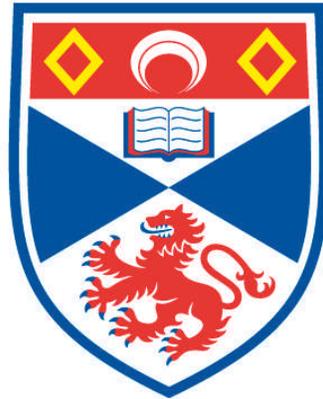


**THE FORMLESS EMPIRE : THE EVOLUTION OF
INDIGENOUS EURASIAN GEOPOLITICS**

Christopher Mott

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



2014

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The Formless Empire: The Evolution of Indigenous Eurasian Geopolitics

A dissertation presented by

Christopher Douglas Mott

And written under the supervision of

Professor Andrew Williams

To the International Relations Department of the University of St Andrews in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Subject of International Relations

St Andrews, Fife

January 2014

Acknowledgements:

I would like to acknowledge my parents, who made this possible in the first place. Also, I would like to acknowledge the following: The original Comrades of Room 13 who assisted in the process of enjoying and adapting to the research student lifestyle despite misunderstanding to the contrary from an outside perspective, to the creative inspiration provided by Qara-Tamgalug, and above all to my supervisor Professor Andrew Williams who from the start had interest and faith in this unconventional topic for research and writing.

1.0...Abstract:

This dissertation seeks to make a unique contribution to the study of geopolitics and empire in Central Asia by focusing on both the indigenous developments of grand strategies and their legacies by examining several key points in history of the region's geopolitics in order to determine the peculiar and specific nature of regional geopolitical evolution, and how its basic concepts can be understood using such a locally based framework. By putting the focus on several key concepts which hold steady through major societal and technological upheavals, as well as foreign incursion and both the inward and outward migrations, which together create the conditions which I have dubbed 'The Formless Empire', it is possible to see the elements of a regional and homegrown tradition of grand strategy and geopolitical thinking which is endemic to the area of Inner Eurasia, even as this concept adapts from a totality of political policy to merely frontier and military policy over the course of time.

This indigenous concept of grand strategy encompasses political, military, and diplomatic aspects utilizing the key concepts of strategic mobility, and flexible or indirect governance. These political power systems originated in their largest incarnations amongst the nomadic people of the steppe and other people commonly considered peripheral in history, but who in a Central Asian context were the original centerpieces of regional politics until technological changes led to their eclipse by the big sedentary powers such as Russia and China. However, even these well-established states took elements of 'The Formless Empire' into their policies (if largely relegated to frontiers, the military, and a few informal relationships alone) and therefore the influence of the region's past still lingers on in different forms in the present.

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Introductory Chapter

“If I determine the enemy's disposition of forces while I have no perceptible form, I can concentrate my forces while the enemy is fragmented. The pinnacle of military deployment approaches the formless: if it is formless, then even the deepest spy cannot discern it nor the wise make plans against it.”

~Sun Tzu, The Art of War

1.1...Defining the Terminology

The two relevant terms which need to be clarified in order for this project to put forth a logical and coherent argument as well as remain focused on a defined scope is both what is meant by the geographic phrase ‘Central Asia’ and its derivative versions as well as the specifics of the new ‘Formless Empire’ concept put forward here to understand that region’s historical and political context. Using historical case studies beginning in the third century B.C.E. and moving up through the present day offers an immense danger of overreach, meaning there are two limiting factors on the specific examples-one is geographic and the other is the conceptual relevance. On occasion a case study slightly or even noticeably outside the region of focus is utilized for illustrating such a purpose and likewise case studies which fall outside of the focus of the primary examples will be brought up as secondary cases to further illustrate preexisting points.

1.2...Geographic Overview

First, it is relevant to define exactly what we call the region ‘Central Asia’. The definition of what this constitutes has fluctuated with time. Originally a place set apart from littoral and coastal Eurasia due to the relative dominance in its economy and politics of both overland caravan trade and nomadic herding people-this is as good a place to start from rather than using the somewhat limiting yet commonly held contemporary definition of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan alone. Indeed, while

the story of Central Asia has moved to increasingly marginalize the importance of the nomadic population in the past few centuries, a certain fluidity of movement and ambiguity of borders is endemic to the region-and so it is only logical that the geographic scope chosen for the examples fluctuates with the warp and weft of eras, political entities, and the apparent strategic thinking used in them. Therefore our concept of what constitutes Central Asia itself is held on the type of state which dwells there, rather than an absolute sense of clearly defined borders.

It is, however, possible to show the rough region of delineation for the purpose of this study. The terms Central Asia, Inner Eurasia, and Central Eurasia can all apply to various examples and often multiple terms will be used to show both minor distinctions and to break up linguistic repetitiveness. 'Central Asia' is often employed to describe what historically is known as 'Transoxiana' and its surrounding steppes. 'Inner Eurasia' and the nearly identical 'Central Eurasia' are used in order to describe a somewhat more vast area including Transoxiana but extending further past the steppe to encompass much of the terrain of non-littoral Eurasia, this can include the Black Sea steppe in the west and the mixed steppe/forest land of Manchuria in the east.¹

This massive region-though often lowly populated in terms of density-known for its overland rather than oceanic trade-is the geographic setting to which we now must turn our attention. Geography and ecology is the first building block in a region from which the societies endemic to it grow, and so it is important to appraise this factor first. The most important elements of this geography is both its vast space as well as its diversity-both contained within a certain level of continuity connected by the flat, dry grasslands known as the steppe. For most of history the steppe was a poor place for agriculture to expand into, aside from the occasional fertile river valley, but still the grass could support numerous domesticated animals. This flat and edible (for pack animals) highway enabled herding-based nomadism to take hold-turning the apparently hostile and sparse landscape into a highway which connected the various mountainous, forested, and cultivated plains areas together through the common denominator of mobile groups of herding people who migrated and traded across the steppe. As the steppe flows west-east from the Ukraine to Western Manchuria and much more

¹ Stuart Legg. *The Heartland* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), pages 31-9

narrowly from the forest edge of southern Siberia to the mountains of the Caucasus and Afghanistan, as well as the deserts of Xinjiang and Turkmenistan, we have a common ecological denominator which can be taken to make a large and diverse area part of a unified geopolitical network. This and the regions adjacent to it are often integrated into this network through the policies and accidents of history, and share certain common attributes which make them a cohesive if somewhat nebulous whole in military and political history. Being on the interior of the world's largest continent and having a seasonal-if often more cold than warm-dry climate coupled with intermediary location between what is traditional considered to be the major world civilizations create a unique context worth examining.^{2 3}

These circumstances naturally facilitate the decentralized 'multicultural' empire as the lynchpin of governance. The modern term 'multicultural' will stand in this dissertation as an approximate term which describes a society of relative openness to foreign influence with an ethnically and often religiously diverse population. Though far more typical and older than the nation-state and endemic to almost every part of the world-the study of empire often evokes negative emotional reactions in contemporary study. We can further delve into the importance of empire in the following chapter, but for now it is worth noting that, value judgments aside, empire is tied only with tribes and city-states for the top place position of historically common political entities. As Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper state succinctly in their overview of the subject:

"By comparison [with empire] the nation state appears as a blip on the historical horizon, a state form that emerged recently under imperial skies and whose hold on the world's political imagination may well prove partial or transitory."⁴

Inside Inner Eurasia this predilection for empire was perhaps even greater than elsewhere overall. Wide varieties of peoples, economic structures, and geographic diversity came together to imply that only a highly mobile, decentralized, and often informal type of power structure could suffice for optimal geopolitical governance. Often it was the tribal element of the nomadic peoples which held the decisive strategic niche

² David Christian. *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia. Volume I: Inner Eurasia from Prehistory to the Mongol Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), pages 5-6.

³ Legg, 37-9.

⁴ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper. *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), page 3.

of mobility and space control to be the ruling elite and the predators that preyed upon the settled and littoral peoples around them. Other more settled people who emulated the military methods of the nomads often responded in kind as they too adapted into this system-though in time technological and economic changes would swing the force of dynamism in this realm to the more settled and littoral powers. Even so, such a change would have to adapt itself to the realities of governing in such a region and make even the new and often alien powers adapt accordingly just as much to the local circumstances.

2,000 B.C.E. is the rough starting point of this geopolitical complex when the chariot was introduced to the region. Utilizing the endemic regional horses to great effect on the flat steppe plains was the first opening salvo in the evolution of the steppe-empire.⁵ This was the first change that enabled the nomadic element of the population to become the decisive lynchpin in the system, however they did not hit their full integral stride until about a thousand years later with the adoption of horseback riding and the high endurance little steppe ponies which would become their staple. The first wave of nomads, such as the Huns and Xiongnu, were the vanguard of this increased potency amongst the nomadic tribes and showed the societies peripheral to them the deadly combination of horse-borne mobility and lifestyle in conjunction with accurate arrow fire from the horn-and-sinew recurve bows which could be fired from full gallop.

Another addition to their power came in another thousand years, with the invention of the stirrup. Now the hammer of the light ranged cavalry could have the complimentary anvil of heavy cavalry armed with a furious charge of lowered lances. The stirrup-enabling the rider to couch his lance in the charge-greatly increased the combat effectiveness of such units and further added to the power of the nomadic armies. With armies which rode entirely on horseback and lived in transportable tents called *gers* (Mongolian) and *yurts* (Turkic) such forces had many advantageous for achieving total strategic dominance out of proportion to their numbers over any place with sufficient grazing land for the livestock, and so the steppe was both highway and corridor for them. It would remain so until the 19th Century, when only railroads would

⁵ Rhoads Murphy. "An Ecological History of Central Asian Nomadism", Chapter 3 in Gary Seaman (Editor) *Ecology and Empire: Nomads in the Cultural Evolution of the Old World* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1989), page 45.

enable the settled peripheral societies to surpass this mobility through technological innovation.⁶

This nomadic system, whether it was employed by indigenous inhabitants of Inner Eurasia or by peripheral powers that had the time and perseverance to adapt, would have certain political aspects in its structure as well which would impact the subsequent phases of geopolitical change to varying extents. In his overview of Central Asian history where he resets the position of Central Asia from its usual relegation to the periphery back to the core of Eurasian history, Christopher Beckwith uses the term '*comitatus*' (originally coined by Tacitus to describe Germanic kinship bonds as well as the practice of rewarding soldiers with land by high ranking officers in the Roman Republic) to describe this method of governance. The nomadic ruling elite would sustain its power through personal charisma and gift-giving, ensuring a loyal retinue to the single ruler which could be relied upon to have large amount of delegation. To do this the leadership of various tribes and empires had to foster trade and tribute systems. Given the military flexibility and power of nomadic armies, this was imposable over large scales of space. However, the constant migration of other tribes often meant such arrangements were temporary and subject to usurpation by others. It was through such processes that a cyclic system of informal empire and economic integration was spread throughout the region. This is a comprehensive system, and in no way simply related to military affairs, but rather all of geopolitics.⁷

The ultimate example of this system would be the first true Eurasia-spanning hegemonic power; the Mongol Empire. We will go into much more detail about that state and its critical importance to this study in Chapter 3, but for now it is relevant simply to use it as an example of the many aspects of the Formless Empire coming together on a truly massive scale. As Burbank and Cooper so adequately summarize it:

“Although the Mongol Empires fragmented quickly, the unification of Eurasia left its imprint on later politics. The Mongols protection of religious institutions, their governing practices based on recognized difference, with no fixed center or core population; the cultivation of personalized loyalty as the sovereigns means of

⁶ Ibid., 46-8.

⁷ Christopher Beckwith. *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pages 11-23, 76.

control; the fluid politics of contingent alliance, pragmatic subordination, and treaty making- this repertoire remained in play long after Chinggis' empire disintegrated."⁸

The general trend of governance in the region was a type of 'tanistry', or consensus building and getting results through a relatively egalitarian distribution of powers-even if from a single head of state. This was a flexible rule with no state church or settled doctrine-and it became the norm throughout the steppes-and was particularly strong when the nomadic influence was at its highest.⁹

As will be examined further in the body of the text, the nature of the land and the preexisting political order begun with nomadism as its central point would have a long and lingering influence after the collapse of nomadic centrality. It was precisely these geopolitical indigenous conditions-and their long term (rather than era specific) nature, which brings us to examine the next critical concept of this study-that of the idea of 'The Formless Empire'.

1.3...The Concept of the Formless Empire

It may seem strange that in a study which purports to examine the indigenous evolution of a Central Asian geopolitical strategy to begin by referencing as its primary theorist a Chinese thinker-but that is where the first example of relevant written strategic doctrine begins. There is no dedicated indigenous geopolitical thinker from Inner Eurasia during its formative years which has survived intact as a primary and recorded source-only historical examples which will make the bulk of this study's argument. The closest two we have are Ibn Khaldun and Sun Tzu-neither of whom were exactly imbedded inside this dissertation's definition of Inner Eurasia. Nonetheless, the former wrote extensively about the region in his historical studies and even personally met one of the case studies mentioned later, and the latter was part of the governing establishment of a state in China-itself the nation most often at long-term odds with the various steppe peoples of Central Asia. The next chapter will go further into detail about Ibn Khaldun and other famous thinkers on the region from across the eras, but it is critical to delve

⁸ Burbank and Cooper, 115.

⁹ Richard N. Frye. "Central Asian Concepts of Rule on the Steppe and Sown" (in Seaman), pages 135-7.

into Sun Tzu, as understanding his works and the strategic doctrine he espoused is of critical importance to the comprehending the concept this dissertation uses when deploying the phrase 'formless'.

Sun Tzu is not an absolutely verifiable figure of history. His identity is as formless as the geostrategic philosophy he advocated. It is possible that he is in fact an apocryphal figure meant to represent the amalgamation of strategic thinking coming from multiple individuals during The Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.E.) in Chinese history and put together in order to summarize the lessons of that two century period of warfare built on harsh and painful experience.¹⁰

For convenience sake, if nothing else, we will treat Sun Tzu as an individual, however. After all, there is at least some biographical information for this nebulous figure. Reputed to be a strategist in the service of the state of Wu, Sun Tzu's military abilities were renowned enough that the King of Wu challenged him to instill martial discipline into the courtly ladies of his palace-a task which Sun Tzu was able to accomplish to the satisfaction of the king. This enabled him to become the chief general of the kingdom and over the course of several campaigns raise the status and power of Wu over its immediate rivals. Somewhere amongst this busy life, Sun Tzu wrote his famous work of strategic thinking.¹¹

Despite the declared martial concentration implicit in the name, *The Art of War's* primary concern is the same as statecraft itself: the ultimate survival of the state. Indeed, it sees warfare, diplomacy, and overall state welfare as holistically integrated, an attitude which it can be noted was used by the Mongols as well who (knowingly or not) used many of the tactics in Sun Tzu's work.¹² The strategic principles encapsulated in the Art of War are based around the ideas of deceptions, speed, mobility, flexibility, and indirectness. Mark McNeilly classifies them into six points based on the major sub-headings of the text:

1. Win without fighting.
2. Avoid strength, attack weakness.
3. Deception and foreknowledge.

¹⁰ Victor H. Mair. *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 12-3.

¹² Mark McNeilly. *Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), page 5-6.

4. Speed and Movement
5. Shaping the Enemy
6. Character based leadership.¹³

Winning without fighting is the declaration that having to resort to warfare is always a loss; even for the eventually victorious party-so the first strategy should be to force a foe to acquiesce without having to engage them in battle. “The general rule for use of the military is that it is better to keep a nation intact than to destroy it.”¹⁴ On obvious parallel to the common tactic of Eurasian empires to leave defeated foes alive as vassals rather than outright annex them can be made here. Following that, if force must be resorted to, aim for the weak points of the enemy, of which one can be made aware of through espionage and good intelligence services. To achieve this crippling of the enemy through striking their weak points, speed of action is the ultimate virtue, which in turn will mold the enemy into a vulnerable position. Sun Tzu makes explicit the point that while military operations can be clumsy and swift-they are never skillful and slow or long-lasting as “victory, not persistence, is most important in battle.”¹⁵ Finally, tying all of these principles together and greatly facilitating their execution is the leadership qualities of the field commander and his officers. In a striking parallel to Beckwith’s observation of the bonds of personal loyalty fostered in Inner Eurasian politics Sun Tzu remarks that the way for a commander to win the loyalty of his men is to instill fair discipline and share their dangers.¹⁶

In direct contrast to this view is the Clausewitzian theory which goes through periods of varying popularity in Western Europe and North America. Its emphasis on decisive battles, direct engagement, and annihilation of the foe as primary objective shows an alternative geopolitical view of military operations.¹⁷ Rather than reveling in simply a decisive blow which is still within the context of an attrition-based warfare paradigm, Sun Tzu’s treatise is really if anything a treatise *against* the very principle of attrition based warfare having any validity whatsoever. Deception, speed, adaptability, and maneuver are all attempts to avoid direct confrontation and still achieve results, and

¹³ Ibid., 68.

¹⁴ Sun Tzu. *The Art of War* (Translated by Thomas Cleary, Boston: Shambhala, 1988), page 66.

¹⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹⁷ McNeilly, 38.

when and if confrontation, due to error or circumstance, becomes inevitable it becomes about overcoming the opposition in such a way as to keep one's own forces as intact as possible.¹⁸ As Sun Tzu says:

“A skilled attack is one against which opponents do not know how to defend; a skilled defense is one where opponents do not know how to attack. Therefore, those skilled in defense are not so because of fortress walls. This is why high walls and deep moats do not guarantee security, while strong armor and effective weapons do not guarantee strength. If opponents want to hold firm, attack where they are unprepared; if opponents want to establish a battlefront, appear where they do not expect you.”¹⁹

Now that we have established the general tenor of Sun Tzu's concept of formlessness, it becomes important to look at the Inner Eurasian context for something similar enough to borrow the term for. Indeed, the term formlessness in this dissertation is to be the term of choice for the case studies examined precisely because there is obvious strategic overlap with the doctrines of Sun Tzu. Rather than blatantly run with Sun Tzu was our theorist however, this work will instead apply the term 'formless' to mean the mobile, flexible, and indirect nature of Inner Eurasian geopolitical evolution itself in its own context.

1.4...Inner Eurasia: The Confluence of Formlessness and Geopolitics

Being now armed with knowledge of the geographic circumstances and the related methods of foreign policy governance which they helped engender, a brief overview of the nature of the case studies which form the bulk of this text are in order.

The next chapter will be the Literature Review and Methodology, which will look at how other thinkers and historians have viewed the region in question and pertinent geopolitics in general and show why the particular ground we are covering is unique to the study of historical international relations. Following upon that is Chapter Three, where we examine the rise and dominance of the first truly formless nomadic geopolitical system in Inner Eurasia and follow it forwards from its regional beginnings

¹⁸ Mair, 53-4.

¹⁹ Sun Tzu, 9.

to near total Eurasian dominance and westward expansion. Chapter Four will examine the mixed nomadic/settled system which grew out of technological changes and the merger of nomadic and settled peoples in certain regions, including ones somewhat out of the typical geographical scope of the study such as The Mughal Empire, who offer up an example of The Formless Empire leaving itself an adapt to the littoral-and show a precursor of what was to come to Inner Eurasia soon after. The fifth chapter will show the apparent unraveling of this system due to expansionistic pressures from outside-namely Russia and China-who at that point become the dominant actors in our narrative as we move into the 18th and 19th Centuries-but we will not simply examine their undoing of the nomadic consensus-but rather focus on the things they adopted from the people they fought and conquered-becoming a bit more like the nomads in the process. This will also show the evolution of The Formless Empire from a total political, social, economic, and geopolitical concept into increasingly merely a military and tactical one. Chapter Six will be the point of lowest ebb of nomadic power, where even littoral states like Britain and Japan enter the fray and large modern-style entities appear to extinguish the indigenous system which once reigned supreme-but even here the echoes of that old system find new rebirth in military strategies and frontier politics amidst one of the forgotten fronts of the Russian Revolution and World War II. Chapter Seven then shows the apparent dominance of such conventional states, changed as they might be, but how ultimately brief that domination was before the Sino-Soviet Split and the end of the Cold War restored flexibility and indirect power relationships to large parts of the region, at least in informal power relations. Finally, we end out case studies in our contemporary times, looking at something more akin to a return to a more effective tradition through an updated model of the Formless Empire-one which takes into account that the present day reality of much of the world, not just the region we are studying, offers potential for Inner Eurasian geopolitical heritage to thrive again, even if acknowledging this time that it shares much more similarities to the rest of the world than it once did.

This is not to argue that a total return to the past is now upon us, but rather that a certain set of trends which ring through all eras of the history of geopolitical Inner Eurasia are always present in some form, to varying degrees of potency. In effect, this

dissertation will be using historical examples to chart the evolution, rather than the destruction or obliteration, of The Formless Empire. How it, just like the geopolitical strategy it advocates, is constantly adapting to new technological and societal changes in order to stay relevant to the land of which it is endemic-and yet throughout it all it retains many of its key characteristics. Like evolution it is neither progressive nor regressive, but simply responds to changing circumstance-a blind system of adaptation for survival which suits a particular ecological niche. One might argue that any region of the world does exactly the same thing-and probably be correct, but the Eurasian steppe and its neighborhood is a region of particularly high levels of migration, mobility, and flux and thus makes the best starting point for examining the principles of geopolitical formlessness in theory as it relates to geopolitics and strategy. Overall, we will see the relevance, both historically and theoretically, of the unique geopolitical model which arose via indigenous roots in the very heart of the world's largest continent.

Chapter Two: Literature Review & Theoretical Methodology

"Realism is the only way of thinking about issues about tyranny and freedom, or war and peace that can truly claim not to be based on faith-and despite its reputation for immorality-the only one which is ethically serious. It requires a discipline of thought that may be too austere for a culture which prizes psychological comfort above everything else-and it is reasonable to question whether liberal societies are capable of the moral effort that is involved in setting aside hopes for world transformation. Cultures that have not been shaped by Christianity and its secular surrogates have always harbored a tradition of realist thought, which is likely to be as strong in the future as it was in the past."

~John Gray

2.0...Summation

Empire in Central Asia seems an almost trite and overdone subject, but a quick review of both theory and historical coverage exposes a lack of overlap between the study of International Relations and history vis-à-vis the grand narrative of Central Asian history past through present, specifically in regards to the assumption of "The Great Game" as wholly representative of the normal geopolitics in Inner Eurasian history, when instead the role of indigenous actors can be taken to be the real starting point for any search survey. There is also a failure to take into account other eras and the continuous process of state and interstate evolution that has been occurring consistently. One could say that while many disciplines, theories, and historical overviews have been completed there has yet to be a comprehensive tying together of source material showing the grand picture of the evolution of a uniquely indigenous type of policy making in Inner Eurasia which connects the policies of early nomadic peoples through more modern state formation and continuing on, in one way or the other, through the present day. Presented below is the state of relevant literature and its inadequacy for addressing the greater and continuous trends in Inner Eurasian grand strategy.

2.1...The Theoretical Texts

This dissertation's main project is essentially to use historical examples to make a case for a new theoretical way to help explain the unique geopolitical evolution and circumstances of Inner Eurasia. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this can be

done by appropriating Sun Tzu's concept of 'formlessness' as a geopolitical one. Sun Tzu's very concept of formlessness, though relayed in a specifically military manner, it is just as useful a geopolitical concept as one of tactical leadership in the field. In *The Art of War* Sun Tzu constantly reminds the reader that it is by being decentralized, mobile, and obscure that one can act where they want and retreat at will. This concept, albeit slightly outside of the Inner Eurasian culture complex, is abundantly useful when exploring the evolution of the grand strategies of the powers involved there, foreign and domestic and will be adapted as terminology to explain a separate, but related, rise of uniquely Eurasian system. What now becomes necessary is to look at other geopolitical thinkers who are relevant to the region, and anything we might be able to harvest from them in our exploration of formlessness as a geopolitical concept.

Halford Mackinder's Eurasian Heartland Thesis as expressed in several articles, of which the seminal *The Geographic Pivot of History* is of course the most famous grand geopolitical study of the region this dissertation covers, in Europe and America at least. Despite being concerned primarily with the issues at stake in the time Mackinder saw as contemporary, it offers great insight into how the low population density and vast inland spaces combine to make mobility the key element of study in the region. He in turn provides the motivation and reasoning for such a form of domination and the purpose of achieving it in the specific context of Inner Eurasia.²⁰ Though it is the purpose of this dissertation to study the indigenous evolution of geopolitics in what Mackinder christened 'The Heartland', and therefore set up a type of counter-narrative to the typical Eurocentric need to understand all part of the world with exported European theories, it is also worth noting that the indigenous developments studied do not run particularly contrary to Mackinder's observations. Mackinder obviously had an understanding of many of the dynamics of the regional history in his observations, particularly in regards to Russia and its geographic heritage.²¹ Most importantly, after charting the fall of this great inland steppe-highway in prominence compared to the

²⁰ Halford J. Mackinder. "The Geographical Pivot of History." *The Geographical Journal* 170.4 (1904): 298-321. *Jstor.org*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 114-6, 150.

maritime system of Western Europe, he postulates that industrialization (particularly railroads) have the potential to return this importance to the region in the future.²²

In the chapter “In Defense of the Heartland-Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics and Hundred Years On”, Colin S. Gray makes the very topical point of Mackinder’s continuing relevance for comparison to how contemporary scholars treat issues such as geopolitics:

“Just as history inherently is strategic, so also must it be geopolitical. The former quality speaks to the persistence of the threat or use of force, while the latter, the focus here, affirms that ‘real international relations occur in geographic space,’ and spatial relationships matter greatly...Modern scholarship on International Relations has been well populated with theories which betray an all but complete indifference to geography in its political and strategic dimensions.”²³

Seeing as the largest scale conflicts in both warfare and diplomacy during the Twentieth Century (the time, arguably, of lowest geopolitical relevance for Central Asia) have been attempts to either impose or thwart Eurasian hegemony through either military or diplomatic means²⁴, this is clearly a subject of significant relevance. Looking at the historical and indigenous evolution of this concept as well as its potential paths for the future is of vital importance, and human- geography interaction remains a key element in this study.

Though geostrategic policy making was not the focus of his intellectual endeavors, another scholar from even further afield in time-if somewhat closer in location-worth looking at is Ibn Khaldun. A fourteenth century historian, traveler, and political theorist from Morocco who spent much time in the Middle East, Khaldun was partly inspired by the history of both the Arab conquests as well as the successions of Turkic migrations which washed over the various regions he called home. He even lived through one, being in Syria during the Timurid invasion and getting to meet the conquering Emir Timur in person during the siege of Damascus and to engage in discussion with him. Interestingly, despite Timur’s fearsome reputation in official history, Khaldun saw him as a masterful prince and heaped praise upon him. We will cover

²² Ibid., 152.

²³ Colin S. Gray in Brian W. Blouet (editor) *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defense of the West* (New York: Geopolitical Series, Taylor & Francis, Oxon, 2005), page 19.

²⁴ Ibid., 9-11.

more of Timur's somewhat misunderstood career later in Chapter Four. Khaldun is therefore a direct witness to some of the very events used as case studies in this dissertation, and this shows in his largely secular and state based analysis of the world he observed. Like Central Asian states he adopted a cyclical view of rise and fall and government for social control rather than religious reasons-as was the common explanation in the Arab world at the time.²⁵

In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun postulates a theory of history encompassing where civilizations arise, and the impact of science on policy, and geography on such things as agriculture. But his main focus is the interaction of nomadic and sedentary people-and his general preference for the virtues of the nomadic people-at least as leaders for the state.

“Sedentary people are much concerned with all kinds of pleasures. They are accustomed to luxury and success in worldly occupations and to indulgence in worldly desires. Therefore, their souls are colored with all kinds of blame-worthy and evil qualities.”²⁶

Nomadic peoples, according to Khaldun, have greater solidarity, or ‘*assibiya*’, which enables them to more effectively utilize leadership, armies, and build larger and better nations. Naturally, however, as they conquer more and more civilized and sedentary people they lose this inherent nomadic virtue and adopt more of the customs of the conquered.²⁷ Without commenting on the subjective values of this process, we will still see something quite similar to this being repeated in cycles through the pageant of Inner Eurasian history.

Khaldun was concerned with creating a safe yet dynamic space for science and trade to progress while embedded within the non-progressive and often cyclic system of international politics. The reason he felt that nomadic people would be both more effective at setting up these temporary periods which would allow domestic society to advance is stated in explicit terms:

²⁵ Fuad Baali. *Society, State, and Urbanism: Ibn Khaldun's Sociological Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pages 66, 73-4.

²⁶ Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Translated by Franz Rosenthal, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958, original publication 1377), page 254.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 265-282.

“These savage peoples, furthermore, have no homelands that they might use as a fertile pasture, and no fixed place to which they might repair. All regions and places are the same to them. Therefore, they do not restrict themselves to possession of their own neighboring regions. They do not stop at the borders of their horizon. They swarm across distant zones and achieve superiority over faraway nations.”²⁸

This type of pan-regional connectivity makes larger and more powerful states, and for a few generations at least (Khaldun estimated an average of four such generations) and in the initial periods when the nomadic ruling elite can harness the wealth of the settled nations but before it is corrupted by said wealth the greatest combination of civic and scientific virtue can be made.²⁹

Ibn Khaldun cannot take such a central place in this study as Sun Tzu, because he focuses less on the strategic element and rather more the setting and the civics of what he studies, but his observations mesh perfectly with looking at the nomadic system from a geopolitical perspective-as well as supporting the idea that good politics can create periods of scientific progress while not necessarily meaning that any progress exists in the political systems which come and go. Of course, Khaldun had no way of knowing that one day the technological progress of the settled world would reset the balance of power against the once militarily dominant nomadic peoples-a phenomenon later chapters of this dissertation will explore further. But even with this inversion of geopolitical power in the realms of the following case studies, Khaldun’s overall idea of the ruling clique having a broader and more flexible understanding would often hold true.

Another large text worth mentioning, more for its possible unexpected lack of use rather than frequent consultation, are the strategic theories of Sir Basil Henry Liddel Hart. Having written an entire treatise on indirect strategy and having for decades before been championing the value of modern strategists studying the campaigns of the Mongol Empire, one might be tempted to assume Liddel Hart’s *Strategy* would be a must for inclusion in this study. The problem is, Liddel Hart seems to have read and become enamored with Sun Tzu but not actually learned many of the fundamental lessons that are taught in the *Art of War*. He correctly deduces that mobility and

²⁸ Ibid., 295.

²⁹ Ibid., 347.

unpredictability are the prize virtues of strategy in this method of thought, but applies them to be rigidly predictable and advocates always operating in the indirect.³⁰ What Sun Tzu actually advocated was to always outsmart and outmaneuver your enemy by being formless, this often means indirect action, but sometimes means very direct action. Certainly, the case studies we will examine will have examples of steppe-space interaction of many geostrategic varieties. Examples in *Strategy* of a direct battle method working are ignored or unconvincingly explained away, most egregiously with the Franco-Prussian War and the Russo-Japanese War.³¹

Though neither primarily about history or international relations, though frequently citing of both, the contemporary philosopher John Gray is worth at least mentioning for making a solid case for the disparaging of progressive ideologies in politics. Just as the Soviet Union failed to install anything but the most temporary and superficial unifying order working for a modernistic sense of progress on the region, so too is it worth at least implicitly implying that other progressive political projects-usually from western Europe or North America- are unlikely to be any more successful if applied to the region.

A large percentage of case studies in this dissertation are from polytheistic, shamanistic, or just generally non-Abrahamic cultures. At no point is this study interested in dealing with comparative religion, but it is worth noting that most world views lack messianic aspects and a progressive ideal to import onto politics. Christianity and Islam are uniquely idealistic and most modernistic political projects are directly descended from them either by reaction or adaptation.³² Even though much of the region studied here would eventually convert to Islam, the values of a more heterogeneous order would never really leave the region, and this further feeds into understanding Inner Eurasia (and I would argue, humanity as a whole) in a politically cyclic fashion. An Abrahamic culture might be far less likely to either produce either a Sun Tzu or be the originator of the very first Formless Empire.

³⁰ Basil Henry Liddel-Hart. *Strategy* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1954, page 324.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 137-142.

³² John Gray. *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2007), page 99.

2.2...Secondary Sources

Despite wishing to overturn its primacy as the most relevant historical era, it is important to examine the nature of the present day understanding of the Great Game, and how it- and its subsequent modern/Soviet period-is an aberration in the historical experience of the region of Inner Eurasia which even so are not removed from the indigenous topic of study presented here.

Seemingly most pertinent to this study is *Nomads, Empires, States: Modes of Foreign Relation and Political Economy* by Kees van der Pijl. Pijl correctly re-asserts the vital role of understanding tribalism in all human relations as well as environmental context. He even mentions such overlaps with this dissertation such as Tang Dynasty foreign policy towards its inland frontier, the 'Pax Mongolica' and Russia and China as societies influenced by their dealings with nomadic people. He goes on, in fact, to say that modern capitalism and its opponents behave as nomadic and non-settled actors of the past once did on the global scale, thus arguing for continuity.³³

It is fantastic that such a work exists within the IR canon. However, dealing with an entirely Marxist viewpoint-while not at all a handicap for the economic issues of the region-still leaves the implicit realist underpinnings of regime survival and above all the geostrategy in military affairs lingering on the sidelines. Since the purpose of this dissertation is more political than economic, it is important to add to the study of the region a non-Marxist perspective of many of the same themes. Also, as previously mentioned, this dissertation seeks to avoid progressive views of political history and Marxism is nothing if not implicitly progressive in its assumption about politics and international affairs. What we will be looking at as far more akin to natural selection, where change is not progressive but merely adaptive and reactive, and the purposes of the adaptations remains constant through the various alterations.³⁴

In *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia* Lutz Kleveman makes the comparison of Central Asian power struggles today and how they mirror the Victorian Great Game, though as he gets into the present day policies and how

³³ Kees van der Pijl. *Nomads, Empires, States: Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy*, Volume I (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pages 24, 89, 96, 206-14.

³⁴ Pijl also makes a somewhat egregious historical error which states that the Ottoman Empire triumphed in the Battle of Ankara over the Timurid invasion, when the opposite is in fact true (page 85).

financial, corporate, and indirect they are³⁵ it becomes harder and harder to square this comparison with an era of massive armies and direct territorial expansion. Karl Meyer makes a similar omission in *The Dust of Empire: The Race for Supremacy in the Asian Heartland* by noting that the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union seems to show a break from the past.³⁶ Of course it was a break from the past of the Great Game, but he fails to note the relevance of older eras where such a rapid and total collapse into smaller units might not be so out of place.

The most thorough survey of contemporary Central Asia, *Inside Central Asia* by Dilip Hiro, is very detailed in noting all the methods that Russia uses to remain a great power in the region, and the methods used by China, India, and the United States use to expand their influence as well. This matches quite well with the general historical experience of the region.³⁷ However there is no discussion of the overlaps these kinds of policies have with the traditional nomadic and semi-nomadic power structures of pre modern states and empires in the region, or the evolution of strategies in the regions and countries involved. Work about the Great Game itself, such as Peter Hopkirk's *The Great Game*³⁸, or Shareen Blair Brysac and Karl Meyer's *Tournament of Shadows*³⁹ focuses purely on the Victorian era and a little around it. One of the things about the era that seems to most intrigue scholars who focus on it is the bipolarity and the lack of large powerful states between India and the core of Russia. This is nothing if not further proof of the Great Game's unsustainability as a typical era in Central Asia, or a worthy comparison to contemporary foreign policy in the region. It certainly has its place, but so does many other eras which need to be examined to understand the full picture.

How Inner Eurasia has been covered so far in both the literature of International Relations and History has been either as a realm that produces bands of predatory conquerors and extorters (the colorfully named "vagina of peoples" by Renee

³⁵ Lutz Kleveman. *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), pages 3, 190.

³⁶ Karl Meyer. *The Dust of Empire: The Race for Supremacy in the Asian Heartland* (Great Britain: Abacus, 2004), 47.

³⁷ Dilip Hiro. *Inside Central Asia* (New York & London: Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., 2009).

³⁸ Peter Hopkirk. *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (Great Britain: Kodansha International, 1992).

³⁹ Shareen Blair Brysack and Karl Meyer. *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Great Britain: Abacus, 2001).

Groussard)⁴⁰, or as the passive and un-empowered victim trapped between the rapacious empires of Britain, China, and Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁴¹ A broad study of the history of Central Asia as its own world unit, and the various forms of indirect imperialism that often spring up in the region, therefore needs to take into account both sedentary and nomadic predatory nations. Although these may appear as two different specimens, their policies influenced each other immensely, and much of the later imperial expansion which came from countries like Russia and China was heavily rooted in their own unique experiences with nomadic conquerors. It is on this topic of the continuity of policy from nomad to settled state that the existing literature is sadly lacking. This is a critically important element in order to study continuity of policy through the ages, and therefore it will be one of the important tasks of this project to seek out the commonalities of policy between the various certain empires that inhabit the Eurasian heartland.

Historical sources are the bedrock of tracing continuity of Eurasian empires, and thus they make up a large bulk of the necessary reference material. The seminal and previous mentioned *Empire of the Steppes* by Rene Grousset, covers the basic history of the nomadic peoples but for further detail of types of political structures, military strategy, and rule there is a rich plethora of historical overviews. For instance, S.A.M. Adshead's *Central Asia in World History* views the pre-modern empires of the region with a particular eye towards their grand strategy. The Timurid Empire in particular is singled out for its geopolitical goals of dominating Central Asia at just the right key geographic points to bring stability to the settled subjects, redirect the trade routes through their territories, and to provide a nebulous frontier that enabled its warriors and nomadic aristocracy to keep occupied through pillaging nearby states.⁴² Also looking at this era is the compilation study *Rulers From the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery*, edited by Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks.⁴³ The numerous essays contained in this work detail such things as the political and strategic objectives of the

⁴⁰ Rene Grousset. *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1970), page 5.

⁴¹ Hopkirk, 7.

⁴² S.A.M. Adshead. *Central Asia in World History* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1993), page 109.

⁴³ Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks, editors. *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery* (University of Southern California: Ethnographics Press, 1991).

Mongols, Mongol policies towards integrating the economy of the whole of Eurasia to serve their needs and submit towards their regulation, the frequency of bipolar, multipolar, and unipolar systems in Central Asia and the cyclic patterns which then tend to emerge in response to each other. They even mention in context the hybrid dynasties in China (such as the Tang) where the first Emperor was half-Turkish and was often called “The Chinese Khaghan.”⁴⁴

Further building on the interconnectivity of China to both the history and the contemporary reality of Central Asian issues is *Eastern Turkistan to the Twelfth Century* by William Samolin. Ostensibly a history of the region of Turkestan (modern day Xinjiang), it naturally deals with numerous interactions between whoever the inhabitants of the area are at a given time and the various Chinese empires that straddled its border. This book contains numerous primary sources (translated) in addition to its mostly secondary source material, including a direct summation of foreign policy objectives from the Han Dynasty.⁴⁵

The strategic overlaps of this example should be obviously compared with contemporary Chinese policies in Xinjiang, and yet so far there has been little effort to show just how traditional modern Chinese geopolitics is. Other interesting anecdotes from this book include a translation of an Orkhon inscription from the Goktürk Empire which admonishes Turkic people of Chinese perfidy and how they seek to use soft power, to put in modern terms, to convert Turkic people into malleable neighbors.⁴⁶ In the collision of settled and nomad, and indirect empires, sources like these are absolutely essential to charting continuity with the present. Continuing on in further eras, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6*, which focuses on foreign and border politics shows the evolution of Inner Eurasian peoples in contact with China and vice versa. Most striking of these examples are the Khitan and Manchus who both did their part to blur the lines between traditional Chinese policy making and the normal political procedures of the more nomadic peoples.⁴⁷ This is a most welcome survey to show the

⁴⁴ Seaman and Marks, 22-43.

⁴⁵ William Samolin. *East Turkestan in the Twelfth Century* (London: Mouton & Co, 1964).

⁴⁶ Samolin, 63-4.

⁴⁷ Herbert Franke and Dennis Twitchett. *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

interconnectivity of China with Inner Eurasia in traditional geopolitical planning, as well as the fears of a compromised and porous frontier in the foreign policy establishment.

The counter to that concern is of course the more aggressive policies of some youthful and more militaristically vigorous dynasties. In particular interest in bridging the gap between distant past and present is the final Imperial dynasty, the Qing. The Qing was the dynasty founded by the Manchus, descended from the Jurchen people who had displaced the Khitans in the 12th Century and whose brief northern regime was ended by the Mongol expansion. The Manchurians placed a highly centralized and bureaucratic regime upon the Chinese, as was the custom of native Chinese rules-but towards the Mongols and the western realms they tried their hand at confederated co-options, and if that failed, overt military despotism. A particularly detailed overview of this historical process of Manchurian state formation and its connections to the present day borders and policies of the contemporary People's Republic is found in Peter C. Perdue's *China Marches West*. This archival-researched tome of Sino-Manchu conquest shows how the old pre-modern border policies of the Han and Tang dynasties evolved under foreign dominion and forged a link with the contemporary foreign policy establishment.⁴⁸

Popular a topic as modern Chinese policy seems to be, and expansive as the historic study of its massive and epic history is, there is not yet a sustained effort to link the two from the perspective of International Relations. This is a loophole this study will seek to rectify. It is always important to remember that long-lived nations such as China have experienced the past few centuries as an aberration-and as the playing field levels for them older methods of policy making from when they were hegemonic powers can become more relevant, rather than less.

China is only half the equation of still-surviving settled states with significant experience as both the victims of Eurasian empires and as their perpetrators. Russia is very important to in the historical context, especially as their experience under the policies of what was called by Europeans of the time and contemporary historians "The Golden Horde" (actually the Kipchak Khanate, or at the time of its founding Ulus of

⁴⁸ Peter C Perdue. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

Jochi) which personifies the nature of indirect empire for the purpose of this study. This parallels contemporary Russian foreign policy today to a certain extent. In *Russia and the Mongol Yoke: The History of Russian Principalities and the Golden Horde* by Leo de Hartog the system of wealth extraction and indirect management the Mongols used on the various divided Russian states are thoroughly detailed. The formless and indirect rule of the Mongols was preferable to many Russians, most notably the Novgorod Republic, than extremely invasive western help would have been. An obvious parallel to modern states in Central Asia relying on Russia or China rather than the US or the EU, and their various liberalist demands, could be made here. In addition, Hartog illustrates clearly both the economic systems set up under this imperial system as well as the great power politics that necessitated mutual dependency, specifically the rise of states like The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the intrusion of The Knights Templar and eventually the coming of Timurid forces.⁴⁹

Charles J. Halperin further elaborates on the structure of nomadic rule upon Russian development, specifically the development of Muscovy, which would of course eventually become the modern Russian state. From carrying over a trans-frontier postal service to toleration of minorities or maintaining influence over vast stretches of alien territory using a combination of indirect methods, the impact of the Mongols on Russian strategic thinking is well documented in *Russia and the Golden Horde*.⁵⁰ Another gap by many regional specialists of Inner Eurasia that remains relatively unexplored is Russia's inherent connection with the greater Inner Eurasia. From pre-Mongol times through to the modern Siberian oil boom the idea of Russian connection with the more Central Asian system is underexplored in the west. The modern Eurasianist thinkers in Russia itself are of course a growing exception. Thinkers like Alexander Dugin may represent an ideologically extreme wing, but they have a valid overall thesis of Russia's integration with its southern and eastern frontiers as vital and overlooked. Eurasianism as a form of soft power, or grand strategy, is discussed by Marlene Laruelle in her book

⁴⁹ Leo de Hartog. *Russia and the Mongol Yoke: The History of the Russian Principalities and the Golden Horde, 1221-1502* (London: British Academic Press, an Imprint of I.B. Tauris & co Ltd, 1996).

⁵⁰ Charles Halperin. *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact of Medieval Russian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

*Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*⁵¹ as well as Graham Smith's *The Masks of Proteus*.⁵² Some western scholarship has also begun to explore the interconnectedness with Russia and Central Asia by looking at the deep historic ties between Russian history and the Turko-Mongolian world, although it is divorced from an International Relations perspective, David Christian's *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia* does a great job putting these events that should have never been divorced in scholarship back together again.⁵³ A Combination with the basic ideas of Eurasianist geopolitics could bridge the gap in both of these views and exploit a previously untapped niche to show the continuous evolution of Russian foreign policy side by side with its more eastern contemporaries. Unfortunately the extreme and often neofascist and totalitarian implications in modern Eurasianist thought belie such hopes as they run quite contrary to the actual examples of governance in the various cases of the Formless Empire in history.

In addition to Russia and China and their various interactions with the steppe and the heartland of Eurasia there are other useful examples that are a bit more removed or at least less easy to categorize. Most notable and interesting of these is that of the Khitan people, who by their very history seem to be a perfect test case for just how flexible an 'onshore balancing' indirect Eurasian empire can be. In *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History* Michal Biran charts the convoluted and intriguing tale of a people who had two different empires, and three different cultural worlds that they moved between. Starting as a nomad force on the very periphery of anyone's system, the Khitans conquered Manchuria, Mongolia and parts of northern China to set up the Liao Dynasty. This was part of a tri-polar system however, and eventually the native Chinese Song Dynasty allied with the Jurchen people to drive them out. The Liao may have fallen, but the Khitans survived. Falling back on their nomadic roots they took to the west, founding a new empire, the Qara-Khitan Khanate, in what is today

⁵¹ Marlene Laruelle. *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008).

⁵² Graham Smith. "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers New Series*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1999), pp.481-494. Published by Blackwell Publishing. Jstor.org Web. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/623236>>.

⁵³ David Christian. *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia* (Volume I: Inner Eurasia from Prehistory to the Mongol Empire. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998).

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and parts of Xinjiang and extending at its height into modern day Uzbekistan. This second chance empire would last a century before being overtaken by the Mongols and rely on very indirect methods and balance of power politics to survive in the cutthroat multi-polar world that was pre-Mongol Central Asia. Added difficulties for them occurred in a subject population that was predominantly Muslim and Turkic under a ruling class of Sinified Shamanistic Khitans.⁵⁴

This quite fascinating but almost unheard of tale of the rise and fall of a truly formless empire shows both the full potential and execution of the types of grand strategy and policy making that this dissertation seeks to examine. Many of the Khitan people would go on to serve as administrators in the aristocracy of the Mongol Empire, which connects them and their policies directly to the evolution of grand strategy to all of Inner Eurasia, as it was the Mongol Empire which was the one time in history where that whole territory was unified under the hegemony of one specific power.

Between these medieval examples and more modern settings lies a crucial bridge where the formless empire went from being an expedient set of policies enacted by nomadic-influenced governments to a centralized and modern state contract. This was what was often referred to in the Middle East and Central Asia as the “Gunpowder Era”⁵⁵ and saw a great increase in the amount of settled or semi-nomadic conquerors which blurred the lines between the previous lifestyle distinction of farmer and herdsman. Nomadism may have been decreasing as the critical element of formlessness, but the policies themselves continued on and evolved to suit technological and demographic changes. In quick succession came numerous state builders who blurred the lines between the old pure nomads and the settled state bureaucracies of what was then the future. Emir Timur redirected wealth through raiding and trade routes through conquest to return to Transoxiana, giving new life to a declining route. This was while attempting to bring prosperity to his settled subjects and a militaristic outlet for his tribal army.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Michal Biran. *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization, 2005).

⁵⁵ Carter Vaughn Findley. *The Turks in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵⁶ Beatrice Forbes Manz. *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

His descendent Prince Babur would be forced to flee the collapse of the Timurid Empire and start anew elsewhere. In a kind of gunpowder era re-enactment of the Khitan relocation he was able to take the army and upper echelons of a mobile state with him into India, and there found the Mughal Empire, which would combine elements of Inner Eurasian with Indian statecraft, creating a new locally adaptable hybrid. In the 18th Century came the last gasp of this kind of Turkic empire building process with both Nader Shah of Iran and later Afghan kingmakers moving to build states and shore up their local power. There was not much mileage left of indigenous Inner Eurasia by this point however, and with the exception of Russia and the Manchu reign in China it seemed like an end to an entire geopolitical way of life. This story was covered most completely in recent years by John Darwin in his historical survey *After Tamerlane*, showing the collapse of what once was the world's largest world-system and its replacement with more maritime powers. The story is correct, but the conclusion of Darwin's work presumes an end or even fundamental change to this system and does not seriously consider its re-emergence in our times or that of the near future.⁵⁷ While it is great that such a survey of this period exists, one which will be cited frequently, this seminal work needs to be seen in a greater context including both the pre-modern past and continuing on through the present.

Getting to the modern period, we touch once more on the previous mentioned era of European great power expansion into the region. The various khanates in the north falling to Russia, the remnants of the Mughal Empire and its neighbors to the British, and the solidification of the Chinese western border under the guidance of the Manchurian Qing Dynasty. This era is certainly not being disregarded by this study, but instead will be treated rightfully as one of many links on a chain. As event the semi-nomadic states lose out to the settled farmer and the modern state the policies of the various competing empires took on a formless dimension, particularly towards each other. Both the eternal Ottoman-Russian frontier in the west⁵⁸ and the questions of Outer Manchuria/Maritime Siberia between Russia and China in the east became nebulous battlefields of influence and intrigue, temporarily increasing, rather than

⁵⁷ Darwin, John. *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

⁵⁸ Charles King. *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

decreasing, in the breakdown of the Russian Empire and before its reunification under the Soviet Union. In the period during this chaos outside powers found the best way to be involved was indirectly and with local mobile proxies. Most notable here was the Japanese intervention in maritime Siberia, as well as the Siberian government in exile led by Alexander Kolchak.⁵⁹ There is much literature exploring this era historically and its impact, but little of it has much to do with the overall geopolitical evolution of Inner Eurasia, and perhaps it is time to examine it as part of that greater whole.

It is also worth keeping in mind that just because empire had passed them by, there is no need to exclude the Mongols from this study as it enters more contemporary territory. Mongolia broke free of China (at least in part) in the early twentieth century and has remained tied to Russian policy ever since. Elements of the Russian Civil War raged within its borders and it became the second country to adopt a Marxist revolution. As a type of almost constant borderland between Russia and China for a century it represents a great case study to see a hangover from previous eras surviving deep into the modernist attempts at centralized collectivization and emerging intact on the other side of the 20th Century ready to pursue the contemporary era.

The failure of Soviet modernization has also been covered by various scholars, though it has yet to be seen as much aside from a policy failure. In *Seeing Like a State* James C. Scott makes the case that local integration is better for development, which is highly relevant. There is, however, no mentioning of how that was indeed the economic policy of most pre-modern Inner Eurasian empires and states, not that one would be expected in such a far ranging book.⁶⁰ One could also argue that it is the contemporary policy of great powers that influence the region today and no longer seek to directly control the independent nations that exist where once there were but large empires. Another author who makes a great contribution is Mark von Hagen who argues that in the Post-Soviet era we should return the concept of “Eurasia” as a world system in order to free ourselves from the tropes of studies just focused on Central Asia or

⁵⁹ Bruce W. Lincoln. *The Conquest of a Continent: Siberia and the Russians* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁶⁰ James C. Scott. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Eastern Europe, and also to reconnect these places with their pre-Soviet past.⁶¹ It is a point that needs to be further explored.

After studying the various forms of indirect and flexible empire within the Eurasian heartland from a historical perspective, more contemporary sources will be needed to show the persistence of continuity. Books like *China: Fragile Superpower*⁶², and *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*⁶³ show the broad strategic framework that the major powers of Eurasia are operating in today and both their domestic and foreign concerns that motivate their contemporary policies. Also relevant to the concerns of indirect empire and great power politics are contemporary works about the present instability and geopolitical fault lines that lurk in former Soviet Space and the policies the Russian government has enacted in such regions.⁶⁴ What these lack is a deep historical perspective that shows the cycles of power and policy over broad stretches of time. They also focus on case studies which lie outside of the self-imposed geographic scope of this work, but it is worth mentioning them for they tackle similar themes that the case studies examined will touch upon, mostly vassalage and indirect geopolitical control.

Though there have been works that do address some of these issues of nebulous conflict outside of conventional nation-state interactions from a contemporary perspective, such as examining the broad view of conflict in books like *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*⁶⁵ by Strathis N. Kalyvas and *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing*⁶⁶ by Christopher Cramer. However these works tend to focus on the more typical international relations hotspots such as wars in Sub-Saharan Africa and nation building

⁶¹ Mark von Hagen. "Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-Paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era." *The American Historical Review*, Vol.109, No.2 (April 2004) pp.445-468, University of Chicago Press. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/1530339>.

⁶² Susan L. Shirk. *China: Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail its Peaceful Rise* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶³ Jeffrey Mankoff. *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2009).

⁶⁴ Svante E. Cornell and Frederick Starr. *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (United States: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Center, 2009).

⁶⁵ Strathis Kalyvas. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ Christopher Cramer. *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing: Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 2006).

through conflict in the Balkans, though they are good at looking at the nature of indirect international action and proxy warfare, but do not focus on Inner Eurasia.

Theories of state-building and empire in Central Asia do find a voice in the historical overview *Empires of the Silk Road*⁶⁷, by Christopher I. Beckwith, one that traces continuity from history through to the post-Cold War world. Given its scope, this is one of the key sources for this dissertation, but even so there are gaps that still need to be filled pertaining the role of geopolitics from the perspective of International Relations which in any case the book is not written to address. Beckwith has a compelling argument about the nature of the nomadic state being an equal part with the settled subjects and pursuing primarily economic objectives. This historical theory deserves to be placed in a contemporary International Relations context. Especially relevant in the nature of interpersonal networks in establishing power politics based on the acquisition and taxation of goods and commerce, rather than direct territorial exploitation. Beckwith is particularly strong in noting that the tradition of the indigenous empires of Inner Eurasia function in this unique way that sets them apart as a case study from the more conventional understanding of empire.⁶⁸

Similarly, the contemporary overview of hot-button political issues in Central Asia contained within *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?* charts the variety of ways great power conflict and influence can drive attempts at hegemony.⁶⁹ Perhaps most relevantly for those who might doubt the relevance of basing a comparison off of the structure of governance used by 'tribal nomads' *The Headless State* by David Sneath makes a welcome addition to the dialogue.⁷⁰ In that work, Sneath argues that the steppe nomad had a fairly typical aristocratic government structure, like most states, and that tribalism played a much less direct role than more typical foreign policy and financial concern normal to governments everywhere. Its execution may have been different, one can

⁶⁷ Christopher I. Beckwith. *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁹ Boris Rumer, editor. *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

⁷⁰ David Sneath. *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

take from this comparison that steppe-based cultures and states can be studied in international relations as proper states, albeit unique ones.

2.3...Geopolitical Sources

Geopolitical literature will be another important part of this project, and will be the foundation upholding many of the theoretical and historical examples. A good overview of geopolitics changing with technology and the times, but staying relevant in the study of International Relations, can be found in Walton's *Geopolitics and the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century*. This work makes the case that all grand strategies have fundamentally geographic objectives, and that this has been the case since the time of Thucydides.⁷¹ Although primarily focused on East Asia and the Pacific Rim, the ideas contained could be applied to Central Eurasia. *Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics*⁷² by John H. Herz examines how technology can impact the strategic concepts of political space, a useful hypothesis in any era, including the Cold War when it was published, but it is especially relevant in the present information age considering the speed that information, finances, and military forces can now move at. This fits in well with Mackinder's ahead of the times thesis about land power resurgence back to its former power in medieval times due to technological advancement, as explained by William H. Parker in his survey of Mackinder's continuing geopolitical relevance: *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft*.⁷³ This topic, as well as its usefulness to the study of contemporary Central Asian politics is also addressed by an even more recent survey of Mackinder's work and its usefulness in understanding Eurasian geopolitics: *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defense of the West*. This work also contains a survey of large directly imposed empires in the 20th Century "Heartland" and how they failed by creating such drastic counter-reactions (Japan, Germany, the Soviet Union, etc).⁷⁴ This is an integral piece of the puzzle to understand why, not just how,

⁷¹ C. Dale Walton. *Geopolitics and the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: Multipolarity and Revolution in the Strategic Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁷² John H. Herz. *Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics* (United States: David McKay Company, Inc., 1976).

⁷³ William H. Parker. *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), page 150.

⁷⁴ Brian W. Blouet, editor. *Global Geostrategy: Mackinder and the Defense of the West* (Oxon: Frank Cass, an imprint of Taylor & Francis, 2005), page 11.

indirect empire comes into existence, and the advantageous it carries over the more overt and brutal forms of hegemony.

How geopolitics is perceived by in various cultural contexts and by the governments of smaller powers is also relevant, as the small powers often determine the options of the larger. This topic is covered quite adequately in the book *Small States in International Relations* though it is not done in an Inner Eurasian context.⁷⁵

The interpretation of geopolitics can also vary over the different priorities of societies as they craft their primary foreign policy priorities. Although this author believes that it is geography which has more of a determining effect on culture than vice-versa, different peoples within the Inner Eurasian system did come to different conclusions on how to manage their indirect empires, which were formless in different ways more often than not. With this in mind *Cultural Realism*⁷⁶ and works like it are relevant studies as well, showing how historical priorities carry certain levels of strategic prestige on contemporary planners.

2.4...Theoretical Sources

As this dissertation seeks to build its own localized theory from historical case studies, it does not deal explicitly with theory as a framework in the same way that it does history. That being said, it is good to appraise the theoretical frameworks which do exist that happen to have the most overlap with the topics in order to draw parallels with more conventional I.R. scholarship.

Neoclassical Realism is particularly useful to the execution of this project because the elements it takes from both classical realism and neorealism, while discarding many others that are only particular to the typical and limiting western/Westphalian system view. Since this research project has its primary focus on the way that states behave toward each other and how they balance, both internally and within alliance networks, as well as how they are motivated by domestic political factors (namely resource acquisition to fuel economic growth and the stability of ethnic

⁷⁵ Christine Ingebrisen, Iver Neumann, Sieglinde Gstohl, and Jessica Beyer, editors. *Small States in International Relations* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

⁷⁶ Alastair Iain Johnston. *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

minorities on their borderlands) realism is of course going to be the most useful theoretical framework. Neoclassical realism is, in particular, of necessity for it takes into account numerous domestic considerations in the study of foreign policy has a more loose and historically grounded, and global definition of exactly what the state is, and thus does not discount the role of economics in power politics as both the cause and the symptom of power imbalances.⁷⁷

Another element of Neoclassical Realism is that it takes away the predictable causality and assumptions of rationality that are so common in the Neorealism more typical of today. As this project seeks to focus on a kind of naturally evolving process that stems mostly from a combination of circumstance and geography, which in turn is tied to policy making responses, whether successes or failures, it would be better to on the Neoclassical side of the Realism spectrum.⁷⁸

Realism is also heavily focused on the examination of hegemony, and how hegemonic powers both come to be, and eventually how they forfeit their position. Hegemony and balance-of-power theory both have a lot to do with the concept of indirect and informal empire. As can be seen in the case of the Golden Horde in Russia, or contemporary Russia in the Central Asian Republics, both of these theories can be combined with a hegemonic state using a system of internal alliance balance-of-power to keep its allies subordinate and maintain its position of dominance and access over and into the “vassal” states. The dichotomy between hegemony and balance-of-power theory itself often has a very modern and western-centric view. For instance, hegemony, rather than balance-of-power is the normal state of international affairs in many regions of the world and eras of history. Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa under the Roman Empire at its height was a decidedly hegemonic system, as have any of the great unified dynasty periods of Chinese history or even the entire world from the fall of the Soviet Union until recently vis-à-vis the United States, as explained quite persuasively in *The Balance of Power in World History*.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, editors. *Neoclassical Realism, The State and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pages 22-26.

⁷⁸ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro. “Neoclassical Realism: The Psychology of Great Power Intervention,” in *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, ed. Jennifer Sterling-Folker (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2006).

⁷⁹ Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little, and William C. Wohlforth, editors. *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

When examining an atypical form of hegemony, as this dissertation seeks to do, both balance-of-power and hegemony no longer seem exclusive, but begin to merge into a similar and fluctuating system. Therefore it is imperative that the insights gleaned from the multilayered interplay between domestic and international factors, as summed up in Neoclassical Realism, be used to study the issue of formless policy making.

Particularly striking and relevant examples of this merger of hegemony with balance-of-power in Inner Eurasian history need to be examined. Obviously “Inner Eurasian History” can be quite a broad swathe of time but since the indirect empire is not a constant, but rather just a particularly reoccurring policy (despite seemingly to be more prevalent there than anywhere outside of the present day) the task is not as daunting as it seems. The primary determining factor for inclusion as a case study will be signs of parallel and continuity with the present situation in Inner Eurasia, or grand strategic theories about its past, present, and potential futures. For instance, it is notable that how The Golden Horde regulated the relations between its underling Russian principalities bear resemblance when compared with the situation of how contemporary Russia manages the affairs of its Central Asian near-abroad. The water disputes between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have eerie parallels with the competition in the fur trade and the hierarchy of tribute payments among the Russian principalities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.^{80 81} Additionally, the Chinese experience, with all its warps and wefts, in its own sphere of influence in Central Asia reflects the unique circumstances of that civilization’s own history within the region. Both Han and Tang Dynasties could achieve hegemony over the East Asian region, but in the open-ended spaces of Inner Eurasia they instead used a strict military rule over the nearby settled areas and then utilized diplomacy for the indirect manipulation of outside tribes and powers.

The Manchu Qing Dynasty of 1644-1911 was the first (aside from the Mongols of course) to take control of the regions, west and north, that threatened China, and although the modern borders of the People’s Republic have shrunk slightly since then, they remain largely intact, albeit without Mongolia and Outer Manchuria, to what the

⁸⁰ Halperin, 126-130.

⁸¹ Meyer, 177.

Qing established with their gunpowder weapons and semi-steppe origins. But it was at this point that the mixed administrative system started to break down, for the mobility of the tribes was finally taking a backstage to the guns of the expanding Russians, who quickly absorbed over the next centuries much of the neighboring territory, leaving behind a bipolar system in Central Asia which would last, albeit with a much larger share of Russian more than Chinese hegemony, until the fall of the Soviet Union. Now, thanks to the imperial scale-back of Russia, the rise of China, and the development of new alliances and war technology, the solid borders of the land give way to the vast fluidity of the steppe once more. This means China's old security concerns from previous eras have returned to haunt her. When this system of direct annexation coupled with peripheral intervention broke down it could leave to grave security concerns and a threatened western border. Thus for obvious reasons it still greatly impacts Chinese policy to this day, especially in relation to the directly annexed area of Xinjiang (new frontier, formerly known as Turkestan) and the indirectly influenced (or at the least attempted indirect influence) of countries like Kazakhstan.⁸²

These types of interactions, which are clearly power politics, also have a variety of overlapping factors such as economic and domestic concerns and fit well with what the research so far has to offer about the experiences of empires in Central Eurasia. It's also a perfect match for Neoclassical Realism whose focus is on regime survival, fear of loss, and reaction to perceived threats that have their roots in historical and geopolitical grievances and objectives.

Though it will not be referenced explicitly in the coming chapters, it is also worth looking at World Systems Theory for another explanation of overlapping interests and strategies which it is good to know about when considering Central Asian geopolitics. World Systems Theory was originally formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein to explain the nature of capitalist economic systems within hegemonic international structures. According to World Systems Theory (WST) both industrial age imperialism and the present globalized economic system are a type of financial imperialism which extracts wealth and resources from the periphery (poorer countries, weaker countries, etc) in order to fuel the growth of the core. Therefore WST deals with indirect imperial

⁸² Christian Tyler. *Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2003).

structures and the ways they can be set up without even direct annexation or administration. It is this element of WST that makes it most useful to understanding the concept of the formless empire.⁸³ It is worth noting, however, that this is a background issue which must take second place to power politics as a primary focus. Still, it explains some methods which are quite directly tied to those very issues as economics usually played second fiddle to regime survival in Central Asia.

At the very nature of WST is the idea that the post-Cold War world is a large an adaptive process that by its multipolar and faced paced nature disregards both Leninist and Wilsonian ideals in equal measure. According to Wallerstein while the 'world system' may be new, many regional systems existed and overlapped each other in history. What is more, those systems were capable of coexistence because they did not adhere to the universalism so prevalent in western and Middle Eastern culture. Examples specifically cited are China during the Tang Dynasty, the Roman Empire, and the Mughal Empire. All of whom were hegemonic powers in their own system but still engaged with other systems elsewhere. The ability for a plurality of economic and political models to exist while still being hegemonic powers is absolutely essential to the understanding of how the Inner Eurasian system worked, even if Wallerstein doesn't focus on that particular example.⁸⁴

"Exploitative Hegemony" is a phrase often coupled with examining the effect of WST on the geopolitical system. Particularly powers which have peaked and fear decline are apt to drain whatever they can from a given international political arrangement.⁸⁵ This shows one of the primary advantages of mobile formlessness, as a state can linger on past its shelf life, so to speak, by maintaining a type of economic hegemony which can have the effect of prolonging its political one. Indeed, in the context of Inner Eurasia, the two types of hegemony may very well be indivisible, and this above all is why both Neoclassical Realism and WST make great partners in understanding the nature and evolution of this region's grand strategy.

⁸³ Immanuel Wallerstein. "Dependence in an Interdependent World: The Limited Possibilities of Transformation within the Capitalist World Economy." *African Studies Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Apr., 1974), pp. 1-26.

⁸⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein. *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World System* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press Syndicate, 1991).

⁸⁵ Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly J. Silver. *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System* (Contradictions of Modernity, Volume 10. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

It is the particular nature of states, empires, and confederacies in Inner Eurasian history to be very loose and open to trade, commerce, and international exchange. In fact some WST theorists think the world system predates Wallerstein's 15th Century origin, specifically in regards to Inner Eurasia. Many place the Mongol Empire as the first World System, whereas others go even further back tracing the long history of international economic activity taking place along the multicultural and multiple empire/national territory through which the trade routes of the Silk Road passed.⁸⁶

In many pre-modern Eurasian empires it was the extraction of tribute that offers intriguing examples when compared with our modern globalized economy. And it is the interplay between power politics, and the movement of trade, capital, and resource extraction that is one of the most vital aspects of this study.

2.5...Methodology

The structure of this dissertation will be unconventional. Its intention is to track the strategies of the indigenous geopolitical concept of The Formless Empire and to chart the course of its continual evolution even as it gradually weakens its hold on the regional Inner Eurasian state system over time before eventually having what could be classified as a potential partial resurgence in the contemporary era. Therefore, the concept itself has the tendency to change from case study to case study. What, in the early chapters, is a comprehensive geopolitical phenomenon encapsulating both the domestic and foreign apparatus of the state and its relationships, gradually is modified to a more finite definition of policy as the countries themselves become more centralized and conventional by modern standards. Nonetheless, the context remains.

While the early examples of the Xiongnu, Khitans, and Mongols represent some of the most blatant archetypes of formless empires by having mobile capitals, different forms of government for different subjects, and ill-defined borders upheld through personal relationships-later examples gradually move in more conventional directions. The Timurids, for example, had a clearly defined capital city in Samarkand and a permanent regional base, yet outside of this immediate area the old ways of nomadism,

⁸⁶ Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, editors. *The World System, Five Hundred Years of Five Thousand?* (London: Routledge, 1993).

raiding, and indirect rule were still remarkably strong. Therefore, the concept of The Formless Empire evolves from one of pure speed and mobility to one of a centralized state core with a massive decentralized and formless periphery.

This process gradually, and then upon reaching the industrial era, quite suddenly, speeds up. Starting with the Russian and Manchu/Chinese conquests and settlements of their own frontier areas, the power of the state sees the withering away of the political element of The Formless Empire, but retains its tactical concepts in order to operate against nomadic rivalry. By this point, the case studies examined will be done so from the perspective that, while even as they bring about the material circumstances which erode the once dominant power of formless geopolitics, the new powers adopt many of its elements into at least their foreign and military policy. This grafting is by no means absolute, and is meant to illustrate a regional phenomenon. For instance, Russian ruling strategy in Central Asia and Siberia is different than it was in Poland or the Ukraine, just as Chinese governance in its core regions, or hegemony in its southern periphery were conducted in other ways due to the different geographic context of those regions. Thus, while the formative experience of nations like China and Russia as they interact with the heartland of Eurasia are critical to charting the evolution of The Formless Empire, they are not assumed to have affected the entirety of foreign policy of these countries on their other border regions (though occasionally this does happen and may be briefly remarked upon).

By the Twentieth Century, the Formless Empire becomes nothing more than a faint echo of policy, seen only in a few shady engagements and the propping up of insurgent surrogates. While the mechanization of warfare after the First World War would likely have led to greater mobility on the battlefield anyway, the various proxy-conflicts in the period of chaos after the Chinese and Russian Revolutions still offered a glimmer of the geopolitical realities in large spaces of low density population such as Siberia and Manchuria, which taxed the logistical infrastructure of conventional states and enabled the rise of less conventional strategic actors, such as Mao Zedong.

It is important to stress once again that the purpose of this study is precisely to see exactly what survived of the original more holistic concept of The Formless Empire, not to make the case that it did not change or weaken with time. However, it is implied

that it provided the historical context for state evolution in the region, and that understanding this context is crucial to a comprehensive world view of the region from a local perspective today, as well as possible avenues of opportunity in its future.

This dissertation seeks to focus exactly on that which charts the evolution of its indigenous geopolitics. Thus, some sources were preferred over others for a variety of criteria. One of which was that it charted evolution and adaptation. This is also true for case studies, which explains the very obvious preference for examples east of the Black Sea. Case studies which prioritized interactions of nomads with future settled agrarian powers were also stressed in order to show how transmission of tactical continuity came about. Some case studies leave the region in question in order to show other interesting adaptations, for instance the rapid littoral evolution of the Mughals, which showed in effect the reverse of what was about to happen in China and Russia. Iran under Nader Shah was also a seemingly atypical example taken because it showed the potential of a semi-nomadic army to wage the massive kinds of campaigns not seen since the medieval era even when deep in the period of technological change brought about by gunpowder. These are critical comparative examples that are included to show how dynamic the Inner Eurasian system could be outside of its homeland, and how this type of cross cultural interaction affected both parties.

Another important concept in selecting both literature and case studies was that it approached a value neutral or even positive view of the nomadic and now peripheral people who make up many of the case studies. Considering thousands of years of having more literate neighbors state that these groups of people were nothing but wild barbarians, it becomes important to follow Beckwith's example but adapt it to an International Relations perspective. Once, Inner Eurasia was the core of regime creation, not the periphery, and always it maintained just as valid geopolitical objectives in its statecraft as did the more conventionally regarded littoral nations with whom it was often at odds. Therefore, to redress the balance here, this dissertation seeks to treat nomadic peoples and their semi-nomadic successors as legitimate state actors whose policies were just as much a product of rational thought and strategic thinking as those of many of their enemies, and indeed, while it may go unacknowledged, they were also

influential on the settled states which would succeed them, first in frontier governance, and then in tactical deployment in the region.

In summation, this dissertation is not an overview of every single possible case study, nor is it to be taken as a survey of anything but the very geopolitical concept which it advocates to be a historical reality and an alternative to more traditional narratives of the region as either a rapacious bastion of land pirates or a weak victim of outside actors alone.

2.6...The Literature Gap

Having explored much of the relevant material pertaining to this subject it becomes apparent there is a significant gap in what is covered, from a geopolitical perspective outside of the modern era. Considering how well Inner Eurasia is covered in general as a topic this may seem surprising, but the gap in the literature is not due to a lack of writing or research, but rather a lack of overlap between grand perspective, different eras, international relations, and history. I.R. scholars have been dismissive or ignorant about the pre-modern heritage of the Eurasian strategic culture complex, or have placed it within a non-indigenous theory of understanding alien to the people of the time. Historians make interesting observations about the geopolitical evolution of native power politics in the region, but tend to cut off their observations once the modern era is reached, or the Cold War came to an end. This leads to the danger of striking the contemporary political situation in the region from the greater record, and divorcing it from being one of many links on an adapting but continuous chain of events. In addition, any attempts to theorize the trends of the Inner Eurasian geopolitical system that is bereft of geographic background or economic and political overlap which can be provided by political theory is likewise missing the big picture.

Therefore, the gap that exists is not in any particular instance, but rather in failing to link all the separate kinds of studies regarding grand strategy in Inner Eurasia together into one cohesive narrative of an evolving system. Using the ideas of an indigenous Formless Empire as the linking mechanism for historical case studies across the eras, it is the purpose of this dissertation to tell the overarching story of the evolution and significance of The Formless Empire in both the past, and today.

Chapter Three: Historic Examples of the Pre-Modern Formless Land Empire

“Such was the harvest of results produced by a cloud of ruthless and idealess horsemen sweeping over the un-impeded plain—a blow, as it were, from the great Asiatic hammer striking freely through vacant space.”

~Halford Mackinder, *The Geographic Pivot of History*

3.0...Summation:

In order to fully understand the workings of the formless empire within the space of Inner Eurasia it is necessary to acknowledge how common this practice of strategic and political mobility combined has been in the history of the region. There are many examples of the formless empire in Eurasian states who originated from nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, more than enough to fill several volumes. Therefore, there will be a specific and focused study of a few examples that illustrate the principle of indirect rule and geopolitical formlessness particularly well, especially in interacting with more conventional neighbors.

Also taken into account are interesting historical parallels to foreign policy decisions that can be observed in the world of today such as balance of power politics, punishment expedition, and the political purpose of economic networks in the maintenance of indirect hegemony. With these factors in mind, the particular case to be used are the Xiongnu people, the Khitan people—who had two successive empires—one in northern China (the Liao Dynasty) and one in Central Asia (the Kara-Khitai Khanate), The early pan-Eurasian Mongol Empire, and specifically the Golden Horde or Kipchak Khanate, the part of the Mongol Empire in Russia and western Central Asia. What these examples uniquely show is not necessarily just the normal pattern of nomadic people becoming sedentary in line with their subject populations of neighbors, as was often the norm observed by Ibn Khaldun up through more modern historians,^{87 88} but fairly stable regime-systems that retained certain essential ‘formless’ characteristics throughout all or most of their existence. Those examples listed above seem to fit this basic

⁸⁷ Zaid Ahmad. *The Epistemology of Ibn Khaldun* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003 Edition).

⁸⁸ David Christian. *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia. Volume I: Inner Eurasia from Prehistory to the Mongol Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), page 179.

geopolitical criterion and thus provide a level of consistency in their policies that make them particularly noteworthy. The case will be made that these empires in particular show parallels to contemporary Eurasian geopolitical thinking and thus offer a unique window to look with hindsight on grand strategies that by circumstance seem to be recurring again today.

3.1...The Steppe Military Model

There have been many nomadic powers throughout the history of Inner Eurasia. Bounded to the north by taiga forests, the south by desert and mountains, and cut with rivers, lakes, and various other topographies, this region is still defined by the centrality of one all-encompassing feature, the steppe.⁸⁹ It is this grassland, dry and yet plentiful for horses and pack animals, that fuels what was arguably the longest lived and most successful set of military cultures of the pre-modern era. Armies existing entirely of cavalry and made up of nomads who had grown up in the saddle possessed the ultimate mobility. The core unit of this success was the mounted archer, who could fire accurately from full gallop. Coupled with the shock forces of a heavy cavalry reserve-to stage a breakthrough at the decisive moment, such a potent and flexible combination often could not be resisted by the armies of settled agrarian neighbors and would dominate the Eurasian military field until the rise of gunpowder and eventually railroads overtook them.⁹⁰ Such forces could also melt back into the endless steppe using both their mobility and lack of permanent settlements (which would need to be defended) and avoid or trap a less flexible enemy. It was quite normal for steppe armies to defeat enemies of significantly greater number by utilizing speed, adaptability, and superior organization.⁹¹

3.2...The Xiongnu and Han: Adaptation Through Imitation

⁸⁹ Stuart Legg. *The Heartland*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 37.

⁹⁰ Rhoads Murphy. "An Ecological History of Central Asian Nomadism," in *Ecology and Empire: Nomads in the Cultural Evolution of the Old World*. Editor: Gary Seaman (University of Southern California, 1989), 46.

⁹¹ Desmond H. Martin. "The Mongol Army." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* No. 1 (Apr., 1943), pp. 46-85 Published by: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Jstor.org. Web. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25221891>>.

Various nomadic steppe people from both north and west of the Chinese civilization had long interacted with the settled kingdoms in China proper. Often when the Chinese were divided the nomadic people could make inroads into the settled areas, and at other times, such as the partially Turkic Tang Dynasty, where China was strong and united it could strike deep into the nomadic steppe and keep the various peoples there divided. A rare historical example of a bipolar system developing amongst this perpetual conflict occurred in the earlier Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) which faced off against the Xiongnu, a nomadic people who occupied both the Mongolian steppe and the area known today as Turkistan. Here a unified nomadic state and a unified Chinese dynasty existed at the same time and the differences between the two could not have started off as any more distinct.⁹²

The Xiongnu Empire was founded by Modu Chanyu. It was a construct based around the mobility of the horse and of livestock through pastureland and was regarded as having particularly uncouth and uncivilized subjects by Chinese scholars of the time. This bothered the Xiongnu little; however they had no agricultural capacity or economic power. Han China, on the other hand, had plenty of both as well as desirable trade goods. In order to be able to reward his vassals and warriors, as well as present diplomatic gifts to other non-Chinese people, it became a vital foreign policy objective to acquire these goods for Modu Chanyu. Although the Xiongnu had captured cities and goods manufactories by taking over the Tarim basin cities, without some form of integration into the Chinese economy they were doomed to stagnation if they could not trade.⁹³

Given that the only significant advantage the nation possessed over the Han Dynasty was its military capabilities, and that the Chinese were notoriously suspicious of trading with nomadic barbarians for various reasons⁹⁴, the natural course of action for the new Xiongnu state was to begin acquiring what they needed through raiding. These

⁹² William Samolin. *East Turkestan in the Twelfth Century* (London: Mouton & Co, 1964), page 21.

⁹³ Carter Vaughn Findley. *The Turks in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32-3.

⁹⁴ It was thought, probably correctly, that this trade would make the nomads stronger. Many Chinese governments in history, most notably the Ming Dynasty, effectively instituted economic blockade upon nomadic neighbors. Usually this just made warfare a more frequent, rather than less frequent occurrence however, even if it often resulted in Chinese acquisition of superior horses from the northern pasturelands. See Beckwith on trade (pages 21-23 and 89) and Samolin (42).

raids eventually convinced the Chinese that it would be easier and cheaper to allow trade with their northern neighbors, resulting in a treaty in 198 BCE stipulating that the Xiongnu were to be treated as diplomatic equals, and rendered tribute in the form of grain and luxury goods in exchange for non-aggression.⁹⁵

This arrangement would soon come to be seen by both sides as mutually beneficial—at least for a little while. The raid could be destructive to the economic patterns active on both sides of the border, therefore representing a potential burden for the nomads as well. After all, the treaty was in force for 60 years and during the ensuing stability the Xiongnu, a nation supposedly built on war, kept wealth flowing into their territories continually and without a renewal of major war. The construction of one of the first almost entirely pastoralist states effectively became based on the control of trade networks and the exacting of tributes.⁹⁶ Although this model of imperial governance may have arisen out of the unique nature of a state ruled by nomadic pastoralists, the plan of the army patrolling key areas and allowing large amounts of the people in its network a certain degree of autonomy was the beginning of a highly successful and often repeated type of grand strategy in the lands of Inner Eurasia. After all, rather than bear the costs and effort of direct rule, why not engage in a mutually beneficial—if unequal—relationship? To quote David Christian on the nature of the Xiongnu system: “Macro-parasites, like micro-parasites, have to protect their hosts.”⁹⁷

This dangerous game was of course being played by both sides. The Chinese had been building up a cavalry based armed force of their own, often supplemented with various steppe peoples. The treaty system may have had benefits for them, but it was humiliating and clearly benefited the Xiongnu more. Eventually, the officials of the Han Dynasty came to the conclusion that it was time to overthrow this order for one more favorable to their interests and security. They would do so by adopting many of the tactics and strategies of the Xiongnu.⁹⁸ It was time to make their own formless empire, only this time with the players reversed.

⁹⁵ Christian, 185-6.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 187-190.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 192.

⁹⁸ Findley, 35.

The Han spent their time fostering internal division in the empire who had opened up their trade routes. Freedom of travel can work both ways, and Chinese money and goods were effective at undermining the unity of the Xiongnu, as well as opening up new contacts with peoples further afield who also bordered the Xiongnu state. A lightning campaign launched by the general Ban Chao (the supposed originator, in China at least, of the maxim “Use barbarians to fight barbarians”) accomplished this feat by heavy reliance on nomadic auxiliaries and a reported interest in the strategies of Sun Tzu. His actions surely implies this is true, as wreaking havoc indirectly through deception before even launching the main assault is a mainstay of the Master’s thinking.⁹⁹ Soon the Xiongnu state was split in two, with one half a tributary of the Han Dynasty and another weakened, but still a foe. Now the battles would take place far from Chinese territory on one or another of the Xiongnu states.¹⁰⁰ Both sides had played for total hegemony of the formless variety over the borderlands, and it seemed the Chinese had won, but this was only the first round.

The nomadic peoples were kept largely on the defensive for a while after this turn of events. As late as 120 CE Pan Yung, a court official, was advocating a continued vigilance towards the western regions in a way that smacks of what would evolve into the tropes of Eurasian formless empires:

- “1. The occupation of the Western Regions denies it to the Hsiung-nu.
2. The cost of occupation is partially defrayed by the payment of tribute and advantageous trade.
3. Neglect of the region will put the Oasis States and the trade routes in the hands of the Hsiung-nu who will profit thereby.
4. A strong Hsiung-nu state inevitably turns to ravage the borders of the empire.¹⁰¹”

Now that the shoe was on the other foot it was time for the Xiongnu and other Turkic peoples of the region to lament their fortunes as the Chinese redirected their trade networks and political order to suit their own ends. Gradually the cost of constant deployment of Chinese armies (who often could not live on their own without a massive

⁹⁹ Sun Tzu, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Christian Tyler. *Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2003), pages 31-2.

¹⁰¹ Samolin, 42.

infusion of supplies on the steppe) to border forts began to wear down the government, and as the Han Dynasty began to scale down the scale of the operations was constantly being pulled back closer and closer to the homeland. The Han would eventually fall and so a long period of disorder would reign in China-and it was the same on the steppe until the coming of the Turkic Empire. The partially Turkic Tang Dynasty, which had its own nomadic heritage would however largely pick up the policies of the Han and continue them towards the Turks. Chinese armies of the 7th and 8th centuries would play the game of vassalage and indirect rule tit for tat with the Turkic peoples. China had gone from being an imitator of the Formless Empire, to being an active player under Tang Taizong, combining the elements of both worlds built on the historical experience of both Xiongnu and Han Dynasties.¹⁰²

As an early Turk inscription said:

“The Chinese people were wily and deceitful...the Turkish people let their state...go to ruin...Their sons worthy to become slaves, and their daughters worthy of becoming ladies became servants of the Chinese people. The Turkish lords abandoned their Turkish titles. The lords who were in China held the Chinese titles and obeyed the Chinese emperor and gave their services to him for fifty years.”¹⁰³

The nomadic state may have pioneered the formless empire but the Han and Tang Dynasties showed that it could be applied by settled states as well. A Eurasian-wide phenomenon of power politics had begun-but it had yet to reach its apogee. That would come later, also evolving in the borderlands between China and the Eurasian nomad, though in a different location-and with different results.

3.3...A Khitan House Divided Can Still Stand

The Tang Dynasty was crumbling in the 10th Century. It had previously been rocked by decreasing power of the central government and massive rebellions. Now the declining government, which was on its last legs, invited a people outside the empire to come in and shore up their northern frontier in 936. These people were the Khitans.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Beckwith, 125-7.

¹⁰³ Findley, 41.

¹⁰⁴ Legg, 213.

The Khitans had originated in the north in what today is known in much of the world as Manchuria or the North-East Province of China. For much of their history before they rose to prominence they had been weaker than many of their neighbors and thus had learned to be canny and adapt to whatever balance of power currently held sway.¹⁰⁵ With their conquest of the Po-Hai kingdom in Manchuria and the invitation by the Tang to enter the game of Chinese power politics their fortunes were about to change quite drastically, however.

Previously in Chinese history, the steppe nomads had largely waged war for access to trade and tribute. The governance of settled people was at best a sideshow to the actual purposes of regime support and acquisition that the nomadic rulers. This would begin to change with the Khitans, who set a precedent of those based in the Liao River valley adopting a different kind of political model for nomadic/settled interaction.¹⁰⁶ The Liao river valley was a unique geographic area in eastern Eurasia which combined pastoralists, small agricultural villages, and cities into one relatively small area where they overlapped. This was not the last time this region in particular would create a unique hybrid dynasty (the Jurchens and Manchus would follow) but it was here, at the start of Khitan rule, that a unique kind of formless empire would start to develop. One nomadic, yet with a large settled element that was an important part of the state.¹⁰⁷

In 907 a leader known as Abaoji united the Khitans and their immediate neighbors into a proper regional force. As the Tang collapsed utterly the Khitans used their clout to justify annexing large tracks of northern China into their rule. Despite the immense opportunities this presented in terms of having direct influence over an agriculturally active and craft-producing populace there were also dangers for the Khitans. The fragmented Chinese states south of them could all economically outperform the new Khitan state through their population alone-and there were still other nomadic groups not in the Khitan alliance network that could simultaneously threaten the northern borders. Adding the acquisition of large amounts of Chinese farmers, merchants, and officials, could become an internal danger in such an uncertain time.

¹⁰⁵ Herbert Franke and Dennis Twitchett. *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), page 47.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas J. Barfield. *Inner Asia and Cycles of Power in China's Imperial Dynastic History*. Contained in *Rulers From the Steppe*, edited by Gary Seaman and Danial Marks, page 24.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

Therefore, Abaoji improvised. He would rule both his nomads and his settled subjects in the ways pleasing to them both, and be a Khan and an Emperor at the same time. Therefore the Khitan Khanate became the Liao Dynasty, named for the unique river valley that had spawned this innovative compromise between ways of life.¹⁰⁸ This unique place would continue being the birthplace of new hybrid dynasties all the way through the 1930s, and we will return to it in future case studies.

The Liao Dynasty sought accommodation by maintaining a nomadic government that still conducted business in major cities which were designated as “regional capitals” that the ruling entourage would travel continuously between. Each city had its region and locally recruited permanent staff of bureaucrats. The northern and western sections of the empire were ruled in the manner of steppe people with personal relationships with the ruler and interwoven relationships between families, lords, and vassals.¹⁰⁹ Pasture land was the primary resource for these people who remained the ruling elite even as they kept to their traditions. This way they could avoid the fate of many other conquest dynasties that had acculturated too much to the settled Chinese way, lost their military talents and flexibility, and succumbed to other invaders. To be a proper ruling class they had to maintain their nomadic way of life, as they saw it.¹¹⁰

The story in the south was quite different. The areas populated by Chinese were given a certain amount of regional autonomy, including the rights to keep the traditional Chinese Confucian examination system to select their administrators. The overall number of governors started out as almost always Khitan but over time there was syncretism between the two peoples, which allowed many Chinese to rise to very high positions in the southern districts. The Chinese sections of the empire, given this level of decentralized autonomy, pretty much conformed to the will of the state and remained loyal subjects, continuing on much as they had during the earlier Tang Dynasty.¹¹¹

Aside from territories held in Manchuria, Northern China, and Mongolia, the Liao sought to avoid a full grab at total control and rather extended their influence outward. This would be accomplished by either using indirect methods or enforcing a peace

¹⁰⁸ Franke and Twitchett, 56-62.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 78.

¹¹⁰ Beckwith, 173.

¹¹¹ John Meskill. *History of China*, contained within *An Introduction to Chinese Civilization*, edited by John Meskill and J. Mason Gentzler (London & New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pages 144-6.

treaty after launching a military campaign on their enemies that would allow them to retain their autonomy under certain conditions. By the time of Abaoji (known to his Chinese subjects as Emperor Taizu of Liao at this point)'s death in 933 Khitan armies had driven deep into parts of China, westerly lands north of Tibet, and the Korean peninsula. Yet in each of the above cases, they withdrew once they had set up an open trade relationship and at least some nominal form of tribute network which flowed from the defeated party to the five capitals. The raw materials and luxury goods stimulated this economy, and the integration with the nomadic Khitans controlling the trade routes (and becoming literate in order to manage this economic web better) made them a vital link in the territories north of native-ruled China. Without direct control a relatively small number of Khitans could maintain a formless empire.¹¹²

The multitude of Chinese states in the south had finally begun to coalesce into something larger and by 960 the Sung Dynasty had formed. In their quest to reunify all the lands holding a primarily Chinese population the Sung struck north with their military to recapture the parts of northern China held under Liao rule. The massive Sung armies were able to eradicate the small states that had been able to survive as tributaries of the Liao, but once they entered Liao territory proper they were utterly crushed by the superior speed and mobility of the Khitan army at the Battle of Kao-Liang River. The Liao counterattack did much damage to Sung territory but the Khitans lacked the numbers to continue the advance and so the conflict to resolve hegemony of northern China descended into stalemate. A peace treaty between the two powers was concluded, and a stable border was drawn as a result. A bipolar power structure emerged in the Chinese world system.¹¹³

The border would not remain entirely stable due to various outbreaks over disagreements, though there would be a lack of full scale war once it was properly demarcated. Additionally, the Khitans began to prepare the Liao state, which was heavily outnumbered by the Sung, for a defensive posture towards its southern neighbor. Along the immediate area of the border rice cultivation was banned (though not other forms of agriculture) in order to facilitate the movement of cavalry, which

¹¹² Franke and Twitchett, 67.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 86.

would be significantly hampered by the extensive irrigation needed to supply rice paddies.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, the less settled frontiers of the Liao state began a process of further integration of their allies. Many of the minor tribal vassals who had been attached to the Liao state started to take lucrative government positions rather than remain as tribute paying vassals. This process was noticed with some alarm by the bordering vassal state of Korea, who the Sung tried to make an alliance with on the pretext of common defense of “civilized values” but the mobility and striking power of the Liao armies coupled with their economic integration within the policies of Korea acted as enough deterrent to prevent this plan from becoming a reality.¹¹⁵

Finally, after a long dance between cold war type jockeying and occasional flare ups, and unexpected victory won by the Liao military finally convinced the much larger Sung Dynasty to give up any attempts to overthrow the balance of power, either by attempting to diplomatically outflank the Liao or by pushing the irredentist claims on the border. The treaty of Shan-Yuan, signed in 1004 finally settled the matter for the long term. According to the statues of the treaty:

1. The Sung would pay the Liao annually 200,000 lengths of silk and 100,000 ounces of silver as a ‘contribution to military expenses’ (effective indemnity for the war-phrased as such to diplomatically avoid the word tribute).
2. An even more rigidly demarcated border.
3. No cross-border disturbances or interference with the agricultural output of the other state.
4. Neither side could give refuge to the fugitives of the other.
5. No new border fortifications could be built.
6. Both sides, in addition to observing the above points, must cultivate good relations and respect each other’s territorial integrity.¹¹⁶

For a century after this treaty was drawn up the borders remained stable and peace reigned between the two kingdoms. The two emperors went so far as to declare themselves of the Northern and Southern courts, Liao and Sung respectively, and to refer to each other as brothers. The only way that the Liao state with its significant lack of comparative strengths to the Sung in terms of economic might, population,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 95.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 99.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 105-110.

agricultural output, and the like could be considered an equal was because of its wealth derived from mobility in its civics and military elements, and formlessness in both its organization and diplomacy. It was through these principles-whether they were naturally occurring evolutions of policy or a specifically planned grand strategy-that the formless nature of Eurasian empire pioneered by the Xiongnu (and of course possibly others from eras not recorded-reached its first germination into a codified state policy on multiple levels under Khitan administration. The Liao Dynasty, for all intents and purposes, was as formless an as empire can get and still be recognizable as a state. Its diplomacy was about maintaining profitable resource extraction routes and it enforced these objectives by keeping its nomadic warrior base sharp and deployed-ready to strike wherever it might need to be needed. That this survived in the face of such a large and daunting foe as the Sung Dynasty (as well as numerous other nomadic peoples swirling around its periphery) for more than a century is testament to its effectiveness. Some scholars estimate, based on surviving records from the Liao, that 750,000 Khitans were able to maintain a privileged position over 2,400,000 Chinese subjects and 650,000 other ethnicities. Altogether a state of 3,800,000 people, led by an ethnic minority of economically minimal origin became a broker of international trade while simultaneously holding its own in a largely bipolar system against a far larger state. Estimates for Sung population range into over 100,000,000 though there are no specific numbers for this earlier period of its history.¹¹⁷

With a stable, yet formless, border the peacetime elements of Khitan policy and their flexible systems' effectiveness at enacting what in more modern parlance might be termed 'brain drain' from the Sung or Tanguts became apparent. Soon they attracted immigrants, laid off Sung bureaucrats and scholars, and those down on their luck or seeking new opportunities. Because of the peace of Shanyuan the two states on the eastern border were no longer technically enemies and so many opportunists took advantage of the situation and became people who could work for both dynasties, circumstances depending. Going to the Liao and then returning later to the Western Xia or the Sung was an option which many people took, becoming a type of government

¹¹⁷ Meskill, 142-3.

temp worker.¹¹⁸ As Zhang Li wrote in the Liao Shi: “I am not accustomed to the local customs of the north, to the food and drink, or to the living accommodation, so I often feel depressed. And it was simply because of this that I ran away.”¹¹⁹ Such workarounds were not only possible, they helped the Liao attract as much talent as possible.

Even with such a stable system the Sung Dynasty was not content. As the Liao rocked from a tribal rebellion in its northeast the Song seized the opportunity to ally with the Jurchen people of northern Manchuria and this Liao Empire eventually unraveled under the pressure. Jurchens jumped from victory to victory and soon they had fully taken over the heartland of the Khitan state, as well as turning on their erstwhile Sung allies and driving even further south than the Khitans ever had. The Jin Dynasty was born. It was a construct much more conventional (in Chinese eyes at least) in that soon the ruling nomadic class began to settle down and become more Sinified rulers. The bipolar system was soon recreated in China—at least until the coming of the Mongols a hundred years later. Much of the Khitan nobility stayed behind and ended up serving the new Jurchen masters, but many others, including much of the military aristocracy—who were still nomadic—packed up their gear and headed west. The story of the Khitan techniques of imperialism and great power politics was not yet over.¹²⁰

3.4...The Khitans Return for Seconds at the Imperial Buffet

Yelu Daishi, a royal descended from the noble Liao lineage and a successful general, led many Khitans westward in the wake of the losses to the Jurchen people. Having escaped to freedom from Jin captivity he rebelled against the incompetent figurehead Liao remnant government and took almost 100,000 Khitans out just in time as that government finally collapsed. They passed into the territory of the Uighurs who gave them their submission and looked to establish a new base somewhere in Central Asia proper.¹²¹ Despite the positive reception of the Uighurs it looked like the Khitan people

¹¹⁸ Naomi Standen. *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossing in Liao China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 64.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁰ Legg, 217-8.

¹²¹ Michael Biran. *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History* (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22-32.

had fallen from glory into obscurity, left to be trampled in the wake of other, newer, power brokers. But having survived in large part due to their mobility, the Khitans also brought their grand strategies and techniques of rule west with them. The Liao Dynasty may have been gone, but its influence was about to be reborn in a new region.

After realizing the Jin were too strong to effectively counterattack from the west the Khitan refugee army moved further towards Central Asia, where the Karakhanid state invited them to annex parts of their former territory that they had lost to rebellious tribal army forces. This plan backfired for the Karakhanids however, as the arrival of Khitans inspired their Qarlug subject people and ask for Khitan protection against both the Karakhanids and their intrusive Seljuk allies. Seeking to exploit this opportunity to build a new Khitan empire, Yelu Daishi gathered his forces for an epic battle against his combined foes, defeating them decisively at the Battle of Qatwan outside of Samarkand in 1143. The shock of this defeat unraveled the coalition against the Khitans and enabled them to take over large swathes of territory in Transoxiana.¹²²

Once again the Khitan found themselves as a ruling minority controlling vastly different subjects who were largely tradesmen and settled farmers. They had not, however, forgotten the lessons learned during the earlier Liao Dynasty. Their new state, the Kara-Khitai Empire, was a successor in more ways than just the ethnicity of the ruling class. Although retaining a pseudo-Chinese court culture (for the prestige it brought these pagan conquerors of Muslims lands as well as tradition)¹²³ the Kara-Khitai hired locally extensively to man their bureaucracy and made sure to keep their nomadic traditions intact, as before. Additionally, they made sure to set themselves to appear more as arbiters than direct rulers by appearing to be the mediators of interests regarding cities, farmers, and nomadic populations.¹²⁴ In foreign policy as well they maintained very stable borders with their neighbors and most military actions were small-scale and focused to establishing tributary networks or prevent the rise of another regional power by balancing against them. Most of the neighbors of the Kara-Khitai

¹²² Ibid., 39-44.

¹²³ The Kara-Khitai Khan was known as Khan or Gurkhan in Central Asia, but still had official Chinese imperial titles and the empire was referred to as the “Western Liao” by both Jin and Song courts. The Song of course realized by this point what a mistake they had made in supporting the Jurchens against the Khitan and sought to build up the credit of the old Liao over the present Jin foe (Christian, 378).

¹²⁴ Biran, 135.

would end up as domestically autonomous and largely recognized as independent states, so long as they kept the supplies and money flowing through trade routes.¹²⁵

For another hundred years this state would continue on, in Islamic Central Asia, using the formless tactics Abaoji had developed to integrate into the periphery of Chinese civilization. This state would be absorbed by another rising power eventually though, the Mongols. It is a testament to the adaptability of the Khitans that many of them became quite high ranking nobles and government advisors in the Mongols. The primary governing administrator of that empire was a Khitan of the royal line, Yelu Chu'Tsai, and the influence of Khitan geopolitical grand strategy would soon make itself felt through this new much larger empire.¹²⁶

3.6...The Mongol World Empire

The most successful group of nomads at conquering a vast empire (which was also the only one to control all of the steppes and borderlands from the Ukraine through Manchuria simultaneously) was the Mongol Empire. At its height the Mongol Empire stretched from Korea to the Hungarian steppe and from the lower Siberian forest to the borders of India, Vietnam, and Palestine. This vast pan-Eurasian empire, while always decentralized to a certain extent, remained fairly unified until the reign of Kublai.¹²⁷

The founder of this empire, the previously exiled son of a slain minor chieftain, was Temujin. Temujin had worked his way up from a minor raiding party leader to eventual unifier and leader of all the Mongol tribes, as well as a few non-Mongol steppe nomads. At his Khuriltai (a kind of electoral gathering to determine the next leader) he adopted the name Chinggis Khaan, often rendered in English as 'Genghis Khan' or 'Universal Ruler'. The Mongol document of law, the Yasa¹²⁸, was also formulated. It provided religious tolerance and meritocracy across ethnic lines to those who were loyal subjects of the Khan. It also guaranteed the safety of merchants, who the government

¹²⁵ Ibid., 85-6.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 87-9.

¹²⁷ Luc Kwanten. *Imperial Nomads: A History of Central Asia, 500-1500* (Leicester; Leicester University Press, 1979), pages 145-150.

¹²⁸ Rashid al-Din (translation by J.A. Boyle). *The Successors of Genghis Khan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971, 1317), 74, 77.

was charged with protecting during travel as well as in general. With the coming of his rule came campaigns against the Jurchen Jin state and the Kara-Khitai Khanate. The former being gravely diminished (though it would not be destroyed until after the Khan's death) and the latter being totally annexed into the Mongol Empire.¹²⁹

Through both of these conquests the illiterate and pastoral Mongols—who had been considering wholesale extermination for the settled peoples near them in order to expand their livestock range—came into possession of the talents of many Khitan administrators. Being the ruling class of the Kara-Khitai as well as much of the bureaucracy of the Jin, but still retaining their identity as pastoral people, they were excellent pre-existing intermediaries for the Mongols to use. Indeed, Yelu Chutsai, a Khitan court official in the Jin Empire, was co-opted into the administration of the Mongol Empire second only to the Khan himself.¹³⁰

Yelu Chutsai was immensely powerful with duties not eclipsed by anyone save the Khan. It was he who talked the Mongol ruling class out of their plans for wholesale extermination of the settled folk, arguing that dead people don't pay taxes, make works of art, or provide markets for trade. The Chinese were spared from genocide. The Khitan legacy was living on.¹³¹

Meanwhile, the empire was continuing to expand at an unprecedented rate, even by the standards of the large geopolitical entities of the Eurasian steppe. After an attack on the merchants and ambassadors of the empire by the Kwarezemian Shah the Mongols turned west, and after destroying this new foe in a lightning campaign combining surprise attacks and massive military movements and deception, entered the Caucasus and the Ukraine in a reconnaissance-in-force which caused the subjugation of numerous minor kingdoms and tribes, and inflicted a foreshadowing defeat on a coalition of Russian and Cuman military forces assembled to stop their progress. By the death of Chinggis Khan in 1227 the Mongol military machine was already a precedent setting force of conquest on the world stage.¹³²

¹²⁹ Igor de Rachewitz (translator). *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2004) pages 124-5, 129, 254.

¹³⁰ Biran, 87-9.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² David Sneath. *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University, 2007), 167-174.

Mongol imperialism, despite its massive scope, was predicated on the idea of indirect rule.¹³³ Local elites were left in charge where they could be depended on. When they could not be trusted a loose coalition of Mongol elites, often women, would take charge of regional governing. The primary objective was tax collection and securing the trade routes. As shamanists the Mongols cared little for religious conversion and used Confucians to administer Muslim lands and Muslims to administrate China. What came from this was not empire in the more famous Roman, Chinese, or Victorian sense, but something based on hierarchy and wealth extraction assuredly, but without either the direct political control nor the 'civilizing mission' or cultural conversion attempts so common to those types of states. It was a partly parasitic but also symbiotic relationship which did not require the death or conversion of the host.¹³⁴

Given the small numbers of the Mongols and the vast expanses of territory they ruled these tactics may have been a necessity, and it was coupled with near total ruthlessness in warfare and in dealing with rebellions, but the result was in effect a type of large scale free trade agreement and declaration of religious toleration. Perhaps (though this can be nothing but speculation) the Yasa had something to do with the relative staying power of such a large and loose geopolitical entity. Either way Jack Weatherford refers to this height of a 'Pax Mongolica' as the first true era of globalization and of a sustainable international trading class and of inter-regional exchange of ideas, particularly that of the sciences.¹³⁵ Amy Chua also gives the height of Mongol rule an entire chapter as a supporting case study for her thesis of 'hypermultipowers' who rule through utilizing multicultural tolerance. Indeed, her central thesis of how the indirect rule of major powers is fostered by the accumulation of human capital by utilizing a hands-off approach to statecraft is nearly exemplified by the example of the Mongol Empire. The carrot was relatively benign governance (which

¹³³ Ibid., 44.

¹³⁴ Beckwith, 188.

¹³⁵ Jack Weatherford. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (United States: Crown Publishers and Three River Press, 2004).

could occasionally still impose massive taxes), the stick was the ruthless terror of the mobile armies.¹³⁶

This type of land-based empire is not usually regarded as analogous to how offshore balancing or maritime empires are considered. But perhaps it should be. It shows clearly that in the space of Eurasia a tradition of formless flexibility brought about by nomads could exist in a massive scale and last for a significant amount of time, touching many disparate societies as it expanded. To quote the scholar Gary Seaman:

“Although the Mongols created their empire with a technology of cavalry maneuver and siege trains rather than with round ships and cannon, they showed many political and strategic objectives with maritime states like the Portuguese, the English, and the Dutch, who batted off the tribute and trading systems they installed in their hegemonies.”¹³⁷

Eventually the centrifugal forces and divergent interests of the distant sub-Khanates began to pull this unity apart. The ascension of the controversial Kublai, who had proclaimed his desire to establish an official dynasty over China in 1260 (what would become the Yuan) alienated many Mongol traditionalists and further drove the Kipchak Khanate (Siberia and Russia), the Ilkhanate (Iran, Iraq, and the Caucasus), and the Chaghatai Khanate (Central Asia) further away from the new Yuan (Mongolia, Korea and China). Many of these sub-Khanates would retain official status as tributaries, though their self-governance was never truly in question and for a long time to come they would still endeavor, despite the political division, to maintain the openness of the trade routes and the safety the merchants who traveled between them.¹³⁸

3.7...A Golden Opportunity for the Kipchak Khanate

Despite this overwhelming achievement, the Ulus of Jochi, known more commonly in its era as the Kipchak Khanate and more famously in the west as the Golden Horde,

¹³⁶ Amy Chua, *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance and Why They Fall* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xxi, 300-5.

¹³⁷ Gary Seaman and Danial Marks, editors. *Rulers From the Steppe: State Formation On the Eurasian Periphery* (Ethnographics Monograph Series, Monograph No. 2, Ethnographics Press, University of Southern California, 1991), page 4.

¹³⁸ Kwanten, 223, 260.

always had a somewhat larger degree of autonomy than the other subdivisions of the empire, and also had many more semi-independent vassals rather than just lightly ruled subject populations. This was due to its faraway location from the center of Mongol power and orientation towards Europe. Europe was given much less priority in the later Mongol Empire compared to rule over such places as Central Asia, China, and Iran.¹³⁹

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It was this soon to be autonomous part of the Mongol realm that showcased the nature of indirect imperialism and power politics common to Inner Eurasia's power relations particularly well, as well as serving as a great example of interaction between Slavic and Turko-Mongolian peoples. It is the policies of this entity, The Kipchak Khanate, which should be examined to understand the particular nature of flexible steppe based power politics and how they can affect people radically different from them without direct annexations or outright imperialism. Also, this would be one of the formative experiences in Russian history-and the Russians would come to be quite the primary actors in the post-Mongol era. The Mongol Empire as a whole may have had its tradition of indirect power and formlessness in policy, but it was this western most outpost that by its very nature would exemplify these principles the most thoroughly,¹⁴¹ which is why it, more than any other part of the empire in the limited space we have to examine it, deserves such a thorough exploration.

While the founding Khan of the Mongol Empire, Chinggis Khan, was still alive the Mongols had previously conducted a reconnaissance in force into the Russian principalities in 1223. The culmination of this first campaign had been the Battle on the River Khalka which had shattered the combined armies of the Russian kingdoms. The Mongols then withdrew this relatively small scouting detachment to rejoin the main armies for further campaigning against the northern Jurchen-Chinese Jin state.

¹³⁹ Christian, 410-12.

¹⁴⁰ Leo de Hartog. *Russia and the Mongol Yoke: The History of the Russian Principalities and the Golden Horde, 1221-1502* (London: British Academic Press, an Imprint of I.B. Tauris & co Ltd, 1996), 62.

¹⁴¹ The reason for this selectivity on this particular realm of the Mongol Empire is largely due to the fact that the vast Mongol Empire behaved in very different ways after it began to fragment. Each of the regions of the empire can be looked at as case studies, but the best one to illustrate the nature of formless empire is almost certainly the Kipchak Khanate.

Thinking the danger over, the Russian principalities soon returned to their own squabbling with each other.¹⁴²

The Mongols had yet to strike in true force, however. Under the reign of Chinggis Khan's successor, Ogedei, western expansion, along with consolidating and expanding gains in the Middle East, became a higher priority. From the beginning, the conquest of Russia and other lands west of the Urals was a multinational affair. The Ulus allotted to Jochi had yet to be conquered before his death and so his son Batu set forth with a core of Mongol troops and recruited numerous Turkic, Alan and defected Kipchak tribesman to strengthen his forces. The Kipchaks, who would later give their name to this enterprise, were another Eurasian nomadic people who had taken up residence in the steppes of southern Ukraine and confederated with the Cuman people, who were of similar extraction. Nominally allied to various Russian principalities they saw the Mongols as their gravest threat. This Kipchak-Cuman alliance already functioned in a flexible and amorphous way that would in many ways presage what was to come.¹⁴³

The Mongol armies under the nominal command of Batu (the veteran general Subotai, who had already conquered large tracks of China and Central Asia, actually commanded the field battles) proceeded to advance westward deep into the Russian forest zone. This attack was conducted in the dead of the winter of 1237, with 50,000 men using the frozen rivers to rapidly advance upon the northernmost Russian principalities. Such provinces as Ryazan and Vladimir were the first to fall, as they were viewed as the most powerful and the ones least touched by the previous Mongol incursion. Being seen as major threats meant they suffered disproportionately, and were not just taken and sacked, but virtually destroyed. By the time Kiev fell, in 1240, the remaining Russian nobles and princelings agreed to swear fealty to the Khan, even in the unconquered Novgorod Republic.¹⁴⁴ The Mongols went on to invade Poland and Hungary, crushing the armed forces of those countries as well as the Teutonic Knights

¹⁴² Viacheslav Shpakovsky and David Nicolle. *Kalka River 1223: Genghiz Khan's Mongols Invade Russia* (United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2001).

¹⁴³ Peter B. Golden. "The Qipchaqs of Medieval Eurasia: An Example of Stateless Adaptation in the Steppes" in *Rulers From the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery*. Editors: Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks), 135-7.

¹⁴⁴ George Vernadsky. *The Mongols in Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953. Reprinted by University Microfilms International, London), 1979.

before wintering on the Hungarian plain and withdrawing to vote in the Empire's succession as Khan Ogodei had died while they were on campaign. Although the Mongol armies withdrew from Eastern Europe, they did remain on in Russia.¹⁴⁵

The Mongols also used spies to cite their document of law which was made by Chinggis Khan, The Yasa, as proof to religious dissenters that they would have freedom, to merchants that their trades and wares would be secure, and to peasants that they would be protected from the rich. The consequences of non-cooperation, however, would be dire. It was in this way that they were able to win support from many segments of the population, especially the important merchant and trading classes and conclude such a vast and ambitious campaign in little over two years.¹⁴⁶ Sun Tzu would have applauded this type of intelligence gathering and lightening campaigning that utilized his ideas of shock, maneuver, and deception. But the Kipchak Khanate had to be governed as well as conquered, and it was here that the principles of the Formless Empire really shone through.

The name Golden Horde, which probably comes from the yellow gers (tents or yurts in Turkic languages) of the royal family's entourage, is primarily a western classification. It did not take long for the Ulus of Jochi to become known both within and outside its borders as the Kipchak Khanate. Mongols, though composing the upper echelons of royalty and hierarchy, were a minority in their new state. Most soldiers were Kipchaks or various other Turkic peoples and intermarriage became so frequent that even the royal family itself came to represent an amalgamation of its various nomadic populations, forming a new ethnicity which would come to be called 'Tatar'.¹⁴⁷

The actual organization of the Kipchak Khanate was largely the creation of Batu Khan, though it remained in place for almost a century and a half, adapting to changing circumstances but remaining fundamentally the same. One of the most unique attributes to this state was the lack of any sort of direct rule policy towards the Russian principalities. The Mongols and Kipchaks stayed on the steppe, keeping their flexible nomadic life and building occasional cities in river valleys for administrative and trade purposes. Meanwhile, the Russians were left in their divided factions under their native

¹⁴⁵ Beckwith, 189.

¹⁴⁶ Vernadsky, 117.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

rulers. Mongol tax assessors and representatives were left among the aristocracy but for all purposes the Russians retained their lands and titles.¹⁴⁸ What made these princelings part of an empire was the indirect methods used to bring about their submission to the Khan and his government which was located in the new city Sarai on the Volga River.

In addition to the building of a few new cities to facilitate commerce and governing, the Kipchak Khanate encouraged the numerous peoples of its empire to migrate into these cities. Turkic peoples, more settled Mongol aristocrats, Russians, Jews, Genoese, and merchants from many places outside of the empire came to set up new lives. With the various steppe peoples largely integrated and living a similar life to each other on the steppes, the state still derived a large amount of resources and control from having settled communities, farmers, crafters and traders. Given the dispensation of the aristocracy this could be done without sacrificing the mobility and military effectiveness that had made the Horde so dominant in the first place.¹⁴⁹

3.8...Political Organization of the Kipchak Khanate

At first, the Khan of the Kipchak Khanate was officially a vassal of the Great Khan in Karakorum. As the empire began to fracture during Kublai's rule and the official capital of his new Yuan Dynasty was moved to China, the loose vassalage grew even more tenuous. By the death of Kublai no one in the Mongol successor states paid homage anymore to the Grand Khan. Being naturally distant however, this affected the Kipchak Khanate little and it would end up outlast the other successor states of the Mongol Empire. Even upon its breakup it would still be able to subdivide into smaller states which had quite a bit of life left in them such as Kazan, Astrakhan, and the Crimean Khanate. The latter would last until 1783.¹⁵⁰

Part of the reason for this successful and adaptable model, which could wrest so much tribute and influence from its neighbors as well as cling to life even in decline, was

¹⁴⁸ De Hartog, 46.

¹⁴⁹ Vernadsky, 209.

¹⁵⁰ Charles J. Halperin. *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), page 29.

the internal organization of the Kipchak Khanate itself. The Kipchak Khanate was a confederation of vassals within further overlapping structures of confederation and vassalage. A roughly feudal structure upheld by bonds of personal loyalty and sworn fealty that was forged in the steppes of Mongolia became merged with more official and bureaucratic forms of government picked up from previous Mongol experiences in Persia and China. Tying this together was a sort of proto-parliament type system common in the steppes of Eurasia: the Kuriltai. A discussion based forum, usually held in a grand ger, which would meet regularly to converse about domestic and foreign policy. The kuriltai could also nominate the successor of the empire. Although restricted to the royal family (or in dire cases a noble with some royal ties) the exact member of the monarchical lineage to be the successor was still chosen by election.¹⁵¹

This system could also be manipulated for policy and inter-empire goals by the Khan. Batu Khan in particular was quite fond of using his indirect influence in both the Kipchak kuriltai as well as the kuriltai in the capital of the main empire (Karakorum) to bring about favorable goals for his newly conquered inheritance. Batu used the wealth extracted from his Russian vassals to fund his own intrigue. Being a possible successor to the throne of Great Khan over the entire empire, his voice carried much clout. But rather than gamble on trying to take the ultimate title Batu worked to establish his personal allies in Karakorum. Ogodei's successor, Guyuk had rocky relations with the independently minded Batu, but after his death the next Great Khan was Mongke, who had served in Batu's army during his invasion of Europe, and was elevated to that lofty position in no small measure due to Batu's maneuvering and patronage.¹⁵²

The Russian princes were under the obligation to travel to the kuriltai as well as pay homage to the Khan whenever a new one ascended the throne or issued an edict. At great expense and with retinue the princes would make their way to Sarai (or whatever nomadic encampment the Khan might be in at the time of the appointment) to offer submission and ask for support against other princes or foreign foes. At these events the Khan would reward those princes he most wanted on his side, or those who

¹⁵¹ Vernadsky, 210-11.

¹⁵² Rene Grousset. *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1970), page 596.

had performed some task that benefited his regime. Often, gifts were bestowed by the Khan so these arrangements were not always entirely one-sided.¹⁵³

Batu had therefore secured his own advantageous and semi-autonomous position while retaining the broader imperial links and the stable pan-Eurasian trade links forged by the empire. What he and his successors would do after this point would showcase further the uses of indirect power and flexibility so common to nomadic Inner Eurasian powers.

3.9...Economic Structures of the Kipchak Khanate

Despite their fearsome warrior reputation, and perhaps in large part because of it, the primary activity of the Kipchak Khanate was commerce. The previously discussed cosmopolitan cities filled with numerous peoples from the hinterlands and periphery of the empire served to connect numerous trade routes. The Mediterranean and Byzantine world was connected with the steppe and Central Asia as well as northern European with much further east than had previously been possible to directly reach with merchant caravans. Sarai boomed as travelers, traders, and ambassadors on exploration missions could pick up route in western Russia, Scandinavia, or the Black Sea and (theoretically at least) take it all the way to the Chinese coast.¹⁵⁴

Lest it be thought this all a great triumph of multiculturalism, the entire system was of course built on vassalage and the payment of tribute by the conquered peoples. As the various nomadic groups in the population converged and became more equal the burdens upon the divided Russian principalities only increased. To fuel the rapid growth of the new administrative and economic the taxes upon the peasantry and vassal kingdoms could only grow.

Tax collectors called Baskaks were placed in the principalities, though they were often recalled once a Russian prince became a reliable vassal and more economically integrated with The Horde. Mongol emissaries and traders were the only direct Mongol presence that usually made its way into the Russian regions, as the nearby deployment

¹⁵³ Janet Martin. *Medieval Russia 980-1584* (Great Britain: University of Cambridge Press, 1995), page 142.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

of nomadic forces just across the border of the forest zone in the steppe implied the penalty for disobedience. Therefore, aside from economically, there was little direct Mongol imperialism. The sphere of influence governed by the Khans over their non-steppe and westerly possessions were indirect, with the army of the Horde only arriving to quash rebellions, support vassal princes and uphold the fiscal extraction net. Despite this, the Khan was acknowledged as the lord of eastern Russia. For two and a half centuries this would remain the rough system in place.¹⁵⁵

As these systems were moving from outright vassalage to stratified economic unit, one principality in particular was quick to jump on the bandwagon. Seeing the prohibitive cost and risk of non-collaboration and the potential to go from backwater to forefront, Moscow was happy to become the economic and political collaborator of the Mongol overlords. When Ivan Danilovich (known now to history as Kalita or 'moneybags') ascended the throne of Moscow in 1325 he saw an opportunity to exploit a niche as the Khan's loyal tax collector and make a hefty profit for himself at the same time. By removing the Mongols from the process but still being able to render them their tribute payments Moscow became the ultimate broker in the inter-imperial relationship between the many principalities and the Horde. For instance, when Moscow became the Khan's enforcer it often clashed with Novgorod, especially over silver payments from which Moscow took a cut. In exchange the Khan and Moscow could co-operate to keep Novgorod out of the hands of Lithuania. This served the purposes of both Moscow and the Horde.¹⁵⁶

As the runoff of this profit enriched Moscow the city also had the good fortune to be viewed increasingly positively by the Khans of the Kipchak Khanate. They in turn bestowed titles and honors on the princes of Moscow and often gave territories captured from less loyal princelings to enrich the domain of their most thorough collaborator. In this one instance, the relationship between master and vassal became much more symbiotic.¹⁵⁷

The lifeline connecting these various webs of economic activity and communication was the postal or 'yam' system set up by the Mongols. This system of

¹⁵⁵ Halperin, 39-43.

¹⁵⁶ Martin 186.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

postal riders with way stations every few hours ride away stocked with fresh horses enabled the quick transit of correspondence, contracts, and occasionally important goods. The yam was clearly a type of soft power constructed to both economically tie the empire together as well as keep the disparate areas integrated. Although an empire-wide phenomenon, the yam was extended by the Kipchak Khanate to encompass its Russian vassals as well. The policy was so effective it was later adopted by Muscovy when it became the rising power in the region.¹⁵⁸

In the western provinces, further away from this nomadic base and its more closely tied vassals, the situation became much more complex and the foreign policy use of indirect action became starkly apparent-if more convoluted.

3.10...Foreign Policy in the Kipchak Khanate

The Republic of Novgorod, nestled deep within the forest zone and never subjected to siege or conquest by the Mongol army, found itself in a uniquely precarious situation. To its north-west the Germanic-Baltic crusading order of the Teutonic Knights used the collapse of Russian princely power to push east. To the south the Kipchak Khanate held sway over the remaining Russian principalities. Being a city state whose profitable trade routes were threatened (as well as its sovereignty) Novgorod could not stand alone. Therefore the city elders and Prince Alexander Nevsky chose to voluntarily submit to the Khan rather than become the stomping grounds of a fanatical order. To ensure regime survival it was better to live under the Horde than to bow before this extremely invasive and conditional Catholic-Teutonic help, especially at the cost of the local religion-which would be unaffected by Mongol policies but would have to be changed in order to even enter negotiations with the Teutonic Order on an equitable basis. The greater Orthodox Church in Russia had fared well under the Mongols, being required only to pray for the health of the Khan, and so the clergy feared the Swedes and the Teutonic Knights far more than the Horde.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Vernadsky, 127.

¹⁵⁹ De Hartog, 50-1.

Having paid his tributes Nevsky then turned west to confront the invasion of the Teutonic Knights and their allies. At the Battle of Lake Peipus in 1242 the invaders were dealt a crushing defeat and many of the fleeing heavily armored knights fell through the ice of the lake. Even with such a victory and a stabilized position, Nevsky turned back to the Horde and even made the trip to Karakorum to present himself to Mongke Khan upon his ascension to the throne.¹⁶⁰

In the Caucasus the newly formed Ilkhanate, another Mongol sub-state that Batu had even sent troops to support became increasingly a rival. As the greater empire started to decay these two mega-states who competed over influence in the mountain range became the largest threats to each other. Unlike the Kipchak Khanate, the Ilkhanate was a direct-rule system of a Mongol army and ruling class ruling over a Persian and Arabic population. The rulers there, after sacking Baghdad and killing the last Caliph of Islam, were in no mood for accommodation with their Muslim subjects. Berke, the third ruler of the Kipchak Khanate, was personally a Muslim (though his state was not) and used his religious tolerance to his subjects and the lack of the Ilkhanate's as an excuse for war in the Caucasus. Indecisive clashes occurred throughout the region before the issue petered out. Aside from opening up trade and diplomatic links with the primary rival of the Ilkhanate, the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt, this issue had little impact on the Kipchak relation with Russia...except of course to show the vast differences between each Mongol successor state. It is relevant to note that the Ilkhanate lasted significantly less time than the Kipchak Khanate, being established in 1256 and collapsing in 1325.¹⁶¹

Further south and west, different rumblings were taking place amongst the western Russian princedoms. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, fresh from defeating its own invasions at the hands of the Teutonic Order, was on the march for expansion. Russian princes on the western periphery of the Kipchak Khanate's reach were quick to realize that an opportunity had opened for them to seek the best deal possible in exchange for their vassalage. Lithuania, the other large pagan empire in Europe at this time, sent forth similar lenient terms for vassalage to the Russian princes as the

¹⁶⁰ Martin, 161.

¹⁶¹ Haplerin, 82.

Mongols had and now the ball was in the court of the Russians to choose who could better secure their interests. The security situation between these two jockeying powers who threatened so subsume all of Russia between them offered danger as well as opportunity.¹⁶²

The flirtation with another regional power such as Poland or Lithuania was cause for rival princes to use large allies against each other. As Prince Rostislav drew closer to Poland Prince Danylo of Galicia used this defection of vassalage to launch a war of expansion against the former's territories. Equipping his army in the Mongol fashion he crushed his regional opposition to become the most powerful Russian prince in the west. Once Danylo became established however he pursued a much more balanced policy of trying to keep Mongol influence at a minimum while still remaining safe from attack. This did not always work and after a Mongol punishing expedition in 1259 he affirmed his vassalage. He did however marry into the Lithuanian nobility to keep his options open.¹⁶³

Danylo was not the only one to engage in this amorphous frontier. Princes allied to the Khan would expand the vassal network of their own volition, as then they would win favors with the Kipchak Khanate and a large amount of spoils...not to mention being supported from counter attack by the Mongols if they failed in these local quests to expand their power and territory. Mongol hegemony in the eastern parts of Russia could be a shield as well as a burden, but in the west where it was weaker large states like Lithuania could make significant inroads. But as Lithuania expanded steadily all the way from the Baltic to the Black Sea, using largely the same grand strategy the Mongols used, events would slowly come to alter this evolving indirect bipolarity. The fractured and divided nature of the Russian principalities would last for almost a century, but all the while the star of Muscovy was rising.

Muscovy had kept its collaborationist posture for almost a century, but after tumultuous times for the Horde saw the adoption of Islam as state religion, ravaging by the Bubonic Plague, and a civil war over succession, this former city state had both the wealth and influence to change the tide. Prince Dmitri, (later Donskoi) a once vassal of

¹⁶² De Hartog, 92.

¹⁶³ Vernadsky, 144-159.

Khan Mamai, turned on his former master in retaliation for a lack of support for his own ambitions. Mamai had grown suspicious of the now ascending Moscow and his suspicions would turn to truth when Dmitri gathered a coalition of princes under his lead. This development so upset the previous international order that former foe Lithuania offered troops in alliance with the Kipchak Khanate in order to keep the upstart Muscovy down. Before this could happen Dmitri met and engaged the Khan in battle on Kulikovo Field in 1380. The battle was close and hard fought, but in the end the Russian coalition prevailed. Often portrayed as a decisive battle, the impact would not truly be known until years later. For although Muscovy was now a robust and independent nation free of vassalage, many other Russian states still submitted to the Horde, especially when Mamai was killed in a brief civil war and the tricky Toqtamysh took his place. Despite this reunification however, the temporary anarchy of the post-Kulikovo Horde had dealt them a great blow to both morale and prestige.¹⁶⁴

3.11...End of an Era...And Two New Beginnings

The true end was soon to come, though it would not be from the west that the blow was struck, but rather from the east. The Horde was about to experience its demise the same way they had struck a fatal blow to Russia almost 150 years earlier. The tricky Toqtamysh may have established control over a re-unified Horde but his schemes to expand influence into Central Asia backfired when he invaded the territory controlled by his patron: the great conqueror Emir Timur. After repelling Toqtamysh, Timur drove deep into Kipchak territory in 1396 and destroyed the capital cities of the Horde in Old and New Sarai along the Volga, as well as raiding and plundering many of the Russian principalities. Toqtamysh's reunified Horde would eventually collapse into several different sub-Khanates such as Kazan, Astrakhan, and the Crimean Khanate which were separated by geography and objectives. Toqtamysh himself would be slain while on the run and many of his soldiers would defect to Lithuania, the Timurids, or one of the new local successor Khanates.¹⁶⁵ This was the true end of the Horde, and from this

¹⁶⁴ Martin, 211-216.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 204.

point on it would be Muscovy who was the expansionist state to whom others paid tribute.

Once Ivan IV (Grozny-or 'Terrible') had conquered the Kazan Khanate, in 1552, the way east was wide open for the settled states to take up the mantle of flexible, mobile empire...at least in the north. Further south and east however the true slayer of the Kipchak Khanate had its own story to tell as well. In fact, with the fall of the Mongol successor state hegemony and the coming of gunpowder would usher in a new era. One of increasingly modern and more familiar looking states, but also states that had been undeniably influenced by their experiences at the hands of nomadic foes or predecessors. Even as the impact of the nomad began to fade from the central position in history, their influence would remain, and they still had some time to remain the dominant regional actors.

3.12...Conclusion:

This chapter has shown the relevance for those studying the nature of imperialism inside Inner Eurasia to be aware of the pre-modern historical precedents that were set there. It is important to establish that this was a frequently used and often effective grand strategy of powers in the history of the region. It was a natural evolution to suit the capabilities of the nomad and their goals of regime support while maintain a distinct and separate realm for themselves. Xiongnu, Khitan, and Mongol/Kipchak people strove to retain their mobility and lower their manpower costs by keeping themselves somewhat divested from direct rule. Instead they were content to control key geographic points, roads and trade routes, and tie it up nicely with a mobile rapidly deployable combat force that did away for the need for massive garrisons and fortifications.

Upon seeing this flexible and formless system of control the parallels with the present day are apparent. Maybe empires in the mold of the Khitan or Kipchak Khanate should be looked at more thoroughly than the more typical examples of imperial behemoths to understand the many multifaceted ways that power politics can work, especially when they have access to great mobility and the ability to advance and retreat from formlessness.

Chapter Four: The Post-Pax Mongolica Through The Timurid Powers

“Through me the dying house of Chinggis flares up again...When I breeze by like the morning wind, the candle of Timur goes out as I pass.”

~Muhammad Shaybani Khan

4.0...Summation:

In the last chapter we skipped ahead to focus on the Kipchak Khanate to the exclusion of the other successor states of the Mongol Empire, which we will deal with presently from the start of the disintegration of Mongol unity with the ascension of Kublai on through to new states which are arguably a kind of spiritual successors. The Chaghatai Khanate and the post-Yuan Mongols will be examined. The primary two states after these in the post-Mongol dominated order are both Turkic in origin, that of the Timurid Empire and, after the brief but very relevant hegemony of that state, that of the politically and dynastically related Mughal Empire.

Besides continuing our narrative of the evolving indigenous geopolitics of Inner Eurasia, the point of this chapter is to show continuity in policy even as the apogee of nomadic power-that of the Mongols-begins to slip away into the night. This prepares us for the coming chapter which shows the mantle of the formless empire being inherited by non-nomadic states for the first time since the height of the Han and Tang Dynasties. It also shows the variety of adaptations of changing circumstances that formless geopolitics can make and shows continuity along such lines as economic and foreign policy in the Inner Eurasian system, even while other factors begin to change in directions which move in different directions.

Also contained in this section is an admittedly unorthodox appraisal of Timur's geopolitical objectives. Generally regarded as a poor administrator who built an ephemeral empire on the feat of skill at war alone, I take a contrary position more in line with John Darwin or Beatrice Forbes Manz, who are cited heavily in the coming pages, that Timur's actual empire was much smaller than the realm of his conquests, and that

his objectives are much more about enrichment of a core at the expense of a periphery than about creating a massive and cohesive state under one law, as was the Mongol Empire at its height. This aspect of Timur's career has been largely overlooked and hopefully redressing the balance can show the importance in the Timurid legacy to the topic being presently examined.

Following on the Timurid stage is the dynastically related Mughals, who take the formless geopolitics of Inner Eurasia out for a spin in the foreign territory of India with mixed results illuminating both for land and maritime powers alike, as well as illustrating the process of acculturation which often occurs in state with more flexible identities. The chapter then finishes with an examination of post-imperial Mongolia, its adaptation from being the first and only supreme hegemon of the entire region being examined in this study, to being a relatively insignificant nation on the margins of the various civilizational cores which re-emerged after Mongol collapse.

4.1...The Chaghatai Khanate and Mongol Persistence in Central Asia

The Chaghatai Khanate warrants a specific examination in this chapter dealing with later eras because it lasted the longest of all the Mongol successor states and came to overlap more with the states of the Post-Mongol era than it did during the 'Pax Mongolica'. In addition, like the Kipchak Khanate, it remained a steppe-based enterprise with a clear delineation between nomadic ruling class, warrior elite and townspeople and farmers. While the Yuan and the Ilkhanate soon acclimated to local systems and the Yasa became less important for how they conducted domestic affairs, Mongol tradition persevered quite strongly in these two other successors.¹⁶⁶

Perhaps due to its central location within the trade networks and Mongol-ruled realms, the Chaghatai Khanate was the most peaceful of the sub-Khanates. It generally, despite its gradually increasing domestic autonomy in the late 13th Century, behaved in foreign affairs as a loyal vassal to the Great Khan in Karakorum (and then after Kublai's ascension in Beijing). By the reign of the third Khan, Mongke-Temur, the Khanate had a

¹⁶⁶ Kwanten, 167.

large amount of autonomy in foreign policy relating to more westerly nations such as the Mamluks in Egypt and the Byzantine Empire.¹⁶⁷

Within this state most people lived in a mostly rural fashion, with a strong agricultural base provided from the Turkic and Tajik peasant populations. The ruling classes intermingled with many of the pre-existing nomads making this segment the second largest element of population, and by far the dominant one. Within these interwoven elements lay the cities of Central Asia, though this would only be part of the state in its beginning. Much like the Kipchak Khanate, the rulers maintained a detached and hands off approach to governance. Despite the fact that most of their subjects were Muslim they did not even convert to the local religion until 1326, when the last Khan who controlled the state's core territories, which were made at the time of its founding, tried to keep the decentralized state on a more unified path by adopting Islam. After his death however the area containing most of the trading cities of Transoxiana broke off into a complex mosaic of feuding local warlords.¹⁶⁸

This situation of partial fragmentation would eventually enable the rise of a new dynamic and expansive state which would build on the core left by the Changatids.

4.2...Timurid Rise and Central Asian Revival

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes only to burn out again soon after, the rise of Timur (commonly known in the west as Tamerlane) would not only give the core area of the Central Asian trading cities its last truly homegrown and powerful indigenous son, but also make them the center of a new political re-orientation. Rather than being tax collection depots for foreign nomads and distant interlopers the cities themselves would be the core of this newest nomadically driven enterprise. The brevity of the Timurid Empire is well understood, but to understand its relevance in the evolution of formless empires and geopolitical strategy is not. As it represents the beginning of a transitional phase, as well as leaving important dynastic and economic legacies, it deserves to be looked at particularly in depth in order to establish the start of when things began to

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

change into something more understandable to geopolitics from a contemporary perspective.

Timur's origin is one of minor aristocracy in the peripheral Barlas tribe, which was located in present day Uzbekistan. Timur entered the feudal service of Moghulistan's (as the Chaghatai Khanate was increasingly becoming known as due to the Mongol ruling class integrating more and more into the local culture) Khan Tuglug-Temur in 1360 but eventually rebelled when overlooked for a promotion opportunity. He then attached himself to the Khan of Khorasan and soon after received the arrow wounds to his right arm and leg which would henceforth classify him as "the Lame" or Timur-i-Lenk.^{169 170}

In the fractured realm of post-hegemonic Chaghatai decay the numerous independent rump states offered great opportunity to the ambitious chieftain and soon he was rising over the lordship of great cities such as Samarkand and Bukhara. With a few strategic marriage alliances into the Chingisid line and a simultaneous commitment to both the settled and nomadic cores of his power base, Timur rose to control most of the territory which had fractured off the western edge of Moghul control.¹⁷¹ According to Hookham:

"Timur was active in plunder, pillage and spoliation, and gathered supplies and collected resources and won to his side the common people and the leaders alike, who obeyed whether they wished to or not...So he gained the realms of Transoxiana and subdued the population by force and compulsion."¹⁷²

As a nomadic tribesman whose capital was a city, and who patroned the arts and infrastructure as well as just the trade of his core cities, Timur was already moving in the direction of a different kind of conqueror-albeit one still firmly rooted in Inner Eurasian traditions.

Timur's empire has required a fairly negative historical reputation based on the massive amounts of devastation he inflicted on places such as the Caucasus and Iran.

¹⁶⁹ Hilda Hookham. *Tamburlaine the Conqueror* (London: The Camelot Press Limited, 1962), pages 43-4.

¹⁷⁰ Justin Marozzi. *Tamerlane: Sword of Islam, Conqueror of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, Perseus Book Group, 2006), 30-1.

¹⁷¹ Hookham, 48-50.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 49.

He waged numerous campaigns across territory he had previously conquered and then failed to administrate the areas, resulting in breakaways and rebellions which necessitated his return to campaign in the region again and again.¹⁷³ Considering however that Timur's primary objectives were domestic, these peripheral lands should be considered less his territories than his unfortunate neighbors and perpetual raiding grounds. Timurid campaigns were not for territorial aggrandizement outside of Central Asia, but rather the accumulation of wealth and prestige for cities like Samarkand and Bukhara. In addition to this objective was the added benefit of taking potentially rebellious and predatory Chinggisid nobles out of Transoxiana and into foreign campaigns where they could share in Timur's prestige and looting. This removed the displaced former rulers and regional aristocracy from Timur's unguarded rear and also gave them something of a stake in the current political system. In addition to this, the policy also prevented the predatory nomads (who were no longer the sole tax collectors of Transoxiana) from raiding the locals of their own nation in order to supplement their income.¹⁷⁴

To use a more modern term than is generally not applied to these eras, Timur was a patriot. Not to the Changhatai Khanate, whom he largely usurped and relegated to secondary status within their own realms, but rather to the region of Transoxiana at large. He was de facto emperor (or 'Emir', his preferred titled) of Transoxiana, and it was up to him to restore, through wealth, prestige, and art, its central location in Eurasia both culturally and economically. His objectives were to wreck rivals, redirect trade, and to balance the concerns of his nomadic and agrarian core constituencies.¹⁷⁵ With this in mind a further exploration of his career and his likely purposes can show his critical, if brief, role in the evolution of the formless empire in Eurasian geopolitics. No longer did grand conquerors in the region dream of uniting the entire steppe and its periphery around their personal rule, rather than sought indirect hegemony through targeted campaigns with economic and status related motives.

¹⁷³ Kwanten, 267.

¹⁷⁴ Beatrice Forbes Manz. *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pages 69-73.

¹⁷⁵ Darwin, 5.

Moving, however unconventionally, in the direction of a centralized state and to cosmopolitan patron as me may have been, Timur's army was still a cavalry-based nomadic force of Turks, Mongols, and others of a similar lifestyle. Whole families, including warrior women, accompanied the army on campaign and lived as if on a giant migration, setting off on deep campaigning with little established supply lines eminently doable. According to Arabshah, Timur's often hostile contemporary historian, the army (despite being part of a now almost uniformly Islamic Central Asia) contained many pagan and foreign elements as itinerant warriors from all over the continent flocked to join up with the successful Emir Timur.¹⁷⁶ Nomadic steppe toleration helped further the goals of geopolitical control, once again.

With his actual hegemony secure in the core and his de facto hegemony now extending out into the Middle East, Timur turned to his northern frontier. With his help the outcast warlord Toqtamysh (see Chapter 3) was placed as a Timurid ally on the throne of the now declining Kipchak Khanate. Barely had any time passed however when Toqtamysh turned on Timur and sacked Tabriz while he was away campaigning elsewhere.¹⁷⁷

After seeing off this raid and forcing Toqtamysh to re-acknowledge Timurid supremacy, Timur brought the remainder of outlying Central Asia and Iran under his control, as well as pushing up to the southern borders of the Kipchaks by reducing Georgia and its neighbors to vassalage. It was at this point in 1388, while Timur was largely mopping up small fractured states, when his most dangerous enemy, who was apparently un-chastised from before, struck once more from the back.¹⁷⁸

Toqtamysh's objectives may not seem apparent, but this is after he had temporarily re-established hegemony over the Russian states in the post Kulikovo world (Chapter 3) and was clearly trying to re-establish the Kipchak Khanate outside of Russia as well. The disputed pasturelands north of Iran were the perfect testing ground for the finicky Khan to bid for supremacy against Timur. By 1387 he was already deep in

¹⁷⁶ Hookham, 65.

¹⁷⁷ Marozzi, 139.

¹⁷⁸ Hookham, 92-4.

Timurid territory encouraging the revolt of various nobles recently co-opted into the Timurid Empire.¹⁷⁹

Rather than immediately rush to engage, Timur saw the threat posed by this third column of disgruntled nobles and made sure his various campaigns to establish hegemony in his outlying areas was not interrupted. Only once he had completed the rooting out of potential problems amongst the nobility did he turn (more than a year later) to engage with the forceful annexation of his northern frontier provinces by Toqtamysh. In the meantime Toqtamysh sent Timur some envoys to hammer out a peace deal, Timur's response was apparently dismissive according to Sharaf al-Din Yazdi:

“When your master Toqtamysh was wounded and fled the enemy, I received him like a son. I took up his cause and made war on Urus Khan on his behalf. I sacrificed my cavalry and equipment, which were lost to that hard winter. However, I continued to support him, and placed this country in his hands. I made him so strong that he became Khan of the Kipchaks, and he mounted the throne of Jochi. But when fortune began to smile on him, he forgot his obligations to me. He chose the time when I was occupied with the kingdom of the Persians and the Medes to betray me, sending troops to ruin the borders of my realm. I pretended not to notice, hoping he would be shamed into regretting his action. But he was so drunk with ambition that he could not distinguish good from bad; he sent another army into my country. It is true that when we marched against him his advance guard turned tail at the very dust of our approach. Now, when Toqtamysh has heard of our approach, he craves pardon, not seeing any other way of avoiding the punishment he deserves. But since we have seen him break his word and violate his treaties so often, it would be imprudent to trust his word.”¹⁸⁰

The titanic clash between jilted master and tricky protégé for the two most powerful Inner Eurasian states of their time was about to come, and it would have a resounding impact on the history of both Central Asian peoples, and perhaps even more critically, on the agrarian players who so far had been victims rather than conquerors in the system.

4.3...Clash for Hegemony

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 125-7.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., quoting Sharaf al-Din Yazdi, 131.

Emir Timur's force struck into the Kipchak Khanate via the eastern Siberian approach, circumventing the mountains and well-defended Caucasus to approach Sarai and New Sarai from the east. The vast expanses of Siberia however were not ideal for provisioning Timur's massive army, and Toqtamysch was sticking to the tried and true steppe tactic of constant tactical withdrawals and leaving behind nothing but scorched earth. Periodically, Timur had to stop his army even when on the verge of engaging the Kipchak Khan and organize giant hunts to acquire the food needed by his army. This of course exposed his forces to harrying counterattacks.¹⁸¹

Toqtamysch had now moved so far north that he ran out of steppe and had to retreat into the taiga forest of Siberia before wheeling west into the Northern Caucasus after being thwarted in an indecisive battle. This slowed his flight immensely and Timur's scouts soon detected signs of the enemy camp in the Terek river valley. In June of 1391 the armies engaged. After Timur had changed his observed battle formation in the night to something less predictable he charged the slightly numerically superior Kipchaks. The fight was desperate, with at one point Toqtamysch himself in a rare showing of fortitude charged his guard straight through Timur's army, temporarily dividing it. This potential rout was only stopped (so it was said) by Timur ordering his grandson to start preparing a meal in a nonchalant fashion to which they would leisurely sit down to eat, which would state to his reserves that they would be neither leaving the field nor retreating when so deep into enemy territory. With this in mind Timur's reserves charged at the now over-extended Kipchak forces and put them to flight. Toqtamysch fled into exile in Lithuania as the remnants of his army were chased down and slaughtered for miles across the region. Thus ended the threat posed by Timur's most dangerous foe.¹⁸²

Although Toqtamysch would live on (and even slightly outlive Timur by a year) he did so as the auxiliary to Lithuania's interests in the east and would eventually be killed by the joint Timurid and puppet Kipchak forces in an inglorious manner in 1406 after

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 132.

¹⁸² David Nicolle and Richard Hook. *The Mongol Warlords* (Dorset: Firebird Books, 1990), pages 178-9.

attempting, in alliance with Grand Duke Vytautas, to recapture his position in the now shattered Kipchak Khanate.¹⁸³

Before leaving to return south, Timur returned to his strategy of plunder and proxies, rather than take any additional territory formally from the Kipchak Khanate. After thoroughly devastating both of the Sarai cities, he sent forth his units to plunder to their hearts content while he placed a puppet Khan on the Kipchak throne. Having uprooted the various links in the still-functioning trans-Eurasia northern Mongol trade network, Timur not only accomplished the immediate enriching of himself and his army as payment for their service in the rigorous and difficult campaign, but also restored the Transoxianian trade routes of the south to their former pre-eminence in the economic system of Eurasia. Once again, Timur was not building a giant empire or waging wars of conquest, but sabotaging other neighboring states to restore economic and political pre-eminence to the trading cities of Central Asia.¹⁸⁴

4.4...Foundations of the Formless, Yet Modern, State

The chief rival now removed from the equation, Timur could now turn to both ravage softer targets to the south, and also indulge in the patronage of his beloved Samarkand. Public gardens and large mosques shimmering with blue tile rose up and his people were often exempt from increased taxation to pay for these power displays. The reinvigoration of the trade routes through their lands coupled with the massive spoils brought back by both Timurid and Chaghatai nobles into the kingdom made such lavishness both possible and likely justified in the eyes of their subjects. Indeed, the growing suburbs of Samarkand were named after the other great cities of the Islamic world in order to show the subordination, at least symbolically, of those cities to Samarkand, with the new neighborhoods of 'Damascus', 'Baghdad', 'Shiraz', 'Cairo', and 'Sultaniya' leading the way. Within these new areas were fountains of iced water and fortresses built outside. For the first time ever, an avowed nomadic state founder

¹⁸³ Halperin, 57.

¹⁸⁴ Marozzi, 214-5.

was constructing fortresses while their army was still nomadic and their territories mostly still steppe.¹⁸⁵

Timur would go on to invade the Delhi Sultanate in northern India. It would become his most profitable campaign of them all, driving the war elephants of the sultan back on his own armies through the use of caltrops and putting the massive armies of that state to inglorious flight. This time no puppet leader or any other pretense of vassalage was even considered. It was simply a raiding expedition for the wealth of India, and once enough of it was pillaged Timur's armies departed west to subjugate Mamluk Syria and move deep into Anatolia to confront the nascent state of the Ottoman Empire. On this rapid five years of whirlwind wars all around the periphery of Inner Eurasia, Hookham says:

“The campaign of Five Years had, in fact, destroyed in four seasons the one opponent capable of offering decisive resistance to the Lame Conqueror. It had secured the vital centers and stages of the trade routes of the Levant, as well as the plunder of the provinces from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf and the Indian seaboard. It had brought Timur's conquests to the marches of Arabia, thus challenging the dominion of Bayazid the Ottoman Turk.”¹⁸⁶

And so Timur's final challenge (though he had no way of knowing that at the time, of course) was Bayezid “The Thunderbolt”, Ottoman Sultan and decisive defeater of an elite crusader army outside of Nicopolis. On the verge of being the conqueror of Constantinople, Bayezid first had to face down the onrushing hordes of Timur's army, now augmented by elephants with Greek fire projectors on their backs. Hastily, Bayezid and Timur both, after an exchange of increasingly acrimonious letters, rushed from their respective directions to meet on a plain near modern day Ankara for battle. Timur, knowing he would be going further away from his base of support than his opponent, had numerous spies, paid travelers, and traders travel ahead before reporting back to him, thus he was able to secure the favorable terrain, including the wells, for his army before Bayezid.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Hookham, 172-5.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁸⁷ Marozzi, 351.

Bayezid was the first truly skillful general Timur had faced since Toqtamysh, and had a professional army which could rival Timur's. However, it was augmented by auxiliaries of Tatar extraction of dubious loyalty, and before the battle Timur had used the tendrils of his intelligence network to secure their betrayal of their Ottoman master. It was this, in the pell-mell and closely fought battle which followed, that turned the tide as the more nomadic Tatars turned on their partially settled Turkish allies and gave full victory for Timur. Bayezid was captured, and his exact fate remains unclear to this day, but he eventually died in captivity. The Ottoman siege of the rump Byzantine Empire was called off as a bloody succession struggle picked up in the vacuum. Timur returned home in triumph only after a brief excursion to the coast of Smyrna to wipe out the last crusader stronghold in the region (thus doing his service as a 'ghazi' or holy warrior). His grim parting blow, as the remaining Knights rowed away into the sea, was to catapult the heads of their fallen companions towards them.¹⁸⁸

Timur planned on his most ambitious campaign yet-one to the still-young Ming Dynasty which had supplanted the Mongol Yuan with a native Chinese dynasty. However, after setting out to cross the mountains on his way to Xinjiang he caught an illness and, far into old age, expired. The campaign dissipated in the wake of his ending, and soon after the outlying regions of the empire began to fall away.¹⁸⁹

What is to be made of Timur's career is less about the immediate impact of his campaigns, with the obvious exception of his enriching his home region and decorating his cities themselves as his monuments to triumph, but more about what would come next. For the first time since the Han Dynasty in China someone had blended the grand strategy of a state primarily agrarian in character with the tactics and the abilities of the nomads. The division between nomad and settled was becoming less clear and Timur had opened the door to a new transitional era. It was an opening for which many others would follow on through.

4.5...A Legacy Transforms into a Second Incarnation

¹⁸⁸ Hookham, 251-4.

¹⁸⁹ Manz, 128.

The Timurid Empire is often understood to have effectively collapsed soon after Timur's death, but as has been demonstrated by the nature of Timur's campaigns, most of what was immediately lost to rising factions like the Ak Koyunlu tribesman and regional Turkic rulers in Iran was not really part of the Timurid Empire but rather their stomping grounds for raiding. The core territory of the Timurid realms, the traditional cities of Central Asia, remained for a few more generations under Timurid rule, along with parts of northern Iran.¹⁹⁰

Shahrukh, Timur's first successor, faithfully governed according to the Yasa of Chinggis Khan. Under his administration, as under the dynasties' founder, nomads were given more regional autonomy than settled people, though both communities had a significant measure self-governance provided they stayed within what was expected of them. In fact, the level of decentralization was so great that the many tribes and cities soon became as much a hindrance in their autonomy as they were a decentralized cost-cutting measure.¹⁹¹

Despite the eventual rule of the enlightened stargazer Ulugh Beg, the military weakness of the state and its gradual disintegration was becoming more and more apparent as the century wore on. The decreasingly loyal subordinates had to be kept in check with divide-and-rule tactics. Eventually, though the wealth and prosperity of the Transoxianan cities still gleamed, the political power unraveled, and split. Minor princelings held on to some territory, while the Uzbeks (themselves refugees from parts of the collapsing Kipchak Khanate) invaded from the north. Muhammad Shaybani Khan, a Chinggisid, was able to re-establish power over many of the Central Asian cities, and so it seemed that Toqtamysh had his posthumous revenge...but the story of the Timurids was not yet over.

4.6...Mughal Dawn, Timurid Rebirth

To chart the rise of the Mughals, and thus, dynastically, also the resurgence of the Timurid line, historians are fortunate to have an indispensable source which is not only

¹⁹⁰ Beatrice Forbes Manz. *Power, Politics, and Religion in Timurid Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20-1.

¹⁹¹ Manz, 28, 126.

primary, but autobiographical. It was the founder of a new empire, Zahir ud-din Muhammad Babur, known usually for expediencies' sake and historical convention by his nickname of just 'Babur' (Farsi for 'tiger'), kept a detailed journal from his youth in Transoxiana to the establishment of his rule across much of northern India. Using this as our primary (but by no means only) guide to the formation of the Mughal period offers a glimpse not only into the actions of someone engaged in Inner Eurasian geopolitics at an important transitional moment, but also a view directly into the conscious decision making processes of its most pertinent driving actor.

Born in 1483 to the royal lineage of the Timurid line, Babur rose to the kingship of what effectively had atrophied to a Samarkand city-state at the age of 12. His unstable rule, run effectively under his mother's influence and advice, weathered numerous upheavals, including a revolt by the knightly Tarkhan class of elite warriors, tribal warfare amongst the other cities and countryside of Transoxiana, and divided factions within his own realm of rule.¹⁹²

This was not the ideal situation to learn the art of statecraft, and the boy and his family were soon evicted from their inheritance. Despite this, the young Babur learned quickly and retaliated, temporarily seizing back Samarkand from the usurpers and exerting enough authority to stop his army from looting the population. This second reign would, however, be of even shorter duration than his first. Once Babur left the city to take Andizhan he would only lose it to the ever southwards-expanding Uzbeks under Muhammad Shaybani Khan. Deserted by all but 200 warriors and his immediate family, Babur fled south in 1498 at the age of fifteen.¹⁹³

Babur himself started to notice a certain acceleration of changes which presaged a new geopolitical era in Inner Eurasia. As he continued his flight south he remarked on the noticeable physical changes to the landscape which was manifested starkly in the massive amount of fort-building: "Because of the Moghuls and the Uzbeks not a single village is without a fort."¹⁹⁴ After yet another failed sojourn to recapture part of the lost

¹⁹² Zahir ud-din Muhammad Babur, translated, edited, and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston. *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 35-49.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 89-93.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

Transoxiannan lands Babur then entered dejected exile in Tashkent, composing a line to describe his sorry state of affairs:

No one remember anyone in tribulation/
 No one gladdens anyone in exile.
 In this exile my heart has not been gladdened/
 No one can be comforted at all in exile.¹⁹⁵

After gathering enough patronage to be able to reconstitute a following, Babur moved into Kabul, which he would place under his own rule. His following there as well as his wealth and relative power also grew, as he now could launch raids into “Hindustan” or the Indian Sub-Continent with ease and the booty proved both lucrative and helpful in building up a new army.¹⁹⁶ Soon, at the gates of Herat, the Uzbeks were finally stopped and their southwards expansion was halted. Shaybani Khan (whom Babur had taken to regularly referring to as ‘Wormwood Khan’) had won the struggle finally. The Uzbek position in the lands they had overrun was secure. Returning to the north looked like an increasingly futile enterprise, and so Babur would sate his lust for a kingdom elsewhere.¹⁹⁷

Despite all the losses, Babur’s army was stronger for it. He had adapted to learning at the hard end of conflicts well. His small force which he led into India to replace the Afghan Lodi Dynasty sitting upon the decaying Delhi Sultanate was well equipped with matchlock firearms in addition to its more traditional Central Asian load-out. Meanwhile, the Lodi Dynasty had technologically stagnated and divided along sectarian lines of Afghan rulers and disgruntled Hindu nobles. Though outnumbered and with a so far unimpressive record, Babur saw this as the time to strike south and take in India what he had lost in Central Asia.¹⁹⁸

4.7...India Gets A Taste of the Formless Empire

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 136, 138.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 162, 186.

¹⁹⁷ Harold Lamb. *Babur the Tiger* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1962), pages 75-80.

¹⁹⁸ Jon F. Richards. *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pages 8-9.

In 1525 Babur made it to the outskirts of Delhi, where a massive yet hastily collected Lodi force under Sultan Ibrahim Lodi waited for him, equipped with war elephants and daring the much smaller invading army to attack them. Rather than do this, Babur drew up a defensive line in Panipat, a town to the north-west. There his flanks could be secured by the town on one side and hills on the other, allowing for a funneling effect of the enemy should they come for him. A trench was dug across the front and something new for an Inner Eurasian army-acted as the linchpin of the defense-lines of matchlock-armed infantry behind a field fortification. This new innovation was still paired with traditional horse-archer and heavy cavalry formations that went out to raid the Lodi army on nightly occasions and kill stragglers to inspire fear.¹⁹⁹

Having an upstart enemy so closely camped to his capital Lodi had to attack, and so he did. As Babur planned he rushed into a headlong attack, thinking to use his elephants to maximum advantage. Babur's cannons and matchlocks made short work of this charge, causing panic and confusion amongst the massive host. The cavalry then swooped in from around the flanks and completed a near-perfect encirclement of the enemy forces who suffered massive casualties. Sultan Ibrahim and half of his army were slain in the aftermath and the Timurid army moved into Delhi. The plunder which came from this single campaign alone would solidify the nobles behind Babur and allow him to constitute a new empire.²⁰⁰ This empire was seen as a successor to that of the Timurids, but it would go down in history by the name the Indians would give it-the Mughal Empire-based on their pronunciation of the word 'Mongol'.²⁰¹

Babur would go on to secure most of Northern India in the next few years, winning equally impressive victories over the Hindu noble Rajputs at Khanwa and stopping a Bengali counter-attack in the east. In all of these cases his small mobile army packing superior firepower was able to choose the location of the battle and react to changing circumstances faster than the larger and more cumbersome hosts of his foes.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Babur, 323-4.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 326-8..

²⁰¹ Catherine Asher. *India: The Mughals 1526-1858 in Great Empires of Asia* (Jim Masselos, ed. London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 2010), page 169.

²⁰² Babur, 369, 386, 421.

Babur would not have long to enjoy his final success, for despite still being relatively young he succumbed to illness in 1531. His son, Humayun, was outmaneuvered by powerful nobles and had to flee the country, leaving the Afghan Sher Shar Sur in charge of the empire. While Humayun entered the protection of the Safavids in Iran, this usurper turned out to be quite capable. He built the Grand Trunk Road, the longest road in India, to better facilitate commerce and communication through the new empire, but when he died in a gunpowder explosion and his heir did not last long in the aftermath, Humayun was able to return and re-establish the legitimate succession to the Mughal throne. Humayun would die the very year of his joint revenge and triumph however and so the throne was open now to his son Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar, whose reign in many ways would come to embody the nature of the height of Mughal rule, as well as the geopolitical nature of the traditions of the formless empire when exported out of its natural habitat and into the agrarian littoral.²⁰³

Akbar, like his grandfather Babur, would be established as ruler of the Mughal state at the age of 12, but fortunately for him the circumstances of his coming to age in rule would be much less harrowing. His first major challenge was to deal with the Rajput threat, which he did. In 1564 the major Rajput areas had been cleared, and during the fall of Garha-Katanga many of the noble women committed self-immolation en masse. Despite this dramatic act, Akbar saw an opportunity to solidify his rule in a way that would set the Mughals apart from the Afghans. The Mughal Empire would not merely be ascendant; it would also be an attractive place to live under, regardless of the faith of the subjects. This kind of toleration would not only solidify Akbar's reign with the masses, but also ensure the relative weakening of Afghan, Uzbek and Timurid nobles who had already proved the consequences of their influence by deposing his father.²⁰⁴

Given the previous encounters between Muslims and Hindus in India it perhaps seems remarkable that the Mughals could so successfully co-opt the Hindu aristocracy for their state, but Rajput warrior ethics were actually a fairly good match for the Mughal imported Central Asian system. Generations of Rajputs would serve the Mughal state along with the imported semi-nomadic cavalymen who were the core of the original

²⁰³ Masselos, 170-1.

²⁰⁴ Richards, 17, 20.

army.²⁰⁵ As expansion continued though more and more emphasis had to be put of infantry and sieges as the army had increasing difficulty in more broken and swampy terrain like the Deccan and Bengal.²⁰⁶

Akbar drew upon influences the Timurids had picked up from both their Central Asian background as well as their time in exile in the Iranian court to create a system in India that reflected the kind of strategies of rule and foreign policy that they were familiar with but adapted to the Indian circumstances:

“Buoyed by conquest and plunder, Akbar and his advisers built a centralizing administration capable of steady expansion as new provinces were added to the empire. The Mughal emperor presided over a system that moved money, commodities, men, and information freely across the empire. The emperor and his advisers were rigorous managers who creatively adapted and responded to changing circumstances. Building on this foundation, Akbar’s successors oversaw steady growth in imperial effectiveness, power, and resources through the seventeenth century.”²⁰⁷

Keeping this “heterogeneous body of free men” that was the Mughal nobility as a unified force was this facilitated by constant territorial, economic, and cultural expansion.²⁰⁸

The Inner Eurasian heritage of the dynasty was the direct precursor to Akbar’s style of rule, so rather than being seen as a uniquely visionary ruler who tried to bridge divides in culture and tradition, perhaps Akbar should additionally be seen in the context of where his family came from and the techniques of statecraft which they inherited:

“The Mughal Khan-the Great Khan- was different from the Khalifa of Islamic theory. The Great Khan was purely a political and military and not a religious leader. It was no part of his duty to enforce a well-defined and immutable code of divine or quasi-divine system of law as was the case with the Khalifa ground by the Shari’at . The Mughal sovereign had no such limitations. He was a political sovereign pure and simple.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 23-6.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 33.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 58.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 60.

²⁰⁹ Prasad Tribathi. *The Turko-Mongol Theory of Kingship* (Chapter 2 in *The Mughal State 1526-1750*, Muzaffar Alan and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, editors. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.), pages 115-116.

Even in a place as foreign from its origins as India, the formless empire was a workable model for those with the speed and adaptability to use it.

In addition to his searching for religious syncretism and his rescinding of religious laws advocating the greater level of taxation from the 'unbelievers', Akbar's long reign also had the fortunate circumstance of coming at a time of regional economic expansion. As trade routes around the world became more integrated due to European exploration and expansion, the vast markets of the Mughal Empire and its many exports found new markets, and New World silver flowed in from the Americas to greatly enrich the state. This influx of cash initiated a market-driven, rather than state directed, capitalist expansion in the early 17th Century. This would lead to the empire becoming quite possibly the largest and wealthiest economy in the entire world. Before the coming of the British, arguably before the capitalization of any nation save the Netherlands, the Mughal Empire had become a monetized and capitalist giant.²¹⁰

4.8...Selling Out, Mughal Style

Jahangir rose to the throne in 1605, his reign would mark the largest territorial extent of the empire, but also the seeds of its fall. This could be seen in both military and domestic political factors.

This process was of course a more modern version of what people like the Khitans and Kipchaks before had tried to avoid by remaining connected to their nomadic roots, with various levels of success. The Mughals, increasingly integrated through their own policies and also more and more cut off from Central Asia, had not retained their military and diplomatic flexibility. Well aware of the threat that someone could do to them what they had done to those who came before; Central Asian security became an increasing concern. But rather than flights of fancy regarding restoring Transoxiana to Timurid rule, this was a defensive and fear-based concern.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Richards, 63, 74.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

The Mughal Empire had continued to follow its successful gunpowder based model, but the large siege weapons used in the south and east lacked the portability of the lighter field pieces used elsewhere, and the well-armed infantry had increasingly dislodged cavalry as the decisive arm of service. Furthermore, the erosion of the Central Asian concerns and lack of direct naval connections meant that the state was losing out of technological advancements being made in the rest of the Turkic world, particularly the Ottoman Empire.²¹²

On a campaign north to secure the frontiers of northern Afghanistan (itself barely a part of the empire anymore) the ponderous Mughal host, which clearly came to resemble something akin to a better armed mob from the Lodi period, could overwhelm their Uzbek foes with firepower, but never catch or outmaneuver them. The Mughals ended up being led around the country from frustrating action to fruitless pursuit. Finally, two years later, they gained two marginal provinces at the cost of 40 million rupees. The annual income of these provinces was only a few million combined. Meanwhile, the once-friendly Safavids had seized the opportunity of the Mughal's embarrassing quagmire and driven into western Afghanistan, taking Kandahar and holding it against massive Mughal counterattack with superior artillery. Combined with an army breakdown in the Himalayas, the rule of Jahangir seemed to show the beginning of the reversal of previously ascendant Mughal power.²¹³

It wasn't just the military failures that were the problem. For a country which had lost touch with its original roots, the domestic policies of Jahangir and later Aurangzeb would play a decisive role in ensuring that the Mughals inroads into being integrated into India would not work be a viable recourse either.

The one front where the empire was still expanding was to the south. It reached its maximum southwards extent under Aurangzeb, though at this point it was largely expanding for reasons of capturing a monopoly on the regional textile trade with the Europeans and Gulf rather than for the glory of its upper classes and tribute system.²¹⁴ Aurangzeb, however, was much more totalitarian than even his increasingly conservative predecessors. He reinstated harsh taxes on non-Muslim subjects,

²¹² Ibid., 142-3.

²¹³ Ibid., 133-5.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 155.

attempted to remove powerful non-Muslim nobles from positions of power, angering the core Rajput constituency in the process, and curtailed the freewheeling economic system that was at the center of Mughal economic might. State 'censors' who were agents to enforce sharia-type laws on the populace crawled through the marketplaces making sure nothing forbidden was on sale.²¹⁵

Having a trained but now unemployed cadre of military Buddhists and Hindus was bad enough, but internal trouble brewed on the opposite front as well. The more traditionally inclined Timurids resented the erosion of their cultural ties, as well as the loss of power by the traditionally influential females of the Timurid line. So while the empire began to crumble around the periphery for betraying the flexibility and dynamism of Babur and Akbar, it also rocked from dynastic revolts from within for much the same reason.²¹⁶

Despite his attempts at centralization and homogenization, Aurangzeb's reign, which ended in 1707, had the opposite effect as what was intended. As more and more provinces became de-facto or even outright independent. The previously societally indifferent government had made a consensus that even European merchants felt at home in, but the reactionary tone of the Mughals into the 18th Century as well as the evident decay did little to slow the decline of the hegemon. A rising group of Hindu nobles, the Marathas, were fast becoming the new power. From their base in the west they harried the ponderous and increasingly backwards Mughal forces with light cavalry, guerilla tactics, and mobile strikes. The mantle of the formless had moved once again and soon what little that was left of the Mughal Empire was a rump state based in Delhi whose detritus was fought over like scraps between the Marathas and a succession of Afghan warlords. This lack of political and military power, coupled with still having some of the richest ports and merchants in the world would make much of post-Mughal India a tempting target for new colonial powers coming not just from the land, but the sea. With the sacking of Delhi by Nader Shah in 1739 (Chapter 5) the floodgates were open to the Dutch and above all the British.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Ibid., 175-6.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 179.

²¹⁷ Asher, 1880-199.

So ended an era where the formless met India. Other Central Asian empires had come to India before, but the level of impact the Mughals would have, especially financially and culturally, would mark them as among the most memorable of invaders. For two-hundred years they were the regional power, and considered only the Ottoman Empire to be another state worthy of being seen as an equal.

In absolute terms the Ming Dynasty in China probably outclassed them both, but as Mughal trade was overwhelmingly directed west rather than east it hardly mattered to them. Their mark on the Indian economy and society was so pervasive that the British chose to co-opt Mughal style governance and fiscal policy rather than simply introduce their own, at least initially.²¹⁸ Elements of the Inner Eurasian style of governance matched with, rather than clashed with, the flexible, mobile, and mercantile nature of sea power. It was an omen of a general geopolitical trend to come where maritime nations would surpass the land states with technology that brought the mobile firepower of the steppe to be even more effectively wielded from the sea.

4.9...The Fragmentation of Transoxiana

Shaybani Khan could have taken the Uzbeks to new heights after his expulsion of Babur in the early 1500s, but it was not meant to be. He overreached himself in wars with the Safavids and was killed at the Battle of Merv shortly after his greatest triumph. 'Wormwood Khan' would meet his end due to his aggression, but not at the hands of the Mughals. The legacy he left behind would be a mixed bag. He would reinvigorate post-Timurid mercantile culture by importing Indian merchants, even while allocating formerly Timurid domains to his nobles through redistribution.²¹⁹

Despite his short reign, Shaybani Khan's reign was important for a variety of factors. Uzbeks, themselves migrants from the various Khanates which spring from the now-defunct Kipchak Khanate made a large proportion of them ethnically, but at this point they seemed much more willing than before to start settling down amongst the

²¹⁸ J.F. Richards. *The Formation of Imperial Authority Under Akbar and Jahangir* (Chapter 5 in *Alan and Subrahmanyam*), pages 126-7.

²¹⁹ R.G. Mukminova and A. Mukhtarov (Chapter 1 of *The History of Central Asia*, Vol.5, Adle and Habib, editors. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003) *The Khanate of Bukhara*, pages 35-44.

farmers in significant levels. This led to an explosion of productivity in the cotton production of the region, which was only just then starting to really expand. This further sped up the process of formal bureaucratization as farming and production started to replace the centrality of herding and trade.²²⁰

His death however heralded the loss of many of the briefly held Uzbek domains. Bukhara became the rump state of the Shaybanid Empire, Kokand and Khiva broke off to become de fact independent city states and Bukhara's awkward attempts to restore unity plus Khiva's incessant raiding on its neighbors only exacerbated what would become full scale and lasting division.²²¹

In addition, most of these states were divided by internal family feuds and rivalries which tore apart any kind of cohesive foreign policy. Small, weak, and divided, these post-Timurid state-lets where only saved (for a while at least) by their remote and distant location from the aggressions of others. The turning back of an antiquated Mughal army by the Uzbeks (as mentioned in the previous sub-section) was one of the last large scale triumph over people from outside Transoxiana they would have. Eventually this constant strife culminated in a large, draining, and ultimately indecisive war between the various Khanates in the region, after which many of them simply retreated into slave raiding Russian settlements and jealously guarding their increasing insularity. This spurning of traditional Inner Eurasian cultural and political openness and flexibility would have dire consequences in the centuries to come. Soon, the once colonized Russians would appear on the scene and turn the tables decisively on the region-and these once-roaming nomads and traders who had appeared so omnipresent and adaptable would have no inkling even of what was to come.

4.10...Meanwhile, Back in Mongolia

Mongolia was the genesis ,or at least frontier, of so many of the case studies examined in this study had one last indigenous hurrah to throw before the era of nomadic power and formless steppe empire started to come to a close. The pre-modern example that

²²⁰ Ibid., 44, 60.

²²¹ M. Annanepesov and H.N. Bababekov. The Khanates of Khiva and Kokand (in Adle and Habib), pages 63.

most resembles modern day formless geopolitics (as will be discussed in later chapters) was pioneered by a later-Mongol leader who emphasized the very indirect and flexible nature that has so far been discussed, yet did so from a stable territory with little need for direction expansion into other nations. Her name was Queen Manduhai, or Manduhai Khatun.

As has been previously mentioned, the once unified Mongol empire started to disintegrate after the civil war of succession and the rise of Kublai. The universal laws, trade regulations (or lack of them) and tax policies inherited from pre-imperial steppe practices were applied consistently. At the time of the empire's height (and its last phase as a truly unified entity) during the reign of Mongke the government exchequer contained so much wealth that slipped past the main Transoxiana bureaucracy that individual regions could keep enough for their own domestic investments.²²²

The process of change from Mongolian to more regional bureaucratization was one of profound impact, particularly in the era of the Yuan Dynasty. Started under Kublai (to strengthen his case as he campaigned to get the remainder of southern China under his rule) the Yuan after his death rapidly become more and more Chinese in character. As this was happening, economic development sprung up along the margins of the steppe, drawing in a massive amount of Mongolian immigration into new market towns in what would eventually become Inner Mongolia. This was useful for Kublai, as he was using the support of his settled constituency to fend off more traditional steppe rivals such as Ariq-Boke, and may have even been an intentional strategy to integrate populations on behalf of the Yuan government in later eras.²²³ This process eventually led to Mongolia being given civil and provincial administration in 1307 under the Chinese style title of Greater Yuan province.²²⁴

When the dynasty collapsed in China due to internal revolt²²⁵ and the native Ming administration soon took power over all of the remaining provinces of China

²²² John W. Dardess. "From Mongol Empire to Yuan Dynasty: Changing Forms of Imperial Rule in Mongolia and Central Asia" in *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. 30, (1972-1973), pages 117-165.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 143-9.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

²²⁵ Almost symbolically, the rebels posed as Chinese merchants and blew open the palace grounds with a disguised gunpowder bomb. A sneak attack using technology that in the right circumstances would come to symbolize the end of the era of nomadic military dominance, eventually, at least.

proper, the Yuan court fled north to Mongolia. However, they found that while they had never truly become Chinese, they had also ceased to be Mongolian. The court of the self-proclaimed Northern Yuan quickly sank into irrelevance. Factionalism reigned supreme on the steppe and the dynasty's repeated tired claims of lordship over China seemed increasingly pathetic in the face of Ming expansion and the loss of territory to Turkic warlords in the western steppe. In fact, many Mongols stayed in the now Chinese ruled areas they had migrated to as the Ming offered more prosperity and security than the deluded Northern Yuan. This division remains in force today as the distinction between Inner and Outer Mongolia, and Inner Mongolia (the province of China) remains the more populous of the two.²²⁶ As Jack Weatherford puts in most artful terms about the Northern Yuan:

“No heroes came to recharge the energy of the sapped nation. No new allies came to join them. No armies set out to expand the decaying Mongol rule over China. Throughout the fourteenth century the Mongol leadership, especially the Borijin [Chinggisid] clan deteriorated. Each generation proved less competent and knowledgeable, as well as more isolated and corrupt, than the last.”²²⁷

Into this vacuum Ariq-Boke's descendants returned to Mongolia and became one of the ascendant clans. They had not squandered their political capital on becoming perfumed and obese aristocrats. However, there would be no resurgence of the clan overall, and this potential soon frittered away into just more division. The Northern Yuan was now so weak and insecure that Mongols in the employ of the Ming and mobile Ming cavalry units of Chinese soldiers alike raided with near impunity, or looted their own trade with Beijing and blamed the loss of valuables on Mongol raiders-which only increased the raiding of course.²²⁸

The titular Essen Khan, ruler of Mongolia (if largely in name) was soon assassinated opening up an entirety of claimants and a potential for a many-sided civil war. It was onto this dire stage that a woman named Manduhai tentatively stepped.

²²⁶ Jack Weatherford. *The Secret History of the Mongol Queens: How the Daughters of Genghis Khan Rescued his Empire* (New York: Crown Publishers Group, 2010), pages 129-131.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 152, 171.

Manduhai had been Essen's young wife. She was now Manduhai Khatun, or female Khan. Her position was vulnerable. The Ming still campaigned and the Xinjiang-based warlord Ismayil was attempting to place his own puppets into power in the Mongolian court. In a society where women may have been traditionally powerful, but never before actually the head of state (at least officially) the circumstances did not bode well for the post-imperial Mongol nation.²²⁹

Fortunately, Manduhai found a legitimate Chinggisid heir; a small sickly boy with the extremely royal Mongolian name of Batu Mongke. Unfortunately, Ismayil had already found out about this family line and had abducted the boy's mother. Queen Manduhai and her warriors rode to snatch the boy before the same fate happened to him and took him back to her primary encampment. She installed the boy in a formal ceremony there under the title "Dayan Khan" as joint ruler, and soon after married him officially. No one could now dismiss the Khatun, she had shored up her position.²³⁰

Before confronting her two biggest threats though, she had to clean house in the north. The Oirats, a tribe of Mongols no longer under Chinggisid authority and from a bit further north-west began to migrate into Manduhai's territory. She turned her forces and with General Une-Bolod struck a series of defeats against the tribe who had sought to capitalize on her nation's present weakness. The Oirats were driven from the field and from the lands they sought to claim for themselves, and so the disruption was ended. This show of strength from the new ruler however made it more apparent to her enemies that she was not to be underestimated, and so they began to gear up for a showdown with the Khatun. She would deal with each in different ways, but both methods would showcase the dynamism of formless geopolitical policy in ways reflective of both its evolution up to that point in history, and also in familiar to us contemporary viewers.

The Chinese general Wang Yue increased tensions on the border by luring Mongols into traps with defenseless looking caravans and then launching ambushes on them while they pillaged. Though his policy was successful, it led to casualties and expenses which detracted from overall purpose of the Ming government, which was the

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 185-6.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 196-204.

rebuilding and reconstruction of the Great Wall.²³¹ Chinese internal politics had bought Manduhai a reprieve from one enemy, so she could focus on another.

The warlord Beg-Arslan was killed in an ambush by Manduhai in 1479, but the bigger problem, Ismayil, remained. He still had Dayan Khan's mother, and now that the Khan was a teenager the shame of this slight could no longer be put aside for the sake of expediency. Besides, Ismayil had been interfering with Mongolian politics for decades. Manduhai had had enough and so she selected a small strike force of just a few of her best warriors and sent them west over the treacherous territory of Uighuristan on a twofold mission-to assassinate Ismayil and to return the Khan's mother.²³²

This Mongolian strike force was lucky to come upon both objectives in the same place, and by surprise. Ismayil rode out to see who the small party of new arrivals were, and was shot dead by the expedition leader instantly. The party proceeded to loot Ismayil's camp of its wealth, driving off his nearby supporters in the process, and took the Khan's mother back with them when they departed. She had lived a long time with Ismayil and she had grown accustomed to the change. Needless to say the reunion or young Khan with mother was complicated and bittersweet, but the job was done and Manduhai's territory now stretched west into the Uighuristan. This left the Ming challenge as the only major stumbling block to the newly invigorated nation.^{233 234}

The Ming was a foe which could not be so easily dispatched. So rather than try, Manduhai enlisted a more soft power approach. The Ming knew she could deal immense damage to their frontier settlements and rob them of wealth if she so chose. This path would be dangerous for the Mongols, but also for the Ming. With this in mind she re-opened official relations with the Chinese dynasty after the multi-generational hiatus since the Yuan had ceased to be the rulers of China. In exchange for renouncing all claims on the people of China, and stopping the regular raiding in Inner Mongolia, Manduhai demanded full recognition of the Mongols as a sovereign entity with equal diplomatic status in negotiations with the Chinese and a resumption of trade between

²³¹ Ibid., 234-7.

²³² Ibid., 248.

²³³ Ibid., 249.

²³⁴ Hidehiro Okada. "Dayan Khan as Yuan Emperor: The Political Legitimacy in 15th Century Mongolia," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francais d'Extreme-Orient* 81 (1994), pages 51-3.

the two. Even upsetting the traditional order of the Confucian state system was worth security on the northern frontier. The Ming acquiesced to the proposal in 1488.²³⁵

Manduhai used what little remaining time she had left to issue a decree recognizing all who lived the pastoral lifestyle in Mongolia as equals and part of the Mongol identity. She was, of course, hearkening back to Chinggis Khan's Yasa, and in so doing she made sure that the various ethnicities that had migrated to the Yuan court back in the days of empire were integrated into the nation. These included Turkic peoples, Kipchak refugees of the breakup of the Kipchak Khanate, Uighurs, and even the descendants of Ossetian bodyguards that the Khan of old once had used. To build on this she also reiterated the old Yasa edict that the state would have no official religion. Like the Khitans she also made mobile flying base camps which rotated around the periphery of the empire securing the trade routes and holding hostile tribes at bay.²³⁶

Once Manduhai Khatun died Dayan Khan would become sole ruler. He would continue her policies and so would several generations of his descendants. A small nation sharing borders with a great power and hostile neighbors would endure until the rise of the Manchus in the 17th Century. This would have important implications for the future of states of the region, nomadic or not. Weatherford sums up Manduhai's reign and political system from the perspective of a historian, though his observations are just as pertinent to the study of Mongolia in international relations, as well as the general concept of the formless empire that this study seeks to examine:

“In contrast to the expansive territorial acquisition favored by prior generations of steppe conquerors, Manduhai pursued a strategy of geopolitical precision. Better to control the right spot rather than be responsible for conquering, organizing, and running a massive empire of reluctant subjects. [...] Now, rather than trying to conquer and occupy the extensive links of the Silk Route or the vast expanse of China, she sought to conquer just the strategic spots from which to control them [indirectly].”²³⁷

²³⁵ Weatherford, 256.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 260-262.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

Previous iterations of the formless empire had been large and dynamic, but often lacked long term staying power. Manduhai showed that nations, rather than empires, can not only play the game, but become powerful actors outside of their normal scope by doing so. In following the policies which she put into place Mongolia was a preview of a more modern period in the history of Inner Eurasia. But before that era could come, the geopolitical formlessness of the region would be first diminished, and then seemingly destroyed forever by the encroaching technological power and expansion of the settled states and their burgeoning populations who had suffered at the hands of it for a significant portion of recorded history.

4.11...Conclusion

This chapter has covered a period of time in which the formless empire, usually dominated by nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples, begins to integrate across civilizational boundaries more often. This process was accelerated by the changing nature of technology and economics, with the more maritime states now overtaking the land-based ones. The early Ming voyages of exploration into the Indian Ocean by the massive ships of Admiral Zhung He, temporary a venture as they may have been, was just a glimpse of what was about to happen with the nations of Europe. Whatever the cause though, at the end of the era the balance of power had already started to blur and the definition of what was formless politics would start to change.²³⁸

Not only were the nomadic peoples adapting and accommodating the settled states, but the settled peoples were learning their own lessons in turn, or re-learning them, which would soon bear terrible fruit for the nomads as the pace of technological change accelerated.²³⁹ Timurids maintained the separation between nomadic military and civil governance, all while running a massive trade-redistribution racket across Eurasia. Plunder fed the army and what can only be called economic redistricting fed the cities. It was a symbiosis along uniquely Inner Eurasian lines.

²³⁸ Darwin, 7.

²³⁹ Beckwith, 219.

Meanwhile, the Mughals left the realm almost entirely (if not by choice) and over the course of time became more and more like the people they had come to conquer. Seeing the shifting winds of trade and priority they soon abandoned their Central Asian possessions and refocused on developing Indian and maritime commerce, effectively evolving into an entirely different kind of state through gradual adaptation.

The Central Asian states began to break up and decline. Timur had brought their prosperity a new lease, but long after his death the trends of global change had already started to pass the region by. Once a center of culture and commerce the various rump states of Transoxiana deteriorated into a succession of squabbling and increasingly impoverished backwaters.²⁴⁰

Mongolia had the most interesting adaptation (from a contemporary perspective at least-this example will return for comparison in later chapters) to the changing times and increasing power of the settled states. It effectively abandoned dreams of direct empire entirely and went full force down the path of indirect control. As has been shown previously, this was not new to Mongol policy by any means, but previous examples of Mongol indirectness usually involved direct conquest, at least initially, and expansion. Manduhai Khatun showed that in light of changes in the balance of power, Mongols could adapt accordingly and use the strategies they had perfected for defensive as well as offensive purposes.

No matter the geographic and circumstantial divergence that made these examples of an era in flux apparent, they shared one thing in common-the situation was changing, and the settled littoral states were on the rise. This reversal in the balance of power would re-orient Inner Eurasia, but not first without a fight.

²⁴⁰ Annanepesov and Bababekov, 68.

Chapter Five: End of Nomads, Rise of States, and the Transference of a Geopolitical Legacy

“Military strategists say: Those who show force arrogantly will lose; those who do not know the other will lose. Our army has committed all these mistakes. [...] We cannot predict the day when I can wipe away this shame and take revenge.”

~The Yongzheng Emperor’s Edict to General Yue Zhongqi regarding a Zhungar defeat of a Qing frontier army, 1731.

“The vanquished always seek to imitate their victors in their dress, insignia, belief and other customs and usages. This is because men are always inclined to attribute perfection to those who have defeated and subjugated them.”

~Ibn Khaldun

5.0...Summation:

When the end came for the formless empires of the nomadic confederations and armies of the steppe it would not be so much because of the failure of their own system, but rather of its large-scale adoption by the settled agrarian states which were so often their foes. Already we have examined how the Han Dynasty and early Muscovite Russia had varying degrees of integration within the systems of previously nomadic powers in Chapter III. Moving into the post-Mongol and Timurid eras a large change begins to occur; that of the partial adoption of formless geopolitics by the settled states at a critical technological juncture. The initial seeds of gunpowder and mercantile innovations, which were scattered throughout Eurasia due to the Mongol conquests and administration of their vast domains, had taken root in the vastly populated and often militarily beleaguered agrarian societies and bureaucratized states.

Over the course of what is often termed the early modern period, the military and commercial balance of power gradually shifted to the settled states. The Mughals and their earlier Timurid ancestors were semi-nomadic elites who eventually became more and more sedentary, creating a type of transitional bridge between the nomadic formless and the more conventional state’s practice of similar strategies. But in this chapter the focus now moves to two states which are still with us today in the contemporary world, as both actors and originators of contemporary geopolitics, and

thus mark a direct lineage from this charted past: Russia, China, and even a little appearance by Iran. But before getting into those two colossi of Eurasia it is worth looking at the general strategic and tactical changes which occurred to make these states which suffered most from nomadic peoples turn the tables so decisively, though in the case of Iran, only temporarily.

5.1...Gunpowder Shifting in the Wind: The Balance of Power Changes

In the previous chapter the influence and changing nature of a state's tactical options were discussed especially in relation to the adoption of gunpowder weapons becoming more and more widespread throughout all of Eurasia. Combined with greater mercantile and agricultural productivity and increasing naval technology, which enabled many more trade routes to become redirected to the maritime realm, the previously victimized settled states were seeing a logistic upgrade to complement their increasing military capacity. Even so, they would not attain true military dominance on the whole until the 18th Century, when both Russia and China entered the real core territories of their longtime nomadic rivals for more than temporary excursions.^{241 242} This codification of the more conventional state would not however come away untouched from its interactions with the nomadic foes it so desperately tried to destroy.

Gunpowder weapons, attached to a more sophisticated and resource rich societal apparatus, would indeed be a decisive element of nomadic downfall, but even that paled in comparison with the new and more flexible understandings of geopolitics that were being developed in both China and Russia (and indeed, elsewhere). It is now time to examine how the settled states would both bring an end to the formless geopolitics of before and also bring about its new beginning. From the perspective of Eurasian land powers, the vast spaces still called for the utilization of proxies, ambiguous space, and unrivaled mobility.

²⁴¹ Peter A Lorge. *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), page 31.

²⁴² Dominic Leven. *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (Great Britain: Pimlico, Random House, 2003), 207.

5.2...Between Chinese and Manchu Worlds: The Qing Dynasty and China's Eurasian Invasion

It was the Qing dynasty, the last of the imperial dynastic age of China, which would most clearly come to define contemporary Chinese border and foreign policy in both its nature and its physical shape. Like the Khitans it was born in a foreign land, but unlike them it would shape the entire destiny of what we now call the unified Chinese state, even including its present day borders.

The Jurchen people, who we previously met in Chapter III as the evictors of the Khitans from their first empire as well as the establishers of the Jin Dynasty, which was in turn destroyed by the rise of the Mongols, had not completely disappeared. Like the Khitans, many of them had been co-opted into the Mongol ruling apparatus. Unlike the Khitans, however, they stayed in their Amur River Valley area. With the collapse of the Mongol Yuan Empire in China the Jurchens could again re-assert sovereignty. At this point there were groups of Sinified Jurchens, 'wild' northern Jurchens, and Jurchens who maintained close contacts with Mongolia and China. The Mongol *yam* postal service remained in service throughout the Jurchen realms. The Ming Dynasty often projected military power into the southern realms of Manchuria to make sure that the Jurchen people remained cowed. Followed by the construction of numerous fortresses along the frontier, the costs of this policy eventually spiraled into a liability for the Ming, and they abandoned the project and withdrew their frontier further south in 1435.²⁴³

The Jurchens experienced much of the Chinese culture, which they had now spent centuries out of direct interaction with through a type of "Mongolian filter" which influenced many independent chieftains to consider re-building their Eurasian style decentralized confederacy.²⁴⁴ In the late 17th Century this desire to be more than a few disparate tribes fighting for the scraps of what trade the Ming would give them grew.

In the Aisin-Goro clan of the Jurchen was one young warrior seeking revenge for the death of his father at the hands of a rival tribe. He had been tutored by a Ming Chinese tutor, and was both literate and aware of the Chinese ways, but was also raised to be a proper horseback warrior. This was Nurhaci. As his quest for vengeance

²⁴³ Gertraude Roth Li. "State Building Before 1644", Chapter 1 in *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 9, Part One, The Chi'ing Dynasty to 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8-14.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

unfolded he won battle after battle against the other tribes. His primary foes fled to the Ming, where that declining dynasty, fearful of the new power held by the Jurchens, acquiesced to demands by Nurhaci to put these exiles to death. It is around this time that a proper unified nation began to emerge for the first time since the old Jin Dynasty of the 12th Century. The term 'Manchu' started to replace Jurchen around this time, describing this rebirth of the Jurchens as a power.²⁴⁵

Though his state was fragile and he dared not yet strike south for full on war with the Ming Dynasty, Nurhaci decided to occupy his warriors by moving west and incorporating the Eastern Mongol lands into his domain. As justification he is claimed to have said:

"The languages of the Chinese and Koreans are different, but their clothing and way of life is the same. It is the same with us Manchus and the Mongols. Our languages are different, but our clothing and way of life is the same."²⁴⁶

To make sure he had the right amount of sinew holding together this new and flexible state, Nurhaci organized the Banner System. The ultimate combination of budding modern bureaucratic state with traditional Inner Eurasian decentralized organization, the Banner System was a way for warriors of all tribes and ethnic backgrounds to retain cultural autonomy with regards to the state apparatus, while being loyal to the Emperor/Khan (title dependent on person addressing) personally. Loyalty was ensured by making an elite warrior rewards system which valued prestige from battle but which brought the promoted warriors closer and closer to the Manchu ruling establishment, which they now had a stake in.²⁴⁷

Having now secured his kingdom, Nurhaci turned on the Ming, but the fighting was inconclusive. The raids on the Ming redirected trade and tribute to Manchuria, and the Ming counterattacks were largely ineffective. Nurhaci seized the critical Liao River Valley in the south, where the Khitan Liao had once ruled, and thus finally had an agrarian base from which to farm surplus food. Soon after this success however

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 27-9.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 31.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 34-8.

Nurhaci died in 1626.²⁴⁸ It would be a testament to his state-building abilities however that both the state he founded and the dynasty he propagated would not only long outlive his death, but both become symbols for formless geo-strategy in their own ways.

When the Manchu people swept south to claim the reigns of the collapsing Ming state and set up their own dynasty, they did so using a combination of the mobile warfare of their semi-nomadic society and the technological ability of China itself. Well-armed with gunpowder weapons but lacking fixed positions which could be threatened by sedentary Ming forces, the Manchus were able to skillfully maneuver their way to power in both war and diplomacy despite being massively outnumbered by even the remaining forces of the old Ming Dynasty.

Once they had been united by Nurhaci, the Manchus held domination over the mixed forest-steppe zone of the Manchurian and Maritime Siberian frontier, and abetted both the lands of the Mongols and the northern edge of the now increasingly decrepit Ming Empire. They soon co-opted many of the remaining independent Mongols into their imperial scheme as well and thus could exert control over the northern and western steppe through proxies, particularly their Eastern Mongol allies. Combined with their widespread adoption of firearms, their mixed semi-pastoral and semi-agricultural base, and their many Mongol allies, who had an almost equal status in the regime as Manchurian peoples, it looked like the Manchus were now well on their way to re-birthing the Liao Dynasty by creating a confederated counterpoint to Chinese civilization in the north.²⁴⁹

Manchurian rule was in some ways a successor of their ancestors the Jin and the continuing influence of the Mongols as stated by Perdue:

“In short, the Mongols contributed a great deal to the early Manchu state. They provided military allies, horses, and a tradition of legitimation reaching back to Chinggis Khan. Along with the Yuan official seal came the concept of a universal empire encompassing many peoples, an ideal of rulership that vastly transcended either the state of the Manchu’s ancestors, the Jurchen Jin, or that of the Ming.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Peter C. Perdue. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 111.

²⁴⁹ Luc Kwanten. *Imperial Nomads: A History of Central Asia, 500-1500* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1979), 282-3.

²⁵⁰ Perdue, 127.

The Manchus, unlike the Khitan Liao, would continue on to much greater levels of success, more akin to replicating the Mongol achievement in China, but with its own key differences.

Quite fortunately for the ambitions of this new Manchurian power, the late Ming were crippled with corruption and shaken by the cost of having to fight off a Japanese invasion of Korea in the late 16th Century. Not to mention the re-building of the Great Wall resulting from Post-Yuan Mongolian resurgence, and was nowhere near as robust as the old Sung Dynasty had been to the Khitan expansion. After a palace coup and the collapse of the Ming government due to rebellions the mayor of Beijing invited the Manchus to fill the power vacuum, which they and their armies were more than happy enough to do in 1644.²⁵¹

Horsemen used gunpowder weapons and superior maneuverability to breach the Great Wall, and charging south removed both the last vestiges of the Ming Dynasty in Beijing as well as quelling the uprisings which had started to occur in the power vacuum caused by the total collapse of the dynasty. To make the process as smooth as possible the Manchus adopted a general amnesty program for any Ming officials and literati who submitted to the new order.²⁵²

After establishing control over northern China it seemed almost that the southern Ming and its de facto leader the pirate admiral Coxinga might hang on, but the Manchus, unlike the Khitans, made sure to fully build a centralized state in the Chinese-dominant provinces to better harness the resources there and were able to bring the full realm of China under their unified rule. Legitimacy was conferred on the Manchus by adopting an official dynasty name, Aisin in Manchurian, Qing in Chinese. Several decades of war in the south ensued, which would culminate with the unification of the former Ming realms under the absolute control of the part-Mongolian part-Manchurian Kangxi Emperor in 1678.²⁵³

The Qing Dynasty was born, and with it came economic revival, a reassertion of military power, and a grand strategy which hybridized both Chinese security concerns and Manchu expansionism. The western frontiers were, however, not yet pacified. And

²⁵¹ Ibid., 128.

²⁵² Jenny Dennerline. "The Shun-Chih Reign", Chapter 2 in Peterson's *The Cambridge History of China*, page 83-4.

²⁵³ Perdue, 114, 137.

while the Manchurian rule of China would become quite conservative and effectively Chinese, their foreign policies and grand strategies would take their own mixed path.²⁵⁴

After a brutal western campaign utilizing both Chinese know-how and Manchu military skill and frontier adaptability, China's modern western borders were finally formed. Nomadic and non-Chinese people were often integrated into the ruling elite much like the Mongols in the north, and a mixed regime was adopted towards pacifying the border. The major differences now were twofold. The first was the technological and economic advantages now enjoyed by more settled (or in the case of the Manchus, conquest-settled) people towards the famously intractable nomadic peoples. Thus was laid the foundations of the more modern and conventional state to make inroads into the far more amorphous political realm of Siberia and Central Asia, even if that state was itself a modified child of formless policy.²⁵⁵ The second was the northern border itself. Because, while China in all its various dynastic forms had always been the land power hegemon its own region, it was about to meet its first real settled-state foreign competition; a nation whose expansion from the opposite direction mirrored the vigor and ambition of its own.

5.3...The Awesome Terror of Muscovite Russia: From City State to Empire

Russia's own version of the formless grand strategy would be to use space as both defenses in depth as well as power projector. Once Russia, like the Manchu Qing, adopted both the mobility of nomadic cavalry coupled with the technology and logistics (especially relevant in the realm of firearms and cannon technologies) of the rapidly developing settled societies of the 17th Century, they were on course for expansion, formless style. Rather than constructing a circular buffer zone round the core, as the Manchu had done, the principality of Muscovy (the dominant city in post-Mongol Russia, largely due to collaboration with the Mongols against the other city-states) which would

²⁵⁴ Darwin, 125-7.

²⁵⁵ Perdue, 5-10.

eventually become the Russian Empire, embarked on an unprecedented landward expansion of colonization and conquest.²⁵⁶

None of this is to say that the balance of power had shifted so dramatically as to make Russia's territorial growth a cakewalk. In fact, the composite bow used by steppe nomads remained the superior weapon over gunpowder until the 19th Century. The difference was simply that it required a massive time investment to learn properly. Firearms, on the other hand, were relatively easy to use-and coupled with the larger population base of the settled societies could make a quite overwhelming combination against the far less populous nomadic peoples. Russia outnumbered much of its eastern opposition by a significant margin, now it could go into battle with them on a much more even qualitative level as well.²⁵⁷

Due to its previously discussed rise as the Golden Horde's tax collector (Chapter 3), Muscovy had consolidated its dominance as the first among many Russian principalities. After the crushing of resistance of Novgorod and other potential rivals Muscovy was the sole indigenous Russian power. It was not, however, the sole Inner Eurasian power. Due to its command of resources and military abilities though, Muscovy was arguably now the dominant Central Asia-connected fulcrum power west of China.²⁵⁸

This was largely evident after Tsar Ivan IV "Grozny" or somewhat inaccurately in English, "Terrible" opened up Siberia to Russian expansion. His campaign against the Kazan Khanate to the east was the decisive moment. The Khanate, a remnant of the old Golden Horde/Kipchak Khanate (as well as the even older Volga Bulgars) which now was split between Sibir, Astrakhan, the Crimean Khanate, and Kazan, stood at the gateway to the Urals. East of it throughout the Siberian forest and north of the steppe there was no other significant state-entity-all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Though it had been occupied by Russia before, under Ivan III ("The Great") it had merely been lightly vassalized, and soon regained its independence. While it is unlikely that Ivan IV was aware exactly how little resistance lay east of the Khanate, the Russians would

²⁵⁶ Darwin, 121.

²⁵⁷ Donald Ostrowski, "The Growth of Muscovy: 1462-1533", Chapter 9 in *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume I: From Early Rus to 1689* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), page 218.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

soon discover it for themselves. It is certainly possible, giving Muscovy's integration with defecting Tatar elites and military units, that they had some inkling of this fact, but either way the campaign to crush this meddlesome surviving appendage of the old Horde was launched in 1552. It only took a few months for the city to be breached and its surrounding lands to fall to the Russians.²⁵⁹

In what may seem like a highly conventional conquest was in fact highly tinged with the formless legacy of the geopolitical region the Russians were entering. Even though now they were the conquerors rather than the conquered, and their society, outside of the military, was quite divergent from that of the Turco-Mongolian peoples, Russian post-war policy was decidedly more reminiscent of the Kipchak Khanate than any more typical western equivalent. For example, though initially the typical medieval/early modern pattern of Christian vandalism and forced conversion of non-Christian subjects, the peace settlement for the newly annexed Kazan was soon codified to be religiously plural. The Muslim Tatars and pagan hangers-on were soon liberated from the initially religiously over-zealous actions of the conquering army by royal decree, and missionary activities were curtailed. In order to better take over the people and trade routes of the Upper Volga without the threat of continuous rebellion or economic disruption, it was determined that it would simply be easier to accommodate the new ethnic minorities with a more decentralized policy.^{260 261}

Once the splintered leftovers of the Golden Horde were swept aside there was no effective barrier, aside from daunting climate and distance, for Russia to expand both its economic base (largely through the fur trade) and its territorial control all the way to the Pacific. These borders which would grow so that they could, if need be, contract for defense, were spread by Cossack horsemen who used much of the mobile co-opting of their ersatz Mongolian overlords to expand. Unlike those former power-brokers, however, they left forts and settlements in their wake. The Cossacks were largely composed of stateless brigands, dislocated Tatars, Russian peasant runaways, and anyone else from the region that joined up. In exchange for their domestic and regional

²⁵⁹ Sergei Bogatyrev, "Ivan IV: 1533-1584", Chapter 10 in *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume I: From Early Rus to 1689* (Maureen Perrie, editor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁶¹ Taras Hunczak, editor. *Russian Imperialism from Ivan the Great to the Revolution* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 36.

autonomy they served the Russian state in both the Ukraine and Siberia, and as time went on, as military units on any front, and were largely deployed as the semi-nomadic cavalry force of the settled Russian state.²⁶²

This is not to say that Russia, like China, found expansion as a purely security driven enterprise. In fact, defensive security concerns could hardly account for the massive explosion of Russia's frontiers which made even the Manchurians look positively modest in their epic scale of hegemonic conquests. A key difference fueling Russian expansion was simple profit. The fur trade was a great opportunity to make copious wealth and so unlike the Qing, Muscovy/Russia was not content just to make a buffer zone, and it had to keep growing for the benefit of the state. The fur trade often became depleted and the natives either hired or enslaved to do the work often fled or died in the process.²⁶³

The blurred line between Siberian natives and new Russian settlements, exuberantly expansionist as they were, was itself a unique and formless method of expanding geopolitical power. After all, the Russians kept to the forests until the mid-18th Century when their greater population numbers and access to technology allowed them to take on the steppe tribes which still existed in the plains to the south in direct battle. Before Russia could exercise its new dominant colonial role however, it would come into conflict with the other settled behemoth of Eurasia.

The formless empires of the Qing and the Russians were about to meet. A process which would not only expose both powers similarities and differences to each other, but also set off another round of battle as the last remnants of the autonomous nomadic actors struggled to survive the coming end times for their way of life as it was crushed to pieces between the two advancing hegemonies.²⁶⁴

5.4...The End and a New Beginning

²⁶² W. Bruce Lincoln. *The Conquest of a Continent: Siberia and the Russians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pages 43-6.

²⁶³ Perdue, 90.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

The collision of Chinese imperialism by proxy through the Manchus and Russian imperialism by proxy through the Cossacks finally occurred in the Amur River valley, which lies within contemporary Primorsky Krai in the Russian maritime east. A Cossack fort had been constructed to claim the river basin, but the Manchurian leadership of the new Qing Dynasty found this uncomfortably close to what they regarded as their ancestral homeland and launched their forces in a counterattack in a rare display of power northwards, rather than westwards or southwards.

The beleaguered Cossacks were soon surrounded, under siege, and decisively defeated. Russian forces in south-eastern coastal Siberia surrendered to peace terms dictated by China and a northern border between the two Eurasian giants was codified in the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk. This would keep Russia far north of the Amur region until the mid-19th Century when they were able to capitalize on the instability and increasing weakness of the Qing regime after the Opium Wars.²⁶⁵

Now that the two giants had met, the former and current nomads between them became endangered societies. The 17th and 18th Centuries were times of increased settlement of Siberia and the steppes by Russians and the border regions of Manchuria by the Chinese. Despite the formless Inner Eurasian influences adopted by both powers, it seemed possible that the formless borderlands had been forever crushed between them as their expansions finally brought them together. It would have been premature to celebrate the death of those people who played a large role in inspiring the methods of expansion used by both settled powers who were now on the rise, for there were still a few rounds to go before the new order could be stabilized.

Most threateningly to the new Qing (and, indirectly, Russian) order would be the battles against Galdan Khan, a Mongol warlord who tried to unify the Mongol tribes into a power once again. His numerous campaigns to create a Dzungar-dominated Mongol state made him the last gasp of relatively large nomadic resistance to the new waves of settlement and conquest by the Qing Dynasty. His ruthless policies of pursuing state creation had almost the opposite effect by increasing the dissatisfaction among more peripheral tribes of his confederation. To groups like the Khalka and Eastern Mongols, the non-Chinese origin of the Qing Dynasty and their battlefield prowess made them just

²⁶⁵ Perdue, 161.

as legitimate overlords as Galdan and his distant Tibetan allies. The Qing decided to nip this potential threat in the bud by harnessing this internal discord and showing off to the Western tribes how open they were. The military banner system founded in the Manchu state before it took over China, which consisted in numerous ethnic military divisions with significant social and cultural autonomy and a high level of prestige, was ideal for recruiting these disaffected Mongols and using them to claim that the Qing had just as much right to the western steppes as Galdan Khan did. It also served to stipulate in their terms of service that they had to cut any homage to obedience to the Dzungar-allied Dalai Llama.^{266 267}

With his own polygot and semi-nomadic army, the Emperor Kangxi set out on campaign in 1688 to end the rise of Galdan and establish Qing hegemony deeper into Central Asia than had been done before. At first Kangxi was happy to allow submitted oasis city states and nomadic tribes along the trade routes to submit and keep their domestic autonomy, as is common with policies of Eurasian geostrategic formlessness. Galdan proved more effective at this indirect type of warfare and he would often withdraw into the steppe, and then re-emerge when the Qing forces had left only small garrisons as they moved on and bring the region under his control.²⁶⁸

Kangxi saw the futility of engaging his more mobile foe in this way, and thus adopted his own version of a false retreat to use on Galdan. He claimed to have been tired of fighting and offered Galdan to come to Beijing to sign a treaty of peace. As Galdan's forces moved east closer to Beijing to what they thought would be a peace settlement, Kangxi attacked. Galdan lost many of his warriors and the Manchus chased his shattered forces back into Central Asia. Eight years later he would be beaten again, the Qing mobile artillery (small cannons mounted on the backs of camels) playing a decisive role in decimating the trapped Mongols. After this second bout of carnage Galdan and very few of his followers fled into exile, where he soon after expired.²⁶⁹

The Dzungars were not quite finished yet. Half a century later a second Khan, also going by the name Galdan, took a more independent path towards the Qing than

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 108-11, 247.

²⁶⁷ Kwanten, 282.

²⁶⁸ Perdue, 144.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 199-202.

had been established in the peace following the original Galdan's death. This necessitated a second campaign that would finally finish the Dzungars off for good in 1745. The divided Dzungar tribes lost their legitimation that year when a pro-Qing government was installed in Tibet and the religious institution there withdrew from the alliance with the Western Mongols. Only then did the Dzungars finally and truly submit to the Qing.²⁷⁰

This enabled large Qing armies to advance further westward than ever before; prompting the eventual capitulation of what now has become China's westward border. With the Manchu rulers also came Chinese settlers and farmers, as well as economic policies to solidify state control. This disruption on the order, though tying the frontier much closer to Beijing, actually disrupted the trade and mobile commerce based economy of the region to such an extent that this once wealthy part of Eurasia became a backwater subsidized by the central government and largely held for security, rather than economic, reasons.²⁷¹

It is worth noting that Galdan Khan himself was aware of the endangered nature of his type of state on the Eurasian stage, as well as the emerging bipolarity. On numerous occasions he made overtures to the Russians for weapons and support to help him resist the Qing advance. Russia was too weak in the east at this point to help, even if they had wanted to. But since both the fur trade and the links with the Qing were profitable, Russia rebuffed his diplomatic advances. He was crushed by the Qing with tacit Russian approval.²⁷² The Treaty of Nerchinsk would hold strong as both powers seemed more concerned with ensuring control over their expanded borders than interfering with each other.

This border insecurity was about to show itself in another way. Galdan may have been gone, and so eventually his empire, but the need for mobility and pasturage still drove many people on the steppe. With an unprecedented amount of control finally seeming to have descended upon the region, the various peoples there that were still comparatively nomadic used confusion over which empire they belonged to in order to retain some amount of autonomy and freedom. Therefore, even during the process of

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 272-7.

²⁷¹ Beckwith, 240.

²⁷² Perdue, 288-9.

making the borders more defined and solid, the people between them still found ways to blur the lines imposed on them for their own self-interest.²⁷³

Arguably, this was not always in contrast to the interests of the now dominant settled states, who could always use claimed overlordship of some mobile ethnic group of people to make some sort of hegemonic claim to a new region. Qing policy towards many regions of its frontier post-Galdan retained this general attitude, as did Russian policy south of the Siberian forest belt and towards the Eurasian steppe. The biggest example of this was a tribe who was affected and trapped between both powers: the Kalmyks.

The case of the Kalmyks is of particular interest. Robbed of the power over their settled periphery by the rise of the new Eurasian states, the Kalmyk peoples still showed an amazing amount of formless adaptability in the confining spaces between the Russians and the Qing. Originally known as the Oirat, an eastern Mongolian tribe, the Kalmyks were a sub-branch which migrated west to flee internal disputes among the Oirat as well as the Qing conquest of Mongolia. They and their herds traveled all the way to the Volga in the Russian Empire, where they began raiding outlying Russian frontier settlements and settling in the region. By the mid-17th Century they were established in a new region, seemingly free of the new Qing regime on the less secure frontier near the Urals.²⁷⁴

Rather than take the time to expulse them by force in this still-peripheral region of the Empire, the Russian government decided rather to co-opt these people into its sphere of influence as a buffer against other still-roaming nomads. The Kalmyk Khanate made itself wealthy through controlling the vital trade routes between the Russian and Chinese frontiers, and did its best to maintain alliance and kinship networks with the other still-nomadic people. This system, and this uniquely majority Buddhist political entity in Europe, would last for a century atop the same region where the Kipchaks once held court in Sarai.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Ibid., 161-3.

²⁷⁴ Beckwith, 240.

²⁷⁵ Michael Khodarkovsky. "Non-Russian Subjects", Chapter 22 in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, Maureen Perrie, editor, 521-3.

With the centralizing policies of the Catherine the Great however, and the increase in Russian and Germanic settlement in and near Kalmyk lands, the situation began to reverse itself from a favorably exploited niche for a remnant-nomad people to a more precarious one. Fearful of losing their semi-autonomy, many (though by no means all) Kalmyks decided to return to the eastern steppe and western Mongolia. In 1771 with the flight of so many re-creating in reverse their original epic trek across Eurasia and back to the now Qing-dominated lands they once fled, Empress Catherine abolished the Khanate and formerly re-integrated the lands back into Russia proper.²⁷⁶

5.5...Settlement and Agriculture: The Codification of Victory

It wasn't just the borders of the settled states that expanded into Eurasia, it was in many cases their way of life as well. The seeds of this change in lifestyle were laid out in the original and regionally seminal treaty of 1689:

“After 1689, refugees, deserters, and tribes people had to be fixed as subjects of either Russia or China. Maps, surveyors, border guards, and ethnographers began to determine their identities internally and externally by stabilizing movement across borders and enabling the suppression of groups who did not fit imperial definitions of space.”²⁷⁷

The destruction of the ways of life of many of the indigenous inhabitants of Inner Eurasia wreaked by these policies was immense. The free-flowing caravan and trade system that gave the region much of its prosperity was terminated by the border and customs agents of the new bureaucratic state. The freedom to move from pasturage to pasturage was severely curtailed by the construction of fortresses and new towns of farmers, often from the center of the new regime.²⁷⁸ Chinese and Russian peasants and their subsidiary agrarian peoples would be the makers of the economy from now on, moving in to exploit the new niche opened up the great reduction if not outright elimination of the nomadic threat. After thousands of years of being on the shorter end

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 525-7.

²⁷⁷ Perdue, 161.

²⁷⁸ Beckwith, 242-2.

of the military and even often political equation, the settled people had finally appeared to achieve total victory.²⁷⁹

Surely, nomadic pastoralism as a percentage of economic means for people inside deep Eurasia had begun an inevitable decline. But the geostrategic practice that had been so well honed by the peripheral nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of the heartland had not disappeared into the sunset with them. We have examined how the settled states gradually adopted more and more of the nomadic methods of diplomacy and warfare to at first keep them at bay, and then supplant them entirely. But the geopolitics of formless space would not be totally disregarded merely because their main inventors had secured the frontier. Such political systems were also useful against other settled states. After all, the geography of Eurasia had hardly changed, even if the political and economic elements that had evolved on it had. An example of this involved neither Russia nor China, yet lurked quite near another front of the expanding Russian state.

Unlike Siberia, the Caucasus did not represent much of a settlement opportunity for Russians, not comparatively anyway. Most of the people there were already settled and agriculturally based. What inroads were made by the empire tended to be by co-opting local ruling elites as independent vassals of the Russians.²⁸⁰ If the Ottomans could be influential through regional proxies, so could the Tsar.

Russia did not drive deep into the region until much later compared to its Siberian expansion as well. This was largely due to the existence of both the Crimean Khanate (still hanging on all this time since the breakup of the Kipchak Khanate but now as an Ottoman dependency) and the Ottoman Empire itself. Largely indirectly, the Ottoman Empire was surely the most dominant power in the region and the mere threat of its involvement kept Russia far away from too much southern movement, at least until the mid and late 18th Century. Looking at the great power situation from an Inner Eurasian based perspective, the power of Russia was not yet apparent. In actuality, the Ottoman Empire would still be considered the dominant power on the western half of

²⁷⁹ A further examination into the extent of surviving nomadism will be undertaken later, but for now it is worth mentioning that this claim is not meant in any way to say that pastoralism went extinct in Eurasia at this time, or ever. It merely was phased from a primary activity to a secondary one in terms of economic priority.

²⁸⁰ Hunczak, 241-4.

Eurasia and Russia would be tied with Iran. And even that balance would first be changed in favor of the former rather than the latter before Russian hegemony would really be felt.²⁸¹

Before we move on to the further Eurasian dominance exerted by both Russia and China in the modern era it is important to investigate this one flash in the pan, where the mantle of the formless empire was passed, if ever so briefly, to another settled state; that of Iran.

5.6...Nader Shah and the Last Gasp of Tribal Nation-Building

The Safavid Dynasty of Iran was already a peripheral player in formless politics to a certain extent. Its military aristocracy was dominated by Turkic and Caucasian tribes and semi-nomadic warrior peoples who had come to call the area in and around Iran a home of sorts in the wake of the Mongol and Timurid conquests. Trapped between the behemoths of the Mughal and Ottoman Empire and with an economy still shattered by the many predatory depredations which it had been subjected to, Iran found itself less of a power projector and more of a struggling entity outshone by its neighbors and under constant assault from the north and north-east.²⁸²

The Safavid Dynasty, which was founded in 1501, had a few really strong rulers, such as Shah Abbas I, but in its later years it suffered from a significant amount of decline, especially caused by the incompetent leadership bred into the heirs by being raised almost exclusively in the harem.²⁸³ After a revolt of the Afghan military auxiliaries in 1722 Isfahan was occupied and the central government collapsed. The Shah was taken prisoner by his erstwhile armed forces, and both the Ottoman Empire and Russia seized the chance to readjust the borders of Iran in ways that benefitted their territorial designs. The son the Shah, Tahmasp II, declared himself ruler and prepared to make a

²⁸¹ Khodarkovsky, 530.

²⁸² Stephen F. Dale. *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3-16.

²⁸³ David Morgan. *Medieval Persia: 1047-1797* (Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1988), 145-9.

last stand in the central mountains of the country. Iran as an independent entity looked as doomed as it had been at the start of the Mongol conquests.²⁸⁴

It was into this dire situation that the last great Asiatic conqueror would arise. A boy named Nader (“Prodigy”) had been born around 1698 in Northern Khorasan to very humble if not downright impoverished origins among the semi-nomadic tribes which were often employed by the Safavid government to protect their frontiers from other groups of people. These tribes had a culture that was a combination of Persian settled attitudes and the Central Asian Turco-Mongolian tradition. Inauspicious origins indeed from the perspective of Iranian attitudes of the time, but as Nader Shah’s official biography claimed in regards to his birth: “The sword takes its merit from the natural strength of its temper, not from the mine from which the iron was taken.”²⁸⁵

It was on this frontier, defending from a raid from enemy tribes as a young mounted musketeer that Nader started a meteoric rise through the military hierarchy of the Safavid state. By the time that the Afghan warlord Malik Mahmud had seized Isfahan and the Shah of Iran he was of sufficiently high rank to become the leading military figure in the resistance against the dissolution of the Iranian state.²⁸⁶

Claiming his loyalty to Tahmasp II, Nader set out to stabilize the military situation. His forces, modified along his own tactical lines emphasizing the mobility of cavalry and the accurate use of the heavy-caliber flintlock musket (which was far more accurate and long-ranged than the more famous European models²⁸⁷) as well as light artillery carried and used from camel-back, reflected both the increasing technological sophistication of the settled areas outside of Inner Eurasia but also the classic models of a nomadic or semi-nomadic steppe army. Using this new force, Nader struck at defecting or disloyal nobles in the west before marching on the Afghans in Isfahan. After a rout and brief siege Malek Mahmud was captured and executed.²⁸⁸

Nader did, however, respect the fighting abilities and potential of the Afghans and thus he pursued them east after their flight not only to make sure they could no longer

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 152-3.

²⁸⁵ Michael Axworthy. *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006), 17-9.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 61-8.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 84, 112.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 70-2.

be a legitimate threat to Iran, but also to create supplicants and vassal states out of many of the tribes, which gave him access to new recruits for his army.^{289 290}

Ottoman attempts to ally with the remaining Afghan powers opposed to this newly resurgent Iran had to be dealt with as well before Nader could turn and oust the two predatory great powers which had staked new claims in Persia. With this task completed he marched west and proceeded to put the Ottomans to flight in a series of lopsided victories. By 1730 there was a de facto truce and re-establishment of the border to its pre-crisis extent. Hoping to encourage Nader to launch more attacks on their common Turkish foe the Russians evacuated Dagestan as an act of goodwill and opened up direct diplomatic channels with the Iranians.²⁹¹ This enabled the Iranians to set up yet more proxy-allies in their northwestern frontier. The Armenians were co-opted by the extension of brought financial and domestic privileges in order to establish a loyal border column between Iran and the Ottomans. Georgia seemed secure, or at least under nominal Russian hegemony, and thus Nader turned south in an attempt to take Iraq and break Turkish hegemony in the Middle East for good.²⁹²

Despite the success of his other policies on this front, the Iraq campaign turned out to be a disaster due to the incompetent military intervention of the Shah, Tahmasp II. Tahmasp led an army against the Ottomans in an attempt to achieve some battlefield glory for himself, in all likelihood to check Nader's dominance of the military, but was decisively defeated. Nader had to campaign for a few extra years to return to the status quo he had worked so hard to build before, including a completely disastrous invasion of Iraq that itself required a successive campaign to stabilize. Meanwhile, using the Shah's incompetence as an excuse, Nader imprisoned both the Shah and his son and acted as regent, before finally declaring himself Shah in 1735 and thus was able to enter directly into foreign negotiations with himself as the head of state.²⁹³ Nader the tribal chief and general had become Nader the Shah, which is what he would be known as for the rest of his career and posterity.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 82.

²⁹⁰ Morgan, 171.

²⁹¹ Axworthy, 146.

²⁹² Ibid., 112.

²⁹³ Ibid., 156.

Nader Shah's domestic policy was subordinate to his wars and diplomacy in terms of priority. Despite this, his approach to the pressing internal issues of Iran at the time showed the traditional flexibility of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples and the kinds of influences they could have over the more traditional states they often ruled. Nader Shah's religious policy was highly motivated from his practical and often even anti-religious outlook.²⁹⁴ He tried to end the diplomatic and cultural isolation to which Iran had been subjected by revising the militantly anti-Sunni practices of the Shi'a majority. Nader instituted a ban on the traditional cursing of the first three caliphs and various other religious practices that made the Shi'a creed so vile to the majority of the world's Sunni Muslim populace. He also attempted to make the state religion neither explicitly Sunni nor Shi'a, and thus could claim to his majority Iranian populace that he was Shi'a but to foreign dignitaries claim that he was Sunni. Given that Sunnis were also a significant portion of his armed forces this policy made sense for his more central goals as well.²⁹⁵

With his position now secure, Nader Shah decided that it was finally time to launch a purely offensive sequence of policies. His objectives were to achieve some kind of financial and territorial gain for the Iranian homeland, which had been so devastated by the decline and fall of the Safavid Dynasty. He also probably knew that his large polyglot army thrived on loot and conquest, and that the ravaged lands of Persia would not suffice for this. Nader marched into Afghanistan to seize Kandahar not only to secure a troublesome imperial flank, but also to prepare for a drive onto Mughal India.²⁹⁶

The Mughal Empire Nader Shah was planning on paying call to was not the mighty and flexible behemoth we witnessed the creation and establishment of in the last chapter. Rotting from within due to decentralization and the power of regional governors, the empire also had to deal with the rise of the Marathas and resurgent militant Hinduism that came with it. With the Maratha leader Shivaji riding roughshod

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 156.

²⁹⁵ Morgan, 154-5.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 187.

over the now increasingly outdated Mughal army the empire had contracted to its northern core territories.²⁹⁷

Nader Shah's army invaded India from Afghanistan in 1737 and drove towards the Mughal capital of Delhi. Having a very small force and no heavy cannons, Nader's plan was to use the old nomadic trick of luring the opponent out with a feint, and drawing them into a trapped field engagement. After threatening the Mughal army's supply lines, Nader was able to get his foes to leave their fortifications and attack him directly. Here, on the open battlefield of Karnal, Nader was able to use his light field guns and mobile cavalry wings to maximum effect. Though the Mughals brought forth war elephants, they were easy targets for the artillery, and the large lumbering Mughal cannons fell into the hands of Nader's light cavalry. The rest of the trapped Mughal army was mowed down by the concentration of musketry brought to bear on the center by Nader's superior firearms. In the aftermath the Mughal Emperor was captured and Delhi was itself sacked by Nader's army.²⁹⁸

Nader did not try direct rule on the Indian sub-continent. He left the current ruler in charge (though substantially less wealthy and more humiliated) and settled for the annexation of everything west of the Indus, not a colossal amount considering that he had crushed the armies and taken the capital of his enemies. What he instead demanded was loot and trade monopoly on the Afghan-Central Asian routes. This he achieved to such an extent that he could rescind even his exorbitant taxes to the people of Iran for three years. Economic recovery was strong enough due to this temporary tax remittance that even devastated Iran started to finally see an improvement in the general economy of the farmers and rural residents.²⁹⁹ The Mughals, on the other hand, were no longer a credible threat to Iran and their weakness was exposed for all to see. It was the large scale conversion of a once grand empire into a de facto Delhi-based city state. Most relevantly for the future, the British East India Company, which had previously been kept in check by Mughal power, now took stock of the totally changed political situation in India.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Lorge, 147.

²⁹⁸ Morgan, 154-5.

²⁹⁹ Axworthy, 206.

³⁰⁰ Dale, 267.

After this success, arguably the pinnacle of his career, Nader Shah drove into Central Asia proper, and once he had received the submission of many of the post-Timurid princes in the region, was content to leave after making the right vassals and ensuring access to the regional trade routes.³⁰¹ Once again, Nader was showing that even as lord of a settled state in a time of rapidly changing technological and economic balances, that the legacy of the formless empires of the past, while altered, surely was still very much in existence.

Nader himself would eventually succumb to both malaria contracted on campaign and increasing mental illness. With the tax holiday over and his interest in securing Dagestan against any future Russian incursions he increased taxes exorbitantly to pay for his increasingly bogged down campaign to pacify the Caucasus tribes of that region. These harsh levels of taxations provoked rebellion, which in turn provoked massive retaliation on the part of the government. Finally, after Nader blinded his son and heir in a fit of rage at his unilateral execution of the deposed former Shah and resorted to building pyramids of human skulls in rebellious areas, his own army elites turned on him and assassinated him in 1747.³⁰²

With the chaos caused by his sudden death and the general upturned order his latter reign had contributed to, Nader's multinational and semi-nomadic army began to break up. Karim Khan took the reins of government in Iran and Agha Muhammad took his Afghan contingent east to take control of Afghanistan. Agha Muhammad would eventually clash in battle with the Marathas, bringing Nader's original style of warfare with him and fighting for the withering rump of the Mughal state. Other protégés of Nader took power in places such as Georgia and the Caucuses.³⁰³ In his own way Nader had left a legacy, even if it was overwhelmingly in the realm of warfare. It was, however, to the last obvious gasp of a dying way of geopolitics...for the time being at least.

5.7...Conclusion:

³⁰¹ Axworthy, 225.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 281.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 283-4.

Gunpowder, more efficient farming, and the rise of mercantilism had all done their parts to break the nomadic stranglehold on mobility and qualitative military power. Even so, while the balance of power shifted decisively in favor of the large agrarian states, the methods that they used to facilitate that shift were often wholly or partially derived from the strategies most often used by the nomadic powers they sought to displace. As it was, many of the ruling classes of the new settled societies were in fact partially nomadic or at least frontier in origin. Nurhaci came from the Manchus, the descendants of the Jurchens, and a people who were largely nomadic but with a small amount of agriculture supporting them. Nader Shah came from a semi-nomadic Turkic tribe on the Persian periphery which guarded the borders of the state from other nomadic bands. The Russians, while not having a nomadic origin, carried over much of the policy ideas formulated during the reign of the Kipchak Khanate (covered in Chapter III) especially in their desire to rule key trade routes and their utilization of the nomadic Kalmyks as proxies and the semi-nomadic Cossacks in pursuing actions towards both their southern and eastern frontiers.

All three of these examples waged war against nomadic foes, who, on the whole, were the last practitioners of the medieval type of formless geopolitics, and thus cut their teeth to be in a way their inheritors, as well as their displacers. They also waged war on settled states using lesson learned from said nomadic foes. In terms of military power and the combination of nomad like mobility with settled technology, the Cossacks, Manchus, and Nader Shah all showed innovation and adaptation and a merger of geopolitical worlds. Now, with the rise of Russia and China (and temporarily of Iran) it was time for a new kind of formless policy to arise. The settled state was about to increase its new role as the purveyor of this doctrine in Inner Eurasia. Indeed, it was the culmination of Sunzi's thinking in a way, since he originally wrote *The Art of War* for the agrarian settled states of pre-unification China. A full circle movement that had finally arrived to something more akin to its intended audience more than 2,000 years after the supposed date of its publication.

Chapter Six: The Invasion of the Littorals

“The Situation of Russia in Central Asia is similar to that of any civilized state that enters into contact with savage nomadic tribes that lack any form of social organization...Consequently, the state must decide: to put an end to its efforts and leave its borders under constant threat, which means prosperity, security, and cultural progress all become impossible; or push further into the wild territories, whereby the increasing distances increase the difficulties and trials.”

~Prince Gorchakov, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister, 1864.

“In the puppet regime they sought a form of colonial state that represented a new kind of collaboration between imperialist and subject, a formula for a colonial ruler neither formal nor informal that would accommodate nationalist demands for sovereignty and self-determination.”

~Louise Young on the creation of Manchukuo

6.0...Summation:

The immense irony of both the history of Eurasian geopolitics in general, and the continuing evolution of the formless empire in particular, was that by the time the large and powerful settled states had finally come to achieve hegemony over the troublesome interior peoples of the continent they would face a new and equally large threat from an entirely new phenomenon in the region's history: its invasion by littoral naval powers.

The same technological change that had enabled China and Russia to finally establish military security and dominance on the frontier was being taken even further by the maritime nations in northern and Western Europe, North America, and eventually Japan. Much as the cavalry-borne nomads once harried, subjugated, and broke into the internal affairs of the large Eurasian land powers using their superior mobility and strategic flexibility, so too would the naval powers be able to achieve this feat using the powers granted by modern navies and industrialized economies. The same tactical advantages of speed, control of space, and concentrated firepower which brought the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of Eurasia so much success for so long, despite relatively small numbers, would work just as much in favor of the advanced maritime

societies. The difference was that these powers were more alien, and adapted to increasing contact with the Eurasian heartland with differing levels of success, all of which proved temporary once the much more thoroughly adapted land powers of China and Russia recovered from the initial shock of their displacement by the new upstarts.

Despite these shocks to the system, for the first time since the Mongol Empire a Eurasian hegemon would rise to dominate much of the continent, and like the Khitans it would rise not once, but twice, and its reign would be far briefer and much more challenged than that of Chinggis Khan's Mongolian achievement. This was Imperial, and then Soviet Russia. But it would be a long and hard struggle even for the brief amount of time enjoyed at the top by both 19th Century Russia and its territorial, if not spiritual, successor which would be filled, perhaps suitably, with many ambiguities rather than clear cut successes and failures.

The Littoral invasion's most lasting impact would be on the societies that often barely survived its coming, and that would have devastating consequences for people's freedom of movement and autonomy in the wake of their expulsion. But before this increase in control by China and Russia, the once central but now peripheral people of Eurasia, (Turks, Mongols, and others) would be able to play important roles once again, both in fighting and collaborating with the various great powers, indigenous and foreign alike. Through the warp and weft of espionage, war, and diplomacy, the effect of such titanic (and often even ignored by posterity outside of their region) struggles would have global consequences. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of this would be in the evolution of modern warfare and the return of rampant mobility to the battlefield, as is illustrated in the evolution of Soviet combat doctrine. Many of these events would also temporarily restore Manchuria and Mongolia, once the vital linchpin of peoples and power under the influence of the Xiongnu, Khitan, Mongols, and early Manchus, to center stage, even if now all the most potent actors would be strangers to the region using them as proxies.

First, we must begin where we last ended, at the height of dominance by the agrarian powers. In their quest for secure borders they would set the frontiers of the next stage of Eurasian drama, as well develop a certain level of overconfidence in their own abilities which would lead them wide open from an unexpected flank. This is also

where both Russia and China, whose experiences if anything seemed to be moving towards convergence in the 18th Century, began to radically diverge from each other, both in terms of relative success and power, as well as the methods they used towards their vast borderlands.

6.1...China Crests, Russia Rises

The Qing Dynasty's campaigns in the west had secured Uighuristan, increasingly known in this era by its contemporary moniker of Xinjiang or "New Frontier", which was obviously not very new or much of a frontier to its Turkic inhabitants. Yet it was not just another province of China, but rather an administrative zone managed using many of the adapted techniques which the Qing and Chinese policy making in general, had picked up in their long experience with nomadic allies and adversaries.

A gradualist approach to colonization began that emphasized almost imperceptibly increasing levels of Manchurian control was employed towards the western and northern regions after the expensive failure of replacing regional warlords with Manchurian and Han governors in the mid-18th Century. The Banner System discussed in Chapter 5 was much more effective at slowly integrating certain useful and usually warlike peoples into the ruling elite. This was an embracement of the Dynasty's Inner Asian heritage in policy making, as C. Patterson Giersch puts it:

"Due in large part to unique ideas and approaches, the Qing conquered and ruled a vast domain that was two times greater and significantly more diverse than their predecessor, the Ming."³⁰⁴

The Emperor Qianlong saw regime security in this arrangement. The immediate frontier was always the threat to the Han, so he could provide security to his Chinese subjects while simultaneously giving him a large non-Han recruitment pool to shore up his alien dynasty.³⁰⁵ Not being as fully nomadic, as the Mongols and Khitans had been, meant easier integration with the locals, but it came at the price of being more dependent on

³⁰⁴ C. Patterson Giersch. *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), page 46-8, 64.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

pleasing the native subjects...and of course lacking the ability to as easily flee if things turned sour.

The economic changes resulting from the strengthening of the settled powers in Eurasia led to the nomadic people reducing their ranges. No longer able to raid or migrate at will it became more important to switch to trading, often at great disadvantage, with the Chinese and the Russians. The overland trade stimulated by the Qing campaigns and garrison towns created an exploitable niche for Russia to turn south. Having made it to the Bering and Okhotsk Seas in the 17th and 18th Centuries, Russian settlement had still not confronted their old foes out on the open steppe, but with the professional military and massive firepower of the army after Tsar Peter I's reforms and the chance of access to new Chinese markets, they soon annexed Kazakhstan and were on the border of Transoxiana by the dawn of the 19th Century.³⁰⁶

Meanwhile, the ever troublesome Mongols had finally been reduced to nothing but an exploitable border population. The Banner Demands had offered great opportunity to the best warriors of the Mongol tribes. This of course left the tribes weak and the state strong. The people who remained in both Inner and Outer Mongolia continued to live through pastoralism, though with increasing powers from Buddhist monasteries and missionaries from Tibet siphoning off yet more young adults. The success of these missions was the result of the economic devastation which resulted in the twofold reduction of pastureland with the arrival of Chinese merchants and attendant loan sharks who made money off the fiscally naive Mongol herders. Inner Mongolia was better integrated and did a bit better, but Outer Mongolia became in effect a land in captivity, where the Mongols themselves became a type of criminal underclass in their own country.³⁰⁷

It would be barely half a century since the wrapping up of Qianlong's successful pacification of Xinjiang, and not much more than a century from the Manchu conquest of Mongolia, when this carefully built house of cards would receive its first shaking. The coming of European navies, led by Britain, was the rude awakening that after thousands

³⁰⁶ Marcus Rossabi. *China and Inner Asia from 1368 to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), pages 139, 164, and 179.

³⁰⁷ John K. Fairbank, ed. *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 10: Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part I*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pages 352-3.

of years of pursuing security to the north and west, the successions of states cumulatively called China had ignored the vast and most open frontier of all; their seaboard coast. The brief but far ranging explorations of Zheng He in the Ming Dynasty had never established a Chinese blue water naval tradition despite great promise and technical capacity, and this, combined with the previously impenetrable and hostile space of Inner Eurasia, had left them cut off from the rampant industrialization going on elsewhere.³⁰⁸

The finite details of the Opium War and its successors need not concern us here outside of a basic overview and the effects it had on the international order. What is of relevance is how apparent the weakness of the giant seemingly powerful Qing state appeared to foreign powers.

The British Empire and the East India Company had reached a point of mounting trade deficit with the Qing Empire. Increasing the selling of opiates from India was a way to offset this balance. Meanwhile in China, the New World silver trade from which the state had become financially tied to was starting to break down. Seeing a general decline in financial stability across the nation, the Qing used the burgeoning opium trade as a scapegoat for the nation's woes and initiated a crackdown. This increased the costs to British traders, but the real blow came with the confiscation of British ships and the destruction of 20,000 chests of opium seized from their cargo.³⁰⁹

The Qing military thought itself adequate for any military response from far-away Britain, but it had fallen behind the times. In a quick succession of conflicts the British Navy with its steam powered warships firing explosive shells decimated the Chinese fleet and enabled troops to land at various points on the mainland coast of China. The Qing response, despite obvious numerical superiority, was constrained by having to retain the deployments of so many troops inland because of the commitments of their massive empire.³¹⁰

The intrusion of Britain, and then France, followed not long after by a less militant but equally economic incursion by the United States, sparked a myriad of reactions

³⁰⁸ F.W. Mote. *Imperial China 900-1800*, (United States: Harvard University Press, 2000), pages 950-961.

³⁰⁹ Julia Lovell. *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China* (Picador-Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2011), pages 38, 63-7.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90-113.

throughout East Asia. Korea shut itself off from the world, Japan's government tried to become a modern state, but was toppled by a coalition of southern clans who then pursued a radical and ultimately successful course of modernization, but it was the massive market of China that the maritime powers really wanted access to-and for all the power the Qing state had acquired, it simply could not keep them out. This is not to say that the Qing state had been wrong in its priorities in the slightest, for despite the spectacle of burning and exploding sailing junks blown apart by the modern guns of the steam powered Royal Navy, the main threat was another Eurasian land power still lurking on the landward side-and it was noticing the delicate state of its rival's fortunes.³¹¹

While China had been growing complacent in its frontier victory, Russia had kept growing stronger. If the mid-19th Century was a time of perpetual decline in Chinese regional hegemony, it was also one of the constant rising of that of Russia-and Russia's region was a large percentage of Eurasia proper. Successfully retaining its Eurasian land power and unique access to frontier space from which to expand from, Russia had also joined the European nations. Straddling the heartland and the littoral, in geopolitical terms, it was both established internationally as well as integrated regionally and thus it could wield many advantageous over increasingly lackluster China.^{312 313}

Seeing the loose hold the Qing had on their outer regions of their own homeland, Manchuria, as well as the poor showing of Qing armed forces against modern arms and the unequal treaties that Beijing was being obliged to abide with, the time seemed ripe to attempt to gain the Amur River Valley. And this time would be no repeat of the failed Cossack invasion in the 17th Century. Thus when Nickolai Muraviev became governor-general of Eastern Siberia he sensed an opportunity. The foreign incursions had touched off the largest war of the 19th Century, the Taiping Rebellion. Eastern China was a sea of destruction and despair and the government of the Qing court was so desperate it had even taken to using the hated foreigners to train and even command some of its armies. Of course it is worth noting that the Qing state was still capable of crushing this colossal rebellion, and its hold on Xinjiang remained strong through this

³¹¹ Ibid., 297.

³¹² Darwin, 123-4.

³¹³ Mote, 961.

period of sudden and seemingly irredeemable weakness, but while it had focused on the immediate threats of the foreign navies and the internal rebellions it had left its northeastern flank wide open.³¹⁴

Muraviev plunged right into the gap. Throughout the 1850s exploratory missions and even shallow water naval gunboats worked their way through Outer Manchuria, charting and claiming as they went. Even Russia's quantified loss in the Crimean War (1856), which entailed it scrapping its Black Sea Fleet and halting its southward expansion against the Ottoman Empire in the west, did not stop Muraviev from continuing operations in maritime Manchuria. Perhaps it even added further impetus to do so. Though the main theatre of the war was to be the Black Sea region, a joint Anglo-French force cobbled together from various Pacific deployments, attempted to take Petropavlovsk. After the unexpected suicide of the commanding officer and repulse from a small militia, the farcical assault withdrew to its ships and fled back south. The war would remain henceforth confined to the western half of Eurasia for its duration-only ending when Russia was removed as an immediate threat to British and French interests in the Ottoman Empire.³¹⁵

But despite this, Muraviev's work was a success. Two years after the conclusion of that conflict Russia in fact found herself the beneficiary of the Treaty of Aighun. This treaty made Russia the de facto protector of the Qing regime from British and French designs (on paper at least) in exchange for annexing all of Outer Manchuria, some 185,000 square miles. This would become modern day Primorye as well as parts of other modern Russian oblasts and the site of Russia's first major Pacific port, Vladivostok or "Ruler of the East."³¹⁶

As China contracted in territory, Russia continued to grow across the board. Transoxiana, that centerpiece of Inner Eurasian Empire and the former seat of Emir Timur's vast domains, had entered rough times and no longer held anything near its levels of former power or wealth. When Shaybani Khan had ejected the Timurids he had redistributed much of their confiscated wealth among his own family and allies, creating

³¹⁴ Rossabi, 196.

³¹⁵ Trevor Royale. *The Great Crimean War, 1854-1856* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pages 165-5 and 501.

³¹⁶ Rossabi, 196.

a vastly powerful nobility which then proceeded to plot and scheme causing the various regions to divide along the lines of what can only be described as independent city states with vast territories of pastureland between them. Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand where the main state-lets to form from the increasingly fractured Uzbek realms and they were possessed of longevity if not dynamism, lasting through the 15th to the 19th Centuries.³¹⁷ As was covered in Chapter Four, over the course of this large time frame more and more of their population became settled agrarian farmers, and thus the states actually benefited from the taming of the nomads occurring due to Russian and Chinese expansion from a security perspective. Of course, without the freedom of movement provided by the nomadic states, their already declining trade routes dried up into nothing and the cities which were once at the heart of cosmopolitan commerce became impoverished and isolated backwaters. Now, despite having crops such as cotton to export, most Eurasian trade was conducted by sea.^{318 319 320}

But the Russian state, concerned about British involvement in the region in the aftermath of the Crimean War, and coveting the cotton plantations to its relatively open southern border, decided to make the mid and late 19th Century the time of its biggest pushes of expansionism to date. This would represent the left wing of the giant pincer movement enveloping China which had already begun in Manchuria. The disastrous and ethnocentric policies of the Uzbek ruling class over their diverse subjects as well as the relative taming of the nomads had opened the way somewhat, but Russia's undeniable power at this time was the most important factor as its forces moved ever southward. As Seymour Becker put it:

“Beginning in the 1820s, the advance of Russian troops southward from Siberia in search of secure boundaries and reliable neighbors ceased only when Russia's frontiers and her sphere of influence were finally anchored in the Central Asian oases, including those of Bukhara and Khiva.”³²¹

³¹⁷ Mukminova, Mukhtarov, and M. Annanepesov, Bababekov and in Adle and Habib, pages 35-8 and 63-6.

³¹⁸ Beckwith, 262.

³¹⁹ Darwin, 212.

³²⁰ Beckwith, 260.

³²¹ Seymour Becker. *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, [Kindle E-Book]), sections 237-55.

By this time the populations of the rump Khanates were majority sedentary, with rough estimates for Khiva being in the range of 72-22%³²² in favor of sedentary farmers. There were still, however, enough nomads interested in raiding to create perpetual border insecurity issues. Regarded by the government back in St Petersburg as a mere nuisance at first, these became a vital concern for the state-much like the acquisition of Outer Manchuria- after the quantified loss of the Crimean War and the increasing fear of British agents operating northwards from India. This would inspire the first major advance on the Khanates themselves in 1864 against Khiva and Kokand and then a few years later a new advance with Bukhara, the strongest, as the main target.³²³

The campaigns went well, Russian rifles and logistics closed the gap of speed usually held by the defenders in Inner Eurasia and the cities were in turn occupied. Rebellions were put down rapidly and the Russians could dictate the terms of peace as they willed. Interestingly they did not go to outright annexation, instead making vassals and clients from their newly conquered lands. This had the effect of stalling British complaints in the region as well as reducing administrative costs.^{324 325}

The legitimization for this post-war expansion was given by Prince Gorchakov:

“To put a stop to raids, the tribes on the frontier have to be reduced to a state of more or less perfect submission. This result once obtained, these tribes take more to peaceful habits, but in their turn they are exposed to attacks of the more distant tribes.”³²⁶

This seemed to be an acceptable way to frame policy to the British, already contemplating doing much the same to Afghanistan even after their humiliating repulse there some decades before. The haughtily named ambassador to Russia, Lord Augustus Loftus remarked in 1872:

“I believe the Emperor and the Imperial Government are anxious to abstain from extending Russian territory in Central Asia, whilst at the same time they are desirous of obtaining a complete control over the small states of which Central

³²² Ibid., 547-54.

³²³ Ibid., 640-705.

³²⁴ Ibid., 1169-77.

³²⁵ Darwin, 293.

³²⁶ Rossabi, 721-20.

Asia is comprised...by avoiding collision to obtain entire influence over Turkestan by conciliatory means through the existing rulers of the several states."³²⁷ Anglo-Russian tensions still simmered, but Imperial Russia's kind of expansion seemed easier to swallow at this juncture than a typical kind of annexation. This type of understanding did not however allay the threat each side felt towards the other, as we shall soon see.

Despite this push from the Kazakh steppe into realms more settled with cities and agrarian economies, the methods of indirect rule changed little at first. The Russians were content to leave the local elites (or more obedient relatives of the former elites) in power and in charge of domestic affairs as long as they controlled the foreign policy of the states, could settle within the territories of the former khanates, and build railroads connecting their new domains with Russia proper. Tashkent itself became a city which the Russians ruled directly in an enclave style and the main military headquarters of operations in the region, but the newly conquered khanates were treated with relative laxity despite their now prostrate status. However, Russia looked towards the crumbling Qing frontier with both a sense of alarm and one of opportunity.

6.2...An Indirect Clash of the Titans

A bizarre three way competition now began in the mountainous southern regions of Inner Eurasia. This conflict would not end in fiery conclusion however, but rather through the offset of a new power intruding elsewhere from an unexpected direction.

It started, as so many things in the greater region of inland Eurasia do, by the actions of a semi-nomadic warlord with imperial ambitions. This was Ya'qub Beg, a tribal leader from Turkestan. It was in the mid-19th Century, when Qing rule still held on strong in Central Asia, that Ya'qub managed to seize the Oasis towns of the Uighurs by ejecting the garrisons by outmaneuvering them in the sparse western sands. Cut off from immediate resupply the Qing had to withdrawal from the westernmost extremity of their empire. This allowed the feisty warlord to set up his own mini-state.³²⁸

³²⁷ Ibid., 742-49.

³²⁸ James A. Millward. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pages 118, 123.

Perhaps it was the nature of the times, with modernism and nationalism on the rise, or the small space he had to work with between the now dominant established powers, but Ya'qub Beg lacked the instinct for flexibility which was the hallmark of all previously successful Eurasian conquerors. His rule of the Uighurs was strict and religiously fanatical. It drove off many of the traders the oasis town needed to prosper.³²⁹ While feelings towards the Qing remained highly negative, the local attitude towards Ya'qub Beg became ever more negative as the economy began to wither due to his actions. Even the devoutly Muslim guardian of Sartuq Bughra Khan's shrine wrote: "Of the Khitay, I hate them. But they were not bad rulers. We had everything then. There is nothing now."³³⁰

It is interesting to note that despite the omnipresent European threat to the coastline and the growing potential for a Japanese threat, the Qing marshaled a huge amount of forces to deal with Ya'qub Beg's rebellion. The justification given by the government for this set of priorities shows clearly the Eurasian geopolitical focus which the state still retained even after fifty years of humiliation at the hands of the maritime powers. It is also possible that the same geostrategy developed on the steppe, which was used far less successfully against the European powers, was still working to keep the western frontier secure even as the situation changed elsewhere.³³¹ "As goes Xinjiang, so goes Mongolia; as goes Mongolia so goes Beijing."³³² This succinct maxim, though undoubtedly meant to cajole a domestic audience, would turn out to be a fair approximation of the near future for the dynasty.

With an upgraded and reinvigorated army, and with the Taiping rebellion long since crushed, the Qing troops moved west in 1878 and in 70 days crossed the desert and destroyed Ya'qub's forces with devastating firepower. The warlord died soon after in mysterious circumstances and the Qing forces were back in control, to a much greater degree than they had been before.³³³ The Qing had finally pulled off success in the realm of military modernization.³³⁴

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 121-2.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

³³¹ Lorge, 167-8.

³³² Millward, 126.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 130.

³³⁴ Lorge, 168-9.

For all its failures on other fronts, the Manchu rulers were dead set on controlling the western frontier, rightly seeing it as a potential nest for British and Russian spies if control was lost of it. With the 1878 expedition they were back on the scene as Central Asian powers. As *The Cambridge History of China* notes:

“Although Ch’ing authority in Inner Asia was superficial, it was strong enough to guarantee the safety of increasing numbers of Han immigrants from China proper, who settled in Inner Mongolia, throughout Sinkiang, and on the eastern fringes of Tibet. Seen as a whole, despite rebellions and European encroachment and the sagging fortunes of the Manchus, the years from the 1790s to the 1860s were the great period of Ch’ing imperial power.”³³⁵

One could make the case that with the crushing of Ya’qub Beg, the Qing restored and then retained that power of China in the western regions on through to the next century.

The Qing also suspected that Ya’qub Beg was sponsored by the British and that if they did not deal with him soon either they or the Russian Empire would take advantage of his presence to shave off parts of Chinese territory. This fear was proven valid when the uneasy *détente* between Britain and Russia was on the verge of breakdown due to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877. As Britain marshaled its navy to defend Constantinople from encroaching Russian armies which had already laid most of the Ottoman Empire’s forces to waste in the Balkans, Russia responded by placing more armies in Central Asia for a planned three pronged invasion of British India. Britain counteracted by engaging in a ‘forward policy’ by pre-emptively invading Afghanistan (the traditional route of Central Asian conquerors into the sub-continent) and deploying forward units to control all of the choke points through the mountain ranges.³³⁶

The cost of Russia’s troop deployments only seemed to exacerbate the potential of Muslim rebellion and incurred a great cost during a time when the newly unified nation of Germany was rising to world power status on its western flank. Meanwhile, the initially successful British invasion of Afghanistan, or Second Anglo-Afghan War, had bogged down into an expensive debacle. The two powers began to negotiate and saw the Congress of Berlin as an opportunity to come to a settlement which guaranteed the neutrality of Afghanistan (though its foreign policy was to be controlled by Britain in great power relations) as well as Russia being allowed to construct massive amounts of

³³⁵ Fairbank, 408.

³³⁶ Becker, 1439-45, 2088-95.

rail networks through its vassal khanates, without British objection. These railroad lines enabled Russia to exert a much stronger level of control over its new dominions.³³⁷

But it was a gradual process of tightening down on the occasionally rebellious khanates, and still they largely controlled their own domestic policy. Bukhara in particular played it close to the Russians and was rewarded with little internal interference. One ominous aspect for the khanates, however, was Russian settlements. Not just the military/depot system of Tashkent, but in cotton plantations (now a booming industry in Central Asia due to the cutoff of American cotton due to the American Civil War and subsequent blockade of southern harbors on that continent) and the insertion of factories owned and operated by Russians along the new rail lines. This in turn led to the expansion of Russian customs offices and legal counsels. Not all natives were displeased. The native Jewish population, who were treated as less than second class citizens before, welcomed the Russians, as did many merchants.³³⁸

In finally achieving control over its open southern flank, Russia had succeeded in the dreams of Tsars since Ivan the Terrible. The construction of railroads through the territory, as Mackinder had noticed not long after it was done, was a vital ingredient in rendering the vast spaces as (or even more) mobile for imperial designs than had the Turkic and Mongol cavalry of old had been. Rapid deployment without massive occupation, that perennial hallmark of the formless empire thought quashed by earlier Qing and Russian victories, was now back, reintroduced by Russia using new technology for an old purpose. With the increasingly apparent weakness of the Qing, it was now obvious that the Russian Empire had achieved a state of hegemony over Inner Eurasia of a kind not seen since the unified Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan through Mongke Khan.³³⁹

Russia did have a few setbacks of course. It was blocked in Afghanistan and Xinjiang, but only just, and after having used proxy warlords to steal some land from China's western flank successfully, if less than it originally wanted,³⁴⁰ and having achieved all its expeditions had set out to gain, plus a hefty profit due to the increased

³³⁷ Ibid., 2509-78.

³³⁸ Ibid., 2764-3305.

³³⁹ Beckwith, 251.

³⁴⁰ Rossabi, 189.

demand for cotton following the American Civil War, Russia was on the rise. Further east however, in its quest for an ice free harbor on the Pacific, the Russian state would find itself not so fortunate, and the fate of two great Eurasian empires would strain to the breaking point from a new intruder into their deadly dance.

6.3...The Inland Rays of the Rising Sun

Not having an equivalent of an India (a primarily coastal yet still attached to Inner Eurasia type of land mass) under its control one might assume that Japan would be an unlikely candidate for a competitor to Russian or Chinese hegemony. Indeed, it would not have anywhere near the level of effect of long term success that either of those powers did. But that had less to do with the nature of its actions in the inland regions of the continent and more to do with its hubris elsewhere. As it was, this new power rose and intruded at just the time when the weaknesses of the big Eurasian giants were beginning to show themselves. China would be the first to feel the blow.

Ironically it would come at least partially due to China's comprehensive attempt to retain its Manchurian frontier from Russian aggression. The introduction of industrial technology had shown just how economically valuable the resource rich provinces of the Qing Dynasty homeland had the potential to be. But it was not only the land which beckoned for exploitation. The population had exploded as well.³⁴¹

Using the Han as permanent migrants, as had worked so well to harness Inner Mongolia to the Chinese base of the state, had been previously rejected by Beijing as being unsuitable for the cultural preserve they wanted Manchuria to be. The loss of Outer Manchuria, however, seemed to jar them into setting aside this concern. In 1860 they had begun to allow Han settlement as far north as Harbin.³⁴² Hoping to create a large and permanent pocket of population which would make Russian influence hard to increase, the Qing found it an easy sell with many impoverished farmers more than happy to escape the tight state controls of China proper for at least the opportunity that Manchuria represented. The first effect of this migration, aside from a regional

³⁴¹ Beckwith 250-1.

³⁴² Fairbank, 357.

population increase of somewhere in the millions, was a breakdown in the recruitment quality of the Manchu soldiers under the banner system. The second was that despite the settlement, central authority seemed not to take.³⁴³

This movement of population did scare Russia however. The newly constructed city of Vladivostok was vulnerable, and the population of this new eastern maritime branch of Siberia was far smaller than that of Manchuria. In what would become a familiar refrain towards its easternmost flank, Russia began to respond to Chinese migration to Manchuria by beginning construction on the Trans-Siberian Railroad in the 1880's. The Pacific would be brought within Russia's sphere of mobility just as Central Asia was starting to be.³⁴⁴

The weakness and potential wealth of Manchuria was apparent to the resource poor yet rapidly industrializing Japanese, but the expansion and hegemonic strength of Russia threatened to grab away any concessions the faltering Qing state might give. Furthermore the Qing still held delusions of their own primacy in East Asia, particularly their vassalage of Korea where a new internal faction of Korean nationalists advocated breaking Qing control and joining in alliance with Japan were being persecuted by the pro-Qing government. The time to act had come. With its modernized army and navy Japan would dislodge China from its increasingly obsolete privileged regional position.³⁴⁵

In 1894 a Japanese backed coup overthrew the Korean regime. The Qing marched to war against Japan to restore its hegemony on the peninsula. In a quick series of engagements the Chinese fleet was crippled at sea and its armies put to a succession of defeats on land by the smaller but tactically and technologically superior Japanese forces. Beijing and the only maritime part of Manchuria, Port Arthur, was captured and the true weakness of the Qing state was exposed to a far greater extent than even the Opium Wars had shown. In the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) China renounced influence over Korea and ceded Taiwan, The Pescadores, and the southern

³⁴³ Rossabi, 194.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 200.

³⁴⁵ S.C.M. Paine. *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), page 321.

part of the Liaotung Peninsula (named for the river valley that was the center of the Liao Dynasty) of Manchuria to Japan, as well as being forced to pay a large indemnity.³⁴⁶

This forced open China like never before, and all the European powers clambered for naval base concessions. Japan was a bit too nearby for comfort though and France, Germany, and above all Russia forced Japan to relinquish its gains in Manchuria in the Triple Intervention. Now the Eurasian hegemon saw its chance to move into Inner Manchuria and complete its conquest of the central inland routes of the continent. The expert Russian diplomat Sergei Witte³⁴⁷ managed to finagle many concessions from the Qing in exchange for getting the Japanese to back out of Liaotung. Most important was the takeover of the Port Arthur concession and above all the right to build railways throughout Manchuria connecting this ice free Pacific port directly to the Trans-Siberian Railroad.³⁴⁸

All these foreign concessions enraged the Chinese. Already nationalists like Sun Yat-Sen were blaming the 'alien tyranny' of the Manchus for China's inability to adapt to industrial civilization like Japan had. Attempts by Han bureaucrats to reform the system met with derision from the court, and the Dowager Empress Tzu-Hsi removed many of them from office and even tacitly supported the anti-foreign mob violence which broke out, known to posterity as the Boxer Rebellion. The rebellion was crushed by the multinational force assembled to relieve the besieged foreign garrisons. Most tellingly, the largest contingents of foreign forces were the Russians and the Japanese. The Empress was forced to concede defeat and China had to give out yet more crippling concessions. Most critically for the fate of the upcoming struggles for Eurasian hegemony was that using their new railways, 150,000 Russian soldiers had come to occupy Manchuria, all but officially detaching it from Qing rule.³⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Outer Mongolia was becoming a vacuum devoid of all but nominal Qing authority and Russian

³⁴⁶ Darwin, 351.

³⁴⁷ Sergei Witte is often more famous as a reformer on the domestic front of Imperial Russia, as well as the chief negotiator for the Russians during negotiations from the Treaty of Portsmouth. He was incredibly active in the construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad and Russian Far East policy in general. One might even call him the last great statesman of the formless empire in Imperial Russia.

³⁴⁸ Rossabi, 201.

³⁴⁹ Darwin, 352.

traders and diplomatic personnel were already penetrating this more inland frontier, if in a less direct way than Manchuria.³⁵⁰

Finally, Russian armies had achieved two notable objectives in the history of the Formless Empire. They had started to infiltrate the homeland of their once Mongol conquerors, and they had finally achieved what the Cossacks had failed to do in the 17th Century in the occupation of Manchuria. But if Qing weakness had enabled this advance, Japanese strength would now check it. Japan saw how the power to gain most from its war with China had in fact been the Russian Empire, and now it sought to redress the balance. Britain, the other Littoral intruder, felt much the same, and so in 1902 a pact was made to break up the overwhelming land power of the Russian Empire, the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Now the two sea-based nations were balancing against the inland hegemon which kept much of Eurasian clamped down under its rule.³⁵¹

Japan demanded that Russia cease interfering in Korea and withdrawal from its massive deployment into Manchuria. Russia, confident in its position yet also insecure about its still relatively recent gains in maritime Siberia due to Japan's rising power, refused in 1903. The reasons for this refusal according to S.C.M. Paine echo not just with the geostrategic thought of this era in Russian history, but of the cumulative experience Russia had acquired since turning the tide on the Kipchak Khanate at the Battle of Kulikovo:

“Russia faced unique national security problems. Historically, its expansion had been the elusive quest for defensible borders largely absent on the great plains of Russia. But expansion created only very long and remote borders that proved extremely costly to defend. Enormous funds had to be funneled away from the civilian economy to defend the empire.”³⁵²

An empire approaching Mongolian scope in size and scale was much harder for even a semi-industrial society to keep hold of if it was a centralized and sedentary state. No matter the lessons learned from nomadic peoples and the success of the state in expansion, the cracks of the industrial era were starting to appear. Fear of the exposed frontiers of Primorye meant that even if Russia had wanted to evacuate Manchuria, they

³⁵⁰ Rossabi, 202.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 205.

³⁵² Paine, 65.

could not, at least in their own way of geopolitical thinking. And so the stage was set, Japan began to plan to evict Russia before it added Manchuria to its ever growing empire. In fact, over the course of the fifty years from the Treaty of Shimonoseki to Japanese surrender in 1945 a colossal proportion of Japanese foreign policy would be directed, directly or indirectly, towards both Imperial and Soviet Russia. The first stage of this proxy-war had started with the Sino-Japanese War, and from here on out it would become a much more obvious battle for supremacy in Eastern Eurasia. It was almost a precursor to later U.S. Cold War containment policy, and it was far more influential for the evolution of the Formless Empire.³⁵³

What mattered is that while the Russian navy was decisively sunk at sea, their army received a series of defeats on land which crippled much of their offensive fighting power. Tellingly, all of the land battles took place in Manchuria proper. The war ended with the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905, in which Russia agreed to evacuate southern Manchuria, cease all interference with Korea, and cede its lease on the Liaotung peninsula to Japan, as well as ceding its territory on the southern half of Sakhalin Island. Both sides became suspicious, however, that the arbitrating power of the United States was playing them off each other for its own interest. Suspecting, rightly or wrongly, that the Americans wished to apply the Open Door policy they advocated for China proper to Manchuria via an American railroad magnate given permission to construct lines through the area by the Qing, Russia and Japan began just a few years after the war to collaborate on keeping out any influence from outside powers. Soon the private railroad scheme was blocked by both powers using legal methods and Manchuria was regarded as a split venture, north and south. In exchange for its many concessions in the war, Russia was given a guarantee by Japan that it would respect the de fact control which Russia increasingly had over Mongolia.³⁵⁴

Both powers, having found a rough regional balance of power for the moment, now turned back to dividing up their primary prey. The faltering Qing was no more popular in even their home traditional base frontier provinces than in China proper. As Japan's South Manchurian railway jurisdiction connected the resources of Manchuria to

³⁵³ Ibid., 321-2.

³⁵⁴ Rossabi, 206-7.

Korea (annexed to Japan in 1910) it began to create jobs and opportunity. Immigration from China proper increased, swelling the new cities of the region with Han workers and increasing its population. In a decade the population swelled from 9 million to 20 million, mostly Han, and traditional Manchu culture began to fade.³⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the Russians left only with their northern toe-hold on Manchuria, refocused on the comparative backwater of Mongolia. After the centuries of suffering at the hands of Chinese merchants the Mongols welcomed the Russian merchants and diplomatic officers with open arms. There were very few Mongols and even the tottering Qing was still a behemoth oppressor, so the connections and potential assistance of the Russians was most welcome. These connections paid off in 1912, when-finally overwhelmed by internal rebellion and lack of legitimacy in the face of foreign concessions, the Qing state crumbled. The six year old Emperor, Pu Yi, was dethroned as head of state and a republic proclaimed.³⁵⁶ Mongolia seized its chance by declaring its own independence and driving the few Chinese troops stationed in the region out with weapons supplied from the Russians. Though no one recognized the independence of Mongolia, including Russia, and the authority of the spiritual leader (or Bogd Khan) was ineffectual outside of the immediate area of that land's only city Urga (present day Ulaanbaatar), Russia had compensated in former Qing space, if not in wealth and potential, for its losses in Manchuria.³⁵⁷

In this period of complete loss, indeed, the very end of the Qing Dynasty, China had one quantified victory. British attempts to do much the same to Tibet as had been done by Russia towards Mongolia met decidedly mixed success. While the British expedition was able to set up some amount of administrative control over Tibet, the push inwards made the Tibetans at large turn closer, rather than farther away from China.³⁵⁸

The Republic of China was as fractious as a supposedly unified state could be without total collapse. The republic of Sun Yat-sen was rife with internal division based on ideology and located in the south of the country while warlords controlled both the

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 203.

³⁵⁶ Darwin, 354.

³⁵⁷ Rossabi, 211-2, 238.

³⁵⁸ Fairbank, 403.

northern and western areas, Han and frontier alike. The country became pregnant with Japanese spy rings and patronage networks towards certain amenable warlords. Russians too infiltrated as advisors for various warlords, if to a lesser extent. The proxy-war for hegemony of Eastern Eurasia was revving up to start again. Most effective of the intrusions was the Japanese influence over Marshal Zhang Zuolin, who set up his power base in Manchuria. Seeing this as an opportunity to gain the rest of the province the Japanese went about making themselves Zhang's patron power, and his relative success in holding onto his Manchurian fiefdom was helped, rather than hindered by the Japanese railway concessions crisscrossing the land.³⁵⁹

Russia had little time to gloat over the collapse of its huge and long term epic rival. Nor could it properly prepare for the coming storm of conflict over the carcass of the former Qing Empire when crisis brewed on other fronts. The doom of Imperial Russia would not come from the east or Central Asia, but rather from its supposedly much more fixed and stable western borders. This of course was the First World War. While Japan and Russia participated on the same side, it was a total war for the latter and light naval operation for the former. While Japan took the German concession port of Qingdao and some Pacific Islands, Russia fought desperately for its very survival against the armies of the Ottomans, Austro-Hungarians, and above all Germans, sustaining massive losses. The epic collapse of 1917 was as much a shock to the regions of Inner Eurasia as had been the fall of the Qing, except that the echoes of this fall, coming as it was from a great power rather than one who had been in terminal decline for almost a century before, would have its effects felt over a much wider scope of territory. Interestingly enough, because of revolts breaking out in Central Asia due to the burdens of taxation and conscription because of the war, Russia had taken direct control over its vassal Khanates in Transoxiana just 29 days before the fall of the ruling government.³⁶⁰

6.4...Chaos Reigns as the Hegemon Falls

³⁵⁹ Philip Jowett and Stephen Walsh. *Chinese Warlord Armies 1911-30* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), page 18.

³⁶⁰ Becker, 4520-27.

With the October Revolution and the subsequent Bolshevik coup, many parts of the Russian Empire sheared off into de facto independence, either under warlords or regional movements. Just as Russia had once aspired to be as powerful as China and had ended up not only catching up to it but surpassing it in scope and influence, so now would Russia follow China's political disintegration by surpassing the levels of chaos and destruction the former's revolution had caused the territory of the state. Because of the massive size of Imperial Russia we need not concern ourselves with every front between White and Red, what matters most are the two fronts most directly connected to the geographic scope of this dissertation, Siberia and Central Asia.

Both Siberia and Central Asia were remote from the core of the old state, and the new Soviet state controlled only the central urban belt of its predecessor, and at first that was tenuous too. Siberia had been quite free for Russia under the Tsars, now in a time of Bolshevik domination of the center of Russia's economic and cultural regions, this sparsely populated and resource rich region was the largest bastion of the White movement. Cossacks (who fought overwhelmingly for the Whites on the Ukrainian steppes as well) and the forces of the Czech legion held the area in relative independence by controlling the only reliable route of ingress and egress, the Trans-Siberian railroad. Equipped with heavy artillery toting armored trains backed up by cavalry forces, Siberia had the chance, however, briefly, to go its own way.³⁶¹

White anti-Bolshevik forces gathered loosely in Siberia under the banner of Admiral Kolchak, and the Allies of the still raging First World War came to assist them under the pretense of rescuing the stranded Czech Legion and securing weapons from the Reds. It is telling that the allied power which contributed the most time, money, troops, and effort to this enterprise was none other than that of the Japanese Empire.³⁶²

It was Allied supreme commander Marshal Foch who thought of the idea of using Japanese troops to effectively re-open the eastern front against Germany. Seeing the daunting task of sending entire armies across the thickest east-west axis of Eurasia in amidst the chaos of the enfolding Russian Civil War, Japanese leadership asked for a high price for such an action-in effect total domination of Manchuria and de facto

³⁶¹ W. Bruce Lincoln. *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War 1918-1921* (New York: De Capo Press, 1989), pages 226-35.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 244.

influence over Far Eastern Siberia, including the demilitarization of Vladivostok.³⁶³ Looking at the various logistical and political difficulties, a more scaled down intervention would take place. As Ullman summarizes: “There was no greater possibility of ‘open conflict’ between the Japanese and the Germans then there was that Germany would ship dismantled submarines from the Baltic to Vladivostok.”³⁶⁴ Despite the scaled back objectives from the dreams of Allied board rooms however, Japan had ambitions of its own in the region.

What was originally supposed to be a joint occupation of Vladivostok, with the Americans, rapidly escalated into an opportunistic-if poorly planned-attempt to wring as many concessions from Siberia as possible. The pretext for this rampant increase of involvement from Japan was the Bolshevik government in the west renouncing the agreements that the state had previously made with various powers, including Japan.³⁶⁵ Contemporary international law professor Ninakawa Arata put it bluntly: “Now that China is helpless and Russia on the verge of disintegration, Japan has no formidable rival...”³⁶⁶

The objectives of Japan in this intervention were eminently familiar to the formless nature of how nomadic peoples once oriented their policies. Officially no territory would be directly annexed to the Japanese state; rather, the military would provide a bulwark of force for administrators and above all local proxies to re-orient the eastern region of Siberia towards Japan’s economic needs while retaining a large degree of domestic autonomy under local rulers. Even with the conclusion of the First World War and the ebbing of the threat of German occupation and resource acquisition in Russia, the amount of Japanese troops were only barely scaled down, and still ranged as far west as Irkutsk to secure the flank of Admiral Kolchak’s regime as well as solidly (with reluctant American assistance) in control of the Trans-Siberian railroad. From Vladivostok weapons and advisers flowed west and from Irkutsk and through Primorye plans were made to have resources and markets flow east.³⁶⁷

³⁶³ Richard H. Ullman. *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921, Volume I: Intervention and the War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), page 86.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁶⁵ Paul E Dunscomb. *Japan’s Siberian Intervention, 1918-1922* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), pages 34-5.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

The problem was that Japan had little experience in this type of policy. Manchurian railways aside, all its territorial acquisitions had been through annexation and direct control so far. Most lacking in its strategy was the instinct for choosing reliable allies who could deliver more than short term results. This was most telling in the particular warlords Japan found itself in bed with east of Kolchak's direct control.

General Grigori Semenov was a product of Siberia if ever there was one. Half native Buryat and half Cossack in ancestry, he had been active in the pre-war operations to funnel weapons and support to the Mongolian independence movement in 1912. He had distinguished himself as a cavalry raider behind German lines on the Baltic front of the war and later had served successfully in the Caucasus against the Ottoman Empire. Now he was effectively a Cossack chieftain in eastern Siberia, along with a 'court' of advisors, many Japanese.³⁶⁸

Unlike Kolchak, based in Omsk, and then, when that fell to the Bolsheviks, Irkutsk, Semenov was not interested in setting up much of an official government and preferred raiding and looting no matter people's political inclinations. Receiving a generous paycheck from the Japanese he and his followers established themselves as wealthy and violent raiders, though not much else. It is worth noting however, that this mobile raiding band did keep the Soviets at bay for longer than might be expected, and was made up of a relatively diverse group of peoples. Waves of migration, mobile cavalry columns, and logistics backed up by armed and armored trains returned the fluid geopolitics of nomadic and Cossack style power to the region, if at least temporarily and with gross abuses by an unloved despot.³⁶⁹ In addition, taking over Semenov and putting him directly in the Japanese pocket took him away from the potential of being influenced by the other allies, making him a reliable proxy.³⁷⁰ Among the people of Siberia a new term arose which became all too familiar – 'atamanschchina'-the rule of terror by Japanese backed warlords.³⁷¹

Despite these positive echoes of traditional Inner Eurasian strategy the edifice crumbled almost immediately when the Japanese withdrew their support and Semenov

³⁶⁸ James Palmer. *The Bloody White Baron: The Extraordinary Story of the Russian Nobleman Who Became the Last Khan of Mongolia* (New York: Perseus Book Group, 2009), pages 75-7, 89.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 95-104.

³⁷⁰ Ullman, 138-41.

³⁷¹ Lincoln, 258.

fled to Manchuria. They had failed to maintain long lasting networks of cooperation or be able to wield influence indirectly. Admiral Kolchak himself commented to his British advisers in 1919 that it was Japanese policy to support a number of weak Russian forces rather than back a single strong opposition leader-like himself one presumes. The White movement was effectively undermined by its largest outside backer. British support for Kolchak was effectively undermined by this Japanese backing of rogue warlords through armaments and paying the salaries of their Mongol troops.^{372 373}

By the early 20s support was flagging for what in Japan became known as the 'Siberian Intervention.' Kolchak's attempts to hold off the Soviets collapsed and he was executed as Bolsheviks marched on Irkutsk. No overt advance occurred into the Pacific Maritime area due to Japanese occupation, for the Bolsheviks figured leaving it as a buffer for the time being would encourage Japan to depart rather than engage in further escalation. They were correct. Burdened by the cost and the meager returns, Japan began a phased withdrawal from Primorye. The Far Eastern Republic which had grown under their protection did in fact develop a regional economy oriented towards Japan, but it knew the writing was on the wall and hoped to negotiate a phased integration into the Soviet Union in 1922, so it asked the United States to pressure Japan to complete its scheduled withdrawal as fast as possible.³⁷⁴

Japan was only happy to comply at this point after four years of fruitless guerilla war and an obvious lack of gaining any foothold which could survive their inevitable pull-out. In exchange for upping its time table it did manage to wring out a few concessions, such as Allied willingness to look the other way as it shifted its Eurasian arms and spying rings south to Manchuria and received acknowledgement of freedom of action from the other powers with its much more potentially lucrative Manchurian proxy, Zhang Zuolin.³⁷⁵ The Whites who had demanded the withdrawal were quite taken aback by how suddenly the pull-out became once these guarantees were assured and absorption by the Soviets became a given.³⁷⁶ But before this withdrawal was completed Japan

³⁷² Ullman, 272-5.

³⁷³ Jamie Bisher. *White Terror: Cossack Warlords of the Trans-Siberian* (New York: Routledge, 2005 [Kindle Ebook]), location 2306.

³⁷⁴ Dunscomb, 135, 148.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 155, 202.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

would use Siberia for staging one more operation, this time directed not towards the Bolsheviks, but the Chinese.

The Russian Revolution had opened the way for China to finally strike back. With the recall of Russian troops from Mongolia, Chinese soldiers soon entered the country and proclaimed it to be back under the control of their state. Soon Republican troops of the Kuomintang were making Mongols kowtow to them publically in the traditional imperial act of submission.³⁷⁷

A protégé of Semenov (himself now preparing a retreat for exile in Manchuria), Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, was organizing an attack on the Chinese in Mongolia. He was a Baltic German-Russian nobleman who had seen service in the First World War, where he had met Semenov. Violently unstable, virulently anti-Semitic and anti-communist, and with delusions of restoring the Mongol Empire with himself as Khan while riding to Moscow in a sea of blood across Eurasia, he was probably not the most ideal proxy for the Japanese to use. Nonetheless, many Japanese officers and soldiers covertly joined the multiethnic force of this seemingly up-and-coming “Mad Baron” as his enemies dubbed him. This force included mercenaries of all types, White Russians, a few Chinese, and at its core Mongolians. All his Russian officers were required to learn Mongolian to communicate with their troops. This force set out south of eastern Siberia for Mongolia in 1921.³⁷⁸

After a few failures to dislodge the Chinese from Urga, Ungern-Sternberg finally took the city by storm perpetrating a truly Mongol style sack and pillage to the only city in Outer Mongolia. The Bogd Khan was freed of his house arrest and made the spiritual head of a once again independent Mongolia. The remaining Chinese broke and were ruthlessly captured and killed out on the steppe by the Mongol cavalry. Now the reign of terror began as Ungern-Sternberg publically executed and tortured anyone perceived to be plotting against him while he seized the livestock of the locals.³⁷⁹ The liberator of the Mongols had become their tormentor in a very brief amount of time, and many Mongols fled northwest to Bolshevik lines to join up with Soviet allied partisans under Damdin

³⁷⁷ Palmer, 122-4.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 95, 107.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

Sukhbaatar, a Mongolian independence fighter trained by the Russians before the First World War.³⁸⁰

The central government of the Republic of China ordered the warlord Zhang Zuolin to march west and remove the Baron before the Bolsheviks did, but himself being a Japanese proxy he was content to take the money the government set aside for the cost of the expedition while opening up diplomatic channels with Ungern-Sternberg. To his credit, Zhang did try to bribe The Baron to leave Mongolia, but this offer was refused.³⁸¹

Baron Ungern-Sternberg decided he could not wait for the Soviet counterattack and drove northwest to meet his enemies in pre-emptive campaign. In a series of cavalry battles the Baron found himself outmaneuvered by Sukhbaatar's Red Mongols and Bolshevik allies, who used traditional false retreat and ambush tactics against him in ways reminiscent of the 13th century behavior of Mongol armies.³⁸² The Baron was driven back once, returned to more initial success the second time, but was finally defeated in detail by Soviet reinforcements using aircraft. While the Mad Baron was trapped fighting against the inevitable in Siberia, Sukhbaatar's Red Mongols drove into Mongolia proper, taking over the regime and setting up the Mongolian People's Republic, the second country in the world to become officially communist.^{383 384}

Abandoned and wounded by his men after they failed in assassinating him by raking his tent with machinegun fire, and wearing nothing but a jacket and multiple shamanic talismans, Ungern-Sternberg escaped into the steppe only to be captured and bound by Mongol herders seeking revenge. He was left tied up with his face in an ant hill until found by a Soviet patrol. Taken to Novosibirsk he was given a trial for counter-revolutionary activities where he denied none of the charges and was summarily executed.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁰ Peter Hopkirk. *Setting the East Ablaze: Lenin's Dream of Empire in East Asia* (Great Britain: John Murray Publishers, 1984, Kindle Ebook), sections 2161-78.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2178-86.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 2318-27, 2351-60.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2377-85.

³⁸⁴ Bisher, 5706.

³⁸⁵ Hopkirk., 2394-2428.

Mongolia had in fact now been detached from China, even if China would not admit it until after the Second World War, though clearly not in a way which favored Japan as was intended by Ungern-Sternberg's financial backers in Tokyo. As a price for its assistance the Soviet Union annexed the Tuva Republic from Mongolia's northern borders and few in Mongolia proper questioned that they had traded one neighbor's domination for another's, even if now officially independent. After the death of Sukhbaatar, his successor Choibalsan, working closely with Lenin's successor Stalin, would become an infamous lapdog to the dictates of Moscow. The Bogd Khan would cease to have any relevance, his death soon after these events had no proclaimed heir to the office, and the extremely powerful Buddhist monastic system once set up by the Qing to tame the Mongols would have its assets seized by the state and lose its influence in society.³⁸⁶

Japan had managed to squeeze Northern Manchuria and mineral concessions on Northern Sakhalin from its Siberian ordeal, and finally pulled troops out of its last Russian bastion on that island in 1925. But it had failed to gain a foothold in either Siberia or Mongolia. Manchuria was always the richest prize by far however, and so by the standards of a new littoral power entering the hinterland of Eurasia, this was a quantified success made possible by the temporary collapse of both traditional regional hegemonies. It was enough to make Japan begin to plan a bid for the whole region. But before getting ahead any further, it is time to examine the other front of Russian collapse and revival, Central Asia.

6.5...Russian Hegemony Holds in the Oxus and Spreads East

Russia and China had both lost immense amount of influence and relative power to Japan in the eastern extremities of Eurasia, but both countries, and in particular Russia, would hold on to their gains in Central Asia with a tenacity born of keeping hard fought gains.

The Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik takeover left a vacuum in Central Asia where the local Khanates carefully plotted either a return to independence or a way to

³⁸⁶ Palmer, 234-45.

gain back more of their former autonomy. Nearby Bolshevik takeovers seemed to show how little they were willing to accommodate former Imperial Russian clients on the basis of ethnicity or culture. Thus it seemed even more a threat to domestic autonomy than the old government did.³⁸⁷ In response Bukhara declared that it would mobilize its army as well as that it would refuse to nationalize property or banks within its jurisdiction. Bolshevik attacks southward to dislodge the troublesome Emir initially met with failure.³⁸⁸

The Soviets, reeling from their loss of so much territory to the Germans and embattled on every front even when the First World War ended, needed desperately to shore up their southern flank, especially because British involvement had become more noticeable since the collapse of the former government. The British had entered in 1918 under the pretext of keeping Germans out from the region but had stayed to support various anti-Bolshevik fighters in the region and to flood the Emirates with spies.³⁸⁹ The Soviets needed a local base in the region to overcome the logistical disadvantageous of operating there and the potential of British troops crossing the border and so turned to the old Imperial stronghold in the region, Tashkent. Tashkent was reinforced, secured, and set up as the regional base for all Soviet operations in Central Asia. Since the original Soviet governor had attempted to defect to the Whites and set himself up as a regional warlord the government was adamant that the city be well garrisoned and secure. This relative fortress city would pay back dividends on the investment placed into making it Red Russia's forward base in the region. Control of Central Asia was going to become far more direct than ever before.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Becker, 4692-99, 5001-8.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5073-5135.

³⁸⁹ A fascinating example of spying in the fractured situation was the experience of Colonel John Bailey, who infiltrated Soviet occupied cities in Central Asia and sent back (often intercepted) dispatches of troop movements and political changes to British intelligence agents in Afghanistan and India. Captured by the Cheka he was placed in prison where he adopted the customs and dress of the Austro-Hungarian prisoners there and managing eventually to pass himself off as one of them, eventually being released when the armistice was declared with that power. He then realized that Britain would not intervene directly in the region and so resolved to escape. He did so by presenting himself, still masquerading as a released Austro-Hungarian prisoner, to his former captors, the Cheka, as willing to work for them in infiltrating British spy networks along the Afghan-Soviet border and even hunting down himself, reported missing presumed escaped from the camp. They gave him papers to pass the checkpoint and money and he managed to escape back to British India. Britain could produce its own agents of formless empire in Central Asia as well (Hopkirk980-1528).

³⁹⁰ Hopkirk, 781-90.

Soon the Emirates were cowed and dismantled. The Communist Party coordinated rebellions in Bukhara and Khiva which then invited in Soviet troops as liberators. By the early 1920s the base at Tashkent had sent forth a variety of campaigns that had brought all former Russian territory and clients in Central Asia under Soviet control. With their newfound direct power the government issued collectivization orders and rebellions sparked in the rural hinterland. This type of guerilla war was more of a challenge to the regime than the re-conquest of the region's cities was and so they turned to former de facto ruler of the now defunct Ottoman Empire who was living in exile in the Soviet Union, Enver Pasha, for help. Enver would gain the loyalty of co-ethnic Turkic peoples for the Soviets in exchange for them backing him to return to power in what was now the Republic of Turkey.³⁹¹

Once he was in the field however, Enver double-crossed his patrons and became the leader of what was now known as the Basmachi Rebellion. He soon was in charge of the rebellion, leading raids of Soviet supply lines and receiving the endorsement of the deposed and on the run former Emir of Bukhara. Soon under his leadership the rebellion was able to take towns and small cities and occupy them. Equipped with an entourage of veteran Ottoman officers, weapons imported from Afghanistan, and a German style staff system, he represented the most dangerous threat the Soviets had yet faced in the region. Only in 1922, when all fronts except Siberia had died down for the Bolsheviks, did the state scrounge up the necessarily massive amount of force it needed to defeat Enver in a decisive campaign. His armies disintegrating after a series of engagements with this new Soviet army, Enver and his few remaining followers launched a suicidal cavalry attack on the enemy line, dying in a hail of bullets near the Afghan border.³⁹²

The new state of the Soviets had triumphed. It had retained Central Asia and in fact increased the level of state authority there. Though it took a much more direct form of control over the region, which led to such problems as the Basmachi Rebellion, it had learned how to use the railways and the value of rapid mobility and deployment. It was the inheritor of Imperial Russia in more ways than one. It even kept the language of

³⁹¹ Ibid., 2463-89.

³⁹² Ibid., 2557-2724.

local autonomy, if not the practice, by declaring that it would create nation-states in Central Asia which would reflect the indigenous character of the places. This was a show for an audience abroad, however, as the states were well integrated into the party system based in Moscow. The national states themselves, being based on ethnicity, were nothing at all akin to the multiethnic and fluid norm of indigenous Central Asian states. And so it seemed that by 1924 the last echoes of the indigenous formless geopolitics of the region had died.³⁹³ Soviet rule, with its ultra-modernist tendencies, was far more akin to Western European type direct colonialism than Imperial Russia, or any regional predecessor, was. Their rule had the hallmarks of the more conventional colonial relationship between rulers and ruled such as travel restrictions and forced education in the colonizers tongue. All other changes in Eurasian geopolitics before this point were far more gradual, this new era was quite an abrupt change of course.³⁹⁴

If the fluid ambiguity that characterized Inner Eurasia had gone into remission in Central Asia, it had now resurfaced in a place where it first had been extinguished-Xinjiang. The death of the Chinese revolutionary leader opened up the way for his succession under Chiang Kai-shek, under whom the government took a far right turn. The Republic, known for its corruption, was decreasingly popular in the frontier provinces and soon a young warlord known as Ma Zhongying, or “Young Ma” seized the area of Xinjiang for his own control and made moves towards turning Xinjiang back into ‘Eastern Turkestan.’ The whole area of north-west China and Xinjiang was run by a series of warlords with the ‘Ma’ title, (shorthand for Muhammad), and all were Muslim Hui people sharpened by struggle with both communist and Tibetan tribal foes. Young Ma, however, was not interested in loyalty to the republic and sought his own Muslim kingdom.³⁹⁵

At the time of Ma’s usurping of the region, the central government was busy in its ‘Northern Expedition’, a giant military advance from the Republic’s base in the south into the domains of the northern warlords. Though it took his eye off of Central Asia, Chiang’s bold move abolished the independence of the northern warlords during its two

³⁹³ Becker, 5633-5794.

³⁹⁴ Sonja D. Schmid. “Nuclear Colonization? Soviet Technopolitics in the Second World War,” in Gabrielle Hecht, ed, *Entangled Geographies: Empire & Technopolitics in the Global Cold War* (United States: M.I.T. Press, 2011), page 128.

³⁹⁵ Hopkirk, 3161-69, 3462-70.

years of operation (1926-28). The Soviet Union, seeking allies for any future conflict with Japan, backed Chiang and his wobbly collusion with Chinese communists, and began to support the Chinese Republic with weapons. The most powerful warlord, Zhang Zuolin (at this point his astute governance had actually paid off all regional debts and created a quantified economic boom in Manchuria) was expected by the Japanese to stop the nationalist advance with their support. Due to his numerous wars of conquest however, the once strong regional economy was beginning to falter, as was his military machine. When he was defeated outside Beijing by nationalists he had outlived his usefulness and was assassinated by Japanese agents by bombing his personal train. Thinking his eldest son-an opium addict-would be a more pliable replacement, Japan moved to install Zhang Xueliang as leader of Manchuria. This in turn would backfire immensely as the son took an even more independent path from his father, executing several Japanese advisors publically and trying to gain close ties to foreign powers such as the United States. Xueliang soon after declared his public support for unification under the nationalist (Kuomingtang) government of Chiang Kai-shek. Altogether, the Northern Expedition was a resounding success that shored up Chiang's base. Brimming with confidence he broke with his communist allies, initiating a general purge of great violence within the party and throughout the country. The Soviet Union balked at the display of treachery and withdrew their support. Chiang prepared to turn west and finally bring Xinjiang under full government control.^{396 397}

The Soviet Union needed its own warlord in Xinjiang. Large numbers of nomadic peoples had migrated from Soviet Central Asia to Xinjiang to escape forced collectivization and were seen as potential threats by the paranoid Stalin.³⁹⁸ Young Ma was rejected as a fanatic likely to whip up sectarian strife throughout Turkestan if allowed to become too powerful. More dangerously, from the Soviet perspective, than the specter of Muslim revolts was Ma's increasingly apparent contacts with Japanese intelligence. If Ma became an ally or proxy of the Japanese it would effectively put the critically important Baku oil fields within range of Japanese bombers.³⁹⁹ Thus the

³⁹⁶ Rossabi, 229.

³⁹⁷ Millward, 196-7.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 185.

³⁹⁹ Hopkirk, 3555-63.

Soviets decided to collaborate with Sheng Shicai, the Kuomintang general sent west by Chiang Kai-shek to restore control of the province. They could remove Young Ma and turn the Kuomintang victory against the Republic of China in one go.⁴⁰⁰

What happened next showed that the USSR was indeed developing its tactical doctrine in line with the new technology of the times as well as the tried and true methods of formless geopolitics, even if they no longer practiced those doctrines in Soviet Central Asia proper. Governor Sheng's army (made up of almost as many White Russian Cossacks in exile as Chinese) advanced west into Xinjiang, while a Soviet force wearing no insignia or national emblems, crossed the border from the west heading east. Between these armies, Young Ma's horsemen were massacred. Soviet armored cars and strafing planes, having now taken up the role of the mounted archers for the 20th Century, decimated the Muslim horsemen. Ma had disappeared, likely into Soviet captivity. Sheng seized control over Xinjiang in 1933 ostensibly for the Kuomintang, but in effect he had signed a secret treaty with the Soviets in exchange for their support. This treaty made him clear all his policies first with the Soviets first and turned Xinjiang into a de facto puppet protectorate for the USSR, not unlike what Manchuria had officially become for Japan two years earlier.⁴⁰¹

6.6...The Strange Case of Manchukuo

The already quite extensive sway held by the Japanese over Manchuria was under threat by the previously mentioned unexpectedly independent posture of the new warlord, Zhang Xueliang. In addition, the stock market crash of 1929 had placed greater pressures on resource poor Japan, whose industry lacked both the space and the materials for an expansion of heavy industry. The Railway concessions were no longer enough, a more absolute hegemony was to be established.⁴⁰²

Though a settled, littoral, and agrarian power, Japan took a page from the book of Eurasian migrations in its plans to harness the eastern edge of Inner Eurasia to its

⁴⁰⁰ Rossabi, 230.

⁴⁰¹ Hopkirk, 3646-55.

⁴⁰² Taiheiyo Senso. *Japan Erupts: The London Naval Conference and the Manchurian Incident 1928-1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pages 6-8.

empire. It would be a frontier space for disgruntled and impoverished farmers coming from Japan. Mass migration would tie the region absolutely to the empire. Already, Manchuria contained many foreign migrants who would likely support the construction of a new non-Chinese state, the virulently anti-communist White Russian émigré community and the dwindling numbers of Manchurians among them.⁴⁰³

On September 19th, 1931, after staging a bombing of the Mantetsu railway, the Kwantung Army (army division of the Imperial Japanese Army responsible for operations north of Korea) began an invasion of Manchuria. This was done without orders from the civilian government, but the public and the nation soon capitalized on the opportunity the semi-rogue army had given them. Within a few months the entire region was under control, save a few pockets of bandits and communist guerrillas out on the frontiers. A lightning campaign by a quick moving foe (Japanese army had armored cars, light tanks, and cavalry of its own) had overcome larger enemy forces to establish control in Eurasia. A familiar story, except this time the aggressive power was an alien naval power. The regime that would be set up in Manchuria, however, would show that the Japanese had begun to learn from the earlier experiences of quantified failure in Siberia and Mongolia.⁴⁰⁴

Cooperation with locals, especially elites, became a key factor in the making of what was passed off as a new state, a homeland for the Manchus named Manchukuo. Officially proclaimed in 1932, the local merchants and affluent settlers were brought into the state, as well as the Russian White exiles. The exiled former emperor, Pu Yi, was invited to become monarch of the new state and was installed as Emperor of Manchukuo.⁴⁰⁵

Immediately, massive amounts of investment were transferred to the country. Heavy industry and general industrial output soon reached parity with homeland Japan, investments were returned two or threefold, and the Manchukuo Yuan, a currency not recognized by most of the world as the state itself was not recognized and Japan had

⁴⁰³ Ramon Myers and Mark Peattie. *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945* (West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1984), pages 230-1.

⁴⁰⁴ Shinichi Yamamuro. *Manchuria Under Japanese Domination* (United States: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pages 98-9.

⁴⁰⁵ Louise Young. *Japan's Total Empire, Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), page 40.

left the League of Nations in protest of the condemnation of the world powers to its invasion of Manchuria in the first place, reached parity with the Japanese Yen by 1937. Investment was opened up to other powers who recognized the state and companies used their profits to pursue large amounts of diversification, profits coming back from various industrial projects often being reinvested in the massive soybean and fishing. To shore up the still-ambiguous borders with the USSR these opportunities were often used to get Japanese farmers to settle specifically near the borders of the state to provide a solid bulwark of protection as well as frontier economic integration with the now booming cities of Harbin and Mukden.⁴⁰⁶

Meanwhile, in addition to disproportionate wealth growth through trade compared to China proper, the cultural development of this puppet state began to bear certain similarities to its geographic forebear, the Liao Dynasty. While it didn't have a rotating capital system and the government was not based in tents, it did straddle the lines between ethnicities, state building, imperialism, and consciously trying to retain a separate identity from China despite the largest single grouping of people being Han Chinese. Most interestingly in the context of the past of Manchuria was the attempt to preserve the way of life of what hunter-gatherers and nomads the state had left. Connections were drawn up between Siberian shamanism and Manchurian folklore with the traditional Japanese religion of Shintoism. The forests of Manchuria were protected by an extensive conservation program and Pu Yi himself was declared to have been reborn through the Japanese goddess Amaterasu and one of the state religions of Manchukuo became Shintoism, even though that religion held no followers outside of the Kwantung Army and the Japanese settler community.⁴⁰⁷

The single most striking individual example of this formless identity of this state was that of Kawashima Yoshiko, born into the royal family of the Qing and Nurhaci as Aisin Gioro Xianyu. An extended relative of Pu Yi, Kawashima had been brought up in Japan and used by that nation's intelligence service as a valuable spy in the region. She had briefly married the leader of the Inner Mongolian independence movement, who was also a pawn in Japanese plots to carve apart China into their own vassal states.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 42-6.

⁴⁰⁷ Prasenjit Duara. *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (United States: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2003), pages 186-8.

After the invasion of Manchuria she moved to the new region her extended family was ostensibly now the head of state of and acted as both a spy-and once she became famous enough to have her cover blown, an outright anti-guerrilla leader in the less secure parts of the kingdom. In a fitting last gasp for the Manchurian Qing royal family, she led a force of cavalry recruits made up of Manchus, Chinese, and Mongolians in operations against both communist bands and bandits. Once the pacification of the countryside was largely complete, she became a public personality in the state recording radio broadcasts and even her own songs.⁴⁰⁸

With the outbreak of full scale war in China proper in 1937, however, the Kwantung army was put in charge of raising funds for operations, which they did by becoming patrons of the opium market which has aggressively marketed towards the Chinese population. Events like this and many others⁴⁰⁹ as the booming economy of Manchukuo was harnessed more and more to Japan's ever outwardly spiraling wars drove the once intelligence, military, and propaganda asset that was Kawashima became sharply critical of the direction of the regime. Despite being dependent on Japanese protection, the pride of the Qing still shown through from time to time when the façade of their supposedly equal partnership was exposed in stark detail. Still, the state was remarkably good at keeping most of the populace loyal and productive using; in the social sphere at least, a relatively hands-off approach. Japan had learned much about dealing with the geopolitics of Inner Eurasia. These lessons were soon repeated with the creation of Mengjiang, effectively a Manchukuo for Inner Mongolia also containing its own royal family, military units, and the like. It is likely had Japan been a victorious power in World War II many regions of China, if not China in its entirety, would have been organized in this fashion. This model of indirect control was in fact exported to South-East Asia after Japan's massive maritime conquests in 1942.^{410 411}

Yet while Japan had been honing its political acumen to deal with the region its long string of military victories had made it complacent. While the various struggles to

⁴⁰⁸ Yamamuro, 98-9.

⁴⁰⁹ This was also the same year that the now infamous biological weapons and human experimentation laboratory Unit 731 begun operations just south of Mukden, but as it was top secret this was probably not known to the vast majority of even the Japanese spy network.

⁴¹⁰ Duara, 63-4.

⁴¹¹ Young, 49.

survive and military setbacks had made the Soviet Union the new regional vanguard of military innovation. Indirect administration is a core value to running a formless empire successfully, but it is only half of the equation, the other is a rapid mobile military which emphasizes speed and firepower. While Japan's conquest of Manchuria did fit this description, it was nothing compared to the evolution of the Soviet Union's military doctrine since the end of the Russian Civil War. Though this disparity would not become clear to either power until both had tested themselves against each other.

6.7...Mongolia Witnesses the Rebirth of Steppe Cavalry, Mechanized Style

A shockingly overlooked battle, from a historical perspective, would occur in the very birthplace of the formless empire which would sound the end of the infantry armies which had come to dominate Inner Eurasia and give the large settled states which now controlled it the one weapon that would make them as flexible and potent a force as the Mongols had been in the 13th Century: the wholly mechanized army. It would come as the long and cold indirect struggle for hegemony between Russia and Japan finally flashed hot in 1939, and it would be one of the most important battles in the history of the evolution of Eurasian battle tactics.⁴¹²

The Soviet Union began to clamp down on the notoriously porous Siberian frontier, and seemed willing to placate Japan on most issues for some time. This in turn led the Japanese to assume that it was weak and thus they adopted a belligerent posture. As the British ambassador to Moscow quipped in 1934: "Soviet-Japanese relations are good, but Japanese-Soviet relations are not so good."⁴¹³

Stalin's current army purge did not help the perception that the giant nation was a paper tiger. Sensing imminent liquidation General Lyunshkov, and NKVD commander, defected across the Primorye-Manchukuo border to the Japanese in 1937. The information he gave them on parts of the disputed border led a Japanese force to launch a night attack which killed and captured all Soviet units on a disputed hill.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² Palmer, 239.

⁴¹³ Stuart D. Goldman. *Nomonhan, 1939: The Red Army's Victory that Shaped World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012, [Kindle Ebook]), sections 501-9.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1405-1557.

The Soviet army in the region, due to inept handling as its upper ranks had been purged, launched a series of clumsy counterattacks to retake the hill. For days the armies battled and despite much larger numbers and larger amounts of artillery, the Soviets failed to dislodge the Japanese. Finally, the Japanese government, not wanting to divert troops from the massive military operations in mainland China, put the brakes on the operation and withdrew from the disputed heights. The territory may have been ceded to the Soviets, but the Russian military performance had only seemed to confirm the sense of superiority of the Japanese army, who had held their position and suffered significantly less casualties than the Russians.⁴¹⁵

There was another section of disputed territory further west, this time between two puppet states, Manchukuo and Mongolia. This Khalkan Gol region was a hot spot for the migrations of Khalkha Mongols seeking pasturage. Not used to modern states or fixed borders they traveled along the border with their herds. The powers then realized they did not quite agree on where exactly the borders of their clients were located in the region. The village of Nomonhan was the only permanent town in the region and soon became the focal point for the two sides. Once again, Japan took the more belligerent position, sending a detachment of Manchukuo native cavalry to occupy the town. Mongolian cavalry then engaged them in battle along the frontier. It seemed like a re-enactment of early Qing expansion into Mongolia in the 17th Century, but for the massive modern build up taking place behind both sides of the line.⁴¹⁶

The re-enactment ended with a massive Japanese offensive that overran Soviet headquarters, killing many of the commanding officers and appearing to be on the verge of crushing their forces there. The Soviets withdrew, but using their superior mobility, were able to check the Japanese advance. Like in Siberia, both sides withdrew leaving the Soviets in the field. Not willing to trust that the Japanese would stay put, Stalin called for Grigori Zhukov, a decorated cavalry commander and proponent of tank warfare, to take charge of the forces in Mongolia. Upon arrival he immediately ordered air raids on the Kwantung Army's forward positions which threw the Japanese, used to air superiority as they were, off balance. They responded in massive force a few days

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 1588-1792.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 2114-20.

later with a crippling mass fighter/bomber attack on Soviet air bases throughout Mongolia destroying upwards of a hundred Soviet planes. It was a prelude to another attack which began a few days later, once again meeting initial success.^{417 418}

The battle raged for days and Zhukov lobbied for armored reinforcements. He was going to use massed columns of tanks to swing around and envelop the advancing (if slowly) Japanese army using the speed and firepower which mobile armor could achieve out on the steppe. At this point, right before the official breakout of the Second World War, this was a new doctrine to be used-the concentrated as decisive push for a tank offensive. This contrasted with what was more common, the using of armor as infantry support, as the Japanese did.⁴¹⁹

A coordinated counter-attack hit both Japanese flanks as intended. Mongolian cavalry drove off the Manchukuoan cavalry scouts and Soviet tanks completed a near total envelopment of the Japanese army. What little was left broke out and retreated back to Manchukuo.⁴²⁰ It was one of the decisive victories in Inner Eurasian history and finally checked the landward advance of Japanese arms which had begun in 1894. The high tide of Japanese power in Eurasia had been met, but with war in Europe only (as it turned out) two days away, Stalin was as anxious to come to peace over the border as were the Japanese. The first example of large scale limited war between industrial powers had been fought, but to anyone familiar with the history of empires in Inner Eurasia, decisive battles and campaigns in the service of limited objectives was really more of a return to the norm which existed before unchecked Sino-Russian hegemony.⁴²¹

The non-aggression pact which both Japan and Russia signed dramatically altered the war. Had Japan joined Germany's 1941 assault on the USSR that state likely would have been crushed.⁴²² It was only Japan's turning south and striking the

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 2381-2705.

⁴¹⁸ Edward Drea. "Nomonhan, Japanese-Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939" (*Combat Studies Institute of the U.S. Army: Leavenworth Papers Study*, January 1981. Internet: http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/cgsc/carl/download/csipubs/LP2_NomonhanJapanese-SovietTacticalCombat_1939.pdf), pages 32-47.

⁴¹⁹ Goldman, 3123-3211.

⁴²⁰ Drea, 71-7.

⁴²¹ Goldman, 3304-3533, 4200-08.

⁴²² Darwin, 421.

maritime powers in 1941 (a decision they reached in no small part to what they called “The Nomonhan Incident”) that allowed Zhukov’s army to rapidly redeploy, using railways and speed across virtually the entirety of Eurasia, becoming the critical reinforcements that stopped the German advance on Moscow that very year and saved the Soviet Union from calamity. Zhukov himself learned from his bold experiments on the Manchu-Mongol border and became the engineer of many of the Soviet Union’s most impressive victories against the Germans, using the firepower and mobility which became his trademarks. Of all the powers in the Second World War, only the United States would successfully fight simultaneously on two fronts. The Soviet Union was in a much more dangerous geostrategic position, and so was able to fight Japan, Germany, and then Japan again at separate times. This was made possible by the combination of railroads and armed forces mechanization.⁴²³ Russia’s position as hegemon was about to return and it had mastered space like never before. It went on to play the single largest part in Allied victory against Germany, just as Japan’s decision to bring the United States into the war would make that country the single largest contributor to Japanese defeat. Even though no large scale land war broke out in Eastern Eurasia, Nonmohan had affected the entire course of the war’s Pacific and European fronts.⁴²⁴

6.8...The Hegemons Return

With the Red Army totally victorious over arch-foe Germany by 1945 and Japan’s navy effectively sunk and all its best army units and equipment stripped from the China Front and Kwantung armies to fight disastrous battles in the South Pacific, Japanese influence on the Eurasian landmass was about to expire. Hours after the second atomic bomb was detonated over Nagasaki a massive Soviet army, once again shipped in speedy fashion over most of Eurasia, crashed into Manchukuo. The sad remnants of the once mighty Kwantung army were utterly destroyed and other assaults hit the Japanese in their previous gains at Russia’s expense, the Kurils and South Sakhalin. The battle hardened and thoroughly mechanized Soviet armies, with the state of the art

⁴²³ Goldman, 4050-59, 4141-48, 4178-85.

⁴²⁴ Drea, 86.

IS-2 heavy tanks and T-34/85 main battle tanks which emphasized speed and maneuverability⁴²⁵, crossed Manchuria and into Korea within weeks. Japanese settlers either killed themselves or were repatriated to Japan after the war while prisoners became fodder for the labor gulags of Siberia. Pu Yi was captured and turned over to the Chinese communists, while Kawashima Yoshiko was eventually apprehended by the Nationalist forces and executed in 1948. The White Russian community and its pro-Japanese spy network too met grisly fates, with the old Cossack Ataman Semenov entertaining his NKVD guests for a dinner party before they arrested him and sent him off to execution in the country he had exiled himself from. The most successful attempt by a littoral power to create an empire in Inner Eurasia had last all of 14 years and ended in a matter of weeks. Japan once became an island-only nation with no mainland holdings while the Soviet Union gained influence in Manchuria, North Korea, and their old maritime territories back.⁴²⁶

Stalin had apparently learned a thing or two over the decades, and rather than retain an empire in Manchuria as the Tsars had wanted he dismantled some of the heavy industry found there as war booty and left some, along with all the Japanese war materiel captured, to communist leader Mao Zedong. Soon after gaining control over former Manchukuo the Chinese communists rushed south, much as the Manchus had once done, and defeated the Nationalists in a series of decisive victories utilizing both loaned Soviet armor and partisans and guerrillas. By 1949 the Republic was in exile on the former Japanese colony of Taiwan and the Communists were in near total control of the mainland, with partisan operations still ongoing in Tibet. After sweeping through the Gansu corridor to remove the Kuomintang warlords from Xinjiang, (Sheng had been removed after turning on his Russian masters right at the time the Nationalists and Russians became allies in the war) the Communist party began to adopt the same outlook on the importance of frontier securitization their Qing forebears had had.⁴²⁷

6.9...Conclusion:

⁴²⁵ A parallel to the traditional steppe army of large amount of light cavalry with a core of heavy cavalry could be made here.

⁴²⁶ Young, 406-9.

⁴²⁷ Rossabi, 267.

Right at the height of power in Eurasia, when Russia and China had established hegemony and security over their border regions after centuries for one and more than two millennium for the other, their system came wildly crashing down on their heads. It was not because their former enemies who had become subject peoples had counterattacked successfully, but rather that outside maritime powers had broken in and re-oriented the system to suit their own ends. Chief among them for the regions this study looks at was the British and the Japanese, particularly the latter.

Firearms and changing economic systems had moved the technological edge to the maritime states of Western Europe and North America, and then later Japan. The forces that had once tamed Eurasia were not adopted to fight these new alien intruders, who could move and deploy with a speed faster than any steppe nomad due to the power of steam powered navies. Only in resistance to these powers did these old continental hegemony learn how to innovate themselves, but the collapse of their own regimes when trying to do so only increased the unraveling of the system they had worked so hard to create. Japan even became good at the game after initial reverses, creating in Manchukuo a multi-ethnic state and commodity driven state, which resembled at least superficially, a modern exhumation of the Liao Dynasty, its geographic forebear.

What Japan learned politically Russia would learn militarily, which in this particular era of the early to mid-20th century seems to have been the more decisive branch of strategy for the formless empire. Once the powers had recovered from initial intrusion and had some time for regime consolidation, war in other realms of the world had initiated the decline of above all Britain and Japan. When the Eurasian powers began to recover they did so with a vengeance. Particularly the Soviet Union, whose experiences in the Russian Civil War, with armor experiments, and at Nomonhan had led it to develop a robust mobile military more than capable of dealing with the challenges of pan-Eurasian hegemony and warfare on distant fronts in a mostly land locked country. Zhukov in particular showed a flair for nations-wide grand military movements and battles which was truly Mongolian in scope. A single nation being able to wage large scale wars in Europe and Asia in close temporal proximity by shifting forces rapidly across the continent was an achievement thought lost to the height of the

Mongol Empire when Batu and Kublai waged their separate, yet connected wars of conquest in Russia and China. The settled societies, now modern states, had first won with technology and economics alone, now they could emulate and even surpass the abilities of the nomads in maintaining military hegemony.

The long era of chaos unleashed by the fall of the Qing and Romanovs was over, and Russia and China were once again the undisputed victorious powers over the region, with the former being the stronger party by far. But if the Soviets thought that they had finally achieved total Eurasian hegemony with a pliant Chinese vassal thoroughly in their sway and permanent borders of stability, they were about to be disappointed.

Chapter Seven: Rebirth through Smothering

“Men and nations have from time to time concluded that some single faith is destined to prevail throughout the world and that institutions professing and applying that faith are fated to become universally regnant.”

~Adolph A. Berle

“Comrade Stalin showed us how to build socialism in a backward country: it is painful to begin with, but afterwards everything turns out just fine.”

~Haffizullah Amin, President of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan

“Ethnic, regional, and local conflicts and aggressive separatism in states cause the main threat to universal security since the end of the Cold War, especially if this kind of confrontation turns out to be a powerful influence in the hands of some states, which seek to maintain and protect their own interests and zones of influence or to change the strategic balance of power in their favor.”

~Islam Karimov

7.0...Summation:

The triumph of state power in its most authoritarian, ideological, and hyper-modernist form inside the two giant Eurasian states who most dominated the inland reaches of the world's largest continent would come to exterminate the flexibility which so symbolizes the nature of the Formless Empire's politics. The Cold War would become a dark age for the dynamic indigenous geopolitics of the region-but also a period of relative stability. It was, however, the most temporary of respites when taken in the grand scheme of things.

The unity of the two former rivals, Russia and China, was short lived despite a newfound commitment towards ideological unity through Marxist doctrine. As countless other practitioners of various messianic religions and revolutionary doctrines had already found out-ideas are a poor substitute for the realities of competing interests between states. Once it was apparent that China's interests no longer lay with being a de facto vassal to the USSR and it would no longer willingly do so, the divide was swift and absolute often came to direct clashes on the borders or indirect clashes through

proxies in such places as Afghanistan, which once again would become the troublesome border zone of Inner Eurasia.

But even this cataclysmic rupture in the communist world would be nothing compared to the epic calamity which awaited the Soviet State which had put so much effort in shoring up its borders and centralized method of rule. When that state collapsed it shed off territory at an unprecedented rate. Central Asia was independent, but this came with the cost of artificial ethnic identities, rampant environmental destruction, and mutilated borders drawn up generations before by an out of touch political class. Despite these handicaps, Central Asia had been injected with many benefits from the Soviet period-some of which mirrored older forms of governance under the various Turko-Mongolian ruling houses. Relatively secular governance, an openness to regional cooperation and regional trade, and in some cases recognition of ethnic plurality. Central Asia had a new beginning.

So did Russia. Acknowledging the independence of its former colonies, Russia adapted (or, one might say, re-adapted) to wielding its power in an indirect manner. Massive security interests still lurked in the region and in a variety of actions it became both more economical and realistic to return to a time when hegemony needed only speed and striking power rather than occupation and assimilation to wield their influence.

China went another way, retaining its position in Central Asia while opening up relations with the now independent states of the region. Clamping down it followed the old Han Dynasty policy of western lands under direct rule and a further 'Western Protectorate' to secure those gains beyond. In effect, the present contemporary situation, with which we will end this chapter mirrors a return to the first case study of this project: the bipolar system of the loosely, lightly populated, but immensely mobile and powerful Xiongnu Empire in the north sharing an intermittent rivalry with Han Dynasty China. The Xiongnu has been replaced by Russia and the dynastic system with the People's Republic-but if anything the technologies of the modern world have given the Formless Empire new relevance and a rebirth from its Twentieth Century remission.

7.1...Central Asia as Peripheral Province

In the era after the Second World War and before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Heartland of Inner Eurasia would reach its greatest levels of colonization and control by outside powers. The dreams of the Han Dynasty and Ivan the Terrible had finally been realized and the rancorous tribes and flexible statelets who had once been the engines of economic growth and large-scale security were defeated. But to add even to the ephemeral victory won by Late Imperial Russia and the Qing Dynasty it was not only the tribes who had been defeated, but the space itself and the weakness of authority with which even those previous conquering powers had wielded over their more distant possessions. There was no question now, state power in the most modern definition of the term was here to stay and the freedom of movement that had so defined the steppes of Eurasia was confined only to the militaries of the two powers that had finally triumphed-or so they thought at first.

The Second World War had finally locked down the troublesome Far East of Siberia. Once so open that Lenin had to in effect purchase security from other powers by offering the United States and Japan competing concessions now the area was rebuilt by the labor of Japanese prisoners of war, while Vladivostok became a restricted naval base allowing no foreign entry. Eventually, economic normalization with Japan would commence, restoring the tenuous trade links of the pre-war era while leaving behind their unequal legacy.⁴²⁸

Siberians, who had never been treated well under the imperial system, actually gained rights under the Soviets as opposed to the now quiet Central Asians.⁴²⁹ It came at a cost; however, as the confiscation of shamans drums by commissars of the party came to be seen as a direct replay of the actions of orthodox missionaries. Mining became a massive boom industry in the region, particularly gold, and the central government began to work on massive damming projects in the rivers of Siberia.⁴³⁰

During the early delineation of the Central Asian Republics the mullahs and local potentates had lost out. In the prewar era the USSR had accomplished many reforms,

⁴²⁸ John J. Stephen. *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pages 164-5, 247, 262.

⁴²⁹ James Forsyth. *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), page 396.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 363-5.

such as mandatory education for children, the political emancipation of women, and the encouragement of university attendance. Massive agricultural expansion, particularly of cotton and other irrigation-thirsty crops alongside certain heavy metal industries and the Soviet space program would however lead to cesspools of toxic waste and environmental devastation, particularly to the Azov Sea. There were both benefits and drawbacks to Soviet rule and these policies served to tie Central Asia closer to Russia proper as never before-and considering that there were certain benefits the region acquiesced with uncharacteristic yet understandable cooperation.⁴³¹

The Soviet Union was recovering from the massive losses and efforts of the Second World War and economic and technological innovation was promising to move towards the future promised by the revolution. It was the Khrushchev era enabled the first satellite to orbit the earth, the first man in space, and a denunciation of Stalin and his political legacy, and a relative relaxation of the state network. Things seemed solid in the Soviet heartland.⁴³²

In Mongolia the attempts to find an urban proletariat (and in light on not finding one, making one) under the Stalinist strategies of Choibalsan had failed due to an economy still dominated by pastoralism. A more gradual approach was adopted and the world's second communist state became one of the most stable, albeit under the tutelage of its northern neighbor and still while fearing the machinations of its southern neighbor. Across the border, in Chinese-ruled Inner Mongolia where even more Mongols lived, the Chinese thought to quell any nationalist yearnings to join with Outer Mongolia by re-introducing Ming Dynasty history of the Inner Mongols as the more civilized of the tribal branches who stood as China's gatekeeper to potentially turbulent northern realms. Whether it worked or not as propaganda is questionable, but the Inner Mongolian frontier seemed stable for the time being.⁴³³

In the inland frontiers of the newborn People's Republic of China outside of Mongolia however, things were not so stable in the immediate postwar era. The Qing and the Kuomintang had both kept a loose hold on the region, and as we have seen this

⁴³¹ Svat Soucek. *A History of Inner Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pages 230-6.

⁴³² Darwin, 473.

⁴³³ Uradyn E. Bulag. *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and Politics of National Unity* (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), page 169.

allowed the Soviet Union to also infiltrate the region of Xinjiang and gain some indirect influence there as well. Chairman Mao was not pleased with this immediately apparent unequal relationship between these two supposedly egalitarian states, so one of the first geopolitical projects of the regime was the same as many other new dynasties, to bring order to the western frontier. Tibet also still had an ambiguous relationship with the government ever since the British had opened relations with the Dalai Llama on a somewhat separate basis from the rest of the government in 1905.

China struck back. The first target was Tibet. The catalyst for decisive action was the outbreak of the Korean War.⁴³⁴ Before committing their troops directly to stem the tide of Allied counterattack from the botched North Korean invasion of the south, China would re-assert its hegemony over Tibet and also shore up a flank with the potential rival of the newly independent India. The fighting was brief. In a matter of weeks, and despite some of the most forbidding terrain in the world, a rapid advance convinced the Tibetan government to surrender. Little was done, however, except assert hegemony, until the Korean War itself was long over. Then in 1955 collectivization was enforced on the territory leading to widespread revolt, full military occupation, CIA involvement in the form of supplying weapons to the rebels, and the flight of the Dalai Llama to India.⁴³⁵

China was back on the march into the frontier. Now it was time for the already controlled yet potentially trickier problem of Xinjiang. Initially, the region had been loosely governed- as previous regimes had done- by General Wang Zhen, after the Korean War the government changed course and instituted a purge of all 'Turkic' party leaders in the local administration. This was followed by unsuccessful attempts to collectivize much of the nomadic economy outside of the cities which did nonetheless increase party control over the actions of the notoriously bad proletariats of the nomadic population.⁴³⁶ Eventually the nomads, who had little concept of class warfare, where

⁴³⁴ Tsering Shakya. *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), page 43.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 139, 206-7.

⁴³⁶ James A. Millward. *Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978* (Chapter 3 in James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue's compilation for The Central Asia-Caucases Institute, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2003), pages 87-8.

combined with co-operative farms to make joint herding-farming units which encouraged the nomads to adopt more defined and less expansive ranges for grazing.⁴³⁷

This was soon followed by a massive influx of Han Chinese immigration and economic development programs. Considering the rapidly strengthening position of the PRC in what was acknowledged to be its sovereign territory, Mao felt strong enough that in 1954 he ordered the Soviet Union's advisers out of the region and accused them of treating the frontier region like 'semi-colonies' and negotiated the selling off of their public stocks in the regions industries.⁴³⁸

It was in this most unlikely of eras, where the past was disregarded for dreams of the future, that the Chinese communists turned to a certain historical figure to legitimize their rule over such a diverse variance of population. Once the outlying regions had been brought largely under control-the government of China began to extol the virtues of a great foe of the Chinese nation-Chinggis Khan. For bringing unity to different lands and peoples as well as encouraging inter-cultural cooperation and establishing the first international postal service, he became almost a role model of the state which was at that very moment destroying the ways of life of pastoralists and ignoring the principles of freedom of movement for which the Mongol Empire had propagated so thoroughly.⁴³⁹

Despite having cooperated in the Korean War and solving some (though by no means all-as we shall soon see) of their border disputes, the two formerly-rival-turned-allies of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China could no longer deny that ideology had not smoothed over the bridges of the geopolitical rivalries that still lay between them. The alliance which held the Eurasian heartland together was showing its first cracks, and soon they would widen into canyons.

7.2...The Sino-Soviet Split

Despite the catastrophic results of many of the policies of The Great Leap Forward, China was growing in assertion and power. The leadership of China, feeling let down by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's radical development method and personality cult (in other words, what Mao was doing at the time) and horrified by Soviet attempts to

⁴³⁷ Millward, 240-1.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 253-5.

⁴³⁹ Rossabi, 267.

downplay confrontation and seek more amenable relations with the United States and other powers, began to assert itself as an independent power more overtly. If the USSR would no longer be a stalwart ally on issues such as Taiwan while China had borne the brunt of the Korean War then perhaps it was not just differences of doctrine and hierarchy that lay between the nations, but that the centuries-long geopolitical rivalry between the nations could simply no longer be contained.^{440 441}

The first big break occurred in light of increased militarization of Tibet to put down another rebellion. Due to border disputes in the region, India took the opportunity to assert its sovereignty over areas of nebulous ownership and also as a precautionary measure in reaction to the increased troop presence on the Chinese side of the border. India was a nation with friendly relations with the Soviet Union and perhaps the objective of the government was to exploit a breach between the two communist countries in taking such an action. The People's Republic of China did not allow this deployment to go unopposed and launched a full scale assault on the Indian positions, driving them out and claiming the disputed mountain passes for China. The USSR was outraged that it had not even been consulted or told of the forthcoming operation. It was time to re-assert hegemony over the socialist camp as far as Moscow was concerned. Khrushchev then decided to initiate a campaign which railed against 'splittists' in the communist movement in 1963.^{442 443}

The danger of nebulous borders was thus made clear to all, even China. This last remaining vestige of formless geopolitics had to be thrown out in the era of radicalized nation-states and so Beijing made every effort to resolve as many of its remaining border issues with mutual compromises. By 1963 the PRC had signed fair border deals with Mongolia, Burma, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. But notoriously absent from this list was the biggest neighbor of all, The Soviet Union.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁰ David J. Dallin. *Soviet Foreign Policy After Stalin* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1960), page 490.

⁴⁴¹ Lorenz M. Luthi. *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), page 46.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 115-6.

⁴⁴³ Sergey Radchenko. *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Washington D.C.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 87.

⁴⁴⁴ Luthi, 181.

Chairman Mao realized he could gain much from no longer being assumed to be the de facto vassal of Soviet policy. Many of the various leftist factions ignored by the Soviets in Africa and Asia could be picked up as useful contacts and proxies from their position of being relegated on the sidelines.⁴⁴⁵ More importantly, with Northern Vietnam (soon to be just Vietnam proper) closer to the Soviets than the PRC as well as the new enemy India still maintaining good relations with Moscow, the Chinese leadership feared encirclement, something the United States could never do to them but the Soviets clearly could.⁴⁴⁶

Mao would act decisively, fearing a Soviet sponsored coup. His first target was Soviet citizens, students and diplomatic personnel within China, and those living in Xinjiang were especially targeted for deportation and intimidation. Incensed, the Soviets retaliated by evicting all Chinese students from their places at Russian and Eastern Bloc universities and sending them home.⁴⁴⁷

But picking on each other's students was just the beginning. In 1964 Mao decided to up the stakes by re-opening the since closed debate on Mongolia's independent status, accusing the Soviet Union of vassalizing a state wrongfully snatched from Chinese clutches in the era of imperialism. Even more worrying to Moscow, Mao made much the same point about Outer Manchuria (that which had since become Primorye and the base of the Soviet Pacific Fleet at Vladivostok). This was likely intended to be a ploy to get a better treaty for the disputed Sino-Soviet border which was a leftover of the territorial ambiguities from the era of Manchukuo. Simultaneously to this aggressive assertion was the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, one objective of which was to root out Soviet sympathizers from the government as well as increase Mao's personal power. In this time of fragility and upheaval in China, it was necessary to rally support with a foreign power as scapegoat. Therefore, the one which most threatened Chinese borders would do-even if it wasn't one of the capitalist powers.⁴⁴⁸ Many of the temporarily buried issues had risen to the fore:

⁴⁴⁵ Radchenko, 71.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁴⁷ Luthi, 214-6.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 276-7, 299.

“Soviet accusations focused on chauvinism, racism, leadership cult and the like, charges virtually indistinguishable from the period of struggle against Nazism during World War II, and against Western imperialism. At times they even exceeded accusations against the latter. The Chinese accusation in turn centered on Soviet hegemonism and great power ambitions...Not only were the forces of communism weakened and split by the Sino-Soviet rift, but the two communist giants were at sword’s point, ready to give battle along all but military lines.”⁴⁴⁹

There was to be no turning back now. The Eurasian Cold War had begun and Inner Asia was its largest new front.

North Korea saw the brewing tensions and started to tilt towards China, denying the USSR the right to station nuclear weapons on its territory.⁴⁵⁰ Mongolia, unsurprisingly, took the opposite path and then-leader Yumjaagiin Tsendenbal requested Soviet reinforcements to protect his sparsely populated country from a hypothetical invasion of the giant to the south. The new Soviet premier, Leonid Brezhnev, used the phrase coined for operations in Eastern Europe of ‘Limited Sovereignty’ to uphold Soviet claim of pre-eminence in the communist world-with an obvious eye towards China and the Cultural Revolution which held so much of the socialist world aghast. In 1968, Mao massively reinforced Chinese military divisions in Manchuria-while six Soviet divisions arrived in Mongolia and more in Siberia. Two events played into this decision, the Soviet Union crushing reform attempts in Czechoslovakia, showing blatant disregard for the domestic autonomy of its allies, and the increasing likelihood of American withdrawal from South Vietnam. The government of China increasingly saw all alliances with the Soviet Union, not just its own, as unequal relationships set up by an increasingly imperialistic power. The Chinese even began to build bunkers and fallout shelters in anticipation for a Soviet invasion.⁴⁵¹

The slow burning fuse had finally hit the bomb and in only a few years the two former allies were now already die-hard foes. At Zhenbao/Damanskii Island which was one of the disputed territories on the badly demarcated Ussuri River, artillery fire was

⁴⁴⁹ Alfred D. Low. *The Sino-Soviet Confrontation since Mao Zedong: Dispute, Détente, or Conflict?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), page 17.

⁴⁵⁰ Radchenko, 76.

⁴⁵¹ Margaret Macmillan. *Seize the Hour: When Nixon met Mao* (Great Britain: John Murray Publishers, 2006), page 133.

exchanged and Chinese military units began crossing into the areas of contention. All bets were now off.^{452 453}

Despite the apparently huge disparity of technology, economy, and stability between the powers which decisively favored the Soviet Union, the situation was more dangerous for them than might be assumed. The same vast spaces with (compared to China) very small population and barely enough infrastructure to support massive and prolonged military deployments put immense strain on both Siberia and the central government. Most military forces had to stay in the primary theater of potential conflict in Eastern Europe and so the Soviet Union effectively put together something they had learned from long periods of conflict in Inner Eurasia; a rapid reaction mobile strike force for punishing expeditions rather than broad front warfare.⁴⁵⁴

A pattern emerged, first the Chinese would cross the disputed boundaries, and then the Soviets would try to drive them off. At first it was fist fights, then the Chinese soldiers would open fire, Soviet tanks would run over Chinese infantry, artillery fire would be exchanged. The first combat deployment of the T-62 tank occurred in this engagement, and the armor-led Soviet counterattack finally swept the Chinese from their encroachments and returned the frontier to what it had been before the escalation.^{455 456 457}

It was now that Mao, remembering that even Stalin made pragmatic alliances with capitalist countries, decided to become receptive to a more friendly relationship with the United States.⁴⁵⁸ Mao reportedly reminded his advisors of an ancient Chinese proverb advocating the position that it was more secure to make alliances with far away

⁴⁵² Radchenko, 202.

⁴⁵³ Ruthi, 299, 340.

⁴⁵⁴ Drew Middleton. *The Duel of the Giants: China and Russia in Asia* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1978), pages 141-6.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 135-7.

⁴⁵⁶ Radchenko, 204.

⁴⁵⁷ According to Middleton, who was writing not long after the events he described, the general assumption among those who studied Soviet strategy was that the Soviet Union would launch a punishment expedition into Manchuria and possibly Xinjiang with the intention of stirring up the minorities and possibly looting the industry. Soviet 'Deep Battle' strategy was viewed to be highly likely to break the less mechanized Chinese army but the Chinese would hold the numerical advantage and be able to use guerilla tactics in occupied territory, therefore, by necessity, and any military action would be raid based and likely involve no permanent border changes except for the disputed territories (Middleton, 141).

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 135-37.

countries and to have the state's enemies nearby.⁴⁵⁹ Sun Tzu would have been pleased with such an application of geopolitical logic.

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean the United States was also probing for a closer relationship with the Chinese. National Security Advisor (and later Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger was seeing the breakdown of ideological considerations not only in his own country, which feared increasing Soviet military power more than anything else, but also the now obvious implosion of two implacable foes' relationships. The decision was made that it was time to recognize communist party domination of China in exchange for establishing a new balance of power. This way the United States would be able to offset the growing strength of the Soviet Union by playing the role of the balancer with China as the leverage. This kind of maneuver would ensure the U.S. retained the decisive position in world affairs.⁴⁶⁰

Given that this was in the wake of the Vietnam debacle, while the U.S. was at low ebb and the Soviet Union was riding high, this kind of a change could rob the U.S.S.R. of its momentum. With the official visit of Nixon to China and opening of formal relations in 1972, the two countries signed the Shanghai Communiqué which stipulated that neither country was to negotiate with third parties in the region without consulting each other and that both China and the U.S. would seek to prevent the domination of any one power over the Asia-Pacific region. The following year the diplomatic ties would grow even closer culminating in what was effectively a defensive pact. The Soviet Union was caught off guard, and now had not only the Iron Curtain in Europe to worry about defending, but also a vast border with China in East Asia. As Dr. Kissinger explains:

“The United States was not about to back the stronger against the weaker in any balance-of-power situation. As the country with the physical capacity to disturb the peace, the Soviet Union would be given an incentive to moderate existing crisis and to avoid stirring up new ones while faced with resistance on two fronts. And China, which had its own capacity to upset the Asian equilibrium, would be restrained by the need for American goodwill on setting limits to Soviet adventurism. Through all of this, the Nixon Administration would try to solve

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁶⁰ Litwak, Robert S. 1984. *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability*. (Great Britain: University of Cambridge Press). pages 76-7.

practical issues with the Soviet Union while maintaining a dialogue on global concepts with the Chinese.⁴⁶¹”

Although it was feared that this game was dangerous and would greatly upset the relations of the two superpowers by introducing China as the wild card, the reverse was in fact to happen. Realizing the danger of the situation Soviet foreign policy became more conciliatory and soon Nixon himself was invited to Moscow the following year. From the Chinese perspective, Manchuria (or North-East Province as it would become known), that eternal and dangerous frontier, was finally secure. It was not so further west.⁴⁶²

Eurasia had approached the closest it had ever been to becoming united since the Mongol Empire. Yet it had not quite made it. The Cold War now had three fronts, as was about to become manifestly apparent in the coming decade.

7.3...War in Afghanistan While China Moderates

The death of Mao and the rise of Deng Xiaoping to power over The People’s Republic of China ushered in a reigning in of the extremity of government policies-and this was felt in the hinterlands as well.

If inequality of alliance was one reason of friction between two powers claiming absolute truth, it could also be a problem for the different groups of citizens in a single country. With both sides having turned (with quite differing levels of success) to their main adversary as a potential ally in a potential war with the other, much of the ideology in the communist world became bankrupt as cohesive policy.⁴⁶³ China-being the more extremely doctrinaire of the two powers was the first to begin domestic reforms both to its economic system and its political apparatus. Though limited in scope, many of these reforms ameliorated the situation of Xinjiang to a considerable degree. Deng condemned policies of “Han chauvinism” in the frontier provinces and gave the Uighurs and others more local control over their party apparatus, though he did nothing to stem

⁴⁶¹Henry Kissinger. *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1994), 730.

⁴⁶² Rossabi, 286.

⁴⁶³ Radchenko, 206-8.

the floodgates of ethnic Han migration to the region. After all, it was still a sparsely populated, turbulent, and border-disputed place with the Soviet Union.⁴⁶⁴ But now, open to investment from abroad and with an increasingly market based economy; the fate of the region under the PRC slowly began to change. As Millward states:

“Xinjiang had been relegated to a status of strategic buffer zone and economic cul-de-sac since the rise of Sino-Soviet tensions in the late 1950s and 1960s. In the new international context Chinese leaders moved simultaneously both to open the region as the conduit for the rest of Eurasia and to integrate it more firmly with the rest of China.”⁴⁶⁵

This mixed policy, reminiscent in geopolitical terms of the old Han and Tang policies of keeping solid bases in the west surrounded by a “protectorate” would reap solid benefits in the decades to come. It was to be a different story across the border with the USSR.

After several decades of direct rule, certain benefits were manifest in Central Asia in the era immediately around and after the Sino-Soviet split. Soviet health programs had led to a population explosion throughout the region leading to an economic expansion in line with increasing industrialization. Unfortunately, this also increased the environmental damage, particularly from the massive irrigation works of the growing cotton fields.⁴⁶⁶ This strengthening of regional positioning in the importance of the various constituent parts of the USSR often took form in resistance to cultural integration-despite welcoming the economic ties of the state. This in turn increased Moscow’s fears of infiltration of the region from Islamic radicals-particularly in light of the recent Islamic Revolution in Iran whose ouster of the pro-American government there quickly became apparent to the originally gleeful Soviets that it would be of no benefit to them either.⁴⁶⁷

As the Soviets turned a paranoid gaze to their south, events unraveled in the perennial borderlands of Afghanistan. It had remained a stable buffer ever since the wars of disputes of the 19th Century, but in the late 70s-just as it was starting to

⁴⁶⁴ Millward, 277.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 289.

⁴⁶⁶ Victor Spolnikov. *The Impact of Afghanistan’s War on the Former Republics of Central Asia* (Chapter 6 in Hafeez Malik’s *Central Asia: It’s Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), page 102.

⁴⁶⁷ Melvin Goodman. *Perestroika: It’s Impact on the Central Asian Republics and their Future Relations with Moscow* (Chapter 5 in Malik), page 77.

develop-calamity struck. The Daud dictatorship, which had seized power from the monarchy not long before, was in good relations with the Soviet Union, so the USSR was quite confused and dismayed when it was toppled by a small cadre of radical leftist revolutionaries with an extensive and potentially destabilizing package of sweeping reforms for a country with little state infrastructure outside of the major cities. This sudden shock of regime change and the heavy handed tactics of the new government caused widespread rebellion to break out across the country. The Soviets had neither wanted nor asked for this change of events, but fearing an opening for U.S, Pakistani, or even Iranian involvement in the rebellion, or even worse, a rebellion that might leak into the Turkic realms of the USSR, they decided to support the new Taraki government by dispatching advisers and army trainers (usually of Central Asian extraction) as well as special forces to bolster the new regime.⁴⁶⁸

The situation further deteriorated when the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan's government split due to Hafizullah Amin, the former ally of Taraki, staging his own coup. This was one step too far for the Soviets, who saw Amin behave like his self-proclaimed mentor Stalin and drive the government deeper into a crisis by attempting to conduct massive purges. Moscow now found itself in the awkward position of having to shore up a faltering allied government by invading that allied country and decapitating its leadership. The Special Forces sent to protect the government in Kabul were ordered to storm the presidential palace and assassinate the president while a two pronged invasion of Soviet mechanized units made a massive pincer movement around the ring road of the country and occupying the majority of the urban areas-largely without a fight. The normal Deep Battle strategy was of no use against a sparse and tribal foe, so the lines of advance for armored columns were secured by paratroopers landing on the mountains near the roads.⁴⁶⁹

Though the initial invasion itself was unquestionably a success, many in the politburo had deep reservations about an open ended commitment. Anatoli Adamishini, a foreign ministry official remarked:

⁴⁶⁸ Roderic Braithwaite. *Afghantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2001, Kindle Ebook), sections 753-837, 1002.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1746, 2272.

“The action in Afghanistan is the quintessence of our internal affairs. The economic disorganization, the fear of the Central Asian Republics, the approaching Congress, the habit of deciding problems by force, the ideological dogmatism-what sort of a socialist is that [Afghanistan’s], what sort of revolutionaries are these?”⁴⁷⁰

As the years were to drag on, the system that had tried to bring unity to modern Central Asia would indeed be taxed to its limit.⁴⁷¹

Full scale combat operations were to last a decade. The Afghan forces bore the brunt of it, and the Soviets had clearly learned from American experience in Vietnam by remaining largely in reserve until needed, then exploding force with air power and armored columns. Still, due to the United States, China, and Pakistan lavishly arming the various insurgent forces and the forbidding terrain, a stalemate emerged which would continue until the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989. Even this withdrawal still left behind both SCUD missile operators and KGB agents-which helped repel an attack on Kabul in 1991, but with the fall of the Soviet Union that year they were withdrawn. The communist government in Afghanistan would actually outlive the Soviet Union by several years, even if dwindling to a greater Kabul-like city state before finally falling to the Pakistani-backed Taliban in 1996.⁴⁷²

Perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev’s attempt to save the faltering command economy of the Soviet Union, had been an encouraging sign to the peoples of Central Asia, even in a time where a quagmire of a war had been burning right across their borders for a prolonged period. The Jadid School of Islamic learning (once which sought to reconcile secular governance with Islamic principles) was a common intellectual strand of the region. Born from the thinking of Crimean and Kazan Tatars (the descendants of various branches of the Golden horde) and gradually spread south towards Central Asia. The general mood was one of optimism that Moscow would now respect local cultures, take a more hands-off approach, and maintain the economic relationship perhaps with a bit more concern for environmental issues.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 1994.

⁴⁷¹ Spolnikov, 14-5.

⁴⁷² Braithwaite, 5062-5437.

⁴⁷³ Abdujabbar A. Abduvakhitov. *The Jadid Movement and Its Impact on Contemporary Central Asia* (in Malik), pages 68-70.

But it was not to be. The Soviet Union was finished. Though the Afghan War had shown the limitations of its logistics systems, the true cause of the collapse came from an unsustainable economic model coupled with a bloated defense budget (itself increasingly a product of rivalry with China adding to the already massive costs of occupying Eastern Europe). When a reactionary left wing coup was staged against the reforming Gorbachev in Moscow the game was up, even though the military uprising was quickly and non-violently quelled. Estonia was the first republic to declare independence, the rest following throughout 1991. Central Asia, in light of its central government economic dependence, the threat of Islamic radicals from Afghanistan, China's rising power since the 80s, and the generally improving social and political conditions, was the last region to break off from Russia proper...but even it too went the path of independence to begin an new era in the history of Eurasia's Heartland.^{474 475}

7.4...Warlords and Oasis States

In the latter stages of the Cold War, certain leaders had risen up to power in the Central Asian republics. With the breakup of the Soviet system and its total dissolution at the dawn of 1992 these men found and seized the chance to declare their nations as independent and sovereign.⁴⁷⁶ But this was to be a very different kind of nationalism or independence than existed in Eastern Europe or East Asia (though unquestionably touched by modernist notions of nationalism through the Soviet experience)...one which acknowledged its history of a region reliant on mutual dependence and the confluence of multiple cultures. Despite the unprecedented and often arbitrary separation of the region into various republics the era of independence saw more resurgence of regionalism than further drifting apart:

“The artificial Soviet division of Central Asia into five “ethnically based” countries has not weakened regional ties. Among other factors, the existence of almost all the Central Asian ethnic groups in every Central Asian country has provided a situation that is conducive in every way to expansion of one countries’ instability

⁴⁷⁴ Beckwith, 304-5.

⁴⁷⁵ Darwin, 478.

⁴⁷⁶ Soucek, 237.

to other regional countries. As a result, no single Central Asia state can be stable so long as others are unstable; in particular, a regional approach to their common security problems seems necessary for the five regional states.⁴⁷⁷

Because the region has always been a nexus of migration, each republic contains massive minority populations from neighbors. Almost a quarter of Tajikistan is Uzbek, and Uzbeks make up over 10% of Kyrgyzstan's population. Uzbekistan had a western chunk of its territory as a semi-autonomous Karakalpakstan. Russians are almost just under 40% of the population of Kazakhstan and live in settlements throughout all of the republics. Peimani elaborates further:

“The history of the five Central Asian countries is the history of a region, not of five separate political entities. Over time Central Asia has been ruled wither by foreign empires, which incorporated the region into their territories as a single political unit, or by a few regional multi-ethnic states. Rulers of these states never identified themselves with specific ethnic groups. As a result, for most of their history the indigenous ethnic groups of this region have seen themselves as members of a regional community sharing the same fate, rather than citizens of different states.”⁴⁷⁸

This is not to imply that as independent states, these new nations would not pursue divergent paths-but rather that in order to pursue their own paths they had to have a level of regional flexibility and adaptability which was relatively unique to their geopolitical circumstances.

A mere two years after official independence, with the ex-Soviet party leaders still firmly in power though divested of communist ideology, a 'Central Asian Union' was created with the goal of furthering economic integration between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. By this point Turkmenistan had gone fully down the path of neutrality under a closed and immensely retro-Stalinist political system and Tajikistan was then descending into chaos-but of the three Turkic countries who wished to stay

⁴⁷⁷ Hooman Peimani. *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia: The Competition of Iran, Turkey, and Russia* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998), page 2.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

engaged in the region there was an acknowledgement that issues such as limited water resources and pipelines for oil and gas.⁴⁷⁹

Uzbekistan took the lead. As the most populous state with the largest army, President Islam Karimov saw his chance to play for top regional influence. It helped that now the region was open to investment and political connections to other countries. Turkey and Iran as well as the United States played the biggest roles in increasing foreign investment and establishing political ties with the new governments. Reaching out to Turkey as a culturally common counterpoint to Russia was a big part in the Karimov program for more independent action-but even so he still hosted the Tashkent Collective Security Agreement in 1992 and even called for continued Russian troop presence in the region to stem any potential tides of pan-Islamic ideology coming out of Afghanistan or Iran.⁴⁸⁰

According to Islam Karimov's own book, Uzbekistan is pivotal as the center of Central Asia, the true axis between any competing power poles. It is thus that he advocates an equitable division of responsibilities among Commonwealth of Independent States-the association of Central Asian, Russian, and Belarusian interests formed during the breakup of the USSR-as well as using the framework of that organization to explore new methods for interrelation and interdependence throughout the region.⁴⁸¹ With such objectives and the capacity to be a regional power it is no wonder Uzbekistan is leading the integrationist charge. Russia is often irked by Uzbekistan's pretensions to be leader on such issues, but as we shall soon see, they have far too many common interests to openly compete for influence in the area and so are more often confederates.⁴⁸²

Kazakhstan, the second strongest regional player by most reckonings, was also a country which immediately began to pursue the integrationist line for the region. This may seem odd considering that it potentially could mean playing junior fiddle to

⁴⁷⁹ Boris Rumer and Stanislaw Zhukov. *Central Asia: The Challenges of Independence* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pages 104, 130.

⁴⁸⁰ Dilip Hiro. *Inside Central Asia* (New York & London: Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., 2009), pages 96, 148, 152.

⁴⁸¹ Islam Karimov. *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (Great Britain: Curzon Press, 1997), pages 103, 138, 191-2.

⁴⁸² Shireen T. Hunter. *Central Asia Since Independence (The Washington Papers: 168, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996)*, page 98.

Uzbekistan, but Kazakhstan had and still has a very valid reason for keeping regional integration and stability at a maximum: its massive Russian population. President Nazarbaev made it a point of his reign to lead an officially multiethnic and religiously pluralist state. Fearing the rise of power of a right wing government in Russia which might demand places like the North of Kazakhstan (where a majority of the people are Russian) to be incorporated by the Russian state, the Kazakh nation has welcomed its sizable Russian minority into the government and political structure of the state and in 1998 moved its far south-eastern located capital of Almaty to a new site near the center of the country and much closer to the areas of Russian settlement. Soon after, in 2000, a massive reserve of oil was discovered in the already resource-rich nation.^{483 484}

Kyrgyzstan, poor and small compared to most of its neighbors and has significant Uzbek minorities and so contains little prospect for great amounts of independent action. Kyrgyzstan was thus the first to open its airspace to the United States after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, allowing the massive Manas Air Force Base to temporarily come under American jurisdiction for the purpose of supporting operations in Afghanistan. Suffering from widespread political and ethnic turmoil it may be, it still does however fit into the regional rubric of being a “secular authoritarianism with some state capitalism.”⁴⁸⁵

Turkmenistan, the most naturally well-endowed with resources of the former republics and also the only state sharing a border with Iran as well as its former co-republics, may have partially removed itself from the regional states integration movement, but it has only been able to do so by becoming by far the most authoritarian state in the region. With all the rotating golden statues of the ‘founder’ of the nation (now deceased) and heavy obstacles to foreign investment at least on nation still lives behind a Soviet style 20th Century guise.⁴⁸⁶

Tajikistan was the other member not interested in unity, for alone among the new states it was of primarily Iranian rather than Turkic cultural identity. That had not stopped it from being a fully integrated part of the region before-but of all the nations in

⁴⁸³ Hunter, 114-5.

⁴⁸⁴ Lutz Kleveman. *The New Great: Blood and Oil in Central Asia* (New York: Grove Press), page 74.

⁴⁸⁵ Hunter, 38-9.

⁴⁸⁶ Kleveman, 150.

the region it was to have the most tragic experience of the post-Soviet aftermath. But its experience would also be one of the most illuminating examples of the changing power-politics of the region which we shall soon explore in the next sub-section.

Of course the post-Soviet era in Inner Asia was not simply restricted to the now independent republics which once were the southern bulwark of both Imperial Russian and Soviet empires. Xinjiang needless to say had not shared in the wave of new states born in the 90s; however it was still affected by the developments in Central Asia to a significant degree even as the rest of the region took a significantly different course.

Decades of integrationist policies had flooded the region with Han migrants on a scale which dwarfed Russian settlement on Central Asia excepting northern Kazakhstan. By 1990 the population of the region was half Han Chinese and half Uighur. Xinjiang was finally, after thousands of years of struggle, firmly and unquestionable under direct Chinese administration.⁴⁸⁷ But this did not imply that the region was out of being relevant to the region-far from it. Xinjiang would benefit immensely from the large amounts of newly independent neighbors it found itself with and their resource-rich and opening to foreign investment markets. Seeking more regional connections, Post-Cold War Xinjiang would become what the Han Dynasty had originally tried to make it long term-a directly controlled Central Asian base from which to indirectly influence the western neighbors-who like after the latter era breakup of the Xiongnu-where ideally divided. In a short period of time Xinjiang had become the de facto base for Chinese business dealings throughout Central Asia.⁴⁸⁸ Its regional trade (and in consequence its level of economic development) was growing at an astounding pace, showing it to be the biggest initial benefactor of Central Asian independence from an economic perspective.⁴⁸⁹

The Chinese government was able to extract certain promises from its new neighbors that showed just how important its influence now was. Its own ethnic situation in the region remained (and still remains) one of potential volatility with occasional outbursts of strife, but since the 80s a gradualist melioration of dealing with the Uighurs

⁴⁸⁷ Soucek, 273.

⁴⁸⁸ Rumer and Zhukov. *Between Two Gravitational Poles: Russia and China* (Chapter 7 in Rumer and Zhukov), page 162.

⁴⁸⁹ Dru C. Gladney. *The Chinese Program of Development and Control, 1978-2001* (Chapter 4 in Millward and Perdue), page 118.

and Kazakhs had calmed things down significantly. With the base secure Chinese frontier diplomacy went on the offense in the region for the first time since the 18th Century. In 1996 they had extracted promises from all the Central Asian countries to not harbor separatist Uighur groups and to turn over anyone who advocated the creation of such groups to China.⁴⁹⁰

One thing that did not change in the region was the nature of military deployment. Nuclear weapons testing and missile deployment had long since been a local specialty in Xinjiang, and the 'Great Wall of Steel' defense network which had arisen during and after the Sino-Soviet split was based on a rapid reaction force of highly mobile mechanized units meant to operate in sparsely populated areas with minimal logistical capabilities. It was something Ban Chao would have recognized from his campaign and occupations against the Xiongnu.⁴⁹¹

Finally in our overview of the post-Cold War geopolitical situation we come to the one country which alone had once achieved total hegemonic status in Inner Eurasia, Mongolia. Much reduced from its once mighty position, the present nation could almost be described as a city-state with vast pastoral properties. The least densely populated independent country in the world it is also the one which maintained its official status as its own nation despite that fact that it was an indirectly controlled puppet of the Soviet Union for the entirety of the Cold War.⁴⁹²

Freed from domination and with the political monopoly held by the communist party broken, Mongolian became the most open and democratic of the former Soviet-sphere countries outside of the Baltic. However, much like the Central Asian republics it was not necessarily in Mongolia's interests to pursue a wildly independent foreign policy which deviated from a Russian-dominated security network. Having only two neighbors, both being giant and powerful nations, Mongolia has been treading lightly in the post-Cold War era.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 109-11.

⁴⁹¹ Yitzhak Shichor. *The Great Wall of Steel: Military and Strategy in Xinjiang* (Chapter 5 in Millward and Perdue), pages 120-3,.

⁴⁹² Soucek, 302.

⁴⁹³ Tsedendamba Batbayar. "Geopolitics and Mongolia's Search for Post-Soviet Identity" (*Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 2002, 43 No.4. V.H. Winst & Son, Inc., Web.), page 324.

Mongolian 'liberalism' (as compared to the Central Asian states) is not so much a break with the past as it is a continuation of a pre-modern tradition—that of the proto-constitution that governed the Mongol Empire, the *Yasa*.⁴⁹⁴ Due to its location Mongolia is dependent on one or both of its neighbors for sea access, and Russia for overland access to Kazakhstan and the rest of Central Asia. This does not prevent Mongolian politicians from looking for other countries to have close relations with—particularly Japan and the United States, as Mongolian Presidential Adviser L. Galbagrakh stated: “Mongolia lies between two giants, therefore our cooperation with the United States is very important from the point of view of security as well as progress towards democracy.”⁴⁹⁵

Mongolia views one of these giants as much more threatening than the other. Historically, as we have seen, the Russians have used Mongolia as an indirect buffer for the southern frontier of sparsely populated and often vulnerable Siberia, whereas the Chinese have sought to reclaim the region and have directly administered and integrated Inner Mongolia into their home realm. Combined with the perception after the Cold War of a Russia on the retreat and in decline and a rising China, Mongolia has been steadily pursuing policies which keep the close (if not as close as it once was) ties with Russia in matters of security and maintaining a skeptical—though not unfriendly—position towards the Chinese. Russia has been quick in the past to remain tiny Mongolia that it cannot pursue a path of independence towards China on its own or in conjunction with far away states with which it shares no border.⁴⁹⁶

7.5...The Revenge of the Formless Empire

After the shedding of many territories the nation of Russia became the de facto successor to the Soviet Union, taking over the nuclear arsenals deployed on its former empire and inheriting much of the diplomatic leftovers from the previous era. It no longer had the economic or military power to affect events directly or the will to behave as an

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 327.

⁴⁹⁵ Jennifer Anderson. *The Limits of Sino-Russian Partnership* (Adelphi Paper 315, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), page 55.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 57.

interventionist policeman. And so, at first by necessity and later by intent Russia would begin to adapt itself to the new geopolitical situation by re-discovering the virtues of a formless geopolitical strategy. As Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar stated as early in 1991: "We would be much better off on our own, for then Russia could be a great power again."⁴⁹⁷ Given the calamitous state of Russia's internal and economic stability in the coming decade, this sentiment may have been premature-but Gaidar was right that Russia could and would adapt successfully in light of the circumstances. Both the history and the geographic realities of the region would offer the guide, and the situation which arose soon after the fall of the USSR in Tajikistan would be the first case study.

In a fashion typical of post-Soviet Central Asia, Tajikistan had a local former party powerbroker holding on to power by reinvention as a nationalist president. Unlike those other states however, early into his reign Rakhmon Nabiev was forced from power by truly massive protests against his reign. A democratic opposition with Islamist tendencies grew into a regional movement in the south and its Islamic character grew proportionally due to influence from nearby Taliban Afghanistan. Tajikistan had split into armed camps and infiltration of the CIS by militant forces was feared.⁴⁹⁸

Both Russia and Uzbekistan feared the worst. Russian troops were deployed into the country to shore up the government and Uzbekistan began to fund Uzbek warlords in the country-getting them to back the side of the regime against the upswing of antigovernment momentum. These limited deployments and construction of Russian military bases checked the democratic and Islamist advances and the war stalemated in 1995 to the point where a tenuous peace deal was enacted the next year which gave political concessions to the democratic side of the opposition while marginalizing the Islamist side.⁴⁹⁹

The effect of the war on Tajikistan's international standing was the most interesting outgrowth of the conflict from an international perspective. The war had often been seen as an attempt by Iran to gain influence as Russia waned-and surely its results dashed the hope that Russia was on the retreat in the region after initial

⁴⁹⁷ Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills. *Strategic Asia 2007-8: Domestic Policy Change and Grand Strategy* (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2007), pages 47, 171.

⁴⁹⁸ Lena Jonson. *Tajikistan in the New Central Asia: Geopolitics, Great Power Rivalry and Radical Islam* (London: I.B. Taurus & Co., 2006), pages 41-4.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 45-50.

withdrawal.⁵⁰⁰ The nominally independent country was now host the largest joint CIS peacekeeping force of any parts of the former Soviet Union. In effect, Tajikistan had become a joint “Uzbek-Russian Protectorate.”⁵⁰¹ Russia effectively took over border control and policing in the region, regulating the Tajik border as it saw fit.⁵⁰² This was the run-up to a counterthrust into Afghanistan-though not one at all reminiscent of the previous decade’s conventional occupation strategy. Another effect, and one further enabled by the re-assertion of Russian control over the country, was that now there was direct access to the anti-Taliban resistance in Afghanistan-the so called Northern Alliance under Ahmed Shah Massoud-one of the greatest foes of Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the previous decade.⁵⁰³

Russia funneled money and guns to its erstwhile foe, picking up the pace whenever Massoud suffered a defeat or it looked like the Taliban was on the march. Massoud remained by far the largest thorn in the side of the Taliban until his assassination one day before the 9/11 terrorist attacks.⁵⁰⁴ Much of the organization for those attacks took place in Afghanistan and its mastermind was living under the de facto protection of the Taliban regime. Suddenly, the situation had changed.⁵⁰⁵

President Vladimir Putin offered use of Russian airspace to launch the initial military operations which became Operation Enduring Freedom, but he was soon taken aback by the enthusiasm that many CIS states showed for American entry into the region as well as the large Manas Air force base in Kyrgyzstan being rented out to the US as a particular sticking point in his view. Fearing that perhaps the CIS area was being taken advantage of in ways which undermined Russia hegemony in the region countermeasures was soon taken. The Chinese government took a highly negative view towards these developments as well as US involvement in Central and South Asia increased continuously in the following years. Despite benefiting from the removal of the Taliban, it was time for the empires to strike back.^{506 507}

⁵⁰⁰ Muriel Atkin. *The Politics of Polarization in Tajikistan* (Chapter 12 in Malik), pages 212-3.

Hunter, 94-5.⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰² Oliver Roy. *The New Central Asia and the Creation of Nations* (London: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2000), page 190.

⁵⁰³ Hunter, 94.

⁵⁰⁴ Braithwaite, 5465.

⁵⁰⁵ Johnson, 58.

⁵⁰⁶ Kleveman, 192.

The increased relevance of terrorism, particularly of the Islamic variety, in the plans of nations offered the opening for Putin to hold onto Central Asian influence. If the United States could infiltrate the region under such a pretense, then so could Russia use terrorism as a rationale for the expansion (or re-expansion) of its own regional sway. Putin was quick to sign joint military and security deals with the CIS states in the aftermath of 9/11 and set up a rapid reaction response force located in Kyrgyzstan and not far from the leased-to-the-US Manas base.⁵⁰⁸

None of this negated the fact that the Taliban remnants and other radicals were still considered the primary enemy—and even as a vigorous response to US regional expansion was pursued, cooperation between Russia and the United States in Afghanistan was still to be continued. The de facto goal was to have the United States neutralize the Afghan problem while simultaneously preventing it from spreading its influence into Central Asia proper. Uzbekistan was the country least dependent on Russia and therefore the one most welcoming to the American presence. Though this relationship quickly fizzled when American, British and French diplomats insisted on criticizing the Uzbek government's human right record and Russia and China more effectively re-asserted themselves.^{509 510}

By 2005 the threat of expanding US influence in Central Asia was effectively neutralized. Uzbekistan was back in the CIS fold. The Kyrgyz took back outer security operations for the Manas base (now referred to as a 'transit center' and its status still under negotiation), as Ariel Cohen states: "While the US may maintain some presence in the area in the future, it will only be one of a much larger concert of powers, each with its own ties, clients and agendas. The US is not about to dominate Central Asia anytime soon."⁵¹¹ Even officially neutral Turkmenistan was still paying for the upkeep of Russian military bases on its borders even as the new leadership after Niyazov's death

⁵⁰⁷ Allison and Johnson, 98.

⁵⁰⁸ Lena Johnson. *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia* (London: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2004, 2006), pages 81, 86-7.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵¹⁰ Hiro, 175, 184.

⁵¹¹ Ariel Cohen. "Yankees in the Heartland" (in *Ariel Cohen's Eurasia in the Balance: The US and the Regional Power Shift*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), page 69.

maintained the structure of the closed off state.⁵¹² Dilip Hiro summarizes the position of the Central Asian nations in the post 9/11 world perfectly:

“...Such were the compulsions of history, geography, and economics that none of these presidents could set themselves completely free from the embrace of Mother Russia. True, every now and then, a Central Asian leader struck a defiant pose only to realize that he could not sustain it for long. Indeed, as Russian president Vladimir Putin started transforming Russia’ political system into a “managed democracy” during his second term in office (from 2004 to 2008) – marginalizing the opposition, gaining almost full control over the electronic media, virtually renationalizing energy and other important industries-the authoritarian and proto-authoritarian rulers of Central Asia began to feel at home once more in the Kremlin.”⁵¹³

Such a coordinated pushback was not brought about without a new and evolving framework for regional integration, something we must now turn to in order to understand the current evolution of the Formless Empire.

As both Russia and China began the push back against the United States, both the benefits of cooperation and the potential conflicts each could have become more apparent. In 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a regional network of military cooperation between China, Russia, and all the Central Asian countries excepting Turkmenistan, was born. Eventually it would include other states such as India, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Mongolia as ‘observers’. The primary goal of this international network as stated in a 2002 press release was to “combat the three evils: terrorism, religious extremism, and ethnic separatism.”⁵¹⁴

Not as explicitly stated but just as real is its purpose to keep outside powers at bay from the heart of Eurasia. Too weak on their own to do this, Russia and China must act in conjunction and in collaboration rather than dominance with the Central Asian states.⁵¹⁵ The effect of such traditional indirect methods with modern means was aptly stated when President Medvedev of Russia wrote off \$180 million of Kyrgystan’s debt and promised \$300 million in loans to said country in exchange for upping the rent and

⁵¹² Hiro, 301, 409.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 408.

⁵¹⁴ Cohen, 87.

⁵¹⁵ Jeffrey Mankoff. *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), page 194.

making life more difficult for the US base at Manas.⁵¹⁶ But such loose alliances do not long outlast the containment of a common foe. Already tensions simmer between the two main power-poles in Inner Eurasia. Though they may be quiet now but two nations of such size and power competing for influence in many of the same places does present potential danger. To keep the CIS together and remain its guarantor, Russia may one day need a new common enemy when the United States is no longer a major regional player. This is, perhaps, somewhat intentional. As Jennifer Anderson states:

“Russia and China’s strategic partnership is unwieldy and imprecise. Weighed down by contradictory commitments, hyperbolic rhetoric and a wide variety of intersecting interests, their relationship is inherently and deliberately vague.”⁵¹⁷

In addition to actual policy moves towards cooperation, joint military exercises through the SCO have become common. Both Russian and Chinese forces have participated with each other in mock-military operations as well as continuous Russian-Central Asian cooperation in military affairs. China and Kyrgyzstan have also conducted joint military exercises along their common border. China’s fear of instability or encirclement seem to have been allayed on the landward side for the time being, while Russian raw materials which complement the rapid pace of Chinese industrialization can be traded and pipelines constructed through eastern Siberia. Meanwhile Russian arms and military equipment is sold at steady rates to the Chinese military as well as the CIS states.^{518 519}

This type of loose confederation against a common foe is hardly a new era in the region, but such coalitions also tend not to be permanent. This relationship is fraught with potential difficulty-as it always has been since two different countries with two different ways of adapting diplomacy and military policy towards the security concerns of the Inner Eurasian steppe. Russian policy makers tend to view the situation as an unequal alliance and fear nationalist Chinese designs on what was once called ‘Outer Manchuria.’ Furthermore, the sparsely populated and resource rich areas of eastern

⁵¹⁶ Hiro, 414.

⁵¹⁷ Anderson, 79.

⁵¹⁸ Kleveman, 192.

⁵¹⁹ Lowell Dittmer. “The Sino-Russian Strategic Relationship: Ghost of the ‘Strategic Triangle?’” (Chapter 5 in Yufan Hao, C.X. George Wei, and Lowell Dittmer’s *Challenges to Chinese Foreign Policy: Diplomacy, Globalization, and the Next World Power*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), pages 98-101.

Siberia are often considered to be vulnerable to a country with a teeming population just across the border.⁵²⁰ Chinese designs for expansion of influence in Central Asia are feared as well, by both Russian and Central Asian policy makers.⁵²¹ The system is in flux, as it ever has been. In an era of satellites, armored columns, air power, Special Forces, electronic financial transactions, and at least token respect for national sovereignty though the potential for fully mobile small units of forces to keep a network held together by common economic and military objectives shows that after being almost totally snuffed out in the 20th Century, the Formless Empire is back and stronger than ever. It is a likely outcome that the countries best adapted through long (and often hard) experience with centuries of conflicts and moving borders in Inner Eurasia will retain a decisive advantage of riding the warp and weft of the geopolitics in this region.

7.6...Conclusion:

From their height of domination both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China had finally achieved the full scale pacification of Inner Eurasia. Their unity was temporary however and divisions between the two poles of communism became more extreme with time. Even division could not bring back the famous fluidity of the steppes (even while militaries and borders continued to shift to meet changing circumstances) as the once open steppes were brought under both countries' central control and were integrated into their economies. But it was the seemingly stronger Russia whose feet were made of clay in the end, and the apparently weaker China who endured the tumult of the 90s unscathed-even strengthened.

State centralization and domination is absolute, and while there is little to no room for the indirect and informal political arrangements of past days, the viability to technology, a globalized economy, and regional independence in Central Asia mean that, as tactical doctrine, The Formless Empire has the potential to return, not as it once lingered in frontier states, but as foreign policy towards the frontier of the most

⁵²⁰ Mankoff, 195, 222.

⁵²¹ Cohen 158.

established states in the region as they seek to rebuild relationships with former rivals and neighbors.

The present day People's Republic of China sits upon a favorable geopolitical position compared to past dynasties. It meets all the territorial requirements necessary for border security (as the Chinese have come to understand it) in accomplishing what was once called the pacification of the western regions through direct settlement and the stabilization of Mongolia through border demarcation. Manchuria, the other region of danger has been thoroughly Sinicized and now can be viewed as a province of China (with the identity-stripping name of North-East China no less). Russia is the weaker power, though being the world's strongest nuclear power and still a proper military power its borders are for now, secure. Now in the present day it is easy to say that the poles have reversed from the last several centuries and returned to when Cossacks first met the Qing Manchus in the Amur River back in the 17th Century. A sparsely populated Russian frontier, a strong state in China, and many smaller ambiguous power in-between. But in the conclusion we will examine the ways this Chinese victory-much like that past one-might be a seemingly decisive result which hides the true amorphousness of the situation underneath. After all, the Formless Empire is just back in full swing now-and it often thrives with many players in the game.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

“Nomad, you're the rider so mysterious/
 Nomad, you're the spirit that men fear in us/
 Nomad, you're the rider of the desert sands/
 No man's ever understood your genius.”

~Iron Maiden, *The Nomad*

8.0...Summation:

Having delved into each of the primary case studies from tracking the rise, fall, and potential resurgence of The Formless Empire concept in action, it is now time to both summarize the findings as well as state the summation of the geopolitical saga which they entail. Following this, a look at why it is important so keep this historical information in mind moving into the future will round out the purpose of this dissertation.

8.1...Summarizing the Case Studies

In a massive temporal scale we have had to be selective in the case studies used to make the case for understanding Inner Eurasian grand strategy in the indigenous evolution of The Formless Empire. Scythians, Sarmatians, and Hephthalites, to name but a few, have been excluded lest we overrun a desirable length. A greater degree of focus on the eastern edge of the region has kept up nearer Sun Tzu's homeland as well as the modern nation-states and empires that have been more directly influenced in their policy-making by being exposed to both the benefits and calamities of contact with various Inner Eurasian societies. In a few cases where the influence spread westward or southward, we have tracked that as well to show the overall applicability of Formless Geopolitics. As was mentioned in the introduction, the cases which were chosen were specifically selected in order to best represent what the Formless Empire is all about: speed, mobility, indirect action, unconventional strategy, and geographic and circumstantial adaptation to vast and often sparsely populated land spaces.

The Xiongnu and their unified empire were an excellent first case study for showing the adaptive nature of formless geopolitics. Not only were they one of the

earliest among powerful confederations of steppe people, therefore showing the remarkable speed and power projection of the Eurasian cavalryman over vast spaces despite their often small numbers, but they also showed the indirect methods of politics and diplomacy which often arise from such a situation. Furthermore, the destruction of the Xiongnu Empire by the Chinese was also an effective early example of a settled state adapting to the superior mobility of its steppe neighbors and training and recruiting its own all-cavalry armies. In addition, after Pan Chao's truly epic victory over the Xiongnu and the establishment of the Han Dynasty into Inner Asia it was not administered as a Chinese province but rather in a more indirect method. Certain critical geographic points were occupied, and the space in between were left to be ruled indirectly and through local elites. The western half of Xiongnu domains was left almost entirely untouched and largely served as a buffer state between the new Chinese realms further east and any new unruly tribe migrating through Central Asia. If the largely independent realm of Western Xiongnu turned against the Chinese, there would still be the Eastern Xiongnu to absorb the shock before any core Chinese territories would be affected.

The creative and clever use of large spaces occupied by small amounts of mobile forces would remain and in some ways even be strengthened by the successor Tang Dynasty, its founder himself of partially Turkic origin. Spreading east from north-westerly origins the Tang would be renowned for its military power and Central Asian influence. Controlling the Silk Road trade routes would give it unprecedented wealth as well.

After a ruinous civil war the Tang gave way and migratory nomads broke into China once again. While the Chinese carried on as before in the south under the Sung Dynasty, the nomadic Khitan people drove out from Mongolia to seize Manchuria and parts of Northern China. Being outnumbered by their settled subjects the Khitans adopted an indirect method of rule, a pattern which would be common to all nomadic people for centuries. The Khitans were the first to codify this into law in the Liao Dynasty, and their governance was largely based around the idea of several permanent Chinese-style cities holding the reins of power-but with a nomadic aristocracy which rode between them in a mobile tent city. Civic law was applied differently to nomads,

forest-dwellers, and agrarian Chinese and a true multicultural state of remarkable legal diversity was born from this nomadic minority.

But even this startling innovation could not hold back the turbulent tides of other mobile people. The Jurchens rebelled and stormed out of Manchuria, soon taking over the former territory of the Khitans. Yet it was in this moment of ultimate crisis that the Khitan political system, which allowed the nomadic population to retain its mobility despite ruling over a predominantly settled state, showed its greatest degree of flexibility. The Prince Yelu Daishi, many of his courtiers, and a substantial segment of his cavalry rode out west and built a new kingdom amongst the oasis and rivers of Transoxiana. Despite the new and alien settings, this second gasp of Khitan power, that of the Kara-Khitai, would last for another century and be one of the dominant nations of Central Asia. It was largely able to do this by retaining the decentralized, flexible system of governance it had formed through experience in Manchuria. When it fell due to its own attempts to subvert this tried and true system by imposing Buddhism on its primarily Muslim subjects, it would be at the hands of another rising power, the Mongols, who were then in the process of learning the lessons the Khitans had apparently unlearned. They would go on to consume Khitan and Jurchen alike and go farther afield than either of those had dreamed.

The Mongols were the apogee of nomadic power in Eurasian history, and the last gasp of the near-total military dominance of entirely nomadic people over settled people in warfare. But after the unification of the various previously marginal tribes by Temujin, who was proclaimed Chinggis Khan in 1206, they became the most successful land based conquerors in history. At first lacking the sophistication and nuance of the Khitans, they proved remarkably adaptable to foreign ideas and recruited heavily from new subject populations to staff their bureaucracy and governing classes. Especially popular with Khitans and Jurchens who were from similar nomadic backgrounds as the Mongols but also were somewhat integrated into the civilization of the Chinese.

Once the Jurchens and the Khitans were both absorbed the Mongols began to expand elsewhere. A war started by the Turkic rulers of Persia brought them west through the rest of Central Asia and into the Middle East and from there the door lay open to a country which so far had been removed from integration into the Inner

Eurasian system, Russia. After Batu and Subotai's campaigns in Russia and Europe, which struck into unfamiliar forest terrain by invading along the frozen rivers during winter, both Russia and China were harnessed to a single empire and a single pan-continental trade system. Small Mongol armies, supplementing their ranks with local recruits, they had used the dominance given to them by being able to live on horseback and having unprecedented mastery of strategic deception and mobility out of proportion to their number. From Russia to Korea and Siberia to Persia, a small group of people dominated Eurasia through local proxies enforced by speed, flexibility, and an efficient international postal service. Even this massive success could only hold for a few generations, as regions begin to split into successor states which in turn adapted to more immediate local concerns, but the trade network would last for centuries to come. However, the Mongols success would one day unwittingly bring about the end of the nomadic dominance of the region by connecting the future nations of continental dominance to each other as well as the Mongolian methods of empire and strategy.

The further from the center a successor kingdom was the more true it had to remain to its formless nomadic roots. Of the successor states, it was the Kipchak Khanate, or Golden Horde, which retained the greatest degree of formless principles, despite its distance and the forested terrain which many of its vassals were shrouded in. The Kipchak Khanate became most skilled at manipulating its vassals, deflecting expansionist wars launched from the west with buffers, and acquiring tribute and security with minimal military cost to themselves. Even with the periodic civil wars for succession which began to occur a few generations into their hegemony, it was usually not too difficult for the victorious party to re-assert the power hierarchy of the region with a campaign or two. The method was effective enough upon the Russian principalities that The Grand Duchy of Lithuania ended up growing immensely to the east using similar methods in the aftermath of the Mongol conquest. This system, which the Russians in later years would come to call 'The Mongol Yoke', was only overthrown from the outside by the next stage in the evolution of the Formless Empire: The Timurids.

The Timurids represented the start of the transformation of the primary seat of The Formless Empire from a purely nomadic model to a coalition of artisan agrarian

cities which was led by a semi-nomadic ruling class in charge of nomadic armies. Rather than merely enrich the nomadic tribes, the purpose of their often seemingly apocalyptic campaigns was to enrich their patron cities at the expense of others. This was accomplished not merely by looting, but by destroying the economic viability of certain trade routes (particularly the northern ones of the fantastically wealthy Kipchak Khanate) in order to redirect wealth back to the increasingly marginalized Central Asian oasis area. In this mission, the Timurids were somewhat successful, gaining a century back in the Eurasian economic spotlight, though their political project, founded as it was on large scale economic calamity, was certainly not, and the empire shrunk to a rump state almost immediately after the death of its founder.

The Timurids, finally reduced to nothing but a city state, were finally driven even from that a century later by the migrating Uzbeks, themselves descended from a branch of the Kipchak Khanates. It was then that they, like the Khitans before them, performed the feat of state migration and becoming, under Prince Babur, the Mughal Empire in northern India. Babur retained the cavalry focus of the army but added large cannons and matchlock guns to its repertoire. At the Battle of Panipat he proved the technological adaptation of the semi-nomadic army and defeated a much larger-and slower-enemy force. There they flourished, adapting to the new circumstances and forging a bridge between Central Asia and India. Eventually, they would be so invested in India their Central Asian segment of the empire would shrivel to an afterthought, and their armies would become more infantry and artillery based, a similar occurrence to what happened to the Ottoman Empire out west. Once the governing elite dropped its more tolerant social policies as well and became a more overt littoral state, it too-like the Kara-Khitai-began to lose ground to competitors. Interestingly, the biggest foe of the Mughals at the start of their decline was the cavalry-dominated army of the Marathas. Soon after the semi-nomadic Afghans and the sea power controlling British would enter the scene, all using superior mobility to force the increasingly conservative and rigid Mughal state to its knees.

No longer wielding global empire, the Mongols still managed to regain much wealth and security even after their total collapse in China through the machinations of Queen Manduhai. She wrestled the Mongol tribes back into a unified

entity, kept the resurgent Chinese at bay largely through guile, and placed Mongol horsepower in the center of a trade axis from East Asia to Central Asia, returning prosperity to her people but doing so at minimal cost in administration of military operations. A small snippet of the history of region perhaps, but one of the most telling examples of The Formless Empire at work for a small state rather than a massive empire.

The initial deathblow was struck by another empire whose ruling elite originated in Central Asia but who had come to rule a long established civilized land: Iran. Nader Shah was an archetype of an up-and-coming warlord in the old Turkic mold, but being a frontier dweller in the service of Persia he was to seek his fortune as a Napoleonic figure there. His military innovations pushed the region further, not only in the dominant weapon of his armies being guns (something the Ottomans had done by this point as well) but in retaining the cavalry as the decisive branch (which the Ottomans did not do). It would be his speedier army which would put a larger Mughal force to flight outside of Delhi in the Battle of Karnai in 1739.

But for the first time in Eurasian history, the strategic pendulum would swing back to the civilized countries in a decisive and irrevocable manner. Naval power had reached a technological point where it was a more effective commerce and power projector than land power, and the increasing levels of British, French, and Portuguese influence on the outskirts of littoral Eurasia boded ill for the nomadic, semi-nomadic, and caravan based entities dwelling within the Eurasian Heartland. The ability of naval power to harness the wealth of two entire new continents (North and South America) to Europe jump started this previously tenuous process.⁵²² But this was a gradual change overall, and furthermore, the new up and coming powers who shared frontiers with the nomadic people had learned more than their fair share, like the Han Dynasty before them had. With the addition of military technologies that put the initiative back in the hands of the agrarian powers, their own take on the Formless Empire would begin, now heading in the opposite direction.

If the reign of Nader Shah and the rise of the Mughals showed the total merger of nomad and settled, the expansions of the Manchus and the Russians would show the

⁵²² Dawrin, 500-1.

total displacement of nomadic peoples as the settled people finally took the long term sustained offensive. The increasing sophistication of gunpowder weapons along with the greater economic might of cities and farms coupled with lessons learned from the nomads in the military sphere would prove an unbeatable combination when harnessed to the larger population and resource bases of Russia and China. Each of those two nations had been provinces of the Mongol Empire, and now each would come to wreak their vengeance in overlapping, yet also differing, ways.

In terms of amount of territory conquered, Russia was the big winner. Using Cossacks, themselves semi-nomadic bands of societal outcasts who had developed their own horse-borne culture, the Russian state drove into the Caucuses and Siberia largely in pursuit of security from raiders in the case of the former and profits from the fur trade in the case of the latter. Along the way they dismantled many successor fragment states from the Kipchak Khanate and even gave some of their ruling elite titles of nobility for defecting peacefully. Despite its authoritarian latter-day reputation, in terms of expansion, the Russian Empire was almost as ethnically and religiously tolerant as that of the Mongols. In Siberia in particular it was entirely driven by economic goals and initially very sparse settlements and Cossack-bases only cropped up only at strategic locations and the native people were largely worked into more of a tribute system than one of direct rule. Eventually, a turn southwards into Central Asia proper would be greatly facilitated by the deployment of railroads, sealing forever the fact that it was now the settled societies who had the truly decisive strategic mobility over the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples.

When the Manchus took over China they governed different populations using a variety of methods, much as the Khitans had. The Chinese were subjected to their usual bureaucratic system of governance-and perhaps even a particularly conservative variety of it as the dynasty aged-while the Mongols, Manchus, and Tibetans were placed under their more traditional kinship-based systems.

Though the new Qing Dynasty did not expand as far or as fast as the Russian state, it faced much more difficult opposition to its westward drive and its gains in territory and vassals were thus just as impressive. Galdan Khan's attempt to forge an independent Mongol state gave the Qing many a smarting blow in battle. But as Russia

and China, the two traditional sufferers of nomadic power, grew towards each other they replaced their original enemies as the driving strategic force of Inner Eurasia, but in so doing became the largest of rivals with each other. At first it was the Qing who came off for the better in the skirmishes upon the new Manchurian/Siberian frontier, but not much more than a century later the tables would begin to turn in favor of Russia, who after a long drive finally managed to wring so many concessions from a weakened and tottering Qing besieged by Britain and France that by the dawn of the Twentieth Century it would be Russian ports open in the south of the Manchuria, and the province would be crisscrossed by Russian railroads and economic concessions. This threatened Britain, and inspired limited British intervention in the southern reaches of Eurasia, showing just how powerful naval powers could be even in land-even if their gains were marginal at best.

But this only helped bring a new rising power into the fray. Maritime dominance was in full swing in the geopolitics of the era, and even upstart Japan burst its way into the Eurasian scene after humiliating China and driving into Manchuria to defeat Russia in 1905. Despite the epic land battles, and Manchuria being the contested ground, it is worth noting that the most decisive victory earned by Japan in its war against Russia was the Battle of Tsushima, at sea. Nonetheless, the results of the Treaty of Portsmouth brought a new actor into Inner Asian affairs with the Japanese takeover of many of the Russian concessions in Manchuria. In the coming decades both the Qing Dynasty and the Romanov Dynasty would collapse to revolutionary pressures and Japan would seize the initiative at both of the current Eurasian hegemon's expense. Soon both countries were engulfed by instability and civil war with Japanese agents and proxies infiltrating deeply into their various conflicts. Many of the warlords they supported also had a brief reign of indirect rule before being swallowed up by other parties.

In many ways, Japan was an astute learner. Using spies and criminal connections they wrung concessions from warlords in both Russia and China, eventually paving the way for a wholesale seizure of Manchuria and the creation of a puppet regime there that in some ways echoed the old indirect Eurasian method of rule (and in many other ways, was quite wanting by such standards as well). Massive intervention in the Russian Civil War was relatively fruitless aside from a few temporary

economic gains and control over several White Russian community leaders, but China would eventually end up divided and torn asunder by Japanese policies. Despite this apparent adaptation, Japan, like Britain, did not meet with total success as it forayed further from the waves. Its military adapted to the new circumstances far less effectively than its policies did, and attempts to further push the USSR and test its capabilities ran into the jaws of Zhukov's more mobile, armored army and was crushed on the frontier between Manchuria and Mongolia.

Even as the Soviets did away with the various indirect and decentralized methods of rule of their predecessors, their army had resuscitated the combination of speed and firepower which nomadic armies had once deployed. And in an era of industrialization and state power, it would be the military that would be the most decisive arm. Their tactics played the primary role in the defeat of Germany in the Second World War from Kursk onward, and their armies would crush a weakened and almost-already defeated Japan in a campaign of Manchurian conquest of nearly textbook success. A few years later China would be re-unified under communist leadership, and it appeared that the traditional anti-nomadic hegemon had been restored to the Eurasian throne, this time under a red banner instead of dynastic ones.

But sometimes, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Communist solidarity did little to stop inter-state rivalry between the two countries. China looked for more distant (and thus less threatening) allies elsewhere and found it in the unlikely yet sensible choice of the United States. Russia floundered diplomatically, and border skirmishes rocked the old troublesome Siberia-Manchuria frontier. Conflict also stirred in Afghanistan, and while Soviet forces conducted themselves well, showing off the use of their army and its rapid deployment and campaigning ability, it was used for direct, rather than indirect control and so its battlefield successes could not translate into any kind of political results.

This was a symptom of the greater modernist-style communist project in both Russia and China. Both empires had been built using mixed methods which took the indirect and formless style of their nomadic opponents and adapted them to settled agrarian states. In an age of ideology and party rule however, rampant centralization of culturally and geographically diverse people was an unsustainable dead end, at least in

the USSR, whose peaceful implosion implied resigned acceptance of even those committed to the core state. In China the state remains intact, in fact stronger than ever before since the dawn of the People's Republic. But it is still rocked by ethnic upset in its various frontier regions, and guards its borders carefully. Still, when dealing with peoples outside of its borders it has shown a remarkable level of subtlety which the Soviet Union never really had. Despite its much larger share of regional power, the Chinese foreign policy establishment went about signing treaties on borders with the newly independent Central Asian states which more often than not appropriated territory fairly between the nations. With new economic dynamism the Chinese state began to set up investment and resource extraction around the region while pursuing friendly relations with the local elites. Perhaps it is fitting that the nation from which Sun Tzu was born adapted better to the changing realities of the post-Cold War era.

The scale-back of Russian power meant its re-appraisal, however. From indirect involvement in the Tajik Civil War to shoring up its alliances with former Soviet states in Central Asia, particularly against Taliban influence and later against an encroaching United States. There was nothing quite like an absolute crash to start a full re-appraisal of foreign policy. So it was that the deployment of Russian power and the nature of the country's geopolitics would change to one of small army bases, checkpoint control, helicopters, Special Forces, and personal relationships between elites. Gone was the Soviet juggernaut of massive troop deployments and direct occupation and in its place instead a streamlined machine to handle an era where the Russian state plays trendsetter and arbitrator amongst a cluster of de facto junior allies. Where things will stand in the future lies unknown, but by looking at the grand trends of geopolitics in the region, as we have done, a few humble probabilities can at least be discussed.

Despite its many mutations and occasional abruptly occurring periods of waning, the key concepts of The Formless Empire survive and even thrive. Adaptability is after all the one of them, and changing winds of fortune to different nations and tribes hardly quashes the others. Mobility and speed trump size, indirect control proves a cost-effective method of power projection, and retains a large amount of reserves to deploy decisively when it proves inadequate. Sun Tzu's formless doctrine would not only have

been at home in the Inner Eurasia of the past had it been born there, but also in the Inner Eurasia of the present.

8.2...The Future of the Formless Empire

What happens now in Central Asia and the surrounding areas is not merely an observation relegated to the past alone. It is not simply an acknowledgement that Batu Khan greatly influenced Russian geopolitics and that Abaoji and Kublai influenced the Chinese in a similar fashion, but rather a chance to see how entire centuries of influencing experience with The Formless Empire are likely to impact the region going forward. The current priority of both Russia and China today is even superficially similar to that of the old nomadic powers, which is that the primary purpose of foreign policy is to secure favorable trade and economic enrichment through resource control. This is the obvious goal of the Chinese leadership, whereas Russia, already resource rich as it is, seems to focus on more tactical goals of securing space around it while it develops its domestic economy.⁵²³

The means of upholding a type of formless hegemony are not as ambiguous as the potential for their future use. When it comes to information gathering, the use of agents, highly mobile military units with large amounts of firepower, and the ability to deploy forces at the decisive moment there is no better era for than the present. With the retention of many military bases, certain collective security agreements like the Commonwealth of Independent States to facilitate cooperation on crime investigations, customs, and diplomacy, as well as the Shanghai Co-operation Organization to facilitate pan regional joint security initiatives and dialogue. Uzbekistan, long playing the role of team leader in Central Asia proper, works with Russian influence rather than against it in order to better secure political and economic stability, but now being independent, it also pushes its own agenda for further regional integration on the Turkic countries alone. In contemporary Uzbekistan, and to a lesser extent Kazakhstan's, policies seem to reflect the former policies of the once tiny and vulnerable city-state of Muscovy, and

⁵²³ Tellis, 28, 138.

how its strengthened itself gradually by becoming the active collaborator and tax gatherer of the Kipchak Khanate.

The two biggest issues in Central Asia today, since the reduction of growing American influence has largely been a success, will most likely remain the ongoing relationship of its two strongest countries. This could go in a variety of directions with three primary branches with gray areas between them. The three major options to consider are continued or even increasing co-operation, the retention of the present ambiguous relationship, and increasing division if not outright rivalry.

Continued co-operation seems the most likely in the immediate short term. The United States is still a more powerful country than either Russia or China and the threat of Islamic radicals to both Eurasian powers is still palpable. Increased co-operation would be a victory of foreign policy planning and regional stability would most likely favor China more than Russia overall, as it has the stronger economy and larger population. For this reason only a drastic weakening of the Russian world position could likely bring this scenario about. Or potentially, a weakening of the Chinese state enough that Russia would no longer be threatened by such an unequal alliance. No matter which power was the dominant actor in such a hypothetical alliance though, such a large and necessarily loose partnership would be a victory for The Formless Empire on a huge scale to whoever could pull it off and keep their hegemony as indirect as possible. In the long run, however, this should probably be considered a less-than-likely scenario.

The retention of the present ambiguous relationship is the least telling of the three, but also a safe bet worth examining. The advantages of maintaining a lose status quo are many, mostly related to the fact that nations can adapt their policies to events as they occur. But the very potential that Central Asian states would act perhaps against Russian interest or seek close ties to Japan, Turkey, or the United States would case a change in the status-quo by the likely defensive reactions of the big regional powers. Even if this way forward might at first seem the most appealing for the smaller states of the area, it likely would simply lead to a backlash from their larger neighbors which would put them into an even more unequal and precarious situation than they are now. After all, their biggest neighbors are also their largest economic partners. As Karimov

states in his own book, both interrelation and interdependence are the way forward for the new states of the region.⁵²⁴

Increasing division and/or outright rivalry is our final and most dramatic option to consider. This has been the norm in relations between China and Russia since both came to be the dominant powers inside the Eurasian heartland. They began their rivalry with skirmishes in the Amur basin, but it aside briefly to deal with the scourge of remaining nomadic people further west, and then returned to it nonstop until both regimes were under the control of communist parties in 1949. Their second period of cooperation was unprecedented in scope to anything before but lasted barely two decades before tension re-ignited in the same Amur basin and led to rivalry which lasted until the end of the Cold War. Now the rivalry has been set aside, but neither are things between the two powers reliably friendly outside of the short term. Differences in the nation's circumstances change their position and priorities. China's economic growth is much larger, and mostly fed from industrializing, whereas Russia is largely dependent on resource exports. These economies seem compatible, and they are, but it leads Russia in the weaker position. Most Russian gas is shipped to Europe, and what is in the east is often looking for Japanese investment to at least increase the options and to avoid being entirely dependent on the Chinese.⁵²⁵

Russia's position in the region is largely carved from the former Soviet husk. It is more likely to degrade than improve. China becomes a more attractive trade partner every day and India, Iran, Turkey, and Japan all have various economic connections in the region now. Were a fall-out to occur between Russia and China it would be Russia which would have to play the defensive and likely China holding the initiative. Would a threatened Russia ramp up competition and rhetoric to hold onto its various attempts at maintaining a Moscow-centered order in Central Asia? Given fear of the immense population disparity of Siberia versus the bordering Chinese provinces which once were Manchuria, it is likely that whether the government wants it or not, a popular backlash against getting too close to the Chinese state is a very real possibility for Russian policy

⁵²⁴ Karimov, 191.

⁵²⁵ Mankoff, 225.

makers. So too must Chinese policy makers occasionally deal with irredentist calls for lost territory to Russia in the Nineteenth Century.

The question is what would a split look like between these two giants? With such a level of regional integration in Central Asia, it seems that Russia is the country with the built in home field advantage in case of another split between the Eurasian hegemony. But China too has learned from its modern past, if not as dramatically. Its foreign policy in Central Asia is often conducted with a humility and equality that Russia lacks. Were some kind of devastating rift to grow between the powers, be it competition over regional allies, general fear and suspicion, or whatnot, the conflict would most likely be indirect. Since both nations are nuclear powers it seems unlikely that either of their territory would be violated. The countries between them, however, may not be so lucky. Drawing upon their collective heritage, however, might increase regional solidarity against both current powers. Even so, the danger for the smaller countries in such a situation would be immense.

The best chance for the small states to prosper is to hope that now that party-driven modernization programs lie in the dust, and attempts to expand by Islamists have been thwarted, that the way forward is not through nationalism or embracing Neoliberalism with the same utopian gusto which their ancestors once had for Bolshevism, but rather to take what is best from the regional historical experiences and apply them adapted to contemporary contexts. Whether unity or division lies in the future of Inner Eurasia, the best guide forward will be the one that recognizes that the region works best when geopolitics is formless and adaptable to the local circumstances on the ground. Wide spaces, mobility, multiculturalism, and a civic polity based on acceptance of divergence rather than enforced unity are key. If the Central Asian republics can look more to their history and less the history of romantic nationalism they can better form coalitions with each other to affirm their independence or increase their bargaining power in pan-regional alliances with larger states. If Russia and China could overcome their seemingly increasing flirtations with xenophobia and centralization they too could guarantee greater success in building the links required to wield stable influence in a place like Central Asia. But if the lessons of the past are ignored than political projects like the SCO and Eurasianism will bear bitter fruit, if any at all. Chinggis

Khan's Yasa code of law, Khitan acceptance of differences, and traditional Turkic and Mongolian adaptability serve as stronger policy benchmarks than contemporary Han chauvinism or Russia's increasingly racist political culture. What keeps geopolitics formless today reminds us that empire is not an anachronism, but a present reality in a new and adapted form, one with deep historical precedent and hardly relegated merely to specific periods of European history.

Despite having long been made militarily irrelevant, the example of nomadic peoples still has much to teach us both in how to govern diverse regions as well as how to plan for their prosperity, all while keeping the military forces at the peak of efficiency by being low in number put high on range and mobility. Above all is the knowledge and willingness to always adapt to changing circumstances. As Sun Tzu puts it:

“So it is said that if you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know other but know yourself, you win one and lose one; if you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.”⁵²⁶

8.3...Conclusion:

The Formless Empire is a unique indigenous geopolitical development which shows the societal adaptation of cultures and states in the particular geographic context of the inland realms of Eurasia. Rather than an intentional process, it was the outgrowth of a confluence of terrain, population density, and the highly mobile lifestyle adapted to either live within those contexts or compete with those who did. As times changed the logistical necessity of the nomadic lifestyle gave way to the material superiority of technologically advanced settled states, but even they too took with them many of the influences of their waning foes. In an era now dominated with mechanized armed forces, electronic communication, and flexible international business models, much of the world has become more formless in its diplomacy and warfare, but the long standing nature of Inner Eurasian geopolitics remains a peculiar and steadfast example of a region which has always been so.

⁵²⁶ Sun Tzu, 82.

This study has sought to show the uniqueness of geopolitics and how derived from indigenous experience they are within the heart of the Eurasian landmass, but that is not to claim that other regions do not have their own unique contributions to offer. It would be a beneficial future project to study the geopolitics of various regions on their own historical terms as the primary method rather than universalizing theories. While there seem to be more similarities than differences in state motivation, the methods used to achieve the various goals of self-interest, security, and the like varying strategic and tactical elements of behavior across different lands and peoples could be an illuminating window in the discipline of International Relations, which too often seems to divorce itself from historical context if not history itself, especially before the modern period.

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