



Chapter Two  
Xinjiang and the  
Expansion of the Empire  
in the Eighteenth Century

By the second half of the eighteenth century, the Qing dynasty was in transition from its early greatness to the decline accentuated by the Opium War disaster of 1842. With the consolidation of Manchu control over the empire following the suppression of the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories in 1681 and the incorporation of Taiwan in 1683, the long reigns of the emperors Kangxi (1662–1722), Yongzheng (1723–1735), and Qianlong (1736–1796) provided an era of continuity and stability. The population recovered from the devastation wrought by the civil wars, natural disasters, and epidemics of the seventeenth century to surpass three hundred million by 1800. The annexation of Xinjiang in 1759 extended the empire deep into Central Asia and marked the apogee of Qing power. Yet the Qing sun was already beginning to set. Under the Qianlong Emperor, a series of crippling expensive border campaigns (including those in Xinjiang) and domestic rebellions undermined the fiscal stability achieved by his predecessor's economic reforms. The population explosion brought in its wake a vastly increased demand for resources, the availability of which did not expand proportionately. This led to a high rate of internal migration and to an increase in the incidence of criminal activity. By the end of the eighteenth century, a general malaise was taking hold of Chinese society.<sup>1</sup>

In the upper echelons of society, the traditional routes to power were

1. For a recent overview of this period, see Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 90–116.

narrowing. Neither the quotas for the academic degrees that led to official appointment nor the size of the imperial bureaucracy expanded to take account of demographic growth, in part because it seemed impossible to raise sufficient extra revenue to pay for more government employees. Thus the relative potential for upward social mobility diminished just as competition for official position intensified. Many degree-holders spent years awaiting a government appointment.

The difficulty of obtaining an official position by legitimate means fostered a system of patronage that, in turn, led to a growth in factionalism. The effects of this development were to render a successful public life increasingly elusive, as the various power groups vied for dominance, and to create an atmosphere of continual tension in Qing political life. Another result, which was related to a commercializing trend in society at large, was the new importance of gift giving among officials and bureaucratic aspirants.<sup>2</sup>

The most notorious—and most successful—exponent of the new political way of life was the former imperial bodyguard Heshen (1750–1799), for more than twenty years the favorite of the Qianlong Emperor. Heshen became the emperor's most trusted adviser and took gross advantage of his position to enrich himself and his associates. Heshen's supporters were dispersed throughout officialdom both in the capital and in the provinces, and during his lifetime effectively resisted all attempts to expose or reform their practices. The origins of the decline of the Qing state are often traced to the endemic corruption that took hold during the Heshen period (1775–1799), although it may be more accurate to say that the Heshen clique elaborated an existing trend rather than initiating a new direction.

Many dark rumors circulated concerning the reason for Qianlong's apparent willingness to tolerate Heshen's activities. Yet it seems probable that the emperor hoped to bolster his own authority by keeping his bureaucracy split into highly antagonistic factions, despite the fact that it was official policy to oppose any resurgence of the factionalism generally blamed for the demise of the Ming.

Heshen's opponents, a group committed to radical revitalization of the government, enjoyed the support of such key figures as the senior Grand Councillor Agui (1717–1797) and the fraternal scholars Zhu Gui (1731–1807) and Zhu Yun (1729–1781), but they proved unable to dis-

2. See Mann Jones and Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion," 113–116.

lodge the favorite as long as the Qianlong Emperor lived. Yet following his death in 1799, Heshen's removal from power was one of the first independent acts of Qianlong's successor, the Jiaqing Emperor (1796–1820). The new emperor introduced measures to curb corruption and reform the bureaucracy but chose to avoid the massive disruption to the mechanism of government that a wholesale purge of Heshen's supporters would have caused. This policy also denied Heshen's opposition the moral triumph and vindication that such a purge would have brought. Instead, the court's restrained actions were intended to encourage the Heshen clique to reform themselves after their leader had fallen. Yet in part as a result of this decision, the wavering of bureaucratic integrity, sensed by many contemporaries as auguring a general dynastic decline, was merely checked rather than halted as the nineteenth century began.<sup>3</sup>

One result of the volatility of late eighteenth-century public life was a change in the causes underlying political success or failure. Scholars and officials were now more likely to lose favor as the result of power struggles at court than as the result of opposition to the dynasty itself. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Manchu consciousness of the tenuous nature of the Qing dynasty's claim to legitimacy had meant that sedition and armed resistance were among the most serious crimes. Ring-leaders of these movements were generally executed, and their families and cohorts exiled. But perceptions of political opposition had evolved since the early years of dynastic consolidation; the attitudes of both rulers and ruled had changed. The fierce attachment to native Ming rule and hostility to the Manchu invaders that had marked the earlier period had become muted and, at the same time, the ensuing long period of relative peace and stability had reduced Qing sensitivities concerning perceived slurs against the dynasty and its alien origins. In addition, by the end of the eighteenth century, the geographic and demographic expansion of the empire had diluted the imperial capacity for direct personal control of public affairs, and this in turn had tended to alter the notion of what constituted a political threat.

Yet at the lower levels of society, outbreaks of opposition to Qing authority continued through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. Across the empire Muslim minorities and indigenous folk Buddhist sects were stirring with dissatisfaction. Sometimes these groups were peaceful, albeit implicitly threatening to the Confucian-oriented

3. Mann Jones and Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion," 108. See also Yao, "Jiu Wen Sui Bi," 2, 3a.

state orthodoxy, but on several occasions, beginning in the 1770s, their activities erupted into rebellions tinged with millenarian and antidynastic overtones. The resulting campaigns of suppression were sometimes so harsh that they provoked further resistance, creating unsettling cycles that produced considerable instability among the population at large. This state of affairs was exacerbated by the well-organized piracy that plagued inland rivers and coastal waters, disrupting law and order and interfering with the flow of state revenues from the rich southern provinces to the capital.

The unprecedented population growth that was in part responsible for these developments also gave rise to a more general restlessness in Chinese society. Geographic mobility increased sharply because of the acute pressure on the land. Impoverished segments of the rural population began to abandon their native villages in favor of the underpopulated territories on the imperial peripheries. Such movements were given impetus by the introduction of New World crops such as maize and sweet potatoes that could grow in marginal land. Other migrants found work in the cities, where the rapidly commercializing economy offered a broad range of new opportunities.

One result of land reclamation and urban construction was severe deforestation that led to a dire increase in the silting-up of rivers. This situation both obstructed important transportation networks and caused floods that often brought devastating famine in their wake, prompting many to flee their homes in search of food.

Frontier expansion during the eighteenth century resulted not only from spontaneous migration but also from the conscious efforts of the Qing government to encourage and in some cases to compel migration with a view to relieving the effects of demographic pressure in the heartland. From the government's point of view, the urgent practical necessity of increasing the food supply for the burgeoning population was enhanced by its particularly powerful need as an alien dynasty to win and keep popular support. Conspicuous concern for public welfare, manifested in part by territorial expansion, was also critical to the Qianlong Emperor's ambition to surpass the achievements of the most glorious rulers of Chinese history.<sup>4</sup>

4. On the conscious efforts of the Qianlong Emperor to emulate his Han and Tang predecessors, see Kahn, *Monarchy in the Emperor's Eyes*, esp. 127. On the connections between political legitimacy and economic expansion in classical Chinese thought, see chapter 3.

The steady settlement of the frontiers altered the empire in several ways. It both extended imperial control and, at the same time, created commercial and other unofficial networks that strengthened links between the interior and the periphery. An increasing number of ethnic minorities came under Qing sway, and the empire became truly heterogeneous in composition.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, under the Qing the demarcation of China proper (*neidi*), long an important aspect of Chinese self-definition, became extremely fluid.<sup>6</sup> The boundaries initially corresponded roughly to those of the eighteen provinces of the Chinese heartland, where settled agriculture was the norm. However, as demographic pressure forced the steady spread of this traditional form of livelihood in all directions, the old definitions began to lose their significance. To the north, the Great Wall represented at least an emotional boundary between China proper and the frontier zone, but it did not always run precisely along provincial boundaries. Gansu province, for example, extends well beyond the western extremity of the Wall at Jiayuguan. Certain regions located beyond the Great Wall, for example Liaodong in southern Manchuria, belonged to an intermediate zone between the heartland and the frontier. The sense of shifting boundaries undoubtedly resulted from the complex new dimensions that traditional notions of heartland and frontiers assumed under the alien Qing.<sup>7</sup>

The Qing followed ancient tradition in exiling offenders to various imperial frontiers. Thus no understanding of banishment under the Qing is possible without reference to some of the principal aspects of general Qing frontier policy in the eighteenth century.

#### SICHUAN

One of the best-known migrations of the early Qing is the movement into the once prosperous western province of Sichuan. When the Qing came to power, Sichuan's population had been greatly reduced, leaving substantial tracts of land available for resettlement. This attracted large-scale migration, encouraged by government offers of tax exemptions and

5. See Naquin and Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 130–133.

6. For a discussion of the traditional Chinese conception of the world, see chapter 3.

7. On the Great Wall as frontier, see, generally, Waldron, "The Great Wall Myth."

material aid, and from 1667 to 1707 more than 1.5 million people moved there, mainly from Hunan, Hubei, and Shaanxi provinces. The goal of colonization led the Qing to discourage single males from migrating to Sichuan.<sup>8</sup>

The province suffered from considerable unrest between unruly settlers and the native tribes on whose lands they began to encroach.<sup>9</sup> In addition, attempts to bring aboriginal territory in western Sichuan under central authority during the eighteenth century were met with open rebellion in 1742 and 1771. These uprisings were suppressed only with considerable difficulty. Following the second rebellion, aborigines who submitted to Qing authority were settled on military agricultural colonies (*tun*) both as a means of incorporating their territory into the regular administrative framework and in the hope of securing native loyalty.<sup>10</sup> A similar policy was applied to the Miao tribes in the central China province of Hunan following suppression of their uprising in the late eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

#### SOUTHWEST CHINA

The Rebellion of the Three Feudatories (1673–1681) in the southwestern provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou had generated profound imperial distrust of the entire region. In the early part of the dynasty, much of the southwest was inhabited by a complex mixture of largely self-governing ethnic minorities with hereditary chieftains over whom the central government did not exercise firm control. The Qing's general desire to consolidate imperial authority in the southwest was strengthened by the availability of land ripe both for cultivation and for the extraction of rich mineral deposits that offered a solution to the monetary crisis threatened by the sharp decline in Japanese copper exports after 1715.

The government's colonization policy in the southwest consisted of two interconnected strategies: the acculturation of the indigenous population and the promotion of intensive migration from the crowded Chinese heartland. Thus in the Yongzheng reign the government initiated

8. Entenmann, "Migration and Settlement in Sichuan," 122.

9. *Ibid.*, 107, 122–124.

10. Shepherd, "Plains Aborigines and Chinese Settlers on the Taiwan Frontier in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," 345.

11. See Mann Jones and Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion," 133.

ing to the desire for exclusivity on the northeast frontier was the hope of preserving lucrative government monopolies in ginseng, pearls, and furs—precisely the lures that attracted illicit settlement.

The administration of the Three Eastern Provinces (*Dong San Sheng*) of Manchuria—Liaodong, the true Manchu homeland, and Jilin and Heilongjiang farther to the north—was unique to that region. Yet much of the Qing experience on the Manchurian frontier, for instance varying the form of administration in different zones, later influenced the approach adopted in Xinjiang and the specifics are thus relevant to this study.

Theoretically, overall control of each of the northeastern provinces was in the hands of a military governor, usually a Manchu or, occasionally, a Mongol. In the two northern provinces, where proximity to the Russian frontier made military affairs a priority, these governors exercised supreme civil and military jurisdiction. In Liaodong the situation was more complicated, for the Qing maintained a secondary capital at Shengjing (modern Shenyang), and civil administration operated through Boards of Revenue, Rites, Punishments, War, and Works that paralleled those at Beijing. By no later than 1727 local government in Liaodong was structured into departments (*zhou*) and counties (*xian*) on the model of local administration in the interior.

The division of authority in the northeast proved a fertile breeding ground for jurisdictional disputes, and this in turn facilitated the growth of corruption in government. At the same time, continued dependence on the central government for financial subsidies served to inhibit the power of senior frontier officials and to erode their autonomy.<sup>22</sup>

For much of the early and middle Qing, official policy aimed at preventing Han Chinese colonization in the far northeast. Nevertheless, immigration restrictions had little significant impact on the long-standing Han Chinese infiltration of Liaodong, and even in Jilin and Heilongjiang further to the north, Han inroads, although gradual, were steady. The difficulty of enforcing restrictions in the face of the shortage of land in north China was compounded by the tendency of local authorities in Manchuria to turn a blind eye to the flow of settlers. This disregard was mainly due to officials' correctly perceiving that Chinese settlers were a promising source of additional revenue because they were far more adept than the native inhabitants at exploiting the untapped agricultural potential of the northeast.<sup>23</sup>

22. Lee, *Manchurian Frontier*, 59–77.

23. Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 40.

Further undermining the anti-immigration policy in the northeast was the introduction of tens of thousands of exiles, both political offenders and common criminals, some of whom were accompanied by their wives and families. They and their descendants soon came to constitute a significant proportion of the Han Chinese population in the northeast; an early eighteenth-century scholar living in exile in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang, commented that exiles outnumbered the troops stationed there by the government.<sup>24</sup> The lives and experiences of some of these exiles are discussed in chapter 4.

## XINJIANG

With the annexation of Xinjiang in the mid-eighteenth century, "the dimensions of the Middle Kingdom's effective sovereignty were greater than at any [other] time in her history."<sup>25</sup> The vast Central Asian lands conquered by the Qing armies were geographically, ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse.<sup>26</sup> They extended from Gansu province west to the Tarim Basin and to the borders of Afghanistan and Kashmir, north to Mongolia and the fringes of the Russian empire, and south to the frontier with Tibet. Edged by the Pamir, Kunlun, and Altai mountain ranges to the west, south, and north, respectively, they were bisected into distinct regions by a fourth range, the Tianshan.

The Qing designated the two regions of Xinjiang thus created the northern and southern circuits of the Tianshan (*Tianshan Beilu, Nanlu*). The northern circuit consisted of primarily pastoral Zungharia, with its principal centers in the fertile Ili valley and in the Ürümqi area; the southern circuit comprised both Uighuristan, essentially the princely states of Hami and Turfan located relatively near China proper, and Altishahr, including the formidable Taklamakan desert, in the heart of Central Asia. In Altishahr the principal centers of agriculture and of trade—with China proper and with their neighbors to the west—were the oases of Kashgar, Aksu, Ush, and Yarkand.

The climate and topography of Xinjiang sharply differentiated it from China proper. The summer heat was as fierce as the winters were bitterly

24. Liu, "Qingdai Dong San Sheng Yimin Yu Kaiku," 68, citing Fang Shiqi, "Longsha Jilüe."

25. Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 35.

26. See Borei, "Images of the Northwest Frontier."

cold, and the low level of precipitation did not support intensive cultivation. The ice and snow from the mountains provided the main source of irrigation, and for the oasis agriculture of southern Xinjiang this runoff was the sole source. In the north, however, the runoff flowed into the Ili and other rivers, providing scope for irrigating the vast tracts of pastoral land that the Qing sought to convert to settled agriculture.<sup>27</sup>

To most Chinese, the native population of Xinjiang was as unfamiliar as the land. At the time of the Qing conquest, this population consisted of a number of different ethnic groups. Some, such as the Ölöds, were of Mongol origin. They were generally organized along the lines of the tribes in Mongolia; many belonged to the Tibetan lamaist branch of Buddhism. Others, such as the oasis-dwelling Uighurs and the nomadic Kazakhs and Kirghiz, were Turkic rather than Chinese in origin and adhered to Islam. These Turkic groups had more in common with their Western Asian neighbors than with the Chinese, whose language and culture were alien to them, and who in some instances treated them as foreign tributaries subject to the authority of the Court of Colonial Affairs (*Lifan Yuan*).<sup>28</sup>

The vast area that the Qing designated Xinjiang was thus far from uniform; the diverse forms of administration that the Qing established to govern their new territories acknowledged the area's complexities. Overall Xinjiang was under the control of a military governor stationed at the newly built city of Huiyuan in the Ili area and responsible for both the civilian and military sectors. He was assisted by lieutenant governors (*dutong*) and councillors (*canzan dachen*) stationed in the major cities and administrative centers. Garrison troops reinforced his authority throughout the region. By the 1770s, with the influx of settlers from China proper, Ürümqi and other centers to the east of northern Xinjiang were brought under a local administration modeled on that of China proper, with departments and counties. This region thereby became an administratively transitional area between the interior and the frontier.<sup>29</sup>

In the south, in Uighuristan, the hereditary princes of Hami and Turfan—members of the Qing nobility like the Mongol banner princes—were technically subject to the authority of the Ürümqi lieutenant governor but in practice ruled with a fair degree of autonomy. In Altishahr the Qing replaced the hereditary elite, long the leaders of revolts

27. Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, 152–153.

28. See Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 62–64.

29. Lin, "Qingdai Xinjiang Zhouxian Zhidu zhi Yanjiu," 29–39.

against Qing authority, with indigenous local officials, known as begs (*bo ke*). These were appointed and removed at the pleasure of the central government in Beijing, where they fell under the jurisdiction of the Court of Colonial Affairs. Their corruption and oppression of the people they governed became legendary. Throughout the south, a strong Islamic religious establishment retained some political power and, particularly in Altishahr, considerable local influence.<sup>30</sup>

Consistent with Qing policy on other frontiers, Han Chinese were excluded from all senior positions in Xinjiang. However, with the sinicization of the local administration in eastern Xinjiang, the Qing found it advisable to appoint a few Chinese to low-level posts such as magistracies in that region, since these positions involved a certain amount of contact with ordinary people, including immigrants from China proper.<sup>31</sup>

Even before the military conquest of Xinjiang was completed, the Qing introduced colonists in order to gain control over these strategically located regions that had been subject to Chinese authority intermittently during the preceding two millennia. Through colonization, they sought to achieve a number of interrelated goals. The first was to make Xinjiang self-sufficient to prevent it from becoming a burden on the already overtaxed Chinese heartland.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, with its rich natural resources and still untapped expanses of arable land, Xinjiang seemed to offer the Qing a means of addressing some of the problems caused by demographic pressures within China proper. The Qing government's second goal was to subjugate the native peoples of the Central Asian periphery to maintain the region as a buffer zone. The Qing were particularly concerned about the expansionist tendencies of the Russians and Kazakhs on the northern steppes and the various Central Asian states such as Kokand to the west. The third goal of the colonization policy was to establish a Han Chinese presence in the newly annexed territories to counterbalance the multiethnic indigenous population, denying ascendancy to any single group and thereby permitting the Qing to rule them all.<sup>33</sup>

For the first seven decades following the annexation of Xinjiang in

30. See Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 73–74.

31. The only other Han Chinese employed in the frontier administration were banished officials. The Qing took advantage of their experience both to keep the exiles beneficially occupied and to save money; see chapter 7.

32. The need for self-sufficiency in Xinjiang was recognized from the outset. See, e.g., ZPZZ QL 24/8/4 (agriculture—opening new lands, packet 31), memorial of Fan Shishou.

33. Chu, *The Moslem Rebellion in Northwest China*, 4.

1758–59, the Qing concentrated their settlement efforts in the area north of the Tianshan because of the abundance of arable land and, thanks to the predominance of nomadism and the devastation wrought by the long Qing campaigns, the relative shortage of a sedentary native population.<sup>34</sup> The main centers of settlement were at Ili, Ürümqi, and Balikun (Barkul). In southern Xinjiang, the Qing severely restricted contact between the native population and Han Chinese and, sensitive to their unpopularity as conquerors, also limited their military occupation of the region. Until the 1830s they discouraged Chinese settlers, particularly in the distant and heavily Muslim region of Altishahr. They especially feared the consequences of economic infiltration, for this was already giving rise to resentment in Mongolia and Manchuria.<sup>35</sup>

The Qing government undertook a wide range of projects to develop the new frontier and realize the important goal of self-sufficiency, particularly in northern Xinjiang. The construction of the new city of Huiyuan, intended to serve as the administrative capital of the entire region, formed a part of this general pattern and, together with the construction of a number of other cities, contributed greatly to altering the nomadic character of the indigenous peoples of northern Xinjiang. The Qing further encouraged the traditional sedentary life-style of the Chinese by initiating large-scale land reclamation projects and creating widespread irrigation networks. To support their various projects, the Qing developed mines, extracting gold and copper as sources of revenue and iron and lead for farming implements and bullets. In several places they operated smelting yards at the pitheads. They built a boatyard that produced a small fleet of boats to transport grain and other commodities on the Ili River.

As on other imperial frontiers, the Qing both encouraged and compelled controlled immigration from China proper into northern Xinjiang to implement their settlement schemes, as well as transferring Muslims from the oases of the south.<sup>36</sup> The colonists who came to northern Xinjiang from China proper consisted of five main groups: soldiers, mer-

34. Zeng, *Zhongguo Jingying Xiyu Shi*, 279. At least hundreds of thousands of Zunghars died in the Qing campaigns. See Borei, "Economic Implications of Empire-Building," 16, n. 28.

35. On the beginnings of government-sanctioned civilian immigration into Altishahr in the 1830s, see Fletcher, "The Heyday of the Ch'ing Order in Mongolia, Sinkiang and Tibet," 374.

36. On the transfer of Muslims to agricultural colonies (*huitun*) at Ili, where they constituted an important source of support for the garrison troops, see Wu, "Qing Qianlong Nianjian Ili Tuntian Shulüe," 93.

chants, civilian immigrants, troublemakers moved to Xinjiang by the government, and exiles.

The varied composition of the garrison forces enriched the already complex ethnic mixture of the region. In Xinjiang were Manchu and Mongol banner troops transferred from China proper; Ölöds from Rehe and Chahars from Mongolia; Chinese Green Standard soldiers and tribesmen, such as the Sibos, Solons, and Daghurs transferred from the northeast.<sup>37</sup>

Initially the Green Standard forces were seconded from Shaanxi and Gansu for tours of duty lasting three (later five) years to serve on newly established military agricultural colonies (*bingtun*), whose primary purpose was to supply food for the army of occupation. However, the limited duration of their terms of service in Xinjiang proved both inefficient from the point of view of defense and agriculture and expensive because of the high cost of constant transfers from China proper. After 1762 Green Standard soldiers were encouraged to settle permanently with their families in colonies throughout northern Xinjiang. After 1802 the government also established agricultural colonies for the banner and tribal forces (*qitun*) to supplement the inadequate food production of the *bingtun*.<sup>38</sup>

On the *bingtun* the government allocated each family about three acres (twenty *mu*) of land, issued seed, livestock, and farm implements to them, and assisted in arranging for the construction of accommodations.<sup>39</sup> The families paid the government an annual tax of 12 to 18 *sheng* (approximately 80 to 120 kilograms) of grain per mu, depending on the quality of the land. The children of these soldiers were allotted additional land upon reaching adulthood and were registered as civilian settlers.<sup>40</sup> On the *qitun* the land allotment was four to six acres (thirty to forty *mu*) and no land tax was payable.<sup>41</sup> In southern Xinjiang, there were few government farms other than at the garrison at Hami. In Altishahr some six thousand banner and Green Standard troops served on rotating tours of duty, unaccompanied by their families in order to

37. Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 59–60; Zeng, *Zhongguo Jingying Xiyu Shi*, 266–267.

38. Wang, "Qingdai Shibian Xinjiang Shulüe," 67. Cf. Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 65, which states that the tribal soldiers were in the *bingtun* system, not the *qitun* system.

39. HDSL (1899) 178, 13a–b. See also, e.g., *Qinding Huangyu Xiyu Tuzhi* 34, 5b–6a.

40. Xu, "Qingdai Qianqi Xinjiang Dichu de Mintun," 86.

41. Borei, "Economic Implications," citing Luo, *Qing Gaozong Tongzhi Xinjiang Zhengce de Tanta*, 215.

deter permanent settlement. Food supplies for the army in the south were produced by native farmers who leased land from the government.<sup>42</sup>

The second group of settlers consisted of merchants from China proper who found the Xinjiang market so profitable that they were reluctant to return home. Some merchants settled their families in northern Xinjiang, where they were allocated four and a half acres (thirty mu) of land in much the same way as other civilian immigrants.<sup>43</sup> From China they brought such goods as silk and tea. Xinjiang yielded such commodities as jade and cattle. Their prosperity was further enhanced by Qing taxation policies that discriminated in their favor and against indigenous Xinjiang merchants and by the considerable scope for illegal trading in restricted goods. Government officials throughout Xinjiang also occasionally indulged in illegal trading, as illustrated by a major scandal of the 1770s involving jade smuggling between Xinjiang and the lower Yangzi region of China proper.<sup>44</sup> Merchant settlers were liable for repatriation to the heartland if they committed any serious infringement of the law while in Xinjiang.<sup>45</sup>

The third, and most substantial, group of immigrants to northern Xinjiang consisted of civilians who migrated from China proper. These included both Han Chinese from Gansu and Shaanxi provinces and Chinese Muslims, who were well placed to bridge the cultural gulf between the Chinese and the indigenous peoples of Xinjiang.<sup>46</sup> The government encouraged these settlers to migrate, initially even providing subsidies to those who could not afford traveling expenses, and, as on other frontiers such as Sichuan and the southwest, offering incentives in the form of land (four and a half acres or thirty mu per family), loans for seed, livestock, and housing, and temporary tax exemptions during periods of reclamation. The relatively low cost of living on the frontier provided a further inducement to immigration.<sup>47</sup>

42. Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 76.

43. Wang, "Qingdai Shibian Xinjiang Shulüe," 67; Ji, "Wulumuqi Zashi," 9b, 12b.

44. On trade, see Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 81-83; on the jade scandal, see *Shiliao Xunkan*, nos. 19-29; McElderry, "Frontier Commerce: An Incident of Smuggling."

45. *DLCY* 45-34. References to this work are to numbered laws (*lü* and *li*) and not to chapters (*juan*).

46. Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 66-68.

47. For a comment on cheap grain prices at Ürümqi in 1770, see Ji, "Wulumuqi Zashi," 16a. In 1794 in Shuntian prefecture (the capital area), maize cost between 1.4 and 2.1 taels per *shi*, 0.6 to 1.3 taels more than at Ürümqi. (The imperial *shi* was equal to between 175 and 195 pounds; see Ch'üan and Kraus, *Mid-Ch'ing Rice Markets and Trade*, 84, 92-98).

The Qing established civilian colonies (*mintun* or *hutun*) throughout northern Xinjiang, attracting at least two hundred thousand colonists by the end of the eighteenth century. These settlers brought to Xinjiang not only farming techniques from China proper but also a variety of crafts and skills that contributed to Qing sinicization efforts. As the second generation of civilian (and presumably merchant) settlers reached adulthood, they were allocated additional land to farm; as in the case of soldier-colonists, civilian families were not expected to divide the original grants of land into ever-decreasing shares.<sup>48</sup>

A fourth category of colonists consisted of trouble-makers (*weifei*) compulsorily transferred from the Chinese heartland for resettlement (*ancha*) in Xinjiang. Such, for instance, was the fate of twenty-three households of the Wu clan of Hubei between 1763 and 1765. Members of this clan had long been ensconced in the Majiling area of Wuchang, where they were known as local troublemakers. The government resettled them in three different locations in Xinjiang and gave them the same resources allocated to ordinary civilian settlers. However, their first few years in their new homes were regarded as probationary, and they were sometimes referred to as criminals (*fan*).<sup>49</sup>

Another such group consisted of almost one thousand people, many of whom were migrants from other parts of China, relocated from Yunnan to Xinjiang in 1775-76. They had worked in the silver mines in Vietnam but were repatriated following a series of disturbances that did nothing to alleviate the shakiness of Sino-Vietnamese relations.<sup>50</sup> These

Wheat cost 1.5 to 2.7 taels per *shi* in Shuntian prefecture, 0.05 to 1.7 taels more than at Ürümqi. Sorghum varied more—in Shuntian prefecture it cost from 0.08 to 1.8 taels per *shi*; at Ürümqi it might cost the same or it might be twice as expensive. Peas (*wandou*), though not grown in Shuntian, cost from 0.9 to 1.3 taels in Gansu province, 0.2 to 0.6 taels more than at Ürümqi. *Qingke* barley (a type grown in west and northwest China and in Xinjiang but not in Beijing) cost from 0.76 to 1.8 taels in Sichuan province, 0.2 to 1.3 taels more than at Ürümqi. *SYD* (B) 59/118, 81-82.

48. Wang, "Qingdai Shibian Xinjiang Shulüe," 64-65, citing *SZJL* and *Xinjiang Tuzhi*; see also 67.

49. *ZPZZ QL* 32/4/11 (agriculture—opening new lands, packet 32) memorial of Wudashan. For some other examples of the compulsory resettlement in Xinjiang of "bad elements" from the heartland, see Wang, "Qingdai Shibian Xinjiang Shulüe," 68. On groups of soldiers sent to Xinjiang with semi-criminal status, see Waley-Cohen, "The Stranger Paths of Banishment," 84-85.

50. "Annai Tuohui Changtu An," *Shiliao Xunkan* 21, *tian* 740a-744b. Another approximately eight hundred were resettled in Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang, and Henan or sent home.

troublemakers were escorted in groups across China. Some died en route and others escaped; like convicts, those who escaped were subject to execution upon recapture.<sup>51</sup> Those who arrived in Xinjiang were resettled in widely separated colonies.<sup>52</sup>

The fifth source of immigrants to Xinjiang was the exile population, the vast majority of whom were convicts sent to northern Xinjiang to serve under the soldiers either on the military agricultural colonies or on separate colonies established specifically for them (*fantun* or *qiantun*).<sup>53</sup> The emperor first approved the banishment to Xinjiang of a group of more than 100 criminals in 1758, as soon as the government had gained sufficient control over Xinjiang to turn its attention to large-scale settlement there. In the 1760s the annual flow of convicts to Xinjiang was never less than six or seven hundred and in some years it surpassed one thousand.<sup>54</sup> The numbers Xinjiang had to absorb thus mounted rapidly: by the end of the decade an unofficial observer (castigated by some later scholars for his reckless inaccuracy) referred to several thousand convicts in the Ürümqi area and more than two thousand in the Ili area and claimed that in some locations exiles outnumbered civilian settlers, as they did in Manchuria.<sup>55</sup> In 1775 there were more than seventeen hundred convicts at Ili (possibly excluding convict slaves) and another thousand at Ürümqi;<sup>56</sup> in 1783 government sources recorded more than three thousand convicts in Ili.<sup>57</sup> Five years later, the military governor in Ili made the possibly inflated assertion that the convict population exceeded six thousand in Ili alone.<sup>58</sup> In 1790 officials reported almost two

51. QSL QL 1010, 9b-10b, 41/6/6.

52. ZPZZ QL 40/10/29, (agriculture—opening new lands, packet 34) memorial of Suonuomuceling. Their families were later sent to join them. QSL QL 1010, 8b-9b, 41/6/6.

53. On these colonies, see also chapter 8.

54. QSL QL 782, 32/4/12; XKTB QL 27/11/24, packet 285, memorial of Changjun; XKTB QL 31/4/25, packet 286, memorial of Shuhede.

55. Qi, *Xiyu Ji*, 1, 6a, 8a; see also Qi, *Xichui Yaoliue*, preface.

56. Qi, *Xi Yu Wen Jian Lu*, 1, cited by Qi, "Qingdai Xinjiang Qianfan Yanjiu," 86. Cf. *Qinding Huangyu Xiyu Tuzhi* 32, and Wu, "Qing Qianlong Nianjian Ili Tuntian Shuliue," 96, which give a much lower figure, presumably because the authors are concerned only with convicts engaged in farming.

57. QSL QL 1195, 14b-15a, 48/12/25.

58. This figure may be exaggerated because it was offered to justify a claim to be unable to recall the precise details of a particular case. SYD (T) QL 53/2/9, 153. Cf. Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 65, which gives the maximum number of criminal exiles in northern Xinjiang as two thousand.

thousand convict slaves at Ili and Ürümqi combined; this figure did not include convicts not subject to enslavement.<sup>59</sup> Convicts formed a small but not insignificant minority in Xinjiang; excluding their families and emancipists, they constituted at most 5 percent of the immigrant population.

Criminal exiles were eventually emancipated but were not allowed to leave Xinjiang. They and their descendants formed part of the permanent population of northern Xinjiang, and by the early twentieth century they were one of the principal groups of Han Chinese in the region.<sup>60</sup>

The use of criminal exiles to colonize Xinjiang declined in the nineteenth century, for the influx of civilian immigrants had been so large that the Han Chinese population was deemed sufficient. After 1799 convicts were no longer used expressly for this purpose, although the banishment of certain types of common criminals to the region continued to the end of the dynasty.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the restrictions on colonization in southern Xinjiang, a few convicts were exiled there starting in the mid-eighteenth century. A maximum of 180 worked in the military agricultural colonies at Hami.<sup>62</sup> Some of the most serious offenders were banished to Altishahr, but in those cases the main purpose of exile was isolation rather than colonization. Such exiles were not settled on farms but were enslaved to the begs, in payment for services rendered to the Qing and as a reward for past or an inducement to future loyalty. Because these offenders were not permitted to return home, they also constituted a de facto immigrant population, albeit a small one. Although few overall figures are available, in 1797 more than 600 convicts were enslaved to begs in that region.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to the convicts, a few hundred disgraced government officials were also in exile in Xinjiang. In 1794, one of the few years for which a figure is available, 455 former officials were serving sentences there, a small percentage of the perhaps 20,000 in the empire who could

59. QSL QL 1353, 40b, 55/4/29.

60. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia*, 9.

61. See *Cheng'an Suojian Ji* 2, 48a; Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia," 65.

62. Convicts initially assigned to Hami might be transferred later to northern Xinjiang for resettlement. See chapter 6.

63. ZPZZ JQ 2/1/21 (law—exile, packet for JQ 1-9), memorial of Changlin and Tuolun.



lay claim to the title of official.<sup>64</sup> These exiles almost invariably returned to China proper after a few years in exile and thus cannot strictly be described as colonists. They did, however, make an important contribution to the colonization process both through their service in the frontier bureaucracy and, after their return, through their stimulation of intellectual interest in Xinjiang's importance to China.

In the early nineteenth century, as the emphasis on the exile of ordinary convicts declined, there was a marked increase in the number of officials subject to frontier banishment. This resulted from the growing complexity of political life as state power began to wane, as well as the campaign of the Jiaqing Emperor to curb rising bureaucratic corruption. As a consequence, more disgraced officials began to be sent to the northeast frontier in Manchuria than had previously been the case. Yet although the reluctant, gradual relaxation of colonization restrictions in the northeast was beginning to bring a larger Han population to that region and was giving rise to a concomitant need for more experienced officials, those exiled to the northeast were still not employed there by the government. This underscores what was perhaps the principal difference between exile to Manchuria and exile to Xinjiang: only in Xinjiang did the government take advantage of the punishment by turning it specifically and consciously to serve the broader purposes of imperial expansion.

The presence of exiles on the newly conquered Xinjiang frontier continued a characteristic Chinese practice of two thousand years' standing, thereby reproducing a traditional paradox: reliance on offenders against the state to promote state policies in sensitive areas. What distinguished the Qing exile and employment of ordinary and elite offenders was the institutionalization and systematization of the ancient practice, processes that led to greater efficiency. These characteristics help to explain the extraordinary range of Qing power at the very moment when "the culmination of the empire also meant the beginning of its downfall."<sup>65</sup>

64. SYD (B) QL 59/4/27, 188. An early nineteenth-century text, *SZJL*, compiled by a senior Mongol official then stationed in Xinjiang, lists 385 exiled officials banished to Ürümqi between 1760 and 1807, but these figures are not absolutely accurate. Archival sources show that some of those he lists were at Ili, not Ürümqi; thus one cannot be certain that some Ürümqi exiles were not omitted from his list. For estimates of the total number of officials, see Chang, *The Chinese Gentry*, 71-141.

65. Perdue, "The West Route Army and the Silk Road," 29.



### Chapter Three

## Exile and Expansion prior to the Qing

Traditionally the Chinese conceived of a universe composed of a series of concentric circles centered on their own world and culture. They designated the heartland of China proper—the precise boundaries of which varied over the centuries—as the “inner territories” (*neidi*) and the periphery as the areas “beyond the borders” (*bianwai*). Throughout Chinese history a vibrant and mutually transformative tension characterized the relationship between the interior and exterior regions. On the one hand, the outward spread of Chinese influence tended to promote the acculturation of the uncivilized peoples of the borderlands; on the other hand, the peripheral territories and their inhabitants helped furnish the Chinese with a self-definition that reached beyond the purely geographical into the realms of politics and culture in general.<sup>1</sup>

The classification into inner and outer zones carried over in complex ways to the banishment of offenders. As a general rule, the greater one's disgrace, the more remote was one's place of exile. The *Shujing*, the classic historical work of antiquity, postulated three areas to which criminals might be banished, differentiated by their distance from the center of the then-known world.<sup>2</sup> The outermost region consisted of the barbarian

1. For a discussion of traditional conceptions of the world, see Yü, “Han Foreign Relations,” 377-383; for a view of the relationship of heartland and periphery in the late imperial period, see Lipman, “The Border World of Gansu, 1895-1935,” 2-4.

2. Karlgren, “The Book of Documents,” 7. Although the authenticity of the texts of the classical canon, including the *Shujing*, has long been the subject of scholarly debate,

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Mid-Qing China

BANISHMENT TO XINJIANG,  
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“You, cousin Herford, upon pain of life,  
Till twice five summers have enrich’d our fields,  
Shall not regret our fair dominions  
But tread the stranger paths of banishment.”

William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 1, 3

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