Since this book covers such a long period, in which the internal and external frontiers of what we now call China were in more-or-less constant motion, I have not attempted historical reconstruction of the frontiers or boundaries of states or substate administrative entities. Rather, for convenience in reference and to prevent cartographers’ nightmares, the maps in this book are based on 1995 provincial and national borders as fixed or claimed by the People’s Republic of China. Since in the narrative I refer to place names appropriate to the period under discussion, noting modern names and positions as appropriate, those anachronistic place names (e.g., Hezhou, now Linxia) have been included in the maps.

My subject requires that many names and terms be either translated or transliterated from Chinese, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. I have used the pinyin system of romanization for standard Chinese pronunciation (putonghua) throughout, with occasional notes on local variation. The languages spoken in northwest China differ radically from standard Chinese in many ways, and it would be both difficult and feckless to try to reproduce local pronunciations. For Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, I have used the romanization system of the Encyclopedia of Islam, modified by use of q rather than k and j rather than dj, and by elimination of consonant underlining. Non-English terms, except those with common transliterations, are given in italics throughout. Islamic terms with common English transliterations are given in that form (e.g., Koran not Qur’an, “muezzin” not mu’adhdhin).

The Chinese Character Glossary contains personal names and terms that are rendered in Chinese in the text (excepting the footnotes), but I have not included characters for place names, which may be found by consulting an English-Chinese gazetteer or geographical dictionary. Familiar terms such as dynastic names (e.g., Ming, Qing) and names of
ancient historical figures (e.g., Laozi, Confucius), as well as those of contemporary scholars, have not been included in the character glossary.

All footnote citations are in shortened form; full citations are given in the Bibliography.

All dating of dynasties uses conventional Sinocentric dates.