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"Include and Rule": The Non-Titular Ethnic Elites in Eurasian Empires, 1500–1850s*

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Eurasian empires were multireligious, multilingual, and multiethnic. This fact, obvious to researchers of West Asian and South Asian empires, has also attracted much attention from historians of the Russian and Chinese empires since the 1990s, especially after the "imperial turn" in Russian history and the rise of the "New Qing History."[1] Studies on the multidimensional and hybrid characteristics of individual empires have proliferated. However, comparative studies of Eurasian empires have largely been limited to themes related to modernity and nationalism.[2] There have been attempts to narrate the history of major empires, both Eurasian and Western, featuring the "politics of difference" that empires employed to incorporate and differentiate people, but their focus has been on the historical trajectories of entire empires rather than on the specific roles of different religious and ethnic groups.[3] The recent Brill series "Rulers & Elites," especially the volume *Prince, Pen, and Sword*, is a remarkable attempt at a comparative study of premodern states.[4] However, its main focus is kingship, and its analysis of elites is not closely related to the politics of difference.

This essay examines one of the features shared by Eurasian empires and the one that also set them apart from the European ones: "the outside factor" or the fact that they were, with a few exceptions, conquered by outsiders with backgrounds originating from Central Eurasian steppes, who in turn relied on other outsiders—an elite drawn from the recently subdued neighboring peoples—to govern their empires. In Europe, intermarriage and exchange between dynasties and elites across empires was common, and diversity was accommodated by the composite structure of empires, such as the Habsburgs, which

* Many thanks to Jeffrey Glover for his editorial remarks and corrections.

1 Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M. Martin, "The Imperial Turn," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 4 (2006), pp. 705–712.; James A. Millward, Ruth W. Dunnell, Mark C. Elliott, and Philippe Forêt, eds., *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

2 For example, Huri Islamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Shared Histories of Modernity: China, India, and the Ottoman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2009); Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

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

4 Maaike van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam, eds., *Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives*, Rulers & Elites, vol. 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

consisted of smaller territorial and jurisdictional units.[5] However, people from conquered territories outside Christian Europe were rarely allowed to enter the upper echelons of power.

In contrast, by the mid-seventeenth century, all Eurasian empires except Russia were ruled by foreign dynasties and people who imposed themselves on the historically predominant population: the Ottomans upon the diverse non-Turkic peoples of Anatolia and the Balkans, the Safavids on Persian civilization, the Mughals on the ancient cultures of the Indian subcontinent, and the Manchu Qing upon the predominantly Confucian Han Chinese. All Eurasian empires, including Russia, actively recruited non-titular ethnic elites. This essay aims to compare the roles of these ethnic elites in different Eurasian empires, thereby shedding light on their distinct modes of imperial authority, elite formation, rule of newly acquired territories, and centralization/fragmentation. This study covers the period up to the mid-nineteenth century; however, because the history of the Ottoman, Russian, and Qing Empires extends beyond that time, we also touch upon the situation of these empires through the early twentieth century.

The Russian Empire: From Assimilation to Acculturation

Among the Eurasian empires, Russia was the only one to emerge in the wake of the Mongol conquest, with an indigenous dynasty at the helm. Nonetheless, Moscow's fortune remained closely intertwined with the steppe and its inhabitants. To assert legitimacy in the newly conquered eastern and southern regions, Muscovite rulers had to present themselves as heirs to Chinggis Khan and the khans of the Golden Horde. From the fifteenth century onward, the tsars positioned themselves as patrons of the dissident Chinggisids and other Tatar nobilities who were willing to migrate to Muscovy. Some fled internal rivalries within the Horde, and others were dispatched by Horde's rulers for safekeeping in Muscovy. These migrants usually arrived with retinues of several hundred horsemen and were given estates and income in exchange for their military service.

One early example is that of Chinggisid Prince Qasim, the son of the khan of the Golden Horde, Ulugh Muhammed. Traditional Russian historiography tells us that in 1452, Moscow's Grand Prince Vasilii II (r. 1425–1462) granted Qasim a frontier town southeast of Moscow. In reality, Vasilii II had little to grant. The town, later named Kasimov, was located in the borderlands between Muscovy, Kazan, and the Crimean Khanate. Moscow's princes continued to collect taxes on behalf of the khans and deliver tributes to the Horde. For Qasim and his successors, Moscow's "grant" was only a customary tribute, which Moscow channeled directly to the Crown Prince Qasim. Even after

5 J. H. Elliott, "A Europe of Composite Monarchies," *Past & Present* 137, no. 1 (1992), pp. 48–71.

Kasimov was annexed by Muscovy in the early sixteenth century, it retained its special status. The official Russian documents continued to refer to Kasimov as "tsardom" and to its rulers as tsars and crown princes well into the seventeenth century.[6]

As Moscow's power grew, and the Golden Horde declined and splintered, more Tatar princes and nobles sought military service in Muscovy. Some came of their own will, were granted estates, and entered military service as the heads of their cavalry units. Others ended up as valuable hostages and were used to blackmail various steppe rulers by threatening to depose them in favor of their rivals held by Moscow.

Ironically, it was Ivan IV (1533–1584), the conqueror of the Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates, who forged a particularly close relationship with the steppe. The first Muscovite ruler to be crowned tsar (a title that was equivalent to both the Roman emperors and Chinggisid khans), Ivan IV, had to present himself as a legitimate successor to the khans to rule in Horde's former dominions. This was the beginning of a long and challenging journey to convince Western and steppe rulers of his legitimacy at both ends of the continent.

Ivan IV spared no effort in attracting steppe nobles to his service. They came from all the corners of the steppe: Kazan, Astrakhan, Crimea, nomadic Nogays, and sedentary Adyges (Circassians) of the North Caucasus. Many became top military commanders and faithful servitors. The Turko-Mongol elite proved to be a critical pillar of Ivan IV's support, and he often used them as counterweights to Muscovite boyars (*boyars*, high-ranking nobles), whom he considered conniving and treacherous.

In the most famous bizarre incident in 1575, Ivan IV briefly abdicated the throne in favor of Sain-Bulat, the Chinggisid grandson of the last khan of the Golden Horde, Ahmad. Sain-Bulat was a prisoner during the conquest of Kazan in 1552, ruled Kasimov in the 1560s, and, after his conversion to Orthodox Christianity in 1573, became known as Semeon Bekbulatovich. His conversion from Islam to Christianity was a prerequisite for his arranged marriage to Anastasia Mstislavskaia, the offspring of the crown princes of Rus, and Ivan III's Byzantine wife, Sofia Paleologue. If necessary, he was qualified to claim crowns in both the steppe and Muscovy. In 1575, this became necessary due to Ivan's machinations. Ivan IV abdicated the throne in Moscow in favor of Semeon and made him a grand prince. For a year, Semeon ruled Muscovy as a figurehead, while Ivan retained power. The ruse worked and the humbled boyars begged Ivan to return to the throne.[7]

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6 V. V. Vel'iaminov-Zernov, *Issledovanie o Kasimovskikh tsariakh i tsarevichakh*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1863–87), vol. 1, pp, 217–246, vol. 3, 317–318.

7 Charles J. Halperin, *Ivan the Terrible: Free to Reward and Free to Punish* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

There are different explanations for Ivan's strange maneuver, which seems to have been intended to make boyars submit to his will.[8] However, Ivan's move certainly made one thing clear: if Ivan claimed to be a successor to the heritage of the Golden Horde, Semeon had equally legitimate claims to rule Muscovy the way his Chinggisid predecessors did for centuries. After Ivan IV's death, Semeon's Chinggisid roots, his conversion to Christianity, and his marriage to the ruling Riurik dynasty made him a feared rival of those who claimed the Muscovite throne. In the following decades and under different tsars, Semeon was deprived of his title, blinded by poison, forcibly tonsured, and moved between different monasteries before finally dying at Simonov Monastery in Moscow in 1616.

There were many personal connections between Muscovy and the Horde. In 1561, Ivan took Guashene as his second wife. Better known as Maria Temriukovna, upon her conversion to Christianity, she was the daughter of the powerful Kabardin prince Temriuk from the renowned Adyge dynasty, who was intermarried with the Chinggisids. Maria's sister married Astrakhan Khan Bekbulat and Semeon Bekbulatovich was her nephew. The kinship bonds between the ruling Riurik dynasty of Muscovy and the Chinggisid rulers from the steppe were intended to forge a political alliance at the highest possible level.

Ivan's preference for the steppe nobles did not escape the attention of Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov, one of the first Russian historians, who in the late eighteenth century lamented that Ivan IV favored the Chinggisids at the expense of the Russian dynasties. Indeed, in a genealogical registry of noble families, the descendants of the Astrakhan, Crimean, and Kazan tsars were second only to the crown princes of Kiev, Vladimir, and Moscow, whereas the dynasties from Lithuania, Chernigov, Tver, and other old Rus principalities were further down the ladder.[9]

Both the Chinggisid and non-Chinggisid noble dynasties were essential parts of the Muscovite nobility. However, thousands of middle-ranking servitors from the lesser nobility arrived from the steppe to join the military.

8 For a comprehensive review of contemporary accounts and extremely varied historiographical explanations of Semeon Bekbulatovich's appointment as grand prince of all Rus, see Donald Ostrowski, "Simeon Bekbulatovich's Remarkable Career as Tatar Khan, Grand Prince of Rus', and Monastic Elder," *Russian History* 39, no. 3 (2012), pp. 269–299. Ostrowski himself inferred that Ivan made Semeon, a Chinggisid, grand prince of Rus to thwart a coup plot to replace Ivan on the throne with the Crimean khan and to enable himself to continue his investigation and punishment of suspected conspirators by acting as a prince under the jurisdiction of the grand prince. The three historians who made comments on his article in the same issue of *Russian History*, however, did not find his hypothesis convincing.

9 M. M. Shcherbatov, *Istoriia rossiiskaia ot drevneishikh vremen*, vol. 4, pt. 3 (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1858), p. 223, as quoted in S. O. Schmidt, *U istokov rossiiskogo absoliutizma* (Moscow: Progress, 1996), p. 348.

The majority of such servitors were compelled to Russify their names and convert to Orthodox Christianity. Within three generations, they were completely assimilated, and only their last names betrayed their true family origins. Today, their presence is evident in many Russified Turkic family names.

For a long time, the price of inclusion in Russian society and the noble hierarchy was religious conversion and assimilation. However, in some cases, the authorities accepted a dual identity for some indigenous elites. This was likely the case with the Muslim Tatar noble Muhammed Qutlu Tawakkul, also known as Muhammed Tevkelev and Aleksei Tevkelev. Initially a translator in Moscow's Foreign Office, Tevkelev was dispatched on many diplomatic missions to the steppe peoples on the southern frontier. Whether he actually converted to Christianity is not clear, but in his promotion to the rank of colonel in 1734, he is referred to as Aleksei Ivanovich Tevkelev. At the same time, to the Kazakhs, Kalmyks, Bashkirs, and others, he continued to be known by his Muslim name. Eventually, he rose to the rank of major general and became a co-governor of the Orenburg region. It is possible that in order to have a more effective negotiator with the indigenous peoples on the frontier, the government allowed Tevkelev to retain a dual identity. It is also possible that he hid his religious conversion from his former co-religionists.[10]

Apart from those converts who merged with the Russian nobility, converts from Islam to Orthodoxy in the Middle Volga region remained a socially vulnerable minority. From the second half of the seventeenth century, the Orthodox Church and government increased pressure for conversion, which eventually went beyond any reasonable measure of assimilation. Forced conversions and the destruction of mosques peaked in the 1740s, but were halted by Catherine II (r. 1762–1796) in 1764. The forced conversion policy led to a prolonged backlash, and as a result of the reinvigorated influence of Islam in the Middle Volga, many baptized Tatars returned to the Islamic faith in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet it is undeniable that these conversions created a hybrid religious milieu, and vibrant Christian Tatar (Kryashen) communities have survived to the present day.[11]

By the early nineteenth century, now the more mature empire had faced a growing need for colonial administrators. In some cases, including the cantonist school system for Jews (1827–1856),[12] the Russian government adopted

10 Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 204; Charles Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire: Loyalty and Tsarist Authority in Bashkiria, 1552–1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), p. 45.

11 Michael Khodarkovsky, "The Conversion of Non-Christians in Early Modern Russia," in Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 115–143; Agnès Nilüfer Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

12 Johanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted into Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

another violent method of assimilation that combined education with the tremendous pressure to convert. As a norm, however, Russian authorities now preferred the cultural assimilation (acculturation) of the non-Christian elite to full assimilation, which required religious conversion. The government's intention was to produce a group of colonial administrators who would become interlocutors between the Russian authorities and the indigenous population. The government recruited a cohort of teenagers from the ranks of the non-Christian elite, brought them to Russian cities such as St. Petersburg, Orenburg, and Astrakhan to attend military schools, and then dispatched them back to their native regions, where they served Russia's interests. These young men were perfectly fluent in Russian language and culture but also retained their native culture, language, and religion.

This Russian policy was curiously reminiscent of a statement made later in 1835 by a renowned British official and historian, Thomas Babington Macauley. He advocated a new approach to governing India by creating "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern [−] a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect."[13] The implications of this similarity are twofold: On the one hand, by the time the British in India began to understand the importance of acculturating the indigenous elite, Russia had been practicing it for decades. On the other hand, the Russians began to provide quality education to the indigenous elite later than the British, who had long supported classical Indian education in Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian.

Dozens of acculturated young men found themselves to be children of several cultures: a native one into which they were born and reared, and an imperial Russian one in which they were educated. Sent to serve Russian imperial interests among their people, some did so with vigor and loyalty. Others, such as Semen Atarshchikov (1807–1845), an ethnic Chechen officer in the Russian army, who was distressed by the injustices of the Russian authorities, chose to defect to the natives and fight against Russian colonizers.[14] Most of these colonial interlocutors found themselves torn between the two worlds that they knew very well. They were certain that they were bringing progress and civilization, new ideas, and new ways to their people. At the same time, they also observed how often the Russian authorities ignored their advice, misunderstood native societies, and abused their power. Many native colonial administrators remained deeply frustrated because what they had envisioned

13 Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir, eds., *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781–1843* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), p. 171.

14 Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal During the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

as a two-way street turned out to be a blind alley.[15] In newly conquered and culturally distant colonies such as Turkestan, Russian authorities treated indigenous interlocutors with distrust, and miscommunication between them was arguably more serious than in British India.[16]

The Ottoman Empire: The Systematic Recruitment of "Outsiders" and Its Decline

Islamic empires relied heavily on integrating non-Muslim elites and commoners into their social hierarchies and imperial structures. The principal institution that channeled non-Muslims into government services was *ghulam* (*ghilman*, plural), a long-established Islamic practice of slave-based military and government administration that had been in place since the Abbasids and often involved steppe people. The ghilman ranks were primarily drawn from prisoners of war, considered a part of the booty, one-fifth of whom was traditionally due to a Muslim ruler. Another source of ghilman was the sons of local nobles from the conquered territories. In the Ottoman case, these were young men of Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, and other Balkan origins who had been trained at the imperial palace.[17]

In the late fourteenth century, under Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402), the ghilman system was fully established. Within several decades, the Ottomans expanded it by putting into practice the institution of the *devshirme*, the child levy collected mostly from the Christian population in the Balkans and later in Asia Minor. Theoretically, the devshirme was levied at a rate of one boy for every forty Christian peasant households. In reality, the devshirme was collected irregularly, and the numbers varied significantly. It peaked in the mid-sixteenth century. Thereafter, until its formal abolition in the early 1700s, the collection of the devshirme was rarely mentioned. It is estimated that, over time, the Ottomans brought anywhere between 200,000 and 300,000 boys to Istanbul to be converted to Islam, trained in administrative or military affairs, and to become the sultan's most loyal subjects.[18]

The devshirme consisted primarily of preadolescent boys, although young men up to the age of twenty years were also included. Most were children of peasants, but some came from families of local notables. They were converted, taught Ottoman Turkish, and introduced to the precepts of Islam before they

15 For different roles played by indigenous intermediaries in the Russian, Qing, and British Indian Empires, see Tomohiko Uyama, "Invitation, Adaptation, and Resistance to Empires: Cases of Central Asia," in Tomohiko Uyama, ed., *Comparing Modern Empires: Imperial Role and Decolonization in the Changing World Order* (Sapporo: Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2018), pp. 99–118.

16 A. S. Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand 1868–1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

17 Halil İnalcık, "Ghulām," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp. 1085–1890.

18 V. L. Menage, "Devshirme," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, pp. 210–212.

could be enrolled in one of the four imperial institutions: the palace, scribes, military, or the clergy. As might be expected, the devshirme system was subject to abuse, where officers in charge took larger numbers of children and sold them as slaves in the private market. Some parents were happy to pay a bribe to be exempt from this levy, while others saw it as a good opportunity for their child's social mobility.[19]

The most promising young men were sent to Enderun Mektebi, a boarding school in the palace. Here, together with the royal princes, the former devshirme received the best academic and military education. Giovanni Antonio Menavino left a detailed account of life among the Ottomans in the early sixteenth century. He was a Genoese sailor, who as a teenager was taken prisoner by the Ottomans, lived as a slave in Istanbul, and eventually was able to return to Italy where in 1548 he published a five-volume description of his experience. He reported that the purpose of the palace education of the ghilman was to produce thoroughly Islamized gentlemen, who knew how to speak and behave politely, were conversant with the literature, and were chaste and self-controlled.[20]

The school's graduates comprised the top tier of Ottoman society, and upon completion were expected to have a full command of the Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic languages, as well as good knowledge of sciences, history, theology, and law. Most graduates held high-level administrative and military positions. Many became grand viziers, the highest office of the Ottoman government. They often maintained their language and ties to their homelands. For example, Mehmet Sokollu Pasha, a Serbian who served as grand vizier under three sultans for fourteen years (1565–1579), persuaded Süleyman I (the Magnificent, r. 1520–1566) to restore the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć when he was still the second vizier, and helped his brother (or a close relative) Makarije become the patriarch.[21]

However, a great majority of the devshirme did not end up in the Palace School, but were instead inducted into the military. Early on, they formed the core of the Sultan's Special Guard, the Kapikulu ("Servants of the Porte") units, which comprised both cavalry and infantry. The latter became famed janissaries (from *yeni cheri* [new corps]) who played an outsized role in Ottoman history. By the end of the sixteenth century, most janissaries came from Muslim families, and the recruitment of the devshirme began to decline.

For some contemporary Ottoman observers, signs of imperial decline seem to coincide with the greatly reduced number of devshirmes. Mustafa Ali, an Ottoman statesman and historian, blamed the policies of the sultan

19 I. Hakki Uzunçarşılı, "Devşirme," in *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Basımevi, 1944), pp. 563–565.

20 Inalcik, "Ghulam," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. 2, p. 1088.

21 Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), pp. 55–59.

Murad III (r. 1574–1595), who preferred "Iranians [*acemler*, including Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens from the border provinces] from abroad to the novice devshirme recruits." To Ali, these "eastern foreigners," who were recruited from the former Safavid territories of Shirvan and Azerbaijan, were the cause of the Ottoman time of troubles, which included riots among palace troops and uprisings in the provinces. His solution was to renew the devshirme and restore the old military slavery system.[22]

The "decline" of the Ottoman Empire in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was a perception of intellectuals rather than an objective reality, and certainly did not indicate the beginning of a 350-year decline of the empire as the obsolete "Ottoman decline thesis" claimed.[23] The works of these intellectuals comprised a literary genre of "decline treatise" that belonged to the broader genre of advice literature (*nasihatname*) in the Islamic world and reflected the intense debate over Ottoman concepts of legitimacy and sovereignty. Mustafa Ali's view, in particular, stemmed in part from his discontent with the personnel policy, which he felt had made his career less successful than what his merits deserved.[24] The gradual abandonment of the devshirme was a result of the routinization of bureaucracy and the transfer of power from the sultan to the vizier and pasha households and was part of the transformation rather than the decline of the Ottoman political system.[25] However, the decline of the devshirme certainly meant the loss of the systematic recruitment of "outsiders."[26]

Whether the military units formed by the devshirme were indeed a form of military slavery remains controversial. Others argued that once converted, the devshirme could no longer be considered slaves, because Islam strictly forbade the enslavement of any Muslim. The Ottoman ulema did not seem to have a problem with this institution, which was common across the Islamic world. In strictly legal terms, it is difficult to see janissaries as slaves. If anything, they

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22 Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 154–155.

23 On the dismantling of the "decline" paradigm and remaining questions, see Leslie Peirce, "Changing Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire: The Early Centuries," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19, no. 1 (2004), pp. 6–28.

24 Douglas A. Howard, "Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline' of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Asian History* 22, no. 1 (1988), pp. 52–77.

25 Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 99–102. Baki Tezcan argues that around 1580 the Ottoman Empire made a transition from patrimonialism to a fledgling limited monarchy. Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

26 Suraiya Faroqhi, "Crisis and Change, 1590–1699," in Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 571.

were slaves of the state as represented by the sultan.[27] The line between slavery and servitude was ill-defined in all Eurasian empires, where subjects were referred to by a word that meant both slave and servant: *kholop* in Russian, *kul* and *abd* in Ottoman, *bende* and *ghulam* in Persian, *booi aha* in Manchu, and *nucai* in Chinese. In many ways, they are best considered slaves of a sultan and servants of a state, with no clear distinction between them.

The influx of non-Ottomans, who joined the military and administrative ranks, came from different places. During the devshirme system, prisoners of war were among the most common sources of military recruits. They were referred to by the specific term *esir*, which meant both a prisoner of war and a slave. In the wake of the Ottoman military success, many arrived from Christian Europe, Arab lands, and Eastern Anatolia.

As a major slave consumer, the Ottomans received a steady supply of human chattels via the port of Kaffa in Crimea. Most of these slaves came from Slavic lands and were sold, resold, and registered in private households. Yet many ended up as slaves in the Ottoman galleys or, if converted, entered the ranks of the navy and army. In addition, the sultans traditionally received thousands of Adyge slaves, commonly known as Circassians, as valuable gifts from the Crimean khans. The khans considered the Adyge people of the northwest Caucasus as their subjects and expected them to offer young men and women as tributes. When such human tributes were not paid, the Crimeans launched punishing raids against Adyge in order to enforce the delivery of native slaves.[28]

The Adyges were particularly prized-women for their beauty and men for their martial skills. Many women ended up in the sultan's harem and many men were recruited to the Ottoman soldiery, where they were particularly renowned for their skills and bravery. With Russia's expulsion of the Adyges from their homeland into the Ottoman Empire, many men continued the old tradition and joined the ranks of the Ottoman military.[29]

Throughout the centuries, the Porte pursued a policy of assimilating non-Ottoman newcomers who joined the government. The devshirme is a prime example. After the devshirme was abandoned, a few non-Ottoman young men were brought to Istanbul to be educated and prepared for government roles;

27 Halil Inalcik argued that the Ottomans did not consider a devshirme levy as enslavement but as an extension of extraordinary services imposed upon the *reaya* (the tax-paying lower class). Halil İnalcık, "Servile Labor in the Ottoman Empire," in Abraham Ascher et al., eds., *The Mutual Effects of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian Worlds: The East European Pattern* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), p. 46.

28 Natalia Królikowska-Jedlińska, "Slaves of the Crimean Khan or Muslim Warriors? The Status of Circassians in the Early Modern Period," in Felicia Roșu, ed., *Slavery in the Black Sea Region, c.900–1900: Forms of Unfreedom at the Intersection between Christianity and Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 364–384.

29 Although initially exempt from military service, immigrants from the North Caucasus became a fixture in the Ottoman army after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024), pp. 62, 77, 110, 112–113, 143–144, 151, 168, 181.

only a few Ottoman administrators came from the same regions and were later sent to help govern. In the nineteenth century, a growing number of Arab-turned-Ottomans assumed higher offices in Istanbul.[30] However, the Porte never made an effort to create an acculturated colonial elite, as the Russian and British Empires did. In part, it was because in contrast to the European and Russian colonial enterprises, the Ottomans lacked an ideology of "a civilizing mission." This was a classic Islamic empire, not a product of the Enlightenment, and they had no interest in enlightening non-Ottoman and non-Muslim populations in secular terms. Additionally, as a military-fiscal state primarily focused on revenue, the Ottomans believed that they had a model of governing that required no change. It was not until the late nineteenth century that both the idea of "a civilizing mission" and the new ways of governing brought about comprehensive changes. The Ottomans made belated efforts to do so in the eastern borderlands, but without much success. To train and educate the sons of tribal notables among Arabs, Kurds, and later Albanians, the authorities founded the Imperial Tribal School in Istanbul in 1897. By 1907, the school closed its doors.[31]

The Safavid Empire: The Georgian Ghilman vs. the Qizilbash

In the early sixteenth century, a new state emerged in Iran. Known as the Safavid Empire, it was created by the successful military alliance of numerous Turkic and Kurdish tribes in the southwestern Caspian region. These tribal troops formed the backbone of the Safavid state and were referred to as the Qizilbash or Red Hats because of their distinct headgear. Adherents of the mystical Safavi branch of Shia Islam, which emphasized the obedience of tribal members (a novice, *murid*) to their spiritual masters (*sheykh* or *pir*), the Qizilbash simply transferred their loyalty from many spiritual leaders to a single military and political authority: the shah. However, it did not take long for rival factions to emerge among the Qizilbash elites.

Throughout the sixteenth century, after successful military campaigns in the Caucasus, the Safavids brought back tens of thousands Georgian, Armenian, and Adyge prisoners of war. Most captives were women and children. Some women ended up in the shah's harem. By the time of Shah Tahmasp's (r. 1524–1576) death, seven out of his nine adolescent sons were born to Georgian or Adyge women.

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30 Metin Kunt, "Ottomans and Safavids: States, Statecrafts, and Societies, 1500–1800," in Youssef M. Choueiri, ed., *A Companion to the History of the Middle East* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 204.

31 Eugene Rogan, "Aşiret Mektebi: Abdülhamid II's School for Tribes (1892–1907)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996), pp. 83–107.

Young male captives, most of whom were Georgians, formed *ghilman* and military slave units, some joining a shah's personal guard, called *qorchi*.[32] Others were government officials and prominent statesmen. Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629) and subsequent shahs used ghilman as a fiercely loyal force to counteract the traditional Qizilbash, whose factionalism threatened his centralizing agenda. By the early seventeenth century, the descendants of these captives had emerged as "a third force" in addition to the Qizilbash and Iranian elites. If the Qizilbash were known as "lords of the sword" and Persians as "lords of the pen," the newcomers from the Caucasus belonged to the warrior class and were mostly competing with the Qizilbash.[33]

While no Georgian ever gained the position of grand vizier, they frequently occupied high military and administrative positions during the Safavid Empire. An early example of this is Jesse, a royal prince from Kakheti. In 1555, the Safavids and Ottomans signed the Treaty of Amasya, which ended two decades of war and left control of the northeastern Caucasus, including the Georgian kingdoms of Kakheti and Kartli, to the Safavids. To gain leverage over the eastern Georgian kingdom of Kakheti, the Safavids demanded a royal Kakheti prince as a hostage. Initially, Jesse, the son of the Kakheti King Leon, was confined to the forbidding castle of Alamut, but in time, he converted to Islam, received a new name, Isa Khan Gorji, and was sent to govern the province of Shaki near his homeland. He eventually married a royal Safavid princess and served the Safavid court until the Ottoman invasion forced him to flee back to Kakheti, where he reconverted to Christianity before his death in 1580.

While some, similar to Jesse, ended up in the Safavid Empire as hostages, others voluntarily looked for support in their unfulfilled ambitions. In 1561, David XI, the brother of the king of Kartli, Simon I, fled Kartli and found refuge among the Safavids. He converted to Islam and became known as Daud Khan. The following year, Shah Tahmasp rewarded him by making him the ruler of Kartli, who reigned from 1562 to 1578. But when, in the hope of rallying Kartli against the invading Ottoman forces, the Safavids released his brother Simon I from captivity, Daud Khan fled to the Ottomans. He was welcomed and lived there until his death in 1583. His two sons remained in Persia and became important players in the Safavid politics.[34]

By the late sixteenth century, the ghilman system had produced its own assimilated high-ranking Georgian elite. In 1586, a Georgian served as a royal tutor and guardian to the Safavid prince. Known as *lala* among both the Safavids

32 Masashi Haneda, "The Evolution of the Safavid Royal Guard," *Iranian Studies* 22, no. 2/3 (1989), pp. 57–85.

33 Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 64–68; H. R. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 343.

34 Rudi Matthee, "Georgians in the Safavid Administration," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 10, fasc. 5 (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2001), pp. 493–496.

and Ottomans, or *atabeg* in the old Turkic tradition, such guardians commanded great respect and played a critical role in instructing the prince in the arts of governance.[35]

A young Georgian boy from the noble Georgian family of the Undiladze was brought to Iran and rose through the ranks of the ghilman to become one of the most successful and powerful government officials under Shah Abbas I. His Muslim name was Allahverdi Khan. Shortly after Abbas I created a special ghilman corps armed with muskets, he named Allahverdi Khan its commander. Allahverdi was the first among the new Georgian elites to govern traditional Safavid provinces, and later served as a commander-in-chief (*sepahsalar*) of the Safavid army until his death in 1613. Allahverdi's two sons, Imam Quli Khan and Daud Khan (Undiladze), also assumed prominent roles under Shah Abbas I as generals and governors. But their fortune changed with the rise of Shah Safi (r. 1629–1642). Suspicious of Abbas I's appointees and influenced by another Georgian Iranian, Khosrow Mirza (Rustam Khan), Shah Safi murdered Imam Quli Khan and his sons. Allahverdi's younger son, Daud Khan (Undiladze), was able to escape to Georgia and join the rebellion against Shah Safi, but eventually had to flee and end his days in the Ottoman Empire.

After Allahverdi's death, the shah appointed another ghulam, an Armenian convert Qarachaqay Khan, commander-in-chief. Among the many Qizilbash and Georgians, Qarachaqay Khan was the only Armenian to hold such an office. His is a typical story of a Christian Armenian boy rising through the ghilman system to become a shah's trusted confidant. At least one thing sets him apart from the other powerful ghilman. Throughout the years, Qarachaqay Khan accumulated an invaluable collection of Chinese porcelain, which he wisely donated to the shah's newly established trust (*waqf*) in Ardabil, the Safavid ancestral home. Today, it remains the most complete collection of Chinese blue and white porcelain, made between 1350 and 1600.[36]

Qarachaqay Khan's fierce loyalty to Shah Abbas I made him the shah's favorite henchman and compelled him to reduce his own homeland, the Erivan-Van region, to ruins to slow down the advance of the Ottoman army. In 1624, Qarachaqay Khan was dispatched for another punitive campaign to quell an uprising in Georgia. The campaign was joined by the Georgian convert and a high-ranking Safavid officer, Georgi Saakadze, also known as Mourav-Bek. Unexpectedly, Mourav-Bek switched sides, and together with the Georgian rebels, ambushed and crushed the Safavid army. Qarachaqay Khan and his son were killed.

35 R. M. Savory, "The Safavid Administrative System," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, p. 366.

36 Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, pp. 81–88; Massumeh Farhad, "Military Slaves in the Provinces: Collecting and Shaping the Arts," in Sussan Babaie et al., eds., *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp. 121–127.

Mourav-Bek's life is a mirror image of the fluid frontier identities and loyalties. In 1612, fearing a conspiracy, he fled to the Safavids, where he converted to Islam and served the shah with distinction. As a Georgian noble and fearsome officer, he proved himself in battle against the Ottomans and rose to become governor of Tbilisi. In 1624, he defected and rejoined the Georgians. For several years, Mourav-Bek continued fighting the Safavids until he was forced to flee and seek refuge in Istanbul. There, he fought several battles against the Safavids until he and his son were accused of treason and were executed in 1629.[37]

The Georgian Iranian nobility was omnipresent among the Safavids, and power struggles between different Georgian dynastic branches were common. For example, the Undiladze dynasty was extinguished as a result of the intrigue of another converted Georgian dynasty, Kartli's royal dynasty. At the center of the intrigue was a prominent Safavid official with Georgian roots. A successful general and governor, Khosrow Mirza, was the son of David XI, known as Daud Khan, and was raised by eunuchs in Isfahan, the Safavid capital. For his loyalty and achievements, in 1630, Shah Safi bestowed Khosrow Mirza with the new name and title of Rostam Khan and dispatched him to become a viceroy (*vali*) of Kartli. Rostam Khan arrived as the head of the Safavid army and quickly and brutally suppressed the resistance. He died in 1658, known for Persianizing Georgian society, while simultaneously protecting and patronizing its Christian Georgian identity.[38]

The numbers and influence of the non-Qizilbash and non-Iranian elites, most of whom were Georgians, continued to grow throughout the seventeenth century. According to one contemporary source, at the time of Shah Abbas's death ghilman held twenty-one of ninety-two most significant offices in the empire. Thirty years later, at least twenty-three out of the thirty-seven top military and administrative positions were held by ghilman. Shahs often took the daughters and sisters of Georgian rulers as wives, and Georgian Iranians married royal Safavid princes. Until the Safavids' demise in 1736, the ghilman-raised elite played a significant role in running the empire. In the end, it was growing factionalism among the elites that contributed to the Safavid decline. The Georgian dynasties were plotting to unseat each other. The smaller Armenian Iranian elite was conspiring against the Georgian ghilman. And of course, the Qizilbash and Iranians despised the ghilman newcomers.[39] Although

37 Keith Hitchins, "Georgia ii. History of Iranian-Georgian Relations," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 10, fasc. 4 (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2001), p. 467.

38 Hirotake Maeda, "Slave Elites Who Returned Home: Georgian *Vālī*-King Rostom and the Safavid Household Empire," *The Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 69 (2011), pp. 98–127; Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Household Reconfigured: Concubines, Eunuchs, and Military Slaves," in Sussan Babaie et al., eds., *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp. 36–38.

39 Matthee, "Georgians in the Safavid Administration." According to one account, the Iranians disparagingly referred to Georgians as *kara oglu*, sons of blacks.

the ghilman supported the shah, society under the Safavids was too divided to maintain stable centralized power for a long time.

The institution of the ghilman lasted until the early nineteenth century, when the introduction of a modern professional military made it obsolete. Geopolitical changes in the region also had an effect. Russia's effective control of Georgia eliminated the Iranian influence and stopped the influx of Georgians into Qajar Iran. One of the last Georgian Iranians was Prince Alexander, also known as Eskandar Mirza. In the early 1800s, Alexander sought Qajar's help against the Russians and launched several unsuccessful military campaigns in Georgia. Eventually, in 1828, at the Treaty of Turkmenchay, the Qajars were forced to cede Georgia to the Russian Empire, thus ending almost three centuries of Persian influence in the region.[40] Russia's annexation of Georgia broke the typical triangle in which Georgian elites often found themselves escaping Georgia to Iran, from Iran back to Georgia, and ultimately to the Ottomans.

We saw how the influx of Christian youth from the Balkans changed the Ottoman elites. A similar infusion of Christian Georgian and Armenian boys and girls had profound, yet different impact on pre-nineteenth century Iran. The devshirme quickly assimilated, and although they often maintained connections with their native environment, they did not form close-knit groups of compatriots. The ghilman in Iran, by contrast, retained much closer ties to their kin and places of origin and did not entirely shed their Christian identity, even upon their conversion to Islam. This was particularly true of the Georgian elite, whose members came from royal dynasties and the local nobility.[41]

Similar to the devshirme, ghilman military units became the first-standing army paid by the crown treasury and personally loyal to a monarch. However, unlike the devshirme, the palace ghilman and high military commanders were commonly appointed to the post of *vali*, the governor-general of a Persian province. Not only did this undermine the traditional privilege of the Qizilbash elite, but it also transformed a province into crown land and channeled revenue away from a hereditary provincial nobility and into a shah's treasury. Ghilman proved to be both a symbol and an instrument of centralization in Safavid state.[42]

In contrast to the Ottomans, the Safavids and Qajars exercised much more limited control over subdued territories and peoples. As a result, they preferred to send newly converted indigenous royals, or high nobility, to govern their former kingdoms and principalities. This was true for the Georgian kingdoms, the Kurdish emirate, and Iran's western provinces. The Russians sought the same when, in the nineteenth century, they began to groom the indigenous elite as imperial intermediaries between St. Petersburg and their former countrymen. Yet Russians never entrusted indigenous elites with any real authority in the

40 G. Bournoutian, "Alexander, prince," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, fasc. 8 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 826.

41 Hirotake Maeda, "On Ethno-Social Background of Four Gholam Families from Georgia in Safavid Iran," *Studia Iranica* 32 (2003), p. 245.

42 Roemer, "The Safavid Period," p. 344.

way the Persians did.

Curiously, when many Ottomans associated the Ottoman "decline" in the early 1600s with the declining number of devshirme and the infusion of the non-Christians into the ghilman system, the Persian observers argued the opposite, namely, that an introduction of the ghilman and the erosion of the Qizilbash elite heralded a decline of the Safavids.[43] In both cases, traditional elites blamed the changes to the established order for explaining the imperial decline and their diminished status.

The Mughal Empire: Once Successful but Fragile Integration of Diverse Elites

Among the Eurasian empires, the Mughal Empire had the most diverse ruling elite. Established by Babur (r. 1526–1530) and the Turko-Mongol elite of Central Asia, it was consolidated only three decades later under Babur's grandson Akbar (r. 1556–1605). By this time, the Turko-Mongol elite had already been balanced by the Iranian, Afghan, and Indian Muslim elites, as well as the Hindu elite. The presence of Iranians, reputed as cultured administrators, was notable, constituting the largest group (28.4 percent) among higher *mansabdar*s (royal officials) in 1647–1648. The new elites served the same purpose as in other empires—to enhance the power of a ruler, often at the expense of the traditional founding elite. What was unique about the Mughal Empire was that part of the "new" elites were preexisting elites from the core areas of the empire, including Hindus, who helped the Mughals put down roots in India. The first Hindu nobles recruited by the Mughals were Rajput chiefs, who formed a Hindu warrior caste residing mostly in today's Rajastan state of India. In return for retaining their political autonomy and land, the Rajputs joined the Mughal military, pledged allegiance to the emperor, and married their daughters to men of the imperial dynasty.[44]

However, unlike the Ottomans and Persians, the Mughals never created a professional slave-based elite military. The Mughal armies had slave soldiers, but they did not comprise special military units loyal to the emperor, such as janissaries or ghilman. Called *chela*s, meaning "faithful disciples," because of Akbar's dislike of the word "slaves," they were usually Hindu children taken as prisoners in war or sold into slavery by their parents. They were raised by their masters and retained their personal dependence. They commonly occupied low-level positions in the military and, at best, were low-ranking officers.[45]

Relying on non-Islamic elites and integrating the non-Muslim population

43 Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 109–110.

44 John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 19–24, 143–148.

45 P. Hardy, "Ghulam," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp. 1084–1085; Jos Gommans, "The Warband in the Making of Eurasian Empires," in van Berkel and Duindam, eds., *Prince, Pen, and Sword*, p. 344.

into his empire became central principles of Akbar I's policies based on the idea of *sulh-i kull* (peace with all [religions]). To do so, he went as far as abolishing the special tax on non-Muslims (*jizya*), abandoning the practice of converting prisoners of war by force, providing common laws for Muslims and non-Muslims, and expanding the idea of a religious foundation (*waqf*) to other religions. In many ways, this was recognition of the fact that Mughal society was predominantly non-Muslim.[46]

Many of these reforms were reversed by Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), who emphasized the Islamic identity of the empire. However, he did not reverse the recruitment of Hindu elites, and by the end of his reign, largely because of the conquest of the entire Deccan, his government employed many more Hindus than his predecessors.[47] Most were Rajputs and Marathas representing 31.6 percent of the Mughal nobility. At the time, however, achieving high status for many Hindus came at a price. The Aurangzeb administration aggressively sought Hindus' conversion to Islam either through violence and the destruction of temples or by offering financial incentives and privileges.[48]

Aurangzeb's grandiose conquests resulted in imperial overexpansion. To consolidate Mughal rule in the newly annexed territories, a growing number of nobles had to be integrated into the imperial service. The generous award of high *mansab*s (ranks in the imperial hierarchy) to Deccani nobles led to an increasing demand for *jagir*s (revenue-producing lands assigned for salaries) and exhausted the available land. The constant shortage of *jagir*s led to an intense struggle within the aristocracy and a growing factionalism within the imperial elite. This damaged "Mughal stability," based on the fragile triangular balance between *jagirdar*s representing the central government, *zamindar*s (local landlords), and cultivators.[49]

The non-tolerant policies under Aurangzeb were later moderated, and the jizya was abolished in 1713; this time for good. However, tolerance could no longer keep together the diverse elites. Throughout the eighteenth century, the struggle for power at the Mughal court was dominated by two rival elites: Afghans supported by the Muslim ulema and the Hindu Marathas. Frequent rebellions by class-based, religious, and ethnic groups occurred, and even the long-standing reliability of the Rajput chiefs was seriously diminished. By the time Persian Nadir Shah invaded the Mughal Empire in 1739 and captured

46 Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, pp. 36–40. About the policy of *sulh-i kull*, see A. Azfar Moin, "*Sulh-i Kull* as an Oath of Peace: Mughal Political Theology in History, Theory, and Comparison," *Modern Asian Studies* 56, no. 3 (2022), pp. 721–748.

47 M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, rev. ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 22–37.

48 Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), p. 58.

49 Andrea Hintze, *The Mughal Empire and Its Decline: An Interpretation of the Sources of Social Power* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), p. 13; Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: Society, the Jagirdari Crisis, and the Village* (Delhi: Macmillan India, 1982), pp. 61–75.

Delhi, the Mughals were in disarray, and the empire collapsed into multiple city-states and confederations. Meanwhile, the British East India Company and a new European elite took control of most territories of the former Mughal Empire until they became part of the British Raj.

Disorders in the Mughal Empire were not caused by economic decline. Rather, long-term economic growth under the Mughal hegemony created a prosperous gentry with conflicting interests in various regions. Regional states such as Awadh, Bengal, and Hyderabad surpassed the center in establishing tighter political and economic control over society. In the military sphere, the Marathas' new warfare styles demonstrated their superiority over the traditional Mughal military system. The rise of the Afghan Durrani Empire was also indebted to the Mughals. According to Jos Gommans, the Mughals, similar to the Safavids, were successful in linking frontier areas with the imperial polity and its interregional trade routes. As a result, Afghans and other tribes prospered in service and trade and were able to challenge imperial power. The Mughal Empire collapsed under the weight of its own success.[50]

The Ming and Qing Empires: A Variety of Systems for Recruiting Loyal and Unruly Non-Han Elites

In China, different dynasties traditionally relied on neighboring non-Han peoples, mostly in military matters. First were the Mongols, China's most feared enemy and often its loyal servants. The Ming dynasty, which replaced the Mongol Yuan dynasty in 1368, continued Mongol hereditary military institutions, retained the privileged position of Chinggisid princes in court, and employed many Mongols.

Shortly after assuming the throne, the first Ming emperor, Hongwu (r. 1368–1398), created the Embroidered Uniform Guard (literally the Brocade-Clad Guard). Initially, the Guard was a military unit similar to the kapikulu and ghilman palace militaries of the Ottomans and Persians, but it soon assumed the additional duty of the secret police. It was given unlimited authority to hound "enemies of the state," including its right to overrule judicial decisions. In this respect, the Guard was similar to the Muscovite special units of "a sovereign's servants," commonly referred to as *oprichniki* (literally "those apart") created by Ivan IV to conduct the bloody purges of those who stood in his way. Known for their cruelty and destruction, the oprichniki were disbanded in 1572, seven years after they were founded. In contrast, the Embroidered Uniform Guard lasted for nearly three centuries under Ming rule. While the oprichniki mainly belonged to the Muscovite Slavic nobility, the Embroidered Uniform Guard consisted of many non-Han people, including the Mongols, Manchus, and

50 Hintze, *The Mughal Empire and Its Decline*, pp. 10–11, 273; Jos J.L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710–1780* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 3–6.

others.[51]

During the Ming dynasty, non-Han elites were mostly employed as frontier commanders. Some of them served loyally, some switched sides, and others led outright rebellions. Belonging to the latter category was Pubei, a Chahar Mongol. In the 1560s, his Mongol rivals forced him to flee, and he and his retainers entered the service of the Ming. Pubei rose through the ranks and became the regional vice commander of the Ningxia borderland region in 1589. Three years later, disagreements with Chinese officials prompted Pubei to rebel, seize dozens of regional forts, demand autonomy, and threaten to ally with the Ordos Mongols. This event is known as the Ningxia Rebellion. It was eventually suppressed by the Ming army, but not without many casualties on both sides, deliberate flooding of the city where the rebels took the last stand, and the suicide of Pubei.[52]

A much larger rebellion led by the Miao chieftain Yang Yinglong occurred southwest of the empire in the 1590s. Miao is a collective Chinese term for several indigenous peoples, each of whom uses a different name. Miao's frequent rebellions against the Han presence compelled the Ming to build a 100-mile-long defense wall and channel Miao's warlike activity up north against the Mongols. For his help in suppressing Pubei's rebellion, Yang was rewarded and promoted to regional military commissioner. Yang's service to the Ming did not last long, and in the mid-1590s he launched a large rebellion against the authorities. Unbelievably, he was captured twice and twice bought his way out of the death penalty: At one point he led an army of 100,000 Miao to ravage China's countryside, prompting Emperor Wanli (r. 1572–1620) to dispatch a 500,000-strong army against him. Until 1601, it took tens of thousands of dead on both sides for his armies to be defeated and Yang to immolate himself.[53]

Many of the non-Han people in the Ming court were Koreans, mostly women or eunuchs. Some Korean women entered the emperor's harem or became consorts of important Ming officials, and eunuchs occupied powerful positions at the palace. In the sixteenth century, several Muslims held important advisory positions at the palace. The most dominant non-Han influence was the legacy and presence of the Mongols. The Ming emperors often presented themselves as Mongol khagans, and had themselves and their attendees dress in Mongol clothing. The Ming also continued the Yuan tradition of imperial patronage of Tibetan Buddhism. They invited thousands of Buddhist monks to live in the capital, sponsored the construction of Buddhist temples, and granted them tax exemptions and other privileges to monks and temples. In return,

51 David M. Robinson, "The Ming Courts and the Legacy of the Yuan Mongols," in David M. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court (1368–1644)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), pp. 394–395.

52 Kenneth M. Swope, "Bestowing the Double-edged Sword: Wanli as a Supreme Military Commander," in *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition*, pp. 79–81.

53 Ibid., pp. 101–109.

Tibetan lamas performed religious ceremonies for the Ming and served as a counterweight to the Han civil bureaucracy.[54]

With continuing expansion under the Qing dynasty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the number and influence of the non-Han Chinese grew proportionately. By 1800, the population of Qing China consisted of five main groups: the Manchus, who ruled Manchuria and the entire empire; the nomadic Mongols of Inner and Outer (i.e., southern and northern) Mongolia and Jungaria; the Buddhist Tibetans in the Tibetan Plateau; the Turkic Muslims in the oases of the Tarim Basin; and the Han Chinese in China proper.

The Qing imperial power relied on military administrative units called banners. The Eight Banners were the principal banners of the Manchus, but they also included Mongols, Han, and Koreans. Distinct ethnic groups within the banners were registered as separate companies. There were reportedly sixteen Han companies among the Manchu Banners. A distinction was made between those who joined the banners before and after 1619. The former were sufficiently assimilated to be considered Manchus.[55]

Additionally, the Mongols were organized into the Jasagh Banners, which were subordinate to the Manchu Banners. The banners in southern Mongolia formed a union that became the basis of a new territorial unit, the League. As in most early modern societies, social, professional, and ethnic identities often overlapped: a Manchu was synonymous with a bannerman (*qiren*), who was a military person, while the Han or *min* referred to civilians, even though there were also Han martial banners.[56]

Within the Manchu Banners there were also companies of bondservants (*booi*, literally "of household" in Manchu). They were also considered qiren but with an ancestry of unfree status. Prior to 1616, they consisted of Koreans, Mongols, Han, and Jurchens, who were held as chattel after being bought, taken captive, or condemned to servitude as punishment. Only the Manchus had bondservants who were formed into companies and distributed among the members of the nobility. There was even one Russian company. The commanders of these companies were Manchus, formerly of an unfree status.[57]

At the center of the relations between the Qing court and the co-opted non-Han elites was an arm of the Qing government, the Li-fan Yuan. It administered relations with Tibet, the Mongol Leagues and Jasaghs, and the *beg*

54 Robinson, "The Ming Courts and the Legacy of the Yuan Mongols," pp. 371–388.

55 Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 45. For a convincing argument about the Central Eurasian origins of the Qing and the Eight Banner system, see Kiyohiko Sugiyama, "The Qing Empire in the Central Eurasian Context: Its Structure of Rule Seen from the Eight Banner System," in Kimitaka Matsuzato, ed., *Comparative Imperiology* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2010), pp. 87–108.

56 Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banner and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 86–87, 133.

57 Ibid., pp. 82–84.

system in southern Xinjiang. The newly conquered region of Xinjiang presented a different challenge because of the Turkic population and Islam, which were outside the Qing ideological framework and traditional experiences. The *beg*s, who comprised the local elite, enjoyed a great deal of autonomy, including the continued practice of sharia law, until Xinjiang became a Qing province in 1884. In a typical colonial situation, local officials were appointed by imperial decree and wore official Qing robes and imperial insignia while retaining their Turkic names and Muslim titles.[58] In contrast, Qing policy toward Kazakh nomads was a mix of Mongolian, Manchu, and Chinese traditions. The Qing government applied the Mongolian concept of the *ejen* (master) and his *albatu* (subject, servant) to the relationship between the emperor and the Kazakhs, although the latter had also sworn allegiance to the Russian emperor. When some Kazakhs immigrated to Qing territory, the government formed a *niru*, a fundamental unit of the Banner system. It also bestowed the titles *han*, *wang*, *gong*, and *taiji* on the Kazakh ruling elites.[59]

The emperor and banner princes had special guard units known as *hiya* in Manchu and *shiwei* in Chinese. Both the emperor's Imperial Guard and princes' Escort Guards were drawn from the children of their trusted subordinates and hostages submitted by unreliable chiefs. The Imperial Guard had three corps: the Guard, the Vanguard, and the Imperial Bodyguard. Altogether, they numbered as many as 20,000 bannermen, mostly Manchus and Mongols. The most elite unit was the Imperial Bodyguard. Assigned to protect the emperor, it consisted of 1,500 solely Manchu guards. As in Eurasian Islamic empires, these guard units became training grounds for high-ranking bannermen.[60]

With nearly a hundred thousand banner soldiers, Beijing was the largest Manchu city in the Qing Empire. In what some called "a Manchu apartheid," the Manchus and Han Chinese were segregated. Joint residence was prohibited,

58 Nicola di Cosmo, "The Extension of Ch'ing Rule over Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet, 1636–1800," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 9, pt. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 119–142. For a comprehensive account of the Qing ruling system of Xinjiang, see Kataoka Kazutada 片岡一忠, *Shinchō Shinkyō tōchi kenkyū* 清朝新疆統治研究 [A Study on Ch'ing Dynasty's Administration towards Hsin-Chiang] (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1991).

59 Takahiro Onuma, "Political Relations between the Qing Dynasty and Kazakh Nomads in the Mid-18th Century: Promotion of the '*ejen-albatu* Relationship' in Central Asia," in Jin Noda and Takahiro Onuma, *A Collection of Documents from the Kazakh Sultans to the Qing Dynasty* (Tokyo: Department of Islamic Area Studies, The University of Tokyo, 2020), pp. 86–125; Jin Noda, *The Kazakh Khanates between the Russian and Qing Empires: Central Eurasian International Relations during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 181–191.

60 Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, p. 81. Based on this and other features, Kiyohiko Sugiyama makes a strong argument for affinity and common Mongol roots of the Ming and Qing regimes and other Eurasian empires, which he calls "Central Eurasian States." Kiyohiko Sugiyama, "A Chinese Dynasty or a Manchu Khanate? The Qing (Ch'ing) Empire and its Military Force," in Markus Meumann and Andrea Pühringer, eds., *The Military in the Early Modern World: A Comparative Approach* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), pp. 267–280.

and the Han were eventually pushed out of the inner city, with the exception of those who served as guards, Buddhist and Daoist monks, and servants within banner households.[61] Whether this separation was based on ethnic, geographical, or professional identities that distinguished northern bannermen from southern civilians remains an open question.

At times, the government saw Sinicization as the best way to civilize "barbarians." Schools were founded in the Miao borderland region and affirmative action quotas were established for Miao and Yao to pass the civil service exam. By the mid-eighteenth century, Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–1796) ordered the closing of frontier schools because they had failed to produce a reliable non-Han political elite. In 1759, in response to a Han official suggesting an expansion of education in the area, the frustrated emperor exclaimed, "The Miao barbarians should be kept illiterate."[62]

The Qing's increasing fear of Sinicization brought about a new cycle of tensions between the Manchus and the Han in the nineteenth century. This fear was not unwarranted, as the Manchus in China received Chinese education and occupied high-ranking positions as banner officers in Manchuria, while schools in Manchuria only taught the Manchu language and military arts. Concern among the Manchus that a new generation was losing The Old Way—that is, the warrior qualities and martial skills—prompted the government to define Manchu identity by blood and decree that children adopted by the Manchu bannermen should be of Manchu origin, not Han. Thus, Manchu ethnic identity evolved from an emphasis on Manchu genealogy in the mid-eighteenth century to acquire racial characteristics that had been further crystalized in the nineteenth century, particularly after the Taiping War (1850–1864).[63]

Despite the court's efforts to preserve the Manchu identity, the Han majority became increasingly assertive, influencing the imperial administration with Han nationalism, which was detrimental to the inclusion of non-Han people. In Xinjiang, Chinese schools opened by provincial authorities were unpopular among Muslims who preferred the Tatar and Ottoman models of modern education and culture.[64] When the Xinhai Revolution broke out in 1911, the Mongols, who were once Manchus' closest allies, saw no reason to remain part of the Chinese state and declared independence.

61 Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, pp. 98–105.

62 William T. Rowe, "Social Stability and Social Change," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 9, pt. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 506–507.

63 Joseph Fletcher, "Ch'ing Inner Asia, c. 1800," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10, pt. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 44; Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, pp. 33, 98–100, 230–233, 269–277; Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Orphan Warriors: Three Manchu Generations and the End of the Qing World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 5–6.

64 Ondřej Klimeš, *Struggle by the Pen: The Uyghur Discourse of Nation and National Interest, c. 1900–1949* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 74–81.

Conclusion

In their efforts to gain legitimacy and establish control over diverse and heterogeneous populations, the Eurasian empires relied heavily on non-titular ethnic elites. Although the Eurasian empires also employed the classic "divide and rule" strategy common to the Western powers, they extensively practiced the principle of "include and rule." This difference in imperial visions and policies can be explained by an ideology that does not clearly define empires' internal and external boundaries. Unlike the West, the Eurasian empires drew no clear line between the nation-state, which comprised the core of the empire, and their colonial peripheries. Articulated in terms of a universal monarchy, their imperial visions blurred the separation between the metropolis and periphery, and between the people within and outside imperial boundaries.

The reliance on non-titular elites in governing newly acquired regions, as well as the incorporation of these elites into the governments' central political structures, was one of the key features of the Eurasian empires. In contrast to the early modern European empires, where hereditary nobility and law traditionally served to limit the supremacy of the central authority, Eurasian emperors used indigenous elites to check the power of the titular nobility, thus enhancing their absolute authority. This policy also served to provide greater social mobility among the indigenous population and prevent or delay the formation of a titular hereditary elite.

The specific mechanisms of inclusion differed throughout the Eurasian political space depending on the origins of the rulers, power relations among different groups of elites, and the degree of centralization. Muscovy, the predecessor of the Russian Empire, was not built by outsiders but was located in a space where the Chinggisids had strong legitimacy as rulers. At the same time, the legitimacy of Muscovy itself was based on Orthodox Christianity. Therefore, it incorporated Chinggisids and other steppe nobles by converting them into Orthodoxy. Later, the Russian Empire, faced with the need for administrators capable of working under the Westernized bureaucracy, embarked on acculturating non-Russian elites through education rather than conversion, a method comparable to that of Western colonial empires. This measure proved effective, although it fell short of preventing distrust between Russian authorities and local interlocutors.

The Ottoman Empire was built by the descendants of people from Central Asia, but by the time the Ottoman state was established, Anatolia had largely been Turkified and Islamized, and the Ottomans were not outsiders in a practical sense. However, as the empire expanded rapidly into areas with diverse populations, it needed to bring different regions under firm control and strengthen its central ruling apparatus. By recruiting and converting adolescents, especially from the Balkans, a semi-core region of the empire, the Ottomans successfully developed loyal elites of diverse origins, although the devshirme system for recruiting "outsiders" became unnecessary with the routinization of the bureaucracy's personnel affairs.

The Safavid Empire was similarly built by non-indigenous elites familiar with the territory they ruled, as the Turkic and Kurdish tribes had long lived in or along the borders of Iran. However, because Qizilbash, the founding elite of the empire, was driven by factional rivalry, the Safavid dynasty recruited Iranians and peoples of the Caucasus, especially Georgians. The Georgian ghilman, who converted to Islam, resembled the Ottoman devshirme elite from the Balkans and contributed to the centralization of the empire. However, they retained closer ties with their homeland and more fluid frontier loyalty. Unlike their Ottoman counterparts, the Safavids were less successful in creating a centralized state or integrating diverse elites.

The Mughal Empire was a conquest dynasty that inherited the traditions of earlier Persianate, Afghan, and Turkic dynasties in northern India. The rulers of Central Asian origin did not hesitate to recruit Muslim elites from other lands, especially Iran, and simultaneously attempted to co-opt local elites, most notably Hindus. The massive recruitment of diverse elites, supported by Akbar's universalist ideology, seemed successful, but was based on a fragile balance. The overextension of the empire and rise of regional states undermined the Mughals' efforts to accommodate diversity, ultimately fragmenting the empire.

Following the Ming Empire's struggles with unruly non-Han elites, the Qing Empire was established as a conquest dynasty that was well adapted to Chinese political life. The Manchus' astute strategies for dealing with diverse populations made it possible for plurality of political cultures to coexist. The Qing also attempted to sporadically create an assimilated non-Han and non-Manchu elite but without much success. Russia's policies seem to have been more successful in achieving the initial assimilation and later acculturation of the indigenous elite.

The system of "include and rule" was successful to varying degrees in co-opting and controlling diverse elites and consolidating Eurasian empires, although none of the empires could completely prevent instability resulting from the shifting loyalties and identities of non-titular elites. Ultimately, this system did not survive the modern era in any of the Eurasian empires. The gradual transfer of power from the emperor to the ruling elites and the maturation of the bureaucracy rendered the recruitment and forced conversion of ethnic elites as the emperors' personal slaves or loyal subjects obsolete. The growing nationalism of titular nations alienated non-titular ethnic groups, which, in turn, became a powerful centrifugal force in Eurasian empires.