

Biran, Michal. 2017. "The Non-Han Dynasties," in M. Szonyi, ed. *The Blackwell Companion of Chinese History*. Oxford: Willey Blackwell , 129-143. [this version includes also the original bibliography specific for this chapter that is part of the Companion general bibliography].  
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## **Ch. 11: Periods of Non- Han Rule<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

For about half of its recorded history, parts or all of imperial China were ruled by non-Han peoples, mainly from Manchuria or Mongolia. The dynasties they founded (mainly the Liao, Jin, Xia, Yuan, and Qing) contributed greatly to the shaping of late imperial and modern China's boundaries and ethnic composition. Yet until recently these non-Han dynasties were treated as the stepchildren of Chinese history, and were studied mainly through the prism of Sinicization, namely when and how they embraced the allegedly superior Chinese culture. The chapter reviews the reasons for the marginalization of these dynasties and the historiographical turns—in terms of both sources and historical frameworks—that, especially since the 1990s, led to their study in their own Inner Asian terms. Highlighting the 'New Qing History' that led this change, the chapter discusses the common political culture of the Inner Asian dynasties and reviews directions of current and future research.

### **Keywords**

Non-Han dynasties; Liao, Jin, Xi Xia, Yuan, Qing, Mongols, Manchus, Sinicization, Inner Asian nomads.

For about half of its recorded history, parts or all of imperial China were ruled by ethnically non-Chinese (more accurately: non-Han) peoples. Most of these ‘alien’—sometimes inaccurately called ‘conquest’<sup>2</sup>—dynasties were established by nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples from Inner Asia,<sup>3</sup> mainly Mongolia and Manchuria. The non-Han rulers contributed tremendously to both imperial and modern China, starting with the resurrection of an effective imperial polity in the fifth-sixth centuries CE, to the reunification of the Chinese realm under the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and up to the shaping of China’s territorial boundaries and its multi-ethnic identity mainly under the last imperial dynasty, the Manchu Qing (1636–1912). Even Beijing’s position as China’s capital is one of the legacies of nomadic rule.

Their lasting contributions notwithstanding, for many years these non-Han dynasties were treated as the stepchildren of Chinese history, and their role was marginalized, obscured or even totally ignored. Furthermore, throughout the twentieth century, the dominant prism through which these dynasties were studied—in both East and West—was that of Sinicization, the thesis that all the non-Han peoples who entered the Chinese-speaking realm were assimilated into Chinese culture. The peoples were classified according to the degree to which they adopted Chinese ways, and the study of their history aspired to detect the process by which they were inevitably attracted to the superior Chinese culture, eventually adhering to it—or failed to do so and collapsed. It is mainly in the two last decades that this narrow prism was largely abandoned, and the non-Han rulers started to be treated on their own, Inner Asian, terms. In this chapter I review the reasons for the marginalization of the non-Han dynasties and the developments, in terms of both sources and

historical frameworks, that led to their new understanding, briefly introducing the common Inner Asian facet of these polities and other nomadic empires.

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### **Main players: The non-Han dynasties**

While Inner Asian people of non-Han origin ruled parts or all of north China during the period of disunion between Han and Sui-Tang (especially in 386–581 CE), and during the Five Dynasties period (906–60), this chapter focuses on the more enduring non-Han dynasties of the tenth century and onwards: the Kitan Liao (907–1125), Jurchen Jin (1115–1234), Tangut Xi Xia (982–1227), Mongol Yuan (1206–1368) and Manchu Qing (1636–1912). These dynasties maintained their own cultural identity while ruling a multiethnic state that included a considerable Han-Chinese population; each controlled territories that had long been ruled by Chinese in addition to territories that were not part of China proper; and each adopted a certain amount of Chinese trappings and administrative models. Yet they also differ from each other in terms of the ethnic and ecological origin of the ruling elite, their territorial extent, longevity, and various other aspects. Notably, the Yuan and Qing ruled over the whole of China proper—and much more—while the Liao, Jin, and Xia coexisted with the Han-Chinese Song dynasty (960–1279). (For more details see table 1.)

I prefer to term these polities non-Han rather than non-Chinese for two reasons: first, most of them—all apart from the Xi Xia—were considered Chinese dynasties by traditional Chinese historiography, i.e. they were acknowledged as part of the Chinese dynastic cycle and holders of the Mandate of Heaven, and had an official history compiled for them by their successors. Second, all of these dynasties are considered ‘Chinese’ in the contemporary definition of Chineseness as inclusive of all the residents of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in its current boundaries (*Zhonghua*

*minzu*). From the perspective of current PRC historiography, the history of the Kitans, Tanguts, Jurchens, Mongols, and Manchus is an integral part of Chinese history (Baoerhan et al. 1986). Whatever the accuracy of this view, it seems heuristically useful to distinguish ‘Chinese’ from ‘Han’ in our context.

The history of these five non-Han dynasties was closely intertwined. The Jurchen and Mongol tribes were subjects of the Liao, and the Tanguts were their tributaries. After the Jurchens established the Jin dynasty, they became the Tanguts’ overlords, but ceded the control of Mongolia, trying to dominate it indirectly by divide and rule policy. After the Jin subsumed the Liao, most of the Kitans remained under Jurchen rule, but a certain group led by a prince migrated westward to Central Asia, where they established the Western Liao or Qara Khitai dynasty (Xi Liao 1124–1218). Under Chinggis Khan and his heirs, the Mongols exterminated the Qara Khitai (1218), the Xi Xia (1227), and the Jin (1234) dynasties. Tanguts, Jurchens, and especially Kitans played an important part in the shaping of the Mongol world empire. In the long run, most of the Kitans, Tanguts, and Jurchens were assimilated into either the Mongols or the Chinese during the Yuan–early Ming periods. Only a minority of the Jurchens who remained in their homeland—northern Manchuria—retained their ethnic identity. In 1616 they established the Later Jin dynasty; in 1636 the dynasty was renamed Qing and the people Manchu. These later Jurchens remained in constant contact with the Mongols, first under Yuan rule and later through various interactions with the post-Yuan Mongol tribal confederations. They were well versed in Mongolian political culture—including the Chinggisid tradition and Tibetan Buddhism—and eventually used this expertise to take over the various contemporaneous Mongolian confederations: incorporating the Chahar of Inner Mongolia in 1634 and the Khalkha of Outer Mongolia in 1691, and exterminating the

Zungars of Xinjiang in 1757–59 (Farquhar 1968; Allsen 1997b; Perdue 2005; Biran 2012). Even this short survey suggests [ p. 133] that the five peoples had a complex history of their own that did not begin or end with their rule in China. Moreover, their Inner Asian interactions were no less—and at times much more—significant than their interaction with the Chinese.

pp. 131-132: Table 11.1:

**Major Non-Han Dynasties (in comparison to the Song):**

Dynasty Ethnicity Dates	Liao Kitans 907-1125	Xi Xia Tanguts 982- 1227	Jin Jurchens 1115-1234	Yuan Mongols 1206-1368	Qing Manchus 1634-1912	Song Han- Chinese 960-1276
Territory	Small part of north China (the 16 prefectures-the Beijing-Datong area); Manchuria; Most of Mongolia	North-West China: Ningxia and Gansu; parts of Inner Mongolia, Shanxi and Qinghai	Manchuria (including parts now belonging to Russia; North China up to the Huai river; no Mongolia	At its height-Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, Manchuria, China Proper, Yunnan Burma; with nominal authority also much westward up to Iran, Anatolia, Afghanistan; Russia and Siberia.	At its height-Manchuria ; China Proper, Mongolia; Tibet; Xinjiang (including territories currently belonging to Russia)	China Proper minus the 16 prefectures (Northern Song 960-1126); South China-Proper, from the Huai river (Southern Song, 1127-1276)
Origin and main mode of subsistence of the founders	Southern Manchuria; Pastoral nomadism	The Ordos region; mixed economy (trade, pastoralism, agriculture)	Northern Manchuria ; mixed economy (fishing, hunting, stock raising, agriculture)	Mongolia, Pastoral nomadism	Manchuria, Mixed economy (fishing, hunting, pastoralism, agriculture)	North China-proper, Agriculture
Languages & scripts	Kitan, Chinese, Turkic	Tangut, Chinese, Tibetan	Jurchen, Chinese, Kitan	Mongolian (Uighur and Phags-Pa Scripts); Chinese; Persian [+various other languages among subjects]	Manchu; Chinese; Mongolian ; Tibetan; Chaghatay (=Uighur)	Chinese

Main ethnic groups	Kitans, Han-Chinese, Bohai, Mongols, Jurchens...	Tanguts, Han-Chinese, Tibetans, Turks...	Jurchens, Han-Chinese, Kitans,	Mongols, Han-Chinese; Muslims; Europeans; Koreans; Tibetans; Uighurs; Kitans; Tanguts; Jurchens etc	Manchu, Han-Chinese, Mongols, Tibetans Turkestani Muslims (=Uighurs)	Han-Chinese
Legitimation	Kitan; Confucian; Buddhist	Tangut; Confucian; Buddhist	Jurchen, Confucian	Mongol-Chinggisid; Confucian; Tibetan-Buddhist	Manchu; Confucian; Mongol-Chinggisid; Tibetan-Buddhist	Confucian
Administration	Dual administration for the nomads (Kitans, Mongols, etc) according to Kitan tribal norms; Southern administration for the sedentaries (Chinese; Bohai); Certain overlap between civil and military functions; Some Chinese officials selected by the exams; other officials by recommendations, origin, personal connections.	A combination of Tangut tribal customs and Song-like bureaucracy; division into 12 military zones grouped as left and right wings; certain overlap between civil and military functions.	Starts with dual administration; gradually moving into Han-Chinese like administration though Jurchens retain certain privileges and organizational modes; certain overlap of civil and military functions; officials chosen mainly according to Imperial exams (in Chinese and Jurchen).	Dual administration- double appointments (often Chinese and non-Chinese) to most offices; classification of subject population according to professions and ethnicity; overlap between civil and military administration; partial use of the examination system mainly from 1313; most officials chosen according to qualifications; recommendations, origin, personal connections.	Different administration to different ethnic groups - Chinese; Manchus; Mongols; Tibetan and Muslims; certain overlap between civil and military administration; Use of the examination system mainly for Chinese subjects.	One administration; Clear distinction between civil and military; Officials selected mainly by Imperial exams

### Historiographical frameworks: From Sinicization to Inner Asian polities

[P. 133 cont] The marginalization of the non-Han dynasties in Chinese history derives from two main reasons: the nature of the sources about these dynasties and the national interpretation of China's history in the twentieth century. As for the sources, while each of the above dynasties had its own language and developed its own script/s, few indigenous historical documents survive (especially for the Liao and Jin). Most of the extant sources were compiled in Chinese by Chinese literati. These members of the bureaucratic milieu were eager to accentuate their own importance, often portraying an ideal state of affairs rather than the real one. This perspective created a picture of routine adaptation of successive invaders to the traditional norms of Chinese government and to the advanced sedentary civilization, which allegedly overwhelmed the barbarian rulers. This intrinsic bias of our sources facilitated the adoption of the Sinicization discourse, capsulated in the Han-period cliché, that “you can conquer China from the back of the horse but cannot rule it from the back of the horse” and stressing the dichotomy between the Chinese (Hua) and the Barbarians (Yi, Rong, Di, Man etc.).

This bias was powerfully reinforced by the attempts of post-imperial Chinese scholars to create a national history that would culminate in the creation of the modern Chinese nation-state. From this point of view, the non-Han dynasties were seen “as an interruption to the grand sweep of Chinese history” (Franke and Twitchett 1994, 1), a dark era in which barbarians ruled over the civilized Chinese, mitigated only by the conquerors' eventual absorption into the superior culture of the conquered. The vilification of alien rule was particularly strong in light of the Qing's poor performance vis-à-vis the Western imperialist powers since the nineteenth century, and the rise of Chinese nationalism under late Qing rule. The discourse of ethnicity (Han-Chinese versus Barbarian-Manchu) therefore played a central place in the

process of nation-building, emphasizing the Hua-Yi or Han-Barbarian dichotomy, and blaming the barbarian rulers for everything that went wrong in Chinese history.

The gradual shift of paradigm in China occurred under the communist regime. Especially since the 1980s, the non-Han dynasties have been fully integrated into Chinese history and appropriated as ‘minority dynasties.’ The by-now extinct Kitan, Jurchen, and Tanguts or the still-existing Mongols (and Manchus), were seen as ethnic minorities, parts of the greater Chinese nation, whose rule is therefore legitimate, and the struggle against which loses the aura of ‘patriotic resistance’ (Baranovitch 2010; Rawski 2012). This perspective enables the inclusion of these dynasties into the Chinese national narrative, appropriates their achievements into those of ‘the multi-ethnic Chinese nation,’ and glosses over the trauma of foreign conquest. This bear hug (or dragon embrace), however, results in yet another distortion of historical reality, as it ignores the Inner Asian facet of these dynasties.

From the 1990s, a new wave of studies of the non-Han dynasties has striven to overcome the Sinicization paradigm. This shift derives from several complementary trends. First is the increasing use of non-Chinese sources, both literary and archaeological. Second is the rise of new historical approaches, such as world, global, and regional histories as opposed to national ones. Third is the rise of cultural history, which, among [p. 134] other things, brings into the limelight the common Inner Asian culture of the non-Han dynasties, on the one hand, and the influence of this culture on China through neighboring nomadic empires even in periods of Han rule, on the other.

*New sources*

The study of the non-Han dynasties benefitted greatly from the use of indigenous, as well as external, but non-Chinese, literary sources, and from incorporating archaeological findings. In terms of indigenous sources, the most apparent transformation has been the use of Manchu materials for studying the Qing. As this ‘New Qing History’ influenced the whole field of non-Han studies, I will describe it in some detail below. Until the 1980s, mainly due to the huge influence of John King Fairbank (1907–91), the doyen of East Asian studies in the US, most western scholars ignored Manchu materials as a source for Qing history, assuming that all documents of the empire were either in Chinese or had been translated from Manchu into Chinese (or vice versa). This premise was challenged by another Harvard scholar, Joseph Fletcher Jr. (1934–84), who strove, in the late 1970s–early 1980s, to write an integrative history of Inner Asia, based on its indigenous sources. Fletcher studied various Inner Asian languages, including Manchu, and trained or inspired many of the leading scholars of the New Qing History, notably Beatrice Bartlett, Pamela Crossley, and Peter Perdue (as well as other prominent Inner Asianists, such as Kim Hodong and Beatrice Manz). Bartlett was the first to challenge the marginalization of the Manchu materials. Her 1991 study of the Grand Council, the inner cabinet of Qing rule, was based on Manchu archival materials and proved that much of the Qing correspondence—even in the middle and late Qing—was conducted exclusively in Manchu, above the heads of its Han officials (Bartlett 1985, 1991; Rawski 1996). Stimulated by the better access to Manchu archival materials in both Beijing and Taiwan since the 1980s, the growing availability of Chinese-language sources and a host of secondary literature (notably Wakeman 1985), the New Qing History continued to prosper after Fletcher’s untimely death, with Evelyn Rawski, Pamela Crossley, and Mark Elliott among its prominent representatives. The

common feature that links them together is their attention to the Inner Asian character of the Qing and its multi-faceted culture. The secret of Qing success, according to these historians, is not an early adoption of systematic Sinicization, but the opposite: a clever manipulation of its connections to various groups of subjects, Han and non-Han alike, which created a universal rulership that disseminated different images to its divergent subordinate groups, whose culture and administration would remain separate. This Manchu-centered perspective also led to a focus on the emperors and their ruling strategies, as well as on the conquest elite—bannermen and imperial kinsmen—as opposed to emphasizing the Chinese under Manchu rule (e.g. Rawski 1998; Crossley 1999; Elliott 2001). The focus on the Manchus' Inner Asian facet also invited more nuanced analyses of Qing expansion (Millward 1998; Perdue 2005) and frontier policies (Mosca, Kim and Zatsopine 2014) and encouraged the study of Mongolian, Tibetan, and Chaghatay materials from the Qing realm. Facilitated by the Chinese 'new Qing history project' that edited and digitalized sources in 'ethnic' languages as well as in Chinese and Manchu (Zhao Ma 2008), the use of such materials promoted the study of Qing non-Chinese territories. It provides a comparative framework for reevaluating Qing policies in China proper, and enables an analysis of the Qing's continental colonialism (e.g. Perdue et al. 1998; Elverskog 2007; Kim 2012; Brophy 2013), in contrast to the former stress on the Qing as a victim [p. 135] of western imperialism. This, however, is still a vexed issue in China, where imperialism and colonialism are reserved mainly for the western powers. Moreover, as PRC control of Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, Xinjiang—and Taiwan—is based on the Qing rule over these territories, the Chinese identity of the Qing is a highly political issue. That old paradigms die hard is apparent in the harsh attack on American New Qing historians, published in the official website and bulletin of the

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in spring 2015. They were accused, *inter alia*, of differentiating Qing from China and of referring to Qing as an imperialist force that invaded Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang instead of celebrating the unification of China by the Sinicized Qing.<sup>4</sup>

While none of the other dynasties left a similar corpus in its native language, advances in the study of indigenous sources has contributed considerably, especially to the study of the Xia and the Liao. The rich Tangut literature is represented by collections originating mainly from Khara-khoto (Heishuicheng, Inner Mongolia), Lingwu (near Yinchuan, Ningxia), and Dunhuang. The bulk of this literature was unearthed in the early twentieth century by famous Silk Road explorers such as P.K. Kozlov, Aurel Stein, and Paul Pelliot, but new materials continue to surface in China. The Tangut language and script were deciphered in both the Soviet Union and China, mainly from the 1960s, and the important collections of St. Petersburg, China, the British Library, and Japan have all been published and catalogued recently (Kychanov 1999; Du Jianfu 2012; Xibei dier minzu xueyuan, 2005; Wu Yulin and Arakawa, 2011). This mainly Buddhist literature, some of which dates to the post-Xi Xia Yuan period, is extremely valuable for the study of Tangut and Yuan Buddhism, and the history of printing (Tangut Sutras are among the first existing examples of movable-type printed texts). The non-Buddhist materials include dictionaries, court odes, letters, and, notably, the twelfth-century Tangut law code. Available in both Russian and Chinese translations, this corpus sheds light on Tangut social institutions, government, military, commercial, and foreign policies and enables the comparison of Tangut law with the Chinese law of the Song and Tang (Kychanov 1987–89; Dunnel 1994; Shi Jinbo et al. 1994).

As for the Liao, upon becoming imperial, the Kitans created two scripts, the small and the large, both only partially deciphered at present. The study of the small script has been greatly enhanced by the discovery of various Kitan tomb inscriptions, some of which are bilingual, that enable a better understanding of how the Kitans referred to themselves (Kane 2009, 2015). Yet, this corpus of about 40 epitaphs does not allow a full understanding of the Kitan language. The large script is an even greater mystery. Its corpus includes a few seal characters, and the only extant Kitan book, unearthed in Kyrgyzstan, near the capital of the Western Liao, in the 1950s but described only in 2011. With its 127 leaves, this intriguing manuscript is by far the longest Kitan text available, and was probably a chronicle or an official document. However, it is still undeciphered, and given the paucity of other Kitan large-script materials may remain so for a while (Zaytsev 2011; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova\\_N\\_176](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_N_176)). In contrast, Jin's extant Jurchen-language materials contain mainly translations of Chinese works, although the occasional original document—such as the list of those who had passed the Jurchen examinations—attest to Jin's hybrid Chinese-Jurchen culture (Jia Guangping and Jin Qicong 1980; Jin Qicong 1995; Xin Wen forthcoming).

The Yuan case is more complicated. *The Secret History*, the only extant Mongol source for the rise of Chinggis Khan (r. 1206–27) and the rule of his son and heir Ögödei (r. 1229–41), now available in Igor deRachewiltz's seminal translation (deRachewiltz 2004, 2013), is a mine of anthropological information. Later Mongolian works, though [136] heavily Buddhist, can also shed some light on Yuan history. Also significant are several Mongolian inscriptions (often bilingual), documents; literary, mostly Buddhist, texts, unearthed mainly in Turfan, Khara Khoto, and Dunhuang; and letters retained in European archives (Tumurtoogoo 2006). These

are instructive for understanding how the Mongols saw themselves, providing a good corrective to the Chinese view represented mainly in the official dynastic history, the *Yuanshi*. One glaring example is the Mongol inscription that equates ‘Da Yuan’ (the Great Yuan, as the dynasty was called in China) with ‘Yeke Monggol Ulus’ (the Great Mongol Empire, the United Empire), thereby suggesting that for the Mongols, the Yuan was not only the China-centered state under Qubilai Khan’s direct rule but the whole Mongol empire, stretching from Korea to Hungary (Cleaves 1951; Kim Hodong 2014).

Moreover, due to the gigantic dimensions of the empire, the history of Chinggisid expansion and rule was recorded in a bewildering variety of languages—Persian, Chinese, Mongolian, Russian, Arabic, and Latin are the most important but nearly any other language is also relevant. Naturally, no scholar can master all of these languages, but reading multilingual external sources from various parts of the empire can partly compensate for the bias and mediation of the historical texts, mostly penned by sedentary, non-Mongol authors. Thus, for example, Morris Rossabi managed to portray a rounded picture of Yuan’s founder, Qubilai (Khubilai) Khan (r. 1260–94), which reflected not only the prism of the Chinese literati but also the point of view of the Mongols’ non-Chinese employees, by extensively using Marco Polo’s book, compiled in Genoa in the early fourteenth century, and the Persian *Collection of Chronicles* (*Jāmi` al-tawārīkh*) compiled by Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318), the Ilkhan’s vizier and the first world historian. Rossabi’s study also signaled the shift of research from the Chinese under Mongol rule (Langlois 1981; de Bary and Chan 1982) to the rulers themselves.

Yet it was the seminal works of Thomas T. Allsen that revolutionized the field and established a holistic, Eurasian perspective for studying both the Mongol

Empire and Yuan China. Equally familiar with the Chinese, Persian, and Russian sources, and fully aware of the various historiographical traditions involved, Allsen placed the Mongols and their nomadic culture at the center of his inquiry and highlighted the cultural exchanges that took place under their rule, thereby illuminating the Eurasian aspects of the Yuan and getting a fuller picture of Mongol institutions and priorities such as shamanism and mobility (Allsen 1987, 1997a, 1997b, 2001). This Eurasian perspective is gradually becoming more prominent. And while multilingual training is certainly desirable, and is more common among emerging scholars, working with sources from one part of the empire with full awareness of studies dealing with its other parts, can also result in excellent comparative works (e.g. Melville 2006; Robinson 2009; see Biran 2013).

While for the other peoples we do not have such a broad array of non-Chinese and non-indigenous sources, wider use of external sources is also helpful and important for adjusting the China-centered scholarship. Thus the Tangut, Japanese, Arabic, Persian and Turkic sources that refer to the Liao, for example, fragmentary and sparse though they are, still give a broader picture of Liao international relations, zooming out from Liao-Song bifurcation (Hansen, Louis, and Kane 2015). In the Qing case, many more sources are naturally available, although their full use has yet to be pursued. Matthew Mosca's work on Qing-India relations in 1750–1860 is a bold example of how shifting the focus from Manchu-Chinese relations, or Qing-western relations, [p. 137] enables a deeper understanding of the Qing view of the world and the evolution of its geopolitical policies (Mosca 2013).

Archaeology is another means for getting a better indigenous picture of the non-Han polities. This is especially relevant for the Liao and Xia: the cultural richness of Liao tombs and the sophistication of their architecture stand in sharp contrast to the

erstwhile ‘barbarian’ image, and attest to the Liao’s wealth and prestige. Liao burial goods reveal a distinct and magnificent material culture in which gold played a pivotal role. The combination of nomadic artifacts, Chinese items, and imports originating in Europe, the Middle East, and Central, East, South, and Southeast Asia—all reveal the thriving and wide-ranging commercial contacts of the Kitans, as well as their complex cultural preferences (e.g. Shen Hsueh-man 2006; Li Qingquan 2008). The extensive archaeological finds—and the good PR of Inner Mongolian archaeology authorities, where most remains are located—have prompted unprecedented scholarly interest in the Liao dynasty, especially in China, and have done much to improve the dynasty’s image in popular and academic circles. However, archaeological findings from Liao territories outside China (usually published in Mongolian, Russian, or Japanese, e.g. Kradin 2011; Enkhtur 2014) are less often taken into account by Chinese and western studies alike; the various planned collaborative projects will hopefully change this.<sup>5</sup>

Archaeology has contributed much also to the study of the Xi Xia. The peculiar architecture of the gigantic imperial Xia tombs near Yinchuan, as well as many other manifestations of the Xia’s distinctive Himalayan-Buddhist material culture, are not only exceptionally impressive in visual terms, but also constitute a statement of ideological and cultural independence (Piotrovskii 1993; Steinhardt, 1993). In both cases, combining archaeology and multilingual sources is by far the best way to study the history, policies, and identity of these dynasties. While few people in the west (including Russia) currently deal with the Xia and Liao (e.g. Franke and Twitchett, 1994; Dunnell, 1996, 2009; Biran 2005; Standen 2007, 2014; Kradin and Ivliev 2014; Solonin and Hill 2014; Hansen, Louis, and Kane 2015), their study is flourishing in China: recent bibliographies compiled by Liu Pujiang, Zhou

Feng, and Sun Guojun list over 6,500 Liao-related publications, almost all in Chinese, and the majority date from the past 25 years (Liu Pujiang 2003; Zhou Feng and Sun Guojun 2008-10; Hansen, Louis and Kane 2015). Tangut studies in China are available mainly through two Xia-related journals, *Xi Xia Xue* and *Xi Xia Yanjiu*, both established in the twenty-first century, and leading scholars include Nie Hongyin and his student Sun Bojun.

In the Mongol case, the splendid archaeological and visual artifacts, recently displayed in various international exhibitions (e.g. Komaroff and Carboni 2002; Beamann 2010; Watt 2010), did much to improve the Mongols' image, although their processing is only in its infancy. While the archaeological and external sources for the study of the Jin dynasty are less impressive in comparison to the other dynasties—one exception is the recent work on Jin's walls (Sun and Wang 2008)—and are scattered between Russia and China, indeed most research still concentrates on the Chinese under Jurchen rule (Tao Jingshen 1977; Bol 1987; Tillman and West 1995; Franke and Chan 1997). When the prism is changed, even a new look at the traditional Chinese sources provides different results. Focusing on the Jurchen emperors, whom she calls by their Jurchen, not Chinese, names, Julia Schneider recently stressed the pragmatic and basically similar policies of Jin emperors, previously classified in western sinology as either Sinicized or revivalists of indigenous culture (Schneider 2012, 2014).

*[P. 138] New Histories*

The new view of the non-Han dynasties derives not only from the impact of new sources, but also from the different approaches to history that have gained popularity in recent decades. These decades have witnessed the rise of world, global,

and regional histories that counterbalance the once overwhelmingly essential national history framework. Whether the unit of historical research is Northeast Asia, Eurasia, or the whole planet, it enables the historian to de-centralize China, thereby leaving more space for the Inner Asian regimes (Rawski 2015). Moreover, these new historical concepts give greater importance to inter-regional and cross-cultural connections. From this perspective, “the centrality of Central Asia” (Frank 1992) is more apparent, and the historical role of the nomads is no longer that of destroyers of civilizations, but of promoters of information exchange between the various sedentary civilizations (McNeil 1963; Kradin 2014). This point of view raised interest in Inner Asia’s nomadic empires in general, both those that conquered parts of China and those that, like the Xiongnu, the Turks, the Uighurs, and the post-Yuan Mongols, consciously preferred to stay in the steppe, manipulating China—or other sedentary realms—from outside, through trade and raids.

This approach, however, often still viewed the nomads as passive and inferior to the sedentaries, as a means whose mediation allowed the superior sedentary civilizations to exchange knowledge. Such an approach is also apparent in one of the most influential works on China-Inner Asia relations, Barfield’s *The Perilous Frontier* (1989). In contrast to the classical theory, according to which nomadic empires rose to power when China was weak (Lattimore 1940), Barfield argued that nomadic empires rose and fell simultaneously with Chinese empires—as the steppe polities needed a strong Chinese empire to exploit in order to assert their stability. He sees the formation of nomadic empires as a secondary phenomenon, dependent on the earlier formation of a sedentary empire in China. Barfield also differentiated between Mongolian-steppe polities, that usually remained in the steppe, exploiting China from afar, and Manchurian or mixed-economy states that conquered parts of China, rising

when both China and the steppe were weak. The (huge) anomaly of this division is obviously the Mongol Empire. While appealing and thought provoking, Barfield's thesis does not always fit historical realities (Di Cosmo 2015). It still treats the nomads as inferior players vis-à-vis China.

The acknowledgment of nomads' active role in both state formation and cross-cultural contacts benefitted from the rise of cultural history since the 1970s. This trend, that underlines the study of cultural representations and the constructed character of ethnic and racial identities, highlights the common Inner Asian character of nomadic empires and the non-Han rulers of China. Based on the pioneering studies of Wittfogel and Feng (1949), Morris Rossabi (1983), Joseph Fletcher (1984), Herbert Franke (1987, 1994), and thanks to the efforts of historians and anthropologists, notably Thomas Allsen, Peter Golden, Anatoly Khazanov, and Nicola Di Cosmo, scholars have begun to realize that a nomadic or Inner Asian civilization, which has its own parameters and distinctive culture, existed. This culture, while having its own material and other aspects, is basically political, as politics was the main glue that held the nomads together, whether in the loose framework of tribes or "headless states" (Sneath 2007) or in larger and more centralized political units. Nomadic empires rose out of nomadic warfare in times of crisis—ecological, natural, or political—as the tribal level sufficed for conducting most aspects of the nomads' everyday life, including raiding into their neighbors' realms. Nomadic empire was thus temporary in nature, and for its successful maintenance, its ruler had to be able [p. 139] to assure his followers that it was worthwhile for them to stay with him, especially since they could easily decamp to greener pastures.

To win the subjects' acceptance of a single legitimate political authority, Inner Asian political culture included both religious-ideological aspects and practical means

for governing an empire. In terms of ideology, the ruler's legitimation was based mainly on a divine mandate bestowed upon a chosen clan, and the heavenly-ordained charisma that accompanied it.<sup>6</sup> The practical means included a patrimonial mode of governance that implied the practice of redistribution; a partial overlapping of the administrative system with the military organization; decimal military organization backed up by a supertribal guard; and a developed system of symbols, titles, and ceremonies meant to strengthen the ruler's control of his kinsmen and subjects. Territorial expansion and contact with sedentaries—whether by trade, raids, or conquest—were also important features for providing the ruler with the necessary goods to reward his supporters. The non-Han polities discussed here chose conquest as their way to deal with sedentaries. Territorial expansion, which resulted, *inter alia*, from conquest of parts or all of China, was an essential part of the state formation that played a major role in the shaping of their identities and government. It demanded the creation of a military-civil elite personally loyal to the leader, transcending tribal allegiances (the Manchu banner system and the Mongol army after Chinggis Khan's reforms are obvious examples), and encouraged the adoption of Chinese-style policies.

Indeed, nomadic culture was hardly isolated—the nomads' inherent mobility and the fragility of the nomadic economy resulted in continuous contacts with contemporary sedentary neighbors or subjects. Moreover, instead of the old concept of a clear-cut dichotomy between China and 'the Barbarians,' the China-Inner Asian frontier is understood as a region, in which mutual influences diffused. The archaeological record, clearly attesting to settlement and limited agriculture even in the steppe, shows a far less definite separation between two mutually exclusive ecological systems. Furthermore, nomadic society was pragmatic: the nomads' ability to adjust to changing circumstances, whether due to natural forces or political

upheavals, meant that they were ready to learn from various outsiders and borrow from other cultures, as long as these borrowings were useful for assuring their rule. This often resulted in an amalgamation of different methods of administration, legitimation concepts, religions, and languages, especially while nomads were also ruling over sedentary populations. Such appropriation is often described as barbarian assimilation into the more elaborated sedentary culture (if along China's frontier, as Sinicization) or as proof of the non-autarkic character of nomadic culture. Instead, such amalgamation might better be described as part and parcel of the Inner Asian mode of governance, and is consistent with the multicultural outlook of Inner Asian nomads.

For our non-Han polities, the Chinese model had various appealing benefits: First, it enhanced the prestige of the ruler vis-à-vis his kinsmen (cf. Abaoji, Liao's founder, who declared himself emperor to avoid the Kitan system of rotation, which limited the term of a leader to nine years; only under Chinggis Khan did the steppe political culture elevate the leader to a height parallel to that of the Chinese emperor). Second, Chinese ways of ruling were more centralized and therefore more efficient in curbing the power of tribal aristocracies and military potentates, whose unruliness was one of the major threats to stability in any nomadic polity. Third, Chinese administrative models were useful for ruling the empire's Chinese subjects, who were often demographically dominant, and for co-opting the local elite. Even superficial adoption of Chinese trappings [p. 140] (e.g. the imperial institution with its rich ritual pageantry; Chinese official titles) was crucial for gaining legitimation—and the resultant collaboration—among the Chinese elites and the subjugated populace. Such adoption could start long before the conquest of China, due to preliminary encounters with Chinese or partly Sinicized dynasties. For instance, Kitans and Tanguts were

considered ‘external subjects’ (*wai chen*) of the Tang, the Jurchens of the Liao, the Mongols of the Liao and Jin, and the Manchus of the Ming. However, this conscious practical and selective adoption of Chinese ways, which stands at the center of the ‘Sinicization’ discourse, should not obscure the multiple alternative policies, which were adopted from the steppe culture, and were at least equally important.

The impact of the tribal past was apparent in such aspects as the importance of personal-patrimonial rather than bureaucratic relations between the ruler and his officials; a more deliberative and consensual decision making process; the special position of the ruling clan, including women and dowagers; bitter—and often violent—succession struggles among the clan members; strong reliance on tribesmen as a clearly defined segment of the ruling elite, at the expense of Han bureaucrats. The tension between the patrimonial-indigenous and the Chinese-bureaucratic modes of rule characterized all polities. Yet, ruling over distinct ethnic groups that practiced different modes of subsistence, the Inner Asian rulers usually avoided indiscriminate imposition of their ethnic culture (language, religion, etc.) on their subjects. Instead, they consciously allowed each group to retain its characteristics, trying to make the most of them for the empire—in both practical terms and for legitimating purposes.

Therefore, these polities remained multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious. They practiced dual or multiple forms of administration and various legitimation concepts: indigenous, Confucian-Chinese, religious-Buddhist (and in the Qing case, also Chinggisid), and plural legal systems. Chinese concepts were always one facet of these dynasties’ multicultural organization—and they regarded the appropriation of Chinese trappings as an integral part of their imperial culture. Therefore it is possible to highlight continuities in the Song-Yuan-Ming, Ming-Qing, or late imperial China as a whole. However, the non-Han dynasties also had other, sometimes multiple

facets, that were also part and parcel of their identity and culture (Golden 1982; Khazanov 1984, 2015; Allsen 2001; Smith and von Glahn 2003; Di Cosmo 1999, 2002, 2015; Biran 2015).

This composite imperial culture also meant that the nomads played an active role in promoting cross-cultural exchange. They were not only a passive medium transferring elements from one sedentary civilization to another, but active participants, who initiated much of the intercultural exchange and whose norms and priorities were the filter and catalyst that determined which cultural elements would be transmitted throughout Eurasia. Such contacts also resulted in mutual influences between rulers and ruled, despite the policy of separating the various groups. Again, however, such assimilation was not one-sided. Under Inner Asian rule, many Chinese adopted—voluntarily or not—the conquerors’ dress, hairstyle, naming patterns, as well as some social norms and ideological components (e.g. Serruys 1987; Robinson 2009; Crossley 2015). In fact, recent scholarship stresses the impact of Inner Asia on Han-Chinese dynasties even in periods in which the nomads stayed outside China (Chen 2012; Skaff 2012; Robinson 2008). Yet, Chinese elements were more dominant when the conquerors were a tiny minority among their subjects and less connected to the steppe tradition, as in the case of the Jin. The Chinese demographic advantage was also significant when the conquerors lost their political dominance, and often led to a certain Inner Asian assimilation into the Chinese, although, as shown above, this assimilation was not always comprehensive even in the long run.

*[P. 141] New questions*

Studying these multicultural empires on their own terms opens a host of new, often world-history related, research questions, and promotes the comparative study of empires synchronically (comparing the Liao and Jin to their contemporaries in the

western steppe, the Seljuqs and the Qarakhanids; or the post-Mongol Eurasian empires including the Ming and Qing, but also the Moghuls, Uzbeks, Safavids, and Ottomans) or diachronically (the evolution and various stages of the Inner Asian model). Based on recent collective volumes, dissertations and monographs (e.g. Smith and von Glahn 2003, Struve 2004, Rossabi 2013; and see Mullany's chapter), as well on two major conferences held in the summer of 2014—Harvard's *Middle Period China (800–1400)* and Jerusalem's *New Directions in the Study of the Mongol Empire*—it is apparent that the study of the Yuan and the Qing is now flourishing, and a few promising directions for current and future research are apparent. These are based also on developments in Chinese studies in general, such as the editing and annotation of dynastic histories in China, the digitization of sources, and the use of databases for acquiring prosopographical and geographical information.

Much effort has been invested in studying the multicultural environment of these dynasties, in terms of the social history and social mobility of various ethnic, professional, and religious groups, as well as in the study of specific cultural exchanges—scientific, legal, religious and artistic ones. Long-term commerce—maritime, continental, frontier—has also attracted much interest, though the comparison between the active Yuan globalization and the passive Qing one still awaits thorough investigation. A prominent feature is the study of networks—commercial, religious, scholarly—which is especially relevant for the highly mobile non-Han dynasties.

Environmental history, which due to the nomadic component of these dynasties is even more pertinent for them than for other polities, has also attracted much interest, from the importance of the Little Ice Age to the rise of the Qing, through the contribution of Mongolia's especially wet climate in the thirteenth century to the rise

of Chinggis Khan (Pederson et al. 2014), to the importance of natural disasters for Yuan politics (Brook 2010). An ecologically informed history of the China–Inner Asian frontier is certainly desirable.

This vitality and promising directions also suggest that a new synthesis of the political, social, and cultural history of these dynasties, catering to western audiences, is due. The Harvard “History of Imperial China” series, while producing an excellent monograph on the Qing (Rowe 2009), adopted an old-fashioned attitude towards the non-Han polities. Thus, no volume was dedicated to the Liao, Jin, or Xia, while the Yuan was squeezed with the Ming into one Sinocentric volume, which does not do justice to the Eurasian facet of Yuan history (Brook 2010). Christopher Atwood’s forthcoming chapter on the Yuan in *The Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire*, will hopefully fill part of this void, but it is about time that the new developments in the study of these dynasties reached the textbooks, too.

In sum, the non-Han polities were much more than foreign barbarians overwhelmed by Chinese culture. They were successful, enduring regimes with a complex and multicultural identity of their own and a common Inner Asian political culture. Their combination of Chinese and Inner Asian modes of government and their long periods of rule contributed much to the shaping of Chinese history and government in the imperial and modern periods. Instead of stressing their ‘alien’ or non-Chinese character, they should be acknowledged as part and parcel of what we call Chinese history, perhaps the northern variant of Chinese history as opposed to its southern, Han-dominated one.

[142]. [The notes which appear at the end of the file are also on p. 142].

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<sup>1</sup> [notes on p. 142]: The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Program (FP/2007-2013) / ERC Grant Agreement no. 312397. I thank Francesca Fiachetti, Kim Hodong, David Levi-Faur, Yuri Pines, Eric Schlusser and Gideon Shelach for their comments.

<sup>2</sup> The term "conquest dynasty" as a designation of a non-Han dynasty is inaccurate, because almost any Chinese dynasty, from Zhou (1046-256 BCE) and Qin (221-207 BCE) onward, rose to power by conquering its rivals, including, most notably, the preceding dynasty.

<sup>3</sup> The term Inner Asia refers to the regions in Asia that were outside the realm of agricultural civilizations. While its boundaries have changed throughout the years, in the period discussed here they included Mongolia, Manchuria, Siberia, Tibet and Central Asia. Central Asia refers to the area between the eastern border of modern Iran and the eastern border of Xinjiang.

<sup>4</sup>Li Zhiting in [http://www.cssn.cn/zx/tt/201504/t20150420\\_1592989.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/zx/tt/201504/t20150420_1592989.shtml); last accessed August 29, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> One such collaboration is the excavation of the so-called "Chinggis wall," actually the Liao northern line of fortifications that stretches for nearly 750 km across China, Russia and Mongolia. This wall, probably designed to protect the Silk Road's northernmost route, is currently being excavated simultaneously by Mongolian, Russian and Chinese teams (Lunkov et al. 2011).

<sup>6</sup> This is of course similar to the Chinese mandate of Heaven, but the concept of the mandate was different: Unlike the Chinese case, *Tenggeri*, the Steppe God, did not bestow his mandate on every generation, thus the steppe world was often left without a unifying ruler. Yet, the notion of the mandate remained as "an ideology in reserve,"

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ready to be revived if the creation of a supra-tribal empire were to be attempted.  
(DiCosmo 1999, Biran 2015).