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An Examination of the Ming Empire’s Inner Asianness: Focusing on Qing Dynasty Analogies

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Abstract

Among overseas “New Qing History” scholars, the Ming Empire is typically interpreted as an ethnically Han-Chinese regime that lacked the characteristics of Inner Asian polities. This author, however, asserts that this view is incorrect. Like the Qing, the emperors of the Ming ruled as qaghans over their northern steppe subjects and as the incarnation of the bodhisattva Manjusri in the eyes of Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhists. Also like their Qing dynasty counterparts, the Ming Empire produced multilingual documents, combining Chinese and ethnic minority scripts, a potent symbol of their “universal” rule. Lastly, the Ming emperors also actively pursued a policy of promoting governance through religion, creating a cultural and political legacy that would come to directly shape later relations between the Qing empire and the frontier regions of their empire.

Keywords

Inner Asia – multilingual literature – Ming Empire – Qing dynasty history

Historical categorization of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) or the Ming Empire by foreign academics has experienced remarkable change over the years. In the mid to late 1970s, a perspective emerged within American sinology that advocated the unification of the nearly six-century-long period containing the

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Ming and Qing (1616–1911) dynasties under a concept that was beginning to gain popularity at the time: Late Imperial China. This new period was defined by the titles and themes of two influential collections of essays published, *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, edited by Wakeman and Grant in 1975, and *The City in Late Imperial China*, edited by Skinner and Baker in 1977.[1] Since then, the term "Late Imperial China" has come to be widely accepted in academic circles, eventually leading to the official renaming of the journal *Ch'ing-Shih Wen-t'i* (Issues in Qing History) – which primarily published research on the Qing dynasty – to *Late Imperial China* in 1985.[2] In summary, the concept of Late Imperial China aims to reveal and emphasize the historical continuity of the Ming and Qing dynasties, while downplaying the differences between the different ethnic identities of the founders. Since the 1970s, this concept has been regarded as the predominant interpretation of Ming dynasty history within the American sinology community.

In the more than two decades since the 1990s, American sinology has gradually transformed, owing to the continuous introduction of new research methods and achievements in scholarship. Some scholars have focused on the continuity and succession from the previous Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1260/1271–1368) eras to the Ming, proposing an alternative categorization of a "Song-Yuan-Ming transition" over a longer period of time. This view was introduced in a collection of essays published in 2003 with several contributing authors, entitled *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*.[3] In the chapter authored by Paul Jakov Smith, one of the collection's editors, he argues that one of the major features of the Song-Yuan-Ming period was the deepening political and cultural exchange between two regions, namely, China proper and the steppes of Inner Asia, which led to a greater degree of integration between the two regions than in previous eras. This perspective recognizes that the history of the Ming dynasty was significantly influenced by the politics and culture of Inner Asia.[4] This view runs directly in contrast to the position of New Qing History scholars who focus on Qing and Manchu history, emphasizing instead the differences between the Ming and Qing dynasties. In this interpretation, the Qing dynasty (or empire) established by the Manchus is viewed as the most prominent Inner Asian polity, in some ways avoiding the typical assimilation process that conquerors of China usually experienced. Within this discourse, the Ming is often reduced to a purely Han Chinese regime and used as a contrasting example to the Qing empire, defined by its "Inner Asianness." In this comparative mode of observation, the historical relevance of the Ming empire to Inner Asia is considered negligible.[5] Similar differences in perspectives are also reflected in contemporary Chinese scholarship, where scholars have recently argued that if one attempts to identify the "Inner Asia" in Chinese history, it is necessary to also emphasize not only the Northern Dynasties (386–581), Liao (907–1125), Western Xia (1038–1227), Jin (1115–1234), Yuan, and Qing dynasties, but also recognize the Inner Asianness that existed during the reigns of dynasties such as the Han (206 BCE–220 CE), the Tang (618–907), the Song, and the Ming. This Inner Asianness therefore would have to be recognized as a significant and often important element throughout the history of Chinese dynastic rule, and therefore the discovery of new, unexamined aspects of Inner Asianness in the Ming dynasty would be a research topic rich in scholarly potential.[6] However, another view in Chinese scholarship, closer to the aforementioned school of thought among American sinologists, emphasizes the differences between the Ming and Qing dynasties, under which the prospect of scholarly inquiry into the Inner Asianness of the Ming history is unlikely and futile.

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[1] Frederic E. Wakeman Jr. and Carolyn Grant, eds., *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); George William Skinner and Hugh D. R. Baker, eds., *The City in Late Imperial China* (California: Stanford University Press, 1977).

[2] While the journal itself officially changed its name to *Late Imperial China*, it kept the characters *Ch'ing-Shih Wen-t'I* (*Qingshi Wenti*) 清史問題 on the cover page to maintain continuity with its previous issues.

[3] Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

[4] Paul Jakov Smith, "Impressions of the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition: The Evidence from *Biji* Memoirs," in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, ed. Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 71–110.

In truth, analysis of Chinese and non-Chinese primary historical sources, supplemented by the integration of related research, is sufficient for us to create a new and flexible understanding of the Inner Asianness of the Ming Empire. How is Inner Asianness embodied or manifested? To address this question, we first summarize the view among American sinologists emphasizing the differences between the Ming and Qing dynasties and how they usually summarize and define the Inner Asianness of the Qing Empire:

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[5] To see more American scholarship on Ming relations with Inner Asia, see Morri Rossabi, "The Ming and Inner Asia," in *The Ming Dynasty 1368–1644, Part 2. The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Dennis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8: 221–71.

[6] Luo Xin, "Chinese and Inner Asian Perspectives on the History of the Northern Dynasties (386–589) in Chinese Historiography," in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, eds. Nicola Di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 174–75.

1. The Qing emperor was characterized by his simultaneous sovereignty over diverse groups. He was revered not only as the Son of Heaven by the Han Chinese in the Confucian tradition, and regarded as Qaghan by the Manchus and Mongols, but also venerated as the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Manjushri and Wheel-Turning King (chakravartin/universal monarch) among Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhists, and even as a patron of Islam to be embraced by Muslim subjects. In other words, the plurality of the Qing emperor's identities and roles reflected the unprecedented universality of his reign.
2. The phenomenon of integrating multilingual documents in Chinese and non-Chinese scripts began to appear, indicating "simultaneous sovereignty" or the aforementioned universal character of the Qing emperor.
3. Through the implementation of a flexible religious policy, the Qing emperors successfully established political alliances with the leaders of non-Chinese religions, such as Tibetan Buddhism, harnessing religion as a powerful tool for stabilizing Qing rule in Inner Asia.[7]

However, all of these "Inner Asian" characteristics were clearly identifiable in the Ming Empire. The following serves as a brief analysis.

1 Pluralism in the Image of the Ming Empire's Monarchs

To begin, we shall look at the first component of the Inner Asianness of the Qing empire to determine if the image or conception of the Ming dynasty monarchs was similarly pluralistic. As early as 1978, David Farquhar revealed an important historical fact in his paper *Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire*, based on the 16th century Tibetan history *Mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston*. In 1406, when the Fifth Karmapa, Deshin Shekpa (De bzhin gshes pa, 1384–1415), came to Nanjing to offer his blessings to the deceased parents of Emperor Yongle 永樂帝 (r. 1403–1424), Emperor Taizu 明太祖 (r. 1368–1398) and Empress Ma 馬皇后 were regarded as incarnations of the bodhisattvas Manjusri and Tara, respectively. Farquhar points out that this perception of the emperor as a bodhisattva was actually inherited from a similar practice in the Yuan dynasty, as seen in the political interactions between Khubilai Qaghan and the Tibetan Buddhist elite.[8] For non Han-Chinese people who practiced Tibetan Buddhism during the Ming dynasty, this depiction of the Ming rulers as Manjusri existed not only during the Hongwu 洪武 (1368–1398) and Yongle 永樂 (1403–1424) periods of the early Ming dynasty, but also continued into the middle and late periods of Ming rule. For example, in the Fifth Dalai Lama's (1617–1682) *A History of Tibet*, written in 1643, the Ming dynasty monarch who bestowed the royal family name upon the local Tibetan ruler of U-Tsang, Emperor Hongzhi 弘治帝 (r. 1488–1505), was referred to as the Emperor of China and as Manjusri.[9] The recognition of the Ming emperor as an incarnation of Manjusri conferred political and religious authority upon the ruler, and was therefore recorded in the Tibetan historical text.

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[7] For a summary overview, see: R. Kent Guy, "Who Were the Manchus? A Review Essay," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 1 (2002): 151–64; Sudipta Sen, "The New Frontiers of Manchu China and the Historiography of Asian Empire: A Review Essay," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 1 (2002): 165–77.

In the 1641 Tibetan-Mongolian bilingual *Iron Certificate Document Given by Gushiri Qaghan to Dap Monastery in the Year of the Iron Dragon*, recently translated by Uyunbilig and another scholar, Ming Emperor Chongzhen 崇禎帝 (r. 1627–1644) was still referred to as the reincarnation of Manjusri. This document was issued by Gushiri Qaghan of Khoshut (r. 1642–1655) to Dap Monastery in January 1641, on the eve of his expedition to Tibet, served to protect his rights from infringement by Buddhist and secular rivals. The Mongolian section of the document clearly includes the expression "kitad-un qaγan manjusiri-yin qubilγan tegün(-ü)qotan," while the Tibetan section, though incomplete, clearly corresponds to the key name "Manjusri."[10]

Even in 1648, the fifth year of the reign of Emperor Shunzhi 順治帝 (r. 1644–1661) and after the Qing had subjugated most of China proper, a letter to the Qing court written in the Mongolian language by Mergen Jinong, a subordinate of Güshi Qaghan, describes the Ming-Qing transition as the Qing dynasty's Great Qaghan "seizing the power of the Manjusri incarnation of the Great Ming Qaghan, and occupying the land of the Han."[11] These documents clearly indicate that to the Mongolian and Tibetan peoples, who had embraced the Tibetan Buddhist faith, the Ming emperors were recognized as incarnations of Manjusri throughout their dynasty. Published Mongolian historical sources indicate that it was not until 1646, the third year of the Shunzhi period, that Tibetans began to refer to the Qing emperor as an incarnation of Manjusri in their correspondence to the Qing court as well.[12] This is several years later than 1640, which Günther Schulemann initially believed to be before the Manchu inroads into China proper.[13] Considering that the Ming dynasty ruled for a substantially longer period than the Yuan dynasty, and that the steppe rulers of the Northern Yuan (1368–1634) were not referred to as reincarnations of the bodhisattva, this conception of the Qing emperor being an incarnation of Manjusri, previously considered one of the most important aspects of his rule over Inner Asia, was in fact inherited from the Ming emperors. This is strong evidence of the Inner Asianness of the Ming empire and its continuing influence on the Qing dynasty.

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[8] David M. Farquhar, "Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38 (1978): 12–16. For a research-based commentary on this chapter in the *Mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston* 賢者喜宴, see Deng Ruiling 鄧銳齡, "*Xianzhe xiyan* Ming Yongle shi shangshi Halima jinjing jishi jianzheng"《賢者喜宴》明永樂時尚師哈立麻晉京紀事箋證, *Zhongguo zangxue* 中國藏學, no. 3 (1992): 84–96.

[9] Di wushi Dalai Ang'awang Luosangcuojia 第五世達賴·昂阿旺羅桑嘉措 [Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho], *Xizang wangchen ji* 西藏王臣記, trans. Guo Heqing 郭和卿 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1983), 141–42.

[10] Wuyun Bilige 烏雲畢力格 [Borjigidai Oyunbilig] and Daowei Cairangjia 道幃·才讓加 [Dobis Tsering Gyal], "Chijiao fawang yuling kaoshi" 持教法王諭令考釋, in *Man Meng dang'an yu Menggushi yanjiu* 滿蒙檔案與蒙古史研究, ed. Wuyun Bilige 烏雲畢力格 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014), 59–70.

[11] Ishihama Yumiko 石濱裕美子, *Chibetto bukkyō sekai no rekishiteki kenkyū* チベット佛教世界の歴史的研究 (Tōkyō: Tōhō shoten, 2001), 218–19.

In addition to being the reincarnation of Manjusri, the Qing emperor was generally regarded by the Mongol and Tibetan populations as the “King of the Wheel” or “Wheel-Turning King” in Buddhist cosmology. The Ming emperors possessed a similar status, at least in the perception of some Mongols of the time. In *The Religious and Folkloric Documents from Mongolian Collections in Europe* by Walther Heissig, an ancient prayer hymn popular among the Mongols describes the objects of wealth that people seek to obtain through prayers, one of which is the gold and silver belongings of the dalai-yin dayibung qaghan in the South.[14] Another similar prayer, also widely circulated among Mongols and translated by a Czech Mongolist Pavel Poucha, writes “dayibung” instead of “dayivang” in this sentence.[15] The term “dalai” here is the Mongolian word for "sea". According to Henry Serruys's interpretation, "dayibung qaghan" is actually an alternative transcription of the Chinese word "Da Ming." The latter, as a proper noun, coexists in Mongolian literature with multiple spellings such as dayiming, dayibang, and dayibung.[16] It is worth noting that the 16th century Portuguese terms for the Ming dynasty as described in *Discoveries of the World* by A. Galvão and *Historia del gran reino de la China* (The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China) by Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza, romanize "Da Ming Guo" and "Da Ming" as Tabenco and Taybin, respectively.[17] In addition, materials from early 17th-century Russia also refer to the Chinese emperor as Daming Qaghan Тайбынъ Каканъ (≈taibein kakan).[18] Therefore, it is not surprising that the transposition of the initial consonant m- with b- in the character "Ming" was a regular phenomenon in the transliteration process at the time. However, while Serruys's above survey is certainly correct, his adoption of Boris Y. Vladimirtsov's explanation that the word "Da Ming" later evolved into a title meaning "great, all-inclusive" in Mongolian literature is rejected by Morikawa Tetsuo, who conducted a comprehensive investigation of relevant materials and pointed out that this interpretation was unfounded, and that the Mongolian word "Da Ming" solely referred to the Ming, without any derivation.[19] In fact, the aforementioned "dalai-yin dayibung/dayivang qaghan in the south" indeed reveals a close connection to the Ming-ruled China proper, in terms of geographic location. According to Mongolian folkloric documents collected by Biambyn Rinchen, Quudan Wang Tngri was able to induce "an increase in the harvest of the fields of the dayibang qaghans of the Chinese land."[20] As Serruys commented, the "kitad-un dayibang qaghan" was indeed the emperor of the Ming dynasty, which ruled over the interior of the Central Plains. Therefore, the term "dayibang" was not used in the sense that Serruys and Vladimirtsov inferred, but rather it consistently referred to the Ming dynasty.[21]

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[12] Xidu rigu 希都日古 [Šidurγu], comp. and trans., *Qing neimishuyuan Mengguwen dang’an huibian hanyi* 清內秘書院蒙古文檔案彙編漢譯 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2015), 77–78.

[13] Farquhar’s mistake stems mainly from his citation of the work of Günther Schulemann, who believed that the Fifth Dalai Lama and others had already referred to Emperor Taizong 清太宗 (r. 1636–1643) as Manjusri in 1640, according to the Mongolian text, *Erdeniin Tobchi* 蒙古源流. However, the Tibetan portion of the source only refers to the Qing ruler as “quormusta” (emperor), not as Manjusri at that time. See: Farquhar, “Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch’ing Empire,” 19; Günther Schulemann, *Die Geschichte der Dalai-Lama* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1958), 243; Wu Lan 烏蘭 [Borjigin Ulaan], Menggu yuanliu *yanjiu* 《蒙古源流》研究 (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2000), 473, 723.

[14] Walther Heissig, *Mongolische Volksreligiöse und Folkloristische Texte aus europäischen Biblioteken* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1966), 80.

[15] Pavel Poucha, “Mongolische Miszellen IX,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 8 (1963), 257–58. See also Krystyna Chabros, *Beckoning Fortune: A Study of the Mongol Dalalγa Ritual* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 220–21.

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[16] Henry Serruys, "On Some Titles in the Mongol Kanǰur," *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1978–1979): 427–28.

[17] He Gaoji 何高濟, "Zhongguo shangpin zai Yinduyang shang: Ju shiliu shiji Ouzhou ren de jishu" 中國商品在印度洋上—據十六世紀歐洲人的記述, in *Yuwaiji: Yuanshi, Zhongwai guaxishi luncong* 域外集—元史、中外關係史論叢, ed. He Gaoji 何高濟 and Lu Junling 陸峻嶺 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 175–76.

[18] John F. Baddley, *Russia, Mongolia, China* (London: MacMillan & Company, Ltd, 1919), 1: ccxviii.

[19] Morikawa Tetsuo 森川哲雄, "Daigen no kioku" 大元の記憶, *Hikaku shakai bunka* 比較社會文化 14 (2008): 65–81.

[20] Biambyn Rintchen, *Les Matériaux pour l'Étude du Chamanisme Mongol* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959), 1: 34.

[21] Henry Serruys, Review of B. Rintchen: *Les Matériaux pour l'Étude du Chamanisme Mongol, Vol1: Monumenta Serica* 19 (1960), 552.

The term “dalai-yin dayibung qaγan” 大海大明可汗 warrants a comprehensive examination of its historical and cultural connotations. The rhetorical employment of the term “sea” to construct “dalai-yin dayibung qaγan” emerged during the reign of Ögedei Qaghan 英文皇帝 (r. 1229–1241) and his sons in the Great Mongol Empire, when it was used to denote a ruler of the whole world, who ruled over an area larger than the territory of the Great Mongol Empire (yeke monggol ulus).[22] However, after the establishment of the Yuan dynasty, with the gradual importation of Buddhist concepts through the 14th century, whenever the Mongolian/Turkic word “sea” was added as a modifier to the front of a ruler’s title, the title correspondingly took on the symbolism of a reincarnated king who ruled over the whole world. Mongolian and Turkic documents in which the title of such a ruler appeared were all religiously colored, coming in the forms of sutra, pagoda, and monastic inscriptions.[23] From the aforementioned folklore texts translated and annotated by Heissig and Poucha, this fixed usage persisted beyond the Yuan dynasty, except that since the Ming dynasty ruled over China proper, the Mongols aptly referred to the Ming rulers as the Great Ming Qaghan, who governed China proper as the (Dharmic) Wheel-Turning King. There is no doubt that this expression highlights a certain respect and admiration on the part of the Mongols for the Ming emperors. In contemporary contexts, some Mongols had also used the term “the Sea Qaghan” to refer to the world monarchs in a generalized sense, such as in the folk epics of the Tuvans of Southern Siberia. The Tuvans, who regard themselves as Mongolians, have sung: “In the sky dwells Buddha (burqan) and the god of the emperor (qurbustu tengkerkey), and the gods of the earth (qurbustu tengkerkey), and on the earth the Sea Qaghan (talay qaan), who rides a black horse.”[24] In this Buddhist-tinged cultural context, the earthly rulers who could be compared to Buddha and Indra should be the most revered secular ruler in Buddhism – the Wheel-Turning King.

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[22] Michael Weiers, “Zu einem Auftrag zur Globalisierung im 13. Jahrhundert und zu seinen Folge,” in *Beiträge zur Mandschuristik und Mongolistik und ihrem Umfeld*, ed. Michael Weiers (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 23–27.

[23] Peter Zieme, *Religion und Gesellschaft im Uigurischen Königreich von Qočo* (Opladen: vs Verlag für Sozialwiss enschaften, 1992); Zhong Han 鍾焓, “Cong ‘Hainei Han’ dao ‘Zhuanlun wang’: Huihu wen ‘Dayuan Suzhoulu yekedaluhuachi shixi zhibei’ zhong de Yuanchao Huangdi chenxian kaoshi” 從“海內汗”到轉輪王—回鶻文《大元肅州路也可達魯花赤世襲之碑》中的元朝皇帝稱銜考釋, *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究, no. 6 (2010): 75–82.

[24] S. M. Orus-ool, “Existenzweise und Vortrag des tuwinischen Epos,” in *“Roter Altai, gib dein Echo!”: Festschrift für Erika Taube zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Anett C. Oelschlägel et al. (Leipzig: Leipzig University, 2005), 410.

The literature discussed above elucidates that the Ming dynasty rulers often dealt with the northern peoples in the role of Qaghan, and this close political connection was reflected in the "master-servant relationship" formed between the Ming dynasty and the tribal leaders of Inner Asia. Prior to the modern era, this dynamic was the dominant form of political subordination in Inner Asia. The Hongwu and Yongle editions of the Mongolian-Chinese translation of *Huayi yiyu: tata guan laiwen* 華夷譯語·韃靼館來文 highlight the historical dynamics involving the Uriangkhai Mongol's chieftans and Jurchen leaders who were pacified during the early and mid-Ming dynasty, respectively, in their dealings with the Ming in the form of a master-servants relationship.[25] In these texts, the chiefs and nobles usually described themselves as "slaves" (boγol), and the letters typically commenced with laudatory phrases such as "suu tu qaγana" 洪福皇帝行 or "qaγan un suu tu " 可汗洪福前 to praise the Ming rulers.[26] Specifically, in the Hongwu texts reflecting the surrender of the Mongol nobles in the early Ming dynasty, in addition to calling the Ming emperor "Qaghan" and regarding him as the master (ejen/ezhan 額氈), they also occasionally called landed feudal princes "master" (ejen). Similarly, when these Mongolian nobles traced their origins in the relevant texts, they also referred to Chinggis Qaghan as the "master of the state" (ulus un ejen) and his son, Chagatai, as "master."[27] Comparing these two, it can be seen that for these Mongol nobles who were ready to submit to the rule of the Ming, the titles "Qaghan" and "master" given to the Ming emperor and his son were consistent with those used for the rulers of the Great Mongol Empire, thereby clearly reflecting a master-servant relationship.[28] It is noteworthy that later the Qing emperor was for

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25 The Hongwu and Yongle records are sometimes referred to as the A and B records, the former of which are located in the early Ming during the Hongwu era, while the latter are from the Yongle era until the middle of the Ming dynasty. After the fifth year of Yongle's reign, in 1407, after the creation of the Siyiguan 四夷館, the collection is referred to as the Yongle records.

26 Yamazaki Tadashi 山崎忠, "Kakai yakugo dattankanraibun no kenkyū" 華夷譯語韃靼館來文の研究, in *Yūboku minzoku no kenkyū* 遊牧民族の研究, ed. Yūrashia gakkai kenkyū hōkoku ユ-ラシア學會 (Kyoto: Shizen Gakkai, 1955); Wuyun Gaowa 烏雲高娃 [oyungoa], *Ming siyiguan dadaguan ji* Hua-yi yiyu *dada "laiwen" yanjiu* 明四夷館韃靼館及《華夷譯語》韃靼"來文"研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2014), 78–145, 173–202.

27 Wuyun Gaowa, *Ming siyiguan dadaguan ji Hua-yi yiyu dada "laiwen" yanjiu* 124–25, 127, 137–38, 146.

28 For a discussion on how the rulers of the Yuan dynasty, below the level of *dawang* 大王, were often referred to as "masters" (ejen), see Qiu Yihao 邱軼皓, "Guanyu 14 shiji Bosi wen shiliao zhong cheng Yili Han wei 'Saiyin Ezhan' de jitiao jizai" 關於 14 世紀波斯文史料中稱伊利汗為"賽因·額氈"的幾條記載, in *Xiyu lishi yuyan yanjiu jikan* 西域歷史語言研究集刊, ed. Shen Weirong 沈衛榮 (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2012), 5:

a long time called ejen han by his Inner Asian subjects, and the superior-subordinate relationship between him and the Kazakh tribes that expressed their subordination to him was also called ejen-albatu. This dynamic referred to a kind of extension and generalization of the master-servant relationship.[29] These communications were previously found in the Yuan dynasty at the beginning of a contract document, in the phrase “May blessings be bestowed on His Majesty the Emperor” 願賜福給皇帝陛下. The appearance of the latter is considered by scholars to be a sign that Yuan monarchical power had already penetrated to a considerable extent into the power structure of the Turpan Basin, where Iduq-qut 亦都护 was the supreme lord. As a result, the Ming emperors and the Mongol chieftains of Inner Asia were similarly organized into a hierarchical order based on a “qaghan-servant” status relationship with a distinctly Inner Asian political identity. This disproves the theory held by some American scholars that those Mongols who came under the rule of the Ming were allies of the Chinese emperor, possessing a certain equality.[30]

In the “post-Mongol Empire era” following the collapse of the four Mongol qaghanates in the 14th century, the orthodoxy that only members of the Chinggisid lineage could legitimately hold the title of qaghan remained deeply entrenched in Inner Asia. For this reason, the bloodline of the Ming emperors, who were regarded by the Mongols as ruling many ethnic groups, including 800,000 Han Chinese, 340,000 Mongols in the interior, and 30,000 Jurchens on the coast, therefore maintaining the “Jade government” (qas törö) and holding the status of “Great State” (yeke ulus), became ambiguous in their minds. Shao

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258. Su Bai 宿白 quotes “Chongxiu Liangzhou baita zhi” 重修涼州白塔志 and contains a passage referring to Yuan princes as “yechan” 也燀 princes, “yechan huoduan wang ” 也燀火端王 and it seems this similar phrase, “yechan,” is repeated. *Han-Zang shiji* 漢藏史集 addressed Prince Godan as “yechen,” which is a transliteration of the Mongolian phrase ejen-額氈. See: Su Bai 宿白, *Zangchuan Fojiao siyuan kaogu* 藏傳佛教寺院考古 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), 265; Dacangzongba Banjuesangbu 達倉宗巴·班覺桑布 [sTag-tshng-rdzong-pa-dpal-vbyor-bzang-po], *Han-Zang shiji* 漢藏史集, trans. Chen Qingying 陳慶英 (Lasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 1986), 138, 352. In the “Xingxiang” 行香 chapter of *Xijin zhi* 析津志, the word “master” is also added to Nomugan, Khubilai Qaghan’s fourth son, evidently as a translation of the Mongolian word “ejen.”

[29] He Xingliang 何星亮, *Bianjie yu minzu: Qingdai kanfen Zhong-E xibei bianjie dachen de Chahetai, Man, Han wujian wenshu yanjiu* 邊界與民族—清代勘分中俄西北邊界大臣的察合台、滿、漢五件文書研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), 36–37; Onuma Takahiro 小沼孝博, “Political Relations between the Qing Dynasty and Kazakh Nomads in the Mid-18th Century: Promotion of the *ejen-albatu* Relationship in Central Asia,” in *A Collection of Documents from the Kazakh Sultans to the Qing Dynasty*, ed. Noda Jin 野田仁 (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo, 2010), 86–125.

[30] David M. Robinson, *Ming China and Its Allies: Imperial Rule in Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 88–130.

Xunzheng 邵循正 was the first to point out that as early as the 15th century, history books compiled during the reign of Shah Rukh of the Timurid Qaghanate described the founder of the Ming dynasty, Emperor Taizu (referred to pejoratively in Turkic as "Dongguz," meaning "pig"), as a Mongolian. He was originally just a general of the guards of the last emperor of the Yuan dynasty, but later overthrew his master's rule and proclaimed himself Qaghan, and successfully concealed his Mongolian heritage from the Han people.[31] This narrative is consistent with the fact that the preface of a set of Mongolian Buddhist scriptures published in Beijing in 1431, the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Xuande 宣德帝 (r. 1426–1435) of the Ming dynasty, reflecting the religious beliefs of the Mongols of that period, also respectfully referred to the imperial family headed by the Ming emperor as the "Golden Family" (altan uruq).[32] This term was originally used to refer only to the descendants of Chinggis Qaghan (the Chinggisid). In the mid Ming dynasty, this legend was further developed in the Mongolian region into a story about how Emperor Yongle was in fact descended from the son of Toghon Temür 元順帝 (r. 1333–1370) (Emperor Huizong or Shun) of the Yuan dynasty. This story is found in the *Altan Tobci* (The Golden Summary) written in the early 17th century. The Ming dynasty, from Emperor Yongle forward, was thus regarded as a continuation of Chinggisid rule. Finally, it should be noted that the Mongols of the Ming and Qing dynasties usually referred to the Mongol Qaghans and the Qing emperor as "Bogdo qan." Around 1638, Altan Qaghan (r. 1571–1582) of northern Mongolia wrote to the Russian Tsar that the Emperor of China, also known as the Bogdo qan, was in charge of a large and varied kingdom with a wide variety of goods.[33] This further corroborates the fact that, in the eyes of Mongols, the role of the Ming emperor had merged with that of the Qaghan.

The image of the Ming dynasty emperor as a patron of Islam originated in the early 15th century in Timurid qaghanate's account of Emperor Yongle. It mentions that during this period, Central Asians tended to view this Ming dynasty emperor as a Chinese monarch who had secretly converted to Islam.[34] In the *Khataynameh* (The Book of China) authored by Ali Akbar Khata'I in 1516, it is asserted that the Qaghan of the Ming dynasty privately revered Muhammad as a saint and had the Prophet's image painted in his palace and set with precious stones for him to gaze upon, and that he prayed to this image on certain days. The text goes on to state that the Qaghan of Daming worshipped the Prophet and accepted the concept of Allah in a specific and subtle manner so as not to cause disturbances that would jeopardize the peace of the country.[35] At approximately the same time, in 1510, the Ottoman Empire in Western Asia was informed by Muslim travelers from China that the so-called "Son of Heaven/God," Emperor Zhengde 正德帝 (r. 1505–1521) had already converted to Islam and was victorious in his campaigns against the non-Islamic Mongol Kalmyks.[36] These religious rumors regarding the Ming emperors are also linked to another popular legend in Kashgar that existed during the Qing dynasty, that the Qing emperors had in fact secretly converted to Islam but were afraid to publicly declare their religious beliefs.[37] Therefore, according to certain Western Muslim perspectives, numerous Chinese emperors of the Ming and Qing had purportedly renounced their original faiths in secret in favor of Islam. It would seem that this rumor, which was intended to reconcile religious beliefs with secular power, was first directed at the Ming emperors and then naturally carried over to the Qing dynasty.

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[31] J. S. Shaw, "Historical Significance of the Curious Theory of the Mongol Blood in the Veins of the Ming Emperors," *Chinese Social and Political Sciences Review* 20, no. 4 (1937): 492–98.

[32] Wuyun Bilige 烏雲畢力格 [Borjigidai Oyunbilig], "Du 1431 nian mukeben weiwuti mengguwen fojing xu he ba: jianlun gumengguyu yuyin xiang jindai yuyin de guodu" 讀 1431 年木刻本畏吾體蒙古文佛經序和跋—兼論古蒙古語語音向近代語音的過渡, *Menggushi yanjiu* 蒙古史研究 11 (2013): 108–22.

[33] M. I. Geliman 戈利曼 [М. И. Гольман] and G. I. Siliesa'erqiuke 斯列薩爾丘克 [Г. И. Слесарчук], *E-Meng guanxi lishi dang'an wenxian ji 1636–1654* 俄蒙關係歷史檔案文獻集 1636–1654, trans. Ma Manli 馬曼麗 and Hu Shangzhe 胡尚哲 (Lanzhou: Lanzhou daxue chubanshe, 2014), 2: 122.

2 Examples of Multilingual Documents "Combined" within the Boundaries of the Ming Empire

Regarding this issue, it should be noted that the "combining" or fusion of multilingual literature from two more or traditions was prevalent during the Yuan dynasty. The foundation gate of the Juyongguan Street Crossing Pagoda, constructed in 1321, the second year of Toghon Temür/Emperor Huizong of

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[34] Joseph F. Fletcher, "China & Central Asia, 1368–1884," in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, ed. John King Fairbank (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 360–61.

[35] Ali Mazhahaili 阿里·瑪紮海里 [Aly Mazahéri], *Sichou zhilu: Zhongguo-Bosi wenhua jiaoliu shi* 絲綢之路：中國-波斯文化交流史, trans. Geng Sheng 耿昇 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993).

[36] Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, "Les événements d' Asie Centrale en 1510 d' après un document ottoman," *Cahier du monde russe et soviétique* 12, no. 1–2 (1971): 189–207.

[37] Alexandre Papas, "So Close to Samarkand, Lhasa: Sufi Hagiographies, Founder Myths and Sacred Space in Himalayan Islam," in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, ed. Anna Akasoy et al. (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 272.

Yuan's reign, was immediately adorned with inscriptions in five distinct scripts (Chinese, Phagspa Mongolian, Uyghur, Tangut, and Tibetan). Some of these inscriptions have remained to this day, a compelling testament to the Yuan dynasty's respect for multiculturalism. The succeeding Ming dynasty upheld this practice with commendable effort. For example, in 1413, the eleventh year of Emperor Yongle's reign, a eunuch of Jurchen descent named Ishiha erected the "Yongning si bei" 永寧寺碑 near the mouth of the present-day Heilongjiang River. It featured a combination of Chinese, Mongolian, and Jurchen scripts. Its content briefly describes the Ming Empire's political influence over this region and the reasons for its establishment. It is an undeniable piece of historical evidence that declares the sovereignty of the Ming Empire and the coastal areas downstream of the Heilongjiang River.

The most impressive combination of documents from the Yongle era is the "Gamaba wei Mingtaizu jianfu tu" 噶瑪巴為明太祖薦福圖 commissioned by Emperor Yongle, based on the prayer ceremonies undertaken by the Fifth Karmapa for the emperor's deceased parents in 1406, in Nanjing. This piece was later collected in the Chubu Temple in Tibet, with a total length of more than 44 meters and a height of more than half a meter. It is composed of 22 consecutive, colored illustrations, each inscribed with five languages, namely Chinese, Tibetan, Persian, Mongolian, and Uyghur.[38] Previously, scholars have praised the vision and generosity of the rulers reflected in the official Qing dynasty revision of the *Wuti Qingwen Jian* 五體清文鑒, an accomplishment deemed superior to the capabilities of many Chinese dynasties. However, the visual and textual impact brought by the over 40-meter-long Karmapa Map, characterized by exquisite paintings and a five-language text, appears to surpass that of typical Qing dynasty multilingual documents such as the *Wuti qingwen jian* and the *Santi jigong bei* 三體紀功碑. This extraordinary artifact showcases the grandeur and regal demeanor of Emperor Yongle, standing on par with any of his Qing counterparts. During the third voyage of Zheng He's 鄭和 (1371–1433) fleet to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Yongle Emperor arranged for the transport of a trilingual inscription – Chinese, Persian, and Tamil – completed domestically in advance, to be installed in a Buddhist temple in the country for charity. The relic remains in Sri Lanka to this day.[39]

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[38] The Persian portion of this text has been translated and interpreted. See Luo Aili 駱愛麗, *Shiwu shiliu shiji de huihuiwen yu Zhongguo Yisilanjiao wenhua yanjiu* 十五一十六世紀的回回文與中國伊斯蘭教文化研究 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 2008).

[39] Liu Yingsheng 劉迎勝, "Mingchu Zhongguo yu Yazhou zhongxibu diqu jiaowang de waijiao yuyan wenti" 明初中國與亞洲中西部地區交往的外交語言問題, in *Zhongguo xueshu* 中國學術, ed. Liu Dong 劉東 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007), 23: 2–9.

It is worth noting that even after the Yongle era, this tradition of multilingual literature did not fade from the Ming empire. Mirza Muhammed Haidar wrote in the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* (History of Rashid) that he witnessed a monument in Tsongkha (Zongka/Xi Ning 西宁), situated in Qinghai (Kokonor), in October 1533, consisting of a combination of three languages: Han, Tibetan, and Persian. The central message of the monument was to promote Buddhism and was accompanied by an official decree to repair its temples. Based on his observations, the monument must have been erected within the previous century.[40] Therefore, it clearly is a product of the period following the death of Emperor Taizu, Yongle's father. This inscription was established by a decree of the Ming emperor who ruled over the Tsongkha region, so as to effectively maintain the very prosperous Buddhist community in the area [which was also the birthplace of the founder of the Gelug Sect, Je Tsongkhapa], and to demonstrate the Ming emperor's strong support for Tibetan Buddhism.

3 Promoting Politics through Religion: a Brief Observation on Ming Empire Religious Policy

Due to limited space, the religious policies implemented by the Ming dynasty discussed in this section specifically refer only to Tibetan Buddhism. It considers the Ming dynasty's use of political means to win over religious forces in the northwest Gansu-Qinghai-Tibet region and strengthening the rule of imperial power in the area. Alternatively, an illustrative example highlighting the specific effects of the Ming dynasty's political and religious policies in the Amdo region can be provided. In the first half of the 19th century, the monk Dkon-mchog-bstan-pa-rab-rgyas of Labrang Monastery completed the seminal work *Mdo smad chos 'byun* (The History of Politics and Religion in Amdo). This work was based on research of local historical books in the southern regions of Gansu. In the book, when describing the religious history of the Gansu-Kokonor region from the 14th–17th centuries, dates were often recorded by the reign year of the Ming dynasty emperors, instead of the traditional Tibetan calendar. This is strong evidence that the Amdo Tibetan region was indeed shrouded in the political prestige of the Ming Emperor, to the extent that historical records at that time utilized Ming era years as the principal form of chronology. This practice was inherited and accepted by Brag-dgon Źabs-druṅ 智觀巴·貢卻乎丹巴饒吉 several centuries later.

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[40] Mi'erzan Maheima Haida'er 米兒咱·馬黑麻·海答兒 [Mirza Muhammad Haidar], *Zhong-Ya Mengwuer shi: Lashide shi* 中亞蒙兀兒史—拉失德史, 2nd ed., trans. Xinjiang shehui kexueyuan minzu yanjiusuo 新疆社會科學院民族研究所 (Wulu muqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1983), 387.

The major policy of "promoting politics through religion," implemented in the Ming Empire was also reflected in its political negotiations with the Eastern and Western Mongolians during the 16th and 17th centuries. The Tümed Mongols in the southern desert became the focus of the Ming dynasty's missionary endeavors. From the early years of the Longqing 隆慶 period (1567–1572), to the early Wanli 萬曆 (1572–1620) period, the Ming dynasty, at the request of Altan Qaghan (r. 1571–1582), repeatedly dispatched lamas and monks carrying Buddhist scriptures and statues to him. These Western lamas, who often originated from the Ming-controlled Tibetan areas, actually shared the same identity as subjects of the Ming emperors. Their religious activities in the Mongolian region played a crucial role in the local Mongols' full acceptance of the Gelug sect's beliefs, thereby alleviating conflicts and enhancing communication between the Ming and Mongols. At present, there is a systematic study in the academic community on the propaganda work actively implemented by the Ming dynasty and its effectiveness, which is related to the fifth chapter of *Hotokatai = Sechien = Hontaiji no kenkyū* ホトカタイ=セチエン=ホンタイジの研究 published by Inoue Osamu 井上治 in 2002.[41] At that time, the high political prestige enjoyed by the Ming empire in Inner Asia and the effects of its religious policies even prompted the Third Dalai Lama to write to Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582) in the sixth year of the Wanli reign (1578), seeking rewards and preferential treatment from the Ming court, and promising to complete the political task of persuading Altan Qaghan to return on behalf of the Ming dynasty.[42] In the early 17th century, the Ming dynasty further shifted its missionary focus to the Western Mongols who were active near the northern Tianshan Road in the Western Regions. According to the account of a Russian envoy who sent the leader of the Oirats people, Erdeni Batur, in 1616, the Ming and Altan Qaghan jointly worked to promote the conversion of the Mongols to their religious beliefs, resulting in mass conversions among the Mongols. He also vividly described the details of Tibetan Buddhism, which was actively spread during religious activities by the Ming and Eastern Mongols.

This policy of promoting politics through religion in the Ming dynasty was not only successful in strengthening the political connection between the Ming court and the border areas, but also smoothened the relationship between the Qing dynasty and the border areas that were later added to the greater empire. In the Mongolian history text, *Zanya Bandida zhuan* 咱雅班第達傳, recorded that when the Dalai Lama of Tibet rewarded Western Mongolians in 1690, he commenced the document with the appellation “degedü tayibung qaγan” to show the origins of his authority, thereby granting secular authority to the Mongol leaders.[43] As mentioned earlier, the term “tayibung qaγan” here explicitly refers to the Great Ming Qaghan, synonymous with the Ming emperor, and the inclusion of the prefix “deged ü” connotes superiority. Therefore, the entire title as written reflected a high degree of respect for the Ming emperor. This begs the question: why did the Dalai Lama first legitimize his power in the documents by explicitly referring to the authority of the Ming emperor when communicating with the Western Mongols? This is believed to stem from the fact that Emperor Wanli 萬曆帝 (r. 1563–1620) had bestowed religious titles on the aforementioned three Dalai Lamas.[44] According to research conducted by Hiromichi Katagiri, during the Wanli era, the Ming bestowed upon the Dalai Lama the title of Abhiseka Gushri 灌頂大國師, a title highly esteemed by the Gelug sect, albeit absent from Ming dynasty records. This is once again demonstrated by the fact that during the Fifth Dalai Lama’s reign, the Tibetan transcription of the Chinese title “kwan ding ta’i gu shr’i” was occasionally employed at the outset of official documents, with a clear reference to the fact that the conferral of the title originated from Emperor Wanli’s decree, and in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of his authority. This public display of this legitimation is strong evidence for the Dalai Lama’s religious dependence and subordination to Chinese imperial power. What is even more intriguing is that this title continues to be used in Tibetan official documents issued by the Dalai Lama even as late as 1648, after Manchus began to rule China proper.

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[41] Inoue Osamu 井上治, *Hotokatai = Sechien = Hontaiji no kenkyū* ホトカタイ=セチエン=ホンタイジの研究 (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 2002).

[42] Deng Ruiling 鄧銳齡, *Deng Ruiling Zangzu shi lunwen yiwenji* 鄧銳齡藏族史論文譯文集 (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 2004), 1: 69–71.

Upon the Fifth Dalai Lama’s visit to Beijing in 1652, he was presented with a new seal engraved in three languages, Han, Manchurian, and Tibetan, corresponding to the new title bestowed upon him by Emperor Shunzhi. This new appellation superseded the one bestowed by the Ming Abhiseka Gushri. The Chinese characters on the new seal read as *xitian dashan zizai zaifo suolingtianxia shijiao putong wachi ladala dalai lama* 西天大善自在在佛所領天下釋教普通瓦赤喇怛喇達賴喇嘛, which the Dalai Lama then had transliterated into Tibetan, word by word, mirroring the approach taken with the

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[43] Xi Nuoerbu 西·諾爾布, annot., *Zhaya Bandida zhuan* 劄雅班第達傳 (Huhe haote: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 1999), 228.

[44] Qi Guang 齊光, *Daqing diguo shiqi Menggu de zhengzhi yu shehui: yi Alashan he Shuote bu yanjiu wei zhongxin* 大清帝國時期蒙古的政治與社會—以阿拉善和碩特部研究為中心 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2013), 60.

Ming-bestowed title. The transcription read as "zi then t'a zhan tsi tse'i ph'o sh'o wu'i then zha shi kyo'u yi thung b'i zhi da'i chi kying gang de'i khe'i shang zi." This title, which states that it comes from the Qing emperor (known as *hong de* in Tibetan transliteration) came to be used at the beginning of official documents issued by the Dalai Lama.

Following these events, a direct transcription of this from the Chinese word "da'i chi kying gang" 大持金剛 was made in 1663 and was frequently seen in the orders issued by the Dalai Lama, gradually superseding the usage of Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, which had been prevalent in earlier edicts. This transliteration gradually displaced the Sanskrit rendition of the name "badzra dha ra," which had been the predominant appellation for the Fifth Dalai Lama, signifying "vajra" in Tibetan script, until his demise in 1682.[45] To sum up, it is not difficult to observe that since the Dalai Lama intervened in the political situation of Tibet as a religious authority in the latter half of the 16th century, until the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the source of his authority had always been derived from the imperial Chinese court, so he used the Chinese titles in the seals granted by the Ming and Qing emperors directly in the way of transliteration in Tibetan language on his official documents, publicly demonstrating that they were legitimized by the Chinese emperors.

In the article above, the author briefly explored and analyzed specific aspects of the Ming empire's "Inner Asianness," which can be interpretated as the primary precursor of the "Inner Asianness" of the Qing dynasty, a subject of inquiry currently being discussed by American scholars of New Qing History. It is evident that the emergence and continuation of the Ming empire's "Inner Asianness" is inseparable from their inheritance of the immense political legacy left by the Mongol Yuan dynasty, and the adaptations the Ming undertook in grappling with it. Regrettably, many foreign scholars have often overlooked this unique continuity in the Ming dynasty when examining the legacy and impact of the Yuan era. For example, when discussing the inheritance and division of "Mongolian heritage," James A. Millward skips the Ming dynasty and directly goes to the Qing dynasty,[46] or, like Hidetoshi Okada, utilizes a Yuan-North Yuan-Qing model to track the cultural impact of Inner Asia.

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[45] Katagiri Hiromichi 片桐宏道, "DaraiLama 5sei no meireibun teikeika to sono eikyō" ダライラマ五世の命令文定型化とその影響, *Tōyōshi Kenkyū* 東洋史研究 71, no. 3 (2012), 1–28.

[46] James A. Millward, "The Qing Formation, the Mongol Legacy, and the 'End of History' in Early Modern Central Eurasia," in *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time*, ed. Lynn A. Struve (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 92–120; Okada Hidehiro 岡田英弘, *Shijie shi de dansheng* 世界史的誕生, trans. Chen Xinhui 陳心慧 (Xinbei: Baqi wenhua, 2016).

These perspectives greatly overlook the coherence and similarity in the rule of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties in maintaining Inner Asian qualities, ultimately mischaracterizing the development of Chinese history. It is the author's view that the international sinology community should platform and advance highly empirical research that vividly demonstrates the profound "Inner Asianness" of the Ming empire. It is only by doing so that we can more accurately explain the complex development of Chinese history of the past two millennia.

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