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Herbert A. Giles
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CHINA AND THE MANCHUS

CHAPTER I

THE NÜ-CHÊNS AND KITANS

THE Manchus are descended from a branch of certain wild Tungusic nomads, who were known in the ninth century as the Nü-chêns, a name which has been said to mean "west of the sea." The cradle of their race lay at the base of the Ever-White Mountains, due north of Korea, and was fertilised by the head waters of the Yalu River.

In an illustrated Chinese work of the fourteenth century, of which the Cambridge University Library possesses the only known copy, we read that they reached this spot, originally the home of the Su-shên tribe, as fugitives from Korea; further, that careless of death and prizing valour only, they carried naked knives about their persons, never parting from them by day or night, and that they were as "poisonous" as wolves or tigers. They also tattooed their faces, and at marriage their mouths. By the close of the ninth century the Nü-chêns had become subject to the neighbouring Kitans, then under the

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2 CHINA AND THE MANCHUS

rule of the vigorous Kitan chieftain, Opaochi, who, in 907, proclaimed himself Emperor of an independent kingdom with the dynastic title of Liao, said to mean "iron," and who at once entered upon that long course of aggression against China and encroachment upon her territory which was to result in the practical division of the empire between the two powers, with the Yellow River as boundary, K'ai-fêng as the Chinese capital, and Peking, now for the first time raised to the status of a metropolis, as the Kitan capital. Hitherto, the Kitans had recognised China as their suzerain; they are first mentioned in Chinese history in A.D. 468, when they sent ambassadors to court, with tribute.

Turning now to China, the famous House of Sung, the early years of which were so full of promise of national prosperity, and which is deservedly associated with one of the two most brilliant periods in Chinese literature, was founded in 960. Korea was then forced, in order to protect herself from the encroachments of China, to accept the hated supremacy of the Kitans; but being promptly called upon to surrender large tracts of territory, she suddenly entered into an alliance with the Nü-chên, who were also ready to revolt, and who sent an army to the assistance of their new friends. The Nü-chên and Korean armies, acting in concert, inflicted a severe defeat on the Kitans, and from

THE NÜ-CHÊNS AND KITANS 3

this victory may be dated the beginning of the Nü-chên power. China had indeed already sent an embassy to the Nü-chêns, suggesting an alliance and also a combination with Korea, by which means the aggression of the Kitans might easily be checked ; but during the eleventh century Korea became alienated from the Nü-chêns, and even went so far as to advise China to join with the Kitans in crushing the Nü-chêns. China, no doubt, would have been glad to get rid of both of these troublesome neighbours, especially the Kitans, who were gradually filching territory from the empire, and driving the Chinese out of the southern portion of the province of Chihli.

For a long period China weakly allowed herself to be blackmailed by the Kitans, who, in return for a large money subsidy and valuable supplies of silk, forwarded a quite insignificant amount of local produce, which was called "tribute" by the Chinese court.

Early in the twelfth century, the Kitan monarch paid a visit to the Sungari River, for the purpose of fishing, and was duly received by the chiefs of the Nü-chên tribes in that district. On this occasion the Kitan Emperor, who had taken perhaps more liquor than was good for him, ordered the younger men of the company to get up and dance before him. This command was ignored by the son of one of the

4 CHINA AND THE MANCHUS

chiefs, named Akutêng (sometimes, but wrongly, written *Akuta*), and it was suggested to the Emperor that he should devise means for putting out of the way so uncompromising a spirit. No notice, however, was taken of the affair at the moment; and that night Akutêng, with a band of followers, disappeared from the scene. Making his way eastward, across the Sungari, he started a movement which may be said to have culminated five hundred years later in the conquest of China by the Manchus. In 1114 he began to act on the offensive, and succeeded in inflicting a severe defeat on the Kitans. By 1115 he had so far advanced towards the foundation of an independent kingdom that he actually assumed the title of Emperor. Thus was presented the rare spectacle of three contemporary rulers, each of whom claimed a title which, according to the Chinese theory, could only belong to one. The style he chose for his dynasty was Chin (also read *Kin*), which means "gold," and which some say was intended to mark a superiority over Liao (=iron), that of the Kitans, on the ground that gold is not, like iron, a prey to rust. Others, however, trace the origin of the term to the fact that gold was found in the Nü-chên territory.

A small point which has given rise to some confusion, may fitly be mentioned here. The tribe of Tartars hitherto spoken of as Nü-chêns, and hence-

THE NÜ-CHÊNS AND KITANS 5

forth known in history as the "Golden Dynasty," in 1035 changed the word *chên* for *chih*, and were called Nü-chih Tartars. They did this because at that date the word *chên* was part of the personal name of the reigning Kitan Emperor, and therefore taboo. The necessity for such change would of course cease with their emancipation from Kitan rule, and the old name would be revived; it will accordingly be continued in the following pages.

The victories of Akutêng over the Kitans were most welcome to the Chinese Emperor, who saw his late oppressors humbled to the dust by the victorious Nü-chêns; and in 1120 a treaty of alliance was signed by the two powers against the common enemy. The upshot of this move was that the Kitans were severely defeated in all directions, and their chief cities fell into the hands of the Nü-chêns, who finally succeeded, in 1122, in taking Peking by assault, the Kitan Emperor having already sought safety in flight. When, however, the time came for an equitable settlement of territory between China and the victorious Nü-chêns, the Chinese Emperor discovered that the Nü-chêns, inasmuch as they had done the most of the fighting, were determined to have the lion's share of the reward; in fact, the yoke imposed by the latter proved if anything more burdensome than that of

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6 CHINA AND THE MANCHUS

the dreaded Kitans. More territory was taken by the Nü-chêns, and even larger levies of money were exacted, while the same old farce of worthless tribute was carried on as before.

In 1123, Akutêng died, and was canonised as the first Emperor of the Chin, or Golden Dynasty. He was succeeded by a brother ; and two years later, the last Emperor of the Kitans was captured and relegated to private life, thus bringing the dynasty to an end.

The new Emperor of the Nü-chêns spent the rest of his life in one long struggle with China. In 1126, the Sung capital, the modern K'ai-fêng Fu in Honan, was twice besieged : on the first occasion for thirty-three days, when a heavy ransom was exacted and some territory was ceded ; on the second occasion for forty days, when it fell, and was given up to pillage. In 1127, the feeble Chinese Emperor was seized and carried off, and by 1129 the whole of China north of the Yang-tsze was in the hands of the Nü-chêns. The younger brother of the banished Emperor was proclaimed by the Chinese at Nanking, and managed to set up what is known as the southern Sung dynasty ; but the Nü-chêns gave him no rest, driving him first out of Nanking, and then out of Hangchow, where he had once more established a capital. Ultimately, there was a peace of a more or less permanent character, chiefly due to the genius

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THE NÜ-CHÊNS AND KITANS 7

of a notable Chinese general of the day ; and the Nü-chêns had to accept the Yang-tsze as the dividing line between the two powers.

The next seventy years were freely marked by raids, first of one side and then of the other ; but by the close of the twelfth century the Mongols were pressing the Nü-chêns from the north, and the southern Sung were seizing the opportunity to attack their old enemies from the south. Finally, in 1234, the independence of the Golden Dynasty of Nü-chêns was extinguished by Ogotai, third son of the great Genghis Khan, with the aid of the southern Sung, who were themselves in turn wiped out by Kublai Khan, the first Mongol Emperor to rule over a united China.

The name of this wandering people, whose territory covers such a huge space on the map, has been variously derived from (1) *moengel*, celestial, (2) *mong*, brave, and (3) *munku*, silver, the last mentioned being favoured by some because of its relation to the iron and golden dynasties of the Kitans and Nü-chêns respectively.

Three centuries and a half must now pass away before entering upon the next act of the Manchu drama. The Nü-chêns had been scotched, but not killed, by their Mongol conquerors, who, one hundred and thirty-four years later (1368), were themselves driven out of China, a pure native dynasty being

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8 CHINA AND THE MANCHUS

re-established under the style of Ming, "Bright." During the ensuing two hundred years the Nü-chêns were scarcely heard of, the House of Ming being busily occupied in other directions. Their warlike spirit, however, found scope and nourishment in the expeditions organised against Japan and Tan-lo, or Quelpart, as named by the Dutch, a large island to the south of the Korean peninsula; while on the other hand the various tribes scattered over a portion of the territory known to Europeans as Manchuria, availed themselves of long immunity from attack by the Chinese to advance in civilization and prosperity. It may be noted here that "Manchuria" is unknown to the Chinese or to the Manchus themselves as a geographical expression. The present extensive home of the Manchus is usually spoken of as the Three Eastern Provinces, namely, (1) Shêng-king, or Liao-tung, or Kuan-tung, (2) Kirin, and (3) Heilungchiang or Tsitsihar.

Among the numerous small independent communities above mentioned, which traced their ancestry to the Nü-chêns of old, one of the smallest, the members of which inhabited a tract of territory due east of what is now the city of Mukden, and were shortly to call themselves Manchus,—the origin of the name is not known,—produced, in 1559, a young hero who altered the course of Chinese history to such an extent that for nearly three hundred years

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THE NŪ-CHĒNS AND KITANS 9

his descendants sat on the throne of China, and ruled over what was for a great portion of the time the largest empire on earth. Nurhachu, the real founder of the Manchu power, was born in 1559, from a virile stock, and was soon recognised to be an extraordinary child. We need not linger over his dragon face, his phoenix eye, or even over his large, drooping ears, which have always been associated by the Chinese with intellectual ability. He first came into prominence in 1583, when, at twenty-four years of age, he took up arms, at the head of only one hundred and thirty men, in connection with the treacherous murder by a rival chieftain of his father and grandfather, who had ruled over a petty principality of almost infinitesimal extent; and he finally succeeded three years later in securing from the Chinese, who had been arrayed against him, not only the surrender of the murderer, but also a sum of money and some robes of honour. He was further successful in negotiating a treaty, under the terms of which Manchu furs could be exchanged at certain points for such Chinese commodities as cotton, sugar, and grain.

In 1587, Nurhachu built a walled city, and established an administration in his tiny principality, the even-handed justice and purity of which soon attracted a large number of settlers, and before very long he had succeeded in amalgamating five Manchu

10 CHINA AND THE MANCHUS

States under his personal rule. Extension of territory by annexation after victories over neighbouring States followed as a matter of course, the result being that his growing power came to be regarded with suspicion, and even dread. At length, a joint attempt on the part of seven States, aided by two Mongol chieftains, was made to crush him ; but, although numerical superiority was overpoweringly against him, he managed to turn the enemy's attack into a rout, killed four thousand men, and captured three thousand horses, besides other booty. Following up this victory by further annexations, he now began to present a bold front to the Chinese, declaring himself independent, and refusing any longer to pay tribute. In 1603, he built himself a new capital, Hingking, which he placed not very far east of the modern Mukden, and there he received envoys from the Mongolian chieftains, sent to congratulate him on his triumph.

At this period the Manchus, whose spoken words were polysyllabic, and not monosyllabic like Chinese, had no written language beyond certain rude attempts at alphabetic writing, formed from Chinese characters, and found to be of little practical value. The necessity for something more convenient soon appealed to the prescient and active mind of Nurhachu ; accordingly, in 1599, he gave orders to two learned scholars to prepare a suitable script for his