Henry Kissinger

ON CHINA

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The Penguin Press

New York

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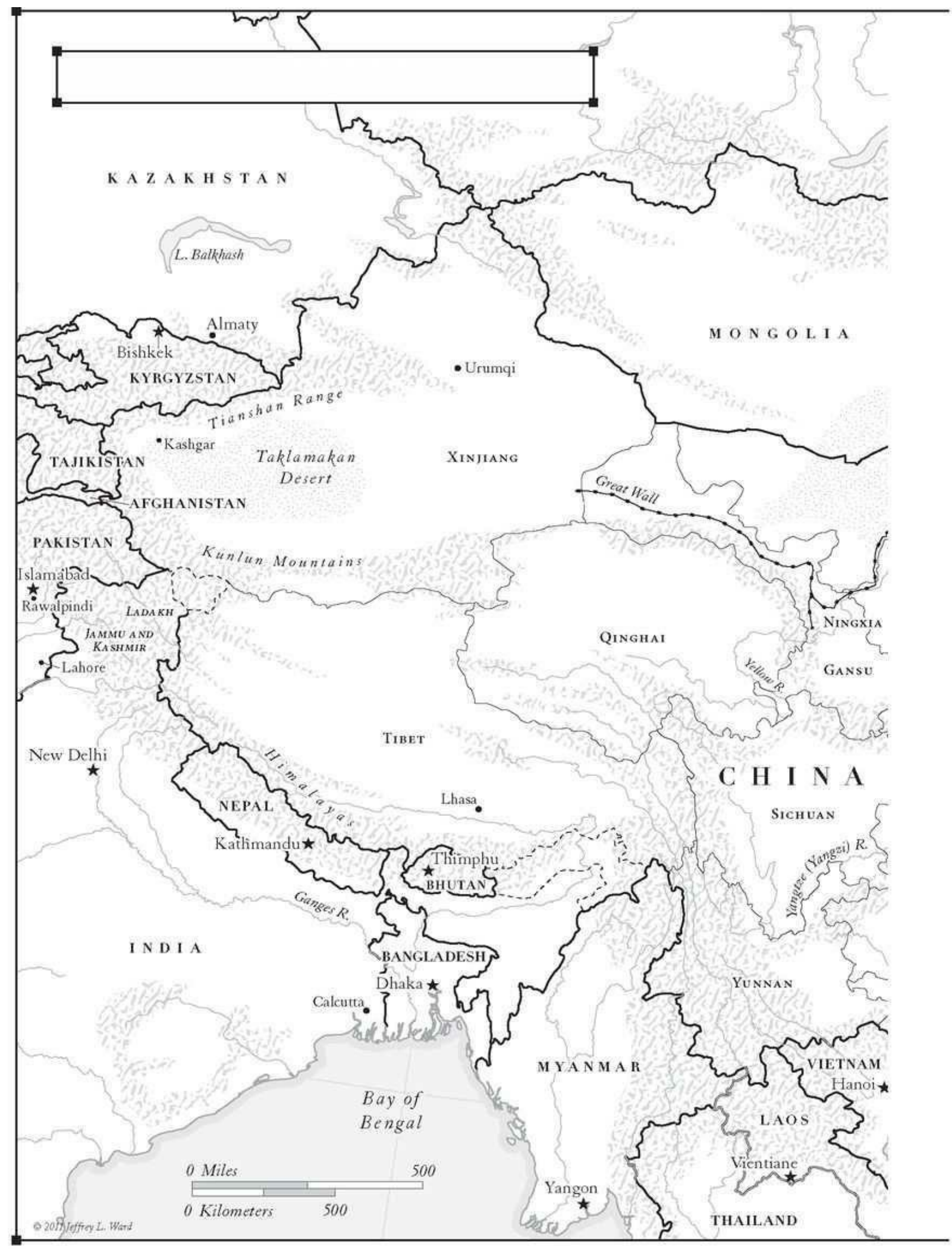
TO ANNETTE AND OSCAR DE LA RENTA

CHINA AND ITS NEIGHBORS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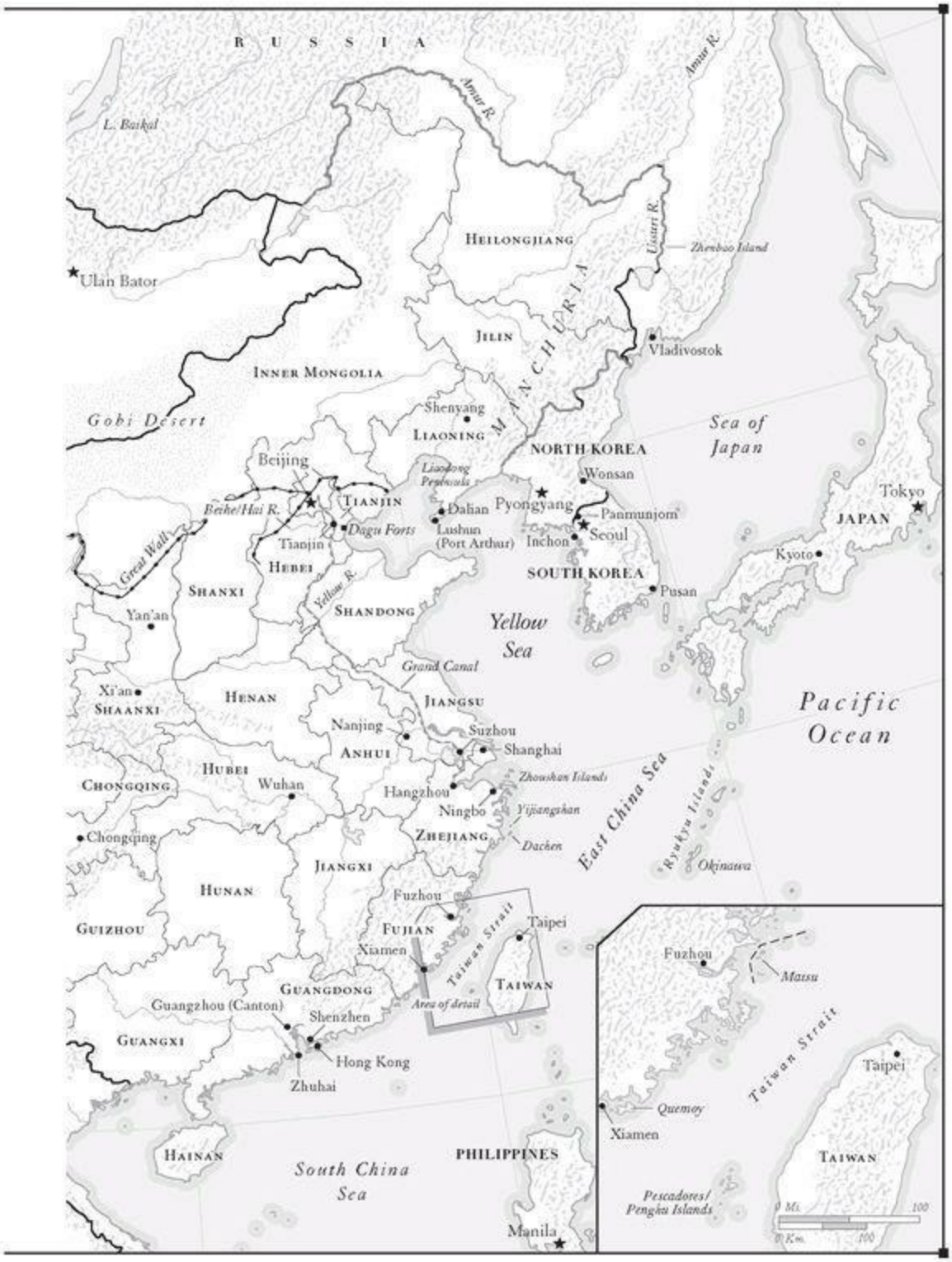
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Preface

FORTY YEARS AGO almost to the day, President Richard Nixon did me the honor of sending me to Beijing to reestablish contact with a country central to the history of Asia with which America had had no high-level contact for over twenty years. The American motive for the opening was to put before our people a vision of peace transcending the travail of the Vietnam War and the ominous vistas of the Cold War. China, though technically an ally of the Soviet Union, was in quest of maneuvering room to resist a threatened attack from Moscow.

In the interval I have been to China more than fifty times. Like many visitors over the centuries, I have come to admire the Chinese people, their endurance, their subtlety, their family sense, and the culture they represent. At the same time, all my life I have reflected on the building of peace, largely from an American perspective. I have had the good luck of being able to pursue these two strands of thinking simultaneously as a senior official, as a carrier of messages, and as a scholar.

This book is an effort, based in part on conversations with Chinese leaders, to explain the conceptual way the Chinese think about problems of peace and war and international order, and its relationship to the more pragmatic, case-by-case American approach. Different histories and cultures produce occasionally divergent conclusions. I do not always agree with the Chinese perspective, nor will every reader. But it is necessary to understand it, since China will play such a big role in the world that is emerging in the twenty-first century.

Since my first visit, China has become an economic superpower and a major factor in shaping the global political order. The United States has prevailed in the Cold War. The relationship between China and the United States has become a central element in the quest for world peace and global well-being.

Eight American presidents and four generations of Chinese leaders have managed this delicate relationship in an astonishingly consistent manner, considering the difference in starting points. Both sides have refused to permit historic legacies or different conceptions of domestic order to interrupt their essentially cooperative relationship.

It has been a complex journey, for both societies believe they represent unique values. American exceptionalism is missionary. It holds that the United States has an obligation to spread its values to every part of the world. China's exceptionalism is cultural. China does not proselytize; it does not claim that its contemporary institutions are relevant outside China. But it is the heir of the Middle Kingdom tradition, which formally graded all other states as various levels of tributaries based on their approximation to Chinese cultural and political forms; in other words, a kind of cultural universality.

A primary focus of this book is the interaction between Chinese and American leaders since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. Both in and out of government, I have kept records of my conversations with four generations of Chinese leaders and have drawn on them as a primary source in writing this book.

This book could not have been written without the dedicated and able assistance of associates and of friends who permitted me to impose on them for help.

Schuyler Schouten was indispensable. He came to my attention eight years ago when Professor John Gaddis of Yale recommended him as one of his ablest students. When I started this project I asked him to take a two-month leave from his law firm. He did so, and in the process became so involved that he saw the effort through to its end a year later. Schuyler undertook much of the basic research. He helped with the translation of Chinese texts and even more with penetrating the

implications of some of the subtler ones. He was indefatigable during the editing and proofreading phase. I have never had a better research associate and very rarely one as good.

It has been my good fortune to have Stephanie Junger-Moat work with me for a decade across the gamut of my activities. She was what in baseball they would call the essential utility player. She did research and some editing, and was the principal liaison with the publisher. She checked all the endnotes. She helped coordinate the typing and never hesitated to pitch in when deadlines approached. Her crucial contribution was reinforced by her charm and diplomatic skill.

Harry Evans edited *White House Years* thirty years ago. He permitted me to impose on our friendship to go over the entire manuscript. His editorial and structural suggestions were numerous and wise.

Theresa Amantea and Jody Williams typed the manuscript many times over and spent many evenings and weekends helping meet deadlines. Their good cheer, efficiency, and sharp eye for detail were vital.

Stapleton Roy, former ambassador to China and distinguished China scholar; Winston Lord, my associate during the opening to China and later ambassador to China; and Dick Viets, my literary executor, read several chapters and made insightful comments. Jon Vanden Heuvel provided helpful research on several chapters.

Publishing with The Penguin Press was a happy experience. Ann Godoff was always available, ever insightful, never harassing, and fun to be with. Bruce Giffords, Noirin Lucas, and Tory Klose expertly shepherded the book through the editorial production process. Fred Chase copyedited the manuscript with care and efficiency. Laura Stickney was the book's principal editor. Young enough to be my granddaughter, she was in no way intimidated by the author. She overcame her reservations about my political views sufficiently that I came to look forward to her occasionally acerbic and always incisive comments in the margins of the manuscript. She was indefatigable, perceptive, and vastly helpful.

To all these people I am immensely grateful.

The governmental papers on which I drew have all been declassified for some time. I would like to thank in particular the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Cold War International History Project for permission to use extended excerpts from their archive of declassified Russian and Chinese documents. The Carter Library helpfully made available many of the transcripts of meetings with Chinese leaders during the Carter presidency, and the Reagan Library provided numerous useful documents from their files.

Needless to say, the shortcomings of the book are my own.

As always over half a century, my wife, Nancy, provided her staunch moral and intellectual support amidst the solitude authors (or at least this author) generate around themselves when writing. She read most of the chapters and made innumerable important suggestions.

I have dedicated *On China* to Annette and Oscar de la Renta. I started the book in their home in Punta Cana and finished it there. Their hospitality has been only one facet of a friendship that has added joy and depth to my life.

Henry A. Kissinger
New York, January 2011

Note on Chinese Spellings

THIS BOOK MAKES frequent reference to Chinese names and terms. Well-known alternative spellings exist for many Chinese words, based on two particularly widespread methods of transliterating Chinese characters into the Roman alphabet: the Wade-Giles method, prevalent through much of the world until the 1980s, and the pinyin method, adopted officially in the People's Republic of China in 1979 and increasingly common in Western and other Asian publications thereafter.

For the most part, this book employs pinyin spellings. For example, the pinyin spelling "Deng Xiaoping" is used rather than the Wade-Giles spelling "Teng H'siao-ping." Where other, non-pinyin spellings remain significantly more familiar, they are retained for the reader's convenience. For example, for the name of the ancient military theorist "Sun Tzu," the traditional spelling is used, rather than the newer pinyin spelling "Sunzi."

Occasionally, in the interest of achieving consistency throughout the book's text, quoted references to names originally listed in the Wade-Giles format have been rendered in their pinyin spellings. Such changes are further noted in the endnotes. In each case, the underlying Chinese word remains the same; the difference is in the method of rendering the word in the Roman alphabet.

Prologue

IN OCTOBER 1962, China's revolutionary leader Mao Zedong summoned his top military and political commanders to meet with him in Beijing. Two thousand miles to the west, in the forbidding and sparsely populated terrain of the Himalayas, Chinese and Indian troops were locked in a standoff over the two countries' disputed border. The dispute arose over different versions of history: India claimed the frontier demarcated during British rule, China the limits of imperial China. India had deployed its outposts to the edge of its conception of the border; China had surrounded the Indian positions. Attempts to negotiate a territorial settlement had foundered.

Mao had decided to break the stalemate. He reached far back into the classical Chinese tradition that he was otherwise in the process of dismantling. China and India, Mao told his commanders, had previously fought "one and a half" wars. Beijing could draw operational lessons from each. The first war had occurred over 1,300 years earlier, during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), when China dispatched troops to support an Indian kingdom against an illegitimate and aggressive rival. After China's intervention, the two countries had enjoyed centuries of flourishing religious and economic exchange. The lesson learned from the ancient campaign, as Mao described it, was that China and India were not doomed to perpetual enmity. They could enjoy a long period of peace again, but to do so, China had to use force to "knock" India back "to the negotiating table." The "half war," in Mao's mind, had taken place seven hundred years later, when the Mongol ruler Timurlane sacked Delhi. (Mao reasoned that since Mongolia and China were then part of the same political entity, this was a "half" Sino-Indian war.) Timurlane had won a significant victory, but once in India his army had killed over 100,000 prisoners. This time, Mao enjoined his Chinese forces to be "restrained and principled."[1]

No one in Mao's audience—the Communist Party leadership of a revolutionary "New China" proclaiming its intent to remake the international order and abolish China's own feudal past—seems to have questioned the relevance of these ancient precedents to China's current strategic imperatives. Planning for an attack continued on the basis of the principles Mao had outlined. Weeks later the offensive proceeded much as he described: China executed a sudden, devastating blow on the Indian positions and then retreated to the previous line of control, even going so far as to return the captured Indian heavy weaponry.

In no other country is it conceivable that a modern leader would initiate a major national undertaking by invoking strategic principles from a millennium-old event—nor that he could confidently expect his colleagues to understand the significance of his allusions. Yet China is singular. No other country can claim so long a continuous civilization, or such an intimate link to its ancient past and classical principles of strategy and statesmanship.

Other societies, the United States included, have claimed universal applicability for their values and institutions. Still, none equals China in persisting—and persuading its neighbors to acquiesce—in such an elevated conception of its world role for so long, and in the face of so many historical vicissitudes. From the emergence of China as a unified state in the third century B.C. until the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, China stood at the center of an East Asian international system of remarkable durability. The Chinese Emperor was conceived of (and recognized by most neighboring states) as the pinnacle of a universal political hierarchy, with all other states' rulers theoretically serving as vassals. Chinese language, culture, and political institutions were the hallmarks of civilization, such that even regional rivals and foreign conquerors adopted them to varying degrees as a sign of their own legitimacy (often as a first step to being subsumed within

China).

The traditional cosmology endured despite catastrophes and centuries-long periods of political decay. Even when China was weak or divided, its centrality remained the touchstone of regional legitimacy; aspirants, both Chinese and foreign, vied to unify or conquer it, then ruled from the Chinese capital without challenging the basic premise that it was the center of the universe. While other countries were named after ethnic groups or geographical landmarks, China called itself *zhongguo*—the "Middle Kingdom" or the "Central Country." [2] Any attempt to understand China's twentieth-century diplomacy or its twenty-first-century world role must begin—even at the cost of some potential oversimplification—with a basic appreciation of the traditional context.

CHAPTER 1

The Singularity of China

SOCIETIES AND NATIONS tend to think of themselves as eternal. They also cherish a tale of their origin. A special feature of Chinese civilization is that it seems to have no beginning. It appears in history less as a conventional nation-state than a permanent natural phenomenon. In the tale of the Yellow Emperor, revered by many Chinese as the legendary founding ruler, China seems already to exist. When the Yellow Emperor appears in myth, Chinese civilization has fallen into chaos. Competing princes harass each other and the people, yet an enfeebled ruler fails to maintain order. Levying an army, the new hero pacifies the realm and is acclaimed as emperor.[1]

The Yellow Emperor has gone down in history as a founding hero; yet in the founding myth, he is reestablishing, not creating, an empire. China predated him; it strides into the historical consciousness as an established state requiring only restoration, not creation. This paradox of Chinese history recurs with the ancient sage Confucius: again, he is seen as the "founder" of a culture although he stressed that he had invented nothing, that he was merely trying to reinvigorate the principles of harmony which had once existed in the golden age but had been lost in Confucius's own era of political chaos.

Reflecting on the paradox of China's origins, the nineteenth-century missionary and traveler, the Abbé Régis-Evariste Huc, observed:

> Chinese civilization originates in an antiquity so remote that we vainly endeavor to discover its commencement. There are no traces of the state of infancy among this people. This is a very peculiar fact respecting China. We are accustomed in the history of nations to find some well-defined point of departure, and the historic documents, traditions, and monuments that remain to us generally permit us to follow, almost step by step, the progress of civilization, to be present at its birth, to watch its development, its onward march, and in many cases, its subsequent decay and fall. But it is not thus with the Chinese. They seem to have been always living in the same stage of advancement as in the present day; and the data of antiquity are such as to confirm that opinion.[2]

When Chinese written characters first evolved, during the Shang Dynasty in the second millennium B.C., ancient Egypt was at the height of its glory. The great city-states of classical Greece had not yet emerged, and Rome was millennia away. Yet the direct descendant of the Shang writing system is still used by well over a billion people today. Chinese today can understand inscriptions written in the age of Confucius; contemporary Chinese books and conversations are enriched by centuries-old aphorisms citing ancient battles and court intrigues.

At the same time, Chinese history featured many periods of civil war, interregnum, and chaos. After each collapse, the Chinese state reconstituted itself as if by some immutable law of nature. At each stage, a new uniting figure emerged, following essentially the precedent of the Yellow Emperor, to subdue his rivals and reunify China (and sometimes enlarge its bounds). The famous opening of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a fourteenth-century epic novel treasured by centuries of Chinese (including Mao, who is said to have pored over it almost obsessively in his youth), evokes this continuous rhythm: "The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus it has

ever been."[3] Each period of disunity was viewed as an aberration. Each new dynasty reached back to the previous dynasty's principles of governance in order to reestablish continuity. The fundamental precepts of Chinese culture endured, tested by the strain of periodic calamity.

Before the seminal event of Chinese unification in 221 B.C., there had been a millennium of dynastic rule that gradually disintegrated as the feudal subdivisions evolved from autonomy to independence. The culmination was two and a half centuries of turmoil recorded in history as the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.). Its European equivalent would be the interregnum between the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and the end of the Second World War, when a multiplicity of European states was struggling for preeminence within the framework of the balance of power. After 221 B.C., China maintained the ideal of empire and unity but followed the practice of fracturing, then reuniting, in cycles sometimes lasting several hundred years.

When the state fractured, wars between the various components were fought savagely. Mao once claimed that the population of China declined from fifty million to ten million during the so-called Three Kingdoms period (A.D. 220–80),[4] and the conflict among the contending groups between the two world wars of the twentieth century was extremely bloody as well.

At its ultimate extent, the Chinese cultural sphere stretched over a continental area much larger than any European state, indeed about the size of continental Europe. Chinese language and culture, and the Emperor's political writ, expanded to every known terrain: from the steppelands and pine forests in the north shading into Siberia, to the tropical jungles and terraced rice farms in the south; from the east coast with its canals, ports, and fishing villages, to the stark deserts of Central Asia and the ice-capped peaks of the Himalayan frontier. The extent and variety of this territory bolstered the sense that China was a world unto itself. It supported a conception of the Emperor as a figure of universal consequence, presiding over *tian xia*, or "All Under Heaven."

The Era of Chinese Preeminence

Through many millennia of Chinese civilization, China was never obliged to deal with other countries or civilizations that were comparable to it in scale and sophistication. India was known to the Chinese, as Mao later noted, but for much of history it was divided into separate kingdoms. The two civilizations exchanged goods and Buddhist influences along the Silk Road but were elsewhere walled off from casual contact by the almost impenetrable Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau. The massive and forbidding deserts of Central Asia separated China from the Near Eastern cultures of Persia and Babylonia and even more from the Roman Empire. Trade caravans undertook intermittent journeys, but China as a society did not engage societies of comparable scale and achievement. Though China and Japan shared a number of core cultural and political institutions, neither was prepared to recognize the other's superiority; their solution was to curtail contact for centuries at a time. Europe was even further away in what the Chinese considered the Western Oceans, by definition inaccessible to Chinese culture and pitiably incapable of acquiring it—as the Emperor told a British envoy in 1793.

The territorial claims of the Chinese Empire stopped at the water's edge. As early as the Song Dynasty (960–1279), China led the world in nautical technology; its fleets could have carried the empire into an era of conquest and exploration.[5] Yet China acquired no overseas colonies and showed relatively little interest in the countries beyond its coast. It developed no rationale for venturing abroad to convert the barbarians to Confucian principles or Buddhist virtues. When the conquering Mongols commandeered the Song fleet and its experienced captains, they mounted two attempted invasions of Japan. Both were turned back by inclement weather—the *kamikaze* (or "Divine Wind") of Japanese lore.[6] Yet when the Mongol Dynasty collapsed, the expeditions, though technically feasible, were never again attempted. No Chinese leader ever articulated a rationale for why China would want to control the Japanese archipelago.

But in the early years of the Ming Dynasty, between 1405 and 1433, China launched one of history's most remarkable and mysterious naval enterprises: Admiral Zheng He set out in fleets of technologically unparalleled "treasure ships" to destinations as far as Java, India, the Horn of Africa, and the Strait of Hormuz. At the time of Zheng's voyages, the European age of exploration had not yet begun. China's fleet possessed what would have seemed an unbridgeable technological advantage: in the size, sophistication, and number of its vessels, it dwarfed the Spanish Armada (which was still 150 years away).

Historians still debate the actual purpose of these missions. Zheng He was a singular figure in the age of exploration: a Chinese Muslim eunuch conscripted into imperial service as a child, he fits no obvious historical precedent. At each stop on his journeys, he formally proclaimed the magnificence of China's new Emperor, bestowed lavish gifts on the rulers he encountered, and invited them to travel in person or send envoys to China. There, they were to acknowledge their place in the Sinocentric world order by performing the ritual "kowtow" to acknowledge the Emperor's superiority. Yet beyond declaring China's greatness and issuing invitations to portentous ritual, Zheng He displayed no territorial ambition. He brought back only gifts, or "tribute"; he claimed no colonies or resources for China beyond the metaphysical bounty of extending the limits of All Under Heaven. At most he can be said to have created favorable conditions for Chinese merchants, through a kind of early exercise of Chinese "soft power."[7]

Zheng He's expeditions stopped abruptly in 1433, coincident with the recurrence of threats along

China's northern land frontier. The next Emperor ordered the fleet dismantled and the records of Zheng He's voyages destroyed. The expeditions were never repeated. Though Chinese traders continued to ply the routes Zheng He sailed, China's naval abilities faded—so much so that the Ming rulers' response to the subsequent menace of piracy off China's southeast coast was to attempt a forced migration of the coastal population ten miles inland. China's naval history was thus a hinge that failed to swing: technically capable of dominance, China retired voluntarily from the field of naval exploration just as Western interest was beginning to take hold.

China's splendid isolation nurtured a particular Chinese self-perception. Chinese elites grew accustomed to the notion that China was unique—not just "a great civilization" among others, but civilization itself. A British translator wrote in 1850:

> An intelligent European, accustomed to reflect on the state of a number of countries enjoying a variety of different advantages, and laboring each under peculiar disadvantages, could, by a few well directed questions, and from very little data, form a tolerably correct notion of the state of a people hitherto unknown to him; but it would be a great error to suppose that this is the case with the Chinese. Their exclusion of foreigners and confinement to their own country has, by depriving them of all opportunities of making comparisons, sadly circumscribed their ideas; they are thus totally unable to free themselves from the dominion of association, and judge everything by rules of purely Chinese convention.[8]

China knew, of course, of different societies around its periphery in Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma; but in the Chinese perception, China was considered the center of the world, the "Middle Kingdom," and other societies were assessed as gradations from it. As the Chinese saw it, a host of lesser states that imbibed Chinese culture and paid tribute to China's greatness constituted the natural order of the universe. The borders between China and the surrounding peoples were not so much political and territorial demarcations as cultural differentiations. The outward radiance of Chinese culture throughout East Asia led the American political scientist Lucian Pye to comment famously that, in the modern age, China remains a "civilization pretending to be a nation-state."[9]

The pretensions underlying this traditional Chinese world order endured well into the modern era. As late as 1863, China's Emperor (himself a member of a "foreign" Manchu Dynasty that had conquered China two centuries earlier) dispatched a letter informing Abraham Lincoln of China's commitment to good relations with the United States. The Emperor based his communication on the grandiloquent assurance that, "[h]aving, with reverence, received the commission from Heaven to rule the universe, we regard both the middle empire [China] and the outside countries as constituting one family, without any distinction."[10] When the letter was dispatched, China had already lost two wars with the Western powers, which were busy staking out spheres of interest in Chinese territory. The Emperor seems to have treated these catastrophes as similar to other barbarian invasions that were overcome, in the end, by China's endurance and superior culture.

For most of history, there was, in fact, nothing particularly fanciful about Chinese claims. With each generation, the Han Chinese had expanded from their original base in the Yellow River valley, gradually drawing neighboring societies into various stages of approximation of Chinese patterns. Chinese scientific and technological achievements equaled, and frequently outstripped, those of their Western European, Indian, and Arab counterparts.[11]

Not only was the scale of China traditionally far beyond that of the European states in population

and in territory; until the Industrial Revolution, China was far richer. United by a vast system of canals connecting the great rivers and population centers, China was for centuries the world's most productive economy and most populous trading area.[12] But since it was largely self-sufficient, other regions had only peripheral comprehension of its vastness and its wealth. In fact, China produced a greater share of total world GDP than any Western society in eighteen of the last twenty centuries. As late as 1820, it produced over 30 percent of world GDP—an amount exceeding the GDP of Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the United States combined.[13]

Western observers encountering China in the early modern era were stunned by its vitality and material prosperity. Writing in 1736, the French Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Du Halde summed up the awestruck reactions of Western visitors to China:

> The riches peculiar to each province, and the facility of conveying merchandise, by means of rivers and canals, have rendered the domestic trade of the empire always very flourishing. . . . The inland trade of China is so great that the commerce of all Europe is not to be compared therewith; the provinces being like so many kingdoms, which communicate to each other their respective productions.[14]

Thirty years later, the French political economist François Quesnay went even further:

> [N]o one can deny that this state is the most beautiful in the world, the most densely populated, and the most flourishing kingdom known. Such an empire as that of China is equal to what all Europe would be if the latter were united under a single sovereign.[15]

China traded with foreigners and occasionally adopted ideas and inventions from abroad. But more often the Chinese believed that the most valuable possessions and intellectual achievements were to be found within China. Trade with China was so prized that it was with only partial exaggeration that Chinese elites described it not as ordinary economic exchange but as "tribute" to China's superiority.

Confucianism

Almost all empires were created by force, but none can be sustained by it. Universal rule, to last, needs to translate force into obligation. Otherwise, the energies of the rulers will be exhausted in maintaining their dominance at the expense of their ability to shape the future, which is the ultimate task of statesmanship. Empires persist if repression gives way to consensus.

So it was with China. The methods by which it was unified, and periodically overturned and reunified again, were occasionally brutal. Chinese history witnessed its share of sanguinary rebellions and dynastic tyrants. Yet China owed its millennial survival far less to the punishments meted out by its Emperors than to the community of values fostered among its population and its government of scholar-officials.

Not the least exceptional aspect of Chinese culture is that these values were essentially secular in nature. At the time when Buddhism appeared in Indian culture stressing contemplation and inner peace, and monotheism was proclaimed by the Jewish—and, later, Christian and Islamic—prophets with an evocation of a life after death, China produced no religious themes in the Western sense at all. The Chinese never generated a myth of cosmic creation. Their universe was created by the Chinese themselves, whose values, even when declared of universal applicability, were conceived of as Chinese in origin.

The predominant values of Chinese society were derived from the prescriptions of an ancient philosopher known to posterity as Kong Fu-zi (or "Confucius" in the Latinized version). Confucius (551–479 B.C.) lived at the end of the so-called Spring and Autumn period (770–476 B.C.), a time of political upheaval that led to the brutal struggles of the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.). The ruling House of Zhou was in decline, unable to exert its authority over rebellious princes competing for political power. Greed and violence went unchecked. All Under Heaven was again in disarray.

Like Machiavelli, Confucius was an itinerant in his country, hoping to be retained as an advisor to one of the princes then contending for survival. But unlike Machiavelli, Confucius was concerned more with the cultivation of social harmony than with the machinations of power. His themes were the principles of compassionate rule, the performance of correct rituals, and the inculcation of filial piety. Perhaps because he offered his prospective employers no short-term route to wealth or power, Confucius died without achieving his goal: he never found a prince to implement his maxims, and China continued its slide toward political collapse and war.[16]

But Confucius's teachings, recorded by his disciples, survived. When the bloodletting ended and China again stood unified, the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) adopted Confucian thought as an official state philosophy. Compiled into a central collection of Confucius's sayings (the *Analects*) and subsequent books of learned commentary, the Confucian canon would evolve into something akin to China's Bible and its Constitution combined. Expertise in these texts became the central qualification for service in China's imperial bureaucracy—a priesthood of literary scholar-officials selected by nationwide competitive examinations and charged with maintaining harmony in the Emperor's vast realms.

Confucius's answer to the chaos of his era was the "Way" of the just and harmonious society, which, he taught, had once been realized before—in a distant Chinese golden age. Mankind's central spiritual task was to re-create this proper order already on the verge of being lost. Spiritual fulfillment was a task not so much of revelation or liberation but patient recovery of forgotten principles of self-restraint. The goal was rectification, not progress.[17] Learning was the key to advancement in a Confucian society. Thus Confucius taught that

> [l]ove of kindness, without a love to learn, finds itself obscured by foolishness. Love of knowledge, without a love to learn, finds itself obscured by loose speculation. Love of honesty, without a love to learn, finds itself obscured by harmful candour. Love of straightforwardness, without a love to learn, finds itself obscured by misdirected judgment. Love of daring, without a love to learn, finds itself obscured by insubordination. And love for strength of character, without a love to learn, finds itself obscured by intractability.[18]

Confucius preached a hierarchical social creed: the fundamental duty was to "Know thy place." To its adherents the Confucian order offered the inspiration of service in pursuit of a greater harmony. Unlike the prophets of monotheistic religions, Confucius preached no teleology of history pointing mankind to personal redemption. His philosophy sought the redemption of the state through righteous individual behavior. Oriented toward this world, his thinking affirmed a code of social conduct, not a roadmap to the afterlife.

At the pinnacle of the Chinese order stood the Emperor, a figure with no parallels in the Western experience. He combined the spiritual as well as the secular claims of the social order. The Chinese Emperor was both a political ruler and a metaphysical concept. In his political role, the Emperor was conceived as mankind's supreme sovereign—the Emperor of Humanity, standing atop a world political hierarchy that mirrored China's hierarchical Confucian social structure. Chinese protocol insisted on recognizing his overlordship via the kowtow—the act of complete prostration, with the forehead touching the ground three times on each prostration.

The Emperor's second, metaphysical, role was his status as the "Son of Heaven," the symbolic intermediary between Heaven, Earth, and humanity. This role also implied moral obligation on the Emperor's part. Through humane conduct, performance of correct rituals, and occasional stern punishments, the Emperor was perceived as the linchpin of the "Great Harmony" of all things great and small. If the Emperor strayed from the path of virtue, All Under Heaven would fall into chaos. Even natural catastrophes might signify that disharmony had beset the universe. The existing dynasty would be seen to have lost the "Mandate of Heaven" by which it possessed the right to govern: rebellions would break out, and a new dynasty would restore the Great Harmony of the universe.[19]

Concepts of International Relations: Impartiality or Equality?

Just as there are no great cathedrals in China, there are no Blenheim Palaces. Aristocratic political grandees like the Duke of Marlborough, who built Blenheim, did not come into being. Europe entered the modern age a welter of political diversity—independent princes and dukes and counts, cities that governed themselves, the Roman Catholic Church, which claimed an authority outside of state purview, and Protestant groups, which aspired to building their own self-governing civil societies. By contrast, when it entered the modern period, China had for well over one thousand years a fully formed imperial bureaucracy recruited by competitive examination, permeating and regulating all aspects of the economy and society.

The Chinese approach to world order was thus vastly different from the system that took hold in the West. The modern Western conception of international relations emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the medieval structure of Europe dissolved into a group of states of approximately equal strength, and the Catholic Church split into various denominations. Balance-of-power diplomacy was less a choice than an inevitability. No state was strong enough to impose its will; no religion retained sufficient authority to sustain universality. The concept of sovereignty and the legal equality of states became the basis of international law and diplomacy.

China, by contrast, was never engaged in sustained contact with another country on the basis of equality for the simple reason that it never encountered societies of comparable culture or magnitude. That the Chinese Empire should tower over its geographical sphere was taken virtually as a law of nature, an expression of the Mandate of Heaven. For Chinese Emperors, the mandate did not necessarily imply an adversarial relationship with neighboring peoples; preferably it did not. Like the United States, China thought of itself as playing a special role. But it never espoused the American notion of universalism to spread its values around the world. It confined itself to controlling the barbarians immediately at its doorstep. It strove for tributary states like Korea to recognize China's special status, and in return, it conferred benefits such as trading rights. As for the remote barbarians such as Europeans, about whom they knew little, the Chinese maintained a friendly, if condescending, aloofness. They had little interest in converting them to Chinese ways. The founding Emperor of the Ming Dynasty expressed this view in 1372: "Countries of the western ocean are rightly called distant regions. They come [to us] across the seas. And it is difficult for them to calculate the year and month [of arrival]. Regardless of their numbers, we treat them [on the principle of] 'those who come modestly are sent off generously.'"[20]

The Chinese Emperors felt it was impractical to contemplate influencing countries that nature had given the misfortune of locating at such a great distance from China. In the Chinese version of exceptionalism, China did not export its ideas but let others come to seek them. Neighboring peoples, the Chinese believed, benefited from contact with China and civilization so long as they acknowledged the suzerainty of the Chinese government. Those who did not were barbarian. Subservience to the Emperor and observance of imperial rituals was the core of culture.[21] When the empire was strong, this cultural sphere expanded: All Under Heaven was a multinational entity comprising the ethnic Han Chinese majority and numerous non-Han Chinese ethnic groups.

In official Chinese records, foreign envoys did not come to the imperial court to engage in negotiations or affairs of state; they "came to be transformed" by the Emperor's civilizing influence. The Emperor did not hold "summit meetings" with other heads of state; instead, audiences with him represented the "tender cherishing of men from afar," who brought tribute to recognize his overlordship. When the Chinese court deigned to send envoys abroad, they were not diplomats, but

"Heavenly Envoys" from the Celestial Court.

The organization of the Chinese government reflected the hierarchical approach to world order. China handled ties with tribute-paying states such as Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam through the Ministry of Rituals, implying that diplomacy with these peoples was but one aspect of the larger metaphysical task of administering the Great Harmony. With less Sinicized mounted tribes to the north and west, China came to rely on a "Court of Dependencies," analogous to a colonial office, whose mission was to invest vassal princes with titles and maintain peace on the frontier.[22]

Only under the pressure of Western incursions in the nineteenth century did China establish something analogous to a foreign ministry to manage diplomacy as an independent function of government, in 1861 after the defeat in two wars with the Western powers. It was considered a temporary necessity, to be abolished once the immediate crisis subsided. The new ministry was deliberately located in an old and undistinguished building previously used by the Department of Iron Coins, to convey, in the words of the leading Qing Dynasty statesman, Prince Gong, "the hidden meaning that it cannot have a standing equal to that of other traditional government offices, thus preserving the distinction between China and foreign countries."[23]

European-style ideas of interstate politics and diplomacy were not unknown in the Chinese experience; rather, they existed as a kind of countertradition taking place within China in times of disunity. But as if by some unwritten law, these periods of division ended with the reunification of All Under Heaven, and the reassertion of Chinese centrality by a new dynasty.

In its imperial role, China offered surrounding foreign peoples impartiality, not equality: it would treat them humanely and compassionately in proportion to their attainment of Chinese culture and their observance of rituals connoting submission to China.

What was most remarkable about the Chinese approach to international affairs was less its monumental formal pretensions than its underlying strategic acumen and longevity. For during most of Chinese history, the numerous "lesser" peoples along China's long and shifting frontiers were often better armed and more mobile than the Chinese. To China's north and west were seminomadic peoples—the Manchus, Mongols, Uighurs, Tibetans, and eventually the expansionist Russian Empire—whose mounted cavalry could launch raids across its extended frontiers on China's agricultural heartland with relative impunity. Retaliatory expeditions faced inhospitable terrain and extended supply lines. To China's south and east were peoples who, though nominally subordinate in the Chinese cosmology, possessed significant martial traditions and national identities. The most tenacious of them, the Vietnamese, had fiercely resisted Chinese claims of superiority and could claim to have bested China in battle.

China was in no position to conquer all of its neighbors. Its population consisted mainly of farmers bound to their ancestral plots. Its mandarin elite earned their positions not through displays of martial valor but by way of mastery of the Confucian classics and refined arts such as calligraphy and poetry. Individually, neighboring peoples could pose formidable threats; with any degree of unity, they would be overwhelming. The historian Owen Lattimore wrote, "Barbarian invasion therefore hung over China as a permanent threat. . . . Any barbarian nation that could guard its own rear and flanks against the other barbarians could set out confidently to invade China."[24] China's vaunted centrality and material wealth would turn on itself and into an invitation for invasion from all sides.

The Great Wall, so prominent in Western iconography of China, was a reflection of this basic vulnerability, though rarely a successful solution to it. Instead, Chinese statesmen relied on a rich array of diplomatic and economic instruments to draw potentially hostile foreigners into relationships the Chinese could manage. The highest aspiration was less to conquer (though China occasionally

mounted major military campaigns) than to deter invasion and prevent the formation of barbarian coalitions.

Through trade incentives and skillful use of political theater, China coaxed neighboring peoples into observing the norms of Chinese centrality while projecting an image of awesome majesty to deter potential invaders from testing China's strength. Its goal was not to conquer and subjugate the barbarians but to "rule [them] with a loose rein" (*ji mi*). For those who would not obey, China would exploit divisions among them, famously "using barbarians to check barbarians" and, when necessary, "using barbarians to attack barbarians."[25] For as a Ming Dynasty official wrote of the potentially threatening tribes on China's northeastern frontier:

> [I]f the tribes are divided among themselves they [will remain] weak and [it will be] easy to hold them in subjection; if the tribes are separated they shun each other and readily obey. We favor one or other [of their chieftains] and permit them to fight each other. This is a principle of political action which asserts: "Wars between the 'barbarians' are auspicious for China."[26]

The goal of this system was essentially defensive: to prevent the formation of coalitions on China's borders. The principles of barbarian management became so ingrained in Chinese official thought that when the European "barbarians" arrived on China's shores in force in the nineteenth century, Chinese officials described their challenge with the same phrases used by their dynastic predecessors: they would "use barbarians against barbarians" until they could be soothed and subdued. And they applied a traditional strategy to answer the initial British attack. They invited other European countries in for the purpose of first stimulating and then manipulating their rivalry.

In pursuit of these aims, the Chinese court was remarkably pragmatic about the means it employed. The Chinese bribed the barbarians, or used Han demographic superiority to dilute them; when defeated, they submitted to them, as in the beginning of the Yuan and Qing Dynasties, as a prelude to Sinicizing them. The Chinese court regularly practiced what in other contexts would be considered appeasement, albeit through an elaborate filter of protocol that allowed the Chinese elites to claim it was an assertion of benevolent superiority. Thus a Han Dynasty minister described the "five baits" with which he proposed to manage the mounted Xiongnu tribes to China's northwestern frontier:

> To give them . . . elaborate clothes and carriages in order to corrupt their eyes; to give them fine food in order to corrupt their mouth; to give them music and women in order to corrupt their ears; to provide them with lofty buildings, granaries and slaves in order to corrupt their stomach . . . and, as for those who come to surrender, the emperor [should] show them favor by honoring them with an imperial reception party in which the emperor should personally serve them wine and food so as to corrupt their mind. These are what may be called the five baits.[27]

In periods of strength, the diplomacy of the Middle Kingdom was an ideological rationalization for imperial power. During periods of decline, it served to mask weakness and helped China manipulate contending forces.

In comparison to more recent regional contenders for power, China was a satisfied empire with limited territorial ambition. As a scholar during the Han Dynasty (A.D. 25–220) put it, "the emperor does not govern the barbarians. Those who come to him will not be rejected, and those who leave

will not be pursued."[28] The objective was a compliant, divided periphery, rather than one directly under Chinese control.

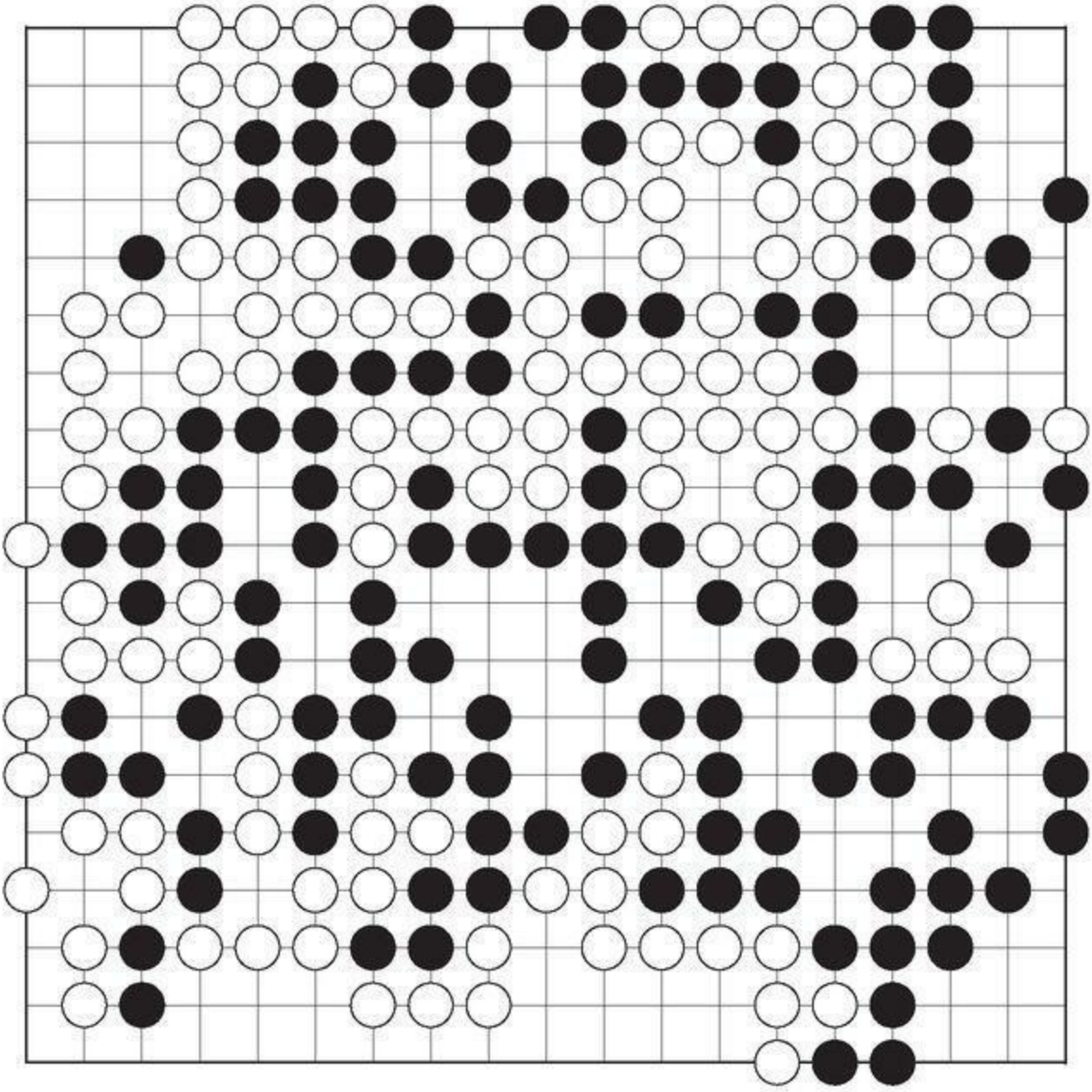
The most remarkable expression of China's fundamental pragmatism was its reaction to conquerors. When foreign dynasts prevailed in battle, the Chinese bureaucratic elite would offer their services and appeal to their conquerors on the premise that so vast and unique a land as they had just overrun could be ruled only by use of Chinese methods, Chinese language, and the existing Chinese bureaucracy. With each generation, the conquerors would find themselves increasingly assimilated into the order they had sought to dominate. Eventually their own home territories—the launching points for their invasions—would come to be regarded as part of China itself. They would find themselves pursuing traditional Chinese national interests, with the project of conquest effectively turned on its head.[29]

Chinese *Realpolitik* and Sun Tzu's *Art of War*

The Chinese have been shrewd practitioners of *Realpolitik* and students of a strategic doctrine distinctly different from the strategy and diplomacy that found favor in the West. A turbulent history has taught Chinese leaders that not every problem has a solution and that too great an emphasis on total mastery over specific events could upset the harmony of the universe. There were too many potential enemies for the empire ever to live in total security. If China's fate was relative security, it also implied relative insecurity—the need to learn the grammar of over a dozen neighboring states with significantly different histories and aspirations. Rarely did Chinese statesmen risk the outcome of a conflict on a single all-or-nothing clash; elaborate multiyear maneuvers were closer to their style. Where the Western tradition prized the decisive clash of forces emphasizing feats of heroism, the Chinese ideal stressed subtlety, indirection, and the patient accumulation of relative advantage.

This contrast is reflected in the respective intellectual games favored by each civilization. China's most enduring game is *wei qi* (pronounced roughly "way chee," and often known in the West by a variation of its Japanese name, *go*). *Wei qi* translates as "a game of surrounding pieces"; it implies a concept of strategic encirclement. The board, a grid of nineteen-by-nineteen lines, begins empty. Each player has 180 pieces, or stones, at his disposal, each of equal value with the others. The players take turns placing stones at any point on the board, building up positions of strength while working to encircle and capture the opponent's stones. Multiple contests take place simultaneously in different regions of the board. The balance of forces shifts incrementally with each move, as the players implement strategic plans and react to each other's initiatives. At the end of a well-played game, the board is filled by partially interlocking areas of strength. The margin of advantage is often slim, and to the untrained eye, the identity of the winner is not always immediately obvious.[30]

Chess, on the other hand, is about total victory. The purpose of the game is checkmate, to put the opposing king into a position where he cannot move without being destroyed. The vast majority of games end in total victory achieved by attrition or, more rarely, a dramatic, skillful maneuver. The only other possible outcome is a draw, meaning the abandonment of the hope for victory by both parties.



THE OUTCOME OF A *WEI QI* GAME BETWEEN TWO EXPERT PLAYERS. BLACK HAS WON BY A SLIGHT MARGIN.

Source: David Lai, "Learning from the Stones: A Go *Approach to Mastering China's Strategic Concept,* Shi*" (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2004).*

If chess is about the decisive battle, *wei qi* is about the protracted campaign. The chess player aims for total victory. The *wei qi* player seeks relative advantage. In chess, the player always has the capability of the adversary in front of him; all the pieces are always fully deployed. The *wei qi* player needs to assess not only the pieces on the board but the reinforcements the adversary is in a position to deploy. Chess teaches the Clausewitzian concepts of "center of gravity" and the "decisive point"—the game usually beginning as a struggle for the center of the board. *Wei qi* teaches the art of strategic encirclement. Where the skillful chess player aims to eliminate his opponent's pieces in a series of head-on clashes, a talented *wei qi* player moves into "empty" spaces on the board, gradually mitigating the strategic potential of his opponent's pieces. Chess produces single-mindedness; *wei qi* generates strategic flexibility.

A similar contrast exists in the case of China's distinctive military theory. Its foundations were laid during a period of upheaval, when ruthless struggles between rival kingdoms decimated China's

population. Reacting to this slaughter (and seeking to emerge victorious from it), Chinese thinkers developed strategic thought that placed a premium on victory through psychological advantage and preached the avoidance of direct conflict.

The seminal figure in this tradition is known to history as Sun Tzu (or "Master Sun"), author of the famed treatise *The Art of War*. Intriguingly, no one is sure exactly who he was. Since ancient times, scholars have debated the identity of *The Art of War*'s author and the date of its composition. The book presents itself as a collection of sayings by one Sun Wu, a general and wandering military advisor from the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history (770–476 B.C.), as recorded by his disciples. Some Chinese and later Western scholars have questioned whether such a Master Sun existed or, if he did, whether he was in fact responsible for *The Art of War*'s contents.[31]

Well over two thousand years after its composition, this volume of epigrammatic observations on strategy, diplomacy, and war—written in classical Chinese, halfway between poetry and prose—remains a central text of military thought. Its maxims found vivid expression in the twentieth-century Chinese civil war at the hands of Sun Tzu's student Mao Zedong, and in the Vietnam wars, as Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap employed Sun Tzu's principles of indirect attack and psychological combat against France and then the United States. (Sun Tzu has also achieved a second career of sorts in the West, with popular editions of *The Art of War* recasting him as a modern business management guru.) Even today Sun Tzu's text reads with a degree of immediacy and insight that places him among the ranks of the world's foremost strategic thinkers. One could argue that the disregard of his precepts was importantly responsible for America's frustration in its Asian wars.

What distinguishes Sun Tzu from Western writers on strategy is the emphasis on the psychological and political elements over the purely military. The great European military theorists Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri Jomini treat strategy as an activity in its own right, separate from politics. Even Clausewitz's famous dictum that war is the continuation of politics by other means implies that with war the statesman enters a new and distinct phase.

Sun Tzu merges the two fields. Where Western strategists reflect on the means to assemble superior power at the decisive point, Sun Tzu addresses the means of building a dominant political and psychological position, such that the outcome of a conflict becomes a foregone conclusion. Western strategists test their maxims by victories in battles; Sun Tzu tests by victories where battles have become unnecessary.

Sun Tzu's text on war does not have the quality of exaltation of some European literature on the subject, nor does it appeal to personal heroism. Its somber quality is reflected in the portentous opening of *The Art of War:*

> *War is*
> *A grave affair of the state;*
> *It is a place*
> *Of life and death,*
> *A road*
> *To survival and extinction,*
> *A matter*
> *To be pondered carefully.*[32]

And because the consequences of war are so grave, prudence is the value most to be cherished:

A ruler
Must never
Mobilize his men
Out of anger;
A general must never
Engage [in] battle
Out of spite . . .

Anger
Can turn to
Pleasure;
Spite
Can turn to
Joy.
But a nation destroyed
Cannot be
Put back together again;
A dead man
Cannot be
Brought back to life.

So the enlightened ruler
Is prudent;
The effective general
Is cautious.
This is the Way
To keep a nation
At peace
And an army
Intact.[33]

What should a statesman be prudent about? For Sun Tzu, victory is not simply the triumph of armed forces. Instead, it is the achievement of the ultimate political objectives that the military clash was intended to secure. Far better than challenging the enemy on the field of battle is undermining an enemy's morale or maneuvering him into an unfavorable position from which escape is impossible. Because war is a desperate and complex enterprise, self-knowledge is crucial. Strategy resolves itself into a psychological contest:

Ultimate excellence lies
Not in winning
Every battle
But in defeating the enemy
Without ever fighting.

The highest form of warfare
Is to attack [the enemy's]
Strategy itself;
The next,
To attack [his]
Alliances.
The next,
To attack
Armies;
The lowest form of war is
To attack
Cities.
Siege warfare
Is a last resort . . .

The Skillful Strategist
Defeats the enemy
Without doing battle,
Captures the city
Without laying siege,
Overthrows the enemy state
Without protracted war.[34]

Ideally, the commander would achieve a position of such dominance that he could avoid battle entirely. Or else he would use arms to deliver a coup de grâce after extensive analysis and logistical, diplomatic, and psychological preparation. Thus Sun Tzu's counsel that

The victorious army
Is victorious first
And seeks battle later;
The defeated army
Does battle first
And seeks victory later.[35]

Because attacks on an opponent's strategy and his alliances involve psychology and perception, Sun Tzu places considerable emphasis on the use of subterfuge and misinformation. "When able," he counseled,

Feign inability;
When deploying troops,
Appear not to be.
When near,
Appear far;
When far,
Appear near.[36]

To the commander following Sun Tzu's precepts, a victory achieved indirectly through deception or manipulation is more humane (and surely more economical) than a triumph by superior force. *The Art of War* advises the commander to induce his opponent into accomplishing the commander's own aims or force him into a position so impossible that he opts to surrender his army or state unharmed.

Perhaps Sun Tzu's most important insight was that in a military or strategic contest, everything is relevant and connected: weather, terrain, diplomacy, the reports of spies and double agents, supplies and logistics, the balance of forces, historic perceptions, the intangibles of surprise and morale. Each factor influences the others, giving rise to subtle shifts in momentum and relative advantage. There are no isolated events.

Hence the task of a strategist is less to analyze a particular situation than to determine its relationship to the context in which it occurs. No particular constellation is ever static; any pattern is temporary and in essence evolving. The strategist must capture the direction of that evolution and make it serve his ends. Sun Tzu uses the word "*shi*" for that quality, a concept with no direct Western counterpart.[37] In the military context, *shi* connotes the strategic trend and "potential energy" of a developing situation, "the power inherent in the particular arrangement of elements and . . . its developmental tendency."[38] In *The Art of War,* the word connotes the ever-changing configuration of forces as well as their general trend.

To Sun Tzu, the strategist mastering *shi* is akin to water flowing downhill, automatically finding the swiftest and easiest course. A successful commander waits before charging headlong into battle. He shies away from an enemy's strength; he spends his time observing and cultivating changes in the strategic landscape. He studies the enemy's preparations and his morale, husbands resources and defines them carefully, and plays on his opponent's psychological weaknesses—until at last he perceives the opportune moment to strike the enemy at his weakest point. He then deploys his resources swiftly and suddenly, rushing "downhill" along the path of least resistance, in an assertion of superiority that careful timing and preparation have rendered a fait accompli.[39] *The Art of War* articulates a doctrine less of territorial conquest than of psychological dominance; it was the way the North Vietnamese fought America (though Hanoi usually translated its psychological gains into actual territorial conquests as well).

In general, Chinese statesmanship exhibits a tendency to view the entire strategic landscape as part of a single whole: good and evil, near and far, strength and weakness, past and future all interrelated. In contrast to the Western approach of treating history as a process of modernity achieving a series of absolute victories over evil and backwardness, the traditional Chinese view of history emphasized a cyclical process of decay and rectification, in which nature and the world can be understood but not completely mastered. The best that can be accomplished is to grow into harmony with it. Strategy and statecraft become means of "combative coexistence" with opponents. The goal is to maneuver them into weakness while building up one's own *shi*, or strategic position.[40]

This "maneuvering" approach is, of course, the ideal and not always the reality. Throughout their history, the Chinese have had their share of "unsubtle" and brutal conflicts, both at home and occasionally abroad. Once these conflicts erupted, such as during the unification of China under the Qin Dynasty, the clashes of the Three Kingdoms period, the quelling of the Taiping Rebellion, and the twentieth-century civil war, China was subjected to wholesale loss of life on a level comparable to the European world wars. The bloodiest conflicts occurred as a result of the breakdown of the internal Chinese system—in other words, as an aspect of internal adjustments of a state for which

domestic stability and protection against looming foreign invasion are equal concerns.

For China's classical sages, the world could never be conquered; wise rulers could hope only to harmonize with its trends. There was no New World to populate, no redemption awaiting mankind on distant shores. The promised land was China, and the Chinese were already there. The blessings of the Middle Kingdom's culture might theoretically be extended, by China's superior example, to the foreigners on the empire's periphery. But there was no glory to be found in venturing across the seas to convert "heathens" to Chinese ways; the customs of the Celestial Dynasty were plainly beyond the attainment of the far barbarians.

This may be the deeper meaning of China's abandonment of its naval tradition. Lecturing in the 1820s on his philosophy of history, the German philosopher Hegel described the Chinese tendency to see the huge Pacific Ocean to their east as a barren waste. He noted that China, by and large, did not venture to the seas and instead depended on its great landmass. The land imposed "an infinite multitude of dependencies," whereas the sea propelled people "beyond these limited circles of thought and action": "This stretching out of the sea beyond the limitations of the land, is wanting to the splendid political edifices of Asiatic States, although they themselves border on the sea—as for example, China. For them the sea is only the limit, the ceasing of the land; they have no positive relations to it." The West had set sail to spread its trade and values throughout the world. In this respect, Hegel argued, land-bound China—which in fact had once been the world's greatest naval power—was "severed from the general historical development."[41]

With these distinctive traditions and millennial habits of superiority, China entered the modern age a singular kind of empire: a state claiming universal relevance for its culture and institutions but making few efforts to proselytize; the wealthiest country in the world but one that was indifferent to foreign trade and technological innovation; a culture of cosmopolitanism overseen by a political elite oblivious to the onset of the Western age of exploration; and a political unit of unparalleled geographic extent that was unaware of the technological and historical currents that would soon threaten its existence.

CHAPTER 2

The Kowtow Question and the Opium War

AT THE CLOSE of the eighteenth century, China stood at the height of its imperial greatness. The Qing Dynasty, established in 1644 by Manchu tribes riding into China from the northeast, had turned China into a major military power. Fusing Manchu and Mongol military prowess with the cultural and governmental prowess of the Han Chinese, it embarked on a program of territorial expansion to the north and west, establishing a Chinese sphere of influence deep into Mongolia, Tibet, and modern-day Xinjiang. China stood predominant in Asia; it was at least the rival of any empire on earth.[1]

Yet the high point of the Qing Dynasty also turned into the turning point of its destiny. For China's wealth and expanse attracted the attention of Western empires and trading companies operating far outside the bounds and conceptual apparatus of the traditional Chinese world order. For the first time in its history, China faced "barbarians" who no longer sought to displace the Chinese dynasty and claim the Mandate of Heaven for themselves; instead, they proposed to replace the Sinocentric system with an entirely new vision of world order—with free trade rather than tribute, resident embassies in the Chinese capital, and a system of diplomatic exchange that did not refer to non-Chinese heads of state as "honorable barbarians" pledging fealty to their Emperor in Beijing.

Unbeknownst to Chinese elites, these foreign societies had developed new industrial and scientific methods that, for the first time in centuries—or perhaps ever—surpassed China's own. Steam power, railways, and new methods of manufacturing and capital formation enabled enormous advances in productivity in the West. Imbued with a conquering impulse that propelled them into China's traditional sphere of dominance, the Western powers considered Chinese claims of universal overlordship over Europe and Asia risible. They were determined to impose on China their own standards of international conduct, by force if necessary. The resulting confrontation challenged the basic Chinese cosmology and left wounds still festering over a century later in an age of restored Chinese eminence.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, Chinese authorities had noted the increasing numbers of European traders on the southeast China coast. They saw little to differentiate the Europeans from other foreigners operating at the fringes of the empire, save perhaps their particularly glaring lack of Chinese cultural attainments. In the official Chinese view, these "West Sea barbarians" were classified as "tribute envoys" or "barbarian merchants." On rare occasions, some were permitted to travel to Beijing, where—if admitted into the presence of the Emperor—they were expected to perform the ritual kowtow: the act of prostration, with the forehead touching the ground three times.

For foreign representatives the points of entry into China and routes to the capital were strictly circumscribed. Access to the Chinese market was limited to a tightly regulated seasonal trade at Guangzhou (then known as Canton). Each winter foreign merchants were required to sail home. They were not permitted to venture further into China. Regulations deliberately held them at bay. It was unlawful to teach the Chinese language to these barbarians or to sell them books on Chinese history or culture. Their communications were to take place through specially licensed local merchants.[2]

The notion of free trade, resident embassies, and sovereign equality—by this point, the minimum rights enjoyed by Europeans in almost every other corner of the world—were unheard of in China. One tacit exception had been made for Russia. Its rapid eastward expansion (the Czar's domains now

abutted Qing territories in Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Manchuria) placed it in a unique position to threaten China. The Qing Dynasty, in 1715, permitted Moscow to establish a Russian Orthodox mission in Beijing; it eventually took on the role of a de facto embassy, the only foreign mission of its kind in China for over a century.

The contacts extended to Western European traders, limited as they were, were seen by the Qing as a considerable indulgence. The Son of Heaven had, in the Chinese view, shown his benevolence by allowing them to partake in Chinese trade—particularly in tea, silk, lacquer-ware, and rhubarb, for which the West Sea barbarians had developed a voracious appetite. Europe was too far from the Middle Kingdom ever to become Sinicized along Korean or Vietnamese lines.

Initially, the Europeans accepted the role of supplicants in the Chinese tributary order, in which they were labeled as "barbarians" and their trade as "tribute." But as the Western powers grew in wealth and conviction, this state of affairs grew untenable.

The Macartney Mission

The assumptions of the Chinese world order were particularly offensive to Britain (the "red-haired barbarians" in some Chinese records). As the premier Western commercial and naval power, Britain bridled at its assigned role in the cosmology of the Middle Kingdom, whose army, the British noted, still primarily used bows and arrows and whose navy was practically nonexistent. British traders resented the increasing amount of "squeeze" extracted by the designated Chinese merchants at Guangzhou, through which Chinese regulations required that all Western trade be conducted. They sought access to the rest of the Chinese market beyond the southeast coast.

The first major British attempt to remedy the situation was the 1793–94 mission of Lord George Macartney to China. It was the most notable, best-conceived, and least "militaristic" European effort to alter the prevailing format of Sino-Western relations and to achieve free trade and diplomatic representation on equal terms. It failed completely.

The Macartney mission is instructive to examine in some detail. The diary of the envoy illustrates how the Chinese perception of its role operated in practice—and the gulf existing between Western and Chinese perceptions of diplomacy. Macartney was a distinguished public servant with years of international experience and a keen sense of "Oriental" diplomacy. He was a man of notable cultural achievements. He had served three years as envoy-extraordinary to the court of Catherine the Great in St. Petersburg, where he negotiated a treaty of amity and commerce. Upon his return, he published a well-received volume of observations on Russian history and culture. He had subsequently served as Governor of Madras. He was as well equipped as any of his contemporaries to inaugurate a new diplomacy across civilizations.

The aims of the Macartney mission to China would have seemed modest to any educated Briton of the time—especially compared with the recently established British dominion over the neighboring giant, India. Home Secretary Henry Dundas framed the Macartney instructions as an attempt to achieve "a free communication with a people, perhaps the most singular on the Globe." Its principal aims were the establishment of reciprocal embassies in Beijing and London and commercial access to other ports along the Chinese coast. On the latter point, Dundas charged Macartney to draw attention to the "discouraging" and "arbitrary" system of regulations at Guangzhou that prevented British merchants from engaging in the "fair competition of the Market" (a concept with no direct counterpart in Confucian China). He was, Dundas stressed, to disclaim any territorial ambitions in China—an assurance bound to be considered as an insult by the recipient because it implied that Britain had the option to entertain such ambitions.[3]

The British government addressed the Chinese court on equal terms, which would have struck the British ruling group as affording a non-Western country an uncommon degree of dignity, while being treated in China as insubordinate insolence. Dundas instructed Macartney to take the "earliest opportunity" to impress upon the Chinese court that King George III saw Macartney's mission as "an embassy to the most civilized as well as most ancient and populous Nation in the World in order to observe its celebrated institutions, and to communicate and receive the benefits which must result from an unreserved and friendly intercourse between that Country and his own." Dundas instructed Macartney to comply with "all ceremonials of that Court, which may not commit the honour of your Sovereign, or lessen your own dignity, so as to endanger the success of your negotiation." He should not, Dundas stressed, "let any trifling punctilio stand in the way of the important benefits which may be obtained" by success in his mission.[4]

To help further his aims, Macartney brought with him numerous examples of British scientific and

industrial prowess. Macartney's entourage included a surgeon, a physician, a mechanic, a metallurgist, a watchmaker, a mathematical instrument maker, and "Five German Musicians" who were to perform nightly. (These latter performances were one of the more successful aspects of the embassy.) His gifts to the Emperor included manufactures designed at least in part to show the fabulous benefits China might obtain by trading with Britain: artillery pieces, a chariot, diamond-studded wristwatches, British porcelain (copied, Qing officials noted approvingly, from the Chinese art form), and portraits of the King and Queen painted by Joshua Reynolds. Macartney even brought a deflated hot-air balloon and planned, without success, to have members of his mission fly it over Beijing by way of demonstration.

The Macartney mission accomplished none of its specific objectives; the gap in perceptions was simply too wide. Macartney had intended to demonstrate the benefits of industrialization, but the Emperor understood his gifts as tribute. The British envoy expected his Chinese hosts to recognize that they had been hopelessly left behind by the progress of technological civilization and to seek a special relationship with Britain to rectify their backwardness. In fact, the Chinese treated the British as an arrogant and uninformed barbarian tribe seeking special favor from the Son of Heaven. China remained wedded to its agrarian ways, with its burgeoning population making food production more urgent than ever, and its Confucian bureaucracy ignorant of the key elements of industrialization: steam power, credit and capital, private property, and public education.

The first discordant note came as Macartney and his entourage made their way to Jehol, the summer capital northeast of Beijing, traveling up the coast in Chinese yachts laden with generous gifts and delicacies but carrying Chinese signs proclaiming, "The English Ambassador bringing tribute to the Emperor of China." Macartney resolved, in keeping with Dundas's instructions, to make "no complaint of it, reserving myself to notice it if a proper opportunity occurs."[5] As he approached Beijing, however, the chief mandarins charged with administering the mission opened a negotiation that put the gap in perceptions in sharper light. The issue was whether Macartney would kowtow to the Emperor or whether, as he insisted, he could follow the British custom of kneeling on one knee.

The Chinese side opened the discussions in a circuitous manner by remarking on, as Macartney recalled in his diary, "the different modes of dress that prevailed among different nations." The mandarins concluded that Chinese clothes were, in the end, superior, since they allowed the wearer to perform with greater ease "the genuflexions and prostrations which were, they said, customary to be made by all persons whenever the Emperor appeared in public." Would the British delegation not find it easier to free itself of its cumbersome knee-buckles and garters before approaching the Emperor's august presence? Macartney countered by suggesting that the Emperor would likely appreciate if Macartney paid him "the same obeisance which I did to my own Sovereign."[6]

The discussions over the "kowtow question" continued intermittently for several more weeks. The mandarins suggested that Macartney's options were to kowtow or to return home empty-handed; Macartney resisted. Eventually it was agreed that Macartney could follow the European custom and kneel on one knee. It proved to be the only point Macartney won (at least as to actual conduct; the official Chinese report stated that Macartney, overwhelmed by the Emperor's awesome majesty, had performed the kowtow after all).[7]

All of this took place within the intricate framework of Chinese protocol, which showed Macartney the most considerate treatment in foiling and rejecting his proposals. Enveloped in all-encompassing protocol and assured that each aspect had a cosmically ordained and unalterable purpose, Macartney found himself scarcely able to begin his negotiations. Meanwhile he noted with a mixture of respect and unease the efficiency of China's vast bureaucracy, assessing that "every

circumstance concerning us and every word that falls from our lips is minutely reported and remembered."[8]

To Macartney's consternation, the technological wonders of Europe left no visible impression on his handlers. When his party demonstrated their mounted cannons, "our conductor pretended to think lightly of them, and spoke to us as if such things were no novelties in China."[9] His lenses, chariot, and hot-air balloon were brushed aside with polite condescension.

A month and a half later, the ambassador was still waiting for an audience with the Emperor, the interval having been consumed by banquets, entertainment, and discussions about the appropriate protocol for a possible imperial audience. Finally, he was summoned at four o'clock in the morning to "a large, handsome tent" to await the Emperor, who presently appeared with great ceremony, borne in a palanquin. Macartney wondered at the magnificence of Chinese protocol, in which "every function of the ceremony was performed with such silence and solemnity as in some measure to resemble the celebration of a religious mystery."[10] After bestowing gifts on Macartney and his party, the Emperor flattered the British party by "sen[ding] us several dishes from his own table" and then giving "to each of us, with his own hands, a cup of warm wine, which we immediately drank in his presence."[11] (Note that having the Emperor personally serve wine to foreign envoys was specifically mentioned among the Han Dynasty's five baits for barbarian management.)[12]

The next day, Macartney and party attended a convocation to celebrate the Emperor's birthday. Finally, the Emperor summoned Macartney to his box at a theater performance. Now, Macartney assumed, he could transact the business of his embassy. Instead, the Emperor rebuffed him with another gift, a box of precious stones and, Macartney recorded, "a small book, written and painted by his own hand, which he desired me to present to the King, my master, as a token of his friendship, saying that the box had been eight hundred years in his family."[13]

Now that these tokens of imperial benevolence had been bestowed, the Chinese officials suggested that in view of the approaching cold winter, the time for Macartney's departure had arrived. Macartney protested that the two sides had yet to "enter into negotiation" on the items in his official instructions; he had "barely opened his commission." It was King George's wish, Macartney stressed, that he be allowed to reside at the Chinese court as a permanent British ambassador.

Early in the morning of October 3, 1793, a mandarin awoke Macartney and summoned him in full ceremonial dress to the Forbidden City, where he was to receive the answer to his petition. After a wait of several hours, he was ushered up a staircase to a silk-covered chair, upon which sat not the Emperor, but a letter from the Emperor to King George. The Chinese officials kowtowed to the letter, leaving Macartney to kneel to the letter on one knee. Finally, the imperial communication was transported back to Macartney's chambers with full ceremony. It proved to be one of the most humiliating communications in the annals of British diplomacy.

The edict began by remarking on King George's "respectful humility" in sending a tribute mission to China:

> You, O King, live beyond the confines of many seas, nevertheless, impelled by your humble desire to partake of the benefits of our civilization, you have dispatched a mission respectfully bearing your memorial.

The Emperor then dismissed every substantive request that Macartney had made, including the proposal that Macartney be permitted to reside in Beijing as a diplomat:

> As to your entreaty to send one of your nationals to be accredited to my Celestial Court and to be in control of your country's trade with China, this request is contrary to all usage of my dynasty and cannot possibly be entertained. . . . [He could not] be allowed liberty of movement and the privilege of corresponding with his own country; so that you would gain nothing by his residence in our midst.

The proposal that China send its own ambassador to London, the edict continued, was even more absurd:

> [S]upposing I sent an Ambassador to reside in your country, how could you possibly make for him the requisite arrangements? Europe consists of many other nations besides your own: if each and all demanded to be represented at our Court, how could we possibly consent? The thing is utterly impracticable.

Perhaps, the Emperor ascertained, King George had sent Macartney to learn the blessings of civilization from China. But this, too, was out of the question:

> If you assert that your reverence for Our Celestial Dynasty fills you with a desire to acquire our civilization, our ceremonies and code of laws differ so completely from your own that, even if your Envoy were able to acquire the rudiments of our civilization, you could not possibly transplant our manners and customs to your alien soil.

As for Macartney's proposals regarding the benefits of trade between Britain and China, the Celestial Court had already shown the British great favor allowing them "full liberty to trade at Canton for many a year"; anything more was "utterly unreasonable." As for the supposed benefits of British trade to China, Macartney was sadly mistaken:

> [S]trange and costly objects do not interest me. If I have commanded that the tribute offerings sent by you, O King, are to be accepted, this was solely in consideration for the spirit which prompted you to dispatch them from afar. . . . As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things.[14]

Given this state of affairs, trade beyond what was already taking place was impossible. Britain had nothing to offer that China wanted, and China had already given Britain all that its divine regulations permitted.

Since it appeared that there was nothing more to be done, Macartney decided to return to England via Guangzhou. As he prepared to depart, he observed that after the Emperor's sweeping rejection of Britain's requests, the mandarins were, if anything, more attentive, causing Macartney to reflect that perhaps the court had had second thoughts. He inquired to that effect, but the Chinese were done with diplomatic courtesy. Since the barbarian supplicant did not seem to understand subtlety, he was treated to an imperial edict verging on the threatening. The Emperor assured King George that he was aware of "the lonely remoteness of your island, cut off from the world by intervening wastes of sea." But the Chinese capital was "the hub and center about which all quarters of the globe revolve. . . . The subjects of our dependencies have never been allowed to open places of business in Peking [Beijing]." He concluded with an admonition:

> I have accordingly stated the facts to you in detail, and it is your bounden duty to reverently appreciate my feelings and to obey these instructions henceforward for all time, so that you may enjoy the blessings of perpetual peace.[15]

The Emperor, clearly unfamiliar with the capacity of Western leaders for violent rapaciousness, was playing with fire, though he did not know it. The assessment with which Macartney left China was ominous:

> [A] couple of English frigates would be an overmatch for the whole naval force of their empire . . . in half a summer they could totally destroy all the navigation of their coasts and reduce the inhabitants of the maritime provinces, who subsist chiefly on fish, to absolute famine.[16]

However overbearing the Chinese conduct may seem now, one must remember that it had worked for centuries in organizing and sustaining a major international order. In Macartney's era, the blessings of trade with the West were far from self-evident: since China's GDP was still roughly seven times that of Britain's, the Emperor could perhaps be forgiven for thinking that it was London that needed Beijing's assistance and not the other way around.[17]

No doubt the imperial court congratulated itself on deft handling of this barbarian mission, which was not repeated for over twenty years. But the reason for this respite was less the skill of Chinese diplomacy than the Napoleonic Wars, which consumed the resources of the European states. No sooner was Napoleon disposed of than a new British mission appeared off China's coasts in 1816, led by Lord Amherst. This time the standoff over protocol devolved into a physical brawl between the British envoys and the court mandarins assembled outside the throne room. When Amherst refused to kowtow to the Emperor, whom the Chinese insisted on referring to as "the universal sovereign," his mission was dismissed abruptly. Britain's Prince Regent was commanded to endeavor with "obedience" to "make progress towards civilized transformation"; in the meantime, no further ambassadors were necessary "to prove that you are indeed our vassal."[18]

In 1834, the British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston sent another mission to attempt a grand resolution. Palmerston, not known for his expertise in Qing dynastic regulations, dispatched the Scottish naval officer Lord Napier with the contradictory instructions to "conform to the laws and usages of China" while, at the same time, requesting permanent diplomatic relations and a resident British embassy in Beijing, access to further ports along the Chinese coast, and, for good measure, free trade with Japan.[19]

Upon Napier's arrival in Guangzhou, he and the local governor settled into an impasse: each refused to receive the other's letters on the basis that it would be demeaning to treat with a figure of such low station. Napier, whom the local authorities had, by this point, christened with a Chinese name translating as "Laboriously Vile," took to posting belligerent broadsheets around Guangzhou using the services of a local translator. Fate finally solved this vexing barbarian problem for the Chinese when both Napier and his translator contracted malarial fever and departed this world. Before expiring, however, Napier did note the existence of Hong Kong, a sparsely populated rocky outcropping that he assessed would provide an excellent natural harbor.

The Chinese could take satisfaction in having forced another round of rebellious barbarians into compliance. But it was the last time the British would accept rejection. With every year, British

insistence grew more threatening. The French historian Alain Peyrefitte summed up the reaction in Britain in the aftermath of the Macartney mission: “If China remained closed, then the doors would have to be battered down.”[20] All of China’s diplomatic maneuvers and abrupt rejections only delayed an inevitable reckoning with the modern international system, designed as it was along European and American lines. This reckoning would impose one of the most wrenching social, intellectual, and moral strains on Chinese society in its long history.

The Clash of Two World Orders: The Opium War

The ascendant Western industrial powers would clearly not abide for long a diplomatic mechanism that referred to them as "barbarians" presenting "tribute" or a tightly regulated seasonal trade at a single Chinese port city. For their part, the Chinese were willing to make limited concessions to Western merchants' appetite for "profit" (a vaguely immoral concept in Confucian thought); but they were appalled by the Western envoys' suggestions that China might be simply one state among many, or that it should have to live with permanent daily contact with barbarian envoys in the Chinese capital.

To the modern eye, none of the Western envoys' initial proposals were particularly outrageous by the standards of the West: the goals of free trade, regular diplomatic contacts, and resident embassies offend few contemporary sensibilities and are treated as a standard way to conduct diplomacy. But the ultimate showdown occurred over one of the more shameful aspects of Western intrusion: the insistence on the unrestricted importation of opium into China.

In the mid-nineteenth century, opium was tolerated in Britain and banned in China, though consumed by an increasing number of Chinese. British India was the center of much of the world's opium poppy growth, and British and American merchants, working in concert with Chinese smugglers, did a brisk business. Opium was, in fact, one of the few foreign products that made any headway in the Chinese market; Britain's famed manufactures were dismissed as novelties or inferior to Chinese products. Polite Western opinion viewed the opium trade as an embarrassment. However, merchants were reluctant to forfeit the lucrative trade.

The Qing court debated legalizing opium and managing its sale; it ultimately decided to crack down and eradicate the trade altogether. In 1839, Beijing dispatched Lin Zexu, an official of considerable demonstrated skill, to shut down the trade in Guangzhou and force Western merchants to comply with the official ban. A traditional Confucian mandarin, Lin dealt with the problem as he would with any particularly stubborn barbarian issue: through a mixture of force and moral suasion. Upon arriving in Guangzhou, he demanded that the Western trade missions forfeit all of their opium chests for destruction. When that failed, he blockaded all of the foreigners—including those having nothing to do with the opium trade—in their factories, announcing that they would be released only on the surrender of their contraband.

Lin next dispatched a letter to Queen Victoria, praising, with what deference the traditional protocol allowed, the "politeness and submissiveness" of her predecessors in sending "tribute" to China. The crux of his missive was the demand that Queen Victoria take charge of the eradication of opium in Britain's Indian territories:

> [I]n several places of India under your control such as Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Patna, Benares and Malwa . . . opium [has] been planted from hill to hill, and ponds have been opened for its manufacture. . . . The obnoxious odor ascends, irritating heaven and frightening the spirits. Indeed you, O King, can eradicate the opium plant in these places, hoe over the fields entirely, and sow in its stead the five grains. Anyone who dares again attempt to plant and manufacture opium should be severely punished.[21]

The request was reasonable, even when couched in the traditional assumption of Chinese overlordship:

> Suppose a man of another country comes to England to trade, he still has to obey the English laws; how much more should he obey in China the laws of the Celestial Dynasty? . . . The barbarian merchants of your country, if they wish to do business for a prolonged period, are required to obey our statutes respectfully and to cut off permanently the source of opium. . . .
>
> May you, O King, check your wicked and sift your vicious people before they come to China, in order to guarantee the peace of your nation, to show further the sincerity of your politeness and submissiveness, and to let the two countries enjoy together the blessings of peace. How fortunate, how fortunate indeed! After receiving this dispatch will you immediately give us a prompt reply regarding the details and circumstances of your cutting off the opium traffic. Be sure not to put this off.[22]

Overestimating Chinese leverage, Lin's ultimatum threatened to cut off the export of Chinese products, which he supposed were existential necessities for the Western barbarians: "If China cuts off these benefits with no sympathy for those who are to suffer, then what can the barbarians rely upon to keep themselves alive?" China had nothing to fear from retaliation: "[A]rticles coming from the outside to China can only be used as toys. We can take them or get along without them."[23]

Lin's letter seems never to have reached Victoria. In the meantime, British opinion treated Lin's siege of the British community in Guangzhou as an unacceptable affront. Lobbyists for the "China trade" petitioned Parliament for a declaration of war. Palmerston dispatched a letter to Beijing demanding "satisfaction and redress for injuries inflicted by Chinese Authorities upon British Subjects resident in China, and for insults offered by those same Authorities to the British Crown," as well as the permanent cession of "one or more sufficiently large and properly situated Islands on the Coast of China" as a depot for British trade.[24]

In his letter Palmerston acknowledged that opium was "contraband" under Chinese law, but he stooped to a legalistic defense of the trade, arguing that the Chinese ban had, under Western legal principles, lapsed due to the connivance of corrupt officials. This casuistry was unlikely to convince anybody and Palmerston did not allow it to delay his fixed determination to bring matters to a head: in light of the "urgent importance" of the matter and the great distance separating England from China, the British government was ordering a fleet immediately to "blockade the principal Chinese ports," seize "all Chinese Vessels which [it] may meet with," and seize "some convenient part of Chinese territory" until London obtained satisfaction.[25] The Opium War had begun.

Initial Chinese reactions rated the prospect of a British offensive as a baseless threat. One official argued to the Emperor that the vast distance between China and England would render the English impotent: "The English barbarians are an insignificant and detestable race, trusting entirely to their strong ships and large guns; but the immense distance they have traversed will render the arrival of seasonable supplies impossible, and their soldiers, after a single defeat, being deprived of provisions, will become dispirited and lost."[26] Even after the British blockaded the Pearl River and seized several islands opposite the port city of Ningbo as a show of force, Lin wrote indignantly to Queen Victoria: "You savages of the further seas have waxed so bold, it seems, as to defy and insult our mighty Empire. Of a truth it is high time for you to 'flay the face and cleanse the heart,' and to amend your ways. If you submit humbly to the Celestial dynasty and tender your allegiance, it may give you a chance to purge yourselves of your past sins."[27]

Centuries of predominance had warped the Celestial Court's sense of reality. Pretension of

superiority only accentuated the inevitable humiliation. British ships swiftly bypassed the Chinese coastal defenses and blockaded the main Chinese ports. The cannons once dismissed by Macartney's mandarin handlers operated with brutal effect.

One Chinese official, Qishan, the Viceroy of Zhili (the administrative division then encompassing Beijing and the surrounding provinces), came to understand China's vulnerability when he was sent to make preliminary contact with a British fleet that had sailed north to Tianjin. He recognized that the Chinese could not counter British seaborne firepower: "Without any wind, or even a favorable tide, they [steam vessels] glide along against the current and are capable of fantastic speed. . . . Their carriages are mounted on swivels, enabling the guns to be turned and aimed in any direction." By contrast, Qishan assessed that China's guns were left over from the Ming Dynasty, and that "[t]hose who are in charge of military affairs are all literary officials . . . they have no knowledge of armaments."[28]

Concluding that the city was defenseless before British naval power, Qishan opted to soothe and divert the British by assuring them that the imbroglio in Guangzhou had been a misunderstanding, and did not reflect the "temperate and just intentions of the Emperor." Chinese officials would "investigate and handle the matter fairly," but first it was "imperative that [the British fleet] set sail for the South" and await Chinese inspectors there. Somewhat remarkably, this maneuver worked. The British force sailed back to the southern ports, leaving China's exposed northern cities undamaged.[29]

Based on this success, Qishan was now sent to Guangzhou to replace Lin Zexu and to manage the barbarians once again. The Emperor, who seems not to have grasped the extent of the British technological advantage, instructed Qishan to engage the British representatives in drawn-out discussions while China gathered its forces: "After prolonged negotiation has made the Barbarians weary and exhausted," he noted in the vermilion imperial pen, "we can suddenly attack them and thereby subdue them."[30] Lin Zexu was dismissed in disgrace for having provoked a barbarian attack. He set off for internal exile in far western China, reflecting on the superiority of Western weaponry and drafting secret memorials advising that China develop its own.[31]

Once at his post in southern China, however, Qishan confronted a more challenging situation. The British demanded territorial concessions and an indemnity. They had come south to obtain satisfaction; they would no longer be deferred by procrastinating tactics. After British forces opened fire on several sites on the coast, Qishan and his British counterpart, Captain Charles Elliot, negotiated a draft agreement, the Chuan-pi Convention, which granted the British special rights on Hong Kong, promised an indemnity of $6 million, and allowed that future dealings between Chinese and British officials would take place on equal terms (that is, the British would be spared the protocol normally reserved for barbarian supplicants).

This deal was rejected by both the Chinese and the British governments, each of whom saw its terms as a humiliation. For having exceeded his instructions and conceded too much to the barbarians, the Emperor had Qishan recalled in chains and then sentenced to death (later commuted to exile). The British negotiator, Charles Elliot, faced a somewhat gentler fate, although Palmerston rebuked him in the harshest terms for having gained far too little: "Throughout the whole course of your proceedings," Palmerston complained, "you seemed to have considered that my instructions were waste paper." Hong Kong was "a barren island with hardly a house upon it"; Elliot had been far too conciliatory in not holding on to more valuable territory or pressing for harsher terms.[32]

Palmerston appointed a new envoy, Sir Henry Pottinger, whom he instructed to take a harder line, for "Her Majesty's Government cannot allow that, in a transaction between Great Britain and China,

the unreasonable practice of the Chinese should supersede the reasonable practice of all the rest of mankind."[33] Arriving in China, Pottinger pressed Britain's military advantage, blockading further ports and cutting traffic along the Grand Canal and lower Yangtze River. With the British poised to attack the ancient capital Nanjing, the Chinese sued for peace.

Qiying's Diplomacy: Soothing the Barbarians

Pottinger now faced yet another Chinese negotiator, the third to be sent on this supremely unpromising assignment by a court still fancying itself supreme in the universe, the Manchu prince Qiying. Qiying's method for handling the British was a traditional Chinese strategy when confronted with defeat. Having tried defiance and diplomacy, China would seek to wear the barbarians down by seeming compliance. Negotiating under the shadow of the British fleet, Qiying judged that it befell the court's ministers to repeat what the Middle Kingdom's elites had done so often before: through a combination of delay, circumlocution, and carefully apportioned favors, they would soothe and tame the barbarians while buying time for China to outlast their assault.

Qiying fixed his focus on establishing a personal relationship with the "barbarian headman" Pottinger. He showered Pottinger with gifts and took to addressing him as his cherished friend and "intimate" (a word specially transliterated into Chinese for this express purpose). As an expression of the deep friendship between them, Qiying went so far as to propose exchanging portraits of their wives and even proclaimed his wish to adopt Pottinger's son (who remained in England, but was henceforth known as "Frederick Keying Pottinger").[34]

In one remarkable dispatch, Qiying explained the approach to a Celestial Court that found the seduction process difficult to comprehend. He described the ways he had aspired to appease the British barbarians: "With this type of people from outside the bounds of civilization, who are blind and unawakened in styles of address and forms of ceremony . . . even though our tongues were dry and our throats parched (from urging them to follow our way), still they could not avoid closing their ears and acting as if deaf."[35]

Therefore, Qiying's banquets and his extravagant warmth toward Pottinger and his family had served an essentially strategic design, in which Chinese conduct was calculated in specific doses and in which such qualities as trust and sincerity were weapons; whether they reflected convictions or not was secondary. He continued:

> Certainly we have to curb them by sincerity, but it has been even more necessary to control them by skillful methods. There are times when it is possible to have them follow our directions but not let them understand the reasons. Sometimes we expose everything so that they will not be suspicious, whereupon we can dissipate their rebellious restlessness. Sometimes we have given them receptions and entertainment, after which they have had a feeling of appreciation. And at still other times we have shown trust in them in a broad-minded way and deemed it unnecessary to go deeply into minute discussions with them, whereupon we have been able to get their help in the business at hand.[36]

The results of this interplay between Western overwhelming force and Chinese psychological management were two treaties negotiated by Qiying and Pottinger, the Treaty of Nanjing and the supplementary Treaty of the Bogue. The settlement conceded more than the Chuan-pi Convention. It was essentially humiliating, though the terms were less harsh than the military situation would have allowed Britain to impose. It provided for payment of a $6 million indemnity by China, the cession of Hong Kong, and the opening of five coastal "treaty ports" in which Western residence and trade would be permitted. This effectively dismantled the "Canton System" by which the Chinese court had regulated trade with the West and confined it to licensed merchants. Ningbo, Shanghai, Xiamen, and Fuzhou were added to the list of treaty ports. The British secured the right to maintain permanent

missions in the port cities and to negotiate directly with local officials, bypassing the court in Beijing.

The British also obtained the right to exercise jurisdiction over their nationals residing in the Chinese treaty ports. Operationally, this meant that foreign opium traders would be subject to their own countries' laws and regulations, not China's. This principle of "extraterritoriality," among the less controversial provisions of the treaty at the time, would eventually come to be treated as a major infringement of Chinese sovereignty. Since the European concept of sovereignty was unknown, however, in China extraterritoriality came to be a symbol at the time, not so much of the violation of a legal norm as of declining imperial power. The resulting diminution of the Mandate of Heaven led to the eruption of a flurry of domestic rebellion.

The nineteenth-century English translator Thomas Meadows observed that most Chinese did not at first appreciate the lasting repercussions of the Opium War. They treated the concessions as an application of the traditional method of absorbing the barbarians and wearing them down. "[T]he great body of the nation," he surmised, "can only look on the late war as a rebellious irruption of a tribe of barbarians, who, secure in their strong ships, attacked and took some places along the coast, and even managed to get into their possession an important point of the grand canal, whereby they forced the Emperor to make certain concessions."[37]

But the Western powers were not so easily soothed. Every Chinese concession tended to generate additional Western demands. The treaties, conceived at first as a temporary concession, instead inaugurated a process by which the Qing court lost control of much of China's commercial and foreign policy. Following the British treaty, U.S. President John Tyler promptly sent a mission to China to gain similar concessions for the Americans, the forerunner of the later "Open Door" policy. The French negotiated their own treaty with analogous terms. Each of these countries in turn included a "Most Favored Nation" clause that stipulated that any concession offered by China to other countries must also be given to the signatory. (Chinese diplomacy later used this clause to limit exactions by stimulating competition between the various claimants for special privilege.)

These treaties are justly infamous in Chinese history as the first in a string of "unequal treaties" conducted under the shadow of foreign military force. At the time, the most bitterly contested provisions were their stipulations of equality of status. China had until this point insisted on the superior position ingrained in its national identity and reflected in the tributary system. Now it faced a foreign power determined to erase its name from the roll of Chinese "tribute states" under threat of force and to prove itself the sovereign equal of the Celestial Dynasty.

The leaders on both sides understood that this was a dispute about far more than protocol or opium. The Qing court was willing to appease avaricious foreigners with money and trade; but if the principle of barbarian political equality to the Son of Heaven was established, the entire Chinese world order would be threatened; the dynasty risked the loss of the Mandate of Heaven. Palmerston, in his frequently caustic communications to his negotiators, treated the amount of the indemnity as partly symbolic; but he devoted great attention to berating them for acquiescing to Chinese communications whose language revealed "assumptions of superiority on the part of China" or implied that Britain, victorious in war, remained a supplicant asking for the Emperor's divine favor.[38] Eventually, Palmerston's view prevailed, and the Treaty of Nanjing included a clause explicitly ensuring that Chinese and British officials would henceforth "correspond . . . on a footing of perfect equality"; it went so far as to list specific written Chinese characters in the text with acceptably neutral connotations. Chinese records (or at least those to which foreigners had access) would no longer describe the British as "begging" Chinese authorities or "tremblingly obeying" their "orders."[39]

The Celestial Court had come to understand the military inferiority of China but not yet the appropriate method for dealing with it. At first, it applied the traditional methods of barbarian management. Defeat was not unknown in the course of China's long history. China's rulers had dealt with it by applying the five baits described in the previous chapter. They saw the common characteristic of these invaders as being their desire to partake of Chinese culture; they wished to settle on Chinese soil and partake of its civilization. They could therefore gradually be tamed by some of the psychological methods illustrated by Prince Qiying and, in time, become part of Chinese life.

But the European invaders had no such aspiration nor limited goals. Deeming themselves more advanced societies, their goal was to exploit China for economic gain, not to join its way of life. Their demands were therefore limited only by their resources and their greed. Personal relationships could not be decisive, because the chiefs of the invaders were not neighbors but lived thousands of miles away, where they were governed by motivations obtuse to the subtleness and indirection of the Qiying type of strategy.

Within the space of a decade, the Middle Kingdom had gone from preeminence to being an object of contending colonial forces. Poised between two eras and two different conceptions of international relations, China strove for a new identity, and above all, to reconcile the values that marked its greatness with the technology and commerce on which it would have to base its security.

CHAPTER 3

From Preeminence to Decline

AS THE NINETEENTH CENTURY PROGRESSED, China experienced almost every imaginable shock to its historic image of itself. Before the Opium War, it conceived of diplomacy and international trade mainly as forms of recognition of China's preeminence. Now, even as it entered a period of domestic turmoil, it faced three foreign challenges, any one of which could be enough to overturn a dynasty. These threats came from every direction and in heretofore barely conceivable incarnations.

From across the oceans in the West came the European nations. They raised not so much the challenge of territorial defense as of irreconcilable conceptions of world order. For the most part, the Western powers limited themselves to extracting economic concessions on the Chinese coast and demanding rights to free trade and missionary activity. Paradoxically this was threatening because the Europeans did not view it as a conquest at all. They were not seeking to replace the existing dynasty —they simply imposed an entirely new world order essentially incompatible with the Chinese one.

From the north and west, an expansionist and militarily dominant Russia sought to pry loose China's vast hinterland. Russia's cooperation could be purchased temporarily, but it recognized no boundaries between its own domains and the Chinese outer dominions. And unlike previous conquerors, Russia did not become part of the Chinese culture; the territories it penetrated were permanently lost to the empire.

Still, neither the Western powers nor Russia had any ambition to displace the Qing and claim the Mandate of Heaven; ultimately they reached the conclusion that they had much to lose from the Qing's fall. Japan, by contrast, had no vested interest in the survival of China's ancient institutions or the Sinocentric world order. From the east it set out not only to occupy significant portions of Chinese territory, but to supplant Beijing as the center of a new East Asian international order.

The ensuing catastrophes are viewed with considerable dismay in contemporary China, as part of an infamous "century of humiliation" that ended only by the reunification of the country under an assertively nationalist form of Communism. At the same time, the era of China's hobbling stands in many ways as a testimony to its remarkable abilities to surmount strains that might break other societies.

While foreign armies were marching across China and extorting humiliating terms, the Celestial Court never stopped asserting its claim to central authority and managed to implement it over most of China's territory. The invaders were treated as other invaders had been in previous centuries, as a nuisance, an unwelcome interruption of the eternal rhythm of Chinese life. The court in Beijing could act in this manner because the foreign depredations were mostly on the periphery of China and because the invaders had come for commerce; as such it was in the interest of the invaders that the vast central regions, including most of the population, remain quiescent. The government in Beijing thereby achieved a margin of maneuver. All the exactions had to be negotiated with the imperial court, which was therefore in a position to play off the invaders against one another.

Chinese statesmen played their weak hand with considerable skill and forestalled what could have been an even worse catastrophe. From the point of view of the balance of power, the objective configuration of forces would have suggested the impossibility of China's survival as a unitary, continent-sized state. But with the traditional vision of Chinese preeminence under often violent

challenge and the country lashed by waves of colonial depredation and domestic upheaval, China eventually overcame its travails by its own efforts. Through a painful and often humiliating process, China's statesmen in the end preserved the moral and territorial claims of their disintegrating world order.

Perhaps most remarkably, they did so using almost entirely traditional methods. A segment of the Qing ruling class wrote eloquent memorials in the classical style about the challenges posed by the West, Russia, and a rising Japan, and the resulting need for China to practice "self-strengthening" and improve its own technological capabilities. But China's Confucian elite and its generally conservative populace remained deeply ambivalent about such advice. Many perceived the importation of foreign-language texts and Western technology as endangering China's cultural essence and social order. After sometimes bruising battles, the prevailing faction decided that to modernize along Western lines was to cease to be Chinese, and that nothing could justify abandoning this unique heritage. So China faced the era of imperial expansion without the benefit of a modern military apparatus on any national scale, and with only piecemeal adaptations to foreign financial and political innovations.

To weather the storm, China relied not on technology or military power but instead on two deeply traditional resources: the analytical abilities of its diplomats, and the endurance and cultural confidence of its people. It developed ingenious strategies for playing off the new barbarians against one another. Officials charged with managing China's foreign relations offered concessions in various cities—but they deliberately invited multiple sets of foreigners to share in the spoils, so that they could "use barbarians against barbarians" and avoid dominance by any one power. They eventually insisted on scrupulous adherence to the "unequal treaties" with the West and to foreign principles of international law, not because Chinese officials believed them to be valid, but because such conduct provided a means to circumscribe foreign ambitions. Faced with two potentially overwhelming contenders for dominance in northeast China, and possessing almost no force with which to repulse them, China's diplomats set Russia and Japan against each other, mitigating to some degree the scope and permanence of the encroachments by each of them.

In light of the contrast between China's military near impotence and its expansively articulated vision of its world role, the rearguard defense to maintain an independent Chinese government was a remarkable achievement. No victory celebration attended this accomplishment; it was an incomplete, decades-long endeavor marked by numerous reversals and internal opponents, outlasting and occasionally ruining its proponents. This struggle came at considerable cost to the Chinese people—whose patience and endurance served, for neither the first nor the last time, as the ultimate line of defense. But it preserved the ideal of China as a continental reality in charge of its own destiny. With great discipline and self-confidence, it kept the door open for the later era of Chinese resurgence.

Wei Yuan's Blueprint: "Using Barbarians Against Barbarians," Learning Their Techniques

In navigating the treacherous passage of assaults by the Western European nations with their superior technology and the new ambitions of both Russia and Japan, China was well served by its cultural cohesion and the extraordinary skill of its diplomats—all the more remarkable in the face of the general obtuseness of the imperial court. By the middle of the nineteenth century, only a few members of the Chinese elite had begun to understand that China no longer lived in a system marked by its predominance and that China had to learn the grammar of a system of competing power blocs.

One such official was Wei Yuan (1794–1856), a midranking Confucian mandarin and associate of Lin Zexu, the Guangzhou governor whose crackdown on the opium trade had triggered British intervention and eventually forced him into exile. While loyal to the Qing Dynasty, Wei Yuan was deeply concerned about its complacency. He wrote a pioneering study of foreign geography using materials collected and translated from foreign traders and missionaries. Its purpose was to encourage China to set its sights beyond the tributary countries on its immediate borders.

Wei Yuan's 1842 "Plans for a Maritime Defense," in essence a study of China's failures in the Opium War, proposed to apply the lessons of European balance-of-power diplomacy to China's contemporary problems. Recognizing China's material weakness vis-à-vis the foreign powers—a premise that his contemporaries generally did not accept—Wei Yuan proposed methods by which China might gain a margin for maneuver. Wei Yuan proposed a multipronged strategy:

> There are two methods of attacking the barbarians, namely, to stimulate countries unfriendly to the barbarians to make an attack on them, and to learn the superior skills of the barbarians in order to control them. There are two methods of making peace with the barbarians, namely, to let the various trading nations conduct their trade so as to maintain peace with the barbarians, and to support the first treaty of the Opium War so as to maintain international trade.[1]

It was a demonstration of the analytical skill of Chinese diplomacy that, faced with a superior foe and potentially escalating demands, it understood that holding fast to even a humiliating treaty set a limit to further exactions.

In the meantime, Wei Yuan reviewed the countries that, based on European principles of equilibrium, could conceivably put pressure on Britain. Citing ancient precedents in which the Han, Tang, and early Qing Dynasties had managed the ambitions of aggressive tribes, Wei Yuan surveyed the globe, reviewing the "enemy countries of which the British barbarians are afraid." Writing as if the slogan "let barbarians fight barbarians" were self-implementing, Wei Yuan pointed to "Russia, France, and America" in the West, and "the Gurkhas [of Nepal], Burma, Siam [Thailand], and Annam [northern Vietnam]" in the East as conceivable candidates. Wei Yuan imagined a two-pronged Russian and Gurkha attack on Britain's most distant and poorly defended interests, its Indian empire. Stimulating long-running French and American animosities toward Britain, causing them to attack Britain by sea, was another weapon in Wei Yuan's analysis.

It was a highly original solution hampered only by the fact that the Chinese government had not the slightest idea how to implement it. It had only limited knowledge of the potential allied countries in question and no representation in any of their capitals. Wei Yuan came to understand China's limits. In an age of global politics, he asserted, the issue was not that "the outer barbarians cannot be used";

rather, "we need personnel who are capable of making arrangements with them" and who knew "their locations [and] their interrelations of friendship or enmity."[2]

Having failed to stop the British advance, Wei Yuan continued, Beijing needed to weaken London's relative position in the world and in China. He came up with another original idea: to invite other barbarians into China and to set up a contest between their greed and Britain's, so that China could emerge as the balancer in effect over the division of its own substance. Wei Yuan continued:

> Today the British barbarians not only have occupied Hong-kong and accumulated a great deal of wealth as well as a proud face among the other barbarians, but also have opened the ports and cut down the various charges so as to grant favor to other barbarians. Rather than let the British barbarians be good to them in order to enlarge their following, would it not be better for us ourselves to be good to them, in order to get them under control like fingers on the arm?[3]

In other words, China should offer concessions to all rapacious nations rather than let Britain exact them and benefit itself by offering to share the spoils with other countries. The mechanism for achieving this objective was the Most Favored Nation principle—that any privilege granted one power should be automatically extended to all others.[4]

Time is not neutral. The benefit of Wei Yuan's subtle maneuvers would have to be measured by China's ability to arm itself using "the superior techniques of the barbarians." China, Wei Yuan advised, should "bring Western craftsmen to Canton" from France or the United States "to take charge of building ships and making arms." Wei Yuan summed up the new strategy with the proposition that "before the peace settlement, it behooves us to use barbarians against barbarians. After the settlement, it is proper for us to learn their superior techniques in order to control them."[5]

Though initially dismissive of calls for technological modernization, the Celestial Court did adopt the strategy of adhering to the letter of the Opium War treaties in order to establish a ceiling on Western demands. It would, a leading official later wrote, "act according to the treaties and not allow the foreigners to go even slightly beyond them"; thus Chinese officials should "be sincere and amicable but quietly try to keep them in line."[6]

The Erosion of Authority: Domestic Upheavals and the Challenge of Foreign Encroachments

The Western treaty powers, of course, had no intention of being kept in line—and in the aftermath of the Qiying-Pottinger negotiations, a new gap in expectations began to appear. For the Chinese court, the treaties were a temporary concession to barbarian force, to be followed to the degree necessary but never voluntarily broadened. For the West, the treaties were the beginning of a long-term process by which China would be steadily drawn into Western norms of political and economic exchange. But what the West conceived of as a process of enlightenment was seen by some in China as a philosophical assault.

This is why the Chinese refused to submit to foreign demands to broaden the treaties to include free trade throughout China and permanent diplomatic representation in the Chinese capital. Beijing understood—despite its extremely limited knowledge about the West—that the combination of the foreigners' superior force, unfettered foreign activity within China, and multiple Western missions in Beijing would seriously undermine the assumptions of the Chinese world order. Once China became a "normal" state, it would lose its historic unique moral authority; it would simply be another weak country beset by invaders. In this context, seemingly minor disputes over diplomatic and economic prerogatives turned into a major clash.

All of this took place against a backdrop of massive Chinese domestic upheaval, masked to a large degree by the imperturbable self-confidence projected by Chinese officials charged with managing contacts with foreigners—a trait unchanged in the modern period. Macartney had already remarked in 1793 on the uneasy accommodation between the Qing's Manchu ruling class, Han Chinese bureaucratic elite, and mostly Han general population. "Scarcely a year now passes," he noted, "without an insurrection in some of the provinces."[7]

The dynasty's Mandate of Heaven having been put into question, domestic opponents escalated the scope of their defiance. Their challenges were both religious and ethnic, providing the basis for conflicts of encompassing brutality. The far western reaches of the empire witnessed Muslim rebellions and the declaration of short-lived separatist khanates, suppressed only at a major financial and human cost. In central China, an uprising known as the Nian Rebellion drew considerable support from Han Chinese laboring classes and, beginning in 1851, conducted a nearly two-decades-long insurgency.

The most serious challenge came from the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), mounted by a Chinese Christian sect in the south. Missionaries had existed for centuries, though severely circumscribed. They began to enter the country in larger numbers after the Opium War. Led by a charismatic Chinese mystic claiming to be Jesus's younger brother and an associate asserting telepathic powers, the Taiping Rebellion aimed to replace the Qing with a new "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace" ruled by its leaders' bizarre interpretation of imported missionary texts. Taiping forces succeeded in wresting control of Nanjing and much of south and central China from the Qing, ruling in the mode of a nascent dynasty. Though little known in Western historiography, the conflict between the Taiping and the Qing ranks as one of history's most devastating conflicts, with casualties estimated in the tens of millions. While no official figures exist, it is estimated that during the Taiping, Muslim, and Nian upheavals China's population declined from roughly 410 million in 1850 to roughly 350 million in 1873.[8]

The Treaty of Nanjing and its French and American counterparts came up for renegotiation in the

1850s, while China was torn by these civil conflicts. The treaty powers insisted that their diplomats be permitted to reside year-round in the Chinese capital, signifying that they were not tributary envoys but the representatives of equal sovereign states. The Chinese deployed their wide array of delaying tactics with the added incentive that given the fate of preceding negotiators, no Qing official could possibly have wanted to concede the point of permanent diplomatic representation.

In 1856, an intrusive Chinese inspection of a British-registered Chinese ship, the *Arrow*, and the alleged desecration of its British flag, provided a pretext for the renewal of hostilities. As in the 1840 conflict, the casus belli was not entirely heroic (the ship's registration, it was later discovered, had technically lapsed); but both sides understood that they were playing for higher stakes. With China's defenses still in an inchoate state of development, British forces seized Guangzhou and the Dagu Forts in northern China, from which they could easily march on Beijing.

During the negotiations that followed, the gap in perceptions was as wide as ever. The British pressed on with missionary conviction, presenting their negotiating positions as a public service that would at last bring China up to speed with the modern world. Thus London's assistant negotiator Horatio Lay summed up the prevailing Western view: "[D]iplomatic representation will be for your good as well as ours, as you will surely see. The medicine may be unpleasant but the aftereffects will be grand."[9]

Qing authorities were not nearly so enthusiastic. They acceded to the treaty terms only after a flurry of anguished internal communications between the imperial court and its negotiator and another British threat to march on Beijing.[10]

The centerpiece of the resulting 1858 Treaty of Tianjin was the concession that London had sought in vain for over six decades—the right to a permanent embassy in Beijing. The treaty further permitted foreign travel on the Yangtze River, opened additional "treaty ports" to Western trade, and protected Chinese Christian converts and Western proselytizing in China (a prospect particularly difficult for the Qing given the Taiping Rebellion). The French and Americans concluded their own treaties on similar terms under their Most Favored Nation clauses.

The treaty powers now applied their attention to establishing resident embassies in a clearly unwelcoming capital. In May 1859, Britain's new envoy, Frederick Bruce, arrived in China to exchange ratifications of the treaty that would grant him the right to take up residence in Beijing. Finding the main river route to the capital blocked with chains and spikes, he ordered a contingent of British marines to clear the obstacles. But Chinese forces shocked Bruce's party by opening fire from the newly fortified Dagu Forts. The ensuing battle resulted in 519 British troops killed and 456 wounded.[11]

It was the first Chinese victory in battle against modern Western forces, and shattered, at least temporarily, the image of Chinese military impotence. Yet it could only stall the British ambassador's advance temporarily. Palmerston dispatched Lord Elgin to lead a joint British and French march on Beijing, with orders to occupy the capital and "bring the Emperor to reason." As retaliation for the "Dagu Repulse" and a symbolic show of Western power, Elgin ordered the burning of the Emperor's Summer Palace, destroying invaluable art treasures in the process—an act still resented in China a century and a half later.

China's seventy-year campaign of resistance against Western norms of interstate relations had now reached undeniable crisis. Efforts at diplomatic delay had run their course; force had been met with superior force. Barbarian claims of sovereign equality, once dismissed in Beijing as risible, shaded into ominous demonstrations of military dominance. Foreign armies occupied China's capital and enforced the Western interpretation of political equality and ambassadorial privileges.

At this point, another claimant to China's patrimony stepped into the fray. By 1860, the Russians had been represented in Beijing for over 150 years—with an ecclesiastical mission, they were the only European country permitted to establish a residence. Russia's interests had in some ways trailed those of the other European powers; it had gained all the benefits extended to the treaty powers without joining the British in the periodic exercises of force. On the other hand, Moscow's overall objective went much further than religious proselytizing or commerce along the coast. It perceived in the Qing's decline an opportunity to dismember the Chinese Empire and reattach its "outer dominions" to Russia. It set its sights in particular on the lightly administered and ambiguously demarcated expanses of Manchuria (the Manchu heartland in northeast China), Mongolia (the then quasi-autonomous tribal steppe at China's north), and Xinjiang (the expanse of mountains and deserts in the far west, then populated mostly by Muslim peoples). To that end, Russia had moved gradually and deliberately to expand its presence along these inland frontiers, poaching the loyalties of local princes through offers of rank and material benefit, underscored by a menacing cavalry.[12]

At the moment of China's maximum peril Moscow surfaced as a colonial power, offering to mediate in the 1860 conflict—which was, in fact, a way of threatening to intervene. Artful—others might argue duplicitous—diplomacy was underpinned by the implicit threat of force. Count Nikolai Ignatieff, the Czar's brilliant and devious young plenipotentiary in Beijing, managed to convince the Chinese court that only Russia could secure the evacuation of the Western occupying powers from the Chinese capital, and to convince the Western powers that only Russia could secure Chinese compliance with the treaties. Having facilitated the Anglo-French march on Beijing with detailed maps and intelligence, Ignatieff turned and convinced the occupying forces that with the approaching winter the Beihe, the river route in and out of Beijing, would freeze, leaving them surrounded by hostile Chinese mobs.[13]

For these services Moscow exacted a staggering territorial price: a broad swath of territory in so-called Outer Manchuria along the Pacific coast, including the port city now called Vladivostok.[14] In a stroke, Russia had gained a major new naval base, a foothold in the Sea of Japan, and 350,000 square miles of territory once considered Chinese.

Ignatieff also negotiated a provision opening Urga (now Ulan Bator) in Mongolia and the far western city of Kashgar to Russian trade and consulates. To compound the humiliation, Elgin secured for Britain an expansion of its Hong Kong colony into the adjacent territory of Kowloon. China had enlisted Russia to forestall what it believed to be a further assault by the treaty powers dominating China's capital and its coast; but in an era of Chinese weakness, "using barbarians against barbarians" was not without its costs.

Managing Decline

China had not survived for four thousand years as a unique civilization and for two millennia as a united state by remaining passive to near-rampant foreign intrusions. For all that period, conquerors had been obliged either to adopt Chinese culture or to be gradually engulfed by their subjects, who masked their practicality by patience. Another such period of trial was at hand.

In the aftermath of the 1860 conflict, the Emperor and the court faction that had urged resistance to the British mission fled the capital. Prince Gong, the Emperor's half brother, assumed the role of de facto head of government. Having negotiated the conclusion of hostilities, Prince Gong summed up, in a memorial to the Emperor in 1861, the appalling strategic choices:

> Now the Nian rebellion is ablaze in the north and the Taiping in the south, our military supplies are exhausted and our troops are worn out. The barbarians take advantage of our weak position and try to control us. If we do not restrain our rage but continue the hostilities, we are liable to sudden catastrophe. On the other hand, if we overlook the way they have harmed us and do not make any preparations against them, then we shall be bequeathing a source of grief to our sons and grandsons.[15]

It was the classic dilemma of the defeated: can a society maintain its cohesion while seeming to adapt to the conqueror—and how to build up the capacity to reverse the unfavorable balance of forces? Prince Gong invoked an ancient Chinese saying: "Resort to peace and friendship when temporarily obliged to do so; use war and defense as your actual policy."[16]

Since no grand resolution was available, the Gong memorial established a priority among the dangers, in effect based on the principle of defeating the near barbarians with the assistance of the far barbarians. It was a classical Chinese strategy that would be revisited roughly a hundred years later by Mao. The Gong memorial demonstrated great geopolitical acumen in its assessment of the kind of threat represented by the various invaders. Despite the imminent and actual threat from Britain, the Gong memorial put Britain last in the order of the long-range danger to the cohesion of the Chinese state and Russia first:

> Both the Taiping and Nian are gaining victories and constitute an organic disease. Russia, with her territory adjoining ours, aiming to nibble away our territory like a silk worm, may be considered a threat at our bosom. As to England, her purpose is to trade but she acts violently, without regard for human decency. If she is not kept within limits, we shall not be able to stand on our feet. Hence she may be compared to an affliction of our limbs. Therefore we should suppress the Taiping and Nian first, get the Russians under control next, and attend to the British last.[17]

To accomplish his long-range aims toward the foreign powers, Prince Gong proposed the establishment of a new government office—an embryonic foreign ministry—to manage affairs with the Western powers and analyze foreign newspapers for information on developments beyond China's borders. He hopefully predicted that this would be a temporary necessity, to be abolished "[a]s soon as the military campaigns are concluded and the affairs of the various countries are simplified."[18] This new department was not listed in the official record of metropolitan and state offices until 1890. Its officials tended to be seconded from other, more important departments as a

kind of temporary assignment. They were rotated frequently. Though some of its cities were occupied by foreign forces, China treated foreign policy as a temporary expedient rather than a permanent feature of China's future.[19] The new ministry's full name was the Zongli Geguo Shiwu Yamen ("Office for the General Management of the Affairs of All Nations"), an ambiguous phrasing open to the interpretation that China was not engaging in diplomacy with foreign peoples at all, but rather ordering their affairs as part of its universal em pire.[20]

The implementation of Prince Gong's policy fell into the hands of Li Hongzhang, a top-ranking mandarin who had risen to prominence commanding forces in the Qing campaigns against the Taiping Rebellion. Ambitious, urbane, impassive in the face of humiliation, supremely well versed in China's classical tradition but uncommonly attuned to its peril, Li served for nearly four decades as China's face to the outside world. He cast himself as the intermediary between the foreign powers' insistent demands for territorial and economic concessions and the Chinese court's expansive claims of political superiority. By definition his policies could never meet with either side's complete approbation. Within China in particular Li left a controversial legacy, especially among those urging a more confrontational course. Yet his efforts—rendered infinitely more complex by the belligerence of the traditionalist faction of the Chinese court, which periodically insisted on meeting the foreign powers in battle with minimal preparation—demonstrate a remarkable ability to navigate between, and usually mitigate, late-Qing China's severely unattractive alternatives.

Li made his reputation in crisis, emerging as an expert in military affairs and "barbarian management" during China's midcentury rebellions. In 1862 Li was sent to administer the wealthy eastern province of Jiangsu, where he found its main cities besieged by Taiping rebels but secured by Western-led armies determined to defend their new commercial privileges. Applying the maxims of the Gong memorandum, Li allied himself with—and established himself as the ultimate authority over—the Western forces in order to destroy their common foe. During what was effectively a joint Chinese-Western counterinsurgency campaign, Li forged a working relationship with Charles "Chinese" Gordon, the famous British adventurer later killed by the Mahdi in the siege of Khartoum in the Sudan. (Li and Gordon eventually fell out when Li ordered the execution of captured rebel leaders to whom Gordon had promised clemency.) With the Taiping threat quelled in 1864, Li was promoted to a series of increasingly prominent positions, emerging as China's de facto foreign minister and the chief negotiator in its frequent foreign crises.[21]

The representative of a society under siege by vastly more powerful countries and significantly different cultures has two choices. He can attempt to close the cultural gap, adopt the manners of the militarily stronger and thereby reduce the pressures resulting from the temptation to discriminate against the culturally strange. Or he can insist on the validity of his own culture by flaunting its special characteristics and gain respect for the strength of its convictions.

In the nineteenth century Japanese leaders took the first course, aided by the fact that when they encountered the West their country was already well on the way to industrialization and had demonstrated its social cohesion. Li, representing a country wracked by rebellion for whose defeat he needed foreign help, did not have that option. Nor would he have shed his Confucian provenance, whatever the benefits of such a course.

An account of Li Hongzhang's travels within China serves as a grim record of China's turmoil: within one fairly representative two-year period in 1869–71, he was catapulted between southwest China, where French representatives had raised a protest over anti-Christian riots; to the north, where a new set of riots had broken out; back to the far southwest, where a minority tribe on the Vietnamese border was in revolt; then to the northwest to address a major Muslim rebellion; from there to the port

of Tianjin in the northeast, where a massacre of Christians had drawn French warships and a threat of military intervention; and finally to the southeast, where a new crisis was brewing on the island of Taiwan (then known in the West as Formosa).[22]

Li cut a distinctive figure on a diplomatic stage dominated by Western-defined codes of conduct. He wore the flowing robes of a Confucian mandarin and proudly sported ancient designations of rank, such as the "Double-Eyed Peacock Feather" and the "Yellow Jacket," that his Western counterparts could only observe with bewilderment. His head was shaved—in the Qing style—except for a long braided ponytail, and covered by an oblong official's cap. He spoke epigrammatically in a language that only a handful of foreigners understood. He carried himself with such otherworldly serenity that one British contemporary compared him, with a mixture of awe and incomprehension, to a visitor from another planet. China's travails and concessions, his demeanor seemed to suggest, were but temporary obstacles on the route to the ultimate triumph of Chinese civilization. His mentor, Zeng Guofan, a top-ranking Confucian scholar and veteran commander of the Taiping campaigns, had advised Li in 1862 how to use the basic Confucian value of self-restraint as a diplomatic tool: "In your association with foreigners, your manner and deportment should not be too lofty, and you should have a slightly vague, casual appearance. Let their insults, deceitfulness, and contempt for everything appear to be understood by you and yet seem not understood, for you should look somewhat stupid."[23]

Like every other Chinese high official of his era, Li believed in the superiority of China's moral values and the justness of its traditional imperial prerogatives. Where he differed was less in his assessment of China's superiority than in his diagnosis that it lacked, for the time being, a material or military basis. Having studied Western weaponry during the Taiping conflict and sought out information on foreign economic trends, he realized that China was falling dangerously out of phase with the rest of the world. As he warned the Emperor in a bluntly worded 1872 policy memorial: "To live today and still say 'reject the barbarians' and 'drive them out of our territory' is certainly superficial and absurd talk. . . . They are daily producing their weapons to strive with us for supremacy and victory, pitting their superior techniques against our inadequacies."[24]

Li had reached a conclusion similar to Wei Yuan's—though by now the problem of reform was exponentially more urgent than in Wei Yuan's time. Thus Li warned:

> The present situation is one in which, externally, it is necessary for us to be harmonious with the barbarians, and internally, it is necessary for us to reform our institutions. If we remain conservative, without making any change, the nation will be daily reduced and weakened. . . . Now all the foreign countries are having one reform after another, and progressing every day like the ascending of steam. Only China continues to preserve her traditional institutions so cautiously that even though she be ruined and extinguished, the conservatives will not regret it.[25]

During a series of landmark Chinese policy debates in the 1860s, Li and his bureaucratic allies outlined a course of action they named "self-strengthening." In one 1863 memorandum, Li took as his starting point (and as a means of softening the blow for his imperial readership) that "[e]verything in China's civil and military system is far superior to that in the West. Only in firearms is it absolutely impossible to catch up with them."[26] But in light of its recent catastrophes, Li counseled, China's elite could no longer afford to look down on foreign innovations, "sneer[ing] at the sharp weapons of foreign countries as things produced by strange techniques and tricky craft, which they consider it

unnecessary to learn."[27] What China needed was firearms, steamships, and heavy machinery, as well as the knowledge and the techniques to produce them.

In order to enhance Chinese capacity to study foreign texts and blueprints and converse with foreign experts, young Chinese needed to be trained in foreign languages (an undertaking heretofore dismissed as unnecessary, since all foreigners presumably aspired to become Chinese). Li argued that China should open schools in its major cities—including its capital, which it had fought so long to safeguard from foreign influence—to teach foreign languages and engineering techniques. Li framed the project as a challenge: "Are Chinese wisdom and intelligence inferior to those of Westerners? If we have really mastered the Western languages and, in turn, teach one another, then all their clever techniques of steamships and firearms can be gradually and thoroughly learned."[28]

Prince Gong struck a similar note in an 1866 proposal urging that the Emperor support the study of Western scientific innovations:

> What we desire is that our students shall get to the bottom of these subjects . . . for we are firmly convinced that if we are able to master the mysteries of mathematical calculation, physical investigation, astronomical observation, construction of engines, engineering of water-courses, this, and this only, will assure the steady growth of the power of the empire.[29]

China needed to open up to the outside world—and to learn from countries heretofore considered vassals and barbarians—first to strengthen its traditional structure and then to regain its preeminence.

This would have been a heroic task had the Chinese court been unified behind Prince Gong's foreign policy concept and Li Hongzhang's execution of it. In fact, a vast gulf separated these more outward-looking officials from the more insular traditionalist faction. The latter adhered to the classical view that China had nothing to learn from foreigners, as given voice by the ancient philosopher Mencius in Confucius's era: "I have heard of men using the doctrines of our great land to change barbarians, but I have never yet heard of any being changed by the barbarians."[30] In the same vein Wo-ren, the chancellor of the prestigious Hanlin Academy of Confucian scholarship, assailed Prince Gong's plans to hire foreign instructors in Chinese schools:

> The foundation of an empire rests on propriety and righteousness, not on schemes and stratagems. Its roots lie in the hearts of men, not skills and crafts. Now for the sake of a trivial knack, we are to honor barbarians as our masters. . . . The empire is vast and abundant in human talents. If astronomy and mathematics must be studied, there are bound to be some Chinese who are well-versed in them.[31]

The belief in China's self-sufficiency represented the combined experience of millennia. Yet it supplied no answer to how China was to confront its immediate peril, especially how to catch up with Western technology. Many of China's top-ranking officials still seemed to assume that the solution to China's foreign problems lay in executing or exiling its negotiators. Li Hongzhang was stripped of his rank in disgrace three times while Beijing challenged the foreign powers; but each time he was recalled because his opponents could find no better alternative than to rely on his diplomatic skills to solve the crises they had generated.

Torn between the compulsions of a weak state and the claims of a universal empire, China's reforms proceeded haltingly. Eventually a palace coup forced the abdication of a reform-leaning

Emperor and returned the traditionalists, headed by the Empress Dowager Cixi, to a predominant position. In the absence of fundamental internal modernization and reform, China's diplomats were, in effect, asked to limit the damage to China's territorial integrity and to stem further erosions in its sovereignty without being supplied the means to alter China's basic weakness. They were to gain time without a plan for using the time they gained. And nowhere was this challenge more acute than in the rise of a new entrant into the balance of power in Northeast Asia—a rapidly industrializing Japan.

The Challenge of Japan

Unlike most of China's neighbors, Japan had for centuries resisted incorporation into the Sinocentric world order. Situated on an archipelago some one hundred miles off the Asian mainland at the closest crossing, Japan long cultivated its traditions and distinctive culture in isolation. Possessed of ethnic and linguistic near homogeneity and an official ideology that stressed the Japanese people's divine ancestry, Japan nurtured an almost religious commitment to its unique identity.

At the apex of Japan's society and its own world order stood the Japanese Emperor, a figure conceived, like the Chinese Son of Heaven, as an intermediary between the human and the divine. Taken literally, Japan's traditional political philosophy posited that Japanese Emperors were deities descended from the Sun Goddess, who gave birth to the first Emperor and endowed his descendants with an eternal right to rule. Thus Japan, like China, conceived of itself as far more than an ordinary state.[32] The title "Emperor" itself—insistently displayed on Japanese diplomatic dispatches to the Chinese court—was a direct challenge to the Chinese world order. In China's cosmology, mankind had only one Emperor, and his throne was in China.[33]

If Chinese exceptionalism represented the claims of a universal empire, Japanese exceptionalism sprang from the insecurities of an island nation borrowing heavily from its neighbor, but fearful of being dominated by it. The Chinese sense of uniqueness asserted that China was the one true civilization, and invited barbarians to the Middle Kingdom to "come and be transformed." The Japanese attitude assumed a unique Japanese racial and cultural purity, and declined to extend its benefits or even explain itself to those born outside its sacred ancestral bonds.[34]

For long periods, Japan had withdrawn from foreign affairs almost entirely, as if even intermittent contacts with outsiders would compromise Japan's unique identity. To the extent that Japan participated in an international order, it did so by means of its own tribute system in the Ryukyu Islands (modern-day Okinawa and the surrounding islands) and various kingdoms on the Korean Peninsula. With a certain irony, Japan's leaders borrowed this most Chinese of institutions as a means of asserting their independence from China.[35]

Other Asian peoples accepted the protocol of the Chinese tribute system, labeling their trade as "tribute" to gain access to Chinese markets. Japan refused to conduct its trade with China in the guise of tribute. It insisted on at least equality to China, if not superiority. Despite the natural ties of trade between China and Japan, seventeenth-century discussions over bilateral trade deadlocked because neither side would honor the protocol required by the other's pretensions of world-centrality. [36]

If China's sphere of influence waxed and waned along its long frontiers in accordance with the power of the empire and the surrounding tribes, Japan's leaders came to conceive of their security dilemma as a much starker choice. Possessing a sense of superiority as pronounced as the Chinese court's but perceiving their margin of error as far smaller, Japanese statesmen looked warily west—to a continent dominated by a succession of Chinese dynasties, some of which extended their writ into Japan's closest neighbor, Korea—and tended to see an existential challenge. Japanese foreign policy thus alternated, at times with startling suddenness, between aloofness from the Asian mainland and audacious attempts at conquest geared toward supplanting the Sinocentric order.

Japan, like China, encountered Western ships wielding unfamiliar technology and overwhelming force in the mid-nineteenth century—in Japan's case, the 1853 landing of the American Commodore Matthew Perry's "black ships." But Japan drew from the challenge the opposite conclusion as China:

it threw open its doors to foreign technology and overhauled its institutions in an attempt to replicate the Western powers' rise. (In Japan, this conclusion may have been assisted by the fact that foreign ideas were not seen as connected to the question of opium addiction, which Japan largely managed to avoid.) In 1868, the Meiji Emperor, in his charter oath, announced Japan's resolve: "Knowledge shall be sought from all over the world, and thereby the foundations of the imperial rule shall be strengthened."[37]

Japan's Meiji Restoration and drive to master Western technology opened the door to stunning economic progress. As Japan developed a modern economy and a formidable military apparatus, it began to insist on the prerogatives afforded the Western great powers. Its governing elite concluded that, in the words of Shimazu Nariakira, a nineteenth-century lord and leading advocate of technological modernization, "If we take the initiative, we can dominate; if we do not, we will be dominated."[38]

As early as 1863, Li Hongzhang concluded that Japan would become China's principal security threat. Even before the Meiji Restoration, Li wrote of the Japanese response to the Western challenge. In 1874, after Japan seized on an incident between Taiwanese tribesmen and a shipwrecked Ryukyu Islands crew to mount a punitive expedition, [39] he wrote of Japan:

> Her power is daily expanding, and her ambition is not small. Therefore she dares to display her strength in eastern lands, despises China, and takes action by invading Taiwan. Although the various European powers are strong, they are still 70,000 li away from us, whereas Japan is as near as the courtyard or the threshold and is prying into our emptiness and solitude. Undoubtedly, she will become China's permanent and great anxiety.[40]

Viewing the lumbering giant to its west with its increasingly hollow pretensions to world supremacy, the Japanese had begun to conceive of supplanting China as the predominant Asian power. The struggle between these competing claims came to a head in a country at the intersection of its larger neighbors' ambitions—Korea.

Korea

The Chinese Empire was extensive but not intrusive. It demanded tribute and the recognition of the Emperor's suzerainty. But the tribute was more symbolic than substantive, and suzerainty was exercised in a way that allowed for autonomy almost indistinguishable from independence. By the nineteenth century the fiercely independent Koreans had reached a practical accommodation with the Chinese giant to their north and west. Korea was technically a tributary state and Korean Kings regularly sent tribute to Beijing. Korea had adopted Confucian moral codes and Chinese written characters for formal correspondence. Beijing, in turn, had a strong interest in developments on the peninsula, whose geographic position established it as a potential invasion corridor to China from the sea.

Korea played in some ways a mirror-image role in Japan's conception of its strategic imperatives. Japan, too, saw foreign dominance of Korea as a potential threat. The peninsula's position jutting out from the Asian mainland toward Japan had tempted the Mongols to use it as a launching point for two attempted invasions of the Japanese archipelago. Now with Chinese imperial influence waning, Japan sought to secure a dominant position on the Korean Peninsula, and began asserting its own economic and political claims.

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, China and Japan engaged in a series of court intrigues in Seoul, sparring for predominance amongst royal factions. As Korea found itself beset by foreign ambitions, Li Hongzhang advised the Korean rulers to learn from the Chinese experiences with the invaders. It was to organize a competition among potential colonizers by inviting them in. In an October 1879 letter to a high Korean official, Li counseled that Korea should seek a supporter among the far barbarians, especially the United States:

> You may say that the simplest way to avoid trouble would be to shut oneself in and be at peace. Alas, as far as the East is concerned, this is not possible. There is no human agency capable of putting a stop to the expansionist movement of Japan: has not your government been compelled to inaugurate a new era by making a Treaty of Commerce with them? As matters stand, therefore, is not our best course to neutralize one poison by another, to set one energy against another?[41]

On this basis, Li proposed that Korea "seize every opportunity to establish treaty relations with Western nations, of which you would make use to check Japan." Western trade, he warned, would bring "corrupting influences" such as opium and Christianity; but in contrast to Japan and Russia, which sought territorial gains, the Western powers' "only object would be to trade with your kingdom." The goal should be to balance the dangers from each outside power, allowing none to predominate: "Since you are aware of the strength of your adversaries, use all possible means to divide them; go warily, use cunning—thus will you prove yourselves good strategists."[42] Li left unstated the Chinese interest in Korea—either because he took for granted that Chinese over-lordship was not a threat of the same nature as other foreign influences, or because he had concluded that China had no practical means to secure a Korea free from foreign influence.

Inevitably Chinese and Japanese claims to a special relationship with Korea grew incompatible. In 1894, both Japan and China dispatched troops in response to a Korean rebellion. Japan eventually seized the Korean King and installed a pro-Japanese government. Nationalists in both Beijing and Tokyo called for war; only Japan, however, had the benefit of a modern naval force, funds initially

levied for the modernization of the Chinese navy having been requisitioned for improvements to the Summer Palace.

Within hours of the outbreak of war, Japan destroyed China's poorly funded naval forces, the ostensible achievement of decades of self-strengthening. Li Hongzhang was recalled from one of his periodic forced retirements to go to the Japanese city of Shimonoseki to negotiate a peace treaty, with the almost impossible mission of salvaging Chinese dignity from the military catastrophe. The side that has the upper hand in war often has an incentive to delay a settlement, especially if every passing day improves its bargaining position. This is why Japan had deepened China's humiliation by rejecting a string of proposed Chinese negotiators as having insufficient protocol rank—a deliberate insult to an empire that had heretofore presented its diplomats as embodiments of heavenly prerogatives and therefore outranking all others, whatever their Chinese rank.

The terms under discussion at Shimonoseki were a brutal shock to the Chinese vision of preeminence. China was obliged to cede Taiwan to Japan; to desist from tributary ceremony with Korea and recognize its independence (in practice opening it up to further Japanese influence); to pay a significant war indemnity; and to cede to Japan the Liaodong Peninsula in Manchuria, including the strategically located harbors of Dalian and Lushun (Port Arthur). Only a would-be assassin's bullet from a Japanese nationalist spared China an even more demeaning outcome. Grazing Li's face at the scene of the negotiations, it shamed the Japanese government into dropping a few of its more sweeping demands.

Li continued to negotiate from his hospital bed, to show that he was unbowed in humiliation. His stoicism may have been influenced by the fact that he knew that, even as the negotiations proceeded, Chinese diplomats were approaching other powers with interests in China, in particular Russia, whose expansion to the Pacific had needed to be dealt with by Chinese diplomacy since the end of the 1860 war. Li had foreseen the rivalry of Japan and Russia in Korea and Manchuria, and he had instructed his diplomats, in 1894, to treat Russia with the utmost sensitivity. No sooner had Li returned from Shimonoseki than he secured Moscow's leadership of a "Triple Intervention" by Russia, France, and Germany that forced Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China.

It was a maneuver with far-reaching consequences. For once again, Moscow practiced its by now well-established interpretation of Sino-Russian friendship. For its services, it extracted special rights in another huge swath of Chinese territory. This time it was subtle enough not to do so outright. Rather, in the wake of the Triple Intervention it summoned Li to Moscow to sign a secret treaty containing an ingenious and transparently acquisitive clause stipulating that in order to guarantee China's security against potential further Japanese attacks, Russia would construct an extension of the Trans-Siberian Railway across Manchuria. In the secret agreement, Moscow pledged not to use the railway as a "pretext for the infringement of Chinese territory, or for encroachment on the lawful rights and privileges of H[is] I[mperial] M[ajesty] the Emperor of China"[43]—which was, however, exactly what Moscow now proceeded to do. Inevitably, once the railway was constructed, Moscow insisted that the territory adjoining it would require Russian forces to protect the investment. Within a few years, Russia had acquired control over the area Japan had been forced to relinquish, and significantly more.

It proved to be Li's most controversial legacy. The intervention had forestalled the advances of Japan, at least temporarily, but at the cost of establishing Russia as a dominant influence in Manchuria. The Czar's establishment of a sphere of influence in Manchuria precipitated a scramble for comparable concessions by all the established powers. Each country responded to the advances of the others. Germany occupied Qingdao in the Shandong Peninsula. France obtained an enclave in

Guangdong and solidified its hold over Vietnam. Britain expanded its presence in the New Territories across from Hong Kong and acquired a naval base opposite Port Arthur.

The strategy of balancing the barbarians had worked to a degree. None had become totally predominant in China, and in that margin, the Beijing government could operate. But the clever maneuver of saving the essence of China by bringing in outside powers to conduct their balance-of-power machinations on Chinese territory could function in the long run only if China remained strong enough to be taken seriously. And China's claim to central control was disintegrating.

Appeasement has become an epithet in the aftermath of the conduct of the Western democracies toward Hitler in the 1930s. But confrontation can be safely pursued only if the weaker is in a position to make its defeat costly beyond the tolerance of the stronger. Otherwise, some degree of conciliation is the only prudent course. The democracies unfortunately practiced it when they were militarily stronger. But appeasement is also politically risky and stakes social cohesion. For it requires the public to retain confidence in its leaders even as they appear to yield to the victors' demands.

Such was Li's dilemma through the decades he sought to navigate China between European, Russian, and Japanese rapaciousness and the intransigent obtuseness of his own court. Later Chinese generations have acknowledged Li Hongzhang's skill but have been ambivalent or hostile about the concessions to which he lent his signature, most notably to Russia and Japan, as well as ceding Taiwan to Japan. Such a policy grated at the dignity of a proud society. Nevertheless, it enabled China to preserve the elements of sovereignty, however attenuated, through a century of colonial expansion in which every other targeted country lost its independence altogether. It transcended humiliation by seeming to adapt to it.

Li summed up the impetus of his diplomacy in a mournful memorial to the Empress Dowager shortly before his death in 1901:

> Needless for me to say how greatly I would rejoice were it possible for China to enter upon a glorious and triumphant war; it would be the joy of my closing days to see the barbarian nations subjugated at last in submissive allegiance, respectfully making obeisance to the Dragon Throne. Unfortunately, however, I cannot but recognize the melancholy fact that China is unequal to such an enterprise, and that our forces are in no way competent to undertake it. Looking at the question as one affecting chiefly the integrity of our Empire, who would be so foolish as to cast missiles at a rat in the vicinity of a priceless piece of porcelain?[44]

The strategy of pitting Russia against Japan in Manchuria produced a rivalry in which both powers progressively tested each other. In its relentless expansion, Russia jettisoned the tacit agreement among the exploiters of China to maintain some balance between their respective claims and a degree of continuing Chinese sovereignty.

The competing claims of Japan and Russia in northeast China led to a war for preeminence in 1904, ending in Japanese victory. The 1905 Treaty of Portsmouth gave Japan the dominant position in Korea and potentially in Manchuria, though less than what its victory might have made possible, due to the intervention of the American President, Theodore Roosevelt. His mediations of the end of the Russo-Japanese War based on principles of balance of power, rare in American diplomacy, kept Japan from seizing Manchuria and preserved an equilibrium in Asia. Stymied in Asia, Russia returned its strategic priorities to Europe, a process that accelerated the outbreak of the First World War.

The Boxer Uprising and the New Era of Warring States

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Chinese world order was totally out of joint; the court in Beijing no longer functioned as a meaningful factor in protecting either Chinese culture or autonomy. Popular frustration boiled to the surface in 1898, in the so-called Boxer Uprising. Practicing a form of ancient mysticism and claiming magical immunity to foreign bullets, the Boxers—so called because of their traditional martial arts exercises—mounted a campaign of violent agitation against foreigners and the symbols of the new order they had imposed. Diplomats, Chinese Christians, railroads, telegraph lines, and Western schools all came under attack. Perhaps judging that the Manchu court (itself a "foreign" imposition, and no longer a particularly effective one) risked becoming the next target, the Empress Dowager embraced the Boxers, praising their attacks. The epicenter of the conflict was once again the long-contested foreign embassies in Beijing—which the Boxers besieged in the spring of 1900. After a century of vacillating between haughty disdain, defiance, and anguished conciliation, China now entered a state of war against all of the foreign powers simultaneously.[45]

The consequence was another harsh blow. An Eight-Power allied expeditionary force—consisting of France, Britain, the United States, Japan, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy—arrived in Beijing in August 1900 to relieve the embassies. After suppressing the Boxers and allied Qing troops (and laying waste to much of the capital in the process), they dictated another "unequal treaty" imposing a cash indemnity and granting further occupation rights to the foreign powers.[46]

A dynasty unable to prevent repeated foreign marches on the Chinese capital or to forestall foreign exactions from Chinese territory had plainly lost the Mandate of Heaven. The Qing Dynasty, having prolonged its existence for a remarkable seven decades since the initial clash with the West, collapsed in 1912.

China's central authority was again fractured, and it entered another period of warring states. A Chinese Republic, deeply divided from its birth, emerged into a dangerous international environment. But it never had the opportunity to practice democratic virtues. The nationalist leader Sun Yat-sen was proclaimed president of the new republic in January 1912. As if by some mysterious law commanding imperial unity, Sun, after just six weeks in office, deferred to Yuan Shikai, commander of the only military force capable of unifying the country. After the failure of Yuan's abortive declaration of a new imperial dynasty in 1916, political power devolved into the hands of regional governors and military commanders. Meanwhile in the Chinese heartland, the new Chinese Communist Party, established in 1921, administered a kind of shadow government and parallel social order loosely aligned with the world Communist movement. Each of these aspirants claimed the right to rule, but none was strong enough to prevail over the others.

Left without a universally acknowledged central authority, China lacked the instrument for the conduct of its traditional diplomacy. By the end of the 1920s the Nationalist Party, led by Chiang Kai-shek, exercised nominal control over the entirety of the ancient Qing Empire. In practice, however, China's traditional territorial prerogatives were increasingly challenged.

Exhausted by their exertions in the war and in a world influenced by Wilsonian principles of self-determination, the Western powers were no longer in a position to extend their spheres of influence in China; they were barely able to sustain them. Russia was consolidating its internal revolution and in no position to undertake further expansion. Germany was deprived of its colonies altogether.

Of the former contestants for dominance in China, only one was left, albeit the most dangerous to China's independence: Japan. China was not strong enough to defend itself. And no other country was

available to balance Japan militarily. After the defeat of Germany in the First World War, Japan occupied the former German concessions in Shandong. In 1932, Tokyo engineered the creation of a secessionist Japanese-dominated state of Manchukuo in Manchuria. In 1937, it embarked on a program of conquest across much of eastern China.

Japan now found itself in the position of previous conquerors. It was difficult enough to conquer such a vast country; it was impossible to administer it without relying on some of its cultural precepts, which Japan, prizing the uniqueness of its own institutions, was never prepared to do. Gradually, its erstwhile partners—the European powers backed by the United States—began to move into opposition to Japan, first politically and eventually militarily. It was a kind of culmination of the policy of the self-strengthening diplomacy, with the former colonialists now cooperating to vindicate the integrity of China.

The leader of this effort was the United States, and its instrument was the Open Door policy proclaimed by Secretary of State John Hay in 1899. Originally intended to claim for the United States the benefits of other countries' individual imperialism, it was transformed in the 1930s into a way to preserve China's independence. The Western powers joined the effort. China would now be able to overcome the imperialist phase, provided it could survive the Second World War and once again forge its unity.

With the Japanese surrender in 1945, China was left devastated and divided. The Nationalists and Communists both aspired to central authority. Two million Japanese soldiers remained on Chinese territory for repatriation. The Soviet Union recognized the Nationalist government but had kept its options open by supplying arms to the Communist Party; at the same time, it had rushed a massive and uninvited Soviet military force into northeast China to restore some of their erstwhile colonial claims. Beijing's tenuous control of Xinjiang had eroded further. Tibet and Mongolia had gravitated into quasi-autonomy, aligned with the respective orbits of the British Empire and the Soviet Union.

United States public opinion sympathized with Chiang Kai-shek as a wartime ally. But Chiang Kai-shek was governing a fragment of a country already fragmented by foreign occupation. China was treated as one of the "Big Five" who would organize the postwar world and were granted a veto in the United Nations Security Council. Of the five, only the United States and the Soviet Union possessed the power to carry out this mission.

A renewal of the Chinese civil war followed. Washington sought to apply its standard solution to such civil conflict, which has failed time after time then and in the decades afterward. It urged a coalition between the Nationalists and Communists, who had been battling each other for two decades. U.S. Ambassador Patrick Hurley convened a meeting between Chiang Kai-shek and Communist Party leader Mao Zedong in September 1945 at Chiang's capital in Chongqing. Both leaders dutifully attended while preparing for a final showdown.

No sooner had the Hurley meeting concluded than the two sides recommenced hostilities. Chiang's Nationalist forces opted for a strategy of holding cities, while Mao's guerrilla armies based themselves in the countryside; each sought to surround the other using *wei qi* strategies of encirclement.[47] Amidst clamor for American intervention in support of the Nationalists, President Harry Truman sent General George Marshall to China for a yearlong effort to encourage the two sides to agree to work together. During that time, the Nationalist military position was collapsing.

Defeated by the Communists on the mainland, Nationalist troops retreated to the island of Taiwan in 1949. The Nationalists brought with them their military apparatus, political class, and remnants of national authority (including Chinese artistic and cultural treasures from the Imperial Palace collection).[48] They declared the relocation of the Republic of China's capital to Taipei, and

maintained that they would husband their strength and someday return to the mainland. They retained the Chinese seat in the United Nations Security Council.

Meanwhile, China was uniting again, under the newly proclaimed People's Republic of China. Communist China launched itself into a new world: in structure, a new dynasty; in substance, a new ideology for the first time in Chinese history. Strategically, it abutted over a dozen neighbors, with open frontiers and inadequate means to deal simultaneously with each potential threat—the same challenge that had confronted Chinese governments throughout history. Overarching all these concerns, the new leaders of China faced the involvement in Asian affairs of the United States, which had emerged from the Second World War as a confident superpower, with second thoughts about its passivity when confronted with the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war. Every statesman needs to balance the experience of the past against the claims of the future. Nowhere was this more true than in the China that Mao and the Communist Party had just taken over.