the grand inception. Meridians were then enumerated eastward to 360, culminating back in Beijing. Their numerical values (0 to 360) were displayed on the equator. The ecliptic also found its place on the map.

Two circles encased each hemisphere: the inner circle indicated latitudes, while the outer one represented the longest day durations for 18 zones, stretching from the equator to the pole. As Jordan Branch puts it, this Ptolemaic graticule on a uniform surface embodied the modern spatial concept. This model also included sequential instructions for determining the longitudes and latitudes of various locations in China. This geometric portrayal of the globe gave the Kangxi Emperor a novel perspective of the Qing realm.[[133]](#endnote-134)

Verbiest’s creation, *The Illustration and Explanation of Geodesy and Cartography*, was an intellectually profound work that addressed the Kangxi emperor’s inquiries during the ferocious civil war between the Qing Empire and Wu Sangui coalition. In the face of this volatile conflict, Verbiest offered his geodesy as an enduring endeavor and used four distinguished Jesuit works to construct a Jesuit geodesy tradition: Matteo Ricci's World Map, Giulio Aleni's *Records of Regions Beyond the Reach of the Imperial Geographer* (Zhifang waiji) from 1623, Alfonso Vagnoni’s *Investigations into the Material Compositions of the Elemental Spheres* (Kongji gezhi) from 1633, and Sabatino de Ursis’ *Explanation of the Gnomon* (Biaodu shuo) from 1612.[[134]](#endnote-135) These Jesuit predecessors operated during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, preceding the downfall of the former Ming empire and the subsequent Manchu invasion of China.

The Jesuit conception of a spherical and water-filled globe originated from Ptolemaic *Geographia*. Their publications display a clear progression of conversations about the spherical and terraqueous globe and a relentless Jesuit endeavor to persuade Chinese scholars of Earth’s sphericity. In the preface to his book, Verbiest responded to Confucian scholar Li Guangdi’s queries, explaining that his references were to the physical form of the cosmos and Earth, not to the Confucian metaphysical or ethical principles of Heaven and Earth.[[135]](#endnote-136) The concept of a spherical and terraqueous Earth, including the celestial sphere with its north and south poles, served as the geometric model for the geodetic survey. A significant circle on the celestial sphere and one on Earth’s surface have 360 degrees. Verbiest described Earth’s surface with a depiction of the equator, grounded in the established principles of Jesuit cosmology, astronomy, cosmography, and geography. The Tropic of Cancer runs parallel to and is situated 23.5 degrees north of the equator. On the summer solstice in the Northern Hemisphere (around June 21 each year), the Sun reaches its maximum northern declination of +23.5 degrees on the celestial sphere, aligning directly over the Tropic of Cancer. Verbiest referred to this as the northern pathway (Beidao). Conversely, during the summer solstice in the Southern Hemisphere, the Sun sits directly above the Tropic of Capricorn, 23.5 degrees south of the equator. Verbiest labeled this the southern pathway (Nandao). The equator, northern, and southern pathways exist both in the heavens and the spherical, terraqueous globe. Verbiest elaborated on parallel lines extending from the north to the south poles, drawing from the example of the equator, northern, and southern pathways.[[136]](#endnote-137)

Astronomical positioning and triangulation are two primary methods for pinpointing relatively exact locations on Earth’s surface. The most straightforward way to measure astronomical latitude at a specific location involves assessing the North Star (Polaris) altitude above the northern hemisphere horizon, which gives the latitude. Verbiest explained that traveling north by 250 *li* (approximately 125 kilometers or 77.67 miles) would raise the North Star’s altitude by one degree. Conversely, traveling straight south by the same distance would lower the North Star’s altitude by one degree.

Moreover, astronomical longitude refers to the angle between the meridian line running through Beijing (serving as the Prime Meridian and at zero degrees) and the measured location. Determining astronomical longitude was notoriously complex, and Verbiest's techniques still need clarification. This method of astronomical positioning provided undeniable evidence of Earth’s sphericity. Once Qing surveyors established the graticule points (longitude and latitude) of a particular location and its distance from the capital, Beijing, they could create a specific grid system.[[137]](#endnote-138) As a result, it would be relatively simple to make calculations with the established computational tables in the Astro-calendrical Bureau and further extrapolate graticule points from the grid. The Kangxi emperor adhered to Verbiest’s foundational principles of geodesy and consistently educated his Confucian advisors, particularly Li Guangdi, about the practical aspects of early modern geodesy. The political implications were undeniably clear.

## The Kangxi Expedition and Survey:

In 1674, Verbiest fulfilled the emperor’s request by creating *The Illustration and Explanation of Geodesy and Cartography*. Despite the challenges of an unpredictable war, Verbiest was able to convey geodetic principles and surveying techniques through his work effectively. Was the Kangxi emperor persuaded? Or was this simply another grand illusion spun by a seasoned Jesuit missionary? Did the Qing dynasty trust in the practicality of these principles and techniques enough to undertake such an ambitious project in a vast and growing empire?[[138]](#endnote-139)

In 1672, the Kangxi emperor had already displayed a clear intention to survey his territory. He commanded his trusted imperial guard, known officially as the “commander of the nine gates” (Jiumen tidu) of Beijing’s inner city, to measure the longitudes and latitudes of all nine entrances of the Forbidden City. These included the Zhengyang, Chongwen, Xuanwu, Anding, Desheng, Dongzhi, Xizhi, Chaoyang, and Fucheng gates. In 1674, the Kangxi emperor entrusted the title of the first “commander of the nine gates” to Fiyanggu (1645–1701), a member of the Ulanala clan from the Manchu Plain Yellow Banner, who was closely linked to the Qing royal family. In 1676, Fiyanggu reported the survey results to the Kangxi emperor, likely with the assistance of Verbiest.[[139]](#endnote-140)

The emperor identified the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihedian) as the central point of Fiyanggu’s measurements for all nine gates. This hall is iconic, made famous today by Bernardo Bertolucci’s sumptuous portrayal of the coronation of the last emperor Aisin Gioro Puyi (1906–1967) in the Forbidden City. Positioning the Hall of Supreme Harmony at the center was a strategic move to determine the exact location through which the future Prime Meridian line would pass in the upcoming map of the Qing empire, just as Verbiest suggested in his *The Illustration and Explanation of Geodesy and Cartography*. Thus, the emperor’s surveying project began in 1672.[[140]](#endnote-141)

While the Kangxi emperor experimented with Jesuit surveying methods near the imperial capital, he sent explorers to study the Manchu homeland between the Yalu and Amur Rivers. Amid the civil war with Wu Sangui in April 1677, the emperor appointed the Manchu Plain Yellow Banner leader, Gioro Umuna, to investigate the ancestral roots of the Manchu ruling dynasty in the Changbai Mountains.[[141]](#endnote-142)

Umuna reached Mukden on June 13, 1677, and Girin Ula (present-day Jilin City) on June 22—the closest military station to the Changbai Mountains. The reconnaissance reported that the journey would be more dangerous than expected, leading Umuna to request support from the senior general at Ningguta, who dispatched additional troops to accompany Umuna’s unit. Umuna had adequate provisions of grain and rice for three months and arranged for the supplies to be transported via water routes. On July 1, Umuna set off on foot with a small group from Girin Ula, and they reached the base of the Changbai Mountains on July 16. Their supplies also arrived at the same time, evidencing well-coordinated logistics. Umuna conducted ancestral rituals at the summit of the Changbai Mountains. Without geodetic or astronomical tools, Umuna approximated the height of the central peak of the Changbai Mountains and the breadth of the Heavenly Lake (Tianchi), which he estimated to be around thirty miles. After offering tribute to the ancestral spirit of Aisin Gioro atop the mountain on behalf of the Kangxi emperor, they journeyed back via the Songhua River waterways. His team reached Girin Ula on July 30, Ningguta on August 10, and finally arrived in Beijing on September 21, 1677.[[142]](#endnote-143)

Umuna’s venture into the Changbai Mountains was not merely an exploration of the northeastern landscape but a strategic and symbolic operation. Most significantly, it signified the Kangxi emperor’s resolution to scrutinize the landscape and investigate the frontier lands. Concurrently, the emperor was embroiled in a violent conflict against Wu Sangui. His ultimate triumph over his adversary occurred in 1681.

The following year, in 1682, the emperor decided to visit Mukden, the ancient Manchu capital (also known as Shenjing, now modern-day Shenyang). He planned to journey through the Manchu homeland, which stretched from the Amur River (Black Water) to the Changbai Mountain (White Mountain). He intended to conduct a ritual paying homage to the Manchu ancestral spirits. This voyage, officially dubbed the “Eastern Tour” (Dongxun), represented a spiritual reconnection to the Manchu roots and served as a homage to forebears following a hard-fought victory. Beyond its ceremonial significance, the Kangxi emperor's trip combined hunting and military drills. During this expedition, Verbiest designed and built the Magical and Mighty (Shenwei) gunpowder cannons successfully tested that year.

Consequently, in 1682, the emperor enlisted Verbiest to join the royal entourage on their journey to the Manchu homeland. He tasked Verbiest with surveying various regions during the expedition, likely aiming to place gunpowder weapons throughout the northeastern territories. Due to Verbiest’s success in weapon development and geodetic surveying, he gained the emperor’s appreciation, culminating in his elevation to the distinguished position of Minister of Works.[[143]](#endnote-144) The Kangxi emperor perceived his triumph over Wu Sangui not as a conclusion but as a precursor to further military campaigns to extend and solidify the Qing Empire’s vast boundaries. These surveying missions and advancing gunpowder weaponry for the Kangxi emperor were initial steps in his grand vision.

In 1682, nearing his seventieth year, Verbiest ascended to a level of influence unprecedented for a Jesuit missionary in China. As the Minister of Works, he stood atop the Confucian bureaucratic hierarchy. His rise was not without challenges; opposition came less from his Jesuit origins and more from the sheer prominence of his position. Yet, his waning health became a concern for the young Kangxi emperor. Even in his advanced years, Verbiest persisted, undertaking a geodetic survey from Beijing to Mukden, adhering to the methodologies in *The Illustration and Explanation of Geodesy and Cartography*. Recognizing his value and the need for succession, the emperor urged Verbiest to beckon skilled Jesuits from Europe to the Qing Empire. This signaled a watershed moment for the Jesuit mission in China. Acting swiftly, Verbiest reached out to the European Society of Jesus, requesting missionaries of his caliber. Answering this call, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), Louis XIV’s First Minister of State, dispatched a group of the King’s mathematicians to China, and they arrived in 1685.[[144]](#endnote-145)

Before these French Jesuits set foot in China, Antoine Thomas, having landed in Macau in 1682, journeyed to Beijing in 1685. As Verbiest aged and became frail, he could no longer fulfill his duties, and he passed away in January 1688. In his stead, Thomas’ primary role was to take over Verbiest’s critical tasks. Thomas started by teaching the Kangxi emperor about geometry and arithmetic and how to use astronomical instruments. The emperor wanted to ensure that Thomas could continue Verbiest’s work in the Astro-Calendrical Bureau and with the geodetic surveys. After passing this test, Thomas took on the crucial task of determining the longitude passing through Beijing, as the Kangxi emperor was eager to press forward with the geodetic survey of his empire.[[145]](#endnote-146) The initial survey of the northeastern landscape, conducted by Verbiest and Thomas under the emperor’s directive, was not an isolated incident. The emperor had demonstrated an exceptional will and resolve to “see” and travel his empire. The geodetic surveys spanned his Eastern Tour, hunting expeditions, and six grand and costly Southern Tours to the Lower Yangzi Valley in 1684, 1689, 1699, 1703, 1705, and 1707. He also made sure to have court painters create extensive scrolls depicting the grandeur of his travels, hunts, and tours. According to historian Michael Zhang, the Kangxi emperor’s entourage served as a mobile court and the command center of the Qing armies, akin to today’s Air Force One.[[146]](#endnote-147)

As Thomas took over Verbiest’s responsibilities in 1685, the Kangxi emperor pivoted to his bureaucracy and gave heed to the advice from his trusted Confucian advisors. Consequently, he established the Institute of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* in 1686. The institute functioned for sixty-four years, spanning the reigns of all three high Qing monarchs. As I demonstrated in the preceding chapter, only the last three empires—the Mongol Yuan, the Chinese Ming, and the Manchu Qing—undertook such a task of territorial documentation. The Mongol Yuan and the Chinese Ming both formed a team for a short period (five to six years) to accomplish the task, indicating that it was essentially a literary project.

In contrast, the Qing monarchy pursued a different method based on the actual geodetic surveys. *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* was an engineering and military venture based on a comprehensive, empire-wide survey of graticule points. This approach made *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* fundamentally distinct from its predecessors’ territorial documentation.[[147]](#endnote-148) Within the Qing court, temporary and task-specific Institutes (guan) would occasionally be administered by the Imperial Household Department (Neiwufu) to compile official literature. Such an Institute was established, called *kaiguan* (establishing an Institute). The location for each institute was primarily chosen based on space availability. For instance, upon the death of an emperor, the new emperor would usually set up an Institute of *Veritable Records* for the past emperor’s reign. This institute would temporarily house all the documents related to the late emperor. The Imperial Household Department was responsible for selecting and assigning the physical space to the institute’s personnel. Once the work was complete, the department would take back the space and reassign it for different purposes. Staff members were paid a fixed salary by the Imperial Household Department and provided with meals during their work at the Institute. Typically, a member of the imperial family, such as the emperor’s son or brother, would supervise the project with imperial sanction. The task and its team, consisting of scholars, compilers, clerks, and copyists, would be managed by an editor-in-chief, often a well-accomplished and reputable scholar-official.[[148]](#endnote-149)

These institutes catered solely to the interests of the Qing monarchy, handling tasks that ranged from:

1. Clerical responsibilities, such as compiling military records and archives.
2. Editorial duties, like the assembly of astronomical and astrological tables and literature.
3. Scholarly tasks include the standardization of the Three Ritual Classics or the Ming History project.

Every piece of literature produced by these Institutes was written in classical Chinese—the common language in East Asia—making literary skills essential for their staff. However, these small prestigious groups were more than meritocracies; they served as crucial platforms for factional formation within the court. Consequently, the appointment of scholars to a specific institute always involved a delicate balance of factional allegiance.[[149]](#endnote-150)

Each Institute was led by an intellectual and political figure and composed of elite specialists in the subject matter. They operated from a dedicated office to complete tasks with minimal interruptions and had infrastructural support from the Imperial Household Department.[[150]](#endnote-151) The table below provides a brief overview of selected institutes, listed in chronological order based on their inception dates.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Title in Chinese | English titles | Initiation and completion dates\* |
| 明史馆 | Institute of the Ming History | 1645–1789 |
| 一统志馆 | Institute of the Grand Union and Commencement Documentation | 1686–1740 |
| 数理精蕴馆 | Institute of the Essence of Mathematical Principles | 1713–1723 |
| 八旗通志馆 | Institute of the General History of the Eight Banners | 1728–38 (Chinese version), 1728–40 (Manchu version), 1772–1796 |
| 朱批谕旨馆 | Institute of the red-ink commentary on the imperial instructions and memorials | 1732–1738 |
| 三礼馆 | Institute of the Three Ritual Classics | 1736–1754 |

The Institute of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* was a factional, specialized, and elite institution within the Qing court. Still, it also benefited from added technical and strategic backing. By the 1680s, it was evident that the Jesuit missionaries worked at the behest of the Qing monarchy. The Kangxi emperor primarily engaged them as military and logistical aid for the Banner armies and in their capacity as experts in mathematics and astronomy. The geodetic surveys carried out by the Jesuits were part of the military and logistic operations under the command of the Kangxi emperor. Unlike mathematical astronomy, the geodetic service was confidential and relatively isolated from the Confucian bureaucracy, save for the compilers within the Institute of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*.

Set against this institutional backdrop in 1687, the Kangxi emperor was gearing up for a monumental conflict on the northern frontier against the Zunghar Mongols. The Zunghar Empire, established in 1634 and grounded in the beliefs of Tibetan Buddhism, presented a challenge to its larger and more enduring neighbors—the Russian Romanov Empire, founded in 1613, and the Manchu Qing Empire, created in 1636. These three early modern states were vying for supremacy over each other in central Asia. The Zunghar Khanate was a coalition of Mongol-Oirat tribes set up in 1634, led by Sengge. In his youth, Galdan, Sengge’s brother and future Zunghar leader, was dispatched to Lhasa to study under the Dalai Lama. Following his brother’s murder in 1670, Galdan returned from Tibet, and avenged Sengge’s death by overcoming his adversaries. Once he seized control of the Zunghar Khanate, Galdan initiated the expansion of his domain, and by 1681, the Zunghar Khanate was a strategic threat to the Qing empire.

After enduring strained relations, Galdan invaded Khalkha territory in 1688, causing its ruler and citizens to seek the Qing empire’s protection. Much of what is now known as Mongolia was controlled by the Khalkha Mongols. A Zunghar Khanate incorporating Khalkha would almost match the size of the Qing realm, and a unified Mongol empire was something the Manchus could not overlook. Adding to the complexities, Galdan had also plotted with Wu Sangui to encircle the Qing domain. As a result, the Kangxi emperor initiated his first campaign against the Zunghar in 1690, ending with a Qing triumph at Ulun Butung, located just 200 miles north of Beijing. However, Galdan’s troops managed to withdraw, preserving their military strength. The Kangxi emperor strategized for a second campaign for five years following the inconclusive victory of 1690. Meanwhile, Galdan continuously tried to rally allies against the Manchus—making overtures to different Mongol princes, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and even Russians—but his attempts yielded few results. He even renewed his oath of loyalty to the Qing to buy time, but the Kangxi emperor was now resolute on eradicating the Zunghar.[[151]](#endnote-152)

The Kangxi emperor was resolved to deploy a colossal force in his second campaign. Not one but three Qing armies, amassing nearly 75,000 troops, embarked towards the Zunghar in the spring of 1696. Under Kangxi’s direct command and departure from the capital, the central army was an imposing early modern force: over 32,000 soldiers, 3,000 horses, and 1,300 supply-laden carts. Kangxi also commanded more than 200 heavy cannons, weighing 11,000 pounds, and 100 lighter cannons weighing around 1,000 pounds. Six of Kangxi’s sons were appointed commanders, and two European Jesuits served as the emperor’s technical advisors. The scene appeared to be ready for a historical battle. Intelligence suggested that Galdan commanded around 10,000 soldiers, with many more supporters. Rumors about 60,000 Russian troops potentially allying with the Zunghar stirred unease among the Qing commanders, but the emperor remained resolute.

The showdown at Jao Modo in 1696 was less intense than initially assumed. The whispers of Russian forces turned out to be unfounded, and Galdan’s troops were notably diminished. By the time they met the Zunghar on June 12, the Qing army had been whittled down by months of traversing adverse weather conditions. Galdan’s forces numbered around 5,000. Rather than engaging with the Zunghar directly, the Kangxi emperor’s Western army, under the leadership of General Fiyanggu (who once oversaw the nine gates of the capital), strategically encircled the enemy. Utilizing the high ground, they unleashed a barrage of heavy artillery fire, followed by a lethal onslaught of close-range arrow fire. Still, this confrontation did not signify the culmination of the Zunghar strife. Galdan, narrowly escaping with a handful of followers, met his end either from an epidemic or internal disputes. The Kangxi emperor triumphantly returned to the capital. Recognizing the importance of preserving this legacy, he directed his advisors to chronicle the official accounts of his military campaigns, ensuring their indelible imprint on history by 1708.[[152]](#endnote-153)

The successive military campaigns prompted the Kangxi emperor to commission a comprehensive survey of the terrain, stretching from the Steppe to the inner realms. The maiden geodetic survey crew set out in 1708. Typically, such a crew comprised a strategic leader, logistical personnel, technical experts, record keepers, and assistants. Historian Kicengge delved into the Manchu records issued by the Ministry of War in 1709, detailing the inaugural survey team’s composition. This assembly included platoon leaders Dekjingge and Toofanhaci (Manchu bannermen handpicked by the Kangxi emperor), their deputies Udari, Sereng, Hemuyen, and frontline officers Nastai and Mingcing. The technical brain trust was led by the mathematical astronomer Cengde, who managed the Astro-Calendrical Bureau, accompanied by three French Jesuits: Xavier-Ehrenbert Fridelli, Jean-Baptiste Régis, and Pierre Jartoux, augmented by four scribes and a duo of cartographers.[[153]](#endnote-154) Unlike Verbiest, who orchestrated the production of gunpowder weapons and headed the Astro-Calendrical Bureau, these French Jesuits assumed a more supplementary role in the team. Additionally, the contingent featured chefs, attendants, and porters who handled the hefty transportation of intricate measuring gear and essentials. Provincial and district leaders lent their expertise and local insights when called upon.

The survey team, a military unit led by Manchu leaders, was birthed in the aftermath of expansive campaigns against the Mongols. Not present were Chinese staff, explaining the dominance of the Manchu language in imperial records. The Kangxi emperor played a pivotal role, directly supervising the survey initiative. The intricate mapping process was meticulously orchestrated through a chain of command that included imperial guards and regional governors. The entrusted leaders of this initiative were also among the emperor’s most esteemed ministers. However, as the emperor’s survey ambitions expanded from Manchu territories to the vast expanse of mainland China, the reliance solely on his loyal Banner leaders became untenable. This necessitated delegating survey responsibilities to territorial and provincial governors. Consequently, the Qing dynasty found it imperative to evolve the geodetic survey into a wider military effort that spanned the entirety of the Chinese mainland.

The survey conducted on the northern borderland was just the start, as the Kangxi emperor made the decision to conduct a survey of the entire Chinese subcontinent. The Kangxi emperor instructed his councilors, including Li Guangdi, on June 19, 1711, that such a massive endeavor could only be accomplished on the principle of the geodetic survey:[[154]](#endnote-155)

In celestial terms, a degree measurement corresponds to the breadth and vastness of the earth. If we apply the measuring scale of the ancient Zhou house, then one degree in the sky aligns with an arc of 250 *li* on the spherical earth. An arc of 200 *li* on the spherical earth matches an arc that equals one degree in the sky. However, since antiquity, mapmakers have struggled to translate celestial degrees into terrestrial distances, leading to numerous inaccuracies. I have therefore tasked those skilled in mathematics and cartography to survey the mountains and waterways of the northeast. They have successfully produced impressively detailed maps for my examination by correlating the celestial degrees with terrestrial distances.[[155]](#endnote-156)

The quoted proclamation from the *Veritable Record* is a direct extract from Verbiest’s *The Illustration and Explanation of Geodesy and Cartography*. More critically, the emperor subscribed to a spherical Earth composed of land and water. His directive should not be seen as a one-off incident or inconsistent with the Qing monarchy’s relentless efforts to promote a new cosmographical understanding of the Earth’s sphericity.

Furthermore, Kangxi’s actions directly countered the Confucian reverence for high antiquity. While these methods contrasted with the cultural values of the Confucian bureaucracy, the pragmatic Kangxi chose to steer the bureaucracy in a direction that served his purpose. However, this process was only sometimes seamless, and the two subsequent monarchs encountered similar challenges.

The quote from the *Veritable Record* is intrinsically linked to an adjacent directive from the Kangxi emperor concerning the border between Qing China and Choson Korea. Qing scholars and modern historians have often disregarded this second portion of the quote. This practice of decontextualizing Kangxi’s directives has led to a fundamental misunderstanding of his intentions. As per Kangxi, the geodetic survey was inseparable from the borderland issues of utmost importance to him. He was cognizant of the Russians and Koreans’ threats to the Manchu homeland. His primary objective was to understand the landscape to the best of his abilities, to ward off Russian invasions and maintain Korean submissiveness.[[156]](#endnote-157)

In this second part of the quote, the Kangxi emperor described three border rivers surrounding the entire Manchu homeland:

The Sungari or Huntong River originates north from Changbaishan, veers northeast passing by Jilin (Chuanchang) and Dawang Wula and converges with the Amur River or Heilongjiang before it empties into the sea. This region forms part of Chinese territory. On the other hand, the Yalu River runs southeast from Changbaishan, then moves southwest between Phoenix City or Fenghuangcheng and Ŭiju county, before ultimately reaching the sea. The area northwest of the Yalu River belongs to China, whereas the southeast region forms part of Korean territory. From the edges of Changbaishan, the Tumen River heads east, then south, eventually reaching the ocean. The region southwest of the Tumen is part of Korea; the area northeast is Chinese land. Though the areas surrounding these border rivers are already identified, the region between the Yalu and the Tumen remains undetermined. I have dispatched a team to the contentious territory at Fenghuangcheng, which shares a border with Ŭiju county in Korea. Apart from conducting a joint investigation, I have directed the team to thoroughly explore our territory's farthest reaches, ascertain and clarify the ambiguous borders, and then report back to me.[[157]](#endnote-158)

The Kangxi Emperor delineated three pivotal rivers that marked the frontiers with Siberia and the Korean Peninsula: the Sungari-Amur, Yalu, and Tumen Rivers. To the north, the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk set a historic precedent as the first official pact between the Qing Dynasty and the Russian Empire. This treaty saw Russia yield territories north of the Amur River up to the Stanovoy Range to the Qing while maintaining their domain between Lake Baikal and the Argun River. This agreement not only globalized Chinese products but also granted Russia the privilege to partake in Chinese commodities, particularly sought-after furs.[[158]](#endnote-159)

From the emperor's directives, it's evident there were tensions along the Qing-Korean boundary, with multiple violent confrontations arising from ginseng collectors and hunters overstepping the border. To address this, in Fenghuangcheng, a border town with Korea, Kangxi institutionalized a bilateral trial system involving both Qing and Korean administrations. While dispatching his representatives to these joint hearings, the emperor discreetly also sent the geodetic surveyors to the frontier. For Kangxi, with Inner Mongolia pacified and the Qing-Russian demarcation settled via the Nerchinsk Treaty, his next agenda was to solidify the Qing-Korea boundary through meticulous geodetic assessments. This 1711 directive from the emperor came on the heels of the 1689 Nerchinsk Treaty and his military campaign against Galdan spanning 1687 to 1696.

In 1711, the same year the Kangxi Emperor dispatched his delegation and geodetic survey team to Fenghuangcheng, he initiated a comprehensive geodetic study of the entirety of China proper. Drawing upon four diverse sources, historian Li Xiaocong has pinpointed thirteen such surveys and cartographic endeavors within China, all orchestrated by the Ministry of War. They sequentially occurred between 1710 and 1716, a timeframe spanning from the Kangxi Emperor's second victorious campaign against Galdan in 1696 to the completion of "An All-seeing Eye over the Imperial Territory" (known as the Kangxi Atlas) in 1717. The following lists them in chronological order:[[159]](#endnote-160)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1710 | Zhili |
| 1711 | Shandong |
| 1713 | Shanxi |
| 1713 | Henan |
| 1713 | Jiangnan |
| 1713 | Zhejiang |
| 1714 | Jiangxi |
| 1714 | Fujian |
| 1714 | Guandong |
| 1715 | Yunnan |
| 1715 | Guangxi |
| 1715 | Guizhou |
| 1716 | Huguang |

The survey initiated in Beijing, progressed south, looped the coastline southwestwards, and culminated in the central Yangzi basin, specifically Huguang. Each province was represented by a single map, with the exception of the lower Yangzi valley which was detailed across two. Upon a provincial map's completion, the respective governor immediately delegated a trusted envoy to hand-deliver it to the Kangxi Emperor at the command center. Each local jurisdiction en route was tasked with provisioning horses and sustenance to facilitate this high-priority dispatch, distinguishing it from ordinary bureaucratic document transfers. After scrutinizing the map, the Kangxi Emperor directed it to the imperial workshop within the Imperial Household Department. It was copied, refined, amalgamated, authenticated, and subsequently replicated through woodblock or copperplate printing. Multiple versions of these prints were made, many of which endure to the present day.[[160]](#endnote-161)

Every one of the thirteen regional maps came adorned with graticules. Pierre Jartoux, the French Jesuit missionary, took charge within the imperial workshop, overseeing the unification of these regional maps to form a comprehensive atlas of the empire (known as the Kangxi Atlas). The imperial workshop crafted several iterations of the Kangxi atlases. One notable edition, *The Great Qing’s Complete Atlas of Inner and Outer Realms under Heaven*, found in Archive No. 1, reveals the assembly, utility, and appreciation of the atlas. A revealing inscription by an unidentified scholar-official on the bottom right corner reads:

Every dynasty has crafted maps, yet many needed more precise coordinates for latitude (referred to as the elevation of the northern pole) and longitude (described as width along the east-west axis). Only Verbiest created a map of the inner and outer domains, distinctly marking gridlines for every hundred li under the heavens. This representation is far superior to its predecessors. The vast expanse of our realm cannot easily be traversed by foot. Our dynasty has united inner and outer territories, embodying a transformative *dao*. In 1716, purveyors were dispatched to every province under the emperor's directive. Using astronomical tools, they measured the elevation of the north polar star and depicted these readings on a gridded map, each square measuring a hundred *li*. [I do not include a short section where the author explains the geodetic survey’s methodology.] This map allows users to gauge the astronomical latitude, discern the alignment of celestial and terrestrial realms, estimate travel durations between places, identify territorial borders, understand mountain formations, and trace water routes. While one can inspect individual provincial maps, their distinct color-coding allows clarity. All these maps can be harmoniously combined into a singular representation of our vast realm. Every latitude and longitude reading aligns flawlessly. The result is a masterpiece of precision and elegance, a treasure as invaluable as gold and gems.[[161]](#endnote-162)

The inscription by this Confucian scholar-official offers a unique lens through which to view the map. It hints at a nuanced difference between the Qing monarchy and Confucian scholars in their perception of the Qing domain. From this scholar’s perspective, the Kangxi Atlas was a novelty, its precision outshining previous works, thanks to the geodetic survey. The endorsement also suggests that the upper echelons of the Confucian bureaucracy, while recognizing and applauding the survey’s efficacy, still had a nuanced perspective distinct from that of the Qing monarchy. While the Qing rulers spearheaded cartographic endeavors, leaning heavily on military endeavors and skilled artisans in the imperial workshop, Confucian officials were more observers and admirers from the sidelines in 1716. Over time, some embraced the Jesuit principles of geodetic survey and cosmology, though this acceptance took time and evolved over decades.

## Claiming the Scientific Expertise:

In 1722, when the Yongzheng emperor took the reins of power, there was a shift in the Qing Empire’s relationship with the Jesuits. Contrary to the Kangxi emperor’s supportive stance towards Jesuits and their evangelistic endeavors, Yongzheng clamped down on their activities. Yet, even with his policy reversal concerning the Jesuits, the emperor did not halt their collaboration in cartographic matters. Historian Feng Baolin points out that during the Yongzheng emperor's reign, four significant imperial maps were crafted with Jesuit expertise.[[162]](#endnote-163) Emulating his predecessor’s approach, the Yongzheng emperor dispatched survey teams to broaden the Qing realm’s imperial survey, especially during or following military campaigns in the northwest and southwest regions. He, too, liaised closely with the Ministry of War and provincial governors, and like before, the predominant language for these imperial maps remained Manchu.

The cornerstone of these geodetic surveys lay in the harmony between the celestial and terrestrial realms. Therefore, the meticulousness in astronomical measurements directly affected the precision of mapping the Earth. At the apex of this meticulous pursuit was the ability to mathematically represent celestial or terrestrial spheres by calculating the distance between two distinct points. Court mathematicians wielded spherical trigonometry, deducing unknown celestial and terrestrial coordinates from established measurements. The outcome was a finely tuned synergy between empirical observations and complex mathematical computations. During the reign of the Yongzheng emperor, the astronomical manual was substantially revised, which profoundly influenced the geodetic surveys.

In 1730, Mingghatu, a revered Mongol mathematical astronomer, took the reins of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau, and reported to the Yongzheng emperor the diminishing accuracy of predicting solar eclipses. Mingghatu proposed a comprehensive overhaul of measurement methodologies and computational techniques to remedy this. The emperor, recognizing the need for precision, gave the green light. Mingghatu then collaborated with Ignaz Kögler, a German Jesuit, and André Pereira, a Portuguese missionary, in their quest for enhanced precision in predicting solar and lunar eclipses.[[163]](#endnote-164)

The Qing’s quest for unmatched astronomical precision often prompted the Jesuits to draw upon cutting-edge European advancements. Yet, this did not translate to wholesale adoption of European scientific philosophies; they instead opted for judicious inclusions from realms like Keplerian dynamics and Newtonian foundations. In this formidable journey, the Jesuits tactically integrated Kepler’s elliptical concepts and computational methods influenced by Newton. Their foremost objective was pinpoint accuracy, even if it necessitated diverging from their religious convictions. They sidestepped the Copernican heliocentric blueprint, marking a radical selection process. They selectively incorporated specific methodologies from the burgeoning Scientific Revolution in Europe, in sync with the Qing Empire’s premium on exactitude. This sweeping reform led to the codification of astronomical tables and refined administrative practices, forming the bedrock for subsequent imperial calendrical calculations. The subsequent geodetic surveys, too, gained from this pivotal astronomical evolution.

After the ascension of the Qianlong emperor in 1735, the pace of astronomical reforms and geodetic surveys continued unabated. Yet, the era marked a significant political shift. The Qianlong emperor adopted a hands-off approach, distancing himself from direct involvement in Confucian bureaucratic affairs. The shift resulted in a complex relationship between the Qing monarchy, which had been supporting Jesuit science since 1672, and the Confucian bureaucracy, who viewed Jesuit sciences with suspicion. The Confucian bureaucracy, consequently, appeared on the back foot, often attempting to downplay, vilify, or challenge Jesuit contributions. This came despite the Jesuits’ instrumental role in gunpowder weaponry, elevating astronomical precision, geodetic expertise, and the conceptualization of global geopolitical maps.[[164]](#endnote-165)

In the Qianlong emperor’s court, the scholars, often called the “science faction,” appeared reluctant to collaborate with the Jesuits.[[165]](#endnote-166) Mathematician-astronomer Mei Juecheng, upon his return to the court, proposed a name change for *The Essence of Mathematical Principles* (Shuli jingyun) to *The Origins of Astronomical Phenomena and Mathematics* (Xiangshu yuanyuan). This was to sidestep potential naming taboos and enhance the work’s dissemination. This seminal piece integrated segments of Euclidean geometry and both plane and spherical trigonometry. Armed with a mathematical treatise, Mei’s goal was to secure the emperor’s blessing to reproduce more copies for the benefit of imperial scholars. Until that year, only the Ministry of Rites held exclusive printing rights for the book. This restricted access meant that mathematical astronomy was largely unavailable to the wider Confucian establishment without sanctioned reprints from the Qing court.

Mei harbored grander ambitions. He proposed that the Ministry of Rites publish several hundred copies, ensuring its reach to provincial offices and foundational Confucian educational bodies. And by renaming the text, he believed it would receive a wider audience. Furthermore, he championed the idea of introducing a specialized examination of mathematical astronomy within the Confucian bureaucracy. This would not only aid in the selection of suitable candidates for the Astro-Calendrical Bureau but also lessen the Qing court’s dependence on the Jesuits and their scientific expertise.

However, the dissemination of this book on mathematical astronomy had a serious obstacle. *The Essence of Mathematical Principles*, previously attributed to the Kangxi emperor and kept exclusive to the imperial court, faced a significant challenge for broader circulation within the Confucian bureaucracy due to the longstanding naming taboo in imperial China. It was customary that the names of emperors, once deceased, became forbidden from being spoken or written. This naming taboo was also prevalent in Chinese lineage customs, where a patriarch’s name would become off-limits after his death. Fully cognizant of this tradition, Mei proposed a title change from *The Essence of Mathematical Principles* to *The Origins of Astronomical Phenomena and Mathematics*. This suggested that the book was not penned by the previous emperor, eliminating the potential for violation of the taboo. However, the Qianlong emperor saw through this and denied the title change while approving the other aspects of Mei’s proposal. He agreed to allow the book to be printed with its original title but required that it be referred to verbally as *The Essence of Mathematical Books* (Lushu yuanyuan) as a sign of respect towards the Kangxi emperor. Despite this minor setback, the science faction considered it a minor reprimand, recognizing that they had achieved most of their goals. This propelled them to recruit and nurture the next generation of mathematical astronomers for the Astro-Calendrical Bureau, slowly diminishing the influence of the Jesuits.[[166]](#endnote-167)

In 1736, the science faction escalated its efforts. Gu Zong (1685–1755), the Minister of Personnel and a notable member of the science faction, presented a memorial to the Qianlong emperor, questioning the authenticity of Jesuit science. He argued that the Jesuits’ translations of mathematical astronomy, rooted in the final years of the Ming dynasty, had seen a multitude of alterations and adjustments. As an example, Gu pointed to the early Jesuit publication *Mathematical Astronomy according to a New Method* (Xinfa lishu) from 1645. This work, he noted, was marred by inconsistencies in its charts and diagrams, often paired with confusing and vague elucidations.

Yet, Gu emphasized the Kangxi emperor’s different approach. Instead of solely relying on Jesuit teachings, the emperor explored the “ancient methods”—a nod to Confucian techniques of superior quality—to enrich the Jesuit content. This venture led to *The Compendium of Observational and Computational Astronomy* (Lixiang kaocheng) in 1722. Gu lauded this as a masterstroke by the Kangxi emperor in integrating Jesuit sciences. His successor, the Yongzheng emperor, further championed this synthesis, standing on the foundation laid by his father.

Gu’s criticism of the Jesuits was clear: if their work were not augmented with comprehensive information, it would lead to the inefficiency and eventual breakdown of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau. Gu and Mei’s primary objective was to dismantle the Jesuit stronghold over mathematical astronomy and make it accessible in a clear, classical Chinese format for the Confucian bureaucracy. They aimed to curtail Jesuit dominance in the Astro-Calendrical Bureau and replace them with more qualified, technical-competent scholars. Their efforts were rewarded as they achieved their intended outcomes.

However, Gu downplayed the importance of the 1730 astronomical reform steered by mathematical astronomers like Mingghatu, Ignaz Kögler, and André Pereira. Gu persistently discredited the Jesuits' contributions. He pointed out that their primary output during Yongzheng's tenure was *The Supplement to the Compendium of Observational and Computational Astronomy* (hereafter referred to as *The Supplement*). As per Gu and Mei's perspective, *The Supplement* only comprised a mere thirty-nine pages of tables aimed at refining solar and lunar eclipse predictions, notably needing more detailed technical commentary or the underlying computational methods. He dismissed their efforts as a mere addendum of thirty-nine pages, primarily featuring tables predicting solar and lunar events. Gu criticized this work for needing more clarity in its methods, making it impenetrable for anyone other than its authors. The primary authors—Ignaz Kögler of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau and Minister of Rites, alongside associates André Pereira and Mingghatu—appeared to be the sole trio capable of interpreting and amending these tables. Gu questioned their motives. Why had they not elucidated the underlying mechanisms of their work? Were they hiding something or selfishly seeking a monopoly over mathematical astronomy? This opaque approach seemed questionable and almost negligent.

Following Gu Zong's memorial, the Qianlong emperor instituted an Academy within the Astro-Calendrical Bureau. The Qianlong emperor mandated that Kögler, Pereira, and Mingghatu elucidate the mysteries behind their tables. This tactic seemed rooted in the presumed cultural superiority of the Confucian bureaucracy. While the European missionaries and the Mongol bannerman might have been adept in mathematical astronomy, they lacked the finesse to articulate their findings in the sophisticated classical Chinese language. Historically, Jesuit missionaries had relied on local scholars, often Catholic converts, to aid in translating their messages and treatises into classical Chinese. But these translations often fell short of the high literary benchmarks set by the civil service examinations and classical literacy standards. Gu and Mei knew Kögler, Pereira, and Mingghatu’s limitations in classical literacy.[[167]](#endnote-168)

Gu presented another memorial to the emperor in no time, positing that crafting lucid explanations and illustrations for such tables demanded a unique scholar of literary artistry and mathematical astronomy expertise. Who could be the ideal fit? The distinguished technical scholar Mei Juecheng, grandson of the celebrated mathematical astronomer Mei Wending from the Kangxi emperor’s era. Mei Juecheng was a powerhouse within the science faction. Another competent choice was He Guozong, who had aligned with the science faction during the Yongzheng era and was well-versed in the mathematical astronomy used in the reforms. Gu proposed that Mei Juecheng lead the Institute revamping *The Supplement*, with He Guozong as his right-hand man. Their ultimate intent was to replace Kögler, Pereira, and Mingghatu with Mei and He.

In 1737, the Qianlong emperor gave the green light to Gu’s proposal. In keeping with the typical operational standards of an Institute, the emperor assembled a team of elite Manchu princes and top-tier councilors to spearhead the revamp of *The Essence of Mathematical Principles* and *The Supplement to the Observational and Computational Astronomy*. This illustrious group comprised Qianlong’s uncles and Manchu royals, Yunlu (1695–1767) and Yunli (1697–1738), as well as esteemed grand councilors Ortai (1680–1745), Zhang Tingyu (1672 –1755), and Xu Ben (?–1747). Their association with the science faction was well-known and influential. However, Mei Juecheng (1680–1763) and He Guozong (?–1767) were the real torchbearers driving the project. They stepped into the roles previously held by Jesuits, steering mathematical astronomy onto a new course.[[168]](#endnote-169)

At this pivotal moment, the science faction began scripting their version of history, detailing how Jesuit science was assimilated into Chinese culture. This narrative sought to reshape the tale of Jesuit contributions, particularly in mathematical astronomy, into the broader tapestry of China’s imperial history. Regrettably, this perspective was largely overshadowed in twentieth-century China. Contemporary historians often leaned heavily on Jesuit records, viewing the rich history of China’s imperial mathematical astronomy skeptically and even labeling it nationalistic. The nuances of accommodation politics frequently got lost, sometimes simplifying the complexities into a dichotomy between “Chinese” and “Western” astronomical practices.[[169]](#endnote-170)

The transition from Jesuit-led scientific endeavors to the ascendancy of the science faction in the Qing court marked a significant shift. Under the reign of the Kangxi emperor, and particularly influenced by Verbiest, the Jesuits introduced and championed “the new method,” bringing mathematical astronomy to the forefront of the Qing Empire’s scientific pursuits. However, during the tenure of the Qianlong emperor, particularly between 1735 and 1737, Confucian scholars, who were gaining traction, propagated the "central and orthodox method" (Zhongfa). They aimed to strengthen imperial mathematical astronomy in ways that benefitted the Qing monarchy and its administrative machinery. This era saw the science faction in the Qing court firmly establishing its authority in the fields of mathematical astronomy and geodetic surveying, a first in the Qing Empire's history.

## The Qianlong Expedition and Survey:

This 1743 delineation in *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* represented the Qing monarchy’s comprehensive territorial vision. Consequently, the senior ranks of the Confucian bureaucracy were tasked with further fleshing out and implementing this territorial ideology. For the first time, there was a clear delineation between the Chinese heartland (the inner realm) and the expansive territories of the Steppe, Central Asia, and the Tibetan Plateau (the outer realm). Each region was governed under a unique administrative system. This spatial understanding was formally laid out in *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*, released in 1743. As per this territorial guide, the Qing Empire’s domain was bifurcated into inner and outer realms. The inner realm incorporated eighteen provinces, totaling 1600 prefectures and counties, known as unity divisions (Tongbu). In contrast, the outer realm comprised fifty-seven frontier regions and vassal states, termed border divisions (Fanbu). Beyond the outer realm, thirty additional tributary states existed, nations that periodically sent tribute to Beijing.

At this critical juncture, however, ongoing internal strife in Central Asia gave the Qing Empire another chance for military intervention. Despite enduring two significant campaigns initiated by the Kangxi emperor, the Zunghar Khanate persisted and became one of the thirty tributary states. However, following the death of Galdan Tsering in 1745, the Zunghar Khanate was plunged into civil unrest. With a strategy previously mapped out by the Grand Council during the Yongzheng emperor's reign, the Qianlong emperor capitalized on this internal turmoil, launching an invasion in 1755. The outcome was the capture of one of the Zunghar leaders and the subsequent division of the Zunghar Khanate into four separate Oirat tribes, each under its khan. Yet, in a twist of events in 1756, one of these khans, Amursana, rebelled against the Qing, aspiring to unite the entire confederacy under his rule.[[170]](#endnote-171)

Amursana's rebellion met with a ruthless counteraction from the Qianlong emperor. In a merciless command, he directed his forces to obliterate the Mongol Zunghars, instructing them to spare no male, including young boys who surrendered. Furthermore, the Qing military strategized to cause starvation by obstructing essential food supplies to the Zunghars. Reports suggest that while certain commanders hesitated to enforce such extreme measures, which were uncommon in conventional warfare, Russian eyewitnesses on the fringes of Zungharia documented entire settlements—comprising men, women, and children—being wiped out. Those who managed to escape the onslaught faced enslavement, losing their tribal identities. The aftermath was a land left barren due to the devastating trio of conflict, hunger, and sickness. Historian Wei Yuan noted that while 40% succumbed to smallpox, 30% faced brutal execution, 10% found themselves subjugated or enslaved, and the remaining 10% sought refuge in Russian or Kazakh territories, ultimately merging with the local populations. The eradication of the Zunghars wasn't solely the work of the Chinese and Manchus; Turkic Muslim communities, especially the Uighurs—who had previously suffered Zunghar invasions and dominance—also played a significant role.[[171]](#endnote-172)

The annihilation of the Zunghars paved the way for a Qing alliance with the Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim population that had formerly been under Zunghar dominance. In a strategic move, the Qing commanders rescued two Khojas brothers of Turkic origin, who were held captive in a Zunghar prison. These Khojas, predominantly from the Nizari Isma'ili Shia sect with roots in India, were released by the Qing in return for their allegiance. With the Uyghurs' assistance, the Qing successfully crushed the Zunghar resistance. However, in a twist of events, the Uyghurs soon turned against their Qing allies. Responding swiftly, the Qing forces extended their reach beyond the Pamir Mountains into Turkic Central Asia. This show of strength compelled the rulers of Kokand and Tashkent to yield to Qing supremacy. Having played their part in the larger political game, the two Khojas brothers were captured, executed, and their remains presented to the emperor. Consequently, by 1759, the Turkic Muslims of Altishahr were assimilated into the Qing empire.[[172]](#endnote-173)

Under the Qianlong emperor’s leadership, the region was overseen by military governors, ensuring it remained separate from China's main administrative framework. Garrisoned troops consisted of Mongol Oirats, Manchu bannermen, Chinese Muslims, and Han Chinese. The Qing state’s primary focus was to ensure the peaceful trade of grain, silver, and cotton cloth rather than attempting to transform Turkic cultures. Over time, the dominance of the Qing led to an incremental influx of Han Chinese settlers into Central Asia. However, for the Central Asian Muslims, the political landscape after the 1759 Qing conquest felt much like their previous existence under the Zunghar reign. The socio-economic dynamics remained largely untouched; it was just a shift in the leadership of the region’s military occupation.

During the Qing’s Central Asian conquest, three surveys were undertaken in 1756, 1759, and 1772. The Qianlong emperor’s approach to surveying mirrored that of his grandfather, the Kangxi emperor. Recognizing the significance of the Kangxi Atlas, as well as the contributions of his father Yongzheng, the Qianlong emperor aimed to extend their cartographic milestones by integrating Central Asia into the geodetic survey. Spanning three Qing rulers, this holistic survey captured the breadth of the Qing Empire’s inner and outer territories, laying the groundwork for *The Grand Union Documentation*. Temporally, the Qianlong emperor released an initial version of *The Grand Union Documentation* in 1743, primarily for display, showcasing the evolving territorial ideology. Yet, this preliminary edition lacked the Central Asian mapping, prompting subsequent publications and a revised edition of *The Grand Union Documentation*. Let us delve into the intricacies of these three surveys and their significance for the Qing Empire.

In 1756, the primary mission of the initial survey team was to study the Tianshan mountains and the Ili region in Central Asia. Taking cues from the Kangxi Atlas and the surveys conducted during the Yongzheng emperor's reign, this exploration was as much a military operation as it was a cartographical endeavor. Led by He Guozong, the head of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau, the expedition included the mathematical astronomer Mingghatu, Portuguese Jesuit mathematicians Félix da Rocha and José de Espinha, two Tibetan lamas named Subudi and Jiramba Dander, and a Banner army financial officer whose name remains unknown. On March 21, 1756, they began their journey from Beijing, destined for the border town of Barköl. Here, Manchu imperial guards Nusan and Hacingga, part of the military force that had taken on the Zunghars, awaited the survey team. It is important to emphasize that the reins of control had shifted to the science faction, notably under He Guozong's and Mingghatu's leadership. The Jesuits were now relegated to a peripheral role, offering technical support. While the survey team was still a military and logistical endeavor, the Qing Empire had reduced its reliance on Jesuit scientific know-how.

The survey team initially gathered in Barköl, which is nestled between the vast Gobi Desert and the towering peaks of the Tibetan Plateau. Located west of Hami, it is adjacent to the verdant-hued Barköl Lake and at the terminus of a slender passage that oversees the historic city of Xian and the Jiayu Pass. Remnants of an older shoreline encircle Barköl Lake, indicating that western China once experienced a more humid climate. Presently, the landscape is parched and barren. The region sees an average rainfall of 210 millimeters (about 8 inches) a year, juxtaposed with an evaporation rate of 2,250 millimeters (around 89 inches). The lake, predominantly fed by runoff, retains mineral-rich, highly saline water post-evaporation. After a three-month journey, the expedition team reached Barköl on June 22, 1756.

In 1756, the survey team’s arrival was punctuated by the unsettling backdrop of Amursana’s rebellion. The Qing army, led by Commander Jaohui, stood against Amursana’s forces in Jinghe, located north of the Tianshan mountains, awaiting directives from the Qianlong emperor. During this time, Liu Tongxun, who had gained a reputation as a reliable problem solver for the Qing monarchy and had recently been promoted to Grand Councilor, made a critical error in judgment. He suggested that the Qing forces withdraw from Barköl, unaware of the Qianlong emperor’s unyielding intent to obliterate the Zunghar Mongols. Displeased with Liu's advice, the emperor summoned him back to Beijing.

Making his way from Ili, Liu reached Barköl on June 30, 1756, just days after the survey team’s arrival. His stay was brief, as he set out for Beijing the very next day. The overlap of Liu’s presence with the survey team was not coincidental. He was pivotal in crafting the *Illustration and Documentation of the Western Regions in the Imperial Territory* (released in 1762). He later partnered with Ji Yun to produce *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters* in 1782. Both these comprehensive works, which I will delve deeper into in the next chapter, benefited immensely from the data points gathered by the Central Asia survey team and were spearheaded by Liu.

On July 2, 1756, the survey team divided into two groups at Barköl, each taking different routes. The northern route, shadowing the Tianshan mountain’s northern side, was navigated by the first group led by Imperial Guard Nusan. This group, Mingghatu, Subudi, and Félix da Rocha, met Commander Jaohui in Jinghe by August 28, 1756. Meanwhile, the second group, led by Imperial Guard Hacingga and featuring He Guozong and José de Espinha, took the southern route along the Tianshan mountain. Both teams successfully concluded their surveys, regrouping in Barköl by November 12, 1756.

On November 23, 1756, armed with crucial survey data and maps, Imperial Guards Nusan and Hacingga embarked on their journey to Beijing via military pathways. However, He Guozong, the director of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau, opted for a more leisurely pace. He made a pit stop in the provincial capital of Suzhou (now known as Jiuquan) before arriving in Beijing on March 1, 1757. The expedition’s cartographic undertakings underscored the dominant role of the Qing army in these endeavors, with the Qianlong emperor acting as the commander-in-chief, overseeing the entire operation.

In 1759, a second survey team was assembled under the leadership of the Qianlong emperor’s uncle and Grand Councilor Fuheng. Due to his royal lineage and military background, Fuheng, a significant figure in the Qing dynasty, prioritized this mission. The team’s mandate was to map the region south of the Tarim Basin. Key members of this expedition included the Blue-feathered Imperial Guard Deboo, the second-ranked imperial guard Wulintai, and technical specialists Mingghatu, Félix da Rocha, and José de Espinha.

Setting out from Beijing on June 4, 1759, they reached Suzhou by July 24 and arrived in Hami by August 18. Their journey was to shadow the paths taken by the Qing army led by Jaohui and his deputy, Gūwalgiya Hala Fude. By this point, Jaohui had quashed Amursana’s rebellion and, with assistance from the Uighurs, effectively eradicated the Zunghar Mongols. This army duo gathered local geographical intel, assessed terrain for military purposes, and crafted a set of maps based on their firsthand observations.

The emperor directed the survey team to follow these army routes and enhance the military maps by pinpointing key sites’ precise latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates. Completing their mission, the team arrived back in Suzhou on April 11, 1760. By June 1760, Deboo and Mingghatu returned to Beijing, bearing the essential data and maps.[[173]](#endnote-174)

To solidify Qing control over Central Asia, Jaohui appointed a military governor to oversee the region and established a mix of garrisons and penal colonies. This vast Central Asian territory, now firmly under Qing dominion, was managed by a military structure. At the helm was the Ili Commander, followed by an extensive system of garrisons and settlements.

The inaugural Ili commander was Mingšui, a leading figure in the campaign against Amursana. He held the position from 1762 to 1767. His successor, Agūi, another key participant in the Amursana campaign, briefly held the Ili commander role in 1767 before progressing to more prestigious roles within the empire. Agūi later became a central supporter of a prominent bureaucratic group that endorsed the evidential scholarship movement, alongside the provincial governor Ruan Yuan. This will be discussed further in the final chapter of the book.

Iletu, the former Minister of War, followed Agūi’s tenure, assuming the role of the Ili Commander in 1768. He maintained this position until his passing in 1785. During Iletu's tenure as the Ili commander in 1771, the Torghuts Mongols journeyed from the Volga River region north of the Caspian Sea to Central Asia, aiming to escape the Russian Romanov Empire’s military draft. Recognizing an opportunity, the Qing Empire welcomed them, offering a settlement in the nomadic regions north of the Tianshan mountains. In contrast to the aggressive tactics of the Russian Romanov Empire, the Qing’s reception of the Torghuts was seen as a positive resolution to the Zunghar campaign. It provided a counter-narrative to the grim Zunghar conflict and demonstrated the Qing’s benevolence in contrast to their Russian counterparts.

The Torghuts’ migration from the Volga River's eastern shores to Ili was perilous. Under the leadership of Ubashi Khan, a vast caravan comprising over 30,000 tents (roughly 150,000 to 170,000 individuals) initiated this formidable exodus on January 7, 1771. By the time Ubashi communicated with Iletu regarding their impending arrival, their numbers had dwindled to about 15,000 tents or approximately 70,000 individuals. This grueling journey witnessed the loss of at least 100,000 lives. Historian Peter Perdue notes that the complete account of this monumental migration still awaits its chronicler. The Torghuts Mongols, descendants of the Zunghar Mongols who had migrated to Russia from Central Asia in 1628, returned under the protective umbrella of the Qing in 1771. Their return stood as a symbol of the Qianlong emperor’s benevolent rule. In 1771, the Qing persuaded the Torghuts Mongols, long accustomed to a nomadic lifestyle, to settle by the Ejin River and adopt agriculture. Like many Uighar Muslims and other Mongol groups under Qing control, they embraced a blend of agricultural and nomadic ways for sustenance.[[174]](#endnote-175)

As evidenced by translated Manchu instructions from Beijing to Ili, the Qianlong emperor was deeply involved in resettling the Torghuts and personally hosted Ubash Khan at the summer palace in 1771. Following this, in 1772, the emperor commissioned a third survey team to Central Asia to meticulously map out the entire region inhabited by the Torghuts. He was keenly interested in their well-being, the satisfaction levels of their communities, and their governance structure, with aristocrats overseeing smaller banners. Yet, the Qing administration only had a nebulous understanding of the terrain surrounding the Torghuts’ new home. The survey expedition, in part, aimed to bridge this geographical knowledge gap.

The third geodetic survey was dispatched. Key members of this survey team included the Qianqing gate imperial guard Booning (who later had two stints as the Ili commander), the newly appointed director of the Astro-Calendrical Bureau, Félix da Rocha, the imperial guard Deboo (a veteran from the second survey), and vanguard Amubatu. Meeting initially at Khobdo, the team was divided into two. Booning, accompanied by Amubatu, ventured north, passing through locations such as Dorbod, Tannu Ulanghai, Ta'Er Bahatai, and Ili, primarily focusing on the vicinity of the Torghuts’ dwellings. Meanwhile, Deboo, with Félix da Rocha, took a southern route, with their survey centering around the Torghuts’ settlements. Eventually, both teams converged at Ta'Er Bahatai, Tacheng, on September 22, 1772. From there, they collaborated in their efforts until reaching Ili. Their efforts collectively covered the Torghuts’ grazing lands in Western Mongolia and parts of Central Asia in Russia.[[175]](#endnote-176)

The three geodetic explorations of 1756, 1759, and 1772 each possessed unique traits. Firstly, they were highly prioritized by the Qianlong emperor and his council, who assigned skilled military leaders to oversee these surveys, emphasizing their importance. The Qing dynasty and its armed forces were the primary drivers behind these explorations, aligning them with their military and logistical objectives in Central Asia. These surveys were not merely academic pursuits born from curiosity. They were essential military operations, subject to time pressures. The maiden exploration from Barköl spanned 134 days. The subsequent mission, which commenced and concluded in Hami, endured for 220 days, while the final lasted just over 100 days. Funding, objectives, support, and the audience for these explorations differed significantly from the French team that measured the meridian through Beijing. However, the most notable distinction was the urgency with which the Qing Empire executed its Central Asian surveys.

The second notable characteristic, stemming naturally from the first, was that only some of the latitude and longitude data published in the *Illustration and Documentation of the Western Regions in the Imperial Territory* were direct measurements.[[176]](#endnote-177) Out of the 107 coordinates west of Hami, only 30 were conclusively identified as measured points. Approximately 36 of these coordinates, representing about 33.64% of the total, were deduced using the actual measured points with spherical trigonometric methods. Thus, the two surveys produced genuine measurements for 53 points, making up 49.53% of the 107 recorded points. This means that just about half of the officially reported data were based on real measurements. While it is known that military and administrative bodies often exaggerated their results, the other half was not merely guesswork. These figures were extrapolated using spherical trigonometry, taking into account the Earth's curvature. Both the genuine measurements and calculated results aligned with the contemporary geodetic standards introduced and detailed by Verbiest.

In conclusion, the vast expanse covered by the three geodetic surveys is truly noteworthy. The Hu Huanyong demographic line, introduced earlier, demarcates two starkly contrasting regions of China. Yet, these distinct regions are roughly equivalent in size and are the fruits of Qing territorial expansion. This means that modern-day China’s boundaries are largely a legacy of the Qing Empire’s Central Asian conquests. This expansion reshaped the Qing empire into a dualistic realm comprising agrarian and arid regions. The eastern side is densely populated with abundant rainfall, while the western expanse comprises arid grasslands, deserts, and elevated terrains, dotted with a few cities and towns. The Kangxi emperor focused his surveying endeavors on the eastern part of the Hu Huanyong line, whereas the Qianlong emperor targeted the west. Qing China spanned an impressive 4 million square miles to provide a broad overview. The eastern provinces and Manchuria took up about half of this, while Mongolia, Central Asia, and the Tibetan plateau accounted for the other half. While the Qianlong emperor didn't survey the Tibetan plateau, undertaking surveys across Central Asia’s dry terrains and the vast Mongolian grasslands was already a monumental achievement.

## Conclusion:

This chapter sheds light on a particular facet of the Jesuits’ presence in China: they were integral to the Qing monarchy and its military forces. Scholars like Joseph Needham and Cordell Yee have differing viewpoints on the role and acceptance of Jesuit cartography in early modern China. It may be valuable to reevaluate the Jesuit’s geodetic and cartographic contributions as components of the Qing monarchy and its military. This would help reconcile these intellectual disparities, revealing significant aspects of a common process. Consequently, despite the criticism and hostility the Jesuits faced from Confucian scholars, they managed to maintain their operations within a military sphere safeguarded by the Qing monarchy. In previous works, I have argued that the Jesuits became indispensable for enhancing the precision of predictions for astronomical events, primarily solar and lunar eclipses. This chapter expands upon this idea, asserting that the Jesuits were deeply integrated within the Qing government's military system, thus rendering them untouchable to the Confucian bureaucracy.

However, the protection the Jesuits received came at a steep cost. The Qing monarchy incorporated them into the hierarchy of the Eight Banners system in their armies and imposed on them the obligation to deliver accurate results under intense pressure. There was no scope for a scientific community or independent exploration. The focus was on military discipline and high accuracy in astronomical observations and geodetic surveys.

The Jesuits were safeguarded within the military niche of the Qing Empire does not imply that they operated in isolation. For instance, the *Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* was a widely recognized compilation among scholars and officials within the Confucian bureaucracy. Some historians, such as Chengzhi (Kicengge), have associated it with cartography, but as far as I am aware, they have yet to link it with geodetic surveys.[[177]](#endnote-178) Furthermore, the provincial and imperial maps created in the imperial workshops were disseminated outside the Confucian bureaucracy below the level of provincial governors. Only in 1929 historians discovered the Kangxi Atlas (copperplate print) in its original place at the Imperial Palace of Mukden. Thus, throughout the Qing period, Confucian bureaucrats were largely unaware of the Kangxi Atlas and its extension maps made during the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns.

However, this does not imply that the upper echelons of the Confucian bureaucracy, the provincial governors, or the Ili commanders (military governors) were oblivious to this geopolitical information. They were indeed privy to it. But how did they attempt to distribute this geopolitical information throughout the Confucian bureaucracy, fully aware of and anticipating the intellectual and cultural resistance that might come from such an initiative?

# Chapter Four: Exploring Yellow River’s Headwaters

Out of 300 million peasants in China around 1800, three million local elites of different hues (1%) were embedded at various levels of this massive agrarian society with transregional markets. Few Confucian scholars entered the bureaucracy, and even fewer had access to imperial politics or sensitive issues at the top level of government. How many could have access to *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* other than those who participated in the Institute? For those in the top tier of Confucian bureaucracy, what did they make of Qing China’s geopolitics? How many scholars-officials at the top of the Confucian bureaucracy could access the confidential geopolitical information of the Qing graticule maps? Could the Qing monarchy monopolize geopolitical information exclusively? What about the geopolitical issues that indeed concerned the scholars and Confucian bureaucracy? When we speak of geopolitical vision, please make no mistake that we speak of an intellectual and elite position. And the Qing monarchy and the Confucian bureaucracy had not always seen eye to eye with each other. In this and the upcoming chapters, I will present two types of scholar-officials in sequence: the Ji Yun Circle and the Ruan Yuan Circle. These scholar-officials possessed knowledge of the Qing Empire's geopolitical information and popularized it using the Confucian language.

One of the critical geopolitical issues for the Ji Yun Circle was exploring the headwaters of the Yellow River. The Qing monarchs and administrations considered the Yellow River hydraulics their highest priority. For centuries, the source of China's most iconic river has been shrouded in mystery and debate among geographers and cartographers alike, with no clear consensus on the exact location of its headwaters. The ancient Chinese cartographers were still determining its exact location but named it Kunlun in a remote mountain range far away from inhabited areas. It is situated close to the Tibetan plateau and right by the historical Silk Road—making it unapproachable yet still signified in the mysterious faraway land. Why was it necessary to trace the headwaters of the Yellow River, and what were the intended goals beyond just managing the river?

Mysterious, uncharted, and awe-inspiring—the Yellow River's headwaters on the Tibetan Plateau evoke a similar sense of wonderment as seen today by those visiting America's Grand Canyon in the West. It is home to numerous glaciers and other natural features that act as a “water tower.” This area is known as the Third Pole because it holds the largest freshwater reserves outside the polar regions. These reserves help to maintain the flow of rivers throughout the region, including the Yellow, Yangzi, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Ghaghara, and Indus Rivers, which all originate from the Tibetan Plateau.[[178]](#endnote-179) In the period before the early modern era, the Tibetan Plateau received little attention from states because it was considered an impassable geographical obstacle.[[179]](#endnote-180) As far as I know, Tibet's significance as a geopolitical region to the Qing empire has yet to be investigated by any historian. Tibet was ruled by a theocracy of Tibetan Buddhism from 1350 until the nineteenth century, with a feudal system like Medieval European Feudalism. In the eighteenth century, the Buddhist theocracy became a partner of the Qing Empire. During the same period, European countries romanticized Tibet as a part of their Orientalism.[[180]](#endnote-181)

The headwaters of the Yellow River had a long history and broad recognition in the literati society and Confucian bureaucracy. Under the Qianlong emperor's watch, the confidential and strategic geodetic survey of Central Asia was an offshoot of the Qing military conquest and territorial expansion. The geodetic survey was an extension of the Kangxi Atlas and served as a trove of confidential, ever-evolving geopolitical data held exclusively by the Qing monarchy. Consequently, the Yellow River's headwaters became the joint issue between the Qing monarchy and the Ji Yun’s circle—the top echelon of the Confucian bureaucracy.

The headwaters were mentioned in historical literature as being in the Kunlun Mountains, but their exact location was never determined. Two expeditions were sent to the region in the eighteenth century to identify the Yellow River's headwaters. In 1708, the Kangxi Emperor sent a team of surveyors to Tibetan Plateau to search for the river's headwaters. The second expedition occurred in 1782 after the Qing conquest of Central Asia. This chapter will show how the Qing Empire began to reckon the Tibetan Plateau as a critical geopolitical region between the two expeditions in 1708 and 1782. We will follow the Qianlong emperor's trusted advisor, Ji Yun (1724–1805), who was best known for his leadership in the editorial board to oversee the imperial library, known as the *Complete Collection of Four Treasuries*. At the same time, he also chaired the task force to document the history and exploration of the Yellow River's headwaters. At the end of the military campaign eliminating the Zunghar state, Ji Yun and his colleagues built upon the geodetic survey and cartography to issue *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters* in 1782.

## Geographical Dissolution of Barbarism:

Ji Yun was born into a successful official family near Beijing in 1724. In the same year, Dai Zhen (1724–1777) was born into a low-level merchant family in Huizhou of the lower Yangzi Valley. Most local scholars of low birth, like Dai Zhen, would not have succumbed to imperial politics the same way Ji Yun had. Two men's lives would cross later. Dai Zhen, a local elite, shows a different career trajectory than Ji Yun, who grew up in a wealthy official family near the capital. Ji Yun's father, Ji Rongshu (1685–1764), passed the provincial examination and served in the high echelon of the Confucian bureaucracy (Ministries of Criminal Justice and Revenue). Such involvement means that Ji Rongshu had to be familiar with imperial politics to advance his career. Ji Yun was his father's favorite, and he relocated to the capital in 1734 (Ji Yun was only ten). In this case, the father's high expectation of his brilliant scion was entirely justified. Ji Yun recalled that he followed his father to the capital, launched his career there, and never returned to his birthplace. Ji Yun rose as a promising official from such a wealthy and well-connected family and became one of the most renowned courtiers serving the Qianlong emperor.[[181]](#endnote-182)

Two seismic events shaped Ji Yun's political and military future before he reached adulthood. The first was the preparation of the military campaign against the Zunghar Mongols. The second was the publication of an eye-popping book titled *The Great Righteousness and the Awakening from Confusion* (*Dayi juemi lu*, hereafter *Awakening from Confusion*) in 1730 when Ji Yun was merely six years old. The book was banned after 1735 at the unexpected death of the Yongzheng emperor. During its relatively short life span (five years), the geographical argument in the book loomed large among those who cared about territorial expansion and the canonical distinction between civilization and barbarism. The intellectual and political consequences of the book must have taught the Ji family an important lesson. In short, *Awakening from Confusion* is the suitable beginning of Ji Yun's intellectual and political saga in eighteenth-century China.

*Awakening from Confusion* resulted from bizarre political persecution, which began with an investigation of an anti-Manchu conspiracy. The Yongzheng emperor mobilized his bureaucratic and military machinery to track the offenders. The emperor's hunt for the villain led him to local scholar Zeng Jing, who was arrested on treason charges in 1728. In the summer of 1729, the Yongzheng emperor started interrogating Zeng Jing. By 1730, the interrogation had cumulated sufficient materials for print. The publication, *Awakening from Confusion,* was a collection of texts that resulted from the inquisition of Zeng Jing between 1728 and 1729.[[182]](#endnote-183)

*Awakening from Confusion* encapsulated the Yongzheng emperor's rebuttal to nearly one century of anti-Manchu arguments. To everyone's surprise, the document was highly candid and direct. With so much at stake between the Manchu monarchy and anti-Manchu resistance, both sides used an ideal of civilization to support their respective arguments explicitly—without hiding behind classical allusions or languages. To put it simply, Yongzheng was not well-versed in the Confucian language. In *Awakening from Confusion*, the Yongzheng emperor articulated spatial magnanimity to communicate his ruling legitimacy, a new articulation of the Mongol version. In part one of *Awakening from Confusion*, Yongzheng selected his major Edicts during the Zeng Jing persecution. In part two, the emperor allowed Zeng Jing's voice to surface, and Yongzheng forcefully refuted Zeng Jing's arguments point by point. In part three, the inquisitor—the vice-president of the Ministry of Punishment and a Manchu nobleman, Hangyilu—continued interrogating Zeng Jing. In part four, the emperor identified the deceased scholar Lu Liuliang (1629–83) as the culprit behind Zeng Jing’s conspiracy. The emperor then viciously attacked Lu Liuliang's legacy and punished his descendants.[[183]](#endnote-184)

The emperor chose to spare Zeng Jing's life as he was seen as a naive supporter of Lu Liuliang. Lu believed the Manchu monarchy did not have the right to rule China. He argued that the Mongol conquerors failed to rule China for over a century due to their barbarian nature. Lu also described barbarians as animalistic, like tigers, leopards, dholes, and wolves, who could never be absorbed into Chinese civilization and should only be battled, expelled, and kept in the nomadic regions. In this manner, Lu returned to the Song ethnocentrism and crafted the Confucian political language to turn the anti-Manchu rhetoric into proto-racist arguments. By the end, the Manchu monarchy and anti-Manchu resistance were at odds over Confucian ideals. The emperor targeted Lu's anti-Manchu stance by attempting to weaken and shift the Confucian language of barbarism.

The undoing of barbarism meant the partial dismantling of the Confucian discourse. *Awakening from Confusion* became a public demonstration of how the Yongzheng emperor admonished the Confucian bureaucracy from top to bottom. The message could not be more explicit: Do not insult the Manchus by calling them barbarians. Do not use references in politics, classical literature, or innuendo, which could indicate that the Manchu are barbaric. The ban had a restricted and specific scope during the Qing Empire's consolidation of its newly acquired territory. In addition to anti-Manchu arguments, the degree of freedom in Qing Confucianism was quite flexible if Confucian scholars did not oppose the Manchu legitimacy. The Manchus also imposed the Manchu hairstyle on all Chinese men, shaving their foreheads and wearing long, braided queues. The gesture was apparent: If any man, except for a monk who shaved his head, openly disobeyed the hairstyle dress code, he would be executed. The authority of the Manchu rulers was not up for debate, but other political matters could be discussed and resolved through negotiation. By 1730, the Yongzheng emperor realized that simply shedding blood would not stomp the anti-Manchu resistance. He knew that dangerous words, particularly the fancy words at the core of Confucian classics, against the Manchus were potentially subversive to the Manchu domination.

Rather than using brute force and violent suppression, the Yongzheng emperor opted for an ideological approach to counter the anti-Manchu argument. At the beginning of *Awakening from Confusion,* the Yongzheng emperor addressed the most prominent issue in the Confucian discourse: the distinction between the civilized Chinese and the unruly Barbarians. The supervillain, Lu Liuliang (1629–83), was the foil. The Yongzheng emperor targeted high-level Confucian bureaucrats when he pursued the supervillain Lu Liuliang instead of the naïve follower Zeng Jing. In contrast, the remainder of *Awakening from Confusion* disproves the ongoing dissemination of false information and gossip surrounding the selection of the Yongzheng emperor as the rightful leader amidst a contentious and secretive power struggle. Despite persistent rumors in smaller communities, rural areas, and anti-Qing factions within the literate society, *Awakening from Confusion* attempts to set the record straight. To put it briefly, the emperor tried to use ideological persuasion to stop the spread of rumors within the local elite and the Confucian bureaucracy.[[184]](#endnote-185)

How effective was the emperor’s ideological persuasion? Consider these five points regarding how the impact of *Awakening from Confusion* affected politics and bureaucracy between 1730 and 1735. The first was the literary inquisition. Like the Spanish, Portuguese, and Roman inquisitions to root out and punish heresy throughout Europe and the Americas from 1100 to 1800, the Qing literary inquisition had cast a wider net than it should have. The inquisitors aimed to capture as many heretics as possible without much concern for the innocent individuals who may be affected. Throughout the eighteenth century, before and after the *Awakening from Confusion*, all three Qing monarchs (Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong) launched these literary inquisitions into the literati society. When scholars crossed the line, the Qing monarchy showed no mercy. The entire kinship or anyone remotely related to the matter could perish. The Qing set firm limits to intimidate those who may have been careless or clueless. As a result, no scholars or officials would have taken the matter lightly. They all understood the ultimate price if they crossed the line—the Manchu's legitimacy to rule.

However, the Yongzheng emperor's persecution of the anti-Manchu conspiracy from 1728 to 1729 was not exactly a literary inquisition. Zeng Jing's book triggered the persecution, but Lu Liuliang died long before. Therefore, the emperor attacked an intellectual legacy rather than punishing an ongoing anti-Manchu resistance. Unlike a literary inquisition, the consequences and repercussions of *Awakening from Confusion* went public. The emperor raised the stake to a ridiculous level by debating the highest civilizational ideal with a meager scholar (Zeng Jing). Like a literary inquisition, on the other hand, *Awakening from Confusion* shows the emperor’s determination to eradicate any potential challenge to Qing legitimacy. Therefore, it is critical to place *Awakening from Confusion* in the context and history of the Qing literary inquisition.

The second was how the Qing imposed political guidelines on Confucian discourses. *Awakening from Confusion* played a crucial role in shaping the boundaries of acceptable criticism of imperial politics within the Confucian tradition during its brief existence. It is important to note that the Ming and Qing monarchies needed the power to change Confucian discourses independently. The Ming rulers, at times, terrorized their Confucian counselors gruesomely. In most cases, the Qing rulers chose to co-opt them into the cultural projects and Confucian bureaucracy. As many intellectual historians have indicated, a new trend of Confucian discourse emerged in the middle of the seventeenth century. Its participants were not always supporters of the Qing monarchy. For instance, Lu Liuliang belonged to this philosophical movement to focus on practical, pragmatic, and concrete affairs (shixue) rather than individuals' moral cultivation and self-perfection. Scholars like Lu Liuliang usually identified themselves as Confucian pragmatists (those who focused on *shixue*), tracing the genealogy of their ideas back to the Neo-Confucian masters, such as Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi, instead of individual transcendental moralism attributed to the Ming dynasty scholar Wang Yangming's doctrines, regarded as empty and insubstantial by the Qing monarchy. Confucian pragmatists like Lu Liuliang, who rejected the Manchu legitimacy, belonged to a small minority. According to most Confucian pragmatists, the Qing empire was magnanimous and benevolent, which aligns with the teachings of Confucius and the ancient sage-kings. By the end of the seventeenth century, the dichotomy between those who praised Zhu Xi for his respect for emphasis on practical, pragmatic, and concrete affairs and those who followed Wang Yangming’s transcendental moralism became entrenched, transparent, and divisive. The Confucian pragmatists, who became the majority in the Qing bureaucracy, identified themselves as followers of Zhu Xi and opposed Wang Yangming's moralistic ideas. At the same time, the Qing monarchy encouraged those Confucian pragmatists in the institutions of the civil service examination system based upon the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy.

The split between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming in Neo-Confucianism went beyond a simple divergence in ideas. It marked a significant shift in the official mindset, academic networks, and Confucian administration. Hence, the Yongzheng emperor’s attack on Lu Liuliang revealed the danger of Confucian pragmatists’ fundamental weakness––their formulation of barbarism. The Qing monarchy condemned the rampant individualism in the sixteenth century as a selfish and corrosive force and blamed it for the Ming’s collapse. The Qing monarchy drew a line in the sand: The Ming dynasty's collapse resulted from the bitter and selfish factional struggles in which bureaucratic factions competed for their factional interests and undermined the Ming ruler's legitimacy. The Yongzheng emperor proclaimed that we should never repeat the same mistake under the Qing rulership. The Qing monarchy believed that the formation of political factions was the main reason for the downfall of the Ming dynasty. This argument was not just political rhetoric, but b also diverted attention from discussing barbarism. For Qing officials like Ji Rongshu, it was imperative to toe this party line and not pursue “provincial and factional interests.”

The third, related to the second, was how the scholars and officials began to accept, ponder, and sometimes envision a new order in their local society under the Qing monarchy. This was undoubtedly a sign that the local elites had accepted the status quo of the Qing rulership. As an extension of Qing state-building, strengthening local elites was the primary strategy to secure their support for the Qing empire. The process was necessary during the civil war between the Kangxi emperor and the southern border warlords. Subsequently, reducing their land tax became the primary policy to sustain the local support of the Qing monarchy. The Qing monarchy tolerated the diversity of local elites and encouraged their domination of the local society. As a result, the competing visions of the regional order and the nearly autonomous governing of local organizations in widely different circumstances became the hallmarks of Qing societies in the eighteenth century. The colorful voices of local elites were proof of such diversification of gentry domination of local communities. Given the diversity of local elites, the Yongzheng emperor claimed that, after the Kangxi emperor's empire-building and pacification for more than sixty years, the Qing empire's stability and expansion had afforded China proper unprecedented peace and prosperity. How did scholars and officials not recognize such political reality? How could they continue the latent but persistent anti-Manchu theories? The Yongzheng emperor’s attempt to reign in the anti-Manchu resistance also expanded the imperial power over the gentry domination in local society. It would be imprudent not to consider the emperor’s warning as directed squarely at writings like “On Enfeoffment” (*Fengjian lun* byHuang Zongxi) and “On Centralized Administration” (*Junxian lun* byGu Yanwu) and their discussion on land reform directly reflected the resistance of the landlord and gentry class to the expansion of the imperial power.[[185]](#endnote-186)

The fourth was the tension between imperial orthodoxy, based mainly upon Neo-Confucianism, and the priorities of local elites. The contradiction between the imperial ideology and the local values existed long before the Manchu conquest of China in the seventeenth century. However, after the Qing conquered and controlled China, a new layer of anti-Manchu conspiracies became prominent among the local elites. Many were known for spreading rumors and engaging in palace intrigues, often speculating about the emperor's power, in the tradition of vernacular literature. However, the Confucian bureaucracy's high-ranking officials held a distinct perspective and a more practical evaluation of imperial power than local elites.

Meanwhile, the bureaucracy's highest-ranking Confucian scholars began collaborating more with Qing pragmatism and cosmopolitanism. Although they all professed to follow Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism, critics of this philosophy had been quietly emerging in various parts of the Qing empire. The Confucian pragmatists at the top of Confucian bureaucracy were crafting a new version of Neo-Confucianism and envisioning a cosmopolitan worldview, while the local elites were building a more solid way of governing the local order. There was a split between Confucian pragmatists in leadership positions and local elites throughout the Qing Empire. When evaluating the effect of Awakening from Confusion on the Confucian bureaucracy's political reality, we must consider this separation between national and local elites.

The fifth implication was a logical extension of the fourth one. The Qing monarchy aimed to distinguish the values of the national elites, who were concerned with the political legitimacy of the Qing Empire or territorial expansion and military success, from the local elites involved with landlordism, village order, or communal ethics. Ji Yun’s family belonged to the national elite and shared imperial ideology. The national elites were generally impervious to the concerns of the local elites. A hierarchical structure was present during early modern China, consisting of the Qing monarchy, the Confucian bureaucracy, and the local elites. At each level, sophisticated systems of values existed. The classically educated Confucian bureaucracy, comprising provincial and national elites, formed and fostered the national unity of Confucian China.

After its publication in 1730, the effects of *Awakening from Confusion* were felt by most of the national elites in the Qing empire across all five points explained above. Reading *Awakening from Confusion*in the imperial schools was not a small feat or mere formality. Every member of national, provincial, and local elites must grapple with its political implication and understand the Yongzheng emperor's points. Let us focus on the Yongzheng emperor’s main issue for the national elites: the dissolution of barbarism in the Qing realm. The Yongzheng emperor's blunt geographical reasoning refused the most profound notion of barbarism held dear by his Confucian bureaucracy. The Confucian and proto-racist notion that barbarians are an innately animalistic and fundamentally alien race was present and repressed at the lower level of the Confucian bureaucracy. Ji Yun's family understood the political implications of dissolving barbarism. To them, rejecting barbarism in the Qing realm was much more than an academic debate. It affected the fundamental premises of the Confucian bureaucracy.

Who were the barbarians? The Yongzheng emperor’s polemics returned to the ancient civilizational ideal established during the axial period. From the Song version of cultural nationalism in the eleventh century through the Mongol representation of spatial magnanimity in the thirteenth century to the Ming reconstruction of the Chinese homeland in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Qing monarchy inherited and negotiated the layers of geopolitical arguments from the past. As the Yongzheng emperor prepared for the military campaign to invade the Zunghar in Central Asia, it should not be surprising to assume that he was keen on engaging the geopolitical visions of the past. The Yongzheng emperor took the helm of the Qing monarchy after sixty years of empire-building enterprises by his widely admired father (Kangxi). The Yongzheng emperor continued his father’s political activism and focused mainly on domestic, bureaucratic, and pragmatic issues except for the ultimate civilizational ideal and the aporia of barbarism. The Yongzheng emperor chose to enter the ideological realm and took on a daring challenge when he confronted the issue of barbarism in the Confucian language. He aimed to challenge the fundamental assumption of barbarism by indoctrinating his bureaucracy with this book, *Awakening from Confusion*, a crucial propaganda piece that emphasizes the risks of straying from the official account of the Manchu legitimacy. Before and after the reign of the Yongzheng emperor, no monarch attempted to do what he did. Simply put, his explanation can be summarized as follows:

Since antiquity, the ancient sage-kings could rule under Heaven because they nourished and protected their subjects within the four seas [in four directions]. This has been the crucial premise of the role of the “son of Heaven” (emperor) in Confucian discourse, and the Yongzheng emperor subscribed to it. In the past, the sage kings did so because they received Heaven's mandate and touched the hearts of millions of people. According to legend, popular support is connected to Heaven's mandate. We should note here that Heaven's Mandate was precisely the political legitimacy shared by the Mongol Yuan and the Chinese Ming dynasties. The Yongzheng emperor proclaimed that the emperors received Heaven's mandate by unifying everyone on the land under Heaven. Only the righteous could become the emperor of China, which was undoubtedly the code word for a rightful ruler in the minds of thousands of scholars and officials staffing the Confucian bureaucracy. Since antiquity, the universal principle has been to unify everyone under Heaven like a family and treat the myriad things under Heaven as one collective. The moral overtone of ancient Confucian universalism remains relevant to the Yongzheng emperor. The emperor should operate with the magnanimous mindset to include everyone under Heaven instead of being belittled by small-minded, selfish, or superficial opinions of those who group themselves based upon local and provincial identities and preferences. At this point, the Yongzheng emperor had ventured into the Neo-Confucian mantra of the unity of Heaven, Earth, and people.[[186]](#endnote-187)

Then comes the most significant twist of the Yongzheng emperor's argument. He retorted: What is the justification for the emperor being granted Heaven's mandate solely based on his place of birth? The Manchus distinguished themselves from the Chinese because of their different place of birth. Should an emperor or the imperial family be disqualified by birth location? The emperor's question was, of course, rhetorical. The Confucian *Classics* had repeatedly declared that only those rulers who accord Heaven's mandate could prosper, and those who go against it shall perish. The virtuous rulers will be in harmony with Heaven (and the cosmos). Therefore, the birthplace of the rulers was entirely irrelevant. Examples include Kublai Khan (a horseback rider and conqueror from the steppe world), Zhu Yuanzhang (from a humble peasant background in the south), and now the Manchu emperors from the northeast corner of the Chinese subcontinent all should illustrate the point. Each of them received a Heavenly mandate and ruled China. Again, their location of birth was entirely irrelevant. In this massive empire across the divide between the agricultural and nomadic regions, the location of the ruler’s birth should not and did not matter. What mattered was the universal rule across the divide![[187]](#endnote-188)

Here, the Yongzheng emperor redefined the principle of spatial magnanimity as the primary virtue of the emperor who could rule both the agricultural and nomadic worlds. It was no longer the Heavenly principle or any transcendental criteria. It was no longer the individual moral practice or cultivation of ethical behavior that merits the communal standards of an idealized Confucian society. It was no longer the Neo-Confucian gold standards of sincerity, tranquility, respectability, or mannerism. The magnanimous mindset and spatial extension encompass the maximum amount of people and land. This virtue of spatial magnanimity represents the fairness and openness of a universal empire rather than the provincial and local interests. Most importantly, the empire was able to unite both the agricultural and nomadic regions successfully. It was a vast and universal empire that could bridge this divide. The Yongzheng emperor's expansion of the Mongol Yuan's spatial claim caused a shockwave in the Confucian bureaucracy and discourse.[[188]](#endnote-189)

Then the Manchu question—the elephant in the room—appeared in *Awakening from Confusion*. The Yongzheng emperor stated that our country rose up from the Eastern Land (a code for Manchuria) and received Heaven's mandate to rule China by implementing virtuous and merciful policies. No political actors should distinguish the Chinese from the barbarians based on the origins of the people. Moreover, all political actors, foreign and domestic, had already recognized and submitted to the Qing rule. The emperor clarified that the *de facto* political reality was the universal acceptance of Qing rule, primarily by the steppe, agricultural worlds, and the overseas people, including Korea, Ryukyus, Vietnam, and Japan. Even the great western ocean visitors (Europeans) submitted to the Qing universal rule. The Qing dynasty was blessed by the grand union and commencement (code word for political legitimacy in the Confucian language), and no one else did. All indications suggested that the Qing rule was widely accepted and celebrated. Therefore, Lu Liuliang and his followers were delusional outliers. They were anti-establishment disruptors who had falsely smeared the Qing's political success.

The Yongzheng emperor redefined the accusation of barbarism as a misunderstanding of its origins. How could they (Lu Liuliang and his followers) dismiss us (the Manchus) because we came from the Eastern land? The Eastern land for the Manchus was like the ancestral hometown (jiguan) for the Chinese families. It was merely a location! And yet some [of the Chinese population] used to ridicule and slander us as barbarians. They did not know that our Qing dynasty came from Manchuria, just like every Chinese person has an ancestral hometown. More importantly, the location of the ancestral hometown had been relative to the civilizational center as the imperial realm expanded. For instance, the ancient legendary emperor Shun originated east of the civilizational center and was regarded as “the eastern barbarians.” The fantastic King Wen of the Zhou House (1050–221 BCE) originated west of the civilizational center and was once considered “the western barbarians.” The locations of the ancestral hometown of these ancient sage kings did not diminish their virtue and wisdom in Chinese history. The emperor argued that if ancient China was at the center of the civilized world, the center had continuously shifted as the civilized world expanded since antiquity. The Qing monarchy, which arose from the eastern land between black water [the Amur River] and white mountain [Changbaishan] in northeast China, followed the evolutionary pattern and became part of the trans-dynastic expansion of civilization. Therefore, accusing the Manchu of being barbarians was an ignorance of the imperial expansion since antiquity, a misconception of the provenance, and a petite-minded view of Chinese geography and history.[[189]](#endnote-190)

However, why did people continue to bicker among them and deride each other based on their birthplaces and ancestral hometowns, the emperor asked? The bickering belongs to the small-minded, mean-spirited, and vulgar men. It does not suit gentlemen, officials, ministers, or monarchs. The Yongzheng emperor attempted to argue that the civilizational ideal was continuously evolving. Still, the reconceptualization of Chinese antiquity would soon undergo in earnest via textual and non-textual studies. Did *Awakening from Confusion* have any impact on classical studies after 1730? Of course, it did. But it did not work like censorship. It cast a long overshadow and was a precautionary reminder of all exegetical explication of classical texts. It certainly affected Ji Yun’s family. Ji Yun later served as the champion and patron of classical scholarship and the editor of the annotated catalog of the imperial library. The Yongzheng emperor singled out the imperial power in the Southern Song as the primal culprit for drawing this unruly line between Chinese civilization and barbarism. At that time, the Chinese subcontinent was divided along the Yangzi River into the north (Khitan people in the Liao dynasty) and the south (the Chinese people in the Southern Song dynasty); both were equally meager and stupid in the Yongzheng emperor’s view. The Northerners called the Southerners “island barbarians,” and the Southerners called the Northerners “braided heads” to show their contempt. It was an ugly and divisive time, the emperor declared. The Yongzheng emperor describes the Manchu Qing empire as a historical moment when the Chinese and barbarians were united like a family under Heaven. How could those delusional crazies deliberately draw the line to separate the insiders from the outsiders and create unnecessary divisions during peaceful times? Only a small group of arrogant, irrational, and angry heretics would go against Heaven and Reason at such a good time. Their actions showed that they disregarded their country's patriarch and monarch. How terrible!

At the end of the Ming dynasty, all the signs pointed to the decline and decay of the Ming imperial house. The emperor said it was time for the Great Qing to rise in terms of the cyclical transition of political powers. And the emperor recited a sequence of Confucian cliches for a rising dynasty. However, he added a unique perspective on the relationship between virtue (political legitimacy) and monarchical lineage. Heaven and Earth have a people-loving heart and a selfless capacity to care for people. If the virtuous ruler came from China, the grand union commencement would be inside and near China. If the righteous ruler comes from outside and far away from China, the grand union commencement would be out and far away from China. The grand union commencement was seen as a symbol of political legitimacy and spatial magnificence, along with the mandate of Heaven.

However, the succeeding Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–96) recalled his father's *The Great Righteousness and the Awakening from Confusion* and quietly banned its circulation as soon as he ascended to the throne. The Qianlong Emperor also ordered the arrest of Zeng Jing and his mentor Zhang Xi and executed them. The Qianlong emperor proclaimed that the official reason for their execution was that they embarrassed his father. The Qianlong emperor appeared to follow the Yongzheng emperor's logic of filial piety: Yongzheng punished Lu Liuliang because Lu slandered his father (Kangxi) and spared Zeng Jing because Zeng merely offended him due to his ignorance. Qianlong executed Zeng and Zhang because they slandered his father (Yongzheng). The Qianlong emperor's motivation was most certainly more than that. The Yongzheng emperor's defense of Kangxi and his succession to the emperorship indirectly brought in all the accusations and rumors of the Kangxi emperor and Yongzheng's cruelty against his siblings. For the Qianlong emperor, *Awakening from Confusion* aired too much dirty laundry of the imperial family. It was embarrassing, so he banned the book. The Qianlong emperor then devoted the next four decades to amending the history of the succession crisis from Kangxi to Yongzheng and its consequences. The succession struggle from Kangxi to Yongzheng overshadowed the fifteen years of the Yongzheng emperor's reign. It continued to preoccupy the Qianlong emperor because all his uncles who struggled with his father for the emperorship still lived with their punishment or imprisonment. During his reign, the Qianlong emperor also revisited his decision to spare some of his uncles (Yongzheng’s siblings during the succession struggle).

The political censorship of *Awakening from Confusion* aimed to clean the historical records of the succession crisis. Analogously to George R. R. Martin's popular fantasy fiction and HBO show *House of the Dragon*, a succession crisis is only dangerous when two conditions are both met: (1) there are two or more claimants who have an equal chance of taking the throne, and (2) these claimants must gather support to form their factions over a relatively long period. *House of the Dragon* is a potboiler that follows the House of Targaryen's struggle for power in Westeros. Fantasy fiction revolves around a succession crisis and its consequences, like the transition from Kangxi to Yongzheng. From the Qianlong emperor's perspective, the descriptive parts of the Qing succession crisis in *Awakening from Confusion* also read like a potboiler and should be banned. The imperial household should inspire dignity, respect, and fear. It is not a subject for gossip or ridicule. As far as the Qianlong emperor was concerned, his father crossed the line. But he could not publicly blame his father, so he invented the cultural logic of filial piety to justify his censorship. Despite this political reversal, historical geography became even more pressing as the Qianlong emperor was ready to launch a new military campaign in Central Asia by carrying out his father's careful plan and preparation. The Qianlong emperor agreed with his father on the geographical arguments and elaborated on them in many ways. But the Qianlong emperor, unlike his father, delegated this thorny task of justifying spatial magnanimity to his Confucian advisors, who could better convince their colleagues and subordinates. Like his father and grandfather, the Qianlong emperor placed empire-building ahead of cultural politics. Unlike his father, however, the Qianlong emperor decided to realign the Qing monarchy with the top echelon of the Confucian bureaucracy and frequently sponsored large cultural initiatives like his grandfather's example, the Kangxi emperor. His support eventually encouraged the Confucian bureaucracy to come to the Qing's geopolitical vision.

## Mapping Waterways in Expanding Territory:

In 1734, the Yongzheng emperor ordered a special palace examination and compelled the provincial governors to recommend the finest talents as equivalent candidates for graduates of the provincial examination. The only precedent for the special palace examination in 1678 was an uncommon and politically charged occurrence. The Yongzheng emperor's announcement was also seen as an incentive to garner support from the Confucian bureaucracy. The rumor was that most provincial elites in the Confucian bureaucracy feared the ferocious emperor and remained skeptical about the sincerity of the Yongzheng emperor's invitation. Therefore, very few provincial governors actively recommended scholars to participate. To avoid humiliation, the special palace examination was postponed to the following year, in 1735, when the Yongzheng emperor passed away suddenly. These two interrelated events transpired when Ji Yun was eleven and significantly impacted his life.

The special palace examination was a singular event within the civil service examination system, which played a decisive role in routinely selecting Confucian officials. The qualifying examination, regularly held at the county seats of the local government, had long been a part of elite culture, and provincial examinations every three years were simultaneously significant commercial and cultural events in the provincial capitals. Aside from the standard government civil service examinations, the special palace examination was a rare opportunity for most well-known hopefuls to break free from their local and regional networks and join the fast track upward to national elites. The Yongzheng emperor's goal was to use this event to incentivize the top level of the Confucian bureaucracy after the publication of *Awakening from Delusion* and other draconic measures. Unexpectedly, the Yongzheng emperor died in 1735, and his son Qianlong inherited the Qing Empire. The dramatical reversal was then staged, and most provincial governors actively recommended their brightest men and cronies to participate in the special palace examination with the hope that the young emperor would select and lean heavily on these new talents of the empire. Shortly after Qianlong's ascension to the throne, the special palace examination dubbed “Scholars of broad learning and vast repository of belle letters” (boxue hongci) occurred in 1736. Most provincial governors anticipated a more flexible and lenient cultural policy the new and young emperor ushered in.[[190]](#endnote-191)

There will be no more special palace examinations in the future, with the 1736 special examination being the last in Chinese history. The Qing Dynasty held just two special palace examinations in Beijing for almost three hundred years. The first was held in 1678, immediately after the Qing and Wu Sangui civil war. “Rhapsody of Heavenly Machinery and the Jade Measuring Instrument (Xuanji yuhen),” an assignment to glorify ancient polities and their astronomical instruments, was the writing task for this special palace examination. 143 candidates were recommended across the empire, and 50 people were admitted. Among them were 20 first-class and 30 second-class candidates, accounting for one-third of the number of candidates for the examination. Most winners joined the Institute of Ming History to produce an official history of the previous Ming dynasty. Fifty-eight years later, as indicated above, the second special palace examination occurred at the dawn of the Qianlong emperor's reign. The provincial governors nominated their specific quota in 1736. Fifteen of the two hundred and seventy-six people were selected and presented to the young Qianlong emperor. The first and second ranks were formed from the top fifteen exceptionally bright candidates. The first rank has five winners, and the second includes ten outstanding scholars. The fifteen winners this time were met with no ready project like Ming History. Instead, they all entered the Hanlin Academy. Although Confucian scholars frequently praised and honored the special palace examinations, the Qing monarchy considered them a minor deviation from the civil examination system's efficient functioning. Consequently, they were only carried out two times during the Qing's history. Due to its rarity in Qing history, most participants of the special palace examination were treated like celebrities on the national stage. These two examinations are often remembered fondly as the “good old days” by Confucian scholars throughout the reign of the Qianlong emperor.[[191]](#endnote-192)

In addition, the palace examination must be viewed as a power struggle between factions. During the early years of the Qianlong reign, two powerful men––Zhang Tingyu (1672–1755) and Ortai (1680–1745), picked by the preceding Yongzheng emperor to assist Qianlong, became rivals and amassed influential factions in court.[[192]](#endnote-193) During the special palace examination, the newly selected Hanlin academicians who were not affiliated with the powerful factions became potential favorites of young Qianlong. The emperor frequently praised these individuals to balance the influence of these factions. Several colorful characters from the first and second ranks of the special palace examination illustrate vividly what cultural celebrities and their pragmatism as a new group meant for the early Qianlong emperor's court. Han Shijun (1696–1773) was selected as one of the five in the first tank, while Qi Zhaonan (1703–1768) was chosen as one of the ten in the second rank. The youngest candidate of these two hundred and seventy–six candidates was Yuan Mei (1716–1797), who was not selected for the Hanlin Academy. Ironically, Yuan became a more widely acknowledged intellectual celebrity than Han, Qi, or anyone selected by the special palace examination. But, at the time, young Yuan Mei was bitterly disappointed by the outcome, and this event changed his life. Yuan was twenty years old, while Ji was twelve years old. The tone of the Qianlong emperor's court was a reconciliation between the Qing monarchy and Confucian bureaucracy. The new group from the special palace examination had to fashion themselves in a specific bureaucratic label. They chose pragmatic learning (shixue, conventionally rendered as substantive learning) to return to the Kangxi emperor's focus on culture and practical skills for building the empire. Under the broader trend of “pragmatic learning,” Qi and his colleagues developed historical geography using data collected from the Qing geodetic surveys.

Qi Zhaonan was arguably the most influential geopolitical thinker during the Qianlong emperor's court. His intellectual contributions helped shape the Qing imperial understanding of geopolitics and waterways and won him praise from Han Shijun and Yuan Mei as essential to empire-building and serving the Qianlong emperor. However, Qi Zhaonan was eccentric and nerdy. Qi had a reputation for an excellent memory, as he could effortlessly retain extensive and random historical information from various sources. We call it photographic memory, though this term was not used until photography became popular in the late nineteenth century. Qi's photographic memory and excellent prose were why he was ranked second in the special palace examination. While researching historical geography, he constantly referenced many unknown written sources. An example is when the Qianlong emperor received an ancient copper mirror found in Ningguta, a military station in Manchuria. Qi used historical references to explain the significance of the mirror, which impressed the emperor and earned Qi praise for his knowledge and skills in memorization. Additionally, this unique skill set was ideal for investigating historical geography.[[193]](#endnote-194)

Soon after Qi Zhaonan was selected in the special palace examination in 1736, the Qianlong emperor placed him in the Institute of The Grand Union Documentation of the Qing Empire. From 1737 to 1749, Qi took full advantage of the exclusive and privileged access to the geodetic survey of the Qing empire. Qi was the only Confucian scholar and official, as far as I can find, who explicitly claimed to have worked in the Institute and had first-hand and unfettered access to the detailed, province-by-province maps of the Kangxi Atlas and the Yongzheng supplement to the Kangxi Atlas. Roughly at the same time, the French Jesuit Michel Benoist (1715–74) was working in the Imperial Workshops to make province-by-province geodetic maps, assembled them into an enormous projection map in conjunction with the Kangxi Atlas and figured out a new narrative of the terrestrial sphere for the Qianlong emperor. In a privileged role, Qi had access to the intricate technical aspects of the geodetic survey, while the majority of Institute staff were limited to tasks like editing and compilation. Most of the academics at the institute were historians rather than geographers. They did not focus on geography as they should have. For example, those who supervised Qi at the institute were precisely the type of bureaucrats being discussed. Wang Jun (1694–1751) and Yang Chun (1676–1753) were senior scholars in the Institute, and they often requested Qi to cope with the issues of historical geography and geodetic survey. Even though Wang and Yang lacked technical expertise, they could merely recite the information from historical texts to sound like they knew some technical issues. This allowed them to fill high positions in Confucian bureaucracies and even specialized Institutes. These Confucian scholars often treated *The Grand Union Documentation* as a literary project. They could compile a literary work of statecraft, administration, and human geography for various purposes.[[194]](#endnote-195)

However, the cartographical dimension, locations' accuracy (city, town, and military colonies), and the topographical features' scale (river, mountain, and desert) all demand relatively high accuracy. This is what Qi Zhaonan claimed to have learned from the Kangxi Atlas. According to Wang and Yang, Qi could access the “confidential materials in the inner chamber” of the Qianlong emperor's court and used the materials well. Here is indirect evidence of Qi's claim that he could access the confidential information of the geodetic survey. We can reasonably assume that Wang and Yang could also access the confidential materials but could not understand them. In contrast, Qi could grasp the technical detail and significance of the Kangxi Atlas. He praised the massive scale and described the undertaking as marvelous due to the Kangxi emperor's ambitious vision in conducting a geodetic survey of the Qing empire.[[195]](#endnote-196)

From 1737 to 1749, Qi was appointed to several intellectually demanding institutions in court, including compiling Three Rituals, a comprehensive history book called *The Essentials of History* (Mingjian gangmu), a compilation of the institutions and regulations of the Qing empire, daily notations of the imperial family, compilation at the Wuyin palace––the imperial print house of all books, regulations, and imperial orders. After rotating through these posts, Qi was appointed to tutor the Qianlong emperor's young heir and promoted to the highest rank in his career–––the Minister of Rites.

Despite Qi's critical and unique position in the Qianlong emperor's court, his career was unfortunately cut short. Qi launched his official career as a remarkable talent at the Institute of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Qing Empire* in 1737. He fell off his horse and cracked his head in 1749, tragically leading to Qi's retirement from the Qianlong emperor's court. The accident began when Qi attended a court ceremony in the imperial garden outside the Forbidden City in the spring of 1749. On his way back, entering one of the gates to the Forbidden City, his horse got frightened and threw him off its back. Qi plunged to the ground, cracking his skull open. His protectors and servants raced him to a physician. The doctor was a Mongolian therapist who possessed magical abilities. He split a living cow's stomach, extracted all the internal organs, and inserted Qi inside the cow to absorb the natural energy and strength of the Cow. This method was believed to bring his bones and veins back into proper alignment. When he heard of Qi's injury, the Qianlong emperor was at Mulan hunting ground near Mukden. He sent his son (Qi's pupil) to check on him and gave him three bottles of the best medicine for external injuries. The emperor then consoled Qi with fifteen bundles of dry deer meat from the Mulan Hunting ground. What happened next was predictable: Six months later, in the winter of 1749, Qi requested permission to retire and return to his hometown Tiantai in the lower Yangzi Valley to care for his mother. His request was granted, but the emperor demanded that he remain in court until the spring of the following year to return to the lower Yangzi Valley. What transpired could have been an accident or a well-planned political theater to retire from the Qianlong emperor's court. Regardless of Qi's reasoning, it was evident that Qi was experiencing political struggles and felt lost in handling politics in the Qing court.[[196]](#endnote-197)

While eccentric nerds like Qi felt out of place in high court politics, we cannot tell if he had staged the accident that removed him from the Qianlong emperor's court. Regardless, he used the opportunity to his advantage to depart from high politics and spent the next twenty years writing his manga opus as a scholar and gentry member in the lower Yangzi Valley. During his first ten years at home, he completed *The Essential Networks of Waterways* (Shuidao tigang, published in 1776) in 1761, an illustration of the pragmatic analysis of China's waterways. Qi's use of early modern geodesy was later corroborated by the Annotated Catalog (tiyao) of the Imperial Library on *The Essential Networks of Waterways*.[[197]](#endnote-198) Without a doubt, Qi followed the early modern geodesy set forth by the Qing monarchy. The tricky thing for Qi was getting his fellow Confucian bureaucrats to believe that early modern geodesy could be practical and integrated into the Confucian system.

Meanwhile, Ji Yun passed the palace examination in 1754 and obtained the *jinshi* degree. While Qi felt disillusioned by the high politics and stayed home in the lower Yangzi Valley from 1750 to 1761, working on his mapping of waterways of the expanding Qing empire, Ji Yun and his cohort became the next batch of national elites to access the geodetic surveys. They developed a different take on the imperial mapping of waterways from Qi. It is crucial to compare the geopolitical visions of these two consecutive generations of Confucian scholars––Qi Zhaonan and Ji Yun––who could access the Qing geodetic surveys. Let me start with Qi's. On the one hand, the chronological parallel between Qi's mapping of waterways in the Qing Empire's expanding territory and Ji Yun's Confucian mapping of waterways in the name of ancient *Classics* is crucial. Qi’s mapping shows the Qing’s new territorial magnanimity. Two geopolitical mapping versions were created nearly simultaneously, with slightly different purposes. The next generation of scholars and territorial managers chose Ji Yun’s version because it closely reflected their values.

Let us look at Qi's geopolitical mapping of China's waterways. In the preface of *The Essential Networks of Waterways*, Qi starts by depicting the Earth (dadi) as terraqueous and spherical. The mountains can be seen as bones, and the waterways act like blood vessels in the human body.[[198]](#endnote-199) Chapter two explains how “astronomical positioning” works by showing how the spherical Earth corresponds to the celestial sphere, and Qi fully endorsed astronomical positioning. Simply put, Qi was able to validate geodesy by using the Confucian language. Qi expressed his endorsement of the Confucian Classics by citing the “Nine Provinces” (Jiuzhou) of ancient China and acknowledging the chapter “Yugong” in *The Book of Documents* as the most well-known portrayal of China's water systems. By referencing the Confucian Classics, Qi improved his credibility as a mainstream Confucian scholar, distinguishing himself from Jesuit, Buddhist, Daoist, and Islamic writers while deploying the early modern geodesy. However, Qi was not content with following traditional methods and chose instead to critique the works of those who came before him. It was uncommon to criticize the writings or teachings of the ancient sage-kings and philosophers of high antiquity according to the Confucian convention. On the other hand, it was acceptable to criticize scholars (from 202 BCE to 1911) during the imperial era because they were not held in the same regard as the ancient sage-kings and philosophers. Qi Zhaonan reviewed past geographical works and highlighted their strengths and weaknesses. He identified Li Daoyuan's *Commentary on the Water Classics* as the most reliable source for information on China's waterways, as doubts had been raised about the authenticity of the ancient *Water Classics*. As a result, Li's Commentary became the new standard for studying waterways, replacing the traditional *Water Classics*.

According to Qi, the *Commentary on the Water Classics* had a narrow focus on the northwestern part of China, completely ignoring the southeast. Due to the significant expansion of the Qing empire in the eighteenth century, Li's *Commentary on the Water Classics*, written centuries ago, appeared outdated and limited in its scope. Qi Zhaonan divided the Qing's territory into “northwestern” and “southeastern” parts according to the new territorial expansion recently completed in the 1760s, a crucial time when the Qing Empire had just taken over Central Asia. Qi's notion of “China” encompassed the Chinese subcontinent and Central Asia under Qing control, while Li’s “China” was merely the North China Plain. As a result, a new and thorough evaluation of the geodetic data was required to assess the Qing's waterways.[[199]](#endnote-200)

Li's definition of “China” was limited to the North China Plain during the Northern Wei dynasty (386–535), which means he could only provide information on the waterways in that area. Qi believed that Li did not have first-hand knowledge of the waterways outside of the North China Plain, and instead relied on other texts, which resulted in the repetition of errors. Qi, in contrast, could access the geodetic survey of the entire Chinese subcontinent. He wanted to record and evaluate Manchuria and Canton's waterways across the recent expansion of the Qing Empire. The range from north to south in Qi's waterways analysis resembles the scope of the Hu Huanyong line (a modern scientific perspective) that separates the dense from sparse China, as discussed in the introduction chapter. The scope from the western end to the eastern coast reflects the most recent and updated territory after the Qianlong emperor's conquest of Central Asia. Qi unabashedly and sharply criticized Li Daoyang's historical limitations in the fifth century from the zenith point of the Qing's territorial expansion. This paralleled the Yongzheng emperor's theory of territorial expansion and fluidity for Chinese civilization (which kept up with the most recent enlargement by the Qing dynasty). It would not be an exaggeration to say that Qi's pragmatic analysis of China's waterways captured the spirit of the Yongzheng emperor's geopolitical dissolution of barbarism in *Awakened from Delusion*. Qi's work also glorified Qianlong's conquest of Central Asia.

To fully understand Qi's *The Essential Networks of Waterways*, it's crucial to recapitulate how Qi used networks of waterways to reveal the Qing territoriality. Qi explains that in Confucian scholarship, *Commentary on the Water Classics* was often studied alongside classical interpretations of the *Book of Songs* and *Spring and Autumn*. Additionally, historical geography played a critical role in Dynastic Official History, as evidenced in the Han History's “Geographical Documentation” section (Hanshu, dilizhi). State officials responsible for governing should be knowledgeable about managing waterways, utilizing them for trade, and as defense borders. The historical examples used to understand the Qing expansion had limitations since the actual size of the territory they controlled was unprecedented and more extensive than modern Chinese republics. The Qing territory was much larger than any previous political powers, including the Han and Tang empires.

Qi set the foundation for re-conceptualizing the magnanimous space of the Qing territory by explicitly comparing its territorial scale with previous dynasties and detailing the waterways and border rivers throughout the empire. The Amur River, for example, separates Qing China from Romanov Russia, while the Yalu and Tumen Rivers do the same between Qing China and Choson Korea. Qi stressed the practicality of historical geography but also wanted to dispel a few myths commonly held by Confucian scholars. Geographical writings historically contain mythologies about the landscape, which may include tales of spirits and demons and surreal depictions of mountains and rivers.[[200]](#endnote-201) Scholars who believed in these mythologies tended to exaggerate the size of the area being described and emphasized the natural beauty and aesthetics of the landscape. Qi wanted none of it. He did what sociologist Max Weber has called the process of disenchantment in the public sphere by attempting to cleanse all magic descriptions of the Chinese landscape. Qi demonstrated a concrete, accurate, and practical documentation of all rivers in the Qing Empire as he knew it in 1761.

Qi's documentation of all rivers in Qing China was a critical effort to reveal the extent and coverage of its territories. All main rivers in the Chinese subcontinent flow from west to east. In *The Essential Networks of Waterways*, Qi first describes (1) the coastline on the eastern seaboard. He then classified all rivers from north to south on the east side of the Hu Huanyong line: (2) Rivers in the Mukden region, (3) rivers in the Beijing region, (4) the grand canal from Beijing to the lower Yangzie valley, and rivers in the Shandong province, (5) Yellow River and its headwaters, (6) all significant rivers that flow into Yellow River, (7) Huai River, all significant rivers that flow into the Huai River, and the southern canal, (8) Yangzi River, part I, (9) Yangzi River, part II, (10) Yangzi River, part III, (11) all significant rivers that flow into the Yangzi River, part I, (12) all significant rivers that flow into the Yangzi River, part II, (13) all significant rivers that flow into the Yangzi River, part III, (14) all significant rivers that flow into the Yangzi River, part IV, (15) Canal in the Yangzi valley and Lake Tai, (16) Zhe rivers (Zhejiang province), (17) Min rivers (Fujian province), (18) Yue rivers (Guangdong province), part I, (19) Yue rivers, part II, (20) Yue rivers, part III, (21) Yunnan rivers (southern part of the Tibetan plateau, or Zomia), (22) Tibetan rivers (Zomia), (23) Rivers north of the Gobi desert, (24) Amur River north of the Gobi desert, (25) all significant rivers that flow into the Amur River, (26) Rivers south of the Amur River and in Korean peninsula, (27) Rivers north of the Great Wall in Mongolia, (28) Rivers in Western Region (xiyu, Central Asia).[[201]](#endnote-202) If you are familiar with Chinese geography, you will be impressed by Qi's list of territories compiled during early modern China. Although he did not have what we consider “frontier knowledge” today, he still had a strong understanding of the integrity of Qing territoriality. This refers to the ownership and control claimed over a particular area or domain, whether physical, political, cultural, or symbolic.

Around 1770, the mapping of Qing waterways reinforced the imperial claims of the Qing territory. Qi thoroughly mapped out all the waterways in the territory of *Pax Manchurica*. In mapping *Pax Manchurica*, Qi conveyed several critical messages. According to Qi, all the rivers west of the Pamir Mountains flowed into the western ocean, while those in the Indian subcontinent flowed into the Southern Ocean, and the rivers in Siberia flowed into the northern ocean (his name for Artic Ocean). This helped to position the Qing empire within Eurasia by identifying the directions of its rivers. Given that Qi had access to the Kangxi Atlas, it stands to reason that he could also read Ferdinand Verbiest's *An Illustration and Explanation of the World* and understand the fundamental concept of spherical Earth and geodetic survey. Furthermore, by understanding there were five continents on Earth, Qi must have realized that the Qing empire was one of many extensive political regimes globally. Unlike the Mongol Yuan's presumptuous and grandiose claim that their empire was morally superior to all others because of its “spatial magnanimity,” Qi could now make a similar claim with more justification and knowledge for the Qing Empire. According to Qi, the Qing monarchy created a map of the entire Qing empire by measuring its longitudes and latitudes, including both oceans and continents. Qi believes that he could write about the Qing empire with confidence because everything is backed up by empirical evidence.[[202]](#endnote-203) According to Qi, many political powers in Chinese history have claimed to have achieved political legitimacy and created a unified empire, but none have been as successful as the Great Qing.

In *The Essential Networks of Waterways*, history was not a significant focus. That is to say, the temporality of the Qing territory was never Qi’s concern. The book's goal was to highlight the expansiveness of the Qing Empire as it was. Qi aimed to demonstrate that the Qing territory surpassed the political powers of the ancient Han and Tang empires in historical China. However, the presentation did not indicate the historical trajectory, the rivers encompassing China, or their time period. The Qing Empire extended in three directions on land: north, west, and south. To prevent Russians from entering, military stations were established in the north and the movement of ginseng harvesters across the Sino-Korean border was regulated. In the west, the Uighurs were pacified, the Zunghar Mongols were eliminated, and the Turghuts Mongols were settled along the Qing border in Central Asia. Wars were waged against Jinchuan in southwest China and Taiwan was taken into the Qing administration. The Qianlong emperor designated Canton as the primary trading port in the south for interacting with European traders. These administrative and territorial measures had no historical precedent. The Qing acknowledged that the Mongols had a vast empire in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, but unlike the Mongols, the Qing created a centralized government and military colonies to govern their conquered lands. The Qing governed the inner realm (the Chinese subcontinent) under a centralized Confucian bureaucracy. The Qing also allowed the political elites in the outer realm to run their regions with their customs, religions, and system. Historians of China have analyzed the management techniques of the Qing dynasty in their outer realm, which may be considered an early example of the “one country, two systems” concept in Chinese history. The innovative features of this approach have been widely acknowledged. Qi grasped the significance of the Qing's inner and outer realms with clarity and accuracy.

Integrating the inner and outer realms to claim the Qing territory was new in Chinese history and the fundamental organizing principle of *The Grand Union Commencement Documentation of the Great Qing*. The connection between Qi's book and the Qing Empire's geopolitical vision was apparent. Here is a story that proves the connection: Whenever the Qianlong emperor would go on tours to the lower Yangzi Valley, Qi would accompany him along with other retired officials to pay their respects at the emperor's residence. Qi was a loyal Confucian official who believed in the Qing monarchy as the ultimate expression of political power in Chinese history. He appeared genuine in his willingness to recognize and respect the Qianlong emperor's universal rule and political legitimacy. It is important to note that Qi arrived at this conclusion through thoughtful deliberation of the Qing territoriality, rather than blind loyalty to the emperor. His comprehensive analysis of waterways in the Qing Empire led him to this conclusion because extensive documentation and geodetic surveys offered new, precise data about the scope of the Qing realm. Before the Qing monarchy, no political power could provide such precise measurements. Qi had great respect for their ability to do so.

Not long after Qi finished *The Essential Networks of Waterways* in 1761, Qi Zhouhua, a disruptive member of Qi's lineage, surfaced in his hometown of Tiantai. He had studied anti-Manchu Confucian scholar Lu Liuliang's doctrines in his youth and escaped home for thirty years. Most members of the Qi family considered him a traitor to the Qi lineage. Qi Zhouhua eventually returned home after thirty years of self-exile and sold his share of the property to raise money to publish his book. In this book, Qi Zhouhua included many of Lu Liuliang's arguments. Qi Zhouhua, who shared similarities with Zeng Jing, the interlocutor in the Yongzheng emperor's *Awakened from Delusion*, submitted his book to Governor Xiong Xuepeng during Xiong's visit to the Taizhou city walls construction site in 1762. However, this submission led to his arrest, confiscation of his home, and the subsequent treason indictment. Qi Zhouhua was sentenced to die by dismemberment. His family members were exonerated and let go. This unfortunate book includes a list of the Qi's lineage names, including Qi Zhaonan. Qi Zhaonan has been arrested and had all his property confiscated by the Ministry of Criminal Justice due to his connection with Qi Zhouhua. The Qianlong emperor pardoned Qi Zhaonan and returned nearly 40 percent of his property. The old gentleman was sad and dejected. He died shortly after returning home in 1768.[[203]](#endnote-204)

## Invoking Confucian Temporality to Mapping:

The literary inquisition consequently sullied Qi’s legacy and lifelong work, *The Essential Networks of Waterways*. Many future generations of Confucian scholars avoided Qi's masterpiece because it carried a certain amount of political risk since 1768. In the same year, Ji Yun suffered disgrace after committing a crime. Ji Yun cautioned his brother-in-law, Lu Jianzeng (1690–1768), about the accusations of embezzlement against him, resulting in Ji Yun's exile to Central Asia as a penalty.[[204]](#endnote-205) In 1771, after serving one year, he was pardoned and allowed to return to court. Despite his previous actions, the Qianlong emperor still held him in high regard and requested that he write poems commemorating the return of Torghut Mongols to Mukden, recognizing him as the finest man of letters in the empire. After celebrating the return of the Torghuts Mongols, Ji Yun shared his first-hand experience and observations of Central Asia by the end of the Zunghar campaign.[[205]](#endnote-206) Although Ji Yun was not a technocrat, he had a scholarly observation of Central Asia. Being exiled to the region proved to be a significant moment for him, impacting his career and personal life. His time spent in Central Asia proved invaluable, making him the best candidate to oversee the project *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters*. The parallel and similarity between Qi Zhaonan’s iteration of the Qing Empire's geopolitical vision and Ji Yun’s *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters* are striking and informative. Qi experienced a tragic downfall and condemnation, while Ji rose to establish Ji Yun's Circle at the highest level of the Confucian bureaucracy. Ji Yun's political savvy and resilience were valuable assets in his ascent. It is noteworthy that Ji Yun shared the same perspective on preserving the integrity of the Qing territory as Qi did, despite their distinct political beliefs, personality, and career trajectories.

At the beginning of the Qianlong emperor's reign, the emperor changed his style, which indicated the conclusion of the Qing monarchy's forceful intervention in the Confucian bureaucracy. In the examination system, the person who selected the examination takers became their mentor, and all those chosen became the examiner’s students. Being an examiner in the Confucian bureaucracy came with the privilege of forming factions. In 1754, Qin Huitian (1702–1764), an official who was previously persecuted under the Yongzheng emperor but quickly promoted to a high rank at the beginning of the Qianlong emperor's reign, oversaw a critical metropolitan palace examination (Hu, 106–09). In this examination, Ji Yun achieved the highest honor of the *jinshi* degree through the palace examination in Beijing. So did Qian Daxin and a remarkable group of scholars, including Zhu Yun (1729–1781), Wang Mingsheng (1722–1797), Wang Chang (1725–1806). They were selected in a cohort in the same year and became close friends and intellectual companions for life. They regarded each other as equals and became lifelong allies in the bureaucracy. And they would all go on to have significant influence in the political and intellectual landscape of Qing China in the coming years.[[206]](#endnote-207)

In the same year (1754), the strange and arrogant outsider of Beijing's polite society, Dai Zhen, barged into Qian Daxin’s residence and became famous among the 1754 cohort of scholar-officials who had just passed the highest hurdle of the examination system and became peers and close allies. Dai Zhen stood out from the 1754 group because he did not pass the palace examination that year. However, despite this setback, he was recognized and promoted by them. Qin Huitian, the mentor of the 1754 cohort, quickly sponsored Dai Zhen with a job and included his works in the *Comprehensive Investigation of Five Rites*. Qian Daxin called Dai Zhen a “marvelous and rare talent” due mainly to Dai's application of mathematical astronomy and historical geography to classical exegesis. Ji Yun was overjoyed with Qian Daxin's evaluation and added Dai Zhen to his staff. Ji also published Dai's *Illustrations of the Records of Ancient Technology* (Kaogongji tu). Dai Zhen's recognition marked a change in the intellectual direction from the previous generation's pragmatic learning. His work reflected the intellectual tendencies of the 1754 cohort. Furthermore, his later association with Ji Yun's Circle highlighted their shared intellectual inclinations.

Ji Yun acknowledged Dai Zhen's mastery of mathematical astronomy and historical geography. In return, Dai provided a detailed account of the ancient sundial and other artifacts in his sponsored publication, *Illustrations of the Records of Ancient Technology*.[[207]](#endnote-208) He used the Tychonic cosmography as a basis for his description and made an argument supporting it. Dai also had another set of manuscripts titled *Records of Waterways and Mountain Ranges* (Shuidi ji), demonstrating his acute awareness of his contemporary issues on historical geography using Tychonic cosmography.[[208]](#endnote-209) Dai then spent the rest of his life revising his works on mathematical astronomy and historical geography. Dai was a perfectionist who said he would not reveal the conclusion until the research proved 100% understanding and certainty of the topic. His manuscripts on classical studies, mathematical astronomy, historical geography, and analytical phonology have survived. So, we have sufficient evidence to show the evolution of his thought. Dai’s *Records of Waterways and Mountain Ranges* shows how his study differed fundamentally from Qi Zhaonan's *The Essential Networks of Waterways* and anticipated Ji Yun's *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters*.

It is important to note that Dai Zhen's research was conducted around the same time as Qi Zhaonan's in 1740. However, Qi had access to the Hanlin Academy and the empire-wide geodetic survey, while Dai, the son of a Huizhou merchant, only had access to a limited amount of commercially available works in the Confucian academy in the lower Yangzi Valley. The main source used by Dai was *A Narrow View of the Yugong Chapter* (Yugong zhuizhi) written by Hu Wei. It is essential to note Hu Wei's career in this context: The high-standing official Xu Qianxue (1631–1694) compiled *The Grand Union Commencement Documentation of the Great Qing* during the Kangxi reign while the empire-wide geodetic survey was still in its early stages around 1690, before the Kangxi emperor campaigned against the Mongol leader Galdan. Hu Wei was an old gentleman in 1690 who had spent most of his life working on historical geography. He finally had a chance to join Xu Qianxue when Xu moved the entire compilation office from the Qing court to his residence in the lower Yangzi Valley. In 1703, during the Kangxi Emperor's southern tour, Hu was honored with an audience. He submitted his work *A Narrow View of the Yugong Chapter* to the emperor and, in return, received recognition for his dedication to historical geography at an advanced age. The Kangxi emperor wrote down four words––Shinian duxue 蓍年篤學 (Devotion to learning at an advanced age)––and bestowed them as an honorific to the old gentleman. Like Mei Wending before him, Hu Wei was ahead of his time because he adopted the fundamental principle of early modern geodesy.[[209]](#endnote-210) Their pragmatic learning received imperial honors because of their unwavering devotion to these challenging fields: Mei Wending on mathematical astronomy and Hu Wei on historical geography. Both fields were deemed pragmatic and valuable for the Qing Empire.

Dai Zhen built upon Hu Wei's geographical data and used it as the scientific basis to interpret geographical information and references in the history books and Confucian *Classics*.[[210]](#endnote-211) As a result, Hu Wei's mapping of the Qing Empire became essential in understanding Dai Zhen's historical geography. Hu Wei's adoption of early modern geodesy was more implicit than Qi Zhaonan's. And yet they both subscribed to the Tychonic cosmography and early modern geodesy. Dai Zhen's historical geography aligned with the Tychonic cosmography, which was supported by the influential intellectuals and politicians of the 1754 cohort. However, despite his interest in early modern geodesy, Dai Zhen lacked access to geodetic survey data from the Qing Empire. Instead, he relied on information provided by Hu Wei for his research. What were their achievements despite not having access to the geodetic survey of the Qing empire? Qi Zhaonan's mapping was more accurate, but the outcome was determined by another factor that carried a greater significance.

Consequently, the Confucian bureaucracy had at least two distinct ways of adopting early modern geodesy from the Qing monarchy. First, Qi Zhaonan wholeheartedly embraced the early modern geodesy of the Qing Empire. Second, Dai Zhen adapted and modified early modern geodesy through classical exegesis in accordance with their revival of the Confucian *Classics*. Ji Yun's Circle eventually adopted Dai's approach, while Qi's work was forgotten. The distinction between the two types of scholars was not absolute, and their positions should be seen as a range of possibilities. Some scholars took a middle position between the two ideal types. For instance, Jiang Yong leaned more toward Qi's approach, while Ling Tingkan leaned more toward Dai's approach. Ji Yun's Circle approved Dai Zhen's historical geography by collectively supporting the second form of assimilation of early modern geodesy. This involves modifying early modern geodesy by following classical exegesis and returning to the historical temporality of Confucian *Classics*. Unsurprisingly, the second form was less connected to the Qing monarchy, but it did not intend to question the legitimacy of the Qing Empire. It shifted towards a relatively more autonomous Confucian administration, like that of the Ming dynasty, rather than showing a subservient attitude toward the Qing monarchy. The Qianlong emperor granted the Confucian greater flexibility and freedom during the same period. The Qing's legitimacy was not questioned, as it would have been unwise to do so. Dai Zhen ingeniously created a new historical geography within these political boundaries.

Dai's significant difference from Qi's map of the Qing's expanding territory was the addition of a temporal dimension based on Confucian historical concepts.[[211]](#endnote-212) Dai and Ji Yun’s Circle created a basic version of something like our Geographical Information System (GIS) for classical exegesis. To begin, Hu and Dai developed a map showcasing their current towns, cities, mountains, and rivers. Afterward, they utilized grid lines sorted by longitude and latitude to identify historical locations on the map. Next, they tracked how the location of towns with the same name has evolved in relation to their present-day counterparts. Finally, they compiled a record of any changes in the town's name and its position on the gridlines based on its current location. A tabulation can clarify a legendary battle that occurred 2000 years ago. By referencing the current positions of rivers, towns, and cities, one can determine how the battle was fought and correct historical records with geographical references. Hu’s and Dai’s primary goal was to accurately identify the details of historical events and prevent any confusion about what geographically transpired in history. They cared more about the accuracy of history and the timing of historical events. They fundamentally differed from Qi Zhaonan’s mapping, which is more aligned with the modern sense of geographer and focuses on the accuracy of geographical mapping.

In contrast, Hu and Dai cared more about accurately dating historical events with geographical references. Dai Zhen had focused more on Confucian temporality than Hu Wei and his major accomplishment was to connect the dots between textual records and locations on a map. But he did not merely connect the dots empirically. Dai Zhen used the Tychonic cosmic model and early modern geodesy as the cosmological basis to fill in the data points. Historians have overlooked these systematic and cosmological premises for a long time. Most intellectual historians have cast this group as evidential scholars or philologists. According to this perspective, these scholars depended on textual and historical records to conduct their research. But, in fact, they also employed non-textual methods. In Dai Zhen's case, he used early modern mathematical astronomy and geodesy to date historical records. It may have appeared to many historians and philosophers that Dai Zhen was merely arranging historical records geographically. What Dai Zhen had accomplished was not a small feat or merely an evidential analysis. Dai Zhen utilized early modern scientific tools such as geodesy and Tychonic cosmology to align historical records on the spherical surface of the Earth and the celestial sphere of astronomical locations. This enabled him to uncover previously unknown evidence and patterns. Although contemporary historians and scientists have disproved some of Dai Zhen's findings, his achievement lies in his ability to incorporate a new dimension of Confucian temporality into the Qing territorial mapping.[[212]](#endnote-213)

Ji Yun had a great interest in technical fields and made efforts to support them. Ji Yun showed consistent interest in natural studies in his notation books. He was also well-versed in imperial politics and was aware of the literary inquisition that led to the downfall of many officials, including Qi's persecution. Among Ji Yun's circle of scholars and friends, many were also knowledgeable in these technical areas. Although Dai Zhen held no official position, he set a remarkable intellectual standard for the Ji Yun Circle. Dai Zhen expected to seamlessly integrate mathematical astronomy and historical geography into the ancient world's cosmos, language, and institutions while maintaining the Confucian system's authenticity, credibility, and integrity. Dai was an influential figure in eighteenth-century China who played a significant role in the emergence of China’s intellectual modernity.[[213]](#endnote-214) Dai died in 1777, but Ji Yun’s Circle followed Dai’s high standards, inspiring many scholars to pursue it. One such pursuit was the exploration of the Yellow River's headwaters.

## Ji Yun Circle’s Writing of Headwaters:

After coming back from Central Asia, Ji Yun started working on *The Complete Collection of Four Treasuries* (Siku quanshu), which was a massive collection of as many books as they could find to build an imperial library, kept in seven pavilions. Historians have studied Ji Yun’s leadership in making the imperial library and his service to the Qing monarchy. Two significant arguments regarding the relationship between the Qing monarchy and the Confucian bureaucracy are crucial. First, the Imperial Library, which reconstructed all past knowledge, information, and heritage in China, solidified the relationship between the Qing monarchy and the Confucian bureaucracy. Second, the Qing monarchy weeded any anti-Manchu language, passage, or books during the collection process of the imperial library. The literary inquisition was conducted with surgical precision, subtly delving into the massive collection of texts from all over China.[[214]](#endnote-215) In this context, Ji Yun Circle began to compose *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters*.

*A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters* was a remarkable text.[[215]](#endnote-216) But, to my surprise, no historians have yet paid attention to it, let alone analyzed it. This document was remarkable because it was produced at the height of Qing expansion. As we will see, *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters* not only provides a glimpse of the Qing's geopolitical vision of the linkage between the inner and outer realms of the Qing territory but also sheds light on how Ji Yun and his colleagues established a close partnership with the Qianlong emperor. Although Ji Yun was a colorful and legendary figure in Qing China's high culture and politics, his leadership in documenting the historical geography of the Yellow River's headwaters received virtually no attention from modern historians. The Qianlong emperor endorsed and included the book in the *Complete Collection of Four Treasuries*.

The Ji Yun Circle, a group of esteemed scholars under Ji Yun's guidance and sponsorship, collaborated to produce *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters*. This book not only documented the historic geography of the area but also resolved contentious debates about mapping waterways. Additionally, it sparked a newfound interest in Central Asian geography among academics. The book was a tour de force and summed up the Qianlong emperor's ambitious plan to connect the newly acquired Qing empire's outer and nomadic realm (Fanbu) with the inner and agricultural realm (Tongbu). The Qing Empire had a clever strategy to establish a strong connection between China's densely populated mainland and the sparsely populated regions like the Tibetan plateau, the northern and southern areas of the Tianshan mountain range, and the Tarin basin in the south. This helped to maintain territorial coherence and led to the creation of Xinjiang, also known as the “New Territory.” During the 1950s and 20th century, the People's Republic embarked on a new era of exploration by investigating further upstream along China's famous Yellow River. This chapter focuses on the early exploration of the headwaters, considered crucial by the Modern Chinese Republic, and explores its political culture.

In 1782, the Qianlong emperor set out to locate the headwater of the Yellow River. The entire operation was initiated due to the inability to combine two streams of the Yellow River at Qinglonggang in Shaanxi province. Mismanagement of the upstream in Shaanxi province could have dire consequences for the downstream of the Yellow River, potentially causing it to shift dangerously and resulting in disastrous outcomes for the North China Plain. While the engineering project to manage the upstream was ongoing, the Qianlong emperor launched a cultural initiative and instructed Amita, the son of Manchu Grand Councilor Agui and a loyal imperial guard, to lead a team to Qinghai (Kokonor) in search of the source of the Yellow River. Many believed that performing a ritual toward the headwaters would calm and soothe the spirit of the Yellow River.[[216]](#endnote-217)

Back in 1730, during the reign of the Yongzheng emperor, an unusual situation occurred. For a period of thirty-six days, the Yellow River ran clear, which was unusual as it normally carries yellow dirt that gives it a murky appearance. This was seen as a positive omen by the Qing Empire, and the Yongzheng emperor chose to construct a temple in Xinin to honor the spirit of the river.[[217]](#endnote-218) Initially, the Yongzheng emperor planned to construct the temple near the source of the Yellow River, but he realized that tracing the river up to the Kunlun Mountain was challenging. Therefore, he chose to build it at Xinin, which is located to the east of the Qinhai (Kokonor) Lake. Amita performed a ritual to the river spirit at Xinin. However, the Qianlong emperor had a more ambitious plan beyond simply performing a ritual for the river spirit, so the matter was not concluded yet. The emperor aimed to surpass his grandfather's impressive feat of discovering the source of the Yellow River. In 1708, the Kangxi emperor dispatched a logistical team led by the imperial guard Laxi to investigate the source of the Yellow River. According to Laxi's report, the source was in the Xingsuhai basin, which sits over 4,000 meters above sea level. This is higher than Mount Tai, considered the most important of China's Five Sacred Mountains. The name Xingsuhai means “Constellation Sea.” Xingsuhai is a lengthy and slim basin. The aerial view of the basin is stunning. Under the bright sun, a cluster of small lakes glistens. The imperial guard Laxi could see this remarkable view from the top of a nearby mountain. He deemed this remarkable place fitting to serve as the location of the Yellow River’s headwaters and reported to the Kangxi emperor accordingly.[[218]](#endnote-219)

On the other hand, Amita's team was given a military logistical mission to perform a ritual, locate the Yellow River's headwaters, conduct a geodetic survey, and create a detailed area map. Although the Qianlong emperor did not want to say that his grandfather missed it, his imperial rhetoric was to honor the Kangxi emperor’s unprecedented achievement and build on Kangxi’s exploration by further mapping out the details of the location of the headwaters. Amita's team, sent by the Qianlong emperor, received new instructions to locate a more specific location of the Yellow River’s headwaters. Amita pointed out a river southwest of the Xingsuhai basin, known as the “golden river” in Mongolian. This river runs for 300 *li* and feeds into the Xingsuhai basin upstream of the Yellow River. Amita also mentioned a massive rock west of the golden river, called the Rock of Polaris in Mongolian, which towers high in the sky. At the top of the rock lies a Heavenly Pond. Golden water is flowing out of the pond and into the golden river. According to Amita, the Heavenly Pond is the true headwaters of the Yellow River.

Amita's report successfully located and celebrated the headwaters of the Yellow River, impressing the Qianlong emperor enough to write a poem in honor of the achievement. However, this could have been a superficial occurrence at the Qing court if the emperor had not asked the Ji Yun Circle to create a historical account of their exploration. This account documented the triumphs and errors in the past, ultimately leading to the emperor's celebrated success at the end.[[219]](#endnote-220) This account was *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters*, published in 1782. The book was written in a bureaucratic language and included information gathered from a geodetic survey and river tracking using longitude and latitude gridlines. It systematically and competently reviewed past explorations of the Yellow River's headwaters. The book also explained why the “outer realm” of the Qing territory, where the headwaters was located, had been explored for centuries before becoming part of the Qing territory. The significance of the symbolism cannot be emphasized enough. The book *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters* offers a technical viewpoint on how exploring the river's headwaters helped cement the Qing territories' inner and outer realms.

*A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters* (hereafter *Yellow River's Headwaters*) had several authors from Ji Yun’s Circle, presumably guided by Ji Yun’s vision and the Qianlong emperor’s instruction. Ji Yun stated that many writers who discussed the headwaters had never actually visited the area where it was located. Consequently, their accounts were based on rumors and guesses and contained numerous errors. That is why Ji Yun articulated the justification for writing this book and outlined the following basic principles for compiling it. According to Ji, waterways are complicated and must be illustrated by maps. The old maps are full of mistakes and inaccuracies. The accuracy of geodetic surveys is critical for the *Yellow River's Headwaters*. These surveys were recorded in a book called *Documentation and Illustration of the Western Region* (Xiyu tuzhi), compiled by Liu Tongxun to commemorate the Zunghar campaign and based on the geodetic survey in Central Asia. It was widely accepted that the surveys conducted held great authority. Completing the *Yellow River's Headwaters* marked the pinnacle of the Qing Empire’s territorial expansion and a comprehensive geodetic survey. The goal was to remove any territorial distinctions between the inner and outer realms of the empire. The “Grand Union Commencement” (dayitong) became meaningful after the Qing Empire accomplished the above actions to maintain the territorial integrity of the inner and outer realms.

*Yellow River's Headwaters* was based upon the maps already developed and detailed in *Documentation and Illustration of the Western Region*. All the measurements, including those chapters in *Documentation and Illustration of the Western Region* with the numerical results of latitudes and longitudes, were based on the geodetic survey's empirical data.[[220]](#endnote-221) Then the intricate waterways of the Yellow River were plotted on the map. The current place names were marked in red ink, while the older ones were in black ink. Any historical names mentioned in the *Yellow River's Headwaters* were circled to show how previous mistakes were made. Additionally, Ji Yun tabulated each stream of the Yellow River in terms of how the different streams combined, separated, went underground, and reappeared. The data were arranged in rows, with the first listing the streams and their movements and the following showing new streams joining them.

In terms of the historical account of the headwaters, the Ji Yun Circle introduced three interesting categories called “interrogating reality” (Zhishi), “verification from the past” (Zhenggu), and “discerning the falsehood” (Bianwei), none of which may have a Confucian implication.[[221]](#endnote-222) For interrogating reality, Ji Yun aimed to eliminate any uncertainties among Confucian readers. He achieved this by adopting the traditional convention of the *Water Classics* and Li Daoyuan's *Commentary*, which involved identifying the names of locations along the river and narrating the path between them. Ji Yun utilized the traditional and respected format of the ancients to persuade his Confucian audience that the river routes and place names were verified through empirical evidence. All river routes were accurately identified and aligned with the formats of the ancient *Classics*. Ji Yun's use of the term “reality” pertains to the practical observation of river paths and the verification of Confucian *Classics*. In other words, for something to be deemed real, it must possess spatial and temporal proof of its existence.

Ji Yun introduced a second category, “verification from the past.” He claimed that only 20% of the descriptions and discussions of the Yellow River’s headwaters were correct, with the remaining 80% being inaccurate. Even though the past descriptions were primarily incorrect, Ji Yun did not want to disregard them entirely. A category was created to screen data and ensure the accuracy of information about the Yellow River's headwaters in historical records. Ji Yun gathered reliable information from various sources, including *Historical Records* (Shiji), the *Official History of the Han Dynasty* (Hanshu), and more recent accounts by eighteenth-century writers like Hu Wei and Yan Ruoju. Ji Yun carefully verified any trustworthy information and followed the example of Zhang Mingfeng's refined geographical writings in *Amazing Landscape in Guangxi* (Guisheng) and *Historical Geography in Guangxi* (Guigu). This involved listing the original texts and verifying the accuracy of textual records and empirical measurements to determine the current location. Such a verification from the past is like what Dai Zhen had accomplished beforehand. Dai Zhen’s legacy lived on in the *Yellow River’s Headwaters*. The third category, “discerning the falsehood,” differs from the previous “verification from the past.” In the previous category, Ji Yun only focused on the correct statements, but in the current one, Ji focused on the false statements regarding the headwaters. In the past, according to Ji, there were many different interpretations to cause confusion among scholars. Some scholars stubbornly held onto outdated doctrines and would not change them, leading to a proliferation of falsehoods. Ji listed the original text and explained why certain statements were untrue. This was to assist Confucian readers in comprehending why there were numerous incorrect interpretations.[[222]](#endnote-223)

The three analytical categories above were often misleadingly labeled “evidential analysis.” Such a misnomer ignores that Dai Zhen and Ji Yun were addressing the geographical issue with the presumption that Earth is real and spherical, and early modern geodesy helped them plot the rivers on Earth. Additionally, the construction of the *Yellow River's Headwaters* depended on two specific conditions based on the Qing territorial expansion. As a result, Ji Yun’s Circle made two fundamental points accordingly. The first, Ji Yun Circle stressed the importance of understanding Mongolian names and Central Asian cultures to avoid past mistakes made by Chinese scholars. This cosmopolitan altitude departed from the attitude, for instance, in the Ming dynasty. Second, Ji Yun’s Circle enforced an invention and coinage of an ancient term for Central Asia, referred to as the “Western region” (xiyu), in ancient historical literature. The categorization of Central Asia as a “Western region” was important as it avoided any negative associations with barbarism, unlike the term Tufan. Additionally, it conveyed a sense of historicity and reverence.[[223]](#endnote-224)

Cruelty, drawn-out battles, and high expenses characterized the expansion of the Qing frontier. The “Western region” included enormous land, almost equivalent to China proper. It contained many geographical features, including the name Kunlun, possibly referencing the enigmatic mountain range mentioned in the official Han dynasty history. In the Western Region, there are many languages. Among them, Mongolian was predominant. Translation manuals are written using standard equivalent vocabulary. The translated names are annotated at the bottom of the sentence, and the proliferation of transliterations in ancient books was noted. Ji Yun utilized the *Standard Translation Manual of the Western Region* (Xiyu tongwenzhi), which was put together in 1763.[[224]](#endnote-225) This helped avoid using historically inconsistent and perplexing place names in Central Asia. In addition to the Qing respect and tolerance of the Mongolian language and place names, Muslim and Uighur customs, and Central Asian geography, Ji Yun’s Circle followed historical convention to cope with the exotic “Western region.” You may find it interesting how Qishiyi was accepting and portrayed Mongolian traditions. The Qing officials no longer saw the Western region as uncivilized.

## Conclusion:

To understand the significance of the Yellow River in China, one can observe the Yellow River Piano Concerto's remarkable performances during major political events, such as the celebration of Hong Kong's return to the socialist motherland in 2017. This demonstrates the Yellow River's symbolic value in Chinese culture and its importance to the Chinese people. The Yellow River is a powerful icon of China's history and people. It represents the suffering and humiliation under Japanese aggression and the country's resilience and rebirth as the People's Republic of China. The river reminds the Chinese people of where they came from and what they have overcome, but it also points toward a bright future. It has now become the image of China's rise in the world: a symbol of resilience, determination, and will.

When the People's Republic of China came into existence, the Chinese Academy of Sciences dispatched a geological team to explore and identify the Yellow River's headwaters once and for all. They built upon their Qing predecessors’ work and further pinpointed the headwaters with remarkable precision and details. Today you may visit the location of the headwaters with a clear landmark on the Tibetan Plateau. And you may also visit the headwaters of the Yangzi River with a similar remarkable landmark. It has become a symbol of nationality and the Chinese transcendental values. Documentation exists that articulates the importance of the Yellow River's headwaters before the concept of nationality was adopted by China. This occurred during the Qing Empire's last stage of territorial expansion, ensuring the unity and integrity of Qing's territory. Tracking the Yellow River, which has been known since the beginning of Chinese civilization, to its source on the Tibetan Plateau is an incredibly compelling story to tell.

# Chapter Five: Cementing Inner and Outer Realms

The book *Illustration and Explanation of Earth* (Diqiu tushuo) provided regional scholars with a simplified take on early modern geodesy, offering a fresh perspective for those within and beyond the Confucian bureaucracy to re-evaluate the concept of “all under the Heaven.”[[225]](#endnote-226) This book was a sincere effort to make early modern geodesy more accessible to Confucian scholars. The preceding chapter explored the challenges the Qing Empire encountered when trying to dominate geopolitical knowledge and how Ji Yun’s Circle collaboratively developed a shared geopolitical vision alongside the Qing monarchy. This chapter delves into how Ruan Yuan’s Circle championed early modern geodesy to make its principles more accessible to local academics. *Illustration and Explanation of Earth* showcased the most accessible global view rooted in early modern geodesy. Acknowledging a spherical Earth meant traditional ethnocentric views or the Middle Kingdom ideology would inevitably fade. Yet, the lingering question was: how could this newfound perspective of Earth be politically understood? Could there be a clear distinction between the inner and outer realms of the Qing Empire?

## Michel Benoist’s Job:

In 1745, the French Jesuit Michel Benoist (1715–1774) arrived in Beijing, introducing himself as a competent mathematician. It did not take long before he was drafted in the first Jinchuan military campaign. The campaign was environmentally challenging, located at the frontier of the upper Yangzi (Sichuan) basin in the Jinchuan area, characterized by towering mountains intersected by two rivers. The indigenous people, speakers of Gyalrong, a language distinct from Tibetan, had risen against the Qing. As a response, Grand Councilor Agui led the campaign and enlisted two Jesuits, Michel Benoist and Felix Da Rocha, to use their technical expertise. Their mission was to survey the Mulamula mountains and pinpoint the optimal locations for cannon deployment against the revolting forces during the first Jinchuan campaign. Thus, in 1747, Benoist began serving in the Qing army, holding a modest role as a purveyor.[[226]](#endnote-227)

Like his grandfather, the Kangxi emperor, the Qianlong emperor enlisted skilled Jesuits from Europe to modernize the world map, adhering to Ricci’s fundamental paradigm that situated the Qing Empire within a global context. Concurrently, the Qing monarchy remained resolute in redefining and reshaping the world map to depict their territorial expansion. Rather than entrusting the Confucian bureaucracy with critical assignments on updating world maps, the Qing monarchy consistently relied on Jesuit missionaries to fulfill such roles. Verbiest played a pivotal role by introducing early modern geodesy to the Kangxi emperor, elevating the significance of his world map beyond that of Matteo Ricci's in the Jesuit tradition. This act set a crucial precedent for creating world maps and conducting geodetic surveys using early modern geodesy within the Qing monarchy. Michel Benoist entered the emperor’s purview in this endeavor. Having been inspired by images of the Versailles fountains showcased by Jesuit missionaries, the Qianlong emperor commissioned him after his return from the first Jinchuan campaign in 1747 to conceive a Baroque-style water fountain ornamented with Chinese zodiac sculptures for the imperial Yuanmingyuan Garden. Upon successfully fulfilling this task and elucidating the principles of hydraulics to the emperor, Benoist earned his favor and trust. In a letter from 1767, Benoist explained that the emperor had tasked him to build a “European Palace” (known as Xiyang lou) in the Imperial Garden. This unique structure combined elements of Baroque, Renaissance, French, and Rococo styles, designed by Jesuits and constructed by skilled imperial laborers and artisans. Benoist succeeded Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766) in 1767 to serve as the principal architect of the European Palace.[[227]](#endnote-228) The completed structure became a remarkable feature within the Garden. Following this accomplishment, Benoist moved on to the significant duty of creating imperial maps.

The Qianlong emperor appointed Benoist as the leader of the cartographical team within the Division of Manufacturing (Zaobanchu), specifically in the esteemed Mind-Nourishing Hall (Yangxindian) under the Imperial Household Department as early as 1767. Benoist’s responsibility was to oversee the extension of the Kangxi Atlas, focusing on plotting grid maps of longitudes and latitudes to encompass Central Asia. During this mapping process, he diligently integrated the latest findings from geographical investigations, incorporating newly discovered countries while removing outdated content no longer aligned with the actual situation. Additionally, Benoist composed an informative manuscript covering various aspects of the earth, comets, and recent discoveries. In parallel, Benoist crafted a new world map, drawing inspiration from Verbiest’s previous work. This map held special significance, as it served as Benoist’s congratulatory gift to Emperor Qianlong on his sixtieth birthday in 1771. The Qianlong emperor was pleased with this grand gesture and the presentation of precious gifts, expressing his deep satisfaction with the magnificent world map. Upon receiving Benoist’s world map as a celebratory gift, the Qianlong emperor promptly ordered multiple copies to be safeguarded within the palace. Moreover, he ensured the newly discovered cartographic content was incorporated into the imperial global map. [[228]](#endnote-229)

Benoist’s world map was a success, and the emperor requested an update regarding the specifics of early modern geodesy. Following the emperor’s instructions, He Guozong, the Grand Secretariat and Minister of Rites, and Qian Daxin, the Compiler of the Hanlin Academy, collaborated with Benoist to create a refined and literary work based on his exceptional world map. The outcome of their joint efforts materialized as the manuscript titled *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*. Despite its significance, the book remained within the confines of the Qing court for two decades. The hope was to find the right opportunity and context for its eventual release, which came to fruition in 1799.

## Ruan Yuan’s Trajectory:

Ruan Yuan, born on February 21, 1764, in Yangzhou, came from a family with a distinguished background in both scholarship and military pursuits. His grandfather, Ruan Yutang, had succeeded in the martial examination in 1715 and enjoyed a distinguished military career. Meanwhile, his father, Ruan Chengxin, received a classical education, and his mother, from the affluent Lin family, possessed talents in poetry and calligraphy. The Ruan lineage held wealth and political influence, with their network centered in the Yangzhou metropolitan area of the lower Yangzi Valley, in contrast to Ji Yun’s family, whose roots lay in Beijing.[[229]](#endnote-230)

In 1775, the rapid ascent of Heshen (1750–1799) from the Imperial Guard to the Grand Council left Qing bureaucrats both in awe and envious of his achievements. His rise to power resulted from various factors, such as his adeptness in forging alliances and dealing with adversaries. At just 26 years old, he had already mastered four languages of the Qing Empire—Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, and Chinese. Additionally, Heshen served as the Qianlong emperor’s financial manager and held a position of utmost trust within the inner circle of power. Additionally, the Qianlong emperor entrusted him with significant cultural projects, including *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*. His managerial skills secured funding for the Qing Empire’s frontier expansion and amassed substantial wealth for his family. His mastery of four Central Asian languages and sharp financial acumen made him a highly successful financier within the Qing Empire. The Qing court, dominated by the influential networks of Ji Yun and Heshen, formed the institutional context into which Ruan Yuan made his entry.[[230]](#endnote-231)

Unaware of the path he was about to tread, Ruan prepared himself to make his mark. Little did he know that his journey would soon be intertwined with Heshen’s dominant political influence, which clouded his aspirations later. Ruan’s educational journey began at an early age when his mother taught him to read and write at four. At five years old, in 1769, he enrolled in a private lineage school, where he interacted and learned from renowned scholars in Yangzhou. A turning point occurred in 1779 when he failed the county-level examination for the first time. This event paradoxically led him to forge strong relationships with intellectual powerhouses like Ling Tingkan (1757–1809) and Jiao Xun (1763–1820). In 1781, Ruan faced a period of mourning after his mother’s passing. However, in 1784, he succeeded in the county examination, which granted him entry into the Yizheng County School. Two years later, in 1786, Ruan excelled in the provincial examination, prompting him to embark on a journey to Beijing to take the metropolitan examination. Although his first attempt proved unsuccessful, Ruan’s father advised him to remain in the capital and prepare for the upcoming metropolitan examination. During this period, Ruan engaged in extensive correspondence with esteemed scholars and had the opportunity to meet them in person. He formed friendships with three individuals associated with Dai Zhen’s admirers and disciples in Ji Yun’s Circle: Shao Jinhan (1794–1796), Wang Niansun (1744–1832), and Ren Dachun (1738–1789).[[231]](#endnote-232)

After facing initial challenges in Beijing, Ruan succeeded on his second attempt at age twenty-five. The chief examiner was Zhu Gui, the opponent of Heshen. His accomplishment in passing the palace examination secured him a position as a promising young scholar in the esteemed Hanlin Academy in 1789. This achievement was no small feat, considering that the odds of passing the provincial examination were less than 1%, and excelling in the metropolitan examination was even rarer, with chances below 0.01%. Ruan’s success resulted from the perfect alignment of his cumulative prestige, raw talent, hard work, and fortuitous circumstances. This remarkable achievement would mark a turning point in his life, leading him to become connected with the most influential figure in the Qianlong Emperor’s court, Heshen.[[232]](#endnote-233) In 1789, Heshen and Peng Yuanrui (1731–1803), the Minister of Personnel, were assigned as leaders of the junior scholars within the Hanlin Academy. During their time at the academy, Heshen became a mentor to Ruan Yuan, solidifying their professional relationship.[[233]](#endnote-234)

On Heshen’s fortieth birthday celebration, Hanlin scholars were divided in their views, with some opposing him and organizing a gathering at the Songyun temple. Ruan found himself caught in conflicting feelings, initially attending the anti-Heshen gathering but ultimately being enticed to leave for Heshen’s mansion. There, he introduced himself and presented his credentials to Heshen, who courteously welcomed him and expressed gratitude for having him as the first guest of the day. During this time, Ruan openly associated himself with Heshen, forming a connection with the influential Grand Councilor.[[234]](#endnote-235)

In 1796, the Qianlong emperor chose to abdicate the throne in favor of his son, the Jiaqing emperor, which put Heshen in a precarious position during this transition of power. Despite being aware of Qianlong’s imminent passing, Heshen remained loyal to the aging emperor. However, the new ruler, Jiaqing, strongly opposed Heshen. As soon as Qianlong passed away, Jiaqing swiftly stripped Heshen of power and compelled him to use a white silk belt to end his life. This event marked the collapse of the Heshen faction in court and a significant turning point in Ruan’s career, as it was directly linked to his past association with Heshen within the court’s intricate politics.

From 1796 to 1805, the Qing Empire faced a peasant rebellion organized by the millenarianism of the White Lotus doctrine in regions such as western Hubei, northeastern Sichuan, and southern Shaanxi (hinterland). As this rebellion began, the Qianlong emperor had just relinquished the throne to the young Jiaqing emperor, who lacked the real power to lead the campaign against the White Lotus. Instead, the Qianlong emperor relied on Heshen to oversee the military effort. Initially, Heshen assessed that the geographical reach and intensity of the rebellion would not be formidable enough to threaten the Qing Empire’s foundation, and he dismissed the White Lotus doctrine as being far from a danger to Qing legitimacy. However, he mishandled the financial side of the war, leading to massive waste and fraud in military spending. As a result, the White Lotus War turned into a disaster for the Qing Empire, not only because of the financial toll it took but also because it exposed the underlying weaknesses of the Qing’s green standard army and the utilization of civilians as combatants in peasant warfare.[[235]](#endnote-236) The White Lotus War clearly showed that China's hinterland had become an economically stagnant, unlike the Lower Yangzi Valley and coastal regions.

Another critical event connected with Heshen’s downfall was the publication of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*. The Kangxi emperor launched this human geography initiative, *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing,* as early as 1672. The project was lengthy because it relied heavily on the imperial geodetic survey. As an exhaustive geographical record of the imperial realm, the compilation incorporated various templates inherited from its predecessors in the Mongol Yuan and Chinese Ming empires. In December 1740, the first completed version of *The Grand Union Documentation* was first presented to the Qianlong Emperor. It had a limited print run in the Wuyin Palace in 1751. Shortly after its publication, the Qing led a campaign against the Zunghar Mongols in Central Asia, resulting in significant territorial expansion. Consequently, *The Grand Union Documentation* went through revisions to incorporate the geodetic survey of Central Asia and accommodate the content of *Illustration and Documentation of the Western Regions in the Imperial Territory* in 1762.

*The Grand Union Documentation* includes templates for various categories, such as administration, landscape, customs, cities, imperial schools, household registration, tax, officials, mountains, ancient traces, waterways, bridges, dykes, crucial passes, chokepoints, official graveyards, temples, renowned scholars, chaste women, important Daoist and Buddhist monks, and native products. It is what we call human geography today. Such human geography seemed to have built on the past templates, but it had new scalability from the geodetic survey. The documentation also establishes territorial units grounded on regions that have been both militarily secured and incorporated, referred to as “unity divisions” (tongbu), contrasting with areas that have been militarily consolidated but still await integration into the administrative system, known as “border divisions” (fanbu). The two divisions relied on geodetic surveys to be accurate enough for territorial scaling and presented in the same grandeur map. In 1785, Heshen, the Grand Councilor in charge of the human geography project, presented the Qianlong emperor with the second edition, including the New Territory (Xinjiang, the newly conquered Central Asia), hereafter referred to as the Heshan edition. The Wuyin palace published this edition three times, and it was also copied and distributed throughout the seven pavilions of the imperial library, referred to as *The Complete Collection of Four Treasures*. Consequently, it has become widely accessible to scholars and officials.

After Qianlong Emperor’s demise in 1799, factions opposing Heshen advocated revising *The Grand Union Documentation*. The Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796-1820), the prosecutor of Heshen, endorsed this idea. By 1839, the third and final edition was under preparation, but the first Sino-British War (also known as the Opium War) disrupted this process. The Manchu Grand Councilor Mujangga (1782–1856) presented this third edition to Emperor Daoguang in November 1842, hereafter referred to as the Mujangga edition. However, this edition never made it to the press. During the early nineteenth century, the Daoguang Depression led to economic challenges and societal unrest, causing a fiscal shortfall for the Qing dynasty. The prevalent recreational use of opium by regional and local elites further intensified this socioeconomic upheaval. As a result, the release of the Mujangga edition was suspended. Both Heshen’s and Mujangga’s versions of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* were products of extensive and rigorous processes connected the empire-wide geodetic surveys.[[236]](#endnote-237)

The Heshen edition was widely distributed among the elite and the Confucian administrative classes throughout the nineteenth century. With the widespread distribution of the Heshen edition and the development of the Mujangga edition, Central Asia’s geopolitical problems sparked considerable interest among scholars and officials in the capital. This surge in intellectual curiosity is well-documented among historians, although the movement’s history in the eighteenth century remains less known to many. The Mujangga edition, which had previously been shelved, is now available for historical research. A modern version of the Mujangga edition with proper punctuation and proofreading was recently published in its entirety, spanning 30 volumes, in December 2022. Modern historians continue to praise it as the most comprehensive and reliable source for traditional historical geography.[[237]](#endnote-238)

Furthermore, the provincial and imperial maps created in the imperial workshops needed to be disseminated among the Confucian bureaucracy beneath the level of provincial governors. The Kangxi Atlas (a copperplate print) was only discovered in 1929 in its original location, the Imperial Palace of Mukden. Thus, throughout the entire history of the Qing Empire, Confucian bureaucrats needed to be more informed about the Kangxi Atlas and its subsequent extensions produced during the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns. These maps were exclusively created for military and logistical uses and kept relatively confidential from the civil bureaucracy, inhibiting any intellectual and cultural discussions arising directly from these geodetic surveys and maps. This, however, does not suggest that the upper ranks of the Confucian bureaucracy, including the provincial governors or the Ili commanders (military governors), were kept in the dark about this geopolitical information. They, indeed, were mindful of it. The pivotal question is how they attempted to propagate this geopolitical information within the Confucian bureaucracy, fully aware of the intellectual and cultural resistance they were likely to encounter. This subject is precisely what Ruan’s *Illustration and Explanation of Earth* addressed.

The year 1799 marked a critical transition for Ruan Yuan, moving from the Qing court to provincial governance. He participated in the imperial funeral of the late Qianlong emperor at the Qing court before taking up his new role as the provincial governor of Zhejiang. This year marks the end of a golden age, not just for him personally but also for his reconstruction of intellectual and political history of imperial China. He held the Qianlong emperor in high esteem, viewing him as an exemplary Confucian monarch under whose patronage Confucian scholarship and culture had thrived like never before. Moreover, his reign had given rise to new academic disciplines and areas of study, taking classical interpretation to unprecedented levels of sophistication and depth. Yet, as Ruan noted, the conclusion of the Qianlong era implied at least a temporary halt to this magnificent epoch, and he mourned the impending end of this remarkable period, characterized by cultural vitality and scholarly progression. For Ruan, the demise of the Qianlong emperor closed a glorious chapter that had significantly shaped Chinese intellectual and cultural history.[[238]](#endnote-239)

Ruan Yuan expressed this message in a latent and obscure way to not offend the sitting Jiaqing emperor. Driven by a passion for classical knowledge, Ruan was imbued with a strong sense of purpose. He recognized it as his duty to commemorate and encapsulate the era of relentless pursuit and discovery of Chinese antiquity, which had been obscured by heresy, misunderstanding, forgery, insincerity, and deliberate appropriation for nefarious political or selfish motives in the past millennia. In his quest, he introduced a novel concept of space and time to illustrate crucial historical models and examples, setting a new standard and direction for comprehending the transmission and preservation of classical knowledge. Driven by this profound sense of responsibility, Ruan’s dedication and sponsorship of classical scholarship and methodology would manifest later. However, at that moment, his position in the Qing court as the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Revenue and the Director of the Institute of Mathematics of the Imperial Academy allowed him to initiate two pressing tasks before his imminent departure. First, he compiled a comprehensive history of mathematical astronomers (Chouren). Simultaneously, he sponsored the publication of *Illustration and Explanation of Earth* in 1799.

## Illustration and Explanation of Earth:

In the unusually long prologue of the book *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*, Ruan began by suggesting that the people from the Western Ocean (codeword for Europeans) possess exceptional expertise in understanding the principles of Heaven and Earth. However, their knowledge has been implied in Chinese antiquity. Scholars should neither blindly embrace it because it is new nor dismiss it simply because it appears marvelous. Neither extreme stance is the correct approach to take. This argument was directed primarily at the Confucian bureaucracy and scholars, as the Qing monarchy had wholeheartedly adopted Jesuit science. However, Confucian scholars, deeply rooted in their traditional knowledge and perspective, needed help to embrace the foundational principles of Jesuit mathematical astronomy and geodesy.[[239]](#endnote-240)

Historians were quick to notice the emergence of Ruan’s remarkable position. Some historians have dismissed this discursive stance as “the origin myth” or “an arrogant ethnocentrism,” but such characterization is fundamentally flawed. Ruan’s argument does not center around origin or ethnocentrism. Rather, it aligns with Voltaire’s concept of “tolerance” towards valuable ideas or practices from a different or foreign culture. In essence, we should be open to accepting them, even if they come from a culture that may appear inferior. Ruan employed a heuristic device, drawing from the commentary traditions on the Confucian Classics, to detect or discover different latent historical patterns. The heuristic device was a prevailing trend among scholars to incorporate new interpretations or innovative doctrines through the medium of commentary. Unfortunately, this trend in the eighteenth century has led some historians to misunderstand the Chinese intellectual tradition as fundamentally conservative or merely a blind adherence to textual authority. Dai Zhen, among others, was a pioneering thinker who faced challenges in breaking free from the constraints of commentary traditions. Within Ruan Yuan’s Circle, many admired Dai Zhen and actively sought innovative methods to reinvigorate Chinese antiquity. They utilized the commentary formats to facilitate their reinventions and groundbreaking ideas. Unfortunately, some historians failed to recognize this form of creativity, leading them to make baseless claims that China lacked “philosophy” during the eighteenth century.

The book *Illustration and Explanation of Earth* was a great example. In the prologue, Ruan recalled how Qian Daxin had asked him to publish a book that the Qianlong emperor specifically instructed to be translated and compiled.[[240]](#endnote-241) After reading it, Ruan was impressed, finding it to be a superior explanation and illustration compared to the earlier work *The Explanation of Instruments and Measurements* (Biaodu shuo) by the Italian Jesuit Sabatino de Ursis (1575–1620). Ruan’s mention of Sabatino de Ursis demonstrated his vast knowledge of previous works by Jesuit missionaries and familiarity with their written texts. This enabled him to provide a well-informed opinion on Benoist’s new book. In his comments, Ruan Yuan connected the term “diqiu,” referring to Earth in Benoist’s book, and “diyuan,” coined by the thirteenth-century Persian astronomer Jamāl al‐Dīn. During the Mongol Yuan era in 1271, Khubilai Khan established an Islamic Astro-calendrical Bureau and an astronomical observatory, operating parallel to the traditional Chinese Astro-calendrical Bureau. During this time, Jamāl al‐Dīn played a role in compiling a zīj (an astronomical handbook with tables) in Persian, which incorporated newly observed planetary parameters and was later translated into Chinese under the title *Huihuilifa* during the early Ming dynasty. Additionally, Jamāl al‐Dīn was associated with *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Yuan*, completed in 1291. Within this text, the Chinese phrase “diyuan” was documented using the Chinese transliteration “kulaiyiaerzi,” representing the Persian word for the wooden globe.[[241]](#endnote-242)

Historian Timothy Brook’s account in *The Great States* highlighted the significance of the wooden globe, now a source of national pride for Iran. However, little did Brook know that Ruan had already recognized this global connection in 1799. The early representation of the terraqueous globe captivated Ruan’s interest, leading him to believe it could be an early precursor to the Jesuits’ concept of the spherical Earth. As it turned out, Ruan’s intuition was not far from the truth.

To substantiate his point, Ruan began with a polemic. He argued that the merging of Ocean and Land formed a terraqueous globe, a spherical body located at the center of the cosmos. He reasoned that if Earth were not positioned at the cosmos’ center, the observable celestial spheres would not be able to rotate at varying speeds around Earth. The division of the celestial line of solar movement by equinoxes into two halves, with 12 hours above and 12 hours below the horizon, served as additional evidence supporting the idea that Earth is round. Continuing his explanations, Ruan aimed to provide straightforward illustrations intended for local scholars as his readers. For example, he observed that early Chinese timekeeping and astronomy employed twelve two-hour periods of the day, corresponding to the sexagenary cycle. As a result, naming these two-hour periods precisely followed the principles of the sexagenary cycle, as prescribed in *The Book of Changes* (Yijing) and familiar to local scholars in their daily life. To further clarify, Ruan provided relatable examples. When a person on Earth faced the sun directly, it marked the “wu” two-hour period. At midnight, it would be the “zi” two-hour period. Moving thirty degrees east of the “zi” point would indicate the “wei” two-hour period and moving thirty degrees west of the “zi” point would signify the “si” two-hour period. Ruan observed that the distance between the two locations equaled 250 *li* when the measured difference was one degree. Therefore, for one two-hour period, covering thirty degrees, the distance between two locations situated one two-hour period apart would be 7500 *li*.

The above principle of geodesy would be invalid if the Earth were square. And the principle of geodesy was not a creation of the Western Ocean people. Ruan introduced a major twist by suggesting that the principle of geodesy was originally from the Western region (Central Asia) and was brought to China by Jamāl al‐Dīn during the Mongol Yuan Empire. However, this idea was also implied in ancient philosophy and classical descriptions. Therefore, Jamāl al‐Dīn did not come up with a new explanation. If Jamāl al‐Dīn’s innovation was partially implied by Chinese antiquity, what should we say about the Jesuit appropriation of the early modern geodesy? We were able to integrate Jamāl al‐Dīn's mathematical astronomy and geodesy. So, why can we not also incorporate the works of Sabatino de Ursis, Ferdinand Verbiest, or Michel Benoist?

Ruan contributed to the debate by referring to the principle of early modern geodesy, explained by the famous mathematical astronomer Mei Wending. Although many scholars and officials usually mention the principle from the Kangxi emperor, Ruan emphasized the importance of Mei Wending’s writings, as he had extensively studied and incorporated Jesuit sciences. Mei Wending’s principle states that moving one degree north or south equals 250 *li* between two locations. This principle was the basis of early modern geodesy, which Verbiest used to convince the Kangxi emperor to conduct an empire-wide geodetic survey and create the Kangxi Atlas. In addition to citing Mei Wending, Ruan also provided his observations. He pointed out that the latitude in the Jiangnan province is 32 degrees, while in the Zhejiang province, it is 30 degrees, resulting in a difference of 2 degrees. According to his explanation, if someone from Jiangnan were to view a person in Zhejiang, that person should appear tilted. Similarly, the latitude in Beijing is 40 degrees, while on Hainan Island, it is 20 degrees. If someone from Beijing were to view a person at Hainan Island, that person should seem as if they might fall off the ground. However, such occurrences do not happen. Without a deep understanding of gravity, Ruan presented a common-sensical appeal. He emphasized that every person stands firmly on the ground with the heavens above their head, and there is no concern about falling off the ground. This simple yet compelling observation challenged existing beliefs and contributed to Ruan’s unique perspective on geodesy and the spherical Earth concept.[[242]](#endnote-243)

Ruan continued to assert that the terraqueous Earth could remain at the center of the cosmos due to the perpetual and uninterrupted movement and operation of the cosmos, as mentioned in a well-known quote from *The Book of Changes*. He used vivid analogies to illustrate his point. One analogy he employed was likening the cosmos to a pig’s bladder filled with enormous air, with Earth placed at the center like a pea within the bladder. He also likened it to a bowl filled with water and tied with a string, which, when spun rapidly, would not spill the water. Another analogy involved placing a wooden ball in the middle of a large water basin and stirring the water vigorously, causing the ball to remain at the center. Ruan further drew on the experience of climbing Mount Tai, where the cold wind blows and one's ears ache. He asked the readers to imagine a height a thousand times greater than Mount Tai, where the air moves even faster and more powerfully than what is experienced at the mountain's summit. According to Ruan, the air in the cosmos swirls rapidly and constantly, thus holding Earth steadily at the center. With these analogies, Ruan emphasized that every person standing on Earth would feel as if they were standing firmly on the ground, leaving no room for doubt about the Earth's central position in the cosmos. His explanations sought to dispel skepticism and reinforce his belief in the Earth's stable and central location within the universe.[[243]](#endnote-244)

Ruan’s analogies in the prologue appealed to the personal and relatable experiences of ordinary scholars in the lower Yangzi Valley. He aimed to dispel any potential contradictions between their life experiences and the concepts of a spherical Earth, assuaging any associated fears. His prologue served as a precautionary introduction to the main text of *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*. As a prominent opinion leader and provincial governor in the Lower Yangzi Valley, Ruan’s words carried considerable weight, far surpassing an unknown Jesuit missionary from Beijing (Benoist). His goal was to endorse early modern geodesy and cosmography, focusing on the cosmographical structure of the spherical Earth at the center, with celestial spheres encompassing the orbits of all seven planets and a stellar sphere forming the outer layer. These cosmological aspects followed “ancient methods,” aligning with the fundamental premise of the Confucian Classics, which attributed the origin of all good ideas to ancient times. Ruan’s emphasis on this cosmology and cosmography showcased his dedication to the enduring principles of antiquity, even as he rejected the inclusion of exotic details and customs from foreign lands found in world maps by Ricci and Verbiest. He believed that the collapse of the ideal ancient rites and music (representing high civilization) led to the dispersal of Chinese mathematical astronomers to various peripheral regions in four directions. In endorsing early modern geodesy and cosmography with a focus on these ancient principles, Ruan sought to reinforce the significance of his perspective by reconstructing both the content and context of Chinese intellectual tradition. Specifically, authentic civilization could extend into distant, peripheral areas and ultimately make its way back to the civilized core. The crucial factor is the ability to identify this lost treasure.[[244]](#endnote-245)

In conclusion, Ruan reiterated his opening statement, emphasizing that cosmology and cosmography, including the concept of a spherical Earth, germinated from the “ancient method” in Chinese antiquity. He urged scholars not to embrace it solely because it was a novel idea blindly nor to dismiss it as marvelous. Instead, Ruan advocated for tolerance and acceptance of this idea, as presented in the book *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*, while promoting early modern geodesy’s significance. By encouraging an open-minded approach, Ruan sought to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of these concepts within the broader intellectual landscape.[[245]](#endnote-246)

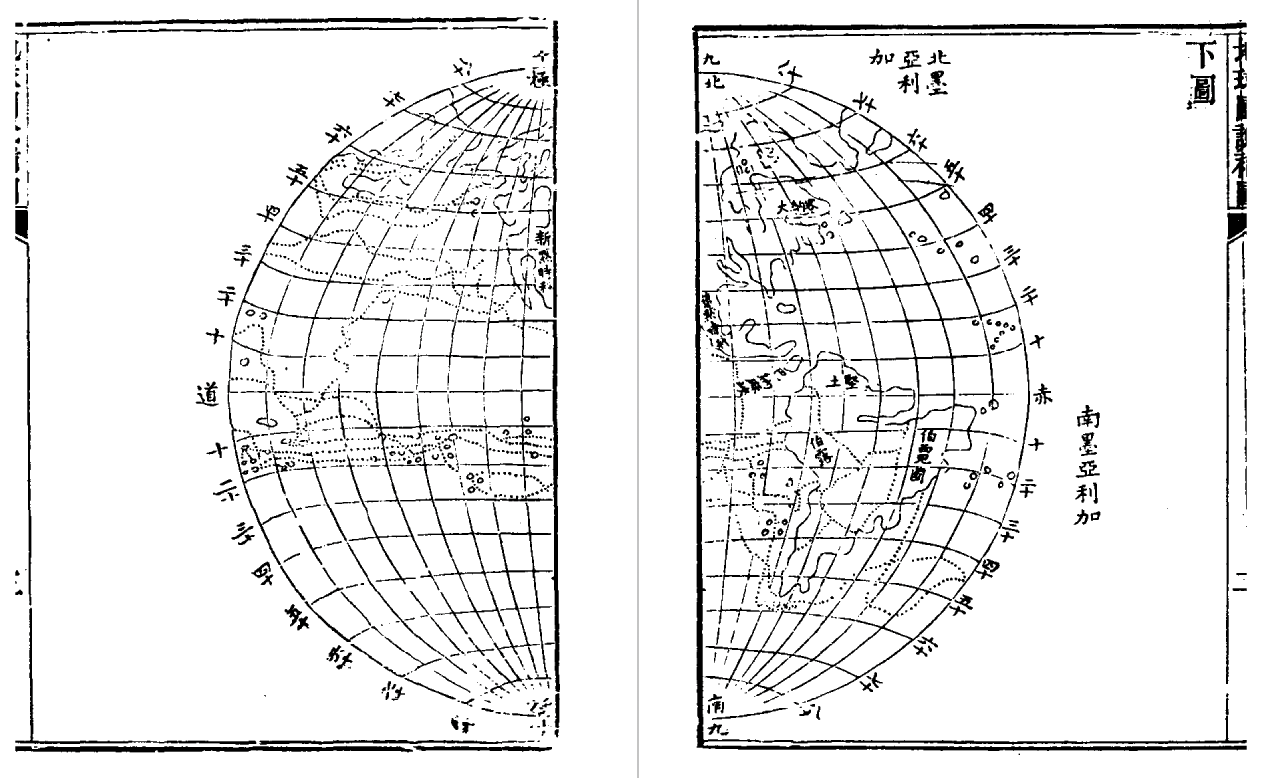
*Illustration and Explanation of Earth* offers a comprehensive depiction, encompassing elements such as latitudes, longitudes, and the novel concept of Earth as an ellipsoid. The book details the four continents—Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. It also elucidates the positioning of the sun, moon, and five planets, the celestial sphere, their dimensions, and the changing seasons. Two sections address potential errors in astronomical measurements stemming from the observer's relative position to Earth's center (diameter) and atmospheric refraction, which can lead to various inaccuracies. Another portion explores the shape of Earth, solar and lunar eclipses, the sun, moon, five planets, and comets. Additionally, it includes a section dedicated to using the armillary sphere as a model for astronomical understanding. The scattered structure of the book indicates that it was not intended as a systematic guide to contemporary astronomical knowledge, as there were already official texts that catered to professional mathematicians and astronomers involved with the Qing court.

Remarkably, *Illustration and Explanation of Earth* had no mathematical or astronomical content apart from the principles of early modern geodesy. It did provide measurements of Earth’s diameter and an intuitive, qualitative understanding of phenomena like eclipses, the movement of the sun and moon, and the transition of seasons. However, the book did not contain any mathematical computations. There was no arithmetic, no application of the Pythagorean theorem, no method for extracting square roots, no plain or spherical trigonometry, no algebra, and no geometry. These were all standard features in the imperial mathematical and astronomical texts. Ruan, who held the title of Director of Mathematics in the Imperial Academy and patronized accomplished mathematicians like Li Rui (1769–1817), who compiled *A History of Mathematical Astronomers* and contributed significantly to Chinese algebra of his era, could incorporate more mathematics into the book. However, the omission of mathematical concepts was intentional, as the goal was to simplify the content for a lay audience rather than a reflection of Ruan’s mathematical competence.[[246]](#endnote-247)

Here is an example: *Illustration and Explanation of Earth* offers clear and concise pictures of Earth’s front (Eurasia, Africa, and Oceana) and back (North and South Americas), including meridian lines and latitudes. Historians have often ignored these illustrations because they doubted the source's credibility or found them difficult to square with the existing historiography. The meridian lines are primarily based on the equator, bisecting it to 160 degrees. Each degree forms a separate elliptical arc, meeting at the North Pole above and the South Pole below, representing the Earth's 360 degrees of longitude. These lines are the meridians at each place. The latitude lines are primarily based on the meridians, bisecting them into 160 degrees. Each degree forms a separate circle, with the equator forming the largest circle. The circles' size decreases further from the equator, converging to a point at the North and South poles. This represents the 90-degree distance from the Earth's equator to each pole. Both meridian and latitude lines are divided into 360 degrees. Benoist's map had a notable difference from Verbiest’s map. Benoist included the French measurement of the meridian, which revealed that the Earth is elliptical. The shape of planet Earth resembles an oblate spheroid. This means that it is mostly spherical but slightly flattened at the poles and bulges at the equator. The diameter of Earth along the equator is larger than the diameter measured from pole to pole.[[247]](#endnote-248)

A two images of a globe

Description automatically generated



On the surface of Earth, what did the concept of “Grand Union” signify for the Qing Empire? The planet Earth now contained the entirety of the known world. The Qing forces only controlled a portion of Eurasia. During the Mongol Yuan dynasty, “Grand Union” referred to spatial magnanimity, while in the Chinese Ming dynasty, it referred to the Chinese homeland. Considering that the entire Earth had become the known world, how did the Qing dynasty rethink or reframe its political territory? What interpretations did the Qing Empire adopt or embrace? To answer this, we need to revisit the pivotal innovation of *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*. The Heshen version of this essential territorial documentation, released in 1751, and the Mujangga version, released in 1842, shared one crucial innovation that bifurcated the Qing Empire into two domains. This division almost aligns perfectly with the Hu Huanyong demographic line, partitioning the Qing Empire into the agricultural and nomadic domains or the inner and outer realms. Generally, it is incredibly challenging for imperial states to expand and inhabit diverse ecologies across vast territories. The reason for this lies in the economic geography and geographical barriers, such as the Gobi deserts, the Manchurian-Mongolian grasslands (or the Steppe), and the Tibetan Plateau, which historically inhibited the Chinese state’s invasion or occupation of Central and South Asia. These geographical obstacles played a pivotal role, setting seemingly impossible limits on human mobility.[[248]](#endnote-249) Most importantly, such geographical barriers continue to serve as crucial constraints on China's development even today. Historian Peter Perdue refers to it as the Great Qing expansion, which managed to conquer Central Asia through military occupation despite the challenges of geography and ecology.[[249]](#endnote-250)

The expansion of the Qing Empire was far from simple or inevitable. Its legacy left the Republic of China grappling with an imbalanced territory, both geographically and demographically. The Chinese geographer Hu Huanyong (1901–98) recognized this issue as early as 1923. A staunch nationalist, Hu was among his contemporaries who urgently sought to chart China's uneven population distribution. His primary concern revolved around a modernist notion of relocating people from densely populated areas to scarcely populated regions. However, before he could devise a solution, Hu was driven to sketch out the stark reality of what he viewed as a drastically uneven population spread. His findings were straightforward, revealing a division into two demographic Chinas. Hu drew a vertical line, now called the Huanyong line. It bisects China into two distinct geographical and demographic territories (refer to the Hu Huanyong line figure in chapter one).

To overcome the geographical and structural barriers indicated by the Hu Huanyong line, the Qing Empire devised an innovative geo-epistemology that coalesced China proper, Central Asia, and the Tibetan plateau into an integrated and unified entity. This was achieved by reinterpreting and reconfiguring the civilizational principle of the “Grand Union” to symbolize the amalgamation of both the agricultural and arid territories or the inner and outer realms. The agricultural and inner areas can be likened to the Chinese heartland during the Ming dynasty. In contrast, the arid and outer areas illustrate the spatial magnanimity of the Qing Empire, larger than the territories of the historical Han and Tang Empires. Such a stance was not merely a display of hubris or exaggeration. Indeed, the Qing Empire achieved remarkable military victories in Central Asia and meticulously chronicled these successes through comprehensive geodetic surveys.

The territorial documentation and human geography, *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*, highlighted this interdependence by coining the new categories of the unity divisions (China proper) and the border divisions (Mongolia, Central Asia, and Tibet). These categories were unprecedented because most scholars and officials commonly employed the concept of “inner and outer realms,” with the main chokepoints of the Great Wall serving as the demarcation between the internal and external domains. During the Ming dynasty’s reign of more than 300 years, China proper developed a strong sense of Chinese homeland among those who lived within the inner realm’s defensive chokepoints. Historically and institutionally, China’s administrative governance has been organized into territorial units through provincial governments. As such, the outer realm or “saiwai” was seen as foreign, with harsh living conditions for nomads, unfamiliar and peculiar individuals, rugged terrain, extreme weather, and an uncomfortable way of life. The Qing Empire came from Manchuria, allied with the Mongols, and conquered Central Asia. Officially, they could not perpetuate the Chinese stereotypes and distinctions between the inner and outer realms. Hence, *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* had to announce an authorized geo-epistemology emphasizing territorial unity. The categorization of unity and border divisions held a crucial ideological significance in demonstrating the territorial integrity of the Qing Empire rather than just being nominal distinctions.

In concluding his work, *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*, Benoist underscored the profound importance of the headwaters of the Yellow River. Having gone through detailed descriptions of Eurasia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, Benoist contended that a single individual could not witness or travel to every country under the heavens. Numerous scholars embarked on far-reaching journeys to document distinctive cultures, spread Confucian principles, discover extraordinary and fascinating traditions to broaden their perspectives, inspect borders and geographical features, and encounter eminent thinkers and figures. Travel challenges always encouraged these pursuits. For example, Zhang Qian (?–114 BCE) from the Han dynasty ventured into the Western region, and the Mongols ventured to the headwaters of the Yellow River in Kunlun. Our illustrious emperors Kangxi and Qianlong dispatched expeditions to scrutinize the Yellow River’s headwaters, with their findings being more meticulous and precise than any prior reports. Our esteemed Qianlong emperor spread his virtues and military prowess far westward, leading to numerous countries yielding to his reign and integrating into our territorial boundaries. As an outsider from the Western Ocean, Benoist modestly voiced his privilege and respect in serving the Qing Empire during such a pivotal time. His mission was to depict and clarify the features and landscapes of the Western region as part of the Qing Empire and to explain how the expansion of the Qing Empire could contribute to this spectacular cosmos, where Earth resides at the center, encircled by celestial bodies, the five planets, and constellations.[[250]](#endnote-251)

Benoist continued to praise the Qianlong emperor as magnificent and sacred. His Majesty’s cultural achievements and military might transcend all previous dynasties. He conquered ten thousand *li* of the western territory. The dangerous, faraway, fierce, and stubborn land is now part of our territory. Those who speak ignorant words and wear weird clothes all kneel and touch their foreheads on the ground, showing their submission to his majesty’s authority. This description certainly aligns with Max Weber’s definition of political territory. In this sense, the Grand Union became the ultimate justification of the Qing Empire, claiming territorial authority over the inner and outer realms. More pointedly, merging the inner and outer realms did not form the Middle Kingdom. Instead, encompassing inner and outer territories, the Qing Empire constituted just a portion of the Earth. This understanding significantly changed the Qing imperial worldview.

In the following two sections, I will describe a synchronic example of “the border divisions or the outer realm” from the acclaimed work of Manchu scholar Qishiyi on Central Asia. Then, for an instance of “the unity divisions or the inner realm,” I will revisit Ruan Yuan’s analysis of the lower Yangzi fluvial plain, demonstrating the global context within his regional and territorial perspectives. On the cusp of Euro-American imperialism, the Qing Empire had developed a profoundly transformed geo-epistemology.

## Qishiyi’s Central Asia:

Very little is known about Qishiyi. Belonging to the Nimaca Hala Manchu lineage, he cleared the metropolitan examination in 1754, the same year as Ji Yun and Qian Daxin. In 1771, he was posted as a magistrate in Henan province, and in 1773, he was reassigned to Ürümqi in Central Asia. Qishiyi served in his Ürümqi position in the military government for over a decade before returning to Beijing, and he likely passed away around 1785. His name, Qishiyi, translates to “seventy-one.” Although he was of Manchu aristocratic descent, his family was not affluent. Despite clearing the metropolitan examination, he never managed to ascend the ranks of the Confucian bureaucracy, maintaining a relatively low-profile political presence. However, his work, *A Record of What I Heard and Witnessed in the Western Region* (Xiyu wenjianlu), stands as a masterstroke, later becoming an essential reference for any literature on Central Asia.[[251]](#endnote-252)

*A Record of What I Heard and Witnessed in the Western Region* and *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*, both penned around the same era, share a foundational premise rooted in early modern geodesy.[[252]](#endnote-253) This idea is encapsulated in the opening line of *A Record of What I Heard and Witnessed in the Western Region*. Despite being central to the celestial spheres, Earth is as tiny as a pinball within the vastness of the cosmos. The central plain—an allusion to the ancient Chinese civilization’s geographic heart—is merely a tiny fragment on Earth's spherical surface.[[253]](#endnote-254) This sentiment expressed by Qishiyi is a contemplative reckoning of the Qing Empire’s earthly positioning and the Earth’s relative insignificance in the grand scheme of the cosmos. It employs a rhetorical effect to captivate readers and represents his grasp of the cosmological understanding of his era. Although he held a low bureaucratic status, he was still considered one of the top intellectual elites in the Qing Empire. However, his access to geopolitical information was not limited, and his expertise in Ürümqi made him a valuable observer of Central Asia. Importantly, it is worth noting that he chose to commence his depiction of the territory referred to as the Western region—the focus of his book—secured through Qing territorial expansion with such a rhetorical device.

*A Record of What I Heard and Witnessed in the Western Region* is divided into five main sections. The first segment delves into the geographical aspects of the “New Territory” (Xinjiang)—a term Qishiyi and his contemporary officials used to refer to the newly annexed Central Asian territory. The second portion outlines the countries surrounding this New Territory in Central Asia, with an apparent strategic emphasis. The third section comprises historical accounts of five military offensives that cemented the establishment of the New Territory as Qishiyi knew it in 1777—the year he completed his book, as per the preface. The fourth part provides insight into the cultural practices and traditions of the Muslim populace residing in the area. The final section catalogs the relative positions and distances of all the military posts (juntai), established for relaying military updates. The Qing Empire, succeeding the previous Ming regime’s system, sustained 1785 such military stations (Yizhan) within China proper and extended these thoughtfully sized military posts to the New Territory.

Qishiyi’s depiction of the New Territory’s geography aligned perfectly with the geodetic surveys led by He Guozong and Mingghatu. These surveys extensively covered the northern and southern regions of the Tianshan mountain range, situated to the north of the Tarim Basin—the largest inland basin in China, encircled by the Tianshan Mountains to the north, the Kunlun Mountains to the south, and Arjin Mountain to the east. Named after the Tarim River that traverses a significant portion of its expanse, the Tarim Basin stands out for its exceedingly harsh desert environment, housing the expansive Taklamakan Desert, one of the world’s largest sandy deserts. The Kulun Mountains are located south of the Tarim Basin and adjacent to the Tibetan Plateau. This is the general vicinity where the headwaters of the Yellow River can be found. Both the Tarim Basin and the Tibetan Plateau prove inhospitable for human habitation. Consequently, in terms of military strategy, the Qing Empire focused on the elongated and narrow regions north and south of the Tianshan Mountains, which offered more feasible prospects for territorial control. The entire first part reads like a historical geography of military operations.[[254]](#endnote-255)

In the second part, Qishiyi presented an extensive listing of the diverse polities that bordered the New Territory throughout the eighteenth century. These encompassed significant entities like Kazakhstan, Burut, Andijan (a city in present-day Uzbekistan), Boluoer, Khanate of Kokand, Mughal Empire, Kashmir, Badakhshan, Timur Shah, Romanov Russia, and Bukhara (another city in modern-day Uzbekistan), among others. These polities were not only mentioned in critical historical works of that time.[[255]](#endnote-256) They were also classified as “foreign barbarians” (waifan) or “tributary countries” (Chaogongguo) in *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*.

During the eighteenth century, the people residing in the regions both north and south of the Tianshan Mountains exhibited stronger cultural and customary connections with the neighboring countries of Central Asia than with China proper. The Qing Empire achieved military dominance over these regions after enduring a series of arduous campaigns, resulting in the loss of countless lives. This hard-fought victory and the suppression of the Zunghar Mongols in the New Territory demonstrated the Qing Empire’s unwavering commitment to secure and maintain military control, creating colonial conditions for the Muslim populace in Central Asia. Protecting territorial integrity and security was paramount to the Qing Empire, as evident from these endeavors. In Qishiyi’s historical narratives, the Qing military devastated nearly all the Zunghar Mongols, after which the Uighur Muslims swiftly occupied the land and replaced the decimated Zunghar Mongols. As a result, most of the territories to the north and south of the Tianshan Mountains were primarily inhabited by Uighur Muslims. Consequently, during the latter half of the 18th century, the Muslim populace lived under a colonial-like existence due to the rule of the Qing Empire. Qishiyi explicitly illuminated the actions of the Qing forces, which encompassed the extermination of the Zunghar Mongols, quelling Amursana’s revolt in 1756, pacifying the Muslim uprising led by the Uighur brothers, Burhan al-Din and Xoja Jahan, suppressing Muslim revolts in Wushi in 1765, and facilitating the return of the Torghut Mongols in 1772. As each campaign concluded, it brought about tighter control and heightened military surveillance over the region.

In 1777, there were only three types of people living outside the Jiayu Pass, which serves as the chokepoint for the Great Wall that separates the inner and outer realms of the Qing Empire. These groups were the Mongols, Uighur Muslims, and Tibetans. Of these three, the Uighur Muslims stood out as being notably different from the Chinese population, unlike the Mongols and Tibetans. The Uighur Muslims, who appear more Caucasian than East Asian, possess distinct cultural traits in contrast to the Chinese inhabitants of mainland China. Historically, these communities were frequently designated as “barbaric” in the external sphere, but such insinuations were absent from both Qishiyi’s accounts and *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*. Qishiyi comprehensively elaborated on the Muslim communities’ societal customs and cultural traditions in the fourth section of his work. He initiated the discussion with Ramadan and described their marriage ceremonies, cuisine, beverages, funerals, and commerce. He further portrayed their greeting etiquette, festive celebrations, calendar events, house construction styles, and prohibition of divorce.[[256]](#endnote-257) He detailed what crops they cultivated, the types of insects and animals that inhabited the region, and the variety of sceneries available, such as Xinxuhai, where thousands of glacial lakes shimmer under the sunlight. It was previously believed that Xinxuhai was the headwaters of the Yellow River. During a survey conducted by the Qianlong emperor's team, it was discovered that the actual location was adjacent to it.[[257]](#endnote-258)

After his detailed account of his journey in the Muslim region, Qishiyi reflected: Under the rule of the Zunghar Mongols, the Uighur Muslims’ land was heavily taxed, with burdens imposed on hunting and agricultural yields. The Uighurs provided meat, wine, and women for the tax collectors, who, driven by their greed, robbed the Uighurs ruthlessly. To this day, Qishiyi noted, the Uighurs continue to hide their grain and money underground, an action he found both laughable and pitiful. Qishiyi then asserted that the Qianlong emperor had quelled and eradicated the Zunghar “barbarians,” thus liberating the Uighur Muslims from living in distress and elevating them to a peaceful and prosperous lifestyle. All Muslims could now savor their unique ways of living till the end of their natural lives. Notably, Qishiyi perceived the Qing military incursion as a liberation for the Uighur Muslims and applauded the Qing Empire’s occupation of the New Territory as legitimate. He viewed the Qing territorial expansion as finalized and absolute. The neighboring countries were predominantly Central Asian Muslims, but the Uighur Muslims residing in the New Territory now belonged to the Qing Empire. The ruthless Zunghar Mongols were defeated, and the Uighur Muslims were made subjects of the Qing Empire. Although they maintained their distinct and exotic way of life, they were no longer considered “barbaric.”

Despite the New Territory’s scarce resources and harsh living conditions, Qishiyi underscored its importance. Although the land was not known for its cultural vibrancy and had a sparse population, it was still crucial to document the history of the Qing conquest, fiscal management, military government, and the customs and cultures of the Uighur Muslims who migrated there and became subjects of the Qing Empire. As a result, Qishiyi contended, it was possible to understand the New Territory’s gradual evolution and even its transformation under the Qing Empire. Further, Qishiyi cataloged the relative locations and distances between all military stations in the New Territory. For instance, the span between Jiayu Pass and Hami, two key military posts, is 1470 *li*. Between these two primary stations, 23 smaller stations existed, spaced approximately 30 to 90 *li* apart depending on the terrain and transportation needs. Hundreds of such military stations filled the New Territory, forming the backbone of the Qing military government.[[258]](#endnote-259) Considering Qishiyi's cosmological introduction to his extraordinary book, it is reasonable to assume that he sourced these data by extrapolating data points from geodetic surveys, perhaps corroborated by military transportation records, given his four-year tenure in the military government.

Qishiyi meticulously recorded the New Territory, solidifying its recognition within the Qing Empire. As efforts by Qishiyi and other Qing administrative factions persisted, the Western Region or New Territory was effectively assimilated into the Qing territory (bantu). Within this territory, Mongols, Tibetans, Manchus, Chinese or Uighur Muslims, and the broader Chinese population were all considered subjects of the Qing. None were viewed as barbarians within the Qing boundaries. While there were external groups, like the British in the nineteenth century, who might act in ways perceived as barbaric and thus be labeled as such, groups like the Mongols, Tibetans, and Muslims were no longer categorized in this manner. Put differently, the term “barbarians” appears to have been primarily used for foreigners, particularly those perceived as hostile, rather than for the uncivilized groups within the Qing domain.

## Ruan Yuan’s Three Rivers:

In 1787, Zhu Gui (1731–1807), who was set to tutor the future Jiaqing emperor and was recognized as a political rival of Heshen in the Qing court, took on the role of Minister of Rites and traveled to Hangzhou in the Lower Yangzi Valley. During his visit, he engaged in a profound discussion with the distinguished scholar Wang Zhong (1745–1794) on the geopolitical significance of the Lower Yangzi Valley. Wang Zhong eloquently captured this dialogue in his essay, “*Guangling dui* (A Conversation about the Lower Yangzi Valley),” emphasizing a distinct consciousness of the Lower Yangzi Valley region.[[259]](#endnote-260)

Wang began by elucidating the cosmological significance of the Lower Yangzi Valley, drawing a correlation between twelve celestial constellations and twelve corresponding regions in China. Within this framework, Guangling was used to denote the Lower Yangzi Valley, though later, the term Guangling also came to refer specifically to the urban area of Yangzhou. Across the entire Chinese territory, the Yellow River had its source north of Kunlun Mountain, while the Yangzi River’s origin was south. Winding through China, the Yangzi River flowed eastward until it reached the ocean via the Lower Yangzi estuary. The construction of the Grand Canal, linking the Yangzi and Yellow Rivers, further elevated the Lower Yangzi Valley’s status, cementing its role as both a commercial and geopolitical hub in Qing China. In a sense, Wang Zhong eloquently demonstrated the cosmological point of the Yellow and Yangzi Rivers' headwaters and territorial contour of what we now reckon as China.

Wang recounted political and military events featuring heroic figures from the Lower Yangzi Valley. Wang embraced an unconventional and inventive approach to historiography in his retelling, positioning the Lower Yangzi Valley at the core of his historical narrative and diverging from *Dynastic Standard Histories* (Zhengshi). This divergence from tradition was so pronounced that Zhu Gui felt compelled to interrupt him for clarification. Wang, however, continued his story without pause, concluding with the following points: During times of peace, the Lower Yangzi Valley and the Yangzhou metropolitan area blossomed into a commercial center for the salt trade, benefiting countless peasants and contributing taxes to the central state, thereby easing the agricultural sectors’ tax burden. The region’s extensive waterways facilitated the transportation of goods, enriching all within the four seas. Should war erupt, the army in the Lower Yangzi Valley stood ready either to march in support of the central state or to hold its ground in anticipation of future restoration. Even if chaos were to persist, the intelligence and bravery inherent in the region’s populace would endure undiminished, a quality evidenced by the absence of any shameful surrenders over the past two millennia. Wang closed by extolling the Lower Yangzi Valley as an unparalleled region beholden to no one in the world.[[260]](#endnote-261)

This reevaluation of the Lower Yangzi Valley’s geopolitical importance, especially Yangzhou, can be attributed to the rise of Yangzhou, Suzhou, and Hangzhou as commercial metropolitan centers within the Qing Empire. It can also be attributed to the critical role of Yangzhou during the Manchu conquest of Lower Yangzi Valley. This newfound perspective was also shaped by the demographic shift towards southern China and extensive migration to Southeast Asia. Concurrently, the Qing Empire contended with the challenges posed by a Catholic Philippines, the civil war in Vietnam and its repercussions, European traders and colonizers passing the strategic chokepoint of Malacca, and the extensive Indonesian archipelago. These complex regional dynamics contributed to a renewed emphasis on the Lower Yangzi Valley’s significance in the broader context of East and Southeast Asia during the Qing period. Wang Zhong’s essay astutely identified this pivotal transition by delving into its role in the historical tapestry of China’s early modern period.

Around 1800, the Lower Yangzi Valley and coastal China began to diverge from the interior regions of China, a shift accentuated by the turmoil of the White Lotus War. In 1799, in a bid to reassert his authority and in reaction to the unsuccessful efforts against the White Lotus rebellion, the Jiaqing emperor took decisive action against Heshen, leading to Heshen’s execution. Subsequently, the emperor dispatched Ruan Yuan to the Lower Yangzi Valley, naming him the governor of Zhejiang province. This decision was influenced by suspicions of Ruan's association with Heshen. Ruan was not tasked with suppressing the White Lotus movement. Instead, he was charged with countering the threats posed by Vietnamese-supported sea raiders along the Southwestern coast. After Heshen's downfall, Ruan actively sought to align himself with the influential Zhu Gui and Zhu Yun (1729–1781), two prominent brothers in the Jiaqing emperor’s court. Ruan was balancing his career aspirations while distancing himself from past associations. This might explain why many official records and his chronological biography do not highlight his ties to Heshen.

From Ruan’s perspective, recent developments marked an end to one chapter and ushered him from the Qing court into his position as a provincial governor. Beyond his proximity to the emperor and political influence, a territorial official's financial benefits and undisclosed earnings made serving as a provincial governor more enticing than simply working within the Qing court. He served in various capacities, starting in Hangzhou (Zhejiang province), then moving to Kunmin (Yunnan province), and finally settling in Canton (Guangdong and Guangxi provinces). There, he witnessed a diverse array of visitors, traders, and invaders converging on China's shores. Eager to relay these insights, Ruan’s governance varied with each post. In Hangzhou, he distinguished between local raiders and their Vietnamese counterparts. In Kunmin, as the Yungui governor, he adeptly managed relations with the area’s minority populations. While overseeing Guangdong and Guangxi in Canton, he grappled with European trade dynamics and the growing opium trade challenge. Facing the surge of British traders, missionaries, and explorers, Ruan’s policy experience became unparalleled. Historian R. Kent Guy notes that throughout his tenure in these regions, Ruan navigated the unique challenges of border provinces where military governance was paramount.[[261]](#endnote-262)

Ruan was overseeing more than just any typical border province. He ardently supported the publication of *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*, with his dedication evident in its prologue. Ruan’s unwavering belief in Confucian universalism remained even when faced with foreign philosophies. He saw these foreign concepts as complementing and reaffirming Confucian doctrines, much like how a vast ocean accepts waters from many rivers. The idea that European advancements in science and technology could sway future generations steering them away from Confucian principles, was inconceivable to him. Given his deep convictions in Confucian universalism, familiarity with early modern geodesy and science, and administrative roles in multiple border provinces, how did he cope with marine raiders from Southeast Asia?

The Le dynasty, which ruled present-day northern Vietnam from 1428 to 1789, was embroiled in a drawn-out conflict during the 17th century. This conflict, which echoed into the 18th century, pitted the northern Trinh lords against the southern Nguyen lords. The Tay Son dynasty eventually stepped in, ending the long-standing feud between the Trinh and Nguyen lords and marking the fall of the Le dynasty in 1789. In this move, they unified Vietnam after two centuries of division. They also forged diplomatic relations with the Qing Empire, earning the recognition of the Qianlong emperor as the rightful ruler of Vietnam. Under the leadership of the prominent Tay Son leader, Nguyen Quang Bình, who later became Emperor Quang Trung, Vietnam enjoyed relative peace and prosperity. However, the inept rule of his successor paved the way for the ousted Nguyen lord, Nguyen Anh, to retake southern Vietnam and eventually supplant the Tay Son with the Nguyen dynasty in 1802.[[262]](#endnote-263)

During the protracted struggle between the Trinh and Nguyen lords, both factions frequently purchased grain from Chinese raiders, who were divided into two main groups in eastern Guangdong province: Fengwei and Shuiao. In 1794, the Tay Son regime provided these raiders with warships, enabling them to attack the southeastern coast of Fujian province. Supported by the Tay Son, this maritime offensive pushed north, creating disturbances in Zhejiang province. They struck Puduo in 1798 and Wenzhou in 1799. By 1800, when Ruan Yuan assumed his role as the governor of Zhejiang province in Hangzhou, he carefully assessed the geopolitical situation in Southeast Asia. He noted the Tay Son regime’s collaboration with the Chinese sea raiders. Unlike the White Lotus rebellion, a domestic conflict raging in central China, Ruan recognized that this was a different situation. He was dealing with a foreign power, officially acknowledged as a tributary state, not a clear domestic enemy of the Qing Empire.[[263]](#endnote-264)

Ruan Yuan’s campaign against the marine raiders was, however, not a success but a prolonged struggle with the coalition of Vietnamese navy and Chinese raiders. The Qing navy from time to time expelled the raiders and could not pursue them into the south. The raiders could always regroup, resupply their ships and attack again. The reason that the Qing navy could not effectively defeat the harassing raiders was the Vietnamese technological superiority in warship and weaponry, and Ruan Yuan admitted as much.

The Nguyen dynasty, which began in 1802, shared similarities with Choson Korea and Tokugawa Japan as unique neighboring states. The Qing Empire acknowledged them as part of the Confucian civilization, with classical Chinese playing a significant role in their elite education. Unlike Tokugawa Japan, Choson Korea and Nguyen Vietnam maintained a civil service examination system and integrated the Confucian *Classics* and *Four Books* into their academic programs. Within Confucian categories, Choson Korea and Nguyen Vietnam were esteemed highly in the civilizational hierarchy.[[264]](#endnote-265) Yet, official accounts occasionally described Vietnamese warships as barbaric. According to Ruan, any nation that sponsored sea raiders targeting the Chinese coastline was viewed as a foe, irrespective of its civilizational rank. Ruan prioritized real-world geopolitical issues over traditional civilizational tiers, demonstrating a practical stance. This emphasis on territorial realism aligns with the overarching narrative from *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing*, which discusses tributary or adjacent states like the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, and even the British.

Given Ruan’s position as a governor in frontier provinces, his pragmatic geopolitical views, and his reliance on early modern geodesy, how did he view the Lower Yangzi Valley region as a pivotal part of Qing China, as eloquently articulated by Wang Zhong? This viewpoint, often overshadowed in historical accounts, emerges in his academic dialogues with Chen Yaotian (1725–1814) regarding the “Three Rivers” debate. The *Book of Documents* credits the legendary Emperor Yu for ingeniously creating three channels that effectively channeled water into Lake Tai during ancient Chinese times. This narrative was widely accepted by scholars and officials, given the minimal hydraulic challenges the lower Yangzi basin faced in the first thousand years of imperial Chinese history. The authoritative passage from the Yugong chapter of the *Book of Documents* states: “When three rivers flow in, Lake Tai remains steady” (Sanjiang jiru zhenze diding 三江既入，震澤底定). This text became a point of contention from the seventeenth century onwards, highlighting the growing geopolitical importance of the Lower Yangzi Valley. Engaging in classical debates was often a subtle way to discuss politics in imperial China, and the debate over the “three rivers” serves as a prime example. It was not merely evidential research; the stake is high in politics, hydraulics, and environmental reality.

However, the hydraulic difficulties in the Lake Tai region—a subregion of the Lower Yangzi Valley—only began to emerge at the onset of the eighteenth century. It is now acknowledged that these challenges resulted from the extended deforestation of the upper and middle Yangzi basin. Over time, the accumulation of sediment increased, eventually leading to substantial blockages that disrupted both the inflow and outflow of Lake Tai. As historian Mark Elvin has shown in the story of Jiaxing, the water-control structure took a long time to stabilize and had taken a long time to evolve. The regional system like Jiaxing or Lake Tai was inevitably connected to and coevolved with the sizeable hydraulic system, like the entire Yangzi River or the lower Yangzi estuary.

Lake Tai served as a significant reservoir, receiving and discharging water to multiple channels in the Lower Yangzi Valley. The ability of water to transport sediment is linked to the current’s speed raised to the fourth power. Hence, even minor alterations in speed significantly affect the sediment-carrying capacity, and the speed, in turn, is influenced by the channel’s depth. In addition to the sediment-carrying capacity, the problem was more than dredging and sedimentation in the Lower Yangzi Valley. The level of Lake Tai, for example, is higher than the farmland, and the level of the farmland is higher than both the Yangzi River and the sea level. Elevation differences among the Lake Tai, farmland, Yangzi River, and sea level directly affected irrigation technology. Irrigation of the farmland went both ways. When the water level in Lake Tai was high, farmers could allow water to flow down into the rice field. When the water level in Late Tai was low, the farmers could leak water from the rice field back into the lake. Hence the irrigation depended on the timing and measurement of the water level in Lake Tai. This was what scholars and policymakers called “water benefits” (shuili, hydraulics). They meant how to maximize the land’s economic outcome and agricultural productivity by managing irrigation and flood control of a given region. Therefore, as a provincial governor, Ruan would require a bird’s eye view of the pros and cons of suppressing specific local resistance and weight different local interests to promote the overall productivity of the Lake Tai region.

Within this regional framework, I will delve into the intellectual discourse about the “Three Rivers,” a traditional reference to the Lower Yangzi Valley area. The primary reference comes from *A Narrow View of the Yugong Chapter* (Yugong zhuizhi), penned by Hu Wei. By 1690, Hu Wei was a seasoned scholar who dedicated much of his life to studying historical geography. In 1703, when the Kangxi emperor embarked on his southern expedition, Hu was granted a special audience. He presented his work, *A Narrow View of the Yugong Chapter*, to the emperor and was subsequently commended for his lifelong commitment to historical geography, even in his later years. Much like Mei Wending before him, Hu Wei was a visionary, embracing the core tenets of early modern geodesy. The Kangxi Emperor's endorsement essentially stamped the work with a seal of approval, making it a trusted source for reference and citation. Notable figures like Mei Wending in mathematical astronomy and Hu Wei in historical geography were celebrated for their contributions, as their fields were considered both practical and invaluable to the Qing Empire.

In *A Narrow View of the Yugong Chapter*, Hu Wei tackled the historically debated topic of the “three rivers.” Hu also elevated the significance of the “three rivers” in the *Document of Books*. These rivers symbolize the convergence of the Han River (northern), the Yangzi River (central), and the Gan River (southern). Many scholars, including Hu Wei, aimed to pinpoint the three rivers that flowed into Lake Tai, suggesting that their confluence played a role in stabilizing the lake.[[265]](#endnote-266) Chen Yaotian delved into this matter, producing *An Evidential Inquiry into Three Rivers in the Yugong Chapter*. In this work, he vehemently contended that “three rivers” referred to a single watercourse. This interpretation was challenged by the esteemed historian and evidential scholar Quan Zuwang, leading to a series of scholarly debates. Chen meticulously analyzed relevant sections of the *Document of Books* and cross-referenced with other historical sources and Confucian *Classics*, employing various philological techniques to bolster his stance. He deduced from his in-depth study that only one channel flows into Lake Tai. According to Chen, the “three rivers” mentioned in the *Document of Books* allude to the confluence of the Yangzi River, the Han River, and the waterway from Yuzhang. Chen theorized that the merging of these rivers could cause extensive flooding. Thus, he posited that the legendary Emperor Yu might have engineered a vast basin to mitigate the impact of these rivers converging into Lake Boyang in the Middle Yangzi basin. Chen effectively elucidated the interconnectedness of the Lake Boyang and Lake Tai regions. He emphasized that the Lake Tai area should not be perceived as a standalone hydrological system.[[266]](#endnote-267)

In 1797, Ruan Yuan became the education commissioner for the Zhejiang province. He consulted Chen Yaotian, whose academic research provided crucial insights into hydraulic engineering, especially regarding the relationship between the Lake Boyang and Lake Tai regions. Two years later, in 1799, Ruan was appointed as the governor of Zhejiang. Continuing his earlier work, he authored *An Inquiry of the Illustrations of Zhejiang Province* (Zhejiang tukao), focusing on identifying where “three rivers” were, which includes a significant portion of the lower Yangzi basin. Ruan’s publication was designed to guide policy discussions addressing the growing challenges of sedimentation, flooding, and irrigation in the lower Yangzi region. Significantly, Ruan proposed an interpretation of the “three rivers” that diverged from Chen’s view and nearly all previous interpretations.Bottom of Form

Ruan’s interpretation of the classical phrase, “three rivers flow in,” redirected the end point of the three rivers from the traditionally believed Lake Tai to the ocean. Consequently, the phrase should be read as “three rivers flow into the ocean, thereby stabilizing Lake Tai.” Ruan expanded on this by explaining that if all three rivers—the northern, middle, and southern—which span the entire Lower Yangzi Valley and culminate in the estuary, are adequately dredged and flow seamlessly, Lake Tai will stay balanced and will not overflow, averting potential complications. This re-reading of the classical text was not just a scholarly analysis. Here, the hydraulic concerns of Lake Tai were integrated into the Qing Empire’s broader water management strategy. The focus shifted from the lake itself to the estuary and the adjacent coastline, emphasizing their long-term ecological and environmental significance. Lake Tai was no longer seen merely as a storage reservoir but as a regulatory system for the flow of the three rivers into the ocean. This broader view of the Lower Yangzi Valley’s connection to the ocean had evident geopolitical ramifications, from transporting grain from the Lower Yangzi Valley to the capital, Beijing, to considerations of migration and conflicts in Southeast Asia, encompassing regions like the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the strategic Malacca strait.

Ruan noted that his native town, Yangzhou, was situated near the northernmost of the three rivers. Between 1796 and 1802, he traveled extensively between Beijing and the Lower Yangzi Valley. During these travels, he consulted classical writings, conducted surveys of the coastline and river pathways, and cross-referenced textual sources with empirical measurements, leading to his aforementioned conclusions. The Yangzi River originates from the Upper Yangzi Valley, winding its way across China to reach Lake Tai before flowing into the ocean. In his subsequent illustrations, Ruan detailed the evolution and expansion of the Lower Yangzi Valley into a dynamic estuary over an extended period. He pointed out that the northern river originally met the ocean at Haining, evidenced by the ancient Temple of River and Ocean built there nearly two millennia ago, dating back to the Han dynasty. The coastline during Ruan’s time was much further than it was in ancient times, implying that Lake Tai was once much closer to the ocean. Consequently, the ecological and geographical landscape during the Han dynasty would have been markedly different from Ruan’s era.

Notably, the southern river originated from Lake Tai, flowed through Hangzhou, and emptied into the ocean at Yuyao. This river was known as the Zhe River (Zhejiang), which gave the province its name. By Ruan’s era, the southern river had disappeared, with sediment accumulation transforming the area into expansive marshlands along the coast. Drawing from his experiences as the Zhejiang governor, Ruan recounted his monthly inspections of the seawall embankment to ensure its structural integrity against the ocean’s waves. This embankment was constructed along the coast’s uneven hills. A stretch of flat marshland lay several miles inland from the embankment. Could this have been the ancient riverbed of the southern river?

A map of a river

Description automatically generated

Ruan posited that by tracing this ancient river’s path and cross-referencing it with historical sources and classical texts, all pieces fall into place, eliminating any disputes or uncertainties about the southern river’s location. He contended that prioritizing contemporary eyewitness accounts was the key to settling this enduring debate. These accounts could then be cross-referenced with historical and ancient texts to confirm the southern river’s existence near Hangzhou, even though it no longer exists. Through this approach, Ruan showcased how classical and historical studies can significantly enhance our contemporary understanding of the Lower Yangzi Valley’s waterway ecological transformations. Thus, classical discussions were resolved, serving intellectual, ecological, and political objectives.[[267]](#endnote-268)

Ruan perceptively transformed the Lower Yangzi Valley into an ecological zone that bordered the maritime world, opening sea routes to northeast and southeast Asia. Upon taking up the governorship in Canton, he recognized that the Canton system, referred to as the old China trade by the British, had positioned Canton as the southern maritime frontier and trading hub for European and American merchants. However, Ruan was keenly aware of the distinctions between these coastal trading hubs and places like Kunmin, where interactions with minority groups were more prevalent. In 1802, the year Ruan released his *An Inquiry of the Illustrations of Zhejiang Province*, he was in the early stages of his tenure as a provincial governor, and the White Lotus War was nearing its end. This period marked a pivotal realization for Ruan: a significant shift from traditional inland border provinces, like Shanxxi and Yunnan, to coastal trading centers like Zhejiang and Guangdong, which were more exposed to the evolving maritime dynamics. Ruan epitomized the adept and pragmatic leadership the Qing Empire needed as the early modern world transitioned from a Eurasian-centric focus to a network of trade routes dominated by the industrialized West.

It might not be solely about the “industrial West,” but rather how the Qing Empire could strategically position itself in the global geopolitical landscape they now faced. The extensive border with Romanov Russia, though significant, appeared less immediate or crucial compared to the intricate trade dynamics and defensive strategies along the coast. This ranged from the trading hub in Canton to the maritime grain transport in the north towards Beijing. This pivotal shift from Central Asia, which Qishiyi viewed as a recently subdued region of the Qing Empire, to the coastal areas, conceptualized by Ruan Yuan as new ecological zones interacting with the broader maritime world, was evident. For the first time in Chinese history, the Qing Empire’s territorial integrity was distinctly articulated, showcasing both its unity and delineated borders, all under the Qing monarchy’s umbrella, as highlighted in the *Grand Union Documentation of the Qing Empire*. Such a concept of territorial integrity would be incomplete without the global perspective offered by the *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*.

## Conclusion:

It is often said that history should not be viewed as a straightforward, linear progression with a predetermined end. What better way to exemplify this than by examining the evolving geopolitics of early modern China? The dominant narrative of China's quest for modernity is often depicted as a direct and progressive path towards freeing its people from foreign and domestic oppression, aiming to establish a prosperous Chinese nation. Interestingly, with China's ascent in the 21st century, the PRC now seeks to challenge the global superpower (USA). This ambition for global prominence still hinges on the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. In the PRC's historical account of the Chinese Communist Party, it is portrayed as the guiding force that led the Chinese people from the shadows, akin to an exodus, battling against Western imperialism, internal feudalism, and societal stagnation. This journey allowed the Chinese populace to reclaim their dignity and stand tall. With this newfound pride in 1950, the PRC steered the nation towards economic growth and industrialization. While the road was fraught with challenges, the PRC navigated its course cautiously, feeling its way forward. By 2008, China had reached industrial sophistication and started competing with leading technoscientific nations for cutting-edge technologies. China's rise to global significance is clear to everyone, and the Chinese Communist Party consistently credits this remarkable transformation to its guidance.

China's pursuit of modernity is rooted in a rich backstory that underscores the enduring legacy of the late empires, spanning from Ming to Qing. This late imperial era, while perceived as relatively static, was characterized by feudal landlordism, burdens on the peasantry, and limited awareness of the external world. In this book, I align with numerous historians in challenging the depiction of the "old regime" as a static, oppressive, and uninformed monarchy. Instead, I present the Qing monarchy of the eighteenth century as a dynamic, strategic, practical, and worldly political entity that expanded and governed an ever-growing territory. I concur with many scholars in resisting the portrayal of the Confucian bureaucracy as an unchanging, conservative, and strictly hierarchical institution. I characterize it as a complex interplay of imperial, provincial, and local agendas and loyalties, enriched with diverse perspectives and beliefs, capable of adapting to unique challenges, even if not always successfully, and intellectually varied in its objectives. Consequently, the Qing monarchy led the Qing state framework, with the Confucian bureaucracy and the Qing armies operating in tandem to execute its directives.

Historians frequently delve into the realms of tradition and memory, aspects that any historical body may inherently embrace, challenge, or disregard. In this book, I examine four imagined territories that the Qing Empire might have integrated. I emphasize the Qing monarchy’s adeptness in merging early modern geodesy, as introduced by the Jesuits, and conducting an extensive survey through its military mechanisms. Although this geodetic survey was revolutionary, its historical significance was somewhat muted, overshadowed by the Confucian bureaucracy’s intellectual and cultural appropriation. Yet, this survey was not entirely eclipsed within this framework. I further explore Ji Yun’s Circle and Ruan Yuan’s Circle to understand how early modern geodesy underwent cultural adaptation or reformation to resonate with classical Chinese legacy, initially in *A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters* and subsequently in *Illustration and Explanation of Earth*.

It is important to note that a significant portion of the Confucian bureaucracy was unfamiliar with early modern geodesy. A prime example is the *Complete Illustration of the Grand Union of All Under the Heaven for Ten Thousand Years* (Daqing wannian yitong tianxia quantu), published in 1811. The creator of this map remains unknown, but it is believed to be a hand-drawn replica of the original by Huang Qianren (1694–1771), the son of Huang Baijia (1643–1709) and grandson of Huang Zongxi (1610–1695). The legacy of the Huang family began with Huang Zongxi, a distinguished scholar who resisted the Qing monarchy’s rule after the Ming dynasty’s fall in 1644. Huang’s expertise spanned mathematical astronomy, historical geography, statecraft, phonology, and ritual studies. Naturally, a scholar of Huang’s stature was well-versed in Confucian Classics, Four Books, and historical texts, and was an exceptional essayist. The Huang lineage held significant influence in the eighteenth century, acting as thought leaders in a delicate political landscape. By the time Huang Qianren crafted his map, encapsulating the entirety of Confucian civilization, it is plausible to believe it represented the geographical insights of the finest Confucian minds who opposed the Qing monarchy and were deeply invested in understanding their world’s empirical details. This map’s reverence and distribution are evident, given its existence in 1811, later acquired by Arthur Williams Hummel (1884–1975) and gifted to the Library of Congress.[[268]](#endnote-269)A map of a city

Description automatically generated

This map stands out as a remarkable cultural artifact. Its significance is amplified for me due to its omission of two key elements typical of early modern geodesy. Firstly, it lacks graticules (or grids) derived from geodetic surveys, making the scaling appear inaccurate to contemporary viewers. Secondly, it does not depict the neighboring states of the Qing Empire with precision. To the modern eye, it overlooks vast regions of Eurasia, including South Asia, Siberia, Central Asia, and Europe. And it needs to include a better depiction of Northeast and Southeast Asia. The Huang family's resistance to the Qing monarchy seemingly isolated them from the wealth of information available to the monarchy. Only those in collaboration with the Qing monarchy, who were more receptive to foreign knowledge, like Ji Yun’s Circle or Ruan Yuan’s Circle, could produce comprehensive works such as *Illustration and Documentation of the Western Regions in the Imperial Territory* in 1762, *A Concise Record of the Yellow River's Headwaters* in 1782, and *Illustration and Explanation of Earth* in 1799. Even with Huang’s distance from the Qing monarchy, Huang Qianren seemed to adhere to the Confucian principles of dynastic governance and submitted to the Qing authority around 1800. All replicas bore the title referencing the illustrations of the entire realm under the Great Qing. However, their depiction of this realm was somewhat skewed. The geopolitical information of the Qing monarchy was only shared with the top echelon of its administration, not widely with Confucian scholars at large. Consequently, at the level of local gazetteers, there was a lack of awareness regarding the particulars of geodetic surveys.

As the Qing Empire began to falter around 1850, the Qing monarchy's exclusive hold on early modern geodesy and their collaborative historical geography projects with Ji Yun’s Circle and Ruan Yuan’s Circle were largely overshadowed. Notably, while *The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Qing* remained in wide circulation, its detailed human geography showed no signs of being influenced by early modern geodesy. Its broad reference and recognition as a geographical authority might stem from its lack of evident reliance on early modern geodesy. As the Qing monarchy teetered on the brink of collapse in the 1860s, and with growing resentment towards Christianity among Confucian scholars and the peasantry, the beleaguered Qing monarchy found it imperative to partner with emerging provincial elites to upgrade their military technology. This modernization, coupled with the rise of reformists and revolutionaries, ushered in a new era of pressing political challenges. Concurrently, the industrialized West introduced a more advanced form of geodesy tailored for military use. By the close of the nineteenth century, early modern geodesy, much like the Qing monarchy itself, seemed antiquated. The entire development of geopolitics, detailed in this book, has been forgotten and abandoned around 1900.

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1. There's a prevalent misconception in academic circles and popular culture that China's vast size has been a constant throughout history. Jared Diamond, however, offers a more nuanced perspective. He stands out among thinkers for dedicating a chapter to the exploration of the southward expansion of ancient Chinese civilization. See Jared M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 322–33. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires*, 1st edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge, 1993), 3–122; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 2: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 358–509, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139381314. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. This book builds upon Peter Perdue’s analysis of the Great Qing expansion and James Milward’s description of how the Qing empire managed its newly acquired realm in Central Asia Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864* (Redwood City, UNITED STATES: Stanford University Press, 1998). My book explains how the early modern Chinese state (Qing) understood its unprecedented *spatial extension* through its military and logistic operations in the eighteenth century. In other words, my book tells a tale of China's geopolitics and spatial ideology as embedded in the political and military process of territorial expansion from China proper to Central Asia and the Tibetan Plateau. Consequently, the Qing's territorial expansion became the rationale for finally dismantling one of the most persistent and powerful political ideologies ever in the Confucian civilization—barbarism. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Kendall A. Johnson, *The New Middle Kingdom: China and the Early American Romance of Free Trade*, Illustrated edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present* (Macmillan, 2016); Scott Kennedy, *Beyond the Middle Kingdom: Comparative Perspectives on China’s Capitalist Transformation* (Stanford University Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Literature, Social Life, Arts, and History of the Chinese Empire and Its Inhabitants*, Rev. ed (New York: C. Scribner’s sons, 1907). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. To my surprise, the following two excellent monographs do not cover Samuel Wells Williams: David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton: University Press, 2017); Stephen R. Platt, *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China’s Last Golden Age*, First edition. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018). The story of Williams awaits to be written. For those who are interested in his life and work, see Frederick Wells Williams, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams, LL.D.: Missionary, Diplomatist, Sinologue* (No place, unknown, or undetermined: G.P. Putnam’s sons, 1889). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Williams, *The Middle Kingdom*, “Preface,” xv. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Williams, “Preface,” xv. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Williams, “Preface,” xv. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Williams, Volume 1, 1. Jonathan Porter cites this passage with approval: Jonathan Porter, *Imperial China, 1350–1900* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 290–91. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History, Vol. 1: Abridgement of Volumes I-VI*, New Ed edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. By the end of the nineteenth century, China's image as the Middle Kingdom had prevailed. As David Hollinger has shown, the protestant missionaries continued to be the main sources of China’s images in the U.S. The second world war, however, changed the circumstances and brought a new generation of East Asian scholars to the fore. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. John King Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order*, Reprint 2013 ed. edition (Harvard University Press, 1968); Cf. Mark. Mancall, *China at the Center: 300 Years of Foreign Policy*, Transformation of Modern China Series (New York: London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1984). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*, Contemporary Asia in the World (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. P. M. Evans, “The Long Way Home: John Fairbank and American China Policy 1941-72,” *International Journal* 37, no. 4 (1982): 595–605, https://doi.org/10.2307/40202091. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Fareed Zakaria, “The New China Scare,” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 1 (2020): 52–69. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, Power and Morality Collection at Harvard Business School. (New York, NY: Random House, 1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Zhang Weiwei is an intellectual celebrity in China. He is currently the Dean and Distinguished Professor of the China Research Institute of Fudan University, director of the National Advanced Think Tank Council (the PRC think tank), and a senior researcher of the Shanghai *Spring and Autumn Development Strategy Research Institute* (the CCP think tank). His books are the best sellers in China, and he popularizes the construction of Chinese political discourse, building a confident and independent China, and the deconstruction of Western academic discourse. His ideas have been less well received outside of China, particularly in the United States [footnote], but this adverse reaction can also corroborate his popularity and influence in China. Such a powerful, articulate, and coherent voice cannot be decoupled from the reality of China's rise. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Weiwei Zhang, *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State* (Hackensack, N.J: World Century Publishing Corporation, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Christopher Coker, *The Rise of the Civilizational State* (Newark, UNITED KINGDOM: Polity Press, 2019), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=5725374. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. Wei-Wei Zhang, *The China Horizon: Glory and Dream of a Civilizational State* (Hoboken, N.J: World Century, 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. Zhao Tingyang 赵汀阳, *Tianxia Tixi 天下体系 (The System of Tianxia)* (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Tingyang Zhao, *All under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order*, *All under Heaven* (University of California Press, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520974210. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Tiejun Wen, *Ten Crises: The Political Economy of China’s Development (1949-2020)*, Global University for Sustainability Book Series (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). The economic historian Wen Tiejun cites Samir Amin and argues that from 1949 to 1952, the newly established PRC suffered its first national inflation crisis. The PRC managed to decouple itself from global capitalism and attain autonomous development of China's primitive accumulation and financial independence from capitalist society in a context of decolonization and socialist nationalization. In this period, the Soviet Union continued aid to China and transferred its industrial technology to Chinese industry. China retained its financial independence, insulated from the fluctuating exchange of global money. For the great majority of Chinese peasants, however, the cost of such independence was burdensome. Wen Tiejun and his collaborator Dong Xiaodan have counted eight major crises over China's economic development in the postwar world since 1949. Following every crisis, China continued to funnel its agricultural surplus into its growing industrial sector. Deng Xiaoping's 1978 rise to power in China saw the country move away from Maoism and adopt global capitalism, welcoming foreign investment into its industries. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. For the actual data and figures, please see The World Bank, “The World Bank in China,” https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future*, Asian Connections (Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. Zakaria, “The New China Scare.” [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. Edward Ashbee, “Countering China: US Responses to the Belt and Road Initiative,” in *Countering China* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685859442. By March 2022, a remarkable 144 countries had signed onto the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—China's massive investment and infrastructure development program—with significant implications for US foreign policy. Edward Ashbee explores how the US has reacted to this global expansion of Chinese power, tracing the arc of policy responses to the BRI from its inception in 2013 through early 2022. Also see Yiping Huang, “Understanding China’s Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, Framework and Assessment,” *China Economic Review* 40 (September 1, 2016): 314–21, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2016.07.007. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. Klaus Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019); Minghui Hu, “Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping,” *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8, no. 2 (November 1, 2021): 429–34, https://doi.org/10.1215/23290048-9299869. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. Several crucial elements comprise this definition:

    Monopoly on Force: The state alone has the prerogative to utilize, threaten, or sanction the use of physical force against its territory's inhabitants. This implies that only the state is authorized to enforce laws, and private deployment of physical force (like vigilante justice or private military forces) is forbidden unless explicitly permitted by the state.

    Legitimacy: The state's monopoly on force is deemed legitimate. While this doesn't necessarily indicate universal agreement with every instance of force, the state's right to employ force is broadly accepted.

    Territory: The state's jurisdiction is limited to a distinct geographical area. This territory is well-defined, with the state holding supreme authority within its borders.

    Human Community: The state symbolizes a group of people. It is a sociopolitical entity, not merely a physical or geographical one.

    While Weber's definition of the state is not universally embraced and other interpretations exist in political and sociological texts, his definition remains one of the most influential and widely utilized. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
31. Timothy Brook has postulated how a series of 'Great States,' from the Mongol, Ming, and Qing dynasties through to the modern republics of the twentieth century, ruled over the Chinese subcontinent and parts of, if not large swaths of, the nomadic regions. More specifically, these 'Great States' governed the Chinese subcontinent and the Steppe for more than seven centuries, with the modern republics inheriting their territories. In contrast, Pamela Crossley has breathed new life into the exploration of how these conquest dynasties managed to assert their dominance over China. It demanded a cosmopolitan ethos to unite the traditions of the Steppe world and the Chinese subcontinent. The early modern Chinese state (Qing) was tiny in comparison to the continuously expanding contemporary republics, which have permeated every facet of Chinese daily life. The Japan-based Chinese historian and political theorist, Hirano Satoshi, examined the Qing Empire from a unique perspective compared to North American scholars. He particularly explored the intricacies of 'Chinese-ness' or Confucian civilization concerning how East Asia grappled with the significant legacy of the Central Asian empire, especially when investigating Sino-Japanese collaboration and conflict within East Asia. Hirano's research definitively portrays the Qing Empire as a Central Asian sovereignty. Thus, it raises the question: What lasting impressions and effects did this empire leave on the Chinese mainland, the Korean Peninsula, and the Japanese archipelago? Brook, Crossley, and Hirano strive to elucidate how the Qing Empire connected the Buddhist-Shamanistic Steppe world with Confucian China as a 'universal empire'. Meanwhile, Perdue and Milward approach from geopolitical and military perspectives, supporting their theoretical standpoints. The contentious debate between Ho Ping-ti and Evelyn Rawski segregates interpretations along ethnic boundaries, a dispute that unfortunately does not lead to any resolution. Timothy Brook, *Great State: China and the World* (HarperCollins, 2020); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Wobbling Pivot, China since 1800: An Interpretive History* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Hirano Satoshi 平野聰, *Taishinteikoku to chuka no konmei 大清帝国と中華の混迷 (The Qing Empire and the Confusion of the Chineseness)* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
32. Hu Huanyong 胡焕庸, “中国人口之分布——附统计表与密度图,” 地理学报 2, no. 2 (April 15, 1935): 33–74, https://doi.org/10.11821/xb193502002. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
33. Mingyue Liu et al., “China’s Poverty Alleviation over the Last 40 Years: Successes and Challenges,” *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics* 64, no. 1 (2020): 209–28, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8489.12353. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
34. Recent demographers still consider Hu Huanyong line as a structurally valid description of China’s demographic distribution today. See Mingxing Chen et al., “Population Distribution and Urbanization on Both Sides of the Hu Huanyong Line: Answering the Premier’s Question,” *Journal of Geographical Sciences* 26, no. 11 (November 2016): 1593–1610, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11442-016-1346-4; Zhichao Hu et al., “Spatio-Temporal Patterns of Urban-Rural Development and Transformation in East of the ‘Hu Huanyong Line’, China,” *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information* 5, no. 3 (February 27, 2016): 24, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijgi5030024; Minmin Li et al., “Study on Population Distribution Pattern at the County Level of China,” *Sustainability* 10, no. 10 (October 10, 2018): 3598, https://doi.org/10.3390/su10103598; Xiangdong Gao, Xinxian Wang, and Beiqian Zhu, “The Distribution of Chinese Minority Populations and Its Change Based on the Study of the Hu Huanyong Line,” *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology* 1, no. 1 (December 2017): 2, https://doi.org/10.1186/s41257-017-0004-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
35. For recent historical scholarship on China’s ecological systems, see David Anthony Bello, *Across Forest, Steppe and Mountain: Environment, Identity, and Empire in Qing China’s Borderlands*, Studies in Environment and History (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Jonathan Schlesinger, *A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
36. Constantine Cavafy, *Complete Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 192–93. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
37. J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Revised ed. edition (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1982). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. Daniel Adam Mendelsohn, *Waiting for the Barbarians: Essays from the Classics to Pop Culture*, The New York Review Collection (New York: Review Books, 2012), ix–x. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. Cf. Ao Wang, *Spatial Imaginaries in Mid-Tang China: Geography, Cartography, and Literature*, Cambria Sinophone World Series (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2018). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
40. For China’s precocity, see John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History, Second Enlarged Edition* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 1–3; Li Ling Ling and 李零, *Wo men de Zhongguo 我们的中国 (Our China)*, Di 1 ban., 第 1 版. (Beijing Shi: Sheng huo, du shu, xin zhi san lian shu dian, 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
41. Jordan Branch, *The Cartographic State: Maps, Territory, and the Origins of Sovereignty* (New Yoir, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 17–35; Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 279–321. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
42. Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
43. Jeffrey Sachs, *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
44. Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
45. Jaspers, 71–77; Shamuel N. Eisenstadt, “The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics,” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv Für Soziologie* 23, no. 2 (1982): 294–314. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
46. Michael Loewe, *Problems of Han Administration: Ancestral Rites, Weights and Measures, and the Means of Protest* (Boston, UNITED STATES: BRILL, 2016), 145–241. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
47. Benjamin A. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Chʻang-Chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Cf. Wang Hui, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought:*, ed. Michael Gibbs Hill (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023), 20–108. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
48. Many lofty ideals came from antiquity studies. One of the most profound issues was the self-definition of “our civilization.” The deep reflection of what we are led to the distinction between the civilized (Chinese) and the barbarians. Both ancient Chinese and Roman elites could be xenophobic and obnoxious in person when they came across a farmer or uncivilized man from afar. Both the Romans and the Chinese, on the other hand, also collectively developed lofty ideas and institutions to define and reflect upon their civilizations. They inscribed these institutional frameworks and civilizational concepts into a set of constitutional texts. For instance, in the Chinese case, the Confucian *Five Classics* consisted of a group of moral and political beliefs embedded in the Chinese imperial system, espousing the Confucian civilization’s universal values. It was at this level that Han Chinese elites addressed the issues of distinguishing between civilization and barbarism. Likewise, the cosmopolitan elites of the Roman empire in the Mediterranean world, who were mostly bilingual in Greek and Latin, also distilled a cohesive civilizational ideal. The core values of ancient kingdoms and civilizations turned out to be driving forces centuries later, in the Renaissance and Enlightenment ages in Europe. Among others, historian John G. A. Pocock analyzes Edward Gibbon’s *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* in the broader contexts of Enlightenment. Pocock’s erudition is on full display in these four volumes of *Barbarism and Religion*, and each one of them has a subtitle to signify its content. As Pocock makes clear, the critical ideas of republicanism and secularism, developed from high antiquity, became the sources of progressive ideas and a contribution to our modern world.  J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, *Fulcrum.Org* (Princeton University Press, n.d.), 1–80. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
49. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Anne Walthall, *Pre-Modern East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History, Volume I: To 1800* (Cengage Learning, 2013), 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
50. Gan Huaizhen 甘懷真, ed., “Dong Ya li shi shang de tian xia yu Zhongguo gai nian 東亞歷史上的天下與中國概念,” Chu ban., 初版., Dong Ya wen ming yan jiu cong shu 62 (Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2007), 149–215. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
51. Muzhou Pu, *Enemies of Civilization: Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Hyun Jin Kim, *Ethnicity and Foreigners in Ancient Greece and China* (London: Duckworth, 2009); Don J. Wyatt and Nicola Di Cosmo, *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries and Human Geographies in Chinese History* (London ; RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
52. Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 93–162. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
53. John B. Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
54. To fully understand the significance of Confucian Classics in Chinese elite society, it's best to explore them within the framework of the civil service examinations. See Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
55. Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*, Harvard East Asian Series 16 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964). [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
56. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship*. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
57. For details, see Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics*; also see the excellent "Introduction" in Stephen W. Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition = Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals,”* Classics of Chinese Thought (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), xvii–xcv. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
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59. Ito Takayuki 伊東貴之, Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡辺義浩, and Hayashi Fumitaka 林文孝, *Chiran no hisutoria : kai seitō sei 治乱のヒストリア: 華夷・正統・勢 (Order and chaos in history: Chinese versus barbarian, orthodoxy, and historical tendancy)*, Shirīzu kī wādo de yomu chūgoku koten シリーズキーワードで読む中国古典 4 (Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku shuppankyoku 法政大学出版局, 2017); Yu Zhiping 余治平, *Chunqiu gongyang yixia lun: Rujia yi wenming jiao huawei benwei de yizhong tianxia zhixu sheji 春秋公羊夷夏论: 儒家以文明教化为本位的一种天下秩序设计 (Theory of Cvilization and Barbarism in Chunqiu gongyang: The Design of Global Order based upon hte Confucian culturalism)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
60. For a comparison of how to interpret Dayitong, see Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton [N.J.]: Princeton University Press, 2012), 11–43; For the contexts of He xiu’s life, see Lu Zhao, *In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture* (Albany, UNITED STATES: State University of New York Press, 2019), 137–70, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=5784220. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
61. Cf. Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, Martin Classical Lectures (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
62. Yu Zhiping 余治平, 春秋公羊夷夏论; Miller, *The Gongyang Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals: A Full Translation*; Ito Takayuki 伊東貴之, Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡辺義浩, and Hayashi Fumitaka 林文孝, 治乱のヒストリア. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
63. Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Lishi Zhongguo de Nei Yu Wai: Youguan “Zhongguo” Yu “Zhoubian” Gainian de Zai Chengqing 歷史中國的內與外 : 有關"中國"與"周邊"概念的再澄清 (The Inside and Outside of Historical China: A New Classification of the Ideas of “China” and Its “Periphery”)*, electronic resource (Xianggang: Xianggang Zhong wen da xue chu ban she, 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
64. Ito Takayuki 伊東貴之, Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡辺義浩, and Hayashi Fumitaka 林文孝, 治乱のヒストリア; Yu Zhiping 余治平, 春秋公羊夷夏论. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
65. Yuri Pines, “Beasts or Humans: Pre-Imperial Origins of Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy,” in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 59–102. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
66. For details, see E.G. Pulleyblank, “The Chinese and Their Neighbors in Prehistoric and Early Historic Times.,” in *The Origins of Chinese Civilizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 446–56; Bret Hinsch, “Myth and the Construction of Foreign Ethnic Identity in Early and Medieval China,” *Asian Ethnicity* 5, no. 1 (2004): 81–103. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
67. Kenneth Warren Chase, *Firearms: A Global History to 1700* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
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69. For a helpful discussion on spatial metaphor, see Ito Takayuki 伊東貴之, Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡辺義浩, and Hayashi Fumitaka 林文孝, 治乱のヒストリア, 2–28. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
70. Li Ling Ling and 李零, *Wo men de Zhongguo 我们的中国 (Our China)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
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72. For details, see Peter K. Bol, “Exploring the Propositions in Maps: The Case of the ‘Yuji Tu’ of 1136,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 46 (2016): 209–24. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
73. Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Lishi Zhongguo de Nei Yu Wai*; Nicolas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order* (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; Cambridge University Press, 2017), 141–275. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
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76. Thomas A. Wilson, *Genealogy of the Way: The Construction and Uses of the Confucian Tradition in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1995). [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
77. Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=989087. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
78. Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Lishi Zhongguo de Nei Yu Wai*; Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Zhai Zi Zhongguo: Chong Jian You Guan “Zhongguo” de Li Shi Lun Shu 宅茲中國 : 重建有關"中國"的歷史論述*, Chu ban (Taibei Shi: Lian jing chu ban shi ye you xian gong si, 2011); Nicolas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*, First edition (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
79. Wilson, *Genealogy of the Way*; Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
80. Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Zhai Zi Zhongguo*; Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Lishi Zhongguo de Nei Yu Wai*. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
81. Yang calls it ethnocentric moralism. See Shao-yun Yang, *The Way of the Barbarians: Redrawing Ethnic Boundaries in Tang and Song China* (University of Washington Press, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
82. Ito Takayuki 伊東貴之, Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡辺義浩, and Hayashi Fumitaka 林文孝, 治乱のヒストリア. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
83. Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China’s Medical History, 960-1665* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
84. Bol, “Exploring the Propositions in Maps: The Case of the ‘Yuji Tu’ of 1136.” [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
85. Brook, *Great State*, 17–36; Marie Favereau, *The Horde: How the Mongols Changed the World* (Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press, 2021), 95–137, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=6525537. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
86. Porter, *Imperial China, 1350–1900*, 21–30. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
87. Xu Youren 許有壬, *Zhi Zheng Ji 至正集 (Ultimately Correct Collection)*, Zhongguo Ji Ben Gu Ji Ku 中國基本古籍庫 (Beijing: Beijing Ai ru sheng shu zi hua ji shu yan jiu zhong xin, 2009), 35: 4a. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
88. Thomas T. Allsen and David Morgan, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge, UNITED KINGDOM: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 103–15, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=202355; Stefan Kamola, *Making Mongol History: Rashid al-Din and the Jamiʿ al-Tawarikh* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 59–90, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvrs91bj. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
89. Qian Daxin 錢大昕, *Qian Yan Tang Ji 潛研堂集 (Collection of the Studio of Submersion and Deliberation)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing : Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.); Cf. Ori Sela, *China’s Philological Turn: Scholars, Textualism, and the Dao in the Eighteenth Century*, Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 122–28. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
90. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China*. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
91. Xu Youren 許有壬, *Zhi Zheng Ji 至正集 (Ultimately Correct Collection)*, 35: 4a-5a. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
92. Xu Youren 許有壬, *Zhi Zheng Ji 至正集 (Ultimately Correct Collection)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
93. Xu Youren 許有壬. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
94. Kenneth R. Robinson, “Chosŏn Korea in the Ryūkoku Kangnido: Dating the Oldest Extant Korean Map of the World (15th Century),” *Imago Mundi (Lympne)* 59, no. 2 (2007): 177–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/03085690701300964. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
95. Christopher Eirkson, “Early Ming Imperial Ambitions: The Legacy of the Mongol Yuan in Spatial Representations and Historical Judgements,” *Frontiers of History in China* 12, no. 3 (2017): 465–84, https://doi.org/10.3868/s020-006-017-0020-8; Sunkyu Lee, “The Cartographic Construction of Borders in Ming China, 1368–1644” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2021), https://search.proquest.com/docview/2593559671?pq-origsite=primo. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
96. Brook, *Great State*. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
97. John W. Dardess, “Did the Mongols Matter?: Territory, Power, and the Intelligentsia in China from the Northern Song to the Early Ming.,” in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge (Massachusetts); London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 111–34. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
98. John W. Dardess, *More Than the Great Wall: The Northern Frontier and Ming National Security, 1368–1644* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019); Morris Rossabi, *From Yuan to Modern China and Mongolia: The Writings of Morris Rossabi* (Boston, UNITED STATES: BRILL, 2014), 145–200, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=1877206. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
99. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*, Hanji shanben quanwen yingxiang ziliaoku 漢籍善本全文影像資料庫 (Tokyo: Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia [Toyo bunka kenkyujo 東洋文化研究所], The University of Tokyo, 1461). [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
100. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
101. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
102. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
103. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
104. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
105. Brook, *Great State*, 29–35. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
106. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
107. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
108. This sensibility is perfectly expressed in the serene and majestic siting of the Ming Tombs, north of the city. I would never have understood this if I hadn’t seen them… [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
109. *Da Ming Yitongzhi 大明一統志 (The Grand Union Documentation of the Great Ming)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
110. Pines, *The Everlasting Empire*, 11–43. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
111. Wan Ming 万明, *Mingdai zhongwai guanxi shi lungao 明代中外关系史论稿* (中国社会科学出版社, 2011), 140–80. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
112. Han Zhaoqing 韩昭庆, “Kangxi Huangyu Quanlantu de Shizihua Ji Yiyi 康熙《皇舆全览图》的数字化及意义 (The Implication of the Digitaization of the Kangxi Atlas),” 清史研究, no. 04 (2016): 53–60. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
113. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 3, Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth* (Cambridge University Press, 1959); J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), https://press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/index.html. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
114. In contrast, the cultural history of maps, such as Norman J. W. Thrower's *Maps and Civilization: Cartography in Culture and Society*, deals with the maps themselves and how they are interpreted across various contexts. Notable investigations into the interpretation of maps in Asian history include works like Thongchai Winichakul’s *Siam Mapped*, Elizabeth Berry’s *Japan in Print*, Kären Wigen’s *A Malleable Map*, and Laura Hostetler’s “Contending Cartographic Claims?” The Qingmaps.org project, a collaboration between the University of Leiden and the University of Macau, generates invaluable and easily accessible information regarding Qing imperial maps.

     Marcia Yonemoto, *Mapping Early Modern Japan: Space, Place, and Culture in the Tokugawa Period, 1603-1868*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2003), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pphzc. [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
115. In Wang Hui’s analysis of Li Guangdi’s role of the formation of the early Qing imperial ideology, he leans toward the Kangxi emperor’s unflinching conviction to the Confucian image of the ideal rulership. Wang Hui 汪晖, *Xiandai Zhongguo Sixiang de Xingqi 现代中国思想的兴起 (The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought)* (Beijing: Sheng huo, du shu, xin zhi san lian shu dian, 2015). Wang Hui is not alone here. Jonathan Spence’s biography of the Kangxi emperor shares a similar conviction. See Jonathan D. Spence, *Emperor of China: Self Portrait of Kʻang Hsi* (New York: Knopf, 1974). [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
116. Minghui Hu, *China’s Transition to Modernity: The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 24–53. [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
117. Ferdinand Verbiest et al., eds., *Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688): Jesuit Missionary, Scientist, Engineer and Diplomat*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 30 (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994). [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
118. Liangdao He and 何良燾, *Ming Qing zhi ji xi fa jun shi ji shu wen xuan xuan ji = MingQing zhiji xifa junshi jishu wenxuan xuanji*, Di 1 ban., 第1版., Zhongguo ke ji dian ji xuan kan. Di 4 ji (Changsha Shi: Hunan ke xue ji shu chu ban she, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
119. Le Dehong 勒德洪, ed., *Pingding Sanni Fanglüe* 平定三逆方略*(Planning and Strategies in Pacifying Three Rebellions)*, electronic resource (Beijing: Beijing Ai ru sheng shu zi hua ji shu yan jiu zhong xin, 2009), https://stanford.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://server.wenzibase.com. [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
120. Verbiest’s world map, *Kunyu quantu*, was stored in the Palace Museum in Taiwan. I use the published reprint from the original copy in the library of Hebei University. Ferdinand Verbiest, *Kunyu quantu 坤輿全圖 (An Illustration and Explanation of the World)*, Di 1 ban., 第1版., “Kun yu quan tu” yan jiu cong shu (Baoding Shi: Hebei daxue chubanshe, 2018). I use the electronic copy of the companion book, Kunyu tushuo, from BnF. Ferdinand Verbiest, *Kunyu Tushuo 坤輿圖說 (Illustration and Explanation of the Geodesy and Cartography)*, accessed August 28, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9006098w. [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
121. Verbiest, *Kunyu Tushuo 坤輿圖說 (Illustration and Explanation of the Geodesy and Cartography)*, 3a; Cf. Qiong Zhang, *Making the New World Their Own: Chinese Encounters with Jesuit Science in the Age of Discovery* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-122)
122. Li Guangdi 李光地, *Rongcun Wenji 榕村文集 (Literary Collection of Li Guangdi)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 20: 7b-8b. [↑](#endnote-ref-123)
123. Verbiest, *Kunyu Tushuo 坤輿圖說 (Illustration and Explanation of the Geodesy and Cartography)*, 1: 3a-3b; Li Guangdi 李光地, *Rongcun Wenji 榕村文集 (Literary Collection of Li Guangdi)*, 20: 7b-8a. [↑](#endnote-ref-124)
124. Cited in Wang Dawen 王大文, *Wenxian bianzuan yu dayitong guannian—Daqing yitongzhi yanjiu 文献编纂与大一统观念—大清一统志研究 (Documentary Compilation and the Idea of the Gran Union and Commencement—A Study of The Grand Union and Documentation of the Great Qing)* (Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 2016), 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-125)
125. Meng Sen 孟森, *Qing Dai Shi 清代史 (History of the Qing Dynasty)* (Taibei: Zheng zhong shu ju, 1960), 133–34; Liu Fengyun 刘凤云, *Qing Dai San Fan Yan Jiu 清代三藩硏究 (A Study of Three Protectorates in Qing China)*, Elman (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1994). [↑](#endnote-ref-126)
126. Matthew W. Mosca, “Empire and the Circulation of Frontier Intelligence: Qing Conceptions of the Ottomans,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 70, no. 1 (2010): 147–207. [↑](#endnote-ref-127)
127. Liu Fengyun 刘凤云, *Qing dai san fang yan jiu 清代三藩硏究 (A Study of Three Protecrates [Protectorates?— the other is not a word]in Qing China)*, Di 1 ban, Elman (Beijing: Zhongguo ren min da xue chu ban she : Jing xiao zhe Xin hua shu dian zong dian Beijing fa xing suo, 1994). [↑](#endnote-ref-128)
128. Natasha Reichle et al., eds., *China at the Center: Ricci and Verbiest World Maps* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-129)
129. Cathérine Jami, *The Emperor’s New Mathematics: Western Learning and Imperial Authority during the Kangxi Reign (1662-1722)* (Oxford: University Press, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-130)
130. François de Aguilón et al., *Opticorum libri sex: philosophiis juxtà ac mathematicis utiles* (Antverpiæ : Ex officina Plantiniana, apud Viduam et filios J. Moreti, 1613), 452, http://archive.org/details/opticorumlibrise00agui. [↑](#endnote-ref-131)
131. John Parr Snyder, *Flattening the Earth: Two Thousand Years of Map Projections*, Paperback ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 29–51. [↑](#endnote-ref-132)
132. Wang Qianjin 汪前进, “Kangxi tongban Huangyu quanlantu de touying zhonglei xing tan 康熙铜版《皇舆全览图》投影种类新探 (New inquiry into the projection of the Kangxi Atlas),” 自然科学史研究, no. 02 (1991): 186. [↑](#endnote-ref-133)
133. Verbiest, *Kunyu Tushuo 坤輿圖說 (Illustration and Explanation of the Geodesy and Cartography)*, 1: 4a. [↑](#endnote-ref-134)
134. Verbiest, 1: 3a; For a detailed elaboration of Jesuit science in China, see Toby E. Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 203–35. [↑](#endnote-ref-135)
135. Verbiest, *Kunyu Tushuo 坤輿圖說 (Illustration and Explanation of the Geodesy and Cartography)*, 1: 3b. [↑](#endnote-ref-136)
136. Verbiest, 1: 3b-4a. [↑](#endnote-ref-137)
137. Verbiest, 1: 4a-4b. [↑](#endnote-ref-138)
138. The Manchu vocabulary was globally oriented even before their conquest of China. Their language incorporated geographical references to East and Southeast Asia, West Asia, the Mediterranean world, North and South America, and Oceania. The Manchus easily grasped the world's concept through the Manchu translation of Matteo Ricci's world map. However, all previous Manchu maps lacked graticule lines, but the Qing monarchy was no stranger to the world map. When Verbiest introduced his world map in 1674, it did not seem an outlandish tool for the Qing Empire. Nevertheless, with its technical advancements and practical aspects, *Illustration and Explanation of the Geodesy and Cartography* went beyond just a picturesque representation of distant lands. It encapsulated global geopolitics and the principles of geodetic surveys. As a practical empire builder, the Kangxi emperor sought something more from a world map—a fresh map grounded on Ptolemaic graticules that could offer a dependable gauge of his empire’s expansibility compared to other global political entities. Hu, *China’s Transition to Modernity*, 2015, 84–109. [↑](#endnote-ref-139)
139. Feiyanggu 費揚古, “《宮中檔康熙朝奏摺》費揚古 奏，〈遵旨測量城門具奏〉康熙15年01月24日，故宮156789 號，件 1 ，國立故宮博物院 ⋈ 清代檔案檢索系統,” n.d., https://qingarchives.npm.edu.tw/index.php?act=Display/image/1042528=Xbb=5Q#07l; Kicengge, “Huangyu Quanlantu Dongbei Dadi Cehuikao 黄舆全览图东北大地测绘考 (Geodetic Surverys in the Northeast for the Huangyu Quanlan Tu),” *Xiyu Lishi Yuyan Yanjiu Qikan 西域历史语言研究期刊*, no. 10 (2018): 490. [↑](#endnote-ref-140)
140. In addition to identifying the Hall of Supreme Harmony as the center and prime meridian of the new topographical surveying project, the Kangxi emperor kept the project on a short leash. He confided only with a small group of imperial guards, territorial officials, and the Jesuit experts. He kept it from the Confucian officials during the civil war with Wu Sangui, who had fared an anti-Manchu psychological and ideological battle against the Manchus. As a trusted military commander, Fiyanggu was supposed to relay the survey information of the imperial capital to the emperor. [↑](#endnote-ref-141)
141. Kicengge, “Huangyu Quanlantu Dongbei Dadi Cehuikao 黄舆全览图东北大地测绘考 (Geodetic Surverys in the Northeast for the Huangyu Quanlan Tu),” 490. [↑](#endnote-ref-142)
142. Mark C. Elliott, “The Limits of Tartary: Manchuria in Imperial and National Geographies,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (August 2000): 603–46; Zhao Xin 赵欣 and Qu Xiaofan 曲晓范, “Wumuna Yu Qingchao Guanfang Dui Changbaishan de Shouci Kaocha 武默讷与清朝官方对长白山天池的首次考察 (Umuna and the Qing Officials’s First Investigation of the Heavenly Lake on Changbai Mountain),” *Dongbei Shidi 东北史地*, no. 03 (2009): 38–40. [↑](#endnote-ref-143)
143. For Verbiest’s accounts of this journey, see R. H. Major, *History of the Two Tartar Conquerors of China, Including the Two Journeys into Tartary of Father Ferdinand Verbiest in the Suite of the Emperor Kang-Hi: From the French of Père Pierre Joseph d’Orléans, of the Company of Jesus. To Which Is Added Father Pereira’s Journey into Tartary in the Suite of the Same Emperor, From the Dutch of Nicholaas Witsen* (Taylor & Francis, 2017), 103–31; Kicengge, “Huangyu Quanlantu Dongbei Dadi Cehuikao 黄舆全览图东北大地测绘考 (Geodetic Surverys in the Northeast for the Huangyu Quanlan Tu),” 491–92. [↑](#endnote-ref-144)
144. Jami, *The Emperor’s New Mathematics*, 102–19; Florence C. Hsia, *Sojourners in a Strange Land: Jesuits and Their Scientific Missions in Late Imperial China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226355610. [↑](#endnote-ref-145)
145. Noel Golvers, “Antoine Thomas, SJ, and His Synopsis Mathematica: Biography of a Jesuit Mathematical Textbook for the China Mission,” *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine*, no. 45 (2017): 119; Han Qi 韩琦, *Tongtian Zhixue: Yesu Hui Shi He Tian Wen Xue Zai Zhongguo de Chuan Bo 通天之学 : 耶稣会士和天文学在中国的传播 (Learning That Reaches Heaven: The Jesuits and the Dissemination of Astronomy in China)*, Di 1 ban (Beijing: Sheng huo, du shu, xin zhi san lian shu dian, 2018), 182–94. [↑](#endnote-ref-146)
146. Michael G. Chang, *A Court on Horseback: Imperial Touring & the Construction of Qing Rule, 1680-1785*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 287 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-147)
147. Kicengge, *Daichin Gurun to Sono Jidai: Teikoku No Keisei to Hakki Shakai ダイチン・グルンとその時代 : 帝国の形成と八旗社会 (The Age of Daicing Gurun: The Formation of the Empire and Eight Banner Society)*, Shohan (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 217–40. [↑](#endnote-ref-148)
148. Preston M. Torbert, *The Chʻing Imperial Household Department: A Study of Its Organization and Principal Functions, 1662-1796* (Harvard Univ Asia Center, 1977); Yang Lihong 杨立红 and Zhu Zhengye 朱正业, “Qing shilu guang renyuan de goucheng 清实录馆人员的构成 (Personnel in the Insititute of Veritable Record),” *Lishi dangan 历史档案 (Historical Archive)*, no. 4 (2012): 123–27. [↑](#endnote-ref-149)
149. Cf. Benjamin Elman, “Unintended Consequences of Classical Literacies for the Early Modern Chinese Civil Examinations,” in *Rethinking East Asian Languages, Vernaculars, and Literacies, 1000-1919*, vol. 115 (United States: BRILL, 2014), 198–219. [↑](#endnote-ref-150)
150. Cf. Martina Siebert, Kai Jun Chen, and Dorothy Ko, eds., *Making the Palace Machine Work: Mobilizing People, Objects, and Nature in the Qing Empire*, 1st ed., Asian History 11 (Amsterdam: University Press, 2021), 23–35. [↑](#endnote-ref-151)
151. Perdue, *China Marches West*. [↑](#endnote-ref-152)
152. Perdue. [↑](#endnote-ref-153)
153. Kicengge, “Huangyu Quanlantu Dongbei Dadi Cehuikao 黄舆全览图东北大地测绘考 (Geodetic Surverys in the Northeast for the Huangyu Quanlan Tu),” 500–511. [↑](#endnote-ref-154)
154. In 1689, while on his southern tour at the Nanjing Observatory, Kangxi Emperor demonstrated to his senior counselor, Li Guangdi, that the seasonal visibility of constellations varied depending on an observer's earthly location. He advised Li Guangdi to trust his personal observations at both the Beijing and Nanjing Observatories rather than relying on the inaccurate ancient constellation records. Kangxi argued that contemporary observers could make more precise observations than their predecessors. Consequently, he disregarded the ancient measurements, acknowledging the need for the accuracy provided by the Jesuits' astronomical and geodetic measurements. The practical Kangxi Emperor had experimented with and verified Verbiest's geodetic survey principles and was confident in their effectiveness. As he prepared to initiate a survey operation in China, he wanted to ensure his bureaucracy understood his objectives and expectations. Minghui Hu, *China’s Transition to Modernity: The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen* (Seattle, [Washington] ; University of Washington Press, 2015), 84–90. [↑](#endnote-ref-155)
155. *Qing shi lu 清實錄*, Di 1 ban., 第1版. (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1985), 3: 440. [↑](#endnote-ref-156)
156. By the late nineteenth century, the Manchuria region that Kangxi had focused on had been named. UNESCO estimates this area to span between 360,000 and 400,000 square miles, roughly equivalent to the size of Egypt (386,700 square miles), and considerably larger than France (200,016 square miles) or Texas (268,581 square miles). It appears that Kangxi had a more accurate understanding than many modern historians that surveying a region of this size would necessitate considering the Earth’s spherical curvature. Therefore, his instructions embody a dual focus - the need for the geodetic survey and the ambiguous nature of the borderland with the Korean peninsula. [↑](#endnote-ref-157)
157. *Qing shi lu 清實錄*, 3: 440-41. Fuchs is the only reference that I can find cites it in full. See Walter Fuchs, *Der Jesuiten-Atlas der Kanghsi-Zeit: seine Entstehungsgeschichte nebst Namensindices für die Karten der Mandjurei, Mongolei, Ostturkestan und Tibet, mit Wiedergabe der Jesuiten-Karten in Original Grösse*, Monumenta serica monograph series 4 (Peking: Fu-Jen-Universität, 1943), 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-158)
158. Nianshen Song, “Imagined Territory: Paektusan in Late Chosŏn Maps and Writings,” *Studies in the History of Gardens &amp; Designed Landscapes* 37, no. 2 (2016): 157; Nianshen Song, *Making Borders in Modern East Asia: The Tumen River Demarcation, 1881–1919*, 2018, 16–53. [↑](#endnote-ref-159)
159. Li Xiaocong 李孝聰, “Ji Kangxi Huangyu Quanlan Tu de Cehui Jiqi Banben 記康熙《皇輿全覽圖》的測繪及其版本 (Editions, Surveys, and Drawing of the Kangxi Atlas),” *Gugong Xushu Jikan 故宮學術季刊 (The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly)* 30, no. 1 (1990): 55–65. [↑](#endnote-ref-160)
160. Kicengge, *Daichin Gurun to Sono Jidai*, 245–56. [↑](#endnote-ref-161)
161. Cited in Fuchs, *Der Jesuiten-Atlas der Kanghsi-Zeit*, 20; Li Xiaocong 李孝聰, “Ji Kangxi Huangyu Quanlan Tu de Cehui Jiqi Banben 記康熙《皇輿全覽圖》的測繪及其版本 (Editions, Surveys, and Drawing of the Kangxi Atlas),” 70–71. [↑](#endnote-ref-162)
162. Feng Baolin 冯宝琳, “记几种不同版本的雍正《皇舆十排全图》,” 故宫博物院院刊, no. 04 (1986): 73–78. [↑](#endnote-ref-163)
163. “Zouyi 奏议 (Reports and Memorials),” in *Yuzhi Lixiang Kaocheng Houbian 御制历象考成后编 (Supplemnet to "The Compendium of Observational and COmputational Astronomy)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Wuyin Palace: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, 1896), 1b. [↑](#endnote-ref-164)
164. “Zouyi 奏议 (Reports and Memorials),” 2a. [↑](#endnote-ref-165)
165. Hu, *China’s Transition to Modernity*, 2015, 98–102. [↑](#endnote-ref-166)
166. “Zouyi 奏议 (Reports and Memorials),” 2b–3b. [↑](#endnote-ref-167)
167. “Zouyi 奏议 (Reports and Memorials),” 3b–5a. [↑](#endnote-ref-168)
168. “Zouyi 奏议 (Reports and Memorials),” 5b–7a, 8a. [↑](#endnote-ref-169)
169. Minghui Hu, *China’s Transition to Modernity: The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 145–51. [↑](#endnote-ref-170)
170. For details of Qing China’s campaigns, see Perdue, *China Marches West*; Kicengge, “阿睦尔撒纳叛乱始末考 Amurasana Panluan Shimokao (Amursana’s Rebellion from Beginning to End),” *Faculty of International Liberal Arts Review, Otemon Gakuin University* 8 (2015): 41–73. [↑](#endnote-ref-171)
171. Perdue, *China Marches West*, 285. [↑](#endnote-ref-172)
172. Laura Newby, *The Empire and the Khanate: A Political History of Qing Relations with Khoqand c.1760-1860* (Brill, 2005), 21–27, https://brill.com/view/title/11876. [↑](#endnote-ref-173)
173. For details of the geodetic survey, see Jin Yu 靳煜, “Qing Qianlong Nianjian Xiyu Cehui Zaikaocha 清乾隆年间西域测绘再考察 (Reexamination of Geodetic Survey in Western Region during the Qianlong Emperor’s Reign),” Lishi dili 历史地理, 30 (n.d.): 250–66. [↑](#endnote-ref-174)
174. Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-175)
175. For details of the geodetic surveys, see Jin Yu 靳煜, “Qianlong Nianjian Sanci Xiyu Cehui Zaifenxi 乾隆年间三次西域测绘再分析 (Reexamination of Three Geodetic Surveys of Western Region during the Qianlong Emperor’s Reign),” Xiyu yanjiu 西域研究, no. 1 (2016): 27–34. [↑](#endnote-ref-176)
176. Liu Tongxun 刘统勋, *Huangyu Xiyu Tuzhi 皇輿西域圖志 (Illustrated Gazetteer of the Western Regions of the Imperial Domain)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, 1782). [↑](#endnote-ref-177)
177. Kicengge, *Daichin Gurun to Sono Jidai: Teikoku No Keisei to Hakki Shakai ダイチン・グルンとその時代 : 帝国の形成と八旗社会 (The Age of Daicing Gurun: The Formation of the Empire and Eight Banner Society)*, Shohan (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 217–33. [↑](#endnote-ref-178)
178. The Tibetan Plateau encompasses the Tibet Autonomous Region, most of Qinghai, the western half of Sichuan, Southern Gansu provinces, southern Xinjiang, Bhutan, Ladakh and Lahaul (India), Spiti (India), Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan), northwestern Nepal, eastern Tajikistan, and southern Kyrgyzstan. The plateau spans approximately 1,000 kilometers (620 mi) north to south and 2,500 kilometers (1,600 mi) east to west. It is the world's highest plateau above sea level and covers an area of 2,500,000 square kilometers (970,000 sq mi), about five times the size of France or seven and a half times that of the Colorado Plateau. The Tibetan Plateau is a high-altitude region with an average elevation of over 4,500 meters (14,800 ft). [↑](#endnote-ref-179)
179. In 2002, Historian Willem van Schendel of the University of Amsterdam coined the term “Zomia” to refer to mainland Southeast Asia, including the Tibetan Plateau. Due to its sparse population and isolation, the Tibetan plateau has yet to be under state control. Similarly, to the Polynesian islands, the plateau has hundreds of estimated spoken languages due to its geographical isolation. The Chinese empire has historically avoided this massive region because it needs more resources and governmentality. In 2009, James C. Scott, a historical anthropologist from Yale University, proposed the Zomia theory to claim that the seeming timelessness of the ethnic cultures residing in Zomia goes against familiar narratives about modernization: primarily, that people will want to conform once they are introduced to modern lifestyles and technology. According to Scott, the contrarian reality was that communities living in Zomia purposely distanced themselves from modernization and its complexity by living more simply through local economies. For Scott, these communities show us “the art of not being governed.” Scott was primarily speaking of the modern states. [↑](#endnote-ref-180)
180. Hui Wang, *The Politics of Imagining Asia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011); Max Oidtmann, “Overlapping Empires: Religion, Politics, and Ethnicity in Nineteenth-Century Qinghai,” *Late Imperial China* 37, no. 2 (2016): 41–91. [↑](#endnote-ref-181)
181. 中国人民政治协商会议河北省沧州市委员会 文史 资料 研究 委员会, *Ji Xiaolan nianpu 纪晓岚年谱 (Chronological biography of Ji Yun)*, Beijing di 1 ban., 北京第1版. (Beijing: Shu mu wen xian chu ban she, 1993), 1–5. [↑](#endnote-ref-182)
182. Jonathan D. Spence, *Treason by the Book* (New York, N.Y: Viking, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-183)
183. I use the electronic copy of the Havard copy. The Yongzheng emperor 雍正帝, *Dayi juemi lu 大義覺迷錄 (The Great Righteousness and the Awakening from Confusion)*, 清雍正間(1723-1735)刊本 (Beijing: Collection of Harvard East Asian Library, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-184)
184. The following analysis is taken from the structure of Ito’s book: Itō Takayuki 伊東貴之, *Shisō to Shite No Chūgoku Kinsei 思想としての中国近世 (The Early Modernity in the History of Chinese Thought)*, Shohan (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005), 137–66. [↑](#endnote-ref-185)
185. For an interesting discussion of Gu and Huang, see Wang Hui, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, 338–51. [↑](#endnote-ref-186)
186. The Yongzheng emperor 雍正帝, *Dayi juemi lu 大義覺迷錄 (The Great Righteousness and the Awakening from Confusion)*, 1a–2b. [↑](#endnote-ref-187)
187. The Yongzheng emperor 雍正帝, 3b–4a. [↑](#endnote-ref-188)
188. The Yongzheng emperor 雍正帝, 5a–5b. [↑](#endnote-ref-189)
189. The Yongzheng emperor 雍正帝, 8b–9a; For the Yongzhen emperor’s argumentaion style, see Li Changran 李畅然, “Yongzhendi de Fuzi Haobian---Zengjing Lu Liuliang an Kaolun 雍正帝的‘夫子好辩’——曾静吕留良案考论 (An Investigation of the Yongzhen Emperor’s Argumentation Style in the Case of Zeng Jing and Lu Liuliang),” 泰山学院学报, no. 1 (2007): 49–53. [↑](#endnote-ref-190)
190. Li Fusun 李富孫, *He zheng hou lu 鶴徵後錄 (Record of sepcial examination, the sequel)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-191)
191. Li Fusun 李富孫; For discussion of the special examination, see Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*. [↑](#endnote-ref-192)
192. Zhao Binzhong 赵秉忠 and Bai Xinliang 白新良, “Qianlong Qianqi Tongzhi Jituan Neibu de Douzheng 乾隆前期统治集团内部的斗争 (Factional Struggles in Early Qianlong Reign),” 社会科学战线, no. 1 (1991): 165–69. [↑](#endnote-ref-193)
193. Hang Shijun 杭世骏, *Daogutang Ji 道古堂集 (Collectoin of the Hall of Dao and Antiquity)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 41: 9a-12b; Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Xiaocangshanfang Ji 小仓山房集 (The Works of Yuan Mei)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 25: 19a-20b. [↑](#endnote-ref-194)
194. “xu,” Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, *Shuidao Tigang 水道提纲 (The Essential Networks of Waterways )* (Waseda University Rare Books Collection, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-195)
195. “xu,” Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, *Shuidao Tigang 水道提纲 (The Essential Networks of Waterways )* (Waseda University Rare Books Collection, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-196)
196. Hang Shijun 杭世骏, *Daogutang Ji 道古堂集 (Collectoin of the Hall of Dao and Antiquity)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 41: 15b-17a; Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Xiaocangshanfang Ji 小仓山房集 (The Works of Yuan Mei)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 25: 20a-20b. [↑](#endnote-ref-197)
197. Tiyao is included in the publication. See “tiyao,” Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, *Shuidao Tigang 水道提纲 (The Essential Networks of Waterways )* (Waseda University Rare Books Collection, n.d.), 1b. [↑](#endnote-ref-198)
198. “xu,” Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, *Shuidao Tigang 水道提纲 (The Essential Networks of Waterways )* (Waseda University Rare Books Collection, n.d.), 1a. [↑](#endnote-ref-199)
199. “xu,” Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, *Shuidao Tigang 水道提纲 (The Essential Networks of Waterways )* (Waseda University Rare Books Collection, n.d.), 1b–2a. [↑](#endnote-ref-200)
200. “xu,” Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, *Shuidao Tigang 水道提纲 (The Essential Networks of Waterways )* (Waseda University Rare Books Collection, n.d.), 3b–4b. [↑](#endnote-ref-201)
201. “muci,” Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, *Shuidao Tigang 水道提纲 (The Essential Networks of Waterways )* (Waseda University Rare Books Collection, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-202)
202. “xu,” Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, *Shuidao Tigang 水道提纲 (The Essential Networks of Waterways )* (Waseda University Rare Books Collection, n.d.), 2b–3a. [↑](#endnote-ref-203)
203. Hang Shijun 杭世骏, *Daogutang Ji 道古堂集 (Collectoin of the Hall of Dao and Antiquity)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 41: 18a-18b; Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Xiaocangshanfang Ji 小仓山房集 (The Works of Yuan Mei)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 25: 21a. [↑](#endnote-ref-204)
204. 中国人民政治协商会议河北省沧州市委员会 文史 资料 研究 委员会, *Ji Xiaolan nianpu 纪晓岚年谱 (Chronological biography of Ji Yun)*, Beijing di 1 ban., 北京第1版. (Beijing: Shu mu wen xian chu ban she, 1993), 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-205)
205. 中国人民政治协商会议河北省沧州市委员会 文史 资料 研究 委员会, *Ji Xiaolan nianpu 纪晓岚年谱 (Chronological biography of Ji Yun)*, Beijing di 1 ban., 北京第1版. (Beijing: Shu mu wen xian chu ban she, 1993), 57. [↑](#endnote-ref-206)
206. Minghui Hu, *China’s Transition to Modernity: The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 133–38. [↑](#endnote-ref-207)
207. Zhen Dai Zhen 戴震, *Dai Zhen quan shu 戴震全书 (Complete Works of Dai Zhen)*, ed. Yang Yingjin 杨應芹 and Zhu Weiqi 诸伟奇, 修订版, Anhui gu ji cong shu. Di 2 ji (Hebei Shi: Huangshan shu she, 2010), 5: 421-26. [↑](#endnote-ref-208)
208. Zhen Dai Zhen 戴震, *Dai Zhen quan shu 戴震全书 (Complete Works of Dai Zhen)*, ed. Yang Yingjin 杨應芹 and Zhu Weiqi 诸伟奇, 修订版, Anhui gu ji cong shu. Di 2 ji (Hebei Shi: Huangshan shu she, 2010), 4: 74-418. [↑](#endnote-ref-209)
209. Hu Wei 胡渭, *Yugong Zhuizhi 禹贡锥指 (A Narrow View of the Yugong Chapter )*, Kangxi version, 1703, 1a–3b. [↑](#endnote-ref-210)
210. Zhen Dai Zhen 戴震, *Dai Zhen quan shu 戴震全书 (Complete Works of Dai Zhen)*, ed. Yang Yingjin 杨應芹 and Zhu Weiqi 诸伟奇, 修订版, Anhui gu ji cong shu. Di 2 ji (Hebei Shi: Huangshan shu she, 2010), 4: 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-211)
211. This is particularly so in Dai’s discussion of the entire course of the Yellow River, see Zhen Dai Zhen 戴震, *Dai Zhen quan shu 戴震全书 (Complete Works of Dai Zhen)*, ed. Yang Yingjin 杨應芹 and Zhu Weiqi 诸伟奇, 修订版, Anhui gu ji cong shu. Di 2 ji (Hebei Shi: Huangshan shu she, 2010), 4: 119-219. [↑](#endnote-ref-212)
212. Dai’s historical geography should be read in conjunction with his cosmological writings see Zhen Dai Zhen 戴震, *Dai Zhen quan shu 戴震全书 (Complete Works of Dai Zhen)*, ed. Yang Yingjin 杨應芹 and Zhu Weiqi 诸伟奇, 修订版, Anhui gu ji cong shu. Di 2 ji (Hebei Shi: Huangshan shu she, 2010), 4: 5-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-213)
213. Minghui Hu, *China’s Transition to Modernity: The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 185–212. [↑](#endnote-ref-214)
214. R. Kent Guy, *The Emperor’s Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Chʻien-Lung Era*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 129 (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-215)
215. Ji Yun 紀昀, *Heyuan Jilue 河源紀略 (A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-216)
216. "shangyu, " Ji Yun 紀昀, *Heyuan Jilue 河源紀略 (A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 1a. [↑](#endnote-ref-217)
217. *Qing shi lu 清實錄*, Di 1 ban., 第1版. (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1985), 7: 798. [↑](#endnote-ref-218)
218. “shangyu,” Ji Yun 紀昀, *Heyuan Jilue 河源紀略 (A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 1b–3b. [↑](#endnote-ref-219)
219. “Yuzhi heyuan shi,” Ji Yun 紀昀, *Heyuan Jilue 河源紀略 (A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-220)
220. “Fanli,” Ji Yun 紀昀, *Heyuan Jilue 河源紀略 (A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 1b. [↑](#endnote-ref-221)
221. “mulu,” Ji Yun 紀昀, *Heyuan Jilue 河源紀略 (A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-222)
222. Ji Yun 紀昀, *Heyuan Jilue 河源紀略 (A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), passim. [↑](#endnote-ref-223)
223. Ji Yun 紀昀, *Heyuan Jilue 河源紀略 (A Concise Record of the Yellow River’s Headwaters)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 1: 10a. [↑](#endnote-ref-224)
224. Oyunbilig Borjigidai 烏雲畢力格, *Tong wen zhi sheng: “Xiyu tong wen zhi” zheng li yu yan jiu 同文之盛：西域同文志整理与研究 (Prosperity of Harmonious cultures: Compilation and Research of Standard Translation Manual of the Western Region)*, Ou Ya gu dian xue yan jiu cong shu (Shanghai Shi: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 2022). [↑](#endnote-ref-225)
225. Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Diqiu Tushuo 地球图说 (Illustration and Explanation of Earth)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Hangzhou: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, 1799). [↑](#endnote-ref-226)
226. *Qing shi lu 清實錄*, 20: 1047. [↑](#endnote-ref-227)
227. Bianca Maria Rinaldi, ed., *Ideas of Chinese Gardens: Western Accounts, 1300-1860*, Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 132–34, https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812292084; Benjamin A. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005), 209–11. [↑](#endnote-ref-228)
228. Zou Zhenhuan 邹振环, “Jiang Youren de Kunyu Quantu Yu Diqiu Tushuo 蒋友仁的《坤舆全图》与《地球图说》(Michel Benoist’s Kunyu Quantu and Diqiu Tushuo),” 北京行政学院学报, no. 01 (2017): 111–21. [↑](#endnote-ref-229)
229. Betty Peh-Tʻi Wei, *Ruan Yuan, 1764-1849: The Life and Work of a Major Scholar-Official in Nineteenth-Century China before the Opium War* (Hong Kong : London: Hong Kong University Press ; Eurospan [distributor], 2006), 1–17. [↑](#endnote-ref-230)
230. Feng Zuozhe 馮佐哲, *Heshen Pingzhuan 和珅评传 (Biography of Heshen)* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe 中国青年出版社, 1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-231)
231. For details, see Wang Zhangtao 王章涛, *Ruan Yuan Nian Pu 阮元年谱*, Di 1 ban (Hefei Shi: Huang Shan shu she, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-232)
232. For success rate, see Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*; For details, see Wang Zhangtao 王章涛, *Ruan Yuan Nian Pu 阮元年谱*. [↑](#endnote-ref-233)
233. Wang Zhangtao 王章涛, *Ruan Yuan Nian Pu 阮元年谱*, 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-234)
234. Liu Chengyu 劉成禺, *Shizaitang Zayi 世載堂雜憶 (Miscellaneous Recollection in Shizai Hall)* (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chebanshe, 1997), 19–21; It is interesting that Betty Wei defended Ruan Yuan here. Wei, *Ruan Yuan, 1764-1849*, 55–56. [↑](#endnote-ref-235)
235. The best description of the fall of Heshen and its repercussions can be found in Dai’s excellent book: Yingcong Dai, *The White Lotus War: Rebellion & Suppression in Late Imperial China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-236)
236. Wang Dawen 王大文, *Wenxian bianzuan yu dayitong guannian—Daqing yitongzhi yanjiu 文献编纂与大一统观念—大清一统志研究 (Documentary Compilation and the Idea of the Gran Union and Commencement—A Study of The Grand Union and Documentation of the Great Qing)*, 205–15. [↑](#endnote-ref-237)
237. “嘉庆重修《大清一统志》整理出版,” 清史研究, no. 3 (2023): 157; Cf. Yu Fengchun 于逢春, “Lun Zhongguo Jiangyu Zuizhong Dianding de Shikong Zuopiao 论中国疆域最终奠定的时空坐标 (On the Ultimate Spatial and Temperal Coordinates of the Chinese Territory ),” *Zhongguo Bian Jiang Shi Di Yan Jiu* 16, no. 1 (2006): 1–13. [↑](#endnote-ref-238)
238. Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Diqiu Tushuo 地球图说 (Illustration and Explanation of Earth)*; Hu, *China’s Transition to Modernity*, 2015; Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Chouren Zhuan 畴人传 (A History of Mathematical Astronomers)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0, Ruan Yuan Ji (Yangzhou: Erudition Dianhai digital platfor, n.d.). [↑](#endnote-ref-239)
239. “xu,” Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Diqiu Tushuo 地球图说 (Illustration and Explanation of Earth)*, 1a. [↑](#endnote-ref-240)
240. “xu” Ruan Yuan 阮元, 1b. [↑](#endnote-ref-241)
241. “xu” Ruan Yuan 阮元, 1b–2a. [↑](#endnote-ref-242)
242. “xu,” Ruan Yuan 阮元, 2a–2b. [↑](#endnote-ref-243)
243. “xu,” Ruan Yuan 阮元, 3a. [↑](#endnote-ref-244)
244. “xu,” Ruan Yuan 阮元, 3b; Ling Tingkan echoed this idea eloquently. See Ling Tingkan 凌廷堪, *Jiaolitang Shiji 校礼堂诗集 (Poetry Collection in the Hall of Editing Rituals)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, n.d.), 11: 10b-13a. [↑](#endnote-ref-245)
245. “xu,” Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Diqiu Tushuo 地球图说 (Illustration and Explanation of Earth)*, 3b. [↑](#endnote-ref-246)
246. “Butu xu,” Ruan Yuan 阮元, 1a. [↑](#endnote-ref-247)
247. “butu,” Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Diqiu Tushuo 地球图说 (Illustration and Explanation of Earth)*. [↑](#endnote-ref-248)
248. It is evey harder for early modern empire to do so with the limited communication and transportation technologies, see Paul R. Krugman, *Geography and Trade*, Pbk. ed., 1993, Gaston Eyskens Lecture Series (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1993); The environmental barriers are the key to the conflicts between the agricultural and nomadic civilizations, see Chase, *Firearms*. [↑](#endnote-ref-249)
249. Perdue, *China Marches West*; Victor Lieberman, “The Qing Dynasty and Its Neighbors: Early Modern China in World History,” *Social Science History* 32, no. 2 (2008): 281–304. [↑](#endnote-ref-250)
250. Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Diqiu Tushuo 地球图说 (Illustration and Explanation of Earth)*, 24b–25b. [↑](#endnote-ref-251)
251. Li Pengxiang 李鹏翔, “《遐域琐谈》为《西域闻见录》最初版本新证,” *Xiyu yanjiu 西域研究*, no. 2 (2021): 140–44. [↑](#endnote-ref-252)
252. There were many contemporary geographical works, see Liu Chaojian 刘超建 and Wang Enchun 王恩春, “Qianjia shiqi xinjiang yudixue zhuzuo yanjiu chutan 乾嘉时期新疆舆地学著述研究初探 (A preliminary analysis of geographical works on Xinjiang during the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns),” 北方民族大学学报(哲学社会科学版), no. 02 (2012): 57–61. [↑](#endnote-ref-253)
253. “xu,” Qishiyi 七十一, *Xiyu wenjian lu 西域闻见录 (A Record of What I Heard and Witnessed in the Western Region)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0 (Beijing: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, 1777), 1a. [↑](#endnote-ref-254)
254. Qishiyi 七十一, "Xinjiang jilue," 1a–19b. [↑](#endnote-ref-255)
255. Qishiyi 七十一, "Waifan liezhuan," 1a–14a. [↑](#endnote-ref-256)
256. Qishiyi 七十一, "Huijiang fengtu ji," 1a–20b. [↑](#endnote-ref-257)
257. Qishiyi 七十一, ”Xichui jishi benmo," 1a–17b. [↑](#endnote-ref-258)
258. Qishiyi 七十一, "Juntai daoli biao," 1a–8b. [↑](#endnote-ref-259)
259. Wang Zhong 汪中, *Wang Zhong ji 汪中集 (Collectied Works of Wang Zhong)*, Chu ban., 初版., Zhong yang yan jiu yuan Zhongguo wen zhe yan jiu suo Gu ji zheng li cong kan 4 (Taipei: Zhong yang yan jiu yuan Zhongguo wen zhe yan jiu suo chou bei chu, 2000), 161. [↑](#endnote-ref-260)
260. Wang Zhong 汪中, 162–65. [↑](#endnote-ref-261)
261. R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796*, A China Program Book (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 231–86. [↑](#endnote-ref-262)
262. For details, see Keith Weller Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: University Press, 2013), 319–403. [↑](#endnote-ref-263)
263. Wei, *Ruan Yuan, 1764-1849*, 84–88. [↑](#endnote-ref-264)
264. Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History*, The Edwin O. Reischauer Lectures (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674045347. [↑](#endnote-ref-265)
265. Wei Hu and 胡渭, *Yu gong zhui zhi: [21 juan]*, Guang xue cong kan (Taibei: Guang xue she yin shu guan, 1975). [↑](#endnote-ref-266)
266. Cheng Yaotian 程瑤田, *Yu gong san jiang kao 禹貢三江考 (An investigation of three rivers in the Yugong chapter)*, Xu xiu Si ku quan shu 55 (Shanghai: gu ji chu ban she, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-267)
267. Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Yan jing shi ji 揅經室集 (Collection from the Hall of Classical Studies)*, 中国基本古籍库V8.0, Wen xuan lou cong shu 1 (Yangzhou: Erudition Dianhai digital platform, 1823). [↑](#endnote-ref-268)
268. “Da Qing Wan Nian Yi Tong Di Li Quan Tu 大清万年一统地理全图,” image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed September 3, 2023, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g7820.ct002256/. [↑](#endnote-ref-269)