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Great States

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"Great State" has gone missing from the vocabulary of state formations in Asia. Though widely used across Inner and East Asia over the past millennium, the term means nothing to most scholars today. It is not flagged, rarely noted, and never theorized. Recent thinking about inter-polity relations in Inner and East Asia has led me to regard the Great State as a distinctive type of political formation that should have a place in our conceptual toolkit if we scholars of Asia are to participate in writing the global history of empire. Given its near ubiquity, the virtual absence of a discourse on the Great State, ancient or modern, Asian or otherwise, may be more than just a curiosity, and it is worth wondering why.

The term is unambiguous in every Asian language that uses it: the adjective "great"/"big" followed by the noun "state"/"country." In Chinese it is *daguo*; in Japanese, *daikoku*; in Korean, *daeguk*; in Vietnamese, *daiquốc*; in Khitan, *masaqú gúr*; in Mongolian, *yeke ulus*; and in Jurchen and Manchu, *amban gurun*. Only in Tangut, *lhiə tha*, does "great" follow "state" according to Tangut syntax. The phrasing is so simple that it is not obvious that anything specific, even technical, is being named. When this adjective-noun pair appears, it is usually split, bracketing the title of a state or a dynasty. It is to this state name that our attention goes, not to what frames it. The term "Great State" is left hidden in plain sight.

Is Great State merely an Asian way of saying "empire"? My initial instinct is to hold off from folding the Asian term into a familiar abstraction formulated primarily from European experience. Instead, I propose that we consider Great State and empire as distinct but overlapping concepts. The existence of the term "Great State" argues that there was something our Asian predecessors needed to conceptualize, even if we modern scholars do not. To understand what the term signifies, we need to pay close attention to the contexts in which it has appeared in the past (only one state today self-identifies as a Great State) and assess what it was intended to do. The exercise of resuscitating the concept risks overloading the term with an importance that it may not have. If I find this risk worth taking, it is because I sense that just the opposite is at stake: that the absence of this concept from our historiography is implicated in the considerable success of post–Great State cultures—which I will address later in this essay as "downstream imperial polities"—to deflect acknowledgment of the long history of intra-Asian imperialism from which they have benefited.

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Reading Ming Texts

I first encountered the Great State, without knowing it, as a graduate student. It surfaced as a practical bibliographic question: how to cite certain official texts of the Ming dynasty. The prime example was the dynastic law code: should I cite it as *Ming lü*, the Ming Code, or *Da Ming lü*, the Great Ming Code? In my reading I had encountered both usages. The copy I had to hand as a graduate student was the late-Qing edition by the great legal authority, Shen Jiaben (1840–1913). He called it *Ming lü*, not *Da Ming lü*, and I followed suit (Shen 1908; cited in Brook 1993, 380). Dropping the *da* suited my inclinations. Why include an aggrandizing grace note to the name of the dynasty when the name on its own should do? Later, when I finally got my hands on a Ming edition (these were the days before PDFs and the Web), I found that its proper title was in fact *Da Ming lü*. Ming editions used the *da* and Qing editions did not.[1] Come the Qing dynasty, *da* was stripped from Ming titles and transferred to Qing, so that the Great Ming Code became merely the Ming Code, and the new law code of the Qing dynasty took the title of Great Qing Code. "Great Ming" was not just an overelaborate way of naming the dynasty: at the time it *was* the name.[2]

Matteo Ricci, the Italian who established the first Jesuit mission in Beijing in 1601, was better informed. In his memoirs, he wrote: "From the year 1368 has reigned the family Zhu, calling itself Ming, which means brightness, and at present that family prefixes the name with the syllable Da, and so is called Da Ming, that is to say, Great Brilliance." He also noted that "to all these names we use," Europeans have "added 'Great,' so they are wont to call it Great China, as Marco Polo called it Great Cathay, and the Spanish call it 'Gran Cina.'" The reason for this usage made eminent sense to him. As he put it, "the magnificence and grandeur of its name is proper and natural" (Ricci 1942, 10, 13).[3]

European visitors to the well-ordered kingdom (*regno*) they found in China may have felt that the Great Ming deserved to be called Great, but that is not how or why the Ming got its name. The foundational documents of the dynasty are not helpful in this regard. In his enthronement edict issued on the fourth day of the first month of his inaugural year (January 23, 1368), the founder, Zhu Yuanzhang, simply announced that the name of the new dynasty was Great Ming (*Ming taizu shilu* 1962, 29.1a, 4a).[4] He offered no elaboration. This title appears frequently in official documents published

[1]The Ming Code, as the title is usually translated, gained this title only in the last year of the Hongwu reign, 1398. Previous editions used the date of promulgation, e.g., *Hongwu qinian lü*, Code of the Seventh Year of the Hongwu Era (1374).

[2]A few scholars have used the term "Great Ming," though more as a rhetorical flourish than a political category (e.g., Barnhart 1993; Clunas 2007); so also for the Qing (e.g., Jones 1994; Rowe 2009).

[3]Following d'Elia's correction of the date of 1263 to 1368. These passages may be found loosely translated in Gallagher (1953, 6–8).

[4]In the version of this proclamation in the dynastic history produced under the Qing, *da* has been removed (Zhang 1974, 19). Huang Yunmei (1979, 15) notes the discrepancy, explaining that *da* was intended to distinguish Zhu's *Da Ming* from Lin Er's *Xiao Ming*, Little Ming, which Zhu's regime absorbed. Uncharacteristically, Huang gives only one source for this slim interpretation.

during his reign, though the dynasty also appears as *Huang Ming*, August Ming, and simply Ming.[5]

The one context in which the full title seems to have been mandatory is diplomatic correspondence. Most of Zhu's letters to Mongol leaders begin by tagging his dynasty as Great: "The emperor of the Great Ming notes and inquires …" or "The emperor of the Great Ming notes and instructs…." But something else, quite as noteworthy, surfaces in these letters. That is the language of address Zhu uses for the Mongol khan whose state he had driven north of the Great Wall. Mostly he speaks of him simply as the ruler of the Yuan. In one of his surviving letters, however, Zhu speaks of the khan's regime as Great Yuan (Zhu 1991, 79–84).[6] The significance of this usage is twofold. It recognizes that the Yuan, despite its diminution, had not forfeited its status as Great Yuan in the eyes of a contemporary ruler. It also suggests that the epithet of Great was not merely decorative but understood to be essential to the dignity of the polity. In this second significance is buried the reason why Zhu adopted the dynastic title of Great Ming, and that is that Zhu would rule nothing less than what he had defeated and replaced. The Yuan being Great Yuan, the Ming could be nothing less than Great Ming.

Lineages of the Great State

Where did the name Great Yuan come from, then? Khubilai Khan gave this title to his new dynasty in his enthronement edict on December 18, 1271. By way of explaining his choice, Khubilai reviews dynastic naming practices from the mythical Chinese sage emperors down to the Sui and Tang, deploring the increasing use of titles based on the place where the conqueror arose. This sort of title staked merely a regional claim, not the sort of universal claim he felt entitled to assert over much of Inner and East Asia. Having completed the "great enterprise" of his grandfather, Chinggis Khan, by extending his rule "to all four directions," Khubilai says that he needed a "great name" (*dahao*) equal to his achievements. He explains to his Chinese subjects that the term "Yuan" comes from a phrase in the *Book of Changes*, but leaves the term "Great" unaccounted for (Song 1976, 138–39).[7] The term *da* does appear in the same phrase with *yuan*—"Great [*da*] indeed is the sublimity [*yuan*] of the Creative [*qian*]" (Wilhelm 1967, 370)—but as an exclamation of praise and not as a modifier of yuan.

If the use of Great was formulaic, it is still worth asking where it came from. Khubilai had several precedents. One was his rival to the south, the Song dynasty, which sometimes called itself Great Song. The text of the Song surrender to the Yuan on April 4,

[5]The inaugural legislation for the dynasty, issued on the eighteenth day of the first month (February 6, 1368), was entitled *Da Ming ling* [Great Ming commandment]. A year later, Zhu ordered a set of rites for the dynasty, published the following year under the title *Da Ming jili* [Collected rites of the Great Ming]. On the *Da Ming ling*, see Farmer (1995, 69–73). On the *Da Ming jili*, see Long (1956, 80–84).

[6]Two undated letters to the "the young ruler" (Zhu 1991, 79) survive, one using *Da Yuan* and the other just *Yuan*. The addressee was probably Ayushiridara (Biligtü Khan, r. 1370–78).

[7]The language of the 1271 edict repeats much of the edict Khubilai issued on being named *kaghan* in 1260 (*Da Yuan shengzheng guochao dianzhang* 1976, 1.1a).

1276, for example, phrases this as the surrender of the Great Song State (*Da Song guo*) to the emperor of the Great Yuan (*Da Yuan*). When the state seals and documents were surrendered a month later, however, they were spoken of as belonging to *Song guo*, without *Da*. Similarly, when the deposed emperor was named thereafter, it was as the ruler of *Song guo* and not of *Da Song guo* (Song 1976, 176, 179, 182). The term *"Da Song"* can be found on calendars and in the titles of publications dealing with the history of the dynasty, but it appears not to have enjoyed widespread use outside certain formal contexts.[8] If we go further back in Chinese history, we find such usages as Great Tang;[9] Great Han; and, in oracle bone inscriptions of the second millennium BCE, Great Shang—though this last may name the Shang capital rather than the polity. I leave this earlier genealogy to the specialists and restrict my observations to these: that Great had a long lineage in the practice of Chinese state naming, and that this usage was largely restricted to formal contexts.

The use of Great in *Da Yuan* could be explained accordingly as an inheritance from the Chinese dynastic tradition. But Khubilai had another precedent. This was the Jin dynasty of the Jurchens, a polity that his grandfather, Chinggis Khan, had broken from in 1211 and that his uncle, Ögedei Khan, had destroyed in 1227. It too used *Da*. Its formal title, *Da Jin*, Great Jin, is attested as early as 1115. The Jurchens also used *Da Zhen*, Great Jurchen, from 1215 and probably much earlier (Chan 1991, 255–56). The usage was not a Jurchen innovation, for we can again travel further upstream in Inner Asia and note that the Jurchens followed Tangut usage. The regional Chinese name the Tanguts used to designate their polity was Xia, the fief name given by the Tang to a Tangut warlord in 882. When the Tanguts founded an independent state in 1038, they gave it the Chinese title of *Da Xia*, Great Xia. Its full title was *Bai gao da Xia guo*, Great Xia State of White and High. Its short form was *Da Guo*, Great State (Dunnell 1996, 3–18; Kepping 1994; Wittfogel and Feng 1949, 60). The Tangut polity was preceded in turn by a Khitan polity. Like the Tanguts, the Khitans identified themselves to China by making use of a regional Chinese name, Liao, and like the Tanguts, they added *Da. Da Liao*, Great Liao, is used as early as 938, though the official declaration of this name was not made until 947. The Khitans had another Chinese name attested as early as 936: *Da Qidan*, Great Khitan, or *Da Qidan Guo*, Great Khitan State (Kane 2013; Wittfogel and Feng 1949, 579). Whether other Inner Asian polities using *Da* lie further upstream from the Khitans I have not pursued.[10]

[8]E.g., *Da Song Baoyou sinian huitian li* [Comprehensive almanac for the fourth year of the Baoyou era (1256)], cited in Ruitenbeek (1996, 106); *Da Song Xuanhe yishi* [Remnant tales from the Xuanhe era (1119–1125) of the Great Song]. As this account of court intrigue during the Northern Song does not exist in a pre-Ming edition, its title may have been adorned with *Da Song* after the fact. I thank Peter Bol for providing references to *Da Song guo* in several other Song and Yuan texts.

[9]The use of *Da Tang* in *Da Tang chuangye qijuzhu* [Daily record of the founding of the Great Tang] may signal the importance of the term in that dynasty; on the other hand, it could be a later addition.

[10]*Da* can be found in the Chinese names of several earlier polities, e.g., Dayi (Dahae), Dawan, Dayueshi, and another Daxia, but these appear to transcribe local names rather than connote greatness (see Sima 1973, 3157–64; Watson 1993, 232–36).

We could foreclose this discussion by declaring that the Khitans were simply aping Chinese practice in calling their polity Great Khitan or Great Liao, but there may be more to learn here. In her study of the Khitans, Naomi Standen challenges us not to assume that the Liao existed because the dissolution of the Tang dynasty in 755 had to lead inexorably to another dynasty. Instead, she argues, we put ourselves in an analytically more powerful position by suspending the assumption of continuity. In her analysis, the Khitans were not trying to construct another Chinese dynasty but building their own. Rather than wait around for the next dynasty to appear in the Chinese chain and wonder why the Liao "failed" to conquer the Song, which is the standard narrative, we would do better to attend to what the Khitans said they were actually doing (Standen 2007, 1–7). They formed the Great Liao in the 930s not as a tryst with China's destiny but because Khitan warriors raiding into adjacent polities were successful in incorporating conquered peoples and territories into a military-based regime extending well beyond the territory the Khitans had previously controlled. That is to say, they regarded themselves as creating something that had not existed before, at least within the terms of their own history as a polity. To place them on the conveyor belt of Chinese-style dynastic formations is to miss the particular form of state-building in which they were engaged. For the political outcome of their military expansion they needed a name. Khitan State was not good enough; Great State was needed.

Khubilai Khan would have known of Great Liao, Great Jin, and Great Song, but the overwhelming model of state-building for him was the work of his grandfather, Temüjin. Temüjin had risen through the ranks of the Mongol leadership to seize control of the *Mongqol ulus*, the Mongol state, in 1206, when he had himself proclaimed Chinggis Kaghan, Resolute Great Khan. That year marks the near-completion of his defeat of most Mongol competitors, an ascendancy built on his success in conquering and absorbing other territories and peoples, including Tanguts and Khitans. At the Great Assembly of 1206, Chinggis asserted his rulership over not just the *Mongqol ulus* but another, greater *ulus*, an "*ulus* under the protection of Eternal Heaven." His claim was to rule not just Mongols but all the nomadic "people of the felt-walled tents"—this would include the Tanguts and Khitans—as well as all the sedentary "people of the wooden doors" who had come under his sway (Rachewiltz 2004, 133–35). As the Chinggisid state expanded, the original Mongol *ulus* or homeland became the core *ulus*, and conquered territories were brought into a greater *ulus* and apportioned as *ulus*-appanages to Chinggis's sons and younger brothers. No name for this polity is recorded in a text of the time, nor does it appear retrospectively in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. Igor de Rachewiltz (2006, 55) has argued that we may suppose that the Mongols were using Great State nomenclature as of 1211, when Chinggis revoked his allegiance to the Great Jin. But the title in Mongolian is only first attested in the seal that Güyük Khan imprinted on a letter of 1246 to Pope Innocent IV, which calls him *Yeke Mongqol ulus-un dalay-yin qan*, the Universal Khan of the Great Mongol State.[11]

If we accept that the step from *ulus* to *yeke ulus*, from state to Great State, marks a distinction that mattered to rulers at the time, I must now ask that we abandon all the

[11]The title is also attested by the Turkic *Ulugh Manqul ulus* on a coin minted in Transcaucasia two or three years earlier (Allsen 2001, 18; Ligeti 1972, 20).

translations used thus far in this essay. Great Ming, Great Mongol State, Great Khitan State, Great Jurchen State, Great Song State: all misparse the phrases they translate. Rather than modifying and heightening the dynastic name it precedes, Great is there to distinguish what it modifies from another type of polity, and that is "State." The Mongol scholar Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene has made this argument for the Mongols, proposing that the standard rendering in English, which repeats Mongolian word order, is a misreading. Putting *yeke* between *Mongqol* and *ulus*, he states, "is syntactically impossible in Mongolian, but has to be understood as such," for "it is not that Mongol is great, but that the state is" (Munkh-Erdene 2011, 222). This might seem a minor quibble of translation, but much is contained in switching from Great Mongol State to Mongol Great State. Mongol Great State says more than that the *Mongqol ulus* got bigger or more ambitious; it tags a distinctive polity, differently constituted and based on different sovereignty claims over conquest populations.[12]

The title of the Mongol Great State was not affected by the rise and fall of the Yuan. Even after Khubilai Khan announced the formation of the *Da Yuan*, the Yuan Great State, *Yeke Mongqol ulus* continued to exist as a separate polity (Cleaves 1949, 94–95; 1950, 105; 1952, 82–83; Mostaert and Cleaves 1952, 448). The titles of both Great States may well derive from the usage of their predecessor, the Jin Great State (Rachewiltz 2006, 54), but as I have already suggested, that lineage does not exhaust the question of what Great State came to mean. That the Jin may have followed Song usage for its title does not mean that the Jin and the Song were the same type of political formation; even less does the use of *Da* by both the Song and the Mongol Great State. Several decades ago, Joseph Fletcher (1979–80) argued for the need to distinguish the superpolities of nomadic Inner Asia from the large bureaucracies of East and West Asia by calling the former "grand khanships"—"supra-tribal" formations over a "multi-tribal nomadic people"—and the latter "agrarian bureaucratic empires." He stressed that a grand khan emerged out of conditions very different from those that produced an emperor, but also observed that a grand khan might exploit particular conditions to transition to emperorship. Such a transition was a protracted process involving many steps, its outcome dependent on whether the grand khan was able, or even inclined, to stabilize succession by shifting his base from nomadic to agrarian resources. This insight enabled Fletcher to link nomadic and agrarian polities within a unified continuum of Asian state formation while recognizing their distinctive historical lineages.

The proposal offered here is that Great State was the sign under which both Fletcher's grand khanship and agrarian polity were located. The use of this term did not make them the same type of political formation, yet the convergent history of the term, particularly as it was mobilized by Inner Asian states, transformed expectations of what a large Asian state of any type should consist of and aspire to. It also shaped how Asia came to be introduced to Europe: through the language of "empire."

[12]Kim Hodong (2015, 265) has similarly argued that in the Chinese usage of *da* as a state honorific, *da* modifies *guo* rather than the name of the dynasty. Contrary to Kim, I regard *Da Yuan* not as the Chinese name of the entire Mongol Empire but as the portion of that empire under Khubilai's direct administration, though the evidence either way is not conclusive.

Great State and Empire

The habit of referring to Chinggis's realm as an empire comes to us from the travels of Marco Polo as narrated by the romance writer, Rustichello of Pisa. Given the literary screen that Rustichello inserts between Polo and the reader, it is hazardous to guess what words Polo spoke to his ghostwriter. Common usage in late thirteenth-century Europe distinguished between realms ruled by kings, on the one hand, and empires built by conquest and ruled by emperors, on the other. Rustichello in fact opens his prologue with this very distinction, addressing "emperors and kings" as the first among his prospective readers (Polo 1986, 33). Khubilai was one of the emperors.

When Europeans were next able to travel to China in the sixteenth century, they spoke of the Ming as a kingdom—in Spanish, a *gran Reino* under a *Rei* (Escalante 1577, 28v; also Johnson 1601, 180)—not as an empire. Matteo Ricci did analogize Ming rulers to Roman emperors, translating *huangdi* for his readers as *Imperatore*, but he declined to call the Ming an empire, preferring *regno* (Ricci 1942, 12, 51, 53).[13] The shift in terminology from Chinese Kingdom to Chinese Empire did not occur in European languages until roughly the 1650s. For example, when the Jesuit procurator Álvaro Semedo wrote his account of China in Portuguese in 1638, he gave it the title of *Relação da propagação da fé no regno da China*. When Manuel de Faria y Sousa revised it for publication in Spanish in 1642, he put *Imperio de la China* on the title page, though China appeared in the text as a *reyno* rather than an *imperio*. "Kingdom" was used in the 1655 English translation (Lach and Van Kley 1993, 349), showing that the transition to "empire" was not yet complete. The same ambivalence could be found in Dutch in the same year, 1655, when both terms appeared in two works of a single author, the Jesuit missionary Martino Martini. In Martini's atlas, China was a *konickryck* (kingdom), but in his history of the Manchu conquest, it was *Sinicum imperium*, the Chinese Empire, which was also the term used in the English translation of the same year. By the end of this decade, then, China had become the Chinese Empire.

I make this point only to remind us that such European concepts as empire are entangled in the valence of those concepts in the European past. The application of empire to China may not be unrelated to the Manchu conquest in 1644, but it has something to do as well with shifts in what the term meant in Europe. For example, one could point to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, convened to address the problems that the Holy Roman Empire could not solve unilaterally through military means, which ended up giving de facto independence to many of the states that had been absorbed into that widely disliked empire. Every historical use of the term brings with it the connotations it carried at that time. The same is true today. If no state in the twenty-first century calls itself an empire, it is because of the history of the term as much as, if not more than, the political form it names.

A definition of empire currently in play is that of Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper (2010, 3): "Empires are large political units, expansionist or with a memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people." The core of this definition—large, hierarchical, with an expansionist

[13]Beware Gallagher (1953), who blithely deploys "empire" where the Italian says *regno*.

history—is loose enough to bring every conceivable empire within their compass. This looseness has the advantage of setting up a general category across which all instantiations of empire can be compared, as the authors do with the Roman and Han empires (which they identify as "equivalent but distinct"). My slight concern is that we end up lumping all historical empires together without asking too closely how particular imperial formations appeared in the places and times they did. It is not just that Asian empires may be theoretically distinct from European empires, but that empires everywhere before the modern period have risen and fallen in relation to what came before and after them, not to what might have happened in other cases within the category. This is important because the decisions that rulers of empire make derive heavily from the specific imperial tradition in which they situate themselves, which must have consequences that no general model can adequately specify.

Should the Great State be considered the same as, or a version of, or a departure from, the political formation we call Empire? There is no conclusive answer to this question, as it must always depend on what we are trying to make clear to ourselves. But for argument's sake, let us consider an ideological feature of peculiar importance to the Great State, which pushes against the Burbank-Cooper notion that an empire must "maintain distinction," and that is the idea of unification.

Unification as a Great State Virtue

When Zhu Yuanzhang cloned his new dynasty on the Yuan Great State he had defeated, he had only the haziest notion of what precedents the name of Great State entailed. Zhu's Ming Great State would prove to be more a vestigial than an actual empire of that sort. It was the claim itself that mattered, for from that speech act flowed legitimacy. Key to that claim was the idea of territorial unification through conquest. Elsewhere I have argued that the concept of unification came to the fore as a Chinese political virtue via the Mongols, who could offer no other value to justify their rule to their new Chinese subjects (Brook 2010, 26–29). Of course, unification was not a new idea in China. The Qin state was regularly celebrated for unifying all rival states under its control in 221 BCE, an achievement that every subsequent dynasty would have to recapitulate, in word if not in deed. The histories of later dynasties might mention unification when it happened, but this was not widely enunciated as an independent political or moral imperative. Only with the Mongols, who had no other call on the allegiance of their Chinese subjects, was the concept of unification elevated as the supreme political value. A Mongol ideology of unification can be found first in Khubilai's announcement in 1274 of his decision to take over the Southern Song. That edict speaks of Heaven as having given him the blessing to "rule universally" (*yitong*), that is, to rule everything as if it were one (Tao [1366] 2004, 1.20b). This term gradually came to represent the idea of national unification, which is what it connotes in the title of the national gazetteer of 1291, *Da Yuan da yitong zhi* [Great unification gazetteer of the Yuan Great State].

As a child of the Mongol political imaginary, Zhu Yuanzhang could claim no less. "All under heaven having been unified" (*tianxia yitong*) became the mantra of success he repeated in his communications to his ministers and subjects as well as to foreign rulers

(e.g., Zhu 1991, 9, 21, 33, 45, 160). Unification was ever after tagged as the founder's greatest achievement. His great-great-grandson, Emperor Tianshun (r. 1457–1564), chose this as the theme of his preface to the Ming national gazetteer of 1461, *Da Ming yitong zhi* [Unification gazetteer of the Ming Great State]. Tianshun praises his ancestor for having taken up Heaven's mandate "to merge All under Heaven and bring all within and beyond the seas onto the map." The result was "a fullness of unification" greater than what any previous Chinese dynasty had achieved (Li 1461, Tianshun's preface, 1a–2a). This was not a truth, but a truth claim that had to be made for the sake of reminding Tianshun's subjects of the legitimacy of the regime—something that mattered to this particular emperor, who a dozen years earlier had been held hostage by the Mongols and removed from the imperial succession before returning to power in a palace coup.

The official editor of the national gazetteer, Li Xian, chimed in support, declaring that Zhu Yuanzhang had "unified Chinese and barbarians to the fullest extent," such that "the fullness of unification under the Imperial Ming caps every polity past and present and will last for ten thousand generations." Untrue on every count, of course, but that was the Great State dream of Chinggis Khan lurking in this invented tradition. When Li Xian specifies the actual extent of the realm, his description—"east to the far edge of Liaodong, west to the shifting desert sands, south to the edge of the sea, and north to the steppe, such that none to the extremities of the four directions or the eight wastes does not come to pay court"—suggests less a Mongol-style outward expansion of sovereignty than the process of internal engrossment by which a Chinese dynasty was supposed to recapitulate the original act of state formation under the Qin (Li 1461, preface, 1a–2b). The Ming did attempt external expansion along its southern border in today's Yunnan and Vietnam, but these incursions did not produce significant territorial acquisitions. After the spectacular forays of the imperial household's eunuch agencies into Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to manufacture legitimacy for the Yongle emperor in the early decades of the fifteenth century under Zheng He, the Ming firmly rejected Great State expansionism. No one would dare deny publicly that the Ming emperor ruled over All Under Heaven, but no one wanted him to breach the pale between China and foreign. Thenceforth expansionism was foresworn as inimical to Confucian rule (Qiu 1488, 143.18b–19a). If the Ming was a Great State, it was by inertia and in name only.

The Manchu occupation of China in 1644 changed this orientation fundamentally. The Qing amplified the Chinggisid model of Great State beyond all precedent and continued as well to celebrate itself in relation to the Mongol idea of unification. The invaders arrived with a superpolity already established, having in 1636 jettisoned the Jin Great State of their Jurchen ancestors (briefly revived in 1621) for what they called *Da Qing guo*, Qing Great State. China thereafter was absorbed into the Qing for the next two and two-thirds centuries. While it has been useful for comparative theory to approach the Qing as a Confucian "agrarian empire" (Wong 1997, 79–96), of equal importance for understanding China's inheritance from the Qing was its adaptation of Chinggisid-style rule beyond the bounds of China proper (Brook 2009; Perdue 2005). Internal engrossment was but one part of the Manchu state-building project. As the New Qing History has demonstrated, that project included the extensive incorporation and colonization of Inner Asian polities into a political unity far beyond Ming boundaries (Hostetler

2001; Waley-Cohen 2004). By the end of Emperor Qianlong's military expansion in 1792, the Manchus had filled their Great State out to what are roughly today's boundaries of China without reference to the principles of agrarian state administration.

The Qing would not be the only Great State in East Asia. Vietnam had been early in inaugurating *Đại Việt*, Viet Great State, in 1054, modeling its nomenclature on Chinese usage and creating a name that continued in use, with one brief interruption, through to 1804 (Lieberman 2003, 353). Other polities picked up Great State nomenclature much later. Japan started using *Dai Nihon koku*, Japan Great State, as early as the sixteenth century, though the name was more regularly invoked only once the Tokugawa family had consolidated its hold over the islands in the seventeenth century (Unno 1994, 368; Yonemoto 2003). Japanese nationalists early in the twentieth century retrojected this title three thousand years into the past in order to naturalize Japan's ambition to become an empire (Kokubu 1909), but it was a recent formulation. Korea picked up Great State terminology in 1897 when the Chosŏn dynasty was briefly reorganized under the neologism *Daehan jeguk*, Great Han Empire ("empire" here being a translation via Japanese of the European word). Daehan was not an empire in any sense, but by that time the language was requisite for marking the aspiration to be the equal of the Great States surrounding it. Once Korea had been absorbed into the Japanese Empire, it was given the name *Daehan minguk*, the Republic of Great Han—the title by which Korea is still known today. This is the last trace of Great State nomenclature among East Asian states, all others having shed Great from their names—just as nations everywhere have shed the name of Empire. This history reminds us that Asian states operated within a conceptual framework that sometimes understood the Great State as a form of empire and sometimes did not, and that we must begin from the Asian side as much as from the European to develop a fully reciprocal concept of empire.

Downstream Imperial Polities

An analytical benefit of aligning Great State and empire is in making sense of their historical outcomes. The history of imperialism in Asia has largely been told as the history of the encroachment and colonialism of European empires into Asia. But Asia has its own history of intra-Asian imperialism. Bringing the Great State back in opens up the possibility of addressing intra-Asian imperialism on Asian terms. It also invites a more explicit integration of that imperialism within the comparative history of empire as that study began in Europe, so that the historical experience of Asian Great States might enable both a more critical history of Asia and a better-informed comparative approach to imperial state formation. The concept I wish to introduce to focus this discussion is downstream imperial polity: a nation-state that has inherited the sovereignty of a zone that was once under the jurisdiction of an empire, and whose scale and boundaries derive to a large extent from that earlier imperial formation.[14]

[14]The analysis offered here converges with Owen Lattimore's (1962, 149) idea of "secondary imperialism," a term he coined to highlight the process of Chinese colonization of Mongolian and other Inner Asian territories in the first half of the twentieth century. Lattimore did not quite tag the

Downstream imperial polities are ubiquitous in the twenty-first century, though their national histories tend to avoid this legacy so as to obscure the questions of legitimacy that might otherwise be raised. Mrinalini Sinha has noted the paradox of an empire cross-dressing as a nation-state in its postcolonial avatar. Writing of anticolonial movements in South Asia, she has observed that nationalist intellectuals aspired to "reconstitute the very foundations of existing empires" in a way that "identified their political and ethical horizons with the contours of the larger imperial polity" (Sinha 2015, 823). What mattered was the future to be embraced, not the past to be reckoned with. Nationalist elites engaged in overthrowing imperial elites to found modern nation-states, in China as in many places, pursued the same strategy of claiming political legacy while denying colonial origins.

China and India are not unique in seeking to stage the transformation to nation-state in this way. Much the same is true of every large territorial state today. The other five of the seven largest states—Russia, Canada, the United States, Brazil, and Australia—all assert sovereignty over territory assembled through the work of empire. The largest, the Russian Federation at 17 million square kilometers, presents something of a unique hybrid case of post-imperial formation, having emerged through a complex history that combines the Great State legacy of the Mongol Golden Horde with the Russian Empire that emerged in its wake. Russia's great imperial expansion also coincided, and was to some extent coordinated, with Qing Great State expansion in the eighteenth century, when these two empires jointly carved up and disappeared Zungharia (Perdue 2005). Although Russia lost some of this Great State legacy when the Soviet Union was dissolved, it continues to occupy an enormous territory on the strength of its past as an empire.

The People's Republic of China at 9.5 million square kilometers is similarly the heir of colonial expansion. Its modern national history highlights the country's suffering at the hands of European empires in the nineteenth century and of the Japanese Empire in the twentieth, but its historical upstream is occupied by the Manchu Great State of Qing and the Great States that preceded it. One *ulus*, Outer Mongolia, managed to break free from this formation after the fall of the Qing in 1911, but otherwise the Republic was able to keep the original Great State intact along with its colonial acquisitions. This legacy places a heavy burden on China today. Had the PRC inherited the Ming, for instance, it would not face its present difficulties with the peoples whose territories the Manchus colonized: Mongols, Uighurs, and Tibetans, among others. But it inherited the Qing, and that has dealt Chinese today a very different hand.

Writing in the context of Bosnian history, Edin Hajdarpasic (2015, 2–3) has identified a powerful modern ideological pull that he calls "nation-compulsion": the compulsion to find, assert, and exalt the nation as though it were primal, eternal, and vast. Nationalist education in China is geared to foster this compulsion, which stimulates the desire that one's nation be as large and as powerful as possible, that no region or people within the nation may derogate from that goal, and that that destiny may be enforced by any means necessary. From this compulsion flow the official discourses of terrorism, secessionism, and "splitism" by which the Chinese state seeks to explain its current predicaments. True to the Great State mantra, national unification is the perfect and

Chinese post-imperial state as a legatee empire, though he was firm in judging that "the history of China in Central Asia … is a history of imperialism, of conquest" (171).

Figure 1. Mongol warriors (Staatsbibliothek Berlin 2005, 255).

necessary goal of the state. It is a goal for which the only endgames are the assimilation or the annihilation of "national minorities" into the imagined unitary community of the Chinese nation-state.

China need not be singled out for how it has handled its upstream legacy, for it is not alone in living with the burdens of imperialism. Downstream imperial polities around the world all face these sorts of challenges. How they are responding to them varies enormously from state to state, and those responses will continue to evolve. Rediscovering the Great State may serve to cast some non-ideological light on the extent to which conquest is historically embedded in nation formation in Asia. Aligning the Great State with Empire enables us to reflect on the processes that have eventuated globally in the world map as we happen to draw it today. Recall that Emperor Tianshun praised the Ming founder for having responded to Heaven's mandate "to bring all within and beyond the seas onto the map," which his loyal servant Li Xian assured him "will last for ten thousand generations." That map—like all maps—has not managed to enjoy quite the longevity that Li predicted. It has been redrawn many times since, and will be redrawn many times more, for we are not yet at the end of history.

The Imperialism of History

This essay began as a keynote address at the 2016 annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. It came with one illustration, which is repeated here (see figure 1). The

illustration shows a panel from the Diez albums in the Berlin State Library. These albums are compilations of drawings and paintings that the Orientalist scholar Heinrich Friedrich von Diez collected about 1789 while serving as Prussian ambassador to Constantinople. This particular painting has been taken out of a Persian copy of the *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* [Compendium of chronicles], a historical survey produced in the 1310s under the supervision of Rashid al-Din Hamadani (1247–1318). Rashid al-Din was a Jewish physician who converted to Islam and served as vizier to Öljaitu of the Mongol Il-Khanate early in the fourteenth century. The Il-Khanate was one of the polities that emerged from the Mongol Great State in the years after Chinggis Khan's death. The painting depicts Mongol warriors on horseback shooting soldiers and noncombatants as they flee on horseback. As the painting has been removed from its original context, we cannot tell which battle it is meant to illustrate (Roxburgh 1995). That doesn't matter for recognizing the purpose for which the painting was made: to give the Il-Khanid elite the pleasure of recalling the glory days of their Great State and gloating at the destruction of those fleeing out the left-hand side of the frame. The irony is that the same fate would befall them only two decades later, when more powerful regional contenders eradicated this remnant of the Mongol Great State system and imposed a new regime.

The Peace of Westphalia in 1648, often associated with the ushering in of the nation-state in Europe, warned of the "prejudicial acts" that empires could commit against lesser states. That was the particular prejudice of the men who framed what they hoped would be a "universal peace," but their caution is still widely shared today. Retrieving the Great State for our conceptual vocabulary might help to open up the history of intra-Asian imperialism in a way that brings into view what small polities have suffered at the hands of large, as well as the burdens large states bear as downstream imperial polities. Someone somewhere is always fleeing from "prejudicial acts." By addressing the global legacy of empire as both European *and* Asian, we can begin to attend to versions of the past that the victims of empire, whether upstream or down, keep alive. Failing to do so, we historians are fated to find ourselves colluding in the imperialism of history.

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