

Beyond National History: Seeking the Ethnic in China's History

Evelyn S. RAWSKI

Although the Chinese heartland (*zhongyuan* 中原, literally the “central plain”) was ruled by non-Han peoples for over half of its recorded history, our understanding of their historical role has been obscured by what Peter Perdue has labelled the “hegemony of inscription”.¹ Chinese regimes produced the overwhelming bulk of written materials describing these encounters, with the result that the scarcity of texts written in the language of the conquerors raises questions about our ability to understand historical events from their perspective. Current interest in focusing on the historical role of conquest dynasties resonates with the exploration of ethnic issues in contemporary China, which is constitutionally defined as a multi-ethnic state. Researchers who seek to understand just how Chinese culture came to be, and the historical contribution made by the various peoples who reside within the territorial confines of the People's Republic of China today, first need to dis-assemble the unilinear narrative created during the process of nation-building which stressed sinicization as a long-term historical process.

Sinicization, the thesis that all of the non-Han peoples who entered the Chinese-speaking realm have been assimilated into Chinese culture, provided a means by which the periods when non-Han peoples ruled portions of the present-day territory of China could be incorporated into a seamless narrative that culminated in the creation of the modern nation. In this paper, I outline the creation and institutionalization of national history, which accompanied the establishment of the modern nation state in China. National history stimulated interstate squabbles over history in East Asia that punctuated the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. I then examine scholarly developments that have created what some have called the “new Qing history”.

1 Perdue 1996, 784.

The Creation of National History

In the late nineteenth century, history, once conceptualized in universal terms, became “national history”. The traditional Chinese historical model was displaced by a new historical framework imported from Europe, which claimed scientific objectivity.² In China, the call for a national History, proclaimed by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) in his “New Historiography” (*Xin shixue* 新史學, 1902), was answered by participants in the New Culture movement. Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) used the “scientific method” to challenge the authenticity of the ancient canonical texts. He Bingsong 何炳松 (1890–1946) introduced the work of American historians to Chinese academics through his translations, just as Yao Congwu 姚從吾 (1894–1970), who studied in Germany under Otto Franke (1836–1946) and Erich Haenisch (1880–1966), brought European sinology to China.³ These historians hoped to strip history of its explicitly didactic function, even as they tried to selectively re-integrate cultural traditions into a new national narrative. To a generation of scholars trained in the Confucian classics, the premises of “scientific historiography” as expounded by Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) seemed to be a variation of principles espoused by the evidentiary school of Confucianism that flourished in the eighteenth century.⁴

Japan was the pioneer in incorporating Western historical models into its own academic structure. The Meiji 明治 government appointed historians to write a new official history and by 1895, the predecessor of today’s Historiographical Institute, “Shiryō hensanjo” 史料編纂所, was established at Tōkyō Imperial History. Ludwig Riess (1861–1928), a student of Leopold von Ranke, came to teach history at Tōkyō Imperial University in 1887 and remained until 1902. European works of history were read by Meiji intellectuals. The eminent educational reformer Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901), founder of Keiō University, modelled his analysis of Japan’s position in the world on Francois Guizot’s *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* (1828) and Henry Buckle’s *History of Civilization in England* (1871); these were among the first European histories to be translated into Japanese.⁵

2 Duara 1995, ch. 1.

3 These developments are described in Q. E. Wang 2001.

4 Breuker 2005, 78.

5 Brownlee 1997.

Although accepting the general rubrics of “scientific history”, the new generation of historians also expressed the nationalist sentiments of their own academic environments. Under the leadership of Shiratori Kurakichi 白鳥庫吉 (1865–1942), a student of Ludwig Riess, *Tōyōshigaku* 東洋史學 (“Oriental History”) emerged as a new historical field in the 1890s at Tōkyō University.⁶ Reacting against the Europocentric Western model of history, Shiratori first culturally separated Japan from China, then presented the Orient, led by Japan, as the civilizational peer of Europe. *Tōyōshi* 東洋史 and *Seiyōshi* 西洋史 (“Western History”) became the major divisions supplementing national history in Japanese education. The Ministry of Education approved *Tōyōshi* as a subject of middle school instruction in 1894, and in 1907 it joined other subjects as a scholarly specialization in higher education.⁷

Governmental interest in regions that would become parts of the Japanese empire helped fund the creation of new institutions specializing in the study of Korea and China. In 1907 Shiratori cooperated with Gōtō Shimpei 後藤新平 (1857–1929), then heading the South Manchurian Railway Company, to found a Research Bureau, the “Mantetsu rekishi chiri chōsabu” 滿鮮歷史地理調查部, that would collect data about Korea and Manchuria. The Bureau became a channel for the production of “Manchu-Korean History” which accompanied the expansion of Japanese empire in Northeast Asia. “Manchu-Korean History” was an attempt to merge Korean and Manchurian history because of the common blood of the peoples featuring in them. The merger was feasible because, scholars contended, Korea itself was “a country without its own historical destiny”.⁸ Korea had been subordinated to Japan from ancient times; its subsequent subordination to “continental influences” had hindered its historical progress.⁹ In confrontations with the Mongols, Koreans showed they lacked “loyalty and courage as well as true strength”.¹⁰ Korea’s lack of an autonomous past justified incorporating its history under the regional rubric and helped rationalize Japanese annexation.

6 Tanaka 1993.

7 Cf. Tonami Mamoru’s introduction to Tonami, Kishimoto and Sugiyama 2006, 15.

8 Breuker 2005, 88; Sin Chubaek 2005, 111-114.

9 Allen 1990, 801; see Schmid 1997, 30-31 on the differences between the Japanese version of *ManSen shi* and Sin Ch’ae-ho’s vision.

10 Breuker 2005, 89.

Social Darwinism also led Meiji and later scholars to drastically revise Japanese views of China. No longer an admired source of culture and civilization, China became a corrupt, weak, and backward society, which needed Japanese aid in order to modernize.¹¹ These new perspectives were expressed by scholars engaged in *Tōyōshi* and *Shinagaku* 支那學 (“China Studies”), a new school led by Kyōto University’s Naitō Kōnan 内藤湖南 (1866–1934). Similarly, intellectuals in late nineteenth century Korea engaged in creating a new Korean identity first decentred the Middle Kingdom, replacing Confucianism with Social Darwinism and the concept of the nation-state, now rooted in a distinctive *ethnos*, the *minkjok* 民族 (Chin.: *minzu*).¹² As in Japan, the government established an agency to compile new histories for the schools. Korean intellectuals like Sin Ch’aeho 申采浩 (1880–1936) tried to write a new history that would stress the unique origins of the Korean people and arouse national pride. *Sadae* 事大, “serving the great [China]” (*sadaejūi* 事大主義), a principle at the core of Chosŏn 朝鮮 foreign policy, was now criticized as an obstacle to realizing an autonomous Korean identity. Sin also explicitly rejected a widely held theory, which identified Kijia (Ch. Jizi 箕子) as the progenitor of the Korean people: that model would have made the Koreans dependent on a Chinese ancestor. Tan’gun, by contrast, was a mythical figure born of a she-bear and a heavenly deity, who appears in the late thirteenth-century first Korean history, *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事. Tan’gun 檀君 as the primordial ancestor also linked the history of the nation to north-east Asia, in land that lay significantly north of the Korean peninsula.¹³

National history set off a search for primordial origins. In all three countries mythic first ancestors – China’s Yellow Emperor, Korea’s Tan’gun, born of a she-bear and a sun-god, and Japan’s Amaterasu – competed with archaeological evidence in the creation of the national narrative. While archaeologists identified the Yellow River basin as the birthplace of Chinese civilization, the Japanese excavated Jōmon 縄文 and Yayoi 弥生 sites in the archipelago, and sought through excavations on the Korean peninsula proof that Koreans and Japanese shared a common ancestry, a major theme of Japanese colonial rule. Archaeology came to be regarded “as a branch of history”.¹⁴

11 Fogel 1984.

12 Schmid 2000, 84.

13 Allen 1990, 796.

14 Nelson 1995, 218.

Quarrels Over History

The national histories of China, Japan and Korea set off disputes among the three countries, especially when they challenged attempts to write a seamless narrative of the territory under the control of the modern nation-state. Korean historians strongly opposed Japanese assertions that Japan had colonized parts of the Korean peninsula in ancient times; similarly, Japanese ignored evidence of the incorporation of elites from the Korean state of Paekche into Yamato court life during Japan's formative state-building phase in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁵ The Kwanggaet'o (Gwanggaeto) 廣開土太王 stele, discovered in 1883 along the Yalu 鴨綠 River in present-day Ji'an 集安, Jilin 吉林 Province, was cited as evidence of Japanese presence in southeast Korea in the fourth century, prompting a dispute between Japanese and Korean scholars that lingered for decades.¹⁶ These nationalist-inspired disputes over history continue into the present day, as illustrated by the 2004 competition between North Korea and the PRC concerning "ownership" of Koguryō (Gaojuli/Gaogouli) 高句麗.

The dispute between the two Koreas and the PRC over historical "ownership" of the ancient kingdom of Koguryō/Gaogouli which flared in 2004 and again in 2006 is a prime example of the inter-state tensions that erupt when nationalist histories clash. Koguryō was a northeast Asian state – its traditional dates are 37 BC to 668 AD – which at its peak, from the fourth to seventh centuries, ruled a territory that extended from the Korean peninsula into China's present-day northeastern provinces. Koguryō's history included a long span, from the end of the second to the end of the sixth century, when there was no centralized Chinese state. During the Later or Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220), Sui 隋 (589–618), and early Tang 唐 periods, Koguryō was one of several autonomous states in northeast Asia that contended with one another and with Chinese regimes for regional control.¹⁷ Koguryō, Paekche and Silla, vying for control of the Korean peninsula, sought to overcome the others by allying with Chinese regimes. Silla eventually won this contest by allying with Tang to destroy Koguryō in 668 AD.

15 See Pai 1994; 2002.

16 See Pai 2000, 26-27, for the historical impact of the Kwanggaet'o stele. On the implications of new archaeological finds, see Park 2008.

17 Pan 1997, 54-58.

World Heritage Sites

The 2004 dispute between the two Koreas and the PRC over “ownership” of Koguryō began in 2001, when the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (henceforth, North Korea) applied to UNESCO to register a complex of Koguryō tombs in P’yōng’an 平安 and Hwanghae 黄海 Provinces as a World Heritage site. North Korea’s application was supported by South Korea and Japan, but opposed by the People’s Republic of China, which was in the process of preparing its own application. The North Korean application was discussed and rejected at the World Heritage general assembly sessions in 2003.¹⁸ On July 1, 2004, at its Suzhou meeting, the World Heritage Committee approved both the North Korean application and an application by China to designate Koguryō capital cities and tombs located in Liaoning and Jilin provinces as World Heritage Sites, recommending that both countries “consider the possibility of a future joint, trans-boundary nomination of the Koguryō culture”.¹⁹

In their applications, the two countries argued for World Heritage status on slightly different terms. The North Korean application stated that the murals on the walls of its Koguryō tombs were “masterpieces” and the tomb construction demonstrated “ingenious engineering solutions”. The tomb complex was “an important example of burial typology”. Moreover, the special burial customs of Koguryō influenced “other cultures in the region, including Japan”.²⁰ China’s applications to UNESCO were part of a cultural offensive to gain international recognition of the high achievements of Chinese civilization. Concretely, Chinese officials wanted to place more Chinese historical sites on the World Heritage list. China’s application noted that “The tombs, particularly the important stele and a long inscription in one of the tombs, show the impact of Chinese culture on the Koguryo (who did not develop their own writing)”.²¹

News of the Chinese success at winning World Heritage recognition for its Koguryō tombs and city ruins, coupled with Chinese press re-

18 See China Heritage Project 2007.

19 See Unesco, 28COM 14B.25 and 28 COM 14B.33.

20 Unesco, 28 COM 14B.33.

21 Unesco, 28 COM 14B.25.

leases describing Koguryō as a “subordinate state that fell under the jurisdiction of the Chinese dynasties and was under the great influence of China’s politics, culture and other areas” aroused intense emotion in South Korea, where protestors dressed in Koguryō garb picketed the Chinese Embassy in Seoul. Official relations between the PRC and South Korea, begun in 1992, were strained over this matter. Earlier in 2004 the Chinese Foreign Ministry had deleted references to Koguryō from the Korean history section on its web site, so the World Heritage affair exacerbated Korean suspicions that China intended to remove any challenges to its incorporation of Koguryō into Chinese national history. A diplomatic “understanding” was hastily negotiated in an effort to ease tensions, but the underlying issues were not so easily resolved.²²

National/nationalist history was a by-product of the state-building effort in the twentieth century. Attempts to trace the territories encompassed by contemporary nation-states backward in time distort the historical reality. When Chinese history is implicitly construed as the study of the governments that have ruled over Chinese speakers, nationalism creates problems of interpretation over conquest dynasties. Under the Mongols and the Manchus, China, defined as the territory occupied predominantly by speakers of Chinese, was itself incorporated into larger empires that spanned Inner Asia and East Asia, a historical feature that is ignored in the history of the Chinese nation.

Qing History Writing

To understand the 1990s movement to re-insert Manchu ethnicity into the history of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), we should begin with a brief survey of how this history was constructed in the twentieth century. In keeping with the pre-1911 tradition, which was set within the idea of dynastic cycles, the task of writing the Qing history was left for scholars in the Republican era. The *Qing shigao* 清史稿 (“Draft History of the Qing”) was compiled under the direction of Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽 (1844–1927) from 1914–1927; the Guomindang 國民黨 viewed it as biased in favour of the Qing and rejected it. The current Qing History project undertaken in the People’s Republic of China picks up this task.²³

22 Brooke 2004; also Klingner 2004.

23 See the articles in Q. E. Wang 2009–2010.

Despite the large number of books and articles on Qing history, there have been relatively few attempts to write a complete history of the dynasty. What we refer to as “standard views of the Qing” is derived from scholarship that focuses on only part of the whole. Based on the European historical model, the history written by Chinese scholars was echoed by Western academics and passed into the English language literature. In *Rescuing History from the Nation* (1996), Prasenjit Duara spoke eloquently to these issues and the problems of interpretation that result from them.²⁴ National history assumed that the nomadic rulers of conquest dynasties had to sinicize in order to rule the sedentary Chinese society. Although some scholars noted that the Mongols adopted multi-ethnic policies during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), the foreign impact on China was assumed to be slight in the middle and long run. The major historical theme was *Hanbua* 漢化, i. e. “sinicization”. For example, in a 1993 colloquium discussion on the historic accomplishments of the Qing dynasty during the eighteenth century, the eminent PRC Qing specialist Dai Yi 戴逸 noted that although the founder of the dynasty was not Han Chinese, “his reception of Chinese culture was rapid as compared with other minorities”. When compared with earlier conquest dynasties, Qing rule was stronger and longer “because their sinicization was comparatively deeper, they rapidly sinicized, very quickly lost their own specific ethnic traits, and were completely transformed into Han people”.²⁵

Mary Wright, an eminent Qing historian writing in 1957, summed up a slightly different version of the “sinicization” thesis, which was later critiqued by Pamela Crossley. Wright responded to earlier scholarship arguing that conquest dynasties such as the Liao 遼 (947–1123) and the Qing were not assimilated but had “achieved a social and cultural symbiosis”.²⁶ Rejecting this notion, Wright asserted that the Manchus lost their distinctiveness during their long sojourn in China. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Manchu conquest group had become “virtually indistinguishable” from the Chinese. Manchu and Chinese officials attempting to halt dynastic decline in that period were united and, by implication, had a common understanding of a “China” which they tried to defend.²⁷

24 Duara 1995, 5.

25 Dai Yi 1993, 1.

26 Crossley 1990a, 224.

27 Wright 1957.

The assumption that conquerors were all swallowed up into Chinese culture; that without adopting Chinese practices, the conquest regimes would never have been able to successfully create and maintain a complex bureaucratic state, was challenged in 1994. Editing a volume in the *Cambridge History of China* on the conquest regimes that ruled China in part or in whole from 907 to 1368, Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett introduced a provocative counter-thesis: that the Tangut (Xia 夏), Qitan 契丹 (Liao 遼), Jurchen 女真 (Jin 金) and Mongol (Yuan 元) regimes succeeded by adopting a different strategy than their predecessors.²⁸ Each was a hybrid regime, whose political skills were honed through interactions with other emerging states within a multistate context. Each ruled empires that encompassed nomads and agriculturalists. All applied different laws to different peoples within the empire, and employed non-Han as well as Han Chinese officials. All four created their own national writing systems, and pursued bi-lingual or multi-lingual language policies, translating Buddhist, Confucian and other works into their own languages. Each was determined to retain its distinctive identity and did so by segregating itself from the subjugated population. In short, the rulers who invaded Chinese territories in the tenth through fourteenth centuries pursued policies designed to govern Han Chinese and Inner Asian subjects simultaneously: sinicization was not the key to their success.

Meanwhile, in a number of seminal articles from 1983 onward, Pamela Crossley explored identity issues implicit in the top-down evolution of a Manchu group, the emergence of a creation myth, and the organization of a multi-ethnic military force.²⁹ In her 1990 study of three generations of the Suwan Gūwalgiya 蘇完瓜爾佳, a banner family living in garrisons in the Yangzi delta during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she refuted Wright's assertion that the Manchus had "melded into the general populace" by 1850. Crossley argued that the reverse was true: bannermen, who had never been an ethnic group, developed ethnic consciousness for the first time in the late Qing. Further, this Manchu ethnic consciousness developed as a response to Han Chi-

28 Franke and Twitchett 1994, 1-42.

29 Crossley 1983; 1985; 1987; 1989; 1990b. Later (1997) Crossley published *The Manchus*, which covered their history from the ancestral Jurchen down to the 20th century.

nese hostility – bannermen were massacred by Chinese during the Taiping rebellion – and later to the emergence of Han nationalism.

Manchu ethnicity was nurtured in the segregated banner garrisons that were scattered throughout the Qing Empire. Crossley and Mark Elliott, author of an institutional history of the Eight Banner system, agree on this point. While also rejecting the sinicization thesis, Elliott departed from Crossley in arguing that ethnic consciousness emerged at an earlier stage and was a persistent influence on Qing policy throughout the entire dynastic period.³⁰ Through the banners, a “performative Manchu way” preserved the separate identity of the conquest elite through several centuries, even after many had lost the ability to speak their mother tongue.

The publications just cited turn the question of why the Manchus were so successful on its head. Instead of looking at China Proper, where the Chinese-speaking subjects of the Qing empire were clustered, they focused instead on the Inner Asian periphery. In my 1998 monograph, I argued that the Qing, precisely because of their non-Han origins, were able to successfully incorporate Inner Asian regions into the largest empire ever controlled from Peking, one which set the territorial boundaries of the modern Chinese nation.³¹ Their origins enabled the early Manchu rulers to understand both Inner Asian (particularly Mongol) and Chinese culture, and synthesize elements from different political traditions. This theme – bringing a “frontier perspective” to bear on Qing expansion – has been further developed by Peter Perdue.³²

Qing ruling ideology did not merely replicate Chinese paradigms. Previous generalizations about the Confucian commitment of the Qing rulers fail to capture their distinctive political and philosophical stance. In her 1999 monograph, *A Translucent Mirror*, Pamela Crossley traced the evolution of a distinctive Manchu ideology of rule, produced by the need to legitimate a conquest regime, from its origins in the late sixteenth century to its fruition in the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1736–1795). This ideology was not merely Confucian. Whereas the Yongzheng 雍正 Emperor (r. 1723–1735) argued that the Qing deserved the Mandate of Heaven because they had been morally and culturally transformed, Hongli 弘曆

30 Elliott 1990.

31 Rawski 1998.

32 Perdue 2005.

(the Qianlong Emperor) based Qing legitimacy on the idea that the success of his founding ancestors was itself proof of the Heavenly Mandate.

The “early modern emperors” constructed by the Qianlong Emperor over the course of his long reign was an amalgam of ideas drawn from different traditions. The diverse subjects of the empire were held together by the person of the emperor: “because the emperor’s consciousness was an extension of the mind of Heaven, he maintained this connection through an encyclopaedic collection of rituals, and he reified Heaven’s will in the magnificence of his regime”.³³

Studying the Qing court in its last decade, Edward Rhoads analyzed the efforts of Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后 (1835–1908) and her successor, Regent Zaifeng 載灃 (1883–1951), to not only reverse the post-1861 trend towards decentralization of government authority but to “re-imperialize” decision-making processes. Both Cixi and Zaifeng appointed imperial princes to high decision-making posts, just as the early Qing emperors had appointed imperial princes and banner nobles to important posts, allowing them to operate with trusted subordinates in a timely and flexible fashion. During the early twentieth century, there were many political appeals to the throne that differences between Manchu and Han should be eliminated, even as the anti-Manchu writings of the period express a conscious separation on the Han Chinese side and an inner core of Manchu imperial kinsmen helped shore up dynastic rule.

Formerly neglected subjects in Qing history were also highlighted by the new focus. Wang Xiangyun’s 1995 dissertation brought together important material on how the Qing court both patronized and exerted control over the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy.³⁴ Chia Ning’s 1993 article on the court’s activities in its summer capital, Rehe 熱河 (Chengde 承德) examined the emperor’s meetings with Mongol nobles, Uighur elites, and Tibetan Buddhist clerics there.³⁵ Patricia Berger’s 2003 monograph analyzed how the Qianlong Emperor used the commissioning of Tibetan Buddhist religious art and the doctrinal framework of Tibetan Buddhism to explore issues of identity and meaning that were directly relevant to his style of rulership.³⁶

33 Crossley 1999, 361.

34 X. Y. Wang 1995; 2000.

35 Chia 1993, 60-92.

36 Berger 2003.

The *Pax Manjurica*, which lowered the boundaries separating Tibet, Mongolia, and China, also stimulated a cultural efflorescence in Inner Asia. Qing Peking became the centre of book publishing in these languages.³⁷ From before 1644, the Manchu rulers commissioned translations not only of the Chinese Confucian canon but also of the Tibetan Buddhist Tripitaka. Multi-lingual dictionaries were also part of the court's on-going effort through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to demonstrate universal monarchy through cultural patronage. Cartography and geographic compilations of the newly conquered far west confirmed the incorporation of present-day Xinjiang into the empire.³⁸

The cultural impact of the incorporation of Manchus, Mongols, and Tibetans into the Qing Empire can be evaluated by surveying the production of works in these languages during the dynastic period. A study of the body of Manchu-language editions (over 2,100 distinct titles/editions) published during the dynasty shows that 60 per cent were in more than one language, and many (over 48 per cent) were Chinese-Manchu editions.³⁹ The poly-lingual editions, which spanned the entire spectrum of subjects from philosophy to literature, were vital in bridging the linguistic boundaries that divided subjects in the empire and in disseminating Chinese literature to Mongol readers. According to Christopher Atwood, "Knowledge of the Manchu language was virtually universal among the nobility and high officialdom of Mongolia, both Inner and Outer".⁴⁰

In contrast to the Manchu books, over 80 per cent of the Mongol works were in Mongolian alone. Mongol literature was bifurcated by genre and language. The larger portion (over 60 per cent), which were on Tibetan Buddhist subjects, were published in the "palm-leaf" format of the Tibetan book, and oriented towards Tibetan textual sources. A smaller number of books dealt with secular topics, notably commerce, administration and language; these books were constructed on the Chinese model, and might be Mongol-Chinese bilingual editions or trilingual Mongol-Manchu-Chinese texts. The coexistence of two contrasting types of books written in Mongolian accurately reflected the cultural dualism of

37 Rawski 2007, 197-235.

38 Millward 1999, 61-91.

39 Rawski 2005.

40 Atwood 2000, 124.

Qing Mongol culture: a strong orientation towards Tibet, the fount of the religion, and an orientation towards Peking and the Qing court.⁴¹

Tibetan-language editions were also published by the Qing government, by Mongols, and by Tibetans. The overwhelming bulk of these books was religious in content; the literary works that exist show an influence from Indian rather than Chinese culture. It was really only in the nineteenth century that several monastic centres began to print texts within Tibet itself. Tibetan was the prestige language in Mongol monasteries. Mongolian monks translated many Tibetan texts into Mongolian, but they also wrote biographies of religious notables, church chronicles, and philosophical treatises in Tibetan.

Inner Asian book culture expanded significantly during the Qing period. It was internally segmented by subject and language, reflecting the life circumstances of different groups. Bannermen who resided in Peking or in garrisons scattered throughout the empire were surrounded by Chinese speakers and Chinese culture; perhaps this is why the Manchu-language literature was dominated by translations of Chinese works and administrative documentation. Khalkha Mongols, who were distinguished from the Khorchin and other Mongol tribes inhabiting what later became Inner Mongolia, were in a different situation. With the exception of a few officials who served in Peking, most Khalkha Mongols lived in Mongolia, where their commitment to Tibetan Buddhism exposed them to Tibetan (and through Tibet, Indian) as well as Chinese culture. Tibetans were the group most insulated from Chinese materials. One specialist wrote that "Tibetan monks and lay scholars seldom, if ever, learned Chinese, thus remaining to this day generally ignorant of Chinese literature and religion".⁴² Tibetan religious and secular literature was instead influenced by Indian works and by the extensive interaction between Tibetan and Mongol clerics.

The Qing court supported the printing of religious literature, administrative texts, and dictionaries. They tried to discourage translation of popular Chinese plays and novels from being published, and relatively few printed editions have survived. Nonetheless the repeated bans on immoral and lascivious literature during the seventeenth, eighteenth,

41 Atwood 1992, 1. For a challenge to the generalization that Qing patronage of Tibetan Buddhism led to their ability to control the Mongols, see Elverskog 2006.

42 Snellgrove 1971, 332.

and nineteenth centuries suggest that Chinese novels did circulate widely and not simply in their original Chinese versions. Some manuscripts even featured phonetic transcriptions of Chinese texts in Manchu letters, so that they could be read aloud to bannermen who could not read Chinese but understood the spoken language. Manchu translations of Chinese fictions were also read by Mongols. "Journey to the West" (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) in particular familiarized Mongols with Xuanzang 玄奘 हेनसांग (c. 602–664), the Buddhist monk who travelled to India to obtain the Buddhist scriptures. He became known as the "Marvelous Lama" in Mongolia.⁴³

Studying the Qing Empire from the perspective of its Manchu rulers permits us to reconsider our ideas about the way in which what we call China developed over the long span of history. Scholars of the ancient period cite archaeological findings to stress that many regional cultures, not just one, existed in the early stages of state formation. The existence of multiple cultural centres raises provocative questions about the accuracy of contemporary historical generalizations implying a unitary Chinese culture or civilization. Is that, too, a myth? Certainly recent work, such as the monograph by Matthew Sommer, suggests that there were still multiple cultures coexisting in China, even among Han Chinese, during the Qing period.⁴⁴ The criminal cases that Sommer studied show a husband exchange the sexual favour of his wife in order to obtain male labour on the farm. Other departures from the Confucian norms appear vividly in these cases.

What about the long historical span? Remove the blinders imposed by modern national territorial boundaries, and we see that the cultural interactions on the Shandong peninsula in ancient times was probably tied to non-Han peoples who also populated the present-day Liaoning plain into the Korean peninsula. The Tang 唐 (618–907) rulers came from non-Han origins, and many Tang policies were more typical of conquest than of Han Chinese dynasties. North China was under non-Han rule for 242 years after the Northern Song fled the region in 1126: How did the long occupation of the region by non-Han peoples affect its regional culture? The possibilities for altering the way in which we

43 Atwood 1992.

44 Sommer 2000.

have talked about Chinese history are many and varied. It is a very invigorating prospect.

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