

At Least Five Frontiers: An Interactive China in Eighteenth-Century Asia

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In discussing a changing and interactive Asia, we need to look at maps all the time. A quick look at the map of East Asia from 1700 to 1800 shows a very large space of political unity and a great deal of common culture, the Great Qing Empire, with a number of important frontiers. This paper seeks to show how the large size of that unified space was the result both of very long trends in Chinese political culture and of specific achievements of the Qing rulers, and also discusses the powerful effects on the Qing of interactions across several frontiers: the Inner Asian, the Sichuan-Tibetan, the southern mountains, the ocean, and the complex zone of interaction with Korea and the Manchu homeland. This may be useful background for discussion of the shapes of interactions across many of these frontiers in our own times.