any single factor, but in the remarkable combination of favourable circumstances in the century after 1613: the consolidation of a social order whose savage discipline reflected the mentality of the 'armed camp';[74] its receptiveness to cultural innovation from elsewhere in Europe; Russia's profitable role as an entrepô t between Europe and the Middle East;[75] its open land frontier, which helped fuel expansion and lubricate the rise of autocratic power; its pivotal role in 'steppe diplomacy'; and the geostrategic fortune that allowed the exclusion of its European rivals from the whole of Eurasia north of the Black Sea after 1710. Here was a model of European expansion to set beside that of the maritime West.

RENOVATION IN EAST ASIA

Viewed from the West, the most striking feature of East Asian history was the retreat into seclusion after the upheavals that had convulsed the first half of the seventeenth century. In both China and Japan, the installation of new political regimes led to the search for political and cultural consolidation at home and to the deliberate shrinking of diplomatic and commercial contacts abroad. At first sight, then, a sharp contrast appears between East Asia – drifting into cultural stasis and economic stagnation behind the political barrier of xenophobic diplomacy – and Europe with its cultural openness, vigorous overseas trade and competitive politics. It would be easy to conclude that the check imposed on European expansion by the long economic downswing after 1620 was only a 'loaded pause' that concealed the widening gap between a dynamic West and an unprogressive East, trapped in its conservatism and introversion.

Before reaching such a verdict, we need to look carefully at the consequences of the great renovation brought about by the Tokugawa shogunate and the Manchu (or Ch'ing) dynasty. Both created polities that lasted some 250years. Both presided over a period of rapid population growth, extensive agricultural

colonization, widening internal commerce and rising demand for books. We should react sceptically to grand generalizations about stasis and stagnation. Nor should we be too quick to assume that China's very limited participation in international trade after *c*.1690 signalled its incorporation into the subordinate 'periphery' of a European 'world system'.[76] Indeed, closer inspection may suggest that the reconstruction of East Asia after *c*.1620 played a crucial part in strengthening East Asian civilizations against the full impact of European expansion that was felt across much of the extra-European world after 1750.

The gradual collapse of the Ming dynasty in North China culminated in the seizure of the imperial capital by the Manchus in 1644 and, nominally, the beginning of a new dynastic era – that of the Ch'ing, as the Manchus styled themselves.[77] But the real founder of the Ch'ing empire was K'ang-hsi (b. 1654, r. 1661–1723), whose long reign had the same importance for consolidating Ch'ing rule as Akbar's had had for the Mughals in India. At K'ang-hsi's accession, the prospects for a stable imperial regime were poor. The Manchus as a ruling elite had not yet made the transition from the clan system characteristic of steppe nomad societies.[78] The idea of dynastic succession – vital for the continuity of imperial rule – was alien to them. Clan politics meant a continuous competition for power and influence, and a sharing (and resharing) of captured wealth and land among the dominant clans and their leaders. It was profoundly at odds with the Confucian system of empire consolidated in the Han era (206 BC–AD 220) and brought to its autocratic apogee under the Ming. Partly for this reason, large parts of South China, and large segments of the literati elite, remained unreconciled to Manchu authority. It had been this state of affairs, and their original dependence upon ethnic-Chinese allies to overcome Ming resistance, that had forced the Manchus to delegate wide powers to the Chinese generals responsible for subjugating the southern and south-western provinces. Indeed, by the 1670s three of these generals – the so-called 'Three Feudatories' – enjoyed practically complete autonomy from Peking, with the tempting

prospect of establishing their own dynastic claim. To add to this catalogue of difficulties, the Manchus faced new threats to their authority in Inner Asia: from the Kalmyks; from the theocratic empire of the Dalai Lama in Tibet; and, in the region south and east of Lake Baikal, from tsarist officials and Russian fur traders. Meanwhile, on the maritime frontier overlooking the South China Sea, the breakdown of Ming rule and the opportunities created by seaborne trade had spawned the trading and privateering state of the freebooter Koxinga (Cheng Ch'eng-kung), securely based, as it seemed, on the impregnable island of Taiwan.[79]

The most immediate threat to the Manchus' survival was their lack of real control in South China. Anticipating K'ang-hsi's determination to crush them, the Feudatories rebelled openly in 1673–4. General Wu, the most powerful of the three, contemptuously offered the Manchu court a territorial partition that would have left it only Manchuria and Korea.[80] A more real possibility was the division of China along the Yangtze, denying North China and the imperial government its vital foodbowl, and reducing Peking to a rump state precariously balanced on the flank of Inner Asia. After a prolonged struggle, K'ang-hsi had gained the upper hand by the early 1680s, partly because Wu had died (of dysentery) in 1678[81] and partly, perhaps, because the feudatory generals held little appeal for Ming loyalists in the south and the scholar-gentry preferred imperial continuity, even under the Manchus, to warlord rule. By 1683, too, K'anghsi had finally liquidated Koxinga's rebel state, and the drastic policy of evacuating the coastal belt[82] (to deny the rebels its resources) that had been pursued for more than twenty years could now be reversed. Foreign trade, closely restricted for the same reason, was opened up once more.[83] In the later 1680s, with South China more or less pacified, K'ang-hsi was able to turn to Inner Asia.

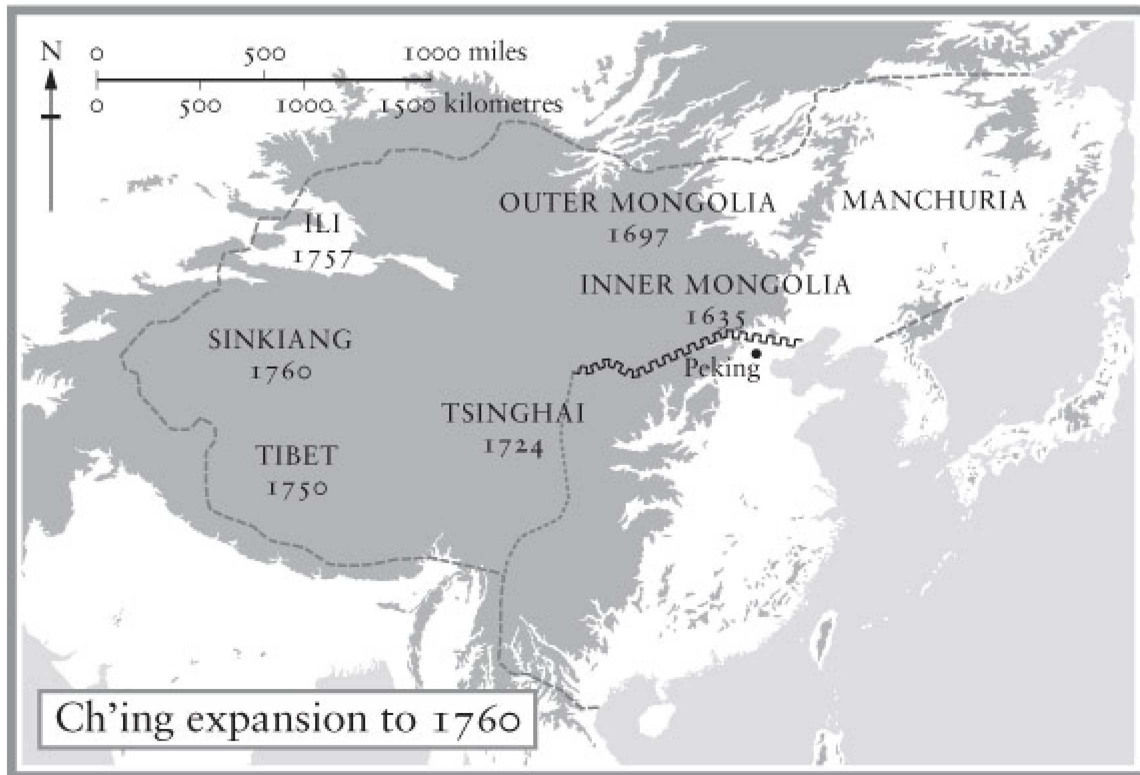
No Manchu emperor was likely to underestimate the danger of a new steppe challenger repeating the Manchu gambit: building a frontier state based on the fusion of steppe and agricultural

economies and strong enough to subvert the loyalty of the ethnic-Chinese population. In the 1670s the Kalmyk (or Oirat) ruler Galdan began to assemble a steppe empire of menacing size. From his original base in Dzungaria, lying west of Mongolia, he conquered the oases and trading cities of eastern Turkestan. In 1688 he invaded Outer Mongolia and threw down the gauntlet to Peking.[84] At the same time, the Russian presence along the northern edges of Mongolia and in Amuria (north of Manchuria) foreshadowed a profitable alliance between these interlopers in the Chinese realm. Perhaps K'ang-hsi was fortunate that this double Inner Asian challenge came too late to coincide with the struggle inside China proper. But no Chinese emperor could have been better prepared for the mental and physical stress of a frontier war. K'ang-hsi was a passionate hunter, and claimed to have killed over a hundred tigers, dozens of bears and leopards, and nearly a hundred wolves. He regarded the chase as practice for war, and his frequent expeditions to the frontier zone, in search of sport and to visit his troops, gave him first-hand knowledge of the theatre of conflict, and of the tactics and logistics needed for Chinese victory.[85]

Neither the Russians nor the Manchus had at first much idea of each other's strength or objectives. In the mid-1650s, Moscow had begun to grasp that the mysterious eastern potentate 'Prince Bogdoy' was more than just a minor ruler and must be treated with as much respect as the Ottoman, Iranian or Mughal emperor.[86] The Russians persisted in hoping that the Manchus would agree to diplomatic relations and the opening of trade. There was already a growing Russian commerce with Central Asia and India through Astrakhan at the mouth of the Volga. Embassies had been exchanged regularly with the Kalmyks and Mongols since the 1630s. K'ang-hsi was willing to sidestep the rigid protocol governing Chinese diplomatic relations and meet the tsar's envoys informally; but he was also determined to expel Russian influence from East Asia. In 1684 he warned the Mongols to cease trading with the Russians. In 1685 his army razed Albazin, the most advanced Russian outpost in the Amur valley. The Russians returned, and

Galdan's conquest of Outer Mongolia in 1688 threatened Peking with a long, exhausting frontier war. But the Russo-Kalmyk alliance failed to materialize, and in 1689 at Nerchinsk in south-eastern Siberia K'ang-hsi surrounded the Russian negotiators with a large army and forced them to renounce the whole vast area north of Manchuria – a defeat for Russian expansion that was not reversed until 1860. In 1690, Manchu armies used artillery to defeat Galdan in battle.[87] Six years later, after a further shattering defeat, Galdan committed suicide. The final consolidation of Chinese overrule in Inner Asia, with the conquest of Sinkiang or East Turkestan, was not completed for some sixty years. But K'ang-hsi had restored Peking's authority in mainland East Asia. This great triumph, followed up by the Yung-cheng (r. 1723–35) and Ch'ien-lung (r. 1735–96) emperors, was the vital geopolitical precondition for the domestic achievements of Ch'ing rule and, in the longer term, for its tenacious resistance to European diplomatic and commercial demands in the nineteenth century.

Indeed, this grand strategic victory opened the way for an exceptionally dynamic period in Chinese history. The Yung-cheng emperor completed the transition from the clannish regime the Manchus had brought with them to a revived and strengthened version of Ming absolutism. The Manchu 'bannermen' – the private princely armies



Ch'ing expansion to 1760

that had played a key role in the seizure of power – were brought under imperial control or pensioned off.[88] This averted the threat of factional warfare at times of dynastic succession. A new and more flexible Grand Council supplanted the Grand Secretariat and the censorate as the centre of decision-making.[89] A third innovation, the 'palace memorial' system, encouraged a stream of confidential information about the misdeeds of provincial authorities. Careful renovation of the examination system was part of K'ang-hsi's reconciliation with the Chinese literati. It was the crucial bond between the imperial centre, the scholar-gentry of the provinces, and the county magistrate (*hsien chih*) whose *yamen* (or office) was the eyes and ears of the imperial government. So long as the scholar-gentry aspired to bureaucratic advancement through the examination system, with its classical syllabus and Confucian ideology, and while China was governed from walled cities with an ultra-loyal Manchu army in reserve, rebellion was unlikely to spread far or last long. The early emperors also insisted upon frugal expenditure to ease the weight of taxation. With large tax surpluses,

and having beaten, cowed or reconciled their enemies, the Ch'ing emperors had found the formula for external security and internal peace.

This was a favourable setting for economic progress and cultural revival. By some estimates, China's population increased threefold between 1723 and 1796 under K'ang-hsi's successors. There was a large increase in the area under cultivation, which may have doubled between 1650 and 1800.[90] Ethnic Chinese (Han) settlers colonized forested regions in the south and south-west. The state repaired damaged waterways and built new ones.[91] New food crops like maize (brought by the Portuguese) and sweet potatoes (brought to Fukien in the eighteenth century) supplemented rice; and cash crops like tea, indigo and sugar were grown for export, especially in coastal provinces like Fukien and Kwangtung. State officials in the frontier province of Hunan on the middle Yangtze promoted double-cropping with advice, tax incentives and the supply of seed.[92] Eighteenth-century China saw the end of serfdom, abolished by the Yung-cheng emperor,[93] and a new freedom to buy and sell land. The number of market towns rose steadily. In the Kiangnan region on the lower Yangtze, where water communications had favoured the growth of large commercial cities, cotton cloth was manufactured on a large scale by village-based artisans. Shanghai exported textiles to inland regions up to 800miles away, and iron goods, silk and porcelain were widely traded.[94] This was a sophisticated mercantile economy in which paper money was supplied by private enterprise and credit was based on the sale of contracts for the future supply of salt to the government – a commodity for which demand was exceptionally stable. China's part in international commerce may have been relatively small, but its internal trade may have been as large, if not larger, than that of contemporary Europe.[95]

But perhaps the most striking feature of Ch'ing rule was that it promoted an exceptionally vigorous phase of cultural renewal. K'anghsi himself liked to converse with the Jesuits at court (their mission had survived the dynastic upheaval). He even learned how

to play the harpsichord. But he rejected the idea of a regular traffic between China and Europe. ‘China has no matters of common concern with the West’ was his crisp conclusion.[96] Westerners, like the Jesuits, were welcome to come. But they had to stay and adapt themselves to Confucian ethics: they could not expect to come and go as they pleased. And when the Pope sent a message asking him to send back Europeans suspected by Rome of heresy, K’ang-hsi refused – adding sarcastically that he would cut off their heads and send them instead, so that the Pope could see that they had been ‘reformed’.[97] The Pope’s response is not known. K’ang-hsi’s main concern was with Chinese culture. He and his successors sponsored the collection and publication of classical literature; K’ang-hsi himself commissioned an encyclopedia. Literacy levels rose, and the volume of printed literature increased to meet the demand.[98] Novels, poetry, histories, biographies, gazetteers, encyclopedias, anthologies and works of antiquarianism were published. This was a gentry culture that propagated the values and traditions of the Confucian classics: the search for harmony within society and with nature; the importance of hierarchy (especially between generations) and ritual or codes of behaviour for preserving social order and cohesion; the need for self-control and the subordination of personal desires. Through literature and art, and the state’s provision of official ‘cults’ and sacrifices as a focus for local popular religion, the influence of Confucian culture was diffused more widely and deeply than ever before.[99] China’s political and economic integration was thus matched by a growing cultural unity achieved in the last era before the more intense and then violent engagement with the West.

But there were limits to the Ch’ing achievement. Much of China beyond its great system of waterways remained locked in localism – though no more so, perhaps, than large parts of contemporary Europe. More serious was China’s notorious failure to revive the naval power renounced some three centuries earlier. Chinese merchants and settlers in South East Asia had no claim on imperial

protection, and savage massacres of Chinese in the Spanish Philippines drew no response from Peking.[100] European fascination with China – however ignorant and ill-informed – had no counterpart in Chinese intellectual circles, a measure perhaps of cultural self-confidence and the prestige of an unbroken classical tradition of exceptional range and subtlety. In some respects eighteenth-century China was turning even more markedly inward: the Yung-cheng emperor reversed in 1727 the limited tolerance granted to Christian missionaries since Mongol times.[101] Even when European ideas were imported, they appeared unworkable or irrelevant in the Chinese context.[102] A good example is the idea of perspective in painting. Chinese artistic theory did not 'fail' to invent perspective: it rejected as invalid a single fixed perspective, stressing instead the multiplicity of viewpoints from which an object or landscape might be viewed.[103] But perhaps a deeper problem (from the point of view of technological and scientific change) was the underlying conservatism of Ch'ing society, which vested enormous social power in its bureaucracy and in corporate bodies like guilds and lineage or clan authorities, who played a key role in maintaining a hierarchic social discipline. Ch'ing rule may have added an extra twist to what were, no doubt, entrenched social tendencies. After all, for all its championing of Confucian culture, this was at bottom a 'Manchu *raj*' – imperial rule by an alien dynasty and its racial henchmen, who were segregated by residence and marriage laws from the Han majority. Like other colonial regimes in world history, the Manchus found that the price of stability was alliance with those who enjoyed local dominance, and the careful avoidance of social or political risk. Thus the *timing* of Manchu consolidation between 1680 and 1750 was highly significant. On the eve of the close encounter with the West, China's distinctive political trajectory (still dominated by its symbiotic relationship with Inner Asia) propelled it not towards an all-powerful oriental despotism (imagined by Europeans) – which might have permitted drastic change in the face of external challenge – but instead still further towards a 'limited *raj*' in which

central government abandoned almost all initiative to local (and usually conservative) forces. When China's eighteenth-century 'economic miracle' turned sour, the scope for political change was correspondingly narrow.[104]

Like China, Japan experienced a remarkable period of political consolidation and economic growth in the seventeenth and early eigh teenth century. The shogunate, or regency, was made hereditary in the Tokugawa clan. The imperial court, reduced to symbolic importance, remained in the old capital at Kyoto, where the shoguns also maintained a splendid palace for their periodic visits. The key to political stability was the supremacy that the Tokugawa exerted over the clans and clan domains into which Japan was divided, and over the *daimyo*, or nobles, who ruled them. Military dominance was supplemented by the notorious system of *sankin kotai*, which required the *daimyo* to leave their wives and children at the shogunal capital at Edo and to reside there themselves in alternate years. While in Edo, *daimyo* were obliged to attend the shogun's court twice a month, and to perform administrative duties in and around the city. At the same time the hereditary warrior class, the samurai, were gathered in domain castle towns, like Himeji or Nagoya, or attended Edo as retainers of the resident *daimyo*. By degrees, they were transformed into a gentry service class, dependent on their clan stipends and increasingly attracted to the gentlemanly ideals propounded by Confucianism, whose vision of the social order was a useful buttress to their novel status.

Internal peace was accompanied by rapid growth in the population, which increased from 12 million in 1600 to some 31 million by 1721 – a figure half as large again as that of France, Western Europe's demographic giant.[105] There was considerable urbanization, and Edo

(*c*.1 million), Kyoto (350000) and Osaka (360,000) were all major cities by world standards. In 1700 Edo was twice the size of London.[106] The area under cultivation doubled between 1600 and