Imperialism and Colonialism in the Qing Context

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ABSTRACTS

Dieser Aufsatz entwirft einen Rahmen für die Verwendung der Begriffe „Imperialismus" und „Kolonialismus" zur Analyse des Qing-Reiches, indem die politischen Ziele des Qing-Staates auf die wirtschaftliche und demographische Zentralstellung der chinesischen Kernprovinzen innerhalb des Imperiums bezogen werden. In Innerasien begrenzte der staatlich gelenkte Imperialismus zumeist das Eindringen han-chinesischer Migranten und ihrer wirtschaftlichen Netzwerke. In den überwiegend nicht han-chinesischen Regionen Südchinas hingegen förderten staatliche Maßnahmen vielfach die Ansiedlung von Migranten und Formen kulturellen Wandels, die eine koloniale Dynamik aufwiesen. Südostasien wurde ebenfalls stark durch das Wirtschaftswachstum und die Abwanderung aus den chinesischen Kernprovinzen beeinflusst, aber hier verhinderte das mangelnde Interesse des Qing-Staates die Entstehung einer Dynamik, die jener des europäischen Kolonialismus geähnelt hätte. Nach 1860 gab der Qing-Staat zunehmend die Bemühungen auf, die Interessen verschiedener Bevölkerungsgruppen auszugleichen, und ging zu einer Kolonialpolitik über, die alle Teile des Reiches so eng wie möglich an die Kernprovinzen zu binden versuchte.

This paper outlines a framework for using the concepts of imperialism and colonialism to analyse the Qing empire, by relating the political goals of the Qing state with the economic and demographic centrality of China proper within the empire. In Inner Asia, state-driven imperialism often restricted the penetration of Han Chinese migrants and economic networks. In predominantly non-Han regions of southern China, by contrast, state policies often promoted migrant settlement and cultural transformation in forms that reflected a colonial dynamic. Southeast Asia was also deeply influenced by China proper's economic growth and out-migration, but here the lack of Qing state interest prevented the emergence of a dynamic resembling that of European colonialism. After 1860, the Qing state increasingly abandoned efforts to balance the interests of various subjects, and shifted to a colonial policy of integrating all parts of the realm as closely as possible with China proper.

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The Qing empire existed in some form for over 300 years, from Nurhaci's early efforts to unify the Jurchens to the abdication of its last emperor in 1912. During this period, it devised a range of administrative structures for the diverse parts of its realm, which it regularly adjusted and occasionally transformed. This short essay does not attempt to detail the course of Qing expansion and administration, or to systematically compare the Qing with other empires. Neither does it offer an overview of the ample comparative scholarship that has emerged in the past decades, although it relies heavily on some of this work. Rather, it sketches one possible framework for using the concepts of imperialism and colonialism to analyse aspects of the Qing empire. Covering so great a span of time and space in a short paper precludes the level of detail and nuance this effort would ideally require, but reveals dynamics obscured by a narrower temporal or spatial scope.

Defining "imperialism" and "colonialism" involves notorious historiographical complexity. For heuristic purposes, this essay draws a contrast between them. Imperialism here describes an order in which a central ruling elite conquers territories and peoples regarded as fundamentally different for the purposes of augmenting its resources and increasing its security. Economically, imperial policy does not favour one component region over others, although private enterprise might exacerbate regional disparities. Ideologically, an empire in this definition does not rank its subjects in civilisational hierarchies. Colonialism, by contrast, is here taken to be a subset of imperialism in which imperial control is intended to favour one component of the empire at the expense of others via transfers of wealth and resources. This could take several forms: settler colonialism, in which the state supports the movement of one imperial population onto the lands of another; or trade networks centred on one part of the empire that dominated commerce and resource extraction in others. Colonialism also posits a hierarchy of civilisational forms to justify a political and legal order treating subjects unequally.

No facet of Qing rule perfectly fits either of these ideal types, but contrasting them allows us to isolate the two primary drivers of Qing expansion and influence. One was the Qing state itself. From its earliest decades, Qing rulers had conceived of their realm as a complex of subject states and peoples. Qing emperors recognized that their Han Chinese, Mongol, Tibetan, and other subjects required regionally-specific forms of rule. These forms were built from elements of existing local administration, suitably modified and supplemented to meet the imperial demand for control and security.

The second source of Qing power was the enormous growth of the empire's Han Chinese population and economy. After Qing armies crossed the Great Wall in 1644, Han Chinese accounted for more than 90 per cent of the empire's population. From a demographic and economic standpoint, they were the chief beneficiaries of the Qing order. By 1700, the Han Chinese population had reached 150 million, equal to the preceding Ming dynasty at its peak; by 1800, it had doubled to at least 300 million, and by 1850 it neared 450 million, a "remarkable demographic expansion" that was "virtually un-

precedented in the history of the premodern world".[1] Although in time this population growth would generate serious environmental and economic difficulties, in the period between 1700 and 1800 it indicated a "boom" in which China's economy became larger, more prosperous, and more commercialized.[2]

The relationship of the Qing state and its burgeoning Han Chinese population was complex. In many ways, their interests aligned: stability solidified the rule and finances of the state just as it increased the security and prosperity of farmers and merchants. Moreover, China's sophisticated merchants sometimes aided the operations and logistics of government. Still, Qing emperors never forgot that for many of their Chinese subjects, Manchu rule was unwelcome. Nor did they see their realm as an iteration of China in which non-Han subjects were outsiders. In this context, the absolute demographic and economic predominance of China proper within the empire posed two risks. Any form of Han Chinese organisation or activity beyond state oversight threatened to become a vector of anti-Qing mobilisation. Also, Han Chinese expansion into non-Han regions of the empire threatened in the short term to trigger indigenous unrest, and in the long term to unsettle what the Qing government regarded as the optimal balance between component territories. In certain contexts, then, the perceived interests of the state and its Han Chinese population could diverge or even clash.

This paper examines three configurations of this complex and uneasy partnership between 1600 and 1860, before the transformative administrative changes of the dynasty's last decades. First, it considers Qing expansion in Inner Asia, which over the course of more than a century reached from Manchuria to the Himalayas and the edge of Kazakhstan. This was an imperial project, but one that contained elements that assumed an increasingly colonial form. Inner Asia is then contrasted to large regions of southern China where policies inherited from the Ming had granted indigenous elites' considerable autonomy. Qing approaches to this region, though complex and varied, in many places supported a colonial economic and political order. Finally, this paper considers Southeast Asia, a region in which the Qing state shunned territorial expansion. Long-term Han Chinese overseas migration, although discouraged by officials, surged in the eighteenth century as Chinese merchants, miners, and farmers came to dominate sectors of the Southeast Asian economy. Unbacked by state support, China's economic influence in the region did not take on a political dimension, in stark contrast to the growth of contemporary European empires in Asia.

1. Qing Policy in Inner Asia

Any generalisation about Inner Asia, a vast and diverse region including Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, requires more qualification than can be offered here.

1 R. von Glahn, The Economic History of China: From Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century, Cambridge 2016, p. 347.
2 Ibid., p. 322.

In the early decades of Qing expansion from southern Manchuria, the founding rulers Nurhaci and Hong Taiji used several strategies to gain the submission of parts of the fragmented political world of southern Mongolia. Marriage alliances, the conferral of Qing aristocratic ranks, patronage of Tibetan Buddhism, the judicious application of force, and the evolution of rules for military discipline into bonds of political subordination gradually transformed relations between equals into "tutelage".[3] The new Qing order conciliated Mongol aristocrats even as it subjected them to coercive methods of control. Apart from those incorporated into the Eight Banners and moved to Beijing to serve in central political and military offices, Mongol subjects remained on the steppe, generally preserving their nomadic pastoralist livelihood. The Qing government divided the Mongols into units loosely based on existing political allegiances, assigned them territories, and designated from among their ruling aristocracy a *jasagh* responsible for enforcing Qing laws and regulations. This system controlled the powerful Mongolian aristocracy, prevented large-scale rebellion, and formed a reservoir of Mongol troops who could be deployed in campaigns. Within this framework, *jasaghs* retained wide latitude to govern their territory. In different permutations, this *jasagh*-banner system extended to virtually all peoples regarded as Mongols by the Qing state, spanning Qalqa (northern) Mongolia, the Oirats of Qinghai, and what became northern Xinjiang. Alternative modes of administration devised for Tibet, the Tarim Basin, and parts of Manchuria, were also based on appointing members of local elites to govern their subjects with considerable autonomy under Qing oversight.

Culturally, legally, and economically the Qing state in Inner Asia prioritized what it regarded as the interests of these local elites and, by extension, their subjects. Before the last decades of the dynasty, there was no effort to promote the study of the Chinese language or the Confucian canon among Inner Asian peoples. To the contrary, Qing political legitimacy in Mongolian and Tibetan territories rested partly on its claim to promote and protect Buddhism. Mongol subjects were also permitted their own criminal and civil law based largely on indigenous principles. In the rare instances when a group of Inner Asian elites was collectively deemed untrustworthy, as for example with the Caqar Mongols, they were placed under centrally-dispatched Manchu or Mongol officials. Before 1860, there were very few instances of Inner Asians being placed under the jurisdiction of Han Chinese bureaucrats.

Qing expansion in Inner Asia was imperial rather than colonial, an effort to expand its power and security by absorbing territories and peoples. Domination of Inner Asia was not pursued for economic reasons, nor did Qing rulers believe that these lands would cover the full cost of their administration. To be sure, from the very beginning of their imperial project Qing rulers and officials had been quick to identify resources that could be exploited to fund their state, but maximizing the fiscal potential of these lands was not

3 N. Di Cosmo, From Alliance to Tutelage: A Historical Analysis of Manchu-Mongol Relations before the Qing Conquest, in: Frontiers of History in China 7 (2012) 2, pp. 175–197.

their priority.[4] In Inner Asia, the Qing state generally tried to exclude Han Chinese migrants, even when their activities might have generated more revenue than pastoralism or harvesting ginseng, fur, and other commodities. After a brief period when Han Chinese agricultural migration into Liaodong was officially encouraged, the Kangxi emperor in 1680 "made the exclusion of Han commoner settlers a primary objective of Qing rule in the northeast".[5] His successors before 1860 upheld or strengthened this policy. As Christopher Isett has noted, "Han exclusion" generated "tension between imperial and bureaucratic interests": officials in neighbouring provinces recognized parts of Manchuria and Mongolia as potential outlets for migration, an argument Qing emperors acknowledged but rarely accepted.[6] Beyond the relatively small Liaodong plain, the Qing state took even firmer measures to restrict access. These imperial policies were never entirely effective. Patrols and checkpoints could be evaded and illegal migration and resource poaching were never be entirely halted.[7] Still, the imperial state did its utmost to insulate Inner Asia from the growing demographic and economic influence of China proper.

In Mongolia, the situation was more complex, partly because the Qing state was somewhat more prepared to accept Chinese agricultural activity if this involved seasonal migration rather than permanent settlement. Moreover, in certain contexts in southern Mongolia, banner administrators were willing to lease land for settlement to Chinese agricultural entrepreneurs, often in order to pay debts they had incurred to Chinese merchants. The spread of such settlement in Mongolia was uneven: some territories bordering China proper and suitable for agriculture, particularly those inhabited by the Qaracin, Ordos, and Tümed Mongols, attracted considerable migration. Others, notably the colder, more arid, and more remote lands of the Qalqa Mongols north of the Gobi, were less appealing.[8]

When reasons of state seemed to demand it, however, the Qing was prepared to acknowledge, and even encourage, a role for Chinese economic activity in Inner Asia. This was particularly true in the case of Xinjiang, a vast northwestern territory organized under Qing control between 1755 and 1759. Earlier, during his campaigns against the Junghars, the Kangxi emperor had promoted military colonies in strategic sites to ease the problem of supplying steppe campaigns. In Xinjiang, between 1761 and 1781, military colonization was augmented by a programme of promoting Han Chinese civilian settlement. In time, civilian settlers, many recruited by entrepreneurs, became the largest group of agricultural settlers in Xinjiang.[9]

4 N. Di Cosmo, The Manchu Conquest in World-Historical Perspective: A Note on Trade and Silver, in: Journal of Central Eurasian Studies 1 (2009), pp. 43–60.

5 C. M. Isett, State, Peasant, and Merchant in Qing Manchuria, 1644–1862, Stanford 2007, p. 32.

6 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

7 S. Kim, Ginseng and Borderland: Territorial Boundaries and Political Relations Between Qing China and Chosŏn Korea, 1636–1912, Berkeley 2017, pp. 77–103.

8 P.-E. Will, Bureaucracy and Famine in Eighteenth-Century China, E. Forster (trans.), Stanford 1990, pp. 45–46; C. Atwood, Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire, New York 2004, pp. 93–95.

9 P. C. Perdue, China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia Cambridge, MA, 2005, pp. 344–357.

Military and civilian colonization proved unable to relieve the region's fiscal burden, and Qing administration in Xinjiang depended on a "silver lifeline" of tax revenues sent from China proper.[10] In the 1760s, the Qing state decided to permit Han Chinese merchants to operate in Xinjiang. Taxes and internal duties on their commerce, in tea, cloth, rhubarb, and jade, offset some of the cost of the garrisons securing Qing rule. Despite attempts to restrict their numbers and prohibit permanent settlement, the Qing military apparatus would have had difficulty functioning without this merchant presence.[11] Han Chinese merchants also came to play an increasingly important role in Mongolia after 1700. Three large trading firms facilitated the commercialisation and monetisation of the Mongolian economy, making them crucial partners for local aristocrats and Qing garrisons. Because they were "necessary to operating a large-scale, complex administrative apparatus in Mongolia", they received official backing.[12] Although trade between Qing Inner Asia and non-Qing territory was sometimes in the hands of Kashmiri or Central Asian merchants, economic exchange between Inner Asia and China proper was almost entirely in the hands of Chinese merchants.

As Han Chinese civilians became more numerous in Inner Asia, the Qing state was forced to adjust its administration. Operating on the principle that concentrations of these civilians needed to be overseen by Han Chinese officials, it devised a complex system of overlapping jurisdictions for parts of Manchuria, Mongolia, and Xinjiang. Indigenous populations and Chinese migrants were expected to live apart, often under different legal regimes, but mixed cases were to be settled by deliberations between provincial bureaucrats and Inner Asian elites, following rules devised in Beijing. Over time, to facilitate this mixed legal order, the separate code promulgated for Qing Mongolia was adjusted to align it more closely with that used in China proper.[13]

Simply put, we can see two broad trends at work. For the Qing state, territorial expansion involved a compromise between Beijing's need for control and the established administrative norms of local elites. It was not intended to acquire territories specifically for economic development, to increase the revenues flowing to the centre, or as a prelude to profound cultural or demographic transformation. In practice, this vision was increasingly hard to sustain, as Inner Asia became an attractive frontier for the growing population of the northern provinces of China. Although in some cases the Qing state itself recruited Han merchants and settlers for its own ends, in most cases it was reluctantly forced to compromise with unsanctioned migration it would have preferred to halt. In short, the increasing economic and demographic integration of parts of Inner Asia with China proper was a bottom-up trend that ran counter to the vision of the Qing state.

10 J. A. Millward, Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864, Stanford 1998, p. 58.

11 Ibid., pp. 109–112.

12 C. Atwood, Partners in Profit: Empires, Merchants, and Local Governments in the Mongol Empire and Qing Mongolia (unpublished paper), p. 17.

13 D. Heuschert, Legal Pluralism in the Qing Empire: Manchu Legislation for the Mongols, in: The International History Review 20 (1998) 2, pp. 310–324.

2. Qing Colonialism in Southern China

The Ming provinces that became one component of the Qing realm in 1644 were far from homogeneous. Several, particularly in the south, contained regions with large non-Han indigenous populations. Western scholarship has highlighted comparisons between Qing policy toward these regions and European colonialism in the Americas.[14] Both cases saw the expropriation of indigenous land for agricultural and resource development by immigrants, backed by a state that hoped this would further its economic and security interests. And in both, the state and settlers viewed indigenous peoples as requiring education and cultural transformation.

Analysis of Qing policy in southern China can begin with the pioneering framework devised by John Shepherd to analyse the fluctuating policies of the Qing state toward the plains of western Taiwan. The Qing had captured this territory in 1683 to eliminate a Ming loyalist proto-state, the Zheng regime. Only with difficulty was the Kangxi emperor persuaded to incorporate these lands into Fujian province, making them part of the realm. As Shepherd argues, Qing administrators faced an enduring policy dilemma. For advocates of colonization, encouraging Han Chinese migrants to farm Taiwan's western plains would generate tax revenue and make local administration fiscally self-supporting. Opponents argued that large-scale migration increased the likelihood of both Han Chinese and aboriginal rebellion, raising security costs beyond what tax revenue gains could offset. The Kangxi emperor initially reduced Taiwan's Han population by deporting former Zheng soldiers, and thereafter remained cautious about encouraging settlement. His son the Yongzheng emperor, by contrast, endorsed an activist programme of migration and agricultural development. Although the Qianlong emperor resumed his grandfather's more cautious approach, the state could not totally halt migration.[15]

To govern Taiwan, the Qing state attempted to balance its interests with those of both Han settlers and aboriginal villages. It prohibited Han penetration of the mountainous regions that constituted the majority of the island's territory, which lowered security costs. On the plains, it implemented a policy whereby aboriginal villages could lease fields to Han settlers, who would pay them rent and also assume the tax obligations of the cultivated land. This allowed an uneasy coexistence between the two groups. As Shepherd notes, the Qing state did not believe that Han Chinese settlers in Taiwan were necessarily more political reliable than the indigenous population. Although it did not seek to protect indigenous peoples as an end in itself, it did consider their interests in order to minimize armed unrest. Despite restrictive policies, migrant farmers continued to flow to Taiwan from land-poor Fujian, and officials were therefore forced to retrospectively legalize Han movement into previously closed areas.[16]

14 For examples of comparisons between Qing and European colonial practices see the works of Hostetler, Teng, Herman, Shepherd, and Wade, cited below.

15 J. R. Shepherd, Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier, 1600–1800, Stanford 1993.

16 Ibid., p. 306.

While this calculus between migration and security can be applied to other parts of southern China, additional factors complicate the issue. Outside of Taiwan, the Qing inherited a range of administrative forms, known as the "*tusi* system", that granted considerable autonomy to indigenous leaders (*tusi*). At their largest, *tusi* territories were akin to small kingdoms nestled within Chinese provinces. Some *tusi* territories were attractive for their agricultural potential, or mineral and timber resources. Soon after crossing the Great Wall in 1644, Qing emperors launched an aggressive, China-wide campaign to promote land reclamation and increase tax revenues. From the standpoint of Beijing, many southern provinces appeared to have an abundance of unused agricultural land. In *tusi* territories, John Herman has argued, this land reclamation push became "settler colonialism – a state-sponsored form of colonialism that seeks to replace a territory's original inhabitants with settlers who embody the cultural and institutional characteristics endorsed by the state".[17] Although the Kangxi emperor was well aware that this migration might spark an indigenous backlash, he concluded, unlike in Taiwan, that frontier settlement was the best way to promote territorial incorporation and strengthen central control, with tax revenue only a secondary consideration.[18]

The Yongzheng emperor accelerated a late-Kangxi policy of aggressively seeking mineral and timber resources in the southwest. Whereas the Kangxi emperor had tried to weaken powerful *tusi* and align them more closely to the Qing state, the Yongzheng emperor and his energetic governor-general Ortai experimented in Yunnan and Guizhou with a new policy that would replace indigenous political leaders with regular provincial bureaucrats. Their goal was to "extend Qing control over the vast internal frontier rich in copper, timber, and land".[19] In a process of "state activism" characterized by "extreme levels of brutality", Ortai used the Qing military to enforce a massive transfer of economic resources from indigenous control.[20] Although the Qianlong emperor showed less appetite for eliminating *tusi*, the overall pattern of resource-driven Han migration continued. Qing rule had a dramatic impact on the politics, economy, and demography of southern China. James Lee has estimated that in southwest China, primarily the two provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou where Yongzheng-era activism had centred, the population quadrupled between 1700 and 1850, from 5 to 20 million, primarily driven by Han migrants attracted by economic opportunities connected to the mining industry. In Yunnan, annual copper production rose from 650 tons in the 1720s to around 9,500 tons in the late 1760s.[21] By 1800, the area under indigenous *tusi* control had shrunk in Yunnan from

17 J. E. Herman, From Land Reclamation to Land Grab: Settler Colonialism in Southwest China, 1680–1735, in: Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 78 (2018) 1, p. 97.

18 Ibid., p. 111.

19 J. Herman, Collaboration and Resistance on the Southwest Frontier: Early Eighteenth-Century Qing Expansion on Two Fronts, in: Late Imperial China 35 (2014) 1, p. 95.

20 Ibid., p. 80.

21 C. P. Giersch, Cotton, Copper, and Caravans: Trade and the Transformation of Southwest China, in: E. Tagliacozzo / W. Chang (eds.), Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia, Durham, NC 2011, p. 43.

about 50 per cent of the provincial territory to 25, and in Guizhou from 66 per cent to 33.[22]

From one standpoint, this was simply a more dramatic manifestation of the trend evident in Inner Asia: Han Chinese settlers, driven by land pressure in more densely-settled parts of China proper, moved into non-Han territory in pursuit of better livelihoods. From the perspective of the Qing state, however, the situation was different. While in Inner Asia the state tried to restrict migration, in southern China it frequently encouraged it. For rulers in Beijing, Han Chinese access to lands previously under indigenous control fulfilled various goals: more tax revenue, the settlement of a rapidly-growing population, access to necessary metals, and the more secure incorporation of what had once been close to foreign territory within Chinese provinces.

In Manchuria and Mongolia, emperors tried to maintain and restore "an embodiment of uncorrupted nature" in a region toward which they felt a close connection.[23] They sought to maintain existing ecologies and indigenous ways of life, even if this protection entailed interventionist regulation that was far from "natural". In *tusi* lands, by contrast, Qing emperors sometimes noted that indigenous peoples and Han Chinese were entitled to equal protection, but had no special concern for preserving existing ecologies, lifestyles, or cultures. To the contrary, they tried to inculcate Confucian moral and political norms among young members of the indigenous elite, which has been described as a "civilizing mission", aiming at cultural "assimilation".[24] Although increased state control was one ambition of this mission, Han Chinese and Manchus seemed to have shared the view that indigenous cultures were primitive and deviant.[25] In sum, while the perceived interests of Qing imperialism in Inner Asia only rarely aligned with Han Chinese economic activity, in southern China the goals of the state and the interests of Han Chinese migrants merged into a colonial form that effected dramatic transformations.

3. The Qing Empire, Chinese Migration, and Southeast Asia

Although no ecological barrier clearly delineated the two regions, the Qing state did not expand beyond the southern provinces of China into Southeast Asia. Its Ming predecessor, by contrast, had invaded Annam (northern Vietnam) in 1406, relinquishing it only after decades of fierce opposition. The Yongle emperor had simultaneously directed large naval expeditions into the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. These were chiefly to expand the reach of Yongle's imperial prestige, though some have suggested that the

22 J. Lee, Food Supply and Population Growth in Southwest China, 1250–1850, in: Journal of Asian Studies 41 (1982) 4, pp. 711–746.

23 J. Schlesinger, A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule, Stanford 2017, p. 169.

24 L. Hostetler, Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China, Chicago 2001, pp. 114–116.

25 E. J. Teng, An Island of Women: The Discourse of Gender in Qing Travel Writing about Taiwan, in: The International History Review 20 (1998) 2, pp. 353–370.

Ming hoped to control strategic nodes of Asian maritime trade in a form similar to that later adopted by the Portuguese.[26] This early Ming presence in maritime Southeast Asia was state-driven, and private trade was banned. The partial legalisation of overseas commerce in the late sixteenth century generated an alternative model for Chinese political influence in Southeast Asia. Powerful Fujian-based commercial networks, most notably the Zheng family enterprise, used armed ships to fight off competitors and secure the coast under loose Ming oversight. This enterprise increasingly resembled a quasi-state, and by the time Zheng Chenggong seized southwestern Taiwan from the Dutch in 1662, he may have envisioned building "a maritime Chinese empire", starting with a demand that the Spanish governor of the Philippines become his tributary.[27] Unbacked by the formidable resources of China proper, this vision proved too ambitious to realize. Still, Xing Hang argues, for a time the Zheng regime not only followed a trajectory similar to that of the Dutch East India Company in Southeast Asia, but indeed outcompeted it commercially. When Qing forces finally overcame the Zheng regime, the Kangxi emperor reluctantly incorporated Taiwan into Fujian province. However, he did not share either the early Ming interest in expanding south into Southeast Asia or the late Ming tolerance for a militarized company of traders active in that region.

In the decades after 1644, the Zheng regime had dominated China's overseas trade. Recognizing the coast of southern China as a bastion of Ming loyalist opposition, the Qing implemented a draconian coastal quarantine. After the elimination of the Zheng regime in 1683, the Kangxi emperor became confident enough to legalize private maritime trade, a decision that permitted its volume to grow enormously. Still, the belief that overseas Chinese posed a security threat persisted. In 1717, the Kangxi emperor restored the ban on maritime trade with Southeast Asia, a restriction lifted only after a decade. Rules on migration were further relaxed by the Qianlong emperor, but although the Qing state came to tolerate overseas Chinese commerce and migration, it never encouraged or materially supported it, and migrants remained wary of the state.[28]

Chinese migration to Southeast Asia intensified in the eighteenth century. Miners moved south of the Qing border in search of metal deposits. Tens of thousands worked in northern Vietnam alone, while others went by sea to the Malay peninsula and Borneo.[29] As shopkeepers and tradesmen, many settled or sojourned in the Philippines, Java, Siam, Vietnam, and elsewhere. Commercial routes expanded to become channels for agricultural migration. Chinese fleeing chaos in south China were "the first group of pioneers of colonization and settlement in southern Vietnam".[30] In Java, Chinese entrepreneurs and

26 G. Wade, The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment, in: Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society 78 (2005) 1, pp. 37–58.

27 X. Hang, Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720, Cambridge 2015, p. 145.

28 P. A. Kuhn, Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times, Lanham 2008, pp. 87–97.

29 A. Reid, Chinese on the Mining Frontier in Southeast Asia, in: Chinese Circulations, pp. 21–36.

30 C. A. Chen, Mac Thien Tu, and Phrayataksin: A Survey on their Political Stand, Conflicts and Background, in: Proceedings: Seventh IAHA Conference, Bangkok 1979, vol. 2, p. 1536.

labourers developed the sugar industry in the hinterland of Batavia. In the Philippines, their involvement in trade, urban crafts, and agriculture made Manila "an advance position of the Fukienese economy".[31]

Far from a unified cohort, overseas Chinese were divided by dialect and native place. Without political support from their homeland, overseas Chinese carved out only a few small autonomous polities. Perhaps the most successful was the enclave of Ha-tien, on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Thailand, founded around 1700 by a migrant from Leizhou. A number of other small independent or semi-autonomous communities were formed by Chinese on the Malay peninsula and Borneo. These small settlements were founded for specific economic purposes, notably maritime trade, mining, planting, or even piracy, and built quasi-state organisations for self-government and defence rather than territorial expansion. All were eventually absorbed by the growing power of "big states" such as Vietnam and Siam, or the expanding Dutch and British empires.[32] For overseas migrants in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, finding a niche as entrepreneurs and administrators in a symbiotic relationship with an Asian state or European colony was more common than seeking political independence. Leonard Blussé has called Batavia a "Chinese colonial town" from its inception: Dutch governors recruited Chinese inhabitants, granted them considerable internal autonomy, and relied on them for construction, revenue, trade, and, increasingly, agricultural development.[33] Chinese-operated shipping also enjoyed a dominant position in Southeast Asia's "Chinese century" between 1720 and 1820.[34]

For the purposes of this essay, the Chinese presence in Southeast Asia offers insight into Qing imperialism as a whole. The legalisation of overseas trade and de facto acquiescence to long-term migration lowered coastal security costs by reducing the attraction of smuggling, raised tax revenue, and most importantly helped the livelihood of those in crowded coastal provinces. Manchu emperors were not exceptionally harsh regarding overseas Chinese activity, and in fact were more flexible than their Ming predecessors. For their part, overseas Chinese also benefitted from this order, and there is little evidence that they were actively anti-Qing after 1700. Indeed, Qing emperors were ultimately more comfortable with the Chinese entrepreneurs seeking profit beyond the empire in Southeast Asia than with those expanding their networks in Qing-dominated Inner Asia. Arguments promoting migration as a mode of relieving pressure on China proper were accepted for the coast far more readily than for Inner Asia. Before 1860, more Chinese could be found in Manila, Batavia, and Bangkok than in Lhasa, Urga, and Ili.

31 L. Blussé, Chinese Century: The Eighteenth Century in the China Sea Region, in: Archipel 58 (1999), p. 119.

32 Chen, Mac Thien Tu, pp. 1565–1568; Y. Sakurai/T. Kitagawa, Ha Tien or Banteay Meas in the Time of the Fall of Ayutthaya, in: K. Breazeale (ed.), From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya's Maritime Relations with Asia, Bangkok 1999, pp. 150–220.

33 L. Blussé, Batavia, 1619–1740: The Rise and Fall of a Chinese Colonial Town, in: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 12 (1981) 1, pp. 159–178.

34 Blussé, Chinese Century, pp. 123–129; A. Reid, Chinese Trade and Southeast Asian Economic Expansion in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: An Overview, in: N. Cooke/T. Li (eds.), Water Frontier: Commerce and the Chinese in the Lower Mekong Region, 1750–1880 Lanham 2004, pp. 21–34.

From the standpoint of imperial power, it is tempting to see the critical role of overseas Chinese in aiding Asian states and European colonial empires as a lost opportunity for the Qing. Indeed, it might be suggested that it was precisely here that the Qing missed the transitions to "modern" (i.e., maritime and commercial) colonialism and allowed expanding European states to grow powerful at its expense. To be sure, Qing policy in Southeast Asia does highlight an unusual disjuncture between the Qing state and the far-flung and powerful influence of China's migrant merchants, miners, and farmers. The reluctance to use the Han Chinese presence as a vector for territorial expansion likely stemmed in part from caution (shared by the Ming) toward becoming reliant on a transient community of doubtful political loyalty, beyond the easy reach of the state's China-based security apparatus. The frontier society of Taiwan was particularly turbulent and prone to rebellions. This, arguably the Qing empire's only overseas possession, symbolized the vulnerabilities of this model of expansion for a state with a strong desire for political supervision. For their part, overseas Chinese showed no desire to draw the Qing state presence outward to sea.

A focus on policy, however, perhaps misses the larger insight to be drawn from Southeast Asia. By 1800, as Jonathan Schlesinger has observed, "merchants from Inner Asia to the Pacific had oriented themselves toward the Chinese interior", generating "commodity booms" (and attendant environmental problems) in Borneo and Sulawesi as well as Xinjiang and Manchuria.[35] Whether the Qing state wanted to halt it, encourage it, or remained ambivalent, its ability to channel and control the migration of China's growing population grew increasingly limited over the course of the eighteenth century. If we view the Qing empire in Asia-wide perspective, it could be argued that even the great political heft of the Qing state paled beside the enormous influence of China's prosperous market and rising population.

4. Conclusion

Qing imperialism and colonialism can be analysed through the complex relationship between two distinct layers. The Qing political project was basically imperial. It aimed to increase the power, security, and resources of the state. Even if one concedes that the richest parts of China proper were conquered chiefly for their wealth, the case for Qing colonialism there is limited. Han Chinese merchants dominated China's economy from top to bottom. Although China's land and tax revenues paid the Eight Banners, the core cohort of imperial functionaries, this modest redistribution did not enrich the Manchus as a group, and indeed they grew increasingly impoverished. Beyond China, the Qing state did not target territories for expansion because it believed that those lands would profit the treasury or benefit the economy. Although revenues drawn from China proper underwrote much of the Qing military infrastructure in Inner Asia, Qing rule did not

35 Schlesinger, A World Trimmed with Fur, p. 11.

attempt to make either China or Inner Asia wealthier at the expense of the other. Neither did it target either region for cultural transformation; to the contrary, the Qing imperial mission in Inner Asia explicitly sought to protect and purify (according to its own criteria) existing religious systems and moral values. As understood by the state, appropriate internal divisions were crucial for the preservation of the empire.

Lifting off this state structure, we can also consider the Qing realm as a demographic and economic entity. On this plane, China proper was so predominant that the empire can be seen as a Chinese core surrounded by regions that were less densely populated, less productive, and less commercialized. Whether colonialism is defined narrowly as agricultural settlement by migrants, or more expansively as external economic forces penetrating a periphery and bringing it into a subordinate relationship with a core area through commerce and resource extraction, virtually all colonial activity within and around Qing territory drew its impetus from the struggle for livelihood by the empire's rapidly-growing Han Chinese population.

To a considerable degree, the expansive energies of these two faces of the empire operated separately. Territorial growth was not meant to address the needs of China's growing population, nor did the outward movement of China's population remain within, or serve to extend, the boundaries of Qing control. Still, these planes of activity were not entirely distinct. Although state policy represented the most significant check on the Han Chinese presence in Inner Asia, it also set the conditions allowing that presence to gradually expand. In Southeast Asia, the Qing state remained nominally opposed to permanent migration, but its relaxed coastal order facilitated the "Chinese century". In southern China, uniquely, there was a strong alignment of interest, and sustained mutual support, between the state and migrants.

For all of its energy and effectiveness, the Qing state was ultimately reshaped by the pull of the empire's economic and demographic core. The ideological vision of a realm of distinct parts, articulated most explicitly during the long reign of the Qianlong emperor (1735–1796), was preserved after 1800 as much by institutional inertia as imperial enthusiasm. The fatal blow to this old order landed in the 1860s, as the catastrophic Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864) limited the state's ability to finance or reinforce its Inner Asian garrisons just as its control was challenged by Russian imperialism and internal uprisings. In a fundamental shift, the Qing state came to associate its political interests in Inner Asia with Han Chinese migration and the models of administration employed within China proper. In 1884, the reconquered Xinjiang was converted to a province, its governors henceforth Han Chinese. Manchuria was legally opened to private settlement, inaugurating one of the largest migrations in history and culminating in the establishment of three provinces in 1907. By its last decade, before its abdication in 1912, the Qing state hoped to survive by harnessing, rather than restricting, its Chinese inhabitants, and by shifting from a form that was in principle imperial to one that was colonial. The consequences of this decision, which cannot be discussed here, profoundly changed the subsequent history of China.