

saw in its full greatness under the Emperor Kublai came to an end through internal decay within a century of Kublai's accession. The Chinese dynasty of the Ming which replaced it was content with safeguarding the north-western borders in Kansu against fresh Mongol inroads by a policy of strict seclusion which stifled trade.

The use of the sea route to China, greatly developed by the Arabs and becoming still more important after the first Portuguese voyages to India, had deprived that ancient Central-Asian highway of its former value for Western trade. But towards the close of the seventeenth century the growing power of the Oirats or Dzungars, Mongolian tribes established north of the T'ien-shan, forced a fresh advance into innermost Asia upon China after it had passed under the Manchu dynasty, then young and vigorous. But it was not until 1755 that expeditions organized by the great Manchu Emperor Ch'ien-lung finally brought the whole of the Tarim basin as well as Dzungaria north of it under direct Chinese administration. Once again, as under the Han and T'ang, a policy purely defensive in its origin had resulted in Chinese expansion over vast Central-Asian regions right up to the Pamirs and the Altai Mountains.

Chinese control of these regions has continued to the present day, in spite of the growing internal weakness of the Empire and the great upheaval caused by the Tungan or Chinese Muhammadan rebellion in the third quarter of the last century. The explanation lies in the fact that for the first time in history China's Central-Asian frontiers had become contiguous with those of a great civilized power, such as the Russian Empire was, capable of dominating the border populations and gradually restraining nomadic