

## Part 5: From Global Empire to Global Economy

### 20: The World Empire of the Mongols



The Mongols built their empire in stages, conquering inner Asia, spreading through the North, then along the Silk Route before conquering the Jin Dynasty (which had taken the N. China Plain) and finally invading the Southern Song. North China was hit hardest with considerable death and destruction.

The Mongols remained in China only 100 years, failing to govern it properly, while lasting far longer elsewhere in the world. Unlike the Huns invading the Roman Empire and plunging Europe into the Dark Ages, China's civilization survived.

One of the reasons was that the Mongols accepted China's elite as necessary to make the bureaucracy work, particularly the local literati of the South. This reliance led to the Ming Dynasty, the first to arise from the South.



The Ming Dynasty originated from a Neo-Confucian vision, with their first mission to drive the Mongols from China and to build the Great Wall as a statement that China was separate, insular, and not a part of someone else's global empire.

And yet, while declaring its insularity, China partook in the world economy through money from Latin America, where a third of the world's silver was mined. Silver became a common currency through Spanish conquest and European exploration.

In this period of the 15th and 16th centuries, maritime navigation began a new way of linking the world. Although Admiral Zheng He gave the Ming a head start in maritime navigation, they failed to hold onto it.

## Historical Overview

The Song rose to power in a multi-state world where the Khitans of the Liao Dynasty and Tanguts of the Western Xia were both accorded rights as brother states, with their own Sons of Heaven atop them. These northern powers would persist and expand, but the actors would change.



Early in the 12th century, the nomadic Jurchens of the far Northeast established the Jin Dynasty, conquered the Liao, and in 1126, the Jin attacked the Song, taking Kaifeng and most of the North, dividing China into the Northern and Southern Song. The Song moved its capital to Hangzhou and in 1142, signed a peace treaty with the Jin.



At the end of the 12th century, in a world of continental trade and stemming from a resource crisis, Chinggis Khan unified the tribes of the steppe and built an army. After conquering central Asia, Khan turned back to take the Western Xia and the Jin and forty years later took the Southern Song, creating a world empire spanning all of Europe and Asia.

## Introduction to the Northern Border



Of all the nomadic and pastoral peoples of the North, the most successful were the Mongols. They are now part of the People's Republic of China.

### The Roles of the Northern Border

**A Strategic Border**, marking a military zone of fighting whose delineation changed with the period.

**A Political Border**, between the Song and the Jin of the Jurchens and the Xia of the Tanguts. The cost of its defense drained the North. Though we sometimes think of the Great Wall as a border, it rarely was.

**A Cultural and Economic Border**, between the steppe and the sown, that is, between the arid grasslands of the north and the agricultural farmland of the south.

### Differences Between Steppe and Sown

The contrast *between the steppe and the sown* can be seen in these ways:

Steppe	Sown
Desert and grasslands, with forest to the north	Agrarian with dry land to the north and wetlands and rice paddies to the south.
Nomads on horses, who ate cheaply	Sedentary farmers with investments in plows and farm animals
Portable housing: yurts	Houses
Tribal society	Villages
Confederations of clans	Administrative hierarchy of counties and prefectures
No permanent government	Permanent bureaucracy
Khans	Emperors

**This northern border therefore separated two fundamentally different ways of life.**

### Who are the Northern Peoples?

They lived with their flocks and moved with the seasons. In hard times, they retreated to the forests. We think of the nomads and the hunter-gatherers of the forests as different people, but they were somewhat interchangeable, moving fluidly between these locales as the climate changed.

## Configuration of Power in the 12th Century



The Song had lost control of the North China Plain in 1120 to the Jin, leaving the Jurchens of the Jin and the Tanguts of the Xi Xia to defend their own northern borders from the tribes of the north.

Those northern tribes included the Tatars and Mongols and other nomadic tribes as well: the Onggirats, Merkits, Kerait, Naimans. Today we call all those people the Mongols, one tribe, but in the 12th century the Mongols were but one tribe among many, and a marginal one at that.

## The Saga of Temüjin (1162-1227 CE)

### Stolen Beginnings and Early Setbacks



Genghis Khan was given the name Temujin at his birth around 1162, a time when the area that today is called Mongolia was fractured into separate warring tribes. He was the third son of a Khamag Mongol, who was the chief of a Kiyad sub-tribe.

This minor chief, Temujin's father Yesüge, had an important claim, that he was an *Anda* of Toghrul - the khan of the powerful Kerait tribe in central Mongolia. *Anda* means *as if born from the same womb* - an honorific earned in battle.

Although Temujin was Yesüge's third son, he was the first son of Hoelun, Yesüge's second wife, an Onggirat Mongol who taken by force. In the world of nomads, kidnapping was common and often created enduring hostilities.



When Temujin was nine, Yesüge took him to Hoelun's tribe, the Onggirats, to find him a wife. Temujin would marry the daughter of one of the chiefs, and would live with the chief until he was of age, around 13. The father left and on his way back was killed by Tatars. With his dying breath, Yesüge told a companion to warn his son that he must quietly leave the Onggirats and return to his home. Why? Because his father would no longer be around to enforce the marriage arrangement, and Temujin would be enslaved.

Temujin escaped home to join his family as one of several children of a widowed mother. They were a family alone, left behind when their nomadic tribe departed. They moved north to hunt and fish in the forests, no longer with any power or connections.

### The Makings of a Leader



According to legend, one of Temujin's half-brothers, stronger by far, would take Temujin's catch when they fished and his game when they hunted. Temujin complained to his mother, Hoelun, who ignored him. So Temujin arranged with his four brothers to sneak up on his half-brother and kill him. Thus did Temujin become the leader of his family.



Now with four brother and their horses, Temujin was a threat to the sub-tribe that deserted his family. They captured him and while he was captured, raiding tribesmen took all but one horse from his family. Temujin escapes from capture and chases the raiders with the remaining horse. On the way, he joins with a young Jadaran tribesman, *Jamukha*, and together they succeed in recovering the stolen horses.

The point is that Temujin's success is due to his willingness to fight for his dependents.



The years went by, Temujin gained adherents, and when he came of age he successfully reclaimed the rights to his promised wife and his legitimacy with the Onggirats. They awarded him a black sable coat to give to his mother, but he gave it instead to Toghrol, the khan of the Keriats and asked for recognition as his father's son, an anda of Toghrol.

*My thoughts:* It's a wonderful story since it ties all up the loose ends so very, very neatly, which makes one wonder how much is true.

## Becoming Chinggis Khan



Meanwhile, the Merkits, from whom Yesüge had stolen Temujin's mother, were waiting. They attacked Temujin's camp and stole his wife, Börte, forcing Temujin to flee. Of course, this meant war! He convinced Toghrol to attack the Merkits with 20,000 cavalry. His old ally Jamukha joined the fight with another 20,000 men and horses.

In 1186, they defeated the Merkits. Börte, now pregnant, was returned. Temujin, at the age of 25, was recognized as the khan.

But as happened with nomadic tribes, after the battle the horsemen melted into the countryside and Temujin was left a leader with no army. To make matters worse his own anda, Jamukha, turned against him with 30,000 men. Temujin fled to find refuge with the Jurchens' Jin dynasty in Beijing.

The Jurchen's decided they wanted Temujin to help defend their territory against the Tatars. Aligned with Toghrol of the Keriats, Temujin organized a force to vanquish the Tatars, this time fighting Jamukha. Determined to have total victory, he executed every male above the height of a wagon's axle and distributed the women and children as slaves to his Mongols.

In reward, the Jurchens named Toghrol the Ong Khan, the King of Khan. Toghrol refused Temujin's subsequent proposal to ally through marriage, as the Mongols were widely considered the scum of the steppes. With his followers leaving in droves, Temujin led a surprise attack against the Keriats with his 2,600 remaining men and destroyed the main force, enslaving them to his Mongols.

He then turned to the western steppe and uses the same ruse that had been successful against the Keriats, of setting large numbers of unmanned campfires at night to lead them into thinking they were surrounded by a large force. In a final attempt to block Temujin, Jamukha joined the Naimans to fight him, but was defeated. When he arrived in Temujin's camp, Jamukha was torn limb from limb.



In 1206 at a meeting of the tribes of the North, Temujin is declared Chinggis Khan, the khan of the North<sup>106</sup>.

## The Church-State Problem

The Mongols believed heaven could bestow irrevocable gifts on people, regardless of virtue. Once a shaman<sup>107</sup> had confirmed your gift, it was yours to have. A family of shamans who had been close to Chinggis Khan during his rise, who had confirmed his gift in 1186 and had confirmed it again in 1206, finally began to cause trouble. They beat up Chinggis' brother Hasar and warned Chinggis that one of his other brothers had heaven's gift as well. Chinggis was about to execute his brother when his mother intervened, using a quiver of arrows to explain the meaning of a [fascis](#), saying that Chinggis must not divide his family.

When the shaman family came for a meeting at Chinggis' yurt, his brothers took the oldest son of the shaman and killed him. Henceforth, Chinggis never let a religious force interfere with his claim to authority.

### Church and State in earlier periods

- David Keightley notes that in ancient China, the state was the church, page 30.
- In the fifth century during the Wei Dynasty, Emperor Taiwu attempted to suppress Buddhism with six years of pogroms, page 95.
- In the 830's, during the Tang Dynasty, the government demanded that monks and nuns return to lay life and dismantled their temples and melted their statues page 110.

### Discussion

What was the outcome of Temujin's conflict with the shaman and his family and why did it matter?

My post:

After years of supporting Temujin in his ascendancy, the shamans tried to sow discord with Temujin's brothers, physically attacking one of them. This forced Temujin to choose between the religious influence of the shaman and his allegiance to his family. Throughout his rise, Temujin had always shown allegiance to those who were closest and those who consistently stayed by his side. Temujin chose family over religion, personal allegiance over imputed authority.

Frankly, I'm not sure yet why this matters to Temujin's future as a ruler, as I don't know the history, but I can imagine there'll be a conflict in the future with a tribe backed by religion and Temujin will remember the shaman family and I'm sure it won't go well for the faithful.

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<sup>106</sup> Robb Stark, King of the North?

<sup>107</sup> Shamans were people who communicated with heaven to find the evil spirits in a body that caused sickness and other troubles.

## From Tribe to Government

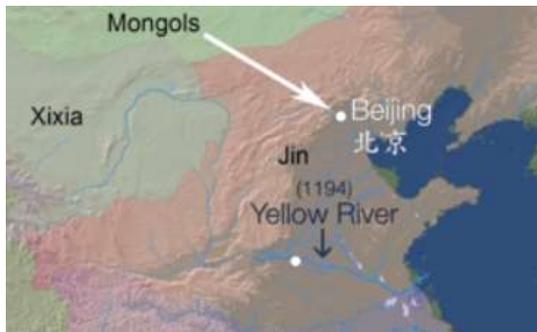


The Mongols were illiterate, which made it difficult to run a bureaucracy. Their first contact with a literate people was the Jurchens. As they moved toward Central Asia, they met the Uighurs, who became a source of literacy for them, leading to the creation of the written Mongolian script.

Chenggis ordered his sons to learn to read and had his rules transcribed into laws and eventually into a legal code. He regrouped the Mongols from shifting nomadic confederations into fixed military units with an officer corps based on a meritocracy. His army numbered 100,000 in 1200 CE, 130,000 at its height.

As a result of this reorganization, the multiple tribes of Mongolia united within a century, with all the nomads thinking of themselves as Mongols.

## The Campaigns of Chinggis Khan



From 1211 through 1214, Chinggis turned south to attack the Jurchens' Jin dynasty. With their mobile cavalry, the Mongols were skilled at conquering open land but they didn't know the siege tactics necessary to take a walled city like Beijing. Further, they couldn't cross the Yellow River, limiting their territory.

The Jurchens deceived the Mongols by asking for peace and then retreating south, moving their capital to Kaifeng and leaving the Jurchens in possession of the North China Plain.<sup>108</sup> Chinggis would not forgive them for claiming obeisance before sneaking south of the Yellow River beyond their reach.

**Khwarazm Empire**  
花刺子模  
(1077-1231 CE)

The Mongols turned next to Central Asia where the Tang had once established its Silk Road protectorates. At the time, this area was under Khwarazm Shah, Mohammed II, who had established an empire after winning a series of wars. It was a wealthy area, with the Valley of Fergana and the great cities of Samarquand, Herat, and Bukhara. These walled cities were the centers of the eastern Islamic world, with universities, mosques, and paved streets.

Chinggis sent a caravan of 450 merchants to Central Asia to trade, but the Khwarazm Empire, thinking little of the Mongols, killed them and stole the trade goods. To defend against the warring Mongols, they stood as many as 50,000 troops to guard the cities.

Having learned from Beijing how to besiege cities, Chinggis armed his hundred thousand warriors with catapults and threatened to annihilate the inhabitants if they didn't accept defeat.

<sup>108</sup> Kaifeng had been the capital of the Northern Song before the Song had been driven south by the Jurchens.



The Mongols moved so quickly over the steppes that scouts could not return a warning before being overtaken by the advancing army. They drove the captives from one city to the next to lay siege, pillaging as they went.

There's some debate among historians whether Central Asia fell to military defeat or succumbed to a new era of peace under the Mongols. Regardless, Central Asia changed from a prosperous region of literacy and learning to a devastated area. What motivated Chinggis to pillage such a place?

Chinggis died in 1227 in a battle with the Tanguts. As his coffin was brought to the place of rest, all those encountered were killed, so no one knows today where he was buried.

Rashid al-Din, a Persian historian of the era, told how Chinggis asked one of his generals what he wanted most out of life. The general replied that he most loved hunting in the spring with a falcon on his arm, to watch it bring down prey. Chinggis said that wasn't for him. He wanted most to defeat his enemies and crush them under the hooves of his horses and watch them die while holding their wives and daughters.

Professor Bol disagrees with Rashid al-Din, saying that Chinggis had to keep fighting, to pillage the defeated, to support his army, in order to remain the Khan. His was not a sedentary agrarian society that could thrive in stasis. Like a shark, the moment Chinggis stopped moving, he would die.

## The Mongol Empire

### After Chinggis Khan: The Khanship

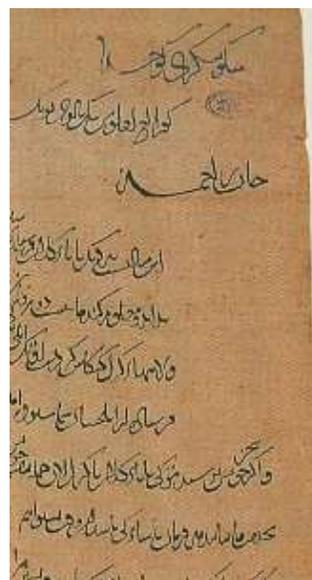
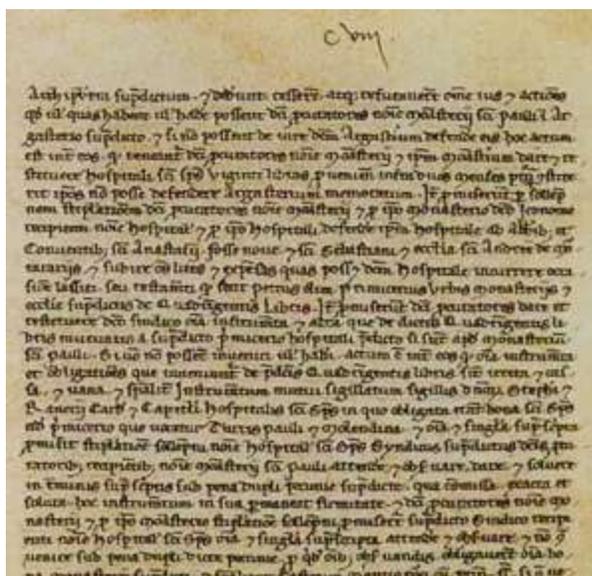
Though the empire was founded by Chinggis, it was his heirs who extended its reach. In 1229, two years after Chinggis death, a [kurultai](#)<sup>109</sup> elected his second son Ogedei, who defeated the Jin five years later, in 1234. Not until 1294, under the reign of Khubilai Khan (r. 1260-1294), were the Southern Song defeated, the last of the Mongol's enemies.

### The Campaign Against the West

From 1237-1242, [the Mongols invaded Rus](#), what would now be western Russia. In 1238, they invaded the North Caucasus and were in Poland and Bohemia by 1241. Henry II, aka Henry the Pious, of Silesia lost to the Mongols at the [Battle of Legnica](#) and was decapitated. Hungary fell in 1241, then Austria and northeast Italy, then Croatia and Serbia and Bulgaria.

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<sup>109</sup> Among the Mongols, the leaders of the tribes would gather in council to elect a ruler.



In 1241, when the Mongols arrived at Budapest (or perhaps Vienna), at the Gates of Europe, the Pope called on all Christians to stop the barbarian hordes. In a letter to the Khan, the Pope demanded he desist and the Khan replied that:

*Heaven gave the world as its gift.*

*It's not for you to tell me to stop.*

*You should submit.*

On the morning of the battle, when the Christians looked out over the gates, the Mongols were gone, leading them to think God had saved them. As it happened, Ogotai Khan died in 1241<sup>110</sup> and couriers rode to recall the generals to a kurultai. The general who was poised to invade decided that the choice of Khan was more important than Europe's plenty, and took his army back to Karakorum.

After the Khan was chosen, the Mongols resumed, destroying Baghdad<sup>111</sup> in 1258 and Korea in 1259. In 1271 and 1284, they sent fleets to Japan and were turned back, according to Japanese history by a divine wind, the Kamikaze, that sank the Mongol fleet.

They took Vietnam in the 1280's and Java in the 1290's.



In the 1320's, they invaded India.

<sup>110</sup> During the spring of 1242, [Ögedei Khan](#) died at the age of fifty-six after a binge of drinking during a hunting trip. Batu Khan, who was one of the contenders to the imperial throne, returned at once with his armies to Asia, leaving the whole of Eastern Europe depopulated and in ruins (before withdrawal, Batu Khan ordered wholesale execution of prisoners). But because of his withdrawal, Western Europe escaped unscathed. See Wikipedia [here](#).

<sup>111</sup> The [sacking of Baghdad](#) was one of the great historical atrocities. It was said that the rivers ran red with blood (okay, perhaps that's commonplace of a Mongol sacking) but beyond that, they ran black with ink from all the books thrown in the rivers from the [House of Wisdom](#), destroying centuries of some of the world's finest historical, medical, mathematical and scientific writings. Estimates of deaths run from several hundred thousand to a million. A marvelous canal system for irrigating the fields was destroyed and Baghdad ruined for centuries.



The Mongols had created the greatest empire the world had ever seen. Difficult as it was to control such a vast empire, they divided it into four Khanates:

- Empire of the Golden Horde**      The Altan Gorda, or central palace was in Russia east of Kiev and lasted until 1502.
- Empire of the Il Khan**              Included Iran, Iraq, Georgia, and Syria, which lasted until 1411.
- Empire of the Chagatai Khanate**      Central Asia.
- Empire of the Grand Khan**      Including Mongolia, Yuan China, Korea, and what is now called Manchuria. This lasted only until 1368.

Most of the world known to the Mongols was in their empire. Japan, SE Asia, N Africa, and Egypt remained outside, along with Western Europe. In the east, in the Yuan Dynasty, China was the richest prize, much greater than Mongolia, leading the Khan to move his headquarters from Karakorum to Dadu, the Great Capital, where Beijing is today.

### **Reading: The Journey of Friar John of Pian de Carpine**

*The Journey of Friar John of Pian de Carpine to the Court of Kuyuk Khan, 1245-1247.*

This was a rather intense travelogue, difficult to read with the antiquated rhythm, diction, and place names.

In a rather understated fashion, Friar John tells of an extraordinarily difficult journey where two monks traveled for two years, mostly on horseback, in severe weather across forbidding terrain, through lands ruled by dangerous, thieving men. On several occasions, to no surprise, they were close to death: from illness, from starvation, from armed men.

He told of the devastation wreaked by the Mongols, of the ease with which one could make a fatal mistake. For example, stepping knowingly on the threshold of a chief's orda (tent) was cause for execution. Demonstrating fealty to the emperor or to any high chieftain was rigidly ordained, with great tents arranged with complex seating where the heights and positions of the seats was determined by rank. Great wealth was accumulated for the chiefs.

He reported that the emperor was good to his people but vicious and cunning in battle.

## The Mongols in China

The Mongols did not accept that they should rule all peoples consistently, but rather that theirs was a multi-ethnic empire that should accord privileges and laws to different peoples as they chose. Given the vast population, they distrusted the Chinese, relying instead on bringing people from Central Asia to help them rule.

**Co-administration.** The Dynasty appointed both a Chinese and a Mongolian official to co-administer major offices.

**Tax farming:** tax collectors bought rights to the taxes and kept a proportion of them.

**Muslim Financiers** were brought in to as the CFO's of the Yuan.

**Tibetan Buddhists** took control of the Chinese Buddhist establishment.

## Ethnic Hierarchy

To defend their interests, the Mongols instituted a hierarchy of four groups, which became apparent when they restored the civil exam system in 1315.

- Mongols
- **Many categories:** people from Central Asia
- **Han:** Khitans of the Liao, Jurchens of the Jin, Tanguts of the Xi Xia
- Southern Barbarians: the Chinese

## The Weight of Empire: Diverging Mongol Visions and Identities



Mongols living in China faced an identity crisis. They couldn't roam and hunt on fields planted with grain, they lived in palaces rather than their familiar yurts, they didn't travel from place to place with herds of livestock. Some advocated eradicating the population (which, according to Friar John, would not have been out of the question) and turning North China into a hunting ground. This was voted down in favor of continuing to tax the Chinese, a concept new to the Mongols.

Thus was there a division between, one might say, those of the Steppe party and those of the Civil party.

sinification  
漢化  
(hanhua)

The Civil party included those from Central Asia who learned Chinese and became literati themselves, who then supported the inclusion of Chinese literati into government and ruled through the bureaucracy rather than through armed force. One might wonder to what extent those Mongols of the Civil Party were becoming sinified.

Prof. Bol feels they were not. Many Mongols were prepared to return to the steppe and when, in the 1360's, they were forced out of China, they did return. Those of the Civil Party were not so much becoming Chinese as simply accepting the literati philosophies of government.

It seems to me that this course has made the point that Neo-Confucian philosophies are about *all* peoples, not just the Chinese.

## Conclusion: Encountering The Mongol Empire, Then And Now



We can see it as an empire that provided safe travel from East to West, across the Khanates, from Beijing to Baghdad (although Friar John might disagree with what it means to travel safely).

We might see it from Marco Polo's point of view. As a young man, he traveled with his father and uncle. He traveled to Cathay, which referred to the Khitans, which is how they thought of North China. He returned through Fujian (Fuzhou), through Southeast Asia and Arabia.

He never had to learn Chinese and he had a safe and profitable journey. He saw rich markets, writing on paper with brush and ink, burning of coal.

His book, told to a cellmate in prison, was regarded as lies and his story wasn't confirmed until Jesuit missionaries of the 16th century confirmed that the Cathay of Marco Polo was indeed, Ming China. Marco Polo said about the Great Khan that he was the greatest, most powerful and richest ruler since Adam.

And so he was.

## Discussion

### What in your view motivated the Mongols' continued expansion?

(Terra Cotta group, my response)

From one of the lectures:

Rashid al-Din, a Persian historian of the era, told how Chinggis asked one of his generals what he wanted most out of life. The general replied that he most loved hunting in the spring with a falcon on his arm, to watch it bring down prey. Chinggis said that wasn't for him. He wanted most to defeat his enemies and crush them under the hooves of his horses while they held their wives and daughters, and he felt all men were that way. So Chinggis' motive was the human desire for brutal dominance.

Professor Bol disagrees with Rashid al-Din, saying that Chinggis had to keep fighting, to pillage the defeated, to support his army, in order to remain the Khan. His was not a sedentary agrarian society that could thrive in stasis. Like a shark, the moment Chinggis stopped moving, he would die.

In other words, nomadic societies cannot support their armies by building and taxing an agrarian society, they support their armies through continued conquest.

### Pax Mongolica

(Terra Cotta group, my response)

Briefly evaluate the argument that the time of the Mongol Empire was that of a "Pax Mongolica." What are the conditions and requirements of "peace"? Were they met during this time?

Peace, in my opinion, in a medieval context, was the absence or suppression of both external and internal armed conflict. From Wikipedia, we have that

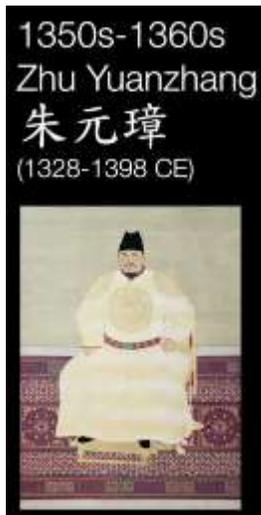
It was commonly said that "a maiden bearing a nugget of gold on her head could wander safely throughout the realm."

The Mongols instituted the Yassa or Great Law, granting among other things, complete religious freedom.

So yes, there's a strong argument that the Pax Mongolica was real.

# 21: Social Policy and the Founding of the Ming

## A Comparison Between the Ming and the 20th Century China



In the 1350's and 60's, Zhu Yuanzhang led one of the only two unifications in Chinese history that came from the south. The Ming Dynasty was declared in 1368 and lasted almost 300 years, until 1644.

Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) led the only other unification from the south, when he took the Guomin Dang against the northern warlords in 1927.

Similarly, there were only two dynastic foundings built on social policy, the Ming and the Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China.

Scholars have pointed to common characteristics, some negative, between Yuanzhang, the Hongwu Emperor (aka Ming Taizu), and Mao. Both came from agricultural beginnings and rose via conquest, both had Utopian visions and believed they knew best and were suspicious of others to the point of purging their own ranks.

Were they autocrats? Were they despots?

### Discussion of Emotionally-Charged Political Words

(unless otherwise noted, these definitions are from Google and do not bear a copyright notice)

**Democracy** a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.

**Despotism** the exercise of absolute power, especially in a cruel and oppressive way

**Benevolent Despot** (from [Wikipedia](#)) However, in enlightened absolutism (also known as **benevolent** despotism), which came to prominence in 18th century Europe, absolute monarchs used their authority to institute a number of reforms in the political systems and societies of their countries

**Autocracy** a system of government by one person with absolute power

**Monarch** a sovereign head of state, especially a king, queen, or emperor

**Meritocracy** government or the holding of power by people selected on the basis of their ability

**Oligarchy** a small group of people having control of a country, organization, or institution bureaucracy

### The Dynastic Founder



Among those who envision themselves as changing history, there are those who believe they alone speak directly for the people and bypass bureaucracy to do so. To compare two outsized figures like these, we must put their thoughts and decisions in the context of their time, to examine:

- The problems of their time
- The forces imposed on them

# Three Views of the Ming Founding

## Summary of the Three Views of Zhu Yuangzhang

- He restored Chinese traditions of governance and culture
- He continued the Mongol's practices in the Yuan Dynasty
- He was a terrible despot who made decisions based on paranoia

## The Restoration Story

Zhu Yuangzhang comes from the southeast which had been under Song control 100 years before the Mongol invasion, the first foreign conquest of all of China.

As we saw in the previous lecture, there were two groups among the occupying Mongols, the steppe Mongols, who saw themselves as nomadic warriors who belonged on horseback, and others who wanted to adopt the civil bureaucracy of the Chinese because it paid the bills and led to a good life. The civil party eventually lost in the internal struggles of the Mongols.

Zhu Yuangzhang conquered an area in Central Zhejiang where officials had a close relation with the Yuan court. They became part of his early brain trust. He emphasized that he was bringing China back to the civil culture of the past. Not as a racist or nationalist policy, but as a moral and civil policy.

The Mongols had composed the Yuan government of a mix of Mongols, central Asians, Khitans, Jurchens, and Han Chinese, creating a system with power dispersed to the provinces. Zhu Yuangzhang wanted to centralize government.

Of the three arms of government:

- civil administration
- military administration
- censorate

The civil administration was paramount. He abolished the prime minister, the chief military commission and the Censorate Tribunal, so all arms reported to the emperor. He mitigated the centralization somewhat by strengthening the provinces.

He limited the military so it could no longer draw upon the civil administration for resources. He created a new system, the Weisuo System, in which border garrisons (wei) were expected to be self-sufficient, farming to create their own resources.<sup>112</sup>

He centralized the Censorate, so it reported directly to him. The Censorate monitored and assessed officials in the bureaucracy for the quality of their work and their adherence to central policy - an arm of government that began in the Yuan and continued through the Ming and Qing.

## The Continuity Story

Zhu Yuangzhang was born under the Yuan and raised as a military man, becoming a rebel commander and vanquishing his rivals. He adopted the Yuan notion that people had rights and obligations based on their hereditary castes, for example that military households provided sons for the military.

He created a military nobility that continued through the 15th century.

He forced large numbers of people to migrate. Leading families like the Suzhou were forced to move to poor areas.

He continued the use of cruel punishments.

He continued the use of Yuan currency.

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<sup>112</sup> From [Wikipedia](#): Ming military institutions were largely responsible for the success of Ming's armies. The early Ming's military was organized by the Wei-suo system, which split the army up into numerous "Wei" or commands throughout the Ming frontiers. Each wei was to be self-sufficient in agriculture, with the troops stationed there farming as well as training. This system also forced soldiers to serve hereditarily in the army; although effective in initially taking control of the empire, this military system proved unviable in the long run and collapsed in the 1430s, with Ming reverted to a professional volunteer army similar to Tang, Song and Later Han.

## The Autocracy Story



Autocracy: one person rules without any legal authority constraining his actions, limited only by rebellion, invasion, or coup d'etat.

When we think about Zhu Yuanzhang as an autocrat, does this mean the Chinese government had always been an autocracy? In the Tang, the chief counselors would sit with the emperor over tea to discuss matters of state. In the Song, they would stand before the emperor. By the Ming, the counselors are prostrate, knocking their heads on the floor before his majesty.<sup>113</sup>

So the question of autocracy concerns the relationship between the emperor and his officials. From there, what is the relationship between government and its institutions, and then one step further, between the institutions and the population? Is it autocracy all the way down?<sup>114</sup>

The question, was China an autocracy, deserves a more nuanced answer than a simple yes or no.

### Population and Economy, Decimation and Stagnation

The wars on the northern frontier and the civil wars during the Yuan, combined with plague and disease, brought the population during the Jin and the Yuan from 100 million at the end of the 11th century to 65 million at the end of the 14th.

Beginning with Zhu Yuanzhang in the 14th century, China's economy stagnated, not reviving until late in the 15th.

### Who was Zhu Yuanzhang?



He was one of the few cases in Chinese history where a poor peasant farmer becomes a monk, then a rebel, then an emperor<sup>115</sup>. He was the youngest of seven, born in a poor region of today's Anhui Province, with most of his family dead from the plague. He joined a monastery, which ran out of money, forcing him onto the streets as a beggar. In a few years he returned to the monastery, learned to read and write, but the monastery was destroyed by a government army suppressing a local rebellion.

Zhu Yuanzhang joined the rebels, rose to commander and joined a larger force known as the Red Turbans, or Red Army, a religious and military sect. In that time of great disease and suffering, and of starvation to the point of cannibalism, the Red Army offered hope through a belief in the salvation of its members.



<sup>113</sup> From Wikipedia: [Kowtow](#), which is borrowed from kau tau in Cantonese, or koutou in Mandarin Chinese, is the act of deep respect shown by prostration, that is, kneeling and bowing so low as to have one's head touching the ground. An alternative Chinese term is ketou, however the meaning is somewhat altered: kou has the general meaning of knock, whereas ke has the general meaning of "touch upon (a surface)", tou meaning head.

In east asian culture, the kowtow is the highest sign of reverence. It was widely used to show reverence for one's elders, superiors, and especially the Emperor, as well as for religious and cultural objects of worship. In modern times, usage of the kowtow has become reduced

<sup>114</sup> It's [turtles](#), Mr. Hawking, *all the way down*.

<sup>115</sup> This is an odd statement. It's hard to imagine that more than one emperor had that personal history: from poor peasant farmer to monk, then rebel, then emperor. I must have quoted the lecture incorrectly.

Zhu Yuanzhang emerged from those times a man of unusual character: disciplined and principled but deeply suspicious to the point of paranoia. The portrait at left shows a gentle avuncular man, but other portraits show him with a jutting chin and pock-marked face, a man who was unusually ugly.

### Zhu Yuanzhang's relationship with officials

He suspected his Chief Counselor, Hu Weiyong, of conspiring against him, which may have been true. The result, however, was Hu Weiyong's execution along with 30,000 others. In 1380, Zhu Yuanzhang abolished the post of prime minister, that no one else could wield power against him.

In a similar vein, Zhu Yuanzhang executed Chief General Lan Yu, a long-time compatriot, along with 15,000 others and abolished the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his military commissioners, all because of suspicions of a plot.

It was said that Zhu Yuanzhang took it personally if a law was broken and used extra-legal punishments against the culprits, punishments that dated back into Chinese history but were not part of the Ming legal code:

- The lingering death: death by a thousand knife strokes
- The boil and scrub: death by boiling and scrubbing off the skin

He extended his despotism to religion, creating a new religious order with a hierarchy that paralleled the administrative autocracy, with Zhu Yuanzhang at the top.

He issued a series of ad hoc Grand Pronouncements, compiled into three large volumes that told the citizenry what was right, what was wrong, and why each person was punished. People who had a copy of these volumes in their house would have the punishment for any crime they committed reduced by one degree. He held contests for the memorization of the grand pronouncements.

He saw himself as the teacher, the sage, and the only power in the world.

## Social Policy

The following anecdote, which occurred before the founding of the Ming in 1368, illustrates how historians interpreted Zhu Yuanzhang's actions differently depending on their point of view.

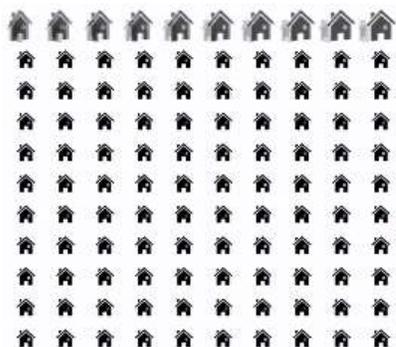
The son of a general was executed for brewing grain to make wine, a practice prohibited by Zhu Yuanzhang's laws.

- Was he acting as the autocrat, executing those who disobeyed his laws?
- Was he continuing the military policies of the Yuan, saying those in the military hierarchy must obey the rules as given?
- Was he trying to restore civil society, conserving grain for food instead of wasting it on alcohol?

None of these explanations tells the full story. Instead, the Ming established a new social policy that sharply diverged from the past.

## The Village System

### Village Tithing



This is the *Lijia* system, where Li means village and jia means group of ten. The ten wealthiest families are appointed leaders, with groups of ten families assigned to each leader, and with overall responsibility for the village rotating among the ten leaders. This worked for a typical rural village of five hundred people.

The Lijia ensured that

- taxes were paid on time
- order was kept
- liability for the laws and for taxes were shared in a group<sup>116</sup>

<sup>116</sup> This is similar to Wang Anshi's advice to Emperor Shenzong of the Song, to organize households in hierarchies, in part to collect taxes and tattle on tax evaders, page 151. Also see Wu's Expansion of State, page 75, and Shang Yang's advice to the Lord of Qin to organize households in groups responsible for each other's taxes, page 55. My opinion: from Shang Yang to Wang Anshi to Zhu Yuanzhang to McCarthyism, institutionalized informants are a signature element of despotism.

## Village Schools

Zhu Yuanzhang also instituted the **Village School System** where all young males would be taught. It was too expensive and too easily corrupted to last long. While it lasted, however, it taught:

- the rules of mourning, which, as we've seen from antiquity and through Confucius, were an important part of the Chinese death ritual.
- the obligations to kin and [partible inheritance](#)<sup>117</sup>.
- taking care of widows
- Zhu Yuanzhang's own sacred edicts on behavior

## Village Elders

Zhu Yuanzhang vacillated on this one until finally deciding that the village elders, typically two or three seniors, could decide low-level cases, with punishments for the convicted. Most important, the elders reported to the capital on the behavior of local officials, with the power to condemn and impeach local officials who outranked them otherwise.

## Communal Shrines

Every village participated in the national hierarchy of shrines.

## Annual Wine Ceremony

In this ritual, all the villagers review the moral failings of those in the community, with announcements of same.

## Ideology

Zhu Yuanzhang believed in inculcating the people with an ideology of social stability, family values, mutual assistance, self discipline - all targeted at an agricultural society.

- The three volumes of Grand Pronouncements
- A placard of instructions for the populace, the Jiamon bangwen:
- responsibilities of elders
- wine-drinking ceremony
- and so forth

Merchants were negatively affected by these new rules and values. They could not travel without an official passport.<sup>118</sup>

We have to look beyond the values and edicts of the Yuan Dynasty, the Song Dynasty, and Wang Anshi and look instead to the Neo-Confucians' voluntary institutions for the basis of Zhu Yuanzhang's ideology. For example:

- A community compact, where families agreed on common rules of behavior, report on each other, and have regular meetings.
- Labor service obligations were pooled and then handled by a group of families rather than directly assigned to one family.
- Community schools in addition to government schools.
- Charitable estates that endow fields to provide local welfare.

Where Neo-Confucians volunteered efforts to improve neighborhoods, Zhu Yuanzhang legislated it.

## What happened to the literati?

Some felt that Zhu Yuanzhang opposed the literati, since he didn't rise from that background and because the literati took a backseat in the early Ming. Nevertheless, the literati were well-represented in his inner circle. Further, he moved literati families to poor communities in part to bootstrap the village tithing (*Lijia*) system.

## What happened to the merchants?

The Southern Song and the Yuan didn't fit the model of a self-sufficient, stationary society that traded through barter and paid taxes in kind. These were commercial societies with complex trading that required traveling merchants and a strong currency.

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<sup>117</sup> From Wikipedia: [Partible inheritance](#) is a general term applied to systems of inheritance in which property is apportioned among heirs. It contrasts in particular with primogeniture, which requires that the whole or most of the inheritance passes to the eldest son, and with agnatic seniority where the succession passes to next senior male.

<sup>118</sup> Perhaps in a similar vein, Shang Yang instructed the Lord of Qin to institute tolls which restricted the travel of Merchants in the Qin. See page 55.

### **What happened to the Ming Dynasty?**

At the beginning, less wealth implied greater stability. But as the peace of the Ming Dynasty continued and as prosperity came to the people, would society stay the same?

### **Discussion**

(Terra Cotta)

*After learning more about Zhu Yuanzhang and given the [definition of despotism](#), do you believe Zhu Yuanzhang is a despot? Why or why not?*

My post follows:

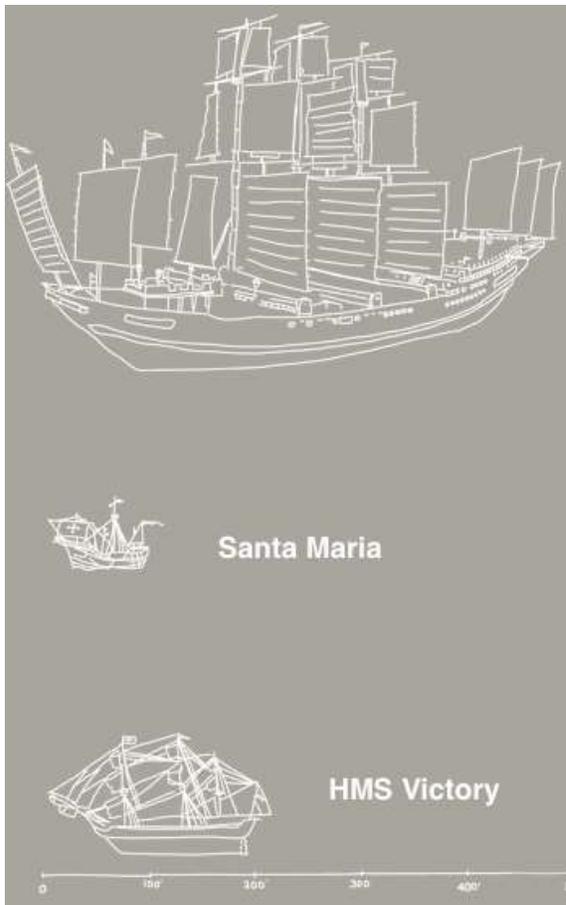
If a despot is a capricious ruler without law to guide him, then Zhu Yuanzhang was not a despot. Placards of instructions and volumes of grand pronouncements were his law.

If despotism is power as an end in itself, then Zhu Yuanzhang was not a despot, as his power was used to promote and enforce his ideology.

If despotism is simply absolute power, unbridled by counsel of any sort, then Zhu Yuanshang *is* a despot, as he disposed of counsel when they failed to suit his means or failed the test of his paranoia. But mostly he purged his ranks out of paranoia rather than caprice.

While Zhu Yuanshang ruled with elements of despotism, he was not sufficiently capricious to clearly mark him a despot.

## Admiral Zheng He Sails the Seas



Sometime between 1431 and 1433, a Ming fleet sailed to Africa, the last of seven fleets sent out from Nanjing. The first fleet, which sailed in 1405, had 317 ships, with 27,000 men. Four treasure ships, the largest wooden ships ever built in all of history, were 400 feet LOA and 4000 nautical tons empty, with a speed of 6 knots. Of triple-planked construction with watertight compartments, they had 9 masts, as tall as 300 feet, with 12,000 square feet of sail weighing 20 tons.

These treasure ships were many times the size of Lord Nelson's flagship, the HMS Victory, and 400 times the size of Columbus' Santa Maria.

**Admiral Zheng He** was a Chinese Muslim eunuch.

In the same period that Zheng He sailed, Prince Henry the Navigator was sailing from Portugal to the west coast of Africa. Prince Henry was going to places they might have heard of but didn't know about, and were trying to discover.

Zheng He was going to places he knew about, to show the flag along well-established routes. There is a stele in Sri Lanka erected by one of the fleets: the Chinese text praises Buddha, the Tamil text praises Shiva, the Persian text praises Allah.

The Ming stopped the expeditions because of their expense. After the expeditions halted, the Great Wall was refurbished.



**Why did they go to Africa?** When the 6th fleet arrived in Sri Lanka they came upon an ambassador from an African state bearing two strange animals. Zheng He's men assumed the animals to be unicorns, which Confucius said would only appear in the time of a Sage. Since the emperor maintained his own zoo, they took these animals as a sign their emperor was a Sage and took the ambassador back with them to China.

They knew they'd found a unicorn because unicorns are benevolent and these animals were herbivores (really? so sheep, cattle, and horses are also unicorns?)

The animal was apparently a giraffe. They sailed the fleet to Africa simply to bring the ambassador home.

## 22a: Silver and Social Change

### Chinese Piracy



In 1542, three ships were confiscated for smuggling 3000 kg of silver into a harbor along the SE coast of the Ming Dynasty. This is a story of the beginning of a new world in which all nations are connected by trade.

Bringing silver into the Ming was illegal because the Ming had forbidden foreign trade by sea, even though the Zheng He expeditions in the 1420s showed the power of the Ming navy to defend trade routes.



In normal circumstances, when governments effectively enforce laws against smuggling, illegal trade stops because the costs are too high. In this case, (my thought) trade was sufficiently lucrative that traders became pirates, invading towns, raping and kidnapping. They began as armed seafarers from Japanese states, which at the time was decentralized, attacking Korea and then China, and by the 1530's-1550's, establishing bases on Chinese coastal islands (shown in right-hand image).

They have become Chinese pirates.

# Silver

## Measuring silver

Silver was measured in *liang* or [taels](#)<sup>119</sup>, where 1 tael  $\approx$  1.3 ounces or about 38 grams. 3000 kg  $\approx$  80,000 tael. That much silver was worth the equivalent annual income from 40,000 acres or 63 square miles, larger than the land owned by any single individual.

## Arbitrage and exchange rates

Why was that much silver taken to China? In exchange for what goods? Here are the markups for selling Chinese goods in Japan:

Chinese cotton thread - 100%

Chinese silk - 150%

Chinese porcelain - 100%

The Japanese had silver mines that were productive when the Chinese had little. On the other hand, the Chinese had manufactured goods that were valuable in Japan. The Chinese also paid for Japanese silver with copper coin. Why? What was so special about silver?

## Ming money system

From [here](#). The Ming had little control over the Chinese money supply, which traded in two metals: copper coin and unminted silver.

Zhu Yuanzhang outlawed the exchange of unminted, aka unofficial, metal, issuing paper money as a [fiat currency](#)<sup>120</sup>. In the early Ming, the Hongwu emperor devalued the paper currency by two thirds, by printing in excess of tax receipts to finance the repair of public works destroyed by the Yuan civil wars.

The Yongle emperor continued the monetary inflation when he repaired the Grand Canal and financed the Zheng He expeditions, until paper money was 10% of its face value.

Inflation raised the expense of doing business with the government, which paid in low-value paper, it cramped savings and investments through uncertainty, and caused hoarding of copper coin.

The long-term impact was economic depression through most of the 15th century and suppression of trade both by edict and by lack of fungible currency. The government reacted by allowing trade in silver and calculating taxes in both copper coin and silver. As the economy recovered toward the end of the 15th century, demand for silver rose as the demand for trade increased. By the 16th century, the government had given up trying to control money.

## Ming tax system

The two Ming taxes were (1) on land requiring payments of grain and cloth and (2) corvée labor. Officials and their families were exempt. Taxes helped create self-contained communities according to the wishes of Zhu Yuanzhang.

Three trends burdened the tax system:

- Barter became an awkward complication as the economy recovered and the market expanded.
- The government was inconsistent and therefore unfair in its cadastral surveys<sup>121</sup>.
- Officials took advantage of tax exemptions to accumulate land farmed by others.

In 1581, Zhang Juzhen reformed taxes nationally to allow payment in currency and ordered another cadastral survey to control the accumulation of land by officials, but this reform was not enough to reduce the bureaucracy or curb the growing power of local officials.

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<sup>119</sup> From Wikipedia: The English word *tael* comes through Portuguese from the Malay word *tahil*, meaning "weight". Early English forms of the name such as "tay" or "taes" derive from the Portuguese plural of tael, *taeis*.

<sup>120</sup> From Wikipedia: **Fiat money** is money which derives its value from government regulation or law. It differs from commodity money, which is based on a good, often a precious metal such gold or silver, which has uses other than as a medium of exchange.

<sup>121</sup> Surveys of landholding and population, recorded in "[fish-scale registers](#)"

## The Portuguese



The Portuguese arrived in 1513 and by 1542 had obtained permission to trade at Macao (modern day Hong Kong). They discovered they could make more money shipping Chinese goods to Japan in exchange for Japanese silver. By the early 17th century, fifty tons of silver were flowing into China annually.

## The Spanish

In 1571, the Spanish arrived in Manila with silver from Mexico and Peru. Chinese merchants sailed to Manila for the Spanish silver, paying twice what Europeans would pay, with payment in everything but copper coin.

## Globalization

By the beginning of the 17th century, the Spanish were sending 40 tons of silver to the Ming. By 1630, roughly 100 tons of silver was coming into the Ming, the equivalent of 2.6 million taels or 1.3 million acres of annual land income.

Europe and China were now connected by sea instead of by arduous land route, with trade including the Americas. Chinese goods included:

- textiles
- ceramics and porcelain
- furniture
- tea

## Tea

The Chinese national drink became the British national drink in the 18th century, paid with silver, so much that the English treasury began to run out. In response, the British taxed tea, which helped foment the American Revolution of 1776. So the Chinese habit of drinking tea helped found a new nation ten thousand miles away - the world was now connected by a butterfly's wing.<sup>122</sup>

## New World crops

China adopted crops from the New World that thrived in what had been marginally arable land: sweet potatoes, maize, peanuts, pumpkins. And the chili pepper. All supporting greater population growth.

## Commercialization

*No closed-captioning on this lecture means notes are rougher and accuracy will suffer. Bear with me.*

How did silver affect the Ming economy? As trade flourished, domestic wealth increased, especially on the SE coast, but without causing massive urbanization. Rather than moving to the city, rural labor was more valuable producing goods *in situ* with the rivers and canals as the conveyor belt of SE China.

The putting-out system: farmers with mulberry orchards sold the leaves to silkworm farmers to feed the worms, who then sold the cocoons to spinners who spun the silk, who sold silk to weavers who made cloth. This allowed families to remain on the farm yet profit from the burgeoning trade economy.

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<sup>122</sup> From [Wikipedia](#): In chaos theory, the butterfly effect is the sensitive dependency on initial conditions in which a small change at one place in a deterministic nonlinear system can result in large differences in a later state.

*My opinion*: if chaos theory is true in this regard, then the greater interdependence of an increasing population should reduce the political stability of the world exponentially. And yet, I'm not sure we see that happening, so there may be mitigating influences - constraints or damping effects - which we might expect as societies are inherently conservative (i.e. they will attempt to preserve their system of values and resist upheaval).

The elaborate system of water transport that was unique to the south facilitated the putting-out system, tying the different corners of the workforce together at 1/10th the cost of land transport in the north.<sup>123</sup>

Cash crops. Farmers discovered they could make more money selling crops grown for trade, like tobacco, rather than crops grown for local consumption, like rice. This improved the economies of other regions of China that exported their rice to the now-wealthy SE coast.

Consumerism. People spent their money on fine gardens, as this is the first period when books were written on landscape design.

Investments. ROI on foreign trade was 200%, with very high risk. Domestic trade ROI was 50-100%. Money lending was 20-40%.

Tenant farmers. Land, the most conservative and honorable investment, returned only 10%, but because of the honor and tradition of owning land, this is where most people put their money, pricing farmers out of land-ownership and forcing them into tenancy.

#### Three Lords of the Field

- One person owned the land, the subsoil rights...
- He rented it to another, who owned the topsoil rights...
- And he rented it to a third party, who farmed the land.

## Social Changes

### Merchants

This was a great era for merchants. By the end of the 16th century, the government was no longer restricting merchant trade and travel. Control of the money supply had shifted from the government to private merchants.

The government was still minting copper coin but no longer printing paper money - it was silver that kept the Ming economy humming.

Merchants used their new-found wealth to buy influence and become patrons of culture, rivaling the literati for status. Literati, that is, those who passed the exams, were prohibited from becoming merchants, but their families could still invest and trade.

A famous novel was written during this time, [\*The Plum Flowers in a Golden Vase\*](#)<sup>124</sup> (aka *The Golden Lotus*) about the corrupt Ximen Qing and his concubines. There's more on this in the section on novels, on page 235.

### Literati

In early Ming, the government had tried to force villages to be self-sufficient and self-supervising, primarily by leaning on the local literati to play leading roles. With their new wealth, people move to towns and cities, becoming absentee landlords, leading to the collapse of the village tithing system, village worship, and so forth. The new wealth led to greater education as people could now afford to send their sons and also their daughters to school. By one estimate, in 1644 the Ming had as many as 800,000 students.

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<sup>123</sup> If this sounds familiar, we covered it in Part 4 page 9, *Southern water transit advantage*. Apparently, this advantage has persisted from 1050 CE.

<sup>124</sup> From Wikipedia: *Jin Ping Mei* (Chinese: 金瓶梅; pinyin: *Jīn Píng Méi*), translated as *The Plum in the Golden Vase* or *The Golden Lotus*, is a Chinese naturalistic novel composed in vernacular Chinese during the late Ming Dynasty. The anonymous author took the pseudonym Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng (蘭陵笑笑生), "The Scoffing Scholar of Lanling," and his identity is otherwise unknown (the only clue is that he hailed from Lanling in present-day Shandong). The earliest known versions of the novel exist only in handwritten scripts; the first block-printed book was released only in 1610. The more complete version available today comprises one hundred chapters, amounting to over a thousand pages.

Its graphically explicit depiction of sexuality has garnered the novel a level of notoriety in China akin to *Fanny Hill* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in English literature, but critics such as the translator David Tod Roy see a firm moral structure which exacts retribution for the sexual libertinism of the central characters.

## Political Changes

Single Whip System  
一條鞭法  
(yi tiao bian fa)

The changes in the sources of income forced the government to alter the tax structure to reach into the flow of silver. In the mid-16th century a collection of policies known as the Single Whip System<sup>125</sup> emerged from several different regions, rather than as a nationally administered system.

Silver cost more for farmers who were outside the merchant networks and who normally dealt with copper currency, forcing them to convert copper to silver. This created hardships along the northern border, as northern farmers took on debt to convert their currency to pay taxes, or fell behind in taxes, weakening the tax base that paid for government clerks and the soldiers in the northern garrisons.

In the 1620's, these farmers, clerks, and soldiers banded together into rebel groups.

To suppress the rebellions, the Ming court sent eunuchs to collect taxes. In Suzhou in the southeast, a silk city, the government taxed all the looms. The weavers revolted, riots broke out, and fires swept through the dense city with their wooden buildings. This kind of tax rebellion repeated in many cities (I think).

At the same time, in 1630, Japan closed its door to all European traders except the Dutch, shutting off the silver that would have been carried from Japan by, among others, the Portuguese. Later in the 1630's, the Spanish reduced the silver going to Manila. The Ming responded to the shortage by deflating its copper currency, minting the coins more thinly, which made silver even more valuable.

The Emperor, a weak and petulant man, refused to work. Factions emerged among officials and with the eunuchs.

To make matters worse, the former Jurchens, now known as the Manchus, had grown in power. In 1630, at the same time that the rebellion of Li Zicheng swept the northeast and reached the capital, the Manchus came to the Shanhai Pass and the Chinese general guarding it let them through on the premise that the disciplined Manchu army was better than the pillaging rebel army.

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<sup>125</sup> Whip means rules.

## Discussion

*This module argues that social and political change in late Ming stemmed from the economic change brought about by the adoption and use of silver as a currency. Are you persuaded by this economic argument? What other ways might we account for the changes that we discussed as taking place in late Ming?*

These were my thoughts posted on the Terra Cotta thread:

I'm going out on a limb with a couple of concepts that seem to make sense, and a question I can't answer. That the two drivers of change were (1) oceanic navigation and (2) free trade. But the massive inflow of silver leaves me with the question of what happened to it, as much as 100 tons a year? How much was used to pay for imports, that is, to balance current accounts? What happened to the rest?

It all started with arbitrage, with China as a high hill of crafts and crops waiting to flow downstream to the Europeans, held back by cumbersome and dangerous overland routes. Compare the Ming with the Song in 1050, when water transit (canals, locks and boat building) allowed the south of China to trade its climate advantage (double crops) with the north, in part for border protection.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, oceanic transit (the astrolabe, bigger ships, better charts) and product advantages (silk, porcelain, tea) were the true enablers of the blooming of the southeast.

Was it necessary for China to convert its domestic currency from paper and copper to silver in order to join the world of international commerce? Couldn't the merchants have traded in silver and then converted to paper or copper in a domestic exchange. Yes, but that would require a government that understood economics and didn't meddle with exchange rates and didn't devalue its currency to pay for public works. Silver developed as a black-market currency with so much commercial value the government was forced to accept it as the coin of the realm.

Bearing in mind that foreign exchange is a two-way street, and not just of current accounts, if

goods exported from China - goods imported to China = 100 tons of silver

then the current account surplus was 100 tons. But what was the total? What was the value of the goods that China received? In part, that would be biotechnology (corn and pumpkins). We weren't told what else, and I couldn't find out on the web (sorry, I only spent a few minutes looking).

So what happened to the current account surplus, which we were told so many times had such enormous value? It seems it was used as the initial electric charge for the battery of domestic exchange - to fill everyone's pockets with silver, replacing their increasingly worthless paper and copper.

Now back to the original question. Was the silver influx a one-time event necessary to convert China to an international currency? And was the price of that conversion a disruption of the tax system, decades of exports, a shift of the balance of power from north to south, and finally, rebellion, invasion and the fall of the Ming?

I believe so. But only because silver was the fee for trading with Europe.

## 22b: Cultural Change in the Late Ming

The Late Ming, between the 16th and early 17th centuries was one of the most fascinating periods in Chinese history, a cultural springtime for literature and art, philosophy and religion, and relations between the sexes. This was also when Catholic missionaries made their appearance, spreading European culture.

### A New Literature

#### New ideals, forms, subjects, and writers

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, a storm of new ideals, forms, and subjects of literature emerged, even a new language.



Two traditional views of literature:

**The moralistic view:** Traditionally, the literati, the Neo-Confucians, valued literature as a tool for teaching morality, that is, *literature is to be a vehicle for the way* (*wen yi zai dao*).

**The craft view:** The best writers looked to antiquity, to Han and Tang writers to shape their craft, with literature as a means of self-cultivation.

In the Late Ming, writers strove for greater self-expression, to give impressions and ideas, to tell jokes, to speak in their own voices. Plays, dramas, and operas began to appear. Although the opera had appeared in the Jin dynasty and had become popular in the Yuan, during the late Ming opera became a literati form.

From dramas came novels, some with as many as a hundred chapters. After the novel, the short story appeared in the form of fiction and dramatized true life, though fiction eventually dominated. The purpose of the dramatic form was no longer for moral education or to invoke antiquity but for entertaining the reader and for satirizing the literati.

The new dramas covered new subjects – merchants, women, wives, concubines – telling life as it was lived not as it was idealized.

Lastly, women emerged as writers, chiefly in poetry.

#### New language

Up to the Late Ming, writing was in *wen yan*, the literary language, which differed from spoken Chinese. *Wen yan* was summary, hard to understand when read aloud. It was written by literati who drew upon and wore on their sleeves their knowledge of past literature.

By the Late Ming, novels were written in the vernacular with dialogue written as it would have been spoken. This became important to 20th century China when it was trying to re-discover a vernacular that could serve as a written language. Conversational writing was, of course, more lively, personal and involving than the effete and self-congratulatory *wen yan*.

#### Short Response

*The beginning of writing in vernacular language as opposed to classical Chinese marks an important development in Chinese literary history, much like the beginning of vernacular literature with writers like Dante Alighieri in western Europe. Why do you think these vernacular shifts take place when they do? And what is their importance?*

My post:

Art as entertainment demands dialogue, whereas art as moral teaching does not. One of the most dominant forms of entertainment is fictional storytelling, which can be done without dialogue, but is more involving with dialogue. Plays and dramas, of course, demand dialogue.

If you have dialogue, you must write the vernacular or your characters can't speak as real people do.

I think it's part of an evolution of the arts, that may coincide with the [development of perspective in painting](#).

## The Lady Who Was A Beggar - Feng Menglong

It starts with a poem, *Lyrics on Abandoning My Wife*, admonishing wives to stay with their husbands or be lost like a flower detached from its branch. The branch can always grow another flower.

The story, set in the time of the Han, tells of a servant, Maichen, and "his wife, whose eyes would fail to recognize [Mount Tai](#)". The quote has historical significance that I don't fully gather - but may represent worship of the ancients, invoking Confucian morality. She abandons her husband because he's poor. We are never told her name.

Maichen was a reader who worshipped books, reading aloud. He aspired to become a scholar-official. He did not haggle (none of the vices of a merchant). He was patient. He invokes the story of Jiang Taigong, a fisherman who waited until he was eighty years old to be venerated by King Wen of the Zhou. Maichen is 43 and announces that when his is fifty, his horoscope says he'll succeed.

His wife was impatient, imploring him to stop talking about the past. Maichen grants his wife a divorce and composes a poem in her dishonor.

As foretold, when Maichen reaches fifty, Emperor Wu appointed him the governor of Kuaiji. He entered the county and happened upon his wife barefoot and disheveled alongside her laborer husband. Maichen granted his wife and new husband land to grow crops. She was mocked, and unlike her husband who had ignored a lifetime of insults with the strength of the faithful, she killed herself.

### Discussion

- Why do you think Zhu Maichen's wife objects to him reading books? My thoughts: *Because her eyes failed to recognize Mount Tai - she doesn't respect the ways of antiquity. Confucius 14.24, she doesn't respect the ancient pursuit of knowledge for oneself. To trust that good things will come.*
- Who do you think is the intended audience of this story? My thoughts: *It's for young married couples but particularly wives, who want to read allegories about Neo-Confucian morality. (in retrospect, I disagree with my earlier thoughts – it seems to target either young men who want to feel righteous or at young women to teach them morality and subservience).*
- Thinking back to Yingying's Story, stylistically, what differences do you see in this form of vernacular writing and the Tang story, Yingying's Story? My thoughts: *First, it's fiction. It's told as allegory. It's first person from the point of view of the storyteller. It's conversational rather than narrative. In the language of writing, it shows the story rather than telling the story, which is more involving and entertaining.*

## Expansion of Education

What does literacy mean? Perhaps 10-15% of the population of 200 million could read well enough to be patrons of the new literature. Some titles were specifically targeted at merchants, some were travel guides.

Merchants needed a level of literacy to do their work, to write letters and gain access to people in power. Some officials wanted to educate the general population, including women, giving rise to schools funded by the local community rather than the government.

In the 11th-13th centuries, in the Song dynasty, printing of books increased dramatically then fell during the Yuan, but in the Late Ming it exploded once again. Part of the reason was the new wealth, but the new kinds of literature was another reason.

Wood-block printing was still in use, but printers were creating more illustrated books on all sorts of topics: moral stories, illustrated poems, multi-colored graphics, annotated novels even in the first edition.

Publishers could survive solely on private printing without government subsidy, printing dramas, anthologies, self-help and how-to books.



An example was a scene from [The Peony Pavilion](#), where bridal Du (Du Liniang?) paints a self-portrait and dies. A young scholar sees the portrait and falls in love with it. His love revives her from the dead. (Note that the plot described in Wikipedia differs from what I've transcribed – I may have gotten it wrong).

# Philosophy and Ethics

## Wang Yangming

After [Wang Yangming](#)<sup>126</sup> died in 1528, his followers went off in different directions. Some pursued moral relativism, where good and bad are not real. Some saw no distinction between Buddhism and Daoism.

These two principles affected the cultural shifts and new ideas of the Late Ming:

- Sagehood is available to all. You could become a sage simply through an act of will, without learning. *The man on the street can be a sage.*

Neo-Confucian preachers used *hollerers* to lecture to audiences numbering tens of thousands, preaching their interpretation of Wang Yangming. *Hollerers* would stand on platforms and repeat whatever the main speaker said.

- Human desire does not impede morality. Song Neo-Confucians distinguished between selfish desire and human emotion, arguing that human emotion was fine but selfish desire was the enemy of morality.

Particularly with regard to sex, Late Ming philosophers argued that the distinction between human emotion and desire is more relative than absolute.

## Yuan Huang



A new movement stated that anyone could practice morality in their daily life. This fit well with the merchant culture. Ledgers have been recovered from the Late Ming with accounts of merit and demerit, self-scoring individuals on the morality of the actions. People from all walks of life, from literati to craftsmen, to women.

Suppose you saw a sick individual on the roadside. If you gave them a cup of tea, score 10 points for yourself. 50 points if you took them to an inn. Debit 20 points for walking by.

Yuan Huang popularized this system. Supposedly, a fortune teller told him that he'd never have a son or pass the exams. He vowed to perform ten thousand good deeds (*ten thousand is a popular number in Chinese philosophy, see page 48.*) After completing his goal, he passed the exams. He performed another ten thousand good deeds and had a son.

It's a utilitarian philosophy - doing well by doing good. Nonetheless, the act of keeping a journal or a ledger from the perspective of one's own morality forces a daily examination of behavior that can't help but improve one's moral actions, regardless of the utilitarianism that might be behind it.

<sup>126</sup> See [here](#) for a comparison of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming.

*Although Zhu Xi did not rule out introspection as a means to illumination, the emphasis of his programme was clearly on scholarly learning.*  
*The most eminent of the thinkers representing an emphasis upon internal cultivation was [Wang Yangming](#). He rejected the intellectualization of personal realization by identifying the heart-and-mind (see [Xin \(heart-and-mind\)](#)) with li, or pattern. For Wang, the human mind is both the locus and the standard of sagehood. Perhaps the most celebrated theme in Wang is his belief in the continuity and inseparability of knowledge and practice.*

See page 160 for the definition of li, page 159 for Zhu Xi and page 171 for Wang Yangming.

## New Religion

### Buddhist Revival

In the Late Ming, a new group of Buddhist monks appeared who wrote for a literati audience, creating their own versions of the Confucian texts, for example, a Buddhist interpretation of the Four Books of Neo-Confucianism.

Bearing in mind that Neo-Confucians were traditionally anti-Buddhist, with the rise of Wang Yangming's philosophy people wondered if Confucian and Buddhist ideas were that far apart.



*Yes, that's our very own Professor Bol at Lingyin si<sup>127</sup>*

### Releasing Life Societies



Buddhism also experienced a lay movement, where people of all walks of life did good deeds in the hopes of reforming society. One such movement was led by Zhu Hong: the releasing life societies. Buddhist monasteries have ponds for releasing life. Buddhists regard all sentient beings (animals) as having value, which is why they're in principle vegetarians. Saving an animal brings karmic merit.

Zhu Hong encouraged people to take positive action to improve their karma, for rebirth in a better life. They would buy fish in a market where they're sold fresh (still alive) and release them in the pond at the monastery.

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<sup>127</sup> For more on Lingyin Si, go to page 99.

## Three Teachings Are One



Although the strict practitioners of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism never believed the three religions could be brought together, some claimed that the goals were the same, and that Buddha, Confucius, and Laozi were the three sages, all on equal terms.

A new movement arose promoting the three as one, and this became a new religion of itself, led by Lin Zhao'en. They built temples with three rooms, they created a uniform symbolizing the unification, and published at least one novel about the movement.

## Christianity

Christianity, brought by Jesuit and Catholic missionaries in the 16th century, was thought to be new, although there were Catholic priests in the Yuan dynasty under the Mongols, perhaps to serve the community of Catholic traders like Marco Polo. But in the Late Ming, they thought it was new and weren't sure that the Cathay in Marco Polo's writers was the same place they were in.

Buddhists and Literati opposed the missionaries and the missionaries were critical of Chinese philosophies. Not until the Qing did the two sides reconcile enough for the mission to proceed.

Catholicism came into the Ming with two claims:

- They were teaching the learning of the lord in heaven, tian zhu jiao. This was religion, based on the bible and the notion of the trinity, involving the worship of Jesus and Mary.
- They were teaching the learning of heaven. This included the Western calendar and Western science and mathematics. As Galileo said, *Mathematics is the language with which god wrote the Universe*.

These two modes, the scientific and the religious, appealed to the public. The Jesuits convert the highest members of the literati and official elite that they can reach, including a number of high court officials.

Mateo Ricci, who led that part of the mission was the most successful father, known in China today as Li Madou, the patron saint of clock makers<sup>128</sup>. He offered a vision of European arts and scholarship and brought back to Europe a positive impression of China. He first used the term *literati* as the translation of the Chinese term *shi*, saying these educated elite were like the Italian literati. And he tells his compatriots in Italy that in China, philosophers are kings, invoking Plato's idealized world.

While Ricci was in the capital, other missionaries were rallying the countryside with self-help and study with a Catholic flavor.

## Charity

Traditionally, charity was the province of the individual and relief was the province of the state. In Late Ming, local communities were organizing charitable societies, led and funded by the local wealthy, including literati, merchants, and monks. Taking on responsibility for the welfare of the distressed, they built orphanages, hospitals, and so on. The Late Ming flowered with religion, ethics, literature, and education.

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<sup>128</sup> See [here](#) for more on Mateo Ricci, one of the most successful of the Jesuits:

He opened a residence in Nanking for himself, his fellow Jesuits and his scientific instruments. Later he became the court mathematician in Peking. His books *Geometrica Practica* and *Trigonometrica* were translations of Christopher Clavius' works into Chinese. He made Western developments in mathematics available to the Chinese and in 1584 and 1600 he published the first maps of China ever available to the West. For the first time the Chinese had an idea of the distribution of oceans and land masses. He introduced trigonometric and astronomical instruments, and translated the first six books of Euclid into Chinese. The Chinese geometrical works for which he is remembered were books on the astrolabe, the sphere, measures and isoperimetrics. But especially important was his Chinese version of the first six books of Euclid's *Elements*, which was written in collaboration with one of his pupils. Entitled *A first textbook of geometry*, this work assures Ricci an important place in the history of mathematics

## Women



The Protestant missionaries remarked upon and abhorred foot binding, but failed to notice the expansion of women's writing and publishing taking place in the Late Ming. More women were published in China than all the rest of the world combined, right through the 18th century.

The [Ming Qing Women's Writers](#) website gives access to 90 titles published during the Ming and Qing dynasties, including some published during the early Republican period.

### Foot Binding

Foot binding began at least as early as the Song and spread rapidly in the 18th century, across all classes. The government tried to wipe it out from the late 19th through the mid 20th centuries. Many in the literati opposed it. There were many reasons given for its oppressiveness, not all of which are valid.

- That men bound women's feet to keep them from running away, which isn't true since women were doing the binding.
- That it was a manifestation of the general oppression of women.
- That women did not feel attractive otherwise.
- That it was a mark of the elite.

If we compare foot binding to body piercing and tattoos prevalent among women in America today, from a relativist point of view, it's hard to argue that foot binding by its nature implies oppression.

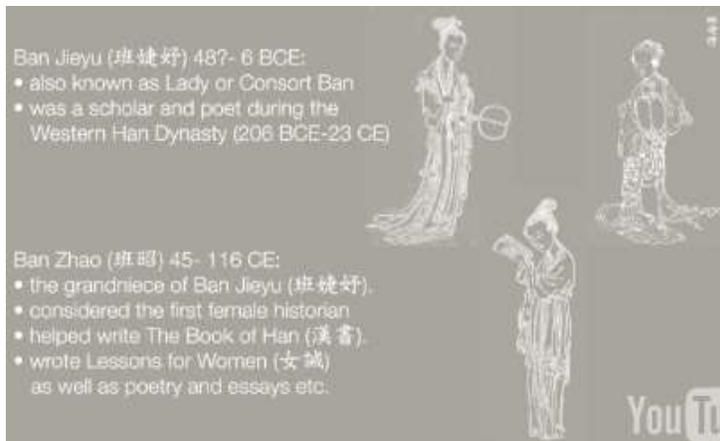
Nonetheless, why does it spread and why does it stop?

It's a sign of women willing to take on hard challenges. It's painful. Young girls don't like it. Women often stop once they're married. It doesn't break the bones, but it deforms the tendons.

It may have stopped because of its spread to common people and therefore no longer differentiated the elite.

But we don't know.

## Women as Writers



The publishing of women was controversial as it allowed women to parade their thoughts before the masses when they were supposed to contain their lives within the family. Worse, they were taking their innermost thoughts of their families public.

Yet this practice was defended and became a source of pride when families published the collected writings of wives and daughters. More than any other time in Chinese history, women's writing was active and talked about in the Ming and Qing. Over 3500 known works by women were published in the Qing.

Women became role models in their writings, with strong women contrasted to weak men, with smart women contrasted to ignorant husbands, and so forth. We don't know why this dramatic uptick in women's publishing took place.

## Discussion

*Our section on women in Ming begins with a contradiction. On the one hand, foot binding was practiced in Ming society; however, women had a greater role in writing and publishing literature than any other part of the world at the time. How do we explain this contradiction? How do you account for the expansion of women's roles in the Ming society?*

My thoughts:

I don't think there's a contradiction. I know the course led my opinion with comparisons to high-heeled shoes, tattoos, body-piercing and the like, but nonetheless it's a valid comparison. It's entirely possible that foot binding was a fashion, a painful one, an execrable one, but a fashion and not an oppression. It's hard to believe that men found it attractive, but as an older man who finds tattoos and body piercing unattractive to say the least, I cease to be amazed.

As for the greater role of women in writing, it goes hand-in-glove with the changes in writing style, one impacting the other. As styles shifted from moral treatises and parables to fiction and self-expression, from the stilted language of scholars to a common vernacular, it invites broader participation. Women who were denied a formal education could now find an outlet in writing. Their participation accelerated the change as women would read their works, providing a greater market, well beyond the narrow market for scholarly writing.

## Final Discussion

*The importation of foreign silver and the adoption of American crops in the 17th century changed China at the time. Thinking now about the world since then the late Ming, what do you see as the most important changes that have affected your country as the result of international trade?*

My thoughts:

In modern history, trade was almost exclusively in physical goods in exchange for currency, where goods progressed through various stages of manufacturing, from raw materials to finished product. With the advent of global communications, especially the internet, trade began to include services at increasingly levels, even as the trade in services was under-measured by the typical metrics. As developed nations shifted to labor-intensive service economies and as developing nations sought to improve their economies, trade in intellectual labor intensified. This shift is helping to spread wealth and technology to developing countries like India and to bind nations together through increasing interdependence and cultural exchange.