

be an extrainstitutional accident and turns instead into an institutionalized activity. When people begin to establish institutions that encourage this combination, the collective quest for worldly success through social plasticity joins the history of freedom.

APPENDIX I:  
NOTE ON SOURCES FOR THE COMPARATIVE  
STUDY OF ANTIREVERSION POLICIES

The best introduction to a more textured study of the problems this essay addresses may well be an analysis of the content and the fortunes of the antireversion policies. These policies were the small repertory of reforms through which the agrarian-bureaucratic states of Eurasia tried to avoid or contain the recurrent crises of agrarian concentration, economic decommercialization, and administrative fragmentation. This note lists sources that I found especially helpful. A little curiosity goes a long way: if the list shows nothing else, it demonstrates that materials for broad-ranging yet detailed and disciplined comparison of the experiences discussed here are at hand.<sup>33</sup>

1. The policy of recruiting a bureaucratic staff from groups directly below the landowning aristocracy. On the Chinese experiment in weakening the link between the bureaucratic staff and local landowning elites through the reforms of the late T'ang and the Sung, see James T. C. Liu, *Reform in Sung China: Wang An-shih (1021-1086) and His New Policies*, Harvard, Cambridge, 1959; Denis Twitchett, "The Composition of the T'ang Ruling Class," in *Perspectives on the T'ang*, eds. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, Yale, New Haven, 1973, pp. 47-85; Brian E. McKnight, "Fiscal Privileges and the Social Order," in *Crisis and Prosperity in Sung China*, ed. John Winthrop Haege, Arizona, Tucson, 1975, pp. 79-100; David G. Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*, Westview, Boulder, Colo., 1977, pp. 19-20, 149-152; Patricia Ebrey, *Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China*, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1978. To Professor Timothy Brook of the University of Toronto, I am indebted for accounts of writings of Niida Noboru and other Japanese historians of China. On the repeated failure of attempts clearly to sever the connection between bureaucracy and landowning elites and on the consequences for the constraints within which policy had to move, see E. A. Kracke, Jr., "Family vs. Merit in Chinese Civil Service Examinations," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 10 (1947), pp. 103-123; Victor Lippit, "The Development of Underdevelopment in Chinese History,"

<sup>33</sup> This note is transcribed from the bibliographical notes to *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1987.

*Modern China*, vol. 4 (1978), pp. 251–328. But for a view that emphasizes the role of official status as a source rather than a consequence of landowning status, see Ho Ping-Ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*, Columbia, New York, 1967.

On the Ottoman palace system as an attempt to achieve through very different measures objectives similar to the aims of the Chinese examination system, see Joseph von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, Hartleben, Pest, Germany, 1828, vol. 2, pp. 218–249 (at the time of the death of Mohammed II); Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition*, Knopf, New York, 1972, pp. 49–60; Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1976–1977, vol. 1, pp. 113–139.

For a representative study of the use of this technique by the prerevolutionary absolutist monarchies of Europe, see Otto Hintze, “The Commissary and His Significance in General Administrative History: A Comparative Study,” in *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze*, ed. Felix Gilbert, Oxford, New York, 1975, pp. 267–301. See also Martin Göhring, *Die Amterkäuferlichkeit im Ancien Régime*, Ebering, Berlin, 1938; Roland Mousnier, *La Vénéralité des Offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII*, Presses Universitaires, Paris, 1971; Eckart Kehr, “Zur Genesis der Preussischen Bürokratie und des Rechtsstaates,” in *Moderne Deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Kiepenheuer, Cologne, 1973, pp. 37–54.

2. The policy of making the nobility dependent for land tenure on service to the state. On the system of *pomestye* land in Russia and its assimilation to *votchina* tenure, see Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, Princeton, Princeton, 1961, pp. 170–188, 252–255. On the Korean system of Merit Subjects and the comparable development it underwent, see Edward W. Wagner, *The Literati Purges: Political Conflict in Early Yi Korea*, Harvard, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 19–21; Susan S. Shin, *Land Tenure and the Agrarian Economy of Early Yi Korea*, 1973, doctoral dissertation on file at Yenching Library, Harvard University.

Consider as a further example the status of “bannermen” within the Manchu Conquest elite in China. See Jonathan D. Spence, *Ts’ao Yin and the K’ang-hsi Emperor, Bondservant and Master*, Yale, New Haven, 1966, pp. 2–18; Robert B. Oxnam, *Ruling from Horseback: Manchu Politics in the Oboi Regency, 1661–1669*, Chicago, 1975, pp. 38–40, 47–49, 124–126, 170–175. And compare to the Mughal *mansabdars* (rank holders) and *jagirdars* (land-revenue assignment holders). See Stephen P. Blake, “The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 39 (1979), pp. 77–94, and the Mughal studies cited later.

3. The policy of agrarian dualism.

a. The reliance of central government on landlords who, though

not involved in central administration, have special fiscal and military obligations. On the Byzantine *ktemata stratiotika*, see Hélène Antoniadis-Bibicou, *Études d'Histoire de Byzance à Propos ou "Thème des Caravisiens"*, Services d'Édition et de Vente des Productions de l'Éducation Nationale, Paris, 1966, pp. 99–114; Arnold Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World*, Oxford, London, 1973, pp. 134–145. On the Ottoman *timariots*, see Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, pp. 125–127; Gyula Kaldy-Nagy, "The First Centuries of the Ottoman Military Organization," *Acta Orientalia Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 31 (2), (1977), pp. 147–183. On the Mughal *zamindaris*, see Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556–1707)*, Asia Publishers, London, 1963, pp. 136–189; M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1966; Norman Ahmad Siddiqui, *Land Revenue under the Mughals*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1970, pp. 21–40. On the Aztec military life-tenants, see Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs: A History*, Univ. of Oklahoma, Norman, 1980, pp. 80–81. On the Byzantine *pronoia*, see Georges Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'Histoire de la Féodalité Byzantine*, trans. Henri Gregoire, Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves, Brussels, 1954.

- b. The reliance on state-obligated small-holders and peasant communities.

On the exemplary Byzantine developments and debates, see Paul Lemerle, "Esquisse pour une Histoire Agraire de Byzance," *Revue Historique*, vol. 219 (1958), pp. 32–74, vol. 219 (1958), pp. 254–284, vol. 220 (1958), pp. 43–94; George Ostrogorsky, "The Peasant's Preemption Right" (see earlier references), and *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. Joan Hussey, Rutgers, New Brunswick, N.J., 1969, pp. 269–276; Arnold Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World*, pp. 122–134. For the aftermath of the failure to uphold the policy of smallholder protection, see Angeliki E. Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire*, Princeton, Princeton, 1977.

On the policy of agrarian dualism at its most successful and aggressive in Chinese history, see Wolfram Eberhard, *Das Toba-Reich Nordchinas: Eine Soziologische Untersuchung*, Brill, Leiden, 1949, pp. 206–221, which should be considered against the background of Eberhard's "Zur Landwirtschaft der Han-Zeit," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, Ostasiatische Studien*, vol. 35 (1932), pp. 74–105; Denis Twitchett, "Lands Under State Cultivation Under the T'ang," *Journal of the Economic and Social History*

of the Orient, vol. 2 (1959), pp. 162–336 (on the connection of agrarian dualism with the system of military colonies); Denis Twitchett, *Land Tenure and the Social Order in T'ang and Sung China*, Oxford, Oxford, 1962. For the northern dynasties and Sui versions of the *fu-ping* system (divisional militia based on smallholders with military responsibilities), see Arthur F. Wright, "The Sui Dynasty (518–617)," in *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, *Sui and T'ang China, 589–906*, Part I, ed. Denis Twitchett, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 96–103; and for the T'ang version see Howard J. Wechsler, "T'ai-tsung (reign 626–649) the Consolidator" in the same volume, pp. 207–208. See also Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure*, Harvard, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 15–20. On the effect that the failure of the policy of agrarian dualism had on agrarian structure in the subsequent Sung period, see Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, Stanford, Stanford, 1973, pp. 69–83; and for a somewhat contrasting view, Joseph McDermott, *Land Tenure and Rural Control in the Liangche Region during the Southern Sung* (doctoral dissertation on file at Cambridge University). It is important to distinguish the policy of support for smallholders from the vaguer and looser set of anticoncentrationist agrarian ideals present at all stages in Chinese history. See Hsu Chung-shu, "The Well-Field System in Shang and Chou," in *Chinese Social History*, trans. E'Tu Zen Sun and John de Francis, Octagon, New York, 1972, pp. 3–17; Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, pp. 47–51, 59–63; Denis Twitchett, *Financial Administration under the T'ang Dynasty*, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 1–11; Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1968, vol. 3, pp. 16–43.

4. The agency of the common people in a social world that revolves within the limits set by the rehearsal and frustration of the reform options previously discussed.
  - a. The privileged urban mob. See Paul Veyne, *Le Pain et le Cirque: Sociologie Historique d'un Pluralisme Politique*, Seuil, Paris, 1976.
  - b. The temporary stabilization of the policy of agrarian dualism. On the Byzantine peasant commune, see Georg Ostrogorsky, "Die Ländliche Steuergemeinde des Byzantinischen Reiches im X. Jahrhundert," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 20 (1927), pp. 23–108; George Ostrogorsky, "La Commune Rurale Byzantine," *Byzantion*, vol. 32 (1962), pp. 138–166. For a comparative discussion that emphasizes the link between the redistributive and the control

aspects of the peasant commune, with the eventual substitution of smallholding by enserfment, see G. I. Bratianu, "Servage de la Glèbe et Régime Fiscal: Essai d'Histoire Comparée, Roumaine, Slave et Byzantine," in *Études Byzantines d'Histoire Économique et Sociale*, Geuthner, Paris, 1938.

On the nineteenth-century redistributive Russian village community, see Geroid Robinson, *Rural Russia under the Old Regime*, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1972, pp. 117-128; Francis W. Watters, "The Peasant and the Village Commune," in *The Peasant in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, ed. Wayne S. Vucinich, Stanford, Stanford, 1968, pp. 133-157; Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, Princeton, Princeton, 1961, pp. 504-535.

On village communities and the role of village officers under the Southern Sung, see Brian E. McKnight, *Village and Bureaucracy in Southern Sung China*, Chicago, Chicago, 1971.

On peasant-held *raiya* villages in Mughal India, see Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, Asia Publishing, London, 1963, pp. 111-135; Ishtiagi Husain Qureshi, *The Administration of the Mughal Empire*, N. V. Publications, Lohaniipur, pp. 281-294.

On the village and the leading village families under the Tokugawa *bakufu*, see Thomas C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan*, Stanford, Stanford, 1959, pp. 1-11.

- c. On peasant rebellion as a confirmation of the structure it defies, see the discussion of the Japanese experience in Irwin Scheiner, "Benevolent Lords and Honorable Peasants: Rebellion and Peasant Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan," in Tetsuo Najita and Irwin Scheiner, eds., *Japanese Thought in the Tokugawa Period, 1600-1868*, Chicago, Chicago, 1978, pp. 39-62.

#### APPENDIX II: THE STANDPOINT OF THE NOMADIC CONQUERORS

A thesis of this chapter is that the encounter between agrarian-bureaucratic societies and the pastoral peoples who occasionally conquered and ruled them played a vital role in the process by which some of those societies eventually escaped or contained the reversion cycles that had beset them. By assimilating governmental institutions and attitudes toward statecraft pioneered by their conquerors, the conquered took an important step in the gradualistic and relatively nonconflictual route of escape from reversion crises. Often this as-

simulation was the result of episodes spread across many centuries. Thus, in China, not until the Ming-Ch'ing Empire do we find a society seemingly immune to the peculiarly radical combination of economic decommercialization and political fragmentation that had recurred in earlier periods of Chinese history. But the institutional innovations of the Ming had their antecedents in the Yüan (1260–1380) and even in far earlier periods, most notably the long, troubled interval between the Han and the T'ang.

As in almost all the historical literature, this chapter considers the dealings between agrarian–bureaucratic societies and nomadic conquerors from the standpoint of the settled peoples. The following table reverses the perspective. It describes the major ways the pastoral peoples dealt with the agrarian civilizations they conquered, coexisted with, and depended on. All the allusions refer to a single, gigantic theater: the relation of the pastoral peoples of the inner-Asian steppe to the great agrarian states that flourished along the fertile periphery of the steppe. Nothing important in my argument turns on the extent to which problems and alternatives similar to those mentioned here reappeared in other more confined geopolitical settings where pastoral peoples confronted societies of planters: for example, Saharan conquest states like the Songhai Empire in relation to Hausaland, and Hausaland in relation to the West African forest and coastal kingdoms. The point is to identify and explain variable change without appealing to theories that predefine its possible forms and outer limits.

This table, then, has aims that go beyond the attempt to present a fuller view of an important link in the argument of this chapter. It illustrates the conception of branching points and multiple pathways, invoked so many times in this book. It also emphasizes, in a nutshell, a central thesis of *Plasticity into Power*: the homely idea that worldly success requires self-transformation. Moreover, self-transformation must move toward a heightened flexibility of response to circumstances imperfectly foreseen or understood. As a result, it demands not just replacing one particular collective identity with another but also weakening the commitment to any collective identity defined by reference to distinctive practices and institutions. A people that wants to exempt even a small and sacred part of its customs from this self-transformative requirement discovers, sooner or later, that it enjoys no such exemption and that every attempt to secure one proves fatal. However familiar this conception may seem in the abstract, its historical applications go beyond belief. To make the point, there is nothing like the history of these transactions between the peoples of the steppe and the great civilizations of Asia.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> For a straightforward survey of many of the peoples and events to which this note alludes, see Luc Kwanten, *Imperial Nomads: A History of Central Asia 500–*

The “moments” and options the table describes represent points on an imaginary spectrum. At one pole of this spectrum lies a situation in which the pastoral nation makes only episodic contact with the agrarian civilization along its borderland, and maintains much of its own way of life. At the opposite pole is the circumstance in which the conquerors merge with the conquered elites, changing themselves in the process. The points along this spectrum represent moments in an almost Hegelian sense: possible advances toward more powerful capabilities, through changes of response and changes of self. The goal here, almost never fully grasped or clearly intended, is worldly success – success at rule, production, and war.

The sequence of moments does not delineate a single evolutionary path, nor even a limited set of evolutionary possibilities, open to pastoral peoples embarked on a career of conquest. It plots what actually happened in Eurasia during a particular stretch of time. It suggests why certain responses to a similar predicament turned out easier to come by and why other approaches, more exacting and less probable, allowed some pastoral conquerors to avoid reversion crises and keep the mantle of power.

To the late Professor Joseph Fletcher, Jr., of Harvard University, I owe much help in the study of the materials and the formulation of the ideas summarized in the following table.

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1500, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1979. For a more analytic study, see A. M. Khanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (1983), trans. Julia Crookenden, Cambridge, Cambridge, 1984.

Table 2. *What happened to the steppe peoples of Eurasia whenever they got involved in "history": a study in the open-ended logic of live options and in the imperative of self-transformation*

*Moment I: The ongoing encounter with an agrarian civilization*

1. Pastoralism as usual, alternating with pillage at the borderland of the agrarian empire

Probable outcomes: (a) long-lasting, low-level stability (increasingly less likely); (b) absorption into the empire (e.g., early Byzantine forced settlement of Slavs; repeated Chinese incorporation of Sinkiang and Turkestan); (c) outright conquest by other pastoral peoples who have mastered some of the organizational economic, or military techniques of the agrarian civilization first (e.g., triumph of the Mongols over the nomadic Merkids and Naimans as well as over the semisedentary and half-sinicized Jürchen, the Karts, and the Tartars); (d) conquest of agrarian civilization as in 5.

2. A client kingdom at the frontier of the agrarian empire (e.g., the Arabian Ghassanid kingdom in relation to the Byzantine Empire, the Arabian Lakmid kingdom in relation to the Sassanian Empire, the Samanid Empire in relation to the Abbasid Caliphate; the Crimean Tartars in relation to the Ottoman Empire)

Serves the agrarian empire as a buffer against more violent outlanders and as a vehicle for international trade. Receives, in turn, the technological, financial, and spiritual benefits of participation in the world order of the agrarian civilization, together with the opportunity to preserve a relatively independent, though compromised seminomadic existence. Likely outcomes: as in (1), though (a) of (1) becomes even less likely because the stability of the client kingdom comes to depend on the transformations of the agrarian world order, the internal factional strife of the elites, and the struggles of this empire with its agrarian or nomadic enemies.

3. An independent seminomadic community with a center of its own (e.g., the Zaporozhan Cossacks)

A historical tour de force. Hard to stop the community from being wholly incorporated into both the international system and the way of life of the agrarian society. The steppe people may increasingly take on the economic and military techniques, and the social arrangements (pronounced society-wide hierarchy and corporate-communal divisions) of an agrarian imperial civilization or pass into the service of external powers (e.g., the Cossack return first to Polish, then to Russian guidance), or meet one of the other fates described in this analysis of Moment I.



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4. Creation of a novel form of social life through partnership between an elite of international traders and a military steppe aristocracy, brought together by enterprising leadership and willing to borrow the cultural language of an agrarian civilization (e.g., the Kievan Rus' under Jaroslav).
5. The nomadic invaders put together an empire out of the bits and pieces of previous agrarian or nomadic regimes that they have torn to shreds. They then turn into a landholding warrior aristocracy distinct from the subject peoples.

To the extent that the partnership succeeds, the live options become those of other agrarian empires; nomadism is superseded. The society moves to the characteristic problems of an agrarian-bureaucratic society, as analysed in this chapter, bypassing Moment II. Insofar as the merger comes unstuck, the society is forced back into one of the other options described in Moment I or falls prey to agrarian or nomadic conquest.

Further possibilities of practical empowerment result from this higher measure of self-transformation. (a) The standard case. Examples: Before the rise of the Timurid and Mongol empires: the Safavid, Samanid, Ghaznavid, Qarakhid, Seljuq, Ghur, and Khwarazmshah empires. The Timurid Empire itself. The Mongol Empire and most of its successor states. After the collapse of the Safavid and Mughal empires: the empires of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Durrani – related to the earlier versions according to the maxim: "first as drama, then as farce." Overlaps with (2). Characteristically encouraged by the transfer of economic, military, and organizational techniques from agrarian empires or from other steppe peoples better acquainted with the agrarian civilization. Important elements of the earlier form of life persist. Minimal central organization; new societywide hierarchies and corporate-communal divisions enrust themselves on preexisting patron-client relations within the steppe aristocracy rather than displacing them; clear-cut division between the ruling and the ruled peoples; impossibility of recruitment of a large-scale peasant army; continuing economic dependence on the international caravan trade; almost entirely parasitic relation to the agricultural and artisanal activities of the conquered populations; oscillation between rearguard effort to uphold customs and perceptions of the nomadic society and fascination with the culture of the vanquished. Crucial vulnerabilities: (1) the largely personalistic and predatory links between capital and outlands;

(2) the failure to develop an internal economic base to replace dependence on the caravan trade and finance continuing large-scale military operations and an enlarged administrative apparatus; (3) the absence of a collective project that can be given both a higher spiritual meaning and a detailed, although changing, institutional form.

(b) A special case. The Yüan and the Manchu (Ch'ing) in China. On the one hand, the conquerors remain largely confined to the political apex of the preexisting agrarian empire. On the other hand, they accept most of that empire's established organizations and the supremacy of its ideals of government and life. The conquerors play a more or less well-recognized role within the conquered society. Their foreignness ceases to prevent them from ruling effectively. The opportunities and risks resemble those in Moment III.

(c) Breakthrough to greater administrative, productive, and military capability, thanks to more radical innovation, further effacing the distinctive, original identity of the conquering people. Examples: Toba Wei Empire in China; the Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal empires. A marginal case: the Il-Khanate. Aspects of the breakthrough: (1) Strengthening of relatively impersonal links between central government and the conquered regions and between higher and lower levels of the governmental hierarchy. (2) Continuing effort by government to shape or regulate large segments of society and corresponding multiplicity of avenues by which these segments can participate, more or less obliquely, in the contest over central governmental power. (3) Direct participation of the conquerors in landholding and tie-in of land tenure to military obligations. (4) Reliance on conquered peasants or gentry for crucial military support; agrarian policy to protect these sources of military strength. (5) Direct governmental sponsorship of agricultural, artisanal, and mercantile activities. No major dependence on international caravan trade; greater economic autarky. (6) Centrality of labor-intensive food-grain agriculture; dangerous oscillations between predominance of protected medium farms and smallholdings in hands of groups with military obligations and

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land concentration in favor of magnates; confinement of international commerce to relatively isolated position in economy and polity; linked with the conversion of tax duties to monetary form as well as with elite luxury or limited foreign trade; manufacturing subordinated to military needs and palace splendors. (7) Development of a new vision of imperial order, inspired by beliefs of conquering and conquered peoples, and almost always related, in tense and ambivalent fashion, to a religion. Clearer conflict between imperial and priestly, scholarly, bureaucratic authorities. (8) Softening of the felt conflict between the collective identities of ruling and ruled peoples. (9) Decisive and irreversible abandonment of the practices and ideals of nomadism but carryover of the outlook of a warrior despotism from an earlier historical moment. (10) Strengthening of societywide hierarchies and deepening of the divisions: (a) between the privileged, ruling nation (together with its clients, allies, and favorites) and everyone else; (b) between the privileged ranks of societies, almost always beneficiaries of agrarian-military privileges, and the nonprivileged peasant mass. Special incongruity and instability of the place occupied by the commercial elites, especially when they do not belong to the conquering people. (11) Importance of patron-client ties, both reinforcing and undermining societywide hierarchies and corporate-communal institutions. These developments produce a new set of options, described in Moment II.

*Moment II: The dream of empire (especially as arising from the reform of a preexisting agrarian-bureaucratic state by a conquest regime, as in Moment I-5c)*

The impulse to raid and conquer on the borderline of the empire (Examples: the Ch'i-tan, the Seljuqs, the Mughals in relation to the Deccan)

The benefits of uninterrupted conquest.

(1) To the central rulers in relation to the landholders: makes it easier for the imperial government to insist on a close link between land tenure and the satisfaction of military obligations; provides a constant stream of benefices for the higher and lower notables of the conquering people while also avoid-

ing their permanent settling down as hereditary landowners; postpones or moderates conflict between emperors and magnates for control of land and work force; deflects from factional struggle among the magnates and notables for fixed stores of land, power, and honor (an effect similar to that of economic growth on the class rivalries of contemporary industrial democracies); (2) to the rulers and landholders alike in relation to the peasantry: expansion at the borderlands serves as a source of wealth and manpower; makes it less necessary to step up exploitation of the peasantry; by limiting economic parasitism, contributes to the relative stability of agrarian relations in the heartland of the empire; (3) to the conquering people in relation to the foreign and unassimilated masses or notables: postpones the choice between the practices and perceptions of an earlier warrior despotism and the responsibilities of agrarian empire.

The perils of the commitment to conquest:

- (1) Mounting likelihood of contact with strong foreign centers of power.
- (2) Possibility of reaching unproductive desert areas at the fringes of the empire.
- (3) Diminishing returns of size. The larger the dimensions of the empire, the more probable it becomes that increased costs of maintaining the broader administrative and communications network counterbalance the economic advantages of size. Moreover, expansion multiplies the strategic difficulties of defense, attack, and repression of internal sedition.
- (4) As the maintenance of the structure of rule becomes more costly and fitful and the strategic burdens greater, several destabilizing forces operate.
  - (a) Stepped-up competition among the notables for land, power, honor.
  - (b) Attempts by the emperors to induct part of the native peasantry and notables into the military and administrative structure of separate imperial domains, aggravating the rivalry between the imperial rulers and the magnates.
  - (c) Increased exploitation of the peasants: by the emperors to meet the burdens of bloated empire; by the landholders, to satisfy fiscal and military obligations. The disturbance of agrarian relations fosters peasant rebellions and encourages the magnates to create large estates through the engrossment of

- Premises of thesis of diminishing returns of size.
1. The overwhelming majority of population and economy remains agricultural.
  2. No technological revolution has yet diminished the cost of imperial rule to the populace in general and the working classes in particular.  
Absence of technological transformation intimately connected with whole character of society. (See discussion of full-scale agrarian empires in the main body of Chapter I.)
  3. Especially great difficulty in eliciting and maintaining loyalties of large number of peasants and soldiers because of superimposition of two hierarchies: (a) the conquering foreign-native conquered hierarchy; (b) the hierarchy of throne, aristocracy, and peasantry.

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peasant land and labor. (d) If there is a stratum of native landholding notables below the aristocracy of the conquering people (e.g., the Hindu *zamindars* in relation to the Mughal *jangirars*), the central power and magnates must step up the pressure on this autochthonous ruling class while also becoming increasingly hostage to its economic and military contributions. (5) Conquest as a high-risk venture: defeat or even absence abroad encourages peasant rebellion, aristocratic conspiracy, and insurrection by the native landholders. (6) Danger of being lost in a larger sea of alien peoples.

For all these reasons, the first impulse tends to give way to a second one, less a distinct option than a changed emphasis.

The impulse to turn inward, toward rule of an agrarian empire, with no commitment to perennial conquest

The emerging features of this society: (1) The basics of power: control of governmental patronage, military recruitment, and land tenure. (2) The centralizing policies of the ruling cliques must work through some combination of the following strategies: (a) constitution of royal agricultural domains as an independent resource and/or military manpower base; (b) protection of a class of smallholders as a source of recruitment for peasant infantry and a counterweight to the aristocrats; (c) attempt to establish or maintain a close link between large-scale land tenure and military and tax obligations, avoiding the transformation of estates into allodial property and turning the aristocratic cohorts or lower gentry into a service nobility; (d) setting up of an independent line of dependent, landless, and unarmed bureaucrats to preside over some aspects of administration, tax collection, and recruitment as well as to regulate relations between landholders and peasants. Rarely are these policies carried to their final antiaristocratic conclusions. To the extent they fail, the imperial government falls under unchecked magnate influence, serv-

ing as a device by which the great landowners uphold their common interests against invasion from outside or rebellion from below. (3) Relative diversity and autonomy of the peasant masses persist as long as: (a) an autocracy has failed to exert direct, societywide control over the peasantry through its lower-echelon agents and (b) the relation of the landholders to the peasants has been kept from the extremes of parasitism by the vigilance of the central government, the resistance of the peasants, or the relative military and economic stability of the country. Thus, aristocratic factionalism may coexist with various forms of peasant-village community. (4) The agrarian economy becomes more market-oriented, allowing for part payment of taxes in money, which in turn facilitates the emperor's freedom of maneuver in military recruitment. (5) Development of cash-crop agriculture and urban artisanal activity, connected, on one side, with the partial commercialization of food-grain agriculture and, on the other, with the desire for luxury by more sedentary imperial courts and landholding aristocrats. (6) Commercial groups remain enclaves – either relatively self-ruling cysts in the agrarian society or direct dependents of court and magnates. (7) Multiple opportunities for disintegration once the march of conquest is brought to a halt: (a) the military-administrative aristocracy tends to merge into a class of hereditary landowners, in constant rivalry with the emperor or with one another for control of land and labor; (b) the scribal-bureaucratic cadres increase in number and develop administrative procedures that impose limits on monarchical discretion and information; in the course of their rise, they try to merge with either the landholding aristocracy or the relatively independent religious functionaries; (c) the religious functionaries try to assert their independence as custodians of the sacred law representing the fount of imperial authority.

Table 2. *What happened to the steppe peoples of Eurasia whenever they got involved in "history":  
a study in the open-ended logic of live options and in the imperative of self-transformation*

Two possibilities of development

The aristocratic condominium.

(1) Abandonment of the peasantry to aristocratic-gentry control. (2) Conduct of imperial ritual and development of imperial-gentry outlook. (3) Near total dependence of the imperial government on aristocrats and/or gentry for military recruitment and taxes. (4) Coordination of conflicting aristocratic claims on governmental patronage. The aristocratic condominium succeeds so long as: (a) the weakness of the monarchy does not encourage aristocratic usurpation, foreign invasion, and peasant rebellion; (b) the level of exploitation of the peasantry does not become so great as to wipe out all elements of peasant community and to disturb all agrarian relations; (c) demographic changes fail to lead either to relative overpopulation and pressure on the land or to underpopulation and struggle among landholders for peasant labor; (d) the aristocrats with access to the spoils of government are hierarchically and spiritually continuous with the landholders who are in effective control of the land and the peasants. (On the significance of failure to satisfy this fourth condition, see the section below labeled the cost of failure.)

The overweening autocrat.

The success of an autocratic centralizing policy requires: (1) playing social classes or estates and corporate bodies off against one another; (2) keeping ultimate control over the appointments of scribes and priests as well as over the content of religious and social doctrine; (3) making sure that large-scale land tenure continues to be impressed with military and service obligations to central government; (4) creating a manpower base for independent recruitment into a peasant army and lower-level administration or government-directed craftsmanship and commerce; (5) building an independent tax base through totally dependent (gentry or bureaucratic) functionaries or through magnates whose tax liabilities are checked by an independent bu-

raucacy; (6) stable succession rules, preferably combining heredity and free selection by the ruler; (7) building a common front – spiritual, political, and economic – with the notables of the conquered peoples. (On the limits to the pursuit of these policies, to the fundamental alteration of peasant life, and to the technical revolution of the instruments of work and warfare, see the discussion of reversion crises in the main body of Chapter 1.)

**Breakthrough: merger with the native elites and reform of the agrarian–bureaucratic state**

A necessary though insufficient precondition to the success of either line of development is the relative dissolution of the barrier between the conquering and conquered. The conquerors must accept an intimate and stable association with the indigenous landholding aristocracy. If the native ruling class cannot be effectively destroyed and replaced, a new, relatively unified ruling class must be created, in direct possession of the land and of peasant manpower. Conversion and compromise must create a lasting spiritual basis on which the conquerors can bind themselves to the notables among the conquered and, if possible, to the native peasantry as well.

**The cost of failure**

Examples: Mongols in China, Mughals in India.

(1) The native landlords remain in direct control of most land and peasant labor. These landlords hold the keys to the expanded economic and military resources the conquerors need. They are able to turn every weakness of the imposed regime to their own benefit and eventually either to overthrow or to manipulate it. The exactions of the conquering rulers and aristocrats increase the exploitation of the peasantry and therefore the instability of agrarian relations. The conquerors suffer from ignorance and lack of control over the countryside. At crucial moments, the native gentry can turn the peasantry against the foreign rulers. (2) The effective ties of communication and commerce among regions owe more to relations among native landholders, merchants, and administrators than to the central government of the empire. Tendency of the country to fall apart into segments only tenuously connected by these local or personalist ties. (3) The conquered gentry justify resistance or insurrection by appeals to outraged collective identities and standards of civilization that the conquerors cannot live up to.



Table 2. *What happened to the steppe peoples of Eurasia whenever they got involved in "history": a study in the open-ended logic of live options and in the imperative of self-transformation*

The price of success

A major example of breakthrough and partial unification by the conquerors: the Ottomans, especially through the *timar* and *devshirme* systems. Major factors bearing on the feasibility of the task: (1) The numerical strength of the conquerors relative to the overrun landholders. (2) The solidity of preexisting landholder-peasant relations and of joint participation by native landholders and peasants alike in a vision of civilized life that extends down to the governance of relations among individuals and of passions within individuals. (3) The availability to the conquerors of suitable models of government (e.g., Ottoman use of Sassanian statecraft, conveyed by the Seljuqs) and their boldness in going beyond previous practices and beliefs. The earlier scheme of a warrior despotism turns into a more complex program of culture and state-making. A high religious tradition often plays a crucial role in this regeneration. The achievement of relative unification, far from solving the problems of relations among peasants, aristocrats, and emperors, poses these problems with new clarity. The options become those common to all agrarian empires.

*Moment III: The reformed agrarian-bureaucratic state (as described in this chapter)*