

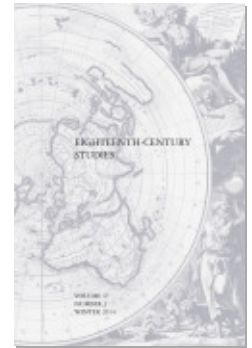


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THE QING STATE AND ITS AWARENESS OF EURASIAN INTERCONNECTIONS, 1789–1806

Matthew W. Mosca

In the eighteenth century, the Qing empire had extensive, indeed global, influence. Its markets drew ships from Europe, South and Southeast Asia, and, by the end of the century, from the east and west coasts of North America. By land, much of Eurasia, from Siam to Semipalatinsk, was traversed by merchants heading to the Qing frontier. Its political influence, if not quite so expansive, still bears comparison with this economic reach. Trends in migration, material culture, and other fields demonstrate the empire's equally far-reaching significance. Studies have established Ming and Qing China's position within global networks, but surprisingly few examine the early modern Chinese state's own perception of this position before the Opium War (1840–42). This question is important, for it might plausibly be argued that an empire as extensive and wealthy as the Qing could not help but be, as it were, passively global: luring more enterprising states, companies, and merchant networks to do the heavy lifting of establishing its long-distance connections, without itself actively manipulating, or even recognizing, the complex networks within which it was increasingly enmeshed. In other words, acknowledging the global importance of the Qing state and economy need not in itself contradict an older view of the Qing as the inheritor of a "Chinese World Order," in which policy-making supposedly neglected external realities in pursuit of ideological ideals.¹ By what criteria, then, might we distinguish the passively "central"—the Qing empire adventitiously finding itself drawing from all directions the inhabitants of distant regions—from the consciously "global"—the Qing

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empire perceiving itself as encircled on land and sea by an interlocking network of economic and political ties, and formulating policy on this basis?

This paper sketches one approach to this question, using a very basic criterion to distinguish the “global” from the “central.” If Qing rulers perceived themselves merely as central, then each foreign state could be expected to approach from one specific direction. One implication of a global outlook, by contrast, would be an awareness of worldwide networks of information, goods, and people that did not fundamentally depend on Qing mediation, and via which one could depart the Qing frontier along any compass bearing and in theory reach it again on the opposite side of the empire. Under such conditions, any attempt by the Qing state to segment the frontier into zones would become an artificially constructed order rather than a natural default.

For the Qing state, a “global” outlook would have to be balanced against bureaucratic routines developed to manage the empire’s heterogeneous geopolitical environment. By 1760, having expanded for over a century, the Qing frontier directly adjoined Russia, Korea, Annam, Laos, Burma, Bhutan, Badakhshan, Khoqand, the Kirghiz and the Kazakhs; smaller entities like Sikkim, Ladakh, Bolor, and Baltistan; zones with multiple power-holders like the Kathmandu Valley and the Shan states; and the heavily trafficked maritime frontier. Anyone hardy enough to circumambulate these borderlands would have found regions varying enormously in structures of administration, political and cultural norms, languages, economies, climates, and ecologies. In response to this huge variation, as I have argued elsewhere, the Qing state saw advantages in managing its external relations in segments, directing a foreign state or people to one designated point on the frontier under the supervision of the ranking local Qing administrator. This allowed rulers and ministers conveniently to monitor foreign entities and, if necessary, coercively stop their trade; it also settled responsibility for managing a foreign relationship neatly on one Qing administrator, who also became a conduit through which the central state could tap regional channels of intelligence that offered a more granular picture of external conditions than anything available in Beijing. This efficient response to diversity had the vices of its virtues, and demanded improvisation in those cases which broke out of this structure to have messy ramifications across several frontiers.² Complexities that arose when “global” cases involving multiple frontiers met a bureaucratic system engineered to handle them in one specific place are central to the two episodes examined in this paper, the 1789 deliberations over how best to keep rhubarb from reaching Russia during a trade embargo, and the growing awareness between 1792 and 1806 that the Kiakhtha and Canton trades were more connected than previously believed.

These sorts of administrative problems rose to new prominence in the late eighteenth century because the Qing quest for administrative order was increasingly at odds with one of the most important long-term secular trends in its foreign relations between 1644 and 1912: the slow encirclement of much of its frontier—albeit with long pauses and occasional reverses—by territories directly or indirectly subject to the Russian and British empires. This progressed with particular vigor between the start of the Seven Years’ War in 1756 and the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. By 1644, Russia was present north of Manchuria and Mongolia; by the early eighteenth century, it moved down the Irtysh toward

the Junghars and Kazakhs. Just before 1800, it accelerated its expansion into the north Pacific; just after that date, Russia began to send tentative commercial and diplomatic missions to southern Xinjiang and over the Pamirs to Kashmir and the Punjab.³ For the British, Bogle's 1774–75 mission to Tibet demonstrated that the East India Company's expansion in Bengal would have implications north of the Himalayas (just as William Moorcroft's 1812 dispatch of Mir 'Izzatullāh to Bukhara via Qing Xinjiang prefigured the northwestern trajectory of its interest), while Broughton's explorations demonstrated the capabilities of the Royal Navy as far north as Sakhalin in 1797.⁴ British and Russian expansion along distant sectors of the Qing frontier, though tentative, complicated the sectoral approach to foreign relations.

Before proceeding, three problems beyond the scope of this paper, but important to its argument, must be at least noted. First, the sort of coordination between frontiers discussed below was not demanded solely by cases involving European empires, although these gave it a new scale. The vast territorial extent of the Junghar empire, a major Qing rival until its destruction in 1757, demanded long-distance coordination.⁵ Some coordination between overland and maritime frontiers was required by Qing policy toward Burma in the 1760s and 1770s.⁶ Second, the origins of the Qing commitment to a "one country, one frontier" policy, by which maritime European trade was basically limited to Canton during the 1750s, and Russian trade to Kiakhta, requires far more attention than it has received. Further inquiries on this subject should also make comparisons with policies adopted toward other states and groups of traders (for instance Vietnam, Korea, and the Newari, Kashmiri, and Andijani traders operating across Inner Asia).⁷ Finally, this paper is concerned with the state perspective, and it would be illuminating to determine how far interlocking networks of Chinese merchants developed the intelligence capabilities necessary to forge a globalized commercial consciousness.

RUSSIA AND THE GLOBAL FLOW OF MERCHANDISE

Between 1789 and 1815, a series of episodes illustrated emerging connections between three sectors of the Qing frontier: Canton, Tibet, and Mongolia. For earlier Qing observers, the possibility that these three widely separated zones might be linked by common external dynamics was not inconceivable, for it was recognized that many trade routes across the overland frontier ultimately led by sea to Canton. The longest of these circuits ran through Russia. Beginning in the seventeenth century, Russian and Qing envoys had demonstrated that Moscow and St. Petersburg could be reached from Mongolia and Manchuria.⁸ The Kangxi emperor knew that Europe lay just beyond Russia, and as early as 1686 had sent letters to Moscow by ship through Dutch and Jesuit intermediaries.⁹ In the far west, the Manchu official Cišii recorded in the 1770s that a trade route running south from Yarkand ultimately reached a port in Hindustan frequented by vessels from China. Earlier, in 1753, a Chinese observer had noted a maritime route to Canton below Tibet. To the southeast, it was recognized that Burma's sea frontier at Rangoon allowed its goods to reach Canton.¹⁰ It followed from these converging routes that any foreign people could in principle have direct or mediated access to virtually any sector of the Qing frontier.

Trade relations with Russia offer the clearest evidence that Qing rulers and officials were alert to this interconnectedness and took its implications into account when formulating policy. After 1755 virtually all legal trade between the two empires took place at Kiakhta on the Mongolian frontier. When Russo-Qing relations deteriorated, Qianlong's preferred coercive measure was to embargo trade, as he did between 1764–68, 1778–80, and 1785–92. Theoretically, halting trade was a matter of purely bilateral concern, requiring only that Kiakhta and the insignificant border market of Tsurukhaitu be sealed. One reason Qianlong was persuaded that a total trade closure would be catastrophic for Russia was their massive import of Qing rhubarb, perceived in Beijing as a strategic pharmaceutical crucial for human health. Qing officialdom regarded rhubarb as a drug produced almost exclusively within its own territories, and thus evolving controls on the flow of rhubarb reveal the measures thought necessary to seal the Qing frontier, and the enormous difficulty this turned out to entail.¹¹

The most glaring vulnerability in the Qing embargo, and the one that first attracted Qianlong's concern, was the possibility of illicit trade in Xinjiang, conquered between 1755–59 as the westernmost sector of the empire. Qianlong refused to authorize new routes of Russo-Qing trade either down the Irtysh River through Kazakh territory into northern Xinjiang, or by the mediation of Central Asian merchants into southern Xinjiang. Although he had recognized early on that non-Russian traders permitted to trade in those regions would likely mix Russian goods among their own produce, he refused to allow Qing subjects or Russians to trade directly with each other.¹² Thus, Qianlong was understandably concerned about Xinjiang as a conduit for rhubarb smuggling.¹³ At the start of 1789, a dragnet placed across a major trade route at Aksu seized almost 8000 pieces of the drug; Andijani Muslims residing in Aksu and Kashgar admitted that they had contemplated selling it in Central Asia, or even onward to Russia, if this seemed sufficiently lucrative. Fusung, the official who made the bust, worried that if Xinjiang's rhubarb trade were entirely severed in the interest of halting Russia's supply, Andijan would suffer collateral damage. He proposed a policy of returning 5% of all confiscated rhubarb to Andijani merchants, allowing a trickle to meet the needs of their homeland.¹⁴ Qianlong, fearing even so small a gap in his embargo, was adamant that all rhubarb trade within Xinjiang and out into Central Asia must be stopped.¹⁵ His concern over illegal exports now heightened, the emperor looked farther afield. On February 16, 1789, officials in the largest administrative centers of Xinjiang (Ili, Tarbaghatai, Yarkand, and Kashgar) and Mongolia (Uliyasutai, Khobdo, and Küriy-e/Urga) were ordered to prevent traders from moving rhubarb northward toward Russia. Qianlong also commanded the governors-general of Zhili and Shaanxi-Gansu and the governor of Shanxi to prevent the commodity from transiting the major passes dividing the provinces of China proper from Inner Asia.¹⁶ Two days later, Qianlong realized that although Russia sent no ships to China, places in the Western Ocean [*Xiyang*; i.e. Europe] were near Russia and regularly traded with it. To prevent these countries from passing rhubarb onward, local officials were commanded to prohibit the sale of rhubarb out of Canton or Macao.¹⁷ It was a short step to seeing any maritime frontage as a potential avenue for leakage, and on March 22 all other jurisdictions along the coast, from Shengjing in Manchuria to Fujian in the southeast, were ordered to

prevent rhubarb from being put to sea, where vessels from a third country might convey it to lands near Russia.¹⁸

As the Kiakhta blockade slowly expanded to cover most of Inner Asia and then the entire coast, its enforcement produced complexities for officials far from the Russian frontier. The coastal ban raised bedeviling details. In Shandong alone, its governor reported, Qianlong's command required thirty-eight harbors to be monitored.¹⁹ Ulana, the governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang, raised other pertinent issues. First, some rhubarb had to be allowed to sail, because Taiwan needed a supply. Also, echoing Fusung's concerns about Central Asia, he fretted over how to balance the traditional supply of rhubarb to the Liuqiu (Ryūkyū) kingdom against the fear that because those islands "distantly connect to the Western Ocean" [*yuan jie Xiyang* 遠接西洋], they might become a smuggling conduit.²⁰ Unyielding in regard to Xinjiang and Central Asia, Qianlong compromised on the maritime frontier. He agreed that a limited amount of rhubarb could be exported overseas to Qing-ruled islands like Taiwan and Qiongzhou, and also to the Liuqius, provided a permit and quota system were implemented (local officials eventually became intermediaries in the rhubarb trade to prevent abuses).²¹ With this precedent in place, it was decided that at Canton and Macao Western [*Xiyang*] countries could also be sold an annual quota, to be carefully recorded by local merchants; Siam and Annam could buy the same amount in authorized tribute years.²² Rhubarb in limited quantities was also allowed through internal passes into heavily-populated Inner Asian regions like Jehol and Bagou, though still not into Xinjiang.²³

Still, permits were required for sensitive zones to ensure that only very limited quantities of the drug were transported. Such permits demanded careful calibration: laxity risked smuggling, but undue strictness might terrify merchants into abandoning rhubarb altogether, endangering all Qing subjects. In pursuit of balance, ranking territorial officials were tasked with drafting rules appropriate to local conditions, subject to imperial approval. When it was proposed that rhubarb traders in Shandong first seek an official permit for their stock, Qianlong judged this too cumbersome, and clarified that permits were needed only for sensitive areas near ports, passes, and coastal islands.²⁴ On the same grounds he rejected the governor of Shaanxi's proposed system of permits and cross-checking for the entire domestic rhubarb trade, but accepted the plan of the governor of neighboring Shanxi to require all Mongols coming to Datong to buy rhubarb first to obtain a permit specifying the quantity they planned to take home.²⁵ Unexpected local complications arose in profusion. For example, in Zhejiang, governor Gu Xuechao prohibited pharmacies from selling high-grade Sichuanese rhubarb to vessels sailing abroad. There was, however, inferior local rhubarb sometimes used by peasants to treat ringworm. Gu's investigations discovered that it was not sold commercially, but he still feared that the desperate Russians might scheme to acquire it, and recommended including it in the export ban.²⁶

The 1785–92 Russian trade embargo offers insight into how Qianlong and his ministers understood the increasingly globalized commercial networks enveloping the empire. What began as a simple effort to prevent one commodity from crossing one border point quickly snowballed into a ramified operation touching almost every corner of the realm. Not only were Qianlong and his officials aware of the interconnectedness of global trade routes, their concern raced far ahead of

available evidence. If the germ of vigilance was real smuggling in Xinjiang, the expansion of the prohibitory net derived from purely theoretical extrapolations based on an awareness that trade routes intersected. One consequence of this awareness was a series of ad hoc regulations, drafted and implemented in a very short period of time, many of which raised unforeseen complications as they addressed existing ones. Although Qianlong held back the totalizing logic of his more zealous field officials, it was obvious that an effective trade embargo could not be limited to one place. Interestingly, interlocking trade routes were acknowledged only in the context of attempts to block them; the fact that even during normal trade they implicitly undermined the effectiveness of a “one country, one frontier” trade policy was not acknowledged. When trade with Russia was restored in 1792, prohibitions on rhubarb and other commodities were lifted, even though it was clear that in reality trade with Russia was indirectly taking place beyond Kiakhta. The reasons for this were clear: an embargo made starkly evident both the theoretical value of a “one country, one frontier” policy, and the difficulties of supervising and controlling trade with one country across multiple frontiers.

BRITISH AND RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM: INTERCONNECTED DIPLOMACY IN THE QING FRONTIER

In 1792 Qianlong ended the multi-frontier vigilance demanded by the Russian trade embargo, but events of that year and over the next decade and a half raised new complications illustrating the commercial and political interconnectedness of Qing borderlands. These began with the Macartney embassy and its relationship to Inner Asia. The connection between his mission and the Himalayas is a topic I detail elsewhere and will here only summarize. In May 1792, Macartney was appointed ambassador from George III to Qianlong, and the Qing court was formally notified via Canton that an envoy of the familiar country of *Yingjili* [England] was on his way. Around the same time, the commander of the Qing force sent to repulse a Nepali invasion of Tibet made contact with local powers, including a tribe called the Pileng [披楞] was the equivalent of the Tibetan *Phe-reng* or Persian *Farangi*, translating to “Frank” or European]. In 1793, a reply arrived from this “Pileng” leader mentioning that his country traded at Canton (although no Qing official recalled vessels arriving from such a place). Shortly before Macartney reached China, Nepal informed Qing officials in Lhasa of a Pileng tribute mission proceeding to China by sea, information that reached Beijing in July 1793, when Macartney’s vessel was approaching the southern coast of China. Ultimately, the Qing court came to understand that the *Yingjili* represented by Macartney was probably the same as the Pileng people south of Tibet.²⁷

Advance notice of Macartney’s visit from a third frontier raised further complications for the Qing court. In February 1793, prior to the British envoy’s arrival, a memorial was received from Yundondorji, the Qing official stationed at Kūriy-e (modern Ulaanbaatar), who was charged with managing the Kiakhta trade. It stated that a certain Russian officer named “Kapitan Wasili” had come to the frontier to report that the “ruler of the country of *Anggiling* has sent an envoy, who will ask for a site in Guangdong and wish to trade.”²⁸ Although I have been unable to find the original memorial reporting the full transcript of Captain Vasilii’s testimony, its contents can be inferred from subsequent Manchu-language

correspondence on the issue. *Anggiling* was reported to be a country in the “Si Yang” [Western Ocean], and the Russians feared (or pretended to the Qing to fear) that if *Anggiling* received the right to trade at Canton it would either cease to trade with Russia, or send fewer of its goods. Russia seems to have been trying to protect the transit trade of European goods through Kiakhta, a lucrative branch of commerce that by 1801 would account for 54.5% of goods entering China from Siberia.²⁹ Yundondorji’s subordinate, the *jarguci* on the spot in Kiakhta, was ordered to question Qing merchants at the border about the nature and extent of *Anggiling*-derived commerce.³⁰

Officials on one frontier were not required to have detailed knowledge of other frontiers, nor was this normally facilitated. Each official supervising the Russian trade from Kūriy-e doubtless had an idiosyncratic understanding of the maritime world patched together from the vagaries of his own bureaucratic postings, readings, and chance encounters. During the rhubarb crisis, for instance, Leboo told the emperor that in his earlier service as the official in charge at Kūriy-e (1780–85), he had learned from a Russian informant that north of his country lay a great ocean by which it was possible to reach the Chinese coast.³¹ He only recalled this vague connection, however, months after Qianlong had already ordered a maritime blockade—a command of which Leboo seems to have been unaware. It is not surprising, then, that Yundondorji was unable to make anything of the identity of *Anggiling* from his vantage point in Mongolia. Only when this report reached Beijing did the Qing court realize that the Russians were describing *Yingjili* [Manchu: *Ing Gi Lii*], which Qianlong knew from other channels was preparing an embassy.³² Yundondorji seems to have believed that *Anggiling* trade at Canton would be an innovation; presumably when the court recognized that the *Anggiling* were simply *Yingjili*, no further action was deemed necessary.

A decade after learning that British goods were being sold through Kiakhta, Russian vessels appeared for the first time at Canton.³³ These had departed from the Baltic in 1803 on a global voyage intended to make diplomatic contact with Japan, aid the new Russian American Company in the North Pacific, and establish maritime trade with Canton.³⁴ On November 20, 1805, the first of these ships anchored off Macao under the command of Adam Krusenstern (Ivan Krusenstern), intending to sell its cargo of fur. The supercargoes of the East India Company were expecting its arrival; they had been ordered to assist the visit after Russia’s ambassador in London, Semen Vorontsov, had requested aid from the British government.³⁵ Qing officials, on the other hand, were not expecting it at all. On November 28, the superintendent of the Guangdong maritime customs (Hoppo) Yangfung received a report from his deputy [*weiyuan*] stationed in Macao that a vessel from the country of *Luchen* [路臣] had arrived. He ordered officials in Macao and the Hong merchants to investigate this unknown country. Soon a second *Luchen* ship was reported. The Hong merchants consulted the English factory and were able to report that *Luchen* was the country normally known in Chinese as *Eluosi* (from the Mongolian *Oros*). A petition from the Russians made matters clearer by stating that while their country had hitherto traded only at Kiakhta, maritime trade was cheaper and they now wished to sell wares at Canton as well.³⁶ Yangfung later reported that he had consulted the Hong merchants at this time in search of a precedent, and they replied that “in the past, when foreign ships have

come to port, regardless of where they are from, all have been allowed to off-load their goods" [*xianglai Yangchuan jinkou, bulun hechu zhi chuan, jie ke kaicang xiehuo* 向來洋船進口, 不論何處之船, 皆可開艙卸貨].³⁷

Still leery that Russia had never before traded at Canton, Yangfung was in a bind. Although inclined to request that the ship be allowed to trade at Canton as a special act of imperial clemency, he worried that if maritime trade were truly easier for Russia, then it would presumably diminish the Kiakhta trade and draw customs revenue away from the northern frontier. Compounding his acknowledged unfamiliarity with the Kiakhta trade, Yangfung reported that he and the Guangdong governor Sun Yuting could not agree on a course of action, and the governor-general, Nayanceng, was off on a tour of inspection. Imperial orders were therefore requested on December 19.³⁸ Then Yangfung blundered. With his term of office due to expire, he unilaterally determined just before his departure that the Russians could trade. He notified Nayanceng and added that he had, without consulting him, added his name to the joint memorial reporting this decision to Beijing. Nayanceng in fact disagreed with Yangfung's decision and quickly wrote to the new Hoppo, Akdangga (who took office December 24), ordering him to halt this trade.³⁹

Nayanceng soon left his post for reasons unconnected to the Russian ships, and the next memorial, of February 6, 1806, came from his replacement Wu Xiongguang. It was appropriate, Wu explained, to wait for Beijing's orders regarding the Russian ships. However, the Hong merchants had petitioned on the Russians' behalf, pointing out that because their country was in the far north they had to depart for home immediately or face long delays due to weather. The merchants added that if the emperor sent down a pertinent edict that arrived after the Russian departure, news of it could be conveyed to Russia by sea via the English (not, interestingly, via Kiakhta). After repeatedly conferencing with Akdangga and Sun, Wu decided to err on the side of leniency; the Russians were allowed to finish loading and departed.⁴⁰ Wu's decision, although he never alluded to it, was likely due more to EIC pressure than solicitude for Russian sailors. On January 27, 1806, responding to a Russian request for help, the EIC supercargoes called together Hong merchants and convinced them to press the case. On February 2, four days before Wu memorialized that he had permitted trade, the Hong merchants were again summoned. It was hinted that from the Western perspective the Russian ships were being forcibly detained by the Qing, and that if no action were taken soon, "some very harsh and unpleasant measures would unavoidably be resorted to."⁴¹ The likely implication was that the Russians might attempt to force their way out of the port with British assistance, leading to potentially catastrophic complications no Qing official would wish to occur on his watch.

Days after the Russian vessels were ready to depart on February 8, the imperial will became known. Yangfung's first memorial of Dec. 19 had not reached Beijing and received a response until January 28, 1806, and this urgent edict in turn had not reached Canton until February 12.⁴² The Jiaqing emperor addressed several aspects of the unexpected Russian arrival. First, he pointed out that, contrary to the belief of the Hong merchants, Russians were not allowed to trade at Canton: foreigners all had one fixed frontier through which they were to trade [*waiyi tongshi, jie you yiding dijie* 外夷通市, 皆有一定地界], and Yangfung's decision to

permit trade was “extremely ill-considered.” The emperor then posed a series of questions: With no Russian interpreters at Canton, how was the vessels’ identity determined? If truly Russian, how did they know the sea route to Canton? What countries had they passed through, and had these supplied guides? Regardless of the answers, in future foreign ships from countries that had not hitherto traded at Canton were to be barred from the port. Wu replied that the identification of the Russians, made by the Hong merchants and English, seemed reliable; like other foreigners, Russians navigated according to directions and maps, so no guide was required.⁴³

In a second edict issued less than a week later, Jiaqing praised Nayanceng’s decision to halt trade, and endorsed his observation that if the Russians “in coming and going become very familiar with the sea routes and circumstances within China proper, this will also pose many inconveniences” [*laiwang shuxi haidao ji neidi qingxing, yi duo weibian* 來往熟悉海道及內地情形, 亦多未便]. The emperor ordered that the Russians be sent away, and measures taken to prevent them from trading elsewhere on the coast.⁴⁴ Later, however, he relented and agreed that the ships in port could trade but no future Russian vessels would be permitted to do so—it is unclear if he knew of Wu’s *fait accompli* when he issued this order.

Although Jiaqing’s edicts to Canton were silent on the issue, the emperor had reason to be unnerved by this sudden arrival of Russian ships, which was no coincidence but part of a pre-arranged Russian plan. Krusenstern’s Russian ships were expected to reach Canton around the time an ambassador, Yuri Golovkin, would have reached Beijing via Siberia and Mongolia. Each was to press the case that Russia required trade with China through both maritime overland routes. As Jiaqing knew much better than his Canton officials, this embassy had already reached the northern frontier in October 1805, generated increasingly acrimonious disputes in the following months over ritual forms, and ultimately left Qing territory without going beyond Mongolia. Given that halting trade was a long-standing Qing response to diplomatic disputes with Russia (although not one resorted to in this case), the ability of Russia to send ships directly to the Chinese coast—something Qianlong had not anticipated even at the height of his vigilance over the rhubarb embargo—must have seemed unsettling.⁴⁵ Jiaqing’s displeasure that Russian ships had been able to slip in and out of Canton without his authorization during a minor crisis in Russo-Qing relations was understandable.

Concern about illicit Russian maritime trade in Canton continued for decades. When a ship from the unknown country of *Yalin* appeared at Canton in 1824, Qing officials immediately feared the return of the Russians in disguise.⁴⁶ The principle of “one country, one frontier” was firmly maintained. The Amherst embassy, for instance, was rebuked for coming straight to Tianjin and reminded that future embassies would have to stop and seek permission in Canton, “the stipulated port for your country” [*erguo yiding kouan* 爾國一定口岸].⁴⁷ When the Englishman William Moorcroft wrote to Kashgar from Ladakh in 1821 requesting permission to cross the Qing frontier into Xinjiang, its ranking Qing official Ulungga rejected the request by stating that “when the Qing court and the various foreign peoples hold intercourse and trade, there is in all cases a fixed system and a fixed place” [*tianchao yu ge waiyi jiaotong maoyi, ju you yiding zhidu, yiding difang* 天朝與各外夷交通貿易, 俱有一定制度, 一定地方].⁴⁸ He might have been

somewhat mollified to discover that the Qing applied this policy equitably, turning down a request in 1829 by the king of Vietnam to supplement overland frontier trade with maritime trade at Canton.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

From the beginning, East and West had been inverted to irrelevance for describing Qing relations with Britain and Russia. In the seventeenth century, both western powers approached the Qing frontier first from the east, on the coast for English shipping and via Manchuria for Russian caravans. Only in the eighteenth century did the possibilities of trade and contact creep westward, to Kiakhta and then the Irtysh River for Russia, and to the Himalayas for Britain, finally meeting up in far western Xinjiang after 1800. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the Russian and British empires had multiple angles of approach to the Qing frontier, with corresponding options and ambitions. Golovkin's diplomatic agenda in 1805 literally encircled the Qing Empire: he was instructed to request the opening of the Amur to Russian navigation, legal trade along the Irtysh River at Bukharma, maritime trade at Canton, commercial rights at Nanjing, and access via Tibet to India and possibly Kabul. Long-distance ventures were not simply plans on paper. In 1808, merchants backed by the Russian state crossed the western rim of Qing territory on their way from Semipalatinsk to Kashmir. In 1817, the British merchant captain Peter Gordon sailed from Calcutta for Okhotsk, stopped along the way in Malacca to pick up Chinese missionary literature prepared in Canton, and sent it overland to the British missionaries working among the Mongols at Selenginsk, near the Qing frontier. He himself visited Kiakhta in 1819.⁵⁰ However singular and tentative these emerging connections were, they demonstrated that the British and Russian empires were encircling the Qing ever more tightly.

Against this backdrop, we can revisit the distinction sketched above between a "central" Qing, standing passively at the core of trade networks forged by foreigners from all directions, and a "global" Qing, aware that it was enveloped within commercial and political networks that did not depend on its mediation. Setting aside ideological considerations, it is easy to see why the "central" position would have seemed greatly preferable to Qing rulers and bureaucrats. If one country could be limited to only one point of access to the Qing frontier, this would greatly magnify Beijing's ability to comprehensively supervise and control the situation. Just as important, this approach streamlined the bureaucratic apparatus and communication channels that would be necessary to gather intelligence and devise and execute policies. Having glimpsed the partial and regionally-inflected understandings of Leboo, Yundondorji, and Yangfung, we can see how difficult it was for Qing territorial administrators to gauge the policy needs of areas beyond their own administration. It would be difficult to exaggerate the radical and complicated bureaucratic overhaul that would have been necessary to shift to a system in which foreign states were permitted to trade simultaneously on multiple frontiers, if this system were to retain for Beijing even a fraction of the surveillance and control theoretically offered it by a "one country, one frontier" approach. In particular, this would presumably have been seen to require some sort of empire-wide quota tracking system for commodities deemed to have strategic significance, and constant lateral communication between the farthest corners of the frontier either directly or

through an agency in the capital. It is hardly surprising, then, that when the Qing state encountered cases requiring coordination between frontiers, it increased its appreciation for the virtues of restricting access.

This paper has argued, however, that it is wrong to proceed from the tenacious Qing adherence to a “one country, one frontier” system to the conclusion that the empire’s rulers and ministers did not have a “global” awareness that their realm was encircled within interconnected networks. Indeed, it can be hypothesized that the decisive shift to a formal “one country, one frontier” policy in the 1750s at Canton and Kiakhta took place at least partly in response to a growing recognition that the empire was surrounded by interlocking trade routes and political connections. There is no reason why, in principle, the Qing should be criticized for seeing its interest in limiting the function of these global networks as far as it could, just as British and Russian statesmen and merchants enthusiastically tried to open and exploit them. Breaking connections and segmenting the frontier, and forging connections and integrating frontiers, were simply two competing ways of redesigning global trade in a pattern that served imperial interests. Ultimately, the wisdom of Qing policy was related to the issue of scale: as long as it remained sufficiently powerful to set the terms of engagement, it was in a position to artificially manipulate the rules of international exchange in ways that most strengthened its leverage. Indeed, before 1840, the Qing empire was generally skillful and effective in thwarting those possibilities of global trade that seemed most undesirable. Although Britons and Russians were technically able to access the Qing frontier from multiple angles before 1840, either directly or through intermediaries, and although several important commodities (for example fur, tea, and opium) were imported or exported across multiple frontiers at once, the limited volume and profitability of these alternate channels meant that they could not fully substitute for the large-scale trades at Kiakhta and Canton. The “one country, one frontier” policy therefore proved a remarkably effective tool for giving the Qing state the leverage it sought in diplomatic crises. This very success, however, meant that for Qing statesmen an integrated worldview remained by definition abnormal—a prospect to be adopted in a crisis, not one to be constantly surveyed for present dangers and future advantage. How the success of segmentation helped forge imperial worldviews before 1840 is a question for the emerging agenda of research into how Qing statesmen and subjects understood the world they had done so much to shape.

NOTES

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1. In 1941, John K. Fairbank and S. Y. Têng described Qing foreign relations as a “Confucian world-order” centered on the “tributary system,” a framework that has remained influential: “On the Ch’ing Tributary System,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1941):135–246. For a very negative evaluation of this system’s impact on Qing policy, see p. 206.

2. For an interpretation of Qing foreign policy and its shift from a segmented to a more integrated

approach, see the author's *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2013).

3. Joseph Fletcher, "Sino-Russian Relations, 1800–1860," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. John K. Fairbank, vol. 10, part 1, *Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), 318–27.

4. On Bogle, see Alastair Lamb, ed., *Bhutan and Tibet: The Travels of George Bogle and Alexander Hamilton, 1774–1777* (Hertingfordbury, UK: Roxford Books, 2002); on 'Izzatullāh see Maria Szuppe, "En quête de chevaux turkmènes: le journal de voyage de Mir 'Izzatullāh de Delhi à Boukhara en 1812–1813," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 1, no. 2 (1996): 91–111.

5. For a recent study on the vast scale and ambition of Qing anti-Junghar diplomacy see Noda Jin, *Ro-Shin teikoku to Kazafu bankoku* (Tokyo: Univ. of Tokyo Press, 2011), 85–118.

6. On the maritime dimension of the Burma war see Masuda Erika, "The Fall of Ayutthaya and Siam's Disrupted Order of Tribute to China (1767–1782)," *Taiwan Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 2, (2007): 75–128; see also Alexander Woodside, "The Ch'ien-lung Reign," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Willard J. Peterson, vol. 9, part 1, *The Ch'ing Empire to 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 267–68.

7. For a brief recent consideration of this topic, see Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 553–55; for an extended comparison by the same author, see "Boundaries and Trade in the Early Modern World: Negotiations at Nerchinsk and Beijing," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no. 3 (2010): 341–56.

8. The most famous account of such a journey, undertaken between 1712 and 1715, was written by the Qing official Tulišen and translated into English by George T. Staunton as *Narrative of the Chinese Embassy to the Khan of the Tourgouth Tartars* (London: John Murray, 1821).

9. Lo-shu Fu, *A Documentary Chronicle of Sino-Western Relations, 1644–1820*, 2 vols. (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1966), 1:88.

10. For the Xinjiang and Tibet cases, see Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 84–85, 63; for the Burma case, see *Gongzhongdang Qianlong chao zouzhe* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1982), 38:309 [Memorial of Li Shiyao, QL42/4/9 (15 May 1777)].

11. Rhubarb and its position in Russo-Qing trade has been studied in greatest detail by Clifford M. Foust in *Muscovite and Mandarin: Russia's Trade with China and its Setting, 1727–1805* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969) and *Rhubarb: The Wondrous Drug* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992). On the medical thinking behind the embargo, see Chang Che-chia, "Origins of a Misunderstanding: The Qianlong Emperor's Embargo on Rhubarb Exports to Russia, The Scenario and its Consequences," *Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity* 1, no. 2, (2005): 335–54.

12. For Qianlong's views on this problem see *Zhong-Su maoyishi ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo duiwai jingji maoyi chubanshe, 1991), 193–95, cited in Noda Jin, "Chūo Ajia ni okeru Ro-Shin bōeki to Kazafu sōgen," *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 68, no. 2, (2009): 377.

13. On rhubarb trade in Xinjiang in this period see James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 178–80, and L. J. Newby, *The Empire and the Khanate: A Political History of Qing Relations with Khoqand, c. 1760–1860* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 129–32. Newby notes that, "As Qing officials were well aware, border markets were now just one link in the trading networks, official and otherwise, that crisscrossed the world" (130).

14. First Historical Archives (Beijing, China): *Manwen lufu zouzhe* [hereafter, FHA-MWLF] 3228-007 144-1188 [Memorial of Fusung, QL53/12/8 (3 Jan. 1789), rescripted QL54/1/4 (29 Jan. 1789)].

15. *Da Qing lichao shilu* [Hereafter QSL] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 25:853–54 [QL 1320.7b-9b, QL54/1/4 (29 Jan. 1789)].

16. QSL, 25:865–66 [QL 1321.12b-14a, QL54/1/22 (16 Feb. 1789)].

17. QSL, 25:866–67 [QL 1321.14b–15b, QL54/1/24 (18 Feb. 1789)].

18. *QSL*, 25:910 [QL 1323.31a–b, QL54/2/26 (22 Mar. 1789)].
19. *Gongzhongdang Qianlong chao zouzhe*, 71:371 (memorial of Gioro Chang-lin, undated).
20. *Gongzhongdang Qianlong chao zouzhe* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan, 1982), 71:598–99 (memorial of Ulana and Xu Sizeng, QL54/4/4, 28 Apr.1789).
21. *QSL*, 25:967–68 [QL 1327.18a–19a (QL54/4/21, 15 May 1789)]; *QSL*, 26:93 [QL 1351.35a–b (QL55/3/26, 9 May 1790)].
22. *QSL*, 25:1181 [QL 1341.3a–b (QL54/10/18, 4 Dec. 1789)].
23. *QSL*, 25:971–72 [QL 1327.25a–27a (QL54/4/26, 20 May 1789)].
24. *QSL*, 25:1019–20 [QL 1331.8a–9a (QL54/IC5/20, 12 Jul. 1789)].
25. *QSL*, 25:1061 [QL 1333.42a–43a (QL54/6/30, 20 Aug. 1789)].
26. *Gongzhongdang Qianlong chao zouzhe*, 71:520–21 (memorial of Gu Xuechao, QL54/3/24, 19 Apr. 1789).
27. Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 127–60.
28. FHA-MWLF 3420–013 155–1857, memorial of Yundondorji et al., QL58/2/2 (13 Mar. 1793), rescripted QL58/2/11 (22 Mar. 1793). Greg Afinogenov has suggested to me that “Captain Vasiliy” may be Vasiliy Igumnov, who was not a captain but served as a translator at Kiakhta and accompanied the Russian ecclesiastical mission to Beijing in 1771, 1781, and 1794 (personal correspondence).
29. M. I. Sladkovskii, *History of Economic Relations between Russia and China* (Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translation, 1966), 57, 62.
30. National Central Archive (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia), Küriy-e Amban Archive, document M1-D1-V1-3224 #5. (Report of Seals Office at Küriy-e, dated QL57/12). I am grateful to Ying Hu for tracking down and transcribing this document on my behalf.
31. National Palace Museum (Taipei, Taiwan), Gongzhongdang, document #040493 (attachment to memorial by Leboo of QL54/4/29 [23 May 1789]).
32. FHA-MWLF 3420-013 155–1857.
33. By July 1761, the Qing Imperial Household Department realized that gold thread could be sourced from both Kiakhta and Canton. It is unclear, however, whether it regarded this commodity as originating at a single site. See Lai Huimin, “Qing Qianlong chao Neiwufu de pihuo maimai yu jingcheng shishang,” *Gugong xueshu jikan*, 21, no. 1 (2003): 6. I am indebted to Dr. Jonathan Schlesinger for drawing this reference to my attention.
34. For a Russian perspective on these negotiations, see H.L. von Löwenstern, *The First Russian Voyage Around the World: The Journal of Hermann Ludwig von Löwenstern (1803–1806)*, trans. V.J. Moessner (Fairbanks: Univ. of Alaska Press, 2003).
35. British Library (London, UK), India Office Records R/10/37 (Letter of Charles Grant et al. to Canton Supercargoes, 23 Nov. 1803).
36. *Qingdai waijiao shiliao* (Beijing: Gugong bowuyuan, 1932), JQ 1.36b–37b [(Memorial of Yan-feng, JQ10/10/29 (19 Dec. 1805)].
37. *Zhong-Pu guanxi shi ziliao ji* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1999), 1:613 [Grand council memorial, JQ11/1/4 (21 Feb. 1806)].
38. *Qingdai waijiao shiliao*, JQ 1.36b–37b [Memorial of Yan-feng, JQ10/10/29 (19 Dec. 1805)].
39. *Jiaqing-Daoguang liangchao shangyudang* (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2000), 10:789–90 [Memorial cited in court letter to Wu Xionguang of 10/12/15 (3 Feb. 1806)].
40. *Qingdai waijiao shiliao*, JQ 1.47a-b [Memorial of Wu Xionguang, JQ10/12/18 (6 Feb. 1806)].
41. British Library, India Office Records, G/12/152 (consultations of 27 Jan. and 2 Feb. 1806).
42. *Qingdai waijiao shiliao*, JQ10/12/9 (28 Jan. 1806).

43. *Putaoya Dongbota dang'anguan cang Qingdai Aomen Zhongwen dang'an huibian* (Macao: Aomen jijin hui, 1999), 696.
44. *Ming-Qing gongcang Zhong-Xi shangmao dang'an* (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 2010), 5:2622–23.
45. *Jiaqing Daoguang liangchao shangyudang* 10:789–90 (Court letter to Wu Guangxiong of 10/12/15 [3 Feb. 1806]).
46. *Jiaqing Daoguang liangchao shangyudang*, 11:23–24 (Court letter of JQ11/1/9 [26 Feb. 1806]).
47. The Jesuit Antoine Gaubil, however, suggested that by the end of his reign Kangxi was aware of the theoretical possibility that Russia might one day become a Pacific maritime power; see Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), 39n16.
48. English sources described the ship as Arab. *Shiliao xunkan* (Guofeng chubanshe, 1963), 68–69 (Memorial of Ruan Yuan, rescripted DG4/9/12 [2 Nov. 1824]).
49. *QSL*, 32:265 [JQ 323.2a–4a (JQ21/10/1, 19 Nov. 1816)].
50. For this correspondence see Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 184–91.
51. *QSL*, 35:408–9 [DG 156.39b–41a (DG9/5/28, 29 Jun. 1829)].
52. Joseph Fletcher, “Sino-Russian Relations, 1800–62,” *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10, part 1: 322.
53. C. R. Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals: The English Missionaries in Siberia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985): 15, 55.