

## Prolegomena

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The present volume is the result of the academic discussion on non-Han Dynasties which took place at the workshop “Ethnicity and Sinicization Reconsidered: Workshop on Non-Han Empires in China” (June 15th to 17th 2011, Ghent University, Belgium).

Non-Han empires have always provided a special challenge for historians. Although they governed regions inhabited by Han people, the founders of these empires belonged to other ethnicities in Central and East Asia. However, many important sources about these empires and dynasties were written in Chinese and often pay special attention to those regions inhabited by Han people. Also, these sources tend to follow a unitary view of Chinese history embedded in a so called “culturalism”, which integrated times of foreign rule in a sinocentric perspective of dynastic succession. Especially after historiography became mostly nationalist historiography in the first half of the twentieth century, it has been neglected that the ethnical and cultural identities of these dynasties were different from the Han, usually explained by the assumption of their gradual assimilation to their Han Chinese subjects, i. e. sinicization. It has not been until the last two decades of the twentieth century that scholars refuted this approach, basing their critique on more and more works, which take the non-Han perspective into account and definitely show that a multifaceted analysis of these dynasties and empires leads to a much more differentiated and colourful picture. These critiques were led by scholars like Evelyn S. Rawski and Pamela Kyle Crossley, both speakers at the workshop.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover a renewed interest for disciplines like Mongolian, Manchu, Tibetan and Central Asian studies, and the translation and

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1 They especially approach the problem of the “sinicization hypothesis” in these two works: Crossley 1990; Rawski 1996.

analysis of documents in non-Chinese languages allowed for the development of a comparative view on the history of these people.

Still, the sources existing in the languages and scripts of the founders of these empires are often difficult to access and to interpret and therefore remain outside the focus of the main academic research.

For these reasons the discourse of the workshop gave particular attention to the analysis of sources of different kinds (textual as well as archaeological) and to the issues they present. Seven speakers had been invited to give lectures on their various fields of expertise all to be found in the area of non-Han empires and states in China. Moreover, they guided the workshop attendees through the translation and analysis of related primary sources. A similar approach has been experienced in a series of six workshops entitled “Research Training in Old Chinese”, organized between 2009 and 2011 by Dirk Meyer (The Queen’s College, University of Oxford) and Joachim Gentz (University of Edinburgh). During these workshops, a focused approach to the texts has proved very productive in the ambit of Chinese language and history. Therefore we decided to follow a similar pattern in the framework of a workshop on non-Han dynasties, whose documents often pose a special challenge to historians, due to their multilingualism and to the multicultural context of their production.

Moreover, we felt the need to bring together researchers on non-Han dynasties, a field which can count on many voices in the current worldwide scholarly panorama, but nevertheless still needs canals of stable communication and exchange.

The attendees came from U.S. American and European institutions, many of them graduated from Chinese universities, showing a wide scholarly interest in the topic. They gained new impulses and deeper insights, not only regarding non-Han empires in China, but also in a more general way regarding the writing of history. The essential idea was to combine sinological perspectives with sociological and anthropological approaches in order to deal with the problematic concept of sinicization in historiography and the challenges for Sinologists when dealing with non-Han empires in China. The twofold approach of the workshop – lecture and translation session – enabled all attendees to take part in lively and illuminating discus-

sions and to get deeper insights into the philological work of senior scholars in this field of study.

Comparative methodology and international communication were therefore the inspiring criteria of this workshop, which has become possible through the efforts and support of many individuals and institutions. It is here the right place to mention the financial support of the Gerda Henkel Foundation, the Doctoral School of Arts, Humanities and Law at Ghent University, the Münchener Universitätsgesellschaft and the China and Inner Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies (Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation). It is also the place to mention the kind cooperation of the speakers with their most interesting lectures and of all attendees with their animated participation in the discussions and last but not least of Angela Schottenhammer (Ghent University) who made the publication of this volume possible. Our hope that the workshop could be the beginning of a series of meeting has been fulfilled by a second workshop on “Political Strategies of Identity-Building in Non-Han Empires in China” (Munich, June 18th to 19th 2012). We moreover hope that this workshop has provided encouragement to others to organize similar events in order to strengthen the communication and collaboration between scholars studying non-Han Empires.

### References

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