

“Ethnicity and Sinicization Reconsidered: Workshop on non-Han Empires in China“

Workshop Report

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From June 15 to 17, 2011, Ghent University hosted the Workshop “Ethnicity and Sinicization Reconsidered: Workshop on non-Han Empires in China“, which was organized jointly by the Institute of Sinology of Ghent University and of the LMU Munich. The event gathered scholars and students from Europe, China and the USA to discuss issues of studies on Non-Han Empires in China.

The Workshop was possible thanks to the sponsorship of the Gerda Henkel Foundation, the Münchener Universitätsgesellschaft, the China and Inner Asian Council (CIAC) of the Association for Asian Studies, the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation (CCK) and the Doctoral School of Arts, Humanities and Law of Ghent University.

The main question of the Workshop was how to deal with the history of those empires traditionally known as “conquest dynasties”. These provide a special challenge for historians. Although they governed regions inhabited by Han people, the founders of these empires belonged to other ethnicities in East Asia. However, the most profound data and sources about these empires and dynasties were written in Chinese and paid attention to those regions inhabited by Han people. The sources existing in their own languages and scripts have been for a long time difficult to access and remained outside the focus of academic research.

Non-Han dynasties have therefore often been analyzed according to their role within a Chinese historical perspective and for a long time it has been mostly neglected that their ethnical and cultural identity was different from the Han, on the basis of the assumption that they gradually assimilated i. e. sinicized to their Chinese subjects. It has not been until the last two decades of the twentieth cen-

tury that the assumption of sinicization was wholeheartedly doubted and academically refuted.¹

The invited speakers offered a wide range of topics covering many periods, from the Han to the Qing, and people like the Xiongnu 匈奴, Khitan 契丹, Koreans 朝鮮, Manchus 滿州 and Mongols 蒙古. Every lecturer discussed his or her own topic with the aid of primary sources of various kinds. Most sources analyzed were Chinese ones, also because of the need of a common reference language for the workshop. Nevertheless, it was possible during the talk of Veronika Veit to discuss Mongolian sources, and Naomi Standen brought some archaeological evidences on the Liao dynasty 遼 (907/916–1125).

After an introductory speech by the host of Ghent University, Bart Dessein, the sessions started, each divided into two sections, a talk and a second part of an analysis of the given source.

Evelyn Rawski (University of Pittsburgh) presented a paper on “How looking at Northeast Asia as a region rather than dividing it into Chinese, Korean or other histories might help to produce new insights into the historical experience of the peoples and states that have resided in the region”. Through the example of the *Chosōn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄 (*Chosōn Veritable Records*), she analyzed North China and the neighboring territories as a macroregion, pointing out the new historical and geopolitical perspective such an approach can offer. The national borders, which were installed only in the late nineteenth century, had a deep imprint on this region’s analysis and made many histories national ones. Rawski pointed out that while national historiography has been unavoidable in times of developing nationalism, it is about time to overcome their limitation.

The two sessions of Nicola Di Cosmo (Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton) and Hans Van Ess (Ludwig Maximilians University München) offered a complementary interpretation of the Xiongnu Empire according to the well-known chapters nr. 110 of the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) and nr. 94 of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (*The Book of Han*). In his talk “Ethnicity and Siniciza-

¹ See for example: Crossley 1990; Rawski 1996; Rawski 2010.

tion in the Genesis of the first steppe empire: the Xiongnu question reconsidered”, Di Cosmo concentrated on the ethnogenesis of the Xiongnu, providing new insights and hypothesis according to biological, economical and other criteria.

On the other hand, Van Ess analyzed the Xiongnu-Han relationship and representation through the “Ethos of the envoy and his treatment by the enemy in Han history”. The session focused on the description of diplomatic aspects, misunderstandings and peculiarities of the Xiongnu and Han relations, with special reference to the *heqin* 和親 (“peace marriage”) policy. These episodes give important indications on the reciprocal representation of the political “otherness” for both the Han and the Xiongnu.

Veronika Veit’s (University of Bonn) session “Tables and Biographies (*piao-chuan*) in Ch’ing historiography: the example of the trilingual ‘Ch’in-ting wai-fan meng-ku hui-pu wang kung piao-chuan 欽定外翻蒙古回部王公表傳/Jarlig-iyar totagagsan gadagadu muji-yin monggol qotong ayimag-un wang güng-üd-ün iledkel sastir/Hesei toktoberha sirame banjibuba tulergi goloi monggo hoise aiman i wang gung sai ulabun’ of 1795” offered a perspective on how to deal with Mongolian histories, with the special reference to the Qing period and the trilingual text named in the title of the talk. Veit went into the problematic of the source text regarding authorship and date of origin, which is even more complicated than usual in case of a multilingual source. The idea of a trilingual text was very much in the meaning of the workshop, pointing out the multiculturalism of non-Han empires, which cannot be reduced only to the perspective and representation of Chinese sources.

The focus of Pamela Crossley’s (Dartmouth College) talk “The *Dayi juemi lu*” 大義覺密錄 (*Great Righteousness Resolving Confusion*) and its outlook on barbarians and Qing legitimacy” lay on the Yongzheng 雍正 (r. 1722–1735) Emperor’s anticipation of the universal notion of Chinese civilization, which according to Levenson’s developed only in the nineteenth century.² As described by Crossley, Emperor Yongzheng was fully aware of the problematic caused by the Manchu descent of the Qing emperors and dealt with

² Levenson 1959.

it by reconstructing the Chinese civilization and the Hua historical entity as universal. In his *Dayi juemi lu*, an imperial polemic published in 1730 and intended to become a set book for the examination candidates, the emperor Yongzheng demonstrated how being Yi 夷 ("Barbarian") would be no problem as long as it was taken as a starting point. The reading of a passage of this text collection enabled the workshop participants to fully understand how the concept of culturalism was influenced and further formed by the non-Han conquerors themselves.

Roy Bin Wong (University of California, Los Angeles) began his talk "Reflections on Qing institutions of governance: Chinese empire in comparative perspective" with a concise summary not only of what had been talked discussed at the workshop so far, but also the general question of a constructed national past and the present nation-state in case of China. This brought him directly to the important but often neglected precondition when examining Qing institution, that is, the acceptance of the fact that Qing methods differed not only horizontally from other empires at the same time like the Russian, the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungary empires, but also vertically from other empires in East Asia in other times. He also drew a direct comparison between the Qing Empire and the modern PRC, especially with regard to 'colonies', which one can claim the PRC keeps until today in form of Tibet and Xinjiang.

Naomi Standen (University of Birmingham) presented during her session "Life on the ground in the borderlands: evidence from texts and material culture" some evidences from the Chifeng International Collaborative Research Project (CICARP) (1999–2007), a survey on archaeological materials in Inner Mongolia. This project was set in a broader, multidisciplinary analysis of the Liao, showing that history is like the process of tracing a map: it deals with literary and non-literary data of different kinds (geographical, archeological, economical). The crossing of this data or the underlining of some of them, together with the evidence of more literary sources, offer us a more complete perspective for the reading of history.

The atmosphere and the proceeding of the Workshop showed the great interest of the international scholarly community to explore the issues of dealing with non-Han empires deeper and with

the new perspective of multidisciplinary approaches. The participating students came from European and US American universities responding to the need and wish of communication and network building among the academic community.

This event hopes to be the beginning of a series of meetings or similar occasions, in order to build a network of scholars working in the field of non-Han dynasties. One step in this direction is the intention to publish some of the Workshop papers in a special issue of *Crossroads*, eventually in summer 2012. This would be an important possibility for continuing the academic discussion on a broader level than the small circle of the Workshop.

For an interesting possibility of discussion and confrontation we thank all the participants, who made this workshop a prolific occasion of academic exchange.

References

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