

## **Chapter 21: Expansion, Reform, and Communication in the Agrarian Empires of Asia**

### ***Imperial Travelers in the Eighteenth Century***

In 1712, the Manchu official Tulisen left Beijing for the shores of the lower Volga River, in Russia, to visit a Mongolian Khan. It was a distance of over 3000 miles, and it took him nearly three years to get there and back. The emperor of China had sent him to explore Russian territory and look for an alliance against other Mongolian rivals. He was not invited to see the Tsar, but he wrote a detailed account of Russia and Central Eurasia, remarking on the topography, ethnography, and history, of all the regions he had crossed.

Seven years later, John Bell, a Scotsman in the service of the Russian Tsar, set out from St. Petersburg for Beijing, covering much of the same route as Tulisen in the opposite direction. He, too, reported accurately on the region's geography, politics, and history, serving the cause of knowledge and intelligence gathering at the same time. Others followed them, like Ivan Unkovski, a Russian officer, who visited the Mongolian Khan in Zungharia in 1722, and the French Jesuit Gerbillon, who accompanied the Chinese emperor on his military campaigns in mid-century. At the end of the century, the Englishman George Lord Macartney arrived by sea in Beijing in 1793 to negotiate the opening of formal trade relations between Britain and China.

All these men easily combined the roles of scientific investigator, diplomat, and spy. They represented a new period of intensified contact between the great empires of Eurasia, each of which was coming in closer contacts with the others. Russia, China, Britain, and France all expanded their territories by huge amounts during the eighteenth century, and all dedicated themselves more intensively to the pursuit of knowledge about the continent. Russia pushed southward against the Ottoman empire, while China advanced westward into central Eurasia. The British created a permanent presence in India, and made their first advances into the China trade. The drive for information collection made the classic imperial projects of conquest, settlement, exploration, and trade more systematic, guided by regulations of expanding bureaucracies. Individuals now were not primarily pilgrims or missionaries acting alone, but were backed by large institutions. Science, empire, and trade supported each other.

This was the last age in world history when agrarian bureaucratic states still dominated the world. The Industrial Revolution had not yet affected most of the world's population, but the linkages created in the eighteenth century prepared the ground for its massive influence in the late nineteenth century.

### ***China 1700 - 1850: The Flourishing Age and Its Troubled End.***

In the eighteenth century, the Qing dynasty of China reached its summit of prosperity and expansion. Successful military campaigns into Central Eurasia extended the empire's boundaries farther than any other dynasty ruled from China's heartland. Peasant settlers followed the armies, pushing land clearance into the farthest recesses of the continent. They also engaged in trade, selling their products on markets linked by extensive transportation networks. Silver flowed in, monetizing the economy, while also generating inflation. The population grew to an unprecedented size of 300 million people by 1800, yet the standard of living remained remarkably high.

In the early nineteenth century, this prosperity began to unravel. Rebellions struck the frontiers, local officials lost control to banditry and corruption, the treasury went into deficit, and ecological crises surfaced. At the same time, the British in Canton pushed their one marketable product, opium, onto all-too-willing Chinese consumers. The Opium war of 1839-42 marked China's first major defeat by a Western power and the conventional onset of her modern history. But even by mid-century, the Western impact was small; strong internal tensions, not Western invasion, had begun to tear the empire apart.

The Manchu rulers continued to prosecute their fundamental military goal, the elimination of an autonomous Mongolian state. [See Chapter 16] The Kangxi emperor's defeat of Galdan in 1696 had not eliminated the Zunghar state; its rulers maintained their control, centered in the Ili River valley, they increased revenues from Russian trade, and they drafted technical advisors from as far away as Sweden. The central site of geopolitical competition with the Qing shifted to Tibet, when the Zunghars sent an army to resolve a disputed succession to the Dalai Lama's position in Lhasa. The Qing responded with an invasion in 1720 that drove out the Zunghars and put the Dalai Lama under permanent imperial supervision. The nature of Qing rule there is still hotly disputed by the Chinese and Tibetans today; the Tibetans claim that they have been substantially independent, while the Chinese claim Tibet as an inalienable part of Chinese territory. In fact, neither claim is entirely true; Tibet's semi-dependent relationship with the Qing fits neither model well.

After an embarrassing defeat in 1731, the Qing emperor stabilized borders with the Zunghars temporarily, but only two decades later, in three short campaigns over huge distances, the Qianlong emperor [r.1736-96] exterminated the Zunghar people and their state. Like the British in India at the same time, he took advantage of internal divisions among the Mongols. He inscribed these victories permanently into the history textbooks as the three most glorious examples of his "Ten Great Campaigns". By 1760, the empire had reached its maximal limits, and it had secured its Central Eurasian borders by treaty with the Russians. The Mongols were now completely under Qing domination, and so was nearly all of Turkestan. In Central Eurasia, only Kazakhs and Tatars remained as partly autonomous nomads, and small Khanates like Kokand and Khiva survived, under constant pressure from Russian expansion.

After the soldier came the farmer. In northwest China, officials actively promoted peasant migration

from the drought-stricken, overpopulated interior with tax breaks, tools, animals, and investment in irrigation works. At the same time, they brought up Turkic peasants from the south who were experienced in using the Persian underground canals to irrigate dry fields with mountain snow. Thus the Qing created a newly mixed population of Turkic Muslims, Han peasants, Manchu soldiers, and Mongolian pastoralists on their northwestern frontiers.

An inexorably expanding, mobile peasant population pressed on low-density, extensively cultivated, radically different ecologies. Officials were ambivalent about migration. It freed up land, but it also created unrest. Six frontiers: Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Southwest China and Taiwan, all experienced this outward push, but in different degrees. Manchuria was sealed off from Han settlement, with limited success, so as to protect the Manchu homeland. Mongolia was heavily penetrated by merchants, peasants, soldiers, and officials from North China. Like native peoples in the Americas, the Mongols died in large numbers from exposure to diseases like smallpox and syphilis; their nobles fell heavily into debt; their young men went to monasteries, deprived of the free-ranging pasturelands. Tibet remained relatively untouched, except for a small Manchu garrison. Southwest China's many hill peoples, practicing slash-and-burn agriculture in low density tropical hills, faced a great onslaught of migrants. They could either adapt to Han ways, becoming "cooked", as the Chinese called them, or flee to more remote areas, where troops and officials regarded with suspicion these "raw" barbarians. In Taiwan, some local officials attempted to preserve the aboriginal populations from Han encroachment, while others actively promoted colonial development.

An unprecedented population growth drove this expansion, once military force opened the frontiers. China more than doubled its population from 1650 to 1800, reaching a total of 300 million. This was a low rate of growth by modern standards, but it made China the largest single political entity in the world. On the other hand, Europe also doubled its population, as did most of the rest of the world [except for Japan and parts of the Ottoman empire]. Malthus, the English population theorist, thought that Asian countries must inevitably be poor, because they did not control their population growth. [See Chapter 20] We now know that Malthus was wrong about China's demographic dynamics. Contrary to Western myth, Chinese did not heedlessly breed up to the limits of subsistence; they limited family size [by infanticide, herbal abortifacients, or abstinence] in response to food supplies. Overall life expectancy at birth of 30 to 35 compared favorably with Europe in 1800. Nearly all women married young, but they only bore an average of 6.3 children, of whom a third or more died in childhood. Extensive use of adoption provided families with male heirs, but the lopsided sex ratio in favor of males left many poor young men without brides. As "bare sticks", they were the dangerous loners of village society, excellent recruits for the army, frontier settlement, or bandit gangs.

Chinese farmers practised the world's most intensive agriculture. Especially in South China, where

long growing seasons and water transport fostered commercial exchange, peasants labored extremely long hours to grow three crops a year, selling a substantial surplus for cash. Their mulberry-silkworm-fish pond system illustrates how they made maximum use of local resources: mulberry trees planted around fish ponds fed silkworms, whose droppings fertilized the soil and water; peasants ate the fish and sold the silk for grain. Local variations abounded: in some regions, powerful lineages bonded their kinsmen to the soil, limiting their access to markets, or large landlords reaped the gains of trade; elsewhere, individual farmers moved into new markets without constraints. Agricultural technologies improved on traditional techniques; no radical innovations occurred, but efficiency and productivity rose. The increased output supported growing rural and urban populations; as markets became linked together in an elaborate hierarchy, prices between regions began to move in synchrony.

The imperial state, for the most part, backed up this developing exchange economy. It was primarily interested in maintaining a prosperous peasantry, the main source of its revenue and its soldiers. Seventy percent of the imperial budget came from the land, but taxes were low in relation to production, and fixed in monetary terms. An empire-wide structure of "evernormal" granaries bought and sold grain so as to dampen grain price fluctuations. Local elites, aided by local officials, invested in water conservancy, a key imperial concern. Elites also supported orphanages, old age homes, bridges, and other public works. Merchants created networks of native place associations, so that traveling traders had a place to stay and useful contacts away from home. Even the boatmen on the Grand Canal had their own local inns. These multiple mixed associations between officials and local groups tied together the core of the empire with crisscrossing strands. No uniform despotism, but a loosely knit social fabric held the core regions of the empire together. In good times, administration and society supported each other. Ottoman writers might have seen Qing norms as similar to the Islamic doctrine of the "cycle of justice", in which the just ruler supports a military, that ensures peace, that protects the people's wealth, which supports the ruler, etc.

Major cities stood at the top of the social hierarchy. Beijing, the imperial capital, gathered 750,000 to one million people: from the top down, these included the Imperial Clan, Manchu bannermen, Han officials and scholars, examination students, and their associated trades of book publishers, peddlers, sedan chair bearers, prostitutes and porters. Below the imperial capital were major provincial cities, each a huge urban conglomeration with its own special character: Hankow, on the Yangtze in central China, where many urban functions were directed by merchant associations; Suzhou, center of the textile industry, drawing in silk from its hinterland to supply its thousands of looms; Yangzhou, at the base of the Grand Canal, renowned for its literary culture; and Guangzhou [Canton], in the South, the upstart center of overseas trade. Many of these urban-commercial centers had grown in the sixteenth century. Now they recovered from seventeenth-century devastation, and new centers spread all over the empire.

As before, commercial and agrarian growth created tensions. The Yongzheng emperor [r. 1723-35] made the most serious effort to address fiscal and administrative issues. The low tax rate left local government chronically underfunded, forcing officials to rely on informal levies ['squeeze' or 'cumshaw' in British parlance] to run their local offices. It was only a short step from essential surcharges to outright bribery and corruption. Much depended on the moral character of the official. Yongzheng instituted "nourishing virtue supplements" to official salaries, hoping that these large cash bonuses would induce local officials to reduce their informal levies. At the same time, he pushed for greater central control over local funding sources, such as those generated by melting silver pieces into ingots for taxation. Yongzheng had presciently put his finger on a major structural weakness of the empire; his reform efforts partially addressed the problem, but his successor, the Qianlong emperor, failed to follow up. As commercial wealth grew, but salaries did not keep up with inflation, officials continued to expand the bounds of informal collection. Vague attacks on "corruption" became an acceptable way to criticize excessive official exactions through the century. Chinese today use the same rhetoric.

Cultural tensions spread beyond the official world. The examination system was the primary source of moral training and inculcation of orthodoxy. These "cultural prisons" drilled the Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi orthodoxy into millions of aspirants each year, but very few would ever achieve the towering peak of an official post. Tutors hired by wealthy families educated more students to take examinations for the bureaucracy, but the number of positions did not increase. In their dreams, diligent students saw benevolent fairies who transformed them into officials with a stroke, and demons who cast them into dungeons of despair. Lucky ones could get posts as teachers and secretaries; less lucky ones joined the ranks of lowly clerks and runners. Others used their literacy and knowledge of the law codes to help commoners write letters and bring disputes to the magistrate's court: attacked as "lawsuit goons" by magistrates, they still provided a useful service. Really frustrated students staged riots at examination halls, carried on smuggling rackets, or even joined bandit gangs as literate advisors, on the heroic model of the Men of the Marshes. A small bureaucracy trying to manage millions of high achieving students had a serious social problem on its hands.

In this sea of Han, the small minority of Manchus had an even worse time. They did not assimilate easily into the Chinese mass: the banner institution itself entitled them to privileges, and walled-off quarters of every major city marked them as distinct. Special quotas gave them a boost in the examination system, but many neglected both the culture of the pen and the sword. The Manchus did not support their entire kinship network; they cut off most of the Imperial clan and the bannermen with small salaries. Bannermen were the military backbone of the conquering elite, but they neglected their horsemanship and illegally joined in the lower levels of the urban economy. Imperial legitimation depended increasingly on convincing the Han majority that the Manchus not only

endorsed the classical ideals, but could take them to new heights. Their vast scholarly public works project, the *Complete Records of the Four Treasuries*, compiled and edited over ten thousand works from the classical Chinese canon with the most precise philological commentary of the newest scholarship. Concurrently, an Imperial Inquisition purged from the canon any works suspected of denigrating Manchu culture.

Qianlong did not try to argue that the Manchus had transformed themselves into "civilized" Chinese; instead, he enunciated separate genealogies of Manchu, Mongols, and Han, giving each a lineage of equal status. Sharpening these ethnic lines, instead of merging the empire's many peoples into one civilization, set them beside each other under the comprehensive gaze of the emperor, the only universal sovereign. Scholars developed elaborate rituals for the emperor to conduct, derived from their reading of classical texts, that demonstrated in practice his ability to link Heaven, Earth, and Man. At annual sacrifices at the Temple of Heaven and other altars, he enacted his role as Son of Heaven, the filial representative of cosmic unification. At the same time, he portrayed himself as supreme patron of Lamaist Buddhism in Tibet, the Grand Khan of the Mongols, and the paramount leader of the Manchu clan.

Such a huge empire, with a limited bureaucracy and tax base, could only be held together through deft combinations of coercion and ritual. Both military force and ritual practice could only be applied sporadically, and sharply targeted. As so much of the governance of the empire relied on delegation to local powers, much of the scholarly debate of the period concerned local administration.

Compilations of statecraft essays discussed how to get high quality officials to manage intricate issues of taxation, commerce, adjudication, and local order. Other scholars addressed themselves in equally meticulous fashion to the philological analysis of classical texts. The grand philosophical speculation of the late Ming, searching in the mind for moral guidance, was rejected in favor of more technical pursuits: getting the pronunciation and characters right for the words of the sages seemed a more feasible, and practical road to truth. This School of Empirical Research evoked the slogan of "seeking truth in facts" that has guided later Chinese reform movements. What may look to us as dryasdust pedantry was for its practitioners an intensive search for reliable empirical and moral knowledge.

Emotional impulses had to seek other outlets. *The Story of the Stone* [also known as the *Dream of the Red Chamber*], written from 1744 to 1763 by the failed literatus Cao Xueqin, is the crowning glory of vernacular Chinese literature. In 120 leisurely, elegantly written chapters, it describes the maturation of Jia Baoyu, a son of a wealthy family with close connections to the Imperial Court. Baoyu, born with a magic jade in his mouth, is destined for a glorious future, but what is it? His father insists that he study the classics intensively, so as to become a high official; but Baoyu sees the corruption of officials around him; he prefers to dally with his young cousins in his family compound. Will he marry the upright, honest, demure Xue Baochai or the emotional, flighty, hyper-

sensitive Lin Daiyu? Phoenix, a sharp domineering woman runs the household with a firm hand as the men enact plots of seduction, bribery, and intrigue. The delicate interplay of poetic romance, bawdy humor, literary allusion, and lowdown dialogue gives us an invaluable vivid picture drawn from Cao's own life of the complex interpersonal relations within one wealthy household. The novel ends in tragedy, with the confiscation of the family fortune, Lin Daiyu's death, and Jia Baoyu's escape from the world into a monastery.

## ***II. Disruption and Upheaval, 1800-1850/60***

The first half of the nineteenth century presents a different picture from the flourishing nineteenth century. There is no exact turning point, but the onset of a series of rebellions on China's peripheries in the 1790s indicates serious social tensions that challenged the empire's stability. Most dangerous was the White Lotus Rebellion, an outbreak by a millenarian Buddhist sect that raged in the hill regions of the central Yangtze from 1796 to 1805.

Popular religious practices beyond the orthodox ancestral rites were always of concern to the state. Outside the bounds of lineage temples and Confucian schools were a plethora of sects deriving their rituals from mingling Daoist, Buddhist, shamanist, and other local cults. Often, the officials succeeded in coopting popular deities into the orthodox pantheon. This was the case, for example, with Guan Yu, a military hero of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, deified by popular worship, and made into an approved God of War; or Guan Yin, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. But the White Lotus movement went further: its adherents worshipped Maitreya, the Buddhist manifestation of the future, who would usher in a radically new era marked by a confrontation of the forces of light with the forces of darkness.

The sect found fertile soil in the tumultuous uplands of the Han River, north of the Yangtze, where immigrants arriving in the late eighteenth century found little new land to clear. They joined the new sect for collective protection at first, with no immediate political goals. Officials at first ignored the White Lotus growth, but ultimately intervened to repress it as clashes increased among the settlers. Only then did the believers form armies, drive out officials, and burst into revolt. In suppressing this rebellion, the Qing troops, both banners and Han Chinese, demonstrated how much they had deteriorated since the days of conquest. Putting down the rebellion took nine years and cost 120 million ounces of silver, exhausting the treasury.

Other revolts broke out around the empire, all indicating serious loss of local control. In Western Sichuan, a Tibetan culture area, the Qianlong emperor spent huge sums trying to put down the powerful Jinchuan peoples, who were protected by fortresses on high mountains. In south China, armed lineages sent their kinsman thugs to do battle with rivals over access to land and water,

creating landscapes marked by fortresses glowering over paddy fields. In Western China, the guolu raiders [from Tibetan goluk for 'bandit'] preyed on merchants traveling in the great Sichuan basin. Many of them were also immigrants from downstream deprived of the prospects of a livelihood. In Xinjiang in 1820, Jahangir led an uprising of Turkic Muslims to drive out infidel Han migrants. The 'Triads', a network of brotherhoods who swore to overthrow the Qing and restore the Ming, flourished in South China and Taiwan. The consequences of imperial overstretch were coming home to roost, as mobile populations under limited control clashed over increasingly scarce supplies of land, water, and employment.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the British, the newly dominant European power, fresh from their incipient conquest of India, arrived on the South China coast. Like all their predecessors, they dreamed of a huge Chinese market. Tea had become a prime national security good in England, necessary to keep industrial workers alert and distracted from ale, and China was its main source. What would the Chinese take in exchange? Tropical Cantonese had little use for Manchester's woolens, and their cotton and silk industries could easily outcompete Britain. As silver drained out of Britain, the East India Company merchants discovered the solution in India. Opium, grown on Bengal plantations with forced labor, became their deadly answer to the trade deficit. It was banned in China, but plenty of entrepreneurial smugglers were willing to help the foreigners, and limited official control of the southeast coast left many small ports open. The exchange of Indian opium for Chinese tea and silk supplied the British consumer with necessary consumption goods at low cost, financed the costs of empire in India, and thrust open the Chinese market to imperial intervention. Of course the British manufacturers did not quite put it that way. Their main slogan was "free trade", and they viewed the Chinese mandarin official class as a backward, corrupt obstacle to trade. All goods, in their view, should be allowed to flow without regulation [except in England, where opium was also banned]. China had confined foreign merchants to one small enclave in the port of Canton, just as it restricted Russians to two cities on the northwest border. The emperor purported to disdain foreign goods, although in fact he wanted foreign silver and military technology, and his Imperial Household itself relied on commercial taxes on Canton trade. George Lord Macartney, sent to China in 1793 to open direct diplomatic and commercial contacts with the court in Beijing, represented a British king who ruled a global empire. When he refused to kowtow [that is, prostrate himself and knock his head on the floor] to another emperor who espoused an equal and opposite claim to a universal empire, he violated the ritual proprieties governing reception of foreign envoys. [He probably did at least kneel down] Unimpressed by his gifts, the Qianlong emperor sent him away emptyhanded. Macartney returned home with a famous description of China as a "great man-of-war", outwardly impressive, but imminent danger of shipwreck.

The British concluded that only military force could open China's ports. Viceroy Lin Zexu provided the casus belli when he was sent to Canton in 1839 to stamp out the illegal trade by burning opium



publicly in front of the foreign warehouses. In 1840, sixteen British warships bombarded Chinese forts near Ningbo, in Zhejiang, then moved north toward Tianjin. The furious emperor sent Lin into exile, but he had no choice but to open negotiations after British troops assaulted Canton and massacred Chinese at Ningbo. The Chinese could claim only one small victory, when a local militia force of twenty thousand defeated a patrol of British and Indian troops who had raped women near Sanyuanli, a market town near Canton. This victory later served nationalists as an epochal demonstration of the power of popular mobilization against foreign oppressors. But the treaty settlements forced on the court were humiliating. Under the Treaty of Nanking, signed in 1842, China had to pay an indemnity, open five ports to trade, grant foreigners rights of extraterritoriality [this jawbreaking term means the right of foreigners to be tried in their own courts, indicating contempt for Chinese justice], cede Hong Kong, abolish its trade monopoly, and limit its tariffs. China was now irrevocably opened to trade on the foreigners' terms, even though her people fought back hard to resist economic penetration. Missionaries, scholars, and more gunboats would soon follow, and the Americans and others would also charge in. Using Turkish sources, notable Boston Brahmin merchant families built their fortunes on the opium trade.

But dating China's modern history from the Opium War is a categorical mistake, as it implies that only foreign intervention drove the course of her history. Just like the comparably misleading dating of Ottoman modern history from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, it ties too much of a giant diverse society's development to a single external event. Like the Ottoman peoples, Qing society was never static, and the domestic drivers of change still predominated by mid-century. The major internal rebellions of the 1850s carried on the frontier turmoil of the 1790s on a much vaster scale.

## ***Japan***

Eighteenth-century Japan followed many of the same trends as China, but in its own distinctive fashion. Commercial networks spread all over the country, but the population did not grow. Foreign trade was highly restricted, and frontier expansion was slight. By the 1790s serious tensions surfaced in the form of social unrest, foreign encroachment, crop failure, and intellectual debate, and beginning in the 1850s, the shogunate was riven by disputes over foreign and domestic policy. While Chinese reformers put the empire back together after its mid-century crisis, Japanese reformers overthrew the shogunate in 1868 and launched the Meiji Restoration that set Japan on its astonishing rise to world power.

The seventeenth-century unifiers had imposed a rigid military and bureaucratic structure on the country, repressed Christianity, and severely restricted foreign contact. Despite their apparently reactionary efforts to freeze society, they in fact promoted new developments. The shoguns, by removing the samurai from the land, made the three hundred castle towns into dispersed centers of local commerce. Since the samurai had to cash in their rice stipends, Osaka arose as the central grain marketing center of the country, with merchants specially designated as brokers for official agents. There were 1300 brokers in the city in the eighteenth century, and it collected 1 million koku of grain per year from the domains. By 1700 Osaka and Kyoto each had a population of 400,000, nearly equal to London and Paris. Edo, the shogun's headquarters, had one million people, equal to Beijing, though Japan had less than one tenth of China's population. Five to seven percent of Japanese lived in cities greater than 100,000, compared to two percent in Europe. Japan was one of the most urbanized societies in the world. These three urban centers dominated the country, each with its own economic niche: Osaka as wholesaler, manufacturer, and financial center; Kyoto outstanding in fine silk and elegant crafts, Edo as the military-bureaucratic center collecting the shogun's retainers and visiting lords [daimyo], who demanded luxury goods and entertainment.

The sankin kttai regulations forced the lords to travel, so the main road to Edo on Honshu island [Ttkaidt] became crowded with lords and their retinues, inspiring innkeepers and peddlers to supply their needs at regular staging towns. [Picture: woodblock print] The maritime route across the Inland Sea likewise tied Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. This and other major interregional trade routes bound the country together economically, despite the inspection stations and custom dues at the border of each domain. There was no national currency standard: Edo used gold, and Osaka silver, while the countryside used copper coins, so major exchange houses dealt in sophisticated financial instruments to adjust currency rates. New merchant houses, among them the house of Mitsui, prospered in the dry goods trade, supplying clothing, uniforms, and household goods to the shogun, lords, and retainers. They wrote their own merchant house laws in 1695, which carefully controlled times of work, dress, food, and relations with customers so as to enforce disciplined service to the firm, described as the "main castle". In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they would clothe and provide ships for the Japanese army. The Sumitomo family, later another powerful zaibatsu [financial combine], began as copper refiners in Osaka.

The dynamic growth of the seventeenth century peaked, and leveled off, during the following century. This was a century of "social stasis", where the Japanese people maintained with difficulty an equilibrium with their environment. Many, especially in the cities, enjoyed quite a high standard of living, and developed a spectacularly creative culture, epitomized by the image of the "floating world" [ukiyo] of fleeting pleasures. The Genroku era [1688 □ 1704 ] is famed for the wealth of its cities, its Kabuki and puppet theaters, the pleasure quarters, and the decadence of the samurai. Its premier representatives were the playwright Chikamatsu [1653-1724] who elaborated on the theme of the love suicide, in which star-crossed lovers trapped between the demands of giri [duty] and ninjo [human feeling] seek their escape in joint self sacrifice. The puppet theatre production of the Tale of the 47 Ronin gained great acclaim despite its seditious content. Ihara Saikaku [1642-93] wrote poignant tales of heterosexual and homosexual love among commoners, samurai, and courtesans in the licensed pleasure quarters, linking the pursuit of sensual delights with the constant awareness of the fragility of both money and love. Woodblock prints of the era celebrated courtesans, actors, and ordinary people, creating Japan's most distinctive contribution to the visual arts.

Shoguns fruitlessly issued streams of sumptuary legislation restricting the clothing, food, and housing of townspeople, and ordered merchants not to "exceed their station", but as in Ming China, the nouveau riche, aping the superior culture of the court and lords, could buy themselves the status of connoisseurs. Despite its distinctive history, in many aspects of material life and commercial culture Japan had caught up with Ming and Qing China. Unlike China, with its vastly diversified regional economies, Japan's culture was more tightly focused on the two largest regions of Kinki [Osaka-Kyoto] and Kanto [Edo], but the mass consumer culture spread through regional and village marketing networks around the country. Cultural unification followed economic networks.

The population of Japan, however, followed a strikingly different pattern from most of the rest of the world. From 1600 to 1720, aggregate population had more than doubled, from 12 to over 30 million people. From 1720 to 1860, it hardly changed at all. The production capacities of the archipelago seemed to have run into an ecological barrier. Nearly all easily accessible trees had been cut down, and new cultivable land was scarce. Severe crop failures caused devastating famines. Japanese village communities were tightly bound networks of prominent families supervising

dependent kinsmen, tenants, and landless laborers. Taxes were imposed on the village as a whole, making everyone responsible for everyone else's obligations. The government tried to enforce its ideal of a self-sufficient, harmonious community [kyotdttai] with controls on migration and trade, as it aimed to restrict each of the four classes - samurai, merchants, artisans, and peasants - to their own profession. Lacking new land, villagers intensified production on their existing fields, but this farming system was highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the weather; households who increasingly specialized in cash cropping were at the mercy of grain markets as well. Landholdings fragmented into diverse sizes, and the uniformity of the agrarian community broke up into landlords, tenants, and landless laborers. All families practiced deliberate restriction of births to adjust their populations to limited resources. Men left home for long periods of time to labor elsewhere; induced abortions and substantial infanticide reduced fertility. Chinese practiced similar demographic controls, but the Japanese were driven to greater extremes because of they lacked room to expand. The Bakufu did try to encourage settlement of Japan's northern frontier, on the island of Hokkaido, but ran into conflicts with the native Ainu tribes there, who were offered protection by the Russians. Fisheries offered one limited option to escape the constraints of land.

The bakufu and daimyo faced severe fiscal crises in the midst of these tensions between burgeoning commerce and limited agricultural production. As the samurai fell heavily into debt, merchants extended their grip over the lords' domains. Lords repudiated their obligations and the shoguns issued more coins, bankrupting many merchants and debasing the currency, but they only postponed the crisis. Shogun Yoshimune [r.1716-45] launched a reform effort guided by the leading Confucian statecraft scholar of the day, Ogyu Sorai. Sorai saw Japan as the ideal country to carry out the true Way enunciated in the Chinese classics, because it had preserved the feudal system of autonomous lords of ancient China. China had degenerated into corruption because of indulgence by its excessively centralized government. Yoshimune issued a new high quality coinage, cut back on expenses, restricted merchant loans, and used heavy doses of moral exhortation to promote austerity. He also supported public works programs to aid the daimyo and directed a campaign against the devastating fires plaguing Edo, replacing thatched roofs with tiles. Despite his dedicated efforts, Yoshimune's reforms only had modest effects. Tensions grew along with prosperity throughout the rest of the century. Rural unrest broke out, marked by petitions against heavy taxation, smashing of moneylenders' shops, and a major rebellion against corvee levies for postal stations in 1764. Later

reform efforts imitated Yoshimune, with even less success.

Despite the shogun's conservatism, intellectual life in isolated Japan was vibrant. A variety of schools of thought tried to place Japan within the East Asian order. Confucianists like Sorai enunciated Japan's special features as a society based on classical texts; Motoori Norinaga, by contrast, denounced the corrosive influence of Chinese teaching, and espoused the unique emotional linkage of the "native Japanese heart" [mikunigokoro] to the Way of the Gods, as expressed in its most ancient poetry and its Shinto cults. He left an explosive legacy to later nationalists with his implications of ineffable Japanese intuitions that defied rational analysis. In the nineteenth century "national studies" scholars defined Japan as a unique polity [kokutai] superior to all others and under threat from foreign influence. By contrast, the Dutch studies scholars used the slim porthole of Nagasaki to obtain books on Western medicine and science from the trickle of Dutch ships allowed to dock there. Among the general population, education spread widely through locally organized temple schools. As Chapter 16 indicates, the sixteenth-century Chinese rulers, though autocratic, did not try to stop popular education. Like China, the repressive shoguns did not fear mass literacy, but saw it as a vehicle of moral indoctrination. Up to 50% of the male population and perhaps 10% of the female population became partially literate through this local education.

The tensions uneasily held in check during the eighteenth century became sharper in the nineteenth century, exacerbated by new foreign contacts, another major famine and revolt, and curious popular movements. New religions, enthusiastic pilgrims, ecstatic dancing, and the cult of Maitreya [the same deity inspiring China's White Lotus movement] indicate a search for saviors from distress and emotional outlets missing in the strictly ordered society. Russian explorers sent by Catherine arrived in Hokkaido in 1792, seeking to open ports to trade; a naval captain returned in 1805 and attacked and plundered Sakhalin island when he was denied access. During the Napoleonic wars the British sent a ship to capture Dutch seamen in Nagasaki harbor, and sought trade with the Ryukyu islands in the south. American whalers appeared off Japan's coast in 1823, looking for refueling ports. Ominous signs of the wider world generated more intensive debates over strengthening coastal defenses and keeping the country sealed. Learning of China's loss in the Opium War made the Japanese even more wary of the West. Outside the central government, the still unsubdued powerful domains of Satsuma and Choshu enacted economic reforms that positioned

them to be powerful rival centers of power to an incapacitated shogunate. None of these potential tensions burst into open conflict, however, until 1853, when the American Commodore Perry steamed into Edo bay demanding the opening of trade.

Tokugawa Japan had developed a surprisingly dense, rich, dynamic social fabric marked by intensive commerce and agriculture and creative artistic and intellectual production within a rigid institutional frame. It was communication-intensive, with a well educated populace, and it had sophisticated financial and commercial institutions that prepared it for a new explosive outburst when the industrialized world cracked its shell.

### ***Shared Experiences of Men and Women***

Except for the Russian empresses, no women emerged into public life in this period, but we now know quite a bit about their lives at home. Chinese women, elite and common, spent nearly all of their lives within family compounds, confined to their duties of cooking, minding children, and spinning and weaving cloth. The high Qing moral codes enforced more rigorous strictures on women than the late Ming, constantly preaching obedience to fathers, husbands, and sons. But as more elite women became literate, they developed extensive communication networks through letter writing and poetry circles. They could claim to be following orthodox Confucian doctrines at the same time as they educated themselves and displayed high aesthetic achievements. Even those who did not write classical prose showed their talents in the elaborate embroidered clothing that formed part of their dowry chest. Some male scholars also began to recognize women's special talents, as they espoused a cult of sentiment remarkably similar to European romanticism. Bao Yu, the hero of *The Story of the Stone*, openly preferred women's conversation to his dull tutors. Lower on the economic hierarchy, women provided vital economic contributions to the household in textile production, which they could practice indoors despite their crippled feet. They could sell their cloth on the market for cash income, giving them wages approximately equivalent to that of male farm laborers. Even in the sphere of reproduction, women had more agency than we might assume. Chinese medical texts justified abortions to save the life of the mother, allowing women to control their fertility to some extent with herbal abortifacients.

Japanese women faced many of the same patriarchal restraints supported by Confucian orthodox teaching as their Chinese counterparts, although they did not bind their feet. They, too, were almost always confined to the household, but many peasant families supported the education of their daughters at rural schools and provided them with lavish clothing. Up to ten percent of women

gained some knowledge of the Japanese syllabic script and Chinese characters. In exceptional cases, some women escaped the bonds restraining them. Ema Saiko, one of Japan's finest poets and painters, developed her great talents with her father's support, and inspired many women disciples. Some new religious sects supported by the merchant class embraced women preachers. Jion-ni Kenka, a Buddhist nun, gave free lectures to men and women in Edo which attracted up to one thousand people. In both China and Japan, within the constraints of orthodoxy, there were openings for extraordinary women to exploit, and considerable variation in women's status by class and region.

Likewise, only a few Russian women could escape from the pervasive power of the male-dominated institutions around them. Peter the Great had liberated elite women from the seclusion of the terem in 1718, allowing them to join high court society and choose their marriage partners freely.

Catherine pressed for broad education of women, founding the Smolnyi Institute for noble girls in 1764 and public schools for poorer women. A few remarkable women became notorious as writers espousing the cause of freedom, like Nadezhda Durova, who ran away from home in 1807, served in the Russian cavalry disguised as a boy, and published journals describing her distinguished military service. Mothers, wives, and daughters of leading male members of the intelligentsia played important supportive roles behind the scenes. Until 1850, women political activists could not escape repression, but they would soon throw themselves actively into the revolutionary movements of the late nineteenth century.

Islamic law bestowed property rights on women, unlike the British or East Asians, so elite women were important economic actors in the Ottoman and Mughal empires. In Egypt they even came out onto the streets to demonstrate on behalf of their interests. Ironically, European colonization and governmental reforms influenced by the West weakened the economic power of these elite Muslim women.

## **Conclusion**

The last 150 years of the Agrarian Age brought to fruition much of the potential of the Eurasian societies, before industrialism changed everything. A central theme of our story has been the progressive growth of the network of social interactions that allowed the coordination of human actions over wide expanses. The communication density of a society -- determined by its trade and transport routes, its literacy, its agricultural productivity, and its government -- had much to do with how well it used its available resources. These empires shared many features, although no generalization applies equally well to all of them. All except the Ottomans expanded the territory under their control; although the Mughals first fell into pieces and were collected together again

under the British. China and Russia expanded the farthest, and even Japan moved north. As they expanded, the empires touched each other, eliminating most of the interstices occupied by nomads and tribal peoples. Treaties fixed boundaries and peoples in place under regularized rule, as bureaucrats replaced soldiers as the dominant players. Populations grew and moved into frontier areas [except in Japan and parts of the Ottoman domains]. Internal trade networks linked regions together and facilitated the movement of people, goods, money, and ideas. Literacy rose to surprising levels, especially in East Asia, as high as 30 to 50% of the male population. Far fewer women, of course, were literate, and most remained confined to their households, but a small elite did learn the fine arts of poetry, embroidery, and letter writing.

The rulers at the center all had trouble keeping these dynamic developments under control. Russia, China, and Japan generally became more centralized, as their bureaucracies aimed to penetrate, standardize, and make more visible the hidden practices of local custom, but local notables took power away from the sultans in Istanbul, and Mughal India fell completely apart, to be replaced by a new, more despotic foreign ruler. When possible, centralizing bureaucrats all mapped and measured their lands, classified and counted their peoples with more efficient methods of statecraft. Sporadic reform efforts in all the empires aimed to improve the flow of revenues toward the center, regularize local administration, and respond to the rising production of both agriculturalists and merchants. The Ottomans made more sustained, and more radical steps toward reform than the Chinese, Russians, or Japanese, but their goals were similar. None of them tried to undermine the basic system of rule; only to make it run more smoothly.

External pressure was only one factor in reform, and usually not the dominant one, but Western European traders and soldiers certainly grew more prominent around the continent. A chartered monopoly trading company conducted the conquest of India; Napoleon's armies had only a brief impact on Egypt, but the Ottoman openness to trade allowed significant commercial penetration; Russia voluntarily plunged into European continental politics and maritime trade. East Asians kept aloof as long as possible, until the global British push for open trade in the mid-nineteenth century forced open China's ports, soon followed by the U.S. in Japan. The integration of the pre-industrial world was well advanced by 1850, fostered by expanding empires and thickening communication networks across the Eurasian continent.



## **Glossary of Key Terms and Dates**

### **China**

Zunghar Mongols  
 George Lord Macartney  
 Opium War, 1839-42  
 Canton trade  
 East Indian Company  
 Kangxi emperor (r. 1662-1722)  
 Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723-1735)  
 Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-1796)  
 Dalai Lama  
 Mulberry-silkworm-fish pond agriculture  
 Evernormal granaries  
 Suzhou  
 Yangzhou  
 Guangzhou (Canton)  
 Bannermen  
 Complete Records of the Four Treasuries  
 School of Empirical Research  
*The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*

White Lotus Rebellion

Triads  
 Lin Zexu  
 Sanyuanli  
 Treaty of Nanking (1842)  
 Extraterritoriality

### **Japan**

Samurai  
 Koku (180 liters of grain, by volume)  
 Edo  
 Osaka  
 Tokaido  
 shogun  
 Mitsui  
 Zaibatsu  
 Ukiyo  
 Genroku era [1688-1704]  
 Sumitomo  
 Kyodotai  
 Mikunigokoro  
 Shinto  
 Kokutai  
 Chikamatsu (1653-1724)  
 Giri (duty)  
 Ninjo (feeling)  
 Ihara Saikaku (1642-93)  
 Kinki (Osaka-Kyoto)  
 Kanto (Kanto)  
 Shogun Yoshimune (r.1716-45)  
 Ogyu Sorai

Motoori Norinaga  
Dutch studies  
Commodore Perry